

The Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group Inside the European Union: Dealing with Environment and Climate Change

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Abstract

In this thesis an answer has been given to the main research question: Why do the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group persist with the item of environmental policy and climate change even though the EU is quite active in this policy field? After contextualizing the topic and explaining what the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group do concerning the environment and climate change, a theoretical framework was created. This framework, consisting of the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, led to six concrete possible reasons why the organizations made the decision to engage with the topics of environment and climate change: lobbying vehicle, wish to pursue certain policies, increase in the salience of the issue, preservation of the organization, international identity and value of the organization. Based on content analyses and interviews it was made clear that not all these six reasons were of the same importance. The most important reasons why both organizations decided to get involved with environment and climate change is because they see it as a very important topic and realize that by forming a power block their lobby position is much stronger than when they try to engage in the topic individually. All four reasons within the logic of consequences are relevant, although not all of them to the same extent and differing per organization. Within the logic of appropriateness only the reason of international identity was verified.

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The Introduction

In a press statement from October 28th 2009 the *Party for Freedom* (PVV), one of the main political parties in the Netherlands, stated that it will no longer attend meetings of the Benelux parliament. Raymond de Roon, member of parliament for the PVV, is of the opinion that ‘the Benelux Economic Union is a fossil from the 1940s’.¹ The PVV is not the only party that refuses to cooperate with the Benelux parliament. According to Harry van Bommel, Member of Parliament for the Dutch *Socialist Party* (SP), the parliament ‘has a high candy trip content and can therefore not be taken seriously’. Another interesting statement he makes is that ‘the Benelux has been overhauled by the European Union’. The new 2008 Benelux treaty has no answer to this problem and is therefore completely redundant.² Several Dutch opposition parties therefore are against the Benelux concept, giving reasons of wasting money and uselessness in comparison to tasks of the European Union.

The Benelux Union is not the only regional cooperation group within the EU and is not the only one facing criticisms about usefulness and relevance in comparison to the European Union. The emphasis in this thesis will therefore not only be placed on the Benelux Union. The research question will be why the two organizations deal with the topic of environment and climate change even though the EU is active in this policy field. Based on two theories and six consequent theoretical reasons it will be researched which reasons are valid in the case of environment and climate change. In this introductory chapter it will be explained which theories will be used, which questions will be addressed and how the case selection will look like.

¹ Partij van de Vrijheid: http://www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2288, January 30th 2010

² Socialistische Partij: http://www.sp.nl/europa/nieuwsberichten/7042/091028-sp_stapt_uit_beneluxparlement.html, January 30th 2010

Theories

The research question focuses on the institutions, not the individual people who work there. Research dealing with the Benelux Union or Visegrad Group often deal with why the organizations still exist and what their function is within the European Union. No one however has written on why these organizations specifically take up topics that the EU also deals with, such as environment and climate change. Although no earlier scholarly work exists on this topic it is possible to use some global theories to look at why the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group deal with a topic that is also been dealt with by the European Union. These theories are the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequences. Although the theoretical framework in chapter two will focus much more on these theories, it can be said here that these logics are the most suitable for this research as they cover a very broad range of possible reasons and do not limit themselves to one specific theory. Other scholars have used the logics to explain institutions before, for example when dealing with creation, maintenance, change and compliance of institutions.³ Based on the two theories two options arise. The first option is that the logic of consequences on the part of the member states of the institutions is the reason for taking up of the topic of environmental policy and climate change. This can be for example because they see it as a lobby instrument to shape EU policy or because they want to press ahead amongst themselves with tighter coordination in different policy areas than exists in the EU. The second possibility is that the logic of appropriateness explains the behaviour of the organizations. The member countries have come to define their international identity – a kind of regional identity– through their adherence to the institutions. The institution has a value in and of itself and is endowed with

³ See: Goldstein and Keohane (1993), *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions and political change*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger (1997), *Theories of international regimes*, New York: Cambridge University Press

legitimacy by the participating states. Also, it may reflect common past experiences that weld the states together.

The research question

Based on the puzzle above, the thesis investigates the historical background, the tasks of the organizations, their involvement with environmental protection and climate change, cooperation between the organizations, differences and comparisons between these organizations and cooperation with the EU. After this contextualization the research question will be addressed:

Why do the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group persist with the item of environmental policy and climate change even though the EU is quite active in this policy field?

This question will be answered with the help of several sub questions. These sub questions will be addressed by the available existing literature and the answer to the research question will be derived through content analysis and interviews. This multi-method approach is the most suitable because it strengthens the results of the thesis. A sole reliance on the content analysis method is not enough to give a valid, reliable answer to the research question. The use of qualitative research by doing interviews is therefore important and useful. It can verify or disprove the importance of the categories that are researched in this paper. Based on the puzzle described above, several questions have to be answered before coming to the final research question. It is necessary to know what the three unions do concerning environmental protection and climate change, and what the comparisons and differences are between the actions of, on the one hand, the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group and, on the other hand, the European Union, in order to

give a qualified answer to the main question. This final question will consist of a theoretical part, consisting of possible answers. After that these answers will be tested with the aid of content analyses and interviews, to find out which are the most likely reasons.

Case selection

As said, the Benelux Union is not the only smaller intergovernmental institution within the European Union. The Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary form the Visegrad Group, the Baltic States form the Baltic Assembly, the Scandinavian countries are represented in the Nordic Council and twelve countries, both European as well as Asian, are represented in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Choosing only two out of the five institutions therefore requires an explanation. Another item that should be further explained is the choice of taking environmental protection and climate change as case study, instead of looking at the complete set of tasks of the institutions.

The Benelux is an intergovernmental organization between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, dating back to 1944, that made the first steps towards European integration. In 1958 the Customs Union developed into the Treaty of the Benelux Economic Union (BEU) that focused on expansion and deepening of the economic cooperation. A new Benelux Treaty was signed in 2008 which results in a focus on the internal market, economic union, sustainable development, justice and internal affairs. The name changed from BEU to Benelux Union. Many of these areas are also covered by the EU.⁴ The Visegrad Group ‘reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration’ but was first and foremost established to support the

⁴ Benelux Union: http://www.benelux.be/nl/bnl/bnl_intro.asp, February 6th 2010

four countries on their way to EU-membership. Now the countries are members of the EU, they changed their tasks to cover other areas as well. These are partly areas that the EU also deals with.⁵

The Baltic Assembly is established 'for coordinating the Baltic countries' cooperation on the parliamentary level, discussing issues and projects of mutual interest, addressing common problems, and expressing a common position concerning international, economic, political and cultural issues'.⁶ The EU plays no role in this establishment, or at most in a small and indirect way. Also the Nordic Council does not have a direct link with the EU: 'the political co-operation is built on common values and a willingness to achieve results that contribute to a dynamic development and increase Nordic competencies and competitiveness'.⁷ It can be seen as a more cultural bond. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) finally was created in June 1992 and consists of a mixture of EU member states and non-EU member states.⁸ Its main goal is to function 'as a unique and promising model of multilateral political and economic initiative aimed at fostering interaction and harmony among the Member States, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity encouraging friendly and good-neighbourly relations in the Black Sea region'.⁹

Based on the differences between these five types of intergovernmental organizations, the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group have been chosen for further research in this thesis. Both unions have a direct link with the EU, either as forerunner of the current EU or as being

⁵ Visegrad Group: <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=858>, January 30th 2010

⁶ Baltic Assembly: <http://www.baltasam.org/?CatID=26>, February 6th 2010

⁷ Nordic Council: <http://www.norden.org/en/about-nordic-co-operation>, February 6th 2010

⁸ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Serbia and Montenegro

⁹ Black Sea Economic Cooperation: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/Information/Pages/testt.aspx>, April 15th 2010

established in order to streamline the process of future accession to the EU. The Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council also have a clear focus on cooperation, mutual interests etc. but have less ground in common with the EU. Their prime reason for establishment also had no link with future accession. The Nordic Council especially is based on cultural ties hundreds of years old and ‘is amongst the oldest and most extensive regional co-operation in the world’.¹⁰ It is not directly linked with the European Union and two of its member states are no members of the EU. Also the BSEC does not consist of all EU member states. Only three of its members are part of the EU, making it not a real organization completely within the EU. Based on these reasons, the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group are the most suitable institutions for this thesis.

Because the answer to the question why the two organizations deal with some of the same topics as the EU might depend on which topic, the focus will be placed on one specific case. This will be the issue of environmental protection and climate change. All three actors in this essay, the Benelux Union, Visegrad Group and the European Union, deal with these issues: the EU already for at least twenty years about climate change and even longer about the environment¹¹, the Benelux Union since the 1970s about the environment and since the signing of the new Benelux treaty in 2008 about climate change¹² and the Visegrad Group since 1999 and 2004 about both topics¹³. The concern for the environment came up during the seventies and eighties, when countries started to realize that the environment was becoming a major problem that required its

¹⁰ Nordic Council: <http://www.norden.org/en/about-nordic-co-operation>, February 6th 2010

¹¹ European Commission, DG Climate Action: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/home_en.htm, February 18th 2010

¹² Benelux Union: http://www.benelux.be/pdf/pdf_nl/act/20080617_nieuwVerdrag_nl.pdf, p. 6, February 18th 2010

¹³ Visegrad Group: <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=941&articleID=3937&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>, February 18th 2010

own policies and often also ministries.¹⁴ The ‘Club of Rome’ is normally seen as the start of this. They produced a report in 1971 saying that things were going wrong and that governments should start acting. After that the ‘public and political consciousness’ started to realize that a ‘clean environment is not self-evident’.¹⁵ European cooperation in this area has been pleaded for because of the ‘great diversity of national policies’ which is contradictory to the idea of a common European market with ‘the same conditions about economic activities’.¹⁶ Environmental protection and climate change therefore are important topics in the current political climate.

Chapter division

In the following chapter a historical overview will be given of the two organizations, after which their current situations will be explained and answers be given to what they do concerning environment and climate change and what the comparisons and differences are between them and the European Union tasks in this terrain. Although these answers belong to the results part of this thesis, it is placed in the contextualization part as there is a direct link between the contextualization and these questions. Also, there are no theories necessary for the answering of these questions. Chapter two will give a theoretical framework explaining the two chosen logics and their concrete applications. Chapter three deals with the methods and techniques that are used to examine these possible reasons, after which chapter four shows the results of this research. After this a conclusion of the whole thesis and an answer to the set research question will be given.

