



RELATIONS BETWEEN VISEGRAD STATES AND UKRAINE: A “TWO SPEED” CENTRAL EUROPE

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Abstract:

Students of Central Europe usually tend to distinguish the Poland's proactive foreign policy toward Ukraine and contrast it to respective policies of the rest of three Visegrad states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). This paper analyzes interactions between Visegrad states and Ukraine at political, economic and social levels, and proposes a new concept of a “two-speed” Central Europe. This concept suggests that after the Orange Revolution Poland and Hungary have developed a considerably closer political and economic relationship with Ukraine, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic have adopted a more cautious approach.

Keywords: Visegrad states, Ukraine, Bilateral Cooperation.

Resumen:

Todo estudiante sobre Europa Central tiende a distinguir la política exterior activa de Polonia hacia Ucrania contrastándola con las políticas respectivas de los otros tres estados del Grupo Visegrad (República Checa, Eslovaquia y Hungría). Este artículo analiza las interacciones entre los estados del Grupo Visegrad y Ucrania en los niveles tanto político, económico como social y propone un nuevo concepto de una Europa Central a “dos velocidades”. Este concepto sugiere que tras la Revolución Naranja, Polonia y Hungría han desarrollado una relación política y económica más estrecha con Ucrania, mientras que Eslovaquia y la República Checa han apostando por una política más cauta.

Palabras Clave: *Estados del Grupo Visegrad, Ucrania, Cooperación Bilateral.*

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1. Introduction

In 2004 Ukraine was at the center of a highly symbolic fight between the East and the West. At that point four Central European (CE) countries – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – had already “returned” to Europe by gaining full NATO and EU membership. Sometimes Ukrainians ask themselves: what would have happened, if Ukraine had joined the Visegrad Group¹ in 1993-1995? Perhaps the political system of Ukraine would have been closer to standards of a western democracy today and its “way to Europe” would have been considerably shorter?

This question may seem interesting, but it is impossible to answer it today. CE countries held a principled attitude that no new members could be accepted to the Visegrad Group. Therefore, each CE country developed its relations with Ukraine mainly on a bilateral basis.² Since the Orange Revolution all four Visegrad states have been consistently expressing their support for Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic ambitions and referring to Kiev as one of the most important partners in the region. However, the actual depth of bilateral cooperation did vary.

Students of the CE region usually tend to distinguish the Poland’s proactive foreign policy toward Ukraine and contrast it to respective policies of the rest of three Visegrad states. But a closer look at interactions between Visegrad countries and Ukraine shows that one can reasonably make yet another distinction regarding Visegrad states and their policies toward Ukraine. In this paper a new concept of a “two-speed” Central Europe is proposed, suggesting that Poland and Hungary cooperate with Ukraine notably closer than Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This conclusion is derived from an in-depth analysis of three different levels of interactions between Visegrad countries and Ukraine after the Orange Revolution: political, economic and social.

2. Political Level: Behind the Diplomatic Smiles

President Leonid Kuchma’s Ukraine was known for its multivector foreign policy and constant balancing between the East and the West. Vocal claims about Kiev’s ambitions to join the EU were a part of such policy. Although CE governments had no illusions concerning the ostensibly pro-Western stance of Ukraine, they were stuck to a principle not to draw any new dividing lines in Europe and welcomed Ukrainians’ elevated talk with even more elevated rhetoric. This point could be illustrated by the meeting of Ukrainian and Slovak prime ministers which took place on the eve of the Orange Revolution. At this meeting Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich assured that Ukraine is interested in the Slovak experience gained during the EU integration process. His Slovak counterpart Mikulas Dzurinda replied that Slovakia is eager to become “a Ukraine’s voice at the European table of negotiation”.³

¹ On 15 February 1991 the Visegrad Group was established by three countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. After the Czechoslovak split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia (in 1993) the number of member states of the Visegrad Group increased to four states. This organization is also known as the Visegrad Process, the Visegrad Four or just V4.

² However, it should be mentioned that joint meetings of representatives from Visegrad states and Ukraine are occasionally held in the so-called V4+ format.

³. Премьер-министр Словакии М.Дзуринда: "Словакия хочет быть украинским голосом за европейским столом переговоров" (Slovak Prime Minister M.Dzurinda: “Slovakia is eager to become a Ukraine’s voice at



2.1. CE States' Reaction to the Orange Revolution

A deep political crisis in Ukraine at the end of 2004 revealed which one of CE countries not only declared support for the Ukraine's pro-Western course, but also was determined to take some active measures. While other EU leaders were eyeing the events passively, the then Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski took the initiative and played a crucial role in resolving the crisis peacefully.⁴

The rest of CE countries limited themselves to voicing a concern about unfair elections in Ukraine and took no diplomatic actions. The Foreign Minister of Ukraine's neighbour Slovakia Eduard Kukan indicated that Slovakia would not intervene beyond expressing its support for democracy.⁵ The Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda reacted to events in Ukraine by voicing a hope that "the current development in Ukraine will be evaluated in the EU framework" in the near future.⁶ So, Prague was decided to learn and be guided by a common position of EU member states in the first place. Finally, Ukraine's other neighbour Hungary reacted to the Orange Revolution reservedly as well. The then Hungarian government failed to openly support "orange" political forces. On the contrary, the socialist government was suspected for its intentions to back Yanukovich candidacy in the Ukrainian presidential election.⁷

