

The Visegrad

Group

– A Central

European

Constellation

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The Visegrad

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of the Visegrad Group.

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15 Years of Visegrad



VISEGRAD GROUP CELEBRATES ITS FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

Jiří Paroubek

After the fundamental changes in Central Europe at the end of 1989, it was necessary to move swiftly to get rid of the consequences of totalitarianism, to arrange the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and to quickly prepare the countries of Central Europe for membership in European and trans-Atlantic structures. One of the useful means of achieving these goals was the creation of a common platform represented by the Visegrad Group.

During the initial phase of its existence, from 1991 to 1993 – when Czechoslovakia still existed – the Visegrad Group played an important role in our communications with NATO and the European Union. The process of expanding both institutions was both time-consuming and complex. It also contributed to the creation of qualitatively new bilateral relations between the countries in the Group. The ability of the Visegrad countries to cooperate and coordinate their approaches impressed the democratic countries of Western Europe. After the creation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia from the former Czechoslovakia in 1993, when the Visegrad Three became the Visegrad Four, however, that cooperation began to flag. The Czech right-wing government of the time decided that it would be most effective if each country took an individual approach to entry to Euro-Atlantic integration. That approach, however, soon proved wrong. Moreover, it left the impression that the Czech Republic had no interest in developing contacts, other than strictly bilateral ones, with its Visegrad neighbours, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. After the Czech parliamentary elections in 1998, which brought Czech social democratic parties to power, there was a revival of the cooperation between the Visegrad states on the political level.

With the entry of the Visegrad countries into NATO and the European Union, the original aims of the Visegrad declaration of 1991 were attained. All the member countries simultaneously expressed the political will to resume the positive aspects of their past cooperation and to continue working together in that spirit in the new situation. The Visegrad Group gradually gained a very good name for itself, both in Europe and in the rest of the world.

Today, it has become a respected “trademark” on the international scene, one that is sought out both to the East and to the West of “Visegrad”. At present, it can be considered the most clearly defined initiative in Central Europe.

Under the Czech chairmanship, from 2003 to 2004, discussions on future cooperation were concluded. The second Visegrad declaration, signed in Kroměříž in 2004, is a reflection of the situation after the entry of the Visegrad countries into the EU. Under the Polish chairmanship, the Visegrad Group intensified its foreign policy activity, and reacted quickly to political changes in the surrounding region. Observers from the V4 countries were present during presidential elections in Ukraine. The Visegrad Group expressed its support for democratic processes in that country. The present Hungarian chairmanship is working to develop the civic dimension of the Visegrad Group, and is strengthening cooperation between the various ministries inside the V4.

Fears that the activities of the Visegrad Group would flag after the member countries joined the EU have proven unfounded. If we take into account meetings on all levels (from presidential meetings to the regular sessions held by various working groups) as well as projects financed by the International Visegrad Fund, at least one Visegrad event takes place every day. That is the most eloquent proof available that the Visegrad Group has not declined in significance. Today, it is no longer a matter for the political elite – practically every citizen of our country can now participate in its activities.

Visegrad has in no way become institutionalized. It is based on the principle of regular meetings between representatives of the four countries, and its practical content is provided by cooperation among the various ministries. At present, there are numerous of projects under way in the areas of culture, environment, internal security, defence, science, and education.



Jiří Paroubek

Politician, economist. Member of the Czech Social Democratic Party, since 2005 Vice-Chairman of the ČSSD. Minister for Regional Development in Stanislav Gross government (2004–2005). Since 2005, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic.

Cooperation is also flourishing in the areas of justice, transportation, tourism, energy, and information technology.

One of the Visegrad Group's most firmly established organizational structures is the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), founded in 2000 with the aim of supporting cultural cooperation, scientific exchanges, research, and cooperation in the area of education, youth exchanges, and cross-border cooperation. In the vast majority of cases, the Fund finances the activities of non-governmental organizations, lending support to the civic dimension of cooperation within the Visegrad Group.

In an important activity, since the end of the previous academic year, the Visegrad Scholarship Program has awarded one-year post-graduate scholarships to students from Eastern Europe to study in the Visegrad countries.

After the Visegrad countries joined the EU, the foreign policy activities of the Group increased considerably. Visegrad did not hesitate to become involved in broader forms of regional cooperation, such as the Regional Partnership (V4 + 2, in other words, the Visegrad countries plus Austria and Slovenia) that emerged from an Austrian initiative in 2001. Areas of common interest were established, such as internal security issues, matters relating to borders, questions of asylum, consular matters, cultural cooperation, and the creation of common infrastructure projects.

Since 2001 the Visegrad Group has begun to develop a relationship with the Benelux countries. This consists chiefly of an informal exchange of opinions on current European topics, as well as work on several concrete common themes, such as problems surrounding the Schengen Agreement on migration. Other contributions include inter-parliamentary contacts, exchange programs, and consultation between other institutions, or cooperation within the framework of the Euro Controled Route (road traffic safety issues).

During the Czech chairmanship, contacts were also established with the Nordic Council with the purpose of getting information about the Council's experience with regional cooperation, and to compare the activities of the Nordic Council with those of the Benelux and to seek inspiration for the development of the Visegrad Group. Discussions were also initiated on cooperation with Japan, which is interested in working together in the areas of tourism and development aid, as well as on several economic matters.

The renewed circumstances in Ukraine after the presidential elections of 2004 opened up new opportunities for cooperation with this large country. In addition to the activities of the International Visegrad Fund, a cooperation is starting to take place in the political sphere as well. Julia Tymoshenko, who was then the Prime Minister of Ukraine, took part in a meeting of V4 Prime Ministers in Poland in May, 2005. Other Ukrainian representatives took part as guests in some of the deliberations of the Visegrad Group. Other activities are being prepared that should help strengthen reforms in our largest eastern neighbour. The Visegrad Group is also aiming to find ways to support the democratization process in Belarus, and has included Moldova among its priorities for 2006.

The Czech Republic considers the Visegrad Group as a key element in promoting regional cooperation in Central Europe. It sees its significance in concrete projects (the introduction of Schengen standards, cooperation among ministries, strengthening relations among citizens of the Visegrad Group) as well as in political cooperation wherever the will exists. Cooperation within the V4 will help to strengthen the identity of Central Europe, and is very useful in coordinating positions on key questions on the European agenda. The potential role of Visegrad in regard to neighbouring countries that are not yet members of the European Union is not to be ignored either.

Despite some differences among the countries of the V4, in general the Group enjoys a significant convergence of interests and the will to strengthen mutual ties. Our four countries already have considerable experience in the conduct of dialogue, which makes it possible for them to take common positions. This approach derives from a mutual understanding of the need to pursue individual national interests, and from complete respect for the foreign policy activities of the individual Visegrad countries. All of these factors make cooperation within the Visegrad Group a useful and promising instrument of foreign policy in Central Europe.

GIVING CITIZENS A REASON TO CELEBRATE VISEGRAD

Ferenc Gyurcsány

In 1335, the Hungarian King Karoly Robert invited the Kings of Poland and Bohemia to the Visegrad Castle to discuss cooperation in the political and commercial fields. This meeting was an outstanding milestone in the stormy history of what we now call Central Europe. This successful royal convention helped motivate the countries of the smaller Central European region to launch a neighbourhood cooperation initiative 15 years ago, as they recognized they were interdependent and that their fates were intertwined just as they were 600 years earlier. Another important factor in the founding of the Visegrad Group was that, back then in the early 1990s, each Central European country was devoted to marching towards independence, freedom, and the restoration of democracy. Their combined efforts also formed part of the Euro-Atlantic integration process, where neither the parties themselves, nor the collective as a whole, were forced to give up their particular interests and traditional values.

In the 1990s, this cooperation initiative was appreciated all over Europe. Based on the historical relations between the partners, their common cultural roots and their similar level of economic and social development, the Visegrad Group established a new form of voluntary cooperation that was unprecedented in the region. The partners recognized that both healthy competition and close cooperation could bear fruit.

From 1990 to 2004, the Visegrad Group's work was related largely to Euro-Atlantic integration. Beyond political, economic and cultural cooperation, the partners wished to establish a mutual and voluntary confederation. Still, this was not an easy period for the participating countries, as they were forced to learn many lessons about teamwork. However, the Group's successes and failures formed a growing pool of useful experience, while each new challenge strengthened cohesion between the partners and improved the efficiency of their joint actions. Gradually, the Visegrad Group established cooperation platforms in the fields of foreign policy and defense as well as in other aspects of government (domestic affairs, education, regional development, culture, etc.). Stepping beyond the regional framework, the Visegrad countries established what was known as the External Dimensions of the V4: relations with the Benelux countries, the North-Atlantic Council, the Regional Partnership, Ukraine, the Balkans, the US, and Japan.

Looking back, the past 15 years of V4 cooperation have been a dynamic and successful period. We achieved our primary goals of joining NATO and the European Union, and the partnership became a globally known and acknowledged political unit.

Still, it is useful to weigh the results carefully. Do we have wide grounds for satisfaction, or have the Group's achievements satisfied only certain groups of politicians? Do we, politicians, still have debts towards our societies? Or, to put it another way: Have we made the best of the opportunities that emerged during the past 15 years?

Opinion polls on the issue give no grounds for satisfaction, as they reveal that the peoples of the Visegrad states do not regard each other as entirely desirable partners. Obviously, if you don't know somebody, you can't appraise or appreciate their virtues. While we, politicians, are happy about the truly valuable achievements of this cooperation, most members of our societies aren't aware of being affected by Visegrad, and know little about the cooperation. Thus, there is still much to be done!

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that, after having joined NATO and the European Union, the time is ripe to take another look at the interests, objectives, forms, and fields of cooperation of the Visegrad initiative. This process of revision has already begun, as some have asked whether it is worth continuing the Visegrad cooperation now that all the partners are members of a wider community that operates far more efficiently.



Ferenc Gyurcsány

Politician, economist. Member of Parliament on behalf of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). Former Minister of Children, Youth and Sports (2003–2004). Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary (since September 2004).

My answer to that question is a clear “yes”. The Visegrad Group proved useful and important on several occasions, and received global recognition. It eased the integration of the partners into the EU, and helped them voice their interests to the other 21 members. In the summer of 2004, the V4 leaders met in the Czech town of Kroměříž and expressed their support for continuing the cooperation, and also decided on concrete development steps.

In June 2005, Hungary assumed the presidency of the Group for 2005 to 2006. Following the work initiated by the Polish presidency, we intend to focus on strengthening regional cooperation, on the Group’s contribution to the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy as well as its Common Foreign Security Policy, and on the promotion of further enlargements. We will also strive to have V4 interests represented efficiently within the European Union, as well as within other international organizations.

Beyond these objectives, however, we face new challenges, such as the problems related to the ratification of the European Constitution, and Euro-scepticism and disillusionment within both new and old member states. I believe that these developments add greater importance to the Visegrad process, and that beyond the pragmatic, interest-driven work of V4 cooperation, there will be a growing need for value-driven, cultural and tradition-oriented attitudes that can reinforce a Central European identity. I believe that our societies are receptive to these attitudes in the wider sense. Cultural and non-governmental ties between the Visegrad partners have developed steadily even during moments when cooperation was more difficult, and there remains an unflagging demand for such ties.

The guidelines announced by the Hungarian presidency are in line with the aims set out above. We have declared as our number one priority “to bring V4 cooperation closer to the citizens” by means of better, more efficient communication with the members of our societies. We hope that individual citizens will take the chance to voice their opinions and expectations. We also hope for feedback and evaluation from non-governmental organizations and other groups, in order to prevent the gap between “high politics” and “ordinary people” from widening. In this spirit, we organized an information event for NGOs on the application and support opportunities provided by the International Visegrad Fund. By providing advice and assistance to NGOs we want to help them prepare applications that meet the formal criteria. The establishment of a joint V4 website to deliver the latest information to people is also underway.

The number two priority announced by the Hungarian presidency is to increase cohesion within the V4 as well as its consultation and cooperation powers on EU matters, and to improve the representation of joint interests. The several summits of V4 Heads of States, Governments and ministries, and increasingly frequent meetings of experts on the new EU budget and the future of the Union, have already served this purpose, and in the future we shall summon the partners to discuss important EU issues more frequently than earlier planned.

Our third objective is to promote transformation and modernization processes in Central Europe beyond inter-ministerial forms of cooperation, especially in infrastructure and research, in keeping with efforts to improve the Union’s competitiveness. I believe that the Visegrad Fund can play an important role here. Based on our initiative, the Fund will give priority to R&D projects that are in line with the presidency’s guidelines. We will continue to generously support the Fund, and we have agreed to increase its budget.

I have no doubt that when they take over the presidency from us, our Slovak friends, with whom we have so much in common, will continue this dynamic work towards our common goals. I wish them success and a further useful partnership and cooperation.

THE VISEGRAD DECLARATION 15 YEARS LATER

Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz

When I was asked to write an introduction to a book commemorating the jubilee of the Visegrad Group, I could not conceal my astonishment. Only 15 years? The Central European idea seems to have always been in the consciousness and the political lexicon of my generation, while the Visegrad Group as an entity is as obvious as its elder and distinguished relatives, the Benelux and the Nordic Council.

However, the calendar is merciless. On 15 February, 1991, Presidents Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel and Prime Minister József Antall signed the Visegrad Declaration, which formally inaugurated the Visegrad Group, and whose 15th anniversary we are now celebrating. This act confirmed the wisdom and far-sightedness of the political elites of our countries that were brought to power by the People's Autumn of 1989. It became possible because the Visegrad Countries – Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary – which had suffered the greatest calamities of the 20th century in the form of Nazism and Communism, managed to put aside their previous conflicts and animosities. Instead, they formed a specific bond, as between victims, and built on the sense that they shared a community of interests. Paradoxically, this shared feeling of a union has been deeper than among neighbours in other corners of Europe.

It is fascinating to look back at the effects of the cooperation between the three, and since 1993, four countries of the Visegrad Group. We have changed the geopolitical map of Europe mutually, jointly, and significantly. As recently as the 1980s, our countries formed the western frontier of the Soviet empire and – as recently revealed by my government – the potential theatre of an apocalyptic nuclear war. Nowadays we are all full members of the Euro-Atlantic community through NATO and the European Union. No decision pertaining to us is made without our participation. Moreover, the Visegrad Group is an invaluable instrument for the mutual participation of the four countries in the European Union forum and other international organizations, providing a synergy effect, and if we acted separately our chances of success would be far smaller.

Today the stakes in this game are far different from what they were 15 years ago. The last half of the 20th century divided Europe into two parts, one highly developed and the other one less advanced. The proverbial Berlin Wall has disappeared, but the differences in national incomes, deficiencies in infrastructure, as well as energy dependency inherited from the previous regimes have remained. Despite the enormous development of the economies of our countries, due to the efforts and patience of our peoples, we need political will, time, and financial aid to redress the civilization differences that separate us from the older members of the European Union.

This gap will have to be bridged if we want to provide the European Union with a real and consistent material foundation, not just a rhetorical one. And here I see a new and wide prospective area for the Visegrad Group to work on. From the perspective of Warsaw and our government, the development of transport infrastructure, especially on the most neglected North-South axis, should become the economic link between Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. We intend to build a freeway soon along the eastern border of Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary to connect the Baltic States with the Balkans and Turkey. We would also like to complete unfinished highways and in the future build a highway connecting Gdańsk with the Czech and German road networks. These new transport routes will generate new jobs, improve cargo circulation, and create better investment conditions.

As far as energy is concerned, the Polish government has done everything in its power to make Poland independent from the Russian Federation, its monopolistic supplier of gas and crude oil. This issue affects the whole of Central and Southern Europe, as well as the Baltic States. It even concerns the entire European Union, whose energy policy must take into account



the interests of all member states as well as the security of the entire community. The Visegrad Group and Austria have already launched an initiative to create such a policy, and I believe it will bear fruit.

The great value of the Visegrad idea comes from the wide support it enjoys among the citizens of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The Visegrad Regions Forum, which was chaired by Poland in 2004, established the organizational basis for cooperation among regional governments, and this should identify the goals and tasks of the new administrations. In this way, while opening mutually to each other, we have been gradually eliminating the bad legacy of the past as well as the artificial frontiers between us. We have been building the Central European Region, not as an alternative to the European Union, but as a unique and appropriate part of the whole.

However, we cannot forget that democracy and freedom are not shared by all nations and communities on the European continent.

The Visegrad Group has already played an important role in supporting the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. It is our moral obligation, as well as in the interest of European security, to support democratic change in Belarus and to strengthen the pro-European orientation of the internal and foreign policies of Ukraine and Moldova. This is not just a task for governments: The non-governmental organizations of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary will have an ever greater say in these matters. Since NGOs usually consist of young people, and cooperation between them influences the Visegrad Group, I look with optimism to the future of the V4, as well as to that of each of our countries.

Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz

Politician, physicist, publicist.
Former State Secretary in the
Ministry of National Education
(1992–1993). Former Chairman
of the Parliamentary Committee
on Privatization, and former
Chairman of the conservative Law
and Justice (PiS) party parliamentary
caucus. Since October 2005 Prime
Minister of the Republic of Poland.

FIFTEEN MEANINGFUL YEARS OF VISEGRAD COOPERATION

Mikuláš Dzurinda

Fifteen years in the history of mankind can seem like a very short period. Fifteen years in the history of Europe, on the other hand, has often meant a great deal. The last fifteen years for Slovakia and its neighbors and partners in the Visegrad Group have been enormously meaningful.

It was a period full of hopes as well as fears. On the one hand, there was great satisfaction at the successful progress of democratic change, while on the other hand the shadow from which the region was emerging was still present. It was a time of great challenges and trials, some of which were surmounted at first attempt, and others that took several tries. It was a period in which our nations were once again able (freely) to breathe the air of democracy, and to decide their destinies and futures. Our common approaches, visions, challenges, ties, and history naturally led us towards the idea of close cooperation.

The joint Visegrad declaration was born in the same place where in 1335, the representatives of Central Europe – the monarchs of the Czech lands, Poland, and Hungary – agreed on a form of cooperation. With their signatures in Visegrad, Presidents Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa, and Prime Minister József Antall confirmed the common desire of our countries to guarantee their citizens stability, security, and prosperity in the new and united democratic Europe. The Visegrad Group was not founded as a formal alliance, nor as an alternative to European integration. Instead, it became a form of preparation for integration, given the enormous significance of Central European cooperation.

We were not the first to speak of cooperation. Doctor Milan Hodža was among those who first grasped the importance of European integration and the role of Central Europe in that process. I now see the Visegrad cooperation through the prism of his thoughts as well, for all that he lived at a different time and in a different situation. I even see Visegrad in a certain way as a continuation of Hodža's thoughts.

Visegrad cooperation is one of our country's foreign policy priorities. It is a cooperation that brings positive synergy, stability, and understanding to the region. It increases the importance of all its members, and strengthens their voices in the pursuit of common regional interests. Practice has shown us that cooperation within Central Europe strengthens this region as a pillar of European cooperation, security and democracy, and benefits both the countries of the region and the whole of Europe. For Milan Hodža, and for us today as well, the basic premise of cooperation in Central Europe is that the region not become a tool of interests, or a forum where various interests meet and battle for supremacy. The other key prerequisite is that the countries of the region not be carried away by nationalist passions.

In 2004, after years of mutual inspiration and cooperation, we managed completely to fulfill our primary goals. Just as the paths our countries were travelling did not come to an end with our joining NATO and the EU, neither was the potential for further cooperation between us exhausted. With this in mind, the Declaration of Kroměříž reflected the new reality and tried to outline a new vision for the Visegrad Group.

This vision continues to rest on flexible and voluntary cooperation without the building of formal bureaucratic structures. It is based on direct and personal debate and the search for common viewpoints. Although our goal is to strengthen cooperation within Visegrad, this cooperation is not limited by geographic borders, but goes far beyond them. On more than one occasion, the Visegrad Group has managed to take a united stance on



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Founder and Chairman of the Slovak
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Republic (since 1998).

serious issues affecting the European Union, and clearly and legibly to formulate and carry through solutions that benefited our countries and the Union as a whole. The Visegrad Group is not a lobby group, however, but a platform on which common stances and coordinated approaches can be borne. Exchanges of ideas and experiences are always beneficial, even when the parties are unable to find common ground, as they help us to understand one another.

One of the most important missions of the "Visegrad Four" remains expanding the area of stability and prosperity to other countries, especially in the Balkans and Ukraine. The countries of the Visegrad Group will not keep to themselves their experiences in building democracy and civil society, and integrating into NATO and the EU. We understand well that the future of Europe and of our own countries is closely connected to the development of these other nations.

While the Visegrad Group does not intend to expand, it continues to successfully develop contacts with other countries and regional groupings, such as the Benelux, the Baltics and the countries of Scandinavia. Contacts with Austria and Slovenia are also developing favourably. The Visegrad Group is therefore not a self-serving and closed group, but an active element in developments on the continent, as well as a generator of new ideas and new cooperative ties. The Group has also been successful in using the tools at its disposal within Euro-Atlantic structures, such as within the field of policy towards its neighbors, cross-border cooperation and so on.

One of the most important cooperative projects of the Visegrad countries has been the founding of the International Visegrad Fund with headquarters in Bratislava. The aims of the Fund include developing ties mostly within the fields of education, culture, science and youth. It is an incubator for scientific knowledge, it is fertile ground for the birth of new artistic values, and at the same time it is a stream through which these values flow. I am convinced that the two million euros the governments set aside for the Fund's activities are a good investment. During its existence the Fund has carried out hundreds of projects with the cooperation of municipal governments, non-governmental organizations, schools, artistic bodies, scientific laboratories and so on. The development of direct contacts between people and institutions within our region has strengthened their sense of belonging to the region.

From my point of view, Visegrad cooperation has been more than merely successful in the fifteen years of its existence. We have long since ceased to need to convince anyone of its viability or justification. This connection has proven to be right and useful not only in terms of the internal development of the Visegrad partners, but for uniting Europe as a whole. It is up to us to make use of the possibilities that this cooperation offers.



Signature of the Visegrad Declaration,
Visegrad, 15 February, 1991.
Seated from the left: President
of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary
József Antall and President
of the Republic of Poland Lech Wałęsa.

Building Visegrad



THE WEST ADRIFT: VISION IN SEARCH OF A STRATEGY

Zbigniew Brzeziński

THE WASHINGTON POST, 3 JANUARY, 1992

The collapse of Soviet communism calls for both a compelling vision of the future and coolly defined strategic goals (...). A policy must define strategic priorities that are attainable even if short of the wholly desirable. Current Western policy is long on vision, rich on rhetoric, generous in gestures – but vague strategically. Specifically, it has not yet come to grips with two central realities: that in the foreseeable future, only three formerly communist countries – Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia – enjoy any likelihood of a successful transition to a market-based democracy; and that in Russia, the near-term issue is not the prospect for democracy but the very definition of what modern Russia ought to be – a national or an imperial state (...)

As of early 1992, Western aid commitments to the former Soviet Union were already in excess of \$81.5 billion (with slightly over \$3 billion for food and medical grants, over \$8 billion for balance-of-payments support and close to \$49 billion for export and other credits and guarantees (...). Aid to Central Europe has also been on an impressive scale – and somewhat more focused. Loans and grants by foreign governments and international institutions come to about \$31 billion. Overall, more than \$110 billion has been committed – an impressive sum by any measure.

However, even in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, difficulties are likely to mount. Unemployment might well be in the range of 15 to 20 percent by the end of 1992, with the millions out on the street not enjoying the benefits of any safety nets. Both GNP and the standard of living are currently declining. The allure of democracy and faith in the free market – not to speak of trust in the West – is likely to wane.

Even under the best circumstances, the per capita income gap between these countries and their immediate Western neighbours will remain shockingly wide for a long time to come. If one makes the optimistic assumption that Germany and Austria will grow at about 4 percent per year and the post-communist states at 6 percent, it would still take Czechoslovakia 34 years, Hungary 51 years and Poland 67 years to close the gap!

However, compared to the prospects further East, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia are in a relatively favoured situation. They already have operating democratic institutions, growing though still modest Western investments and gradually expanding private sectors. They identify with Western Europe and have some real reason to expect to be part of a larger European community within a decade (...)

The two central strategic priorities for Western policy should thus be to ensure that Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia consummate a successful, model transition to pluralist democracy and that Russia consolidates its status as a post-imperial democratic and European nation, especially by normalizing its relationship with Ukraine. A Central Europe that is increasingly linked to Western Europe would itself help to draw Russia into the European framework (...)

Pursuit of these goals will require innovations in Western policy: First, the West, including its financial institutions, must show greater sensitivity to the social problems of the ongoing transition in Central Europe. It is politically and morally unacceptable for the West to insist that post-communist countries deliberately accept prolonged, massive and painful unemployment. Yet that is in effect what both the IMF and foreign private investors are demanding as part of the privatization process. At a minimum, the West should help create some temporary safety nets for victims of the transition (...)

It is urgent to stimulate the declining economies of the region in a socially positive way. Right now, Central Europe needs some major, labour-intensive projects that provide both long-term economic benefits and short-term employment and growth (...)



The West needs to enhance the sense of security of the Central European countries. They feel themselves defenceless in the face of the growing crisis in the East. They fear massive migrations, not to speak of the possible spill-over of any violence that might erupt in the event of a total breakdown of the former Soviet Union. Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia should now be more formally included in binding security arrangements involving either NATO or the Western European Union. The existence of a security vacuum in this sensitive region is counterproductive for all parties (...)

PRESS CONFERENCE OF ZBIGNIEW BRZEZIŃSKI, 2 APRIL, 1995 AT THE AMERICAN CENTER IN SOFIA

As you all know, there is a great deal of expectation today that in the course of this decade and at the latest in the first half of the next decade the four Visegrad countries – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – will become members of Europe and of NATO. You have to ask yourself why is that so, and the answer is because they, like Western Europe, are genuinely ready for stable, regional co-operation. Their membership in Europe does not mean importing into Europe ethnic conflicts. Their entrance into Europe means enlarging the scope of a stable Europe. And that in turns means that NATO is prepared to ensure the security of a larger Europe. But Europe will not come and NATO will not come to those parts of Europe which are dominated by ethnic conflicts.

Zbigniew Brzeziński

Political scientist.

Served as United States National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter (1977–1981). Currently counsellor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

Meeting of Visegrad High Representatives,
Budapest, 15 February, 1991





FROM THE ANTI-COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND TO NATO AND THE EU

Andrzej Ananicz

1. The pre-Visegrad period – preparing the groundwork

Visegrad cooperation began long before it was proclaimed by the authorities of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. In Poland, as far back as the 1970s, thanks to the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR), the Independent Publishing House (NOWA), and other independent initiatives, we became familiar with the publications of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian opposition figures. Democracy activists from our countries met each other despite repression from the communist authorities. We knew that regardless of the borders that divided us, our views of reality were similar and our assessments of communism identical.

The circle of the quarterly publication *The Camp*, to which I belonged, was preoccupied with the communist plague all over the world, but the Visegrad area was particularly close to us. We wrote about it frequently. At one point, with the great help of our publisher, Czesław Bielecki, we decided to prepare *The Zone*, a major publication in Polish, Czech, and Hungarian (language) versions. To keep the KGB occupied, on the cover of each language edition we inscribed the words Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest respectively, even though all of the work was done in Poland (we remain very grateful to our railwaymen, who helped transport part of the edition to Czechoslovakia and Hungary). It was also symbolic that the co-editor of the whole publication and the editor of the Hungarian part was Ákos Engelmayer, the first ambassador of Hungary to Poland after we regained our independence.

There were many other groups similar to ours. Opposition activists visited each other as frequently as they could. Our printers and illegal radio transmitter specialists trained colleagues in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Colleagues from these countries in turn participated in strikes during the Polish “carnival.”

2. Visegrad – consolidation

The new democratic authorities of our three countries consisted of people who either knew each other personally from their opposition activities during communism, or who had at least heard of each other. The Visegrad Triangle thus came to life in a very natural way. And in an equally natural way it faced the fundamental challenge of finding an appropriate place on the political map of Europe. We wanted to ensure ourselves full sovereignty and security as quickly as possible, and to join the Western system of cooperation for good.

The first requirement was to dissolve the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. That was rather easy, although care had to be taken of the reaction from the Moscow side. Negotiations with Moscow on new bilateral treaties and agreements on the withdrawal of the Soviet army from our territories demanded considerable intellectual effort and persistence. We consulted each other almost every week, mutually following the proposed treaty clauses. They were not always identical, as the Soviet army, for example, was stationed in Hungary and Czechoslovakia illegally as an outcome of the armed interventions in those countries, whereas it was in Poland

1989

15 January, Prague – Over 5,000 people demonstrate on Wenceslas Square on the anniversary of the 1969 self-immolation of Jan Palach, who was protesting the Warsaw Pact’s military invasion of Czechoslovakia. Police brutally disperse the demonstrators and arrest 90 people.

6 February – 5 April, Warsaw – The communist authorities for the first time agree to start a dialogue with the opposition. As a result of the Round Table discussions, *Solidarity* is re-legalised and new parliamentary elections are arranged.

21 February, Prague – A court sentences Václav Havel to nine months imprisonment.

3 May, Warsaw – The first issue of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Electoral Gazette*) is published – the first non-communist, legal newspaper in Central Europe in 30 years.

as a result of the unfortunate agreements signed in 1945. Nevertheless, we stuck to the same line, and these difficult questions were solved without too much tension with our former Big Brother.

At that time, Western Europe did not envisage us joining their circle; instead, they preferred some unspecified form of adaptation to the new conditions. Despite our mutual efforts, we won no prospect of membership in the association systems of the European Community, while accession to NATO seemed flat-out impossible. Thus, although we managed to break the restraints of communism, we remained outsiders for the Western world. Our path to that world led through our own reforms, through activities within the Council of Europe and the CSCE (the OSCE since 1994), as well as through creativity in regional politics (such as cooperation between Visegrad and the Benelux, or mutual solutions to the Yugoslav crisis), and most of all through the pursuit of our strategic goals.

Joint visit in Washington D.C. by Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Visegrad countries, 5 April, 2001. Seated from the left: Ján Figel (Slovakia), Zbigniew Brzezinski (former security adviser to US President Jimmy Carter) and Andrzej Ananicz (Poland).



3. Doubts – stuck in neutral

The division of Czechoslovakia, although it was a “Velvet” divorce, weakened the political integrity of the Visegrad Group. The anti-Western and, to put it mildly, populist ideas of Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia were a difficult fit with the rest of the group. The Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, did not see much sense in such cooperation, and instead promoted the ideology of individualism in pursuit of national goals.

This does not mean, however, that we always agreed on everything beforehand in Visegrad. Once, one of the Visegrad member countries distributed selected comparative data at a forum of international organisations that demonstrated its superiority over its other two partners. Each country’s politicians behaved in a similar manner on various occasions. Our attitudes towards national minorities and the Diaspora differed as well. Occasionally, disputes over customs duties occurred, despite our mutual aim of establishing a free trade area before accession to the European Union.

While I was negotiating our bilateral treaty with our Czechoslovak colleagues, they demanded that I remove the word “solidarity” from the title of the document because they

4 June, Poland – Parliamentary elections bring a spectacular landslide victory for *Solidarity* candidates.

16 June, Budapest – 250,000 people attend ceremonies commemorating the anniversary of Imre Nagy’s death.

6 September, Budapest – Conclusion of the “Triangular Table” discussions between the authorities and the opposition in Hungary.

12 September, Warsaw – Nomination of the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government, the region’s first non-communist government in 5 years.

viewed it as communist jargon. My argument that we could not throw out our dictionaries because of the communists made no impression. Hence, on my initiative, we threw out many other words that had been “contaminated by communism”. The Hungarians, on the other hand, had no such objections.

After the division of Czechoslovakia, our cooperation did not cease, but it decreased in intensity and became more focussed on economic issues. At that time, customs barriers were being lifted and the Visegrad Fund was being created. It was also a time to think again about what could be done and what was worth doing together in politics.

4. The return of the group – maturity

The period from 1995 to 1998 sparked a renewed awareness of the importance of the role of the Visegrad Group. The first big threat was the American idea of the Partnership for Peace. In its original shape it was to have replaced the membership of our countries in NATO¹. Here the role played by Lech Wałęsa cannot be overestimated. Wałęsa said he would reject the whole project if it was not altered to become a path to joining NATO. Opposing most of his own administration, President Bill Clinton agreed with Wałęsa during his meeting with the leaders of the Visegrad Group in Prague.

We now had a new task ahead of us to unite the member states, and later on yet another – supporting the NATO candidacy of Slovakia, which had been left out of the first expansion round due to the excesses of the Mečiar era. These goals required continuous and coordinated talks between our leaders and NATO partners, as well as the activation of our diplomatic and non-governmental organizations, and numerous public debates with Russian experts who warned that the expansion of NATO to the east would bring terrible consequences.

Once it became apparent that the scales in the game were tipping in our favour, we found it easier to argue for membership in the European Union. Despite the differences between our goals in various sectors of the Union, we managed to sustain a basic level of unity in the face of strategic challenges for our countries.

Voices could occasionally be heard from one capital city or another that each nation’s state of readiness for accession negotiations should be judged on its own merits, and that the tortoises should not delay the hares (the regatta rule). Games were occasionally played, and moments of insincerity occurred, but generally speaking, we proceeded together.

The importance of this Visegrad cooperation was confirmed by the fact that various other countries from the wider region constantly asked to be admitted. This is understandable. Notwithstanding the weaknesses of the group, we regained our sovereignty and a noteworthy place in Europe.

¹ When, during unofficial talks in Budapest, I asked one of its creators (*nomina sunt odiosa*) if the project was to be the confirmation of the Yalta arrangement in the new political situation, he said – “yes”.



Andrzej Ananicz

Iranist, diplomat. The Head of the Foreign Intelligence Agency (2004–2005). Former Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey (2001–2004). Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1997–2001) and Deputy Head of the Negotiation Team for Poland’s Accession to the EU (1998–2001).

The Visegrad Chronology

2–4 November, Wrocław –

Czechoslovak artists and dissidents participate in the Festival of Czech and Slovak Independent Culture in Wrocław. Many independent activists are detained at the border.

9 November, Berlin – The Berlin Wall falls.

17 November, Prague –

Demonstration in Prague, beginning of the Velvet Revolution.

19 November, Prague – Creation, at the initiative of Václav Havel, of the Civic Forum, which assembles various opposition groups.

THROUGH VISEGRAD TO THE WEST

Jan Krzysztof Bielecki

As early as in 1989, our ambition was to link Poland with the West and to join Euro-Atlantic structures as soon as possible. Only a complete separation from our previous political and economic ties allowed us to gain independence from the USSR and guaranteed real freedom, which was the dream of *Solidarność* (Solidarity).

This line of thinking at the time was not obvious to everybody. The political reality of that period did not support such a philosophy: The Soviet Union still existed, as did the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or Comecon. As a matter of fact, we hoped the Warsaw Pact and Comecon would both die a natural death, but at that point even the wildest optimists did not seriously expect the dissolution of the USSR.

Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (left) in the Polish Parliament (*Sejm*), with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz.



The idea of cooperation in the name of eventual integration with the West was born at the turn of 1990 and 1991, at a time when the USSR, in order to save its European empire, suggested a reprise of the Comecon concept. Initially, fearing possible retaliation, it seemed a natural thing for us and our neighbours to the south to accept this concept, while rejecting it did not find too much support even among politicians from our country.

This was one of the most important problems I had to face when I took over the post of Prime Minister in January 1991. Personally, I had no doubts which direction to take: To block the Comecon initiative and to opt for integration with the West. That was what I did. There was a risk of retaliation from the USSR; however, I was convinced it was a risk that had to be taken.

Having rejected the renewed Comecon project, we decided that on our way to the West we would join forces with our neighbors to the south who were also implementing reforms, and building free market economies and democratic structures.

20–24 November, Prague –

As a result of demonstrations lasting several days, attended by several hundred thousands of people, the politburo of the governing Communist Party of Czechoslovakia resigns. A few days later, Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec and President Gustav Husak submit their resignations.

29 December, Prague –

The parliament elects Václav Havel as President of Czechoslovakia.

1990

25 January, Warsaw – During his first foreign visit, in a speech before the Polish *Sejm*, the newly elected President of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, for the first time voices his belief in the need for cooperation with Poland and Hungary to put a new face on Central Europe.

25 March and 8 April, Hungary – The first democratic parliamentary elections, won by the Democratic Forum (MDF) ahead of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) and the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP).

The declaration of cooperation between Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary on the mutual project of European integration, signed in Visegrad on February 15, 1991, was an act of political will that was transformed into mutual action, despite the numerous differences between us. Our three countries were at various stages of development and did not always have similar short-term economic goals. Opinions on regional cooperation varied as well. Our partners were afraid that the regional association might delay their accession to European structures. The concept of “the consultative group” carried the day, however, becoming the new formula for collaboration in the region – one without formal structures.

Visegrad was deliberately chosen as the birthplace for this initiative. This town is the historical symbol of cooperation between our three countries. Right here, many centuries ago, an unusual regional collaboration was born during a historical meeting between the kings of Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary. A few years after this 1335 meeting, King Casimir the Great initiated a personal union between Poland and Hungary in Visegrad, entering a treaty with the Hungarian king under which the kings from the Capet-Anjou dynasty were to take over the Polish throne after his death.

The Visegrad Declaration for the first time employed the term “Central Europe” with regard to a group of countries including Poland. In this way, Visegrad became a symbol of the common interests of the nations from our region. The region of Central Europe had until then been identified, geographically and culturally, with the group of post-Habsburg Danube countries.

Visegrad, however, is the symbol of regional striving towards mutual strategic goals. Cooperation within the Visegrad Group has been a test of political maturity and the capacity to compromise – if we can cooperate within our small family, we will be able to collaborate within the larger European family.

This regional collaboration helped us accomplish our main strategic target: Now we belong to NATO and to the European Union. We made the Solidarność dream of a free Poland come true, with Poland being released from the domination of the USSR. Visegrad proved an effective means of reaching this aim.



Jan Krzysztof Bielecki
Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland (1991) and Minister of European Integration (1992–1993). Executive Head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1993–2003). Since 2003 Deputy Head of Bank Pekao S.A.

The Visegrad Chronology

9 April, Bratislava – At a meeting of Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and Parliamentarians from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, it is decided to go ahead and work on a common political declaration by the three countries.

16 May, Budapest – József Antall’s (Hungarian Democratic Forum – MDF) government, supported by a centre-right coalition, comes into being.

8–9 June, Czechoslovakia – First democratic parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia, won by the Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech lands, and by the Public Against Violence (VPN) movement in Slovakia.

14 June, Bratislava – Vladimír Mečiar heads the government of Slovakia.

VISEGRAD YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Ján Čarnogurský

Central Europe has historically been a place where wars begin and end. European and global powers have clashed here, and Central Europe on its own was unable to erect a barrier to them. Conflicts in Central Europe have tended to spread towards the East and towards the West from the centre of the continent. A peaceful and settled Central Europe that does not generate conflicts is therefore in the interest of even the most remote parts of Europe.

Following the abrupt fall of communism in 1989, Central Europe suddenly found itself in an uncertain geopolitical situation. The Warsaw Pact and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) fell apart. The political system which had existed until then also

disintegrated, leaving only the desire of the countries of Central Europe to join the European Union as quickly as possible. The vision of future membership in the European Community gave Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary a common goal to shoot for, but it was a goal whose fulfilment depended on events and powers beyond Central Europe. Historical experience, as well as knowledge of ourselves, urged us to find a system that would provide an anchor of stability within Central Europe itself.

Among the lessons that history had taught us were the tensions between Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary during the inter-war period, which led to defeat for all, both before and after the Second World War. The first attempt at learning a lesson from this was a plan to create a post-war Polish-Czechoslovak confederation. The governments in exile of Poland and Czechoslovakia signed an agreement in London in November 1940 on the creation of such a polity. The Polish exile government under General Sikorski, in talks with Edvard Beneš in London, also pushed for the membership of Hungary in the future confederation. But the absence of a Hungarian representative in wartime London and the clear reluctance of Hungary to give up land it had gained from the Munich Agreement presented problems. Following the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Germany in June 1941, the Soviets gained an important voice in debates on post-war arrangements in Central Europe, and came out against the creation of the confederation. Then



Meeting of Visegrad Group countries Justice Ministers on the coordination of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Tatranská Javorina, Slovakia, 6 October, 1999. Standing from the left: Otakar Motejl (Czech Republic), Ján Čarnogurský (Slovakia), Hanna Suchocka (Poland), and Ibolya David (Hungary).

3 August, Budapest – The parliament elects Árpád Göncz as President of the Republic of Hungary.

6 November, Strasbourg – Hungary becomes a member of the Council of Europe.

25 November and 9 December, Poland – The legendary leader of *Solidarity*, Lech Wałęsa, wins the first democratic presidential elections. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki is eliminated in the first round.

29 December, Warsaw – Jan Krzysztof Bielecki becomes Prime Minister.

followed our mutual post-war membership in the East Bloc, together with attempts at freeing Poland and Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and so on. In 1986, on the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising, dissidents from Poland, the Czech lands, Slovakia, Hungary, and East Germany signed a joint petition demanding the return of freedom to their countries.

Then freedom returned

The first ideas on building a new system of stability in Central Europe arose within the group around Václav Havel. Shortly after his election as President of Czechoslovakia, Havel proposed a meeting between the Presidents and Prime Ministers of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary in Bratislava in March 1990. The meeting took place in the Bratislava Castle. Czechoslovakia was represented by President Havel and the federal Prime Minister Marián Čalfa, Poland by Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and President Wojciech Jaruzelski, and Hungary by Prime Minister István Neméth and President Matyás Szűros. Bratislava was chosen as the site of the meeting, as its geographic location and historical traditions made it a natural choice for the beginning of a new era in relations among the participating countries and nations. Poland and Hungary were equally aware of the need to fill the political vacuum that had arisen following the sudden collapse of communism. They not only accepted the invitation of President Václav Havel, but they also actively participated in discussions on the continuation of cooperation between the three countries. The contents of talks at the meeting betrayed the fact that it was taking place shortly after the political earthquake in Central Europe. What is more, Hungary was just about to head into elections, the first free ones it had enjoyed in a century. The Czechoslovak diplomatic corps was unable to prepare a goal-driven vision of cooperation between the participating countries in time for the conference. The fact that the meeting was held at all, however, was a success, as were the decisions taken to continue with further cooperation.

The host of the meeting scheduled for the following year was to be Hungary, where the government of József Antall and Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky had recently taken power. Jeszenszky was a living example of the tangled fates of the nations of Central Europe. His ancient forbear, Ján Jesenský, was a noble who came from Slovakia's northern Liptov region, and at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War had been the chancellor of Charles University in Prague. In 1621 he was beheaded on Old Town Square in Prague following the defeat of the Czech army at Bílá Hora (White Mountain). Hungary set the site of the 1991 meeting in Budapest and Visegrad, a town on the Danube River below Estregom. The Hungarian hosts prepared a concept of further cooperation between our three countries for the meeting. All three wanted to avoid the creation of new bureaucratic offices, organs, and officials that would be remote from the cares and concerns of the citizens of the participating countries, and would produce an enormous quantity of paper about nothing. What the participants did agree on was to hold further meetings and to coordinate their foreign policies, as well as other vital matters. The term Visegrad, which the participating countries bestowed on their cooperation, was adopted in place of an institutional structure that no one wanted. The name was not chosen randomly, but because, like the town, it symbolized the unity of the member countries.

The Visegrad Chronology

1991

15 February, Visegrad (Hungary) – the president of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, the president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, and the Prime Minister of Hungary, József Antall, sign the “Declaration on Cooperation Between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for

European Integration”. The document, called the Visegrad Declaration, sets the following goals for the three partners: harmonising activities to shape cooperation and close contacts with European institutions; trying to create free contacts between citizens, institutions, churches and social organisations; developing economic cooperation based

on free market principles; strengthening cooperation on infrastructure, ecology, the free flow of information and cultural values; supporting the full realisation of the rights of national minorities; and supporting cooperation between local self-governments.

2 April, Bratislava – The Slovak parliament dismisses Vladimír Mečiar from his post as Prime Minister, and appoints the chairman of the Christian-Democratic Party, Ján Čarnogurský, in his place.



Ján Čarnogurský

Slovak lawyer. Before 1989 prevented from practicing his profession for defending dissidents. After 1989 Deputy Prime Minister of the federal government, then Prime Minister of the Government of Slovakia. Former leader of the Christian Democratic Party. Currently back in law practice.

The name Visegrad is a Slavic one, while the town lies in Hungary and in the 14th Century was the site of a meeting between the kings of Hungary, the Czech lands, and Poland to discuss cooperation.

The cooperation which emerged from the 1991 meeting had its ups and downs in accordance with the situation in each member country and in Europe as a whole. In 1993 Czechoslovakia divided into two states, and the Visegrad Troika suddenly became the Visegrad Four. This development had no impact on the basic content of the Group's cooperation. The Visegrad Group became a communication link between Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, a place where they could debate and try to solve their problems more privately than within Europe-wide organizations. In some of the capital cities of the member countries in the years that followed, the governments that took power trusted Visegrad, while in others the level of interest was lower. Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, for example, was not a Visegrad enthusiast, while Václav Klaus, albeit for different reasons, also did not have a high opinion of the way the Group worked. Nevertheless, internal communication within Visegrad continued to function, demonstrating its basic viability. The members of the Visegrad Group entered the European Union at the same time, inviting debate as to whether Visegrad was still needed. Visegrad admittedly lacks the internal unity of the Benelux Group, but on repeated occasions it has been able to present a more or less united position within the European Union, which is far better than if its members were competing with each other. The Nice Treaty, which remains in force after the failure to pass the European Constitution, gives Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary collectively 46 votes in the European Council, which is more than Germany has, for example.

The future of the Visegrad Group will depend on whether or not the member countries are able to transform the differences between their interests into a mutual strength rather than a mutual liability. Hungary continues to face a challenge in its domestic policy to refrain from rhetoric regarding its compatriots living in foreign countries, in line with the rules of the European Union. If it does not manage to do so, it may weaken or even destroy the Visegrad Group, while Hungary may easily find itself in international isolation.

In terms of foreign policy, the principal challenge again is for all Visegrad member countries to turn their traditionally different foreign policy ties into a common strength rather than a weakness. In simplified terms, during foreign policy crises Hungary has traditionally looked towards Germany, the Czechs and Slovaks towards Russia, and Poland to remote powers, such as France and England in the past, or the United States at the moment. The Visegrad Group should not try to suppress these historic inclinations, but rather to use them to promote its common aims.

At the end of the Trojan War, Odysseus asked Tiresias the way home to Greece. The soothsayer gave him the following advice: "Despite great suffering, you will reach your goal if you manage to master your passions, as well as those of your companions."

We too are capable of mastering our passions.

6 October, Kraków – At a meeting of the Visegrad countries' Prime Ministers and ministers responsible for foreign economic relations, it is stated that economy, transport, environmental protection, and science will be the main areas of increased cooperation. At the same time, the need for removing customs barriers in trade is recognised.

27 October, Poland – Parliamentary elections. Despite the victory of the Democratic Union (UD), the party's candidate for the post of Prime Minister, Bronisław Geremek, is unable to form a new government.

26 November, Strasbourg – Poland becomes a member of the Council of Europe.

5 December, Warsaw – Jan Olszewski becomes Prime Minister and forms a new government based on a centre-right coalition.

MY VISEGRAD QUESTION

Rudolf Chmel

I am not a fan of self-quotation, and even though one can occasionally not avoid plagiarizing oneself, I dislike re-reading things I have written. But now there's no help for it, partly for practical reasons, but mostly for personal ones. The text I have been asked to write here cannot help but be personal.

When in June 1990 I came to Budapest as the Czecho-Slovak ambassador (not knowing I would be the last one), Czecho-Slovakia was regarded very positively, and it was almost a pleasure to represent such a country. Given that I had a lot of old friends in Hungarian politics



and public life, the pleasure was all the greater. It was no coincidence that among the ambassadorial community, my best friend was Maciej Koźmiński, a superb Polish historian and "Hungarologist". In ambassadorial posts and in surrounding states we met above all with intellectual names such as Jacek Baluch and György Varga in Prague, and Ákos Engelmayer and the young dissident Markéta Fialková in Poland. In such company (we somehow found plenty of reasons to get together) and parallel to "high" politicians we generated a more internal meaning and content for Visegrad cooperation. But I'm getting ahead of myself, and as a good memorialist, who has already put out a book of his recollections from this period called *My Hungarian Question* (1996), I should humbly return to the beginning. On 15 February, 1991 I wrote the following text, which I believe can be regarded not only as a subjective one, but also as historically authentic:

Meeting of Visegrad Group Ministers of Culture in Ostrava. From the left: Andrzej Zakrzewski (Poland), Milan Kňažko (Slovakia), Pavel Dostál (Czech Republic).

The Visegrad Chronology

1992

6 May, Prague – At a meeting, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group underline their will to strengthen cooperation leading to membership in the European Union, NATO, and the Western European Union.

5–6 June, Czechoslovakia –

Parliamentary elections, won in Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech Republic) by the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), and in Slovakia by Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS).

2 July, Czechoslovakia – Jan Stráský becomes head of the new federal government, while Vladimír Mečiar heads the new government of the Slovak Republic, and Václav Klaus chairs the new Czech government.

3 July, Warsaw – After the fall of Jan Olszewski's government, and an unsuccessful attempt by Waldemar Pawlak, leader of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), to form a new government, a new centre-right coalition comes into being. Hanna Suchocka (UD) becomes the new Prime Minister.

“Today, finally, was an historic day – the inauguration of the Visegrad Three. The idea of coordination and cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Poland, and Hungary was proposed first by President Václav Havel in the Polish Sejm on 25 January, 1990. On that occasion he invited the representatives of Hungary and Poland to meet on 9 April in Bratislava. These were not the main steps towards Visegrad, but they were undoubtedly important preparatory events that were made more concrete in November at a meeting between Havel, and Prime Ministers József Antall and Tadeusz Mazowiecki at a CSCE summit in Paris.

Back in Bratislava these three states had agreed on a certain minimum, that they would later issue a common declaration. Now the moment has arrived, and we will see if the three countries can fall in step over the longer term. Yesterday, following the arrival of our delegation after dinner with its own entourage (an elegant protocol term that means you are not accompanied by a host) the Czecho-Slovak representation went to the nearby residence of President Árpád Göncz. Göncz had a warm welcome for Václav Havel, Marián Čalfa, Karel Schwarzenberg, and Alexander Vondra. György Konrád was also present. Together we set out on an evening stroll, ending up at the Vienna Café of the Forum Hotel (Karel Schwarzenberg subtly remarked that he would have preferred the original café, meaning the non-Vienna one!). In terms of the overall atmosphere, the Czecho-Slovak delegation dined in a restaurant at the government residence, while at the same time the Polish, led by Lech Wałęsa, dined in an adjoining restaurant, separated from ours by a wall; there was no contact.

We departed as if in secrecy after dinner to see Árpád Göncz, while József Antall (again, as if in secrecy) at the same time arrived to take tea with Lech Wałęsa, who didn't want to go to town with him for dinner. In other words, at a certain point in the evening, all of the basic parties to the Visegrad talks were under one roof, but they didn't meet. Our meeting with Árpád Göncz was interesting in that József Antall, his government and the Hungarian foreign ministry had done all they could in the preceding weeks to manoeuvre Göncz out of the action. The almost three-hour meeting and stroll of the small Czecho-Slovak group with Árpád Göncz, including a pleasant chat at the Forum Hotel, helped, I believe, to alleviate the rather cold atmosphere of the founding summit (even relations between Havel and Wałęsa were not marked by unusual sincerity). Today's talks focused on cooperation between the three countries, the situation in the Soviet Union and within the Warsaw Pact, and the conflict in the Persian Gulf. Václav Havel noted that today we were following up on the meeting in Bratislava from April of last year. He said that Western Europe was expecting to see successful cooperation between the countries of the Visegrad Three, and that our ability to coordinate our efforts was, in their eyes, a test of the maturity of our new democracies. He said we should not be aiming to start a new pact or to set up a *cordon sanitaire*, but suggested that we needed some kind of security guarantee, and that this could be provided by the treaty that we were to sign with each other. Lech Wałęsa informed Václav Havel and József Antall that he – unlike them – was a practical politician, and that he was saddened by the fact that an unhealthy rivalry had grown up between our countries. Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski stressed the need to conclude new bilateral treaties between our countries that would contain conditions for military cooperation as well. József Antall also stressed that the West disliked it when small countries squabbled. He reported that Romania was interested in joining the Visegrad Three, as Prime Minister Roman had written him in a letter claiming that 'the division of the former socialist countries into

20 July, Prague – In a gesture of protest against actions aimed at the division of Czechoslovakia, President Václav Havel submits his resignation.

20 December, Kraków –

The ministers of economy of Poland and Hungary, and their counterparts in the governments of the Czech and Slovak Republics, sign the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

1993

1 January, Czechoslovakia – Division of Czechoslovakia. Creation of Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

26 January, Prague – Václav Havel is elected President of the new Czech Republic.

Central and Eastern Europe is an artificial one'. Géza Jeszenszky, the only one to mention national minorities, pointed out the existence of a large Russian minority. Of Bulgaria and Romania Václav Havel said that Visegrad was not an attempt to isolate anyone, but to promote cooperation between neighbours who shared similar fates.

At this meeting a proposal was officially adopted to create an ambassadorial forum of the Visegrad Three. The ceremonial signing of the Joint Declaration amid the ruins of Visegrad officially confirmed the will of the three countries to cooperate on the road to European integration. We'll see if it remains valid in a year, or two, or three..."

Since then I have participated in various Visegrad summits, ambassadors' meetings (these remain in my memory by virtue of the pleasant intellectual company they provided), and smaller gatherings such as summits of culture ministers, seminars, and conferences of experts and intellectuals. In short, I have travelled Central Europe in support of Visegrad in times that were both trying (until 1998) and more positive (after 1998) for the alliance. The bibliography



Ninth meeting of Visegrad Group countries Ministers of Culture, Levoča, Slovakia, 7 February, 2003. From the left: Waldemar Dąbrowski (Poland), Pavel Dostál (Czech Republic), Rudolf Chmel (Slovakia) and Hungarian State Secretary László Kocsi.

Rudolf Chmel

Literature historian. Former Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic (2002–2005), president of the Open Society Foundation (1993–2000), and ambassador of Czechoslovakia to Hungary (1990–1993). Former editor-in-chief of the *Central European Gazette*. Member of the Slovak parliament.



of my writings on Visegrad is also not a meagre one, although the tone of most of these texts is not optimistic but sceptical, because the view of things from the inside gave few reasons for optimism. They still don't. The basic idea of Visegrad cooperation was that it should lead us together to the European political, economic and security structures we craved, and this has been fulfilled. This is a significant accomplishment, even though not all of the participants in the Visegrad Three, or from 1993 the Visegrad Four, saw the same meaning and future in this common work. But the result stands. What remains is for us to remember, even within unified Europe, that Central Europe truly unites these four states and nations, and that they should continue to coexist as a meaningful political, economic and cultural unit in the future. I am neither a sceptic regarding Visegrad (I may be the only one who is not), nor am I dogmatic about it, but I believe that after so much variable weather, the skies above Central Europe – above the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – will eventually clear.

The Visegrad Chronology

8 February, Bratislava –

The government of the new Slovak Republic declares its wish that Slovakia join the Visegrad Group.

15 February, Bratislava – The Slovak parliament elects Michal Kováč (HZDS) as President of Slovakia.

30 June, Strasbourg – The Czech Republic and Slovakia become members of the Council of Europe.

26 August, Bratislava – The Friendship and Cooperation Treaty between Russia and Slovakia is signed.

VISEGRAD DREAMS

Pavol Demeš

The Visegrad Four is today a tried and true foreign policy trademark that has the potential to last another 15 years. I am among those whose view of this Central European grouping was positive from the outset, but I admit to the feeling that from time to time our “quartet” could play better music.

From the era of the V3, when Visegrad consisted of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, I have a vivid memory of the historic meeting in Brussels on 16 December, 1991, when as Slovak foreign minister I participated in the ceremonial signing of the Europe Agreements between Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland and the European Community. The V3 Prime

Meeting of Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group countries, Kraków, Poland.



Ministers met in the conference rooms with their delegations and the representatives of the European Commission and the member states in a cheery mood, which was spoiled by a Spanish diplomat who brought forth some unexpected objections shortly before the signing ceremony. I believe they concerned the manufacture and export of steel. We were all speechless at this euro-manoeuvre. We had to find a suitable compromise formula quickly, and all three delegations as well as the Commissioner for Enlargement struggled greatly with it. Czechoslovak Prime Minister Marián Čalfa used some colourful language. It was the Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, a calm man with wide experience of international law, who finally pulled the thorn from the Visegrad paw. Finally, under the lights and cameras, the V3 in front of Prime Ministers signed the historic documents that opened our path to the family of European democracies. (Slovakia and the Czech Republic, following the dissolution of their federation, later had to renegotiate these agreements and sign them again.)

During the reign in Slovakia of Vladimír Mečiar and the temporary expulsion of Slovakia from European and trans-Atlantic integration processes, I closely followed the efforts of the representatives of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland on the international scene. These were times when our country was doubted on all sides. I worked at the side of President Michal Kováč, and I remember how Presidents Václav Havel, Árpád Göncz, and Lech Wałęsa (and

19 September, Poland – Early parliamentary elections and the defeat of the parties of the hitherto governing coalition. Victory for the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Peasant Party (PSL).

18 October, Warsaw – The leader of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), Waldemar Pawlak, becomes Prime Minister.

1994

18 March, Bratislava – Political conflict in Slovakia. The parliament recalls Vladimír Mečiar as Prime Minister and entrusts this position to the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jozef Morávičik.

8 and 29 May, Hungary – The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) wins parliamentary elections, with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) coming in second. Defeat of the coalition that has governed since 1990.

later President Aleksander Kwaśniewski) fought for Slovakia and encouraged us in our internal battle for democracy, which we eventually won. Thanks also to Visegrad togetherness the foursome gained membership the European Union, and despite occasional speculation, did not quit their cooperation within the EU. It is gratifying that the representatives of the four countries continue to meet regularly, and that a proper financial mechanism was found for the International Visegrad Fund, which has already supported hundreds of excellent projects.

I occasionally notice with the V4 that there is little activity on common stances towards difficult problems and nearby crises. The most glaring example of this was during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, with whom three Visegrad states share a border. In the most critical moments, however, the Visegrad states did not make any common statement. A new test as well as a chance for the V4 will be their contribution to the solution of the complicated situations in Belarus, Ukraine and the West Balkans, above all in Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo.



Looking to the future, I see the significance of the V4 lying in deepening the many-layered relations between Visegrad countries, and in coordinating their approaches and stances in an ever more complicated European Union. The cooperation and experiences of the countries of the V4 could also be a significant inspiration for other countries – what about trying to replicate the International Visegrad Fund model in the Balkans? What if a southern Visegrad Fund were founded and managed by the countries of the former Yugoslavia? The Hungarian town of Visegrad, where 15 years ago a small Central European family was started, has a sibling town in the north of Bosnia. In this southern Visegrad lies perhaps the most famous bridge in the Balkans over the Drina River, a bridge described in the world-famous book by Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić. Do these facts not offer us parallels to our own Visegrad dream?



Pavol Demeš

Politician, bio-medical researcher, photographer. Director for Central and Eastern Europe of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) in Bratislava. Previous Executive Director of the Slovak Academic Information Agency – Service Center. Served as Foreign Policy Advisor of the President of the Slovak Republic (1993–1997) and as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1991–1992).

Summit of Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group countries at the Dobříš Castle (Czech Republic), 1 October, 2003. From the left: Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakia), Vladimír Špidla (Czech Republic), Leszek Miller (Poland), Péter Medgyessy (Hungary).

The Visegrad Chronology

14 July, Budapest – Gyula Horn, leader of the Hungarian socialists, heads a government supported by the centre-left coalition between the MSzP and SzDSz.

9 September, Slovakia – Parliamentary elections. Vladimír Mečiar's party wins 35 per cent of the vote.

12 December, Bratislava – Vladimír Mečiar becomes Prime Minister in the new government, based on a coalition between the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS).

1995

25 January, Slovakia – Meeting of Prime Ministers Mečiar and Horn, aimed at the preparation of a friendship treaty between the two countries. The treaty will be signed on March 21 at the Paris Conference, but Slovakia will postpone its final ratification for another year.

VISEGRAD: THE FIRST PHASE

Jiří Dienstbier

After taking power in December 1989, we understood that entry into the democratic world would be a long and bumpy road. It wasn't clear to anyone, not even in the West, what the new Europe would look like.

It was in our interest, though, to ensure that a democratic society was firmly established not only in our own country, but in the neighbouring countries as well. After all, it had been precisely such unresolved tensions between the countries of Central Europe that had contributed to the catastrophe of a world war and, ultimately, to the establishment of a Soviet regime in the region. An iron curtain came down between the countries of the Soviet bloc as well.

The false brotherhood of the oppressors disappeared after the collapse of their regimes. The new cooperation, however, was made easier for us by the years of personal contacts between the dissident movements whose members, first in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and soon afterward

in Hungary, assumed political power. Despite their differences, the three Central European countries were, of all the post-communist states, the closest to each other in terms of historical and cultural ties, level of their economies, and their way of thinking, which in those countries was expressed in widespread opposition to the Soviet system.

In January 1990, as Czechoslovak foreign minister, I took part in meetings in Warsaw about how our three countries could support each other in dismantling the Soviet empire, transforming our countries politically and

economically, and integrating with the institutions of the developed world. In Budapest, I agreed with Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn that one of the aims of our common labors would be contributing to the creation of a united Europe. President Havel convened an informal meeting in Bratislava on 9 April, 1990, to which official representatives and some publicly active citizens of Poland and Hungary were invited. The foreign ministers of Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia accepted invitations as observers.

To all those present, the President posed a question: Can we agree that we do not wish to place obstacles in each other's way, or even envy each other, but on the contrary, that we want to assist each other? This was how Havel officially initiated the dialogue between these Central European countries.

The first test of this approach was the departure of the Soviet troops and the gradual curtailing and ultimately the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The level of cooperation in 1990 was so remarkable that it led to efforts to formalize it.

At the Paris Summit of the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in November 1990, a delegation of the Central European "troika" held talks mainly on



Jiří Dienstbier (third from the right) during discussions at the 14th Visegrad Seminar in San Sebastian, Spain.

15 February, Bratislava – As a result of an official visit by Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, Slovakia signs 12 agreements with Russia.

19 June, Budapest – The Hungarian parliament re-elects Árpád Göncz as President.

11 September, Brno, Czech Republic – Slovakia officially admitted to the Visegrad Group.

1996

31 May – 1 June, Czech Republic – Parliamentary elections. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) wins the elections, but the opposition Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), led by Miloš Zeman, comes second. Václav Klaus remains Prime Minister in a minority coalition government, whereas Miloš Zeman is elected Speaker of the Parliament.

harmonizing their approaches to integration with Western Europe. Prime Minister József Antall of Hungary suggested that we follow up the meeting in Bratislava with one in Visegrad, Hungary. Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki suggested a further meeting in Kraków. At the same time we made it clear that we were not creating a new bloc, if only because in the West many people were proposing cooperation in Central Europe as a substitute for structural integration into Western Europe.

Preparations for the meeting in Visegrad were accelerated by developments in the Soviet Union. After Eduard Shevardnadze's departure as Soviet foreign minister our three foreign ministers decided on 21 January, 1991 that we would try to achieve "the quickest possible dissolution of the Warsaw Pact" and that we would work together to negotiate all the association agreements with the European Community.

On 15 February, 1991, József Antall opened a summit meeting of the "troika" in the Hungarian parliament buildings in Budapest. The delegations agreed that working groups



Jiří Dientsbier and Václav Havel during a meeting of Civic Forum (Občanské fórum) Prague, November 1989.

would be set up to seek solutions to particular problems; that the Prime Ministers and Presidents would meet once a year; and that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and other areas would hold regular consultations. They also instructed the ambassadors of the three countries to carry a common message to the governments in whose countries they were accredited, and so on.

In conversations about European security there was a basic and overarching agreement that a pan-European security system should take the place of former pacts, and at the same time that NATO, as the only working security institution, should become the pillar of this system. That formulation, which at first sight may appear somewhat schizophrenic, was a reflection of the "situation on the ground." At that time the notion of expansion was unacceptable to NATO. It was, however, possible to discuss the role of NATO within the framework of the CSCE.

The Visegrad Chronology

1997

19 September, Poland – Parliamentary elections, won by the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), led by the leader of the *Solidarity* trade union, Marian Krzaklewski.

25 September, The Hague,

Netherlands – The International Court of Justice finds in favour of Slovakia in its dispute with Hungary over the construction and operation of a system of dams on the Danube River at Gabčíkovo/Nagymaros. The tensions between the two countries are such that on 20 September an official visit to Hungary by the Slovak foreign minister is cancelled.

10 October, Warsaw – Formation of a coalition government between the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) and the Freedom Union (UW). Jerzy Buzek becomes Prime Minister.

30 November, Czech Republic – The government of Václav Klaus falls.

From Budapest we drove to the Danube River where, in a chapel among the ruins of the former Visegrad, Antall, Havel, and Wałęsa signed the Declaration of Cooperation among the three countries who were on the road to European integration. The Presidents, Prime Ministers, and foreign ministers were photographed together in front of a memorial plaque commemorating the fact that in this fortress, on 19 November, 1335, three kings had met – the Hungarian king, Robert of Anjou, the Polish king, Kazimierz, and the Czech monarch, Jan of Luxembourg – to negotiate peace and economic cooperation in Central Europe. Thus did the informal “Visegrad Group” become a formal entity.



Meeting in Visegrad, 15 February, 1991.
From the left: Maciej Koźmiński,
Lech Wałęsa, Ákos Engelmayer,
Arpád Göncz, Rudolf Chmel, Václav Havel,
Marián Čalfa, József Antall.

In agreement with Poland and Hungary we, as the country chairing the Warsaw Pact, accelerated the dissolution of the military organization and then the dissolution of the Pact itself through an agreement among the member states that took effect on 1 July, 1991. The “troika” also adopted a common approach in negotiating new agreements with the Soviet Union. In New York on 27 September, at a meeting of the two “troikas” – the Benelux and the Visegrad Group – the foreign ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands confirmed their intention to quickly sign agreements regarding the application of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, for membership in the European Community, including the proviso that these candidacies should aim at full membership as soon as possible. The Benelux Group offered the Visegrad Three information about how they had created the first European regional grouping in the 1950s.

