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**Bc. Veronika Tencerová**

**COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES**

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE  
VISEGRAD FOUR CO-OPERATION SINCE THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES  
ENTERED THE EUROPEAN UNION?**

**Master Thesis**

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Thesis supervisor: *doc. Jozef Bátora, MPhil., PhD.*

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**Bc. Veronika Tencerová**

## **Čestné vyhlásenie**

Vyhlasujem, že záverečnú prácu som vypracovala samostatne s použitím uvedenej literatúry.

**V Bratislave, 7.4.2010**

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## Abstrakt

TENCEROVÁ, Veronika. *Aký praktický prínos mala spolupráca Vyšehradskej štvorky, odkedy vyšehradské krajiny vstúpili do Európskej únie?* (diplomová práca). Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave. Fakulta sociálnych a ekonomických vied. Ústav európskych štúdií a medzinárodných vzťahov. Školiteľ: doc. Jozef Bátora, MPhil., PhD.. Obhajoba: Bratislava, 2010. 103 str. Stupeň kvalifikácie: Magister (Mgr.).

Cieľom mojej diplomovej práce je zistenie, aký praktický prínos mala spolupráca zástupcov vlád a verejných štruktúr vo formáte Vyšehradskej štvorky od vstupu vyšehradských krajín do Európskej únie. Sústredím sa na zodpovedanie nastolenej otázky aj z teoretického, aj z praktického hľadiska. Prvá kapitola je venovaná terminologickým a historickým východiskám kvalitatívneho výskumu spracovaného v tejto práci. Následne sa zameriavam na teoretické zdôvodnenie opodstatnenosti miesta a zmyslu/ účelu Vyšehradskej skupiny v priestore Európskej únie; ako aj na objasnenie spôsobu tvorby koalícií spolupracujúcich štátov v EÚ, pričom jednou z nich sa zdá byť aj V4. Metodológia výskumu je detailne popísaná v druhej časti druhej kapitoly. Výskumné zistenia obsiahnuté v tretej kapitole 1/ potvrdzujú, že v sledovanom období bolo vytvorených dostatok príležitostí na rozvíjanie vyšehradskej regionálnej spolupráce; 2/ konkretizujú, ako boli tieto príležitosti zužitkované, t.j. aký hmatateľný/ praktický prínos spolupráca na úrovni V4 priniesla, a kto ho požíval; 3/ na základe výstupov prípadovej štúdie objasňujú, či a akým spôsobom mali zainteresovaní aktéri prospech zo spolupráce štátnych úradníkov z vyšehradských krajín v prípravách na vstup do Schengenskej zóny (uvedenej v rôznych zdrojoch), alebo ide len o zidealizovaný výkon Vyšehradskej skupiny. V Diskusii beriem do úvahy potenciálny prínos spoločného vystupovania krajín V4, ktorý nie je hmatateľný, a preto je ťažko definovateľný; ako aj niektoré zatiaľ nerozvinuté, ale momentálne diskutované oblasti spolupráce Vyšehradskej štvorky. Nakoniec, záverečná kapitola poskytuje všeobecný sumár hlavných zistení.

*Kľúčové slová:* Vyšehradská skupina/ štvorka, región, spolupráca, praktický prínos, Európska únia, Schengen

## Abstract

TENCEROVÁ, Veronika. *What has been the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the European Union?* (Master Thesis). Comenius University in Bratislava. Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences. Institute of European Studies and International Relations. Thesis supervisor: doc. Jozef Bátora, MPhil., PhD.. Thesis defence: Bratislava, 2010. 103 pp. Qualification degree: Master (Mgr.).

The aim of my thesis is to find out what has been the practical contribution of the co-operation of representatives of governments and public structures in the Visegrad Four format since the Visegrad countries entered the European Union. I concentrate on answering the question raised, both from the theoretical as well as the practical point of view. The first chapter is devoted to terminological and historical points of departure of the qualitative research performed in the thesis. Consequently, I aim at a theoretical reasoning of a justification of the position and purpose of the Visegrad Group in the European Union environment; and at an elucidation of a way of building coalitions of collaborating states inside the EU, one of which the V4 seems to be as well. Methodology of the research is described in detail in the second part of the second chapter. Research findings contained in the third chapter 1/ confirm that there have been enough opportunities created for developing the Visegrad regional co-operation in the period observed; 2/ specify how they have been utilized, i.e. what has been the tangible/ practical contribution produced by the co-operation at the V4 level, and who have been the beneficiaries; 3/ clarify, based on the case study outputs, whether and how a collaboration of officers from the Visegrad countries in preparations for accession to the Schengen area (mentioned in various sources) have benefited actors involved, or one can see just an idealized achievement of the Visegrad Group. In the Discussion I take into account a potential contribution of the V4 countries' joint performance which is not tangible and thus hard to be defined; as well as some not yet well-developed but topically debated areas of the Visegrad Four co-operation. Finally, the concluding chapter provides a general summary of the main findings.

*Key words:* Visegrad Group/ Four, region, co-operation, practical contribution, European Union, Schengen

## Preface

At the first sight, it may seem that the Visegrad co-operation is no longer relevant within the European Union (EU). This is because all cardinal economic, security and political advantages of being integrated in international structures that the Visegrad countries enjoy nowadays spring from their membership in the EU (and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization, of course). Thus they are at disposal to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia regardless of their belonging/ not belonging to the Visegrad Group. In addition, integration of the Visegrad countries to the European political, economic, security and legislative system was a central constitutive goal of their regional co-operation project. Hence this mission accomplishment had signified a partial ideological depletion of the V4 (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 18); and yet before the admission to the EU in May 2004 it had given rise to a hesitation or scepticism in some political commentators', analysts' and politicians' statements on a possible future functioning of the V4. However, it is important to realize that other objectives and priorities of the Visegrad Group were stipulated in the first Declaration in 1991, and that they have been updated since then. Despite rivalry between the V4 countries in some areas, several bilateral contentions (primarily between Hungarian and Slovak political elites), despite no permanent institutional structures (except for the International Visegrad Fund), the Visegrad Four as a regional group has persisted so far. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore what practical purposes it has served, i.e. to answer the question: *What has been the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the European Union?*

Most of the literature on the topic deals with priorities and possibilities of the Visegrad Group, what should or could be accomplished by means of this regional co-operation project, but not what has been done actually. Forasmuch as nobody has summarized practical results of the Visegrad Four collaboration achieved for more than five years of the Visegrad countries' membership in the EU so far, this thesis aspires to be the first survey in this regard and thus may become a useful information source for a wide range of readership.

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## List of Abbreviations

AHICE – Art Historian Information from Central Europe  
B3 – Baltic trio (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia)  
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy  
CEE – Central and East Europe  
CEFTA – Central European Free Trade Agreement  
CEJSH – Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities  
CEO – Chief executive officer  
CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy  
COREPER – Committee of Permanent Representatives  
CZ – Czech Republic  
DG JHA – Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs  
EMU – European Monetary Union  
ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy  
ESDP – European Security and Defence Policy  
EU – European Union  
EURODAC – European Dactyloscopy  
FYROM – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
HU - Hungary  
IOs – international organizations  
IVF – International Visegrad Fund  
MEP – Member of the European Parliament  
MFAs – Ministries of Foreign Affairs  
MLG – multi-level governance  
MP – Member of Parliament  
NATO – North-Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NGO – non-governmental organization  
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
PL - Poland  
SAP – Schengen Action Plan  
SIRENE – Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries  
SIS – Schengen Information System  
SK – Slovak Republic  
UK – United Kingdom  
UN – United Nations  
U.S. – United States  
VARP – Visegrad Artist Residency Program  
VASs – Visegrad Academies of Sciences  
VG – Visegrad Group  
VSP – Visegrad Scholarship Program  
VSS – Visegrad Summer School  
VStP – Visegrad Strategic Program  
VUSG – Visegrad University Studies Grant  
VYA – Visegrad Youth Association  
VYC – Visegrad Youth Confederation  
V4 – Visegrad Four  
V4DIS – Visegrad Four for Developing Information Society  
WNIS – Western Newly Independent States  
WTO – World Trade Organization

## Introduction

Visegrad region was successfully incorporated to the European Union<sup>1</sup>. Except numerous rights gained; new members of the EU took over the duty to live up to obligations resulting from the EU-membership responsibly and actively. In particular, these involve following the *acquis communautaire* and contributing to the fulfilment of goals the EU pursue by performing its policies. Doing so, member states can proceed individually or they can work hand in hand with other ones, if appropriate. Regional groupings inside the EU create preconditions for such team work and can benefit members of the grouping, functioning of the EU and even actors outside the EU. The objective of the thesis is to find out how and for whom the common activity of representatives of governments and public structures in the V4 format has been beneficial since the accession of the Visegrad countries the EU. By a word “beneficial” I mean offering an advantage or an added value. Simply put: *What has been the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the European Union?* Finding answers to this question should help us to shed light on the issue of why preservation of this regional group in the EU matters.

In order to build the thesis construction on transparent and solid grounds, ambiguous terminology is explained and a review of the most important moments and indentures of the Visegrad Four on its way to the EU is made at the beginning. Afterwards, in regard to doubts about a relevance of the V4 after joining the European Union, I target at a reasoning of a justification of the existence and purpose of regional constellations of member states in the EU (such as the Visegrad Four) from a theoretical point of view; employing the multi-level governance concept and the Groupthink theory. The multi-level governance concept is applicable to the Visegrad Group’s functioning within the EU in the sense that it reckons with more than two well-known levels of the “game” (domestic and international). Alternatively speaking, presence of smaller regional blocs in the EU may be understood as a confirmation of the multi-level governance premises taking into account variability of quality and quantity of multiple actors participating in the EU policy making, interacting in various formations and directions. One of the potential purposes of these regional groupings surviving in the EU environment is a reduction of number of divergent member

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term European Union (EU) as it is generally used, denominating erstwhile three European Communities incorporated in the common appellation by the Treaty on European Union (the Maastricht Treaty), possessing legal personality according to the Article 46 A of the Treaty of Lisbon since 1 December 2009 in addition.

states' views which should simplify reaching EU-level agreements and decision-making. According to the Groupthink theory, with growing number of EU members, decision-making power should be structured more and more. The more there are the EU actors, the more it is difficult to co-ordinate their standpoints. Hence, to ease the EU decision-making, it is desirable to harmonize particular positions on a certain issue or policy first within smaller groups/ coalitions of member countries, till the debated agenda gets to the EU official ministerial negotiation and voting table. By virtue of findings of recent studies (Mattila, 2008; Naurin, 2008; Van Roozendaal, Hosli, & Heetman, 2008) made in the realm of a coalition-building in the Council of the European Union (i.e. the Council of Ministers), the major decision-making and legislative body of the EU in the period examined; I aim also at an elucidation of a way of building such coalitions. Specifically, I base my first hypothesis upon results of the survey focused on the co-operation behaviour of governmental representatives during the negotiation process in the Council of Ministers<sup>2</sup>, elaborated by Daniel Naurin (2008, 36pp.). They revealed existing coalitions of co-operating states in the EU. In a comparative perspective offered by the survey, relationships between the EU-15 members have remained more or less the same after the 2004 enlargement, but in the group of ten newcomers, two new blocs have appeared – the Baltic trio and the Visegrad Group (Naurin, 2008, p. 14). *I assume that the Visegrad Four has formed a coalition, i.e. a group of states, whose representatives have co-ordinated their action within the European Union decision-making space.* I expect the research to provide concrete evidence/ examples of this.

Theoretical considerations are followed by a detailed description of the methodology (objectives, structure and proceedings, methods applied, sources and data collection procedures used). This predominantly qualitative research<sup>3</sup> is comprised of the three parts: 1/ assessment of whether necessary institutional preconditions/ space for developing the Visegrad regional co-operation have been created at all (whether conventional meetings of representatives of the four countries at various levels of government and public administration have been held in the period observed); 2/ assessment of how this space has been utilized and converted into specific actions for about five years (what has been the practical contribution of and who has been benefited by the V4 co-operation); 3/ single-

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of the survey, they were asked representatives of which member states they most often co-operated with within their working group in order to develop a common position.

<sup>3</sup> I use just a few numerical data.

case study aimed at eliciting whether a collaboration of officers from the Visegrad countries in preparations for joining the Schengen area (mentioned in various sources) have benefited actors involved or, after taking a closer look, one can see just an idealization of the Group's achievements.

In addition to activities of the International Visegrad Fund, practical results of which have always been easily identifiable by looking at myriad projects implemented and recipients of financial support; before undertaking the research I had known just of one extra case of a purportedly useful co-operation at the level of the V4 - that prior to the four countries' accession to the Schengen area, praised in primary and some secondary literature. (Hence this is the matter of concern for a single-case study.) Thus, based on my actual knowledge of the topic gained by following mainly news and respective online portals (content of the Group's and the Fund's official web sites); political analysts' and university professors' contributions to the field<sup>4</sup> (in the form of working papers, articles, book sections, etc.); as well as from a personal experience in functioning of the International Visegrad Fund<sup>5</sup>, I formulate the second hypothesis to be confirmed or disproved by performing the research: *I suppose that except activities of the International Visegrad Fund and a liaison of the V4 countries' experts in preparations for accession to the Schengen area; co-operation of representatives of governments and public administration of all four Visegrad countries after their entry to the EU has not provided actors involved with any tangible contribution (benefit or added value).*

Research findings compose the central part of the thesis. Finally, I discuss a potential contribution of the Visegrad Four joint performance which is not tangible and thus hard to be defined, and some not yet well-developed but topically debated areas of the co-operation within the V4 framework.

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<sup>4</sup> Bilčík & Strážay, 2006; Dangerfield, 2008, 2009; Kaźmierkiewicz, 2005; etc.

<sup>5</sup> I went through a two-month internship at the International Visegrad Fund which lasted from 1 June 2009 till 31 July 2009 so I had a chance to see how it works, to find out some interesting facts and details and to gain answers to questions unresolved for me until then by direct contact with its personnel and work carried out at the Fund.

# **1 Terminological and historical points of departure of research on the Visegrad Four co-operation**

To build up a coherent and overall picture, it is important to clarify basic terminology inflected in this thesis and summarize historical milestones of the Visegrad Group and content of the most important official documents at the outset.

## **1.1 Explanation of the terminology used**

The EU as such is an expression and outcome of regional co-operation. However, there are smaller regions inside the EU, regional groups of states such as the Visegrad Group which I deal with in my thesis. Even further type of regions exists in the EU – subnational (intra-state) regions (composed of self-governing regions, municipalities, etc.), many of which, especially those bordering ones, also co-operate (occasionally as well as in the long term). For the sake of a clear interpretation of meanings of adjectives used for various levels of co-operation, a distinction among them (from the lowest to the highest level) proposed here is as follows: subnational, national, regional, European<sup>6</sup>. Under “the Four” I mean the four Visegrad states. Visegrad Group (VG)/ Visegrad Four (V4)/ Visegrad co-operation are labels for four, initially three (before the split of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic into the two independent republics on 1 January 1993) post-communist Central European countries: the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Under the “subnational” level of collaboration one should comprehend that of particular intra-state regions/ subnational units; under “regional” that of Visegrad Four, Benelux and other regional alignments of states within the EU or that of states comprising the EU frontiers with non-EU member states. Co-operation at the level of the European Union is simply labelled as “European”. The adjective “Visegrad” in conjunction with any noun means related to the territory of the countries comprising the Visegrad Group. [A root of the word “Visegrad” (in English), meaning a castle or a city on the hill, is correctly spelled *Visegrád* in Czech and Hungarian, *Wyszehrad* in Polish and *Vyšehrad* in Slovak language (“How to correctly spell ‘VISEGRAD’,” n.d., para. 11).]

<sup>7</sup> Probably for the first time in international diplomacy beyond the V4, the term “Visegrad countries” was used by the U.S. Secretary of State James Baker in September 1991 when he met Visegrad Ministers of Foreign Affairs in New York (Jeszenszky, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, pp. 61-62).

“One of the few issues on which writers on regionalism<sup>8</sup> agree is that there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ region. Regions are social constructions whose members define their boundaries.” (Ravenhill, 2008, pp. 174-175) According to the theory of international relations, besides geographical closeness; homogeneity of states - social (involving race, religion, culture and history), economic (meaning level of economic development and possibility of integration), political (in the sense of type of a political regime) and external (embracing common institutions and co-operation in foreign affairs) - is a predisposition needed to give birth to the regional co-operation (Evans & Newnham, 1998, In Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 6). Based on these theoretical propositions and assuming that regions may not be just geographical or administrative objects, “but should be conceived of as acting subjects in the making (or un-making)...” (Hettne, 2005, p. 9); the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have always had, in the pre-EU-accession as well as in the post-EU-accession period, a potential to develop the V4-level co-operation.

In a debate on the purpose of coalition-building within the EU it is important to jointly understand what is meant under the term “coalition”. Basically, it is “a temporary alliance for combined action” (Pearsall, 1998, p. 350). Explained in more detail, coalition is “a set of actors that coordinate their behaviour in order to reach goals they have agreed upon” (Elgström et al., 2001, In Naurin, 2008, p. 4).<sup>9</sup>

Majority of practical results achieved thanks to the co-operation of the VG states after they joined the EU can be found in the civil society sphere. There are many approaches how to define civil society. Broadly speaking, it is the third sector of the life of society, in addition to the first one represented by a state and the second one which is a market mechanism (Krno, Lysý, Mokrý, & Ottová, 2007, p. 18). Put in another way, civil society is a set of institutions and organizations of non-state nature (Gramsci, In Krno et al., 2007, p. 18). Standing off a direct influence of a state power, civil society is a characteristic of full-fledged sovereign citizens’ community who can actively participate in democratic creation and control of the state power (Mielecky, In Krno et al., 2007, p. 20). Nevertheless, the

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<sup>8</sup> Regionalism, as conventionally understood, is a formal process of inter-governmental collaboration that involves more than two states, on a geographically concentrated basis (Ravenhill, 2008, pp. 174-175). It should be distinguished from a term regionalization, which refers to an emergence or growth of a de facto regional economy, to an economic interdependence within a given geographical area, propelled by cross-border activities of economic actors, particularly firms (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 174; Rosamond, 2003, p. 123).

<sup>9</sup> “From a functional perspective coalitions reduce complexity in multilateral negotiations, narrowing down the number of alternatives and simplifying bargaining by reducing the number of parties involved” (Raiffa, 1982, In Naurin, 2008, pp. 4-5).

scope of the joint V4 action has not been confined to various aspects of the four member countries' civil as well as public life. Three out of the four Visegrad countries now compose the EU Eastern and South-Eastern border which means that they are supposed to actively participate in performing the European Neighbourhood Policy and in the Europeanization process, i.e. in a "diffusion or export of forms of political organization and governance distinct for Europe beyond the European territory"<sup>10</sup> (Bátora, 2005, p. 62).

## 1.2 Historical background of the Visegrad co-operation

According to the Visegrad political leaders incumbent at the time of establishing the VG, favourable basis for an intensive development of the Visegrad co-operation had been embodied in "traditional, historically shaped system of mutual contacts, cultural and spiritual heritage and common roots of religious traditions" (Declaration on cooperation, 1991). However, in the early 1990s, there had been more salient motives propelling regional collaboration of states generally entitled as the Central and East European (hereinafter CEE)<sup>11</sup> as in the case of the VG (but also CEFTA, Central European Initiative and others), besides the historical, geographical and cultural kinship. On the one hand, considering that the Visegrad countries had shared mutual foreign policy goals (Wałęsa, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 81) as well, co-operation had been in their very interest in order to cope with security, economic and political changes following the collapse of Communism more easily and more quickly<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, supporting CEE regional

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<sup>10</sup> Olsen (2002) suggests this understanding of Europeanization is one of five complementary ones. "The other four include Europeanization as a) changes in external territorial boundaries; b) development of institutions of governance at the European level; c) central penetration of national and sub-national systems of governance; and d) a political project aiming at a unified and politically stronger Europe." (In Bátora, 2005, p. 64) Another well-elaborated definition of Europeanization, or, rather, EU-ization (Solioz, 2009, p. 7), is offered by Radaelli: "Europeanization consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion, and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies." (In Featherstone & Radaelli (Eds.), 2003, p. 309) (This definition draws upon Olsen's work as well.)

<sup>11</sup> Although various differing approaches towards a delimitation of Central and East Europe (and even Europe as such) exist; and the meaning of such label(s) has been changed over time, the terms "Central Europe", "Central and East Europe" (CEE), have become part of the regular political language in the 1990s, generally understood as composed of post-communist European countries (Ash, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 112). (For a more extensive discussion on Central Europe, see for example "The puzzle of Central Europe" or "Does Central Europe exist?" by T. G. Ash, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, pp. 112-116.)

<sup>12</sup> However, underground publishing and existence of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity and the Polish-Hungarian Solidarity bear evidence of the fact that Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Polish opposition activists and dissidents had already collaborated and consulted each other before the fall of the communist regimes.

co-operation projects had also been part of the EU's answer to the question of how to reunite Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. "Since these poor, fragile new democracies could not immediately be brought within the Union, the existing EU members decided to encourage CEE countries to pursue their own...groupings as a means to promote stability and cooperation in the interim" (Aggarwal & Fogarty, 2003, p. 36)<sup>13</sup>.

For the first time, the idea to build "a new system of stability in Central Europe" (Čarnogurský, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 34), to establish and maintain the Visegrad co-operation was proposed by the then President of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Václav Havel. Founding document formalizing the Visegrad co-operation, "Declaration on co-operation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European integration"<sup>14</sup>, shortly known as the Visegrad Declaration, was signed on 15 February 1991 in a Hungarian town Visegrád<sup>15</sup> by newly elected democratic political leaders: President of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Václav Havel, Polish President Lech Wałęsa and Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall<sup>16</sup>. Following the fall of the communist regimes in these countries, it set several targets: to establish "new forms of political, economic and cultural co-operation" (Declaration on cooperation, 1991); to fully resurrect state independence, democracy and freedom; to dissolve all remainders of the former totalitarian system;<sup>17</sup> to build up parliamentary democracy and modern state of law with market economy; to respect human

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"As early as the late 1970s, the first secret meetings of leading representatives of the Polish Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) and the Czechoslovak Charter 77 were held on the Polish-Czech border...The Czechoslovak-Hungarian border was just as hot: Tons of literature published by the Czechoslovak exile community were smuggled from Hungary to Bratislava and Prague." (Vondra, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 79)

<sup>13</sup> Except Balkan countries - an area beginning to slip into chaos in the early 1990s - "the EU would see its relations with potential (though by no means certain) future members develop with three new blocs: the Visegrad group of Central Europe (including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary), the Baltic trio (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former Soviet republics)" (Aggarwal & Fogarty, 2003, p. 37).

<sup>14</sup> unofficial translation of the title from the official website of the Visegrad Group (Declaration on cooperation, 1991)

<sup>15</sup> "It was the very place where a meeting of three kings had taken place on 19 November, 1335...where centuries ago the kings of Bohemia, Poland and Hungary had met to discuss peace in this region of Europe..." (Grabiński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 86) "...and agreed to cooperate closely in the fields of politics and commerce" ("Where does the name come from?" n.d., para. 1).

<sup>16</sup> An agreement to work such a declaration was made at a meeting of Presidents, Prime Ministers and other official representatives from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland on 9 April 1990 in Bratislava. (Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia also attended the meeting as observers.) Its content had been endorsed on 28 December, 1990 during a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Grabiński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 87).

<sup>17</sup> These all aims had first of all required dissolution of institutions of the former socialist bloc - the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (both were dissolved in 1991), and departure of Soviet armed forces.



rights and fundamental freedoms; and to fully involve these countries in the European political, economic, security and legislative system. For that reason, practical steps to be jointly undertaken were stated in the Visegrad Declaration: to harmonize endeavours of the Visegrad countries to establish co-operation and close ties with European institutions; to consult issues related to their security; develop peaceful relations among their citizens, institutions, churches and social organizations; ensure optimal conditions for a full realization of the rights of national minorities living in the Visegrad region; contribute to a mutually beneficial co-operation of bodies representing self-governing regions; support economic co-operation favouring four economic freedoms (free movement of people, goods, services and capital); to expand transportation infrastructure and telecommunication networks connecting the Visegrad countries; harmonize their energy systems; extend co-operation in the field of ecology; and to create appropriate conditions for an exchange of information, press and cultural values.

It was especially in the initial period of its existence, till the splitting-up of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, when the VG had played its most important role during talks with NATO and the EU ("History of the Visegrad Group," n.d., para. 3). From 1993 to 1998, "the intensity of Visegrad cooperation weakened significantly"<sup>18</sup>. Contacts at parliamentary and expert level continued, but the leading representatives of the Czech and Slovak governments began to treat the idea of political cooperation among the four partners with reserve...The mutual atmosphere was further poisoned by tensions in Slovak-Hungarian relations"<sup>19</sup> (Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, pp. 44-45).<sup>20</sup> In this period, purposeful Visegrad collaboration at the highest political level (presidential and prime ministerial) involving all four members en bloc practically did not exist. They co-operated

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<sup>18</sup> After the division of Czechoslovakia, competition among the four Visegrad countries on their way to NATO and the EU was felt in Europe (Kozínska-Frybes, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 94). There were fears that if the Four concentrated too much on the co-operation with each other, joining the EU could be delayed (Waleśa, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 82).

