

## SOME ASPECTS OF POLITICAL REGIONALIZATION OF VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

The structure of contemporary international relations is multilateral in nature and stage of the international system is rather of entropy. Changes in the system of international relations in the last two decades regrouped states as basic elements of the system, and states are now looking for a new place in the emerging new temporary balance. The symmetry of relations between the great powers is changing and radius of action of medium and small states in international relations has diminished. What are now possibilities for protection of interests of small and medium size European states? Have such states ample space to establish them inside European Union, or have they to look for other platforms? Strengthening the international position of small and medium-sized states certainly offers the regional integration - European Union. However, quite often is the EU's foreign policy fragmented and national interests are too diversified. One of possible answers to the questions referred offers inner regionalization of EU - the Visegrad Group, its aims and focus.

Established in 1991, the Visegrad Group, with the member states Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary (V4) went during its existence through glorifying as well as condemnation. However, almost a quarter century confirms sense of its existence. The V4 is the as well as the EU successful in the process of linking institutions and individuals through The V4 Fund. For the further orientation, it is important to recognize its inner potential for cooperation and integration. What are the sources of the tendency toward regionalization of V4 countries (commonalities) and what are the divergences of these countries, which may cause misunderstanding?

Interests of states in international relations are usually promoted through as well as foreign policy and defense policy, and such contacts are among the Visegrad countries very intensive. Therefore it is important to answer the question of whether the regionalization of V4 can help its member states, most of which are small or medium size, to better assert their national interests at international level. Would be useful to have common foreign policy and military corps under common leadership?

The study is the contribution to the theory of regionalism and interregionalism and offers the opportunity better understand to possibilities of cooperation and integration in Central Europe.

**Keywords:** V4 Group, international relations, regionalization, foreign policy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Established in 1991, the Visegrad Group, with the member states Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary (V4) went during its existence through glorifying as well as condemnation. For the further orientation, it is important to recognize its inner potential for cooperation and integration, find out the areas, where collective action is more efficient than individual.

## **FORMATION OF VISEGRAD COOPERATION**

The symbolic historical connecting link between countries of Visegrad initiative may be Czech St. Vojtěch (Śv.Vojciech, St. Adalbert also as Béla), who in 10<sup>th</sup> century baptized by Christianity first Czechs, than Hungarians and finally Poles. The symbol can also be Visegrad Castle on the Hungarian Danube Bend, where they met in the 14th century kings of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland to enforce peace in Central Europe. Symbolic can also be a common Austro-Hungarian history that – however - each of these nations experienced a little bit differently. The symbol can also be secretly or openly spoken words of world rulers at the Yalta conference that with a thick line highlighted the independent development of Central European states and caused the spirit of the Cold War. Then, at the end of the 20th century, the crumbling Soviet Union had no power to keep military the centrifugal satellite states. Thus could be a symbol of Visegrad also spontaneity of social forces: although often its velvet was hard enough for to change the face of Europe in the last two decades of this strange 20th century [1].

States which have signed in 1991 Visegrad Agreement therefore have a lot of differences, but also a lot in common and their commonalities we have to recognize as a base for good cooperation in future. The Visegrad Group (V4 or V4 Group) was formed on 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic Václav Havel, the President of the Republic of Poland Lech Wałęsa, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary József Antall. The main goal was the desire to intensify mutual cooperation and friendship among the three Central European states. The formation of the Visegrad Group was motivated by four factors of decisive relevance: the desire to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe; the desire to overcome historic animosities between Central European countries; the belief that through joint efforts it will be easier to achieve the set goals, i.e. to successfully accomplish social transformation and join in the European integration process; and the proximity of ideas of the then ruling political elites [2]. The pact was certainly not dictated or even suggested by Moscow, Washington or Brussels, but was an independent decision by those leaders to work together in re-aligning these historic countries with "the West" in order to prevent the repetition of past national tragedies and to speed up their transition from the Soviet orbit to Euro-Atlantic structures. [3].

The platform V4 was very helpful and instrumental during talks Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary with NATO and the EU in the initial period of its existence (1991–1993). After velvet desintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Visegrad Group has since then been comprised of four countries, as both successor countries, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, became members of V4 group. This first period was period of initial political and economic changes in member states, forming a next political system and its institutions, change of ownerships relations, creation of a new

value system. [4]. That time leader position among Visegrad countries had former Czechoslovakia, due to authority of Václav Havel and promises of Václav Klaus's economic privatization, other countries were like little in tow [5].

In the following years, the intensity of cooperation between the V4 countries activity has weakened as prevailed the idea that individual efforts towards accession to the Euro-Atlantic integration formations will be more efficient. The biggest promoter of this attitude has just been Czech Prime Minister and later President Václav Klaus. On the one hand, he evaluated critically the prospects of the common European currency project; on the other hand he did not conceal his ambitions to lead the Czech Republic to the European Union the first without close co-operation with the other prospective countries. Similar opinion had also Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. Slovakia searched a way to distinguish themselves from historically more dominant Hungary and Czech Republic. Visegrad cooperation was then resumed in 1998 and V4 countries joined the EU together in 2004.

Nowaday, the V4 cooperation can be currently referred to as the most clearly profiled initiative in Central Europe. The pillar of this cooperation consists of mutual contacts at all levels—from the highest-level political summits to expert and diplomatic meetings, to activities of the non-governmental associations in the region, think-tanks and research bodies, cultural institutions or numerous networks of individuals. A number of joint projects are currently being implemented particularly in the fields of culture, environment, internal security, defence, science and education. At the same time, cooperation in the field of justice, transportation, health, tourism, energy or information technologies is also intensifying

The member states of the Visegrad Group also organizes a cooperation with their neighbours, with the reforming countries in the region, and with other countries, regional formations or organizations.

