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The Visegrád Group in the Expanded European Union: From Preaccession to Postaccession Cooperation

Martin Dangerfield*

This article investigates whether the Visegrád Group (VG) is proving capable of a successful transition from preaccession to postaccession cooperation in the expanded European Union (EU). Prior to EU accession, the VG agenda mainly emphasised political cooperation around strategic goals of EU and NATO membership, acting as an incubation chamber and the organising framework for joint policies and actions. The article finds that pessimistic prognoses for postaccession VG cooperation in circulation around the time of EU entry rather underestimated the VG's staying power and its usefulness as a vehicle for serving some of the requirements and challenges of the actuality of the "return to Europe." The postaccession agenda seems to have opened up many new avenues for cooperation on both intra-VG and external affairs, including towards the EU, and seems to have given rise to the kind of substantial practical cooperation agenda that eluded the VG during the preaccession period.

Keywords: Visegrád Group; subregional cooperation; regionalism; European integration; European Union enlargement; Central Europe

Preliminaries

Subregional groupings that emerged onto the European scene after 1989 have to varying extents played useful, albeit low-profile, roles in the interrelated processes of constructing the post-cold war security order and enlarging the EU eastward. For certain subregional associations the 5th EU enlargement was

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somewhat of a crossroads since they had been created specifically to assist their participants' NATO and EU entry. Could or should such groupings continue to exist and, if so, what should the purpose of cooperation be, and what forms should it take to maintain relevance in the postaccession era? So far, the EU enlargement of May 2004 has not been followed by dissolution of any subregional associations, raising the possibility that certain of them at least—even ones with the closest links to the EU preaccession process—may be evolving into viable postaccession groupings able to respond to new agendas that have emerged as a result of the shift from impending to actual membership of the EU. This article investigates whether the Visegrád Group (VG) is proving capable of a successful transition from preaccession to postaccession cooperation in the expanded EU. VG, which consists of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, was one of the first subregional groupings to emerge in the post-cold war environment. After some thirteen years of cooperation, NATO membership for all four countries followed by their EU accession on 1 May 2004 meant that the “fulfilment of the intentions set out in the (February 1991) Visegrád Declaration put the participating countries before the question of how to go on.”¹

The first part of the article identifies possible modes of interaction between subregional cooperation and EU integration. It ascertains that the VG corresponds with the *complement/preaccession instrument* category, in which, as explained more fully below, the subregional association exists primarily to support and assist the EU preaccession exercise. It also briefly compares VG's EU preaccession role with that of other types of subregional cooperation initiatives that have been active in post-communist Central Europe. The next section focuses on the period from the formation of the VG to the May 2004 EU enlargement, covering the origins and the main phases in the development of the VG and outlining the nature and scope of VG cooperation as it progressed during EU preaccession. The final part of the article focuses on the role of the VG in the postaccession period. The run-in to the EU enlargement took place against the backdrop of some serious setbacks for the VG in 2002 and 2003 (in the form

of top-level political spats and inability to maintain solidarity at critical moments), and this seemed to reinforce predictions already in circulation that EU entry would mark the demise of the VG. So far, however, there is evidence to suggest that the pessimistic prognoses rather underestimated the VG's staying power and its usefulness as a vehicle for serving some of the requirements and challenges of the actuality of the "return to Europe." The postaccession period seems to have opened up many new avenues for VG cooperation on EU affairs. These have included political cooperation on the big issues (e.g., the recent negotiations on the 2007–13 EU financial perspective); functional cooperation around adapting to existing EU policies, especially Schengen entry; and cooperation to shape certain evolving EU policies (e.g., on enlargement and "neighbourhood" policy). In fact, the postaccession period seems to have given rise to the kind of substantial practical cooperation agenda that eluded the VG during the preaccession period.

EU enlargement and subregional cooperation processes

Alternative types of subregional cooperation

Subregional cooperation has been defined as "a process of regularised, significant political and economic interaction among a group of neighbouring states. This interaction takes place between national governments, local authorities, private business and civil society actors across a wide range of issues."² Although subregional cooperation in Europe was already well established prior to the fall of communism, with the Benelux Group and Nordic Cooperation being the main examples, the proliferation of groupings after 1989 generated the need to understand the purpose, potential, and limitations of what Björner called "children of the post-Cold war era."³ Most studies of the role and effects of this generation of subregional groupings have stressed their security-enhancing properties, which stem from the facilitation of top-level political dialogue (especially

valuable in sensitive contexts) and also from practical cooperation, particularly in “soft security” fields such as economic development, border management, environmental cooperation, and so on.⁴ Their record as agents in dealings with NATO and the EU has also been highlighted, both as preaccession support and as entities that help to relieve potential tensions between the included and excluded in the process of integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

As far as interplay between EU integration and subregional cooperation in general is concerned, according to Dangerfield, postwar experiences suggest four categories of grouping as follows: *pioneer*, *substitute*, *complement/preaccession instrument*, and *involuntary alternative/substitute*.⁵ Where groupings act as pioneers, it means that they not only achieve a more advanced level of integration than other larger regional integration projects but also exert influence on the integration agenda of the latter. As Inotai has informed us, the Benelux economic union is a prime example of the pioneer category.⁶ This grouping reached the higher stages of economic integration well before the larger entity it became subsumed in—the European Economic Community—and in so doing acted as an important precursor for the latter.⁷ The second type, that of *substitute*, occurs when states establish the subregional cooperation project as an alternative to other options and adopt an integration agenda that could be either more or less far-reaching than that of other contemporary regional associations. Examples of substitutes in postwar Europe include the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA); the European Free Trade Association (EFTA); and its “offspring,” the European Economic Area (EEA). In practice, the cold war context of the former CMEA left EFTA and the EEA as bona fide alternative integration projects for those countries staying out of, or excluded from, the EU.

The third category, the *complement/preaccession instrument*, is a model specific to the post-1990 period and to EU candidates from post-communist Europe. Here, the participating states aspire to join a larger and more developed regional project, and subregional cooperation exists primarily to support and assist this process. Cooperation may take various forms including, for

example, mutual integration up to limits that are both politically and practically defined as exemplified by the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Baltic Free Trade Area (BFTA).⁸ The expectation that the subregional association will disappear upon EU accession is quite strong. A significant feature of this type of cooperation is that participants tended to be somewhat reluctant, at least initially, to engage in subregional (re)integration because of perceptions that it would affect negatively ambitions for early EU membership. The fourth and final category, as yet hypothetical, is that of *involuntary alternative/substitute*. This scenario concerns European states whose fate is to become condemned to a “limbo” of at best semipermanent association with the EU. At the present time, contenders for this status include East European states currently denied an EU membership perspective but earmarked for associate status under the terms of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the EU.⁹ The *involuntary alternative/substitute* fate could also potentially befall certain South East European states covered by the EU’s Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) should they fail to progress with the accession conditions and/or if current debates about the “absorption capacity” of the EU and other enlargement-related issues undermine their EU membership perspective.¹⁰

Where does the Visegrád Group fit?

Which of the above categories are most apt for VG? Clearly, the *pioneer*, *substitute*, and *involuntary alternative/substitute* models can be excluded with minimum discussion. The days of pioneer groups, at least outside of the EU, are over, and VG is obviously not a substitute of any sort. Its official status as an entity to *support and promote* the process of EU accession rather than an alternative organisation was consistently stressed during the preenlargement period. Furthermore, the fact that these days the VG, like other of its subregional contemporaries (e.g., the Central European Initiative [CEI], which has always combined EU members, candidates, and noncandidates), is an organisation consisting of states who are also EU members is further evidence that it was never in any sense conceived of as a substitute body.

VG evidently corresponds with the *complement/preaccession instrument* category, although compared with other subregional groupings, there have been key differences in the ways in which it has supported the EU membership endeavour.¹¹

The VG agenda has mainly emphasised political cooperation around strategic goals of EU and NATO membership, acting as an incubation chamber and the organising framework for joint policies and actions to serve those goals. In the early phase of the VG, part of its importance lay in the image of an avant-garde group of post-communist countries worthy of early EU accession. Solidarity among the VG member states has also been somewhat fluid. While separatist attitudes clearly prevailed during the mid-1990s' VG low point, during the late 1990s priority was given to the catch-up needed by Slovakia to compensate for the delays in the Euro-Atlantic integration progress that set in during the Mečiar era. In the VG's most recent phase there has been growing emphasis on concrete, including project-based, intra-VG cooperation in various spheres including culture, education, environment, tourism, and so on (see second section). The VG's EU preaccession role did not therefore have the clear-cut functional nature of its close relative, CEFTA. As noted above, CEFTA has been exclusively focused on economic cooperation in the form of trade liberalisation to achieve mutual market integration in advance of the more intensive integration now under way in the setting of EU membership.¹² In fact, of the two, VG probably bears closer connection to CEI than CEFTA. Top-level political dialogue/cooperation (which includes annual summits of the CEI states' prime ministers and regular ministerial-level meetings) has been and continues to be a key facet of CEI cooperation, although the current emphasis is on shifting the balance of CEI activities away from the "switchboard"/talking shop functions towards its concrete project-based dimension.¹³ The role of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) as a source of funding and promoter of intra-VG projects is also somewhat reminiscent of the project dimension of CEI activities. The VG has, however, avoided the open membership and greater dilution of purpose often associated with the CEI. As a club of (until May 2004) exclusively EU associates/candidates, VG has in principle been far less constrained than CEI

in terms of its ability to focus and concentrate energies on EU preaccession (and these days, postaccession) tasks.

