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TARTALOMJEGYZÉK / CONTENTS

V4 SUMMER SCHOOL AS A NEW BRAND – GUIDE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING V4 STUDIES
(CURRICULUM PLANNING, TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT)

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Abstract

The context of the paper is introducing the historical evolution of V4 and main outcomes and results of the Education for Democratic citizenship project connected to the relationship between V4 Summer School as a new brand and Guide for learning and teaching V4 Studies. The purpose of the study is to introduce some results of the V4 project, the trends and processes of curriculum planning, teaching and learning methodology and assessmen. This paper provides some important steps in the implementation of the V4 project in higher education from the international collaborative prespective, especially some pragmatic experience such as: making and using competency standards in curriculum development and changing learning and teaching mindset and give examples about the guided techniques and supporting system of the project.

Keywords: *V4, democratic citizenship, learning-based curriculum, collaborative learning, collaborative assessment culture*

The context

Historical evolution of V4

The former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, the three Central European countries entered negotiations at the beginning of the year 1990, its' main goal was free cooperation without dependence on the Russians. The relationship was on a voluntary basis and built on historical traditions.

Finally, József Antall – the first Hungarian prime minister after the regime change – invited the leaders of the other two countries, in Visegrád Castle. This castle was symbolic, because this town was the place of the first Visegrád-Congress between Hungary, Poland and Bohemia in 1335. On February 15, 1991, József Antall, Václav Havel Czechoslovakian President and Lech Wałęsa Polish President signed the famous Visegrad Declaration, officially establishing the Visegrad or V3 Group.

The first two years of the V3-cooperation were a very active period of initiatives and actions taken by the three countries. The first and one of the most important goals of the cooperation was to abolish the former Soviet system of cooperation. The Hungarian Prime Minister Antall played a major role in this on February 25, 1991 in Budapest, and further strengthened regional cooperation between the three countries.

V3 was a successful regional model for all the post-soviet block. The Visegrad countries became the first to sign the Europe Agreements. These three countries made the first step to reach the integration to the EU. One year later, at the end of 1992, the V3 countries established the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) too.

Although the number of members of the Visegrad Group increased with the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993 - it became this V4 - yet this new situation weakened cooperation between the countries. The main reason for this was the new political leaders of the newly state, Slowakia. Vladimír Mečiar Slovakian prime minister was a famous Russian Friend and the anti-Western oriented leader of the newly Visegrad state, Slovakia.

In 1998 there was a trilateral summit of Budapest. It was a turning point in the history of the Visegrad Group. Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland gathered to express their support for their cooperation after half decades. The first major joint achievement for the three major countries was the NATO accession in 1999. It was also the first big moment of the group's collaboration. Five years later the primary goal of Euro-Atlantic

cooperation completed, and all four Visegrad-countries were admitted into the European Union. It was another major turning point the summit of Stirina in June 2000, when the International Visegrad Fund was established. The main goal of the Visegrad Fund is to support cultural and scientific cooperation by cross-border scholarships etc. in the region.

The last ten years of the cooperation of the V4 can be described as the most important decade of regional cohesion. There are several reasons why cooperation between the four countries has become stronger over the past decade. On the one hand, ideologically closer parties lead these countries. On the other hand, the central European region faces more serious challenges, for example, international migration or covid-crisis. The common problems have brought the Visegrad-countries even closer in recent years, which will strengthen cooperation in the longer term.

V4 began to hold regular meetings in different formats larger groups of countries. There are many forms of regional cooperation in the European Union, and several formations of cooperation have developed in Central Europe either. Such formats were the 'V4+7' including Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia or the 'V4+EaP' with non-EU members of the Eastern Partnership or the 'V4 + Nordic and Baltic' countries. This process also led to the creation of *the Three Seas Initiative*, perhaps it will be an important regional group with the Visegrad-countries in its centre in the future.

Although the future of cooperation depends on the international political situation, changes in the world economy and the domestic political situation in each V4-country, it's expected to become an increasingly important force in Europe in historical terms. (Orbán, 2021)

Education for Democratic citizenship

In 1997, the Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) project was set up with the aim to find out which values and skills individuals require in order to become participating citizens, how they can acquire these skills and how they can learn to pass them on to others. (Birzea, 2000) The many activities carried out between 1997 and 2000, such as conferences, seminars, workshops. (Belanger, 2001; Forrester, 2000) The first EDC project (1997-2000) sought to explore the concepts and practice of education for democratic citizenship through research, conferences and supporting sites of citizenship. As a result of the success of this project a second project was launched in 2001 and will continue until 2004. Within this second project, policy development has been identified as the main

priority and there are currently a number of activities underway. The historical milestone of the two-phase project was the opening conference in Strasbourg in 1996. The aim of the conference (40 country representatives) was to make a common terminology, because of the experts and the practitioners used different concepts, for instance Citizenship Education, Civics, Civic Education, Human Rights Education etc. It has been resulted a Glossary, which contains the relevant key-concepts.

Citizen/Citizenship

Citizenship Sites

- Civil and Political Rights

- Cultural Rights

- Democracy/Democratic

- Diversity

- Economic and Social Rights

- Education for Democratic Citizenship

- Equality

- Human Rights (O'Shea, 2003)

This common terminology, defining basic concepts and core competencies can strengthen mutual understanding, effective collaboration, and discussion about the EDC from strategy to practice, which is based on values and experience. (Audigier, 2000) In the section of public education, the clear vision and tendency of Civic Education was a strong cross-curricular approach, which means, that every subject has significant parts for democratic citizenship. In fact, there is a strong consistency between cross-cultural approach and inter- multi- or transdisciplinary. (Vass, 1997) In practice, global problems (environment, demography, health, unemployment etc.) are relevant curricular topics in order to stress the above-mentioned between cross-cultural approaches and inter- multi- or transdisciplinary. (Audigier, 1996)

4

In 2005, the different versions of 'citizenship education' in formal curriculum emphasized civics, political education and social studies, or involved a variety of interdisciplinary combinations, including: history and civics; history, civics and economics; history and social studies; anthropology and social studies; religious and moral education; the study of man and ethics; civics and ethics; ethics, social sciences, geography and history (Bîrzéa et al., 2005).

On the one hand, these global topics do not fit to one subject are, for instance history or geography, but on the other hand from the methodological point, these topics require collaborative learning, group work, inquiry-based learning and individual research. In the section of adult learning, the lifelong learning strategy came into prominence, which related to education for democratic citizenship and competency-based education. Firstly, the focus of this process is teaching democracy in citizenship. (See Figure 1)

"Teaching about democracy should involve pupils in active experiences of democracy in the school and wider community and engage them in using their knowledge and understanding whilst acquiring and developing democratic skills."[1]

In these topics, obviously, there are some cross-curricular and extra-curricular topics, which are based on active learning, project-based work and problem-based learning as well. At the macro level, this is the triangle: internationalisation, creativity and transformation in higher education. (Smith-Vass, 2017) At the micro level, it is a complex transformative process in higher education, which requires strong coherency among curriculum planning, teaching and learning methodology and assessment. (Vass-Kiss, 2021) In fact, higher education is under the pressure to change all over the world. It has been resulted the competency based higher education, where the required coherency between changes and innovation focus on new meaning of learning and knowledge. As a result of new meaning of learning and lifelong learning strategy, higher education are growing demand for developing self-directed, active, meaningful and constructive learning. (Kiss-Vass, 2018)

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[1] Teaching democracy in Citizenship - a summary. https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/resource/teaching-democracy-citizenship-summary

Figure 1. Teaching democracy in citizenship

Why V4 Summer School?

Summer School is a significant part of effective competency development for democratic citizenship and extracurricular activities. Summer School gives opportunities to the teachers and students exchanging ideas and sharing experience among the V4 countries. It can strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation and collaborative learning. Summer School can create a pragmatic, innovative learning environment in a flexible way to stress 2x4C model and intercultural partnership. Because of the growing need to adapt to a fast changing world, the model of four-dimensional education contains knowledge, skills, character and meta-learning domains (Fadel, Bialik and Trilling, 2015) Focusing on the areas of competency, parallel to these structures, Jacob's 4C model emphasizes the growing

importance of creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, which have become a significant part of the new competency set (Jacobs, 2010; Vass, 2020) This is the first 4C model, called renewed basic skills model.

How V4 Summer School?

In order to analyse how?, we need to turn back to the triangle coherence at the micro level, namely curriculum planning, teaching and learning methodology and assessment.

Curriculum planning

Turning to the main trends and processes of curriculum development, the original meaning of curriculum has changed from the 'plan for teaching' to the 'plan for learning'. From the paradigmatic perspective of curriculum theory, the emphasis has transferred from the teacher-and teaching-centred to the learner- and learning-centred paradigm. (Cullen–Harris–Hill 2012; Easton 2002; McCombs–Whisler 1997; Pinar–Irwin 2004; Pinar 2012; Schiro 2013). In the focus of a learner- and learning-centred paradigm, instead of selection and structurization of content or subject-matter knowledge, competences are coming to the fore. The main characteristics of a learner-centred approach for curriculum development is focusing on competences for lifelong learning, especially learning to learn and problem solving via individual, differentiated learning paths. In this context, another recent trend in curriculum development is a competency-based curriculum approach, where the focus is on planning transversal competences (critical, creative and innovative thinking, communication, collaboration, global citizenship, physical and psychological health) as horizontal points.

In summary, changing the culture of curriculum development in teacher education has some significant differences when compared to the traditional way of curriculum planning. When summarizing these differences (see Figure 2), first we have to point out the vision of changing the culture of curriculum development interprets the curriculum as a process. Thinking of it as a developmental process is a key factor of this vision, which is based on an 'active model of the individual'. (Kelly, 1999) This developmental model prioritizes competences and learning strategies. Parallel to this model, an output-based approach concentrates on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes focus on what the learner has achieved and what the learner can reach at the end of a learning activity. It is thus different from formulating aims and objectives or defining content.

Traditional way of curriculum planning	Changing the culture of curriculum development
curriculum as product	curriculum as process
individual planning	collaborative curriculum development
input (aims and objectives)	output (learning outcomes)
knowledge and content	competences
teaching methodology	learning strategies
summative assessment	diagnostic and formative assessment
teacher- and teaching-centred	learner- and learning-centred

Figure 2: Differences on traditional way of curriculum planning and changing the culture of curriculum development (Vass, 2020; Vass, 2018)

Assessment has more complex phenomena, with diagnostic and formative assessment functions having a more important role in curriculum development. Finally, from the point of cultural changes, collaborative curriculum development has an enormous impact on students' learning and organizational development.

Curriculum planning of V4 Summer school is based on these trends, especially a revised Bloom-taxonomy, expected learning outcomes, METU competency standards and professional competencies, interdisciplinary curricular content, students' and teachers' tasks, tools and assessment (diagnostic, formative and summative). The algorithm of planning is (i) defining the aims of the course focusing on learning outcomes and competency areas, (ii) short content description with key concepts and interdisciplinary approach, (iii) planning students' and teachers' activities, which are based on interaction and cooperative learning strenghthening methodological culture and learn to learn competence, (iv) planning diagnostic, formative and summative assessment.

To sum, V4 Summer School curriculum development focuses on learning putting competencies and learning outcomes at the centre of planning. In order to reach these aims and expected outcomes promoting a V4 Summer School curriculum planning, learning and teaching methodology and assessment, we developed METU competency standards, namely

- Communication competency will be developed through individual and group work creating complex situations, so students can observe the function and operation of communication. They develop further

competence through new exercises set by themselves and practice presentation skills and collaborative assessment.

- Creative competency is based on divergent thinking by finding and solving a problem from different aspects and to combine apparently incompatible elements creating something new and valuable. During problem solving students are allowed to be open to different and multiple ideas and points of view.
- Complex problem solving means dealing with real life problems and tasks by involving external partners in the education. Problem solving progresses often in groups which requires cooperation with students and teachers via project-based courses.
- Critical thinking: Information gained through observation, thinking and communication will be analysed and synthesized in problem-based tasks. Through this way of critical thinking and debating, the students can be trained in their own experience, arguments and thoughts.
- Cooperation means working togetherin an effective way. The students bring their own ideas and interests to the project set together with the teacher to discuss the aims, expected outcomes and collaborative tasks. Social and civic competencies are significant in this process.
- Decision making will be developed through a large number of discussions, alternative tasks and different ways of thinking for potential solutions and by setting goals and defining the current conditions
- Digital competence means competent use of ICT tools with a high level of information processing, selection, construction and creative knowledge transfer.
- Self-knowledge and self-improvement can promote students to enhance their self-knowledge and to help in self-understanding. Through self-improvement the students can recognise their strengths and weaknesses by collecting evidence for their career portfolio. (Vass-Kiss, 2021)

Teaching and learning methodology

V4 Summer School is based on active teaching and learning methodology in order to strengthen intrinsic motivation, such as group work, project work, collaborative and inquiry-based learning. The project-based research started making collaborative research plan.

RESEARCH PLAN

Focused topic (Why is it so important to you and V4?)	
Research question (1)	
Problem description (2-3 sentences)	
Research methods	
Project and time management (sharing, collaboration-meetings, time schedule, deadlines)	
Expected outcomes	

Figure 3. Research plan form

Basically, the good topic is actual, relevant, research-based, interesting and complex. After the activity of focusing, the students need to formulate relevant research question. The good research question is opened, consistent with the topic and relevant to V4 topic. Problem description is based on problem sensitiveness. It requires some problem-based sentences to face the problems and dig deeper in the research analysing the research problem from the complex view. The "soul" of the research plan to define qualitative research methods, especially content and data analysis and online questionnaire. The other important element is to plan and manage the research with precise, operationalized milestones, deadlines and collaborative, communication forms. Finally, formulating expected outcomes is an out-put based thinking in order to see the main impact of the project.

PROGRESS REPORT

What we did? (3-4 points or sentences)	
What we are going to do? (steps and deadlines)	
Risk factors	
Success criteria	

Figure 4. Progress Report form

10

Progress Report is an importan tool during the process of research in order to follow the progression and reach required accountability of the project. Following the progression via results and feasible outcomes in order to face the risk factors and summarize the success criteria. The Progress Report can promote collaboration among the students and the teachers and strong consciousness. They use some cooperative learning methdos, such as place mat, brainstorming and making mind map.

Assessment of the project

There are three functions of the assessment of the project, namely diagnostic, formative and summative. We use mainly diagnostic and formative assessment functions, such as mapping the prior knowledge, diagnose the competencies, using collaborative assessment culture discussing about the assessment criteria focusing on the presentations. The students took part at the preparatory workshop to discuss together about the Progress Report and the Assessment Criteria.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Content	1	2	3	4	5
relevancy					
coherency (Why?-How?-What?)					
informative					
Presentation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
understand					
visualization					
creativity					
Comment:					

Figure 5: Assessment criteria form

Conclusion

We achieved the planned results, especially summer school activities and publishing book with some relevant articles and publications. We satisfied with these outcomes, in the case of summer school the students got the preparatory workshop in order to present their project work in a scientific and creative ways. The students had strong intrinsic motivation and interests, they understood the evaluation criteria, especially the content and presentation parts, for instance relevancy, consistency, creativity etc. They collaborated effectively and work hard on the project to reach the overall goals of the summer school. In the case of the book, the planned publications can represent the international cooperation and the different process and results of the project. Basically, international cooperation has two levels. Firstly, the students worked together on the project, so the collaboration was successful during this process. Secondly, they work together with their national and international tutors representing collaborative professionalism during the project. Based on the experience and results of the pilot course, we enrich the international course portfolio with this topic using some important and relevant competencies such as cooperation, communication, project-based work and creative thinking. We are thinking about developing and implementing the standard-based curriculum while sharing the experience of online learning and teaching strategies. We are reflecting the relevant changes in the V4 countries via some collaborative research and project using the experience from the pilot phase.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND THE ESSENCE OF V4 COOPERATION SINCE 1991

PÉTER STEPPER

We have witnessed several paradigm changes in the last decades here in Europe and also globally. These changes also altered the way how we need to understand our world and the challenges stemming from these developments. The importance of the Visegrad Cooperation, based on the principles guiding the V4 since its founding in 1991, namely mutual trust, flexibility, and a focus on common traditions, values and interests, has been growing recently. The V4 countries constitute stability and growth in the European Union, and have the legitimate intention to contribute substantially and as equal partners to the dialogue on the future of the EU, NATO and of course our region.

The modern form of Visegrad cooperation exists since 1991, but it has its old historic roots. Its aims and framework changed a lot since the post-communist transformation of the then three countries, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. Its existence has been questioned several times, at first the 1999 NATO, then the 2004 EU accession raised the question of the necessity of such a regional platform. However, the V4 did not lost its significance and during the long road of self-definition it might find once a Visegrad identity. Nonetheless, the cooperation is still not institutionalized and works strictly on intergovernmental basis.

V4 countries generally agreed on these common principles serving as common denominators through the history of cooperation, but from time to time, the perception about V4 changes significantly. In Slovakia, the Meciar era resulted in some integration deficit, due to their reluctance of give up neutrality and join to the Euroatlantic community. This was driven primarily by a Russophile attitude of the government, combined with some serious cases of corruption, even influenced by organized crime. It has changes after 1998 and the election of Mikulas Dzurinda. The political change was a showcase of chaging political course, and it revealed, the public opinion became more and more pro-European. Pro-European Slovak politicians perceived Visegrad as a perfect vehicle to prove that the country

is ready for Euroatlantic integration, and able to work together with regional partners and maintain good neighbourly relations.

In case of Hungary V4 has been extremely important from the same reason, because Antall government was keen to join Euroatlantic structures as soon as possible, especially after the failed coup d'état against Yelcin in 1991, which highlighted the potential threats from the Eastern flank. Therefore, Budapest used V4 framework as much as it could in order to get into the European club. However, this feature also resulted in the reduction of the importance of V4 cooperation format directly after 1999 and 2004. It was quite simple, every country believed that the being members of the EU and NATO is enough politically and there is no need for redundancies, if we can discuss all the European affairs in Brussels. In reality, Budapest could not influence any European matter significantly, but merely follow German leadership to a certain point. Thus, political leaders realized how much V4 group can help, if they want to create a core of a coalition in European politics.

Poland being the largest country in the group had legitimate claims to formulate and not just follow European political agenda. However, they realized soon that Poland cannot be and will not be in the similar position as Germany or France, even their efforts to form an alliance (see: Weimar Triangle) with them, did not brought much results. However, the V4 partners could provide a stable backyard, and *ad hoc* partners if necessary.

Czech Republic has been the poster child of the West in the sense of their efforts to rejoin Europe, and implement mainstream political ideas in their post-communist state. However, the election of Václav Klaus to presidents (2003-2013) changed this direction in a some sense, Kláus being a Eurosceptic and realist politician focusing on the question of political autonomy and sovereignty of the Czech Republic right after the accession in 2004. During this era of Czech Euroscepticism, one could also witness the reluctance of using the V4 cooperation platform. Kláus also argued frequently that the idea of V4 is obsolete. However, certain members of the government and the present Prime Minister Andrej Babiš is supportive towards the V4 cooperation, and his centre-right political party, ANO can use this platform for the national interest assertion in the European Union.

What bind us together? Common V4 heritage and interpersonal relations.

16

It is hardly surprising that successors of the artifical state Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia has a lot of people-to-people connections. 43 % ofthe Slovaks have at least one relative living in the Czech Republic, and 20% of the Czechs has family members in Slovakia. Due to the large number of historical minorities living there, 64 % of the Hungarian also have family members living in Slovakia. Regarding these three nations, Slovaks, Czech, and Hungarian, research revealed, 70% of them know people in the the region, who they consider to be friends. Almost the same number (66%) of Czechs visitited Slovakia at least once in their lifetime, and 60% of Slovaks visited Hungary. Because of geograpihical, historical reasons these numbers are considerably lower in case of Poland.

Common past

Historical experiences, traumas and good memories and create a common identity, or deepen grievences, it all depends on the perception and remembrance of the political community. The research calle my hero is your enemy tried to reveal some of the differences who V4 nations perceive certain political figures thourghout history.

During a research (called 'my hero is your enemy') conducted by V4 NGOs supported by the International Visegrad Fund in 2005, a lot of findings has been published based on public polls related to people living in the region. When they were asked about heroes, Czech, Hungarian and Polish people mentioned 9-10 historical actors considered to be their national pantheons, Slovaks were reluctant to highlight more than three significant personalities. Czechs and Hungarians mentioned political leaders from the Middle Ages (I. Stephen, IV. Charles, King Mathias) to the 18-19th century (Kossuth Lajos, Széchenyi István, Deák Ferenc, Rákóczi Ferenc, Jan Masaryk, Maria Theresia, Józef Pilsudski, Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The problem of national anti-heroes is far more problematic aspect of V4 state to reseach, because 60 % of the responsdents did not name any, when asked about this. However, it is quite similar feature to highlight the oplicital leaders of opperssive regime Kelemnt Gottwald, Gustáv Husák, Rákosi Máatáys, Szálasi Ferenc, Wojciech Jaruzelskim Boleslaw Bietru, or Jsef Tiso. However, some of the currently active politicians like Václáv Klaus, Vladimir Meciar are on the list. It is also confusing that János Kádár, leader of the Hungarian comunist party was not just mentioned on the list of anti-heroues, but also among national pantheons.

Generally speaking, most of the respondents have been proud for their historical past and heritage, 43-75% is rather proud on his or her own past, while 20-44% said they are neither proud nor ashemed of historical events happened in their country of origin.

What is / shall be the role of V4 today?

It seems to be a legitimate question if the V4 cooperation is still relavant today from two main reasons. On the one hand, it is important to remember that V4 has been established to help NATO/EU integration of the four countries, which has happened sucessfully in 1999/2004. On the other hand, common past, and geographic proximity in itself, has not determined on which fields countries would like to harmonize their positions. Having that question at hand, an IVF research project made a poll about the relevance of V4 in 2015. people responding to the question „Is V4 still relevant today?", the yes answers in almost every country exceeded the 50% threshold in 2003, but showed a slight decrease in the next 10 years.

Agenda setting activity in Europe

Public opinion is important in terms of measuring political willingness to form a certain agenda, and we could see that a significant amount of people think, V4 is relevant today, and they also have some solid ideas on the preferences, where to cooperate. However, governments mark the cooperation areas based on their standard operational procedure, which is in connection with the rotational presidency programs.

The frequency of the political and expert-level meetings is influenced by the rotational presidency. In 2017, it was orchestrated by Poland and was followed by the Hungarian V4 Presidency in 2018. Hungarian presidency has been followed by the Slovaks in 2019, the Czechs in 2020, and again Poland organized the presidency in 2021. The most important priorities, the topics and level of negotiations are determined by the Presidency programs.

It is always a huge challenge to comprehend a presidency program, which somehow reflects the interests of the country which holds the presidency on the one hand, still able to serve the principle of consensus and continuity on the other. Only such a comprehensive approach could strengthen the bonds and serve as a follow-up of the previously successful joint projects. This is key to preserve the credibility of Visegrad cooperation. The main goal of the 2017 Polish V4 Presidency was to have a stronger V4 voice in

the European Union decision-making process and to increase the visibility of special Central European interests in Brussels. Hungary chose the motto of V4 # Connects for the 2018 presidency, which reflects the attitude towards the whole project, as Budapest intends to facilitate interconnections both in terms of infrastructure and of extended dialogue. Lately there has been more talk on Visegrad than ever before. Press releases of influential Hungarian politicians, daily newspapers and TV channels are constantly presenting news on V4. MTVA, the public television channel even has a special news session called "Visegrad News" – V4 Híradó in prime time, which shows how important Budapest finds it to advertise the V4 cooperation format.

Back in 2018-2019, one of the most important goals of the V4 Group was to be heard in a multi-speed Europe, and still it is one of the key priorities.

The first chapter of the 2017 Polish Presidency Program called 'Strong V4 Voice in Europe' reflected on this desire and identifies policy fields, which is essentially important for Central European states in European politics. The Polish presidency program highlighted the challenges of irregular migration, which is on the top of the agenda of European politics since the spring of 2015. The aim of the V4 countries is to tackle root causes of forced migration and to strengthen border control, while preventing the erosion of traditional European principles of free movement of labour stemming from the Schengen system. Concerning the Common European Asylum System (hereinafter: CEAS) the V4 Group clearly rejected any kind of initiatives aiming to implement a mandatory quota system to relocate asylum seekers and/or refugees. However, V4 supported the strengthening of European Asylum Support Office (hereinafter: EASO), the EU Refugee Fund and any platform useful of strengthening border protection, like the new Frontex, the European Agency for Border Protection and Coast Guards.

Economically, it has been a top priority for the region to promote their interest during the negotiations about the next multi-year EU budget of 2021-2027. While the Czech Republic will be a net contributor of the EU multi-year budget in 2019, also Poland has ambitious plans to follow this path. As Deputy Minister of Economic Development Jerzy Kwieciński argued, Poland's goal is to be net contributor in the future, because if EU has ambitious goals in terms of innovation and competitiveness as well as security policy and migration, it should have a proportionally ambitious budget, too. While V4 is willing to do what it can in financial terms to support common European projects, there is still room for increasing

19

economic convergence between EU member-states.. In Poland, for example, the GDP per capita was only 50% of the EU average in 2004, but EU cohesion support helped to reach 70%.

V4 position was to simplify cohesion policies and new regulations should be future-proof. Instead of providing only grants, EU funds could provide financial instruments, loans, capital instruments or guarantees, much easier to acquire. However, plans of some EU bureaucrats in Brussels and Berlin to use conditionality and introduce political standards like the level of rule of law in exchange of providing financial assets is unacceptable. While the transformation of cohesion policy is necessary indeed, it is purely an economic question and not a field of political bargains. Increasing economic convergence within the EU is also in the interest of Western private companies, because without the recent cohesion support for the CEE region, their FDI cannot find their market opportunities and they will move forward to East, occasionally. Furthermore, the increase in terms of purchasing power of the population of V4 countries is an essential requirement to sell the goods produced in EU countries. The V4 Group finds initiatives about the future of EU really important but reminds every member-state that the most essential task is to show credibility and consistency. In order to remain credible, the EU needs to respect its own commitments laid down in the treaty of Lisbon in 2009 and not to hasten reform procedures with ad hoc decisions, which can erode the traditional European values, based on the consensual form of decision of every sovereign member-state. EU committed itself to negotiate with Western Balkan countries and it remains open for the options of further enlargement and to maintain partnership relations with Eastern Partnership countries. V4 supports to keep these enlargement promises for Serbia, Bosnia, North-Macedonia and Montenegro. Similar argument applies for the free movement of labour, thus V4 Group intends to defend the Schengen system with strengthening border protection. From their perspective, Europe needs reform programs, which have more than just a limited support of a few like-minded member-states, but a wide consensus on the future of the European asylum system, migration policy and border protection. V4 countries harmonized their positions towards these issues before every General Affairs Council (GAC) and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meetings and pursued dialogue on lower level of negotiations like COREPER meetings and preparatory commission works. Concerning negotiation with other European member-states like the big players, as Germany or France, or the smaller neighbors like Austria or Slovenia, V4+ format remained salient. It is not surprising that in terms of negotiations with Germany, there is always

easier to promote the common interests of a region of 65 million inhabitants than of a single country. V4+ can be an effective tool to discuss a potential accession of Slovenia to the EU V4 Battlegroup after its stand-by in 2019, but it highly depends on the chances to transform the V4 BG into a Permanent Modular Force. Thus, negotiations with other EU member-states are also important in the field of defense policy and it is absolutely true in case of the Nordic-Baltic 8. V4 troops were deployed there on a rotational basis in the framework of NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (hereinafter: EFP). V4+ negotiations on EU spatial policy and cohesion/structural policy with Romania and Bulgaria are probably going to remain important in the future as well.

