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GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS?

THE VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES AND UKRAINE

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Introduction

Since the Ukrainian revolution of 2014, the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union has emerged as one of the most important unsettled issues for the foreign and neighbourhood policy of the European community. This crisis has lasted for three years now, ever since the then Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovych, decided to suspend the implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, prompting hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens to flood the streets in protest. As a result of the popular unrest, Yanukovych was forced to flee to Russia in February 2014 and was subsequently relieved of his office by the Ukrainian parliament. A month later, Russia invaded and occupied the Crimean Peninsula, and hybrid warfare broke out in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, pitting pro-Russian separatist forces against the Ukrainian army. These events in 2014 resulted not only in a protracted and ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis, but also led to a massive deterioration – unseen

in scope since the Cold War – in the relations between Russia, on the one hand, and the EU and the US on the other.

In this complex crisis, the four Central European Visegrád states – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – found themselves in a special position: On account of their geographic location, they were directly affected by the conflict. The public in these formerly communist states is especially alert to any type of change in the Russian sphere of influence. At the same time, however, the majority of these countries depend on Russia to cover their energy needs, and the general economic ties between the V4 and Russia are also important. Thus, in addition to the real and presumed fears of the public, when it came to taking sides in the conflict, reactions to the Ukrainian crisis were also shaped by the interests of the economic elites in the Visegrád countries. In the meantime, Ukrainian refugees and Ukrainian guest workers – leaving their country because of the deteriorating economic situation – began turning up in the central European region, and they were greeted with far more welcome by the locals than were African and Middle Eastern refugees arriving at the EU's southern borders.

In the present volume, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Policy Solutions examine how these countries reacted to this challenge, what political and economic support they offered Ukraine and how they have helped or impeded Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration in the past years. The studies in this volume were authored by foreign policy experts and analysts from the four Visegrád countries.

At the same time, however, the foreign and neighbourhood policies of these countries are not only relevant and interesting when viewed separately; an overview of their joint activities is also revealing. The

increasing cooperation between the Visegrád countries manifested itself most often in the context of their handling of the refugee issue. But the V4 were also active in other areas, including their joint support for Ukraine. That is why we will launch this volume with a review of the evolution of the Visegrád cooperation, before then proceeding to summarize how the V4 as a community have supported Ukraine in the three years since the revolution there. We will then turn to the foreign policies of the individual Visegrád countries towards Ukraine – and, of course, to their policies towards Russia, which are inextricably linked to the former.

We hope that this volume will be able to highlight where the foreign policies of the four countries towards Ukraine are in alignment and where they are at odds. In so doing, reading the following will illuminate which governments have emerged as Ukraine's most important champions with respect to Euro-Atlantic integration, and which governments are trying to maintain an equal distance between Ukraine and Russia. As the need for progressive policies and politics in the region is becoming increasingly dire, we trust that this publication will help shed light on a complicated geopolitical picture.

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1.
About the Visegrád Group

Summary

The Visegrád Declaration of 1991 was signed by Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, Czechoslovak President Václav Havel and Polish President Lech Wałęsa. Through this document, the parties formally committed themselves to tight-knit cooperation in the service of European integration. The potential economic and political weight of the V4 is indicated by the size of the bloc's population. Its 64 million citizens would form the fourth largest country within the European Union. The size of the V4 economy would place 15th in a global ranking of states. Due to its low level of institutionalization, the Visegrád Group's cooperative and consulting functions are conducted mainly through high-level political meetings between the prime ministers and ministers of the four member states in a manner reminiscent of the Council of the European Union. In the last few years, opposition to immigration and refugees was one of the most important areas in which V4 governments presented a united front against the mainstream EU position. The members' stance in this regard involved beefing up the borders of the Schengen Area and the rejection of mandatory refugee quotas.

The Visegrád Group – also known as the Visegrád Four (V4) – is an intergovernmental regional cooperative effort between four central European countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. It was created in 1991 for the joint economic, political and diplomatic representation of these states. The cooperation emphasizes Euro-Atlantic integration, the dismantlement of the remnants of totalitarianism, the protection of democratic values, economic improvement and advocacy for Central European identity and values.

The History of the Cooperation

While the history of modern cooperation between the four countries stretches back only a quarter of a century, the partnership and its name were inspired by a medieval event. In 1335, Charles I, the Hungarian monarch at the time, invited his Polish and Czech counterparts, Casimir III and John the Blind respectively, to the Hungarian city of Visegrád. They set out to discuss countering the staple right of Habsburg Vienna, a prerogative which proved to be disadvantageous for all three kingdoms, by harmonizing their economic and political interests. The three rulers agreed on the creation of new trade routes. These turned out to be successful in circumventing the Viennese levies and contributed to the countries' economic flourishing. The cooperation between the V4 countries thus has its roots in a centuries-old pact, and it draws its intellectual inspiration from the success of this early concord.

The recent renewal of the Visegrád cooperation is tied to an extraordinary period: the democratic transitions from socialist systems in the late 80s and early 90s. This era meant both

significant opportunities and challenges for Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

15 February 1991 – the day when the Visegrád countries, of which there were only three at the time, officially began to cooperate – took place during this transformative historical period. The Visegrád Declaration of 1991 was signed by Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, Czechoslovak President Václav Havel and Polish President Lech Wałęsa. Through this document, the parties formally committed themselves to tight-knit cooperation in the service of European integration. While previously, the membership of Romania had also been considered, this never materialized due to the decision of the Romanian leadership. The organization took its final form when Czechoslovakia split in two in 1993, and this configuration has remained unchanged for the last 24 years.

While in the 2000s, the possibility of expansion through the inclusion of Austria and Slovenia was raised, the countries failed to deliver an agreement in this regard. Nonetheless, although the "V6" never came to be, the necessity for closer cooperation with these states turned into an issue around which a consensus formed. Consequently, Austria and Slovenia began participating in some V4 meetings as observers in 2014, and the V4 also regularly holds meetings including these two countries. However, the V4 also frequently cooperates with other countries from the region, and with Romania, for example, the relations are especially close.

The potential economic and political weight of the V4 is indicated by the size of the bloc's population. Its 64 million citizens would form the fourth largest country within the European Union, and they make up 12.5% of its population. The size of the V4 economy would place 15th in a global ranking of states, while the countries' combined export capacity would make it the third largest entity within the EU in that regard.

The V4's Declared Goals

The creation of the cooperation was inspired by four definitive factors. The first of these was the common need to eliminate the remnants of communism in Central Europe. Overcoming the historical animosity between the four countries and facilitating the achievement of mutual goals served as motives as well. Furthermore, the similar ideological commitments of the reigning political elites also prodded the parties towards the realization of an intergovernmental pact. The most important goals of the newly-established political, economic and cultural arrangement were the eradication of the last vestiges of dictatorship, the reinforcement of democracy, the boosting of economic performance within the framework of the new market economy replacing socialism and the advancement of European integration.

The 1991 founding document – the Visegrád Declaration[1] – emphasizes five goals in these respects. It declares the sovereignty of the states; the complete restoration of democracy and liberty; the elimination of the remains of the social, economic, and intellectual manifestations of the totalitarian systems; the establishment of the modern rule of law; and respect for human and fundamental civil rights. Additionally, it highlights the creation of modern market economies and the complete integration into Europe's political, economic, security and legislative systems.

These initial goals were almost completely achieved by the V4 countries in just over a decade. Dictatorial systems were transformed into parliamentary democracies ruled by law, and the V4 economies were reorganized around the free market. After 13 years of cooperation, the Euro-Atlantic integration of the four Central European countries was also realized by the mid-2000s.

1 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412

Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland joined NATO in 1999, while Slovakia was admitted five years later. The first V4 country to join the OECD was the Czech Republic in 1995, with Hungary and Poland following a year later. In 2000, Slovakia was added, too. Finally, the four states joined the European Union together in 2004.

After the successes of this first period pertaining to democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration, it became necessary to reword the cooperation's goals. This occurred immediately after the 2004 EU accession in the Czech town of Kroměříž, where the four countries' leaders signed the New Visegrád Declaration.[2] This document indicated that, in the future, opportunities for joint action would be taken in a manner that stressed mutual interests and avoided illusions. The goals stressed here include the strengthening of the identity and advocacy role of the Central European region, support for efforts aimed at accomplishing the European Union's common goals, along with the continuation of European integration and regional cooperation. The declaration sketched out mechanisms for cooperation, including plans for meetings at the highest, expert, policy area and political levels.

The V4's Organization and Functioning

Although the Visegrád cooperation is over 25 years old, it is barely institutionalized. The Visegrád Four continue to lack an official headquarters and only have a few institutions. The management and harmonization of its affairs are handled by the member state fulfilling the presidency, a position which rotates annually. This overseeing of affairs, conducted in accordance with predetermined

2 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1

tasks and goals, is evaluated by the other members at the end of a country's presidential term. The presidency starts in July each year. The first country to fulfil this post at the 1991 outset of the pact was Czechoslovakia. The office was then awarded to Poland and finally to Hungary. In 1994, after the 1993 breakup of Czechoslovakia, the rotation was fixed as Slovakia-Czech Republic-Poland-Hungary.

While the most crucial parts of the cooperation continue to be meetings between leading politicians and experts, the V4 has in fact created a handful of entities during its existence. As such, its lack of an institutional infrastructure is not complete.

CEFTA

The first such institution was the 1992 Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Based on the example of Western Europe, it aimed to invigorate trade between the four countries. The success of this trade agreement is illustrated by the fact that it was eventually expanded to a considerable degree, as it came to include Slovenia (1996), Romania (1997), Bulgaria (1999) and Croatia (2003).

As per the agreement, CEFTA members must abandon the deal after joining the European Union. Consequently, CEFTA's history splintered from the V4 in 2004. Other countries in the region which have since joined the EU have also withdrawn. Their places are now filled by, as outlined by the 2006 incarnation of CEFTA, the seven Southern and Eastern European countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia.

The International Visegrád Fund

Another one of the Visegrád Group's institutional manifestations – and perhaps its most successful initiative to date – is the

International Visegrád Fund, which commenced activities in 2000. The Fund is one of the few V4 institutions which does in fact have headquarters; they are to be found in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava. According to the intentions of the Fund's founders, it aspires to strengthen cooperation between the four countries in the fields of culture, science, research, education and youth relations.

The IVF operates with a yearly budget of eight million USD (excluding the budget offered by non-V4 countries), which it utilizes to support cultural, scientific and touristic scholarships and projects, as well as artist residencies. Moreover, the IVF's sphere of mandate also extends to humanitarian aid between the member states. The budget is financed equally by the four states, but several third countries also donate to it: Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and South Korea also support the IVF. Accordingly, resources are not only allocated to institutions and citizens from V4 countries, but to anyone so long as the theme of the project in question relates to the member states.

Visegrád Patent Institute

The four Central European countries decided to establish the Visegrád Patent Institute (VPI) in 2015 to create better conditions for the region's inventors and businesses by making use of a patent cooperation agreement covering 150 countries. As such, the institute operates as a research and preliminary testing body and is headquartered in Budapest. The body began its work in the summer of 2016. Its secretariat is led through a rotational system, which places the heads of the patent authorities of its members at the helm of the VPI. To further cultural cooperation, the V4 countries started a radio programme in 2017, while Poland and Hungary are going to launch an English-language TV news channel in 2018 too.

The Functioning of the Visegrád Group

Due to its low level of institutionalization, the Visegrád Group's cooperative and consulting functions are conducted mainly through high-level political meetings between the prime ministers and ministers of the four member states in a manner reminiscent of the Council of the European Union. Questions of political strategy and policy are thus debated by the heads of government, those at the top of relevant portfolios, and experts. Such discussions are held at set intervals, as well as on an ad hoc basis. The coordination of current affairs and themes is handled by the country fulfilling the annually alternating office of the presidency at any given time, and its tasks are based on a predetermined plan. The formation of a mutual position and the harmonization of the four countries' interests occur through negotiations between the V4 countries.

