

Spring 2001

Vol. II, No. 1



SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY AFFAIRS

Review for international politics, security and integration

SFPA

Visegrad and Central Europe

Yladiie HANDE - Adrian HYDEPRICE

Germany and the Visegrad Countries

Karl HUSMAN

Visegrad Countries in Energy
Relations between Russia and the EU

Pavol VYASAC

Visegrad Cooperation - Ideas,
Developments and Prospects

Kodiv FERRARO-WANDNER

Strategic Partnership and Political
Challenges in Europe



PAVOL LUKÁČ

Visegrad Co-operation – Ideas, Developments and Prospects

The historical background to regional co-operation in Central Europe

In February this year we commemorated the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Visegrad Group - an informal organisation named after its birthplace. One decade is undoubtedly not a long time period in political history, however, it provides a certain distancing from events in order to look closely at fundamental political and ideational motivations which gave birth to the Visegrad grouping, at the transformation of these ideas into concrete political practice, and at possible prospects of further development in subregional co-operation in the space of Central Europe.

Central Europe traditionally represented a geographical space, where a number of small nations with different ethnicity, beliefs, historical experience and tradition have co-existed in a compressed environment. Many times a small nation in Central Europe had a mutually negative experience, but at the same time, their individual political and intellectual representatives strove to formulate a conception counting on the existence of a supranational political entity. They were spurred by the necessity of establishing a larger political entity in Central Europe, which, despite multiethnic and geographical differentiation of the region, would make possible defence against power pressure from the East and the West, as well as own power self-assertion on the continent.¹

Currently two platforms increasingly differentiating in terms of views are observable, one of which is represented by proponents of the idea of a co-operating Central Europe, who point to positive moments in common history and to the tradition of multiethnic and multicultural forms

¹ There exist many historical projects of Central European federations or confederations by different authors. Austrian historian Horst Haselsteiner who occupied himself with these projects enumerates the following motivational elements:

- the starting point of these plans was a recognition that Central Europe was multiethnic in shape, and in a natural way it was not possible to achieve the state in which all ethnic requirements of national groups could be saturated in terms of territory, borders, etc.,
- national groups have always striven to ensure natural autonomy and have resisted centralism,
- the federative organization was to ensure collective defence against negative influences of neighbouring powers to small and medium-size nations,
- such a harmonized and stabilized community could have a better chance in political, economic and cultural self-assertion,
- the balancing of interests inside a federative grouping was, at the same time, to reconcile traditionally antagonistic relations between individual national groups.

See Haselsteiner, H.: "Föderationspläne in Südosteuropa", In: *Europäische Visionen, Begegnungen*, Schriftenreihe des Europa Institutes Budapest, Budapest, 1995, pp. 76-77.

Pavol Lukáč studied history and political science at the Faculty of Arts Comenius University in Bratislava. In addition, he did research abroad in Bochum (1992), Munich (1995), and in 1998, as a visiting scholar he did research at Georgetown University, Washington DC. He has been working in the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association since 1995, and since 2000 he has been Deputy Director of the SFPA Research Center. He is also editor in chief of the Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs.

of the Central European space. They are mostly intellectuals, writers, historians and essayists, who have significantly influenced ideational or political discourse whether in emigration or dissent, as well as after the fall of the Iron Curtain, in the early 1990s, as many of them entered active politics. The second camp includes pragmatic politicians as well as intellectual sceptics who regard the whole idea of Central Europe as a modern myth and the source of intellectually and politically impotent reflections. The aims of this study is to compare both these approaches, to what extent they influenced the development of a conceptual framework for the possible Central European co-operation on the platform of the Visegrad group.

The idea is shared by several scholars that the establishment of the Central European political platform after the fall of communism was partly spurred by the discussion provoked by an outstanding essay by the well-known Czech writer living in Paris, Milan Kundera, who published it under the title *The Tragedy of Central Europe* on 26 April in the Orwellian year 1984 in New York Review of Books. The essay itself addressed only the differentiation of Central Europe from Eastern, which during communism represented a monolithic homogenous bloc of communist countries, and highlighted the specific character of Central Europe especially in the area of culture. Rather than a political recipe, Kundera's essay represented a kind of reminder for the West, in order that it should not forget about old European nations subjugated by communism, while in many respects it was sharply anti-Russian in tone. In fact, Kundera characterised Central Europe as a space, which was not a state, but "a culture or destiny. Its borders are imaginary and must be re-demarcated in each historical situation."² After all, Milan Hauner, the Czech historian and political scientist living in emigration as well, pointed to this fact even at the time of its creation, when he wrote: "...Kundera incessantly understands Central Europe as 'a culture and destiny', and not as a historical and geopolitical entity."³

However, it would be a mistake to renounce all these intellectual deliberations about the Central European space, because it was them that contributed in many respects to the "revival of Central Europe", initially as a cultural phenomenon and later as an independent geopolitical entity.

Besides Kundera's reflection, even at the beginning of the 1990s some historians considered the revitalisation of the concept of an Austro-Hungarian empire in the shape of a Central European federation, such as Pierre Behár, who wrote on the pages of the French journal *Commentaire* that the idea of a Danube Federation arose from the indispensable requirements of Europe's political statics, and as such, it was not a modern idea, but a topical one.⁴

In 1989 during his visit to Poland, the significant American political scientist of Polish extraction, Zbigniew Brzezinski, advisor for national security in Carter's administration revived the idea of a Czechoslovak-Polish confederation and the possibility of its re-establishment.⁵ The Czechoslovakian diplomacy rejected this plan even at the beginning of 1990.⁶

³ Hauner, M.: A letter to the editorial staff of *The New York Review of Books* (it was originally not published), *Svědectví* 89/90, 1990, p.382. See the discussion into which Milan Šimečka, János Kis, Francois Bondy, and Georges Nivat entered, *ibid.* pp. 374-386. At that time a number of West- and East European intellectuals published articles and essays on the theme of Central Europe at the level of aesthetic-literary deliberation rather than at the political one, e.g. György Konrád, Czesław Miłosz, Timothy Garton Ash, Karl Schlögl and others.

⁴ Behár, P.: *Znamená Rakúsko-Uhorsko myšlienku budúcnosti Strední Evropa*, 19, 1991, pp. 38-50. See the response of Kende, P.: *Dunajská federace: myšlenka budoucnosti Střední Evropa*, 20, 1991, pp. 11-18. Kende is more sceptical in this respect; on the one hand, he admits that "the Danube federation, potentially with Poland or even (why not?) with the Baltic countries integrated into it, would be, undeniably, desirable, at least theoretically". p. 15. On the other hand he, however, states that "the idea of a new Austria-Hungary is a chimera." p. 16.



Although all these ideational conceptions were marked by political Utopianism and were far from political reality, they contributed to the formation of Central European cultural patriotism which a small group of the political, and especially intellectual elite in Central European countries embraced.

