

The history of Visegrad cooperation

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The structure of the lecture

- Historical background and regional developments that led to Visegrad cooperation
- Development of V₄ cooperation
- Current pattern of V₄ cooperation
- Cooperation in the field of energy security
- Questions

Changing geopolitics of East Central Europe

Major regional developments that shaped ECE international politics in the early stage of transition and democratic consolidation:

- collapse of the Soviet Union and multilateral regional structures of the Warsaw Pact and the COMECON, which left inter-state relations 'still considerably swayed by *Realpolitik* calculations and the search for a stable regional balance of power',
- appearance of free and sovereign Ukraine, that changes the geopolitics of Europe,
- disintegration and split of USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia that makes the region more diverse and isolates Russia from her former ECE neighbours
- 'prevalence of national minorities and arbitrarily drawn borders'.

Hyde-Price, A., *Patterns of International Politics*, in: S. White, J. Batt, P. G. Lewis (eds.), *Developments in Central and East European Politics 2* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998).

The concept of Central Europe

‘One way or the other, one thing is certain: For the first time in history, we have a real opportunity to fill the great political vacuum that appeared in Central Europe after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire with something genuinely meaningful. We have an opportunity to transform Central Europe from what has been a mainly historical and spiritual phenomenon into a political phenomenon’

The return to Europe

Not only the wish of Central European countries to be perceived as 'European' by complacent West, but also their attempt to become full members of the European Communities and NATO.

New regionalism

Most important factors that led to regional grouping:

- upsurge of the Central European identity
- apprehension that united Germany may dominate the region
- wish to strengthen the regional position by the participating countries
- conviction that regional cooperation strengthens stability
- recognition that regional cooperation is an indispensable requirement for the region's integration into European structures.

First meetings

- 'Central European Summit' in Bratislava 9th April 1990
- The Visegrád meeting 12th - 15th February 1991

Visegrad Declaration

In a declaration adopted by the presidents Lech Wałęsa, Václav Havel and Arpad Göncz the parties formulated their objectives, from among the most important were:

- full restitution of state independence, democracy and freedom,
- elimination of all existing social, economic and spiritual aspects of the totalitarian system,
- construction of a parliamentary democracy, a modern State of Law, respect for human rights and freedoms,
- creation of a modern free market economy,
- full involvement in the European political and economic system, as well as the system of security and legislation.

Visegrád in its heyday.

The end of the old structures

The Krakow summit of 6th October 1991

- The Krakow meeting adopted *The Krakow Declaration of the Triangle States*, in which it was proclaimed, that the principal task set by Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary was a full-range integration into the European political, economic and juridical as well as security system. The first step on the way to accomplish this task was an association with the European Community.
- The Triangle declared pressing measures on abolition of barriers in mutual trade turnovers and planned signing appropriate agreements on trade liberalisation as soon as possible. Shortly after, a working group was established.

The Central European Free Trade Agreement

Signed in Kraków on 21st December 1992. The objectives of the *Agreement* were:

- to promote through the expansion of trade the harmonious development of the economic relations between the Parties and thus to foster in the Parties the advance of economic activity, the improvement of living and employment conditions, and increased productivity and financial stability,
- to provide fair conditions of competition for trade between the Parties,
- to contribute in this way, by the removal of barriers to trade, to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade.

1993-1997

The year 1993 marked an end of the idealistic and enthusiastic period of international politics in Central Europe.

Reasons of the breach:

- Disintegration of the Czechoslovak federation,
- Foreign policy of the new Czech government,
- conflicts in Yugoslavia and Chechnya,
- NATO reluctance to accept new members,
- Breaking point in the economic development of the Visegrád countries,
- Rivalry between V₄ countries.

Foreign policy of the Klaus Government

- Critical assessment of the hitherto foreign Czechoslovak policy
- “Argument of two Václavs” - ‘Non-political politics’ and ‘moral reconstitution of society’ opposed by Klaus’ liberal conservative belief in the power of free market,
- Policy of ‘Czech uniqueness’ based on the conviction that to join the EC, the candidate state needs to fulfil certain criteria,
- Policy orientated on developing internal economic and political stability, which in the eyes of the Prime Minister, was more profitable than constant pressure on the West.

‘Visegrád does not apply to us. It was a process, which was artificially induced by the Western countries’

CEFTA – the only field of understanding

Slovakia

- Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar with his nationalistic rhetoric that evoked the feelings of hostility among the 600 000 Hungarian minority and the angry response of Budapest,
- long-drawn-out question of Grabčikovo-Nagymáros dam, the huge hydroelectric project from the communist times with far-reaching implications for ecology and politics,
- Intensified political and economic contacts with Moscow, that caused the disapproving reaction of Prague,
- Slovakia left out in the process of NATO enlargement.

Visegrád in crisis – the Clinton visit to Prague

In January 1994 Clinton came to present his project of Partnership for Peace to the V4,

Prague refused to elaborate the common position of the Group and tried to arrange the meeting to be the American President's visit to the Czech Republic with some common appearance of the Central European leaders at the end,

Prague did not organise the multilateral talks with the American President and blocked the common declaration on the Partnership for Peace.

The breakthrough

- The decision of NATO to invite Visegrád countries (without Slovakia) to the Madrid summit intensified the regional contacts. Closer coordination of pre-accession efforts became necessary. The Russian opposition towards the enlargement of NATO contributed to further step-up.
- After the 1995 enlargement the EU began to pay more attention to the East and launched preparations for necessary reforms preceding the eastern enlargement. Within the framework of *Agenda 2000*, the Commission presented opinions on the preparation of individual associated countries. The Commission recommended the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia to open the negotiations. The Luxembourg European Council accepted the suggestion and stated that the accession was to be launched on 30 March 1998.
- Changes of governments that occurred in all V4 countries in 1997 and 1998 revived the ideas of Visegrád and Central Europe and opened a new chapter in the region's partnership.

