

# **The Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with the importance of the Visegrad relations for the Czech foreign policy (FP). Relations between the Czech Republic (CZ) and the Visegrad countries take place at three main levels: bilateral, regional, and multilateral. These three levels of relations reciprocally interact and complement each other, moreover they form the Visegrad dimension of the CZ's FP. In this work, the Visegrad policy is examined from the perspective of the Czech interest in this policy. The research is based on the concept of national interest by Kratochvíl (2010). In parallel with the analysis which defines the Visegrad interest as the Czech national interest, this thesis also seeks to specify the content, structure, and the chronology of the changes of Czech interests regarding this policy. The presented analysis confirms that the topic of "Visegrad" is a long-discussed and advocated policy which has been continuously present throughout the entire existence of the independent Czech state. The Visegrad policy affects the process of transformation and integration of the CZ within the region and also in Europe. Moreover, this policy has the support of the Czech policy makers, it is acceptable for the Visegrad states and it is compatible with the national interests of other democratic partners in the European and Euro-Atlantic area. The Czech Visegrad policy corresponds to the Czech national interest, therefore, it is a part of the overall national interest which is the basis for the positionalization of the CZ in the international environment. The formation of the Czech national interest in the Visegrad dimension of the Czech foreign policy is a process that, based on the changes of the domestic and European environment, changes its intensity, content and structure. The analysis also demonstrates a link between the interest of the CZ in the Visegrad dimension of the Czech FP and the behaviour of the Czech Republic, both in the region but also in Europe. Therefore, the Czech Visegrad policy corresponds with the overall positionalization and integration of the CZ in the European environment as well as with the efforts of the CZ to play a role of an important political player in Central Europe.

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## List of Abbreviations

AMO	– Asociace pro Mezinárodní Otázky
AT	– Austria
CEFTA	– Central European Free Trade Agreement
CEI	– Central European Initiative
CFP	– Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy
ČSSD	– Czech Social Democratic Party
CZ	– Czech Republic
EaP	– Eastern Partnership
ENP	– Eastern Neighbourhood Policy
EU	– European Union
FP	– foreign policy
GER	– Germany
HU	– Hungary
IIR	– Institute of International Relations in Prague
IVF	– International Visegrad Fund
KDU-ČSL	– Christian and Democratic Union
KSČM	– Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
MFA	– Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	– North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODS	– Civic Democratic Party
PL	– Poland
SK	– Slovakia
Úsvit	– Dawn, the National Coalition
V4	– Visegrad Group

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Visegrad dimension (i. e. Visegrad policy) of the Czech Republic's foreign policy (FP) represents relations and joint activities of the Czech Republic (CZ) with its Visegrad neighbours: Slovakia (SK), Poland (PL), and also with the Czech "honorary neighbour"<sup>1</sup> Hungary (HU). The aim of this study is to understand the process of formation of the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy as well as to understand the reasons for the current Czech emphasis on this policy.

The Czech interest has for a quarter of a century been overcoming various fluctuations and turbulence of relations with the Visegrad neighbours. "In the mid-90s, the Czech society was a valedictorian of democratic consolidation and transatlantic integration. It was less interested in the cooperation in the region. However, today, the situation is different. At the level of political elites can be seen more interest in the Visegrad cooperation which is reflected in the public opinion" (ČTK 2016d; Gyárfášová & Mesežnikov 2016). Even an opinion survey from 2015 reported a growing interest in the Visegrad cooperation at the level of the Czech political elites (AMO.cz 2015). Moreover, the motto of the 2015/2016 Czech V4 presidency "V4 Trust" also proves the current interest of the Czech Republic in deepening of the Visegrad cooperation<sup>2</sup>. The current attention and the unusual media coverage of the Visegrad policy in the Czech Republic were the motivations for choosing this thesis topic in particular. This study is focused on the significance of the Visegrad relations for the Czech Republic from the perspective of the Czech interest in this policy.

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1 Although the Czech Republic and Hungary do not share a common border, they consider themselves to be "honorary neighbours" (MFA CZ 2016d; Drulák 2015).

2 This Presidency program (see MFA CZ 2015) does not contain any controversial geopolitical themes and emphasizes common interests and preferences.



The rest of this chapter, will firstly chronologically elaborate on Czech interest in the Visegrad policy from the historical perspective which should provide a sufficient background to the context of the thesis topic. The later part will present the research problem more in detail as well as the research question and the method of analysis. This chapter will be closed by a brief summary of overall findings which are presented in detail in chapter 6.

During the last 25 years, “Visegrad” has not been a widely covered topic within the Czech political discourse<sup>3</sup>. In the same fashion, the Czech scholarly discourse has focused little on the analysis of the Czech interest in Visegrad from a comprehensive perspective with an emphasis on dynamics, intensity and content of the relationships (see Chapter 2). The Visegrad policy is not the main topic of the Czech foreign policy, although the relations with the Visegrad neighbours as well as the Visegrad coalitional cooperation has accompanied the foreign activities of the Czech Republic throughout its existence, since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Given this, the topic of “Visegrad” shows its stability within the Czech Foreign Policy. Moreover, the current Czech discourse demonstrates this increasing interest in the policy which is also associated with its mediatisation.

The Czech interest in the Visegrad policy is deeply rooted in the history of Czech national self-identification in Europe. In the Czech discourse, the “idea of a grouping of smaller countries which are located between Germany and Russia is not new” (Musil & Kubičko 2001). Already in 1918, the 1<sup>st</sup> President of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, spoke about a democratically oriented Central European Federation. Furthermore, before the Central European states succumbed to the Soviet sphere of influence, the exiled Czech president Eduard Beneš was considering a Czechoslovak-Polish confederation (Měšťan 1996). Yet, the

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3 The awareness of the Czech public about the cooperation with the Visegrad countries has only increased in connection with the crisis in Ukraine (UA) as well as with the current migration crisis.

subsequent “socialist friendship” and the lack of mutual solidarity during the anti-communist protests (HU 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, PL 1981) were not the optimal beginnings for new and good neighbourhood. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, the cultural and social proximity was preserved by prominent groups of citizens or by dissidents (Musil & Kubičko 2001).

A quarter century ago, in a period that immediately followed the historical changes in post-socialist Europe, the Czech Republic found itself on the brink of a new era, with new challenges and objectives. It had to build its sovereign and independent foreign policy. This led to the revitalization of the Czech idealistic and to some extent even illusive idea of self-perception as a prominent member of the European community. This notion correlates with the Czech seeking of support in the Central European region and with Václav Havel’s vision of a “genuine friendship” among the Visegrad countries on their joint road to a dignified “return to Europe” (Havel 1990), which began with the establishment of the Visegrad Group (V4). This coalition is based on common goals as well as on historical and cultural proximity (Visegrad Group 1991), moreover it represented the first step towards new Visegrad relations.

After the initial period of idealized visions, the Czech Republic arrived to realization that the Western Europe is looking for itself and has its own problems (Pehe 2002). Moreover, the states within a broader Central Europe, among which the CZ belongs, expressed no interest to create a unified region (Klaus 2015b). The Visegrad states have often preferred national interest over common regional goals. In addition, they were competing for favour of the West. Thus, the Visegrad cooperation went through alternating periods of attenuation and revitalization (Diensbier 2001). However, V4 received a good reputation as a catalyst of integration processes in contrast to unstable Balkans, therefore it is perceived as a symbol of stability in Central Europe (MFA CZ 2016b).

Due to a successful transition and integration into NATO and the EU, the status of the Czech Republic and the other Visegrad countries has changed together with their increased

compatibility with other neighbours. The normalization of bilateral relations in the group and multilateralization of relations in Europe and Euro-Atlantic structures created conditions for intensification of bilateral ties with Germany and Austria (Handl 2010a, p.170). The Czechs, who consider themselves to be Euro-realists, welcomed the Euro integration as an opportunity to exert their influence on the multilateral level (MFA CZ 2013a). At the same time, they feared that “the Czech Republic would dissolve [in Europe] like a sugar cube in a cup of coffee” (Sebastian 2003). This new approach towards Czech Foreign Policy was reflected in the Visegrad policy. Furthermore, the Czech Republic sees the utilization of this coalitional framework also within the EU framework (Visegrad Group 2004a; Visegrad Group 2004b). This cooperation increases the intensity of contacts and extends into a number of sectoral and foreign policies<sup>4</sup>.