High-level summits that include non-V4 countries have also become common, with a "V4 + third country" format used regularly. On such occasions, the V4's position is represented uniformly during negotiations with the third country. As a regional intergovernmental organization, the Visegrád Group regularly cooperates with other advocacy blocs such as the Benelux Union, the Baltic states or the Nordic Council. Amongst the priorities of the Visegrád Four is dialogue with countries belonging to the EU's Eastern Partnership and to the Western Balkans.

The Advantages and Drawbacks of the Visegrád Cooperation

From the outset, the Visegrád Cooperation meant flexible cooperation allowing the parties to leave their inner conflicts

behind and voluntarily collaborate on issues on which their interests and goals coincide. In accordance with this pragmatic approach, the organization has wilfully shunned institutionalization over the years, and it continues to have only a handful of – primarily cultural and apolitical – permanent institutions. Though this loose alliance has its benefits, it also contains several pitfalls. The most obvious flaw of its informal operational framework is that the roles of current political leaders and personalities become overemphasized, and the cooperation's success then depends on the political interests that they define.[3] The dynamics dictated by the four-year (and unevenly timed) governmental cycles can result in significant uncertainty, and the organization's effectiveness is greatly influenced by the presence or absence of harmony between the continuously alternating political actors.

The lack of institutions also hinders decision-making efficiency. Because the member states have no duty to consult in any particular area, each can decide when and in what field it wishes to start a conversation within the V4 framework. Simultaneously, this type of cooperation fails to guarantee agreement, even if the four parties' interests coincide for an extended period or temporarily, unless the partners make a concerted effort to formulate a common position on regional European or international topics.[4]

The lack of an institutional framework also means that the weight of the largest and most populous member state, Poland, is growing larger within the cooperation. The largest party is a more momentous player than the other three combined, and this imbalance cannot be countered without institutions. This results

3 http://kitekinto.hu/europa/2014/04/29/kihivasokkal_teli_egymasrautaltsag

4 http://kki.gov.hu/download/1/0b/b0000/Kulugyi_Szemle_2010_02_A_Visegr%C3%A1di_N%C3%A9gyek_(V4)_E_.pdf

in the heightened importance of Poland's willingness to commit and lead during negotiations.[5] Along the lines of similar logic, the informal V4 framework becomes more diluted in the considerably more robust, institutionalized and bureaucratized political system of the EU, and its role is becoming ancillary as the pan-European platform is transforming into the main battlefield for advocacy and political action.

Inner Tensions and Conflicts

From the start of the Visegrád Cooperation, intra-alliance conflicts of interests and historical hurts have complicated life for its members. The fact that the organization continues to be a loose and informal alliance without a serious institutionalized infrastructure is partly due to these tensions. Historical grievances such as the Treaty of Trianon, the Beneš decrees, the Prague Spring or the Soviet repression of the Czech and Slovakian attempt to bring about a "socialism with a human face" in which Hungarian and Polish forces participated because of the Warsaw Pact, remain sources of dissension.

Furthermore, the style of Slovakian politics developed in the 1990s by Vladimír Mečiar is also a thorny issue. This intended to aid the formation of a Slovakian national consciousness through the portrayal of Czechs and Hungarians as historical enemies.[6]

Although integration efforts regarding the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is a clear signal of the V4's successful foreign policy

5 http://kitekinto.hu/europa/2014/04/29/kihivasokkal_teli_egymasrautaltsag
6 http://kitekinto.hu/europa/2012/02/27/a_visegradi_egyuttmkodes_jelene_es_jovje

beyond its independently-achieved NATO or EU memberships, the diplomatic interests of the individual V4 members are not completely uniform and thus remain a source of discord.

Characteristically, relations with Russia and Germany are contentious topics. While the Hungarian government's attitude is increasingly pro-Russian, Poland is traditionally critical of that Federation for historical reasons. In the case of Germany, however, it is precisely these two countries which are in accord, as their populist and anti-Western politics are prone to go against Germany, a state that serves as the backbone of the EU. In comparison to the Polish and Hungarian cabinets, the Czechs and the Slovakians use a much milder rhetoric towards Germany and the European Union, and – even though the position of the populists in these countries is growing firmer – their governments' need for antiliberal democracy is less pronounced.

A further conflict of interests arises from the fact that, while Slovakia is a member of the Eurozone, the other three countries continue to use their national currencies without much concern for introducing the common currency. As such, an economic and monetary policy is difficult to synchronize. In respect of Slovakia, commercial stability is already being undermined by the fact that the exchange rates in the other states – where the export sector is interested in a weak national currency – are constantly changing. What is more, the ability to compete on the international level in these countries depends on a cheap and well-trained labour force, the salaries of which would increase considerably with the adoption of the Euro. Consequently, even the economically more stable Poland is trying to delay joining the Eurozone. [7]

7 http://kitekinto.hu/europa/2014/04/29/kihivasokkal_teli_egymasrautaltsag

Similar differences exist in the (otherwise prioritized) field of energy. Although all four members depend to a considerable degree on Russian energy and are thus aiming to reduce this dependency, the Hungarian government is building new additions to its nuclear plant with a Russian company and using a Russian loan. This indicates that Hungary is committed to nuclear energy, while Poland prefers coal-based sources and has no nuclear reactors at all.

Populism and Anti-Refugee Sentiment as a Basis for Cooperation

Due to the loose and informal cooperation of the Visegrád Four, the organization continues to function. Joint actions between the four countries were initially aided by the fact that they were led by governments with similar worldviews and were in analogous political situations. A quarter of a century later, when assessing the current political situation within the V4, this description once again rings true. Such agreement could provide momentum for regional cooperation – though arguably in a direction that goes against the organization's initial goals. Recent trends indicate the emergence of a (primarily right-wing and Eurosceptic) populism at the governmental level. In Hungary, a conservative populist government came to power in 2010, and it almost completely divorced itself from liberal democracy. Due to this, it entered into bitter conflicts with the EU and other international organizations. The largest V4 member, Poland, elected a similarly populist right-wing outfit: Kaczynski's Law and Justice Party. This grouping continues to uphold the Orbán government's concept of democracy as its inspiration, and it, too, undertook many controversial measures which endangered the rule of law and

attracted condemnation from the international community. In the Czech Republic, a populist formation entered the government as a minority party in 2013 and quickly became the country's most popular political force. Hence, the Andrej Babis-led populists of ANO are likely to win the upcoming elections in autumn. In the smallest V4 country, Slovakia, the populists made the largest gains of all the EU states over the last year. [8] Besides, Robert Fico, the social democratic leader of the current governing coalition, is also no stranger to populist tendencies.

Opposition to immigration and refugees was one of the most important areas in which Central European populism presented a united front against the mainstream EU position. It thus demonstrated that, on certain European topics, the V4 are still capable of political coordination. The members' stance in this regard involved beefing up the borders of the Schengen Area and the rejection of mandatory refugee quotas.

Although in September 2015, immediately before losing the elections, Poland's previous centre-right government ended up voting for the EU's plan to distribute 120,000 refugees (and was the only V4 country to do so), a year later the Visegrád Group's new migration plan was nonetheless introduced under the leadership of the new Polish administration. This plan, which was announced during the Slovakian Presidency, outlined the principle of "flexible solidarity," which essentially places the burden of absorbing refugees on the shoulders of economically more advanced member states, while allowing individual member states to decide on their own degrees of participation. To boot, the document urges the "full and timely implementation

8 http://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/elemzes/257/populizmus_evkonyv_vegleges_feketefeher_teljes_web.pdf

of the roadmap Back to Schengen" and the introduction of more stringent border controls.[9]

In November 2016, the V4 decided on the establishment of a joint migration crisis centre that will focus on coordinating its members' activities to support refugees within conflict zones, sharing best practices at the national level and harmonizing the use of budgetary resources earmarked for these purposes.[10]

The unity of V4 in the field of migration – a viewpoint quite distinct from the EU's stance – is of importance to the four countries because there are no other EU topics on which the Visegrád Cooperation could demonstrate a similarly forceful and fiercely coalesced position.

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9 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-the-160919
10 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/v4-to-set-up-common

2.

The Visegrád Cooperation and Ukraine

Summary

Since their accession to the EU, the V4 members have become providers of development aid, and Ukraine is the most important recipient of assistance from the V4 states. The particular interests behind this support have varied among the member states. Hungary, and on a certain level Poland, predominantly supported their minorities in Ukraine. By 2005, Ukraine had already become the most important foreign policy partner of the Visegrád Group. Ukraine has a strong impact on the two most important regional policies: energy and security cooperation. The V4 foreign ministers have at least one official meeting almost every year with their Ukrainian counterpart. Since 2014, the V4 member states have also provided military, predominantly humanitarian, assistance to the Ukrainian forces. The high volume of projects implemented with the support of the International Visegrád Fund is promising for the development of new policy processes. Although diplomatic relations between the V4 and Ukraine are very active, this has not yet corresponded to major political outcomes. However, the inflow of more than one million Ukrainian workers to V4 countries and the further acceleration of this process will guarantee stronger ties between the parties.

The Visegrád Cooperation has been through three main phases in its existence. Until 2004, the first two phases were highly concentrated on fulfilling the goals of democratic transformation and coordinating the accession process of the member states to Euro-Atlantic institutions. In 2004, when the integration process into the EU and NATO had been fulfilled, the Visegrád countries launched their new programme through the Kroměříž declaration[11]. The declaration laid down the main direction of the future operation of the regional alliance. The member states declared their willingness to coordinate their positions within the European Union on a regular basis, to deepen regional cooperation in a number of fields and to use their experience to contribute to shaping and implementing EU policies towards Eastern and South-Eastern European countries. The balances within the V4 were always different. While the main advocate of the Eastern dimension was Poland, the rest of the group often preferred relations with the Western Balkans.

Since their accession to the EU, the V4 members have become providers of development aid. Ukraine is the most important recipient of assistance from the V4 states. The ODA (Official Development Aid) flows towards Ukraine have been constantly increasing since 2009; the rate of this growth has accelerated since 2012, reaching over 30 million USD in 2014.[12] Russian aggression and the democratic transformation of the country have further increased the support coming from the V4 countries. The particular interests behind this support have varied among the member states. Hungary, and on a certain level Poland, predominantly supported their minorities in Ukraine. Hungary's support for countries on the OECD's DAC List of

11 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/guidelines-on-the-future-110412

12 Balázs Gyimesi, "The Visegrád Group's development assistance to Eastern Partnership countries", Nouvelle Europe [online], Sunday 2 October 2016, http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/node/1953, displayed on 29 March 2017.

ODA Recipients has been traditionally linked with its minority policy. Therefore, from a governmental perspective, it was always obvious that most of Hungary's development aid would be channelled into Ukraine and Serbia.

For Poland, the importance of Ukraine significantly grew in the wake of the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution; this was also reflected in the levels of development aid. It is extremely important to highlight that, although the V4 countries run a number of projects coordinated to support the transformation of Ukraine, there is little or almost no cooperation in terms of their development aid policy.

By 2005, Ukraine had already become the most important foreign policy partner of the Visegrád Group. Ukraine has a strong impact on the two most important regional policies: energy and security cooperation. Since 2005, the V4 foreign ministers have had at least one official meeting almost every year with their Ukrainian counterpart. From 2010 to 2013, these meetings were organized in an Eastern Partnership format, but since 2014, separate meetings were once again organized with the Foreign Minister of Ukraine. Therefore, it should be highlighted that from a foreign policy perspective, Ukraine is clearly the most important partner of the Visegrád Group.

Following 2005, cooperation developed most intensively in the field of security under the "V4+ Ukraine" format. The Ukrainian Defence Minister and Chief of Staff were regularly invited to meetings with their V4 counterparts. The most important military exercises since 2006 have been as follows: the joint command-staff Exercise "Rapid Trident" (Poland, Hungary), Exercise "Cossack Steppe" (Poland) and Exercise "Light Avalon" (Slovakia, Hungary).