13 December, Luxembourg –

At a meeting of the European Council, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the exception of Slovakia, are officially invited to start accession negotiations with the European Union.

1998

2 January, Czech Republic –

President Havel appoints an interim technical government led by the former governor of the Czech National Bank, Josef Tošovský.

10 and 24 May, Hungary –

Parliamentary elections and victory for the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) party.

8 July, Budapest –

Viktor Orbán becomes Prime Minister of the new government. Fidesz forms a coalition with the Independent Smallholders Party.

A day before the summit in Kraków's Hotel Forum in October 1991, the three foreign ministers discussed a common approach to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, as well as association agreements with the European Community, security in Europe, and ways to broaden trilateral cooperation. The ministers of economy talked about a more integrated economic area, about customs tariffs for the three countries, and about liberalizing trade in harmony with the liberalization of trade with the 12 countries of the European Union. They decided to appeal to the European Community to quickly clarify the terms on which Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland would participate in Western aid to the Soviet Union. They also decided to ask the European Community for help in restructuring the economies of their three countries, particularly in light of the collapse of the Soviet market. The meeting climaxed with the acceptance of the Kraków Declaration on the group's further activities. The foreign ministers issued a joint statement about cooperation with NATO.

Our "troika" also worked to prepare a triangular operation in which aid would be provided to the Soviet Union by sending them goods from Central Europe financed by Western institutions. Given their experience with the Soviet marketplace, the "troika" offered to provide services to Western countries such as warehousing, transportation, and the marketing of goods through our networks, as well as the distribution of Western shipments. The Benelux countries supported this triangular operation. In January a conference in Washington, D.C. on aid to the Soviet Union – which by now was the former Soviet Union – gave high marks to this common approach. On 22 January, 1992, speaking on behalf of the three countries of Central Europe, I said that humanitarian assistance was only the first step: "The strategy for success in Europe consists of extending democracy eastward." The funds provided by the West could thus fulfil several functions at once: "They can stabilize the post-Soviet countries and, at the same time, stabilize democracy in Central Europe. In other words, they can guarantee the progress of democracy, stability, and renewal throughout the entire post-communist world."

The United States and the European Community saw in our activities an assurance that there would be stability in Central Europe, and a gradual widening of the zone of democracy and freedom to the East. For German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, for instance, the stability of the three countries in the "troika" pointed to the possibility of success and positive change in the former USSR. Beyond that, we had demonstrated that we would know how to cooperate as well in European integration. It was also thanks to this mutual coordination that all three countries signed association agreements in Brussels as early as December 1991, only a year after they had begun talking about doing so.

The final summit of the Visegrad Three was held in Prague on 6 May, 1992. The day before, the foreign ministers had met in Prague with representatives of the European Community and the European commissions to agree on further steps toward integration. The ministers from the Visegrad Group discussed whether to continue talks with the Benelux Group, and prepared the first document concerning their intent to contribute to three-way cross-border cooperation, which would facilitate direct contacts between communities, companies, and independent organizations.

The broad declaration placed a high value on the activity that had become "a new model for relationships" and "a stabilizing factor in Central and Eastern Europe." In a special message to the members of the European Union, the Visegrad Three confirmed that "the ultimate aim of

The Visegrad Chronology

June, Prague – Early parliamentary elections. The Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), hitherto in the opposition, wins the elections.

22 July, Prague – Miloš Zeman becomes Prime Minister.

25–26 September, Slovakia – Parliamentary elections with a 84,2 per cent turnout. Despite the victory of Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS party, the parties opposing him form the new coalition. Mikulas Dzurinda becomes Prime Minister of the new government (30 October).

21 October, Budapest – The Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland – Miloš Zeman, Viktor Orbán and Jerzy Buzek – declare their wish to reactivate the Visegrad cooperation, underlining the role of the group in putting a new face on Central Europe. From 1993–1998, the intensity of Visegrad cooperation weakened significantly. Contacts at parliamentary and expert level continued, but the



Jiří Dienstbier

Czech journalist and writer. After 1968 prevented from practicing his profession, active member of the Charter 77. After 1989, Deputy Prime Minister of the federal government and Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the second half of the 1990s, UN Special Envoy in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

our countries is to enter the European Union,” and restated their desire “to take an active part in the creation of a European security system.” Before the Lisbon Summit of the European Council, they expressed the hope that “the strategy of the Community will be shaped in such a way that our countries will become an integral part of the European Union.” And they confirmed their “determination to continue to develop areas of cooperation between us, which we hope will be a useful contribution to attaining our common goal of a unified Europe.”

Finally, in a message to the G7 before their meeting in Munich, the Visegrad Three appealed to the group of the seven most economically successful countries in the world to support their “efforts to strengthen cooperation among our three countries, which we judge to be in the common interest of European integration and international cooperation.”

Before the summer of 1992, the Visegrad Group managed to achieve a high level of common activity that was well regarded both in the European Communities and the United States.

Many promising plans were halted or reversed by the setback that occurred in Europe in 1992. The bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and the inability of other countries and international organizations to intervene effectively drew more and more attention to itself, as did the unexpected difficulties arising from the integration of the former German Democratic Republic into a unified Germany, the growth of unemployment, and also the break-up of Czechoslovakia.

Nevertheless, the fact that three – and, after the division of Czechoslovakia, four – Central European countries were able, at the outset, to demonstrate an aptitude for multi-tiered cooperation was one of the factors that led to their being among the first post-communist states to join the process of European integration. Today the issues are different than they were 15 years ago. But the cooperation of the Visegrad countries continues to be a guarantee of regional stability. It can still be an effective instrument for dealing more rapidly with the demands of integration into the European Union. Support for democracy on its eastern and south-eastern borders can remain a unique and active contribution to the common politics of Europe.

leading representatives of the Czech and Slovak governments began to treat the idea of political cooperation among the four partners with reserve. CEFTA, which provided a framework for economic cooperation, started to play the lead role. Slovakia’s democratic shortcomings hindered the strengthening of Visegrad relations with this country. The position of the Czech side was shaped, to a large extent, by Prime Minister Klaus

reservations regarding the Visegrad concept. The mutual atmosphere was further poisoned by tensions in Slovak-Hungarian relations over the dam on the Danube at Gabčíkovo/Nagymaros. The Visegrad Group’s “hibernation” ended with Vladimír Mečiar’s departure from power in Slovakia, and with the creation of a new centre-left coalition in the Czech Republic.

1999

12 March – The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland become members of NATO.

14 May, Bratislava – During a meeting attended for the first time in years by all four Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad countries, the participants recall the advantages of harmonising their respective activities vis-à-vis external partners and international structures.

FANFARES AND FRICTIONS

Ákos Engelmayer

In the 1980s, independent centres dealing with international issues understood the significance of cooperation among the members of the opposition in the countries of Central Europe. In Poland there were many such centres and initiatives. Besides underground publishing, the independent Central European press agency was established. Polish-Czech Solidarity worked effectively, and based on its example the Polish-Hungarian Solidarity group was formed in Podkowa Lesna in 1987. Markéta Fialková, who later became the ambassador of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic to Poland, participated in the founding meeting. Some Polish-Hungarian and Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity activists after 1989 joined the civil service and from there shaped the policy of the region.



Signature of the Visegrad Declaration, Visegrad, 15 February, 1991.

From the left: President of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel, Prime Minister of Hungary József Antall, and President of Poland Lech Wałęsa.

The idea of the Visegrad Triangle was born within the former opposition, but putting it into action through state structures ran into difficulties. After free elections, the idealism of the former opposition activists often clashed with the national egos of the various countries. I myself, as the ambassador of Hungary in Warsaw, was attacked by some ministers of my own government for attempting to act on the idea of “a brotherhood between our countries.”

As an opposition activist and the first ambassador of free Hungary, I took part from the very beginning the difficult work of establishing the Visegrad Triangle. During the first summit of the Visegrad Group in 1991 in Budapest, President Lech Wałęsa wanted to meet only with President Árpád Göncz of Hungary. This demand was apparently the result of misinformation – he did not know that in Hungary, real power – similar to Germany – was in the hands of the Prime Minister. After long hours of negotiations, a meeting between Wałęsa and Prime Minister József Antall finally took place. The Hungarian PM normally took a very friendly attitude towards Poland, but after this incident he began to nurse a grudge. It is worth adding that he was the son of a politician by the same name – József Antall senior – who during the Second

The Visegrad Chronology

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, NATO members since 12 March, declare their support for Slovakia's pro-Western aspirations. The rules of the Group's informal annual presidency are also decided. Slovakia is the first to assume this role.

15 and 29 May, Slovakia – Presidential elections. The candidate of the ruling coalition, Rudolf Schuster, defeats Vladimír Mečiar in the second round.

16 October, Javorina, Slovakia – At an informal meeting, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia announce the coordination of activities against organised crime, and discuss visa policies. The government heads also

agree on the need to create a common Fund to support cultural, scientific and promotional projects in which all four countries participate. It is agreed that the Fund's headquarters will be in Bratislava.



Ákos Engelmayer

Took part in the Hungarian uprising in October 1956. Ethnographer, politician, ex-ambassador of the Hungarian Republic in Poland (1990–1995). Currently he lectures at the Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna in Pultusk and at the University of Warsaw.

World War had rescued tens of thousands of Poles looking for shelter in Hungary (Antall junior showed Wałęsa documents proving this fact).

To attend the second Visegrad meeting in Kraków, an ill Prime Minister Antall arrived directly from the United States. When he got there he discovered that his meeting with President Wałęsa was to last only 20 minutes. The Prime Minister scolded me and the ambassador of Poland in Budapest, Maciej Koźmiński, for not sufficiently respecting his prestige, as he had spoken with the president of the United States for two hours. Additionally, the list of guests invited to the official dinner held by Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski did not include the second most important person after the Prime Minister in the Hungarian delegation. It looked as if the Hungarian delegation was going to withdraw –not perhaps from the three-sided talks, but certainly from the visit to Warsaw announced earlier. At night I brought documents from the embassy in Warsaw that proved that the time limit on the meeting between President Wałęsa and Prime Minister Antall had been set by the undersecretary of state of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Imre Szóka. The Hungarians were also responsible for the faulty guest list to the Polish foreign minister's dinner. I mention this to show that in the name of Visegrad we had to fight not only the egos of our neighbours, but sometimes even the representatives of our own governments.

After these incidents, the Hungarian ambassador in Prague, György Varga, and I told Prime Minister Antall that either the minister would have to go, or we would resign. As a result, undersecretary of state Imre Szóka was dismissed.

I myself have withdrawn from active politics, but Central European issues are still close to my heart. I have lectured on the history of Central Europe at the University in Pultusk, and I keep a constant eye on current developments. I observed with anxiety the close relationship between the Prime Minister of Hungary, Gyula Horn, and the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Vladimír Mečiar, which undermined and eventually weakened the Visegrad cooperation. I also worried when the Polish press accused Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of paralysing the Visegrad Group's work. It was either a clear misunderstanding or deliberate misinformation.

In this memoir I have focused on the difficulties and have not written too much about the successes, of which the greatest was the establishment of the Visegrad Group itself. Now, within the framework of the European Union, new assignments for the Group and new planes of cooperation are emerging.

10 November, Berlin –

On the occasion of celebrations commemorating the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Visegrad Group Prime Ministers meet with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

3 December, Gerlachov, Slovakia –

Presidents Václav Havel, Árpád Göncz, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and Rudolf Schuster adopt the "Tatras Declaration", in which they stress the importance of cooperation between their four countries to put a new face on Central Europe, confirm their determination to gain membership in the European Union,

and again declare their support for Slovakia's integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition, the Heads of State underline the role of cross-border cooperation, and emphasize the importance of setting up the Visegrad Fund for mutual cooperation among the members of the Group.

19 December, Helsinki, Finland –

The European Summit decides to begin accession negotiations with Slovakia.

VISEGRAD THREE, VISEGRAD FOUR

Árpád Göncz

When the leaders of the Visegrad countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and of course Hungary – met in Hungary in 1991 to debate their various thorny issues, they were not meeting for the first time. The first ever “summit” between them had occurred in the early middle ages, in 1335, with their three kings, the Polish Kazimierz, the Czech Jan, and the Hungarian Charles Robert, assembling at Visegrad to set an example for posterity of diplomatic negotiations and the reconciliation of interests.

The Visegrad Four were still Three in 1991, before the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, when the Hungarian Prime Minister of the time, József Antall, suggested the idea of another such meeting in our age.



Meeting of the Presidents of Visegrad Group countries, Vysoké Tatry, Slovakia, 3 December, 1999. From the left: Árpád Göncz (Hungary), Rudolf Schuster (Slovakia), Václav Havel (Czech Republic), Aleksander Kwaśniewski (Poland).

This did not, of course, happen by accident. History provided the foundations for cooperation between the Visegrad countries, and from the outset made connections between these countries both necessary and inevitable, not just because they are neighbors, but because of the power game that this proximity brings with it. Their history and their political situation was always somehow shared. Throughout history, almost with a kind of inevitability, the societies of these Central European countries also developed in very similar ways, in a European way as well as in a particularly Central European way that was distinct from the societies of countries to the West or to the East.

Despite some small differences, our recent history is also a shared one. In the era of socialism, this common fate was linked to the fact that, under the rule of the Soviet Union, our image of the enemy became a collective one. It is no accident that during the change of the regime in 1989 these countries, which had just fought for their freedom, faced essentially the

The Visegrad Chronology

2000

28 April, Gniezno, Poland – The Visegrad Group Prime Ministers meet with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on the occasion of celebrations commemorating the millennium of the Gniezno Congress.

4 May, Paris – The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group meet French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin to discuss the reform and enlargement of the European Union.

20 May, Prague – The end of the dispute over the division of assets of the former Czechoslovak Federation. The Prime Ministers of the two countries meet and sign four bilateral agreements on cooperation (culture, education, health service, cross-border movements, and data protection).

9 June, Štířín, Czech Republic – Prime Ministers Jerzy Buzek, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Viktor Orbán, and Miloš Zeman sign an agreement on the creation of the International Visegrad Fund – a four-way organisation to support joint projects in

same problems. We need only consider that these countries were still finding their places in a renewed Europe, in which power games were still shapeless and unresolved.

Shapeless and awaiting resolution. The Visegrad countries, over the centuries, have learned that together they are stronger, and that together their voice is better heard.

Even if the Visegrad summits had no tangible diplomatic or historical consequences, they gave a perspective to cooperation from the very beginning, and established personal connections that later, when the situation required, could at any moment inspire a reconciliation and a common stand on things.

The need for this was very evident at the time of the accession of the Visegrad Four countries to the European Union, for they could have formed a separate unit within the group of accession countries at a time when a common battle had to be fought against the interests of the western states. And even if the scissors have sometimes widened during the last decade and a half, and

Árpád Göncz

Politician, writer and translator. Former President of the Republic of Hungary (1990–2000). Founding member of the Alliance of Free Democrats in 1988 and President of the Hungarian League for Human Rights. Political prisoner after the Hungarian uprising in 1956.



Hungary's President Árpád Göncz, right, is escorted by Norway's Queen Sonja to a State Dinner at Oslo's Royal Palace, 22 March, 1999.

Norway's King Harald V escorts Mrs. Zsuzsanna Göncz, followed by Norway's Princess Astrid and her husband, Johan Martin Ferner.

cooperation has flagged, again and again it has been made clear how, if their backs are up against the same wall, the Visegrad Four countries can strengthen each other in this alliance of interests.

culture, science, education, youth exchanges, and cross-border co-operation. The participating foreign ministers meet in the inaugural meeting of the Fund's highest body, the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

6 June, Hungary – Ferenc Mádli, a 69-year-old professor at the Academy of Sciences, is elected President of Hungary in the third round of voting.

6 October, Warsaw – The prime ministers of the Visegrad Group meet with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

8 October, Warsaw – Presidential elections. Aleksander Kwaśniewski is re-elected in the first round of voting.

VISEGRAD – A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF COOPERATION

Gábor Hárs

The space available to me is too small to recall all the events of the past decades or even of the most recent 15 years. Therefore, allow me to recall several important events from the time when I represented Hungary in Warsaw as an ambassador, and when we developed the true “Visegrad” cooperation with two colleagues and friends of mine, Karel Štindl and Marián Servátka, the Czech and Slovak ambassadors to Poland.

In March 1995, not long after I presented my credentials to Lech Wałęsa, I was invited to the residence of the Czech ambassador with my wife and the Slovak ambassador couple. Our Czech colleague meant this to be an explicitly “Visegrad” dinner, emphasizing that he attributed great significance to our meeting in this “Visegrad” circle on a regular basis. He argued that our countries are dependent on each other because of both our historical roots and our common ambitions today. The important events of the recent past, such as the peaceful separation of Czechoslovakia or the signing of the Hungarian-Slovak basic treaty following long but very efficient work, justified our cooperation. The ambassador referred to his earlier unsuccessful attempts to organize such a meeting, and proposed to make our meetings regular.

A few weeks passed before the next meeting was held at the Slovak residence, this time attended also by Stefan Meller, Undersecretary of State (now Minister of Foreign Affairs in Poland) in order to make the V4 circle “complete”. Here we again pledged to embark on a wide-ranging Visegrad cooperation. Meller told us he would hold the next meeting in the guesthouse of the Foreign Ministry, and so he did.

In the course of my visit in November 1995 to Bronisław Geremek, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the Polish parliament, we talked primarily of Visegrad cooperation. The Polish participants were worried that we Hungarians were about to withdraw from the “Visegrad idea”. In answer to my question concerning recent Polish criticism of Hungary on the score of Visegrad cooperation, he told me that from the fall of the communist regime until now, in the opinion of the main players in Polish foreign policy, Hungary like Poland had been an active promoter of regional cooperation, including Visegrad. It was pleasing that Prague’s reservations regarding Visegrad had recently vanished. Prime Minister Václav Klaus seemed to have recognized that regional cooperation would not cast a shadow on bilateral relations with Euro-Atlantic organizations, but that on the contrary, a “common voice”



Conference on Human Rights, Bratislava, December 1999.

23–24 October, Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic – Informal meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group.

11–12 December, Bratislava – The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group meet with the Prime Ministers of Estonia and Slovenia.

19 December, Bratislava – Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group with Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok.

2001

19 January, Pszczyna, Poland – Visegrad Group Presidents Václav Havel, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Ferenc Mádli, and Rudolf Schuster adopt a declaration devoted to Visegrad achievements and prospects for cooperation, European Union and NATO enlargement, and regional cooperation.

might improve the chances of each country. There was consensus between the Polish government and the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, although opinions differed within the coalition, on integration. There was also full agreement on the importance of Hungarian-Polish relations.

In November 1996, Andrzej Towpik, Undersecretary of State for foreign affairs, told me that Visegrad “does not exist, but it works”. And I quoted the words of Gyula Horn, the Hungarian Prime Minister, who said that the preservation of “the Visegrad Four” was important not only for us but also for the West. Other representatives of the Hungarian government also emphasized the importance of cooperation on every occasion they got, given the fact – among others – that the West preferred us to operate as a group. On the other hand, mainly because of the former Czech position, we were frequently told that the content rather than the appearance of cooperation was key. The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), built on the Visegrad principle, was also aimed at enhancing this cooperation.

The morning of 22 August, 1997, found me in Kraków where a long overdue meeting of the Visegrad Prime Ministers was to take place – on that occasion without Slovak representation, as the country’s government seemed unconcerned by NATO expansion and indifferent to EU expansion. Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz was the first to arrive from Warsaw, and I and my Czech colleague welcomed him together. We did not expect too much of the meeting because of some recent Hungarian declarations that had been received poorly by the Polish side. The Polish Prime Minister was supposed to ask a small circle of top delegates: “If this is what friendly relations are like, what do unfriendly ones look like?” But instead he engaged me in a friendly conversation in which we first touched on the flooding that was happening at the time, as well as the economic situation. When the Hungarian aircraft arrived, the two Prime Ministers greeted each other cordially, with nothing suggesting there had been any trouble. A little later the Czech delegation also arrived, and we left for the Forum Hotel.

At ten sharp we were seated around a large round table. After a brief introduction by Cimoszewicz, Horn took the floor and praised the cooperation between the three countries. “Now we have to discuss concrete issues,” he said, “among them the treatment of those not invited to participate in the first round of NATO expansion.” Klaus responded that we had to decide what issues we would handle on our own and what we would do together. Regarding the negotiations scheduled for September, Cimoszewicz proposed that we remain in direct contact, and that Poland coordinate matters. Following the referendum in Hungary, the Visegrad defence ministers should make a joint trip to the US. Horn spoke up again, saying that efforts in the ratification process should also be coordinated. The Hungarian army needed to be modernized, and this would cost many times more if Hungary did it on its own than if it modernized as a member of NATO. We considered it important that during entry talks, NATO should take the economic capacity of each country into consideration to the maximum extent possible.

Klaus surprised us from the outset. He said that the three countries did not regard each other as rivals, and referred to the Washington Agreement that obliged them to mutually support each other. The Czech party did not want to submit membership to a referendum, he said, but the referendum in Hungary had made their position more difficult. He added: “If Prime Minister Horn had had the strength to quash this idea before November...” He asked us about our neighbors: “What can we do together? We should be very careful to prevent bad feelings from

31 May – 1 June, Kraków – Official meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group, ending the annual Polish presidency. The government heads present, *inter alia*, their opinions on an Austrian proposal to strengthen Central European cooperation in the form of a regional partnership that would include, alongside the member nations of the Group, Austria and Slovenia.

24–25 August, Tihány, Hungary – Informal meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group.

7–8 September, Krynica, Poland – Meeting of Visegrad government heads during the discussions of the Krynica Economic Forum.

23 September, Warsaw – Parliamentary elections. Major victory for the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) with 41 percent of the votes. Leszek Miller becomes Prime Minister.

developing” (a reference to Slovakia). He imagined that the ratification process might be difficult. According to Horn, ratification was not in danger in the US. “We were not happy with the referendum, either,” he said, adding with a smile that he would think over Klaus’ proposal. Concerning Visegrad’s neighbors, he said that if there were a second expansion round, only Slovenia and Rumania had a chance to join; NATO was unlikely to reach an agreement on the Baltic states, Slovakia or Bulgaria (he was wrong in this prognosis, as we of course discovered later). Klaus was more cautious, saying he didn’t have the right to rank the chances of countries in the second round.

Cimoszewicz established that a common position had been reached on three issues: 1) there would be cooperation among the Ministries of Defence and Ministries of Foreign Affairs on joining NATO, 2) new lines of demarcation must not be allowed to develop in Europe, and 3) there would be cooperation on the modernization of military forces.

Issues concerning the European Union followed. The Polish Prime Minister regarded the future cooperation as very useful and proposed that information be exchanged every day. The pace of negotiations should be maintained, while the long process of EU expansion should be shortened. He referred to a promise by French President Jacques Chirac concerning the year 2000. We could help each other a great deal in the harmonization of legislation, he said, and should not try to weaken each other in negotiations, but instead consider joint lobbying.

Horn pointed out in his contribution that our voice was stronger in relation to the EU than to NATO, which was why it was especially important to decide on a common position now. He too made proposals: 1) we should not argue on the details of the Commission’s proposals, 2) we should reinforce the structural and cohesion funds, 3) the PHARE programme needed a new concept, 4) we should consult more in the fields of education, communication, legislative harmonization, etc., 5) the EU already expected us to present our demands regarding the timing of membership, 6) the EU should clarify what support they would offer in implementing the Schengen Agreement, and 7) we should develop a final position on the depth of cooperation (commission seats, voting ratio, etc.) once we are members of the EU. As far as the timing of admission was concerned, we expected it to happen in 2000, since negotiations could be concluded in two years. Concerning our neighbours, Slovakia was the biggest question. It was important that we not lose the chance to continue negotiations. We had better – he added – act jointly on this issue as well.

Klaus agreed that the EU negotiations required more work than the NATO talks. It made a big difference, furthermore, that the US was not involved in the former process, as the acceleration of the NATO process had been attributed to the Americans. Concerning the date of admission, he too often referred to 2000, but as we see today, this date was unrealistic.

In response to Klaus, Cimoszewicz said we must not allow the date to be constantly pushed back. To his mind, Horn’s tactic was worth trying. In Poland, there was a lot of debate on the EU, including a number of errors in the EU’s evaluation that made the value of the whole assessment process questionable. Horn claimed we should push for the date we wanted in the course of negotiations, and that 2005, mentioned recently by the Germans and the Italians, was unacceptable. The philosophy of different speeds for different countries used by the EU in relation to the countries waiting for admission could send both good and bad messages. As far as the evaluation of the Commission was concerned, we concerned ourselves less with the

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2002

5 December, Luxembourg – First summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Prime Ministers of the Benelux countries.

1 March, Bratislava – In protest against Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s statements on the Beneš Decrees, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic and Slovakia refuse to participate in a Visegrad Group meeting planned to take place in Hungary.

7 and 21 April, Hungary – Parliamentary elections bring a narrow victory for the Socialist Party (MSzP) over the right-wing coalition. Thanks to their coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz).

15 May, Budapest – Peter Medgyessy becomes Prime Minister of the new Hungarian government.



Gábor Hárs

Diplomat, politician, writer.
Former Ambassador of Hungary
to Poland (1995–1998).
Member of the Hungarian
Parliament.

details than with the overall tone of the evaluation. We had reached a new stage, but the EU was not responding to this, and was treating us as if we had already joined the Union. At the same time, we were unable to meet the economic criteria. He suggested that we support Slovakia in fulfilling the requirements set by the EU. It would not benefit anyone if Slovakia turned towards the east!

Cimoszewicz noted that in the course of his visit to Bratislava the previous day, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski had declared support for Slovakia. Klaus said: "Slovakia will find no better advocate of its interests than the Czech Republic". The EU's evaluation of Slovakia was rather unjustified, he felt, as our common neighbor was more advanced in many respects than many other countries with better chances of integration. According to Horn, it was in our interest that Slovakia fulfilled the Euro-Atlantic criteria.

Cimoszewicz attempted to summarize what had been said. He asked Klaus first to sum up what could be jointly communicated to the press. The Czech Prime Minister "passed the ball back," saying that Cimoszewicz had enough "diplomatic charm" to do it himself. Our common position was that EU negotiations should start; that expansion should not be postponed unreasonably; and that the EU should not impose solutions upon us, but rather allow us to influence the criteria. It had to be stressed that we were not rivals and that we did not want to build new barriers with our neighbors. Horn agreed with all of this and added that we had agreed to exchange information and to consult among the delegations, and that every country should start from a position consistent with its level of preparedness, meaning that each would be sovereign in representing its own position. Klaus recommended that our working groups should meet to exchange information. "We have not spoken about serious issues today," he continued, "and maybe we have different ideas on certain issues." In his opinion, such meetings had to be prepared better in future by means of documents and government positions. Horn added that it should be made clear that our three countries had a common basis (NATO, EU, OECD) from which to start in developing good relations with neighboring countries. At this point, Cimoszewicz tried to close the session, and said that this unconventional meeting had made a great impression on him. Horn said the next meeting should be organized in Hungary in the spring of 1998. Cimoszewicz and Klaus thanked him for the invitation, and Klaus added that he had wanted to suggest Prague, but that he imagined there would be another meeting after the signing of the NATO entry treaty in December. The Prime Ministers agreed, although none of them was still in office by the spring of 1998.

We left the hotel shortly after one o'clock and went to the Wawel Castle, where President Kwaśniewski invited the whole company for lunch. The atmosphere was very good, with the President and Klaus pulling Horn's leg over the referendum, and Horn trying to defend himself humorously but unsuccessfully. After lunch, President Kwaśniewski accompanied the group through Wawel, and finally to the castle promenade for a joint photo op.

Now that we have been members of NATO for several years and are together in the European Union as well, I am gratified that the Visegrad Four cooperation has not diminished, but on the contrary seems to be growing stronger. I believe that in a world that is shrinking and growing at the same time, Visegrad cooperation, like other forms of regional cooperation, is a must. Because if it is true that power lies in unity, as demonstrated by both NATO and the EU, then it is also true that we can achieve more together.

24–25 May, Trenčín, Slovakia –
Second summit of the Visegrad Prime
Ministers and the Prime Ministers of the
Benelux countries.

14–15 June, Czech Republic –
Parliamentary elections. The Czech Social
Democratic Party (ČSSD) wins with 30.2
per cent of the vote. Vladimír Špidla
becomes the new Prime Minister.

14–15 June Esztergóm, Hungary –
Meeting of the Visegrad Prime Ministers.

**22 August, Častolovice, Czech
Republic** – Summit of the Presidents
of the Visegrad Group.

THE VISEGRAD DREAM STILL RELEVANT TODAY

Václav Havel

In the early 1990s, after the historical changes and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the countries of Central Europe – Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland – were faced with the emergence of another enormous task: To integrate our young democracies into European and transatlantic structures.

At that time, we embraced the Euro-American notion of democracy with two basic aims in mind: To strengthen our own democracies and to render impossible any return to totalitarianism. It was clear that we couldn't achieve such ambitious goals if our three countries



Meeting on Sněžka Mountain, March 1990. From the left: Lech Wałęsa, Jan Stachowski (interpreter), Adam Michnik, Vaclav Havel, Zbigniew Bujak.

were to compete with each other on the international stage. On the contrary, we could only reach our aims through close cooperation. We had to convince our western colleagues that we were willing and able to participate in broader forms of cooperation, on both the European and the trans-Atlantic levels.

That is why, at a meeting in Visegrad, we agreed on the foundations of a common approach, which in the following years we developed and deepened. From the first steps, which were more of a declaratory than a demonstrative nature, our countries developed modes of cooperation that were very concrete and carefully considered. Presidents and Prime Ministers met, government ministers and other representatives of our countries held talks. In this way, a relatively broad network of relationships developed and continued to fulfil its basic purpose despite the voices of doubt that were raised from time to time.

The main organizations we wished to join were the European Community and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It was also our intention from the outset that our three countries

The Visegrad Chronology

5 September, Krynica, Poland – Informal meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group during the XII Krynica Economic Forum.

20–21 September, Slovakia – Parliamentary elections. Despite victory by Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS, the party is not able to form a new government. Instead, Mikuláš Dzurinda, leader of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), forms another government based on a coalition of four parties.

1 December, Budapest – Informal meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group devoted to the accession of the Visegrad countries to the European Union.

6–7 December, Smolenice, Czech Republic – Informal meeting of the Visegrad Prime Ministers.



Václav Havel
Czech writer and politician.
Former President of Czechoslovakia
(1989–92). First President of the
Czech Republic (1993–2003).

be accepted as members of these groupings at the same time. Following the break-up of Czechoslovakia, and after developing in its own unique way, Slovakia joined NATO a few years later than the rest. Essentially, however, the aims we set for ourselves at the beginning of the 1990s have been fulfilled.

That, of course, does not mean that our four countries have no need to coordinate their policies in areas where it makes sense. On the contrary, there are clear regional groupings in the European Union that differ radically from one another in their histories and their national characters, groupings like the Benelux, the Baltic states, the Balkans, and of course Central Europe. And in that sense, the idea of close cooperation in Central Europe is still alive today.



Visit of the Czech President Vaclav Havel
in Poland, 1998.

2003

28 February, Prague – In the third round of voting, Václav Klaus is elected President of the Czech Republic.

14 June, Czech Republic – Referendum on EU accession. Voter turnout is 55.21 per cent, with 77.3 per cent voting in favour of accession.

16–17 June, Slovakia – Referendum on EU accession. Voter turnout is 52.15 per cent, with 92.46 per cent voting in favour of accession.

24–25 June, Tále, Slovakia – At a meeting in Tále in the Low Tatra Mountains, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group sum up the annual presidency of Slovakia and adopt guidelines for future cooperation between the Visegrad countries within the enlarged European Union. The Prime Minister of Ukraine participates in the second part of the deliberations.

Václav Havel

Warsaw, 25 January, 1990

(...) First of all, we must take advantage of the fact that after many long years and decades, the prospect of a genuine friendship between our nations now lies before us. Ancient conflicts, rivalries, and animosities have been covered over by the common experience of totalitarianism. The so-called "druzhiba" – that formal and stage-managed demonstration of friendship within the framework of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon – is vanishing along with the totalitarian systems. Along with them, the covert, quiet and malicious incitement of nationalistic and selfish tendencies – carried out in the spirit of "divide and conquer" – is vanishing as well.

The years of similar destinies and struggles for similar ideals ought therefore to be assessed in the light of genuine friendship and mutual respect; that is, precisely in the spirit that dominated the years during which secret independent literature was smuggled in rucksacks across our common mountain ranges (...)



Václav Havel, moments before his speech at the Polish parliament (*Sejm*). Standing beside him is general Wojciech Jaruzelski.

This authentic friendship – based on a proper understanding of the destiny imposed upon both our countries, on the common lessons it taught us, and above all on the common ideals that now unite us – should ultimately inform a proper coordination of our policies in a process we both refer to as "the return to Europe." We should also coordinate our efforts as best we can with Hungary – where I and my co-workers are going tomorrow – and with other nations in our part of Europe.

We should not compete with each other to gain admission into the various European organizations. On the contrary, we should assist each other in the same spirit of solidarity with which, in darker days, you protested our persecution as we did against yours.

It is too early to predict what institutional forms our coordination in Eastern and Central Europe will take. Western Europe is considerably ahead of us in the integration processes, and if each of us were to return to Europe separately, it could take a great deal longer and would be far more complex a process than if we proceeded in a coordinated fashion. This concerns not only economy; it concerns everything, including disarmament talks.

The Visegrad Chronology

1 October, Dobříš, Czech Republic

– Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group devoted to preparations for the Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC).

3 November, Budapest – Summit of the Presidents of the Visegrad Group.

2004

8 March, Koloděje, Czech Republic

– Informal meeting between the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group.

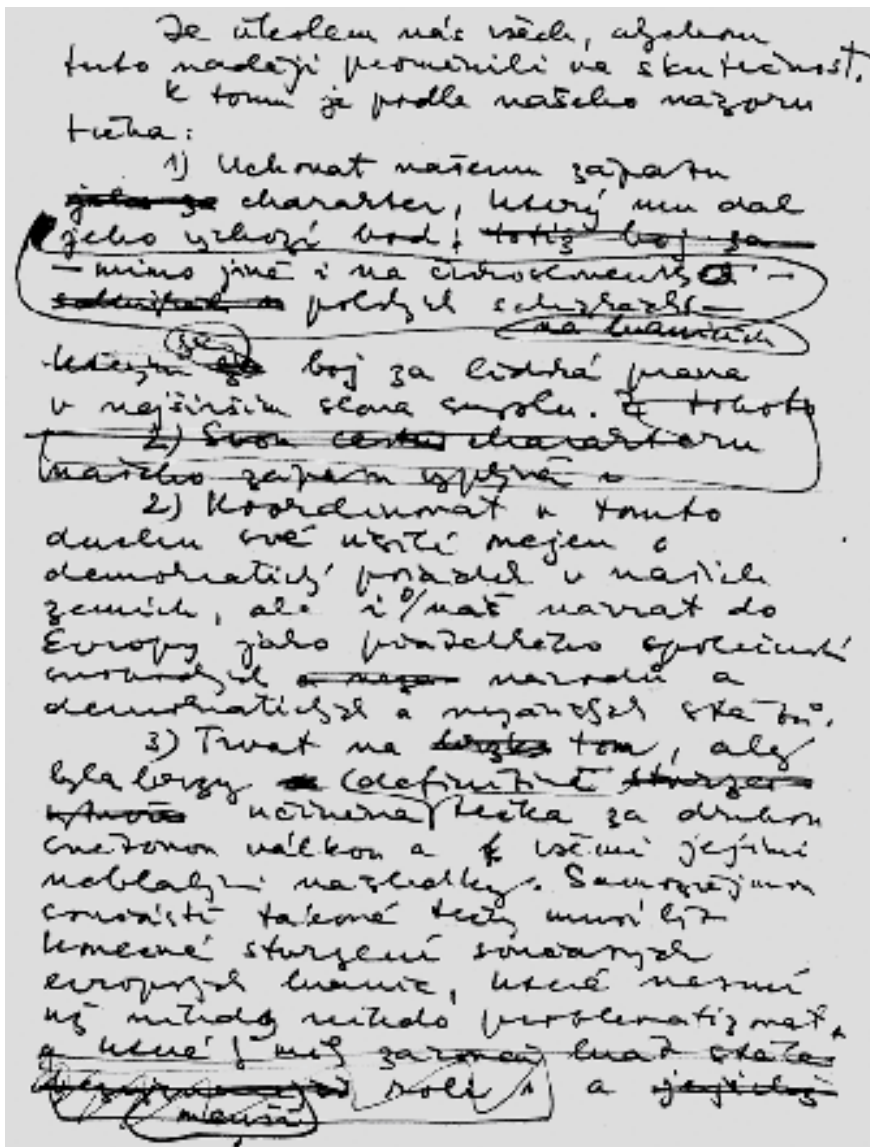
11–12 March, Košice, Slovakia –

During the summit of the Presidents of the Visegrad Group, the leaders of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland bid farewell to Slovak President Rudolf Schuster, whose term is ending.

Very soon, I would like to invite various representatives of the state and the public from Poland and Hungary, perhaps with observers from other Central European countries, to a meeting in the Bratislava Castle, where we could spend a day quietly talking about these matters. Perhaps this would again make us somewhat wiser.

One way or the other, one thing is certain: For the first time in history, we have a real opportunity to fill the great political vacuum that appeared in Central Europe after the collapse

of the Hapsburg Empire with something genuinely meaningful. We have an opportunity to transform Central Europe from what has been a mainly historical and spiritual phenomenon into a political phenomenon. We have an opportunity to take this wreath of European states – so recently colonized by the Soviet Union and now attempting to build a relationship with the nations of the Soviet Union based on equality – and fashion it into a special body. Then we can approach the richer nations of Western Europe, not as poor failures or helpless, recently amnestied prisoners, but as countries that can make a genuine contribution. What we have to offer are spiritual and moral impulses, courageous peace initiatives, under-exploited creative potential, and the special ethos created by our freshly won freedom. We can offer the inspiration to consider swift and daring solutions.



The draft of the Visegrad Declaration, hand-written by Václav Havel.

25 March, Brussels – Meeting of the Visegrad Prime Ministers and the Prime Ministers of the Benelux countries.

29 March – Slovakia becomes member of NATO.

2 and 17 April, Slovakia – Presidential elections. Ivan Gašparovič wins in the second round against Vladimír Mečiar.

May 2, Warsaw – After the fall of Leszek Miller's government, the economist Marek Belka is designated Prime Minister.

HOW I STARTED VISEGRAD IN MROZIEWICZ'S KITCHEN

Zbigniew Janas

If I had to say when the Visegrad Agreement began to take shape, I would pick the moment in the 1970s, in the mountains, when the representatives of KOR (the Committee for the Defence of Workers) and Charter 77 began meeting with each other. Or afterwards, in 1981, when the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity was established. Or maybe the time in 1979 in Podkowa Leśna, during the hunger strike in defence of the arrested Mirek Chojecki, when the Hungarian opposition representative Tibor Pákh came over from Hungary. He was the first herald of the impending Polish-Hungarian Solidarity, which was officially constituted later, in the 1980s.

It was natural that as soon as the communist system collapsed in all our countries, we started to think of what to do to sustain the values we had nurtured in difficult times, to preserve the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. By this time certain misunderstandings had already taken place, unfriendly comments been uttered, and various points of view on the nature of the cooperation presented.

When in January 1990 President Václav Havel came for the first time to Poland and did not fly to Gdańsk to meet Lech Wałęsa (he didn't have enough time, as I know because I prepared his visit as the representative of the Czechoslovak president), the media began speculating about a Polish-Czechoslovak conflict. We cut it short by organising a meeting between Havel and Wałęsa in the Giant Mountains as an expression of Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity. People were also conscious of the need to discuss new ideas and organizations to adapt to the changing situation. In this way we approached the idea known today as the Visegrad Agreement.

After numerous talks with friends from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, I took a tape recorder and interviewed the most important people engaged in cooperation between our countries, such as Professor Bronisław Geremek and Adam Michnik. Armed with this material I turned to Robert Mroziejewicz to write a proposed mission statement that could be approved during the meeting in Bratislava, the place suggested by President Havel. The text, whose original version I have preserved, was composed on the kitchen table in Mroziejewicz's flat. In the evening I took it to Michnik, who in turn went with it to the flat of the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Professor Krzysztof Skubiszewski. The next morning we met at the airport before the flight to Prague, and Adam handed me the text with the minister's handwritten corrections. We then flew to Prague to meet with our friends. Later on, the Czechs and Slovaks contacted the Hungarians. In this way, the first great meeting, at President Havel's invitation, took place in Bratislava on 9 April, 1990. Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and parliamentarians from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland participated in it. During the plenary session in the castle, various forms of future cooperation were debated, and despite much disagreement, the seed that was soon to yield the Visegrad Agreement was planted.

Two months later, in June, Professor Bronisław Geremek and I attended a consultative meeting in Prague. Václav Havel said in welcome: "Look, Zbyszek, the fact that today we can

The Visegrad Chronology

12 May, Kroměříž, Czech Republic

– Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries, during which Marek Belka, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Péter Medgyessy, and Vladimír Špidla discuss the state of mutual cooperation after their countries' accession to the European Union.

The government heads underline the achievement of one of the main points of the 1991 Visegrad Declaration: All the member nations of the Group have become members of the European Union and NATO. It is stated that the Group should remain an important element in regional cooperation. A new Visegrad

Declaration is signed which stresses, *inter alia*, the need for further integration within the framework of the European Union; the importance of contacts with the Benelux and Nordic countries; and the unique importance of contacts with aspiring EU members Bulgaria and Romania.

26–30 June, Czech Republic –

Defeat for the social democrats in elections to the European Parliament (8.8 per cent of vote). The ODS receives 30 percent of the vote, and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) 20.3 per cent. The Vladimír Špidla government falls. Stanislav Gross, hitherto minister of internal affairs, is entrusted with the mission of forming a new government.

Zbigniew Janas

Politician, Solidarity's activist. Member and co-founder of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity and founder of Polish-Hungarian Solidarity. Founder and Director of the Forum for Central and Eastern Europe at the Stefan Batory Foundation. Member of Parliament (1989–2001).

talk about consolidating the cooperation between our countries is something we owe to having kept on meeting, in the most difficult times and against all odds, to discuss projects concerning the future."

In Prague we discussed the practical forms of cooperation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jiří Dienstbier, and with our former friends from the meetings in the mountains, who did not hold important posts, but who had an impact on political issues. And, obviously, we talked most with President Havel himself.

After the talks in the castle, Havel took us to a restaurant for dinner. We went on foot, and the President conducted us through the restaurant. At a certain point he stopped next to a couple sitting at a table and spoke to them for a while. When Professor Geremek and I approached, he introduced us. It turned out to be film director Miloš Forman. Professor Geremek told me later that Havel and Forman had not contacted each other for some time, but that Havel had taken



Zbigniew Janas (left) with Vaclav Havel during a meeting of Polish and Czechoslovak opposition activists on the Polish-Czechoslovak border, 1987.

advantage of our presence (it is a privilege to be taken advantage of in such a way) to renew contact with the famous director.

This was more or less the beginning of the cooperation that led to the establishment of the Visegrad Triangle. It is a pity that the meeting itself in Visegrad was without the parliamentarians of our countries, the people who started this agreement. However, for me, the most important thing is that despite various phases, discussions, and even conflicts, Visegrad is still alive today. It was of great value that the Visegrad Fund was established, as it is very helpful in various mutual financial undertakings. It is also wonderful that the Polish-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian Solidarity found people to carry it on, people who are ready, despite many problems, to promote cooperation between our nations.

4 August, Czech Republic – After five weeks of negotiations, the new Stanislav Gross (ČSSD) government is formed based on the existing coalition.

29 September, Budapest – After the fall of Péter Medgyessy's government, Ferenc Gyurcsány is designated Prime Minister.

8 December, Warsaw – Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group devoted to European issues (EU enlargement and cohesion) and the situation in Ukraine.

2005

25 April, Czech Republic – After several months of crisis, Stanislav Gross resigns. Jiří Paroubek becomes the new Prime Minister.

THE ORIGINS AND ENACTMENT OF THE “VISEGRAD IDEA”

Géza Jeszenszky

Writings on history and politics tend to focus on conflicts and their causes. Stories in which rivalries and potential conflicts play second fiddle to collaboration in the common interest thus deserve special attention. Such has been the story of Visegrad, the name of a once magnificent Hungarian fortress and castle towering above the Danube River which became a symbol of regional cooperation after the signing of a pact on its historic grounds 15 years ago. In many ways this Central European initiative was a replay of what had happened in Western Europe after the Second World War.

Hardly had the joy at victory in the Cold War subsided when fears were expressed in Europe and America that Central Europe, now freed from the Soviet straightjacket, might again be engulfed in rivalry and conflict over territory and mistreated national minorities. The first half of the 20th century in the region had indeed been characterized by animosities, mutual ill feeling and war. These ills were stowed away in the deep-freezer during Moscow’s rule, but were never cured.

The historical experience of the peoples of Central Europe is richly varied. The grandeur of the late Middle Ages was followed by direct foreign domination and/or partition by more powerful neighbors. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918) was an attempt at non-democratic integration, and was replaced by one group of small states ganging up on another with support from a selfish great power (the Little Entente of 1921 to 1938 and the alliance of Austria, Hungary and Italy in the mid–1930s). Less is known of the presence of a tradition of cooperation in Central Europe, particularly against aggressive great powers like the Ottoman Empire or the Habsburg, Prussian and Nazi variations on German expansionism. Many of the national leaders of Central Europe in the past two centuries (Palacký, Kossuth, Jaszi, Piłsudski, Sikorski, Hodža, and others) proposed federations or confederations uniting the nations of Central Europe. The most recent example of solidarity between these peoples was their common opposition to the communist dictatorships in their countries, especially during and after three attempts at change in 1956, 1968 and 1980/81.

There are many versions in circulation about the origins of the Visegrad cooperation, and several individuals are credited with inventing it. As probably the closest witness I can testify that it was at the Paris summit of the CSCE in November 1990 that the Prime Minister of Hungary, József Antall, invited the leaders of Poland and Czechoslovakia to Visegrad, once the



Meeting of Visegrad Group countries Ministers of Foreign Affairs with Niels Helveg Petersen (Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs), Brussels, April 2001. From the left: Krzysztof Skubiszewski (Poland), Milan Kňažko (Slovakia), Niels Helveg Petersen (Denmark), Josef Zeleniec (Czech Republic) and Géza Jeszenszky (Hungary).

The Visegrad Chronology

6 June, Hungary – Presidential elections. László Sólyom, supported by Fidesz, wins in the third round.

10 June, Kazimierz Dolny, Poland – At a meeting of the Visegrad heads of government, discussions centre on the situation in the European Union in the aftermath of the French and Dutch referenda rejecting the Constitutional Treaty, and on issues connected with the New Financial Perspective for 2007–2013. A declaration on the EU and Ukraine is also adopted.

13 July, Budapest – Prime Ministers Marek Belka, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Ferenc Gyurcsány, and Jiří Paroubek discuss the situation in the European Union, which faces problems after the fiasco of the New Financial Perspective discussions. Regional issues are discussed in a broader group with the participation of the Prime Ministers of Austria and Slovenia.

30 August, Budapest – The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group discuss European policy issues with the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.

residence of the kings of Hungary and the site of a meeting back in 1335 where the Polish, Bohemian and Hungarian kings met to coordinate their policies. It was in the restored hall of the old royal palace that the Declaration of Cooperation was signed by President Havel of Czechoslovakia, President Wałęsa of Poland, and Prime Minister Antall of Hungary on 15 February, 1991 in the presence of the President of Hungary and the participating countries' Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. The pact was certainly not dictated or even suggested by Moscow, Washington or Brussels, but was an independent decision by those leaders to work together in re-aligning these historic countries with "the West" in order to prevent the repetition of past national tragedies and to speed up their transition from the Soviet orbit to Euro-Atlantic structures. It was a crisp, sunny day with fresh snow covering the streets and the medieval ruins. For me even the weather augured well for the future of our venture. We were all moved and felt that we were launching something worthy of our exalted aim of building a new Central Europe on top of the wreckage left by decades of communist misgovernment.

The primary but unspoken aim of the Visegrad cooperation was to dismantle the institutions that embodied our political, military, and economic dependence on the Soviet Union: the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. The message of the first summit was captured by the apt comment of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: "Separately, the Central European countries are weak; united they are irresistible, and Gorbachev was the first to note that." The military organization of the Warsaw Pact was signed away just a few days later, on 25 February.

The three countries wanted to complete the switch from command to market economies as quickly and smoothly as possible by learning from one another. The heads of states and governments, along with ministers and various experts met regularly on a rotating basis to evaluate international developments, set common aims and coordinate policies.

Visegrad was not an institution. For a long time it had no formal organization, "not even a secretary," so there was no bureaucracy to hinder prompt action. What made Visegrad work at the outset was the personal affinity among the leaders of the countries involved, and the common purposes that they championed. The founders were all staunch anti-communists who were committed to democracy and human rights. The "Visegrad idea" of Central European solidarity enjoyed popular support going back to older and more recent history. It was not a formal alliance, but especially in its early phase it came quite close to that. As once I put it to Foreign Minister Skubiszewski, it was an alliance "in pectore," in our hearts.

The first results of this cooperation were impressive. The formal dissolution of the Warsaw Pact took place on 1 July, 1991. Immediately after the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, the "Visegrad Three" held consultations and agreed on common responses. The Kraków Summit of October 1991 resulted in the conclusion of bilateral treaties and agreement on an important warning to the international community on the conflict in Yugoslavia. The three countries condemned all actions that were incompatible with the accepted legal norms of warfare, especially attacks on civilians, and advocated solutions that respected the right of nations to self-determination including the formation of independent states, and that guaranteed full protection for the rights of national minorities. It took the European Community some time to endorse those very principles.

The United States and the three Benelux countries were the first to warmly welcome the initiative. The term "Visegrad countries" was probably first used in international diplomacy by

25 September, Poland –

Parliamentary elections give a major victory to the Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO) right-wing parties. The two are unable to form a coalition, and Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PiS) eventually become Prime Minister of a minority government.

30 September, Wista, Poland –

Presidents Ivan Gašparovič, Václav Klaus, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and László Sólyom discuss European issues and the political situation in the neighboring regions of Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

9–23 October, Poland – Presidential elections won by Lech Kaczyński, the candidate of the Law and Justice Party (PiS).

11 December, Budapest – Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

US Secretary of State James Baker in September 1991 in New York when he met the foreign ministers of the three countries. That congress was soon followed by a meeting between these ministers and their Benelux counterparts on 27 September, 1991. Many foreign leaders saw a welcome model in our cooperation, something worth following for other regional groupings. The European Community's signing of the "Europe Agreements" on association with these three countries at a joint ceremony in Brussels on 16 December, 1991, was a very visible endorsement of the Visegrad model.

It would be a mistake to think that anti-Russian feelings were the major common platform of Visegrad. On the contrary, we were keen to maintain our economic relations with, and our traditional exports to, the former Soviet Union, and sought common arrangements with the EC and the US to send aid to the new Commonwealth of Independent States, such as at the conference in Washington, D.C. in January 1992. On the other hand, feeling and fearing a security vacuum in Central Europe, the Visegrad Group sought membership in NATO. The first public expression of this wish was at the summit on 6 May in Prague. At the time we sent a message to the 12 members of the European Council indicating our wish to join as full members.

Enthusiasm for "Visegrad" was not universal in the three member countries. Prime Minister Antall had some words for the dissenters at the Prague Summit: "We value the cooperation we have embarked upon most highly. On the other hand I am greatly surprised that there are people who are not aware of its significance, who believe that a combination involving three is an obstacle in the fast-track approach to NATO. We are of the opinion that our combination facilitates our acceptance, and that those who seek separate roads will be undeceived within a few months."

The 1992 elections in the Czech and Slovak lands and the subsequent split of Czechoslovakia led to a short-lived ebb in high-level political cooperation, but at the same time an important step was made in the economic field with the signing of the Central European Free Trade Agreement in December 1992. In March 1993 CEFTA came into effect, eliminating approximately 40 percent of the duties on industrial goods. In the following years, with further tariff reductions and with the accession of Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, the common CEFTA market covered nearly 90 million people, and trade between the members increased significantly, preparing the ground for barrier-free commercial relations once these countries joined the EU. Although the accession of the Visegrad countries to the EU in 2004 meant that CEFTA lost its founders, the Agreement nevertheless continued.

Overcoming Russian opposition to NATO enlargement involved coordination with the entire Euro-Atlantic community. President Clinton's visit to Prague in January 1994, and his determination to meet there specifically with the Visegrad Four, gave a boost to the Group's cooperation by showing that Antall had been right, that more could be achieved by keeping together. By presenting and maintaining a common front rather than appeasing Russia, three of the Visegrad members gained entrance into NATO in 1999, with Slovakia following several years later.

Changes in the governments of the member countries by 1998 contributed to a renewed awareness of the value of the Visegrad association, which by then had accomplished almost the entire agenda of 1991. I personally hope that as members of the EU these four Central European countries will continue as a regional group, leading to an enhanced Visegrad both in content and as a geographical extension.

Ambassador Géza Jeszenszky presenting his letter of credentials, Washington, D.C.



Géza Jeszenszky
Professor of history, politician. Founding member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (1988) and Hungarian Foreign Minister (1990–1994). President of the Hungarian Atlantic Council (1995–1998) and then Ambassador to the United States of America (1998–2002). Currently teaches international relations and history of Central Europe in Hungary, Poland, and Romania.



A TRUE FEELING OF TOGETHERNESS

Michal Kováč

At the time the Visegrad Group was formed I was a minister in the Slovak government, and Slovakia was a part of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. While I was not a direct participant in this act, I felt very keenly all of the positive things it led to, and was keenly aware that the event leading to the formation of this forum was held at Bratislava Castle.

When we realize that from one day to the next all post-communist countries of Eastern Europe ceased to be part of the Comecon and the Warsaw Pact, and as if out of thin air found themselves free and independent, we are better able to understand the importance of the foundation of Visegrad for these countries. A feeling of loneliness was replaced by a true feeling

Prague, meeting of Presidents of Visegrad Group countries with US President Bill Clinton. Standing from the left: Michal Kováč (Slovakia), Lech Wałęsa (Poland), Václav Havel (Czech Republic), and Árpád Göncz (Hungary).



of togetherness, of a meaningful cooperation with countries that had all inherited the same problems following the break-up of the Soviet bloc.

At the same time, these countries expressed the readiness to cooperate in solving these problems, as well as the will to transform themselves into democratic states while respecting the principles of legal states, and to transform their economies into market economies. Above all, they freely and spontaneously subscribed to the values held by the Euro-Atlantic community. Their citizens at various gatherings expressed all of this with their slogans and their chants: "We want to return to Europe."

I sensed an extraordinary desire for cooperation among these countries once I became the first President of the Slovak Republic from 1993 to 1998. The development of cooperation between the countries of the Visegrad Group depended above all on the approaches of their governments and Prime Ministers. The Presidents of these countries could do nothing to change these attitudes. At our meetings as Central European Presidents we always gladly welcomed it whenever any government head expressed the will to deepen cooperation, but we also watched with great misgivings as the Czech Prime Minister from the ODS party blocked attempts to deepen or institutionalize the Visegrad relationship. But the Visegrad Group survived these growing pains, and I welcomed the founding of the International Visegrad Fund.

I regarded the deepening of cooperation not as an attempt to replace or postpone integration to the EU, but rather as a means of hastening the integration process. Unfortunately, in the 15-year history of the Visegrad Group, we were also witness to a certain amount of rivalry as to who would gain entry to the EU first. It was a period when some groups succumbed to egoism

and put individual aims of being in the EU as soon as possible ahead of the wider and more intense cooperation that helped to hasten the integration of all Visegrad countries to the EU.

Here I am not referring to the fact that Slovakia was not invited to begin entry negotiations at the same time as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The decision of the EU and NATO on this score was entirely justified by the fact that the Slovak government of Vladimír Mečiar (1994 to 1998) did not respect the suggestions and criticisms of the EU, and departed from the path of deepening and strengthening democracy. The demarches and diplomatic notes Slovakia received from the EU states and the US sounded the same message: "Slovakia is experiencing an absence of democracy."

Even though all of the Visegrad Group members have now joined the European Union, in my opinion we have still not exhausted the justification for continued cooperation. Developments have shown that unless we want to be just passive members of the EU, we have to speak with a common voice and message. Regular concrete and constructive dialogue can't hurt anybody. It is always possible to find a solution or a compromise that does not weaken the identities of individual countries and does not slow economic development, but on the contrary sparks further growth. It's time to look for new forms of cooperation, ones that can help us catch up to the other member states of the European Union.



Michal Kováč

Politician, economist. President of the Slovak Republic (1993–1998). Founder and Vice-Chairman of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia and Chairman of the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia (1992). Finance Minister of the Slovak Republic (1989–1991).

DIPLOMACY OVER BUCKWHEAT AND DUMPLINGS

Maciej Koźmiński

On 15 February, 1991, in the hall of the renaissance palace, at the foot of the castle hill, surrounded by the monumental walls of the medieval residence of Hungarian kings, two documents were issued. One, the Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration, was signed by the Presidents and the Prime Minister of Hungary, while the second – and this fact is rarely remembered – the Solemn Statement, was signed by the Presidents and Prime Ministers of these countries.



Meeting in Visegrad. From the left:
President of Czechoslovakia –
Václav Havel,
President of Hungary – Arpád Göncz,
Prime of Minister
of Czechoslovakia Marián Čalfa,
Prime Minister of Hungary – József Antall,
Prime Minister of Poland – Jan Krzysztof
Bielecki and President of Poland –
Lech Wałęsa.

The Declaration contains an extensive catalogue of possible goals that were to be achieved over months or years. The first goal included “full restitution of state independence, democracy and freedom”. The list of “practical steps” that were to be jointly undertaken began with the announcement that the parties to the agreement “shall harmonize their activities to shape cooperation and close contacts with European institutions and shall hold regular consultations on security matters.” This “practical step”, its meaning obscured by the sophisticated language of diplomacy, actually called for the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance as soon as possible.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the international situation created favourable circumstances for the Visegrad partners to undertake mutual steps. The diplomats and the originators, initiators and organizers of the founding Visegrad meeting – at that time the roles were not precisely distinguished – skilfully interpreted “the moment in history” and marked its place.

The Solemn Statement, in profoundly solemn words, recalled the meeting in Visegrad of “prominent predecessors” in 1335, including Casimir III, the king of Poland; John of Luxembourg, the king of Bohemia; and Charles Robert, the king of Hungary. This small town situated on the Danube River must have preserved some kind of *genus loci*, since it gave its name to probably the best known form of regional cooperation in Central Europe at the end of the 20th century.

The Statement, signed by Presidents Lech Wałęsa, Václav Havel, and Arpád Göncz, and Prime Ministers Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, Marián Čalfa, and József Antall, expressed “the desire and will to courageously deal with the tasks ahead, drawing on a common historical heritage, in accordance with traditional values and the main trends in European development...

to do the utmost for the attainment of peace, security and welfare for the nations of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.”

This is not the place to discuss the path that led to Visegrad. I would note only that back in 1981, at the first meeting of the *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the Independent and Self-Governed Trade Union delegates approved an Appeal to the People and Workers of Eastern Europe.

Even among some *Solidarność* circles, the Appeal was considered too bold for the times. However, during the martial law period there was a return to the ideas hinted at in the Appeal. Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity and Polish-Hungarian Solidarity were born, and although they were still quite weak in terms of organisation, they were very strong in spirit. Underground literature created the intellectual foundations of independent thought; the notion of “Central Europe” was widely discussed, and there were attempts to define its historical and cultural nature. References were frequently made to both mutual and individual experiences, even to the differing experiences of the years 1956, 1968, or 1981. Historical similarities were discovered.

The breakthrough came when the political opposition that emerged from *Solidarność* won the elections on 4 June, 1989 by an unexpectedly large margin. On 12 September the *Sejm* listened to the policy statement of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, whose government prompted the erosion of the system in Central Europe.

The phenomenon that would later be known as “Visegrad” appeared in third place on the list of Polish foreign policy priorities as early as 26 April, 1990. Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, in his annual parliamentary policy statement, mentioned “integration within the triangle formed by Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary” as only marginally less important than the creation of a European security system (CSCE) and cooperation with “our powerful neighbors” (the USSR and Germany). To accomplish these tasks – including Visegrad – fresh recruits were “parachuted” into missions abroad to replace Foreign Ministry employees. Six of the ambassadors appointed in 1990 and serving in three Central European capital cities shared intellectual and academic links, but had hardly any (or no) command of diplomatic techniques, nor any experience as civil servants. They also shared similar experiences and encounters in opposition, including youthful episodes in the armed struggles in Budapest, or participation in seminars and underground publications.

However, the most important thing that differentiated them from the majority of their predecessors and colleagues was the conviction that relations between the countries, societies and nations they represented had to be changed. Our common and individual histories had to be taken into account, as did the bilateral and multilateral problems that had been in forced hibernation during communism.

The parachutists dropped by these new democracies into the world of diplomacy formed the Council of Ambassadors. This body, according to a concept born in Budapest, comprised the six leaders of the missions: Markéta Fialková and Ákos Engelmayer in Warsaw; Jacek Baluch and György Varga in Prague; and Rudolf Chmel and Maciej Kozmiński in Budapest. Ideas flourished over those two years and during dozens of diplomatic and Council sessions, such as in Budapest over stewed beef with roast buckwheat or Russian dumplings, in Prague over beer, and in Warsaw over some other beverages. Our ideas concerned almost all areas and issues of international relations, both issues that were addressed by classic diplomacy, and those that we were drawn to by virtue of our experiences and intuition. We spoke about mutual control of Visegrad airspace and about sharing consular services in distant third countries; about infrastructure projects and highway networks; about coordinating purchases of all kinds of equipment; about mutual and separate traditions and ways to record them in literature, film, and fine arts. Thanks to our meetings and conversations, which met with understanding and even tolerance from our superiors, this semi-formal, semi-institution was allowed to carry on to what seems to have been to great advantage.



Maciej Kozmiński

Professor of history. Former Ambassador to the Republic of Hungary (1990–1996). Chief of Department of Diplomacy at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, professor at the Warsaw University and Collegium Eötvös at the University of Budapest.

A HISTORY OF COMMON SUCCESS

Aleksander Kwaśniewski

The Visegrad Group is a story of great mutual success. Through Visegrad, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia recorded a new and profitable chapter in their histories. Each of the four member countries owes this success to hard, relentless work in their own backyards; Visegrad cooperation has significantly multiplied our potential. Although there have been ups and downs, our mutual voice has undoubtedly become much stronger, more significant, and more carefully listened to. Visegrad means creativity and efficacy.

This much can be seen clearly when we look back at the past 15 years and how much ground we have covered since signing the Founding Declaration on 15 February, 1991. My predecessor as President, Lech Wałęsa, represented Poland during the summit in Visegrad. Visegrad



Meeting of Visegrad Group Presidents in Košice, 11–12 March, 2004. From the left: Ferenc Mádl, Rudolf Schuster, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Václav Klaus.

cooperation was also one of the priorities of my 10-year presidency. It is part of the Polish sense of statehood. It is how Warsaw views cooperation with our Central European partners, regardless of the political changes on our domestic scene. I am convinced that these statements will remain true in the future. The Visegrad Triangle, which later on was transformed into the V4 Group, came to life, above all, because we wanted to support each other in the international arena. We understood that it was useful to consult and coordinate our actions; that together, we could achieve more. We aspired to combine our efforts and advantages in a special way to gain entry to NATO and the EU. It was one of the greatest challenges in our contemporary history. Although it was not easy, we achieved a great success.

We strengthened our security within the circle of NATO allies. Great development prospects opened up for all of us within the family of uniting Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – we are all playing in the European premier league. We all contribute to the formation of our continent. We take our share of responsibility for international peace, order and stability. We have managed to promote the Visegrad Group, which has become a tested and renowned brand name. The term “Visegrad countries” has entered the dictionary of politicians, analysts, and journalists for good. These achievements are explicitly linked to our skill in conducting dialogue, to partnership, predictability, and the stability of our region, and to our established democracies and consistent reforms. These assets brought us the trust and sympathy of the international community; they eased our entry to NATO and the European Union.

There is also a deeper element to our cooperation. The Visegrad Group is a symbol of the history we share. This became visible especially after the Second World War, when, as Milan Kundera put it, we became “a kidnapped West”. Our societies fought on many occasions for

freedom, sovereignty, and human rights. After 1989, we threw off the yoke of the previous regime and of Soviet domination. We made a gigantic attempt at transformation and astonished the world with our pioneer spirit. We returned to our European home.

However, this mutual fate goes back further, into the depths of history. It shapes our Central European identity. A beautiful and ancient town, Visegrad was chosen as the site of the founding summit in 1991 because it had been the site in 1335 of a meeting between the Polish king, Kazimierz the Great, the king of Bohemia, Jan Luxembourg, and the king of Hungary, Charles Robert. This is not just an attempt at political analogy or a reference to tradition. The Visegrad Group builds on the entire legacy of Central Europe, which includes such pearls of European civilisation as Kraków, Prague, Buda and Levoča.

The common Central European identity comes from a shared memory, a proud and original memory, since it was here in the middle of the continent that our cultures, religions and



Meeting of Visegrad Group Presidents in Častolovice, 22 August, 2002. From the left: Aleksander Kwaśniewski (Poland), Ferenc Mádl (Hungary), Václav Havel (Czech Republic).

mentalities met. That is why our contribution to the European cultural treasury is so interesting. At the same time, this mutual memory is a very painful one for our nations. We were squeezed between the European powers as if between millwheels. Wars were fought here, our lands were torn, our nations enslaved. The history of Central Europe – so colorful, so tragic and so magnificent in its victories over its own historical fate – is instructive for all Europeans. The Visegrad Group also bears this message. Solidarity and cooperation between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia still has enormous significance, both for us and for uniting Europe. Like the partnership between the Benelux countries, and like the Nordic cooperation, the Visegrad Group is an important factor for the integration of the continent.

We look forward to the challenges ahead of us. The Visegrad Group countries should continue to play a significant role in the formation of the eastern policy of the EU towards such countries as Russia, Belarus, and particularly Ukraine. We have rich experiences of contacts with the East, and we know which of the processes that are going on over there can present an opportunity for Europe, and which can be a threat. We understand perhaps better than other European countries what promising prospects were created by the success of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine as well as the pro-European ambitions of Ukrainians.