2.2. Dipomatic Rhetoric after the Orange Revolution

After the victory of the Orange Revolution the new Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko declared he will stick to pro-Western foreign policy. As a result, CE countries changed their tactics: they gave up their previous policy of non-interference and started to support the "orange" forces actively. For example, the socialist Hungarian government, which had been criticized for its indifference to the events in Ukraine, was quick to show a special attention to Kiev straight after the Revolution. In February 2005 Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány paid an official visit to Ukraine and became the first of EU leaders who met the new Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in Kiev. During that meeting Gyurcsány was presented with an orange scarf and he assured of unconditional support of Hungarians for Ukraine's EU bid.⁸

The rapprochement between Ukraine and Euro-Atlantic institutions, which had been predicted after the Orange Revolution, allowed CE countries to represent Ukraine's interests and avoid repeating an earlier Polish experience, when its active support for Kiev had provoked the negative reaction of Western countries.⁹ In 2005 Ukraine's chances to join

the European table of negotiation"), *ЛІГАБізнесІнформ*, 21 June 2004, at <http://www.liga.net/news/112464.html>.

⁴ For a brief evaluation of the Poland's role in the Orange Revolution see: Kuzio, Taras: "Poland plays strategic role in Ukraine's "orange revolution", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 1, no. 144 (December 2004), at http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3172&article_id=2368993.

⁵ MacLeod, Magdaléna: "Ukraine court decrees re-run", *The Slovak Spectator*, 13 December 2004, at <http://www.slovakspectator.sk/clanok.asp?vyd=2004048&cl=18115>.

⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic: "Statement of Minister Svoboda on the Elections in Ukraine", 25 November 2004, at <http://www.mzv.cz/wwwo/mzv/default.asp?id=29172&ido=6569&idj=2>.

⁷ Dempsey, Judy: "Bush looking for new partner in East Europe", *International Herald Tribune*, 21 June 2005, at <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/06/21/news/hungary.php>.

⁸ "Gyurcsány presented with "Ukrainian liberation" scarf", *The Budapest Sun* 17 February 2005, at <http://www.budapestsun.com/cikk.php?id=16046>.

⁹ For example, in 1999 Poland exerted pressure on Germany to get Ukraine included in the list of EU candidates. Since Poland was not even an EU member state at that time, its demands caused irritation among German



NATO looked pretty good. In April 2005 the Alliance invited Ukraine to begin a so-called “Intensified Dialogue” and there were some rumors that NATO could offer Ukraine to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as early as during the Riga summit in November 2006. In January 2006 defence ministers of the Visegrad Four declared during the meeting in Budapest that CE countries are ready to support Ukraine in its way to NATO. In addition, they discussed about establishing a special committee, which would promote the reform of Ukrainian armed forces.¹⁰ Some attempts to coordinate actions of CE countries could also be noted regarding relations between Ukraine and the EU. For example, in March 2006 foreign ministers of the Visegrad Four publicly urged Brussels to provide Ukraine with a “concrete [EU accession] perspective”.¹¹

2.3. Examples of Practical Cooperation

In spite of some occasional instances, it should be acknowledged that countries of the Visegrad Groups failed to effectively coordinate their policies toward Ukraine. Poland is the most distinguished for its role of Ukraine’s advocate. Even Ukrainians themselves notice that Poland has become a lobbyist for Ukraine’s interests and has earned a monopoly in this field.¹² However, in recent years the Ukrainian-Hungarian partnership, especially its practical side, has strengthened considerably.

At the level of diplomatic rhetoric, all four CE countries act more or less in the same manner – all of them declare a strong support for Kiev’s Euro-Atlantic ambitions. But some instances of practical cooperation reveal that CE countries are divided into two groups. The first group includes Poland and Hungary that demonstrate openness to Ukraine and take some practical steps in order to strengthen their bilateral partnership with Kiev. The second group includes Slovakia and the Czech Republic that view Ukraine more cautiously and are not ready for a closer cooperation yet.

This distinction can be well illustrated by comparing visa policies that were implemented by CE countries before and after the Orange Revolution. Before 2000 all four Visegrad states maintained a visa-free regime with Ukraine. However, after the EU had opened accession talks with CE countries in 1997 (with Slovakia in 1999), it became clear that their visa-free regime with Ukraine would be canceled sooner or later. Slovakia and the Czech Republic canceled it as early as 2000 hoping that the EU would appreciate such rapidity. In other words, they decided to sacrifice their closer ties with Ukraine for requirements of the EU. Of course, Poland and Hungary had to take that same decision as well. But these two countries negotiated harder with the EU and tried to retain the visa-free regime as long as possible (finally, it was canceled in autumn 2003).¹³ Besides, when Poland and Hungary started to issue visas for Ukrainians, they decided not to ask a visa fee. Slovakia and the Czech Republic decided to waive a visa fee much later, after the Orange Revolution.

diplomats. See: Wolczuk, Roman: “Polish-Ukrainian Relations: A Strategic Relationship Conditioned by Externalities”, *Defence Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 2002), p. 148.