The inception of the Visegrad and its hallmarks

First signs of regional co-operation in the Central European space were more concretely delineated by Vaclav Havel, then the president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (its official name had not yet been changed by law) during his first visit to Poland. On 25 January 1990 he addressed members of both the chambers of the Polish Parliament, the Sejm and Senate, and invited representatives of Poland and Hungary for a meeting to Bratislava Castle. The analysis of this speech clearly shows the influence of reflections on the theme of Central Europe and well illustrates to what extent intellectual inspirations may influence real political development. In his address Havel highlighted the need to cease "nationalistic selfish moods and the policy of their provoking in a spirit of the slogan "Divide and Rule", and that it was time, on the basis of learning from fate, to commence a good co-ordination of policies in the process labelled Return to Europe at that time. He characterised the overall credo of Central European political co-operation by the following words: "...for the first time there is a real historical chance before us to fill a large political vacuum that has emerged in Central Europe after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire with something meaningful. We have an opportunity to turn Europe as so far a predominantly historical and spiritual phenomenon into a political one. We have an opportunity to turn the wreath of European nations, colonised by Soviets until recently and today striving for such a friendship with the nations of the Soviet Union that would be based on equality, into a certain special body, which would approach richer Western Europe not as a poor renegade or amnestied prisoner powerlessly looking around, but as someone who is coming up with something like that, namely with spiritual and moral incentives, bold peace initiatives, unused creative potential, the ethos of newly acquired freedom and the inspiration for bold and quick solutions."⁷ In addition to the idea of Central European co-operation, a certain visionariness and Messianism inherent in Havel's political ideas were reflected in this idea. According to him, "the Central European body" was to become a kind of intellectual avant-garde of unifying Europe.⁸

⁵ The idea of the Polish-Czechoslovak federation was very live during World War II, where Czechoslovakia's exile government under the leadership of Beneš and Poland's exile government under the leadership of Sikorski signed by the end of 11 November 1940 a pronouncement, in which both states declared that "they are resolved to enter into a more focused political and economic union." In an interview in April 2001 Zbigniew Brzezinski said: "Immediately after the end of the Soviet bloc, I felt that it was important to create new and larger cooperative structures. However, a Czech or Slovak-Polish federation no longer proved feasible, while the dissolution of Czechoslovakia further enhanced the drift toward diversity. In that context, alternative forms of cooperation such as the Visegrad Four, became more desirable, as a transition eventually to NATO and to EU membership.", the interview was published in the *SME* daily, 30 April 2001.

⁶ Dienstbier, J.: *Od snění k realitě*, Prague, 1999, pp. 65-68.

⁷ Havel, V.: Projev presidenta ČSSR v polském Sejmu a Senátu, www.hrad.cz/president/speeches/1990

⁸ Some political scientist and philosophers highlight the basic components of Havel's political thinking, (developed from the thinking of philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl or Jan Patočka), according to which historical experience enriches individuals and nations and those may become the source of new intellectual and politic activities on the basis of own existential experience. About that see e.g. Tucker, A.: Heidegeriánsství Václava Havla, *Prostor*, V.. No.17, 1991, pp.27-38. or Rosenberger, Ch.: Havel a dejiny: poučenie zo strednej Európy, *Medzinárodné otázky*, I., 2, 1992, pp. 42-45. Partly these approaches are analysed by British political scientist Keane in his controversial book, not well-founded throughout. Keane, J.: *Václav Havel, Politická tragedie v šesti dějstvích* (Václav Havel, Political Tragedy in Six Acts), Prague 1999. Václav



Although in many annals and historical surveys the Visegrad process of co-operation between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary begins with this summit held in north-Hungarian Visegrad, the truth is that before this foundation meeting, a meeting took place in Bratislava, to which President V. Havel invited representatives of Central European countries. The Bratislava informal meeting was held on 9 April 1990 on the premises of the Castle upon the Danube with the participation of top-ranking state representatives of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as well as with the participation of Foreign Affairs Ministers of "geographically and politically close countries" – Austria (Mock), Italy (de Michelis) and Yugoslavia (Loncar). Even though in his unconventional speech Vaclav Havel expressed the hope that the fact that these representatives met at all was not the only success, though in many respects it, after all, was.

V. Havel asked the audience ten questions, which in many respects were key denominations of efforts at common Central European policy, but which also reached beyond the horizon of the Central European region or even the whole of Europe. Here I set forth the shortened version of Havel's questions as he formulated them at the Bratislava meeting, in the plural form as he raised them.

I. Are we or are we not capable today of approximating to the position that would express the common direction of our reflections on the theme of future Europe?

II. Are we or are we not capable of agreeing on that that we do not wish to obstruct one another in entering these mechanisms or even envy one another, but, just the opposite, that we wish to help one another in achieving this?

III. Are we capable of expressing out common attitude to the structures whose members we are, but whose possibilities and roles are radically changing today, that is, to the Warsaw Treaty and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance?

IV. Are we capable of finding a common course in dealing with our ecological, social, cultural, economic, political and security problems? All these problems are interconnected in some way, and cannot be solved separately and individually.

The fifth question concerned the geographical and geopolitical shape of the future regional grouping. Initially Havel introduced the question by this reflection: "Although our brothers Poles know that historically they do not belong to the Danube space, at the same time, they are rightly concerned about the possibility of being pushed aside from fast-forming integration groupings again, and of becoming a traditionally unhappy zone between large Germany on one side and even larger and the similarly dramatically transforming Soviet Union on the other. If we want and must think about one another with solidarity, then we, all together, must consider Poland's politico-geographical situation. Reflections on a certain north or Baltic equivalent of the Adriatic alliance and on Czechoslovakia as a geographical logical link between these two working communities appear have arisen." Then the fifth question followed.

V. Are these reflections carried in the right direction or not? Does anyone of those present have a more meaningful alternative in his/her mind, and are we capable of agreeing on its meaningfulness?

Havel developed these ideas at the conference held on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of "the Velvet Revolution" on 17 November 1999 in Prague in the presence of George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, Danielle Mitterand and Lech Walesa. During a panel discussion of these statesmen, he opposed L. Walesa, who argued that we needed a new Marshall plan, by stating: "We just do not need to get something again, we must give something too." In the spirit of his tradition of thought, Havel encouraged the articulation of intrinsic existential experience in the sense of the idea by Jan Patočka "sacrifices prove worthwhile".