One of the main results of military cooperation has been the assistance of the V4 countries in reforming the Ukrainian armed forces and their transition to NATO standards.[13] Ukraine was invited in 2011 to support the strategic transport capability of the Visegrád Battlegroup, which was on standby from 1 January until 30 June 2016. Although the Ukrainian participation in the Battlegroup was limited due to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the V4 countries will seek opportunities to involve Ukraine more deeply in the setup of their next Battlegroup, planned to be on duty in the second semester of 2019.

Since 2014, the V4 member states have provided military, predominantly humanitarian, assistance to the Ukrainian forces. A more profound cooperation in the field of defence and security is currently being developed and will be introduced by the upcoming Hungarian Presidency (2017/2018) of the Visegrád Group.

At the end of 2014, according to a statement released by the V4, the member states agreed on their specific roles when it came to the sectorial focus of their assistance to Ukraine in the reform process related to the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU. Slovakia is sponsoring reforms of the energy security and security sectors, the Czech Republic is helping with the building of a civic society, the media and education, Poland is responsible for decentralization and the public finance reform and Hungary is supporting small and medium enterprises. As part of this assistance, the V4 member states organized the "V4 Road Show in Ukraine". Agreed by the V4 deputy foreign ministers in

13 Andrii Kudriachenko, "Ukraine and the Visegrád Four: Current Status and Prospects for Cooperation", http://www.collegium-carolinum.de/fileadmin/Veranstaltungen/BohemistenTreffen_Exposes/Expos-es_2016/2016-18-Kudriachenko_UkraineandtheVisegradFour.pdf

Lvov on 7 October 2014, it had the aim of first, sharing the reform experiences of the V4 countries with Ukraine in the selected policy areas and second, of enhancing the coordination of V4 assistance to Ukraine.[14]

The first round of the V4 Road Show was concluded by early 2016,[15] by organizing four events in major regional cities of Ukraine, and although both participation and outcomes were limited, V4 state decided to continue the programme.

The abovementioned sectorial distribution was also introduced in the Civil Servant Mobility Programme (CSMP) of the "Think Visegrád" think-tank network.[16] The network, established in 2012, consists of two organizations from each of the V4 member states. The CSMP was introduced in 2014 in order to support the transformational experience of the EaP countries. In that the same year, as an immediate reaction to Russian aggression, the foreign ministries had already decided to dedicate one of the two CSMPs organized each year to Ukraine. Although the idea in 2015 was to introduce topics based on the sectorial distribution, by 2016 some of the foreign ministries had already decided to follow the recommendations of their local embassies instead when selecting topics.

The main instrument for providing regional assistance to Ukraine, including funding programmes led by Ukrainian NGOs, is the International Visegrád Fund (IVF). Founded in 2001 to support regional cooperation between civil society, academia and

14 Visegrád 4 Ukraine, "Improving Energy Efficiency", http://www.sfpa.sk/event/visegrad-4-ukraine-improving-energy-efficiency/

15 "V4 support to Ukraine", Kormany.hu, April 13 2016, http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/v4-support-to-ukraine

16 About the Think-Tank Platform: https://think.visegradfund.org/

individual citizens of the member states, the IVF is the only formal institution of the V4. Its budget, provided by the V4 countries, was raised to over eight million EUR annually; through separate agreements, it manages to provide an additional 1-1.5 million EUR. The majority of its projects and scholarships are still focusing on internal cohesion, but through its Visegrád+ grants, it has been supporting the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries for more than a decade.

Since the formation of the EaP, but especially since 2014, Ukraine has become the most significant recipient country of IVF grants. In 2014, support for Ukraine through the IVF reached 1.3 million EUR annually according to a statement by the V4 governments.[17] Currently, more than 1.5 million EUR is spent on projects in Ukraine, with Ukrainian organizations and on scholarships for Ukrainian university students. A large proportion of these activities is carried out under a cooperation agreement with the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Dutch government is providing more than one million EUR to the programme managed by the IVF.

The primary focus of this support is the promotion of democratization and the strengthening of civil society in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries in line with the aspirations of the EaP policies of the European Union. Its projects are to fall within the following thematic categories:[18]

17 Joint Statement of the Visegrád Group and Ukraine, 16 December 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/joint-statement-of-the-141217

18 Priorities of funding from Dutch sources: http://visegradfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/calls/NL-IVF_call-for-proposals_12-2016.docx

1. Legislation and justice
2. Good governance: public administration/public order/ policy/immigration policy
3. Communication, media and access to information
4. Development of civil society/support of human rights and minorities

V4 has also tried to lobby in Brussels on a number of cases; probably the most visible instance was the case of the visa waiver programme between the EU and Ukraine.

Although diplomatic relations between the V4 and Ukraine are very active, this has not yet corresponded to major political outcomes. The high volume of projects implemented with the support of the IVF is promising for the development of new policy processes. However, the inflow of more than one million Ukrainian workers to V4 countries and the further acceleration of this process will guarantee stronger ties between the parties.

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3.

Slovakia's Policy towards Ukraine

Summary

For Slovakia, the gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU is a national interest. With Ukraine, Slovakia would not be a periphery and Bratislava could hope for a boom in development for the economically stressed Eastern Slovakia. However, although Slovakia could occupy an honest broker position among the Visegrád countries toward Ukraine – it has neither a troubled history like Poland, nor a sizable minority like Hungary – there is lack of focus and capacity devoted by Bratislava to its largest neighbour. However, Bratislava feels the urge to accelerate relations and support to Ukraine, mainly because of the perceived soft and hard security risks and also because it sees the modernization of the Ukrainian state as the key remedy. As Ukraine is in a hybrid conflict with Russia, Bratislava is concerned both with potential further aggression from Russia, as well as with an increase in violence. Slovakia provided humanitarian aid to a total value of 210,000 EUR, and almost 60 participants of the Euromaidan protests and wounded Ukrainian soldiers underwent a medical examination or rehabilitation in Slovakia. Slovakia's biggest support to Ukraine has been in energy security. Slovakia rarely makes headlines with is rhetoric, but it is one of the most invaluable, if silent, lobbying tools for Ukraine in the West.

Slovakia's foreign policy framework towards Ukraine is based on its immediate proximity, its neutral historical context, the intensity of its energy cooperation, the experience of Bratislava's complicated Euro-Atlantic integration history and the need for stability on the eastern borders of the EU.

For Slovakia, the gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU is a national interest. With Ukraine, Slovakia would not be a periphery and Bratislava could hope for a boom in development for the economically stressed Eastern Slovakia. The Ukrainian Association Agreement was considered by Slovak elites as a milestone as well as trigger for the modernization of its neighbour.

Bratislava accelerated its relations accordingly via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Kiska, as well as through numerous civic and political actors. However, the security implications of the Russian aggression, as well as the fragile state of Ukraine meant that mitigating risks vis-à-vis its largest neighbour became Slovakia's biggest priority regarding Ukraine.

Unknown Neighbours

Both Slovakia and Ukraine were born from the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. They share a 98-kilometre-long border, belong to the Slavic nations and have a long history of having been dominated by a larger nation.[19] Despite these similarities, both countries have played a surprisingly minor role in the foreign and domestic policy of the other.

19 Vazil Hudák, "Relations between Ukraine and Slovakia: Recent History and Future Opportunities", https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/90427/2000-01-01_Relations-Between-Ukraine.pdf

Although Slovakia could occupy an honest broker position among the Visegrád countries toward Ukraine – it has neither a troubled history like Poland, nor a sizable minority like Hungary – there is lack of focus and capacity devoted by Bratislava to its largest neighbour. The main reason is that the Euro-Atlantic integration was an absolute priority, leaving little attention (or capacity) left for its largest neighbour. As the Foreign Policy Audit of the Institute for World Policy put it, "at this moment of time, an analyst or an average Ukrainian citizen would find it hard to attach a straightforward label of "friend" or "opponent" in Europe to the Slovak Republic (SR). Our Slovak interlocutors acknowledge that Slovak society and political circles have a mixed approach to Ukraine."[20]

With the Slovak public overwhelmingly disapproving of Russia's aggression, there is a growing concern about Ukraine's hectic governance. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, Russian aggression has taken the limelight. But Bratislava needed to adjust from its traditionally balanced position when it comes to Russia. Slovak nationalism, in contrast to Ukraine or Poland, has been traditionally pro-Russian, and Slovak elites have been open to the ideas of Pan Slavism.[21]

On top of these issues, there is a growing realization that the EU alone is unlikely to complete Ukraine's load of homework, namely to re-build a viable social contract and state capacity. Bratislava's worries about a more inward-looking country without an external trigger may mean the growing potential for internal friction.

20 Foreign Policy Audit, Ukraine-Slovak Republic, Institute of World Policy, Ukraine, 11 July 2016, http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/2092.html
21 Ibid.

History of Relations

Bilateral relations between Slovakia and Ukraine were in the shadow of Russia until 1998, when Slovakia took a pro-Western course after the delay caused by the semi-authoritarian Mečiar government. Even those relations with Russia were mostly framed by the former USSR debt repayment, ensuring natural gas as well the critical Western stand toward the Mečiar government. Ukraine was mostly considered as an energy transit country and a gateway to the Russian market.[22]

The Dzurinda governments (1998-2002 and 2002-2006) accelerated Slovakia's accession to the European Union and NATO. During this period, Slovakia's key focus was its own (delayed) integration process. Consequently, far fewer resources were devoted to Slovakia's relations with Eastern Europe.

Slovakia, along with the other three Visegrád states and three Baltic countries, was among those EU members highly interested in the shaping of a new EU Eastern policy after the 2004 enlargement. According to the Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2004–2015,[23] the future integration of Ukraine into the EU and the democratization of Belarus were among the key elements of Slovakia's foreign policy priorities. Accordingly, these countries have been a priority for official development aid.

Contrary to the dominant perception in the West, Robert Fico's government (2006-2010) has been an active supporter of Ukraine. However, relations cooled during the last years of the

22 Alexander Duleba, „Slovak-Ukrainian Relations", December 2002, http://www.batory.org.pl/doc/d1.pdf
23 "Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2004–2015", http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002703/01/strategy_fp_sr_until_2015.pdf

Yushchenko-Tymoshenko ruling tandem due to the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine in 2009. The then-Prime Minister Fico, as the single representative of an EU member state, officially condemned Kiev as responsible for the crisis. Slovakia's (justified) grievance was that Kiev (as a partner to Slovakia) did not inform Bratislava about the reverse flow and its consequence of shutting down gas to the EU (via Slovakia). However, the gas crisis served as the impetus for Slovakia to reconsider its own energy dependency on Russia – leading to the diversification of the country's energy supplies.

Democratization Concerns

Relations between Slovakia and Ukraine slightly improved under Viktor Yanukovych's presidency: Slovakia, following Poland's example, intensified its political dialogue with Ukraine despite Yulia Tymoshenko's prison sentence – which was widely seen as a case of selective justice. While it may sound ironic today, the Yanukovych government was seen as pragmatic and politically stable back then, especially compared to the previous tandem's cabinet.

Slovakia's support for the EU's eastern neighbours has not become an obstacle to its working relations with Russia, which are based less and less on economic grounds (trade with Russia has been declining since 2007), and more on the balancing geopolitical logic of (certain) Slovak elites. This has also been supported by public opinion: although 83% (data from June 2014) supported Ukraine's choice to orientate its own foreign policy, 64% disagreed that Ukraine is part of the Russian sphere of influence, 45% supported an active Slovak foreign policy towards Ukraine and 54% were

also against becoming too critical of Russia.[24] To recognize this ambivalence, the ECFR Foreign Policy Scorecard put Slovaks into the category of "friendly pragmatists".[25]

Relations after Euromaidan

Euromaidan, initially a timid reaction to Ukraine's U-turn on the EU's Association Agreement before the Vilnius Summit, burst into a national resistance movement after Kiev used violence against the protesters. The so-called Revolution of Dignity only re-enforced Ukraine's previous strategic importance for Slovakia, while Russia's annexation of Crimea and its aid to the Donbass insurgency altered Bratislava's security calculus.