The other area where the Visegrad Group could do a lot is in the Union's policies towards the western Balkans. The Uniting Europe has already invited Croatia to join; it should not remain indifferent to the problems of countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. The Visegrad Group has been regarded as the positive antithesis of the Balkan region, which until quite recently has been wracked by tragic conflicts. Today, for those



Aleksander Kwaśniewski
Politician. Former President of the Republic of Poland (1995–2005).
Founding member and chairman of the Social Democratic Party in 1990.
Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and chairman of the Constitutional Committee of National Assembly (1993–1995).

who are struggling to overcome the painful experience of war, for those who are undergoing the hardships of transformation, for those who aspire to join NATO and the European Union, we can serve as an example of collaboration and integration.

Most of all, however, Visegrad cooperation is necessary for us Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks. It has really brought us a lot of benefits, not just those with historical meaning, but also less spectacular gains of an everyday nature. Regular meetings of Presidents and Prime Ministers, as well as defence, transport, justice, culture, and environment ministers have borne excellent fruit. The launch in 2000 of the International Visegrad Fund with headquarters in Bratislava has helped strengthen civic initiatives and support non-government organizations. Visegrad cooperation has reached ever further down the hierarchy of power, drawing in local communities, and thanks to this, has become more concrete and effective.

Now that we have made our home in the European Union, we should take even greater advantage of the chances created by the Visegrad partnership for our countries. Some challenges we should look at more “globally”, such as the industrial restructuring of Silesia or building a transport infrastructure through our countries from north to south.

We must remember that the EU is not only an integration effort on a continental scale, but it also involves regional thinking. The Visegrad Group has become a perfect part of the European network, bringing people closer and making them want to rely on each other and build a common future together.

Let me say it once again: the Visegrad Group is a success story, and I am convinced that the coming chapters in the tale will be just as successful.

THE MUTUAL RETURN TO EUROPE

Tadeusz Mazowiecki

From the very beginning I viewed the "Visegrad process" with great expectations but, I must admit, a certain scepticism as well. The year 1989 was about more than merely the will to throw off the alien domination forced on us decades earlier by the Soviet system. The sudden awakening and spectacular emergence of Central Europe's peoples onto the public stage was at the same time evidence of their mutual ambitions, including their European aspirations. These aspirations had been hidden for so long that it was hard to foresee at the beginning of the 1990s what direction they would take, or how dynamic they would eventually become.

"Europe is experiencing an unusual time. Here you have half a continent, cut off from its roots nearly half a century ago, that now wishes to return," I said at the beginning of 1990 in a speech at the forum of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. A few months later, building on Central Europe's mutual historical experiences, shared cultural inheritance (which managed to survive communist ideology), and independent contacts between the democratic opposition and catholic circles, the first official meetings took place as a precursor to the establishment of the "Visegrad Group".

The democratically elected leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland decided to accept the challenge of building a cooperation based on the same values and pursuing the same goals. With the Soviet empire collapsing and uniting Europe seeking a new identity, they decided to form a loose structure of dialogue and cooperation. It was a courageous step, but not as obvious a one as it now appears. The years of "international friendship" under the supervision of the USSR had enormously compromised the ideas of cooperation and solidarity. At the same time, this sudden feeling of freedom had revived our differences, rivalries, and narrow visions of our national paths. We may have marched in the same direction, but not always according to the same drummer. Nevertheless, there were occasions on which it all came together, such as in Poland's spontaneous solidarity with Slovakia in its attempts to make up lost political ground and join the EU — proof that we were still joined by mutual aspirations.

Regardless of all the difficulties, misunderstandings and mutual prejudices, cooperation within the Visegrad Group proved useful and necessary. And although there have been no spectacular successes so far, the existence of this cooperation is a sign that the political identity of Central Europe has been reborn.

Now, 15 years later, the countries of Central Europe form an integral and important part of the European Union. They also form a strong and predictable pillar within NATO. They provide an oasis of stability in this region of the world, with the ability to solve conflicts through dialogue and compromise. They support the democratic ambitions and the need for freedom of their eastern neighbors with responsibility and interest, being able to understand probably better than anybody else the depth of their longing to return to Europe. A Europe to which — against all the odds — we have always belonged spiritually.

It is hard to foresee the future of the Visegrad Group in the European Union. The need to overcome the long-term effects of the division of Europe, and the differences and delays in development indicate that not all of these targets have yet been achieved. Certainly, we are not interested in seeing the members of the Union further divided into "old" and "new". We need to take greater mutual responsibility for the entire European Union. Not only can our countries



Prime Minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki (left) with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz, 1989.



Tadeusz Mazowiecki

Politician, human rights activist, journalist. Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland (1989–1990). Chairman of the Democratic Union (1991–1994). Member and expert for Solidarity trade union, Editor-in-Chief of *Solidarity* weekly. Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations during a mission in Yugoslavia (1992–1995).

benefit from Europe, they can also give something to Europe, something related to our legacy and our devotion to freedom (the different and yet similar experiences we all had of resisting Soviet totalitarianism).

The cultural cooperation that has developed recently, symbolized by the impressive performance of the Visegrad Fund, should certainly be strengthened and included into the operating mechanisms of the Union. The EU is not only an economic and political alliance of countries. It is as well a “Europe of the spirit,” and it was to such a Europe that the Central European countries dreamed of returning.



Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki after having presented his government's policy statement at the Parliament, September, 1989.

THE FIRM ROCK OF VISEGRAD

Petr Pithart

It was clear to us long before Visegrad – and by “us” I mean those Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and Hungarians who were not regarded with favour by the regimes in our countries – that after “it” was all over, we would be working closely together.

In the Czech lands, many people from the ranks of the dissidents set out at the time to learn Polish, and some even learned Hungarian. We listened to the Polish broadcasts on Radio Free Europe when the programmes aimed at Czechoslovakia were blocked by jamming. We read their *samizdat* publications. We travelled to Budapest (not everyone could) using only our internal identity cards as travel documents, so that we could meet with our Hungarian friends who were Czech specialists, sociologists, and economists. I travelled there to edit a literary and



Petr Pithart (right), Prague 2004.

philosophical magazine that was aimed at both a domestic audience and the exile community. It was possible to meet our Polish counterparts – though it was not nearly as easy – on the “Czechoslovak-Polish Friendship Trail” along the summits of the northern mountain ranges that marked our common border. And such meetings occurred, even when the path was guarded by Polish soldiers with machine guns who would shout at anyone who strayed off it: – “Stan wojenny!” – “Martial law!” – just as watchmen on the ramparts of ancient fortresses had shouted out: “Away from the walls!”

It was absolutely clear to us then that there was far more uniting us in the present than had separated us in the past. But I think we were the first to pay systematic attention to all that – and precisely to all that. We knew that the old, unhealed wounds would one day be reopened, and we wanted to be prepared for it.

I remember well that the very first foreign visit – if we can call it that – was undertaken by a delegation from the Civic Forum post-revolution political movement that went to Poland in early December 1989, only days after the Czechoslovak regime had begun to fall apart. We went to Těšín, a town divided by the state border. And there on the border we were met – if I’m not mistaken – by Andrzej Jagodziński and then, in the Hotel Piast, by Adam Michnik.

What united us then, and to this day, was the unrepeatable experience of living under undemocratic, totalitarian regimes, as well as the experience of unsuccessful revolts against the system. We knew that Europeans to the west of the Iron Curtain had only very vague notions of all that, if they had any idea at all, and that they would not then, or later, ask many penetrating questions.



Petr Pithart

Political scientist, essayist,
Charter 77 activist. Czech Prime
Minister in 1990–1992,
Speaker of the Senate 1996–1998
and 2000–2004, since 2004 Deputy
Speaker of the Senate.

It was only logical that the Presidents – the dissidents Havel, Wałęsa, and Göncz – agreed on cooperation among the Visegrad countries. And it was also to be expected that some of their successors would call the importance of Visegrad into question and make it known in various ways that they had no interest in such a community. In the end, however, the common interests of the countries in the centre of Central Europe, a region otherwise torn by divergent aims, always prevailed.

At one point, when scepticism regarding Visegrad had once more come to a head (this time from the Czech side), we Czechs met with the local Hungarians in the Slovak town of Dunajská Streda, near the Danube River, to set up a special Visegrad imprint with the Kalligram publishing house, so that Poles, Hungarians, and Slovaks would have access to unfamiliar Czech literature which could help break down the stereotypical notions they may have had of Czechs. And vice versa... We told ourselves that if our politicians were letting us down at the moment, then we intellectuals had to step into the breach.

In a Europe that is uniting, our voice should be heard, both now and in the future, as a common voice. Not necessarily in everything, but in what is essential, always.

It is by no means certain that this will happen. The voices of a new European nationalism, particularly in Central Europe, are growing louder and louder. The danger is that interest in the articulation of common experiences on European soil will be drowned out by the voices of narrow national interests. It would be short-sighted to let this happen, and we would pay a heavy price for it. As we already have, more than once.

May Visegrad have the steadfastness and the strength and the endurance of the Danube River that flows far beneath it. Those three kings back in 1335 knew very well why they chose that place to meet, on a solid outcrop high above the Danube. They did so because they wanted the majesty of the silent and powerful river to remind them that there are values that stand above the daily conflicts and squabbles of neighbors.

A EUROPEAN CROSSROADS WORN BY CENTURIES OF USE

Ladislav Snopko

Roads between businesses. In order for them to work, for human communication to arise, people needed the freedom of movement and security. These were paths that had been trodden since before memory. At their crossroads lived people who ensured that they were passable. The countries of Central Europe are a European crossroads worn by centuries of use.

In the mid-1980s I led an archaeological dig of the ancient Gerulata site near Bratislava. It was exciting work on the only part of modern-day Slovakia that had been part of the former Roman Empire. I remember cleaning off the remnants of a Roman floor tile from the third century AD. The tiles commemorated the over 200-year stay of the Kannanefat mounted troops who had guarded the Empire's northern border.

The work of an archaeologist, mostly on his digs, is often dictated by his desire to touch finds discovered in their original positions, their original "discovery situations". That's why I was cleaning off the Roman floor tile with my hands and touching its surface. Everyone knows the wonderful feeling of touching old artefacts worn by time. The worn floor tile that I was handling was about 1,700 years old and had been walked on by tens of thousands of feet that had shaped its surface. As if it contained the irreplaceable experiences of a human age. To put it another way, it contained the experiences born of the antipodes of complicated developments in which it had been vital to choose the path of understanding, even at the cost of many compromises. It contained also the experience of compassion for those who had been unwilling in the name of tolerance and humanity to compromise. It is an experience that we are still living today. It is our European experience. I have the same feeling when I climb an old flight of stairs to the tower of a Gothic church and I touch the worn wooden railings, or when I sit on their benches that bear the imprint of the ages. They are smooth, and in their smoothness I feel the softness as well as the hardness of the palms that touched them for centuries.

Whether it was at Gerulata that Slovakia began its European history, or in the smooth benches of a Gothic cathedral that this development continued, or today, in this pro-European age, when the world for many has shrunk to an Internet village, I always regard our authentic Central European differences as the basic life principle of the peoples of this region, and the avenue of their future development.

Central Europe, which includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia has always been a very complicated and conflict-ridden area, in which the borders of states changed so often that they created units of which the countries of today's V4 form an integral part. This multinational region thus gained an exceptional ethnic, cultural, and religious identity that was distinct from the rest of Europe. That's why it's understandable that in this new era these countries began to search for that unrepeatable Central European "unity in difference," and on 15 February, 1991 founded the "Visegrad unit", known as the V4. The main point of the V4 from the outset was cooperation in the pursuit of common aims within uniting Europe. It was an attempt to create a type of social consciousness, also respecting the other European states, which is familiar from other multinational regions like the Benelux or Scandinavia. After the principle of multinational cooperation within the V4 was fulfilled, the cooperation spread to a lower, but very important level – regional governments that create a rich mosaic of historic lands.

This last event occurred when all V4 countries had designated "higher territorial units" as their self-governing regions with representative organs. It was only a matter of time before an initiative was born for them to be mutually linked in the areas in which they had sovereign powers. This initiative arose during the working visit of a delegation of Polish culture officials to Slovakia, which had been organized by Professor Jacek Purchla, the director of the

Ladislav Snopko

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International Culture Institute in Kraków in June 2003. I have been friends with Professor Purchla since 1991. The delegation that visited Bratislava included Marshall Janusz Sepiol. We agreed to change the programme of the visit, and on 9 June we organized a meeting between Marshall Sepiol and the then-chairman of the Bratislava self-governing region, Lubo Roman. The meeting was marked by mutual understanding and led to a proposal to arrange the first meeting of V4 regional representatives.

On the basis of this proposal, the conference of the preparatory committee of the Forum of Regions of V4 Countries was called for 20 and 21 May, 2004 in Kraków, which was attended by the representatives of 10 self-governing regions of these countries, who expressed the will to cooperate in all the relevant areas. The most important areas of cooperation were identified as finding a common strategy for defending their interests among the states of the European Union, environmental policy, and investments in communications infrastructure. At the same time they agreed on a joint declaration calling for the first Forum of Regions of V4 Countries in October 2004.

The first official Forum of Regions of V4 Countries was held on 11 and 12 October, 2004 in Kraków. The representatives of more than 30 higher territorial units from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic officially declared their will to cooperate regularly. After it was over, the second Forum of Regions of V4 Countries was called for 26 and 27 September, 2005 in Bratislava. As the main topic of debate the delegates chose the development of V4 regions following their entry to the EU, cooperation between V4 regional representatives in the EU's Council of Regions, questions related to the admission of new members to the EU, and cooperation within the area of culture, education and environmental protection. Cooperation between the V4 countries thus acquired a further, very viable dimension, because the best path to mutual closeness leads from high up to down below, from states through regional self-governments to citizens.



Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers in Kraków, 1 June, 2001. From the left: Viktor Orbán, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Jerzy Buzek, and Miloš Zeman.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY IN THE SUCCESS OF VISEGRAD

György Szabad

On 15 February, 1991, as a result of the Visegrad meeting convened by Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, Presidents Václav Havel of Czechoslovakia and Lech Wałęsa of Poland along with PM Antall published a joint declaration bearing testimony to their friendship and to the cooperation between their three countries.

As a venue, Visegrad carried a symbolic meaning: More than 650 years before, in 1335, the Polish King Kasimir the Great, the Czech King John of Luxemburg, and the Hungarian King Charles Robert had met at Visegrad Castle to resolve conflicts and weave joint plans.

The timing of the Visegrad meeting was no accident, since all three countries were already on the road of political transition. An important element in this political change was that, due to Antall's initiative in Moscow on 7 June, 1990, Hungary – followed by the other two countries of Central Europe – left the Warsaw Pact, while all the organizations that the USSR had forced on Central and Eastern Europe were on the edge of dissolution. At the same time the European integration path of the newly liberated countries was unfolding. In January 1991 the



Meeting of Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers in Prague, July 1994. From the left: Andrzej Olechowski (Poland), Géza Jeszenszky (Hungary), Josef Zieleniec (Czech Republic), and Jozef Moravčík (Slovakia).

Hungarian parliamentary delegation, headed by the author of this article, was the first among the previous Soviet satellite countries to take its seat as a full member of the Council of Europe. Meanwhile, political and military talks on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary got underway. It is also important to note that the integration of Slovakia to the Visegrad Group after its establishment on 1 January, 1993 received unanimous support, while the Central European Free Trade Agreement signed by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia received speedy ratification in the parliaments of the four countries.

The Visegrad policy of Hungary's political leaders was guided by their serious national and democratic commitments as well as the lessons they had drawn from the past – namely that political relations between small states and major powers sooner or later resulted in unequal partnerships that led to defencelessness. That is why firm solidarity and democratic cooperation were indispensable for these states, situated as they were between great powers, for the sake of the security of the region as well as the legal security of their inhabitants. Besides the lessons of the past, it became clear that the independence of these countries could not be maintained without European integration and Euro-Atlantic solidarity, both of which would be supported rather than weakened by regional cooperation.

The above-mentioned conclusions and the first successes at the outset of the 1990s were closely related to the fact that – among others – Prime Minister Antall, Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky and myself as Speaker of the Hungarian parliament were all historians.

György Szabad

Professor of history. Author of numerous books and essays on the economic, social and political history of Hungary in the 18–19th century. Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Member of the Hungarian Parliament (1990–1998) and Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament (1990–1994).



THE OPTIMAL FORMAT FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

Magda Vášáryová

The human memory, with its tendency to rid itself of unnecessary information, is the means by which each of us preserves his integrity. We get rid of experiences and problems that we have come to terms with, as well as those we would rather not remember.

Perhaps it is precisely this mechanism, that of contenting ourselves with what we have achieved, that causes us to forget the circumstances and conditions in which Visegrad regional cooperation arose. The 15th anniversary of "Visegrad" is a suitable occasion on which to recall some of its basic goals and the conditions in which it was born. Who among us today would



Visegrad Seminar in San Sebastian.
From the left:
Miguel Angel Aguilar (Spain),
Aleksander Kwaśniewski (Poland),
Hanna Suchocka (Poland),
Magda Vášáryová (Slovakia),
Karel Kosík (Czech Republic).

emphasize the elimination of the relicts of the communist regime as a priority? Following the entry of the Visegrad Four (V4) member countries to the European Union and NATO, we have increasingly forgotten about these goals, which in 1991 seemed virtually impossible to achieve. It is also very important not to forget the second point in the original Visegrad Declaration, which expressed the desire to overcome the historical prejudices and animosities among the countries of Central Europe.

Today it is as if we have forgotten about the relations between our four nations in this hard-tested region, relations that were not always harmonious and often were downright unfriendly. This is why we should stress that Visegrad cooperation is an historically unique example of cooperation between four states who were gravely affected by the turbulence of the 20th century, which was the main reason this region lagged behind in terms of culture and civilization in the second half of the 20th century. From this point of view above all it is understandable that for Slovakia, Visegrad cooperation remains today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the optimal form of regional cooperation. This is why Visegrad is a stable entry on the list of Slovak foreign policy priorities.

Today, all of the states of the V4 live with each other in peace and work on developing their market economies; their citizens feel secure and sovereign. Entry to the European Union did not take away our ability to decide our own fates nor the conditions of cooperation with the rest of Europe's states and nations. But because of our common historical experience and our common attempts to get rid of the residue of the totalitarian regimes in our countries, dialogue between the members of Visegrad concerning our role in the European Union remains an important complementary process to pan-European and trans-Atlantic cooperation. At the same time, this

intensive dialogue should not lead to political and economic uniformity in Central Europe; it should remain a group of cooperating states that respect each other's differences and similarities.

Visegrad cooperation is a daily reality in the work of all government and state institutions, as well as of countless activities of the non-governmental sector and the International Visegrad Fund. This tool for supporting cultural collaboration in the widest sense of the word has in the past few years quite logically become a means of harmonizing the foreign policy of the V4. Its engagement with Ukraine, Moldova and other neighboring states has increased the scope of the Visegrad Group's activities far beyond the border of simple regional cooperation. The same can be said of the many meetings between the Visegrad Group and other similar regional alliances, such as the Benelux.

The signatories to the Visegrad Declaration in 1991 agreed to do all they could to ease and promote direct contacts between citizens, interest groups, churches, social institutions and non-governmental organizations. Even through until 1989 we were a part of the Soviet Bloc, we discovered with amazement, and we're still finding out to this day, that we were in fact isolated, that we never knew one another, and that between us was always an enormous space for misunderstandings and the spreading of prejudices. If we were today to evaluate the effectiveness of this aim, we would have to state that this is one of the most successful chapters in Visegrad cooperation, but one that is often forgotten. It is impossible to tabulate everything that has been achieved over these 15 years, but the most important thing of all was that the citizens of the V4 took the initiative into their own hands, and today, freely and without problems, contact each other across mutual borders, meet each other on the municipal and regional levels, and do business together.

If anything remains from the original ideas of the founding fathers that has not seen significant improvement, it is in the area of infrastructure and the connection of energy systems. Building effective connections to allow the widest possible communications between the four main Central European states remains a wish rather than a fact, whether we're talking about roads, high-speed rail links, electricity network connections, the construction of minor gas lines, or other infrastructure connections without which modern states cannot prosper. This is a task that remains alive but problematic in talks between V4 government officials. Connections between media concerns, multilateral cooperation in the exchange of information, joint programs, joint presentations, and cooperation in the area of tourism, which were such remote goals for the founding fathers, remain on the V4 agenda. Within the coordination of our European policies these areas of cooperation remain important themes at meetings between ministers, experts, and non-governmental organizations.

Every year there are some journalists who announce the definitive end of Visegrad, as if they were trying to prove the folk saying that anyone who is declared dead while they are still alive, will continue to live for many years. Fifteen years is not a great age, which is why we need to pay attention to the details of Visegrad cooperation, which is the basis of true cooperation. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility, after 15 years, to demonstrate daily that the V4 was not "created at the behest of the West" as some commentators wrote in 1991, but that it belongs among the common strategic interests of four modern European countries, who in this way declare their allegiance to a single region, their responsibility for its development, and their support for interpersonal ties on the level of modern European nations.

Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers in Budapest, December 2002. From the left: Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakia), Vladimír Špidla (Czech Republic), Péter Medgyessy (Hungary), and Leszek Miller (Poland).



Magda Vášáryová

Diplomat, completed studies in philosophy, actress in the Slovak National Theatre (1970–1989). Czechoslovak Ambassador to Austria (1990–93) and Slovak Ambassador to Poland (2000–2005). Founder and director of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA, 1993–2000). Since 2005 State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



VISEGRAD COOPERATION: HOW DID IT START?

Alexandr Vondra

Those whose memories go back far enough will remember the 15 years of cooperation represented by the Visegrad Group. The group was officially constituted by a document signed in February 1991 in Visegrad, Hungary, by two Presidents – Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa – and one Prime Minister, József Antall.

In a certain sense, however, the close cooperation in Central Europe represented by the Visegrad Group started long before then. The grand ceremonial signing in Visegrad had to wait until Lech Wałęsa became the Polish President, because without his signature the act of signing would have lacked an important dimension. It also had to wait until the organization of the

meeting could be undertaken by the Hungarians, because the relatively freer conditions in Hungary in the late 1980s meant that after the Velvet Revolution of late 1989, they had perhaps the best prepared and most professional government, which worked hard to make sure the moment would leave its mark on history.

But the modern beginnings of Czech-Hungarian-Polish-Slovak cooperation go back before 1989 to the period of dissent. In 1981, when Jaruzelski's "state of war" drove the Polish unofficial trade union Solidarity underground, opposition groups in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw realized with increasing urgency that they had to work together. The domino-like collapse of the communist regimes in 1989 was presaged by the mutual solidarity of the repressed. 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. Contraband flowed across the same border in both directions in the form of *samizdat* literature and pamphlets, printing technology and financial assistance. Young Czechs and Slovaks who had not yet had their travel documents confiscated travelled to Poland to gain inspiration and experience. 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.

It was a time when intellectuals in Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Gdańsk, Košice, Kraków, Prague, Warsaw, and Wrocław became more keenly aware of their political and cultural kinship. *Samizdat* publications were full of translations of works by Adam Michnik, György Konrád, Czesław Miłosz, and others. The Poles and Hungarians loved Václav Havel and Bohumil Hrabal. They all read Milan Kundera's "The Tragedy of Central Europe" when it first came out in 1984. In the West, Timothy Garton Ash popularized Central Europe in his essays; in Czechoslovakia, the idea of Central Europe was given new life by Luděk Bednář and Petruška Šustrová when they put out a *samizdat* magazine by the same name.

In 1989, when communist regimes in Europe were collapsing like houses of cards, it was not hard to take this awareness and pour it into a new mould, that of practical international cooperation. From the very early days of January 1990, we had dozens of discussions in the Prague Castle about how to strengthen such cooperation and give it institutional expression. Two new ambassadors to Prague had a major role to play: György Varga, the translator of Havel and Hrabal into Hungarian and a great admirer of Central European literature, and Jacek Baluch, a Polish literary historian from Kraków who dreamed of reviving the spirit of the ancient cooperation.



Visegrad Group countries Ambassadors in Washington, D.C. From the right: Aleksandr Vondra (Czech Republic), Martin Bútora (Slovakia), Géza Jeszenszky (Hungary) and Michael Novak (American theologian).

At the end of January 1990 President Václav Havel went to Warsaw on a state visit and in a speech delivered in the Polish *Sejm* invited Polish and Hungarian representatives to the Bratislava Castle to talk about these things “in peace and quiet.” He summarised the idea behind cooperation in Central Europe as follows: “We should not compete with each other to gain admission into the various European organizations. On the contrary, we should assist each other in the same spirit of solidarity in which, in darker days, you protested already quoted our persecution as we did against yours.” The next day, Havel travelled to Budapest with the same message.

The idea of close cooperation and coordination in Central Europe had its own *raison d'être*. We wanted not only to reconnect with the tradition of cultural kinship and cooperation from the period of dissent, but also – and perhaps chiefly – we wanted to avoid any revival of the hostile rivalry and jealousy that had destroyed our mutual relations in the inter-war period and left us easy prey for the powerful appetites of Berlin and Moscow. Těšín/Cieszyn and Komárno/Komárom – the former straddling the border between the Czech Republic and Poland, the latter between Slovakia and Hungary – would become bridges leading to a deeper kinship, not theatres of new conflict. We felt very strongly that cooperation between countries living on the uncertain territory between a reuniting Germany and a collapsing Soviet Union was a matter of supreme and vital importance.

That meeting at the Bratislava Castle took place at the beginning of April 1990. At a conference of intellectuals on the theme of “Ethics and Politics,” almost everyone who meant something in the Central European discourse was there: Ján Čarnogurský, Ladislav Hejdránek, Zbigniew Janas, János Kiss, György Konrád, Adam Michnik, László Szigeti, and many others. That was followed by a summit of the top representatives of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, to which the foreign ministers of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Austria were invited as observers. At the time, Havel was the only President in attendance to have emerged from the democratic opposition, and from the sour smiles of our Polish and Hungarian friends, it was clear that they would have preferred to be represented at such a meeting by someone other than the communist General Jaruzelski or his Hungarian friend (whose name – I swear – has already vanished from my mind.)

But we, the Czechoslovaks who organized this meeting, did a less than stellar job as well. Our revolution was proceeding at breakneck speed and there was scarcely time to prepare properly for such an important meeting. Havel’s concept of the summit as an intellectual, Socratic “symposium” had a certain charm, but it proved an inappropriate forum for practical politics. Many fine speeches were made at the conference and at the summit, but nothing concrete came out of them. Thus did Bratislava lose its chance to make history.

Despite everything, the Bratislava meeting, in my opinion, had great significance. It paved the way to Visegrad. And in the summer of 1991, when the leaders of the putsch in Moscow tried to bring down Mikhail Gorbachov, Visegrad went through its first trial by fire. During some discreet meetings in the Tatra Mountains in Poland, coordinated steps to be taken by all three countries were agreed upon, resulting in a common declaration that autumn in Kraków that put Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland on the road to NATO membership.

The brief history of cooperation within the Visegrad Group has had its ups and downs. There were times when some politicians in Prague and Budapest thought the Visegrad Group was merely an impediment to their rapid integration into the West or into Europe. Why should we wait for the slowest among us to catch up? they asked. Nor did the authoritarian Vladimír Mečiar’s accession to power in an independent Slovakia help matters. Yet despite these difficulties, time has clearly shown that the Visegrad Group is viable and has a future. It was precisely this close and coordinated work among the three countries that compelled American and Western European politicians to open the doors of the Atlantic alliance to us.

Thanks to those who helped to create a new spirit of cooperation in Central Europe, no great barriers remain in the way of Czech-Hungarian-Polish-Slovak cooperation.



Alexandr Vondra

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FROM SOLIDARNOŚĆ (SOLIDARITY) TO COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

Lech Wałęsa

Anniversaries are times of reflection, such as the one we are embarking on now, 15 years after the establishment of the Visegrad Group. I believe that this initiative – the manifestation of the good will of free states – is the fruit of the idea of Solidarity, launched 10 years before the start of Visegrad. In 2005 we celebrated the anniversaries of both movements.



Negotiations in Gdańsk Shipyard,
August 1980.
Lech Wałęsa (left) and, opposite,
Communist Deputy Prime Minister –
Mieczysław Jagielski.

Looking back over the last 15 years, we can confirm that the Visegrad Group was founded on mutual foreign policy goals, similar historical experiences, and geographical proximity. These common grounds still provide a substantial reference point in our mutual relationships.

The tangible fruits of this cooperation can be seen nowadays in the integration of our countries with European and Atlantic structures. Today we can see that the Visegrad Group was an important platform for cooperation in achieving the integration aspirations of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Our membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was a joint success for candidate and Alliance countries. The Visegrad Four managed to speak with one voice on the most important matters, frequently putting common aims above the interests and rivalries of individual countries. The experiences gained from pre-accession cooperation could be a valuable contribution to further collaboration within the wider family of European countries.

Solidarity in international relation should be envisaged in this way. We need each other, both as separate states, as organizations on the European continent, and as unifying Europe in a globalizing world. These goals should be constantly pursued with appropriate instruments

and mechanisms. Existing achievements must be perfected and new conditions taken into consideration. Such integration, such cooperation is becoming an integral part of wider integration processes. The International Visegrad Fund also plays a significant role during common actions by supporting states as well as governmental and social institutions. Culture and education are, after all, crucial meeting points for various circles, cultures and mentalities, and help build mutual understanding and collaboration. Support for youth is especially valuable. Such actions bring people closer together.

The Visegrad initiative has also experienced its moments of weakness, even moments of breakdown. We were not able to bring the message of true integration to our societies, as our ideas frequently did not go beyond political salons. There were fears that if we concentrated too



much on cooperation with each other, our accession to the European Union could be delayed. Sometimes, competition and rivalry also got in the way.

But now all this is behind us. We are now witnesses to an entirely new impulse in the actions of the Group. We are capitalizing on our geographical proximity, our cultural, mental, social, and economic similarities, as well as on the interests and businesses we share. We have an increasingly better understanding of the tasks we have to fulfill, not only for ourselves but also for the whole region. Cooperation between the Visegrad Group and other countries, especially those of Eastern Europe, has become an important assignment, especially given the fact that borders are losing their importance in the globalizing world. This process has been visible in such areas as ecology, infrastructure, transport, energy, tourism, and media. We must invite cooperation from the other countries we share borders with, such as Ukraine, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Russia, Moldova, and hopefully Belarus, which we are watching with special care. We can play an essential role as a bridge in relation between these states and the whole of Europe and its institutions.

March 1990, Meeting in the Giant Mountains (Polish-Czechoslovak border). Václav Havel (left) and Lech Wałęsa (right).

Lech Wałęsa

Founder and the first leader of the Solidarity trade union. Laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983. President of the Republic of Poland (1990–1995).

With such actions, we would like to send a message that is close to all our hearts, from the Polish Solidarity (*Solidarność*) movement. Twenty-five years ago it did not seem possible that we could learn to cooperate so quickly – and as free countries – without compulsion, on our own free will. International solidarity brought us freedom, and today we in Europe and in the world stand in particular need of such solidarity. We have to remember again how much can be achieved through cooperation. The countries of the Visegrad Group have the genuine ability, potential and, I trust, the determination to pass on this message and surmount mutual challenges.



Lech Wałęsa visiting the European Parliament.

VISEGRAD BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Michael Žantovský

When the Presidents, Prime Ministers, foreign ministers and other leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland met to sign the founding declaration of the Visegrad Group on a misty winter day on 15 February, 1991, it was at the height of the heady euphoria brought about by their newfound freedom. The shadows of the past – with Soviet armies all over Central Europe, with the Warsaw Pact, the only military alliance in history to attack only its own members, and with the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, a huge bureaucratic mechanism to redistribute poverty and inefficiency among the countries of “real socialism” – were quickly receding. The shadows of the future – with the operatic coup attempt in the expiring Soviet Union, its subsequent collapse and the ensuing period of instability, and the horrific wars in former Yugoslavia licking the shores of Central Europe – were yet to come.

The idea of the newborn grouping, conceived at a meeting of the top representatives of the three countries in Bratislava in April 1990 and delivered on the Hungarian banks of the Danube River nine months later, seemed like a no-brainer at the time. It reflected the almost identical initial positions of the three countries that had been recently liberated

from the bear hug of the totalitarian East, and that were determined to work their way back to the democratic West. It also reflected an older affinity between three countries whose destinies had been linked for a long time, in part or in whole, to that of the Habsburg Empire, through similar cultures, languages, creeds, and problems. And to some it even spoke of the ancient mythological past of the Danube-Carpathian region, in which the same term – Visegrád, Vyšehrad or Wyszogród, meaning a castle or a city on the hill – was to be found in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, Transylvania (yes, Visegrad was also the seat of Count Dracula, one of the less admirable examples of Central European sophistication) and even on the banks of the Drina River in what is today Bosnia and Hercegovina.

But for most of us who gathered in Visegrad that day, the emphasis was on the future rather than the past. In the preparations for the meeting it had been relatively easy to agree on the five goals in the official declaration, whose English was more than a little marked by the novelty of the situation:

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



Unofficial meeting of Vaclav Havel (left) and Lech Wałęsa (right).



Michael Žantovský

Diplomat, politician, translator and author. Founding member of the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia. Since 1990 a press secretary and spokesman for President Václav Havel. Former Ambassador to the United States of America (1992–1997) and current Ambassador to Israel (since 2003). Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Security (1996–2002).

It is a measure of the success of the regional transformation process that all of these goals have been achieved in all of the countries involved. On the other hand, it is harder to demonstrate what, if anything, the Visegrad process had to do with it. For, almost immediately following the meeting, things started to change. One after another, the ruling elites, which had originated in the opposition movements and in the revolutions of 1989, were replaced by governments whose leaders had been less opposed to, and sometimes even descended from, the *ancien régime*. The *zeitgeist* of reemerging nationalism, fortunately of a relatively mild and non-lethal variety, was also passing through Central Europe, leading to the division of one of the member countries into two successor states, and thus increasing the number of Visegrad members to four. Both these developments, with the resulting divergence in economic strategies, foreign policies and even views on human rights, democracy and minority issues, inevitably weakened the Visegrad format. The common interests of the region took a back seat to the formulation and pursuit of national interests. This may have diminished the importance of Visegrad, but it did not make it irrelevant. In the crucial pursuit of NATO membership for Central Europe, three of the four member countries found it essential to join forces, and used the concept of Visegrad as a powerful negotiating tool, irrespective of the weight given to the format in public by some of the member governments.

As the Czech Ambassador in Washington, D.C., I felt it was in the best interests of my country to plan, exchange information, and lobby the US government together with my Polish and Hungarian colleagues. The visit of President Clinton to Prague in January 1994 to announce the plan to enlarge NATO at a summit meeting of the Presidents of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, was the best demonstration of the success of this strategy. Immediately after our accession in 1999 and after the election in Slovakia of a pro-Atlantic, pro-democracy government, we joined forces again to bring the remaining member of the group on board. This, in my view, was Visegrad's finest hour.

The second opportunity presented itself in the accession of the Central European countries to the European Union. There the Visegrad countries proved unable to agree on a joint negotiating position and to assume the leadership of a bloc of candidates that would be a natural center of gravity in the latest enlargement. From a diplomatic point of view, they would almost certainly have secured better terms for their accession had they taken that road. The intelligent negotiating strategy of the European Union, which first dispersed the 8 post-communist candidates into a regatta, only later to herd them back together at the goal line, was not conducive to a joint strategy, either. Finally, on many occasions it turned out that the foreign policies, affinities and loyalties of the Visegrad countries, both regionally and globally, worked better along the East-West dimension than along the North-South axis.

The failure to make use of this historical opportunity has largely determined the future political significance of the Visegrad project. It is simply not realistic to expect that the group will find it easier to identify and pursue common interests in the EU, with its multitude of disparate interests, changing alliances and multiple loyalties, than it did when its interests were clear-cut and shared.

Visegrad can, however, continue to play a useful role in facilitating a myriad of other links, connections and synergies that bind the people living in the region. It can, and does, support cultural exchanges, the sharing of information and ideas, people-to-people contacts, cross-border cooperation and other activities that, taken together, constitute and express the positive value of the elusive concept of Central Europe. Who will say this is not enough?

THE SUMMIT IN THE FROSTY RUINS: THE BACKGROUND OF THE 1991 VISEGRAD MEETING

Tomasz Grabiński

in collaboration with **Peter Morvay**

The winter of 1991 in Central Europe was quite frosty. The mayor of Visegrad at the time, Sándor Hadházy, remembers how before the February summit meeting the government envoys came to him to find an appropriate place. "They were very surprised because we couldn't find a venue which met the safety and security requirements and additionally could be heated. Eventually, we ended up in one of the cellars of the royal palace, which at the time housed a collection of stones," Hadházy recalls.

On the morning of the signing of the Visegrad Declaration, the thermometers showed -10°C , and it had snowed heavily during the previous days. "There was no door on the room, just some bars, and no heating. We had an idea to install the rather heavy brocade curtains, which were to prevent the heat from escaping. We put a few gas heaters in the cellar, and managed to warm it up a little," the mayor of Visegrad says.

In theory, the entire event could have been moved to another town, but its significance would have been lost. For symbolic reasons it had to be Visegrad. The first person to realise this was the Prime Minister of Hungary, József Antall. "He was a historian and he knew that it was the very place where the meeting of three kings had taken place on 19 November, 1335," says Hadházy.

Thus did a location where centuries ago the kings of Bohemia, Poland and Hungary had met to discuss peace in this region of Europe, become in February 1991 the site of a meeting between the representatives of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary: Presidents Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa, and Prime Minister József Antall.

"Today the historical day has finally arrived – the Visegrad Three has been established," reads the diary of the Ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Hungary at the time, Rudolf Chmel. "In Bratislava [in April 1990] these three countries had already agreed on a certain minimum: To issue a mutual declaration. Now the time has come."

Why the meeting in Visegrad was an historical event whereas the earlier one in Bratislava was not is explained by Alexandr Vondra, then the foreign affairs advisor to the Czechoslovak President: "At that first meeting we still had the revolutionary fever. There were also some objective reasons: Both Poland and Hungary were still ruled by Presidents from the previous regime, so Václav Havel would have felt a little lonely. The meeting in Visegrad was prepared much better and was more professional. The new elites had gained

experience throughout the previous year, and hence the cooperation was successfully formalised."

Talks

At the beginning of 1991, all three countries were ruled by freshly elected democratic politicians. Václav Havel had the most political experience of the three men who signed the Visegrad Declaration, having been in office for nearly a year. The Soviet army was still stationed in the region, and the Soviet Union still existed – although it was decomposing – as did other structures of the socialist bloc such as the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).

"These three countries were joined by something more than simply the neighborhood. Although their specific situations were different, of all the post-communist countries they were the closest to each other due to their historical connections with the West, and the level of their political thinking and economic development," wrote Jiří Dienstbier, then the minister of foreign affairs of Czechoslovakia, in his memoirs. "The preparation of the Visegrad Declaration and the meeting, planned initially for January, was delayed," he noted. "Besides other questions, there was still a dispute over the level of institutionalisation. Poland wanted to form a committee/council of Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, whereas Hungary was against it. We regarded this dispute as meaningless."

The summit began in Budapest in the impressive building of the Hungarian Parliament, situated on the banks of the Danube River. The talks were devoted to cooperation between the three countries, the situation in the USSR, the Warsaw Pact and the Gulf War. Havel reminded the participants that the meeting was the continuation of a similar one in Bratislava a year earlier. He stressed that Western Europe was expecting to see cooperation between these three countries; it was a kind of test of their maturity. The President of Czechoslovakia underlined, however, that there was no need for a new pact or new lines of division. Nevertheless, some biting remarks were made: Lech Wałęsa let both his partners know that he was a practical politician, unlike themselves. He also mentioned that the signs of unhealthy rivalry and quarrels between the countries of the region saddened him.

The memo recorded by Chmel, who accompanied President Havel, records the events behind the scenes on the evening preceding the talks: "We went almost secretly after supper to see [Hungarian President Árpád] Göncz, while Antall (somewhat in confidence as well) came at the same time to have tea with Wałęsa (he did not want to go to town with him to supper). In that way, although all three leaders at one point were under one roof, no meeting between them took place." Chmel described the atmosphere of the summit as "quite stiff," and noted that the relationship between Havel and Wałęsa seemed insincere.

The politicians moved from Budapest to Visegrad, where they solemnly signed the *Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration*. Its initial content had been accepted on 28 December of the previous year during a meeting of foreign ministers. As the head of the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps recalled: "It was not our aim to create some kind of a new bloc, a variety of the pre-war Little Entente, or a formal organisation that could be treated as a substitute for the Warsaw Pact or Comecon. This could have proven dangerous to our integration to European and Euro-Atlantic organisations. We were willing to help each other in our struggle and in such economic transformations that would draw us nearer to conditions in Western Europe," wrote Dienstbier.

"The cellar in which the signing ceremony took place could only accommodate a small table. Everybody was sitting around it, rather cramped, and it didn't look very elegant," Mayor Hadravský recalls. The Presidents, Prime Ministers and foreign ministers were photographed under a plaque commemorating the meeting of the three kings in the 14th century. Dienstbier noted the following of Visegrad: "Wałęsa joked that he was hoping the ruins would be rebuilt, like in Warsaw and Gdańsk. Antall remarked dryly that he had no money. "When you get rich," commented Wałęsa. During dinner, however, he praised the good foundations in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. "At least that's my impression, as the foundations are not visible." Antall smiled, and Ambassador [of Hungary to Czechoslovakia György] Varga told me it was the first time that many people had seen him smile. Havel remembered that Jan Luxembourg's retinue had had to be supplied every day with bagfuls of bread and barrels of wine. "We don't have such an enormous retinue, and we're not going to drink and eat as much, but instead we're going to meet again sooner than in 656 years time," he said.

"The solemn signing of the mutual declaration in the Visegrad ruins officially confirmed the prospect of cooperation between the three countries on their way to European integration. We'll see if it still holds true in one, two, or three years time," wrote Chmel, who later devoted many essays to the Visegrad collaboration and was also editor-in-chief of the *Central European Gazette*, a mutual supplement to the three main daily papers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary.

As can be clearly seen – at least from this publication – the Visegrad Group not only lasted a few years, it endured and remains in good shape after 15 years of existence and in an entirely new geopolitical situation. Now all of the member states have achieved the goals they set themselves at the beginning: They are members of NATO and the European Union, while the Warsaw Pact and Comecon are history.

Other targets that were set during the meeting in Visegrad have also been accomplished. "I said (...) that the West was trying to focus on our three countries and was expecting that over time, they could change from being recipients of help into a source of help for others," Dienstbier wrote. The Visegrad Group countries now play precisely that role towards their eastern neighbors, especially Ukraine and Belarus.

"The communists spoke of friendship, but they were friends only with each other. Between our nations there were barriers and entanglements. Our task is to remove them, to introduce pluralism, and to make the relationships among us more civilized. Politicians must create frameworks, and the nations will fill them with content in economy, culture, science, and mutual exchanges," said Lech Wałęsa in Visegrad.

Who knows, perhaps over time the greatest achievement of Visegrad will be the fact that ordinary Czechs, Hungarians, Poles and Slovaks have gotten to know each other better.



Tomasz Grabiński
Polish translator and journalist.
Journalist with *Gazeta Wyborcza*
(2001–2005)
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-Czechoslovak Solidarity.

Meeting of Presidents of Visegrad Group countries, Budapest, 3 November, 2003.





THE SPIRIT OF VISEGRAD WAS REVIVED IN WASHINGTON

Martin Bútora

The second half and the end of the 1990s was an exciting and dramatic period for the Ambassadors of the Visegrad countries to the United States. With the possibility of the North Atlantic Alliance's expanding becoming ever more likely, cooperation between Visegrad and Washington received a fresh impetus. It also gained a clear agenda, one that was both tremendously important and very attractive for the Visegrad countries. It gained a concrete goal that had a mobilizing effect. It also gained a framework for action that required significant organizational and personnel efforts, both in private and public diplomacy. All of this encouraged the top political, diplomatic and intellectual representatives of the Visegrad states to make contacts with the political and diplomatic establishment in Washington and its political foundations – an opportunity that is rarely afforded by a global superpower to the political elites of smaller countries.

Between the years 1996 and 1998, this cooperation concerned above all three of the countries of the Visegrad Group, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland which were the first to be invited to join NATO. Later it was expanded to include Slovakia. As of the beginning of 2001, this cooperation gradually went beyond the borders of Visegrad, and the Visegrad Four (V4) model was successfully exported to the Vilnius Ten (V10), uniting the other candidate countries for NATO entry – Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The climax of this final phase in May 2003 was the unanimous ratification of the entry of seven states from the V10 into NATO by the American Senate.

People first

Everything I have said so far is true, but it's not the whole truth, because it lacks people. One of the architects in Washington of this exciting but complicated discussion of the various aspects of NATO enlargement was the Polish Ambassador, Jerzy Koźmiński. It was he who invited me immediately after my arrival in Washington in March 1999 to his residence for an informal breakfast meeting that he and his Hungarian and Czech colleagues had been holding for some time. "Here's the fourth chair that we've been saving for Slovakia," he said.

For me it was encouraging to see Géza Jeszenszky and Saša Vondra sitting in the other two chairs. I have known Géza Jeszenszky from the beginning of the 1990s, and I had worked with Saša Vondra for over two years, from 1990-1992, when we both served as advisors to the President of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, Saša for foreign policy and I for human rights. Our excellent Visegrad relations continued as well following the arrival of Martin Palouš, whom I had known for more than a decade as well, to take Saša's place, while the Polish ambassadorship went to Przemysław Grudziński and the Hungarian office to Ambassador András Simonyi. This human factor was another reason why Visegrad was successful in Washington.

And it really was successful, with Slovakia enjoying most of the fruit of this cooperation as it was trying to "catch up" with the other three after its years under its authoritarian leader, former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. Slovakia had to be once again pencilled in to the most important American maps – foreign policy, security, military. We had to take a more aggressive line in making ourselves known to the American public, in winning allies, friends and supporters.

Of course, first it was necessary that Slovakia's more human face become somewhat known in the US. At the invitation of the embassy, Washington was visited not only by Slovak politicians but also by people from the non-governmental sector, students, researchers, artists, mayors, journalists, judges, entrepreneurs and figures from other areas. These people showed that Slovakia was a country undergoing deep changes, and that it had people who were willing

and able to continue these changes. Our colleagues from the Visegrad Four played an irreplaceable role in this regard.

Many Americans were curious about the “Velvet Divorce” between the Czechs and Slovaks, especially in the context of the bloody events in the former Yugoslavia. They were impressed that even though our nations had separated, we were still able to cooperate. The idea of celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Washington together with the Czech Embassy was met with a positive response. President Bill Clinton during this time agreed to make a speech on the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Americans invited two leaders from the new democracies to this event – Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman and Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda. After a joint appearance at Georgetown University, the two were both received at the White House.

We also worked closely with the Czech Embassy on other occasions – we started the tradition of the annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture Series at the Woodrow Wilson Center, kicked off by a Christian philosopher with Slovak roots, Michael Novak. He was followed by Madeleine



Meeting of Visegrad Group countries
Ambassadors with American
Congressman George V. Voinovich
(Republican Senator from Ohio).

Albright, who even as Secretary of State had accentuated the significance of Visegrad during the first visit of Prime Ministers Zeman and Dzurinda to Washington in November 1999, and had welcomed the support that the Czech Republic was offering Slovakia. We invited the editor-in-chief of the Polish *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Adam Michnik, to give the third lecture, and he spoke in the American Congress building at a ceremonial meeting in December 2002 on the occasion of the invitation of the new candidates to join NATO.

Then there was also a celebration of the opening of the Maria Valeria Bridge across the Danube River, which was rebuilt in 2001 between Štúrovo in Slovakia and Esztergom in Hungary. We invited the Ambassador of the European Commission, Guenter Burghardt, and together with Hungarian Ambassador Géza Jeszenszky we stressed the bridge as a symbol of our rapprochement and joint entry to Europe.

“The city on the hill”

One of our largest joint events was the visit of the four deputy foreign ministers of the V4 countries to the US shortly after the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Visegrad Group in April 2001. At the influential Center for Strategic and International Studies think-tank, and in front of Zbigniew Brzezinski and 150 other guests, Andrzej Ananicz (Poland), Ivan Baba (Hungary), Ján Figel’ (Slovakia), and Pavel Telička (Czech Republic) discussed the Visegrad model. At the time, the Bush administration was just taking office, and these four politicians were among the first to be officially received by the Undersecretary of State, Richard Armitage. It was the first time the full Visegrad orchestra played together. When the former American Ambassador to NATO, Robert Hunter, had the term “Visegrad” translated, he discovered that it meant “the city on the hill”, a phrase which occupies a unique and irreplaceable spot in

American national mythology, the place where the "American dream" of freedom, equality and prosperity was lived out. The noble idea of Central European cooperation thus became fused with American idealism.

After a while, the Americans began to take an interest in the economic side of Visegrad as well. In February 2001 in New York, the InWest Forum, an investment conference, attracted 350 entrepreneurs and company and institutional representatives from the US and the V4 countries. A similar forum was held in 2002 in Washington.

Attractive model

The voice of Visegrad was also heard loud and clear at the founding and the launching of the "Vilnius Group" of 10 candidates for membership in NATO. This group had arisen in 1999 as an informal association of the ambassadors of these countries at a time when it was far from certain whether another round of enlargement would even take place. The group drew its inspiration from the example of Visegrad.

We proceeded according to three axioms. First, we believed that the candidate countries that had been explicitly invited to participate in preparations for membership at the 1999 Washington Summit could achieve more by taking a common approach. We agreed on two principles, that of solidarity and that of performance. The first meant that one candidate would not try to score points at the expense of another, while the second respected the fact that NATO would be judging us individually. We gradually organized meetings between the leaders of the candidate countries in each capital, at which the representatives of the new democracies made clear their determination to gain entry to the Alliance, and their political will not to slack off on reforms.

Second, we had to have the courage to think big, for example to reject the attractive – and for Slovakia, seemingly advantageous – alternative of NATO's accepting only the duo of Slovenia and Slovakia, given that the other candidates were either not very well prepared (the countries of South-Eastern Europe) or were unacceptable because of Russian opposition (the Baltic countries). But from the beginning it was clear to me that it would be impossible to gain two-thirds support in the US Senate, or the votes of 67 senators, for one or two small countries. We had to come up with something that would appeal to both the hearts and the practical minds of American politicians.





Martin Bútorá.

Slovak sociologist, publicist. Before 1989, beared from practice. During the Velvet Revolution, co-founder of the Public against Violence movement (VPN), advisor to President Václav Havel, Ambassador to the USA. Curenly, Director of the Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava.

The preceding wave of enlargement had not only a security dimension, but also a moral and historical note: To a certain extent it was about righting a historical wrong. We talked a great deal about how and with what we could “sell” the rather disparate “Vilnius Group” as a concept. Gradually, in the key political environment, the “big bang” concept began to take root, after having been first presented at a 2000 Bratislava conference by the head of the US Committee for NATO, Bruce Jackson. With this courageous-sounding vision of the need to invite the Baltic countries as well to join NATO, our enlargement round gained its own moral aspect, and as time went by, more and more people believed that the idea of a major enlargement would carry the day. The aid of our Visegrad colleagues, especially Saša Vondra and Przemek Grudziński, was exceedingly important in this regard.

Since Slovakia had been left behind in the previous round, we realized we would have to work harder than the rest. For example, during preparations for the Bratislava Summit in May 2001, President George W. Bush was preparing to embark on his first trip to Europe, and so we wanted a clear moral voice to be heard from Bratislava defining our vision of NATO enlargement. We put our hope in Czech President Václav Havel as a man of charisma whose word counted. I travelled from Washington to Prague for an informal meeting with Havel, and won a promise from him to attend, and later even his willingness to make the keynote speech. The result was a successful Bratislava Summit at which Havel made a beautiful speech about the new direction of Europe, which became the most-quoted speech in the US by a foreign statesman during that period.

The cooperation between the Visegrad and Vilnius groups climaxed in Washington in March 2002 when an historic meeting took place at the Slovak embassy of the representatives of the American ethnic organizations of the 10 candidate countries, as well as the representatives of the ethnic communities of the three new member states of the Alliance. These expatriates called on the American President and the US Senate to support the invitation of all countries that were prepared for membership, and in the crowded main hall of our building adopted a common statement that returned to the vision of a Europe whole and free as it had been described by President Bush and, before him, President Clinton.

The discussion was also joined by the Republican Senator for Ohio, George V. Voinovich, who had also served as governor of Ohio and mayor of Cleveland, which happened to be the US state and city with arguably the largest ethnic communities of the candidate countries. He expressed delight that these countries that had been so hard tested during their histories were now working together for a common goal.

“Today’s meeting was for me very, very encouraging,” he said, expressing the feelings of all of us who had worked to realize the bold V10 vision . “When you think about it, it’s in fact a miracle.”

COMMUNITY IN FARAWAY COUNTRIES

Joanna Kozińska-Frybes

We came to Mexico towards the end of 1993, after Czechoslovakia had separated and its embassies been divided. My colleagues were settling into their new residences. The Czechs stayed in their old embassy, whereas the Slovaks moved to a new place. The first Slovak Ambassador in Mexico, Ján Bratko, presented credentials together with me. Our NATO future looked uncertain at the time, and the prospect of joining the EU was still very distant.

In all diplomatic corps in all countries and in most epochs, there have always been more or less formal consultative groups. These have been complemented by multilateral decisions, ministerial instructions, common interests, and language relationships, as well as cultural and geographic kinships. In the 1990s in Mexico, the ambassadors of the European Union, Latin America, Asian and Arab countries as well created, and met in, separate groups.

We – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – were not connected (then as now) by any formal coalition apart from the “Visegrad Triangle” which, after the division of Czechoslovakia, became a quadrangle. In Europe, however, 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.

For an average Mexican, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary were a complete unknown. I was asked whether I was the ambassador of Bolonia (in Spanish Poland is Polonia), or where in the United States Poland was located. The Hungarians were asked whether they had come to Mexico by bus, while the “Czechoslovaks” received sympathy because of the Balkan War. They were surprised that we did not belong to the USSR, or – in the best cases – that we were not members of the European Union. Sometimes, our footballers were a reference point: our Lato, the Hungarian Puskas, or even Plánička from Czechoslovakia (1934). Occasionally, the names Havel and Wałęsa rang a bell, and of course the Pope, who nonetheless was often considered to be Italian.

We all encountered similar problems, surrounded by an ocean of ignorance (or “other knowledge”) that presented a common challenge to us. We had to find a way to provide the Mexicans with at least some information on our Central European reality.

I don’t recall who initiated the first joint meeting. But I do remember that it took place in the Polish embassy. The Ambassadors at the time were Ján Bratko from Slovakia, Václav Čekan from the Czech Republic, József Kosarka from Hungary, and me, the undersigned. Each of us was different: We had different backgrounds, different political views, different likes and dislikes. We spoke Spanish with one another. We saw local politics in a similar way and made similar efforts to help the locals understand our countries. We participated in joint presentations



Joanna Kozińska-Frybes – Polish Ambassador to Mexico, and Marek Pernal – Polish Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Mexico 1997.



Joanna Kozińska-Frybes

Polish historian of Latin America and diplomat. General Consul of Poland in Barcelona (since 2001), director of the Department of Cultural and Scientific Cooperation at the Foreign Ministry (1999–2001), Ambassador to Mexico (1993–1999), Secretary general of the Polish National Commission of UNESCO (1992–1993).

at local universities. At a certain point, we suggested to our ministers that they provide us with some limited funding separate from our promotional budgets to support our joint initiatives. It didn't work, as Visegrad politics were at a difficult stage at the time.

It's hard to remember after all these years if we managed to organize any joint public cultural event in which all four countries took part. However, there were lots of bilateral ventures. I well remember my official trip to Chiapas, where I was accompanied by the Ambassador of the Czech Republic. The Hungarians bid farewell to us, whereas we organized the "Tatra" farewell for the Slovaks. The menu provided a starting point for the toast, which became a mini lecture on the relationships uniting us. I quote the menu in the original with accompanying translations, making it easy to guess what the toast was like.

Cena para despedir a los Embajadores de Eslovaquia Natasa y Jan Bratko
(A farewell supper in honour of the Ambassadors of Slovakia)

MENU de los TATRA (The Tatras menu)

libertad de las cimas, encuentros de las veredas, amistad de los valles
(The Freedom of Summits, Meetings of Routes, Friendship of the Valleys)

Velká Kôpa Kôprová (Loma grande de eneldo)

(...)

primavera de los prados; aguacatada con eneldo

(Spring in the Mountain Pastures: Avocado Salad with Dill)

*

Zielony Staw Gąsienicowy (Laguna verde del Valle de Oruga)

(...)

verano de los arroyos; crema de verdolaga,

(Summer of Streams: Sorrel Cream)

*

Rysy a Gerlachowský Štit (Picos de los Tatra)

(...)

otoño de las cimas; pavo con setas y castañas,

(Autumn of Summits: Turkey with Mushrooms and Chestnuts)

*

L'adový Štit (Cumbre Helada)

(...)

invierno de las nieves; sorbete de limón

(Snowy Winter: Lemon Sorbet)

Champagne

(...)

San Angel, 22 de julio de 1998

(22 July, 1998)

VISEGRAD COOPERATION: A 15-YEAR-OLD SUCCESS STORY

András Simonyi

The Visegrad Cooperation is one of the most effective sub-regional cooperative arrangements in Europe established after the sweeping political changes of 1989. The reason for this, in part, stems from the distinctiveness of Central Europe, a region with its own identity and dynamism, one that brings a special value to the international arena. A common history and culture bind us together, and, despite some significant differences among us, we pursued the same path following the democratic transformations in our countries.

In my experience as ambassador, the importance of the Visegrad cooperation lies mostly in its effectiveness as an instrument for achieving specific goals. This is not new. The countries of Central Europe have pooled their efforts for specific objectives before. When the original Visegrad cooperation was founded in 1335 by the kings of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland, it was for the purpose of uniting their forces against outside attacks, and – more specifically – for establishing a trade route around Vienna.

The Visegrad cooperation is also a forum that enables the participating countries to express and coordinate their positions on a whole range of issues of common concern. Visegrad countries often coordinate their policies to make a more substantial impact, and to achieve more substantial objectives. Obviously, the four countries are in a better position to further their goals together than by themselves. The Visegrad Cooperation is an obvious “coalition”, although – as experience shows – it is not always obvious that the positions of the four countries converge for specific objectives. Keeping together on issues that profoundly affect national interests is not always easy.

Furthermore, the rotation of the annual presidency of the Visegrad Cooperation 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.

The Visegrad Cooperation can claim a historic success in its efforts to win the trans-Atlantic community’s embrace of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in the course of its outreach to Central and Eastern European countries after 1989. The most tangible result of this outreach was our invitation to join NATO in 1997. For us, joining NATO not only meant accession to a strong and stable political-military alliance, but it was also an historic step towards regaining our position in the community of democratic nations. (Slovakia did not participate in the Visegrad Cooperation during the 1994 to 1998 Mečiar regime, nor was it invited to join NATO along with the other three Central European countries, but instead joined several years later.)

Serving as the Hungarian Ambassador to NATO at the time when Hungary joined the Alliance was a very rewarding professional experience. From the mid-1990s onward I had the honour and the responsibility of being a part of the team in Brussels that implemented the accession process, ensuring that Hungary would join NATO on the best possible terms. During this time, cooperation and coordination with my Central European colleagues was an important element of our preparation for membership. We regularly exchanged views and experiences regarding the accession process. At the same time, there was a healthy competition among us, which resulted in even better preparedness for membership.

The Visegrad Cooperation was also instrumental in fostering the completion of democratic change, as well as in enhancing our preparation for EU membership. During the 1990s, the Visegrad Cooperation grew to be a strong and credible group and became a trademark.

Five years after joining NATO, the countries of Central Europe joined the European Union, opening up a new chapter in the history of the Visegrad Cooperation. The four countries brought a new dynamism to the EU. We share the same commitment to promoting the neighborhood policy of the EU towards Eastern Europe, and to helping the Balkan countries on their way to European integration.

András Simonyi

Diplomat, political scientist, economist. Ambassador to the United States (since 2002). First Hungarian permanent representative on the NATO Council. Headed the Hungarian Liaison Office to NATO in Brussels (1995–1999). Deputy chief of mission at the Mission of Hungary to the European Communities and NATO in Brussels (1992–1995).



The four Visegrad countries understand the importance of cultural exchange. We improved our cultural institutes in each other's capitals and even managed to open new ones following the political changes. These cultural centres not only help to preserve the language and cultural identity of our minorities beyond our borders, but they also represent a very lively artistic and cultural presence in their host countries. Apart from the historical aspects of our cultures, they help to convey important messages about today's Czechs, Hungarians, Poles and Slovaks.

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.



Consultations of Heads of General Staff of the Visegrad Group countries on military aspects of fighting terrorism, Budapest, 10 December, 2005. From the left: Ľubomír Bulík (Slovakia), Pavel Štefka (Czech Republic), András Havril (Hungary), and Czesław Piątas (Poland).

It is important to highlight that since the late 1980s the United States has built up a distinct relationship with Central Europe. Washington has regarded the Visegrad countries as reliable partners that were the engines of democratic transition in the region, and now as countries that are strong allies in the fight against terrorism. This distinct partnership can only strengthen each country's position and prestige, and we should capitalize on it to promote the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Fifteen years after its establishment, the Visegrad Cooperation can claim success in having become a force for stability, a forum for coordination, and an engine of a more dynamic EU policy towards Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. As the international community faces new challenges in a new era, the Visegrad Four can serve not only as a bridge between democracies on both sides of the Atlantic, but also as a promoter of the spread of democracy and freedom based on the experience of these countries in democratic transition. We can be an example for others to follow. This might be a mission for the Visegrad Cooperation for the next 15 years.

HOW THE SLOGAN “VISEGRAD GROUP” OPENED THE DOOR TO UKRAINE

Karel Štindl

The 15-year history of the Visegrad Group (often referred to as “Visegrad” or the V4) has not been simple and it has been marked by disputes over its very essence. True, these conflicts never threatened the group’s existence, but they sometimes altered the view of individual members of the work of the group, or affected the extent of its activities.



In the case of Czechoslovakia, ideas about possible future cooperation among the countries of Central Europe grew out of memories of the unfortunate conditions in Central Europe before the Second World War, and they were discussed by the independent dissident groups in the country. At the time, I was a member of such a group, the Democratic Initiative, where we talked about the creation of a Central European customs union in which we would have been happy to have included Austria, along with the future members of the Visegrad group. After all, we were linked to Austria not just by geographical proximity, but also by 300 years of common history, and by the friendship expressed when the politicians and people of Austria welcomed large numbers of Czechoslovak political émigrés after the communist putsch in 1948, and after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Discussions on this theme were conducted by members of the Czechoslovak-Polish Solidarity group, and the Democratic Initiative also held similar talks with Hungarian dissidents.

After the revolutions in Central Europe in 1989, all the Visegrad countries held free elections in which political coalitions that had emerged from dissident circles won the majority of seats. The future of Central European relations thus found itself in the hands of new Presidents and governments all inclined to strengthen the forms of cooperation in this complex geopolitical zone.

The Civic Forum was founded in Czechoslovakia on 19 November, 1989, and became the basis for a mass movement. Its membership – which included a number of dissident groups and some old and new political parties – eventually came to number millions of citizens and

Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers with the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Kazimierz Dolny (Poland), June 2005. From the left: Jiří Paroubek (Czech Republic), Ferenc Somogyi (Hungary), Yulia Tymoshenko (Ukraine), Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakia), Marek Belka (Poland).

thousands of small civic groups. It was dominated by Charter 77 and led by Václav Havel, who was elected President of the country before the end of the year. In the first free elections held in June 1990 to elect a parliament for a transitional period of two years, the Civic Forum won an overwhelming victory and went on to form the government. Thus it was President Havel's and the new Czechoslovak federal government's shared in decisions that shaped the nature of Central European cooperation and led to the creation of the Visegrad Group in 1991.

At the time, however, there were ministers in the government, and in particular the minister of finance, Václav Klaus, who felt that economic, rather than political, cooperation was more important. Within two years, the Civic Forum had dissolved and out of it came the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) which elected Klaus as its leader. The ODS went on to win a decisive victory in the general elections in June 1992, and a new government was formed with Václav Klaus as Prime Minister.

Up until the summer of 1992, Czechoslovakia, with strong support from its citizens, played a major role in achieving the main political aims of the Visegrad Group, including the coordinated withdrawal of the Soviet occupation armies, and resistance to the continuing influence of Russian power in Central European affairs. Both during the election campaign of 1992 and particularly after the elections, the ODS and its ministers were sharply critical of the Visegrad Group, labelling it a pointless organization. Klaus and his government later successfully negotiated with the countries of the Visegrad Group for the creation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), but for reasons that are not entirely clear, they positioned it in sharp opposition to the Visegrad Group. Such a positioning caused deep disappointment in the other member countries, particularly Poland; there were public polemics and the suspicion lingered that Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) was no longer interested in cooperating with Central Europe.

It was my opinion, then and now, that this whole conflict was pointless, and that it would have been sufficient to present CEFTA as the economic dimension of the cooperative relationship between the Visegrad countries, as it in fact was for a time. After some years, the conflict died down and now even Klaus himself, as President of the Czech Republic, has been speaking in Ukraine about CEFTA as the project (true, he considers it as the only one) which sustained Visegrad.

The essential difference between the Visegrad Group and CEFTA appeared later. Whereas the V4 to this day, for logical reasons, is an organization with a closed membership, CEFTA was open. At the CEFTA summit in Poznań in the spring of 1995, a proposal put forward by Czech Prime Minister Klaus established three conditions for membership: bilateral agreements on free trade with all members of CEFTA; membership in the OECD; and membership in the WTO. Thus CEFTA opened its doors to other countries. It was a superb project that contributed a great deal to the Visegrad countries and the others who gradually joined it. And this brings us, at last, to Ukraine.

Several times since gaining its independence, Ukraine has applied for membership in the Visegrad Group. And, until the most recent round of expansion of the European Union, when a number of countries had to withdraw from CEFTA (since membership in the European Union precludes membership in any other free trade area), it also applied for membership in CEFTA. None of its efforts were successful, in the former case because the Visegrad Group did not want to expand, and in the later case because Ukraine did not fulfil the "Poznań" conditions.

