



## WISEGRAD GROUP AS INSTITUTION FOR CENTRAL EUROPEAN COOPERATION: UPS AND DOWNS OF SMALL INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

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### Abstract:

Central Europe has always been an integral part of all processes on the European continent. Nowadays, more than 30 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Central Europe has broad opportunities for cooperation in all areas and is fully integrated into various regional and international organisations. Using qualitative methods—analysis and comparison with combination with the theory of social constructivism—help us understand the social phenomena of cooperation among states. Based on social constructivism theory, our article elaborates on the factors of cooperation between individual states, focusing on the cooperation of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries in Central Europe. We examine the factors leading to the establishment of V4 cooperation, its form, and specific features related to the European Regional Security Complex, as well as future challenges.

**Keywords:** Visegrad Group, Central Europe, Regional Cooperation, Security Environment, Security Challenges

*Título en Castellano: El Grupo de Visegrado como institución para la cooperación en Europa Central: Altibajos de las pequeñas organizaciones internacionales*

### Resumen:

*Europa Central siempre ha sido una parte integral de todos los procesos del continente europeo. Hoy en día, más de 30 años después de la caída del Telón de Acero, Europa Central tiene amplias oportunidades de cooperación en todos los ámbitos y está plenamente integrada en diversas organizaciones regionales e internacionales. La utilización de métodos cualitativos -análisis y comparación en combinación con la teoría del constructivismo social- nos ayuda a comprender los fenómenos sociales de cooperación entre los Estados. Sobre la base de la teoría del constructivismo social, nuestro artículo explica con más detalle los factores de cooperación entre los distintos Estados, centrándose en la cooperación de los cuatro países de Visegrado (V4) en Europa Central. Examinamos los factores que conducen al establecimiento de la cooperación V4, su forma y las características específicas relacionadas con el complejo de seguridad regional europeo, así como los retos futuros*

**Palabras Clave:** Grupo de Visegrado, Europa Central, cooperación regional, entorno de seguridad, desafíos de seguridad

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## 1. Introduction

Central Europe is an interesting object of academic research and has become an epicentre of all political or security changes that took place on the entire European continent. When focusing on the region of Central Europe, we may state that this territory is an area that has no fixed geographical boundaries. As Halford John Mackinder said, the one who rules East Europe commands the heartland and who rules the heartland commands the world. H. J. Mackinder himself divided Europe into three parts: Germany, Western Russia, and the countries between them (including the countries of Central Europe). From his perspective, Eastern Europe plays an important role in the balance of power on the continent, as it is a buffer zone separating great powers, and at the same time, it provides an entry point into continental Eurasia.<sup>2</sup>

The Visegrad Group or Visegrad Four (V4) countries are relatively small, medium-sized democratic states with a market economy. In the past, they have been quite unstable, and the national boundaries have been changing constantly. Only after World War II the territory of this region took the shape that we know today. The main problem in this region was its multinational, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional character that significantly influenced and fostered regional disputes. According to Jana Lasicová, contradictions and conflicts arose “rather through language and identity as a means of mutual contacts”. Conflicts in this area have always been related “to the power ambitions of great powers rather than being inherent to the region”.<sup>3</sup>

The main geopolitical changes that have influenced contemporary relations between the states occurred in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Before, the V4 countries had been an integral part of the Soviet bloc, which determined their regime, political orientation, and economic dependency. Nowadays, more than 30 years from the fall of the Iron Curtain, which also marked the establishment of Central Europe as a region, the progress achieved by Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and Hungary significantly helped to shape not only individual Central European countries but also the entire region. However, the illusion of success is diminishing due to the different challenges that affect the security and stability of Central Europe.

The main aim of this study is to look closer at the Visegrad group as one of the cooperation frameworks inside Central Europe, which almost shaped their evolution in the last 30 years. It also tries to define the security environment of the Central European countries from a wider perspective and to identify the main points of mutual security cooperation among the Central European states. The main methodology used in the study is qualitative, helping us to understand the social phenomena of cooperation between states on V4 through analysis and comparison. These methods will be supplemented using the theory of social constructivism as a key for consideration of how social phenomena are developed in social contexts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mackinder, Halford J.: “The geographical pivot of history”, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 170, n° 4 (1904), pp. 298-321.

<sup>3</sup> Lasicová, Jana (2006): *Bezpečnosť. Bezpečnostná agenda súčasnosti*, Banská Bystrica, Univerzita Mateja Bela, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> The central pillar consisted is the regional security complex theory (B. Buzan - O. Wæver, 2003) and its critics and, of course, primary documents of the Visegrad Group and individual states. All this is supplemented by studies and accessible publications written by authors from different states: R. Czulda – M. Madej (2015); M. Kořan et al. (2014), S. Goda, et al. (2017), I. Balogh (2013); J. Eichler (2011); Šuplata, M., et. al. (2013); A. Denková – K. Kokoszczyński – E. Zgutová – Z. Gabrižová (2017), A. Biencyk-Missala – S. Goda – L. Hörömpöli – J. Valuch (2017). They demonstrate and critically assess the development processes in the V4 countries from various points of view.



## 2. Regional Security Cooperation—theoretical approach

The scope of the research on new approaches to security is expanding not only in the international environment but also in the study of state security. Nowadays, the state has a different position in the international system. Although it remains a key player, many of its traditional roles disappear or are limited by global and regional dependencies and by the voluntary transfer of parts of its sovereignty to international organisations.

In the research agenda on the security of states, there are several approaches for analysing and defining security. We can distinguish absolute vs. relative security (absolute security is understood as the ownership of material and spiritual means to achieve one's own security individually; relative security is determined by the mutual ratio of action of two or more actors with absolute power in the system); hard vs. soft security (oriented to the means that the actor uses to achieve security, hard—represented by force, military, and soft—represented by diplomatic and other non-military means);<sup>5</sup> or objective vs. subjective aspects of security. Security can be understood as a relationship between objective and subjective factors (i.e. between the reality of existing threats and the perception of these threats (or lack thereof) by a specific state. Objective aspects of security exist independently of the subject; they are, however, subjectively interpreted, resulting in a distinctively perceived security environment. This short excursion into the understanding of security helps to identify the basic parameters in the analysis of different countries and their understanding of security and the search for opportunities for mutual security cooperation. Based on the premise of social constructivism, the *sine qua non* of security cooperation of individual states is the existence of mutually supportive security interests and common goals and characteristics (at least to a certain degree). Speaking of Visegrad Group, all these elements can be found in the current implementation of national security agendas. Today, we can observe that the V4 states have some elements in common, but it is easier to find this similarity within non-military aspects than the military ones and, of course, it is related to the perception itself. As the theory defines—the threat is always objectively given, but the perception of risk already passes through the subjective side of decision-making, and in the case of the state it is mainly through political elites. Thus, the V4 states have the same attitude to threats, but the attitude related to the nature and degree of risk is different for each of them when they deal with non-military ones.

