



REPORT

RUSSIA AND THE VISEGRAD GROUP: THE UKRAINIAN CHALLENGE

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The Eastern Partnership policy that triggered the Ukrainian crisis has provided ample opportunity to reflect on Russia–EU relations, alongside with evaluating cooperation between Russia and the Visegrad Group countries (also called the Visegrad Four or V4). The Visegrad Four have taken on responsibility for the eastward enlargement of the European Union having become its members.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
1. Russia, the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership Programme (<i>Shishelina L.N.</i>)	8
2. Evolution of the Visegrad Group's Policy on Ukraine (<i>Shishelina L.N.</i>)	13
3. Economic Relations between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine (<i>Drynochkin A.V.</i>)	18
4. Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership in the Policy of the Visegrad Region Countries (<i>Shishelina L.N., Lykoshina L.S., Shcherbakova Yu.A.</i>)	24
5. Visegrad-Russian Relations and the Ukrainian Crisis (<i>Shishelina L.N., Lykoshina L.S., Shcherbakova Yu.A., Drynochkin A.V.</i>)	38
Conclusion	66

Introduction

The Eastern Partnership policy that triggered the Ukrainian crisis has provided ample opportunity to reflect on Russia–EU relations, alongside with evaluating cooperation between Russia and the Visegrad Group countries (also called the Visegrad Four or V4). The Visegrad Four have taken a significant part of responsibility for the eastward enlargement of the European Union having become its members.

After almost a quarter of a century, relations between Russia and the Visegrad Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) have not evolved as efficiently as Russia's contacts with each of the group's member countries. The reason lies above all in the geopolitical nature of the two actors, their potential, goals and tasks. Having launched reforms in the mid–1980s, the Soviet Union paved the way for transformations in the Central European countries. However, it subsequently failed to preserve its leadership and prevent regional disintegration in the 1980s. Of course, Russia was not the only player in the region. Since it was not Moscow's initiative to create the Visegrad Four, its attitude to the Group has been critical.

The European countries and the United States do not perceive the Visegrad Group as a subject or object of modern international relations. However, the United States still considers the Visegrad Group a region of its influence at the former Soviet Union borders. As for the European Union, it has repeatedly demonstrated its concern about the meetings of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic before summits in Brussels, and has delegated some of its projects, like in case of the Eastern Partnership, to the Visegrad Group. The former Soviet Union Republics represent an area of clash of interest. Russia has not yet severed its multiple links with the former USSR republics while the Visegrad Group countries feel responsible for the EU security in the East, alongside with the EU enlargement. This is why bilateral relations between Russia and the Visegrad Group countries can no longer respond to international challenges.

The mission of the Visegrad Group might have consisted in balancing Russian influence in Ukraine.

Ukraine that receives integration impulses from both sides brings together and at the same time separates the Visegrad Group countries and Russia. The mission of the Visegrad Group might have consisted in balancing Russian influence in Ukraine. Each of the Visegrad Group countries had its historical and economic interests in the country, but it was only together that Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic could become an equal and effective partner to Ukraine capable of balancing the “Eastern challenges” emanating from Russia.

Ukraine regrettably could not be turned from an area of confrontation to a space of cooperation that would reflect the interests of all parties to the conflict. Possible causes of the most dangerous European and global conflict of the 21st century might arise from internal problems in Ukraine itself, which has failed to become a

politically stable state. Another reason might be the clash of other global powers' interests in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The 20th century ended with the fall of the bipolar world, the collapse of the USSR, the last global empire and the world socialist system. After a quarter of a century of reforms some transformations, initiated in the late 1980s have not been completed yet. Most probably the Ukrainian conflict represents the final phase of the post-bipolar reshaping of the world order. Russia and the Visegrad

Ukraine regrettably could not be turned from an area of confrontation to a space of cooperation that would reflect the interests of all parties to the conflict.

Group countries have been caught in the midst of crisis in Ukraine, thus failing to regulate it and becoming victims of its unpredictable development.

The causes can be found in the traditional clash of the forces of the Sea (Euro-Atlanticism) and the Land (Russia). In that case, the question is whether the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can be seen as an element of the scenario that provoked a war in the heart of Europe?

Other possible reasons frequently mentioned in the mass media embrace the battle of oligarchies for oil, gas and control over transportation networks and the urge for the democratic transition, which was the key slogan of Maidan.

The latter version, actively promoted today in Ukraine and Europe, can hardly be taken seriously because there were no signs of hatred towards Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich until the third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. On the contrary, in late November 2013, people gathered on Maidan Square to support the President's determination to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. If that document had been signed, he would have become the most popular figure in Washington, Brussels and in pro-Western sectors of Ukrainian society.

We should also pay attention to the regional aspect of geopolitics that puts Ukraine's immediate neighbours – Russia and the Visegrad Group countries – on the frontline.

The Visegrad Group's relations with Ukraine became a priority back in 2003, when the European Neighbourhood Policy was adopted, and continued in 2009 with the Eastern Partnership policy.

The Visegrad Group's development and its commitment to further evolution was bound to boost cooperation with neighbouring countries. The Visegrad Group's relations with Ukraine became a priority back in 2003, when the European Neighbourhood Policy was adopted, and continued in 2009 with the Eastern Partnership policy. The argument for putting the EU "Eastern Policy" within the competence of the Visegrad Group was that it was hard to control all the strands of foreign policy from Brussels. The Group being on the Eastern periphery of the European Union was consequently more interested in the security of its borders – the Eastern borders of the European Union – than other countries. Although there were no official resolutions, it was easy to see that the Visegrad Group played a leading role in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. It

is enough to recall that the Eastern Partnership summits took place in the capitals of the Visegrad Group countries and the Baltic States, with representatives of those countries and Angela Merkel forming the backbone of EU participation.

A closer look at the Visegrad Group leadership in implementing that programme reveals the leading role of Poland, and an active stand of the Czech Republic.

The special relationship between Poland and Ukraine played a crucial role in the evolution of the Eastern Partnership, alongside with a dislike of Moscow that was partly inherited from pre-perestroika times and was most pronounced during the presidency of Lech Kaczynski. The latter circumstance made first the ENP, and subsequently the Eastern Partnership, hostages to the deep-seated grievances nurtured since the Soviet period of these countries' history. This is why Russia was never invited to take part in the negotiating process conducted exclusively between the European Visegrad countries and the former Soviet republics. The Visegrad Group countries responsible for the Eastern Partnership initially saw the attitude of the post-Soviet states towards Russia through the prism of their own biased perception. They did not pay attention to studying the complex political, ethno-cultural and socio-economic links between Russia and the former Soviet Union countries. They enjoyed support of the powerful West and counted on it.

Part of the reason for the one-sided view of the situation was Ukraine's urge for an independent foreign policy. Kiev has persistently declared that it could become a member of the Visegrad Group.¹ This made Ukraine the main partner of the Visegrad Group and at the same time a territory for competition between the Visegrad Group and Russia.

The European Union, with its disposition to symbolic actions was likely to expect to add to its list of events in celebration of NATO and the European Union expansion eastward (the 15th and 10th anniversaries, to which we could add the 25th anniversary of revolutions in Eastern Europe) by at least two more. The Vilnius Summit and Ukraine's signing of the Association Agreement was to be the turning point in the EU policy, marking the tenth anniversary of the ENP and the 5th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership. However, the celebrations did not take place: President Viktor Yanukovich did not sign the Association Agreement. Moreover, massive EU and U.S. support of opposition forces in Ukraine has plunged the country into a geopolitical catastrophe triggered by the uncompromising policy of the Eastern Partnership, which has ignored the multiple Russian-Ukrainian ties.

What has happened as a result of pressure on Ukraine cannot be reversed. However, it is highly important to analyse mistakes to work out possible solutions to the crisis. Russia has made a few crucial mistakes. 24 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has failed to become an attractive alternative centre and to elaborate an effective integration model. This is partly the reason why Russia couldn't fully estimate the consequences of the Eastern Partnership policy and respond to it either by initiating a similar programme or by insisting on being a party to the solution of Ukraine's problems. The main lesson Russia should learn from this is that while building its relations with global powers, it should not forget about regional partners – including the Visegrad Group. This is all the

¹ Stindl K. How the Slogan "Visegrad Group" Opened the Door to Ukraine / The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation. IVF. Bratislava 2006, p. 99.

more necessary because the Central and East European region has been playing an indisputably important role in Russia's interests.

Today, much has been said and written about Russia's supposed interest in the breakup of the Visegrad Group. This was how Vladimir Putin's visit to Hungary in March 2015 was covered in the media. The rumours that Russia is happy to see discord within the Group is one of those clichés that Europe has never been able to get rid of in its perception of modern Russia.

The aim of this report is to trace the evolution of Russia's policy towards the Visegrad Group states, to analyse the development of relations in the Russia–Visegrad Group–Ukraine triangle from the emergence of these three subjects to the present time, and to define possible ways of cooperation between them to put an end to the crisis.

1. Russia, the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership Programme

Twenty-three years after the Visegrad Group came to life, Russia's sceptical attitude towards the V4 as a factor of European policy in the region has hardly changed. Signs of an improved image of the new European Four emerged at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. The reason lay in a greater openness towards Russia – the Visegrad Group Days were held in Moscow and the idea of regional unity was promoted among Russian experts and politicians. However, no real changes occurred to bring Russia and the Visegrad Group closer together on the more pressing issues.

Signs of an improved image of the new European Four emerged at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not include the Visegrad Group in the list of international partner structures that pursue active cooperation with Russia. It is partly explained by the fact that the Visegrad Group was not organized structurally. Indeed, the presidency in the Visegrad Group goes from country to country once a year, and the only institution with a permanent office is the International Visegrad Fund, which distributes money to finance the interaction programmes within the region and in the Eastern Partnership countries. Thus, the Visegrad Group does not even have an official address.

The main reason for Russia's scepticism is its wariness of organizations that were created with the active support of its geopolitical rivals (in this case the United States). At the same time, Moscow, which lacks a strategy in the Central and Eastern European region, naturally, is unable to work out a policy on the Visegrad Group. Nevertheless, up to the middle of 2013 the bilateral links with Poland and Hungary were improving, and the relations with the Czech Republic and Slovakia were traditionally good, which compensated Russia for the lack of links with the Visegrad Group. Since the Visegrad Group emerged, Russia has treated its initiatives with detachment, yet analysing them in terms of their impact on its security and prospects for economic development.

Today, it is clear that the Visegrad Group is incomplete in geopolitical, economic, cultural and political-ideological areas. But, it is obvious that the Group seeks to overcome this condition, proved alongside with other measures in the security field, by the formation of the 3000-strong Polish-led international battalion. It was begun in 2012, and is to be completed by 2016. The energy projects mentioned in the Eastern Partnership Programme also demonstrate the Group's interest in expanding its geostrategic influence and forming a stable segment of the European market in the region. At present, the leverage of the Visegrad Group, largely due to Poland's efforts, stretches to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and adds to interaction with the Baltic and Balkan countries. In future, the enlargement of the Visegrad Group to Carpathian Europe or the Baltic-Danube

Axis cannot be ruled out. However, the Visegrad Four will in any case remain the key element of the structure.

In future, the enlargement of the Visegrad Group to Carpathian Europe or the Baltic–Danube Axis cannot be ruled out.

Even so, the Visegrad Group is not yet strong enough to be immune to internal and external threats. Although the Visegrad Group has existed for almost a quarter of a century, many territorial disputes in the region have not been resolved, the habit of defending their common interests in Brussels has not been formed, and there is practically no common vision of the prospects for such kind of regional interaction. The current crisis in Ukraine has revealed that behind the external show of the Visegrad Group's unity there are significant differences in interests and assessments of the situation. There are no signs of a common view on the Subcarpathian area. Moreover, the reaction of the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the possible victory of Jaroslaw Kaczynski's conservative policies in the upcoming Polish elections remains unknown. The future of the Visegrad four if Hungary and Poland finally gain the upper hand over the social–liberal wing (Slovakia and the Czech Republic) is also unclear.

The current crisis in Ukraine has revealed that behind the external show of the Visegrad Group's unity there are significant differences in interests and assessments of the situation.

The main sore point in the relations between the Visegrad Group and Russia has always been Ukraine, located between them, with both sides, including the Visegrad Group as an organization and Visegrad countries individually, obviously having their geopolitical interests in that country. For a long time, Russia has sought to keep Ukraine within its economic orbit with such projects as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Customs Union and the promise of the Eurasian Union. It was hard to involve Ukraine in closer cooperation forms (modelled on the Union State of Russia and Belarus) because of its dual geopolitical nature.

The European Union has constantly ignored Ukraine's dual nature, seeking to attract the Ukrainian elite (to a considerable degree through the efforts of the Visegrad Group) by grant projects aimed at planting "European values" in Ukrainian soil, thus setting it in opposition to the pro–Russian sections of the population and arguing that the future of Ukraine lies with the Euro–Atlantic alliance and not with Russia. By initiating foreign internships and summer school programmes the European Union has placed its stakes on the younger generation, which needed financial support and was ready to embrace change. Though the Visegrad countries had never been the main sponsors of the Eastern Partnership grant programmes in 2006–2007 the budgets of the International Visegrad Fund had a separate item for Ukrainian grants, which increased from 265,000 to 530,000 euros. These grants were replaced in 2011 by the biggest ever V4EaP Fund Programme, which was aimed at supporting the Eastern Partnership strategy and amounted to 1.5 million euros by 2014.² Almost simultaneously, the

² International Visegrad Fund site. Budget Section.
URL: <http://www.visegradfund.org/about/budget>

United States and Taiwan became sponsors of the Fund's programmes, which had previously been funded only by the Visegrad countries.

Undoubtedly, the policy of detaching Ukraine from Russia was rooted in the European Union's expansion projects, and was being implemented partly through the efforts of the Visegrad Group in the framework of Eastern Partnership programme.

The report of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy on November 5, 2003 noted that "the projected establishment of a Common Economic Space together with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan could hamper further cooperation between Ukraine and the EU."³ Thus, even before the European Neighbourhood Policy was shaped, Ukraine was deliberately forced to choose between Brussels and Moscow, although the economic welfare of millions of its citizens still depended on interaction with Russia. "Ukraine by virtue of its size, geographical location, deep historical, cultural, economic and other links to Central and Western Europe, as well as to Russia, and its potential to become an even more valuable partner of the EU in essential areas must be given a particularly important role in the context of the EU's Wider Europe–Neighbourhood policy," the report read.⁴ The European Union therefore "supports Ukraine's desire for EU integration." It is notable that Ukraine's link with Europe (including Western Europe) is placed above its links with Russia.

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In Ukraine, the attitude to possible association with the European Union has always been mixed. Even Euro-optimists, along with the undoubted pluses, have noted the significant costs of such a step for the Ukrainian economy. Obviously, Ukraine can only supply a limited range of goods to the European Union market. Ukrainian industry does not interest the European Union because Europe is witnessing the closure of its own steel-making and car-making industries. Ukraine's chief export could be a low-cost and high-quality workforce.⁵

The architects of the Eastern Partnership programme ignored the close economic ties between Russia and Ukraine. They overlooked the fact that, in addition to people from the former Soviet republics who obtained Russian citizenship, more than one third of the population of Armenia and Moldova, and over 15 per cent of Azerbaijani citizens and 8 per cent of working-age Ukrainian citizens live and work both legally and illegally in Russia.⁶ In the case of Ukraine, this amounts to half of all its citizens working abroad. In 2012 alone, 14 million people, mainly

³ Report on "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours". COM (2003) 104 – 2003/2018(INI). Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy // European Parliament 1999–2004 Session document. Final A5-0378/2003. November 5, 2003, p. 10.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Ukrainian government's press service reported that the share of CIS countries in Ukraine's trade exceeded 42 per cent in the first seven months of 2011. Trade between Ukraine and Russia in 2011 amounted to \$54.9 billion (33 per cent of total trade). Ukraine is still Russia's leading economic partner among CIS countries. Its share in Russia's total trade in 2011 was 6.4 per cent, putting it in fourth place as Russia's trading partner. Russia accounts for 27.1 per cent of the total export of Ukrainian goods, while 39.9 per cent of imported goods come to Ukraine from Russia.

⁶ Based on data from the Russian Federal Migration Service.
URL: <http://www.fms.gov.ru/about/statistics/foreign/details/54891> (in Russian).

from the former Soviet republics, entered Russia legally.⁷ In the first half of 2013, the figure was 11.3 million, of whom 80 per cent came from the former Soviet republics.⁸ That figure was 17.3 million for the whole of 2013, of whom 3.3 million were Ukrainian citizens.⁹ In 2013, two-and-a-half times more people (about 44 million) entered Russia illegally.¹⁰ If we count the families that are with them and those waiting for remittances from Russia back home, the number of citizens of the states involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy living off the Russian economy exceeds the population of many EU states.

According to statistics, in the first half of 2013 alone, physical persons transferred 218.5 billion roubles from Russia to foreign countries through banks.¹¹ According to the Central Bank, the largest amounts are remitted to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Ukraine, these three countries accounting for 64 per cent of all money transfers by non-residents. And significant amounts are exported by-passing banks.

Opinion polls show that more than 80 per cent of Ukrainian citizens have relatives, friends and acquaintances in the Russian Federation. A study conducted by the Research & Branding Group in 2012 asked the question: “Of the countries that are friendly towards Ukraine, who can be counted on for support?” Among those who responded, 54.6 per cent said Russia could be counted on for support, while 10.3 per cent said the United States.

Ukraine, like Yugoslavia, is a plural state in terms of ethnicity and culture. Therefore, if it continues to be torn apart by political strife and fails to embark on the path of federalization, it may break up into several parts like the USSR did in its time.

Over the past 23 years, Ukraine has had more parliamentary elections and more prime ministers than any other former Soviet Union country. One of the reasons for this is the pattern whereby in order to come to power in Ukraine one has to win over the Russian speaking regions; and in order to stay in power, one has to win over the Western regions. There is still no uniting political figure in sight. Nor is there even a semblance of a single nation-state core, a national idea, with the exception of the ruling elite’s attempts to unite the nation by opposing to Russia.

By 2012, more than \$3 billion has been spent on all the Eastern Partnership projects, but the effect has been negligible. The Programme’s main problem is that its destination is unclear. The expectations of the objects and subjects in this partnership diverge. So far, only the tactical tasks are more or less clear: to weaken Russia in the post-Soviet space and put the oil and gas infrastructure of the client countries under Brussels’ control.

The future of the Eastern Partnership Programme, which turned five in 2014, is important. It is only with a high degree of bitter irony that the programme can be described as partnership with regard to the whole of Ukraine and Moldova.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Proceedings of the Extended Meeting with the Head of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation held on July 26, 2013. URL: http://www.fms.gov.ru/press/news/news_detail.php?ID=69630 (in Russian).

⁹ From Konstantin Romodanovsky’s press conference, RIA Novosti News Agency, March 24, 2014: <http://ria.ru/society/20140324/1000802649.html> (in Russian).

¹⁰ From an interview with the Head of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation. URL: <http://www.anvictory.org/v-2013-godu-v-rossiyu-vexalo-44-000-000-chelovek> (in Russian).

¹¹ Migrants are Draining Money out of Russia at a Slower Pace / Polit.ru August 19, 2013. URL: <http://www.polit.ru/news/2013/08/19/migrants/> (in Russian).

Nevertheless, the architects of the programme seem to be unperturbed. For instance, the Visegrad Group is still pressing for increased spending on European internships for Ukrainian students and support of the loyal media and other humanitarian programmes to promote “European values”.

Moscow sees the Eastern Partnership as an attempt to weaken Russian influence in the post-Soviet space and offer a different development model to the former Soviet Republics.

Russia’s attitude to the Eastern Partnership Programme has been determined in many ways by its former view on the European Neighbourhood Policy programme, which was aimed at alienating the republics from Russia and de facto at severing the geopolitical sphere of the country, a process that began at the turn of the 1990s. In the spring of 2010, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov declared that the European Union’s programme could damage relations between Russia and the Partnership countries, primarily the integration structures formed within the CIS.¹² Moscow sees the Eastern Partnership as an attempt to weaken Russian influence in the post-Soviet space and offer a different development model to the former Soviet Republics.

Of late, the Eastern Partnership seems to have engaged EU policymakers more than relations with Russia. In the period before sanctions, the new EU–Russia Treaty that was to replace the one that became invalid because of Poland’s veto in 2006 was never signed. “The four spaces” that were to fill the protocol vacuum of relations at the end of the first decade of the 21st century remained on paper and never reached a formal stage. In spite of the “common energy space”, the European Union is seeking alternative sources of energy. In spite of the “common legal space and freedom space”, the programme of abolishing visas was not implemented and there was no mutual recognition of educational diplomas, scientific degrees, etc.

After the Vilnius Summit, and especially after the events in Kiev and Crimea, a heavy pause emerged in relations between Russia and the Visegrad Group.

On March 4, 2014, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group released a joint statement expressing concern about the deteriorating situation in Ukraine and the decision of the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly to allow President Putin as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to use Russian forces on Ukrainian territory against the wishes of the Ukrainian government.¹³ They called on Moscow to comply with the terms of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, stressing that “military actions by Russia are not only in violation of international law, but also create a dangerous new reality in Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are appalled to witness a military intervention in 21st century Europe akin to their own experiences in 1956, 1968 and 1981.”

That statement reflected the common position of the European Union and NATO, and since that moment the common stand of the Visegrad Group towards Russia can be described as a regional expression of the Euro-Atlantic strategy. Let us stress that we are referring to the Visegrad Group as a whole and not to individual countries in the region.

¹² Based on RIA Novosti materials. URL: <http://www.rian.ru>, May 13, 2010 (in Russian).

¹³ Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine. March 4, 2014. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/statement-of-the-prime>

2. Evolution of the Visegrad Group's Policy on Ukraine

Since the 1990s, relations with Ukraine have been marked by attempts by the Visegrad Group to work out a common policy. In addition to the more successful bilateral contacts, these relations have developed in two other directions: as a regional policy of the Visegrad Group based largely on historical traditions, and as a policy of an EU and NATO sub-region with corresponding geostrategic obligations.