The cooperation is based on regular meetings with the Visegrad partners which create conditions for mutual trust (MFA CZ 2015e) and also are important for socialization of the Visegrad agenda (Kořan 2011b). However, a wide range of themes leads to the fact that the Group serves primarily as a consulting and information platform which inclines towards a general and declarative character of the Group (MFA CZ 2007a; MFA PL 2008; MFA HU 2009; MFA SK 2010). Vague positions are often the result of such cooperation (Robejšek 2001). Thus, the coalition has long been looking for its “raison d'être” (Kašan 2014).

Due to the above presented factors, the Czech membership in V4 cannot be justified through the fact that the Group would have homogenous interests (Vykoukal 2003, p.353), but rather through a political will for mutual dialogue, for seeking consensus and formulation of common positions, and promotion of joint projects focused on the internal as well as external

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4 Gradually, energy security, integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and NATO, the expansion of cooperation with the countries of Eastern Partnership (EaP), the field of defence etc. were established as subjects of discussion and collaboration. Contacts with third countries and other regional organizations (Benelux, the Nordic Council, the Baltic States) have also developed (Government CZ 2016a). Moreover, the importance of the only institutionalized part of V4 – the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) is also growing.

dimension of the Visegrad cooperation (Drulák 2015). However, different politico-economic interests that impede the coalition's potential exist among the Visegrad countries. Nevertheless, based on the “continuous political will”, the Visegrad cooperation is able to overcome “often conflicting interests”<sup>5</sup> (Kořan 2011b). These differences can also be traced in the interest for the Visegrad cooperation as such<sup>6</sup>. Despite all the fluctuations of the cooperation and differences between the Visegrad countries, it can be argued that these states need and support each other (Sobotka 2016). Symbiosis of competition and cooperation, the will to seek consensus, and the “ability to disagree” (Kořan 2011b) together with a specific institutional framework has created a unique integrational format. Therefore, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary have declared their interest in further strengthening of mutual relations (MFA CZ 2016c; MFA CZ 2014c), in looking for new areas and opportunities for cooperation (MFA CZ 2013b) and for ambitious long-term projects (Kořan 2011b; MFA CZ 2014b).

The European Union represents a general framework for the Czech Foreign Policy and it also constitutes a certain framework for the Visegrad relations. The claim that the Visegrad Group “has become a well-established brand and a respected partner” which “actively contributes to a strong Europe” (Visegrad Group 2011a) is partially demonstrable. In addition, behind some of the V4's achievements there is an observable effort of V4 to contribute to the

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5 In recent years, an increased tensions emerged between the Visegrad partners due to the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and also because of fundamental differences in the geopolitical perception of Russia (Palaščíková 2014; Dostál 2014; Ehl 2014).

6 For example, the Poland's priority is a close cooperation with important players and the Visegrad Group is only one of the means to achieve it. An example of efforts to establish good relations with strategic Polish partners was the joint summit of the V4 and the Weimar Triangle in Warsaw or a meeting of V4 with the Nordic and Baltic countries (Lucas 2013; Tuček 2013).

EU<sup>7</sup>. However, behind other successes stands “defence” cooperation with the EU or with other countries<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, this EU-V4 relationship is affected by the division between the “old” and “new” Member States (EurActiv.cz 2011b). The Czech Republic and the V4 countries refuse these “dividing lines in Europe” (MFA CZ 2016c), but the “US-THEM” dichotomy (Kratohvíl 2014) is still present in the discourse. The internal cohesion of the coalition which is based on the “differences between the European West and East” (Pehe 2016a) reinforces the marginalization of the Visegrad countries within the EU<sup>9</sup>. Due to the retreat of the Visegrad countries from the “standards and values of Western Europeanism”, the EU realizes that liberal democracy in the Western European understanding is not a “commonplace in former communist countries” (Pehe 2016a). Nevertheless, “V4 needs the European Union, just like the European Union needs the Visegrad countries” (MFA CZ 2016c).

For the last 25 years, the Visegrad cooperation has been an integral part of the Central European area and it represents an essential component of the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic’s foreign policy. This policy is accompanied by transformation and identification of the Czech Republic in the European area, thus it has an immediate impact on the Czech society and policy-making. The fact that neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries, in contrast

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7 For example, by a joint pressure on the EU Council in the creation of the EU financial framework 2007-2013, the Visegrad countries contributed to the increase of financial resources for the new Member States (Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj ČR 2012). During the creation of the EU’s financial framework 2014 - 2020, the V4 states were against the removal of the European Social Fund from the EU Cohesion Policy (Visegrad Group 2012). Other examples come from the field of security and defence. For example, the creation of a Czech-Polish-Slovak brigade (Světnička 2005), or the recently completed project of a collective security - the EU V4 Battlegroup (MFA SK 2015b; Paulech & Urbanovská 2014)

8 For example, the cooperation in the area of energy security which was created mainly in response to shutting of supply of strategic raw materials from Russia (Visegrad Group 2010); the cooperation for a faster entry into the Schengen Area (Lustigová 2006); a critical stance towards the Nord Stream (ČTK 2016e). Recently, the Visegrad group has united in a joint confrontational stance against the European solution to migration (Visegrad Group 2016b).

9 “The prevailing sense of self-doubt and mistrust in Europe makes it all the more important that Visegrad reaffirms its core purpose of embedding Central Europe firmly in EU’s normative and institutional construction” (MFA CZ 2016e, p.8).

to relations with other neighbours, grew into a stable coalitional framework demonstrates their unique potential.

This Visegrad cooperation is organized by an annual rotating Presidency of one of the V4 member states (Visegrad Group 2004b). Although the program of the Presidency has to be approved by all four member states, the actual V4 priorities are primarily determined by the presiding country (Kořan 2008, p.115). This means that the presiding country has an opportunity to create and lead the implementation of the Visegrad policy for one year. Since 2004, the Czech Republic has had this opportunity four times: in 2003/2004, 2007/2008, 2011/2012, and 2015/2016<sup>10</sup>. This possibility assumes a relevant in-depth preparation which is related to the position of the Visegrad cooperation within Czech FP. The Czech Republic appreciates this voluntary, equal, mutually beneficial partnership and flexible framework of V4.

This work has ambitions to contribute to the understanding of the importance of the Visegrad relations for the Czech Republic, and specifically from the perspective of the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy. Furthermore, it wants to examine whether the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's foreign policy is a Czech national interest, to define the content of this interest and to determine its place in the overall FP of the country. This thesis seeks to understand the circumstances due to which the CZ prefers the Visegrad relationships and strives for its revitalization, deepening and improvement. It is beneficial to observe the spirit of Visegrad and whether ideas which were in the early 1990s at the birth of the Group are still present. Moreover, the motivation for the choice of the topic is given by the relevance of this issue due to the new emphasis on Visegrad as the most important regional policy and the

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<sup>10</sup> During its latest Presidency (2015/2016), the Czech Republic backed down from controversial topics in its program and it focused primarily on the development of the Visegrad's "most precious resource - mutual trust" (MFA CZ 2015e). The CZ emphasized themes which unite the Visegrad partners and it aimed at releasing tension in the group due to different perceptions of Russia as a security threat.

efforts of the Czech Republic to improve internal coalition relations and enhance the Group's cohesion.

Therefore, in this work is looking for an answer to the main research question: **What is the significance of the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's FP in the context of the Czech national interests?**

To answer this research question, this work utilizes the analytical framework for the legitimacy of the national interest which was introduced by Petr Kratochvíl (2010c; 2010a). This concept has been previously applied successfully in the Czech discourse on various cases in several publications (Drulák & Střítecký 2010; Drulák & Horký 2010a; Drulák & Handl 2010; Drulák & Braun 2010), but not on the case of the Visegrad Dimension. Through the operationalization of this concept, this thesis wants to focus on previously unexplored topic as well as to show the contribution of the Czech scholarship to the research of international relations.