From the sixth to the last question, Havel, however, turned from problems of the Central European region to the problems of human rights in general, to the questions of minorities, nationalism and chauvinism, to the possibility of the transfer of experience of the fight against totality for the nations of the Soviet Union, to the expression of solidarity with the people of the People's Republic of China, as well as to the question of co-responsibility for the development of the third world.⁹

The last questions indicate that V. Havel wanted to address global issues too. As the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jiří Dienstbier, wrote in his political memoirs, Poles and Hungarians did not feel like debating the problems of the world. Rather they were interested in possibilities of co-operation in its Central European part. Although Poles came with the proposal for trilateral economic co-operation, Hungarians rejected, because they had the idea that their economic lead owing to a more liberal form of "goulash" communism distinguished them from the other two countries. The Polish party did not like Czechoslovakia's persisting on closed borders and restricting free border crossing.¹⁰

Another actor in the Bratislava Central European meeting, the significant creator of the Czech Republic foreign policy after 1989, a historian, diplomat and later the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic, Jaroslav Šedivý, describes the meeting in his memoir book as a diplomatic fiasco, when he writes: "The Bratislava meeting was not very successful, embarrassment was manifest on each part."¹¹

At the end even a common pronouncement which the participants were to sign was abandoned.¹² Nonetheless, the Bratislava meeting of Central European countries was an opportunity for some Slovak political forces which sought to influence the agenda of the session by their own proposals and conceptions.¹³

Since the Bratislava meeting was marked by general unpreparedness not only with respect to the event itself but also its participants, the actual start was not sooner than on 15 February 1991 in Budapest, and the signature of a declaration on a common and co-ordinated course towards pan-European integration took place in the ruins of Visegrad Castle, after which the whole process is named. It was in this castle that many centuries ago – on 19 September 1335 – the Hungarian king

⁹ Havel, V.: *Projev presidenta ČSFR na setkání představitelů Polska, Československa a Maďarska*, Bratislava, 9 April, 1990, www.hrad.cz/president/speeches/1990.

¹⁰ Dienstbier, J.: *Od snění k realitě*, Prague, 1999, p.136.

¹¹ Šedivý, J.: *Černínský palác v roce nula*, Prague, 1997, p. 126.

¹² *Ibid.* Jaroslav Šedivý wrote in his book: "The draft communiqué written in the Prague Ministry of Foreign Affairs obviously exceeded the capacity of local officers, they executed it with the old routine.", p. 125.

¹³ It is interesting to compare post facto some politico-conceptual initiatives that emerged at that time. Štefan Šebesta, an expert on international law, then collaborated with the key political force in Slovakia – The Public against Violence, provided me with the material proposing parallel actions during the Bratislava summit of Central European countries. The material considers the incorporation of other countries, such as the German Democratic Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria and proposes the establishment of a Central European Parliamentary Assembly. The Central European Parliament was to be "a prospective assembly, or rather an organization made up of a fixed number of members. Members of the Central European Parliament would be elected in individual countries of Central Europe in accordance with agreed electoral regulations." *Stimuli to the Central European initiative of President V. Havel at the meeting with representatives of Poland and Hungary and the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy invited in April 1990 in Bratislava Castle*, manuscript, the personal archives of the author. It was, of course, only a proposal for activities, and author, inter alia, suggested the establishment of a Central European Advisory Assembly of civic organizations or the foundation of a Central European university according to the tradition of Academia Istropolitana (later the foundation of a Central European University in Bratislava was considered, but under the growing pressure of nationalistic moods in Slovakia, the idea was renounced).



Charles Robert of Anjou, the Polish king Kazimir and the Bohemian king John of Luxembourg met in order to deal with the issues of peace in Central Europe and mutual co-operation. Thereby the Visegrad meeting assumed an appropriate historical aura.

At the beginning of his address, Václav Havel reminded the audience that this meeting was linked back to the meeting held in Bratislava a year ago, and emphasised that Western Europe

The intellectual ideas posed at the beginning of Visegrad co-operation were soon replaced by the actual seeking of political models and practical know-how for regional co-operation.

accepted successful co-operation between the countries of the Visegrad Three, the ability to co-ordinate efforts was the test of maturity of the new democracies in its eyes. Similarly, Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall repeated that the West did not like small countries arguing.¹⁴

After this repeated start the idea of regional co-operation was being implemented by concrete activities. One of the greatest achievements in the first phase of Visegrad co-operation were co-ordinated activities in dissolving the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. It was here that the individualistic

principle was replaced by collective mutual informing and a joint course of action.¹⁵

The intellectual ideas posed at the beginning of Visegrad co-operation were soon replaced by the actual seeking of political models and practical know-how for regional co-operation. A consultative meeting of two "Threes" – the Visegrad Three and the Benelux Three – was held on 27 September 1991 in New York. In addition to the fact that Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg confirmed their will to conclude EC association agreements with Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, Benelux offered the Visegrad Three its own experience and information concerning the formation of the first European post-war regional grouping, which was established in the early 1950s. It was mainly the issues of the development of a free trade zone, of common monetary and customs measures, in which the know-how of Benelux could be also useful for Central European countries. This activity was to be co-ordinated by Czechoslovakian, Polish and Hungarian ambassadors to Brussels.¹⁶ The fact that Benelux became a certain model for the formation of the Visegrad was reflected even in the fact that some publicists and journalists, e. g. Adam Michnik spoke of the Visegrad as of "a Benelux in Central Europe".

The meeting of the Visegrad Three in Krakow was also of great significance, and EC as well as NATO membership of these three countries was very concretely spoken about here. Ministers of Foreign Affairs released their common pronouncement on co-operation with NATO. Here President Havel attempted to assess the development of Visegrad co-operation, and described the development of relations between the three countries by stating that in Bratislava the Visegrad countries had been linked only by the consciousness of geographical proximity and similarity of the tasks they were confronted with. In Visegrad the level of consensus and will resulted in a common declaration. Krakow marked the start of the period in which the international community viewed the Three as a good example of regional co-operation.¹⁷

¹⁴ Chmel, R.: *Moja maďarská otázka*, Zo zápiskov posledného česko-slovenského veľvyslanca v Budapešti, Bratislava, 1996, pp. 64-67.

¹⁵ Šedivý, J.: *Černínský palác v roce nula*, (Ze záklisí polistopadové zahraniční politiky), Prague, 1997, pp.127-130.

¹⁶ Dienstbier, J.: *Visegrád, Mezinárodní politika*, 2, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.



The last summit of the Visegrad Three was organised on 6 May 1992 in Prague. At this meeting ministers debated further on continuing talks with Benelux, which offered its experience of trilateral co-operation even within the European communities. Then the atrophy of the Visegrad Three commenced. Its first phase in the early 1990s was, however, characterised at first by the emergence of great ideas, great diplomatic plans and only their slow transformation into political reality. But the Visegrad came to an end before it could happen.

The atrophy of the Visegrad: why did it happen?

Initial euphoria of the early nineties was soon replaced by a dull reality connected with many problems in post-communist countries. Many of these problems contributed to the cessation of Visegrad co-operation in the first half of the nineties: specifically e. g. internal tensions between Czechs and Slovaks ultimately leading to the dismembering of the Czechoslovak Federation; escalation in Slovak-Hungarian relations due to the completion of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros water work or the situation of the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. An important moment in turning from regional co-operation towards rivalry and competition was a decision of almost all the countries of the "Three" to go their ways to European integration structures, believing that the Visegrad co-operation could become nothing but a brake. At the same time, several countries of the Visegrad grouping aspired to leadership in the region either on the grounds of size, position or success in the transition process, which, however, the other countries did not accept.

