Euromasters

Humboldt University

University of Bath

Security Implications of Central Europe's In-Betweenness:

The degree of cooperation within the Visegrad Group in security and defense

Silvia Pcolinska
August-Bebel-Str. 36
18055 Rostock
silvia.pcolinska@gmail.com
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Central Europe between the east and the west

Central Europe- as the title suggests – has enjoyed a rather complicated position within the European continent in terms of geopolitics as well as identity. What is today regarded as Central Europe has indeed served as a fluid and flexible concept, giving way to a variety of discussions regarding the geographic, geopolitical and cultural implications of this region. The terms 'Central Europe' as well as 'Mitteleuropa' have been conveniently applied to demarcate the area between the 'east' and the 'west', but its imagined borders have been a rather troubling concept to tackle and continue to be subject of debate (Hagen 2003).The historical experience of Central Europeans has indeed been largely influenced by their interaction with their eastern and the western neighbors whose advancements in and out of this region reflected in the consequent fluidity of borders, languages and statehoods present in this area throughout history. The resulting instability negatively affected Central Europe's status quo as it found itself at the receiving end of east's and west's actions. This east-west dichotomy has thus become the principal focus of the recent debates surrounding the characteristics of Central Europe's societies and governance, and the ever-changing character of this concept contributed to the narrative of Central Europe as the ambiguous, unstable and even mysterious part of Europe[1]. In spite of its geographical proximity, East Germany and everything falling to its east continued to represent the unsteady borderland of the west throughout much of the 20th century.

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[1] The east-west contrast has also been adopted by many Western states during the years of Nazi domination. For these states, Central Europe was so ideologically distanced from the western 'bastions of democracy' that states such as Czechoslovakia gained the status of a "' faraway country' of which very little was known' in the west (Hagen 2003, additional debate in Gyarfasova 2002:14-16).

1.2 Common threads

While it is hard to delineate not only the borders of Central Europe, it is also at times difficult to precisely define the identity that permeates this region due to the fact that various elements of Central European culture have been subject to fluctuation, fragmentation and even elimination. Despite the turbulent nature of this region, several unifying factors have been at play throughout history which have ultimately transformed Central Europe into a perceived entity of its own. These elements of semblance allow us to distinguish this region from other parts of Europe and lend it a distinctive – although at times perhaps arbitrary – collective identity. Let us start with the obvious. Keeping in mind the linguistic origins[2] of Central Europe, many cultural traditions such as food, music, or customs, as well as various societal perceptions and religious beliefs also represent a shared point of departure for many nationalities in this region that have set them apart from their western European counterparts. It is important to note, however, that many of the existing cultural notions and norms are indeed a product of cultural intermingling and exchange not only between Central European countries, but also received from the surrounding regions and especially from formerly occupying dominant nations. Furthermore, the predominant religion – mainly Roman Catholicism – has set Central Europe apart from both east and west and continues to influence the social sphere in many of Central European states. These effects are, of course, varied. Nevertheless, religion has had and continues to have an effect not only on the existing societal standards and norms, but also on domestic politics and the way issues are approached and discussed today[3].

Furthermore, the rather reactive nature of the nations in this region provided one common factor for evaluation. As Le Rider observes, the resistance to Ottoman advances as well as to Germanization during the Habsburg monarchy served as one of the focal points in the early formation of collective identity which stemmed from these countries' resistance and definition *against* their more powerful neighbors (Le Rider 2008:159). Much of this feeling was reinforced during the 20th

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[2] Linguistically speaking, Central Europe houses a large majority of inhabitants of Slavic origin, whose languages – save those of Romania, Hungary and Moldova – bear many similarities to one another and thus serve as a reminder of a common etymological background and development (Halecki 1944: 2).

[3] Interestingly enough religious traditions, as scholars argue, have enforced in Western Europe the notions of Protestantism and the subsequent development of democracy (Burgess 1997:79-80; Le Rider 2008:156).

century when the impact of Nazi Germany as well as the Soviet Union was felt profoundly throughout the region (Asmus et al 2005:204-209). Central Europe - fragmented into new, small and vulnerable states- thus became an even easier target for outside domination, whether due to the Munich agreement or to Stalin's post-war advancement into the heart of Europe. The shared negative response to outside domination resonated through many of these states and once again reinforced the defensive character of Central Europe, sustaining the dilemma of being small in size and not 'western' enough to be pried out of Soviet influence (Burgess 1997:4, Kundera 1984:1-14).

Indeed, the cultural, religious and political elements that have divided the European continent into east and west more than once eventually impacted the central region plagued by the dilemma of being, as Milan Kundera puts it, "culturally in the West but politically in the East" and transformed this region into a turbulent fringe of both east and west (1984:2). Further exacerbating this dilemma was the fragmented statehood of these countries whose complicated history of shifting borders has amplified their already fragile position as they emerged from under the Soviet rule in the 1990s.

The four westernmost countries of the former Eastern Bloc – Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary – share this sense of cultural connection as well as a sense of camaraderie that became most pronounced through the effects of history. All four states have throughout time been – with varying sovereignties - parts of larger entities such as Austria-Hungary or Prussia, and the resulting national as well as administrative borders intertwined and shifted along with every territorial development in these empires. Later on, in the latter half of 20th century they fell under the Soviet influence as satellite states and showed signs of unity as the various social and dissident movements sprung up in each of these states during their existence behind the Iron Curtain[4]. These revolts against Soviet domination inevitably set the ground for common ideological perspectives in the middle of a developing regime resistance and a growing desire for democratization and reform (Basora 2011:1). Seeking to disassociate themselves from the Soviet Union through political, economic and societal change, these nations aimed to move closer to Europe and, figuratively speaking, to democracy (Hagen 2003:493-494; Travnicek 2010, par 10). Thus these countries' unified, although at times

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[4] Hungarian revolt of 1956, Polish revolts of 1956 and 1968, Prague spring of 1968, and the Velvet Revolution of Czechoslovakia in 1989 were all an expression of dissatisfaction with the soviet-imposed policies (Asmus et al. 2005, Kundera 1984).

unpronounced, defiance of its strong neighbors ultimately lead to a formation of a collective rationale characterized by constant striving for independence from oppressive regimes such as, most notably, the Soviet Union. This attitude was indeed what brought on the drastic change once the Iron Curtain fell and these countries, along with their newly-found statehood and national identity, were free to determine the political and economic direction for the future. Furthermore, the westward-oriented perspective advanced as Central Europe sought to reinvigorate their ties with the United States of America – a relationship that would prove extremely beneficial in the years to come.

1.3 Visegrad Group emergence and early cooperation

As the most 'western' and the most proactive ex-communist countries, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia became "eager to join the EU's 'cooperative empire dedicated to liberty and democracy'" as they sought to transform their states ideologically as well as economically (Asmus et al. 2005:208). The mutual aspirations to distance themselves from their soviet past, overcome tensions between one another, and reinforce their efforts for a successful transformation and European integration encouraged the likeminded elites to form the Visegrad Group in February 1991, which later expanded from three to four states when Czechoslovakia split up in 1993 (History of the Visegrad Group, 2006; Cooper in Kagan 2008:10). The platform for dialogue that became the Visegrad Group – or, alternatively, Visegrad Four (from now on V4) – has quickly become instrumental in defining common goals, confirming the group's efforts to join western institutional structures such as NATO and the European Union, and overcome common challenges facing these nations as they underwent extensive domestic transitions.

The following years were dedicated to regular discussions between ministers and heads of state and parliaments regarding shared strategies to attain European integration in regards to the transformation of the economy, institutional reform and democratic consolidation. Central Europe clearly affirmed its desire to become part of modern Europe. However, as Ronald Asmus points out, some western European states such as France and Germany originally showed sparse support for these states' western integration. Therefore V4 sought to boost the ties with the United States through

which they gained a powerful ally who would help them advance into NATO accession talks[5] and reinforce their position as qualified and committed candidates (Asmus et al. 2005:208-209; Basora 2011:1). Despite the fact that during the mid-1990s the V4 cooperation took the back seat to the countries' individual focus on transition and integration, the group revived its focus in 1998 when Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary took on the role of enhancing their visibility within Europe and confirming their status as dedicated candidates for both NATO and EU (History of the Visegrad Group, 2006, Basora 2011:2). Due to variations in domestic political climate and foreign affairs, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO as early as 1999, only to be joined by Slovakia in 2004[6]. All four countries also became members of the European Union in May 2004. Not only did these events bring about a major change in regards to status; the profound economic, political and societal adjustments also activated new dynamics within the region as well as within Europe. However, with their joint ambitions to formally integrate into EU and NATO achieved, the V4 found themselves without agenda as they fell short of establishing new, updated goals to work toward.

1.4 New challenges, old habits

With the 1999 and 2004 NATO entry as well as the 'Big Bang' accession of 2004 which incorporated these and a number of other Central and Eastern European states, the cooperation of the four states as well as their positive relationship with the US proved beneficial not only for the Visegrad states who achieved full integration into Europe, economic benefits and security guarantees, but also for the US, who gained new strategically important allies along NATO's eastern borders[7], strengthening its edge adjacent to the less stable eastern European countries still in transition. It is clear that the V4 cooperation during the 1990s was fueled mainly by pragmatic reasons – all four states understood that their potential for successful European integration would be enhanced by working together as a group and that a positive relationship with the US would

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[5] At the same time, V4 cooperation and efforts to join NATO reflected positively on these states' endeavors to join the European community as their revived dialogue with Washington showed determination to improve the quality of democracy, successfully transform the economy and shed the soviet legacy by integrating into Europe.

[6] Slovakia's accession talks were postponed due to its nationalist domestic movement and reluctance toward the west between 1993 and 1998 (Ágh 1999:271)

[7] US involvement was key in recommending the V4 for NATO accession in the 90s. Furthermore, the support of the US also enhanced V4's trajectory towards EU accession (Asmus et al, 2005, 209, Gazeta 2009, par 2).

also prove rewarding. However, in the early 2000s, as the individual countries focused on pre-accession domestic reforms and 'catching up' with the west, the cooperation between them lost momentum and the subsequent EU and NATO accession also brought new perspectives to this region – a more secure geopolitical position, economic benefits and development, greater transatlantic engagement and growing ties with Brussels (Basora 2011, 2).

What went unchanged, however, is Central Europe's relationship with Russia and their remaining uneasiness in the face of Russia's increasing presence in the global political arena, as well as its natural energy resources, regional influence and veto power in the UN Security Council (Kagan 2008: 12-25;Larrabee 2010). While maintaining cordial relations, many states of CE are well aware of Russia's growing assertiveness and presence, as highlighted by their involvement in the Georgia conflict of 2008 as well as natural gas cut-offs that have deeply affected many of Russia's neighbors. Furthermore, the relationship between the V4 (and CEE in general) and the US have taken on a new meaning. Washington's new foreign policy, which included the retraction of plans for missile defense shield on Czech and Polish soil in 2009 as well as the normalization of their relationship with Russia has left CEE briefly wondering whether its countries are slowly slipping off the American radar and losing their strongest western ally (Gazeta 2009, Joyner 2009, Lightfoot 2009). It is true that the United States have since renewed its pledge to deliver a new and improved defense system to Poland and Czech Republic. However, they have also made it clear that the new relationship with these two countries - as well as with Central Europe in general - will focus more on cooperation, rather than assistance[8]. At the same time, EU's talks with Russia have woken up from stagnation in efforts to achieve a secure energy partnership. In addition to the growing east-west dialogue, the fact that neither EU nor NATO reacted strongly to the Georgia-Russia conflict of 2008 left CEE anxious (Facts and Figures 2011, Larrabee 2011:45). Combined with Central Europe's historical experience with Russia – whose recent muscle-flexing only confirmed its growing assertiveness in the international political arena – CE found itself once again in the cumbersome midst of an east-west constellation of interests in which each shift in power may have an impact on the entire region.