Slovak impulse

- After the elections of September 1998 political domination of internationally neglected Vladimír Mečiar came to an end.
- New wide coalition government of Mikulaš Dzurinda unified four parties of the former opposition. The Premier announced the Bratislava intention to cooperate with the three neighbours.
- The tensions between Bratislava and Budapest eased off, as the new agreements on the Grabčikovo-Nagymáros dam were signed.
- The context of fulfilment of the Schengen treaty - PL, CZ, and HU would be obliged to establish their borders with Slovakia an external EU border.

What Visegrád?

Slovakia's answer to the Visegrád invitation was immediate. The government held a view that all the V₄ members were 'disadvantaged by Slovakia's exclusion'. However, the efforts to include Slovakia in the mainstream of the regional politics seemed to be insufficient ground to resurrect the V₄.

The Bratislava summit in May 1999, hosted by the Prime Minister Dzurinda, was the first summit in the quadrilateral formula. It adopted the programme document called the '*Contents of Visegrád Co-operation*'

Contents of Visegrád Co-operation

- decision not to institutionalise the grouping,
- consultations and issuing, as and when the need arises, of joint statements on issues of common interest,
- regular meetings of V4 ambassadors,
- exchange of information on long-term strategies and concepts of foreign, security and defence policy,
- exchange of views on the stability and security of the Central and Eastern European region',
- transfer of the experience with the EU integration,
- new fields of mutual actions - internal affairs, education, culture, society, youth and sport, science and technology, environment, infrastructure and cross-border cooperation,
- creation of joint fund supporting Central European projects,

Contents of Visegrád Co-operation

- economic issues deliberately left out - these should remain within CEFTA's jurisdiction,
- the cooperation was to be realized through regular meetings on various levels,
- prime ministers' meetings to be hold twice a year,
- support for other representatives' contacts, such as the meetings of the heads of state, the regular communication between the parliaments, the intensive contacts between 'intermediary bodies' of civil society,
- stress on governmental not presidential cooperation,
- creation of a presidency on a rotating basis with a mandate for one year.

The Visegrád Fund

- Major purpose: to promote and develop cultural cooperation, exchanges in the field of science, research, cooperation in education, youth exchanges and regional cooperation.
- The special attention and preference was given to 'projects involving the greatest number of member countries and contributing to greater awareness of the jointly shared Central European area.
- The members committed themselves to contribute to the project with the amount of 250 000 Euros a year.
- For the purposes of managing the fund the Secretariat was established in Bratislava, what constituted the first and only organisational structure of the V4.

Second Visegrád Declaration. What future for the Group?

Signed in Kroměříž in May 2004. Main goals:

- strengthening of the Central European links and identity
- helping other countries that wish to join the EU to accomplish their goals by transferring of the transition and accession experience,
- contributing to the common policy of the EU, especially towards the Eastern and the Southern Europe, the field that Central Europe had a unique knowledge on.

A will to continue the cooperation and use the facilities it gives:

- *The cooperation, 'rooted in centuries of interlinked history and based on similar political, economic and social developments in the past decades, will enrich the community of European nations and contribute the building of a reunited, democratic and prosperous Europe'.*

Fields of V4 cooperation after the enlargement

- Energy security
- Eastern Partnership
- Climate change and greenhouse gas reductions
- EU enlargement
- Promotion of democracy
- Other

V4+

- Flexible instrument of ad hoc cooperation
- Cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries
- Cooperation with Western Balkans
- Other partners:
 - B3, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania
 - Benelux
 - Nordic Council
 - China, Taiwan, Japan
 - Israel, Egypt
 - Germany

Cooperation in the field of energy security

High Level Group for Energy Security established during the Prime Ministers summit in Wieliczka (3 June 2009).

Major goal of the HLG – to revive and strengthen the cooperation in the field of energy and to prepare the rules of cooperation in the creation of north-south energy corridor.

V4+ Energy Security Summit was held in Budapest on the 24th of February 2010 with participation of V4 and Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and Romania.

V4+ Energy Security Summit

- Decision to integrate gas networks and diversify routes and sources of supplies:
 - By promoting the North-South interconnections through all V4 countries, between the planned Croatian and Polish Liquefied Natural Gas terminals and also
 - By further promoting and implementing the Nabucco and the NETS projects,
 - By supporting the Constanta LNG terminal and other LNG and CNG projects in the wider Black Sea Region
- Decision to hold regular HLG meetings and to set up "ad hoc" working groups at expert level on different projects such as the North-South interconnections and other regional interconnectors, oil supply in the region, etc.

North-South energy corridor - interconnectors



North South Gas Corridor - the flagship project

Main goals:

- to provide alternative gas supply for the region
- to create a two-way mutually connected transit and supply network

Benefits of the project:

- easy to achieve and low-cost investments to eliminate the infrastructure gaps
- enhancing internal integration of EU market
- creating a regional market – more attractive for external suppliers
- enabling prompt reaction to potential crises

High Level Group activities

V4 Ministers responsible for energy security letter to the Energy Commisary G. Oettinger:

- development of North-South Gas Corridor
- development of energy infrastructure on the European level

As a result the European Commision put the N-S Gas Corridor on the list of priorities of the EU energy infrastructure package in November 2010.

The list of priorities was adopted by European Council on 4th of February 2011.

Thank you