This concept assumes that the policy which can be considered as a national interest must be legitimate. In order to prove the legitimacy of national interest, the internal (i.e. the interest must be long-term and relevant to the country, and should be adopted throughout the national political discourse) and external legitimacy of the interest (i.e. the interest must be accepted by the external community) must be empirically confirmed. Due to the logic of this concept, the complex main research question was further divided into two sub questions which evaluate the internal and external legitimacy:

- 1) What is the Czech interest for the Visegrad policy, and does this interest have internal legitimacy?**
- 2) What is the external legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy?**

Answers to the above presented sub-research questions are searched in publicly available text documents published by the Czech government and political parties. In addition,

this work uses publicly available data published by the Visegrad Group as well as the recently released opinion research of the Visegrad policymakers.

Based on the analysis, it is possible to consider the Visegrad policy as the Czech national interest which has been continuously present throughout the entire existence of the independent Czech state. This policy is associated with the behaviour of the CZ, both in the region and in Europe. Furthermore, it is also related to the overall positionalization and integration of the Czech Republic in the European environment and, last but not least, it is related to the efforts of the Czech Republic to play a role of an important political actor in Central Europe. The current emphasis of the Czech Republic on the Visegrad policy and the findings of this thesis demonstrate that one can assume that there is an increase in the importance of this policy. Therefore, further research on the intensity and content of the Visegrad relations would be important for understanding the behaviour of the Czech Republic in Central Europe but also as part of the integration of the European community (for detailed presentation of findings see Chapter 6).

This work proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 presents the literature review focusing on the Visegrad policy within the Czech academic discourse. The first part of Chapter 3 introduces the above mentioned framework for the research of the national interest and the second part of the chapter applies it to the case of the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy. Research design, data sources as well as plan of the analysis are presented in Chapter 4. The following Chapter 5 is dedicated to the analysis which is divided into three parts due to the theoretical grounding presented in Chapter 3. Conclusion of this study is contained in Chapter 6.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Concerning the Visegrad cooperation, there is a plethora of extensive literature which focuses on this “regional alliance”(Dangerfield 2014), that is the most important (Kořan, 2012, p. 201) and successful (Nad’ et al. 2010, p.144) coalition in Central Europe, “even if criteria for measuring such success are absent” (Fawn, 2013b, p. 340). In the academic discourse, the cooperation of the Group is studied at different levels and from divergent perspectives, such as a regional forum in connection with the accession to the EU and NATO, the issue of structural funds’ adoption and assertion of interests at the EU level or relations with particular international actors (see Husz et al. 2005; Kazmierkiewicz et al. 2006; Weiss 2012; Fawn 2013a). Other scholars attempted, for instance, to determine which factors are necessary for regional cooperation (Drulák, 2002; Kořan, 2012), analysed whether V4 is a successful project or not (Fawn, 2013b), or focused on the state of V4’s internal cohesion (Marušiak 2013). The periods of decline and revitalization (Dangerfield, 2014; Fawn, 2013b; Kořan, 2012) which this coalition has experienced as well as broadening of its activities and problems with internal cohesion (Lucas, 2014; Nad’ et al., 2010, p. 146) had an influential impact on the amount of literature dedicated to this topic and its focus.

However, texts that focus on the Czech Republic’s relations and interests in the Visegrad dimension appear primarily as a small part of larger publications that attempt to offer a comprehensive view on the Czech politics in different contexts (see Handl 2004; Drulák & Střítecký 2010; Drulák & Braun 2010; Kořan 2014). Such publications acknowledge that the Visegrad policy has some importance for the Czech Republic, but they do not sufficiently elaborate it nor do they connect it to the national interest of the Czech Republic. These books dedicate more space to the bilateral relations of the Czech with its neighbours (primarily Germany), as well as relations with the EU and NATO. Therefore, I would argue that there is

a significant lack of publications which would comprehensively analyse the importance of the Visegrad policy for the Czech Republic and for its national interests.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the most relevant Czech literature focusing on the Visegrad Dimension in the context of the Czech national interests. Section 2.1 highlights the relevant publications from the Czech discourse which are dealing with the Visegrad policy in Czech international relations literature and the Czech national interest from an IR perspective. This section shows that the relevance of the Visegrad dimension of Czech foreign policy has not been systematically analysed. Section 2.2 presents publications that provide more advanced theoretical and methodological view on the concept of national interest and the Visegrad dimension as an aspect of (Czech) foreign policy.

## ***2.1 Visegrad Dimension in the Czech Foreign Policy research***

### **2.1.1 Early research on Czech FP and interests**

The early publications on the Czech Foreign Policy, dealt with the national interest after the breakup of Czechoslovakia, in which authors highlighted and evaluated changes brought by the demise of bipolarity in the international environment which allowed the small and medium states to promote their interest (Had & Valenta 1993, p.60). Publications offered recommendations for the future direction of foreign policy and of a search for national interests (see Krejčí 1993; Had & Valenta 1993; Valenta 1992). These early reflections<sup>11</sup> tended to lack not only theoretical coherence (Drulák 2010b, p.7), but also a discussion of the role of the Visegrad dimension for the Czech interests. The aim of these books was simply to start a discussion about the democratic ideals, national interests and their relationship to the foreign

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11 The Czech Republic has a long tradition of foreign policy research which dates back to the period of establishment of an independent state in 1993 (Kořan 2009b, p.13). However, in the Czech context, the research of international relations and foreign policy overlaps and leads to the fact that the analysis of foreign policy is actually a supplementary research for the authors who specialize in other more specific topics (Weiss et al. 2016, pp.84–85).

policy of the Czech Republic (see Valenta 1992, p.220) and not to focus on individual policy relations. Interestingly, these publications pointed out the importance of the historical past which can influence foreign relations (Had & Valenta 1993, p.54), highlighted the overall importance of bilateral and multilateral relation for the Czech interests (Had & Valenta 1993, pp.57–59), and they also provided comprehensive discussion of the possible future Czech interests <sup>12</sup>. Influence of these books is observable in later publications, which focused on the analysis of Czech interest (e.g. Krpec, 2009), or for instance in the conceptual framework which this thesis is operationalising (see Kratochvíl 2010c).

According to Had & Valenta (1993, p.54), the formulation of the national interest “must necessarily take into account the needs of the own country, but also the needs of other countries and the wider international community” (cf. Krpec 2009, p.103). National interests have been identified as a social category which is a subject to constant evolution and requires new definitions (see Had & Valenta 1993, p.54; Valenta 1992, pp.12–14). These interests are often redefined in discussions, “which have an essential importance because they contribute to national consciousness and consensus”<sup>13</sup> (Had & Valenta 1993, p.54).

### **2.1.2 Czech FP and interests after the entry to the EU and NATO**

The process of integration into the EU and NATO led to the creation of publications that dealt not only with the place and the interests of the Czech Republic in these international organizations, but also with the evaluation of the existing developments of the Czech regional and international politics. However, these publications were not theoretically or

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<sup>12</sup> Attempts to define national interest at that time were uncommon, thus it is possible to call these pioneer works as unique (Zbrožil 1992, p.81).

<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that the objectives of the Czech Foreign Policy (e.g. entry into the European Union and NATO, development of good neighbourly relations and the promotion of peace initiatives to ensure European security) were clearly defined, the question of their practical applicability and potential foreign policy alternatives in solving problems was problematic (see Kotyk 1995; Kotyk 2000; Kunštát 2015).

methodologically grounded and had primarily a form of a “critical thinking” without particular theoretical or methodological grounding.

According to Pick & Handl (2004), the main objective and interest of the Czech foreign policy, in this transformational period, was to join NATO and the EU, as well as the development of good relations with neighbours and other major partners. Authors argue that the Czech Republic has been successful in these areas (Handl & Pick 2005, p.1). Long-term interest in a fully-fledged regional ties have “neutralized [historical] burden in the Czech-German and Czech-Austrian relations”<sup>14</sup> (Handl & Pick 2005, pp.3–4). Furthermore, authors highlight that this Czech emphasis on multilateral regional policy did not represent an alternative to the integration into the European Union and NATO (Pick & Handl 2004, pp.57–58).