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[8] „That's why in America, we no longer think in terms of what we can do for Central Europe, but rather in terms of what we can do with Central Europe." (Biden, 2009, par 17).

1.5 Determining the new direction

Against the backdrop of America's intentions to repair its ties with Kremlin, however, where do Central Europe and the V4 stand? Will the region become an unstable patch of external geopolitical influence? Most likely not. All four states possess a security guarantee through NATO[9] and all four are members of the EU and take part in EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). On the other hand, it is possible that these countries will become strategic players whose former weaknesses – size and position – can now become their biggest asset as they interact with both EU and NATO to the west, as well as with Russia to the east. Additionally, these four countries together contribute considerably to EU's population and also constitute a major combined voting bloc in the European Parliament (larger than those of Germany and France combined), it is intriguing to determine whether their post-accession interaction[10] on the V4 platform could lead to a new strategic cooperation which could transform these states into more proactive and significant players within both NATO and the EU, and contribute to these two institutions' agenda towards the east (Basora 2011:2-4; Mitchell 2009).

Since 2004, the V4 have engaged in a variety of discussions regarding a number of issues – from energy security, to western Balkans, to the Roma minority - not only with each other, but also with other partners[11] (Events 2006-2010). It remains to be seen, however, how the V4 will assess their future relationship with the east as well as with the west, namely in questions of security and defense. With the aforementioned changing dynamics between Russia, EU and the US, Central Europe found itself in a precarious position where their formerly close alliance with Washington seemed to have been sacrificed for America's interaction with Russia (Gazeta 2009). Yes, it is true that the CE of today faces fewer security risks than before 2004. Nevertheless, their concern with Russia's renewed ambitions[12] in the hands of Vladimir Putin

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[9] Article 5 of the Washington states: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence" ("What is Article 5?" 2005)

[10] Analysts have noted an increased formal commitment to V4 dialogue produced through V4 meetings of ministers, presidents, prime ministers, as well as at non-governmental summits, conferences and discussion panels

[11] V4+ Romania and Bulgaria, V4+ B3 (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania) (Events, 2006-2010).

[12] Kagan 2008:13

and their nervousness over NATO's possible weakening has reflected in their collective reaction to Barack Obama's new foreign policy towards Russia[13].

As the most integrated states of the former Eastern Bloc in the midst of developing a new post-accession dialogue, the V4 have the potential to become more significant regional actors in terms of security since their involvement with NATO and the EU gives them the advantage to utilize these platforms for constructive agenda-setting given that they zoom in on their common goals and strategies. For this reason this work will focus on determining whether their mutual interaction on the V4 platform, as well as the states' intentions to cooperate, lead to cooperative behavior on governmental level, that is, are the V4 governmental bodies attempting to reach commonly defined goals and overcome diverging opinions through adjustment to one another's preferences and abilities and active cooperation. The success of cooperation will be measured by the frequency of such behavior, exemplified by the occurrence of instances where common positions are taken or common policies are created. I will first examine the existing form and performance of institutionalization and interaction within the V4's framework such as the existing avenues and mechanisms for discussion. Then I will assess the Visegrad states' official governmental positions and strategies in order to evaluate to what degree the communication regarding cooperation between the Visegrad states leads to actual cooperative behavior between governments and ministries. The outcome may be represented either by individual compliance with commonly defined aims or – in an ideal case - by a formulation of joint policies.

A significant factor in this evaluation is V4 states' relationship with the US, vis-à-vis NATO, and it is therefore relevant to examine whether their individual attitudes toward security and defense draw from the quality of this relationship. This additional transatlantic dimension will thus be valuable in assessing the divergence of interests within the V4 and their subsequent motivation – or a lack thereof – to pursue a common security policy.

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[13] Political dignitaries as well as analysts wrote "An open letter to the Obama administration from Central and Eastern Europe" in 2009 expressing concern over America's recent shift of focus away from CEE and onto Russia (Gazeta 2009).

1. 6 Content and structure

For the purpose of this evaluation, I will gather information from various types of dialogue between the V4 states. The main source will be the interaction on the V4 platform, as represented by released statements, summaries, and communiqués. Other document sources will include additional regional governmental and expert forums such as conferences, summits, working groups, etc. The empirical research presented will correspond to the events and developments between 2005 and present day, with 2005 being the first year of post-accession and the starting point for many new trends brought on by the enlargement of 2004. In the second part of my evaluation, I will assess governmental documents released by the ministries of foreign affairs and ministries of defense of the V4 countries order to review whether the existing formal discussion regarding cooperation also translates into tangible policies – in other words, are the results of this dialogue officially implemented – either jointly, individually in accordance to jointly-set goals, or are there explicit plans to take relevant action in the future. If so, does it reflect a united stance, or rather a discord – or a combination of both? Finally, I will summarize the findings and propose various tentative factors that may serve in understanding and explaining the current state of cooperation between the V4.

CHAPTER II: COOPERATION

2.1 What is cooperation?

When assessing the quality of coordination between the V4, it will be crucial to first understand the theoretical backbone of cooperation. In a world where each state possesses distinct preferences and interests, cooperation may play a powerful role in opening up avenues towards a systematic and effective attainment of those goals that are communal. In other respects, sovereignty, as well as diverging preferences, internal dynamics or power politics may push states to actually avoid cooperation, and thus remain solely responsible for attaining their goals within what realists would call anarchy. However, before I delve into concepts related to cooperation, I find it appropriate to elaborate further on cooperation and its definition, and for that I deem Robert O. Keohane's work on cooperation to be an immensely valuable point for this evaluation.

Cooperation, harmony and discord

The basic distinction that Keohane brings forth goes hand in hand with the degree of joint activity among states, or a lack thereof. Keohane proposes a basic categorization of intra-actor behavior: cooperation, harmony and discord (Keohane 1984, 1989). Despite the former two being conducive to states attaining their goals, it is nevertheless crucial to distinguish between cooperation and harmony due to the fact that when in a state of harmony, actors' actions automatically allow for other actors to attain their goals, i.e. no *adjustment* of policies or positions is necessary, and there is an absence of conflict (Keohane 1984:55). In other words, in situations where harmony prevails, states do not engage in particular behavior *in order to* assist

the reaching of common goals. However, their behavior does accommodate the behavior of others in a way that allows for an automatic facilitation of their interests[14].

In contrast to harmony, cooperation - while also facilitating the attainment of common goals - does so only with the help of adaptation through a process of negotiation or bargaining[15]. From a similarly-shaped sociological perspective, actors may demonstrate what Allwood refers to as cognitive consideration - i.e. states recognize the status quo and aims of fellow states and may subsequently attempt to alter their behavior in order to influence the other actor's activities to the point when the two actors' behavior becomes compatible and can yield results beneficial to both[16] (Allwood 2000:873). The factors of cooperation are thus, according to Keohane, built on the assumption that the states interested in cooperation will recognize the aims of other states and attempt to establish a mutually-beneficial relationship for the purpose of carrying out desired interests[17] through dialogue, negotiation and planning. Once states decide to follow this pattern of interaction, they ought to establish mechanisms within this framework of interaction through which they can express their interests and jointly discuss and construct policies that will serve as a means to an end of reaching the preferred outcome for all actors involved. Cooperation between states thus rests largely on political dialogue involving negotiation or even bargaining, supported through negative reinforcements or rewards.

However, as Keohane specifies, should actors decide to not pursue the formation of joint policies, or should these policies, once established, prove incompatible for all parties involved, a state of discord will prevail[18]. In this scenario, each actor will maintain his interests, but policy conflicts might be brought on by the actors' unsuccessful efforts to alter the behavior of others[19] (1984:52-54). This scenario thus goes hand in hand with the realist concept of self-interest and

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[14] As Keohane notes, harmony is rare in international politics. For examples given, see Keohane 1984:54.

[15] Alternatively, Allwood refers to cooperation as the "interaction between 'motivated rational agents' engaged in a joint activity" (Allwood 2000).

[16] See chart in Keohane 1984, 53.

[17] Lindblom's adaptive adjustment: an actor may "shift its policy in the direction of another's preferences without regard for the effect of its actions on the other state, defer to the other country, or partially shift its policy in order to avoid adverse consequences" , or nonbargained manipulation: "one actor confronting another with a *fait acompli*" (Keohane 1984, 52)

[18] It is important to point out though, that a failure to cooperate might arise even if both actors share the same interests, but might be prevented from cooperation by outside factors (see Keohane 1984, 65-66).

[19] States may at this point also choose to pursue cooperation, in order to avoid conflict.

anarchy, since states are left with their own tools to effectively and successfully pursue their own interests, and they show no regard for the goals of other actors.

An important factor present in cooperation as well as other types of state interaction is the concept of rational behavior – the cost-benefit analysis actors engage in within the process of decision-making - and its impact on the motivation of actors. One should note, however, that the information available to states is likely to be limited, resulting in a bounded rationality that presents drawbacks to 'perfect' rational behavior[20]. Cooperation is also, despite its apparent softer approach to dealing with other sovereign states, ultimately motivated by rational analyses of cost-benefit relationship and can at times be rather exploitative in nature[21] (Allwood 2000, Keohane 1989:159).

2.2 Neo-liberal institutionalism

As many theoretical concepts agree, cooperation *is* always possible. However, realists and neo-realists assert that cooperation is hard to attain and even more difficult to maintain thanks to the anarchic nature of international relations where peace is only a temporary condition and state interaction is nothing but a struggle for power. As Charles Lipson notes, for cooperation to be stable, certain factors must be present in the relationship among states. They must recognize their interdependence and be aware of their decisions as being mutually dependent; there must be enough time for states to recognize and respond to other actors' decisions; states ought to be interested in long-term cooperation and there should be a difference between the rewards for cooperation and the punishment for the lack thereof (1993, 65). However, even when all of these conditions are satisfied and actors have an interest in achieving the best possible outcome, some structural obstacles may remain. One of the principal stumbling blocks for cooperation is the risk of non-compliance, as exemplified by the prisoner's dilemma

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[20] See Simon in Keohane 1984:111-115
[21] Example: developed states exploiting developing world through cooperation with one another (Keohane 1989:159-160).

model[22]. Furthermore, the transaction costs for communication and the reception of relevant (and widest possible) information may be too costly for individual states, and despite the fact that two or more actors may share the same interests, high transaction costs and difficult attainment of information, as well as a lack of channels for dialogue may hinder them from cooperating (Keohane 1989:2).