In trying to understand the role of V4 in the security policy of Central Europe<sup>6</sup> as well as in the wider European space, we should remember that the V4 was built primarily as a political project rather than for security and defence purposes. However, during its creation, more competencies were developed affecting the security policy of the V4 countries, focusing more on soft security rather than on hard security. Undoubtedly, we can say that this soft

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<sup>5</sup> Roselle, Laura; Miskimmon, Alister and O'Loughlin, Ben: "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power", *Media, War and Conflict*, vol. 7, n° 1 (April 2014), pp. 70-84.

<sup>6</sup> In this study, we will understand the concept of the Central European space as defined by L. Cabada, as Central European regionalism, which is based mainly on a tradition that is at least two hundred years old. L. Cabada connects this definition with the Congress of Vienna and the definition of Central Europe as an inter-space. This alternately weakened or strengthened depending on belonging to a higher whole. Finally, confirmation of the existence of Central Europe can be found during the interwar period, when *de iure* international treaties created them as well as *de facto* identity of the states of Central Europe and the concept as such, thus creating a region of small nation states. Cabada, Ladislav: "The Visegrad Cooperation in the Context of Other Central European Cooperation Formats", *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 14, n° 2 (2018), pp. 165-179.



security dimension was one of the main purposes of the Visegrad Cooperation signed in February 1991.<sup>7</sup>

If we want to proceed with the analysis of V4 as a security complex, the Regional Security Complex Theory of B. Buzan and O. Wæver<sup>8</sup> seems to be a suitable tool. It is built on the logic that international security is created based on interrelations between individual units in the environment they operate. They interact in the context of security challenges, threats, and risks in which they are exposed from the perspective of each unit. The main problem, however, is that these connections have changed over time and have taken on various forms. In the past, we understood them mainly from a military perspective, but in recent decades we have witnessed a transition mainly to non-military aspects of security. In the context of research, many studies focus on issues arising from global problems, which is understandable, because the processes in each unit are indirectly influenced in today's globalized world by processes at the highest levels. But most threats work at a shorter distance (i.e. the shorter the geographical distance to the perpetrator of the threat, the greater is its perception). Otherwise, the units tend to respond to the threat coming from the immediate neighbourhood rather than from distant powers. This, in turn, results in heterogeneous security interests and a complex security relationship between various regional and global actors.

The second context that we must consider in a regional cooperation system is the interdependence of states, which precludes a "pure" strategic rational choice, not only for states but also for integrated groups such as the European Union, intergovernmental organisations such as the North Atlantic Alliance,<sup>9</sup> or even regional groupings such as the V4. For instance, in the energy domain, economic and political dependence predetermines not only strategic choices but also strategic partnerships and significantly modifies the security environment. A concrete example is the conflict in Ukraine and the attitudes of the V4 member states, and even the entire European Union and the world powers regarding the Russian approaches to Ukraine.

The standard model of security interdependence in a geographically fragmented and anarchic international system is represented by regionally defined clusters, which are called security complexes.<sup>10</sup> These are mainly influenced by the high degree of interstate security relations, where there is a redistribution of power and influence over individual actors and units. Within such regional clusters (security complexes), the probability of cooperation between the respective units increases with their interdependence and quality of relations. Units with high levels of interdependence and friendly/peaceful relations have higher prospects of security cooperation. However, in the context of regional security complex theory, it is important that they arise in a coherent geographical area and should be separable (ideally by a threat or perception of a given threat) from a neighbouring complex.<sup>11</sup> The European region is specific in its own right, and this influences Visegrad Group countries. To be precise, Europe is concurrently under the influence of two different security structures: NATO and the EU. NATO is a rather unicentric regional security complex with the dominant position of the United States. The EU, on the other hand, is a multicentric regional security complex whose structure and relations are the result of the establishment of common institutional bodies and processes. In this context, while Central Europe is an integral part of the European Security Complex, it

<sup>7</sup> Bajda, Piotr: "The Visegrad Group in the security architecture of Europe", *The Warsaw Institute Review* (September 2018), at <https://warsawinstitute.org/visegrad-group-security-architecture-europe/>.

<sup>8</sup> Buzan, Barry and Wæver, Ole (2003): *Regions and Powers: The structure of International Security*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Kilroy, Richard; Sumano, Abelardo Rodriguez and Hataley, Todd (2012): *North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework?* Boulder, Lynne Rienner.

<sup>10</sup> Buzan, Barry; Wæver, Ole and De Wilde, Jaap (1998): *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder / London, Lynne Rienner, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Buzan and Wæver define standard, centric regional security complexes, super-complexes and proto-complexes.



simultaneously exploits certain fluidity between the two structures. While all Visegrad Group countries are interested in attaining an adequate level of security (comprising the V4 cooperation as one of the means), they are not always coherent in the means to achieve it, and we can observe certain deviations (tilting towards the EU or NATO on occasions) between individual V4 countries.

One specific aspect of regional security complex theory is important for our research, namely the part that explains how countries cooperate within the complex. Complexes can be divided into homogeneous and heterogeneous complexes.<sup>12</sup> It is within this division that heterogeneous complexes are claimed to involve different types of actors across different sectors. In practical terms, this means that one form of cooperation within an established regional security complex does not hinder the specific sub-cooperation on a different level, involving only selected units. It is the critique of the concept of regional security complex theory by David Lake and Patrick Morgan<sup>13</sup> that suggests that security is one of the important variables that govern the development of regional arrangements, but certainly not the only one. They argue that security regions have different dynamics compared to the international system; thus, specific approaches are needed to allow for a proper understanding of regional security dynamics and the formation of regional security (sub)complexes. Additionally, they argue that specific types of threats can connect different regional complexes, regardless of the nature of the threats (i.e. military or non-military).

In light of the above-mentioned theoretical approaches, we sustain that in the case of the Visegrad Group, we need to lean on the combined Buzan-Wæver and Lake-Morgan approach emphasising the soft security dimension. We believe that Visegrad Group falls into the regional security cooperation category, as all requirements for such cooperation are met—clearly defined territorial boundaries, interdependencies, and distinctive relations within the European Regional Security Complex.

