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The Deconsolidation of Democracy in East-Central Europe: The New World Order and the EU's Geopolitical Crisis

ATTILA ÁGH

Abstract: *In recent decades, the most remarkable feature of East-Central European (ECE) states has been their engagement in a deconsolidation process that necessitates the reconceptualising of European Studies and the theory of democracy. In the early '90s, during the "revolution of high expectations," consolidation was the key term in the conceptual framework of the transitology paradigm, but this approach was questioned increasingly in the 2000s and rejected in the 2010s. In its place, deconsolidation was introduced as one of a wide array of similar terms referring to the decline, backsliding or regression of democracy and later as one of a whole "other" family of opposite terms like (semi-)authoritarian system and competitive/elected autocracy. Indeed, rather than a transition to democracy, a tendency to transition to authoritarian rule has been observed in the ECE states in general and in Poland and Hungary in particular. In the last quarter century, the twin terms of Europeanisation and democratisation, which denote normative approaches, have been the main conceptual pillars of analyses of the ECE states. It turns out, however, that the opposite processes of de-Europeanisation and de-democratisation can now also be observed in these countries.*

Key words: democracy, deconsolidation, East-Central Europe, geopolitical crisis, EU

In fact, the systemic change in East-Central Europe took place during the Old World Order (OWO) between 1989 and 2014. In contrast, the New World Order (NWO) since 2015 has introduced new global rules and created a new international environment for ECE domestic developments. This article therefore

proceeds on two levels and via two conceptual frameworks: it begins by offering a theory of the deconsolidation process in the ECE countries of the EU during the OWO stage and then describes the new conceptual framework for ECE in the NWO stage. The first part discusses internal deconsolidation while the second part deals with external deconsolidation, looking briefly at the EU's global role and analysing the EU's regionalisation process as a "nested" game in the ECE region. During the current "polycrisis" in the EU, a two-sided process of securitisation and de-securitisation has also taken hold within ECE due to the return of geopolitics with the refugee crisis. The first half of this article, thus, takes a triple crisis in the Old World Order as its point of departure while the second half responds to the de-securitisation of ECE states in the New World Order. Finally, in an effort to attain a more positive outlook, I outline some perspectives on re-democratisation as a bottom-up process that could replace today's failed top-down democracies imposed by elites.

Introduction: The age of uncertainty in democracy studies

In the good old days, everything was clear according to a "simple dichotomy" between democracy on the one hand and autocracy or authoritarian systems on the other (Merkel 2004: 33). As democracy has declined in East-Central Europe (ECE), the response in the academic literature has become more and more uncertain and chaotic. Democracy is increasingly qualified with adjectives like "electoral," "minimalist," "populist" and "defective," and this has also been necessitated by special developments in individual ECE countries. Nowadays, the ECE countries are caught "in between," i.e. in a space somewhere between democracy and non-democracy and in systems which have slipped in the last few years from semi-consolidated democracies into "flawed democracies" (FH 2016a, b). Although this historical trajectory of deconsolidation has been described extensively in the international scholarship, it remains highly contested among ECE academics due to acute national sensitivities and the apologist efforts of incumbent governments. Political scientists internationally have discussed the ECE region in terms of declining democracy since at least 2007 when the *Journal of Democracy* published a special issue on the topic ("Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?"; see Rupnik 2007) and the debate has continued in special issues of that journal, most recently under the heading "Is Democracy in Decline?" (2015). Based on these overviews, it appears that the common historical trajectory of democracy's decline in ECE can best be summed up by the term *deconsolidation*.[1]

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1   I have dealt with the internal deconsolidation process in ECE in earlier works (Ágh 2015a, b,c). This article tries to locate this issue in the context of the latest developments. It takes as its background

This deconsolidation has been confirmed and well-documented by major ranking institutions including the Bertelsmann Foundation (BF), The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and Freedom House (FH, with Nations in Transit, NIT Reports) year after year. At a glance, there has indeed been a growing gap between *formal* and *substantive* democracy since the very beginning of the systemic change period. Thus, despite national sensitivities in ECE countries and the apologist views of loyal experts to national governments, inventories of the health of these countries have suggested a serious socio-economic and political crisis based on the converging assessments of all relevant international policy institutions. At the same time, the international media have reported on election landslides, major corruption scandals and the symptomatic actions of oligarchs in and around these ECE governments. These events have been accompanied by the declining popularity of ECE parties and governments and the increasing apathy, mass protests, radicalism and Euroscepticism of the population, generating a huge gulf of trust between the elite and citizens. Loyal ECE analysts may close their eyes to these developments and minimise them and/or only list the achievements, but this is also the reason why the "lack of the deep substance of democracy remains largely and voluntarily unobserved" in ECE (Papadopoulos 2013: 2).[2]

All in all, it is rather difficult to find a proper term for these hybrid polities between democracy and non-democracy in ECE. As a result, political scientists studying the democratisation and Europeanisation of ECE countries have entered an age of uncertainty. Big problems surround definitions of democracy, which vary depending on whether assessments of recent developments are positive/optimistic or negative/pessimistic. Many new terms have been circulated that apply fundamentally different – thin and thick – criteria for democracy and result in contradictory evaluations. Mainstream analyses have used polite terms, referring to "hybrid," "deficit" or "half" democracies since some negative issues are too glaring to ignore, particularly when they affect ECE parties and party systems. Increasing corruption and decreasing trust in politics and politicians have already been observed superficially (EC 2014b), but in most cases, these issues have been addressed separately and not in terms of their organic connections as *systemic features* demonstrating the profound decline of the new democracies. In order to avoid negative evaluations, many studies fall back on a minimalist definition of democracy based on electoral democracy

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the New World Order and the recent authoritarian turn in Poland, presenting Poland and Hungary as trendsetters.

2 For detailed data about this deconsolidation process, see the Annex to this study; I return to this material in what follows. This article focuses on ECE countries. While the first part also applies to all new member states (NMS) *mutatis mutandis* to a large extent, there is no space here to comment on the idiosyncrasies distinguishing ECE from wider NMS developments. In the second part, I focus on the drastic transformations of New World Order, which affect the NMS as a wider region more fully and directly.

with its "free" elections and some basic human rights. Supposedly, this allows these polities to qualify as democracies but at the high price of ignoring the "unfair," illusory and non-representative nature of their elections (OSCE 2014) and the actual socio-political exclusion of large communities, which prevents them from enjoying their "individual freedoms."[3]

In order to legitimise their regimes, many (soft) dictatorships also permit some sort of manipulated and/or controlled election process which results in elected autocracies or competitive authoritarianisms. Given the fact that today's dictatorships may embrace some core elements of democracy, while democracies may be hollowed out by developing some authoritarian features, the under-theorisation of democracy and dictatorship is particularly clear. It is no longer enough to separate these two main forms of regime in a simple way for analytical purposes, i.e. describing democracy as merely the opposite of dictatorship. Since standard analyses often lack the traits of a holistic or systemic approach, the theory of democracy needs a new system for defining both democracies and non-democracies based on a detailed theoretical understanding that captures all the sub-types in between. At the same time, the only way to systemise democracies and dictatorships and all their hybrid variants and sub-types is to infuse nuance and/or substance into the earlier radical and mutually exclusive distinction between democracies and dictatorships. The systematisation also implies developing a conceptual framework for the emergence of deconsolidation as a *process*. Earlier studies focused only on the transition to democracy but today's system must include the *transition from democracy to authoritarian rule*. The various regimes representing sub-types must also be geographically (regionally) clustered, e.g., for the ECE countries (for a recent account, see Lidén 2014: 50, 53).[4]

Nevertheless, in this age of uncertainty for democracy studies, experts have hardly considered that the "democratisation" resulting in deconsolidation took place under the Old World Order (OWO). This systemic change in ECE began in the early '90s and was accomplished over the last quarter century under favourable conditions. In contrast, the ECE's historical trajectory is now proceeding under the drastically different and unfavourable conditions of the New World Order (NWO). EU accession has been both an opportunity and a challenge, functioning in very different ways under these changing world orders: while the OWO offered a great *opportunity*, the NWO presents a severe *challenge*. The

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3   To mark the occasion of ten years of EU membership, special issues of several journals reviewed the decline of ECE democracies and the shift to authoritarian rule. See *East European Politics and Society* (Rupnik– Zielonka 2013), *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Epstein – Jacoby 2014) and *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* (Banac 2014).

4   The new ECE authoritarian regimes are usually presented in international politics and media as "illiberal states," a term advanced by Orbán (2014).[Alternative wording/meaning here: states,"as Orbán (2014) observes.]

"polycrisis" in the EU under the NWO has led to an increasing core-periphery divide, which threatens to marginalise the ECE region further and portends future conflicts between ECE and central EU institutions.[5]

In general, European governance needs to be analysed from the twin perspectives of multi-level governance (MLG, the institutional-territorial-regional dimension) and multi-dimensional governance (MDG, the coordination of policy development dimension). If we take an *inward-looking* approach, the deconsolidation process can also be described by way of these two dimensions. The first considers the socio-economic and political history of the last quarter century according to a conceptual framework of "triple transition – triple crisis," which has led to three debates about democracy. The second analyses ECE's different integration, i.e. the region's divergence from mainstream EU developments based on what may be summarised as de-Europeanisation and de-democratisation processes (in these polities, politics and policy structures serve as negative, elitist and regressive forms of integration). The point of departure for the first aspect of this inward-looking approach is the Dahrendorf-Offe "trilemma" between political, economic and social systemic changes in ECE. In the second half of this article, I address the deconsolidation process using an *outward-looking approach* that refers to the EU polycrisis (Juncker 2016) due to the incoming New World Order. This analysis first approaches deconsolidation as some kind of domestic socio-economic and political de-securitisation process. It then turns to emerging tensions between the transnational and member state levels based on increasing security debates. I, thus, examine the resulting danger that the ECE region may become its own sunken continent.

The inward-looking approach: ECE's historical trajectory under the Old World Order

Triple transition and triple crisis: Three democracy debates

Triple transition and triple crisis are key concepts for understanding the present social and political situation in ECE. The ECE countries first underwent a triple transition of their economies, polities and societies and later experienced a triple crisis as three profound socio-economic crises morphed into a political crisis over the last quarter century under the OWO. These countries went through a transformation recession in the early '90s and then fell into a post-accession

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5   I address the external deconsolidation process as a new field of research elsewhere (Ágh 2016 a, b,c). This new conceptual framework has just begun to enter European Studies. As one Bruegel analyst notes, the major Eastern crisis of an expansionist Russia and declining Eastern Partnership region came as a surprise to the EU since Europeans appear to have lost the habits and expertise required to analyse the world in geopolitical terms during the relatively relaxed multi-polar era (Biscop 2015: 2). The edited volume by Magone et al. (2016) provides a comprehensive analysis of core-periphery relations under the NWO.

crisis on their EU entry in the 2000s, which was quickly followed by the global crisis later in the decade. In sum, these states have paid a very heavy social price for their political and economic transformation during the triple transition. The original assumption in the early '90s had been that the three – political, economic and social – dimensions of the democratic transition would create a virtuous circle and reinforce each other. The triple crisis, however, unleashed a vicious circle in which these dimensions increasingly – and fatally – weakened one another. The negative outcomes of the triple transition, known as the "Dahrendorf effect" and based on the diverging timing and controversial processes of the various spheres of this systemic change (Dahrendorf 1990), were observed as early as the '90s by public commentators as well as academics. In an often quoted analysis, Ralf Dahrendorf explained that political-legal transformation requires about six months while economic transformation takes six years and social transformation 60 years. Claus Offe (1991; see also Offe – Adler 2004) also warned of the dangers of taking a simplistic approach to triple transition, pointing out the virtual contradictions between political-legal, economic and social transformations.[6]

The Western fallacy had held that the Western road from democratisation to consolidation could be replicated in ECE, producing the same macro- and micro-structures of liberal democracy and a vibrant civil society. Consolidated democracies had, however, emerged in Western Europe after World War II based on a solid foundation of socio-economic development following three decades of rapid economic growth; Western civil society was the product of even longer term historical developments. Despite all warnings to the contrary, advocates of an Eastern carbon copy of the Western model maintained that liberal democracy would thrive in ECE immediately after the establishment of large formal democratic institutions. For a long time, the Dahrendorf and Offe exhortations were neglected and the naive optimism of the Western fallacy prevailed, with experts arguing for the success of a catch-up process. Although the negative historical trajectory of deconsolidation was already apparent to some extent in the early 2000s, these worries were swept away by EU-euphoria and over-optimism that EU membership with all its "automatic" effects would resolve the basic contradictions between and within economic, political and social developments. Proponents maintained that the ECE region was an "emerging continent" soon to join the core of developed countries and consolidated democracies.

The idea of "sustainable" democracy had come to the fore of political science debates in the '90s (Przeworski 1995) when the future of ECE democracies was called into question within the third wave of democratisation. Up to that point,

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6 Data about the triple crisis are readily available. See the large databases of Bertelsmann Foundation (BF) (2015a, b), the European Catch Up Index (2014), International Labour Organization (2016), Freedom House (FH) (2016a, b) and World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015), among others.

the eco-left literature had only emphasised that democracy was needed for sustainable – ecological and social – developments. However, from the '90s onwards, more and more stress was put on the opposite argument that sustainable economic and social development was essential for sustainable or "consolidated" democracy. Despite emerging signs of a vicious circle between political, economic and social systemic change, EU documents continued to present the history of democratisation and Europeanisation in ECE as overwhelmingly a success story or sunny-side narrative. In a similar way, mainstream Western theories and most ECE experts tended to describe the ECE transformation as basically an evolutionary process, i.e. without special attention to the increasing contrast between the presence of formal-legal democratisation and the lack of social consolidation. These commentators were typically unwilling to give up a formalistic-legalistic approach to democratisation and they failed to detect that increasing social disintegration and fragmentation were the main drivers behind political crises.

The global crisis ultimately exposed the weak development of the semi--periphery of the EU, and after ten years of membership, malaise about democracy became the dominant mood in ECE with a populist turn and growing Euroscepticism. Back in the early 2010s, a European Policy Centre (EPC) analysis had warned that countries like Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Czech Republic appeared to take a "populist turn," suddenly calling into question the hitherto linear reading of democratisation which presumed a cumulative and irreversible progression of the CEE democracies from transition to consolidation. Fast-forwarding to the present day, against the backdrop of the crisis, the incidence of threats to the EU's democratic principles and values has increased (Balfour and Stratulat 2012: 2).

From a present-day vantage point, it is undoubtedly difficult to strike a balance between positive and negative features when describing this process of democratisation and social disintegration. Nevertheless, marked signs of socio--economic and political crisis in recent times call for the presentation of a darker narrative about the deconsolidation of ECE democracy. A very large-scale recent debate about anti-democratic tendencies and democratic regression in ECE has come to the conclusion that democracy should not be taken for granted in ECE countries. In fact, it is useful here to consider three other discussions about democracy which have been taking place among international political scientists in parallel with the triple crisis in ECE. These debates are very helpful for understanding ECE developments in general since their redefinitions of democracy mirror the radical shift of attention in ECE from the "political" to the "social" history of democratisation and from a consolidation to a deconsolidation paradigm.[7]

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7   Rupnik and Zielonka (2013) point out that the academic literature has focused on political-legal issues or macro-politics in ECE and neglected the social and cultural dimensions. In the same spirit, Gergana

These debates about democracy have been organised around the three main themes of transition, consolidation and quality of government (Denk – Silander 2012: 26). The first set of discussions took place in the '90s with participants describing sharp regional differences in the democratisation process in a rather optimistic mood. These commentators maintained that after an initial *transition* period of dynamic ECE democratisation, democratic *consolidation* would follow, bringing about the homogenisation of the new social system as a whole; in contrast, in the controversial East European (EE) version of democratisation, only semi-democratic systems would emerge. The main divide was, thus, between ECE "democracies in the making" on one side and special EE forms of half-democracy on the other, with this "reverse wave" producing new semi-authoritarian regimes. While the focus of this first debate was on the legal-formal institutionalisation of democracy, in the second debate, it shifted to a more complex analysis of democracies based on many social and political indicators. In the 2000s, the evolutionary development of ECE was called into question when it emerged that consolidation had been delayed or become doubtful. Hybrid democracy was used as an analytical device to explain this situation since the heterogeneity of social and political transformations remained the best analytical concept to account for ECE in the 2000s (Bogaards 2009; Cassani 2014; Coppedge et al. 2011; Dzihic 2014). On this basis, commentators tried to explain why after profound political and economic transformations, social systemic change had been delayed in the '90s and later failed in the post-accession crisis of the 2000s. That failure meanwhile generated widespread public discontent and its repercussions undermined popular support for democracy to a great extent. The second generation of theories still drew a vital distinction between the embedded or "deficit" democracies of ECE and the semi-authoritarian regimes or "defect[ive]" democracies of EE (Merkel 2004). Nonetheless, among those in a more pessimistic mood, the weakening of ECE democracy was already being discussed in the larger context of the "backsliding" of democracy in ECE (see, e.g., Rupnik 2007), with some even predicting deconsolidation.[8]

Noutcheva (2016) has recently argued that mainstream literature emphasises the major role of the transfer of big formal institutions in the Europeanisation of the NMS; she notes, however, that these publications overlook the importance of "societal empowerment." It is no coincidence that BF has launched a Social Inclusion Monitor (SIM) project in Europe. In fact, social crisis is the most important new phenomenon since the global crisis, especially in ECE countries. In 2015, BF published its second report in this series (BF 2015c).

8   The "transition to authoritarian rule" approach grew out of a school of Nordic thought concerning the quality of democracy, an increasingly topical issue in the 2010s with the sensational return of authoritarianism worldwide. It was no coincidence that around this time the journal *Democratization* published its special issue "Unpacking Autocracies: Explaining Similarity and Difference" (edited by Köllner – Kailitz 2013). In a comprehensive book-length study of democracy, Papadopoulos (2013: 2–3) discusses a "hollowing-out of democratic politics" (with reference to Guy Hermet), which is very characteristic of ECE developments. Over the three debates, both the number of countries and the socio-political indicators considered were greatly extended.

The third set of democracy debates, which began in the late 2000s, has embraced all states in the world and concentrated on the quality of democracy and social progress using a highly complex set of indicators described by many international ranking agencies. This larger discussion has uncovered the fundamental weaknesses of the ECE countries from the standpoint of global competitiveness. At the same time, it has become clear that the EU has produced not only positive but also negative externalities since the modernising effects of EU transnational actions often appear at the core and the setbacks on the periphery; this is the case for the Eurozone, for example. Since the global crisis, it has become more apparent than ever before that the tremendous changes in ECE have not come organically from inside but arrived from outside as a tsunami or "imported crisis." In particular, the ECE transformation crisis arose from the collapse of the East-West confrontation in a bipolar world, the post-accession adjustment crisis was generated by the EU entry process, and finally, the crisis over competitiveness broke out due to the global fiscal crisis. A second point of discussion has been the entirely half-baked and controversial reactions of ECE countries to these external challenges. The democratic transition was not properly completed because both "anticipatory" Europeanisation and later "adaptive" Europeanisation remained unfinished, and the global crisis, thus, exploited the vulnerability of the ECE countries. These states either responded to the EU's moves with national resistance to structural reforms due to reform fatigue or they only adopted placebo reforms and so ensured non-compliance instead of effective compliance. In sum, the EU has had only a limited impact on these new member states because they have neutralised the Europeanisation pressure. It is no accident that these countries have been poor at managing the global crisis; after all, the recent "statocracy" system and "new nomenclatura" have not fostered any crisis resilience given the poor governance and fragile governments in ECE.[9]

Rejecting the idea of "rapid democratic consolidation" in ECE (see Merkel 2008), many recent publications have, thus, focused on re-evaluating the post-communist success story. In a special issue of *Europe-Asia Studies*, Ramona Coman and Luca Tomini (2014) specifically analyse the development of scholarship about the ECE countries. Pointing out the general trend of democracy's decline in their introduction, these authors conclude that the most important question today is "How can we explain the democratic crises in the new member states [?]" (2014: 855). This key task is also identified in the title of Tomini's contribution "Reassessing Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe and the Role of the EU." The backsliding of democracy or "democratic regression" has indeed come as a surprise to most analysts, who

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9   This third democracy debate provides the general background for recent analyses by ranking institutions. I return to this debate further on with reference to the WEF data contained in the Annex.

defined democratisation very narrowly, referring only to the establishment of big formal institutions in young democracies. As Lise Herman (2015) observes, minimalist definitions of democracy –based on the "procedural minimum" of the operation of big formal institutions – now have little explanatory power. Such well-designed formal institutions seemed to provide a guarantee against the erosion of democracy in ECE, however this thin democratic façade has crumbled without the support of a vibrant civil society and deeply ingrained democratic norms (Herman 2015: 4,9,13). The result is that the democracies of the elite have been eroded and a deconsolidation process is under way.[10]

Deconsolidation in ECE as de-democratisation and de-Europeanisation

Deconsolidation should also be described in terms of EU convergence and divergence since democratisation and Europeanisation are two sides of the same coin in the same way that the opposite processes of de-democratisation (De-Dem) and de-Europeanisation (De-EU) are. The convergence model was evolutionary and optimistic and it dominated the ECE literature for a long time. This explanatory model presupposed that despite some hesitation, weaknesses and partial setbacks, the ECE countries had basically converged with the EU through a catch-up process in economic, social and political terms. The divergence model, in contrast, is backsliding-focused and pessimistic, and it has recently become more influential. Maintaining that ECE countries have basically diverged from the Western trajectory, this innovative model treats ECE's controversial development as a specific kind of underdevelopment on the semi-periphery. As such, it holds that the EU membership of the ECE countries has merely reproduced the age-old East–West divide "at a higher level."[11]

Seen, then, as divergence from mainstream EU developments, the deconsolidation process can be measured and documented as a matter of differentiated integration (DI) across the "polity," "politics" and "policy" spheres. In fact, when it comes to polity DI, the Rome Treaty stipulates that only *democratic* European states may be members of the EU. There is no doubt that a variety of national models of European democracy can exist and this variety can be seen as *positive*

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10 Poland and Hungary have been the trendsetters when it comes to both the transition to democracy in the late '80s and the transition to authoritarian rule in the 2010s. This is quite clear from the latest country reports (see BF 2016a, b; FH 2016c, d; Pappas 2014). A FH Poland report notes that "[t]he year 2015 brought immense political change in Poland" and concludes that due to "the PiS' aggressive agenda (…) the state of Polish democracy will continue to deteriorate." (FH, Poland 2016b: 2–3).

11 There is a temptation among some comparative politics analysts to compare the ECE countries given their similar trends and key indicators. Poland has often been cited –especially by Polish authors – as an exception, but in fact it is part of the same regional trend. The Polish political system is analysed in very critical terms in a comprehensive paper by Rupnik and Zielonka (2013) as well as other more recent publications (see Aniol 2015).

divergence. The EU has, however, only raised the issue of the ECE's *negative* divergence from democratic polity very belatedly since it has over-respected the "sovereignty" of new member states. ECE's *negative* divergence occurred long before the global crisis and there was no meaningful EU reaction. Moreover, due to the global crisis, the deconsolidation of democracy has since become widespread, producing an increasing gap in levels of democracy across the EU. Finally, European Parliament (EP), that guardian of democracy, has concluded that the regular violation of democratic European values is dangerous for the EU. In this way, it has recognised that the EU must pay a high price for neglecting ECE's negative divergence and over-respecting the principle of non-interference. In addition, EP has itself begun to take steps against some cases of negative divergence and declining democracy though so far this has only seen limited success.[12]

The negative and regressive DI is also reflected increasingly in the realm of politics with decreasing rates of popular participation in ECE's domestic polities. These democracies of the elite have, in turn, weakened the voice of ECE countries in EU transnational decision-making bodies. In particular, there has been a split between the participatory democracies of the West and the non-participatory, "passive" democracies of the East. The EU28, thus, now represents far more than a "multi-speed" Europe; it is a "multi-floor" Europe since the positions of the different member states have already been institutionalised, i.e. rather strictly arranged and regulated legally, to a great extent. On this basis, even Poland only has *partly effective* membership at best while the other ECE countries have *absolutely marginal* membership.

The Copenhagen criteria stipulate the need for not only a democratic polity but also "competitive polic[ies]" since member states must have the capacity to withstand competitive pressure within the EU. Some degree of policy DI remains necessary in terms of socio-economic development because of the (growing) heterogeneity of the EU. In the case of policy, however, there is a difference between *progressive* divergence, which describes the creative capacity of DI to foster alternative developments, and *regressive* divergence, which is the failure to accommodate EU rules. Even progressive divergence, when applied as a policy for catching up with mainstream developments in an optimal way, has generated a lot of problems and complications. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, such divergence may prove helpful for EU members' common future if these transitory stages and forms lead to a more convergent EU. In contrast, regressive divergence refers to the refusal or avoidance of policies needed to adapt to the EU and/or to changing external conditions. This non-compliance

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12 In July 2013, European Parliament, acting as a kind of guardian of democracy, accepted the Tavares Report, which showed that such violations in Hungary were of a systemic nature – that is, they pointed to a coherent anti-democratic system that the Hungarian government had designed and created.

with the policy-oriented membership rules results in socio-economic backsliding and creates a widening competition gap.

Obviously, these three types of DI divergence are closely interrelated. They veer closest together in the preparation, execution and monitoring of the member states' *strategic direction* for socio-economic and political development. Due to the shallowness of their EU integration, "non-democratic" and "non-competitive" member states not only lag behind in quantitative results but also slide back qualitatively to a "low-performing" mode of development. It is important to point out that this polity-politics-policy DI has produced a profound divergence from mainstream EU developments with common features that can be described as deconsolidation in ECE. Such common divergence has generated another vicious circle of backsliding EU democracies which might have been detected before the global crisis and which that crisis has, in fact, very much intensified. This approach makes clear that basic divergence in even one country hurts the EU as a whole. Thus, in the spirit of the Copenhagen criteria, we can draw a contrast between well-performing "thick" democracies and low-performing "thin" democracies. As the guardian of treaties, the Commission has taken action in many cases of regressive divergence where direct rules exist. It has, however, been unable to go beyond this narrow understanding of the *acquis* since the strategic direction of socio-economic development has mostly remained under the competence of member states.[13]

This DI approach raises additional questions about two pairs of opposed processes: democratisation vs. de-democratisation (De-Dem) and Europeanisation vs. de-Europeanisation (De-EU). On this basis, a *relative* De-Dem and De-EU process would mean underperformance in the EU despite predominant convergence while *absolute* De-Dem and De-EU would describe a process in which divergence dominates across the polity, politics and policy fields. The *relative* De-Dem and De-EU position assumes that though the distance between East and West may be growing, the two still have a common target and are on the same road. In this scenario, an evolutionary-convergence model would still apply and the process might qualify as partial consolidation. Under *absolute* De-Dem and De-EU, on the other hand, even if new achievements arose in some fields, the basic historical trajectory would be one of divergence from mainstream EU developments in a vicious circle of deconsolidation.

Applying this understanding, we may conclude that in the first decade of systemic change, the relative De-Dem model and consolidation paradigm oper-

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13 The European Commission has established a New Framework of the Rule of Law Initiative. This is, it notes, a response to "recent events in some Member States [which have] demonstrated that a lack of respect for the rule of law and, as a consequence, also for the fundamental values which the rule of law aims to protect, can become a matter of serious concern. [...] there is a systemic threat to the rule of law and, hence, to the functioning of the EU." While infringement procedures are triggered by "individual breaches of fundamental rights," the New Framework has been designed to address "threats to the rule of law [...] of a systemic nature" (EC 2014:2,5,7). See also Euractiv 2014.

ated to some extent in ECE. After ten years of socio-economic destabilisation, however, the next decade brought increasing political destabilisation due to a populist movement that remobilised the relatively and absolutely disempowered. This increasing destabilisation of the political, economic and social arenas caused the partial *deconsolidation* of the overall system. Finally, in the third (and present) decade of change, ECE's lack of resilience to the global crisis has exposed the basic divergence between East and West as a clear case of *absolute* De-Dem with deconsolidation. Across the ECE region, more and more non-democratic features have emerged in situations of state/agency capture (Innes 2014), which, in my view, also represent full "democracy capture."

The capture of the state/agencies by business and party oligarchs has led to chaotic democracies and a relative paralysis of power within the ECE states. It has also tempted some to believe that a strong leader in a guided democracy or velvet dictatorship might restore law and order. In a state of captured democracy, a quasi-monopolistic central power uses formal democratic institutions as a mere Potemkin wall or democratic façade to legitimise their regime both internally and externally. After the long decade of Poland and Hungary's EU membership, leading EU politicians and experts have put these states in this category, declaring that these new trendsetters in the deconsolidation process would be rejected if they applied for membership today. These countries, they claim, have seriously violated European rules and values and so cannot be considered working democracies.[14]

The outward-looking approach: The deconsolidation of ECE under the New World Order

The Eastern semi-periphery of the EU: ECE's internal deconsolidation under the NWO

In the late '80s and early '90s, theories based on long waves or Kondratieff cycles were very popular since it seemed convincing that systemic change would take place at the end of the "short 20th century." In fact, the world system did change drastically during the transition from a bipolar to a multi-polar system due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The emerging world order determined the ruling social science paradigm with its optimistic outlook on global democratisation and its special ECE version, which was paired with the "return to Europe" in a process of democratisation and Europeanisation. For many, it was plausible that this was even a sign of the "end of history" based on a very simplified model of worldwide democratic victory. In the mid-2010s, however, the "new" world

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14 Javier Solana (2016) has argued that EU membership applications by Poland and Hungary would be rejected today. Bill Clinton has called the incumbent Polish and Hungarian regimes "authoritarian dictatorship[s]" (quoted in Chadwick 2016).

order unexpectedly turned into the "old" world order. Moreover, since that time, the social sciences have been unable to digest the new paradigm of returning geopolitics and securitisation which has worsened conditions worldwide for democratisation, including the Europeanisation of ECE. If we are to avoid the conceptual trap of theorising the current ECE situation in terms of the OWO, then it is crucial to situate these ECE developments in terms of the NWO. Having considered how the favourable conditions of the last quarter century gave these states an opportunity to catch up, I, thus, face the task of describing their starting position in the New World Order with a focus on new challenges.