The Visegrád Group: Cooperation during EU preaccession

Origins and objectives

The inaugural VG meeting took place in Bratislava in April 1990. At the instigation of Václav Havel, the presidents of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland held informal discussions around the themes of “the ‘coordination of policies’ and ‘synchronisation of steps’ on the road to Europe.”¹⁴ Notwithstanding the vital importance of this initial move, various factors, including retention of office by communists that somewhat compromised the Hungarian and Polish delegations, held up substantive progress until the second half of 1990 when ministerial cooperation and further presidential dialogue began to gather pace. Soviet actions in the Baltic states in January 1991 accelerated the process, and the Visegrád 3 (V3) presidents, foreign ministers, and parliamentarians met in Budapest on 15 February for the signing of the original Visegrád Declaration, which stressed that “[t]he similarity of the situation which arose in the course of the past decades compels the three states to work toward the achievement of identical goals.”¹⁵

The current Czech president once famously described the VG as an “artificial creation of the West.” The emergence of the VG was, however, arguably more of an autonomous development instigated by the first post-communist leaderships of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland but necessitated and propelled by the imperatives and uncertainties of the external economic and political dimensions of the impending transformation.¹⁶ As Dwan observed, the “end of bipolarity in Europe, with its rigid territorial, political and military delineations, left continental and local power vacuums. This encouraged states to negotiate new arrangements to provide stability in a time of profound change.”¹⁷ In this context, the three avant-garde post-communist states found that a common agenda was thrust upon them. It consisted of disentanglement from the

CMEA, Warsaw Pact, and Soviet tutelage generally amid signs, especially in early 1991, that the window for doing so may not be open for long; the corresponding need to either push for the creation of new pan-European security structures or attempt to join existing Euro-Atlantic ones; the pursuit of EU membership; and dealing with the fact that even the most clearly reformist of the new regimes in central and eastern Europe were not initially wholeheartedly embraced by the West. In this environment then, when it came to the external sphere of their affairs, the V3 had simply “no alternative to cooperation.”¹⁸

The main evolutionary phases of VG cooperation

Since 2004 VG cooperation has been relatively stable. This has been in contrast to the somewhat more volatile EU preaccession phase during which oscillation between relatively high-visibility/resonance and virtual extinction fed perennial uncertainty about the value and viability of the VG. As EU accession approached, the chequered history of the VG colored expectations about its future viability. VG optimists believed that it had become a permanent feature of the new Europe, not always clear to pin down, based on an inescapable bond between the four countries and dense networks across them, especially in elite and intelligentsia circles. Somewhat paradoxically, given its often precarious existence, the VG was also seen by some as having most claims to a contemporary representation of Central Europe.¹⁹ Indeed, this is even a goal with official backing these days. According to the May 2004 Declaration of VG Prime Ministers, VG activities are “aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region.”²⁰ On the other hand, VG pessimists perceived VG as an unstable and unreliable phenomenon, beset by internal contradictions bound to come increasingly to the fore once the common purpose of EU and NATO accession had been achieved. In this view, VG is insufficiently embedded either in compatible national interests or in elite and popular consciousness to guarantee that it will endure as an exclusive entity. The alternative perspectives on the VG are also a consequence of its own history of ups and downs since its emergence in 1990. In the EU preaccession

period three distinct phases in VG cooperation are identifiable—1990–92, 1993–98, and 1998–2004—and they represent not only episodes of relative activity and inactivity but also evolutionary stages in the focus and content of VG cooperation.

1990–92: Visegrád 1. By early 1991 immediate mission of the VG had crystallised, following an initial period of debate on future integration and security strategies in the context of the “disruptive effects of the strategic earthquake of 1989.”²¹ Cooperation became focused on two key objectives—dissolution of the Soviet-era security and integration structures and accession to the EU and NATO. The V3 effectively pursued common policies that served those two goals, and by the end of 1992 the VG brand was well established within and outside the region. In the initial years VG cooperation was therefore almost exclusively focused on foreign policy issues and took the form of intergovernmental cooperation both between the governments of the V3 and between the V3 and the major external actors. The success of subregional cooperation as an instrument to help expedite the key goals of external policy seems indisputable. As Rusnak notes, the VG had a “spectacular start in 1991 [with] common success in dismantling the Soviet legacy in Central Europe [namely, Warsaw Pact and COMECON].”²² It is also widely acknowledged that the collective approach to the EU played an important part in the EU’s decision to sign Europe Agreements with the V3 in December 1991, thereby granting them a “privileged” status with the EU.

VG cooperation also yielded important complementary security results as far as the relations of the V3 themselves were concerned. The successes in this respect included eliminating early divisions within the V3 relating to alternative concepts of security frameworks for Europe centred on the (predominantly Czechoslovak/Polish) idea for an inclusive pan-European solution based on the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE; then CSCE) versus the preference for developing closer relations with NATO with a view to eventual membership; the general confidence and security-building process of intense diplomatic activity and ministerial dialogue and cooperation; and collaboration on defence reforms to include “a system of regular consultation

at all levels of the military and examining possibilities for closer cooperation in military technology, production and procurement . . . [b]ilateral military cooperation agreements were also concluded between the three states in the spring of 1991.”²³ Given the way that events were unfolding in the former Yugoslavia, the way that the V3 managed their own underlying tensions, caused by minority and other issues, violence-free carried particular resonance.

Two further outcomes of VG cooperation that were more broadly related to both Euro-Atlantic and post-communist transformation goals should be mentioned. First, it played an often underestimated but absolutely crucial role at this time by providing an incubator for the Visegrád countries’ economic reintegration in the form of mutual trade liberalisation. Although Western—and particularly EU—pressure to push ahead with subregional integration was a key catalyst, it is unlikely that the Krakow Treaty that created CEFTA would have been signed in December 1992 without the VG framework. CEFTA was to play not only an important role in the economic sphere but (see below) in the political sphere as well, particularly in the so-called dormant phase of VG cooperation. Second, VG cooperation served the important purpose of cementing the external perception of the V3 as a group. There was “little doubt that the Visegrád states’ concerted pressure forced the West to address their concerns more directly”²⁴ and that the West soon came to treat “the three countries as a group, with Central European Prime Ministers meeting as a group with EC leaders for the first time in October 1992.”²⁵ Fawn also concurred, observing that “Visegrád appeared firmly to exist on an official level. Its activities were wide-ranging . . . and major international actors treated the three countries in common fashion. Central Europe now seemed to be defined by Visegrád cooperation.”²⁶

Before moving to the 1993–98 period, one final point to make about this early stage of VG cooperation is that it was essentially an elite intergovernmental affair largely confined to the top-level political sphere. Extension to the civic and regional levels did not really progress past the discussion stage. As well as the lack of priority given to them by the political leaders, these dimensions

of cooperation failed to materialise “due to the lingering impact of communism, which engendered both isolationism and passivity and also the rekindling of nationalism, as well as an overwhelming emphasis on constructing ties with the West [and] . . . important bureaucratic and economic obstacles.”²⁷

1993–98: Visegrád in decline (or transition?). As is well documented, formal political cooperation in the VG framework waned dramatically after the end of 1992. The division of Czechoslovakia was instrumental since the leaders of the newly independent Czech and Slovak Republics were both—for different reasons—counterproductive for VG cooperation, with the Czech government becoming most overtly “VG-sceptic.” Alongside this was the raising of “Slovak-Hungarian tension in connection with finishing the works on the water construction on the Danube *Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros* and also in connection with the situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.”²⁸ The advent of CEFTA at the end of 1992—which some parties and particularly the neoliberally predisposed Czech government were inclined to see as the natural and only viable next stage of the VG project—was also relevant (although, as explained later, it would be wrong to see CEFTA as a mainly negative influence on the VG). The deteriorating position of Slovakia in the Euro-Atlantic integration process, and the concomitant reluctance of other VG governments to be seen as associates of Vladimir Mečiar, further served to undermine the VG logic and purpose. The mixed message of Western actors’ stance on subregional cooperation also played a part in the breakdown of cooperative attitudes, with encouragement and support along with a tendency to treat the VG as a group in some respects on the one hand, and stress on individual assessments for EU and NATO membership readiness on the other.