In the topic of the Central European cooperation, this prominent<sup>15</sup> publication omits the Czech interests in the Visegrad Dimension and focuses primary on the Czech bilateral relations with “the greatest and most influential direct neighbour” (Pick & Handl 2004, p.1) – Germany, and also on relations with Austria and Slovakia. Poland did not receive a separate chapter as the previously mentioned Czech regional partners, and the bilateral relationship with Hungary received even less attention. In addition, authors highlight the asymmetry of relations within the Central European cooperation as well as the existence of historical tensions (e.g. relations with Germany). Despite providing critical view on achievements, issues and perspectives of the Czech foreign policy between the years 1993-2004, this publication does not provide complex

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<sup>14</sup> Authors claimed that this development of the Czech foreign policy signified a shift from “sceptical realism” (see Zahradil et al. 2001), which considered the relationship with its neighbours as one of its priority, but at the same time was sceptical towards multilateral projects while following the goal of the “return to Europe” which was seen as part of the national interests.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike the previously presented early publications, this was the first comprehensive book evaluating the foreign policy of the newly formed Czech Republic (Weiss et al. 2016, p.85).

view on the Czech interests within the Visegrad Dimension and places emphasis on bilateral relations with several neighbours.

The same neglecting of the Visegrad policy can be observable for instance in the book by Kořan (2010) which focused on the Czech Foreign Policy in the light of the social science research. The individual chapters have a character of critical commentaries with occasional use of theory. The authors of this book omitted the complexity of the Visegrad Dimension and focused only on the Czech bilateral relations with Austria and Germany which have asymmetric and problematic nature.

Whether the Central European states have common geopolitical priorities that would unify them was analysed by Vít Beneš (2012), who based his analysis on the number of presidential visits which according to him reflected the geopolitical orientation of states. All five countries (CZ, SK, HU, PL, AU) showed orientation towards Western Europe, especially towards Germany. His analysis also showed that the Czech Republic is characterized by a strong preference for transatlantic partnership. Furthermore, Beneš found that Hungary is somewhat isolated in this collaboration and that it is not a favoured destination of presidential visits (Beneš 2012, p.21). However, his analysis did not show what the significance of the Visegrad dimension for the Czech interests might be.

In the recently published book, Petr Fiala (2015) critically discussed the status and priorities of the Czech foreign policy in the context of the growing threat of Islamic terrorism and the prolonged conflict in Ukraine. Fiala argued that a closer central European integration is in the interest of the Czech Republic. According to him, friendly relations with neighbouring countries are important for the stability of the region as well as create an opportunity to promote joint interests within the framework of the EU (Fiala 2015, p.135). However, he deals with the “Central-European policy” only briefly, and does not specify or give more attention to the Visegrad policy and the Czech FP interests in it. Fiala gives more attention to the EU and

NATO. Interestingly, he argues that there is a low public interest in the Czech foreign policy (Fiala 2015, p.67) and in the European policy (Fiala 2015, p.99). The same phenomena was reported for instance by Kunštát (2015, p.169) or by Drulák (2012, p.7), who moreover argued that the current Czech politics is in a deep crisis because after joining the EU and the completion of its return to Europe, the Czech Republic is no longer able to find, formulate, and to conduct any societal, public, long-term goal. This theme of crisis in Czech politics, and fragmented ineffective FP is also observable in previously introduced publications.

In short, more recent literature on the Czech foreign policy also fails, like its earlier precursors, to deal with the Visegrad policy as an integral part of CZ FP in a serious, theoretically informed fashion.

### **2.1.3 Comprehensive and long term evaluation of the Czech FP**

In addition to individual publications, several extensive series which continuously engaged with the Czech foreign policy in the Czech discourse were also published. A detailed description of the Czech FP and its interest areas have been written in a form of extensive reports by the Czech Foreign Ministry (MFA) in cooperation with the publishing sector of the Institute of International Relations in Prague (IIR). These reports<sup>16</sup> have thoroughly presented multilateral cooperation and bilateral relations of the Czech Republic, the situation of the Czech citizens abroad and provided a detailed description of the situation from the vantage point of the Czech Foreign Ministry.

In these 400-600 pages publications, only two pages are dedicated to the Visegrad cooperation which is described as “the most important format for regional cooperation in Central Europe” (MFA CZ 2010, p.118; MFA CZ 2011c, p.81). The Visegrad dimension and

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<sup>16</sup> See MFA CZ 2000a; MFA CZ 2001; MFA CZ 2002; MFA CZ 2003c; MFA CZ 2004a; MFA CZ 2005; MFA CZ 2006; MFA CZ 2007b; MFA CZ 2009c; MFA CZ 2010; MFA CZ 2011c; MFA CZ 2012d

the regional cooperation in general receives minimal attention in contrast to parts discussing activities of the Czech Republic in the EU or in NATO. In every document, there is a repeated generic paragraph which is describing what V4 is and the rest of the text is listing the content of ongoing Visegrad presidency as well as the list of the V4 meetings. These publications were not comprehensive academic analyses but mostly dense summaries of data without a further comprehensive analysis and interpretation.

Since 2007 the IIR, as the key workplace for the Czech foreign policy research (Weiss et al. 2016, p.85), continuously analyses the foreign policy of the Czech Republic and has published monographs<sup>17</sup> which followed a single analytical framework. In each of the publications two chapters are dedicated to Central European dimension of the Czech foreign policy, respectively to the relations towards Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, and also towards the Visegrad cooperation in general. The relationship between the Czech Republic and Hungary appears in the texts, but it does not receive equal amount of attention as the Czech relations with the other Central European partners. The chapters dedicated to the Visegrad Policy assessed in detail the political context, agenda and events. For instance, in 2012, the authors argue that the Central-European partnership is one of the most important FP partnerships for the Czech Republic. Unlike the above mentioned publications by the CZ MFA, these publications included not only summary of agenda and political context of the Visegrad policy but also attempted to critically reflect on them. However, these texts did not have a character of analysis but represented critical reflections resembling the previously mentioned publication by Pick & Handl (2004).

In addition to publishing series from the IIR, the think-tank Association for International Affairs (AMO) publishes annual evaluations of the Czech FP since 2006. In comparison with

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<sup>17</sup> See Kořan 2008; Kořan 2009a; Kořan 2010; Kořan 2011; Kořan & Ditrych 2012; Kořan & Ditrych 2013

the descriptive texts of the Foreign Ministry and partial analyses by the IIR, evaluations published by AMO represent only critical commentary (i. e. “annual audit”) without an attempt for a deeper analysis. These publications contain recommendations for the upcoming year and also an audit of implementations from the previous year. A separate chapter is devoted to the Visegrad cooperation as well as to the key bilateral relations. For example, in 2016 the Visegrad cooperation has been identified as the main format for the Czech Central European politics, although the coalition has been criticized for its inability to find a common position which is damaging its international reputation. Thus, the Visegrad cooperation was rated as “3+” (Dostál 2016, p.35).

To conclude, these comprehensive and long term evaluations of the Czech FP, did not focus comprehensively on the Visegrad dimension of the Czech FP, but they primarily presented a list of facts with a critical commentary which again lacked theoretical and methodological grounding.

## ***2.2 Czech interest and non-interest***

The above presented publications partially reflected on the national interests and foreign policy of the Czech Republic without a greater reflection on the concept of national interest and its constitution. National interest basically served as a buzzword. Therefore, it is appropriate to briefly mention the literature which in the Czech context, has besides the application of the Czech interests, also concentrated on the theoretical demarcation of the national interest itself.

