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THE ROLE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP IN THE EU INTEGRATION

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Aim. To analyse the effectiveness of the Visegrad Group within the EU and its role in the regional cooperation in order to understand whether this group can serve as a proper model for European integration.

Methodology. The research was conducted using the methods of qualitative research, content and discourse analysis of primary and secondary sources, and case study. The basis of qualitative research was formed by an analysis and interpretation of single treaties, declarations and other decisions made by the Visegrad Group throughout its functioning, which have had an important impact on the development of the region, single countries and the EU as a whole.

Results. The findings confirmed that regional cooperation in a specific format is beneficial for the application of democratic principles during the process of regime transition. In addition, such a partnership is helpful in encouraging, developing and implementing projects representing common interests.

Research implications. This research contributes to the studies of Central and Eastern Europe and can serve as a case study in the research of regional cooperation. From a practical perspective, the findings can be used to forecast possible cooperation and development in certain spheres of the studied region, which can be beneficial, e.g. when designing specific policies towards the Visegrad Group

Keywords: Visegrad Group, Central Europe, European integration, EU, NATO, regional cooperation

РОЛЬ ВЫШЕГРАДСКОЙ ГРУППЫ В ИНТЕГРАЦИИ ЕС

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Цель. Проанализировать деятельность Вышеградской группы в рамках ЕС и её роль в развитии регионального сотрудничества. Выяснить, может ли она стать моделью для европейской интеграции.

Процедура и методы. Исследование основано на комплексном и дискурсивном анализе договоров, деклараций и других документов, принятых Вышеградской группой на протяжении всей её деятельности.

Результаты. Сделан вывод, что региональное сотрудничество в определенном формате выгодно для применения демократических принципов в процессе смены режима. Кроме того, такое партнерство помогает стимулировать, развивать и продвигать проекты, представляющие общий интерес.

Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость. Результаты исследования вносят вклад в изучение регионального сотрудничества в Центральной и Восточной Европе. С практической

точки зрения они позволяют прогнозировать тенденции развития в определенных сферах изучаемого региона, что может быть полезным, к примеру, для выработки конкретной политики по отношению к Вышеградской группе.

Ключевые слова: Вышеградская группа, Центральная Европа, Европейская интеграция, ЕС, НАТО, региональное сотрудничество

Introduction

The main aim of this article is to analyze the development of the Visegrad Group, its efficiency, and its role in the integration process, while the paper works with the question whether this regional cooperation can serve as a relevant model of successful European integration to follow? For this purpose, the analysis is based on research of primary sources as official documents issued by the Visegrad member countries, nevertheless, the paper works also with the secondary sources like articles of various scholars, who significantly contributed to the research of the Visegrad region. Important research on European integration and Visegrad countries is made by Martin Dangerfield (2009) in his article *The Contribution of the Visegrad Group to the European Union's "Eastern" Policy: Rhetoric or Reality?* In his article, Dangerfield is analyzing the development and the role of Visegrad in the EU until the first important inputs of the Visegrad members to the EU agenda, however, the article lacks the more up to date research on the contribution of Central European countries to the politics of EU and its further integration. The analysis of Jennifer Shea and Christoph Stefes (2002) *EU integration of the Visegrad Countries* richly documents the transition process, obstacles, and the developments made between the four European countries and the EU during the integration of process, what serves as a fruitful source for historical perspective and proposes alternatives, but it could not predict the fulfilling of integration process efficiently. A different perspective on the development of the Visegrad Group and its role in the EU integration provides the research of Martin Hudec (2016) in the *Development of the Visegrad Group in the Context of Efforts to Accelerate the Convergence Processes by Joining the European Union*.

Hudec is analyzing the development in the Visegrad countries after the fall of the communist regimes and further compares their preparation procedures and factors influencing the EU integration way, while concludes with the advantages and assets of such cooperation in relation: EU – Visegrad, and vice versa. Following the publication edited by Wojciech Gizicki (2012) – *Political Systems of Visegrad Countries*, one can establish rich insight with respect to the foundation of legislative, constitutional and executive power in every Visegrad country as well regarding the architecture of cooperation between them, what is essential for any political study of the concerned region. A popular and important topic in the context of Visegrad is associated with security issues. The NATO membership is viewed by the Visegrad Group as a measure for preventing of armed conflict in Eastern Europe what is analyzed in Paul Lutawski's (1993) *NATO's "near abroad": The Visegrad group and the Atlantic Alliance*, and at the same time, important is a discourse of security also in the context of relations between NATO – Visegrad(EU) – Russia what is evaluated for example by Yuri E. Fedorov (2013) in *Continuity and Change in Russia's policy toward Central and Eastern Europe*. Finally, the significant discourse linked with the Visegrad is driven by initiatives proposed within the group and that is having an effect on coherence and functioning of the EU in general. As a first, this is related mainly on relations with Russia, and also a context of Ukraine Crisis – for instance in Lyubov Shishelina's (2015) *Russia's view of relations with European Union and the Visegrad Group*, in which the author discovers profound analysis on the state of relations from a different perspective, clear of stereotypes that are standing in a way of the new cooperation, or by Dangerfield's (2012)