The period 1993–98 is usually characterised as, at best, a time of “weak” VG cooperation with the internal strains compounded, as Vachudova reminds us, by the fact that even the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland soon lost their monopoly of avant-garde status of post-communist states. Estonia and Slovenia, for example, got their invitations to begin EU membership negotiations in 1997 too.²⁹

During 1993 the VG became increasingly conspicuous by its absence, and its apparent demise was emphasised in January 1994 when a summit was organised in Prague to confirm U.S. backing for the V4 in the context of the introduction of NATO's Partnership for Peace. While Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia favoured a "coordinated approach to NATO, Czech Defence Minister Antonin Baudys refused to attend a meeting with his Visegrád counterparts to discuss such an approach [and] Czech Minister for Foreign Relations Josef Zieleniec stated that 'we don't believe in organising lobbies or pressure groups to knock on doors.'"³⁰ Slovakia's subsequent exclusion from the invitations to begin EU and NATO membership negotiations issued to the other three in 1997 was for many the event that finally seemed to confirm the "clinical death" of the VG. Yet claims that the VG was finished proved premature, as its reconvening and reactivation in 1999 was to show. While 1993 to 1998 was certainly a dormant time in comparison to the intensity and high profile of VG cooperation that prevailed in the 1990–92 period, there is evidence to suggest that the inactivity was not quite as pronounced as it might seem and, moreover, that it is more appropriate to see VG cooperation at that time as essentially in a phase of transformation.

The first factor to mention is CEFTA, which quickly emerged as a successful case of subregional cooperation in the economic field and acted as a useful surrogate for the dormant VG. From 1994 onwards the CEFTA machinery included annual summits of prime ministers, which provided an important vehicle for dialogue between the VG political leaders. Until CEFTA expanded in 1996 the prime ministerial meetings were Visegrád summits in all but name.³¹ Because of this precedent set in CEFTA, after 1998 regular meeting of prime ministers became embedded in the revived VG process, whereas in the first active phase of the VG it was a forum for the VG presidents. CEFTA also provided a framework for various ministerial-level meetings in respect of areas into which CEFTA business was expanding (Finance, Agriculture, Public Procurement, etc.) and in so doing laid some foundations for the ministerial cooperation that would be an important element of the revived VG. Steady forward progress in the CEFTA

project also helped to rebuild confidence in subregional cooperation and allowed Slovakia to maintain regular—but out of the spotlight—high-level political contact with the other Visegrád states. Finally, CEFTA played a key role in “bringing about the reconvening of the Visegrád forum. The 1998 (Prague) session, when the Czechs suggested that CEFTA could ‘develop some political dimensions along the lines of the Visegrád Accord’ clearly paved the way for the first meeting of ‘Visegrád 2’ in May 1999.”³²

Second, although there was a distinct absence—other than via CEFTA and also within the auspices of other subregional initiatives such as the CEI—of high-level cooperation involving all four VG partners in the 1993–98 period, partial cooperation was still in evidence. Bilateral cooperation remained strong between Poland and Hungary, for example.³³ At both the 1995 and 1996 CEFTA summits, for instance, the two used the occasions to argue (unsuccessfully) for the resuscitation of the VG. Also, even by middle of 1995 there was evidence that external imperatives to cooperate were beginning to moderate tendencies for individual approaches to Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. Pressures connected to NATO accession in particular stimulated a *de facto* revival of VG cooperation albeit ultimately trilateral because of Slovakia’s exclusion from the process. In May 1995 the VG defence ministers met in Budapest to discuss integration into NATO. This was “the first such meeting attended by a Czech minister of defence.”³⁴ Intense diplomatic activity—including ministerial, prime minister, and presidential meetings—in early March 1996, in the context of Warren Christopher’s upcoming visit to Prague, was interpreted as heralding a major revival in Czech-Polish cooperation. According to Pehe, a key reason why Czech foreign policy changed after 1995 was because “Czech leaders also began to realise that an individual race against Poland, in particular, for NATO membership was counterproductive. Poland, with its size and strategic importance, was clearly a favourite for early NATO membership. Close relations with Poland could thus only benefit Czech aspirations.”³⁵ This trilateral cooperation accelerated as the NATO accession process progressed. Immediately after the formal membership invitation was issued on 8 July 1997 the presidents of the three stood together

to “read a prepared statement of satisfaction to reporters [and] . . . five trilateral meetings of the countries Prime, Foreign or Defence Ministers followed by the end of the year.”³⁶

Third, it can be argued that the 1993–97 period was, at least in part, something of a hiatus in relations with the EU. Following the achievement of associate status in 1991 and the 1993 EU Copenhagen Summit decision to give associated Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) states a membership perspective, the *political* cooperation imperative relaxed somewhat or at least was more easily outweighed by the competitive/individualistic tendencies. This temporary sidelining of VG cooperation vis-à-vis EU affairs also reflected the fact that a practical EU preaccession-related cooperation agenda could be, and was, pursued via CEFTA. For example, in 1995 and 1996, following the release of the European Commission’s May 1995 White Paper on Eastern Enlargement, there was a flurry of proposals to further develop CEFTA in the direction of a common market. This idea of the 1993–98 period as a natural interval in the EU preaccession dimension of VG cooperation is supported by the fact that, as noted below, the move in 1998 to the EU membership negotiation stage began to generate issues of common interest that could make use of the VG framework. By this time CEFTA had more or less reached the limits of its development as a EU preaccession instrument and was therefore becoming less suitable as a VG surrogate because of the nature of the cooperation needed and also because CEFTA’s membership had expanded beyond the “Luxembourg group.”³⁷ Just as with the NATO preaccession process, cooperation revived when the pragmatic reasons for doing so manifested themselves.

1998–2004: Visegrád 2. The process of reviving full-blown VG cooperation took off in the second half of 1998 in the context of governmental changes in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the Czech Republic an anti-VG leadership was replaced with a pro-VG one at a time when the evidence (especially in the realm of economic performance) for the Czech superiority complex exhibited by the previous government had evaporated. Meanwhile, in Slovakia, a government with credentials acceptable to the West

and the other VG members gained power in September 1998. As already noted, renewal of VG was also connected to the NATO accession process of Poland, Hungary, and Poland, which had already been stimulating considerable cooperative activity between the three regardless of any top-level political rhetoric. Added to all this, although what was probably the major theme of the revived VG—assisting Slovakia to “catch up” in the NATO and EU accession process—was consistent with the new spirit of cooperation, there was a pragmatic dimension for the other VG members too. Separate Slovak entry to the EU posed considerable problems for the Czech Republic and Hungary. In the case of the Czech Republic, entering the EU before Slovakia was bound to cause unwelcome disruptions to the high level of integration between the two. This not only included the customs union established upon division but more importantly the free mobility of people between the two territories. For Hungary the issue of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia was relevant, and accession of Slovakia to NATO was also in the Hungarian interest because “its strategic position, left physically isolated from other NATO members, would be improved.”³⁸

The first move to formally reconvene the VG was made during the occasion of the September 1998 CEFTA summit in Prague. A request that Slovakia take up its empty chair was the key result of the first meeting of the reconvened VG three in Budapest on 21 October 1998. The revived VG held its inaugural meeting in Bratislava on 14 May 1999 and produced a framework for significant expansion of the scale and scope of cooperation. The role of Visegrád 2 would remain focused on the original agenda of furthering the EU and NATO membership endeavour, although now including the catch-up mission of Slovakia as an important task. Alongside this, however, was a new emphasis on various intra-VG cooperation activities to develop civic/societal spheres of the VG project. The substantive elements of the post-1998 VG cooperation were specified as follows: Foreign Affairs (maintaining VG image/profile; meetings/consultations/transfer of experience in various fields but especially in the EU/NATO accession processes); Internal Affairs (border and immigration affairs; organised crime, drug/people/weapon trafficking, etc.); Education, Culture, Society,

Youth and Sport; Science, Technology; Environment; Infrastructure; Cross-border Cooperation.³⁹ Subsequent protocols signed by the VG governments have added new areas of cooperation including, for example, joint actions in tourism development and promotion in 2002.⁴⁰

A second key feature of the revived VG was the establishment of a quasi-institutionalised structure for the intergovernmental cooperation. This was necessary to serve and facilitate the expanded range of activities and ensure involvement of the relevant bodies. It was also needed, given the lessons of the 1993–98 period, to ensure stability via a more permanent basis for VG cooperation and to try to make it less hostage to the vagaries of government changes in the member countries. The structure includes two regular meetings per year of prime ministers; two regular meetings per year of foreign ministers; meetings of other ministers as and when needed; regular meetings of ambassadors in the VG presidency country; meetings of VG presidents; meetings of VG parliamentary representatives; appointment of national VG coordinators, meeting at least twice per year; ministerial cooperation at expert/specialist level; establishment of the rotating presidency of the VG that has an important role on coordinating both the external and internal dimensions of VG cooperation, including compiling the VG work plan and reporting on the progress of its implementation.⁴¹