However, to be noted, that Visegrad cooperation is not institutionalized and it is based exclusively on the principle of periodical meetings of its representatives at various levels (from the high-level meetings of prime ministers and heads of states to expert consultations). Official summits of V4 prime ministers takes place on an annual basis. Between these summits, one of the V4 countries holds presidency, part of which is the responsibility for drafting a one-year plan of action.

The only organization within the V4 platform is the International Visegrad Fund. The Fund represents the civic dimension of the V4 cooperation. Was established in year 2000 with the aim of supporting the development of cooperation in culture, scientific exchange, research, education, exchange of students and development of cross-border cooperation and promotion of tourism. In an absolute majority of cases. The Fund provides financing to activities of non-governmental organizations and individual citizens, scholarships, contacts with neighboring countries. The annual contributions to the Fund by the governments of the Visegrad Group countries have had an increasing tendency [6].

## **POTENTIAL OF V4 GROUP IN THE EU AND IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Metamorphosis of the basic elements of the system of international relations in recent decades has led to multipolarity. The structure of contemporary international relations is

now multipolar in nature [7] and stage of a system is rather of entropy where time and space lost their previous decisive importance [8]. Globalization has changed especially the relationship between states and transnational corporations and became a kind of new form of economic and politic colonization, where individual states are gradually colonized by globalized transnational corporations. States are now looking for a new place in the emerging new temporary balance: in such a situation can play regional groupings more important role [9]. Technological changes gave birth to information society [10]. The symmetry of relations between the great powers is changing and radius of action of medium and small states in international relations has diminished. What are now possibilities for protection of interests of small and medium size European states? The effective way how to gain visibility in international relations is to connect with other states into functional groupings. Integration efforts of small states have a sense: are beneficial in developing their foreign policy through regional organization [11]. Strengthening the international position of small and medium-sized states certainly offers the regional integration - European Union. However, have small and medium states ample space to establish themselves inside European Union, or have they to look for other platforms? Quite often is the EU's foreign policy fragmented and national interests are too diversified. The Visegrad Group is one of the answers to the marginalization of the role of states and, one of examples of inner regionalization inside bigger regional integration.

Concept of Central Europe is always related with the current most important European power – Germany, part of which is post-Communist Germany. Germany and individual Visegrad countries are predisposed to co-operation by their geographic proximity, as well as their cultural, economic and technological compatibility. In addition, relations with smaller neighbors traditionally represented an important source of legitimacy of post-war German policy. So far, however, a lack of internal coherence makes Visegrad as a group unattractive to German policy, while bilateral relations may become strained given the disappointing developments in Hungary, the anxiously-awaited Polish elections in 2015, and astonishing political infighting among the Czechs [12]. Germany has become undoubtedly the most important economic partner of all the Visegrad countries, accounting for 25% of Polish, 30% of Czech, 20% of Slovak and 25% of Hungarian foreign trade [13]. Likewise, the Visegrad countries play a substantial role in the German economy. Poland's share of German trade (3.9%) is higher than that of Russia (3.8%), with the Czech Republic closely following (3.2%); the shares of Hungary (1.9%) and Slovakia (1.2%) are also relevant and growing [14]. Germany focus her efforts on individual Visegrad countries while treating the group as a general political framework. Reason is, that every Visegrad country has some particular problem with political system, which extends into the foreign policy of the state and Visegrad countries there have diverging foreign policy concepts represented by competing political parties and fractions within those parties, so either have no clear and sustainable foreign policy line, or their policy lines tend to change with every change of government. Poland, due to its historical experience is very uncompromising towards Russia. On the contrary, Orbans's Hungary trying to find "special" position in EU, has rather a client position, that's why is very accommodating to Russia, when Czechs and Slovak change own not clear position with every change of government.

In political situation in Europe is necessary consider also other than North Atlantic defense platform. Very intensive is cooperation of V4 in defense policy, which is part of

foreign policy. On 2011, Polish Defense Minister said that Poland will lead a new battlegroup of the Visegrad Group; the battlegroup would become operational and be placed on standby in the first half of 2016. The ministers also agreed that the V4 militaries should hold regular exercises under the auspices of the NATO Response Force, the first such exercise was held in Poland in 2013. The battlegroup would include members of V4 and Ukraine. In 2014 was then signed “Framework for Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation”. Resulting capability development projects will fundamentally encompass three types of practical solutions: pooling and sharing assets, the joint procurement of equipment and research and development. Visegrad Group, being at the moment rather cooperative regionalization, has in this area tendency to have integrational elements. Nevertheless, even in this situation, Germany - as Europe’s most important power - still has not decided whether has the political will and economic capacity to have a leadership role in defense cooperation in the region and remained primarily non- military, rather cultural and diplomatic approach. Germany is big enough to be European’s leader, but not big enough to economically and militarily resolve problems of European countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

Interests of states in international relations are usually promoted through as well as foreign policy and defense policy, and such contacts are among the Visegrad countries very intensive. The regionalization and interregionalization of V4 can help its member states, most of which are small or medium size, to better assert their national interests at international level. Due to the changed international relations and political situation in Europe (especially the war in Ukraine, instability the Black Sea region and the Balkans, and also due to the position of Russia) is necessary to consider also the other than North Atlantic defense platform. That’s why is highly important to have an institutional platform of V4 for harmonization of common foreign policy and military corps under common leadership.

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