¹⁴ Neelen, Rutgers, Tuurenhout (red.) (2003) *De bestuurlijke kaart van Nederland – Het openbaar bestuur en zijn omgeving in nationaal en internationaal perspectief*, Uitgeverij Coutinho, Bussum, second, completely revised edition, p. 72

¹⁵ Van den Bos and Wegter (2009) *Europa, wat heb ik eraan? – Wat de EU concreet doet en waarom*, Koninklijke De Swart, Den Haag, p. 35

¹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 1: History, present and the topics of environment and climate change

The first issue that will be addressed in this chapter is to give an overview of the three unions under discussion, which an emphasis on the Benelux Union (BU) and Visegrad Group (V4¹⁷), as being the main actors in this thesis. Therefore, in the following section several topics will be dealt with. First of all a glance will be cast on the history of the unions and their current state of affairs. After that an answer will be given to what the BU, V4 and EU do concerning environmental protection and climate change and what the comparisons and differences are between the actions of, on the one hand, the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group and, on the other hand, the European Union. It will become clear that both the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group are trying to deal with the existence of the EU and its rules and regulations. Both organizations however deal with the topics of environment and climate change in different ways.

1.1. The history and current state of affairs

The first topic that will be addressed is what the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group actually are. Before going into details about what they do concerning environment and climate change it is important to establish when they were set up, what the initial goals were and how the organizations look like nowadays, within the European Union.

¹⁷ As the Visegrad Group comprises of four countries it is often referred to as the Visegrad Four or V4

1.1.1. The Benelux Union

The Benelux Union, until 2010 known as the Benelux Economic Union (BEU), is a regional intergovernmental union consisting of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. It is commonly seen as a precursor of the European Union. In 1943 a monetary treaty was signed, and in 1944 a treaty that would shape the customs union. Due to the fact that the Netherlands were liberated much later than the other two countries, this customs union came into existence only in 1948. The treaty is seen as the first step to an 'economic union' with 'free transport of people, goods, services and money and a common external economic policy'.¹⁸ According to Neelen et al, the BEU did not completely realize its goals, due to the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1958, and their subsequent rules.¹⁹ The Benelux consists of several sub-institutions, of which the Committee of Ministers determines the guidelines and priorities of the Benelux cooperation, the Benelux Parliament informs and advises their governments about all Benelux-affairs and the Secretariat-General Benelux supports the Benelux cooperation.²⁰

The 1958 treaty was set up for fifty years, expiring in 2008. The political leaders of the three countries had to decide before that date whether to continue with the cooperation or to disband the organization, and if they chose for the first option, in which shape the cooperation would continue. The decision was made to continue with the Benelux concept but not in the same form. A new treaty was written with three main areas of cooperation: economy and market, justice and home affairs and durability.²¹ Although up till now the treaty has not been ratified yet, this is not seen as a cause for concern by the actors involved. Ratification has been done by the Netherlands

¹⁸ Neelen, Rutgers, Tuurenhout (red.) (2003) p. 204

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 205-206

²⁰ Ibid, p. 205

²¹ Benelux – actief en actueel, Secretariaat-Generaal van de Benelux, September 2009, p. 5

and Luxembourg. In Belgium the process is still continuing but the delay is merely a procedural matter, not a case of conflicting interests or opposing sides.²²

1.1.2. The Visegrad Group

The Visegrad Group was established much later than the Benelux Union, in 1991, as the Visegrad Three, on the initiative of Vaclav Havel. It became the Visegrad Four after the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993. The first and foremost goal was ‘incorporation into transatlantic structures’.²³ Whilst the BEU aimed at economic cooperation, the main tasks of the V4 were getting rid of the Soviet legacy, creating a modern market economy and full cooperation and integration in the existing European structures. The joint statement was titled ‘The Declaration on Cooperation ... on the Way of the European Integration’ and clearly put an emphasis on the goal of European integration. The goal of becoming a member of the EU was already reached in December 1991, when the association agreements with the EU were signed.²⁴ In comparison to the BEU the V4 faced many crises since its creation. Almost immediately after 1991 the Visegrad Group practically ceased to exist, due to political tensions between the countries. Czechoslovakia fell apart, tensions between Slovakia and Hungary came to the fore, the war in Yugoslavia started and all these events almost led to the death of the Visegrad Group. Several times people referred to the Visegrad cooperation as an ‘empty shell’.²⁵ However, it did not die, most of all in the area of the military cooperation that kept on going like nothing was happening. The intelligentsia of the four countries also played a capital role. They did not want to abandon the idea of one Central

²² Benelux newsletter, NL, March 2010/1, General Secretariat of the Benelux Union, p. 6; interview 2, April 8th 2010; Comite Nieuwe Benelux: <http://www.benelux2010.com/nl/data/brochureNL.htm>, accessed: April 24th 2010

²³ Visegrad Countries Economic Guide (2001), Bratislava, p. 5-6

²⁴ Ibid, p. 6

²⁵ Rusnak (2004), Is there any future for Visegrad Cooperation within EU?, via: http://www.europeum.org/doc/arch_eur/EPF_future_of_Visegrad.pdf, accessed: April 23rd 2010, p. 1

European area.²⁶ Their goal of ‘full incorporation into the European political, economic, security and law systems’ was reached in 2004 when the countries joined the EU.²⁷

The situation of ‘near-death’ changed in 1998, with the signing of a treaty to reestablish the Visegrad cooperation, not only in the political arena but also dealing with ‘traditional European values, civil rights and market economy’.²⁸ This change in the opinions of the political leaders originated in a concrete need for cooperation and the aspiration of getting Slovakia back into their circle. The fact that they had applied for EU membership and that Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland became NATO members increased the feeling of belongingness.²⁹ The emphasis of this ‘new version’ of the Visegrad Group still lay on joining the EU. They, more than previously, declared common positions on important issues.³⁰ Solidarity however remains a difficult topic, as often the Visegrad countries show no ‘real concession of its own national interest in favour of common Visegrad solidarity. Stakes during EU negotiations are internally very high, which makes any considerable adjustment to the common position unrealistic today’.³¹ Also, the citizens of the four countries are skeptical about the cooperation as they do not see any practical achievements.³² In 2004 a new declaration was set up, which changed the focus from economic transition and joining the EU to ‘determination to continue developing the cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries as Member States of the European Union and NATO’.³³ The cooperation ‘has now evolved and has been trivialized in a good sense. The focus is much more

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 6-7

³⁰ Ibid. p. 2

³¹ Ibid. p. 3

³² Ibid.

³³ Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union (2004)

on practical details instead of monumental events’.³⁴ A political commentator said that ‘the best achievement of Visegrad (is) coming from the field of political culture. We have started to think about our countries as a region’.³⁵

1.2. Environmental protection and climate change

After explaining the background of the two organizations it is possible to give an answer to the question what the three unions do concerning environmental protection and climate change.³⁶ The Benelux Union is involved with the topic of the environment already since the 1970s but gave it a different turn in the new treaty of 2008. The topic of climate change is a completely new topic and exists within their tasks since 2008. The Benelux cooperation in the field of the environment and climate aims at developing sustainability criteria and the exchange of ‘best practices’ related to the advancement of the environmental policy. This is connected with the enactment of European legislation. It is aimed at air quality, fine particles and water quality, as well as the development of new technologies that try to repress CO₂-emission. The parties also agreed to extend their cooperation on the topic of renewable energy sources.³⁷ Exchange of information is an important means of reaching these goals. These exchanges consist of studies about so called ‘green jobs’, finding out what the impact is of these green jobs and a consequently green economy on the labour market in total. An important topic at the moment is the ‘alignment of viewpoints concerning the agenda *environment and climate* of the Belgian EU-presidency’.³⁸

³⁴ Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/V4_presidency/visegrad_cooperation.htm, accessed: April 24th 2010

³⁵ Quote from Jan Urban, via: <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/32172>, accessed: April 24th 2010

³⁶ For extended table see appendix 1

³⁷ Common work program 2009-2012 Benelux Union, p. 14

³⁸ Year plan 2010 Benelux Union, p. 7

The Visegrad Group sees protection of the environment and subsequent coordination among the four countries as ‘particularly important’ and focuses, amongst others, on the following topics: strengthening the environmental security in the region and exchange of opinion and coordination of positions on the negotiations on climate change related issues.³⁹ The Group mainly aims at an exchange of information concerning these topics and wants to reach this through yearly meetings of the Environment Ministers of the four countries and meetings of the prime ministers. Apart from this the Group does not do much on the terrain of the environment and climate. There are some practical issues such as problems with boundary waters, flood prevention and waste recycling, but the bigger issues are not touched upon.⁴⁰

The EU finally has an extended repertoire of topics and measures: climate change, biodiversity, environmental health and sustainable development. The EU sees climate change as ‘one of the biggest problems for humanity’. They make efforts to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses by means of a worldwide treaty. The EU-leaders gave their consent for a broad range of measures to reduce these emissions. Durable energy has to increase, the total amount of energy use has to decrease and the use of fossil fuels has to be changed for bio fuels, electricity or hydrogen. The EU is actively trying to improve the environmental circumstances and stop climate change through means of both practical measures and more ‘ideological’ means. The industry in the EU has to deal with strict rules and regulations. There are rules about the types and amount of chemicals that are tolerated in products, the air and biotechnology. The ideologically driven means are for example multilateral environmental agreements, ‘green diplomacy’, that try to

³⁹ Program of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group – July 2010 – June 2011: <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/FD5D5C9A-C7AD-488C-9CEF-9AD6968B9E48/0/V4Programeng0605.pdf>, February 16th 2010

⁴⁰ Press release July 10th 2009: ‘16th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries’ Joint statement, via: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=939&articleID=24126&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>, accessed: June 2nd 2010

solve the issue of climate change and environmental protection on an international level. Within the European Union are a large number of programs that should change the current situation for the best.⁴¹

The answer to the question what the comparisons and differences are between the actions of the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group and the European Union, can also be given now. When looking at the ways the Benelux Union, the Visegrad Group and the European Union handle the topic of environmental protection and climate change it becomes clear that the three institutions have different attitudes towards the topic. But what are the concrete differences in their policies and what does it mean for the seriousness with which they deal with the topic?

First of all, it has become clear that the EU has the most extended measures. They are in a position to concretely influence daily affairs of their citizens, industries and national governments. As a block they are able to let their voice be heard on the international stage. Secondly, the Benelux Union aims at an exchange of information and at concrete measures that concern the three countries. Although their involvement with climate change only dates back to two years ago they already have concrete plans. There is a link with the policies of the EU and they try to find paths that the EU has not been occupied with yet. They also want to extend their cooperation and work together as a block. The Visegrad Group finally also aims at an exchange of information and has some practical issues that it concerns itself with. However, apart from yearly meetings and these practical issues there is not much that the Visegrad Group does concerning environment and climate change.