A major innovation of Visegrád 2 was the establishment of the IVF, mooted at the May 1999 Bratislava summit and formally approved by the VG leaders in June 2000. The main idea behind the IVF was to complement the external dimension of cooperation with concrete activities in the internal sphere and specifically to sponsor projects in the education, arts/culture, and science and technology fields.⁴² The IVF is a somewhat special entity in that it is a genuine VG permanent institution with its own premises, staff, and own resources, and its existence legally commits the VG member countries to support the internal cooperation activities via the obligatory financial contributions. Furthermore, the IVF has been perceived as an important tool for fostering and strengthening the incursion of VG cooperation into the civic domain and public awareness. At the time of the

public unveiling of the IVF in August 2000 Radio Prague reported that “Visegrád has never really captured the public imagination and that’s one of the reasons why the new fund has been set up . . . it aims to support regional cooperation at a grass-roots level, and give real meaning to the rather abstract idea of a regional identity.”⁴³ The IVF’s contributions have received affirmative comment within the VG countries. Polish scholar Bukalska, for example, remarked “how significant the IVF is for the region. . . . Activities partially financed by the fund, though rarely making front-page news, are extremely important for increasing our knowledge about each other.”⁴⁴ Former IVF Director Urban Rusnak stresses the IVF’s strengths in “supporting building and maintaining ties between people of V4 . . . [s]tipulation of cohesion among peoples is creating more positive public approach to the whole idea of Visegrád cooperation and making it more difficult to cut this process in case of less affirmative approach of political leadership in any of the member states.”⁴⁵ The effectiveness and relevance of the IVF also seem to have been recognised at the top levels if the willingness to expand the finances of it is anything to go by. In 2005 the IVF was given a budget of 3 million Euros, which was already three times higher than the initial amount granted for its first year of operation.⁴⁶

A further important development was the “V4 plus” formula that provides the framework for the VG to cooperate, as a group, with third parties, which can either be individual states, regional or subregional entities, or international organisations. The various occasions of V4 plus can come about at the initiative of any of the VG and can also be a response to requests from the other actors. V4 plus is obviously in part a compromise solution to enlargement of VG, which is ruled out at present but something to which certain VG members are less averse than others. V4 plus also seems to have resulted in activities that sometimes produce little except dialogue/gesture (as was the case with, for example, the meeting of foreign ministers of VG and Ukraine in July 2002 instigated by Poland) and more concrete results at other times. A good example of the latter is the fairly intensive cooperation between the VG and Benelux Group, which made useful contributions to thinking about the postaccession role of the VG and

has also involved practical postaccession assistance to the VG countries.

By end 2002, of course, the aim of securing Slovakia's catch-up, and with it the original objectives of the VG, were fulfilled. During the period between the closure of the EU accession negotiations and May 2004, debates about the future role of the VG—including, at least in some circles, discussions about whether it was actually going to be needed in the postenlargement era—were conducted at official, expert, and even media levels. The aim was to conclude the period of reflection, and if it proved to be positive about future viability, to agree on a new framework document for cooperation by the end of the 2004 Czech presidency of the VG.⁴⁷ The reflection was, however, conducted against the background of some ominous developments for the VG in 2002 and 2003.

Crises in Visegrád 2 and perspectives on postaccession cooperation prospects

Much of the expanded range of VG cooperative activities are carried out quietly, attracting little publicity. Media attention to the VG does, however, understandably surge when negative developments in top-level intra-VG political relations occur. The year 2002 turned out to be a particularly problematic year for post-1998 VG cooperation with the first major crisis erupting in February prior to a VG summit scheduled to take place in Budapest. Despite the fact that top agenda items included the EU proposals for farm and regional subsidies for the acceding states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia opted to stay away from the meeting in protest at “remarks by Victor Urban, the Hungarian Prime Minister, suggesting that the Benes decrees were incompatible with EU membership.”⁴⁸ These events “gave many politicians and journalists the reason to speak about the *clinical death of Visegrad* or even about *the end of Central Europe*.”⁴⁹ While a change of government in Hungary helped heal this spat, further doubts about whether VG cooperation was working properly came when certain VG parties broke ranks at the December 2002 “endgame” Copenhagen EU summit. This

was either to unilaterally accept EU bargaining terms on level of agricultural compensation payments or gain more advantageous last-minute individual deals. Most notably, there was the late Polish shift away from pushing for a raise in the 25% level of farm compensation payments offered to accepting instead lump sum payments into the national budgets, and subsequent negotiation of a 1 billion Euros transfer to its exchequer in the guise of what was called a “cash flow facility.” This disappointed Poland’s VG partners and was seen by some as serious evidence of the lack of any genuine alliance of VG countries.

A year later it was Poland’s turn to feel let down by the VG and doubt its solidarity. During the run-in and immediately prior to the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on the Constitutional Treaty numerous V4 prime minister summits took place to “attempt to coordinate the positions of the four Visegrád countries before the IGC gets underway in Rome.”⁵⁰ Yet the final outcome of the IGC seemed once more to highlight fundamental divisions and bode ill for postenlargement VG cooperation on EU affairs. In early 2004 former Polish Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski expressed the view that “the Visegrád Group *de facto* disintegrated at the time of Poland’s biggest diplomatic push in its post-1989 history—the crusade to defend the Nice Treaty provisions. Not a single Visegrád group country supported Poland, and some openly voiced their dislike of the Polish position.”⁵¹ The timing and context of this series of high-level spats proved insufficient to derail the VG but inevitably raised its profile and caused some loss of confidence, bringing the issue of its preaccession usefulness and postaccession purpose very much to the fore. Although abandonment of the VG was to prove an unlikely prospect, the discourse of its demise was real enough. Olechowski also added, “So we are back to square one. We may continue the collaboration or abandon it and consider it no longer relevant upon EU accession.”⁵²

Against the backdrop of these apparent VG failures in the context of NATO membership and impending EU entry, a number of pessimistic assessments of the future came into circulation. A common premise of the negative prognoses was that the external dimension of cooperation had been crucial for sustainability

and vitality of the VG and that there was little chance for successful cooperation without the shared agenda of Euro-Atlantic integration to give it purpose and hold it together. Much of the analysis centred on a key problem of imbalance caused by the presence of Poland. In an early prognosis of postenlargement VG prospects Vachudova foresaw that the VG would become a casualty of the separation of Central Europe into “two different groups of states ... *Provincial Central Europe* and *Cosmopolitan Central Europe* will be divided by fundamental differences on matters of European integration, immigration and security.”⁵³ Vachudova’s view was that divergent interests across the many spheres of the EU policy domain would prevail and the VG countries were most likely to “find partners among the other EU member states that share their own interests, while their shared origins in East Central Europe will become more and more irrelevant.”⁵⁴ Poland was predicted to form part of *Cosmopolitan Central Europe*, eager to play an active part in shaping major EU policies central to its own interest and ambitions, including the Common Agricultural Policy (of the European Union) (CAP) and Common Foreign and Security Policy (European Union) (CFSP) and also to favour eastern borders being as open as possible taking a positive attitude towards cross-border movement of traders and workers. Willingness and enthusiasm to engage its military outside Europe, indulge a global perspective on security issues, and attempt to dominate the regional security arrangements would also distinguish *Cosmopolitan Central Europe*.⁵⁵ The other VG countries were predicted, on the other hand, to be characterised by a more defensive posture and approach to EU policies, lack of serious ambition in shaping security policies, and more inward-looking passive approaches to foreign policy in general. This, together with the higher profile of Eurosceptic, anti-immigration right-wing political parties, would lead them into *Provincial Central Europe* that would “regroup the small post-Habsburg nation states of Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia.”⁵⁶

Well-known Czech political analyst Jiří Pehe, in a more recent critique of the VG, highlights Poland’s size, Baltic region/east European orientation, strong desire for a key role at regional and

global levels, its part in the Iraq crisis, and early showing as an uncompromising partner in European Council negotiations as factors that do not bode well for the VG.⁵⁷ Pehe suggests Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia should prioritise other cooperation initiatives, in particular the as yet under-utilised “Regional Partnership” initiative that combines the V4 with Austria and Slovenia. “Such a regional grouping, whose members would be connected by the virtue of a long common history and compatible interests, would be much more organic than the current Visegrád initiative—an organisation that lumps together three small states with a country that has more inhabitants than its three partners put together, plus its own power agenda.”⁵⁸ Another variant of this theme is that in the enlarged EU, Poland will—as a result of its size, key areas of interest in EU policies, together with its regional and global security perspectives—gravitate to the larger EU states. Using the experiences of the VG countries in the Future of Europe convention to give indirect indications of whether the VG could be expected to become a compact entity in the EU, Kral envisaged that Poland “will belong to the ‘Big Six’ in the enlarged EU. It will be [or at least will try to be] on equal footing with the largest and influential EU countries like France or Germany which can be witnessed now (e.g. the so-called Weimar Triangle cooperation).”⁵⁹ Indeed, Polish Foreign Minister Cimoszewicz’s address to the Sejm on Polish foreign policy in 2004 stated that priority will be given to relations with Germany and France and that the Weimar Triangle could enhance “understanding of mutual expectations and contributing to building mutual confidence.”⁶⁰

The VG in the expanded European Union: Cooperation or coordination?

The “new” guidelines

Despite the difficulties within the VG in 2002 and 2003 and the discourses these events generated, the VG governments decided that their cooperation vehicle was a valuable one and should be continued. The declaration of the VG Prime Ministers’ meeting

held in the Czech Republic on 12 May 2004 was meant to serve the purpose of redefining and updating the mission of the VG following the expiry of the original 1991 declaration. The 2004 declaration states that “[t]he cooperation of the Visegrád Group countries will continue to focus on regional activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region. In this context, their cooperation will be based on concrete projects and will maintain its flexible and open character.”⁶¹ Four dimensions of cooperation are specified: cooperation within the VG area itself, cooperation within the EU, cooperation with other partners (including individual countries and other subregional structures), cooperation within NATO and other international organisations.⁶² The declaration also affirms the intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms, based on prime ministerial, ministerial, presidential, and parliamentary spheres.