The *stages* of world system development known as the OWO and NWO contain several *periods*. The final period of the OWO stage can be identified as the EU's transformation in the early 2010s in the wake of the global crisis. This turned into the most recent period of geopolitical crisis in the mid-2010s when the world system entered the NWO stage. If we are to take an outward-looking approach to the EU's global role after this world system change, then we need a new conceptual framework based on the twin paradigms of European governance. Concerning the first paradigm (i.e. policy development, MDG), the EU's traditional role as a civil superpower has been shattered under the pressure of new, complex and ever-increasing security challenges at the current stage of active globalisation. This new global situation calls for an urgent and coordinated securitisation response in the widest possible sense of security. As regards the second (institutional-regional, MLG) paradigm, the EU has had at the same time to respond to world system changes through a new "globalisation-cum-regionalisation" form of action. This has entailed the drastic reform of its own mega-region through the use of new kinds of macro-regions both inside and outside the Union for the territorialisation-localisation of European governance.[15]

The global crisis has weakened the EU on both these fronts. The EU has not yet resumed its trajectory of sustained economic growth in the face of global competition and nor has it been able to play its former influential role in the world system. These routes are barred since the EU's old civil superpower profile does not enable multi-dimensional governance (MDG) in a complex multi-level security system (MLG). Going beyond classical notions of "economic Europe," the EU needs to (re-)organise and coordinate an "energy Union" and a "digital Union," and even more pressingly, a "security Union" (the latter seems to be falling apart, at least in the current transitory situation of the emerging NWO). The ECE region has suffered even more intensely from both these weaknesses of European governance. The pressures of the global crisis and its aftermath have

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15 Management of the Eurozone crisis was the key issue during the EU's transformation crisis. This management was more or less achieved though it remains incomplete. Concerning the pending geopolitical security crisis, the main issue is the completion/reform of the incomplete and fragile Schengen system, which embodies all the weaknesses of the EU's complex security arrangements.

endangered not only European cohesion generally but the cohesion of the ECE region in particular, including the domestic socio-economic and political cohesion of individual ECE states. The latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) regional report investigates how ECE countries have been "weathering the internal and external shocks" and concludes that after the global crisis, "convergence is effectively off the fast track"; IMF notes that the reason for this "growth slow-down is thought to be structural" (IMF 2016). This IMF report follows a World Economic Forum (WEF) analysis which links the worsening competiveness of all five ECE countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) primarily to the weaknesses of their institutions and human capital. The IMF's recommendations for ECE structural reforms therefore concern the institutional sector, which has been deeply and organically connected with investments in human capital (IMF 2016: 21,45,50; see also IMF 2014a, b).[16]

It is clear from the recent IMF report that ECE countries have maintained the traditional GDP-based model of economic development which managed to produce a modest catch-up effect for some years. They have not, however, been able to switch to the newer innovation-driven model based on investments in human capital, as advertised by the EU in its EU2020 Strategy (see WEF 2012). As such, they have avoided making painful structural reforms to their institutional systems, and this weakness of ECE institutions points to the reason for both the economic slowdown and the decline of democracy in the region – that is to say, for its deconsolidation process. It is indeed shocking to contrast the general rankings of ECE countries with their institutional rankings on the one hand and their development of human capital through education and innovation (R & D) on the other. This contrast is, however, also the key to understanding ECE's declining competitiveness. A similar pattern can be observed in Bertelsmann's country reports on the gap between the situation index (SI), which indicates the general development level, and the management index (MI), which denotes the specific level of good governance or governmental capacity in the given ECE state.[17]

The WEF's "economic" reports have turned increasingly into social and political reports as commentators search for reasons for the global competitive-

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16 The WEF sets out a total of 12 pillars which effectively cover all areas of socio-economic life. In particular, the four "basic requirements" for competitiveness within the WEF concern (1) institutions, (2) infrastructure, (3) the macroeconomic environment and (4) health and primary education. In addition, there are six "efficiency enhancers", which relate to higher education with (2–6) five market efficiency factors. Finally, two "innovation and sophistication factors" refer to (1) business sophistication and (2) innovation. The BF country reports make the same effort to reflect the complexity of all social factors. BF's social reports are especially helpful in this respect.

17 The overall Bertelsmann rankings for ECE countries and their institutions were as follows in 2015: Czech Republic: 31–57, Hungary: 63–97, Poland: 41–58, Slovenia: 59–67, Slovakia: 67–104. According to the 2016 BF country reports, the difference between SI and MI in Hungary was 12–76 while in the Czech Republic, it was 3–12 and in Slovenia, it was 7–18 (see BF 2016). It is no coincidence that the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI, World Bank 2015) showed a sharp decline in good governance in ECE in this period.

ness of individual countries. The WEF has, in fact, developed a 12-pillar system covering all dimensions of social life from institutions to innovation, and this goes far beyond the simplified model of GDP-based economic growth. The new policy-development paradigm – which I have referred to here as MDG – is in tune with the above-discussed third democracy debate that focuses on the *quality of democracy* and the effective workings of democracy as the basis for global competitiveness. Under this new approach, economic growth is not reduced to GDP but seen as an innovation-driven development. This presupposes above all that there is (1) comprehensive institution-building with good governance and a high level of administrative capacity and (2) extensive reproduction of human capital through good (higher level) education with a substantial research and innovation capacity in the given country.

Institutions and human capital have been the big losers over the last quarter century in ECE, and the global crisis is just the latest blip in this negative process. ECE countries have avoided making structural reforms to the elite democracy system in general and to government operations in particular. Moreover, investment in human capital has been neglected over the last 25 years to that extent that there is now an "innovation divide" in the EU (Veugelers 2016). Based on the impact of the triple crisis, the internal cohesion of these "low trust" countries has here been seriously reduced along the following lines: (1) instead of *economic* cohesion, dual economies have emerged, (2) instead of *social* cohesion, social polarisation has deepened and (3) instead of *territorial* cohesion, the ECE countries have split into two – developed and underdeveloped – parts (western East vs. eastern East). At the same time, the cumulative neglect of human capital has eroded binding and bridging social capital along with trust in ECE social and political institutions. The majority of ECE populations have, thus, experienced a dramatic loss of social security while an economic and political internal *de-securitisation* process has also been unleashed. In the final analysis, social insecurity and social deficits in the areas of jobs, income, status and identity have produced a precarious situation across all – young, middle-aged and older – generations in the region. This cumulative "social deficit" (Aniol 2015) is the key to understanding the disillusionment and resentment that have produced a golden age of populism with the deconsolidation of democracy.

All in all, the ECE countries have undergone a historical process of social, economic and political *de-securitisation* in which a downward spiral or vicious circle of negative processes have reinforced each other. As such, there has been dramatic political destabilisation with a total loss of public trust in ECE political elites and institutions. We may, thus, understand the socio-political crisis discussed in the first part of this study as a process of *internal* deconsolidation with cumulative effects which are now registering in the initial stage of the NWO.

In what follows, I consider the *external* deconsolidation of the ECE region as a virtual "sunken continent."[18]

The sunken continent: The external deconsolidation of ECE under the NWO

Drastic changes in global security and the global economy, both subsystems of the world system, have demonstrated the specific roles of these subsystems in the ongoing transition between the two world orders. Of the two, the security framework is the more rigid, comprising geopolitical networks and power positions on the global map. The global security system breaks down quickly and changes suddenly but may then remain quite stable for longer periods. In contrast, other subsystems like the global economy with its social (employment and income) structures, usually change more slowly and continuously; they also regularly produce smaller crises requiring adjustments. The latest Kondratieff half-century long cycle, which started around 1990, reached its internal turning point in 2015. In keeping with this, the bipolar security system collapsed in 1990, turning into a tripolar system composed of the USA and EU with some vague roles for BRIC countries. In 2015, that tripolar system became more multi-polar after an aggressive comeback by Russia and the entry of China as well as new claims by regional powers like India, Turkey, Iran and Brazil.[19]

These specificities of the changing world order have, however, long been neglected in European Studies discussions of global regionalisation in continent-size mega-regions like the EU. The collapse of the bipolar system meant the devaluation of traditional military security and the disappearance of the geopolitical dimension from strategic thinking during the OWO. The emergence of the current system of the NWO has brought the return of military security, which is combined now with new dimensions like energy and cyber-security. Moreover, the character of wars has changed beyond recognition, as we may see from wars by proxy and hybrid wars that have activated long-term frozen conflicts, and this has generally provoked terrorism at a global level. In fact, the meaning of "security" is now changing constantly both in terms of "hard" forms of traditional-military security and "soft" forms of emerging energy, cyber-

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18 The 2015 rankings of World Economic Forum (WEF 2015) demonstrate this political destabilisation, as seen primarily in the areas of (1) diversion of public funds, (2) public trust in politicians and (3) transparency of government decision-making. See the first pillar (institutions) of the detailed rankings of the Global Competitiveness Index country reports: Czech Republic (CZ: 92-107-88), Hungary (HU: 119-120-119), Poland (PL: 48-100-106), Slovenia (SI: 70-105-71) and Slovakia (SK: 127-113-79). In this respect, the ECE countries fall within the lowest third of the 148 states ranked by WEF.

19 The discussion in this section is a short summary of my recent security-related publications (Ágh 2016a, b,c), which deal with the securitisation of the ECE region in the NWO based on the changes in the Visegrad Group (V4) and the EaP crisis. The economic development of the BRICs has recently suffered a significant setback and as a result their position in the NWO has decline. This topic, however, like Russia's expansionism in the Balkan and EaP regions, is beyond the topic of this paper.

-digital, climate or "green" security. There are many other types of soft security in the form of "financial" security, including the control of black money transfers and money laundering or global human trafficking, and all of these forms presuppose new roles for security services. At present, we are, thus, experiencing securitisation as a process of complex security arrangements. The coordination of these overlapping and conflicting hard and soft security dimensions has created a tremendous task for all mega-regions under the NWO. More specifically, it has produced a "polycrisis" based on the huge overload of crisis management, geopolitical strategy and security governance for the EU.

As globalisation now stands, the entire multi-level nested game has appeared in the form of a new regionalisation, resulting in the territorialisation of EU crisis management across different levels. This basically means a division among (1) the EU as a mega-region in the world system, (2) macro-regions like ECE and (3) individual member states. As a mega-region, the EU initiated regionalisation in its neighbourhood under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the 2000s. Nevertheless, the EU could not cope with the ensuing challenges – among them, the "carrot crisis" on one hand and over-demanding and underperforming neighbours on the other – as the failure of the Arab Spring and Eastern Partnership (EaP) crisis demonstrated. In the mid-2010s, the geopolitical situation changed drastically around the EU's eastern and south-eastern borders, producing a serious challenge for the entire EU28 and the ECE region in particular, with direct concerns for some countries. In the current "New Cold War," to use the words of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the securitisation of European governance in MDG and MLG terms has occurred through the coordination of several policy fields and territorialisation of security governance – a process that has so far had little success. This new security governance includes renewed external governance in the EaP and West Balkan macro-regions since with the comeback of geopolitics, dormant and frozen conflicts have been activated in the EU's "near abroad," mostly due to Russian expansionism and the Ukrainian crisis.

The EU securitisation process can also be understood via a short history of EU regionalisation-territorialisation under the MLG paradigm. Regarding the regional structure of a cohesive Europe, there have been three periods of development of an EU spatial system serving as the middle layers between the EU and its member states. The first, which we may call the "Europe of regions," occurred when the NUTS2 meso-regions covered the whole map of the EU as sub-national territorial levels. This eventually led to the formal-legal extension of EU cohesion policy so as to include the territorial cohesion of these regions under the Lisbon Treaty after their economic and social cohesion. The second period involved the organisation of functional macro-regions in the 2000s, starting with the emergence of the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the Danube Strategy (EUSDR). While these functional regions had both historical

and structural-practical roles, their innovative years are now over. Nevertheless, this regionalisation has generated its own map of a cohesive Europe. This stage of regionalisation has also had implications for a wider Europe based on the intensive contact between the two macro-regions above and their meso-regions, and the West Balkans and Eastern Partnership. The third period has seen the emergence of a multi-floor Europe based on the "re-structuring" of the core-periphery divide during the global crisis and subsequent geopolitical crisis. Due to the aggressive pressure of the geopolitical crisis on its eastern and south-eastern borders, the EU has "(re)discovered" geopolitics (Kagan 2015). Along these lines, a new regionalisation has taken place in the EU, producing geopolitical regions of some kind under the NWO. The same applies to the ECE region though it remains poised halfway between being a functional region and being a geopolitical region and is, thus, at a critical juncture in many respects. In sum, the initial phases of securitisation have occurred at all the three levels of the EU, i.e. affecting the EU as a whole (mega-region), its geopolitical regions (macro-regions) and its member states in particular locations.

While the various dimensions of securitisation have impacted differently on the EU's emerging geopolitical macro-regions, the effect on the ECE region has clearly been very serious. The macro-region of ECE – and on a wider view, the NMS – is now at a crossroads with the destabilising effects of global politics appearing at its borders just as this region recognises the failure of the catch-up process. Thus, instead of a "return to Europe," the new strategy in the region is a return to the past based on a traditionalist-nativist mindset. The ECE countries regained their full national sovereignty from the Soviet Union after the collapse of the bipolar world, and for them, real national sovereignty in the form of "independence" remains a delicate issue. These states have conceptualised their national identity as a permanent fight with foreign powers for their national sovereignty over the course of history. On this basis, ECE's newly emerging "de-democratised" regimes (or, if you like, incompetent "de-Europeanised" governments) have murmured the "sovereignty" mantra whenever the EU calls on them to take common actions in the current geopolitical crisis. While the ECE countries have over-played national sovereignty in this geopolitical crisis, the neglect of the particular features of the crisis in the ECE region may ultimately prove counter-productive for the EU as a whole in a kind of "revenge of geopolitics" (Nodia 2014). This new vicious circle of internal and external deconsolidation has further disturbed EU operations while strengthening the domestic positions of (semi)-authoritarian leaders in ECE.[20]

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20 Taking their own approach to securitisation, the V4 have actually developed several alternative formations including the V4+ or V4+B3 (meaning the three Baltic states), which aims to ensure the V4's efforts cover the whole NMS region to some extent (see Törő et al. 2014). On the unholy or authoritarian alliance of the V4, see, e.g., Dostál (2015), Kucharczyk – Meseznikov (2015), Parkes (2014) and Visvizi – Stępniewski (2013).

In fact, just as EU authorities failed to confront growing ECE divergence during the earlier and far more favourable OWO stage, they are now responsible for the even greater neglect of this divergence during the polycrisis of the NWO. The EU must ultimately face this new round of negative divergence from ECE governments and at least take efficient measures against serious violations of European rules and values. The acuteness of the danger has been quite obvious since Poland's recent turn in a populist-authoritarian direction. Under the pressure of the refugee crisis, the Visegrád Four (V4) – the security organisation of ECE countries – has formed some kind of unholy alliance within the EU in a controversial new instance of ECE regional cooperation. Originally, many had expected that the Europeanisation of ECE countries would lead to more regional convergence within the mainstream EU and provide a common "voice" for the proper representation of these states' interests in the EU transnational decision-making system. Ironically, however, the earlier divergences among the ECE countries have turned to tentative convergence because of the impact of the new "negative externality" of the geopolitical crisis.[21]

Following the dual – Ukrainian and refugee – crises of the New Cold War, ECE countries have achieved greater regional cohesion in opposing mainstream EU policies despite their remaining idiosyncrasies. Faced with the common pressures of Russian interventionism and the refugee crisis, these countries have come closer to taking a common stand, which has characteristically diverged from the EU mainstream approach in its geopolitical strategy. The new attitude manifesting in V4 declarations is double-edged. It shows the slow and contradictory regionalisation of these states but it also points to the danger of their further marginalisation as they increasingly turn away from mainstream EU developments. All in all, this extreme case of negative differentiated integration has had a serious impact on the EU as a whole and an even more devastating effect on the ECE region. Moreover, its destabilising effects can be understood as part of a complex externally/geopolitically-driven deconsolidation process or international "de-securitisation" of this virtual sunken continent.[22]

A brief conclusion: High time for re-democratisation and "securitisation"

By the mid-2010s, it was clear that the ECE countries had failed at their first try at democratisation, Europeanisation and the "convergence dream" (Darvas 2014) under the favourable conditions of the Old Word Order. Today, these

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21 The European Policy Centre identifies the new authoritarian leaders as "troublemakers" in the area of foreign policy; see EPC (2016).

22 The Economist (2016) describes the new orientation of the V4 organisation as "[b]ig, bad Visegrad" in "illiberal Central Europe."

states must begin their second attempt under the unfavourable conditions of the New World Order, which has converged with the geopolitical crisis. There are, however, some lessons to draw from the region's failed elite democracies and national resistance to structural reforms in the EU – that is, from de--democratisation and de-Europeanisation – if we are to understand the main reasons for ECE's historical divergence. It is true that outside the dominant positive externalities driving Europeanisation and democratisation, negative externalities of the EU have also had toxic effects. These effects have played a role in this negative historical trajectory of ECE since some of the EU's modernising effects have appeared at the core and not on the periphery. In general, the EU's failure to take effective measures against violations of European rules and values in ECE countries remains a key issue.

The ECE region is now facing a deconsolidation and de-securitisation process driven from both outside and inside. On top of the external pressures of geopolitical tensions, there are the internal pressures of authoritarian regimes, exhausted societies and non-competitive economies. The situation clearly shows the long-term limits of the EU's "transformative power" as well as the failure of recent security governance in a systemic misfit/mismatch. The vital issue is now whether these states can stop and turn back a process of increasing marginalisation, or the core-periphery divide will further weaken the ECE region, rendering it a sunken continent in the EU.[23]

Just as the management of the Eurozone crisis was pressing on the EU in 2010 during the economic-financial global crisis, the EU's top challenge in 2016 is management of a security crisis based on a new and complex understanding of security. At present, the EU's capacity for crisis management is overloaded given the crisis over crisis management (polycrisis) that has appeared together with the failure of balanced integration in a Europe where cohesion is deeply eroded. These events have only widened the split between the core and the periphery. Extending into the second half of the 2010s, the biggest challenge for the ECE countries is, thus, two-fold: they must regain their external security through intensive cooperation within the EU; and, at the same time, they must restore their internal security through "re-democratisation." The latter is a bottom-up process that could replace the failed top-down elite democracies in these countries.

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23 There is extensive academic literature on the limits of the EU's transformative power. See, e.g., Grabbe (2014).

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Annex

Tables concerning continental New Member States (NMS-8)

Table 1: EIU – democracy rankings and overall score on a 1–10 scale (10-best)
The Economist Intelligence Unit (167 countries)

	2006	2008	2010	2011	2012	2014
BG	49–7.10	52–7.02	51–6.84	52–6.78	54–6.72	55–6.73
CZ	18–8.17	19–8.19	16–8.19	16–8.19	17–8.19	25–7.94
HR	51–7.04	51–7.04	53–6.81	53–6.73	50–6.93	50–6.93
HU	38–753	40–7.44	43–7.25	49–7.04	49–6.96	51–6.90
PL	46–7.30	45–7.30	48–7.05	45–7.12	44–7.12	40–7.47
RO	50–7.06	50–7.06	56–6.60	59–6.54	59–6.54	57–6.68
SI	27–7.96	30–7.96	32–7.69	30–7.76	28–7.88	37–7.57
SK	41–7.40	44–7.33	38–7.35	38–7.35	40–7.35	45–7.35

Table 2: NIT Independent media ratings, 2005–2014 (1-best)
Freedom House

	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Rank
BG	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	78
CZ	2.00	2.25	2.25	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.75	28
HR	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	84
HU	2.50	2.50	2.50	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75	78
PL	1.50	2.25	2.00	2.25	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	51
RO	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	74
SI	1.50	2.00	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	---	33
SK	2.25	2.25	2.75	3.00	2.75	2.75	3.00	3.00	38

Ranking: Global ranking in 2016

Table 3: Social Justice Index 2015, rankings of NMS-8 (28 countries)
Bertelsmann Foundation

	rank	PP	EE	LA	SC	HE	IJ	MP
BG	26	28	23	20	26	25	16	28
CZ	5	1	11	10	14	5	9	12
HR	22	23	3	25	26	18	21	22
HU	23	24	19	18	24	23	23	26
PL	15	16	8	19	14	26	10	18
RO	27	27	24	21	25	28	17	27
SI	9	11	7	17	9	14	6	11
SK	17	6	28	26	20	21	18	15

PP – poverty prevention, EE – equitable education, LA – labour market access
SC – social cohesion, HE – healthcare, IJ – inter-generational justice
MP – severe material deprivation

Table 4: Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) 2005–2015 (Rankings of 122–148 countries)
World Economic Forum

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
BG	61	72	79	76	76	71	74	62	57	54	54
CZ	29	29	33	33	31	36	38	39	46	37	31
HR	64	51	57	60	61	76	80	81	75	77	77
HU	35	41	47	62	58	52	48	60	63	60	63
PL	43	48	51	53	46	39	41	41	42	43	41
RO	67	68	74	68	64	67	77	78	76	59	53
SI	30	33	39	42	37	45	57	56	62	70	59
SK	36	37	41	46	47	60	69	71	78	75	67

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Table 5: Rankings of institutions (1st pillar), NMS-8 between 2008 and 2015
World Economic Forum (Rankings of 134–148 countries)

	2008	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
BG	111	110	108	107	112	107
CZ	72	84	82	86	76	57
HR	74	90	96	93	87	89
HU	64	73	80	84	83	97
PL	88	52	55	62	56	58
RO	89	99	116	114	88	86
SI	49	55	58	68	75	67
SK	73	101	104	119	110	104

Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016

Table 6: Rankings for trust in politicians (in 1st pillar) NMS-8 between 2008 and 2015

World Economic Forum

	2008	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
BG	112	95	85	97	130	110
CZ	117	134	139	146	138	107
HR	79	104	115	114	124	122
HU	94	130	128	129	113	120
PL	113	76	90	100	101	100
RO	106	119	133	141	109	112
SI	47	96	116	133	133	105
SK	115	132	136	139	121	113

The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016

Table 7: Rankings in selected government fields in 2015 (in 1st pillar)

World Economic Forum

	Public funds	Favouritism	Transparency
BG	104	122	120
CZ	92	94	88
HR	84	100	113
HU	119	125	119
PL	48	69	106
RO	97	111	84
SI	70	97	71
SK	127	138	79

Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016
(1) Diversion of public funds, (2) favouritism in government officials' decisions, (3) transparency of government decision-making

Table 8: Rankings of NMS-8 countries for innovation-driven development 2015

World Economic Forum

	Institutions	Health and education	Higher education	Innovation
BG	107	53	64	94
CZ	57	27	29	35
HR	89	63	51	92
HU	97	72	57	51
PL	58	40	31	64
RO	86	83	59	75
SI	67	15	22	33
SK	104	50	53	66

Rankings in the 1st, 4th, 5th and 12th pillars
The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016

Table 9: Rankings in education and innovation in 2015

World Economic Forum

	Education	Talent–1	Talent–2	Innovation	R&D
BG	93	133	132	79	78
CZ	60	58	85	26	30
HR	103	134	135	122	85
HU	99	123	121	131	97
PL	73	116	126	72	84
RO	90	131	113	63	94
SI	50	98	118	41	39
SK	121	127	129	77	63

(1) Quality of higher education system (in 5th pillar), (2) country's capacity to retain talent (in 7th pillar), (3) country's capacity to attract talent (in 7th pillar), (4) capacity for innovation (in 12th pillar) and (5) corporate spending on R & D (in 12th pillar).
The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016

Table 10: EU2020: Overall rankings and scores of member states in 2010 and 2012 (7-best)

World Economic Forum (2012)

	Rank 2010	Score 2010	Rank 2012	Score 2012
BG	27	3.79	27	3.76
CZ	14	4.64	16	4.49
HR	--	4.1	--	4.1
HU	24	4.4	24	4.6
PL	23	4.6	23	4.8
RO	26	3.84	26	3.79
SI	12	4.69	13	4.59
SK	22	4.17	22	4.13
EU	--	4.94	--	4.88

(Sweden has the highest ranking: 5.77)

Table 11: Smart EU2020: Rankings and scores of member states in 2012 (7-best)

World Economic Forum (2012)

	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score
BG	26	3.69	24	3.65	26	4.30	26	2.96	27	3.95
CZ	16	4.38	16	3.88	17	4.86	17	3.98	16	4.82
HR	--	3.86	--	3.30	--	4.72	--	3.44	--	4.27
HU	22	4.60	23	3.61	21	4.60	20	3.53	23	4.61
PL	21	4.90	22	3.65	23	4.44	22	3.39	14	4.89
RO	27	3.64	26	3.44	27	4.80	27	2.89	26	4.14
SI	15	4.41	19	3.73	16	4.88	15	4.80	13	4.95
SK	24	3.91	20	3.70	24	4.34	25	3.23	25	4.36
EU	--	4.98	--	4.26	--	5.44	--	4.90	--	5.30

Overall ranking; rankings for enterprise environment, digital agenda, innovative Europe and education, respectively (Sweden has the highest ranking: 5.76)

Table 12: Inclusive EU2020: Rankings and scores of member states in 2012 (7-best)

World Economic Forum (2012)

	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score
BG	26	3.98	15	4.32	27	3.64
CZ	10	4.84	14	4.35	11	5.34
HR	--	3.89	--	3.55	--	4.24
HU	21	4.24	22	3.97	21	4.52
PL	25	3.99	19	4.10	24	3.97
RO	24	4.20	20	4.00	23	4.30
SI	14	4.73	16	4.26	14	5.19
SK	20	4.35	24	3.92	18	4.78
EU	--	4.88	--	4.33	--	5.43

Overall ranking and rankings for labour market, employment and social inclusion, respectively (Denmark has the highest ranking: 5.98)

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Analysis of the Voting Behaviour of Czech Members of European Parliament in Areas of the Europe 2020 Strategy [1]

ONDŘEJ MOCEK

Abstract: *Aim of this paper is to analyse the behaviour of Czech MEPs in the topics related to Europe 2020 Strategy. This Strategy is one of the most important documents of recent decade on the European level and it is not so often studied on the level of the European Parliament. The purpose of this text is to find out if Czech political parties in the European Parliament are cohesive or not. The second question is related to the voting patterns, whether Czech MEPs create some kind of voting coalitions or not and if these coalitions reflect the national coalition. Methodology is based on the analyses of roll-call votes. The research period is the first two years of the 8th term of the European Parliament.*

Key words: Czech MEPs, Europe 2020, RCV voting behaviour, European Parliament

Introduction

The Europe 2020 Strategy has grown into a key document for determining the course of the European Union. It sets priority improvement areas for the entire EU, including the Czech Republic. In addition to the views of the individual states charged with fulfilling these policies, it is also worthwhile to examine them from another standpoint.

Some studies have shown that Europe 2020 is virtually overlooked in political debates at the national level (see, e.g., Hloušek et al. 2015). National actors perceive the objectives set under Europe 2020 not competitively, but strive instead to fulfil them as part of their obligation toward the EU. It is thus important to determine the extent to which these objectives constitute conflictual/consensual policies at the European level, since some policies may arouse conflict at the national level but not the European level, or vice versa. This paper focuses on the European Parliament (EP) as the sole EU institution which is directly elected. Special attention is paid to Czech representatives serving in the body, who create a case study.

Aim of this article is to verify whether Europe 2020 themes have motivated political conflict between Members of European Parliament (MEPs) that is whether these European actors differ from national actors in the areas in question in the level of contestation present. In general, this boils down to answering the question of whether themes present in the Europe 2020 Strategy, given that they do not arouse conflict at the national level, at least do so at the European level.

The paper thus emphasizes priorities set under Europe 2020 Strategy as they are reflected in voting by Czech MEPs, with the aim of determining the extent to which Czech MEPs speak with a unified voice in these areas. Further analysis will reveal which parties tend to vote together more frequently and which less so. Also investigated will be the extent to which the stances of the national coalition and the opposition are reflected in these areas, since it is possible that the national government coalition may not be mirrored in party coalitions in the EP. It is most likely that Czech MEPs will vote on the basis of their affiliations to individual political groups, rather than from their participation in the government at the national level.

In addition to examining Czech MEPs as a homogeneous unit, each political party will be dealt with separately. The analysis will reveal the degree of homogeneity Czech MEPs display within their political parties, i.e. whether their cohesion is high. The dominant opinions expressed by individual parties will also be determined and mutually compared.

The study is carried out using roll-call votes (RCV), which is one of the type of voting in the EP. The voting examined here will be to do with environmental and social issues, as well as education and research—policies for which objectives were set under the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Why Europe 2020

The Europe 2020 document was tied to the failed Lisbon Strategy. Although finalized during the global economic crisis, its objectives extended beyond achieving higher employment and a better standard of living. Key priorities

included intelligent, sustainable, inclusive economic growth—an economy that was to develop on the basis of knowledge and innovation, aimed at a low-carbon economy and job creation, along with a reduction of poverty and social exclusion (Evropská komise 2014b, Hloušek et al. 2015: 41–44, Krutílek et al. 2010: 18).

These priorities formed the basis for the definition of specific objectives to be fulfilled by the EU as a whole. In particular, employment was to reach 75 %, while investment in research and innovation were to comprise 3 % of GDP. Other objectives targeted climate change and sustainable energy sources: a 20% reduction in greenhouse gases, boosting the share of energy from renewable resources by 20 %, and increasing energy efficiency by 20 %. In education, the EU objective was to reduce the share of those who do not complete their studies under 10 %, and to increase the share of the population with university degrees to 40 %. The final objective was to reduce the number of people living in poverty and social exclusion by 20 million (Evropská komise 2014a).

