"THE CHANGING POLITICAL ROLE OF VISHEGRAD COUNTRIES IN THE EU"

Final Master thesis

Political science study programme, state code 621L20004

Political science study field

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Kaunas, 2017
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ABSTRACT

The Master Thesis analyses contemporary challenges between Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the European Union. The object of the Master thesis is the political role changes of the Visegrad states in the EU during last three years. By the “role” in that case mean the political actions of the V4 members as the part of the European Union. Master Thesis aims to identify the contemporary challenges of the changing relation between EU and V4 states. To reach the aim the given tasks have been chosen: to introduce the theoretical background of the research and to identify possible features and concerns of “the liberal intergovermentalism” theory of European Integration; to make a historical trend of the bilateral relations between V4 and EU; to indicate the main steps and decisive actions taken towards the EU-membership; to demonstrate the main political changes of states’ position separately analyzed below at the EU-level; to investigate the main EU-related issues led to variation of positive perception of the wide integration processes; to scrutinize high-level representatives’ stance about the future perspectives of the EU-V4 relations; to analyze internal actions of each state caused problems between the European Union and local Governments. For this purpose both qualitative and quantitative methods used: comparative method, historical method, document analysis and analysis of the statistical data. Initially, the theory of the “Liberal intergovermentalism” has been chosen in order to analyze main changes of Visegrad states political actions towards EU integration and its reasons. The main reason to choose this theory is the fact that it explains the European Integration as well as possible disintegration from the perspective of National Interests what is suitable for the research. First empirical part of the Master thesis explaining the stance of the Visegrad states in the beginning. Visegrad group countries are comparatively new members of the European Union which were very enthusiastic about EU-membership during the first years of the integration processes and membership. However, last three year their position in the EU is changing in a negative way. From countries which were enthusiastic about EU, they became states with widely spread Euroscepticism. Thus the third chapter of the paper encompasses analysis of the state level officials and other representatives of the political elites position towards EU and its influence on the formation of the image of the EU among masses. In other words, this part of the Master Thesis demonstrates how the perception of European integration is changing last years. Last chapter of the Thesis devoted to recent challenges for the mutual relation between V4 states and EU.
This chapter divided to two subchapters first of which shows the Visegrad Group dissatisfaction on EU internal and foreign policy, whereas the second speaks about the internal policy of the local Governments led to the increasing tensions between parties.

**Key words:** EU, Visegrad group, national interests, European Integration, contemporary challenges.
SANTRAUKA

per pastaruosius metus. Paskutinis magistrinio darbo skyrius yra skirtas patiems neseniai iškilusiems abipusių V4 valstybių ir ES santykių iššūkiams. Šis skyrius padalintas į du poskyrius, kurių pirmajame aprašytas Višegrado grupės nepasitenkinimas ES vidaus ir užsienio politika, o antrajame pateikta vietinių Vyriausybių vidaus politika, kuri prisidėjo prie didėjančių įtampų tarp šalių.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** ES, Višegrado grupė, nacionaliniai interesai, Europos integracija, šiuolaikiniai iššūkiai.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CVVM institute – The Public Opinion Research Centre – Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění

EU – European Union

FIDESZ – Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Association of Young Democrats)

IVF – International Visegrad Fund

LSNS – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (People’s Party Our Slovakia)

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice party)

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

VAT – Value Added Tax

V4 Visegrad 4 (Visegrad group)

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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INTRODUCTION

The research project mainly premises on the investigation of the main changes of political stances of the Visegrad countries en route for European integration. The Visegrad Group holds 4 main states in the Central Europe including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. These four countries united in the cultural and political alliance were very enthusiastic to become the member of European Union and after the long-lasting transition processes in 2004 finally became part of the EU. The pivotal role of their ambitions to be the member of the EU led to the big alteration within their both internal and external policies. Amid the period of last 25 years, the countries needed a foreign both political and economic assistance in terms of establishing sustainable political and economic systems, these states became far more integrated and developed states with stable financial institutions. They commenced to play a crucial role in the internal economy of the Union and to take part in the foreign policy initiatives and actions of the EU. Today, with all the experiences they have, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia themselves try to help neighbor countries to establish sustainable political systems. At the current time, they are participating in all the social programs of the EU including ERASMUS.

Despite the fact that integration to the EU is mostly beneficial for the countries aforementioned above. However, the reunion to the Western Europe causes some disadvantages. Thus, their foreign policy is gradually shifting and they sometimes choose the divergent interests (divergence vs convergence theory) rather than the convergent interests based on European acts, at the same time, they are in some way, show the unwillingness to stay as a part of the Union with its unsolved problems.

Novelty and relevance of the topic. Foreign as well as the domestic policy of the given states were analyzed by researchers before, however, the topic chosen for this master’s thesis mainly elaborates on the processes which are going on at the present time, for that reason, it is quite novel and relevant for final research. The main political actions analysed in the given paper have begun in 2015 and continue in 2017.

Research problem. The main problem has been analyzed in the master thesis is the reasons of the changing position of the Visegrad countries in the European Union during last three years.

Research question The main research question is “What are the changes of the political role of the Visegrad countries in the EU during 2015-2017 and the reasons led to the rise of Euroscepticism?
The main goal of my research is to identify the contemporary challenges of the changing relation between EU and V4 states. The tasks chosen in order to reach main aim is written below:

1. To introduce the theoretical background of the research and to identify possible features and concerns of “the liberal intergovermentalism” theory of European Integration;

2. To make a historical trend of the bilateral relations between V4 and EU;

3. To indicate the main steps and decisive actions taken towards the EU-membership;

4. To demonstrate the main political changes of states’ position separately analyzed below at the EU-level;

5. To investigate the main EU-related issues led to variation of positive perception of the wide integration processes;

6. To scrutinize high-level representatives’ stance about the future perspectives of the EU-V4 relations;

7. To analyze internal actions of each state caused problems between the European Union and National Governments.

The object of my Master thesis is the political role changes of Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary in the EU during last three years. By the “role” in that case mean the political actions of the V4 members as the part of the European Union.

Hypothesis: V4 countries, as EU newcomers were more enthusiastic Union supporters, while in the latest years they became more pragmatic defenders on the National interest.

The methodology of the research: The study is based on the both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods. Research methods such as book analysis, a comparative method, an analytical method and a descriptive method are used in the research. In order to evaluate the trends of relations between Visegrad countries, the historical method also was used in the research. The analytical method mainly focuses on how the political standpoints and view angles of Visegrad countries including Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia changed toward the EU within an international system by comparing their former and latter strategy separately. In order to understand main changes of attitudes about European Union institution among the public Eurobarometer data has been used.
Main Literature of the research: In this part, the researcher referred to different monographs from well-known scholars. The study sources are based on materials that collected from books of scholars, mainly monographs in scholarly articles, working papers, annual strategic plans and framework laws of Visegrad countries. The study sources are based on materials that collected from books of scholars, scholarly articles, working papers and annual strategic plans of two states and important databases namely, Oxford Journal Online, SAGE, JSTOR, Cambridge Journal, Carnegie Endowment Center for International Peace journal, Taylor&Francis group and etc. The source also included academic research materials, reports, that had been published by leading think tanks and research institutions specialized mostly in V4. For theoretical part of the research liberal Intergovernmantalism theory of the European theories have been applied. The articles as “Centralization Or Fragmentation?: Europe Facing the Challenges of Deepening, Diversity, and Democracy”, “The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht”, “National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement” by Andrew Moravchik analysed in this chapter. The second part mostly written on the basis of the reports of the International Organizations like IMF, European Commission and International Visegrad Fund as well as scientific articles about political and Economic transition in the region. For the analysis of the public opinion of Visegrad nationals in the third chapter Eurobarometer data published by the European Commission had been used. Last chapter mostly based on the latest news regarding EU-Visegrad relations.

The structure of the research: According to tasks, the research paper is composed of four main parts. The first chapter devotes to the theoretical framework and attempts to identify the main role of Visegrad countries in the EU from the prism of “liberal inter-governmentalism”. The second chapter encompasses historical backgrounds of mutual relation between EU and Visegrad countries and demonstrates the degree of willingness to became and remain part of the Union during the first years of the integration. In other words, the first empirical part explains what was in the beginning. The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the Elite influences on the formulation of the image of European Union. In this chapter has been shown the main position of the high-level officials of the Visegrad group towards European Integration and main changes of the public opinion about European integration after 2015. Thus, in this chapter, the main trends of the public and elites opinion regarding EU membership has been analyzed. In the last chapter, the contemporary challenges between EU and V4 countries have been identified. This chapter is divided to two subchapters on the base of the sources of the problems for mutual relations: the first disagreement of the Visegrad states about the decision of EU institutions, second – internal policy of the each state which led to increasing political tensions between states and Union.
1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

The first chapter of the Master thesis encompasses theoretical framework of paper which helps the author to analyze the chosen topic. There are plenty of authors which have discussed the processes which were going on in the European community. They had different, sometimes opposite, ideas about the integration of European states.

European Integration Theories are classified into several groups depending on the main ideas. The first group is so-called Functionalism (later Neofunctionalism). The founder of the given theory was German-American scientist Ernst Haas. The main representatives of the given group are Leon Lindberg, Philippe Schmitter, Wayne Sandholtz, Alec Stone Sweet. In their opinion, European Institutions play the supra-national role for member-states. The second group of integration theories is called “Europeanisation” or “normative theory”. In their works named “Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy” Manner Jan, “Europe as Empire” Zielonka Jan, “EU promotion of democratic governance in the neighborhood” Schimmelfennig Frank and others pay attention to the normative power of the European Union sometimes identifying to the Soft Power of EU foreign policy against neighborhood or accession states. Next approach is “multilevel governance”. Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch in their book “European Integration” published in 1996 mostly focus on the relations between different levels of management structures like national-regional or regional-supra-national and etc.

The theoretical approach chosen for the Master thesis is “Liberal intergovernmentalism” approach of the European Integration Theories. The founder of the given current in science was the famous professor of the Harvard University Stanley Hoffman. According to him, integration is not an automatic process which is going on without national-based needs. Main reasons for the integration, in his point of view, are rational interests of the member states. Governments which are

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Last accessed: 07/03/2017


4 Ibid p.,89

controlling the foreign policy of theirs countries and their capacity of negotiation are important factors of the co-operation between different states or between states and International Organizations.

These ideas were mostly developed by another American professor Andrew Moravcsik who is currently the director of the European Union Program at Harvard University's Center for European Studies. He devoted many books to the integration processes which are going on in the EU.