Comparison of the preexisting VG cooperation guidelines—and particularly with the *Contents of Visegrád Cooperation 1999* that had already gone some way toward updating the VG terms of reference—with the provisions of the May 2004 declaration reveals that the latter was more of a political document affirming the ongoing viability and role of the VG rather than heralding a substantive departure from what was already in place. Of course, the new guidelines served the purpose of adapting the VG agenda to the updated context of actual EU membership, and the aim of “cooperation within the EU” was to some extent a move into uncharted territory. A key question was whether the environment of the enlarged EU (with a more disparate membership and an assumed set of shared interests for new members that are both inexperienced in operating within the EU and that also share certain economic characteristics) would combine with the cooperative tendencies already established and enable a distinct subregional entity within the EU to emerge. Or would the new environment mainly serve to bring the centrifugal forces to the fore and leave VG to remain at best a vehicle for furthering internal cooperation in the future with the possibility that the downgrading of the external agenda will gradually cause the VG to lose profile and relevance as per the gloomy scenarios discussed above? Vachudova and Pehe, together with other

pessimistic assessments of the future of Visegrád cooperation, were correct to identify some of the key risks and contradictions that the postenlargement VG would face. However, these analyses underestimated the resilience of the VG and, in part because of them being rather centred on geopolitical issues (and according to Vykoukal in Pehe's case also seriously overestimating Poland's capacity to act as a big power⁶³), failed to consider the demands for cooperation that would arise as a result of the *postaccession* phase of EU entry and how the VG cooperation culture and established structures/mechanisms would respond to the new opportunities. For sure, views such as the one recently expressed in *The Economist* that “[s]ince those aims [NATO and EU membership] were achieved a year ago, Visegrád has been falling, if not quite apart, then at least into insignificance” are well wide of the mark and guilty of a lack of any proper investigation into the topic.⁶⁴

New avenues and incentives for cooperation

Although it is still very early to judge, there is already enough evidence to support the view that the VG members will have an above-average close relationship through which to pursue shared interests in the EU and will be able to maintain some kind of group identity within it. First, as noted earlier, the quasi-institutionalised structure of VG cooperation entails regular meetings at various levels of government. The scheduled meetings that take place as a regular part of the VG process provide the opportunity to debate EU affairs and establish whether or not common positions exist, which can then be pursued collectively. VG leaders have also held extra meetings before key EU sessions, both on occasions just prior to them or on the fringes while the EU gatherings are taking place. While this framework carries no guarantee of collective positions—or even that the VG countries will always be able or inclined to use it—it does mean that an important mechanism to identify and act upon group positions is available and has become incorporated into the policy-making process to some degree. That this process of consultation was working was in evidence throughout the period

running up to the May 2004 EU enlargement. Despite the ultimately insurmountable obstacles at the December 2002 and 2003 EU summits, the VG leaders and key ministers held many meetings in which they arrived at coordinated positions, prepared joint statements in opposition to some key aspects of EU bargaining positions in the negotiations, and so on. Even after the apparent low point of the 2003 IGC negotiations, the VG soon seemed to be bouncing back strongly when in March 2004 the “Visegrád Four countries signed an agreement on coordinating their approach to applying for European Union structural and cohesion funds after they join the Union on May 1.”⁶⁵ More recently, the VG prime ministers meeting held on 10 June 2005 in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, produced a Joint Declaration in the aftermath of the French and Dutch referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty. The common position was that “the process of ratification should continue. . . . All Member States should express themselves on the Treaty. They should proceed with ratification at the pace they consider most appropriate in their individual circumstances.”⁶⁶ The subtext to this joint position may well have an attempt to prevent the ratification crisis spilling over negatively into the EU budget negotiations, but either way, it was clearly VG cooperation on their mutual interests.

Second, the section of the guidelines on the future areas of Visegrád cooperation that specifies the spheres of cooperation within the EU makes reference to a number of policies in which the VG countries expect to find common ground and that various analysts within the VG countries predicted.⁶⁷ They include an open section that provides for consultations and cooperation on current issues of common interest; active contribution to the development of the CFSP, including the “Wider Europe–Neighbourhood” policy and the EU strategy toward the Western Balkans; consultations, cooperation, and exchange of experience in Justice and Home Affairs, Schengen cooperation, including protection and management of the EU external borders; creating new possibilities and forms of cooperation within the European Economic Area; consultations on national preparations for joining the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU); and active participation in the development of the European Security and Defence Policy

(ESDP), as a contribution to strengthening of relations and dialogue between the EU and NATO.⁶⁸ In addition to the official VG list, other aspects of the regular business of the EU (e.g., on budgetary size and structure debates, resistance to issues such as moves to tackle alleged “tax-dumping” and attempts to close off Western European markets to service providers from the new member states, etc.) offered scope for cooperation, in many cases in tandem with other EU new members and less prosperous states of the EU15. Furthermore, several commentators have pointed to one clear shared strategic interest on the ESDP front: to try to ensure that development of EU military capability does not occur at the expense of the role and relevance of NATO, which the VG states continue to regard as their prime security guarantee and framework.

Third, some extra comments about the policies set out in the guidelines should be made. Several of them are preexisting components of EU integration that the new members are aiming to be incorporated into—Schengen, EMU in particular—and illustrate the key point that the day in which any new member joins the EU does not mark the end of the transition to full application of the *acquis*. Rather, it signifies the commencements of the postaccession phase of the EU in which the new members not only adapt to working within the EU but also look to progress to the innermost core of the integration they have joined. Although there is no synchronised policy for EMU, on Schengen preparations, however, moves to initiate enhanced cooperation had already been agreed at a meeting of VG interior ministers on 11 September 2003. This included the establishment of the V4 “Working Group for Schengen Cooperation” with the brief to “check conditions and modalities for the joint submission by VG states of an application for participation in the Schengen cooperation.”⁶⁹ There were more than ten VG meetings at either minister, deputy minister, or expert level during the 2003–4 Czech VG presidency as well as ongoing IVF projects and cooperative activities in the V4+ framework.⁷⁰ At their meeting in July 2004 Ministers were able to “declare that the degree of compatibility among V4 National Schengen Action Plans achieved so far as well as the progress made in their implementation by each State will

enable V4 countries to submit an application for full participation in the Schengen cooperation at the same time.”⁷¹

Fourth, even in the case of those policies where some claim that the V4 will have dissimilar or opposite interests, closer scrutiny of the situation indicates that this is not necessarily the case. A typical case of this is agriculture, which, as Daňková, for example, assumed “is an issue particularly for Poland and it is therefore logical that its position on this issue will be radically different from that of the other Visegrád members.”⁷² Yet when policy spheres such as agriculture are disaggregated into the multitude of issues they actually comprise in reality, the idea of incompatible interests does not always hold true. In the case of agricultural policy issues, three areas where the VG countries have been cooperating intensively, often in the “V4 plus” format and with Slovenia in particular, are as follows: serious loss of export trade to Russia in food products experienced by VG producers immediately after the May 2004 enlargement because of problems with the need for certificates of approval of hygiene/sanitary standards to be issued by the Russian authorities (these certificates were not needed prior to EU membership); the debate over the need to harmonise the EU customs code, especially for food/agricultural products; and reforms to the CAP sugar regime. To give another example, also on the agenda of cooperation is the need to ensure that the interests of VG producers are represented in the agricultural market access deal to be struck with Croatia as part of the latter’s accession negotiations.

Fifth, the need to disaggregate policy areas and focus on alternative levels of policy is also relevant for CFSP. While the issue of an early membership perspective for Ukraine and future strategic concepts for EU relations with Russia, Belarus, and Moldova are linked to high politics/strategic considerations and make common VG positions rather complicated, the VG countries can cooperate at lower level practical dimensions of EU Eastern policy. Contributions to the broader Europeanisation processes for Eastern neighbours, including economic opening and other issues connected to business/economic and soft security concerns of all the VG countries all became possible and also afford the VG countries an opportunity to bring their expertise and experience, as well as interests, to bear on this EU policy sphere.⁷³

As Gromadzki et al. wrote on the potential role of the VG vis-à-vis Ukraine: “The Visegrád countries, because of vested interests, could facilitate a more flexible implementation of the Schengen regime to the benefit of both parties . . . thanks to their unique perspective they have insightful ideas for supporting democracy and civil society in Ukraine. . . . In addition to assistance provided by the EU, Visegrád countries should consider using their own resources to maintain and expand cooperation and encourage people-to-people contacts in their respective countries and Ukraine. This could take place bilaterally or through joint efforts, for instance through the International Visegrád Fund.”⁷⁴ Recent pronouncements and actions seem to be matching this prognosis. In June 2005 it was confirmed that the VG countries will

exchange information on [and coordinate where beneficial] bilateral assistance projects and the engagement of Visegrád countries in the twinning cooperation when it is finally offered to Ukraine later this year. In particular, joint Visegrád Group efforts will concentrate on institutional development, regional co-operation and development, and implementation of selected reforms. The Visegrád Group countries will work towards closer co-operation between the EU and Ukraine in the area of CFSP, JHA as well as development of economic co-operation, with respect to facilitation of Ukraine’s accession to the WTO as well as start of negotiations on free trade agreement between the EU and Ukraine.⁷⁵

Sixth, intergovernmental cooperation and micro-level cooperation via the IVF and other processes are not the only modes of VG cooperation at work. VG cooperation can also be found working “invisibly” in intra-VG networks at the nongovernmental level, for example, within pan-European sectoral associations/lobbies seeking to influence the relevant aspects of EU trade and agricultural policies. Representatives of the national VG country federations of food and drink industries have been working intensively as a group (also in a “V4 plus” equivalent with other new members) in pressing and negotiating with the European Commission in matters of concern to their members. This level of VG cooperation has been especially proactive and involved in the case of the agricultural and trade policy issues noted above.⁷⁶ Evidence that VG cooperation is working at the business network level shows that to restrict the discussion of the relevance

and operation of VG to intergovernmental cooperation within the EU does not reveal the full picture. It also shows that it would not be straightforward and perhaps not even possible for government to terminate V4 cooperation in the highly unlikely event there was any political reason to do so.