Visegrad Group Co-operation and Russia that is analyzing difficulties to “accommodate” Russia in the foreign policy of the Visegrad and the EU in general. Secondly, the policy of Visegrad’s energy security policy which is very complex due to the parties involved in it with their own market rules and different perceptions of a model that is adequately analyzed in *Natural gas market integration in the Visegrad 4 region: an example to follow or to avoid?* by (Osička, Lehotský, Zapletalová, Černoch, Dančák, 2018). Last but not least, the Visegrad’s discourse concerning the security issues like extremism, radicalism, hybrid threats or migration, elaborated for instance in: *Security-related Cooperation among the V4 states* by Jaroslav Уїiak (2018), or by Olga Potemkina (2016) in *Vishegradskaya Gruppy i Gibkaya Solidarnost* which analyses the objections of the four countries against the EU’s policy of *Solidarity*, more particularly facing the migration policy.

However, during the research, it was noticed that there is also a substantial amount of studies and other researches evaluated by other scholars from particular countries of the Central European region, as well by various institutions united under the platform – *Think Visegrad*, that were useful for the current analysis. To identify the methods of this research – the mentioned sources are subjected to qualitative research, like content and discourse analysis, and case study of single Visegrad member states.

Since its establishment in 1991, the Visegrad Group (V4) was successful in fulfilling its aims to cooperate between its members to achieve such level of freedom, democracy, and principles of a market economy that allowed them to secure integration process into Euro-Atlantic structures in 1999, 2004 respectively. Achieving the Euro-Atlantic integration of the V4 countries has changed the environment of international affairs what brought for its members new challenges related to political, social and economic issues. As the participating countries in Visegrad Group saw their cooperation beneficial, the decision to continue and improvement of

partnership gained effect in the same year, known as the *Declaration of Kroměříž*¹.

Internal and External Dimensions of Cooperation

The common interest of V4 countries presented in the Declaration set the goals in several areas that included internal and external aspects of participation. The internal aspects of cooperation encompassed on the one hand the dimension within the EU and NATO – contribution to the development of *Common Foreign and Security Policy* (CFSP) or strategy towards Western Balkans, and cooperation in the framework of NATO and its defence capacities. On the other hand, internal aspects included also cooperation within the V4 – strengthening of infrastructure, defence or environmental management, but mainly civic element of cooperation by increasing the support of joint projects via *International Visegrad Fund* (IVF) that included the fields of culture, education, science and youth exchange, promotion of tourism and cross border cooperation². The external aspects are related to cooperation with other partners – EU and NATO candidates or within OSCE, UN or OECD member states in the fields of the new challenges and possible joint initiatives³. For even more constructive partnerships, The prime ministers of Visegrad countries also agreed on specific mechanisms of governmental cooperation that included, for instance, one-year presidency, various summits, and meetings of prime and foreign ministers or the structure of IVF and permanent representations

¹ Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union, 12 May 2004. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2004/declaration-of-prime> (accessed: 22.10.2019).

² Visegrad Fund, Annual Reports, Annual Report 2004. Available at: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/annual-reports/> (accessed: 22.10.2019).

³ Guidelines on the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/guidelines-on-the-future-110412> (accessed: 22.10.2019).

to the EU and NATO. However, the Visegrad Group lacked any kind of interstate body that would add the level of institutionalization to the partnership, and possibly would add the effectiveness.

The improvements of V4 cooperation made on *Kroměříž Declaration* have been instrumental for future cooperation within the Group itself what has outlined the possibilities for the construction of the regional identity in Central Europe. Nevertheless, these developments were beneficial also for collaboration with respect to the EU and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)¹ by sharing of practices and lessons of the V4 countries experienced during the integration process.