The individual member states reflected these objectives within their own contexts, and in specific areas, selected national goals of their own to support fulfilment of the European objectives. Although the document is not directly binding nor enforceable, the European Commission possesses several enforcement tools to compel the Member States fulfil the objectives. These are, specifically, evaluation and consultancy under the so-called European semester, during which Member States submit progress reports, among other things. Another tool is the National Reform Program, which Member States are obligated to submit, and in which they commit to steps to fulfilling the Europe 2020 objectives. In addition, the Stability and Growth Pact may be used, obliging countries to present stability programs or, in the case of non-eurozone countries, convergence programs. As part of these programs, countries describe the steps they are taking to attain a good state of public funds. The programs are then assessed by the European Commission and the Council (Hloušek et al. 2015: 45–46).

The above indicates that although Europe 2020 is not a binding set of legislative documents, it does form a substantial strategy influencing the direction taken by individual member states and the EU as a whole. For this reason, the individual areas in which Europe 2020 objectives are set were taken as key reference areas into which the EU has invested significant political capital.

Study of MEP Behaviour

The European Parliament's Rules of Procedure contain several options for voting. Most frequently used is acclamation, in which a majority is estimated by a visual check. Electronic voting is also used. Here, MEPs' votes are recorded, but the only results available or summary results, not the votes of individuals. Such votes are recorded only under RCV. Roll-call voting produces a list of names in which it can be seen whether a particular MEP voted for, against, or abstained.

This makes clear that RCV is the only type of voting that may be utilized to examine MEP behaviour. Opinions on the information value of such an analysis vary greatly. Criticism comes from two directions: some researchers fear that the RCV may be used as a political tool, since most roll-call votes are taken at the demand of political parties, who may then use the votes as ammunition in their political battles (Hug 2012; Yordanova – Mühlböck 2015).

Others, meantime, criticize the underlying statistics, pointing to the sample structure to argue that RCV analyses are inconclusive because votes are not evenly distributed throughout the voting population, thereby distorting the overall picture of MEP behaviour (Carrubba – Gabel 1999, Gabel – Carruba 2004, Carrubba et al. 2006, Thiem 2006). RCV ratios change over time—analyses of this sort do not always provide a precise representation of reality. The proportion of votes taken by means of RCV is estimated at one-third (Judge – Earnshaw 2009: 143). The issue is further complicated by the fact that it has been made mandatory for final votes. Specifically, since 2009, the EP Code of Procedure has mandated the use of RCV in the final vote on all legislative acts (further details in Mocek – Pitrová 2014).

There is, however, one stream of research that maintains RCV analysis is indeed conclusive. In the forefront of this group of researchers is Simon Hix (Hix et al. 2004, Hix – Noury 2009). Their focus is on the study of homogeneity/cohesion among the individual political actors of the EP. VoteWatch.eu, a website intended to provide insight into MEP voting for the public at large, also utilizes RCV as a suitable tool for examining MEP behaviour.

Other actors also point to the appropriateness of utilizing RCV analysis to explore the voting behaviour of MEPs and determine members' stands on particular themes. A study on Turkey's accession to the EU may serve as an example: it consists in spatial analyses that determine the extent to which the opinions of individual MEPs differ (Braghiroli 2012). Additional studies focus not primarily on RCV, but rather seek out the determinants of MEP behaviour by examining the votes of individual MEPs under RCV (Rasmussen 2008, Yuvaci 2013).

Thus, although the scientific community does not have a uniform opinion on the relevance of studying MEP behaviour on the basis of RCV analysis, such research is being carried out, and this has motivated its use in the present paper.

Methodology

Target of this text is Czech MEPs. All 21 MEPs elected to represent the Czech Republic during the 2014 EP elections were analysed. Specifically, these are MEPs representing ANO, ČSSD and TOP09, parties that have four representatives each. KSČM and KDU-ČSL each obtained three mandates. Two chairs were won by ODS and one by SSO. It must be noted that during the period studied, KSČM replaced an MEP after the death of member Miroslav Rans-

dorf, who died 22 January 2016. On 4 February, 2016, his seat was taken by Jaroslav Kohlíček.

Czech political parties are present in almost all EP political groupings. KDU-ČSL and TOP09 are part of EPP, ČSSD is in S & D and ANO in ALDE; KSČM is part of GUE-NGL and ODS has become a member of ECR. SSO joined EFDD. The specific details for Czech MEPs are given in Table 1.

Table 1: A list of Czech MEPs and Their Affiliation with Political Parties and Political Groups in the EP

Political party	Name	EP political group
KDU-ČSL	Pavel Svoboda	EPP
	Michaela Šojdrová	
	Tomáš Zdechovský	
TOP09	Luděk Niedermayer	
	Stanislav Polčák	
	Jiří Pospíšil	
	Jaromír Štětina	
ANO	Dita Charanzová	ALDE
	Martina Dlabajová	
	Petr Ježek	
	Pavel Telička	
ČSSD	Jan Keller	S&D
	Pavel Poc	
	Miroslav Poche	
	Olga Sehnalová	
KSČM	Kateřina Konečná	GUE-NGL
	Jiří Maštálka	
	Miloslav Ransdorf (until 22. 1. 2016)	
	Jaroslav Kohlíček (since 4. 2. 2016)	
ODS	Evžen Tošenovský	ECR
	Jan Zahradil	
SSO	Petr Mach	EFDD

Source: The author

The focus here is on themes that contain objectives under the Europe 2020 Strategy. These themes include the environment, employment, social peace, education, and research. To classify individual proposals within these categories, a selection key for individual voting sessions was developed: each item voted on has a committee responsible for it—a committee that discusses the item in question prior to any approval in the plenary session. These committees were used to classify the individual items. But because EP committees cover broader political ground than the particular segment in focus, the second criterion was developed to do with the individual DGs in the European Commission. Only relevant areas of the individual items will thus be considered.

In addressing the issue of the Environment, the selection process was carried out on the basis of issues assigned to the Committee for the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety; the parent DGs were either DG Environment, or DG Climate Change. For Science, the Industry, Research, and Science Committee was used, and DG Research and Innovation. Issues to do with Education were selected if they were handled by the Committee for Culture and Education, and DG Education and Culture. For this particular issue, a classification had to be made of the authors of propositions, because within both the EP and the Commission, the actors involved deal with both education and culture. To be classified as an Education issue, then, items that concerned culture were excluded, leaving only those focused on education in the study. At the EP and Commission levels, employment and social peace policies are addressed by joint bodies. For purposes of this study, therefore, these two areas were merged. The EP committee with competence was the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, and for the DG, Employment, Social Affairs, and Social Inclusion.

This structure gave rise to four areas within which Czech MEP voting behaviour was analysed. The initial data came from the eighth EP term of office, consisting of all voting sessions that touched on the selected areas from the beginning of this period In June 2014 until the present (April 2016). This results in a period of almost two years in which Czech MEP behaviour was observed. The number of voting sessions for the individual areas targeted is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Voting Sessions in the Areas Studied

Area	Number of voting sessions
Employment and Social Affairs	146
Environment	118
Education	21
Research	5

The author based upon the European Parliament (undated)

The table 2 shows that voting sessions were not equally distributed among all areas in question. The number of items discussed was dependent upon how extensive the EU's powers were in the area, and the extent to which the relevant issues are addressed at the supranational level versus the national level. Employment and Social Affairs is an example of a shared policy for which competencies are divided among the EU and member states (TFEU: Art. 4 Par. 2). By contrast, Education is purely a coordinated policy, with the key role played by the Member States (TFEU 2009: Art. 6). Treaties define the Research area as follows: "In the areas of research, technological development and space, the Union shall have competence to carry out activities, in particular to define and implement programmes; however, the exercise of that competence shall not result in Member States being prevented from exercising theirs." (TFEU 2009: Art. 4 Par. 3).

The number of voting sessions that took place, however, makes clear that the Union is not particularly active legislatively in the area.

The study includes a calculation of the cohesion among all Czech MEPs, as well as the cohesion present for individual political parties. The calculation is carried out using the Agreement Index (AI), as shown in Formula 1 (Hix et al. 2003: 317). The resulting value shows the extent to which the entity in question may be considered homogeneous. Y, N and A stand for individual voting modalities, in other words, how many MEPs voted for (Yes, Y), how many against (No, N), and how many abstained (A). For this type of calculation, the maximum is 1—indicating everyone has voted identically— and the minimum 0, the result obtained when the votes of all MEPs studied are equally distributed among all three voting modalities, i.e., there is maximum disagreement.

Formula 1: Cohesion Calculation

$$AI_i = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

Source: Hix et al. 2003.

The second indicator is used to ascertain the dominant opinion of the individual parties. This must be brought into play whenever MEPs within a single party fail to vote identically. Because the study centres on the mutual attitudes of the political parties, which attitude is dominant within a particular party is key. Since Czech parties have only a small number of mandates, a simple rule was used: more than 50% of MEPs must vote 'Yes' on a particular issue for the stance to be designated as dominant. If no such majority is present, the party is recorded as lacking a majority opinion for that voting session, and is no longer included in the comparison. For ANO, ČSSD and TOP09, parties that hold four mandates, three MEPs represent an absolute majority. Dominant opinion may be inferred for KSČM and KDU-ČSL if an opinion is held by two out of three MEPs. Because ODS has only two mandates, both its MEPs must agree on an issue for their stance to be considered dominant. In the case of SSO, the situation is simple: the solitary MEP determines the party's dominant view.

Study Results

The first analysis focused on cohesion among Czech MEPs. The aim was to determine whether the level of homogeneity of Czech MEPs differs in the designated areas.

Table 3: Cohesion of Czech MEPs in Areas Studied

Area	Cohesion
Employment and Social Affairs	0.6253
Environment	0.6082
Education	0.6754
Research	0.8649

Source: The author

Table 3 makes clear that aside from Research, there is little difference in the cohesion levels of Czech MEPs. Even with the Research theme, however, it is difficult to determine whether the policy truly prompts greater consensus, or whether the few items chosen simply did not encompass many controversial themes.

Looking specifically at individual political parties, it becomes clear that the parties are fairly cohesive in all areas.

Table 4: Cohesion among Czech MEPs by Political Parties and Areas Studied

Area	ANO	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	KSČM	ODS	SSO	TOP09
Employment and Social Affairs	0.9769	0.9692	0.9863	0.9783	0.9743	x	0.9384
Environment	0.9703	0.9703	0.9831	0.8297	0.9873	x	0.9121
Education	1.0000	0.9464	1.0000	0.9643	0.9286	x	0.9107
Research	0.9250	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	x	1.0000

Source: The author

Table 4 reveals that, with the single exception of KSČM voting on Environment, calculated cohesion remains above the 0.9 level, evidencing high homogeneity. The issue under discussion is not central: parties show a high degree of conformity in all areas studied, the single significant exception being KSČM's numbers on the Environment. But even this is not particularly dramatic—conformity remains at fairly high levels. Cohesion is not calculated for SSO since, as indicated in the Methodology, calculating cohesion for a single MEP is nonsensical.

Comparing the cohesion results for individual political groups and the overall cohesion of Czech MEPs makes clear that though the parties are homogeneous, like the Czech delegation overall, they do not agree on votes, and comprise various streams of opinion.

To determine which parties tend to vote together and which are less likely to do so, dominant party opinions were compared. The results are given in the tables below, with green designating the highest level of conformity, and red the lowest. The tables include an "Average Conformity" column which indicates the average number of instances of conformity with other political parties. In such a context, the use of the mean is not entirely logical but may serve as an indicator of potential cooperation potential.

Table 5: Number of Conformity Instances: Dominant Party Opinions on Employment and Social Affairs

	ANO	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	KSČM	ODS	SSO	TOP09	Average conformity
ANO	x	83	117	42	82	44	114	80.33
ČSSD	83	x	93	58	35	16	90	62.50
KDU-ČSL	117	93	x	36	69	37	140	82.00
KSČM	42	58	36	x	23	21	38	36.33
ODS	82	35	69	23	x	68	68	57.50
SSO	44	16	37	21	68	x	35	36.83
TOP09	114	90	140	38	68	35	x	80.83

Source: The author

Of the 146 total voting sessions on Employment and Social Affairs, the highest conformity is attained by TOP09 and KDU-ČSL, as evident from Table 5. In 140 cases, both parties had identical dominant opinions. The significant harmony between the two parties may be attributed to membership in the same political grouping. Their ideological proximity is thus significant, and it may be presumed that the entire grouping (and not just these two parties) coordinates its voting. ANO and KDU-ČSL, and ANO and TOP09 also have a high number of instances of conformity. Within the EP, these centrist/right-wing parties have very similar opinions on Social Affairs. In contrast, SSO and ČSSD attained the lowest number of instances of conformity at 16. This is a very low number, which may be explained by extreme differences in thinking between social democratic ČSSD and the liberal SSO. Other examples of low conformity values may be interpreted to indicate a conflict between right-wing and left-wing, since they involve KSČM versus SSO or KSČM versus ODS. This ideological discrepancy on Social Affairs is entirely expected.

In this case, the highest cooperation potential was attained by KDU-ČSL, but they are followed closely by ANO and TOP09. In contrast, KSČM has the lowest potential, and even SSO is practically at the same low levels.

Table 6: Number of Conformity Instances: Dominant Party Opinions on Environment

	ANO	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	KSČM	ODS	SSO	TOP09	Average conformity
ANO	x	73	90	40	48	17	87	59.17
ČSSD	73	x	65	54	26	12	62	48.67
KDU-ČSL	90	65	x	35	57	27	112	64.33
KSČM	40	54	35	x	50	49	35	43.83
ODS	48	26	57	50	x	68	56	50.83
SSO	17	12	27	49	68	x	26	33.17
TOP09	87	62	112	35	56	26	x	63.00

Source: The author

A total of 118 voting sessions were recorded on the topic of Environment. Conformity among individual parties is indicated in Table 6. The highest number of instances of conformity came, once again, from TOP09 and KDU-ČSL. The two parties held the same position a total of 112 times. Here, too, closeness was in evidence between the centre and the right wing. Once again, ANO and KDU--ČSL, and ANO TOP09, evidenced high conformity levels. The lowest count of instances of conformity on the issue, significantly so, came with SSO and ČSSD, as was the case for Social Affairs, but SSO and ANO performed similarly. This disparity of opinion was not in evidence with the issue of Social Affairs.

Cooperation potential is once again highest for KDU-ČSL, closely followed by TOP09 and ANO. The lowest coalition potential in this area comes from SSO, followed at some distance by KSČM and ČSSD.

Table 7: Number of Conformity Instances: Dominant Party Opinions on Education

	ANO	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	KSČM	ODS	SSO	TOP09	Average conformity
ANO	x	20	19	10	7	3	18	12.83
ČSSD	20	x	18	11	6	2	17	12.33
KDU-ČSL	19	18	x	8	8	5	20	13.00
KSČM	10	11	8	x	3	3	9	7.33
ODS	7	6	8	3	x	9	8	6.83
SSO	3	2	5	3	9	x	5	4.50
TOP09	18	17	20	9	8	5	x	12.83

Source: The author

The area of Education comprises only 21 voting sessions. Thus the results obtained may be more distorted than those for the prior two areas due to the size of the voting population. As Table 7 shows, ANO, TOP09 and KDU-ČSL, once again, have similar opinions on the policy. The highest level of conformity is attained by ANO and ČSSD, voting identically in 20 cases. The conformity levels of these two parties for prior policies were not as high as they were here. The lowest conformity level is once again shown by ČSSD and SSO (2). But SSO and ANO, and SSO and KSČM, also show very low conformity (3). The same obtains for ODS and KSČM.

The highest average conformity—indicating the greatest cooperation potential in the area of Education—was shown by KDU-ČSL, closely followed by ANO, TOP09 and ČSSD. The other side of the spectrum once again features SSO, followed by ODS and KSČM. The parties possess rather distinct opinions on this issue and evince either high levels of conformity or high levels of disagreement; there is very little room in the imaginary centre.

Table 8: Number of Conformity Instances: Party Dominant Opinions on Research

	ANO	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	KSČM	ODS	SSO	TOP09	Average conformity
ANO	x	4	4	4	4	0	4	3.33
ČSSD	4	x	5	5	5	0	5	4.00
KDU-ČSL	4	5	x	5	5	0	5	4.00
KSČM	4	5	5	x	5	0	5	4.00
ODS	4	5	5	5	x	0	5	4.00
SSO	0	0	0	0	0	x	0	0.00
TOP09	4	5	5	5	5	0	x	4.00

Source: The author

The Research theme is difficult to interpret. Over the period studied, only five pertinent voting sessions took place. This greatly influences the information value of the data. As Table 8 reveals, Research does not generate conflict; most parties vote identically. In all five cases, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, KSČM, ODS and TOP09 held the same dominant opinion. ANO differed in a single case. The interesting thing is, however, that although this theme looks as if it indicates the same level of significance for consensus among Czech MEPs, Petr Mach did not vote the same as other SSO party members. He alone thereby created an imaginary opposition.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been on the voting of Czech MEPs in theme areas set under the Europe 2020 Strategy. The strategy was selected as the key document of the current decade, one which defines the priority policies of the contemporary EU. The strategy targets increased employment, a reduction in poverty, reduced emissions of greenhouse gases, increased energy efficiency, an increased proportion of renewable resources, a higher share of citizens with university education, lower levels of abandoned studies, and increased investment in science and research.

These objectives were then transformed into four areas for study, specifically: Employment and Social Affairs, Environment, Education, and Research. Czech MEP voting behaviour was observed on these policies.

The aim has been to verify the extent to which the policies generate conflict at the European level, since it has been demonstrated that competition in these areas is practically nonexistent at the national level. To ascertain whether such political conflict does exist at the European level, the votes of Czech MEPs were utilized. A further aim was to assess whether voting in these areas is reflected in national party composition—in other words, whether the parties that form a government coalition likewise vote together in the EP.

The results reveal a fairly uniform cohesion situation for all Czech MEPs in the areas of Employment and Social Affairs, environment, and education. There is neither significant conformity nor significant disagreement in any of these areas. For Research, by contrast, the level of cohesion was higher, but only five voting sessions took place in the area, casting uncertainty on the results. When it comes to cohesion within individual parties, all parties studied independently evinced a high degree of homogeneity of opinion across areas. Czech political parties are homogeneous bodies in the EP, and their members coordinate their votes in these areas.

The study also focused on a comparison of the dominant opinions held by individual Czech parties in these same four areas. Here the existence of some sort of centre/right-wing coalition involving KDU-ČSL, ANO and TOP09 may be detected—these parties all acted in significant conformity with each other in all areas. The results are attributable to the parties' involvement in political groupings, since EPP and ALDE are close politically. It was no surprise that ČSSD did not join the other parties in the area of Social Affairs; however, ČSSD voted alongside the three above parties on issues to do with Education and Research. This fact confirms the assumption that the voting coalition in the EP encompasses the entire political spectrum from left to right in many areas.

The lowest level of conformity of all Czech parties in the EP was exhibited by SSO, followed by KSČM. ODS was also at relatively low levels. All these parties are part of political groupings that are positioned outside the mainstream, so the low level of co-operation was expected. The results for SSO, in particular, given that it is part of the extreme-right faction EFDD, are no surprise in this regard. The study thus confirms the rhetoric coming out of these parties, who have oftentimes felt themselves to be the opposition within the EP.

When it comes to domestic politics, given that the majority government of the CR is formed by KDU-ČSL, ANO and ČSSD, it is interesting to note that collaboration between them is not wholly apparent at the European level. As indicated above, within the EP, ČSSD does not agree with KDU-ČSL and ANO in the area of Environment and Social Affairs. In contrast, TOP09, an opposition party at the national level that hardly collaborates in Parliament with the government coalition, behaves more consensually in the areas studied at the European level. National structures are thus not reflected in the logic that drives Czech MEP voting or, if they do, they feature only to a very limited extent.

It is clear that in general, the voting of Czech MEPs is not unified. Varying streams of opinion on these policies exist within the Czech delegation; these streams are not stable, but rather differ by individual area.

Overall, the study has shown that Czech political parties are homogeneous bodies within the EP. Political and ideological proximity have proved decisive in the areas studied which, in terms of competencies, do not rank among primary EU policies but rather constitute areas in which the EU and the Member States

have defined goals to improve the EU's competitiveness. Although it might seem that national level structures would permeate these areas, this proved not to be the case.

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Economic Crisis and Euroscepticism:
A Comparative Study of the Hungarian
and Italian Case (1990–2013)

ANNA MOLNÁR

Abstract: *This comparative paper examines the reasons and the features of the rising Euroscepticism in Italy and in Hungary in the light of economic, financial, and political crisis. The financial crisis became the main focus of the political debates and discourses among the Italian and the Hungarian political parties between 2008 and 2013. In Italy and Hungary, Euroscepticism is still on the rise. In the first chapter, I will shortly summarise the conceptual framework of Euroscepticism. In the second chapter, I provide an overview of the way Hungarian and Italian political discourse has envisioned Europe in the post-bipolar, or post-Maastricht, period that began in the early 1990s. The fall of the Berlin wall had a decisive impact on the domestic politics of Hungary and Italy, and subsequent international changes created the basis for different forms of transitions in both countries. Hungary left behind dictatorship and the one-party system to create a functioning democracy, whereas Italy experienced the end of the political party system of the "First Republic," giving birth to the highly promising "Second Republic."*

Key words: Italy, Hungary, European Union, Euroscepticism, integration, domestic politics

Introduction

This comparative paper examines the reasons and the features of the rising Euroscepticism in Italy and in Hungary in the light of economic, financial, and political crisis. The financial crisis became the main focus of the political debates and discourses among the Italian and the Hungarian political parties

between 2008 and 2013. In Italy and Hungary, Euroscepticism is still on the rise (Molnár 2011; Molnár 2012; Molnár 2013)

In the first chapter, I will shortly summarise the conceptual framework of Euroscepticism, which is a negative or sceptical attitude towards the European integration process. The literature addresses both Euroscepticism at both the party and individual levels, as well as soft and hard Euroscepticism; that is, sceptic public opinion towards the EU as a whole or the membership of a country in the EU, versus public scepticism of only one common policy. In the second chapter, I provide an overview of the way Hungarian and Italian political discourse has envisioned Europe in the post-bipolar, or post-Maastricht, period that began in the early 1990s. The fall of the Berlin wall had a decisive impact on the domestic politics of Hungary and Italy, and subsequent international changes created the basis for different forms of transitions in both countries. Hungary left behind dictatorship and the one-party system to create a functioning democracy, whereas Italy experienced the end of the political party system of the "First Republic," giving birth to the highly promising "Second Republic."

This time period can also be considered the post-Maastricht era, because European integration has had an increasing impact on domestic politics and on the national party system in the years since the Maastricht Treaty (Mair 2000). As the EU has become more and more integrated and, as a result, complicated, society has become increasingly critical of the union, rising questions about the perceived democratic deficit, information deficit, and communication deficit of the EU, as well as other issues.

The following section focuses on individual and party attitudes towards the EU public opinion towards the membership of Italy and Hungary, and the opinion of the governments and political parties about the institutional reform of the European Union based on primary and secondary sources. In order to analyse Euroscepticism, Eurobarometer surveys are used. For both Hungary and Italy, the Euro has become a modernisation symbol, and a certain "EU-enthusiasm" or Euro-enthusiasm can be observed in order to join the Eurozone (Italy) or EU (Hungary). Following the realisation of these projects there has been an ever growing euroscepticism (Hungary, Italy) or Euro(-coin)-scepticism (Italy), and less and less confidence due to waning economic advantages. The "euro" in Euroscepticism refers to the European integration, and "Euro" in Euro-scepticism refers to the common currency. Similarities between two major Italian and Hungarian politicians, Berlusconi and Orbán, make the countries valuable cases for comparison. Indeed, both leaders have pursued populist, soft-Eurosceptic policies with respect to media laws, migration policy, and security policy (Körösényi –Patkós 2015)

In the third chapter, I focus on the causes of growing Euroscepticism (party level or individual Euroscepticism) in Italy and in Hungary as a consequence of

the financial and economic crisis 2008). In my research I analyse the post-crisis period, which more or less coincides with a second transition period.

Table 1: Transitions

Italy	Hungary
1947–1992/93 First Republic	1949–1989 Second Republic
1992/93–2011/13 „Second Republic"	1989–2012 Third Republic
2011–13 beginning of the „Third republic"?	2012– Forth Republic

The importance of my research field is confirmed by the fact that the first draft of the new Global Strategy of the EU in 2015 emphasised that "The European Union, too, is more contested. The financial and economic crisis has posed a serious challenge to European unity. Many Europeans have been hit by the crisis, and have come to view themselves as losers of globalisation. This is feeding certain constituencies within Member States which express criticism of, if not outright opposition to, the European project. This trend, which often blends legitimate grievances with a dangerous mix of nationalism, populism, protectionism and even racism, is exposing a new rift within the EU and bringing new anti-establishment forces to the fore. It is a divide between elites and citizens manifested in voter disaffection, and a lack of trust in public institutions and policies. (…)

A more contested EU is bringing about broader external challenges. The rise of nationalism, protectionism and illiberalism could expose European nations to the lure of anti-democratic models promoted from outside. Populism and racism could feed fortress Europe mentalities, undermining credible enlargement and neighbourhood policies, forthcoming migration and mobility policies, and even trade liberalisation." (European External Action Service 2015: 8)

Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is a negative or sceptical attitude towards the European integration process (Taggart – Szczerbiak 2001). Euroscepticism exists at both the party level and the individual level. Gabel and Whitten stated that the worsening economic situation has had a positive impact on the level of individual Euroscepticism, as in it has increased euroscepticism (Gabel – Whitten 1997: 81).

A division can be mentioned between soft and hard euroscepticism. Soft euroscepticism includes, for example, opposition to certain policies of the EU. Those who express revulsion against the political or economic 'deepening' of the EU (e.g. objection against the introduction of the Euro) are also counted among 'soft sceptics'. In short, those who belong to the soft wing of eurosceptics are not against European integration, but have different opinions about par-

ticular measures. They attach primary importance to the promotion of national interest. In contrast, the representatives of the hard euroscepticism are totally against the political and economic integration, and they even oppose the EU membership of their own country (Taggart – Szczerbiak 2001: 8). They generally express criticism against capitalism, liberalism and socialism considering these as certain power tools of the EU.

There is a large variety of levels and opinions concerning the European integration process. Kopecky and Mudde (2002) established the categories of Euroenthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Europragamatists, Eurorejects. Analysing Italian political parties, Conti and Verzichelli defined five different types of attitude towards European integration. According to their classification, the centre-left parties (PPI, DS, and later the PD) represent identity Europeanism, the extreme left (RC) represent hard euroscepticism, centre-right parties (FI, AN) display functional Europeanism and soft euroscepticism, and the Extreme right (LN) float somewhere between functional, soft, and hard Euroscepticism (Conti 2003).

Since 2012 the Hungarian Europe Society has been conducting a regular monitoring research project to examine the attitude of the Hungarian political parties towards the EU, and created its own PERC-index categories. 1 represents the "total rejection of any kind of European integration" and 10 "the complete acceptance of a full-blown European federalism" to measure their attitude between June 2009 (European elections) and mid-2012. In the PERC-index 1. is Euro-destructive, 2. is Europhobe, 3. is Hard eurosceptic, 4. is Soft eurosceptic, 5. is Europessimist, 6. is Europragmatist, 7. is Soft europragmatist, 8. is Euro--constructive, 9. is Eurooptimist and 10. is Federalist. The executive summary of the project stated that no Hungarian parliamentary party received 1 (real Euro-destructive which would refuse to participate in EP elections) or 10 (real federalist which offers a coherent federalist vision), that is the two opposite categories. (Európa Társaság 2013: 5)

First Transition Following the Collapse of the Bipolar World and the Post-Maastricht Period

Party attitudes towards the EU in Italy

In Italy up to 1990s, in reality European-level policy-making did not involve competition between large, oppositional coalitions, mainly due to the lack of the political alternation between governments of different political opinions and due to bipartisan EU-policy since the 1970s. It was only after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the actions of "mani pulite" and the electoral reform (1993) that the two large opposing governmental coalitions took shape. The introduction of the majority principle in the electoral system contributed to the formation

of party coalitions which were more efficient in securing a stable governmental operation, thus creating the basis for the real political alternation of governments. The events taking place in Italy during the early 1990s were considered by many as a "transformation" which marked the end of the "First Republic" and the birth of the highly promising "Second Republic" (Fabbrini 2009).

Although the collapse (1989–1991) of the Eastern Bloc served as a fundamental impetus for change, the real political avalanche was launched by the corruption scandal that broke out around the Italian Socialist Party. In the case of Italy, however, it is not possible to speak about the birth of the new Republic in the traditional political or constitutional sense, as this process was not due to the elaboration and approval of a new constitution, but rather was the result of political changes concerning parties, the political elite and the party system. In the midst of major changes to the party system, smaller parties almost totally disappeared while the bigger ones were transformed to a large extent, with their support dropping. This remarkable transformation of the political and party system was connected to the renewal of the political elite and helped the creation of the bipolar party-system.