Nevertheless, neoliberal institutionalism proposes a way to deal with the setbacks to cooperation that provides an alternative to the realists' rather pessimistic view of cooperation in international relations. As Robert Keohane and Robert Axelrod argue, states seek absolute gains[23] in cooperation and in order to overcome the existing obstacles, international regimes can be established in order to mitigate the barriers to cooperation by safeguarding reciprocity that allows states to foster trust, providing a set of rules or norms that elicit desired behavior, and reduce the severity of transaction costs (Axelrod et. al 1993:109, Keohane 1984:56-61). Through institutionalization, international regimes can aid in the establishment of decision-making mechanisms as well as channels for the transfer of information and thus provide actors the means to establish dialogue and coordinate through either a formal or an informal routine (Axelrod 1993:109). Therefore, international institutions play a significant role in establishing and maintaining cooperation between states due to the fact that they can support the structures through which communication and successful dialogue can be led.

Institutions and regimes

As we understand, institutions may not always be easy to define as they appear in all shapes and sizes, and their institutional make-up varies across regions and issue areas. Robert Keohane points out that the term "institution" does not necessarily refer to a formally-established and highly institutionalized entity; institutions can describe general patterns of behavior, or particular agreements on interaction consciously constructed by actors who wish to engage with

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[22] However, critics of PD have found it too rigid, lacking regard for cognitive and subtle interaction and oversimplifying complex bargaining games where a variety of factors might influence actors' behavior (Lipson 1993:69).

[23] Absolute gains have a more emphasized role within the school of neo-liberal institutionalism which assumes that, regardless of the gains of others, states focus primarily on their individual well-being and the achievement of the best possible outcome, while relative gains are of importance to realist and neo realists on actor's standing in relation to other actors is ultimately what lends states greater or smaller utility and thus renders them more or less powerful within the international system (see Lipson, Grieco in Keohane, 1993:6).

one another (1989:162-163). Furthermore, as Keohane stresses, their level of institutionalization may differ – from tightly-bound regimes with explicit rules and regulations to relatively informal structures such as conventions which may be permanent or serving a long-term commitment, or they may arise on an ad hoc basis such as committees or commissions in order to address a specific issue area relevant to all (Keohane 1989:3-5). Keohane also delves into the concept of hegemonic cooperation – the neorealist notion that the presence of a powerful leader, such as the US in the latter half of the 20th century, is conducive and beneficial to cooperation in that it enforces an order in international economic relations that enforces compliance through increased interdependence and high rewards (Keohane 1984:135-150). Despite this theory being most relevant to free trade and economic interdependence, neo-realists would posit that a general order in international relations exists alongside the presence of a state "powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so" (Keohane 1984:34). By this assumption, one could extend this argument to regional cooperation and the constellation of power as a defining factor of facilitated interaction and cooperation[24].

Institutions and effectiveness

For institutions to effectively fulfill their purpose, they should to be a successful facilitator of dialogue, policy coordination and cooperation. They ought to efficiently reduce transaction costs and lower the risk of un-cooperative behavior. However, we should not confuse this normative assessment of institutions with their character in reality. Despite existing norms and rules, as well as payoffs for cooperation, many existing institutions and regimes still face obstacles to cooperation[25] - apart from non-compliance there may arise other external factors such as adverse domestic political climate, scarce financial resources or differing cultural

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[24] It is important to note, however, that Keohane's argument is that non-hegemonic cooperation is possible. He concludes that the decline of a world hegemon such as the US has not and would not lead to loss of cooperation. Rather, states and international institutions are able to adjust and create legitimate and secure frameworks for cooperation (Keohane 1984).
[25] Apart from non-compliance (Keohane 1989: 6-9).

attitudes towards the importance of institutionalization[26]. Furthermore, as Ronald Coase observes[27], institutions are less likely to be effective if they satisfy at least one of the following characteristics: 1) there is no explicit legal framework that outlines the accountability of actors, 2) transaction costs remain high, and 3) there is a lack of necessary or relevant information. Naturally, all three conditions are what both realists and neoliberal institutionalists claim as inherent in the international system, and it may also be difficult for institutions to overcome all three obstacles at the same time all the time.

So what kind of cooperation –if any - does the V4 foster? As I have mentioned previously, the V4 hosts a variety of issue-based intergovernmental dialogue, including the aforementioned questions of security and, while being only loosely institutionalized, this platform provides a plethora of avenues for discussion as well as tools for policy coordination. However, with the presence of intergovernmental and inter-departmental cooperation dialogue on one side, it remains to be seen whether this dialogue leads, on the other side, to actual cooperative behavior characterized by active coordination and attempts to make adjustments.

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[26] However, Keohane's observations assess that the level of institutionalization, i.e. the clout and profundity of a regime's legal framework, does not necessarily increase its effectiveness or efficiency. On the other hand, providing a useful and well-functioning platform for dialogue, flow of information and coordination mechanisms may often prove more valuable.

[27] See Coase theorem in Keohane 1984:85-88, Keohane 1989:110-111.

CHAPTER III:

COOPERATION MECHANISMS AND DIALOGUE, 2005-PRESENT

3.1 Channels for cooperation

Visegrad Group/Visegrad Four

Undeniably, people of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have throughout history shared similar views and perspectives, as well as insecurities and struggles which ultimately turned them in many aspects into like-minded states aiming towards the same goal – European integration, democratization and economic transformation. The Visegrad states recognized the need for and the benefit of established channels for debate and coordination as soon as they emerged from under Soviet influence and with the creation of the Visegrad Group in 1991, these (at the time) three countries – which two years later turned into four after the split of Czechoslovakia - formally established a flexible forum for a constructive and creative discussion regarding the necessary steps for V4's desired political and economic transition, as well as the aspired entry into the European Union and NATO ("History" 2006). By presenting themselves as a united entity and mutually endorsing their common position, the Visegrad states sought to emphasize their determination to depart from their Soviet past and convince the west of their status as adept candidates for eventual integration into the European Union and NATO.

The Visegrad Group has from then on actively engaged in discussing transition and entry into the EU and NATO - however, with varying degrees of intensity due to fluctuations in domestic political attitudes as well as individual setbacks[28]. The following 1999 and 2004 entries into both structures have prompted the V4 to reassess their common interests and reshape their debate in order to address their post-accession goals and responsibilities. The group has been committed to carrying out this dialogue and it is indeed visible that the number of regular

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[28] Slovakia was originally excluded from accession talks due to the political instability and isolation resulting from the ruling party's attitudes towards western integration (Samson 1999:10-11)

intergovernmental and the frequency of interaction has indeed increased gradually since 2005 ("Calendar" 2005-2011).

Interaction mechanisms and actors involved

While the V4 is not institutionalized, there is a great deal of interstate and expert interaction present. The prime ministers of V4 meet annually to discuss previous developments as well as mark the beginning of a new presidency of the Visegrad group which countries hold for a year on a rotating basis ("Aims and Structure" 2011, "Guidelines" 2004). The chairing presidency is additionally responsible for presenting a structured program for the upcoming presiding period which outlines the principal aims for the presidency. In addition, prime ministers and foreign ministers hold ad hoc informal meetings prior to international events in order to review their priorities.

The various issue areas on the V4 agenda - which range from culture to environment to defense - are tended to during the meetings of relevant ministers on an ad hoc basis, usually taking place at least once per presidency. Moreover, state secretaries of foreign affairs hold bi-annual meetings during which programs for upcoming collaboration projects are discussed and drafted and ambassadors come together four times a year in order to assess the progress of cooperation as put forth by the annual V4 program of the presiding country ("Contents of Visegrad cooperation" 1999). Further opportunities for debate are also assigned to expert groups, issue specialists and intra-state coordinators who work together with the foreign ministers, as well as with ministers of specific departments. Additionally, national representatives also engage in consultation among the Permanent Representations of the member countries to a number of international forums such as NATO, EU, WTO, OSCE and others ("Guidelines" 2006).

"V4+" format

In addition to intra-V4 interaction, the group also seeks to maintain positive relations as well as establish new avenues for cooperation with other European and neighboring entities and states. Closer regional cooperation is already in place with Austria and Slovenia, while the V4+ format was established to support interaction. Currently, the V4+ scheme engages in talks with a variety of neighboring and faraway states such as the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania and

Latvia (B3) and Southeastern Europe (Annual Implementation Report 2010/2011:7). Relationships with a longer history have also been maintained with the Benelux countries as well as the Nordic Council states

3.2 International Visegrad Fund

In the year 2000 the Visegrad states established the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) which is the only firmly institutionalized part associated with the V4. The IVF works with an annual budget of 6 million Euro and provides financial resources for a variety of projects such as grants for students and non-governmental organizations, research, culture and education, tourism, and arts, to name a few ("Basic facts" 2011). The fund has two governing bodies (Council of Ambassadors and Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs) and two executive bodies (the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director), as well as the Secretariat which handles the administrative tasks of the institution.

The IVF thus supports cooperation of the V4 in an institutionalized manner, but it does so in regards to issues which are not related to foreign policy. Nevertheless, the IVF is a valuable tool for the interaction between the Visegrad countries in terms of research, education and cultural and societal exchange since it serves as a joint financial resource for many mutual projects.

3.3 Other platforms for dialogue

In addition to coordinating interaction between the Visegrad states, the four countries also engage actively in a variety of other forums. One of them is GLOBSEC, an international foreign policy and security conference organized by the Slovak Atlantic Commission and co-organized by the Visegrad Group, amongst others[29]. GLOBSEC annually hosts conferences in Bratislava, Slovak Republic during which a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors can participate in discussions regarding security, foreign affairs and defense ("More Than a Forum" 2011). Each year the conference encourages productive debates on a specific issue area

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[29] "Partners" 2011 (available http://www.ata-sac.org/globsec2011/general-information-2/partners/)

not only among Central European actors, but also within a transatlantic scope since the forum heavily engages NATO as well as USAID[30] and the American Embassy ("Partners" 2011). The issues discussed range from defense and security to European Neighborhood Policy, transatlantic alliance, or Central European engagement in peacekeeping and conflict resolution missions (GLOBSEC 2005-2011[31]). Apart from fostering cooperative deliberation and defining the strategic identity of Central Europe, GLOBSEC seeks to influence the policy-making process by promoting dialogue between Central and Eastern European governments as well as between governments and policy analysts or expert working groups.

3.4 Issue areas for cooperation

The V4 have had, as previously mentioned, a number of shared interests – some of which have been on the agenda before EU accession, while others are new or being redefined following EU and NATO accession. Some of the currently relevant topics put up for debate are for instance energy security and energy diversification, regional development and cooperation with countries involved in the ENP. Other areas include foreign affairs, culture, education, agriculture and environment. Furthermore, the V4 maintain an active debate regarding transatlantic relations and the Euro-Atlantic strategic culture on both the V4 forum as well as within GLOBSEC.

One of the discussed areas is also security and defense – not only in the regional or pan-European sense, but also the broader concept of transatlantic security. Since 2004, the V4 have participated in ministerial and expert meetings of the security and defense sector at least once a year – either on the V4 platform or via GLOBSEC where they involved a variety of topics that have so far helped form a very general security identity outline ("Calendar" 2005-2010).