Even if initially there was a will to transform the Visegrad Three into the Visegrad Four after the break-up of the Czechoslovak Federation, before long any political communication within the V4 format was dismissed and all regional co-operation was shifted to the area of economic co-operation within the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA).

The death of the Visegrad manifested itself the most markedly at the meeting of V4 Prime Ministers in November 1994 in Poznań. The Prime Ministers agreed on the common dismantling of tariffs and on Slovenia's incorporation in their commercial co-operation in the near future. Nobody spoke about political co-operation any more.¹⁸

Almost from the very beginning, the important Czech politician and liberal economist Václav Klaus opposed the idea of Visegrad co-operation, even declaring: "The Visegrad Four is a hollow phrase for me."¹⁹ Klaus's principal arguments against this regional co-operation were stemming from the opinion that the Visegrad co-operation was a construct by Brussels, thereby striving to establish a kind of a substitute grouping which was to saturate the requirements of new candidates concerning EU membership. Besides, Klaus argued that the dynamics of the economic and political transition of individual countries differed. In his view, this form of regional co-operation was a brake for better developed countries, and on the way to the EC/EU the situation of the countries that were not so developed held back for instance the Czech Republic which he considered to be "top of the class" in economic and political transition. Václav Klaus vigorously criticised not

¹⁸ Hungarian journalist Iván Scipiades stated that it was Hungary that gave the fatal blow to the Visegrad by supporting individual approach, i. e. "each country along its own road to the EU", as V. Klaus proposed a long time ago. He quoted the then Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, László Kovács who pronounced: "On the one hand, Hungary does not wish any country would wait for it, when wishing to join the EU, but on the other hand, Hungary will co-ordinate its EU entry with no country." Scipiades, I.: *Umrel (už) Visegrád SME v strednej Európe*, No. 10, 30 December 1994.

¹⁹ Chmel, R.: *Slovensko v strednej Európe mimo Visegrádu alebo vo Visegráde mimo strednej Európy*, OS, the zeroth issue, April, 1997, p. 23.



only the Visegrad group, but he also sceptically viewed even the "motives of its development", as he himself wrote in one of his essays. For him the idea of Visegrad was associated with pessimistic reflections in which the era of post-communist transformation would take a long time, that it would not flow directly immediately to a standard capitalist society, but that an intermediate stage, an intermediate step or an intermediate society would exist. At the same time, he associated these motives, totally wrongly, with the idea of "bridges" between East and West, and with dreams about idyllic "third ways", and accused the authors of these ideas, to whom, as he contended, many non-communist critics of capitalist society and the market economy belonged, that they intended to unite Central European countries against "Eastern despotism as well as the dehumanisation of Western market mechanisms."²⁰ In this criticism he, naturally, expressed his strong disagreement with the political conceptions of his political opponent, President Václav Havel. Both politicians have represented and still represent two different lines of thought - not only with respect to the country's transformation, but also to the roles of political parties, elites and the civic society.

It is interesting that in spite of the declared death of the Visegrad, the idea of Visegrad co-operation survived not only among its intellectual proponents, the political opposition, but also abroad, where many times the this model was valued more than in its member countries. Rudolf Chmel, the last Czechoslovakian ambassador to Hungary wrote on one hand that "the Visegrad, (...) died a long time ago", but on the other hand, he pointed to the fact that "even though the Visegrad ceased to exist in reality, it still existed as a psychological and geopolitical unit, which was worked with within Euro-Atlantic structures in spite of its fictitious nature."²¹

The fact that it was not a fictitious unit was partially proven by the fact that, for example, in Washington all the four diplomats representing countries of the Visegrad Four were invited for mutual consultations at the State Department at first, and later only three hot favourites (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary) were invited for discussing the issues connected with NATO enlargement. The Slovak representative was simply omitted.²² Thus it may be said that though in the mid-nineties the Visegrad did not function, the mutual co-operation between the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary in the NATO accession process seemed to function in a way.

Biggest problems with democratic transition were experienced by Slovakia. It manifested itself the most markedly after the 1994 parliamentary election, when the coalition of the populist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, the extreme Slovak National Party and the ultra-left Association of Slovakia's Workers (HZDS-SNS-ZRS) under the leadership of Vladimír Mečiar was constituted. This government deviated from the course of the other Central European countries not only in foreign policy but also in domestic politics. Its way of handling the power approximated to semi-authoritarian countries like Croatia under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman or the Yugoslavian Federative Republic under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević. Western democracies as well as its immediate neighbours watched this political development with growing concern, because Slovakia became an island of political instability, an untrustworthy country, and a potential regional conflict inducer. The country received repeated *démarches* from the European Union and the U. S., and the final result of the Slovak complications was reflected at

²⁰ Klaus, V.: *Jak je to s visegrádskou spoluprací?*, *Lidové noviny*, 12. 8. 1995, p. 5.

²¹ Chmel, R.: *Slovensko v strednej Európe mimo Visegrádu alebo vo Visegráde mimo strednej Európy*, OS, the zeroth issue, April, 1997, p. 23.

²² An interview with Slovak diplomat Ján Orlovský in Washington DC, June 1997.



the NATO Madrid summit, where Slovakia was excluded from the first group of Alliance membership candidates.²³ By this significant moment the security homogeneity of the Central European region was violated and, as American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it, Slovakia became "a black hole" on the map of Central Europe.

The individualistic approach of the three other countries showed that the Visegrad Four in the form of "three minus one" was not viable either, and that the Slovak complications were not the only reason for the dissolution of the Visegrad grouping. At that time one Hungarian economic expert sceptically described it as follows: "It is indifference and disinterestedness that is characteristic of the Hungarian-Polish-Czech relation; these countries are willing to keep together only under outside pressure."²⁴

The revitalisation of the Visegrad, characteristics of the second phase of the Visegrad Four

The process of revitalisation of Visegrad co-operation was possible only after the parliamentary election in the autumn 1998 in Slovakia, when the Slovak Republic renounced undemocratic politics and isolationistic policy and returned to the policy of regional co-operation and, most importantly, to the policy of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. It was preceded by important internal political changes in Warsaw and Prague. In the autumn 1997 after the elections in Poland, the coalition was formed from the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) and the Freedom Union (UW), which stressed the co-operation of "grupa wysegradska" after the term had almost ceased to be used.²⁵ The cabinet of Prime Minister Václav Klaus was replaced by the social-democratic cabinet led by Miloš Zeman, which partly restored the foreign policy establishment that had started Visegrad co-operation, and partly restored the shaken trust in the Czech "Visegrad" policy.²⁶ At the meeting on October 21, 1998 in Budapest, the Prime Ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, Jerzy Buzek, Miloš Zeman and Viktor Orbán, invited Slovakia to take up the seat reserved for it in the Visegrad grouping. This also resulted from the common experience of all the members of the fruitlessness of an egocentric course of action in the integration process, then from the realisation of the advantages of mutual co-operation as well as from the will to take wider responsibility for events in the region. Undoubtedly, an effort to assist Slovakia in getting out of isolation, after it got rid of its undemocratic representation in the parliamentary election, was a marked motivational element

If there is something the Visegrad really needs, then it is a delineation of a positive political program for the future, and that even within the European Union.