As for the region's independent policy, "the hereditary factor" played an important role. It was an attempt to fit into the new policy and new relations the range of problems the region had inherited from the post-war territorial settlement, which during Soviet times had been sustained by membership of the Moscow-led Warsaw Treaty Organization. First of all, it was necessary to work out new approaches to the problems of national minorities in neighbouring states. Practically every member of the Visegrad Group had so-called co-national minorities on Ukrainian territory: Lemkos, Rusyns, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians and Germans.¹⁴ Another important element in bilateral relations was the fact that the Visegrad Group countries saw Ukraine as a promising close-lying market.

Both factors made it necessary for the Visegrad Group to shape a special approach towards Ukraine in order to derive maximum benefit from neighbourhood relations without formalizing them. This gave great room for manoeuvre: depending on the situation, the Visegrad Group countries could either act on their own or implement the strategy of their Euro-Atlantic allies, who were interested in the Ukrainian geopolitical space and the opportunities it offered to influence Russia. Thus, there was tangible external influence in the policy of the Visegrad community, and in bilateral relations with Ukraine.

Both factors made it necessary for the Visegrad Group to shape a special approach towards Ukraine in order to derive maximum benefit from neighbourhood relations without formalizing them.

The inclusion in the Visegrad Group of such a large, ethnically and culturally complex and economically weak state could greatly impede the efforts of the Group's countries to achieve the average European level of social and economic development. Relations between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine followed the same formula as the European Neighbourhood Policy and later the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy: as close as possible, but ruling out membership. The doors to negotiations remained open, but the decisions were vague. Ukraine was held on a hook without being allowed to swallow the bait.

The first opportunity to expand the Visegrad Group presented itself in connection with the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). At the Poznan Summit in spring 1995, the Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus articulated three conditions

¹⁴ According to the recent Ukrainian census held in 2001, there were: 157,000 Hungarians; 151,000 Romanians; 144,000 Poles; and 33,000 Germans living in Ukrainian. In Subcarpathia alone there were: 152,000 Hungarians; 32,000 Romanians; 6,000 Slovaks; and 3,500 Germans. Rusyns are not recognized as a nationality in Ukraine.
URL: <http://www.2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality> (in Russian).

of accession to the common customs space formed by the Visegrad Group in 1992: the existence of bilateral free-trade treaties with all the CEFTA countries; membership of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹⁵

The conditions set by Václav Klaus in the 1990s might have been an official screen concealing the reluctance of the Visegrad Group countries to admit Ukraine into its ranks in spite of that country's repeated bids to become a member.¹⁶ Relations with the Visegrad Group have had their ups and downs, and Ukraine could count on attracting the Visegrad Group's attention only when the group was on the rise. Since the early 2000s, cooperation has been sustained by inviting Ukrainian government ministers to the meetings of Visegrad counterparts, a format that acquired a new dimension with the creation of the International Visegrad Fund in 2000. In 2003, the Visegrad Group launched a series of consultations on border issues in the V4+Ukraine format.¹⁷

After the Visegrad Group joined the European Union in 2004 and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia left CEFTA, admitting Ukraine to the Visegrad Group became meaningless and cooperation continued under the auspices of the European neighborhood policy. Such cooperation was largely confined to humanitarian programmes, i.e. cultural-educational and information matters aimed, as the initiators of the programme claimed, "at strengthening civil society in that country."¹⁸ The International Visegrad Fund stressed the development of links between small towns in Ukraine and the Visegrad Group countries.

Even so, the internal political situation in Ukraine and bilateral relations with the country were discussed at various levels within the Visegrad Group. Thus, on December 7, 2004, a meeting of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Krakow issued a statement welcoming the decision of the Supreme Court of Ukraine to annul the results of the second round of the presidential elections and saying that the Visegrad Group countries were ready to support Ukraine in its urge for democratization and adherence to Euro-Atlantic values.¹⁹ After Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski intervened in resolving the situation concerning the Ukrainian elections, a prolonged period of cooling ensued in Russian-Polish and Russian-Ukrainian relations. Simultaneously, the Russian political establishment became more sceptical towards the Visegrad Group in general.

On June 10, 2005, the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries expressed their determination at a meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko at Kazimierz Dolny in Poland to back Kiev in pushing ahead with the earlier plan of association with the European Union.²⁰ On October 10, 2006 a meeting of the

¹⁵ Stindl K. How the Slogan "Visegrad Group" Opened the Door to Ukraine // The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation. IVF. Bratislava, 2006, p. 99.

¹⁶ Such attempts were repeatedly made following Yushchenko's 2005 victory in the Ukrainian elections. Another attempt was made in 2008. Ibid. pp. 98–100.

¹⁷ Meeting of National Visegrad Coordinators in Nyíregyháza (Hungary) in the Framework of the Conference on Cross-Border Cooperation in the V4+Ukraine Format. October 16–17, 2003. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2003>

¹⁸ Stindl K. How the Slogan "Visegrad Group" Opened the Door to Ukraine // The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation. IVF. Bratislava, 2006, p. 100.

¹⁹ Statement of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the Situation in Ukraine. December 7, 2004. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2004/statement-of-the>

²⁰ Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the V4 Countries on Ukraine. Kazimierz Dolny. June 10, 2005. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2005/joint-declaration-of-the-110412>

Visegrad Group Prime Ministers in Budapest declared that as EU representatives in the region they were responsible for “promoting a culture of integration in the neighbouring regions.”²¹ The document adopted at the 15th anniversary meeting of the Visegrad Group voiced support for the process of reform in the European Partnership countries in the “strengthening of their European orientation.” Special attention was to be paid to contacts among professional groups of citizens, student exchanges, etc.

The 5th meeting of the European Union Affairs Committees of the National Parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries in Krakow on January 15–16, 2007 stressed the need for “a strong and long-term engagement of the EU in the cooperation with Ukraine, taking into account the role of this country in creating the stability and security in the region.”²²

The line for a rapprochement between Ukraine and the European Union was consolidated on April 23, 2008 during the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, Sweden and Ukraine in Prague. The joint final statement noted that the Visegrad Group and Sweden supported Ukraine's desire for Euro-integration and considered it to be “an important element of the ongoing transformation process in Eastern Europe.”²³ As early as April 25, the Visegrad Group ministers of defence held a working lunch with their Ukrainian counterpart, Y. Yekhanurov, expressing their readiness to support Ukraine in implementing its action plan on the way to EU, and possible NATO, membership. A joint statement issued after the meeting referred to assistance in the Ukrainian reform process as “key to the success of their Euro-Atlantic integration efforts.”²⁴

The first summit of the Eastern Partnership, a new collective form of the interaction of the European Union with the former Soviet republics, was held in Prague on May 7, 2009. As a result, the European Union informally delegated the responsibility for its functioning to the Visegrad Group, under German supervision. A new important stage in the evolution of the Visegrad Group was the adoption by the European Union of the Eastern Partnership programme proposed by Poland and Sweden during the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On June 3, 2009, the parliament speakers of the Visegrad Group supported the establishment within the European Commission of the post of Special Coordinator of the Eastern Partnership programme and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly bringing together the members of parliament of the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries.²⁵

²¹ Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries, Visegrad, Hungary. October 10, 2006.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/official-statements/documents/declaration-of-the>

²² Statement of the 5th Meeting of the European Union Affairs Committees of the National Parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries. Kraków. January 15–16, 2007. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2007/statement-of-the-5th>

²³ Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, Sweden and Ukraine. Czech Republic. April 23, 2008. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2008/joint-statement-of-the-110412>

²⁴ Joint Statement of the Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad Group Countries. Prague. April 25, 2008.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2008/joint-statement-of-the-110412-1>

²⁵ Initially that structure was conceived as a joint body of six representatives of the European Parliament and six representatives of the Eastern Partnership countries. The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was tasked with monitoring compliance with international legal norms in the Eastern Partnership countries. The plan was never carried out because Belarus refused to join. In the end, the representation of the Belarusian parliament was dropped and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was inaugurated under the President of the European Parliament J. Buzek on May 3, 2011. Four standing committees were formed (on human rights and democracy, integration, energy security, and culture, education and civil society) along with working groups. See: Lykoshina L.S. Poland and the Eastern Partnership // *Visegrad Europe*, 2013, Issue 2 (in Russian).

With the adoption of the Programme, the issues of energy supplies and management of the energy grid were put on the agenda of negotiations between the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership countries. The declaration of the Presidents of the National Parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries adopted in Warsaw on June 3, 2009 proposed that the European Commission approve the initiative to extend the EU technology guarantees and access regulations to the Ukrainian gas infrastructure. It also called for the energy infrastructure in the Visegrad Group to be developed and to connect it to the existing infrastructure in Europe and to new routes and sources of supplies.²⁶ Thus, the issues of creating a Visegrad Group energy market became a permanent item on the Eastern Partnership agenda.

On December 4, 2009 the EU–Ukraine Summit in Kiev issued a joint declaration reaffirming Ukraine’s “European aspirations” and welcoming its “European choice”. An association plan was also adopted. The opening clauses of the draft association agreement spoke about involving Ukraine in actions of common EU security and defence.²⁷ Then followed measures to modernize Ukraine, above all its energy sector.

On March 2, 2010, the European Commission allocated 5.7 billion euros to support programmes of political and economic reform and regional cooperation in 17 countries covered by the European Neighbourhood and Eastern Partnership policies. Ukraine was named among the priority targets of this financial project for 2011–2013, and received 470 million euros in 2011 alone.²⁸

On June 16, 2011, a meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group in Bratislava decided to intensify the Eastern Partnership in the framework of the new Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Programme.²⁹ Its aim was to deepen reform in the Eastern Partnership countries and thus bring them closer to the European Union. Increased financing of the International Visegrad Fund programmes starting in 2012 was also envisaged.

The next Eastern Partnership Summit, which took place in Warsaw on September 29–30, 2011, announced that by the time of the Summit the European Union had already invested 2 billion euros in the programme. The Polish Prime Minister said his country was ready to contribute a further 150 million euros in 2011–2013.³⁰ The summit failed to garner any attention in the media because some key figures were absent (despite the fact that it was chaired by Herman van Rompuy and Jose Manuel Barroso, Angela Merkel was the only leader of an EU founding state present) and because the documents it passed were non-binding.³¹ The European press described it as a “diplomatic fiasco.”³²

²⁶ Joint Declaration of the Presidents of the National Parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries. Warsaw. June 3, 2009. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2009/joint-declaration-of>

²⁷ Bulletin Quotidien Europe. December 8, 2009. No. 10035.

²⁸ Ibid. March 3, 2010. No. 10089.

²⁹ Joint Statement on the Enhanced Visegrad Group Activities in the Eastern Partnership. V4 Prime Ministers' Summit. Bratislava. June 16, 2011. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/joint-statement-on-the>

³⁰ Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw. URL: <http://www.easternpartnership.org/ru/publication/2011-09-30/eastern-partnership-summit-warsaw>

³¹ European Press on the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw. Pawel Siarkiewicz. URL: <http://www.easternpartnership.org/ru/publication/2011-10-07/european-press-eastern-partnership-summit-arsaw>

³² European press comments on Warsaw Summit. URL: <http://www.euractiv.com/europes-east/diplomatic-fiasco-mars-warsaw-su-news-508077>

On July 23, 2012, a working meeting of European Union leaders and Eastern Partnership foreign ministers held in Brussels signed a roadmap of the Eastern Partnership aimed at “implementing the partnership principles”.³³ The meeting also voiced great expectations connected with the Eastern Partnership Summit due to be held in Vilnius in November 2013. Thus, a Central and Eastern European country, and historically Poland’s closest ally, was once again chosen as the venue for a “decisive summit”.

Throughout 2013, the Eastern Partnership countries increased pressure on Ukraine. In May, an international conference organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary and the Polish Institute for Eastern Studies was held in Budapest as a part of the permanent Ukraine–EU Forum.³⁴ On the fringes of the forum, the prospects of association presented by the Ukrainian delegation and by former and active politicians from European and post–Soviet countries were described as Ukraine buying a ticket on the *Titanic*.

A meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership as well as of Ireland and Lithuania in Krakow on May 17 discussed further measures to enhance the Eastern Partnership in connection with “ambitious” financing plans for 2014–2020.³⁵ It named Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as the most promising partners, and a programme of intensive cooperation with the remaining three countries not far behind.

Interestingly, on the same day, the political secretaries of the Visegrad Group foreign ministries held consultations in Washington on ways to strengthen Trans–Atlantic cooperation and resolve current international problems, including the relations of the Visegrad Group with the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. During the visit, the Visegrad Group political secretaries met with the U.S. Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman and other officials.³⁶

On October 14, the Visegrad Group heads of government met in Budapest to discuss the formation of a Polish–led Visegrad military force by 2016 to strengthen regional and general integration security. It was decided at the same meeting to increase the International Visegrad Fund budget by 250,000 euros from each country, bringing the total to 8 million euros. The rationale for such contributions was the Visegrad Group’s strategic vision of the prospects for the Eastern Partnership.

Thus, throughout 2012–2013, preparations for Ukraine signing the Association Agreement were moving ahead at full speed and the financial and military elements of the Visegrad Group were being strengthened. Meanwhile, dialogue with Russia did not even start. The May 2013 visit of the Visegrad Group state secretaries to Russia was more of a fact–finding affair and yielded no constructive proposals.

³³ Bulletin Quotidien Europe. July 25, 2012. No. 10662.

³⁴ Forum in Budapest – A Decisive Time for Ukraine. URL: <http://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/6th-forum-europe-ukraine/forum-in-budapest-a-decisive-time-for-ukraine/?lang=en#.VJPwSsgKA>

³⁵ Joint Statement on the Eastern Partnership of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group, Ireland and Lithuania. Kraków and Wieliczka. May 17, 2013. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/joint-statement-on-the>

³⁶ Website of the US Embassy in Budapest. URL: <http://www.ircblog.usembassy.hu/2013/05/16/a-visegrad-nyek-a-transzatlanti-kozossag-kuicsfontosagu-tajjai/> (in Hungarian).

3. Economic Relations between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine

The economic relations between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine are anything but intensive, with Ukraine accounting for a modest 1 per cent of the total trade of the Visegrad Group countries.³⁷ Furthermore, half of the Visegrad Group foreign trade with Ukraine has been on the part of Poland.

Ukraine does not present much interest to the Visegrad Group as a source of imports, with its share of imports in each of the group’s countries varying between 0.6 and 1.6 per cent.

A study of foreign trade flows reveals that Ukraine does not present much interest to the Visegrad Group as a source of imports, with its share of imports in each of the group’s countries varying between 0.6 and 1.6 per cent. No trend can be identified in the change of shares in the period under study: it is hard to discern either an upward or a downward trend (see Table 1). The negative impact of the 2009 crisis is quite noticeable. In the post–crisis period the indicators approached, but did not exceed, the pre–crisis level.

Table 1. Ukraine’s Share in the Foreign Trade of Visegrad Group Countries (%)

Year	POLAND		CZECH REPUBLIC		SLOVAKIA		HUNGARY		Total for V4	
	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import
2003	2.90	1.10	0.53	0.72	1.01	1.04	1.03	1.25	1.48	1.02
2004	2.75	1.16	0.68	0.79	1.07	1.37	1.12	1.13	1.52	1.07
2005	2.92	0.98	0.91	0.84	1.30	1.48	1.32	0.83	1.74	0.97
2006	3.60	1.03	1.01	0.64	1.31	1.28	1.77	1.13	2.12	0.98
2007	3.96	1.02	0.97	0.53	1.34	1.08	2.01	1.38	2.27	0.97
2008	3.75	1.10	1.07	0.75	1.38	1.07	2.06	1.27	2.25	1.04
2009	2.51	0.75	0.67	0.50	0.73	0.65	1.56	0.89	1.51	0.70
2010	2.48	1.01	0.71	0.83	0.76	0.94	2.07	0.99	1.63	0.95
2011	2.47	1.29	0.85	0.90	0.83	1.11	2.08	1.31	1.87	1.16
2012	2.89	1.30	1.09	0.78	0.71	0.95	2.27	1.63	1.89	1.16
2013	2.82	1.08	1.02	0.78	0.74	0.96	2.44	1.62

Source: Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>.

³⁷ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

Export to Ukraine is more important for the Visegrad Group countries, especially for Poland and Hungary, with Ukraine accounting for 2–3 per cent of their exports (see Table 1). This is not surprising, because being economically more developed, the Visegrad Group members are more interested in selling their goods. This indicator hovers around 1 per cent for the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

A more optimistic picture emerges if we look at the place of the Visegrad Group in Ukraine's foreign trade: the total share of the Visegrad Group in Ukraine's foreign trade is 6–9 per cent, of which Poland accounts for about one half (see Table 2).

Table 2. Share of Visegrad Countries in Ukraine's Foreign Trade (%)

Year	POLAND		CZECH REPUBLIC		SLOVAKIA		HUNGARY		Total for V4	
	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import
2003	3.31	3.49	0.94	1.37	1.25	0.87	3.68	1.17	9.18	6.90
2004	3.00	3.34	0.92	1.45	1.22	0.75	2.47	1.25	7.61	6.79
2005	2.95	3.89	1.10	1.64	1.48	0.84	2.01	1.73	7.54	8.10
2006	3.50	4.68	0.89	1.82	1.43	0.85	2.47	1.78	8.29	9.13
2007	3.32	4.82	0.87	1.91	1.31	0.86	2.51	2.05	8.88	9.64
2008	3.49	5.00	1.00	1.61	1.36	0.87	2.04	1.50	7.89	8.98
2009	3.04	4.78	0.86	1.37	1.09	0.67	1.84	1.49	6.83	8.31
2010	3.48	4.59	1.22	1.23	1.11	0.73	1.67	2.00	7.48	8.55
2011	4.09	3.85	1.23	1.43	1.23	0.73	1.96	1.61	8.51	7.62
2012	3.74	4.21	1.03	1.47	0.98	0.69	2.20	1.37	7.95	7.74
2013	4.02	5.29	1.30	1.30	1.19	0.86	2.46	1.82	8.97	9.27

Source: Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin from Ukrstat data. URL: <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua> (in Russian).

The analysis of goods traded between the Visegrad Group countries and Ukraine in 2013 does not reveal any unified structure of import and export, with each country having its particular features.

For example, the agricultural sector is only significant in Ukraine's export to Poland (about 10 per cent); for the other Visegrad Group countries it hovers at around 1 per cent. The common stereotype that Ukraine is a major grain producer does not seem to be true, as its share of grain would have been larger. However, supplies of Ukrainian grain to the Visegrad Group countries account for 4–14 per

The analysis of goods traded between the Visegrad Group countries and Ukraine in 2013 does not reveal any unified structure of import and export, with each country having its particular features.

cent of agricultural imports into those countries.³⁸ In relation to the total imports, these indicators are far less significant. Moreover, absolutely all the Visegrad Group countries have a surplus in the bilateral trade of agricultural products, the

³⁸ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

difference being expressed in multiples: Poland by 2.5 times; the Czech Republic by 3.5 times; Slovakia by 5 times; and Hungary by 10 times.³⁹

Agricultural supplies from Ukraine to the Visegrad Group countries have a relatively narrow range and a high degree of specialization, i.e. sugar accounts for 60 per cent of exports to Slovakia; fruit and vegetables account for two-thirds of supplies to Hungary and 50 per cent of supplies to the Czech Republic.⁴⁰ Supplies to Poland are a little more diverse. Half of its imports from Ukraine represent three categories of goods: fresh vegetables and fruit, dried vegetables, fruit and maize.

Ukraine is an attractive market for the agricultural sector of the Visegrad Group countries, whereas only a few Ukrainian agricultural products are traded in these countries.

In turn, agricultural exports from the Visegrad Group countries are far more diverse: livestock, meat,⁴¹ meat products, dairy products, grain (Hungarian maize is widely known), vegetables and fruits and canned products. Thus, Ukraine is an attractive market for the agricultural sector of the Visegrad Group countries, whereas only a few Ukrainian agricultural products are traded in these countries.

The majority of other goods (“finished goods”, “chemical products”, “machinery and equipment”) also reveal a considerable surplus in favour of the Visegrad Group. Ukraine has a surplus in trade with the Visegrad Group countries only in the categories of “mineral raw materials” and “animal fats and vegetable oils”. As for minerals, Ukraine exports iron ore (in significant amounts to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland) and timber (mostly to Hungary) to the Visegrad countries.⁴²

Energy has a special place in Ukraine’s economic links with the Visegrad Group countries. Unlike the familiar situation in which one country provides energy and the other countries buy and consume it, Ukraine is both a supplier and consumer of coal, oil and gas.

It is interesting to compare the above indicators with the amounts Russia offers Ukraine and the Visegrad Group countries (see Table 3)

Ukraine accounts for the biggest share of Russia’s foreign trade among the group of countries analyzed here. But if we look at the Visegrad Group countries all together, a very different picture emerges. Russia exports much more to the Visegrad Group countries than it does to Ukraine. Imports, on the other hand, reveal the opposite trend: the share of supplies from the Visegrad Group is rising, while the share of those from Ukraine is going down.

³⁹ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

⁴⁰ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

⁴¹ An embargo on the import of Polish beef was imposed in 2008 due to an outbreak of mad cow disease. In March 2013, the embargo was extended to include Polish pork because pigs and wild hogs on Polish territory were found to be infected with the African swine fever virus. In May 2014, preparation was underway for consultations between the veterinary services of both countries on lifting the embargo.
URL: http://www.ukrinform.ua/rus/news/ukraina_gotovitsya_otmenit_embargo_na_polskoe_myaso_1634026 (in Russian).

⁴² Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

Table 3. The Share of Visegrad Group Countries and Ukraine in Russia's Foreign Trade (%)

Year	POLAND		CZECH REPUBLIC		SLOVAKIA		HUNGARY		Total for Visegrad Group		UKRAINE	
	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import
2006	3.8	2.5	1.5	1.1	1.5	0.6	2.1	1.4	9.0	5.5	5.0	6.7
2007	3.8	2.3	1.3	1.2	1.5	0.7	1.7	1.3	8.3	5.6	4.7	6.7
2008	4.3	2.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.1	2.0	1.4	9.2	6.5	5.0	6.1
2009	4.1	2.5	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.6	7.9	6.6	4.6	5.4
2010	3.8	2.5	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.4	7.6	6.3	5.8	6.1
2011	4.1	2.2	1.1	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.5	1.1	8.1	5.7	5.9	6.6
2012	3.8	2.4	0.9	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.0	7.2	6.2	5.2	5.7
2013	3.7	2.6	1.1	1.7	1.1	1.1	1.2	0.9	7.1	6.4	4.5	5.0

Source: Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Federal Customs Service of Russia.
URL: www.customs.ru (in Russian).