V4 Group's Relations with non-EU countries

In the field of enlargement and neighborhood policy a slight exhaustion can be experienced in the past few years, but V4 tries to vitalize the relations with the Western Balkans, whose EU accession is of its prime interest. Building more and more connections towards Eastern Partnership countries remained a significant initiative and V4 strongly supports economic reforms in this region. Due to the global effects of protracted conflicts - such as irregular migration and terrorism - V4 Group supports the policy of global opening and seeks constructive dialogue with Middle-Eastern and South-American countries, besides the traditional ways of multilateral diplomacy in the framework of the UN. It uses V4+ negotiation format to pursue this goal.

Visegrad+

Negotiations with non-EU countries focus on countries with future investment potential like China, Japan, South-Korea and the United States of America. Information and know-how sharing is the best way to materialize such initiatives. A good example for this is the case of a V4+ Japan project, where companies and a scientific team worked together on common projects related to materials sciences. V4 countries use V4+ format also in multilateral diplomacy, so they harmonize their positions in terms of several topics like UN SDGs, human rights protection, international peace-keeping and conflict resolution.

Eastern Partnership

EaP countries have been be just as important for V4 as they were earlier, thus Visegrad countries welcome every development project on transport and energy networks, reform initiatives in the field of state-building, democracy and anti-corruption, which are crucial to have stability in the eastern neighborhood of the European Union.

V4 Group highlighted several times that EU should pay attention to the different levels of ambitions in the EaP countries and focus on those which stood firm to implement the reforms in the framework of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (hereinafter: DCFTA). V4 is ready to share its experience and knowledge with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. In practice we can find several programs to support this initiative like the Civil Servant Mobility Program (CSMP) , which is implemented by NGOs of Think Visegrad Platform. The aim of CSMP is to facilitate civil servant mobility and make it possible for Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian civil servants to visit Hungary, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia in order to change ideas with their fellow colleagues and meet staff of NGOs, SMEs, ministries related to their field interest.

Concerning the future EaP, the realistic goal ofor the V4 is to keep the credibility of EU and do not let these partner countries be disappointed due to the unfulfilled promises of the past. It is essential to maintain stability. In order to achieve this, clear messages has to be communicated towards the region about what the EU really expects and what they can achieve in the foreseeable future. The most successful way of cooperation is to do as many small, but significant projects as one can. Such areas of cooperation can be the cross-border cooperation and/or infrastructure building. It is true that DCFTA and institutional reform is the guarantee of future development, and reform cannot be done without such projects as CSMP. Economic reform takes time, like the transformation of the Ukrainian agriculture sector, but it cannot succeed without the reduction of the corruption level, which is still one of the biggest problems in the region.

Regarding Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, not just EU accession, but NATO enlargement used to be on the agenda, but it is not reality anymore. It is primarily because of the Russian activity to undermine these efforts. While NATO as a defense community perceives enlargement and partnership initiatives as a tool of promoting stability and peace, Moscow understood this process as an aggressive extension in its neighborhood and reacted accordingly. Russia, at least partially, achieved its strategic goal to block further NATO enlargement. The 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula made these EaP countries'

efforts to join NATO impossible. Enlargement towards countries which have unresolved armed conflicts on their territories is not an option for the member-states of the transatlantic alliance. In spite of this, it is essential for NATO to show solidarity towards these countries and find partnership possibilities instead of empty enlargement promises. Such initiatives are the Comprehensive Assistance Package in Ukraine, the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and the Defense Capacity Building Initiative in Moldova. If there is political will, these projects can be significant assets of capacity development.

According to the V4 declarations, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia are equally important partners of the V4 Group, but it can be a real challenge for the future to find the balance terms of foreign relations towards these countries.

Western Balkans

The V4 Group still supports the idea of enlargement, because it can be the primary tool to expand the zone of stability and welfare towards southern and eastern directions. Therefore V4 welcomes action plans and projects like the NERLFR (Network of Experts on the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights) and Enlargement Academy project, both of which help to transfer best practices. Furthermore V4 facilitates the enhancement of political consultation and keeps the question of Western Balkan accession on the EU agenda.

V4 constantly seeks for options to facilitate projects aiming stability, security and economic growth in the Western Balkan region. Agenda setting activity is really important concerning this question, because the last analysis of the European Commission on the chances of accession is of November 2016, and no other such report has been created or even planned to be published in the future. It is a clear sign of the "enlargement exhaustion", which shows that without any strong lobby activity of certain EU member-states, the question of WB accession will disappear from the agenda sooner or later and it is the vital interest of V4 Group to prevent it from happening.

Agenda Setting and V4 Priorities

Inter-state cooperation in Visegrad functions on a daily basis with the help of inter-ministerial meetings, political consultations, working groups,

which result in publishing common letters, declarations, non-papers and other ceremonial documents. Before ceremonial press conferences and release of such documents, a lengthy process takes place where representatives of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland try to harmonize their positions, which reflect their national interests, and are also acceptable for the regional partners. V4 seems to be successful, because these countries are cautious enough not to talk about issues where consensus would be hard to achieve. Of course this means that V4 Group has never been more than a political consultation platform, but it does not mean that it would be a problem in any sense. Policy fields like agriculture, defense industry, or energetics significantly differ in these countries, because of their differences in terms of the size of the country, population, and geography; so finding the common interest is not an easy process. The realistic aim for V4 is to find at least a few policy areas where the countries can identify common interests and take steps to implement some tangible projects. The three most successful such territories of cooperation are the energy policy, digitization and defense policy. It is easy to understand why it is important for the whole region to increase the competitiveness of the ICT sector, to build a stable energy infrastructure, which increases supply diversification and reduces vulnerabilities, to maintain defense capabilities and defense industry during the time of austerity.

THE VISEGRAD SPIRIT AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

PETER RADA

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2021 is a Central European year for Hungarian foreign policy, but also for the other V4 partners because the Visegrad Cooperation celebrates and commemorates the 30th anniversary of its foundation. Furthermore Hungary took over the Presidency of the Visegrád Group (V4) starting on July 1st, 2021. The year offers Budapest the chance to continue working on enhancing cooperation in Central Europe, eliminating the remaining obstacles to joint regional initiatives and strengthening the Visegrad Spirit within the European Union an in the Transatlantic Cooperation. This would help bolster our region's mutual interests within the European decision making process; in solving global challenges which we have witnessed the last decades and expand the sphere of stability and prosperity to the neighborhood; and increase the security of Central Europe.

Despite some diverging interests, Central Europeans have learnt that continuity in cooperation has real value. The V4 Presidency this year provides Hungary the tools needed to stress Hungary's priorities within our region, building on the achievements of previous presidencies and continuing to fine-tune ongoing processes and projects. This Central European year is also a unique opportunity for Hungary to improve the synergies between the goals of the V4 partners. The process will be facilitated by the numerous interlinked events within the V4 frameworks.

The Visegrad Spirit is at the heart of the V4 and it pervades the vision and goals of Hungary in 2021. It has its roots in the systematic and continued synchrony of mutual efforts, while also embodying the differentiated interests of the member states. Hungary will continue to emphasize that the V4 has become successful fora of cooperation precisely because the programs of the individual presidencies have traditionally been developed after a thorough planning process based on mutual agreement among members, where none of the priorities or program points of a presidency have been implemented against member state opposition.

During this Central European year Budapest will build on the region's common values of solidarity, creativity and respect for traditions. Hungary has a vision of a stronger Central Europe within the EU, stemming from regional cooperation based on continuity, stability, cohesion, sustainability, and last but not least, mutually prosperous economic development. Several interconnected strategic priorities for this Central European year have already clearly emerged. First, our region has been traditionally keen on strengthening its joint lobby power within the EU's decision making framework.

However, the parallel challenges of the last decade (there will be more details on them later) made it clear that longer term planning also needs to be backed by the ability to adapt to the quickly changing realities. We only need to mention a few examples. One is very obvious, the Covid-19 pandemic overwrote many plans and the EU was slow in reaction. The another one is less clearly seen but similarly a global problem: the Taliban captured entire Afghanistan which will reignite mass migration towards Europe. Second, our region unfortunately also was affected by the financial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However compared to the 2009 global financial crisis when the V4 countries needed to face a drawn-out financial and economic crisis, now it seems that the engine of economic development is rather in our region than in the traditional Western leaders such as for instance France. Enhanced cohesion within Central Europe, improved regional accessibility and the development of physical and human infrastructure are at the forefront of Hungary's and our region's response to the economic challenges in 2009, which made it possible that the V4 performed relatively better in 2020 and 2021. Third, it is in the joint interest of Central European countries to cooperate in order to increase our region's competitiveness and cope with the pressures of global economic forces. Probably, this statement does not need further explanation, either.

Central Europe as a whole is much more than just the sum of its individual countries. Effective cooperation puts our region on the global map. Hungary intends to utilize this and increase the economic importance of Central Europe by strengthening the synergies of economic activities within our region as well as with actors outside of Europe. These prospects have already been noticed by some foreign investors, because which we have received lot of criticism from our EU partners.

Ultimately, it is more than evident that the Central European year is a unique opportunity for strengthening the Visegrad Spirit. And so in 2021, Hungary will continue to work on fostering synergies within the V4

through enhanced regional cooperation, on maintaining a space for Central Europe on the "global map of importance."

In Central Europe 2019 was a symbolic benchmark when the region's countries will celebrated and commemorated leaving the Soviet sphere of influence 30 years before, the 20th anniversary of the NATO membership for Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, the 15th anniversary of the EU membership and for many the NATO membership, and not least the 70th anniversary of the Washington Treaty.

The last three decades we have discussed comprehensively on the new world order and consequently the challenges stemming from the new realities. As already said, 2019 was a special year to think back as it commemorated many anniversaries. The symbolic numerology of the „30-20-15" reflects the cornerstones and of course the many headaches in Central Europe. For us Central Europeans the real question related to the new world order has always been our ability to adapt to these new realities.

As mentioned above 2019 was a symbolic historic benchmark when our region's countries celebrated and commemorated leaving the Soviet sphere of influence 30 years ago; the 20th anniversary of the NATO membership for Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic; the 15th anniversary of the EU membership and for many the NATO membership; and not least the 70th anniversary of the Washington Treaty. During this long transition process the Central European countries have had and caused many headaches during the parallel political, economic, and societal changes which ended in the full Euroatlantic integration. It has been a long and exhausting road but today Central Europeans are more pro-NATO and have better views on the United States than most of the citizens of older allies despite some up and downs in the alliance and some inconsistent American policies towards the region. It has been often mentioned in the last years that Atlanticism is waning in Europe but actual opinion polls from Central Europe cannot back these fears. This is partly the consequence of the successful Euroatlantic integration of Central Europe. And also it is true that the NATO regained some momentum after the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. (However, without any early judgement, but the failure in Afghanistan will not help.)

Even though 2019 is a symbolic year but we also know that the new world order have brought new threats and new challenges. The Euroatlantic integration's importance lied in this very characteristic of the international system and politics that it has changed many times and very quickly. The

last decades were more than unpredictable, see eg. the Covid-19 pandemic – therefore being the member of a stable political, military and economic alliance has been a guarantee for our region's countries. At the end of the first decade of the new century many publications tried to analyze the changes in international relations and they tried to predict the possible ways how our world would develop. This is still a valid questions today and it is very important because in case we understand our world better we can adapt to it easier. It is even more important if we think about how volatile the events were in the last decade. The 2010s began very pessimistically and continued even worse. We could witness significant changes, which made us rethink what the new world order really is, the conclusions from 10 years before became outdated.

During the last three decades there were real changes and we could witness events which were not or should have not been a surprise but the common characteristics were that these events changed how we understand the security challenges. Of course the most significant were the series of system changes in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

2001 and the simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States woke up the world's military superpower from its strategic slumber and the global war on terror emerged as the most important priority of the Western alliance (even though it created serious friction especially due to the invasion of Iraq in 2003).

The number of conflicts within the NATO have increased even more after the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 most importantly because the allies ran out of money and the United States realized that it could not bear the burdens alone. Washington decided to pull back, to moderate the American presence and to lessen the costs of the overstretched foreign policy.

2014 is the next turning point because – despite the fact that the allies still struggle with economic problems – the Russian invasion of Ukraine called the attention to the original goal of the NATO and that territorial defense is still valid. Simultaneously in 2015 the ongoing identity crisis of the EU manifested in the counterproductive political statements and dangerous steps trying to manage the illegal migration crisis. The crisis is still one of the most serious challenge but after 6 years there is still no common ground and no solution at sight even according to the most optimistic commentary. However, it is obvious that we need to rethink the basis of our security also within the EU.

And most probably, 2020 will be considered another turning point in our history.

Our region, the EU, the NATO has faced parallel challenges and threats, too; traditional ones such as the Russian aggression, the growing appetite and presence of China in the world, the failed Iran nuclear deal, or North Korea; and also non traditional ones such as state failure in Africa and the Middle East (largely contributing the new waves of migration), the appearance of the Islamic State and international terrorism in general and the ever growing threat within Europe, still present financial and economic problems in the developed world. It is clear that our existing institutions have not been able effectively control the events. This leads to serious criticism towards the security architecture and the questioning of it is relevance. Consequently, the international players have been forced to find alternative solution even if it sometimes drew serious criticism from the allies, see the Hungarian policies to stop illegal migration as an example. It sounds pessimistic but a better and more secure Europe and World is still a distant goal therefore regional cooperation such as the Visegrad Cooperation will have an important role in the coming years.

As mentioned above 2019 is a special year for commemoration. In 1989 Hungary not only chose a new political path but this year let Hungary rejoin the West after that in Yalta took this opportunity for 40 years. It is true that the last decades were not easy and the road of the political, economic, societal, even cultural transition was bumpy, however, Hungary today is the full and equal member of the Transatlantic alliance and the Western value community despite the fact that unsubstantiated criticism and double standards are still common towards the "new" members. The "new" ones still feel often that it is still worth bearing criticism because the membership gave back opportunities and possibilities, which were lost after the Second World War and with the Soviet "alliance". Our region regained the momentum to be able to develop along those values and more importantly interests which we share with our Western partners. The Euroatlantic integration has had no alternative. Nevertheless, there will be conflicts, frictions and debates. However, a healthy dialogue rather strengthens the alliance than questions its effectiveness, especially if the "new" ones are equal not only on paper.

Central European have felt some kind of alienation within the club and they also have had the valid feeling that despite the full membership the "new" members are rather second class ones. The feeling of neglect has come back time to time and it is still tangible in many decision processes today,

therefore sticking together for instance in the frames of the Visegrad Cooperation is very important. In the 1990s the most important foreign policy priority was alinement to the NATO and the EU which resulted in the acceptance of the rules without much criticism and also the adaptation of the Western institutions according to the Western interests. This resulted in on one hand that the Western allies are not used to strong Central European voice and on the other hand that events and processes in our region have been less important in Brussels and we could not react in time, either. The energy security and the 2006 and 2009 gas crises are good examples. The energy security and a common position in the EU was not a priority earlier. Probably it is even better example how surprised certain Western members and Brussels were that a "new" member can be so vocal on the illegal migration crisis.

Hungary's core interest – similarly to the other V4 countries – to be member of the Euroatlantic institutions. Nonetheless, the last 16 and 21 years also proved that the alliance and these institutions can only function effectively if the members are able to present their interests, make their vice heard and equally participate in finding the solutions. Honest dialogue is also in the "old" member's interest. The Central European feeling of being neglected will definitely not help the smooth development. This is not only true in the EU and NATO but in the bilateral relations with the United States. Due to the serious effects of the global financial crisis the United States decided to turn away from our region and the "pivot to Asia" had clear economic reasons. With the pivot new reflexes were born: since the beginning of the 2010s it became more and more common that Washington openly criticized the allies' domestic policies and also openly tried to influence them. From the American point of view we could even justify this change but it is beyond question that the new tone in the American foreign policy could not help deepen the cooperation within the alliance.

It has become obvious the last years that those liberal political and economic institutions which were created after the Second World War and intended to help avoid a new great war are not able to handle the new problems and provide effective and sustainable solutions. Thus the ideological debate about the existing institutions is not a simple European problem, but it is also present in the international politics. On the other hand, the debate is rather a Western "extravagancy" because many regional powers and international players already abandoned the dysfunctional international frames and suggested new forms of cooperation, think about Russia, or China. The gravest Western dilemma is how long the liberal

world order is still able to manage the challenges and despite the problems to maintain the credibility of the institutions.

The liberal label gained negative connotation whilst the debate should focus on the reform of the international institutions and not about how the "new" members such as Hungary should change their domestic institutions to fit the best in the clashing institutional frames. Without the "new" members the reform of these institutions is not possible and their voice is really important. Without the development of the reformed structure it is difficult to imagine that the institutions will be able to survive under the growing pressure and facing simultaneous challenges. This ability of reform needs political will but the future of our region, the EU and the Western alliance is at stake.

Since 1989, the Central Europeans needed to adapt quickly to the changes in international politics and because of the forced openness they were very vulnerable at the same time, especially economically. Nonetheless, the "canaries" were not listened to in the West, the geopolitics stroke back and the West could not understand the different needs and interests for instance being too close to the civil war in Yugoslavia, and definitely the unavoidable influence of Russia in the neighborhood. The EU and NATO expected and even demanded full and quick integration and adaptation of all the Western institutions in exchanges letting in the new members. The serious conditionality let not much room for the Central Europeans than follow the instruction without questioning them. However, the last decade Europe faced significant changes which hopefully make the Western Europeans realize that a functioning EU needs all the members. These hopes are still vague seeing that some politicians blocked the process of the formation of the new European Commission only on selfish and domestic political basis not considering the destroying effects of lengthening the process and deepening the rift between East and West.

Besides the argument for reforming the liberal institutions it is even more clear that the international security architecture is outdated and is not able to answer the new challenges. Not surprisingly it created lot of tension within the Transatlantic alliance. The Cold War ended without forcing the West and the United States to seriously think about the reform of for instance the NATO. Of course it is true that the NATO looked for new tasks proving that there were still need for the formal alliance. In the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and more importantly due to the Yugoslav War, the civil wars in Africa it seemed that the West will not face a serious military challenger but the small conflicts create regional security

vacuum which was not in the Western interest. The NATO tried to be prepared to go beyond territorial defense and answer the "new security threats". The paradox of the 21st century lies in this very process: the outdated institutions tried to find new impetus whilst the 20th century's traditional military threats never disappeared, think only on Ukraine. It became clear that the institutions are not anymore able to manage the traditional threats, either.

Before the Russian aggression in 2014 – despite the fact the 2008 Georgian War was a very serious proof – it seemed that Fukuyama was right and the history in Europe indeed ended and the West can forget the traditional military conflicts. The EU and the Western powers not surprisingly were shocked, surprised and were not able to find adequate answer for the Russian aggression. The unanimously accepted – but many times criticized – sanctions against Russia rather hurt the European economy and has not proved effective. The parallel other challenges such as the global financial crisis, the illegal migration crisis, or UK's decision to leave even more complicated the otherwise serious situation. Obviously, the EU was too occupied finding the (new) identity and solve the domestic, institutional problems, strengthen the Euro, regain trust and bridge the divide between North and South and East and West.

In 1991, it seemed that Russia intended to return as a full member of the Western institutional system and will accept the rules of liberal international relations. The (European) peace of the 1990s – despite the Yugoslav War – made the West comfortable and probably a bit negligent. It was expected that the hard security challenges were part of the past and the future is to manage the new security threats and rather to focus on "soft" power. Accordingly, the EU and member states paid more attention to use the "peace dividend" rather than accepting the realities and being able to reform the security architecture in Europe. In 2019 – or since Donald Trump became president – it is more and more clear that the United States is fed up paying for European security alone. The Russian invasion of Ukraine did not bring back the traditional military threats rather it clearly proved that they never disappeared.

The emerging regional military powers are testing the existing international system and world order. Russia cannot be circumvented in Europe, in the Russian near abroad or now in Syria, and obviously has intentions to be more active in other continents such as Venezuela in Latin America. China today seems to be a peaceful superpower without any violent intentions, however, for the neighbors it is already more serious and the Chinese

provocation is the South China See are part of everyday life and China made it clear that it intends to strengthen its influence in the region. Furthermore, in the Middle East the proxy wars – such as in Yemen – hinder any regional political solution. The Iran deal in 2015 held the hope for a short period that the nuclear threat at least was managed. In 2018 the United States unilaterally left the deal which shows that the deal was not that stable after all.

Many politicians' expectation was not met in 2016 and many were surprised by the political changes in the United States and the earlier unbelievable electoral win of Donald Trump. At the same time similar political processes are ongoing in Europe, too, which could not be seen. The politics and the politicians have got in distance from the electorate and the voters' real everyday problems. The elite politics is not in the interests of the voters who demand significant changes – such as "drain the swamp" in Washington. These changes are necessary and instead of each others criticism the EU needs reforms which pays attention to the special problems of each citizen and not only on the vague liberal "Europe visions" of the Western political elite.

We cannot state that the validity of the Western and European political value system has gone but the recent changes question how universal this Western value system is. The Fund for Peace think tank has published a yearly publication on the functioning of the states since 2005. The failed states index or the fragile states index shows yearly how well the countries performed each year. Of course the criteria system is Western and consequently the list shows how close these countries are to the liberal Western values. The last decade the number of underperforming states and state failure steadily grew, which poses the question whether the world became worse or the Western evaluation criteria is outdated and we should reform it, too, according to the realities. The most recent map shows that only the United States and Europe (and in general the Western world) was able to fulfil the expectations and fit to the Western criteria. This could be flattering but it should rather call for caution. Today we tend to engage in philosophical debates on the real meaning of words such as liberal, democratic etc., but we need to accept that it does not matter at the end whether our system is liberal, or something else if it is not able to manage the new security threats and seizes to exist.

It has been a decade long question whether the United States is still able and willing to fulfill its role as the protector of the Western world and the values. The role Washington accepted after the end of the Cold War. The

"America first" slogan and program did not appear only with Donald Trump. There was already strong need to pull back during Barack Obama's presidency and demand more activity and share of the burdens form the allies. Few would argue that this is the beginning of a new multipolar world. This is for sure not true on the global scale but valid in different regions locally. China is a clear challenger but not strong enough militarily yet, Russia is on the other hand a real military power but the economy is weak and small, today and the next few years hold the last opportunity for Russia to participate in shaping the World. Thus, the United States is clearly the most important and still the only real superpower even if it is more reluctant and more critical.

Donald Trump was often criticized that his foreign policy is unpredictable but it is not true. We can conclude that Washington became tired to be policeman of the World and is fed up with paying the protection of the Western world alone while maintaining the liberal institutions is rather a burden on the American foreign policy. It is understandable that Trump was not sure why the United States should bear the costs of fighting international terrorism and defeating the Islamic State alone whilst the European allies are engaged in shoreless debates about the identity and they are not able to come to a common agreement how to stop the immense flow of illegal migrants. Furthermore, it seems that Trump was also less patient asking the allies in vain to significantly increase their defense budget. There are positive developments in this sense but the road is still long.

It is difficult to evaluate the Biden administration because of many reasons. First, due to the global pandemic Biden was not that active in the international sphere as it was expected.

Considering these developments we could witness new trends in international politics. The United States intends to decrease the number of all those activities which are costly and have become more and more reluctant to engage in solving new challenges alone. We can see this very clearly in case of Afghanistan in 2021. The American foreign policy clearly overstretched in the 2000s and became tired. Especially, after the 2003 invasion of Iraq Washington gained more criticism than approval. It could not be continued and already George W. Bush tried to find a way out; Obama's main goal was to engage the partners and leave the two battlefronts in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Trump has also looked for new solutions for the dilemma: how to remain in a world leadership position and decrease the burdens and costs on the United States at the same time. In this sense Trump did not begin a new politics rather the foreign policy

reflects the American public opinion. And even more importantly Biden continued along this trend.

All the arguments above are valid despite the fact that still around 200 thousand American soldiers serve abroad and the United States is still present in all continents. It is also true even though the American troops did not leave Syria after defeating the (formal) Islamic State and killing the leader of the terrorist group. Dealing with the regional challengers Trump decided to engage them and have more intense conversation with them trying to solve bilateral conflicts with them, such as the trade balance and trade questions with China. Trump or Biden are not idealists and intending to have better relations with the competitors (words are not equal to deals as we see in case of Biden) serves pure American interests.

As it was mentioned earlier the trend reemerged in the 2010s that the international politics became remilitarized and the traditional power politics is a reality again. This also brought as a consequence that generals are again active participants of international diplomacy. Think only on the White House and how many generals served in different positions very close to the presidents. It is not necessary brand new because after 2001 the American presidents have followed the tendency and the generals were dominant in the foreign policy decision making process. The military solutions are on the table and diplomacy, international law, or political solutions lost some importance. At the same time the conflicts are also changed; the number of armed groups increased and the violent conflicts within the states are also more common.

Consequently because the international community was not able to manage the new threats created even more problems. It was not a secret earlier wither that the EU is an attractive goal for those who would like to have a better and richer life, however, 2015 meant a significantly new problem especially because of the scale of the migration. It is even sadder that the EU could not find a solution still.

In 2009 the official American foreign policy position changed and Washington announced that the era of democracy promotion is over and the states are responsible for maintaining stabile political system and control the monopoly of use of force within their borders. However, the so-called Arab spring overwrote the screenplay and plans accepted and agreed earlier in Washington and made it almost impossible for the United States to leave the region. On the other hand even hearing the plans of an

American pull out made the regional competitors more confident and encouraged them to test the American red lines.

Parallel to the decreasing American possibilities and capabilities Barack Obama forced the allies to bear the costs of maintaining the international (liberal) order. The Obama era not surprisingly completed remarkable international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement or the Iran nuclear deal, even though the United States left them since. Trump believes in bilateral agreements and even tries to convince the adversaries such as Kim Jong Un, and even more so with Vladimir Putin. The withdrawal from multilateral institutions shows the lack of trust in the international institutions and international law in general. Nikki Haley was a strong UN Ambassador between 2017-2018 and after she left and published her memoire it even more obvious that the UN and the multilateral for a is not a first priority for the United States. Most probably we can expect more unilateral foreign policy decisions and steps from Washington.

The EU struggles with the domestic problems and the dysfunctional institutions and the Transatlantic community is in general in an identity crisis. Having said that it is even more understandable the "American first" slogan, and that the United States relies more on the realist self-help. Economic trends shows that in the future the economic investments main target countries will be the United States and China and the EU's share will decrease steadily. If the EU will not able to reform itself and get over the shoreless debates on the members domestic politics and party politics motivated criticism the future is rather dim. In the meantime China's economy is still growing faster. China can only profit from a longer crisis period in the EU, let alone the fact that Russia always intended to create tension, the crisis of the Western world is also a comfortable development for Russia. The trends in world politics and the events and processes which govern the international politics are unpredictable and besides the challenges in this dimension we should not forget that there are regionally conflicts which directly does not affect the future of the World, but they still mean a heavy burden for the international community.

The conflict of the two Koreas is typically such a problem. Even though there were some positive developments such as the meeting of the two leaders and also Donald Trump – as the first American president – also personally met Kim Jong Un, the nuclear threat has not been solved yet and thus the fears of an unpredictable war and steady provocation is still a possibility.