<sup>19</sup> Probably the most serious was the conflict over the dam on the Danube at Gabčíkovo/Nagymaros. But there have also emerged disputes over the treatment of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia.

<sup>20</sup> Neither then (1993-1998) Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus's scepticism towards this regional grouping (except from its economic aspect) did help to improve relations and to put in motion interactivity of the Visegrad countries. Slovakia faced internal problems referring to Vladimír Mečiar's authoritative government (1993-1994, 1994-1998) which negatively influenced also its international standing. Unlike its Visegrad colleagues, Slovakia was not invited to start negotiations on acceding NATO after the Madrid summit in 1997. Furthermore, based on the European Commission assessment of the internal developments in candidate countries, the 1997 Luxembourg European Council disqualified Slovakia from the first round of opening talks on the EU membership. In the first round, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Cyprus, Estonia, and Slovenia were allowed to start negotiations. Although Slovakia was judged relatively favourably in terms of its economic development, it failed to meet Copenhagen political (democratic) criteria (Rybář, 2002, p. 50).

rather in economic matters within the CEFTA<sup>21</sup> which was incorporating also other states (then Slovenia and Romania, Bulgaria since 1999).

Revival of the Visegrad co-operation came at once with the change of political elites in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia in 1998<sup>22</sup>. On 14 May 1999, Bratislava hosted an official meeting of the VG Prime Ministers who jointly reaffirmed the aim to integrate the four countries into the EU and Slovakia into NATO additionally (Bilčík, 2001). In the Contents of Visegrad Cooperation, they agreed upon exchange of information, experience and consultations in the realm of foreign, security and defence policy (especially concerning the EU integration processes and NATO membership), environmental protection and risks, infrastructure, telecommunications, transport and power generation systems, co-operation in the field of border and immigration affairs, research and technological development, education, culture, sport, activities of youth and Visegrad societies in general (Contents, 1999). Initially, laggard Slovakia was receiving a public and knowledge support from its Visegrad neighbours in its efforts to catch-up in the course of the EU and NATO accession. But, as efforts in the accession process were accelerated, V4 countries witnessed a certain amount of rivalry again<sup>23</sup>. In fact, particularly the final phase of negotiations was too specific for every country, so that a promise from the December 2002 Prime Ministers' summit in Smolenice<sup>24</sup> that the Four would proceed shoulder to shoulder on their way to the EU membership till the very end of the talks (Rusnák, 2004, p. 2), has stood rather in a declarative form.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ministers of economy of the Visegrad countries signed the Central European Free Trade Agreement in Krakow on 21 December, 1992. It came into effect on 1 March, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> "The 1999 Helsinki European Council formally rewarded new Slovak leadership by inviting the country to start direct negotiations on the accession to the EU." (Rybář, 2002, p. 57) Gradually, Slovakia successfully caught-up its Visegrad partners in closing the negotiations on 31 policy chapters.

<sup>23</sup> Each VG country had taken its own (different) transformation path and their representatives vied with each other in their EU accession endeavours, especially at the close of the negotiations (Nosko, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> following the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002

<sup>25</sup> However, it is important to realize that "the accession process is based on bilateral...negotiations between the EU and the political elites of the applicant countries" (Grabbe, 2001) and that the 1993 Copenhagen criteria were "elaborated and specified for a concrete candidate country in the framework of the so called political dialogue set up in the association agreements and in the European Commission's annual evaluations of the candidates' progress" (Rybář, 2002, p. 49). It is just the EU which has a "gate-keeping role in determining when each candidate can progress to the next stage towards accession" (Grabbe, 2001). As a matter of fact, the EU applying conditionality to prospective members indirectly encourages not only reforms in the candidate countries, but also competition between them through ranking of "the applicants' overall progress, benchmarking in particular policy areas, and providing examples of best practice that the applicants seek to emulate" (ibid.). Additionally, the EU pre-accession policy advice through technical assistance offered by the PHARE program and the twinning program aimed at helping candidate countries to comply with membership requirements by learning from member states' experience of framing the legislation and building the organizational capacity necessary to implement the *acquis*, involving secondment of officials

Consequently, even after the so-called revitalization in 1998, V4 has been “several times labelled as a non-perspective artificial group or simply as an empty shell” (Rusnák, 2004, p. 1) by some observers, politicians and political commentators. Except the aforementioned rivalry, further noisy confrontation between the Visegrad partners flared up. Early in 2002, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic and Slovakia followed by their Polish colleague and subsequently Ministers of Culture as well refused to participate in Visegrad meetings (both planned to be held in Hungary) as a reaction to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s statements on the Beneš Decrees sounded in the European Parliament, too. Nevertheless, the disputes were settled<sup>26</sup> and the regional constellation was not inhumed at that time. It has been the very interesting moment in the process of Visegrad co-operation since then that even in times of intra-Visegrad bi- or trilateral political clashes provoked by nationalists who, unfortunately, often get into governmental structures; quadrilateral Visegrad meetings and communication at various levels (that of Prime Ministers, Presidents, Ministers, experts from Ministries, etc.) have continued to take place in a full format. One could notice this for example in August-September 2009 when Hungarian and Slovak Presidents did not manage to meet and communicate bilaterally due to the cooled political relations, but participated in the Visegrad summit in Poland.

After the Visegrad countries became members of NATO and the EU<sup>27</sup>, their Prime Ministers met in Kroměříž, Czech Republic, on 12 May 2004 to redefine the key objectives of the 1991 Visegrad Declaration. They signed the “Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on co-operation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union” (hereinafter the Declaration of Prime Ministers) where they stated that the initial objectives of the Visegrad Declaration were achieved; presented their determination to continue in developing the co-operation of the V4 countries as NATO and EU member states; and endorsed “Guidelines on the future areas of Visegrad co-operation” (hereinafter Guidelines). Prime Ministers stipulated further collaboration (at the governmental, presidential and parliamentary level) to be focused on regional activities strengthening the

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from the EU member states, is not controlled centrally at the EU level. So the impact on the acceding countries’ public administrations preparedness is likely to be diffuse or somewhat random in that it depends on the experience and assumptions of the individual pre-accession advisors of different nationalities and with different backgrounds. (Ibid.)

<sup>26</sup> The Prime Ministers met in June 2002 in Esztergom, Hungary.

<sup>27</sup> The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland entered NATO on 12 March, 1999; Slovakia on 29 March, 2004. Despite not proceeding at the same pace in the integration, V4 countries joined the EU altogether on 1 May 2004.

identity of the Central European region as well as on joint contributing to the fulfilment of the EU's common goals (Declaration of Prime Ministers, 2004). The 2004 Guidelines document also set several dimensions of a future development of the Visegrad co-operation (within the V4 area<sup>28</sup>, within the EU<sup>29</sup>, with other partners<sup>30</sup>, within NATO and other international organisations<sup>31</sup>).

After the admission of the four countries to the EU, Visegrad Group has not ceased to exist, despite further bilateral contentions between Hungarian and Slovak political representatives, despite not speaking with one voice externally and proceeding at a different pace in approaching the obligations resulting from the EU membership (e.g. in the case of the EURO adoption). Important to point out, “the reasons to suppose that the VG will not become an automatic platform for coordinating positions and speaking with one voice on the EU stage seem irrefutable...there is no intention for this to happen and nowhere in official pronouncements on VG cooperation can one find such an aspiration. The watchword in VG is flexibility, and the idea is that VG cooperation mechanisms are available to identify common interests and policy preferences and collectively pursue them but not to start from the premise that the VG exists to produce common positions, either in EU business or other areas” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 657).

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<sup>28</sup> aimed at culture, education, youth exchange, science, strengthening the civil dimension through programs and resources of the International Visegrad Fund, infrastructure, environment, fight against terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration, cross-border and Schengen co-operation, disaster management, defence and arms industries, exchange of views on possible co-operation in the field of labour and social policy, exchange of experience on development assistance policy (Guidelines, 2004)

<sup>29</sup> concentrated on current issues of common interest, active contribution to the CFSP (articulating involvement of the V4 in the enlargement process and in the EU's policies towards the East European and South-East European countries in particular), consulting experience in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, Schengen co-operation, visa policy, protection and management of the EU external borders, development of economic co-operation within the European Economic Area, consulting national preparations for entering the EMU, participation in the ESDP as a contribution to the strengthening of relations between the EU and NATO (ibid.)

<sup>30</sup> including a co-operation with interested non-Visegrad Central European countries, with the EU and NATO candidate and aspiring countries, with other regional groupings, interested third countries and international organisations (ibid.)

<sup>31</sup> intent on strengthening of a trans-Atlantic solidarity and cohesion, consultation and co-operation within the OSCE, UN, Council of Europe, OECD, etc.

## 2 Theoretical considerations and methodology

In respect to the accession of all Visegrad countries to the EU (and NATO), some political commentators, analysts and politicians had made hesitant or even sceptical statements regarding a possible future functioning of the V4. For example, Tamás Novák (2003), a researcher at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, had opined that it was an open question whether the Visegrad states would be able to pull their individual ambitions aside in favour of common interests. According to a former Czech MP and currently MEP Jan Zahradil (2004), it was not possible to consider Visegrad to be a political definition anymore, rather a geographical delimitation of the area. A researcher and analyst Andrej Nosko stated in May 2004 it was probable that the V4 would be meaningful after the entry to the EU but this co-operation would need to be strengthened, especially at the level of civil society. He also asserted (and has not been the only one in this respect) that in order to ensure a permanent encouragement to develop this regional collaboration, it was necessary to institutionalise it, to establish a kind of “a bureaucratically undemanding secretariat” which would search for possibilities of further co-operation at the same time (Nosko, 2004).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, reflections had occurred that inside the EU, Poland would resort to seeking other partners more corresponding to its size and geopolitical importance and would become the first “deserter” from the Visegrad “club” (see for example Král, 2003; Pehe, 2004).<sup>33</sup>

With regard to these doubts, yet before the detection of concrete practical results of the Visegrad co-operation and its beneficiaries, I concentrate on reasoning of a justification of the very existence (a position) and purpose of smaller regional groupings of member states such as the V4 inside the EU from a theoretical point of view; using the multi-level governance concept and the Groupthink theory<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, by virtue of findings of a few recent studies made in the realm of a coalition-building in the Council of the European Union (the major decision-making and legislative body of the EU), I aim to elucidate also a

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<sup>32</sup> Even public in the Visegrad countries (with an exception of the Poles) had preferred that mutual ties of the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia should have been the same as with every other EU member, as a survey made in 2003 by the Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava revealed (see the Appendix 1).

<sup>33</sup> However, as one can see, neither has Poland left the V4 behind (the Polish presidency has not hindered functioning of this regional constellation at all) (Kolář, 2005), nor have permanent institutional structures in addition to the International Visegrad Fund been established, and the V4 has not ceased to exist after its member countries' entry to the EU.

<sup>34</sup> The theoretical reasoning of Groupthink is applied for the second time in the part devoted to an intra-Visegrad level of institutionalisation and distribution of power.

way of building coalitions of collaborating states in the EU, one of which the V4 seems to be as well. The second part of the chapter contains a detailed description of the methodology for doing research elaborated in the third chapter.

## 2.1 Theoretical considerations

- **Multi-level governance**

The fact that states are not the only important actors on the international scene, that non-state actors (multinational corporations, international governmental as well as non-governmental organizations, ...) affect the world course of events, has been admitted by scholars endeavouring to explain European integration processes being in progress since the end of the Second World War. They have developed various ad hoc international relations theories – federalism, intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism, neo-liberalism, neo-realism, interdependence theory, social constructivism, etc. However, no one of these competing theoretical concepts has succeeded to fully encompass the unprecedented ever-evolving phenomenon of the European Union<sup>35</sup>, all of its internal processes and external performance. The reason can be found in a messy (though, probably for that reason handy<sup>36</sup>) scholarly model - the “multi-level governance” (hereinafter MLG) - “an attempt to capture the complexity of the EU” (Rosamond, 2003, p. 120), according to which “different levels of action in the EU require different sorts of theory” (Peterson & Bomberg, In Rosamond, 2003, p. 118). Thus, MLG should not be seen as an all-encompassing concept either, but rather as a complement to traditional schemes of international relations (Peters & Pierre, 2005, p. 76).

The MLG model “notes that different patterns of policy making occur in different areas of EU activity” (Rosamond, 2003, p. 118) which is “segmented, complex, and populated by multiple stakeholders” (ibid. p. 119) acting at different, often overlapping levels – subnational, national, regional, European. In other words, MLG can be defined as “the dispersion of authoritative decision-making across multiple territorial levels” (Hooghe &

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<sup>35</sup> The EU “sits between nation states and the international system and arguably transforms both through its very existence” (Rosamond, 2003, p. 126).

<sup>36</sup> Multi-level governance concept is “...tempting and attractive in its informality and orientation towards objectives and outcomes, rather than focused on rules and formal arrangements...” (Peters & Pierre, 2005, p. 85)

Marks, 2001, In Rosamond, 2003, p. 120). Moreover, the MLG emphasizes that modes and timing of implementation of the EU law acts is flexible (Haas, 1976, p. 208); integration is uneven<sup>37</sup>; and devolution of decision-making competences is fluid across these levels and across the policy areas, implying that policy actors may move between different tiers of authority (Rosamond, 2001, p. 120).

This concept is applicable to the question of the Visegrad Group's functioning within the European Union in the sense that it reckons with more than two well-known levels of the "game" (domestic and international)<sup>38</sup>. Alternatively speaking, presence of regional constellations such as the Visegrad Group, Benelux, Nordic Council of Ministers (hereinafter the Nordic Council), etc. within the EU may be understood as a confirmation of the MLG premises taking into account variability of quality and quantity of multiple actors participating in the EU policy making; and the fact that "authority has not simply shifted upwards" (Rosamond, 2001, p. 121) away from national governments to European institutions over the past sixty years. Rather, "it has become dispersed" (ibid.) among a variety of private and public; subnational, national, regional and European agents, affecting each other in various directions, often simultaneously adhering to several alliances based on territorial or functional principle, those acting within the EU borders, but also those crossing them and thus connecting the EU members with non-members. A telling example is a parallel participation of all Visegrad countries in other regional co-operation mechanisms: Visegrad+, Regional Partnership and Central European Initiative<sup>39</sup>. In addition, Poland is a particularly striking example, acting simultaneously within the so-called Weimar Triangle and within the Council of the Baltic Sea States. "The basic idea here is that in multi-level governance actors, arenas, and institutions are not ordered hierarchically but have a more complex and contextually defined relationship..." (Peters & Pierre, 2005, p. 79).

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<sup>37</sup> Many examples of unevenness of the European integration processes can be found, the most recent and regarding the Visegrad region is that although all four countries joined the EU and its internal market in 2004, only Slovakia has adopted the common European currency "euro" so far (in January 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Though, according to the Art.5 and 10 of the EC Treaty, "there is no treaty basis for the EU to intervene in matters of regional cooperation if the specific area of a cooperation does not fall under the exclusive competence of the EU, and as long as the member states facilitate the achievement of the tasks of the EU and abstain from any measure jeopardising the attainment of EU objectives" (Brusis, 2002, pp. 71-72).

<sup>39</sup> I agree with authors claiming there is no need to enlarge the Visegrad Group. Evidently, co-operation with Slovenia, Austria and other Central, East and South-East European countries is possible and functional within other formats mentioned, without a direct incorporation of these partners into the VG (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 23).

- **Groupthink and coalition-building**

There are three basic propositions into which knowledge related to the dynamics of the group decision-making<sup>40</sup> can be summarized: (1) extremes in the distribution of power within a decision-making group (when power, referring to an authority and resources, is highly concentrated or highly diffused among group members) and (2) extremes in the size of that group (when the policy-making group is very small or very large) affect the group's deliberations (and thus its resolutions and actions) counterproductively, (3) the integrative complexity of group deliberations is maximized when power concentration and group size increase together (the group's inner power concentration should be appropriate to the group size in order to work properly). (Kowert, 2001, pp. 201-207)

Capturing the third proposition is needed to comprehend the purpose of the coalition-building within the EU. Simply put, the larger the group in number of its members, the more hierarchically the power should be structured; and vice versa, the smaller the group in number of its members, the more evenly the power should be distributed among them (the comparatively lesser the formal structure or hierarchy of power is required) "for purposes of coordination if they are to be effective" (ibid. p. 208).<sup>41</sup>

The allocation of votes in proportion to the country's population in the Council of the European Union (hereinafter the Council) fits the theory of Groupthink because in this way, decision-making power in the multi-member EU is hierarchically structured. Then, why does building coalitions of member states in the Council make sense? Based on the theory of Groupthink, with growing number of EU members, decision-making power should be structured more and more. One does not need any theoretical knowledge background to understand that the more there are the EU actors, the more it is difficult to co-ordinate their differing standpoints. "Mechanisms for discussing issues and voting procedures can be adapted to counter the problems of numbers and diversity." (Kahler, 1992, In Ravenhill, 2008, p. 180) Hence, to ease the EU decision-making, it is desirable to harmonize individual viewpoints of the member states on a certain issue or policy first

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<sup>40</sup> Initially, the theory of "Groupthink" was propounded by Irving Janis in the early 1970s. Studies by scholars like Festinger, George, Hart, Hemphill, Kowert, Zajonc, and others have followed and developed an academic debate on the group policy-making.

<sup>41</sup> Hemphill similarly asserts, "as group size increases, group members become more and more willing to accept strong, directive leadership" (ibid. p. 206). More importantly, they benefit from such leadership, and, on the other hand, "very small groups benefit from a more even distribution of power within a group" (ibid. p. 207).



within smaller groups of states, till the debated agenda reaches the EU official ministerial negotiation and voting table. Although informal, such co-ordination of viewpoints has already become member states' Permanent Representations' routine working procedure in the Council<sup>42</sup> to good effect.

Regional blocs in the EU such as the V4 can serve as those smaller groups, coalitions of states, reducing the number of divergent views on the issue to be decided on, in that way reducing also the number of interlocutors in principle, thus simplifying the process of reaching an agreement. However, why should these coalitions be founded on the regional adherence, rather than, for example, on size of the countries, Leftist-Rightist government's position, Euro-enthusiasm/ Euro-scepticism, pro-/ anti- American stance in the foreign and security policy or according to any other cleavages? Can and do the coalitions within the EU show signs of stability or longevity at all?

Basically, "coalitions may be long-term and cross-cutting, covering a range of policy issues over time, or they may be short-term and issue specific" (Naurin, 2008, p. 6). Some analysts (Spence, 1995; Cf. Nugent, 1999; Grabbe, 2003) argue that rather than permanent alliances of states co-ordinating their positions and forming persisting power blocs in the Council, the pattern is much more likely to be fluid coalitions, shifting issue by issue; assuming that "countries will get together where they have common interest on a particular issue, rather than because of special friendships" (Grabbe, 2003)<sup>43</sup>. However, survey data show that "even in a highly professionalized and seemingly business-like environment like the Council people are likely to be affected by non-interest based factors, such as culture, language, traditions and historical legacy" (Naurin, 2008, p. 5)<sup>44</sup>. It is just the drastic increase in the number of EU members as a consequence of the last EU enlargements

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<sup>42</sup> taking place in several working groups and committees during initial stages of the negotiation and decision-making process (Van Roozendaal, Hosli, & Heetman, 2008, p. 5), subsequently also in the COREPER, "a filtering point enabling constructive coordination of member state policies at the EU level, while at the same time consulting and instructing national actors as to what is negotiable at the EU level" (Bátora, 2005, p. 55), holding session every week

<sup>43</sup> This is rather a rationalistic view of the coalition-building, stressing the importance of actors' strategic choices based on their policy interests (Mattila, 2008, p. 3).

<sup>44</sup> A constructivist approach emphasizing the significance of actors' culture and social norms (Mattila, 2008, p. 3) is proved right here. According to results of the survey elaborated by Daniel Naurin from the Gothenburg University, "correlations between the cooperation ties and such cultural variables as language, popular cultural affinity and religion – in particular after the 2004 enlargement – also when controlling for a range of interest based factors, indicate that the choices of coalition partners are not only rational preference-based calculations. In many cases it may be a very simple human motive behind: It is usually easier to cooperate with people who are more like your self. Historically inherited path dependency mechanisms and normative ties could also be at play." (Naurin, 2008, p. 22)

(2004, 2007)<sup>45</sup> that “raised the functional demand for more stable coalitions” (Naurin, 2008, p. 7) within the Union.

As regards the cleavage of small vs. big EU member states, generally, it does usually occur when institutional issues such as establishing a post of the President of the European Council<sup>46</sup>; and when the distribution of votes among member states is discussed. Extension of the use of the qualified majority voting is a bone of contention between Euro-sceptics and Euro-enthusiasts. Matters of a Euro-Atlantic importance, especially in the realm of defence, foreign and security policy (for example the war in Iraq) tend to divide the so-called American Trojan horses, sometimes ironically entitled Trojan donkeys (Kim, 2003), from the less Atlanticist-oriented governments. However, these countries’ general positions expressed on the outside in formal political statements and votes may be uncoordinated; states may even take a common stand towards a proposal for diverse reasons (Naurin, 2008, p. 10). The fact that two or more countries take a similar attitude towards an issue is “not enough to conclude that they have acted, or will act, as a coalition, as they may formulate and promote their positions independently” (ibid.) and for different reasons<sup>47</sup>. After all, “coalition is not just a group of actors who happen to want the same thing, but a group which coordinates action” (Cf. Humphreys, 2008, In Naurin, 2008, p. 10). EU member states’ governments’ Leftist-Rightist position or party ideology also “seems to have little to do with the choice of coalition partners in the Council<sup>48</sup>. Geographical proximity is the dominating pattern.” (Naurin, 2008, p. 4) But “geography is not much of an explanation in itself” (ibid. p. 15). Lying behind these geographical formulas; cultural factors, historical legacy, and trading relations appear to determine the coalition-building processes in the EU’s major decision-making body in the most significant way (ibid. pp. 15-21).

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<sup>45</sup> In 2004, the four Visegrad states, the “Baltic trio” (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia joined the EU. Romania and Bulgaria became members of the EU in January 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Small countries opposed the idea of creating a post of the President of the European Council in the debate on the Constitutional Treaty within the European Convention because they were “afraid that a president... would listen mostly to the larger countries” (Grabbe, 2003). Polish government representative “as the only one from the V4... expressed her support for the Franco-German proposal for the creation of the post of a quasi-permanent president of the European Council albeit conditioned by the necessity of a clearer specification of his position and competences” (Král, 2003). Czech, Hungarian and Slovak representatives were against this concept, and even their positions diverged (ibid.). (After all, the Treaty of Lisbon established the position of the President of the European Council, elected for a maximum of 5 years.)

<sup>47</sup> As Helene Sjursen pertinently argued in the late 1990s, the fact that Austria, Finland and Sweden are not NATO member states did not translate into any concerted effort to advocate a particular ‘neutral’ position within the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as it had been feared prior to the 1995 EU enlargement (Brusis, 2002, p. 73).

<sup>48</sup> See for example Naurin, 2008; Mattila, 2008

Of course, factors such as the prevalence of Euro-scepticism or Euro-enthusiasm in the EU member countries, their general pro- or anti- American stance in the foreign and security policy, etc. influence their behaviour and decisions taken. But it has not been proved that these inputs would form a basis on which the member states co-ordinate their decisions taken at the European stage, many of which are made behind a “dropped curtain”, before formal voting, if any voting is held at all<sup>49</sup>.

Results of the recent survey focused on the coalition-building in the Council of Ministers, i.e. on the co-operation behaviour of governmental representatives<sup>50</sup> during the negotiation process in the Council, asking them representatives of which member states they most often co-operate with within their working group in order to develop a common position (ibid. p. 11)<sup>51</sup>; reveal existing coalitions of states in the EU. In a comparative perspective offered by the survey, relationships between the EU-15 states have remained more or less the same after the 2004 enlargement, but in the group of ten newcomers, two new blocs have appeared – the Baltic trio and the Visegrad countries (ibid. p. 14). As regards other alliances found out in 2006, a North-Core one includes the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, and a South-Core triangle is composed of France, Spain and Italy (ibid. p. 13). Germany holds together Visegrad, North-Core and South-Core groups, through co-operation with Poland, the UK and France<sup>52</sup>. Interestingly, there is no firm Benelux coalition. “Cyprus and Malta...have joined Greece in the Southern periphery” (ibid. p. 14); Slovenia, Austria and Ireland have no strong connection to any of the constellations identified in the survey.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> To fully understand this, one should be/ get acquainted in general with the way how the Council works. A dominant decision-making practice is negotiating behind closed doors (Naurin, 2008, p. 3), in the working groups and afterwards in the two COREPERs. Ministers explicitly vote only in about 20% of the cases (ibid. p. 9). Moreover, some proposals fail “to assemble a large enough majority to go through the Council...much of the action in the Council thus is left outside the voting records” (ibid. p. 10) and therefore outside the publicity.