The V4 with its geographic position gradually became an influential part of the EU's neighbourhood strategy by deepening of the European integration process. Mitigating the situation in Ukraine after *Orange Revolution* by *Joint Declaration of the V4 Prime Ministers in Kazimierz Dolny* on June 2005 was significant for the implementation of *EU – Ukraine Action Plan* where the V4 concentrated on the exchange of information, regional development or implementation of selected reforms, aimed on strengthening of democratic principles in Ukraine's public life².

The neighbouring policy of the V4 countries has intensified even more after these countries entered the EU's Schengen zone in 2007 and launched an active policy with respect to their eastern border. At this point, the EU started to feel pressure from the Visegrad Group as these countries had spe-

cific relations with their eastern partners for years, and their interest, as well the interests of the EU towards the East has matched what has been proved already during the *Orange Revolution* in Ukraine. To underline their interest, the V4 countries referred to the need of developing more institutionalized cooperation with their eastern neighbours by issuing of *Joint Political Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy*³. This document stressed their common historical experience and cultural closeness as well as the necessity for bringing their partners closer to the EU in a more corporate way. Ultimately, thanks to the stimulus from the V4 countries and initiation from Poland and Sweden more particularly, the talks about the need for the establishment of EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) achieved more weight, and finally, during the EU's presidency of the Czech Republic in 2009, the EaP was launched.

The main intention of the EaP is to expand the economic and political cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbours, namely – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It allowed mentioned countries (and the whole EU) to accelerate the political partnership, to improve the border policy and economic integration into the EU's internal market, thus the EaP can be assumed as the first major political influence of the V4 countries towards the EU's neighbourhood policy [1, p. 1742] and its membership in the European Union in general.

Cooperation between the EaP countries and the V4 members (EU members respectively) achieved an even more sophisticated level during the Czech presidency of the V4 in 2011/2012 when the new Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Programme (V4EaP) was adopted. This programme has significantly increased activities of the IVF, like promoting the democratization and scholarships, or

¹ The ENP was launched in 2004 based on a Communication entitled "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood" adopted by the European Commission one year earlier. The Policy was set as a framework to govern the EU's relations with 16 of the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbours in order to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration. The ENP: Evolution and Review. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en (accessed: 23.10.2019).

² Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the V4 Countries on Ukraine, Kazimierz Dolny (June 10, 2005). Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2005/joint-declaration-of-the-110412> (accessed: 23.10.2019).

³ Joint Political Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/official-statements/documents/joint-political> (accessed: 24.10.2019).

social and economic transformation projects towards the EaP partners¹. Since then, the Visegrad's IVF started to receive funds from partners like Canada, Sweden, the USA, South Korea, and others for their activities in promoting the transformation process in the EaP countries². The importance of the EaP for the EU members and the V4 countries as well is stressed in the document issued in 2016 with the title *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* – the most important priorities and principles according to which will EU act for making Europe more stronger and effective in contemporary global issues.³ The efficiency of this strategy is reviewed in the report named “*The EU Global Strategy in Practice – Three years on, looking forward*”⁴, elaborated in June 2019. The responsibilities for the V4's members stemming from this document were underlined during the latest meeting of foreign ministers of the V4 and the EaP representatives on occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership in May 2019 in Bratislava⁵.

V4+ Cooperation and Western Balkans

Due to its specific geographic location, Central Europe was always a significant region on the political map and during its evolution has learned to withstand and cooperate with different statehoods, identities,

cultures, or religions what has left its trace on the Visegrad countries in contemporary as well. However, every V4 member has experienced different historical developments with various countries and among themselves as well, the fact that Central European countries decided to form constructive institution in a shape of Visegrad Group means that they got through their negative historical legends and animosities, and established new form of effective internal and external cooperation which can serve as an example for the other regions. The effectiveness of the V4 cooperation should be reflected by positive outcomes of foreign policy, and except the EaP, the V4's partisanship is functioning also on different kinds of interregional cooperation – e.g. Benelux countries, *Nordic Council of Ministers or Nordic-Baltic 8*, *The EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, *Three Seas Initiative* or so-called *16+1 Initiative*, but also on principle of cooperation with single countries and in the V4+ format. Nevertheless, taking into account Visegrad's experience with the Euro-Atlantic integration process and the commitment to form a common institution that can serve as a case, the most significant partnership from the perspective of both, the EU and the Visegrad, apart of the EaP is the cooperation between Western Balkans and the V4. At the same time, the V4 is the only regional group that is maintaining the regular partnership with the countries from Western Balkan [2, p. 48].