36

The general developments in the Middle East are not positive either and we cannot have too high hopes for an easy and quick settlement of the hostilities and wars. Leaving the Iran deal will not help in stabilizing the situation either, and also the American decision to move the Embassy to Jerusalem means that the Americans are openly left the position of supporting the two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Saud-Arabia is a regional power fighting for dominance with Iran which is materialized in the proxy war in Yemen. The Turkish invasion of Northern Syria, Assad's new momentum of maintaining the power, Russia's strong presence and the American contradicting moves will not help find a quick solution.

The Middle East is a typical and general example of the international diplomacy's failure and the individual particular and short term interest's of the states in the region. The Israeli-Palestinian relations is not better and the two state solution is out of sight. A devastating war is still ongoing since 2011, which drew in all the regional players international actors, the United States, Russia, Turkey and many foreign fighters. There has been no peace in Iraq since the end of the Cold War, the country is not stable and probably the only stability comes from the Kurds who are the enemy of Turkey, Iran and Assad in Syria. The Shia-Sunni conflict horizontally makes the problems even more complex. In Yemen, even though Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war is not on the front page of the international Western media, more than 8 million people are on the verge of famine, there is no health care, no central authority.

Afghanistan is still not a solved problem after 18 years, the statebuilding exercise failed. The international community cannot leave the country even though there were many plans and agreements that by the mid-2010s there will be a final solution and the international community will finally leave. The Taliban is still, or again strong, it is very difficult to imagine that without them there can be any kind of political solution. On the other hand letting them into politics questions the whole rational of the war since 2001. The Islamic State's presence in the Asian country made the Taliban seem to be a moderate force and probably the only organized group which would be able to fight against the extremist Jihadism.

It is also not completely surprising that many other "smaller" conflicts cannot reach the threshold of attention in many cases. The Western countries as it is the general reaction usually condemns the human rights violations on paper or in a statement but nothing really happens later. The ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, the devastating decades long civil wars in

Africa, the ungoverned territories of the Sahel where terrorist groups and organized crime groups found home seem to be second class problems. Regionally probably there are solutions but if we think about Nigeria the strongest military power in Africa and it cannot defeat the Boko Haram.

After the end of the Cold War it became a common sense that civil wars are not European problems and violent military conflicts are characteristics for Africa. However, since 2014 more than 10 thousand people died in Ukraine and it does not seem that the conflict will be ended soon.

Speaking about the above mentioned parallel threats and challenges unfortunately 2020 brought a qualitatively new problem: the Covid-19 pandemic that overwrote basically every single political and economic agenda.

This happened in a time of limitless and open world. Thus 2020 was beyond question an unconventional year. The "Googleized", "Twitterized", or "Facebookized" international politics meant myriad of interconnected processes, the global political awakening of (everyday) people, and the emergence of new power centers (eg. tech companies and the Silicon Valley). The power of the media, the social networks have given new opportunities for politicians but also have emerged as a very heavy burden. The Western World is trapped in a situation when the fig leaf of political correctness overwrites logical decisions; thus it is not surprising that 2020 became a "chicken bone" that stuck in the throat of international political analysts who could not swallow, or spit out it, consequently no reliable answers were provided regarding the challenges of 2020.

When political scientists and international relations experts try to analyze certain foreign policy events, the certain decisions of states or any developments in international relations they tend to use the conventional tools of IR. These tools are represented by the frameworks provided by international relations theories, lessons learned from decades of practice and previous experiences. That is, international relations have been analyzed by reflecting on the past. However, in years like 2020 we cannot, or could not rely on general wisdom. Giving predictions in international relations is always a difficult enterprise but 2020 overwrote all we believed and we tried to look for as a "mental crutch" in trying to understand our word better.

In 2020 we witnessed many challenges, which most probably will prove to be a turning point or a cornerstone in the development in international relations, and similarly in the Transatlantic relations. These challenges –

only to name a few – were those that are widely analyzed this year in the international political literature but convincing arguments and answers for the challenges are not presented yet. Of course the Covid-19 global pandemic; the further problems with Russia and China; not decreasing number of terrorist attacks in the Western hemisphere; further environmental problems; not solved identity crisis in the EU – including the not properly managed Brexit, and the debates on the MFF; unpredictable presidential elections in the United States.

However, before we go into more details about 2020 we should look at where we started at the beginning of the year, and also we should a little bit reflect on the past. This is valid despite the fact that we argued against conventional knowledge we gathered because it may be misleading when analyzing 2020. We need to be aware what we expected due to the lessons we learned in the last decades to know what is different in 2020. As it was argued above, 2020 is/will be a turning point in international relations, but there were other very important cornerstones that changed the course of our modern history, the environment in which political decisions were made, or in general our thinking about international relations, politics, or security policy.

It is not surprising that we could not predict the events in 2020 and we are not able to do so in 2021 considering that we had similar problems in less unconventional years in the last decades. We have been talked about the consequences of globalization for a few decades now, however, we still cannot elaborate a single model or description which would help decision makers identify clear patterns for policy decisions regarding international politics and 2020 made the picture even more blurry. We cannot pick a single phenomenon as the ultimate threat, because the myriad of interconnected issues influence each other, sometimes counteract or on the other hand strengthen seemingly independent processes.

At the end of the first decade of the new century many publications tried to analyze the changes in international relations and they tried to predict the possible ways how our world would develop. This is even more valid question in 2020 and it is very important because in case we understand our world better we can adapt to it easier. It does not need further explanation if we think about how volatile the events can be even in a year. The 2010s began very pessimistically and continued even worse. We could witness significant changes, which made us rethink what the new world order really is, the conclusions from 10 years before became outdated and the impetus

of new analysis became stronger. We need add unfortunately that the 2020s' start is not better either.

In 2020 it became even more obvious and tangible that those liberal political and economic institutions which were created after the Second World War and intended to help avoid a new great war are not able to handle the new problems and provide effective and sustainable solutions. Thus the ideological debate about the existing institutions is not a simple European problem, but it is also present in international politics. On the other hand, the debate is rather a Western "extravagancy" because many regional powers and international players already abandoned the dysfunctional international frames and suggested new forms of cooperation, think about Russia, or China, as it was mentioned above.

Eight months after the Biden administration took power in Washington and one thing is obvious:. what can we expect from him is not crystal clear yet regarding the Transatlantic relations especially considering that during the election campaign only few words dealt with foreign policy and beyond many words not many deeds hapenned. What we still can predict that the Transatlantic relations will remain very important for the United States, and Washington will not forget that Europe is the most important ally. However, the balance will move towards Western Europe again and Germany's relation with the United States will develop from the all time low during Donald Trump. The United States' interest will be a united EU and will not tolerate differing voices from Central Europe as it will be regarded weakening the unity of the EU. Also Washington will need stronger economic ties to recover the economic fall due to Covid-19. Biden will not tolerate close ties with Russia, or China whilst he will expect more global level cooperation in the international organizations.

Biden needs to answer the most pressing issue: it has been a decade long question whether the United States is still able and willing to fulfill its role as the protector of the Western world and the values. The role Washington accepted after the end of the Cold War. The "America first" slogan and program did not appear only with Donald Trump. There was already strong need to pull back during Barack Obama's presidency and demand more activity and share of the burdens form the allies. Few would argue that this is the beginning of a new multipolar world. This is for sure not true on the global scale but valid in different regions locally. China is a clear challenger but not strong enough militarily yet, Russia is on the other hand a real military power but the economy is weak and small, today and the next few years hold the last opportunity for Russia to participate in shaping the

40

World. Thus, the United States is clearly the most important and still the only real superpower even if it is more reluctant and more critical.

As a conclusion, the success of Central and Eastern Europe's Euroatlantic integration is beyond question even though there are many challenges today. The NATO regained some momentum after the Russian invasion of Crimea but the Alliance still lacks a clear mission and struggles to provide an unmistakable point of reference. Whilst there was a wide consensus in the Central European political elite that the political, economic and societal transition process needs to be designed according to the Western norms due to the unquestioned goal of the Euroatlantic integration. However, even after joining the NATO and the EU Central Europeans still cannot completely trust the Western European allies due to the different views on fundamental questions for instance within the EU, such as illegal migration, consequences of the Brexit, the future of the Eurozone. Furthermore, the Central Europeans have had some fears on a potential Western-Russian conciliation. In order to avoid to become too vulnerable to the Western interests and to balance the Russian presence Central Europeans wanted to build as close relationship with the United States as it was possible. The Central European fears were not completely unsubstantiated which was proved for example by the North Stream agreement and the North Stream 2 plans, the double standards regarding South Stream, or Nabucco, or when it came to the economic sanctions against Russia after the invasion of the Crimea. The Central Europeans have been more affected by the sanctions which has been mentioned several times for instance by the Hungarian government provoking only Western criticism while Germany, or France maintained close economic ties with Russia even in strategic sectors.

Even though the clear effort of the Central Europeans to remain close to the United States Washington has not always appreciated the "newest" allies and sacrificed them in case other strategic consideration were stronger such as the "reset" with Russia, or the pivot to Asia. Despite the Central European efforts and participation in most missions by the end of the day the criticism remained common mostly – except Poland – due to the low defense spending. It is on one hand not surprising because burdensharing has been a general debate within the NATO the last decades. The Trump administration was more pragmatic and paid more attention to Central and Eastern Europe. The ideologically dictated foreign policy seemed to disappear but probably only those allies can expect less criticism in the future which indeed make efforts to fulfill the American requests

regarding defense spending, or are geostrategically very important and not too close to Russia politically.

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EUROPEAN VISEGRAD: HOW TO USE V4 GROUP AS A PLATFORM IN EUROPEAN POLITICS?

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ZSOLT MIHÁLYI

ABSTRACT

First of all, thankyou very much for attending the summer university. It was very useful for us. We have met other students of the universities of the Visegrád countries and got to know their opinions and positions, as well as ours. We have chosen the topic of the battle groupbecause it may be one of the most important elements of the European Union's security policy in today's worldbecause of the events taking place across the world. Thus, in ouressay, after a brief historical description, wedescribe the purpose, tasks, and future possibilities of the battle group.

Keywords: *Battlegroup, Visegrad four, Europian union, crisis management*

1 INTRODUCTION

An example of the formation of a battle group was modeled on the agreement between France and Britain on the need for such an army. The battlegroups make up units of about 1,500 people that are submitted within 15 days can be sown. Battlegroups can be deployed for 30 days, as appropriate and by replenishment this period may be extended to 120 days. However, the joint Visegrad battle group set up also had additional opportunities that could be exploited later.[1] "European battlegroups operate on a six-monthly stand-by basis. The V4 Battlegroup will be the first of its kind on standby between January and June 2016 performed - the next standby service in 2019 II. half a year (Tulok et.al, 2018, p 39)" The main tasks of the battle group:

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[1] Tulok P., Sáringer J., Perényi Zs., Remete B., Márky Z. & KSH (2018). *A Visegrádi Négyek jelentősége, struktúrája és értékei.* (szerk. Blaskó A.). pp 31-48.

- separation of warring parties,
- conflict prevention,
- stabilization,
- reconstruction and military advice,
- evacuation operations,
- humanitarian aid

The battlegroup is based on a battalion-sized, quick-to-deploy, all-armed force, complete with combat support and combat security elements. This includes the capacity for strategic transport *(air, land and water)* and logistics *(systems and 9R),* although no "operational application" has been implemented since the adoption of the EU Battlegroup concept, so its details cannot yet be reported.[2] Battlegroup V4 works closely with several other EU Battlegroups, such as the Balkan and Northern EU Battlegroups. Another flagship of the four countries 'cooperation is the V4 All-Force Logistics Support Group Command, and this is the first capability offered to NATO jointly by the Visegrad countries.

2 HISTORYCAL OF TOPIC

The first meeting of the 3 countries was taken place in Visegrad in 1335.There were three kings, John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, Charles I of Anjou (Charles Robert), King of Hungary, and Casimir III, King of Poland. The aim of the meeting was to create a friendlier atmosphere between the 3 rulers, and to set up a new commercial route that avoids Vienna. The meeting was successful, the relationship between them became better, and the first signs of a regional cooperation started to howing. They have created an alliance and a commercial cooperation.[3] *(Figure1)*

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[2] https://figyelo.hu/valo-vilag/visegradi-partnerseg-egyre-szorosabb-a-katonai-kapcsolat-10771/

[3] Stanislaw Szczur: Az 1335. évi visegrádi királyi találkozó http://acta.bibl.u http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/40546/1/aetas_1993_001_028-042.pdf szeged.hu/40546/1/aetas_1993_001_028-042.pdf Letöltés dátuma: 2021. 09. 06.

Fugire 1: three leaders of Central European kingdoms
(***https://hungarytoday.hu/wp-
content/uploads/2015/11/Chronicon_Pictum_I_Karoly_Robert.jpg***)

After more than 650 years the Visegrad *(2. figure)* cooperation was revived. With the end of the communist era in 1898 system changes have happened in the countries of the Eastern Blockas they have won back their freedom and independence. Altough it was a very happy moment for every previously occupied nation, and the day marking the freedom from communism is everywhere a national holiday, these countries were in a harsh situation. Their economy, their commercial relations was in bad shape. They had not just to rebuild them, but to build it in a completely new way: free market economy. This form together with the democracy was basically unknown for the visegrad countries, not to mention Slovakia who became independent in 1993 for the first time in its history, which means that they had to learn how to be a souvereign nation with own decision, legislation and bureaucracy as well. Besides that the main goal for the new governments were one: to participate in the western integration, more precisely to become a member of the European Union and the NATO. Since they were facing more or less the same challanges and had the same goal, they thougt it would be better to pull together.

46

Figure 2: The medieval castle of Visegrád
(https://hungarytoday.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/311260_visegrad_rajz.jpg)

So the Visegrad Group was formed again on 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the

President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, József Antall.[4]The plan broadly explained was that they will harmonize their country's efforts to fulfill the requirementsof accession defined by the western organizations *(EU and NATO)*. This meant discussion, joint efforts and supporting each other. Altough the idea was good, unfortunately did not realized as well as they imagined. The EU had negotiated with the countries separately so they could not really harmonize their actions. Besides that the cooperation soon became a competition, where all the visegrad countries rather tried to gain more advantage than to wait for or help the others. [56]

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[4] *A V4 és az Európai Unió Jövője.* Antall József Tudásközpont. 2018. 7. o.
[5] Hamburger Judit: *Közép-Európa politikai dimenziójának megvalósítási kísérlete: a visegrádi együttműködés (V4).* In: Külügyi Szemle, 2010/nyár. 43-44. o.
[6] Grúber Károly – Törő Csaba: A Visegrádi Négyek (V4) Európai Unión belüli együttműködésének szempontjai és eddigi tapasztalatai. Külügyi Szemle, 2010/nyár. 52-53. o.

This first phase of visegrad cooperation was not favourable for the security cooperation as well. Besides the reasons mentioned above, working together on the field of security and defence policy had further obstacles. The system changes caused a smaller chaos almost in every sector, and in themilitary as well. The governments had to find out how to reorganize, relocate their armed forces, what will be the new tasks of the security sector and also had to create a new security strategy. And even if they were able to work these out, there were not enough money to realize these efforts. It would have been really expensive to transform the obsolete soviet-styled military and equipmentsto something new that is more compatible with the western armies. But not just the financial resources were inadequate, but the political capacity as well. Between the debates and discussions of the accession talks and the huge work on building a functional western-like country with free market economy and democracy there were barely enough efforts remained to deal with the military sector.[78] The only thing most of them were able to manage is to lower the number of the soldiers and the equipments, which were calculated for the soviet tactics and so were absolutely inappropriate for the defense of the given country. The other thing they could do is the relocation of the forces. For example in Hungary most forces were stationed onthe western side of the country since we were on the western border of the Eastern Block. So after gaining back the leadership over the hungarian armed forces the decision makers tried to work out a more reasonable dispersion that covers the country with higher efficiency.[9] Beyond this there were not significant acts regarding the security sector. When Czechia, Hungary and Poland were getting closer to the NATO membership, security and defence cooperation became more important than before, but after reaching their goals, first in 1999, then in 2004 with the accession of Slovakia it was fading back into the background. But then this gradually changed as the circumstances became more and more favourable for security and defence cooperation. First the 2008 global financial crisis, then the occupation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia, the mass migration in 2015 etc. These occasions made the european countries to work together on the field of security, for example to develop and procure weapon systems and equipments together, to establish joint multinational

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[7] Adéla Jiřičková: *Defence Cooperation of the V4+.*Prága,Association for International Affairs, 2015. 3-

[8] . o.

[9] Szenes Zoltán: Honvédelem- védelempolitika. NKE 2020. 32. o.

units, and all in all to spend more on defence *(which was an old request of the United States towards the european NATO members)*. This was true for the visegrad countries as well. After these events they all paid more and more attention to their defence capabilities, and real joint efforts were finally made in this regard, for example the V4 EU Battlegroup. Today security and defence collaboration is a very important part of the V4 agenda, and -considering the security enviroment with the happenings like in Afghanistan or in the MENA region *(the civil war in Ethiopia)*- it will be in the future as well.

3 TOPIC INFORMATIONS

The only organization within the V4 platform is the International Visegrad Fund.[10] The aim of supporting the development of cooperation in culture, scientificexchange, research, education, exchange of students and development of cross-bordercooperation and promotion of tourism—represents the civicdimension of V4 cooperation. The objective of developing the V4 Smart Platform is to implement uniformly interoperable electronic services supporting the comfort of the citizens and the public administration that can be jointy introduced in the in the V4 membercountries, such as the provision of interoperability between mobility *(transport),* tourismservices, creation of a common, standardized electronic and mobile payment infrastructure, ensuring new generation of digitalservices in a standardized, openmodel and the provision of new market opportunities for the companies of the V4 membercountries.

V4 Think Tank Platform - Its main aim is to create a platform for regular and structureddialogue and for the exchange of views and ideas among the Visegrad experts from the non-governmental sector.[11]

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[10] We also have to mention the Visegrad Patent Institute and the V4 House in Cape Town

[11] https://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/aims-and-structure

4 BATTLEGROUP

4.1 About the Battlegroup concept

In the 2000's, more than10 years after the fall of Soviet Union, more and more signs were showing how the new world order will look like and that Francis Fukuyama was not entirely right. Altough the globalization is a great process that makes our life easier and comfortable, it also made the evolving and spreading of the problems and threats faster. Terrorist groups, smugglers, drug cartels etc. also took advantage of globalisation. With the fading borders *(especially in the EU),* the faster traffic and transport they have started to pose a more complex threat with a shorter response time and predictability. As the distance did not matter anymore, countries had to start to deal with countries in other region, even if they were thousands of kilometres away. Defending yourself was not interpretable anymore with defending your borders, but you had to take care of regions far away that could affect your security. Best example is the migrant crisis in 2015: a civil war in Syria made a huge impact on the security and unity of the european continent. Because of these effects the EU realized that if it wants to maintain the security of the continent, rapidly deployable efficient forces are needed.

So in November 2004 the EU came up with the aim of providing a general conceptual basis for the conduct of EU-led military crisis management operations *(CMO)* requiring a rapid response. The result of this idea was the Battlegroup concept. The history of EU battlegroups dates back to 1999 when the meeting of the European Council in Helsinki identified the need for the EU to have rapid reaction forces available that would represent an essential tool within EU crisis management. This session resulted in passing the Helsinki Headline Goal concept, which set up a task for the member states to prepare available and deployable rapid reaction forces[12]. The Battlegroup *(BG)* is the minimum militarily effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations. From this notion one can tell that the purpose of the BG's was that with them the EU will be able to turn up

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[12] R. Hamelink (2005). The Battlegroups Concept: Giving the EU a concrete "military" face. EuroFuture [online]. Winter, p. 8. cit. 2021. 08. 16.

in conflict zones as soon as possible to prevent the escalation. Depending on the complexity of the given conflict it would be able to solve the problem or at least to hold the line until bigger and more appropriate forces, for instance NATO or UN units arrive.

In regards of its structure: BG is a multinational unit with a framework nation. Since the forces are given by the participating countries, their size and equipments are not strictly determined becauseit depends on the capabilities of the nations. With establishing around 13 BG it would be possible to continously keep one in readiness for 6 month periods. If something happens during this period, they should be able to be deployed to everywhere within 10 days, and should be sustainable for 30 days initial operations, extendable to 120 days, if re-supplied appropriately.[13]

4.2 The Visegrad Battlegroup

The European Union *(EU)* shows incessant effort to maintain its status as a prominent security actor on the international scene. As part of this effort, in 2004 the EU introduced within the then European *(today already Common)* Security and Defence Policy *(ESDP/CSDP)* a new tool of rapid reaction - the EU battlegroups *(EU BG)*. Hence the Union sent out a clear signal that it was ready to assume a greater share of responsibility for keeping international peace and security. In 2007, these battlegroups reached full operational capability, which offered the EU a possibility to conduct two parallel operations every six months while simultaneously using two of these battlegroups.

The visegrad countries supported the concept, and they came up with the idea of creating an own BG already in 2007. But the circumstances were not favourable: none of the countries had experience, and they could not free up enough forces for this task *(for example because of the NRF and ISAF participation)*.[14] But until 2010 they gradually learned these experiences: firstly Hungary, then Slovakia and Czechia in a common BG, and finally Poland, the two latter as a framework nation. So in 2012 with the conditions given they have decided the establishment of a V4 EU Battlegroup with Poland as a framework nation. The V4 EU BG had its first

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[13] Jana Urbanovska: *Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress.* In: Obrana a strategie (Defence & Strategy), January 2014. 3-4. o.

[14] M. Paulech & J. Urbanovská (2014). Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress. cit: 2021. 08 15.

standby period from 1st January to 30th June in 2016. Its personnel was a bit more than 3900 man.Poland, as the framework nation gave the most personnel: 1870. Czechia sent 728, Hungary 716, Slovakia 466 man. Besides these forces there were several ukranian groups as a complementary force.Each country had its own role:

- Czechia was responsible for the medical and logistical providing

- Hungary had engineer, CIMIC and PSYOPS tasks

- Slovakia was responsible for the biological, radiological and nuclear protection

- Poland operated the cyber and communication systems, and also the headquarter as the framework nation[15]

Between July and December of 2019 they had their 2nd standby period with 2250 man. The share-out of the tasks was the same as previously. The participating nations ceremoniously concluded the six-month stand-by period of the V4 EU Battlegroup in Krakow on 8 January 2020. Soldiers from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia were also present at the closing ceremony. Major General Dr. Slawomir Kowalski, Commander of the V4 EU Battlegroup Operations Command, thanked the participants for their cooperative, high-quality work and stressed that although the six-month stand-by period was over, it was planned to continue in 2023[16]. *(3. figure)*

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[15] The Visegrad Group's Role In The European Security System. https://euro-sd.com/2019/05/articles/13041/thehttps://euro-sd.com/2019/05/articles/13041/the-visegrad-groups-role-in-the-european-security-system/visegrad-groups-role-in-the-european-security-system/ Letöltés dátuma: 2021. 09. 06.

[16] https://honvedelem.hu/hirek/hazai-hirek/bizonyitott-a-v4-eu-harccsoport.html, Zsófia Halász lieutenant, 2020. január 13.

3. figure: Nations ceremoniously,
*(https://honvedelem.hu/media/cache/width_1200_p/images/media/5f222b6becb8a0008
28381.j pg)*

4.3 The results of the V4 Battlegroup

It is not easy to judge the efficiency of the Battlegroups, since none of them were deployed so far. Without pragmatical experience we can just guess if they would stand a ground or not in sharp position. Thats also true of the V4 BG. However having a joint battlegroup has a lot of advantage even so. Forming a BG was a good opportunity to prove their willingness *(and ability)* in the protection of the EU and the Euro-Atlantic area.

Nowadays the first thing that comes up in one's mind is the debates between the EU and V4 (for instance on migration, rule of law etc.), even though there are various fields where the visegrad countries are active supporters and good partners. Security and defence policy is one of these, where the V4 is backing the endeavours of the EU on building a strategic autonomy, to raise the defense budget and so on. Unfortunately this is a less popular topic compared to the ones where are harsh debates, but hopefully in the future this will change as the topic gets more and more important.

The BG concept is fostering the interoperability between the 4 country, which is a very important and useful factor. In todays world the states and international actors have to conduct a lot of missions abroad. This means a completely new enviroment, landscape and in most cases a new culturefor the forces sent abroad. So being part of a multinational unit and learning all the experiences and knowledge of working in this kind of enviroment is a really useful thing. Not to mention that it makes the increasment of interoperability easier, which is also a relevant and a cost-saving step to a stronger and deeper cooperation. Besides that a battlegroup is a very good indicator that shows where the participating countries at at the developement of their security system and military or of the common projects. It also shows those gaps that need to be filled both on national and international level. Like this the result will be a better harmonized and more pragmatical and effective cooperation.

Considering the whole security cooperation of the visegrad countries, V4 BG is clearly the biggest and the only tangible successful project. It has a lot of advantage for all the member countries and also the EU/NATO can benefit from it.

4.4 The V4 security cooperation

Despite the successful setting-up of the V4 BG and having other ongoing projects in the field of securitycooperation the Visegrad Group'sachievments are confined. Although they have other initiatives like regular joint trainings and exercises (via *Training and ExerciseStrategy and Midterm Plan of Training Opportunities)* none of the significant endeavors like V4 Military Academy or the joint procurements and modernisations were realised (except of course the BG). If we review the efforts and attempts of the past years, we can barely find any success. For instance:

- the joint procurement of Mobile 3D Radars was failed in 2014,

- the trade of RosomakArmoredPersonnelCarriers between Slovakia and Poland did not realized in 2015. After the failure both parties were blaiming each other.

- instead of the joint modernisation of old soviet-era helicpoters th countries choose other options

This failures are not just sorrowful because they could have been really fruitful for all the countires, but because every one of them just increased the mistrust among the 4 countries, making it harder and harder for the next

project to be realized. As the DAV4 report stressed in 2012, the trust is one of the key issue for a successful cooperation. To overcome the mistrust stemming from the failed projects, they need some smaller success and positive feedback to gradually gain back the confidence towards each other. These projects do not have to bear big importance, the main aim is to achieve something together. A good example of this is the joint acquisiton of 300,000 rounds of ammo in 2021.[17] With small initial steps like this we can count on larger achievements (on middle or long term) in the future.

5 WHAT NEXT?

As we have seen above, the security and defence cooperation between the visegrad countries is struggling right now. Despite this fact we should not bury and mourn it. The circumstances are quite favourable: the security enviromentsignificantlyworsening *(most recent example is Afghanistan),* the need for security cooperation and for BGs will grow in the future. The exigency and the necessity of this topic will be more significant. Besides that V4 BG is a great platform for commonprogression, for developingaccurate capabilities and so it is worth for the member countries to keep up with the cooperation and to try to maintain it, altough they have to work a lot in this regard.

Also an important factor, that the decision-makers of the visegradcountries have the politicalwillingness for maintaining and boosting the collaboration in security policy. Until it remains like this, the chance of a closer cooperation will endure. And if in some of the visegrad countries the goverment will change inthe future, we can still hope that despite the contradictory political view they will find the V4 collaboration worth to preserve.