Ukraine is often seen as a country that has significant coal reserves and is actively extracting them: in 2008–2013, Ukraine produced 75–85 million tonnes of coal every year, six to seven million tonnes of which it exported. Of this amount, 10–15 per cent, or 0.5–1.0 million tonnes per year went to Visegrad Group countries.⁴³ Ukrainian coal exports to Hungary are modest (2,000–5,000 tonnes); exports to the Czech Republic have started to increase in the last three years (120,000–130,000 tonnes), while the bulk of these supplies went to Poland and Slovakia (300,000–600,000 tonnes), which themselves are coal-producing countries, like Ukraine.⁴⁴ Poland and Slovakia also export coal to Ukraine. However, while Slovakia's exports are largely symbolic (1,500–3,000 tonnes), in certain years Poland's coal exports to Ukraine outstripped its imports. The reason for this ratio in Polish–Ukrainian coal supplies is apparently the discrepancy in the production and consumption cycles, although other factors should not be ruled out.

Ukraine has its own oil and gas reserves on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains (the so-called Carpathian zone), along the left bank of the Dnieper River (the Dnieper–Donetsk zone) and in the Crimea area (the so-called Black Sea–Crimean zone). Now that Crimea is part of Russia, these reserves can hardly be counted on, although we cannot rule out loss of income lawsuits. Part of the reserves in the Dnieper–Donetsk zone causes additional problems because of administrative changes in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. In fact, only the Carpathian zone remains untouched. And we have to bear in mind that the production of oil and gas is not big enough to support active export. In 2012–2013, there was even a prohibitive zero quota on the export of Ukrainian crude oil.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Eurostat

⁴³ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

⁴⁴ Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.
URL: <http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb>

⁴⁵ In 2014, Ukraine would lift the ban on the export of oil and restrictions on the import of meat, pork fat, coal and charcoal / segodnya.ua. December 31, 2013
URL: <http://www.segodnya.ua/economics/enews/ukraina-v-2014-godu-otkazalas-ot-zapreta-eksporta-nefti-i-ogranicheniya-importa-myasa-i-sala-uglya-i-koksa-486255.html> (in Russian).

statistics did register oil export from Ukrainian territory to the Visegrad Group countries.⁴⁶ Most probably this was third countries (for example, Azerbaijan) “fiddling” with oil. Oil exports officially resumed in March 2014 due to Ukraine’s dire financial state, but the real volumes are not known. Poland and Hungary export significant amounts of oil to Ukraine.

The situation in the gas sphere seems to be even more severe. One of the tasks of the Ukrainian energy strategy is to increase gas supplies from the European Union. In 2013, Ukraine expected to import 27.3 billion cubic metres of natural gas.⁴⁷ Reorientation of gas flows can mainly be achieved by reversing existing gas pipelines. In this regard, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia offer invaluable assistance. Thus, as early as autumn 2012, Hungary announced it was ready to allow the transit of natural gas to Ukraine from Germany or Croatia (as part of the Adriatic Gas Corridor being built). This is technically possible, and daily transit could amount to some 5 million cubic metres of natural gas. Ukraine has declared that gas supplies from Germany would save it about \$2 billion.⁴⁸ The saving is the result of the fact that Russia sells gas to Ukraine at more than \$400 and to Europe at \$300.⁴⁹ Obviously, in this situation it makes more sense for Ukraine to import Russian gas from Europe. Hungary’s interest in Ukraine was prompted by the wish to diminish what the Hungarians believe to be the one-sided orientation of Hungarian export towards Western Europe.

In 2013, Ukraine almost agreed the possibility of reversing natural gas supplies from Slovakia. If the Slovak route of reversing gas supplies is launched, it may get at least 10 billion cubic metres. In reality, reversing supplies would only be possible with the permission of Gazprom, but the theoretical possibility of re-exporting 15 billion cubic metres is very attractive, both for Ukraine and the Visegrad Group countries seeking additional revenues. The Slovaks did everything to delay the start of reversion, but had to promise to start it in the summer of 2014 under the EU pressure.

As a result, test supplies began in mid-August, while official supplies commenced on September 2.

At the by now traditional GLOBSEC Bratislava International Security Conference in May 2014, the Visegrad Group expressed the need to create a mechanism of “gas solidarity in the event of a gas crisis”.⁵⁰ The details of that mechanism are not yet known, but it can be said that because the gas passing through Ukraine accounts for just 15–16 per cent of the total amount of gas consumed by the European Union, breaks in supplies in that direction affect the Central and Eastern European Countries more than they do to the countries to the West of the EU. In addition, there is a perceived need to shift part of the burden of the cost incurred (or rather, the cost that may be potentially incurred) by the Visegrad Group countries in connection with events in Ukraine to other EU members.

⁴⁶ In 2008–2013, Ukraine delivered 60,000–90,000 tonnes of oil to Poland and 100,000–150,000 tonnes to the Czech Republic every year. Sporadic supplies have been recorded to Slovakia and Hungary.

⁴⁷ OrientPress.hu. 15.08.2013. URL: <http://www.orientpress.hu/117276>

⁴⁸ OrientPress.hu. 27.11.2012. URL: <http://www.orientpress.hu/106945>

⁴⁹ Price of the issue. How Much Do Europeans Pay for Russian Gas? Korrespondent.net. June 12, 2014. URL: <http://www.korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3377201-tsena-voprosa-vo-skolko-evropeitsam-obkhodytsia-rossyskiy-haz> (in Russian).

⁵⁰ ROSBALT. May 15, 2014. URL: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/ukraina/2014/05/15/1268697.html> (in Russian)

The statement of the Visegrad Group suggests that it already has concrete ideas about the mechanism: it should include both the physical capacity to guarantee energy supplies,⁵¹ and the financial instruments of compensation for overpayment,⁵² at the expense of the EU funds.

In general, the Visegrad initiative is a development (or elaboration) of the idea of the EU Energy Union proposed as early as April 2014 by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.⁵³

⁵¹ For example, by sharply increasing energy transportation between countries to redistribute available resources.

⁵² Among the few comments on this mechanism the following is worth noting: "The essence of such solidarity is 'one should be ready to pay for the other a higher price than the market price'". URL: http://www.ukrinform.ua/rus/news/vishegradskaya_chetverka_dumaet_kak_preodolevat_gazoviy_krizis_1633635 (in Russian).

⁵³ Donald Tusk on the Polish project of the European Energy Union. URL: <http://www.premier.gov.pl/29/03/2014>; <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/donald-tusk-on-the-polish-project-of-the-european-energy-union.html>

4. Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership in the Policy of the Visegrad Countries

Poland

The Eastern Partnership programme is arguably the most significant and ambitious Polish initiative within the European Union. It was the Republic of Poland that was the driver behind that programme, the showing persistence and perseverance in its development and arguing its importance for a European unity and the implementation of the European Union's Eastern policy.

"Polish diplomacy was aware," writes Polish researcher A. Legucka, "that it would be a long process, but the European perspective was seen as a powerful factor of change within these countries".⁵⁴ Special EU assistance programmes were proposed to implement the set targets. Poland proposed creating a European fund in support of democracy and a European fund for freedom.

Throughout the European Parliament session in 2004–2008, Polish ministers repeatedly called for giving the peoples of Eastern Europe, notably of Ukraine, the possibility to join the European Union and revise the Neighbourhood Policy, which does not envisage enlargement of the European Union.

Under the Tusk government, which included Radosław Sikorski as Foreign Minister, the country's foreign policy became markedly more pro-European and was looking for new cooperation opportunities. One manifestation of this was the Polish–Swedish proposal to create the Eastern Partnership Programme. Donald Tusk stressed in a statement that Poland would pay particular attention to eastern policy, with the special focus on relations with Ukraine and Belarus.

The Polish–Swedish initiative was favourably received by EU members (for example, German Chancellor Angela Merkel backed it). However, there were concerns about the reluctance to finance the Eastern Partnership. Spain and Portugal feared that this would increase illegal immigration. Besides, the majority of EU countries did not want the programme to provoke Russia's negative reaction. It is no secret that in Europe Poland is seen as a state that has certain inferiority complex when it comes to Russia. In the opinion of A. Włodkowska of the Institute of International Relations in Warsaw, Russia deliberately fosters the idea of Poland as a Russophobe state invariably acting against Moscow.⁵⁵

Polish scholar G. Grosse believes that the European Neighbourhood Policy, within which the Eastern Partnership is developing, is biased in favour of the European Union: "[The European Neighbourhood Policy] does not create a new post-Westphalian regional system, it is rather an ideological and institutional platform that makes it possible to maximize European interests and legitimize dominance with regard to its neighbours."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Legucka A. Porównanie koncepcji polityki wschodniej UE // Europejska Polityka Sąsiedstwa. Warsaw, 2012, p. 82 (in Polish).

⁵⁵ Włodkowska A. Perspektywy Partnerstwa Wschodniego // Europejska Polityka Sąsiedstwa. Warsaw, 2012, p. 321 (in Polish).

⁵⁶ Grosse G. Analiza koncepcji geopolitycznych stosowanych wobec Europejskiej Polityki Sąsiedstwa // Europejska Polityka Sąsiedstwa. Warsaw, 2012, p. 73 (in Polish).

The key factor that prompted Poland to come up with the Eastern Partnership initiative was undoubtedly geostrategic.⁵⁷ Poland pretends to obtain the role of regional leader, and these claims often clash with Russia's interests. Seeking to ensure its security, Poland's foreign policy cannot ignore the possibility of increased Russian influence in the "near abroad" countries. This can be avoided, according to many Polish analysts, only if Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova reorient their policies towards the West. In other words, these countries should adopt Western European values and become integrated in the European structures.

Seeking to ensure its security, Poland's foreign policy cannot ignore the possibility of increased Russian influence in the "near abroad" countries.

When Poland initiated the Eastern Partnership programme, it had Ukraine in mind above all. Back in 1993, the Polish Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka characterized relations with Ukraine as a "strategic partnership". In turn, at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit in 2009 President Yushchenko declared that the Partnership's goals corresponded to Ukraine's strategic goals.

Poland saw the Eastern Partnership as a departure from its special relationship with Ukraine towards a common Eastern policy. This Polish approach plays down the anti-Russian aspects of its policy in Ukraine. Not all Polish analysts agree with this approach, insisting that Ukraine plays a special role in Poland's Eastern policy.⁵⁸

The problems faced by the Eastern Partnership were highlighted at the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit in the autumn of 2011. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk called for new life to be breathed into the Partnership's activities. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was present at the Summit. He was sceptical about the programme and proposed to invest it with concrete substance. What is more, he repeatedly urged the need to allow Ukraine to join the European Union which, as it is known, was not the intention of the "old Europe" countries.

Nevertheless, Poland still believed its programme could succeed. Donald Tusk proposed that the principles and goals of the Eastern Partnership be revisited in order to make them more concrete and realistic: "We need a new definition of Eastern Partnership which would focus on the principles of 'more for more' and 'less for less'.... Our neighbours must see that if they follow the path of democratic and market reforms they will be rewarded. In choosing the opposite path they will face serious consequences."⁵⁹

In general, the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit was not a breakthrough event but it cannot be seen as a failure. Its participants managed to agree to increase financing and create an Eastern Partnership Academy of Public Administration.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Mizerska-Wrotkowska M. Geneza i instytucjonalizacja Partnerstwa Wschodniego // Między sąsiedstwem a integracją. Założenia, funkcjonowanie i perspektywy Partnerstwa Wschodniego Unii Europejskiej. Warsaw, 2011, p. 52; Zurawski P. Wiel Grajewski Partnerstwo Wschodnie Unii Europejskiej główne, czy pomocnicze narzędzie polskiej polityki wschodniej? // Partnerstwo wschodnie w kontekście europejskiej polityki sąsiedstwa i agendy Grupy Wyszehradzkiej. Krakow, 2010, p. 46 (both in Polish).

⁵⁸ Stolarczyk M. Nowe akcenty w polityce wschodniej Polski pod koniec pierwszej dekady XX I w. // Partnerstwo wschodnie. Wielka szansa Europy. Poznań-Chorzów, 2011, p. 36 (in Polish).

⁵⁹ Council of the European Union. URL: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/homepage/showfocus.aspx?lang=en&focusID=68859>

⁶⁰ Joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw on September 29–30, 2011. URL: <http://www.eap-csf.eu/ru/news-events/news/joint-declaration-of-the-warsaw-eastern-partnership-summit> (in Russian).

In effect, Poland reaffirmed its ambition to be the regional leader.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, member of the European Parliament, thinks it is necessary to continue developing the Eastern Partnership programme despite all the difficulties. Otherwise, it would fail as a project and as a projection of the European Union's foreign policy goals. "Its collapse would be very painful because the majority of our neighbours are a litmus test of the EU's ability to establish levers of influence in other countries," the Polish MEP believes. In his opinion, due to European Union's sluggishness, Eastern Partnership countries may fall under the influence of other agents. Moreover, they have an alternative to European integration which does not require any efforts to adopt specific standards.⁶¹

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic considers the Eastern Partnership programme to be useful because it promotes not only the economic and other standards of the European community among partner countries, but also fosters their cooperation with the European Union on the basis of common values. The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic (2011) emphasizes that shared values is the main criterion in its relations with the Eastern Partnership countries, both on a bilateral basis and within the EU framework. Czech foreign policy documents seal the principles of respect for independence and territorial integrity of partner countries. Its aim is to maintain political, social and economic stability in these countries.⁶² As of late, the Czech foreign policy has paid special attention to human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, the development of political pluralism, freedom of the media and civil society in the countries with which it is developing its relations.

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The Czech foreign policy establishment expresses regret that the Eastern Partnership is not regarded as an initiative coming from Prague within the EU, and that Czech diplomacy has faced criticism for being rather passive. Czech experts feel that the Czech people are, if not the parents, then certainly the godfathers of the programme.⁶³ When the Eastern Partnership was launched, it was backed by Václav Klaus, the then President of the Czech Republic. Although he had a solid reputation for being sceptical about the European Union's political and legal initiatives, his support confirmed that the Czech Republic was genuinely

⁶¹ Looking Back on Euronest: Interview with Member of the European Parliament Jacek Saryusz-Wolski.
URL: <http://eastbook.eu/ru/2013/06/country-ru/armenia-ru/ogliadyvaias-na-evronest-interview-s-deputatom-evroparlamenta-jacekom-sariushem-vloskim> (in Russian).

⁶² Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky.
URL: http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/vyrocní_zpravy_a_dokumenty/koncepce_zahranicni_politiky_ceske.html (in Czech).

⁶³ The Head of the Northern and Eastern Europe Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Elishka Zhigova revealed on Czech radio what she said was a little-known fact. She said that the idea of the Eastern Partnership was conceived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in 2006 and, after being discussed at various levels, caught the attention of the Polish and the Swedish colleagues. This led to the elaboration of the Eastern Partnership programme, which was officially launched during the Czech presidency of the European Union.
URL: http://www.rozhlas.cz/cro6/stop/_zprava/815623 (in Czech).

interested in promoting the Eastern direction of the EU policy. At the same time, Václav Klaus deemed it necessary to stress that he saw the Eastern Partnership only as proof of the EU openness towards a new form of relations, but did not see it as an alternative to the EU membership of these countries in the long run. The Eastern Partnership, in his opinion, is based more on its members' aspirations towards freedom, democracy and market economy, rather than geographical proximity.⁶⁴ Mirek Topolánek, who was Prime Minister of the Czech Republic in 2009, summed up the goal of the Eastern Partnership in the following way: "The European Union has a vital interest in its neighbours being stable countries."⁶⁵

The most interesting part for the Czech Republic was the possibility of diversifying energy resources and thus strengthening its energy security

There is no doubt that shared values, the development of democratic institutions, supporting stability in the region, a free trade zone and visa-free travel are important elements of the Eastern Partnership programme. However, it is more likely that the most interesting part for the Czech Republic was the possibility of diversifying energy resources and thus strengthening its energy security (this is also one of the programme's goals).

The Eastern direction of the EU policy is one of the Czech Republic's foreign policy priorities, and Czech diplomats are trying to attract as much attention to this idea among EU member states as possible: France, Spain and Italy, countries that are primarily concerned with the southern direction of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Petr Mareš, who is responsible for the Eastern direction of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, urged the need for taking into account the fact that in the East there are East European neighbours, while in the south there are merely "neighbours of Europe" while defining the priorities of European Neighbourhood Policy.⁶⁶ In the opinion of Petr Mareš, the fact that Germany consistently shows interest in the Eastern Partnership programme is significant. Although the Germans do not welcome further enlargement of the European Union, which will inevitably lead to greater costs, it considers Berlin to be a reliable partner of Prague in implementing the Eastern Partnership policy.

Little by little, participation in the Eastern Partnership programme and its further development became one of the Czech Republic's basic interests. As Petr Mareš told *Česká Pozice* online magazine, "the next government may change emphasis in some areas, but the Eastern Partnership is in any case so closely linked to the interests of the Czech Republic that I am not worried about its prospects as a Czech foreign policy priority."⁶⁷ This view is shared by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Lubomír Zaorálek.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Blesk.cz. April 27, 2015.

URL: <http://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-politika/114882/klaus-na-summitu-unie-se-bude-dal-rozsirovat.html> (in Czech).

⁶⁵ Mezinárodní politika, Prague, 2009. No. 4, p. 14 (in Czech).

⁶⁶ Macek D. Nechává EU země Východního partnerství napospas Rusku? May 23, 2013. URL: http://www.ceskapozice.lidovky.cz/nechava-eu-zeme-vychodniho-partnerstvi-napospas-rusku-pgx-/tema.aspx?c=A130518_080619_pozice_126106 (in Czech).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The Czech Republic has paid great attention to assisting the emergence of the civil society in the partner countries. In 2013, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic announced a contest of projects to promote the goals of the Civil Society Forum (CSF) in the Eastern Partnership countries. The projects were to reflect the priorities of Working Group 1 (“Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability”) and Working Group 4 (“Contacts between People”).⁶⁹

Prague, along with Warsaw, Bratislava and Budapest, have always emphasized that the Eastern Partnership does not infringe on Russia’s interests. Assessing this foreign policy initiative, Václav Klaus stressed (without specifically mentioning Russia) that “no country needs to be afraid that the Eastern Partnership is aimed against it.”⁷⁰ Alexandr Vondra of the Civic Democratic Party said that Eastern Partnership was not a defensive organization like, for example, NATO. The Partnership only seeks to promote political and economic stability on the territory between the European Union and Russia. In his opinion, the European Union sees the Eastern Partnership and the development of relations with Russia as two separate, parallel processes independent of each other.⁷¹

Nevertheless, Prague was aware that Moscow had its reasons for being cautious about the programme. The representatives of the opposition Social Democratic Party noted that the Eastern Partnership understandably irritates Russia, and this, coupled with the Czech Republic’s intention to be part of the U.S. anti-missile shield, complicates relations between Russia and the Czech Republic.⁷² Lubomir Zaorálek, while still Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Social Democratic Party, rejected outright the Czech Republic’s participation in the U.S. anti-missile shield, citing Moscow’s anger over the anti-Russian orientation of the Eastern Partnership.⁷³

Prague was aware that Moscow had its reasons for being cautious about the programme.

Throughout 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic officially stressed that the Eastern Partnership was not directed against Russia. Nonetheless, they admitted that one of the motives of creating the programme was the wish of the European Union to counterbalance Russian influence. Czech diplomats felt that it was their task to persuade Russia to cooperate in the Eastern Partnership region, which in their opinion was very useful and in line with common European interests. At the same time, they understood that Ukraine’s choice between the Customs Union and the free trade zone was at stake. Cooperation with the

⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Eastern Partnership Grant Scheme 2013 / Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. April 18, 2013.

URL: http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/human_rights/cz_mfa_eastern_partnership_grant_scheme.html

⁷⁰ Blesk.cz. April 27, 2011.

URL: <http://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-politika/114882/klaus-na-summitu-unie-se-bude-dal-rozsirovat.html> (in Czech).

⁷¹ Vondra A. Vychodní partnerství nikoho nikam, nevytlačuje a nikam ,neproniká // Mezinárodní. Politika. Prague, 2009. No. 4, p. 29.

⁷² Hospodářské noviny HN.IHNED.CZ. January 25, 2008. Radar bude hlídat Rusko, tvrdí Zaorálek.

URL: <http://www.hn.ihned.cz> (in Czech).

⁷³ Hospodářské noviny HN.IHNED.CZ. January 25, 2008. Radar bude hlídat Rusko, tvrdí Zaorálek.

URL: <http://www.hn.ihned.cz> (in Czech).

European Union, in their opinion, implies modernization, while Russia could offer was discounts on energy resources.⁷⁴

For a long time, official Prague pretended that the Eastern Partnership was not a matter of geopolitical rivalry between the European Union and Moscow. However, when the European Union launched the programme following the 2009 Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Moscow was clearly angered by the possibility of losing influence in the former Soviet Republics that had joined the Eastern Partnership. Some analysts admitted that a more active EU policy in the countries neighbouring Russia led to stagnation and even a cooling of relations between the European Union and Russia. Others believed that the Eastern Partnership was unlikely to threaten Russia's interests in the region, though they did not rule out that it might become a bone of contention between Moscow and Brussels in the future. The prospect of increased EU influence on the internal development of the former Soviet Union countries cannot be welcomed by Moscow, because it defines the post-Soviet space as "an area of its territorial interests."⁷⁵

Cooperation with the European Union, in their opinion, implies modernization, while Russia could offer was discounts on energy resources.

The Czech Republic expressed hope that the Eastern Partnership countries would come to terms with the idea that membership of the European Union was not on the agenda. Official Prague paid attention to the fact that some countries wanted closer ties with the European Union more than the others. Ukraine, in their view, belonged to the first group of such countries.⁷⁶

Czech analysts have always considered Ukraine to be a very important country, not only for the European Union, but for Russia as well.⁷⁷ Ukraine was to become the locomotive of the Eastern Partnership. But that state, which appeared on the world map 23 years ago, has yet to make up its mind about its value benchmarks. Analysts point out that some in Ukraine feel dismayed that the West, having supported the Orange Revolution, then left the country alone. According to the Czech officials, this was not the case. After all, it was membership in the Eastern Partnership that envisaged assisting Ukraine in solving the problems of democratic

It was membership in the Eastern Partnership that envisaged assisting Ukraine in solving the problems of democratic development.

development. Moreover, it is up to Ukraine to decide how to use this assistance and advice. Prague understood the apathy of Ukrainian society with regard to the European Union: "The disenchantment was caused by the fact that the Eastern Partnership is seen in Ukraine as a double standards policy. The European Union

⁷⁴ Česká iniciativa v projektu Východní partnerství.

