

A REGION IN TRANSIT: THE ROLE OF EXOGENOUS FORCES IN THE RESURGENCE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

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ABSTRACT

The Visegrad Group (V4) is a fairly permanent feature of European politics even though it was principally founded to assist and speed up the accession of its members to the European Union (EU). However, the V4 has often been buried by scholars and policy makers during its two decades of existence. It is puzzling then that the V4 has not only survived EU enlargement but both regionalism and regionalisation processes intensified *ex post*. Examining incentives and their effects on state-level and sub-state level cooperation, the interaction of interests and ideas favourable to regional cooperation can be observed, suggesting that the Visegrad Group can be considered a case study of Katzenstein's 'porous regions' concept of new regionalism. While not claiming their salience, this thesis argues that exogenous forces, most notably the EU, are conducive to further cooperation by creating possibilities and pressures on already existing structures, which play an increasing role in regional identity formation in state-level regionalism and sub-state level regionalisation in the Visegrad Group.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BALTIC-3 – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

BENELUX – Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg

BIG-6 – Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain

CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy

CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy

EEAS – European External Action Service

EU – European Union

EU-15 – European Union prior to enlargement in 2004

EU-27 – European Union at present

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy

EP – Eastern Partnership

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

IVF – International Visegrad Fund

LNG – Liquefied Natural Gas

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

NORDIC COUNCIL – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

TNC – Transnational Corporation

UK – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

V4 – Visegrad Group, Visegrad Four (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia)

INTRODUCTION

It was a solemn moment high on symbolism when on 15 February 1991 presidents of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland met in the Hungarian town of Visegrad, which for centuries served as the royal seat of Hungarian kings in medieval times. It was at the very spot where, kings of the three countries first met in 1335 to launch economic and political cooperation. In 1991, three historic nations of Central Europe were reaching back to long gone times when they were reasonably wealthy, sovereign, and powerful, to distance themselves from their communist past and to differentiate themselves from the rest of the post-communist countries, and in order to gain quicker acceptance to European institutions. The Visegrad Group that was consequently formed thus became a regional cooperation to facilitate its members' successful accession to the European Union.

However, since its conception almost twenty years ago, the Visegrad Group (V4) has been buried by scholars several times. In the late 1990s, Andrew Cottey argued that the cooperation disappeared by the second half of the 1990s and its end was symbolically confirmed in July 1997 when NATO invited Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary – but not Slovakia – to join the Alliance.¹ In the mid-2000s, Peter Katzenstein argued that the idea of a 'Central European' identity was simply a tool of European identity formation in opposition to Soviet-style Communism by the dissident intelligentsia.² The apparent impasse in V4 regionalism after the break-up of Czechoslovakia was not necessarily against the wishes of many observers and policy makers in the V4; it was not without a whiff of *Schadenfreude* that some scholars noted the retreat of the 'Visegrad-idea'. Some of them had

¹ Andrew Cottey, "The Visegrad Group", In: Andrew Cottey (ed.), *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 70.

² Peter Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 84.

feared that a sophisticated regional scheme could tempt the European Union (EU) to further postpone Eastern enlargement.³

“Visegrad-scepticism” was especially widespread in those V4 states, like the Czech Republic and Hungary, which had thought that they would be first admitted to the EU and considered Poland’s size and economic underdevelopment as a hindrance to their efforts. Fierce competition for foreign investments and EU membership however were not the only phenomena that acted against a more enhanced cooperation. Others argued that the economic rationale contradicted stronger cooperation in the V4. For Istvan Korosi, it was “neither possible nor reasonable” for the Visegrad Four to form a closed economic unit because it would have been less than optimum size, and the technology flows and impulses for its development would have still been external.⁴ As Central European regional groupings proliferated in the 1990s many, including some policy makers in the V4, started to consider the Visegrad Group as only one of the regional talking shops, “not an alliance but a mere consultative forum”.⁵

Others, like Martin Dangerfield, however pointed out that burying the V4 might have been too early. He argued that EU enlargement had the opposite effect that many scholars had predicted and the Visegrad Group not only underwent a revitalisation but it appeared that a “new subregional cooperation agenda [was] being generated”.⁶ The Visegrad Group has indeed found a new lease of life since its four members, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland, joined the European Union in 2004. The V4 has arguably become a major foreign policy tool for its members within the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the group is now aiming to extend its visibility in third countries by

³ Martin Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: The Political Economy of CEFTA*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), 29.

⁴ Istvan Korosi, *The European Union’s Influence on the Visegrad Countries and Regional Cooperation*, Institute for World Economics – Working Papers, (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1996, No. 60), 4.

⁵ Judit Hamberger, “The Future of the Visegrad Cooperation from the Hungarian Perspective”, *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, (Bratislava: Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2006, Issue: 03-04), 92.

⁶ Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe*, 3.

establishing common, ‘Visegrad’ embassies.⁷ Its influence is growing, at least this is perceived to be the case.⁸ In a clear reference to the V4’s growing weight, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France even ‘warned’ the four countries recently that they should not make a ‘habit’ of their pre-EU Summit meetings to align their positions.⁹

Because V4 states have often been uncertain themselves whether the Visegrad Group exists or what it is good for, little attention has been given to establish whether there is any logic to the changing scope and intensity of the cooperation. If the V4 was simply a tool to help and speed up the accession of these countries to their “external centre of gravity”, the EU, as was argued by many, it is puzzling why the V4 has not only survived EU enlargement but both regionalism and regionalisation intensified *ex post*?¹⁰ Could it be that, as in the past, the resurgence of regionalism and regionalisation in the V4 is in part the result of exogenous forces, notably the EU integration process? It appears that the Visegrad Group could be responding to outside circumstances once again when its members enhance their cooperation within the EU and extend their visibility to third countries as a region.

On the other hand, for the first time in its history, the V4 seems to be also experiencing a surge in bottom-up, economic regionalisation: intra-regional economic activity and the cooperation of what Whitley calls the ‘international epistemic communities’ appear to create the sort of solid foundation to V4 that it was lacking in the past.¹¹ Regionalisation is also in part exogenous in origin, stemming largely from the regional

⁷ [“Visegrad Houses to Open Worldwide”], *EurActive.hu*, 3 March 2010, <http://www.euractiv.hu/kulpolitika/hirek/visegradi-hazak-nyilnak-majd-vilagszerte-002424> (accessed: 5 May 2010), (in Hungarian).

⁸ “Central Questions”, *The Economist*, 4 March 2010, http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15622359 (accessed: 1 June 2010); [“Bajnai is Invited to Talks with Obama”]; *Népszabadság*, 31 March 2010, http://nol.hu/kulfold/bajnait_is_targyalni_hivta_obama (accessed: 1 June 2010) (in Hungarian).

⁹ Honor Mahony, “Sarkozy Warns Visegrad Countries Not to Make a Habit of Pre-Summit Meetings”, *EUObserver.com*, 4 November 2009, <http://euobserver.com/9/28928> (accessed: 19 May 2010).

¹⁰ Korosi, *The European Union’s Influence on the Visegrad Countries and Regional Cooperation*, 3-4.

¹¹ Richard Whitley, “Changing Transnational Institutions and the Management of International Business Transactions”, In: Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack (eds.), *Globalization and Institutions: Redefining the Rules of the Economic Game*, (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2003), 117-118.

activities of transnational corporations, the epistemic communities, and the EU. Nonetheless, this is not an attempt to argue against the role and impact of the nation state and ideational forces which played a defining role in the development of the V4, or to claim the salience of exogenous factors over endogenous ones. Aware of the near impossibility of measuring the extent of outside influences in a deeply interconnected and globalised world, it is argued nevertheless that external factors impacting the V4 ought to be considered and accounted for as well as possible since a change in the international environment is bound to have an impact on the regional cooperation. It is also argued that the dynamics of the Visegrad Group is better understood in the dynamic theoretical framework of new regionalism, which is flexible enough to account for changes in the scope and intensity of cooperation, and accommodate endogenous and exogenous factors alike.

In my MA thesis, I will argue that the resurgence of regionalism on the state-level and economic regionalisation in the Visegrad Group is in part a result of the V4 states' integration in the 'EU-imperium', very much in line with Katzenstein's notion of 'porous regions'.¹² Thus, it will be contended that exogenous forces have had a role in the resurgence of V4 regionalism and regionalisation since EU enlargement, and that this was also the case *ex ante*. However, the starting point for research and analysis of V4 regionalism and regionalisation is the EU accession of V4 states in 2004 prior developments will, nevertheless, also be referred to as necessary. The dissertation will be organised as follows: in the first chapter, the debate over whether the Visegrad Group can indeed be considered a region will be reviewed along with how exogenous forces can influence regionalism and regionalisation. It will be argued that new regionalism, in general, and Katzenstein's 'porous regions' concept, in particular, can be applied to the case of the changing scope and intensity of cooperation in the Visegrad Group. In the second chapter, the resurgence of state-level regionalism will be scrutinised in

¹² Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1.

the following way: in the first section, V4 as a foreign policy tool and voting group for its members in the EU will be examined. In the second section of this chapter, the possible impact of EU-funded programmes like Erasmus on the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and on the intra-regional cooperation of NGOs, and academia will be contended. In the third chapter, the first signs of economic regionalisation processes will be examined.

To account for the possible impact of exogenous factors on the V4 cooperation, I will use mixed method research the following way: in the first section of the second chapter, voting behaviour in the EU, foreign policy statements and documents by the V4 and other EU partners regarding the V4 will be reviewed and set against those international developments that could have had an influencing role. I expect that documents and statements will underline that V4 states, and their EU and third country partners increasingly consider the V4 as a foreign policy actor. A review of the V4 states' voting weight in the EU and their consultative structure will highlight the impact of EU accession and Europeanisation. The existence of these factors together could create conditions in which increased cooperation between V4 states becomes more beneficial than going it alone. In the second section of the second chapter, I will review IVF activities and set it against the impact they have on V4 NGOs by conducting interviews and reviewing their activities. It will be argued that sub-state level cooperation in the V4 is a growing and important part of V4 identity, but cooperation is primarily IVF-, and EU-funds dependent. In the third chapter, a change in regional trade patterns will be examined by analysing regional exports, set against GDP and FDI data and trends. This is expected to demonstrate that intra-regional trade relations and business connections have become more important but it is in large part due to the regional activities of TNCs.

The findings of this thesis will contribute to our understanding of why regionalism and regionalisation have strengthened in the Visegrad Group since EU enlargement. By

arguing that the Visegrad Group can be understood as a special case of Katzenstein's 'porous regions' concept, the changing scope and intensity of the V4 regional cooperation can be accounted for as a dynamic process which at times recedes, at others it resurges when conditions are ripe. Accounting possible external factors that may influence the intensity of cooperation in the V4 promises that the dynamics of regional processes taking place in the V4 can be better understood. While external factors alone cannot fully explain how "conditions become ripe" for the intensification of regionalism, they may shed some light on the ways regions function as building blocks of the global order.¹³

¹³ Katzenstein, *A World of Region*, 1-36 and 43-103;
Robert Cox, "Thinking About Civilizations", *Review of International Studies*, (2000, Vol. 26: 5), 217-234.