Ultimately, the V4 is not the only regional security group in Europe made up of different states with similar interests and coordinated based on different motives. Several other groups on the continent differ in their tradition, size, and level of cooperation.<sup>14</sup>

At present, the security of the V4 states is significantly influenced by NATO and EU membership, which sets the boundaries for decision-making, participation, and direction in the area of state security policy. In recent years, the EU as a major economic integration grouping has been developing complementary components in the field of security policy (CFSP, ESDP/CSDP). These are also used as complementary to NATO capabilities, as the current situation highlights the need for a North Atlantic Organization on the European continent. In particular, if we look at the last five years after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, we see the importance of the North Atlantic Alliance in taking over the responsibility for the protection of the eastern border of the EU and NATO.

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<sup>12</sup> Buzan, Barry; Wæver, Ole and De Wilde, Jaap, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> Lake, David and Morgan, Patrick (1997): *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press.

<sup>14</sup> These include: Nordic Defense Cooperation (Nordefco), which consists of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; B8 (Nordic-Baltic Eight), which is a combination of Nordefco countries with three Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia); a C4 group consisting of Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, which is modelled on the V4 model; The EU Med Group, which brings together Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, in order to coordinate the interests of the southern countries in relation to the EU and its decision-making; Benelux Union - formal international intergovernmental cooperation of three neighbouring countries: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg; as well as the Weimar Triangle - a grouping of Poland, Germany and France and many others.



However, we must affirm that state security can only be developed based on the existing political system. The existing regime creates a specific security environment, evokes its changes and development as well as involvement in international groupings and creates space for mutual cooperation, including security. We can divide the security environment in two basic aspects: either external or internal. In recent years, the external security environment is further divided into immediate (state and immediate neighbours), close (Europe—participation in Warsaw Pact organizations, NATO in CMEA integration groups, EU, etc.) and remote (areas of interest in terms of powers—UN membership and other international organizations). In all cases, the state and its political system enter a correlation between subjects and objective reality. Not only as a unit of organisation of a certain society in a certain time and space, but also as a set of bodies, institutions, and rules created to protect one's own state idea, integrity, citizens and as a means of protection against external threats. Each state has its particular features depending on the values of its political system and its basic core. The relationship between the state and its subjects creates specific security cooperation not only within the whole complex but also within it.

### **3. Visegrad group as the core for Central European cooperation—the role of soft power/security**

As already mentioned, the subject of the analysis in this article is four small- to medium-sized states that have lost their independence on various occasions throughout history while simultaneously trying to build their own statehood rationale. In many cases, it was not just a matter of defending their territory, but of the survival of the nation and the preservation of national identity. "Small nations, which were once independent states, were able to survive thanks to the hope that their borders, names, maps have stopped changing, and that their defence would not only be emotional but real."<sup>15</sup> For centuries, these states were subject to external power pressures, frequent changes of their boundaries, and were always in a state of an imminent attack. Most of their history has been dictated by an outside power, forcing them to accept subjugation or to perish. They were unable to set their own course or to define their interests, and their only option was to join and follow the conqueror.

These words can also be used to define the cooperation of the V4 countries. Its specifics are historically different at a time when these states were separate units (Great Moravian Empire, the Czech state of the Přemyslids, the Polish state) when they became part of the empire (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary—the monarchy of Austria-Hungary and Poland—Russia and Prussia), and when they achieved independence after World War I with the disintegration of Austria-Hungary and the end of the Russian Empire.<sup>16</sup> After World War II, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland became part of the Soviet bloc and, from 1955, part of the Warsaw Pact doctrine. This process lasted more than three decades and was terminated by the demise of the USSR. Her successor state, Russia, has renounced any doctrinal political and strategic dominance in Central Europe. After Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech and Slovak Republic in 1993 and the V4 was formed by Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, developments began to take shape in these four states gaining NATO and EU membership. The last two decades point to the convergence of the four countries analysed in their views on the Euro-Atlantic value system and the resulting residuals, but there are still some factors beyond the region and within the V4 that delay this convergence.

Therefore, we approached the analysis of security and other forms of cooperation in the Visegrad countries with strong attention to details and particularities. We go through selected development stages, basic historical milestones, and important correlations between individual

<sup>15</sup> Szabó, Magda (1983): *Přihlížitelé*, Praha, Mladá fronta.

<sup>16</sup> Charvát, Jaroslav (1980): *Svetové dejiny*, Bratislava, Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo.



countries. We define what created the conceptual framework of the current cooperation of the V4 states for the period that started after 1990. Although the national framework and values of countries are relatively stable and are not subject to short-term fluctuations, the international environment that affects them is less stable and more prone to fluctuations due to various influences, which are often unpredictable and difficult to grasp. Subsequently, we will try to analyse the convergence and divergence of mutual cooperation of the V4 states within the region of Central Europe and how its planning and operational dispositions are reflected in the practice of foreign and especially security policy. We assume that the very formation of regional cooperation structure of current V4 laid foundations of the respective countries' credibility in their partnership with the Western states and facilitated their integration process. In this way, the founding members of V4 showed their unity and cohesion, differentiating themselves from the Yugoslavian scenario of ethnic conflicts,<sup>17</sup> and emphasised the Central European cooperation as the source of their soft power within the European Regional Security Complex.

Visegrad cooperation is historically the first largest documented example of the search for common practices and effective multilateralism in this field of cooperation among the countries of Central Europe,<sup>18</sup> the former V3 (Czech and the Slovak Federal Republic, Poland and Hungary) today V4, which was created ten days before the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact Organisation. On February 15, 1991, the three states signed a joint declaration on a coordinated approach to accession to the EC and NATO.<sup>19</sup> As part of this coordinated cooperation, these post-communist states saw the possibility of accelerated accession to NATO and the EC. The purpose of this V3 initiative was to gain new security guarantees in the changing environment in a qualitatively different way than it was during the Warsaw Pact period.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the natural goal of defending their vital interests was to seek a coordinated approach that justified geographical proximity, shared historical experiences, value preferences, and cultural affinities.<sup>21</sup> The main initiator of the idea and the founding documents of the future Visegrad Group was the then president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, who in 1990 first proposed a wider Central European grouping, including the Baltic countries as well as the Danube states to the Adriatic Basin,<sup>22</sup> but this initiative was not welcomed by Poland. Consequently, the cooperation aimed at a narrower definition of Central Europe. One of the reasons was that the involved states lacked the sense of "belonging" and were interested in being a member of a cooperation group voluntarily, without external coercion. The essence, however, was that it was not a new international organisation of any kind but rather a free form of political cooperation between the three states. This form has remained to this day and the V4 benefits from its un-