<sup>50</sup> working within agricultural, foreign and security policy, economic policy and internal market issues (Naurin, 2008)

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed description and substantiation of the methodology used in the survey, as well as for a critical reasoning of other research methods used in previous surveys aimed at the processes of coalition-building in the Council (based on the Council’s formal voting records and the like, neglecting a few important details of the Council’s working process), see Naurin, 2008, 36pp.

<sup>52</sup> “In fact Germany is number one on the French list of most frequently mentioned cooperation partners, and France is number one on the German list. Thus, in spite of the fact that France and Germany often initially take diverging positions on Commission proposals they still choose to cooperate to develop common positions in the process” (ibid.). The reason can be found in “path dependency mechanisms...a historically derived feeling of a ‘duty’ to cooperate” (ibid. p. 22).

<sup>53</sup> See the Appendix 2

There seems to be an utilizable potential of usefulness and efficiency in regional coalitions of states inside the EU, such as the V4 (benefiting the EU but also these regional alliances themselves). The practical co-operation at the level of the VG representatives in the Council working groups and COREPER, as well as at the level of the V4 governmental and public administration representatives' meetings held before, after or accompanying key EU conferences and summits<sup>54</sup> bear probably the best evidence of this.

Nevertheless, one should be aware it is not the purpose of the V4 to speak with one voice at the EU stage, to form unitary positions every time. After all, not even other regional groups in the EU function in this manner, whether one thinks of the Benelux or the Nordic Council “which successfully combines countries with varied interests and approaches to the EU” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 658). Rather, the V4 should be perceived as “a forum that enables the participating countries to express and coordinate their positions on a whole range of issues of common concern” (Simonyi, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 96) and on “an array of EU-related issues and policies” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 657) especially in favour of the European Union, but also in favour of the Four itself. As the recent survey revealed, such a forum has been in operation in the Council. However, further surveys with updated data are needed to show whether despite changing domestic situation (changes of government, above all) and influence of external factors<sup>55</sup>, this co-operation has persisted even following the 2007 EU enlargement and whether the V4 will continue to co-ordinate its action in the Council and maybe at other EU forums further on<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> E.g. meeting of VG Prime Ministers prior to the European Council of December 2004 devoted to a discussion on the New Financial Perspective of the EU; informal meeting of VG Ministers of Transport in October 2008 accompanying the Council session on Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; consultation of V4 senior officials for European Affairs in early October 2009 concerning the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and institutional issues resulting from its adoption which preceded the European Council session on 29-30 October; and so on. Moreover, the VG political elites' meetings take place also after other international events, to discuss their outputs and ways of implementation (for example the meeting of VG Ministers of Defence in April 2008, after the NATO Bucharest summit).

<sup>55</sup> State preferences themselves are not formed in a vacuum: membership in the EU itself as well as in other international cooperation mechanisms has become an important influence on how governments define their interests. (Sandholtz, 1993, In Ravenhill, 2008, p. 196)

<sup>56</sup> Last round of interviews within the survey I base my theoretical assumptions regarding coalition-building upon was conducted in February – March 2006 (Naurin, 2008, pp. 10-11). Although a continuation of the survey dated 2009 (results have not been published yet) indicate that “the patterns with respect to the Visegrad countries are fairly stable” (D. Naurin, e-mail communication, 17 December 2009); I do not dare to assert definitely that since 2006 the V4 still has been working as a coalition of collaborating EU member states grounded just on the informal communication and without knowing the terms of this survey continuation.

## 2.2 Methodology

In a comparative perspective offered by the survey on the coalition-building in the Council of Ministers, the Union's major decision-making body (presented above); relationships between the EU-15 member states have remained more or less the same after the 2004 enlargement, but in the group of ten newcomers, two new collaborating blocs have appeared – the Baltic trio and the Visegrad Group (Naurin, 2008, p. 14). Based upon findings of this survey implying, inter alia, the coalition-building potential of the Visegrad Group within the EU, I formulate my first hypothesis: *The Visegrad Four has formed a coalition, i.e. a group of states, whose representatives have co-ordinated their action within the European Union decision-making space.* I expect the research to provide relevant factual evidence.

With the exception of the IVF activities, practical results of which have always been easily identifiable by looking at myriad projects implemented and recipients of financial support; before undertaking the research I had known just of one extra case of a purportedly useful co-operation at the level of the Visegrad Group - that prior to the four countries' accession to the Schengen area. This provides an explanation both to the choice of the topic of concern for a single-case study comprising the last part of the research and to the second hypothesis: *Except activities of the International Visegrad Fund and a liaison of the V4 countries' experts in preparations for accession to the Schengen area; co-operation of representatives of governments and public administration of all four Visegrad countries after their entry to the EU has not provided actors involved with any tangible contribution (benefit or added value).* For the purpose of eliciting whether the Schengen preparations-related collaboration mentioned in various sources had somehow benefited actors involved or, after taking a closer look, one can see just an exaggeration or idealization of the Group's achievements; process tracing technique is applied within the case study. Case study method enables to gain in-depth knowledge of an individual example (an individual, group, organization, process or event), "better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part" (Gerring, 2007, p. 1). In this thesis, the case study is constructed diachronically, i.e. "by observing the case or some subset of within-case units over time" (ibid. p. 21). Particulars of the process of undertaking the research, its parts and respective methodology are as follows.

The intuitively attractive argument that regional blocs simplify negotiations within larger and more complex arenas (in this case the European one) by reducing the number of actors involved is counteracted by the difficulties that these regional groupings often have in reaching a common position (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 200). Since success in solving internal difficulties of international co-operation mechanisms often depends upon their institutional design (Kahler, 1992, In Ravenhill, 2008, p. 180), since functioning and image of the Visegrad co-operation has been largely influenced by the incumbent political leaders in the four countries and their willingness or unwillingness to co-operate<sup>57</sup>; the idea “to further institutionalise the VG, including creation of a secretariat with the ability to independently formulate and propose (although, of course, not impose) possible VG policies, initiatives, joint positions, and so on” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 660), or a post of an ambassador (Mr. Visegrad) who would co-ordinate the Visegrad co-operation, has been discussed in the past (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 20). Nevertheless, the co-operation has continued on flexible and voluntary grounds without building stable formal structures (Dzurinda, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 20). How has the co-operation of representatives of governments and public administration in the VG format been working? Have there been, without any stable institutions (such as the Secretariat General, College of Arbitrators, etc. in case of Benelux; or the Secretary General, the Nordic Committee for Co-operation, etc. in case of the Nordic Council) enough opportunities for consultations and developing regional co-operation in the V4 framework at all? For the sake of answering these questions, the introductory part of the research is aimed to detect whether conventional meetings of representatives of the four countries at various levels of government and public administration have been held in the period observed. Following the information gained by means of personal and e-mail communication with representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) of the V4 countries, and of the International Visegrad Fund, publicly accessible official documents of the V4, “Calendar” published at the official website of the Visegrad Group, International Visegrad Fund website, and some secondary literature; I trace what the actual framework of governments’ and public administrations’ collaboration in the Visegrad format, one without permanent common institutional structures (except the International Visegrad Fund), has looked like.

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<sup>57</sup> When searching for striking negative examples of the concrete political representatives’ influence on the run of the Visegrad co-operation, one can easily recall personalities such as the former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, the then Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus or Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Consequently, another portion of the research is targeted at the ascertainment how these opportunities to co-operate on the Visegrad regional basis have been utilized and converted into actions for more than five years; and who has benefited from the practical results of the collaboration of the four countries' governmental and public entities' representatives. When doing this exploratory qualitative research, I scrutinize first of all text-based primary sources from the official website of the Visegrad Group such as Annual Reports of the V4 presidencies<sup>58</sup>, joint statements, press releases, reports from meetings, etc. related to the period in question<sup>59</sup>; website of the International Visegrad Fund; other websites devoted to projects resulting from the common official activities of the Visegrad Group<sup>60</sup>; and numerous secondary sources, too. Some unclear or information-poor indications or notions of a practical contribution of the Visegrad co-operation found are necessarily followed by searching for related information and additional evidence, as well as by communication with representatives of the International Visegrad Fund and other agencies which have something to do with the practical outcomes of the V4. I do not take bilateral or trilateral actions between or among the Visegrad members (not involving all four countries) into consideration in the research; nor do I map achievements of broader groupings of states in which the Visegrad countries have been participating, those permanent or those created for a concrete purpose since these have most assumedly not required existence of the VG as such. I do not mention plenty of intentions, opinions and goals set by official V4 representatives which have been just proclaimed but not realized either.

The objective is to give an overview of practical contribution of actions initiated or put into practice thanks to the purposeful co-operation of the V4 governments' or public entities' representatives since the four states entered the EU. The most visible and worthwhile in this sense has been functioning of the International Visegrad Fund (hereinafter the Fund/IVF) as such, benefiting enormously broad spectrum of recipients, predominantly from the civil society sector. Hence, its contribution is described in a separate section. For sure, it is

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<sup>58</sup> Considering the fact that they are official documents and outputs of inter-governmental co-operation, it is a pity that with the exception of the Polish presidency (July 2008 – June 2009), Annual reports of Visegrad presidencies have been usually written in quite a low level of English. Moreover, Annual Report of the Slovak presidency held in 2006/2007 was missing at the time I needed it for the sake of the thesis. Hence, I asked Mr. Marián Varga from the Slovak MFA, Department of Central and Northern Europe and neighbourhood relations, for sending me this Report. He met my request, though it is written in Slovak.

<sup>59</sup> These sources are available in the parts of the website "Documents" and "Calendar".

<sup>60</sup> I assume if there is anything the V4 had succeeded to achieve, if there is any significant result of the V4 co-operation, Annual Reports of particular presidencies and other official outputs of the numerous meetings at the V4 level definitely ought to mention it.

unimaginable to enumerate all particular projects and scholarships granted by this Fund herein. So the aim is rather to briefly inform about main areas it has promoted; types of the Fund's programs serving the promotion, and to elucidate its practical purpose. Subsequent sections are thematic which means that achievements within the V4 framework are categorized into specific fields of collaboration I have identified by virtue of the research findings (Europeanization; science, research, youth training and education; culture; media; tourism; self-government). Firstly, these include exemplification of activities co-financed by the IVF but only those supported repeatedly (some of them occasionally and some persistently); involving partners from all V4 countries; characterized by longevity; frequently praised by public officers and observers in primary and secondary sources; and most of them realized under the auspices or with an engagement of V4 governmental or other public structures<sup>61</sup>. Secondly, I have tried to do my best to search for and present independent (not IVF-sponsored) joint VG-level projects and networks which have produced certain practical outcomes, and organization of which has required public bodies from the Visegrad countries to act in concert. I have discovered just a few such cases; you can find them all in the thematically arranged sections.

The last part of the research is the aforementioned single-case study. Case description is followed by presenting results of data generated: First, I compile general information found in primary and secondary sources about what the VG members had done collectively in the process of preparations for joining the Schengen area. Herein I would like to thank to some of my respondents who have provided me with some internal unpublished documents such as minutes from meetings and presentations. Second, by conducting unstructured, in-depth interviews with informants<sup>62</sup> - experts from organizations of the Slovak Ministry of Interior participating in Expert groups' meetings with their counterparts from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (focused on the preparations of the V4 countries for their entry to the Schengen zone); by e-mail communication with a representative of the Czech Ministry of Interior, with a former high-ranked officer then working at the Migration Office (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic) and one representative of the Slovak Ministry of Interior also participating in the VG experts' meetings; I aim to find out whether and how this co-operation had helped (e.g. eased or

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<sup>61</sup> It is almost sure that more examples meeting these conditions and resulting in a tangible added value could be discovered and that those detected by me are not completely exhaustive.

<sup>62</sup> Informants are "respondents with insiders' knowledge about the topic" (Marvasti, 2004, p. 16).



speeded up) to achieve the goal of their activity – successful incorporation of the Visegrad countries in the Schengen area as soon as possible. I consider the format of unstructured, in-depth interviews as the most appropriate to fulfil the set goal because they “allow more fluid interaction between the researcher and the respondent...respondents are not forced to choose from a pre-designed range of answers; instead, they can elaborate on their statements and connect them with other matters of relevance...this data collection procedure is simply referred to as ‘talking,’ signifying its informal and conversational style” (Marvasti, 2004, p. 20). In-depth interviewing does not limit respondents to a fixed set of answers, they “can place qualifying conditions on their responses” (ibid. p. 21). During the interview, interviewer and interviewee are free to express their views about an issue (Douglas, 1985, In Marvasti, 2004, p. 22). One can see I use a theoretical/ purposive (i.e. non-random, non-probability) sampling strategy.

There was a Working group for Schengen co-operation at the symbolic level of Deputy Ministers of Interior with two practising subgroups - Expert group for SIS II and Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis - established in 2003. Director of the National Central Office SIRENE Slovakia, Department of the International Police Co-operation, Police Force Presidium of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; is one of the Slovak officers who participated in two Prague meetings of the Visegrad countries’ Expert group for SIS II (in February and July 2004). He offered me a contact to Mr. Jiří Čelikovský; Head of the Division of co-ordination of Schengen co-operation and border protection, Department of asylum and migration policy, Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic; who also participated in both meetings of the Expert group for SIS II<sup>63</sup> and readily replied to my e-mails. Although the representative of the Slovak Police Force Presidium kindly answered the questions regarding goals, activity and achievements of this group in the interview conducted on 9 December 2009<sup>64</sup>; afterwards, when being asked and allowed to review the text containing outputs of the interview he refused me to use and publish his name and his statements en bloc, unwilling to discuss particularities and specify his reservations. Hence, in an attempt to shrink range of impoverishing effect of this ban on the information and opinions offered by the Slovak public officer in the interview, I requested another Slovak member of the Expert group for SIS II, Mr. Pavol Maliarik; Director of the Department of applications, Office of informatics, telecommunications and

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<sup>63</sup> He attended meetings of the V4 Working group for Schengen co-operation, too.

<sup>64</sup> The respondent did not agree with recording interview on a Dictaphone so I took notes.

security of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; to answer similar questions. He preferred e-mail communication to personal interview. Accordingly, in the part devoted to the activity of the Expert group for Schengen information system I use the information gained by e-mail communication with two of its direct participants<sup>65</sup>.

To describe activity and reveal an effect or a practical contribution of the V4 Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis, initially I had planned to interview Mr. Bernard Prielcel; Director of the Migration Office, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; who had represented Slovakia at meetings of this Expert group before the accession to the Schengen area. But due to his busyness he asked Mrs. Michaela Sumilasová; Head of the Dublin Station at the Migration Office, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; to substitute him<sup>66</sup>. Mrs. Zuzana Némethová; Head of the Division of fingerprint identification of persons, Department of criminalistic identification, Criminalistic and Expertise Institute at the Police Force Presidium, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic; who participated in the first meeting of the Visegrad countries' Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis on 2 April 2004 in Prague as an observer (a member of the delegation sent to this meeting on behalf of Slovakia), offered me her piece of knowledge on the matter as well<sup>67</sup>. Finally, Mrs. Bronislava Bieliková, former Head of the Dublin Station at the Migration Office (Slovak Republic) being present at all six sittings of the Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis<sup>68</sup>, provided me with useful information by e-mail<sup>69</sup>.

I admit a validity of the outcomes generated within this case study is limited because of a small sample of respondents. Moreover, with the exception of one Czech representative, only Slovak members of the Visegrad Expert groups were asked. Last but not least, I have not been allowed to publish findings derived from one of the interviews. Nevertheless,

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<sup>65</sup> I would like to thank to the gentlemen for their collaboration in the search for information.

<sup>66</sup> I would like to thank to Mrs. Sumilasová who had prepared for the interview (conducted on 18 December 2009, recorded on a Dictaphone); collected information required by me, despite she was not holding her current position in the period examined yet (she went through materials and talked to Mr. Prielcel to find out details regarding the meetings Mr. Prielcel had attended); and helpfully reviewed the text containing outputs of the interview, especially terminology used.

<sup>67</sup> The interview with Mrs. Némethová was conducted on 17 December 2009 and was recorded on a Dictaphone.

<sup>68</sup> The meetings at the level of Directors of Migration Offices and Heads of Dublin stations of Visegrad countries were realized three times in 2004, once in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Since Mrs. Bieliková has been working in Luxembourg for about two years and it would be very difficult to manage a personal interview, we have communicated by e-mail.

when investigating a practical contribution of the co-operation of Visegrad experts prior to the four countries' entry to the Schengen zone, I have tried to pay heed to details and factuality in order to be able to draw more or less legitimate conclusions. In case I did not identify any concrete example of the contribution of the Expert groups' activity thanks to the interviews and e-mail communication with other informants, it would not be fair to conclude that common activity of the Expert groups in charge of co-ordination of efforts targeted at the soonest possible incorporation of the Visegrad countries to the Schengen area had not produced any tangible outcomes. However, forasmuch as I have been informed about some benefits the co-operation had brought; regardless of facts and views I was notified of during the interview which I was refused to publish later on; I can come to a reasonable conclusion.

### **3 Research on the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the EU**

This chapter contains research findings providing 1/ assessment of whether necessary institutional preconditions/ space for developing the Visegrad regional co-operation have been created at all (whether conventional meetings of representatives of the four countries at various levels of government and public administration have been held in the period examined); 2/ comprehensive answer how this space has been utilized and converted into specific actions for about five years (what has been the practical contribution of and who has been benefited by the V4 co-operation); 3/ elicitation of whether a collaboration of officers from the Visegrad countries in preparations for joining the Schengen area (mentioned in various sources) have benefited actors involved, and in what way.

#### **3.1 Intra-Visegrad level of institutionalisation and power distribution**

A few days after the VG countries joined the EU, their Prime Ministers confirmed in the Declaration a will to hold one official summit a year at the end of each presidency (rotating on a yearly basis in the order Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia)<sup>70</sup>, with Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs meetings preceding it; agreed to hold occasional informal Prime Ministers' and Foreign Ministers' meetings before significant international events; as well as meetings of other Ministers in V4 and V4+ format<sup>71</sup>; to intensify communication of the V4 national Co-ordinators; co-operation of Permanent Representations to the EU, NATO and other international forums (OECD, UN, WTO, etc.); to continue in development of collaboration utilizing the IVF; to sit at the level of Presidents (indefinite

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<sup>70</sup> The tradition of the country's presidency (since July till June in the subsequent year) was established by VG Prime Ministers at their summit in Bratislava on 14 May 1999, and its co-ordinating role was further stipulated at the Prime Ministers' summit in Esztergom on 29 June 2002, in the Annex to the Content of Visegrad Cooperation. Within external dimension, any initiative to hold a (top-level, lower or experts' level) meeting in the V4+1 format should have been discussed first among the VG representatives and afterwards presented to a third country by the V4 presiding member. Within internal dimension, a rule was arranged that expert talks (e.g. at the level of departments of individual Ministries) would not take place in the presiding country and that any VG member could summon the experts' meeting. In addition, Ministries themselves would be in charge of organising their mutual collaboration. At the beginning of its mandate, presiding country would set priorities of its presidency, a kind of a one-year work plan of the Group, and would consult them with experts. Before the end of the presidency mandate, Prime Ministers would report on the progress of implementation of the priorities (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 645).

<sup>71</sup> dealing with particular questions in charge of corresponding Ministries

frequency), to co-operate at the level of Parliaments (indefinite form and areas of co-operation) (Declaration of Prime Ministers, 2004).

Except 2006, Prime Ministers had met before end of each presidency. Some Prime Ministers' and Foreign Ministers' meetings ahead of international events (such as European Council's gatherings or the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU) have been held, however often in the V4+ format (attended by foreign partners, e.g. political representatives of Austria, Slovenia, Benelux, Baltic trio, Romania and Bulgaria...). Ministers and experts from Ministries of culture, environment, defence, finance etc. have come together slightly more often than in the pre-EU-accession period, Presidents at least once a year. The heads of Parliaments of the VG<sup>72</sup> and Parliamentary EU Committees of the Visegrad countries have also held a few meetings since signing of the Declaration of Prime Ministers. Intensive collaboration has been developed especially between the Ministries of Interior in connection with the incorporation of the Visegrad region in the Schengen area. Communication of the V4 national Co-ordinators have been intensified as well (they have met more often than before 2004). However, I have not found any publicly accessible evidence of a more frequent or concentrated collaboration of national Co-ordinators/ Permanent Representations to NATO and other international forums (except the EU<sup>73</sup>). At the level of civil society, the International Visegrad Fund founded in 2000 has become the most active base for organized co-operation within the V4, as well as between the VG and non-Visegrad countries. Thanks to its co-financing, sessions have been held and initiatives and projects implemented by youth, artists, scientists, representatives of municipalities, non-governmental organizations (hereinafter NGOs), schools, etc. Moreover, following the entry of the Visegrad countries to the EU, Visegrad co-operation "gained a new...self-government dimension" (Activity of the Polish presidency, 2005) with the emergence of the Forum of regions of the VG countries in 2004. It is a voluntary association of municipalities and self-governing regions of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia; a platform for developing co-operation of sub-national administration units interconnected on the basis of territoriality, culture and history; facing similar challenges regarding their social and economic development, mainly in the context of the V4 countries' membership in the EU ("Fórum regiónov," n.d., para. 2). Since 2004,

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<sup>72</sup> An agreement institutionalising the Visegrad co-operation at this level was signed on 18 April 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Visegrad EU Ambassadors have used to meet on a monthly basis (Rettman, 2010).

sessions of the Forum of regions accompanied by festivals of Visegrad culture has been organized by particular Visegrad countries' self-governing regions on a yearly basis.

Thus, one can see there have been enough opportunities for communication and developing co-operation of representatives of governments and public administrations in the V4 format since the VG countries joined the EU. While Prime Ministers' and Presidents' summits are mostly of a symbolic value, practical content of the Visegrad co-operation is provided by particular Ministries and overall co-ordination by Ministries of Foreign Affairs<sup>74</sup>. Co-ordinators' role is an ascertainment of a real interest in the co-operation of the Four, initialization and evidence of project activities, identification and interconnection of corresponding expert bodies, demarcation of main VG co-operation areas, and organization of the meetings of the highest political representatives of the Visegrad countries ("Informace o Visegádské skupině," n.d., para. 13).

How is the internal power of making proposals and decisions distributed within the V4? The existing even distribution corresponds with the proposition of the theory of Groupthink, according to which the smaller the group in number of its members, the more evenly the power should be distributed among them (and the comparatively lesser the formal structure or hierarchy of power is required). There are only four Visegrad members. Hence, equal say of each member within the Group, commensurate equal financial contributions of the four countries to the budget of the IVF, and rotating one year presidency of the VG are a suitable pattern<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> There are no special departments dealing with the agenda of the V4 co-operation. Department of Central Europe at the MFA of the Czech Republic (V. Pořízová, Czech MFA, e-mail communication, 12 October 2009), Department of Central and Southern Europe at the Polish MFA (L. Hensel, Polish MFA, e-mail communication, 16 October 2009) and Department of Central and Northern Europe and neighbourhood relations at the MFA of the Slovak Republic are in charge of co-ordinating the co-operation in the V4 format. But the Departments mentioned maintain and develop relations with other (non-Visegrad) countries as well (for example with Slovenia, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland etc.) and other Departments at the MFAs, depending on a topic discussed, can be involved as well. Moreover, there is quite a high level of fluctuation of employees at these co-ordinating Departments (J. Sýkora, IVF, personal communication, 23 July 2009). Only at the Hungarian MFA there are relatively stable posts dealing specifically with the V4 agenda (ibid.): two people at the Regional Subdivision within the EU Foreign and Security Policy Department and one at the Consular Department (dealing with the V4 in consular matters) (K. Kókai, Hungarian MFA, e-mail communication, 14 October 2009).

<sup>75</sup> "The rotation of the annual presidency...provides an opportunity for the country holding it to raise its own profile on international issues, and to make an impact on the direction the Visegrad Cooperation is taking." (Simonyi, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 96)

- **International Visegrad Fund**

The decision to establish the IVF was made at informal meeting in Javorina (Slovak Republic) on 16 October 1999. Prime Ministers of Visegrad countries agreed upon the “need to create a common Fund to support cultural, scientific and promotional projects in which all four countries participate” (Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 46) and Bratislava was chosen as its headquarters. “The main idea behind the IVF was to complement the external dimension of cooperation with concrete activities in the internal sphere...Furthermore, the IVF has been perceived as an important tool for fostering and strengthening the incursion of VG cooperation into the civic domain and public awareness.” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 645) An official agreement establishing the IVF was signed and the first meeting of the highest body of the IVF – Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs – was held in Štířín (Czech Republic) on 9 June 2000. It has a status of international organization.

One should realize that the Fund is an executive, predominantly bureaucratic body, not a policy-making agency which could or should set the agenda of the Visegrad co-operation. Nevertheless, although not being “a brain” of the Visegrad regional team work, it has become an irreplaceable segment of the Visegrad Group’s construction. The IVF has been the only permanent Visegrad institution, and the only one putting “into practice what the V4 has prepared in theory” (Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2008).