Bratislava feels the urge to accelerate relations and support to Ukraine, mainly because of the perceived soft and hard security risks and also because it sees the modernization of the Ukrainian state as the key remedy. At the same time, Ukraine is in a hybrid conflict with Russia, and this new threat has brought consequences for Slovakia as a NATO member: Bratislava is concerned both with potential further aggression from Russia, as well as with an increase in violence. Both would have a direct effect on Slovakia as Ukraine's direct neighbour.

The intensity of bilateral contacts has been quite spectacular of late: Ukraine has become a top destination for Slovak policy-makers. The Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Miroslav Lajčák, paid several visits to Ukraine;

24 Alexander Duleba, „Kríza na Ukrajine ako impulz pre východnú politiku SR a EÚ", Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava 2014, http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A09.pdf

25 Jana Kobzova, "View from Bratislava: Slovakia changes course on Russia" , 9 March 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_slovakia_changes_course_on_russia311312

President Kiska followed suit. The key points for discussion were – among others – the support for large scale reforms in Ukraine, visa liberalization for Ukraine and the functioning of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. These discussions were especially important given the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers between July and December of 2016.

However, Slovakia's position can also be described as controversial, given some messages received by Ukraine and the international community from the Slovak government. Despite the fact that the Slovak Republic traditionally follows the common foreign policy course set out by the EU, the Slovak government — and especially Prime Minister Robert Fico – is famous for its statements on not being willing to accept Muslim refugees. Fico also claimed that sanctions against Russia were counterproductive. It is important to underline that Slovakia has never officially questioned sanctions in Brussels — in contrast to the issue of EU migrant quotas, against which the Slovak government filed a lawsuit.

Nothing can more characterize the altered security calculus in Bratislava than the plan of the Slovak Ministry of Defence to replace virtually all of the Soviet-made weapons in its armoury, beginning this year with military helicopters and to be followed by supersonic jets and air defence radar systems. Moreover, Slovakia announced that it is ready to provide spare parts for Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters and engines for Armoured Personnel Carriers (BVP). Slovakia also conducts two training courses for Ukrainian deminers, since demining is one of the hottest issues in the Minsk agreement deliberations.

Slovakia also provided humanitarian aid to a total value of 210,000 EUR, delivered by four convoys and including medical supplies, generators and lighting equipment, special medical cases, sleeping bags, carriers, disinfecting equipment, splints and shoes. Almost 60 participants of the Euromaidan protests and wounded Ukrainian soldiers underwent a medical examination or rehabilitation in Slovakia. Slovakia is also supporting the exchange of experience focusing on the security sector and educational reform, providing small grants from its Embassy in Kiev and scholarships for Ukrainian students to a total value of 550,000 EUR.

Slovakia's biggest support to Ukraine has been in energy security. After an interconnection with the Czech Republic was built following the 2009 gas crisis, the reverse gas flow has also become technically available to Ukraine. However, it took almost another one and a half years for the sides to clear all of the legal and technical hurdles and move to launching the reverse flow. Although Kiev and its European advocates (notably from Poland) blamed Slovakia for the delay, in practice it was Ukraine that refused to accept the Slovak offer to utilize the existing pipeline, pushing instead for a much more expensive (and longer-term) solution.

Moscow was not happy, as both its economic and political leverage was undercut. Hitherto, gas supplies from Russia were instantly cut by 40-50% after Slovakia started to supply gas to Ukraine via the reverse flow at the end of 2014. This has greatly contributed to Ukraine's energy security and saved up to $3bln according to the Ukrainian government estimates.[26] Last year, Slovakia exported 9.7

26 In 2013, Ukraine imported 27.973 bcm of gas, of which 25,842 billion cubic meters (bcm) came from Russia and 2,132 came from the EU (92%). In 2014, out of 19.6 bcm imported, 14.5 came from Russia and 5.1 from the EU (74%). In 2015, out of 20.8 bcm, 12.7 came from the EU and 8.1 from Russia (39%). In 2015, imports of gas from the European market more than doubled from 5.0 to 10.3 bcm. In 2015, imports from the Russian Federation decreased 2.4 times compared to 2014 from 14.5 to 6.1 bcm. As a result, the share of Russian supplies in Ukraine's gas consumption decreased from 34% in 2014 to 18% in 2015.

billion cm of natural gas to Ukraine, making the small country the largest exporter of gas.

Mitigating Risks, Help from Behind

Building the Schengen border with Ukraine required the modernization of Slovak border protection; smuggling and human trafficking have become serious challenges. While the Slovak-Ukraine border is considered one of the most modern and secure on land, it is not impenetrable. Underground tunnels for smugglers have been uncovered and two small planes (used presumably for smuggling) crashed in 2015. Both cases show that cross-border security will continue to be tested.

The shooting incident in Mukachevo[27] in the summer of 2015 highlighted both governance and cross-border risks for Slovakia. The investigation report by the Ukrainian parliament on the incident showed that the local branches of the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior, as well as the National Security Service (SBU) were not only directly involved, but were literally fighting over the control of the smuggling business in Ukraine's western regions neighbouring Slovakia and Hungary.[28] The level and lucrativeness of smuggling and the potential breakdown (or weakening) of central authority creates a vision of a neo-feudal kingdom as the worst case scenario. In the future, these challenges could be coupled with a greater risk of migration flows from Eastern Ukraine, if the Donbass war significantly heats up.

27 Balázs Jarábik, "Ukraine's Fall- Rocking the Boat", Visegrád Revue, 28 September 2015, http://visegradrevue.eu/ukraines-fall-rocking-the-boat/

28 "Has The War In Ukraine Moved To A Second Front?" http://www.rferl.org/a/war-in-ukraine-second-front-transcarpathia-russia/27125339.html

Mitigating risks when it comes to Ukraine – whether they be Kiev's poor reform performance or its security challenges – was a crucial task for Slovakia's EU presidency. After the referendum, this task was taken from Slovakia from those Slovak officials serving in the EU, as well as advisors working in the Cabinet of Ministers.[29,30] Slovakia rarely makes headlines with is rhetoric, but it is one of the most invaluable, if silent, lobbying tools for Ukraine in the West.

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29 Predstavytel'nyca EK, "Ydet vojna meždu ukraynskymy ynstytucyjamy y lyčnыmy ynteresamy", European Pravda, 20 March 2017 http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/interview/2017/03/20/7063267/

30 Strategic Advisory Group for Supporting Ukrainian Reforms (SAGSUR), http://reforms.in.ua/en/page/advisory-group

4.

The Czech Republic's Policy towards Ukraine

Summary

The Ukrainian minority is the largest minority living in the Czech Republic, providing an important labour force for the Czech Republic and resulting in economic benefits for both countries. In the post-Maidan years, the new Czech government remained a stable supporter of Ukraine's pro-Western inspirations. The official Czech position on matters concerning Ukraine and Russia has always been in line with the EU's position and in support of the democratic orientation of Ukraine. Shortly after the eruption of deadly clashes in the Maidan, the government of the Czech Republic adopted a resolution to support Ukraine in its democratic transformation by allocating financial resources to the value of 50 million CZK for the years 2014-2016. Among the most successful initiatives has been the government-run medical humanitarian programme MEDEVAC, which focuses on the provision of medical care to regions stricken by humanitarian crises or natural disasters. The programme was expanded to Ukraine shortly after the deadly protest on Maidan square. However, bilateral relations with the Ukrainian government have been harmed by the provocative rhetoric of the pro-Russian Czech President, Miloš Zeman. Both abroad and at home, Zeman is considered to be the Kremlin's Trojan horse within the EU. Altogether, Czech foreign policy has been viewed as disunited, ambiguous and often misleading, which not only harms the Czech reputation in Ukraine, but also on the international level.

Czech Republic is the only V4 country that does not share an immediate border with Ukraine; yet, Ukraine constitutes an important partner for the Czech Republic. The Ukrainian minority is the largest minority living in the Czech Republic, providing an important labour force for the Czech Republic and resulting in economic benefits for both countries. For years, Ukraine has served as a gateway for goods and energy products between the Czech Republic and Russia, and is today among the key priority countries in the official Czech export strategy and in the MFA's transformation programme.

Nevertheless, the important partnership has for years been constrained by a rather passive Czech foreign policy towards Ukraine. During the years of President Viktor Yanukovych, the Czech Republic regularly criticized human rights abuse in Ukraine and provided shelter for some of its prominent opposition figures, which hampered the development of untroublesome bilateral relations between the two countries.

In the post-Maidan years, the new Czech government remained a stable supporter of Ukraine's pro-Western inspirations; yet, it has paved the way for a more pragmatic approach towards Ukraine. Nevertheless, bilateral relations with the new pro-Western government in Kiev have been harmed by the provocative rhetoric of the pro-Russian Czech President, Miloš Zeman.

Even though the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Czech Embassy in Kiev, initiated a number of successful programs and policies in the years 2014-2016, the divisions between official Czech foreign policy and the behaviour of pro-Kremlin voices in the Czech Republic have created a certain void between the two countries.

Shared Interests between the Czech Republic and Ukraine

Ukraine's current security situation, socio-economic development and pro-EU development has had an immediate impact on the Czech Republic from a number of perspectives. First, the Czech Republic has been on the receiving end of the Ukraine's labour force for years now. According to the Czech Statistical Office, the Ukrainian minority is the largest minority in the Czech Republic, constituting more than 106,000 people in 2015.[31] This is mainly due to the high employment fluctuation. Nevertheless, illegal immigration and consequent human trafficking has long been an ignored and unresolved issue by Czech law enforcement agencies.

Second, Ukraine has for years served as a corridor for goods being exported to Russia, as well as for energy products being imported from Russia to Europe. Nevertheless, after the 2006 and 2009 gas crises, when Russia cut off all gas supplies to Europe travelling through Ukraine, the Czech Republic diversified its supplies as well as increased its gas reserves. This ultimately decreased its dependence on Ukraine.

The size of the country and its population makes Ukraine a potentially interesting market for Czech companies, and vice versa. The bilateral trade between the two countries grew steadily between the 90s and 2013; yet, it has been hampered by the war in Donbass, as many Czech businesses are hesitant to export to Ukraine.[32] Ukraine is currently one of the top priority countries for the 2012-2020 export strategy of the Czech Ministry

31 https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/32846249/2900261602.pdf/3ef23fca-f146-46aa-a37d-fac22e86239e?version=1.0

32 http://euractiv.cz/kratce-odjinud/obchod-a-export/cesky-export-na-ukrajinu-opet-roste-ozivila-ho-i-dohoda-s-eu/

of Industry and Trade, yet more direct incentives by both sides would be welcomed.

Historical Development of Relations between Ukraine and the Czech Republic

Bilateral relations between post-Soviet Ukraine and the post-communist Czech Republic were already beginning to form by the late 80s due to the strong dissident networks in both countries and the exchange of independent information and literature towards the end of the regime. These ties were deepened after the fall of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Ukraine was one of the first countries to open diplomatic relations with the independent Czech Republic, which were established on 1 January 1993, the first day of the independent Czech Republic. In the late 90s and the early years of the new millennium, extensive migration, mainly travelling from Ukraine to the Czech Republic, became a key interest for both countries.

Later on, the Czech Republic became a stable supporter of Ukraine's pro-Western direction. This was especially the case during the governments of Mirek Topolánek and Petr Nečas (both ODS), when prominent Czech human rights advocate Karel Schwarzenberg (TOP 09) served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. During Viktor Yanukovych's presidency of Ukraine, the Czech Republic openly criticized human rights abuse in Ukraine and condemned the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Unlike its V4 counterparts in Poland and Slovakia, the then-Czech President Vaclav Klaus boycotted the 2012 Yalta Conference to protest against the treatment of Tymoshenko.