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<sup>17</sup> Bajda, Piotr, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> From the point of view of decision-making, states and its representatives were faced with seven alternatives, while they could choose the most suitable one for them: neutrality; the establishment of its own independent regional security organization; involvement in and transformation of the then existing regional security organization; the re-establishment of the Eastern Security Organization; involvement in Western security structures; the creation of a pan-European security architecture; reliance on national defence alone. See Cottey, Andrew (1995): *East-Central Europe after the Cold War*. London, Macmillan Press; Nagy, László and Kovács, Tibor: "Hungary's Security and Defence Policy in the new geostrategic environment", *Τέτυχος*, nº. 35 (2006), at [http://www.elesme.gr/elesmegr/periodika/t35/t35\\_09.htm](http://www.elesme.gr/elesmegr/periodika/t35/t35_09.htm).

<sup>19</sup> It was the first joint declaration that built on these historical foundations of mutual contacts, common history as well as cultural proximity. The declaration set out clear strategic goals for mutual cooperation in the context of building parliamentary democracy, a liberal market economy, respect for human rights and freedoms, and much more, including restoring freedom, sovereignty, and working together for integration into Western structures. See *Visegrad Declaration* at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-2>.

<sup>20</sup> Ondrejcsák, Robert (2016): *V4 – 25 years*. Varšava, Fundacja Res Publicaim. Henryka Krzeczowskiiego.

<sup>21</sup> Šoth, Ján (2010): "Visegrad as a Challenge: Success and Failures", in *Panorama of global security environment 2010*, Bratislava, CENAA, pp. 11-17.

<sup>22</sup> Bajda, Piotr, *op. cit.*



institutionalised form. On one hand, this creates barriers to mutual cooperation, as any agreement negotiated at the V4 level is subject to national approval, slowing down agreements in many cases. On the other hand, such an arrangement allows for freer discussions, talks, and arrangements that are not tied to any area or topic. Thus, the nature of the structure of free regional cooperation has enabled states to use the V4 as a suitable form of cooperation on topics that are beneficial to all. This allows dismissal of topics that states do not want to discuss or are not interested in discussing. It was this consensus rule that created stability within the V4 and equality for all participating countries. So far, meetings have taken place twice a year, with meetings of the Prime Ministers, as well as ministerial meetings as needed.<sup>23</sup> Because they wield the greatest influence, the Prime Ministers preside over these meetings to discuss harmonisation steps, an exchange of experiences, and determination of common procedures.

Between 1999 and 2004, cooperation, among other activities,<sup>24</sup> focused mainly on helping the Slovak Republic prepare for NATO membership. V4 has demonstrated its soft power once again when the group proved to be an extremely useful and effective tool.<sup>25</sup> We still see this soft power as one of the main functions of the existence of V4, as it is able to mobilize in decisive situations. In the year 2004, after the accession of all countries to NATO and the EU, cooperation within the V4 slightly stagnated.<sup>26</sup>

As the main priority of the creation of the V4 – accession to the NATO and the EU— was fulfilled, the states started looking for a new direction for future operations of the group that would justify its persistence. The new priorities of the V4 after 2004 were defined in a declaration adopted at the meeting of Prime Ministers in Kroměříž.<sup>27</sup> It was the Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and the Slovak Republic in cooperation between the Visegrad Group countries after they acceded to the European Union that raised the issue of future cooperation and the question of the essence of the group.<sup>28</sup> The impasse was overcome by the adoption of Guidelines on Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation, a document stipulating the obligation to organise a summit of the Visegrad Group once a year and providing the guidelines for the future cooperation. Areas to be explored for future cooperation were as follows: support of the EU's common foreign and security policy, strengthening the EU-NATO relationship, consulting on a common approach to NATO's defence capabilities, strengthening cross-border cooperation, combating organised crime, illegal migration and the protection of external EU<sup>29</sup> borders, cooperation in the area of crisis management and the area of defence industry.<sup>30</sup> The framework of cooperation and consultation with minor variations still applies today. Soft power can be found also in the context of the priorities of the V4 groupings on the Eastern Partnership and the European

<sup>23</sup> *Contents of Visegrad Cooperation*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/contents-of-visegrad-110412>.

<sup>24</sup> However, this period also brought other significant shifts in the activities of the V4: in 2000, a presidency mechanism was established, which will last from July to June of the following year; support for scholarships, grants or various mobility programs (See Rosputinský, Peter (2012): *International Organisations. definitions, classifications and activities in the field of human rights protection*. Praha, Professional Publishing.) and last but not least, it was the emergence of the V4 + format according to needs and areas of interest as the Western Balkans, but there were also others such as V4 + Japan, V4 + Germany and France and others.

<sup>25</sup> Bajda, Piotr, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Paulech, Michal and Urbanovská, Jana: “Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress”, *Obrana a strategie*, Vol. 14 No. 2 (2014), pp. 49-60.

<sup>27</sup> *Kroměříž Declaration*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> In 2007, the states and their territories joined the Schengen area, creating the need to protect the EU's external border.

<sup>30</sup> *Kroměříž Declaration, op. cit.*



Neighbourhood Policy, which after 2009 became an instrument of the V4 states within the EU for building peace and stability in Europe.<sup>31</sup>

Today, cooperation takes place in various areas, and states are trying to coordinate their defence and security policy through various projects, such as the effort to create a joint EU battle group of the Visegrad Group. There is also an effort to create space between all states for joint operations, military exercises, trainings, and coordinated procedures within international groupings in terms of their common positions on individual foreign security and defence issues or other procedures (many are still only in the form of proposals).<sup>32</sup>

The subdued cooperation in 2004–2009 was mainly based on a joint declaration. The impetus for reviving cooperation was rushed in by the global economic crisis and the gas crisis of 2009 when states found a renewed motivation. The period of 2009–2010 (gas crisis) and the building of a joint EU battle group represented an important milestone in the search for mutual intersections of cooperation through the Eastern Partnership initiative. In 2011, the initiative to establish a joint EU battle group was officially announced.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the willingness of all partners to revive the cooperation intensified much more in the following years. Cooperation was significantly shifted by the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the four states in Bratislava in 2011, where we see a revival of cooperation in the security field, when a mutual agreement was reached on an active approach to combat major threats,<sup>34</sup> as well as determining the need for complementarity arising in the EU.<sup>35</sup>