CHAPTER 1: THE DEBATE

Before any theoretical framework can be set out, it is important to find plausible explanations to two questions: first, while the Visegrad Group was referred to as a region in this thesis thus far, it is fundamental to establish whether it can indeed be regarded as such, especially post-enlargement, and second, what role external influence or exogenous forces can play in regionalism and regionalisation processes. Regionalism and regionalisation are sometimes used as synonyms in ‘new regionalism’ literature; in this thesis they will be considered as two different phenomena, opposite in direction, although intricately interlinked. *Regionalism* is understood here as a state-driven cooperation, or integration, a top-down process, while *regionalisation* is seen as a micro-level process that stems from regional concentrations of interconnecting private business or civil sector activities, a bottom-up development.¹⁴ In other words, regionalism is the conscious, *de jure* process, while regionalisation is the outcome, the *de facto* process.¹⁵ Factors stemming from EU integration, foreign policy developments, and integration in the global/European economy will be referred to as external or exogenous forces in this thesis.

1.1 The Visegrad Group as Region

First, the question whether the Visegrad Group can be described a region is important because it predetermines whether certain theoretical explanations can be applied to describe its activities. Regions are typically formed by a limited number of states, which are linked

¹⁴ Christopher Dent, *East Asian Regionalism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

¹⁵ Mark Beeson, *Regionalism and Globalisation in East Asia*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

together by geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence.¹⁶ A more comprehensive take on regions is that it consists of states which have some common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and historical bonds.¹⁷ Although there is much to be said in favour of considering continents, larger geographical areas or organisations covering them as regions, ‘new regionalism’ theories arguably allow for a broader understanding of regional cooperation which could include groupings like the V4. Regions today not only differ in their purpose but also in their institutional form, type of identity, and internal structure from previous understandings of regions.¹⁸ Regions are ever changing, not simply physical constants or ideological constructs; they express changing human practices.¹⁹ Regions, such as the V4, are no longer formed to rebuild economic autarchy that is impossible to maintain at the state-level, but to ensure participation of their members in the global economy.²⁰ It is also widely accepted notion that regions are socially constructed therefore what is critical is how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region.²¹

New regionalism literature therefore provides ample explanation as to why the Visegrad Group can indeed be considered a region or regional grouping, now a ‘subregion’ in the EU. Taking the V4 region as a unit of observation is thus not an arbitrary act of analysing the sum of its parts either; the re-territorialisation of economy, society, and polity can arguably be observed.²² Even if V4 countries did not regard themselves as a region, there would be strong arguments in favour of considering the V4 states a ‘region’ for the purposes

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organization*, (New York: University Press of America, 1987). 5-8.

¹⁷ Bjorn Hettne, “Beyond the ‘New’ Regionalism, *New Political Economy*, (Vol. 10, Issue 4, December 2005), 3

¹⁸ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰ Paul Bowles, “Post-global Financial Crises”, in: *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Shaun Breslin, Christopher W. Hughes, Nicola Phillips and Ben Rosamond, (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 86.

²¹ Andrew Hurrell, “Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective”, in: *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, eds. Louise Fawcett & Andrew Hurrell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 38-9.

²² Michael Keating, “The Spatial Dimension”, in: *Whose Europe? The Politics of Differentiated Integration*, eds. K. Dyson, and A. Sepos, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

of spatial analysis. The latter question arises because the V4 states have become members of the EU, a region very different in character. The EU is also at a higher degree of ‘regionness’ than the V4, as it has sophisticated legal and institutional instruments.²³ Therefore, from the perspective of regional integration the Visegrad Group is a rather peculiar case: its member states achieved a higher degree of regionness in legal and institutional terms by joining another regional grouping, the EU. Consequently, this has constrained the Visegrad Group to develop towards a higher degree of regionness as building up an institutionalised cooperation and a sophisticated legal framework became irrelevant. The Visegrad Group is also a special case because its destiny was clear from the outset: EU integration.²⁴ It was made clear at an early stage that these countries’ future ambitions to join Western organisations would in part depend on their willingness, and ability to cooperate with each other.²⁵

A less benign take on why V4 states were urged to cooperate is that the EU sometimes had the ulterior motive of postponing these countries’ admission by putting forward a substitute, and thus the Visegrad Group was a prerequisite for its members to develop cooperation among them first, and then graduate to membership of the EU.²⁶ Scholars, writing on the early years of the V4 seemed to have been informed by more traditional approaches when they voiced serious concerns about Visegrad as a viable region. It was argued that Visegrad countries differed greatly in the ways they conducted their transition, that there was a fierce competition between them for external markets, available outside resources, and endorsement of their transformation strategies by the international political and business community, and that these factors could have affected regional

²³ Bjorn Hettne and Frederik Soderbaum, “Theorising the Rise of Regionness”, in: *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Shaun Breslin, Christopher W. Hughes, Nicola Phillips and Ben Rosamond (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 37-45.

²⁴ [“Declaration on the Cooperation of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary on the Road to European Integration” – Visegrad Declaration], 15 February 1991, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=37> (accessed: 11 May 2010), (in Hungarian).

²⁵ Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe*, 33.

²⁶ Korosi, *The European Union’s Influence on the Visegrad Countries and Regional Cooperation*, 4.

cooperation adversely.²⁷ Others contested whether the Visegrad Three, at the time, had a really solid foundation for cooperation, both in terms of post-war and longer-term historical experiences and traditions.²⁸ It will be argued however that the V4 can be described by Katzenstein's dynamic and flexible 'porous regions' framework which allows for regional cooperation to recede and to resurge when political circumstances are ripe.²⁹

1.2 Exogenous Forces and Regions

Second, the role of external influence or exogenous forces in regionalism and regionalisation processes is important to review. This MA thesis however is not contributing to the debate whether endogenous or exogenous forces are more salient; it simply argues that exogenous forces matter and shape the scope and intensity of regional cooperation. It could be argued that in some ways this debate is a reflection of development and dependency theory debates about the significance of the international environment *vis-à-vis* the nation state; southern nationalist *dependencistas* and Marxist theorists argued for the dominance of external factors, while others questioned the role of the international environment.³⁰ Similarly some scholars contributing to 'new regionalism' literature stress that the development of regions is highly endogenous and shaped by economic, socio-cultural, political and historical path dependent factors.³¹ In a similar vein, it could be contended that regional developments

²⁷ Andras Inotai and Magdolna Sass, *Economic Integration of the Visegrad Countries: Facts and Scenarios*, (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for World Economics – Working Papers, 1994, No. 33), 2-3.

²⁸ Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe*, 26.

²⁹ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 53.

³⁰ Tony Smith, "The Underdevelopment of Development Literature: The Case of Dependency Theory", in: *The State and Development in the Third World*, ed. A. Kohli, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 61.

³¹ Bjorn Hettne and Frederik Soderbaum, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness", in: *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Shaun Breslin, Christopher W. Hughes, Nicola Phillips and Ben Rosamond (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 33;

Helen Wallace, "Europeanisation and Globalisation: Complementary or Contradictory Trends?", in: *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Breslin et al, (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

can be explained by simply analysing the institutional preferences of its member states.³² Others however emphasise the impact of the international environment, and most notably the role of the United States in the development of regional groupings.³³ As this thesis will argue, the applied theoretical framework can accommodate both endogenous and exogenous factors without claiming the primacy of either.

It can be reasonably well argued that exogenous forces and the external environment do impact upon state cooperation. Even neorealist scholars of IR, who argue in favour of the salience of the state, emphasise the importance of the international environment and its possible impact on the cooperation of states. In this theoretical frame states, aware of their external environment, could well perceive their relations in the EU for example, asymmetric and make the strategic decision that cooperating more strongly would assure their survival best.³⁴ The foreign policy cooperation between states would thus be based on their common cultural, political, strategic, or economic similarities and interests.³⁵ A possible strategy that cooperating states could then adopt to better assure their survival could be balancing against an imbalance in their foreign relationships, for example the dominance of bigger EU member states, or the old member states.³⁶ Even though Katzenstein's 'porous regions' concept borrows realist/neorealist arguments, applying a purely neorealist framework to regions and the Visegrad Group would have its serious shortcomings: first, the unequivocal existence of outside security threats is missing; second, the framework cannot account for some of the internal dynamics of regions which underpin their cooperation.

³² Peter Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), 1-68;

Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack (eds.), *Globalization and Institutions: Redefining the Rules of the Economic Game*, (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2003), 25-26.

³³ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1-36 and 43-103;

Robert Cox, "Thinking About Civilizations", *Review of International Studies*, (2000, Vol. 26: 5), 217-234.

³⁴ Seth G. Jones, *The Rise of European Security Cooperation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19-20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁶ Barry Posen, "European Union Security and Defence Policy: Response to Unipolarity?", *Security Studies*, (2006, Vol. 15: 2), 155.

Scholars of ‘new regionalism’ also underline the importance of the external environment and exogenous factors. Some argue that regions function as mediating layers of governance between the nation-state and global players; transnational corporations (TNCs), and institutions.³⁷ Globalisation is often referred to as the most important of exogenous forces that impact regionalisation and regionalism.³⁸ Notions that regions are some sort of transmission belts or building blocks of the current global order, favouring the Western civilization and interests, also suggest that exogenous forces do have an impact on regional developments, regardless of the validity of such arguments.³⁹ Katzenstein’s central argument that regions have become ‘porous’ to external influence highlights the importance of exogenous factors.⁴⁰ His argument that varied relations to the United States and its differing attitude to European and Asian countries have resulted in different-types of regionalism further accentuates the relevance of exogenous forces and suggests that external influence, such as the European Union or TNCs, could have had a defining role in the development of regionalism and regionalisation in the Visegrad Group.

1.3 Visegrad and the ‘EU-imperium’

Having established in the previous sections that the Visegrad Group can indeed be described as a region or subregion by applying arguments of ‘new regionalism’ theories, and that exogenous forces have a relevance in the development of regionalism and regionalisation, it is important to ascertain how Katzenstein’s ‘porous regions’ concept can be applied to describe the changing scope and intensity of cooperation in the V4. Katzenstein

³⁷ Shaun Breslin et al, “Regions in Perspective”, in: *New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy*, eds. Shaun Breslin et al, (Routledge, London-New York, 2002), 6.

³⁸ Hettne, “Beyond the ‘New’ Regionalism, New Political Economy”, 3.

³⁹ Cox, “Thinking About Civilizations”, 217-234.

⁴⁰ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1-36 and 43-103.

argues that since the 1990s, freed from the pressures of the Cold War and the scrutiny of the United States, states are “racing to regionalise”.⁴¹ For him, the US played a defining role by applying a different strategy in the parallel development of two types of regionalism: European and an Asian variety. The former illustrates the material, formal, and political aspects of regionalism, while the latter the imagined, informal, and economic ones.⁴² European-type regionalism is thus considered to be ‘deep’, while the Asian-type as ‘shallow’ integration. It is argued that the ‘American imperium’ preferred to deal with Asian states on a bilateral basis and it discouraged the emergence of a sophisticated regional cooperation similar to the EU. Imperium here signifies non-territorial power, a zone in which formal and informal systems of rule assure influence.⁴³

The Visegrad Group can arguably be described as an Asian-type, ‘shallow’ integration: it lacks sophisticated institutions and legal framework, and is based on informal and loose cooperation. Another trait of ‘Asianness’ in the V4, certainly in the early years of their integration, is that regionalism was based on the competition of national economies and ethnic groups in growing markets.⁴⁴ Fierce competition for admission to the EU in the early 1990s and later for foreign direct investment, and the remnants of historical rivalry for dominance in the region suggest that the Visegrad Group can be considered a „region of rivals”.⁴⁵ For Katzenstein, there exists a vertical relation that links core regional states to America, regions to sub-regions, and America to regions. The argued link between imperium and regions suggests that sub-regions like the V4 have a role even when embedded in a region like the EU, through which the V4 states connect to the world economy, the global order, and its *primus inter pares*, the United States. It also suggests that even as a ‘shallow’

⁴¹ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 23.

⁴² Ibid., 36.