V4 in NATO and EU

Even before their accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the Visegrad countries have on many occasions showed their commitment to the Euro-Atlantic alliance as well as support for Washington's foreign policies. One could argue that this determination is

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[30] United States Agency for International Development
[31] To be found at http://www.ata-sac.org/globsec/

underscored by Central Europe's tradition of Atlanticism, albeit it is true that not all CE states are equally loyal to the US[32] (Asmus et al., 2005; Missiroli 2004:127). However, as some scholars point out, Central Europe has for long felt more comfortable with its transatlantic relationship than with ties to Western Europe, what contributed to their initial skepticism towards the CSDP and a more enthused attitude towards Washington and NATO (Asmus et al. 2005, Missiroli 2004). The V4 states have indeed benefitted from their accession to NATO thanks to the fact that the alliance has reduced the likelihood of Central Europe becoming an unstable region again by anchoring it closer to the West not only in regards to ideology, but also security and defense. On the contrary, NATO accession also presented new challenges to the V4 in terms of financial contributions[33] and obligations in regards to missions abroad requiring military compatibility and modernization, and with the simultaneous entry into the EU the V4 were faced with a delicate balancing task between both institutions' demands and impact – a task that remains on the V4 agenda to this day.

Stabilization and enlargement

The function of the V4 within NATO and the EU has thus far been somewhat muted as the newcomers have lacked both a prominent profile[34] as well as an explicit security focus[35]. However, V4's resentment towards Russia throughout the 20th century has ultimately become a key factor in their regional position when dealing with the EU and NATO[36] also in the years following accession when the V4 encountered more than one new concern - mainly in regards to CEE's anxiety caused by Russia's assertiveness in the 2008 Georgia conflict (and the lack of assertive response from the West[37]) as well as the gas shortages caused by Russian-Ukrainian relations in 2006 and 2009 (Gow 2009). This made Putin's Russia even more visible on EU's

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[32] Poland, followed by the Czech Republic was traditionally more Atlanticist of the four Visegrad countries. However, this trend has changed since the early 2000s, with Poland's more open attitude to Brussels.

[33] 2% of GDP is required of member states for the military budget (Kiss 2011, par 3).

[34] That is not to say, however, that the Visegrad states were strategically insignificant. On the contrary, the accession of Central European states to NATO (and the EU) as well, extended the euro-transatlantic zone of stability further east and reduced the perceived gap between Western Europe and the former Eastern bloc.

[35] The discrepancies between the V4 countries' progress as well as turbulent domestic politics took a toll on the unity of V4 at time of EU and NATO accession.

[36] This attitude however varies. Furthermore, Poland's current attitude of rapprochement has also altered slightly the region's relations with Moscow (Rettman 2010).

[37] Russian invasion in Georgia motivated only a weak response from the west, neither the EU, nor NATO were willing to intervene, considering a potential subsequent conflict with Russia (Larrabee 2010:36; Mitchell 2010, par 5).

and Central European radar, fueling slight disquietude over CEE's geopolitical position next to a resurgent eastern neighbor whose influence it would rather avoid this time around. Furthermore, unstable states in the Western Balkan region as well as in Southeastern Europe and the Caucasus have also caught the attention of the V4 who would like to extend the periphery of the west further. For this reason, stabilization of the European neighborhood has become one of the recurring topics in the V4 forum, as well as in the dialogue with both NATO and EU. The V4 have a special interest in promoting democratization and reform in these areas and tend to advocate NATO's open-door policy and enlargement towards these countries in order to eradicate turbulent national politics as well as any possible impact of Russia or any lingering Soviet legacies. Ukraine is especially instrumental due to its proximity to CE on one hand and its ties with Russia on the other, creating a potential for Russian leverage in the CE region.

Diverging interests

In order to mitigate any security risks stemming from an unstable periphery, the V4 has sought to assert its position in front of NATO and the EU – in the midst of western efforts to reshape the relations with Kremlin. As Missiroli points out, disputes with Western European states on how to approach Russia already emerged shortly after the V4's accession into the EU and NATO and further doubts emerged as the US in the last few years decided to 'reset' their relations with Kremlin after previously retracting the Bush administration's plans to erect ballistic missile defense (BMD) shields in Poland and Czech Republic[38] (2004:127). The Obama administration put the preceding Central European partnership on temporary hold and chose strategic bilateralism in order to succeed in negotiations with Russia regarding arms control and Iran's sanction veto, and while the BMD was eventually adopted into NATO[39], president Obama's less than diplomatic unilateral decision to recall these plans made many CEE states second-guess their relationship with the US.

It can be argued, however, that it is due to these developments that some Visegrad countries opened up more to Brussels as well as the CSDP, as opposed to remaining staunch

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[38] X-band radar in the Czech Republic and 10 interceptors in Poland (Hynek et al. 2009).
[39] Although it started as a bilateral effort between the US and Poland/Czech Republic (Hynek et al. 2009:268)

Atlanticists of the 1990s and early 2000s[40]. Additionally, with the voting power these countries possess in the European Parliament, the Visegrad states have discovered their weight in the European forum and have shown determination to raise their collective voice in both the EU and NATO. Further motivation to do so may also stem from the changing relations between Russia and Western Europe who, similarly to the US has recently sought to normalize their ties with Russia as well as increase their economic engagement exemplified by the current Nord Stream project in addition to other forms of diplomatic and entrepreneurial engagement such as regular discourse, agreements and joint structures[41] (Gomart 2008:3; Larrabee 2010:47). It is true that Poland has also recently decided on a 'rapprochement' with Russia. However reservations most likely still remain among the V4 who certainly have an interest in approaching Russia carefully.

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[40] CEE have persistently supported US foreign policy towards Iraq and Afghanistan (despite the disapproval of some Western European states); the elites of Poland and Czech Republic also welcomed BMD plans despite the public's negative response (Hynek et al. 2009)

[41] Including working groups, councils, Partnership and Cooperation Act, 'Four Spaces Program', etc (Gomart 2008:2-4)

CHAPTER IV:

FORMAL PLEDGES TO COOPERATION

4.1 General aims and strategies of the V4 platform

The first step to determining the state of cooperation between the Visegrad countries is to assess the four countries' formal commitment to joint planning and development of activities. These can be found in the documents formulated on the V4 platform as a part of the V4's regular ministerial, presidential and governmental meetings. The annual reports, as well as the communiqués released following the regular meetings of the ministries of defense contain an overview of the contents and the outcome of the V4 debates. Furthermore, other forums such as the annual GLOBSEC conference as well as additional expert-based working groups focused on policy-formation provide the V4 governmental and non-governmental actors with ample opportunities to discuss and develop common strategies in security and defense.

Regional stability, NATO enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy

As I have mentioned previously, stabilization of the European Neighborhood has been a recurring security and foreign affairs topic on the V4 forum. In the 2004/2005 presidency report, the four states advocate further efforts in the stabilization of the CEE region, and place special importance on further assistance to Ukraine in terms of democratization (Visegrad Group 2005). This dialogue continued on through the Czech 2007/2008 presidency, when the V4 reconfirmed their dedication to the further development of the ENP and its processes and in 2009, due to Polish and Swedish joint requests to deepen the political and economic engagement with some of its neighbors, the V4 inaugurated the Eastern Partnership Initiative as a sub-project of the ENP framework (Hungarian Presidency 2011, Visegrad Group 2008). Since 2007, the V4 have also increased their support for the western integration of Ukraine and Western Balkans by reaffirming their support for participation in the NATO Membership Action Plan, which would

pave the way for eventual integration into NATO. A particularly important step in pushing for NATO enlargement came about in 2009, when Albania and Croatia both joined the alliance and thus stretched the zone of Euro-Atlantic security further (NATO 2009). Additional emphasis was placed on the continuation of effective and productive transatlantic relations and the need to balance between strategic cooperation with NATO on the one hand and with that of the EU on the other. (Ministers of defence 2007, par7)

In 2009 and 2010 much of the debate on the V4 platforms was dedicated to the topic of Eastern Partnership - an initiative brought alive by Polish-Swedish joint efforts that strives to improve and maintain their eastern partners'[42] efforts towards democratization, transparency, judicial and economic reform in order to anchor the post-communist part of Europe closer to the west (Foreign ministers 2010). In 2010 and early 2011 the V4 also recommended increasing the IVF budget allocations for EaP in order to enhance the existing collaboration with their partner states and increase the effectiveness of existing EaP projects (Visegrad Group 2011). Furthermore, the V4 increased their engagement in the integration of Western Balkans into the EU by urging these states to carry out domestic reform, endorsing the advancement of accession negotiations[43] and firmly standing behind EU's involvement in the region. Additionally, the V4 continued to support NATO's open-door policy towards remaining non-members and especially urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolve their defense property issues in order to advance in talks towards the Membership Action Plan participation (Visegrad Group Ministerial Statement 2010, par 6, Ministry of Foreign Affair 2009, par 6).

Military engagement

In addition to the efforts to stabilize and integrate the immediate neighborhood of the EU through dialogue, exchange of knowledge and formal support in the European forum, the V4 also pledged to act on their responsibilities as NATO and EU members by participating in conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions not only in the European neighborhood, but also beyond.

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[42] Partner countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Joint statement of the foreign ministers 2010)

[43] The V4 were advocates for increasing flexibility in accession talks to Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Serbia and acknowledged the EU integration goals of Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (where the V4 involvement continued through EU military presence and ongoing operations) See: Visegrad Group Ministerial Statement on the Western Balkans (2010).

V4 showed commitment to provide continued assistance[44] in the stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan in the form of troops, military technology and equipment (Ministers of defence 2007, 2008). Furthermore, the countries also emphasize the need to modernize and exchange expertise between each other in order to provide appropriate capabilities and resources to face some of the most prominent threats to the Euro-Atlantic region - the threat of international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and biological weapons – and the V4 are committed to preventing and battling these threats both as NATO and EU members.

Recognizing the growing importance of European security structures, the dialogue on the V4 forum has since 2005 also conveyed an increasing interest in a reassessment and further development of EU's security strategy. Therefore, upon the introduction of the readily deployable battle group concept in 2006[45] - in which the EU proposed this idea to the member states with the option to create varied and MS-operated multinational battle groups of around 1,500 personnel – the Visegrad states commenced dialogue regarding the potential establishment of a Visegrad Battle Group from 2015 onwards (Ministers of defence 2007, par 6). In the following years, the V4 steadily expressed their determination to take part in this joint military initiative. However, they also determined it necessary to first receive and agree on a firm set of rules regarding the battle group's function and utilization of force as well as to review and reinforce the previously-gathered military knowledge and experience, thus establishing 2010 as the base year for the start of planning and formulation of the battle group (Visegrad Group 2009). During the the 2010/2011 Slovak V4 presidency the four countries issued a formal decision that assigned 2016 as the starting year for the EU V4 Battle Group project (Visegrad Group 2011:14).