All of the main political parties have expressed a pro-European approach since the 1970s, but during the post-Maastricht Treaty period, different levels of Euroscepticism have emerged. On the left, the major successor of the PCI (Italian Communist Party), the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left, 1991–1998), later transformed into DS (Democrats of the Left) (1998–2009), emphasizing the social and democratic aspects and supranational federalist vision of the integration concentrating on welfare and social issues. The PDS/DS, a founder of the Party of European Socialists (PES), expressed this opinion during the electoral campaign of the 1999 EP elections with its political slogan: 'yes to a market economy, no to a market society'. The Party for Communist Refoundation (PRC), the smaller of the two successor parties to the PCI, represented a different model of the integration. It expressed its critical opinion about the deepening of the integration and the institutional reform, voting against the Maastricht Treaty and later the European Constitutional Treaty, and criticising the wider incompetence of the EU. The PRC wanted and felt the absence of the articulation of some basic principles, like the ban of all wars and the creation of a full-employment economy. (Bardi 2007: 6–7; Conti 2003: 25)

The other main pro-European centre-left party, the PSI became one of the main losers of the party system crisis due to the actions of the so called 'Mani Puliti'. The SDI (Italian Democratic Socialists), which was the most important successor of the PSI, maintained the pro-European, federalist attitude of its predecessor and lost significant support. The left and liberal Radical Party was also pro-European, and in its 2004 statute stated the necessity to strengthen 'the liberal, liberist, and libertarian struggle for liberal revolution and for the United States of Europe'. The party supported the federal development of the

integration based on the principle of subsidiarity in order to make decisions closer to the people. The 2000 statue of the Greens expressed a similar, pro-European opinion: 'The Greens are those who work for the political unity of a Europe based on the principles of democratic federalism and subsidiarity.' They represents that the environment is a key issue for the creation of the political unification of the Union. (Bardi 2007: 7)

The centre-left parties (e.g. DS, PPI) have been the most devoted supporters of the deepening European integration since the 90s with the aim of creating a supranational, federal union, highlighting the importance of a common European identity. Following the collapse of the Italian party system, the Italian Christian Democracy (DC) split into two major factions that headed in different political directions. The right wing of the DC created the CCD (Christian Democratic Centre) and the CDU (the United Christian Democrats, which later became the UDC, Union of Christian and Centre Democrats). The successors of the DC were all pro-European and in favour of the deepening of the European integration. The left wing of the DC founded the Italian Peoples Party (PPI). The PPI later played an important role in the creation of the centre-left Margherita.

In 1993, leaving a political vacuum behind, the Italian Christian Democracy finally dissolved, and the voter support of the successor parties also significantly decreased. Consequently, the vacuum in the internal politics was filled suddenly by a new type of political parties. On the right side of the political spectrum during the 1990s, three new parties emerged that attracted most of the voters with a right-wing orientation: Forza Italia (FI), National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale – AN) and the Northern League. This process naturally did not occur without any precedents as the routes of the Northern League can be traced back already to the 80s. At the same time, the National Alliance grew out of the Italian Social Movement (MSI, Movimento Sociale Italiano). In 1993 a new party emerged to oppose the centre-left coalition: Forza Italia. This party indeed constituted a totally new, unprecedented political construction. The huge vacuum in the right-wing was finally filled by the real-estate and media magnate Silvio Berlusconi.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Italy had to face serious economic problems. In 1992, the Lira was deflated by 7 percent (and then 30 percent), so, although only temporarily, Italy had to leave the European Monetary System. Simultaneously, other macroeconomic indicators of the Italian economy, such as the foreign trade balance and the government debt, showed worsening trends, while Italy's ability to join the European common currency also became less certain. During the first Berlusconi government in 1994, the Foreign Minister, Antonio Martino, criticised the EMU project. He emphasised that 'the convergence was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for monetary unification'. He also considered it necessary to renegotiate the convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty. The Prime Minster Silvio Berlusconi also proposed the renegotiation of

the TEU so that Italy could join the EMU without fulfilling the convergence criteria. (Quaglia 2003: 11)

However, by the middle of 1990s, following the 1996 elections, the new centre-left 'Olive-tree Coalition' managed to re-stabilise the Italian economic balance. In November 1996, the Lira re-joined the European Monetary System. The ''Olive-tree Coalition' considered one of their priorities to fulfil the euro convergence criteria (Maastricht Criteria). (D'Alema 1998; Ciampi 2000a: 203–205) In this period, the problems of the Italian economy made it uncertain whether Italy could remain at all an important member of the European Union. The Prodi government considered their primary mission to conclude the necessary reforms. They set as their goal the elimination of economic problems and the reestablishment of the prestige of the political elite. They also sought to fulfil the euro convergence criteria, lead Italy back into the European Monetary System, get admitted into the Euro Zone, and reform of the public sphere and political institutions. (D'Alema 1997: 157) In the year 1997, in order to comply with the euro convergence criteria, without any resistance by the Italian public, they introduced a so called 'one-time Euro tax' to be valid only until the fulfilment of the criteria had been achieved. Owing to the success of the economic policy, Italy became a member of the Monetary Integration, which the centre left government could account for as a great achievement when it was finally approved in Brussels on May 1, 1998. (Horváth 2000: 550–553) After the introduction of the Euro, analysts found that contrary to earlier difficulties, participation in the European Monetary meant a serious advantage for Italy; the interest rates for example decreased at a higher speed than in other states, and as analysts claimed, the 2000 oil crisis also impacted the Italian economy less than it would have were Italy to have faced the crisis on her own (Vaciago 2001: 208).

While after the introduction of the Euro several political fields (e.g. inflationary and monetary policies) became part of the common policies, several others remained under the authority of national governments (e.g. employment policy, technological development, tax policy and social policy). National governments remained responsible for the reform of the latter political fields. In Italy, the execution of reforms was to a large extent made difficult by the economic problems that had cumulated during the preceding decades (e.g. the problems occurring in the Mezzogiorno, the high government debt and the relatively low R+D subsidies). Italian politicians (e.c. Massimo D'Alema, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi) worried about the country's exclusion from the important issues concerning the integration in case of staying out of the Euro Zone (D'Alema 1998; Ciampi 2000a). Already during the first two Berlusconi governments (1994), the government began to drift away from the traditional EU policy. The new government, through a more determined emphasis on national interests, stopped representing the traditional 'follower' EU policy of its predecessors. After the inauguration of the second Berlusconi government, communications concern-

ing the Euro seemed to underpin the worries of those who had concerns about the future of the integration. In early January 2002 the debate between some members of the government, like Umberto Bossi and the minister of foreign affairs concluded in the resignation of the foreign minister, Renato Ruggiero. During the years following her accession to the Euro Zone, Italy was still able to maintain the macro-economic indicators required by the convergence criteria (La Repubblica 2002; Corriera della Sera 2002).

Hungary

Following the collapse of the bipolar world, EC/EU membership has become the modernisation symbol of a prosperous, democratic and European Hungary, which has always been an organic part of Europe. In the period of the collapse of the socialist state, the primary goal of the main Hungarian political parties was immediate accession to the European Union. As Hungary, during the eighties, had a special, albeit limited, experience of liberalisation in economic and political fields, it was considered the best prepared country in the region among the first group of states to join the EC/EU.

During the first free election campaign in 1990 there was a common agreement among the political parties that the most important foreign policy goal was early Hungarian membership in the EU. There was only one anti-European political party: the communist Workers' Party, which was an extra-parliamentary movement following the first free elections and the smaller of the two successor parties to the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Apart from this movement, all the mainstream parties that formed during the period of peaceful transition in the period 1987–1989 were pro-European, but some differences can be identified in their political goals regarding EU membership and integration.

The Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) and the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP, the main successor party to the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) emphasised concentration on welfare issues, social democratic aspects, and a supranational federalist vision of integration. As a consequence of the 1990 electoral failure of the HSDP, the traditional social democratic party was not able to form a parliamentary party. Following the transitory period, from 1991 onwards the socialist party (the larger of the two successor parties to the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) became one of the most important mainstream parties, and by 1993 had transformed into a centre-left party of a 'social democrat' or 'social liberal' kind. As a testimony of its pro-European attitude, the HSP frequently called the attention of the Western European public and politicians to the very important role of Gyula Horn, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the German unification (Navracsics 1997: 10–11; Mayr 2009). The pro-EU left-wing actors (e.g. HSP and the Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD)), have considered the accession as anti-nationalistic and part of the modernisation

project. These parties have emphasised the economic advantages of membership, and the finalisation of the change of the regime.

The AFD and Fidesz (Alliance of Young Democrats), concentrated on the neoliberal, capitalistic approach of the European economy based on free trade principles. For the liberals, EU membership was the only way to modernise the country. After a short transitional period of sharing similar visions concerning the EU, their political paths diverged: the AFD, while turning into an authentic social-liberal party, started to concentrate on the social democratic aspect of the EU, whereas Fidesz moved towards a more conservative interpretation of Europe, defining itself as a liberal conservative party (Navracsics 1997: 12).

Conservatives focused on the political aspects of European integration based on the conception of a Europe of nations. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), the Independent Smallholders' Party (ISP), and the Christian Democratic People's Party, defined Europe by its cultural aspects, emphasising that Hungary was an organic part of the West, but 'it was violently isolated from its natural environment for forty years' (Navracsics 1997: 13). Thus, their political slogan was not 'the road to Europe', but return to Europe.

Individual attitudes towards the EU or the introduction of the Euro

Italy

The deepening of European integration was not only supported by the changing governments, but also by the Italian public. Among the countries of the EU, it was Italy whose population supported this process most. The future of Italy was considered as dependent on the country's role in the EU. The Italian public has been an ardent devotee of integration, even more so than the EU average.

In 2004 the Flash Eurobarometer showed the confidence of Italians in the Constitutional reform of the European integration. The majority of Italians (82 percent) seemed to agree that without a Constitution, the Institutions of the European Union could reach a deadlock, so they recognised the usefulness of a Constitution (European average 69 percent) (Eurobarometer 2004).

Italians traditionally have greater confidence in EU institutions than in their national ones. In Spring 2005, Eurobarometer survey showed that 56 percent of Italians trusted the European Union, while 33 percent who did not (Eurobarometer 2005: 2). In 2005 the level of support was lower than in June-July 2004, when more than 90 percent of Italians supported the Constitution, and accordingly viewed constitutional reform positively. However, only 15 percent of Italians knew the text of the Constitution (EU–25 WATCH No. 2. 2006: 69). As showed by the Eurobarometer 2006 (Spring), 78 percent of the Italians were not familiar with the whole contents of the European Constitution, or had never

heard of the Constitution itself. It is important to underline that the average level of knowledge of the texts of the Constitution was quite low. However, 78 percent of Italians agreed with the statement that the adoption of the Constitution would make the EU more democratic, while 76 percent agreed it would make the union more efficient and more transparent.

According to the Eurobarometer survey after the French and Dutch 'no' referendum about the European Constitution, the relative majority of the Italian interviewed (37 percent) stated that EU Member States should continue the ratification process. And 33 percent answered that the European Constitution should be renegotiated. Only 6 percent of Italians said that the European Constitution should be abandoned, while 23 percent abstained from answering. In spring 2006 '56 per cent of the Italian sample considers that for Italy to be part of the EU is a good thing' (Eurobarometer 65 2006: 3–5).

For the majority of Italians the EU membership was still an advantage. However, during that time period, a wider scale of opinions regarding EU issues can be noticed, and there was a more critical approach in the public debate. According to the 2007 Spring Eurobarometer survey, 74 percent of Italians surveyed agreed with the opinion that 'every European decision is the subject of negotiations in which the opinions of the national governments of all Member States are taken into account'. Furthermore, 53 percent of Italians thought the 'voice of Italy counts in Europe', and 55 percent anticipated 'that Italian influence in the EU will be even stronger in the future'. Italians decisively support the European management instead of the national one in certain policies such as foreign and defence affairs (67 percent), energy (68 percent), immigration (67 percent), the fight against crime (63 percent), and environment (60 percent). Italians agreed with the concept of the so-called 'Multi-speed Europe' where those member states which are prepared to strengthen the level of integration of a common European policy in certain areas could do so without waiting for the others (Eurobarometer 67 2007: 3–5).

A few months before abandoning the European Constitution, 72 percent of Italians still had a positive approach to the Constitutional Treaty, and 68 percent of interviewees were optimistic about the future of the EU. The majority thought that the 'European Union in the next 50 years will have a common army and will be a leading diplomatic power in the world'. 72 percent agreed with the notion that the European Union should have its own Foreign Minister. (Eurobarometer 67 2007: 3–5) In 2008 the relative majority of Italians still had a positive opinion about Italy's membership in the EU, though a clear decline (from 50 percent to 39 percent) can be noticed. 37 percent of Italians thought about EU membership in a positive way, believing that Italy had benefited from its membership in the union. Half of the interviewees believed that the Italian position was not taken into account at the European level. It is important to underline that only 15 percent of Italians thought that MEPs paid attention to

their views and 14 percent thought the same about the European Commission. 78 percent of Italian believed that national institutions were not transparent, and 50 percent thought the same about European institutions. Still, the relative majority of Italians maintained confidence in the European Union (40 percent), yet the number of sceptics was growing (Eurobarometer 69 2008: 2–3).

Hungary

Following the collapse of the communist regime, the image Hungarians formed of Europe was determined by their economic and political expectations. In the referendum held on the issue of EU membership (2003), the turn-out was 45.6 percent, and 83.76 percent of the voters said 'yes'.[2] So, despite relatively low participation, the Hungarian population voted overwhelmingly for accession. According to Miklós Sükösd, the low turnout might have been caused by the lack of genuine debate in the political sphere. That is, there had been no serious arguments for or against the accession of Hungary, and all this had led to a staggeringly low interest in the European issues. The communication campaign started abruptly, and rather late, which also contributed to the communication deficit (Sükösd 2005).

It is necessary to mention that the communication deficit was not only a Hungarian problem, but also a problem that practically all the member states confronted. Nevertheless, it seems important to examine the specific reasons for the growing disappointment among the Hungarian population in the years following the accession. István Hegedűs emphasized that the Hungarian press was not able to convey the gravity of the Hungarian accession and the European integration (Hegedűs 2005). The adoption of the acquis by the Hungarian administration did not create a heated debate in the press, except for during the final phase of the negotiation process, when it was mainly common issues (like the impact of accession on the use of poppy-seed as food ingredient) that appeared in the Hungarian media (Uitz 2008: 44).

In 2005, a poll was carried out in order to examine what Hungarians were thinking about the EU membership, and its local consequences (Medián 2005). Similarly to some other opinion polls of the period, 75 percent of the subjects were for the Hungarian membership, and 25 percent were against it. The number of supporters increased linearly with the educational level of the subjects asked, i.e. among those who had no secondary degree, the proportion of supporters was 70–75 percent, and in the case of professionals, this proportion was 80 percent (Kormány 2006: 89).

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2   Czech Republic: turnout – 55.21 percent, yes – 77.33 percent; Poland: turnout – 58.85 percent, yes – 77.45 percent; Slovakia: turnout – 52.15 percent, yes – 92.46 percent;

According to Marján, one of the main reasons for Hungarians' sense of disappointment with the union was that prior to the accession, there were several myths among the Hungarian population about the fast rise of salaries, new employment possibilities and material subsidies similar to those enjoyed by beneficiaries of the Marshall plan. The potential EU membership of Hungary assured financial resources from the EC/EU. In spite of this, Hungarians were also afraid of losing sovereignty as well as the onset of fatal competition due to the opening of the markets (Marján 2006: 5).

These fears can be traced back to three main sources: a) even in spite of the intensive change-over to market economy, free market conditions could not yet come to life; b) market players were smaller and less developed, and so they felt insignificant in comparison to competitors. Finally, there was quite a lot of fear that costly regulations protecting the environment, consumers, and the labour force would be introduced. Not all the fears were well founded. In the spheres of industry and services, for example, no serious crisis took place after May 1, as most of the development had already taken place during the accession process through the liberalization of commercial and market contacts and legal harmonisation. And, most importantly, Hungary obtained real voting rights in the decision making process if the EU.

Another cause for fear regarding the accession for Hungarians was the issue of sovereignty. This arose from the fact that Community Law has primacy over national legislation. Like every other member, Hungary also gained the possibility of enforcing the country's interests as a member with voting rights. In the globalizing world, more and more problems can only be solved as a member of a larger international community. Moreover, for a small country like Hungary, this is the only road to success. Also the curious paradox can be mentioned that this fear occurred after Hungary's full adoption, in the period of accession, of the 80 thousand page documentation of the acquis that had been formulated without the country's representative participation in the EU legislation process. In fact, the real challenge for all the new members has been hidden in the process of convergence to EU average income (Marján 2006: 15).

The Eurobarometer of October 2006 already clearly showed Hungarian society's disappointment with the EU accession. Since spring of that year, the support for EU membership has dropped by a further 10 percent, reaching 39 percent, probably due to the country's domestic political issues (elections, growing economic problems, general feeling of uncertainty).

In 2006, as seen from the Eurobarometer figures, trust in the institutions of the European Union was the highest among new member states. 82.5 percent of those who were supporters of Hungary's membership thought that it meant a guarantee against the return of dictatorship. Among those, however, who were against it, agreement with this statement registered only 63.5 percent support. As to the statement that 'the sovereignty of Hungary suffered with the acces-

sion of the country', 76 percent of those against the membership claimed they agreed, while amongst those who supported the accession, this ratio was only 43 percent. There was a slight majority among the subjects of those who though that the country suffered a disadvantage as a consequence of the accession (53 percent), leaving merely 47 percent claiming that, on the whole, the accession brought about an advantageous result (Kormány 2006: 90).

The long-term benefits of accession were not debated. However, in the short run, the negative aspects of the process were felt by those who were threatened by existential uncertainty: something which was least applicable to the strata with the highest level of education. 54 percent of those interviewed agreed with the statement that 'Hungary does not have a word in the EU legislation', showing that a significant portion of the population was not aware even of the most basic facts about the European Union. (Kormány 2006: 91).

The issue of sustaining and preserving national traditions, as well as the alleged threat against them, became part of everyday discourse during the process of accession. This was reflected in the number of respondents who agreed with the statement, 'The EU will threaten national traditions' (40 percent). 36 percent of those who claimed to follow the daily news reports regularly thought that the EU meant a threat to traditions, while this portion was 44.6 percent among those who reported they did not watch daily news. This shows a relatively low impact of the media interpretations of the accession on the public opinion. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents claimed that the accession would improve upon the conditions of the pre-accession period, in the fields of the country's security (62 percent), human rights (57 percent), legal security (52 percent), and development of the economy (51 percent). Opinions on the following fields already reflected slight doubts as to the possible positive consequences: stability of democracy (49 percent) and financial stability (47 percent) (Kormány 2006: 94–5). There were also negative expectations about the consequences of the accession with regard to finance, labor, health care, and, above all, agriculture.

In 2007, as seen in Hungary from the next Eurobarometer figures, approval of the country's status as a member of the union continued to decline. Although the general support of the EU had never been as high as in 2007, this year showed the lowest support ever in Hungary. 57 percent of EU citizens thought that their country's membership was 'a good thing', and only 15 percent viewed the membership as totally wrong. This indicated a 4 percent rise in approval as compared to the previous Eurobarometer. Contrary to this trend, 40 percent of Hungarians did not consider the EU accession beneficial for the country, and only 37 percent claimed that it was 'good'. Hungarians are among the most pessimistic citizens, both as to the issue of membership (25th place), and to the advantages of membership (27th place in the rank order).

Hungary was one of the three countries in which people who were of the opinion that accession had not brought about any benefit to their homeland constituted the majority.

Nevertheless, the trust in EU institutions (European Parliament and the Commission) was far stronger than the EU average. For Hungarians, the European institutions are more trustworthy than the national ones. In case of Hungary the reason for this can be found in the fact that the new member states have a short and sometimes negative experience in the 'existing Hungarian capitalism and democracy' and in the consolidation of national democratic political institutions. Citizens' attitude to European symbols (the EU flag, anthem), the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE), and of further accession was remarkably positive. The low acceptance rate of EU membership was primarily due to the widespread perception that the national economy was in a state of crisis. Only a staggering 9 percent of the respondents expressed a positive opinion about the Hungarian economic situation. This is proved by the figures expressing the changes in people's opinion: in 2004 only 10 percent of the population thought the EU to be 'a bad thing', whereas by the spring of 2009, this percentage had grown as high as 23 percent.

According to the data gathered by the Standard Eurobarometer of Autumn 2008, Hungarian pessimism can be traced already in the answers to the first set of questions, as only 31 percent of the respondents evaluated membership positively, in contrast with the EU average of 53 percent. It is worth noting that in the Autumn of 2004 the percentage of positive responses was still high, at 49 percent. While 60 percent of the EU average citizens claim that the EU imposes its opinion on the member states, only 57 percent of Hungarians share this view. At the same time, in contrast with the EU average of 60 percent, 47 percent of Hungarians think that their country's opinion counts at the European level (Eurobarometer 2008: 31–32).

Growing Euroscepticism

Post-Euro-introduction Crisis: Italy

According to the results of a 1999 telephone poll with 2,003 subjects, the majority of Italian citizens was aware of the fact that they would have to cover the costs of the introduction of the Euro, but they still believed that this process would play an important role in the development of the country. 85 percent of the respondents thought that it was good for Italy to be a member of the EU, and 92 percent of them considered the further strengthening the European Integration necessary (Battistelli-Bellucci 2002).

In the year 2000 the exchange rate of the Euro fell against the US Dollar, which was followed by a decrease of Italians' trust in the common currency and

the common institutions. According to the poll of September 2000 carried out by Ipsos, a mere 58 percent of Italian citizens trusted the Euro, which though higher than the EU average (46 percent), was lower than the figures of two years before by 20 percent. (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2000) Similarly to the opinion poll data of the Ipsos, La Polis also came out with results referring to the decrease in people's trust. In 1999 it was shown that 72 percent of Italians 'trusted very much' the EU institutions, while by 2000, this ratio fell to 57 percent. In 1999 it was only a thin 25 percent of the respondents who thought that belonging to the EU was disadvantageous for the country, and this proportion grew to 35 percent within a year's time. In 1999, the majority (53 percent) of Italians thought that it was for the advantage of the country and its citizens to join the EU, while in 2000 only 41 percent agreed with this statement (Dente 2001: 1054). Nevertheless, institutional reforms were still supported by Italians. This was shown by the data of October 2000 Eurobarometer in which 84 percent of Italian citizens agreed with the creation of a European Constitution. This ratio by far surpassed the EU average (70 percent). The outstandingly positive attitudes towards the EU of the Italian public may have originated from the more apparent disappointment in their own national institutions. Thus, it was the integration that they expected to lead to the economic development of the country. Together with the devaluation of the common currency, the trust in Brussels institutions began to decrease. The temporary crisis of the Euro raised the number of Italian Euro-sceptics measurably (Dente 2001: 1052).

After December 2004, the Commission's interest in the Italian budget situation gradually increased. It became known that the Italian government, similarly to Greece, accessed more credit each year than it reported to Brussels. During that year, the gradually growing government deficit and the structural problems of the Italian economy caused a steadily increasing problem. According to official data of the EU, Italy's government deficit in proportion to the GDP was 3.5 percent in 2003, 3.5 percent in 2004, 4.2 percent in 2005, and 4.4 percent in 2006. At the same time, government debt was 104.3 percent of GDP in 2003, 1013–8 percent in 2004, 106.2 in 2005, and 106.8 percent in 2006. (Eurostat 2008) In 2006, Italian government deficit was the highest in the Euro Zone. Padoa-Schioppa, minister of economy still thought at the end of 2006 that the 2007 budget would give a chance for Italy for remaining below the 3 percent threshold (Corriere della Sera 2006). In April 2006, when an approximate 4 percent deficit in proportion to the GDP was predicted, one of the analyses of the Financial Times even mentioned that Italy would have to leave the Euro Zone. The chance for this, however, was not substantive. Nonetheless, Italy was forced to execute further severe reforms to avoid this threat (La Repubblica 2006). In 2009, as a consequence of the global crisis, all of the indicators listed above became more extreme. The government debt was as high as 110.5 percent, and

the government deficit reached 3.7 percent of the GDP. In addition, the government also experienced an GDP decrease of 2 percent.

It became evident that during those years that support for EU membership decreased significantly. In 1991, 78 percent, and in 1999, 62 percent of respondents considered membership a good thing, whereas only 39 percent in 2008 and 41 percent in 2011 agreed with the statement. The proportion of those stating that membership was a bad thing rose from 4 percent to 17 percent between 1991 and 2011, with a rise to 17 percent in 2008 at the peak of the financial crisis.

According to the data gathered by the Standard Eurobarometer in 1993 it was shown that 62 percent of Italians 'tend to trust' the European Commission, while by 2013 this percentage fell to 35 percent. Likewise, in 2003, 57.20 percent of Italians trusted the EU itself, while in 2013, only 23 percent declared this opinion (Eurobarometer 2015).

Italy – Eurosceptic approaches

In Italy, in spite of the strong pro-European orientation of public opinion, centre--right political parties began to embrace both hard and soft approaches to euro-scepticism. Already during the first (1994), but manifestly during the Berlusconi governments, eurosceptic approaches surfaced on a national level (Quaglia 2003). It must be emphasized that the different parties of the centre right coalition (House of Freedom) represented different levels of euroscepticism.

Forza Italia's attitude regarding the EU was very fluid because of its wide range of social background and its rather vague ideological platform, mainly based on the Thatcherian principle of liberal market economy. This attitude emphasised the defence of Italian national interests. As Lucia Quaglia underlined in 2001, 'the position of its leaders on EU issues is still unclear' (Quaglia 2003). Silvio Berlusconi's government demonstrated its soft Euroscepticism in a variety of ways. First, it attempted to re-negotiate the Treaty on the European Union in 1997 in order to join the EMU without fulfilling the convergence criteria. Next, it decided not to participate in the project of the Airbus A400M military transport aircraft (2001). Additionally, members of Berlusconi's like Tremonti and Martino voiced soft Eurosceptic views regarding the introduction of the Euro.

These eurosceptic elements can also be considered as the manifestation of latent individual Euroscepticism in the Italian society (Quaglia 2003: 7–20). Bardi Luciano expressed a similar opinion on Forza Italia: 'Forza Italia is one of the most ambivalent Italian parties with regard to attitudes towards the EU. Documents and manifestoes concerning EP elections are imbued with all the classic elements of pro-European rhetoric. In other documents and positions, however, the party's attitude is more detached and less enthusiastic, especially if compared with that of Italian Catholic and moderate left parties. FI's hesitations are particularly visible on issues having implications for domestic fiscal

and budgetary policies, and also on foreign policy and security questions, probably in view of the party's preference for a stronger and closer relationship with the United States.' (Bardi 2007: 10) As Conti argues, 'European integration is not at the centre of the ideology of FI, where the market is, instead, the focus' (Conti 2003: 26). Forza Italia joined the European Peoples' Party in 1999. This fact largely contributed to the party gaining political power.

In 1995, the National Alliance (AN) replaced the nationalist and post-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). The extreme wing of the MSI created the new party, the MSI-Tricolour Flame, which represented a soft eurosceptic attitude, and the idea of a 'Europe of nations'. The AN maintaining an intergovernmental approach, had a more pro-European attitude than its predecessor, the MSI, in order to realise the political rehabilitation of the party. From the beginning, Gianfranco Fini's main aim was to lead the party toward the political centre, creating a new centre-right Gaullist party. The Statute (1995, Fiuggi) emphasised the 'Europe des patries of de Gaulle'. At the conference of Verona (1998) the final document still proposed the reduction of the significance of national government by increasing the power of the European Parliament' (Bardi 2007: 7). Minister for Telecommunications of the second Berlusconi government, Maurizio Gasparri, emphasised that 'on the one hand there has to be a greater political and democratic legitimisation of the [EU] institutions; on the other hand, there has to be a more balanced promotion of national interests' (Secolo d'Italia 2001; Quaglia 2003: 13–14).

The right-wing, neo-populist Northern League was officially founded in 1991 as a federation of leagues from different northern regions. The party won its first important success in the 1983 elections, when in the region 4.3 percent of voters supported the party. In the second half of the 1980s, however, the centre of the different regional leagues moved over to Lombardy, and their leader, Umberto Bossi, received a seat in Senate in 1987. Bossi who recognised the limitation of the ethno-regionalism, created the Northern League in 1991. The case of this regionalist party is interesting because the LN changed its position regarding the European integration from a pro-European to a eurosceptic standpoint. The Lombard League, the predecessor of the Northern League, often referred in its political ideology to the European Integration Process. Already in the 1980s they envisioned the token of the independence of Lombardy in a Europe organised on a federative basis. The basis of legitimazing their anti-constitutional, secessionist intentions was provided by the just deepening European Integration. Nevertheless, they conceptualised Europe as a confederation of regions with the broadest possible competencies (concept of Europe of Regions). They considered the Integration as an alternative to national identity. They did not support the development of an integration based on nation-states, centrally governed from Brussels (Diamanti 1993: 161).

Umberto Bossi, in his book 'Wind of the North', wrote about the birth of regional states and the formation of a 'Europe of Regions,' or a Europe of peoples. Obviously, the constantly growing competence of the Brussels bureaucracy did not fit into this picture. The goal of this party was to create 'the federal Europe of regions' based on the inter-regional (not inter-governmental) principle (Bossi – Vimercati 1992). Umberto Bossi envisaged the role of Brussels as threatening the danger of becoming a 'new Rome'.

Nevertheless, in 1993 the League voted in favour of the ratification of the TEU. They considered the establishment of the Committee of the Regions a major step forward that could lead to the transformation of the EP into a federation with two chambers, since, according to their plans, the upper chamber of the European Parliament would fulfil the task of representing the sub-national regions (Diamanti 1993: 166). During the first Berlusconi government in 1994, the Northern League argued that it represented a strong pro-European approach, without any eurosceptic attitude. The LN represented the stance that Italy had to fulfil the convergence criteria in order to enter the Single Currency Zone. Umberto Bossi, the leader of the LN, wrote a letter to the European Commission asking about the possibility for Padania to join EMU (Quaglia 2003: 15; Giordano 2004).

The Northern League, on their Milan Congress in 1997, officially accepted the party's strategy. Indeed, the party's motto suited the previous views of the NL concerning the integration: 'free Padania in a free Europe'. Their goal was to achieve a 'federation based on the cooperation of independent 'small nations'. In this period the NL built their strategy on the fact that Italy was not expected to become a member of the EMU. According to the party this would have strengthened the secessionist inclination in the people of the Northern regions and the formation of a unified Northern identity (Luverà 1997: 88).

The Northern League solidified its eurosceptic stance following Italy's official qualification to join the EMU, which the NL declined to support during parliament voting. After joining the EMU at the millennium, the popular support for the NL decreased significantly (in 2001 3,9 percent and in 2006 4,1 percent). At the same time, Umberto Bossi and the NL began to express increasingly eurosceptic views (La Padania 2002a; La Padania 2002b).