Governing bodies of the Fund are the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs<sup>76</sup> (hereinafter the Conference of MFA) and the Council of Ambassadors<sup>77</sup>. The executive body is the Executive Director<sup>78</sup> together with his/ her Deputy<sup>79</sup>. It is a custom that the

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<sup>76</sup> It is the IVF supreme body. Presidency held by one of the MFAs rotates in one-year intervals in the English alphabetical order of the names of the Visegrad countries. The President schedules place and date of the Conference session, at least once a year. The Conference of MFA determines the amounts of annual contributions, approves annual and long term plans regarding activities of the Fund, Rules of Procedure of the Secretariat and of the Council of Ambassadors, budget of the IVF and its clearance, rules governing the use of financial means of the Fund, as well as annual statements presented by the Council of Ambassadors. (Statute of the IVF, 2000)

<sup>77</sup> It is composed of Ambassadors of the V4 countries accredited to the head of the state whose plenipotentiary is presiding over the Conference of MFA, plus a plenipotentiary of this state holding presidency. The Ambassadors meet at least once every six months. They prepare drafts of the IVF budget, programs of the Fund’s activities, report on their utilization and implementation in the previous year and submit them for approval to the Conference of MFA. Additionally, they propose programs and documents for sessions of the Conference of MFA, lay down binding guidelines for the Executive Director’s and his/ her Deputy’s activity, as well as rules governing the preparation, acceptance and implementation of projects submitted to the Fund. It can amend the Rules of Procedure of the Secretariat. (Ibid.)

<sup>78</sup> He/ she heads the Secretariat, represents the Fund, is responsible for implementation of its objectives, and participates in sessions of the Council of Ambassadors as an advisory capacity (informs about the Fund’s activities, prepares annual statements and clearance of the IVF budget). (Ibid.)

Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director incumbent simultaneously comes from two different Visegrad countries. The administrative body of the Fund is the Secretariat<sup>80</sup>. The official language used is English. (Statute of the IVF, 2000)

As each Visegrad government subsidizes IVF with the equal sum of money, there is a rule of distributing roughly even rate of approved financial contributions to projects among the applicants from the four countries<sup>81</sup>. According to Jiří Sýkora; in charge of V4 Public Relations, Public Relations of the Fund and Visegrad+ Program co-ordination; an underlying philosophy or a reason is to give tax payers of the V4 countries the share they participate in the IVF budget composition back (personal communication, 23 July 2009). Therefore, some observers' suggestions that it would be worthy to consider whether following this rule is not contra-productive as regards preferring projects of a lower quality to superior ones (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 23) will most likely not find backing for realization. Similarly, if for example Slovakia required re-counting sum of money put into the IVF budget on the per capita basis, it would have to be ready to accept a re-distribution of power/ re-counting of votes within the Group at the same time.

Contributions of individual countries to the Fund have had an increasing tendency over time. The difference between the first annual budget and the current one is striking. Initially, each government released EUR 250 000 for the Fund's purposes, thus comprising its very first EUR 1 million budget. In 2009 individual countries' contributions amounted to EUR 1.25 million. A total annual budget for a year 2010 is EUR 6 million, composed of equal EUR 1.5 million contributions of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic. Growing annual Visegrad countries' subsidies to the Fund as well as accumulative interest in grants offered<sup>82</sup> testify to the importance the V4 governments constantly attach to the activities of the IVF and to a rising popularity among public. Thanks to the Fund, year after year, more and more projects of co-operation at the

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<sup>79</sup> Each contracting party has the right to nominate its own candidate for the position of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director. They are appointed by the Conference of MFA. The term of their office is three years, it can be renewed once. (Ibid.)

<sup>80</sup> It provides assistance to sessions of the Council of Ambassadors and of the Conference of MFA (ibid.). Ten people altogether led by the Executive Director and his/ her Deputy (Project Managers, Project Controllers, Public Relations Officer, Financial Manager, Secretaries) work at the IVF Secretariat and ensure overall functioning of the Fund.

<sup>81</sup> See the Appendix 3. Moreover, financial support is allocated to non-Visegrad countries as well and its rate has been growing (from roughly 3% in 2005 to 16% in 2008).

<sup>82</sup> Number of applicants (in all grant schemes) has increased. See the Appendix 4.



Visegrad level (but also spanning the borders of the four Visegrad countries) submitted by various subjects have been realized.

The IVF has been flourishing because of working mechanism relatively independent of political debates within the VG (Rusnák, 2004, p. 3). This has been proven several times, for example during the V4 internal crisis early in 2002, caused by the attempt of re-opening of the Beneš Decrees (ibid.), and more recently in August-September 2009 when Hungarian-Slovak political communication was brought to the boil again due to the disputes over the Slovak language law and the planned controversial visit of the Hungarian President in Komárno, a town in southern Slovakia.<sup>83</sup>

### **3.2 Practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the EU**

As one may see from the observations on the level of institutionalisation and distribution of power within the VG, there have been enough opportunities for discussing and working on a development of the co-operation in the V4 format. This part of the chapter is to give an answer to the question how they have been utilized and converted into tangible results for more than five last years. The objective is to present an overview of practical contribution of actions initiated or put into practice thanks to the purposeful co-operation of the V4 governments' or public entities' representatives since the four states entered the EU.

#### **3.2.1 International Visegrad Fund**

The Fund's purpose is to enhance "development of closer co-operation among V4 countries (and other countries) through the support of common cultural, scientific and educational projects, youth exchanges, cross-border projects and tourism promotion"

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<sup>83</sup> Although the Fund may be dissolved exclusively by a unanimous decision of the Conference of MFA (subject to a prior consent of the participating countries), it is easy for each country individually to withdraw from the Fund. It may do so at any time. If a country withdraws, its membership will be terminated twelve months (Statute of the IVF, 2000).

("About us," n.d., para. 2)<sup>84</sup>, to create and anchor a sense of Visegrad togetherness and to promote "common presentation of the States of the Contracting Parties in third countries" (Statute of the IVF, 2000). It provides financing to activities of non-governmental entities, municipalities, schools and universities, as well as private companies and individual citizens (from the Visegrad, and gradually also more and more other than Visegrad countries<sup>85</sup>) through several grant schemes<sup>86</sup>; "thus significantly promoting the civic dimension of Visegrad cooperation. The Fund also grants individual scholarships and artist residencies which contribute to the exchange of views in the V4 region and the neighbouring countries." ("The Structure," n.d., para. 2) Generally, "the basic principle of the Fund is to support projects involving at least three (or better, all four) countries of the Visegrad Group" (Jagodziński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 213) and implementation of the projects co-financed by the IVF usually affect either wide public or certain categories of people (interest groups, specialists in various fields, etc.) in more V4 countries. Thus, the Fund helps to build social and inter-institutional partnerships and networks, to establish people-to-people contacts and relations within the Visegrad region as well as between the Visegrad region and non-Visegrad countries<sup>87</sup>.

- **Standard Grants**

Standard Grants have been promoted since the very beginning of the IVF existence. Areas supported through the Standard Grants are as follows: cultural co-operation, scientific exchange and research, education, youth exchange, cross-border co-operation and promotion tourism; albeit practically any field of activity of the society can be embraced in these officially set fields of collaboration (sport events, ecology seminars, sightseeing trips for pupils, etc.). ("Small Grants/Standard Grants," n.d., para. 1) "With the exception of cross-border cooperation, entities from at least three Visegrad...countries...must be

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<sup>84</sup> "In early stages there was a trend that the fund supported mostly education and culture projects...Applicants from the field of education and culture still prevail but the number of scientific projects is growing... The support for environmental activities is, as well, among...priorities... Environmental projects have always had their support since the countries are in the same space and indeed are trying to solve very similar problems." (Vágner, In Balogová, 2009, p. 7)

<sup>85</sup> "especially but not exclusively non-EU member states in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus" ("About us," n.d., para. 2)

<sup>86</sup> See the actual overview in the Appendix 5

<sup>87</sup> "The accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia to the European Union to a certain extent changed the principles on which the International Visegrad Fund works, which opened the door for applicants from other countries as well. Since 2004, institutions and organizations from all EU member states...can apply for a grant under the same conditions" (Jagodziński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 213) - they have to find project partners from at least two V4 countries, depending on the type of the grant, and the subject matter of the project has to be somehow related to the VG region (ibid.).

involved (e.g. a V4 organizer + at least two V4 partners)” in the project realization (ibid. para. 2), however, “it is advised...to include partners from all V4 countries” (ibid.). Any organization or individual in the world (except bodies directly financed from state budgets) “is eligible for the funding provided that the proposed project has ‘Visegrad’ features” (ibid.). Every year there are two deadlines for submitting projects within the Standard Grants scheme, in March and in September. The sum required must not represent more than 50% of total project costs and it has to be more than EUR 5000, i.e. EUR 5001 at least (this limit has been changed only recently, in the past it used to be EUR 4001 at least. Time frame for utilizing the Standard Grant must not exceed twelve months.

- **Small Grants**

Small Grants have been offered since 2002. The areas of co-operation granted and the eligibility criteria are the same as within the Standard Grants. Differences can be seen in frequency of calls for proposals open, amount of financial subsidy and time frame for implementing projects. There are four deadlines for applying for the Small Grant annually - in March, June, September and December. Nowadays, grantees of the Small Grants may ask for a support up to EUR 5000 that must not cover more than 50% of the total project budget. The grant has to be spent within a period of six months.

The IVF web site contains lists of approved projects (not only of those subsidized by the Standard and Small Grants) and a database of potential co-organizing project partners that might be helpful for interested persons and institutions in preparing and submitting their project for the first time.

- **Visegrad Strategic Program**

The Visegrad Strategic Program (VStP) was established in 2005 to support implementation of important long-term projects of strategic importance for the Visegrad Group (Rules of Preparation, 2010). Although priority orientations for the VStP are defined annually by the four MFAs, reflecting priorities of particular VG presidency (ibid.); in order to ensure continuity, for instance three out of the four VStP priorities have been the same in 2008, 2009 and 2010 - sharing V4 know-how with neighbouring regions, good governance in the public sector, and the V4 promotion targeted at raising awareness of the Visegrad co-operation. In addition to these, creating better conditions for scientific research, environmentally-friendly motif of building a “green Visegrad”, and Roma inclusion have

occurred among priority goals of the VStP in the recent years. Grantees (both from Visegrad as well as non-Visegrad countries) have to co-organize the project with partners from all other VG countries, within a given time frame which is 12-36 months (ibid). Projects within the VStP can be supported by the Fund up to 50% of total project costs (ibid.).

- **Visegrad Scholarship Program**

The IVF “offers Master's and Post-Master's scholarships awarded to selected scholars for periods of 1 or 2 semesters (with the exception of Master's scholarships within the In-Coming scheme where 1- to 4-semester scholarships can be awarded)” (“Visegrad Scholarship Program,” n.d., para. 1), thus “to facilitate academic exchanges...among the specified countries” (Rules, 2009)<sup>88</sup>. Moreover, the Visegrad Scholarship Program (VSP) benefits not only individuals (young students and researchers) but also universities and institutions of academies of sciences receiving a generous financial subsidy for hosting them.

The decision to establish the VSP was made by the V4 Foreign Ministers in 2002 and has been effective since 2003. So-called Intra-Visegrad and Out-Going scholarships have been available since the very beginning, i.e. since the academic year 2003/2004. Intra-Visegrad scholarships have been directed at “scholars coming from one of the V4 countries...who plan to study in any V4 country other than that of their citizenship (at accredited universities or institutes of the respective national academies of sciences)” (ibid. para. 7). They have operated in favour of development of a Visegrad consciousness or a feeling of regional partnership (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 29) among young scholars from the V4. The first Out-Going scholarships were initially offered to postgraduate students from VG countries going to study outside of the Visegrad region, particularly in Western countries (Vágner, In Balogová, 2009, p. 2) in the academic years 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. Following the accession of the Four to the EU, orientation of the Out-Going scholarships has shifted to the East and South-East Europe. From 2005 on, Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak “outstanding students or Master's degree holders” (“Visegrad Scholarship Program,” n.d., para. 9) have been allowed to apply for granting their study or a research stay in one of the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and

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<sup>88</sup> “The country of citizenship shall be different from the host country.” (Ibid.)

Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine, within the Out-Going scholarship program.

In 2004 the scope of the VSP was extended to include so-called In-Coming scholarships. In the academic year 2004/2005, citizens of Belarus, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine (Jagodziński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 213) were provided with an opportunity to spend part of their studies “at accredited universities or institutes of the respective national academies of sciences in V4 countries” (“Visegrad Scholarship Program,” n.d., para. 12). With changing circumstances<sup>89</sup> and priorities of the VG and thus of the IVF; target countries of the In-Coming scholarships have been re-set as well. Nowadays, interested students from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine are eligible applicants. Within the In-Coming scholarships, special programs were founded for Ukrainian and Belarusian students and researchers (the former in 2005, the latter in 2009). Owing to their specific value, they are elaborated into more detail thereafter, in the part devoted to the Visegrad Group’s involvement in the Europeanization processes. So is the **Visegrad+ Program** which started up in 2008.

- **Visegrad Artist Residency Program**

The Visegrad Artists Residency Program (VARP) was approved in 2006 and since 2007 it has benefited artists and authors by “facilitating art exchanges for applicants who are citizens of the Visegrad...countries” (“Visegrad Artist Residency Program,” n.d., para. 1) and giving them a chance to seek inspiration, knowledge and contacts; and to compose their pieces in a new environment during the three-month artist residency.<sup>90</sup>

- **Visegrad University Studies Grant**

The Visegrad University Studies Grant (VUSG) is designed to promote launching and development of distinctive “university courses or study programs (i.e. degree programs) that deal with...phenomena explicitly related to the Visegrad Group countries” (“Visegrad University Studies Grant,” n.d., para. 1) and “to cultivate...inter-university

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<sup>89</sup> for example Romania and Bulgaria entering the EU

<sup>90</sup> You can find a gallery containing selected works created within projects financed from the VARP on the IVF website: <http://www.visegradfund.org/gallery.html>.

cooperation...particularly but not exclusively in the social studies and humanities” (International Visegrad Fund welcomes, 2009). Since 2008 the grant program has been accessible to any public or private university department, faculty or school in the world (“Visegrad University Studies Grant,” n.d., para. 1, 2) able to document a syllabus/ curriculum for such a course/ program, confirm its planned long-term enrolment (ibid. para. 2) and “to secure at least two relevant quest lecturers from two different V4 countries (other than that of the applicant)” (International Visegrad Fund welcomes, 2009). The amount of support is EUR 15,000 for each selected course and EUR 50,000 for every degree program awarded (“Visegrad University Studies Grant,” n.d., para. 2).

In order to raise awareness about its achievements and possibilities it has been offering, the IVF has developed various promotional activities, for instance presentations in recipient countries. In addition, during the Polish presidency 2008/2009 the Fund’s grants and scholarships were officially presented to EU partners in Brussels for the first time at a conference on the EU scholarship system addressing Western Balkans countries (Executive Report, 2009, p. 2).

In 2010 the IVF is celebrating a significant anniversary. It will have been ten years since the Fund started its operation. “The majority of the events supported by the Fund would probably never have happened without its help, while the rest would have been organized on far smaller scale.” (Jagodziński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 213) Moreover, the IVF with its sponsorship of “cultural, scientific and educational projects, exchanges between young people, cross-border cooperation and tourism promotion, is a very good example of the regional dimension reinforcing initiatives at the European level” (Barroso, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 185).

The functioning of the IVF and its outcomes are even so impressive that sometimes those who have been acquainted with the Fund stop differentiating between the Visegrad Group and the Fund. They somehow forget that it is the official regional co-operation of representatives of governments and public administrations at the level of the V4 “behind the scene”, not the IVF per se, which is responsible for existence of the programs helping to realize so many valuable ideas, and to which they owe thanks for supporting their projects. A telling example is a sentence in one application for a grant submitted to the

Fund which I found by accident during my internship at the IVF: “The purpose is a popularization of traditional jazz among the states of the Visegrad Fund”. In fact, there are no states of the Visegrad Fund, but of the Visegrad Group.

### **3.2.2 Visegrad Group’s participation in the Europeanization/ EU-ization**

The Visegrad countries share a natural geographical interest in widening of common rules of the EU behind the EU frontiers (Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 24), thus in the Europeanization, or, the EU-peization/ EU-ization as is it used by some authors (Benč, Bilčík, Duleba, & Najšlová, 2008, p. 53; Solioz, 2009, p. 7) due to the notorious disputes over what is and what is not “Europe”. However, their Europeanization efforts aimed at neighbouring East and South-East European regions and at the South Caucasus area to a certain extent as well have not been co-ordinated within the V4 framework. The only tangible exceptions of the V4 common activities serving to the purpose of Europeanization of countries outside the EU can be found again among the activities of the International Visegrad Fund.

- **Scholarships**

Within the scholarships offered by the IVF, Visegrad In-Coming Scholarship Program (since 2004)<sup>91</sup> together with special Scholarship Program for Ukrainian students (since 2005) and Scholarship Program for Belarusian students (since 2009) have played a role in Europeanization “by widening the horizons of the next generation of leaders/intelligentsia” (Dangerfield, 2009, p. 12). They have been enabling a flow of young scholars between the VG member states (being the EU member states at the same time) and non-EU member states; and a dissemination of knowledge and information about the VG and the EU, inter alia. These scholarships are supposed to allow students at the Master’s or PhD-level and researchers from East European, Western Balkans, South Caucasus countries and from Russia to spend part of their university studies or to conduct a part of their research in Visegrad countries and later bring their experience, knowledge or even some kind of know-how back home to be able to tackle the problems the V4 countries have been forced

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<sup>91</sup> Students from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kosovo, FYROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine are eligible applicants for the In-Coming scholarships.

to tackle alike in recent past (Report on Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2004). Interestingly, “more Ukrainians receive scholarships funded by the Visegrad Four<sup>92</sup>...than by the rest of the EU put together” (Kucharczyk & Lovitt, 2008, p. 21).

Presenting the purpose of In-Coming, Ukrainian and Belarusian scholarships in a way that they have been designed to allow students and researchers from the non-EU member countries to experience studying and living in the EU, bring knowledge and findings gained to their homeland and use them for solving similar problems the VG countries have been faced with, to be able to improve situation or some particulars of their public and civil sectors and import new information, norms and thinking; may create an impression that only scholars in the fields of political science, economics, international relations, public policy, and other similar branches potentially have been eligible applicants. However, currently this is not the case. There has been no limitation on the applicants’ study or research specialization for the last couple of years. Except the students of social and political sciences; students of chemistry, mathematics, literature, linguistics, informatics, etc. have also been granted the scholarships. On the one hand, it is definitely useful to provide students of natural sciences and other fields mentioned with the opportunity to get acquainted with different approaches and information related to their specialization as well. On the other hand, it is legitimate to doubt the “Europeanization impact” in case of such types of professional orientations of those studying or doing research in the V4 countries because these stays have hardly contributed to the fulfilment of the In-Coming, Ukrainian and Belarusian scholarships aim – “that the students return home...and use what they have learned to improve the state administration or other areas of public life in their home country” (Stanková, 2009a, p. 5).

At the launch of the Visegrad Scholarship Program in the academic year 2003/2004, Europeanization was promoted in the opposite direction, towards academia of the VG countries (D. Pekaríková<sup>93</sup>, IVF, e-mail communication, 3 February 2010). So within the Out-Going scholarships, Visegrad scholars were sent to be educated in Western Europe and “Europeanized”. Only those focusing on European integration, law, and other EU-related branches in their studies and surveys were being eligible applicants. The same

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<sup>92</sup> for the most part from the International Visegrad Fund

<sup>93</sup> Dana Pekaríková has been working at the IVF as a Program Manager in charge of the Visegrad Scholarship Program, Visegrad Artist Residency Program and Visegrad University Studies Grant.



requirements were defined at the IVF website for the field orientation of students from the V4 willing to apply for the Out-Going scholarships in the academic years 2004/2005 and 2005/2006. In-Coming scholarships run by the IVF since 2004 have been opened to studies on Central Europe. In the academic year 2006/2007 the Visegrad Scholarship Programs were opened to applicants from any fields of studies. However, the priority was given to scholars with the following scope: A) Intra-Visegrad Scholarships - Visegrad studies; B) In-Coming Scholarships - Studies on Central Europe; C) Ukrainian Scholarship Program - Enhancing the Region's Competitiveness. Since then, there has not been any precedence over the applicants' study or research specialization, or, it has not been strictly reviewed when deciding on applicants to be supported, though the applicant's focus on a problem present in his/ her homeland might have improved chances of success. (D. Pekaríková, IVF, e-mail communication, 3 February 2010) However, it is possible that the scope of the scholarships will be directed purely at political and social sciences again in the future.

“So the exchanges between young people funded by the International Visegrad Fund can be seen as...example of action at the regional level directly complementing efforts at the EU level in the fields of education, culture, citizenship and young policy.” (Barroso, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 185) Despite the likelihood that after coming back from the study or research stay, not all scholars have endeavoured to present new incentives in their workplaces, public or civil life, or to contribute with their knowledge and experience to the adjustment of certain standards, norms or rules valid in their homeland to those applied in the EU; they have gotten in touch with different economic, political, social circumstances, policy styles, opportunities, etc. at least. They have become potential initiators and promoters of the Europeanization behind the EU frontiers.

- **Visegrad+ Program (Flexible Fund)**

The Visegrad+ Program (sometimes called the Flexible Fund) was launched in 2008 (when the first call for proposals was announced) “with the goal of maintaining the pro-European orientation” (“The International Visegrad Fund,” n.d., para. 4) in selected countries. Although it is by definition “a grant program created to administer and finance projects which contribute to the democratization and transformation processes in relevant countries and regions” (“Regulations for,” n.d., Art. 1), one should remember that “the V4 countries are still going through a transition in their own civil society sectors” (Kucharczyk & Lovitt, 2008, p. 23) as well as in their public sectors. In addition, is the EU; whose formal

and informal norms, standards (institutional, legal, technical, etc.), “ways of doing things” (Radaelli, In Featherstone & Radaelli (Eds.), 2003, p. 309) the Union and its members have been trying to spread to the neighbouring territories; democratic?<sup>94</sup> Hence I would rather not use the term “democratisation” in respect of the Visegrad+ Program and generally of the Group’s influence over transformation processes in non-EU member states.

A person or an organization is eligible to apply for financial support of a project within the Visegrad+ Program scheme, provided the project submitted entails a co-operation of at least two entities from the two different Visegrad Group countries (“Regulations for,” n.d., Art. 5). “Unless stipulated otherwise in the contract, the project will be financed by the Fund up to 100% of the total project costs” and “the time frame for the projects is up to 3 years” (ibid. Art. 8, 9).

The first beneficiary of the Visegrad+ Program was Belarus with a project focusing on media promotion of the IVF scholarships and support of several independent Belarusian newspapers before the parliamentary elections in Belarus in September 2008, funded by EUR 80 000. There have been three calls for proposals within the Program published so far and they have only been addressed to Belarus and Serbia. But Georgia, Ukraine and some other non-EU member countries are potential beneficiaries during next presidencies of the V4 because deciding on the target countries depends on priorities of the concrete VG presidency and the Group’s foreign policy priorities. As regards a focus of projects within the Visegrad+ Program, for instance areas contained in the last call for proposals (with the deadline in October 2009) aimed at sharing experience of the VG countries with the target ones were as follows: reforms in the education system (call for Belarus); challenges of the European integration of V4 countries (call for Serbia); civil society and political parties (call for Serbia). (J. Sýkora, IVF, e-mail communication, 2 February 2010; [www.visegradfund.org](http://www.visegradfund.org)) Thus, by combining the VG priorities with the needs of

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<sup>94</sup> The “EU’s democracy deficit” is a huge topic for discussion. Let me mention just one example of the EU lacking in democracy concerning the EU member states acceded in 2004 and their relation to their Eastern neighbours: “In the course of the accession process, the then candidates brought their visa regimes and foreign trade relations with the East European countries in line with EU requirements having, naturally, to meet the membership conditions, not so much to discuss them. The very fact that the new member states are responsible for implementing policies and programmes developed without their participation, represents a challenge to ‘democratic political legitimacy’ per se.” (Duleba, 2007, p. 7)

beneficiary countries, this program has been fostering the Europeanization process in the Union's neighbourhood.