Further V4 discussion in military cooperation took place during 2008-2011 period when the four ministries of defense expanded this collaboration by proposing and developing strategies for the exchange of expertise in the area of international military operations, military management and military transformation, in addition to reviewing strategies for air defense and biological weapon prevention (Visegrad Group 2008). During the Polish presidency of 2008/2009, the four states drafted an agreement to cooperate in the area of armaments,

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[44] "Czech Republic" 2011, "Czechs offer helicopter" 2011, "Poland prolongs Iraq" 2010
[45] See EU Council Secretariat 2007

specifically those relating to air defense, weapons of mass destruction, strategic transport and agreed on establishing expert working groups for the above-mentioned topics, as well as for the elaboration of the '21st Century Soldier' project which was to focus on modernization of troops and military capabilities (Visegrad group 2010). In addition, the debates among the National Armaments Directors, V4 Chiefs of Defense and defense-related working groups further focused on the potential establishment of official military information exchange channels[46], as well as a common development of military capabilities, deeper inter-state cooperation in the area of military technology and further combined efforts in crisis management missions. The focus is to increase the coordination and consultation tools in the area of security and defense in order to enhance the defense and NATO membership capabilities of each state. For the purpose of expanding this debate and introducing the topic of security to a wider audience, the ministries also agreed on the establishment of a multi-national Safety and Defense Course to take place at the University of Brno starting in the 2012/2013 academic year (Visegrad Group 2011:14).

In the post-accession years, the defense ministries also focused their attention on the importance of NATO transformation, as well as the integration of the proposed US-backed ballistic missile defense[47] into the NATO framework. As regards NATO enlargement, the V4 have in 2010 and 2011engaged in multi-level ministerial defense meetings that also involved Ukrainian defense representatives, gearing the discussion towards the Ukraine's possibilities and tasks for Euro-Atlantic integration in regards to which the V4 expressed their will to assist Ukraine with military modernization and capability growth (Visegrad Group 2011:13-14).

4.2 GLOBSEC and non-governmental discourse

Another integral part of the contact between the Visegrad countries is played by the variety of non-governmental and expert groups involved in formulating common goals and fostering cohesion of the CE region through debate, coordination and engagement in joint

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[46] The leading coordinating state of which is to be the V4 presidency state at the time of rotation (Annual Implementation Report 2010/2011:15)
[47] Proposed in 2007, for details on MD plans see BBC 2009.

endeavors. One of such platforms – GLOBSEC[48] - was established in 2005 in the form of annual international conferences.

The GLOBSEC conference of 2009 indeed addressed a highly relevant topic of security and the Visegrad countries. As highlighted in the "Summary of Proceedings", the discussion panel members – mostly former diplomats or members of non-governmental agencies, think tanks, and working groups – agreed that the V4 of the post-accession era lacks clearly defined goals which need to be expressly formulated and elaborated on through continued discussion (GLOBSEC 2009a). Furthermore, the talks also concentrated on the question of how the states ought to utilize their membership in the European Union for strategic security cooperation not only with the West but also with the East and additional attention was given to the importance of the longevity of ENP as well as the continued necessity to strengthen Ukraine's democracy, transparency and economy (GLOBSEC 2009a: 1-3).

 Several members of the panel furthermore acknowledged the need to improve the structure and cohesion of the V4 and recommended working as a coalition when engaging with Brussels in order to make their common goals as well as their security identity more coherent and visible (p 3-4). Naturally, an organized and explicit security position would be best reinforced by a presence of a regional leader and speaker for the coalition – which could potentially become Poland whose size and weight in the EU would be best able to shoulder such responsibility. However, it is debatable whether this assignment would be an acceptable solution to the other V4 members whose strong tendencies towards national identity and sovereignty prevent them from complying with the introduction of uneven internal dynamics, and particularly the Czechs, who expressed their preference for bilateralism, favor a V4 as a less formal union serving rather as a safety net instead of a primary vessel for coordination (GLOBSEC 2009a:7-8).

Furthermore, this conference also addressed the topic of resurgent Russia and how to approach it. The discussion members agreed that Russia indeed still possesses numerous tools for

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[48] Organized primarily by the Slovak Atlantic Commission, Euro-Atlantic Center and NATO Public Diplomacy Division, but enjoying a wide array of sponsors and organizers today (Slovak Atlantic Commission 2005, par 1).

dividing Europe[49] – albeit these are of a different character today than historically. The panel thus concluded that the V4 ought to strengthen their instruments for coordination and unity in order to deal with not only Brussels, but also Russia, but pointed out that it is advantageous to continue supporting EU's and NATO's growing interaction with Russia due to the fact that a politically stable and cooperative Russia would make for a highly valuable partner for the entire Euro-Atlantic zone ("Summary" 2009, par 14-17). However, with Russia's tendency towards bilateralism, it is unclear whether the Kremlin would be open to a broader EU-bound relationship.

The talks concluded with a set of proposals for the Visegrad countries to take into account in order to improve their mutual cooperation. The security identity of the CE region should be reinforced, as should the consultation mechanisms between the member countries. Additionally, each member state would benefit from a broader and improved public diplomacy. This would include the establishment and promotion of informal discourse about security, and the possibility to extend this topic towards universities and schools. Furthermore, as I have mentioned previously, the four countries should increase their focus on working as a coalition when dealing with the EU and NATO by presenting joint opinions, as well as applying for funding together. Further formalization of the group beyond the International Visegrad Fund was also recommended. In terms of concrete goals in the area of security and defense, the V4 should cooperate more closely in defense, as well as in the transformation and modernization of the armed forces (GLOBSEC 2009b).

Other platforms for dialogue

An additional communication forum for the Visegrad countries to take advantage of was established in the recent years by the Slovak-Atlantic Commission as a step towards facilitating expert dialogue regarding questions about security and defense. The Visegrad Security Cooperation Initiative (VSCI) created a network of experts and expert groups focused on energy security as well as security and defense who, through meetings and regular discussion, work together on drafting policy proposals to be then presented in the form of policy papers to

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[49] Position on Iraq and Kosovo, ballistic missile defense system, NATO enlargement, energy security, etc. (Kagan 2008: 13-14; Larrabee 2010:34-37).

governmental, non-governmental and academic entities (Slovak Atlantic Commission 2010). The latest policy paper issued in 2010 acknowledged that the existing V4 dialogue failed to produce significant results in the previous years and pointed out the occasional lack of harmony even in projects that were in fact of mutual interest (Nad et al. 2010:4). Therefore, the VSCI experts suggest that the V4 their relationship with Russia more precisely, and use their geopolitical position to act as a mediator between Russia and the West. Furthermore, paper proposes a number of steps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication between the four states such as creation of V4 units in each member state, creation of consultation forums for Ministries of Defense and Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, the paper advises the V4 to establish annual V4 security conferences as well as formulate a V4 common security guarantee clause, and it advocates an extension of the existing expert dialogue regarding pressing issues such as illegal migration, organized crime, corruption and extremism (Nad 2010:6). The experts conclude by acknowledging that despite the lack of active coordination, the upcoming 'Year of Central Europe'[50] might have a positive effect on V4's agenda-making prospect and their will to become more proactive not only when interacting with each other, but also with other EU and NATO bodies and partners.

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[50] 2011: Hungarian EU presidency, followed by Polish EU presidency

CHAPTER V:

IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATION DIALOGUE GOALS

The aims and recommendation presented in the previous section surely provide ample possibilities for the Visegrad countries to expand and deepen their official inter-governmental relations in security and defense, at least in the normative sense. Despite this claims it is true, however, that the V4 forum was not designed with policy formulation in mind. Nevertheless, the four states repeatedly state their will to *cooperate* and it is the active implementation of mutual interests and goals that renders cooperation its meaning and. As Robert Keohane posits, without actual *adjustment* of state policies with one another, cooperation becomes a hollow term.

In this respect it is thus crucial to evaluate whether the group pledges to follow common goals have been or are being also formally acted upon, i.e. through official policy released by administrative bodies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) or the Ministry of Defense (MoD). The following chapter will thus focus on examining these documents in order to assess the character V4 interaction based on either a) released official policies that are congruent with commonly set goals or b) official policies that have been jointly formulated and coordinated. Apart from explicit policies and official plans, it is also of value to assess what kind of recognition and acknowledgement the V4 garners in such documents in relation to interests in bilateral relations.

This analysis will be carried out on a state –by – state basis, focusing on annual reports and policy statements issued by MFAs and MoDs in each state. Each section will focus on various relevant topics such as relations with NATO/EU, policies ENP and EaP and Russia, general regard for V4 and defense cooperation.

5.1 Slovakia

NATO and EU

The MFA and MoD annual reports, evaluations strategies have provided an interesting insight into the ladder of priorities of the Slovak government in both international and national issues. In the years immediately after the accession until 2009, the MFA reports' opening chapter, as well as the country's security strategy from 2005 clearly stressed primacy of NATO cooperation and involvement, as NATO has been for long regarded as the primary provider or security guarantees as well as the main forum for security questions. Nevertheless, the primary goals stressed in these documents in regards to NATO correspond to those expressed jointly in V4 forum[51]. The latest security strategy, the Slovak Model 2015 – an update from an earlier[52] security and defense strategy outline - as well as the MoD Program Statement for the years 2010 until 2014[53] also both reiterate the country's commitment to NATO and the good relations and responsibilities for Slovakia to uphold in this respect. In dealing with the EU, Slovakia is interested in interacting with like-minded countries in questions where qualified majority voting is employed, implying collaboration with the V4 states due to the fact that many of their interests are shared ("Model 2015" 2010:52). Nevertheless, the MoD highlights Slovakia's will to advocate a value-based foreign policy and espouse the notion of European identity, as well as to actively participate in strengthening ESDP in the following years.

V4 engagement

In regards to the Visegrad group, the Slovak MFA recognized that the group has experienced some misunderstandings[54] in the past, but also that the V4 remains an instrumental part of Slovakia's regional involvement. Nonetheless, signs of a coherent and explicit policy output regarding V4 are scarce – especially in the documents released before 2010, where

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[51] NATO integration of Western Balkans, EaP, stabilization of Ukraine, NATO transformation and enlargement, EU enlargement, and Slovakia's engagement in strengthening their impact (MoD 2005:4-10, MFA 2007-2009, "Complex evaluation of defense" 2005-2008)
[52] "Model 2010" released in 2004/5.
[53] Released in August 2010.
[54] Intra-state tensions (mainly pointing to Slovak-Hungarian relations), inability to coordinate promotion of institutional candidates (MFA 2007-2008, p6; p 30 respectively).

Slovakia's relationship with the V4 forum is described as rather pragmatic, while bilateral dialogue with Czech Republic and Poland was met with increased attention in both 2008 and 2009 (MFA SVK 2008, 2009). Similarly, the security strategy released in 2005 gives only a brief nod to the V4 by stating its importance as a forum for debate, and signs of any other V4 involvement are missing.

In contrast to the earlier policy reports, the 2010 MFA statement opened with a chapter on V4 cooperation and neighborly relations, which could point to an increasing emphasis on regional cohesion and coordination. The summary further pointed out Slovakia's growing desire to use the V4 as a tool for a greater influence on EU policies, exemplified by the involvement of the President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy and the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso in two V4 meetings in 2010 (MFA SVK 2010:9). Furthermore, the Program Statement of 2010 stressed Slovakia's intention to intensify regional cooperation, raise the region's profile and assert the interests of CE, as well as contribute actively to these to strengthening the legitimacy of the EU and NATO and increasing the credibility of the V4 (Program statement 2010:49). However, specific steps regarding this intention were not outlined. Nevertheless, increased openness towards regional collaboration was also highlighted by the MoD who commented on plans to establish an expert net to facilitate and expand discussion about regional cooperation in defense. These plans include a formulation of proposal for strategic assessment of defense by 2012, which is then to be applied into official legislature (Program statement 2010:49).