In 2000, at the Pontida meeting of the NL, Umberto Bossi claimed that the EU did not only threaten large nation states, but also small nations. He expressed his view that emphasising the principle of subsidiarity was only necessary in order to mislead people, as it was only useful for concentrating power at the community level. (Bossi 2000) According to Umberto Bossi, the European left was striving to create a super-state similar to the Soviet Union (Bossi 2001). All over Europe there was a surge of indignation after Bossi called the EU 'the USSR of the West' and a 'Stalinist superstate' (Bossi 2002). Although the Italian government had a traditional pro-Turkish approach, the Northern League stood

against the opening of the accession process to Turkey because of its Muslim traditions and its large population, despite the fact that the accession process was supported by the main Italian parties. No widespread debate occurred within Italian society over the question of the Turkish accession (EU–25 WATCH No. 2: 127–128). Following the general elections of 2006, the LN formed the opposition and represented a soft eurosceptic attitude. In general they emphasised that the Euro was the cause of the crisis of Northern Italy's small industries.

By 2007, it became clear that the Italian political processes in the short term would result in the formation of a bipolar party system. One of the major signs of this process was that beginning from 2007, the process of fusions between parties accelerated at both sides of the Italian political spectrum. Despite conflicts between ideologically similar parties, the following two years witnessed the rise of two mass parties: People of Freedom and the Democratic Party. The centre-left Democratic Party was established in October 2007 under the leadership of Walter Veltroni following the dissolution of the Democrats of the Left (DS) and the Margherita, as the successor of the Olive-tree Coalition. Veltroni, reacting to the political tensions in Italy, grouped the political goals of the party around four main topics: the environment, agreement between generations, job training, and security. The definition of the position of this new political agent among the European political parties, however, proved to be very difficult and inspired debates among politicians. The party embraced politicians from both from the left wing and from the former Christian Democrats. That is why the Socialist Group in the European Parliament adopted a new name: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S & D). The Party's Manifesto stated that 'The process of the European unification is still restrained by the strong resistance of nationalistic egoism, which the Democratic Party intends to withstand in order to realise a complete political and democratic integration (Partito Democratico 2008).

The creation of the new centre-right mass party, the People of Freedom, was prepared by Silvio Berlusconi in 2007, and officially finalised during a party congress on 27–29 March 2009 with the fusion of Forza Italia and the National Alliance. The new party still has a wide social background and a rather vague ideological platform. As emphasised in the 'Charter of Values' (Popolo della Libetá 2009) of the People of Freedom, the major ideological issues and goals of the party were its 'Christian' and 'liberal' character, the defence of traditional values as well as of individual responsibility and self-determination, the adherence of the party to the values and the platform of the European People's Party (EPP), and its support for European integration

Post-EU-accession Crisis: Hungary

After the EU accession, the 'EUphoria' in Hungarian society was soon replaced by a feeling of disappointment ('EUphobia'). This happened partly because the accession took place later than expected and partly because it did not fulfil the sometimes exaggerated hopes of convergence to the EU average (incomes), let alone the communication deficit regarding the accession. According to data gathered in 2004, the proportion of those who thought that EU membership would be advantageous for Hungary peaked in autumn 2002 at 76 percent, followed by consistent decline (Eurobarometer, 2004b). During the next one and a half years, as 'the requirements set and support offered by the Union became clear', the proportion of optimists decreased by 18 percentage points by spring of 2004, 'when only 58 percent of Hungarian citizens professed to believe that EU membership would be advantageous for the country'. Among the new member states, Hungary still remained one of the three most optimistic countries regarding the advantages expected from EU membership (Eurobarometer, 2004b, 1: 4). Still, it is worth mentioning that Hungary received a chance to become closer to the more developed European nations, because Hungary was less developed than the rest of the EU, in 2004 the GNP per capita in six regions of Hungary was below 75 percent of the EU average (38.25 percent – 60.47 percent), and only that of Central Hungary was 89.24 percent of the EU average.

Post-accession factors have played some role in popularizing Euroscepticism in Hungary following the accession to the EU. During the government of the second conservative coalition (1998–2002), two small parties took a hard Eurosceptic position. The far right Hungarian Justice and Life and the Hungarian Workers' Party adopted a strong opposition to Hungary's EU membership. According to Taggart and Szczerbiak, 'soft Euroscepticism' was taken up by two parties in the then governing coalition, FIDESZ and the Smallholders Party (the smaller partner). The leader of FIDESZ, Prime Minister Victor Orban, was increasingly accepting 'national interest' Euroscepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001: 16).

It became evident that in most of Hungary's regions, there has not been any economic convergence toward more developed areas of the EU in recent years. Moreover, in the case of some Hungarian regions, a certain amount of divergence can be observed.

Table 2: GDP per capita (PPP), percentage of the EU average of NUTS[3] regions of Hungary

NUTS 2	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Central Hungary	99.9	101.2	103.3	105.1	102.9	105	109
Central Transdanubia	58.0	60.1	59.3	57.0	57	58	54
Western Transdanubia	67.7	65.9	62.6	63.2	61.5	62	60
Southern Transdanubia	45.6	45.0	43.7	42.6	42.7	44	45
Northern Hungary	40.6	41.9	41.5	40.3	40.1	40	40
Northern Great Plain	41.8	41.4	40.1	39.1	39.4	40	42
Southern Great Plain	43.6	44.1	42.8	41.9	41.8	43	43

Source: Eurostat: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu

The Eurobarometer of October 2006 already clearly showed Hungarian society's disappointment in the EU accession. Since the spring of that year, support for membership has dropped by a further 10 to 39 percent, probably due to the country's domestic political issues such as elections, growing economic problems, and a general feeling of uncertainty (Eurobarometer 2006: 6).

By 2007, the support for membership had further decreased, as is evident in the following Eurobarometer statistics. Although general support of the EU had never been as high as in 2007, that year showed the lowest level of support ever in Hungary's history: 57 percent of EU citizens thought that their country's membership was 'a good thing', and only 15 percent viewed the membership in an entirely negative light. This indicated a 4 percent rise as compared to the previous Eurobarometer. Contrary to these findings, 40 percent of Hungarians did not consider the EU accession beneficial for their country, and only 37 percent claimed that it was 'a good thing'. Hungarians were among the most pessimistic citizens, both with regard to the issue of membership (ranked 25th place) and to the advantages of membership (27th place) (Eurobarometer 2007: 15–16).

According to the data gathered for the Standard Eurobarometer recorded in autumn, 2008, Hungarian pessimism can be traced already in the answers to the first set of questions, as only 31 percent of the respondents evaluated membership positively, in contrast with the EU average of 53 percent. It is worth noting that in autumn of 2004 the percentage of positive responses was still high, at 49 percent. While 60 percent of the EU average citizens claimed that the EU imposed its opinion on the member states, only 57 percent of Hungarians shared this view. At the same time, and in contrast to the EU average of 60 percent, only 47 percent of Hungarians thought that their country's opinion counted at the European level (Eurobarometer 2008: 31–32).

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3 In the EU, regional statistics are based on a common classification of territorial units: the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). NUTS has three regional levels, each with minimum and maximum thresholds for the average population size of the regions.

It became evident that following the economic and financial crisis support for EU membership has decreased significantly. In 2004, 49 percent of respondents considered membership a good thing, whereas by 2011 only 32 percent stated that this was the case. The proportion of those stating that membership was a bad thing rose from 10 percent to 22 percent between 2004 and 2011, with a further rise to 23 percent in 2009 at the peak of the financial crisis, followed by a fall to 15 percent in the year of the general elections (2010). In 2010, the proportion of respondents stating that EU membership was a 'good thing' was 38 percent as compared to 34 percent in 2009. The change in percentage might have reflected new hope for stronger representation and promotion of national interests on the EU level. The proportion of respondents who thought that membership was 'neither good nor bad' also increased, from 36 percent to 44 percent over the same period.

According to the results of opinion polls conducted by Medián in 2004, 80 percent of the respondents supported Hungary's membership in the EU. Although in 2011 the percentage had fallen to 68 percent, two-thirds of the population still supported Hungary's membership of the EU (Medián 2012). In 2012, the results of an opinion poll conducted by Századvég showed that less than half (49 percent) of the respondents said that membership of the EU was beneficial for Hungary and 53 percent did not support further deepening of the European integration process (Origo 2012). According to the data gathered by the Standard Eurobarometer in 2004 it was shown that 64 percent of Hungarians 'tended to trust' the European Union, while by 2013 this ratio fell to 47 percent (Eurobarometer 2015).

2010: changing political landscape and debate on the political changes

Since the general elections of 2010, the Hungarian political landscape has changed significantly due to the high level of protest votes: Fidesz received a more than two-thirds majority in Parliament, the socialists lost their political support, and Jobbik became the third largest party in the country. Moreover, the two more important parties of the transition period, namely the liberals (AFD) and the MDF, disappeared, and the LMP (Lehet Más a Politika, 'Politics Can Be Different'), a new green and anti-corruption party, entered the Parliament.

After the electoral victory of Fidesz Prime Minister Orbán has started to build the so-called system of national cooperation[4] based on the implementation of a „central political field of force" (Centralis erőtér) which would replace the "dual field of force", or the antagonistic dualism between the government and

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4   A Nemzeti Együttműködés Programja. 22. maggio 2010. http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/00047/00047.pdf

the opposition. A very important element of the process of centralization and strengthening of the state was the drafting and approval of the new constitution (Basic Law).[5] The political changes and the new constitution have also received criticism from the Venice Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe, the EU institutions (European Parliament, European Commission, infringement procedures), and the United States of America. (Venice Commission, 2011). According to the critics of the constitutional framework the process was too fast, not transparent, and, as debated by the opposition parties and by EU institutions, considered by the left-wing opposition as a sign of the deconsolidation of liberal democracy and a move from liberal democracy to centralised illiberal or partial democracy. (European Parliament 2011; Friedman 2016)

There is reason to emphasise that the words 'liberal' and 'liberalism' have become used almost as swear words in the Hungarian society and in the political debate, due to the negative attitude in society towards the high level of liberalisation and privatisation of the Hungarian economy, and due to the negative public opinion about the most recent socialist-liberal governments. The main reason for the crisis of liberalism is the decline in support for the political and economic transition, the decline in trust in the function of democracy, the high level of corruption among politicians, and the worsening economic situation of Hungary. In 2011 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development presented its document on transition economies (the Transition Report), which showed a decline in public support for democracy and the market economy in the countries that joined the EU (EBRD 2011). The decrease in support for democracy was higher in countries hard hit by the financial crisis (Krugman, 2011). Hungary was among the European countries most seriously impacted by the international financial crisis after 2008, and is finding itself in a deep economic recession until 2014. The country has had economic problems since the beginnings of the 21st century. Due to Hungary's high budget deficit, the European Union's excessive deficit procedure has been in place against Hungary since its year of entry to the EU.

In May 2013 the European Parliament made public a draft version of the report on the state of fundamental rights in Hungary prepared by the EP's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (rapporteur MEP Rui Tavares). The draft document was criticised by the Hungarian government saying that it is based on false premises. The case of the so-called Tavares report demonstrated very well the standpoint of the Hungarian government regarding the European Union, which can be defined as Euro-realism, or a soft Euroscepticism based on national interests and national-sovereignty. This case also made clear that a European political space had been created, where domestic political af-

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5   Kormany.hu, n d b, 'The Fundamental Law of Hungary', http://www.kormany.hu/download/4/c3/30000/ THE percent20FUNDAMENTAL percent20LAW percent20OF percent20HUNGARY.pdf

fairs became European ones, causing several heated debates among European politicians in different institutions of the EU (European Parliament 2013). FIDESZ's attitude regarding the EU focusing on the defence of Hungarian national interests has become very fluid, floating between pro-EU and Eurosceptic standpoints because of the wide range of its supporters' social background and the party's rather vague ideological platform (Fidesz 2009; BBC 2012; Fidesz 2011, Euractiv 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; Hiradó 2013; Hungarian Spektrum 2013, Arató – Koller 2015).

During the second conservative government, Jobbik still expressed semi-hard or sometimes hard Euro-sceptic standpoints, while pro-European/euro-optimist positions were more common among members of the Democratic Coalition led by a highly criticised ex-socialist party leader, Ferenc Gyurcsány, and the LMP. According to a research carried out by the Hungarian Europe Societz, Fidesz 'covers internal divisions', as the research identified two wings in Fidesz: 'a less visible, Euro-constructive one and a noisier, Euro-pessimist one led by Viktor Orbán' (Európa Társaság 2013: 4). At the national level, the MSZP carefully avoids taking a position in debates concerning the future of the EU. Only the LMP has a coherent federalist vision of the EU (in its 2010 electoral manifesto) (Európa Társaság 2013: 4).

As a result of the 2010 parliamentary elections, Jobbik became the third main party in Hungary, with 17 percent of the votes. Its popularity is highly connected to the economic problems in Hungary (in 2010 the GDP was −6.3 percent, and the unemployment rate was above 11 percent), and to the disappointment in the process of democratisation and Europeanisation due to the high level of corruption. The characteristic features of Jobbik's extreme rightist ideology are anti-democratic feelings, nationalism, chauvinism, and racism. They usually do not reject the application of radical methods in resolving social problems.

Jobbik, like extreme right nationalistic parties in general, represents a semi-hard Euro-sceptic standpoint in not supporting the further deepening of integration. The party appeared to see the integration as standing for a supranational political structure that aims at the renewed suppression of small countries. In Hungary, the reason for growing Euro-scepticism is probably the lack of economic growth following the accession (2004) and the disillusionment with the process of democratisation and liberalisation (Vona 2009; Teol 2009).

Accession to the EU brought about a serious trauma for Hungary, known as the "post-accession crisis". Under the influence of the change of the regime, there was, on the one hand, a social-structural crisis, because the economic deficit was transformed into social deficit during the process of crisis management. On the other hand, the new democratic state had no time to develop fully, and thus remained weak. Fast-paced democratization led to a serious social deficit, namely to economic and social insecurity. When Hungary's accession to the EU was achieved, the state and civil society were still weak. It was this

fact that caused trauma; the country was not ready for accession either from the point of view of societal capacity or of the state of development of the institutional structure. In addition, the onset of the so-called "accession and reform exhaustion" has resulted in the rise of populism (Ágh 2008: 94–95). In 2010, the new governing coalition answered to this challenge with the strengthening and centralising state capacities, and with a quiet populist approach based on emphasised promotion of national sovereignty.

Italy – Third Republic?

There is still the question of whether following the resignation of Berlusconi (2011) as prime minister, the transition to the Third Republic has started or not. But we must emphasise that there is a changing political landscape, the end of bipolarism, and the fragmentation of the party system (Terza Forza, M5S) has started again. Due to the wave of corruption scandals and to Italians' eroding confidence in their politicians, the Italian party-system transformed significantly.

The birth of a new populist, anti-political movement, the Five Stars Movement (M5S) was a clear symptom of the deep crisis of Italian representative democracy. This political movement, taking advantage of the possibilities of direct democracy offered by the web, in 2013 became the third largest political party in the country, gathering 26 percent of the votes at general elections and filling the political gap left behind by PdL and LN. Created following the beginning of financial crisis, M5S has positioned itself in opposition to existing political parties and the traditional elites. Its aim is destroying the established party system. We can observe that since the beginning, it has represented the anger of the Italian electorate.

M5S has an unclear picture of EU and embraces soft eurosceptic standpoints. In 2013 it started to prepare a referendum on EU membership and on the Euro. Beppe Grillo said that ''Europe should be rethought,'' It is more against the Euro and the EU-imposed austerity policies.

Following the resignation of Berlusconi in 2011, the governments of Monti and Letta have clearly returned to the traditional EU-policy of Cristian Democrats supporting more an integration in terms of a banking union, fiscal union, and Eurobonds. We can easily observe a growing gap between the Italian political elite and Italian public opinion. The ambitious Renzi government has started to implement the political and economic reforms in order to lead the country toward the "third republic".

Conclusion

Both Italy and Hungary have had difficulties of different types of transitions, and both have been hit hard by financial and economic crises. The two countries semi-peripheral positions have been strengthened by the economic and

financial crisis. Jobbik and M5S are the clear symptoms of the deep crisis of representative democracy in Hungary and Italy. There is growing populism and euroscepticism due to the disadvantages of joining the EU and the Euro-zone, and due to the persistent democratic deficit of the EU. As a consequence, the EU has extended its competences to override national governments on timely issues, such as pension reform. In the case of Hungary, we can observe the process from EU-foria to EU-fobia (Euroscepticis). In the case of Italy, we can trace the process from Euro-enthusiasm to Euro-delusion.

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Business-Firm Parties and the Czech Party System after 2010[1]

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Abstract: *The case study presented in this paper applies the business-firm party concept to two political entities active in the Czech party system after 2010: the Public Affairs Party (VV) and the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011) movement. We assess whether these actors meet the criteria of the business-firm party model and, thus, whether they can be considered representatives of this type of political party in the Czech Republic. The study concludes with a comparison of VV and ANO 2011 as two possible variations on what is known as the business-firm party model.*

Key words: Czech Republic, party politics, business-firm party, entrepreneurial party, Public Affairs Party, ANO 2011

Introduction

Modern politics is inconceivable without political parties (cf. Schattschneider 1942). These parties are one of the main forms of political representation in contemporary representative democracies. In recent years, however, political partisanship has generally seen a significant qualitative and quantitative shift, including the transformation of consolidated democracies. The Czech party system is no exception in this regard, and this new trend in its development dates back to at least the end of 2009 and start of 2010. At the same time, the current Czech political scene can hardly be understood if we fail to comprehend its party politics.

Before 2010, established political parties in the Czech Republic based their electoral support on relatively stable electorates. A mostly closed party system also provided very limited opportunity for new political parties to enter the parliamentary arena. The 2010 elections, however, brought a significant change on this front and may can therefore be regarded as critical (Key 1955; cf. Norris – Evans 1999). These elections saw the erosion of electoral support for the established parties, an increase in electoral volatility mainly due to a shift by voters to new parties and the entry of those new political parties into the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) of Czech parliament (Charvát 2014). By the time of the 2013 elections, the existing system of party competition based on the electoral rivalry between the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) had been disrupted.

Current developments in Czech party politics represent not only a crisis for established political parties but also some sort of crisis for Czech political partisanship in its existing form. The organisation of the new parties is characterised by several phenomena never before encountered in Czech politics. Political parties no longer behave programmatically, and traditional ideologically-oriented parties known for their conflicts along socio-economic lines (the axis of political competition) are being replaced by new political entities that offer the simplest possible solutions instead of elaborate political programmes. Only TOP 09,[2] which entered the Chamber of Deputies in the 2010 elections, still essentially has the profile of a traditional political party, based in its case on a conservative political ideology combined with a liberal (pro-market) view of economics and a pro-European view of foreign policy. Furthermore, it should be noted that both successful new political entities in the 2013 election, ANO 2011 and Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy Party, emphasised their anti-party sentiments and the fact that they were not political parties but political movements.[3] Last but not least, these new political entities are closely associated with the person of their founder, a political entrepreneur for whom they are a political project. This applies to three of the four new political entities which have succeeded since 2010: the Public Affairs Party (VV), which entered the Chamber of Deputies based on the 2010 elections and subsequently the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens 2011 (*Akce nespokojených občanů*, ANO 2011)[4] and Dawn

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2 The TOP 09 acronym reflects the foundations of the party's programme and the main principles which it stands for. These include tradition, responsibility and prosperity. The numerals 09 refer to the year (2009) when the party was founded.

3 Both parties made an effort to capitalise on general criticisms of Czech party politics by relying on details of the law on political party organisation in the Czech Republic. This law allows for the formal registration of a political movement that can operate under the same conditions as a political party.

4 The ANO 2011 acronym (*ano* also means "yes" in Czech) refers to the group's origins as a civic association called the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens in the autumn of 2011. This followed several public appearances by current ANO 2011 leader Andrei Babiš in which he condemned the corruption of the Czech state administration and political scene and criticised Czech society generally. Soon afterwards, the

of Direct Democracy (the "Dawn") movements, which both broke through in the 2013 early elections. We are yet to be convinced that VV and the ANO 2011 movement are indeed examples of a specific political party type such as the business-firm or entrepreneurial party (see below). Dawn, in contrast, cannot be called a business-firm party mainly due to its low level of professionalism and rather one-theme political orientation. We also take into account the campaign's financing through a bank loan rather than direct sponsorship from the political entrepreneur Tomio Okamura or any companies associated with him and the movement's limited use of external experts, e.g. for the creation of election programmes (for more details, see Kopeček – Svačinová 2015).

The focus of this paper is therefore on political parties, which despite many shortcomings, remain the key actors in contemporary European politics in terms of democratic representation. In what follows, we investigate several questions: Why have the "new" parties been successful vis-à-vis the established parties in the Czech Republic, a situation particularly clear at the end of the first decade of the millennium? And how different are these parties from the others? Our underlying hypothesis is that the features of both the political parties under investigation, VV and ANO 2011, reflect a new model of political party, the so-called business-firm party.

With these aims in mind, this article proceeds as a case study applying the original concept of the business-firm party to VV and ANO 2011. The first part provides a brief introduction to the business-firm party model and its basic classificatory criteria, which later serve as the start of an analytic framework. We then give a short account of the two entities examined with a special emphasis on the defined organisational criteria. The study concludes with a comparison of VV and ANO 2011 as two possible variations on what is called the business--firm or entrepreneurial party model.

As the name of this new party model itself suggests, one of the signature features of these entities is their close links with business, trade or economic structures. According to Miroslav Novák (2011: 559), entrepreneurial parties use "the weakness of states to attempt to dominate them" and are therefore "a typical expression of globalisation since the late 20th century." The linking of party--political and subsequently parliamentary and governmental institutions on the one hand, with the holders of economic and business interests on the other hand, was until recently characterised as a conflict of interests and a source of potential corruption, i.e. a development that was unhealthy for politics and had to be strictly limited. The paradox here is that both investigated political entities representing business parties in the Czech Republic (see below) chose the fight against corruption as one of their key campaign topics.

civic association was transformed into a political entity, and in May 2012, ANO 2011 was registered with the Czech Interior Ministry.

Defining the business-firm party concept

The emergence of business-firm or entrepreneurial parties can be seen as a natural turn of events based on a political party development typology which describes the gradual transformation of political parties across four domains. These cover the party's origin, ideology, organisation and electoral appeal. This development typology emphasises the ability of political parties and movements to adapt in these particular areas as well as to changing contemporary circumstances and the realities of political development, whether domestic (e.g. professionalism, the personalisation of politics and changing political communication and campaign methods) or related to international politics (particularly the impact of European integration) or socio-economic, demographic and cultural-value transformations of society and the state.

In the past, the development of the political culture and political environment happened gradually. After an initial stage in which only parties of cadres (also known as elite parties or parties of notables) were established, the next stages of social development produced mass parties, catch-all parties, electoral-professional parties and cartel parties (Fiala – Strmiska 1998: 85–86; Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 308; Krouwel, 2006: 252–260; Novák 2011: 554–559; Krouwel 2012: 15–25). At the turn of the 21st century, a new development model – the "managerial type modern elite party" – was added (Klíma 2015: 46). This model is also known as the business-firm party model (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999). It was generally defined and delimited by Jonathan Hopkin and Caterina Paolucci (1999) based on a study of two examples, Adolph Suárez's Union de Centro Democrático Party (Union of the Democratic Centre) in Spain in the 1970s and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia Party (Forward Italy or Let's Go Italy) in Italy in the 1990s. These authors applied the concepts of the cartel party, and in particular, the professional electoral party, which had previously been formulated by Angelo Panebianco (1988). This party model is a recent phenomenon in continental Europe though not in the Americas (Krouwel 2006: 260; 2012: 25) and it appears when a new party system is being created (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 307). Later, the concept of the business-firm parties was further developed, specified, classified and systematised by André Krouwel (2006; 2012), who also coined the term "entrepreneurial party" as more or less a synonym for the business-firm party.

The business-firm party model is said to have six defining criteria (Hopkin –Paolucci, 1999: 332–334; Krouwel, 2006: 260–261; 2012: 25–27; cf. Havlík –Hloušek 2014: 561). The first of these is the existence and activity of a political entrepreneur who founds a party and significantly contributes to its management and financing. Business-firm parties generate financial resources from the private sector and here differ significantly from cartel parties that use state resources for their activities. As Miroslav Novák (2011: 558) points out, a major

source of the business-firm party's income is funding from an entrepreneur or entrepreneurs who was/were present at the birth of the party and strongly influence/s its political activities. This element is usually accompanied by the marked personalisation and centralisation of the political entity since the politician-entrepreneur stands at the centre of decision-making. This high degree of personalisation is also reflected in the electoral appeal of business-firm parties, which mobilise supporters through their leaders.

On the issue of financing, the business-firm party model varies significantly from the cartel party model, however when it comes to the other three defining traits, these models are relatively similar. The second key feature of business-firm parties is their low rate of party institutionalisation, which logically relates to the specific and dominant position of the political entrepreneur, their influence and the role that they play within party "structures." "Party bureaucracies are kept to a bare minimum, with technical tasks often 'contracted out' to external experts with no ties to the party" (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 333). According to André Krouwel (2006: 260–261; 2012: 25), this element, that is, the fact that "all party activities and tasks are brought under formal (commercial) contract in terms of labour, services and goods to be delivered to the party," seems to be the essence of the business-firm party model. The outsourcing of some party affairs and activities, i.e. their provision by external experts, or, in business terms, suppliers with no ties to the party, can, thus, be seen as another sign of the business-firm party model. The fourth defining criterion is the limited size of the membership base and a general resentment and indifference around the question of whether to significantly expand the membership or include in intraparty activities and decision-making itself. The consequence is that "a high proportion of party members [are] office-holders who see the party as a vehicle for acquiring political positions" (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 311).

Turning to the fifth criterion, business-firm parties are characterised by the absence of any unifying official ideology; instead, they manifest a related policy--making flexibility that allows for the changing of political positions based on the current public mood. Party policies are not pre-set but determined by the results of "electoral market" surveys. The party is, thus, conceived as an organisation with only one basic function – to mobilise immediate and superficial broad public support during elections. One useful tool for achieving this goal is direct control over the media. A final important defining feature of business--firm parties is their approach to voters as consumers rather than as individuals who should be identified with the ideology and values of a given party.

Although it is not a basic criterion set by Hopkin and Paolucci (1999), the context of the political party's emergence is another key factor that should be observed here. We argue that the party's entrepreneurial nature is already firmly anchored in the way that the business-firm party was established. Moreover, it is this mode of establishment that makes business-firm parties significantly

different from earlier types of political parties. Business-firm parties arise from an external source, having their origin in the private initiatives of political entrepreneurs who see politics as another business opportunity (cf. Keman – Krouwel 2007). Since for business-firm parties, the party and its ideology are no longer goals in themselves (see above), the party "becomes a kind of business firm, in which the public goods produced are incidental to the real objectives of those leading it" (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 311; Krouwel 2006: 261; 2012: 26). Furthermore, in addition to the fact that business-firm parties arise from private initiatives and private resources are used to establish them, political elites are recruited primarily from the business environment (Krouwel 2012: 36).

On the topic of party origins, André Krouwel distinguishes further between two basic sub-types of business-firm parties. The first of these is "based on an already existing commercial company, whose structures are used for a political project" (Krouwel 2006: 260; 2012: 25). In other words, the political entrepreneur is "in fact a businessman, and the organisation of the party is largely conditioned [on] the prior existence of [a] business firm" (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999: 320). The second sub-type is "a new and separate organisation specially constructed for a political endeavour" (Krouwel 2006: 260; 2012: 25). Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia is a model of the first type of business party while Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Pim Fortuyn List) in the Netherlands might be a typical example of the second type (Krouwel 2012: 25).

In the context of the Czech Republic, which we describe further on, the case of VV presents us with a political party that was not originally connected with an entrepreneur or linked to a business. At a certain stage in its development and existence, however, the party was taken over by corporate structures and used to promote their influence in politics. Given the nature of the political parties that are analysed in what follows, it is to some degree justifiable and understandable that we enlist terms from the business environment. In this way, we can speak of certain forms of business acquisitions where the political party became an *acquired asset*.

Prerequisites for the emergence of business-firm parties in the Czech Republic

The development of political parties in the Czech Republic can also be analysed in the context of the particular stages of development of Czechoslovak and later Czech society. In contrast with the theoretical nature of the development typology, however, we can observe here certain variations, modifications and especially shifts in timing which are mainly due to half a century of limitations or prohibitions on the development of a pluralistic political party system followed by a discrete period in which the party system and its individual actors were formed in connection with the post-1989 transition to democracy.

In the context of contemporary Czech (and generally Central European) politics, it is also important to bear in mind the public's particular perceptions of political parties as such. As a result of negative historical experiences, political parties have pejorative or at least not entirely positive connotations, and this remains an important reason for the low level of long-term trust in political parties (Pridham 2009: 281–282). During the communist regime, membership of the (Communist) Party was often coerced since it was a prerequisite for the career growth of the person concerned as well as that of their descendants and relatives. The controversy over the role of political parties in the political process was hardly exhausted during the first phase of the transition to democracy in 1990, and it has been a permanent and integral fixture of Czech politics since 1989. Moreover, as Vlastimil Havlík and Vít Hloušek recall (2013: 121), the criticism of political parties in the Czech discourse of the early 2010s was no weaker than it had been twenty years earlier. Recently, however, the debate over the role of political parties has taken on an important new dimension (see below).

If we focus on the electoral level, the advent of business-firm parties can be detected from the growing instability of electoral support for political parties. While the transformation of political parties from the catch-all to the cartel types was accompanied by a stabilisation or in some cases even a decline in the level of overall electoral and especially extra-system volatility,[5] an upswing in such volatility in the age when political competition is increasingly staged among the established parties implies citizens' growing dissatisfaction with these mainstream parties. This, in turn, would suggest an opportunity for the entry of new political parties, including business-firm parties. Although we cannot automatically attribute the appearance of business-firm parties to this increase in extra-system and overall electoral volatility and we should also consider other aspects of possible shifts in party support, electoral volatility is a significant indicator of potentially transformative trends in the party system.