²⁴ Lengyel, L.: Visegrádska trojka, *Střední Evropa*, 76, January, 1998, p. 27.

²⁵ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12. 11. 1997.

²⁶ Czech expert Jiří Vykoukal accurately characterized Czech Visegrad policy in a working draft project concerning the Visegrad Four: "It is obvious that of Visegrad Four member countries it is the Czech Republic that shows the largest fluctuations vis-à-vis this grouping, while in the case of Hungary and Poland these are quantitative, rather than factual fluctuations: ...Similarly, it is obvious that these fluctuations in Czech stances arouse certain amazement abroad, and not only in our "Visegrad neighbours", and above all, disturbs the whole Visegrad via feedback, Visegrád: perspektivy a limity středoevropské spolupráce, Návrh výskumného projektu pre Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí ČR (A draft research project for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic), manuscript, the archives of the author.



of the Visegrad revitalisation too. It would be, however, wrong to understand the Visegrad revitalisation – and it has been partially grasped in that way – as happening just because of Slovakia; in that case it would be only a negative definition, which could act as a stumbling block to regional co-operation. If there is something the Visegrad really needs, then it is a delineation of a positive political program for the future, and that even within the European Union.

During his unofficial visit to Slovakia shortly after the 1998 election, Czech President Václav Havel proposed that the next summit of the Visegrad group should take place in Slovakia, although according to the time schedule it was the Czech Republic's turn. Since the SR had no President at that time, it was decided that it should be a meeting of Prime Ministers. It was a significant change in the constellation of power related to the management of the Visegrad; the Prime Minister's baton was substituted for the President's one, which was initiatory in the early nineties. On May 14, 1999 the summit of V4 Prime Ministers took place in Bratislava. All the four countries decided on a joint course of action in EU integration, and also on their unequivocal support to the Euro-Atlantic integration of other countries of the former communist bloc, while primarily aiming at furthering Slovakia's NATO membership. Visegrad co-operation was considered a beneficial instrument of regional co-operation which could promote the ideas of pan-European integration at a lower regional level. At the same time, this co-operation was to show individual countries' preparedness for joining integration groupings. The revived co-operation was interpreted by the member countries of the Visegrad Four as a contribution to pan-European integration, in which there are similar associations, such as Benelux or the Nordic Council.

At the plenary meeting in Bratislava two documents were adopted - Joint Statement and the Content of the Visegrad Co-operation. The documents encompassed a revitalised structure of meetings of representatives. V4 presidency rotates: every year this function is held by one member country, on the territory of which summits of Prime Ministers are organised (an official, formal summit and an informal, called "sweater summit"). Familiarising citizens with the entire Visegrad idea, i.e. instilling it into practical life of civic society in all member countries was a fundamental change from the first V3 phase. Visegrad co-operation is to strengthen the Central European identity in the awareness of the citizens of V4, as well as to make it visible from the outside. The whole process was given a working name – the strengthening of civic comfort. Besides the idea of establishing a fund to support Visegrad projects in culture, science and sport (the fund already exists and shows considerable success), Prime Ministers have considered the foundation of an academy for diplomats and V4 public administration professionals, as well as a project of a television channel which would interconnect member countries.

The Bratislava summit of the Visegrad Four initiated several projects, the implementation of which began in the next period. It became a milestone on the way of the revitalisation of Visegrad co-operation. Since Bratislava was, after all, involved at the very beginning of the Visegrad idea, a certain symbolism may be perceived in that.

In the second phase of revitalised co-operation of the Visegrad Four, completely autonomous relations started developing between individual sectors, such as defence, the interior, justice, the environment and culture in which Ministers themselves decide a common Visegrad agenda. For example, in the common V4 format the following issues are solved: the fight against illegal immigration, against organised crime, against violence in sporting events, against car theft and smuggling, against computer criminality, the prevention of the brain-drain of scientists from Central Europe, a common grant policy toward the EU and its 5th Framework Programme for Science and Technology, economic aspects of cultural heritage protection, the commercialisation of



culture and many other areas of the political and social life. In many areas a dialogue persists at a political as well as an expert level.²⁷

Thereby the entire Visegrad co-operation moved shifted from the level of "high politics" to the practical and more diversified level.

The homogeneity and diversity of the V4 countries' interests

From the very beginning, each country of the Visegrad grouping entered this free co-operative association with its own interests, foreign policy priorities and ideas how to employ the instruments of regional co-operation. While many priorities, interests and international political challenges were common to all member states, in many approaches their opinions naturally differed. It is necessary to state openly that differences in approach are absolutely legitimate, and differences in opinion do not imply that the Visegrad co-operation does not work.

Naturally, difference in interests results from a different geographic position and size, different historical experience and political and social traditions, as well as from current political accents formed by a local political scene.

We shall attempt at outlining the national motivations and interests of individual countries according to these determining geographic, historical, political, and cultural factors:

POLAND

■ it is geographically the largest country of the Visegrad grouping, and even in the European setting it belongs to "medium-size" countries. Moreover, it aspires to the status of a regional superpower. Its geographical position is on the periphery of the Danube region, and its geopolitical orientation is rather horizontal (the Weimar Triangle, co-operation with the Baltic republics)

■ from the historical standpoint it may link back or refer to the concept of an *Intermarium* (*Miedzimorzie*) from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, i.e. historically it tends more towards western Ukraine and western Belarus (the former parts for the historical Poland)

■ from the foreign policy point of view, Poland is the most stable country.

Potential internal political changes do not pose a threat to a foreign policy course; almost all significant political forces in Poland emphasise good relations with neighbours and regional co-operation, maybe only with different accents. Poland will probably pay more careful and long-term attention to its eastern neighbours - the Baltic republics, among which Latvia has a special position, then Ukraine and Belarus.

It is necessary to state openly that differences in approach are absolutely legitimate, and differences in opinion do not imply that the Visegrad co-operation does not work.

²⁷ Lukáč, P. - Samson, I. - Duleba, A.: Visegrádska spolupráca, regionálne iniciatívy a vzťahy SR so susednými štátmi, In: *Slovensko 2000, Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti*, Kollár, M. - Mesežnikov, G. (ed.), IVO, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 369-371.



THE CZECH REPUBLIC

■ from the geographical point of view, after the break-up of Czecho-Slovakia its power potential sharply decreased, and therefore it cannot aspire to its original role of a political "binder" in Central Europe. Its "lonely" neighbourhood in the proximity of big Germany could potentially push the Czech Republic more towards regional co-operation in the Central European space

■ from the historical point of view, the Czech Republic may link back to the intellectual production pursuing Central European co-operation (F. Palacký, T. G. Masaryk), which still has its followers in intellectual circles.