A noteworthy V4 achievement endorsed by the Slovak MFA was the issuing of a joint statement regarding V4's support for the ENP - upon Poland and Sweden's proposal – which was later forwarded to Brussels (MFA SVK 2007:32). The Slovak MFA further commended the V4 for introducing new topics to the agenda such as energy security, climate change and increased focus on ENP. The 2009 report placed V4 cooperation as well as involvement in ENP and the newly-created EaP on a higher position and acknowledged an growing need to establish a positive and constructive regional profile and regional identity (MFA SVK 2009:24). Involvement in Western Balkans remained a top issue, with Slovakia expressing their support and availability for consultation and exchange as part of V4 agenda.

ENP/EaP and Russia

In regards to the integration of Western Balkans into western structures in 2010 the Slovak MFA established the Centre for Transfer of Integration and Reform in order to provide countries such as Montenegro and Macedonia with knowledge and advice on the integration process gathered by the V4 during their integration efforts (MFA SVK 2010:9). However, in formulating its position regarding Western Balkans to the European External Affairs Service, Slovakia refrained from presenting it as a group interest - despite this position being in fact in accordance with common V4 interests -and the 2010 approach to EaP remained rather bilateral as well (2010:19).

Additionally, in 2010 Slovakia moved a step further in defining its relationship with Russia. It did so in a rather reserved manner, focusing mainly on pragmatic relations based on trade agreements and diplomacy (MFA 2010:36). At the same time, the MFA expressed support for a more effective NATO-Russia council, as well as called for NATO to clearly define its relationships with Russia (MFA SVK 2010:37). A similar stance is held by the Slovak MoD which also expressed formal support of NATO's and EU's strategic engagement with Russia, but does not specify in which way – if at all – Slovak engagement could be of benefit in this respect (MoD 2005:13-15). In 2009, the MoD released a joint statement formulated by the V4 on the steps to be taken in elaborating the new NATO Strategic Concept and also on a strategy to improve ties between NATO and the EU, via the V4 ("Complex defense evaluation" 2009). The MoDs of the four countries also mutually offered the possibility to use each other's training facilities (2009:5).

Defense

The 2010 defense evaluation was significantly more supportive towards engagement in the V4[55], as exemplified by Slovakia's MoD cooperation with the other Visegrad countries in drafting a joint study on the feasibility of an EU Battle Group. The submission of the document resulted in Slovakia's MoD official recommendation to establish the Battle Group ("Evaluation" 2010:10-11). The document also established the interest in developing better opportunities for

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[55] Although this may be also due to Slovakia's position as a V4 president at the time.

military education and knowledge-sharing in the future and outlined an educational project underway, in the form of a course on international and national security of the Visegrad countries (2010:11-12). In regards to transatlantic ties, intensive cooperation with the US remained a top priority in 2010, as well as deepening of bilateral ties with the V4 countries, while the question of improving the V4 as a collective did not receive much attention.

5.2 Czech Republic

The annual foreign policy statements of the Czech Republic share, in general, similar interests to those of Slovakia – in foreign and security policy, as well as in regards to the Visegrad group. On the one hand the foreign policy reports from the years 2005 until 2010 show Czech Republic's recognition of the V4 forum as highly important to regional cohesion and interaction, as well as a useful tool in advancing the V4 member states' agenda in the wider Euro-Atlantic space[56]. On the other hand, the Czech FP also maintains its preference for bilateralism and opts for a more reserved stance towards the V4[57], based mainly in the concept of voluntary engagement.

NATO and EU

In regards to security and defense questions, Czech Republic has also leaned more towards NATO, while approaching CSDP as complementary[58] (MFA CZ 2005:47). The Czech Republic has also since 2005 steadily supported NATO transformation, which the Czechs boosted further trough army growth, and through participation in strengthening the existing scheme of political consultations and financing (MFA CZ 2005:53-54). In the recent years, however, the Czech foreign policy has indicated an increased effort to improve the capacities of the CSDP and CFSP, and to facilitate the interaction between CSDP and NATO. In 2010, the Czech FP has made the CSDP comprehensive approach a priority and the updated Czech security strategy from the same year shows a firm intention to support CFSP through effective regional

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[56] Expressed support for the continued contribution of V4 to EU policy, mainly in questions regarding enlargement (MFA CZ 2007:12-16)

[57] In 2007, Czech Republic acknowledged previous doubts about the V4 format (MFA CZ 2007, p 12)

[58] Czech Republic has regarded NATO as the 'cornerstone' of trans-Atlantic security and has steadily supported the longevity of the Article 5 of the Washington agreement (MFA CZ 2008:67; MFA CZ 2010:60-61).

cooperation (MFA CZ 2010:54-55; Security Policy 2010:10). Czech Republic thus actively supports and promotes the function of the EU-NATO Capability Group and has hosted a number of meetings in 2009, during which questions of defense capabilities and technical knowledge were addressed (MFA CZ 2009:15, 86).

ENP/EaP

The Czech Republic has also steadily supported ENP and EaP, as well as the MAP for countries in the Western Balkans. A summit held in Prague in 2009 established further intentions to deepen the cooperation with countries involved in both programs and established the 27+6 platform for dialogue with the six EaP countries[59] (MFA CZ 2009:77). In 2009, the Czech presidency of the EU also effectively supported Montenegro's western integration and eventually aided the country in advancing in EU accession talks (MFA CZ 2009:75). Under the Czech presidency, the Stability and Cohesion Pact was activated for Albania, Serbia also advanced in accession talks, and also joined Montenegro and Macedonia in the continued visa liberalization process (MFA CZ 2009:76). Furthermore, although without an explicit reference to V4 agenda, the country has showed growing interest in a constructive partnership with Ukraine, and supports the reinforcement of NATO-Russia dialogue within the format of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) (MFA CZ 2010:62-64).

V4 engagement

Regarding explicit V4 joint agenda, the Czech Republic showed support in creating joint policies in issues tied to cooperation with the Baltic states, as well as the general expansion of the V4+ format. This format was thus successfully adopted, resulting in increased dialogue of Czech Republic with the Baltics and with Southeastern European states, while kept within the V4 initiative (MFA CZ 2007:265; 2008:86). Nevertheless, Czech Republic continues to approach the V4 from a rather flexible and voluntary stance, stating that the group will only strive for "political cooperation wherever the four Visegrad countries are willing to agree on common approaches" and instead focuses on bilateralism, primarily NATO-related issues, where

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[59] Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia (www.easternpartnership.org)

it has endorsed its position on enlargement, transformation and finances without noting this as V4 agenda (MZV CZ 2008:86).

Defense

According to the recent status of military cooperation with all fellow V4 members, Czech Republic has also shown only marginal interest in doing so, while leaning more towards partnerships with one of the countries at a time. An example of this is the Czech and Slovak combined battalion in the Kosovo KFOR mission, active from 2002 until 2005, as well as the assistance with Poland's Mi-24 helicopter modernization project, which, due to it being only slightly successful in garnering the attention of the V4 group as a whole, was carried out mainly through Polish and Czech combined efforts (MoD CZ 2011; European Security and Defence Assembly 2010). Furthermore, Czech Republic remains heavily committed to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, as well as to the ALTHEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Current deployments" 2011).

5.3 Poland

NATO and EU

Similarly to the previous two Visegrad countries, Poland's foreign policy also highly values a broad security strategy consisting of an Atlantic and a European pillar (MFA POL 2006-2007). Similarly to Czech Republic, Poland also esteems their transatlantic relationship with the United States as the backbone of the country's security identity, and has in stayed very loyal to Washington's agenda even after the accession to the European Union in 2004. For this reason, Poland has for many years after accession regarded NATO as the leading and principal platform for discussing security questions. Poland has also supported the growth of NATO's security and defense capacities, and expressed the intention to do so through cooperation (MFA POL 2006). In addition to the desire to enlarge and stabilize the immediate Euro-Atlantic neighborhood, Poland has also been actively engaged in military collaboration with NATO as exemplified by their considerable and steady contribution to the ISAF Mission in Afghanistan as well as the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (MoD POL 2011, par 3-4). Furthermore, Poland was one of the

eight European countries who in 2003 supported US military intervention in Iraq, and the country provided military support for Operation Iraqi Freedom until 2008 (Visegrad Info 2010).

Despite the longevity of their bond with the United States, Poland has also in the recent years revaluated their stance towards the European Union, and specifically to CSDP[60]. The current foreign policies as well as the security strategy advocate a higher involvement in EU security structures and missions[61], as well as a closer cooperation between the EU and NATO. Specific recommendations have not been, however, specified. However, few acknowledgements are made regarding the V4 or the joint agenda the forum has produced.

ENP/EaP

In regards to their eastern neighbor Ukraine, Poland has supported and continues to support this country's integration into NATO, which is seen as a potentially tremendous boost to the security of the alliance, in addition to being able to shift Poland's position – geopolitically speaking – further west. As one of the primary drivers behind the creation of EaP, Poland is heavily invested in the stabilization of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and is keeping vigilant of the rate of democratic reform in Belarus on which their support for the western integration of Belarus is dependent. Furthermore, Poland, while maintaining mainly economy-based relations with Russia, also has called on NATO to improve their consultation capabilities with Russia, and it is made clear that Poland wants to sustain their existing diplomatic ties with Kremlin with NATO's assistance (MFA POL 2007).

Defense

As the MFA and MoD documents convey, one of the few points of joint decision-making in the V4 in the recent years has been in regards to the improvement of defense capabilities and exchange of military expertise. The principal project is currently the EU Battle Group concept, which is to be in the ready in 2016 (MFA POL 2006-2007). The Polish MFA as well as the MoD have also stressed the importance of conflict prevention stabilization missions, as well as

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[60] Some analysts point out that this changing attitude may be a response to the cooling of the relations with Poland, particularly following the withdrawal of the US-backed missile defense plans, and Poland's unanswered appeals for the US to include the country in the US Visa Waiver Program (Visegrad Info 2010).
[61] Poland currently participates in Concordia mission in Macedonia, and the ALTHEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Poland in CFDP" 2011, par 7).

conflict prevention and reduction – namely in Kosovo, Transnistria, and South Caucasus (MFA POL 2007, MoD POL 2009:7-10). Furthermore, Poland intends to also actively take part in strengthening the CSDP, namely through the fostering member state dialogue on cooperation with Eastern Partners[62] and through the involvement in the above-mentioned battle groups. Apart from the creation of the V4 battle group being currently underway, Poland has pledged to establish a Weimar battle group together with France and Germany, for which the technical agreement was signed in 2011 (MoD POL 2011).

V4 involvement

Nevertheless, Poland's principal foreign policy and security priorities remain largely focused on bilateral interaction with various partners and there is very little mention of any of the above-mentioned policies either being endorsed or jointly formulated by the V4 - despite the fact that they are to a considerable extent compatible with the goals defined in the V4 forum. On the other hand, Poland has recently expressed the need to bolster cooperation between the Visegrad states and contributed to V4's current character when it (supported by the Czech Republic) pushed forth its preference to initiate the expansion of the V4+ format to include the Baltic States, as well as Southeastern Europe, which the rest of the V4 adopted officially (MFA POL 2006). Poland also successfully carried their dialogue with the Benelux countries over to the Visegrad forum, establishing new partners for the V4+ platform. (MFA POL 2007).