On the whole the four countries have all the chance to get to a higher level of cooperation, if they remain on the path they have stepped on. The extern

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[17] V4 defense ministers discuss joint purchase of ammunition, foreign missionshttp://www.xinhuanet.com/english/europe/2020-06/25/c_139164847.htm and V4-VÉDELMI

MINISZTEREK: A HADSEREGEK A JÁRVÁNY IDEJÉN IS

BIZONYÍTOTTAKhttps://demokrata.hu/magyarorszag/v4-vedelmi-miniszterek-a-hadseregek-a-jarvany-idejenhttps://demokrata.hu/magyarorszag/v4-vedelmi-miniszterek-a-hadseregek-a-jarvany-idejen-is-bizonyitottak-260019/is-bizonyitottak-260019/

pressure of the security enviroment will grow, the EU and NATO will support and help the regional endeavors like V4, and (at least for now) all the four goverment are committed to make the Visegrad Group stronger. It only depends on how capable they will be to overcome the mistrust and build the confidence that will give a stable basis for the future collaboration. *(4. figure)*

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Figure 4: V4 Nations flag (*https://www.30yearsofv4.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/shutterstock_1485791840b-web.jpg*)

6 SUMMARY

All in all we can say that despite the contradictions the security and defence is one of the most important field of the visegrad cooperation. It has its own structures *(for instance at training and exercises)* and regular discussion and meetings on bilateral, regional and international level *(EU NATO).* With their active and committed behavior towards the security of the european continent is exemplary. It is not a coincidence that the baltic countries started to follow the V4 in some aspects, for example they are making joint declarations now just like the visegrad members. The central asian countries are also looking at the V4 as a good example of regional cooperation. This is a great opportunity for all 4 countries to represent its view stronger or to have access to larger volume projects which would not be accessible as individual. They are playing an important role in the security of the European Union, especially since they are border

countries.[18] With the increasing migration flow their importance will be larger, just like their weight in european politics. We really hope that the countires can overcome the existent and the future obstacles and hardships and they can become a strong bastion of the European Union.

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CULTURAL (AND OTHER) SPECIFICITIES
OF THE V4 COUNTRIES

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The history of Slavic and Non-Slavic nations living in the heartland of Europe- the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians, has been intertwined for centuries. According to some records, the Slavic tribes, which were later divided into further parts, including the Polish, Czech and Slovak nations, appeared in what is now Central Europe as early as the 6th century AD (Halecki, 1980, p. 14). The Hungarians settled in Pannonia, in part of present-day Hungary, a few hundred years later, in 896 AD. From this period onwards, the Hungarian people formed a border between the southern and western Slavs, in close proximity to them. The histories of countries and former kingdoms have intertwined over the centuries, sometimes with a common ruler forming one country,[1] usually with the same views, and, in most of the cases, with very similar destinies.

One of the most striking differences between the Visegrad 4 nations is that Hungary is the only non-Slavic nation in the group. It is a well-known fact, the Hungarian language is very different from its Slavic counterparts. Hungarian is a member of the Uralic language family[2], which makes it completely unique and incomprehensible to its neighbours in the Central European region (Kiss – Gerstner - Hegedus, 2013, p. 11). Unlike Hungarian, the Slovak, Czech and Polish languages are very similar. This

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[1] For example, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which existed from 1867 to 1918 and included, among others, parts of present-day Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland.
[2] Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family; along with the Ob-Ugrian Hantic and Mansi creating the Ugric branch of the language family.

is, of course, since all these languages are of Slavic[3] origin and have interacted with each other over the centuries, which has resulted in many common words in these languages (see Comrie - Corbett, 1993).[4]

In several aspects Visegrad Group is heterogeneous, not only linguistically, but also ethnically. All four countries have many ethnic minorities, mainly due to the numerous small ethnic groups that settled in Central Europe centuries ago.

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[3] Czech, Slovak and Polish are among the West Slavic languages.

[4] It is also interesting to note that although the Hungarian language is completely different from the named Slavic languages, Hungarian has adopted a lot of expressions from them (and vice-versa, Slavic languages borrowed original Hungarian expressions). This process began with the settlement of the Hungarians, as early as the first contact with their Slavic neighbours from whom they had much to learn. This includes, among other things, words related to animal husbandry, agriculture, crafts, and the names of the plants they had newly encountered. The borrowing of words continued afterwards, but nowadays these are mostly regional borrowings, mainly from a particular dialect or area. In the present day, there are also a number of Slavic words in the Hungarian language, which are mainly used by Hungarians living as minorities in neighbouring countries (Fazekas, 2017, pp. 197 – 200). Therefore, we can conclude that despite the fact that the Visegrad 4 is a heterogeneous group, there is an intense cultural exchange among the nations. From different perspectives, there are similarities which bring the V4 member countries closer together.
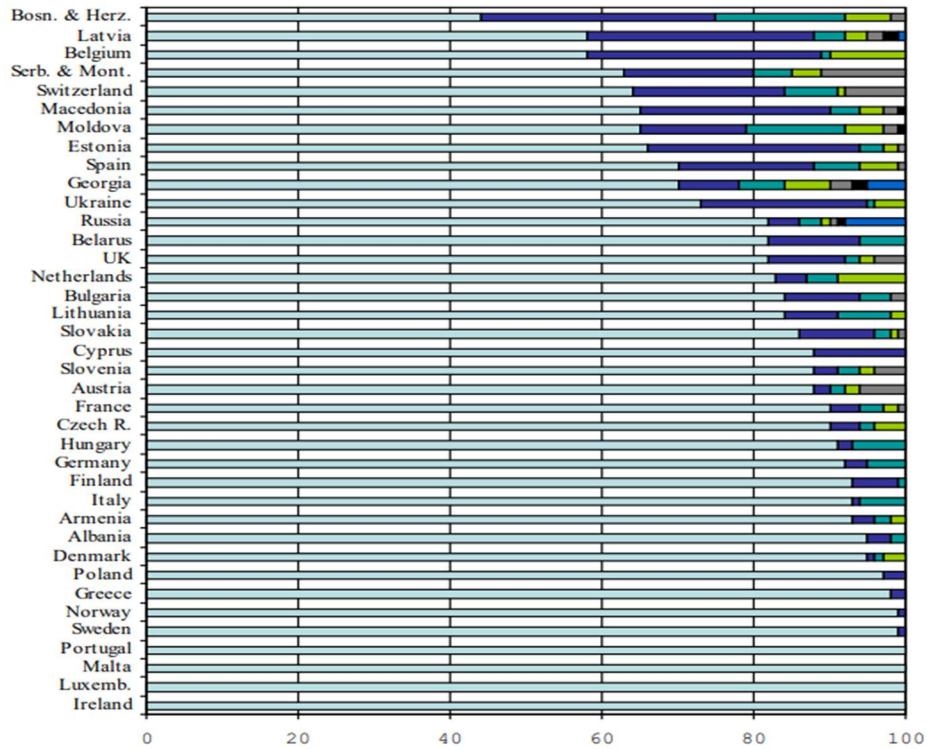
The table reveals that the Visegrad countries are somewhere in the middle of the European average in terms of the number of minorities. It also suggests that of these countries, Slovakia has the highest proportion of minorities, followed by the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland.[5]

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[5] To be exact, according to the 2001 census, Slovakia has a population of over 5 300 000 inhabitants. The proportion of ethnic and national minorities in the country's population is 14.22%. Hungarians (520,528) make up the largest proportion, followed by Roma (89,920), Czechs (44,620), as well as Rusyns, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, Croats, and other even smaller minorities (Dohányos – Lelkes - Tóth, 2003, p. 15).

Also, according to the census of 2001, there are currently more than 10 190 000 people living in Hungary. 4.34% of the population belong to a minority. The largest minority is the Roma (205,720), followed by German (120,344), Slovak (39,266), Croat (25,730), Romanian (14,781) and other smaller minorities (Tóth - Vékás, 2001, pp. 2-4).

As can be seen, the V4 countries are very diverse, with so many different minorities composing their populations, typical by a large number of minorities in their neighbouring countries (the Slovak minority in Hungary, the Hungarian, Czech and Polish minorities in Slovakia, the Slovak, Polish and Hungarian minorities in the Czech Republic, or the Czech minorities in Poland etc.), concentrated in border areas close to their mother country. This is probably due to the fact that the borders of the Central European countries and indeed the borders of the present V4 countries have changed a lot over the last centuries, but the people there live in relatively the same areas.[6]
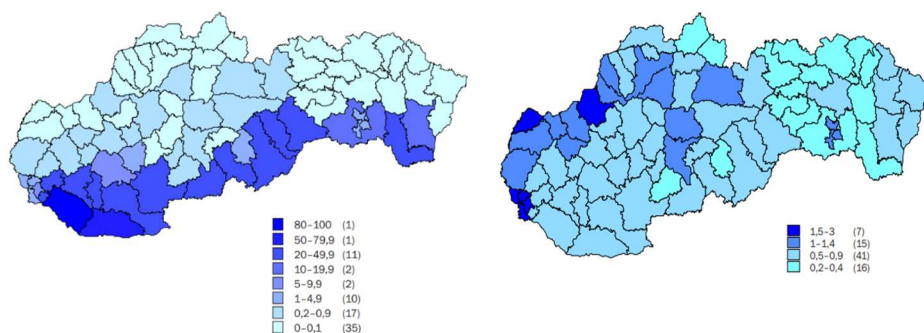
The Hungarian minority in Slovakia and the Czech minority in Slovakia (Dohányos - Lelkes – Tóth, 2004)

A survey in the same year estimated the Czech population at over 10 200 000. The largest minority is the Slovak (193,190) one, followed by Polish (51,968), German (39,106), Ukrainian (22,112), Hungarian (14,672) and Roma (11,746) minorities (Šamanová, 2005, p. 10).
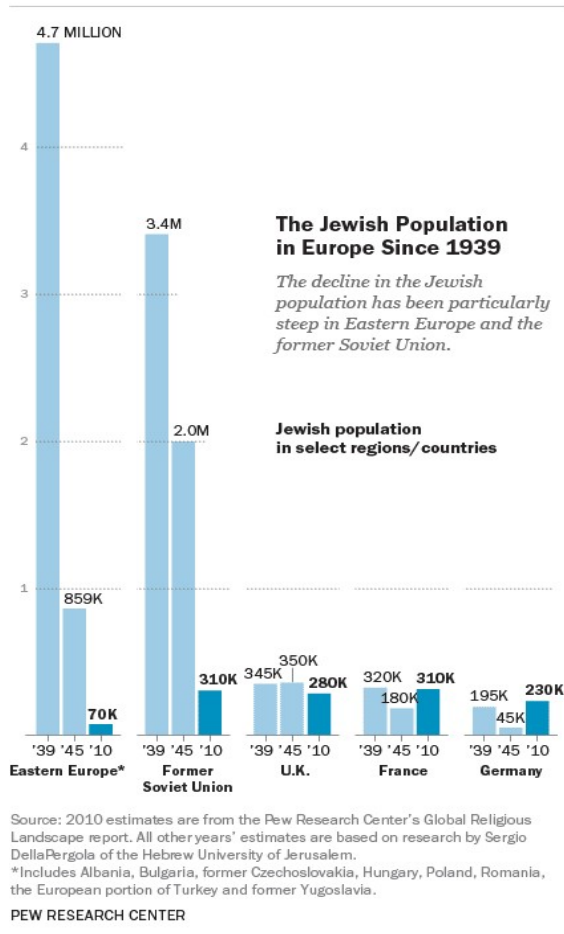
Poland, the largest country in the V4, has a population of more than 38 200 000 according to 2002 statistics. Like other Central European countries, Poland is home to many ethnic groups. The largest of these is Silesian/Czech (173,153), followed by German (152,897), Belarusian (48,737), Ukrainian (30,957), Roma (12,855) and other smaller minorities (Babiński, 2004, p. 141).

[6] Except the population exchange e.g. between Hungary and Czechoslovakia as a backdrop of the quite recent intervention into demography of this area (see Bakker 1998) and other historical events, which gave the region its distinctive character.

1. Spiritual culture in the region of Central Europe

Another aspect where similarities can also be found between the V4 countries is religion. For centuries, the Catholic religion has been a dominant part of the image of today's V4 countries. It was already a prevalent religion in Europe when the nations in question were settled and had a major influence on the formation, governance, and history of the first states of the present V4 countries. Another important milestone for these countries is the creation of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which covered a large part of today's Central Europe, including the V4 countries. This empire, ruled by the House of Habsburg, a famously Catholic ruling family, further strengthened the power of the Catholic religion in this area (see Halecki, 1980). However, it was history as well as the political and other trends of the 20th century, that have greatly reshaped the religious views of people in Central Europe, which pushed the V4 countries apart: while only about 10% of Czechs say they are Roman-Catholics, it is almost 90% in Poland.

Before the World War II, the area was also a home to the largest number of Jews in Europe. This religious group has greatly shaped, enriched, and embellished the present V4 countries, economically, socially, and culturally.

The Jewish Population in Europe Since 1939

The decline in the Jewish population has been particularly steep in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Jewish population in select regions/countries

Source: 2010 estimates are from the Pew Research Center's Global Religious Landscape report. All other years' estimates are based on research by Sergio DellaPergola of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
*Includes Albania, Bulgaria, former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the European portion of Turkey and former Yugoslavia.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Lipka, 2015)

As can be seen, since 1939 Jewish society in Central Europe has been rapidly declining. Fortunately, there are several organizations working to preserve and revitalize Jewish culture in Europe.

The Visegrad Fund and Projects Realization

Based on previously mentioned common features of the region, Central European cultures carries a specific ethnic code which makes the V4 grouping distinct. Although the main purpose of V4 foundation was

64

political and economic cooperation, preservation and promotion of the cultures[7] became an important sphere of interest as well.

For this purpose, in 2000 the governments of the Visegrad Group countries founded an international donor organization – the Visegrad Fund. The intensification of regional cooperation in the sphere of culture, science, public relations, health care, sport etc. is the key idea of the Fund. It provides scholarships and grants for projects in the spheres of culture, science, research, education, exchanges of artists and students, or projects oriented towards cross-border cooperation and tourism development.

Annually every V4 member country makes an equal contribution of €2 million to the Fund. Also, some other donor countries like Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States have provided extra €10 million to support the Fund since 2012. Then, all these €18 million subsequently earmarks for grants and scholarships for residents of Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

The Fund supports not only inner cooperation (between member countries) but works with Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership region countries as well. This is to expand international cooperation and broaden political dialogue, but also to provide a wide range of opportunities to travel, study or visit surrounding regions in order to enrich mutual partnerships and relations and create a platform for cultural exchange.

The Fund provides 3 different kinds of scholarships:

Visegrad Grants support regional partnerships among civil society organizations, public institutions, municipalities and education centres in Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic only.

The next are Visegrad+ Grants are intended for cooperation between the Visegrad, the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia,

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[7] We intentionally speak of the cultures (in its plural form). This is due to the respect of individualism and uniqueness of the national cultures and their local variations. On the other hand, the links among them are so strong, that they greatly contribute to the formation and straightening of the idea of „central-europeanism" – the idea of belonging to the group of nations with similar historical, spatial and cultural features with the connection to Central European region, helping to form a distinctive category of its supranational identity.

Moldova and Ukraine) and the Western Balkan region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) countries. These grants support projects which suggest solutions to democratization and transformation issues in selected countries.[8]

The third and last type of grants were founded for projects which deal with annual strategic priorities of the Visegrad Group. The list of strategic priorities is updated annually and can be found on the official website of the Visegrad Fund. This most recent strategic priorities focus on:

returning to the roots of the Visegrad cooperation in the context of Visegrad group's 30th anniversary,

COVID theme and post-COVID recovery,

popularizing regional tourism to and within the V4 countries.

By the end of 2020 the Visegrad Fund has supported more than 6 000 projects and provided about 2 400 scholarships and artistic residencies which is approximately 96 million €. The Fund supports development in the sphere of democratic values and media, public policy, innovation, and social development as well.

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[8] The dialogue with the Eastern European countries continues with the V4 as a mediator of the issue.

Projects by objectives

8.28%
4.72%
10.88%
5.76%
12.40%
19.5%
38.92%

5848 projects
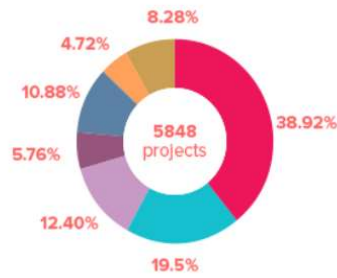
■ Culture and common indentity
■ Education and capacity building
■ Regional development, environment, tourism
■ Democratic values and media
■ Public policy and institutional partnership
■ Innovation, R&D, entrepreneurship
■ Social development

Funding by territory

2.74%
12.87%
3.52%
20.13%
20.39%
19.94%
20.41%

95 million €
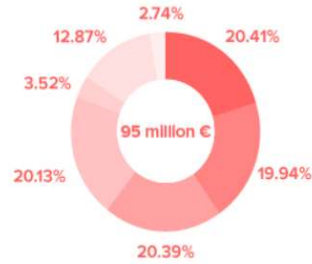
■ Czechia ■ Hungary ■ Poland ■ Slovakia
■ Western Balkan countries ■ Eastern Partnership countries
■ other non-V4

(www.20visegradfund.com)

By providing scholarships, grants and artistic residencies it supports artists and activists not only from V4 countries but Western Balkans or the Eastern Partnership countries as well. It gives an opportunity to discover new talents and represent the local culture to world society. Out of all the successful projects supported by the Visegrad Fund we would like to mention digitalization of parliamentary documents V4 Digital Parliamentary Library+ (Austria also joined), project *VisegRUN: Let's Run for V4 Health & Integration*, whose goal is to advance V4 citizens' physical activity & pro-healthy behaviour through developing joint V4 sports and health promotion initiatives while contributing to regional integration and cooperation, but also environmentally oriented projects such as *Green Future* or pandemic related project called *Does well-being matter? Higher education teachers during Covid-19 pandemic*, which raises concerns about the high workload of university teachers in COVID-19 era.

As demonstrated, at the third decennium of existence of the V4 group, it is already possible to define this alliance as an organized regional cooperation in Central Europe and even beyond its borders, representing the V4 as a new "brand". Nowadays we can see the results of member countries' collaboration in other different projects carried on together, from the first major achievement of the alliance: the Central European Agreement of Free

67

Trading letting the member states to trade between each other with simplified duties and restrictions, to the Action Plan of the Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation, which specifically considers eight subareas: V4 EU battlegroup, defence planning cooperation, joint training and exercises, joint procurement and defence industry, military education, joint airspace protection, coordination of positions and communication strategy (www.visegradgroup.eu).

Given the political nature of the cooperation between these countries, the decisions and actions taken together are driven by their common interests and goals. Nonetheless, according to T. Strážay (2014), the V4 should not be considered as a block where there is no space for disagreement; there is still a lack of regional institutional co-operation because of the not full inclination by all the four countries. Still too few documents and political actions are present in order to constitute a solid institutional framework for this area.

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CREATION AND (RE)SHAPING OF THE IMAGE OF THE V4

LENKA TKÁČ-ZABÁKOVÁ

Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (as cultural entities as well as modern democratic states) with their 65 million inhabitants have always been a significant constituent of the European civilization. These nations share distinctive cultural values, which is preserved and strengthened over the years. In order to not only protect, but also to expand and promote their cohesion and cooperation within the group of "The Four" in the field of politics, culture, education, science, exchange of information and other ever-expanding agenda, they formed the Visegrad Group. This (sub)regional cooperation, also officially referred just as V4 or Visegrad Four, is similar to BENELUX or Nordic Cooperation programme in many ways: common interests and ambitions led to the actions of these groupings, together they aim to strengthen stability and prosperity in the regions.
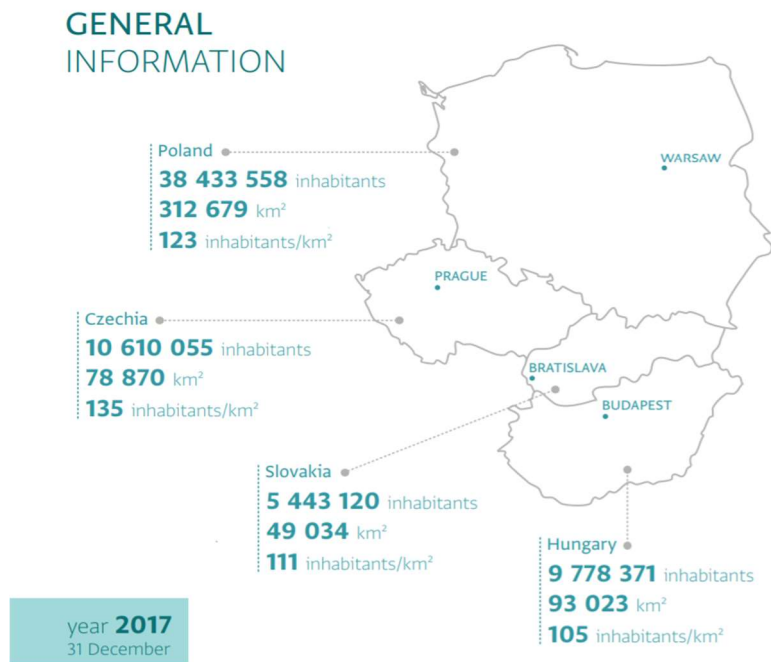

Figure 1. (Source: Selected indicators of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, 2019, p. 12)

Visegrad cooperation provides a flexible platform, which helps to coordinate cooperation between member states; mainly in political and business affairs;[1] they mostly deal with common objectives from the spheres of international relations and economy. On regular summits and meetings of the countries' leaders (as well as non-governmental representatives and their teams),[2] several ad hoc areas of cooperation are discussed to identify, whether common positions exist and to see if mutual policy would be viable and more effective for the partners. Shared interests of the V4 partners are easier to formulate and promote as well as such union of countries is more likely to create space for a discussion within the bigger structures, namely EU. "*It is no exaggeration to say that Visegrad Cooperation has thrived during the ten years since EU accession and that nowadays the V4 undoubtedly regard their 'regional alliance' as an indispensable tool for their diplomacy and a useful asset for maximising the benefits of EU membership. As well as embedded internal cooperation, and cooperation within EU, the VG has affirmed its identity as a vehicle that supports the reform and EU integration of its neighbours to the south and east and is undoubtedly a real player in this dimension of the EU's enlargement and foreign policy agenda*" (Dangerfield 2014, p. 87). It is important to stress, that this regional grouping is based not only on future mutual interests, but there are also numerous common elements, that these joint ambitions raised from – in the first place, past political experience with non-democratic regimes, then also mostly Slavic origin, shared culture and religious foundation etc. This is why the visions and plans of the supranational forms of a partnership within the Central European region have roots far older than the idea of the V4. The most dominant historical, cultural and socio-political aspects contribute to the creation of the image of the Visegrad Group as a whole, yet still respecting individuality of each cooperating partner. Hence the image creation, different opinion on

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[1] V4 was created primarily to achieve a certain degree of "western" integration – to leave behind communist past and enter European and even transatlantic structures such as European Union and NATO (see Havel 2006, p. 54).

[2] It includes annual meetings of the presidents, frequent ministerial and parliamentary meetings. Different academic and scientific teams also meet in order to discuss on specific issues like environmental policies or pandemic looms etc. (see Dangerfield 2014, p. 74). These meetings are also functional in terms of exchanging valuable experience and preferences to find common ground for different problem solutions, universal for the members of the alliance.

ourselves (autoimage) or the image of "the other" (heteroimage) can be identified. They can take the character of stereotypes, prejudices, myths or clichés, which have often been cultivated over the generations. In fact, they do not necessarily reflect the reality, moreover they can be rather an expression of power interest or intellectual discourse of various ethnic or social groups opinions, created with certain intentions (commonly to promote or, on the contrary, discredit one culture over another). For the illustration, we could name popular image of German/Swiss high product quality standard in a contrast to Polish or Chinese one, usually referred as poor. It is a matter of fact, that people naturally associate some specific characteristics they would hear or read about a certain country, its citizens or their reputation. It is more appropriate to call them (cultural) images, which are often based on (someone else´s) impression of the nation or its representatives (or even a single individual having bonds to a certain group), not necessarily coming out of our own personal experience. *"…The notion that the images and imagotypical structures were not a reflection or so, of real collective qualities of the communities in question … but fictions, i.e. ideas that at some time in the course of history emerged in the countries or communities concerned. These ideas were partly handed down from generation to generation and they were in the long run even able to produce effects completely different from the original opinions and intentions of those who started them"* (Dyserinck 2003, p. 5). Looked at more closely, image creation can be related to prejudice: preconceived opinion that is often based on limited facts; preconception, prejudgement, preconceived idea can be used as its synonyms. It is fundamentally necessary that investigation of its formation and perception is cross-disciplinary; using valuable knowledge from a field of ethnopsychology, anthropology, historiography and others. Both heteroimages and autoimages should be critically assessed and appropriately evaluated before they are used to generalize character of any ethnic, nation, social or other group. In a context of the V4, several questions can be asked: What is a general image of the Visegrad Group? How did this image evolve? What is it based on? Some of the answers can be found in older initiatives along with determinants, which greatly inspired the creation of the V4 union as we know it nowadays. These concepts and integration strategies are based on facets and interests common for the member states, which are the fundament of the image or vibe creation.

Popular and academic literature, but also individual viewpoints of different public figures or their groups, provide various different perceptions of the V4 region. Some focus only on the fundamental (but essential) overlook of the history, basic geographical and cultural features, while others provide

comprehensive analysis of their past and contemporary geopolitical identity, their ideological vision and other important aspects are taken in consideration. The phenomenon of Central European unity appears to be truly a bottomless subject of interest of many research fields, which often deal with following (or similar) questions:

- **What** are the interconnections that naturally have been leading to the common interests of these countries in spheres of international politics, economy, culture etc.?
- **Where** did the idea of such mutual cooperation and integration within the Central European region come from?
- **Why** are the countries of the V4 so close one to another?

When taking a retrospective insight of the above-mentioned partial subjects, explaining the basis of the V4 group in its historical aspect should never be omitted. Realizing the common ground of the Central European unity helps to better understand the depth of their mutual interaction. It is important to emphasize the fact, that the presented roots have been lasting, regardless the political and other circumstances, for several hundred years of tradition, contributing on current vision of the region.

Historical, geographical and cultural introspection as a common ground of the V4
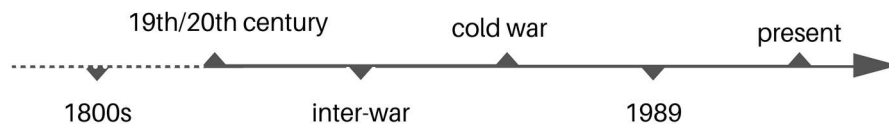
Figur 2. Origin of the conceptions of Central European unity

Central Europe – the term referring to the V4 allies – was understood differently in 1800s, at the turn of the 19th century, in the inter-war period, during the cold war or after 1989. There are several stable interlinks between Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which have not only common but also strong cultural and historical heritage. The nations

of this area, however they are now living in their own independent democratic states (plus some state-less nations such as Ruthenians or Kashubians), have always been having close relations based on some of the mutual features, which can be easily identified: their (mostly) Slavic origin and language (except Finno-Ugric Hungarians), similar material and spiritual culture and some other determinants, which lead to some of countries common objectives.