Oldřich Krpec (2009) dealt with the problematic of constituting national interest in a democratic political system on the example of the Czech Republic. The author did not seek his own definition of national interest nor the assessment of different approaches to the definition, but he tried to sketch a model of national interest with a solid explanatory potential (Krpec 2009, p.67). In addition to the extensive theoretical part dealing with the approach to national



interests as a sum of “the preferences and goals of the nation” (Krpec 2009, p.16) from various theories of international relations, Krpec presented an extensive empirical part which highlights the continuity of the Czech FP (Krpec 2009, p.114). Moreover, the author argued that the constituting of the Czech foreign policy “is significantly modified by the Czech’s involvement in supranational integration framework and its particular character” (Krpec 2009, p.183). Nevertheless, the interests of the EU are presented in the Czech discourse as “foreign” interests. At the same time, Krpec (2009) pointed out the non-confrontational style of the Czech political elite, which may result in a less controversial foreign policy in which national interests play a smaller role. The Visegrad policy and the V4 itself is only briefly mentioned as an element which contributed to the development of the neighbourly relations (Krpec 2009, p.118). The author discusses the overall Czech interests and their development in detail, analyses how they were created and continuously shaped, but does focus on the Visegrad dimension at all.

Significant contribution to the research of national interest within the Czech context was made by Petr Kratochvíl (Kratochvíl 2010c). He argued that it is impossible to permanently define the substance of the national interest, but it is possible to examine it on the principle of internal and external legitimization (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.25). In the context of V4, this approach was used by Michal Kořan (2010b), who focused on the socialization within the Visegrad Group and its impact on Czech interests. Kořan argued that the V4 cooperation was developing despite the lack of joint interests and goals, thus is not possible to explain the Czech approach towards other V4 members via application of purely rationalistic perspective and concepts (Kořan 2010b, p.174). Moreover, he argued that the V4 cooperation does not reform politically created national interest but it impacts the way how the Czech Republic promotes those interests (Kořan 2010b, p.197).

In general, Kratochvíl’s approach to examining legitimacy of national interest has been successfully adopted and implemented in narrowly focused stand-alone articles (Tichý &

Binhack 2012) and it was also applied to various topics in several successive larger publications<sup>18</sup>. These books identified the Czech Republic's national interest, such as; the promotion of human rights, the support of the EU enlargement in general, or for instance the Czech policy towards its neighbourhood countries Slovakia and Austria. Interestingly, authors did not attempt to apply this framework on the whole Visegrad dimension.

Conceptualization by Kratochvíl presents a useful framework for the research of the national interest which was previously missing in the Czech discourse. Authors applied it on various cases and through multiple methods, however, they did not apply it on the case of the Visegrad policy in the relation to the Czech national interest. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this gap and provides a new application of this framework.

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<sup>18</sup> See Drulák & Střítecký 2010; Drulák & Horký 2010a; Drulák & Handl 2010; Drulák & Braun 2010

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This work sees reality as not constant and objectively given experience, but as an inter-subjective social construct emerging in a particular human community (Risse 2004, p.145; Wendt 1992; Klotz & Lynch 2007, p.7). This, in the form of policy discourse, contributes to the construction of social identity and subjective position in relation to social entities (Fairclough 1993, p.64; Milliken 1999, pp.229–230; Hynek & Střítecký 2010, p.85), including for instance ideas about foreign interest or fora for international cooperation (Klotz & Lynch 2007, p.24). Epistemologically, instead of explanation, this understanding provides an interpretation that strives for “internal insight into the functioning of social structures and reveals the hidden mechanisms of communication mechanisms” (Bílková & Matějková 2010, p.128).

Discourses and interpretation in this conception are not mere instruments for observing the interests of actors, but they are an essential element for the definition of their identity from which their interests and method of observation proceed (Drulák & Kratochvíl 2009, p.126). The identity of an actor and internal normative characteristics may vary and this also changes the actor’s own interests and behaviour (Wendt 1987, p.369). “Foreign policy is what states make of it” (Smith 2001, p.38). Therefore, this work perceives foreign policy as the result of a social process which is influenced by “perceptions of internal and external conditions in the context of historical experiences and ideas about the role the state has to play in this historic moment” (Handl 2010b, p.129). This work does not search for a causal mechanism, but focuses on the explanation of the internal functioning of social structures in their specific socio-historical anchoring (Bílková & Matějková 2010, p.125).

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis. Section 3.1 presents a brief theoretical overview of the concept of the national interest by Petr Kratochvíl which is

operationalized in this thesis to answer the research questions (see Chapter 4). In section 3.2 this concept is applied to the case of the Czech interests in the Visegrad dimension.

### **3.1 Conceptualization of national interests by Kratochvíl**

Based on a systematic study of national interest, Petr Kratochvíl (2010c; 2010a; 2010b) rejects the previously presented approaches to the study of national interest, but at the same time he builds on the (constructivist) attempts to find criteria of public interest which focus on whether a particular policy is of national interest or not (Drulák 2010b, p.13). According to Kratochvíl, it is impossible to permanently define the substance of national interest, but it is possible to examine it on the principle of internal and external legitimization (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.25; Kratochvíl 2010b, p.28). The author rearranged the concept of national interest by linking theoretical and practical discourse of national interest in order to make this concept a useful tool for research (Hynek & Střítecký 2010, p.22). This clearly defined concept is not tied to any particular narrow theoretical or normative position, which is usually the case with the concept (Drulák & Horký 2010b, p.190).

Kratochvíl (2010c) grounds his conceptualization on the idea that legitimacy is crucial for defining national interest. This legitimacy is conditioned by three procedural criteria: *Relevance*, *Consensus*, and *External Acceptability* (Kratochvíl 2010b, p.28). These criteria “reflect concerns that are voiced by a variety of scholars and traditions” in the field of International Relations (Drulák 2010a, p.14). The first and second criterion belong to the “internal legitimacy” of the national interest, while the third criterion is the “external legitimacy”. These criteria have their theoretical foundation especially in liberalism, but also in classical realism and constructivism. Nevertheless, the final content of the interest is not shifted in one or another theoretical direction, but the criteria are content-neutral (Drulák 2010b, p.13).

“In other words, Czech national interest cannot be associated with a foreign policy issue which is not taken seriously by the Czech society, which does not enjoy a broad support at home, or which is not accepted by key partners of the Czech Republic in the EU or sometimes by the actors at which the policy is aimed” (Drulák 2010a, p.14).

For the analysis of internal legitimacy (relevance, and consensus criterion), Kratochvíl was inspired by debates in democratic theory which dealt with the question of “whether it is possible to delimit the researched phenomenon (i.e. democracy) through procedures that must be met in order for a political action to be considered as democratic” (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.25). In relation to the third criterion which deals with external legitimacy, the author proceeds from the theory of international relations, where the various authors have created sophisticated models of external acceptability of foreign policy, but did not connect them to its internal dimension (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.28).

On the one hand, Kratochvíl admits that this framework has possible limitations, on the other, he argues that these conditions can be even possibly “applied to political activities of transnational/supranational groupings, such as the European Union” (Kratochvíl 2010b, p.33).

### **3.1.1 The Criterion of Relevance**

The first condition for national interest to be considered legitimate is the criterion of relevance which is based on the premise that the national or public interest is constituted by policies that: a) significantly influence the (internal, external) functioning of the community b) substantially change its essential characteristics, c) leads to the creation of new rights and obligations for the community (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.26; Kratochvíl 2010b, p.28).

Empirically, the criterion of relevance “can be ascertained by asking whether the topic has been present in the community for a long time (at least several months, ideally several years)” or whether the central authorities across the spectrum regardless of their political orientation and composition deal with this policy (Kratochvíl 2010b, p.29). Furthermore, the author suggest that the criterion can be confirmed through examining of the programme

declarations of the central institutions, the public opinion surveys as well as the speeches of the top leaders. In addition, Kratochvíl highlights the possible importance of a long-term presence of this issue in the social and media discourse (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.26).

### **3.1.2 The Criterion of Consensus**

The second criterion for a policy to be considered part of a national interest is consensus which means that “a socially relevant question that has become part of public deliberation, will lead to a such change of deliberate attitudes that gradually a political consensus of parties about the solution of the question will crystallize” (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.26). This is virtually the creation of the majority standpoint. However, an absolute agreement within the society is not necessary because that is hard to imagine in terms of a democratic society (Bílková & Matějková 2010, p.132).

Kratochvíl (2010a) claims that in examining whether an agreement was reached or not it is important to distinguish between: a) the objectives of a concrete policy, b) a general strategy which will be used to achieve the goal, c) the specific tactical steps (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.27). It is possible that there will be a consensus regarding the basic objective, but a consensus will be missing in regards to the means via which to achieve this goal. Therefore, the aim of this empirical research is to determine “the borderline” (Kratochvíl 2010b, p.29) between areas where consensus is and the areas where it is not possible to find it (Kratochvíl 2010a, pp.26–27).