URL: http://www.rozhlas.cz/cro6/stop/_zprava/ceska-iniciativa-v-projektu-vychodni-partnerstvi--1171095 (in Czech).

⁷⁵ Kulhánek J. Rusko a Východní partnerství: geopolitické soupeření prozatím nehrozí // Mezinárodní politika. Prague, 2013. No. 4 (in Czech).

⁷⁶ Česká iniciativa v projektu Východní partnerství.

URL: http://www.rozhlas.cz/cro6/stop/_zprava/ceska-iniciativa-v-projektu-vychodni-partnerstvi--1171095

⁷⁷ Kulhánek J. Rusko a Východní partnerství: geopolitické soupeření prozatím nehrozí // Mezinárodní politika. Prague, 2013. No. 4 (in Czech).

declares one set of principles, but in reality the EU member countries stick to very different approaches, for instance, in their respective visa policies.⁷⁸

The heads of state of Central and Eastern European Countries discussed the “strategy of growth in post-crisis recovery” at a summit in Bratislava in June 2013. During that multilateral meeting, numerous bilateral talks took place, including between President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich and President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman.

Until now, relations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine were anything but smooth, largely due to the character of Czech policy. For example, on November 18, 2010, former Minister of Economy of Ukraine Bohdan Danylyshyn applied for political asylum in the Czech Republic, and his request was approved. On November 29, Viktor Yanukovich had his first and only official meeting as president with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Karel Schwarzenberg. On May 13, 2011, the Security Service of Ukraine announced it had exposed Czech military attaches at the embassy in Kiev as spies: they were Colonel *Zdeněk Kubiček* and the military attaché Major Petra Novotna. On January 6, 2012, Yulia Tymoshenko’s husband asked for political asylum in the Czech Republic. All these events were accompanied by high-profile political statements on both sides. However, neither Prague nor Kiev were interested in breaking diplomatic relations.

Positive shifts seemed to emerge in Czech-Ukrainian relations in April 2013. One of the reasons for this was Miloš Zeman’s election as President of the Czech Republic. On April 17, the Advisor to the President of Ukraine Andrii Goncharuk met with ambassador-at-large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Petr Mareš on the issues of the Eastern Partnership. On April 20–21, Karel Schwarzenberg went to Kiev on what the Czech side said was a “private” visit. On May 15, Andrii Goncharuk met with the head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration of the Czech Republic Hynek Kmoníček. On the whole, the bilateral diplomatic activities in the spring and summer of 2013 showed that Prague had decided to unfreeze its relations with Kiev.

During the talks in Bratislava, Czech President Miloš Zeman was invited to pay an official visit to Kiev, and the possibility of holding Ukrainian-Czech business forums was also discussed. In May 2013, Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic Petr Bendl visited Kiev for talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Nikolai Prisyazhnyuk. In October 2013, Miloš Zeman visited Kiev. On the eve of the visit, speaking at a press conference after the Visegrad Group Summit, the Czech President declared that he had accepted the invitation to visit Ukraine from his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovich.⁷⁹

Slovakia

Slovakia supports the expansion of the European Union and the admission of new members (notably Croatia). Therefore, Slovakia was especially interested in

⁷⁸ Česká iniciativa v projektu Východní partnerství.
URL: http://www.rozhlas.cz/cro6/stop/_zprava/ceska-iniciativa-v-projektu-vychodni-partnerstvi--1171095 (in Czech).

⁷⁹ Czech President to Visit Kiev a Month Ahead of the Vilnius Summit. Inpress.ua. July 3, 2013.
URL: <http://www.inpress.ua/ru/politics/12428-prezident-chekhi-priedet-v-kiev-za-mesyats-dol-vilnyusskogo-sammita> (in Russian).

signing an association agreement with Ukraine. According to official statements, Slovakia's foreign policy seeks to actively contribute to the shaping of the Eastern Partnership policy and the EU policy in the post-Soviet space in general.⁸⁰ Until the very summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák said that the Eastern Partnership was not aimed against any country and called on Russia to actively cooperate with the European Union.⁸¹

Slovakia has a common border with one of the partners, namely, Ukraine. Therefore, it also sees the Eastern Partnership as an instrument of resolving acute conflicts in the region.

Slovakia was an ardent supporter of the Eastern Partnership initiative from its inception. The country's interest in cooperation with the Eastern Partnership was based on a respect for democratic principles and the commitment to political and economic stability in these countries. Slovakia believes they needed help and advice in moving towards further integration. Bratislava sees this as its special mission and is ready to offer its resources to implement the Eastern Partnership programme. Besides, Slovakia has a common border with one of the partners, namely, Ukraine. Therefore, it also sees the Eastern Partnership as an instrument of resolving acute conflicts in the region.

Bratislava did everything to maintain cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries on a multilateral and bilateral basis. It was important for it to see as many countries as possible sign association agreements with the European Union and become members of the free trade zone. Slovakia was looking forward to Ukraine signing documents on deepening European integration in the autumn of 2013.⁸² In the opinion of the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Pavol Paška, this could be important not only politically, in terms of stability and democratic development, but also economically. Mutual trade was expected to triple.⁸³ It should be noted that the previous all-time high in the trade between Slovakia and Ukraine was 1.2 billion euros.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the issue of whether Brussels should, out of geopolitical considerations, increase its strategic influence on Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in order to speed up the process of their rapprochement with the European Union (Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia are not considered in that context for various reasons) was repeatedly discussed in Bratislava. Politicians also wondered how to reconcile this approach with the effective implementation of measures for closer cooperation with the European Union, one of which was strict adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms.

⁸⁰ Miroslav Lajčák: Russia and EU need to trust each other. MGIMO University, September 8, 2009. URL: <http://www.mgimo.ru/news/university/document120339.phtml> (in Russian).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Official site of the Slovak Government. URL: http://www.economy.gov.sk/aktuality-t-malatinaky-vyznamnym-nastrojom-rastu-je-orientacia-na-trhy-tretich-krajin/10s140395c?set_subframe=text (in Slovak).

⁸³ Pavol Paška vyjadril podporu Ukrajine. TERAZ / Slovensko, October 1, 2015. URL: <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/pavol-paska-vyjadril-podporu-ukrajine/59859-clanok.html> (in Slovak).

⁸⁴ Official site of the President of the Slovak Republic. June 17, 2011. URL: <http://www.prezident.sk/?vystupenie-prezidenta-sr-ivana-gasparovica-na-otvoreni-slovenskougrajinskeho-ekonomickeho-fora-bratislava-17-6-2011> (in Slovak).

In autumn 2013, the presidents of the Central and Eastern European EU member countries met in New York to discuss Ukraine's European future. During the discussion, Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič said that the Slovak Republic is a friend of Ukraine and supported a European future for its eastern neighbour. "We consider the issue of Ukraine's European orientation to be a strategic issue for Europe in general. This is our fundamental stance." He recalled that Ukraine was a European country that belonged to European politics and culture. He said Ukraine was moving towards integration with Europe and its parliament had every chance of passing the necessary legislation.

For almost a year, Ivan *Gašparovič* and Polish President Bronisław Komorowski held talks with Viktor Yanukovich on strengthening Ukraine's economic and political ties with the European Union. The Slovak President stressed his commitment to continuing this policy, because it met Bratislava's vital interests.

For Slovakia, it was vital that the Eastern Partnership's Vilnius Summit sent an unequivocal signal to the partner states, as well as to Russia, that compliance with the EU norms and standards should in no way diminish the importance of economic cooperation of Eastern Partnership countries with Russia.⁸⁵

According to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic Miroslav Lajčák, Brussels was aware that the European Union and the Eastern Partnership were not the only players in the region. "There is also Russia, which has its own projects – the Customs Union, the Eurasian Union, etc. Our partners should themselves decide the direction they want to move in. [...] We understand that the ultimate goal of all these programmes is the same: to have a stable and developed neighbourhood. The difference is only in the instruments of achieving that goal," the Slovak diplomat said.⁸⁶

The conclusions are obvious. Slovakia did not see the Eastern Partnership as an alternative to Russian influence, but it recognized de facto that Russia had its geopolitical interests in the post-Soviet space and tried by its rhetoric to mitigate the problem of a Russia-EU confrontation. At the same time, there has been no consensus about the essence of the Eastern Partnership programme among Slovak experts.⁸⁷

Hungary

Initially, Hungary was fairly detached from the Eastern Partnership programme for several reasons. To begin with, it was not the leader of the programme unlike Slovenia and then Poland. The Czech Republic joined the process later because it was holding the presidency of the European Council the year it was adopted. Secondly, from the late 1980s, Hungary had its own "neighbourhood policy", which was concerned much more with conational diasporas in neighbouring countries that emerged after the two post-war settlements. At the same time, Poland had minorities living in Belarus and Ukraine.

⁸⁵ Official site of the President of the Slovak Republic. URL: <http://www.prezident.sk/?spravy-tlacoveho-oddelenia> (in Slovak).

⁸⁶ REGNUM. URL: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1646732.html> (in Russian).

⁸⁷ REGNUM. URL: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1691469.html#ixzz2iM26mDiv> (in Russian).

In terms of the eastern direction, Hungary was only interested in about 160,000 Hungarians living in Ukraine's Subcarpathian area. Budapest was and is still engaged with its own "neighbourhood policy", which has different vectors compared to those of Poland. Nevertheless, before it assumed the EU presidency in January 2011, Hungary included the Eastern Partnership Summit in its agenda – even though it was to be succeeded during the presidency of Poland, the country which had initiated the programme. Hungary lost the right to host the summit, but it has been a partner of Poland ever since, including in this foreign policy dimension.

Budapest was and is still engaged with its own "neighbourhood policy", which has different vectors compared to those of Poland.

Hungary experienced problems deciding what its regional priorities should be. In the second half of 2013, it was simultaneously the President of the Visegrad Group (beginning from July 1) and the Central European Initiative (from January 2013). Thus, 2013 was more of a Central European year for Hungary. As Deputy State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Hungary Szabolcs Takács said, Hungary's foreign policy had two important directions: the Eastern Partnership and integration with the Western Balkans,⁸⁸ with the second direction being more important than the first. Despite the "enlargement fatigue" after 2008, Hungary sees it as its duty to persuade the Western European Union partners to continue this line.⁸⁹

The Eastern Partnership policy puts the European Union into a serious conflict with Russia.

It is worth noting that there is little analytical literature in Hungary on the problem of the Eastern Partnership. Judging from the remarks of Hungarian diplomats, politicians and scientists, Hungarians have their own view on partnership. Once Director of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs Janos Terenyi, when discussing the differences between the Paris-led Southern Neighbourhood policy and the Eastern Partnership during a roundtable meeting with the Slovak colleagues, referred to Prague and not Warsaw as the main driver of the latter.⁹⁰ It is unlikely that the man who was at that time the country's chief foreign policy analyst had made a slip of the tongue. If that were the case, then by awarding the idea of the Eastern Partnership to Prague, Hungary was more likely associating the programme with the Slavic or Pan-Slavic idea. And this may account for its traditionally guarded attitude towards it.⁹¹ It should be noted that Janos Terenyi sees no strategic differences between the policy of enlargement and the policy of partnership. In his opinion, both have the same road and the same goal. Finally, he is definitely aware that the Eastern Partnership policy puts the European Union into a serious conflict with Russia.

⁸⁸ 2013 és 2014 is Közép-Európa éve a magyar külpolitikában. August 10, 2013. URL: <http://www.2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/kulugyminiszterium/biztonsagpolitikaert-felelos-helyettes-allamtitkarsag/hirek/2013-es-2014-is-kozep-europa-eve-a-magyar-kulpolitikaban> (in Hungarian).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Keleti Partnerség: terjeszkedés Oroszország felé. KITEKINTŐ. 20.05.2009. URL: http://www.kitekinto.hu/karpat-medence/2009/05/20/szines_tarsasag_kopogtat_az_eu_kapujan/#.UofHe9JdVtU (in Hungarian).

⁹¹ With the advent of a Fidesz government to power, the idea of Hungarians belonging to the Turan branch has been actively promoted. It began to be more generously financed than the Finno-Ugrian idea.

Analysing the prospects and options open to Hungarian diplomacy under a new Cabinet of Ministers, András Deák, noted Hungarian analyst of the Institute of International Affairs, made the following forecast: Hungary, which has brilliant diplomats in the traditional area of the Balkans, will continue to have more success there. Since it has no comparable potential in the eastern direction, it could only fulfil some technical tasks as part of the Eastern Partnership.⁹²

Hungary's activity with regard to the Eastern Partnership was closely linked with the need to promote proposals for the agenda of its presidency. There again the duality of that country's geopolitical position made itself felt. On the one hand, Hungary is historically a country of the Danube Region, one of the heirs to Austro-Hungary. On the other hand, it has been a member of the Visegrad Group for more than 20 years now and out of solidarity with it has to promote a programme that is of much greater interest to its northern neighbours than it is to itself. As a result, Hungary proposed two programmes for its presidency in the European Council: the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and intensification of the Eastern Partnership. However, history offered another path, claiming the entire potential of Hungary's diplomacy to be involved in diminishing the negative consequences of the Arab Spring.

For Hungary, the Eastern Partnership is more a demonstration of solidarity because its interests, and the real potential of the programme, are incommensurate with those it has in the Balkans. Besides, the unquestioned favourites of that policy are Belarus, in which Hungary has no national interests, and Ukraine, where it has some interests that are nevertheless disproportionate in scope to other areas of the neighbourhood policy. Besides, judging from what Hungarian analysts say and write, the people in the country realize that in reality the European Union seeks to consolidate its presence where Russia is absent or has not yet managed to establish itself.⁹³

For Hungary, the Eastern Partnership is more a demonstration of solidarity because its interests, and the real potential of the programme, are incommensurate with those it has in the Balkans.

In March 2010, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary Péter Balázs called on his European colleagues to fill the Eastern Partnership with real content and real financial support.⁹⁴ In 2010, during the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary proposed that a “group of friends”, including states that are members or supporters of the programme, be created to support the partnership.⁹⁵

According to Enikő Győri, the Hungarian Minister of State for European Affairs Brussels does not put its stake on Budapest's initiatives, preferring to deal with Warsaw on that issue.⁹⁶ Indeed, in deciding whether to hold the Partnership

⁹² Víziónak a Visegrádi Négyek / EURACTIV.HU 05 May 5, 2010.
URL: http://www.kitekinto.hu/europal/2010/05/05/viziotlanok_a_visegradi_negyek/#.UoflotJdVtU (in Hungarian).

⁹³ Nagy Gergely: Határainkon hódít az EU. July 28, 2009.
URL: http://www.kitekinto.hu/hatter/2009/07/28/nyujtozkodik_az_unio_oroszorszag_fele/#.UofHb9JdVtU (in Hungarian).

⁹⁴ Budapest nagyobb sebességre kapcsolt / EURACTIV.HU 05.03.2010.
URL: http://www.kitekinto.hu/europa/2010/03/05/budapest_nagyobb_sebessereg_kapcsolt/#.UoflRdJdVtU (in Hungarian).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Túlélésre játszik a magyar EU-elnökség / KITEKINTŐ ÖSSZEÁLLÍTÁS. October 11, 2010.
URL: http://www.kitekinto.hu/bem-rakparti/2010/11/11/tulelesre_jatszik_a_magyar_eu-elnokseg/#.UofJetJdVtU (in Hungarian).

summit in Hungary or in Poland, which succeeded each other as presidents in 2011, Brussels decided in favour of Poland. However, that incident, preceded by exchanges between the two foreign ministries and governments over the Eastern Partnership programme, opened the line for closer interaction between Warsaw and Budapest on issues related to the Partnership.

The Eastern Partnership provided the keynote of the Visegrad Group presidency of Poland in 2012–2013 and Hungary in 2013–2014.

In May, 2013 when Ukraine was expected to sign an association agreement the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary and the Polish Institute for Eastern Studies held the 6th Ukraine–EU Forum. Although the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine did not attend the forum, it provided an opportunity for the Visegrad Group countries to confirm their readiness to patronize Ukraine in its “European choice”.

Opening the event, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary János Martonyi linked the success or failure of the November 2013 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius with the signing of an association agreement by Ukraine: “the upcoming summit will answer many questions, the major of which is whether we have managed to awaken an interest among the Partnership countries in strengthening cooperation with the EU.”⁹⁷ Deputy Prime Minister of Hungary Tibor Navracsics then gave a speech, noting that, first of all, Hungary considered it an honour to be hosting a forum devoted to Ukraine, and second, that after 2010 (when the Fidesz government came to power), Hungary acquired positive experience in overcoming such economic problems as its budget deficit – experience it could share with the Eastern Partnership countries.⁹⁸

On May 18, 2013, after the Krakow Summit of the Visegrad Group, János Martonyi declared that the Group was not indifferent to what was happening to the east, and therefore sought to do everything possible to bring these countries closer to the European Union.⁹⁹ At the same time, he stressed that it was important to understand the significance of the Programme for the European Union. Having assumed presidency of the Visegrad Group on July 1, 2013, Hungary was leading the Visegrad Group towards strengthening the Euro–Atlantic policy. Szabolcs Takacs, recently appointed Deputy State Secretary for Global Affairs of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, paid his first to the United States in order to express solidarity with Washington on all international issues, including Syria. In early October, the secretaries of state for political issues of the four foreign ministers visited Kiev, thus continuing the practice of joint visits by secretaries of state to the key countries on which the Eastern Partnership may in one way or another depend, a practice begun under the Polish presidency. The Hungarian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs said that the aim of the visit was to demonstrate that the “Visegrad Group was a friend of Ukraine.”¹⁰⁰ Besides, they expressed

⁹⁷ 8th Economic forum Europe – Ukraine.

URL: <http://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/6th-forum-europe-ukraine/?lang=en#Uoz0t9JdVtV>

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Martonyi János: a visegrádiak krakkói találkozója felgyorsíthatja a keleti partnerországok közeledését az EU-hoz. May 18, 2013. URL: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulugyminiszterium/hirek/martonyi-janos-a-visegradiak-krakkoi-talalkozoja-felgyorsithatja-a-keleti-partnerorszagok-kozeledeset-az-eu-hoz>

¹⁰⁰ A visegrádi csoport értékeli az uniós közeledést célzó ukrán reformokat. October 4, 2013. URL: <http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/kulugyminiszterium/biztonsagpolitikaert-felelos-helyettes-allamtitkarsag/hirek/a-visegradi-csoport-ertekeli-az-unios-kozeledest-celzo-ukran-reformokat> (in Hungarian).

hope that Ukraine would comply with the requirements that still remained and that the November summit in Vilnius would open a new page in the Eastern Partnership policy.

On October 21, 2013, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary János Martonyi confirmed his country's position during a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Luxemburg. He said that the signing of an agreement with Ukraine corresponded to the interests of the Visegrad Group countries, as was the initialling of similar agreements with Moldova and Georgia. He lamented the fact that the issues of signing similar agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, which opted for stronger ties with the Eurasian Customs Union, was not on the Vilnius Summit agenda and urged the European Union to work towards free trade agreements with these countries.¹⁰¹ Besides, Hungary's top diplomat noted the differences with Russia over the Eastern Partnership and expressed hope that "they will be resolved over time."¹⁰²

With the Fidesz government coming into power, Hungary found its own eastern policy formula. The national-conservative government of Viktor Orbán described it as "opening up to the East". The Prime Minister thus formulated its essence: "We are sailing under the Western sail, but in the Eastern wind".¹⁰³ Apparently, this should be interpreted as an admission that being competitive in the Western integration without relying on the resources of Eastern neighbours in the continent was becoming even more problematic for Hungary (and for the Central and Eastern European region as a whole). However, this policy, like the Euro-Atlantic policy, was not given a proper conceptual basis.

Hungary and Ukraine successfully solved the issues of gas supply, the import of Hungarian agricultural produce (although Ukraine is interested in selling its agricultural produce on the European markets). Nevertheless, Kiev has a guarded attitude to Hungary's policy of granting Hungarian citizenship to its compatriots living abroad and is not welcoming the policy of dual citizenship in its own country. About 160,000 Hungarians live in Ukraine's Subcarpathian area, and many of them took part in the parliamentary elections in Hungary in 2014. Hungary opened a consulate in the Subcarpathian city of Berehove and is actively investing in the region, taking part in numerous trade, economic and construction projects.

Having stepped up its participation in the Eastern Partnership and collaborating with its Visegrad Group allies, Hungary can find – and is finding – the opportunity to achieve its political and economic goals in the region more effectively.

Hungary's bilateral relations with the Eastern Partnership countries can hardly be called smooth. For several years, it has been trying with no success to restore its relations with Armenia. Ties are developing more successfully in the economic field, giving an impression of fairly constructive dialogue. Having stepped up its participation in the Eastern Partnership and collaborating with its Visegrad

¹⁰¹ Az EU-ukrán megállapodás történelmi lehetőségét jelent. October 21, 2013.

URL: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulugyminiszterium/hirek/az-eu-ukran-megallapodas-tortenelmi-lehetoseget-jelent>

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Magyarai Péter. Orbán: keleti szél fúj. Index. November 5, 2011.

URL: http://www.index.hu/belfold/2010/11/05/orban_keleti_szel_fuj/ (in Hungarian).

Group allies, Hungary can find – and is finding – the opportunity to achieve its political and economic goals in the region more effectively, especially since the main vectors of the Eastern Partnership policy coincide with the “opening up to the East” policy proclaimed by the Fidesz cabinet.