- Spatiality

Figure 3- Major geographical features of Central Europe

By the description of O. Krejčí, Central Europe occupies the lowlands from the North and Balkan from the South (2000, p. 13). Considering the geographical features of the region, it is interesting to see that there are no natural formations creating relief which would outline this cultural area. Of course, there are Carpathians and its basin, majestic river Danube or Polish Vistula and many other diverse landforms albeit they don't specify the

border of Central Europe.[3] They only run through the region and expand far beyond its mental borders. For this reason, their actual borders cannot be identified by their natural character. If attempting to state a border of any cultural area, there are many more factors than just geographical features to be taken into consideration. In fact, with the regard to the V4, we can get closer to the real limits of this subregion when trying to identify its limits with political state borders of individual member states.[4] Even so they naturally create rather a transitional zone between the surrounding cultural and geopolitical regions than any lucid line; the border between Central Europe, which (in our understanding) identifies with the Visegrad Four, i.e. excludes Austria, Germany, Croatia, Slovenia or other often included countries, and Eastern European countries of Balkan Peninsula or Western Europe as the most notable. Depending on a concept, there are several other ways to mark out the countries of the Central European region. Due to mostly historical and political reasons (yet to be explained in the following passages of this text), south-eastern countries such as Croatia, Slovenia or other states of Balkan do not fit into the concept of relatively homogenous Central Europe neither from the point of view of the distance from the "centre of a political interest" during specific periods of time (World War I and World War II followed by the cold war between 1947 - 1991). Spatial features within "the Old World"[5] – with the relation to centre of where the Iron Curtain once divided West from the East, shifted the level of international and even world interests in the second half of the 20th century towards several locations, e.g. former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland as the westernmost expansion of the socialist world.[6] The V4 countries as an inland territory, with the only access to the sea on

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[3] Maybe except the Baltic sea to the North.

[4] Even though there are notable diasporas of, for instance, ethnic Hungarians living just behind the border of Romania (making above 6% of the total Romanian population) and so Hungary does not fail to look after the interests of these expats living in neighbouring countries. The same applies to Slovaks, Czechs or Poles living abroad – they create numerous ethnic diasporas, ethnic enclaves and migrant networks, which are highly concentrated in surrounding states, especially their bordering territories (within or outside the V4), even so they still work on cultivating their cultural memory and preservation of their national identity.

[5] An idiom often used to refer to Europe.

[6] Balkan was undoubtfully another one of them.

the north of Poland, were "bombarded" from both western world and socialist states, namely the Nazi-Germany interests from just before and during the WW II, later the intervention of the Soviet Union during Hungarian Uprising (1956) or the Warsaw Pact invasion carried out in order to abort liberalization movement known in a history as Prague Spring (1968). These and other common past challenges the region overcame shaped up a collective memory of its inhabitants in a specific way.

- Historical background

None of the world's nations and countries are free from their past. It is no different in the case of Central Europe. There are several major milestones which determine its current form, cultural creation, political thinking and mentality of its citizens. Austrian biologist and economist Robert Th. Kaestner (in Trávníček 2009, p. 301) defined these 24 historical events, which he considered to be the most important in the past of the region with the regard to the subject of Central European identity and image creation; these historical determinants resulted in a current condition of the region, which is in the centre of our attention:

- 1355 the reign of Charles IV
- 1458/1490 Constitution of the Hungarian Empire
- 1520 reforming activities of M. Luther
- 1526 the Battle of Mohacs
- 1620/1621 the Battle of White Mountain
- 1569 - 1795 Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth
- 1745 Prussia takes Silesia
- 1772 / 1793 / 1795 partitions of Poland
- 1848/1849 revolution in France and Central Europe
- 1866 Battle of Königgrätz[7]
- 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise
- 1918 Dissolution of Austria-Hungary
- 1919/1920 Treaty of Paris
- 1933 Hitler's rise to power
- 1938 Munich Agreement
- 1945 Yalta conference
- 1956 Hungarian Uprising
- 1968 Prague Spring

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[7] Hradec Králové in Czech.

- 1979/1980 The first pope's pilgrimage to Poland and the establishment of Solidarity
- 1989/1990 the fall of the Iron Curtain
- 1999 EU entry discussions

Many more events, especially from before the 14th century as well as the formation of Visegrad group itself as one of the most recent ones, could be added. This brief overlook of the past is valuable in order to not only remind ourselves of the past, but respecting the selection of Kaestner, it also shows what elements should be taken into account when trying to find characteristics of the nature of the region – past territorial and power interests, major reformation processes, national movements but also religion related historical events etc.

It frequently occurs, that small states (just like the ones located in Central Europe) are existentially dependant on configuration of worldwide political relations and arrangements larger or "more important" countries decided on. As it has already been mentioned, the strategic placing of the area also made the region a target of influence of both Eastern and Western political powers. The events in 1980s and 90s, when citizens' movements in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were decisive in overturning the political order in Central Europe, resulted in the most recent vast political changes. Consolidation of the region started only in late 1990s: in the second half of this decade Poland[8] "*was convinced of its leading role in the group*" (Bauerová 2018, p. 122). Instability was partly caused by the domestic problems with e.g. organized crime. At this time, Slovakia was not even yet invited to the V4 discussions and the EU scepticism among Czechs culminated. As previously mentioned, it took a long period of time until "locals" managed to put together all the impulses and ideas and made

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[8] Poland is the largest of the four member states with its 40 million inhabitants and it has a long external border, which was used for the transfer of the large group of immigrants from Belarus, Ukraine or Moldavia. This was one of the major problems of not only Poland or the V4 states, but it was a concern of the EU, too. After the joint policy initiative known as Eastern Partnership established in 2009, special political relations and a cooperation was founded with a possibility of the future visa liberalization with the eastern EU neighbours. It was the group of Visegrad countries as the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004, which not only pointed out but pressurized the need of the discussions between Eastern European states and EU members to be started.

them grow them into real plans lead by their common interests, which are now developed within the agenda of the Visegrad group. Under the flag of the V4, the member states stopped being a passive element of the continental political sphere and began to actively contribute to the ideas and solutions, expressing their interest in solving all-European issues.
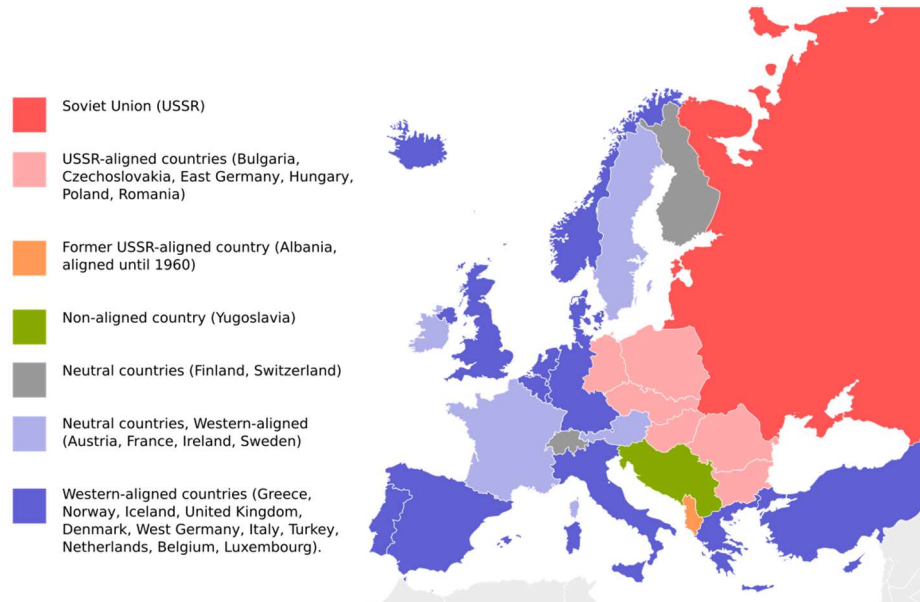

Figure 4. Spheres of influence

(**https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/350dea88a91c41a8a1f1a7a04bd93823**)

- Cultural assets

The idea of Central Europe doesn't only consider objective geographical or political characteristics. It is founded on spiritual essence of both Slavic and Non-Slavic nations living in the region, severely related to common values, morals and beliefs represented by diverse spiritual and religious traditions (mostly Judeo-Christian heritage), democratic style of leadership, art and customs, which supposedly embody the Central-European spirit. Despite the "dual origin" of the dominant nations living in the region (Slavic Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Finno-Ugric Hungarians), due to the intensive official but also informal (civic) cooperation and close relations between the nations, the level of culture and language exchange, the cultural area of Central Europe possess similar cultural orientation and

appear to be relatively homogenous also with the similar evolution.[9] As little puzzle pieces coming together, this all contributes to the image creation of the Central Europe. While cultural characteristics are presented daily in various ways (traditions, architecture, literature, music, clothing, cuisine etc.), in order to deeper understand merits of the common problems, historical and spatial aspects are very complex and they have a history of their own. At this point, 30 years after the establishment of the Visegrad Group, the early initiatives of the unity of the V4 should not be only remembered, moreover elucidated further. In the following part, more and lesser known integrating ideas dating back to 1800s are presented. We can take several paths to follow when categorizing different concepts of what Central European unity could mean. The geopolitical theories such as (1) pan-Germanism as a movement whose goal was the political unification of all people speaking German or Germanic languages as the whole branch of Indo-European languages, (2) pan-Slavism which recognized a common ethnic background among the various Slavs as the largest European ethno-linguistic group, the movement was formed by intellectuals, scholars and poets developing their sense of national identity,[10] (3) Austroslavism as an

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[9] Numerous recollections of the common fundaments of the regional culture can also be spotted in the most popular cultural artefacts. In the field of film art and history of its production in individual countries, an extraordinary number of parallels and similarities can be found. In the interwar period, Central European cinematography was generally considered rather the periphery of world cinematography, after the Second World War they were nationalized and then misused to spread state propaganda. In the 1960s, thanks to the weakening of censorship and the rise of a generation of progressive filmmakers, the film production of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland became extremely inspiring and appreciated at the global level. After the fall of socialism in 1989, they all underwent an economic transformation and a general decline in audience interest. In the last decades, we have seen an increase in film cooperation among four countries. The titles of co-productions, such as *Bathory* (dir. Juraj Jakubisko, Slovakia - Czechia - Hungary - Great Britain, 2008), *I served the King of England* (dir. Jiří Menzel, Czech Republic - Slovakia - Germany - Hungary, 2006), *Strawberry Wine* (dir. Dariusz Jabłoński, Poland - Slovakia, 2008), The Red Captain (dir. Michal Kollár, Slovakia - Czech Republic - Poland, 2016) and many more, draw on a common history and socially relevant themes in the Central European environment (Timko 2019, p. 2 - 4).

[10] In both cases, prefix "pan-" refers to "all, all together, involving everyone".

ideological programme of the Slavs under Habsburg rule regarded the Austrian empire as some kind of the optimum political framework for the existence of the Slavs of central Europe and (4) federal organization of the Central European area, all appeared as early as 19th century. All of these ideas form an opinion, that self-sufficient economic policy can be pursued only by larger economic units (Doležalová 2014, p. 61). It is important to mention, that the 18th and 19th centuries were a period of time, when in Central Europe a struggle for national emancipation and (democratic) rights was yet escalating. General national and political consolidation of the region was only at its beginning, when the idea of uniting independent nations living the region started to appear. Countries of the Central Europe were interested in creating some kind of multi-state model with healthy mutual international strategies. This was also when the centres of world geopolitical powers outside Europe started to shape. Only supranational economic groups would help to build competitive dominance along with large economies such as US or Russia. This was an impulse for a creation of larger alliance of states and their nations within but also beyond European continent. It was in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when local Central European (geo)politics came under pressure from the rise of national ideologies in Germany and from Russian expansion, too. Czech representatives such as František Ladislav Rieger, Karel Havlíček and František Augustin Brauner, who were considered to be liberal, preferred constitutional system and worked on gaining political autonomy for the Czechs in the Habsburg Empire. Czech historian and politician, one of the influential personas of the Czech National Revival, who is also considered to be the founder of the new Czech historiography **František Palacký** (1798 - 1876) was the central figure in early days of planning federalization of the region. Palacký believed that the region of Central and Eastern Europe represents a bridge between East and West. He describes it as multiethnic space alongside the river Danube, which needs to be united in some of form of an association. *"... Along the frontiers of the Russian Empire, there live many nations widely differing in origin, in language, in history and morals — Slavs, Wallachians, Magyars and Germans, not to speak of Turks and Albanians — none of whom is sufficiently powerful itself to bid successful defiance to the superior neighbour on the East for all time. They could only do so if a close and firm tie bound them all together as one. The vital artery of this necessary union of nations is the Danube. The focus of power of such a union must never be diverted far from this river, if the union is to be effective and to remain so. Assuredly, if the Austrian State had not existed for ages, it would have been a behest for us in the interests of Europe and indeed of humanity to endeavour to create it as*

soon as possible" (Palacký 1947/1948, p. 304). This text was written in the midst of the European revolutions in German and it was published in National Newspaper (in Czech original *Národní noviny*, Prague: Nos), while the authorized Czech version was published in the first volume of *Spisy drobné* (edited by B. Rieger published in Prague: Bursík a Kohout 1898, pp. 16 - 22).[11] Geopolitical vision of Central Europe at this time had two basic variants: with and without Germany. Just the same as many others (Romanian A. Popovic, Austrian K. Renner, Hungarian O. Jászi, Pole A. Czartoryski and Slovak M. Hodža), Palacký rejected the vision of "the Greater Germany" (Gross Deutschalnd), but not rejecting the visions of so-called Klein Deutschland – the Lesser Germany, which means Germany to be united without Austria. Palacký criticized the German expansion towards the East[12], and the Russian expansion towards the West. At the same time, he refused to join either of them for fear of the totalitarian regime (See Vargová 2015).

Palacký developed a comprehensive concept of international relations and foreign policy of the Czech nation, which was based on knowledge of the functioning of the power balance and seek to safeguard the interests of small nations in Central Europe. However, he was a defender of the national interests of the Czechs particularly, he did not believe in the possibility of securing them with their own state, whose existence would be possible without a help of a larger supranational Austrian unit. He insisted on guarantee of precisely defined self-government of not only

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[11] *„... Podél hranic říše ruské, přebývají národové mnozí, původem, jazykem, dějinami a mravem znamenitě rozdílní, - Slované, Valaši, Maďaři a Němci, o Řecích, Turcích a Škipetařích ani nemluvíc, - z nichžto žádný sám o sobě není dosti mocen, aby přemocnému sousedu svému na východě odporovati mohl s prospěchem po vše budoucí časy; totoť mohou jen tehdáž, když je svazek ouzký a pevný bude spojovati všecky v jedno. Pravá životní žíla tohoto potřebného svazku národů jest Dunaj; oustřední jeho moc nesmí se od řeky této nikdy daleko uchylovati, má-li skutečně vůbec platna býti a zůstati. Zajisté, kdyby státu Rakouského nebylo již od dávna, musili bychom v interessu Europy, ba humanity samé přičiniti se co nejdříve, aby se utvořil"* (See more http://texty.citanka.cz/palacky/isr2-a.html).

[12] „Drang nach Osten" („Towards the East") was one of the main mottos of the 19th century German nationalist movement, referring to the policy of eastward expansion of the Nazi rule.

Czechs, but all the nations living under the Habsburg rule. He therefore demanded the monarchy to be transformed into a federal state with the warranty of freedom of nations: *"The rights of nations are in truth the rights of Nature. No nation on earth has the right to demand that its neighbours should sacrifice themselves for its benefit, no nation is under an obligation to deny or sacrifice itself for the good of its neighbour. Nature knows neither dominant nor underyoked nations. If the bond which unites a number of diverse nations in a single political entity is to be firm and enduring, no nation can have cause to fear that the union will cost it any of the things which it holds most dear"* (Palacký 1947/48, p. 307).[13] As illustrated, he generally manifested the idea of equality of nations. At the same time, Palacký expresses his general concerns of the small nations as self-standing moral and legal entities, which should help each other against the expansion of the large ones to balance out the historical powers leading to centralization. As Z. Vargová states (2015, s. 33), his concept was based on historical rights of national independence and it led to the idea of creating a "centralised power" in Central Europe, which would be able to face the expansion of the states from the West and the East. While the German environment was characterized by the promotion of pan-German ideas, in the Slavic one, in addition to above-mentioned federalization plans, the organization of Central European projects was built upon the idea of joining under the Slavic unity. **Ľudovít Štúr** (1815 - 1856) – the leading figure of the Slovak national movement, linguist, poet, historian, politician,

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[13] Czech original: *„Právo národů jest skutečné právo přírody; žádný národ na zemi nemá práva, žádati, aby k jeho prospěchu soused jeho sebe sám obětoval, žádný není povinen, pro dobré souseda svého sebe sám zapříti neb obětovati. Příroda nezná žádných ani panujících ani služebných národů. Má-li svazek, který spojuje více rozličných národů v jeden politický celek, býti pevný a trvanlivý, nesmí žádný národ míti příčiny, obávati se, že tímto spojením přijde o některý z nejdražších statků svých, naopak, každý musí míti jistou naději, že v ústřední moci nalezne ochranu i záštitu před možnými přechvaty sousedů přes čáru rovnosti; potom se také každý přičiní, opatřiti ústřední tuto moc silou takovou, aby dotčenou ochranu mohla s prospěchem vykonávati"* (See more http://texty.citanka.cz/palacky/isr2-a.html).

publicist, initially an advocate of Austria as the centre of Europe, was one of the main promoters of this conception. In his work *Slavdom and the World of the Future* (1853) he describes and elucidates three conceptions of the integration based on the unification of Slavic tribes. The Slavic Federation was an attempt to resolve the situation, which would require republican establishment. It would yet exclude Russia as the only independent Slavic state, and all the tribes which are under its influence – Kingdom of Poland, Kingdom of Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Albania and Montenegro. It would thus include Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, Galicia, Slavic tribes in Carinthia, Styria, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Serbian Vojvodina. This was even though none of them was yet independent, therefore they would have to gain freedom before the federation was formed. On the top of it, each tribe uses its own dialect and its own literature, the spatial distance, different religions and general negative attitudes towards unification of Slavs from the point of view of Germans, Hungarians, Italians, but also Russians, would become a problem when creating a non-Russian Slavic state. Štúr also refuses the idea of austroslavism – he believed Austria would not be a centre of all Western and Southern Slavs. This was mainly because their initiatives leading to germanization of the region would prevent Slavs from obtaining equality among the other nations. In fact, he considers the Russian-Slavic empire to be the best model of Slavic unification. For him Russia is a model of utilitarian and effective social and political organization leading to prosperity of the state. The major downside was the emergence of a unified empire for all Slavs conditioned the general transition to Proto-Slavic faith and the acceptance of Russian as an all-Slavic literary language. Nevertheless, he inclined to the East and to enlargement of The Russian Empire (Vargová 2015, p. 34 - 36). Slavic cultural element plays a strong role in a conception of a Polish romantic writer and philosopher **Zygmunt Krasiński** (1812 - 1859), who searched for a solution to the imbalance in Central Europe in the transformation of Austria into a Slavic state, which would include Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and all the Austrian provinces, where the Slavs live. He also warned German politicians against the emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism as a consequence the absence of perception of the Western Slavs as allies. The idea of Krasiński reflects the memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Federation, which at the end of the 14th century stretched all the way from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea (ibid.). In the reform age, Hungarian representatives also contributed to the development of geopolitical considerations in this area. It is interesting to see, that their concepts ally Hungary also with southern (Balkan) countries instead of the Central European unity, represented by the current V4

alliance. It was a Hungarian statesman and publicist Lajos Kossuth (1802 - 1894) who became a promoter of great federation plans. His initial proposal (originally in Hungarian Szövetség Szabad Észak-keleti Államok, eng. Community of Free Northeastern States) dates back to 1849, included restored Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Romania (Romsics 2002, p. 13). In 1862 in the Proposal of the Danubian Confederation (orig. Dunai Szövetség tervezete) assumed that the new federation would include states in the territory between the Carpathians and the Danube, the Black and Adriatic Seas, namely Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia and possibly Serbia. Confederation thus formed, without Austria, Bohemia and Poland, was meant to have a common defence, foreign policy and economic alliance that would be under the authority of the Federal Council to guarantee for the mutual protection and benefit (Kossuth 1862; Jakócs 2015). As Kossuth himself writes "*Even if the nations of the lower Danube succeeded in drawing together all ethnic cousins who now belong to other states, they would create, at best, second-rate states whose independence would be forever in peril and which would inevitably be vulnerable to foreign influence. But if the Hungarians, the southern Slavs, and the Romanians embrace the above-mentioned plan, they will become, with their 30 million people, a first-class state, rich and powerful, and one that will weigh heavily in Europe's balance*"(1862, p. 734). No matter how pro-democratic his plans sound,[14] he was not able to abandon his nationalist outlook. Kossuth believed that Hungary's history and state-building traditions, along with more practical considerations, predestined Hungarians for leadership within and beyond the country's historical borders. As a result, he placed Hungarians at the top of the region's ethnic hierarchy. Hungarian politician and diplomat László Teleki (1811 - 1861) familiarized himself with Kossuth's confederation concepts and also became a supporter of the federalization of the monarchy on ethnic principle. He was convinced that Hungary could gain a leading position within the future confederation if it takes the initiative and takes the first steps to implement this project. Over the years, the options were elaborated, reconsidered and eventually turned down, partly because of the concern

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[14] The executive bodies of the federation would alternately operate in Pest, Bucharest, Zagreb and Belgrade. In other respects, judiciary, the parliament, public administration as well as local self-government, freedom of language and of association on the basis of nationality and the election of national leaders of each member-state would remain autonomous.

that other nationalities would demand similar rights, which would lead to the dismemberment of Hungary (see Miru 2020). As it´s been already demonstrated, in 19th century, the Central European region has been defined mainly by external pressures, and therefore its nations often perceived the preservation of the powerful Austrian monarchy as a necessity. It was the last third of the 19th century, which can also be seen as the beginning of the end of Central Europe as an independent macro-region. Its form was changed with the emergence of the German Empire. It tied itself closer to the European West, thanks to its colonial and economic ambitions (Hroch 2014, p. 157). This was a period of time, when cultural term Central Europe raised its importance and transformed itself into a (geo)political one. The distinctive image of the region started to be verbalized by the voices of different state representatives.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850 - 1937) was one of the most important figures in Slovak and Czech history, who also became the first president of Czechoslovakia in 1918. For him, Central Europe was not only a political but also a moral issue (Havelka 2000, p. 19). Even though he didn´t use the term Central Europe any often, at first, he demanded only the reform of the monarchy: he suggested the change from dualistic to "trialistic" version - he thus demanded the equivalence of the German, Hungarian and Slavic populations within the monarchy (Trávníček 2009, p. 260). Later on, he stopped believing the possibility of a fair and equal federalization of Austria-Hungary and anticipated its disintegration. He considered Central Europe to be a "zone of small nations", which should be somewhat unified – possibly under pan-Slavic vision. In the 1930s, a Slovak proponent of regional integration **Milan Hodža** (1878 - 1944) perceived Central Europe as a continuation of Western European civilization, which also needs more reliable pillars – he pointed out the necessity of all-European cooperation, which, in the first place, needs regional alliances to build upon. However, there was a *Little Entente* – a mutual defence arrangement formed in 1920/1921, considering Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which, he believed, "*must not be just a diplomatic mechanism; it must have an economic raison d'être*", which should lead towards organization within the region.[15] He also emphasized, that "… *if we do not manage to bring together the 96 million people of Central Europe, future generations will blame us if, because of internal political trivialities, we fail to rise to the occasion and strengthen the basis*

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[15] Hodža for Montagblatt (March 22nd 1931).

of our existence for the future."[16] Hodža´s Central European federation was a concept to which he devoted much effort during his career. He summarized his elaborate proposal of a federation in his book *Federation in Central Europe*, which was published in London, 1942. Respecting the principles of national sovereignty of small Central European nations , he suggested Central European integration to become a process, which must take place in stages: in the first phase, states with certain common interests should be united; its political integration should be preceded by economic integration. Its basic premise was the elimination of trade and agrarian political barriers to the conclusion of agrarian agreements between states. "*This would have made them equal partners in dealing with their big neighbours and a strong factor for security and peace in Europe. Hodža was convinced that the mere existence of such a federation might have meant a great deal. Nazism would hardly have dared to resort to an act of aggression against European collective security*"(Múdry-Šebík 2019, p. 1549). Among the number of reasons why Central European unity should be formed, Hodža recognized the fear of security guarantee of the great powers as the main problem. He describes Russia as a strong worldwide player, which he considers to be a motive for uniting powers in the rest of Europe. He explains, that if there was no such cohesion and solidarity among the European nations, with Russia as a neighbour, one day we could possibly find ourselves between Germany and Russia as between two crushing millstones.[17] For him, Germany was a part of Central Europe, but belonged Western Europe – from the point of view of geography, society or economy.[18] His initiatives to create a federation referred to the area

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[16] Hodža for Národní listy (April 19th 1931).

[17] „*Je celý rad dôvodov, prečo stredná Európa je a má byť – ale upozorňujem na Rusko. Keby pre strednú Európu nebolo žiadnych dôvodov politických a hospodárskych, stačil by ten, že dnešné Rusko je svojou civilizáciou a svojím systémom vlastne nový diel sveta. Východ sa začína tam, kde sa začína Rusko. Štáty a národy v strednej Európe sa musia spoločne pripraviť na každý možný vývoj Ruska. Keby v strednej Európe nebolo tejto súdržnosti, tejto solidarity vzhľadom na ruského suseda, znamenalo by to, že by sme sa jedného dňa ocitli medzi Nemeckom a Ruskom ako medzi dvoma drviacimi mlynskými kameňmi*" (Hodža 1997, p. 20).

[18] „*Nemôžeme stáť za stredoeurópskym riešením na čele s Nemeckom z objektívnych a politických dôvodov. Dnes už Nemecko nie je žiadna stredná Európa – ani zemepisne, ani civilizačne. Nemecko je súčasťou západnej*

between the Baltic and Black seas, with an ambition to become more than an intermediary between the two great powers. After a brief recall of some of the older conceptualizations of Central Europe, we now will provide and overlook of the viewpoint originally presented by an American scholar J. O'Loughlin (2001, p. 607 - 628). He identifies the area, where the Visegrad countries lay, with a regard to the following seven geopolitical visions: Mittleuropa, kidnapped Occident, European inter-zone (so called Crush zone), return to the West, "Third Europe", "NATO's Black Hole and Expansion" and some other geopolitical concepts. Well known concept of Mitteleuropa was created by German politician Friedrich Naumann (1860 - 1919). It was presented in 1917 and was one of the long-lasting visions of Germans dating back to 1870s, in which German speaking nations should have a dominant role. It was meant to be "*the zone to the east of the Second Reich*" which O´Laughlin calls to be "*not a border between two states but two worlds*" (ibid.). It was a tool to eliminate the tension between ethnical groups and nations under the same economic structure This "superstate" was considered to be a successor of the Holy Roman Empire, based on German culture, German organization and German spirit, but, at the same time, it would never dictate the rules in the sphere of education, language politics or church. In various sources, it is often described as a unified and coherent union, conditional on mutual understanding and tolerance between states. Integration of these countries was to take place in three stages: economic cooperation was to be followed by military union, which would determine the management and unification of the foreign policy. Finally, cultural integration of the nations was to be realized (Vargová 2015, p. 41). The basic geopolitical conception of Central Europe was clearly articulated in Milan Kundera's[19] work *A Kidnapped West* in 1983.

Európy. Ale to neznamená, že by sme chceli – alebo mohli – Nemecko vylučovať zo spolupráce so strednou Európou. Naopak, stredná Európa, organizovaná tak, ako si ju predstavujeme, bude môcť pokojnejšie, bezpečnejšie a trvalejšie než stredoeurópske národy a štáty jednotlivo upraviť svoj spoločný vzťah k Nemecku a nemectvu vôbec. Jednoducho preto, že v strednej Európe aj s Nemeckom by všetky nie nemecké národy boli nie spojencami, ale vazalmi" (Hodža 1997, p. 48).

[19] A French writer of a Czech origin, one of the leading figures of the Prague Spring.