Looking closer at the stability of electoral support for Czech political parties, we find that overall extra-system and electoral volatility have both exhibited a downward trend since the 1996 Chamber of Deputies elections though there was an increase in overall electoral volatility between the 2002 and 2006 elections. That change was, however, mainly due to a broader shift in voter support among the established parties and particularly towards the two main poles of party competition, ODS and CSSD, which reached their peak electoral support in 2006. In contrast, extra-system volatility increased only slightly. The 2010

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5 Overall electoral volatility reflects the aggregate rate of movement of electoral support among the political party candidates in two surveyed (compared) elections, which are usually consecutive. This overall volatility consists of two sub-components: intra-system volatility, which reflects the shifting of electoral support between established parties, and extra-system volatility, which indicates the level of the shifts in electoral support from established to newly formed parties. (For more details, see Powell – Tucker 2014; cf. Mainwaring et al. 2016).

parliamentary elections, however, significantly modified this picture. There was a striking rise in the level of extra-system volatility, which exceeded the rate of in-system volatility; overall electoral volatility saw a similar increase. The 2013 elections brought a decline in extra-system as well as overall electoral volatility, however both values remained very high. Since 2010, there have, thus, been signs of transformative trends in the Czech party system (see Charvát 2014).

Although at the outset of this paper, we introduced the concept of business--firm parties by reference to a text which focused on examples from Italy and Spain (see Hopkin – Paolucci 1999), we might also add that these entities have found better progeny in the post-communist space. In this context, Michal Klíma (2015) refers primarily to the phenomenon of state capture by which a non-transparent business segment is able to assert its interests in the decision--making realm. This leads to a systemic failure of the established parties and the demand for new parties; in other words, the established political parties are themselves seen as the source of this crisis. According to Klíma (2015: 25, 34–35, 45, 225), the emergence of business parties has been a public response to the "clientalisation" of the established parties, who are, thus, known as "clientelist" parties, and of democracy in general, and this has been characteristic especially of the "post-transformation state of the post-communist regime."

Several reasons can be found for the onset of an obsession with business structures in the form of the personalised, institutionally weak and programmatically flexible parties of the Czech political environment at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. One important determinant of the electoral success of these ill-defined new parties in the post-communist context has been the perception of corruption, i.e. the belief that corruption was at a high level or was growing long term (see, e.g., Ilonszki – Olson 2012; Kostadinova 2012; Sikk 2012; Hanley 2014; Hanley – Sikk 2016). Another equally important factor which helps explain the emergence of the new parties and moreover closely relates to the corruption issue, has been the presence of a political crisis (Havlík – Hloušek 2014: 554). Last but not least, we should also mention the growing professionalism of election campaign leadership and the personalisation of Czech politics since at least the 2006 Chamber of Deputies elections as a significant factor contributing to the breakthrough of entrepreneurial political parties.

As in the debate over the role of political parties, past experience has an important influence on corruption, and a key concern here is the process of party appointments to public positions or so-called party patronage (see e.g. Kopecký – Spirova 2011). Under the communist regime, corruption was quite rampant: the problem grew gradually until the final phase in the 1980s when the regime had significant corrupt involvement, and some of these corrupt networks even survived the fall of communist power. Many authors agree that the level of corruption rose again after communist rule ended (Naxera 2012: 254–256, 265).

The most consulted empirical indicator of perceptions of corruption is the composite Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which is published regularly by the non-governmental non-profit organisation Transparency International.[6] Although the CPI is sometimes criticised for only reflecting the level of perceived corruption and not capturing the true level, it is clearly a meaningful indicator. In fact, the actual level of corruption is very difficult, if not impossible, to record empirically. We should add that in the context of the present study, the CPI provides exactly the information that we need to capture. The actual level of corruption is not the cause of the diversion of voters from the established parties to the "anti-corruption parties," as Andreas Bågenholm (2013) calls the parties that have stressed the fight against corruption as a major election campaign theme. That cause is the public perception of corruption.

In the case of the Czech Republic, some authors consider the period of the Opposition Agreement (1998–2002) to be the turning point for perceived corruption, noting that this agreement put the country on the path to a more corrupt and collusive form of government (see Hanley 2014; Klíma 2015). According to the CPI, we can discern an increase in perceived corruption in the Czech Republic throughout the reported period, i.e. from 1996 until the crucial year of 2002, when the trend reversed. Starting in 2002, the level of perceived corruption in the Czech Republic began to decline gradually. This culminated in 2007 and 2008, when perceived corruption dropped to the 1997 level. Even so, the Czech Republic has been assessed as a country with a relatively high rate of perceived corruption. Since 2009, the trend has turned back and perceived corruption in the Czech Republic is growing again.

According to the CPI, in around 2010, the degree of perceived corruption in the Czech Republic was relatively high when compared with developing countries, and this rate continues to increase. Some space has, thus, been needed for the possible emergence of new parties. As Marko Klasnja, Joshua Tucker and Kevin Deegan-Krause show (2016; cf. Belanger 2004), for new parties to succeed, there is a need for something more than citizens who see corruption as a major problem. Voters are galvanised to vote on the corruption issue because of the appearance of a new political party which politicises corruption. While Klasnja, Tucker and Deegan-Krause (2016) draw these conclusions from

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6   The CPI has been measured since 1995, and the Czech Republic has been included in this research since 1996. The composite index is based on the results of expert surveys about corruption (the respondents are typically academics, policy analysts, ratings agencies, prominent business leaders from the Czech Republic and abroad, top and mid-level managers, journalists and ordinary citizens). These surveys are undertaken by a variety of reputable independent international institutions. The CPI assesses issues including abuse of public office and public funds, corruption in institutions and fields of governance, the transparency of public institutions, the ability of governmental institutions to punish corruption and the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures. Since 2012, index values have ranged from 0 (indicating a high level of corruption in the country) to 100 (indicating a country with almost no corruption). Until 2011, the rating scale ranged from 0 (a high level of corruption in the country) to 10 (almost no corruption in the country).

an analysis of Slovak politics from 2004 to 2011, there is little doubt that their findings relate to recent developments in the Czech Republic. In his study of Canadian, British and Australian political practices, Éric Bélanger (2004) adds that if a new party fails to appear, voters do not cast their ballot for the main competing parties but instead abstain from voting altogether in the elections.

Shortly before 2010, new themes of corruption, clientelism and party patronage, often associated with the effects of the established political parties, began to come to the fore of Czech political discourses and agendas. A strong anti-corruption and anti-clientelism rhetoric was especially present among extra-parliamentary protest groups, and it was strengthened by the freeing up of the police force and state prosecutor, as well as the intensive work of investigative journalists and the establishment of various civic activities and initiatives.[7] All this contributed to the discovery and exposure of a series of corruption cases closely linked to the political parties previously in office. These cases implicated not only the parties in power immediately before 2010, but all those entities that had taken turns at holding office since 1990.

These factors all contributed significantly to the loss of Czech public trust in political institutions, including political parties, and democracy in general (see Linek 2010; Štefek 2012), and consequently, to the onset of a political crisis. Aside from the more widespread association of established political parties, their leaders and the political elite in general with corruption, negative perceptions of Czech policy were exacerbated by the chronic inability of Czech governments to take any action (Havlík – Hloušek 2014: 555). The early fall of the second Mirek Topolánek government deepened voters' frustration with established parties. In contrast, Jan Fischer's newly established interim caretaker government was significantly more popular than its predecessor (for more details, see Just 2012: 423; Hloušek – Kopeček 2014). It created the impression that politics could be different from what had been seen to date from the established political parties; there was a sense, moreover, that the political realm might be made uncomplicated and free of mutual attacks.

Finally, there was an expansion of the role, importance and influence of political marketing. The first instance when professionalism in electoral campaigning could be observed (at least to some degree) in the Czech Republic was in the 2002 general election. However, it was only with the 2006 elections that we began to sometimes speak of a so-called marketing revolution in campaign leadership and of the Americanisation of campaigns in the Czech Republic. As well as the intensive use of negative and comparative advertising tools, one important aspect of these campaigns has been pronounced personalisation, with the electoral contest between the major parties ODS and ČSSD being

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7 These initiatives included Reconstruction of the State, the Endowment Fund Against Corruption, Revival, Give Us Back Our State, Transparency's Anti-Corruption Academic League and many others.

transformed into a conflict between the leaders Mirek Topolánek (ODS) and Jiří Paroubek (ČSSD). The personalisation trend in politicshas largely continued in the period since the 2006 election, creating a favourable environment for the success of the entrepreneurial political parties.

It is helpful to take a closer look at the two Czech political parties which probably represent the business-firm party model most faithfully. The first of these is the VV Party, which succeeded in the 2010 elections to the Chamber of Deputies, claiming 10.88% of votes and twenty-four seats in what was then the best election result for a non-parliamentary party since 1992. The second is the ANO 2011 movement, which made even more significant inroads in the 2013 election, garnering 18.65% of votes (the second highest share in the election after ČSSD, which held 20.45% of votes) and forty-seven seats.

Public Affairs

Public Affairs (VV) can be considered the first relevant political party in the Czech Republic with a closely linked business element. At the outset, it should be noted that the party's roots had nothing in common with these types of parties. Public Affairs was established in 2001 (and officially registered a year later) as a local political entity active in several districts of Prague (Matušková, 2010: 109; Havlík – Hloušek 2014: 556–557); its aim was to improve living conditions for young families with children in Prague. Until 2010, the entity was active only at the local level, initially operating solely in the Prague 1 district before extending to other districts of the capital as well as some smaller cities and villages (Černošice and Kostelec nad Orlicí).

In 2009, VV came under the influence of ABL, the largest private security agency in the country and ABL owner Vít Bárta. The latter originally expressed interest in gaining political influence in an internal company document titled "Strategy 2009–2014," which he presented at an ABL managers' meeting in October 2008. In that document, disclosed to the public through the daily *Mladá fronta DNES* in 2011, Bárta detailed his visions, goals and methods for expanding his economic and political influence (cf. Havlík – Hloušek 2014: 563; Klíma 2015: 107). One of the key tools and resources for strengthening his profile was said to be VV, where he later actually gained some influence without becoming a member initially.

Vít Bárta's personality and activities can therefore be seen as fulfilling the first criterion for a business-firm party, namely the existence of a political entrepreneur. Bárta wasn't present at the birth of the party, but he was there during its shift from purely local clusters into a relevant party operating within national political structures. At this point, it should be noted that Vít Bárta first exerted his influence on the party from outside as a purely informal leader. He became a member of the party in the second half of 2010 after he was elected as a VV

representative to the Chamber of Deputies and appointed as a member of government. The fact that a non-party member was elected to the Chamber as a party candidate and that he also became a member of the government was not surprising in itself. Vít Bárta, however, also took part as an outsider in the post-election coalition negotiations, which can be considered clear evidence of his impact on the political direction of the party. After joining the government which he had helped to negotiate and shape as an independent individual, he joined the party. Three years later, he became its chairman at a time when only representatives of a breakaway faction and the Bárta-led "remains" of VV comprised the opposition.

Even while he did not have a role in the party, Bárta influenced VV's formal leaders, especially its chairman Radek John, who as a former presenter and at the time reporter for the very popular TV Nova investigative programme *Na vlastní oči*, was supposed to represent VV's anti-corruption and anti-clientelist agenda. Thanks to this TV show in which John "fought for the rights of ordinary citizens," he also enjoyed relatively high popularity (Matušková, 2010: 110). A confluence of factors including a popular leader who was moreover surrounded by young women candidates whose physical appearance was stressed in promotions, a critical attitude to established parties and politicians (whom VV labelled "dinosaurs" in the campaign), "a new project" (Sikk 2012) and a focus on appealing topics, can explain the party's success in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, quite soon after its political debut, the party began to face crises that were often based on the conflict between its practices and its previously highlighted anti-corruption and anti-clientelist appeal (for more details, see Klíma 2015: 106).

Even when he did not hold a formal leadership position in VV, Bárta's influence as a political entrepreneur was reflected less in the weak organisational structure of the party (i.e. one of the elements of business parties) than in the gradual dependence of that structure on Bárta. After all, in contrast with the later ANO 2011 movement, Public Affairs became a business-firm party *after* it was taken over by an entrepreneur (Bárta); up to that point, it had operated similarly to other political parties, even in terms of its organisational structure. After Bárta's takeover, the party became substantially dependent on his financing whether in the form of donations from himself as an individual or from his company ABL (Bureš 2012: 149). Before the 2010 parliamentary elections, Bárta was one of the four largest sponsors of the party, with donations representing a key and, compared with the situation in established parties, significantly above-average income source for VV. After the party's entry into the Chamber of Deputies, state contributions, of course, became the main item in the revenue part of its budget, and their share of its total revenue more or less corresponded with the picture for established political parties (Outlý – Charvát 2016).

Bárta also gradually strengthened his institutional position by "special" means, including the fact that one of the party's vice-chairpersons – and after

the election, the deputy speaker of the Chamber of Deputies – was his girlfriend, fiancée and later wife Kateřina Klasnová. Party leadership meetings often took place at Bárta's home instead of at the party's offices and this was common even when Vít Bárta was not yet the formal head of the party. These additional factors confirm the hypothesis that Bárta enjoyed a dominant position and influence as a political businessman standing at the centre of party affairs and decision-making.

Outsourcing could also be observed in VV, albeit only for some partly party-related activities. This outsourcing did not always involve sources that were fully external since in some cases, Bárta used the services of his own company ABL, which had a *de facto* connection with VV. As a business party, VV also fulfilled the requirement of having a relatively small number of members. Although precise member numbers data are not traceable, the figures available suggest that during its existence, the party had between 800 and 1,600 members (Chvojka 2016: 75–76). Aside from its regular party members, the party also set up a system of so-called registered supporters, who numbered up to 16,000. These people did not, however, have the same rights and obligations as members. The party used them to conduct indicative polls on certain issues, but positions arrived at in this way were not binding on party authorities. These intra-party polls were in fact more of a façade which complemented the emphasis on elements of direct democracy in the party's campaign rather than an actual and relevant part of the internal decision-making process.

The party did not identify with any ideologies, and nor did it sign up to any party affiliations. Its election agenda lacked any unifying conceptual framework and was more of a reflection of various voters' interests and demands. This was clear, for example, from the less than coherent language of its election programme (Eibl 2010: 74). Jan Bureš describes Public Affairs as "less transparent" and the party's policies as a combination of "(often contradictory) liberal, radical-social and populist rhetoric" (Bureš 2012: 148). The reluctance to be identified on the Left–Right spectrum was demonstrated by party chairman Radek John himself, who at a VV press conference in May 2010 (one month before the election) described the election programme as follows: "We don't want to move to the right nor to the left, we want to move forward" (quoted in Kraus 2010). In a study that measured the ideological distance between the parties based on their programmes, Otto Eibl placed VV in the middle of the political spectrum (Eibl 2010: 83–84). The exit polls during the 2010 elections and subsequent sociological surveys also indicated that support for VV came from the former voters of both right-wing and left-wing parties (Bureš 2012: 142,150; Matušková 2010: 110).

Turning to the party's attitude to voters as consumers, i.e. the last of the characteristics of business-firm parties, we find that VV in fact worked with this concept in its internal documents. The party maintained that voters did not seek

out ideologies but they wanted to be offered immediate and simple solutions. In formulating its policy objectives and strategies, VV relied heavily on surveys and the voting preferences of its registered supporters. Its references to the desires and demands of the public highlighted a space outside the parties. A key point of VV's election agenda was the introduction of other elements of direct democracy into the political system not only at Czech national level (Public Affairs, 2010: 5, 13) but also at European Union level (Public Affairs 2010: 40).

The Action of Dissatisfied Citizens 2011 (ANO 2011)

ANO 2011 was founded in 2011 by Andrej Babiš as a political movement critical of political corruption. The reference to "dissatisfied citizens" in the movement's name might suggest that it arose from the bottom up based on the activities of civil society but in fact the opposite is true. From the start, this initiative has been fully in the hands of Andrej Babiš and nothing has changed even since the movement's development and establishment as a relevant player in the party system after its entry in the Chamber of Deputies in 2013. The status and role of the political entrepreneur-founder have been even more pronounced in this case than they were in the earlier one of Public Affairs and Vít Bárta.

Andrej Babiš, the owner of Agrofert group and its many subsidiaries which are active in the agriculture and food sectors, the chemical industry, healthcare and the media, founded the ANO 2011 movement and from the beginning, he has been the party's head and the main donor to its activities. As ANO 2011 chairman, he represented the movement in the post-election negotiations, and after joining the government, took up the positions of first deputy prime minister and finance minister. He has always had unanimous support for his position at the forefront of the movement. ANO 2011 has, thus, been organised around the principles of strong personalisation and centralisation,[8] with founder Andrej Babiš taking a dominant position from the outset, whether through formal or informal mechanisms. Since 2015, the movement has also followed the principle that the chairman is irreplaceable in political negotiations; an exception is allowed for "specified matters" where the vice-chairman may obtain written authorisation from the presidium. Andrej Babiš, thus, spoke honestly when he told *The Financial Times* in a mid-February 2016 interview that "the party is connected to my person. The party is me" (Foy 2016).

The dominant role of Andrej Babiš within the movement has been observable since the spring of 2013. Before this, there was a "rift" caused by the results of the ANO 2011 leadership elections at the March 2013 movement convention. As a consequence, Babiš began to pay full attention to building up his political

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8   The ANO 2011 presidium has even confirmed the chairpersons of its regional organisations in their positions, for example.

career while also controlling ANO 2011 as though it was a 100%-owned company. Though Babiš himself was elected as party chairman without any complications at this convention, to his great surprise, the delegates did not elect any of the Agrofert holdings-associated candidates whom Babiš had chosen for the vice-chair positions (these individuals included Babiš's closest political collaborator, Jaroslav Faltýnek, who until then had, in fact, exercised executive power in the movement). In a bid to ensure the power of territorial groups vis-a-vis the operation and decision-making of central authorities, the delegates awarded the majority (four out of five) of the vice-chair positions to regional organisation representatives contrary to Babiš's wishes as chair. The upshot was conflicts in the ANO 2011 presidium when these vice-chairmen showed their tendency to behave independently of Babiš. In contrast, Babiš opted to ignore the other members of the presidium when making decisions, comparing them to regional godfathers who had attempted to dominate the movement and justifying his own actions on the axiom "I pay, I decide" (Koděra 2013; Menschik 2015: 15). The four vice-chairmen continued to defy the chair for twenty-six days before resigning from both their positions and the movement. These vice-chair positions remained vacant, however, until the next convention in 2015 (no extraordinary convention session was convened). No convention was even held after the movement lost its statutory vice-chairwoman in autumn 2014, when the last vice-chair of ANO 2011 Věra Jourová left her role to take up a position as European commissioner. Since that time, the ANO 2011 presidium has consisted of a single person, the movement's chairman Andrej Babiš.

As founder and chairman of the movement, Babiš therefore affects virtually all aspects of ANO 2011's existence and makes the majority of decisions and the movement depends on him financially. The campaign before the 2013 elections was financed by Andrej Babiš largely from his own funds with most other revenue coming from the companies of Babiš Agrofert holdings. At this point, it should be noted that the movement had the most expensive campaign of any of the candidate parties (Gregor – Matušková 2014: 59, 71). Just before the elections, however, a turnabout in the party's revenue sources occurred, when ANO 2011 accounts revealed major sponsors who were not part of the Babiš business empire. The success in the 2013 parliamentary elections significantly changed the revenue structure. Although the level of ANO 2011's sponsorship remains exceptionally high when compared with the picture for established parties, the main source of its income is state contributions, which represent a similar share of revenue to the situation in those parties (Outlý – Charvát 2016).

A number of high-ranking representatives in the movement as well as its candidates and officers in various state government positions originally worked as managers of companies belonging to Agrofert group, a link that significantly strengthens Babiš's position. These include, in particular, one of the party's founding members and since 2015, its first vice-chair and chair of the

ANO 2011 parliamentary caucus, Jaroslav Faltýnek, who was one of the Agrofert board members. Another such person is the current Minister of the Environment Richard Brabec, who was brought into politics by Babiš from his position as CEO of Lovochemie, a company belonging to Agrofert holding. The circle of people that Andrej Babiš recruited into politics and state administration from various positions in Agrofert group is, however, much broader.

The Babiš movement also meets the business party criteria when it comes to the issue of the outsourcing of many of the party's activities. The most obvious example is the movement's permanent co-operation with professional public relations agencies and political communications experts. These arrangements go beyond the scope of election campaigns where the use of external agencies is also common among other political parties. ANO 2011 uses these agencies' services in the periods between elections. Media outlets owned by Andrej Babiš play a specific role in the movement's marketing and public relations (ANO 2011 does not communicate with its supporters primarily through its membership structure but instead uses "his" media). These outlets were acquired by Babiš less than five months before the 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections. The Babiš-owned Mafra media group includes two influential national dailies (*Mladá fronta DNES* and *Lidové noviny*), two related news websites (idnes.cz and lidovky.cz) and the free newspapers *Metro* and *5 plus 2*. Babiš later also purchased the most popular Czech radio station, Radio Impuls.

The extremely exclusive nature of membership is also characteristic of the ANO 2011 movement: becoming a member is quite a complex process, and there is a semi-annual waiting period for prospective members, which may be shortened or extended based on a decision of the presidium. In addition to consenting to the party's ethical code and statutes, applicants must submit specific documents such as their CV, a statement concerning indebtedness and impunity since 2015 and even their criminal record. The party's very first members, the co-ordinators who founded the ANO 2011 regional organisations, also had to pass psychological tests, a situation largely due to the party's origins in Babiš's Agrofert holdings (Kopeček – Svačinová 2015: 188). As such, the movement registered 732 members in the first year of its existence as a fully-fledged political entity (approx. from mid-2012 to mid-2013). This was despite the presence of around 7,000 candidates for ANO 2011 membership at the time of the 2013 elections. The most recent (end-of-2015) data show that the membership base stands at only 2,750 members (Chvojka 2016: 65). This corresponds entirely with the characteristics of a business-firm party.

The movement also operates with a relatively small number of members who are all targeted deliberately. The rhetoric of its leading representatives clearly shows a preference for maintaining a small membership base and even restricting numbers further. Even before the 2013 elections, Andrej Babiš claimed that "our aim isn't to have thousands of members, but to have supporters and

prospective voters" (quoted in Válková 2013). The then vice-chairwoman of the party Věra Jourová made a similar point in a statement to idnes.cz before the 2013 elections where she described the ANO 2011 movement HR strategy as follows: "Quantity is not our priority, we are interested in people who have experience and a strong professional sense." She added that "the reason for not accepting [someone] may be [their] extensive political tourism or bad references from previous political activities. Of course, there is also the criterion of integrity, and regarding the elderly, we also look at their influence in the Communist Party. Basically, we don't accept members who were in leading positions of the party" (quoted in Válková 2013). This distancing from Communist Party officials creates some embarrassment about the communist past of not only Andrej Babiš but also some other movement representatives although it is true that none of these individuals had leading positions in the Communist Party hierarchy. To date, ANO 2011 has maintained the strategy of maintaining a limited membership base, warning repeatedly about opportunists who want to join ANO 2011 in order to take advantage of the movement. Some of these people, it claims, have already infiltrated ANO 2011.

It must be noted here that as well as controlling the size of the membership base and the process for admitting new members, the ANO 2011 leadership seeks to review accepted members, who are, for example, obligated to inform the leadership of any infraction or enforcement or criminal proceedings affecting them. ANO 2011 currently has systems in place which make it fairly simple for the movement to expel any member. The expulsion is decided on by the presidium, and the reason may be merely "acting against the interests of" ANO 2011; decisions on this issue have immediate effect (Kopeček – Svačinová 2015: 188–189). Thus, at a meeting with movement members before the Senate and regional elections in early May 2016, ANO 2011 chairman Andrej Babiš openly stated that one of the "most important tasks before the next parliamentary elections is the cleansing of our movement of (…) opportunists" (Bartoníček 2016).

The limited size of ANO 2011's membership base is partially offset by its co-operation with independents, who run in elections as ANO 2011 candidates. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of ANO 2011's representation in European Parliament (EP); of the four MEPs who were elected for ANO 2011 in the 2014 EP elections, none was a member of the movement at the time of the elections (Czech Statistical Office 2014a). The same situation precisely applies to the four senators who were elected for the ANO 2011 movement in 2014: all of them were independents as well (Czech Statistical Office 2014b).

As in the case of the Public Affairs Party, the ANO 2011 movement's programme has not been built on any unifying ideological base. The tone of its original policy documents was mainly negative and oppositional, criticising the state of Czech politics and the way the country was being managed. The

campaign drew mainly on citizens' dissatisfaction with the current political situation (Gregor – Matušková 2014: 60). In its election programme, the movement offered short-term quick solutions rather than long-term conceptual and strategic plans. Reflecting on the development of this election platform, Lubomir Kopeček and Petra Svačinová (2015: 197) describe the situation before the early elections in 2013. A product marketing survey found that some points of the programme might be confusing and even discouraging for voters and so it was continuously edited. The result was that the final version was completed just before the elections. This, in fact, reflects two key features of a business-firm party: the crucial role of communications and marketing experts and consultants and the flexibility of the movement's policies.

Like the Public Affairs Party, ANO 2011 did not seek out a position on the Right–Left continuum. After the EP elections, however, the movement joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) faction. Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what degree this was an ideological step and to what extent it was a pragmatic one. Representation in this European faction, the third largest in European Parliament, may be an attempt to gain some form of international recognition. ANO 2011's integration into European Parliament's ALDE group was significantly advanced by the leader of the ANO 2011 line-up in the EP elections, the former chief negotiator during the Czech Republic's EU integration talks and later European commissioner Pavel Telička.

Although, ANO 2011, like VV, has been programmatically quite vague, its voting base, unlike that of VV, has been formed mainly from the former supporters of the right-wing parties ODS and TOP 09 (see above). Just under a quarter of votes (23%) for ANO 2011 have come from people who voted for ODS in 2010; almost one-fifth (19%) of supporters were recruited from the ranks of former TOP 09 voters. The same percentage are former VV voters (Gregor 2014: 207). In sum, the Babiš movement has received more than three-fifths of its votes from former supporters of the parties of the 2010–2013 coalition government comprised of ODS, TOP 09 and VV. The rest, forming just a few percent of the ANO 2011 electoral base, are previous non-voters or supporters of other political parties (Gregor 2014: 207). It may be that the profile of these voters has ultimately played a role in the movement's gradual shift to the right of the political spectrum. These right-wing elements in the party may also be an attempt to challenge the main competitor on the political scene, the left-wing ČSSD.

The ANO 2011 movement's election strategy clearly focuses on the market and consumers. This is also reflected in the extensive use of public opinion research, an emphasis on advertising and marketing and the recourse to simple slogans without concrete and substantive content, for example "YES. It will be better!," "We're not politicians. We work hard," "Clear rules for everyone. No

exceptions," "We can give people jobs," "So our kids aren't ashamed of us" and "We can do it simply." For political communications and campaigning purposes, the name of the movement was simplified to ANO without formally renaming the movement that continues to be registered as ANO 2011.

The voter as consumer is the centre-piece of the ANO 2011 campaign in the lead-up to the upcoming (autumn 2016) regional elections. The movement's main election slogan is "We want a better Czechia." This is accompanied online by the message "What do you want to change in your region? Just tell us, and things will start to happen" and an interactive box labelled "Add a comment" where voters can leave feedback for the movement.

Comparing Public Affairs and ANO 2011

Although at first sight it seems that Public Affairs and ANO 2011 were similar entities, their fates have been different. ANO 2011 is now in its third year in government in 2016 and it remains in the lead in terms of preferences. At the same point in its history, Public Affairs was already declining. Under the leadership of the then deputy prime minister Karolina Peake, one faction of the party founded the Liberal Democrats (LIDEM) while a second faction – the remainder of VV – was perilously hitched to Bárta's problems and concerns. The two entities had disputes with one another and both were below the threshold for entering the Chamber of Deputies. According to the election model of the Centre for Research on Public Opinion at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CVVM), ANO 2011 has maintained strong and stable support since the 2013 elections. In twenty-eight public polls carried out from November 2013 to June 2016, ANO 2011 occupied the top spot in twenty-three cases while ČSSD "won" in the remaining five polls. According to the CVVM, ANO 2011 had its lowest level of support in March 2016 (at 22.5% according to the CVVM's electoral model) while the highest levels were reached in May 2014, March 2015 and May 2015 (33% in all cases) (Červenka 2016: 3). For now, there is no indication that the ANO movement will follow the fate of the Public Affairs Party.

Where does the difference between Public Affairs and ANO 2011 lie? The first major distinction concerns these parties' origins. While VV originated as a small local political party which was later taken over by political entrepreneur Vít Bárta, who made it a nationwide party, the ANO 2011 movement actually began as the top political project of entrepreneur Andrej Babiš. Although political entrepreneurs played a dominant role in both these political parties, and they were moreover surrounded by a narrow set of managers from their own businesses in line with the business-firm party concept, VV was never officially led by a charismatic and strong personality despite the presence of a political entrepreneur. Vít Bárta was initially kept in the background while the party

was officially driven by Radek John.[9] When Bárta finally did become chairman, the party was already in disarray due to its previous affairs. In contrast, ANO 2011's Andrej Babiš has been a strong leader from the beginning; he not only drives the party from behind the scenes but is also its official chairman and its main face to the outside world. ANO 2011 has also been more successful in maintaining efficient and professional political communications and it is helped here by favourable coverage from Babiš-owned media, particularly in combating the political competition.