### **3.1.3 The Criterion of Acceptability**

Apart from the above presented two criteria, which deal with the assessment of the internal legitimacy of policies, there is also an external criterion of acceptability which “connects the domestic legitimacy with its external analogies” (Kratochvíl 2010a, pp.28–29).

The politics, which the country wants to perform on the basis of domestic consensus must be also authorized by other states and that means that it cannot be a policy which would directly harm the interests of other actors (Kratochvíl 2010b, pp.30–31). In this case, the question arises; what is considered to be an international community. Kratochvíl states that it is best to examine this issue in the framework of the community of democracies (Kratochvíl 2010a, p.28). Here a reference group is crucial for the research of the external acceptability in the case of the Czech Republic, as a fully adequate European Union's member country (Hynek & Štrítecký 2010, p.25).

### 3.2 Application of Kratochvíl's framework (see Figure 1)

In this work, the above presented concept of national interest is used as an analytical framework for analysing the Visegrad dimension of Czech foreign policy. According to this concept, the bellow presented scheme is divided into two parts: internal and external legitimacy

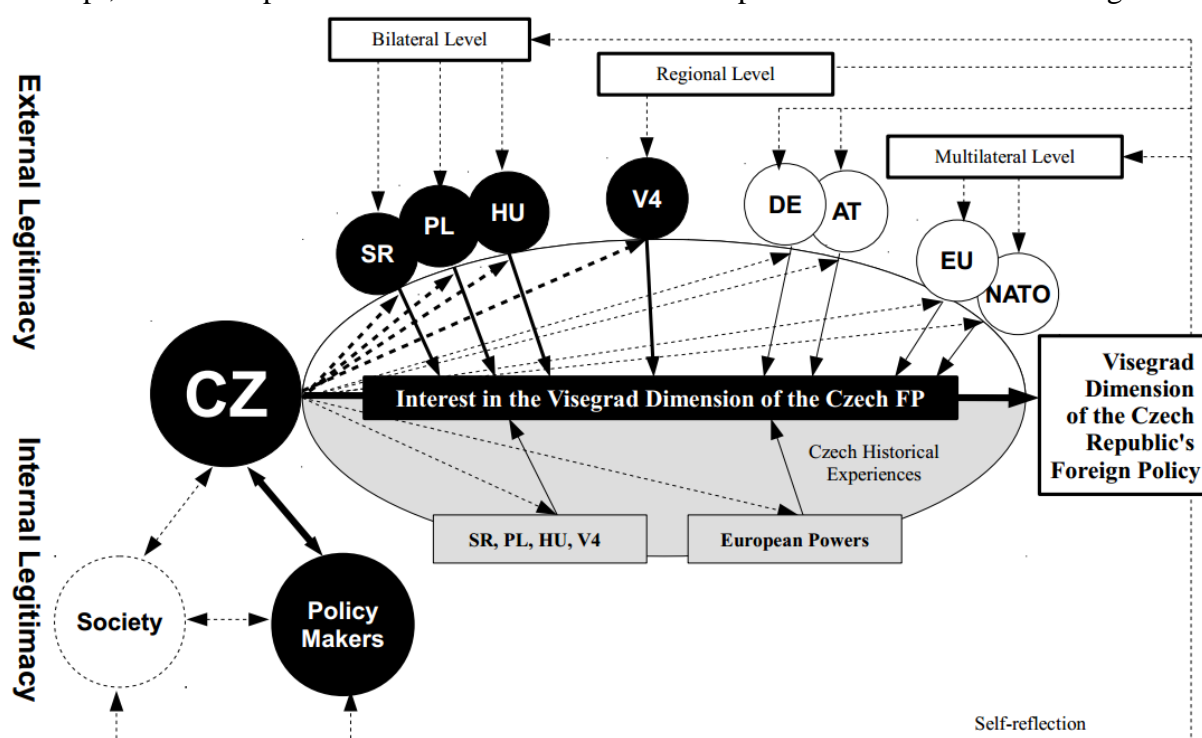


Figure 1 Application of Kratochvíl's conceptualization (author)

of the national interest. The work focuses on the question, whether the Visegrad dimension as

a part of Czech foreign policy, reflects the national interest of the Czech Republic. The expression of interest is represented by a concrete Foreign Policy as well as by concrete international activity. The Czech interest in the Visegrad dimension is carried out through the creation of network of relationships with the Visegrad states and also through the actual Czech Republic's V4 membership.

The process of creation and legitimization of the interest takes place at the internal and external level. A specific policy, which is important for the community, is due to a long-term discourse being formed at the internal level (Kratochvíl 2010a). Officially, the state supports the creation and presentation of such policies. Moreover, its formation is also affected by individual subjects - political representation and the public (Krpec 2009, pp.85–93). This long-term and significant policy can gradually receive a consensual support from the entire spectrum of policymakers, regardless of their political affiliation and functions. Politicians or interest groups that support the policy (or reject it), seek for their stance a broader support from the public (Cisár & Fiala 2004, p.197). In this way, a widely supported policy which is important for the society and the state is being formed. According to the concept of national interest, such policy can be regarded as an internal legitimate interest.

The internally legitimate interest as a Foreign Policy (and to also reflect the behaviour of the Czech Republic in the international environment) must be acceptable for the Czech Republic's foreign partners. This means that the Czech interest must be compatible with the national interests of other states. In other words, the implementation of the specific Czech Republic's Foreign Policy must acquire an external legitimacy (Kratochvíl 2010a). According to the above presented scheme, the process of implementation of the Czech Visegrad policy must be acceptable especially for the Visegrad neighbours. Nevertheless, this policy must be also acceptable for other countries (EU Member States and NATO). According to the concept of national interest, the most suitable solution is to analyse the external acceptability only within



the community of democratic countries. This limitation is sufficient for practical reasons of the analysis of the Czech Foreign Policy (Kratochvíl 2010a). Based on their own interest preferences, all reference groups reflect on the Czech interest and react to its implementation.

The Czech interest is shaped in the process of internal legitimation and as a result of self-reflection. The expectations of foreign partners are important factors for this process. In the case of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation this first and foremost refers to the Visegrad neighbours - Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. Apart from the reciprocal interests of the Visegrad States, the Western neighbours of the Czech Republic – Germany and Austria – are also important for the implementation of the Czech Visegrad policy. These states are influential economic and political players of the regional and European policy. Since 2004, the Visegrad countries are members of the EU and NATO. These major European integration structures create a framework of the Czech Foreign Policy (MFA CZ 2015a). Therefore, reflections of the EU and NATO expectations are crucial for shaping of the Czech Foreign Policy. The development of the Czech Visegrad policy connects the domestic and Central-European environment. It also affects the search for coherence of national policies with the international obligations of the Czech Republic (MFA CZ 2015a, p.2). In addition to the reflection on the current expectations of foreign partners, the historical experiences of the Czech Republic also influence the formation of the Czech interests:

“Historical experiences which do not ‘dissolve’ easily, are prone to reproduce historical patterns of cooperation and conflict and thus may lead to ‘historical animosities’ become self-fulfilling prophecies in current policy making. Historical experience can be a powerful explanatory tool for the policies of the European Union aimed at the member states” (Beneš & Harnisch 2015, pp.146–147).

The process of legitimation of the interest presupposes also some modelling and corrections. Self-reflection of the Czech Republic on the success of its own Visegrad policy and a reflection on the prescriptions of its Foreign Policy partners may cause a change in the Czech Republic’s behaviour. This entire dynamic process of creation of interest is aimed at

internal and external legitimization of the Czech interests in the Visegrad cooperation. It is in fact a filter of interests, after which only legitimate national interests remain in the long-term.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design, sources of data and the method used to analyse these data. In section 4.1 design of the study is presented. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 focus in detail on the data sources and analysis.