This notion mainly reflected the Cold War era. Kundera's other essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe* (*Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe Centrale* was the essay's original French title) was published in 1984. The author sought to define Central Europe by setting it against the background of the East-West dichotomy. Whilst, as a result of the world wars, Central Europe politically belonged to the East, historically, it has always been part of the West. Therefore, as he states in the title of his work, he considers the area to be literally "kidnapped" in 1945 and attached to the Eastern bloc. Kundera's notion of the mid-1980s is often described by the concept of Central Europe as the "periphery of the West". The conception of Central Europe as a "periphery" would most probably cease to be relevant only when the basic economic, social and cultural-political differences between these countries and their western neighbours disappear, what might be a matter of next few generations (Horváth 2006). Kundera´s vision of Central Europe was later carried forward by Czech statesman and the last president of Czechoslovakia Václav Havel, Polish-American poet and Nobel prize laureate Czesław Miłosz, Hungarian novelist György Konrád and many others. The nick "Crush zone" or a "Shutterbelt" may sound somewhat expressive. It is based on the geographical characteristics of the area, which, in a greater picture of world geopolitics, cannot be overstressed. This European heartland in between Germany and Russia is determined to remain one of the fairly large strategic areas, that happen to be a target of not only European, but also world political powers. The image of the V4 countries as a returner to the capitalist West is due to the process of overcoming the post-communist transition. It has clear sources, for instance in international trade marketing data: it is fair to say, that quite recent international market opening of the local economies towards not only all-European, but also world ones, is unquestionably one of the important features connecting the countries of the V4.

The concept of the "European tripartite" surpasses the image of Europe as geopolitically divided in two – East and West. The Iron Curtain never represented a clear line defining the own political or other beliefs of the area, which we could imagine alongside. For a majority of modern European history, it was rather a zone of political variability. This is not only because of its central location, but because of the ongoing struggle to define relations with the rest of Europe. The area has been "contaminated" by both western and eastern culture, chiefly the great geopolitical interests

of both severely affected the ability of this cultural region to develop independently, also lacking the continuity of the process of a self-development and growth. It is important to say, that a lot of the local political actions from the past century were undergone unwillingly, often due to the decisions made by "bigger and greater powers" (e.g. Red Army invasion etc.). As a result, for some, doubts about the general international (in)dependence of the area remain actual even nowadays. Previously mentioned issues probably lead the author to depict Central Europe as "*geopolitical black hole and NATO expansion*" (O'Loughlin 2001, p. 620). This metaphor carries a strong negative vibe – it provides an image of Central Europe as a passive player, making a void impact on international discussions. We have to admit that the atmosphere of a Cold War brought a lot of a negative vibe to the image of the V4. Beyond everything, instead of nourishing the previous negative experiences and turning it into some kind of stigma, Central Europe took it as a "lesson learnt". As a part of a cultivation of the image, stable and well-established contemporary partnerships provide a great platform to fight together this aura of uncertainty and unpredictability of the regional politics surrounding the Central Europe. The last conception O'Loughlin offers, is an explanation of so-called "chaotic concepts" of understanding Central Europe, or, better said, a pursuit to distinct it from the Eastern Europe. As them both were previously a part of the Eastern bloc, their image might appear to be the same, or vastly similar. However, these regions are quite distinct in specific ways, similar characteristics on both sides still make it very difficult to identify their mutual borderline. Like in many other cases (e.g. African continent), local criteria for regional division are to be used – as there are no suitable physical barriers to follow (mountains, rivers or other natural landforms), certain criteria of human geography such as language, race, history, economy, political orientation, but also religion as one of them, apply.

The idea of a "self" and "othering" concept, in order to distinguish Eastern European society from the Central European one, was brought around 1980s. It is not only O'Loughlin (2001), who considers the line between the two to be drawn by the division of Orthodox and Catholic religion as abstract (mental) border to follow. It is quite interesting that this division has been existing for over a millennium by now, therefore it is not any present-day related feature of the cultural regions, which should be newly acknowledged – it was already in the 11th century when the great schism split the main fraction of Christianity into two divisions. This division line

shall be used as a mental border between cultural Eastern and Western Europe.

Figure 5. (Source: National Geographic)

In order to comprehend the unique character of both Central and Eastern European culture, this simplified attempt to specify a zone of a transition between these two cultural and geopolitical regions, which naturally still shouldn't be considered as rigorously homogenous, can be useful. As we already mentioned, religion (and spiritual culture in general) also has been one of the main means for forming the nations within Europe. Religious aspect is, in fact, a very important factor, which co-founded and shaped Central European society. As it is well known, the region generally belongs to the part of Europe rooted in Roman Christianity. However, in no way it can be limited to the Christian religion only. There also has been a large and valuable Jewish community contribution, that gave the region a distinctive character, which also affects modern perception of Central Europe. Peter Jordan defines Central Europe geopolitically as area much

larger than the V4. He accents some of the very interesting features of the region: besides clear political and economic orientation to the continent, not overseas, he considers religion and the church to be important determinants of cultural character. He recognizes the influence of German and Jewish culture together with Slavic, Romanesque and Hungarian (Jakabová – Jenčo 2010, p. 29). Serbian historian, essayist and translator Danilo Kiš considers centre of Europe to be an idea rather than a unified geographical and cultural phenomenon. He sees its in proclaiming opposition to Russian expansion and emphasizing the right to its own legitimacy and identity. He also beliefs in significant participation of the Jewish population in its economic and cultural development. Just the same as Friedrich Naumann, he perceived Jews as an integrating factor in Central Europe (Krejčí 2010, p. 112). In Central European society, they represented not only the middle class but also the "business elite" (Davies – Moorhouse 2002). As J. Křen states (2005, p. 133), Jewish minority occupies a special place on the ethnic map of Europe; their diaspora was one of the oldest and most important on the continent ever, while other minority groups have left only a faint historical mark. The Jews were a scattered and evolving diaspora with strong inner bonds of faith, but at the same time no less firmly embodied in the "host" societies with which they shared their entire development. Thanks to the continuity of more than three thousand years of their ethnic-religious tradition, they have been a minority, but with powers and influences far exceeding their number (see Hrbáček 2015). According to Křen, without Jews, Europe, and especially Central and Eastern Europe, is incomprehensible. He also highlights their ability to assimilate, despite the language and religious differences. On the whole, mosaic of the regional culture is created by the mixture of (current and past) ethic groups and individual national cultures. The centrally located countries have been under the sphere of influence of either Eastern or Western political powers at different times. Their evolution resulted in a creation of a unique socio-political and cultural mixture of both (post)socialist and democratic elements, with a strong national Slavic – Non-Slavic base represented by the local nations. This shared cultural heritage creates is a fundament for the image creation. In the cultural and geographical territory of Central Europe some peculiar factors, connected to social changes resulting from the transformation of political development since early 1990s can be identified. For quite some part of the previous century, the heart of Europe had been ideologically East-oriented. Radical transformation in local political structures, coupled with the arrival of democracy, have determinedly disrupted this one-sided orientation. An increase in awareness about foreign political and cultural features also

initiated a change of the general opinion and reorientation of the majority of Central European society from East to West. Major consequences of the gradual detachment from the ideological practices associated with the previous regime(s), can be seen in complex transformation that the society came through. It also reflects in the intensity of the international political cooperation. At present, some shifts leading towards general European integration and globalization can be recognized. They go in hand with internationalization of the Central European cultural and political environment. Enough time has passed since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the common goals of the Visegrad group members were set and some already achieved. The stigma of (mostly) small nations, dwelling in the centre of Europe, has to be fully outgrown by the ambition to come out of the shadow of larger nations. Leaving behind the satellite past of the region and the image of land as an interest of a foreign policy of "someone else", the V4 alliance gives and opportunity to become a valuable partner along with other respected European nations. With the mutual cooperation created within this concept, spanning investments into scholarships and student exchange schemes, cultural events, contacts between regions and municipalities, and mobilization of cross-border civil society networks are supported by international V4 institutions. One of the priorities of the V4 is to promote culture and identity of its inhabitants, thus there is a lot to offer. The Visegrad cooperation, with its almost 534 thousand square kilometres, is comparable in size to France, has a population of more than 60 million. It provides a platform for synergies where four countries can deliver better results than individual solutions. The future is set as the heart of the project – well-funded, multiyear program for the promotion of Central European culture, exhibiting the richness and commonality of Central European cultural heritage. The origins of Visegrad cooperation date back to a common sense of solidarity. The great political changes that began in the 1990s did not mean the discovery of fundamentally new notions of Central Europe as a geopolitical region. There have only been modifications to previous concepts. Overcoming all differences between Central and Western Europe, full involvement in all political and economic structures of the West (but also other partners), was the main motto of the new democratic governments of Poland, former Czechoslovakia and Hungary. This common goal: to be ultimately and universally accepted by the West, formed the basis for the common V4 policy of these countries in the last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The fact that the Visegrad Group remains limited to these countries, represents close relations not only in terms of culture, politics and history, but common general perspectives for the future. The Visegrad Group's

policy has already had several successes: the abolition of the Warsaw Pact organization and integration into European structures, such as European Union were undoubtfully two of them and there hopefully will be many more.

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E-MARKETING OF CITIES BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CAPITALS OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP'S COUNTRIES

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the increased importance of the new media has considerably influenced the modes of marketing communication, including the marketing of cities. Online tools have been employed by cities for promotion, as well as for image building and communication with clients. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019, the trend of using the Internet for all areas of social life, including commerce, science, communication, work, health and tourism, has significantly grown. Internet-based marketing tools for city promotion fit into the broader spectrum of place marketing. The cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries during the pandemic also influenced the temporary opening of borders and opportunities for tourist travel during the examined period. So far, no Internet portal has been created presenting tourist attractions of the cities analysed in the study, namely the V4 capitals –Warsaw, Bratislava, Prague and Budapest. Such a portal would not only significantly contribute to the growth of tourism in Central and Eastern Europe, but also make it easier for travellers to obtain information, plan their stays and find tourist attractions. Thus, it could promote coordinated tourist activities in more than one city, where it would have to include elements related to travelling and moving between the cities (train, flight, bus timetables or other connections). Obviously, it would have to be done in all of the languages of the V4 countries and some other common languages, such as English, Chinese, German, Russian and Spanish, because the greater the number of languages, the greater the openness to tourists. When planning the marketing activities of cities, it is always important to, first and foremost, define all stakeholders and potential partners. Consequently, the main focus of capital cities is on tourists, investors and residents. The V4 cities have directed their actions at different stakeholders on the Internet by creating several official websites.

The aim of this paper is to show the level of e-marketing of the capital cities of the Visegrad Group countries examined mainly through the prism of their official websites, with particular attention paid to the used Internet tools and the specificity of cooperation and the CEE region. The research involves a media analysis of the content of the cities' websites, an analysis of the tourist conditions of the cities, and identification of the problem on the basis of the subject literature and tourist policy. The main research methods used in the above-mentioned empirical studies are methods of media analysis, comparative analysis of websites, and methods of statistical analysis of websites.

2. City marketing

Territorial marketing is most often defined as all actions undertaken to attract investors to a given region (city, district, municipality, province), develop local enterprises, promote the region's favourable image outside, as well as to talk about its attractiveness in such a way that as many people as possible, potential investors, tourists and possible future inhabitants, know about its good image[1].

Marketing is seen as "planning, coordinating and controlling the activities of a territorial unit aimed at current and potential markets with a focus on:

  a) conscious customer orientation;
  b) interdisciplinary orientation;
  c) systematic market research;
  d) setting long-term goals and strategies;
  e) shaping the market through a set of marketing tools;
  f) differentiated influence on market segments;
  g) coordination of activities within the organizational structure of the company".

Marketing researchers Philip Kotler and Nancy Lee believe that thinking in marketing terms should go beyond the concept of the 4 Ps (product, price, place and promotion) to include doing scientific research on marketing; defining customers, partners and competitors; market segmentation; targeting specific audiences; positioning offers of given services; managing the process of innovation and introduction of new

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[1] A. Borawska, *Zastosowanie elementów marketingu terytorialnego w zarządzaniu miastem*, [in:] *Miasta Polski na początku XXI wieku. Społeczeństw – gospodarka – rozwój. Vol. I*, ed. M. Kozaczka, Stalowa Wola 2011, p. 194.

services; spreading new channels of distribution of public services; appropriate pricing of services; easy communication.

Place marketing includes four activities:

1. Designing a set of characteristics/marketing mix and services for a given community;
2. Establishing attractive incentives for current and potential customers or users of goods and services;
3. Delivering products and services in an efficient and accessible manner;
4. Promoting the place's value and image among potential users so that they are aware of the advantages of the place being recognised.

The essence of city marketing management, therefore, boils down to the conviction that there are city users whose present and anticipated needs can and should be satisfied, and treating these needs as a driving force behind actions aimed at the socio-economic development of the city. The object of city marketing remains a wide range of goods, services, ideas and urban spaces, forming a complex megaproduct. Cities are perceived as brands consisting of many elements, and their promotion is a complicated task, far from easy. On the one hand, characteristic places must be properly highlighted as complex and unique, and on the other hand, they must be presented in a simple way that will be remembered by tourists. If the city brand is regarded as the main brand, its sub-brands may be physical elements (buildings, infrastructure, monuments), services (transport, accommodation, catering, other accompanying services), well-known enterprises or headquarters of institutions, products typical for the place, famous people and symbols[2]. For example, the brand of Warsaw can be any of the following: Palace of Culture and Science, Old Town, Łazienki Park, National Stadium, Frederic Chopin, Warsaw Ghetto, Copernicus Science Centre.

A marketing approach to place development is an overarching answer needed by places to compete effectively in the new economy. Places have to manufacture products and provide services that current and future customers want or need. They must also offer domestic and international services internally and externally, because place marketing is a continuous

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[2] M. Jabłońska, *Submarki w kształtowaniu wizerunku marki terytorialnej. Badanie wizerunku marki Warszawa* [in:] *Marketing jednostek terytorialnych. Przykłady z Polski*, ed. K. Kuć-Czajkowska, K. Muszyńska, Lublin 2016, p. 17,

activity that must be adapted to meet changing economic conditions and new opportunities[3]. During the Covid-19 pandemic, city marketing took on an entirely new dimension, as national lockdowns and closed borders significantly affected not only travel, but also domestic and international tourism, consequently weakening the economic potential of tourism.

As noted by American researchers Stephan and Susan Dann, marketing is an adaptive, highly intelligent field, which, being consumer/customer-oriented, must constantly evolve and, in response to changes in the social environment, constantly adapt techniques, preferences and practices to maintain its value to the organization.

The marketing theorists propose 9 points to make place or territory marketing effective[4]:

1. Places need to create a market-oriented strategic planning process to meet these challenges;
2. Places need to adopt a genuine market perspective towards their products and customers;
3. Places need to provide quality in their programmes to compete with other places;
4. Places need skills to effectively communicate and promote their competitive advantages;
5. Places need to diversify their economic base and develop mechanisms to adapt flexibly to changing conditions;
6. Places need to develop and nurture entrepreneurial qualities;
7. Places need to rely more on the private sector to fulfil their missions;
8. Each place must develop its own unique process of change as a result of differences in place culture, policy and leadership process;
9. Places need to develop organisational and formal mechanisms to sustain their development and momentum that has already begun.

3. E-marketing and e-tourism

E-marketing of places comprises all the activities aimed at creating a positive image of the local authority (in our case the city), products or

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[3]P. Kotler, D. Haider, I. Rein, ed., *Marketing places. Attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states, and nations*, New York 1993, p. 345.

[4] P. Kotler, D. H. Haider, I. Rein, ed., *Marketing places. Attracting investment…,* op. cit. p. 318-342.

services by means of tools and techniques of Internet communication, in such a way that the advertisement reaches customers (inhabitants, investors, entrepreneurs, tourists) and encourages them to take the preferred action, that is to take advantage of the offer and buy. Territorial e-marketing is a process of promoting the city in digital media – computer, iPhone, smartphone, tablet or any other device with access to the Internet.

Research on city websites revolves around topics known in the literature as: research on website content (perceiving a website as a collection of information, focusing on a set of topics and message content); research on website structure (a website's s structure becomes an object of analysis), usability research (covering website structure, layout, correctness); research on internet geography (a website is treated as a node in a network of links), and research on website users (a website is perceived as a kind of community identity)[5]. In the conducted research, a website is understood as a new media tool that functions on the Internet as a basic form of information, promotion and communication. The term "webpage" (WWW site) is often used interchangeably with websites, or information services. Each of the analysed official websites, as well as social profiles run by the cities, is a kind of product offering wide opportunities for promotion – in the examined case we will be interested in the tourist offer. Marketing objectives are directed at improving the e-marketing activities of cities, the effects of which can be seen through an increase in tourism. There are many definitions of e-tourism, and one of the most general says that it is the digitalization of all processes and value chains in tourism, travel and hospitality that allow organizations to increase their efficiency and effectiveness[6].

Considering that internet marketing is a modern tool, it differs significantly from the assumptions of traditional marketing. The new principles of marketing and PR are therefore as follows:

> ➢ marketing is more than just advertising;
> ➢ PR is for major audiences;
> ➢ "You are what you publish", that is the information that we publish on your profile shows that we are received by others;

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[5] A. Dytman-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko, *WWW – Sieć metafor, metafory Sieci i studia nad Siecią*, [in:] *WWW – w sieci metafor. Strona internetowa jako przedmiot badań naukowych*, ed. A. Dytmon-Stasieńko, J. Stasieńko, Wrocław 2008, pp. 9-11.

[6] Wang J. (2001), Developments in digital business (G53DDB), Tourism & Travel, Research Institute, Nottingham University Business School, Nottingham.

- ➢ People want authenticity, not fiction;
- ➢ People want participation, not propaganda;
- ➢ Instead of causing unilateral disruption, marketing aims to deliver its content exactly when the recipient himself needs it;
- ➢ Traders need to shift their menstrial thinking from mainstream to the masses in order to reach huge numbers of these online customers;
- ➢ PR is not about seeing the company on TV, but about making buyers see it on the Internet;
- ➢ Marketing is not about the agency winning prizes, it is about winning business transactions;
- ➢ internet has reinvented PR after years of virtually exclusive focus on the media;
- ➢ companies have to force people into purchasing processes with the main use of the internet;
- ➢ Online blogs, video, e-sides, messaging and other forms of online content delivery allow organizations to communicate directly with buyers in the form they want;
- ➢ social networks allow people all over the world to share information and connect with the people and companies they do business with;
- ➢ on the internet, the game between marketing and PR has blurred[7].

E-tourism also includes all applications and devices used in tourism, i.e. audio-guides and mobile guides, electronic cards in museums, photo codes, websites with information for individual tourists, spatial information systems (e.g. Google Street View), social recommendation portals, and city profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook[8]. The process of looking for tourist information via the Internet gives clients the possibility to efficiently seek necessary data, reduce search time and effectively evaluate existing service alternatives[9]. E-tourism consists not only in using the Internet as a communication and information channel for the promotion of tourist offers, because by stimulating the development of tourism, it provides effective tools that enable consumers-tourists to identify and

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[7] Scott D. M., *Th e new rules of marketing and PR: How to use social media, blogs, news releases, online video, and virtual marketing to reach buyers directly*, Hoboken 2010, p. 23.

[8] B. Gontar, J. Papińska-Kacprerek, E-turystyka jako element koncepcji budowania inteligentnego miasta, [in;] Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Studia Informatica, No. 29/2012, pp. 20-21.

[9] W. Grzegorczyk, A. Sibińska, W. Krawiec, *Funkcjonalność stron internetowych banków a zachowanie nabywców na rynku usług bankowych*, Łódź 2009, p. 48.

purchase the right product, while their suppliers develop and distribute offers and manage them on a global scale[10].

4.   E-marketing of Warsaw

Entering the Warsaw website, we see in the left corner a logo resembling the Warsaw Mermaid with the inscription: Fall in love with Warsaw. In the upper right corner, on the other hand, there are social media plugins: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
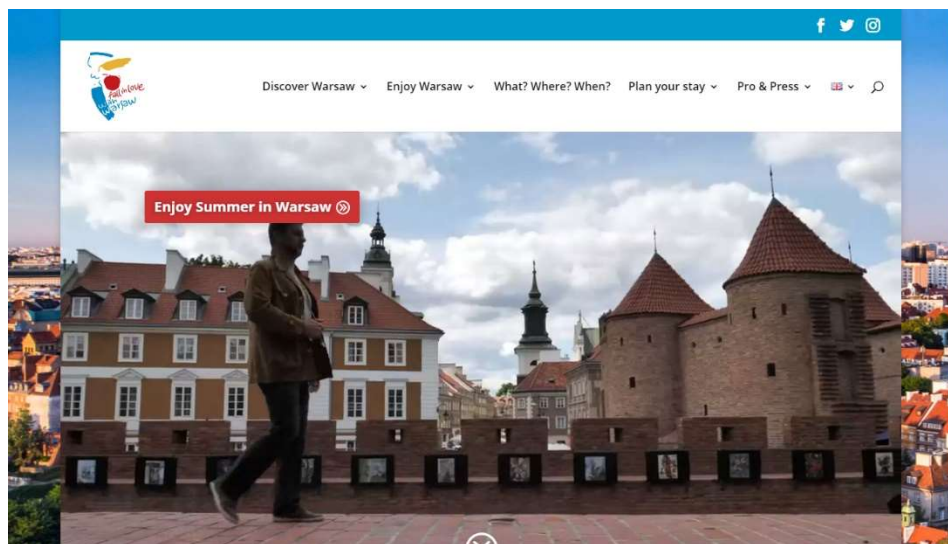

Figure 1. Warsaw tourist portal (https://warsawtour.pl)

The tourist website of the city was prepared in four language versions (English, German, Spanish and Polish), all of them containing identical information. Undoubtedly, however, 4 language versions of the website are not enough in the case of the capital city, because in the era of the global village tourists travel from the most remote corners of the world. Interestingly, the website does not account for the languages of other countries of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership, so administrators of the website, i.e. the city represented by the Warsaw Tourist Office, do not see any tourism potential in this group.

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[10]W. Gaworecki, *Turystyka*, Warszawa 2007, p. 277.

The website consists of the following subpages: *Discover Warsaw; Enjoy Warsaw; What? Where? When?; Plan your stay; Pro & Press.* In the first subpage, *Discover Warsaw*, we have the following tabs:

- *Warsaw is waiting for you,* where the attractions of the city are listed, and by entering a selected attraction we are automatically redirected to the website of this attraction. What's noteworthy is that at the end of the subpage there is also a link to visit Warsaw online. The minus is that it is hardly visible"
- *Top10* is a subpage showing photos of ten tourist attractions of Warsaw. After clicking on the picture, we are redirected to a subpage with information about the attraction and its photos, and sometimes even a video. However, there is no consistency in the posted media materials as sometimes there is only one main photo.
- The *Explore Warsaw* subpage suggests tourist routes from some attractive places: by clicking on a photo of an attraction, we are automatically redirected to the route's subpage. Although it has both photos and descriptions of subsequent places along the route, a map for a better orientation by tourists is missing. The content of the subpage seems to be very chaotic, as there are no thematically sorted tabs, such as: *Beaches on the Vistula, What you can do in Warsaw for EUR 6; Green Warsaw, 21 reasons to go to Warsaw, On the footsteps of socialist-realist Warsaw.*
- *Warsaw in 1, 2, or 3 Days:* on this page you can find ready-made sightseeing plans with descriptions and photos of places for one, two or three days, respectively.
- *Museums:* here you can find pictures with the names of the most important museums in Warsaw. By clicking on the picture, you can get a description of the museum with its address. Additionally, there is often a video.
- *Other attractions*: this subpage includes pictures of other attractions such as fountains, zoos, libraries, or cemeteries. When you click on a picture with the name of an attraction, you receive information on the place together with photos and sometimes a video.
- *Vantage Points:* this subpage contains six pictures of described vantage points.
- *Warsaw Legends:* on this subpage there are four photos with the title of the legend about Warsaw. If you click on a photo, you can read the legend and see pictures or short films posted there.

104

The second subpage of the main page, *Enjoy Warsaw*, has the first tab *Food and drink*. It contains photos with captions related to cuisine. After clicking on a given photo, you can read information about, e.g. traditional Polish breakfast, accompanied by photos as well as videos more often than not. The very idea of providing culinary information seems absolutely necessary to promote the culinary base of the city, and thus its products. The *Shopping* tab contains information about shopping malls, trendy streets, exclusive stores and outlet stores, as well as their addresses. The third tab –*Nightlife* – gives information and addresses of bars, clubs and places where you can go at night. Apart from photos, there is also a short video about bars and night clubs in Poland's capital city. The last tab is *Warsaw Quest* – by visiting it, we are automatically redirected to a separate page with a quiz about Warsaw.

On the next subpage –*What? Where? When?* – there is an active banner on top with selected upcoming cultural events, while below it you can find a calendar of events scheduled for the approaching months.

In the next subpage of the main page, *Plan your stay*, you will find a lot of useful information. The first tab – *About Warsaw* – contains information about the most crucial places to visit along with photos. The next one – *Warsaw Tourism Information* – informs about the opening hours and addresses of Warsaw Tourist Information and its branches.

In the next tab – *Getting to Warsaw* – visitors find information on how to reach Warsaw by plane, train and bus, with active links to the websites of particular means of communication. The fourth tab – *Getting around* – provides information on public transport, including ticket prices and links to the website of the Warsaw Transport Authority, and a virtual showpiece of a taxi. The next tab – *Parking in Warsaw* – discusses how to park your car in Warsaw and what fees and payment options there are, including mobile applications used for this purpose. The *Good to know* section, on the other hand, encompasses information and details of the City Contact Centre, emergency telephone numbers, Polish currency, free access to the Internet, a link to a list of Embassies, information on the ban on drinking alcohol in public places, and information on holidays and trading Sundays. The next tab – *Public bikes* – informs visitors on how to rent a city bike, how much it costs, and where bike stations are located. *Warsaw Pass* is a tab with information about the possibility of purchasing a card to explore the city, which gives free admission to 20 tourist attractions. The penultimate tab, *Mobile Apps*, contains a list of all downloadable mobile applications that will help you discover Warsaw. Such a solution seems

very good in the era of digital media and proves the proper functioning of a smart city. In the last tab, *Brochures,* you can find nine various brochures for tourists, e.g. those with maps and descriptions of tourist places.

In the last subpage, i.e. *Pro & Press*, tabs include information about the Warsaw Tourist Office and a link to separate websites of the Warsaw Convention Bureau and the Warsaw Tourism Organization.

3. E-marketing of Prague

The official tourist portal for Prague is available in 21 language versions, all containing the same information, with one exception – some language versions have two sections of subpages (e.g. English, Czech and German), while others have only one (e.g. Polish, Japanese, Norwegian). As far as the V4 countries are concerned, there is only one language *(other than Czech) available* – Polish. Undoubtedly, a Hungarian language version would also be useful. Overall, however, it must be stated that Prague has adopted a very good approach to promoting its city brand by means of different language versions of the website.