A similarly tough line was adopted by the Czech government during the numerous gas crises between Ukraine's Naftogaz and Russia's Gazprom. When the 2009 supply disruption coincided with the Czech presidency of the EU, the then Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek called for a tougher approach towards Russia and Ukraine, and later played a crucial mediatory role between the two countries.

In a similar manner, the Czech Republic provided shelter for a number of prominent Ukrainian opposition figures, for instance Ukraine's former Minister of Industry Bohdan Danylyshyn or Oleksandr Tymoshenko, husband to the imprisoned Yulia Tymoshenko. Both asylum cases inherently heightened diplomatic tensions between the two countries even further.

Repercussions soon followed. In 2011, two Czech diplomats were granted "persona non grata" status for allegedly obtaining sensitive information about Ukraine's state secrets. The request to expel the two diplomats came from Ukraine's intelligence services. However, the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg, then suggested that the step was in retaliation to the asylum granted to Bohdan Danylyshyn and he later reciprocally expelled the Ukrainian diplomats from Prague.[33]

Stiffness in relations was furthered by additional problems, such as the 2008-2009 visa scandal at the consular office in Lvov. Between July 2008 and January 2009, Ukrainians applying for a visa were directed to schedule an appointment though a Czech private call centre, where each applicant had to pay around 20 USD for the

33 http://zpravy.idnes.cz/ukrajina-vyhostila-ceske-diplomaty-pidili-se-po-tajnych-informacich-1i1-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A110513_142224_zahranicni_stf

appointment.[34] Over 150 people complained to the Ukrainian office about the practice and Ukraine's representatives repeatedly voiced concerns over the non-transparent scheme.

In the same period, the Czech Republic was a provider of assistance for Ukraine's civil society within the Visegrád Fund framework, as well as the Eastern Partnership program. In addition to multinational projects conducted within the V4 grant scheme since 2005, more than 400 Ukrainian students received scholarships to study in the Czech Republic to a total amount of two million EUR. On top of that, the Czech Republic annually gives away nearly four million CZK to the countries of Eastern Partnership, where Ukraine is one of the most important target countries.

Relations after Maidan

When the new government of Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (CSSD) came into power in January 2014, the long-standing devotion to the promotion of human rights in vulnerable countries, a tradition mostly associated with the first President Vaclav Havel and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg, shifted towards a more pragmatic approach in the foreign policy.

This also became noticeable in the Czech approach towards Ukraine. The official Czech position on matters concerning Ukraine and Russia, however, has always been in line with the EU's position and in support of the democratic orientation of

34 http://www.lidovky.cz/do-podvodu-s-vizy-byl-zapojen-i-cesky-velvyslanec-pise-ukrajinsky-server-1lb-/zpravy-svet.aspx?c=A090924_202055_ln_zahranici_tes

Ukraine. After the refusal of Viktor Yanukovych to sign the long-awaited EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and bloody clashes in the Maidan, the Czech Republic's MFA swiftly condemned the use of violence by riot police and unknown shooters.

At the same time, the Czech government adopted a more vigilant position in its foreign policy towards Ukraine. Prime Minister Sobotka's statements publicly defended the territorial integrity of Ukraine, yet he named Czech national economic interests as equally important in 2014. Indeed, sanctions against Russia and its effect on the Czech economy became one of the most divisive topics among Czech politicians. Andrej Babis, leader of the ANO party and Minister of Finance, when asked about the issue in 2014, advised against viewing politics and the economy as being two distinctive issues. Other prominent politicians, such as President Milos Zeman or ex-President Vaclav Klaus, repeatedly stepped out to condemn the negative effect of anti-Kremlin sanctions.

Supporters of the sanctions regime, on the other hand, have always been rather reticent and ungainly in defending their own position. This has resulted in confusion a lack of knowledge among the general public. According to 2014 opinion polls by the Academy of Science, around 39 respondents disagreed with the sanctions, while 41 agreed. However, only 11% of respondents admitted that they understood the nature and content of the anti-Russian sanctions.[35]

Regardless of the internal debate surrounding anti-Russian sanctions, which the Czech government always supported during EU voting, the most detrimental factor vis-à-vis diplomatic relations

35 http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7274/f3/pm141003.pdf

between Ukraine and the Czech Republic has been the personage of the Czech President, Milos Zeman. Both abroad and at home, Zeman is considered to be the Kremlin's Trojan horse within the EU, and several of his advisors and close associates, such as Martin Nejedly or Zdeněk Zbytek, indulge in close ties with Russian business and diplomats.

President Zeman is likewise a frequent visitor to the Rhodes Forum - Dialogue of Civilization, organized by his friend and Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin. It was during his 2014 visit to the conference that he stated that the crises in Ukraine were only a '"flu" and called for the lifting of sanctions against Russia. On other occasions, he openly questioned the presence of Russian troops on Ukrainian soil, most notably at the 2014 NATO summit in Wales. On many occasions, he has sparked controversy on issues concerning Ukraine and has preferred to follow the line of Russian propaganda rather than that of the Czech government.

It is important to note that Zeman's actual power in foreign policy is limited, as his role is representative; however, he exerts significant influence on the public and political discourse in the country. By all means, his gestures and statements are one of the most pernicious factors in bilateral relations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, forcing other politicians to adopt rather reactive policies.

As a matter of fact, the Czech Republic is considered to be at the forefront of pro-Russian propaganda and the Kremlin's influencing activities, recently prompting the Czech Ministry of the Interior to create a Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats, a special task-force to counter fake news, propaganda and hybrid threats.

Pro-Russian narratives have deeply penetrated into Czech political and public discourse. Among other anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian political voices are the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), the only one of the former ruling parties in post-communist EU countries that did not drop its communist name. It received 14.91% of the votes in the last 2013 parliamentary elections, making it the third most popular party in the country and a prominent voice in the Czech debate.

Its representatives often question the territorial integrity of Ukraine and support pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. In January 2016, for example, two of the KSCM's Members of Parliament, Zdenek Ondrášek and Stanislav Mackovík, illegally crossed the Russian border and entered separatist-held areas in Donbass.[36] Their aim, as they claimed, was to monitor the situation in Donbass and to find the truth about and evidence of the crimes of the Ukrainian army. However, the two MPs did not notify the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs or their Ukrainian counterparts about the visit, which sparked outrage on both sides.

Consequently, the Czech Republic has enjoyed a certain level of popularity among pro-Russian separatists in Donbass. Aside from KSCM MPs, other Czech activists have visited the war-torn region of Donbass. Among them is Nela Lisková, a xenophobic activist and a member of the Czech pro-Russian paramilitary group National Self-Defence, who in 2016 established the first consulate of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic in the Czech Republic. The step was endorsed by representatives of the so-called DPR; however, at the moment of the writing of this report, Czech authorities are undertaking legal steps to close the office.[37]

36 https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/dva-poslanci-kscm-vyrazili-navstivit-proruske-separatisty-ve/r~9ed-7c208bac211e584160025900fea04/?redirected=1491508169

37 https://informnapalm.org/en/donetsk-separatists-office-in-the-czech-republic-facts-and-fantasies/

Support for Ukraine

Shortly after the eruption of deadly clashes in the Maidan, the government of the Czech Republic adopted a resolution to support Ukraine in its democratic transformation by allocating financial resources to the value of 50 million CZK for the years 2014-2016. Even so, the ambiguity and divisions on the side of the Czech government and Prague Castle have translated into insufficient and often late humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine.[38] Nevertheless, several successful programmes and assistantships such as, for instance, the state-run MEDEVAC or grant programmes by the Czech Embassy in Kiev, are laudable.

The Transition Programme of the Czech MFA

Ukraine is one of the 10 priority countries within the "Programme of Transformation Cooperation" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focusing on supporting human rights and transformation cooperation in developing countries. In reaction to the 2014 developments in Ukraine, the Czech MFA allocated an additional five million CZK to be spent over the next year in Ukraine. In 2016, for example, the Czech Republic supported seven projects in Ukraine coming to an amount of nearly 10 million CZK, which is around one fifth of the whole sum allocated for the TRANS programme.[39] This makes Ukraine one of the top receiving countries within the programme.

MEDEVAC Programme

Among the most successful initiatives has been the government-run

38 http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/amocz_agenda2015_cz.pdf

39 http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/lidska_prava/prioritni_zeme_a_projekty_transformacni/ukrajina/index.html

medical humanitarian programme MEDEVAC, which focuses on the provision of medical care to regions stricken by humanitarian crises or natural disasters. The programme was expanded to Ukraine shortly after the deadly protest on Maidan square in February 2014, when 10 million CZK were allocated to the programme in Ukraine.[40] In addition to the treatment of 39 Ukrainian activists in the Czech Republic, three Czech doctors were sent to Kiev in 2014. However, only nine people were treated in the Czech Republic a year later, in spite of the ongoing fights in Eastern Ukraine.

Humanitarian Aid

In the first year of the Ukrainian conflict, the Czech Republic designated a very limited and insufficient aid to Ukraine. Throughout 2014, only around 2.5 million CZK were allocated to Ukraine. The help came in the form of medical aid, in collaboration with the Red Cross, or was designated for internally displaced people (IDPs) in cooperation with the UNHCR. The amount allocated to humanitarian aid grew the following year, when around 31 million CZK were distributed through the development and humanitarian aid of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Among other recognized means of financial assistance to civil society in Ukraine was, for example, support provided to StopFake, a vital initiative fighting Russian fake news and propaganda. In 2015, the Czech Embassy in Kiev became one of the first donors to support the newly established organization, which has since grown into one of the most world's most highly regarded propaganda countering organizations. The Czech Republic has also supported the training of anti-conflict specialists and promoted scientific cooperation in the aviation industry.

40 http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/program-humanitarni-pomoci-medevac-se-rozsiruje-na-ukrajinu.aspx

For all the good intentions and policies of the Czech government, the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Embassy in Kiev, genuine support for the democratization and transformation of Ukraine has been hampered and overshadowed by statements coming from Prague Castle and the Czech pro-Russian scene. As a matter of fact, the Czech Republic has gained a reputation as one of the most Kremlin-friendly nations in Europe. Czech foreign policy has been viewed as disunited, ambiguous and often misleading, which not only harms the Czech reputation in Ukraine, but also on the international level.

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5.

Poland's Policy towards Ukraine

Summary

In the last 25 years, the Polish authorities have regularly expressed the view that the two countries have a "strategic partnership", and that Ukrainians are for the Polish a "kindred nation". The symbol of this Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was the joint organization of the Euro 2012 European Football Championship. Poland has also become one of the major countries advocating for a decisive strategy to counteract Russian "aggressions", including the maintenance of the sanctions imposed on that country in reaction to the occupation of Crimea and the Donbass region. However, the Sejm Resolutions of 2009, 2013 and finally 2016, recognizing the Volhynian-Galician events of 1943-44 as genocide, and the reluctance of Ukrainian elites to admit OUN and UPA responsibility for this massacre, have caused huge criticism of one another's politics of memory for a huge part of the publics and political elites of both countries. One phenomenon impacting on Polish-Ukrainian relations in a growing way is the huge wave of Ukrainian immigration in Poland. According to estimations, it has exceeded one million people. Excepting tens of thousands of students, it is primarily composed of hundreds of thousands of workers, often seasonal workers, spending a few months in Poland, and a few in the Ukraine, and performing as a rule low-paid manual work.

Ukraine has been playing a special role in Poland's policy towards Eastern European countries - the former Soviet republics – since the 1990s. Contrary to Belarus and Russia, where after several years of democratization, authoritarian tendencies and a confrontational approach towards the Central European states and the broader Euro-Atlantic community have gradually grown, Ukraine has been a rather poorly functioning democracy throughout the whole period of its independence, with a significant deficit in the rule of law. Yet, the nation's aspiration to become an EU and NATO member, verbalized in the second term of Leonid Kuchma's mandate (1999-2004), combined with cultural-historical ties between the Polish and Ukrainian people, have meant that successive Polish governments have been very involved in developing relations with Ukraine.