Significant milestones for cooperation between states within the Visegrad Group until 2015 were the years 2009–2010 when there was a significant reduction in defence spending in the context of the global economic crisis and the deployment of new initiatives and confirmation of existing defence cooperation programs within NATO and the EU (“pooling and sharing” and “smart defence”), and subsequently at the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, when the crisis in Ukraine erupted in full. Both events determined the fundamental framework for the development of relations between all four member states. We can consider both years as crucial because they revealed how fragile declared cooperation can be. Like in the past, the period of great challenges may show how many security cooperation issues are a priority for the Visegrad Group states, especially when these security threats and challenges directly affect the states themselves.<sup>36</sup> In this context, it is necessary to mention the position of the Visegrad Group itself, which seeks political, economic, and cultural cooperation,<sup>37</sup> as well as efforts to coordinate the various policies of the Visegrad Group, in some cases foreign and security policies. Cooperation was most visible in the cultural or educational areas. In the field of foreign and security policies, however, we see fundamental discrepancies. On one hand, we see joint declarations, which set out common action on some issues (the declarations of agreement in non-recognition of the

<sup>31</sup> Pulišová, Veronika (2010): “V4 in the Area of Security and Defence: The United Divides, the Divided United”, in *Panorama of global security environment 2010*, Bratislava, CENAA, p. 109

<sup>32</sup> Ušiak, Jaroslav: “Slovakia's perspective on NATO”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 51, n° 2 (2018), pp. 125–137.

<sup>33</sup> Paulech and Urbanovská, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Extremism, terrorism, cyberterrorism, trafficking in human beings and drugs, illegal migration, or climate change, as well as poverty.

<sup>35</sup> *The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava>.

<sup>36</sup> Šuplata, Milan: “The Visegrad Battlegroup: Building new capabilities for the region”, (2013), at <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/visegrad-battlegroup-building-new-capabilities-region>

<sup>37</sup> *The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group*, *op. cit.*



illegal annexation of Crimea).<sup>38</sup> However, the attitudes of individual representatives of the respective countries are not so unified. Initially Poland, and subsequently all V4 countries, perceived NATO and not the EU to be the guarantor of the Central European security, protecting against Russian interference.<sup>39</sup>

Based on expert proposals and recommendations, there are three main areas for future cooperation within the Visegrad Group: capacity development and procurement; establishment of international units and cross-border activities; and joint education and training.<sup>40</sup>

It was in the area of security and defence policy,<sup>41</sup> where the greatest success was achieved with the establishment and deployment of the EU battle group of the Visegrad Group in the first half of 2016. If we look at the historical context, “Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia already had a joint brigade more than 10 years ago”.<sup>42</sup> This initiative already existed in 2007 when the possibility of establishing an EU battle group of the Visegrad Group was mentioned in a joint communiqué.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, finding the common ground between individual V4 countries proved to be problematic and prevented the practical implementation of this initiative under the auspices of the EU battle group. Aside from the joint brigade, we can also find practical examples of V4 cooperation in the non-military field of security. For instance, in the area of energy security of the Visegrad countries an agreement has been reached to build future interconnection of the North- South Gas Corridor (although only in response to the gas crisis in 2009), which is already done between Hungary and Slovakia and is planned to be completed between Slovakia and Poland in the coming years.<sup>44</sup> A second example is the regular meetings of the European Affairs Committees since 2005, whose communiqués and conclusions are forwarded to the relevant European institutions. Overall, the process of joint statements and communiqués within the Visegrad Group is simpler than its practical implementation. To conclude, the non-military aspects (mutual policies, nominations, opinions on foreign policies and security) make the Visegrad group more ready for practical implementation in security and less prepared for practical cooperation in defence.

The most important contribution in the field of security and defence in terms of cooperation within the Visegrad Group was the creation of a separate EU battle group of the Visegrad Group and its deployment in the first half of 2016 and re-deployment in 2019. The structure of the battle group consists of three components: Force Headquarters, the "core" of the battlegroup, and the operational and strategic assets based in Krakow, Poland.<sup>45</sup> The V4

<sup>38</sup> *Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Ukraine*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/joint-statement-of-the-141217>.

<sup>39</sup> Hodges, Ben; Bugajski, Janusz and Doran, Peter, B. (2019): *Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank. A Strategy for Baltic-Black Sea Coherence*, Washington, Center for European Policy Analysis, at [https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f-8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196\\_8754c3428d9d4da0adb29bef6df2f5b4.pdf](https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f-8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196_8754c3428d9d4da0adb29bef6df2f5b4.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> *The Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/budapest-declaration-of>.

<sup>41</sup> The V4 Defence Cooperation Action Plan during the Slovak V4 Presidency in 2014 and 2015 set out a framework agreement for defence cooperation through the main principles: strengthening joint defence planning, airspace protection and also the potential permanent V4 defence modular capability. See *Druhé zasadnutie Senior Body predstaviteľov ministerstiev obrany V4*, at <http://www.mosr.sk/34395-sk/druhe-zasadnutie-senior-body-predstavitelov-ministerstiev-obrany-v4/>.

<sup>42</sup> Bednár, Vladimír: “Bezpečnostná spolupráca V4 – nefungujúci concept” SME.sk (2014), at <http://vladimirbednar.blog.sme.sk/c/352829/bezpecnostna-spolupraca-v4-nefungujuci-koncept.html>; Lukášek, Libor (2010): *Visegrádská skupina a její vývoj v letech 1991-2004*. Praha, Karolinum.

<sup>43</sup> *Joint Communiqué of the Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad Group Countries*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2007/joint-communiqué-of-the>.

<sup>44</sup> EUSTREAM 2020 [https://www.eustream.sk/sk/prepravna-siet/sk\\_prepojenie-pl-sk](https://www.eustream.sk/sk/prepravna-siet/sk_prepojenie-pl-sk).