He also wrote several articles on the given topic. In his scientific works, including "Preferences and power in the European Community: A liberal intergovernmentalist approach" and "Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Integration: A Rejoinder", he focuses on the main reasons led to the integration of the EU. He made a historical overview of the establishment and development of European community and argue that every state which decides to become the member of the EU has its own national interest and national level issues which want to solve with the help of the community. Their interests can be caused by different demands like the economic growth which is highly possible with the support of the EU institutions. Intergovernmental co-operations also can be induced by the stimulus to create establish new structures which will guarantee the credibility of the multilateral strategic agreements signed between different European actors. The relative power is another fact encourages states to co-operate.

According to his theory, there are three steps of the integration (Figure 1):  

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6 For instance:

✓ “Why the European Community Strengthens the State: Domestic Politics and International Cooperation” published by Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Publications Office in 1994;
✓ “Centralization Or Fragmentation?: Europe Facing the Challenges of Deepening, Diversity, and Democracy” published by Council on Foreign Relations in 1998;
✓ “National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement” publisher by Harvard University, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies in;
✓ “De Gaulle and Europe: Historical Revision and Social Science Theory” Published by Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies of Harvard University in 1998 and etc.


7 Figure done by author in the basis of the information provided in book: Michelle C. European Union Politics. New-York: Oxford University Press, 2007.p.110
The success of the each stage leads to the transition to the following phase. It means that the first step towards integration comes from the internal need and transform to the foreign policy of this or that state. These preferences adopted on national level stimulate the cooperation on the international level. Common interests lead to the convergence of the states and the beginning of the bargaining process. In the discussed topic, negotiations begin between the main institutions of the EU and the governments of the accession states. Only after discussion all terms and conditions in details states choose the appropriate institutional mechanism.

In the point of view of Andrew Moravcsik, European Union is an organization which based on the international regime created by the members. This system constructed for "the management of the interdependence" where countries do not lose their sovereignty, however, become the part of the one of the modern "great power"s. The structure of the EU bases on the equality of all members that's why the relative power of any of the party depend on the symmetry of the complex correlation arrangement.

For the Master thesis, I chose the "liberal intergovernmentalism" theory due to several reasons. Firstly, the history of the mutual relations between EU and Visegrad group have been developed in exactly the same way like described by Andrew Moravcsik. As mentioned above, the initial step of integration processes is a formation of the national preferences and understanding of the rational interests of any country on the Governmental level. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia had regained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the beginning of 1990th. Of course, national movements during 1980th were aimed to become free from the pressure of the USSR. After recognition of the sovereignty of these states, the main goal of V4 was the creation of new political and economic systems. The new states were weak and had no experience in the democracy and market economy. Their need to gain skills of the administration from Western European states had motivated them to re-establish relations with developed states of the continent. Moreover, being part of the EU meant for Visegrad group the access to the huge market. Therefore, the statement of the American scientist about the causes of the integration is applicable to the region.
There is no doubt that the second step towards integration for the Visegrad states as well as others was long-lasting intergovernmental bargaining. During the first years of the independence discussed states were developing close relations with regional powers and at the same time EU was promoting its values to these states through many programs which aimed to support democracy and market economy in the countries and help them to prepare their legal and financial systems for the integration.

As Moravcsik mentioned, the success of the transition to the next step of integration depends on the success of previous one. In our case, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia made a huge success on negotiation processes and improvements of the administration what opened new paths for deeper co-operation with EU. After a decade of bargaining V4 states finally signed accession agreements and had chosen the institutional arrangements of the mutual relations.

Another factor led to the choosing this theory was the idea of liberal intergovernmentalism about being part of EU. Mainly, It has been said that countries are continuing to stay part of EU because of their national needs and if there will be any issue caused by the Union, states can demonstrate dissatisfaction about EU internal or international policy. The EU-related problems can cause not only discontent about European Institutions but also the aspiration to leave the community. These features have also shown by the governments of the states. Currently, the question of "Czexit" is quite popular in the Czech Republic.

The only limitation of the chosen theory is the fact that it explains the integration and disintegration movements from the position of the national states. However nowadays there are group of challenges for relations which comes from European Union institutions. These challenges explained at the last subchapter of the Master Thesis.

Summarily, in my opinion, Moravcsik’s theory is the most appropriate theory in order to investigate the mutual relations between EU and Visegrad countries, to analyze their roles in the Union and Foreign Policy of the organization, to understand the impact of the EU policies on national levels and to explain the contemporary changes in V4-countries.
2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN EU AND VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES

In the given chapter of my Master Thesis, I am going to perform the historical overview of the mutual relation between discussed states and the European Union. As mentioned before Visegrad group countries had been part of the communist block during half of the century. The fact that Western and Central European countries disconnected during Cold War period influenced in the behavior of different levels of the society. Their political and economic systems of two parts of Europe had been developed in absolutely different ways. However, everything had changed in the last decade of twenty’s century. As mentioned in the previous chapter the liberal Intergovermentalism theory explains integration as three pillow process first of which is understanding of the national preferences, then negotiations and membership. Historical overview of the mutual relations demonstrates that the same scenario explained by authors happened in this region. The decisions of the local Governments on the ground of national interests about European membership motivated these states to create the social-political institutions on the basis of European Values.

2.1. Political transition

Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia together with the other representatives of post – communist block had chosen democratic way of political transition. From the first days of independence from USSR pressure, these countries demonstrated willingness to become a part of European community.

In order to become a member of European Union candidate states should satisfy some conditions which developed by Copenhagen European council in 1993 and so-called “accession criteria” or “Copenhagen criteria”. All conditions had been included in three groups. First of them is the guarantee of stability of democratic institutions as well as institutions supporting rule of law and human rights including protection of national minorities in the countries. All requirements written in the previous sentence are stated in “the Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union”. In other words, we can call it political criteria of accession. Second basic guidelines set includes economic requirements. It requests the existence and a well-functioning economy based on market principles. Moreover, economic systems should be able to cope the pressure of the huge competitiveness within the Union as well as control the market forces on states and EU level. The last set of rules consist of the capacities to take obligations of the EU-membership and the administrative as well as institutional
capability to implement acquis communitaire and adopt national laws according to the main legal acts of the Union. According Grab Heather “European Union conditionality and the ‘Acquis Communautaire” the main problem of Accession Criteria is that EU require all candidate states to implement new political and economic systems however does not specify the level of development.

Different authors have analyzed the political as well as economic reconstruction of CEE countries and became to diverse, sometimes absolutely opposite consequences about Europeanization of the given states. For instance, Kupper who is the famous legal historian from Germany had a pessimistic point of view regarding the enlargement of European Union. According to him, the different historical ways changed societies in opposite ways. Kupper, who chose historical approach during his analyses, highlighted that CEE disjoined Western Europe after Renaissance and chose socialism what resulted in enduring legacy. He argued that “the devaluation of law in people’s mind inherited from socialism times.” Oppositely, a group of people like Cameron who was an official in European Commission hand an optimistic look at EU enlargement. He agreed with the fact that it would be difficult to establish new sustainable democratic systems in countries including to “the third wave of democratization” whereas argued that these states can achieve a big progress in Westernization of political, social and economic systems. He pointed that these countries just need a time and support from the European Union who always promote and support democratization of various countries, especially neighbors.

The first step towards EU membership was the adoption of national laws to the legal system of European Union. In other words, one of the most important acts, in order to access the Union, was acceptance of acquis communautaire. On its turn, it is important to note that acquis communautaire is term using to donate all the treaties and laws of the adopted by the European Union. Acquis also includes declarations and resolutions of European Council as well as international bilateral and multilateral agreements signed in order to create the rules of EU internal and international affairs. The judgments provided by the main legal organ of the European Union – European Court of Justice are part of common EU legal system, too. Likewise, all the documents mentioned above, decisions referred to the common security, foreign affairs, and justice are components of the legal system of European Union. Some authors call acquis communautaire is the perfect tool of “soft power” against new Accession States and candidates.

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There are plenty of scientists have analyzed the incorporation of EU law to the state level. Each of them focused on specified aspect of transfer of regulations of European Union to states’ legal systems. For instance, a German official Peter Schütterle in his scientific articles\(^\text{10}\) mostly focused on state aids. Another person explored the transformations of the national laws according to the legacy of the organization was L.Borissova who based on competition and energy policy of states in different levels.\(^\text{11}\) Financial contracts had been discussed by Hungarian professor Izsó Lajos.\(^\text{12}\) Presently, one of the most influential sectors is media. Professor of the Manchester University Alison Harcourt in her book called “European Union and the Regulation of Media Markets” paid attention to this aspect.\(^\text{13}\)

In order to acquire accession criteria in time, three of V4 countries adopted new constitutions (Poland in 1997, Czech Republic 1992, Slovakia in 1992). Hungary in its turn replaced the previous constitution with one they had before communism law. However, It was the only first step in a way of changing the state level laws and their interactions with European Legal acts. Only in the 2000 parliament of the Polish Republic enacted 176 laws whereas 66 of them were directly connected to the acquis. Until 2003 deadline Polish government adopted more than 200 laws and 900 guidelines.\(^\text{14}\)

Notwithstanding constitutions of the states were adopted according to the EU common declarations, the supremacy of the constitution had been highlighted. It means that in the case of the conflict between some European laws and constitutional articles, constitutional acts should be applied. However, it is not the same for other legal acts at state levels. In event of such an issue, constitutional Courts of the States should decide which of the laws – national or international should be applied.

\(^\text{10}\) For example:
- “Implementing of the EC State Aid Control – an Accession Criterion” ”(Berlin:Lexxion Publisher,2002)
- “Enlargement: Pre-Accession – State Aid after Accession” ”(Berlin:Lexxion Publisher,2003)
- “State Aid Control in the Western Balkans and Turkey”(Berlin:Lexxion Publisher,2005)
- “New Romanian State Aid Procedure Legislation”(Berlin:Lexxion Publisher,2007)


Haughton Tim in his work “When does the EU make a difference? Conditionality and the accession process in Central and Eastern Europe.” argues that CEE states in case of absence of European community also would choose the liberalization of economy and democratization of political system however the external help improved the quality of transition and help to speed up this process.

Together with the implication of the Acquis as well as economic reforms, Visegrad countries established the new system of administration of the Government – from one party system countries to the multi-party system state with the Parliamentary model.

2.2. Economic transition

To speak about the economic transition, during last 25 former communist states were reintegrated into the global and regional economies, developed sustainable economic and financial sectors what had been resulted in the improvements in the living standards. The process of building of market economies was difficult for newly independent states. However, liberalization of prices, as well as trade, had been finished more quickly in comparison to the institutional reforms like privatization and enterprise restructuring.

First years of transition were extremely arduous. All countries faced big inflation which made economic circumstances even more difficult. The budget deficit, which was equal to 7 percent of GDP in Poland in 1989, were covered by printing currency.