⁴¹ Management Plan 2010 , DG Environment: via:
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/environment/pdf/management_plan_2010.pdf, accessed: June 2nd 2010

In this chapter it has become clear that the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group both have a long and interesting history and are trying to deal with the consequences caused by the European Union. The Benelux Union, after the expiration of the old treaty, decided to set up a new treaty aimed more at current affairs and less at economic development and customs union. The Visegrad Group left its goal of EU and NATO-integration, as these goals were achieved, and started to focus more on its neighbours and its position within the EU. The extent to which they deal with environment and climate change has been shown and it has become clear that they deal with these topics in different ways. The Visegrad Group says that it is acting to improve the environment and the climate, but, apart from a few concrete things, it does not get any further than talking about it. The Benelux Union is still in the initial stages of cooperation about climate change but concerns itself with some useful issues. Environmental protection was already a better known topic for them. They try to find a gap in which the EU is not acting yet and they fill this gap within the three countries.

Chapter 2: The theoretical framework

In this theoretical framework the main question will be addressed. First of all theoretical answers will be given to why the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group deal with the topic of environment and climate change. These answers will consist of two logics, the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. Based on these two logics the chapter will continue with giving six concrete possible reasons for the decisions of the two organizations.

To answer the question why the two organizations decided to get involved with environment and climate change it is necessary to create a framework of possible reasons. The focus will be placed on the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. These logics are the most suitable to find an answer to the research question because, first of all, they are very broad theories, making it easier to give a variety of possible reasons, and related to that, they do not focus on one specific theory but are general logics of behaviour that can be used in many situations and are able to explain several different actions.

2.1. The logic of consequences

The logic of consequences holds that ‘possible rules and interpretations (are treated as) alternatives in a rational choice problem’. It assumes that ‘man’s natural proclivity is to pursue his own interests’.⁴² Acting according to this logic means thinking about the following steps: what are my alternatives, what are my values, what are the consequences of my alternatives for my values and based on that choosing ‘the alternative that has the best expected consequences’.

⁴² March and Olsen (2009) The logic of appropriateness, ARENA Working Papers WP 04/09, via: http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/wp04_9.pdf, p. 2, accessed: February 19th 2010, p. 5 (footnote)

By acting ‘in conformity with rules that constrain conduct’ it means that the actor bases his or her decisions on ‘rational calculation and contracts’ that are ‘motivated by incentives and personal advantage’.⁴³ Rules ‘reflect interests and powers’.⁴⁴

Rational choice theory ‘is an attempt to apply micro-economic models of rationality to the analysis of the collective choices that are made in the political process’.⁴⁵ It looks at the individual and assumes complete rational behaviour, meaning that people make ‘deliberate and conscious choices in the pursuit of their personal goals’.⁴⁶ In the words of Max Weber, the organizations are ‘shaped by the relentless march of technical and managerial rationality, which expresses itself in ever-increasing bureaucratization’.⁴⁷ Complete rational behaviour however is not possible. Most of the scholars writing about rationality therefore accept that only bounded or limited rationality is a possibility.⁴⁸ All actors involved will use cost-benefit analyses and risk-benefit analyses in order to make their decisions.⁴⁹

2.2. The logic of consequences: concrete reasons

Four concrete reasons can be given within the logic of consequences.

1. Lobbying vehicle

The first possible reason that can be given for why the two organizations deal with environmental protection and climate change is that the actors involved see the organizations as effective

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 5

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998) *Strategy Safari – A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management*, Free Press, NY, p. 294

⁴⁸ Stone (2002) *Policy Paradox – The Art of Political Decision Making*, revised edition, W.W. Norton & Company, NY, p. 233

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 235-236

lobbying vehicles. This can have been both a reason for the member states and for the organization itself. Due to the ‘progression of the European integration process’ the importance of developing a bigger role in the creation and implementation of European policies has increased.⁵⁰ In an article about regional representations the authors state that, due to the increasing amount of EU-rules on an increasing number of policy areas, the regional governments became more aware of the importance of the EU for their region and the possible influence they could have on the policies of the EU.⁵¹ According to the authors, the regions try to influence the European agenda, by cooperating with other regional representations or local governments, in order to gain a stronger position vis-à-vis the EU. This influence will also increase the knowledge that the EU has about the region and the bargaining position of the region will enlarge.⁵² As governments feel more and more the influence of the EU, the necessity to increase the ways of influencing the EU becomes more important. The Benelux Union and Visegrad Group can be seen as ‘potential new partners on the European chessboard’.⁵³ Although this specific article looks at regional representations, it is also valid when looking at intergovernmental forms of regional cooperation such as the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group. Both types are focusing on their status within the EU. De Rooij states that the EU is encouraging cooperation between border regions. Whilst he speaks about subnational governments his assumption is also applicable to intergovernmental projects that deal with border areas. The Benelux Union has many cross-border projects, ranging from the shared care of a national park to cooperation between police units.⁵⁴ These policies can give the organization a

⁵⁰ Van der Knaap and Hilterman in ‘Bestuurskunde’, 1997, jaargang 6, nr. 6

⁵¹ Huyseune and Jans (2008), *Brussels as the capital of a Europe of the regions? Regional offices as European policy actors*, Brussels Studies, e-journal, issue 16, 25 February 2008, p. 4

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ De Rooij (2003) *Nederlandse gemeenten en provincies in de Europese Unie – gevolgen van het nationale EU-lidmaatschap voor subnationale overheden*, Kluwer, Deventer, p. 1

⁵⁴ Benelux – active and timely, information brochure (2009), p. 27, 40

larger claim to the influencing of EU policies, as they already agree on things within the three countries.⁵⁵ The story is the same for the Visegrad countries.

2. *Wish to pursue certain policies*

The second reason is that the organizations take up the environment and climate topics because the national leaders, or the staff of the organizations, want to pursue certain policies. These can be more strict policies, or different contents that are not covered, or covered in a different way, by the European Union. When the Czech Republic had the Visegrad-presidency it saw this as a chance to increase its cooperation with the other three states.⁵⁶ It focused on five themes, of which one was *‘nachhaltige und sichere Energie’*, a topic belonging to the environmental policies of the Visegrad Group.⁵⁷ On the other hand, when looking at the most important policies of the Visegrad Group, the environment and climate are not even mentioned.⁵⁸ This might indicate that a wish to pursue certain policies is not a valid possibility. Seen from yet another perspective however, within the Eastern Neighbourhood program environment and climate change are seen as important topics and *‘strategisch wichtige Fragen’*.⁵⁹ Environment is sometimes also called one of the *Schlüsselgebiete*, key areas, of Visegrad cooperation.⁶⁰ To sum up, the literature disagrees on the importance of environment and climate. Some sources call it an important topic, other do not even include it in their list. Therefore the possibility remains that the wish to pursue certain policies has contributed to the inclusion of these two topics in the 2004 agreement and can be further investigated in this thesis. Although there is no clear controversy

⁵⁵ De Rooij (2003), p. 55

⁵⁶ Karlas, Koran and Tulmets (2008) Prag, die Visegrad-Gruppe und die EU – Tschechiens Ziele in der EU-Ratspräsidentschaft, Osteuropa, 58, 7/2008, p. 153-163

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 156

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 158

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 159

about the topic in the literature about the Benelux Union, the same problems that the V4 are facing can also be a problem within the Benelux Union.

3. *Increase in the salience of the issue*

The third reason is that actors may believe that by multiplying international actors that deal with the environment and climate change, they increase the salience of the issue and thus make it more likely that something will be done. Cash et al. define salience as being ‘how relevant information is to decision making bodies or publics’ and say that it is an issue that should not be overlooked. They argue that the more emphasis you place on a certain topic, in other words increasing the salience of this topic, the more likely it becomes that this topic catches more attention of policy makers or relevant organizations and the more likely it is that the topic will be addressed and attempted to be solved.⁶¹

4. *Preservation of the organization*

The last reason is that they do this because either institutional or key national actors try to show the relevance of the organizations in order to preserve them. The values and beliefs that these people have work ‘as a ‘short cut’ allowing actors to operate more effectively and to situate themselves in the political world’.⁶² The actors within the Visegrad Group for example are keen on preserving their personal networks, networks they value as important.⁶³ Symbolic resources

⁶¹ Cash, Clark, Alcock, Dickson, Eckley and Jäger (2002) *Salience, Credibility, Legitimacy and Boundaries: Linking Research, Assessment and Decision Making*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Faculty Research Working Papers Series, November 2002, via: http://ssrn.com/abstract_id=372280, accessed: May 25th 2010, p. 1

⁶² March and Olsen (2009), p. 22

⁶³ Ruzicka, Koran (2006) Totgesage leben länger – Die Visegrad-Gruppe nach dem EU-Beitritt, Osteuropa, 56, 10/2006, p. 28

are concepts such as reputation, prestige and status. These resources are used ‘to protect the organization from uncertainty in its environment’.⁶⁴

A symbol ‘is anything that stands for something else’ and depends on the interpretation, use and response of the people who use it.⁶⁵ When applying these symbols to the case of the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group, it becomes clear that they can be used to explain their behaviour and their decision. The narrative stories can be split into two streams. The first stream, the ‘story of decline’, can be relevant here as a story of the decline of influence of the BU and V4. The citizens of the countries involved might have lost interest in the institutions, causing a declining influence and relevance. They do not see why the organization should still exist. The national governments however do value the organizations and want to continue with them. The second stream of narrative stories is the story of ‘helplessness and control’. The same initial idea is present as in the previous stream, namely the idea that there is a decline of influence. The story of helplessness and control however focuses on ways to control this problem, instead of just stating that something is going wrong. The end of the first treaty can be seen as a new opportunity. When taking these two streams of stories together, the value of the new treaty and the decision to clearly implement the topic of environment and climate change in the treaty can be seen as a symbolic means of increasing the importance of the institutions.⁶⁶ The assertion of both stories is that there is a choice that can be made, between acting or not acting, between a new treaty or no new treaty, between implementation of environment and climate in the new treaty or sticking to the old topics.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998), p. 294-295

⁶⁵ Stone (2002), p. 137-138

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 138-142

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 144

2.3. The logic of appropriateness

In comparison to the logic of consequences there is the logic of appropriateness. This logic is defined by March and Olsen as:

... a perspective that sees human action as driven by rules of appropriate or exemplary behavior, organized into institutions. Rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation.⁶⁸

The statement that human action is driven by rules of appropriate behaviour means that the actors follow the norms, rules and codes of conduct as are acceptable in the institution they work for. Every institution has its own procedures, norms and values and the employees are expected to adhere to them. They have to follow the norms and rules of these institutions. If they do not do this then they cannot work for the institution.⁶⁹ The rules dictate what is appropriate behaviour and action.⁷⁰ Most of the rules are seen as obvious and as a fact. This means that most actors do not question the validity of the rule.⁷¹ The logic of appropriateness says that acting appropriate is: ‘to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good’.⁷² As ‘democratic political life is ordered by institutions’, and institutions are a collection of rules, norms and common practices that define the way of working in these institutions, these rules, norms and practices are seen as the most important way of working and learning in an institution and

⁶⁸ March and Olsen (2009), p. 2

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 6

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 7

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 7

⁷² Ibid, p. 4

political life as a whole.⁷³ The institution ‘(links) roles/identities, accounts of situations, resources and prescriptive rules and practices’.⁷⁴ The actors in the institutions however are ‘limited by the complexities of the demands upon them’, meaning that they are limited ‘by the institutionalized capability for acting appropriately’.⁷⁵ The question that remains now is why there are rules of appropriateness in the first place. Or, as March and Olsen, put it: ‘why are specific behavioural prescriptions believed to be natural or exemplary and why do rules vary across polities and institutions?’⁷⁶ They believe the answer lies in the past. The actors base their actions on previous experiences, on lessons from the past, and these lessons are ‘encoded either by individuals and collectivities drawing inferences from their own and others’ experiences, or by differential survival and reproduction of institutions, roles and identities based on particular rules’. In short: the behaviour that in the past caused a success will most likely be repeated, behaviour that caused failure will not.⁷⁷ When trying to change a rule it has to be validated that the change is a good one not just in efficiency terms, as would be the case with the logic of consequences, but also in value rational terms.⁷⁸

2.4. Logic of appropriateness: concrete reasons

Two concrete reasons can be given within the logic of appropriateness.

1. *International identity*

The first reason based on the theory of logic of appropriateness is that member countries have come to define their international identity – a kind of regional identity – through their adherence

⁷³ Ibid, p. 5

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 5

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 10

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 12

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 12

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 14

to the institutions. This may reflect common past experiences that weld the states together beyond any instrumental calculus. The actors in this case are national policymakers.

Nielsen and Salk state that the most important predictor of regional representations is very much tied to the legacy of the regional history and the type of country.⁷⁹ According to them the presence of strong regional feelings leads to a higher chance of regional representations. The inhabitants of an area identify themselves with this area because of resemblances in language, ethnicity, culture or history. This feeling leads to an urge to represent itself on a regional level.⁸⁰ A strong cultural bond with the region also leads to a wish to represent itself as a region within Brussels. The tie with the region is already there and this will make it easier for a government or governments to make the decision to set up a regional form of cooperation or continue with it.⁸¹

Different forms of regions are materializing. Some regions or countries still have the same territory as they always had, others kept on changing their boundaries over centuries. The Benelux countries share a long common history and have many cultural similarities. They therefore can have a strong regional identity and see themselves as a block instead of three different countries. The Visegrad countries all see themselves as part of Central-Europe, as a different entity than Eastern-Europe. Their histories have also often been linked to one another. However, they also often diverged.⁸² There was a feeling of superiority of the Czech Republic towards Slovakia, which lead to the materialization of 'second-class citizenship'.⁸³ Because of

⁷⁹ Nielsen and Salk (1998) *The Ecology of Collective Action and Regional Representation in the European Union*, European Sociological Review, vol. 14, No. 3, p. 247

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 248

⁸¹ Greenwood (2007) *Interest representation in the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, second edition, p. 232

⁸² See chapter 1 of this thesis

⁸³ Gallagher, Laver, Mair (2006) *Representative Government in Modern Europe: Institutions, Parties, and Governments*, McGraw – Hill, fourth, international edition, p. 75

the large amount of ethnic groups, histories, languages and cultures, the four countries can also sometimes be seen as strikingly different from one another.⁸⁴ Current opinions about this however are that the Visegrad is a '*Markenzeichen*', a brand, with which they can present themselves as a block.⁸⁵

2. *Value of the organization*

The second reason is that the drivers behind the addition of environment are institutional actors rather than national ones, and they want to preserve the organizations because they value the institutions for which they work. They identify with them and their mission and well-being. According to March and Olsen the factors that 'govern targets of political identification and codes of appropriate behaviour' are the following: 'relative importance of specific political ideologies, institutions, professions and educations, and belongings to larger social categories such as nation, gender, class, race, religion, and ethnicity'.⁸⁶ March and Olsen assume that 'individual perceptions are largely a product of the social environment'. The main characteristics of this theory are: institutional structures determine the content of people's interests and beliefs; action on the social stage is primarily a reflection of the relationships between the functional parts of institutional structures; different institutional structures are governed by different 'laws of motion'.⁸⁷ The main idea behind this theory is that the institutions frame the interests and beliefs of the actors involved. According to Bara and Pennington '(they) are seen to reflect the overall logic of larger-scale structures such as 'capitalism', 'the nation-state' and more recently

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ruzicka, Koran (2006), p. 28

⁸⁶ Herrmann, Risse and Brewer (2004), in: March and Olsen (2009), p. 14

⁸⁷ Bara and Pennington (2009) *Comparative Politics – Explaining Democratic Systems*, Los Angeles, London: Sage, p. 25

‘globalization’’.⁸⁸ The individuals do not come up with a *raison d’être* of the institution but the institutions create their own *raison d’être*. The people involved in the organization identify themselves with the organization.⁸⁹

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter the theoretical framework and concrete possible reasons for why the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group deal with environment and climate change has been explained. On the basis of two logics, the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, this chapter gives several possible reasons. The logic of consequences created four possible reasons. The first reason is that the actors see their organizations as a means of lobbying in other international circles such as the EU. The second reason assumes that the national governments want to pursue certain policies and therefore implement it in the two organizations. Reason three is that they try to increase the salience of the issue in order to create more platforms where the topic of environment and climate change can be addressed. The fourth reason is that the national actors want to preserve the organization itself and therefore give it more tasks and responsibilities. The logic of appropriateness finally created two possible reasons. The first reason is the international identity of the region. They see themselves as a block, not as individual countries, and act accordingly. The second reason is the value of the organization itself and says that the employees of the organizations want to keep the organizations because they identify with its goals and values.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 26

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Methods and techniques

As the theoretical framework has been given in the previous chapter, it is now possible to explain how the research, finding out which theoretical reasons are valid, will be done. The purpose of this chapter is to explain why the choice for content analysis and interviews as research methods was made and how the analysis of the data will be done.

3.1. Research methods

Two different types of research methods were used in this thesis. The first one is content analysis and the second one is interviews. As also stated in the introductory chapter, the choice for a multi method approach was made in order to strengthen the results of the thesis. A sole reliance on the content analysis method or on interviews is not enough to give a valid, reliable answer to the research question. Therefore the choice was made to make a combination of both methods.

3.1.1. Content analysis

According to Hardy et al., discourse analysis ‘is a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive and constructionist’, exploring how ‘socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place’.⁹⁰ Content analysis on the other hand adopts a positivist approach and ‘involves the development of analytical categories that are used to construct a coding frame that is then applied to textual data’. It is (or at least tries to be) objective, systematic and quantitative.^{91 92}

⁹⁰ Herrera and Braumoeller, Symposium: *Discourse and Content Analysis*, Qualitative Methods, Spring 2009, p. 19

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 20

⁹² Neuendorf (2002) *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Sage Publications, p. 1

When looking at the difference between discourse analysis and content analysis, four statements can be made. First of all, whilst discourse analysis sees the data source as ‘textual meaning, usually in relation to other texts, as well as practices of production, dissemination, and consumption’, content analysis looks at ‘textual content in comparison to other texts, for example over time’. Another difference deals with subjectivity and objectivity. Whilst discourse analysis assumes subjectivity, content analysis prefers objectivity. Difference three is that discourse analysis ‘can only understand texts in discursive context’ and content analysis ‘does not necessarily link text to context’. A last difference deals with reflexivity. Whilst the author is ‘part of the process’ of meaning construction in discourse analysis, when doing content analysis the author ‘simply reports on objective findings’.⁹³ ⁹⁴ The researcher is not involved in the process. The focus in this content analysis will lay on several words and terms and how often these appear in the texts. The statements and documents will be seen as objective documents. Only at the end of the thesis, when interpreting the results, will subjective statements be made. The documents can also be evaluated independent of any context. The author is independent from the documents under review. When looking at the differences between content analysis and discourse analysis as described in this section, it is clear that content analysis is the best method for this research.

Content analysis of Visegrad Group: the text material

Several documents will be under review in this thesis.⁹⁵ First of all the joint statements of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries in the years between 1999 and 2009 will be under investigation. These documents are relevant because they are set up after each of the

⁹³ Herrera and Braumoeller (2009), p. 21

⁹⁴ Neuendorf (2002), p. 5-6

⁹⁵ All these documents can be found on the website of the Visegrad Group: <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=939>, <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=859> and <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=941>; all accessed March 23rd 2010

meetings of the four Ministers of Environment and give a good image of the topics that were under discussion at those moments and the reasons for their decisions. Two of the joint statements date from before the EU accession, the other five from after that moment. Other relevant documents are the document about the contents of the Visegrad cooperation, the guidelines of the future areas of Visegrad cooperation and a press release about the sixteenth meeting of the Ministers of Environment, giving more information about that meeting than given in the joint statement.⁹⁶

Content analysis of Benelux Union: the text material

Also several documents of the former Benelux Economic Union and the current Benelux Union will be under review. These documents are specific documents related to meetings and committees, an information brochure, a work program and annual plan and a newsletter. The three documents about specific meetings or decisions are written between 1975 and 1982 and deal with the environmental side of things. The treaty of the establishment of the Benelux Union shows the areas that are now seen as important. The information brochure and newsletter also show the current state of affairs and the issues that are important at this moment in time. The common work program and the annual plan finally give concrete points of action concerning the environment and the newest topic of climate change.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The precise information of the documents can be found in appendix 2

⁹⁷ The precise information of the documents can be found in appendix 3

Content analysis of both institutions: the unit of analysis and categories

As previously stated, the information from the interviews will not necessarily correlate with the statements in official documents as the interviews deal with actors who might have a different opinion or viewpoint. Therefore it is necessary to look at the official reasons too. Attention will be paid to several words and phrases that are linked to the theoretical framework given in chapter two.