### **4.1 Research Design**

The main research question of this thesis is: **What is the significance of the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's FP in the context of the Czech national interests?** To answer this question, the thesis operationalizes conceptualization of national interest by Kratochvíl (see Chapter 3). This conceptualization was selected because it was successfully used in several publications dealing with the Czech national interest and has proved itself as a valuable approach (see Section 2.2). Due to the logic of this concept (see Section 3.1), the main research question was further divided into two sub questions which evaluate the internal and external legitimacy of the Czech interest (see Section 3.2): **1) What is the Czech interest for the Visegrad policy, and does this interest have internal legitimacy? 2) What is the external legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy?**

The thesis has a mixed research design; it contains qualitative thematic analysis as well as it incorporates some quantitative aspects. To answer the first sub question, which represents the first and the second criterion (internal legitimacy) of the Kratochvíl's concept (see Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), the thematic analysis of text documents was used. Thematic analysis itself is a "poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.77). This method it used for identifying, analysing and reporting themes (patterns) within data (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.79). The method itself was used due to the character of the researched documents (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) as well due to the used

concept of Kratochvíl. The second sub question which represents the third criterion (external legitimacy) of Kratochvíl (see Section 3.1.3) is answered through the interpretation of a publicly available and recently published survey (see Section 4.2.3.1) and through frequencies of meetings between V4 and their foreign partners (see Section 4.2.3.2 and Appendix G). When some part of the analysis is unclear, the explanation is further sought in additional documents.

The overall logic of the research and its visualisation is presented in the **Appendix A**.

## **4.2 Data Sources**

According to Kratochvíl, each of the researched criteria of legitimacy requires different empirical data (see Section 3.1). Therefore, the selection of below presented data is driven by the theoretical framework.

### **4.2.1 The Criterion of Relevance**

The criterion of relevance presupposes that the policy is important for the Czech policy community. Kratochvíl (2010a; 2010c) considers as sufficient to empirically prove that the policy has long been present in the primary governmental documents, independent of changes in the composition or the political orientation of the central authorities. The Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation is a part of the Czech FP, therefore, the appropriate data source for analysing the criterion of relevance would be the Concepts of the Czech's FP.

Concepts of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy (CFPs) are the official and primary documents that are prepared by the government in cooperation with the office of the President and the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The Czech security community, including representatives of state and non-state sectors, also take part in the creation of these documents. The CFP is a framework for the foreign policy activity of the state, which promotes its interests in a specific international setting (CFP, 1999, pp. 2–3). Each of the CFPs builds on the previous

document. CFPs are based on the programme declaration of the government, from the audit of foreign policy carried out by the Czech MFA, moreover the documents themselves reflect on changes in the international environment (CFP, 2015, p. 1).

The Concept reflects the real possibilities of the Czech Republic in the international environment and seeks the balance between state resources and its ambitions (CFP, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, it forms the ground for the realization of FP in the long run. CFPs are pursued in a medium and short-term horizon through other governmental documents<sup>19</sup> (sub-ministerial or governmental concepts or strategies).

Since the establishment of the independent Czech Republic, five Concepts of Foreign Policy were created: 1993, 1999, 2003, 2011, and 2015. The first CFP (1993) is in form of a speech of the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs in front of the Chamber of Deputies. Other CFPs are documents of varying size - from 18 to 33 pages. CFPs were prepared by governments of different political character<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the entire political spectrum contributes to the creation of these Concepts. A detailed description of Concepts is presented in the **Appendix B**.

#### 4.2.2 The Criterion of Consensus

According to the concept of national interest, the relevant interest must be also consensual. This means that the long-term discussed and enforced policy gradually receives consensual support of the entire spectrum of policy makers, regardless of their political affiliation and function. According to Kratochvíl, the goal of an empirical research for this criterion is to determine on what degree of generality there is a consensus and where the consensus cannot be found anymore (Kratochvil, 2010: 26-27). In order to define a relevant

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<sup>19</sup> Among other documents for the realization of the Czech FP are for instance: the Policy Conception of the Czech Republic in the EU, the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic, the Export Strategy of the Czech Republic and others (CFP, 2015, pp. 17–18).

<sup>20</sup> From the right-wing and the centre-right government of Václav Klaus (1992-1996) and Petr Nečas (2010-2013) to the social-democratic government of Miloš Zeman (1998-2002) and the centre-left coalitions of Vladimír Špidla (2002-2004) and Bohuslav Sobotka (2014-).

source for empirical analysis, it is necessary to specify the reference group which influences the Czech and the Visegrad policy.

#### **4.2.2.1 Reference Groups**

Officially, the state is responsible for the creation and presentation of its FP interest. The formation of these interests is also influenced by individual actors - political representation and the public. During the formation of the FP interest, the political representation proceeds from geopolitical positions, its historical traditions, and also from the electoral logic. Thus, politicians usually do not advocate issues which could harm them in the elections <sup>21</sup>.

Various interest and social groups present their interest as the national interest and seek for a wider public support (Císař & Fiala 2004, p.197). They usually present their interest as the interest of the public. An important feature of the Czech politics, is that the public is minimally involved in the foreign policy issues (see Fiala 2015). Voters are primarily oriented towards the domestic political issues or controversial foreign topics which can directly affect them. Most of the Czech population is satisfied with their Foreign Policy and in principle agrees with its orientation and approves of it (Krpec 2009, pp.131–149).

In the case of the Czech Visegrad Policy, the reference group is identical with the group of relevant FP actors - the Czech political elite. This decision is based on two reasons: the Visegrad project is primarily a political and intergovernmental project (Visegrad Group 2004b; MFA CZ 2016e), moreover there was no controversial debate about the Visegrad relations within the Czech public discourse. Because of the previously mentioned logic, and also because of the time and a content demarcation of this work, the interest defined by the Czech elites will

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21 In the case that political representation, is for example, under the pressure from various interest groups, and advocates a controversial topic, it must reckon with the public response and the risk of losing voters (Krpec 2009, pp.85–93).

be considered as a general interest of the Czech Republic. Therefore, the public interest will not be reflected on.

In the Czech Republic, the executive power is divided between the President and the Government which can cause conflicts in certain topics. However, the role of the President can be considered as symbolic in a situation where the Head of the State and the government share the perspective towards the foreign policy. Therefore, it is important to define the opinion of the President and the government. The criterion of consensus in the area of the Czech interest towards the Visegrad policy is studied at the level of articulated interest of 3 reference groups. A detailed description of the individual reference groups is in the **Appendix C**:

- 1) the government;
- 2) political parties;
- 3) the President.

Therefore, the data body is composed of three groups of relevant documents:

- 1) The policy statements of the government of the Czech Republic, and coalition agreements;
- 2) parliamentary election programs of political parties;
- 3) declarations of the President.

#### **4.2.2.2 Data Body**

The first data body is represented by 13 governmental policy statements and 6 coalitional agreements (see the **Appendix D**). “The Policy Statement of the Government of the Czech Republic” is the basic political document which contains political vision and tasks of the government. The newly appointed government presents this document to the Chamber of Deputies with a request for a vote of confidence. These Policy Statements serve as the basis for other detailed documents. The Czech government has usually a coalitional character, thus it is

composed of 3 or 4 political parties. The coalition agreement defines the conditions and objectives of a long-term cooperation. In the coalition governments all relevant parliamentary parties were represented based on the number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (see the **Appendix E**). KSČM is an exception, because the other political partners have pledged to not create a coalition with this party (Pehe 2012).

The second data body is represented by the electoral programs of seven parliamentary parties (see the **Appendix F**). The sample of political parties was selected based on the results of the last 2013 elections to the Chamber of Deputies. The parties in the sample have influenced the political life of the Czech Republic for several years (see the **Appendix E**). Due to this and the overall scope of the research, it is considered as sufficient to focus primarily on parties from the last 2013 elections which still exist and influence the current approach towards the Visegrad policy. In the Appendix E, the political parties are sorted according to the political orientation from left to right, i. e. from the communist party KSČM (successfully preserved heritage from the past) to a pre-election established radical party ÚSVIT. In general, the electoral programs of political parties put more emphasis on domestic issues. Unlike other parties, the party ÚSVIT presented a 10-point program without a foreign policy part. Other parties refer to the FP, including neighbourly relations, regional cooperation and the Visegrad cooperation.