But that did not lead to worsening relations between Ukraine and the V4 countries and CEFTA; on the contrary, Ukraine considers both organizations paragons of regional, and particularly of non-institutional, cooperation. Ukraine itself has tried to develop such forms of cooperation in its own region. Even so, some emotional notes were sounded, and found expression in slogans like "Europe doesn't want us" – which, of course, was also directed at other organizations, like the European Union.

CEFTA did not become politically engaged in "opening the door" to Ukraine. The Visegrad Group made its presence felt to Ukrainians chiefly through the International Visegrad Fund,

which provides financial support to the cultural, educational, and scientific projects that take place under the rubric of “Visegrad Plus Ukraine”. At the same time, it provides assistance to activities aimed at strengthening civic society. One of the interesting projects supported by the Fund is a program of cooperation between medium-sized Ukrainian and Visegrad cities. And for the second year running, the Fund has provided scholarships for Ukrainian students to study at universities in the V4. And during the election crisis in Ukraine in 2004, a group of election observers from Visegrad was present on the ground.

The Ambassadors from the Visegrad countries to Ukraine deal bilaterally with Ukraine, or, to put it simply, we neither flaunt the Visegrad Group nor operate under its cover. The kinship that comes from our personal experience inside the Visegrad Group, however, works spontaneously and splendidly in our favour. The four ambassadors often meet to discuss Ukrainian politics; we exchange information about relations between our countries and Ukraine, and about their opinions of Ukraine. Thanks to this, the “Visegrad effect” can be felt in that whenever any of us talk with Ukrainians, for instance as participants in a conference, our Visegrad experience is quite naturally and implicitly present in all our deliberations.

The V4 has a good name in Ukraine. It’s not quite as big a name as the EU or NATO, but still, the countries of the Visegrad Group are trying to help Ukraine on its way to full democracy. They do so, among other reasons, because they are bound by a certain feeling of responsibility that comes both from a shared sense of history and an interest in expanding the territory of prosperity and stability in Europe.



Karel Štindl

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Victor Yushchenko – President of Ukraine.



VISEGRAD AS SEEN FROM PARIS

Jan Tombiński

The Visegrad Group is one of the best political ideas to come out of the 1990s in Central Europe. The states and nations that founded it had been enclosed for decades in a “refrigerator for nationalism”, which the Soviet bloc used to be, but showed they were able to communicate and devise joint programmes, both to eliminate the remnants of the previous system, and to shape the future.

The ability of the Visegrad Group countries to cooperate with each other and to take responsibility for stability and security in the region was appreciated by their partners in Western Europe, particularly in light of the tragedy of Yugoslavia. Some countries from that area (e.g. Slovenia) tried to join Visegrad in order to escape the Balkan context and move towards the more stable and creative space of Central Europe. The Visegrad Group, as an instrument of regional cooperation, set an example for other groups of countries.

In France, references to the Group are rather sporadic, although the notion itself exists in the political dictionary. The Group has also helped to differentiate our four countries from the more general idea of PECO – *Pays de l'Europe centrale et orientale* (Countries of Central and Eastern Europe), which includes everything from the Czech Republic to Russia. The political activity of the Group and its members, the continuous and persistent reminders of the differences between Central Europe and the countries to the east of it, as well as of our ambitions, and our demonstrations of the capacity to widen the European zone of security and stability – all of these have helped to distinguish the Group from other forms of cooperation in our region. The emphasis placed by Poland during the meetings of the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, and Poland) on the mutual views represented by the Visegrad Group helped to consolidate in Paris and Berlin the conviction that the countries of Central Europe were capable of developing effective forms of political coordination.

The advantage of the Group is its light structure, which is devoid of administration and related costs. The only exception is the Visegrad Fund, which was founded in 2000 to stimulate contacts with non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions, to boost cross-border educational and publishing projects, and to support tourism and mutual education about neighboring countries, their histories, traditions and languages. The aim is clear: To get rid of mental stereotypes, to inspire interest, and to build natural relationships between the member nations.

From the Paris perspective, the Visegrad Fund, which due to changes in its statutes can now support projects outside the Group, is becoming an important tool of spreading knowledge about our countries. Academic textbooks for political science or history students published in French lack contemporary material written with deep awareness of the political realities and ambitions of the Central European countries. Nor are there many specialists from our region lecturing at French universities. The fascination with the countries of our region that accompanied the Prague Spring or the Solidarność movement bore fruit in the number of publications and the amount of research done; however, since then, decades have passed and public interest has moved on to different events and regions of the world, followed by funding for research programs. Central Europe has become a victim of its own political success in recent years: It does not cause any problems, and generates more positive news than crises, meaning that from the political and research point of view it has become less interesting and worthy of investigation.

We should not accept this situation. The Visegrad Fund can make Central Europe once again a subject of serious interest in academic circles, such as through financial support for translating books or covering the cost of visits by Visegrad Group researchers to universities in France. This investment should create circles of people sensitive to the problems of our region and ready to refute the stereotypes of the past.

Jan Tombiński

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT TO CENTRAL EUROPE

Marek Loužek

The fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Visegrad Group provides us with an opportunity to think about the kinds of cooperation among the countries of Central Europe that led to the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

While the Visegrad Group has more or less limited itself to political proclamations, CEFTA established a concrete goal – to liberalize trade among its members. Have its aims been achieved? And can CEFTA serve as a model for international cooperation today?

Unlike the rather vague organization of Visegrad, whose activities are oriented mainly toward political cooperation, CEFTA has become a genuine milestone because it has stimulated mutual trade among the Central European states. It was initiated by the then-Czech Prime Minister, Václav Klaus, a great advocate of free enterprise.

The Central European Free Trade Agreement was signed on 21 December, 1992 in Krakow by the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak Republics. The preparations for it took place in 1991 and 1992. The agreement began to take effect on 1 April, 1993, even though it did not come into full force until after its ratification by all four countries on 1 June, 1994.

CEFTA was based on Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The agreement liberalized mutual trade in industrial and agricultural goods (Chapters I–97 of the Tariff Ratebook) and simplified the conclusion of trade deals.

CEFTA was an economic breakthrough because it gradually got rid of the limitations to trade, in the case of both goods subject to tariffs, and those that were not. It was conceived as an open-ended grouping: The original four founding countries were gradually joined by Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria. Even if CEFTA expired when its member states joined the European Union, its history is worth recalling.

CEFTA had considerable economic significance, but ultimately it was politically important as well. It created a gradually liberalized market in the center of Europe, with a population of 65 million initially and, with expansion, of 100 million. The agreement assumed the discarding of barriers to mutual trade through the lowering of tariffs and quotas, a process that was to take place in three stages.

In the first stage, which occurred right after the agreement was signed, tariffs were dropped on 60 percent of dutiable items. In the second phase, tariffs on so-called moderately sensitive products were lowered over a period of four and five years. In the third phase, tariffs were lowered over an eight-year period on so-called sensitive products (steel products, electronics, textiles, etc.) The lowering of tariffs was symmetrical and gradual. Thanks to this, CEFTA became the engine that drove mutual trade between the countries of Central Europe.

Perhaps the most difficult question in the negotiations over CEFTA was the trade in agricultural products. In the end, however, after long and complicated talks, a compromise was reached in which tariffs on agricultural products were to be gradually reduced, while maintaining the system of quotas that, to a certain extent, limited the export of agricultural products from the CEFTA territories.

In cases where too much liberalization would threaten their own production, CEFTA enabled the signatory parties to protect their domestic markets. Based on the GATT statutes, these measures included general exceptions, exceptions based on security issues, safeguards against dumping, and cases where there were serious shortfalls in products. CEFTA countries could also accept measures to protect wage levels, or to cushion the effects of structural changes.

Exceptions for the Czech Republic were applied from the Polish side in the case of petrochemical, iron and steel products (valid until 1 January, 2000) and of some agricultural products. Slovakia temporarily levied a general import surcharge. In 1998, Hungary negotiated for protection against the import of iron and steel products (introduced in 1999 and lifted on 1 June, 2002). The Czech Republic and Poland applied mutual quantity limits on their trade in coal; these were lifted on 1 January, 2003.

CEFTA was directed by a committee consisting of highly placed officials from the parties to the agreement – specifically, the ministers from each country responsible for external economic relations. In the case of Hungary and Slovakia, these were the Ministers of economy; the Czech Republic and Poland were represented by their Ministers of Industry and Trade, and Bulgaria by the Minister of Tourism and Trade. Slovenia was represented by its Minister of economic Relations and Development.



President of the Czech Republic – Václav Klaus, and President of the Republic of Poland – Lech Kaczyński, Prague, February 2006.

The role of the committee was “to oversee the carrying out of the agreement, and to administer this process.” Fulfilling the regulations on the lifting of trade barriers was the responsibility of each of the signatory states. To ensure coordination among the member states, the countries were responsible for informing each other regularly about their activities.

The deliberations of the committee took place on the basis of mutual agreement. For CEFTA to accept any decision, all the signatories had to agree. If the constitutions of any of the

signatory countries required it, it was possible to ratify a decision with an exception. The decision would then become operative once the conditions laid down in the constitution were met (for instance, ratification by parliament.)

CEFTA’s highest level was its first ministerial meetings. The conduct of these sessions was not established in any CEFTA document, but from 1994 on the Prime Ministers met regularly, usually in the country serving as chair at the time. The deputy ministers and department heads of the relevant ministries also met regularly to coordinate future decisions at the highest level.

Here, too, the same principle applied: unanimity of all parties to the agreement. With the expansion of CEFTA – that is, with the addition of Slovenia, and particularly of Bulgaria and Romania – the conversations became more complicated and consensus became harder to achieve.

When it first came into being, CEFTA was signed by four member countries. Soon after it was founded, however, other countries expressed an interest in membership, and the founding members responded in two opposite ways. Hungary argued for a “closed bloc,” according to which CEFTA ought to include only the most developed countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, argued for an “open” grouping of states.

In the end, the “open” concept won the day. In 1995, a “Supplementary Agreement” to CEFTA was signed, which laid out the three necessary conditions for new membership in CEFTA: aspiring members had to have signed an association agreement with the EU; they had to be members of the World Trade Organization (WTO); and they had to have signed bilateral, free trade zone agreements with each of the current members of CEFTA. On the basis of these conditions, CEFTA accepted Slovenia in 1996, Romania in 1997, and Bulgaria in 1999.

Whereas in the case of Slovenia the motive for membership in CEFTA was primarily economic, Romania and Bulgaria made no secret of the fact that their motives were primarily political. For these countries, membership in CEFTA was a guarantee or a confirmation that the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the members of the European Union, considered them politically stable and trusted countries that could be counted on in the expansion of the EU.

CEFTA's achievements included the expansion of a liberalized market to include almost 100 million people; a growth in the volume of trade among its members; and the strengthening of competitiveness. Unfortunately, trade in agricultural products was not liberalized. The fact that CEFTA was an attractive option for other countries as well is attested to by the fact that Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia all applied for membership.

CEFTA was a unique project that managed to do without any formal institutionalization. There was no CEFTA secretariat, nor did it have a headquarters or any other building. Decisions were made by a common committee whose members were ministers in their respective countries. For free trade to take place between the Central European countries, there was no need for any common control systems, nor any harmonization of regulations.

After the majority of the countries of CEFTA became members of the EU, this free trade agreement naturally expired. One of the pillars of the EU is the free movement of goods, services, and capital. Nevertheless, CEFTA had great historical significance because it showed that free trade can exist without common institutions, norms, and regulatory bodies. In this sense, it can serve as a model for the present-day EU as well.



Marek Loužek

Economist, advisor to the President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus.

A LONG, DIFFICULT BUT MOSTLY SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

Jana Steckerová

From an economic point of view, all of the Visegrad Group countries have had a very long and difficult journey during the last 15 years. Although each country has handled the problems of economic transition in its own way, in 2004 all were ready to join the European Union. This best illustrates the enormous progress made by all these countries since the fall of communism.

The Czech Republic successfully dealt with the problem of high inflation, which was prevalent in the transition economies. In 1991, inflation rocketed to more than 55%, on the back of price liberalization, but thanks to strict monetary and fiscal policy it fell very quickly to 10%. The only swing in prices came in 1993, when the Czech Republic implemented tax reforms and inflation jumped to 20%. In the same year the former Czechoslovakia was split into the Czech and Slovak Republics, which was also an important historical milestone for both countries. The years 1994 and 1995 were quite promising for the future of the Czech economy: GDP grew speedily, inflation stabilized around 10%, while unemployment stayed below 3%. In addition, the Standard & Poor's rating agency assigned the Czech Republic an A rating, while the country became a member of the OECD and its currency became freely convertible. The picture of the economy started to cloud in 1996, however, when deficits on the trade balance and the current account deepened dramatically. The central bank reacted by widening the fluctuation band for the currency to $\pm 7.5\%$, but was unable to prevent the currency from strengthening further, despite deepening external imbalances. This resulted in a currency crisis in 1997, which forced the central bank to adopt a managed floating regime for the currency. Monetary and fiscal restrictions were implemented to fix the problem, but they substantially reduced domestic demand and the country fell into recession. This was further amplified by a lack of restructuring in the industrial sector, imperfect laws, and hasty privatization. Nonetheless, the situation stabilized in 1999 and the economy started to grow. Now it enjoys 5% export-driven GDP growth and a stable, low inflation environment. The currency is maintaining its strengthening trend given trade balance surpluses and continuing FDI flows, while the central bank can afford to keep interest rates even below the ECB level. However, as in many countries in the European Union, the lack of structural reforms and the failure to reform the pension system remain the weakest points of the economy.

Hungary experienced a soft transition after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, in comparison with other post-communist countries. The government carried out a continuous and gradual liberalisation of the markets and avoided shock therapy to maintain political stability and stable growth. As a consequence, inflation stayed high at around 20-35% from 1990 to 1997. Inflation started to fall, but not remarkably until 2001, when the monetary regime was switched to direct inflation targeting. Despite relatively high inflation, the Hungarian economy, after three years of contraction, started to perform quite well from 1997 on. GDP growth was fuelled by very strong export and investment growth, especially after Finance Minister Lajos Bokros' austerity package in 1995 and the acceleration of privatization during the 1995 to 1997 period. The banking, energy and telecom sectors were all privatized and the country saw significant new foreign investment. As a consequence, GDP has continuously grown by 3 to 5% since 1997, and even the global economic slowdown in 2001 did not depress growth below these levels. At the same time, inflation declined from 10% in 2001 to the current 3% without sacrificing GDP growth. In comparison with the other countries of the Visegrad Group, however, the Hungarian economy suffers the most from high current account and public finance deficits. Elections in 2002 led to a substantial fiscal loosening, with the public finance deficit falling to more than 9% of GDP. Although some fiscal consolidation has been achieved, the deficit is likely to stay at a high 8% of GDP in 2006, as it is an election year. The troublesome

fiscal situation has already culminated in a downgrade of Hungary's LT foreign and local currency ratings by the Fitch ratings agency. The government is sticking to its 2010 euro adoption target, so the most important and probably also the most difficult task that now lies before Hungary is to consolidate its public finances and substantially reduce its budget deficits.

The Polish economy started its transition with very high inflation rates and relatively underdeveloped market institutions. Inflation shot up close to 80% in 1991 and stayed around 30% through 1995. A policy of "shock therapy", however, led to stabilisation, and starting from the mid-1990s inflation started to fall. Unfortunately, the fall in inflation was not accompanied by proportional declines in interest rates, which along with the relatively high unemployment rate resulted in a deterioration of economic growth from 2001 to 2002. The currency regime has also played an important role in the Polish economy within the last 15 years. The crawling devaluation was important in curbing inflation and inflation expectations, while a widening of the bands eventually led to a switch to a purely floating exchange rate in 2000. This in turn helped the economy to dodge the currency crises rampaging throughout the emerging economies in the 1990s. An interesting picture of the economy can also be gained from the development of the Polish current account. Admittedly, the C/A deficit as a percentage of GDP had been growing through 1999, but the situation has become more favourable since then, as export competitiveness rose quickly, and now Poland enjoys the lowest C/A deficit as a percent of GDP of all four countries. The country's capital markets have been an important tool in helping to speed up the Polish privatization process. Many companies have been floated, and market capitalization has increased to over 30% of GDP. This has also improved local individuals' participation in equity ownership, although this could still be better. One of the most important successes of the transition was the avoidance of any financial crisis. Perhaps the closest Poland came to crisis was in 2001, when the government announced horrible prospects for the deficit. Other than that, the fiscal balance has improved recently and even though Poland is still in violation of the Maastricht requirement for the debt-to-GDP ratio, EMU entry is still within the government's reach. The government has successfully tackled pension system reform, but reforms in health and education are still needed. Poland has the highest unemployment rate in the EU, as its tax burden is still too high, so this could also be an area where focus is needed.

Slovakia started the process of transition in the same way as the Czech Republic, with the introduction of "shock therapy" according to the principles of the Washington Consensus: deregulating prices, opening up to foreign trade, introducing market exchange rates, and maintaining tight monetary and fiscal policies. Although there was a small recession in 1993, after Slovakia became independent, the above-mentioned strategy led to the quick stabilization of inflation along with solid GDP growth of around 6% from 1994 to 1995. In 1994, however, the authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar came to power and the economic situation started to worsen dramatically. Slovakia's current account deficit deepened substantially from 1996 to 1998, which resulted in a marked weakening of the currency and finally forced a change in the foreign exchange rate regime. GDP growth and employment were kept artificially at high levels ahead of the crucial 1998 elections, mostly through high subsidies from the state budget, which further deepened macroeconomic imbalances. The worsening of the economic situation resulted in Slovakia's being downgraded to non-investment grade, and prevented the country from joining the OECD and NATO. The situation started to improve in 1999 when the Mikulas Dzurinda government came to power. From 1999 to 2002 the currency stabilized, interest rates fell substantially, the structure of growth improved, and Slovakia got back on the EU membership path and joined NATO and the OECD. Starting its political term in late 2002, the second Dzurinda government has implemented far-reaching reforms, including a 19% flat tax along with pension, labour market and social reforms. The country was awarded 'Best Reformer' for 2005 by the World Bank, and the changes introduced in the business environment have been increasingly welcomed by foreign investors. Unfortunately, reform of the health care system has not solved the country's difficulties regarding the collection of "contributions", or

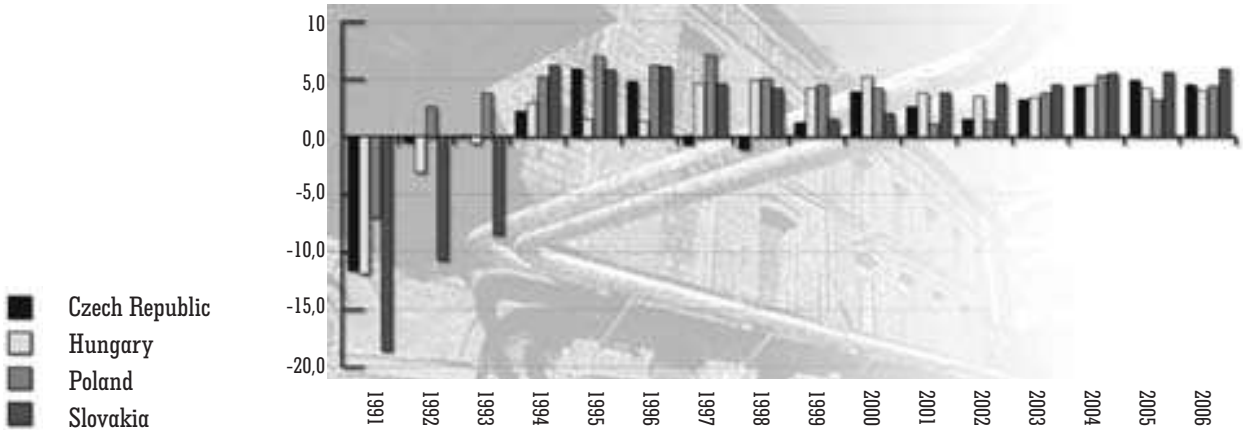
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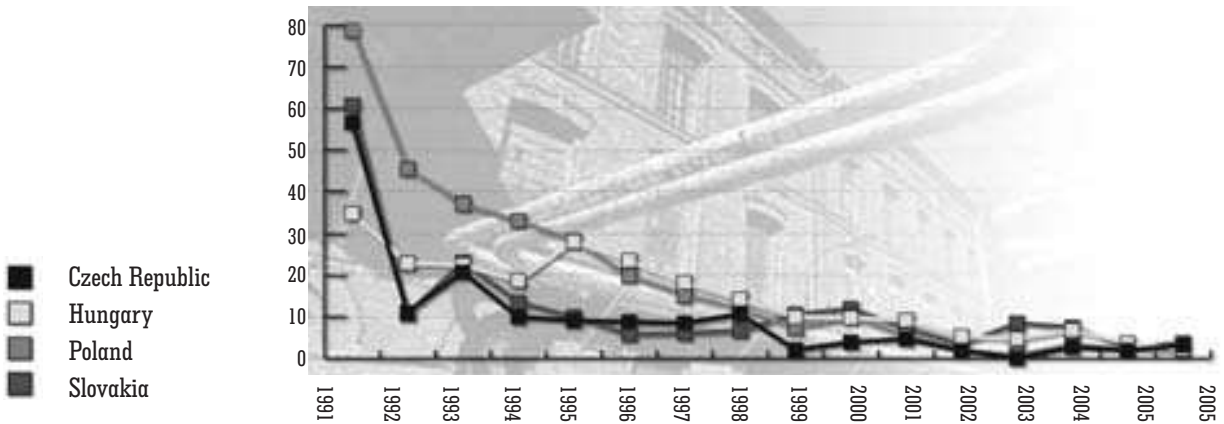
surcharges on wages paid by both employers and employees, which in fact should be classified as taxes. Overall, the burden of such contributions remains the highest amongst OECD countries, and reforms in university education are still needed. Slovakia has already become a member of the ERM II, with euro adoption planned for 1 January, 2009, which makes its position within the Visegrad Group unique.

Although all countries of the Visegrad Group have made respectable economic progress during the last 15 years, some demanding tasks still lie ahead. The year 2006 will see elections in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, so these countries will find it even more difficult to curb budget spending. In addition, reforms to health care and education need to be undertaken in most countries. The most challenging goal of all is euro adoption, but this seems to be within grasp for all four countries.

GDP growth (%)



Inflation (%)



Inflation (%)

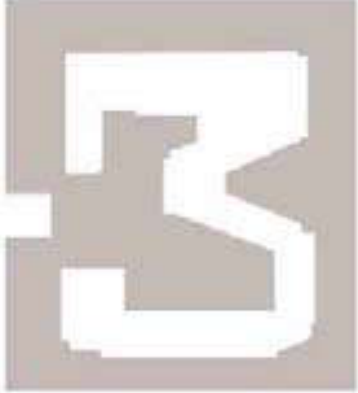
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Czech Republic	56.6	11.1	20.8	10.0	9.1	8.8	8.5	10.7	2.1	3.9	4.7	1.9	-0.0	2.7	1.9	3.1
Hungary	35.0	23.0	22.5	18.8	28.2	23.6	18.3	14.3	10.0	9.8	9.2	5.3	4.7	6.8	3.7	2.2
Poland	78.8	45.5	37.2	33.2	28.4	19.9	15.1	11.9	7.3	10.1	5.5	1.9	0.8	3.3	2.2	1.9
Slovakia	60.8	10.7	23.2	13.5	10.0	5.8	6.1	6.7	10.6	12.0	7.3	3.3	8.5	7.5	2.7	3.7

GDP growth (%)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Czech Republic	-11.6	-0.5	0.1	2.2	5.9	4.8	-0.7	-1.1	1.2	3.9	2.6	1.5	3.2	4.4	4.9	4.5
Hungary	-11.9	-3.1	-0.6	2.9	1.5	1.3	4.6	4.9	4.2	5.2	3.8	3.5	3.4	4.5	4.2	4.0
Poland	-7	2.6	3.8	5.2	7	6.2	7.1	5	4.5	4.2	1.1	1.4	3.8	5.3	3.2	4.4
Slovakia	-18.6	-10.7	-8.5	6.2	5.8	6.1	4.6	4.2	1.5	2.0	3.8	4.6	4.5	5.5	5.6	5.9



Roots



DOES CENTRAL EUROPE EXIST?

Timothy Garton Ash

Central Europe is back. For three decades after 1945 nobody spoke of Central Europe in the present tense: the thing was one with Nineveh and Tyre. In German-speaking lands, the very word *Mitteleuropa* seemed to have died with Adolf Hitler, surviving only as a ghostly *Mitropa* on the dining cars of the Deutsche Reichsbahn. Even in Austria, as ex-Chancellor Fred Sinowatz has remarked, "until ten years ago one was not permitted so much as to mention the word *Mitteleuropa*." In Prague and Budapest the idea of Central Europe continued to be cherished between consenting adults in private, but from the public sphere it vanished as completely as it had in "the West." The post-Yalta order dictated a strict and single dichotomy. Western Europe implicitly accepted this dichotomy by subsuming under the label "Eastern Europe" all those parts of historic Central, East Central, and South-Eastern Europe which after 1945 came under Soviet domination. The EEC completed the semantic trick by arrogating to itself the unqualified title, "Europe."

In the last few years we have begun to talk again about Central Europe, and in the present tense. This new discussion originated not in Berlin or Vienna but in Prague and Budapest. The man who more than anyone else has given it currency in the West is a Czech, Milan Kundera. (See his now famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" in *The New York Review*, April 26, 1984.) Subsequently, the Germans and the Austrians have gingerly begun to rehabilitate, in their different ways, a concept that was once so much their own. The East German leader, Erich Honecker, talks of the danger of nuclear war in *Mitteleuropa*. The West German Social Democrat, Peter Glotz, says the Federal Republic is "a guarantee-power of the culture of *Mitteleuropa*"; whatever that means. And Kurt Waldheim's Vienna recently hosted a symposium with the electrifying title *Heimat Mitteleuropa*. A backhanded tribute to the new actuality of the Central European idea comes even from the central organ of the Polish United Workers' Party, *Trybuna Ludu*, which earlier this year published a splenetic attack on what it called "The Myth of 'Central Europe'."

There is a basic sense in which the term "Central Europe" (or "East Central Europe") is obviously useful. If it merely reminds an American or British newspaper reader that East Berlin, Prague, and Budapest are not quite in the same position as Kiev or Vladivostok – that Siberia does not begin at Checkpoint Charlie – then it serves a good purpose.

Timothy Garton Ash
La chaudière
Europe centrale 1980-1990

Collection Témoin-Gallimard



The puzzle of Central Europe

Timothy Garton Ash

"I'm delighted," said Henry Kissinger, "to be here in Eastern, I mean *Central* Europe." And for the rest of his talk he kept saying "Eastern, I mean Central Europe." The place was Warsaw, the time, summer 1990, and this was the moment I knew Central Europe had triumphed.

For nearly forty years after 1945, the term was almost entirely absent from the political parlance of Europe. Hitler had poisoned it; the cold war division into East and West obliterated it. In the 1980s it was revived by Czech, Hungarian, and Polish writers such as Milan Kundera, György Konrad, and Czesław Miłosz, as an intellectual and political alternative to the Soviet-dominated "Eastern Europe." At that time, I wrote a sympathetic but also skeptical essay in these pages entitled "Does Central Europe Exist?" In the 1990s, Central Europe has become part of the regular political language. To mark the shift,

both the US State Department and the British Foreign Office have Central European departments. Although people still privately say "Eastern Europe", every young diplomat knows that one should refer to the entire post-communist region as "Central and Eastern Europe", a phrase so cumbersome it is often reduced to an abbreviation CEE in English, and MOE *Mittel- und Osteuropa* in German. Even Queen Elizabeth II has spoken of "Central Europe", in the Queen's Speech to the British Parliament. So it's official. If the Queen and Henry Kissinger say it exists, it exists...

The idea of "Central Europe" exploded during the First World War as a furious argument between those, like the German liberal imperialist Friedrich Naumann, who envisaged a German- and Austrian-ruled *Mitteleuropa*, and those, like Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the future president of Czechoslovakia, who were fighting for a Central Europe of small states liberated from German, Austrian, and Russian imperial domination. This argument between visions of *Mitteleuropa* on the one side and of *Střední Evropa* or

So, also, if it suggests to American or British students that the academic study of this region could be more than footnotes to Sovietology. But of course the voices from Prague and Budapest that initiated this discussion mean something far larger and deeper when they talk of “Central Europe.”

The publication in English of the most important political essays of three outstanding writers, Václav Havel, György Konrád, and Adam Michnik, a Czech, a Hungarian, and a Pole, gives us a chance to examine the myth – and the reality. Of course it would be absurd to claim that any one writer is “representative” of his nation, and anyway, Havel, Michnik and Konrad are different kinds of writer working in quite dissimilar conditions.

Havel comes closest to general recognition as something like an intellectual spokesman for independent Czech intellectuals, although there is a great diversity of views even within Charta 77 (as we can see from the other Chartists’ essays collected under Havel’s title *The Power of the Powerless*). His “political” essays are rich, poetic, philosophical meditations, searching for the deeper meaning of experience, “digging out words with their roots” as Karl Kraus once put it, but rarely deigning to examine the political surface of things. (He nowhere so much as mentions the name of any of the present communist rulers of Czechoslovakia. Magnificent contempt!) He shows a great consistency, from his seminal essay “The Power of the Powerless,” written in the autumn of 1978, through his 1984 address on being awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Toulouse, to his open letter to Western peace movements, published in 1985 as *The Anatomy of a Reticence*. You hear in his writing the silence of a country cottage or a prison cell – for his part in the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) he was himself unjustly prosecuted and imprisoned from 1979 to 1983 – the quiet voice of man who has had a long time for solitary reflection, a playwright catapulted by circumstances and the dictates of conscience into the role of “dissident,” but not at all by temperament a political activist. Yet his contempt for politics is also more generally characteristic of Czechoslovakia, where most people find it hard to believe that anything of importance will ever again change on the immobile, frozen surface of Husak’s geriatric “normalized” regime.

Michnik, by contrast, has seen the earth shake in Poland. Though a historian by training, he has spent most of his adult life actively engaged in political opposition. A central figure in the Social Self-Defence – KOR and then an adviser to Solidarity, he, unlike Havel or Konrád, writes with the knowledge that he will be read for immediate political advice. Activists of underground Solidarity, students involved in *samizdat* publishing, look to him (among others) for practical answers to the question, “What is to be done?” This gives a sharper political focus to his work, but also makes it more controversial.

Europa Środkowa on the other continued throughout the “second Thirty Years War” from 1914 to 1945. It culminated in the Austrian-German Adolf Hitler’s attempt to impose his own grotesque version of *Mittleuropa* on Germany’s eastern neighbors.

So when the term was revived in the 1980s, there was understandable nervousness both among Germany’s neighbors and in Germany itself. Many German writers preferred to use the less historically loaded term *Zentraleuropa*. But recent years have been reassuring. After some discussion, the Masaryk of the 1990s, Václav Havel, invited President von Weizsäcker of Germany to attend regular meetings of “Central European presidents”, and the German president has done so ever since. Most German policymakers now accept that the reunited country is firmly in both Western Europe and Central Europe again. As Havel once put it to me, Germany is in Central Europe “with one leg”.

Of course, there have been tensions between Germany and its eastern neighbors – especially between Germany and the Czech

Republic. And there will be more as the enlargement of the European Union slowly approaches, with Germans fearing that Poles and Czechs will take their jobs, and Poles and Czechs fearing that Germans will buy up their land. (The latter fears are especially pronounced in the formerly German western parts of Poland and in what used to be the Sudetenland, in the Czech Republic.) Yet no one could now argue that there is any fundamental political difference between what a mainstream German politician means by *Mittleuropa* and what a Czech leader means by *Střední Evropa* or a Pole by *Europa Środkowa*. Increasingly, they are just different words for the same thing. This testifies to the wisdom of all sides, and it is one of the bright spots on the map of Europe at century’s end. . .

The new democracies of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia set out early in the decade to pursue Central European cooperation, symbolized by their forming the “Visegrad Group” in February 1991. They did this partly because they believed in the idea of Central Europe, which Havel and the new Hungarian president, Árpád Göncz,

Like Havel, he is a hero to many of his compatriots. Unlike Havel, his views are fiercely contested. The KOR tradition, of which he is perhaps the most articulate spokesman (and certainly the most lucid essayist), now vies for popularity in Poland with views that may be characterized, with varying degrees of inaccuracy, as Catholic positivist (in the very special Polish usage of that term), Catholic nationalist, liberal, libertarian, or even neo-conservative. Astonishingly, the greatest part of his work has been written in prison and smuggled out under the noses of General Jaruzelski's jailers. (Besides almost 300 pages of political essays, including *Rzecz o kompromisie* ("These Times... On Compromise"), he has also produced a 285-page book of literary essays.) His style is often polemical, full of rasping irony — the rasp of an iron file cutting at prison bars — but modulated by a fine sense of moral responsibility and a keen political intelligence. Like Havel, he also displays a great consistency in his political thought, from his seminal 1976 essay "The New Evolutionism" to his 1985 "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison" (first published in English in *The New York Review*) and his most recent long essay "On Compromise" which has so far appeared only in Polish.

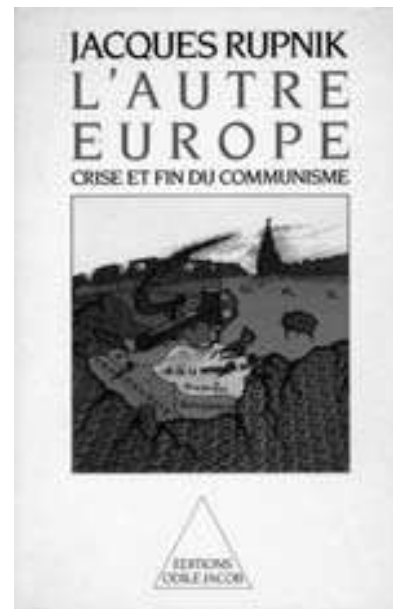
Konrad is different again. He is writing not in and out of prison but in and out of Vienna or West Berlin. We hear in the background of his long excursive disquisitions not the slamming of prison doors but the clink of coffee cups in the Café Landtmann, or the comradely hum of a peace movement seminar. In his book *Antipolitics* (German subtitle: *Mitteeuropäische Meditationen*) and subsequent articles, Konrad, a distinguished novelist and sociologist, has developed what I might call a late *Jugendstil* literary style: colorful, profuse, expansive, and ornate. *Antipolitics* is a *Sammelsurium*, an omnium gatherum of ideas that are picked up one after the other, briefly toyed with, reformulated, then abandoned in favour of other, prettier, younger (but alas, contradictory) ideas, only to be taken up again, petted, and restated once more a few pages later. This makes Konrad's essayistic work both stimulating and infuriating. Contrary to a widespread impression in the West, one finds few people in Budapest who consider that Konrad is a "representative" figure even in the limited way that Havel and Michnik are. On the other hand, they find it difficult to point to anyone else who has covered half as much intellectual ground, in a more "representative" fashion.

So Havel, Michnik, and Konrad are very different writers, differently placed even in their own countries, neither fully "representative" nor exact counterparts. Yet all three are particularly well attuned to the questions a Western reader is likely to raise, and concerned to answer them. And all three are equally committed to the dialogue between their countries. Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* was written specifically as the start of a projected dialogue between Charta 77 and KOR. In discussing the richness of Polish *samizdat* Michnik singles out the work of "the

had preached in the 1980s, and wished to preclude any return to the petty nationalisms of the interwar years. But it was also because this tight little regional cooperation would win their countries favour in the West. Which it did.

They had little trouble distinguishing themselves from the new eastern (with a small e) Europe: Belarus, Ukraine, and European Russia. More difficult was the south. Romania tried to join the group at an early stage. The door was firmly closed in its face. A good reason for this was that Romania was at that time an undemocratic mess. A less good reason was that Polish, Hungarian, and (then still) Czechoslovak leaders thought they had a better chance of entering or (as the Central European ideology prescribes) "rejoining" the West in a smaller, more homogeneous group. Which they did.

From: Timothy Garton Ash, "The Puzzle of Central Europe"
The New York Review of Books, March 18, 1999



extremely popular Václav Havel," and both Havel and the Hungarian Miklós Haraszti have appeared alongside Michnik on the masthead of the Polish independent quarterly *Krytyka*. Konrád refers constantly to Czech and Polish experience, and in one striking passage he apostrophizes a Pole identified only as "Adam" – but the "Adam" is clearly Michnik. So if there really is some common "Central European" ground, we can reasonably expect to discover it in the political essays of these three authors. If we do not find it here, it probably does not exist.

In the work of Havel and Konrád there is an interesting semantic division of labour. Both authors use the terms "Eastern Europe" or "East European" when the context is neutral or

negative; when they write "Central" or "East Central," the statement is invariably positive, affirmative, or downright sentimental. In his *Antipolitics*, Konrád writes of "a new Central European identity," "the consciousness of Central Europe," a "Central European strategy." "The demand for self-government," he suggests, "is the organizing focus of "the new Central European ideology." "A certain distinctive Central European scepticism," Havel comments in *The Anatomy of a Reticence*, "is inescapably part of the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual phenomenon that is Central Europe. That scepticism has little in common with, say, English scepticism. It is generally rather strange, a bit mysterious, a bit nostalgic, often tragic and even at times heroic."

Later in the same essay he talks of "a Central European mind, sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated" – in short, everything we think of as quintessentially English. Or Konrád again:

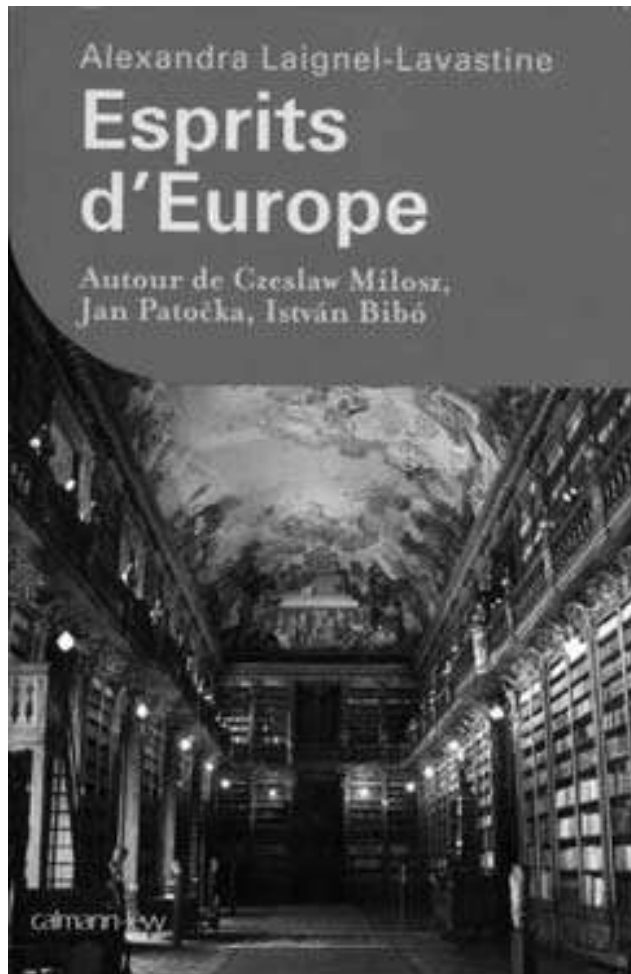
"It was East Central Europe's historical misfortune that it was unable to become independent after the collapse of the Eastern, Tartar-Turkish hegemony and later the German-Austrian hegemony of the West, and that it once again came under Eastern hegemony, this time of the Soviet Russian type. *This is what prevents our area from exercising the Western option taken out a thousand years ago, even though that represents our profoundest historical inclinations.*" (my italics)

In this last passage, history has indeed been recast as myth. And the mythopoetic tendency – the inclination to attribute to the Central European past what you hope will characterize the Central European future, the confusion of what should be with what was – is rather typical of the new Central Europeanism. We are to understand that what was *truly* "Central European" was always Western, rational, humanistic,

democratic, sceptical, and tolerant. The rest was "East European," Russian, or possibly German. Central Europe takes all the "*Dichter und Denker*," Eastern Europe is left with the "*Richter und Henker*."

The clearest and most extreme articulation of this tendency comes from Milan Kundera. Kundera's Central Europe is the mirror image of Solzhenitsyn's Russia. Solzhenitsyn says that communism is to Russia as a disease is to the man afflicted by it. Kundera says that communism is to Central Europe as a disease is to the man afflicted by it – *and the disease is Russia!* Kundera's Central European myth is in frontal collision with Solzhenitsyn's Russian myth. Kundera's absurd exclusion of Russia from Europe (not endorsed by Havel or Konrád) has been most effectively criticized by Joseph Brodsky. As Brodsky observes, "The political system that put Mr Kundera out of commission is as much a product of Western rationalism as it is of Eastern emotional radicalism." But can't we go one step further? Aren't there specifically *Central* European traditions which at least facilitated the establishment of communist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and traditions which those regimes signally carry forward to this day?

A super-bureaucratic statism and formalistic legalism taken to absurd (and sometimes already inhuman) extremes were, after all, also particularly characteristic of *Central* Europe



before 1914. That is one reason why we find the most exact, profound, and chilling anticipations of the totalitarian nightmare precisely in the works of the most distinctively Central European authors of the early twentieth century, in Kafka and Musil, Broch and Roth. And then, what was really more characteristic of historic Central Europe: cosmopolitan tolerance or nationalism and racism? As François Bondy has tellingly observed (in a riposte to Kundera), if Kafka was a child of Central Europe, so too was Adolf Hitler. And then again, I find myself asking: *Since when* has the “Central European mind” been “sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated?” For a thousand years, as Konrád seems to suggest? In 1948, when, as Kundera vividly recalls in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the most Central European of intellectuals joined hands and danced in the streets to welcome the arrival of heaven on earth? Or is it only since 1968?

The myth of the pure Central European past is perhaps a good myth. Like Solzhenitsyn’s Russian myth it is as an understandable exaggeration to challenge a prevailing orthodoxy. Like the contemporary West German myth of the 20 July, 1944, bomb plot against Hitler (the myth being that the conspirators were true liberal democrats, proleptic model citizens of the Federal Republic), its effects on a younger generation may be inspiring. So shouldn’t we *let good myths* lie? I think not. And in other moments, or when challenged directly, Havel and Konrád, among others, also think not.

In the late 1970s, the Czechoslovak historian Ján Mlynárik (writing under the pseudonym “Danubius”) started a fascinating and highly fruitful discussion in Prague when he argued that the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans by the non-communist Czechoslovak government in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War was itself an inhuman and “totalitarian” act – a precedent and pathbreaker for the communist totalitarianism to come. “Let us not forget,” the Czech writer Jiří Gruša movingly reminded us at the unofficial cultural symposium in Budapest last year, “that it was us (the writers) who glorified the modern state” and that “our nationalist odes may be found in all the schoolbooks of Europe.” Havel goes out of his way to underline the lesson of his fellow intellectuals’ “postwar lapse into utopianism.” And Konrád declares bluntly: “After all, we Central Europeans began the first two world wars.” So if at times they indulge the mythopoetic tendency, there is also, in this new discussion of Central Europe from Prague and Budapest, a developed sense of historical responsibility, an awareness of the deeper ambiguities of the historical reality, in short, an understanding that Central Europe is very, very far from being simply “the part of the West now in the East.”...

And yet I do believe they have a treasure to offer us all. At their best, they give a personal example such as you will not find in many a long year in London, Washington, or Paris: an example, not of brilliance or wit or originality, but of intellectual responsibility, integrity, and courage. They know, and they remind us – vividly, urgently – that ideas matter, words matter, have consequences, are not to be used lightly – Michnik quotes Lampedusa: “You cannot *shout* the most important words.” Under the black light of a totalitarian power, most ideas – and words – become deformed, appear grotesque, or simply crumble. Only a very few stand the test, remain rocklike under any pressure; and most of these are not new. There are things worth suffering for. There are moral absolutes. Not everything is open to discussion.

“A life with defeat is destructive,” writes Michnik, „but it also produces great cultural values that heal. . . . To know how to live with defeat is to know how to stand up to fate, how to express a vote of no confidence in those powers that pretend to be fate.” These qualities and values have emerged from their specific Central European experience – which is the central European experience of our time. But since we can read what they write, perhaps it may even be possible to learn a little from that experience, without having to go through it.

The Russian poet Natalya Gorbanyevskaya once said to be: “You know, George Orwell was an East European.” Perhaps we would now say that Orwell was a Central European. If this is what we mean by “Central Europe,” I would apply for citizenship.



Timothy Garton Ash

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WE, THE TRAITORS

Adam Michnik

A German publicist wrote an article in the German daily *Die Tageszeitung* in which he stated that Vacláv Havel, Adam Michnik, and György Konrád, who had been the moral authorities for Western Europe for many years, had all of a sudden become the uncritical flatterers of America. For the German publicist, it was another example of betrayal by the intellectuals.

I read that article and was touched by nostalgia. Here we were together again.

Our three names were set together for the first time in a famous essay by Timothy Garton Ash nearly twenty years ago. If I remember correctly, both Havel and I were in prison at the time, and György Konrád was banned from publishing his books in his own country.



Václav Havel (left)
with Adam Michnik (right).

I met Konrád in the spring of 1977 in Paris in the flat of the Hungarian emigrant, the sociologist and historian Peter Kende. We were then considering the possibility of cooperation between the opposition circles in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The meeting was also attended by Antonín Liehm, another emigrant from Prague, who was the author of a famous essay at the time, "The New Social Agreement". Today I think with a certain nostalgic pleasure that perhaps this was the first meeting of the Visegrad community.

I met Vacláv Havel a year and a half later in the summer of 1978 at a meeting on Sněžka Mountain of the Workers Defence Committee (KOR) and the Charter 77. We decided then to start a cooperation whose fruit was to be a joint book. For the purpose of this book, Havel wrote his famous essay, "The Power of the Powerless".

I remember it all like shots from a thriller movie, one that could be made of our friendship.

Meanwhile, I met Konrad again in Warsaw during the carnival of the first "Solidarność." I didn't see Havel again for many years, as it happened that either he or I tended to be in prison. We met illegally in 1988 on the border in the Sudetes Mountains, and a famous photo was then taken of the two criminals in their scruffy shirts who soon were to become politicians gracing the front pages of newspapers.

The next shot, January 1990, was taken in Prague. The newly elected President of Czechoslovakia, Vacláv Havel, invites his two friends for a beer – György Konrád and Adam Michnik. Havel is already President, Konrád is soon to become president of the International PEN Club, and I am working already for the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, as well as being a member of the Polish parliament.

I wonder whether Timothy Garton Ash was right to put our names together, but I have no doubt that during all these years, although we did not meet too often, we still preserved some common foundation in our ideas on values and politics. I think we always had in common that dream of freedom: A dream of a world filled with tolerance, hope, respect for human dignity, and rejection of the conformity of silence in the face of evil. Konrád wrote about anti-political politics, Havel wrote about “The Power of the Powerless,” and I wrote about the new evolutionism that was to break the totalitarian principles of the communist world by means of social self-organisation and civic disobedience. We also shared a specific knowledge of the people who had experienced “history let off its chain”: An overwhelming feeling of loneliness among people and nations subjected to the pressure of totalitarian despotism and abandoned to the indifference of the world. Each Hungarian carried within him the experience of burning Budapest in 1956, while each citizen of Czechoslovakia had in front of his eyes the image of the tanks in the streets of Prague in 1968, and each Pole had at the back of his mind the memory of Warsaw in the autumn of 1944, murdered by Hitler and betrayed by the allies.



Adam Michnik

Essayist, editor-in-chief of Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Former opposition activist (one of the founders of the KOR, the Committee for the Defence of Workers) and Solidarity activist during the 1980s. Solidarity expert during the Round Table Talks.

György Konrád

We were not cave-like anti-communism fanatics. We saw in communism a historical phenomenon, and in communists human beings who could change into democrats. It was in this way that Konrád wrote about Imre Nagy and Havel about František Kriegel. Later, after 1989, we disliked – Havel, Konrád and I – the fundamentalism of the anticommunist radicals, especially those who during the dictatorship years had sat quiet as mice, but now wanted to build gallows for the communists.

From: Adam Michnik, “We, the traitors”, in: *Rage and Shame*, Foundation of Literary Copybooks, Warsaw 2005, pp. 294 – 296.

IMPORTER OF THE POLISH PLAGUE

Gábor Demszky

Everybody or nobody – it became clear for the Hungarians after 1956. Either the whole of Central Europe together gets released from Soviet totalitarianism, or nobody will manage to get free. Our mutinies thus became intertwined with each other. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 began from a demonstration of solidarity with the Polish October, while the Prague Spring of 1968 followed the demonstrations of Polish students and Hungarian economic reforms. The declaration of support for the Czechoslovak Charter 77, signed by 40 Hungarians, gave birth to the organised democratic opposition in our country. A circle of nonconformists and people guided by ethical principles in politics soon gathered around the signatories of the document.

In 1979, a protest against the imprisonment of Vacláv Havel and his colleagues was signed by 270 Hungarians. This small group of mostly young people became the social soil from which the independent institutions of Hungarian civic society sprang, such as the free press, the flying university, and the Support for the Poor Fund (SZEFA).



The Hungarian Triangular Table,
June 1989.

The authorities, wrote the author of “The New Evolutionism”, will not be able to absorb or subjugate this movement. Its purpose will be the political emancipation and self-organisation of citizens and control of the government. Instead of toppling the system it will remain outside the system, and ostentatiously demonstrate that we are the society, and they are the communist party; we and they are two worlds apart. This self-organising society became Solidarity. When Solidarity was established in August 1980, it became clear to me that a diametrical change in the political situation in Europe was taking place in our part of the continent. I thus began methodically to prepare for the transformation of Polish experiences into the Hungarian situation. I decided to start an independent publishing house; I bought a ton of paper and hid it in my parent’s cellar. I educated myself on Polish subject matter by listening to Radio Free Europe and reading material on Poland that was everywhere in the western press, and studying illicitly-obtained secret information bulletins that had been prepared for the Hungarian authorities.

Finally, in May 1981, I went on a month-long “scientific research trip” to Poland. I was not the first opposition representative from our country, as László Rajk and Magyar Bálint had paid short visits to Poland before me. I treated the trip as a professional challenge – equipped with a tape recorder and a camera, I gathered data for a sociological-political study and acquired a command of the basic printing skills. Ewa Milewicz helped me reach the top experts in Solidarity. The elections of delegates to the coming Solidarity congress were just taking place. I had to admit, while listening and observing the debates, that Solidarity was more than just

We read, translated and distributed the programmes of the Polish and Czechoslovak theoreticians of opposition. Adam Michnik’s 1976 essay, “The New Evolutionism,” was a revelation for us. In my opinion this short text, along with *The Gulag Archipelago*, was the most important translation released in the Hungarian *samizdat*. Facing the classical dilemma – reform or revolution – Michnik proposed a third solution: establishing our own institutions and social structures independent of the communist authorities, including media, trade unions, and human rights committees.

a trade union. At the time it was a powerful political movement that united various currents in the social resistance. Its leaders represented not only the factory workers who voted for them, but the entire community.

After my return to Budapest I gave a lecture in the apartment of the opposition activist Ferenc Koszeg on the situation in Poland. Because of that lecture I was fired from work, from the editorial staff of the magazine. From that time on, I was without work until the collapse of communism.

I used the knowledge I acquired in Poland to establish the independent AB publishing house in 1981 — the first Hungarian publisher that employed printing techniques. The earlier Hungarian *samizdat* had limited itself to typing up texts with carbon paper to make more copies. The irony was that the first of AB's printed publications reached readers in December 1981, when Jaruzelski was introducing the putsch in Poland.

After the announcement of the martial law I helped my Polish friends. Every morning, at



Gábor Demszky

Hungarian politician, lawyer, sociologist. Mayor of Budapest since 1990. Leading member of the democratic opposition, founder of the SZEFA (Fund for the Support of the Poor) and the AB Independent Publishers publishing house (1981).

Austrian Vice-Chancellor Alois Mock and Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn, cutting the barbed wire at the Austrian-Hungarian border, August 1989.

dawn, I went to the Western Railway Station where the Batory express train arrived at its final destination from Warsaw. I was not there to pick up my friends but the latest news. The western borders of Poland were closed, and foreign journalists had been kicked out. However, the information blockade had leaks. Reports of repression and detentions, and bulletins on strikes came to Hungary on the Batory. In Warsaw the editors of the *Mazowsze Weekly* inserted these bulletins in secret places agreed on earlier, and I took them out and handed them over to the Paris Solidarity Office and the editors of *Le Monde*. Thanks to this night railway mail, the world was informed of the latest developments, such as the long strikes in the Piast mine and the victims from the Wujek mine who were shot to death.

In Hungary, the AB publishing house released anthologies composed of materials from the Polish resistance. They were translated into Hungarian by the late translator and popularizer of Polish literature, Gracia Kerenyi.

The success of the Polish-Hungarian undertaking helped me to recover after the shock of 13 December. For us, the Hungarian opposition, the introduction of the martial law in Poland came as a blow. Fortunately, we got over it quickly.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF CHERRY PITS

Wojciech Maziarski

In the early summer of 1981, we shot at a statue of Soviet soldiers on St. Francis Square in the heart of Budapest. At that time it was still called Liberation Square. It was good it still had this name. It would be silly to fight a battle in a place named after the Franciscan spirit of humility, joy and love for all creatures. On Liberation Square – you are welcome to shoot.

A lecture of the illegal “flying university” dedicated to the experiences of the Polish “Solidarność” had just finished. The participants had not yet left for their homes when, all of a sudden, a strange silence fell outside, and a low buzzing began to grow. We ran for the windows. From the fifth floor we had an excellent view of some lorries covered with canvas,

“Hungary 1956 – We Remember”,
Poland, 1981.



jeeps and vehicles pulling guns and trailers. At that time in Hungary it was a common scene. After the 1956 uprising, the Soviet empire no longer hid its presence, and from time to time reminded the locals of the political situation and allowed their troops – on their way to base or the training grounds – to drive through the streets of towns and villages.

Uncensored literature

Tomáš Vrba

Several years ago, in the historic National Museum in Prague – just before the “thousand year flood” swept through the city – there was on display a remarkable collection of flyers, books and magazines reproduced by typewriter or cyclostyle, works of art and documents, along with curiosities like postage stamps used by the Polish underground movement. The exhibition, called *Samizdat*, was prepared by the University of Bremen in Germany as a testimony to the independent cultures and political activities of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s in Hungary, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and the Soviet Union.

By now, the alternative culture of those times is legendary, and it's no surprise to find that it has given rise to many myths. Even the otherwise reliable exhibition catalogue reproduced as fact the charming but utterly imaginary story about a Prague artist who, just

after the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, under cover of night, highlighted with white paint the pockmarks made by Soviet machinegun bullets on the facade of the National Museum. It was helpful to learn that this nice legend had circulated in Budapest after the Soviet invasion of Prague. It's more appealing than the more modest truth.

What is definitely not a myth, however, is the fact that the independent cultural initiatives represented in the exhibition were a phenomenon throughout the entire Soviet bloc, spanning borders. They remind us of how the increasingly paranoid ruling “internationalists” erected iron curtains between countries within the bloc as well, and how this was energetically resisted by enthusiasts in the Czechoslovak-Polish Solidarity movement, in the Hungarian and Polish underground press, in the East German and Slovak religious communities, and in ecological groups. The Prague exhibition demonstrated this with a striking installation of cases displaying Russian, Polish, German, Slovak, and Czech typescripts and secretly

We attacked them with cherry pits that someone had brought in large amounts from the garden. The cannonade lasted a good few minutes and was aborted only after the last car in the column disappeared around the corner. "It's a fitting symbol of our mutual endeavors for freedom and democracy in Central Europe," somebody said, as the city outside the windows shook off the sound of the army's diesel motors and returned to normal evening life. "Here you have a small group of unemployed and marginalized Hungarian intellectuals and one student from Poland attacking the forces of the Soviet Union with cherry pits." It sounded as if he wanted to say: "Abandon all hope."

He was wrong. Today, the host of that meeting – Ferenc Koszeg – is the chairman of the Hungarian section of the Helsinki Committee, and, after 1989, became a politician and a member of parliament. The speaker at the time, Gábor Demszky, who was describing his stay in Poland and his meetings with the leaders of "Solidarność," is now one of the most popular personalities in Hungarian public life, and has been the mayor of Budapest for four straight terms. Others of those "marginalized intellectuals" are now journalists, businessmen, employees of research institutions, and representatives of elites and the middle class. Apparently, the Polish-Hungarian brotherhood of cherry pits was more effective than it realized.

Budapest express train

However, cherry pits were not the main weapon in this alliance. The written word played a much more important role, multiplied in several thousand copies and distributed among Hungarian readers, who in the 1980s learned to their astonishment that it was possible not only to write something but also to print it without the authorities' consent. But what a paradox: The first issue of *Beszélő*, the clandestine (*samizdat*) periodical produced with Polish printing technology, went to distribution the same day that General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared the martial law in Warsaw. The distribution in Hungary of the underground press can be credited mainly to current Mayor Demszky, who brought from Poland not only stories about



Demonstration in front of the Hungarian Parliament in October 1956. On the banners, a portrait of Imre Nagy and a slogan "Polish-Hungarian friendship".

printed texts beside one another. One of the curators emphasized the symbolism of this intellectual network by calling it "The *Samizdat* Archipelago." The point was to show that a hopeful path had led out of the scattered and isolated islands of the Gulag to these "islands of positive deviation," and that the population of these islands was a rich mix of nationalities.

Much of the material, by its mere appearance, evokes not only powerful associations but also powerful emotions. The Russian typescript, worn by many hands to the point of illegibility, reminds one of the paper roses created by the Czech artist Ladislav Novák. The secret prison letters – on loan from a private collection and carefully framed – now suddenly look like perversely aesthetic works of graphic art.

The three syllables in *samizdat* are like hammer blows, forming a single word that is understandable in any language. And while that is an advantage, in that translation is unnecessary, it can also be misleading. In its original Russian meaning, *samizdat* was an

expression used to describe anonymous copies of written works, executed with no editorial, typographical, or publishing pretensions. Its sole purpose was to make the texts available to a broader audience, and for that it deserves much credit. A more general expression to that would include all the uncensored literary, documentary, and informational publishing activities of those times is "independent literature," that is, writing free of any official constraints. Alongside "classical" *samizdat* – the wild, spontaneous style of *samizdat* that anyone with a typewriter could practice – an increasing role was played by systematic editorial and publishing activities, with more attention being paid to the content and the appearance of the independent publications. The activity became in a sense professionalized, and the appearance of signed editions of books and magazines was a significant watershed at that time.

Most free-thinking citizens of the "Eastern Bloc" shared a similar outlook on life no matter where they lived: a mixture of frustration, defiance, stoicism, and hope. But the degree and the brutality of the

Solidarity but also silk-screen printing skills, and started the AB publishing house, the first Hungarian publisher of *samizdat*. He even borrowed some terminology from the Poles: the copying of the text from a stencil stretched over a frame was called “ramkazik” by the Hungarians, which was derived from the Polish word “ramka” (frame). Nowadays it is a forgotten term, as is the technique itself.

One of the first publications released in Budapest in *samizdat* was a selection of materials from the underground press from the beginnings of the martial law. On 13 December, 1981, the Jaruzelski regime tried to cut off all possible channels of communication and exchange of information within the country and abroad. However, they forgot about “the loos”. Polish underground pamphlets traveled on the Batory express train through sleeping Slovakia, stuck in foil bags to the insides of the garbage bins in the toilets, and being delivered first thing in the morning straight into the hands of Hungarian publishers, as well as of middlemen who transmitted the information by telephone to the West and to Polish emigré centers.

Those who know the contemporary reality of the Poland-Belarus or the Poland-Ukraine border most likely by now have forgiving smiles on their faces. The naïve concepts of the conspirators a quarter of a century ago impress no one anymore. Now everyone and his brother can think of better techniques for smuggling spirits and cigarettes across the border. A bag in the garbage bin? You must be joking. At the time, however, it was an innovative idea, and the secret police never discovered the contraband. Not only did the Hungarians adopt the Polish printing technique, they almost adopted their radio broadcasting methods as well. At the end of the 1980s the same Demszky, inspired by the experiences of the Solidarity radio, was thinking of starting a radio transmitting station in Budapest to interfere with TV programming. An envoy from Hungary came in the spring of 1989 to Warsaw for training in radio broadcasting. The first programme was scheduled for 23 October (the anniversary of the 1956 uprising). However, the radio station never opened because communism had just collapsed. On that very day in Hungary, a multiparty democracy system was solemnly proclaimed.

Anti-communist internationalism

Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Russians. In those times we needed each other. The 1980s were a time of building democratic anti-communist internationalism. A decade of solidarity across borders. We were overwhelmed by the regionalization of our resistance and our shared feeling of a Central European fate.

Whenever a slight political thaw occurred and we could stick at least the tips of our noses above the surface, we immediately tried to fill the public domain with institutions and symbols

persecution they faced differed considerably from country to country. In Russia and Poland, life-and-death situations were more common. In Budapest, the degree of risk, especially in the 1980s, was considerably less, which does not mean that we should underrate the importance of those Hungarian literary circles, as if the copying of poetic almanacs were, absent the threat of prison, merely the gestures of self-important *boulevardiers*. The truth, of course, is that something like “salon *samizdat*” and a snobbish desire to accumulate forbidden fruit were part of society of that time, in Prague as well as in Moscow.

There were also differences in the degree to which the Central and Eastern European unofficial publishers and artists took themselves seriously. In this instance, too, it is impossible to resort to mechanical stereotypes about Czech humour, Russian heavy-handed intellectualism, Polish quixotism and German obsession with detail. Alongside the Orthodox emotionality of Solzhenitsyn there were, even then, Russian poets and artists who were capable of a considerable degree of cosmopolitan irony, and alongside the “Merry Ghetto” of the

Czech underground lay a literary territory that was pretty serious.

What was most valuable about those times was the sense that we were all in it together. We were grateful for the sympathy and support of the West, of course, but with our nearest neighbors we were like old co-conspirators. Polish generosity and friendship was instrumental in organizing, in the late 1980s in Wrocław, a meeting of Czechoslovak domestic opposition members and artists living in exile. The Poles treated the Czech singer Karel Kryl like one of their own. Polish underground publishing enterprises distributed books by Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, and Václav Havel. Czechs and Slovaks read, in typescript versions, translations of work by Tadeusz Konwicki, Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert. In Prague, an anthology of more than fifty Polish poets was published under the title *The Word and the Wall*. In both countries we knew the work of György Konrád, and our exile magazines were our main source of information about Hungarian opposition economists and sociologists. In Budapest, another György translated Czechoslovak writers for *samizdat*: György Varga.

of our community. In the second half of the 1980s, initiatives popped up like mushrooms: “Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity,” “Polish-Hungarian Solidarity,” “The Eastern European Information Agency,” mutual publishing initiatives, statements, demonstrations for mutual expressions of solidarity, and observance of our neighbors’ anniversaries.

Sometimes – as in the case of the Polish-Hungarian Solidarity – these organizations were not needed and did not serve any purposes. What do you need an institutional framework for when you are a group of friends and acquaintances who get along well and for years have done things together without needing any such structures? Nevertheless, for some reason we thought that such institutions were necessary. We probably wanted to demonstrate our mutual presence in the public domain. We wanted symbolic endorsement of the importance and longevity of our relationships.

Life vetted these ambitions: institutions that arose from authentic necessity, such as the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity or the Eastern European Information Agency, flourished, whereas those that were artificial, like the Polish-Hungarian Solidarity, ended their lives with their mission statements.

And then came the Autumn of the People in 1989. Some of us hoped that the moment had come when the conspiratorial internationalism of resistance to totalitarianism would come to the fore and shape the politics of this part of Europe. Many of us in Poland hoped that our spiritual fatherland, based on our mutual experiences and fate in Central Europe, would take an institutional shape and materialize in the form of... well, of what? Federation, confederation? Nobody was courageous enough to say it, but something like that was going through our heads.

Nonetheless, nothing of the kind happened. The citizens of Central Europe shared the fate of the East Germans, who had wanted to nurse their identity and autonomy. They were absorbed and digested by the German Federative Republic, while we were incorporated by the West, which we had always wanted to join, at the same time that we were convinced of the identity and exceptionality of Central Europe.

The powerful wave from the West washed off our institutions and symbols. Our Visegrad Group, this joint political-economic-cultural creation, was not thought of as an independent being, but more as a tool enabling our integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. Somewhere at the local level there were some remnants of past alliances such as Polish-Czech-Slovak Solidarity, which was transformed into a forum for cross-border cooperation. However, the myth of Central Europe suffered a defeat. It disappeared in the turmoil of globalization and Euro-Atlantic integration.

But there were also abyss-like differences in the productivity of underground publishing ventures, which understandably had to do both with their technical background and with the repressive tactics applied at any given moment by the secret police. Independent writing was sometimes tolerated, within limits, as a kind of minor safety valve for social tension, but of course the police tried to map these activities, or infiltrate them, and the threat of hard repressive measures was always there. In the final years of communism in Poland, the regime gradually let things get out of hand.

It was Poland that was the unrivalled kingdom of independent literature. After the imposition of the martial law in 1981, the independent trade union movement, Solidarity, with its nation-wide structure and its sophisticated communications system, provided a production and distribution network that the regime was never able to destroy. If the Poles aimed above all at quantity (some books were published in print runs of several thousand), the Czech typewritten editions were outstanding for their cultivated graphic design and their excellent use of the bookbinder’s art.

The Czechoslovak regime may perhaps have been less brutal, and corrupted its population more with a decent standard of living, but it was, on the other hand, more ideological, more totalitarian, and made more use of its secret police. Charter 77 had a thousand signatories; Solidarity had ten million members, which says everything. Even before the rise of Solidarity, however, the opposition found ways to use the rotten state of affairs to their own advantage. According to those who were there, the universality of corruption made many more things possible. Workers in state enterprises, it was said, were willing, for a reasonable amount of money, to print even the truth.

When the *Samizdat* exhibition was on, in the lecture hall of the museum, and as well in Hungarian and Polish cultural institutes, surprisingly popular public discussions were held with the former underground publishers in all the Visegrad countries. Czech Television taped and then broadcast a fifteen-part series about people connected with Czech *samizdat*.