¹⁰ Perepelytsia, Grigoriy M.: “NATO and Ukraine: At the crossroads”, *NATO Review*, no. 2 (Summer 2007), at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/issue2/english/art2.html>.

¹¹ РБК-Украина: “Вышеградская четверка: ЕС должен дать Украине четкую перспективу” (“Visegrad Four: EU should give Ukraine a concrete perspective”), 9 March 2006, at <http://dev3.rbc.ua/rus/top/2006/03/09/12490.shtml>.

¹² Главред: “Выдрин: Польша уже стала лоббистом Украины” (“Vydrin: Poland has already become a lobbyist for Ukraine”), 12 April 2005, at <http://www.glavred.com/archive/2005/04/12/164157-0.html>.

¹³ Kaźmierkiewicz, Piotr: “The Visegrad States between Schengen and Neighbourhood”, *Working Paper*, presented at the Workshop on Visa and Immigration Policies of the Visegrad Countries (October 2005), p. 3, at http://www.visegrad.mtaki.hu/workingpapers/V4visa_KazimierkiewiczStudy.pdf.



In May 2005 Ukrainian President Yushchenko decided to lift visas for all EU countries. Reacting to that, Slovakia and the Czech Republic waived a fee of short-term (up to 90 days) visas for Ukrainian citizens. It is also important to note that attempts to coordinate visa policies toward Ukraine at the Visegrad Group level have failed.¹⁴

The differences in visa policies between the first group (Poland and Hungary) and the second group (Slovakia and the Czech Republic) can be explained by differences in their perception of visa functions. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic a stricter approach prevails, which is close to that of most EU member states. According to this approach, the visa-issuing process is considered as the first barrier against potential illegal immigrants, which also helps to verify intentions of the applicant.¹⁵ The choice of relatively strict visa policy is quite natural because of the negative attitude to Ukrainians in the Slovak and Czech societies (see Chapter 3.2 of this paper). Poland and Hungary, on the contrary, consider visas as instruments of foreign policy, rather than a tool to fight criminality. Poland stays open to Ukraine because of the principles of its Eastern policy, and Hungary stays open because of its policy toward ethnic Hungarians abroad (including those in Ukraine).¹⁶

Poles and Hungarians showed more sensitivity to Ukraine's interests not only in the field of visa issuing, but also in some other fields. For example, Hungary and Poland were the first among Visegrad states to recognize Holodomor¹⁷ as genocide against the Ukrainian nation. As early as 2003 the Hungarian parliament evaluated Holodomor as "a horrible tragedy in human history".¹⁸ In 2006 the Polish parliament followed by condemning "the totalitarian regime responsible for this genocide".¹⁹ The Czech parliament came up with a similar resolution at the end of 2007 declaring that Holodomor was committed by the "criminal and totalitarian Stalinist regime" in order to "break the resistance of the Ukrainian nation".²⁰ In December 2007 Slovak parliamentarians also drafted a resolution on Holodomor in Ukraine, but it didn't eventually result in the recognition of Holodomor as genocide of Ukrainians. After the intervention of the Slovak cabinet (and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular), the text of the resolution was amended. So, the Slovak parliament finally recognized Holodomor as the "act of extermination" in the former Soviet Union, but it didn't distinguish one single nation, which had been a victim of Holodomor.²¹

Another example of the Poland's and Hungary's exclusive support for Ukraine could be their position concerning the new enhanced agreement between the EU and Ukraine, which would replace the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. In January 2007 EU foreign ministers discussed whether to include in the text of the new

¹⁴ Duleba, Alexander and Strážay, Tomáš: "New Chances, New Challenges", in Jagodziński, Andrzej (ed.) (2006): *The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation*, Bratislava, International Visegrad Fund, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=830&articleID=4066&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>, pp. 145–147.

¹⁵ Kaźmierkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁷ Holodomor is the name given to a man-made famine carried out by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin during 1932–1933, which starved to death up to 3.5 million Ukrainians.

¹⁸ "Венгрия признала голодомор в Украине трагедией" ("Hungary recognized Holodomor in Ukraine as a tragedy"), *Главед*, 26 November 2003, at <http://glavred.info/archive/2003/11/26/121152-9.html>.

¹⁹ "Польша приняла постановление по Голодомору в Украине" ("Poland adopted a resolution on Holodomor in Ukraine"), *Главед*, 6 December 2006, at <http://www.glavred.com/archive/2006/12/06/103451-6.html>.

²⁰ "Чехия признала Голодомор в Украине" ("The Czech Republic recognized Holodomor in Ukraine") *Корреспондент.net*, 1 December 2007, at <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/218994>.

²¹ "Словацкий парламент: Голодомор в бывшем Союзе – "акт истребления" ("Slovak parliament: Holodomor in the former [Soviet] Union – "act of extermination"), *DELFI*, 13 December 2007, at <http://www.delfi.ua/news/daily/politics/article.php?id=109412>.



agreement a promise to accept Ukraine into the EU. According to media reports, foreign ministers of Poland and Hungary were among those who insisted on inclusion of such promise most fiercely.²² Again, these two countries stood out among other CE countries.