25 Years of Polish-Ukrainian Relations

Poland was the first country in the world to recognize Ukraine's independence. Warsaw did this on the 2 December 1991, right after the announcement of the preliminary results of the Ukrainian SSR's referendum on independence, which indicated that over 90% of the population supported the independence proclaimed on 24 August. Thus, Poland anticipated the act of recognizing the second biggest Soviet republic's independence by three weeks – most countries decided to recognize Ukraine only after Mikhail Gorbachev relinquished his duties as President of the Soviet Union, which occurred on 25 December 1991.

One month later, on 8 January 1992, both countries established diplomatic relations and they signed an agreement forming the basis for all forms of mutual cooperation in the May of that

year: the Treaty on Good Neighbourhood, Friendly Relations and Cooperation. This legal act definitively corroborated that Poland had no territorial claims regarding Ukraine, and the border, set up in 1994, is ultimate (after the Second World War, Poland was forced to cede around 89,000 square kilometres to the Ukrainian SSR, nearly all lands which had been occupied and illegally annexed by the USSR in November 1939 excepting Przemyśl and some border counts. In this way, the idea – conceived in the 1950s, and heavily promoted by the Polish émigré journal "Kultura" – claiming that an independent Poland should renounce all territorial claims towards its neighbours, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus, in the interest of its own safety, was successfully implemented.

In the 1990s a basic cooperation infrastructure was created – representatives of both Poland's and Ukraine's authorities, including state presidents, visited one another regularly. The border was opened and its crossing did not require visas, which allowed for the developing of social contacts; transport connections were also extended. In 1995, the large Euroregion Bug, consisting of the border regions of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, was established. Besides that, both Poland and Ukraine were members of another Euroregion: Carpathian. Military cooperation was established, the tangible result of which was a joint Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian battalion (1998) which served between 2000 and 2010 at the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Finally – and most importantly –Poland, having acquired NATO membership and in the midst of negotiating accession terms with the EU, engaged actively in lobbying for the so-called Eastern dimension of the European Union and the corresponding shape of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This has been observed more or less since 1998. The goal of this policy was to increase the EU's involvement in Ukraine and to encourage its members

to apply a strategy towards that country that also occupied itself with the Central European countries. These efforts were echoed by the adoption of this strategy by the European Union in 2009. The "Eastern Partnership" initiative, proposed by Poland and Sweden a year earlier, the aims of which were to develop the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, to extract from this policy more engagement and to provide more financial means for the EU's Eastern European neighbours.

These actions have allowed Poland to acquire the brand of Ukraine's "advocate" in Europe and have raised the level of confidence of politicians in both countries, including Leonid Kuchma, isolated during his second term in the international arena. This atmosphere enabled the Polish President, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, to be the de facto chief mediator between the camps of Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych during the Orange Revolution. Furthermore, nine years later, Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski – along with his German and French counterparts – fulfilled a similar function of "conflict facilitator" during the "revolution of dignity" (Maidan), supported by the overwhelming majority of the Polish political forces and the wider public.

Poland has also become one of the major countries advocating for a decisive strategy to counteract Russian "aggressions", including the maintenance of the sanctions imposed on that country in reaction to the occupation of Crimea and the Donbass region. During these 25 years, the Polish authorities have regularly expressed the view that the two countries have a "strategic partnership", and that Ukrainians are for the Polish a "kindred nation". The symbol of this Polish-Ukrainian cooperation was the joint organization of the Euro 2012 European Football Championship.

Moreover, social relations were getting better: according to CBOS sociological data from the 2017, 36% of Poles have a positive attitude towards Ukrainians - the highest level in the history of the poll. Yet, 32% of the Polish inhabitants surveyed declared their antipathy, which in 2016 seemed to have been more eagerly expressed. For the sake of comparison, it is worth mentioning that in 1993, at the initiation of the study, the respective numbers were 12% (warm attitude) and 65% (cool attitude). In Ukraine, in turn, Poland has taken first place amongst Ukraine's most liked countries for many years (53% positive vs. 7% negative attitude).

The economic relations of both countries are rising; however, overall, they remain underdeveloped given their potential. According to Polish data for 2016 (excluding December), Ukraine was the recipient of 1.85% of Polish exports and provided 1% of Polish imports. For comparison purposes, Hungary amounted to 2.66% and the Czech Republic 6.6%. From the point of view of Ukraine, Poland was the third biggest exporter of goods to Ukraine (approximately 7% in 2016, with respect to 2015) and the third biggest recipient of Ukrainian imports (6%, according to the data). The relevant indicator increased by 15% in 2016.

Problems

Despite the generally positive balance of 25 years of Polish-Ukrainian contact, mutual relations during this period also faced risks and challenges, related either to the negligence of Poland's weight by Ukrainian elites, or to their history.

The first visible signs of a bad atmosphere in mutual relations became visible in 2008 - the then Polish government realized that the Ukrainian elites did not care too much about developing

relations with Poland and were taking Polish support for granted. They focused instead on expanding relationships with other countries, especially Germany. Respectively, in the following years, the dynamics of political meetings at the highest level weakened, which, given the simultaneous improvement of Polish-Russian relations, gave the impression that Ukraine had downgraded its foreign engagement with Poland. The burden of Warsaw's relations with this country was shifted onto European policy, which Poland, admittedly, continues to actively co-shape.

More importantly, however, was the fact that tensions over the two countries' historical background, which had been present from the very beginning of independent Ukraine's existence, were increasing in significance. Several hundred years of modern Western and Central Ukraine's existence under the umbrella of Polish statehood or under Polish cultural dominance is variously interpreted by the "mainstream" of both countries. The Ukrainian historical consciousness, based on an anti-Polish vision of 19th century Ukrainian historiography, and then on a Soviet one, and the most sensitive dispute over how to assess the anti-Polish action UPA between the years 1943 and 1944, has begun to grow intensively in recent years. Among Polish and Western historians, there is a consensus that the massacre, which claimed the lives of about 100,000 people - Polish civilians living in the occupied South-Eastern Polish provinces, the lands of present-day Western Ukraine – was an ethnic cleansing, deliberately organized by the Ukrainian nationalist underground (UPA). At the same time, Ukrainian public opinion has been shaped by the voices of those trying to present the matter as a mutual war between the Polish and Ukrainian underground movements; as corroboration of that view, they have addressed the fact of the deaths of several thousand Ukrainian civilians, who were

Polish victims of the reprisals. The latter view also tends to be the official interpretation of the Ukrainian state authorities. The Sejm Resolutions of 2009, 2013 and finally 2016, recognizing the Volhynian-Galician events as genocide, and the reluctance of Ukrainian elites to admit OUN and UPA responsibility for this massacre, have caused huge criticism of one another's politics of memory for a huge part of the publics and political elites of both countries.

One has to add that the radicalization of certain segments of Polish society, which had long been restrained to Ukraine, has been supported by Ukraine's short-sighted politics of memory (and the rapid but also emotional development of Ukrainian historical identity). The latter glorifies activists of radical nationalism in former Eastern Poland and emphasizes their contribution to the Ukrainian national cause and national independence, omitting a critical reflection of their responsibility for crimes of genocide and war crimes, as well as for individual acts of terror towards Ukrainians who opposed the OUN. Such Ukrainian opinions and the popularity of the historical film "Volhynia" released in the autumn of 2016, might also have radicalized "Ukrainian sceptics" in Poland.

One phenomenon impacting on Polish-Ukrainian relations in a growing way is the huge wave of Ukrainian immigration in Poland. According to estimations, it has exceeded one million people. Excepting tens of thousands of students, it is primarily composed of hundreds of thousands of workers, often seasonal workers, spending a few months in Poland, and a few in the Ukraine, and performing as a rule low-paid manual work. They are replacing the Polish labour force, many of whom have immigrated to Western Europe in search of a better life. Moreover, the "Polish

Card" - a document issued by Polish consulates to foreigners from post-Soviet countries, confirming their Polish origin and allowing free study and work in Poland, has transformed itself into an instrument of Polish migration policy. Polish Cards are relatively easily accessible. Contrary to the law-makers' intentions, in practice they are making most holders of this document not so much "ethnic Poles", but simply "Ukrainians" with some Polish roots. Despite their declared Polish nationality, their holders do not feel any emotional connection with Poland or Polish culture in practice.

As a result of this immigration, public opinion in both countries, particularly in 2016, was alarmed by incidents and crimes against nationality committed in Poland. It is worth noting that the conflict of historical memory and the reluctance of Ukraine to recognize UPA's action for ethnic cleansing encouraged some Polish nationalists to express aggressive hostility towards Ukrainians. Apart from that, there are good reasons to suppose that Russia is interested in the increase in Polish-Ukrainian tensions, and Russian authorities are at least indirectly responsible for at least some of the provocations of 2016, such as the devastation of Ukrainian graves in Poland or that of important Polish monuments in Ukraine.

The Strategy for the Future: Challenges

After 25 years of Polish-Ukrainian relations, there is still a consensus among Polish parties, including the two largest, which are in sharp conflict with one another, that Polish-Ukrainian relations are a priority with respect to Eastern Europe. One also agrees that

Poland should support its neighbours on their way to European and Euro-Atlantic integration and that Warsaw should provide Ukraine at least with political support during its war with Russia. Warsaw still remains an advocate for the consistent policy for the containment of Russian revisionism.

As far as the long-term goals of Polish policy towards Ukraine are concerned, they might be reconstructed as follows:

- The permanent anchoring of Ukraine in the structures of NATO and the EU, or in other international alliances, in which the Republic of Poland is or will be a participant;

- The transformation of Ukraine into a Polish political ally with respect to the widest possible range of international issues, including the desired shape of European projects in their political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions;

- A dramatically increased Polish business presence in Ukraine;

- The partial restoration, systematically annihilated by the Russian Empire and the USSR, of a community of culture and identity between the populations of Poland and Ukraine;

- The de-occupation of Crimea by Russia;

The means to achieve these goals are:

- All kinds of support for policy initiatives in favour of the reintegration of the Donbass region with the rest of Ukraine,

on the condition that this does not hamper prospects for the democratization and Westernization of Ukraine;

- All kinds of support for reforms to strengthen democracy and the rule of law;

- Efforts to set up a strong political and economic pro-Polish lobby in Ukraine;

- A noticeable increase of a Polish business presence in Ukraine;

- The dissemination of Polish command and knowledge of Polish culture in Ukraine;

- A resolution to existing historical problems and the prevention of the emergence of new ones through measures aiming at the partial reshaping of the Ukrainian historical consciousness by dismantling or combating beliefs about the negative role of Poland in the history of Ukraine.

Leaving out all kinds of risks associated with the development of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the internal situation in that country, the biggest challenge for Polish policy towards Ukraine is currently to maintain public support for a consensus on the need to develop existing Polish-Ukrainian relations in the overwhelming majority of Polish political forces. The second, closely related challenge is to uphold the readiness to resist Russia's policy.

Both among Polish intellectuals and representatives of some parties, especially smaller ones remaining in opposition to the "mainstream", slogans advocating reduced support for Ukraine consistently

appear. Such people almost always justify their reluctance towards or disapproval of Ukraine through arguments about Ukrainian politics of memory: the glorification of the OUN and the UPA, their activists and, overall, the anti-Polish vision of history being taught in Ukraine. Although the Maidan and Russia's aggression in 2014 pushed these votes to the margins of political debate, Ukraine's big political mistake in April 2015, the adoption of decommunization laws – which are generally positive but recognise, i.e., criticism of the UPA as unlawful act – have revived the issue. What is more, the law was adopted a few hours after Polish President Bronisław Komorowski's speech in the Verkhovna Rada, who was running for his second term as President. Thus, Polish political elites received an important indication that a readiness to support Ukraine might generate measurable domestic political costs.