⁴³ Ibid., 2-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁵ Bela Greskovits, “The Visegrad Group: A Region of Rivals”, [To be published].

integration, the V4 is an important platform for its members through which their integration in the 'EU-imperium' has in part been taking place.

While the aforementioned can be considered as external influences in Katzenstein's theoretical frame, the inclusion of endogenous factors of regional development in the theoretical frame is equally possible, even though this is not a primary objective of this thesis. However, ideational factors will be of relevance when discussing sub-state level developments in the V4 (Chapter 2). Katzenstein cogently argues that regions are ever changing, not simply physical constants or ideological constructs; they express changing human practices.⁴⁶ Borrowing from rational choice theory, he also argues that regions are formed by states and governments for mainly economic, utility maximising reasons; to create regional economies of scale, and because savings in transportation costs encourage intensive trade, and investment relations can accelerate economic growth, and finally, to increase efficiency and competitiveness through international forms of deregulation at the regional level.⁴⁷ The economic rationale was arguably of great importance for V4 states to cooperate pre-enlargement; the Visegrad Group and its former free trade arm, CEFTA, could be considered as case studies of Katzenstein's economic argument. This especially held true after the signing of the 'Europe Agreements' with the EU in 1991 which left the products of the Visegrad countries at a tariff disadvantage in each other's markets, thus creating a free trade area was a belated rectification of that.⁴⁸ However, post-enlargement the economic rationale behind V4 regionalism is no longer there. Instead, as it was predicted in the early 1990s, the recent development of intra-regional trade among the V4 states is the consequence of their successful integration into the world economy.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁸ Korosi, *The European Union's Influence on the Visegrad Countries and Regional Cooperation*, 4.

⁴⁹ Inotai and Sass, *Economic Integration of the Visegrad Countries: Facts and Scenarios*, 3.

Finally, having argued that Katzenstein's concept can accommodate both exogenous and endogenous factors to explain regional developments, it is important to determine whether it can explain the changing scope and intensity of regional cooperation, and the apparent resurgence of the Visegrad Group. Change in this frame can come from many different sources: the embeddedness in the global system and economy, whether we call it the American or EU 'imperium', posits that the external environment can become an important catalyst of change. Bottom-up regionalisation can even take place entirely as a result of TNC activities or as consequence of EU incentives to epistemic communities. Equally however the idea for change can be endogenous. In either case, the agents of change in this theoretical frame are the people who imagine that such a region as an idea exists; these people, whether they are at the helm of states, businesses organising their activities first in countries they feel they know best, or students on exchange programmes, can respond to changes in circumstances by strengthening their cooperation. Even if the political, economic, material and formal aspects of V4 regionalism now take place at the EU-level, the Visegrad Group still maintains such an informal and imagined identity. This underlines Katzenstein's argument that new regional identities can emerge quickly when political circumstances are ripe, bringing together political entrepreneurship, material power, and an idea that reverberates.⁵⁰

Katzenstein's flexible approach to what constitutes a region arguably allows for a better understanding of the V4. However, the very flexibility of the argument, that regions are ever changing and regionalism can recede at times, paradoxically makes it difficult to pin down whether regionalism is simply in an impasse or dysfunctional at any given time. Katzenstein's concept could also be criticised for combining material, ideational, and behavioural theories which makes the formulation of a parsimonious argument difficult, if

⁵⁰ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 53.

not impossible. However, I will argue that the Aristotelian whole is more than the sum of its parts; ideas, however difficult they are to identify, help clarify the motives behind apparently rational choice decisions.⁵¹ Therefore, this thesis will argue that the recent resurgence of state-level regionalism and sub-state level regionalisation in the Visegrad Group is a consequence of the V4 states' integration in the European Union. The V4 will be considered as a case of 'new regionalism', an imagined, informal, 'shallow', Asian-type integration which ensured its members' integration in the global system and which found a new lease of life under different circumstances. Consequently, I will argue that regionalism in the Visegrad Group is a dynamic process that can recede and resurge when conditions are ripe and people respond to changing circumstances; it is a region in transit.

⁵¹ Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework", in: *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, eds. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, (Cornell University Press, 1993), 3-5.

CHAPTER 2: RESURGING REGIONALISM

In this chapter, the resurgence of state-level and sub-state level regionalism in the Visegrad Group after EU enlargement will be scrutinised. In the first section, this thesis will argue that the changing environment has contributed to the increase of state-level cooperation in the V4. Accession to the EU has changed circumstances for the V4 the following way: first, the leverage of V4 member states to influence affairs that impact them within the EU, and *vis-à-vis* third states has arguably increased to unprecedented levels, thus circumstances have increased the possibility of meaningful cooperation. Second, the internal dynamics of EU decision making, the changing voting alliances or what is referred to as ‘variable geometry’ have created pressures on V4 countries, which arguably have similar interests, to cooperate. The almost ‘carrots and sticks’ like influence of ‘possibility’ and ‘pressure’ together have acted as catalysts to increase cooperation in the V4 as actors of change, committed to common ideals, responded. In the second section of this chapter, the possible impact of EU accession on the sub-state level cooperation will be examined. This thesis will argue that EU-funded programmes have contributed to the increase of sub-state level cooperation of NGOs and academia in the V4, far exceeding the scope and financial possibilities of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), the only institution of the V4 which was founded in 2000 to foster regional cooperation.

2.1 Possibilities and Pressures

While joining the European Union creates ‘possibilities and pressures’ for acceding countries to seek for allies and increase their voice, it is by no means inevitable that countries

with similar interests cooperate, even if they were members of the same regional grouping prior to EU accession. This has been the case for Ireland and the United Kingdom for example; both countries arguably have historically ambivalent, yet close relationship with each other however they cannot be considered close allies within the EU.⁵² In the EU-15, Austria, Finland, Greece, and Ireland could be regarded as ‘loners’; countries without permanent allies or special lobbying and voting relationships with other member states. In the EU-25 only Ireland and Austria were not members of voting groups as Finland reinforced its relations with the Nordic countries after the Eastern enlargement, while Greece with other Mediterranean members, notably Cyprus and Malta.⁵³ The case of Austria is understandably less surprising, if one considers state-level cooperation only; its ‘natural’ ally, Germany, is one of the ‘big’, founding members of the EU with different strategies and interests, and the situation is similar with its Southern neighbour, Italy. Despite its role in *Ostpolitik* during the 1980s, Austria effectively turned its back on its Eastern neighbours when it joined the EU in 1995 and consequently missed the formative years of the Visegrad Group which, even though it groups net beneficiary, former Communist EU members, could have been some sort of alternative alliance for Austria.⁵⁴

More surprising is the path that countries of two regional groupings comparable to the V4 have taken since their member states joined the EU. While Sweden allied with its Nordic Council partner Denmark after it joined the EU, Finland joined this ‘Northern-axis’ of the EU only after the Eastern enlargement.⁵⁵ Even more interesting is that the Netherlands, a member of the Benelux which is arguably a deeper integration than the V4 and in many ways was a model for the EU, often sides with Northern, liberal, net contributor states like Denmark,

⁵² Daniel Naurin, *Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU*, (Florence: European University Institute – Working Papers RSCAS, 2007/14), 15-16.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Paul Luif, “Cohesion of the EU Member States in Foreign and Security Policy: How does Austria Fit in?”, (paper presented at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, 30 March 2010).

⁵⁵ Naurin, *Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU*, 15-16.

Sweden, and the UK and not with Belgium and Luxembourg; the other two Benelux states however are each other's most important cooperating partners within the EU.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Benelux countries still coordinate their positions before EU summits.⁵⁷ Alliances, voting or otherwise, between Naurin's cooperating partners are often ad-hoc in nature in accordance with the recent developments in EU decision making, which is also referred to as 'variable geometry'. Nevertheless, his empirical study reasonably well demonstrates that first, the EU does have an impact on the cooperation of its member states, second, EU accession does not necessarily increase cooperation in previously existing regional groupings, and third, the countries of the Visegrad Group have identified each other as partners with whom they cooperate and develop common positions in EU matters nevertheless.

2.1.1 Increased Leverage

For the Visegrad Group, EU accession has created 'possibilities' and 'pressures' which were conducive to stronger cooperation. The most important 'possibility' is the fact that under the Nice Treaty, the four Visegrad countries have as many votes in the Council as France and Germany combined which potentially gives the V4 a significant leverage.⁵⁸ Subsequently, already in 2006, the Visegrad Group was recognisable as a close group, distinct from the Baltic Three and the two Mediterranean islands that joined the EU at the same time.⁵⁹ They also possessed relatively high network capital compared to some founding

⁵⁶ Naurin, *Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU*, 15-16.

⁵⁷ Robert Kron, "The Visegrad Group Revival: Time for Washington to Take Notice?", *Central Europe Digest*, (Washington: CEPA, 3 May 2010, Issue Brief No. 111), http://www.cepa.org/ced/view.aspx?record_id=235 (accessed: 18 May 2010).

⁵⁸ France and Germany have 29 votes each, while Poland 27, Hungary and the Czech Republic 12 each, and Slovakia 7 votes.

⁵⁹ Naurin, *Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU*, 16-17.

member states like Belgium, Luxembourg, and net budgetary contributors like Austria.⁶⁰ They were also relatively closely connected to the ‘core’ through cooperation with Germany which appeared to be bridging EU’s North-South and East-West divides existent in networking and voting patterns. This demonstrates that the V4 can indeed be considered a closely collaborating group within the EU. This fits into Katzenstein’s conceptual framework: political circumstances became ripe after EU accession, to develop meaningful foreign policy cooperation and the V4 consequently quickly developed a corresponding identity as each other’s most important allies in the EU, creating a feedback mechanism.

Although the voting weight of the V4 only has a direct impact in those EU policy areas which are decided by qualified majority voting, an increased presence as a closely cooperating group has also been beneficial to the four countries in other institutional settings. The perception that these states form a group has consequently increased their leverage which is indirectly demonstrated by how ‘heavyweight’ actors within the EU behave *vis-à-vis* the V4. President Jose Manuel Barroso of the European Commission, for example, recently joined a Visegrad Summit to gather support for his plans about the European External Action Service (EEAS) after the four countries circulated an informal paper in which they demanded ‘fairer’ representation for their diplomats in the EEAS. The V4 managed to build-up considerable momentum when eleven other EU countries joined their initiative.⁶¹ It was claimed that pre-summit meetings of this kind have become a ‘tradition’.⁶² This has not gone unnoticed: it was part of a well-choreographed move by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France when he ‘warned’ the V4 recently that they should not make a ‘habit’ of their pre-EU Summit

⁶⁰ Naurin, *Network Capital and Cooperation Patterns in the Working Groups of the Council of the EU*, 13.

⁶¹ “Barroso Joins Visegrad Mini-Summit for the First Time”, *Eurotribune.eu*, 25 March 2010, <http://www.eurotribune.eu/?p=8335&l=0&idioma=2> (accessed: 18 May 2010).

⁶² “Eastern Europe Asks for Fair Representation in EEAS”, *EurActiv.com*, 25 March 2010, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/ambassdor-eastern-europe-asks-fair-representation-eeas-interview-378586> (accessed: 18 May 2010).

meetings to align their positions.⁶³ Sarkozy, at the same time, tried to cajole Poland into working closer with the Franco-German ‘tandem’ as part of the EU’s ‘Big Six’, the group that includes the largest member states, instead of the V4.