3. Economic Level: foundation for the Future Partnership

Three out of four CE countries have a common border with Ukraine, so a network of mutual economic interests has been naturally established. In addition, all CE countries are dependent on the transit of Russian oil and gas via Ukraine. It could be noticed however that an extent of economic cooperation with Ukraine is not the same among CE countries. The differences between two groups (Poland and Hungary *versus* Slovakia and the Czech Republic) manifest themselves at the economic level as well.

3.1. Trade, Investment, Labor Force

Although Ukraine's imports from CE countries exceed its exports to that region, such neighbouring countries as Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are important to Ukraine as export destinations in the first place. Poland is the second largest destination for Ukrainian exports among all 27 EU member states. Hungary stays close to Poland, and the Czech Republic is the only CE country, which is left outside the top ten of destinations for Ukrainian exports in the EU (see Table 1).

Table 1. Ukraine's exports of goods to CE countries in 2007

	Value, USD million	Place among EU-27
Poland	1,637	3
Hungary	1,235	4
Slovakia	645	6
Czech Republic	429	12

Source: State Statistics Committee of Ukraine.

Poland is also a leading exporter to Ukraine among CE countries. In 2007 Polish exports of goods to Ukraine amounted to \$2,921 million. Hungary and the Czech Republic occupied the second and the third place with \$1,241 million and \$1,155 million respectively. Slovakia lagged behind with exports of \$523 million.²³ By comparing the annual growth rates of exports from CE countries to Ukraine of the period of 2003-2007 it can be observed that the Orange Revolution didn't make a big difference – noticeable leaps had happened before it as well (see Table 2).

²² "EU Foreign Ministers Discuss Iran, Ukraine, Northern Cyprus", *Deutsche Welle*, 22 January 2007, at <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2323234,00.html>.

²³ For appropriate statistical data see the website of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, at http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2007/zd/ztt/ztt_e/ztt1207_e.htm.



Table 2. Growth of CE countries' exports of goods to Ukraine (% change; year on year)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Poland	49	21	40	50	39
Hungary	43	34	37	24	55
Slovakia	47	8	25	26	37
Czech Republic	41	34	38	39	40

Source: State Statistics Committee of Ukraine.

The volumes of Visegrad states' foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ukraine are relatively small. As of 1 July 2008, Polish FDI in Ukraine amounted to \$731 million (just 2% of the total FDI inflow in Ukraine), and Hungarian FDI amounted to \$557 million (1.5% of the total inflow). It should be emphasized that neither Poland, nor Hungary made to the top ten of foreign investors in Ukraine.²⁴ A relatively minor role of CE investors in Ukraine could be explained by the fact that Visegrad states are small countries, and besides, they have recently undergone economic transformation themselves and focused all their attention to the process of integration into the EU.²⁵ Nevertheless, a rapid increase in Polish and Hungarian FDI in Ukraine has been observed since the beginning of 2006 (see Table 3). Such trend correlates with a political support for Ukraine demonstrated by Poland and Hungary, but it would be very hard to prove a causal link between these two factors.

Table 3. CE countries' FDI in Ukraine (USD million; as of 1 January)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Poland	152.7	194.7	225.5	394.6	670.5
Hungary	128.7	177.3	191.0	370.9	400.9
Slovakia	46.0	93.3	93.8	100.1	102.9
Czech Republic	42.7	46.9	46.8	65.0	78.1

Source: State Statistics Committee of Ukraine.

²⁴ For appropriate statistical data see the website of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, at http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2008/zd/ivu/ivu_e/ivu0608_e.htm.

²⁵ Blinov, Oleksiy: "The Challenges of Relocating Commercial Activity from New Member States to Ukraine", *INDEUNIS Papers* (September 2006), p. 7, at <http://indeunis.wiiv.ac.at/index.php?action=filedownload&id=116>, p. 7.



Speaking of economic relations between Visegrad states and Ukraine, some attention must be paid to Ukrainian migrant workers that are legally or (more often) illegally working in CE countries. Because such migration is most often illegal and temporary, accurate figures are very difficult to establish. It is presumed that most of Ukrainian migrant workers have been working in Poland and the Czech Republic – 300,000 and 200,000 respectively.²⁶ Slovak and Hungarian labor markets were less attractive. According to estimates of 2002 presented by Ukrainian embassies in these countries, around 5,000 Ukrainians have been working in Slovakia and just a few hundreds – in Hungary.²⁷ However, the Visegrad states' membership in the EU and a consequential surge in wages might have become an additional factor encouraging Ukrainian workers to migrate to CE countries. According to some sources, the number of Ukrainian workers in Poland might have increased up to 800,000, in the Czech Republic – up to 250,000 and in Hungary – up to 13,000.²⁸

It can be observed that Ukrainian migrant workers have been treated ever more positively by CE business and political leaders in recent years. Because of Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian workers' migration to richer EU member states, Visegrad states start lacking unskilled labor force, such as constructors, seasonal agriculture workers, drivers, nannies, tailors, etc. There is no wonder that businessmen in CE countries exert pressure on their governments demanding for softer policy on labor immigration.