Wojciech Maziarski

Chief of the publicist column for *Newsweek Poland*. Co-founder of the Eastern European News Agency (panel for cooperation between Polish, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Lithuanian opposition). From 1989 to 2003 journalist at *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Perhaps it was a great triumph, but were we not able to foresee it? Maybe the solidarity of the Central European nations lies in what they do not have. There are no border disagreements, no territorial claims, no sharp ethnic conflicts in our part of the continent. Perhaps it is easier to assess the Central European legacy of international resistance when we turn our eyes towards the former Yugoslavia – and ask whether, without the brotherhood of cherry pits shared by the Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, and Ukrainians, we would still enjoy the peace and quiet that we are blessed with today.



Covers of books devoted to the events in Hungary published in Poland by the independent Publishing House NOWA.

If you come to Prague and you don't feel like going for a beer, pay a visit to the *Libri Prohibiti* study centre on Senovážné náměstí in Prague 1. It's not a museum of independent culture: It has tens of thousands of volumes and it exists, naturally, to demonstrate that the phenomenon of *samizdat* actually existed, but the books are there to be read, not just looked at. And while it is true that in the legendary epoch of alternative culture, the distribution of books and posters offered James Bond-style adventures, there is still plenty of adventure here – the adventure of making unique literary discoveries, since many of these books and magazines still exist only in typescript and have yet to be officially published.

FROM THE UNDERGROUND TO DIPLOMACY: THE HISTORY OF THE POLISH-CZECHOSLOVAK SOLIDARITY

Mirostaw Jasiński

Cooperation between those Poles, Czechs and Slovaks who opposed communism began towards the end of the Second World War and was reborn at the beginning of the 1980s. The first of the big meetings between Polish and Czech opposition activists took place in the summer of 1987 on the Borowkowa Mountain in the Kłodzko Valley. Precisely 40 years earlier, activists with the Polish People's Party of Stanisław Mikołajczyk (PSL) and the Czech National Socialist Party had met secretly in exactly the same place. That meeting had taken place in the context of approaching Stalinisation, while the 1980s contact was made as communism was in decline. The decades between those two meetings saw various examples of cooperation and mutual sympathy, such as the work of the "Tatra Climbers" in smuggling émigré publications from the West through Slovakia's Tatra Mountains to Poland; the regular participation of young Czechs and Slovaks in the Jazz Jamboree or in the pilgrimages to Jasna Góra, the cooperation between the secret monasteries, and the help given to the Catholic Church in Slovakia, Moravia, and the Czech Republic. The Kraków Catholic circles around Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – the future Pope John Paul II – were especially active on the latter score, with secret ordinations of Czech and Slovak priests in Poland, smuggling religious publications, and so on.

The breakthrough, however, came after the signing of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. The establishment in 1976 of the Polish KOR (Committee for the Defence of Workers) and the Charter 77 Declaration on 1 January, 1977 resulted in the idea of holding meetings between the activists of the two organizations on the border. There used to be a road on the border in the Giant Mountains whose official name was the Polish-Czechoslovak Friendship Road. These meetings yielded fruit in Czechoslovakia in the form of the first sentences issued for cooperating with the opposition of a neighbouring country. In protest against this repression the Polish opposition groups organized hunger strikes in the Warsaw Church of St. Martin and in Podkowa Leśna. The emergence of an organized opposition in the second half of the 1970s also meant the development of independent publications. The work of Václav Havel, Jan Patočka, Milan Šimečka, Miroslav Kusý, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Leszek Kołakowski and many other authors was slowly becoming part of the mutual legacy and was entering the intellectual biographies of young people on both sides of the border. Slowly, more and more texts and pamphlets began crossing the border, although not yet in an organised way. A big wave of repression aimed at the Charter 77 activists, and especially the arrest and trials of the members of the VONS (Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted) in 1979 and 1980 occurred at the same time as the outbreak of strikes in 1980 and the establishment of *Solidarność*. To understand what happened later it is worth stressing the broad contacts between "alternative culture" circles in underground music, especially among young people. Even publicly sold Polish rock albums sounded revolutionary compared to everything else that was available. The Polish Institute in Prague and Bratislava in the 1970s and 1980s was thus almost a centre of cultural and ideological subversion.

The message of the First Congress of NSZZ (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union) Solidarity to Working People of Eastern Europe in September 1981 was a signal that the nearly 10 million-strong *Solidarność* had matured to become aware of its size, and was beginning to cross Polish borders. Soon afterwards, a discussion took place on the board of the *Solidarność* NSZZ in the Lower Silesia Region in Wrocław regarding the possibility of supporting the opposition Charter 77 and expanding their cooperation. (Unfortunately, as a result of the "revolutionary" developments in Poland that engaged the entire opposition, as well as the

political repression in Czechoslovakia at the time, the cooperation almost completely died out). In October 1981 an envoy from the Wrocław Solidarity, Aleksander Gleichgewicht, visited Prague for a few days. The meetings he held yielded the idea of establishing a Polish-Czech Solidarity. But soon afterwards the martial law was imposed and Gleichgewicht was detained.

The link was re-established in March 1982. On the Polish side, a group of unknown 20-year-olds (who had experience in the students' conspiracy after 13 December) appeared, while the other side was represented by Anna Šabatová and the future bishop, Václav Malý.

In 1984, Petr Uhl, one of the key people in the development of the cooperation, left prison. Due



Meeting of Polish and Czechoslovak opposition activists on the border, August 1987.

to their unmasking, the entire Polish group had been replaced by other people. A courier network began to operate, as well as an exchange of materials. A joint statement was issued and signed by the Charter 77 activists and the Solidarity and ex-KOR members in hiding. The enduring strength of the damaged but not destroyed Solidarity underground was the reason that most activities were initiated by the Polish side, although the arrest of Petr Pospíchal in the spring of 1987 (another key person behind our cooperation) made us realize that the risks were not all on one side.

The public activities of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity in 1987, and the first big meeting of opposition activists from both sides (among them Václav Havel, Zbigniew Bujak, Jacek Kuroń, Jan Čarnogurský, Adam Michnik, Petr Uhl, Jaroslav Šabata, Jozef Pinior, Jan Lityński) had a moral significance not only for the Czechoslovak side. During that difficult year for the Solidarity underground it was essential that the spirit of resistance be bolstered in Poland as well.

I should mention a few more people. First of all, Zbigniew Janas together with Petr Pospíchal in 1986 started the "Brno-Warsaw" cooperation thread. His abilities, contacts and ideas resulted in such actions as the issuing of a special edition for stamp collectors for the 10th anniversary

of the establishment of Charter 77, which was successfully distributed within the official stamp circulation of the Czechoslovak post office. Jacek Kuroń and Václav Havel were mentors and invaluable “spiritual fathers” of numerous activities of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity. It is hard to say what it all would have looked like without their support. Another important person was Ivan Lamper, who created the first effective and regular group for smuggling materials across the border. In 1987, Lamper, at the time the editor of the underground *samizdat* magazine *Revolver Revue*, gathered a group of young people together to shoulder the burden of daily chores (Jan Ruml, Jáchym Topol, Alexandr Vondra, Markéta Fialková, and others). Ivan Lamper established an unusually effective group from Zlín, directed by Stanislav Devátý.

Mieczysław “Duczin” Piotrowski deserves special mention. He organized the Wrocław network for smuggling various materials, which in 1989 reached the frequency of two a month.

As time passed, further groups appeared in Cieszyn, Ostrava, Bielsko Biala, and Opawa. In



Czech émigré bard Karel Kryl performing at the 1st Festival of Czech and Slovak Independent Culture, Wrocław, 3 November, 1989.

December 1987, on the Polish side, the *Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity Bulletin*, a *samizdat* monthly, began to be issued regularly (the editors included Jarosław Broda, Tadeusz Kuranda, and others). The Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity “served” the *samizdat* Polish periodicals dedicated to international issues – *ABC*, *Obóz* (Camp), and *Nowa Koalicja* (New Coalition). It also sent information on the opposition in Czechoslovakia to the *Mazovia Weekly* (*Tygodnik Mazowsze*) and the *Agency News Review* (*Przegląd Wiadomości Agencyjnych*), and transported printing equipment for the opposition in Czechoslovakia. In 1988 a hunger strike was organized in Wrocław of political prisoners and the “Patronage” (Patronat) organization, under which various people, independent organizations and parishes took care of Czechoslovak political prisoners and their families. This care also had a practical dimension, including letters, interventions, parcels, etc. At that time as well, due to the great dedication of two men who had been colleagues for many years, Jan Stachowski and Andrzej Jagodziński, the “Independent Collection of Czech and Slovak Literature” series was started. The pragmatic attitude of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity, an organization that associated people from the radical left to far right, that set out to accomplish defined tasks and focused on rational collaboration, eventually became a model of cooperation for various groups, not only in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In 1985, a separate section was formed called the Polish-Ukrainian Group, which dealt with the smuggling of materials to Ukraine, and lasted until the end of 1987. In 1988, the “daughter organization” Polish-Hungarian Solidarity was established in Podkowa Leśna. This international experience resulted in the formation in 1988 of the VIA–WAI, the first



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independent international news agency in Central and Eastern Europe, whose main motors initially were Petr Uhl, Wojciech Maziarski, Anna Morawiecka, and the Podrabinek brothers from Russia. The year 1989 was a time of change, which in Poland started with preparations for the Round Table, and which in Czechoslovakia brought the January "Palacháda," the dispersal of a demonstration organized on the anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation, and the arrest of Václav Havel, Alexandr Vondra and other opposition activists. Soon afterwards in Warsaw, after many years of having been banned, three one-act plays by Václav Havel, entitled *Audience*, *Private View*, and *Protest*, were staged. The première showed how much the situation in both countries was beginning to differ. The then Prime Minister of the communist government of the Polish People's Republic, Mieczysław Rakowski, attended the première, while after the performance Adam Michnik gave a speech in defence of the imprisoned playwright.

On 4 November, 1989, two weeks before the Velvet Revolution, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic closed the border with Poland for two days. The move was caused by the staging of the Czech and Slovak Independent Culture Festival in Wrocław from 3–5 November. The festival accompanied the "Culture at the Crossroads" International Central Europe Seminar. It attracted many Czech participants such as Karel Kryl, Jaroslav Hutka, and Vlastimil Třešňák. Several thousand Czech and Slovak participants were invited by the inhabitants of Wrocław to their homes in a spontaneous act of generosity that included the provision of room and board. The Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity had gone beyond its opposition-dissident framework and established the foundations of something completely new. The new mood encouraged a decision on the formation of the Visegrad Group. It was no accident that a considerable number of the people who had participated in the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity also took part in the founding of Visegrad.

After 1989, the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity on the Czech and Slovak sides died out. However, the Polish structures of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity, together with their Czech partners, have been carrying out great cross-border projects for the past several years. The Polish-Czech Days of Christian Culture in the Kłodzko Valley and its Czech surroundings draw thousands of participants, while festivals such as "Theatre on the Border" and "Cinema on the Border" in Cieszyn and the Czech Těšín are also a continuation of these activities. The Polish-Czech-Slovak Solidarity Fund based in Warsaw is now turning its attention to the East.



BREAKFAST WITH A BILLIONAIRE, OR A CENTRAL EUROPEAN DREAM

Tomáš Vrba

Twenty years ago, we used to have recurring dreams. Most were rather frustrating: our émigré friends living abroad would dream that they had managed to return home secretly, only to be informed on by someone and sent straight to prison. Those of us who lived here, on the other hand, would dream that through some administrative slip-up, we'd been given permission for a twelve hour visit to New York, but that the submarine put us ashore somewhere on Long Island, fifty miles from Manhattan, with 25 cents in our pockets... You know it, I'm sure: it's Kafka's *Amerika*. Or you might have dreamed that the regime had finally fallen and someone had arranged a breakfast with you and a billionaire who wanted to give you money to fulfil an ancient hope: to put out an intelligent newspaper for Central Europe.

In the end the regimes did fall, and at last, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland enthusiastically embraced friendly cooperation with each other through the Visegrad Declaration. The hangover arrived a couple of years later. The first generation of revolutionaries was replaced by a new professional political establishment, and the original idea of advancing together into Europe was replaced by a none-too-gentlemanly horse-race. A war was raging in Yugoslavia, and in each of our countries, nationalists and other extremists were popping up all over. After Czechoslovakia fell apart in 1993, Mečiar and his people took power in Slovakia. With trepidation, we realized that we now knew less about our neighbors from the former Soviet bloc than we did in the bad old days.

In the spring of 1994, Václav Havel invited six of his colleagues – all of them central European presidents – to the East Bohemian town of Litomyšl. At the same time, he opened a meeting of Central European intellectuals, an event that had the melancholy title: "A Shared Seclusion." Was there a more appropriate place to introduce the idea of the *Středoevropské noviny* – the Central European Gazette – given that its Czech acronym (SEN) means "dream" in Czech?

Several years passed before the first issue came out. The idea for such a publication had been in the air for quite a while. During the early years of Visegrad cooperation there were impulses in that direction of varying strength. Adam Michnik pushed the idea from the beginning and, in the end, his practical steps were the decisive factor in setting things in motion. Petr Pithart had originally planned to publish the Czech version in his magazine *Přítomnost* (The Present), but in the early stages he was preoccupied with politics, and then his magazine got into financial trouble. The liberal daily, *Lidové noviny* was the next choice.





Tomáš Vrba

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The most difficult task was to persuade the management of the paper to take it on. They found it hard to believe that they'd be receiving a ready-to- lay-out supplement each month, with no financial outlay on their part except for the cost of the paper. At the time, the editor-in-chief's post at *Lidové noviny* was a bit of a revolving door. Luckily, when the moment of decision came, the chair was occupied by Jaromír Štětina, who readily agreed. He was gone by the time the first issue appeared, but by then it didn't matter. The work was well under way.

Central European Gazette appeared as a slim monthly supplement in four major Central European dailies – the *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Warsaw, *Magyar Hírlap* in Budapest, *Sme* in Bratislava, and *Lidové noviny* in Prague. This gave the supplement a combined readership of a million. The supplement's mission had an air of Old World nobility about it: to educate its readers to become better acquainted with each other. In other words, it was consistent with the aims of the Visegrad Library that was just about to get under way at the time. The national editions were not identical, but some regular features appeared in all four languages. Month after month, the pages of the supplement were filled with articles in a variety of genres: reportage, analysis, and commentary, complemented by photographs and cartoons and chronicles of important events from the preceding month in the other three neighbouring countries. Sometimes the issues would include articles that had appeared in the mother publications in the other countries, but for the most part the articles were written directly for the supplement.

From our sponsor, we received funds to cover contributors' fees, copying machines, faxes (remember the days when a text would arrive by fax and then have to be typed into the computer by hand?). The staff were all volunteers and highly committed to the task, full of ideas, elan, and good will. We were surprised to discover that nevertheless it was sometimes hard to agree on everything; given that this were so, how much harder must it have been for neighbors who didn't care about agreement? It was a useful lesson in the realities of Europe, and we were fortunate to be able to learn it on the forgiving sands of Visegrad.

The main lesson? Good will alone is not enough without the will to cooperate. We often, and mostly (though not always) in jest, threw stereotypical insults at each other, based on the prejudices that Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks had accumulated about each other throughout their history – and when we gathered these together in a series of articles, they turned out to be one of our greatest hits.

Gradually, we worked through our somewhat naive optimism to a position of healthy scepticism. In this, however, it's always worth paying attention to the Hungarians: in Europe, they do pessimism better than the Portuguese or the Czechs. In December, 1994, we reprinted an article from the *Magyar Hírlap* headlined "Obituary for Visegrad", – and just to make sure the point wasn't lost, we ran the sub-head: "Visegrad Has Lost Its Meaning". The following June, Adam Michnik picked up on the gloomy tone in an article entitled "The Imaginary Visegrad Museum". Suddenly, however, against all expectations, the Czech Prime Minister at the time, Václav Klaus, proclaimed: "Visegrad lives!" (*Středoevropské noviny*, August 1995) and on we went.

The billionaire's name, by the way, was George Soros, and the breakfast was held in the temporary headquarters of his Central European University in the Prague working class district of Žižkov. It was in a hotel once operated by the former Communist trade union. Dreams sometimes, temporarily at least, become reality, except that on that particular day, the person in charge of the dream-like stage-props had a bad day. The venue was no Rainbow Room. Through a serving window in the canteen, we were each handed a battered tray with a cup of thin trade-union tea, a rubbery, day-old roll, and a miniature plastic container with an unidentifiable jam-like substance inside. Welcome to Kafka's Prague.

WHEN WE BEGAN

Antonín J. Liehm

It's been more than two decades since the first issue of the quarterly journal *Lettre internationale* came out in Paris. The Cold War was winding down at the time, but Europe and the world were still divided, and one half viewed the other exclusively through the lenses of half-truths and half-lies. At the time we went to battle against the former with the aim of demonstrating that in the field of culture, at least, Europe was still a single entity, that its riches lay in the diversity of its cultures. But these cultures knew little of each other, and this was true on both sides of the Iron Curtain. We wanted these cultures to confront one another within a single publication on the basis of common themes and subjects, and at the same time we wanted to show that Stalinism had not eliminated culture in the East, nor had it undermined its European-ness, nor its quality, regardless of whether that culture could express itself publicly or in any other way.

One of our main inspirations was the experience of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, which, within communism, had brought forth fruit that the world still admires today. At the same time, we wanted to show that the borders between cultures were not identical with the borders between countries, which of course related to Central Europe, but not exclusively. The *Lettre internationale* very quickly came out with a series of autonomous national editions and, after 1990, it did not remain limited to the original countries: France, Italy, Spain, and Germany. It began to appear as well, first in Yugoslavia (in two versions, Serbian and Croatian, and for a short time it even had a single editorial board), and then in Czechoslovakia (the articles alternated between Czech and Slovak), and in Hungary, Romania, and elsewhere.

Let's return to Central Europe, which the magazine viewed not only as the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but as a group of cultures with a high common denominator, to which belonged Switzerland, part of Germany, Berlin, the Baltic states... The idea of Visegrad was born, and George Soros offered to finance a magazine that, following the model of *Lettre*, would come out in four autonomous editions. Rudolf Chmel then presented him with a project, but it seemed undoable and too expensive to him, so he withdrew his offer. I felt sorry about that, so I offered to go around to all the Visegrad countries at his expense to try to find another solution. In the end, the *Central European Gazette* (Středoevropské noviny) was created as a monthly supplement to appear in the major newspapers in the region. It would have a single editorial board, of which I would





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be the chairman. Rudolf Chmel was named editor-in-chief of the whole project, even though Adam Michnik insisted that the Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, would have complete editorial autonomy.

For the first issue, I wrote an editorial about how Visegrad could and should become something like the Nordic Council, that is, a kind of loose and mainly economic association of four countries that gradually, by developing joint projects, would prepare the ground for a smoother entry into the European Union (which in the case of northern Europe, with the exception of Norway, actually happened). The problem was that post-communism was still in diapers, and after years of cohabitation in an unloved association of states under the Soviet Union, each country wanted to play the game largely on its own terms. Quite simply, the time wasn't yet ripe for Visegrad. In the Czech Republic, this attitude – "they'll only hold us back" – went so far that the government rejected Soros's offer to make Prague the seat of a European University funded by him, and the Prime Minister recalled the ministers who were already on their way to a meeting of Visegrad Presidents with Richard von Weizsäcker. Nevertheless, the *Central European Gazette* came out; its international editorial board met once every three months, usually in Prague, in the offices of the Czech edition of *Lettres*. The fact that the time was not ripe was inevitably reflected in the *Central European Gazette* which, with Soros's support, quixotically pretended that everything was in order and that the Visegrad Group actually existed. I travelled in for regular editorial meetings, but in this pre-internet era, a Central European supplement couldn't be done in Paris, and so it began to languish until finally, after a meeting in Bratislava with Soros, it stopped coming out altogether. Only *Gazeta Wyborcza*, thanks to its complete autonomy and financial success – in this Michnik had been right – was able to keep it going, though in a different form.

Even *Lettre internationale* – clearly another quixotic project – did not survive the time in which it was born and to which it spoke. After not quite four years, it died, first in Prague, and gradually elsewhere as well (in Poland, where it was to have been the first edition in Eastern Europe, only two issues came out). Oddly enough, in Hungary and Romania, the journal is still alive, even though it should more properly be called "*Lettre Nationale*." At the other end of Europe it disappeared, first from Paris (the role of the flagship edition was taken over by the Berlin *Lettre*) and then all the other editions likewise turned into small national or local magazines (though, oddly enough, a new Danish mutation has appeared). The problem is obvious as well in the European Union, whose allocation for culture is even more laughably small than it is in the budget of its new member states. Today, the Union does not see as its cultural mission the creation of mutual understanding among 30 cultures, whose diversity forms a single identity. Moreover, the prevailing opinion now is that to understand the eastern part of Europe, we don't need a mediator; by now, we can do all that for ourselves. Which is proving to be a mistake.

In Central Europe, however, Visegrad was born again like a Phoenix from the ashes; it has more ways and means at its disposal and, thanks to a consensus that was lacking at the beginning, it has incomparably more opportunities. We have to hope that it can demonstrate that its member states, over time, will come to know more about each other and know each other better, and work together better, than they do now. When it happens, however, I won't be there.

THE 1335 MEETING OF KINGS IN VISEGRAD

Slawomir Gawlas

For the entire month of November 1335, the town of Visegrad played host to a meeting between the kings of Central Europe: the Hungarian king, Charles Robert; the king of Bohemia, John of Luxembourg, and his son Charles, the margrave of Moravia and the governor of the kingdom; the Polish king, Casimir the Great; and the plenipotentiary of the Great Master of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, as well as a number of dukes.



Castle of Visegrad.

The story of Visegrad started with the Mongolian incursion in 1241. Soon afterwards a defensive upper castle was built there and became the place where the Hungarian coronation insignia were stored. Later on, in the lower castle, an impressive dwelling house was raised. After defeating the oligarchic opposition in 1323, Charles Robert chose Visegrad for his abode. It was developed into a multipartite residence composed of two renovated castles, upper and

Central Europe's mutual saints

Wojciech Biliński

Saint Andrew Swierad (ca. 980–1031/2)

We know very little about the early years of this saint. He was likely born in the Małopolska Province in south-east Poland, probably in a place called Tropie on the Dunajec River, in a peasant family. He received the name Swierad, originating from the ancient Slavonic Wszerad, meaning someone who is always happy with everybody.

After 1018, he left his homeland and moved to Hungary. At about the same time Duke Bolesław Chrobry (the Brave) ceded his rule over Slovakia's Nitra to the Hungarian king, Stephen I. The Hungarian sovereign supported the Catholic priests who stayed on his territory. Swierad settled in the St. Hippolitus Benedictine monastery on Zobor Mountain in the vicinity of Nitra and took on the monastic name of Andrew. He was considered a saint even during his lifetime by the local Slovak people. The centre of his cult was the basilica in Nitra, where

his remains were placed. His canonization took place in Esztergom on 17 July, 1083. Nowadays he is worshipped by the Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians.

Saint Melchior Grodziecki (ca. 1582–1619)

He was born in Cieszyn to a noble family. After he completed his education at the local parish Catholic school around 1595, he went to study at the Jesuit College in Vienna. Later he lived in Brno (as a novice), Kłodzko (musical education), Budějovice, Prague (philosophical studies), Kłodzko again (professor of grammar), Prague again (theological studies), and Brno yet again. In 1603 he took his first vows, and in 1614 he was ordained a priest.

In 1618 he went to Košice. Together with other Jesuits – a Hungarian named Stephen Pongracz and a Croat named Mark Kriz – he worked as a missionary at the emperor's army garrison stationed in the town. As Grodziecki had a good command of Latin, Polish, Czech, German and Slovak, he was offered the post of military

lower, as well as the palace complex, whose shape after numerous later reconstructions would be hard to recognise. In 1335 Visegrad was the main seat of Charles Robert, the place where his court stayed, and the real capital city of the country (the formal capital was Buda).

Hungary was governed autocratically: Power and the political life of the kingdom were concentrated here in the royal court. The residence must have immensely impressed the guests on their arrival. The Hungarian treasury had considerable amounts of cash at its disposal owing to the gold mines on the territory of present-day Slovakia and Transylvania.

The immediate cause of the meeting was the submission of a Polish-Teutonic dispute to a court of arbitration. The conflict had begun in 1308-1309 with the invasion by the Teutonic Knights of Gdańsk Pomerania while the Polish state was uniting under King Władysław Lokietek (Ladislaus the Elbow High). King Lokietek never came to terms with the loss, but was not strong enough to press his claim with force of arms. The disagreement went on for years.

St. Jadwiga (Hedwig).



A complaint submitted to the Pope led to the court's being called. The conflict worsened after King Lokietek allied with Giedymin, the Duke of Lithuania, and invaded Brandenburg. The enormous destruction and his alliance with the pagans hurt the reputation of the Polish ruler. The Teutonic Order, on the other hand, responded by forming a coalition with the Bohemian

chaplain. When, in the summer of 1619, Košice surrendered to the Transylvanian army that was rebelling against the emperor, its commander, György Rákoczy, imprisoned the Catholic priests and a court sentenced them to death. In March 1620, thanks only to the intercession of the Catholic wife of the Hungarian Kingdom palatinate, the remains of the assassinated priests were placed in Alsó-Sebes (Nižná Šebastová) near Prešov, and in Hertník near Bardejov. Since 1635, the sarcophagus with the bodies has been in St. Ursula's monastery in Trnava, whereas the silver cases with their skulls are exhibited in the local Jesuit church. On 15 January, 1905, Pope Pius X declared Melchior Grodziecki, Mark Kriz and Stephen Pongracz the blessed, while on 2 July, 1995, Pope John Paul II made them saints.

Saint Jadwiga the Queen (ca. 1373–1399)

Jadwiga (Hedwig) was a daughter of King Ludwig Hungarian (the Great), king of Poland and Hungary, and of Elisabeth of Bosnia. In 1378 she was betrothed to the Habsburg scion, William of Austria. After her

father's death, her mother decided that she should take the Polish throne instead of her elder sister, Maria, because the Polish noblemen were rather reluctant to accept Maria's husband, Sigismund of Luxembourg. After her arrival in Poland Jadwiga was crowned, and under the pressure of the Kraków court she broke her engagement. The Polish magnates saw a chance to strengthen the country through a union with Lithuania, and the marriage of Jadwiga with Lithuanian ruler Władysław II Jagiełło, who took the name Władysław as the Polish king, was to serve this purpose. The wedding took place in 1386 and the marriage initiated the Jagiellon dynasty, one of the most powerful in Europe at the time, which ruled Poland until 1572, as well as Hungary (1440–44 and 1490–1526), Bohemia (1471–1526) and Lithuania (1377–1434 and 1440–1572). Queen Jadwiga Angevin helped christianize Lithuania and supported the peaceful settlement of the conflicts between Poland and the Teutonic Knights. She was an educated woman and gathered around her the intellectual elite of the country, as well as helping to restore the Kraków Academy. After her

king, John of Luxembourg, who had his eyes on the Polish throne as the successor and heir of the Premyslid dynasty. However, in 1320, King Lokietek was crowned with the Pope's consent. Lokietek was also backed by King Charles Robert of Hungary, whose political interests connected him more with Poland than with Bohemia.

The war with the Knights of the Teutonic Order that had allied with John of Bohemia in 1329 spelled big losses for King Lokietek. Despite enormous political and military efforts and sporadic successes, Poland lost. The majority of the Silesian dukes accepted John Luxembourg as their liege lord from 1327 to 1329. Wielkopolska (Greater Poland) was devastated, and the Teutonic Order occupied Kujawy, the inherited lands of King Władysław, as well as the Dobrzyń lands. In the summer of 1332, a year-long-ceasefire was declared thanks to the mediation of a papal legate, Pierre de Auvergne. During the truce, in March 1333, King Lokietek died. The new king, Kazimierz, later called the Great, achieved a political breakthrough by bringing his political goals in line with what was really possible. The truce was extended, peace with Brandenburg was signed, and in 1334 it was formally agreed that the dispute would be submitted to the court of arbitration of the kings of Hungary and Bohemia.

The host of the meeting in Visegrad, Charles Robert, was a great-grandson of Charles, Count of Anjou and Provence, and the brother of King Louis IX of France. The Hungarians had a close relationship with the papacy, while their political alliance with Poland was strengthened by the marriage between Charles and Elisabeth, sister of Kazimierz the Great. On the other hand, Hungary's natural opponents were the Habsburgs in Austria, the Luxembourgs in Bohemia and Venice, and the countries of the Balkan Peninsula.

John of Luxembourg was in a different position. He had become king of Bohemia due to his father's diplomatic skills (count Henry VII of Luxembourg). John did not gain strong support from Bohemia, and after failing to establish his own rule after coming of age, after 1318 he turned it over to the Czech magnates, and treated his kingdom as a source of money for carrying out his political plans. John, who embodied the ideal of the king-knight, rarely stayed in Bohemia, and felt best in Paris. Participation in many tournaments and crusades in Prussia had left him with many wounds, but with large acclaim as well. He was



St. John Nepomucene (Jan Nepomucký).

death she was considered saintly, which was confirmed by her worship and canonization in 1997 by Pope John Paul II on the Krakow Blonia. She could be the patron saint of united Europe as she had French, Italian, Bosnian, Hungarian and Polish blood, and her political achievements also influenced Lithuania and Kievan Rus.

Saint Adalbert-Vojtěch-Wojciech (ca. 955–997)

Vojtěch-Wojciech (Adalbert) from the Czech Slavník family is one of the main patron saints of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, and was canonized two years after his death, in 999. He was related to the Czech Premyslid family and the Emperor Otto II from the Saxon dynasty. He was brought up in Germany (studied in Magdeburg), and since he knew politics well, in 983 he became the bishop of Prague. He was one of the fathers of the idea of Christianizing Central Europe, but in his own country he did not gain any support. Due to conflicts in Bohemia he was forced to leave his diocese twice and go to Italy. He played an important role in Hungary, (later on worshipped as Bela)

where he stayed several times at the court of Duke Geza. He baptized and confirmed the duke's son, Vajka, who during his christening took the name Istvan, and later, in 1000, was crowned the first king of Hungary. After his death he became a saint, and is now known around the world as Saint Stephen. Adalbert, as his mentor and spiritual guide, had a great impact in his young years in shaping his personality and views. He also undertook the mission of going to the emperor's court to sue for the hand of the German princess Giselle on behalf of Istvan.

In 997, based on an agreement with the Polish King Boleslaus the Brave (Boleslaw Chrobry) and the emperor Otto III, he went to Poland to undertake a mission to Christianize the Prussians. In the same year he died the death of a martyr. His remains were buried in Gniezno, which in 1000 became the seat of a new archbishopric. The first archbishop there was Wojciech's close associate, Radzim (Gaudenty), while another member of his retinue, Anastasias, became head of another new archbishopric in the Hungarian Esztergom.

connected with the French court by marriage and a vassalage relationship. His greatest success was to enter the Polish-Teutonic conflict. However, his military operations against the Habsburgs did not bring the expected success in the summer of 1335, and John returned to Prague after three years of absence needing money very urgently.

Kazimierz the Great was in a much more difficult situation. The truce with the Knights of the Teutonic Order had been extended, but agreement with the calling of the court of arbitration also meant accepting its sentence. The judgement was easy to foresee, as the choice of arbiters offered little hope for an advantageous decision, and a return to the situation preceding the war was the best result that could be expected. In the summer of 1335 the Polish delegation took its complaint with the Teutonic Order to Avignon and demanded the return of Gdańsk Pomerania, and the Chelm Land obtained in 1226. They claimed considerable damages as compensation for the destruction and plunder. An anxious Teutonic Order rejected the accusations.

St. Venceslas (Václav).



In May 1335 a truce was arranged and a commission was appointed to settle border disputes. The main negotiations took place in August under the patronage of Charles Robert. King Kazimierz authorised his delegation to follow the advice of the king of Hungary. The agreed conditions of the peace included John Luxembourg's renunciation of his claim to the Polish

St. John Nepomucene, the icon of Central and Eastern Europe

Tomasz Dostatni

I come from Poznań, a Polish city about 300 km from the Czech border. Since my childhood I have always remembered the monument of St. John Nepomucene, which stands in the middle of the market square. After one of the biggest floods in the history of our town, a monument to St. John Nepomucene was raised in 1724 as a patron who had saved his people from even worse flooding.

St. John is sometimes called the saint from the bridge, as his first incarnation is situated on the Charles Bridge in Prague. Crowds of tourists passing over the bridge stop under St. John to touch the worn relief under his monument. Few know that St. John died only several meters away after being thrown into Vltava River. A small bronze cross on the stone balustrade marks the spot. Impressions of the Prague statue of St. John, showing the priest in a surplice, holding a cross in his

hand and often with an aureole made of stars, can be found not only in the Poznań market square but in practically every corner of the world. St. John Nepomucene stands next to rural footpaths and bridges, in square and in front of churches in the Czech Republic, Moravia, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Bavaria and Hungary. This is to be expected, but the outcome of the return to the Catholic faith after the Trident Council was that the Czech saint can now be found in both Americas and in Asia. The image of St. John Nepomucene has become an icon of Central Europe, recognised by Catholics all over the world, even though his life and death are not so well known.

St. John is often presented as the patron of the mystery of confession. As a priest he did not reveal to the king what his wife had confessed, despite being tortured. However, historians now say that the main reason the martyr was murdered was that the king was furious that John, as the general vicar of the Prague Archdiocese, had approved the election of the Abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Kladruby. This act was an attempt to prevent the King from establishing a new diocese and

throne, and preparations for the meeting in Visegrad began. In the meantime, the position of Kazimierz was undermined by Charles Robert, who entered into an alliance with John Luxembourg including mutual armed assistance.

The court of arbitration in Visegrad commenced deliberations at the beginning of November 1335. Both sides presented their demands and evidence. The Teutonic Order was in a better situation as they had at their disposal copies of documents proving their title to Pomerania and the Chelm Lands. The endowment of the Dobrzyn Land to the Teutonic Order in 1329 by John Luxembourg was annulled. Together with Kujawy, it was to be returned to the rule of King Kazimierz, who in this way recovered the land lost by his father, King Lokietek, during the last war with the Teutonic Order. Pomerania and the Chelm Lands were to remain under the rule of the Order as the perpetual alms of the Polish king. The use of such a formula signified acknowledgement of the rights of the Polish monarch. Both parties were to abandon their claims for war damages and to give amnesty to their subjects. Kazimierz pledged to sign the peace treaty on these conditions and issue the appropriate documents. However, after the meeting, the Polish king conducted further negotiations in an attempt to arrange better conditions. The situation changed with a war that began in 1340, which taxed Kazimierz's powers. A final peace was achieved in Kalisz in 1343, with the Polish king renouncing his claim to Gdańsk Pomerania and the Chelm Lands in favour of the Teutonic Order.

The other topic of the Visegrad talks was Polish–Czech negotiations. The Czech side, in return for 20,000 threescore Prague groschen, dropped their claims to the Polish throne. The arrangements were not advantageous for the Polish ruler. Charles Robert played the role of mediator and arbiter, and with Kazimierz given no space to maneuver, he accepted the conditions he was offered. After the meeting he accompanied John Luxembourg to Prague, where he stayed as his guest for a few days.

The meeting in Visegrad in 1335 was a breakthrough in Polish–Czech relations. After 30 years the conflict over the Polish throne ended in compromise. During the Visegrad Congress, for the price of accepting the existing power situation and the loss of land, Poland broke out of its political isolation. The meeting in Visegrad sanctioned the success of the Luxembourgs and the participation of Poland as a partner. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it meant the acceptance of new, more peaceful principles of diplomacy and limits on armed conflicts. Later on, multilateral meetings of monarchs became more frequent, which earlier had been hard to imagine. It created a platform for a certain mutuality of interests in the region, which prevailed over political calculations. Generally speaking, the meeting was evidence of a decisive change in our region in late medieval Europe.

appointing a new bishop backed by the wealth of this monastery, and who would be completely subjugated to the king's will. St. John died as a result of the conflict between religious and lay authority. He defended the independence and sovereignty of the Church against the power of the king, Václav IV. He died when assassins hired by Václav threw him from the Charles Bridge into the Vltava on 20 March, 1393. His legend grew for centuries, hiding the true motives behind his death. No other Czech saint has been worshiped by the faithful of the entire Catholic Church, nor has any other saint been more revered by the Czech nation. He was a bright light – *lux in tenebris* – at a time in Czech history sometimes called “the epoch of darkness”. John Nepomucene has sometimes been called a Jesuit and a Habsburg saint, as the Jesuits spread his cult through their missions all over the world, while the arch-Catholic Habsburg dynasty supported the cult of the saint as much as they could.

The Jesuit scholars who had educated noblemen and the bourgeois elites from the 16th to the 18th centuries presented John as an example of loyalty to the Catholic Church. The many poems, hymns, paintings

and sculptures dedicated to John show how effective that religious teaching was. Nowadays, John Nepomucene is no longer such an idol. Prague, however, with its countless Baroque monuments, would be incomplete if this Catholic saint disappeared from living memory.

Images of John Nepomucene that we encounter while wandering through this part of Europe remind us that people understand sainthood as the presence of God in our everyday lives. Perhaps these figures that can be found standing in the middle of a field, next to a road or beside a bridge, are the last signs of religious and divine reality. An icon is a sign that reminds us of invisible things through the beauty of material things. The Great Russian orthodox theologian and martyr of Stalin's prisons, Pavel Florenski, wrote: “An icon is the name of God written in colour. What is the image of God then, that spiritual light that flows from holy images, if it is not written on the personality of the saint? Just as saints do not show themselves but God, so too do the painters of icons show not themselves but the saint, the witness of God, and through him the Lord himself.” Do not these words refer to Saint John Nepomucene as well?



Stawomir Gawlas

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Sts. Cyril and Methodius.



Visegrad Today and Tomorrow



A MIRACLE CALLED VISEGRAD

Martin Bútora

Visegrad could be described as a political, strategic and human miracle for a number of reasons: that the Visegrad *Trojka* was born at all; that it achieved vital political goals; that it proved capable of transforming into the Visegrad Four; that it served as a new model for relations in the complicated arena of Central Europe; and, finally, that it still exists today. Not one of these achievements was ever a certainty.

In terms of politics, the birth of Visegrad accomplished several things at once.

First, although it might seem like an exaggeration, Visegrad defied history; if not all history, then at least one tradition in the history of the nations living in the region of Central Europe, a history marked by significant "asynchronism". In the past two centuries we have often seen

how an advance, success or civilizational progress by one nation, state or region has been achieved at the expense of another. We find plenty of examples of this kind of asynchronism in relations between the Czechs and Germans, or the Hungarians and the Slovaks. What the Magyar ruling elite in Hungary after the Austrian-Hungarian settlement of 1867 regarded as a blossoming of economy, architecture and culture, of the capital of the kingdom, which grew to become beautiful, and even of civil society, part of the Slovak cultural elite experienced as a decline, a restriction, and a threat to Slovak national development, culture and language. On the other hand, the Hungarians after Trianon experienced a trauma that took them a long time to recover from, while democratic Czechoslovakia fared quite well. Even Czech and Slovak relations went through occasional periods of mutual annoyance: In

the 1930s, several political groupings in Slovakia, from "the autonomists" (those in favour of Slovak autonomy) to "regionalists", and even Slovak communists, felt the need to resolve "the Slovak question" through a more equal partnership between the two nations. And when Slovaks in complicated historical circumstances – in 1939 with the foundation of the independent wartime Slovak state, and in 1968 with the federalization of the common state – achieved a greater degree of self-government (in both cases it was more appearance than reality), the Czech side was disappointed and regarded it as an expression of Slovak ingratitude. Communism united and homogenized all of us, and various divisions and tensions were stored away "in the cooler". It was always possible that following the collapse of communism, and the related thaw, mutual tensions could reappear. But it never happened; instead, Visegrad arrived on the scene.

Secondly, the state representatives of the Visegrad countries, and the citizens who elected them, for perhaps the first time were able to act freely and democratically, and above all without pressure from a larger power. Luckily they acted not only freely but also responsibly, despite their different natures, conflicts and squabbles, pettiness and large egos. They certainly also acted in this way because the key personalities among them had proven themselves in the struggle with communism. This is far from the norm in history, but this is probably precisely why people and history remember such statesmen. It's very easy not to reach agreement and later to find excuses, and far more challenging to defend the reasons why it is necessary to find agreement.

Third, Visegrad to a certain extent enriched traditions and modes of intellectual discourse. The fact that the countries of Visegrad had lived out the majority of their 20th century history



Meeting of Visegrad Group countries Ambassadors in Washington, D.C. From the left: Géza Jeszensky (Hungary), Martin Bútora (Slovakia) and Alexandr Vondra (Czech Republic).

under undemocratic regimes was on the one hand sad and often tragic for their inhabitants, while on the other hand it was also fertile ground for intellectual criticism. This was especially true of Central European intellectuals, who were so much a part of the history and myths of this sceptical region, with its ironic reflections, feeling for the grotesque, and doubts as to whether it was possible to alter the bitter fate of small nations. Many of these intellectuals were adept at recording national failures, not only in the 20th Century but also in preceding periods. The Czech strain of this intellectual exploration identified in the national character smallness, provincialism, and a lack of moral fibre, as well as an unwillingness to fight or resist. The Poles lamented their inability to unite and their fateful habit of being defeated in desperate, hopeless conflicts. The Hungarians repeatedly focused on their feeling of loneliness and melancholy, on the swings between their spectacular moments of heroic exceptionality and their miserable moments of desperate backwardness, on the balance between their consciousness of the exceptional nature of the Hungarian calling, and the recognition of the Hungarian destiny as a "collective neurosis".

And thus could we continue with the Slovak intellectual self-examination, which combined a feeling of unimportance with the sense of having been wronged. Readers might have derived pleasure from these brilliant writings, which in various streams of thought attempted to demonstrate that "it can't be done" – that true freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, tolerance, rule of law, none of it was attainable. However, in the context of Visegrad, another way of thinking came to the fore attempting to draw a lesson from all of these failures and defeats and to set a course for the future that might overcome this fateful predestination for tragedy. Following the collapse of communism and later the decision to unite Europe into one democratic whole, this "other" future began to seem possible. The beauty of resistance, distance and critical reflection gained a challenger: the creative excitement of building and forming new entities.

Fourthly, the founding of Visegrad in a certain way politically recast Central Europe. The region had long been known as a cultural expression of Western Christianity, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and a fellowship of historical fates. As a political concept the Central European identity was linked to its problematic terrain, one that had witnessed dramas that more than once led to global conflict. It was not connected only with the personalities and statesmen who had led the fight for freedom, from Kościuszko to Kossuth and Masaryk and the modern fighters for democracy such as Lech Wałęsa, Václav Havel, and Arpád Göncz – it was also connected with a history of horrors, with the Holocaust and Stalinism, and later with the "abduction" of civilized Central Europe to the Soviet steppes. Visegrad set the stage for a new contextual integration: the return to democratic Europe.

The Visegrad *Trojka* quickly found favour with the West, because it was a positive, sensible, stabilizing, and constructive concept. Positive symbols are essential in politics and public diplomacy, and Visegrad quickly became just that.

In the **fifth** place, the Visegrad concept and the Visegrad Group demonstrated the needed flexibility in reorienting themselves towards acceptance to NATO instead of their original priority, the fastest possible integration into the European Union. The focus on the Alliance, where at first only Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were admitted, brought two positive moments. The first was the Atlantic dimension, the experience of close cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the United States, the irreplaceable cooperation between the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians and later the Slovaks on the one hand, and the pro-Atlantic and anti-isolationist personalities on the political scene in America at the time on the other hand. This experience enriched the political culture of the Central European elites, and helped them not to yield to one-sided anti-Americanism and to respond in a more balanced way to existing conflicts and tensions between the two sides of the Atlantic. The second positive moment was that by this security integration Visegrad became an example, one that was first copied by Slovakia with the significant aid of the first three members, and later a model that was followed by the Vilnius Ten, which comprised the further candidates for entry to the Alliance.

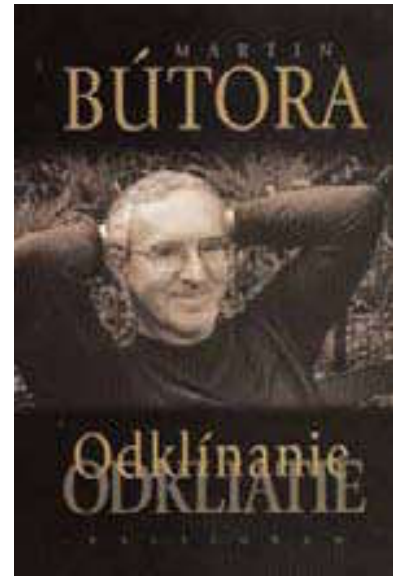
In the **sixth** place, Visegrad was an impressively successful initiative despite its occasional lapses due to temporary departures by some of its members from the common spirit, whether in the search for individual strategies, the reduction of Visegrad to only its economic content, or to Slovakia's becoming problematic as a full member of the group. Visegrad worked very well in eliminating unwanted institutions (the Warsaw Pact) and in gaining membership in desirable institutions (NATO and the European Union). And, paradoxically, Slovakia's temporary stumble and elimination from the group of front-runners for NATO and EU membership, and then its "domestic rehabilitation" in 1998 general elections, became a new unifying element: Now it was necessary, and not only in the interest of Slovakia, for the other three to help the fourth succeed.

When in my lectures as the Slovak Ambassador to the US I occasionally tried to give the American public a simplified and comprehensible idea of the meaning of Visegrad, I used a comparison from the history of NATO itself. In the famous words of Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO, the organization was founded "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". Visegrad served the same goals for Central Europe as NATO had for Western Europe: "to keep the Russians out", meaning to secure the departure of Soviet troops and the abolition of the Warsaw Pact; "the Americans in", in other words to ensure a continued American presence in Europe and to enter NATO; and instead of the Germans, to keep "the demons of Central Europe" – aggressive nationalist populists – under control.

Despite all its mistakes and problems, the democratic transformation of Visegrad can serve as an example for countries in its vicinity that still have a long road in front of them. It is through more than merely being in the European Union's "neighborhood" that Visegrad helps to mould and create the future shape of united Europe. Visegrad also has wider, pan-European and global potential. It faces new questions, which its individual members can certainly answer individually, and which they will attempt to answer along with their other partners in the European Union – but which still require them to come up with a "Visegrad answer".

Finally, in seventh place, we come to that side of Visegrad that is consistently closest to us. It concerns our common historical, cultural, and mental experiences, that which united and unites us, and which could unite us still more firmly if only we knew more about each other, knew each other better, came closer together, and looked harder to find how we could mutually enrich each other, and if this enrichment could produce something. The activities of the International Visegrad Fund in this sense are priceless, because this knowledge is not born overnight.

I don't know how things sit with the other three countries, but as for Slovaks, I see that we are still a mystery to ourselves and to others. We never had an occasion – and that is the beauty of Slovakia, the smallest Visegrad country – to learn about ourselves, what we are capable of, whether we truly have free conditions for development, and if we have freedom, whether we will remember to be responsible. In this sense Slovakia is a country of "undiscovered talents," and the same is true in spades of Visegrad.



NEW CHANCES, NEW CHALLENGES

Alexander Duleba, Tomáš Strážay

The year 2004 was a breakthrough one for Europe, and especially so for Central Europe. The entry of several Central European countries to the European Union meant the fulfilment of the foreign policy priorities they had defined at the beginning of the 1990s following the collapse of the communist regimes and the eastern bloc as a whole. The Visegrad countries, simply put, became a part of the West, that area of democracy, stability and economic prosperity. In doing so they fulfilled the dreams of several post-war generations of Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks.



Meeting of Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group countries with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Budapest, 11 December, 2005. From the left: Tony Blair, Ferenc Gyurcsány (Hungary), Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakia), Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (Poland), and Jiří Paroubek (Czech Republic).

Visegrad is integrally linked to the term Central Europe. While other institutions and initiatives were founded in this region after 1989 and bearing some variation of the label “Central Europe”, Visegrad was exceptional. While the Central European Initiative (CEI) now numbers 17 member countries, including Italy, Albania and Belarus, and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) has Romania and Bulgaria as active members, the number of states participating in Visegrad cooperation – apart from following the breakup of Czechoslovakia – has not changed. The Visegrad Group – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – actually forms a common base for CEI and CEFTA, along with other regional initiatives.

Although the course of Visegrad cooperation following its birth in 1991 has not always been free of problems, and for a certain period was even suspended, the achievement of the most important goals of the Visegrad countries, namely integration into NATO and the EU, was not merely a significant success for the individual member countries, but for Visegrad cooperation as a whole. The Visegrad Group demonstrated its viability as a relevant form of cooperation for

four Central European countries. The theory that Visegrad was “an artificial creation of the West” was proven to be mistaken. As a label, the Visegrad Four, and before that the Visegrad Three, was regarded in Washington and Brussels as a guarantee of stability and the successful pursuit of political, economic and social transformation in Central Europe. Today Visegrad is an example for other former Soviet-dominated countries as well as those countries marked by war in the West Balkans. Visegrad also managed to make its mark on the subconscious of the populations of Visegrad countries.

The year 2004 was not only a period in which the integration ambitions of the Visegrad countries reached a peak, but it was also, in metaphorical terms, a year of growing Visegrad scepticism. The reasons for this doubt lie in fears that Visegrad cooperation would become irrelevant with the entry of these countries to the EU and the completion of their main mission, as well as fears that Visegrad would disintegrate within the more heterogeneous environs of the EU – even though Poland was most frequently accused of being a potential Visegrad disruptor. Although fears of Visegrad’s disintegration were not borne out, both of these fears have to be taken into account, as we saw from the preferences of various countries for solitary approaches on issues affecting the whole group. The reluctance of Visegrad countries to proceed together was seen for example in their inability to coordinate the introduction of visas for Ukraine during the entry process to the European Union, or more recently, when at the outset of entry talks between Croatia and the EU, Visegrad was unable to jointly support Croatia. On the other hand, following the fulfilment of their basic aim of gaining entry to NATO and the EU, it is natural that the period of euphoria gives way to a certain period of searching and redefining priorities. For the future it is promising that the individual Visegrad countries worked together so constructively on preparing the financial outlook for the EU from 2007–2013.

Integration with NATO and the EU required that the Visegrad countries define new goals. It would be desirable for the term Central Europe to become a synonym for progressive ideas that could turn heads in Brussels and in some of the older member countries. In gaining entrance to the EU, the Czech Republic Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia gained an opportunity to directly form and influence the policy of the entire Union. In terms of foreign policy, there already exists an area in which the Visegrad countries have an advantage over their “older” Union partners: their unique experiences from the transformation process, and their knowledge of the neighboring regions of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans and their social, historical, economic and cultural ties from the past.

Both of these regions fall within the EU’s foreign policy priorities – Eastern Europe, or more precisely Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia fall within the EU’s neighborhood policy, while the countries of the West Balkans are a part of the Stabilization and Association Process that the EU started. The leaders of the Visegrad countries have already declared on many occasions the readiness to participate in the formation of neighborhood policy and pro-integration strategy towards Eastern Europe and the Balkans. By a joint approach and their activities in the above-mentioned areas, the Visegrad countries can show that the Central European form of cooperation makes sense even following EU enlargement. Above all, the Visegrad countries can achieve consensus far more easily and quickly on mutual foreign policy goals than they can on other EU policy areas, such as agriculture.

It remains to be seen whether the countries of Central Europe are able to create a form of closer cooperation within the EU as well. However, talk of forming a coherent Central European bloc within the EU is both unrealistic and counter-productive.

We cannot expect that the interests of Slovakia, with its population of 5 million, will always correspond to those of Poland, with its 38 million citizens. And even if the Visegrad countries were able to speak with one voice within European institutions, they would still need the support of other countries to push through key decisions. As a form of regional cooperation, Visegrad can function effectively within the EU only as long as it complements other cooperation platforms and processes for deepening European integration. At the same time it can serve as inspiration for other models of regional cooperation in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The



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unique geopolitical situation at the outset of the 1990s, when Visegrad was founded, together with the economic situation in individual countries, their cultural similarities and common past to a certain extent makes Visegrad a unique entity that cannot be reproduced in other conditions, but this is not true of select aspects of Visegrad cooperation. Apart from regular high-level political meetings, the deepening of mutual contacts at the regional level and support for cultural, especially educational projects, are all worthy of emulation. Much can also be learned from the mistakes of Visegrad, especially the period when developments in the Visegrad Group came into conflict with undesirable domestic political developments in individual countries.

The countries of the West Balkans, thanks to their more clear prospects of EU membership, are closer to the Visegrad model than the states of Eastern Europe. In view of the proliferation of regional initiatives, however, the thought of founding a new form of regional cooperation as a type of “Balkan Visegrad” seems undesirable. A more practical solution would be for the most viable of the existing regional initiatives to import know-how and experiences from Visegrad through meetings or working groups. In doing so they would not only help themselves, but they would also allow the Visegrad model to be tested out.

A common approach by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia in the creation of the EU’s eastward foreign policy, and any aid they gave to the integration ambitions of the Western Balkans, could give Visegrad cooperation another lease on life. It would also bring Visegrad from the fringes of the Union into the center of affairs, and definitively end the role of Central Europe as a “buffer zone” between East and West. The Visegrad Four in this way could be about to embark on an interesting and productive period within the EU, whether in coordination with other regional groups or in the “Visegrad plus” format, which would benefit not only developments in Central Europe, but also the Union as a whole and the countries on its borders.

Don't forget the Visegrad Group

Bronisław Geremek

Bronisław Geremek

Historian, essayist and politician. Solidarity activist and advisor. Member of the Polish parliament and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1997–2000). Since 2004 member of the European Parliament. Holds the Chair of European Civilisation at the College of Europe in Natolin.



We should not forget about the Visegrad Group, which – although it has recently performed its role rather poorly – still ought to be taken advantage of. In the European Union we will inevitably form alliances to deal with specific issues, including strategic ones. I believe that the concept of “Central Europe” is not only a sign of nostalgia for a certain type of café, for similar cultural traditions, but that it is also a political instrument. If only was it possible to recreate the atmosphere of the first meeting in Bratislava, in 1990, which preceded the establishment of the Visegrad Group, and expand the formula to include Austria!

I believe it is very important for the foreign policy of the European Union that Poland’s role should consist of creating its Eastern policy. To be honest, from the point of view of Polish honour, this would mean fulfilling its own obligations as well as the expectations of the countries whose fates we share, but most of all it is a political necessity. I think that the Visegrad Group would be revived if Ukraine joined it. It would have great significance for the way the European Union regards this country, and its Eastern policy in general.

Excerpt from a speech at the Batory Foundation

CAN VISEGRAD BE SHAKEN OUT OF ITS RUT?

Péter Tálás

There are probably many in the field of security and defense policy who look back on the last decade and a half of the Visegrad Group with disappointment and a certain bitterness. For, despite the common strategic goals and similar security policy circumstances of the Visegrad member countries, this cooperation did not develop as the enthusiasm of the first years suggested it might. Paradoxically, our countries, which from 1990 to 1993 were able so successfully to stand together in the interests of disbanding the remnants of the East Bloc, were



Meeting of Visegrad Group Ministers of Defense, Warsaw, January 2002. From the left: Juraj Liška (Slovakia), Ferenc Juhász (Hungary), Jerzy Szmajdziński (Poland), and Karel Kühnl (Czech Republic).

subsequently unable to work together as fruitfully, despite many attempts. On the road to NATO and EU membership we resembled more rivals than partners sharing the same fate and fighting for the same cause.

With the benefit of more than a decade's hindsight, of course, the fundamental reasons why the Visegrad cooperation withered after 1992–93 are far more evident, and not only in the field of security and defense policy.

On the one hand, I consider the most crucial of these factors to be the "re-nationalization" of East-Central European foreign and security policy (which even affected Poland and Hungary, not to mention the successor states to Czechoslovakia, which unravelled at the end of 1992), as a result of which the political elites in the region each assigned a very different role to security and defense policy. (By re-nationalization I mean the tendency of these countries, after decades of foreign domination, to reassert their sovereignty in various areas.) Suffice it to mention that while Poland, for example, with its particular enthusiasm in this area, strove and strives to increase its weight and influence in Europe's power hierarchy, and to compensate its relative weaknesses on other matters necessary for this, processes in the defense area over the last decade and a half have turned Hungary into a country that is always at the bottom of the list in terms of military power.

On the other hand, we have to recognize that the concept of East-Central European regionalism has never enjoyed universal success in the West. This despite the fact that a large part of the programs promoted by Western governments and international organizations targeted the East-Central European region as a single entity. Unfortunately, however, this



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approach generally worked in one direction only. Throughout the 1990s, the approach of the West to our region could best be described as “regional cooperation: yes, regionalism (i. e. the expression of interests at a regional level): no”. In practice, and in most fields, this acted as an obstacle to cooperation within the region.

The question, of course, is whether, now that we have reached our strategic goals as members of NATO and the EU, we will be capable of shaking cooperation between the V4 states out of the rut it has been in over the last decade. Looking at things realistically, we cannot, at least in the short term, be too optimistic in this regard. Though with accession our opportunities appear to have increased, so has the number of players in the common arena. Add to this the fact that there are stark contrasts in our sizes, ambitions and capacity to contribute, not to mention the differences in our approaches to trans-Atlantic questions. What is more, heightened coordination in the field of security and defense policy should in principle presuppose that the V4 countries are vying for a role within the European Union that is already taken (“vanguard”, “sentry”), and which can or should, at most, be joined.

Everything goes to show that our cooperation with each other in future can at most be *ad hoc* (and even this would be a huge step forward compared to the previous period), until the day that a common strategic culture evolves within the European Union that might make security and defense policy cooperation between member countries at least more natural and in every sense more structured than it is today.

If there were one thing that is really worth us thinking about together – renewing the cooperation of Visegrad, if you like – then it is that our lasting regional particularities in the field of security and defense policy (with regard to circumstances, objectives and approach) could become one of the central components of a common strategic culture. For no one else will take this on if we don't.

VISEGRAD AS VIEWED BY CITIZENS OF THE FOUR MEMBER COUNTRIES

Ol'ga Gyárfášová

Visegrad cooperation has a clear political and diplomatic dimension, but it is lived and created by ordinary people – neighbors and regional partners who are linked by their shared history. For better and for worse.

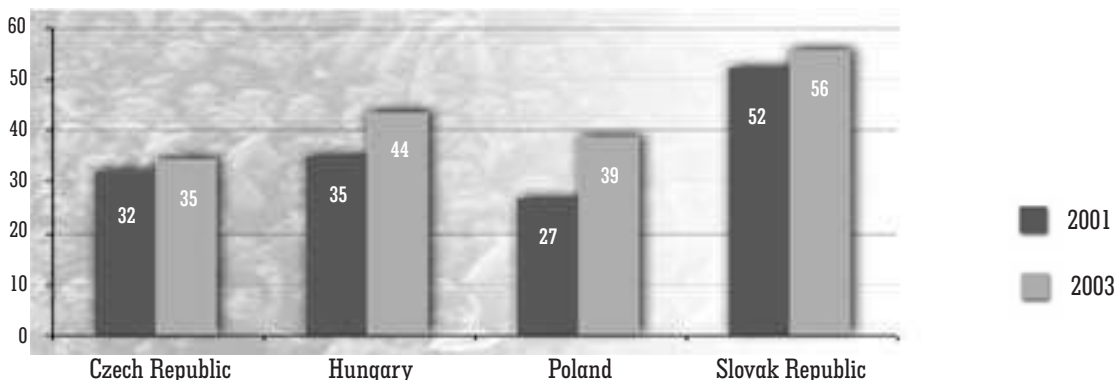
The main goal of the research project called "Visegrad Cooperation – How it is Viewed by the Citizens of the Four Countries" – was to discover what the citizens of the individual countries think of Visegrad. Do they even know what it is? Where do they see their common interests as lying? What approach do they prefer in European integration? How do they regard each other? Who is closest to whom, and where is the "mental gulf" the greatest? These questions and others were answered by a sociological survey that, thanks to the support of the International Visegrad Fund, was done in 2001 and again in 2003. Both surveys were coordinated by the Institute for Public Affairs in Bratislava.

The following is a summary of the main findings of both surveys 1. Since they were carried out, the Visegrad members have become members of the European Union and are facing new challenges. However the framework of cooperation built by the Presidents of the then three states in February 1991, however, remains with us.

Visegrad visibility – do people know what it's all about?

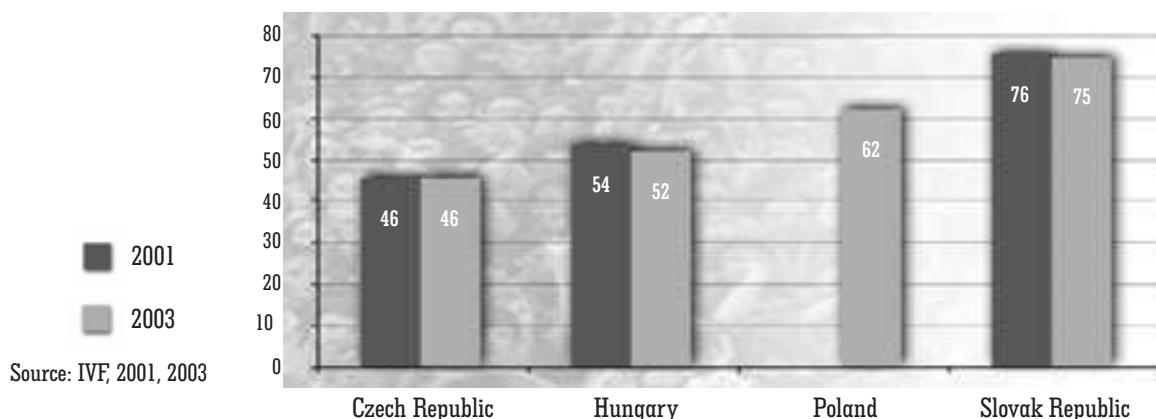
People's opinions on foreign policy issues more than anywhere else tend to reflect the opinions of politicians and the opinion-shaping elite. For this reason it is not surprising that we find the greatest awareness of what Visegrad cooperation means in Slovakia. In 2003, some 56% of respondents said they were familiar with the term and knew what it meant; this compares to 44% of Hungarians, 39% of Poles and 35% of Czechs (see Graph 1). These findings reflect the great interest of Slovak politicians in close relations within Visegrad. After 1998, regional cooperation became part of their strategy of making up integration deficits, and Slovakia became the motor of the revitalization of these platforms. Slovak politicians frequently stated that Slovakia's road to Brussels led through Visegrad. This undoubtedly affected the visibility and importance of cooperation in the eyes of the Slovak public. In the 2003 survey some very positive changes were visible compared to the 2001 survey mainly in Poland and Hungary, where the ratio of informed citizens rose by 12 and 9 percentage points respectively (see Graph 1). This growth was likely related to those countries' approaching membership in the European Union. Their citizens were more frequently exposed to debates on how to proceed, and a common interest existed connecting all four countries.

I have heard of the Visegrad Group and I know what it is (%) Graph 1



Does Visegrad cooperation have any value? This question is often asked by opinion writers, and often the answer is negative. That's understandable. Top level meetings that are full of formal expressions of mutual understanding cannot hide the fact that when the cards are down, and concrete interests or sensitive disputes are at stake, diplomatic mutuality goes out the window and a tough rivalry takes over. Most of the inhabitants of the member countries, however, answer positively when asked if Visegrad has any meaning. The strength of this agreement varies widely, however (see Graph 2). Again it was Slovakia that in both surveys exhibited the greatest share of positive responses (over 70%). The greatest contrasts are visible between Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which formed the two poles in the range of opinions. Czech society in the mid-1990s enjoyed the image of "integration poster child". Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus on more than one occasion referred to Visegrad cooperation as an outmoded concept. The dismissive approach of the political elite trickled down to the views of the public. Nor was the situation much better in Hungary, where, in its long pre-entry marathon, Hungary portrayed itself as a "tough solo player" who bet everything on its economic performance. Overall we can say that each country showed majority support for cooperation (or, in the case of the Czech Republic, almost majority), but with significant differences. The strongest support was seen in Slovakia and Poland, while a large part of the population of the Czech Republic and Hungary took a reserved view.

Is cooperation among the Visegrad Group countries still important, and does it have a role to play? (% answering "yes") Graph 2



Source: IVF, 2001, 2003

Citizens of Visegrad member countries felt that the group should work together more closely above all in the economic area. While in 2001 common interests included also coordinating each country's entrance to the EU, in 2003 – that is, one year before entry – the economic content of this coordination had the upper hand.

Mutual perceptions and alliances of trust

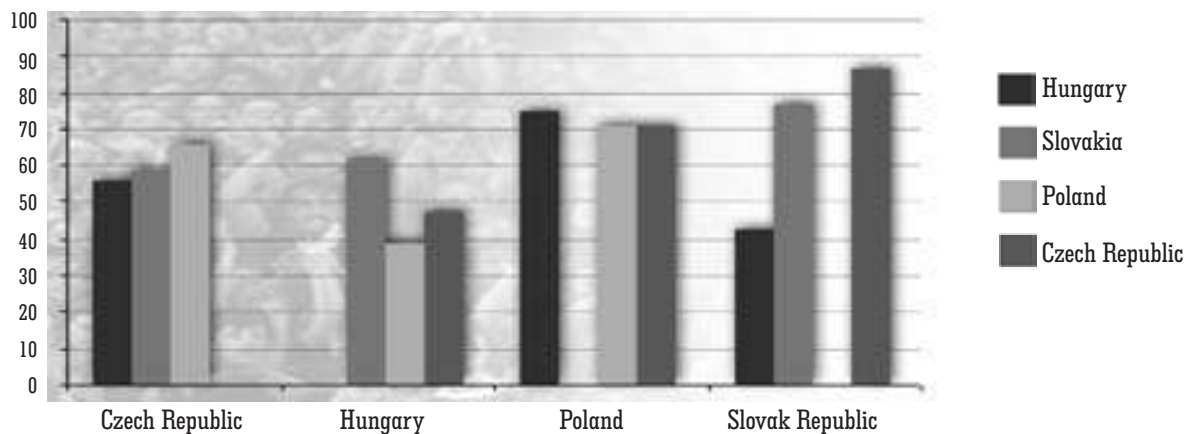
The nations of Central Europe carry an enormous load in their historical memories from their common past. They create images of their neighbors from both recent and ancient history, in which everyone owes something to the others, and everyone at some point wronged the others. On the other hand, these nations are also connected by a certain similarity in their historical "fate". The images these countries have of each other do not always correspond with reality, and often rest on clichés, stereotypes or prejudices. In our research, as the simplest measure of how these nations view each other, we used the yardstick of trust. To what extent do the individual nations trust each other?