The first word is *cooperation*. Although it can fit within both the two logics and their concrete possibilities, this word mostly has a link to the option of the organization as a lobbying vehicle and the option of an increase in the salience of the issue of environment and climate change. The second phrase is *common interest* or *common goal*. This phrase also belongs to almost all of the six concrete possibilities but mostly fits with the wish to pursue certain policies, increase in the salience of the issue and the international identity of the organizations. Thirdly, the word *climate* or *climate change* will be looked at to find out how often this word is actually mentioned in the official documents. The fourth phrase is *names of international institutions* such as the UN or the EU. When claiming that there is an increase in the salience of the issue or the creation of an international identity then there should presumably be many references to other international organizations. The word *enlargement* is important in order to find out whether the 2004 accession to the European Union is still on the minds of the actors dealing with the Visegrad Group, or whether implementation of the EU rules and regulations or other lingering consequences of EU-accession do not play any role anymore. It is important for the Benelux Union in order to find out whether they see the EU-enlargement as an important event for them or whether it is of no consequence. The last phrase is *global issue*, which has a direct link with the possibility of an increase in the salience of the issue. Due to conflicting ways of spelling in the documents and

several options of phrasing the word, the words between brackets give alternative possibilities of all the six words and phrases that will be part of the analysis.

Table 1: Words and terms of content analysis

	Official word/phrase	Other options / ways of spelling
1	Cooperation	Co-operation, co-operating, cooperating
2	Common interest	Common goal, common plan, common ...
3	Climate	Climate change
4	Names of international institutions	United Nations, European Union, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Abbreviations are also taken into account
5	Enlargement	-
6	Global issue	Global problem / global need / global ...

Apart from this, attention will also be paid to interesting quotes and sentences. Some of the text material consists of information brochures and newsletters. Information in these sources is specifically aimed at informing the larger public in the three countries and explaining to them why the Benelux Union is an important institution. Paying attention to quotes and sentences therefore is a good way to find out how the Benelux Union tries to convince its public of its relevance and of the relevance of the choices they made about dealing with environment and climate change.

3.1.2. Interviews and lecture

Interviews can be held in several ways. Depending on the type of research researchers choose structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews to find the answers to their questions. For this thesis semi-structured interviews are the best type. This type handles from the assumption that it is known beforehand which kind of information is necessary, and therefore the researcher can ask quite direct questions about certain issues.⁹⁸ However, the interview can still go another

⁹⁸ Baarda and De Goede (2001) Basisboek Methoden en Technieken – Handleiding voor het opzetten en uitvoeren van onderzoek, Stenfert Kroese Groningen, third, revised edition, p. 184

way if during the interview other information appears to be relevant. An unstructured interview on the other hand assumes that little information is known and that a lot of information about several aspects has to be acquired to find the right answers. This is not the case for this thesis. There is knowledge about the type of questions to ask and about possible answers. Enough space will be given to the interviewee to come with his own points of view and other information that he deems relevant or otherwise important. The interview questions will be open ended in order to make sure that the interviewee does not give just a yes/no answer.

A final way of gathering data is the attendance of the lecture: 'the echo of the new members - The Visegrad Group and EU external action', organized by the Center for EU Enlargement Studies.⁹⁹ As this lecture partly deals with the same topic as this thesis it can give relevant information.

3.2. Further case selection

Interviews were held with several actors. All actors were working in a field dealing with the Benelux Union or the Visegrad Group and had a thorough knowledge about the subject. Slovakia will hold the next Presidency. It can therefore be expected that they are making preparations for this event and are more up to date with the matter than Poland and the Czech Republic.¹⁰⁰ In the following table more information about the interviewees can be found:

⁹⁹ Part of the Central European University, Budapest. Lecture attended May 4th 2010

¹⁰⁰ Although Hungary currently has the Visegrad-presidency, there is no interview with someone from Hungary as it was not possible to schedule an interview with someone from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Table 2: Information about interviewees

Number of interview	Title of interviewee	Work place	When ¹⁰¹ and where	Length of interview
Interview 1	Policy officer	Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April, Brussels	01:03:28
Interview 2	Policy officer	General Secretariat Benelux Union	April, Brussels	00:31:54
Interview 3	Policy officer	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April, The Hague	00:36:32
Interview 4	PR Coordinator	International Visegrad Fund	April, Bratislava	00:35:48
Interview 5	Policy officer	Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April, Bratislava	00:30:00 ¹⁰²

3.3. Method of data analysis

After the interviews were held and transcribed, they had to be analyzed. After transcribing, the information from these transcripts was categorized, in order to make the large amounts of information more synoptic. The information was divided into several categories, existing of a piece of text from the interview. The interviewer did not make up a category-name herself, but based the name on the information in the text. This categorization happened per transcript and could also be called labeling.¹⁰³ If all the information was labeled, then the information that was relevant was highlighted from the interview and given a final name. This process is called coding or encrypting. It was possible that some labels would not be used because they were not relevant for the topic of this thesis.¹⁰⁴ All important pieces of text of the same label, of all the interviews, were put together to get a better overview. After this a separation was made of the several topics

¹⁰¹ All interviews took place in 2010

¹⁰² The interviewee asked me not to tape the interview. Therefore only an approximation of the duration of the interview can be given.

¹⁰³ Morse and Field (1996) Principles of data analysis. Chapter 6 in: Morse and Field, *Nursing research: The application of qualitative approaches*, Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes Ltd., p. 108

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

in one label, in order to increase the number of categories.¹⁰⁵ Finally, after this categorization, the categories were checked for possible overlapping codes. The categorization of the information was done with the aid of a coding tree¹⁰⁶. Depending on the acquired information some of these variables came back in the results and some not. To make sure that the analyses did not derail from what the interviewee had said, and to underpin the results, quotes were used. The risk of misinterpreting statements is thereby avoided and the interpretations are based on the information from the interviews.¹⁰⁷

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter made clear how the research was done. Content analysis and interviews were used to find which reasons, as given in the theoretical framework, were valid and which were not. Several documents were evaluated and analyzed and several people of both organizations were interviewed. The documents of the Visegrad Group were joint statements of years between 1999 and 2009 and some other relevant records, the documents of the Benelux Union were declarations of the 1970s and 1980s, and recent information brochures, newsletters and others. Five interviews were done, with people from the Benelux Union General Secretariat, Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Visegrad Fund and Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A smaller research method, in this thesis grouped under the heading of interviews, was the attendance of a lecture about the Visegrad Group. This multi-method approach is better than using one single method because it strengthens the results and makes it more reliable. Based on the combination of the three research methods it was possible to research why the two organizations took an interest in the topic of environment and climate change.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 108-109

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 108

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 4: The results

Based on the theoretical framework given in chapter two and researched according to the methods explained in chapter three, in this chapter the results of the interviews and content analyses will be given and an answer to the main research question will be formulated. The results of the research question will be provided, split in the results of the content analysis and the results of the interviews. In the end an overall conclusion of the results will be given.

4.1. Results of the Visegrad Group

In this section the results of the content analysis and interviews concerning the Visegrad Group will be given. After that an overall conclusion of these results will be formulated.

4.1.1. Content analysis

After the coding and marking of the words and terms described in the previous chapter and the counting of these same words and terms, the following table with the results can be made:

Table 3: Results of content analysis of the Visegrad Group

	Cooperation	Common interest	Climate (change)	International institutions	Enlargement	Global issue
1	7	2	1	25	1	2
2	4	2	2	13	-	-
3	5	2	-	14	2	-
4	2	-	-	11	-	-
5	1	-	6	22	-	3
6	2	-	8	20	-	2
7	1	-	6	20	-	1
8	-	1	-	-	-	-
9	4	2	-	3	-	-
10	3	-	1	4	-	-

When looking at the data of the joint statements, being documents one till seven, it becomes clear that the term '*international institutions*' comes up often, with a maximum of 25 in the first document and a minimum of eleven in the fourth document. The same, apart from lower numbers, goes for the word '*cooperation*', which also appears in all the joint statements. However, this term goes from seven in the first document to two and one in the last four documents. The term '*enlargement*' is not an issue in these documents, apart from one reference to it in the first document and two references in the third. Also the term '*global issue*' does not come up often, with a maximum of three times in document five and another five references overall in three documents. The term '*common interest*' was present in the first three documents but absent in the other statements. The term '*climate*' or '*climate change*' is absent in two out of seven documents. The first two documents give a result of one and two references per text and then there are two years of absence. In the other three years the terms appear in the documents more often, being six, eight and six times. The results of the last three texts, the other relevant documents, shows the same lines, with no presence of '*enlargement*' and '*global issue*', only one reference for '*climate*' or '*climate change*', some results for '*common interest*' and higher numbers for '*cooperation*' and '*international institutions*'.

The absence of the word '*enlargement*' can be easily explained. The first three documents were written before the accession of the four Visegrad Group countries to the European Union. Before the accession they had to streamline many rules and regulations concerning environment and climate change to be in accordance with the EU rules. After accession this streamlining process was mostly finished.¹⁰⁸ Therefore the topic of enlargement probably was a bigger issue before their accession than after their accession. Reasons why the terms '*global issue*' and '*common*

¹⁰⁸ Europa, gateway to Europe: http://europa.eu/pol/enlarg/index_en.htm, accessed March 24th 2010

interest’ are (mainly) absent are unclear. The importance the Visegrad Group countries attach to other international institutions is quite clear from the numbers. The term ‘*international institutions*’ scores the highest. This can be explained by the interrelated activities and economies and the importance of these institutions on the policies of the Visegrad Group countries. The word ‘*cooperation*’ can be related to this interrelation of the countries. The last term, ‘*climate*’ or ‘*climate change*’ became more present in the last three joint statements. This can refer to the increase in importance that this topic is having in the last few years. The importance and severity of climate change is (by most actors) no longer underestimated and is taken seriously by many scientists, scholars and government officials.¹⁰⁹

When stepping away from the counted words and focussing on the text as a whole, some interesting quotes and sentences can be given. First of all, there are again many references to other international organizations, mainly the EU and the UN, in which is stated that they either follow rules that are set up by those organizations or use the funds created by them.