3.2. Cooperation in the Energy Sector

For CE countries, cooperation with Ukraine in the energy sector is of vital importance. Three major aspect of such cooperation can be distinguished. First, Ukraine is an important player in ensuring the uninterrupted transit of Russian energy resources to CE countries. Second, some CE countries seek to cooperate with Ukraine in search for alternative routes of oil and gas supply. Third, CE countries are interested in electric power imports from Ukraine.

Everybody in Central Europe realized the crucial role of Ukraine in ensuring the security of energy supply in January 2006, when the row between Russia and Ukraine resulted in temporary disruptions of natural gas supply to Europe. Hungary has then reported a 40% fall in supplies, Slovakia – a 30% fall and Poland – a 14% fall.²⁹ Another wake-up call for CE countries was a breakdown in natural gas transit pipeline in Ukraine in May 2007, which was probably caused by a decay of pipelines.³⁰ Luckily, gas supplies to Europe had not been disrupted at that point.

Accidents concerning gas supplies have prompted politicians in CE countries to show more interest in Ukraine's domestic politics and its relations with Russia, as it became evident that these factors directly affect the energy security of Visegrad states. In addition, CE countries started to show interest in possibilities to use underground gas storage facilities in

²⁶ Malynovska, Olena: "Migration in Ukraine: Challenge or Chance?" *European View*, vol. 5 (Spring 2007), p. 76, at <http://www.niisp.gov.ua/en/pdf/Malinovska-article.pdf>.

²⁷ Special Report of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights: "On the status of observance and protection of the rights of Ukrainian citizens abroad", presented to the Ukrainian parliament on 2 April 2003, at http://www.ombudsman.kiev.ua/S_Report1/zm.htm.

²⁸ Düvell, Franck: "Ukraine – Europe's Mexico?", *Country Profile*, Central and East European Migration, Research Resources Report 1/3 (2007), at http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/publications/papers/Ukraine_Country%20Report_1of3.pdf, p. 3.

²⁹ "Ukraine "stealing Europe's gas", *BBC*, 2 January 2006, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4574630.stm>.

³⁰ "Ukraine: Another Break in Energy Supplies from Russia", *Stratfor*, 7 May 2006, at http://www.stratfor.com/ukraine_another_break_energy_supplies_russia.



Ukraine's territory. This topic now often surfaces in the agenda of meetings of Hungarian and Ukrainian leadership. It can also be predicted that Visegrad states will press the EU to monitor condition of pipelines crossing Ukraine's territory. Not only condition of gas pipelines, but also condition of oil pipelines should be taken into account.

Another field of cooperation between CE countries and Ukraine could be the diversification of energy supplies. Poland is especially interested in this issue. Recently Polish authorities have paid much attention to the project of Odessa-Brody-Plock-Gdansk oil pipeline. If successfully implemented, this project would provide Central Europe with oil coming from the Caspian basin and bypassing Russia. Ukrainians built the Odessa-Brody section of the projected pipeline under President Kuchma in 2002. Initially, it had been planned to transport Caspian oil towards western border of Ukraine and sell it to European consumers. But the Ukrainian government failed to find oil suppliers in the Caspian region, and for this reason, in 2004 it agreed with the Russian oil company TNK-BP to transport Russian oil in reverse direction – to the port of Odessa.

Poland was very disappointed with such development. But after the Orange Revolution negotiations on pipeline extension to Plock and Gdansk have started anew. In 2007 three more countries –Azerbaijan, Georgia and Lithuania – joined this project. Not only Poland, but also Slovakia and the Czech Republic uphold the idea of importing Caspian oil via Ukraine³¹. According to some projections, in the future Odessa-Brody oil pipeline could be connected to the southern branch of “Druzhba” oil pipeline, thus enabling CE countries to transport Caspian oil via the Slovak territory to the Kralupy refinery in the Czech Republic.

Lastly, Ukraine is important to CE countries not only as a transit country, but also as a supplier, since Poland, Slovakia and Hungary import electric power produced in Ukraine. Hungary has been the biggest importer of Ukrainian electricity so far (see Table 4). Ukrainian electric power enjoys a great demand in Central Europe, because it is relatively cheap and because the Ukraine's so-called Burshtyn Island is synchronously connected to the electricity transmission grid operating in Central and Western Europe (UCTE area).

Table 4. CE countries' imports of electric power from Ukraine (million kWh)

	Number of connections	2005	January-June 2006
Hungary	4*	3319	1776
Poland	2	983	436
Slovakia	2**	279	278

* All four connections are synchronized with UCTE area.

³¹ See: "Словакия заинтересована в успешном завершении проекта "Одесса-Броды" ("Slovakia is interested in successful completion of the "Odessa-Brody" project"), *ЛІГАБізнесІнформ*, 22 May 2008, at <http://news.liga.net/news/N0826922.html>, and: "Украина и Чехия считают перспективным сотрудничеством в сфере диверсификации источников нефти" ("Ukraine and the Czech Republic consider the cooperation in the field of diversifying sources of oil supply as promising"), *RusEnergy*, 17 September 2008, at <http://www.rusenergy.com/?page=news&id=96636>.