<sup>45</sup> Šuplata, Milan, et. al. “From battlegroup to permanent structures”, (2013) at <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/dav4-ii-report-battlegroup-permanent-structures>.



battle group consists of over 3700 soldiers.<sup>46</sup> It should be added, however, that no battle group has yet been activated at the request of the EU. Poland, in addition to its leading position, is responsible for communication and information systems within the battle group, while the Slovak Republic is mainly responsible for radiation, chemical, and biological protection.<sup>47</sup>

After 2015, we see other trends that affected the functioning of the V4, such as the migration crisis and the related dispute over the "EU core". Finally, we need to mention the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which also put pressure on the group and Central Europe to work together.<sup>48</sup> It is the migration crisis that has opened several questions of a common V4 approach. Several consultations took place, the last of which was in 2019 with the V4 defence ministers.<sup>49</sup> The context of EU and NATO membership was emphasised, as well as the assistance offered in the Mediterranean to help combat illegal migration, but initiatives such as coordinated exercises to combat hybrid threats and the issue of cybersecurity were also outlined. The migration crisis has become a topic that has strongly polarized EU members, but the position of the V4 states has remained unified as opposed to the Western EU countries. This was further confirmed by the fact that Brussels considered the opposite position and the rejection of European solidarity in the context of the redistribution of migrants and threatened the V4 states to withdraw European funds or impose financial sanctions for not accepting refugees.<sup>50</sup> As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, countries were willing to create a small Schengen area among themselves rather than coordinating their actions with the rest of the EU. This demonstrates the strength of the Central European affiliation of these countries once again.

The Visegrad Group has become an instrument of the foreign policy of its member countries, often used as internal opposition to the EU. By using the soft power of cooperation within the Visegrad Group, respective countries can gain more on the EU level than each of them would be able to achieve individually (perhaps except for Poland). While Western Europe considers the V4 states to be problematic countries, these nations see themselves rather as pioneers.<sup>51</sup> On the essence of V4 security cooperation, we must realise that it is based on belonging to the Central European environment, where states can agree mainly on vital strategic interests, but in other aspects, cooperation is more difficult—however, not impossible—to achieve. Many initiatives are created by a top-down system, where affiliation to international organisations pushes these countries to fulfil their commitments effectively (including the area of mutual security and defence cooperation). States have decided to apply the concept of soft power, where they try to achieve their interests externally through non-military means. It is the low level of institutionalisation that allows the V4 states to respond with flexibility to new stimuli and challenges, thus introducing new forms of cooperation,<sup>52</sup> to innovate with new

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<sup>46</sup> *Od ledna bude obranu EU posilovat bojová skupina V4. Tvoří ji na 3700 vojáků*, at [http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/evropskaunie/\\_zprava/od-ledna-bude-obranu-eu-posilovat-bojova-skupina-v4-tvori-ji-na-3700-vojaku--1568975](http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/evropskaunie/_zprava/od-ledna-bude-obranu-eu-posilovat-bojova-skupina-v4-tvori-ji-na-3700-vojaku--1568975).

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with the expert for Slovak-Polish bilateral relations, (2016). Notes are available in the author's archive.

<sup>48</sup> *Teleconference of Foreign Ministers of the V4 Countries and Germany*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/teleconference-of-v4-prime-ministers-european-council-president-discuss-post-pandemic-economic-reconstruction>, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/news/v4-prime-ministers>

<sup>49</sup> *Joint Communiqué of the V4 Defence Ministers*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/joint-communique-of-the-190617>.

<sup>50</sup> Bajda, Piotr, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Cabada, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>52</sup> Gizicki, Wojciech (2012): "Architecture of the Visegrad cooperation", in *Political Systems of Visegrad Group Countries*, Trnava, University of Ss Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, p. 9.



stimuli and initiatives,<sup>53</sup> or to create new regional initiatives that are not counterproductive in terms of priorities and ongoing activities of the V4 itself.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Main challenges for the V4 group in the future

In the previous paragraph, we pointed out that cooperation has gone through various phases over the last 30 years, from initial euphoria, through stagnation and restart, to certain disagreements caused by the Ukrainian crisis and re-locking in migration to finding the closest partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before we get to the main security implications for the V4 itself or more specifically for its member countries, it is worth considering whether the basic preconditions for mutual cooperation are met (i.e. the existence of defined territorial boundaries, the existence of interdependence, and the relationship characteristics). Hence, what are the preconditions for cooperation at the time of state establishment and in a later period? One of the basic assumptions is the existence of the geographical boundaries of the countries on the eastern border of the EU and NATO. In the beginning, there was a common vital interest in the integration into NATO and the EU, which enabled the V4 countries to stabilize their political, as well as wider geopolitical space.<sup>55</sup> It has been shown that states can find agreements and do not have explicitly contradictory national interests. Even on the basic issues of direction, they can find a common consensus, whether it is on further enlargement of the EU, or even in the context of a migration crisis that has affected the whole EU and where the V4 states have stood up to the older Western European countries. As the V4 states themselves acknowledge, they are small and medium-sized states whose voice is not so audible in the European security complex but is audible enough when they are together, as long as they can oppose the positions taken by larger actors in the complex, such as France and Germany.

Let us therefore look at what threats or security challenges individual countries define in their basic security documents,<sup>56</sup> which set the framework for finding opportunities for security cooperation between them within the V4. The security policy of the V4 states is a policy that has been developed in an environment determined by a specific strategic culture. In the past, the countries of Central Europe were often referred to as cordon sanitaire (i.e. space that creates a territorial barrier between the empires, later ideological blocs. Cultivating a strategic culture in the past has been marked by this specific feature. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the security situation in Europe changed radically—the cordon sanitaire ceased to

<sup>53</sup> Dančák, Břetislav, et al. (2011): *Two Decades of Visegrad Cooperation*, Bratislava, International Visegrad Fund, p. 36-37.

<sup>54</sup> Strážay, Tomáš (2015): *Exploring possibilities of deepening the internal cohesion of the V4: Polish and Slovak perspectives*, at [http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Internal-Cohesion-of-the-V4\\_SK-and-PL-perspectives.pdf](http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Internal-Cohesion-of-the-V4_SK-and-PL-perspectives.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Marušiak, Juraj (2013): “Conclusion.” In *Is Visegrad still a Central European “Trade Mark”?*, Bratislava, VEDA.