5. Visegrad–Russian Relations and the Ukrainian Crisis

Ukrainian crisis has had a greater impact on the Visegrad countries and Russia if compared to others, and not only because of their geographical location. These countries are closely connected with Ukraine in terms of cultural and social bonds. Working alongside each other, countries pursue projects of cross-border nature and on general Ukrainian integration, which often vie with each other. The Russian projects mainly covered Ukraine's eastern and south-eastern regions and Crimea. The projects initiated by the West, especially under President Yushchenko, spilled over the borders of the Western regions and began to overlap with the Russian projects in the East of Ukraine and on the Crimean Peninsula. Thus, on the eve of the presidential elections in 2009, the European Union decided to join what the media described as the "behind-the-scenes Russian–American battle" for Crimea by putting forward "Joint Cooperation Initiative in Crimea".¹⁰⁴ The initiative provided for investments in all the spheres of Crimea's economic and social life.¹⁰⁵ Jose Barroso promised Viktor Yushchenko that Crimea would be turned into a "pilot region of regional development" by 2013.

While Russia mainly pursued cooperation links dating back to Soviet times, the Visegrad Group as a representative of the European Union built new economic projects – mainly in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and then of the Eastern Partnership strategy. Such projects were inherently competitive and gradually pushed Ukraine towards a decision to renounce economic relations with Russia. The turning point between the two states was to be the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union in Vilnius, in which the Visegrad Group countries were directly involved. The failure to sign the agreement led to a clash of interests between Russia and the Visegrad Group – spokesman of the Euro-Atlantic community strategy.

While Russia mainly pursued cooperation links dating back to Soviet times, the Visegrad Group as a representative of the European Union built new economic projects.

When analysing Visegrad Group's individual and collective approach towards Ukraine and Russia, a gradual evolution of this central European community and internal shifting attitudes are revealed as the crisis unfolded. Most of these stages have less to do with positions on Ukraine (which underwent the least change) as they do with the attitude towards Russia, declared responsible for the crisis by the USA and Brussels.

¹⁰⁴ European Union Enters Battle for Crimea // *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, October 19, 2009. URL: http://www.ng.ru/cis/2009-10-19/1_crym.html (in Russian).

¹⁰⁵ The then first Deputy Premier of the Ukrainian Government Oleksandr Turchinov said that for Ukraine the new Crimea project meant rapid rapprochement with the European Union and a new stage of development. "The project is indeed important for the Ukrainian government and Yulia Tymoshenko at the start of the election campaign, because it demonstrates that Crimea is part of Ukrainian territory and that Ukraine can attract investments," the head of the Gorshenin Institute, Konstantin Bondarenko, said. URL: http://www.ng.ru/cis/2009-10-19/1_crym.html (in Russian).

Stage one starts with the protests on Maidan Square in Kiev until the end of March 2014, when the United States and the European Union for the first time imposed sanctions on Russia. At the same time, the initiatives of the Visegrad Group countries were still aimed at retaining their regional leadership role against the background of the common Euro–Atlantic strategy.

Stage two (approximately April–July 2014) is marked for the Visegrad Group by the need to go along with the sanctions as members of the bloc. From that moment onwards, the members of the Group have become mere onlookers while two countries – Poland and the Czech Republic – introduced their own anti-Russian sanctions.

Stage three (August–September 2014) saw a reaction to Russia’s retaliatory measures that mostly hit the Central European countries and the attempt of the Visegrad Group to assess the effectiveness of Euro–Atlantic sanctions.

Stage four roughly coincides with the Minsk meetings on Ukraine and opens the search for ways to settle the crisis, as well as a deepening rift within the Visegrad Group, rising pressure coming from the United States and the European Union on those Visegrad Group leaders who refused to follow a tougher line with regard to Russia.

The Visegrad Group’s Common Position

Initially, the European Union’s reaction to the events of January 2014 on Maidan Square lagged behind that of Visegrad Group countries. The Visegrad Group countries were themselves at a loss and their response was of a more spontaneous nature than of a constructive one.

Initially, the European Union’s reaction to the events of January 2014 on Maidan Square lagged behind that of Visegrad Group countries.

As expected, Poland assumed leadership of Visegrad Group actions in Ukraine, even though Hungary was the president at the time. In spite of the varying degrees of interest in the Eastern Partnership, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, as members of the Visegrad Group, backed the Polish initiatives and issued joint statements. These statements indicated an evolution of the Visegrad countries’ joint viewpoint, which did not accept defeat at the Vilnius Summit and still hoped to restore their status in the European Union’s eastern policy.

On January 29, 2014, after the Maidan protests resulted in clashes between opposition and policemen, the Visegrad Group prime ministers issued a joint statement calling the Ukrainian authorities “to immediately stop violence and respect the right of Ukrainians to peaceful assembly and to the freedom of expression.”¹⁰⁶ At the same time, they urged the International Visegrad Fund to boost up activities in Ukraine aimed at strengthening civil society, which implied greater student mobility, and support for independent media and small and medium-sized enterprises. Given the circumstances, an official statement about

¹⁰⁶ Joint Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries on Ukraine. 29.01.2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/joint-statement-of-the>

“scholarships and student grants” was hardly appropriate. However, it might have been also proof that state leaders were still ignorant of repercussions of the Eastern Partnership programme.

Mass murders of the February 18 have triggered a change in the official rhetoric, making the list of proposals and measures set forward longer. In a statement delivered on February 24, the Visegrad Group foreign ministers stated their satisfaction with the mission of Radosław Sikorski's which resulted in signing an agreement on political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis between Yanukovich and the opposition on February 21. The ministers proposed a range of economic and humanitarian measures which could put an end to crisis and push Ukraine towards European integration. The ministers agreed on flying to Ukraine with an official visit to share their countries' experience of transitional period.¹⁰⁷ During their trip, the foreign ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary visited Kiev and Dnipropetrovsk. The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs János Martonyi visited his Hungarian compatriots in the Subcarpathian region of Ukraine on his way back.

Ukraine was at the top of the agenda at the February 28 meeting of the parliament presidents of the Visegrad Group. On March 4, the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group delivered a joint statement expressing deep concern about the decision of the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly which authorized the use of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory. They called for compliance with the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 so as not to create “a dangerous new reality”, one that is “similar to [the] experiences [of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia] in 1956, 1968 and 1981.”¹⁰⁸ In a joint letter addressed to the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton and European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle, the prime ministers urged Brussels to meet Ukraine's integration ambitions as quickly as possible.

On March 28–29, Hungary, which then chaired the Visegrad Group, hosted a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership. The participants developed a comprehensive programme of measures for further interaction within the Eastern Partnership. The programme envisaged, among other things, an increased humanitarian assistance to Ukraine under the Eastern Partnership competences, bringing forward European Union association for Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, ensuring energy security and the setting up of a common economic zone.¹⁰⁹

In a joint statement delivered on October 26, the foreign ministers of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic welcomed the victory of pro-European forces in parliamentary elections in Ukraine, stressing their commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine and resolve to help solve its problems, including the

¹⁰⁷ Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine. 24 February, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-of-v4>

¹⁰⁸ Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine. March 4, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/statement-of-the-prime>

¹⁰⁹ Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 Countries on the Occasion of the V4+EaP Informal Ministerial Meeting. April 28–29, 2014. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/statement-of-the>

matter of reverse gas supplies.¹¹⁰ Judging from this and all subsequent official Visegrad Group statements, the Visegrad Group’s position was generally in line with that of the European Union and NATO. Some of these statements – the October 31 statement condemning elections in Novorossiia, for example – were adopted under the supervision of other foreign ministers (in this case British Foreign Secretary).¹¹¹

On December 9, 2014, a meeting of the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries issued a joint declaration on deepening defence cooperation. The document stresses that the “illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, ongoing Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine as well as military provocations along the eastern border of NATO perimeter have profoundly challenged the security architecture framework in our region proving that inter–state conventional conflict at the Alliance’s borders is still possible. The Visegrad Group countries reaffirm their commitment to international law, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. In this regard, V4 countries will coordinate their national positions to maximise the efforts to support Ukraine.”¹¹²

In declaring their adherence to NATO, the prime ministers once more backed the idea of creating a rapid reaction NATO–EU force to settle crisis situations and brought forward another Polish initiative to create a second Visegrad Group military force by the second quarter of 2019.¹¹³

On December 11–12, 2014, the presidents of the Visegrad countries met in Prague with their Austrian and Slovenian counterparts. In addition to the development of regional communications and the region’s energy security, they discussed the situation in Ukraine, advocating a political solution to the crisis with due account of the interests of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹¹⁴

On December 16, 2014, the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group made another joint trip to Kiev to meet the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin. The parties focused on recording exact amounts of gas supplied to Ukraine. According to statistics brought by the ministers, these supplies covered half of the Ukrainian demand in this particular type of energy. Over the course of the year, the countries transferred 4.6 million euros of financial aid to Ukraine, expressing their willingness to provide more grants for young people and civil servants under International Visegrad Fund programmes. Moreover, they noted that the 1.3 million euro aid programme to Ukraine was the largest of its kind ever offered by the International Visegrad Fund.¹¹⁵ The participants in the meeting aspired a lot from the coming EU–Ukraine meeting and the Eastern Partnership Summit scheduled for 2015 in Riga.

¹¹⁰ Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers on Ukraine. October 30, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/the-joint-statement-of>

¹¹¹ Joint Statement of the V4+UK Ministers of Foreign Affairs to the Local Elections in Donbas. 31 October, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-of-the-141031>

¹¹² Bratislava Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation. December 9, 2014. URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/bratislava-declaration>

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Joint Press Statement of Presidents of the Visegrad Group and Austria and Slovenia. December 11–12, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/joint-press-statement-of>

¹¹⁵ Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Ukraine. December 16, 2014.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/joint-statement-of-the-141217>

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia Miroslav Lajčák, the Visegrad Group countries split the responsibility between each other in assisting Ukrainian reforms. Thus, Slovakia would be responsible for general and energy security; the Czech Republic's would be helping build a civil society in Ukraine, as well as education reform and structural changes in the mass media; Poland would take charge of decentralizing regional and municipal government and reforming the financial sector; and Hungary would be responsible for providing support to small and medium-sized enterprises.¹¹⁶

At a meeting of foreign affairs committees of Visegrad Group parliaments in Bratislava which took place on February 25, 2015, the members of parliament reaffirmed that their national leaders condemned "the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the subsequent intervention in Ukraine." In spite of fact that sustaining relations with Russia would be profitable for the countries, the parliamentarians backed sanctions as an instrument for pressuring Russian political course.¹¹⁷

Throughout the meetings, the heads of the parliamentary committees backed the efforts of the Minsk Group to settle the Ukrainian crisis and welcomed joint endeavours of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande to conduct negotiations and cease military operations in Ukraine.

Positions of the Visegrad Group Countries

From the very beginning Visegrad Group countries differed in their approach towards the Ukrainian crisis. Alongside Poland, the Czech Republic supports the idea of the Eastern Partnership. Czech diplomat, Štefan Füle, was the EU responsible for EU Eastern Partnership programme implementation in 2010–2014. In that respect, Hungary and Slovakia merely showed their solidarity. Poland was the first to limit the scope of bilateral relations with Russia by cancelling celebrations within Polish cultural year in Russia scheduled for 2015. The Czech Republic introduced a ban on delivering mail to Crimea on April 2, 2014, and Poland followed suit on April 3. On September 14, 2014 the Czech government announced that brought down the number of bilateral ministerial meetings.

From the start *Warsaw* supported the Maidan protests and was unprecedentedly taken in by the Ukrainian events. After the failure of the February 21 Agreement,¹¹⁸ Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski proposed that the EU and NATO emergency meetings of foreign ministers had to be called. Following the March 1 decision of the Russian Federal Assembly's Federation Council,¹¹⁹ he described the events in Kiev as "a dangerous game that may trigger regional conflicts."¹²⁰ During an extended meeting of the Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in Narva (Estonia) on March 10, Radosław Sikorski

¹¹⁶ Slovakia to aid Ukraine in energy and Security Reforms. The Slovak Spectator. December 17, 2014.
URL: <http://www.spectator.sme.sk/c/20052991/slovakia-to-aid-ukraine-in-energy-and-security-reforms.html>

¹¹⁷ Conclusion from the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Committees of V4 Parliaments. February 25, 2015.
URL: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/conclusion-from-the>

¹¹⁸ Agreement on the Settlement of the Crisis in Ukraine. URL: <http://www.ria.ru/world/20140221/996319889.html> (in Russian).

¹¹⁹ Resolution No. 48-SF of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation dated March 1, 2014. Moscow "On the Use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the Territory of Ukraine".
URL: <http://www.rg.ru/2014/03/05/voyska-dok.html> (in Russian).

¹²⁰ Poland: "Very dangerous games" are being played in Crimea.
URL: <http://www.newsland.com/news/detail/id/1331203> (in Russian).

declared that the main aim was not only in signing of the agreement that Ukraine had rejected in November, but to achieve a higher level of integration.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk was the first among European political leaders to call for an emergency session of the European Council. In March 2014, the European Union passed a decision on imposing first sanctions on Russia and on signing the political part of the Association Agreement with Ukraine.

In search of a consolidated Polish position, Donald Tusk held a meeting with the representatives of various political forces. Among those present at the meeting were: Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Włodzimez Cimosevic and Leszek Miller of the Polish Left, Polish People's Party leader Janusz Piechociński, and Chairman of the Law and Justice Party, Poland's largest opposition grouping, Jarosław Kaczyński. Kaczyński had never before taken part in such events, but after the meeting he said: "Soon it will be possible to speak about unity among Polish politicians on the Ukrainian crisis."¹²¹

The Polish President showed dynamism on the issue. On March 6, during his visit to Turkey (he attended the opening of the 600 Years of Relations between Poland and Turkey exhibition) Bronisław Komorowski sided with President Abdulla Gül in expressing interest in the preservation of Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity while questioning the legitimacy of the Crimean referendum. In March, President Komorowski convened the National Security Council to discuss Ukraine. The President noted that there was no threat to Poland's security, but the situation threatened international order. Thus it was important to focus on the changes in the armed forces.¹²² This taken into account, President Komorowski was driven by the belief that Ukrainian crisis corresponds with Russian national interest which was to weaken regional links with Kiev.¹²³

However, gradually Bronisław Komorowski came to the conclusion that the key to resolving the conflict and supporting Ukraine was in the hands of the European Union and the United States. Poland backed the United States and tried to make Brussels realize that "if Russia's plan to destabilize Ukraine and stop the process of modernization succeeds, this would threaten the whole political order in Europe." According to President Komorowski, the more pro-Western Ukraine's position was, the more secure Poland would be.¹²⁴ At the same time, Komorowski realized that such a scenario would likely be a return to the Cold War.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk's declarations on the Ukrainian crisis were similar to those of the President Komorowski. He said that "an undeclared war" was being waged in Ukraine and that Russia was responsible for the tension.¹²⁵ The chances of a diplomatic settlement were fading away. Consequently, NATO and

¹²¹ Kaczyński: Jesteśmy blisko stanu, w którym można mówić o jedności polskich polityków w sprawie Ukrainy Cały / Wyborcza.pl. March 2, 2014 URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15552545,Kaczyński__Jestesmy_bliisko_stanu__w_którym_mozna_mowic.html#TRrelSST (in Polish).

¹²² Komorowski B.: W sprawie Ukrainy Polska chce stać mocno na gruncie proponowanym przez USA. URL: <http://www.m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/55,105226,15558139,,,15557394.html?i=0> (in Polish).

¹²³ Kryzys na Ukrainie wywołany, by utrudnić wybory. Prezydent.pl. May 3, 2014. URL: <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta/wywiady/art,289,kryzys-na-ukrainie-wywolany-by-utrudnic-wybory.html> (in Polish).

¹²⁴ Pilnujemy własnego bezpieczeństwa. Prezydent.pl. April 4, 2014. URL: <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta/wywiady/art,278,pilnujemy-wlasnego-bezpieczenstwa.html> (in Polish).

¹²⁵ Tusk o Ukrainie: mamy do czynienia z wojną, choć bez wypowiedzenia.TVN 24. May 4, 2015. URL: <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/tusk-o-ukrainie-mamy-do-czynienia-z-wojna-choz-bez-wypowiedzenia,424408.html> (in Polish).

the European Union had to be ready to defend their borders.¹²⁶ Europe must take a consolidated stand. Eurosceptics, “in reality, objectively or subjectively, were playing the role of politicians who were helping Putin in his very dangerous game,”¹²⁷ (by Eurosceptics, Donald Tusk meant the Law and Justice Party, which considered the Eastern Partnership to be a failure).¹²⁸

In March 2014, given the unanimity among the Polish leadership, a contingent of U.S. troops and aircrafts arrived in Poland. Meanwhile, Warsaw tried to convince the European Union of the need to adopt a common policy. As the Secretary General of Civic Platform Pawel Gras sharply put it, “when you go bear hunting in a dark forest, it is better not to do it alone, but in the company of strong friends.”¹²⁹

Among strong believers in European unity as the key element in settling crisis, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, also convinced of the key importance of European unity, spoke directly about pressing necessity to create the “common European framework with U.S. involvement”. He also stressed the importance of regional cooperation with Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria.¹³⁰

At the first stage of the Ukrainian crisis there were practically no contradicting opinions within Polish society. The only political force that fully supported the Russian policy of protecting its population in Crimea was the marginalized Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland Party. The attempts of certain periodicals (*Obserwator Polityczny*, for example) to criticize the United States and the European Union for being helpless against Russia in the Ukrainian issue were sharply dismissed by the rest of the media.

Already after the sanctions have been implemented, Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski voiced Polish stand on the crisis. Addressing the Polish Sejm on May 8, 2014, he described Russia’s actions as “violating the principles of peaceful coexistence of nations”, “legally unacceptable” and “politically unsafe.”¹³¹ As long as Russia went along the rules of the modern society, the minister said, Poland would follow Tusk’s premise in its relations with Russia – that is, “they are what they are”. Poland had to make necessary changes to the partnership with Russia after Ukrainian issue arose. After Russia embarked on the path of aggression, Poland made the relevant conclusions. Radosław Sikorski stressed the role of the Eastern Partnership as an embodiment of the principles of Jerzy Giedroyc’s principles in the given situation, highlighting the geopolitical importance of the programme that Vladimir Putin considered “to be the main challenge for his vision of the post-Soviet order.”¹³²

¹²⁶ Tusk: dobrze, że Polacy martwią się Ukrainą. TVN 24. May 10, 2015.

URL: <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/tusk-dobrze-ze-polacy-martwia-sie-ukraina,426853.html> (in Polish).

¹²⁷ Tusk do PiS i eurosceptyków: Nie pomagajcie Putinowi. Wyborcza. May 9, 2014. URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15928040,Tusk_do_PiS_i_eurosceptykow_Nie_pomagajcie_Putinowi.html#ixzz3Yb10E0W3;
http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15928040,Tusk_do_PiS_i_eurosceptykow_Nie_pomagajcie_Putinowi.html (in Polish).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ukraińska pobudka Unii. Wyborcza. May 9, 2014.

URL: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,15851753,Ukraińska_pobudka_Unii.html (in Polish).

¹³⁰ Aleksander Kwaśniewski: Trzeba bić na alarm. Wyborcza. March 3, 2014.

URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,15554149,Aleksander_Kwasniewski_Trzeba_bic_na_alarm.html#TRrelSST (in Polish)

¹³¹ The official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. URL: http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja_ministra_spraw_zagranicznych_o_zadaniach_polskiej_polityki_zagranicznej_w_2014_roku (in Polish).

¹³² In spite of the Ukrainian crisis, the Eastern Partnership continues to develop. The members of the programme will get substantial financial assistance, with 11 billion euros earmarked for Ukraine alone. This is only slightly less than the entire budget of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Radosław Sikorski maintained that it was precisely at the moment that Ukraine was restoring its governing structures that they fell prey to Russian aggression launched under the far-fetched pretext of protecting the rights of national minorities. Poland did not recognize the outcome of the Crimean referendum since it had been held amidst ongoing violence. At the same time, Warsaw sent the largest number of observers (more than 100) to the presidential elections on May 25.

Russia's actions in Ukraine, according to Radosław Sikorski, call for a broader scrutiny not only of Russia's foreign policy but also of the corresponding ideology. "Moscow is challenging an ideological confrontation... which Russia is unable to win," because its economic potential is greatly inferior to that of the European Union. Russia has its own vision of the world. "I have the impression," the Minister said, "that Russia has not quite realized what a failure Sovietism was for the world and for itself. Russia needs more time to learn the lesson of its own totalitarian history." Radosław Sikorski proposed his own vision of Russian history: "Contemporary Russia considers itself to be the heart of the Orthodox civilization, the only heir to the former Russia. Therefore, it thinks it has the right to 'gather the Russian lands', just like the Moscow princes did in the late Middle Ages. This philosophy goes against history, because if there is a country that can consider itself to be an heir to Kievan Rus', it is Ukraine not Russia."¹³³

The Ukrainian crisis surprised the world, but Poland, the minister said, was ready for it. Over the previous seven years it had established the largest network of consulates in Ukraine among all EU and NATO countries (following Radosław Sikorski's initiative, Polish consulates were opened in Sebastopol and Donetsk), which allowed Warsaw get prompt and accurate information.

It is unlikely that the relations between Warsaw and Kiev will cool down to a high degree.

As for the sanctions period in Poland's eastern policy, it was mostly during the new government headed by Ewa Kopacz, which was sworn in in the autumn of 2014. The overall course remained the same but the accents were set more pragmatically. Kopacz condemned "the seizure of the territory of the sovereign Ukrainian state," but felt that the Ukrainians were solely responsible for affronting challenges set before them as a nation.¹³⁴

At the same time, it is unlikely that the relations between Warsaw and Kiev will cool down to a high degree. In any case, Deputy Chairman of the Polish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Robert Tyszkiewicz insists on the continuity of the previous Prime Minister's policy and the fact that Ewa Kopacz calls for pragmatism, in his opinion, merely signifies that Poland denounces the rhetoric and calls for effective solutions in the face of the Russian threat. Under current conditions, Robert Tyszkiewicz believes, the national interests of Poland and Ukraine coincide: "Poland shares more deeply than other countries Ukraine's awareness that only Western civilization can guarantee its well-being

¹³³ Official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. URL: http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/informacja_ministra_spraw_zagranicznych_o_zadaniach_polskiej_polityki_zagranicznej_w_2014_roku

¹³⁴ Exposé premier Ewy Kopacz [STENOGRAM]. Wyborcza. October 1, 2014. URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,76842,16735622,Expose_premier_Ewy_Kopacz_STENOGRAM.html (in Polish).

and security.”¹³⁵ He admitted that Poland’s position on the Ukrainian issue differed from those of other Visegrad Group countries: the Poles put security in the military–political sense above economic security, whereas the Visegrad countries put economy on the top.¹³⁶

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New Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Grzegorz Schetyna reiterated Warsaw’s readiness to support sanctions against Russia and continue to take an active part in resolving the Ukrainian crisis.¹³⁷

Thus Poland’s political leadership and the leaders of its main political parties are unanimous in condemning Russia’s actions in the Ukrainian crisis, approving sanctions and advocating a common EU policy based on U.S. military and political support.

