



EDITORIAL NOTE

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This issue of the Journal, coordinated by Professor Jaroslav Ušiak at Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, is dedicated to the countries that make up the Visegrad Group (V4). It is a subject in which we have had special interest, as it is a group of European states whose security approaches and politics are not very well known in Spain.

A team of specialists from the universities of the Visegrad countries present us a set of different studies that will allow us to understand their perceptions, approaches and policies, what influences they received from third countries, what role has been and is being played by the EU with its common foreign security and defense policy, what interests these countries have in NATO and in the EU, what Russia wants and what China wants with the 17+1 initiative and its growing footprint in Central Europe.

The Journal first explains the formation of the V4, the factors that led to the establishment of V4 cooperation, their specific characteristics and future challenges.

Though there are differences among Visegrad countries, there is an obvious displeasure with political elites and their responsibility and/or accountability, the respect for the rule of law or the fight against corruption.

However, the opinion polls show that people in these countries value democracy as a concept, and value the freedom that it brings, but a significant majority of respondents in the region believe that democracy is under threat. People are in general dissatisfied with how economy, and related social justice, turned out in all V4 countries, but are not disillusioned with liberal democracy *per se*; they are disillusioned with the unfair socio-economic system that has come with democratization process. However, this is not the specific case of V4 countries, as these tendencies and positions can be seen all over the democratic world.

Regarding the European Union, it can be said that a strong disillusionment with Europe and the integration process is spreading in the countries of Central Europe. This is a fertile field for the development of populist parties of the left and the right. Analysing the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections campaigns of populist parties operating in the different V4 countries, the “immigration crisis” and the contemporary state of the European Union are considered as the most problematic topics by a majority of these populists. Adding to this, they feel abandoned by the EU after a period of stabilization efforts following the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the majority of these parties do not want to leave the EU. They rather want the reform of the European Union.

In this context, one article shows that Russia does not only try to undercut faith in Europe and its institutions among the V4 citizens, but it also aims to offer a “better” alternative.

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The Slovakian case shows that there is an increasing Russian effort to create an alternative value universe against the “nihilist” and “decadent” West, promoting illiberal and social-conservative values. The article examines whether Russian soft power fulfils the criteria of attractiveness or just coercion, and what Russia is pursuing by promoting this form of power.

Emigration is also an important topic. An article analyses the main trends in migration to and from the Visegrad countries, and tries to prove that political considerations and public attitudes often prevented the formulation of appropriate government responses. It is considered a critical problem for their security as well as terrorism and organized crime. As border countries they have a particular perception of threats. They focus in particular on Russian policies, but also on the implications of the instability in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Islamic world, China, and the globalization process and its implications. During the last few years it is evident that Central Europe is a space where the Russian and Chinese presence and influence have been risen. In this regard, one of the articles analyses several questions aiming to scrutinize the Russian and Chinese presence and activities in V4, when and how Russia and China penetrated into CE, what are the consequences of the rising Russian and Chinese influence and who are the supporters and opponents of Moscow and Beijing in V4.

Regarding the cooperation among the V4 countries, another article presents a special case: the conditions of cooperation under The Three Seas (TSI) initiative, evaluating the activities of the TSI investment fund, the CEEplus stock index and selected projects implemented under the TSI.

On security and defense cooperation several articles show a significant but limited change taken place in the V4 security orientation and a gradual involvement in security initiatives such as the current EU-led PESCO, explaining the current possibilities and security capabilities of V4 countries, as an integral part of the European Union, and their contribution to an autonomous European security architecture. The V4 countries are an important part of NATO and the European Union, even though they are small to medium-sized countries with limited security capabilities. Participation in the creation of collective security under NATO has a stable, several-year position in the countries, but the European Union is on the rise in its security agenda, and that is assumed by the V4 countries with its participation in EU initiatives such as PESCO and the integrated involvement of the V4 in ongoing military projects. For a long time, the V4 countries only participated sporadically in EU missions, but the final article, closing this issue, shows the changes taking place. The article raises the question of whether the show-the-flag strategy adopted by the V4 countries and their former reasons in the decision-making process on whether or not to participate in EU missions and activities are relevant for ensuring European security nowadays.

I would like to thank to Professor Jaroslav Ušiak and his collaborators for their selfless work in preparing this interesting issue dedicated to the Visegrad Group.