Among V4 countries first big step to the economic transition had been done by Poland. There, the commission, with Leszek Balcerowicz at the head, had finished a document with the plans for reforms in the end of 1989 which were implemented beginning in 1990. That form of reforms is known as “shock therapy”. The “Balcerowicz Plan” in Poland was a very risky approach that’s why the majority of observers of the situation in Poland were not confident about the correct choice and they did not believe in the success of the plans.

Firstly there is a need to write basic fact of the conditions in 1989 in order to understand which problems this state had in the beginning and then explain ways to solve them and results of


reformation. Most prices in the internal markets were managed. In the beginning of the liberalization credits which were very cheap as well as subsidies financed by the Polish Central Bank followed by hyperinflation in the country. Moreover, the deficit of currency widened and led to the default of external debts. The labor market at that period also was not functioning and the majority of the people did not manage to find workplaces.

The reform package called “Balcerowicz Plan” consist of three pillars.\textsuperscript{17} (\textit{Table1})

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Tightening financial policies. & Liberalizing the economy. & Building market infrastructure. \\
\hline
➢ Devaluation and fixation of zloty & ➢ Removal of the price controls & ➢ Structural changes were launched to set up capital markets to facilitate ownership changes; \\
➢ Increase of interest rates & ➢ Adjustment of energy prices & ➢ Modernization and strengthening of the banks; \\
➢ Application of tax-based income policy to the firms & ➢ Replacement of the import restrictions and foreign trade monopolies by tariffs. & ➢ Improvement of the regulatory and accounting standards; \\
 & ➢ Availability of the foreign exchange & ➢ Modernization of the tax system \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Three pillars of the reform package:}
\end{table}

As demonstrated in the table above, the first pillar of reconstruction was “Tightening financial policies”. With the help of regional and international financial organizations like EBRR and International Monetary Fund national currency of the Poland – zloty was devalued and then fixed to the dollar.\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, Interest rates in the state were increased rapidly. Moreover, the income policy of the Government, which were based on the taxes, from that time had been applied to all firms in the country without exceptions. Furthermore, these firms had to pay penalties to the administration of the country in case of the increases of the wages above the fixed norm. These changes prevented the tax exemptions in Poland.

\textsuperscript{17} Table done by author on the basis of information provided in book: Lane D. \textit{Elites and Identities in Post-Soviet Space}. London: Routledge, 2013, pp.60-61


The second step was the liberalization of the economy. To reach the given goal, Polish government decided to stop controlling of the most prices in local markets. Likewise, the prices for energy resources as well as its products were adjusted in accordance of the reflection of the costs. Reforms change the import system by replacing import restrictions as well as foreign trade monopolies by the use of tariffs. Exchange of foreign currency became available all over the country for transactions.

The last branch of reforms aims to build market infrastructure. Capital markets should be ready to facilitate ownership changes. Alteration of the structure aimed to modernize as well as strengthen the Polish banks. In that case, Government improved the standards of regulations and accounting and implemented the new system of taxes based on the VAT.

As a result of above-mentioned reforms, financial conditions within the country had been improved. By end-1991, the corporate sector was able to react to the incentives of the market. Due to the fact that demand and import competition became much lower the rate of disinflation increased. The government took under its control monetary aggregates which got much more stable. At the same time, real interest rate, in the majority of cases, demonstrated positive indexes.

Generally, “Balcerowicz Plan” can be called successful because of the improvements in the economy of the Republic of Poland in a short time. Therefore, so-called “shock therapy” approach set an example for the other regional powers. Similar reforms began in the Czechoslovakia a year later in 1990. The only state among Visegrad Countries was Hungary which decided to change economy without rapid reforms because of the fact that its start position was much better than other two and then three states. The reform rates of the V4 were highest in the post-communist area. (Figure 2) Furthermore, discussed countries were reached the macro-economic stabilization really quickly in comparison with other states of Communist Block. (Figure 3)
Despite the all pessimistic predictions and difficulties of reconstruction, in fact, V4 states acquired necessary features in order to become wholly equal members of the European Union. Accession treaties between parties signed in 1998 and later updated in 1999. Finally, in 2004 all 4 countries became the members of the European Union. Later, in 2007 they joined Schengen Area.
2.3. The promotion of European Values during the early years of membership

In the previous chapter of the Master Thesis mentioned about the promotion of the democracy values in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. EU using its programs sometimes directly sometimes indirectly supported the reconstruction of the political systems of the states. The support which had been given during the 1990s by the Western Europe to the Central Europe was a major factor in the democratic transition. Presently, Visegrad countries are democratic states with the positive economic indexes. Their experiences became the best example for the countries aiming to improve their administrative and legal systems in democratic way. This achievement resulted in an increasing interest to spread the advantages of the democratization other regional states. Thus, in the given chapter information about democracy assistance will be provided.

Firstly, It is important to explain what is democracy assistance. This collocation means a foreign policy which main goal is to help to the nations of third states construct institutions of the governance based on the democratic regime, to increase the level of the participation of publicity in decision-making process, promote multi-party political systems and pluralism ideas, freedom of the press and the most important to protect human rights together with the works aimed establishment of new legal system with the rule of law.

Only in 2006 V4 governments had spent more than ten million euros in order to support democratic transition in other countries. The list of countries got democracy assistance by Visegrad states is written in table 2. The majority of the money went to Ukraine and Belarus.

\[\text{Table done by author on the basis of information provided in book:}\]
Last accessed: 10/03/2017
Table 2. The list of target countries for assistance of the Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Cuba, Burma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Serbia(including Kosovo), Ukraine, Belarus, Montenegro, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sudan, Macedonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, Palestine Authority, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2004-6: Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vietnam, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine Authority, Ethiopia, Yemen, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Iraq 2008: Serbia, Belarus, Moldova, Albania, Cuba, Palestine Authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the main tools to promote democratic values such as human rights protection, freedom of the press and others is support of NGOs in the countries with autocratic regimes. In that case, a number of non-governmental organizations of the Visegrad group develop relations with human right campaigners in non-democratic states like Belarus. As an example of such of organizations in the region can be shown "Pontis Foundation and People in Peril Association" in Slovakia, "People in Need" in the Czech Republic, and "Grupa Zagranica" in Poland. Nevertheless, there is a list of NGOs, like International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT) in Hungary, which has maintenance by the Government and aims to support not only non-governmental but also governmental actors defending democratization. ICDT mostly focus on the Western Balkans region and neighbor-state Belarus.

The fact that consultants and diplomats of the V4 countries have the high reputation in Balkans has caused by the features such historical background of communism (similar to former Yugoslavia) and their achievement in being part of the EU with its political and financial systems. Due to the experiences in their own region, Visegrad states can perceive the processes of the political and economic transition as well as integration with EU through the position of the accession states. Moreover, unlike the Western European representatives, people from the CE can understand and speak the local languages.

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Surely, the projects of the Visegrad countries are much smaller in their scale in comparison to the project of the world-famous democratic assistants like USAID, OSCE or particular delegation of European Commission in the specific region.21

There are a lot of instruments using to support the political and economic transition in different regions. These tools are mostly focus on various policy areas.

First of the spheres of democratic assistance is the education of the main factors of social transformation processes. The most important fields, in that case, can be counted economics as well as the social system. Privatization is one of the first acts towards the creation of the market economy and it should be one with the attentiveness. Professors can teach also the process of transformation of the administration of the governments on states and local levels. As mentioned in previous chapters V4 states have a huge experience in the transition from the non-democratic regime to new political systems based on individuals. Therefore, they can explain all requirements of the successful transition to the countries aim to establish new political structure. One of the steps towards democracy is the reformation of the legislative systems. In order to achieve this goal, legislation reforms should be made new constitution can be proposed. Moreover, rehabilitation of the political prisoners what is quite popular in autocratic countries should be done immediately.

Another feature of the EU political systems is the presence of the civil society which mostly weak in nondemocratic regimes. In democratic states, public is mostly engaged in the process of decision-making what is quite unusual for other forms of Government. Accordingly, promotion of the civil life is one of the priority spheres of democratic assistance.

One of the main indexes of the democracy according to the Freedom House is freedom of the press which is lamentably in the majority of the authoritarian states including some states of the Eastern Neighborhood program. Thus, V4 states, as well as other EU members, promote the establishment of the independent local media with no link to Governmental propaganda in countries recipients of democracy. Moreover, the importance of the creation of normal conditions for its work is highlighted. Together with guarantees of the freedom of the speech, Visegrad group stimulates the improvement of the standards of journalists’ work.

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Unfortunately, at the current time, there are some existing repressive regimes. In that case, V4 try to help to resolve problems related to autocratic rules. Moreover, EU-members aim to decrease the number of such issues or even eliminate them. The governments of the Visegrad group provide support to imprisoned persons or persecuted group. This assistance can be given in different ways, such as legal or psychological aid or provision of mediation materials to prisoners. Alternative ways of information spreading can be useful in that case, too.

Visegrad countries spread democracy also by the of financial support when they transfer an amount of money to the project of one of the areas mention previously in the given chapter. Financing can be done by one of the EU funds or another international organization including fund of the Visegrad group itself as well.

Such projects can be in various forms like training activities including scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students from third states including young people from nondemocratic states. As an example can be shown Visegrad scholarships program which provides scholarship for nationals of the Eastern Neighborhood countries. V4 countries often organize seminars and conferences where can people from around the world. Moreover, there are plenty of scholarship they can take in order to participate in such types of training held in Poland Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Another type of project includes publication of scientific works in different languages and states in order to increase the quality of education, especially in democracy-related subjects. The third form of projects is consists of exchange visits as well as study and work for different activists on human rights, specialists on different spheres relevant to the project or conference, local politicians, independent journalist and bloggers, representatives of the Non-governmental Organisation and so on. Next group of the projects held in third states is cultural events such as “Eurovillage” or presentation of the EU-institutions in different regions.

There is no doubt that different countries have different issues that why nothing strange that the priory is of the assistance also vary from one state to another. The decision what kind of support particular country decided on ad hoc basis. The promotion process in the individual target country begin after the consultation with the diplomats working at the embassies of the V4 group states in the target countries.

One of the states-recipients of the democratic assistance by V4 states is Ukraine. There are mainly three channels of the streaming the support by Visegrad group. First of the channels is the

22 The information about Vise grad Scholarship Program can be founded on official website of the international Monetary fund: http://visegradfund.org/scholarships/visegrad-taiwan-scholarships/ Last accessed: 02/05/2017
International Visegrad Fund, the second includes bilateral agreements of cooperation signed by the ambassadors as well as Ministers of the Foreign Affairs of two particular countries, whereas the third channel encompasses incorporation of NGO of the V4 with Ukrainian NGOs.