If we were to construct a "sociogram of trust" for the Visegrad nations, it would look as follows:

- the strongest bond of trust is between the Czechs and Slovaks, and this goes both ways;
- the least trust is between the Slovaks and Hungarians, and again this is mutual;
- the Poles trust the Hungarians most, and vice versa. It appears that the absence of fields of conflict, whether historical or current, has a positive impact on how nations view each other.

This “sociogram of trust” (see Graph 3) is the result of centuries of mutual relations and stereotypes, and informs an image of “us and them” that is part of the national identity of each nation. In terms of the Slovaks, relations with Hungary have long been reserved. On the other hand, as many surveys have confirmed, the good news is that relations between the Czechs and Slovaks are very warm, and are dominated by feelings of trust, openness and mutual closeness. The attitudes of the public of both nations show no trauma from their 1993 “divorce”, nor any tendency to blame each other for anything. Poland is a problem-free partner for Slovakia, although bilateral relations between the two countries have definitely not reached their potential. Despite the great dynamism of the past two or three years, we still see what historians used to call “two neighbors with their backs to one another”; relations between the two lack not only negative feelings but also positive ones.

How much do you trust the nations living in the Visegrad Four member countries? (% of respondents answering definitely + somewhat trust) Graph 3



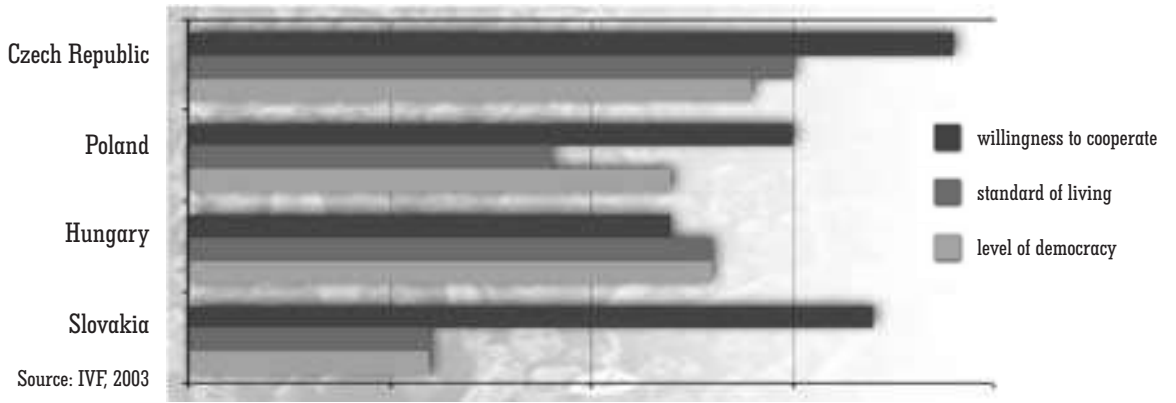
Who wants to cooperate the most? We do!

The survey respondents were also asked to evaluate their own willingness and that of other countries to work together within the V4 framework. The results pointed to an interesting phenomenon – the inhabitants of all countries regarded themselves and their country as the most willing to cooperate with the others. In concrete terms, 34% of Czechs awarded the greatest degree of willingness to the Czech Republic, while the other three countries scored about 20% each from the Czech respondents. Meanwhile, 22% of Hungarians gave highest marks to Hungary, while 19% went to Poland, and 9% and 7% respectively to the Czech and Slovak Republics. Polish respondents saw things the same way: 42% put their own country in first place, while the other three states scored from 14% to 18%. Almost half of Slovak respondents favoured their own country, while about a quarter chose Poland and the Czech Republic, and 22% chose Hungary (see Graphs 4 to 7).

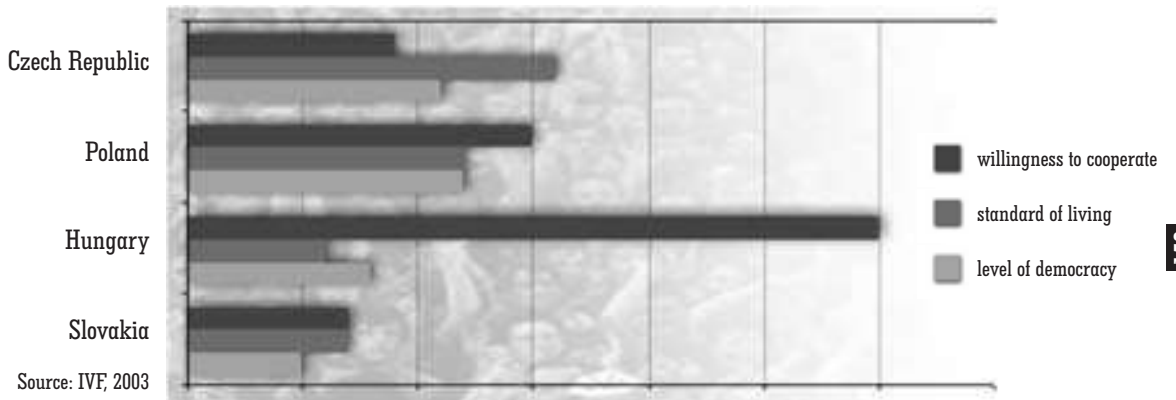
While most citizens tend to believe their own country is the most willing to cooperate, in terms of average standard of living and the level of democracy, Slovaks tend to believe that their neighbors and especially those living to the West have better lives.

Evaluate the individual countries of the V4 in the following areas: willingness to cooperate with the other countries of the V4, standard of living, and the level of democracy the country has reached (% of respondents answering “high” on a three-point scale) Graph 4–7 →

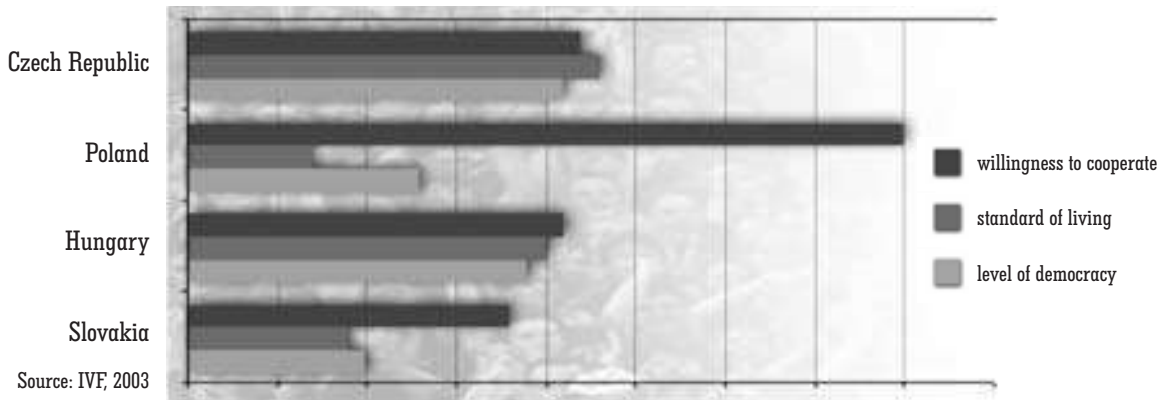
Evaluate of the V4 countries – views of Czech citizens (respondents answering "high" on a three-point scale in %)



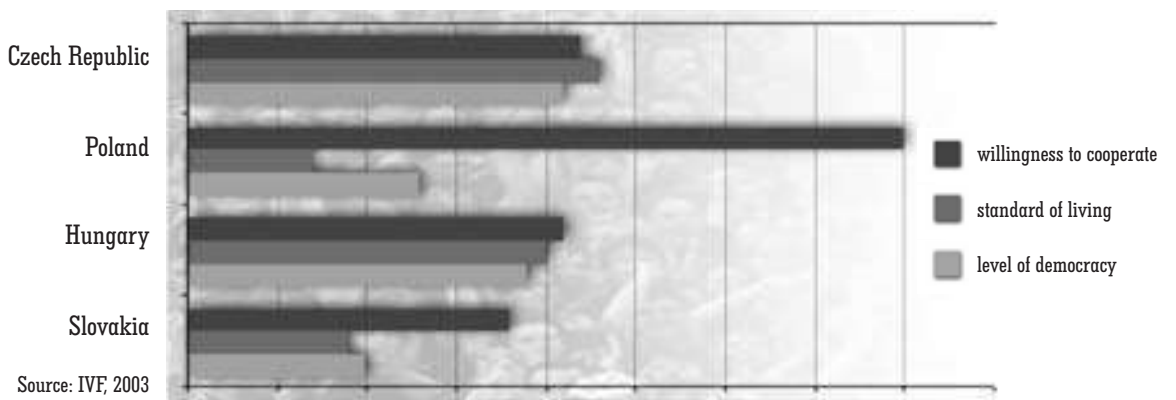
Evaluate of the V4 countries – views of Hungarian citizens (respondents answering "high" on a three-point scale in %)



Evaluate of the V4 countries – views of Polish citizens (respondents answering "high" on a three-point scale in %)



Evaluate of the V4 countries – views of Slovak citizens (respondents answering "high" on a three-point scale in %)



Within the European Union together, or everyone for himself?

The Visegrad members along with another six countries entered the European Union on 1, May 2004. During the years that preceded this event, the question of whether the entry process should be coordinated or whether every country should proceed on its own steam had been extensively debated. Findings from this period have more than just an historical interest; they also reflect the state of the publics and the political elites, which may continue to work together following their entry to the EU. In the 2003 survey, the Poles were most in favor of close Visegrad cooperation within the EU, followed by the Slovaks, while the Czechs and above all the Hungarians preferred to go solo (Table 1).

Table 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 %)

	Czechs	Hungarians	Poles	Slovaks
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 don't know	24	19	8	8

On the other hand, the majority of the citizens of the four member states shared the opinion that following EU entry they would become "second-class citizens". The feeling that some members of the enlarged EU club were more equal than others was undoubtedly strengthened by certain results of entry talks, and various "transitional periods" for the new members to gain full EU rights, such as in the free movement of people. This feeling did not have a major negative impact on support for EU entry, but formed more of a perception of how things worked in the EU. If we compare the results of the 2003 survey with 2001, it is clear that the feeling of being "poor relations" remains a majority one in all four countries, although it has fallen the most in Poland, where the public is increasingly coming to understand the country's "weight" as a European player.

What's ahead?

The individual members of the Visegrad Group face very different problems. Their internal and external political situations, despite many similarities, still have too many dissimilarities to allow them to take a united view of mutual cooperation. At the time of our survey, the Slovaks had the greatest expectations of Visegrad cooperation, as they regarded regional cooperation as a means of catching up with the other three in integration. Pro-cooperation views ruled in the other countries as well, albeit with less enthusiasm. To be sure, much depends on whether and to what extent people identify with regional interests, and to what extent politicians and other elites are able to communicate these interests to their citizens. Cooperation will also be helped by examples of what it means in practice. If it can be shown that people are materially better off from a coordinated rather than an individual approach, that will be a strong argument supporting the continuation of Visegrad also under the new conditions in the EU. The V4 is a strong player and can be a persuasive advocate of regional interests. True cooperation needs more than a formal framework, however: It must have concrete contents as well. Among the priorities of the V4 in the years ahead are financing for the future, their entry to the Schengen zone, and, in the longer term, to the EMU. The extent and content of Visegrad cooperation will be determined above all by the political elites. But whatever happens, the countries of the V4 will not cease to be neighbors and close regional allies, and relations between them will continue to be created and lived not only by politicians, but also by ordinary people.

¹ The research on representative samples of the adult population according to a single questionnaire was carried out in all four countries in November and December 2001 and May and June 2003. The final results of the project can be found in the publication *Visegrad Citizens on the Doorstep of the European Union* (Gyárfašová, O., ed.), Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava 2003. The book is available in pdf format at www.ivo.sk.

A QUICK GLIMPSE OF V4 YOUTH INITIATIVES

René Kubášek

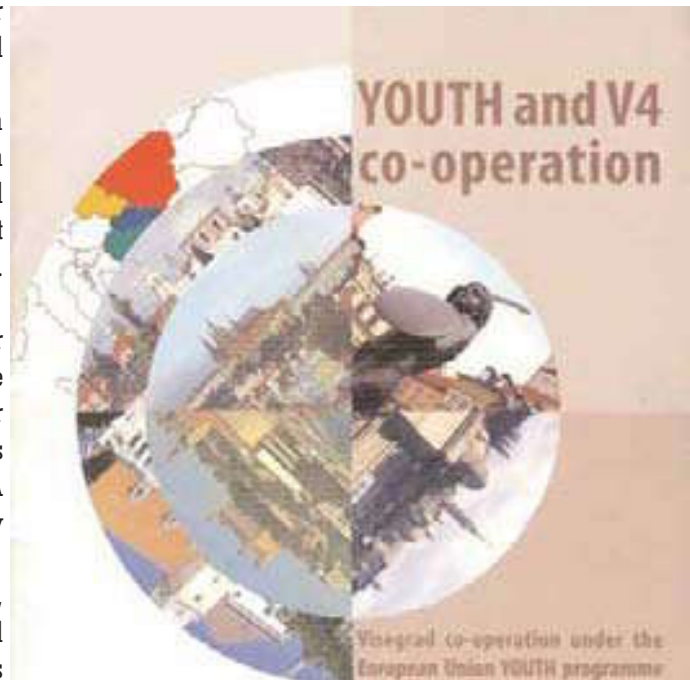
Every year, several hundred Visegrad-oriented projects run by young NGOs take place in all parts of the region in the fields of culture, education, sports, research – basically, any field you could imagine under the “civil sector” label.

Apart from these grassroots projects, a number of youth organizations, associations and clubs have been working successfully on a permanent basis. Some are co-financed by grants from the International Visegrad Fund, while others run more or less independently. In any case, many seem to be flourishing and extending their activities.

The existence of all these civil organizations and youth associations is a very positive sign for the Visegrad Cooperation. In a way it proves that Visegrad is connected not only by its historical traditions and events, but also by a certain cultural closeness that makes young people from our four countries want to work together. Let me mention a few examples:

The Visegrad Youth Association (VYA), which brings together youth organizations and individuals from V4 countries, is active mainly in the non-governmental sector. It organizes trainings for NGO representatives, regular meetings and conferences to allow its members to exchange their experiences of NGO activities. The VYA also publishes the Visegrad Yearbook, which contains yearly reviews of economic, political and social life in V4 countries.

Another long-lasting initiative is the Visegrad Summer School, an alternative learning space for young people from Central Europe. Every year since 2002, the Visegrad Summer School has brought together students, graduates, PhD researchers, young journalists and teachers with leading experts dealing with contemporary social, security, economic, political and cultural issues. A unique atmosphere is created in the Villa Decius in Kraków during two weeks in July.



Aliante project – a road from Central Europe to California

In 2001, a unique project came into existence in the Czech Republic – the Aliante contest. It is focused on high school students and its main idea is promotion of NATO and interest in security issues. Every year more European countries join the project, and in 2007 American students will take part for the first time, which will give the project transatlantic dimension.

The project's strategy is simple – to raise interest in security issues among the students and offer them a possibility to win a holiday excursion that one can not buy in any travel agency in the world.

Every year there are several hundred contestants. The best of them must prove deep knowledge of political science, history, geography, but also an ability to cooperate internationally in difficult psychological and physical conditions.

Aliante is simply a unique combination of knowledge and adventure.

Brief history of Aliante:

- 320 teams accredit for the first year of Aliante contest, which takes place in the Czech Republic in 2001. The winners then visit, among other places, a submarine base of the Polish navy in Gdynia and NATO headquarters in Brussels.
- In 2002, Slovakia joins the contest by launching Aliante SK
- Since 2002 the finals have been taking place always in a different country: in 2003 in Prostějov (Czech Republic), in 2004 in Wrocław (Poland), and in 2005 in Žilina (Slovakia).
- In 2004 and 2005, special editions of the project are held also in Ukraine, thus being the first NATO presentation ever taking place on the Ukrainian territory
- The 2006 finals take place with support of a NATO founding member – the Netherlands – at the Royal Navy base Den Helder. Already 9 countries have joined the contest – Czech Republic,



René Kubáček

Political scientist. Deputy executive director and Czech representative at the International Visegrad Fund. Collaborator with several non-governmental organizations.

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, or Jagello 2000, which holds student debates on defense and security issues following the membership of the V4 countries in NATO. The European Union's YOUTH programme publishes a Visegrad handbook, while young V4 scientists from AMAVET meet regularly in one of the Visegrad countries.

Nowadays you can also find many Visegrad-oriented endeavors on-line. You can visit the server www.visegrad.info run by the Prague-based Association for International Affairs in cooperation with their colleagues from other V4 countries, or you can check cultural programmes on www.ahice.net, which is put together by classical art lovers from the V4, or even join the mailing list of the Visegrad Fund.

There are many areas where cooperation among the V4 countries is very useful. The development of civil society, even 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is definitely one of them. The building of civil society is also a key concept in the statutes of the International Visegrad Fund, and it is nice to witness more and more people working together to fulfill this aim.

Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

- An interest in organizing Aliante 2007 was expressed on by the USA by U.S. Tactical from San Diego, California.
- 9.000 students have participated in the Aliante contest throughout the last five years.

Detailed information can be found at www.project-aliante.org



Winners of the Aliante competition at a former Soviet Navy base in Ukraine, 2005.

CEU GRADUATES EQUIPPED WITH LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Yehuda Elkana

When it was founded in 1991, the mission of the Central European University was to promote the values of democracy and open society in the previously communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which were all in “transition”; to study what followed from this; and to advocate the implementation of what followed. This applied to economics (switching from centrally planned economies); law (teaching business law, unknown under the Soviet system); political science, sociology, and international relations (developing multi-party democracies, getting rid of the *nomenclatura*, distancing society from Soviet-style stratification); nationalism studies (developing a non-sectarian approach to nationalism, which erupted after having been “controlled” for decades by the communist regimes); gender studies (promoting a type of studies completely absent in the region, focusing on the significance of gender categories in different economic, social, or political settings), and even history and medieval studies (studying the common heritage of the region, and formulating policy recommendations for dealing with this heritage at different levels). The departmental structure of the CEU, as it was established then, reflected this general mission, and the need to facilitate such changes.

Much of this has been accomplished in the meantime, while at the same time the institutional structures of Central Europe also changed. When the CEU started, the universities in the region were in a shambles: Under the communist regime much of the research had been concentrated at academies of sciences and not at universities, despite the universities’ brave attempts to do research in the face of political interference in both appointments and curriculum. In addition, their curricula in the humanities and in the very few social sciences they taught were heavily freighted with indoctrination. The CEU came to life as a window to the West in those difficult first years. More than a decade later, many of the universities in Hungary and neighboring countries function as proper universities, integrating research and teaching, and their faculties are full of gifted young people who received their degrees from excellent Western universities. This means that the CEU, respectfully and in a genuine spirit of collaboration, must now seek joint teaching schemes and shared programs with these high-quality universities in the neighboring countries – certainly in the countries that have joined, or are on the way to joining, the European Union.

Today the CEU is focused on interdisciplinary research and the study of social change and the policy implications of transition for open societies. In addition, emphasis is placed on European Union affairs, as well as on the special features of non-Western democracies.

Through their international experience at the CEU, and exposure to a multitude of different – and sometimes opposing – points of view, students at this university develop a deep understanding of the intellectual and practical challenges arising along the shifting boundary between the local and the universal. They leave the CEU with knowledge and skills that enable them to pursue careers in academia, government and the non-governmental sector, international organizations and research institutes, missions of the United Nations, as well as business at the national and the international levels.

CEU graduates reside in more than 80 countries, across all continents. Among them are ministers and ambassadors, professors and scientists, research analysts, lawyers and human rights activists, CEOs and managers. They share a common interest in critical reflection and social engagement, and contribute to the university’s mission to serve pressing and challenging social needs.

Located in the very heart of the Visegrad region, the CEU serves as a valuable center of international academic discourse and interchange, thus adding to the region’s reputation as a noteworthy center of academic achievement.

Yehuda Elkana

Professor of the philosophy of science. Since 1999 president and rector of the Central European University in Budapest. In 2001 elected to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.



CEU - THREE LETTERS PROMPTING GOOD MEMORIES AND FIRM FAITH

Josef Jařab

On 17 March, 1997 I stood before a large and distinguished international gathering in the beautifully modernized Budapest classicist palace, the site of the Central European University, to deliver my inaugural address as new rector and president of this educational institution. Remembering the words of one of my favorite writers, Carl Sandburg – “Beware how you use proud words, for once you let proud words go, it is not easy to call them back” – I cautiously, yet with conviction, described what I thought the university should pursue in the years to come. I understood that my plans ought to conform with the intentions of the Board of Trustees and



Visegrad Academic Summer School, Villa Decius, Kraków (Poland), June 2004.

the nascent academic community of teachers and students, namely that the young school should try to inform and open people’s freshly liberated minds, and to teach them how to think critically. In a word, to cultivate what the founder, George Soros, called “the reflexive connection between thinking and reality”. I believed that the new institution should do all of this while studying the human history of the region whose name it bore.

I was convinced that studying Central Europe’s rich and dramatic history would not only help us to understand ourselves, but could also serve as a useful case-study of the human condition as well as a research resource for academics from Central Europe and elsewhere. In its pursuit of these objectives, among others, the CEU has certainly been successful in its short history, and has become an important regional and international place of learning.

For someone like me with a background in American studies, solidifying the trans-Atlantic ties of the university was a natural and attractive mission, and I trust that the role of the CEU in this respect has grown during recent years, after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the ensuing war on terrorism, including the attack on Iraq, which marked an unfortunate cooling in relations between the US and Europe. Not only was our new and innovative graduate school – first located in Prague and then in Budapest and Warsaw – registered in the state of New York, but in 1998 we also decided to seek full recognition for our study programs with the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in America – a demanding process that reached fruition only last year. In a friendly gesture, my successor at the CEU, Yehuda Elkana, invited me to attend the announcement of this historical achievement. It was nice to be back at this flourishing institution, now formally recognized both in America and in Europe, where it had become a member of the Association of European Universities in 1998. Sadly, various factions within the region, most of them nationalist or extremist in orientation, displayed hostility towards this generous educational and research center.

At present, however, it is clear that the CEU is here in Central Europe to stay. Its founder endowed it with resources that guarantee its material independence, while the school has become not merely institutionalized but also accepted by the global educational and academic community. I keep meeting CEU graduates around the world, many of whom greet me as “our rector” proudly and with a smile. Many have gone on to study at the best American and

European universities, while others work for national and international bodies, including governments, parliaments, foreign services, and institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg or Vienna. Still others are involved in non-governmental organizations, while some have been successful in the world of economics, finance and business.

I am convinced that we did well to open the Alumni Office during my term at the university – the data and reports on the subsequent careers of our former students are the best evidence of the institution's growing relevance. It is clear that the many thousands of CEU graduates are making a difference in the region and around the world. Besides being well educated, their minds are, more often than not, tempered with openness and tolerance. Respect for human rights and dedication to the ideals of freedom, democracy and the rule of law are further qualities that can be expected from those who leave the university. The CEU certainly has the potential to be a force in shaping and reshaping the world, and in helping to develop a reality and a state of mind that Sir Karl Popper called "open society." As a former administrator of the university in Budapest and, until last year, a member of the board of the Open Society Foundation in Prague, I believe that the CEU should also be seen as one of the sources of the activist network from which the whole region has for years so clearly benefited.

At the end of my three-year term in Budapest, it was a pleasure to take part in the university ceremony awarding the Open Society Prize to Václav Havel. The Czech President was the second recipient of the award after Sir Karl Popper, the originator of the concept and the coiner of the phrase "open society". Havel, in turn, proved a persuasive advocate and an effective practitioner of the idea as a citizen of his country and the world, as an artist, and as a politician. In the years before 1989, the Soros foundation was one of the vital sources of subsistence for the dissident movements in the region, so it was hardly surprising that Havel, along with Bronisław Geremek and Árpád Göncz, figured among the early supporters of the project to open a university that would help, especially in social sciences, to overcome the heritage of communist totalitarianism. Neither was it a surprise that Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar were such strong opponents of Soros and his activities.

I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to lead, during the period of transition and reforms, first a state university (in Olomouc for seven years after 1989), and then a developing private university in Budapest and Warsaw. I found both experiences demanding and rewarding, and I believe they were also somewhat complementary. If asked which of the two was more interesting, I would have to say that I would not have missed either. It is only natural as a Czech that I regret that the Central European University, launched so boldly in Prague, did not remain in our country. But it is still open and available to Czech students, whom I would like to see apply in larger numbers, because to study at the CEU is to study and prepare for an open, and therefore promising, future.

CEU – The intellectual hub of Central Europe

Central European University (CEU), based in Budapest, came into being along with the sweeping social, political and economic changes of the early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The university was established in 1991 by a group of visionary intellectuals (many of them prominent members of anti-totalitarian, democratic oppositions) led by the philanthropist George Soros.

Beginning with 100 students in its first year in Prague (1991), the CEU has grown rapidly. Enrollment now stands at over 1,000 students drawn from almost 70 countries, the majority from Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, but also from Western Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. Its faculty members come from more than 30 countries, with the mix of nationalities increasing every year.

When the CEU was founded in 1991, it immediately became a regional phenomenon as it was the first to provide Western-style graduate education in Central and Eastern Europe. As of 2005, the number of CEU graduates has grown to more than 5,300 and the university continues to be one of key intellectual centers of the region.



Josef Jařab

Rector (1989–1997) and professor of English and American literature at Palacky University. Rector of Central European University in Budapest and Warsaw (1997–1999). Senator, Chair of the committee on Foreign Affairs, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

THE TURN OF THE REGIONS, OR NEW LIFE FOR THE VISEGRAD GROUP

Janusz Sepioł

Some believe that the original goals of the Visegrad Group have been achieved. A free trade zone came to life, while efforts to enter NATO and the EU were successfully coordinated, leaving only the Schengen Agreement and the common European currency. One might congratulate Visegrad for its effectiveness, were it not for the fact that Visegrad solidarity was so easily split during entry negotiations, or that its targets were not always the same. So has the Visegrad Group really become a closed chapter? Let's not rush to make such judgements.

The Visegrad Group, although still an economic dwarf, is comparable in terms of population with the United Kingdom or Italy, and politically has greater power than commonly believed. To see the political potential of the Group, it is enough to look at the number of votes it wields in the European Council (according to the system arranged at Nice), or at the number of MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) or deputies in the Committee of Regions that Visegrad as a whole controls.

While it is true that the MEPs are organized according to political criteria (the parties they represent) rather than national criteria, some coordination is nevertheless permitted. One only has to look at the successes of the Scandinavian group, whose potential is, after all, much smaller.

It is important to remember that the Visegrad countries, in addition to the tiny Baltic republics, will be the greatest beneficiaries of the EU's cohesion policy, certainly for the next 7 years and probably for the next 14, thus making Visegrad the largest concentrated target of the Union's regional policy. It is an undertaking on a greater scale than that which helped put both Spain and Portugal back on their feet, not just in terms of territory and population, but also given the greater economic challenges involved.

However, the problems facing the Visegrad countries are not limited to managing the challenges of general European convergence. They also have immense tasks of their own to accomplish. A process of regional reform has recently taken place in all the countries of the Group. It began in Poland in 1998, followed by Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. It took a more original shape in Hungary, where the system of traditional medieval districts was maintained.

The rise of these new political entities – self-governing regions – has given a new impulse to the Visegrad Cooperation. These new regions have the power to work together internationally and conduct independent cultural policy, while at the same time they must deal with the remnants of past economic structures, compete for their place within Europe, and handle being the main beneficiaries of Europe's regional policy. The upshot of all this is that besides cooperation between the countries of Visegrad, there is space for autonomous cooperation between the Group's regions.

This cooperation might involve an exchange of experience from the process of regional reform. Each country employs different economic and social solutions. There is plenty to compare and plenty to learn.

Secondly, this cooperation between regions can enliven culture, promote the exchange of young people and scholarship holders, and boost tourism. Of course, the priority is still regions lying on mutual borders, but new financing possibilities for 2007 to 2013 hold out possibilities unknown until now for all Visegrad regions.

Finally, the Visegrad regions could influence the direction of the EU's cohesion policy, as well as how to use EU funds. So far, transport infrastructure in Visegrad is dominated by East-West links or links between capital cities and the surrounding provinces, while there are few strategic connections running North-South. There is, for example, no freeway or fast train project to cross the Carpathian or Sudeten mountains.

To facilitate cooperation between the Visegrad regions, a dialogue was undertaken in the "Forum of the Visegrad Group Regions". The first meeting took place in Kraków and attracted representatives from 30 Visegrad regions (there are 54 altogether). Successes included the adoption of the final declaration and the decision to schedule the year's meeting in Bratislava. The Bratislava Forum was enriched by a cultural festival staged by the regions of Visegrad countries. The second Bratislava Forum attracted more participants, including observers from Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. Brno offered to organize the third meeting, while the final resolution took into account the European budget, and appealed for an increase in financing for the Visegrad Fund. A valuable initiative was undertaken to create a "Visegrad Observatory" on behalf of a group of universities that would conduct coordinated comparative studies of the participating regions. The first meeting of these universities took place at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in late 2005.

Regional agreements, such as those regarding the Alps, the seaside and the peripheral regions, did a lot for their members. Cooperation between the youth of the new regions of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia can help them form their own structures, build their own development strategies, win their own friends in Europe, talk with their own governments, and jointly influence European institutions. The field for activity is so vast that regional cooperation may prove to be a second life for the Visegrad Cooperation.



Janusz Sepiot

Polish architect. Since 2002 Marshal of the Malopolska Region. Director of the department of physical planning at the State Office for Housing and Urban Development (1997–1998).

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES IN THE PROMOTION OF TOURISM

Gábor Galla

The “European Quartet – One Melody” is the brand that unites the National Tourist Offices of the Visegrad Countries. The Czech National Tourism Authority, the Hungarian National Tourist Office, the Polish Tourism Organization, and the Slovak Tourist Board are cooperating in tourism promotion on long-haul markets under this umbrella. The idea, initiated by the Prime Ministers at the end of 2002, is one of the success stories in the 15-year-history of the Visegrad Cooperation.



The beginning

In February 2003, the deputy ministers of tourism and the general directors of the tourism organizations met in Budapest to discuss the possibility of cooperation on promoting the four countries in some of the major long-haul markets. The meeting, held in the Hungarian parliament, illustrated unprecedented levels of willingness to act jointly to strengthen the tourism position of the Central European region. Both politicians and marketing people agreed that promoting the four countries together in certain markets created value for potential tourists and therefore could be a factor in increased tourism to this region.

After the protocol was signed, the tourist offices began to turn the political pronouncements into actions. Meetings held regularly in the member countries quickly outlined the scope of activities, the target markets, the featured products, and the way the work was to be organized and distributed.

Whereas the four countries compete with each other within Europe, on long-haul markets these countries are seen more as a single unit. The travel habits of Americans and Japanese tourists illustrate that the Central European countries are highly appealing for tourists as a single package. 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 the 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.

This made it clear that the selection of source markets should start with the US and Japan. However, to make the cooperation broader, additional countries were selected as grounds for common activities: Poland suggested Brazil as a market with great potential, and naturally the ever growing Chinese market was selected by all four members.

The travel patterns of long-haul visitors feature historic cities and towns as the main attraction. The historical background of the four countries and their cultural similarities made it evident that marketing activities should be based on tradition, culture and history. Our



architecture, gastronomy and folklore are also unique differentiating factors. Therefore, the selection of historic towns, UNESCO world heritage sites and Jewish heritage seemed the most logical choice for the quartet.

Besides history and culture, natural resources play an important role in all four countries. While Poland and Slovakia feature the High Tatras, the Czechs are proud of Český Krumlov and Hungary praises Europe's biggest fresh-water lake, Balaton; thermal water is found in all countries. This is a resource that has become woven into our cultures, as we have lived with it since Roman times. Spas were selected as the fourth product in the cooperation.

Once we decided what we want to sell and to whom, we had to make sure our marketing was structured accordingly. The number one priority was to find a brand that best represented our similar, but at the same time very multi-faceted region. Being a true admirer of the music and musicians of these countries, one colleague suggested that we should be seen as a quartet of musicians playing the same melody with similar, but slightly different instruments. That is how the brand "European Quartet – One Melody" arose.

The brand name was also adopted in an unconventional way. After a long day at one of the working group meetings, the team was having dinner at a Jewish restaurant in Kraków. During the main course, someone spat out this slogan as a funny idea, but everybody loved it! The saying that hunger assists creative thought was indeed proved correct.

Marketing activities

By attending many of the official meetings in the first months of the cooperation, we all learned a great deal from each other. These were occasions on which we could share our experiences and learn how the others were solving some of the problems we had encountered. Learning what each other was doing brought one very practical benefit to our work – besides increasing trust among us – namely that we could assign marketing tasks to countries that had the most experience in the given field.

Slovakia was responsible for proposing a design for the European Quartet – One Melody logo, while the Czech Republic was asked to supervise the study tours and deploy the website of the quartet, www.european-quartet.com. As it was the only country with a physical presence on the Chinese market, Hungary was to lead our activities there, such as travel fairs and road shows. Poland, which had the most experience with Brazil, was in charge of the Brazilian activities.

The quartet has a long list of marketing tasks ranging from travel fairs to road shows, and study tours to presentations. We prepared a common brochure, a film and a website, all of which are updated regularly. We do everything we can to bring our message to potential visitors either directly or via the media and travel agencies.



Costs and benefits

In the initial year of the quartet, the four countries put up some 200 thousand euros to finance this joint initiative. In its first year the quartet organized two travel fairs and two study tours, as well as the required promotional materials (website, brochure, film). Even our initial efforts brought benefits. A travel agency called Unique World Cruises, invited from the United States to our first common farm trip, liked the program and the idea so much that it instantly added a trip to the four countries to its programme. Not only that – they even requested permission to publish the same itinerary and sell it under the name “European Quartet – One Melody.”

With such concrete success and some positive feedback in our hands, we decided to increase the budget to 240 thousand euros and to add more activities.



Achievements

The Visegrad Four stand, built and designed especially for the China International Travel Mart in Kunming, won a prize in 2003 for its decorativeness and attractive design, while the film made for the 2005 US road show received a special award from the president of Czech Tourism at the Tourfilm competition.

Since the cooperation started, all four markets have shown a steady growth of around 20%, distributed evenly among the countries of the region. That’s what the European Quartet was brought to life for!

Gábor Galla

Director of the Hungarian National Tourist Office (since 2002).
Former vice-president for sales and marketing of Danubius Hotels Group, vice-president for the operation of spa and resort hotels of Danubius Hotels Group, senior vice-president of HungarHotels Rt.



VISEGRAD - ONE MARKET.

THE ATTRACTION FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS

Shirish Apte

Against the backdrop of the collapse of communism and the disintegration of established regional structures, the Visegrad Agreement created a regional alliance to promote political stability, economic growth and prosperity by strengthening social and economic cooperation between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Fifteen years later, in 2006, the alliance has successfully supported the establishment of democratic government, and entrenched political stability and economic growth in all four countries, symbolically culminating in accession to the European Union in 2004. This process of transformation has not only brought prosperity to their people and enhanced the countries' international political profiles, but it has also opened up significant strategic opportunities for international financial markets and investors worldwide.

Citigroup was amongst the first financial institutions to recognise the enormous growth potential of the Central and Eastern European region, in particular the four Visegrad nations. From the very start, the bank has supported growth and is proud to have a long-established presence in all four economies, dating back to 1986 when Citibank first opened in Budapest. In the intervening period, Citigroup has significantly expanded its footprint, including acquiring the 135 year-old Polish institution of Bank Handlowy as part of its total investment of well over \$2 billion in the region.

Today, Citigroup boasts thriving corporate and retail banking businesses in all four Visegrad markets, serving businesses and consumers and partnering with them to support their evolving financial needs. The company has also built upon the intra-regional growth and development by establishing a regional operations and processing centre in Poland. Initially focused upon back-office processing and operations within the Visegrad region alone, in recent months the firm has made the strategic decision to build out this resource to service operations within the wider Europe and Middle East region, following a model first employed in India. This growth further cements the Visegrad economies as a centre for growth and development for Citigroup's business as a whole, underpinning operations throughout Europe. Evidence of the strategic importance that the firm places upon the region was underlined earlier this year, when the International Advisory Board meeting was held in Prague.

The Visegrad opportunity

Citigroup is by no means alone in embracing the strategic opportunity that the Visegrad region represents. Geographically accessible to both Western Europe and the rapidly expanding markets of Russia and the East, politically stable and a part of the European Union's evolving single market, the region occupies an important strategic position in global markets.

Political and economic liberalisation coupled with foreign direct investment averaging some 30 percent of GDP per annum have injected capital, products, new technology and tested risk management processes to both the retail and corporate segments of these growing markets, effectively allowing them to "leap-frog" into the latest banking products and structures. Substantial banking reform such as restructuring bank balance sheets, recapitalizing financial institutions, the development of effective capital market regulation and privatization in



partnership with international investors have paved the way for a stable, sophisticated financial system with well-capitalized banks and a growing number of institutional investors in the form of newly created insurance and pensions companies. In addition, the structure of capital markets has evolved, with bank lending moving from 30 percent of GDP in the mid-1990s towards the 90–100 percent of GDP levels of more established economies.

Growth has been particularly marked in the retail sector, where the evolution of consumers' needs throughout the market has meant that assets are increasing faster than in the corporate sector, largely as a result of broader access to the full range of retail finance products, particularly through the growth in mortgage lending activity. This process has been bolstered by entry into the EU, as banks have become disintermediated as deposit takers and lenders are increasingly affording retail consumers direct access to investment and insurance products from across the single market. This represents a significant opportunity for international as well as domestic investors.



Capital market liberalization has increased liquidity by almost 500 percent within the region over the past five years. Indeed, the Warsaw Stock Exchange has reached a market cap of 50 billion euros in just 13 years, reflecting the successful growth of the economy as a whole: Polish real GDP growth has averaged 3 percent since 2000.

In the wake of the recent economic downturn, these figures are not only competitive in comparison to the rest of the single market, but are also within striking distance of leading world economies; for example, Slovenia achieved 6 percent GDP growth in 2004 and topped 5 percent growth in 2005, in comparison to 6 percent growth in Russia last year.

Bolstered by membership in the single market, corporate borrowers are also beginning to branch out of their home market to seek capital in the more developed European markets. Strong growth is creating an increased demand for capital, and much of this money is coming from European markets in addition to global regions including the US and Asia. This process has been facilitated by in-region investment by international firms who are now leveraging growth opportunities in partnership with colleagues and distribution networks worldwide.

Challenges to growth

Of course, in globalized capital markets, no country is immune to competition from all corners of the globe. Increasingly, the Visegrad countries are competing against other growth economies such as Russia, China and India, both as places to invest and as sources of funding. But the development of Asia has also brought growth to the region as well, as new groups of foreign investors seek to target opportunities in high-growth regions of the world. Here, Citigroup is leveraging the experience of its business throughout the Asia Pacific region to support the opening of markets and to enable the Visegrad region to make the most of its strategic geographic, economic and political advantages in a global marketplace.

A major concern for capital markets authorities in the Visegrad states is whether domestic stock markets will be overwhelmed by the larger markets in Western Europe. This is indeed a valid concern, as corporate issuers will seek out the maximum liquidity for their instruments. While the newly developing national pension funds, insurance companies, retail investors and mutual funds are increasing investment on the domestic markets, the attraction of listing on Western Europe's exchanges is still very strong for larger players, such as the Polish telecom

provider TP SA, listed in Luxembourg. Nevertheless, domestic capital markets in the new member states are essential to growth and there will always be a need from certain corporates to raise capital in their local market. At the same time, not every corporate will have easy access to the capital markets in Western Europe. Over time, these markets will work out the most efficient way of dealing with respective companies.

Secondly, the Visegrad countries felt the effects of very low growth between 2001 and 2003 as a result of macroeconomic factors and the widespread downturn in international capital markets. Since then, however, the recovery of the Visegrad countries in particular has been strong, a fact which has been attributed to growing domestic demand in retail and from the increasing institutional investors in the market, together with inward investment from the EU and increasingly from investors in the US and Asia as well. Increased inward investment into the growing market economies has bolstered overall growth and created many opportunities for investors today.



Shirish Apte
Chief executive officer of the Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEEMEA) Corporate and Investment Bank (since February 2003). Previously worked as the country business manager for Citigroup with Citibank Handlowy in Poland.

The future outlook

The Visegrad region has made a remarkable success of aligning and strengthening financial services to meet the challenges of an enlarging European Union and to compete effectively with larger and more developed countries both regionally and internationally. Governments, regulators and market participants have shared information and knowledge to achieve growth and competitiveness, cementing sustained GDP growth of between four and five percent, through the right mix of capital investment, technology and productivity. The success of the Visegrad model has also been bolstered by a number of similar agreements both within the wider European region and throughout the world.

The strong banking and financial system that has been put into place will help to foster and sustain the region's growth, in partnership with investment from international companies and individuals who recognise and are tapping into the continued potential of these markets.

“HOMO VISEGRADICUS”

Róbert Kiss Szemán

When the archaeologists of the distant future draw a cultural map of the atomic age, there will no doubt be a region on the map of Europe they will either call “Middle Europe” or “Central Europe.” Either way, it will be a colourful spot, given that in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries this area in the center of Europe was most notable for its fragmentation and diversity. This cultural and geographical area was created (they will say) by the friction and collision of Europe’s two great tectonic plates, that to the East and that to the West, and many languages and nationalities contributed to its diversity (Polish, Slovak, Czech, Roma, Hungarian, etc.). This linguistic and ethnic variety was made even more colorful by numerous religions and cultural customs (Catholic, Jewish, Reformed Church, Evangelical, etc.), not to mention the



multitude of important historical influences that were felt here. No one will be able to protest, then, if in the future this cultural region is referred to as a “Central European mosaic”.

For the historians of the future, the facts will clearly show that the peoples in this small area fought bloody battles against each other around the time of the atomic age. They attacked each other both with and without external assistance, destroyed and disbanded state organizations, took goods and redistributed them, and took and regained territories from each other. Nor were their ceasefires much quieter, as in the peacetimes between wars they organized reprisals against each other: The Hungarians Hungarianized, the Slovaks Slovakified, the Czechs Czechified and, together with the Poles, de-Germanized, etc.

The “age of isms” will occupy a separate chapter in textbooks on the Central European mosaic: They will mention Austrianism, Dualism and Trialism, capitalism and socialism, Nazism, anti-Semitism and Communism. These “isms” all provided ideal excuses and opportunities for those in power to limit the multicolored Central European mosaic to a single colour, such as black or red, thereby crippling people accustomed to diversity. The “age of isms” will in due course come to mean the era of terror and fear, and when archaeologists find the Monument to the Victims of Communism on the side of the Prague Castle, and reconstruct the House of Terror in Budapest, or confront the fact that Popiełuszko, admired as a Polish martyr, also lived at the time of Central European “isms”, the hairs on the back of their necks will stand up in fear.

The historians of the future will scratch their heads in disbelief at the length of time it took for Central European people to start cooperating. How long they believed they could rid themselves of the burden of communism on their own, giving it a try every twelve years! First

came the hotter-blooded Hungarians in 1956, then the Czechs and Slovaks together in 1968, and another dozen years later the Poles in 1980. It is no great surprise that they did not succeed. Yet the leading figures always observed their counterparts in the other countries, learned each other's languages, respected each other's cultures, and recognized each other's national interests. Lajos Kossuth, an exile following the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49, created a plan for a Danube confederation, while Pope John Paul II used every means at the Catholic Church's disposal to free its peoples from foreign occupation. The colourful tapestry of Central European folk music has also inspired the timeless works of such musical greats as Fryderyk Chopin, Leoš Janáček or Béla Bartók.

The researchers of the distant future will observe a significant change in the quality of the Central European mosaic at the beginning of the 21st century: Two centuries of disintegration being replaced by rapprochement, and political and cultural cooperation between the people of Central Europe taking the place of strife. In parallel with this phenomenon, the various peoples of Central Europe underwent a process of self-awareness and self-criticism. The Hungarians, for example, recognized the ways in which their historical dominance made them both over- and underestimate themselves, and began to see their historical role in the region in a more realistic fashion. The Czechs put aside their tendency to side with the greatest power, which had always put them at the mercy of other, more powerful nations. The Poles became aware of their complexes arising from their fears of losing their statehood and nationhood, and renounced their dream of becoming the medium power in the region, while the Slovaks, as the smallest and youngest nation of the four, came to terms with their inferiority complex.

The Central European peoples also became capable of learning from one another. What could be learned from each, and integrated into what was common? From the Hungarians, the explosiveness of their 100-metre runners and their generous hospitality. From the Czechs, the capacity to take good care of material wealth, and their tactical foresight. From the Slovaks, their natural freshness and inventiveness, and their capacity to achieve victory from an originally disadvantaged situation. From the Poles, ingenuity and cultural elegance, accompanied by a solid religious conviction. All obstructions to the birth of the Central European were removed during this period, the future archaeologists will see, with the birth greatly aided by the best Slovak, Hungarian, Polish and Czech statesmen and artists.

Ecce homo visegradicus!

Here is the Visegrad man, explosive but generous with his hospitality, cautious and careful but fresh and capable of winning, because he looks to the future in an ingenious and optimistic fashion. Who would not want to belong to this breed?

Let's all cheer him on, that he might settle this Visegrad land as soon as possible.

There is but one danger he faces: The danger of "isms", which could distort the Visegrad idea into "Visegradism"...



Róbert Kiss Szemán

Hungarian historian of literature, essayist. Director of the Hungarian Culture Center in Prague (2000–2005). Currently professor of Slavic studies at the University of Budapest.

YES, THE “TRIBES OF EUROPE” CAN LIVE TOGETHER!

Edouard Gaudot

As the Wall went down in 1989, the winds of change that had been forcefully repressed in Berlin in 1953, Budapest in 1956, Prague in 1968 and Poland in 1980 swept across what was then known as Eastern Europe. Sowing the seeds of freedom, it blew away the old structures and filled the whole continent with hope. Yet along with this hope came a worrisome sense of ambiguity. One thing was certain: The time of certainties had come to an end.



A second age of nations

Thus when the once much-admired Yugoslav Federation sunk into ethno-nationalist bloodshed, and the first war of serious scale since 1945 in Europe occurred, concerns grew stronger. Fears that the old nationalist quarrels would ignite the very heart of the continent shook most of the western intelligentsia out of its confident dream of the victory of liberal democratic ideals. The question was: Would the tribes drag Europe back down the old paths of history, into blood, death and misery?

The members of the European Community, about to become the European Union in 1992, had forgotten about political instability and geopolitical challenges. After four decades of integrating, pooling their sovereignty, and working at the peaceful

reconciliation of the old foes, these old nations had developed another kind of identity. It was a kind of national identity no longer rooted in an ethnic historical narrative, filled with 19th century romanticism and ideals, but rather one shaped by modern market forces, social trajectories, and individual welfare.

In order to interpret what was unfolding in their “backyards”, these European states drew on old stereotypes and intellectual habits. They argued that in terms of linear historical progression, the former communist nations had seen their transformations hindered and their modernization belated. The metaphorical theory of the “freezer” was schemed to explain the violent return of history, in countries where historical processes and protracted conflicts had been “frozen” by totalitarian rule. Hence, in the cultural identifications that replaced communist rhetoric, they saw the return of Dracula, of passion, of war. Worse, they even tended to react as if history had been reversed, and old geopolitical interests reasserted themselves, such as when Germany or France hastened to defend their “traditional” allies. Defiance became the rule.

Zwischeneuropa, Europe médiane, Central Europe, etc.

But defiance was found not only in Western capitals. Some of the flame carriers became anxious that the wind of liberty could fan new dangers. In 1990, in a rather melancholic tone, the *Solidarność* icon Adam Michnik expressed his concern that the spirit of the anti-totalitarian struggle would be lost, diluted into the most gruesome nationalism and “tribal hatreds”(sic). He recalled that the forces that had overturned the communist dictatorship had shared a kind of spiritual momentum, filled with the virtues of solidarity and forgiveness, free of resentment,

and full of tolerance and generosity. He urged that this spirit not be lost to a fundamentalist interpretation of national identity.

This part of Europe seemed ripe for outburst. It had no long-standing democratic traditions, no rationalized borders, no truly positive historical experiences. Instead, the region had a history of overlapping polities, irredentism, trans-national minorities, and changing territories. Its states would once again be competing with each other, and the nationalism long held in check would resurface.

And yet nothing happened. Following the pattern established in the German-Polish Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation (17 June, 1991), the Poles also reconciled with the Czechs. The Hungarians did the same with the Slovaks, and later on with the Romanians. Beyond these mere international agreements, the tools contained in the first German-Polish treaty paved the way towards the resolution of many conflicts related to national minorities scattered around the region. The minorities no longer seemed to threaten stability and cooperation in the region.

In another, related domain, the foundation in 1991 of the Visegrad Triangle marked the first international and intergovernmental cooperation at the heart of Europe. Then, very smoothly, the triangle became a quadrangle after the Czechs and Slovaks divorced on 1 January, 1993. The separation occurred without a fight, without ethnic cleansing or any form of nationalist aggression, but by means of a law passed a month earlier. Such a pacific partition was resounding evidence that “the tribes of Europe” were capable of civilized behavior.

Post-national maturity?

Indeed the pressure of the European Union and the incentive of prospective membership in the EU contributed a lot to successive settlements, as well as to a regional pattern of multilateral cooperation. The positive impact of the EU’s enlargement policy is no longer to be demonstrated, but these results are genuinely linked to some other factors, namely the specific identity of the region. In fact, the troubled history of this part of Europe and in particular the discontinuity in the territorial identification of the peoples tended to dissociate their identity from the real territory and rather associate it with the cultural features, in both the folk and popular culture and its elitists higher version. Torn between the real territory and the imagined territory, these communities are developing into societies rather than nations. They do not identify culture and tradition as much as the old nations of Western Europe do, and when the cultural discourse is filled with a kind of missionarism it remains articulated on a vision of the future, not a revival of a mythical past.

The effects of these features inherited from the distant and recent past are felt in the relations between religion and politics. In Poland, for example, the Church has played a significant role in the struggle against illegitimate regimes, but as soon as the regime was defeated, it lost its political influence and relevance, and seemed an obstacle to the modernization of society. Interestingly, the religions of central Europe seem to have led to, and eventually delivered, a genuine kind of political modernity, in which the religious pattern has not been completely wiped out. A political modernity in which the individual is situated and never completely alone, facing the state or the power, as the personalist philosophy would put it.

This philosophical approach of the identity duly translated into a judiciary framework would allow exploring the ways and means for the eventual management of the manifold minorities present within the national communities. At the stake lies the possibility of a truly multinational political construction. In fact, drawing on its specific historical experience, made of long standing networks and connections of persistent patterns in informal and convivial relationships, and of a relative autonomy from the political structures, this part of Europe could be paving the way towards an alternative kind of post-national maturity.



Edouard Gaudot

French historian, political scientist, writer. Since 2004 academic assistant for Professor Geremek’s Chair of European Civilisation at the College of Europe in Warsaw.

A VISEGRAD WITHOUT CULTURE?

Rudolf Chmel

One of the fathers of the idea of a unified Europe, Jean Monnet, said on his deathbed: "If I had to do it all over again, I would start with culture." It's probably not a bad idea to repeat these ideas where the Visegrad Four are concerned. Even united Europe began fifty five years ago with coal and steel, and culture is still awaiting its turn. It's no coincidence that the culture community is the source of complaints about the technocratic manner of building the European Union.

Visegrad Youth Philharmonic Orchestra
(young musicians from secondary
musical schools from the Czech Republic,
Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) in concert,
Wrocław, October 2003.

It occurred to me that this analogy was not inappropriate for the 15th anniversary of Visegrad, for while its founders didn't begin with coal and steel, nor did they spare a thought for culture. Even today culture is considered more out of obligation than authentically or meaningfully.

Nevertheless, something has changed. Following the fulfilment of some initial political, security and economic aims (cancellation of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and the entry of the V4 countries into NATO and the EU, culture is imperceptibly coming to the fore. But it still lacks any sort of concept, as well as any real, rather than merely formal interest. Culture ministers meet, even twice a year, but their plans become action only very slowly and sporadically. This shows that ministerial bureaucrats do not always recognize good ideas, and perhaps also that the feeling of belonging to Central Europe is weaker than it was at the end of the communist era, at least among the dissidents.

Thus it is only in a very limited sense that we can speak of any significant common cultural projects. The mutual presentation of Visegrad musicians in Brussels (2003), the joint Czech-Slovak-Polish booth at the Cannes festival (2004–2005) and various other festivals (Wrocław, Plzeň, Prešov, Košice, Pécs), the slow but promising development of the Visegrad library, plans



Did you watch Visegrad TV the other day?

René Kubáček

Don't laugh – you could be asked just such a question in the near future. Plans are afoot to establish a Visegrad region television station, inspired by the French-German channel ARTE.

Public TV stations in all four Visegrad countries produce ambitious programs, but space for screening them remains limited. As a result they are usually broadcast late at night, and reach only a very limited number of potential viewers. How could a program about a Czech or Hungarian writer, a concert by a Slovak orchestra, or the work of a Polish artist reach more viewers? How could shows on international cultural events such as the Chopin Contest in Warsaw, the Film Festival in Karlovy Vary, or the theatre review in Nitra, reach beyond the borders of the countries in which these events take place? The answers to these questions may lie in the founding of the new Visegrad satellite channel.

Experts estimate that the potential audience for such programs is about 1 percent of the population, more than half million viewers in the Visegrad region. These numbers may rise over time – the French and German productions aired by ARTE are watched regularly by about 35 million viewers!

The Visegrad channel, as envisaged by the authors of the idea, Messrs Chodakowski and Chojecki, would start with evening broadcasts of about four hours a day on weekdays and six hours a day on weekends. That would allow the screening of 1,664 hours of ambitious cultural and social programs, films and entertainment a year. In the beginning, these program blocks could be repeated throughout the day.

The program structure would be very clear, e. g.: Monday – music, Tuesday – arts, Wednesday – literature, Thursday – theatre, Friday – history and society, Saturday and Sunday – programs about "culture in general". A feature film would be shown every day.

The TV signal would not be encoded, and its reception would be free. It would be offered to cable networks and, where the law

for a Visegrad musical depository, a Visegrad internet library, a Visegrad gold film fund, even a Visegrad television station – all this shows that something is afoot, but the problem is that so far it is not systematic. The fact that many of these events listed above tend to be conditional or virtual rather than real also demonstrates the lack of importance assigned to cultural cooperation in Visegrad, and shows the preponderance of good will and good intentions over real results. However, it is encouraging that smaller towns and municipalities, and not only those that lie on the borders, are taking a greater role in Visegrad cooperation.

For a long time, non-governmental organizations have been one of the motors of cultural cooperation. In the 1990s one of the most important of these was the Open Society Foundation (OSF), whose founder, George Soros, understood the importance of Central European cooperation far before the communist bloc fell apart. The results of one such activity was the many years of support for Visegrad supplements in serious daily newspapers. Unfortunately, no new contributor has been found to continue the publication of these supplements, which further questions the viability of the idea of spiritual cooperation in Central Europe. One of the few permanent program centres of such Visegrad cooperation in culture is the Bratislava-based Kalligram printing house, whose director, László Szigeti, in March 2005 became the first recipient of the Visegrad prize for culture, on the proposal of the ministers of culture of the Visegrad Four. But this is almost a unique example of someone who sees that the sense and future of Visegrad lies in cultural cooperation.

Today, many cultural, educational and scientific cooperative activities exist mostly thanks to the International Visegrad Fund (founded in June 2000), whose support is well planned, but whose finances are limited.

At the time Visegrad was founded, it is likely that culture occupied the minds only of the ambassadors of the member countries, who coincidentally tended to have backgrounds in the humanities and culture. It was not until much later, and in a very weak voice, that any mention was made of culture and art and their role in cultivating this region that had seen so much war, nationalism, totalitarian regimes and so on. The fact that these last elements are on the decline is another reason the role of culture in Visegrad cooperation should increase. If we were unable to start with culture, we should at least make it the permanent continuation of the cooperation between our states and nations within the European Union. Without culture, neither the Visegrad Four nor the European Union will be able to exist.

permits, also to numerical platforms. The main costs of the new channel will be translation into the other three languages plus into English, French, Russian and German, which would make the programs attractive to other potential viewers outside the V4 region as well. The total annual costs of the new channel are estimated at between 5 and 8.5 million euros. However, this amount could be covered to a large extent by commercials – the advantage of the channel is its precisely defined target audience, which makes it attractive for advertisers.

Of course, the basic precondition of the program is close cooperation among the four Visegrad public TV stations, which would have to contribute their programs and films to the new TV channel free of charge at least during the first three years.

Will we have an opportunity to watch interesting programs created by our neighbors' TV stations? Is there sufficient political will to make this idea come true? We will see in the near future, but the idea of a Visegrad TV is definitely challenging and worth considering!

THE VISEGRAD FOUR

– A CULTURAL OPPORTUNITY

Péter Módos

This year, the European Traveller Foundation and Osiris Press published together a collection of essays entitled *The Central European Reader*. In this collection we traced the development of the concept of Central Europe, an area that lies between Russia and Germany, investigating a part of the world that is geographically and historically as difficult to define as it is varied and rich in its culture. It was in the 1980s that the concept of a Central European



Gustav Meyrink's play, *Golem*, was performed seven times by a group of Visegrad countries artists who also held theatre workshops.

unit – a unique space separate from both East and West – was debated most fervently. The changes in the balance of power in the bipolar world drove eminent writers, essayists, political scientists, and historians to look for what was common of the region as a whole.

As editor of the journal *European Traveller* (Európai Utas), I have played a part in the region's cultural cooperation since 1989. I have lived through the euphoric reunion of its intellectual figures, and the meeting of the intellectual communities of a divided Central Europe. I also lived through a period in which these relationships became matter-of-fact, and, without wanting to sound bombastic, I can say that the greatest prize and reward for my efforts was that I became acquainted with the region's richness, natural assets, culture, cities, and character.

In 2004, we held a wide-ranging Sándor Márai exhibition in Budapest, in which we presented the life of this writer, the fate of the works he wrote, and the works his oeuvre inspired. This project involved the participation of the Petőfi Literary Museum, the East Slovakia Museum of Košice, the Márai Circle from Salerno, and communities from Rome and Vienna. Meetings of literary translators and Márai researchers drew packed lecture halls in a lengthy and rewarding series of meetings. Everyone who took part was the wiser for it – not just about Márai, but about Europe, its history, the Cold War, the Germans, the Austrians, the Hungarians, the Americans, and the Italians.

We could do with more meetings like this. In 2004, I regularly returned to Lille because I was interested to know what the title of European Capital of Culture could mean to this wealthy northern French city that is little known in our region, and what it would make of the opportunity. With its carefully considered and executed series of events, Lille embraced the

surrounding area within a 50–100 kilometre radius, reached over the Belgian-French border and offered work opportunities to many young people. Within the year, the city had written itself onto Europe's cultural map.

The Visegrad Four have this same opportunity. The region and its cities (Bratislava, Kraków, Český Krumlov, to name just a few of the beautiful places that are so rich in history and culture) deserve their place on that map in the same way. True, in 1335 it was only three kings who signed a royal treaty on the banks of the Danube, and in 1991 their successors were only three in number, but the world (the politicians, those who form public opinion) accepted the V4 just as they had previously accepted the V3. We have the brand name, now we just have to use it.

We need to find new opportunities for cooperation, whether through the V4 or through culture. This region is connected and interlinked in many ways, through historical events, works of art, and the destinies and lives of their authors. Today we can say that the great European regime changes are over: States have disappeared, been transformed, or been created



anew. With the large-scale EU expansion of 2004, the former Eastern European socialist bloc is ready and waiting for EU funds in order to align its infrastructure, economy and entire social apparatus with that of the rest of the Union. The countries of this region need to work together, something that is attainable in the sphere of culture. Events like the Márai exhibition help the development of a regional and a European identity. The European Union strives to protect cultural diversity. This requires cooperation, for on the EU stage we can achieve more if we work together than individually. This also presents many opportunities for the Visegrad Group, and at such crucial moments in history, such opportunities must be taken.



Péter Módos

Writer, editor-in-chief of *European Traveller* (since 1990). Director of the Central European Cultural Institute (since 2001).

The International Visegrad Fund also supports the participation of Visegrad Group music bands at international festivals such as Pohoda, which takes place every year in Slovakia's Trenčín.

OUR VISEGRAD EXPERIENCE

Luboš Veselý

“The Visegrad Group contributed nothing to either the political or the economic development of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. These countries were incapable of a unified approach, whether in negotiations over their entry into the EU, or as members of the EU today. The economic and political interests of the individual Visegrad countries were, are, and will always be different, and thus the Visegrad Group makes no sense, and it would be wiser to dissolve it.”

This is more or less how an opponent of cooperation between the countries of Central Europe might argue. But even if there were some truth in this statement, let us attempt, before taking drastic measures, to look at whether the Visegrad group isn't perhaps something more, something that might be of more value than the ability to take a common position on the reform of the Union's unhappy common agriculture policy.

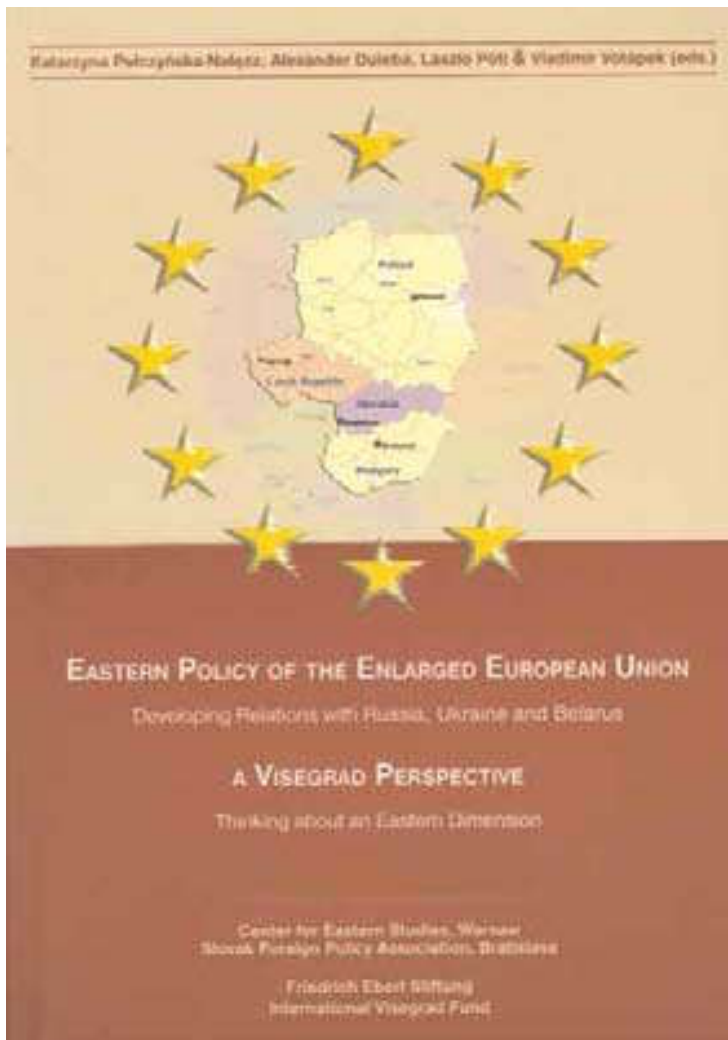
It's no accident that those who were present at the creation of the Visegrad Group were former dissidents who had experience very concrete forms of cooperation with their colleagues in the other countries, that is the exchange of uncensored information, the smuggling in and out of their countries of literature and music, or the sharing of techniques. While it is true that few knew about these activities at the time, that very fact added to their success. And precisely thanks to these contacts, the dissidents were probably more keenly aware of the mendacious nature of official socialist propaganda about the inseparable friendship and cooperation that bound our countries together.

What the communist regimes called “friendship” was in reality a sad parody of real friendship, and it found expression in the systematic attempt to limit any form of contact between people. During the period when the unofficial Polish trade union, Solidarity, was flourishing, this oft-touted “inseparable friendship” did not prevent the Czechoslovak regime from deliberately broadcasting and publishing anti-Polish propaganda, or from preparing for a military intervention, the same thing the Hungarian and Polish regimes had carried out

in 1968 under the banner of “international fraternal assistance” to put an end to the Prague Spring. The fact that it was difficult to travel between our countries is something that many people will remember as well.

If the Visegrad project was successful in anything, its main achievement consisted of laying the groundwork for free, neighborly communication and cooperation. Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks are conscious of their individual responsibilities and their own identities, and they have given a lot of thought to where they live and what it means to be genuine neighbors. We are interested in each other, we visit each other, and more and more young people are going off to other Visegrad countries to study. At the same time, we are increasingly aware of how similar we are in our differences.

It's significant that the dynamism of our mutual contacts is lacking in neighboring countries, particularly in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Society in these places was even more devastated by communism than it was in Central Europe. This offers us a unique



opportunity to use our Visegrad experience to support our eastern and southern neighbors in their difficult efforts to overcome the heavy burdens of the past. We can, and should, jointly support the sharing of these experiences with our neighbors, and we should do so even if cooperation within the Visegrad Group has not always gone smoothly; that is, we should offer help even in areas where each of our countries has gone its own way. Comparing the different ways in which the transformation of our economies, legal, health and education systems, and other aspects of our societies were brought about, and openly admitting the problems we encountered and the mistakes we made in those processes – all that can be immensely valuable to our partners, and can make an important contribution. Most important of all, however, is support for civil society, establishing contacts between various groups and organizations, and creating mutual trust both within these countries themselves, and between them and the countries of the Visegrad Group and the whole of Europe.