<sup>56</sup> *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020*, at [https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/National\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Poland\\_2020.pdf](https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dokumenty/National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Republic_of_Poland_2020.pdf);

*Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2015*, at

[http://www.army.cz/images/id\\_8001\\_9000/8503/Security\\_Strategy\\_2015.pdf](http://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf);

*Magyarország Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégiájáról 2020*, at

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwih967NoYfqAhXLi1wKHamHBXoQFjAAegQIBB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmagyarkozlony.hu%2Fdokumentumok%2F6c9e9f4be48fd1bc620655a7f249f81681f8ba67%2Fletoltes&usq=AOvVaw3jAZ-q2TbF5iLU2mG3\\_VP](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwih967NoYfqAhXLi1wKHamHBXoQFjAAegQIBB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmagyarkozlony.hu%2Fdokumentumok%2F6c9e9f4be48fd1bc620655a7f249f81681f8ba67%2Fletoltes&usq=AOvVaw3jAZ-q2TbF5iLU2mG3_VP);

*Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej Republiky - návrh 2017*, at [https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy?p\\_p\\_id=processDetail\\_WAR\\_portletsetl&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=2&p\\_p\\_state=normal&p\\_p\\_mode=view&p\\_p\\_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&p\\_p\\_col\\_id=column-](https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy?p_p_id=processDetail_WAR_portletsetl&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&p_p_col_id=column-2&p_p_col_count=1&processDetail_WAR_portletsetl_fileCooaddr=COO.2145.1000.3.2141557&_processDetail_WAR_portletsetl_file=170831---Vlastny-material---Navrh---Bezpecnostna-strategia-SR.docx&_processDetail_WAR_portletsetl_action=getFile)

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exist and a new frontier was created due to the enlargement of NATO and the EU to the former Eastern Bloc states, a replacement for the old border of potential future disputes.

In addition to the identical global security threats that affect NATO and EU membership as well as the V4 countries, specific regional threats can also be identified. These threats mainly include organized crime, energy self-sufficiency (security), corruption, cyber (information) security, and extremism. At the same time, these are the threats and risks where these states have found common ground, and the V4 states are now working together to coordinate their energy policies,<sup>57</sup> to combat extremism as well as radicalism and hybrid threats. As a separate part, we can mention military and defence issues.<sup>58</sup> Cooperation with NATO and the EU remains the cornerstone of the security policy of the V4 countries. It needs to be emphasised that for V4 countries, the pro-Euro-Atlantic feeling is not just an empty proclamation, but the basic paradigm of security (this is still maintained regardless of the different political proclamations of individual statesmen in the V4 states). In terms of conflicting goals, there are some differences in the security policies and the preferences of states concerning the state of the economy, political stability, and the budget that individual states can spend in defence.

To properly assess the potential and general possibilities of cooperation of the Visegrad Group states in the field of security, we need to examine fundamental dependencies and trends that we expect to accelerate in the upcoming years:

- The proximity of Russia and a potential clash, which became more than visible after the annexation of Crimea.<sup>59</sup> Poland specifically has the most strained relations with Russia. Even before the Ukrainian crisis, Poland's priority was to support independence and a pro-Western foreign policy in Eastern Europe. For Poland, the possibility of integrating the post-Soviet area under Russian influence poses a security risk. In the context of the crisis in Ukraine, Poland's policy towards Russia is the most consistent—Poland supports EU sanctions, agrees to deploy NATO military bases on its territory and in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, Hungary, which many analysts consider a pro-Russian country, followed by the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic,<sup>61</sup> operates between the two poles, according to the current situation and defined priorities, and this ambivalent attitude is supported by differences of opinion within domestic political elites as well as the public.<sup>62</sup> On one hand, they officially support sanctions against Russia,<sup>63</sup> but otherwise, they are guided by their own national interests that are politically and economically the most advantageous to them. The challenge remains whether states will find a balance between national and V4 interests.

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<sup>57</sup> This point is connected, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, with the long-term connection of these countries to their main partner, today the Russian Federation. See Zapletalová, Veronika and Komínková, Magda. "Who is fighting against the EU's energy and climate policy in the European Parliament? The contribution of the Visegrad Group" *Energy Policy*, vol. 139 (April 2020), at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421520300835>.

<sup>58</sup> One of the results from the last period is the creation of a joint EU combat group of the Visegrad Group, the issue of the creation of a joint Czech-Slovak air unit or common sky that could be compatible with Poland and Hungary (minimum joint purchase / lease of new aircraft) and others.

<sup>59</sup> Batta, Anna and Ishiyama, John. "The Russia Connection: What Explains Level of Support for Russia in Central and Eastern Europe? Testing the Economic Attraction and Ideological Affinity Hypotheses" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 53, n°. 1 (2020), pp. 1–12.

<sup>60</sup> See Marušiak, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> Batta and Ishiyama, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Majer, Marián; Schneider, Jiří and Šuplata, Milan: "Crisis in Ukraine and the V4's Defence and Military Adoption" (2016), at <http://www.ceid.hu/ukraine-crisis-and-the-v4s-defence-and-military-adaption/>.

<sup>63</sup> They also signed a joint declaration agreeing not to recognize independent of Crimea and condemning the illegal annexation of Crimea. See *Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Ukraine*, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/joint-statement-of-the-141217>.



- The Visegrad Group has often sought security cooperation in the military field, but in times of financial crisis, there is more pressure for being austere, forcing the states to cooperate, and here we see real opportunities for developing cooperation in the future. One such trend will be the financial crisis following COVID-19 pandemic, but the question will be how the V4 states will use this challenge for their coordination in the defence and military field. In the past, we have seen several failures of such an effort to save financial resources, making joint defence purchases, whether it was the modernisation of helicopters or the purchase of mobile 3D radars.<sup>64</sup> Despite the expected financial savings and other economic benefits, these initiatives often involve different national interests and national interest groups, which often slow down or even prevent the process.

- In the non-military aspects of security, there is a discussion between the Visegrad Group states to ensure common energy self-sufficiency<sup>65</sup> (north-south transit interconnection), common solutions/mutual assistance in crises (crisis management), or social security<sup>66</sup> (migration, extremism issues) but also economic security (corruption, organized crime).

- The political transition of these countries is not over. Many analysts have assumed that after more than thirty years the transition to democracy in the countries of Central Europe is over, but in recent years as the practical policy in individual countries shows, the struggle is not over.<sup>67</sup> The growing influence of nationalism and the rise of extremism, as well as the rise of autocratic leaders,<sup>68</sup> is still present in all these countries. Also, the rise of world populism has not bypassed Central Europe. Recently, various member states have increasingly prioritised their individual interests over V4 cooperation and the coordinated approach. In the future, the crucial moment in V4 existence will be the decision of individual states whether to maintain or further deepen the cooperation or revert to promoting individual interests, which potentially might lead to conflicts.<sup>69</sup>

- The above-mentioned point is followed by foreign programs of disinformation and propaganda. Central Europe has become a breeding ground for the activities of countries interested in this region. We can mention Russia after the annexation of Crimea, and more recently, China, intensifying their activities after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.<sup>70</sup> The scope and content of the dissemination of disinformation present diverse facets. One can see an increase in their activities focusing on undermining the democratic system and the position and policies of countries in the European institutions as well as questioning membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions and belonging to Western society.<sup>71</sup> Last but not

<sup>64</sup> Nad', Jaroslav; Šuplata, Milan and Majer, Marián: "DAV4 five years later: Success or a missed opportunity?", (2016), at <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/dav4-five-years-later-success-or-missed-opportunity>.