Leading Polish media have also condemned Russia’s policy. Thus, the editor-in-chief of the influential *Gazeta Wyborcza* Adam Michnik described Russia’s policy as “aggressive” and “imperialist” and called on journalists, writers and those involved in mass culture to be like the “sacred geese of the Capitol Hill” warning of the danger (Michnik’s open letter to EU leaders was reprinted by 12 European newspapers). His activities in the field of Poland’s eastern policy earned him an award from the Giedroyc Polish–Lithuanian Dialogue and Cooperation Forum.¹³⁸

Yet there are alternative viewpoints in Polish society. Thus, Professor Bronisław Łagowski believes that Poland would be better off as an ally of Russia, because there are no serious problems in Russian–Polish relations, although he admits that the Polish people would not follow that line. As regards Ukraine, here Poland should be a mere observer without any direct involvement, especially since Poland is no more than a USA’s helping hand. Łagowski compares Russia’s takeover of Crimea with Poland’s takeover of Vilnius after the First World War (the so-called Zeligowski Mutiny).¹³⁹

One cannot avoid the fact that not all Poles are ready to forget dark times in the recent history of Polish–Ukrainian relations, notably the atrocities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Volyn tragedy. An incident which occurred at the East European State Higher School in Przemyśl (PWSW) is a vivid illustration of the fact that Polish society is still reminiscent of the recent past. Nine Ukrainian

¹³⁵ UKRINFORM. URL: http://www.ukrinform.ua/rus/news/predsedatel_komissii_seyma_polshi_zapad_ne_prekratit_davleniya_na_rossiyu_1673426 (in Russian).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Schetyna: Polska powinna wrócić do negocjacyjnego stołu w sprawie Ukrainy. *Wyborcza*. October 7, 2014. URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,16762052,Schetyna_Polska_powinna_wrocic_do_negocyjnego.html#ixzz3Yb3wUPrP; http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,16762052,Schetyna_Polska_powinna_wrocic_do_negocyjnego.html (both in Polish).

¹³⁸ Adam Michnik. Nikt tak pięknie nie mówił o pokoju. *Wyborcza*. July 26, 2014. URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75968,16381653,Nikt_tak_pieknie_nie_mowil_o_pokoju.html; <http://www.dw.de/die-welt-apel-michnika-my-g%C4%99si-kapitol%C5%84skie/a-17816311> (both in Polish).

¹³⁹ The Zeligowski Mutiny is the name given to the 1920 capture of Vilnius by General Lucjan Żeligowski in 1920 ordered by Polish Chief of State Józef Piłsudski (by decision of the League of Nations, Vilnius was given to Lithuania). The Republic of Central Lithuania, which became part of Poland after a 1922 referendum, was thus formed. Interestingly, Polish President Bronisław Komorowski wrote a paper about the Zeligowski Mutiny when he was a student.

students posted a photograph of themselves on the Internet holding a UPA flag, thus triggering a wide social protest among Polish people.

An action staged in Grushovitsy, which was a Ukrainian village before the war, is also worth noting. After the democratic revolution of 1989, the followers of Bandera illegally erected a monument to the UPA in the shape of a gate with a trident (the emblem of Banderites) and the words “Glory to the UPA heroes, fighters for a free Ukraine.” Following the events in Ukraine, an inscription was made on the monument in Grushovitsy saying “Death to the butchers of Volyn and Donbass.” Plaques were put up nearby with photographs of the victims of the 1943 Volyn tragedy and those living in Novorossiia who died in 2014.

The nationalist organizations Camp of Great Poland (OWP)¹⁴⁰ and the Slavic Union staged several protest marches and demonstrations against the Polish policy in Ukraine in the autumn of 2014 in Warsaw¹⁴¹ under anti-Bandera and anti-American slogans.

While the Polish authorities are unanimous on the Ukrainian crisis, Polish society is not void of historic pragmatism.

Recently one of the unusual changes in today’s political life has been the resurgence of the Kresy movement (which traces its origin to Kresy Wschodnie, or Eastern Borderlands, on the outskirts of Rzeczpospolita). The participants in the constitutional congress of the Patriotic Union of Kresy and Veterans’ Organizations (PZOKiK) held in Warsaw pledged to oppose Ukrainian nationalists, the successors of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Bandera and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and seek official recognition of the “genocide of Poles” with regard to the criminal actions of Ukrainian nationalists in Kresy in 1939–1947.

Thus, while the Polish authorities are unanimous on the Ukrainian crisis, Polish society is not void of historic pragmatism. Opinion polls illustrate this vividly. In April 2014, the Millward Brown Institute conducted a poll on Ukrainian events, in which 74.4 per cent of respondents said that Crimea should not be part of Russia, despite their shared history and the fact that many Russians live there.¹⁴² However, responses coming from the Eastern Ukraine were not that overwhelming: 39.3 per cent of respondents supporting referendum outcome. Younger generation (18–24) turned to be mostly supportive of the referendum. On a territorial basis, the largest number of referendum supporters could be found in Silesia (which is natural considering the mounting regional movement and rising aspirations for autonomy there). In the event of a Russian military invasion in Ukraine, 45.4 per cent would consider a NATO intervention legitimate; 53.8 per cent supported anti-Russian sanctions even if they affected Poland’s economic interests; and 57.3 per cent of respondents said that Vladimir Putin was a good leader in terms of defending Russia’s interests.

¹⁴⁰ The Camp of Great Poland is a nationalist organization created in 2003. It is inspired by the ideas of Roman Dmowski.

¹⁴¹ The Slavic Union was founded in 2006. Its members preach the ideology of Pan-Slavism.

¹⁴² Pawłowski W. Nasza nie nasza wojna. URL: <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/sytuacjanaukrainie/1579021,1,polacy-o-kryzysie-na-wschodniej-ukrainie.read> (in Polish).

Clearly, in spite of the existing problems, the Polish people seek to develop relations with Russia, which is its fifth largest market. In 2013, exports to Russia amounted to \$11 billion, an increase of one tenth.

In his recent book, Herman van Rompuy noted that when he assumed the post of President of the European Council, relations between Ukraine and the European Union worried only Poland, but today the events in Ukraine are of concern to the whole of Europe. Polish politician and analyst Adam Rotfeld considers this to be an indisputable success of Poland.¹⁴³ However, in light of the dramatic events unfolding in Ukraine, Rotfeld's conclusion is debatable to say the least.

Prague's reaction to unfolding Ukrainian crisis was prompt, although Czech politicians have repeatedly changed their stance since. Thus, on March 1, 2014, President Miloš Zeman said he understood Russia's concern about the position of the Russian-speaking population in Crimea, but that the chosen reminded him of the invasion of 1968. Later he tried to adjust his earlier comparison, drawing a line between the events surrounding Crimea to the events of Kosovo, but he had no support in the political and media circles at home.

On March 1, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka spoke in favour of Ukraine's territorial integrity and stressed that political differences should not be resolved by violence. Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek, reacting to the March 2 decision of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, expressed concern about the prospect of military landings in various parts of Europe and the occupation of territories to protect the rights of fellow citizens.

As the tension around Crimea escalated, the club of social-democratic members of parliament criticized Zaorálek and the Minister for Human Rights Jiří Dienstbier. Nevertheless, Bohuslav Sobotka, after some hesitation, signed to a rather harsh statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group on March 4.

On March 25, the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic passed a resolution condemning Russia's actions in Crimea as a violation of international law. This however should not be taken as a Czech Republic's refusal to back the decision to introduce economic sanctions against Russia, as some Russian media have done.¹⁴⁴

According to an opinion poll conducted in March 2014 and published by the Czech TV channel CT24 shortly after the events in Crimea, 66 per cent of respondents saw the Russian military presence on the peninsula as occupation and 15 per cent as an adequate reaction aimed at protecting the interests of the Russian-speaking population; 46 per cent of respondents said the Crimean events reminded them of the 1968 Soviet invasion; and 10 per cent saw similarities with the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of the Sudetes region in 1938.

Given these statistics, former Czech President Václav Klaus's statement was rather surprising. He described Ukraine as an artificial entity and expressing his support for Putin's actions. The Czech communists also approved of Russian actions in

¹⁴³ Rotfeld, A. "Putin się przeliczył. Polityka salami, odcinania Ukrainy po kawalku, została zatrzymana" wPolityce.pl. 28.08.2014. URL: <http://www.wpolityce.pl/swiat/210091-rotfeld-putin-sie-przeliczyl-polityka-salami-odcinania-ukrainy-po-kawalku-zostala-zatrzymana> (in Polish).

¹⁴⁴ See for example, Izvestia, March 28, 2014, p. 10; Rossiiskaya Gazeta, March 27, 2014, p. 9 (both in Russian).

Ukraine. However, these voices were drowned out by the chorus condemning the “Russian intervention.”

The following control check of official position in the Czech leadership took place in May 2014. In an interview to *Parlamentní Lísty* on May 9, 2014, the Czech President said: “I am against economic sanctions with regard to Russia because it’s useless. On the other hand, I am against the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine, but economic sanctions cannot stop it – only the NATO troops can do it.” Thus Miloš Zeman thought it possible to threaten Russia in order to prevent a possible invasion in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁴⁵

Prague has not supported the inclusion of Crimea into Russia and does not support the manifestations of separatism in Eastern Ukraine, the President said.

On 9 May Miloš Zeman did not attend the traditional reception at the Russian Embassy in Prague to mark the end of the Second World War in Europe. Prague has not supported the inclusion of Crimea into Russia and does not support the manifestations of separatism in Eastern Ukraine, the President said. In his opinion, referendums in Eastern Ukraine are illegitimate, although they did reveal certain sentiments among the Russian-speaking population.

The Czech Foreign Ministry also refused to recognize the referendums outcome in Eastern Ukraine. It said that the vote further destabilized Ukraine and was against the principles of international law, the Constitution and democracy. The Czech Foreign Ministry called for restoring law and order in South-Eastern Ukraine. Foreign Minister Zaoralek declared that the referendums on the self-determination of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions would not solve Ukraine’s problems and made no sense because they promoted the ideas of separatism at a time when the government was ready to negotiate decentralization of the country. However he did not rule out the possibility of diplomatic negotiations with the regional representatives. Although Zaoralek admitted that not all of Kiev’s initiatives and measures were successful, Moscow was to blame for the conflict. According to him, parties have to do their best to avoid Yugoslav scenario and start comprehensive negotiations. As for the sanctions against Russia the Minister backed the EU decision to impose sanctions not only on individuals but also on the companies, which are responsible for the “confiscation of Ukrainian property on the territory of occupied Crimea.” Zaoralek believes that the firms stealing Ukrainian property should be severely punished.

Appearing on Czech television on May 10, 2014, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and current leader of the TOP 09 Party (TOP stands for “Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita”, or “Tradition Responsibility Prosperity”) Karel Schwarzenberg suggested that immediately after Russia’s takeover of Crimea, severe sanctions had to be applied to deter further Russian aggression. Schwarzenberg suggested that the takeover of Crimea diminished Putin’s credibility because Russian President had violated the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. Under that Treaty, Ukraine in the 1990s voluntarily gave

¹⁴⁵ Občanská válka se přiblížila. Zeman učinil prohlášení k Ukrajině i k české vládě. May 9, 2014. URL: <http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Obcanska-valka-se-priblizila-Zeman-ucinin-prohlaseni-k-Ukrajině-i-k-ceske-vlade-318336> (in Czech).

up all its nuclear weapons and strategic missiles in exchange for guarantees of territorial integrity.

After the dramatic events of the summer of 2014 and Russia's retaliatory sanctions, the Czech leadership finally shaped official view of the Ukrainian issue. President Miloš Zeman became more consistent in condemning unjustified accusations against Russia. On numerous occasions he stressed that he favoured continued trade relations between Russia and the Czech Republic. Addressing the NATO Summit in Wales in October 2014, he said that a Russian invasion of Ukraine had not been proved and criticized the sanctions against Russia. At the 12th Rhodes Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations" in the autumn of 2014, Zeman described the situation in Ukraine as "a seasonal flu" which would soon pass and again called for "lifting the sanctions, which are not only useless, but counterproductive and impede dialogue." He added that "civilized states should develop a dialogue based on exchanges in the sphere of religion, capital and information. We need to fight international terrorism."¹⁴⁶

The President's position was heavily criticized by leading Czech media (newspapers *MF Dnes* and *Pravo*, newsmagazine *Respekt* etc.), which publish mainly anti-Russian materials, hinting that Russia is dragging the Czech Republic into war.¹⁴⁷ They compare modern Russia with Nazi Germany, call the reunification of Crimea "Anschluss" (German for "annexation"),¹⁴⁸ and compare the present situation with the annexation of Sudety from Czechoslovakia as a result of the Munich Agreement in 1938.¹⁴⁹

The Czech media also aggressively criticized former President Václav Klaus,¹⁵⁰ who openly denounces the Western elite's hostility toward Russia based on what he considers to be a misfortunate and out-dated opinion of that country: "I am not confusing the Soviet Union with Russia. Those who see no difference between them simply prefer to turn a blind eye to it," and "the anti-Russian propaganda of the U.S. and the EU is absolutely absurd, and I cannot tolerate it," Václav Klaus has declared.¹⁵¹

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Lubomir Zaorálek has recently been expressing fears about a possible Russia's resurgence within the boundaries of the former empire, and the consequences for Central Europe if this happens.¹⁵² First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Petr Drulák had to admit in September 2014 that "standard political relations with Russia had been put on hold because of

¹⁴⁶ The Czech President, Speaking in Russian Called on Europe to Lift the Sanctions Against Russia. September 30, 2014. URL: <http://www.russian.rt.com/article/52218> (in Russian).

¹⁴⁷ Hron J. Co když Rusko chce válku. URL: <http://www.archiv.ihned.cz/c1-62034670-jan-hron-co-kdyz-rusko-chce-valku> (in Czech).

¹⁴⁸ Fendrych M. Český národní zájem: chránit nás před agresivními Rusy. URL: <http://www.nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/cesky-narodni-zajem-chranit-nas-pred-agresivnimi-rusy/r-8f26effe341911e4a7300025900fea04/> (in Czech).

¹⁴⁹ Srovnání Krymu a Sudety jako politická metafora sedí, říká Romancov. URL: [http://www.m.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/268590-srovnani-krymu-a-sudet-jako-politicka-metafora-sedi-rika-romancov; Pehe J. Riskantní historické paralely. URL: <http://www.novinky.cz/komentare/343452-komentar-riskantni-historicke-paralely-jiri-pehe.html>](http://www.m.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/268590-srovnani-krymu-a-sudet-jako-politicka-metafora-sedi-rika-romancov;Pehe J. Riskantní historické paralely. URL: http://www.novinky.cz/komentare/343452-komentar-riskantni-historicke-paralely-jiri-pehe.html)

¹⁵⁰ Václav Klaus: The West is Telling Monstrous Lies about Russia. URL: <http://www.inosmi.ru/world/20141001/223344157.html> (in Russian).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Zaorálek L. Putin působí dojmem, že chce znovu Rusko budovat jako impérium. URL: <http://www.cssd.cz/media/cssd-v-medich/l-zaoralek-pro-pravo-putin-pusobi-dojmem-ze-chce-znovu-rusko-budovat-jako-imperium/> (in Czech).

Ukrainian events.” He said that the relations had been frozen at the governmental level and in fact were maintained “at the technical working level.”¹⁵³

In spite of a relative idleness of the Czech population over the issue of Ukraine, the opposition political forces have managed to unite numerous opponents of President Zeman.

The number of Czechs who are interested in the Ukrainian events has not changed over the year and accounts to less than a half of the respondents (47 per cent). Sociologists note that 59 per cent of respondents raised the Ukrainian issue in their conversations. In March 2014, when Crimea was reunited with Russia, about 60 per cent of Czechs showed an interest in that event. Czech society still finds it difficult to form a clear idea of events and take a stand. Only 39 per cent of respondents have a clear understanding. Surveys have shown an increase by 16 per cent (to 65 per cent) in comparison with the summer of 2014 of the share of those who are concerned about the security of the Czech Republic in connection with the Ukrainian conflict. 43 per cent of respondents have not made up their minds on the preservation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, and 34 per cent support the integrity of that country. Of all the parties to the conflict, the lowest marks were given to the actions of the east Ukrainian separatists (83 per cent) and Russia (82 per cent).

In spite of a relative idleness of the Czech population over the issue of Ukraine, the opposition political forces have managed to unite numerous opponents of President Zeman.

Sanctions have recently become the subject of political discourse in the Czech Republic, splitting Czech society into two almost equal parts: 41 per cent of the respondents have heard about the sanctions, while 39 per cent have no idea. Only 11 per cent have a clear understanding of what the situation is all about. The majority of TOP 09 Party’s supporters (67 per cent), which forms part of the parliamentary opposition, approved of the sanctions, while 26 per cent disapproved. 56 per cent of the opposition Civic Democratic Party supported the sanctions, and 22 per cent opposed them. The situation in the parties of the ruling coalition is as follows: the Christian Democratic Party – 54 per cent in favour of sanctions, 36 per cent against; ANO 2011 – 42 per cent in favour, 40 per cent against; Social Democratic Party – 33 per cent in favour, 45 per cent against. The largest number of those opposed to anti–Russian sanctions is in the Communist Party (36 per cent in favour, 54 per cent against).

As for the consequences of mutual sanctions, according to Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic Marian Jurečka, they resulted in a loss of 830 jobs (the total number of unemployed in the Czech Republic is 500,000) and a 2.5 billion koruna (around \$100 million) shortfall in revenue. Some companies introduced shorter working hours to avoid laying off employees. Exports of cheese, butter and cottage cheese to Russia dropped by 300 million koruna (around \$12 million). According to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, the country’s food exports to Russia now amount to a mere 2.4 billion koruna (about \$96 million).¹⁵⁴ Moreover,

¹⁵³ Druhlák: Rusko se vydává cestou izolace, která ho zásadně poškodí. URL: <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/286115-druhlak-rusko-se-vydava-cestou-izolace-ktera-ho-zasadne-poskodi> (in Czech).

¹⁵⁴ Sankce ohrožují přes 800 míst. Jezme české potraviny, vyzývá ministr. iDnes.cz. August 8, 2014. URL: http://www.ekonomika.idnes.cz/ruske-sankce-v-cislech-06a-lekonomika.aspx?c=A140808_171106_ekonomika_fih (in Czech).

the flow of Russian tourists to the Czech Republic has dropped almost twofold compared with 2013. Although this is not directly linked to the sanctions a side effect on the tourist industry is obvious. However, Czech firms do not expect billion losses, according to the Czech Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber's expert analysis shows that the real consequences for the Czech economy will not kick in until 2015. The Czech Government faces the task of import- and export-replacement. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Serbia and Azerbaijan have been mentioned as potential partners.¹⁵⁵

In general, despite certain differences in the positions of leading European countries and the United States over Ukraine and the sanctions issue, the Czech Republic is a disciplined member of the European Union. The Czech Republic sees its task as upholding national interests in the overall framework of the Western policy.

Slovakia's position over Ukraine can be described as moderate. Unlike Warsaw and Prague, Bratislava has not made any high-profile statements on the issue and has even managed to create an illusion of neutrality. Initially, President Ivan Gašparovič only stated that his country could not afford to play on its own in such situations, and Prime Minister Robert Fico said gestures should not be made for the sake of gestures. In early March 2014, Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák, together with his Visegrad Group colleagues, flew to Ukraine to look at the situation on the ground and discuss the future with those who inherited the powers of the vanished president Viktor Yanukovich.

Slovakia's position over Ukraine can be described as moderate.

On March 5, during an official visit to Austria, the President of the Slovak Republic stressed that "the only possible solution to the crisis in Ukraine is negotiations and the search for compromises." Characterizing the situation in the country in general, Gašparovič said that Ukraine "is on the brink of a catastrophe."¹⁵⁶

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, proceeding from the decisions of an extraordinary meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council held in Brussels on March 3, resolutely condemned the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and Russian Armed Forces acts of aggression. He stressed that these actions grossly violated the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, as well as Russia's commitment to respect the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic called on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory and henceforth to refrain from interfering with the affairs of that country, warning that further escalation of tensions would seriously threaten international peace and security.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Průzkum HK ČR k sankčním opatřením: Čeští exportéři miliardové ztráty neočekávají. Hospodarska komora České republiky. August 25, 2014. URL: <http://www.komora.cz/aktualni-zpravodajstvi/tiskove-zpravy/tiskove-zpravy-2014/pruzkum-hk-cr-k-sankcnim-opatrenim-cesti-exporteri-miliardove-ztraty-neocekavaji.aspx> (in Czech).

¹⁵⁶ Official site of the President of the Slovak Republic. URL: http://www.prezident.sk/?spravy-llacoveho-oddelenia&news_id=18912 (in Slovak).

¹⁵⁷ Statement of the Slovak Foreign Affairs Ministry on the Ukrainian crisis. March 4, 2014. URL: <http://www.mzv.sk/kyjev> (in Slovak).

The statement indicates that Slovakia is displaying solidarity as a member of the bloc rather than having its own position. What made Slovakia different was that its media did not launch a campaign of Russophobia. It is important to note that the country's presidential elections took place while crisis was unfolding in Ukraine.

For such a small European state as Slovakia what matters most are not the geopolitical but specific practical aspects of the Ukrainian problem, because Gazprom has a gas distribution hub for the whole Europe on the Republic's territory. Having once faced the problem of gas transit via Ukraine, Prime Minister Robert Fico got a clear idea of that aspect of Russian–Ukrainian relations, especially since the United States brought up the issue of possible reverse gas supplies to Ukraine.¹⁵⁸ The Prime Minister was from the beginning afraid of Ukrainian non-payments for the gas delivered because he did not consider Ukraine a reliable partner in fulfilling its obligations. Although Slovakia favoured the signing of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, this did not mean that it was prepared to solve Ukraine's problems out of national budget. In the opinion of the Slovak Prime Minister, Ukraine sees the European perspective largely in the context of the need to address its own problems (mainly financial), which it is unable to sort out with Russia.