It was the benevolent aid we received from the countries of the democratic West before 1989 that made it possible, behind the Iron Curtain, to develop independent initiatives in widely different areas, be they translations of otherwise inaccessible books, the publication of underground literature, or assistance to the families of political prisoners and other victims of repression. A whole range of public and private institutions from the United States and Western Europe also gave significant assistance to the countries of Central Europe in the hectic period of the early 1990s, after the fall of communism. The Visegrad countries now have a unique opportunity to use their experience as recipients of such help to become effective and knowledgeable providers of assistance for the transformation of the Balkans and the states of Eastern Europe.

Then, perhaps, thanks to the support that encourages contacts between people and non-governmental organizations, and joint work on projects that are apparently small and invisible, we will all be able to communicate better with each other, to know one another better, and thus to forge the sense of trust that is so necessary to any common effort.


Then, perhaps, this will enhance our abilities to agree on the apparently large and important matters that are discussed each evening on the television news.



Luboš Veselý
Czech human rights activist.
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Address <http://www.europeanquartet.com/index.php?xid=000101>




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UNESCO heritage

Numerous sights registered in the UNESCO World Cultural heritage list, including those of breath-taking beauty and leaved with the burden of ages past, can be found throughout the countries of the Visegrad group. Among sites listed are villages, castles, towns, natural resorts and many others. The region has undergone a long historic development with many important events taking place therein.

Members' sites

- [czechtourism.com](#)
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Visegrad Group

HOME - Visegrad Group

Visegrad Group

History, General Aims and Structure

History

The Visegrad Group was formed on 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the President of

THIS TEXT WROTE ITSELF

Robert Makłowicz

I got up rather late. My mouth was still full of the intense flavor of pears, even though I had consumed the last glass of Hungarian Zwack *pálinka* at least eight hours earlier. I felt awful. The day was as gloomy as the program of a farmers' party, and its prospects were just as dull.

I made coffee and warmed up some milk. I never have espresso for breakfast. Not because the Italians took over the South Tyrol after the First World War; I just always drink mixed roast for breakfast. Afterwards I have espresso, but first it has to be the good old Vienna mixed roast. I opened the refrigerator. With disgust I moved aside some rings of Olomouc cheese, at the same time not wanting to show them that there are times of the day when they simply disgust me. Oh,



Olomouc cheese — how long did I wait to taste you for the first time! Your legendary flavour was described to me by my grandmother, although she used the German name, *kwargle*.

"My dear grandson, I have never eaten anything so delicious that made such a stink!" she said. I couldn't wait to test Granny's raptures with my own tongue.

But I had to wait, and for a very, very long time. The first time I visited Prague was in 1979, but painful coincidence prevented me from meeting you. On the very first day, having been dispatched by the boys in my class with money we had collected, I bought lots of beer and, after having smuggled it to my room, interrupted by numerous distractions caused by the teacher's alertness, I realised that I had bought non-alcoholic beer. When the psyche of a young man is branded by such a failure, it lasts a lifetime, and to this day I never touch non-alcoholic beer. Back then I ate nothing at all for a few days, and because the trip did not last long, the *kwargle* escaped my grasp. But a few years ago I went to Loštice in Moravia. For two days I ate nothing but Olomouc cheese, on its own with cumin, with paprika, even fried in pastry. But never in the morning. In the morning I can only eat eggs served in a glass.

On the morning in question I was cooking two eggs, timing them for three and a half minutes, while putting a bit of butter into a glass with some finely chopped spring onions. I was thinking to myself that now these Olomouc cheeses can be bought in every larger store in Kraków. My granny did not live to see their triumphant comeback.

I mixed the bright egg whites and liquid, gorgeous yellow yolks — the eggs came from the domestic "green-leg" Polish hen — with the contents of the glass, and then spread some butter

Robert Makłowicz

Journalist and historian, culinary critic. Published in many Polish magazines and newspapers. Author of a weekly TV show, *Robert Makłowicz's Culinary Travels*.



on a bread roll. The roll was topped with caraway seeds. Visitors to Kraków from other parts of Poland are constantly astounded that caraway can be found in almost any kind of local bread. This is the influence of Central Europe. Caraway is like the local *credo*. The inhabitants of Warsaw go mad when they hear that my grandmother used to make caraway soup by boiling a whole bag of caraway in milk. After all, caraway is good for *Weltschmerz*, relieves hangovers, and is as important to your well being as your mother's goodnight kiss used to be.

I bit a few seeds I found inside the roll. With eagerness I consumed the eggs and felt my appetite growing. I spread *liptauer* from the refrigerator on the other half of the roll. I prepare this kind of spread from *bryndza* cheese from the Liptov region in the north of Slovakia. The traitor and scoundrel, Colonel Redl, who was caught spying for the Tsar, used to have all the best things from the whole region at home, including *bryndza*. *Bryndza*, *bundz*, *oscypek*— these traditional products of the Carpathian highlanders that descended from the Vlachs can be found

all over the Carpathian Mountains.

After breakfast, I rang my mother to make sure she was going to bake the Slovenian *potica* cake in the evening. I adore it. Made of yeast, rolled and often filled with nut stuffing, it can also be made of poppy seed. The Italians from Trieste call it *putizza*.

Then I left the house. A short walk to the market square, cappuccino in a café. I hoped they would not serve any sprinkled chocolate or cinnamon powder on the milk foam, a horrible American habit that spoils the drink. With a fresh newspaper under my arm I was feeling much better. I took care of some business. For lunch I had mushroom *kulajda* and beef *pörkölt* with *galuszka* dumplings. Tiny, tempting, supple dumplings, called *halusky* in Slovakia, and in Cieszyn Silesia *hauski*. A glass of the dark red Istrian *refoska* wine washed down the strong paprika sauce splendidly. I was prepared for the cherry strudel. I was also ready for a nap.

Afternoon dreams are the most pleasant. This time I was drinking lemon vodka in Brody with Joseph Roth, who complained to me that for years he had been mistaken for Philip Roth, which he did not deserve at all. I don't know why Egon Bondy was there as well, but he didn't drink anything, just kept his head high, and when he let it down for a moment, beer dripped from the corners of his mouth. "Velkopopovický Kozel," said Roth.

"Velkopopovický Kozel," said my wife as well, gently patting my arm. "All the Velkopopovický Kozel has disappeared from the fridge." She was not complaining in saying it, but I realized all of a sudden why I had felt so awful in the morning. And I also became aware that a few days earlier I was supposed to have finished a text for Andrzej Jagodziński about the cuisine of the Visegrad Group countries. I still haven't written it. I apologize, though I'm not sorry. This text wrote itself, as a matter of fact. In bronze and in hexameters, and I cannot write like that.





Views from Abroad



IS VISEGRAD REGIONAL COOPERATION USEFUL FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION?

José Manuel Barroso

Fifteen years ago, Europe was a surprisingly different place. The rusting hulk of the iron curtain had finally collapsed, and the dust was still settling. Further east, the Soviet Union was staggering towards oblivion, while further west, the 12 Member States of the European Community were continuing with plans for a single currency. This was the world, which, on 15 February 1991, witnessed the birth of the Visegrad Group.

From the start, the aim of the group's founding members was to strengthen stability in Central Europe. Rather than isolating themselves from the rest of Europe, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia encouraged cooperation with all countries, especially their immediate neighbors. They promoted democratic values across Europe, while preserving and promoting cultural cohesion, and celebrating common values in the fields of culture, education and science. In short, they seized control of their own destiny, and jointly paved the way for a smooth transition to their subsequent membership in the European Union and other international alliances. By successfully meeting the challenges of this cooperation, the Visegrad Group members helped equip themselves and each other with the attributes necessary for successful integration into the European Union. Even today, the Visegrad Group see themselves as completing and reinforcing the work of existing structures in Europe, both at the EU and transatlantic level.



The Member States of the EU have long recognized the importance of cooperation when working towards common goals, even in areas traditionally held to be the responsibility of national, regional or even local authorities. One example of this is education policy. While education is a matter for the Member States' or regions' authorities, the EU institutions have been instrumental in bringing these authorities together to work towards common goals for the benefit of Europe as a whole.

The European Commission in particular has been very active in this area. A new method of coordination, the so-called "Open Method of Coordination", was used with great success to improve the level of cooperation among the Member States. Under this system, Member States translate European guidelines into national and regional policies, set targets and adopt measures through monitoring, evaluation and peer review, while adhering to timetables, indicators and benchmarks to compare best practice. The result has been a dramatic rise in cooperation among the Member States and regions on education issues over recent years.

This approach has also become increasingly important in making a success of our Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs – the number one priority of my Commission. Europe's regions have been quick to respond to this challenge. One example of their activities is so-called "Lisbon Regions Network". This was set up to emphasise the relevance of Europe's regions in the delivery of the Strategy for Growth and Jobs, and to explore the specific role that regional authorities play in meeting Lisbon's objectives and targets.

In this context, regional groupings like Visegrad Group are clearly very appropriate for delivering a valuable and effective regional response to our Strategy for Growth and Jobs and other Community policies.

Effective cooperation at the regional level is an excellent way to reinforce the efficiency and proximity of action taken at the EU level. The International Visegrad Fund (IVF), with its support for 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.

Of course, the success of EU actions and programmes in these fields is not just measured in terms of the number of projects funded, but also by their impact on European citizens' attitudes and choices. For example, a more cohesive Europe needs to promote European citizenship; civic participation by European citizens is evidence that they feel they belong, and can identify with a shared vision for Europe. Such citizenship starts by getting to know the neighbors better – precisely what the Visegrad Group has always aimed at.

Last year's referenda in France and the Netherlands on the European Constitution showed

Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers with José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Budapest, August 2005.



that the biggest proportion of "no" votes was among the young. This may partly reflect a growing sense of alienation among the young, a perceived lack of influence in the political process. This trend can be reversed by clearly demonstrating to young people the added value of the European Union: how the EU is working to improve Europe's education systems, how it is creating new and better jobs, how it is helping Member States lay the foundations for sustainable prosperity and economic development, and bringing youth issues onto the mainstream political agenda. So the exchanges between young people funded by the International Visegrad Fund can be seen as yet another example of action at the regional level directly complementing efforts at EU level in the fields of education, culture, citizenship and youth policy.

Overall, the European Union welcomes the Visegrad Group's approach of strengthening cooperation among the new Member States and elsewhere, and promoting cultural and educational exchanges and mobility, to promote better mutual understanding. Being a well-established political association, with a long tradition of successful cooperation, the Visegrad Group is particularly well-equipped to take this kind of initiative forward, and make further valuable contributions, for the greater good of the European Union as a whole. For all these reasons, I offer my best wishes on this, the Visegrad Group's 15th birthday, and look forward to another 15 years of fruitful cooperation.

José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission (since November 2004). Former member of parliament for the PSD party. In 2002 became Prime Minister of Portugal.



THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES OF CENTRAL EUROPE – A CHANCE FOR AUSTRIA

Erhard Busek

Enlargement is the greatest challenge for Europe in the years ahead. Our shared European identity is something that is all too easily taken for granted. To make the best of our common European identity, we have to continue to engage with the rest of Europe, we have to identify and seize the opportunities that Europe presents, and together we have to shape Europe in the 21st century. We have to acknowledge and identify ourselves as Europeans.

The key to that future is enlargement. The 2004 enlargement of the European Union towards the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) represented a historic process that helped to overcome the artificial separation of the continent. The area of stability, welfare and security that was achieved due to European cooperation after the devastating experience of the Second World War has now been expanded towards the East.

As Austria is situated in the heart of Europe, the continental dimension of the European model of a voluntary combination of free nations is of particular importance to us. Our country is moving more towards the center, both politically, economically and strategically. It has always been the priority of the Austrian government to see the EU enlarged rapidly. We wanted to see the new EU member states taken in swiftly in order to allow for the implementation of the EU's body of laws and practices, and to allow those states to operate as full members of the single market from day one.

As I see now in my new position as the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and taking into account my previous experience as Enlargement Representative of the Austrian Government, the EU perspective provides for momentous changes, including the ways in which governments relate to their citizens, and how those citizens relate to each other.

Since 1989 we have witnessed profound social and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 changed the politics of Europe, opening space for a Europe of the future. It meant the end of unnecessary, enforced divisions between national governments, between regional authorities, between towns, and between individuals. And it ended the exclusion of so many members of the European family of nations from the process of European development. Membership in the EU has rebuilt the European family because the EU is precisely about those relationships, at all levels, which are so vital to political, economic, cultural, and social growth and development.

Enlargement has extended the benefits of the single market to all of the new member states, ensuring a level playing field for all participants, and Austrian industry has concentrated heavily on these Eastern markets. In the area of foreign trade, Austria benefited considerably from doing business with the candidate countries of Eastern Europe since the opening of these states: The trade balance surplus of 2003 and 2004, for example, was due to trade with the Visegrad countries, which after Germany are Austria's strongest partners. Between 1989 and 2000, Austria's exports to Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland increased more than sixfold, while imports only doubled. The CEEC's share of Austrian exports increased from 4.4 percent in 1989 to 18 percent in 2004.

Since the opening up of the Eastern European markets, Austrian firms have also held a very strong position in the area of direct investment. By 2004, Austrian enterprises had invested more than \$20 billion in Eastern European countries, obtaining a market share of 9 percent of existing investment capital. This has led to the establishment of approximately 20,000 Austrian subsidiaries and joint ventures in this area. In some countries, such as Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Austria is one of the main foreign investors.

But enlargement is not just about economics: It was and remains the only right and sensible

Erhard Busek

Austrian politician and writer. Special coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (since 2001). Chairman of the Institute for the Danube and Central Europe. Former Vice-Chancellor of Austria (1991–1995).



response to the changing pressures and circumstances of the past decade and the new century. It cements the sense of stability, the respect for democracy, the promotion of human rights and the cultural diversity for which the candidate countries themselves worked so hard. These are issues and values that cut across national boundaries and that require us to discuss and cooperate on. Similarly, there are issues on which we need to take joint action, and where the European Union is uniquely well placed to provide common solutions implemented by national governments. As well as the profound political shock brought about by the fall of communism, the last decade has also seen a revolution in how we think about social and economic policy. The EU is a forum for us to explore, and to share and promote that thinking.

Eastern enlargement was a way for us to extend that process. Even before they joined the EU, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe had already made great strides in policy areas that affect all our citizens' lives.



Austrian Vice-Chancellor Alois Mock and Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn, cutting the barbed wire on the Austrian-Hungarian border, August 1989.

Projects of this size inevitably involve risks. There are fears of added strains on the job market, dangers along border areas, disadvantages for agriculture, and excessive financial demands.

These anxieties are not to be dismissed, but one must also avoid horror scenarios. As we have seen since the 10 new member states joined the EU, the attendant problems were handled and the necessary precautions taken by the EU and the candidate countries themselves. The EU and the member states showed responsible and well-planned involvement with the enlargement project. This can be a benchmark for future enlargements, namely towards the countries of the West Balkans. We need to continue with the enlargement project, because it would be wrong to ascribe the current crises in the EU (the two failed referenda on the EU Constitution) to the recent enlargement.

Europe has now finally been brought together. The foundations for cooperation were laid by the revolt against communist rule in Central Europe. It is up to all of us now to build on that cooperation. We have the tools, and the EU and the Visegrad Countries have a wealth of resources to offer each other – human, financial, knowledge-based and physical. The benefits are clear, as are the obligations.

It is encouraging to see that the Visegrad Group has now – again – found its place as a forum of political debate. It is encouraging to see increased coordination within the V4, as it proves that regional cooperation is alive and well in the European Union. This not only benefits the participating states, but it also serves as an important role model for the countries of the West Balkans.

FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

Benita Ferrero-Waldner

The 15th anniversary of the Visegrad Group is a landmark occasion. It is an opportunity to revisit and honour the accomplishments of this group of countries over the last one-and-a-half decades.

Formed in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the iron curtain, the Visegrad "Group of Four" has made an important contribution to regional cooperation and served as a Central European catalyst for European integration, which culminated in the countries' EU accession last year – nothing less than Europe's reunification.

Based on its shared political and cultural values, the Visegrad cooperation has played a key role in overcoming the artificial division that scarred Europe for so long, and helped its member countries to return to their rightful place in the very heart of our continent.

At the same time, it has successfully identified and tackled regional cross-border issues ranging from the economy to the environment, from transport to trade, and from infrastructure to education, thus delivering immediate added value for its citizens. As Austrian State Secretary and Minister for Foreign Affairs, I always attached great importance to this good neighborly cooperation, which ties in with Austrian initiatives such as the Regional Partnership.

With their valuable experience of political and economic transition, the Visegrad states have become helpful allies for the European Commission in strengthening Europe's foreign policy, especially in our new Eastern neighborhood. As the EU Commissioner in charge, I look forward to deepening this policy in close dialogue with the Visegrad partners.

I am sure that cooperation among the Visegrad countries will remain an important building block of the European architecture in the years to come. I salute those leaders who have built this platform with strategic foresight, and those many European citizens who make it work in practice.



Benita Ferrero-Waldner
Lawyer. EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy (since 2004). Former federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria (2000–2004) and state secretary for foreign affairs of Austria (1995–2000). Served as UN Chief of Protocol (1993–1995) and as Austrian diplomat in Paris (1987–1990) and Senegal (1986).



BENELUX AND THE VISEGRAD GROUP

B.M.J. Hennekam

It is impossible to talk about Europe without talking about the Benelux. The interaction between the two has always been extremely intensive.

On 5 September, 1944, the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg signed a customs agreement that soon became known as the "Benelux Agreement".

At the outset of the EEC in 1958, the three countries decided to maintain and develop this agreement by signing the Benelux Treaty of the Economic Union.

The small Benelux countries wanted faster and greater results from economic cooperation.

In the years following 1958, the development was spectacular, and the EEC's achievements grew continuously. Nevertheless, the Benelux kept well ahead in many sectors.

New opportunities for cooperation emerged, new matters which gained importance in society, policy areas such as physical planning, the conservation of nature and the environment, energy policy – all of these were embedded in the Benelux cooperation.

By legally binding agreements between the three countries a framework was created to give shape to this cooperation.

Later, infrastructure and transport also became a part of the package, as well as matters



Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers with Prime Ministers of Benelux countries, Trenčín, 25 April, 2002.
From the right: Representative of the Hungarian Government István Stumpf, Prime Minister of Slovakia Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Marek Pol, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman, Prime Minister of the Netherlands Wim Kok, and Prime Minister of Belgium Guy Verhofstadt.

close to people such as public health, drugs, police and justice, cross-border work, and youth.

Apart from these cornerstones in today's Benelux consultations, the three countries are working to refine and develop the internal market. Economic cooperation such as on small and medium enterprise policy and public procurement still remains of interest within the Benelux framework.

Benelux has always, until today, been a sort of laboratory for the European Union (e. g. the Schengen-agreement).

On 1 May, 2004, 10 new countries became member states of the European Union. Here also the Benelux has tried to contribute to this enlargement by providing assistance and support to a number of new member states, including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (the Baltic States) and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (the Visegrad Group). For them, cooperation with the Benelux offers a model of regional cooperation. Best practices can be exchanged, and seminars organized.

In terms of cooperation between the Visegrad and the Benelux, in 2003 the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia decided to determine fields of cooperation between them in

order to identify possible common actions. This resulted in two working levels for this cooperation, namely the group of national coordinators and the “V4-Benelux Task Force”, which does the preparatory work. The national coordinators met each other in Brussels, Bratislava and Budapest (12 January, 2006). In 2005, a delegation of national parliaments of Visegrad countries assisted at the plenary sessions of the Benelux parliament in Hague. A visit was also organized for the different national patent offices of the Visegrad countries to the Benelux Trademark and Design Office in Hague.

Other fields of cooperation which have to be developed in the future include the organization of a seminar on Schengen, cooperation within the *Euro Contrôle Route*, issues concerning infrastructure and spatial planning, environmental issues, social and labor policy, labor market issues, and youth policy.

I think Benelux has a duty to help the Visegrad Group where possible. This cooperation, the exchange of ideas and best practices, can be useful for Visegrad as well as for the Benelux, as it is part of regional cooperation within the EU.

I wish to congratulate the Visegrad Group on its 15th anniversary, and hope for a fruitful cooperation between our countries in the future.



B.M.J. Hannekam

Lawyer specialized in constitutional and administrative law.

Since 1990, Secretary General of the Benelux Economic Union (an intergovernmental organization between the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg). Former member of the Dutch Parliament (1978–1990).

THE IMAGE OF VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

Takeaki Hori

Since the countries of the Visegrad Group succeeded in cutting their umbilical cord with the former USSR in 1989, they have worked hard to establish a new but common identity for themselves. I am fascinated by the transition changes that have taken place in the Visegrad countries, which have been a gold mine for a social anthropologist such as me. Wherever I go I see fascinating dynamic transitions that involve every aspect of the human drama.

It was only 15 years ago that the totalitarian regimes in these countries were toppled and democracy, human rights, civic movements and market economies took their places. Capitalism hit the region like a tidal wave, not only in the form of privatization but also material

consumerism. But the societies of Central Europe rode out the storm. It was not easy, but the economic changes turned out to be the easy part. The most difficult challenge was for people to understand how their societies' value systems had changed. This was a burden for everybody, but especially for older people who had to undergo rehabilitation both psychologically and spiritually. However, they never lost heart. They had trust in their intellectual powers, their rich culture and history. They concentrated on restoring human values. Their efforts to overcome this difficult transitional period were truly enlightening to the outside observer, and convinced us that mankind has a bright future.



Takeaki Hori (in the middle)
at the Forum 2000, Prague 2004.

Whenever I read the history of this region, I am always impressed by the rich variety in people's ways of doing things. Surrounded by dominant countries, the Visegrad nations had always faced external pressures, and sometimes had found themselves in a vulnerable position. At one time they disappeared from the map entirely, leaving the area blank. But this vulnerability gave way to a unique identity and facilitated a long period of inter-ethnic relations as well as mixed cultures.

By way of contrast, it was only 130 years ago that Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world, a decision that accelerated the development of national identity. I believe that external pressure helps to accelerate the emergence of national identity.

The process of trial and error continues in Central Europe, and almost every day I notice newspaper articles on the region, even in the Japanese media. Some of them are rather depressing, but most of the news one reads is encouraging and promising. What I wanted to stress was the diversity of the human drama that has played out in the region. Against all of our expectations, the end of the Cold War did not bring peace to the world. Instead we were witness to the most dreadful chaos and a series of wars. However, as long as Central Europe keeps looking for peaceful solutions, we can expect a more peaceful and orderly world in the future. That's why I call what is happening in the region "the Central European restoration".

One thing I can say, at least of the transition phenomena in the region, is that the power of consistency is overwhelming. Among the many challenges and reforms that the Visegrad countries tackled over the last 15 years, I see the wisdom of mankind. When I review the various achievements, it is a rather miraculous and eye-opening experience, and holds great promise for future civilization in helping mankind to transcend his territorial problems and find a new paradigm – a non-territorial world order.

Takeaki Hori

Economist and anthropologist.
Advisor to the President of the
Nippon Foundation. Executive
Director of the Japan P.E.N. Club.



A VIEW OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

Milan Kučan

From today's perspective, the decision to form the Visegrad Four was a good one.

Despite the euphoria and optimism that overflowed in Europe at the end of half a century of political, ideological, spiritual, and moral division, rational considerations were nevertheless needed as well. It was necessary to take a clear look at what had happened, at how it had been possible, and primarily at what it all meant for the future.

The latter issue was particularly relevant for people in the Eastern part of the divided continent, who experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall in a different, more emotional manner, including greater expectations and idealism. Above all, they believed that this mental wall had fallen for both sides, the East and the West, that the general view of Europe would change, and that there would be no more partitions – at least no new ones – to be found on Europe's geopolitical, economic and spiritual map.

The expectation that the consequences of Europe's division would be alleviated quickly was, unfortunately, not realistic. Fifty years had left a profound mark on the European mentality. Nor was that all: Soon it was apparent that new divisions were waiting to emerge, and that the path to Euro-Atlantic integration could be longer than expected. The hope that the injustices of history would be put right was soon replaced by pragmatism. The spiritual and developmental gap between the East and the West was just too wide to bridge overnight. The East soon had to come to terms with the realization that it would get nothing for free. The path was open, but hard work would be needed to meet the requirements and unlock the gates to the then European Community and NATO. Fortunately, the immense energy and optimism of these nations who had managed to unseat undemocratic regimes did not give way to disappointment and lethargy. Instead, they completely mobilized their resources to undo the ills of the past and create new bridges to overcome the historic gap with the rest of Europe.

EU and NATO membership provided sufficient motivation for all of these countries. It represented security in the uncertain times following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the East Bloc's military, political and economic structures, as well as the wars in South-Eastern Europe. At the same time it constituted recognition of the ability of these countries to run their own lives according to democratic standards and European values, providing their citizens with a quality of life not substantially different from that in countries that had not been held back by totalitarianism. It was with great energy and fervour that these countries believed in European values and the idea of European integration at a time when the EU was already showing signs of putting pragmatism and individual interests above its founding ideals. This tendency later became clear in the discussions and decisions on the Constitutional Treaty and the EU's next Financial Perspective.

The Visegrad Group contributed to a rational consideration of the position in which the former Central European members of the Warsaw Pact found themselves after 1989. The withdrawal of the Red Army forces and the strengthening of economic cooperation between these countries and the West were among the group's primary objectives. Visegrad helped these countries to fulfill the membership criteria for European structures quicker and more easily. The admission of Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO was a success that encouraged other countries, proving that their goals were realistic.

Slovenia – which long remained entangled in the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the wars and blockades in the West Balkans, as well as the problems of creating its own independent state and the struggle for international recognition – did not take a clear stance on



Meeting of Presidents of Supreme Courts of Visegrad Group countries, as well as Croatia and Slovenia, Beladice, Slovakia, 10 November, 2004. From the left: Lech Paprzycki (Poland), Iva Brožová (Czech Republic), Franc Testen (Slovenia), Milan Harabin (Slovakia), Ede Rabóczy (Hungary), and Ivica Crnić (Croatia).



Milan Kučan

Politician, lawyer. Former President of the Republic of Slovenia (1992–2002). Currently a member of the Club of Madrid (organization dedicated to strengthening democracy around the world), co-president of the International Ethical Collegium in Paris.

this kind of cooperation, although it shared the same strategic objectives as the Visegrad Group countries. On the one hand, this was a consequence of its historic political circumstances, which in many respects were completely different, while on the other hand views within Slovenia differed as to which path offered the fastest and most certain passage to European integration structures. It took the admission of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into NATO to allow a clear view of such alliances, but by then it was too late. The Visegrad Four already had a clear profile. It is difficult and still premature to judge whether the group's unique exclusiveness is justifiable in light of the processes under way in Europe, particularly in Central Europe.

History shaped the understanding among Central Europe's citizens that we were connected by a shared fate, that we were mutually dependent and accountable to one another, and that we were an inseparable part of Europe and its fate. Nevertheless, our response as Central Europeans to some of the crucial dilemmas of the past 15 years, including the recent attempts from the outside to divide Europe into the Old and New, lacked confidence and forethought, and was certainly unconvincing in the eyes of "Old Europe". The question is why it was so. Such a division would have been a crude physical and spiritual intervention in the Central European environment, rendering it incapable of taking an active role in European integration and in shaping Europe's strategy for strengthening its role and responsibility on a global level. Given Central Europe's experience, one might expect that it would naturally have rejected such attempts at division, and instead worked to redefine European integration, to strengthen the EU's value base, and to reposition it in the world. That is precisely what Europe needs to become a centre of influence and responsibility for the development of human civilization, a Europe capable of cooperation through dialogue on the future of humanity and our planet.

I believe that one of the key issues in such a dialogue is the need to find a balance between labor and capital. If globalization remains limited to the globalization of capital, as is currently the case, and fails to include the globalization of responsibility for social cohesion, for ecological balance, and for the reduction of the gap between the rich and the poor, then people's impression that their physical, social and national existence is at risk will grow stronger. For Central Europe, a relatively small area harboring a great diversity of states, nations, languages, cultures, religions and civilizations, these dilemmas pose an even greater challenge.

The problem is made even more topical by the rapid flight of capital and production capacities to less developed countries. In our part of the world as well, workers are left without jobs, while exploitation through low wages and limited social rights is on the rise elsewhere. This leads to conflict even within the EU, reflected in the increasing resistance to deepening internal ties and towards enlargement. This trend is depriving Europe of its *élan*, and crippling its ambition to set a course for the crossroads of the world and to offer new solutions. I'm referring not only to conflict zones, but I'm also talking about social, developmental and environmental issues. Europe could offer the world its experience with its own social model. Unfortunately, certain Central European states are drifting away from that model through neo-liberal reforms in attempts to reduce their development gaps. Social security and social cohesion the price that will have to be paid, including, unfortunately, a decrease in democratic standards. Competitive pressures from countries where labor, social and environmental standards are not respected are not being met by an equal but opposite pressure from Europe to demand universal respect for these standards. Europe is thus giving in to the standards being set by others.

In the future, the Visegrad Group could make its name by encouraging dialogue on these and other issues to the benefit of Central Europe and, indeed, all of Europe. Otherwise, the Group runs the risk of becoming obsolete. Its members now share the fate of all other members of the EU, where alliances are forged around concrete projects based on legitimate interests and with responsibility to all. It is precisely a Visegrad initiative that could give new meaning to the Central European Initiative, by protecting the equality of its members through dialogue, while at the same time avoiding the risk of Central Europe's being seen solely as the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

THE NEW PICTURE OF EUROPE

Vytautas Landsbergis

The Visegrad Group was an extremely significant idea. With the shadow of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in the background, three Central European States, without looking around for separate ways, proceeded bravely to show their pro-Western determination to seek a common regional and European future.



Vilnius.

This act altered Western Europe's understanding of the allegedly "grey area" beyond the former Iron Curtain. Three independent post-communist countries with different problems and a different cultural and historical identity appeared on the European stage as a team signalling changes for the whole of Europe.

Lithuania wanted to be a part of this change. Just before the announced second meeting of the Visegrad Group, I wrote on 10 February, 1991, to Lech Wałęsa, the President of Poland:

"Dear Mr. President,

The meeting of the leaders of the three East-Central European states at Visegrad will be a very significant event, not only for that region but for the future of Europe and the world. Lithuania's struggle for freedom, democracy and state independence is even more complicated, but it is nonetheless an integral part of the problems experienced in this region and the international arena.

We have previously participated together in our [common] efforts, and therefore, we would also like to participate in this meeting at Visegrad. I ask you, Mr. President, to look favourably upon my request that a representative observer from Lithuania could take part in this meeting of the Three. This role could be fulfilled by Czesław Okinczyc, deputy of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, who is now serving as my temporary representative in Warsaw.

With heartfelt thanks for your country's support of Lithuania, I remain . . ."

I see now that the proposal had little chance of success as it was too unexpected and uncoordinated with the other participants of the still emerging Visegrad. My additional idea to include Okinczyc in the Polish delegation could not even reach President Wałęsa.

But Lithuania's wish to participate in the Visegrad Group had further consequences.

One of the geopolitical dangers for the Baltic States was if they were treated as a separate "post-Soviet" group of nations, which is precisely what Russia constantly insisted on. Therefore, Lithuania's historical and cultural ties with Poland presented a convincing argument to reject any such new partitioning of Central Europe. I used to compare the division between Poland and the Baltic States promoted by Russia with the shameful Molotov-Ribbentrop line. Opposing the concept of "a special Baltic case" by promoting "Central-Baltic Europe" was a political struggle whose goal was to see Lithuania become a link in a chain of post-communist democracies from the Gulf of Finland to the Adriatic Sea, and especially between the Visegrad States and the Baltic States.

The most significant step towards our European future, including Visegrad, was the establishment of the Assembly of the Two Parliaments, the Polish Sejm and the Lithuanian Seimas, in 1997. At the same time it was stated officially that Lithuania and Poland were strategic partners.

This link with the Visegrad Group was not explored by our southern neighbors, while the Baltic and Scandinavian countries strengthened their cooperation under the 5+3 formula. Lithuania remains open to both options and could again serve as an intermediary link with Visegrad under the possible formula 5+3+4 (or 4+3+5). Broader consultations and cooperation on political support for Ukraine and Moldova appear even more achievable. For the moment, this type of cooperation, based on special and improved mutual understanding, is playing a role in the European Parliament.

Vytautas Landsbergis

Composer, musicologist, poet, politician. Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania (1990–1992). Member of parliament since 1992. Member of the Lithuanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and member of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly. Since 2004 member of the European Parliament.



GERMANY AND THE VISEGRAD GROUP

Kai-Olaf Lang

The breakdown of communism in 1989 caught Europe unprepared. For Germany as well, the fall of the Iron Curtain was more of a wonder than an event for which concepts already existed. One of the main challenges for unified Germany was to adjust its relations with its direct neighbors in the eastern part of Central Europe: To take advantage of the democratic changes, to adapt cooperation to the new international and strategic environment, and to look for ways to protect stability and prosperity in the region.

Was there a role for the Visegrad Group? Did Germany try to foster contacts with the Visegrad Three or, later on, the Visegrad Four? The answer is that German cooperation with Visegrad was feeble, even nonexistent. Apart from ceremonial acts like the meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers in the Polish city of Gniezno in April 2000 with the German Chancellor, no significant cooperation ever grew between Germany and the Visegrad Group. Why?

Although relations between Germany and the member countries of the Visegrad Group soon gained momentum, the intensity and quality of these contacts varied substantially due to different historical, economic and political factors:

a) Due, *inter alia*, to its sheer size and position as the largest country in Germany's eastern neighborhood, Poland was supposed to be Germany's "strategic partner" in the region. The new Germany worked hard to make progress on historical questions, since a mutual attempt to come to terms with the past would show that the united Germany also supported the principles of the post-war reconciliation policy. Moreover, from the German point of view, Poland was regarded as a particularly important player in the future European order, and Warsaw had been called by German politicians "our Paris of the East". The special weight attributed to Poland, an emerging regional power, also led to the creation of the Weimar Triangle, a trilateral forum consisting of France, Germany and Poland, which is not an effective "engine" of Europe, but in symbolic terms allows for the opening-up of the German-French axis.

b) The role of the Czech Republic changed somewhat. In the 1990s, the perception of the country in Germany was mixed. On the one hand, the Czech Republic had been perceived for some time as the front runner of economic reform in Central Europe. On the other hand unresolved historical issues, particularly the Beneš decrees and the fate of the Sudeten Germans who had been expelled from Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, caused misunderstandings. From the German angle, the reconciliation process with Prague in the 1990s went less smoothly than with Warsaw. One observer even considered the Czech Republic "the ugly duckling" of Germany's relations with its Eastern neighbors. Obviously, this has changed a great deal. In the preliminary stages of EU enlargement and after the Czech accession, German-Czech relations became more pragmatic. The big clashes that had occurred in German-Polish relations in recent years (EU Constitutional Treaty, Iraq, attitude to wards Russia, Centre Against Expulsions) were nowhere to be found.

c) Germany's relations with Slovakia have been even less spectacular. Their most important feature was a dramatic change in perception. Whereas the Slovakia of PM Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s was seen as a deviant case in the region, current PM Mikuláš Dzurinda's firmly pro-market policies have given Slovakia the image of a reform tiger.

d) Cooperation with Hungary has been mainly plain sailing for Germany. Mutual contacts are not fraught with difficult historical problems, and both societies have traditionally been sympathetic to each other. During the 1990s Hungary did well with economic transformation.

So, with relations intensifying with all Visegrad countries, why did this not translate into more dynamic German-Visegrad Group cooperation? Above all, five factors seem to have played a role:

a) improving bilateral contacts. Because of the growing relevance of bilateral cooperation, from the German angle it was not necessary to create an additional regional forum for dialogue and consultation.

b) after 1989, Germany never defined a new regional approach towards Central and Eastern Europe that might have replaced Germany's traditional *Ostpolitik*, a term that refers to the countries "beyond Visegrad" – i. e. the post-Soviet space, especially Russia. With regard to Central and Eastern Europe, including the Visegrad countries, the new paradigm was NATO and EU enlargement. As for Visegrad, at least in the first half of the 1990s, it was treated in Germany as a sub-regional pool of countries that had yet to show their ability to cooperate with each other.

c) given the increased cooperation with individual partner countries in the Visegrad region and the overarching process of "Europeanization", German-Visegrad cooperation occurred on the bilateral level and the multilateral European level, whereas the middle level, i. e. Germany-Visegrad relations, remained anaemic.

d) Germany's cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been

characterized by a sort of political self-restraint. Launching regional initiatives and invigorating German-Visegrad relations could have caused suspicions, both within Visegrad and among Germany's Western European partners. By taking a rather low regional profile, Germany tried to show continuity and reservation towards power politics in post-Cold War Europe.

e) the rather poor track record of Visegrad cooperation itself discouraged Germany from actively approaching the V4. Notwithstanding a number of useful and concrete Visegrad cooperation projects, the perception remained that Visegrad was a formal scaffolding without political efficacy.

Of course, after May 2004, some of these factors and the general context of German-Visegrad relations changed. The fact that all were now members of the EU opened up new prospects for German-Visegrad contacts. In the enlarged EU, sub-regional groups could gain new importance by preparing common positions for the decision-making process. Having new member countries work out their issues in regional groupings before approaching the EU as a whole could make Visegrad an attractive partner for Germany. Moreover, Germany is interested in intensifying its dialogue with medium-sized and smaller member countries in the EU. A forum like Germany + V4 might be an additional format for getting in touch with some of these partners. Lastly, Germany – like other member countries – is interested in benefiting from the expertise of the Visegrad countries. For example, Visegrad initiatives on the European Neighbourhood Policy or on the Western Balkans might be highly welcome contributions to strengthening the EU's common foreign and security policy.

Is this realistic? Without a doubt, dialogue between Germany and the Visegrad countries in the expanding EU is possible. This new relationship does not have to start from scratch, but can build on bilateral cooperation and the common European environment. It could also build on what Visegrad is associated with in Germany: A group of countries distinct from "Eastern Europe" or "the Balkans" that successfully transformed and are now firmly anchored in the West. Of course, there are two preconditions: The will of the Visegrad countries to define their mutual cooperation as a strategic political project in the EU, and their willingness to establish a long-term partnership with Germany.

Meeting of Visegrad Group Prime Ministers with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Gniezno (Poland), 28 April, 2004.



Kai-Olaf Lang

Political scientist, research fellow at the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* in Berlin, member of the "EU Integration" research unit. Previously research fellow of the Federal Institute for Eastern and International Studies in Cologne.



TALKING OF VISEGRAD

Yuri Levada

Unfortunately, not much is known about the Visegrad community in our country. However, history and memory bind us Russians in complicated but firm ways with the people and governments of the countries of Visegrad: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Historical and geopolitical conditions have always given Poland a special role in relations between Russia and Europe. Following the failure of efforts to create a dynastic union between Moscow and the Kingdom of Poland in the 16th and 17th Centuries, an era of four centuries of frequent Russian and Polish conflicts began, closely connected with a confrontation between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. A barrier was thus created between Russia and Europe. I think this was an important factor leading to the isolation of Russian society from Europe and to the durability of Byzantine (partly also Mongolian) traditions in the political system and culture of Russia. Nevertheless, even in those difficult times, the Polish lands still acted as a communications link between life and culture in Russia and that in Europe, as well as in Poland.

The two Polish uprisings against Russian rule in the 19th Century served as an inspiration for Russian revolutionaries, whose patriotic beliefs were severely tested. Not many withstood the test. I am ashamed that even today, in the center of St. Petersburg, a mid-19th Century triumphal arch still commemorates the victories of Russian armies over Polish rebels.

After the Second World War we (at that time we were still called "the Soviets") happened to end up in a single bunker together with the people of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. It was these people who in 1956, 1968 and 1980 did the most to break down the walls of our common bunker and push their way towards a European social and political renaissance. For many in my country, the Hungarian national revolution of 1956, the "Prague Spring" of 1968 as well as the famous "Solidarność" of 1980 were sources of hope for a better future.

Sadly, together with the common "chains" of communism, other connections between our countries and people have also been broken. Russia once again faces a difficult historical choice between a road leading towards Europe and the rest of the world, and another leading towards aggressive isolation, which would harm mainly the Russian people. For this reason I think it is even more important for our country now to search for new possibilities of cooperation with the Visegrad countries as well as others who sympathize with them (such as Ukraine or Lithuania).

Entre le passé et l'avenir
**L'HOMME SOVIÉTIQUE
ORDINAIRE**
Enquête

Youri
LEVADA

PRESSES DE LA FONDATION NATIONALE
DES SCIENCES POLITIQUES

Yuri Levada

Doctor of philosophical sciences, professor. Director of Yuri Levada Analytical Center since 2003. Former deputy director (1988–1992) and director (1992–2003) of the Russian Center for the Research of Public Opinion.



OUR WINDOW INTO EUROPE

Alyksandr Milinkevich

Even though it may not be obvious to members of the Visegrad Group, the fact is that Belarus has connections with the Czech lands, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia that go back many centuries. And while state formations in this part of Europe have changed many times, and few borders have remained where they were originally drawn, Central Europe has always been, for the citizens of our small country, a window into Europe and a symbol of hope.

Historical ties have linked Belarus territory with Poland, with whom, over the centuries, we have shared both the good and the bad in a single state. But Belarus has also enjoyed broad political, cultural, and trading associations with the other countries of the Visegrad Four. Many

Alyksandr Milinkevich (left)
at the Forum 2000, Prague 2005.



of our young scholars have gone there to study. The most important Belarusian humanist, František Skaryna, the founder of printed book production in Eastern Europe and the translator of the Bible into Belarusian, was active in Prague at the beginning of the 16th Century. Stefan Batory, who was king of Hungary and Poland, was also a grand duke in our country.

Although the citizens of the Central European nations often stood on opposite sides in the First World War, when the conflict was over they all lived in independent states where they were free to develop their own cultures and educational systems. Belarus citizens had no such luck, and the Belarus Democratic Republic, after a brief period of existence, was divided between Poland and Soviet Russia. Here, in particular, our culture and language were systematically liquidated along with the intelligentsia, a social class that had embraced the idea of an independent, democratic, and free Belarus.

The Second World War had a tragic impact on all of Europe. Our country was levelled and lost a quarter of its population. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland became a part of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, and the 40-year rule of communism brought yet another calamity to their citizens, devastating almost every aspect of their lives. Yet despite all of this, it was precisely to those countries that a great majority of Belarusian people looked with hope. The Polish and Hungarian uprisings of 1956, the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968, and the Polish events of 1970 and 1980 strengthened our faith in the possibility of positive changes in our own homeland as well. While the *nomenklatura* and the party cadres clung to Moscow, the West, so damned by Soviet propaganda, was the centre of interest for an enormous number of people. Once again, Central Europe for us was a window into that "West" because that was where the books, newspapers, magazines, rock music, and blue jeans came from.

The “miraculous year” of 1989 brought freedom to those countries, and to us. It gave us the motivation and provided the impulse that helped bring about the final collapse of the Soviet Union and led to the declaration of independence in Belarus in the summer of 1991. The countries of the Visegrad Group achieved the aim they set for themselves when they came into being. Despite a number of problems, they successfully managed their economic and political transformations and built for themselves stable, democratic states based on the rule of law, and became members of the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. In our country, unfortunately, with a lot of help from Moscow, the neo-Soviet regime of Alexandr Lukashenko, who considers Belarusian citizens to be his serfs or a herd of dumb animals to be manipulated in any way he wants, emerged victorious.

And thus, entirely correctly, Belarus has been labelled the last dictatorship in Europe. It is



Alyaksandr Milinkevich
Belarusian scientist, physicist and mathematician. Opposition candidate in the presidential elections in 2006.

The Belarusian group N.R.M. (Niepodległa Republika Mroja) during a performance at the Warsaw concert commemorating the 25th anniversary of Solidarity, 2005.

certainly no accident that, in this difficult situation, we have been getting the most help and understanding from the countries of the Visegrad Four. At the same time, their important and necessary assistance is not limited to mere declarations and high-sounding pronouncements, but has taken the form of concrete joint projects, scholarships, and other activities that, along with aid from the US, enables us to preserve and develop the foundations of civil society, which represent the greatest threat to the dictatorship in Belarus. I am extremely glad that the International Visegrad Fund has joined this support, and I believe that its scholarship and grant programs for Belarus will continue to grow.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the countries of Central Europe have remained a symbol of hope for Belarus. We all believe that with their support, these hopes will be fulfilled and that Belarus will soon join a democratic and free Europe.

UKRAINE CROSSES FINGERS FOR VISEGRAD

Bohdan Osadcuk

When I heard about the Visegrad Group for the first time I was surprised. Wasn't Visegrad that old town on the Dnepr River that used to be the residence of the rulers during the times of Kiev Russia? When I discovered my mistake, I set out to deal with this new element in the political life of contemporary Europe – but from the historical perspective, rather than the modern point of view. As a professor of the comparative history of Eastern and Central European countries at the Free University in Berlin, and a contributor to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*,

I had been researching the problems of the region for a long time. I thought that cooperation between the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary was a courageous and ambitious idea.

Ever since the national identity of these countries began to gel, they occasionally found themselves at loggerheads, such as over their attitudes towards Tsarist Russia, or Hungary's policy towards Slovakia, to name but a few.

It seems to me that despite the passage of time, these mental burdens have not entirely disappeared from the thinking of the political class, or even from the general attitude of local communities.

Differing national interests caused further clashes after the First World War, with the countries of the region participating in different international agreements, such as the Little Entente, which was directed against Hungary. Czechoslovakia belonged to the Entente, but Poland did not as it was allied with Hungary. Warsaw usually disagreed with Prague, whereas Bratislava had nothing to say.

In the period after the Munich Agreement the entire region was engulfed, first by Hitler's Germany, and then by the Soviet empire. Once again, the fates of these invaded or dependent countries differed. Attempts by governments in exile during the Second World War to form a Polish-Czechoslovak federation failed, and after the war new disputes occurred over border lands.

It was with this historical burden that these four countries undertook the brave project of Visegrad, whose goal was to overcome old rifts and create new foundations for regional cooperation and harmony. This undertaking has not always been smooth, but despite the difficulties it is worth the risk. From Ukraine's point of view as well, cooperation with the Visegrad Group is beneficial and desirable.

The Orange Revolution, Kiev 2004.



Bohdan Osadcuk (Alexander Korab)

Ukrainian publicist and journalist, émigré since 1941. Historian, professor emeritus at the Free University of Berlin. Collaborator of the *Kultura* monthly, edited in Paris by Jerzy Giedroyc.



THE VISEGRAD COMMUNITY – A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

Guillaume Siemienski

In 2003, a Bratislava nurse was preparing to travel to Canada. She and a number of her colleagues were going to participate in a study tour, which was to take place as part of a technical assistance project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. She bumped into me on the street and with great anticipation told me how excited she and her fellow travelers were about the upcoming trip. They were looking forward to learning so much from the Canadians. As the representative of the government of Canada in Bratislava, I of course shared her enthusiasm, but added my hope that the Canadians might also learn something from her.

My remark was not entirely orthodox. In those days of EU pre-accession it was assumed by the international community of funders that knowledge and expertise went from the West to the East and not the other way around. My interlocutor was a bit perplexed and somewhat bemused! The point I was trying to make was that members of the Visegrad community had learned much from their past mistakes and were actually dealing with these “Canadian” issues of regional cooperation, integration and inclusion in what seemed to be an increasingly effective manner. I signalled to her how noteworthy it was that after the collapse of the Soviet empire both Slovakia and the other members of the Visegrad Group had managed to avoid inter-ethnic and cross-border strife, which could not be said about other parts of post-communist Europe. The four members of the Visegrad community were making a conscious and sustained effort to build a common cultural space, a region of shared values, aspirations and inclusions. All of this was being done with very limited resources.

Canadians like to think of the Canadian experience of tolerance, inclusion and regional integration as a success story with universal appeal and applicability. Sometimes we tend to forget that others too have developed or are developing approaches and methods to achieve similar objectives in different and sometimes more challenging circumstances. In this context I can't help but think that the objectives which the states of the Visegrad community have set out for themselves represent a greater challenge.

There is no doubt that any attempt to compare the Canadian experience with that of the Visegrad community will be somewhat lopsided. Even though Canada is a “country of regions” with two founding nations; two official languages; a community of First Nations; numerous ethnicities and races and strong regional identities, it is nevertheless a federal state. Comparing a federal state to a flexible international agreement is risky. However, the focus of my observations is not so much on structures but rather on the practical processes of building a “common space” of shared values, objectives and collaboration. In this sense a comparison of the Canadian federation of regions with the Visegrad community can be worthwhile but only if the objective is to better understand the challenges and obstacles encountered in the process. The comparison only goes so far.

Canada's experience of regional integration is one that has sought to integrate a wide range of diverse communities that settled this enormous land mass relatively recently. Some came three centuries ago while others came within the last 50 or 20 years. Only Canada's First Nations can claim to be the “original” Canadians. A majority of the francophone community of Quebec would probably take exception to my categorizing the French of North America as newcomers. They see themselves as one of Canada's founding nations and their sense of identity is similar, to a degree, to that of the Visegrad nations. This having been said, I think it's still safe to argue that there are few in Canada who seriously question the validity of the state structures in place. Or maybe this should be rephrased in more Canadian terms: There are few in Canada who feel strongly enough about these issues to risk armed conflict, uprisings and violent confrontation.

The challenge of building the Visegrad space is more daunting. For the Visegrad experiment to succeed a measure of its cross-border aspirations and objectives must be reflected in the domestic policies of all the participating states. The reason for this is simple: All members of the Visegrad community share a difficult past of inter-ethnic conflict. To a greater or lesser degree they are all faced with the presence, within their borders, of national minorities whose so-called "kin states" are located literally next door. These communities never chose to migrate anywhere. For centuries they have been and continue to be a historic and stationary presence with every right to be there, and yet they have been subject to dislocation and conflict as a result of shifting borders and changing state structures. The Visegrad process can only succeed if this reality is

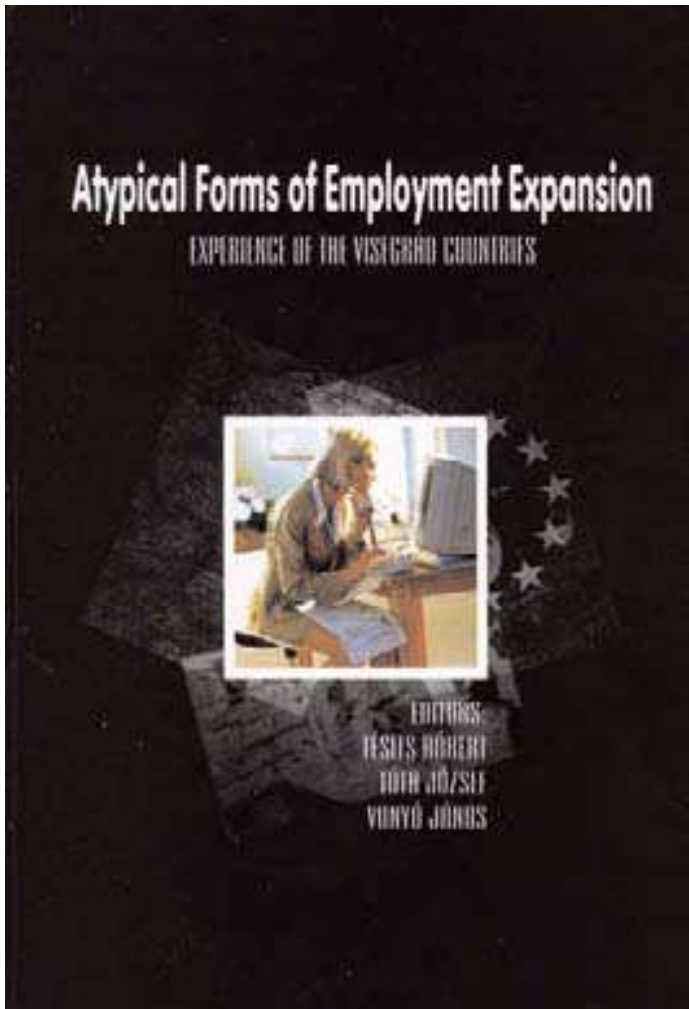
factored into both the domestic policies and the national psyche of each member state. I refer here to such policies as the rights of national minorities, language rights, education rights, the promotion of pluralism and tolerance, restitution, if need be, and so on. The challenge of building a common space of shared values, objectives and cooperation in a context of entrenched historical identities and perceptions is enormous. To think that anyone would have the courage to take it up! This objective can only be achieved if the Visegrad states see their shared historical experience, both good and bad, as a common asset rather than a source of division. A remarkable challenge indeed, one the likes of which Canada has never had to face. Although Canada does have a past of tensions between white and native, French and English, these tensions are less visceral, less entrenched. Canada hasn't been around long enough for such patterns to have become as rooted as they are in the countries of Central Europe.

The issue of identity is another element that marks a fundamental difference in the challenge facing Canada and members of the Visegrad community. Canada is constantly in the process of building and defining its national identity. This time-consuming and rather exhausting exercise is a function of Canada's growing demographic diversity and its policy of multiculturalism. In the Visegrad context, however, the issue of identity is more complex. The participating states seek to temper strongly defined national identities by building an additional layer of regional identity, one which will hopefully reduce what are often uncompromising perceptions of historical rights, injustices and animosities. While Canada is attempting to draw the circle of

identity, the Visegrad community is trying to square it!

Wealth is also an issue. As a member of the G-7, Canada is a wealthy state that can afford to develop and implement regional integration programmes that the countries of post-communist Europe can only dream of. In the Visegrad context, political will rather than wealth will be the determining factor in success, and this is what makes the challenge both so enormous and so attractive. The Visegrad vision will only come true if the elites give it their active and sustained support. The vision will only take root if civil society buys into it. The Visegrad Fund is an example of what can be achieved at grass roots level when one combines a large dose of conviction and enthusiasm with a bit of money.

And, finally, there is one fundamental characteristic that gives the Visegrad community a very particular flavour, one which no other regional arrangement enjoys. This is the common experience of oppression and resistance. All four Visegrad states remember and understand what it meant to be brutally subjected to ideologies that are fundamentally alien to their mentalities and cultures. It is this experience that, after the collapse of the Soviet empire, galvanized the political elites of the Visegrad nations to collaborate with each other in the



common long-term objective of admission into both NATO and the European Union. In actual fact the origins of this collaboration go back to the times of communist repression when members of political opposition movements in the Visegrad states met clandestinely to share experiences, ideas and strategies. These two defining characteristics of oppression and resistance as binding elements are not readily understandable to North America, as both Canada and the United States have lived in peace and tranquil prosperity since the end of the Second World War. These defining characteristics are difficult even for the European Union to grasp fully. Because of their experience of over 40 years of brutal Soviet domination, the nations of the Visegrad community bring with them a much deeper understanding of some of the original, defining concepts that made up the very foundation of the European Community. It was not only about infrastructure and farm subsidies. It was about building a community of interdependence and shared values, which would hopefully prevent Europe from repeating the mistakes that lead to the two World Wars and the Cold War. The Visegrad community brings with it this added insight which hopefully will renew the European Union in spite of itself!

There is every reason for Europe and the rest of the world to keep an eye on the Visegrad community's efforts to both tackle the past and move forward into the future together. This is an enormous challenge that doesn't allow anything to be taken for granted. Its success or failure will no doubt have an impact on Europe's future. Canada should keep watch. It might yet learn something from the Slovakian nurse!



Guillaume Siemienski

Regional head of aid of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the Slovak and Czech Republics and representative of the government of Canada in Bratislava. Currently head of the Human Dimension Office of the OSCE Mission to Georgia.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

Per Unckel

As the Visegrad Group celebrates its 15th anniversary, regional cooperation between groups of countries has become even more valuable than before.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official institution for cooperation between the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Our cooperation also includes the self-governing areas of the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands.



Our cooperation is different from that of the Visegrad countries. It is to a great extent institutionalized, and has been in operation for many years. Initiated officially in 1992, the Nordic countries have been cooperating unofficially for ages. The Nordic Council of Ministers is structurally organized in different ministerial councils with a total budget of more than 100 million euros.

Cooperation among Nordic governments has various aims. Historically it was created to take care of obvious common objectives. The Nordic Passport Union, numerous social agreements, and a close cooperation in education, research and culture are among the achievements of Nordic cooperation in its earlier days.

The Visegrad cooperation was created for different reasons, with a clear focus on membership in the EU and NATO. It successfully completed its original mission with the accession of the four countries to NATO and the EU.

However, the final mission has not – in my opinion – been accomplished, either by the Visegrad countries or the Nordic Council of Ministers. On the contrary, in an EU of 25-plus members, there is a need for a new type of regional cooperation that might be different from the original objective of the two organisations, but that nevertheless has to be addressed.

I am not saying that the EU should be seen as a sort of sum of regional interests. Such an EU would not be able to fulfil its mission. But groups of countries cooperating within the EU based on geographical proximity is one aspect of cooperation that the EU will need, together with cooperation among groups of countries based on common interests.

This is the perspective in which the Visegrad countries, and the Nordic Council of Ministers,

ought to be seen. Regional cooperation within the EU should not be seen only, or even primarily, as a process of forming common positions on subjects discussed at meetings in Brussels. Its wider perspective shows the potential for joint action. Let me mention two examples from our Nordic experiences.

The Nordic countries realize the need to be attractive to people and foreign investment. At the same time we acknowledge that we are small and on the periphery of Europe. One way to compensate for these factors is to remove borders between our countries to an even greater extent than EU rules allow member countries to do.

The European Union means both cooperation and competition among member states; our countries have everything to gain from behaving as one when it comes to making themselves attractive.

Another example is research. While the Nordic countries devote considerable resources to R&D, all five countries are still small players on the international scene. A joint Nordic institution – the Nordic Research Board – encourages the Nordic countries to achieve as many common priorities as possible, thereby helping them compete for international and EU funding and international R&D infrastructure investments.

These experiences should be seen not only as Nordic but also as examples of how regional cooperation – institutionalized or not – could stimulate the development of Europe.

The same could be said for cooperation between old and new members of the European Union. The Nordic Council of Ministers is experiencing dynamic win-win cooperation with our Baltic neighbors, taking the best elements of individual experiences and combining them into Baltic Sea development.

The Visegrad countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers exchanged experiences with one another on several occasions in the past. We come from different backgrounds and different parts of Europe, but have nevertheless – or maybe because of that – been able to profit immensely from our deliberations.

It has been a good start to a relationship that should last forever.



Per Unckel

Lawyer, politician. Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers since 2003. Former chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Constitution (1998–2002) and chairman of the Sweden in Europe Foundation (1997–2001).

DIALOGUE FROM A DISTANCE

Miguel Angel Aguilar and Fernando Valenzuela

It was towards the end of 1988 that the great political changes in Central Europe were in their final stages, but few at the time knew this with any great certainty, nor could they predict the future path, how it was to be done and at what price. It was only H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, professor of Soviet studies at the College of Higher Education in Paris, who wrote about it in her book, *L'Empire  clat *, and expounded on it further in December of that year at the annual conference on European defense organized by the Association of European Journalists in Toledo.



Miguel Angel Aguilar (left) talking to Adam Michnik, Visegrad Seminar in San Sebastian (Spain), July 2003.

The memory of a transition that had permitted a dying dictatorship to disappear from the map without dragging anyone else down with it was still fresh in Spain's mind. For some representatives of the democratic oppositions of Central Europe, that "Spanish route" towards democracy was a rich source of inspiration, a useful tool for counteracting the threats of those whose only support came from the fear of change.

A promising arena was opening up for dialogue between Spain – which after 40 years of marginalization on the international scene was being incorporated into the EC and NATO – and the Central European nations, confined to the sphere of "Eastern Europe", the Warsaw Pact, Comecon and the USSR, again for 40 years, as a result of an agreement between the "Big Four" at Yalta.

It didn't appear easy to resume a dialogue after such a long time. Cinema, theatre, music, and literature – in other words culture – were almost the only links that had survived a century so rich in disasters. Therefore, shared culture and the desire to once again become fully a part of Europe were the only points of reference that could be used.

At the beginning of 1988, the Spanish section of the Association of European Journalists decided to establish contacts with their friends in Prague, Bratislava, Budapest and Warsaw, and received a similar response. The effort was worthwhile in order that the voices of silenced Central European democrats be heard on the other side of our small continent. It was also important that the most dynamic sectors of the establishment in these capitals, who were eager to break the ties to the past in order to find a future, should find opportunities, away from home, to set out on the tough road of agreement and compromise.

In Spain we found an unexpected level of help with this task: The generous support of one of

the major financial establishments in the country, assistance from some of the best means of communication, the valuable involvement of the best journalists, and the invaluable support of Her Majesty Queen Sofia. The image of the Queen as a witness to the public reconciliation between General Jaruzelski and his long adversary, the journalist Adam Michnik, was the front cover on what was one of the best days in July 1991.

The political ramifications of this public embrace were felt strongly in Poland. Jaruzelski began to be considered one of the “heroes of the retreat” so well described by Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Adolfo Suárez, and the paths of bitterness became less travelled. Thus it was shown that distance from home can often encourage dialogue between compatriots.

The last vestiges of the Soviet empire were falling, and many who had almost secretly attended our first seminars now arrived in San Sebastian as members of the governments of their countries, which were now four rather than three after the bittersweet separation of the Czechs and the Slovaks.



Meeting once again in Europe was no longer a distant dream but one of the first tasks to be carried out. However, some of the shortcomings that were obvious from our first encounter in July 1989 were still stubbornly making their presence felt. Chief among them was the shortage of wide contacts between the leading Central European nations, between their leaders and above all between their citizens.

Finding a solution to this challenge has, perhaps, been the greatest achievement by the founding fathers of the European Communities: a deep connection between its peoples, based on an intense network of contacts, exchanges and shared initiatives, comings and goings, trips and visits, and awards and friendships. In a small measure this has also been the aim of the Association of European Journalists, whose various current National Sections are partly a result of personal ties established in the seminars that began in Santander and later continued in San Sebastian. During those years, some of the best Central European leaders made this their goal.

As it is common in all regional cooperation projects – and there have been many over the years in this part of the world – Visegrad also engendered initial mistrust among all sides. However, viewed from San Sebastian or Madrid, with both the natural distortions imposed by distance and the special perspective that distance gives, there is no doubt about the success of the undertaking.

In a world that is becoming increasingly global and which some would wish to be unipolar, there are few attempts to bring neighbors together, to get to know them up close, or to share



Miquel Angel Aguilar

Spanish physicist and journalist, renowned political analyst and commentator. Secretary-General of the Spanish branch of the Association of European Journalists. President of the Carlos de Amberes Foundation.

Hungarian writer Imré Kertész (left) at the Visegrad Seminar in San Sebastian.

Fernando de Valenzuela

Spanish journalist and translator. Graduated in philosophy in professor Jan Patočka's class in Prague. International President of the Association of European Journalists.



interests and desires. That is what drives our efforts, because Spain, its institutions, and above all its people, continue to push for and support this process, because its success will benefit all Europeans.

The Spanish section of the Association of European Journalists will continue to sound out the truth in Central Europe every year in this forum for dialogue and encounter that we established 18 years ago.

Javier Solana in San Sebastian.





International Visegrad Fund



FIVE YEARS OF THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

Andrzej Jagodziński

The five years that the International Visegrad Fund has been in existence is a relatively short period of time, nevertheless it gives us an opportunity to recapitulate some of its history. Established in June 2000 in Stirina, during a summit of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, it was designed to support cultural cooperation, scientific research, cross border cooperation, and the exchange of young people between our countries. Initially it had at its disposal the modest sum of one million euros, which was distributed among the best projects involving the participation of at least three member states.



The first director of the Fund was Urban Rusnak, who built the organization from scratch and gave it solid foundations. The Fund does not propose any projects, but rather supports the best of the projects that have been submitted. The number of applications has always exceeded

Iwona Dabkowska, University of Gdańsk, PL,
Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

“I had a great time in Prague. The city is fascinating, the people are friendly, and my research group from the Czech Academy of Sciences was inspiring and improved my scientific qualities. I am happy I could obtain such a great lesson on how to operate in the modern world of science.”

Martin Panigaj, University of P. J. Šafárik, SK,
Institute of Immunology and Microbiology, 1st Medical Faculty,
Charles University, Czech Republic

“I appreciate being able to attend the VSF scholarship program. It is very positive that the IVF recognizes that cooperation in Life Sciences is equally as important as cooperation in political and economic studies, and moreover that it supports it.”

Doubravka Olšáková, Institute of Contemporary History, CZ,
University of Debrecen, Hungary

“My stay in Budapest, which was supported by the Visegrad Scholarship Fund, helped me enrich my thesis on Central European painters in the 19th Century with the case of Hungary. I also appreciate the cooperation with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.”

Arpád Welker, Central European University, HU,
Research Center for the History of Sciences and Humanities,
Czech Republic

“The Visegrad scholarship offered me a wonderful chance to pursue research in Prague. Despite the fact that Prague is one of the most beautiful cities of Europe, the opportunity to study the fate and position of local Jewry – probably the most prominent and remarkable of its kind in Central Europe – was of great importance from the point of view of my research.”



Andrzej Jagodziński

Polish translator, publicist. Journalist with *Gazeta Wyborcza* and correspondent for Czech Republic and Slovakia (1989–1995), Director of the Polish Institute in Prague (1996–2001), Executive Director of the International Visegrad Fund (since 2003).

the Fund's financial capacity. It is worth noting that the IVF is a cost-effective organization and in its initial years spent only 7 percent of its budget on administration, with the figure later rising to 8.5 percent (the standard for this type of institution is 10–15 percent). This sum also covers the cost of bank transfers to grant holders.

The basic principle of the Fund is to support projects involving at least three (or better, all four) countries of the Visegrad Group. We have tried to create a network of people and institutions in our countries that know each other, are in touch with each other, and organize events together. Despite the opening of our borders in 1989 and the elimination of obstacles to travel, we still don't know each other very well, and know very little about ourselves. Changing this situation is the only political goal the Fund has, besides encouraging civil society.

The IVF began with only one grant program. After two years, when its budget was raised to 2.4 million euros, the Small Grants Program was established, providing awards of up to 4,000 euros meant for smaller, local projects. It soon gained considerable popularity.

The next step was a scholarship program for post-graduate students and doctoral candidates. Initially it was only for students from the Visegrad countries, but since the 2004/2005 academic year it has also been available to the citizens of the six non-EU neighboring countries (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Croatia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro).

At the beginning of 2005 we started another grant program called the Strategic Program, which was for bigger projects lasting from one to three years. Under this program, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad countries indicate their priorities, and the Fund then invites bids for the grant.