The informal recognition of Poland as an important player in the EU has had profound consequences.⁶⁴ For Poland it is consequently more beneficial to choose both groupings: support by the V4 arguably gives Poland significant leverage *vis-à-vis* other big EU members. The three smaller V4 countries however also have a stake to encourage Poland’s participation in both the V4, and the ‘Big Six’ as this offers the best chance for the three countries to have an influence at the ‘top’ of EU decision making. Poland’s changing status and the pressure on the V4 states to be able to influence EU decision making seems to have eased apprehensions about the dominance of Poland which was once a significant barrier to more enhanced foreign policy cooperation within the V4. Previously some scholars even argued that an introverted ‘Provincial Central Europe’ of the three smaller states, excluding Poland, might emerge and should regroup the ‘Habsburg-nations’ to include Austria, Slovenia and, once it joins the EU, Croatia.⁶⁵

This was not unthinkable even at the time of enlargement: in 2004 for example, no V4 country supported Poland, and some even voiced their dislike of the Polish position, about its diplomatic push to defend the voting provisions of the Nice Treaty, which prompted former Polish Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski to declare the Visegrad Group *de facto* disintegrated.⁶⁶ It took some getting used to for the smaller states that Poland was no longer the ‘big and backward’ country that they had considered a hindrance to their EU integration

⁶³ Honor Mahony, “Sarkozy Warns Visegrad Countries Not to Make a Habit of Pre-Summit Meetings”, *EUObserver.com*, 4 November 2009, <http://euobserver.com/9/28928> (accessed: 19 May 2010).

⁶⁴ Jacek Pawlicki, “Brown, Berlusconi, Merkel, Fillon, or a Diplomatic Festival in Warsaw”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 April 2010, http://wyborcza.pl/1,86871,6516398,Brown_Berlusconi_Merkel_Fillon_or_a_Diplomatic.html, (accessed: 19 May 2010).

⁶⁵ Martin Dangerfield, “The Visegrad Group in the Expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation”, *East European Politics and Society*, (2008, Vol.22, No.3), 649-650.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 648.

efforts but the central player in their region.⁶⁷ Therefore, the current voting weights within the Council, the perception of the Visegrad Group as a close cooperation within the EU by other member states, the increasing importance of Poland within the EU, and Poland's improving status within the V4 have contributed to the increasing leverage of the Visegrad Group.

2.1.2 Visegrad as a Foreign Policy Tool

Although this thesis is only arguing for the importance of exogenous forces in the resurgence of the V4 and not claiming their salience, it is important to reaffirm that the 'possibilities' created by EU integration would have not been enough in themselves without accompanying 'pressures', and internal developments in the Visegrad Group. While the V4, apart from establishing the International Visegrad Fund, has been keen to avoid creating institutions and preserving its informal style, intergovernmental meetings at various levels were quasi-institutionalised at the re-launch of the cooperation in 1999. It was the year when the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO but not Slovakia; the latter however had a new, pro-Western government following elections in 1998 and was keen to give a new impetus to the Visegrad Group in order to prove that the country is, once again, a reliable member of the European community. The V4 agreed to establish a system of regular meetings at presidential, heads of governments, ministerial, inter-parliamentary and national V4 coordinator levels, and the institution of the rotating one-year presidency of the V4.⁶⁸ These consultative fora functioned reasonably well by the time of EU accession, even during periods when bilateral relations between some V4 members, notably Hungary and Slovakia, were tense.

⁶⁷ Dangerfield, "The Visegrad Group in the Expanded European Union", 649.

⁶⁸ "Contents of the Visegrad Cooperation Approved by the Prime Ministers' Summit in Bratislava", 14 May 1999, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=859&articleID=3937&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 20 May 2010).

Building on the experience of regular consultation and cooperation in the pre-enlargement years, the V4 states also established regular cooperation between their permanent representatives to the EU. In 2004, only a few days after the V4 states were admitted in the EU, the four countries reiterated their original declaration and stated that they intended to cooperate ‘within the V4 area’, ‘within the EU’, ‘with other partners’, and ‘within NATO and other international organisations’.⁶⁹ The ‘four areas’ practically allow for the extension of the cooperation to any new direction. However the already defined fields in the Declaration are dominated by foreign affairs and European policy issues, and even the ‘within the V4 area’ clause bears the hallmarks of the EU: fighting against terrorism and illegal immigration, and preparing for the Schengen co-operation are examples to the Europeanization of the Visegrad agenda.⁷⁰ The impact of the EU-agenda is all the more apparent in the section which outlines the issues for the ‘within the EU’ cooperation. It states that the four countries particularly want to contribute to the “development of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including the ‘Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood’ policy and the EU strategy towards Western Balkans”, and actively participate in the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), “as a contribution to the strengthening of relations between the EU and NATO and deepening of substantive dialogue between both organisations”.⁷¹ The latter is a clear sign of the ambiguous attitude of new member states towards CFSP/CSDP at the time of their joining, which also suggests that ‘possibilities’ created by EU membership were accompanied by ‘pressures’ early on.⁷²

⁶⁹ “The Visegrad Declaration on Cooperation After EU Accession”, 12 May 2004, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=35>, 3-4, (accessed: 19 May 2010).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Kerry Longhurst and Marcin Zaborowski, “The European Union as a Security Policy Actor: The View from Poland”, *The Future of the European Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after Enlargement*, ed. Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006), 56; Laszlo J. Kiss, “Hungary as ‘Policy Maker’ and ‘Policy Taker’ in CFSP/ESDP”, *The Future of the European Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after Enlargement*, ed. Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006), 105.

Prior to enlargement, EU accession was at the heart of the Visegrad Group, however this was little more than consultations as the European Commission negotiated with the V4 states individually, and consequently some of them secured better deals at the final stages of negotiations. At the fifteenth anniversary of the Visegrad Declaration of 1991, the V4 prime ministers declared that “making a distinct and effective contribution to the [...] EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy remains a top priority for the cooperation”.⁷³ Foreign affairs cooperation in the V4 is therefore embedded in the EU framework, V4 foreign policy priorities and interests are significantly influenced by CFSP objectives; a special interest in Eastern Europe, notably Russia and Ukraine, a central role in developing the Eastern Partnership in the European Neighbourhood Policy, and staunchly supporting the EU integration of the Western Balkans are the main areas of attention for the V4.⁷⁴ The four countries have also developed a wide-ranging network of cooperation within the EU and with third countries. The ‘Visegrad+’ formats are used to build alliances in the EU with other regional groupings like the Benelux, the Nordic Council, and the Baltic Three, and on ad-hoc basis with Austria, Slovenia, Romania, among others.

The ‘Visegrad+’ format has also become popular *vis-à-vis* non-EU countries. Several such meetings have taken place with the United States; V4 representatives also plan to gather in Washington in the summer of 2010 to seek further cooperation as a group with the Obama Administration.⁷⁵ The framework of the ‘V4+Japan’ cooperation has existed for several years now: foreign ministers decided on a regular V4+Japan cooperation at their meeting in May 2007. The cooperation follows the ‘quasi-institutionalised’ pattern of the V4: biannual ministerial meetings are complemented by yearly meetings of heads of departments or state

⁷³ “Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries”, 10 October 2006, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=939&articleID=4708&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 23 May 2010).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Robert Kron, “The Visegrad Group Revival: Time for Washington to Take Notice?”, *Central Europe Digest*, (Washington: CEPA, 3 May 2010, Issue Brief No. 111), http://www.cepa.org/ced/view.aspx?record_id=235 (accessed: 18 May 2010).

secretaries.⁷⁶ While the ‘Visegrad+’ formats are not necessarily direct consequences of EU accession, the V4’s increasing visibility as a group has arguably facilitated the emergence of such consultative fora. Visibility in an EU of twenty-seven has become an important issue for the V4. It was decided that the four countries will strengthen their presence as a region worldwide by opening common embassies in non-EU posts, for example in Cape Town, Santiago de Chile, and elsewhere.⁷⁷ This arguably builds on the closer diplomatic cooperation within the EU based on the Lisbon Treaty, and the rights derived from European citizenship.⁷⁸

Therefore, EU enlargement and CFSP have acted as catalysts for the development of the Visegrad Group as a major foreign policy tool for its members. The originally exogenous influence of the EU and CFSP did not create significant tensions because the V4, building on their existing consultative structures, embedded their cooperation in the EU-frame, and foreign policy interests of the EU and the V4 were in part overlapping. The V4 foreign policy cooperation in the EU has arguably created spill-overs which manifest themselves in the proliferation of the ‘Visegrad+’ cooperation with non-EU countries, and plans to open common, ‘Visegrad’ embassies.

⁷⁶ “Consultation of the V4 Political Directors in Japan”, 1 February 2010, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=1154&articleID=27476&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 22 May 2010); “V4+Japan Foreign Ministers Meeting”, 28 May 2007, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=1072&articleID=9340&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 22 May 2010).

⁷⁷ [“Visegrad Houses to Open Worldwide”], Euractive.hu, 3 March 2010, <http://www.euractiv.hu/kulpolitika/hirek/visegradi-hazak-nyilnak-majd-vilagszerte-002424> (accessed: 23 May 2010) (in Hungarian).

⁷⁸ The concept is hardly unique: Hungary and Austria, like other EU countries, have also opened a ‘common’ embassy in their former dominion: Montenegro.

2.1.3 Pressing Matters

However, EU accession has not only created ‘possibilities’ but also ‘pressures’. The latter also acted as catalysts to further cooperation in the Visegrad Group. Before enlargement, some scholars argued that the foreign policy priorities of either the newcomers or the old member states would have to change if the EU’s common foreign policy was to function.⁷⁹ It was argued that EU-15 countries always considered themselves industrialised states belonging to the Western system of values while new member states, bar Cyprus and Malta, did not share the experience of the emergence and consolidation of these values after World War 2.⁸⁰ The new member states’ geographical proximity to Russia, energy dependence, instinctive Atlanticism, recently (re)gained sovereignty, and different formative years were some of the arguments against their smooth integration. Despite the apparently unproblematic integration of the V4, these arguments also suggest that integration was expected to create pressures, and logically the pressure to adjust had to have been more significant on the V4 than on the EU-15.

These ‘pressures’ had varied characteristics: old member states had either little or no interest in certain issues, for example offering Ukraine the perspective of EU membership, a priority for Poland, or differing interests, for instance in the case of energy security and Russia. Consequently, in spite of their differing priorities, the V4 started to build-up their profile within CFSP as soon as they joined the EU. When President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland mediated for a peaceful solution during the so-called ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, he had the backing of the V4 which also expressed its support to offer Ukraine a

⁷⁹ Gerhard Hafner, “The CFSP in the Light of the Newest Enlargement”, *The Future of the European Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after Enlargement*, ed. Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006), 20.

⁸⁰ Hafner, “The CFSP in the Light of the Newest Enlargement”, 20.

“long-term European perspective”.⁸¹ At the time, there was little V4 cooperation in foreign policy but it increased interest in the stability in the Eastern neighbourhood, and V4 countries were also keen to avoid Austria’s mistake of turning their backs on the East once they joined the EU.⁸² Thus, the threat of renewed instability at their external borders created pressures for the V4 to cooperate, and the case of Ukraine a precedent to take up an active role in the EU’s new neighbourhood.