- **Visegrad+ instrument**

Not only the scholarships and the Visegrad+ Program mentioned above, but almost all the grants offered by the IVF (Small, Standard, Strategic, Visegrad University Studies Grant; with the exception of the Visegrad Artist Residency Program) are available for applicants from other, non-Visegrad countries as well; thus applicable (and applied in fact) within a so-called Visegrad+ (policy) instrument which is directed at the co-operation of individuals and organizations from the Visegrad region with out-of -Visegrad partners (most of all from the East and South-East Europe but also from Austria).<sup>95</sup> There is a condition that a non-Visegrad grantee has to co-organize the project with at least two other partners from different V4 countries. This ensures a larger regional scope of the co-operation and its impact. The Visegrad+ instrument which has enabled co-organizing of various projects (mainly in the realm of culture, education and research) and meetings of high political representatives in the V4+ format has become a tool the VG governments have used for participating in the Europeanization processes in the territories of the EU neighbourhood. Visegrad Summer School (introduced thereafter) attended by young people not only from the Visegrad countries but from the South Caucasus region, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Kosovo, etc. as well, is also an example of applying the Visegrad+ instrument. The fact that a share in the IVF budget distributed to non-Visegrad recipients has increased since the establishment of the Fund and to date has reached almost 20% of the total IVF financial spending on grants and scholarships cannot be omitted.

### **3.2.3 Contributing to the advancement of science, research, youth training and education within the region**

Science and research belong to the branches highly encouraged by the Group and its Fund. Scholarships and many nonrecurring projects implemented thanks to the IVF grant schemes have contributed to the development of scientific and research co-operation

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<sup>95</sup> An example of the Visegrad+ project financed by the IVF is a program of co-operation between medium-sized Ukrainian and Visegrad cities (Štindl, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 100) submitted by the Institute of Society Transformation in Kyiv.

among individuals and organizations at the V4 level (including conferences, competitions, common publications, etc.). Except that, a few repeating as well as continuous actions offering additional possibilities for realization and advancement of potential of academia in the Visegrad countries (including young people) have emerged and gradually acquired attention of governmental representatives followed by their consequent approval for financial support from the IVF budget:

- **The Visegrad Group of Academies**

Networking and collaboration of Academies of Sciences in the V4 countries (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Polish Academy of Sciences and Slovak Academy of Sciences) was institutionalised in 2000 and labelled “The Visegrad Group of Academies”. Delegations of Visegrad Academies of Sciences (hereinafter VASs) have met (on a rotation basis in order Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic) twice a year until 2005 when the number of meetings was reduced to one meeting yearly. In the period of concern for this thesis, i.e. following the Visegrad countries’ entry to the EU, the VASs established an English electronic database of abstracts of articles and reviews called “Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities” in October 2004; they have awarded outstanding young researchers with the “Visegrad Group Academies Young Researcher Award” since 2005; organized scientific conferences, summer schools and training programs for young scientists; developed co-operation with other scientific bodies (for instance from Austria and the United Kingdom); co-operated when participating in activities of international scientific organisations, running both at European and worldwide scale; they have jointly applied for financial support for several research projects and implemented them together; launched its website in 2007 (<http://v4.avcr.eu/>); etc. These and other common activities stimulating and allowing scientific and research co-operation among Visegrad countries have been financed by the VASs themselves and by the IVF as well. (<http://v4.avcr.eu/history.php>)

- **Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities**

The “Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities” (hereinafter CEJSH) was launched in October 2004 as one of the projects realized by the Visegrad Group of Academies. It has been largely co-financed by the IVF. “The objective was to establish an electronic, open-access journal publishing English abstracts of articles and reviews that appear mostly in national languages in scientific journals devoted to social sciences and

humanities in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic as well as in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine” (“About the Central European Journal,” n.d., para. 2) and to boost overview and visibility of scholarly publications unknown even to neighbours due to a language barrier and a limited circulation of many national journals (ibid.). The CEJSH database is available at the address <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/>, and to date (mid-February 2010) it has offered an access to almost fifteen thousand abstracts published in more than two hundred scientific journals covering disciplines such as anthropology, arts and architecture, economics, ethnology, law and administration, media and communication, philosophy, political sciences, psychology, sociology, theology, etc. (see the official CEJSH website <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/>). Editorial and publishing board is composed of one editor from each Visegrad country’s Academy of Sciences (“About the Central European Journal,” n.d., para. 4).

- **Visegrad Group Academies Young Researcher Award**

Based on the decision of the Visegrad Group of Academies in 2004, every member Academy of Sciences has been allowed to nominate one laureate awarded the “Visegrad Group Academies Young Researcher Award” since 2005. The award consists of “a diploma and financial means to cover the costs of participation in one European scientific conference” (“Regulations of the Visegrad Group Academies,” n.d., para. 10) according to the particular winner’s preference. Young researchers from the V4 countries up to 35 years and “employed by research units of the V4 Academies” (ibid. para. 1) are eligible to apply for the nomination within the internal competition announced by their national Academy of Sciences. Thus, four researchers are awarded each year for their achievements in one scientific field set by the VASs (2005 – Social Sciences and Humanities; 2006 – Structural and Evolutionary Biology; 2007 – Physical Science and Astronomy; 2008 – History, Archaeology and Ethnography; 2009 – Neurosciences and related behavioural sciences). (<http://v4.avcr.eu/awards.php>)

Furthermore, except the IVF scholarships, Visegrad Artist Residency Program, Visegrad University Studies Grant and projects once supported by the Fund; several yet traditional activities promoting Visegrad regional collaboration in the field of education and training, whether granted by the IVF occasionally or regularly, made further worthy contributions to ambitious young people in the V4 countries:

- **“Olympic Hopes” tournament**

An “initiative to integrate young people from neighbouring countries” (Executive Report, 2009, p. 16) and “a separate field of V4 countries’ sports-related co-operation is that of a system of ‘Olympic Hopes’ competitions for gifted young athletes, resulting from the memorandum of co-operation signed in 1994 in Zakopane” (ibid.) by the VG countries. The tournament organized once a year has been supervised by the committee composed of representatives of respective Ministries and Olympic Committees of the Visegrad countries (2009/2010 Hungarian Presidency, 2009). The committee has held annual meetings “in one of the member states to discuss reports drafted following the given year’s tournaments, and to approve the event agenda for the upcoming year” (Executive Report, 2009, p. 16). The Olympic Hopes system has enabled “young athletes to participate in competitions abroad in order to expand their experience in and contact with international tournaments” (ibid.), so to test their sport performances and compare them first with competitors within the region, before finding themselves at major international sporting events. I have not found any evidence it has been co-financed by the IVF.

- **Visegrad Youth Association**

A broader youth platform co-ordinated in the V4 framework is represented by the Visegrad Youth Association (hereinafter VYA). It was established by twelve youth organizations from V4 countries in 2005 (Minárik, 2005), referring “to the tradition of the Visegrad Youth Confederation – coalition of youth organizations from the V4 countries which started their cooperation in 2001” (“Visegrad Youth Association,” n.d., para. 2). It is a politically neutral international NGO uniting youth bodies and individuals from the VG countries (“Visegrad Youth Association,” n.d., para. 1). The official language used within the scope of the VYA performance is English.

Annual Visegrad Youth Conferences, the major events organized by the VYC and VYA later on, have taken place in the Visegrad countries in rotation from 2001 till 2007 under the auspices of VG’s Ministers of Foreign Affairs with support of the IVF and the European Commission (Minárik, 2005). They have been accompanied by workshops, lectures and seminars enabling exchange of experience and development of practical skills in the realm of NGO management, fundraising, applying for and administering the EU structural funds, etc. Depending on a scope of the particular Conference, ambassadors of the VG countries, representatives of the MFAs and other Ministries have attended the

Conferences and given speeches to the young audience on the issues discussed. Since the seventh Visegrad Youth Conference in Banská Bystrica in April 2007, I have not found a notion of any further Conferences, and the VYA website ([www.visegradyouth.org](http://www.visegradyouth.org)) has not been probably updated since 2006. Nevertheless, members of the VYA (i.e. non-governmental, mostly youth organizations, specialized university centres and departments, as well as individuals - “students, graduates, young professionals and NGO leaders” (Lejman, 2005) from the V4 countries) and “observers from other European countries” (ibid.) (for example Bulgaria, Romania or Croatia) may have took a lot from participation in the Conferences and other VYA doings strengthening regional co-operation of active young people and organizations.

- **Visegrad Summer School**

Likewise the Visegrad Youth Conferences, also the Visegrad Summer School (VSS) - a two-week interdisciplinary educational program - has been organized on the annual basis by the Villa Decius Association in Krakow every July since 2002. The VSS has provided students, graduates, PhD. researchers, NGO leaders, etc. with an opportunity to discuss and form opinions on current political, social, security, economic, and cultural issues (Kubášek, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 156) “and challenges relevant to the Visegrad Group region, the European Union and the CEE countries” (“Visegrad Summer School 2009”, n.d., para. 1) in company with Ambassadors, “recognized academics, political analysts, journalists and other regional experts” (Stanková, 2009b, p. 5)<sup>96</sup>. Every year about fifty active young people coming mostly from Visegrad, but also from East and South-East European countries (ibid.), studying or working in the field of international relations, public policy, political science, European studies, law, economics, sociology, journalism and other corresponding disciplines have been selected to participate in the VSS. During the two weeks, they have attended lectures and workshops, study visits and some cultural program.

The VSS “had its eighth edition in 2009, and as such perhaps deserves the status of a traditional event” (ibid.). It has gained a continuous financial support of the Fund, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and several private sponsors. This youth- and education-oriented co-operation has created an “alternative learning space” (Kubášek, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 156) for young people with a potential to influence or become

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<sup>96</sup> For instance, in 2009 participants have dealt with “the missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, the introduction of the European single currency in Slovakia,” etc. (Stanková, 2009b, p. 5).

political, cultural, economic or other professional elites of their countries in the near future ("Visegrad Summer School 2009", n.d., para. 1).<sup>97</sup>

“The Visegrad phenomenon has also inspired other youth civic groups such as the Civil-Democratic Youth in Slovakia, which has convened meetings of representatives of politically active youth of V4 conservative parties, ...Jagello 2000, which holds student debates on defence and security issues following the membership of the V4 countries in NATO” (Kubášek, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 157), and many others.

### 3.2.4 Cultural co-operation of the V4 countries

Cultural interactivity within the Visegrad region also belongs to the areas widely promoted by the IVF. The following are projects persistently sponsored by the IVF, highlighted in primary and secondary sources and touching a large audience; plus one art historian information network not co-financed by the Fund (I have not found any notion of such sponsorship) but provided by public institutions from the V4 countries. (There have been plenty of common Visegrad-level projects on literature, theatre, fine arts, music<sup>98</sup> and other branches of culture. However, most of them have not involved patronage or participation of V4 governmental or other public structures; neither have many of them succeeded in receiving a financial injection from the IVF more than once.)

- **Visegrad Days**

A tradition of organizing so-called Visegrad Days in Košice every year (regularly granted by the IVF) has been maintained after the V4 countries' accession to the EU. It is a two-month cultural festival of “theatre, music and fine art” (Experts' Report on the approved or implemented projects, 2010) produced by authors and artists from the Visegrad countries. This series of exhibitions, concerts and theatre performances has been aimed at spreading of a feeling of togetherness or fellowship and promoting inter-cultural dialogue among Visegrad citizens and artists ("O festiiale," n.d., para. 4).

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<sup>97</sup> Useful information related to the VSS and some outputs of previous editions can be found at: [http://www.villa.org.pl/e\\_index.php](http://www.villa.org.pl/e_index.php), [www.visegradsummerschool.org](http://www.visegradsummerschool.org) / [www.visegradsummerschool.eu](http://www.visegradsummerschool.eu).

<sup>98</sup> Interesting example is “a Slovak-Czech-Polish-Hungarian ensemble” (Uhríková, 2009, p. 8) of four violoncellists established in 2005 under a label Visegrad Cello Quartet. It has regularly sold out concert halls throughout the Central Europe, contributed “to familiarise local audiences with contemporary classical music in V4 countries” (ibid.), become a symbolic expression of a musical dimension of the VG co-operation.



- **International Visegrad Prize**

Since 2005, outstanding achievements of individuals and legal entities in developing cultural co-operation of the VG countries during the previous four years have been annually awarded the International Visegrad Prize (Statutes of the International Visegrad Prize, 2004), also known as Visegrad Cultural Prize (hereinafter the Prize). Statutes of the Prize were adopted by V4 Ministers of Culture in November 2004, based on the recommendation of Visegrad Prime Ministers. Except diploma and badge, an awarded receives financial acknowledgement of EUR 20 000 at least, withdrawn from the annual budget of the IVF (*ibid.*). Nominations are made by the V4 Ministries of Culture (one nomination per country) and the winner is chosen and given the Prize by the Ministers of Culture (*ibid.*).<sup>99</sup> Thanks to the Prize, promoters of cultural co-operation in the Visegrad region have been appreciated morally as well as materially and this might serve as a motivating factor for those involved in the cultural life to make the effort to develop such a co-operation further on.

- **Literary Anthology of Visegrad 4 Countries**

Another project approved by Four's Ministers of Culture in January 2007 has been aimed at the propagation of the Visegrad literature. Co-operation of editors from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in selecting pieces of contemporary literature by young writers from the VG countries and translating them into five language versions (V4 national languages and English) resulted in publishing a book – a collection of these thirteen literary pieces called the Literary Anthology of Visegrad 4 Countries - in autumn 2007. The book was presented at international book fairs in each Visegrad country: in November 2007 in Bratislava, in 2008 in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest. In 2008, an English-Arabic version of the Anthology (entitled *The Stories from the Heart of Europe*) was made and presented in co-operation with the Egyptian Sphinx Publishing Agency and the Alexandria Library, *inter alia*, in January 2009. Presentations of the original editions, financially supported by the IVF again, have been reiterated in 2009 as well. Following their success, Spanish version and co-operation with the MERCOSUR countries on the

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<sup>99</sup> The first laureate (in March 2005) was “László Szigeti – an essayist, writer and director of the Kalligram publishing house” (Jagodziński, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 215) and a co-author of the idea to found the Visegrad library (*ibid.*). In 2006, International Cultural Centre in Krakow was awarded. In 2007, International Festival THEATRE Plzeň received the Prize for a systematic presentation of theatre plays by Visegrad authors. Mr. György Spiró, a Hungarian writer, poet, historian of literature and translator, was awarded in 2008. International Visegrad Prize 2009 has been recently given to Vladimír Godár, a Slovak classical music composer and writer.

matter is now (late February 2010) being under discussion.<sup>100</sup> (Press Release, 2008; Experts' Report on Progress, 2009; Experts' Report on the approved or implemented projects, 2010) The Literary Anthology of Visegrad 4 Countries has not been the only initiative allowing authors from the Visegrad region to publish their works in several languages and helping to familiarize the public with Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak literature. Numerous projects supported by the IVF have served this purpose. For instance, presenting young Visegrad authors on audio books has been granted several times or; two digitalisation colloquiums of librarians and specialists in charge of information technologies in respective V4 libraries were organized (in Banská Bystrica in 2006 and in Brno in 2008<sup>101</sup>) for the sake of experience and best practices sharing in the field of digitalisation of libraries as a method of documents protection as well as of improving public access thereto (Executive Report, 2009, p. 14).<sup>102</sup>

- **Art Historian Information from Central Europe**

Art Historian Information from Central Europe (AHICE) is an “internet portal run by art lovers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia” (In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 221) providing “information about current events in the domain of art history in the Visegrad region” (ibid.) in English. It was created by International Cultural Centre in Krakow, in co-operation with Moravian Gallery in Brno, National Office of Cultural Heritage in Budapest, and Department of Art History of the Comenius University in Bratislava. Many galleries, cultural institutes, houses of art, publishing houses, museums, design studios, foundations, institutes belonging to universities and academies of sciences, monuments boards, journals and libraries have joined the network in order to share information on their activities. The AHICE portal has been targeted at delivering useful and updated information on cultural, art history-related happenings<sup>103</sup> primarily to registered partner “institutions with a museum, research, educational or publishing

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<sup>100</sup> The Literary Anthology is available (and downloadable) at: <http://www.kulturpont.hu/v4anthology.php> or <http://www.litcentrum.sk/en/43139>.

<sup>101</sup> The second round of the colloquium was associated with a workshop hosting participants from non-Visegrad countries, too.

<sup>102</sup> The Visegrad Library project “assumed publication of four selected titles of the contemporary literature of the V4 countries each year, in all the V4 languages, as well as in French and German” (Experts' Report on Progress, 2009). A pilot version focused on such cross-translations of the V4 literary pieces was allegedly being realized in 2005-2006 thanks to a co-operation of publishers in the Visegrad countries. However, I have not found any evidence of its outcomes or continuation.

<sup>103</sup> including exhibitions, conferences, publications, calls for applications for cultural awards, etc.

activity” (“What is Ahice?,” n.d., para. 2), but the information on the portal is available also for individuals.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.2.5 Advertising the Visegrad Group - interactivity in using media

Four’s states have been presented and, more importantly, have presented themselves and the Visegrad Group collectively through mass media. Except routine brief reports on the V4 high-level political meetings in newspapers (in both printed and online version), television or radio news; several websites have been acquainting their followers or random visitors with the Visegrad reality in a sense. For instance, by looking at any of the V4 countries’ national versions of the well-known portal “EurActiv”<sup>105</sup> with the ending .cz/ .hu/ .pl/ .sk; one can discover that at the top of the website there are links just to the rest of the VG member countries’ national versions of the portal. Another example is an economically-oriented website <http://visegrad-investments.blogspot.com/><sup>106</sup> or one concerning waste management<sup>107</sup> with a separate section publishing news on the waste management somehow related to the Visegrad states: <http://wastemanagement.einnews.com/visegrad-group/>. There are surely even more websites specifically distinguishing the Visegrad region. Moreover, numerous IVF-sponsored websites have contributed to spread a perception of and knowledge in the Visegrad Group from different perspectives, be them those created ad hoc to present projects implemented within the Fund’s grant schemes<sup>108</sup> or those maintained and upgraded in the long run. One of the most notable is the one interlinked with the EurActiv portal which, inter alia, brings together information from all of its four national versions and includes some statistics on the V4 countries - [www.visegrad.info](http://www.visegrad.info). Last but not least, of course, the official portals of the IVF [www.visegradfund.org](http://www.visegradfund.org) and of the Visegrad Group [www.visegradgroup.eu](http://www.visegradgroup.eu) (listing all major events at the Visegrad level, containing basic information, official documents, reports from meetings, articles and analyses, useful corresponding links, even a V4 photo gallery and a translator, etc.) have been constantly

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<sup>104</sup> For more information, see [www.ahice.net](http://www.ahice.net).

<sup>105</sup> It is devoted to the EU-related news, commentaries, analyses, articles, etc.

<sup>106</sup> provided by the ITCB Consulting Ltd (economic and management consulting company)

<sup>107</sup> provided by the European Internet Network

<sup>108</sup> e.g. a website of the Visegrad Summer Film Festival organized in 2009 for the first time: <http://visegradfilm.com/en/>

updated<sup>109</sup>. These forms of interactivity in using media as a tool to advertise the V4 have been complemented by Four's own regional TV magazine.

- **TV magazine "Quartet"**

Not a separate Visegrad Group's TV channel as it has been intended to be created<sup>110</sup>, but a special TV magazine has been broadcasted at national TV stations of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia for around last ten years. It owes its existence to a partnership of eight territorial studios of the V4 countries' national TV stations (with public legal status)<sup>111</sup> founded in 1999 ("Kvarteto," n.d., para. 2). This cross-border monthly magazine called Quartet has belonged to one of its most important activities (ibid). Producers have consulted a thematic content of the magazine and their experience in annual working meetings (ibid. para. 5). They have been mapping various aspects of Visegrad citizens' life and interest in their reportages. To be more concrete, particular parts of the program have been focused on topics such as presentation of new relax centres in the region, reconstruction of monuments, comparison of conditions of a parental leave in the VG states, professional and non-professional military service, etc. During the first two years of broadcasting, each part was composed of eight reportages, two per country ("Tvorcovia," n.d., para. 3); afterwards it has been reduced to four reportages comprising one month edition, one per country ("Kvarteto," n.d., para. 3). The project and its own website containing information and archive of the magazine (<http://v4tv.eu>) have been supported by the IVF since 2002 (ibid.). The Quartet archive is also available on online portals of the national TV stations involved (e.g. <http://www.stv.sk/videoarchiv/relacia/kvarteto/>). Among other activities of the eight studios' partnership one can find a festival of TV programs produced by territorial TV studios from the V4 countries called "The Visegrad seal" ("Tvorcovia," n.d., para. 6).

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<sup>109</sup> Not only official editors (representatives of the IVF and MFAs) have replenished the official VG website. Since November 2006 a private company (Newton information technology) has been monitoring media in the four countries on behalf of the VG, searching for international information regarding the V4 co-operation, and publishing outputs of the monitoring at the VG website (Zhodnotenie, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> Plans have been "afoot to establish a Visegrad region television station, inspired by the French-German channel ARTE...The TV signal would not be encoded, and its reception would be free" (Kubášek, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 173). However, these plans (though, occurring in experts' debates repeatedly) have never been realized.

<sup>111</sup> i.e. regional studios in Ostrava and Brno (CZ), Szeged and Miskolc (HU), Rzeszów and Krakow (PL), and in Košice and Banská Bystrica (SK)

### 3.2.6 Common tourism promotion

Based on the VG Prime Ministers' initiative at the end of 2002, an intensive co-operation has been developed among National Tourist Boards of the four countries and respective Ministries<sup>112</sup>, aimed at a common tourism promotion of the Visegrad region at distant overseas tourist markets “whose tourists are more likely to take a longer roundtrip rather than visit a single country in the Central European region” (Kincses, In Liptáková, 2009b, p. 6 Spectator). So, the project of collaboration labelled “European Quartet - One melody” has been running since 2003 in accordance with the assigned scope of activities, featured products, and way the work was to be organized (Galla, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 163). An originally defined group of target countries – U.S., Japan and China – has been widened to include Russia, Brazil and India later on.

Representatives of the competent Ministries and heads of National Tourist Boards have worked out yearly marketing plans containing time schedules and clear specification of the division of labour among the V4 countries, in other words, countries' responsibility for performing particular tasks. At their meetings they have also discussed topical issues (for example anti-crisis provisions); and exchanged information and knowledge concerning tourism, statistical data and results of market researches. Common promotional activities have involved launching and updating the website [www.european-quartet.com](http://www.european-quartet.com) available in English, Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese language versions; preparation and presentation of a film spot on the V4 attractions (see <http://www.european-quartet.com/movie>); joint participation in tourist fairs in third markets; inviting travel industry subjects and the press to study tours to the region (so-called familiarisation or “fam” trips and press trips); road shows in the target countries connected with workshops and exhibitions (see for instance <http://www.european-quartet.com/roadshow>), introducing tourism possibilities to tour operators, travel agencies and journalists; distribution of advertising materials in various language versions (brochures, maps, etc.); e-learning program for the U.S. travel agents (nowadays registering more than 2000 participants and there is a plan to make the program available also to Russian travel agents in 2010). (European Quartet, 2007; Protocol, 2009; Krajiny V4 vstupujú, 2010) “The national tourist boards are especially jointly presenting

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<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland, Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Local Government of the Republic of Hungary, Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic

certain product groups such as capital cities and historical cities, spas, Jewish monuments, UNESCO sites and MICE (the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions segment of tourism)” (Lukáčová, In Liptáková, 2009b, p. 6). Initially, a yearly “membership fee” for the sake of financing the project implementation was EUR 50 thousand per country (Galla, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 165). With a rising scope of project-related activities and their target markets, the common budget has been increased to EUR 240 thousand and since 2007 to EUR 280 thousand (ibid.; K. Vysloužilová, Czech Tourism, e-mail communication, 25 January 2010).

Designers of the co-operation within the framework of the European Quartet have agreed that a common course of action, promoting the four countries as an integrated target destination of tourism, would create a value for potential tourists (Galla, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 163; European Quartet, 2007).<sup>113</sup> According to Mr. Gábor Galla, a CEO of the Hungarian National Tourist Office, at least “the travel habits of Americans and Japanese tourists illustrate that the Central European countries are highly appealing for tourists as a single package”. (In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 163)<sup>114</sup> While competing in some branches such as attracting foreign companies to build business in their markets; in this case the Visegrad countries have managed to put their potential, marketing ideas, efforts and money together in order to enrich and widen their offer of possibilities and information related to their tourist products.

### **3.2.7 Self-government dimension of the Visegrad co-operation**

As already mentioned, the Visegrad Four co-operation gained its formal self-government dimension with the emergence of the Forum of regions in 2004. However, except the annual sessions enabling discussions and information exchange, it has not accomplished any remarkable practical outcomes. Another project of collaboration among the VG countries’ municipalities and self-governing (sub-national) regions was started up in the

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<sup>113</sup> It really did as it can be seen in some statistics. See the Appendix 6.

<sup>114</sup> “If, for example, you meet an American tourist in Prague or Budapest, you can almost be sure that he is on a tour of more than the Czech Republic or Hungary. As for Japanese, the reason they rush off after taking so many pictures in one place is that they are determined to travel to four or five countries in the region within a week...” (Ibid.)

same year. Similarly, it has been grounded on annual conferences but these have been more focussed on a specific subject.