For such a small European state as Slovakia what matters most are not the geopolitical but specific practical aspects of the Ukrainian problem, because Gazprom has a gas distribution hub for the whole Europe on the Republic's territory.

In the opinion of Mikuláš Dzurinda, member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the Prime Minister has underestimated the significance of the Ukrainian issue. Dzurinda believes that the Slovak government should not have minced its words and should have called the events in Crimea an act of Russian aggression. Other members of the parliamentary opposition were equally determined. They believed that the Russian President had violated international law and that his ambitions would not be limited to Crimea only.¹⁵⁹

Traditionally, the government's position plays a major role in political issues. Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák has reiterated that it is impossible to solve the Ukrainian crisis without the active cooperation of the Russian Federation, but only by peaceful means and in a legal framework. However, the country's new president Andrej Kiska has made it clear that he is a staunch supporter of the European path for Ukraine in spite of all the risks involved. He believes that the European Union and NATO should be at one in supporting Ukraine and that the Slovaks should say upfront that Crimea has been occupied by Russia and that Russian actions will never be recognized as legitimate.

As for the main parties, the Social Democratic Party – the Prime Minister's party – on the whole adheres to the principle of “zero conflict” with Russia, although

¹⁵⁸ In a conversation with U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Theodore Sedgwick, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic Miroslav Lajčák said that considering the drop in gas consumption in the spring and summer, Slovakia's stocks would last four to five months. URL: http://www.foreign.gov.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw_ByID/ID_EA7419BDE7ECAA99C1257B4A002DA134_SK&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/%28vw_ByID%29/ID_23A5773A366F3774C1257C050046B5EF (in Slovak).

¹⁵⁹ Fico sa obáva, či je Ukrajina solidný partner. Spravy, Pravda.sk. March 10, 2014. URL: <http://www.spravvy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/311085-fico-sa-obava-ci-je-ukrajina-solidny-partner> (in Slovak).

not all the members of the party support it. At the same time, the united right wing supports Ukraine's European aspirations. Thus, Radoslav Procházka's new party was one of the first to call a major press conference and raise the issue of Slovakia's attitude to the Ukrainian–Russian crisis.

By the autumn of 2014 the issue of organizing reverse supplies of Russian gas to Ukraine became critical. Supplies began on September 2 and, according to Bratislava and, incidentally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, such reverse supplies did not contradict agreements with Gazprom.¹⁶⁰ However, Gazprom itself repeatedly made it clear that it was not pleased with the idea. Chairman of the Management Committee of the gas concern Alexey Miller said as early as late June that sanctions might be introduced against its partners. At a press conference following a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, Miroslav Lajčák commented on the situation: "Ukraine has asked us to arrange reverse gas supplies. We met Ukraine halfway and are preparing such a route. We consider this to be normal and useful, but as regards the actual deliveries, that is another operation. We just provide the route. Who buys, who sells and who pays is a commercial operation and does not concern us."¹⁶¹

Overall, in its relations with Russia and Ukraine Bratislava is very pragmatic.

Slovakia objects to certain points in the European Union's anti–Russian sanctions plan, as Prime Minister Robert Fico said in September 2014.¹⁶² The ministers who attended the meeting objected to a ban on the export of so-called dual-purpose goods for private Russian firms unconnected with the public sector. Slovak machine builders have a big stake in it. The EU sanctions may put some of them on the brink of bankruptcy, as Minister of Economy Pavol Pavlis has warned. Besides, members of the Slovak government intend to make sure that EU sanctions do not affect the Slovak branch of Russia's Sberbank, which has tens of thousands of clients in the republic.

Overall, in its relations with Russia and Ukraine Bratislava is very pragmatic. This seems to be the best approach for such a small state as Slovakia. It has to be stressed that Slovakia remains one of the few EU countries openly supportive of mutually beneficial non-ideological cooperation with Russia. As for the attitude of the current Slovak leadership to Ukraine and its European aspirations, Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák said that Bratislava would provide every kind of assistance to Ukrainian reforms at the expert level. It should be noted that on September 24, 2014, Slovakia ratified the agreement of Ukraine's association with the European Union. On the eve of the ratification, the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs paid an official visit to Kiev in order among other things to deliver humanitarian aid. However, when President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko visited Slovakia in November, he was met by demonstrators chanting anti-fascist slogans in front of Andrej Kiska's residence.

¹⁶⁰ Lavrov: Reverse Gas Supplies from Slovakia to Ukraine do not Violate Agreements with Gazprom. *Vedomosti*, May 19, 2014. URL: <http://www.vedomosti.ru/companies/news/26652101/lavrov-revers-gaza-na-ukrainu-iz-slovakii-na-narushaet> (in Russian).

¹⁶¹ URL: <http://www.pravda.ru/news/world/europe/19-05-2014/1208537-slovakia-0> (in Russian).

¹⁶² URL: <http://www.ria.ru/world/20140904/1022797956.html> (in Russian).

Hungary's official reaction to the events in Ukraine is more restrained and neutral compared to other Visegrad Group partners. This may be because, first of all, the Eastern Partnership was never Hungary's strong diplomatic point. Second, the events in Ukraine coincided with the start of the election campaign in Hungary, and it would have been much better for the Cabinet to demonstrate a calm and pragmatic approach. Third, in early January Hungary signed an economic contract with Russia on very favourable terms. Fourth, what held Hungary back from making sharp statements was concern about the 160,000 Hungarians living in Carpathian region of Ukraine. Nevertheless, Budapest never declared that it shared Russian viewpoint of the crisis.

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On February 18, 2014, following the bloody events in Kiev, Viktor Orbán inspected the refugee camps. Speaking on the Hungarian radio programme "180 Minutes" on February 21, 2014, he said that Hungary was closely following the developments in Ukraine and was prepared for any outcome. He said the government was paying special attention to the situation around the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine, which so far had given no cause for concern. At the same time, Hungarians must certainly be worried about the destruction of a neighbouring state, looming chaos and anarchy. Not in the territorial sense, the Prime Minister stressed, but in terms of law and order.

On March 4, 2014, on the eve of his trip to Brussels, Viktor Orbán once again stressed his concerns about the fact that the new Ukrainian authorities had dropped the law on languages, but he called on Hungarian politicians to refrain from rash statements that could harm Hungary's interests. In the same statement, Viktor Orbán supported the European Union's position that Russia committed an act of aggression by separating Crimea from Ukraine.

Touching upon the Ukrainian theme in his speech to the Congress of the European People's Party in Dublin on March 7, Viktor Orbán proposed a non-military response on the part of the European Union to Russia's actions because "violation of international agreements cannot be left without consequences." In his opinion, such a response could take the form of an effective EU integration policy, the first step being a visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens. However, on March 8, the Prime Minister, referring to the upcoming referendum in Crimea, conceded that "no one could prevent it any longer," thus acknowledging the legitimacy of the Russian community's position on the peninsula.¹⁶³ Furthermore, at the Dublin congress Viktor Orbán urged the need for a new EU leadership, one that is capable of coming up with bold and visionary responses to the challenges of the modern world.¹⁶⁴

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary adhered more closely to the official Brussels line. On March 3, at an extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers on

¹⁶³ Senki sem akadályozhatja meg a referendumot // Magyar Hírlap. March 8, 2014.
URL: <http://www.archivum.magyarhirlap.hu/senki-sem-akadalyozhatja-meg-a-referendumot> (in Hungarian).

¹⁶⁴ Bátor európai vezetőkre van szükség // Magyar Hírlap. March 7, 2014.
URL: <http://www.archivum.magyarhirlap.hu/orban-bator-europai-vezetokre-van-szuksege> (in Hungarian).

Ukraine the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary János Martonyi stressed that it was necessary to speed up the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union and make it clear that association was not EU's final goal. Supporting the Visegrad Group's statements, he also proposed to recognize the legitimacy of Ukraine's interim government and put together an aid package as soon as possible.

On March 4, 2014, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Zsolt Németh invited the Russian Ambassador to his residence to tell him that Hungary supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and insisted on the return of Russian military troops, now in Crimea, to the places where they are permanently stationed. He told the Russian Ambassador that the current Russian "unlawful behaviour" reminded the Visegrad countries of 1956, 1968 and 1981 events. Curiously enough, the same historic parallels were made by the ruling cabinet and the socio-liberal opposition in Hungary, which constantly staged anti-Russian rallies in front of the Russian Embassy in Budapest.

The right-wing radical party For a Better Hungary (Jobbik) disagreed with the opinion of the Hungarian Cabinet and fully supported Russia's actions in protecting fellow Russians in Crimea. The European Parliament deputy from this party Béla Kovács was present at the Crimean referendum as an observer. The party led by Gábor Vona described the central leadership in Kiev as illegitimate and called on the ruling party to protect the interests of Hungarians in Carpathian region of Ukraine. In general, the party perceived the conflict as a sign of aggravated confrontation between Moscow on the one hand and Washington and Brussels on the other.

As for expert opinions, the range of viewpoints was fairly diverse – from accusing Russia of genetically inherent aggressiveness to sympathy for Russia's concerns in connection with the geopolitical losses of 1991. Most experts saw no difference between the oligarchic system of the old authorities and the emerging new power in Ukraine.

It has to be noted that the Arab Spring events broke out during Hungary's presidency of the European Council, requiring solid diplomatic efforts from the chairing country, and the Ukrainian crisis erupted during the Visegrad Group's presidency, forcing the Hungarian leadership to once again work under pressure (on top of that, an election campaign was under way). It is important to bear in mind, although Hungary was the president Poland was still playing the leading role in the Visegrad Group in the spring of 2014, even though Hungary replaced Poland as president six months beforehand.

As for Hungarian officials' public statements, we can say that the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speeches were more moderate, emphasizing the need to respect human rights and freedoms and the rights of national minorities. However, Minister of Foreign Affairs János Martonyi made numerous harsh statements about Russian actions in Crimea, and the country's policy in Ukraine in general.

Hungary's own problems with its co-national minority population in Ukraine could leave untouched its position. The Hungarian people might have wished to support Russia, but the diaspora that was left after obtaining a second (Hungarian) citizenship (which does not exceed 40 per cent even in the most densely populated

“Hungarian” communities) prevented Hungary from putting forward territorial claims. It has to do with calls for national autonomy (incidentally, Viktor Orbán reiterated that demand in his inaugural speech). However, on May 17, 2014, he appeared on Hungarian television’s Channel 1 and said, following the European and Visegrad line, that “in light of Russia violating the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, we have to take the side of Ukraine.”¹⁶⁵

No opinion polls on Ukrainian events were conducted in Hungary. Perhaps this was because of the 2014 election campaign, when citizens could choose either the conservative Fidesz government that was committed to promoting relations with Russia, or the Liberal Socialists, who wanted relations to be severed. The fact that the campaign resulted in a second consecutive election victory for Fidesz can be interpreted as overwhelming popular support for Viktor Orbán’s course.

Hungary did not impose sanctions against Russia and resisted the attempts of the United States and Brussels to force it to renounce economically beneficial agreements it had signed with Moscow. Thus, in response to Brussels’s attempts to persuade him to renounce the reconstruction and building of new reactors at the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, Viktor Orbán suggested that the European Union find an alternative for Hungary on terms at least as advantageous. Realizing that pressuring Viktor Orbán was futile (Hungarian government is structured on the German model, in which the Prime Minister is the key figure), Brussels and Washington launched an offensive on the Hungarian government. They resorted to direct attacks and obstruction, as well as enlisting the help of internal liberal opposition – the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, which lost the election, and the newly formed small Hungarian Liberal Party. Socialist former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, who once was eagerly seeking meetings with Vladimir Putin, and his successor Gordon Bajnai (in office until 2010) led the protest movement against any agreements with Moscow (on the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, the South Stream, etc.) and in support of the “Ukraine’s freedom-loving aspirations”. One of the leaders of the Together 2014 opposition civil movement, Gergely Karácsony, said judging from the Ukrainian crisis partners should tread relations with Russia with caution.¹⁶⁶ The activists of pro-American liberal movements staged repeated demonstrations at the walls of the Russian embassy in Budapest, covered the Fidesz headquarters with posters and took to the central streets and squares of the Hungarian capital in the autumn.

In the autumn, U.S. President Barack Obama himself joined the battle. Addressing the Clinton Global Initiative Foundation on September 23, 2014, he named Hungary among the countries where civil society initiatives were being oppressed.¹⁶⁷ Shortly afterwards, the U.S. Charge d’Affaires was spotted at a major anti-government demonstration in the centre of Budapest. About a month later the U.S. Department of State imposed a ban on certain Hungarian officials from

¹⁶⁵ Orbán a kárpátaljai magyarok autonómiáigénye mellett szólt. Magyar hírlop. April 17, 2014. URL: <http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/orban-a-karpataljai-magyarok-autonomiaigénye-mellet-szolt#sthash.enVE3TdF.dpuf> (in Hungarian).

¹⁶⁶ Ülészene az ellenzék // Magyar Hirlap. March 6, 2014. URL: <http://www.archivum.magyarhirlap.hu/ulesezne-az-ellenzék> (in Hungarian).

¹⁶⁷ Obama to Civil Society: America Stands with You. The Budapest Beacon. September 24, 2014. URL: <http://www.budapestbeacon.com/featured-articles/obama-civil-society-america-stands>

entering the United States. Having accused them of corruption, the Department of State never proved the legal side of the accusation.

Thus, Viktor Orbán's pro-Russian position is closer to that of Robert Fico than it is to Václav Klaus's or Miloš Zeman's. It is a purely pragmatic position that he spelled out when the programme of "Opening Up to the East" was adopted. "We are sailing under the Western sail, but in the Eastern wind."¹⁶⁸ The pragmatic approach towards Ukraine was essentially reaffirmed by Viktor Orbán in an interview to Hungarian television's Channel 1 as early as May 17, 2014, and has remained unchanged ever since: "We are interested in a stable and democratic Ukraine; however, it cannot be stable nor democratic if it does not give the minorities and ethnic communities – including the Hungarian community – living there what they are entitled to. This is above all dual citizenship, collective or community rights and autonomy."¹⁶⁹

While a strong anti-government campaign was going on in the West, the Hungarian leadership had to make some resolute statements in response to their Western partners. Thus, the Speaker of the National Assembly Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament László Kövér said: "The West should not count on success by launching a cold war against Hungary: no one can dictate to Hungary how to live."¹⁷⁰ The pro-government press reacted to the autumn wave of anti-government demonstrations in Budapest by reminding that Budapest was not Kiev and that a government coup could not be pulled off so easily in a democratic country.¹⁷¹

On February 17, 2015 President Vladimir Putin arrived in Budapest for an official visit. It was his first trip to Europe since the G20 summit in Brisbane in autumn 2014, which was a failure for Russia, and since Russia's proclaimed course "towards itself" and "towards Eurasia". The visit, even when Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande arrived in Minsk, was thus significant both for Russia and Europe, and not only for Hungary, which has lately become used to the meetings between leaders.

The European press was quick to describe the event as Putin's attempt to split Europe, while the central European press described it as an attempt to destroy the Visegrad ensemble. By the way, Polish press published similar comments during Putin's visit to Budapest in 2006. The Visegrad Group countries are very cautious of each other's relations with Russia.

On February 2, 2015, to avoid speculation and to stress that the Russian President's visit should be seen exclusively as a pragmatic discussion of economic relations and that Hungary was not violating its obligations as a EU and NATO member, Viktor Orbán invited German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Budapest. He then visited Serbia, where he met the ministers of Greece and other countries through which territories the European branch of the Turkish Stream would pass. He even met Ukrainian President Poroshenko in Kiev the day before

¹⁶⁸ Magyarai Péter. Orbán: keleti szél fúj. Index. November 5, 2011. URL: http://www.index.hu/belfold/2010/11/05/orban_keleti_szel_fuj (in Hungarian).

¹⁶⁹ Orbán a kárpátaljai magyarok autonómiaigénye mellett szólt // Magyar Hírlap. May 17, 2014. URL: <http://www.archivum.magyarhirlap.hu/orban-a-karpataljai-magyarok-autonomiaigeny-e-mellett-szolt#sthash.khteGnqc.dpuf> (in Hungarian).

¹⁷⁰ Kövér: Nem tűrjük, hogy az unió kioktasson minket/ HIR TV. October 26, 2014.

URL: <http://www.mno.hu/ahirtvhirei/kover-nem-turjuk-hogy-az-unio-kioktasson-minket-1255226> (in Hungarian).

¹⁷¹ Budapest nem Kijev // MNO. October 26, 2014. URL: <http://www.mno.hu/vezercikk/budapest-nem-kijev-1255494> (in Hungarian).

Vladimir Putin's arrival. After the departure of the Russian President, Viktor Orbán headed for Warsaw, where Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz coldly received him.¹⁷²

Brussels criticized the agreements signed during the Russian President's visit on the construction of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant new unit in Hungary and the building of the Turkish Stream. However, after reviewing Hungarian arguments, Brussels chose not to oppose these plans openly.

Under Sanctions

The Visegrad Group's policy towards Russia in the economic sphere obviously does not go along with the resolute joint political declarations. Realizing that sanctions damage both sides, the Group's countries are looking for their own way to bypass them, although this cannot always be done in the face of pressure from Brussels and Washington. The lack of a common Visegrad Group position on the issue is the main cause of the deepening differences.

Poland is by far the only country in the region that supports Ukraine and welcomes anti-Russian sanctions.

The Visegrad Group is in fact divided into two parts: Poland and the other three countries. Some Polish analysts (Jagiellonian University lecturer Lukasz Koltuniak, for example) admit "the war in Ukraine has caused the most dangerous crisis in relations between the Visegrad states since 1989."¹⁷³ Poland is by far the only country in the region that supports Ukraine and welcomes anti-Russian sanctions.

The cautious attitude of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia is understandable. The hopes for a "civilizational solidarity" (i.e. all kinds of support from Western Europe to Eastern Europe because of their belonging to the same civilization) that were fairly widespread in the candidate countries before they joined the European Union in 2004 have not come true. The results of their EU membership, according to Russian assessments, are lamentable rather than positive. Most probably, this is not the only reason for the caution that Hungary shows, the Czech Republic and to some extent Slovakia to the range of problems caused by the events in Ukraine. However, they assist Ukraine not so much out of "civilizational solidarity" as out of economic feasibility. At least this may account for the miserly financial assistance rendered to Ukraine by the Visegrad Group countries (including even Poland). As a rule, it is confined either to modest transfers (about 10,000–40,000 euros) or the provision of medical treatment to a small number of injured "pro-Kiev fighters", which costs just about the same.

As for the *trade and economic relations between the Visegrad countries with Ukraine*, the events of 2014 brought no changes to the economic interaction between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine.

¹⁷² Kopacz: Rozmowa z Orbanem byla szczerza i trudna. Wyborcza. February 19, 2015. URL: http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75478,17455173,Kopacz__Rozmowa_z_Orbanem_byla_szczerza_i_trudna.html#ixzz3Yam8V1av (in Polish).

¹⁷³ Koltuniak, Lukasz. Can Visegrad Survive the Ukrainian Crisis? / New Eastern Europe. October 1, 2014. URL: <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/1344-can-visegrad-survive-the-ukrainian-crisis>

Table 4. Ukraine’s Share in Foreign Trade with Visegrad Group countries (%)

Year	POLAND		CZECH REPUBLIC		SLOVAKIA		HUNGARY		Total for Visegrad Group	
	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import	export	import
2013	2.82	1.08	1.02	0.78	0.74	0.96	2.44	1.62
2014*	1.22	2.00	0.69	1.25	0.1	0.18	1.76	3.11	0.99	1.73

* January–July 2014

Source: Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.

Admittedly, Visegrad Group exports to Ukraine dropped by 30 per cent during the first seven months of 2014 on an annualized basis (if a country has no money, it cannot buy anything), while import spiked, albeit by just 9 per cent (see Table 4). However, the reason for growing imports is simple: Ukraine is selling everything it can in order to get currency to pay for imports. And we should not forget that the weakness of the national currency – the hryvnia exchange rate dropped by 1.5 times – stimulates export.

Concerning the Visegrad Group’s percentage in Ukraine’s foreign trade ratio (see Table 5), the picture is slightly more optimistic: the overall share of Visegrad Group countries in Ukraine’s foreign trade is 6–8 per cent, of which Poland accounts for about one half.

A look at the Ukrainian foreign trade in 2013–2014 (see Table 5) shows us that no common structure of import and export can be discerned for the Visegrad Group countries. Different countries have different trade structures (see Table 5 which shows the Visegrad Group foreign trade with Ukraine).

It is hard to assess the Ukrainian economy in 2014, but some indicators are easy enough to understand.

In connection with the armed clashes in coal-rich Donbass, where, according to official Kiev, “pro-Russian separatists destroyed coal mines that supplied Ukrainian thermal power plants,” about 30–35 mines are out of order and the working mines lack explosives.¹⁷⁴ Naturally, coal production dropped by almost a half in January–August 2014. This spread to coke fuel, metallurgy, and car-making, etc.

As a result, Ukraine tried to import coal for the first time since 2000: in the middle of August Ukrinterenergo signed a contract with the South African Steel Mont Trading Ltd. for the delivery of one million tonnes of anthracite coal in order to diversify its coal sources.

However, South African coal turned out to be inferior in terms of generating heat. Thus, Ukraine had to make additional purchases from Russia and use expensive fuel oil or gas. The price was hiked to \$20 per tonne, which permitted the contractors to get an additional 200 million hryvnia in profits (around \$9.5 million at today’s exchange rate). As a result, the Minister of Energy and Coal Mining of

¹⁷⁴ URL: <http://www.novostia.net/ekonomika/60119-ukraina-zakupit-ugol-v-yuar.html> (in Russian).