Apart from instability in their neighbourhood, the V4 have also been concerned about other foreign policy developments, creating external pressures on them to cooperate: EU integration of the Western Balkans, common security risks stemming from the Russian energy policy, non-transparent steps of Russia in Ukraine, increasing instability in the Euro-Asian regions, and the Eastern Partnership in general.⁸³ All V4 countries have been worried and affected by Russia’s increasing assertiveness and its attempts to re-establish influence in its ‘near abroad’. The annual gas transit fee debates with Ukraine, which habitually culminates in gas stoppages in Central Europe, has united the V4 against more cautious Germany, France and Italy whose ‘friendly energy companies’ have nevertheless intensified cooperation with Russia’s Gazprom, to campaign for a common energy policy in the EU.⁸⁴ In the meantime, V4 states have decided to integrate their energy grids: East-West pipelines will be extended by interconnectors to the North and the South, establishing coastal LNG terminals in Croatia and Poland is also being discussed.⁸⁵ The V4 has also been advocating a sort of ‘energy Article 5’ in the EU, a mutual help clause in energy crises modelled on the collective defence of NATO.

⁸¹ “Statement of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the Situation in Ukraine”, 7 December 2004, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=961&articleID=3887&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 22 May 2010).

⁸² Luif, “Cohesion of the EU Member States in Foreign and Security Policy: How does Austria Fit in?”.

⁸³ Ivo Samson, “The Visegrad Four: from Loose Geographic Group to Security Internationalization?”, *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, (Bratislava: Vol. XVIII, No. 4/2009), 6-7.

⁸⁴ “Central Questions”, *The Economist*, 6-12 March 2010, 32-34.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Russia, in general, has remained an important foreign policy concern for the V4, especially for Poland, which has been affected by the Obama Administration's decision to cancel the deployment of an anti-missile defence system because of concerns voiced by Russia. By the time of the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008, the V4 was coordinating foreign policy more closely within the EU, therefore the Polish and Swedish initiative for an Eastern Partnership (EP) to balance against Russia's growing influence in the region was successfully launched. The V4 countries have considered themselves as the main proponents of the six EP countries' institutionalised relationship with the EU. The 'V4+6 Summit' in Budapest confirmed that because of the "common historical experience with the partner countries and geographic proximity", Eastern Partnership has a specific importance for the Visegrad countries.⁸⁶ The V4 countries also offered their support for political and socio-economic reforms, "facilitating approximation and convergence" towards the European Union within the Eastern Partnership framework.⁸⁷ By taking a leading role in EP, the V4 not only could increase its influence and networking capital in these countries but arguably also within CFSP. Germany's early support of the EP initiative is also a further sign that the V4 could become a player of a more equal standing in the 'variable geometry' of EU agenda formulation and decision making.

Ukraine's and Belarus's stability is a primary concern for Poland, which in turn supports Hungary in promoting EU's 'Danube Strategy', launched in 2009. This involves most countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the three smaller V4 states, as well as most successor countries to the former Yugoslavia except for Kosovo and

⁸⁶ "Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group at their Meeting in Budapest", 2 March 2010, http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/V4_presidency/V4_statement_100302.htm (accessed: 22 May 2010).

⁸⁷ "Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group at their Meeting in Budapest", 2 March 2010, http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/V4_presidency/V4_statement_100302.htm (accessed: 22 May 2010).

Macedonia.⁸⁸ The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia are keen to divert more EU financing to this region and the V4 is lobbying for this, which suggests that in many cases the EU's impact on V4 regionalism is through financial incentives, and EU-funded programmes. Following Hungary's initiative, the V4 has also been a keen supporter of the EU integration of countries of the Western Balkans, including the introduction of visa-free travel to some of these states, in the hope that it will increase trade but also soft power and influence in the region. The V4's regional presence, and its self-assumed role in CFSP as an advocate of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, has also made V4 countries more attractive partners to cooperate with within the EU, especially for Romania, Bulgaria but also to Slovenia and Austria.

Thus, EU accession has created indirect 'pressures' on the V4 countries to cooperate because old member states often had little or differing foreign policy interests in issues that affect primarily the V4 countries. The stability of the Eastern neighbourhood, Russia's increasing assertiveness, and energy dependence have been major concerns for the V4 and been conducive to further cooperation since EU enlargement. Providing assistance to the countries of the Western Balkans in order to speed up their integration in the EU has also enhanced V4 cooperation. The main concern for the V4 which motivates their resurging cooperation has been the experience that they wield little influence over deals, done between their EU and NATO allies and third countries, even if these deals affect them. More direct 'pressures' by the EU, financial incentives to cooperate, EU-funded projects, have also been conducive to further regional activity in the V4.

⁸⁸ *EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm (accessed: 23 May 2010)

2.1.4 Switching Agendas

A third way, though not distinct from ‘possibilities’ and ‘pressures’, in which external environment impacts regionalism in the V4 is the Europeanisation of the Visegrad-agenda. Borrowing from the concept of Europeanisation is not in contradiction with the theoretical frame: in fact, it could be argued that Europeanisation, as understood by Goetz and Hix with a focus less on the institutions but more on the EU as a source of change, would very much fit into Katzenstein’s ‘porous regions’ concept.⁸⁹ The EU’s paramount influence on the Visegrad-agenda is obvious from V4 policy papers and documents. For instance, the first sentence of the Polish V4 Presidency’s Annual Report in 2008/2009 starts with a reference to the “immensely dynamic developments in the European Union”, setting the frame for the rest of the document.⁹⁰ Statements by the Visegrad Group often start by ‘recognising’ or declaring ‘awareness’ of challenges and developments within the European Union, and continue by cooperating, consulting or sharing experience about participation in, or the effects of EU projects and programmes.⁹¹ The influence of the EU can be observed even at meetings of Ministers of Culture in references to EU programmes and “financial instruments”, even though culture remains firmly in the national domain of member states, and is thus one of the least Europeanised fields of cooperation in the V4.⁹²

⁸⁹ Klaus H. Goetz and Simon Hix, “Introduction: European Integration and National Political Systems”, in: *Europeanised Politics?: European Integration and National Political Systems*, eds. Goetz and Hix, (London-Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 1-3.

⁹⁰ “Executive Report on the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group”, June 2009, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=132> (accessed: 22 May 2010).

⁹¹ “Joint Declaration of the V4 Ministers of Transport”, 18 March 2005, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=962&articleID=3921&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 22 May 2010)

⁹² “Communiqué of the 15th Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Visegrad Group Countries”, 5 September 2006, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=52> (accessed: 22 May 2010); Communiqué of the 16th Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Visegrad Group Countries”, 12 January 2007, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=1072&articleID=6619&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 22 May 2010)

The EU-agenda impacts Visegrad regionalism by the same rewarding mechanism as was argued in the previous subsections. If V4 states can accord to formulate common positions, it brings benefit to individual member states because of increased leverage in that single issue but it is also beneficial to the Visegrad Group in the long term as it increases the V4's presence, visibility and its influence. Consequently, the practice of aligning their positions prompted the V4 states to meet habitually even if no agreement is reached or include areas in their cooperation which are of less importance strategically. This can be well observed in the proliferation of meetings and consultations: in the early 2000s, prior to enlargement, V4 states met at various levels around twenty times a year. A marked increase is apparent from 2003, thirty-six meetings, while in the year of enlargement this number increased to forty-seven, excluding consultations between V4 permanent representatives in Brussels.⁹³ The V4 meetings have become so common that annual reports in the last few years only mention those which are deemed more important.

2.1.5 Ideas and Actors

In the previous subsections, it was argued that interests and structures were conducive to further regionalism in the Visegrad Group. However, the impact of the changing circumstances on ideas and actors are also of importance in the process. It appears from the previous subsections that 'negative' and 'positive' ideas go hand in hand to underpin regionalism in the V4. The fear of being left out of, or not being able to influence decisions at the EU-level and in the international community could be identified as 'negative', which is nevertheless conducive to cooperation and to the formulation of foreign policy strategies in

⁹³ *Visegrad Group*, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=859>, (accessed: 24 May 2010)

the region.⁹⁴ The idea of cooperation instead of “conflicts and jealousies which nobody want[s]” based on the centuries old idea of Central Europe could be considered ‘positive’.⁹⁵ In general, the duality of these two streams of ideas has been enduringly conducive to state-level cooperation in the V4, even if, at times, leaders only paid lip service to them. The latter is illustrated in a statement by the former Prime Minister of Slovakia, Vladimir Meciar, who argued that Visegrad countries would have to cooperate “sooner or later”, even though he was considered to be one of the ‘obstacles’ to V4 cooperation in the mid-1990s.⁹⁶

Due to the fact that the Visegrad Group remains an informal and loose cooperation on the state-level, the agents of change are government ministers, prime ministers and presidents. Even though the V4 established a system of regular meetings at various levels, it is the foreign ministers, premiers and presidents who set the scope and intensity of cooperation.⁹⁷ Thus, ‘personal chemistry’ between leaders is important; without permanent institutions, only regular meetings between governments can provide continuity and create pressures for cooperation, even if foreign ministries also have a defining role in determining policy objectives for the rotating V4 presidencies. Consequently, statements by ministers and heads of governments reflect the duality of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ approaches to cooperation.

Two statements are cited to illustrate this: former Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia adhered to the ‘positive’ definition of the V4 cooperation when he claimed that he had approached the cooperation with “real goodwill” because the value of “his house” is

⁹⁴ Longhurst and Zaborowski, *The European Union as a Security Policy Actor: The View from Poland*, 66

⁹⁵ E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), 53.

⁹⁶ George Kolankiewicz, “Consensus and Competition in the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union”, *International Affairs*, (Vol. 70, Issue 3, 1994) 477. Originally published in [“Interview with Vladimir Meciar, Prime Minister of Slovakia”], *Wprost*, 13 February 1994, (in Polish).

⁹⁷ “Contents of the Visegrad Cooperation Approved by the Prime Ministers’ Summit in Bratislava”, 14 May 1999, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=859&articleID=3937&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (accessed: 20 May 2010).

dependent on the reputation of the neighbours.⁹⁸ However, the ‘negative’ motivation can also be observed in his remark that energy security cooperation was important because he was “extremely worried” that Germany had made a deal with Russia about building a gas pipeline that circumvents Poland “behind the back of Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians and Czechs”.⁹⁹ The statement of Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi of Hungary is a more recent example: he clearly adhered to the ‘positive’ idea that underpin V4 regionalism when he declared that he had “had a dream: Central Europe”, and that he had wanted to “strengthen cooperation”. However, he also suggested that other alliances might become more important for Hungary, if the Visegrad cooperation was no longer meaningful.¹⁰⁰ Commitment to the ideals of cooperation and common destiny by signatories are amply expressed in joint statements and declarations; even when they are of little substance, by these documents states reaffirm their commitment to the idea of the Visegrad Group and construct regional identity.

In the previous section and subsections, this thesis argued that the external environment and EU accession have significantly impacted on the resurgence of the Visegrad Group. Joining the EU created ‘possibilities’ and ‘pressures’ which have been conducive to further cooperation because first, the V4 already had structures in place, second, it promised greater benefit to act in a group than alone. The increasing leverage of the V4 was identified as one such ‘possibility’; it was argued that this is primarily due to their voting weight in the Council, the increasing importance of Poland, and the perception of the Visegrad Group as a close cooperation within the EU by other member states. EU enlargement acted as a catalyst to identify foreign policy cooperation and CFSP as the main fields of cooperation for the V4. The influence of the EU and CFSP did not create tensions because the V4, building on their

⁹⁸ Daniel Izsak and Erno Simon, [“Reformers Don’t Lose – Interview with former Prime Minister of Slovakia, Mikulas Dzurinda”], *Figyelo*, 3-9 July 2008, 27 (in Hungarian).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ [“Statement by Incoming Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi of Hungary”], *Origo*, 27 May 2010, <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/percrolpercre/20100526-beszamol-terveiol-pinter-sandor-miniszteri-meghallgatasok-csutortok-percrol-percre.html?pldx=3> (accessed: 27 May 2010) (in Hungarian).

existing consultative structures, embedded their cooperation in the EU-frame, and the process has also created spill-over in the V4.