Parallels of interaction between Western Balkans (WB6 – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) and the V4 (as a member of the EU) can be found in the *CEFTA* arrangement (Central European Free Trade Agreement). The agreement founded in 1992 by the V4 members and gradually joined by other countries served as one of the efficient instruments for mobilization of integration process into the EU. However, the countries which joined the EU have left the *CEFTA*, nevertheless, those which does not fulfil the integration process were joined by others, and so in 2006, the *CEFTA* was joined also

¹ Report on the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group July 2011 – June 2012. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/czv4-pres-eng-final> (accessed: 24.10.2019).

² Visegrad Fund. Available at: <https://www.visegradfund.org/about-us/the-fund/?search-query=eastern+partnership> (accessed: 24.10.2019).

³ A Global Strategy for the European Union. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/49323/global-strategy-european-union_en Document: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf (accessed: 24.10.2019).

⁴ From Vision to Action: The EU Global Strategy in Practice – Three years on, looking forward. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/64034/vision-action-eu-global-strategy-practice-three-years-looking-forward_en (accessed: 24.10.2019).

⁵ The Visegrad Group Joint Statement on 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/the-visegrad-group-joint-190513> (accessed: 24.10.2019).

by Western Balkan countries¹. Therefore, the format of *CEFTA* designed by Visegrad Group serves as model that can help WB6 countries and other candidates to prepare themselves for the EU integration.

The more comprehensive dialogue between Western Balkans and the V4 was initiated by foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group during the Hungarian presidency in 2009 as the wish of the Group to share its experience in the European integration process and to encourage the stability and democratic principles in the region in accordance with the *Thessaloniki Agenda*². Since then, both sides are meeting regularly every year in order to discuss the perspectives and new projects of cooperation. As these meetings are always attended by various delegates with different agendas, they provide also a beneficial platform to present new initiatives, developments or strategies for the representatives of EU member states in the WB region and vice versa. To mention the most significant developments of this multilateral cooperation, one should note the *V4 – Western Balkans Expert Network on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights*, an initiative to support better reform process with permanent V4 pool of experts presented in 2012³; or funding of around 60 projects of the IVF in the WB6 countries related to democratization, cross-border cooperation, migration or security and defence, and at the same time, the IVF served as the inspiration for cooperation between the WB6 countries what has resulted into establishment of *Western Balkans Fund* in 2015 [3, p. 3–5].

The role of Western Balkans in the common European project has played also at least one very peculiar sequence that is re-

lated to migration crisis since 2015. On the one hand, the migration route stemming from Balkans witnessed an initiative of the V4 countries helping to solve the crisis by sending police and technical support contingents to Macedonia or Serbia what was appreciated by Brussels. On the other hand, the EU's policy of migrant quotas was unanimously rejected by Visegrad common statement⁴, paradoxically, it enhanced Visegrad+ cooperation and found support in some EU countries like Austria, which is aspiring on its function as a bridge between Visegrad and Western European countries⁵.

V4 and Defence Cooperation

The development of the V4's cooperation in context of security and defence among its members was one of the vital interests since the Group's establishment and its desire of Euro-Atlantic integration. As the former members of the Warsaw Pact, and with regards to their heritage of identical, Soviet armament, there was a huge potential for the development of common defensive strategy and military cooperation. Nevertheless, the V4 served only as a political platform for security and defence consultations and possible interoperability of the V4's members armed forces, and the first meeting of Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad countries took place only in November 1999⁶. Since then, the cooperation on defence and security issues increased from the willingness of Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (as the fresh NATO members) to accelerate the integration process into Euro-Atlantic structures of its partner – Slovakia, which joined North-Atlantic Treaty in 2004.

¹ CEFTA, Central European Free Trade Agreement. Available at: <https://cefta.int/cefta-parties/> (accessed: 25.10.2019).

² The Visegrad Group stands ready to promote the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2009/the-visegrad-group> (accessed: 25.10.2019).

³ Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Western Balkans. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-statement-of-the> (accessed: 25.10.2019).

⁴ Visegrad nations united against mandatory relocation quotas. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/visegrad-nations-united-against-mandatory-relocation-quotas/> (accessed: 26.10.2019).

⁵ Austria opts for dialogue with the Visegrad four. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/austria-opts-for-dialogue-with-the-visegrad-four/> (accessed: 26.10.2019).

⁶ Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/defence> (accessed: 26.10.2019).