Cooperation rather than coordination

It seems fairly convincing that, for the time being at least, there is room for collective VG approaches to an array of EU-related issues and policies and that the necessary mechanisms for exploring and acting upon common ground exist. At the same time, the reasons to suppose that the VG will not become an automatic platform for coordinating positions and speaking with one voice on the EU stage seem irrefutable. First, there is no intention for this to happen, and nowhere in official pronouncements on VG cooperation can one find such an aspiration. The watchword in VG is flexibility, and the idea is that VG cooperation mechanisms are available to identify common interests and policy preferences and collectively pursue them but not to start from the premise that the VG exists to produce common positions, either in EU business or other areas. This state of affairs reflects the lessons of the final stages of the EU accession negotiations and differences over the contents of the EU Constitutional Treaty, both of which played an important role in shaping decisions and expectations how the VG would operate in future. Since the events bred disillusion about the reliability of VG cooperation generally and cast doubt therefore on whether the VG countries would even constitute a coherent group in the enlarged EU, they prompted a more thorough reflection and assessment of the state of the cooperation than might otherwise have been the case. Subsequently, this reflection process prevented the VG from drifting into the postaccession phase without a firm and realistic agenda on the one hand and potentially damaging overinflated expectations on the other. Timing was also important as Falkowski et al. correctly predicted in their late 2003 call for a pre-May 2004 review of the post-enlargement role of the VG: "This is a good moment for another quiet reflection on the possible future of the Visegrád Group, on

the purpose of regional collaboration between our countries in an enlarged Union. It is better to do it now than during the initial hectic months and years of EU membership.”⁷⁷ In addition, as mentioned earlier, in the course of their own reflection on the postenlargement future of the VG, the member countries studied the experience of other subregional groupings in the EU, and “working contacts were established with the structures of the Nordic Council of Ministers and Benelux, from whom the Visegrád countries drew inspiration in questions concerning the functioning of regional cooperation within the European Union.”⁷⁸ Although cooperation with the Benelux Group has been more intensive during the past two years, the Nordic Council experience, which successfully combines countries with varied interests and approaches to the EU and which strongly focuses on cooperation with other subregions as well intraregional cooperation, is viewed as a particular interesting example as far as future trajectory of the VG is concerned.⁷⁹

Second, it is well established that a pattern of shifting alliances prevails in both the intergovernmental and supranational domains of EU governance, and this will apply to the VG countries too. To take one relatively recent example, on 8 February 2005 EU member state officials met to discuss whether to “write into EU law a deal on train drivers conditions and hours signed in early 2004 between the Community of European Railways and Infrastructure Companies (CER) and the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) . . . representatives of the Netherlands, Denmark, United Kingdom and Slovakia argued that the impact of proposed legislation on drivers hours had been insufficiently thought through.”⁸⁰ It is normal for states to have varying interests and circumstances, as well as instinctive attachments to sovereignty/independence that affect their approaches to, and positions in, international organisations and particularly in the EU where sovereignty issues are especially resonant. The VG countries may have strong networks, a cooperation culture, and specific collective interests as new members that give the VG a measure of group identity in the EU, but a healthy degree of divergence in many cases would be expected.

Third, not only is it unrealistic to expect that the VG actors would concur on the myriad issues arising in EU business, but

there is also the peculiar governance structure of the EU to consider. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), ostensibly operating independently from their home governments/parties, tend not to organise in regional or even national clusters. Furthermore, in the present European Parliament (EP), for certain VG states, the MEPs predominantly represent parties currently in opposition, most notably in the case of the Czech Republic, although all VG sitting governments fared relatively poorly in the June 2004 EP elections. On the occasion of the early 2005 EP vote on the EU Constitutional Treaty, both the Czech and Polish representations were negative. Of twenty-four Czech MEPs, just seven voted in favour, while a majority of Polish MEPs either abstained or voted no.⁸¹ The EP vote shortly afterward on whether Ukraine should be given a EU membership perspective was passed by 467 to 19, yet “in contrast with the European Parliament, the European Council representing EU members states and the European Commission, the EU executive, remain reluctant to accept that Ukraine could eventually join the EU.”⁸² Notwithstanding the nonbinding nature of these EP votes (although, of course, the EP has very real powers to exercise in areas of EU business) and differences within the VG on how exactly and within what timescale the EU should proceed in enabling Ukraine to draw closer to it, these examples serve to illustrate the essential point that the issue of the VG acting together in the EU is complicated by the EU governance context.

Fourth, potential shortcomings of the VG intergovernmental cooperation procedures need to be acknowledged. There is the permanent risk that the individual government leaders will opt not to use or even boycott the VG consultative framework. This is clearly most likely to occur in the context of any high-octane political conflicts or as a result of indiscretions that create serious tensions, as per the Czech and Slovak boycott of the scheduled February 2002 VG summit following the Urban outbursts on the Benes Decrees. This episode also showed that the post-1999 VG cooperation procedures and commitments have not shielded it from such disruptions since Urban “effectively suspended the cooperation in 2002 for the sake of domestic electoral politics and allying with the Austrian and Bavarian governments . . . [conveying]

the impression that the intensity of cooperation among the four states is susceptible to the changing preferences and priorities of political leaders.”⁸³ Bypassing the VG framework can also occur in times of normal relations as shown by the case of the (failed) Polish attempt at the December 2004 EU summit to “agree to give Ukraine special status.”⁸⁴ The other VG countries did not support Poland’s position, and although this may have been the case anyway, any chance of a common VG position was ruled out because the Polish government did not consult the other VG countries on its proposal prior to the summit. Go-it-alone instincts or preferences carry the risk of missed opportunities for positive application of the VG framework and can generate bad publicity in media and official circles and also send negative signals to the others about how certain parties perceive the group concept.

Because of perceived underlying frailties of even the post-1999 bolstered framework for intergovernmental cooperation, there have been calls to further institutionalize the VG, including creation of a secretariat with the ability to independently formulate and propose (although, of course, not impose) possible VG policies, initiatives, joint positions, and so on. The hypothetical VG secretariat could also have an important role in the direction, coordination, and promotion of the VG actions at the concrete, intraregional cooperation level, especially as regards the activities of the IVF. At present the opposition to creating such institutions for VG is firm, and the creation of a VG secretariat in the foreseeable future should not be expected.⁸⁵ Apart from cost issues and the argument that such a secretariat is unnecessary anyway because the rotating VG presidency carries out the proposed functions, resistance to institutionalisation of subregional cooperation initiatives in Central Europe has been constant throughout the post-1990 period.⁸⁶ Despite many proposals that surfaced, particularly in the 1995–96 period, and mainly at the instigation of Poland and Slovakia, CEFTA remained institution-free even though some proposals had a practical logic. Imbalance in the V4—mainly to do with the relative size of Poland—has always been a key factor, and it remains the case that suspicion that certain parties will, when it suits them, look to use the VG to gain influence in their specific matters of concern will be hard to eradicate.

In sum, whether looking at the content or the mechanisms for the VG's activity, it seems fairly safe to predict that for the immediate future, the relationship will be based on cooperation and acceptance of the principle that coordination is to be the norm only in cases where it suits all parties and where the EU governance system allows. Each VG member "has its own priorities and will, above all, look out for them in the EU . . . this does not exclude cooperation in areas where the Visegrád Group's interests are concurrent, as was the common goal of integration into NATO. The V4 should be viewed in a realistic, not maximalist, manner. It should not set too high expectations and must be elastic in its adjustment to various situations."⁸⁷

Conclusions

Although the EU enlargement was certainly a landmark for the VG, any debates about whether it meant that time could be called on Visegrád cooperation were premature. The fluid and evolving nature of Visegrád cooperation, though hinging always on the Europeanisation process, meant that unlike some other subregional groupings based purely on functional preaccession activities—for example, CEFTA, which the VG members were compelled to leave upon EU accession—the VG was not bound to reach a natural conclusion of its activities upon accession to the EU. The advent of actual membership of the EU coupled with a high-profile failure of VG to achieve coordinated stances at crucial times in the negotiation end game and in the 2003 IGC raised the need to debate and reflect on what the VG might and might not be able to achieve but not whether it could continue. Those lessons revealed that the VG would not be a platform for a consistent group position in the EU, and acceptance that postaccession cooperation in the EU, and indeed on other international issues, would be essentially flexible.