** One of two connections is synchronized with UCTE area.

Source: International Energy Agency.³²

It can be predicted that electricity imports to Visegrad states will increase in the future. For example, the Hungarian government intends to build a hydroelectric power station in the Ukrainian territory and to import electric power produced by it.³³ And Slovakia claims to become one of the largest importers of Ukrainian electricity. In its EU accession treaty Slovakia has pledged to close the Bohunice nuclear power plant by the end of 2008. The Slovak government expected that after the closure it could compensate for the electricity deficit by importing more electric power from Ukraine. Slovaks planned to build a new connection with Ukraine and import as many as 2,000-4,000 kWh of Ukrainian electricity annually.³⁴ However, this vision didn't come true.³⁵

4. Social Level: Shadow of “Ukrainian Mafia”

At the political level relations between CE countries and Ukraine seem to be close enough. At least, the elevated rhetoric of Visegrad leaders suggests that all CE countries are ready to pursue Ukraine's interests in Euro-Atlantic organizations and contribute to possibly soonest integration of Ukraine into NATO and the EU. Close economic ties should only reinforce such commitment.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that every state leader is a politician, and therefore he or she is dependent on a mood of electorate in his or her country. For this reason, it is essential to explore the social level of relations between Visegrad states and Ukraine. In other words, attitudes of Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian societies need to be analyzed.

4.1. Central Europeans' Support for Ukraine's EU Membership

The level of support for Ukraine's EU membership is probably the most appropriate criteria to judge about Central Europeans' attitudes toward Ukraine. A high percentage of membership supporters would mean that people in CE countries regard Ukraine as a democratic and pro-Western country, which could join the EU club smoothly enough.

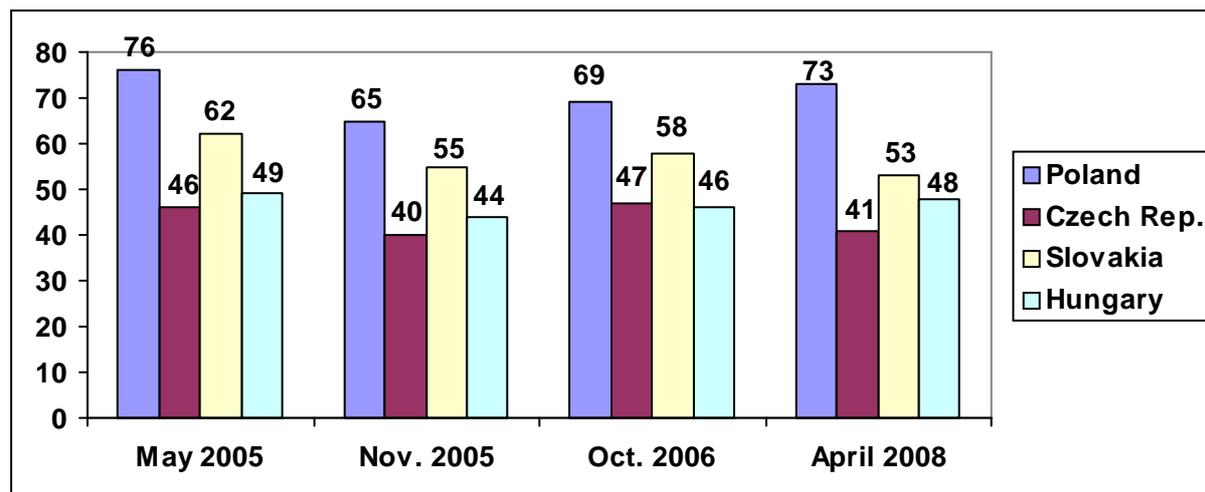
Picture 1. Central Europeans' support for Ukraine's EU membership (%)

³² International Energy Agency (IEA) (2006): *Ukraine – Energy Policy Review 2006*, Paris, International Energy Agency, pp. 286-289.

³³“Hungary intends to build hydroelectric power station in Ukraine”, *ForUm*, 6 March 2007, at <http://en.for-ua.com/news/2007/03/06/131428.html>.

³⁴“Slovakia to import electricity from Ukraine”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 8 October 2007, at <http://www.slovakspectator.sk/clanok-29408.html>.

³⁵“Ukraine Destroyed Realization of Electrical Energy Export to Slovakia”, *SK Today*, 28 September 2008, at http://www.sktoday.com/content/1600_ukraine-destroyed-realization-electrical-energy-export-slovakia.



Source: European Commission.³⁶

The analysis of survey results of 2005-2008 reveals that public support for Ukraine's EU membership has exceeded 50% only in two CE countries – Poland and Slovakia (see Picture 1). The support of Czechs and Hungarians is lower and range from 40 to 50%. It is important to note that since the Orange Revolution the Central Europeans' support for Ukraine's EU membership has not been constantly increasing as might be expected. For example, in November 2005 the support decreased in all Visegrad states. Such drop could be explained by the divide in the "orange" camp, i.e. by the President Yushchenko's decision to remove "orange princess" Tymoshenko from the Prime Minister's office made in September 2005. However, in October 2006 the Central Europeans' support for Ukraine's EU membership climbed back almost to the level of June 2005.