Since then, the defence issues was not on the top of the V4's list, as this agenda became covered by NATO, nonetheless, the V4 has issued several declarations, documents and projects that strengthened the Visegrad defence cooperation, and reassured its commitment stemming from EU/NATO membership as well. Another, and the most significant development of cooperation in terms of defence and military was achieved by signing the *Memorandum of Understanding on Establishment of the V4 European Union Battlegroup* in March 2014.

The idea to launch the V4 Battlegroup formation was adopted in 2011, with the plan to establish common military unit that is "available for rapid deployment within ten days and within a radius of six thousand of kilometres from Brussels" [4, p. 49]. The motivation of the V4's Battlegroup establishment is stemming from the desire of Visegrad countries to enhance the cooperation in this sector and as the motivation to modernise their armies to achieve better compatibility within the NATO and following the agreements of the *Common Defense and Security Policy* (CDSP) of the EU. The first stand-by regime of the V4 Battlegroup was in the first half 2016, deploying around 3000 soldiers altogether.

However, the format of EU Battlegroups is not strictly the V4's invention, as this concept is in the EU fully operational since 2007 on rotational basis whereas two Battlegroups are always stand-by for a period of six months¹, the new impetus from the V4 lies in initiative to prolong its second stand-by regime in 2019 into the permanent V4 multinational force².

¹ EU Battlegroups. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/factsheet_battlegroups.pdf (accessed: 28.10.2019).

² Visegrad Four Defense Cooperation: Years of Missed Opportunities. Available online: <https://warsawinstitute.org/visegrad-four-defense-cooperation-years-missed-opportunities/>

The heads of governments of the V4 countries were discussing the possibility of the joint forces even before first EU V4 Battlegroup deployment. See also: Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation. Avail-

Energy Security

Another dimension of regional cooperation and continuity of policy with intention on improving of neighbourhood relations between V4 countries (and the EU members) and its neighbours, one should mention some achievements also in the aspects of energy security.

Common energy security policy is a relevant, if not the most fundamental topic for Visegrad countries mainly because of their shared inheritance from the communist past connected to dependency on USSR and on Russia in contemporary. On the other hand, from the perspective of the EU's energy security, the V4 countries play here a key role as the transit countries. Despite the fact that crisis related to gas disruption from Russia in the same year of Czech presidency to the EU (2009) – the issue of energy security appears as obvious and its solution should be indisputable duty of EU leaders, however, energy security was one of the main issue on which has Czech Republic focused already during its presidency of V4. Thus, the EU presidency provides for V4 countries opportunity to reflect and possible implementation of their cohesive policies at the multinational level. Such opportunity allowed asserting alternative routes for the gas supply to the EU, independent from Russia, for example, the one very demanded among Visegrad Group – the *Nabucco* pipeline. The project that was due to geopolitical and business factors abandoned in 2013, although the projects of *TANAP* (Trans Anatolian Gas Pipeline) and *TAP* (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) reduced the EU's dependency on gas from Russia, however, they reduced dependency only by one-third of the gas in comparison to that *Nabucco* was supposed to deliver [5, p. 3–5].

Diversification of natural gas sources remained one of the main priorities also during the Hungarian presidency of the V4 in 2009/2010 and later in the interim of the EU presidency in 2011. On the level of the V4,

able at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/budapest-declaration-of> (accessed: 29.10.2019).

an essential improvement in these regards was organizing the V4 *High-Level Energy Working Group*¹ to build the gas interconnection pipelines among the Visegrad countries. For the effective implementation, the V4 has proposed the platform of regional summits where the possibilities of interconnectors are discussed. One of such summits took place in Budapest on February 2010 in format V4+, where a declaration of several Central and South-East European countries promised their will for improvement of the energy security in the region². The Hungarian EU presidency achieved stimulus with respect to energy policy after the *Visegrad Bratislava Declaration* on February 2011 during which the prime ministers of all member countries acknowledged on fulfilling the European democratic values, fostering cohesion in promoting the development of transport infrastructure and cultivate the energy security by expanding the internal energy market³. Its signing was imperative for the development of the *Central and South-Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity* (CESEC) a high-level working group made up of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and the EU in 2015⁴. Nevertheless, the emergence of CESEC was inevitable to implement the resolution of the European Parliament adopted during EU's presidency by Hungary in 2011, called *Energy infrastructure priorities for 2020 and*

beyond. Its proposed completion in 2020 will among the other issues also diversify the sources and strengthen the safety of gas, electricity and oil resources in the whole EU⁵.