On the other hand, EU accession also meant ‘pressures’ on the V4 countries to cooperate; their Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, Russia, and their energy dependence presented them with challenges which were easier dealt with as a group than individually. This thesis argued that the main concern for the V4 has been that they wield little influence over deals, made by others, that affect them. The Europeanisation of the V4 agenda was also considered to have an influence on the resurgence of regional cooperation. It was also contended that the changing environment had an impact on ideas and actors; the duality of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ ideas that underpin V4 regionalism were defined and it was suggested that the impact of the external environment is reflected in ‘negative’ regionalism. Finally, this thesis argued that agents of change in state-level regionalism are heads of states and governments due to the informal nature of the Visegrad Group, who reaffirm their commitment to cooperation by joint statements and regular meetings, and thus contribute to the formation of a regional identity.

2.2 The EU's Impact on V4 Regionalisation

Sub-state level cooperation in the Visegrad Group has been one of the most dynamic areas of regionalisation in the past decade. The *de facto*, bottom-up regionalisation process takes place in the epistemic communities, first and foremost in the not-for-profit sector and to a lesser extent in academia.¹⁰¹ Not underestimating the existence of genuine interest, the impact of ideational forces, and the role of an emerging Central European identity, regionalisation has, in part, been a response to financial incentives by the V4 governments and the EU.¹⁰² Although the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), the only V4 institution as of today (see Subsection 2.2.1), is not reliant on EU funding and consequently is free to pursue its own agenda, the mechanism of cross-cultural cooperation to foster regional linkages and identity is very much the 'EU-way' of promoting understanding and regional integration. However, V4 governments directly set strategic objectives to the Fund and consequently use it as a tool for furthering their Europeanised agendas. The marked presence of Eastern Neighbourhood Policy and Western Balkans countries in IVF-sponsored scholarships and projects therefore can be considered the EU's indirect influence.¹⁰³ Similarly, EU-funded programmes, which exceed both the scope and the financial possibilities of the IVF, have also contributed to the increase of sub-state level cooperation of NGOs and academia, and thus regionalisation.

¹⁰¹ Whitley, "Changing Transnational Institutions and the Management of International Business Transactions", 117-118.

¹⁰² Beeson, *Regionalism and Globalisation in East Asia*, 5.

¹⁰³ *Visegrad Fund Annual Report 2008*, http://www.visegradfund.org/press/ANNUAL_REPORT2008.pdf, 24-25 (accessed: 25 May 2010).

2.2.1 The International Visegrad Fund

The Visegrad Fund was established in 2000 to promote closer cooperation among V4 countries. Nevertheless, it functions in a very ‘EU-inspired’ way: to create a ‘Visegrad-identity’, it supports common cultural, scientific and educational projects, youth exchanges, cross-border projects, and tourism similarly to the EU.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the geographical delimitation for the IVF is a strong sign that the Fund serves as a foreign policy tool for the V4 *vis-à-vis* countries of the Western Balkans and the EU’s Eastern Partnership, as its target area is, besides the V4, countries in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and the South Caucasus.¹⁰⁵ This indirect external influence is reflected in the goals of the IVF’s so-called ‘Visegrad Strategic Program’, which are set annually by the Conference of [Foreign] Ministers in accordance with the strategic objectives of the V4 Presidency. In 2008, for example, one of the four strategic priorities was “Sharing V4 Know-How” about EU accession in neighbouring countries.¹⁰⁶ However, the extent of the impact of the ‘Strategic Program’ is likely to be limited as its budget represented only ten per cent of the total grant budget and five per cent of the overall IVF budget in 2010.

More marked is the EU’s influence on the ‘Visegrad Scholarship Program’, which took up more than one-quarter of the annual IVF budget, and was distributed to scholars from seventeen countries in the academic year 2009/2010. It supports V4 scholars’ studies in other V4 or designated countries, or scholars from designated countries in the V4 countries.¹⁰⁷ A map depicting the number of academic exchanges clearly shows that besides a strong intra-

¹⁰⁴ *Statute of the International Visegrad Fund*, <http://scholarship.visegradfund.org/download/statute.pdf> (accessed: 27 May 2010).

¹⁰⁵ *International Visegrad Fund*, <http://www.visegradfund.org/about.html> (accessed: 25 May 2010).

¹⁰⁶ *Visegrad Fund Annual Report 2007*, http://www.visegradfund.org/press/annual_report2007.pdf, 27 (accessed: 26 May 2010).

¹⁰⁷ *Visegrad Fund Annual Report 2008*, http://www.visegradfund.org/press/ANNUAL_REPORT2008.pdf, 23 (accessed: 26 May 2010).

regional activity, the importance of Ukraine and, to a lesser extent Serbia, is overwhelming in IVF relations.¹⁰⁸ Around eighty-five per cent of the funds were paid to applicants in the four countries while the other ‘target countries’ shared the rest, with Ukraine receiving almost half the remaining funds.¹⁰⁹ This strongly suggests that the IVF also functions as a foreign policy tool of the V4 to increase Visegrad soft-power in target countries, in accordance with the intention of its founders. As the foreign policy of the V4 is itself heavily impacted by the EU agenda, it can be argued that the EU agenda therefore impacts the scope, direction and intensity of this facet of regionalisation in the Visegrad Group.

Nonetheless, the extent of external influence in the IVF and its impact on regionalisation should not be overestimated. The Fund runs several grant programmes and these take up the largest share of the annual budget which has increased from one to around six million euros *per annum* over the years with equal contributions by the four states. Small grants are up to five thousand euros, standard grants are above five thousand. More than one third of the budget in 2010 is spent on such projects, which range from cultural festivals to regional conferences. The variety of programmes and recipients is vast: individuals, private companies, schools, universities, local and regional governments, and NGOs can also apply. The budget for small and standard grants represented around eighty per cent of the total grant budget in 2010. The variety of projects financed also suggests that foreign policy objectives have little direct influence in these two sub-categories; the aim is to build and define a common identity.

The Visegrad Fund thus responded to the need to “fill with something meaningful the great political vacuum that arose in Central Europe after the break-up of the Habsburg

¹⁰⁸ *Visegrad Fund Annual Report 2008*, http://www.visegradfund.org/press/ANNUAL_REPORT2008.pdf, 24-25 (accessed: 26 May 2010).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Empire”.¹¹⁰ It was claimed at the time of its establishment that the Visegrad Fund would help define the meaning of Central European identity.¹¹¹ The V4 have emphasised the ideational foundations of their cooperation since the signing of the Visegrad Declaration in 1991.¹¹² However, during the impasse of the mid-1990s, it became clear that a ‘Visegrad-identity’ might not even exist and, as President Vaclav Klaus of the Czech Republic once famously said, the Visegrad Group is just an “artificial creation of the West” with a common agenda thrust upon them.¹¹³ Consequently, at the re-launch of their cooperation in 1999 the V4 governments were keen to give a more solid foundation to the Visegrad Group, which they had considered as the embodiment of ‘Central Europe’ since the beginning.

In this sense, the Visegrad Fund was to capture and even to create the contours of an imagined region in a more precise manner than ‘the lands between’ major empires, defining the instinctive feeling that these countries, in some ways, are different from those to their West and East.¹¹⁴ In other words, the IVF was to become a ‘second pillar’ to the Visegrad Group which would prove that the cooperation did not only represent “a logical realisation of national interests”, but it was “an expression and proof of pursuing a common path”.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the Visegrad Fund can be considered a response by V4 states to external developments inasmuch as it prevents the weakening of V4 regionalism and its members’ position within the EU, and helps pursuing the EU-influenced foreign policy cooperation of the V4 countries. In fact, the IVF is very much endogenous in origin, based on the idea of

¹¹⁰ The Speech of President Vaclav Havel of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the Polish Sejm and Senate on 25 January 1990, in: Andrew Cottey (ed.), *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 3-4.

¹¹¹ Statement by Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, in: Laszlo Hernadi and Zoltan Udvardi, “[International Visegrad Fund is Established]”, *Magyar Nemzet*, 10 June 2000, <http://www.mno.hu/portal/5486> (accessed: 27 May 2010) (in Hungarian).

¹¹² [“Declaration on the Cooperation of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary on the Road to European Integration” – Visegrad Declaration], 15 February 1991, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=37> (accessed: 11 May 2010), (in Hungarian).

¹¹³ Dangerfield, “The Visegrad Group in the Expanded European Union”, 636.

¹¹⁴ Rick Fawn, “The Elusive Defined? Visegrad Co-operation as the Contemporary Contours of Central Europe”, *Geopolitics*, (London: Routledge, Vol. 6, Issue 1, Summer 2001), 49.

¹¹⁵ Jan Figel, “Visegrad – Not Only a Symbol But a Challenge for the Future”, in: Marek Stastny (ed.), *Visegrad Countries in an Enlarged Trans-Atlantic Community*, (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2002), 8.

Central Europe that reverberated among decision makers and the peoples of the four countries alike; it aims to create intra-regional dynamics more than responding to exogenous forces.

Thus, the IVF has become a major tool for state induced regionalisation processes in the Visegrad Group. Its main aim has been to help define and create a Central European or Visegrad identity by creating regional linkages. However, the EU's indirect influence could be observed in the conceptual frame: creating linkages to support the regional integration with a bottom-up process. The EU's foreign policy objectives in the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood and the Western Balkans can also be identified in financed grant and scholarship programmes. The Visegrad Fund's success, which appears from its increasing budget and growing number of applications, demonstrates that the idea of Central Europe was prevalent among states and peoples of the Visegrad Group alike.

2.2.2 Visegrad NGOs and Academia

The response of NGOs, academia, and the epistemic communities, arguably the main beneficiaries of the Visegrad Fund and EU-funded projects has been positive to the possibility of regional cooperation. Genuine interest, stemming from an imagined Central European identity based on historic and cultural links, combined with financial incentives provided by the IVF and EU funds have been, to some extent, conducive to regionalisation processes but 'regional' cooperation often takes place indirectly, via West European institutions. While an extensive research into the relation of NGOs and the EU is beyond the scope of this thesis, it can be safely argued that despite the growing popularity of the Visegrad Fund, the scope of EU-funds provide more opportunities to NGOs and academia to cooperate with fellow V4 organisations. Interviews, conducted with V4 NGOs and scholars

suggest that first, regional cooperation in the V4 is dependent on financial incentives, second, EU projects often act as the main catalysts for regional cooperation in the V4, and third, despite the financial dependence for maintaining regional links there is a growing interest in developing and fostering durable intra-regional relations.

2.2.2.1 Financial Dependency

The phenomenon of NGO dependency on certain financial donors, and politically directed aid has recently become a serious concern even in countries like the United States and Britain, which traditionally had financially independent NGOs and aid organisations.¹¹⁶ Donor dependence has been particularly virulent in post-communist countries like the V4, where the NGO sector developed more as a result of financial assistance by foreign aid donors than genuine, bottom-up societal processes with accompanying independent financial resources. Therefore, many NGOs in the V4 have become financially dependent on national, regional, and EU programmes to assure their existence. Consequently, many NGOs do not always undertake projects which would fit their long term objectives but search for partners to participate in programmes which would likely be supported by international financial donors, such as the EU.¹¹⁷ It appears that academic cooperation in the Visegrad Group sometimes follows similar patterns: cooperation between regional universities and scholars are dependent on financial incentives whether those are from the EU or the Visegrad Fund.¹¹⁸ It is telling of the financial difficulties some universities face that the purpose of regional

¹¹⁶Mark Duffield and Nicholas Waddell, "Securing Humans in a Dangerous World", *International Politics*, (Vol. 43, No.1, 2006), 13.