- In accordance with the outcome and the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development...¹¹⁰
- Recognising the importance of the conclusions of the ... session of the ... United Nations Environment Programme ... and the Second Global Forum of the Ministers of the Environment ...¹¹¹
- Use of EU co-financing in the implementation of national environmental programmes and national development plans¹¹²
- ... bearing in mind the conclusions of the European Council in March 2007 in the field of climate protection and energy policy and realizing the need for a coordinated action.
- The Ministers - take note of the relevant initiatives within the EU and the UN system ...

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, DG Climate Action: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/home_en.htm, accessed March 24th 2010

¹¹⁰ Joint Statement Visegrad Group Environmental Ministers, sixth meeting, 2001

¹¹¹ Ibid. These two quotes are not the only ones dealing with the UN and other international organizations (also many quotes dealing with the EU)

¹¹² Joint Statement Visegrad Group, Environmental Ministers, eleventh meeting, 2004

Other recurrent themes are the geographic bond between the countries and the ‘need for coordination of their joint positions’. The first theme appears regularly and is used as a reason why the countries work together in general. The second theme is more specifically aimed at the topics under review. The idea of a ‘shared vision’ also seems to be important and is linked to the geographic closeness and their idea of the four countries as one block:

- The preparation of the WSSD¹¹³ in 2002 ... as one of the priorities of the Visegrad Group countries that have already adopted or they are just finalising their national strategies for sustainable development. Due to geographic closeness and to environmental, social and economic similarity ..., the interlinkage and harmonization between their national strategies for sustainable development is desirable...¹¹⁴
- The Ministers underlined the importance of the Visegrad countries’ traditional role in bridging the East and the West within this region.
- Shared vision¹¹⁵
- ... being aware of the need for coordination of their joint positions on the priorities in relation to the mid-term review of the Sixth Environment Action Programme of the European Community for 2002-2012
- The Ministers - agree to promote this joint position at national level as well as within the EU and in their international relations.¹¹⁶
- The Ministers agreed on coordinating their positions in relation to the ongoing negotiations on the EU level regulation ...¹¹⁷

Their agreement on the importance of the topics also comes to the fore in several quotes:

- Consultations and co-operation on current issues of common interest¹¹⁸
- The Ministers exchanged views on the importance of the issue of climate change, and they agreed that an immediate action in global scale at all levels to combat climate change is crucial.
- The V4 meetings serve as a way to work out the definite solution to the most important problem in the field of environment protection as well as the occasion to exchange the information and experiences. They have become more important especially after the V4 member states accession to the European Union; then, they play a basic role in creating the regional common views.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ World Summit on Sustainable Development

¹¹⁴ Joint Statement Visegrad Group, Environmental Ministers, sixth meeting, 2001

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Joint Statement Visegrad Group, Environmental Ministers, fourteenth meeting, 2007

¹¹⁷ Joint Statement Visegrad Group, Environmental Ministers, fifteenth meeting, 2008

¹¹⁸ Guidelines on the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation, May 12th 2004

¹¹⁹ Press release sixteenth meeting Environmental Ministers, Visegrad Group, 2009

4.1.2. Lecture attendance and interviews

The lecture on the Visegrad group proved useful in several ways. First of all, it made clear that the aim of the institution changed after EU-accession. Before this moment the main aim was EU and NATO accession and security, starting 2004 it turned into a ‘political will and moral obligation to support further candidates’ of EU membership.¹²⁰ Secondly, the Visegrad Group sees itself as a kind of ‘communication tool’, through which they can consult with one another and ‘increase the voice of Central Europe’ within the European Union and other international arenas. The four countries wanted a stronger position within the EU and tried to reach this by continuing the Visegrad cooperation.¹²¹ One scholar called the V4 cooperation ‘the most important and effective window for cooperation within EU/Brussels’.¹²² Another aim of the cooperation was to prepare the EU-presidencies of the countries.¹²³ They see themselves as ‘a new actor of Europeanization and regional socialisation’. The Visegrad cooperation was also called ‘the best regional cooperation that we have – but not optimal’. This scholar sees the Visegrad Group as a ‘risk diversification effort’.¹²⁴ The Eastern Partnership program is also seen as an important tool for the four countries in their quest to support EU-candidacy for their neighbour countries. In this respect, the Visegrad Group has been called ‘an advocacy group of member states supporting its further development’.¹²⁵ The new challenges that the Visegrad Group is facing are: finding a common foreign policy identity, diversifying the communication to be better heard at EU and other multilateral levels and moving towards a greater common

¹²⁰ Elsa Tulmets, lecture Visegrad Group

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Tomas Strazay, lecture Visegrad Group

¹²³ The Czech Republic had the presidency in 2009, Hungary and Poland will have the presidency in 2011. Slovakia is in 2016: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:001:0011:0012:EN:PDF>; accessed May 10th 2010

¹²⁴ Andras Deak, lecture Visegrad Group

¹²⁵ Agnieszka Łada, lecture Visegrad Group

participation in EU programmes.¹²⁶ The Group has become more important, mainly due to the fact that it is working as a block. The four countries are stronger together than alone: ‘the V4 has a role to play’.¹²⁷ Although these results are dealing with the Visegrad in general, not specifically with the environment and climate topic, they can be applied to them.

During the interviews it came to the fore that the common goals and the lobbying position of the countries constitute an important reason why they picked up the topic of the environment and climate. One of the interviewees called the V4 a ‘mark’, meaning a trademark within the region.¹²⁸ According to him the Visegrad Group, because of friendship ties, historical ties and territorial boundaries, is a block that tries to bring its countries to the level of Western Europe and to improve the relations between the four countries and with its neighbours.¹²⁹

Environment and climate change belong to the issues that require a common position. The four countries can realize more things if they work together and form a stronger lobby position within the European Union and other international organizations. Although the EU is involved in these topics the V4 cooperation is still seen as relevant and even necessary because of the benefits it gets from the cooperation. According to one interviewee the time for ‘just waiting for EU money’ is over and the V4 are actively involved in changing issues such as environment and climate.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Elsa Tulmets, lecture Visegrad Group

¹²⁷ Tomas Strazay, lecture Visegrad Group

¹²⁸ Interview 5

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Another interviewee agrees that the topic is ‘part of concrete meetings’, but states that ‘it is not a primary goal’. According to him it should be seen as a platform.¹³¹ The V4 tries to bridge the West with the East in order to not allow ‘another sort of Iron Curtain to be built on the border of the EU’. The V4 are a lobby force that serves ‘purposes of funding mutual priorities that we can push through’.¹³² The interviewee however says that ‘it is not a power block, it is not a powerful block anyway’, meaning that the V4 are not that important within the EU. He goes as far to say that ‘it is below any recognition of anyone’. He also acknowledges however that this situation is changing since 2005: ‘it has become much more visible and much stronger too’.¹³³

The accession of the four countries to the EU led to a treaty that had become unnecessary. When making a choice between either continuing with the Visegrad cooperation or disbanding it, the countries chose to give the V4 a new goal, ‘to catch a new breath, try to turn a page’.¹³⁴ The Visegrad Group went from being an organization focused on itself to an organization focused mainly on its neighbouring countries and on global issues such as environment and climate change. Climate change ‘made it into the strategic priorities of the Visegrad Fund’ and caused the Hungarian presidency to have a ‘green Visegrad’ as part of its agenda. According to the interviewee these actions served as a ‘message to our grantees, to applicants’ and led to more interest in the topic.¹³⁵

The results of the interviews are that the lobby position and the existence of common goals are very important contributors to why they engage in the topic of environment and climate change.

¹³¹ Interview 4

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The many references to the EU and the UN in the documents, in combination with the statements of the interviewees lead to believe that the lobby position is very important for them. Although the importance of common goals did not really come to the fore in the content analysis the interviewees constitute it as an important reason. The governments of the four countries realize that these topics cannot be handled solely individually and that they can realize more if they start working together on these areas. The importance of the topics in comparison to other topics that are handled by the V4 however is unclear. Although some sources and actors claim that it is an important topic, others disagree and say that it is not one of their primary goals. The fact however remains that environment and climate change are becoming more visible topics, although there is little reference to it in the documents. It made it into the priorities of the Visegrad Fund, leading to more interest from outside actors, and the interviewees agree that it is a rising topic.

4.2. The results of the Benelux Union

In this section the results of the content analysis and interviews concerning the Benelux Union will be given. After that an overall conclusion of these results will be formulated.

4.2.1. Content analysis

The results of the content analysis of the documents of the Benelux Union are as follows:

Table 4: Results of content analysis of the Benelux Union

	Cooperation	Common interest	Climate (change)	International institutions	Enlargement	Global issue
1	7	-	-	14	-	-
2	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	2	-	-	-	-	-
4	18	1	1	6	-	-
5	104	3	2	15	-	-
6	27	-	1	1	-	-
7	34	-	4	14	1	-
8	20	-	1	15	1	3

When looking at these numbers the first thing that is prominent are the high numbers in the categories of *cooperation* and *international institutions*. Apart from the first three documents, with no results for the second document, the numbers for *cooperation* are high. The highest number is 104 and the majority is around 25. The numbers for *international institutions* alternate. Some documents refer to them often, with two times fifteen as the highest, in other documents there is one or not even one reference to them. The topic of *climate (change)* is mentioned a few times in the more recent documents, ranging from three times one reference, one time two references and one time four references. It is absent however in the first three documents. The topics of *common interest*, *enlargement* and *global issue* are negligible. *Common interest* is only referred to twice, in the more recent documents, *enlargement* also twice in the last two documents and *global issue* only once.

The absence of *climate change* in the first three documents makes sense as climate change was no concern of the Benelux Union when these documents were drafted. The lack of persuasive numbers for *climate change* in the more recent documents is difficult to explain. Based on the fact that climate change is a hot topic for the last few years and is given a lot of attention, it could be expected that the numbers for *climate change* in these recent documents would have been higher. This however is not the case. Just like in the case with the Visegrad Group also here the references to other international organizations are high, although not as high as for the V4. Enlargement appears to be of no interest to the Benelux Union. This can be explained when realizing that the Benelux Union has no voice when deciding about possible EU-enlargements, as this is a European Union affair. It also does not border any of the new EU member states and focuses on the affairs between its own three members, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. And most importantly the countries were founding members of the EU and

therefore were never actors in the enlargement process themselves. Finally, it is surprising that there are hardly any references to *common interest* or *global issues*, as these are terms that are often used to explain why organizations make certain choices.