Initially, International Visegrad Fund was established by Governments to deepen the cooperation between members, aiming integration to EU. Thus, during first years, it focused on projects in the region. Nevertheless, after 2005 organization decided to extend the scale of the activities and conduct the project in the countries bordering V4.

During 2005-2007, the assistance to the Ukrainian citizens has been increased rapidly. Despite the fact that assistance by providing grants was smaller, the support via the scholarships for the students and scientists of the nationals of this state was quite significant. Scholarship during these two years is equal to 738000 euro. 2.3% of the money, spent by IVF in 2000-2006, used to go to the projects in Ukraine what placed it to the 5th place of the list of beneficiaries of the Visegrad fund after the member states. In 2007 the percentage of the total assistance increased to 8.8% which is equal to the 63% of the foreign assistance to third countries by fund. 23

Ukraine has taken lots of advantages from the fund. With the help of IVF which has furnished Ukrainian researchers with access to V4 colleges and Universities. Moreover, this fund empowered local NGOs to take part in long-lasting programs. One of the examples of such a cross-border projects was the initiative of the Ukrainian NGOs to establish the partnership on the cities level. It means that the cooperation between small cities of the five countries would be launched. As I mentioned above in co-operation with third countries embassies played the key role. The same happened in Ukraine. Three projects on this basis were carried out by V4 state-representatives amounting 40000 euro.24

As written in the beginning of the chapter, V4 provides democratic assistance not only to the regional states but also worldwide. The second example of recipient countries is Cuba. Despite the fact that there is no organization-level support, a small budget aiming to provide democratic aid is allocated by the Embassy of the Czech Republic. This money directed to support the active local NGOs defending human rights and freedom of the media. All ministers of the Foreign Affairs of the members of the Visegrad Group highlighted the significance of the democracy promotion all over the

23 Lvova O. Visegrad countries take lead in democratic aid to Ukraine. International Centre for Policy Studies. 24/11/2008

world. However, Cuba has been announced as an objective of the foreign policy only by the Czech Republic.\textsuperscript{25}

The embassy of the Slovak Republic is also quite active in the field of the democracy promotion in Cuba. It is one of the rare places in the country providing citizens free internet. This opportunity mostly using by the opposition. This kind of the activity, without any doubts, is hated by the local authorities.

Previously, the diplomats from Czech and Slovak republics had demonstrated more explicit position regarding the political prisoners. There was a practice of the invitation of victims of political regime to the embassy. However, due to the issues related to this activity, they had to stop to support dissidents openly. However, the assistance of the civil society, as the markable feature of the democratic regime, still continues. The Polish Embassy had provided the assistance to the families of the victims of the regime, had often contacted them and helped the opposition to show the world the real situation on the island.\textsuperscript{26}

The only state among the V4 countries, which show the diplomatic stance with Cuba Government, is Hungary. The extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Hungary said that they promote democracy in their own way. Instead of the direct help to the opposition, they co-operate with the local authorities in order to prevent the violence against human rights.

Together with official representatives of the V4 states, NGOs from the region also defend human rights by direct help to citizens or campaign aiming to demonstrate Western societies all the truth about political system of the Cuba.

Another example of the target states is Belarus under the rule of Lukashenko. There are various reasons for the democracy support in this country. One of them is certainly the geographical factor. The second cause is common historical background and similarity of the cultures.

Presently, Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic is concentrated on the violence of human rights in the bordering states. Moreover one of the main actions towards the

\textsuperscript{25}Concept of the Czech Republic’s Foreign Policy, Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 03/08/2015
Last accessed: 03/05/2017

democratization of Belarus is assistance of the students from this country. At the same time, another member of V4 Slovak Republic has focused on the projects, conferences, seminars and other training of the human rights defenders and social activist as well as NGO participants. The main goal of the Slovak foreign policy in Belarus is the development of civil society. Hungary, on its turn, does not play such an important role in the democratic promotion in Belarus due to the fact that the foreign policy of Hungarian MFA is focused on the Western Balkans with the emphasis in Serbia as well as others states with Hungarian minorities. However, immediately after opening the new embassy in the capital Hungarian Government donated 50000euro on the projects held by the diplomats in Minsk or other cities.27

Sometimes due to the problems with the budget, projects of the NGOs of the Visegrad countries are financed by third actors, like the National Endowment for Democracy , the German Marshall Fund of the United States ,Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Norwegian Human Rights House Foundation, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Open Society Institute (OSI) and the European Commission.

Summarily, 'the fresh experience" of the comparatively new members of the Union which had finished the democratic transition in a really short time, places them in the position where they can understand both parties of democratic assistance donors and recipients at the same time. They can easily understand which of the donor's methods will be effective and which will not bring any successful consequences. Moreover, Visegrad states are well-placed in order to learn from the best approaches and can help EU to find the best ways of the promotion of the democracy worldwide. The main objective of the given policy should be based on the interest of citizens who suffer under the authoritarian rule.

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27Annual report of the European Humanities University for the period October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2012. P.97
3. ELITE INFLUENCE

The given chapter encompasses the role of the political elite in the formulation of the opinion of public regarding EU integration.

There are lots of scientists which gave the definition of the “political elite. For instance, famous British scientist Parry Geriant in his book named “Political Elites” published in 1969 defined this collocation as “small minorities who appear to play an exceptionally influential part in political and social affairs”\(^{28}\). Another author explained Siegfried Frederick Nadel explained elite as “A stratum of the population which for whatever reason can claim a position of superiority”\(^{29}\).

Political elites are individuals who are able to change the perception of the integration processes going on in Europe. In that way, they can use the political explanation of the incorporation of the states with the organization. However, the success or the failure of their attempt depends on the national conditions.

Different authors tried to analyze the importance of the elite in the formulation of the public opinion. These scientists can be included to two main groups based on the significance they devote to the elites role.

The first group of scientists argues that opinion of the nationals is based not only the speeches of the political actor and their position towards EU integration but also other groups of influence in any state. For example, Adam P. Brinegar argues that the European integration mostly depends on National Contextual Factors and Public Support for European Integration or in other words utilitarian considerations than only on elite propaganda\(^{30}\). As an example of this hypothesis, he had shown the referendum in the Denmark which held in 1992. As a result of the public voting citizens of Denmark rejected the Maastricht treaty. However, after second referendum Denmark became the part of the Union. He explained that attitudes of the ordinary citizens of any states are influenced by the structure of the political and economic systems of the state, factor endowment and other national contextual influences. In his point of view, people decide to be or not be part of the European Union depending on the opportunities this integration provide them directly.


Other representatives of the first group of scientists analyze EU from the prism of the religious
tolerance. For example, Sara B. Hobolt argues that one of the main factors caused problems of EU
enlargements is religious intolerance, especially in the case of Turkey. From her position, this
intolerance diffuse so-called “Eurosceptic” and causes the increase the number of the opposition to
the future enlargement of the Union with Muslim state. In her research, she compared the position of
the citizens on EU enlargement in two member states as in Ireland and the Netherlands and came to
the conclusion that social identities are strong determinants of Euroscepticism.

Theresa Kuhn on her turn explained the important role in the formulation of the public opinion
of European integration plays internationalism and cross-border relations. According to her people
living on the border are less skeptical than people living in the core district of this or another state

Summarily according to first group scientists variation of the degree of support of integration
processes reasoned by the changes of the dispositional anchors of the attitudes.

Oppositely to them, the second group of scientists argues the political elite plays the major
role in the formation of the public opinion towards EU. According to them, elites are capable of
formulating and varying the citizens’ attitudes. Moreover, they actively use different tools to change
it. For example according Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Leonard Ray ‘and Marco R. Steenbergen
one of the effective tools using by elites is party cueing. According to Hooghe and Marks, there
is the link between the division of the elites and the skepticism about EU integration in societies: the
more people opposite integration in countries with more divided elites and fewer citizens demonstrate
unwillingness towards EU policy in states with the low level of division. It other words, more unified
parties has more influence to the mass opinion and in majority of cases elites support EU integration.
It is important to note that this effect is more evident in states whose citizens have mostly nationalistic
mood. One of the reasons for such an effect is the fact that nowadays party leaders actively use public

31 Vössing K. Transforming public opinion about European integration: Elite influence and its limit. European Union
32 Hooghe L., Marks G. Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration. London: SAGE
21/04/2017
opinion about EU in order to get political power and this attitude became a field of the strategic interaction among elites.\textsuperscript{33}

Marco R. Steenbergen, explains the interaction between elites and voters as “A conditional dual-process model”. According to his point of view elites at the same time try to influence the citizens as well as to respond to the needs and desires of the mass public.\textsuperscript{34} During referendums, the linkage between elites and masses becomes more obvious. Politicians who know all the variations of the EU policy spend the majority of their time by proving information to their supporters and explaining the advantages of their positions to masses. Thereby referendums which aim to include all the citizens to the ongoing processes in their state may instill in elites a habit of explaining all their ideas to the ordinary people what on its turn strengthen the connection between citizens and politicians.

According to the law of the EU citizens of the Union have a right to participate in European Parliament elections. In the formulation of the opinion on this or that political issue information providing by mass media plays a significant role. Therefore, political elites frequently use media scene to influence public opinion and change it in a way they want. In his article "News Coverage and Support for European Integration, 1990–2006" Rens Vliegenthart found out that majority of the citizens be aware of the EU stems from the press. Moreover, European citizens identify the mass media including newspapers and television as the most important source of getting data on EU-related issues.\textsuperscript{35}

Public opinion about EU integration as well as enlargement policy play more and more significant role in decision-making processes which on their turn has still dominated by elites of the particular state. According to Jürgen Maier and Berthold Rittberger “Since the ‘revocation’ of the


‘permissive consensus’ between the political elites and the European public, public opinion features ever more prominently in affecting the pace, content and direction of the European integration project.”

They argue that rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in France and Netherlands is caused by lack of use of media by political elites in these two countries. Moreover, it's not the first time when elites and masses demonstrated contrast position. Maier explains that a key to comprehending the main reasons for such different standpoints related to the development of the Union between social groups is the role of the press. Thus, Jürgen Maier, as well as Berthold Rittberger consider that models supporting EU for the successful promotion of their ideas, need to pay more attention to mass media which includes press, radio, television and the Internet serve.