- **V4DIS (Visegrad Four for Developing Information Society)**

Since 2004, V4DIS two-day conference and meetings of working groups of experts from the V4 countries specializing in development of information society have comprised an international part of the annual ISSS/LORIS conference<sup>115</sup> (Informatizácia, 2007). It has won Přemysl Sobotka's patronage (who is the President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic) and persistent financial support of the IVF. The main organizer is a Czech NGO ("Czech At Association") co-operating with the Union of Towns and Cities of Slovakia, Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities and other self-governing entities, educational and research institutions, associations, partner town and cities from the Four's countries as well as from some countries neighbouring the Visegrad region (ibid.). Representatives of VG national governments and parliaments have also participated in the event (ibid.). Topics of concern have included e-government, e-tourism (with a focus on municipal attractions and destinations), and electronic services for citizens (online public administration portals). A benefit rests in international exchange of experience in application of information and communication technologies in public administration; and presenting sample cases derived from the four countries' praxis. Experience shows that close collaboration in this area (facilitated by the V4DIS) have contributed to a systematic development of e-government and to a progress in use of the information and communication technologies in the public administration and related services (not only in the V4 countries, but also in their neighbourhood). (Ibid.; Visegrad Four Conference, 2009; The V4DIS 2010 Conference, 2009) The conference of the V4 for Developing Information Society will have taken place for the seventh time in April 2010.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to the practical results of the Visegrad Four team work adduced up to this point, I have found one extra case of a co-operation of the VG countries' public officers (experts overseeing preparations for the accession to the Schengen area) potentially beneficial. In

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<sup>115</sup> LORIS (Local and Regional Information Society) conference aimed at town twinning and networking (not at the Visegrad co-operation per se) has been organized within the ISSS (Internet in State Administration and Self-Government) which is the biggest Czech national information and communication technology conference. (<http://www.loriseu.eu/>; <http://www.issc.cz/>)

<sup>116</sup> For more information, see the official website: <http://www.v4dis.eu/>.

order to elicit whether this collaboration mentioned in various sources had been useful in reality, and in what way, I have decided this to be the topic of concern for the single-case study comprising the last part of the research.

### **3.3 Case study: co-operation in preparations for joining the Schengen area at the level of the Visegrad Four**

At the outset, I consider it necessary to set a misleading jargon found in some official sources and consequently in some secondary ones referring to them<sup>117</sup> right: The co-operation of the Four in preparations for entering the Schengen zone has been several times mistakenly labelled as “enhanced”<sup>118</sup>. However, the phrase “enhanced co-operation” refers to a specific instrument the EU member states (that wish to work more closely and move forward at a different speed in order to achieve some goal) are allowed to use under certain conditions, among them, the enhanced co-operation cannot be applied to an ambit that falls within the exclusive Community competence<sup>119</sup>; at least eight countries had to be involved in the enhanced co-operation at that time<sup>120</sup>; etc. Obviously, employment of the enhanced co-operation in this case would have been neither pursuant to the *acquis communautaire*, nor even possible. Therefore, it would have been more appropriate to specify the co-operation at the V4 level herein simply as deepened, strengthened or intensified, if it deserves these characteristics at all.

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<sup>117</sup> See for example: Declaration of Visegrad Group Ministers of the Interior, 2004; Dangerfield, 2008; Druláková, 2007

<sup>118</sup> For instance: “On 11 September 2003, V4 Interior Ministers agreed to initiate enhanced cooperation in the preparations for joining Schengen...” (Declaration of Visegrad Group Ministers of the Interior, 2004); “... on Schengen preparations...moves to initiate enhanced cooperation had already been agreed at a meeting of VG interior ministers on 11 September 2003. This included the establishment of the V4 ‘Working Group for Schengen Cooperation’ with the brief to ‘check conditions and modalities for the joint submission by VG states of an application for participation in the Schengen cooperation’...” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 654); Druláková (2007, p. 11) used the phrase “enhanced co-operation” alike.

<sup>119</sup> The Schengen *acquis* as a part of the EU legislation had been divided between the first and third pillar instruments (Free movement, 2009), thus falling under the exclusive competence of the EU and under the non-exclusive competence in the latter case at the same time. The Dublin *acquis* inflected thereafter had belonged just to the first pillar, i.e. under the exclusive competence of the EU. (The three-pillar structure of the EU was abolished by adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon.)

<sup>120</sup> The Treaty of Amsterdam and the Treaty of Nice afterwards laid down rules for launching and managing enhanced co-operation initiatives (Brusis, 2002, pp. 80-81). In the period observed in this chapter (since 2004 till the accession to the Schengen at the end of 2007), eight countries minimum had to participate in enhanced co-operation. The Treaty of Lisbon (effective since 1 December 2009) determines new threshold of nine countries necessary to establish and practice enhanced co-operation.



### 3.3.1 Case description

The 2004 EU enlargement was the first one by which Schengen became a point dealt with before the accession itself, during the negotiation talks (Kaźmierkiewicz (Ed.), 2005, p. 82). Seeds of a co-operation aimed at a simultaneous integration of the Four into the Schengen system had also started as early as before the V4 countries entered the EU. These had included consultations at different levels (Ministers of Interior, Deputy Ministers, experts from the Ministries, Heads of border guards) and focused on various issues (asylum policy, problems of illegal migration, smuggling of weapons, etc.). Forasmuch as analysing the pre-EU-accession period is not the object of scrutiny in this thesis, I will not go into more detail. What is important, nevertheless, at their meeting in September 2003 Visegrad Interior Ministers agreed, inter alia, to consult and co-operate in preparations for entering the Schengen area; and set up “a joint group of experts consisting of high-ranked officers of the Visegrad Group countries responsible for the process of accession to the Schengen system” (Statement of the Ministers of the Interior, 2003). Thus, a Working group for Schengen co-operation at the level of Deputy Ministers of Interior with two subgroups - Expert group for SIS II<sup>121</sup> and Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis<sup>122</sup> - was established (Report on Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2004).

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<sup>121</sup> SIS is an acronym for the Schengen information system connecting respective police, judicial and customs authorities in countries of the Schengen area to each other as well as to the SIS Central office in Strasbourg, enabling these bodies to communicate, exchange data and co-operate particularly in search for wanted, missing or undesirable persons and objects. Since capacity of the original SIS (called SIS I) was designed for the twelve EU member states in early 1990s and modified to needs of eighteen countries maximum later on (so-called SIS I+), states involved in the 2004 wave of EU enlargement and being prepared to join the Schengen in 2007 had been supposed to be connected to the SIS of the second generation (SIS II). However, development and launching of the SIS II has been delayed several times and it has not been implemented so far. Due to the technical problems with the SIS II, removal of further internal borders and thus enlargement of the Schengen zone in 2007, according to an originally agreed schedule, had been endangered. Thanks to a substitute software solution for the SIS II, a so-called SISone4all developed and proposed by Portugal, endorsed by the Council in December 2006; nine new EU member states (except Cyprus willing to join only the SIS II) were connected to the SIS on 1 September 2007 and allowed to join the Schengen in December 2007. (Changes arising from the preparation, 2007; "Základné informácie," n.d., para. 3)

<sup>122</sup> Called after the place of signature of the first respective enactment - the Dublin Convention (signed in 1990, effective since 1997); the Dublin acquis regulating asylum and immigration policy and harmonizing corresponding rules is implemented concurrently by all EU member states and by those non-EU member states which are part of the Schengen zone. It consists of a so-called Dublin I effective since late 1990s and Dublin II legally binding for all new EU and non-EU but Schengen member states which joined the EU or the Schengen area after 2003 when new legislation on Dublin related issues was adopted. Thus, dealing with asylum seekers; determining responsibility of member states for examining asylum applications; laying of financial burden connected to treatment of asylum seekers and process of asylum administration among member states out; etc. has been legally regulated by and carried out in accordance with the Dublin Regulation (“Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national”) in all participating countries of the 2004 EU enlargement, the Visegrad ones inclusive. (Bieliková, 2004; World Wide Web)

Moreover, contact network of legal experts, who had communicated actual issues and possible problems concerning the application of Schengen acquis to national legislation in correspondence, was created (Report on results of activities, 2004).

As gaining the EU membership did not mean incorporation in the Schengen area and implementing whole Schengen acquis at the same time, non-participation in the Schengen information system (hereinafter SIS) and different visa regimes with the US (and Canada) have stimulated co-operation among the V4 states striving to achieve the same conditions in these matters as the old EU members (Druláková, 2007, pp. 10-11). At the momentous time of May 2004, in the afore mentioned Declaration, Visegrad Prime Ministers encouraged to co-operate, inter alia, in preparations for joining the Schengen. They were followed by VG Interior Ministers who confirmed their intent to submit applications of the V4 countries for full participation in the Schengen system at the same time and in the Declaration signed in Brussels on 19 June 2004 they stated several general prerequisites leading to this goal (for example harmonization of national Schengen Action Plans - their changes and updates, mutual consultations and notifications of any facts potentially causing delays in preparations, etc.). Many of those concerned have affirmed that relations between the VG countries had become much more co-operative in phase of preparations for entering the Schengen zone (Kaźmierkiewicz (Ed.), 2005, p. 9), and that continuing EU integration had led to intensified technical and operational collaboration among the institutions<sup>123</sup> involved in implementation of the Schengen acquis and in co-operation in justice and home affairs, within the Visegrad framework and at EU forums as well (Kaźmierkiewicz, Husz, Mišina, & Slosarčík, 2006, p. 76; Kaźmierkiewicz (Ed.), 2005, pp. 9-10).

The V4 Working group for Schengen co-operation bringing together Deputy Ministers of Interior and some other high-ranked officers of the Visegrad countries, held its initial session on 21 October 2003. Three meetings in 2004 (on 2-3 February, on 13-14 April, and on 15-16 June) focused on analyzing and harmonizing national Schengen Action Plans (hereinafter SAPs)<sup>124</sup> followed. (Declaration of Visegrad Group Ministers of the Interior, 2004)<sup>125</sup> The Working group has not held any further sessions.

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<sup>123</sup> Ministries of Interior, MFAs, border guards and police forces of the Visegrad states

<sup>124</sup> A questionnaire containing fourteen more or less broad questions (such as: Do sufficient financial, professional and personal capacities for fulfilment of the SAP exist?) had been worked out and filled in by

Despite of a general - informative and consultative - nature of the meetings realized, with regard to the degree of compatibility among Visegrad states' national SAPs achieved and the progress made in their implementation by each state (ibid.), applications of the VG countries for the accession to the Schengen zone were submitted jointly at the end of 2004 (Kaźmierkiewicz (Ed.), 2005, p. 85). Additionally, representatives of the Four approved the Polish proposal to send a common application for simultaneous evaluation of the V4 countries' readiness for the joint entry to the Schengen area expected in 2007 (ibid.). In autumn 2006, V4 Presidents (in September), Prime Ministers (in October), Presidents of Parliaments of the Visegrad states (in November) and V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs together with their counterparts from the Baltic trio countries (in November as well) expressed their firm interest in entering the Schengen zone in October 2007 in accordance with the originally agreed schedule, not later as it was being echoed from Brussels due to the technical problems with the SIS II at that time; appealing to the European Commission and the Council of the EU to reaffirm their commitments, to take measures allowing to meet this target, and to provide full, updated and transparent information about the status of the SIS II project. At the V4 Prime Ministers' summit on 18 June 2007, participants concluded they did not agree with Austrian and German efforts to keep border controls on borders of the Visegrad countries even after 1 January 2008 and such to delay their inclusion to the Schengen area<sup>126</sup> (Zhodnotenie, 2007). Nine new EU member states (except Cyprus) acceding to the Schengen started to use the substitute online information application SISone4all on 1 September 2007 and throughout September 2007 they passed evaluations of SIS and SIRENE<sup>127</sup> workplaces. VG states became members of the Schengen area on 21 December 2007<sup>128</sup>.

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representatives from each VG member state, as a basis for evaluation of mutual compatibility of national SAPs of Visegrad countries.

<sup>125</sup> Agenda of the sessions had been communicated to participants by e-mail in advance. To give a clearer picture of their content; for example in April 2004 the Working group adopted a text of few "Rules for harmonization of Schengen Action Plans of the Visegrad Group states" according to which national SAPs were modified and updated in following months; in June 2004 delegations exchanged information referring to measures taken at national and bilateral level, discussed co-ordination of submitting applications and possibilities of co-operation in EU structures, consulted visa policies and corresponding bilateral agreements (e.g. Hungary – Monte Negro, Serbia; Poland – Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), way of potential co-operation with the Benelux and within the Salzburg Forum, amended a draft of the Declaration prepared by the Czech representatives and supposed to be signed by VG Ministers of Interior at their meeting preceding the session of the Council of the EU for Justice and Home Affairs on 19 July, etc. (Záznam IV. jednání Pracovní skupiny, 2004)

<sup>126</sup> The Prime Minister of Portugal also attended the summit in Bratislava. Besides discussing other issues, he informed the V4 partners about the experience of Portugal in joining the Schengen zone (Press Statement, V4 + Portugal, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> SIRENE is an acronym for the Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries.

<sup>128</sup> together with the B3, Malta and Slovenia

Except the co-operation within the VG, representatives of public administration and governments of the Four had consulted Schengen-related issues also at respective EU forums; bilaterally; and occasionally in the V4+ format with colleagues from other - non-Visegrad - countries (with Baltic trio and Benelux ones; Ukraine; within the Salzburg Forum/ Salzburg Group gathering Ministers of Interior and senior experts and officials working in the field of Internal Security from Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and the V4 states<sup>129</sup>; within the Regional Partnership; etc.).

### **3.3.2 Results of the data generated**

As already mentioned, by interviewing Slovak experts entrusted with the co-operation within the two V4 Expert groups prior to the integration of the Visegrad countries to the Schengen area and by e-mail communication with three experts involved (one Czech two Slovak ones), I would like to find out whether the declared co-operation had somehow benefited countries involved or, after taking a closer look, one can see just another exaggeration or idealization of the Group's achievements.<sup>130</sup>

- **Activity of the V4 Expert group for Schengen Information System**

Important to say, the two Prague sessions of the Expert group for SIS II initiated by the Czech Republic (on 12-13 February 2004 and on 1-2 July 2004) and attended by both Mr. Čelikovský (CZ) and Mr. Maliarik (SK), were the only ones in fact. Expert group's national representations had also communicated by e-mail and informally at meetings in Brussels (P. Maliarik, e-mail communication, 17 February 2010).

Mr. Čelikovský admitted that bringing the idea of co-operating in preparations for connecting to the SIS and for joining the Schengen area to the V4 format had been an idea of the Czech side under the Czech presidency, resulting from its national strategy, i.e. to enter the Schengen as soon as possible. Later Schengen integration of Poland and Slovakia (than of the Czech Republic) would have caused undesirable difficulties to the Czech Republic because it would have had to deal with a complicated question of creation of the

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<sup>129</sup> For example, in October 2006 countries of the Salzburg Forum expressed their support to the Portuguese solution SISone4all and thus to a common approach of new EU member states for early widening of the Schengen area (Aktivity rezortov počas slovenského predsedníctva V4, 2007).

<sup>130</sup> For summary information on respondents, dates and means of interviews conducted, see the Appendix 7.

outer Schengen border with its neighbours<sup>131</sup>. Therefore, the V4 had been an ideal grouping for collaboration in this case because of the four countries' relatively long common internal borders in the future.<sup>132</sup> The aim of creation of the Expert group for SIS II had been the Visegrad states' mutual co-ordination taking into account the actual state of the SIS II development, and searching for an optimal way of their preparation for entering the Schengen at the national level. (J. Čelikovský, e-mail communication, 16 December 2009)

As to the first Expert group's meeting in February 2004, national delegations presented the level of preparedness for joining the Schengen and upgraded their interest in abolishing internal border controls and using the SIS as soon as possible to a political objective (Report on the Expert Group for SIS II, 2004). Participants agreed to elaborate their national SAPs in detail (ibid.). The second meeting in July 2004 devoted to the question of possible access to data from the SIS was attended by members of the Expert group for SIS II, V4 legal experts and a representative of the European Commission Jan Westmar, Head of the SIS II project of the European Commission Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs (hereinafter DG JHA). Legal aspects of the possibility of forbidding residence to a person who had been refused to reside in any Schengen member state, inter alia, was also discussed by national delegations. In the second part of the meeting Mr. Westmar informed about the actual situation of preparations for transition to the SIS II and its possible variants, and he got acquainted with the common stance of the Four's national representations assuring him of their interest in the soonest possible access to data from the SIS. (Report on results of activities, 2004) To summarize the content of the expert consultations, partners from the Visegrad countries had debated actual situation with the SIS II project implementation and had informed each other of the status of implementation works related to the Schengen integration at the national level (P. Maliarik, e-mail communication, 17 February 2010).

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<sup>131</sup> Thanks to the simultaneous entry of the Visegrad countries to the Schengen, the Czech Republic had not had to be concerned with securing its land borders, thus the Czech state bodies had faced much simpler preparations in this sense.

<sup>132</sup> Forasmuch as the issue of entering the Schengen zone had been live at that time, naturally, it had been discussed at the V4 meetings. Representatives of all V4 countries had declared they were willing to join the Schengen even if some of their neighbouring countries would not join at the same time. However, the variant of the simultaneous entry had been the most suitable solution for every VG country. (P. Maliarik, e-mail communication, 17 February 2010)

As regards a contribution or a value generated by the Expert group, Mr. Maliarik was not aware of “any specific result” (e-mail communication, 17 February 2010). However, he saw some positives in existence of the Expert group such as exchanging information or answering some questions (e.g. means of financing). These activities had not been developed only within the scope of the V4, of course. But even the few consultations at the Visegrad level had then partly aided the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak officials in charge of the preparations for Schengen in accomplishing the goal. Generally, the Expert group’s aims had been achieved. As long as one understands that co-operation and mutual support had been declared, Mr. Maliarik opined, this objective had been fulfilled. (Ibid.) Mr. Čelikovský stated the existence of the group had enabled an expert discussion and co-ordination of preparations at the experts’ level (reflected at the political level later on by signing the common Declaration of Visegrad Interior Ministers in July 2004) but the preparations for the SIS had been largely complicated by long-missing specifications falling under the confidentiality regime. Nevertheless, according to Mr. Čelikovský, the fact that all four Visegrad states had been prepared for connection to the SIS at the same time, successfully passed the Schengen evaluation in September 2007 and became full-fledged members of the Schengen area in December 2007 was a manifestation of the fulfilment of the Expert group’s aims. (E-mail communication, 16 December 2009) However, one could cast doubts on this formulation asking whether this would not had been reached without the few experts’ informative meetings and consultations in the V4 framework.

In reality, although the Expert group for SIS II had remained under the Czech leadership<sup>133</sup>, following the end of the Czech V4 presidency 2003/2004, the Expert group was dissolved. Currently, no extraordinary co-operation regarding the SIS II project is being developed within the VG. Collaboration of all the EU member states is spread at respective EU forums - within the Council or the Commission. (J. Čelikovský, e-mail communication, 16 December 2009)

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<sup>133</sup> An interesting moment did appear at the meeting of the Working group for Schengen co-operation on 15 June 2004 when national delegations were discussing on regular rotating of the V4 presidency, then from hands of the Czech Republic to Poland in May 2004. Polish representatives stated they assumed the chairmanship of the two Expert groups for SIS II and for Dublin acquis should remain in charge of the state that had initiated and established them, i.e. the Czech Republic. In the end, participants agreed Poland would take over presiding to the Working group and the two Expert subgroups would be led by the Czech Republic further on (Záznam IV. jednání Pracovní skupiny, 2004).

- **Activity of the Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis**

There were six meetings of the Expert group at the level of Directors of Migration Offices and Heads of Dublin stations of Visegrad countries realized (three times in 2004, once in 2005, 2006 and 2007). Prague hosted the first experts' sitting on 2 April 2004. Since 1 May 2004 all regulations concerning the Dublin agenda have had to be fully applied in the countries joining the EU and forasmuch as there had not been any possibility to negotiate particular conditions a few weeks before entering the EU, Mrs. Némethová opined the aim of this meeting was just to inform each other about the state of implementation of the Dublin acquis in Visegrad states prior to the EU accession<sup>134</sup>. So did Mrs. Sumilasová in the interview who stated that mainly creation and running of the Dublin stations<sup>135</sup> in V4 countries was being discussed (how they would be provided personally etc.) and various relevant information exchanged (how screening of the fingerprints would be provided and sent to the EURODAC<sup>136</sup>, where persons falling under the Dublin Regulation would be transmitted, etc.) at the first experts' meeting. However, the Dublin acquis would have been applied in the Visegrad countries regardless of their mutual consultations because it had been directly applicable in all EU member states meaning that there had been no need to transpose it into the national legislature by adopting any implementing measures. Thus, the Prague meeting was informative; it was about sharing practical information and ideas of ways of solving concrete problems occurred at the national level. (M. Sumilasová, personal communication, 18 December 2009) Although Mrs. Némethová admitted she was not able to assess an overall practical contribution of the V4 Expert group for

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<sup>134</sup> The V4 states were found at different stages of fulfilment of the Dublin acquis. For example, in case of Slovakia, a treaty with the Netherlands had been signed concerning the co-operation within the PHARE program resulting in a big twinning program aimed at the implementation of the Dublin acquis as well as of the EURODAC as a tool for its fulfilling. In this respect, representatives of the Migration Office in charge of establishment and running of the Slovakia based Dublin Station had been advised by the Dutch colleagues. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland had not signed any similar treaties. Moreover, for example the Czech Republic was facing considerable technical problems with implementation of the EURODAC at that time (each country had contracted its own supplier of the system which had to be united for the sake of entering the EU). Mrs. Némethová could not point many details as she participated only in the first Expert group's meeting as an observer but she was sure that Slovak representatives offered a lot of materials related to the PHARE project to the other sides, at least to the Czech Republic with which the Slovak Republic has ever co-operated closely. (Z. Némethová, personal communication, 17 December 2009)

<sup>135</sup> By entering the EU, the Dublin Regulation became legally binding and directly applicable for the newly acceded EU member states. Among others, this implied a duty for each such a state to establish one national contact point, a so-called Dublin station, responsible for mutual communication related to asylum seekers; processing of incoming data and transmitting outgoing data; issuing an acknowledgement of receipt for every incoming transmission; etc. (M. Sumilasová, personal communication, 18 December 2009; Bieliková, 2004)

<sup>136</sup> EURODAC (an acronym for the European Dactyloscopy) is a European online system/ a database of asylum seekers' and illegal immigrants' fingerprints allowing their registration, comparisons, etc., being in operation since January 2003 (Z. Némethová, personal communication, 17 December 2009; World Wide Web).

implementation of the Dublin acquis objectively; she concluded she was not aware of any follow-up practical results, agreements or steps taken (for example change or harmonization of some working procedures, etc.) after the first meeting. She opined nothing had been co-ordinated in this regard within and thanks to the V4 framework prior to the accession to the Schengen zone because of the firm determination of rules by the EU. (Personal communication, 17 December 2009)

VG Directors of Migration Offices and Heads of Dublin stations met on 17 June 2004 in Bratislava for the second time. They exchanged statistical data and consulted actual issues, for example proposals of bilateral agreements and a co-operation/ non-co-operation with some “old” EU member states whose representatives were trying to proceed towards new EU member states differently than to the old ones as regards the operation of the Dublin stations. Furthermore, a retroactive validity of the Dublin Regulation had been proposed and recommended by the European Commission. Accordingly, and forasmuch as the new EU member states had not requested a transitional period; the Regulation should have been applied to asylum seekers submitting their applications three months backwards before 1 May 2004. Consequently, as the position of the European Commission had not been legally binding because it is not a competent body to impose duties on EU member states in this realm, and the retroactivity were deemed disadvantageous for the Visegrad countries by the experts; Mr. Prielcel representing Slovak Republic proposed a common opposing strategy to be worked out at the level of the V4 and presented in the forthcoming (October 2004) Dublin contact committee<sup>137</sup> meeting in Brussels. The stance was really presented by the Slovak representative Mrs. Bieliková, supported by the Czech delegation. Although Polish and Hungarian representatives were silent on the issue, no Visegrad country applied the retroactivity in the end. Last but not least, since some problems resulting from the application of the Dublin Regulation in new EU member states had been expected quite naturally, Slovak officers from the Migration Office came with an idea to organize informal meetings in the V4 framework before each official Dublin contact committee meeting in Brussels and met with a positive response. (M. Sumilasová, personal communication, 18 December 2009) Usually, these VG meetings preceding the EU-level ones had been managed in fact before entering the Schengen (B. Bieliková, e-mail communication, 14 January 2010).

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<sup>137</sup> The Dublin contact committee gathered experts from all EU member states working with the Dublin agenda, once or twice a year (M. Sumilasová, personal communication, 18 December 2009).