■ in the internal politics of the Czech Republic the question of Visegrad co-operation is quite a sensitive matter, as the former Prime Minister V. Klaus and the leader of the current opposition party (ODS) was the biggest opponent of Visegrad co-operation. This party, after all, under the slogan of "Eurorealism" has become a vigorous critic and in many aspects also an opponent of pan-European integration in the form of today's EU. A potential election victory of this party might jeopardise the Visegrad co-operation by striving to freeze it again.

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

■ geographically, Slovakia has an advantageous position owing to its bordering on all member states of the Visegrad Four, thus having the potential for binding them

■ from the historical standpoint, Slovakia can draw on the ideational production of the Slovak politicians who sought to establish a Central European supranational bloc, whether in the form of a federation or confederation, the most prominent personality of them being former Czechoslovakian Prime Minister Milan Hodža, who wrote a book on this topic, entitled *Federation in Central Europe*, during his emigration to Great Britain.

■ politically, Slovakia still ranges among less mature post-communist countries, and thus it is perceived with caution by the Visegrad partners. The political opposition in the country still verges on nationalism, populism and isolationism. There is still a risk that in the case of a change after the next elections, the country may divert from the Central European course of democratisation again. The status of Slovakia will be problematic even in case of its not becoming a NATO member.

HUNGARY

■ from the geographical point of view, owing to its position in the open Panonian basin this country has to monitor carefully and respond to the development of the situation in the countries on the western Balkan (Croatia, The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially Voivodina with the numerous Hungarian minority), as well as the countries on the eastern Balkan (especially Romania and its part Transylvania with numerous Hungarian minority). Hungary is currently the only member of NATO bordering on the hot Balkans. Moreover, it has no terrestrial borders with the other NATO members, and thus it finds itself in the position of an isolated "Atlantic" island in the Balkan environment (thus the geographical role of Slovakia, as a Visegrad partner and a link with other NATO countries becomes more important). Hungary wants to take advantage of the situation, for example, it aspires to play the role of Europe's "gate" to the Balkans in connection with planned EU projects for the reconstruction of the post-Yugoslavian space.

■ from the historical standpoint, Hungary draws on the Austro-Hungarian political tradition, being an important determining political element in the Danube basin, which includes Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, part of Yugoslavia, part of Romania and part of the Ukraine. With respect to its intellectual tradition, besides liberal thinkers of the second half of the 19th century, it may also



reference to modern political intellectuals, such as Oszkar Jászi, or especially István Bibó and his classical book *The Misery of Small Central European Nations* or Jenő Szücs and his *Three Europes*.

■ from the point of view of foreign policy, almost every government has been bound by there "pillar": Euro-Atlantic integration, good neighbourly relations and care of the Hungarian minority abroad, while the priorities of individual pillars are determined by a political force in power. In many ways the care of Hungarian minorities abroad (Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia), as the Hungarian government understands it, contradicts efforts at good neighbourly relations and regional co-operation. Thus the situation related to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia becomes a potential risk of conflict within Visegrad co-operation, which, under a specific development, may be a core of disputes in bilateral Slovak-Hungarian relations. However, this relation may be simply solved by democratic means, providing radical political forces do not come into power in Hungary (and in Slovakia).

It is obvious that there are many political questions dividing the Visegrad countries, e.g. it is difficult for them to reach consensus about the issues concerning their eastern policy (Ukraine) or the Balkans. For instance, the policy of the introduction of visas for Ukrainian citizens, where the Czech and Slovak Republics were of the same opinion and Poland and Hungary took just the opposite stance, appeared to be the most serious defect in the common operation.²⁸

Visegrad is on the way to seeking its joint foreign policy and an internal political interlinked agenda. László Lengyel once wrote that these countries, separately as well as collectively, had to re-form specific Polish-European, Czech-European, Slovak-European and Hungarian-European, as well as Central European social and economic models. And it still holds true.²⁹

How the V4 is perceived by other European countries

Typologically, European countries may be divided into three groups according to their perception of the Visegrad group:

■ the first group comprises western countries, which perceive the role of V4 in a positive way, consider V4 to be an important regional grouping facilitating the stability of the region, good neighbourly relations and EU integration. This view is typical of the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany and the Benelux countries.

■ the second type of perception is typical of the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, the relation of which is both diplomatically respectful, but on the other hand, also "slightly jealous". In the past, many of them unsuccessfully attempted to win the membership of this grouping, among them e.g. Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Ukraine and Lithuania.

■ the third type of perception is represented especially by the Russian federation, which regards V4 as a grouping whose primary integration ambitions are inconsistent with Russia's strategic interests in the region of Central Europe. Negative perception of the Visegrad group was presented by the Russian ambassador to Slovakia who at the margin of the Bratislava Summit of V4 Prime Ministers declared that V4 was subject to the influence of NATO.³⁰

²⁸ Duleba, A.: Ukraine, Central Europe and Slovakia's Foreign Policy, *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Vol. I., No. II, Fall 2000, pp. 84-86.

²⁹ Lengyel, L.: Visegrádská trojka, *Střední Evropa*, 76, January 1998, p. 24.

³⁰ Lukáč, P.-Samson, I.-Duleba, A.: Visegrádská spolupráca, regionálne iniciatívy a vzťahy SR so susednými štátmi, In: Slovensko 2000, *Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti*, Kollár, M. Mesežnikov G. (ed.), Inštitút pre verejné otázky, Bratislava, p. 371.



A certain exclusivity of V4 became visible after its revitalisation in summits of V4 Prime Ministers with prominent statesmen from Western European democracies.

An important meeting of Prime Ministers Jerzy Buzek, Miloš Zeman, Viktor Orbán, Mikuláš Dzurinda and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was held in the Polish city of Gniezno on April 28, 2000. Prime Ministers discussed European solidarity in the process of integration and in the development of a situation in the Central European space. They also signed a solemn declaration in which they expressed their support to European integration while preserving European heterogeneity. They stressed the need of natural solidarity and the necessity of effective policy against nationalistic, xenophobic and totalitarian tendencies in today's world.³¹ The meeting of V4 Prime Ministers and the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, in Budapest on May 4, 2000 was another expression of the acceptance of revitalised V4. The importance of this meeting was increased by the fact that it had taken place shortly before France's taking over EU presidency in the second half of the year 2000. The agenda of the meeting reflected this fact, and the representatives of V4 and France concentrated to EU internal reform and its eastern enlargement.

The summit of V4 Prime Ministers (Hungarian Prime Minister V. Orbán was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Mártonyi) and British Prime Minister Tony Blair on October 6, 2000 in Warsaw was an important meeting too. T. Blair took advantage of this occasion to give a significant lecture on European Union enlargement and reform. He expressed energetic support to the idea of the early eastward enlargement of the Union. He said: "Only few countries contributed to the fall of fascism and Soviet dictatorship in Europe as you did. Now we want you in the EU."³²

The meeting of V4 Prime Ministers and Dutch Prime Minister Willem Kok took place on December 19, 2000, and the idea of co-operation between V4 and Benelux was revived.