Nowadays nationalist-populist ideology is widely spread in Visegrad countries. The main parties of all 4 states are also represent the Eurosceptic Ideology (Table3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Bohuslav Sobotka (Left-wing)</td>
<td>Victor Orban (conservative)</td>
<td>Beata Szydlo (right wing)</td>
<td>Robert Fico (leftwing, populist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Milos Zeman (social democratic)</td>
<td>Ader Janos (Nationalist)</td>
<td>Andrzej Duda (Nationalist-conservative)</td>
<td>Andrej Kiska (Independent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Czech Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>FIDESZ (Association of Young Democrats)</td>
<td>Law and Justice (PiS)</td>
<td>Smer Direction – Social Democratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nationalists and populist Governments demonstrated the unwillingness to implement each of the EU decisions because in their point of view these decisions create threats to the security of the national states. Thus, as explained by the Liberal Intergovermentalism theory, national interests is the main motivator of the direction of the foreign policy which led to the actions of the states on EU level.

Euroscepticism is widespread in all Visegrad states, including Czech Republic. The pool held in June 2016 found out the fact that 34% of the citizens of the Czech Republic want to stop the membership of their country in the European Union. The survey by the CVVM institute (The Public Opinion Research Centre –Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění) demonstrated that Czech satisfaction with EU fell 7%, from 32% to 25% in last two years. Thus, in 2016 the President of the Czech Republic Milos Zeman offered holding a referendum on the membership of the state in both EU and NATO. He noted that he is the supporter of EU integration and against the leaving of the European Union. Despite the fact that according to the constitution of the Czech Republic he has no right to call a referendum, Milos Zeman as the first elected president and influential leader he tried to organize this referendum. He said "I disagree with those who are for leaving the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but I will do everything for them to have a referendum and be able to express themselves."

The government quickly responded to the suggestion of the President of the Republic. The spokesman of the Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka declared that "Membership in these organizations is a guarantee of stability and security", that’s why there can be no question in holding of the referendum.

During the interview with the Czech newspaper Hospodářské noviny, Minister of the Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Lubomír Zaoralek opposed the EU institutions. He mostly dissatisfied by the EU institution which does not take into account the views and positions of Czech Republic as one of the equal members of the European Union on important issues. He stated: ““The Czech Republic’s opinion on important issues has not been heard at all. And when we have occasionally had the chance to say something, it did not make much sense. Today we are considered dunderheads who do not really know what they want,” “Let’s Wake Up our Foreign Policy” The last publication of European commission obviously shown that the similar pattern regarding so-called discrimination is

39 Heinrich M. Czech government rejects president’s call for referendum on EU, NATO. Reuter news.01/07/2016 Found at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-czech-president-idUSKCN0ZH4C8 Last accessed: 04/04/2017
popular among public as well. Mainly majority of people living in Visegrad group countries disagreed with the statement that their voice is counted in the EU. *(Table 4)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. The public opinion about the personal importance in the EU</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Czech Republic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Poland</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Slovakia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hungary</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These intentions have not taken place only in Czech republic. In another Visegrad state Slovakia where Euroscepticism ongoing. In June 2016 after “Brexit” referendum, the head of the far-right People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) which holds 14 seats in Slovakia's 150-seat parliament Marian Kotleba said that they were going to begin petition in order to set up a referendum in their country on EU membership. He argued that "It is high time Slovakia, too, left this sinking European Titanic". However, a poll published in the middle of the June 2016 demonstrated that more that 60% of citizens of Slovakia in case of referendum would vote to remain part of the European Union whereas approximately 22% would vote to leave the Union.

Polish Officials also demonstrated the Eurosceptic attitudes. One of the Examples of such an action should be demonstrated the fact that the Prime Minister of Poland Beata Szydlo decided to remove EU flags from the press briefing soon after her term in Government began in 2015. From that moment only Polish Flag would be demonstrated from the podium where she gives conferences.

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41 Table done by author on the basis of information provided in:
Standard Eurobarometer 86 – Autumn 2016 “Public opinion in the European Union, First results” European Commission, 2016, p.18


Dissatisfaction with EU policy is high in Hungary as well. Viktor Orban who is the chief of staff to Hungarian Prime Minister announced that he were going to vote to leave Eu in case of referendum

“If we let the Muslims onto the continent to compete with us, they will outnumber us,” Orban said last year. “It’s mathematics. And we don’t like it.” Many Hungarians agreed with him.45

According to the Figure 3 , the majority of the political as well as economic elites of the Visegrad group countries mostly positioned on the EU critic pole on an essential level. Moreover Czech Republic took the position of the most Eurosceptic state among EU members. However, there is need to highlight that representatives of the Elites of particular V4 states had expressed different, sometimes conflicting opinions toward EU. The only country among Visegrad members who demonstrated more EU supporting position in 2012 was Hungary, however last three years situation changes in a Eurosceptic way.

![Figure 4](image_url)  

45 Lebor A. Hungary likely to reject European Union refugee quota. The Independent news, 24/09/2016  

According to the Eurobarometer data, the image of the EU among public also changed in negative way during last years.

Despite the fact that in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia the number of people with positive image of the European Union is remain positive, the statistical data obviously demonstrated the
decrease of public support. *(Table 5)* Only in one year, the Eurosceptic ideology among citizens increased. The biggest changes of attitudes had been shown by Hungarians (8%). The only country where Negative image of the EU dominated in 2016 was Czech Republic (34% against 26 whereas 40% people showed neutral position.

*Table 5. Public Opinion about EU*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The position of political elites about future integration is also at low level in comparison with western societies. The proportion of the political elites which are favour about strengthening of unification of the Union is only 31% in average. *(Figure5)*

*Figure 5. Dimensions of Europeanness—unification should be strengthened (100% strongly in favour)*


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*Table done by author on the basis of information provided in:
According to the Eurobarometer data, the image of the EU among public also changed in negative way during last years.

Despite the fact that in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia the number of people with positive image of the European Union is remain positive, the statistical data obviously demonstrated the decrease of public support. *(Table 5)* Only in one year, the Eurosceptic ideology among citizens increased. The biggest changes of attitudes had been shown by Hungarians (8%). The only country where Negative image of the EU dominated in 2016 was Czech Republic (34% against 26 whereas 40% people showed neutral position.

The public opinion regarding future of the European Union is also chancing in negative way. The pessimistic view of the future of the European Union in increasing. During 2015 in all four V4 states pessimistic mood owereighted. The biggest variation of the attitudes towards future of the Union held in Hungary (34 % of citizens demonstrated pessimistic ideas in 2015 whereas a year later the number increased up to 52 %)

Public opinion about future of the EU at percent demonstrated in *(Table 6)*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Optimistic</th>
<th>Pessimistic</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The given table above illustrates the public opinion of the Visegrad countries namely the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia concerning the future of the European Union in terms of both pessimistic and optimistic approaches in the period of between 2015 and 2016.

Overall, it is crystal clear that Poland in the given table according to 2015 demonstrated the significant increase in its optimistic approach toward the EU estimated at 67% compared to other partner countries including Hungary and Slovakia which constitutes for 61% and 62% of optimistic view respectively. In the contrary, in 2016 these countries underwent the significant decrease which shows itself in the case of Hungary and Slovakia. While others such as the Czech Republic and Poland holds the optimistic public opinion toward the EU in the level of 48% and 63% separately. On the other hand, from the prism of pessimistic public opinion in 2015, the Czech Republic holds the dramatic increase in its stances toward the EU in comparison with Hungary and Slovakia making up for 34% of pessimistic public opinion. In the contrary, Poland attitudes en route for the EU contains the less percent estimated at 25%. In comparison with 2015, pessimist side public opinion showed the significant increase in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia constituting for 52%, 50% and 42% separately compared to Poland with 29% increase at a moderate level.

Summarily, the analysis done in this chapter obviously demonstrates the negative changes of the position of the Visegrad Group political elites towards European Union and future integration, following by the variation of the positive image of the EU among citizens.
4. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF RELATION BETWEEN V4 COUNTRIES AND EU

Last chapter of the Master Thesis encompasses main challenges of the EU-V4 states contemporary relations. The dissatisfaction of the Visegrad states about EU policy make difficulties in cooperation between parties whereas V4 states’ current acts can make problems for EU Integration.

4.1. The disagreement of the Visegrad countries on the decisions of the EU

During last three years the Visegrad states demonstrated their opposition to the European Union Internal as well as external policy. All this dissatisfaction comes from the threats for the national security. This chapter divide into three part: first explain the acts of the Visegrad countries during Migration crisis which is European Union biggest problem during last years. The decision of the National states had been based on the threat to national security. The second chapter explains the foreign policy decision of the European commission led to the economic and energy problems in the countries. The third one explains one of the internal issues of the EU angering V4 Governments. All above mentioned can be explained by the main theory of the research because all of the based on national interests of the states.

4.1.1. Migration Policy of the EU as a threat to a national security

Recently, European Union is handling of migrant or refugee crisis what became one of the significant problems between Western and Eastern Europe with the communist Past.

In September 2015 the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker offered the package proposals (Table 3) aiming to solve refugee crisis.

According to his plan the relocation of the people from the most affected EU members – Greece, Italy and Hungary is one of the first steps should be done by other states. He offered to begin movement of 15,600 refugees from Italy, 50,400 refugees from Greece and 54,000 from Hungary to the territory of the other member states based on the need of these people of the international protection. In that case, Visegrad countries should accept totally 13767 immigrants including 2978

49 Table done by author on the basis of information provided on the website of the European Commission:

to Czech Republic, 9287 to Poland and 1502 migrants to Slovakia. "It's 160,000 refugees in total that Europeans have to take into their arms and I really hope that this time everyone will be on board - no rhetoric, action is what is needed," said Mr. Juncker.⁵¹

<table>
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<th>Table 7. Mr Juncker's proposals</th>
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<td><em>(Brief overview)</em></td>
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<td>➢ An emergency relocation proposal for 120,000 refugees from Greece, Hungary and Italy</td>
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<td>➢ A Permanent Relocation Mechanism for all Member States</td>
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<td>➢ A common European list of Safe Countries of Origin</td>
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The given proposals were strongly opposed by Visegrad states with the experience of the flows of migrants. The President of the European Council who was a Polish Prime Minister before Donald Tusk also opposed the quotas. The Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán note that his country should export refugees that import them (migrants from Serbia)⁵²

The Czech Republic as well as other V4 member states rejected mandatory quotas. According to the position of high level official of the Czech Republic only this or that state can decide about the numbers of the refugees they can accept in their country based on their own economic, financial social and security circumstances. This country announced that supports the right of individual states freely choose the scope of solidarity in order to solve migration issue.⁵³

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“Resettlement cannot resolve the cause of this recent tragedy, which is not located on the shores of Europe, but beyond them. The EU should therefore have the courage to deal with it effectively, but primarily at its source.” noted the Prime Minister of the CR Bohuslav Sobotka.\textsuperscript{54}