The comparatively higher support for Ukraine's EU membership in Poland and Slovakia may be explained by the fact that Poles and Slovaks are less prone to doubt the possibility of Ukraine's accession in the near future. According to the survey carried out in May-June 2007, as many as 31% of Poles believe that Ukraine will join the EU in the near future (the first place in the rank), and 22% of Slovaks share the same belief (the second place), while the EU-27 average is 10% only.³⁷ Meanwhile, most of Czechs and Hungarians don't regard Ukraine's EU membership as a real possibility. As a result, their support for membership is accordingly lower.

It goes without saying that a public opinion in any country is mainly molded by politicians of that particular country. Therefore, it can be assumed that a deviance of public opinion in some of CE countries from EU's average reflects an uneven degree of Europeanization of Visegrad states' foreign policies.

The Polish government aims to pursue the proactive Eastern policy without paying much attention to a cautious approach demonstrated by old EU member states. In contrast to Poles, Czechs and Hungarians are prone to hand over any initiatives to Brussels and big EU states. The Czech diplomacy believes that the EU must deal with countries with a clear

³⁶ For appropriate surveys see: European Commission: *Standard Eurobarometer*, no. 63, no. 64, no. 66 and no. 69, at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm.

³⁷ European Commission: "The EU's relations with its neighbours", *Special Eurobarometer*, no. 285 (September 2007), p. 7, at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_285_en.pdf.



membership perspective (Turkey, Western Balkans) first, and only then turn to its Eastern neighbours (such as Ukraine or Moldova).³⁸ Besides, Prague considers internal problems encountered by the EU as a higher priority than a Czech-Ukrainian partnership.³⁹

The Hungarian government has chosen to act as a reliable if somewhat passive player on the European level, and contrasts itself to the ‘big players’ that are expected, and accepted, to take the lead⁴⁰. So, if the question of Ukraine’s EU membership is not on EU agenda, Hungarian politicians, bureaucrats and, consequently, society will perceive Ukraine’s EU membership as a matter of distant future.

Finally, the Slovak case raises most questions. Perhaps, Slovaks’ high support for further EU enlargement is an outcome of their own complicated journey to the EU. Time will show, whether Europeanization affects Slovakian foreign policy to the same extent as those of the Czech Republic and Hungary.

4.2. Ukrainians’ Image in CE Countries

One more indicator reflecting Central Europeans’ attitudes toward Ukraine is the image of Ukrainians prevailing in Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian societies. It should be admitted that their image is rather negative in all Visegrad states.

Although the majority of Poles support Ukraine’s EU membership, this doesn’t mean that Polish people like Ukrainian nationals. According to sociological survey results, even at the height of the Orange Revolution (in December 2004) the share of Poles, who disliked Ukrainians, was larger than the share of those, who liked them (see Picture 2). The same surveys show that similar feelings of Polish people have been evoked by Bulgarians, Byelorussians and Russians.

Interestingly enough, Czechs, who are the least enthusiastic about Ukraine’s EU membership, exhibit attitudes to Ukrainian nationals that are very similar to those exhibited by Poles. In the scale, where 7 points mean the most negative attitude and 1 point means the most positive attitude, Ukrainians have scored 4.48 points in February 2003, 4.26 points in February 2005, 4.42 points in December 2006 and 4.31 points in December 2007.⁴¹ Such ratings put Ukrainians among other the most unpopular nations in the Czech Republic, such as Kurds, Turks, Serbs and Chinese.

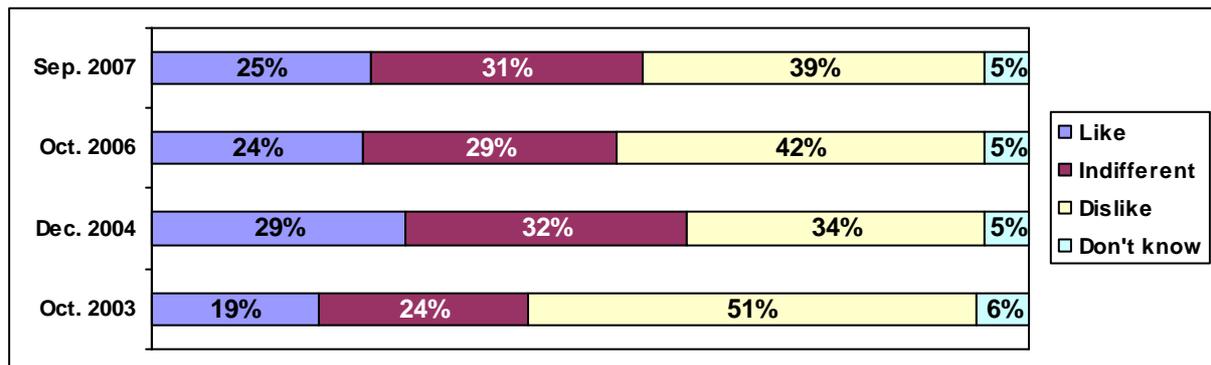
Picture 2. Poles’ attitude to Ukrainians

³⁸ Král, David: “Ukraine and the EU – Membership or Partnership? The Czech Perspective”, Institute of Public Affairs (IPA/ISP) *Research Reports, Policy Papers*, (January 2007), p. 4, at <http://www.isp.org.pl/files/827652070051992001169458880.pdf>.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Batory, Agnes: “Analysis of Policy Debate on the European Future of Turkey and Ukraine in Four Central European States: Report on Hungary” (December 2005), p. 6, at http://www.europeum.org/doc/arch_eur/Turkey_Ukraine_report_Hungary_final.pdf.