Table 5. Foreign Trade of Visegrad Group Countries with Ukraine (million euros per annum)

SITC	Food, animal fats		Commodities, fuel and energy goods		Chemicals		Machines and other manufactured goods		Other		Total	
	Sections 0, 1, 4		Sections 2, 3		Sections 5		Sections 7 and 8		Sections 6 and 9		Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014
	Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014	Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014	Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014	Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014	Jan–July 2013	Jan–July 2014		
EXPORT TO UKRAINE												
POL	244.6	201.1	270.3	184.6	576.7	255.0	917.4	622.2	598.1	460.6	2607.1	1723.5
CZE	17.8	16.6	7.6	2.6	138.6	56.8	498.6	300.9	75.7	61.9	738.2	438.8
SLV	11.3	6.9	27.9	5.3	54.1	26.5	125.0	61.2	75.0	61.7	293.4	161.7
HUN	79.2	91.6	93.1	128.5	451.1	238.8	528.3	415.4	114.9	81.7	1266.5	956.0
IMPORT FROM UKRAINE												
POL	118.0	133.0	351.4	377.1	44.1	45.6	385.9	484.9	334.2	433.1	1233.6	1473.7
CZE	6.9	9.5	37.2	324.8	11.4	12.5	79.8	117.8	41.3	71.1	496.5	535.6
SLV	2.4	2.2	252.9	217.4	8.8	6.8	96.7	108.5	55.2	62.7	416.1	397.7
HUN	7.5	16.8	166.1	256.3	8.9	9.3	523.8	491.6	289.7	266.1	996.0	1040.0

Source: Calculated by A.V. Drynochkin using data from the Comext database.

Ukraine Yuriy Prodan was accused of corruption, South Africa's reputation was marred and the contract can be broken.

Kiev tried to exploit the idea of "European solidarity", asking Poland to supply coal to Ukraine starting from July 2014 (100 000 tonnes under contract) fully or partially free. The Polish side rejected the proposal, their pro-Ukrainian position notwithstanding.¹⁷⁵

On the whole, the Visegrad Group countries are not as interested in the Ukrainian market (Poland to a lesser extent) as they used to be, especially amidst internal crisis.

On the whole, the Visegrad Group countries are not as interested in the Ukrainian market (Poland to a lesser extent) as they used to be, especially amidst internal crisis. Therefore, if an opportunity to make money out of a project presents itself, why not grab it? Systemic cooperation between the Visegrad Group countries and Ukraine does not seem to be feasible, and some economic boost in relations is due almost entirely to the political stimulation of bilateral trade.

¹⁷⁵ URL: <http://www.ukraina.ru/news/20141015/1010832699.html> (in Russian).

Some time ago the Czech automobile manufacturer Skoda, aiming at possible duty-free exports of goods from Ukraine within the free trade zone that included Russia, was actively studying the prospects of locating the production of electrical locomotives in Ukraine.¹⁷⁶ However, after Russia declared that it would close its market if Kiev signed an association agreement with the European Union, their interest diminished dramatically. The agreement has already been signed, so Skoda is not in Ukraine – nor will it be in Ukraine any time soon.

In addition to Skoda, CSA Czech Airlines laid off 30 per cent of its staff (77 pilots and more than 200 cabin staff and administrative workers). Many observers blamed Ukrainian events for this. True, passenger carriage began to fall earlier, and not only on the Ukrainian air route of CSA operations. In 2013, the company lost 922 million Czech koruna (around \$37 million) and shareholders made the decision to reorganize the company. The events in 2014 brought more losses. Because the company could not make profit out of using the airplanes in the 2014–2015 season, it is getting rid of six A320 Airbus planes. However, Korean Air (as the main shareholder) and Aeroflot have already showed an interest in employing Czech pilots.¹⁷⁷

But while Skoda acted cautiously suspended investments, Czech Airlines was probably too late in making this decision. However, there are no massive cases of bankruptcies of Czech, Hungarian, Slovak and Polish companies that can be attributed to their activities in Ukraine.

Rather, their problems arise due to the sanctions imposed against Russia. Because it is hard to make a quantitative analysis of the impact on the national economies of the Visegrad countries, we will confine ourselves to rather pessimistic estimates.

For example, during the summer months, industrial output (on an annualized basis) dropped in Slovakia (by 7.5 per cent in June; 4.7 per cent in July; and 2.7 per cent in August) and Hungary (by 12.3 per cent in July and 0.5 per cent in August). The same trends were registered in the Czech Republic. However, it would not be entirely correct to attribute the drop to sanctions, because the seasonal factor was more important.

Another widely used indicator is the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), which reflects the results of surveys of managers about purchases and what they feel about future orders. It is thought to have a high prognostic value, because it is ahead of official data by several months. For the Visegrad Group countries the dynamics of that index are changing from positive to negative. The biggest drop was registered in the automobile industry, which traditionally dips in the summer period. The impact of sanctions seems to be there, but it should be taken into account that the Visegrad Group national economies are closely linked to Germany, and the slowdown of German industry almost automatically causes a slowdown in the Visegrad Group countries.

An analysis of the correlation in the development of the Russian and Visegrad economies carried out by the Belgian KBS Bank shows that a 1.5 percentage point slowdown of the Russian economy brings down the growth of Czech and Slovak economies by 0.1 per cent, the Hungarian economy by 0.2 per cent and

¹⁷⁶ Vlasova O., Ilyina N. *Wither Ukraine?* // *Expert*. 2013. No. 42 (in Russian).

¹⁷⁷ URL: <http://www.nol.hu/gazdasag/a-munkatarsak-harmadat-elkildi-a-cseh-legitarsasag-1488329> (in Hungarian).

the Polish economy by 0.4–0.5 per cent. In general, it can be said that there is a degree of dependence, but the negative impact, with the exception of Poland, is not so great.¹⁷⁸ For the economies of the other Visegrad countries to experience a greater slump (by at least 0.5 per cent), Russia's economy has to slow down by 8 per cent, which is unlikely at this point.

Summing up the political and economic impact of the events in Ukraine on the Visegrad Group and its relations with Russia, we can note that the effect is largely negative, though not yet fatal.

As for Russia, by introducing retaliatory sanctions, it targeted above all the European Union and not just the Visegrad Group, because the sanctions had been imposed on behalf of Brussels and not Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw or Prague. However, as close neighbours, and those most dependent on trade with Russia, the countries of Southeast and Visegrad Europe were the most exposed to their negative impact. In April 2015, Russia decided to revise its position with regard to those countries that had not imposed sanctions against Russia and continue to cooperate with the Russian Federation. Among the Visegrad Group, these countries include above all Hungary whose Prime Minister repeatedly declared that imposing sanctions against Russia is like shooting yourself in the foot.¹⁷⁹ Considering the pragmatic position of Prime Minister Robert Fico, Slovakia can also be counted in this group.

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Russia is aware of the pressure coming from Euro–Atlantic solidarity. Only a quarter of a century earlier the same countries were urged to adopt a similar behaviour line by Moscow when, being members of the socialist community, Hungary and Poland were signing agreements with the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Economic Community and other organizations in the West of the continent. It turns out that the fate of these countries once again brings them back to geopolitical rules of the game, the derivatives of which are the unifying role of the region and the still untouched potential for rapprochement between the two parts of the continent. This very possibility – being an intermediary between the two integrations – was highlighted by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán during President Putin's visit to Hungary.¹⁸⁰ The “personal opinions” of those who are interested in keeping European peace and pragmatic relations with Russia attest to the spirit of opposition and criticism that is traditional for that part of Europe. No one wants to see the conflict grow into a war. The only exception may turn out to be Poland, which seems to be ready to pursue the conflict to the end. However, today it is clearer than ever that this may cost Poland the unity of the Visegrad Group,

¹⁷⁸ URL: <http://www.fxstreet.com/analysis/kbc-flash/2014/09/23>

¹⁷⁹ Orbán: Az Oroszország elleni szankciókkal „lábón löttük magunkat”. *Mandiner*. August 15, 2015.
URL: http://www.mandiner.hu/cikk/20140815_orban_az_oroszorszag_elleni_szankciokkal_labon_lottuk_magunkat
(in Hungarian).

¹⁸⁰ Orbán mintha diszlexiás lenne. *NOL*. February 23, 2015.
URL: <http://www.nol.hu/kulfold/putyin-meg-az-uveges-tot-1517755> (in Hungarian).

a prospect it certainly does not anticipate. The Baltic region, which Poland has been lately penetrating deeper and deeper, does not compensate for its role in European politics.

Speaking about the impact of the Ukrainian crisis and the overall policy of the Euro–Atlantic community with regard to Russia on individual Visegrad countries, odd as it may seem, abnormal circumstances have not made a tangible impact on these countries' relations with Russia. The countries that have sought to improve bilateral relations (Hungary) continue to work towards that goal, albeit working against greater odds. The countries with more balanced policies (Slovakia and the Czech Republic) also try to stay within the framework of political and economic pragmatism. The countries that had committed themselves to confrontation even before the crisis and de facto are authors of the Eastern Partnership Policy seem to have achieved their goal, i.e. a dramatic deterioration of relations with Russia. It is no coincidence that Russia and Poland are engaged in a verbal war. These are countries whose interests clash in Ukraine more than those of other countries. And it is within the power of these countries to get the conflicting sides in Ukraine to the negotiating table.

Speaking about the future of the Visegrad Group against the background of the crisis, the signs of divergences over Ukrainian events and especially anti–Russian sanctions have introduced discord in the Visegrad Group: on the one hand, Poland is determined to follow the course to the very end; and on the other hand, the remaining three countries have been speaking of late about spreading Visegrad interaction in the south–western direction towards Austria and Slovenia. Political relations with Russia were only seriously damaged with Poland, while relations with Brussels and the United States became more strained for the remaining three countries, primarily for Hungary and Slovakia. A new configuration is emerging in Central Europe against this background, this time to preserve a balance of relations.

On January 29, 2015, the prime ministers of the Czech Republic and Slovakia together with the Chancellor of Austria met in Slavkov, Czech Republic, to sign an agreement that provided a new framework of regional interaction in Central Europe.¹⁸¹ Poland and Hungary were not invited to take part in this cooperation, allowing some analysts to proclaim the beginning of the end for the Visegrad Group. It is possible that the Czechs and Slovaks, having decided to forge closer ties with Austria, have tried not only to distance themselves from Poland's hyperactive and overambitious policy and the increasing national–conservative policy line in Hungary, but to return to the idea of the Austrian balancing role in Central Europe. Whether this format will become a temporary lifeline for Central Europe – primarily for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which have decided to follow their paths – or a constant of Central European policy, only time will tell. The history of the Visegrad Group has included periods of stagnation, during which there were no meetings convened and no decisions made; the equally difficult mid–1990s (1994–1998); the Balkan crisis; and poorly received European decisions that led to war. However, the Visegrad Group saw fit to preserve their

¹⁸¹ Jakub Groszkowski. The Slavkov Declaration. A New Format of Regional Cooperation / OSW. February 24, 2015. URL: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-02-04/slavkov-declaration-a-new-format-regional-cooperation>

format, although it has changed somewhat since their admission to NATO and in the run-up to their admission to the European Union.

Contrary to the expectations of Polish analysts, the new test – “the test by Ukraine” – did not unite the four, which can only be cemented by the wish to preserve the VG/V4 trademark as the most successful form of interaction in the transformation period. But for this to happen the dissenting interests and differences must be overcome. Even though EU enlargement dragged the Visegrad Group into the Ukrainian conflict, countries have an escape way, which is only possible through active participation in regional settlement, taking Russian interests into account, and by making their unifying role real.

Conclusion

The situation around Ukraine, as far as the Russia–Ukraine–Visegrad triangle is concerned, can be described as the most acute conflict of a global exposure in the post–socialist space, and one that has been triggered by a combination of internal and external factors. Not only has it caused severe economic and social damage to the region, but it has also put the slow–moving process of rebuilding relations between Russia and Ukraine, and between Russia and the Visegrad countries, back to square one, not to mention international relations at a higher level.

Ever since the Eastern Partnership became a priority in the eastern policy of the Visegrad Group countries, these countries have effectively been faced with the dilemma of how to reconcile their own national interests in developing cooperation in the post–Soviet space with the general line of the European Union. Some of them understood immediately that the programme was fraught with the potential for a conflict and, as a result, did not see it as a priority in building new relations with Russia and the former Soviet countries. Others, primarily Poland, continued to follow this course almost unconditionally.

In the series of post–bipolar conflicts that began with the war in Yugoslavia, this one is the most difficult to be settled because it directly involves the key players, Russia and the United States. In this situation, the lack of a third party’s potential may play a decisive role in further escalation.

The Ukrainian crisis brought these contradictions to the fore and led to further weakened regional cooperation. However, the main reason was not just the Ukrainian crisis, but the attitude to the anti–Russian policy of the European Union and NATO, and especially towards the sanctions.

Ever since the Eastern Partnership programme was launched, the Visegrad Group – especially Poland – has been the leading European Union advocate of bringing Ukraine closer to the Euro–Atlantic community. Perhaps the supporters of that idea had hoped that, if successful, the 2013 Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit would, first of all, boost the prestige and status of the region so that the countries would be set equally alongside core states of the EU. Secondly, an increase in funding for the Eastern Partnership (which previously amounted to a third of the budget of the Mediterranean Neighbourhood) was also highly desirable. Thirdly, the countries sought to speed up the Visegrad Group’s economic convergence.

This explains why the failure of the Vilnius Summit has come as a hard blow for the Visegrad Group, especially Poland. The setback over Ukraine destroyed the spotless image of the Visegrad diplomacy and tuned down regional politicians’ influence. Most importantly the practicability of increasing investments in the programme of bringing in former Soviet republics was questioned. These investments were distributed mainly through the Visegrad Group countries benefitting their general welfare. This explains the official statement about the

need to increase scholarships, grants and boost student contacts and exchange programmes. At the time this statement was perceived as grossly inappropriate given the first hundred victims fallen during the Maidan protests.

As the Ukrainian crisis unfolded, Moscow, Washington and Brussels became more subjective towards crisis management. Thus the Visegrad Group countries exercised “field shuttle diplomacy” to a great extent as their last resort, in spite of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslaw Sikorski’s efforts to initiate meetings of the EU and NATO officials at various levels.

Some of the Western politicians who have learned to appreciate the advantages of a fair and balanced dialogue with Russia over nearly 25 years of successful business cooperation, have started to suggest that the bloody conflict in Ukraine had been sparked by the inept but very persistent diplomatic efforts of the “European newbies” who tried to demonstrate their superior knowledge of its Eastern partners and Russia. Gradually, voices started to be heard among Western politicians blaming the short-sighted and extremely stubborn policy of Ukraine’s Visegrad and Baltic neighbours for the situation that eventually came to occur in the country, as these countries claimed to have greater knowledge of the post-Soviet space than their partners in the European Union. By signing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union on the Eastern Partnership fifth anniversary the Visegrad Group also wanted to get back to Russia for historical injustices of the common past.

How can we find the way out? The mechanisms of Russia–Visegrad interaction have not been formed yet, while trust in the potential of the Visegrad Group and the Baltic States to hold a dialogue with Ukraine within the framework of the Eastern Partnership without hurting Russian interests is practically undermined. The Visegrad countries missed the opportunity to take advantage of the favourable moment when Russia’s policies in the region changed at the beginning of the second decade of a new century and have not tried to harmonize their vision, including that of the Eastern Partnership. At the same time, Russian diplomacy was too sceptical about this regional entity, seeing it as a mere derivative of Western policy, and thus did not engage them in an independent dialogue.

Indeed, taking into account major ingredients, Visegrad diplomacy is a unique phenomenon. On the one hand, it is a combination of the foreign policies of four countries, or rather, an attempt to combine their interests. This is the most difficult level, because the national and political interests of the member countries often diverge. On the other hand, the Visegrad Group is an integral part of the European Union and NATO, whose line it must follow. It is increasingly difficult to show independence in such an association, because the implementation of national interests confronts hard frameworks set by the EU and NATO whose policies often differ from one another. We see a mirror situation to the 1990s: having failed to receive new incentives to development within the European Union, these countries are actively looking for them in the East, trying to outdo their rivals. Not surprisingly, they have been able to implement their interests in numerous areas, with Poland’s being mainly in Ukraine together with the United States; Hungary looking further East and focusing on the opportunities of working with Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and China; the Czech Republic seeking to forge links with Austria without disappearing entirely from the post-Soviet market; and Slovakia

being torn between Russia and the Czech Republic. The Ukrainian crisis brought these contradictions to the fore and led to further weakened regional cooperation. However, the main reason was not just the Ukrainian crisis, but the attitude to the anti-Russian policy of the European Union and NATO, and especially towards the sanctions.

But there are deeper levels: general public and ruling elite do not see eye to eye on many aspects; quite vivid interference of Western funds into the Central European countries' political life through the institutions of civil societies, the organization of protest movements, etc.

As a result, throughout the Ukrainian crisis, the Visegrad Group showed Euro-Atlantic unanimity when adopting official documents but all the while demonstrated dissenting opinion. For example, Hungary is very much concerned that the 160,000-strong Hungarian diaspora living in Subcarpathia may be affected by the crisis. Not all political forces in these countries support the escalation of tensions in relations with Russia and the further "Balkanization" of the Ukrainian conflict. Rational citizens are not looking to fight from the barricades, but aspire for a peaceful settlement to the conflict through parties' consensus. After a serious disagreement between Hungary and Poland, and the Czech Republic making moves on its own, the Visegrad Group countries are experiencing another period of mutual alienation. How long will it last? And how will the group mark its 25th anniversary in 2016?

Another question arises: Is the situation in the Russia-Visegrad Group all that hopeless? Should Russia, against the background of the Ukrainian crisis, take that regional union into account or continue to ignore it and pursue its relations with each country separately?

Several scenarios are possible, depending on which role this Central European community chooses to play. On the one hand, over the last 10-15 years the Visegrad Group has been content with the favourable development of economic relations with Russia. Strong contacts with Russia gave them extra leverage in negotiations with their Western partners. On the other hand, the Visegrad Group came into being with the knowledge, and even the support, of the United States. Here its place is unique in European politics, similar with the United Kingdom.

Clearly, the circumstances prevent the Visegrad Group from putting forward any initiatives in relations with Russia. However, it could again become a mediator in the regional politics, and Visegrad Europe could in the coming months become an effective forum for consultations and roundtables in search of a way out of the Ukrainian crisis, given the good will of its establishment and a reasonable approach to the situation. Hungary is already considering such an opportunity. Besides, the development of transcontinental cooperation coincides with the logic of both the Visegrad Group's and Russia's continental geopolitics and best suits them today.

Therefore, the dialogue between Russia and the Visegrad Group is worth maintaining and developing. Such a dialogue would allow them to work together in search of ways to stabilize Ukraine and strengthen the situation in the region that today is at the crossroads of Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian integration. The Visegrad Group should be interested in this because it would have a chance, first,

to fix the blunders made in implementing the Eastern Partnership. Secondly, the Visegrad Group would become the main ground in the Central Europe for the dialogue between Russia, Europe and the United States on the other. And in the future it could possibly play a new Central European role in international politics.

Although the situation is changing rapidly, it is possible to make some forecasts and recommendations concerning the further development of relations in the Russia–Ukraine–Visegrad triangle.

In the short term, the situation within the Visegrad Group itself attracts a number of questions. Poland and the remaining Visegrad countries may differ even further in their approach towards Ukraine. Other countries – notably the Czech Republic – would try to go Southwest towards Austria and Slovenia, thus restoring the outlines of Austria–Hungary, from whose shadow the United States has been trying to pull Europe for a quarter of a century. Here Hungary and Slovakia would certainly back The Czech Republic. The three Visegrad Group countries would be irritated by attempts to force them to move closer to Ukraine because they have repeatedly barred Kiev’s admission, realizing that another big member that sides with Poland could bring the group down. Perhaps the shifting political inclination of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards the Southwest will lead Poland to strengthen its military contacts in the Vilnius–Warsaw–Kiev triangle. The aim of creating a joint military group was already declared two years ago and has been implemented during the current crisis. Besides, these are more equal partners who have been close historically, unlike Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which are more similar in various characteristics to each other. Such a delimitation would simultaneously encourage greater regionalization of Ukraine itself, making federalization all the more inevitable forcing its northern regions to determine their stance on the matter. Here much would depend on Belarus.

Russia needs to understand which scenario best suits its geopolitical interests. Then Moscow has to choose partners or at least temporary allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

In midterm, it’s possible to revive four countries’ sound relations because Hungarian–Polish mutual attraction is centuries old. Thus, the Visegrad Group may restore itself in a more robust form due to a deeper interaction with the neighbouring regions of adjacent countries. Here it is worth taking a closer look at Carpathian Europe. In any case, Russia has to be ready now and clarify its official opinion of Central and Eastern Europe. Moscow may build up its authority in the region if it gives the Visegrad Group an opportunity to regain its status, if only as a venue for negotiations on the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. Meanwhile, this would make up, albeit belatedly for the mistakes of the European Union and the Visegrad Group in ignoring Russia’s interests in Ukraine.

Long term relations between Russia and the Visegrad Group countries will be determined not only by the effectiveness of bilateral relations, but also in cooperation to resolve the multitude of issues surrounding Ukraine. Given that the crisis has already descended into military confrontation, there is little hope for voluntary reconciliation between the east and west of the country. Ukraine needs mediators, and these mediators could feasibly be its immediate neighbours – Russia and the Visegrad Group countries. Russia’s priority is to avoid confrontation between countries under any circumstances. Use-of-brute-force scenario

coming true, Ukraine can no longer be a buffer. Reconciliation between Eastern and Western Ukraine is unlikely, as are negotiations with the Visegrad Group in the absence of its immediate supervisors, Germany and the United States. In that case, the Visegrad Group may be given a say in European politics, using its knowledge of the region and helping the parties to find a regionally acceptable solution. Unfortunately, the USA is pursuing quite a rigid policy in the region which constitutes an obstacle. One example is the sanctions against the Hungarian government. By the same token, given the deteriorating political situation and the threat of irrevocably destabilizing Ukraine, its immediate neighbours will begin to understand more clearly the real roles and potential of powers, states and unions in the Ukrainian scenario, and will start to act more decisively and in unison. Russia still has some time to focus on its own development – on mobilizing all internal resources and capabilities. It will allow Russia offer other countries a continental alternative of future development to the Atlantic one. This will present a precious opportunity to stabilize not only Ukraine but Europe in general with a special emphasis on mending Russia–Visegrad relations.

Notes

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