Despite its participation in government, ANO 2011 continues to behave in many cases like a protesting opposition party rather than one responsible for governance. In their public criticisms of the Social Democrats as the strongest government party and Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (CSSD), ANO 2011's ministers headed by Minister of Finance and ANO 2011 chair Andrej Babiš give the impression that theirs is a protest movement fighting "against those above." At the same time, ANO 2011's partly oppositional rhetoric has taken the wind out of the sails of the opposition, which has failed to effectively attack this unwieldy coalition government.

Another key element of the success of the Babiš movement is the high degree of discipline among its representatives in parliament, where a key role is played by faction chairman and the movement's first deputy chair Jaroslav Faltýnek, one of Agrofert's managers. It is true that this discipline is relative, and we highlight it here in relation to those at the central level of government, i.e. primarily in the Chamber of Deputies. In contrast, at the municipal level, there are in fact comparatively frequent within the movement's caucuses in municipal assemblies; a number of town hall coalitions have had to face their own disintegration and many of the party's mayors have been removed from office due to problems in local ANO 2011 clubs. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Public Affairs failed to ensure stability within either its clubs or the Chamber of Deputies. Most strikingly, in the three years and four months which the party spent in the Chamber of Deputies, five separate chairmen headed its parliamentary caucus.

The failure of Public Affairs was also influenced by the problematic evolution of the party after 2010, which was marked by a series of publicly discussed intra-party clashes, corruption scandals involving (but not limited to) Vít Bárta, the frequent departure of members from both parliament and the party itself and ultimately the party's actual disintegration. The performances of the party's official leaders and Bárta as their unofficial boss were clouded by more embarrassments, and none of these individuals seemed to be a strong and charismatic party leader. Unlike ANO 2011, Public Affairs could not depend on the goodwill

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9   Interestingly, TOP 09, the second new parliamentary party to take shape after the 2010 elections, chose a similar strategy, placing a popular figure, the former foreign affairs minister Karel Schwarzenberg at the head of the party, while the *de facto* leader (in TOP 09's case, Miroslav Kalousek) remained in the background. (Kalousek was the party's first deputy chairman.)

of a section of the media which would either not report any problems or divert attention elsewhere, for example, to the problems of coalition partners.

Conclusion

At the end of the 2000s, Czech party politics underwent some kind of internal crisis which took the form of an impasse both for the established political parties due to the erosion of their electoral support and decline in their membership, etc., and for political partisanship in its existing form. An ongoing and ever deepening loss of confidence in political institutions, including political parties, and democracy in general, caused by corruption scandals around the established parties and political elites and compounded by the persistent inaction of Czech governments, culminated during the 2010 and 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections. Reflecting on the results of the 2010 parliamentary elections, some authors have written of a political earthquake (Haughton – Novotná – Deegan-Krause 2011; Havlík – Hloušek 2014; Maškarinec V Bláha 2014; Klíma 2015). These elections brought new trends and phenomena to party politics in the Czech Republic, which had in many respects excluded them from the transformations of the party system between 1996 and 2010. They also transformed the Czech party system, which until then had been considered one of the most stable in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe by various domestic and foreign experts (see, e.g., Birch 2003; Deegan-Krause – Haughton 2010; Stegmaier – Vlachová 2011; Charvát 2012; Maškarinec – Bláha 2014 etc.).

At the electorate level, there was a weakening of the positions of the established parties as citizens mobilised against them and their leaders in 2010 while also undermining the existing system of party competition. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, the qualitative transformation of the Czech party system continued in certain ways.[10] At the same time, the crisis in both major parties intensified with ODS being occupied in many respects by ANO 2011, the political movement led by Andrej Babiš. The erosion of support for traditional political parties necessarily brought an increase in electoral volatility along with the entry of new political entities into the realm of deputies. Until 2010, parliamentary newcomers had held seats representing just slightly over 5% of the electoral threshold. In contrast, Public Affairs, which had the lowest level of support of any elected entity in the 2010 ballot, still received almost double the proportion of votes of the weakest newcomers elected in previous elections.[11] In

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10 Given the self-sustaining and cyclical patterns that are observable not only in the Czech political system but in the systems in other Central and Eastern European countries, Tim Haughton and Kevin Deegan--Krause (2015: 68–69) suggest that "hurricane" may be a more suitable metaphor than the popular designation of "earthquake."

11 The Public Affairs Party received 10.88% of votes in 2010 in the first (and only) election of its representatives to the Chamber of Deputies. By way of comparison, the Green Party, a newcomer and the smallest entity elected in the 2006 ballot, received 6.39% of votes. Freedom Union entered the Chamber of

this regard, ANO 2011's achievement was even starker: the movement finished in second place in the 2013 elections. With a gain of almost 19 %, it trailed only slightly behind the winner of the elections, i.e. ČSSD.

Both the Public Affairs Party of 2010 and the ANO 2011 movement of 2013 took advantage of public discontent with existing political circumstances, especially targeting the performances of political elites and the established political parties. Their campaigns therefore invoked an anti-establishment and protest rhetoric which criticised the current political establishment and stressed the need to fight the corruption that (apparently) directly affected existing political elites. The presentations of these parties were based on the fact that they were new political actors with new projects (Sikk 2012) that offered an alternative to established political parties and their past practices. They were also innovative when it came to the use of modern communication technologies, marking a significant difference from the established political parties. VV and later both ANO 2011 and Andrej Babiš himself made far greater use of social media networks, especially Facebook, than the established parties.

At the level of the party system, there was a transformation of the parties in terms of their themes (the appearance of new ill-defined and programmatically flexible parties) as well as their organisation (a new dependence on both corporate structures and personalised and institutionally weak business-firm parties). At the thematic level, the experiences with both the Public Affairs Party and the ANO 2011 movement confirm that electoral success can now be secured based on the appeals of protests along with novelty and a popular image, as André Krouwel aptly notes (2006: 261; 2012: 26) "the best wrapping for these popular policies is an attractive candidate (or even a single leader) so that the marketing of the policies can be reduced to the promotion of an individual."

At the organisational level, these new political entities are closely associated with the person of a political entrepreneur and they serve as this individual's political project. This applies to three of the four new political entities which succeeded after 2010: VV, ANO 2011 and Dawn. These political parties were managed as private companies, with a focus on profit, i.e. election success, which was the subject of all their strategies. This was also reflected in their organisational structure which was substantially similar to that of a private company, with senior party management, i.e. the party presidium, playing a key role. Both the successful new political parties which took part in the 2013 elections, ANO 2011 and Dawn, further emphasised that they were not political parties but political movements.

Deputies with 8.60% of votes in 1998. In 1996, the Civic Democratic Alliance was elected with 6.36% of votes. In the 1992 elections, three political parties each received less than 6% of the votes [Alt. Wording/meaning:"three political parties together received…"). (Czech Statistical Office, data for each election available at http://www.volby.cz)

While the VV party and ANO 2011 movement differed in a number of respects, both political entities can be described as cases of the business-firm party model. Though previously non-existent in Czech party politics, that model has to some extent become a new phenomenon in political partisanship in the Czech Republic since the 2010 elections. What has not changed, however, despite the introduction of business-firm parties to the Czech political scene, is the enormous importance of state funding for political parties (van Biezen 2003: 192–193). Even business-firm parties primarily generate their income from state contributions, beginning, of course, from the time of electoral success, and the level of these provisions is comparable to that for the established parties. The experience with VV and ANO 2011, however also confirms Lucardie's (2000: 179) earlier conclusion that for a new political entity to succeed, it requires an investment of specific resources, including among other things funding from members (and we may add in the case of business-firm parties, from a political entrepreneur directly), and an effective self-presentation in the media (ideally under the direct control of the business-firm party itself). In other words, the successful political debut of a new party can be facilitated by an investment of private financial resources and a well-chosen communications strategy. At the same time, the recent Czech experience shows that a political party may be a suitable vehicle for businesses in the political sphere.

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DISCUSSION

Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration

ANDREA SCHMIDT

Abstract: *The Visegrad Group celebrated its 25th anniversary in February 2016. Established as an initiative of three statesmen from the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, this cooperation has experienced booms and crises. The aim of this paper is to analyse the function of this regional integration in the years following the end of bipolar system as Visegrad Group members headed down the road to Euro-Atlantic integration. To this end, I apply different theoretical approaches and attempt to explain the influence of key former politicians as well as new scenarios for the Visegrad Group's position in the European Union. This analysis also covers the latest foreign policy changes and challenges facing CEE due to the involvement of a wider region that creates a counter-balance to the core EU. Statistical data and official documents from the Visegrad Group's website strengthen these findings.*

Key words: regional cooperation, European Union, foreign policy

The Visegrad cooperation celebrated its 25th anniversary in February 2016. This special type of regional cooperation was established by the three participating states from the ruins of a collapsing bipolar system. Since 1993, when Czechoslovakia was dissolved and the Czech Republic and Slovakia became independent, Visegrad has functioned as an entity with four member states. Over the last quarter century, this regional cooperation has seen booms and crises, and at times its legacy has come into question. The birth of the Visegrad Group was treated (and is sometimes still seen) as a miracle and the ultimate proof of the success of strong contributions based on common interests without any outside aid. The Group is still active, and from time to time, it causes surprises and obstacles in the European context.

For all these positive appraisals, Visegrad has had its share of controversies. On several occasions, the necessity of this cooperation and its effectiveness have been questioned; leading politicians have put the success of the Group at risk by subordinating it to their personal ambitions. Nevertheless, these occasional common threats – along with shared goals, international events and the obstacles of everyday operations – have also deepened the cooperation. This article deals with the prospects of survival of the Visegrad cooperation. Mindful of the role of regional integration generally and in CEE in particular, I analyse various scenarios and standpoints in order to find adequate answers to the question of whether the Visegrad cooperation can still be treated as effective integration and whether, from a broader perspective, Central and Eastern Europe represents a collapsing region. My position is reinforced by statistical data regarding the position of the Visegrad cooperation; other documents related to annual presidencies also support this analysis. Lastly, in comparing the prospects of the Visegrad cooperation, I note that the survival of the Group can be explained in various ways.[1]

Borders in Central and Eastern Europe

Examining the past and present state of CEE cooperation – that is, the way it came to take on the form and function of Visegrad Group – confirms the historical lesson that the European continent cannot be considered a homogeneous entity; it contains cleavages which are either cultural or economic. Unsurprisingly, these two kinds of divisions are located at more or less at the same places.[2] Like many others, Hungarian historians have accepted Wallerstein's (1983) model of a triply divided structure. Observing common roots and differences in the development of the CEE region, Jenő Szűcs (1981) developed an extended model to reflect internal cleavages within the European continent. According to this common view, the gap between the more developed West and the (eastern) periphery can be explained by several historical and economic factors. Both these commentators also identified a so-called semi-periphery, which can be understood as the Central and Eastern European region.

Assessing borders and cleavages raises complicated issues. The situation may become even more complex if we wish to examine the reasons and methods for border creation. The region can be seen as a special case given the fact that the

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1   In a lecture in September 2016, Géza Jeszeszky, the former foreign minister of Hungary in Antall József's government of the early '90s and one of the Visegrad negotiators, confessed that a lack of strict rules had perhaps been crucial for the cooperation's survival.

2   The division of Europe is a popular theme among scholars. Wallerstein's (1983) theory of the core and the periphery is based on an ideology also described by the Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs (1981) in his work *Vázlat Európa három történeti régiójáról*[Aside from its aspiration to provide a summary comparison of the different regions of Europe, the importance of this essay lies in its delicate timing. First published in the early 1980s, it claimed that there was no such thing as a homogenous Eastern Europe.

final borders of the CEE states were settled in the 19th and 20th centuries while in Western Europe during the Cold War, the placement of borders remained a symbolic issue that could link people together. The problem of borders is also closely connected with how Europe is identified. According to Jacobs (2012), for example, it is obvious that "Europe" represents a concept as well as a continent. On this interpretation, Europe became virtually synonymous with Christendom during the Middle Ages. Another relatively recent if generally unaccepted theory maintains that Europe spanned half the globe, extending from Iceland to the Bering Strait and nearly touching Alaska. Religious issues remained at the core of Europe's division into smaller units, and concerns about ethnic and religious identity often surfaced in debates about the structure of the European regions.

The post-World War II period saw the creation of new concepts. The entire Central and Eastern European region belonged to the Soviet Union's sphere of interest, and it was hardly possible to discuss any kind of cultural, ethnic or even religious cleavages (Schmidt 2011). Later, in the second half of the 1980s especially, new discussions opened up about the structure of Europe. Following Huntington's (1996) theory as well as the 1930s scholarly debate between Oscar Halecki and Jaroslav Bidlo over East–West borders,[3] Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia were deemed to be the western half of the CEE region, while Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Rumania, FYROM and parts of Bosnia composed the eastern half (Gorzelak 2002).

During the Cold War, however, the opposite tendency prevailed: all of the Soviet Union, including Vilnius, Riga and other cities that today lie within the European Union, was excluded from Europe entirely. At times, even the Soviet satellite states under the Warsaw Pact were left out, and thus, "Europe" became synonymous with the "West" and its associated political values (Schmidt 2013). The Cold War period saw widespread understanding and agreement about where the borders of a divided Europe were to be found and which ones were most important (Bialasiewicz 2009). The borders that divided Europe also divided the world. They created the geopolitical division between East and West. The Iron Curtain both divided Europe and – because this division was exported to other parts of the world – also worked as a global border.

Among the consequences of the revolutions of 1989 was a profound reordering of the spatial imaginary of Europe. The collapse of both the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc called for the creation of new geographical stories and new spatial representations that could capture and codify the cartographic chaos of the former Eastern European space (Bialasiewicz 2003). Although the Cold War was over, its borders did not disappear at once. The European East–West ones

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3   In the interwar years, the famous Polish historian Halecki and Czech Byzantinist Bidlo had quarrelled over the place of Poland in Europe. While Halecki located the country in the east based on a simple bipartite division of the continent, Bidlo claimed it was wholly western (Okey 1992).

were inevitably strengthened, and while in Western Europe, the role of borders declined and there was some kind of recognisable integration, to the east of the continent, the isolation of borders became even more critical. As we have seen, while the entire Central and Eastern European region fell in the sphere of interest of the Soviet Union, it was scarcely possible to reflect on any kind of cultural, ethnic or even religious cleavages or indeed any other differences among the group of socialist countries. Nevertheless, these discussions began from the second half of the 1980s especially.

Some final points about borders should be noted here. The act of border creation can be understood to happen in one of two ways: on the first approach, the border is created from above by way of state participation and efforts in a process that usually seems rather peaceful. The peacefulness of this method is particularly clear when we compare it with the second approach whereby borders are established from outside, usually as a consequence of cataclysmic events such as a painful loss or victory on the battlefield and peace talks. It remains a crucial question whether aside from their shared acknowledgement of borders, inhabitants enclosed by state boundaries experience any kind of common identity related to the region they come from. Today, people from the Visegrad region are supposed to feel connected to several identities: these are local, regional, national, European and – last but not least – some sort of "Visegrad" or Central European identity.

Cleavages in Europe and the position of Visegrad

As we have seen, the internal cleavages or borders of Europe were a forgotten issue in the age of the Cold War. The Central and Eastern European region was treated as a homogenous entity matching Russia's so-called zone of influence. As perceived by the West, Europe ended at the Iron Curtain and everything located beyond this border was part of the group of satellite states within the Soviet Union's sphere of interest.

The question of CEE regionalism, in fact, remained complex throughout the 20th century. The notion of a common territorial identity among citizens with different mother tongues was suppressed in state propaganda, which presented the historical regions as "actually" ancient Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Romanian lands. Moreover, the depiction of the relationship between territory and ethnicity was one dimensional, and because of socialist states' hierarchical centralism, the historical regions did not evolve into collective actors (Tägil 1999).

Turning to the progressive increase in European integration after the end of World War II, the European experience provided different models for regional integration. On the one hand, Western European integration focused on trade agreements and helped remove customs duties among member countries. By the end of 1990s, these changes had produced a deeper level of integration leading

to the formation of a common currency area (Lee – Kim 2013). On the other, the Central and Eastern European countries saw political changes requiring the radical revamping of their trade policy and political institutions. Along with the inevitable political reforms, one noteworthy development was the considerable opening up of local markets to foreign suppliers of goods and services.

As the late 1980s became the age of debates about the division of the CEE region, new questions and problems arose. Given the political transformation and collapse of the Soviet Union, historical forces demanded the reorganisation of the spatial structure of the region. As we have noted, the 1989 revolutions brought a radical reordering of Europe's spatial imaginary (Bialasiewicz 2003). Early in the next decade, the new democracies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, thus, set out to pursue a new mode of Central European cooperation symbolised by their formation of Visegrad Group (Ash 1999). Attempting to move past old debates and misunderstandings related to the history of this region, the political leaders of the three (later four) Central and Eastern European countries began to focus on this totally new form of cooperation. This mode of regional integration was a natural consequence of historical forces. Regional integration was useful since there was no external actor who could assist with the transformation and orientation of these countries, let alone other issues. Accepting Haas (1970) review of regional integration, the Visegrad cooperation might be seen as a good example of a process whereby nation states "voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbors so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among themselves."

Generally speaking, we can examine integration efforts in terms of eight important functions

1.	Strengthening of trade integration in the region
2.	Creation of an appropriate enabling environment for private sector actors
3.	Development of infrastructure programmes to support economic growth and regional integration
4.	Development of strong public sector institutions and good governance
5.	Reduction of social exclusion and development of an inclusive civil society
6.	Contributions to peace and security in the region
7.	Development of environment programmes at regional level
8.	Strengthening of the region's interaction with other world regions

The processes of regional integration that emerged after World War were originally most concerned with trade and economics. In contrast, the "new regionalism" wave after the 1980s was a multi-dimensional process entailing aspects of politics, diplomacy, security and culture alongside economic cooperation. (íde

ílombarde-Van Langenhove 2006) The end of the bipolar system and subsequent transformation years unleashed a sequence of unresolved questions in the post-socialist world. For independent states in the region, the new challenges concerned how to balance integration with a state of total or partial isolation. In creating Visegrad Group, the founding states, thus, had to focus on a very special form of integration that would reduce the meaning of internal borders while suggesting the potential for new external boundaries. The natural course of this cooperation would have been some kind of permanent institutional structure, however the founding partners concentrated on a looser approach entailing limited norms and a less institutional structure. Referring to academic analyses of regional integration (Dobson 1991), this process recalled the most intensive form of inter-state interaction with common inter-state policies. The aims of this Visegrad integration may be understood in various ways. While the Group was established partly for practical reasons, as Ash (1999) remarks, there was another explanation for this alliance:

they believed in the idea of Central Europe, which Havel and the new Hungarian president, Árpád Göncz, had preached in the 1980s, and wished to preclude any return to the petty nationalisms of [the] interwar years. But it was also because th[is] tight little regional cooperation would win their countries' favor in the West (Ash 1999; see also Schmidt 2011)

The role of the Visegrad cooperation can also be analysed by applying some of the factors set out in the general scholarship. Most crucial here is the issue of whether the regional agreements of the Group met any or all of the following criteria:

1. Consistency with domestic policy objectives[4]
2. Creation of incentives to reduce, minimise or eliminate trade diversion
3. Production of a deeper level of integration than what could have been achieved through the "multilateral option"
4. Enabling of a faster rate of integration with outside countries than what would have been possible under multilateral agreements (Drabek 1997)

The great challenge for CEE countries initially was moving away from traditional isolationism. The next step entailed joining or activating membership in multilateral economic institutions and encouraging various regional initiatives. Sometimes these efforts all took place at the same time.

At the outset, there was common agreement across Europe that the *political* objective for the CEE countries was the introduction of democracy based on a multi-party political system, respect for human rights and the principles of

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4   The consistency of the Group's multilateral agreements with domestic objectives should also be considered.

a market economy. A second common interest was *security*. While the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA)[5] and the Warsaw Pact were generally welcomed, many in Central Europe believe Russia's retreat from Central Europe was only temporary. Building closer security ties to the West was, therefore, an important goal of the CEE states. A third shared interest was *environmental* issues. The EU had a strong interest in cooperating more closely with Eastern Europe in order to resolve a variety of environmental problems that had plagued the CEE countries for decades (Drabek 1997).

Despite the integration process, the issue of independence continued to occupy a central position. When it came to planning future cooperation, historical experience also proved very helpful. Focusing on historical roots, Vaclav Havel, the former president of Czechoslovakia put together a cooperation initiative that referred to the success of a historic meeting of Bohemian, Polish and Hungarian kings in 1335. In a message to the Polish and Hungarian prime ministers and presidents, he put it:

We should not compete with each other to gain admission into the various European organizations. On the contrary, we should assist each other in the same spirit of solidarity in which, in darker days, you protested [against] […] our persecution as we did against yours (quoted in Lengyel – Suranyi 2013)

In initiating the cooperation, Havel aimed to break free of the isolation in which the Central and Eastern European countries found themselves after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. No longer part of the Soviet zone, these states had only just begun to confront the challenges of independence and were reluctant to give up this position and take on an Euro-Atlantic orientation (Lengyel 2006). The CEE countries were also waiting to be invited and received into the European Economic Community but in the early 1990s, there was no sign of the acceptance of their efforts. The Visegrad cooperation focused on economic, cultural and security issues but its chief task was helping member states on the transformation path. The inauguruation meeting organised by Havel took place in Bratislava in 1990; its main task was the development of a security policy since the end of the bipolar system and collapse of the Soviet Union called for a new orientation within foreign policy.[6]

There can be no doubt that by 2004, the ultimate goal of European and trans--Atlantic integration had been accomplished, and in economic terms, these

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5 CMEA had been a Soviet Union-led system of regional integration. The dominance of the Soviet Union inevitably hampered the extension of common trade agreements among the satellite states.

6 The idea of restoring a sense of Central Europe was very popular in the late 1980s. Several conferences, meetings and publications dealt with the changing role of CEE. The Central European University was the practical result of annual conferences along these lines in Dubrovnik. The university even had its faculties in Prague (Czechoslovakia), Warsaw (Poland) and Budapest (Hungary), that is, in the countries which were the "closest to each other," creating a "geopolitically important [,] blessed and damned region where the future of Europe could be decided and solved" (Kiss Gy. 2000)

countries also took on a Western orientation. Nevertheless, the framework for economic independence remained a key problem. In the beginning, it was obvious that the Visegrad region needed financial resources from abroad in order to help these states' ruined economies while Western European countries required extended markets in which to sell their goods. It was merely a side effect that in adapting to the principles of a market economy, this region gradually integrated market economics. Seeking new perspectives, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia agreed to establish their own sub-regional trade initiative – the Central European Free Trade Arrangement (CEFTA) – in March 1993 and they invited Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia to join.

With the collapse of CMEA and the disappearance of the Soviet Union as the main trade partner of the majority of the CEE states, CEFTA had to guarantee economic cooperation in order to support the region, and it did this by eliminating taxes and tariffs on international commercial activity. Later, with European integration, CEFTA would lose its original members, who enjoyed tax-free trade within the European Union. The CEFTA arrangement then took on a new orientation, gradually expanding its area of interest to include other satellite and even post-Soviet states.

The Visegrad cooperation had its own special integration mission to accomplish. This was not the reconstruction of a *petite entente* as there was no great power working behind the scenes to control the member states or even coordinate their cooperation. Similarly, there was no push to revive the Yalta system, which was the structure that the new independent states most wished to avoid. The integration sought not to pit the states against one another but to provide a proactive tool for their cooperation. As there was no existing model for such habitual use, only limited rules were adopted. In fact, this system of cooperation remains special since it *continues to lack of* the following elements:

1. An organised structure.
2. Fixed and written rules of cooperation. (The system is flexible.)
3. Official headquarters. (Through a special annual rotation system, each member state takes on the tasks of the presidency every fourth year. The Czech presidency, for example, extended from July 2015 until June 2016.)
4. A strict agenda. (Annual meetings take place among different experts and sectoral policy representatives at ministerial level.)
5. More than one functioning organisation. (The Group's organisation, International Visegrad Fund (IVF), is based in Bratislava and has an annual budget of 8 billion Euro that is paid by the four member states. This is also the basis for the scholarships offered by IVF.)

This system of cooperation lacking written and fixed rules was strongly influenced by the representatives of the member states for whom the Group had

different meanings. The general aim set out a series of action plans concerning the consequences of political and economic transformation and the new international political environment. The founding partners expressed their intention to rebuild based on the democratic framework of a new civil society and transformation into a market economy.

The success of the Visegrad Four (V4) has, thus, been based on the effectiveness of their cooperation, and this is also what may guarantee the Group's survival. The size and influence that these countries may achieve if they are united by common aims cannot be ignored. According to the data, if the V4 were a single country, then its total population of 64,301,710 would make it the 22nd largest state in the world and the fourth largest in Europe.[7] From the standpoint of economic potential, the Visegrad Group is the world's 16th–17th largest economy.

Table 1: Estimated GDP in 2016

Ranking	Country	GDP in USD million
	Total world	**73,993,835**
1.	USA	18,558,130
	EU	*16,477,211*
2.	China	11,383,030
3.	Japan	4,412,600
4.	Germany	3,467,780
5.	United Kingdom	2,760,960
6.	France	2,464,790
7.	India	2,288,720
8.	Italy	1,848,690
9.	Brazil	1,534,780
10.	Canada	1,462,330
11.	South Korea	1,321,200
12.	Spain	1,242,360
13.	Australia	1,200,780
14.	Russia	1,132,740
15.	Mexico	1,082,430
16.	Indonesia	936,955
	Visegrad group	*866,296*
17.	Netherlands	762,521

Source: Author according to http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2016/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.
   x=51 & pr.y=10 & sy=2015 & ey=2016 & scsm=1 & ssd=1 & sort=country & ds=.&br=1 & c

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7   This transformation of the V4 into an independent state was never on the agenda of the Visegrad Group member states.

Table 2: Largest European Union countries by population in 2016

Ranking	Country	Number of inhabitants
1.	Germany	80,682,351
2.	UK	65,111,143
3.	France	64,668,129
	Visegrad Group	*64,392,055*
4	Italy	59,801,004

Source: http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/

Extension scenarios: Visegrad Group on the road to Euro-Altantic Integration

In the first decade of its existence, the V4 cooperation experienced several conflicts and downturns. The very first obstacle came in 1993 when the number of original founders increased with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Immediately after the territorial changes in 1993, the Czech prime minister, Vaclav Klaus announced that his country's aims would supersede the common interest. Klaus went so far as to suggest that the Czech Republic would no longer be interested in the Visegrad cooperation since the focus should instead be on cooperating with Western Europe (Jovanovic 1998). Klaus's view can be explained by the fact that even in the mid-1990s, he was convinced that the Czech Republic belonged to the West more than to any other formation, and he dismissed Central Europe as a geopolitical category.[8] Klaus claimed that the Visegrad Group was an artificial product of the West (Lázár 2014). This position harmed cooperation with the Czech Republic's neighbours and a competition began to see who would join the EU soonest. These comments from the Czech PM also disregarded the practical reality: it would be foolish to believe that the industrial Czech Republic belongs anywhere besides Central Europe, which also includes Poland and Hungary.[9]

The V4 countries were not satisfied with mere association with the European Communities, and as such, in the mid-1990s, they submitted their official EU membership applications. Hungary was the first V4 country to apply for full membership, lodging its official application on 1 April, 1994. Poland officially

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8 In several respects, Klaus was correct. The Czech Republic's geographical position is different from that of the other three member states. The country is located to the west of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. While there are several models of Europe's inner borders, the location of the Czech state is generally treated as "Central" while the other three countries represent "East Central" or "Central East" Europe. At the same time, the locations given to the Visegrad Group member states are highly dependent on the expert making the pronouncement.

9 For more information, see Dostál (n.d.)

applied for EU membership on 8 April, 1994 and Slovakia did so in June 1995. The Czech Republic made its formal application in Brussels at the beginning of 1996. At the European Council's Luxembourg summit in December 1997, a decision was reached that the Polish, Hungarian and Czech applications were ready for negotiation. As such, these three Visegrad Group states began their EU membership pre-accession negotiations together with the other Luxembourg group states (i.e. Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus) in March 1998. During the EC's Helsinki summit in December 1999, it was agreed that Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Malta would also start their EU membership negotiations. Pre-accession negotiations with Helsinki Group states (including Slovakia), thus, began in March 2000 (Pawlas 2015).

Before joining the EU, the Visegrad Group members had emphasised that their strength was based on cooperation. Nevertheless, in 2002, the Polish and the Czech members took part in secret negotiations in Denmark. After European integration, the Visegrad Group contained representatives from three different groups of states: with a potential Warsaw-Berlin-Paris triangle in the pipeline, Poland found itself among the most prestigous member states while Hungary and the Czech Republic each belonged to the group of medium-sized EU member states and Slovakia represented the Visegrad Group's interests among the smallest EU members. Having been quite efficient in its negotiation process, Slovakia managed to finish its accession negotiations together with other Visegrad Group states on 13 December, 2002 in Copenhagen. The Accession Treaty between these V4 states and the EU was signed on 16 April, 2003 in Athens and they all acceded to European Union structures on 1 May, 2004. (They were joined by six other new member states, i.e. Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Malta and Cyprus, who also finished the negotiation process in Copenhagen in December 2002.) Since that time, all these states have been treated as full European Union members and have, thus, had the right to participate in creating the EU's future (Pelkmans 2006).

The first few years of the Visegrad Group's cooperation resulted in various doubts about the prospects of mutual understanding. As the V4 states checked off their final goals of transforming into market economies and achieving Euro-Atlantic integration through the acceptance of invitations to join NATO and later the European Union, new questions and cleavages emerged regarding the cooperation itself. Breakdowns and setbacks, usually attributed to ideas of solidarity and coordination being overriden by competitive attitudes and national ambitions during the EU accession negotiations, prompted many to seriously doubt the chances of the Group's survival (Lázár, 2014). Pessimistic views were shared about this highly painful if illuminating failure of Central European cooperation. In the face of these doubts, the V4 members concluded the 2004 Kroměříž Declaration, which set out a framework and goals for future cooperation, taking account of the fact that the original V4 objectives of some 15 years

earlier – a trans-Atlantic orientation and European integration – had now been fulfilled.[10] The V4 representatives, thus, expressed their commitment to becoming ambassadors of countries awaiting integration with the European Union.