The next meeting in Budapest on 30 September 2004 did not produced anything significant according to Mrs. Sumilasová, it was devoted to regular statistical data exchange, problems arising from the application of the Dublin Regulation (for example using of a national language in requests received from other member states). She briefed me also on the content of the fourth Visegrad Expert group's meeting held in Warsaw on 25 April 2005 which resulted from a need to consult certain questions opened at the Dublin contact committee sitting in Brussels on 1 March 2005. Except exchange of statistical data and consulting of applications of some concrete articles of the Dublin Regulation; the Czechs and the Slovaks informed about legislative changes at the national level, and Slovak and Hungarian delegation about signing of bilateral agreements with Austria. Similarly, at the Prague meeting on 31 October - 2 November 2006, delegations of the Visegrad countries (except the Hungarian one) exchanged statistics and discussed some concrete issues (for example, when and how applicants were being informed about starting the Dublin procedure); and they came to a common position to questions sent by the Spaniards and the Irish ahead of the Dublin contact committee gathering (regarding an interpretation of several articles of the Dublin acquis). Polish officers informed about changes in their national legislature. Bratislava hosted the meeting on 3-4 April 2007 where statistical data, changes in the personnel structure and other information regarding functioning of Dublin stations in the Visegrad countries were presented, plus the Hungarian delegation informed about a forthcoming signature of bilateral agreement with Romania. This was the last session of the V4 Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis. However, even the Dublin contact committee, the EU forum, assembled in October 2007 for the last time. (Personal communication, 18 December 2009)

Mrs. Sumilasová would like the readers of the thesis to see the point that she is not a rightful person to assess the impact or effectiveness of the Expert group's contribution because she has not been working at the Dublin station yet and, needless to say, she did not participate in the meetings mentioned above. However, from a personal point of view and based on the information she has found in the internal materials related to the meetings and she has been made aware of indirectly, Mrs. Sumilasová opines the Expert group's meetings and communication prior to entering the Schengen zone had been useful; had positively contributed to functioning of the Visegrad Dublin stations; and in comparison to the situation the experts would not have been consulting, it had been helpful for public administration officers in the V4 countries working with the Dublin agenda (for those

high-ranked ones proposing concrete steps in the implementation of the Dublin acquis as well as for their lower-ranked colleagues executing particular articles and norms in practice, for instance border police). Hence, I asked her for giving some concrete examples of the Expert group's practical contribution. Except the common non-application of retroactivity of the Dublin Regulation proposed by the European Commission, a "gentleman agreement" was concluded among the V4 countries in November 2006. The experts agreed upon that within sending of applications for taking back of asylum seekers<sup>138</sup> among the VG bodies, they would attach a record or a transcript of an interview with a particular asylum seeker regarding his place of residence and his transit route within the EU member states (it is not a duty resulting from the Dublin acquis) in order to ease and speed up the process of returning asylum seekers, in other words, to prevent an unnecessary delay of this process. Presenting and handling mutual problems at the meetings had also benefited work of experts entrusted with management of the Dublin acquis implementation - following the discussion; some inter-state problems within the V4 had been solved<sup>139</sup>. Moreover, Visegrad states started to exchange information on migration flows of foreigners in a written form, ensuring an overview how the asylum seekers move, which country is usually an entrance and a target one for them. (Ibid.)

Finally, Mrs. Bieliková, former Head of the Dublin Station at the Migration Office (Slovak Republic) being present at all sittings of the Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis, offered me her piece of knowledge, too. Surprisingly, she heard about existence of the V4 Working group for Schengen co-operation with the two Expert subgroups for the first time only from me (e-mail communication, 14 January 2010). The point is that the meetings Mrs. Bieliková took part in while she was working at the Migration Office were organized predominantly within the scope of the ARGO<sup>140</sup> project entitled "Information exchange on Dublin Regulation among V4 countries"<sup>141</sup> submitted by Hungarian Interior Ministry in 2004 and co-financed by the EU (European Commission, DG JHA) with

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<sup>138</sup> according to the Article 16.1 C of the Dublin Regulation No. 343/2003

<sup>139</sup> I was informed by Mrs. Sumilasová about one instance of such problem or a state of affairs which had been improved due to the VG experts' talks. But she asked me not to mention it because it had been related to a concrete country and its temporary deficiency.

<sup>140</sup> ARGO (2002-2006) is an EU action program encouraging administrative cooperation among EU member states and between them and either a candidate or a third country in the fields of external borders, asylum, visas and immigration (allowing for example experiments with issuing and checking biometric visas, or a harmonisation of the policies listed and relevant legislature). (World Wide Web)

<sup>141</sup> A brief notion of the project can be found in the document "Aktivity rezortov počas slovenského predsedníctva V4" (2007) which is a part of the annual report of the VG Slovak presidency 2006/2007. However, it is not made clear in here which activities explicitly were organized within the ARGO project.

financial contribution representing almost 60% of the overall project budget (List of selected projects, 2004). This project was aimed at the co-operation among the V4 states as well as between Hungary, Poland and Slovakia on the one hand and Ukraine as their common neighbour on the other hand. On average, three meetings were organized in every capital of Visegrad countries (B. Bielíková, e-mail communication, 14 January 2010). Mrs. Bielíková added: “Yes, there had been some co-operation before, so we were outside of the ARGO project in Prague on 2 April 2004 at least, but I do not remember particulars” (ibid.).

Be it co-operation under the auspices of the Working group for Schengen co-operation and its two Expert subgroups or within the V4 project co-funded by the EU, Mrs. Bielíková sees importance of the co-operation of public officers from the Four’s Interior Ministries in implementing the Dublin acquis in Visegrad countries prior to their integration to Schengen: first of all, it had been possible to exchange information and compare progress among comparable partners<sup>142</sup>. Hence, the co-operation had been practical par excellence and the meetings had been instrumental in sharing VG officers’ experience with Dublin stations in other EU member countries, in solving actual issues and exchanging statistical data with a monthly regularity. Mrs. Bielíková stated that although she did not remember any tangible results; the essential point had been the establishment of personal relations that had helped to solve concrete mutual cases. Usually, the meetings at the V4 level focused on Dublin agenda had preceded expert negotiations of the Dublin contact committee in Brussels and Visegrad partners had attempted here to harmonize their attitudes towards some of the topics proposed to be negotiated at the EU forum (for instance the common opinion on the application of retroactivity of the Dublin Regulation in the member states integrated to the EU in 2004). End of the project as well as financial shortening had restricted consultations and meetings. However, also a need of such happenings had been ceased due to the lowering number of “Dublin applications” foregoing the Schengen entry. (Ibid.)

On the one hand, considering the activity of the Expert group for SIS II (based on the information generated by e-mail communication with its two members), one can hardly detect its specific practical added value in the preparation process of the VG states for

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<sup>142</sup> Funding had been limited comparably. Moreover, all asylum systems in the VG states were established after 1989 based on the German and Austrian systems, or the Swiss one eventually. (Ibid.)

connecting to the SIS. On the other hand, though, when taking a closer look at the co-operation of public officers from the Visegrad countries within the Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis, its practical contribution cannot be neglected as interviewing and e-mail communication with the insiders able to adduce concrete examples of tangible results of their collaboration showed.

## 4 Discussion

Annual Reports of particular VG presidencies and other official and publicly available documents of the Visegrad Group mostly enumerate meetings, conferences, working groups' sessions, etc. I admit that some of the plentiful formal and informal meetings at various levels, seminars, and other forms of gathering of governmental and public administration representatives of the V4 countries and often other countries as well which have not resulted in anything practical or tangible for outsiders, could have been beneficial in terms of sharing experience or information and mutual learning from each other<sup>143</sup>. However, neither primary nor secondary sources are concrete about this kind of benefits. To elicit and describe effect of these declarative activities, mostly wrapped in vague and "embroidering" words; further extensive surveys would have to be conducted consisting of interviewing persons involved, searching for what has been done or changed due to their "co-operation". Simply put, "it is difficult to evaluate concrete results of non-concrete actions" (Martyniuk, In Benč et al., 2008, p. 26).

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that some of these numerous Visegrad public officers' sessions have led to a harmonization of standpoints presented at the respective EU forums afterwards which has helped the V4 to make its presence felt and to enhance the perception of the Group in the EU. For instance, members of Parliamentary committees of European Affairs of the Visegrad countries called on the European Commission and the Council in their Statement to lower visa costs for citizens of neighbouring countries "including the citizens of Belarus and the Balkans in order to contribute to the openness and democratisation of their societies" (Statement of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, 2007). To give another example, joint positions on the expected Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Health Check effects and on "the allocation of non-disbursed CAP budget expenses to the purpose of covering differences between the EU-15 and the EU-12" (Executive Report, 2009, p. 19) adopted by VG Ministers of Agriculture at the Poznań meeting in September 2008 were later presented at the EU level (ibid.). The Four also drafted a joint position proposing certain changes related to rules of execution of the European "Marco Polo Programme" on freight transport in November 2008, "thus opening an opportunity for a

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<sup>143</sup> These have been focused on diverse issues in the field of energy policy, environment, justice and implementation of EU law acts, security and defence policy, agriculture, small and medium enterprises, labour market, transport infrastructure and road safety, migration, crisis management, cohesion policy, patent and industrial property systems and certifications, protection of cultural heritage, etc.

greater number of entities from Visegrad Group countries to benefit from related assistance” (ibid. p. 11). Thanks to this, “in the course of proceedings at the European Council and its working groups, significant amendments were introduced to the draft resolution on the second Marco Polo programme edition to the benefit of businesses from Visegrad Group countries” (ibid.). Further instances of the V4 common activity reflected at the EU level can be found.<sup>144</sup>

Despite of the fact it has often happened that the Four’s officials representing their countries in EU structures have not come to an agreement among themselves, they have used to meet and consult actual agenda routinely (though, not every time) before or along with meetings of the Council of Ministers, the European Council and other EU forums. Firstly, I was notified of this by Mr. Sýkora from the IVF in our discussion (July 2009). Secondly, the research on the preparations of the four Visegrad countries for entering the Schengen area has revealed that debates in the V4 framework had usually preceded meetings of the Dublin contact committee in Brussels. Thirdly, Annual reports of the VG presidencies and some other sources declare this to be true<sup>145</sup>. Although the primary focus of the research on the V4 practical contribution since the Visegrad countries joined the EU has not been on testing a theory, I would dare to claim that its findings have confirmed Daniel Naurin’s premises presented within the theoretical considerations implying, inter alia, the coalition-building potential of the Visegrad Group in the EU. Interestingly, the V4 meetings ahead of the EU summits have made feel worried even the French President Nicolas Sarkozy who expressed his concerns over them in early November 2009: “if they have to meet regularly before each council, that could raise questions...” (Sarkozy, In Mahony, 2009). Thus he reacted to the Brussels discussions of Visegrad political leaders

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<sup>144</sup> In addition, the V4 has subscribed to several joint initiatives and positions also with other states or regional groupings at EU forums. For instance, in 2008 the Four in conjunction with other EU member states (Romania and Bulgaria at least) drafted a joint letter “containing proposals of changes to the Cohesion Policy implementation system” (Executive report, 2009, p. 5), “thanks to which the Commission took specific action to the purpose of improving the Cohesion Policy implementation system: it proposed regulatory amendments, and established a task force to reflect on the Cohesion Policy system, consisting of experts representing member states” (ibid. p. 6). In April 2009, Foreign Ministers of the VG and of Lithuania, Latvia, Italy and Slovenia “submitted a letter of appeal to high representative of the EU, concerning the need to liberalise visa regime traffic with West Balkan states” (ibid. p. 2)...

<sup>145</sup> Permanent V4 representations in Brussels “are cooperating very intensively, including exchange of experience and consultations on their positions on current EU issues. There are ongoing consultations on COEST, COTRA and COASI issues” (Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2008). (COEST means the Working party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia, COTRA is the Working party on transatlantic relations, and COASI is the Asia-Oceania working party.) Moreover, VG Prime Ministers, besides regular presidency-related sittings, have met “on the occasion of nearly all European Council sessions...to exchange opinions on current affairs, and primarily to draft joint positions, later presented at EU level meetings” (Executive Report, 2009, pp. 2-3).

about “a last-minute Czech demand for an exemption from part of the Lisbon Treaty and climate change negotiations” (Mahony, 2009).

It is also to the Visegrad Group’s credit as regards functioning as a coalition of states that its highest political representatives have often held sessions en bloc with representatives of third countries or the EU and thus have often acted in concert externally<sup>146</sup>; as well as that special links between Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak diplomatic missions in third countries and international organizations (hereinafter IOs) have been maintained<sup>147</sup> (Activity of the Polish presidency, 2005). Other countries and IOs have been “gradually establishing contacts with the Visegrad countries because they can see that communicating with the V4...simplify mutual relations on issues where the Visegrad countries have a similar approach or hold identical views” (Svoboda, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 225). The V4 has witnessed an interest of third countries (e.g. the Baltic trio and the Benelux ones, Austria, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Japan or the GUAM countries – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) in sharing information and collaboration, what can be considered to be a proof of an attractiveness of this regional co-operation (Zhodnotenie, 2007). Thus, the VG has developed relationships especially with Slovenia and Austria; and other European regional constellations such as the Benelux and the B3 consisting “chiefly of an informal exchange of opinions on current European topics, as well as...on several concrete common themes” (Paroubek, in: Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 15); but also with

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<sup>146</sup> One can recall meetings such as that on 30 August 2005 in Budapest where the VG Prime Ministers discussed with the President of the European Commission J. M. Barroso; on 11 December 2005 when Budapest hosted the meeting of VG Prime Ministers and the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair; or when the VG Foreign Ministers conferred with the Japan Foreign Minister on the occasion of the ASEM meeting (in May 2007 in Hamburg and in May 2009 in Hanoi); and so on.

<sup>147</sup> Except national interests, organizational culture and values of the respective MFA; professional actions of a diplomat (wherever he/ she is sent on a mission) are informed also by corporate culture, professional language, behavioural codes, socialization patterns, norms and standards shared by the diplomatic community transnationally (Bátora, 2005, pp. 45, 49). It is desirable to quote a former Polish Ambassador to Mexico (1993-1999) and a former Hungarian Ambassador to the US (2002-2007) thereto: “In all diplomatic corps in all countries...there have always been more or less formal consultative groups...We – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – were not connected...by any formal coalition apart from the ‘Visegrad Triangle’ which...became a quadrangle. In Europe...Visegrad was undergoing a political crisis caused by ideological differences and competition on the way to NATO and the EU. Nevertheless, we ambassadors of the different countries of Central Europe in Mexico were remote from those troubles, and the cultural and historical closeness of our home countries formed a basis for mutual understanding. ‘The Triangle’ proved a natural ground for meetings, discussions, and cooperation.” (Kozińska-Frybes, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 94) “In my current assignment as Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, I am experiencing a further aspect of Visegrad Cooperation. For a superpower like the United States, it is often easier to deal with a larger entity than with smaller countries separately, especially if it can build on a similarity between policy priorities and the cooperative nature of that entity. In the context of the Visegrad Cooperation there is a whole range of issues that the US can address with all of us as a group.” (Simonyi, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 97)

such distant partners as Japan. Furthermore, representatives of incoming EU presidencies (be it Prime Ministers – most recently in the case of Portugal and Slovenia; President – France; or Foreign Minister – Sweden) have been regularly invited to V4 summits (Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2008; Executive Report, 2009, p. 2) to present and discuss priorities of the incoming EU presidency and actual course of EU events concerning also the Visegrad countries (for instance the accession to the Schengen zone), and to arrange mutual contacts.

Although these activities could have been useful and the parties involved have probably profited from some of them, it is hard to grasp and define their practical outcomes. Therefore, they are not included in the chapter summarizing the VG's practical contribution since the Visegrad states entered the EU. However, they are worthy of mention. Neither have I dealt with bilateral or trilateral actions taken within the Group not involving all V4 members (for example bilateral cross-border co-operation); nor have I mapped achievements of broader groupings of states in which the Visegrad countries have been participating, those permanent (e.g. the Regional Partnership) or those created for a concrete purpose (for instance the Coalition for Visa Equality<sup>148</sup>); since these have most assumedly not required existence of the VG as such. Either have I not mentioned numerous intentions, goals and initiatives for potential areas of co-operation just raised or proclaimed but not realized, in which outer observers could not have noticed any tangible achievements so far (concerning e.g. co-ordination of official development assistance; common answers to challenges associated with energy security; sharing of consular facilities in distant third countries in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa or South America for the purpose of cutting costs; or when looking at the aspirations of the Forum of regions to work out principles of the co-operation in the Committee of the Regions and to become an influential opinion-making group in the area of the EU's regional policy). Among telling examples topically under discussion in this regard, one can also find the Visegrad Four

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<sup>148</sup> Since the autumn 2006 the Coalition for Visa Equality composed of the Visegrad and the Baltic trio countries has been lobbying the U.S. Congress (directly through the meetings of official representatives of countries involved and indirectly through institutions and individuals representing compatriots of the Coalition's countries living in the U.S.) to amend the U.S. Visa Waiver Program in order to allow visa-free travel for its citizens to the United States. The Coalition has asked for support also the EU Commission in conjunction with the EU presidency. (Druláková, 2007, pp. 13-14; Statement of the Visegrad-4 and Baltic-3 Foreign Ministers, 2006) Except Poland, countries gathered in the Coalition for Visa Equality were successfully incorporated into the Visa Waiver Program in late 2008.



engagement with the Western Newly Independent States (WNIS): Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine; and with the Western Balkans<sup>149</sup>.

Some Visegrad political leaders and analysts have stressed several times the Visegrad Group's commitment to offer a helping hand in transformation processes in the WNIS<sup>150</sup>; and declared at the European level<sup>151</sup>, at meetings in the V4 format as well as at the V4+ sessions hosting WNIS' representatives "their support for WNIS' attempts to further advance their relations with the EU" (Dangerfield, 2009, p. 8) (for instance in the form of statements on the need to increase the size of EU financial commitments overall, to address the imbalance between the resources allocated to the Eastern and Southern dimensions of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (ibid.), to grant trade preferences by the EU and so on). "...it is...completely natural that the new member states should want to adjust the EU's Eastern policy to be more in line with their national interests. It sounds logical – and even reasonable from the new member states' point of view – to expect that...they too should seek to protect their national interests within the EU's Eastern policy...in reshaping the EU's Eastern policy in favour of a more intense and structured dialogue...with their direct neighbours, especially Ukraine, Belarus and also Moldova." (Duleba, 2007, p. 8) Furthermore, all V4 countries (together with the Baltic trio, Romania, Bulgaria and Sweden) have expressed their support for reducing visa fees as the first step targeted at easing the EU visa regime towards Eastern partners (Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers, 2008); and for strengthening of the ENP dimension called "Eastern Partnership" which is a Polish-Swedish policy initiative (addressed to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), reinforced also by Finnish and German EU presidencies. Following the approval by the European Council in June 2008, "this

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<sup>149</sup> "The Western Balkans is an artificial EU term that has been around since 1999. It refers to the area of the former Yugoslavia (minus Slovenia, plus Albania) and includes (since February 2008) seven countries: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania" (Vörös, 2008, p. 119).

<sup>150</sup> "We are obliged by our history and by the spirit of solidarity to share it with those nations that are setting out on roads that we have travelled." (Meller, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, pp. 230-231) "We share the same commitment to promoting the neighbourhood policy of the EU towards Eastern Europe..." (Simonyi, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 96) "It is in the interest of the whole of Europe that the principles, practices and necessary conditions of democracy, freedom, security and economic prosperity emerge along the EU's eastern and south-eastern borders" (Somogyi, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 227).

<sup>151</sup> For example, a joint political statement of the Visegrad countries on strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy with the aim to support an intention of the forthcoming German presidency of the EU to deepen co-operation with Eastern EU neighbours was submitted at the General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting on 22 January 2007. The document was discussed at the informal meeting of EU member states' Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Gymnich) in Bremen on 30-31 March and appreciated by the German presidency. (Zhodnotenie, 2007)

initiative was launched under the Czech EU presidency...in May 2009. The main aim of the partnership is to improve the political and economic trade relations of six post-Soviet states of 'strategic importance' ...with EU." (Strážay, In Liptáková, 2009a, p. 4)

Despite of the proclaimed interest in the common VG's involvement, efforts towards the Eastern policy initiatives have been made by single Visegrad countries working on their own or in conjunction with non-Visegrad partners, Poland being the case in this respect (Dangerfield, 2009, pp. 15-16)<sup>152</sup>. Except the scholarships and the IVF grants allocated within the V4+ Program, and meetings held in the V4+ setting; products of the Group's intentions for its engagement in the region have included just official manifestations of encouragement, conferences and workshops "to develop and share ideas and experience, policy briefs,... studies of specific issues/problems" (ibid. p. 13). This is not the case just of the countries falling within the scope of the Eastern Partnership, but also of the Western Balkans countries being a part of the Stabilization and Association Process. Both regions (belonging to the Union's foreign and security policy priorities) have occurred among the Visegrad Group's priority areas in official documents, speeches and in programs of particular presidencies.

The Four has started to develop a closer co-operation with the Western Balkans since 2006 ("Where does the name come from," n.d., para. 8) and it has normally happened in consultation with Austria and Slovenia (Activities of the Czech Presidency, 2008). According to official pronouncements, "the Visegrad Group stands ready to promote the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans...including the handling of their membership applications... The Visegrad countries offer their help and recent expertise in drawing-up and implementing integration strategies" (The Visegrad Group stands ready, 2009). Definitely, "there are important ways that Visegrad cooperation can serve as a model of effective regional cooperation" in the Western Balkans (Strážay, 2007, p. 235). One such a way can be seen in the case of CEFTA, originally established by the V4 in early 1990s (later joined by Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia) in order "to adapt their economies to the single market of the EU" (ibid. p. 238). (Because of joining the EU in May 2004, the V4 countries and Slovenia left CEFTA behind.) The South-East

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<sup>152</sup> "Despite the V4 announcement in 2005...that a significant engagement in 'twinning' by VG actors would be a priority aspect of the VG contribution to Eastern states' Europeanisation, participation of VG states has been low so far. In the case of twinning projects for Ukraine, for example, there are no projects led by a V4 state..." (Dangerfield, 2009, p. 17)

European countries have understood “that the removal of trade barriers and other protectionist measures is in their common interest” (ibid.), so the CEFTA project has been “exported” to this region. A new CEFTA (warmly welcomed by the EU) was established by merging of existing bilateral free trade agreements between Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia (including Kosovo at that time) into a single regional trade agreement in December 2006. The simplified system of rules has made trade within the region and between the EU and the region easier (EU welcomes signing, 2006). Moreover, countries gathered in the new CEFTA constituting a consolidated market have become more attractive for foreign investments (ibid.). (Bulgaria and Romania had to leave CEFTA due to their admission to the EU on 1 January 2007.) However, the differences that do exist between the two regions, for instance in ethnic heterogeneity, level of economic development among the countries and of preparedness for the EU and NATO accession, etc. (Strážay, 2007, p. 236), “are real, and they suggest that the transfer of Visegrad know-how will have its limits” (ibid.).

Undoubtedly, based on their experience in the transformation processes, knowledge of the East European and the Western Balkans countries as well as social, historical, economic and cultural ties from the past (Duleba & Strážay, In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 146); Visegrad Group might significantly contribute to internal reforms and Euro-Atlantic integration efforts of these regions (ibid.; Bilčík & Strážay, 2006, p. 25). However, with the exception of the aforementioned IVF programs and several high-level meetings in the V4+ format, this “helping hand potential” has not been commonly utilized by the V4 so far.

Last but not least, one might suggest that the thesis could answer not only to what practical contribution the VG’s has led, but also to which undesirable realities the Visegrad regional co-operation has prevented. (Some argue to Balkan recidivism, for example.) Nevertheless, I have not dealt with answering this question because it is too hypothetical.

## Conclusions

Not always successful attempts (or sometimes no attempts at all) to come to a common agreement within the V4; occasional bilateral conflicts and the so-called dormant phases of the Visegrad co-operation “bred disillusion about the reliability of VG cooperation generally but also cast doubt...on whether the VG countries would even constitute a coherent group in the enlarged EU” (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 657). The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have truly diverged in many respects. But claims that this is why maintenance of their purposeful regional collaboration does not make sense within the EU, that the V4 fails to do the trick and therefore it is futile, are a result of rather superficial cognisance of this regional grouping and its activities.

Representatives of the four countries at various levels of government and public administration have persistently expressed their willingness to co-operate in areas of common interest, and the survey confirmed their conventional meetings have been held in the period examined. So there have been enough opportunities created for developing the co-operation within the Visegrad Group. How have they been utilized? *What has been the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation since the Visegrad countries entered the EU?* I tried to answer the question both from the theoretical as well as the practical point of view in this thesis.

As to the former, I concentrated on justifying the very existence and purpose of smaller regional groups of member states such as the V4 inside the EU through the prism of the multi-level governance concept and the Groupthink theory. Obviously, there are more than two levels of the “game” (domestic, international) in the current European arena. Regional groupings are one type of multiple actors participating in the EU policy making, interacting in various formations and directions. Nevertheless, their presence and activity in the EU environment should not be viewed as something redundant, adding up to the overall complexity of the intra-EU relations and decision-making processes. On the contrary, according to the Groupthink theory, they have the potential to reduce number of divergent member states’ positions which should simplify reaching EU-level agreements and decision-making. By virtue of findings of a few recent studies made in the realm of the coalition-building in the Council of the European Union, I aimed also at an elucidation of a

way of building these coalitions of collaborating states in the EU. Results of the survey focused on the coalition-building in the Council of Ministers, i.e. on the co-operation behaviour of governmental representatives during the negotiation process in the Council, elaborated by Daniel Naurin from the Gothenburg University, showed that “geographical proximity is the dominating pattern” (Naurin, 2008, p. 4). But “geography is not much of an explanation in itself” (ibid. p. 15). Lying behind these geographical formulas; cultural factors, historical legacy, and trading relations appear to determine the coalition-building processes in the Union’s major decision-making body in the most significant way (ibid. pp. 15-21).