5.4 Hungary

NATO and EU

As the fourth member of the Visegrad group, Hungary also shares many of the priorities of its neighbors that are primarily related to the region's broad concept of security and stability. As the previous three states, Hungary also steadily advocates NATO as the leading security forum and a crucial component of Euro-Atlantic security (MFA HU 2003:7-9). A key part of Hungary's contribution to the alliance has been and still is its involvement in NATO missions

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[62] Poland is hosting the above-mentioned EaP summit in September 2011 (SME 2011)

abroad – such as its participation in the IFOR/SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina even before NATO accession, and its current involvement in the KFOR and ISAF missions (MFA HU 2008). Another element of in sustaining successful transatlantic dynamics is Hungary's contribution to transatlantic cohesion which it aims to achieve by supporting a constructive dialogue between the US and EU. For this reason, Hungary's most prominent interests for the future are to maintain a close transatlantic bond, of which good relations with the United States are an indispensable element. Hungary has also acknowledged the presence of emerging non-traditional threats such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and has thus expressed its acknowledgement and support for the efforts carried out by the US to counter these threats (MFA HU 2003). In the matter of European security questions, Hungary has, like its Visegrad partners, recognized the growing relevance of CSDP and intends to contribute to its growth by promoting and integrating the country's security and foreign policy agenda into the CSDP structure (MFA HU 2003:8).

ENP/EaP

It further aims to bolster the stability of the CE region as well as gear Western Europe's focus further towards ENP and EaP, and has a particular interest in maintaining a constructive relationship with the Balkan countries, in order to boost their trust in pursuing European integration. This partnership is crucial for Hungary, as it has repeatedly put emphasis on the stabilization of the neighboring regions and Hungary has successfully embedded this topic into its 2011 EU Council presidency not only through pledges of support, but also through its involvement in pushing for a conclusive ending to the accession talks for Croatia (Havasi 2011, par 7; "Summing up the Hungarian presidency" 2011:3). Additionally, Hungary has recently collaborated with Poland in regards to the hosting and organization of an EaP summit scheduled to take place in Warsaw in September 2011 ("Priorities of Presidency" 2011). Furthermore, Hungary advocates a continued EU presence in the Western Balkans, and has also shown concern for the stabilization of CIS countries[63], particularly Ukraine and the Caucasus region due to the existing threat of instability and the resulting waves of illegal migration and organized crime that Hungary might experience due to their proximity to these states (MFA HU 2003:5).

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[63] Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan

V4 engagement

As regard the European neighborhood and CIS states, Hungary has also the importance of the Visegrad group and would like to improve cross-border cooperation on issues dealing with Western Balkans and Ukraine by increasing efforts to "harmonize national development plans with other countries (MFA HU 2006:86). Despite its will to increase interaction, however, neither Hungary's foreign policy nor security strategy specified explicit steps taken or planned in order to carry out strengthening of the V4 functions. Furthermore, the above-specified security and foreign policy interests have been officially promoted solely by Hungary, thus avoiding connections to joint policy decisions despite being in line with the common interests defined on the V4 platform.

Defense

On the other hand, Hungary has steadily supported the EU V4 Battle Group project and joined the group in May 2011 for the announcement of the project's official start in 2016 and has pledged to pursue a collective V4 agenda – specifically in regards to involvement in Western Balkans – through engagement in informal debates and conferences (Kanya 2009).

5.5 Summary

As seen in the previous sections, cooperation in regards to policies discussed on the V4 platform has not been explicitly applied and has not necessarily led to a linear development of common policies among the V4. Instead, four states have harmonized many of their positions, and depended on bilateralism and presented many of these positions individually, rather than endorsing them as a group position. In other words, the Visegrad states' positions on major security issues coincide, and one could argue that the geopolitical similarities, historical situation and status of western integration would render this harmony natural. However, the Visegrad states have only in rare cases gone as far as to *adjust* their behavior in order to facilitate the achievement of a common goal – for instance, Czech Republic and Slovakia coordinated their forces in a joint deployment for the KFOR mission in Kosovo, and all four states are on board for the upcoming Battle Group initiative. However, in many other cases foreign policy steps and

positions reflected a national and bilateral focus and the V4 also experienced a number of failures where full V4 cooperation was unsuccessful such as in the Mi-24 helicopter modernization project, creation of common Slovak and Czech airspace and creation of a Visegrad brigade ("Summary of proceedings" 2009:8, Schneider 2009:3). Therefore, despite numerous calls for cooperation, the interaction between the V4 does not entirely meet Robert Keohane's definition of cooperation as discussed earlier. Rather, the Visegrad states have in the immediate post-accession years preferred harmonization of interests, i.e. collaborate without having to make *adjustments* to their existing preferences.

In terms of positions and interests, the four Central European countries have placed a special focus on NATO as well as CSDP and its impact on the general stability of the CEE region. In the years following the accession, the governments of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic have also repeatedly stressed the importance of regional stability as well as democratic transformation of their eastern neighbors. Therefore, many aspects of the individual states' foreign and defense policies, such as their stance towards the stabilization of the European neighborhood, the integration of western Balkans, or modernization of the military are similar – if not identical – and the four countries have encouraged the same positions on the V4 forum. However, formulation of these as joint policies has been rather rare and – save for the establishment of the EaP, or the creation of the V4 Battle group – the V4 have been hesitant in engaging in significant collaboration that requires a certain degree of adaptation of individual plans in order to formulate an outcome to mutual interests[64], that is engaging in cooperation as defined by Keohane and others. Therefore, despite the rather liberal use of the term 'cooperation' in the V4 forum, what the V4 have actually mostly engaged in was harmonization where it seemed fit.

Despite the scarcity of true cooperation between the Visegrad countries, there is a silver lining forecasting perhaps a deeper collaboration and a more flexible and constructive use of regional interaction in the future. On the one hand, it is true that the cooperation between the V4 has been weak after their EU accession. On the other hand, while the earlier foreign policy and

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[64] Such as the states' failure to motivate full cooperation in previously-mentioned Mi-24 helicopter modernization, later undertaken by Poland and Czech Republic or their previous lack of success in reaching a consensus during the selection process for institutional candidacies (MZV SVK 2007:21

defense conveyed a less explicit debate and rare joint policy outcomes regarding security, the utility of the V4 forum seems to have been enjoying more attention since 2009, and in the last two years the V4 became more involved in and enriched their discussion on the development and the future of the Eastern Neighborhood Program, bringing about the establishment of the Eastern Partnership Initiative led by Polish interests. The effort to develop ENP/EaP were further supplemented by Hungary's successful efforts to assert this topic in the European forum and by their collaboration with Poland in organizing the EaP summit in September 2011, as well as by Poland's push for establishing the 27+6 format, their engagement in advancing the integration process for Western Balkans, and Slovakia's likeminded effort to support information transfer through the creation of the Centre for Transfer of Integration and Reform.

Furthermore, countries such as Slovakia, Poland and Hungary pledged to increase regional cooperation, as well as to raise the region's profile in the EU and NATO, and the establishment of new expert working groups such as the Visegrad Security Cooperation Initiative and the successful continuation and development of GLOBSEC security conferences suggest the Visegrad countries may be more receptive towards policy advice and expert input – although it is yet to be seen whether these promises go beyond lip service. Furthermore, the recent goals put forth by the Slovak presidency in the latter part of 2010 sought to aim the attention at Central Europe within the EU. Keeping in mind the upcoming 'Year of Central Europe" – with the Hungarians and the Polish holding EU presidency in the first and the second half of 2011 respectively - the Slovak presidency proposed strengthening the position of the V4 through a reinforced dialogue and cooperation between the V4 mainly when participating in international forums (MFA SVK 2010:1)

CHAPTER VI:

TENTATIVE EXPLANATIONS AND CONCLUSION

So why has true cooperation in security and defense been only sporadic despite numerous statements and pledges towards working together? The Visegrad states have without a doubt expressed goals that are similar in character and have harmonized well, as the four countries naturally share many of these aims that stem from their geopolitical position, their relationship with Western Europe and the United States, as well as their size. However, there may be several actors at play that may lessen the impact of the decisions established in the V4 forum and other non-governmental and advisory bodies.

6.1 Low institutionalization

As chapter 2 of this work has elaborated, international institutions may be beneficial in securing cooperation and compliance, and in reducing costs as well as the risk of non-compliance. For this reason, as neoliberal institutionalists assert, states with similar interests may seek to establish and participate in international institutions since institutions aid in making the achievement of the actors' mutual goals more attainable than if the states pursued these separately and without regard for each other's aims and interests.

However, as Robert Keohane has noted, cooperation does not come about automatically and there is a set of criteria necessary for the existence as well as effectiveness of such an institution, one of these being the degree of instutionalization. It is true that institutionalization may vary, and high institutionalization does not always render an institution more prominent or

efficient[65]. However, as I have previously pointed out, Ronald Coase does posit that institutions and cooperation are at risk of being less effective and harder to maintain if there is no existing legal framework of rules that would establish appropriate procedures in cooperation and create a system for sanctioning non-compliance (Coase in Keohane 1989: 110). If states are to cooperate and adjust to each other, there ought to exist an official framework of rules that sets the standard for interaction according to which actors are expected to behave, as well rewards of compliance and penalties for a lack thereof that should fuel the motivation to cooperate, i.e. consequences that are either more beneficial or more harmful than what the actors could have achieved alone. In the absence of a legal outline of institutional mechanisms, procedures and expectations, states are subject to their own judgment regarding the importance of cooperative behavior which, of course, may in end effect cause heterogeneity of opinion and thus prevent compromise-building. This argument might therefore be applicable to the status of cooperation between the Visegrad states, whose cooperation has been – although currently on the rise – primarily only sporadic and whose activities in the V4 forum are likewise not institutionalized.

Indeed, as I have mentioned, the International Visegrad Fund is the only V4 initiative established with a legal and official framework in mind and, unlike the IVF, the V4 forum is not bound by any formal structures that go beyond the regularity of ministerial meetings, rotating presidency, and activities with third parties under the V4+ platform. States have no legal framework to fall back on when elaborating shared interests and have little motivation to push those joint activities that need active collaboration and adjustment past the discussion stage, letting the existing pledges of cooperation go unanswered[66]. The V4 have, without a doubt, been successful in maintaining regular contact and sustaining and even developing active discussion on a high governmental level and have even showed increased openness towards welcoming expert opinions and recommendations. However, it remains to be seen whether these recommendations prompt a response in which the V4 states show flexibility and willingness to adjust.

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[65] For example, the International Court of Justice – a highly institutionalized entity – does not enjoy a particularly prominent place in international politics, while NATO's increased institutionalization has bolstered its position, as well as refined the changing focus of NATO, shifting from security alliance to a security management organization (Keohane 1989:7, Keohane et al. 1999:26-29).
[66] For instance, such as the aforementioned helicopter modernization project taken up by Poland and Czech Republic only after the remaining Visegrad states failed to respond.

6.2 Hegemonic cooperation

Another possibility for only limited cooperative behavior may lie in the fact that the Visegrad states may have been hesitant to engage in cooperation that would lead to one of the states enjoying greater management of the coordination of shared endeavors. As Robert Keohane and Duncan Snidal summarize, the theory of hegemonic stability has been applicable to cooperation in international relations, particularly in regards to the hegemony of the United States in economic cooperation during much of the 20th century (Keohan 1984: 135-150; Snidal 1985:581-583).