Although the long-term role of the VG remains uncertain, there is evidence that for the time being at least it has a relevant part to play in the expanded EU. The actual points of admission to NATO and the EU were stages in an ongoing process rather than some kind of finality, and the postaccession phase of EU

membership in particular gives scope for cooperative activity. In fact, it can be argued that whereas cooperation in the EU preaccession phase was essentially one-dimensional around the membership issue itself and often compromised by competitive/individualistic instincts and country-specific aspects of the negotiations, actual membership and the postaccession phase have been giving rise to numerous avenues and themes for cooperation. Some of these were in motion (e.g., cooperation around Schengen entry) even before the actual accession. Areas where cooperation is particularly realistic are highlighted in the VG May 2004 declaration, and even for those EU policy areas most commonly flagged up as ones that would undermine VG cooperation, the discourse has tended to focus on the macro level and failed to take into account the disaggregated actuality of EU policies. Close VG cooperation on EU matters has also been taking place at a nongovernmental level, and of course, there is the emphasis on intraregional cooperation that has important contributions to make, for example, in the promotion and development of areas particularly useful for the VG economies such as in tourism.

A VG group identity remains discernible and looks set to continue for the time being. On the basis of the preliminary evidence, it certainly seems feasible that the VG will be able to maintain an above-average degree of interaction and consolidate as a discernible brand joining the family of established groupings within the EU. The fact that the VG looked to the Benelux Group and Nordic Cooperation as examples of possible ways forward in the postenlargement context and continues to actively cooperate with those groupings has increased the likelihood of a successful transition from preaccession to postaccession cooperation. The integrity of the VG will be challenged by individual tendencies, and whether these and new networks that will become established in the wider EU, including at the nongovernmental level, will erode the V4 brand remains to be seen. The essential message of the May 2004 VG Declaration was, according to Jaromír Plíšek of the Czech Ministry of Affairs, that the VG has “passed the test, and it has a future.”⁸⁸ The next few years should reveal whether the VG has a chance of developing into a genuine manifestation of Central European identity or will turn out to be

just a fixed-term phenomenon dependent after all on common goals peculiar to the EU and NATO entry.

Notes

1. *Report of the Czech Presidency of the Visegrád Group, June to May 2004*. Henceforth abbreviated to “Czech VG Presidency Report 2004.” <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
2. Renata Dwan, “Subregional, Regional and Global Levels: Making the Connections,” In G. Herolf, ed., *Subregional Cooperation and Integration in Europe* (Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2000), 81–100, 81.
3. Anders Bjurner, “European Security at the End of the Twentieth Century: The Subregional Contribution,” In Andrew Cottey, ed., *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1999), 8–20, 8.
4. See especially A. Cottey, ed., *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 2000).
5. Martin Dangerfield, “Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans: Stabilisation Device or Integration Policy?” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 5:2(2004): 243–72.
6. Andras Inotai, “Correlations between European Integration and Sub-Regional Cooperation: Theoretical Background, Experience and Policy Impacts” (Working Paper No. 87 of the Institute for World Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 1997).
7. The Nordic Council is another case of a pioneer group. For example, since 1954 Nordic citizens have had the right to travel between Nordic countries without passports and also the right to reside in other Nordic countries without permits.
8. It is important to note that although the *complement/preaccession instrument* and the *substitute* types of regional cooperation can be distinguished in terms of intent, where economic integration has been the main focus of activity, there has been a commonality in terms of the form of integration developed and limits that apply. The usual pattern has been the formation of a free trade area, and although there is potential for intensification into a single market as the example of those countries that opted for the EEA shows, the essential point is that the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Baltic Free Trade Agreement (BFTA), the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA), and the European Economic Area (EEA) are all what Inotai calls *follower* groups (Inotai, “Correlations Between European Integration and Sub-Regional Cooperation,” 66). This means that the level of mutual integration is equivalent to, though does not exceed, what they already have in place with the EU and therefore integration with the EU has been the driver of the content of these regional integration exercises one way or another.
9. In the case of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, the development of an *involuntary alternative/substitution* subregional cooperation project presupposes the emergence of some genuine attempts at economic integration or other substantial forms of multilateral cooperation. Also, the December 2004 electoral triumph of President Victor Yushchenko in Ukraine, together with the new dynamics on the EU eastern policy that the May 2004 enlargement has imparted, opened up the debate on Ukraine’s EU membership prospects despite the apparent limitations (see below) of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
10. Apart from the membership perspective already offered by the EU and the relatively advanced positions of Croatia and Macedonia, the “Wider Europe/New Neighbourhood” concept proposed by the European Commission in March 2003 and accepted by the June EU Thessaloniki summit, is instructive here in that the most obvious negative interpretation of this initiative is that a key purpose of it is to identify those European countries whose relations with the EU are going to fall short of full membership, even in the longer term. The “Wider Europe” does not “therefore apply to the Union’s relations with the remaining candidate countries—Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria—or the Western Balkans” (European Commission 2003, Com 2003, 104 Final, Brussels, 11 March. http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/we/doc/com03_104_en.pdf, 4). On the other hand, the

likely hurdle of EU member state referenda on Turkish accession, as on the agenda in France, for example, means that Turkey's status is not so clear-cut, of course. Furthermore, even the assumption about inevitable Western Balkan entry to the EU may not be watertight. Deteriorating support for EU membership in West Balkan countries was becoming more and more evident in 2005, even in Croatia where "the EU increasingly came to be seen as a bully because of the Gotovina affair, which resulted in a decline of popular support for EU membership. By late August, only 39 per cent of Croats were in favour of joining the bloc" (Patrick Moore, "End Note: Is There Life outside the EU for Western Balkans?" *RFE/RL Newswire*, Part II, 9:176, 16 September 2005). It will be interesting to see whether the EU's October 2005 decision to open at last Croatia's membership negotiations will revive popular support in Croatia.

11. See Dangerfield (2002, see note 32, "Subregional Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe") for a detailed analysis of the varied roles of subregional groupings in post-cold war Europe.
12. CEFTA has generated useful political by-products, however, which were especially valuable during the "dormant" (1993–98) period of the Visegrád Group (VG). See below for further discussion of political dimensions of CEFTA cooperation.
13. The Central European Initiative's (CEI) much looser links to the EU integration process have not featured direct preaccession activity. CEI's role has been more one of contributing to the baseline "Europeanisation" activities laying the foundations for integration proper, and CEI has also followed the principle that the benefits of the cooperation should mainly accrue to those states lagging behind in the twin processes of post-communist transformation and integration with the EU. A key mission of the CEI has been to help prevent new dividing lines emerging in Europe as a result of EU and NATO enlargement processes.
14. Andrew Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," In Andrew Cottey, ed., *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1999), 69–89, 70.
15. Declaration on Cooperation between Czech and Slovak Federal, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European Integration, Krakow, 15 February 1991. Henceforth abbreviated to "VG declaration 1991." <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
16. Not forgetting the important role of dissident-intellectual networks during the late communist era that translated into political cooperation in the post-1990 regimes in which many of these former dissidents held office.
17. Dwan, "Subregional, Regional and Global Levels: Making the Connections," 82.
18. Milada Anna Vachudova, "The Visegrád Four: No Alternative to Cooperation?" *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2:34(27 August 1993): 38–47.
19. See, for example, Rick Fawn, "The Elusive Defined? Visegrád Co-operation as the Contemporary Contours of Central Europe," *Geopolitics*, 6:1(2001): 47–68.
20. Declaration of prime ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of VG countries after their accession to the European Union, Prague, 12 May 2004, 1. Henceforth abbreviated to "VG Declaration 2004." <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
21. Adrian Hyde-Price, *European Security beyond the Cold War* (London: Sage/RIIA, 1991), ix.
22. Urban Rusnak, "One Year Experience of the International Visegrád Fund Activities," *Central European Political Science Review*, 2:5(2001): 244–51.
23. Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," 75.
24. Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," 74.
25. Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," 77.
26. Fawn, "The Elusive Defined?" 54.
27. Vachudova, "The Visegrád Four," 39.
28. Pavol Lukáč, "Regional Co-operation in Central Europe at the Beginning of the 21st Century—New Forms and New Challenges," in *Yearbook of Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic* (Bratislava: Slovak Institute for International Studies, 2002). The fact that it was necessary to anchor Slovak-Hungarian relations in an EU-sponsored bilateral treaty showed the limits of the VG as a security community incubator.
29. Milada Anna Vachudova, "The Division of Central Europe," *The New Presence* (Autumn 2001), 12–14, 12.

30. Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," 78.
31. Slovenia became a CEFTA member on 1 January 1996.
32. Martin Dangerfield, "Subregional Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: Support or Substitute for the 'Return to Europe?'" In Cameron Ross, ed., *Perspectives on the Enlargement of the European Union* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2002): 95–118, 106.
33. See Cottey, "The Visegrád Group," for further details of ongoing bilateral cooperation during the VG's inactive phase.
34. *Prague Post*, 7 June 1995. <http://www.praguepost.com>.
35. Jiří Pehe, "Post-Zieleniec Policies Offer Hope for Change," *Prague Post*, 12 November 1997. <http://www.praguepost.com>.
36. Matthew Rhodes, "Post-Visegrád Cooperation in East-Central Europe," *East European Quarterly* 23:1(1999): 51–67, 59.
37. By 1998 Romania had joined CEFTA, and Bulgaria was on the verge of doing so. Along with Slovakia, both of them had been excluded from the first group of post-communist countries to open EU accession negotiations in 1998.
38. Fawn, "The Elusive Defined?" 62.
39. For obvious reasons it is not possible to go into detailed description of the cooperative activities, meetings, sessions, and so on, but interested readers can easily access more detail by consulting any of the recent VG presiding countries' annual reports via <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
40. See Contents of Visegrád cooperation as approved by the prime ministers summit in Bratislava, 14 May 1999. Henceforth abbreviated to "Contents of Visegrád cooperation 1999." A budget of 240,000 Euros exists for joint promotion of the Visegrád territory as a distinct tourist area. Marketing activities include joint presentations at overseas tourism fairs in the main target markets—currently the United States, Japan, China, Brazil, and India.
41. The annual VG work plan sets the agenda for the year ahead and plans the schedule for VG ministerial meetings and expert consultations.
42. Early projects included, for example, "International Film Festival for Children and Youth," "Seminar of the Multiregional International Business Program—Central and Eastern European Countries," "Improvement of Biomedical Engineering in V4 Countries," and "The Conference of Visegrád Youth." Scholarships to cover the cost of intra-VG student mobility were introduced in 2003.
43. David Vaughan, "Central European Cooperation Goes into a New Gear," *Radio Prague* (8 August 2000). <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/101698>, 1.
44. Patricia Bukalska, "A New Visegrád Group in the European Union—Possibilities and Opportunities for Development," *Centre for Eastern Studies Policy Briefs* (June 2003), 3.
45. Rusnak, "One Year Experience of the International Visegrád Fund Activities," 249.
46. The annual budget was increased to 3 million Euros at the suggestion of the 2003/4 Czech VG presidency. Each VG member contributes 750,000 Euros.
47. The V4 each take turns to hold the rotating annual presidency of the VG that runs from June to May. The current presidency (2005–6) is held by Hungary.
48. *Financial Times*, 23–24 February 2002.
49. Lukáč, "Regional Co-operation in Central Europe," 72.
50. Rob Cameron, "Visegrád PMs Meet in Czech Republic Ahead of Crucial IGC Meeting in Rome," *Radio Prague*, 1 October 2003, 1. <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/45821>.
51. Piotr Koslewski and Paweł Krzeczunowicz, eds., *Poland's foreign Policy: Continuation or a Break with the Past?* (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2004), 21. Lack of VG consensus was also evident on the question of whether the Constitution preamble should include reference to Christianity, again with Polish preferences not getting VG back up, and also on the question of minority issues as per Hungarian views.
52. Koslewski and Paweł Krzeczunowicz, *Poland's Foreign Policy*, 21.
53. Vachudova, "The Division of Central Europe," 12.
54. Vachudova, "The Division of Central Europe," 14.
55. Poland's engagement in Iraq and taking of the lead in the EU's mediation in the Ukrainian 2004 presidential election crisis would be seen as evidence of these "cosmopolitan" tendencies.
56. Vachudova, "The Division of Central Europe," 14.

57. A long-standing suspicion has been that Polish motives toward subregional cooperation initiatives in central Europe have mainly been less to do with ideas about the intrinsic value of such cooperation and more about using subregional groupings as instruments to “amplify” Poland’s voice and influence abroad.
58. Jiří Pehe, “Is the End of Visegrád in the offing?” 18 February 2004. <http://www.pehe.cz/Clanky/2004/02-18-visegrad.htm>.
59. David Kral, *Profile of the Visegrád Countries in the Future of Europe Debate* (Prague: EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, September, 2003), 2. <http://www.europactiv.com?Article?tcaturi=tcm:29-117205-16&type=Analysis>.
60. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, “Government Information on the Polish Foreign Policy in the Year 2004 Presented at the Session of the Sejm on 21 January 2004 by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Włodzimirz Cimoszewicz” (2004), 21. <http://www.ms.gov.pl/Government,information,on,the,Polish,foreign,policy,in,the,year,2004,presented,at,the,session,of,the,Sejm,on,January,21,,2004,by,the,Minister,of,Foreign,Affairs,of,the,Republic,of,Poland,,Wlodzimirz,Cimoszewicz,,2140.html>
61. 2004 VG Declaration, 1.
62. Full details of the dimensions of VG cooperation as set out in the May 2004 VG Declaration are available at <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
63. Jiří Vykoukal, “The End of Visegrád Cooperation, or ‘Don’t Kill the Messenger,’” *Visegrad.info*, 27 March 2004, 2. <http://www.visegrad.info/index.php?ID=nazor&IDt=12>.
64. *The Economist*, 16 April 2005.
65. *Radio Prague*, 3 March 2004.
66. Joint Declaration of the prime ministers of the V4 countries on the EU, Kazimierz Dolny, 10 June 2005, 1. Henceforth abbreviated to “VG Joint Declaration June 2005.” Available at <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
67. For example, Kral, *Profile of the Visegrád Countries in the Future of Europe Debate*, and Bukalska, “A New Visegrád Group in the European Union.”
68. VG Declaration 2004, 3.
69. *Declaration of Visegrád Ministers of the Interior*, 19 July 2004, 1. Henceforth abbreviated to “VG Interior Ministers’ Declaration 2004.” Available at <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.
70. Schengen issues are one of many areas of cooperation between the VG and the Benelux Group, including the transfer of experience and know-how from the latter to the former. For details, see “Fields of cooperation between the Visegrád countries and the Benelux (List of decisions for the meeting in Bratislava on the 15–16 February 2005).”
71. *VG Interior Ministers’ Declaration 2004*, 1. The joint submission commitment is subject to certain conditions—for details of them, see *VG Interior Ministers’ Declaration, 2004*.
72. Hana Daňková, “Regional cooperation in the European Union—Benelux and Visegrád,” *VISEGRÁD.info*, 2003. <http://www.visegrad.info/tisk.php?tabulka=clanek&ID=30>.
73. Use of the V4 cooperation structures to formulate policy inputs to the intra-EU debates on Eastern policy has included not only regular consultations between foreign ministers and other foreign ministry officials but also major V4 seminars on this topic (e.g., in Bratislava in November 2004) involving experts from the major foreign policy research institutes/think tanks. On the International Visegrád Fund (IVF), the internal sphere of VG cooperation should be consolidated by the 2003/4 Czech Presidency’s instigation of discussions and proposals to adapt and upgrade the IVF to the new conditions of EU membership which will make access to EU funds to support and extend the scale of IVF projects more possible and extend IVF projects more into cross-border cooperation between the V4 and East and South East European neighbours. For example modest contributions to development of relations with countries in the EU’s new border zone are being made by the fact that VG scholarships are now available to incoming students from South East and Eastern European countries including Belarus and Ukraine.
74. Grzegorz Gromadzki, Oleksandr Sushko, Marius Vahl, Katarzyna Wolczuk, Roman Wolczuk, eds., *More Than Neighbours: The Enlarged European Union and the Ukraine* (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2004), 16.
75. *Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the V4 Countries on the Ukraine, Kazimierz Dolny, June 10, 2005*, 1. Henceforth abbreviated to “VG Joint Declaration Ukraine 2005.” <http://www.visegradgroup.org>.

76. This lobbying activity has been via the auspices of the Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the European Union (CIAA). I am grateful to Lladislav Cervenka, vice president of the Federation of the Food and Drink Industries of the Czech republic, for advising me of this.
77. Mateusz Falkowski, Patrycja Bukalska, Grzegorz Gromadski, "Yes to Visegrád," *Analyses and Opinion*, 16 (November 2003): 2.
78. VG Declaration 2004, 7.
79. The Nordic Council also includes some non-EU members, for example, Iceland, Norway, and Greenland.
80. *Financial Times*, 16 February 2005.
81. *Financial Times*, 13 January 2005.
82. *Financial Times*, 14 February 2005.
83. Martin Brusis, "Prospects of Visegrád Cooperation in an Enlarged European Union," in Marek. Št'astny, ed., *Visegrád Countries in an Enlarged Trans-Atlantic Community* (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2002): 67-84, 67.
84. *Financial Times*, 19 December 2005.
85. Although some VG members—Hungary most notably in the post-1999 period—have been ardently more anti-institutionalist than others, the author conducted interviews with several of the national VG coordinators in the course of this research, and this was the basic message coming from of all of them.
86. With the exception of the CEI, which has a secretariat in Trieste financed by the Italian government.
87. Bukalska, "A New Visegrád Group in the European Union—Possibilities and Opportunities for Development," 18.
88. Jaromír Plíšek, "Visegrád has passed the test, and it has a future," *Visegrad.info*, 21 October 2004. <http://www.visegrad.info/index.php?ID=nazor&IDt=30>, 1.