Since the beginning of Visegrad co-operation, there has been a problem of its geographical, ideational or topographical delineation. In spite of the fact that representatives of the other countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe were also invited to the Bratislava meeting, the Visegrad co-operation itself was started and developed just by three countries. At the foundation meeting in Budapest in 1991, the Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall informed of a letter from Romanian Prime Minister Petre Roman in which Romania's effort to join the Visegrad grouping was articulated. P. Roman described the division of former "socialistic countries" as artificial. The then Czechoslovak president Vaclav Havel commented that in the cases of Romania and Bulgaria it did not mean pushing them aside but represented a co-operation between neighbours with a similar fate.³³ Many other countries in the region considered the Visegrad idea to be a manifestation of certain exclusivity and the way of distinguishing Visegrad countries from the other post-communist countries. Vaclav Klaus took advantage of this view to criticize Visegrad co-operation too.³⁴

³¹ The text of the declaration is put forth in the exact wording and the congress in Gniezno is discussed in more detail in the article - Lukáč, P.: Weimarský trojuholník a Visegrádská štvorka, *OS*, No. 7, 2000, pp. 41-48.

³² *SME*, 7 October 2000.

³³ Chmel, R.: *Moja maďarská otázka*, Zo zápisov posledného česko-slovenského veľvyslanca v Budapešti, Bratislava, 1996, pp. 64-67. J. Dienstbier writes similarly: "The Visegrad group was like a magnet in the area. Bulgarian President Zhelju Zhelev during the state visit to Prague on 4 February at the meeting with President Havel expressed his regret that Bulgaria had been invited neither to the meeting of the Three in Budapest, nor to the previous one in Visegrad." Dienstbier, J.: *Visegrád, Mezinárodní politika*, 2, 1999, p. 5.

³⁴ "If I wished to be a bit malicious, I would have to say that the Visegrad Three (or the Visegrad Four later) was an attempt at separating from the other post-communist countries as something better, "more equal"." Klaus, V.: *Jak je to s visegrádskou spoluprací? Lidové noviny*, 12 August 1995, p. 5.



This question, undeniably, relates to the long-term and never-ending intellectual discussion on what Central Europe in fact is, which countries belong and do not belong to it.

In this we may agree with the statement of Matthias Rübbs who provides his interpretation of Visegrad Central Europe in his essay *Where Is Central Europe Situated?* "An unusually wide spectrum is offered for the topographical demarcation of Central Europe (...). At the "small" end of the spectrum there is Central Europe made up of Poland, the Czech and the Slovak Republic and Hungary."³⁵ And he adds that "the union of the so-called Visegrad countries revived a "small" variant of Central Europe."³⁶

This ideational and geographical statement (against which many counterstatements may be posed), of course, does not exclude other countries from the space of a "small" Central Europe – and from the Visegrad platform.

Almost since the beginning of Visegrad co-operation, and after its revitalisation, the question of V4 enlargement has been a collective taboo for its members. During the annual lecture of Eduard Kukan, the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the premises of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Kukan offered a reserved answer to the question of the Bulgarian ambassador on the possible invitation for the other applicants for V4 club membership: "...members of the Visegrad Four – and we are unanimous about that – have agreed that the number four is nice and if it changed, the new number would not be so nice."³⁷

The only official V4 extension proposal presented by an official representative was to Prague, when the Polish President proposed V4 enlargement by two new members, Slovenia and the Ukraine. President Kwasniewski expected that he would win over the Czech diplomacy by the variant of Slovenia's incorporation into the Visegrad, and along with that the Polish long-term political initiative to include the Ukraine to the Central European space would be successful. The Czech diplomacy, however, responded to this proposal in a restrained manner, and in fact, rejected it.³⁸

During the Czech V4 presidency, the position of Slovenia moved more markedly towards the Visegrad. Point 5 of the Prague Appeal of V4 Prime Ministers made after the summit on June 9, 2000 states the following: "We view with satisfaction the interest of other countries, especially Slovenia, in developing good relations and close co-operation with the Visegrad group."³⁹

The quick meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers (the Polish Prime Minister did not participate at the meeting) and the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Drnovsek, in Bratislava on December 11, 2000 on the same day as the Nice Agreement was signed after long negotiations at the European summit, was a very reasonable step taken by Slovak diplomacy. The outcome of the summit showed how advantageous it would be to join the potential of small countries in the future European Union. The joint vote potential of V4 and Slovenia outweighs the joint vote potential of France and Germany in the Union. After joining the EU, the Visegrad should become a Central European group within the Union, as the Mediterranean and Scandinavian groups exist within the EU. Slovenia's joining the Visegrad appears to be of significance not only because it would increase the vote in

³⁵ Rübbs, M.: Kde leží středná Evropa?, *Kafka*, Journal for Central Europe, 1, 2001. p. 14.

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 18.

³⁷ Kukan, E.: *Zahraničná politika SR v polčase volebného vládnutia*, SFPA, Bratislava, 2000, p. 13.

³⁸ *Lidové noviny*, 23 February, 2000.

³⁹ *The Prague Challenge*, www.v4.sk.



the EU Council, but also because Poland, the largest country of the V4 group, might take different positions on some issues from those taken by European "small ones".⁴⁰

Austria's relation with the Visegrad represents a special chapter. In spite of the fact that many Austrian politicians, especially those who are close to the Austrian People's Party (E. Busek, E. Brix, A. Mock) welcomed the idea of Central Europe at the intellectual level, they did not turn this idea into political reality after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and opted for the individual way to the EU. And often, they even did not develop such intensive contacts with neighbouring countries as it was expected. The topical plan of "Central European Strategic Partnership" thus does not meet with much understanding on the part V4 countries and Slovenia. Some diplomats even regard it as a plan aimed against the sense of Visegrad co-operation.

In spite of these facts, it is necessary to state Slovenes and Austrians most actively participate in individual projects of Visegrad co-operation in the form of "V4 plus 1".

Conclusion

Looking back on the ten-year existence of the informal subregional association Visegrad Four today, one might notice several things. It is still a structure under process, which gradually formulates its goals and intentions in the continual consensual dialogue of its individual members. At the beginning of this association's existence elevated ideas were posed, then were modified in political practice, and implemented as a political programme in individual areas such as security, transborder co-operation, culture and science, the environment, etc.

The basic motivational factors existing at the beginning of its operation are still politically valid and inspiring, even though in many respects they have taken on a more practical cloak of everyday politics.

At the same time the model of V4 serves as a positive furthering of the concept of soft security; by the fact that countries participate in developing common policies in many areas, possibilities of conflicts, tensions and disputes are markedly minimalised. As one Western expert has put it, it is "an indirect approach" to security, which by regular contacts between top-ranking representatives, as well as by contacts on the levels of elites and population establishes closer links between member countries and creates the atmosphere of trust and the peace base for co-existence in the region in a long time horizon.⁴¹

Thereby the Visegrad Four represents – and above all against the background of conflicts in the western Balkans – a successful pattern of democratisation and regional co-operation, and becomes not only "a success story", but also a possible model for other areas of Europe, even though we may be more sceptical about its implementation elsewhere.⁴²

However, it more than obvious that the Visegrad Four has to have a clear and positively defined political plan for the future. A number of politicians from member countries suggested the possibility of further existence of the Visegrad Four in the EU and its formation as a political

⁴⁰ Lukáč, P.: Má Slovinsko rozšíriť rady Visegrádu?, *Listy SFPA*, March 2001, p. 7.