The documents of the Benelux Union also give some interesting quotes and sentences. The topic of the Benelux Union as an ‘experimental garden’ or a ‘model and source of inspiration’ is clearly present and shows the importance of this topic for the organization.

- The Benelux is the EU’s experimental garden
- The Benelux is a model and source of inspiration for other regional cooperations, such as those amongst the Scandinavian and Central European countries¹³⁶
- The expansion of the European Union to 27 member states, also gives the opportunity to test new initiatives first in a geographically confined area. The pioneer function of the Benelux hereby comes in the focus. There are also plenty of cross-border cooperations possible where the European framework is too broad and where the center of gravity is in the Benelux.¹³⁷
- The Benelux-parliament also involves the Belgian regions in her cooperation so that the new Benelux is the meeting point of several governments so as to launch together new initiatives.¹³⁸

The lobby position is also an important topic, based on statements such as:

- The Benelux cooperation gives the members greater weight within a larger EU (together they have just as many votes as France or German)
- In the Benelux there is a possibility for cross-fertilisation, but also for the Benelux countries to adopt common and comparable positions within international forums.¹³⁹

The importance of the topics of climate change and other environmental issues is clearly implemented in the documents too:

- The Benelux has a high population concentration, a strong economy and intense traffic within a relatively limited area. The demand for sustainable development, where account is taken of the coming generations, is thus very relevant here. Social cohesion within this highly evolved society also requires attention.

¹³⁶ The first three quotes are from the information brochure Benelux Union, p. 9

¹³⁷ These three quotes are from the Newsletter Benelux Union, p. 7

¹³⁸ Newsletter Benelux Union, p. 8

¹³⁹ Information brochure Benelux Union, p. 26-27

- Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg want more then before to find solutions for practical problems with the implementation of cross-border laws and regulations.¹⁴⁰
- The Benelux and surrounding areas know a variety of common challenges...¹⁴¹
- Air quality is and will continue to be a very present-day problem ... Good information exchange and alignment comes to the fore for different reasons. In the first place there are strict European norms that are not met yet and that also have to be tightened. In the second place the Benelux countries (...) 'export' a lot of air pollution to each other because the majority of the emissions often gets transported over (very) large distances. Thirdly, a lot can be learned from each other and forces can be joined, for example by working together when doing research.¹⁴²

This can be called surprising as the phrases themselves did not show any high numbers in the earlier part of the content analysis. When skipping the precise phrases and focussing on complete sentences however they become more apparent in the documents. Finally, apart from many references to the EU in general, there is also a reference to the United Nations that shows that the UN can have an influence on the importance the Benelux Union gives to the topic: 'The United Nations have declared 2010 to be the international year of biodiversity'.¹⁴³

4.2.2. Interviews of the Benelux Union

According to the interviewees the Benelux Economic Union, after the initial purely economic cooperation, evolved from an economic approach to an approach based on territorial cohesion. It started as a customs union but evolved to end up as an unclear grouping of different tasks: from a very focused idea of a customs union (it went to) an organization that had taken on a variety of tasks that did not have any clear line in them'.¹⁴⁴ In the seventies the governments of the three

¹⁴⁰ Newsletter Benelux Union, p. 6

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 21

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 14. Although this text was in reference to joined cooperation of the Benelux countries and the German area of North Rhine-Westphalia, the information is also valid for the Benelux countries per se.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 19

¹⁴⁴ Interview 3

countries decided to give the cooperation a new orientation. There was and still is: ‘a strong cohesion (...) between Benelux cooperation and European cooperation’,¹⁴⁵

When the end of the old treaty was coming near the three governments had to decide on what to do: ‘the original treaty (...) expired and we could either prolong the treaty and keep everything the same, or change it and charge [ourselves] with making something new out of the cooperation. We did the last thing.’¹⁴⁶ The governments have the intention to make the Benelux more of a project organization, working with multi-year programs. The old treaty, consisting of many detailed, concrete provisions, was abolished and new multi-year programs came into existence.¹⁴⁷

This decision had positive effects on the status of the organization, as more people became interested in the organization. According to one of the interviewees, the Benelux used to have a ‘corny image’: ‘I think that the Benelux has a corny image within the countries. However, I think that the Benelux still has a certain status because they are three of the founding members of the EU. They have a long tradition of cooperation and I think that that is one of the reasons why they continued with the Benelux Union. It would also undermine the diplomatic position of the three countries if they would have said ‘that cooperation, that is not necessary anymore’.’¹⁴⁸

The new treaty was ‘*a process between the governments*’: ‘We as the General Secretariat can give support on request from the governments, but not about the contents. We are here for the execution of the mutual program. As far as the negotiations were concerned, that was a case

¹⁴⁵ Interview 1

¹⁴⁶ Interview 3

¹⁴⁷ Interview 2

¹⁴⁸ Interview 2

between the governments (...).¹⁴⁹ One interviewee commented that a division should be made between administration and politics. Within politics ‘climate is currently an important topic that they want to propagate through several channels that they care about it’. Within the administration there is less interest to do this.¹⁵⁰ Climate is a topic that is very ‘hot’ in the Flemish government.¹⁵¹ It is also on the international agenda: ‘if you want to be a part of them you will follow what they do and also put it on the agenda’.¹⁵²

The reason why environmental protection became an issue for the Benelux in the seventies was because: ‘there (was) in this treaty enough space to set up special committees for certain topics’.¹⁵³ The 1958 treaty did not make strict rules about which topics the Benelux cooperation could touch upon, and this led to several topics getting into the cooperation activities whilst they did not have a link with the economy or the customs union in particular.

Another interesting point that came to the fore in the interviews, and what also appeared from the content analysis, was the fact that they see the Benelux as a ‘European laboratory’, having adding value for the EU: ‘there the Benelux government plays an interesting role (...) an inspiring role also for the other European countries’.¹⁵⁴ The Benelux also serves as a framework of reference for other countries.¹⁵⁵ The interviewees also stated that the Benelux Union is constantly looking for a rationale to exist.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview 2

¹⁵¹ Interview 2

¹⁵² Interview 2

¹⁵³ Interview 1

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Interview 2

The topic of climate and climate change is a very new item on the Benelux agenda and has been the product of bilateral discussions with the Benelux countries. According to one of the interviewees, the topic of climate is in an exploration phase. They are in the process of finding out what the added value is of a Benelux approach within the European framework.¹⁵⁷ The General Secretariat does not know why the three governments decided to include climate into the Benelux affairs: ‘they [the Benelux governments] tend to the Benelux added value, they know where help is needed’.¹⁵⁸ Another interviewee commented that ‘it depends on the interest of the ministries. I do not know if there is a lot of interest, to give the Benelux Union a bigger role on the terrain of climate... I do not think they are very interested in an extra parallel circuit. I think the Benelux Union has more value when dealing with cross-border problems. With other dossiers it can be that there is an alliance between the three countries but that is hardly ever supported by the Benelux Secretariat. In that case there is contact between the three countries themselves’.¹⁵⁹ Based on this quote it can be said that the emphasis on climate change in the Benelux Union organization is more focused on concrete problems that the three countries are dealing with, not with the overall climate change problem. This problem is addressed either by the countries individually or by the European Union or other larger international organizations. The position of the Benelux countries within the EU is also a reason for the new treaty: ‘it is not always easy for the three countries to let their voice be heard within Europe. So the Benelux basis has the same value as France, as Italy, the big European countries. And that is also important’.¹⁶⁰ Cooperation leads to a stronger lobby-position.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Interview 1

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Interview 2

¹⁶⁰ Interview 1

¹⁶¹ Interview 2

Although the topic of the environment and environmental protection is a part of the Benelux plans since the 1970, it has evolved from very unstructured plans into more concrete projects under the new treaty of 2008. Due to the old treaty there was the possibility to set up special committees for projects that had no connection to the initial goals of a customs union and economic union. This way the environment came into the Benelux plans. In the new treaty the topic of climate change makes its appearance. The decision has been made on a bilateral level. The governments see the Benelux as a laboratory in which they can experiment with plans and projects that go further than the initial European rules and regulations. By this they want to create a stronger lobby position for the organization. One of the interviewees however emphasized that the topic is still in the exploration phase. The three governments want to find out in which way the topic of climate change can have an added value by Benelux cooperation.

4.3. The overall conclusion of the results

Now all the separate results of the two research methods of the two organizations have been given, it is time to give an overall conclusion, based on the possible reasons explained in the theoretical chapter. By analyzing the research question used in this paper via the content analysis method it has become clear that there are some words and terms that are more important or more used in the analyzed documents than other words and terms. This can indicate that the words and terms that are more often used are also more valid or more probable as a reason why the Visegrad Group and Benelux Union started to deal with the topic of environment and climate change. In combination with the results from the interviews and the results of the lecture overall conclusions of the results can now be given.

Table 5: Results content analysis and interviews combined

	Benelux Union	Visegrad Group
Lobbying vehicle	Very relevant	Very relevant
Wish to pursue certain policies	Very relevant	Not relevant
Increase in the salience of the issue	Relevant	Not relevant
Preservation of the organization	Relevant	Relevant
International identity	Very relevant	Very relevant
Value of the organization	Not relevant	Not relevant

First of all the logic of consequences. The first possible reason is the organization as a lobbying vehicle. This has been shown to be a very important reason for why both the Visegrad Group and the Benelux Union started dealing with environment and climate change. Both organizations aim to improve their position vis-à-vis the European Union and other international organizations. The second reason is a wish to pursue certain policies. This is seen as a valid reason for the Benelux Union as they profile themselves as a laboratory of the EU and deal with some topics that the EU has no concrete rules for or the BU can solve within the three countries. This is definitely the case for the topic of environment, less however for climate change as this topic is still in the initial stages of development. The fact that they decided to get involved in this topic does show that they are committed to come with actual results on their territories. For the Visegrad Group this appears to be of no great concern as neither the interviews nor the content analyses give interesting information. The increase in the salience of the issue is possible reason three. Although this did not come up in the results very often it is a minor reason. It came up during the interviews of the Benelux Union, stating that as many organizations concern themselves with this topic, and the topic is considered to be of high importance, the Benelux Union should act too. The Visegrad Group did not mention the topic as a reason. Finally, the preservation of the organization is a possible reason. Although this topic is also not one of the most important reasons it is still a minor reason. The Benelux Union, when faced with an almost expired treaty, decided to continue with the cooperation and to give this cooperation a new shape. Durability

became one of the three pillars and environment and climate change formed part of this pillar. The Visegrad Group also decided to continue with the cooperation and set up new goals for itself.