Figure 2. Prague (https://www.prague.eu/en)
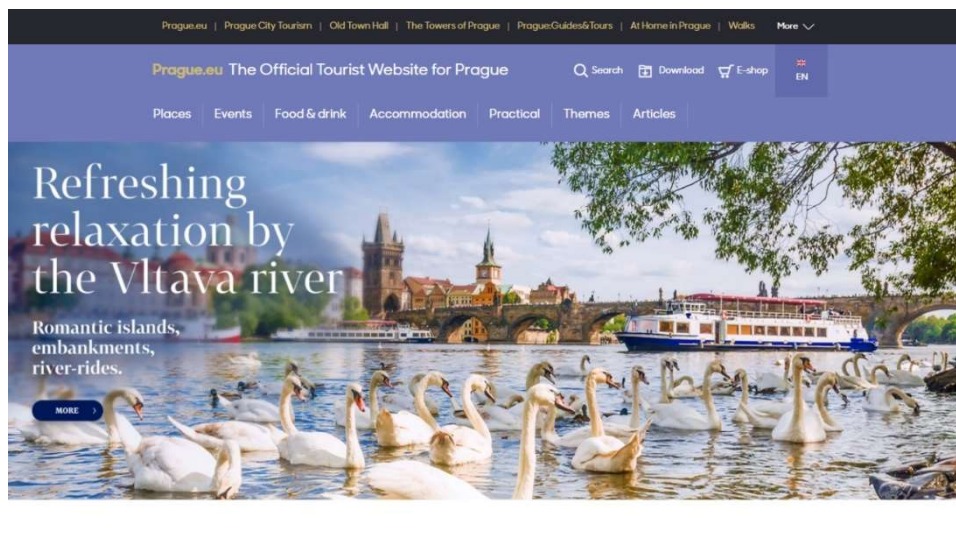
You have the following tabs in the first section of the portal's subpages: Prague.eu, Prague City Tourism, Old Town Hall, The Towers of Prague, Prague: Guides&Tourism, At Home in Prague, Walks, More. When you visit the first section, Prague.eu, it opens in a new tab. The same happens in the case of Prague City Tourism, where you are automatically redirected

to a new page. When entering the next tab – Old Town Hall – at the top of the page you see a moving banner of the Old Town Hall with the Astronomical Clock. You can find this place on a map, take a virtual look in 3 D and watch a video, see how much a ticket costs, and what the opening hours and the address details are. The next tab, The Towers of Prague, contains a general description and eight photographs of the towers, whose names are given below the pictures. When you click on a photo you enter another subpage, where you find further pictures and a general description of the tower. There is a possibility to see the place on a map, view it virtually in 3 D, and check its opening hours, address and history. At the bottom of the page there are other spots worth visiting. The next tab is Prague: Guides&Tourism. It encourages visitors to use licensed guides who organise tours and private walks in and outside the city. Going to the next tab – At Home in Prague – you are automatically redirected to a separate page where you can find information such as: events, hotels, guides, and tips for trips. There are also applications to be downloaded on your phone. The penultimate tab – Walks – contains information on recommended walking routes, outlining five interesting itineraries beyond the most famous sights (there are photos with interactive links underneath, by clicking which you see more pictures, a description of the tour and a map). Below are walking routes for people with disabilities and parents with prams: five interesting routes are recommended here, too (with the same structure as above – photos with interactive links which direct you to other pictures, a tour description and a map). As far as the last subpage of the first section is concerned, we have the following tabs: Day Trips, Kids, Design, Cafés, Wine, Beer. By selecting Day Trips, you open a subpage with a new menu (Towns & Cities; Castles & Châteaux; Nature, First-hand Experiences, More Tips). Each of these units contains a photo and an interactive name underneath (where information about a given place can be found).

Choosing the *Kids* tab, you are redirected to a subpage of the main website with a new menu, where all the information for children is placed. The menu consists of: *Places, Playgrounds, Eating Out, Active Fun, Events, Gifts & Toys, Download, Practical*. They are all listed on the page, together with photos and interactive names, opening hours and addresses. As far as the *Design* subpage is concerned, following the interactive changing banner we have a menu which consists of: *Guide, Places, Event, Shops, Articles*, where information about important places related to design can be found. On the next subpage, *Cafés*, as in the previous cases, there is a large changing banner (showing cafés) and a menu below. The menu consists of:

Guide, Historical, Local charm, Modern. It is followed by pictures of cafés in individual tags and interactive links – by clicking them we are redirected to subpages with more pictures, a map with the marked place, opening hours and address. Interestingly, there is also a brochure in English about the cafés, which can be downloaded. The next tab – *Wine* – is structured identically to the previous ones: a changing banner with a wine theme, and an extensive menu below which includes: *Guide, Vineyards, Wine- bars, Restaurants with wine selection, Fine dining, Wine shops, Wine events.* On this subpage all the necessary information on wine-related topics is presented. There is also an information brochure on wine, which you can download. The next subpage is *Beer in Prague,* which is structured in the same way as the previous ones – first a banner on beer-related topics, then a menu which consists of: *Guide, Breweries, Classics, Gardens, Tours.* A brochure related to beer can be downloaded from the website. Afterwards, three links are posted. These are only captions (*Breweries, Classics, Gardens*), which transfer website visitors to another subpage – *Food & drink.* In the *Beer tour* section we have a dozen or so photos with interactive names of places connected with beer, which are worth visiting. When you click on them, you see numerous photos, a given place marked on a map, opening hours of the attractions, and their historical outline.

Below the first menu there is *Search, Download* (where you can download *Images, Videos, Brochures,* or *Apps*), then the *E-shop*, which is built as a subpage with its own double menu. The first menu, on the left, is expandable and contains all information about the e-shop – contact, reclamation, payment technologies, while the second main menu contains the following tabs: *Tickets, Private tours, Group Walking Tours, Maps, Brochures.* The e-shop offers the possibility of buying online *Private tours, Souvenirs,* or *Group Walking Tours*. What is interesting is that the e-shop is available in only three languages: Czech, English and German, where the Czech language version is much more developed.

The main menu of the website provides different content for different language versions. For all versions, however, it consists of: *Places, Events, Food & drink, Accommodation, Practical, Themes, Articles*. Each of these tabs is a main tab that unfolds, and by entering it you also access a new menu comprising: *Monuments & Architecture* (castles/châteaux, palaces, houses, towers, lookout towers, churches, foreign-language services, synagogues/Jewish heritage, cemeteries, technical monuments, squares/streets, bridges, fountains, statues/memorials, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Barque, Rococo, Classicism & Empire, historicist

styles, Art Nouveau, Cubism, functionalism, modern architecture, free, romance, views, wheelchair access, with children, TOP monuments); *Parks & Gardens* (parks, gardens, natural sites, botanical gardens, zoos, views, with children, children's playground, wheelchair access, free, romance); *Arts & Entertainment* (theatres, cinemas, galleries, museums, concert halls, jazz clubs, rock & pop clubs, dance clubs, multifunctional spaces, observatories/planetariums, attractions, with children, free, wheelchair access); *Sports & Relaxation* (adrenaline sports, climbing, cycling, fitness, golf, Horse riding, ice skating, in-line & skateboard, outdoor fitness, outdoor swimming pools, racket sports, rowboats and pedal boats, running/trekking/Nordic Walking, sports centres, sports games, stadiums, swimming pools, unusual sports, waking routes, water sports, wellness & spa, winter sports, wheelchair access, sports equipment rentals, with children, children's playgrounds, TIPS); *Shopping* (antiques, books, Czech fashion, design, glass & porcelain, jewellery/fashion jewellery, luxury, markets/marketplaces, musical instruments/music, shopping malls, souvenirs, toys/marionettes/crafts); *Tourist Services* (tourist information centres, walks, sightseeing tours, cruises, sightseeing flights, luggage storage, bike rentals & rides, car rental, other, with children). Following the menu there is the *Articles* tab, with photos and interactive links to selected articles on places. After clicking on a chosen tab, e.g. *Monuments & Architecture*, you see a list of interesting places and their number (e.g. castles/châteaux, palaces, houses, towers, etc.). When you select one of them, a list of places within this category is displayed below – first a photo and then an interactive link to the subpage of the place with other photos, a map of the place, opening times and ticket prices, contact details and address, and links to its official Facebook page, website and e-mail. There is historical information about the place underneath. Similarly, the whole tab is constructed in such a way that it is a kind of integrated search engine. The whole solution is undoubtedly very good as it does not cause chaos, information overload or difficulties in searching for needed facts, and thus it is very clear and logical.

The next tab, *Events*, is identically structured to the previous one and consists of the following subpages: *Exhibitions, Music, Theatre & Dance, Festivals, Food & Markets, Sport, Other, Permanent exhibitions, Walks*. They are divided into further subtypes constituting a search engine for events divided into particular groups. Following the menu, there is the *Articles* tab, with photos and interactive links to selected articles on events.

The *Food & drink* tab encompasses the following subpages: *Restaurants, Beer, Wine, Bars, Cafés & Tearooms, Sweets, Snacks, Delicatessens.* As in the previous cases, each of these subpages has its own menu, functioning in a similar way to a search engine that gives users the ability to find categorised pubs, restaurants, clubs and cafés. A link, posted under the photo of a place, takes us to a subpage dedicated to the promotion of the site, with photos, opening hours and address. Moreover, there is the *Articles* tab under some menus, with photos and interactive links to selected articles on food and drink.

Another tab, *Accommodation,* direct visitors to a new subpage with a search engine for accommodation available on booking.com. Underneath, there is a page menu made up of: *Hotels, Pension Hostels, Campsites.* The tabs on the subpage function as a search engine to find places. Traditionally, there are photos below, with interactive links to the subpages of the places, with pictures, maps and information.

In *Practical information* you find information about travelling around the city, contact details of important institutions, contact to a tourist information office and guidebooks to download.

At the bottom of the page you can check the current weather conditions or exchange rates, as well as subscribe to a newsletter. There are also links to social media – Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. At the bottom of the page we also have the same main menu, divided into individual tabs. Without a doubt, the site lacks facilities for the visually impaired.

4.   Bratislava

Bratislava's website is available in three languages: English, German and Slovak. In the upper left corner there is the logo of Bratislava. At the very top of the page there is a menu and a promotional video posted below it showing various attractions of the city (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Bratislava (https://www.visitbratislava.com/)
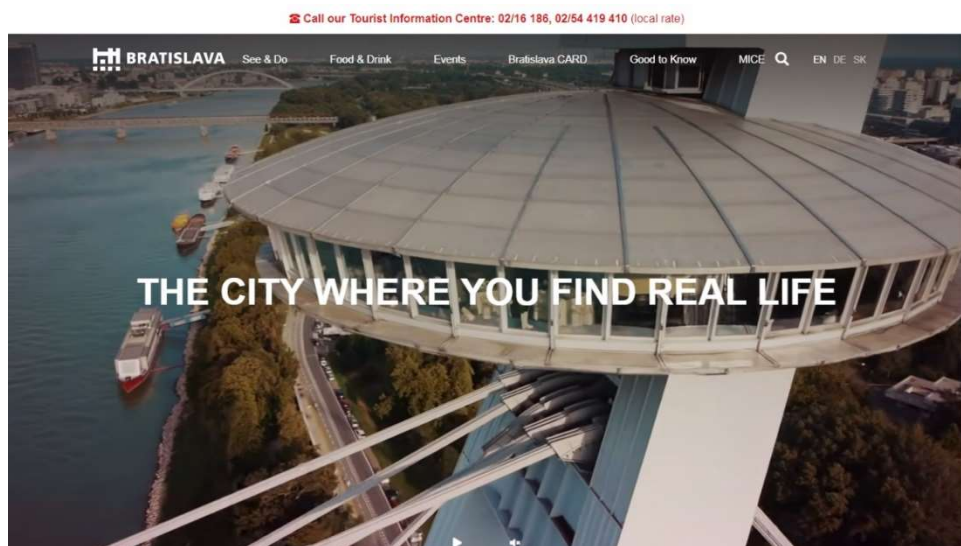
The main menu consists of See & Do, Food & Drink, Events, Bratislava CARD, Good to Know, MICE. After them, there is a search engine. The first tab, See & Do, has the following subpages: Top 10, Attractions, Sightseeing Tours, Things To Do, Culture & Art., Shopping, Nightlife, Bratislava Region, Trip Planner. On the Top 10 subpage there are 15 photos, signifying different categories of the Top 10 places. These are: Summer Experiences in Bratislava, In Bratislava, Things You Can Experience Only In Bratislava, Instagram Spots in Bratislava, Spring Experiences, Beer Pubs, Wine Experiences, Street Food Shops, Views in Bratislava, Like a Local, Romantic Places in Bratislava, Nightlife, Bratislava's Modern Architecture, Winter Experiences, Autumn experiences in Bratislava. By selecting a particular Top 10 category, you will find 10 attractions/places with photos and videos and, at the very bottom, a map of where they are located. Some Top10s contain interactive links redirecting a visitor to a new subpage of the main site. In Attractions we find information about attractions [such as escape rooms, a virtual reality gin & tonic bar or a bunker], where by clicking on the posted pictures or the name of the place, one is taken to a subpage with that place's photos, description and a map showing how to get there. In the next tab, Sightseeing Tours, we are redirected to a new subpage with a search engine. Here we can choose, for example, which topic we are interested in, how we want to move around [on foot, by bike, by bus, etc.] or how long we want to spend on a tour. Choosing a tour by clicking on its illustrative photo or name, as before, we go to a subpage with pictures, itineraries, contact

details of the organizer, and organizational information about the tour. On the right side there are recommended regular tours and themed city tours. The Things To Do tab contains 11 subpages with attractions grouped by a topic related to history, noteworthy monuments, cultural life, local gastronomy, wines and beers, proximity of nature. When you click on a given photo or the name of a chosen theme, you are taken to a new subpage with a description, photos and, on the right-hand side, recommended places connected with a given theme. Clicking on an interactive photo, you are taken to a subpage of the attraction, which has photos and practical information such as a phone number, address, website, e-mail and opening hours. There is also a map at the bottom. The next tab, Culture & Art, contains information on art and culture. The subpage's construction resembles the previous ones and is rather poorly readable for users: under the banner we can find brief information and several photos, on the right side two categories of recommended places: Theatres and Philharmonic and Museums & Galleries. By selecting a category, we are transferred to a subpage listing attractions with photos and captions underneath. If you click on a given photo, you move to a further subpage of the chosen attraction, where there is a description, contact information and a map. On the right side, as before, there are further recommendations. The next tab, Shopping, presents, in the same way as the previous subpages, information about shopping centres, where a selected place has a short description, contact details and a map. In the Nightlife tab, following a short description, there are interactive photos with recommended places, which, if selected, redirect us to a subpage of the place with its description and a map. As previously, on the right side there are icons of places – Guided tours – with the following subpages: Bratislava by Night, Bratislava Wine Tour, Bratislava Beer Tour, Bratislava Craft Beer Tour, Bratislava City Wine Tasting Tour, Legends of Bratislava. The next tab is Bratislava Region, containing information about the region, descriptions of places and photos. On the right-hand side you find Tips for trips and an interactive photo. If you click on it, you are taken to a search engine of the region's attractions. You can also choose an attraction yourself by clicking on a photo or a caption underneath (as before, a short description, contact information and a map are provided on the place's subpage). Clicking on the last tab, Trip Planner, takes us to a new page devoted to planning a trip, with regard to specific days, who is visiting [a couple, family, friends or singles], what time of the year and what themes are of interest. Such an electronic tool for planning a trip seems to be a very good idea; additionally, it is very easy to use, and you end up with a downloadable plan, with a map of designated places. In the next tab, Food & Drink, there are the following subpages:

112

Restaurants, Cafés, Wine Bars, Breweries, Street Food, Patisseries, Ice Cream Shops. In Restaurants we find brief information under a banner and photos of places with their names. Clicking on any of them takes us to a subpage of a given place with its description, basic information and a map. On the right side information about recommended places is posted. All tabs in this section are structured in a similar way. The next tab – Events – is a search engine for events in a given period. The subpage consists of tabs that are search topics: All, Top, Exhibitions, Music & Concerts, History, Family, Sport. When an event is found and you click on its image, under a themed banner you will find general information on the event, its date, a map with an indicated venue, ticket prices, and often photos from previous similar events. When you click on the Bratislava CARD tab, you are automatically redirected to a new subpage dedicated to purchasing the card, which entitles you to visit certain places free of charge, travel by public transport, and gives you discounts on various events, attractions, shopping, and visits to restaurants and cafés. A card holder enjoys a wide variety of benefits. The card's website is very clear and easy to navigate. In the tab Good to Know there are the following subpages: Arrival, Transport & Parking, Information Centres, Maps & Brochures, Accommodation, Other Useful Information, Press/Media/BTB, About Bratislava Tourist Board. Arrival informs you how to get to Bratislava by plane, train, bus, car, ship and bicycle, and provides necessary links and a downloadable map of the city. In the next tab, Transport & Parking, we can find information about public transport, purchase of tickets, taxis, and rentals of bicycles, electric scooters, scooters and recreational places. The Information Centres tab contains information on tourist info centres and a map of the city centre. In Maps & Brochures you can download maps and information brochures: there are 24 in all. The Accommodation tab, under the banner, has information on accommodation. Moreover, by clicking on the option Recommended Hotels in a Nutshell on the right, you are taken to a new subpage with a map of the hotels and photos with interactive links to hotel information and contact details. Other Useful Information includes information about free Wi-Fi, luggage storage, weather, drinking alcohol, good manners, etc. The next tab, Press/Media/BTB, contains information about brochures, city marketing, famous conferences, logos, photos and downloadable applications. The last tab – About Bratislava Tourist Board – is dedicated to the Bratislava tourism community. On the right there is information about BTB members (indicating, among others, selected restaurants and hotels, museums) and people who make up the team responsible for Bratislava tourism and marketing. In the last tab, MICE, we are taken to a subpage with a new menu, which includes: Event Planning,

Bratislava Motor City, Capacities at a Glance, Request for Proposal, MICE News, Contact. Here you find information related to the menu topics, either on the main subpage or we are automatically redirected to a new page. On the Event Planning subpage, there are icons on the right – Capacities at Glance, Request for Proposal, Promotion Materials, Suppliers, Venues/360 Videos. When we select one of them, we are redirected to an appropriate subpage with information. At the bottom of the page there are icons for social media: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Linkedin.

5.   Budapest

Visiting the website for Budapest (Figure 4), you see the city's logo first.
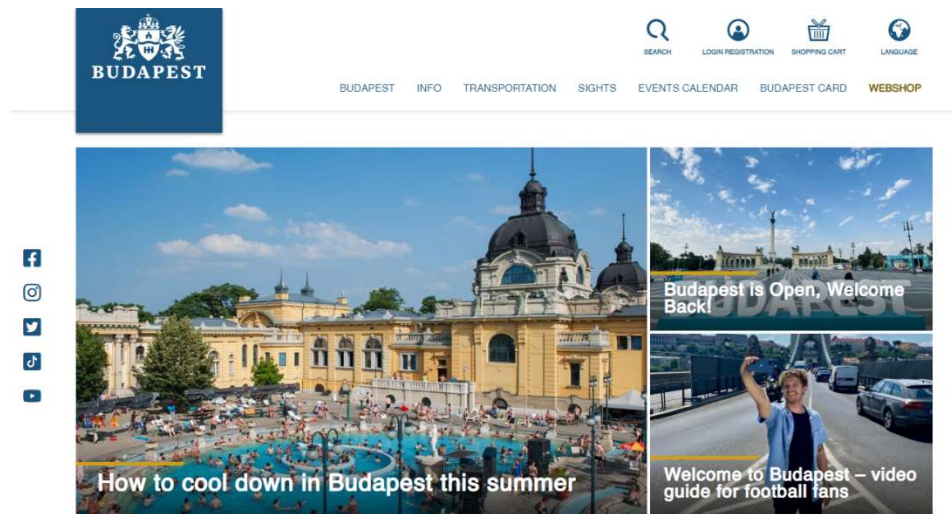
Figure 4. Budapest's website (https://www.budapestinfo.hu/en/)

In the right-hand corner, on the other hand, there are: *Search, Login Registration, Shopping Cart, Language.* The website offers nine language versions, English, Hungarian, German, Italian, French, Spanish, Polish, Russian and Chinese, differing significantly in terms of content. Below is the menu of the site, with the following sections: *Budapest, Info, Transportation, Sights, Events Calendar, Budapest Card, Webshop.* Under the menu you can find interactive photos, some of which are already placed somewhere in the sections: *LGBTQ+ friendly Budapest, Covid: general regulations; How to cool down in Budapest this summer.* This is followed by *Program Tips* (a photo and an interactive title) with different tour options linked to relevant subpages. Then the *News* tab can be found, with various pieces of information, the first one being *LGBTQ + people are*

welcome in Budapest, which was undoubtedly caused by the fact that in June 2021, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law stipulating that school classes dealing with issues of sexuality may not promote sex conversion or homosexuality. Apart from school educators, only individuals and organisations appearing in an official, updated register will be allowed to conduct such classes. This prompted the European Commission to initiate infringement proceedings against Hungary. Therefore, the capital city does not want to lose foreign tourists and indicates its openness towards LGBTQ+. Afterwards, there is another tab, *Top Attractions*, followed by the *Budapest Card*. Moving to the main menu, you will find the following sections under the Budapest tab: *Budapest Welcomes You!, The History of the City, About us, LGBTQ + friendly Budapest, Budapest's weather, Photos, Videos.* In *Budapest welcomes you!* you can read some general information about Budapest. *The History of the City* encapsulates the history of the Hungarian capital. The *About us* section provides information about the NGO that runs the site and is responsible for its marketing. Another tab, *LGBTQ + Friendly Budapest,* contains various LGBTQ+ related articles. *Budapest's Weather* describes typical weather conditions in Budapest in different months, illustrating it with photos. *Photos* includes pictures of Budapest, while *Videos* features promotional films. The *Info* section includes the following subpages: *Useful Tips, BudapestInfo Points, Publications, Embassies, Accommodation, Health Care, Toilette, Rehydrant Project in Budapest.* Each subpage is accompanied by a thematic banner. *Useful Tips* imparts useful information for tourists, such as emergency telephone numbers and regulations on drinking alcohol and smoking. In the tab *BudapestInfo Points* you can find contact details, while in *Publications* there are photos with interactive captions underneath, which redirect you to a subpage with brochures which open interactively and can be read. The *Embassies* section contains addresses and telephone numbers of embassies. In *Accommodation* we come across general information on hotels and guest houses. In the middle of the text we find the icon "Next", which moves us to a new page with a hotel search engine. On the *Health Care* subpage you see a large thematic banner at the top, with photos and interactive descriptions underneath, linked to *Pharmacies, Private Clinics, Emergency care*, subpages dedicated to these topics, respectively. In *Toilette*, information on city toilets and a map of their locations in the city can be found. *Rehydrant Project in Budapest* informs us about drinking water for inhabitants and tourists in the form of drinking fountains and a map of their distribution. In the third section of the menu – *Transportation* – we have the following tabs: *Reaching the City and its Centre, Taxis, Public Transport, Without Barriers in Budapest, Wheelchair*

Accessible Public Transportation, Car Rental, Biking Around Budapest. This whole section is dedicated to information about buses, trains, trolleybuses, taxis and car rental. The next section, *Sights,* has the following tabs: *Top Sights, City Walks, Sightseeing, Cultural Sights, Baths/Lidos, Market Halls and Markets, Gastronomy, Sports and Nature, City Districts and Neighbourhoods, Shopping.* In *Top Sights* a large banner is posted along with information about sights underneath. Then there are interactive pictures with names of places: by selecting a particular attraction, you are taken to a subpage dedicated to it. There, under the description of the place, we have the Google Map, which, however, did not load during this analysis. This tab is of very low quality in respect of its content and video materials, because apart from the main banner with a photo, it has no multimedia whatsoever. In the next tab, *City Walks*, a few places to visit are presented. We can choose either a photo illustrating a given itinerary or an interactive link, but when we click on them we have a subpage with just a banner or small photos and short descriptions. It is probably of little help to potential tourists who would like to see some pictures, and, above all, a map so as to be able to get there. A good approach to tourists is missing along with basic information, or at least solutions offered for walkers by the websites of Warsaw and Prague. In some subpages there is a link at the bottom – *More information here*. By clicking on it we are automatically transferred to a new, separate web page. On the next subpage, *Sightseeing,* we have information, provided in a similar way, about all kinds of transport (buses, car rental, scooters, bicycles, scooters, motorbikes, etc.) necessary during sightseeing in the city. Under the main banner there is information, followed by interactive pictures with captions, which redirects you to a short description and the address, but without maps. In the next tab, *Cultural Sights*, you can find the description of boat trips, and under it there are photos, with active links - *Churches, Museums, Folklore culture events*. Choosing one of them, we are redirected to a subpage catalogue of selected thematic attractions, in a similar visual scheme as before. If we select a particular place, all we get is a short description. Another tab, *Baths, Lidos*, is similarly constructed, with a short description under the main banner and photos with active links underneath: *Benefits of Mineral Baths, Baths, Lidos / Waterpark*. By selecting one of the following tabs, we are transformed into a subpage of the catalog of selected thematic attractions, in a similar visual scheme as before - a banner about water attractions, and when selecting a specific attraction, we move to a page with a short description, the address and link to the water attractions page are provided. All subsequent tabs - *Market Halls and Markets, Gastronomy, Sports an Nature, City Districts and*

116

Neighborhoods, Shopping, and thus their subpages in this section, are structured identically and contain the most important thematic information with an indication of attractions. In the next tab *Events Calendar*, under the banner, there is an event search engine, followed by an event calendar. In the penultimate tab, *Budapest Card*, you can find all information about the purchase of city tourist cards, including all types of cards and information on what the tourist receives within the purchased card. In the last *WebShop* tab, the tourist can buy any card of his choice on the capital's website. Interestingly, icons redirecting to social media can be found on selected banners from various tabs. And so, the city's marketing is carried out on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok and YouTube, respectively. At the bottom of the page, you can order a Newsletter and find information about the site and contact the organization that manages the site.

6. Researching the websites of capitals with internet tools.

In this subsection, I present the technical flaws of the researched websites of V4 capitals with the use of internet tools and I will try to show their influence on communication. Therefore, I will have to use IT concepts and issues, which I will try to do in the simplest possible way, because this level is quite complicated. Checking the correctness of the code of the analyzed pages using W3C (X) HTML validation and CSS validation is an extremely important part of the technological research on the functioning of websites of the studied cities, because thanks to them we receive information about errors in websites. Examination of the pages in terms of technological structure is a key element of the functioning of the website, and thus influences the actual operation of real use, therefore it is important for every user of a given website of capitals, as it affects its reception and functioning. Validation is the process of verifying the syntax correctness of an XHTML / HTML document. A distinction is made between syntax checking and checking compliance with the official XHTML / HTML specification and only syntax validation. In the first case, usually web services (so-called parsers) are used, in the second, usually special programs, so-called validators. Validators scan the document for errors in the code and non-compliance with the specification; in addition, they highlight missing or incorrectly used tags, incorrect nests, and misuse of styles"[11]. Cascading CSS style sheets is a language for managing the visual

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[11] The information comes from the website, http://html-css-ajax.com/css.php, (accessed on 20/07/2021).

part of a website and consists of a list of rules that define how an HTML document element will be displayed, namely the text color, font, page background, margins, element position, spacing between letters and lines[12]. CSS validators work similarly to XHTML / HTML validators - they will check the correctness of style declarations, their properties and values against the current W3C standards[13]. The PageSpeed Intsight tool is used for technical research of websites and it is worth using it in order to present information on specific Internet errors, and at the same time to present the ranking of the examined websites in terms of technical correctness of capitals' websites. The program itself works in two versions, for computers and for mobile phones. It is checked to show the elements to be "improved", "worth improving" and "rules followed". The data obtained using this program not only finds errors, but also shows how to fix them. The website of Warsaw (Figure 5), technically on mobile phones, meets very few standards - scoring only 21 points, and the performance of the website on mobile phones is very poor.

