
**Visegrad 4 and the European integration:
Challenges and opportunities of Regional Cooperation**

MIREES' open lecture

Participants:

1. Professor Dorina Malova vice Dean for International Relation of the Faculty of Arts Comenio University Bratislava, Slovakia.
2. Maria Krasnohorska Ambassador of the Slovak Republic in Italy, Slovak Presidency of Visegrad Group.
3. Andrea Babcanova Head of Administration Department of the Visegrad Fund.
4. Tomas Szemler Dean of the College of International Management and Business, Budapest Business School.
5. Anna Kolomycev Institute of Political Science University of Rzeszov.

This conference was organized by the Lectorate of Slovak Language and Culture at the SLLTI, the Slovak cultural association and international Master of Arts MIREES and Visegrad Chair at the Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna. This event was definitely something new for me because I didn't imagine that within EU there can be additional economic informal union of states. So what I realized from the conference is that the Visegrad Group (V4) is an informal, regional form of cooperation comprising four Central-European countries – Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The Visegrad states are united not only through their common neighborhood and similar geopolitical situation, but also through their joint history, traditions, culture and values. The idea of the Group's foundation was to intensify cooperation in the field of building democratic state structures and a free-market economy, and – in the longer-term perspective – to participate in the European integration process. The Visegrad Group was formed on 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the Prime Minister of the Republic

of Hungary, József Antall. This high-level meeting in Visegrad, Hungary, created an imaginary historical arch linking the idea of this meeting to the idea of a similar meeting, which took place there in 1335 and was attended by John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, Charles I of Anjou (Charles Robert), King of Hungary, and Casimir III, King of Poland. The central motif of the two meetings was the desire to intensify mutual cooperation and friendship among the three Central European states.

The formation of the Visegrad Group was motivated by four factors of decisive relevance:

1. The desire to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe;
2. The desire to overcome historic animosities between Central European countries;
3. The belief that through joint efforts it will be easier to achieve the set goals, i.e. to successfully accomplish social transformation and join in the European integration process; and
4. The proximity of ideas of the then ruling political elites.

It was especially in the initial period of its existence (1991–1993) that the Visegrad Group played its most important role during talks with NATO and the EU. In the following years, the intensity of cooperation between the V4 countries began to slacken due to the prevalence of the idea that individual efforts towards accession to the Euro-Atlantic integration formations will be more efficient. Visegrad cooperation was resumed in 1998.

In the wake of disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Visegrad Group has since then been comprised of four countries, as both successor countries, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, are members of the Visegrad Group.

Since 2004, all V4 countries have been member states of the European Union, and the Visegrad Group is a platform for exchanging experiences and working out common positions on issues which are essential to the future of the region and the EU. Apart from European issues, V4 cooperation focuses in particular on reinforcing the stability of Central Europe, exchanging information, and promoting cultural community and cooperation in the field of culture, science, education and youth exchange.

Cooperation priorities include the development of transport infrastructure, as well as the reinforcement of energy security in the region. The V4 also offers a mechanism of cooperation with third countries in the “V4+” format. Visegrad cooperation involves a host of actors: presidents, prime ministers, ministers, parliaments, governmental institutions, NGOs, research centers, academies and cultural institutions. The only fully institutionalized form of cooperation among the V4 countries is the International Visegrad Fund. The Visegrad Groups’ rotating presidency is held for a period of one year and its program is approved by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries. Slovakia is holding its V4 presidency from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015.

For more than 20 years, regional cooperation of the V4 has successfully developed in the intersectional and interministerial field, e. g. in such areas as the economy, infrastructure, energy, cross-border cooperation, cultural exchanges and scholarships, coordination of foreign policy positions and pursuance of common interests within the EU and vis-à-vis third countries/regions. The coordination of V4 cooperation is carried out by the ministries of foreign affairs and by national Visegrad coordinators. The activities of the V4 are based on presidency programs adopted by the Prime Ministers at Visegrad Group summits. During the Slovak V4 Presidency the Bratislava Declaration was adopted at the Summit of the V4 Prime Ministers on 15 February 2011 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad co-operation. The Declaration contains the previous results of the V4 and defines its main challenges for the future.

But at the end I want to say that for me it is still not clear why European States are trying to create an additional organization within EU, as it is not easy to develop this kind of relation with European Union. I think I need to study a lot in order to understand the original reasons for creating Visegrad Group.

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