Following the *Bratislava Declaration* and resolution of the European Parliament, the V4 countries continued to support energy security by various reinforcing political steps. One of them was market integration blueprint by issuing the document entitled "*The Roadmap towards the Regional Gas Market*" which outlined the physical integration, market design, institutional framework and external dimension of the V4 gas market integration, issued during the Polish presidency of the Visegrad Group in 2012–2013⁶.

Accordingly, it is important to mention also a project that is substantially initiated by the V4 member, introduced by Slovak TSO (Transmission System Operator) company *Eustream* aimed at diversification of gas resources with its self-infrastructure, called the *Eastring* pipeline. Introduced in 2014, its role is to connect the Slovak transmission system to the Turkish gas hub via Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. According to its capacity, the *Eastring* represents significant improvement of EU's internal energy market, with the first phase planned to be built in 2025 allowing it to transfer around 20 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually and second phase operating in 2030 with its possible annual capacity up to 40 bcm.⁷ Since 2015 is *Eastring* listed as PCI (Project of Common Interest), however, since the 22nd of October 2019 the project lost its place in PCI, probably because of the

¹ 2009/2010 Hungarian Presidency – Annual Report. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/2009-2010-hungarian-110412> (accessed: 2.11.2019).

² 2009/2010 Hungarian Presidency – Annual Report. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/2009-2010-hungarian-110412> (accessed: 2.11.2019).

³ The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava> (accessed: 2.11.2019).

⁴ Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/infrastructure/high-level-groups/central-and-south-eastern-europe-energy-connectivity#content-heading-0> (accessed: 4.11.2019).

⁵ Publications Office of the European Union, Energy Infrastructure priorities for 2020 and beyond European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2011 on energy infrastructure priorities for 2020 and beyond (2011/2034(INI)). Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/86e3806f-6f96-11e2-9294-01aa75ed71a1> (accessed: 5.11.2019).

⁶ Report of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group July 2012 June 2013/ Visegrad 4 Integration & Cohesion / Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland. Warsaw 2013. P. 51–55. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/report-pl-v4-pres-07-131209> (accessed: 5.11.2019).

⁷ *Eastring*, Capacity and Construction. Available at: <https://www.eastring.eu/page.php?page=capacity-construction> (accessed: 5.11.2019).

Turkish-Syrian conflict while confirmation of its out-listing is still a matter of the decision of the European Parliament. Nevertheless, no matter how the decision of the European Parliament is going to be, it would not have a crucial effect on the realization of this project. The platform of V4 summits became profound in promoting of Visegrad interests and its further realization also in other issues.

Conclusion

Visegrad Group definitely is an advantageous format of cooperation that allows its members to promote their common interests in regional and international manners. Its role in European reunification and the EU's integration is indisputable what have been illustrated on the most significant issues on which is the V4 searching constructive solutions via regional and interregional cooperation.

Notwithstanding the fact that the V4 lacks any intergovernmental body or some kind of formal institutional structure, its clearly profiled ambition with common goals are covered by various summits, high-level expert and diplomatic meetings, and cooperation between ministries with the agendas and researches elaborated by different think-tanks, ngo's or cultural institutions united under platform named *Think Visegrad*¹. Membership of the Visegrad countries in different

organizations and its intensive cooperation in defensive policy of the NATO and the EU is strengthening the foreign and security policy of its actors both, regionally and globally. Effective cooperation and share of the same interests and attitudes on the important EU issues among the countries outside the V4 brings the possibility of potential extension of Visegrad Group of new members.

Indeed, there are also topics, which are reshaping the relations between the EU and the V4 – topics like migration policy, as well European issues on which are having the V4 members other opinions among themselves – the Russian foreign policy. Anti-migration policy of the V4 countries, with the rise of national, chauvinistic, radical-right parties - strictly in the breach with the official politics of Brussels and fundamental values of the EU, duplicated with pro-Russian sentiment (that is “forbidden” by Brussels) is bringing a question whether is Visegrad Group relevant model to follow for European integration? One should say probably not, however, there are many contemporary factors in world politics that are influencing the negative answer on this question, nevertheless, if we would apply only the “raw” format of Visegrad idea in its inception and look on the benefits it brought, the answer would be probably more positive.

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¹ Think – Visegrad V4 Think Tank Platform. Available at: <https://think.visegradfund.org/> (accessed: 6.11.2019).

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