After all the discussions, the EU Commission set up a specific treatment of CEE countries including members of the Visegrad Group, which openly demonstrated their disagreement to the mandatory quotas.\textsuperscript{55}

Moreover, these states demonstrated the racist position. For example, Poland announced that the country can accept 50 families from Syria only on religious criteria. The main role in that case will play polish private organization – Estera whose initiative it was. This organization had to arrange the selection among refugees and immigration of these families to the country.\textsuperscript{56}

Slovakia showed similar position to this question however explained it in different way. The spokesman of the Ministry of the Interior Ivan Netik noted that Muslim would not be accepted by the Government of the Slovakia due to the fact that Muslim refugees would not feel at home\textsuperscript{57}. After arguing from such an interesting position he denied the fact that this step was discriminatory one. Ivan Netik said that "We want to really help Europe with this migration wave but... we are only a transit country and the people don't want to stay in Slovakia…We could take 800 Muslims but we don't have any mosques in Slovakia so how can Muslims be integrated if they are not going to like it here?"\textsuperscript{58}


\textsuperscript{56} Wasik Z. and Foy H. Poland favors Christian refugees from Syria. Financial Times,21/08/2015. Found at: https://www.ft.com/content/6edfdd30-472a-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b Last accessed :04/04/2017


Islamophobia is widely spread in Czech Republic as well. The current president Milos Zeman noted that the population of the country is 10.5 million Czech whereas only 3.5 thousand among them are Muslims and according to his words these part of society could be targeted in a jihadi attack Therefore he urged his nation to arm themselves and fight against so-called possible “super-Holocaust”. Moreover, during his interview in 2016 Zeman “I am for deportation of all economic migrants,” because Muslim migrant culture was “fundamentally incompatible” with European society.

The Minister of the Finance of the Czech Republic Andrey Babis also supported anti-migration position. "After what has been happening in Europe, I say clearly that I don't want even a single refugee in the Czech Republic, not even temporarily…And even if they came, then the Czech Republic should fight the European Commission's decision and sue it over possible sanctions.” – said Mr. Babis.

During her speech, the spokeswoman of the European Union Commission Annika Breithard highlighted the fact that all members of the EU were banned from any kind of discrimination including religious one. At the same time, Central European spokesman for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Babar Baloch said that Resettlement is necessary for majority of the refugees who faces to the extreme risk for their lives. Therefore UNHCR calls on the states help resettle refugees without basing on discriminate selection.

The re-elected prime-Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico announced that he would never accept the quotas of the European Union about refugees from Syria. Due to the Migrant crisis nationalistic movements in the region is increasing. As an example of such an action can be shown the results of

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elections in 2016 which resulted in the rise of Slovakia's extreme right. In the election held March 5 previous year 200,000 citizens (population of Slovakia is 5.5 million whereas approximately 2.6 million people participated in elections) supported Neo-Nazi People’s Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS). It should be highlighted that 23% of first-time voters are cast ballots for the given Party what was big surprise. As a result, Neo-Nazi party had scored nearly 8% in an elections and had gained 14 out of 150 parliamentary seats at the Narodni Rada (National Council). The leader of the LSNS Marian Kotleba is openly demonstrated his Nazis position by dressing a militia uniform if the Nazi-Sponsored Slovak state which had been designed by Hinka Guard. During the pre-election campaign the main slogan of his party that had been appeared on billboards was “STOP IMIGRANTOM!” (Stop Immigrants!). Moreover, he publicly called European Union and NATO as “terrorist” organization. After his election as the head of the Banská Bystrica region in 2013 he displayed a banner on the administrative building where was written: “Yankees, go home,” and “Stop NATO.” Ultra-nationalist People's Party-Our Slovakia showed strong performance so that shocking outcomes of the election made difficulties to the Prime-Minister of the Slovakia Robert Fico to build a majority coalition. The increase of the Nationalistic mood in country will bring problems to mutual relation between EU and Slovakia. The Foreign Minister of Slovakia Miroslav Lajcak commented about new Government “The perception of Slovakia in Europe will be complicated. We have elected a fascist to Parliament.”

67 Michael Minkenberg Transforming the Transformation?: The East European Radical Right in the Political Process. London: Routledge, 2015, p.239
According to the last publication of the European Commission, the total number of refugees relocated to the Visegrad countries during last two years is only 28 people among 16,340 refugees whereas 12 relocated from Greece to Czech Republic and 16 from Greece to Slovakia.

Increasing Euroscepticism can have unpleasant consequences for the group. In 2015 when informal negotiations about the multi-year budget of the EU began, one of the most powerful member of the Union Germany had hinted that it would favor countries sharing the burden of refugees in order to help the Union to solve refugee crisis. Currently lots of European officials are eagerly impatient with the Visegrad group members. According to the Milan Nic the head of the Central European Policy Institute noted as an example that, many years before Austrian politician used to mention Visegrad states with respect. However nowadays in his point of view “Visegrad is like a bad word.”

4.1.2. Food “double standards” as a political message against V4

The prime minister of the Slovak Republic Robert Fico called his colleagues from V4 states to hold a meeting over the food “double standards” and the law quality of the products in the CEE markets. According to the last studies majority of multinational companies as well as TNC put bad ingredients in foods which are going to sell in the poorer members of the European Union.

The meeting held between counterparts 2nd of March 2017. During the meeting they hammered out their own proposals for the future of the EU which aims to strengthen the position of all member states avoiding division in the Union.

After this meeting Beata Szydlo (Polish Prime Minister) announced that Visegrad Group joint new declaration for a “better Europe” which presented 25th of March in Rome during EU anniversary.

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71 In comparison Lithuania provided asylum to 237 people, including 8 from Italy and 229 from Greece, Latvia 260 refugees and Estonia 100.


Summit. This document aims to call the main institutions of the European Union to solve the problems affecting European citizens such as security, protected borders, dignity, justice and equal treatment of each of the member states.\footnote{Central European nations present plan for stronger EU. The Daily mail, 02/03/2017. Found at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-4274344/4-central-Europe-nations-discuss-EU-prospects.html#ixzz4HgotvYh ; Last accessed: 25/04/2017}

One of the most significant problems highlighted by the Visegrad countries was the absence of the uniform food standards on EU level what led to the situation when the nationals of the V4 states obtain inferior products.\footnote{Central European nations present plan for stronger EU. Central News today, 03/03/2017. Found at: http://centralnewstoday.com/story/4-central-europe-nations-discuss-eu-prospects/0024554/ ; Last accessed: 25/04/2017} Therefore, by the given proposals V4 members seek to appeal European Commission to adopt new legislative acts aim to ban this practice which divides Europeans to the different categories and to eliminate “double standards in quality” of food products.

In February 2017 the Ministry of the Agriculture of the Slovakia presented the results of the laboratory analysis. Scientists found out that half of the foods bought in the Bratislava has poorer quality and differ in taste, forms and ingredients than their equivalents in the bordering Austria.\footnote{Extraordinary V4 Summit over “Garbage Can” Food Quality in Central and Eastern Europe. Visegrad Post, 28.02.2017 Found at: https://visegradpost.com/2017/02/28/extraordinary-v4-summit-over-garbage-can-food-quality-in-central-and-eastern-europe/ ; Last accessed: 25/04/2017}

Especially non-alcoholic drinks, spices, teas and meat products which have been sold in the capital of Slovak Republic had poorer quality in comparison with the same products sold in Austria. The similar food had a smaller share of meat, a greater proportion of fats, lots of artificial sweeteners and preservatives and less weight.

The Minister of the Agriculture of the Czech Republic Marian Jurečka noted that people of the Visegrad Group were tired to be “Europe’s garbage can”.\footnote{Tatiana Jancarikova. East Europeans decry “double standards” for food, seek change to EU law. Reuters, 01/03/2017. Found at:http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-central-europe-food-idUKKBN168578 ; Last accessed: 25/04/2017} The Prime Minister of the Hungary Viktor Orban appreciated the outcomes of the tests as “the biggest scandal of the recent past”.\footnote{Ibid.} He
told that Visegrad states “have to avoid … having Europe use our countries and markets as a garbage dump”. 80

Summarily, all prime ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries demonstrated their disagreement for such a unethical sale and showed strong position against the “double standards” of the quality of the products selling in the new and old member states of the European Union. Moreover, they urged main European Institutions like European Commission and European Parliament to react to the given issue as soon as possible. According to the Prime Minister of the Slovakia Robert Fico, “the different standards in food quality are "unacceptable", and send a "dangerous political message".” 81

4.1.3. Russian dilemma as a threat to the energy security

Despite the fact that the priorities of the members of the Visegrad group can be seem linked to the distractions of internal and foreign policy of the EU, majority of the priorities of the given states have been derived from the geopolitical location of each state within its local issues.

One of the foreign policy acts of EU which bring problem to Visegrad countries and then to the relations between Union and Central European states were sanctions against Russia. After Ukrainian Crisis in April 2014 members of the EU agreed on imposing new sanctions against the Russian Federation. Majority of the sanctions were aimed to target the energy companies and individuals which control these organisations.

The given decision seriously affected the local companies and resulted in loss of trust on economic and business side. These followed by the rapid decrease of the activities of such companies. Once the business environment as well as economic circumstances had been changed by government policy decisions, companies tend to save their losses, seeking ways to avoid sanctions. Consequently, the activities of the local companies activities no longer correspond to state policy, which is creating to the dangerous gaps for the energy security.

80 Alexe D. Visegrad leaders call for bigger role for national parliaments in EU. Newseurope 03/03/2017. Found at: https://www.neweurope.eu/article/visegrad-leaders-call-bigger-role-national-parliaments-eu/ Last accessed: 25/04/2017
The Crimean war questioned the attitude towards Russian Federation due to the fact that the energy sector and economic policy of the local Governments had been seriously affected since the summer of the 2014. Visegrad states have accepted the given decision of the EU ambivalently taking into account the possible negative outcomes for energy security of the countries. Eventually all 4 countries were dependent on gas supplies from Russian Federation. Moreover a huge proportion of the export from the Visegrad region focused on Russian market.\textsuperscript{82}

It is important to note that Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia made some pro-Russian statements and demonstrated that Governments would like to reconcile and strengthen relations with bordering Russia. Despite the fact that nowadays Visegrad States appear as a unit their foreign policy on Russia are very different. Poland is only state of the group which clearly condemns the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and strongly support sanctions against the Russia. Other three representatives of the V4 group try to develop to develop bilateral relation with RF. As an example of such a position can be shown the plan of the Hungarian Government to let Russia built two new reactors for its Paks nuclear power plant. Thus the dependence of Hungarian energy sector on Russia will increase due to the fact that nuclear fuel rods will be supplied by Rosatom.\textsuperscript{83}

The public opinion about Russian Federation in these states showed that majority of the people living in Visegrad states think that currently the political influence of the Russian is stronger that the political influence of the European Union\textsuperscript{84}

4.2. The internal changes of each state led to the problems with the EU

Last chapter of the research analyses the internal political changes of the each Visegrad state led to the problematic relation with the European Union. Among them the decrease of the democracy


index of the states\textsuperscript{85}. The fact that these states from the promoters of the European values all over the world became the states themselves violating the Rule of law, freedom of press and education, multilateral agreements led to the deterioration of relations between parties and threat of possible sanctions against states.