⁴¹ Škodová, Markéta: “Vztah Čechů k vybraným národnostem” (“Czech attitudes to selected nations”), *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.*, (January 2008), at http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100750s_ov80131.pdf.



Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS).⁴²

Several different factors account for such negative image of Ukrainians prevailing in societies of CE countries. First, Ukrainian migrant workers can be regarded in Visegrad states as foreigners that steal jobs from local population. For example, in the Czech society Ukrainian nationals are notorious for migrating to the Czech Republic for work, lured by higher salaries and cultural closeness.⁴³ It's not surprising that Central Europeans, especially unskilled workers, view Ukrainians as intrusive competitors.

Second, the Ukrainian community is often identified with criminal world in CE countries. Such opinion is being reinforced by negative media coverage telling stories about illegal immigrants, human traffickers and prostitutes from Ukraine. In the Czech Republic the term "Ukrainian mafia" has become a general idiom referring to any criminal practices.⁴⁴ In Slovakia the term "Ukrainian mafia" is also popular, though the level of organized crime on the territory of Slovakia caused by the Ukrainian citizens is estimated at a mere 1% of the total amount.⁴⁵ Media articles about positive achievements of Ukrainians are too sparse to improve the image of Ukrainian nationals.

Third, the media in Visegrad states often presents Ukraine as a backward country. For example, comments and analyses dealing with Ukraine in the Hungarian press generally portray a country where public services do not work, a large part of the population lives below the poverty line, corruption and organized crime are rife, and the legal system and government are barely able to contain local "barons".⁴⁶

To summarize, politicians of CE countries don't feel any pressure from their electorates to cooperate closer with Ukraine and strive for its accession into the EU. On the contrary, the political and economic elite of Visegrad states needs to persuade the public that a partnership with Ukraine is a strategic interest of their countries.

⁴² For appropriate surveys see: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS): *Polish Public Opinion*, September 2007, October 2006 and December 2004, at <http://www.cbos.pl/EN/Bulletin/bulletin.shtml>.

⁴³ Král, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Hudak, Vasil: "Relations between Ukraine and Slovakia: Recent History and Future Opportunities", in Clem, James and Popson, Nancy (eds.) (2000): *Ukraine and Its Western Neighbors. Conference Proceedings*, Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center, p. 6, at <http://wwics.si.edu/ees/special/2000/hudak.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Batory, *op. cit.*, p. 15.



5. Conclusion

This brief overview of political, economic and social interactions between Visegrad states and Ukraine revealed that diplomatic smiles did not always correlate with substantive cooperation. All CE countries declared strong support for Ukraine, but not all of them were equally quick to respond to Ukraine's needs.

As it was argued in this paper, Poland and Hungary used to stand out among Visegrad states. For example, Poles and Hungarians were the last to cancel a visa-free regime for Ukraine; they were the first to recognize Holodomor as genocide of Ukrainians; and they were the most vocal in advocating Ukraine's right to join NATO and the EU. At the economic level, the same pattern of "two-speed" Central Europe can be observed. Poland and Hungary are strong leaders in the region as regards bilateral trade with Ukraine and investment activities in this country. In addition, Poland and Hungary express the biggest interest in a closer cooperation with Ukraine in energy sector. Poles attribute to Ukraine an important role in their plans to diversify energy supplies, and Hungarians are mostly concerned about increasing the security of gas transit via Ukraine's territory. Finally, Poland and Hungary are the largest importers of Ukrainian electricity among CE countries.

However, a proposed concept of "two-speed" Central Europe is valid, only while speaking of the political and economic levels of cooperation with Ukraine. The examination of public opinion and public discourse in Visegrad states showed that the image of Ukrainians is rather negative in all CE societies, including both Polish and Hungarian population. Central Europeans look at Ukrainian nationals with distrust, if not with hostility. Naturally, they don't urge governments to strengthen ties with Ukraine. As a result, relationship between Visegrad states and Ukraine is a bit "lame": while political and economic elite is projecting a pragmatic partnership, the convergence of values between CE and Ukrainian societies lags far behind.

Some important aspects of relationship between Visegrad states and Ukraine left outside the scope of this paper. Different historical interpretations in Poland and Ukraine, Ukraine's old debt to the Czech Republic, legalization of Ukrainian migrant workers in CE countries, rights of Rusyn and Hungarian minorities in Trans-Carpathia – these are just a few points of disagreement between individual CE countries and Ukraine that appear to be important obstacles for further development of cooperative relationship. Therefore, a strong political will is needed on both sides of the border in order to raise the partnership between Visegrad states and Ukraine to the strategic level.