There is also the danger that the Russian policy aiming to play off Poland against Ukraine and diminishing the level of both countries' confidence in their partner's intentions, will continue to use the conflict of historical memory as a tool and weapon, especially in relation to the 20th century, and that it has partially achieved this goal. Acts of disinformation in cyberspace and provocation are diminishing the mutual confidence of both nations in one another.

Another challenge, partly related to the previous ones, is the efficient integration of the huge Ukrainian diaspora in Poland that has arrived in recent years. This is no easy task for many obvious reasons, and for another reason: certain political or intellectual circles exaggerate the scale of incidents perpetrated in the name of ethnic background, but also give such a character to common crimes. No matter whether they are perpetrated for political or emotional reasons, their voices clearly influence the mood of public opinion in both countries.

Last but not least, the long-term challenge that is hugely affecting Polish-Ukrainian relations is maintaining a policy based on a normative approach towards Russia. At the moment this is relatively easy in Poland, due to the traditional hostility of Poles towards Russian foreign interventions, and to the small scale of Russian business involvement in Poland. Nowadays, politicians are mainly being pushed towards a policy of certain agreement with Russia by some segments of the agricultural lobby. Therefore, it is not out beyond political imagining that, sooner or later, one of the future governments could be co-shaped by a political party using pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. Even if such voices were ignored by more powerful parties in these governments, politicians might not be able to help showing sensitivity to the position of Russia - although the latter expects Poland to cease its support for Ukraine.

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6.

Hungary's Policy towards Ukraine

Summary

Despite their fruitful and efficient low-level pragmatic cooperation, Hungary's foreign policy towards Ukraine has long been formulated with the primacy of good relations with Russia as a leitmotif. All moves of Hungarian foreign policy vis-a-vis Ukraine in the early period of the crisis need to be interpreted through the lens of domestic politics, as well as that of the primacy of Russia. The problem of how to stand up for Ukraine and for European stability and values without alienating Russia was a particularly burning issue in the spring of 2014 during the general elections in Hungary. While since 2015 hundreds of Ukrainian children from the war-torn Eastern regions have been provided with a free summer camping holiday in Hungary, the government has been consistently opposed to providing Ukraine with lethal military aid. However, obligations originating from EU and NATO membership clearly have an absolute priority, even over relations with Russia, and will continue to do so in the future. Hence, even though Hungary has been strongly critical of the EU sanctions against Russia, Budapest never vetoed them. All in all, one may conclude that EU and NATO membership still constitutes the defining framework of Hungarian foreign policy, despite all of its intentions to assure closer ties with Russia – and this also affects Hungary's relations with Ukraine. In the future, Budapest will concentrate on low level, pragmatic issues, focusing particularly on the Zakarpattia region and the Hungarian minorities living there, and in EU and NATO projects Hungary will simply follow the line, but without being too vocal about it.

Historical context

Historically, Hungary's relations with Ukraine, or with the states that ruled the territory of present day Ukraine, have been rather shallow. The North-Eastern Carpathians constituted a strong natural boundary that separated the Kingdom of Hungary from Ukraine. Even in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when Galizia belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was administered from Vienna and not from Budapest.

Consequently, relations with Ukraine are far from being highly important parts of Hungary's historical foreign policy identity, like they indeed are in the case of Poland. While in the Polish language, there is even a separate word for the former Eastern territories (collectively named Kresy), expressing Poland's strong sense of closeness, there is nothing like this in Hungarian. Since the 15th century, Hungary's foreign policy attention has been focused to the South, to the Balkans, while from the East, Hungary was pretty much isolated.

The only exception is the Transcarpathian part of Ukraine, i.e., today's Zakarpattia, which belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary until 1920. However, nowadays, even these historical connections with Zakarpattia are focused only on the small Hungarian ethnic minority living there close to the Hungarian border, and not on the whole region as such.

Besides, the feeling that ethnic Hungarians of Zakarpattia are part of the Hungarian self is very different from their feeling any kind of closeness vis-à-vis Ukraine as a whole. This is particularly so because Hungarian is not a Slavic language, and so linguistic ties are practically non-existent, as are cultural ones. Moreover,

not only is the Hungarian minority in Ukraine very small (about 156,000 people) when compared to the overall population of Ukraine, but also the Ukrainian minority in Hungary is a tiny one.

Contemporary Relations

Hungary was one of the first countries to recognize Ukraine's independence, and the former General Consulate in Kiev was quickly upgraded to a fully-fledged Embassy. The Hungary-Ukraine Fundamental Treaty had already been signed by 6 December 1991, and prescribed that the two countries had no territorial claims towards each other and that the cultural, educational and language-related rights of national minorities should be respected. Even though in Hungary, the rapid signing of the Fundamental Treaty was later debated many times by nationalist political forces, accusing the then-Prime Minister József Antall of betraying the Hungarians of Zakarpattia and giving up their territorial hopes, in fact, the Fundamental Treaty was never seriously questioned by any of the mainstream political forces.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Hungary has been consistently striving to maintain pragmatic, ideology-free relations with the subsequent governments of Kiev, and Ukraine has had similar objectives. The main reason for this pragmatism was that neither Budapest nor Kiev had any especially sensitive issues to settle, or any serious conflicts to settle. Bilateral history was much less burdened than Polish-Ukrainian relations, and thus symbolic issues never seriously hampered pragmatic, economy-oriented interstate cooperation. (Although Hungarian historical monuments in Zakarpattia occasionally get vandalized, both sides have handled these atrocities in a very sober way.)

Reasons for this mutual pragmatism were related to strong economic interests and to the lack of similarly strong political motives. Both sides have constantly been interested in the uninterrupted transit of Russian oil and gas through Ukraine and also in the smooth flow of trade both to Ukraine and to Russia. Besides, influential elite groups in both countries have profited a lot from the intensive, cross-border economic activities between Zakarpattia and North-Eastern Hungary, which have also historically involved various smuggling and corruption-related schemes.

Meanwhile, regarding foreign policy, since the early 1990s Hungarian foreign policy has concentrated on the country's Euro-Atlantic integration, also paying significant attention to the Balkans (particularly during and after the Yugoslav civil war), while the Eastern dimension got largely neglected, not independently from the economic downfall of Ukraine that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

This, of course, did not prevent pragmatic, politically neutral cooperation, focusing particularly on cross-border issues. In line with the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional traditions of the region, cooperation has been conducted not only in bilateral, but also in multilateral, frameworks. Already in February 1993 the Carpathian Euroregion was established together by Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine in the Eastern Hungarian city of Debrecen. This was the first Euroregion to be formed by former Eastern Bloc countries. Slightly later, Romania also joined, so at present the organization has five full members. Ever since it was established, the Carpathian Euroregion has been engaged in regional, cross-border development projects concentrating mainly on economic, infrastructural projects and the harmonization of

public administration practices in the region, as well as fostering people-to-people contacts.

Another successful multinational project involving both Hungary and Ukraine is the setup and operation of the Tisza Battalion. Following the disastrous floods of the early 2000s in Zakarpattia, in 2003 a joint Ukrainian-Hungarian disaster management framework unit was set up involving both armed forces. Later, Romania and Slovakia also joined the project; thus, nowadays the Multinational "Tisza" Engineering Battalion is composed of the militaries of four countries.

In addition to all of these, ever since Ukraine's independence, Hungary has been actively contributing to the development of the Zakarpattia region, concentrating mostly on the Hungarian-populated parts through massive development aid projects and also in other frameworks, such as via cultural and educational funds as well as numerous NGO-funded projects. The general strategic objective behind these activities is to help improve the living circumstances of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine.

The Primacy of Russia

Despite their fruitful and efficient low-level pragmatic cooperation, Hungary's foreign policy towards Ukraine has long been formulated with the primacy of good relations with Russia as a leitmotif. The dominance of relations with Moscow is explained by the strong dependence of Hungary on hydrocarbons delivered from Russia, by the massive investments some major Hungarian companies have made in Russia and also by the persistent hopes about "getting back to the Russian market", i.e., by strengthening the position

of Hungarian export companies in Russia. The latter motive has only become stronger since 2010, because the second and third governments of Viktor Orbán have declared that foreign trade should be the main priority of foreign policy. Eastern markets, obviously including Russia, have been considered as one of the main target areas, as envisioned by the "Eastern opening" concept that has been consistently present on the foreign policy agenda of Budapest since 2010. In such circumstances, also taking into account the abovementioned shallow identity-related connections with Ukraine, it is not surprising that bilateral relations with Kiev have long been practically subordinated to Hungary's ties with Moscow.

At the same time, Hungary's NATO and EU accession in 1999 and 2004, respectively, have significantly transformed the country's foreign policy in general. Since then, NATO and particularly the EU have become the main frameworks and orientation points of Hungarian foreign and security policy. This phenomenon is not dependent on the composition of the government in Budapest, but is a constant, defining factor.

The Post-Crimea Setting

The Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula, as well as the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, came at a particularly complicated moment for Hungary, because the crisis fully overlapped both with its parliamentary and European Parliament elections. Stakes were high: Viktor Orbán's government was committed to keeping the constitutional majority in the Hungarian parliament achieved in 2010 by once again scoring a decisive victory.

Hence, all moves of Hungarian foreign policy vis-a-vis Ukraine in this early period of the crisis need to be interpreted through the lens of domestic politics, as well as that of the already described primacy of Russia. The latter was particularly important because Orbán's most important election promise, i.e., to uphold the cutting of household utility costs (the well-known Hungarian term was rezsicsökkentés), was dependent on the continued supply of cheap Russian gas.

Consequently, the problem of how to stand up for Ukraine and for European stability and values without alienating Russia was a particularly burning issue in the spring of 2014. Budapest managed the task by conducting a two-track approach: while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister János Martonyi personally were very vocal in supporting Ukraine and condemning the Russian aggression, as well as subscribing to the first EU sanctions introduced after the annexation of the Crimea, Prime Minister Orbán decided to stay silent and demonstratively refrained from openly criticizing Russia.

The two-track approach became particularly visible when, in May 2014, Orbán openly demanded territorial autonomy for the Hungarians in Zakarpattia for the first and last time. This move hit Ukraine at a very sensitive moment, because the crisis in Eastern Ukraine was just escalating, and there were widespread concerns, which were also being fuelled by nationalistic forces, that Hungary would stab Ukraine in the back. However, in fact Orbán's claim was motivated purely and exclusively by domestic political interests: he wanted to impress and attract voters of the far-right party Jobbik before the upcoming European Parliament elections by vocally stepping up for the interests of Hungarians abroad. This was not the only move directed against Jobbik:

besides an intensive negative campaign, an espionage case was demonstratively launched against one of Jobbik's MEPs, Béla Kovács.

The assessment that Orbán's claim for autonomy was domestically motivated is supported by the fact that Budapest never again repeated this claim: once the European Parliament elections were over, the autonomy demand completely disappeared from Hungarian foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis Ukraine. The related anxiety on the Ukrainian side took, of course, a lot more time to mitigate. All in all, one may conclude that the demand for autonomy was another case in which foreign policy interests got subordinated to domestic political ones.

After the elections of spring 2014 were over in Hungary, foreign policy towards Ukraine returned to the usual dilemma of how to manoeuvre between the need to support Ukraine, a direct neighbour and home to a sizeable Hungarian community, and how not to alienate Russia. Since then, the foreign policy actions of Budapest have shown considerable fluctuation, particularly since Péter Szijjártó became Minister of Foreign Affairs on 23 September 2014.

Just two days later on 25 September 2014, shortly after the then head of Gazprom, Alexei Miller, visited Budapest, Hungary stopped the delivery of reverse gas flow to Ukraine, stating technical reasons. Delivery was not re-started until 10 January 2015. Since then, however, supplies have not been stopped again.