4.2.1. The conflict over the national law between Poland and EU

At the current time, although Poland has an important role in the EU initiatives and actions, it is mainly anchored on nationalist, conservative and in some way Euroskeptic stance en route for the EU which can be characterized as a crucial damage for the EU and other Eastern neighbors. In turn, this action can be beneficial for Russia. Between the period of 2007 and 2015, Civic Platform took the control in the Polish Government. During the administration of Civic Platform, political elite comprehended that the interests of U.S have waned in Europe, therefore, the EU had to take into account its own defense and security issues seriously. At the moment, because of the reason of defense and security, Polish national security interests collide with the EU policy which Polish side for the first policy conception takes its defense and security conception rather than other common values and rules within the EU. Civic Platform also had some kind of problems and faced many challenges on EU energy security policy and an EU energy Union. The crucial question is that Polish nationalist-conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS) is discarding somehow the common policy of the EU.

In fact, this party today has taken the way of being strong nationalist, patriotic and Catholic weltanschauung. If Poland is not able to provide its common values and rules along with the EU, it will be the big loser and big winner in the region, former will happen in the example of the EU, the latter will show itself in the case of Russia. On the other hand, it is apparent that PiS is prone to the anti-Russian prism and at the same time, is not a great fan of Germany. Today, the Euroskeptic standpoint of Poland mainly premises on open economies, open boundaries, open society and the mainly basic humanitarian assistance and towards refugees. It is not a crucial problem of merely Poland, but in common it matters also the rest of Visegrad countries, including Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Upon the reelection of PiS party in October 2015, the European Commission has been criticizing the actions and policy of government under the supervision of the PiS. Within

\textsuperscript{85} According to the last report of the Economic Intelligence Unit there is a decrease on the level of democracy in all four states: Czech Rep from 8.17 to 7.82; Poland from 7.30 to 6.83 ; Slovakia from 7.40 to 7.29 and Hungary from 7.53 to 6.72 during 2006-2016 years. Found at: \url{http://pages.eiu.com/rs/783-XMC-194/images/Democracy_Index_2016.pdf} Last accessed: 04/05/2017
Poland, even some groups and public also are opposed to the PiS’s policies. After the victory of Polish conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS) in October 2015, it gave more places to political elites in Warsaw to undertake political shifts in an unparalleled way. In spite of critical stance from Brussels against government policy in Poland, PiS even today, is strengthening its Euroskeptic hardliners and mentioning that Central European countries has to determine its own policy the path toward prosperity, stability and strong defense rather than catching up the EU policy. It is needed to mention that stability and security within Poland are necessary for the EU. However, within the supervision and unstable policy of PiS in the government, (neither Russia nor Germany supporter), the forfeiture to Poland, the EU, and Eastern Europe will be immensely big.

Since the socially conservative Euroskeptic Law and Justice Party gained the ruling power in Poland on 25th of October 2016, Poland has caused a headache for Europe. This party is the first party to govern Poland alone since the fall of communism. Currently, Poland’s heated rhetoric in recent days has evoked concerns in Brussels that the situation could spin out of control if the EU doesn’t react. The PiS party has the same powerful place like Hungary in which Viktor Orban has overdominance in Hungary. This situation can be considered as a key obstacle for the European Integration. Therefore, Poland and Hungary are much more prone to be one-party system rather than multi-party system. Regarding the fact that this system emerging in these countries is weakening the constitutional processes, balances and even media freedom. According to some interlocutors in Poland, the fear of Orbanisation has emerged today, meaning that Poland is following the illiberal path of Viktro Orban rather than opting for their liberal way. These problematic situations force the EU to take constructive approach toward these countries which can impedes the development of the European integration for foreseeable future.

Compared to Hungary, Poland in this case, matters more because of the fact that it is the sixth largest country within the EU territory that joined the bloc in 2004. In order to cope with the problems emanating from this ruling system, Brussels could offer some regulatory actions and radical reforms to revive the government structures in Poland. Some EU officials want Poland to be monitored, by using a rule-of law mechanism which was adopted by the EU in 2014. As a result of this monitoring system, in the worst-case, Warsaw’s voting rights in the EU could be ceased, which refers to serious

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and persistent breach of the EU calls according to the Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union.\textsuperscript{88} The same monitoring system has to be implemented in Hungary by taking into account the Orban party which crucially needs the structural alteration and reforms in Hungarian ruling system.

The president of the European Commission Frans Timmermans demonstrated his dissatisfaction about the rule of law in Poland previous year. Timmermans who is the responsible person defending rule of law on EU member states and controlling the application of EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

During the press conference held in Brussels on 1\textsuperscript{st} of June 2016 he stated that “The European Union is built on a common set of values, enshrined in the [EU] Treaty… These values include respect for the rule of law. . . . Making sure the rule of law is preserved is a collective responsibility of the EU institutions and of all Member States. And it is part of the Commission’s role as guardian of the Treaty.”\textsuperscript{89}

Due to above mentioned, the commission of the European Union adopted an opinion on the Rule of Law in Poland. The president of the Commission announced that they were going to continue the negotiations with Polish Government in order to resolve the given problem. If Poland will not comply with the fundamental values of the Union, European Union most probably will invoke the article number seven of the treaty of the EU signed by all member states, including Poland. Based on the given article EU can trigger sanctions against Polish Government in case of serious breach of the European values. Penalties in this situation include the suspend of right of voting in the EU Council representing all member states.\textsuperscript{90}

Poland's downward trend arrow reflects sustained attempts by the ruling Law and Justice party to increase government influence over the media, judiciary, civil service, and education system.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} Why is Poland’s government worrying the EU?, The Economist, 12/12/2016. Found at: http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2016/01/economist-explains-7 Last accessed: 01/05/2017

\textsuperscript{89} Dempsey J. Poland’s Gamble With the EU. Carnegie Europe, 02/06/2016. Found at: http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=63714 Last accessed: 01/05/2017

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid

4.2.2. Illiberal democracy in Hungary

Hungarian challenges with the EU rules is at stake which also impedes the EU actions. It is undeniable fact that regarding some issues, Hungary and the EU could not able to reach a common agreement like other Visegrad countries namely Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Before all, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is the apparent candidate to be called Russian best counterpart in the EU compared to other Visegrad countries leaders. Orban who has an authoritarian smudge is in a contradictory situation with the EU.

Even during his speech on 17 February 2016, he mentioned that EU’s sanctions imposed against Russia might not be extended and had to be toppled down as soon as possible. In some way, Russian-Hungarian relations could be relevant, however, Hungary also shows its conflicting behavior and perceptions toward the EU, who is not inclining to the adaption or implementation of some policy issues of the EU in the example of the refugee crisis. Pursuant to the Hungarian-Russian deal, Russia pledged to expand the capacity of credit estimated at 10 billion euro to Hungary for the nuclear reactors. 92

If the project between them is implemented, Russia will be able to keep its influence as a major actor in the Eastern European nuclear power market for coming decades. As a consequence of this nuclear deal, Hungary will receive cheap or affordable electric energy that will ensure around one-third of its needs. However, there is also obstacles emanating from Hungarian-Russian relations toward the EU. Because of the fact that currently, Hungary is not prone to implement or obey the energy requisites and framework laws of the EU. 93 At the same time, both Hungary and Russia are waiting for a so called green light from the EU which in turn does not have in mind to give a rush to implement this project. The main reason of the EU’s dissatisfaction stems from the environmental concerns and related issues. In fact, in accordance with the 2020, 2030 and 2050 Energy Agenda of the EU, each country within the EU, as a member state has to obey the framework laws and energy requisities due to providing energy security, security of supplies and transit routes, energy efficiency, mainly the issue of climate change and maintainance of environment. 94 Thus, the EU is highly dissatisfied about the construction or implementation of any other nuclear power plants in general

93 Nic M. and Dostal V. Central Europe’s Outlook on the EU and Foreign Policy. Carnegie Europe, 08/01/2016 . Found at: http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=62423 Last accessed: 02/05/2017
94 Overview of Energy Strategy and Energy Union/ Secure, competitive, and sustainable energy, European Commission, 02/05/2017 Found at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union Last accessed: 03/05/2017
and in particular, Russian ones. Therefore, some misperceptions and conflicting conditions between Hungary and the EU are at stake and these obstacles reduce Hungarian enthusiasm toward the EU for coming years.

Presently, Brussels is away from the mind of letting Hungarian incept the construction of the project at Paks. On the other hand, the EU does not have in mind to cease the bilateral agreement or nuclear deal between Hungary and Russia on building the two new nuclear power plants. In turn, the EU by taking its feet away from the project, it could reach the dissolution of the project by itself. In fact, Orban is not capable of imposing any kind of serious fight with the EU, that could underestimate his political position both in Europe and overseas. Meanwhile, Orban even today is not ready to take this kind of risk against other Western leaders. Regarding the fact that Orbanism in Hungary and its reluctance toward the EU diminish the future prospects of relations between Hungary and the EU.95

Having authoritarian character and spirit of Post-Communist behavior force him to show contradictory approaches in some issues including energy, refugee crisis toward the EU. Indeed, as a result of this kind of actions and politically unstable maneuvers toward the European Union, Hungary might be isolated in the EU and its relationship with the individual Western countries may be proved as fruitless.96 Furthermore, due to the political perplexing and unstable policy of Viktor Orban in Hungary, the EU at the end of this relationship, will take its foot away from Hungary and keep it away from the EU’s activities. Hence, it is clear that Hungary shows the lack of solidarity toward the EU which diminish the involvement of not only Hungary but also other three Visegrad countries in the EU’s actions.