¹¹⁷ Interview with board member, Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid (HAND), 14 May 2010 (in Hungarian).

¹¹⁸ Interview with university professor, University of West Hungary, 5 April 2010 (in Hungarian).

cooperation with other universities is often to fill budgetary gaps, which means that the cooperation is weak in substance.¹¹⁹

Thus, poorly endowed NGOs and academic institutions in the V4 countries provided a fertile ground for IVF and EU funds, once V4 NGOs and academic institutions built up capabilities that had been needed to apply for grants and external financing. However, the relatively modest financial resources of the Visegrad Fund could never compete with that of the EU: the IVF's annual budget for all its programmes and grant schemes is around six million euros in 2010, while the European Commission earmarked forty million euros to Eastern Partnership projects alone, in 2009.¹²⁰ This means that for those V4 NGOs and academic institutions, which are at the heart of the regionalisation processes in the Visegrad Group, the EU is a major, if not the most important, source of external financing. International development NGOs in Hungary, for instance, are predominantly dependent on the EU's 'EuropeAid' funds for their projects, the part and parcel of which is adhering to EU objectives and agenda.¹²¹ In the field of education, the European Union's influence is equally overwhelming: the European Commission's 'Lifelong Learning Programme', which includes student exchange schemes like 'Erasmus Mundus', has a budget of seven billion euros between 2007 and 2013.¹²² This means that in many V4 universities student and scholar exchanges are maintained, and often only exist, because of Erasmus and other EU educational programmes.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Interview with university professor, University of West Hungary, 5 April 2010 (in Hungarian).

¹²⁰ "Commission Decision C(2009) 4294 of 10 June 2009, *European Commission – External Cooperation Programmes*, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/aap/2009/aap_2009_enpi-e_en.pdf (accessed: 28 May 2010).

¹²¹ Interview with board member, Hungarian Association of NGOs for Development and Humanitarian Aid (HAND), 14 May 2010 (in Hungarian).

¹²² *European Commission Culture & Education*, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm (accessed: 28 May 2010).

¹²³ Interview with university professor, University of West Hungary, 5 April 2010 (in Hungarian).

2.2.2.2 Growing Regional Interest

The EU therefore has a considerable influencing potential to advance its own agenda, whether it overlaps with that of V4 NGOs and academic institutions or not. However, while in some cases the EU imposed its own objectives, in the not-for-profit sector in particular, the EU involvement has had another consequence: it has effectively contributed to regionalisation processes and the development of regional identity in the Visegrad Group. Some of the EU-financed projects have led to genuine regionalisation between NGOs. In one case, for instance, international development NGOs in the four Visegrad countries have decided to formulate a common position to lobby as V4 in the future without any EU involvement.¹²⁴ However, when development NGOs from the V4 sent a petition to MEP candidates before the last European elections, concerning the UN's Millennium Development Goals, the common V4 letter was published also under the aegis of the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), a lobby organisation.¹²⁵ CONCORD is also an important actor in the EU's multi-level governance structure, which suggests that regionally cooperating V4 NGOs have become embedded in EU structures.¹²⁶ This is a further sign that regionalisation by epistemic communities in the V4 is, to some extent, a by-product of these countries' integration in the EU.

Interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis also seemed to confirm that there is a 'natural affinity' between V4 scholars taking part in common research, exchange programmes, or in conferences, which suggests that IVF or EU financed gatherings

¹²⁴ "Questionnaire for the V4 National NDGO Platforms", Document provided by the Czech Forum for Development Co-operation (FoRS), [Not for Publication].

¹²⁵ ["The Responsibility of the European Union in the World – Call to the Candidates of the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections"], http://www.zpok.zoldpok.hu/img_upload/f880a7b608b6eaa8411125e501dc0547/EP_Manifesto.pdf (accessed: 28 May 2010) (in Hungarian).

¹²⁶ Gary Marks, Liesbet Hooghe and Kermit Blank, "European Integration from the 1980s: State-Centric v. Multi-Level Governance", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (Vol. 34 Issue 3, 1996) 346.

contribute to the recognition of common traits of identity. Interestingly, while other questions about the Visegrad cooperation had to be explained in detail, ‘natural affinity’ did not have to be defined or specified to receive a meaningful comment from any of the respondents. One of the interviewees also claimed that as a result of regional cooperation in the V4, whether EU financed or not, personal and professional connections developed which consequently increased interest in each other’s work.¹²⁷ However, the durability of these linkages is unclear without further projects. Differing fields of interests were also identified as hindrances to regional cooperation by one scholar, who claimed that while researchers in Poland are more interested in Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, in Hungary the Balkans is of interest.¹²⁸

In this section (2.2), it was argued that EU integration has been conducive to regionalisation processes in the Visegrad Group. The EU has impacted these processes both directly and indirectly: the former can be observed in parts of the NGO sector and academia in the V4. Many NGOs have become dependent on EU funds, the part and parcel of which is adherence to the EU agenda. NGOs have also integrated in the EU’s multi-level governance structures through joining epistemic communities at the EU-level. In academia, regional cooperation, and students and scholar exchange programmes are also largely dependent on EU financing. While there are NGOs in the V4 which do not depend on EU financing, those seeking regional cooperation have often adhered to the EU agenda to be eligible for EU financing. Finally, regional cooperation is often an auxiliary requirement of EU projects.

The EU’s indirect influence is recognisable in the foreign policy objectives of the International Visegrad Fund, its geographical definition, and in its very concept of fostering regional ties and identity by cultural exchanges and cooperation. The EU’s direct and indirect influence however has been conducive to the strengthening of a regional identity: there are signs that V4 NGOs do seek cooperation with each other even without EU involvement, and

¹²⁷ Interview with university professor, University of West Hungary, 5 April 2010 (in Hungarian).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

similar signs could also be observed in academia. The EU has therefore played a pivotal role in inducing regionalisation processes by providing financing and, in some cases, frames for cooperation. This further underlines Katzenstein's argument that new regional identities can emerge quickly when political entrepreneurship, material power, and an idea that reverberates are brought together.¹²⁹

In this chapter (Chapter 2), this thesis argued that the external environment and EU accession have had a significant impact on the resurgence of the Visegrad Group. In the first section, it was contended that joining the EU created 'possibilities' and 'pressures' at the state-level, which have been conducive to further cooperation. Interests and rational choice were identified as the main factors that helped the resurgence of cooperation as a response to the varied impact of EU integration. However, it was also argued that an imagined, common identity, which had been reinforced or created by the Visegrad Group, underpinned the resurgence of cooperation. Political elites at various levels, whose socialisation in the international community since the 1990s was linked to the idea of Central Europe and the formative years of the Visegrad Group, responded to changing circumstances by strengthening their cooperation.

In the second section, this thesis argued that 'bottom-up' regionalisation started when stronger cooperation on the state-level created spill-overs, though not automatic in the neo-functionalist sense, to the sub-state level. Political elites created the International Visegrad Fund to help define Central European identity, in part responding to a demand by internationalising epistemic communities. Consequently, the only V4 institution indeed helped foster regional cooperation in the NGO sector and academia. However, it was contended that EU financial incentives, integration of these sectors into EU structures and the Europeanisation of their agendas strengthened regionalisation and identity formation more in

¹²⁹ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 53.

these sectors. The exogenous influence on both state-level and sub-state level cooperation in the Visegrad Group suggests that the V4 is an important platform for its members, through which their integration in the 'EU-imperium' has in part been taking place, in accordance with the theoretical frame. This also underlines Katzenstein's argument that regions are ever changing constructs which express changing human practices.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 12.

CHAPTER 3: SIGNS OF ECONOMIC REGIONALISATION

In the second section of the previous chapter (2.2), this dissertation argued that sub-state level regionalisation processes have emerged due to financial incentives by V4 governments and the EU, as the idea of Central European identity reverberated amongst internationalising NGOs and academia. However, genuine, bottom-up, economic regionalisation has been a weak point of the Visegrad Group, similarly to the archetypical, Asian-type ‘shallow’ integration found in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Nevertheless, it will be argued that a genuine economic regionalisation process can now be observed in the Visegrad Group. Due to the V4 countries’ foreign investment based development and integration into the global economy regionalisation is likely to be the result of the activities of transnational corporations (TNCs), largely independent of the idea of Visegrad and Central European identity.

3.1 *Changing Direction*

While Katzenstein argues that regions are formed by states and governments for mainly economic, utility maximising reasons to create regional economies of scale, the case of the Visegrad Group is arguably different: although economic actors in the V4 might have supported the idea of regional cooperation, they were unlikely to lobby for it in the early 1990s.¹³¹ By the mid-1990s, the already weak intra-regional trade in the V4 was on the decline: while in the mid-1980s, V4 countries conducted ten to fourteen per cent of their

¹³¹ Katzenstein, *World of Regions*, 23

foreign trade with each other, by 1995 this dropped to around five per cent for Hungary and Poland, and less than ten per cent for pre-separation Czechoslovakia.¹³² Therefore, the lack of economic interdependence in the region failed to create the upward pressures which could have been conducive to regional cooperation or made it more substantive. It was argued in the early 1990s that the Visegrad countries might constitute a region in geographical, geopolitical, and strategic but not in economic terms because the dominant partner in foreign trade, cooperation and capital inflow is the EU.¹³³ Economic transition indeed took on an East-West direction as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland reoriented their exports to Western markets relatively early on after the collapse of the CMEA and the Soviet market. In fact, the much needed reorientation of Central European economies in the early 1990s was one of the primary reasons why many viewed Central European regionalisation as the likely postponement of their development.¹³⁴

While V4 countries were at pains to distinguish themselves from the rest of Eastern Europe, by the time of EU enlargement, the similarities between the four countries mattered as much as the differences. Poland has a sizeable domestic market, a considerable pool of home-grown firms, and agriculture still plays an important role, while the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia are trade dependent, extremely open economies, which have become more dependent on foreign direct investments (FDI) for their development.¹³⁵ In fact, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic take second, third, and fourth places respectively in the OECD, in terms of growth in their trade to GDP ratio between 1995 and 2007.¹³⁶ The three countries' trade to GDP ratio is amongst the highest in the OECD, while Poland's is at

¹³² Korosi, *The European Union's Influence on the Visegrad Countries and Regional Cooperation*, 12-14.

¹³³ Ibid., 3-4.

¹³⁴ Dangerfield, *Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe*, 29.