Meanwhile, when Péter Szijjártó visited Kiev in December 2014, he emphasized the need for a strong Ukraine, and announced that Hungary had contributed by 100,000 EUR to NATO's fund

aimed at strengthening Ukraine's cyber security. Another 100,000 EUR was provided for the functioning of the OSCE Observation Mission to Ukraine, in which Hungary has participated with 21 observers.

Besides, it was announced that Budapest was ready to receive seriously wounded Ukrainian soldiers for medical treatment and rehabilitation. Szijjártó also took up the commitment that Hungary was ready to contribute to Ukraine's administrative reform. In addition to all of the above, since 2015 hundreds of Ukrainian children from the war-torn Eastern regions have been provided with a free summer camping holiday in Western Hungary at Lake Balaton. Meanwhile, Hungary has been consistently opposed to providing Ukraine with lethal military aid. Hungary is not participating in the multinational military training mission in Ukraine either.

Due to the shortage of publicly available sources, it cannot be known whether this ambiguous approach follows a well-calculated strategy or reflects a lack of one. Most probably, Budapest intends to get back to "business as usual" in the strategic sense vis-à-vis Ukraine: providing support in many different and important fields, but avoiding such sensitive moves that would alienate Russia too much.

However, obligations originating from EU and NATO membership clearly have an absolute priority, even over relations with Russia, and will continue to do so in the future. Hence, even though Hungary has been strongly critical of the EU sanctions against Russia, Budapest never vetoed them. Nor did Hungary try to block or hamper NATO's decision to reinforce the defence of the Baltic States. Even though Hungarian foreign policy has repeatedly

questioned the idea that Russia would pose a threat to NATO, at the same time, Budapest has been also contributing to the reinforcement measures through military means. All in all, one may conclude that EU and NATO membership still constitutes the defining framework of Hungarian foreign policy, despite all of its intentions to assure closer ties with Russia – and this also affects Hungary's relations with Ukraine.

Problems

At present, the ongoing instability in Eastern Ukraine, as well as a possible military escalation, remains an important source of concern for Hungary. Budapest is closely following the situation in the Donbass and is also actively contributing to the OSCE and EU missions in Ukraine. Soft security concerns are also still on the agenda, particularly regarding criminality and corruption, as well as social, health-related and environmental risks.

The recently-drafted law project of Ukraine, which would negatively discriminate against holders of a foreign passport in Ukraine (obviously including Ukrainian-Hungarian double citizens), is a new, very sensitive problem for Budapest. Even though Ukrainian law did not permit the possession of a second citizenship even earlier than this, the ban was not enforced in practice. If Ukraine decides to move forward with the proposal, serious negative reactions from Budapest are more than likely.

In general, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia is, and probably will remain, a source of concern. This has been particularly so since the Euromaidan in 2014, as various far-right forces in Ukraine gained a lot of momentum

during and after the revolution, as well as in the early years of the war, when the so-called volunteer battalions (many of them composed of hardcore nationalists) played a key role in defending Ukraine from Russia's aggression. Although Hungary noted with considerable relief that during the October 2014 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, far-right forces got much less support than many in Budapest were afraid of, concerns over radical Ukrainian nationalism and its possible effects on the Hungarian minority have not disappeared.

Strategy for the Future: Challenges

Regarding the problems enumerated above, in the long run it is very likely that the political tensions originating from the post-Crimea situation will decrease and bilateral relations will get back to the usual, pragmatic, cooperation-oriented setting.

Hungary's main interests regarding Ukraine are likely to be the following:

- Supporting the further EU and NATO approximation of Ukraine, motivated both by stability-related and economic interests. As full NATO membership of Ukraine will not be realistic for the foreseeable future due to the country's territorial conflict with Russia over the Crimea, Budapest will be able to support Ukraine's security sector reform, including the adoption of NATO standards, without actually alienating Russia too much, i.e., while maintaining its traditional, pragmatic approach vis-à-vis both Kiev and Moscow.

- Preserving the presence and identity of the Hungarian minority in the Zakarpattia region.

- Increasing the presence of Hungarian business entities and fostering investments, particularly in the Western regions of Ukraine. If and when the war in Donbass comes to an end, Hungary would probably be eager to participate in the reconstruction.

- Strengthening political and economic cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, focusing particularly on the free movement of people, motivated both by trade interests and by the need to attract a Ukrainian skilled labour force in order to mitigate the domestic shortage of the labour force in Hungary. Budapest has already been eager to attract a Ukrainian labour force for a while now, and this is likely to become more intensive in the future.

- Supporting the modernization of the Ukrainian state administration and security sector, thus improving the efficiency of the fight against corruption and against cross-border crime.

Meanwhile, the situation of the Hungarian minority living in Zakarpattia will continue to constitute a possible source of tension, depending on the minority policy of the Ukrainian government. In other words, treatment of the Hungarian minority will long remain a political leverage in the hands of Kiev.

At present, the most important challenge of Hungarian foreign policy vis-à-vis Ukraine is that of how to synchronize the essential need to assist Ukraine's reforms in the EU and NATO

frameworks with the perceived need to have close relations with Russia. In other words: how to support Ukraine without alienating Russia. Most probably, the solution will be similar to the policy lines already followed in the past decades: regarding Kiev, Budapest will concentrate on low level, pragmatic issues, focusing particularly on the Zakarpattia region, and in EU and NATO projects Hungary will simply follow the line, but without being too vocal about it.

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7.

Conclusions: the Political Interest of the Visegrád Group Member States towards Ukraine

Ukraine is the biggest non-EU neighbour of Central Europe (apart from the Kaliningrad region of Russia), and it has always played an important role in the bilateral and multilateral relations of each V4 country. While Poland is the most vocal and active in highlighting the importance of relations, geopolitics plays an important role for the rest of the members as well. As the current Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán harshly described: "The real relevance of Ukraine in fact is that it creates a space between Russia and us. History has taught us that this space is crucial for our own security. Therefore, we will be always interested in the existence and integrity of the country."

Despite of this fact, V4 did little, or simply not enough, to keep the issue of supporting Ukraine at a proper level on the European agenda. However, the willingness to change the bad image of Central Europe in Brussels might be a good opportunity to reintroduce the question onto the EU agenda.

Ukraine is not only important from a security policy perspective, but also for a number of economic reasons as well. The country is one of the top five export destinations outside of the EU for

Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, and it is one of the top 10 export partners of the Czech Republic. Its importance significantly increased following the introduction of EU sanctions against Russia and Russia's counter-sanctions, and simultaneously, the radical changes in Ukrainian-Russian economic relations which have reshaped Ukraine's trade structure. At present, for the V4, Ukraine is almost as important as Russia in terms of exports; many analysts suggest that Ukraine could even bypass Russia within a decade.

Ukraine is vital for the competitiveness of the region for another reason as well. The region's hunger for skilled labour is practically unlimited. However, the migration crises put these countries into a specific situation. For political reasons, not only the quality, but the origin of labour is playing a decisive role. Visegrád countries have been competing with each other for Ukrainian workers for the last two years; however, they could potentially cooperate in handling the social impact of this mass Ukrainian labour movement. Obviously, the attractiveness of Visegrád countries for Ukrainians varies widely, but by now more than one million Ukrainians are living in Poland, more than 100,000 reside in the Czech Republic, while there has been a rapid increase in Slovakia as well. Hungary has also launched recruitment campaigns, but its non-Slavic status and lower salaries make the country less competitive in this race.

Obviously, the relevance of Ukraine in the foreign policies of each of the Central European countries differs for a number of reasons, some of which have been previously introduced. Still, the most important factor of all is that Poland and Hungary are not only sharing a border with Ukraine, but also have a significant ethnic minority living within the country. This factor is not only

contributing to an increased interest, but is also serving to create a greater potential for conflicts.

The Hungarian population is highly concentrated in the Sub-Carpathian region. During the 20th century, this territory first belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom (of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), but following to the Trianon Peace Treaty, Czechoslovakia took over control. In the Second World War, Hungary occupied Carpathian Ruthenia for a short period, but the region ended up in the Soviet Union following the Second World War as a part of Ukraine.

Their historical roots have made these countries focus their bilateral aid on this particular region. In the Hungarian case, this means that about 90 to 95% of the support is concentrated in this sole region, in order to improve the living conditions of the 156,000 ethnic Hungarians still living in the country.

It is not a coincidence that Russia is playing the minority card, also on the level of disinformation, to damage Hungarian-Ukrainian relations. But we have to also acknowledge that Russia and Hungary have been natural allies in terms of disputes related to minority rights for more than two decades. Any Ukrainian legislation affecting ethnic minorities, most importantly those related to the use of national languages, invoke strong opposition from Hungarian governments. Hungarian foreign policy is based on three pillars, as was declared by József Antall, the first Prime Minister following the country's democratic transition. The first pillar is the status and rights of Hungarian minorities in the neighbourhood. The second is the primacy of relations with its immediate neighbours, partly due to security reasons, but more importantly to support the first pillar. The third pillar is the Euro-

Atlantic integration, which guarantees the sustainability of the first and second pillars of this foreign policy in the long-term. Any vocal action or legislative plan with the potential to harm Hungarian minorities also creates internal political disputes and risks for Hungary. Therefore, any major change in territorial focus within Ukraine by the Hungarian government is highly unlikely.

We have to highlight that this ethnic factor, already existent prior to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, has driven Russia and Hungary onto the same platform. Actions by the new Ukrainian government related to the conflict in the Donbass, which tried to limit the use and influence of the Russian language and media, coincidently set off the well-known alarm bells once again in Budapest. Some of the Hungarian response was misinterpreted by international actors, while the Hungarian government also showed little understanding of and respect towards Ukraine's extraordinary situation.

The number of Poles in Ukraine, once peaking at around half a million inhabitants, declined after Ukraine's independence. Currently, about 144,000 Poles live in the country according to the 2001 census. Most Poles are concentrated in Zhytomyr Oblast (about 49,000), Khmelnytskyi Oblast and Lviv Oblast (approximately 20,000 in both). Historical clashes and memory often overshadow bilateral relations, however, Poland's well-known reservations vis-à-vis Russia make the two countries natural allies. Although Poland spends more money on supporting national projects and structures than Hungary, a regional concentration of funds can be detected in Warsaw's policy as well.

Historical memory, the small number of ethnic Slovaks (approximately 7,000), the large number of people of Ukrainian

origin in Slovakia and the different foreign policy strategy of the country have resulted in a completely different approach from the Slovak government. Slovak, as well as Czech, support is less concentrated by region. Therefore, any concentrated regional support by the Visegrád Group should not focus on regions close to the Polish or Hungarian borders, but rather on those in Central or Eastern Ukraine.

Obviously, the level of support given to Ukraine often depends on external factors as well. Since the election of President Donald Trump, Central European countries have been unconvinced that supporting Ukraine would also score them points with the US administration. If the Americans were to push and call for further support, that would give a further impetus for the increased efforts of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Relations between the V4 states and Russia are also heavily influencing relations with Ukraine. Hungarians, Slovaks and Czechs have visibly limited their support, primarily their military support including selling arms to Ukraine, due to the fear of a possible decline in their relations with Russia. Hungarians are vocal critics of EU sanctions, but Czechs and Slovaks are equally not the strong lobbyists for maintaining them. Many analysts suggest that this position is mainly linked with Hungary's energy dependency on Russia and with the Orbán government's commitment to building new nuclear power blocks in Paks, which is due to be financed by Russian loans and constructed by Rosatom.

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Good Neighbourliness?
The Visegrád Countries and Ukraine

Since the Ukrainian revolution of 2014, the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union has emerged as one of the most important unsettled issues for the foreign and neighbourhood policy of the European community. In this complex crisis, four Central European Visegrád states – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – found themselves in a special position: on account of their geographic location, they were directly affected by the conflict.

In this book, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Policy Solutions examine how the Visegrád countries reacted to the crisis in Ukraine, what political and economic support they offered and how they have helped or impeded Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration in the past years. The studies in this volume were authored by foreign policy experts and analysts from the four Visegrád countries.

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