*As regards the Visegrad Four, it has formed a coalition, i.e. a group of states, whose representatives have co-ordinated their action within the European Union decision-making space, indeed - the first hypothesis was shown to be right.* Despite of the fact it has often happened that the Four’s officials representing their countries in EU structures have not come to an agreement among themselves; they have used to meet and consult actual agenda routinely before or along with meetings of the Council of Ministers, the European Council and other EU forums. Firstly, I was notified of this by Mr. Sýkora (in charge of V4 Public Relations, Public Relations of the IVF and Visegrad+ Program co-ordination) in our discussion (July 2009). Secondly, the research on the preparations of the four Visegrad countries for entering the Schengen area revealed that debates in the V4 framework had usually preceded meetings of the Dublin contact committee in Brussels; and searching for the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation brought also examples of Visegrad-level co-ordination of viewpoints on certain issues (they are adduced in the part of the thesis called Discussion). Thirdly, Annual reports of the Visegrad Group presidencies and some other sources declare this to be true. Evidently, the V4 representatives have several times contributed to a reduction of number of differing viewpoints on issues to be decided on at the EU level and to a simplification of reaching agreements and decision-making in the EU. Although the research on the V4 practical contribution since the Visegrad countries joined the EU was not focused first and foremost on testing a theory, I would dare to claim that its findings confirmed Daniel Naurin’s premises implying, inter alia, the coalition-building potential of the Visegrad Group in the EU. However, further surveys with updated data are needed in this realm (involving all current EU member states, finding out which areas specifically are possible to be subject to the co-ordination of positions and action within coalitions of states in the EU, and whether

a stability and longevity of such alliances may be achieved). Besides, next investigations of the intra-EU coalition-building (in the Union's major decision-making and legislative body/ bodies) should take into account the fact that co-decision rights of the European Parliament were significantly extended by adopting the Treaty of Lisbon<sup>153</sup>.

What is more, the Visegrad Four co-operation has been beneficial in practice. The research revealed in which ways and for whom. *The second assumption - that except activities of the International Visegrad Fund and a liaison of the V4 countries' experts in preparations for accession to the Schengen area; co-operation of representatives of governments and public administration of all four Visegrad countries after their entry to the EU has not provided actors involved with any tangible contribution (benefit or added value) - was disproved by the research.* Undoubtedly, most of the tangible benefits resulting from this co-operation have been brought by functioning of the IVF. Therefore the thesis contains, inter alia, exemplification of the IVF-funded activities but only those supported repeatedly (some of them occasionally and some persistently); involving partners from all V4 countries; characterized by longevity; frequently praised by public officers and observers in primary and secondary sources; and most of them realized under the auspices or with an engagement of V4 governmental or other public structures. However, there have been at least three independent (not IVF-sponsored) joint VG-level projects and networks (briefly described in the thesis) which have produced certain practical outcomes, and organization of which has required public entities from the Visegrad countries to act in concert (Olympic Hopes tournament, online portal of Art Historian Information from Central Europe and project serving the Group's joint tourism promotion called the European Quartet). Even if anything else was not achieved in practice thanks to the purposeful collaboration developed under the auspices of the V4 public servants, one should be aware that every single cent offered by the IVF is offered due to the Visegrad Four co-operation in fact. It was the political decision made within this regional constellation to establish and provide its own Fund. So have been increments of the Fund's resources (budgetary revenues) pooled from the V4 countries' public finances, and setting of trends in grants and scholarships programs. The VG interactivity has created possibilities and space for networking, realization of interests and solving problems (it sometimes happens that a problem of one member becomes a problem also for the rest of the Group and vice versa).

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<sup>153</sup> But in the period observed, the Council of Ministers was truly the major decision-making and legislative authority of the EU.

Thematic fields in which the tangible outcomes of the Group's team work was identified by the research are as follows: Europeanization of the neighbouring East and South-East European regions and of the South Caucasus area; culture; science, research, youth training and education; using media to advertise the V4; tourism promotion; application of new information and communication technologies in the public administration; and the preparations of the four countries for the Schengen accession. As regards the co-operation of the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak experts ahead of the VG states' entry to the Schengen zone (elaborated in the case study), its practical contribution cannot be denied as interviewing and e-mail communication with the active participants showed. But it should not be exaggerated as it can be seen in some sources misleading their readers in this regard. While more often consultations and more intense co-ordination of public officers within one of the two V4 Expert groups (the Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis) had produced practical shifts in its doing (and thus in preparations of the Visegrad countries for joining the Schengen) as argued by the hands-on respondents; one can hardly deduce a specific practical added value from the relatively vague positive assessments of activity of the Expert group for SIS II made by the two experts.

The activities of the International Visegrad Fund have benefited not only the V4 countries but also the EU as a whole and some countries outside the EU borders. Individuals and various entities [schools, universities, academies of sciences, other educational and research institutes, youth and interest (sports, scout,...) groups, many (mostly non-governmental) organizations and institutions, towns and municipalities, self-governing (subnational) regions, audiences of cultural events, etc.] from Visegrad, other EU member as well as non-EU member states have been provided with the contribution of the Fund's grant programs to their lives.

Certain types of the Visegrad scholarships and almost all the IVF grants have been available also for applicants from non-Visegrad countries; thus applicable (and applied in fact) within the so-called Visegrad+ (policy) instrument. It has been directed at the co-operation of individuals and organizations from the V4 region with non-Visegrad partners (mostly from the East and South-East Europe but also from Austria and elsewhere). The Visegrad+ instrument which has enabled co-organizing of meetings of high political representatives and various projects in the V4+ format has become a tool the V4 governments have used for their involvement in the Europeanization if comprehended in

terms of export of forms of political organization, rules, norms, ideas and ways of doing things distinct for the Union beyond its territory. The fact that a share in the IVF budget distributed to non-Visegrad recipients has increased since the establishment of the Fund and to date has reached almost 20% of the total IVF financial spending on grants and scholarships should not be omitted.

The last part of the thesis preceding the Conclusions is devoted to a probable contribution of the Visegrad Four common activity which is not tangible and thus hard to be defined without casting too many doubts on its validity as a real benefit or an added value, and to some not yet well-developed but largely discussed areas of the co-operation in the V4 framework.

Visegrad Group as a regional constellation has further possibilities to move forward, to develop co-operation within the Visegrad region as well as with non-Visegrad partners to the benefit of the V4 countries, the EU and a bulk of actors outside the EU. Respective high political representatives have not made the best of the Group's potential yet. Nevertheless, this overview of the practical contribution of the Visegrad Four co-operation clearly shows its performance has been meaningful even after the four states entered the EU.



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## **Appendixes**

**Appendix 1**

*In the event that the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia become members of the EU, do you think they should create a group within the EU with closer ties, or should they have the same ties as with every other EU member?*

(in%, survey conducted in 2003 by the Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava)

(In Jagodziński (Ed.), 2006, p. 154)

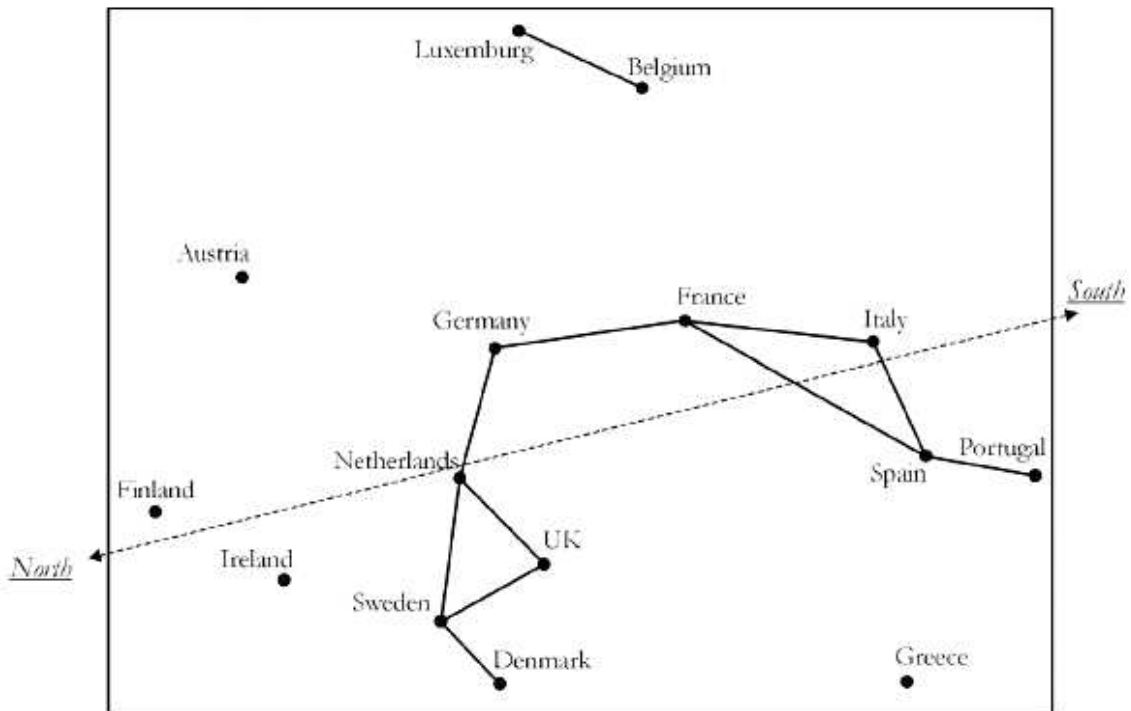
	<b>Czechs</b>	<b>Hungarians</b>	<b>Poles</b>	<b>Slovaks</b>
they should create a group within the EU with closer ties	34	12	50	44
they should have the same ties as with every other EU member	42	69	42	48
I do not know	24	19	8	8



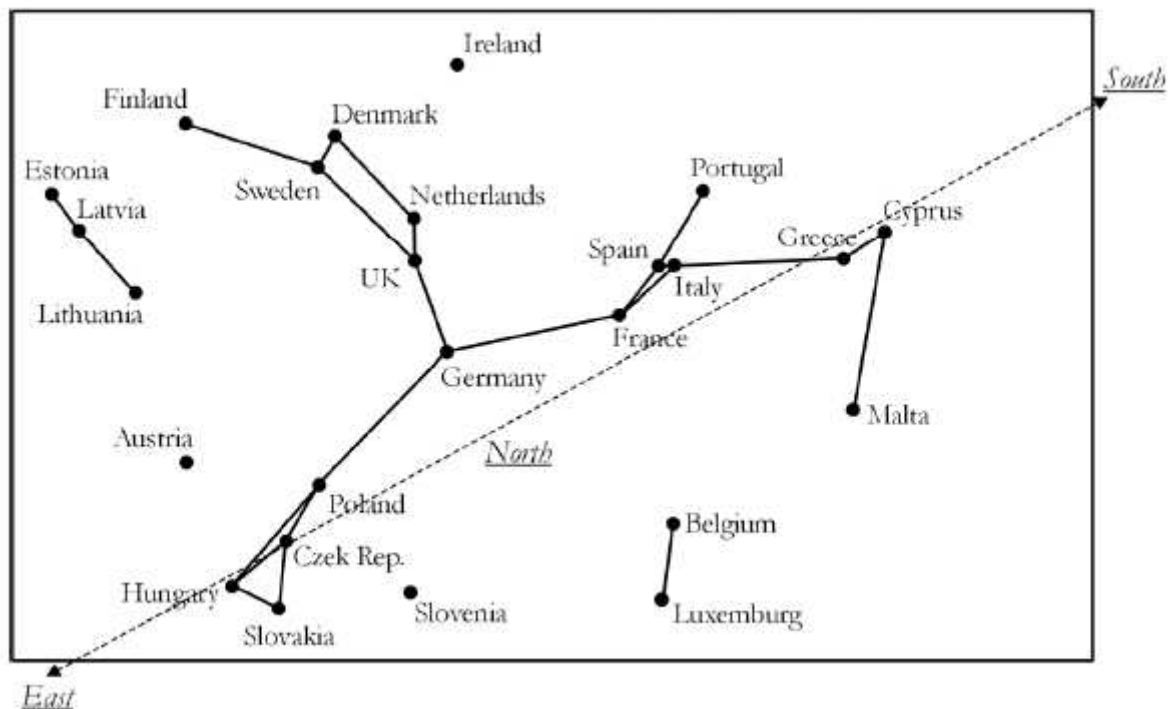
## Appendix 2

The figures are based on the average number of times member state representatives mentioned each other as co-operation partners in response to the question: “Which member states do you most often co-operate with within your working group, in order to develop a common position?” The lines connecting some of the countries indicate that they have a particularly close relationship, defined as being top-three on each other rankings. (Naurin, 2008, pp. 23-24)

*The co-operation space of the EU-15 in 2003*

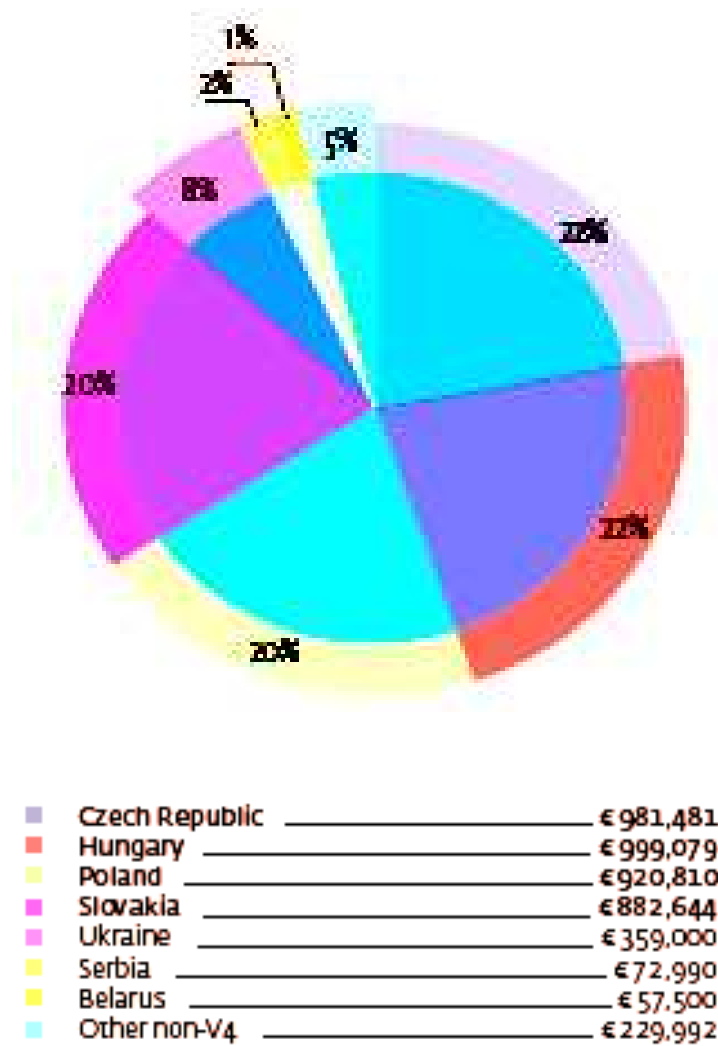


*The co-operation space of the EU-25 in 2006*



### Appendix 3

Rate of financial support of the IVF to projects by countries  
(International Visegrad Fund, 2009, p. 13)



#### Appendix 4

Indicator	Deadline	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<sup>o</sup> 2008	<sup>oo</sup> 2009	2000 -09 altogether
<b>Standard Grants</b>												
Number of Applications		236	469	251	267	309	372	466	539	482		3,391
Number of Grants		26	89	91	110	139	172	216	248	240		1,331
Allocated Money (€)		406,317	1,523,019	1,723,700	1,749,693	1,623,000	1,804,809	1,854,200	2,146,200	2,255,584		15,086,522
<b>Small Grants</b>												
Number of Applications				224	372	336	332	395	443	405		2,102
Number of Grants				53	93	133	129	127	155	151		841
Allocated Money (€)				200,894	332,224	467,048	462,045	453,652	559,967	556,412		3,032,242
<b>Visegrad Strategic Programme</b>												
Number of Applications							8	11	14	13		46
Number of Grants							2	4	3	7		16
Allocated Money (€)							110,000	190,000	149,350	329,610		778,960
<b>Grants Total</b>		26	89	144	203	272	303	347	406	398		2,188
<b>Allocated Money Grants Total (€)</b>		406,317	1,523,019	1,924,594	2,081,917	2,090,168	2,376,864	2,497,852	2,855,517	3,141,606		18,897,724
<b>Visegrad Scholarships</b>												
Number of Applications					61	100	241	182	260	302		1,146
Total Scholarships					27	35	80	68	171	176		557
Allocated Money (€)					246,000	260,000	538,500	459,500	1,116,500	1,295,500		3,916,000
<b>Visegrad Artist Residency Programme</b>												
Number of Applications									29	61	52	142
Number of Residencies									21	24	24	69
Allocated Money (€)									94,500	108,000	108,000	310,500
<b>Visegrad Univesity Studies Grant</b>												
Number of Applications										33		33
Number of Residencies										12		12
Allocated Money (€)										285,000		285,000
<b>Money allocated total (€)</b>												23,409,224

<sup>o</sup> Since the launch of the on-line application system, total numbers of applications cannot be compared with the past rounds. As of 2008 incomplete or error applications are not considered.

<sup>oo</sup> 2009 figures refer only to the 2009 Visegrad Artist Residency Program (i. e. September 2008 deadline).

(International Visegrad Fund, 2009, pp. 10-11)

## Appendix 5

*Grant schemes currently offered by the International Visegrad Fund*  
(Basic Facts about the Fund, 2009)

### The Fund's Programs in 2009:

**Small Grants** (budget of €512,000) / **Standard Grants** (budget of €2,200,000)

- for projects of cooperation among subjects from V4 countries and other countries
- deadlines: 1 and 15 March, 1 June, 1 and 15 September and 1 December

**Visegrad Strategic Program** (budget of €300,000)

- for important, long-term strategic projects (see the list of priorities for 2008)
- deadlines: 15 February and 15 May (more: <http://www.visegradfund.org/grants.html>)

**Visegrad University Studies Grant** (budget of €100,000)

- for development and launching of university courses/programs that deal with V4 countries
- deadline: 10 November (more: <http://www.visegradfund.org/curriculum.html>)

**Visegrad Scholarship Program** (budget of €1,884,000)

- for Master's and Post-Master's studies
- deadline: 31 January (more: <http://www.scholarships.visegradfund.org>)

**Visegrad Artist Residency Program – VARP** (budget of €108,000)

- 3-month residencies for V4 artist in institutions in the other V4 countries
- deadline: 10 September (more: <http://artists.visegradfund.org>)

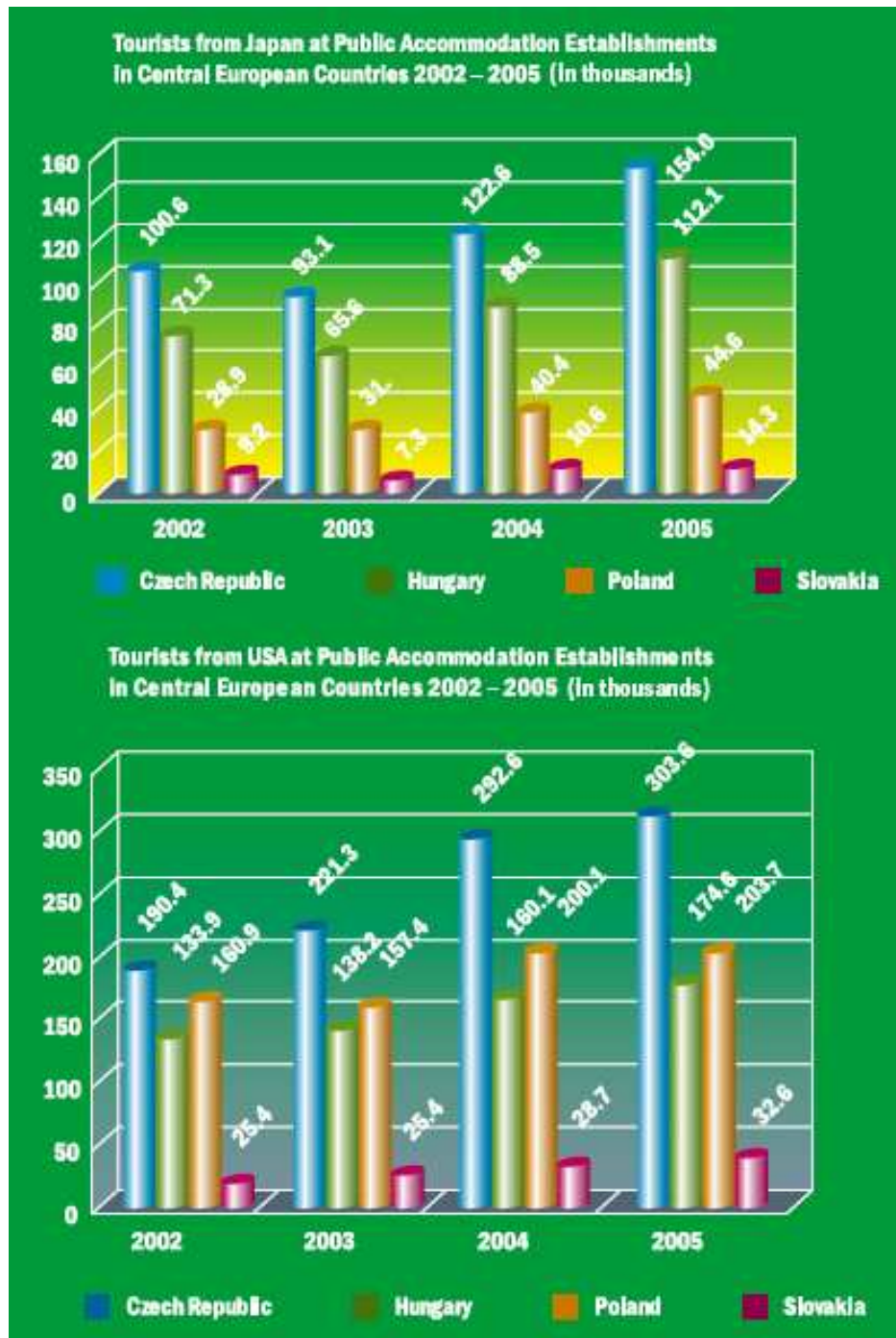
### Project statistics (as of 1 January 2009):

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
<b>Apps.</b>	236	469	475	639	645	712	866	996	900	-	5,938
<b>Grants</b>	26	89	144	203	272	301	347	406	396	-	<b>2,184</b>
<b>Apps.</b>	-	-	-	61	100	241	182	260	302	-	1,146
<b>Scholarships</b>	-	-	-	27	35	80	68	171	167	-	<b>548</b>
<b>Apps.</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	61	52	142
<b>VARP</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	24	24	<b>69</b>

### Appendix 6

Number of tourists from Japan and the USA at public accommodation establishments in the Visegrad countries 2002-2005 (in thousands)

(Statistical information, 2006, p. 9)



## Appendix 7

Summary information on respondents, dates and means of interviews conducted within the case study

<b>date</b>	<b>respondent</b>	<b>nationality</b>	<b>relevance to the Expert group</b>	<b>means of communication</b>
9.12.2009	Director of the National Central Office SIRENE Slovakia, Department of the International Police Co-operation, Police Force Presidium (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic)	Slovak	Expert group for SIS II	personal interview (not recorded, notes taken in writing)
16.12.2009	<i>Jiří Čelikovský</i> , Head of the Division of co-ordination of Schengen co-operation and border protection, Department of asylum and migration policy (Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic)	Czech	Expert group for SIS II	e-mail
17.2.2010	<i>Pavol Maliarik</i> , Director of the Department of applications; Office of informatics, telecommunications and security (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic)	Slovak	Expert group for SIS II	e-mail
17.12.2009	<i>Zuzana Némethová</i> , Head of the Division of fingerprint identification of persons, Department of criminalistic identification, Criminalistic and Expertise Institute at the Police Force Presidium (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic)	Slovak	Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis	personal interview (recorded on a Dictaphone)
18.12.2009	<i>Michaela Sumilasová</i> , Head of the Dublin Station at the Migration Office (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic)	Slovak	Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis	personal interview (recorded on a Dictaphone)
14.1.2010	<i>Bronislava Bieliková</i> , former Head of the Dublin Station at the Migration Office (Slovak Republic)	Slovak	Expert group for implementation of the Dublin acquis	e-mail