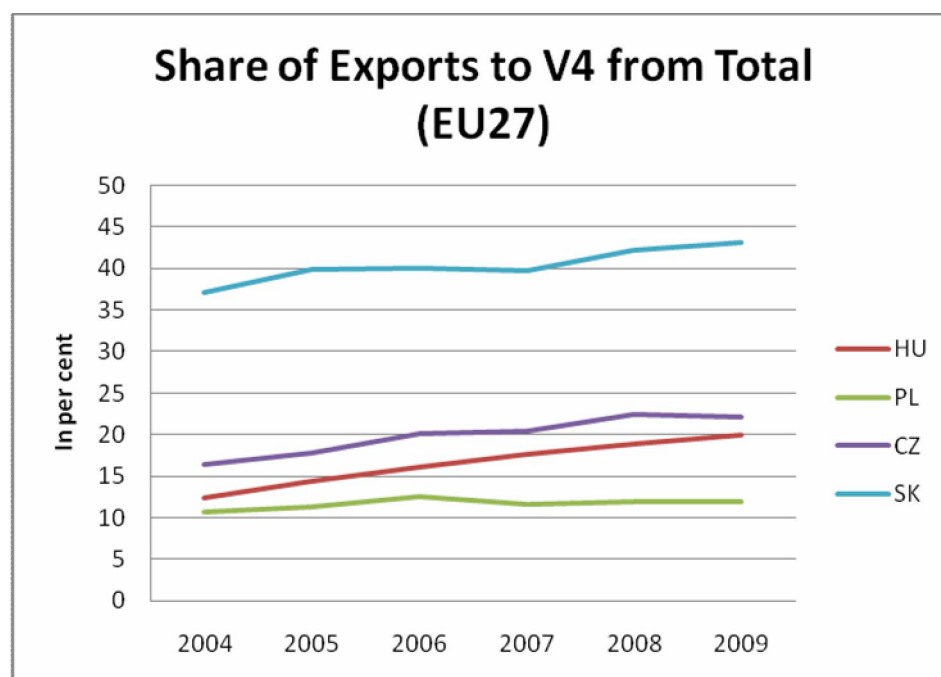
¹³⁵ Zoltan Pogatsa, "Hungary: From Star Transition Student to Backsliding Member State", *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, (Vol. 5, Issue 4, 2009) 1-17.

¹³⁶ "Trade in Goods and Services", *OECD Factbook 2009*, <http://lysander.sourceoecd.org/pdf/factbook2009/302009011e-03-01-01.pdf>, 73, (accessed: 30 May 2010)

the EU-27 average, and is similar to that of Germany.¹³⁷ Another consequence of the FDI-based developmental model is that trade in the V4 is largely driven by TNCs, certainly in the three smaller countries. This suggests that the trade is a potentially significant reserve for regionalisation processes, and when that process happens, it is likely to be driven by TNCs present in the region.

3.2 Growing Importance of the V4

Export volumes from the four countries to the V4 area increased markedly between EU accession in 2004 and the start of the global economic crisis in 2008, signalling the region's growing importance for its members.¹³⁸ The latter is reflected in the steady increase in the share of the Visegrad region for V4 states in their economic relations (See chart).¹³⁹



¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>, (accessed: 29 May 2010)

¹³⁹ Ibid.

The previous chart suggests that economic regionalisation in the V4 exists and has increased since EU enlargement. In the case of Slovakia's exports, it is not an exaggeration to describe it as 'Visegrad-dependent'. A higher than average interdependence could have been expected in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia anyway: apart from possible remnants of recent economic ties, cultural and linguistic similarities make the 'psychological barriers of entry' to each other's markets lower for local firms. The share of V4 countries in Hungary's exports grew by sixty per cent since EU enlargement, in the case of the Czech Republic this growth was thirty-four per cent. This is a clear indication that economic interdependence has increased in the V4 since the four states joined the EU's single market.

What is even more remarkable is that the share of intra-regional trade continued to grow in 2009 when the total exports of the V4 to the EU-27 sharply declined.¹⁴⁰ This suggests that the region has become, to a varying degree, more important for economic activity for firms based in the region. However, it would be fairly reasonable to argue that intra-regional trade is primarily driven by TNCs: data which shows the penetration of manufacturing and services industries by foreign firms is indicative about the transnationalisation of these economies. Firms, in which foreign investors hold more than fifty per cent of shares with control, employed twenty-nine to forty-four per cent of all employees in the manufacturing, and ten to twenty-five per cent in the services sector in V4 countries in 2005 (the last year when comparable data was available).¹⁴¹ This suggests a high transnationalisation of the economy in the V4 compared to other EU countries, indicating indirectly that export growth in the V4 is likely to be driven primarily by TNCs.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>, (accessed: 29 May 2010)

¹⁴¹ OECD Factbook 2009, <http://lysander.sourceoecd.org/pdf/factbook2009/302009011e-03-02-02.pdf>, 93 (accessed: 29 May 2010).

¹⁴² Ibid.

The intra-regional export growth might be the result of different TNC organisation models.¹⁴³ Manufacturers could be moving partially assembled products in their regionally organised production and supplier chains, thereby inflating export statistics. The growth in trade might equally be the result of an increase in selling local produce via transnational supply chains. For instance, Tesco's, a UK-based supermarket chain, claims to have exported twenty billion forints (around seventy-three million euros) worth of Hungarian food products to its stores in other V4 countries in 2009.¹⁴⁴ While an in-depth research into the share of V4 owned and controlled companies in the exports increase is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is highly likely that the process is TNC-driven, considering the TNC dominance of these economies.

In this chapter, this thesis has argued that there are signs of increasing economic regionalisation in the V4, which is likely to be TNC-driven. This is in accordance with predictions that increased economic activity in the Visegrad Group will be the consequence and not a precondition of these countries' integration in the world economy.¹⁴⁵ However, the significance of this phenomenon for V4 regionalism and identity is not yet clear. A strong incentive competition for FDI between V4 governments, in part fuelled by investors, indicates that firms do consider the V4 a region, even if it is part of the EU's single market but this has had little or no impact on V4 regionalism thus far. However, it is quite possible that employees of TNCs, traveling and building personal connections in the region, will become regionalising actors in the future regardless of their firms' origins. By and through them, a new facet of Central European identity might develop which is independent of state-level regionalism, and state subsidised regionalisation, irrespective of the 'exogenous' nature of the current economic regionalisation.

¹⁴³ Peter Dicken, *Global Shift. Reshaping the Global Economic Map in the 21st Century*, (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 122-163.

¹⁴⁴ Gyorgy Balo, "Interview with Erzsebet Antal, Financial Director of Tesco Global Hungary", *Hungarian Television*, 1 April 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Inotai and Sass, *Economic Integration of the Visegrad Countries: Facts and Scenarios*, 3.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to find plausible explanations to the resurgence of the Visegrad Group after the four countries joined the European Union. The phenomenon appeared puzzling as the V4 had considered their cooperation only a tool to help achieve EU membership, and despite their best intentions, the V4 often appeared to be close to dissolution. In fact, many scholars and policy-makers in the region still consider the V4 dysfunctional, if not outright irrelevant as a region, an effective foreign policy tool, or the embodiment of a Central European identity. However, this dissertation argued that the V4 has indeed developed a new regional agenda since the early 2000s in connection with the four countries' EU integration: although the V4 has maintained its informal character, it has created a dense network of quasi-institutionalised consultative fora at various levels. Since the early 2000s, state-level regionalism has also been accompanied by regionalisation processes. The revival of the V4 is also reflected in the fact that it is increasingly considered a relatively stable actor within and outside of the EU.

The central line of argument of this thesis was that the resurgence is a logical consequence of the Visegrad Group's integration in the 'EU-imperium', and thus, exogenous forces have been conducive to the development of both state-level regionalism and sub-state level regionalisation. It was argued that the Visegrad Group is a case study of Katzenstein's 'porous regions' concept: it is a region that differs in its purpose, institutional form, type of identity, and internal structure from previous understandings of regions.¹⁴⁶ It was not formed to rebuild economic autarchy or to rival the EU but, in part, to ensure participation of its members in the global economy.¹⁴⁷ In accordance with Katzenstein's understanding of 'new

¹⁴⁶ Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Bowles, "Post-global Financial Crises", 86.

regionalism', this thesis argued that agents of change in the V4 are driven by 'interests' and 'ideas', and exogenous forces, most notably the EU, have impacted both.

On the state-level, EU accession created 'possibilities' and 'pressures' which have been conducive to further cooperation. Increasing leverage was identified as such a 'possibility'. This thesis argued that the V4's influence has grown due to their capitalising on their voting weight in the Council, and thus creating the perception of being a closely cooperating group within the EU. Foreign policy and CFSP became the main fields of cooperation as the V4 could build on their already existing consultative structures, and embed them into the EU-frame. On the other hand, the countries in their Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, Russia, and energy dependence created external 'pressures' which were easier dealt with as a regional grouping than individually. The Europeanisation of the V4 agenda was also considered to have had an important influence.

The agents of change, heads of states and governments, due to the informal nature of the Visegrad Group, acted because the V4 already had structures of cooperation in place, and collective action promised greater benefits. However, in the absence of solid institutions to lock the actors in, the process is highly conditional on the changing preferences of its members. The external environment also impacted the ideational factors that underpin V4 regionalism. Cooperating for the fear of being left out of, or not being able to influence decisions at the EU-level and in the international community was identified as 'negative' regionalism, while cooperation based on the centuries old idea of Central Europe was defined as 'positive'. It was suggested that the impact of the external environment is reflected in 'negative' regionalism. However, in general, the duality of these two streams of ideas has been enduringly conducive to state-level cooperation in the V4, even if, at times, leaders only paid lip service to them.

This thesis argued that EU integration has also been conducive to regionalisation processes in the Visegrad Group, both directly and indirectly: the former can be observed in parts of the NGO sector and academia. Many NGOs have become dependent on EU funds, the part and parcel of which is adherence to the EU agenda. NGOs have also integrated in the EU's multi-level governance structures through joining epistemic communities at the EU-level. In academia, regional cooperation, and students and scholar exchange programmes are also largely dependent on EU financing. The indirect influence of the EU is recognisable in the objectives of the International Visegrad Fund, its geographical definition, and in its very concept of fostering regional ties and identity by cultural exchanges and cooperation. The EU's direct and indirect influence has been conducive to the strengthening of a regional identity, nevertheless, there are signs that V4 NGOs do seek cooperation with each other even without EU involvement, and similar signs could also be observed in academia. However, the durability of these linkages is unclear without further financing.

In addition to state-induced regionalisation, there are signs of a genuine, bottom-up, economic regionalisation. This thesis has found that the process is most likely to be TNC-driven. This confirms earlier predictions that increased regional economic interdependence will be the consequence and not a precondition of these countries' EU integration.¹⁴⁸ It clearly appears from the relevant export data that the importance of intra-regional trade was increasing, despite or because of the global economic crisis. It was, however, pointed out that export data might be inflated by the organisation of product and supply chains of regionally active TNCs. In fact, the significance of economic regionalisation for V4 regionalism and identity is not yet clear; further research could highlight the different strategies these firms follow and the impact they may have on regional cooperation.

¹⁴⁸ Inotai and Sass, *Economic Integration of the Visegrad Countries: Facts and Scenarios*, 3.

The way regionalism resurged, and regionalisation emerged in the case of the Visegrad Group suggests that integration of regions into the global order is a reflexive process. Regions or subregions are formed to help their members' integration into the world economy, or as Katzenstein argued, into the 'US-imperium', and to invite globalising processes into their fold. During the early phase of this process, the 1990s for the Visegrad Group, regional cooperation might have been feeble; the primary linkages were being made with the region's external centre of gravity, which was the EU in the case of the V4. Once integration, formal or otherwise, had taken place intra-regional state-level linkages became more important to increase bargaining power, or because the idea of regional cooperation reverberated. A similar surge on the sub-state level could follow as a consequence of increasing economic activity of those firms which were attracted by the regional space in the first place.

Therefore, in many senses, it is not surprising to find the development of the Visegrad Group being significantly influenced by the external environment, and the EU, in particular. The former is a natural consequence of globalisation, the latter, is the outcome of these countries' geographical position, the nature of their economic transition, and political development. It is also reasonable to expect that exogenous forces have as strong an impact on the region as on the countries forming it. The Visegrad Four, on the inner periphery of the 'EU-imperium', have extremely open economies, and relatively weak states. Already in the 14th Century, the Visegrad states built a relatively strong North-South cooperation to be on a more equal footing with dominant Western Europe. By and large, this is what they attempt to do within the European Union in the 21st Century. Historically, this might be the Central European heritage and identity they seek to redefine today.

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