⁴¹ Cottey, A.: Europe's New Subregionalism, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23., No. 2 (June 2000), p. 24.

⁴² To illustrate this, the example of the international conference organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung "Is Visegrad a Viable Co-operation Pattern to be Studied and Implemented by South Eastern Europe?", pp. 13.-15. November 2000, Eger, Hungary.



platform, for achieving the aims in which they are united by common geographical position, historical experience and the size of their countries.⁴³ However, the way to this convergence of European standpoints is still long, and partners in the Visegrad Four should learn to search for common courses of action and strategies. That would make their presentation even as EU members easier.

Slovakia's Visegrad policy may be characterised by what the state deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jan Figel', accurately formulated: "If Slovakia did not head for the Visegrad Four, it would not head for its EU or NATO membership either. Slovakia's way to European and trans-Atlantic structures is through Visegrad co-operation. It is neither sentiment, nor toadying to neighbours' interests. It is a need for Slovakia's clear orientation and the orientation of its neighbours in order that they may form a cohesive community of states and nations, which not only share history (which was disturbed by pressures and invasions of dictatorial powers from the East or the West), but also, in the positive sense of the word, are able and want to share the future."⁴⁴ Thus the Visegrad could really have aspirations to the position of "a regional power", as Bronislaw Geremek put it.

It is utterly natural that in many areas the individual interests of member countries will be divergent and will not agree on one negotiation platform. It will be possible to see it more and more in the accession process in negotiations with the EU. This, however, does not have an impact on the fact that the political potential may be multiplied by a joint course of action with respect to the issues on which these countries are able to agree. Even in the future, Visegrad co-operation may be a good subregional political platform, which may attain influence and respect in the whole of Europe. In order to achieve it, the abandoning of egoism and superiority many times and the promoting of the policy of solidarity and grander European objectives will, undoubtedly, be necessary. ■

References

- Brzezinski, Z., Slovensko sa zlepšuje / Slovakia Is Improving (an interview) *SME*, 30 April, 2001.
- Bútora, M., Šebej F.(ed.), *Slovensko v šedej zóne? Rozširovanie NATO, zlyhanie a perspektívy Slovenska* (Slovakia in the Grey Zone? NATO expansion, Slovakia's Failure and Perspectives), IVO, Bratislava, 1999.
- Cotter, A., Europe's New Subregionalism, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23, No 2 (June 2000).
- Duleba, A., Ukraine, Central Europe and Slovakia's Foreign Policy, *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, No. 11, Vol. 1., Fall 2000.
- Havel, V., *Projev prezidenta ČSSR Václava Havla v polském Sejmu a Senátu* (The speech of President Václav Havel in the Polish Sejm and Senate), <http://www.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990>.
- Havel, V., *Projev prezidenta ČSFR Václava Havla na setkání představitelů Polska, Československa a Maďarska* (The speech of President of the Czechoslovak Federative Republic Václav Havel at the meeting of the representatives of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary), Bratislava, 9 April 1990. <http://www.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990>.
- Haselsteiner, H., Föderationspläne in Südosteuropa, In: *Europäische Visionen, Begegnungen, Schriftenreihe des Europa Institutes Budapest* I., Glatz, F. (ed.), Budapest, 1995.
- Dienstbier, J., *Od snění k realitě* (From Dreams to Reality), (*Vzpomínky z let 1989-1999 / Reminiscences of 1989 -1999*), Prague, 1999.

⁴³ As an example, we may use the statement by Czech Prime Minister M. Zeman: "I firmly hope that this group will continue after our membership in the European Union, because the influence of a regional group is always greater than the influence of any individual country.", quoted according to "10 years of Visegrad Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, 2001.

⁴⁴ Figel', J.: Visegrád je nielen symbol, ale aj veľmi vážna výzva, *SME*, 18 February 1999.



Dienstbier, J., *Visegrád, Mezinárodní politika*, 2, 1999.

Figel', J., Visegrád je nielen symbol, ale aj veľmi vážna výzva (Visegrad is not Only a Symbol, but also a Very Serious Challenge), *SME*, 18 February 1999.

Geremek, B., Visegrád regionálna veľmoc (The Visegrad - a Regional Power), *OS*, No 5, 2000.

Chmel, R., Moja maďarská otázka (My Hungarian Question), (*Zo zápisov posledného česko-slovenského veľvyslanca v Budapešti/ From records of the last Czecho-Slovak ambassador to Budapest*), Bratislava, 1996.

Chmel, R., Slovensko v strednej Európe mimo Visegrádu alebo vo Visegráde mimo strednej Európy (Slovakia in Central Europe outside the Visegrad or in the Visegrad outside Central Europe?), *OS*, the zeroth issue, April 1997.

Klaus, V., Jak je to s visegrádskou spoluprací? (How is it with Visegrad Co-operation?), *Lidové noviny*, 12 August 1995, p.8.

Kukan, E., *Zahraničná politika SR v polčase volebného vládnutia* (Slovak foreign policy in the half-time of electoral government), *SFPA*, Bratislava, 2000.

Lukáč, P., Pourquoi les Slovaques ont-ils besoin de Visegrad? *Regard sur l'Est*, May-June 2000.

Lukáč, P., Má Slovinsko rozšíriť rady Visegrádu? (Is the Visegrad to be Enlarged by Incorporating Slovenia?), *Listy SFPA*, March 2001, pp. 6-7.

Lukáč, P., Weimarský trojuholník a visegrádska štvorka (The Weimar Triangle and the Visegrad Four), *OS*, No.7, 2000.

Lukáč, P., Samson, I., Duleba, A., Visegrádska spolupráca, regionálne iniciatívy a vzťahy SR so susednými štátmi (Visegrad Co-operation, Regional Initiatives and Slovakia's Relations with Neighbouring States), In: *Slovensko 2000* (Slovakia 2000), *Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti* (A global report on the state of society), Kollár, M., Mesežnikov, G. (ed.), Bratislava, 2000.

Lengyel, L., Visegrádska trojka (The Visegrad Three), *Střední Evropa* (Central Europe, 76, January 1998.

Rübb, M., Kde leží střední Evropa? (Where Is Central Europe Situated?), *Kafka*, 1, 2001, pp.14-23.

Scipiades, I., Umrel (už) Visegrád / Has the Visegrad Died (yet)?, *SME in Central Europe*, year 1, No. 10, 30. 12. 1994.

Šedivý, J., *Černínský palác v roce nula* (The Cernin Palace in the Year Zero), (ze zákulisí polistopadové zahraniční politiky - from the backstage of post-November foreign policy), Prague, 1997.

Ten years of Visegrad Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2001.