<sup>65</sup> Dyduch, Joanna and Skorek, Artur: "Go South! Southern dimension of the V4 states' energy policy strategies – An assessment of viability and prospects" *Energy Policy*, vol. 140 (May 2020), at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421520301282>.

<sup>66</sup> Kowalczyk, Jan: "Broad Approach to Human Security in the Visegrad Group Countries" *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka*, n°. 1 (2020), pp. 59-80.

<sup>67</sup> Frodlová, Aneta: "30 years anniversary: The Velvet Revolution and democratic changes in the countries of the Visegrad Group" *V4 Human Rights Review*, vol. 1, n°. 2 (2019), pp. 9-11, at [https://www.humanrightscentre.org/sites/default/files/attachement/bulletin/V4\\_humanrightsreview\\_autumn2019.pdf#page=9](https://www.humanrightscentre.org/sites/default/files/attachement/bulletin/V4_humanrightsreview_autumn2019.pdf#page=9).

<sup>68</sup> Kasprowicz, Tomasz and Dall, Galan: "The Future of Work. Scenarios for Central Europe" *Visegrad Insight* (May 2020), at <https://visegradinsight.eu/future-of-work-scenarios-ce/>.

<sup>69</sup> Husenicová, Lucia: "Idealizmus ako integrálna súčasť liberálnej teórie medzinárodných vzťahov", *Politické vedy* vol. 20, n°. 3 (2017), p. 70-94.

<sup>70</sup> Kazharski, Aliaksei: "An ad hoc Regionalism? The Visegrád Four in the "Post-Liberal" Age", *Polity*, vol. 52, n°. 2 (2020), pp 250-272, at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/708182>.

<sup>71</sup> Mesežnikov, Grigorij. – Kocúr, Miroslav (eds.) (2015): *Extremism vs. Democracy in Central Europe: Issues, Experiences, Challenges*, Bratislava, IVO.



least, this is caused by a polarized society, not only within individual states but also outwards, i.e. among the different states. A deeply divided society without effective communications can only cause disagreements.<sup>72</sup>

- A separate chapter that will determine the future direction of the entire region will be the relationship of V4 countries with the US, China, and Russia. Additionally, the question of what will happen after Brexit remains unsolved. On one hand, it will mean an increase in Poland's influence and position within the EU,<sup>73</sup> which will provoke a response from France and Germany when the V4, led by Poland, becomes a major player, able to push the Central European agenda in a wider EU political and security field. On the other hand, the particular interests of the United States will intersect with the major powers of mutual relations and the economic benefits of the various partnerships. The main challenge will be to find a balance between these influences, the individual national interests and the cooperative efforts of the V4 itself.

The challenges presented above are only selected issues that V4 states and the V4 as a unit are facing. Coordination within the V4 can make an adequate response easier, thus helping to manage future threats. This challenge may have a positive as well as a negative impact depending on the form of social reaction inside the states and among the states in the form of cooperation. Hence, it is important to determine the measures that should be undertaken to reverse possible negative implications for all V4 countries.

## **5. Conclusion**

As stated in the first section of this article, from a theoretical point of view, cooperation is possible if states have defined territorial boundaries, interdependence and relational characteristics. Within the European regional security complex, it has been demonstrated over the last 30 years that the V4 as a regional form of cooperation has proved vital and purposeful in the area of security and otherwise.

The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Poland, and Hungary are middle-sized or small post-communist countries. This fact influences their vital interests as well as their ability to promote and protect these interests. The V4 grouping as a non-institutionalized cooperation group among the four countries of Central Europe has created a unique opportunity to coordinate their intentions and interests on a wider regional basis. This cooperative strategy was key for improving their mutual relations giving greater visibility to the Central European countries within a wider European region, as individually, these states have only limited possibilities of promoting their own interests on the international level as well as restricted capacities to assure their own safety.

NATO and the EU memberships significantly affect the security environment of any member state. Consequently, each member state becomes an integral part of the collective defence arrangement (NATO) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy/Common Security and Defence Policy (EU). This implies participating in various actions in support of NATO/EU operations and strategies, as well as taking responsibility for joint decisions and their implementation both internally and externally. We consider the North Atlantic Treaty, in particular, to be decisive today, guaranteeing the collective defence of Central European countries, but in the future, we cannot rule out the strengthening of the European security

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<sup>72</sup> Cox-Brusseau, Louis: *Disinformation, Opportunism and Gaslighting*, (April 2020) at <https://www.cepa.org/disinfo-opportunism-and-gaslighting>.

<sup>73</sup> Mierzejewski, Dominik: "China-CEE Maritime Cooperation: Polish Intermarium Project and "16+1" Nexus", *China Belt and Road Initiative Journal: Research Analysis and Perspectives*, vol. 3, n°. 1 (January 2020), pp. 89-95, at <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/paths/cbrij/2020/00000003/00000001/art00009>.



architecture at the expense of the Alliance. In this respect, we can understand the increasing engagement of Poland, which aspires to be the regional leader within Central Europe.

If we look at the potential for the future, we can stress the following points for cooperation: ensuring energy security, the fight against extremism and Russian propaganda; cooperation in the development of new EU and NATO strategy papers; cooperation in the field of military and civilian intelligence; joint research and development,<sup>74</sup> especially in the defence industry, and crisis management cooperation. More specifically, in the field of the joint military operational deployment, the EU Joint Combat Group of the Visegrad Group, which can be an asset not only for the EU but also for NATO, has planted the seeds for developing the joint military activities of all Central European countries.

Regarding the challenges previously summarised, the biggest ones can be considered cyber (information) security coming from the external actors; relations with the EU, NATO, the US, China, and Russia; and the compatibility between the interests of the different states with the cooperation activities within the V4. The V4 will continue building their common position on soft power and strive to strengthen cooperation with the countries on the borders of the Visegrad Group. During almost 30 years of the V4, there have been many ups and downs of joint cooperation. Nevertheless, we can say that unless the states face no significant challenges, cooperation stagnated, but the V4 states were always able to unite in crisis, vital challenges, and pull in the same direction.

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<sup>74</sup> Nad', Šuplata and Majer, *op. cit.*



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