The threat of the Government headed by Victor Orban to close one of the biggest Universities of the Budapest Central European University, which have been founded by George Soros mobilized the citizens of the Hungary as well as European Union officials. EU evaluated this newly accepted law of the Hungarian Parliament incompatible with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of EU what will led to the taking legal actions (possibly sanctions) against Hungary. The law on higher education adopted by the Government in April 2017. Before the adoption of the law Prime Minister of the

Hungary Viktor Orban accused CEU of "deception", what obviously demonstrate the political matter of the decision.\textsuperscript{97}

During the April 2017, the European Commission expressed the concern about the list of measures taken by the Hungary ongoing year. Moreover, Commission highlighted the persistent problems in the country which are discrimination against Roma and absence of protection for female workers what s conflicting with the core laws of the EU. In addition the recently taken decision about foreign institutions in the territory of the Hungary led to the attempt of the stifle academic freedom as well as close the American Founded CEU.

\textbf{1st} of April 2017, the Hungarian government launched a national consultation which have been called as “STOP BRUSSELS”. This consultation mainly focused on 6 specific areas. The main ideas of demonstrate during this event were opposed EU.

On April 24\textsuperscript{th} the increasing tension between EU and Hungary escalated when the European Commission guarantying the EU fundamental right all over the Union initiated a lawsuit over the closing of the CEU and answered to the indictments of the Hungary displayed during “STOP BRUSSELS” propaganda campaign of the current Government.

The main claims of the campaign are:

- “Brussels wants to force us to abolish the reduction in public utility charges”
- “Brussels wants to force Hungary to let in illegal immigrants”
- “Illegal immigrants heading to Hungary are encouraged to illegal acts by not just the human traffickers but also by some international organizations”
- “More and more organizations supported from abroad operate in Hungary with the aim to interfere in Hungarian internal affairs in a non-transparent manner”
- “Brussels is attacking our job-creating measures”
- “Brussels is attacking our country because of tax cuts”

The main EU’s regulatory body took immediately responded to the arguments of the Hungary and proved that the campaign against EU “factually incorrect or highly misleading.”

To respond to third claim of the Hungary, Commission note that EU as one of the promoters of the human rights all over the world has no tolerance to human trafficking. The explained that the help to people moved from their countries because of the bloody events and wars, really highly need the international protection cannot be counted as promotion of irregular migration. Moreover, there is no Non-Governmental Organisations working with criminals in order to help migrants to enter the territory of the Union. Oppositely the NGOs are very reliable during refugee crisis due to the fact that they offer all needed information to the Asylum seekers as well as legal advice, helping to easier the burden of the states of Union.

EU commission noted that the circumstances under which International Organization work in the each state of the Union is based on the national Law of the particular State. On its turn EU guarantying transparency and lobbying of its Institutions.

To explain the situation about taxes EU representatives said that the establishment of corporate tax rates and income tax rates is the sovereign right of each member state. Thus the EU has no right and does not interfere with that. All questions concerning the tax can be agreed only by the all member states. According the last agreement among members of the Union about minimum VAT levels Hungarian Governments decided 27%, which is the highest rate among the same indicator in all member states. However this year the local Government reduced VAT rate for internet service what breaks the rules agreed before at EU level. This is the main reason why Commission of the EU which is responsible for EU legal system reminded Hungary about its obligations.

4.2.3. The spread of Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic

The Czech political stance has undergone many alterations at the time of EU accession process which was dominated by eurosceptic president Vaclav Klaus. During the administration of Vaclav Klaus in Czech government, his political opinion and even policy toward the EU has changed significantly and took the way of so called who wanted to dictate to us once again. After the break out of Velvet revolution, like other Central European countries, Czech Republic was involved in the democratization processes and initiatives launched by the EU. However, the Czech Republic within itself in some way has a spirit of Communism which has taken all privileges and
authorities over the country. Amid the onset of Warsaw Pact of 1955, the country had been forced to join under Soviet rule. Therefore, before everything else, the providing the national security and national interests within the country is considered as a key element of its foreign policy.

Therefore, the fears of outsiders in the Czech Republic give it a more place to claim or defend its national interest conception in face of the EU. The main obstacle, therefore, emanates from this issue with the EU. Similar to other Visegrad countries, it is also against the Lisbon Treaty initiated by the European Commission which for Prague, Lisbon Treaty does not provide the interests of the country. In some way, both pro-EU and anti-EU regards in the country frequently change the appetite of Prague toward the EU. Even today, the majority of people are prone to the ideological eurosceptic behavior and wants Prague to take an independent approach away from the EU. Furthermore, they are seeking for the alternative ways to disentangle the country from the rest of the European Union rather than finding out common solutions to the problems with the EU. The emergence and today availability of unstable political environment and perplexing situation within the country have drawn the crucial fact that the Czech Republic is the only EU member which does not possess a civil service law which might depoliticize the state bureaucracy. The unavailability of civil service law even at the current time is leading to a low-level performance by the government, the increasing amount of systemic corruption, and the decrease processes in European funds.

4.2.4. Slovakia’s parliamentary election 2016

Similar to other Visegrad countries, we could mention the same cases and obstacles including eurosceptism toward the EU, refugee crisis and national interest conception in the example of Slovakia too. Because of the fact time, compared to the rest of Visegrad member states, Slovakian government, to a large extent, Fico government is prone to be nationalist populist, more anti-U.S and more inclined to be pro-Russia and today is playing off with Brussels. Although after the demise of Soviet Union, Central and Eastern European countries have been involved in the democratization and

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integration process within the supervision of the European Union, however, there is a lack of confidence and lack of democratic spirits between these Visegrad countries.

In the example of Slovakia, it is clear that it inked up for European values of liberal democracy, rule of law, transparency, the establishment of democratic institutions, ensuring of human rights, however, Slovakia at the current time is not able to internalize itself more effectively into these values. As Mr Milo said: *Slovakia still see those values as something as weird or alien to our national character and determination.*

Today, both Slovakia and the Czech Republic have opted for the same direction as Poland and Hungary toward the EU due to their increasing domestic issues and national interests. Although Slovakia is more or less supportive of the EU, however, it is the most Russian-leaning and is prone to be an anti-American country in the region. The crucial problem of Slovakia colliding with the EU are the solutions to the common sharing problems that does not benefit Slovakia like other Visegrad countries. Because of the fact that when it is referred to the Slovakian perspective on the refugee crisis, it is clear that it is opposed to the quote system commenced by the EU. For that reason, Slovakia does not have in mind to take common approaches to the EU in terms of solving common problems within Europe. Before European values, Slovakia is more likely to take into consideration its own domestic security and national interests conception. The presence of this political or so-called national mood takes its feet away from the EU’s activities and other initiatives. The lack of comprehensive approach between these countries lessens the EU’s attempts toward the challenges emerging at the present time. Thereby, first and foremost, choosing the policy of *comprehensive or common approach rather than separate approach* could benefit both these countries and the EU in face of challenges.

In conclusion, the four Visegrad countries namely Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia till date, have been showing an immense lack of solidarity, to a large extent the lack of common thought and opinions toward the challenges that the Europe faces. In the period of the refugee crisis, they apparently showed their reluctance and impeded the development of the EU democratic mechanism in order to ratify quotas with regard to the resettlement of migrants based on

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the EU’s Lisbon Treaty. Meanwhile, these states openly have shown no willingness to accept refugees voluntarily or to assist the countries which are mostly affected by the mass flow of refugees.  

On the other hand, these countries mentioned above, dramatically underestimate the EU’s at home basic principles such as rule of law and liberal democracy on which the EU is set up. They are claiming that there is no exact rule or mechanism in the EU’s rules concerning the withdrawing of an unreliable country from the union. Moreover, these countries are deeply egged on a post-Communist mentality which they are still continuing the violation of EU’s rules and common values and today, their relationship toward the EU is considered like that, “we are committed to the EU’s structural funds, but in turn do not ask us to give anything back to you”.  

Currently, these countries still have some problems with giving more places and their national sovereignty to the EU, due to the legacy of their Communist regimes. For the future of EU Integration, it can be said that Visegrad countries regards and their expectations toward the EU is quite divergent and fragmented rather than convergent and comprehensive one. The divergent interests of these countries respectively diminish or undervalue the solidarity of the EU for coming decades. The divergent or fragmented interests or foreign policy origins from these countries separate interests neither Visegrad countries group nor the EU member state. Polish today is prone to other big EU countries. Hungary highlights the increasing roles of both Russia and China and sees them as fruitful partners for its future rather than the EU. Czechs and Slovaks opted for the enhancement of close relations with other small countries in the region such as Austria. Therefore, before Visegrad group and the EU itself, first and foremost, harmonized policy has to be taken into consideration within these countries via which, they would be able to address the challenges gradually in order to solve them effectively both in the EU and within Visegrad group. Otherwise, neither Visegrad countries nor the EU will be the winner side within the political arena.

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CONCLUSIONS

1. By investigating the liberal intergovernmentalism theory, it has been determined that the given theory of the European Integration seeks to explain the reasons of the political acts of the Visegrad countries at the European level during the early years of the membership as well as the last 3 years. The need of assistance and national preference towards EU membership motivated them to make changes to the political and economic systems in accordance with the EU system. However, during the period of between 2015 and 2017 Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary have demonstrated opposed stances and regards towards European Union decisions due to the threat to the National Interest, which is considered as the one of the main ideas of the chosen theory.

2. The historical trend of the relations between European and Visegrad countries had been helpful to identify the main political and economic actions and incentives of the states like adoption of the Acquis Communitaire, the establishment of the Market Economy, Creation of the multiparty systems, civil society and during the early period of the integration. It obviously demonstrates the enthusiasm of the V4 towards the membership of the European Union. Moreover, amid the initial years of the membership, these countries had huge eagerness to promote European Values like democracy all over the world.

3. By comparison of the political acts of the V4 group countries as newcomers and their recent foreign policy towards European Union clearly demonstrated the main changes of the states’ position. Their dissatisfaction on the internal and external policy decisions of the European Union led to the increase of the Eurosceptic mood among politicians as well as masses. The proposal of the Mr. Junker for resolving of the migration crisis of the EU followed by the irritation of the national governments, and feeling for the threat of their national security. Moreover, the food-double standards of the EU led to the aggressive speech of the state officials feeling their nations discriminated by Brussel.

4. EU-related issues investigated at two main phases based on the sources of the problems. First group’s problems are caused by the disagreement of the countries with the European commission decisions or dissatisfaction on the western countries’ higher position in the EU. The second group’s problems reasoned by the states internal changes. Regarding the fact that these states from the promoters of the European values such as freedom of the press, freedom of the education, freedom of the expression and rule of law became the countries themselves violating European fundamental rights followed by the negative reaction from the European
commission. Furthermore, the violation of the EU-based agreements by Hungary became a threat for the possible sanctions against the government.

5. During the investigation of the study, the main hypothesis has been confirmed. Namely, by the analysis of the stance of the high level officials of the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia in the latest years, governments have been inclined to be more pragmatic defenders of their National interest while as EU newcomers they were more enthusiastic Union supporters.
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