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 organisations from all EU member states (including the six countries in the Visegrad "neighbourhood") can apply for a grant under the same conditions: They have to find partner organizations from at least two Visegrad countries, and the subject matter of the project has to be related to our region.

In the five and a half years of the Fund's existence, nearly 1,500 grants and 140 scholarships worth a total of over 10 million euros have been distributed. 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.

The Fund demonstrates that even with relatively small amounts of money, a lot can be done. All the governments that have been in power in the Visegrad Group countries have understood

Gabor Bekessy, University of Pécs, HU,

Jagiellonian University, PL

"The IVF scholarship provided me with an ideal environment for carrying out my studies for the "Polish chapter" in my prospective comparative PhD thesis. The IVF grant is absolutely sufficient to give any researcher in the V4 region an optimal level of scientific independence."

Juraj Sevela, Jagiellonian University, PL,

Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations, Poland

"I feel that the Visegrad Scholarship provides an excellent opportunity for young scholars from Central Europe to proceed with their research and studies in the region. The value of this opportunity and experience is unquestionable. As a student, I greatly appreciated the quality of the academic assistance I received at Jagiellonian University for my research and studies. I can heartily recommend the Visegrad Scholarship to anyone who seeks an opportunity to study or conduct research in Central Europe!"

The International Visegrad Fund

Paweł Franciszek Palka,

Master's thesis, Warsaw, June 2005

"The International Visegrad Fund is a well-managed international organisation that uses the finances of the member states well and fulfils the aims for which it was established. In its five years of work this institution has significantly supported the development of the Visegrad Cooperation. The IVF is an inseparable part of the Visegrad Group. To develop the Visegrad Cooperation it is necessary to continue to reinforce the Visegrad Fund, because it directly benefits the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland." (pp. 90–91)

this, and almost every year their contributions to the Fund have increased (from 1 million euros in 2000 to 3 million euros in 2005). On the other hand, the number of applications submitted has increased even faster, and we are simply not able to satisfy all of them.

After five years of operation, the International Visegrad Fund is a stable and solid institution and – equally as important – follows absolutely transparent principles and rules for financing its activities and projects. It has supported enormously diverse projects, ranging from those that make the newspaper headlines to small local events. We appreciate them all and treat them the



same way, as they all help to develop and activate civil society in our countries, and help us to understand each other better.

We are also glad that the four Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group countries all supported our proposal to bolster cooperation with our eastern and south-eastern neighbors. There are both political and moral arguments in favor of this: The West has supported us for many years, so now that we are in the European family, we should repay it by helping those who need it on their way to unifying Europe.

From the streets of Pécs, the venue of the International Adult Puppet Festival with a large representation of Visegrad puppetry schools.

AT THE BEGINNING THERE WERE 300 REQUESTS

Urban Rusnák

From the outset, the Visegrad Fund was a professional challenge for me – to build an international organization from the ground up. It is the first and so far the only organization within the Visegrad cooperation, whose initiators promised at the beginning of the 1990s that it would not be institutionalized, but that it would immediately prove its utility and justification.

Youth events are an important part of the projects supported by the IVF.

The International Visegrad Fund was started on 9 June, 2000 at the Štiřín Castle not far from Prague, and its founding was sealed with the signatures of the Prime Ministers of all four

countries. We flew to Bratislava by government jet, and I took office that very day, based on a decree from the Conference of Foreign Ministers, but in unfamiliar quarters, and without means or staff.

What does an institution need to be able to function? A headquarters, a bank account, offices, equipment, staff, an internet connection. There are in fact hundreds of such operational details as well as important components. But the main thing it needs is an idea – for what and for whom was it created?

Furthermore, what will drive its further development? The answer is simple: It was, and still is, the citizens of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia who wanted to

cooperate with each other. They had the ideas and the contacts, but they lacked the money to convert them into action. For this reason it was necessary to get the grant mechanism going as soon as possible in order to demonstrate or refute the need for this cooperation. If there were no interest in grants for cooperative projects between Visegrad countries, the Fund would have no purpose. The first deadline was 15 September, 2000, and the closer we came to that date, the

The Visegrad Cultural Prize

By the decision of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Four countries, a Visegrad Cultural Prize was introduced in 2005. Its first laureate was László Szigeti – an essayist, writer and director of the Kalligram publishing house. In the 15 years it has been in existence, this institution has published almost 1,000 books, mostly by Central European authors. It also publishes three magazines. Kalligram is active in both Slovakia and Hungary, and also cooperates with publishing houses in the Czech Republic and Poland. László Szigeti was the co-author of the idea to found a “Visegrad library” – a literary series containing the most important works of Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak writers.

The prize is financed by the International Visegrad Fund.

Andrzej Jagodziński

“For an institution of freedom, Kalligram’s publishing instincts are phenomenal. It has a precise sense of what it means to be a promoter of free thought under an authoritarian regime with democratic legitimacy, and in an environment of moral relativity. Its activities are testimony that apathy and cynicism cannot destroy faith among us Central Europeans in democracy and in the value of human life.”

Adam Michnik, political analyst, essayist, editor-in-chief of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily.



clearer it was that the idea had interested people. The first round was a clear triple success – a success for the idea of supporting Visegrad cooperation among the civil societies of the V4 countries, a success for grant applicants, and a success for the Fund's secretariat, which managed to handle 300 applications.

In the following years we worked on improving the grant system, and we gradually introduced small grants and a scholarship programme. Our basic principle was transparency and trying to create friendly relations with the applicants. This led to communication with the public and consultation with individual applicants, project implementation and grant accounting. The public rewarded our efforts with its constant interest in Visegrad cooperation, to which the governments of all four countries responded by regularly increasing their contributions to the Fund's budget. In this way, an initiative of the governments of the four countries became an initiative of the citizens, whose interest and worthwhile projects showed the critics that Visegrad is more than merely an idealistic concept dreamed up by political elites, or some form of short-term cooperation. The governments in their turn truly acted responsibly to the Fund, and never, even when political relations within the V4 were at the freezing point at the beginning of 2002, questioned their commitments to the International Visegrad Fund.

In the course of my work I got to know many great people in Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, who had been allowed to implement their ideas by money from the Fund. The Visegrad Fund aroused interest beyond our borders as well, as thanks to the V4+ formula we were able to support projects extending into neighboring countries.

During an evaluation of the first three years of the work of the International Visegrad Fund at the summit of the V4 Prime Ministers in Tále in Slovakia's Low Tatra mountains in the summer of 2003, the Fund was called the flagship of Visegrad cooperation. In 2005, the Fund celebrated a small jubilee – its first five years in existence. I believe that the idea of deepening cooperation between the citizens and institutions of the four Central European countries is now completely viable.



Urban Rusnák

Slovak diplomat and analyst. Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Ukraine (since February 2005). Served as a first executive director of the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava (2000–2003).

The sports meeting in Šternberk, the Czech Republic, is one of many projects focused on youth in Visegrad Group countries.

“I regard Kalligram as one of the symbols of Central Europe, and at the moment as one of the best Hungarian publishing houses. As an intellectual workshop, Kalligram, and László Szigeti personally, play an irreplaceable role in the formation of modern thought and the elimination of the tension of our times. Kalligram is at least as valuable as a political party, but a pro-European one.”

Árpád Göncz, writer, President of Hungary from 1990 to 2000.

“The Kalligram publishing house is an example for intellectuals across Central Europe of sovereign cooperation, on the basis of one's own decisions and without prejudices. Kalligram sweeps away stereotypes and revives values that were unjustly neglected or left to collect dust. It builds spiritual bridges, thanks to which our common difficulties and common tasks are clearly recognizable.”

Petr Pithart, political analyst, essayist, Deputy Speaker of the Czech Senate.

IVF FACT SHEET

Date of Establishment:

9 June, 2000, Štířín (Czech Republic)

Member States:

Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia

Governing Bodies:

Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs,
Council of Ambassadors

Executive Body:

Executive Director: Andrzej Jagodziński,
Deputy Executive Director: René Kubásek

Administrative Body: Secretariat**Seat of the Secretariat:**

Drotárska cesta 46, 811 02 Bratislava, Slovakia

The mission of the International Visegrad Fund is to promote the development of closer cooperation between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia and the strengthening of ties between these states. In other words, to promote regional cooperation among the Visegrad countries through supporting the development of common cultural, scientific, and educational projects, as well as exchanges between young people, and the promotion of tourism and cross-border cooperation.

The budget of the Fund consists of equal annual contributions from all Member States. As of 2005, the Member States agreed to contribute EUR 750.000 each, providing a total yearly budget of EUR 3.000.000.

IVF Programs in 2006

1. Standard Grants (budget of 1.600.000 EUR)

- for cooperation projects between subjects from V4 countries
- deadlines: March 15 and September 15
- minimum grant amount is 4.001 EUR

2. Small Grants (budget of 448.000 EUR)

- for cooperation projects between subjects from V4 countries
- deadlines: March 1, June 1, September 1 and December 1
- maximum grant amount is 4.000 EUR

3. Visegrad Scholarships Program (budget of 524.000 EUR)

- for post-masters studies
- deadline: January 31

4. Visegrad Strategic Program (budget of 200.000 EUR)

- for important, long-term strategic projects (see the list of priorities for the year 2006)
- deadline: January 31

All applications must be submitted in English.

Results of application selection process

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Grant Applications	236	469	475	639	645	712
Requested Amount	8 677 583	12 122 811	7 746 000	9 699 942	9 463 955	11 684 253
Granted Amount	406 317	406 317	1 924 594	2 081 917	2 090 168	2 336 864
Grants	26	89	144	203	272	301
Scholarship Applications	N/A	N/A	N/A	61	100	241
AwardedScholarship	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	35	80

Actual Trends of the IVF Selection Process (2000–2005)

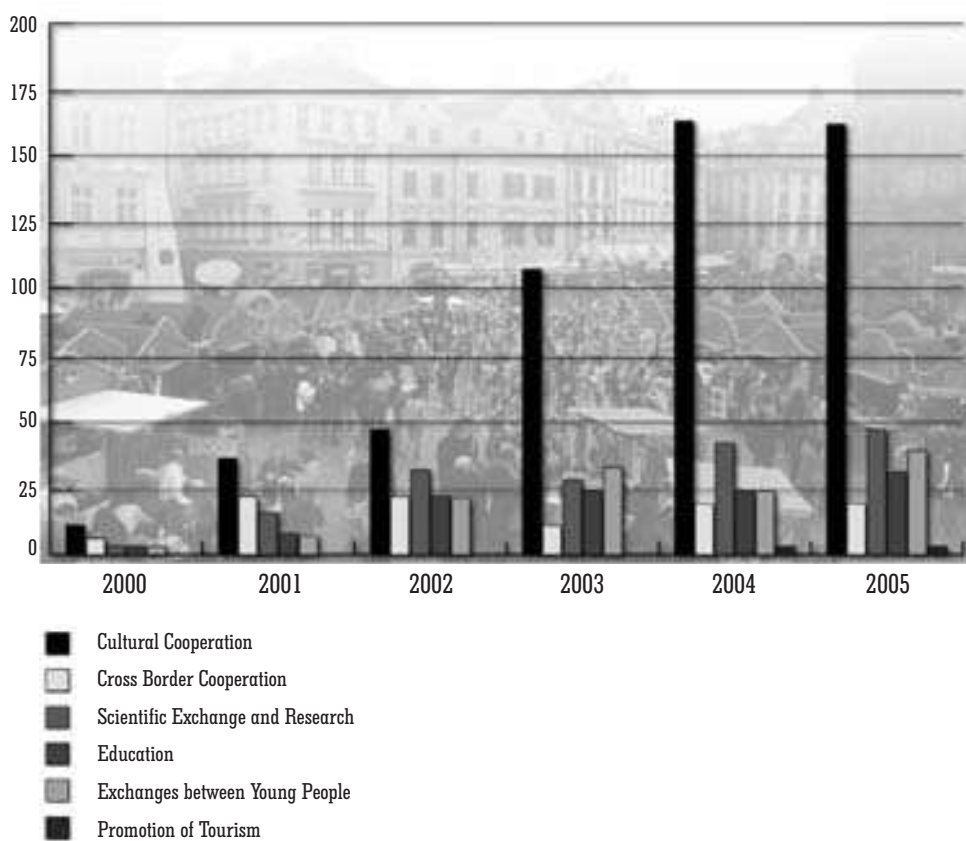
Status: December 31, 2005

Deadline Indicator	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Standard grants							
Number of Applications	236	469	251	267	309	372	1904
Number of Grants	26	89	91	110	139	172	627
Allocated Amount in €	406 317	1 523 019	1 723 700	1 749 693	1 623 000	1 804 809	8 830 538
Small Grants							
Number of Applications	N/A	N/A	224	372	336	332	1264
Number of Grants	N/A	N/A	53	93	133	129	408
Allocated Amount in €	N/A	N/A	200 894	332 224	467 168	462 055	1 462 341
Visegrad Strategic Programme							
Number of Applications	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8	8
Number of Grants	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2
Allocated Amount in €	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	110 000	110 000
VisegradScholarships							
Number of Applications	N/A	N/A	N/A	61	100	241	402
Number of Grants	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	35	80	142
Allocated Amount in €	N/A	N/A	N/A	246 000	260 000	538 500	1 044 500

Breakdown of IVF Small and Standard Grants by categories and countries

Status: December 31, 2005

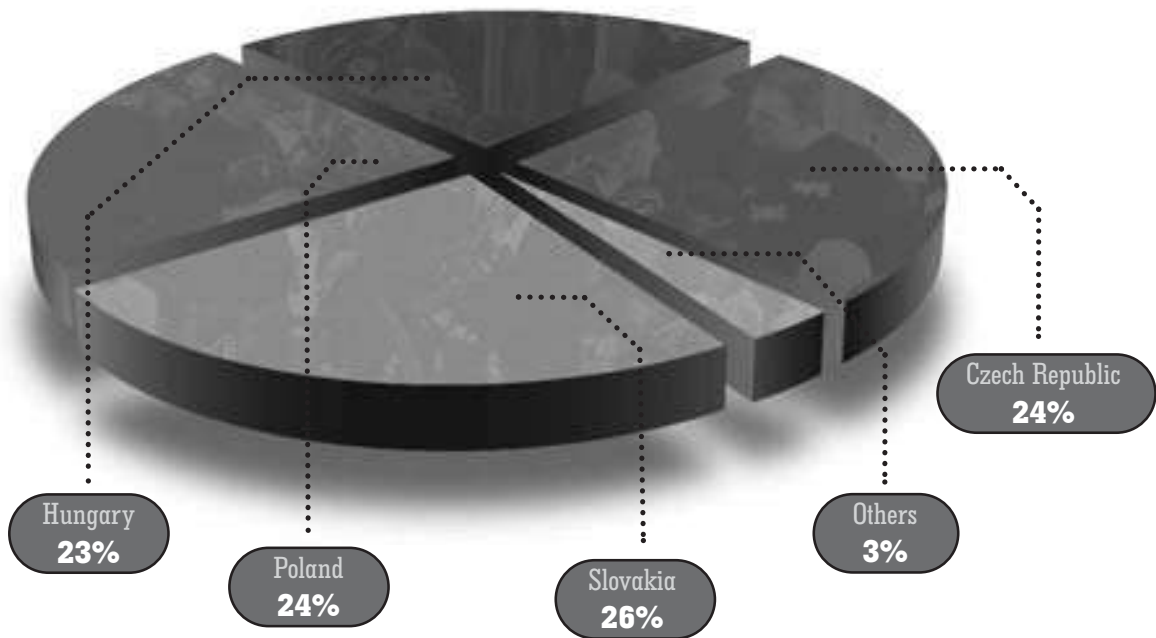
Category Round	Cultural Cooperation	Cross Border Cooperation	Scientific Exchange and Research	Education	Exchanges between Young People	Promotion of Tourism	Total
2000	11	6	3	3	3	0	26
2001	36	22	16	8	7	0	89
2002	47	22	32	22	21	0	144
2003	107	11	28	24	33	0	203
2004	163	19	42	24	24	0	272
2005	162	19	47	31	39	3	301
Total	526	99	168	112	127	3	1035
In %	50,82	9,57	16,23	10,82	12,27	0,29	



Breakdown of Contracted Grants and Scholarships by Countries in EUR.

Status: December 31, 2005

Year	2000	2001	2002		2003			2004		
type	Standard	Standard	Standard	Small	Standard	Small	VSP	Standard	Small	VSP
CZ	65 425	410 134	429 000	49 075	424 600	80 790	63 000	410 000	106 764	54 000
HU	132 387	335 255	394 700	48 232	475 000	85 626	56 000	400 000	108 428	49 000
PL	61 800	412 580	410 800	47 950	431 000	78 288	63 000	407 000	130 231	53 000
SK	146 705	365 050	489 200	55 637	419 093	87 520	64 000	406 000	121 745	64 000
AT										
BY										20 000
DE										
HR										
RO										5 000
RU										5 000
UA										
UK										
SCG										10 000
total	406 317	1 523 019	1 723 700	200 894	1 749 693	332 224	246 000	1 623 000	467 168	260 000



2005				Total				Grand Total	% of the Total Budget
Standard	Small	VStP	VSP	Standard	Small	VStP	VSP		
428 000	114 258	40 000	75 500	2 167 159	350 887	40 000	192 500	2 750 546	24,0 %
426 309	115 603		58 500	2 163 651	357 889	0	163 500	2 685 040	23,5 %
429 00	107 205		101 500	2 152 180	363 674	0	217 500	2 733 354	23,9 %
455 500	112 000	70 000	98 000	2 281 548	377 891	70 000	226 000	2 955 439	25,8 %
30 000	8 000			30 000	8 000	0	0	38 000	0,3 %
			10 000	0	0	0	30 000	30 000	0,3 %
7 000	4 000			7 000	4 000	0	0	11 000	0,1 %
			0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0 %
			10 000	0	0	0	15 000	15 000	0,1 %
			10 000	0	0	0	15 000	15 000	0,1 %
14 000			170 000	14 000	0	0	170 000	184 000	1,6 %
10 000				10 000	0	0	0	10 000	0,1 %
			5 000	0	0	0	15 000	15 000	0,1 %
1 799 809	462 055	110 000	538 500	8 825 538	1 462 341	110 000	1 044 500	11 442 379	100,0 %

www.ahice.net

Internet portal run by art lovers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia provides information about current events in the domain of art history in the Visegrad region.

www.visegradgroup.org

The official V4 website administered by the Foreign Ministries provides information about political meetings in the format of V4. It contains all statements, declarations and agreements made since the foundation of the Visegrad group.

www.visegrad.info

This internet magazine, run by four NGOs from V4 countries, offers analytical articles on both Visegrad and Central European issues. Their authors are publicists, university professors, politicians, research workers and university students.

www.visegradfund.org

Official website of the International Visegrad Fund. Contains information on IVF's grant programmes, guidelines for grantees as well as calendar of activities supported by the Fund.

www.european-quartet.com

Joint project of the V4 National tourist authorities presents the region as a unique destination for travelers from all parts of the world. It offers routes, which allow them to visit sites throughout the Visegrad region.

www.visegradyouth.org

Website of the Association of Visegrad youth NGOs provides information on training courses, capacity building programmes and various youth activities.



Visegrad 15 Years from Now



PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP IN THE NEAR FUTURE

Cyril Svoboda

In 1335, the Bohemian, Hungarian, and Polish kings met in Visegrad. The aim of their meeting was simple: To negotiate peace and cooperation. At the same place more than 650 years later, in 1991, the top representatives of three Central European countries set themselves a similar task: To intensify the regional cooperation of the three (and subsequently four) Central European countries with a view to strengthening the identity of the Central European region and mutual contacts among its inhabitants. In the aftermath of the political upheaval at the end of the 1980s, the historical experience shared by the Poles, Slovaks, Czechs and Hungarians of living alongside each other for almost 1,000 years gave rise to an agreement on mutual cooperation, on the joint presentation of common political opinions and other points of contact, and on the convergence of the citizens of today's four Central European countries which are geopolitically, historically, culturally and otherwise bound up in a single regional unit.

The fundamental common political objective of the member states of the Visegrad Group was to ensure security and political and economic solidarity with the euro-Atlantic area and its international groupings, especially NATO and the European Union. At the same time that efforts were being made towards achieving these goals, mutual relations among the inhabitants of the Visegrad countries constantly expanded and resulted in the need to create the International Visegrad Fund with a view to distributing the V4 countries' finances pooled for the implementation of diverse cultural, scientific and other events and projects. This civic contact and the rising natural interest in what was going on in the countries of the Visegrad partners did not ease off even in the run-up to the V4 countries' accession to the European Union, when political interests and opinions on specific issues diverged more frequently than before.

However, despite the pessimistic forecasts, EU membership confirmed the legitimacy of the Visegrad platform as a useful means of mutual consultation, identification and coordination of common issues, and simplification and unification of the presentation of the common interests of the Visegrad countries. The past year also demonstrated that there was unity in the expectations of how the Visegrad Group's operations would develop in the near future. The Visegrad countries have created a functioning, flexible mechanism of cooperation that has proved its worth in practice; the results of this cooperation are likely to be reflected in the way the Visegrad Group's activities are guided in the future.

Does the Visegrad cooperation still offer us any prospects? I am convinced that it does.

In my view, Visegrad cooperation could be intensified along two main lines: growing rapprochement among the countries within the Visegrad Group, and the reinforcement of its influence on the international scene. The smoothly working Visegrad, judging by its activities to date, seems to have a genuine chance to establish a strong position for itself within the European Union in the upcoming period and to become an integral part of the EU's consulting forum, ranking alongside other regional organizations. The V4 countries' common and profiled experiences could help establish additional links in the broader Central European region, ensure the efficient implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and provide effective assistance in particular to those countries in the region which are undergoing social and economic transformation. Considering that the foreign-policy interests of the Visegrad Group's individual members are naturally reflected in the organization's policy, these priorities can be conveyed to other partners within the V4 in a positive manner. In this respect, the Czech



Cyril Svoboda

Politician. Current Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic. From 2002–2004, Deputy Prime Minister. Former leader of the KDU-ČSL party.

Republic has the opportunity, in the future, of enriching the activities of Visegrad with its international initiatives in areas such as human rights or in other priorities of its foreign policy. I consider it significant that all four member states agree on the key trends in the Visegrad Group's future operations.

I believe that the major rise in the Visegrad Group's foreign policy activities that we have recently witnessed should continue. The V4 is developing and consolidating its cooperation with the Benelux, and it has established contact with the Nordic Council, where there is potential for common action in certain fields of European policy in the future. The transformation in progress in Ukraine has become a natural challenge for the V4 countries to pass on their experience, and has paved the way for new opportunities of cooperation with this Visegrad neighbor. The Visegrad Group is rightly keen, in the next two years, to focus on support for the democratization process in Belarus as well, and to make Moldova another of its priorities. The V4's cooperation with the West Balkan countries should also continue, especially in the form of assistance to these countries as they strive for greater integration.

Other countries and international organizations are gradually establishing contacts with the Visegrad countries because they can see that communicating with the V4 will simplify mutual relations on issues where the Visegrad countries have a similar approach or hold identical views. Therefore, the Visegrad Group as a whole increasingly has much to offer, and interest in its activities is escalating among the countries of Western Europe and beyond. Countries such as Austria, Slovenia, the Baltic countries, the countries of South and Eastern Europe, and even Japan, Canada, the Mercosur association and others have all expressed an interest in establishing closer cooperation.

The quality of Visegrad cooperation is intensifying proportionately to the mushrooming contacts and awareness of the reciprocity inside and outside this group. Besides constant increases in contributions to the International Visegrad Fund and the expansion of its activities to cover further fields, another means of developing relations among the citizens of the Visegrad countries can be found in the project to nurture an efficient Visegrad Group information and communication policy, because general awareness of Visegrad cooperation is currently poor when we consider the indisputable results of its broad range of activities. The project of an external information strategy and quality Internet presentation should promote better awareness of the V4's activities in line with the current requirements of the professional and general public. The internal dimension of this policy should lead to more effective communication channels within the group of Visegrad countries. The goal of achieving a higher degree of mutual awareness should apply not only to the broad population base of the V4 countries, but also to other areas.

I am at pains to stress that the Czech Republic believes that the format of the Visegrad Group will be an important instrument of regional cooperation in Central Europe in the future, and that through its foreign-policy activities it will help stabilize and drive forward integration efforts in other parts of East and South-Eastern Europe. We support the trend of expanding the format of joint V4 negotiations with other countries and groups inside and outside Europe. We also support the newly emerging projects of the International Visegrad Fund, which focus in particular on the fulfilment of foreign-policy goals in accordance with the priorities of Visegrad Group policy, which are being set on an ongoing basis. We rate the increasing interest in grants and scholarships awarded by the International Visegrad Fund very highly; these are one of the most concrete manifestations of the support for cooperation among V4 countries and for the promotion of their international operations, and we will continue to strive to maintain them while expanding and obtaining aid from other countries, especially the EU member states. It is pleasing to note that the number of grant applications has also escalated in the field of science and research, which indicates that there is an awareness of the closeness and mutually beneficial creative potential in practical fields of relations among V4 citizens.

The overlapping of the diverse aspects of the community in the Central European region has almost no limits, whether we consider the perception of its unity in the form of a joint field of

study at universities around the world, the establishment of a tradition of joint cultural events, the further harmonization and convergence of cultural, educational, social-science, scientific, research and other policies, the close cohesion of the governmental and non-governmental institutions of Visegrad countries, the contact among the representatives of cities and regions, tourism, international relations, or the effective support of common goals and their coordinated realization. In my opinion, the energy invested in other Visegrad activities will consolidate the coherence, identity and significance of the Central European region on a global scale to an extent that our Central European rulers could not have imagined in 1335.

VISEGRAD 15 YEARS FROM NOW

Ferenc Somogyi

A decade and a half ago, the common goal of speedy accession to Euro-Atlantic organizations acted as a catalyst for regional cooperation in East-Central Europe. In 1991, the three transitional countries in the region decided to establish the Visegrad Agreement, with the primary objective of harmonizing the positions presented during accession negotiations. By 2004 – with Visegrad's now four countries all having joined NATO and the EU – the formal phase of the institutionalization of Euro-Atlantic integration had come to a close. The ensuing year and a half has proven, however, that the *raison d'être* of the V4 in this new state of affairs has not only been preserved, but in many senses has become stronger. Awareness of and respect for the group has grown; the V4 has become a kind of trademark for the expression of mutual goals and efforts in East-Central Europe. Acting together has brought results, and in many areas the Visegrad Four have become active in the formation of European Union policy. So there is good reason for us to work together, and with a decade and a half's experience under our belt, we can look to the next 15 years of Visegrad cooperation with confidence.

Until now, regional cooperation between our countries has always been within the framework of a common culture and history, a similar level of development, and often similar problems and interests. For the most part, the V4 pursued pragmatic goals with clear deadlines, but today a reinforcement of the long-term foundations of cooperation has become necessary. We have recently seen much evidence of European public opinion falling into disarray. Reservations emerging about the EU's operating mechanism can on occasion endanger the practical implementation of basic EU principles. We can satisfactorily represent the interests of our region in the process of communal thinking that has begun in the Union if we are successful in consolidating a Central European self-identity based on our unique interests and our common traditions and values. It is the conscious acceptance of this regional identity that provides a secure backdrop to future actions of the Visegrad Group.

Let us not forget, however, that the set of values rooted in Central Europe is not limited to the V4 countries: it can be found elsewhere, in Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, and even in Lithuania. In many areas we have seen efforts similar to ours on the part of regional groups that are geographically further afield. It will help us to achieve our goals if in the future we continue to give a conspicuous role to the cooperation arrangement created by so-called "shifting geometries": V4-plus.

It is both the responsibility and in the interest of the countries of the Visegrad Group to actively support the Western Balkans and the eastern dimensions of the European Union's policy towards its neighbors. 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. The set of historical connections between the V4 and these regions, as well as their common past and geographical proximity, present the Visegrad countries with both an opportunity and a responsibility: We must cooperate closely and share our experiences to help the Western Balkans and our direct neighbors to the east join the Euro-Atlantic organizations.

There can be little doubt that it is the prospect of integration that is the greatest incentive for reform and political, economic and social transition in these neighboring regions, as well as for the strengthening of regional stability. The role of the Visegrad countries in the presentation and representation of this prospect – both within the Union and *vis-à-vis* the neighboring states – cannot be overstated. The consistent reinforcement of the V4-Ukraine and V4-West-Balkans set of mutual understandings thus represents significant added value within the EU's foreign and security policy, and maintaining the intensity of cooperation in the period ahead will be very important. The activity of the V4 includes sharing experiences, organizing professional exchange programmes, assisting the region's small and medium-sized enterprises,

strengthening the civil sphere, providing advice on EU legal harmonization, and not least encouraging cultural relations.

One of the serious failures of the Visegrad Group over the last 15 years is that awareness and acceptance of the results of regional cooperation have been lower than desired in the member countries themselves. In the interests of reinforcing the V4's social cohesion and support, the content and practice of cooperation must be brought closer to ordinary people; the public must be informed systematically and thoroughly of the objectives and achievements of common endeavours. It is vital that, in addition to the specialists in charge of individual projects, there be closer bonds between various civil organizations (sports clubs, self-education groups, specialist colleges, foundations, etc.), professional bodies, educational institutions, local authorities and churches. The broadening and intensity of interaction between non-governmental actors can produce a stable basis for cooperation between the four countries, as well as a significant guarantee of equilibrium in political relations.

The cultural dimension plays an important role in strengthening cohesion within the V4. We have the common task of seeing that the residents of the Visegrad states become aware of the cultural values of our partner nations. World-famous writers like Kollár, Kertész, Mickiewicz, Gombrowicz, Mrožek, Kundera, Hrabal, Márai, Nádas; internationally recognized artists such as Cernak, Brunovský, Munkácsy, Mucha, Rippl-Ronai, Aba-Novák, Toyen, Štyrský, Pankiewicz; and musical greats like Bartók, Chopin, Dvořák, Janáček, Suchoň, Szymanowski, Lutoslawski, Penderecki: all form an inseparable part of our common, Central European cultural heritage. Neither should we forget the many dozens of Nobel Prize winners that the region has given to the world. Central and Eastern Europe has enriched universal civilization to a degree far out of proportion with the population of the nations that live there. We must thus pay greater attention to our eminent personalities, and to spreading awareness of their work.

Tourism is an unrivalled means for our peoples to meet and learn more about each other. While tourism within the V4 appears to be on the rise, there is much more to be done in becoming acquainted with each other's countries. While UNESCO has declared treasures like Litomyšl castle in the Czech Republic, Vlkolínec in Slovakia, Zamość in Poland or the Fertő-Hanság Nemzeti Park in Hungary to be a part of world heritage, they are still relatively unknown among people in the other partner countries. The Slovak spas of Trenčianske Teplice, Dudince or Štrbské Pleso; the Polish thermal waters of the Sudety mountain range; the waters of Františkovy Lázně, Luhačovice and Kyselka in the Czech Republic; or equally Bükkfürdő in Hungary: all have the necessary assets to become favourite destinations for large-scale health tourism. Apart from helping to strengthen the Central European identity, our countries have a significant economic interest in improving internal tourism. There is little doubt that mutual promotion of our tourist assets will attract greater attention in the V4's future cooperation projects.

Close regional cooperation is unimaginable without roads, airports and railway lines that are up to the demands of the 21st century. The physical infrastructure connecting the countries of the region is in need of significant improvement. It is also our common responsibility to protect East-Central Europe's natural environment, and to satisfy conditions for sustainable development. We are counting on the European Union to support both objectives. A number of the continent's transport corridors will pass through our countries, the building of which will give new momentum to our regional connections. In the case of infrastructure development and environmental projects, too, we must come up with projects that reach across borders, and whose financing can be supported by EU funds.

The International Visegrad Fund plays an important role in the institutionalization of V4 cooperation. The Fund was established on 9 June, 2000 with the goal of supporting cultural contacts; over the years its activities have continued to expand. Today it also organizes programs in fields ranging from education and environmental protection to R&D. A striking new element of the Fund's operation is that, as a tool of the V4 programs contributing to the EU's foreign and security policy, it now transcends the narrowly defined Visegrad framework. Since



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2003 it has provided scholarships to young people from nearby countries (Ukraine, Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Belarus).

Over the years, the number and quality of applications submitted to the Fund has steadily improved. The Fund's sources of financing need to be boosted, however, for its ever-widening activities to be sustainable. With stronger financial backing, the IVF could not only increase the number of scholarships and grants it provides, but it could expand its activities to other forms of cooperation. In this way the Fund could, among other things, play a greater role in joint communication programs. I trust that the launch of the planned V4 television channel will be a step forward in this regard.

The above all makes clear that the Visegrad cooperation is far from "mission complete". During the last 15 years, the four countries have successfully acclimatized to the changing principles and methods of cooperation, and have proved themselves capable of overcoming occasional operational problems. Meanwhile, the activities of the Group have broadened considerably, while its international reputation has increased. In today's Europe, the primary condition for the successful representation of interests is cooperation, acting together. Our future economic and social progress demands the preservation of the region's stability and the success of projects that operate across it. We are thus condemned to cooperation, and Hungary, as president of the V4, strives to strengthen this long-term approach. We have every reason to be confident about the future of the Visegrad Group. We are certain that a successful and fruitful further 15 years lie ahead of us.

THE VISEGRAD GROUP

- A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

Stefan Meller

The Visegrad Group was established at a definite moment in our history. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, our countries found themselves in a security void, in the grey zone of European security. Regional cooperation was to be an effective tool in helping to solve the most important problems of the time: dissolving the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, and securing the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Central Europe. It also proved useful in tasks connected with the attempt of the countries of our region to find a new place on the map of Europe through accession to NATO and the European Union. Today we can say that despite various obstacles over the last 15 years, the Visegrad Group has become a recognizable visiting card for the region, a "brand name" denoting the successful European changes. It also means a collaboration between countries with a similar history which in the past occasionally opposed one another. It signifies the capacity to cooperate not only in solving current problems, but also in focusing on long-term goals. It means cooperation, not only during top political and diplomatic meetings, but also through contacts based on the everyday work of experts, communities, regions, and non-governmental organizations.

Nowadays it would be hard to imagine a Central Europe without the Visegrad Group. Our four countries are now members of NATO and the European Union, but this does not impair the continuation of the cooperation, and not only between governments: In 2000 the International Visegrad Fund was set up for the support of non-governmental projects, and recently the Forum of Visegrad Regions was also established. Our contacts have also increased with foreign partners such as the Benelux, the Nordic Council, and specific countries such as Japan.

The future of our cooperation appears to be intimately linked with the European Union, since the four Visegrad countries became members of the EU on 1 May, 2004. The Visegrad Group fits well with the logic of smaller groups existing within the EU that help achieve compromise in the Union.

The Visegrad collaboration should still focus on three planes. On the internal level, the projects that are carried out should reinforce the potential of the entire region of Central Europe. This concerns mainly the influx of new investments and modern technologies, transport and telecom infrastructure, diversified energy connections, etc. To achieve the desired aims, non-governmental bodies, private enterprises, local governments and businesses must be more widely included in these projects. In the near future it is also worth considering the formation of a regional, Visegrad mechanism of financing projects carried out jointly by governments and NGOs. Here it would be valuable to compare legislation in the four countries regarding public-private partnership.

The V4 countries will engage in projects related to Central Europe and its surroundings, and in this way the entire European Union. The processes of democratization, systemic transformation, and greater proximity with the West that have begun in the nations of Eastern Europe and the Balkans require our help. The Balkan countries already have a clear prospect of gradual accession to the EU and NATO. A timeframe has not been defined, as the process depends on the ability of individual countries to meet democratic standards and to practice healthy economic policies, and above all to absorb the rules and values that are common to the entire Western community. Given current political trends, creating positive and encouraging prospects for the countries of Eastern Europe will be no less important for the Visegrad countries, as well as convincing their EU partners to create such prospects. Events in Ukraine and Moldova showed that these nations have the crucial potential to modernize, but that they require decisive and constant external support, especially from the EU. We in Visegrad could capitalize on the experience we have gained since 1989. We are obliged by our history and by



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the spirit of solidarity to share it with those nations that are setting out on roads that we have travelled.

The EU should remain the main platform of the Visegrad Group's activities. Our four countries, together with the others that joined the Union recently, have introduced to the Union a fresh dose of optimism, innovation, and openness to brave, new projects. Such an attitude would be very useful, for example, in the debate over the future of the EU itself, the direction of its development, its institutional structure, its role in international politics, as well as concrete projects to support future prospects, such as the Lisbon Strategy. Greater mutual engagement by the Visegrad countries in debate on these issues, such as by using the experience and prestige of the former Presidents of our countries, would increase our significance in this context. As a matter of fact, a "club of ex-Presidents" would be a magnificent way to promote the Visegrad Region in general, not just within the EU.

Greater engagement by the Visegrad Group within Eastern Europe and the Balkans fits well into the actions undertaken within the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The experiences of our countries, as well as of the EU itself, show clearly that we should aspire to have the Common Foreign and Security Policy carried out as much as possible in a harmonized, agreed and communal way. This requires not only the support of the Visegrad Group for the idea of an "EU Minister of Foreign Affairs" or the formation of a European External Action Service, but also their approval of a gradual increase in the budget of the Common Foreign and Security Policy so its decisions would not remain on paper only. It is worth adding in this context that the position of the Visegrad countries in NATO also makes us a valuable partner in the EU-NATO dialogue and, more broadly, in the trans-Atlantic dialogue.

The cooperation between our four countries over the last few months has shown that voices predicting the expiry of the Visegrad idea after we gained membership in the EU were wrong. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have managed to adjust their formula for cooperation under the new conditions in a mature way. This has only enriched our experiences and strengthened our feeling of regional identity. The processes which are ongoing or which will occur in our region, nevertheless, will bring new challenges and new projects, which will be the subject of future Visegrad Group cooperation.

VISEGRAD 15 YEARS FROM NOW – END OF THE MISSION OR NEW CHALLENGES?

Eduard Kukan

Fifteen years ago, the Presidents of Czechoslovakia and Poland, Václav Havel, and Lech Wałęsa, together with Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, met in Visegrad to agree on cooperation between their countries. It was a courageous and far-sighted step to take at a time when Europe and the world were undergoing the most profound changes since the end of the Second World War. Radical political changes had taken place in the three Central European countries, bringing an end to totalitarian regimes and placing deep socio-economic changes on the agenda, together with an aspiration to join the family of free, democratic and prospering countries.

The declaration signed by the participants of the Visegrad Summit of 1991 clearly formulated the objectives of the cooperation between the Central European countries: the restitution of state sovereignty; elimination of the remains of the totalitarian system; the building of legal states and market economies; and accession to Euro-Atlantic integration structures.

On 1 May, 2004, one of the key objectives of the declaration – accession to the European Union – became reality, and the plans of the Visegrad countries from 15 years before were fulfilled. But the V4 countries concluded that their cooperation remained meaningful even after their accession to the EU and NATO, and expressed a willingness to continue. It is difficult to predict today what the Visegrad Group will look like in 15 years. But we know which path we want to take, and we know the Group's priorities. The Kroměříž Declaration adopted by the Visegrad partners on 12 May, 2004 identifies them precisely, which is extremely important for the future of the V4 Group.

The Visegrad Group was not established as an organization and, therefore, does not have a formalized institutional framework (with the exception of the International Visegrad Fund, which supports civil contacts and activities). It is, instead, a regional consulting forum whose members are united by common interests and objectives. The V4 has maintained this character without major changes until now, and there are no signs that the participating countries want to change it.

The future of the V4 lies in its ability to develop its internal ties and to recognize and make use of the opportunities for joint projects that will benefit individual localities, neighboring regions, as well as all of the Visegrad countries. The strengthening of cohesion is connected with broader regional, continental, and even global processes. The development of infrastructure to provide quick links between individual V4 countries and to trans-European transport networks is of special importance in this respect. The geographical location of our countries and increasingly strong east-west and north-south economic ties show that this is a strategic matter where joint action will be beneficial.

The environment is another area that will be at the forefront of attention in the new phase of the Visegrad Cooperation, not only because of the impact of climate change on our region, but also because we bear responsibility for creating proper conditions for life and for eliminating those factors that often have a negative effect on all V4 countries.

International terrorism and organized crime are global threats that need to be effectively addressed both regionally and locally. This is a relatively new area of collaboration between the four Central European countries that is directly related to the security of their citizens, as well as to security in broader terms and our international commitments and responsibilities.

The new phase in the operations of the Visegrad Four is closely related to the European Union. It was not long ago that our efforts focused above all on meeting the criteria for accession to the Union. The key question today is how to effectively participate in the Union's decision-making processes and to contribute to its development.



Eduard Kukan

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We became members of the Union at a time when it is confronting both short-term and strategic problems. The priority is EU reform, which should help to improve the Union's competitiveness and preserve the European social model. It is also vital to improve its absorptive capacity to cope with the next wave of enlargement. The Visegrad countries, together with other members of the EU, are seeking answers to these complex questions, and their regional dialogue can help shape opinions and solutions within the Union as a whole.

The V4 countries do not have the ambition to become a special, jointly acting organizational structure within the Union's decision-making process. This is completely natural, because, along with common interests, they have many different views. On the other hand, where their views are identical or similar, they can successfully cooperate and drive the resolution of complex issues. Our experience so far of membership in the EU has shown that this is a flexible method that can be successfully applied in the long run.

The V4 countries have considerable potential to help form the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Because they are situated on the south-eastern and eastern borders of the Union, they have a national and regional interest in seeing the zone of stability and prosperity expand. They see their participation in this policy as their responsibility to Europe.

The Visegrad countries will continue to play an important role in the Union's policy on the Balkans, and in the stabilization and association processes that are now starting. The start of negotiations on EU membership with Croatia is clear evidence that accession to the Union is not just a pipe dream, but a very realistic future for the Balkan states. Therefore, it makes sense for them to reform their social institutions and to develop constructive relations with their neighbors. Our experience of preparation for EU membership and our knowledge of the situation in the region enable us to provide effective assistance to the countries of the West Balkans in meeting the requirements for accession to the Union. An agreement dividing the tasks in this process between the individual V4 countries is a new and positive step towards better coordination and greater efficiency in their work.

The already traditional contacts between the V4 countries and Ukraine will certainly contribute to the implementation of the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The dialogue in the V4 + Ukraine format will be especially important, as it makes it possible to jointly assess the most important issues in mutual relations and to identify further directions for our cooperation. The transformation of Ukrainian society is currently one of the hottest topics, and one that will have a long-term impact on the situation in this part of Europe and the continent as a whole. These are very difficult steps, but without them, democratic development and economic prosperity are impossible. It is ultimately also the key requirement for the success of Ukraine's ambition to become a member of the EU and NATO. Political and expert support for reforms will be one of the key points in the future cooperation between the V4 and Ukraine.

After its members joined the EU and NATO, the Visegrad Group did not lose any of its inner momentum. On the contrary, today it faces a whole range of new challenges that call it to action. There is probably no threat of stagnation due to a lack of stimuli over the next 15 years. Another condition for the operation of the V4 – the will and desire of its members to cooperate – has also been met. Hence, the chances are great that this group will continue to play an important role in international politics.

Annex

DECLARATION ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK FEDERAL REPUBLIC, THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY IN STRIVING FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

(unofficial translation)

The meeting, in Bratislava, of the presidents, Prime Ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and members of parliaments of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary began a process of creating foundations and new forms of political, economic and cultural cooperation between these countries in the altered situation in Central Europe.

The similarities in the situation that has evolved over the past decades has determined some common basic objectives for these three countries:

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

The common nature of these objectives, as well as the similarity in the means of achieving them, in many fields poses identical tasks for the three neighbouring countries. The coordination of their efforts – with respect for their national particularities – increases the chances of attaining the desired goals and hastens the reaching of their objectives.

The similarities between the significant changes occurring in these countries, their traditional, historically-shaped system of mutual contacts, their cultural and spiritual heritage, and the common roots of their religious traditions ensure a favourable basis for the intense development of cooperation. The diverse and rich cultures of these nations also embody the fundamental values and achievements of European thought. The mutual spiritual, cultural and economic influences exerted over a long period of time, resulting from the fact of their proximity, could support a cooperation based on natural historical development.

Cooperation between the nations and civil communities of the three countries is essential for the joint creation of conditions that will contribute in each country to the development of a democratic social system based on respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, the liberty of economic undertakings, the rule of law, tolerance, spiritual and cultural traditions, and respect for moral values.

At the same time, the signatories to the Declaration respect the right of all other nations to express their own identities. They emphasize that national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, in accordance with traditional European values and in harmony with internationally recognized documents on human rights, must enjoy all political, social, economic, and cultural rights, including education.

In a unified Europe, to which the three countries wish actively to contribute, it is possible for nations to maintain their cultures and national characters while fully implementing the universal system of human values. The systematic fulfillment of the idea of civil society is a key issue in the spiritual and material development of Central Europe, and is an indispensable condition for establishing a mutually beneficial cooperation with developed countries and with European institutions. Universal human values, as the most important element in the European heritage, along with individual national identities should serve as the basis for developing a society of people cooperating with each other in a harmonious way, tolerant of each other and of individual families and local, regional and national communities, free of hatred, nationalism, xenophobia, and local strife.

It is the conviction of the states-signatories that in the light of the political, economic and social challenges ahead of them, and their efforts towards renewal based on the principles of democracy, their cooperation is a significant step on the way to general European integration.

The signatories of the Declaration shall jointly undertake the following practical steps:

- in accordance with the interests of the individual countries they shall harmonize their activities to build cooperation and close contacts with European institutions, and they shall hold regular consultations on matters concerning their security;
- they shall endeavour to create free contacts between citizens, institutions, churches and social organizations;
- in order to support the free movement of labour and capital, they shall develop economic cooperation based on free market principles, and mutually beneficial trade in goods and services; moreover, they shall strive to create favourable conditions for direct cooperation between enterprises and on foreign capital investments, aimed at improving economic efficiency;
- they shall focus on the development of communications infrastructure, with regard to the links both between the three countries and with other parts of Europe, mainly on the north-south axis, and they shall coordinate the development of their power systems and telecommunications networks;
- they shall increase cooperation in the field of ecology;
- they shall create favourable conditions for the free flow of information, for the development of the press and for cultural values;
- they shall jointly develop multilateral cooperation to ensure optimum conditions for the full realization of the rights of national minorities living on the territories of their countries;
- they shall support mutually beneficial cooperation between interested local self-governments in their countries, and the establishment of sub-regional contacts.

The signatories to the Declaration state that their cooperation will in no way interfere with or restrict their relations with other countries, and that it will not be directed against the interests of any other party.

The cooperation between the signatories will be realized through meetings and consultations held at various levels and in various forms.

Done in Visegrad on 15 February, 1991 in three identical originals in the Polish, Czech and Hungarian languages, equally valid.

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEETING OF THE PRIME MINISTERS OF THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

Bratislava, 14 May, 1999

1. We, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic, welcome the opportunity to meet in Bratislava in order to revitalise the cooperation of the Visegrad Countries in its full historical dimension. We are pleased that the group will be able to act to its full capacity.

2. Taking into consideration the proximity of our States and the similarity of our experiences in the process of political, economic and social development, the participants of the meeting recognise the need for closer cooperation of the Visegrad Countries and confirm their interest and readiness to participate in developing good neighbourly relations in the region of Central Europe.

3. We strongly condemn the deliberate policy of oppression, ethnic cleansing and violence pursued by Yugoslav military, police and paramilitary forces against the civilian population in Kosovo. We call upon the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to comply with all conditions set forth by NATO and other international organisations and countries to ensure a verifiable halt to all military actions and the immediate end of all forms of violence. We sympathise with all people afflicted by the Kosovo crisis and will undertake all necessary efforts to put an end to the conflict, secure lasting peace and stability in South-East Europe, and promote democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law.

4. We welcome the progress of the Visegrad Countries towards full integration with Euro-Atlantic and European structures. We are satisfied with the results of the NATO Summit in Washington, the reaffirmation of the Alliance's open door policy and the inclusion of Slovakia into the group of candidate countries. We reaffirm that it is in the interest of all Visegrad partners and the region as a whole that Slovakia become a full member of NATO and start accession negotiations with the European Union as soon as possible. The transfer of expertise is of crucial importance for all partners. The Visegrad states will share their experiences from the process of accession into NATO and integration with the European Union, as well as those related to informing the public about accession.

5. We are determined to deepen the cooperation in the area of preparation for meeting the EU criteria in the field of justice and home affairs, with the emphasis on combating illegal migration, trafficking in people and illicit drugs and weapons, as well as combating international crime and terrorism. The development of cross-border cooperation at the local, regional and intergovernmental level is an effective way of strengthening our mutual relations. It is desirable to intensify the use of the relevant existing and future EU programs and funds.

6. The building of solidarity and integrity in the region should be facilitated by various activities aimed at enhancing day-to-day contacts among the citizens of the Visegrad countries. We assign great significance to the activities of non-governmental organisations and shall encourage their cooperation.

7. The considerable revival of the Visegrad Group should be strengthened by the annual meetings of Prime Ministers, members of Government, state secretaries of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and coordinators of the Visegrad cooperation. We assume that the subsequent meetings will be hosted by the partners on a rotating principle. It is with satisfaction that we accept the invitation to meet in Prague next year.

Miloš Zeman
Mikuláš Dzurinda
Jerzy Buzek
Viktor Orbán

DECLARATION OF THE PRIME MINISTERS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY, THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND AND, THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC ON THE COOPERATION OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES AFTER THEIR ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic, assembled on May 12, 2004 in Kroměříž, state with full satisfaction that the key objectives set out in the 1991 Visegrád Declaration have been achieved, and declare their determination to continue developing the cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries as Member States of the European Union and NATO.

The Visegrad Group countries regard their accession to the European Union and NATO as a significant step towards the reunification of Europe and as a historic milestone on the path of their democratic transformation, integration efforts and mutual cooperation. The integration of the Visegrad Group countries into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures opens up new opportunities and poses new challenges for their further cooperation on issues of common interest.

The cooperation of the Visegrád Group countries will continue to focus on regional activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region. In this context, their cooperation will be based on concrete projects and will maintain its flexible and open character.

The Visegrad Group countries are strongly determined to jointly contribute to the fulfilment of the European Union's common goals and objectives and to the successful continuation of European integration. They reiterate their commitment to the enlargement process of the European Union. They are ready to assist countries aspiring to EU membership by sharing and transmitting their knowledge and experience. The Visegrad Group countries are also ready to use their unique regional and historical experience and to contribute to shaping and implementing the European Union's policies towards the countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

The Visegrad Group countries are committed to closely cooperating with their nearest partners in the Central European region. They are also ready to cooperate in specific areas of common interest with countries within the wider region, with other regional groupings in Europe as well as with third countries and international organizations.

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries express their deep conviction that further cooperation between their countries, rooted in centuries of interlinked history and based on similar political, economic and social developments in the past decades, will enrich the community of European nations and contribute to the building of a reunited, democratic and prosperous Europe.

H.E. Mr. Vladimír Špidla
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

H.E. Mr. Péter Medgyessy
Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary

H.E. Mr. Marek Belka
Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland

H.E. Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda
Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

GUIDELINES ON THE FUTURE AREAS OF VISEGRAD COOPERATION

Having in mind the common interest of all participating countries presented in the Declaration in Kroměříž on May 12, 2004, future cooperation will be developed particularly in the following areas:

Cooperation within the V4 area

- Culture;
- Education, youth exchange, science;
- Continuation of the strengthening of the civic dimension of the Visegrad cooperation within the International Visegrad Fund and its structures;
- Cross-border cooperation;
- Infrastructure;
- Environment;
- Combating terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration;
- Schengen cooperation;
- Disaster management;
- Exchange of views on possible cooperation in the field of labour and social policy;
- Exchange of experiences on foreign development assistance policy;
- Defense and arms industries.

Cooperation within the EU

- Consultations and cooperation on current issues of common interest;
- Active contribution to the development of the CFSP, including the “Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood” policy and the EU strategy towards the Western Balkans;
- Consultations, cooperation and exchanges of experience in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, Schengen cooperation, including protection and management of the EU external borders, visa policy;
- Creating new possibilities and forms of economic cooperation within the European Economic Area;
- Consultations on national preparations for joining the EMU;
- Active participation in the development of the ESDP, as a contribution to the strengthening of relations between the EU and NATO, and deepening of substantive dialogue between both organisations.

Cooperation with other partners

- Cooperation with interested Central European countries;
- Cooperation with EU and NATO candidate and aspiring countries in support of reforms essential for their European and Euro-Atlantic prospects;
- Collaboration in effective implementation of programmes of cooperation of these countries with the EU and NATO;
- Cooperation with other regional structures;
- Collaboration with other interested countries and organisations.

Cooperation within NATO and other international organisations

- Consultations and cooperation in the framework of NATO and on its defense capabilities;
- Commitment to strengthening trans-Atlantic solidarity and cohesion;
- Cooperation on the basis of the V4 experience to promote a common understanding of security among the countries aspiring to European and Euro-Atlantic institutions;
- Enhanced cooperation within the international community in the fields of new security challenges, with a special emphasis on combating international terrorism;
- Consultation and cooperation within the OSCE on issues of common concern for V4 countries; possible joint initiatives;
- Consultation, cooperation and exchange of information in international organisations (UN, Council of Europe, OECD, etc.); consideration of possible joint initiatives;
- Possible mutual support of candidacies in international organisations and bodies.

Mechanisms of cooperation

Governmental cooperation:

- Rotating one-year presidency, each chairmanship prepares its own presidency program ensuring, among others, continuity of long-term V4 cooperation;
- One official Prime Ministers summit annually at the end of each presidency;
- Occasional informal meetings of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers before international events;
- Deputy foreign ministers meetings preceding the official PM summits;
- Meetings of other ministers in V4 and V4+ formats;
- Intensified communication of V4 national coordinators and their key role in internal and inter-state coordination;
- Consultation and cooperation of Permanent Representations to the EU and NATO in Brussels, as well as in all relevant fora (OSCE, UN, CoE, OECD, WTO, etc.);
- International Visegrad Fund and its structures.
- Meetings of Presidents of V4 countries,
- Co-operation of Parliaments of V4 countries.

AGREEMENT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

The Government of the Czech Republic, the Government of the Republic of Hungary, the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the Contracting Parties) guided by the provisions of the Visegrad Joint Statement signed on May 14, 1999 in Bratislava, hereby agree as follows:

Article 1

The International Visegrad Fund (hereinafter referred to as the Fund) with its seat in Bratislava is hereby established.

Article 2

The Statute of the Fund is hereby adopted and shall constitute an annex hereto.

Article 3

This Agreement shall be adopted pursuant to the relevant national legislation of the States of each Contracting Party and shall enter into force as of the day on which the last instrument certifying adoption hereof is deposited with the Government of the Slovak Republic, acting as the Depository.

Article 4

This Agreement shall apply provisionally from the date of its signing until the date of its entry into force in accordance with relevant national legislation of the States of the Contracting Parties.

Article 5

The Government of the Slovak Republic, acting as the Depository, shall notify all Contracting Parties of the deposit of all instruments certifying adoption, the entry into force hereof, as well as of any other facts connected with this Agreement.

Article 6

The withdrawal of any Contracting Party from the Fund or the dissolution of the Fund in accordance with the Fund Statute shall constitute the withdrawal of that Party from this Agreement or termination of this Agreement in its relations with all other Contracting Parties.

Done at Štířín on the ninth day of June in the year two thousand in a single original in the English language to be deposited with the Government of the Slovak Republic.

The Depository shall provide all Contracting Parties with certified copies hereof.

For the Government of the Czech Republic: **Miloš Zeman**

For the Government of the Republic of Hungary: **Viktor Orbán**

For the Government of the Republic of Poland: **Jerzy Buzek**

For the Government of the Slovak Republic: **Mikuláš Dzurinda**

STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

CHAPTER ONE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Article 1

The purpose of the Fund shall be to promote:

- the development of closer cooperation between the Contracting Parties;
- the strengthening of ties between the States of the Contracting Parties;
- common presentation of the States of the Contracting Parties in third countries.

Article 2

The objectives of the Fund shall be pursued through financial support of activities, in particular in the following areas:

- promotion and development of cultural cooperation;
- promotion and development of scientific exchanges, research and cooperation in the field of education between the Contracting Parties;
- promotion and development of exchanges between young people;
- promotion and development of cross-border cooperation;
- promotion and development of tourism of the Contracting Parties.

Cooperation between the Contracting Parties in these fields regulated under other international treaties shall not be affected.

Article 3

The Fund can support projects originating in countries other than the Contracting Parties, provided that they shall have at least two (2) co-organizing partners from the Contracting Parties and that the topic of the projects shall be related to the Visegrad Group region.

CHAPTER TWO SEAT AND MEMBERSHIP

Article 4

The Contracting Parties to the present Agreement shall be the founding Members of the Fund. The seat of the Fund shall be in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

CHAPTER THREE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Article 5

The governing bodies of the Fund shall be:

- the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs;
- the Council of Ambassadors.

The executive body of the Fund shall be the Executive Director. The Executive Director shall have his/her Deputy Executive Director.

The administrative body of the Fund shall be the Secretariat.

CHAPTER FOUR CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Article 6

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall be the supreme body of the Fund.

Article 7

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall be composed of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Contracting Parties or their duly authorised representatives.

Article 8

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall designate from among its members its President, with the Presidency rotating in the English alphabetical order of the names of the States of the Contracting Parties.

Article 9

The term of office of the President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall be one year and not renewable.

Article 10

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall determine the amounts of annual contributions and their due dates for each Contracting Party.

Article 11

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall approve the annual and long term plans regarding activities of the Fund.

Article 12

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall approve budget of the Fund, annual statements and clearance of budget presented by the Council of Ambassadors.

Article 13

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall approve the Rules of Procedure of the Secretariat and may decide on amendments thereto.

Article 14

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall adopt resolutions unanimously.

Article 15

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall meet at least once a year in order to estimate the implementation of the tasks set forth in the present Statute. The President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall schedule the place and date of its session.

CHAPTER FIVE COUNCIL OF AMBASSADORS

Article 16

The Council of Ambassadors shall consist of:

- ambassadors of the Contracting Parties accredited to the Head of the State whose plenipotentiary currently holds the post of President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, or of chargé d'affaires a.i;
- and the plenipotentiary of the Contracting Party whose representative holds the post of President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 17

Sessions of the Council of Ambassadors shall be chaired by the plenipotentiary of the Contracting Party whose representative holds the post of President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 18

The Council of Ambassadors shall prepare programmes of activities of the Fund and reports on their implementation in the preceding year and submit them for approval to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 19

The Council of Ambassadors shall prepare draft budgets of the Fund and reports on their utilisation in the preceding year and submit them for approval to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 20

The Council of Ambassadors shall lay down binding guidelines for the activities of the Executive Director and rules governing the preparation, acceptance and implementation of projects submitted to the Fund, taking into account the rules regulating the rights and duties of the Executive Director set forth by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 21

The Council of Ambassadors shall draft programmes and documents for sessions of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 22

The Council of Ambassadors shall adopt resolutions unanimously.

Article 23

The Council of Ambassadors shall meet at least once every six months and in between these periods whenever it shall deem it appropriate for the implementation of the objectives defined in Chapter One. The Chairperson of the Council of Ambassadors shall schedule the place and date of its session.

Article 24

The Council of Ambassadors shall adopt its Rules of Procedure, which shall be subject to approval by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 25

The Council of Ambassadors may propose to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Secretariat, to be approved in pursuant to Article 13.

CHAPTER SIX EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND THE SECRETARIAT

Article 26

1. The Executive Director shall be responsible for the implementation of the objectives of the Fund and its smooth performance.

The Executive director shall be empowered to make representations on behalf of the Fund. On behalf of the Fund the Executive Director shall be empowered by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to sign The Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the International Visegrad Fund.

2. The Executive Director shall head the Secretariat.

3. The Deputy Executive Director shall perform the duties specified in the Rules governing rights and duties of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director.

Article 27

Each Contracting Party of the Present Agreement has the right to nominate its own candidate for the position of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director. The Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director shall be appointed by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The term of the office of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director shall be three years and may be renewed for one additional term.

Article 28

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall lay down rules regulating the rights and duties of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director, the manner in which they are to be performed as well as the terms of office of the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director.

Article 29

The Executive Director shall participate in sessions of the Council of Ambassadors in an advisory capacity.

Article 30

The Executive Director shall be responsible for the functioning of the Secretariat and, in conformity with the legislation of the State in the territory of which the Fund has its seat, shall determine the terms and conditions of employment for the staff of the Secretariat pursuant to the rules adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 31

The Executive Director shall regularly inform the Chairperson of the Council of Ambassadors on the manner in which the programme of activities of the Fund is implemented, prepare annual statements and clearance of the budget of the Fund.

Article 32

The Secretariat shall be responsible for services provided during sessions of the Council of Ambassadors and services provided in connection with the sessions of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs as well as other services related to the functioning of the Fund.

Article 33

The responsibilities of the Executive Director shall be of an exclusively international character. In the performance of his duties the Executive Director shall follow the rules defined by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and shall not receive instructions from the third parties.

Article 34

The official language of the Fund shall be the English.

CHAPTER SEVEN LEGAL STATUS OF THE FUND

Article 35

The Fund has full legal personality necessary for the fulfilment of the aims associated with its activities.

CHAPTER EIGHT FINANCES

Article 36

Activities of the Fund shall be financed from contributions made by the Contracting Parties and financial contributions from other resources approved by the Council of Ambassadors.

Article 37

Each Contracting Party shall undertake to provide an annual contribution to the Fund by the due date specified by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The first annual contribution to the Fund shall be one million euro to be paid by the Contracting Parties in equal shares. The amount of further annual contribution shall be determined by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 38

The rules governing the use of the financial means of the Fund shall be determined by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Article 39

The Fund shall open its bank account in the State providing the seat of the Fund. Financial means of the Fund shall be kept in this bank account. The funds shall be administered by the Executive Director.

CHAPTER NINE TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Article 40

Each Contracting Party may at any time withdraw from the Fund by giving an instrument of denouncement to the Depository Government. Its membership shall be terminated twelve months following the receipt of such instrument by the Depository Government.

Article 41

When a Contracting Party withdraws from the Fund, a final settlement shall be made between such Contracting Party and the Fund on the basis of mutual agreement at the earliest session of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

CHAPTER TEN DISSOLUTION OF THE FUND

Article 42

The Fund may be dissolved exclusively by an unanimous decision of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, subject to a prior consent of the Contracting Parties.

Article 43

Following a decision under Article 42 of the present Statute, the Executive Director shall forthwith terminate any and all activities except for activities related to the due collection and liquidation of assets and payment of liabilities.

Article 44

Within the disbursement of assets, the liabilities of the Fund shall have priority over the refund of the contributions.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Fifteen years is a very short time compared to the scale of the universe, but for each person it constitutes a significant part of their lives, all the more so that in the past fifteen years our countries have seen so many fundamental changes. Hence, the anniversary of the Visegrad Group is undoubtedly a good occasion to sum up this period and to reflect on prospects for the immediate future. This was the starting point of the idea to ask several dozen people – mainly from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, though not only – to share their thoughts, emotions and memories connected with the creation and functioning of the Visegrad Group. The idea met with a very warm reception among the Visegrad Coordinators in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, who agreed to this publication, encouraged us to do this work, and gave us a lot of valuable advice. It went without saying that the International Visegrad Fund, as the sole joint institution of the Group, should be the publisher.

The book you are holding is a collective work of many people, and we would like to thank them all whole-heartedly for their goodwill and effort. First and foremost, we would like to thank the authors who did not refuse our request and sent us their – often very personal – contributions despite their numerous obligations, and despite the holidays and New Year’s season. We would also like to thank: all those who made available photographs and documents from their private collections; Director Gábor Galla from the Hungarian Tourist Office which coordinated the preparation of the CD accompanying our publication, and which provided us with many photographs free of charge; the Spanish EFE press agency and its International Director Fernando de Valenzuela for having made available photographs free of charge; the Director-General of the Czech CTK press agency, Milan Stibrál, and the Editor of its photo section, Dusan Vesely, for an enormous reduction given for our purchase of unique photographs; and – last but not least – Maciej Domański, the Director of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw, for financial support for this publication and for having seconded a number of his staff members to help in its preparation. Without their expert knowledge our task would have been more difficult – after all, the Fund is not a professional publishing house.

We would also like to thank many other people of goodwill, whose names cannot all be mentioned here, who helped us in obtaining contacts, addresses, telephone numbers, photographs, or who provided us with logistical support. Finally, we extend our thanks to all the authors of joint Visegrad activities in various areas and those who implemented them, for it was thanks to their everyday work that our contributors had material to write about.

We are enthusiasts of Visegrad Group cooperation, and we think that its continuation – now within the framework of the European Union – makes perfect sense. We wanted to recall the achievements of the past 15 years and present the broadest possible range of joint activities directed both at our countries internally and to the outside. Many of these initiatives do not find their way into the media and therefore, unfortunately, remain almost unknown to the broad public. If reading this book gives you material for reflection, or whets your curiosity, then our efforts have not been in vain.

Editorial Board

This book would not have come into being without dedicated work of an international team involved directly in its production: editors, translators, photo editors, and – first and foremost – a team of excellent graphic designers led by professor Lech Majewski. A great involvement of all the colleagues from the Editorial Board was also fundamental – they are very busy with everyday obligations, yet they decided to take on additional responsibilities for several months, and their creative ideas bore fruit in the final shape of this publication. Thank you very much.

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The Adam Mickiewicz Institute was established by the Ministry of Culture in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The AMI dedicates itself to international cultural co-operation in general and to promoting Poland, its culture, heritage and language throughout the world. Its most important partners include Polish and foreign cultural institutions, embassies and consulates, Polish studies departments at universities, translators and the cultural institutions of Poles living abroad.

The institute pursues promotional projects that strengthen Poland's positive image as an open, modern country with a rich culture.

Key current projects include:

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- Jerzy Giedroyc Year 2006

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Apart from vast, interdisciplinary promotional projects, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute also manages a range of programmes that ensure that Poland and its culture, language and history remain a constant presence throughout the world.

We invite you to visit our website at: www.iam.pl, www.culture.pl, www.diapozytyw.pl

Bogdan Bernaczyk-Słoński
Director



Bogdan Bernaczyk-Słoński
Theatre director, lecturer at acting schools and a manager of culture. He worked and created in Poland, Belgium, France, and Latin America. Currently in position of Director of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute.



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