Figure 5. (https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwarsawtour.pl&tab=mobile)

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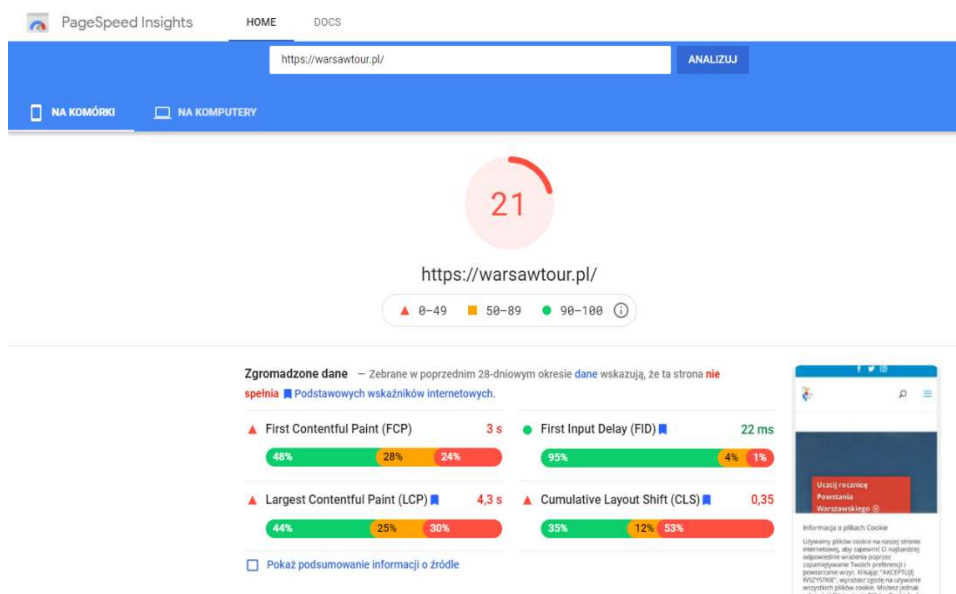
[12] Informacje pochodzą ze strony internetowej, http://html-css-ajax.com/css.php, (dostęp na 20.07.2021).

[13] The World Wide Web Consortium, abbreviated as W3C, is a consortium founded in 1994 by Tim Berners-Lee - the creator of the first website, the first web browser and the WWW server.

The website of Warsaw (Figure 6) technically on computers meets many standards and in the point range it is to be improved, received 87 points, and the operation of the website on computers is good.
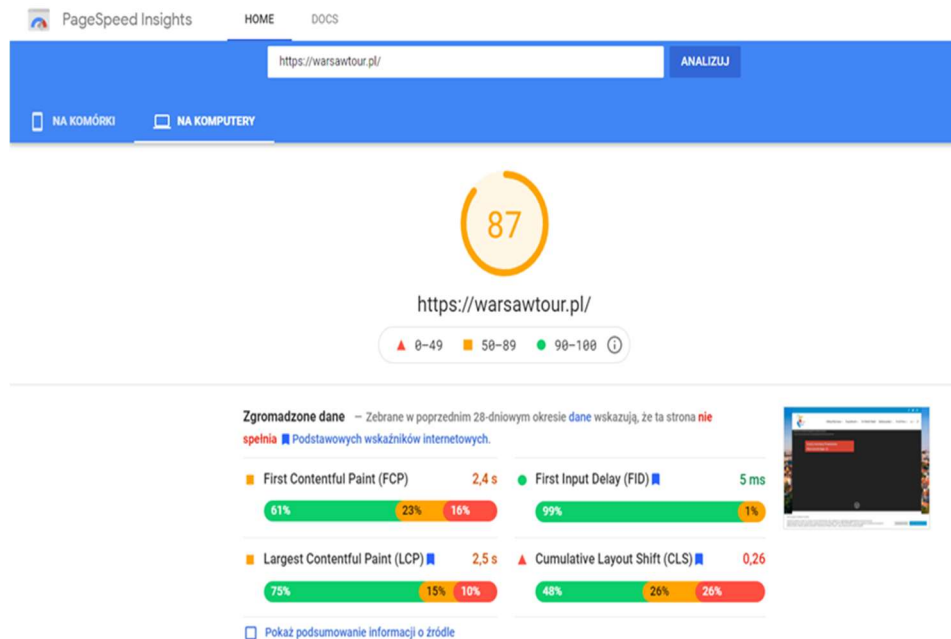

Figure6.

(https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwarsawtour.pl&tab=desktop)

Prague's website () meets very few standards on mobile phones - it scored 40 points and the website performance on mobile phones is very poor, but it is still the highest score among all V4 capitals.
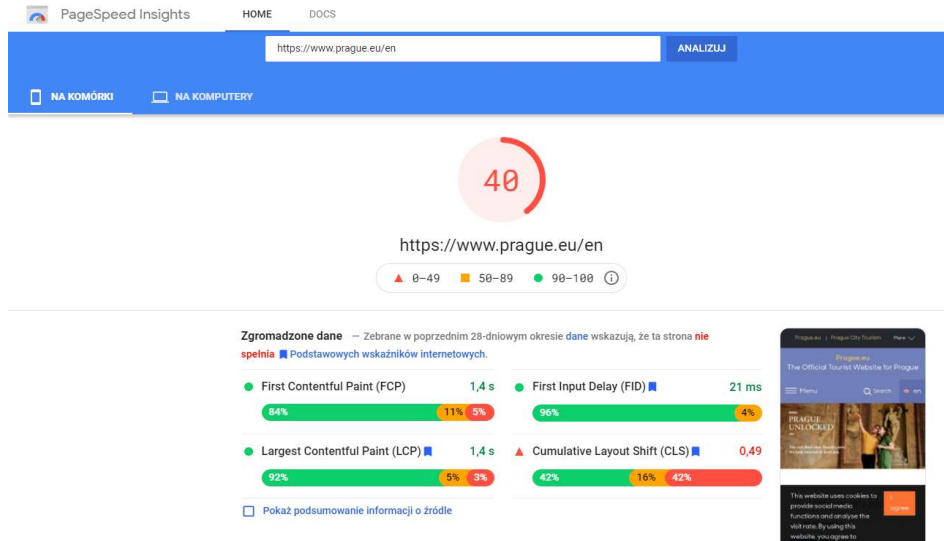
Figure 7.

(https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.prague.eu%2Fen)

The website of Prague (Figure 8) technically for computers is in need of improvement, where it received 88 points.

Figure 8.

(https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.prague.eu%2Fen&tab=desktop)
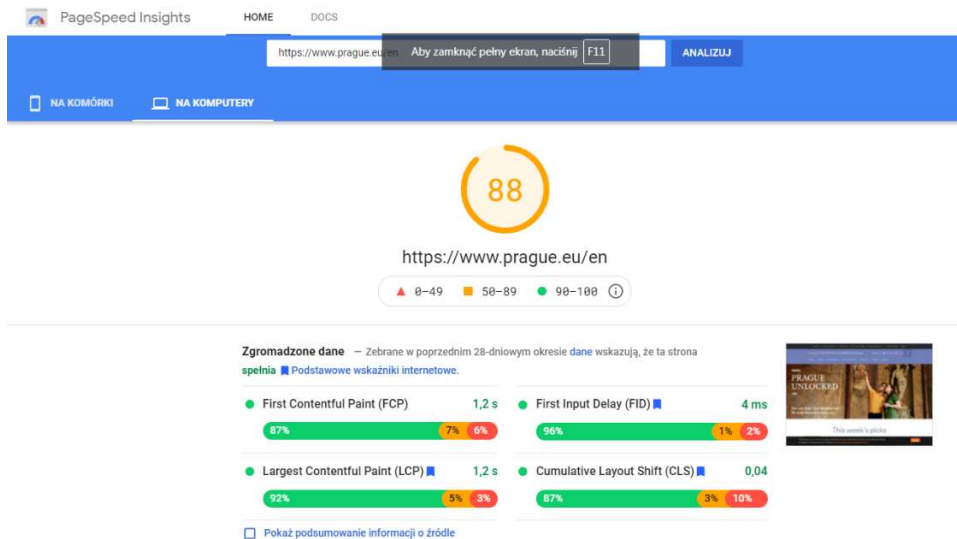
The website of Bratislava (Figure 9) technically meets very few standards on mobile phones - scoring only 31 points, so it operates illegally.
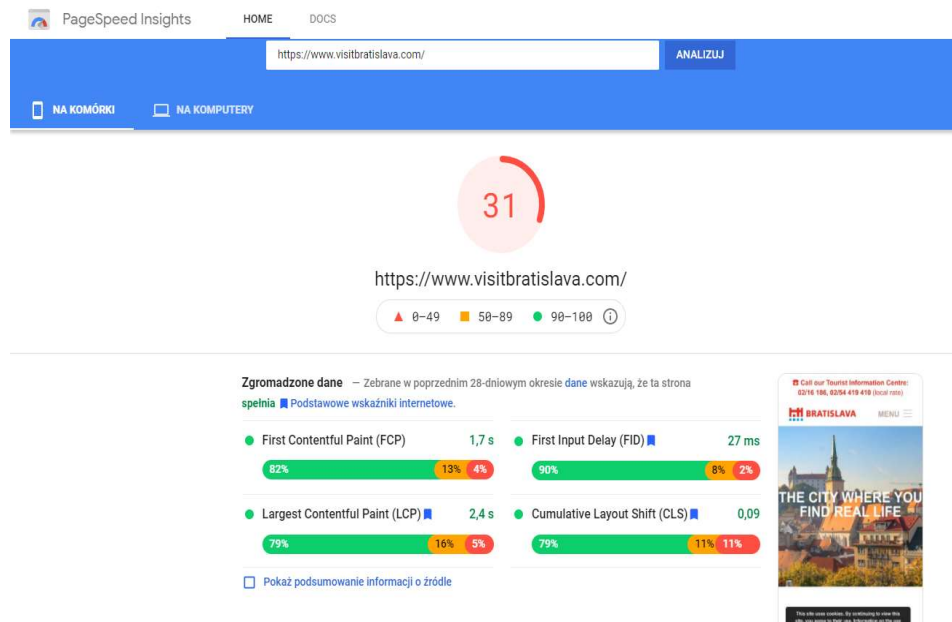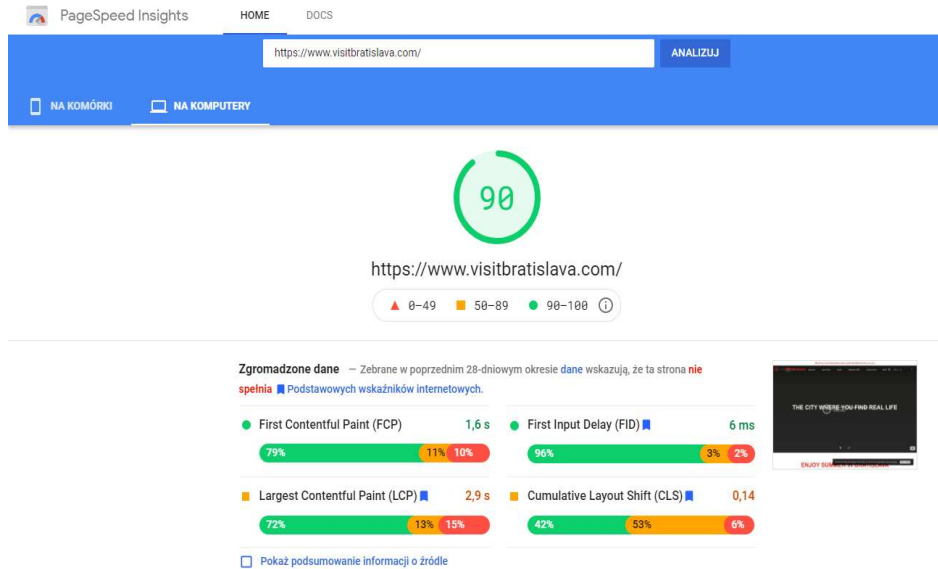

Figure 9.

The website of Bratislava (Figure 10) for computers is technically well-established - it received 90 points, and therefore it works very well on computers.

Figure 10.

(https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?hl=pl&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.visitbratislava.com%2F&tab=desktop)

The website of Budapest (Figure 11) technically for mobile phones meets very few standards - it scored 27 points, and the website on mobile phones is very poor.
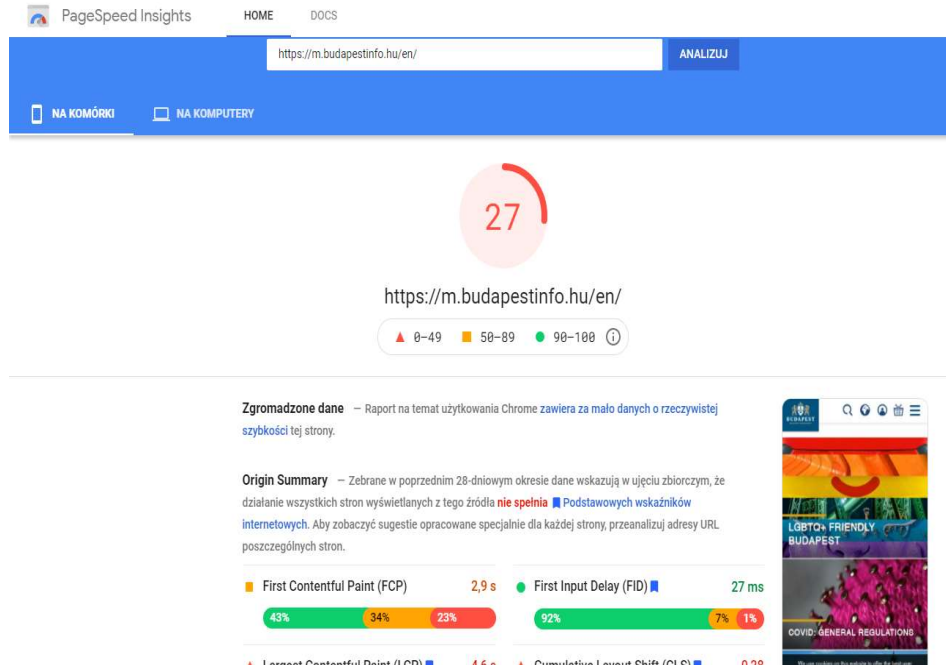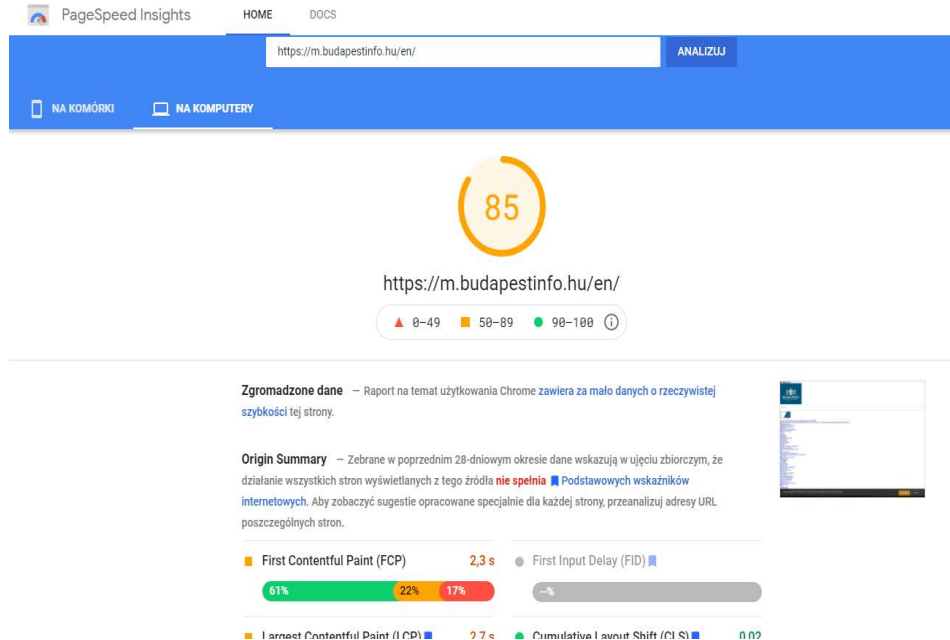
Figure 11.

The website of Budapest (12) technically for computers meets many standards - it received 85 points, but there is room for improvement.

Figure 12.

(**https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?url=https%3A%2F%2F m.budapestinfo.hu%2Fen%2F&tab=desktop**)

The websites of the capitals participating in the overall study were technology tested with validators. The websites have been tested for the correctness of (X) HTML standards using the web program available on the website - https://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/. The results of the research on the technological functioning of websites are presented in Table 1 (Table 1), which shows errors and warnings regarding specific websites.

Website	Errors	Warnings
Warszawa	27	1493
https://www.prague.eu/en	9	595
https://www.visitbratislava.com/	10	1876
https://www.budapestinfo.hu/en/	0	0

Table 1. (https://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/)

124

The website of Warsaw has the greatest number of errors - 27, and the websites of Prague (9) and Bratislava (10) are comparable. The best website in terms of technical standards is on the Budapest website, which is the only one that meets all standards and is correctly written with CSS version 3 and SVG. The program not only shows the number of errors on capitals' websites, but also shows the exact location of the error so that it can be corrected faster.

7. Summary

The effectiveness of the e-marketing activities of the capital cities' websites can be checked using online tools. The presented tool shows the actual technical level of the examined websites, where their quality on mobile phones is very low, failing to meet the basic standards. In the era of the Internet and smartphones, it seems that the correct functioning of websites on mobile phones should be a standard, but unfortunately this is not the case. It is a pity, because a large number of tourists navigate cities using their phones. There is still a lot to be done for the V4 capitals to enable them to become smart cities. Undoubtedly, in the last 10 or 20 years the V4 capitals have benefited from ICT innovations, but after the present analysis, it seems that the people who create the websites lack a broader perspective on e-marketing and e-tourism. "The concept of a smart city covers many areas of life, including tourism, which is a source of revenue. The e-tourism infrastructure can attract tourists, so it should be supported by the local administration and the state. One of the elements of infrastructure is a city's website created by the authorities, a natural communication tool in the age of the information society[14]. The discussions about the Internet as a tool for territorial marketing have confirmed the hypothesis that the global network plays a dominant role in urban tourism, and even more so in capital cities, which, however, do not fully exploit its potential. This tendency is not always shaped by the expectations of tourists, who develop according to the dynamics of IT progress and free market mechanisms[15]. Regrettably, capitals' marketing is not directed at tourists from the Visegrad countries, which is proved by the unavailability of their languages. There is also no cooperation between the capitals in terms of e-tourism and tourism in general, which would undoubtedly be fruitful in this time of pandemic.

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[14] B. Gontar, J. Papińska-Kacperek, E-turystyka jako element koncepcji budowania inteligentnego miasta, [in;] Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Studia Informatica, No. 29/2012, pp.20-21.
[15] E. Kancik-Kołtun, *E-marketing terytorialny. Teoria i praktyka*, Lublin 2017, p. 329.

While Prague's website is extensively developed and well thought-out, Warsaw's is slightly weaker, Bratislava's is even weaker, and Budapest's website is the least geared towards tourists and contains very little information and multimedia. It is important to note that in many places the websites under examination are illegible, the font quality is poor, and the information is chaotically placed, especially on the website for Budapest. However, this refers to other websites as well. The discussed cities, which are capitals, undoubtedly lack, for example, the option of enlarging the font and increasing contrast for the visually impaired. The capitals of the V4 countries should rely on integrated e-marketing in the tourist industry, which has already been applied in several solutions of the studied websites.

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DIGITALIZATION CHALLENGES WITHIN THE VISEGRAD GROUP

EJULIA BŁACHOWICZ

DESI (Digital and Digital Society Index) is a project aimed at tracking the state of digitisation in the European Union. Among the areas analysed are: connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technology, digital public services. The 2020 ranking is based on data for 2019. The Visegrad Group countries ranked: Czech Republic 17th position, Hungary 21st, Slovakia 22nd and Poland 23rd.[1] Full statistics are available in the attached chart (see Figure 1).
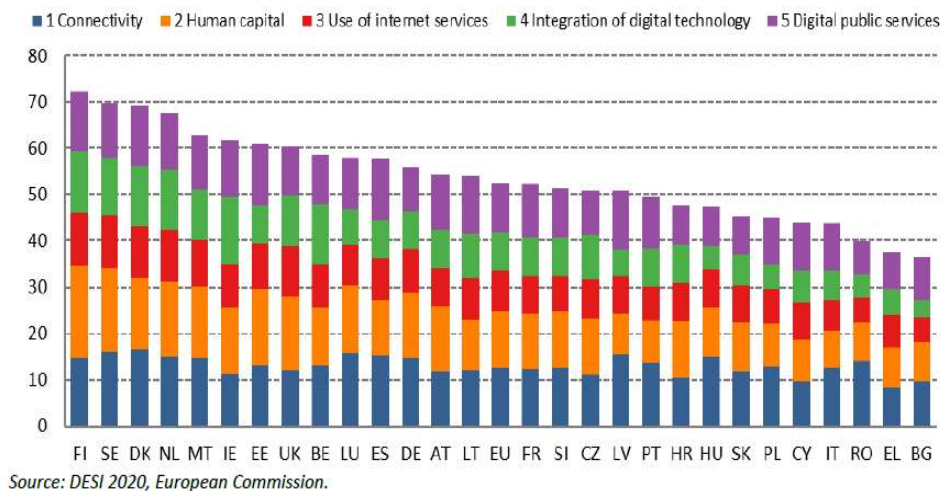

Source: DESI 2020, European Commission.

Figure 1

The leading positions belong to the Scandinavian countries. Further positions are occupied by the countries of Old Europe. The new members close the ranking, although the exception here is the position of Italy. Therefore, apart from the Czech Republic, which is ahead, we are talking about a very similar state of digitisation. This may lay the foundations for the joint development of plans and strategies.

In order to better understand the plans of the Visegrad countries at the national level, the author analysed individual and currently valid

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[1] European Commision, Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020, s. 14.

digitisation strategies. Due to the quantitative limitations of this article, it was decided to analyse selected areas.

During the analysis of documents concerning Poland the following areas were selected: cyber security (at the societal level) and Artificial Intelligence. Providing cyber security requires an adequate human resources base. An answer to this problem may be the promotion of the cyber-security field of study.[2] But what guarantees that graduates of this programme will want to find employment in the public sector? The only logical answer is a guarantee of a salary similar to that offered in the private sector. The core curriculum delivered in education must address cyber security. But before this can happen, teachers need to acquire the right knowledge so that they can teach it. Speaking of education, citizens already need education that includes the ability to distinguish between true and false information. The Visegrad Group is too late with education in this area. For it should cover all groups of people, regardless of age. Informal education and courses could be the answer to attempts to educate the public in this area. The ability to exert influence through false information can be observed particularly today on the subject of vaccination against the coronavirus.[3] Analysing the Polish approach to AI, one can come to the following information. It is quite an interesting idea, which also appeared in the strategy for Slovakia. A map of platforms that will include courses, articles, materials, exchange of experiences in the field of AI.[4] So as not to keep this area only at universities. But to give access to all interested parties. What is behind the slogan of building a culture of using data?[5] Organisations have never had as much data as they do today. So it is important that education in data use and processing becomes a popular skill, as it once was with English communication skills. Digital competence status survey.[6] This is a weak fact from a data management point of view, but there is no government data showing the state of digital competence of citizens. And this should be the basis for writing programmes and creating strategies. What else? If we are talking about an educational network

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[2] Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji, Strategia Cyberbezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na lata 2019-2021, s.22.

[3] GOV.PL, Walczymy z fałszywymi informacjami, https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/walczymy-z-falszywymi-informacjami, [dostęp: 06.10.2021].

[4] Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji, Założenia do strategii AI w Polsce. Plan działań Ministerstwa Cyfryzacji, s.79.

[5] Ibidem, s.81.

[6] Ibidem, s.82.

accessible to everyone, there must be courses allowing to acquire digital competences. This subject should also be present in the public media.

The area of AI is equally important in Slovakia's digitalisation strategy. Activities and projects in this area require large financial resources.[7] State aid in this area can support innovation and interest of citizens in this topic. Advisory groups- many sides need to speak in this debate.[8] Effective planning and implementation needs representatives of government, business and the third sector (non-profit, voluntary organisations) at the discussion table and ordinary citizens who simply want to act. In order to design solutions for all, everyone needs to be present in the conversation. It's hard to imagine being able to participate in an opinion poll using chatbots.[9] But it sounds like something worth pursuing, if only for the accessibility, convenience and encouragement of participation. The companies are there, so why not have the contact with academic centres or government there? Thanks to the pandemic, the e-state has developed very quickly. There is still a lot to do in this field. For example, ensuring fast access and transfer of data between institutions.[10] The use of blockchain in the area of secure document circulation. It can make data verification much simpler and more secure. The use of this technology makes it possible to create a secure ecosystem, of which not only government administration, but also other institutions, such as banks, are a part.[11] And so, the topic of smart cities, which has been popular for years. Here, the activities can be really quite numerous, from monitoring the state of the air to the number of buses on the road on a given day. In short, demand analysis and action adjustment.

The Czech Republic is the leader in the position of the Visegrad countries with regard to digitisation. It is difficult to talk about plans and strategies without the appropriate infrastructure. Access to high-speed Internet cannot depend on where people live or what means of transport they use.[12] Digitalisation must affect all areas of human activity, and it must not be limited only to administration. Support programmes for digitisation should also cover culture, public health and, quite simply, entertainment and

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[7] Akčný plán digitálnej transformácie Slovenska na roky 2019 – 2022, s.61.
[8] Ibidem, s.63.
[9] Ibidem, s.64.
[10] Ibidem, s.50.
[11] Ibidem, s.52.
[12] Implementační plán hlavního cíle č. 4 – DES. Podpora konektivity a infrastruktury digitální ekonomiky a společnosti, s.2.

everyday tasks.[13] The pandemic has shown all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that the situation with digitisation of schools is not as good as imagined. Practically all schools are connected to the Internet, but its quality varies greatly depending on location. Also the Czech strategy deals with the aspect of cyber security. The following actions are recommended in this area for the first and second sector. Create backup scenarios for the operation of the company, e.g. due to network failures or cyber-attacks.[14] Creation of an independent centre of experts and standards, which would allow an objective assessment of the security of individual elements of critical IT infrastructure. Creating uniform security standards. Which apply as a standard for both public administration bodies and private entities.[15]

The Hungarian strategy stands out from the others. It includes an analysis of the current state and the goal the country wants to achieve in 2030. From the perspective of the digital competence area. The percentage of people without digital skills should be below 2%. The percentage of people who regularly use the Internet should be 100%. The percentage of university graduates with digital skills should be 14%.[16] From the perspective of the digital economy area. The share of enterprises with (ERP- enterprise resource planning) exceeds 40%. The share of companies using big data analytics reaches 20%. The share of R&D expenditure in the "information, communication" sector as a % of total national expenditure on this sector exceeds 12%.[17]

Proceeding to initiatives aimed at a common path to digitisation of the Visegrad countries, Digital V4 should be pointed out. This project was established in 2019 and is still under constant development, for example this year's projects such as virtual office and virtual projects. It assumes the cooperation of digital and high-tech organisations. Among the more interesting ideas of this initiative are: supporting start-ups and SMEs, initiating cooperation between business and academia, or optimising regulations related to digitisation so that they are not an obstacle to it.[18]

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[13] Ibidem, s.3.
[14] Implementační plán hlavního cíle č. 5 – DES IP Zajištění bezpečnosti a důvěry v prostředí digitální ekonomiky a společnosti, s.14.
[15] Ibidem, s.2.
[16] NEMZETI DIGITALIZÁCIÓS STRATÉGIA 2021-2030, s.9.
[17] Ibidem, s.10.
[18] DigitalV4, https://digitalv4.eu/pl/, [dostęp: 06.10.2021].