The logic of appropriateness consists of two possible reasons. First of all the reason of international identity. All the countries of both organizations see themselves as part of a specific territory. They emphasize old ties and geographical comparisons and see these as an important reason for the existence of their organization. The topics of environment and climate change are part of the overall reason why they want their cooperation to continue. The other reason is the value of the organization. This topic has not appeared in either the content analysis or the interviews or lecture. No interviewee mentioned that they decided to implement environment and climate change into the treaties because the people working for the organizations valued them and wanted the topic in the treaty. As emphasized earlier, the decision of the Benelux Union was on a bilateral level and between the national and federal governments.¹⁶² The General Secretariat of the BU had no input in this matter. The Visegrad Group is not institutionalized, apart from the Visegrad Fund, and their decision has therefore also been made on a bilateral level between the four national governments. The people working for the institutions had no say in the matter.

¹⁶² The several governments within Belgium

The Conclusion

In this thesis an answer has been given to the main research question. Based on content analyses of many documents, lecture attendance and interviews with several people of both organizations, it is now possible to give the final conclusion about the research question:

Why do the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group persist with the item of environmental policy and climate change even though the EU is quite active in this policy field?

After contextualizing the topic and explaining what the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group do concerning the environment and climate change, a theoretical framework was created. This framework, consisting of the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, led to six concrete possible reasons why the organizations made the decision to engage with the topics of environment and climate change: lobbying vehicle, wish to pursue certain policies, increase in the salience of the issue, preservation of the organization, international identity and value of the organization. In the previous chapter it was made clear that not all these six reasons were of the same importance. The most important reasons why both organizations decided to get involved with environment and climate change is because they see it as a very important topic and realize that by forming a power block their lobby position is much stronger than when they try to engage in the topic individually. The wish to pursue certain policies is a valid reason for the Benelux Union only, as there have been no indications that the Visegrad Group had these desires. The Benelux Union wants to be a laboratory or experimental garden of the EU and tries to reach things that the EU cannot. However, the topic of climate change is still in the developing stages.

The other two reasons belonging to the logic of consequences are minor reasons. The Benelux Union tries to increase the number of fora in which climate change is discussed by taking up the topic itself. It did not come up as a result for the Visegrad Group. Both groups on the other hand want to preserve their own organization by creating new goals and projects. All four reasons within the logic of consequences therefore are of importance, although not all of them to the same extent and differing per organization. The two reasons of the logic of appropriateness are more contradictory. Whilst the international identity of the countries is seen as important and many references to old ties and geographical overlap given, the value of the organization does not play a role. As this reason focuses on the wishes of the actors in the organizations, meaning the employees of the Benelux Union General Secretariat, it is clear that they do not play a role within this story. The decision to deal with environment and climate change was made on a bilateral level with the General Secretariat giving administrative support. The Visegrad Group, as being not institutionalized, also does not see this reason as important. Within the logic of appropriateness therefore only one of the two reasons is verified.

The two hypotheses that are phrased in the introduction of this thesis are that either the logic of consequences is the most important reason or that the logic of appropriateness is more important. Although from both logics there are valid reasons, one hypothesis can be said to be more valid than the other. The hypothesis that the logic of consequences explains the best why the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group decided to engage with the topic of environment and climate change is the most important hypothesis in this thesis. All four reasons were reasons why the Benelux Union made the decision it made, although not all four of them to the same extent. For the Benelux Union their wish for a stronger lobby position and to pursue certain policies are the strongest reasons, but also the wish to preserve the organization and trying to increase the number

of platforms where discussions about climate change take place are relevant. However, only two of these reasons are valid when looking at the Visegrad Group: their wish to have a stronger lobby position and their wish to preserve the organization. Of the logic of appropriateness only one out of two reasons was said to be relevant, this being the reason of international identity. Although this reason is a very strong reason, it still does not make the logic of appropriateness the most convincing logic, in comparison to the logic of consequences.

The differences between the validity of the six reasons between the Benelux Union and Visegrad Group also show that there are a number of concrete differences between the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group. Apart from the fact that the BU is significantly older than the V4 and the shape of the organizations is radically different, there are some striking differences. Whilst the Benelux Union is highly institutionalized, with its own General Secretariat, Parliament and Court of Justice, the Visegrad Group only knows the Visegrad Fund, which does not deal with the political and juridical side of things. The countries of the V4 have regular meetings of either individual Ministers or the Prime Ministers. These meetings however stay more on the level of talking and do not lead to concrete plans of action or concrete improvements. When looking at the two reasons within the logic of consequences theory that were not relevant for the Visegrad Group, this lack of relevance can be explained by referring to the differences between the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group. Whilst the BU wants to improve the situation concerning environment and climate change and make sure that as many people as possible engage with the topic, the V4 stays closer to home and has other priorities. Their main priority is a focus on their immediate (non-EU) neighbours. Whilst the BU sees itself as a laboratory in which they can focus on items that are not addressed by the EU or on more specific regulations than the EU set up, the V4 has other goals.

This research focused on two specific organizations, the Benelux Union and the Visegrad Group, and one specific topic, environment and climate change. Within this focus the thesis looked at two logics and identified six concrete possible reasons why the two organizations decided to engage themselves with environment and climate change. However, it is also possible to take up another topic and apply the reasons to the two organizations, or choose other organizations. Although the choice for the two organizations in this thesis was made because all the participating countries were members of the European Union, whilst other regional organizations were differently structured, it might be possible to apply the same theories to other groups of countries. This is worthy of further investigation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Involvement of the three organizations with topic

Institution	Environmental protection and climate change
Benelux Union ¹⁶³	Exchange of information about environmental measures (reducing CO2-emissions) Information exchange and alignment of viewpoints concerning the agenda environment and climate of the Belgian EU-presidency Information exchange concerning climate and employment: studies and initiatives about 'green jobs', qualitative and quantitative impact of a green economy on the labour market
Visegrad Group ¹⁶⁴	Opportunities for co-operation in the field of environmental protection and risks: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. exchange of information about long-term strategies and projects for sustainable development and other environment related issues, 2. safety issues concerning nuclear energy, 3. questions related to boundary waters and flood prevention, 4. co-ordination in construction of equipment for waste recycling, 5. creation of a system for monitoring and exchange of information on transfrontier movement of waste, 6. co-operation in preparing and creation of protected landscape in regions near the common borders
European Union ¹⁶⁵	Air Biotechnology Chemicals Civil protection and environmental accidents (civil protection, marine pollution, chemical accidents), Environmental economics (published studies, database on environmental taxes) Enlargement and neighbouring countries (enlargement, financing, South-Eastern Europe, Russia and other NIS, Danube and Black sea, Mediterranean Partners), Health Industry and technology (Environmental Technologies Action Plan, Eco-label, Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, Integrated Product Policy, Pollution from industrial installations, Retail Forum, Small and medium-sized and environment, standardization, the greening of public procurement) International issues (WSSD, Multilateral Environmental Agreements, International relations, Green diplomacy) Climate change (emissions trading, European Climate Change Programme, Air emissions, Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the Community, Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases)

¹⁶³ Benelux Jaarplan 2010 & Gemeenschappelijk werkprogramma 2009-2012, Secretariaat-Generaal Benelux

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.Visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=941&articleID=3937&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>

¹⁶⁵ 2008 Environmental Policy Review, European Commission, DG Environment

Appendix 2: documents Visegrad Group

Documents used for the content analysis of the Visegrad Group	
1	Joint Statement – Sixth Meeting of Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group countries on co-operation in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation, Olomouc Czech Republic (August 30-31, 2001)
2	Joint Statement of the Tenth Meeting of Ministers of the Environment of Visegrad Group Countries, Cejkovice, Czech Republic (2-3 October 2003)
3	Joint Statement of the 11 th Meeting of Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group Countries, Siofok, Hungary (20-21 May 2004)
4	Joint Statement of the 13 th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries, 4-5 May 2006, Kosice, Slovakia
5	Joint Statement of the 14 th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries, 24-25 May 2007, Prague, Czech Republic
6	Joint Statement of the 15 th Meeting of Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group countries, Budapest, Hungary 18-19 September 2008
7	Joint Statement of the 16 th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group States, Cracow, Poland, 9-10 July 2009
8	Contents of Visegrad Cooperation approved by the Prime Ministers' Summit Bratislava on 14 th May 1999
9	Guidelines of the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation (Kromeriz, 12 May 2004)
10	Press release: the 16 th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries, July 10 th 2009, Cracow

Appendix 3: documents Benelux Union

Documents used for the content analysis of the Benelux Union	
1.	Decisions de la troisieme conference intergouvernementale Benelux tenue a Bruxelles les 20 et 21 octobre 1975 au Palais D'Egmont
2.	Decision du comite de ministres du 28 aout 1980 instituant une commission speciale pour l'environnement
3.	Convention Benelux en matiere de conservation de la nature et de protection des paysages – signee a Bruxelles le 8 juin 1982 avec expose des motifs commun
4.	The Treaty Revising The Treaty Establishing the Benelux Economic Union Signed on 3 February 1958 ¹⁶⁶
5.	Information brochure 'Benelux – active and timely' (September 2009)
6.	Common work program 2009-2012 ¹⁶⁷
7.	Annual plan 2010 ¹⁶⁸
8.	Benelux newsletter NL March 2010/1

¹⁶⁶ http://www.benelux.be/pdf/pdf_en/act/20080617_nieuwVerdrag_en.pdf, accessed: February 18th 2010

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ http://www.benelux.be/pdf/pdf_nl/sg/sg_JaarplanWerkprogramma2010.pdf, accessed: February 18th 2010

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- Benelux Yearplan 2010 and common workprogram (Jaarplan 2010 & Gemeenschappelijk werkprogramma) 2009-2012, Secretariaat-Generaal Benelux. All documents of Benelux Union come from: http://www.benelux.be/nl/home_intro.asp
- Benelux newsletter, NL, March 2010/1, Secretariaat-Generaal van de Benelux
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- Convention Benelux en matiere de conservation de la nature et de protection des paysages – signee a Bruxelles le 8 juin 1982 avec expose des motifs commun, Benelux Union
- Decisions de la troisieme conference intergouvernementale Benelux tenue a Bruxelles les 20 et 21 octobre 1975 au Palais D'Egmont, Benelux Union
- Decision du comite de ministres du 28 aout 1980 instituant une commission speciale pour l'environnement, Benelux Union
- Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union (2004)
- 2008 Environmental Policy Review, European Commission, DG Environment
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