In the case of the Visegrad Group, the potential regional leader would become Poland. With its size, ties to Western Europe and Scandinavia, as well as relatively big political and economic weight in the region it could become a natural sub-regional leader. This however, may be problematic for the remaining three members who, historically, have placed high value on national sovereignty and independence and have been in the past extremely skeptical of other regional leaders such as the USSR, as well as the EU. Furthermore, the creation of a leading actor of the group would impact the power balance in the V4 forum between the four states which, as of now, is based on equal standing and flexibility in participation. These and similar concerns over individuality of opinions, sovereign direction and preference for a less-binding guidelines could be what prevented the V4 from further discussing the prospects of establishing Poland as a group leader when the idea was presented at the GLOBSEC security conference in 2009. Experts involved in the discussion panel proposed this step as a way to bolster the Visegrad Group's unity and encourage a cohesive regional security image within other international forums (GLOBSEC 2009). Part of this proposition expressed at the 2009 GLOBSEC conference by a team of Slovak experts suggested establishing the country with the highest profile within EU and NATO - Poland - as a potential representative and speaker of the group in order to boost the group's image as a unified entity. This was, however, met with discontent namely on the part of the Czech expert Tomas Weiss who pointed out that "speaking with one voice does not actually mean having one voice", pointing to a possibility that having a regional hegemon-like actor would not be particularly helpful in promoting a unified stance ("Summary of proceedings" 2009:8). Hungary partially agreed, highlighting that the V4 should

primarily focus on repairing the existing flaws in cooperation, especially in those cases where interests meet, before approaching the topic of selecting a V4 representative.

Nevertheless, a step towards a consensus on creating a group representative was taken when the V4 agreed on establishing Poland as the leader of the V4 Battle Group scheduled to become active in 2016. Additionally, all four states agreed on improving cooperation with one another and revamping the existing interaction mechanisms. However, it is not certain that the four states would also go as far as to a) increase institutionalization of the V4 and thus lose the flexibility of the forum that they have thus far praised or b) choose a regional speaker for the group that could potentially introduce a hegemonic aspect to the group dynamics that could exacerbate the other members' fear of losing their voice and pulling the shorter end of the string.

6.3 Divergence in Atlanticism and domestic politics

Keeping in mind the historical development of the region, it is hard to deny that strong ties to the United States have formed a visceral component of how Central Europe interacted with Russia, as well as with Western Europe. As Ronald Asmus notes, the US has provided vast amount of support to this region during the times when some Western European states preferred to remain doubtful, and had it not been for the involvement of the US, the Visegrad states might not have achieved western integration as fast as they have (Asmus et al. 2005). Nevertheless, Atlanticism in Central Europe has developed with varying degrees, and countries such as Poland and Czech Republic have since the fall of communism showed higher loyalty to Washington than Hungary or Slovakia. In terms of cooperation, a stronger transatlantic focus might have influenced these countries (particularly Czech Republic's) reservations about the functionality and relevance of the Visegrad Group forum.

Poland, for instance, was one of the biggest supporters of the United States' Operation Iraqi Freedom, despite widespread scrutiny from many European states. It has also been primarily loyal to NATO, putting engagement in the alliance before regional involvement, and their openness towards the planned but canceled missile defense also demonstrated their transatlantic loyalties. Furthermore, the political elites in Poland have, until recently, been

strongly Atlanticist, going hand in hand with the late president Lech Kaczynski's rather skeptical stance towards a closer involvement in the EU, and an uncompromising attitude towards Russia[67].

Similarly, the Czech Republic has also expressed great reservations about deep regional engagement stating that "unless [the V4 states] have common interest, the V4 group would be a label which [the Czech Republic] will not be comfortable with" ("Summary of Proceedings" 2009:8). Czech Republic – also a staunch euroskeptic thanks to president Vaclav Klaus's blunt doubts about European integration[68] - has therefore been more vocal in their high regard for NATO a primary foreign policy focus as well as transatlantic ties, and the country proved this point when the government decided to approve George W. Bush's plans for installing part of the proposed missile defense not far from Prague – despite a significant public criticism.

The presence of strong Atlanticist tendencies of Poland and Czech Republic does not mean, however, that Slovakia and Hungary – whose loyalty to the US has been less pronounced – has also been completely devoted to regional cooperation. Rather, a combination of internal political factors could serve as an explanation of only moderate interest in regional engagement. Slovakia, for instance, has not been as adamant with their lack of faith in Brussels as has the Czech Republic, nor has it been as pro-American as Poland. Despite the Meciar years (1993-1998) , when Slovakia experienced isolation due to hard euroskepticism, as well as lack of proper mechanisms for NATO accession, the post-accession Slovakia has showed only soft euroskepticism reflected in the country's difficulty to comply with the *Acquis communautaire*, rather than an opposition to the EU principles (Riishøj 2010:19). Hungary has followed a similar path. However, the political tensions between the two states caused by the questions of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia[69] have consumed much of both governments' focus in the post-accession era and until 2010, when both countries welcomed a less nationalistic agenda along with newly elected representatives.

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[67] Accounted for by factors such as suspicion of Germany and its ambitions, EU's weak stance towards Russia, and Russia's growing assertiveness in the region (Matraszek 2010).
[68] Such as vetoing the signing of the Lisbon treaty in 2009 (EurActiv 2010).
[69] Slovakia's controversial language law; Hungary's passing of citizenship law that facilitates the process of obtaining Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians (Terenzani-Stankova 2009; Than et al. 2010)

In fact, it could be argued that the recent changes in all Visegrad countries' political climate go hand in hand with the more open attitude towards regionalism that has been on the rise in the last year. The new and more pro-European governments of Poland – with president Komorowski's rapprochement with Russia, as well as increased interest in reviving its ties with Germany and France – offers the possibility of Poland also becoming more active regionally – and perhaps even becoming a regional representative – if the V4 states prove willing and flexible to commit to greater cooperation (Matrazsek 2010; Rettman 2010). The first step is the aforementioned creation of the V4 Battle Group which may, depending on the quality of cooperation in this project, also affect the future of V4 constructive coordination.

Similarly, Slovakia's new Euro-minded government has also brought about an improvement to Slovak foreign relations, the country's overall position in world politics as a stable and democratic partner, as well as its relations with Brussels and an increased awareness of the agenda-setting potential of greater regionalism. Due to the lack of nationalist rhetoric, the Radicova government has also carried out efforts to mend the ties with its Hungarian counterparts, as well as curb the proliferation of extremism on home turf. And Hungary, after successfully completing its six months of presidency of the Council of the EU, has managed to bring Europe's attention to regional interests such as ENP/EaP as well as enlargement of the EU and NATO.

Finally, the Czech Republic – the previous strong euroskeptic – has remained cautious of the EU, but only slightly so (EurActiv 2010). Furthermore, the country's long-lasting atlanticism might also be receding, since the country recently pulled out of participating in the revamped missile defense system proposed to replace the one canceled by the Obama administration in 2009 (RT 2011). In the light of America's reset policy with Russia and their cautious approach to the missile defense system, the Czech Republic ultimately withdrew from hosting the new defense shield possibly due to the Czech's dislike for holding a minor part in greater US-Russian geopolitical games[70].

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[70] According to the Czech defense minister, the country wants to be a part of the American defense plan, but "not in this way" (RT 2011, par 2)

At the same time, the shift in US foreign policy reflected by Washington's increased interest in constructive bilateralism with Russia and a reduced focus on Central and Eastern Europe may have made the Visegrad Countries reevaluate their stance not only towards their post-accession goals – as shown in V4 discussions from 2009 and later – but also towards their will to intensify regional involvement via the V4 as well as the V4+ format and it is yet to be determined whether this changing attitude coupled with the two consecutive EU presidencies headed by a V4 state will have an impact on regional cooperation and spark an active interest in raising the V4 profile in the EU and NATO.

6.4 Conclusion

The principal point of this work was to evaluate the existing state of security and defense cooperation between the Visegrad Group states, who have been actively taking part in the V4 forum activities and discussions. While policy coordination would be a commendable achievement, the V4 has enjoyed only a low level of institutionalization and has primarily served as a well-organized discussion circle as opposed to a policy-forming institution. Nevertheless, regardless of the presence of intentions to formulate joint policies or a lack thereof, the V4 platform's numerous pledges to cooperative behavior suggest that the states are willing and able to overcome potential hurdles to cooperation, work together and *adjust* in order to devise a common strategy to achieve shared goals. However, what we have seen during most of the post-accession era thus far has been not perfectly congruent with Keohane's definition of cooperation, as the V4 states have, for the most part, been in harmony with one another. At the same time, it is true that there has been an abundance of regular contact and communication between the four countries. However, this dialogue has mostly been used to for a reassurance of the states' matching positions – for instance their focus on ENP/EaP, NATO and EU enlargement and modernization, as well as balancing of CSDP and NATO – which have been in line with what was determined at the V4 forum even when presented by individual V4 states to the EU or NATO.

Nevertheless, two flaws remain, one of them being that while the V4 countries managed to achieve a nicely harmonized group of opinion (albeit still needing further development), there

were very few cases in which the countries were willing and able to adjust and accommodate each other in order to reach a common goal – the recent decision to establish a V4 Battle Group and the joint support for Poland in pushing for the creation of the EaP being the most prominent examples. The second shortcoming lies in the Visegrad Countries' uncertainty when it comes to delving deeper into regional cooperation. As my analysis of the official policies has shown, despite the coherence of individual policies with the group positions on the V4 platform, the V4 states have rarely endorsed their stance as a regional one. Instead, a tendency towards bilateralism came across, and the Visegrad forum garnered only scarce remarks when referred to in official documents, strategies and evaluations. In this regard, it is thus safe to state that what the V4 have referred to as cooperation has rather born the resemblance of harmony, with certain failures in cooperation and only sparse positive results.

There is a variety of factors I found useful to point out, in case further research is desired. These potential causal elements could be the low institutionalization of the V4 forum, the potential risk of engaging in hegemonic cooperation, and varying degrees of Atlanticism as well as turbulent domestic politics and party alliances.

But despite the less-than-ideal state of cooperation in the immediate post-accession years, a slightly rising interest in regionalism can be noted during the most recent years, namely since 2009, when Poland advocated the establishment of EaP and thus stimulated further motivation of its fellow members to not only support this project, but increase their engagement in and dialogue with the European neighborhood, as well as bring this issue to the forefront. Furthermore the V4 has proposed and successfully established additional avenues for expert dialogue regarding regional security and has welcomed the resulting analyses and recommendations for consideration. Furthermore, the GLOBSEC security conferences have been a successful and increasingly relevant part of V4 activities, and time will tell whether the countries will actively apply the expert recommendations to also establish a separate V4 security conference as well as boost mechanisms for dialogue and sharing of expertise. Despite the fact that the V4 have hardly used their agenda-setting potential in the European and transatlantic forum, the recent shifts in national party alliances as well as the Battle Group creation officially underway will hopefully be a sign of growing cooperation, policy coordination and unity in Central Europe.

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