Though European integration was the ultimate proof of the legitimacy of the V4 cooperation, it also raised new concerns about the cohesion of these four countries. A key issue was the asymmetrical size and influence of the member states. In this regard, Poland emphasised its own distinct aims and interests in seeking out a position in the European Union and NATO as a strong partner to the US in the war in Iraq. This difference in Poland's position recalled an old quandary for the V4 states: Was it necessary to concentrate on political alliances, or were they better off emphasising the importance of civil platforms? Fałkowski-Bukalska-Gromadzki 2003). Here some Czech commentators maintained that instead of strengthening ties with Poland, it would be reasonable for the Czech Republic to focus on Central Europe and the historic connection with Austria and Slovenia instead (Pehe 2004).[11] Czech President Milos Zeman and his Slovak counterpart, Ivan Gasparovic also discussed the prospect of enlarging the Visegrad cooperation by inviting new member states to join. While Zeman supported enlargement through the entry of Slovenia, Gasparovic opposed this move, maintaining that no conclusion had ever been reached on the expansion of the V4, a reputable and important "brand" in Europe, which should continue to cooperate according to its traditional alignment (Lázár 2014). Earlier, in 2007, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico had expressed the same opinion, arguing that the Visegrad Group enjoyed a high level of political "added value" and so there was no reason to enlarge it (Lázár 2014).

The view in Hungary was similar to the one in the Czech Republic, however Poland insisted that the Group take no new members. Instead of focusing on the "restoration of the Habsburg monarchy," as Polish experts usually accused

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10 This declaration included the following wording: "The Visegrad Group countries regard their accession to the European Union and NATO as a significant step towards the reunification of Europe and as a historic milestone on the path of their democratic transformation, integration efforts and mutual cooperation. The integration of the Visegrad Group countries into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures opens up new opportunities and poses new challenges for their further cooperation on the issues of common interest.

The cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries will continue to focus on regional activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region. In this context, their cooperation will be based on concrete projects and will maintain its flexible and open character."

11 This remains a live issue. In future years, the situation may become even more complex since some Czech, Hungarian and Slovak politicians would like to join in hardcore European integration in the event that European states create a two-speed Europe following the failure of the [YEAR?] Brussels summit. If some Visegrad countries commit to hardcore European integration, while others, in particular, Poland, opt out, there will be a new dividing line between these groups, which will definitely bury the Visegrad cooperation.

Whatever happens, it is time to start thinking seriously about a new way of organising Central Europe. For the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, close cooperation with Poland may not be the best route to self-protection and self-advancement in the EU since the interests of those small countries and a large and self-confident Poland may not coincide.

their Hungarian colleagues of doing, Visegrad Group members have, thus, gradually turned east, involving the Eastern Partnership member states in the cooperation and beginning to orientate themselves towards the Balkan peninsula.[12] Cooperation with the Eastern Partnership is an obvious choice since three of the four Visegrad member states share borders with Ukraine, and the "Orange Revolution" and resulting Ukrainian political instability have created new threats at eastern borders. These are also the eastern borders of the European Union, which has led to more interest in the security question.

After ten years of EU membership, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and resulting security policy issues, including the defence of Visegrad and European Union borders, are among the most challenging concerns that the V4 and EU have had to face. This war has practically moved into the neighbourhood, calling on the states to adopt an active security policy.[13]

Strong statesmen, weak cooperation?

The success of the Visegrad Group has also been the result of its active politicians. In the absence of institutionalisation or any automatically binding cooperation mechanisms, the place of the Visegrad cooperation in the minds of the political leaders of the Visegrad states provides an important lead when it comes to assessing the prospects of the cooperation as well as any signs of how successful or significant the V4 actually is or might become (Lázár 2014). Personal connections and relations among prime ministers and presidents could easily affect the success or failure of the cooperation. As we have seen, the first obstacles to the Visegrad Group's cooperation emerged as a result of Vaclav Klaus's standpoint on the Czech Republic's position and orientation. Klaus formed the opinion that there was a need for CEFTA cooperation instead of dealing with a "tenth rate initiative at best" from a Polish and Czech perspective (Lázár, 2014). At a meet-

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12 As we have seen, over the years, several scenarios have been put forward for extending cooperation by accepting new members. The Hungarians have made frequent reference to the "good old traditions" between Hungary and Austria and also cited Slovenia /and Croatia as potential new partners. In contrast, the Poles opposed re-establishing the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the turn of the 21st century. This Polish preference for working with Eastern Partnership members may be explained by Polish foreign policy's Ukraine–Lithuania–Belarus (ULB) orientation. Historically, there have been special ties among these states, and Poland has felt a special responsibility towards them. Notably, these ties were disrespected by Russia

13 Based on discussions of a preliminary plan, the V4 battle group was to be placed on standby by 2016 under the Defence Austerity in the Visegrad Region (DAV4) programme. This was combined with plans to set up a long-term cyber security cooperation mechanism, a V4 + Ukraine EU battle group, common V4 air surveillance, a common air force pilot training centre and stronger cooperation among V4 defence academies. As a result of the V4's specific geographical position and opposition to illegal immigration as well as dilemmas concerning the relaxation of its visa policy for citizens of Eastern Partnership states, the Group needed to adopt a special joint refugee policy in 2015 to deal with the growing number of immigrants. This issue formed the basis for a common platform among cooperating politicians and governments.

ing of CEFTA member prime ministers in Poznan, Poland, on 25 November, 1994, he reaffirmed his opposition to the political interdependence of Visegrad countries, claiming that Czechs were only willing to cooperate on trade matters within a CEFTA framework. At the meeting's final press conference, he went so far as to say that the Czech Republic now translated "Visegrad" as "CEFTA" in its internal dictionary. Klaus denied that there was a lack of cooperation in this region; instead, he contended that the Czech Republic was the "driving force" behind the economic cooperation embodied in CEFTA. In response, the Polish president, Lech Walesa accused him of elevating Czech interests above those of Visegrad Group (Fawn 2005). By 2011, Klaus's view had changed considerably and he remarked that the Visegrad cooperation had contributed to strengthening the friendship among the four countries. Concerning his previous position, he claimed that he had only rejected the idea of the V4 replacing fully-fledged national membership of Western institutions when Western partners had hesitated to promise EU and NATO membership to the four countries. After EU accession, however, the V4 had acquired a new foreign political dimension and this permitted the formulation of joint interests and priorities as well as their promotion at international level (Lázár 2014).

The former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar was not a Visegrad fan either. The Slovak challenge to Visegrad was also ideological but had different content. The nationalistic Mečiar antagonised the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, damaging relations with Budapest. His regime's foreign policy also moved away from Euro-Atlanticism and even made surprising overtures to Russia (Harris 2010). Mečiar's attitude hampered Slovak participation in the Visegrad cooperation between 1994 and 1998. Eventually, he also concluded that "in the end, sooner or later we will have to cooperate together"(Harris 2010). Despite these tensions, internal communication in Visegrad continued to function, demonstrating the Group's basic viability. As we have seen, Visegrad Group members entered the European Union together, a development that might be understood as the ultimate sign of their Western orientation. Nevertheless, this achievement also called into question the very grounds for the cooperation's existence. The Visegrad cooperation has frequently been compared with the situation of the Benelux states. While the Group admittedly lacks the internal unity of the Benelux Union, it has repeatedly succeeded in presenting a more or less united position within the European Union, which is a far better outcome than if its members were competing with each other.[14] Even so, the late 1990s saw the eruption of a crisis in the Group. Along with Vladimir Mečiar's views, Hungary's Orbán government of the late 1990s had the effect of weakening the cooperation. Slovak–Hungarian relations had always been seen as a weak point in the Group.

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14 This opinion was also expressed by former Hungarian foreign affairs minister Geza Jeszenszky on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Visegrad cooperation.

From the perspective of FIDESZ, Hungary's governing party, it was vital that the country's foreign policy focus on advancing Hungarian interests. In 1998, when Orbán was invited to Washington, it had already been announced that Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic would join NATO in the near future while Slovakia might be invited later on. In 1999, the European Union added that Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Cyprus and Slovenia were the first six states chosen to begin European integration negotiations. It was also noted that these negotiations might be protracted for as long as a decade.[15] This decision gave Orbán's government a new impetus to focus on strengthening regional diplomacy, including the renewal of the Visegrad cooperation and reinforcement of ties with Austria in April 2000.[16] Orbán declared his aims in a speech to the Hungarian national assembly in November of that year:

With all our efforts, we have to try to take part in the cultural, political and economic re-structuring of Central and Eastern Europe. We have to treat the neighbouring countries as our partners in the creation of a common Central European future. This was our intention when we concentrated on the renewal of the Visegrad cooperation beginning with the negotiations with Poland and Czech Republic, then with Slovakia after the elections (quoted in Gavra 2003)

The first obstacles to this renewed cooperation came with a statement by Orbán on the incompatibility of the existing Benes decrees with European integration and the need to adapt to the EU legal system. This issue was seen as unacceptably sensitive and, as a result of Orbán's comment, a meeting of Visegrad Group prime ministers scheduled for Budapest in 2002 was suspended when Czech and Slovak partners refused to participate. The frozen relations between Slovakia and Hungary gradually thawed, and in 2013, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Orbán spoke of "opening a new chapter in the shared history of the two countries," claiming that the relationship between the two states was based on "political and personal trust" (Lázár 2014).[17] In the same year, Slovak Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajcak added that "Visegrad is going strategic, we are more mature. Visegrad makes each of us individually and as a group stronger."[18]

Analysing the role of Visegrad Group member representatives more closely, it is clear that these politicians have generally hesitated about whether to refer

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15 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm

16 For more information, see Gábor Gavra (2003): A kormányzó FIDESZ és az EU csatlakozás: igenek és nemek, Magyar Narancs, http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/a_kormanyzo_fidesz_es_az_eu_csatlakozas_igenek_es_nemek-62225

17 As Lázár (2014) remarks, Fico's personal position appeared to change after 2006 when he first participated in a meeting of relevant parties. This seems to have been a formal meeting without substantive content. By 2013, the relations had progressed to pragmatic rational cooperation with the participating countries making informed and important decisions.

18 http://www.globsec.org/globsec2013/highlights-news/globsec-visegrad-makes-us-stronger-said-lajcak/

to national sovereignty or express anti-EU sentiments. Orbán and his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico have long drawn on sovereigntist narratives while the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has often also resorted to anti-EU rhetoric. The famous statement of former Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski "I fear German power less than…German inactivity" might, thus, be adapted to reflect the positions of some Visegrad leaders: "We fear German power and do not care about EU inactivity."[19] There are various reasons for this standpoint. Leaving aside the political culture of these states, we can see from the traditions of Visegrad Group that this region's convergence with the core European Union can also affect public opinion. Politicians have always sought to understand the demands of their citizens, attempting to identify with their feelings and make sense of their fears. These demands and fears appear to have been widespread, and although prime ministers and presidents have represented different political parties with different priorities, they have easily managed to find common ground on certain issues.

Table 3: Party divisions among Visegrad Group political leaders

State	Politician		Party
	Prime Minister	**President**	
Hungary	Orbán, Viktor	Áder, János	FIDESZ (Hungarian Civic Alliance) – conservative, nationalist
Poland	Szydlo, Beata	Duda, Andrzej	Law and Justice (PiS) – right-wing, nationalist-conservative
Czech Republic	Sobotka, Bohuslav	Zeman, Milos	Czech Social Democratic Party – left-wing, social democratic
Slovakia	Fico, Robert	Kiska, Andrej	Direction – Social Democratic (Smer) – left-wing, populist/independent

Source: Edited by the author

This varieties of self-representation of the Visegrad states and their frequent attempts at self-determination may have added to their differences. Nevertheless, there have also been common threats which have eliminated these conflicts and forced V4 states to focus on practical solutions. The 2009 energy crisis demonstrated the gas dependency of the Visegrad member states. These countries' home production falls far short of the volume needed for sufficient consumer supplies and their gas and other energy imports rely primarily on one country: Russia.[20]

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19 http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=62423 http://pl2011.eu/en/content/minister-radoslaw--sikorski-visit-berlin

20 http://www.visegrad.info/energy-security-infrastrucutre/factsheet/energy-security-of-visegrad-region.html

The priorities of each presidency have, thus, included collaboration on energy, the Eastern Partnership project, defence cooperation and the development of a digital economy. Other important topics are transport infrastructure development, the social dimension of European integration and the fight against tax evasion. The crisis in Ukraine in 2014 and the acceptance of the embargo against Russia have shown that member states' interests may vary. While Polish foreign policy has tried to ensure Poland avoids all cooperation with Russia, Hungary has made moves to strengthen ties through economic cooperation. At a meeting of prime ministers in Bratislava in May 2014, the Polish prime minister expressed his negative standpoint to the Hungarian partner, claiming that the V4 cooperation is more than a symbolic representation of a common past and future and the threats from Russia cannot be ignored. Hungary's position on the question facing the new Ukrainian government about whether to give "full collective rights" and dual citizenship to Hungarians living in the Zakarpattia Oblast has also impeded the chances of agreement among the Visegrad Group member states and Ukraine. Orbán has himself expressed his support for maintaining the territorial integrity of Ukraine; in the context of the Ukrainian–Russian conflict, this aligns with Russian rhetoric since it suggests that the government in Kiev is undemocratic and guilty of discriminating against ethnic minorities in Ukraine (Sadecki 2014). Orbán has also been blamed for the pending Hungarian position on the Ukrainian–Russian conflict. Although Hungarian diplomats co-authored both the Visegrad Group and EU declarations which condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as Sadecki (2014) points out, the Hungarian prime minister has emphasised Hungary's neutrality as regards the Ukrainian–Russian conflicts and tried to avoid any friction in relations with Russia since Hungary is in the process of building closer cooperation with the energy sector.

Notwithstanding this situation, the year 2015 saw important changes in the bilateral relations between Poland and Hungary when after eight years of governance, Poland's Civic Platform party (Platform Obywatelski, PO) lost the country's presidential and the parliamentary elections; these were both claimed by the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawedliwość, PiS) in October 2015. After an extended period of controversial relations between Poland and Hungary, the new governing party and Hungary's FIDESZ have, thus, revived their friendship. While the issue is critical, the Hungarian attitude to Russia remains almost the only point of conflict between the two party leaders. The landslide victory of Poland's conservative PiS has allowed the new political elite in Warsaw to make changes at an unprecedented pace. Though Polish–Hungarian relations have reached a new peak after the change of Polish government, both states have become and remain targets for the European Union. Criticism of government policies from Brussels only adds fuel to the fire and may strengthen the posi-

tions of Eurosceptic hardliners within PiS, who believe that Central Europe has to find its own path to prosperity, and this should not be based on catching up with Western Europe.

The ultimate proof: European integration

As we have noted, the V4 member states all joined the European Union in 2004. By taking this step, they were able to actively shape the future of European integration. Visegrad Group representatives work in all EU institutions – the Council of the European Union, the European Council, the European Commission and European Parliament as well as in the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, the Court of Justice of the EU, the General Court and the Court of Auditors. Moreover, this European integration has played an important role in their economic development. The V4 states joined the European Union as relatively poor countries, characterised by their low level of per capita GDP when compared to the rest of the EU (especially the EU15 countries). EU transfers today provide an important injection into the economies of the Visegrad Group countries, however the reality is far from the expected convergence. While the financial support of the new member states has been critical, the data suggests that there has been no narrowing of the gap between Visegrad Group and the most developed EU member states.

Table 4.

GDP in EUR bn
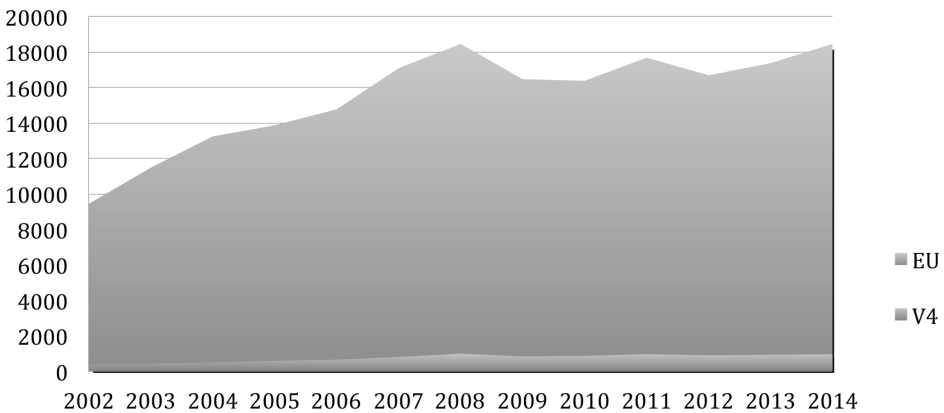
Source: IMF, http://index.hu/chart/2014/04/30/erre_jutottunk_a_sok_eu-s_penzzel/

Responsibility for the Council of the European Union presidency is seen as an important aspect of EU membership. According to the official presidential calendar, the Czech Republic was the first V4 member state to play this role, which it occupied between January and June 2009. The country also co-operated closely with France and Sweden in a presidency trio. The three priorities of the Czech presidency were the economy, energy and external relations. Here, a competitive and open Europe was treated as a crucial goal, with the Czechs emphasising the need to deepen the internal market by enhancing the four freedoms and improving innovation policy management. Regarding energy and climate change, the Czech presidency focused on energy security, including improving the reliability of supplies and the creation of an external energy policy. Finally, in the area of external action to the EU, the areas promoted were Euro-Atlantic relations, the Eastern Partnership, openness and further enlargement of the European Union (Drulak 2008).

Hungary was the second V4 state to take on the EU Council presidency. The Hungarian presidency occurred between January and June 2011, constituting a presidency trio together with Spain and Belgium. The Hungarian presidential agenda focused on four main topics: growth and employment through the preservation of the European social model (small and medium enterprises, demographics and family policy and the fight against poverty); a stronger Europe (food, energy, water initiatives); a citizen-friendly European Union (implementation of the Stockholm Programme; promotion of cultural diversity in the EU); and finally, enlargement and neighbourhood policy (Croatia and the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership).[21]

In late June 2011, Hungary handed over the presidency to Poland, which, presided over the EU Council from July to December 2011 and formed a presidency trio with Denmark and Cyprus. Among the priorities of the Polish presidency were the EU's exit from crisis; the EU and its external partners/neighbourhood (construed as the reinforcement of the Eastern Partnership and EU expansion) and finally, the safety of Europe (to be implemented through the EU's common security and defence policy and external energy policy) (Pawlas 2012).

In line with the presidential timetable, Slovakia has led the EU during the second half of 2016, comprising a presidential trio with the Netherlands and Malta.

It would seem that the priorities of the V4 states have been closely determined by the internal and external challenges facing the European Union. It must, however, be pointed out that these priorities have been partly derived from the specific internal problems and geopolitical location of each V4 state. Among other things, the war in Crimea has called into question attitudes to Russia, and the region's economic policy has been affected by the embargo on

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21 http://www.eu2011.hu/priorities-hungarian-presidency

Russian products since August 2014. Visegrad Group members have accepted this restriction ambivalently given the effects on energy security: after all, all these states were dependent on gas supplies from Russia and a huge share of their export activity focused on the Russian market.[22]

The refugee crisis has led to a renaissance of the Visegrad Group as the threat of an increasing number of migrants from the south-east has required a coordinated reaction. The Hungarian prime minister was the first to argue for prioritising national interests, and this standpoint was soon taken up by the three member states. In February 2016, the states made a joint declaration concerning a common security policy, closer cooperation with Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia and the plan to stop the refugees at Greece's borders. A so-called line of defence was to be set up under this agreement. Andrzej Duda, the Polish president has also drawn attention to the increasing power of the Visegrad Group based largely on the migration crisis. Moreover, Zeman and Duda have agreed on the importance of strengthening ties with northern and southern states in the CEE region.

Under the new Polish government, the country's foreign policy has taken on a new approach. Instead of the old Ukraine–Lithuania–Belarus (ULB) orientation, Duda has addressed these states from a new direction based on the Adriatic Sea, Baltic and Black Sea (*Czarne morze*) triangle. This idea, known as the ABC policy, has received support from the Baltic states.[23] The strengthening of ties among these target regions was confirmed by the visits of the Polish president to relevant areas in the first half of 2016. This development has special importance since it was greatly influenced by the migration crisis.[24]

Faced with the Ukrainian crisis and growing fears of Russia's actions as well as the knowledge that certain core EU members might not resist Russian aggression firmly in the Black Sea and Baltic regions, Poland has gone looking for a regional counterweight. The country has, thus, returned to the geopolitical concept of the "Intermarium," a plan for a military alliance across the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas that was intended to counter Bolshevik and Stalinist expansion in the 1920s and 1930s.[25] For President Andrzej Duda, who came to office in May 2015, this Intermarium-resembling project is a foreign policy goal. This situation has opened up a new path for cooperation, and the result-

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22 As EU members, the Visegrad states have also struggled with the supply of agricultural products. In one example, tonnes of unsold apples have remained in Poland while Russian zoos suffer a shortage of apple supplies. While this may seem like a marginal concern, the Polish government has had to deal with the difficulties of both farmers and traders.

23 http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,122,president-starts-official-visit-to-hungary.html

24 When considering future scenarios for the Central and Eastern European region, Poland's geopolitical ambitions are critical. As Kraev(2016), notes, the Intermarium, a forgotten idea introduced in inter-war Poland, has been reborn in the new foreign policy of the Law and Justice Party that provides scope for wider cooperation beyond the framework of Visegrad Group.

25 http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1976-warsaw-pivots-to-the-black-sea

ing response of Visegrad states to EU initiatives has worried many actors. As a consequence, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has warned V4 members that their EU funds will be suspended if they are not willing to accept EU rules and regulations. Back in the autumn of 1991, there was a general view within the EU that "ideas in the [Visegrad] proposal fully corresponded to their ideas for further development of cooperation between the Alliance and Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary."[26] Nowadays, this has changed to a perception that "Visegrad is like a bad word."[27]

From time to time, a question has also arisen about whether there is a real threat that Visegrad Group may obstruct the European Union's decision-making. In this regard, it is highly relevant whether the Group remains an entity with four member states or it opens up to absorb more states. The role of this cooperation also often comes into question. V4 supports usually agree that the Group will remain a cohesive bloc at EU level on some key issues such as energy and migration.

On the question of their position within the European Union, it is clear that V4 countries are now being taken more seriously than they were previously. This is partly because of these states' opposition to EU migration policy, an area where common EU policies have failed to deliver results. In part, this failure reflects the reluctance of member states, who are the main parties responsible for implementation. The old methods by which strong member states pushed through policies have also created a backlash.[28] After the EU summit in June 2016, Viktor Orbán echoed these sentiments, telling reporters that the EU's democratic legitimacy could only come from member states:

> We have to return to the notion that the basis of the EU is not its institutions, but its members. The democratic feature[s] of the EU can only be reinforced through the member states, and the relationship between the institutions and member states must be improved.[29]

There is a feeling within Brussels institutions that a stronger V4 might also mean greater nationalism, populism and even xenophobia in Europe. In a media report published in September 2016, one senior EU official put it, "If you let the

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26 Former German politician Hans-Dietrich Genscher made this remark about the Visegrad cooperation at a meeting of foreign ministers in Krakow, Poland in November 1991. See Spero 2004: 267.

27 See the comments of Central European Policy Institute expert Milan Nic in January 2016: http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21689629-migration-crisis-has-given-unsettling-new-direction-old-alliance--big-bad-visegrad

28 Exemplifying these methods, French President Francois Hollande scheduled a visit to Central Europe in 2016 to promote European policies as part of a symbolic reaching out to the "East." This trip was later cancelled after the terrorist attack in Nice in July 2016.

29 http://www.visegradgroup.eu/brexit-could-amplify-the

Poles gang up with Orbán and lead the contributions at the Bratislava summit, then we are doomed."[30] This comment partly referred to the current Warsaw government, which has come under heavy criticism from the EU Commission and European Parliament.[31] The same official also argued that EU institutions and Western member states had to take Central Europe more seriously than in past years while also working more closely with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and his Czech counterpart Bohuslav Sobotka, who are the "more reasonable" V4 members: "They [Fico and Sobotka] need our gestures. It is that moment. Thinking you can go to Bratislava, having made your call to Berlin, is not enough."[32]

Regarding the potential of V4 members to obstruct voting at the Council of the European Union session, current rules dictate that a blocking minority must include at least four Council members who together represent more than 35% of the EU population.[33] The extended cooperation among Visegrad Group, the Baltic states and countries in the Black Sea region represents a combined 102 million citizens, however to block the member states' actions effectively, a population of 178 million citizens is required. The Visegrad Group and members of the ABC countries are, thus, still too weak to paralyse the European Union's decision-making process though they may cause problems. Assuming that these states had a common cause with at least one bigger and one smaller member state, they could hamper the work of the Council of the European Union.

Concerning the future of EU integration, the expectations of V4 are quite diverse and fragmented. While the Poles and Czechs foresee expect more differentiated (multi-speed) integration, the Hungarians believe that the larger member states will dominate increasingly and the Slovaks – the only Eurozone country in the group – anticipate a reinforcement of the Euro area.

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30 Ibid

31 Ibid

32 Ibid

33 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/

The ABC states

Europa trzech mórz
w koncepcji prezydent Chorwacji

Source: http://www.tvn24.pl/magazyn-tvn24/abc-sen-o-potedze-krajow-trzech-morz,25,571

Table 5: Share of ABC states within the European Union

	State	Population in thousands (2015)
1	Bulgaria	7.202
2	Croatia	4.225
3	Czech Republic	10.538
4	Estonia	1.313
5	Hungary	9.855
6	Latvia	1.986
7	Lithuania	2.921
8	Poland	38.005
9	Romania	19.870
10	Slovakia	5.421
11	Slovenia	2.062
	Total	103.498
	EU 28 total	*508.293*
	Share of ABC countries related to EU28	*20.36%*

Source: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries_en

The refugee crisis opened up new chapter in the Visegrad cooperation. If the response to the embargo against Russia divided the member states, then the fear of the growing number of immigrants helped them to strengthen and deepen their cooperation. Public opinion and politicians' standpoints were quite closely aligned within the Visegrad member states. The Czech public was roundly opposed to taking in asylum seekers, while Milos Zeman, the country's populist president, claimed that the integration of Muslim refugees was "practically impossible."[34] Anti-migrant sentiment, thus, unified the Visegrad Group of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Hungary's Viktor Orbán had already demonstrated the position of himself and his government in the late summer of 2015, and in an October 2016 referendum, he hoped to win the support of Hungarian voters as well.[35] A similar standpoint may be expected from Polish politicians such as Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice Party and a great supporter of Orbán's policy.

Regarding the future of the Visegrad cooperation and its relations with the European Union, the increasing support for nation states and the fragility of the Union itself may still lead to unpleasant incidents. As the Hungarian ambassador to Italy, Péter Paczolay explained in February 2016 at the conference in

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34 In the past year, the country has accepted just 520 of these refugees. http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21689629-migration-crisis-has-given-unsettling-new-direction-old-alliance-big-bad-visegrad

35 The results of this referendum are beyond the scope of this study, and thus, we need only note that participation in this referendum did not reach the expected threshold. Only 43% of the population took part. Nevertheless, the results showed that the majority (98%) of participants wished to stop these migrants at Hungary's borders.

Forli organized for students, the Visegrad cooperation can be treated as a form of "practical solidarity," but this may be counterbalanced by the culturally and historically determined need to preserve the regional self-perceptions and identities of these four states.[36]

Conclusion

The Visegrad cooperation has a unique position in the Central and Eastern European region. The basis of the group is an almost six century-old history of cooperation. The cooperation has survived its years of greatest uncertainty and it has managed to overcome obstacles and threats. The founding states stood on different sides at the peace summits following the two world wars, however after 1945, they were forced to remain in the Soviet bloc. During the Cold War, they faced the challenges of belonging to a non-existent Central Europe and being isolated from Western civilisation, and there may be a common sense of recovery of a sunken history that the cohesion of these states helps to address.

Looking back over the centuries, we can see that this part of Europe was always the playground of the great powers, and the survival of these states was strongly influenced by their ability to co-operate. European integration and NATO membership were the ultimate proof of the Western orientation of the Visegrad states, and the Visegrad Group has also served as a kind of litmus paper or testing ground for the European Union. Remaining alone after the collapse of the bipolar system, the three (later four) countries had to focus on self-determination. The Visegrad cooperation framework that has survived for the last 25 years was developed, then, based on the methods current when the Central European region states were already dealing with the problem of being satellite states of the Soviet Union, but they had not yet accepted the norms and rules of an integrated Europe. The euphoria of sovereignty and independence has sometimes hampered and continues to obstruct acceptance of the EU's operating institutional framework; instead of conforming, these states have shown a tendency to propose new norms that may inevitably shock the older member states and their diplomats. Even so, given their geopolitical position and the potential advantages they can demonstrate over the other former socialist states, these V4 members have managed to preserve their importance and position in the European context. Concluding our investigation, we may, thus, note that this special type of regional integration has survived a great deal and may now serve as a model for other partnerships. As Martonyi Janos, the former Hungarian foreign minister puts it:

36 http://www.pecob.eu/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/EN/IDPagina/4943/UT/systemPrint

V4 is an ad hoc reaction to a very concrete situation and for preparations for NATO. We had to ask who we were. We are all Central Europe, and V4… is not only [a] regional operation, it is based on specific historical and spiritual identity that we now call Central Europe.[37]

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37 http://www.globsec.org/globsec2013/highlights-news/globsec-visegrad-makes-us-stronger-said-lajcak/

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Single author books:

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Two or more authors:

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Waisová, Šárka (2005): Czech Security Policy – Between Atlanticism and Europeanization, Bratislava: Ministry of Defence, Working Paper No. 05/2.

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