The third data body represents the speeches and articles of three Czech Presidents (see the **Appendix G**). The documents were selected based on their coverage of the topic of the Visegrad cooperation. These documents are freely available on the official websites of V. Havel, V. Klaus and M. Zeman or on the website of the MFA. The selected documents characterize the evolution of attitudes of the Presidents towards the Visegrad cooperation. Havel was a signatory of the Visegrad Group, while Klaus and Zeman have influenced the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic also as representatives of the main political parties, as heads of the government, and as Chairmen of the Chamber of Deputies. All the mentioned



Presidents are influential personalities which evoke admiration or indignation within the society.

### **4.2.3 The Criterion of Acceptability**

According to Kratochvíl, the concept of national interest is legitimate when its internal and external legitimacy is proven. For external legitimacy it is sufficient to prove the acceptability of the external interest. This acceptability means that the policy that a country wants to pursue in its foreign policy must be concurrently considered as legitimate by other states, and to be compatible with the interests of others, mainly democratic nations (Kratochvíl, 2010). Therefore, in the case of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation the acceptability concerns two reference groups: 1) the Visegrad countries, and 2) other foreign partners.

#### **4.2.3.1 The Visegrad Acceptability**

The Visegrad acceptability of the Czech interest in the V4 cooperation means that Slovakia, Poland and Hungary adequately assess bilateral relations with the Czech Republic, that they perceive the coalition relations within V4 positively, and that they are willing to develop relations at the regional and multilateral levels. The data for this empirical analysis are drawn from publicly available dataset “Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy 2015”. This project wanted to “explore and compare the views held by foreign-policy communities of Visegrad Group countries” (AMO.cz 2015). Sample size of this study was 429 respondents from the four Visegrad countries, from which 207 were policy makers, and the rest were various elites which can impact the creation of the Visegrad policy. The questionnaire had 24 questions and was

distributed electronically. The responses were collected between April and November 2015 by four Visegrad think-tanks<sup>22</sup>.

From this dataset were selected data that indicate how the individual Visegrad countries perceive partnership with the Czech Republic, the symmetry of bilateral relationship, and how they perceive the importance of V4 and the benefit from membership in this coalition.

#### 4.2.3.2 The Acceptability by other international partners

In order to demonstrate the acceptability of the Czech Visegrad policy by other states or international groups, it is considered as sufficient to prove the acceptability of the Visegrad Group. Therefore, to demonstrate the acceptability of bilateral Visegrad relationships is considered as redundant. The reference group of foreign partners has been geographically divided into: non-European partners, and European partners<sup>23</sup>.

Until the entry of the Visegrad countries into NATO and the EU (before 2004), the acceptability by the EU and NATO was supported by the fact that these institutions welcomed and supported the creation of the V4 coalition. In addition, the Visegrad states were jointly invited to join NATO, and at the same time these countries were a part of one EU enlargement wave. Therefore, this part of the work deals with the external acceptability in the period after 2004.

Arguments for the external acceptability of V4 will be looked for in a number of meetings at a higher level<sup>24</sup>, which took place between V4 and foreign partners (see the **Appendix G**). These meetings, consultations, summits are often closed by a joint statement on important foreign policy topics and they indicate the state of V4 bilateral relations with its

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22 Participating organizations: Association for International Affairs (CZ), Center for EU Enlargement Studies (HU), Central European Policy Institute (SK), Institute of Public Affairs (PL).

23 The European Union, and the Western, Northern, Southern, Eastern European countries

24 Information about the meetings are freely available at [<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar>.]

foreign partners. This work does not analyse the content of these statements. The very fact that the meetings are taking place is considered as an evidence that other international actors accept V4 as an adequate partner.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

(For the roadmap of the research see the **Appendix A**). At first it was necessary to collect documents which would be appropriate for each criterion, i.e. selection of documents was driven by the theoretical framework as well as the availability of these documents. A wide range of publicly available strategic primary documents of the Czech Republic were collected. After an initial “familiarisation” (see Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Ritchie & Spencer 2002) with the collected documents, based on the above presented research questions, the relevant documents for the analysis which are reflecting on the researched topic were selected (see Section 4.2).

After a multiple thorough readings of the above presented documents, the relevant parts of texts that refer to the Czech relations with the Visegrad countries were selected. During the familiarization with the documents, it was discovered that Visegrad policy is presented as a specific regional construct that consists of three levels of relationships which reciprocally interact and complement each other, thus they require more comprehensive approach:

- 1) level of bilateral neighbourly relations;**
- 2) level of regional relations;**
- 3) level of multilateral relations in international organizations which the Visegrad states are members of.**

During the analysis of the documents these three levels which represent the inductive thematic categories were monitored in all the three criteria of Kratochvíl. The analysis did not search for the keywords representing a theme, but it searched for a presence of the whole

theme in the documents. As section 4.2 showed, each of the conditions required different documents for the analysis.

The preliminary familiarization with the documents has shown that the emphasis and content of the individual-levels is changing. Moreover, the Czech interest for the individual Visegrad states differs. Therefore, to understand the logic of the relationship, a chronological illustration at each level of the relationship was composed. This allowed to determine the relevance of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation and to specify the interest.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

The aim of this study is to understand the process of formation of the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy as well as to understand the reasons for the current Czech emphasis on this policy. Thus, the main research question is: What is the significance of the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's FP in the context of the Czech national interests? Due to the logic of the theoretical concept (see Chapter 3), the complex main research question was further divided into two sub questions which evaluate the internal and external legitimacy: 1) What is the Czech interest for the Visegrad policy, and does this interest have internal legitimacy? 2) What is the external legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy?

According to the Kratochvíl's conceptualization (see Chapter 3), the internal legitimacy contains the criterion of relevance and the criterion of consensus. Thus, sections 5.1 (criterion of relevance) and 5.2 (criterion of consensus) are focused on the answering of the first sub question. The criterion of acceptability represents the external legitimacy, therefore section 5.3 (criterion of acceptability) answers the second sub question. Each of the conditions is analysed through the three levels of relations – bilateral, regional, multilateral (see section 4.3) which is reflected on the structure of the individual sections (5.1, 5.2, and 5.3).

### **5.1 Criterion of Relevance**

The criterion of relevance is searched for in the Concepts of the Czech Foreign Policy (for the list see the Appendix B). The condition is analysed through the three levels of relations.

#### **5.1.1 Bilateral Level of Neighbourhood Relations**

Individual subsections (5.1.1.1 – 5.1.1.4) analyse the Czech bilateral level of neighbourhood relations (with the Visegrad countries as well as with Austria and Germany).

#### 5.1.1.1 Relations with Slovakia

The distinctiveness of the Czech-Slovak relationship<sup>25</sup> stems from the common history in the federation, shared culture, personal and family relations, as well as from economic ties. In the first Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy (CFP) from 1993, the CZ realized that building a cooperative and friendly relationship between the two independent states is important for the European stability, as well as for enhancing the credibility of the CZ externally (CFP, 1993). This relationship slowly develops and another Concept from 1999 registers the major decisions of the Czech Republic to support the efforts of the Slovak Republic to join the European and Euro-Atlantic structures (CFP, 1999, p. 21). Already in 2003, the CFP is making a great progress and evaluates the relationship between CZ-SK as exceptional. At the same time, a new and deeper dimension of the relationship after the Slovak's entry into NATO and joint accession to the EU in 2004 was expected (CFP, 2003, p. 10).

A high intensity of cooperation and a wide range of contacts is observed by the Concept from 2011. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have common interests in the areas of economy, energy, infrastructure and regional cooperation<sup>26</sup>. According to the last Concept from 2015, the Czech-Slovak relationship still has an exceptional and strategic nature which is reflected on a bilateral, regional and multilateral level of cooperation<sup>27</sup>. The common interest has broadened to the areas of defence, environment, education, and culture.

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25 After the dissolution of the federation, property and financial settlements, construction of the borders, the customs union between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the signature of the Treaty of Good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation followed.

26 Moreover, the CZ seeks to maintain mutual awareness of language and culture among the young generation (CFP, 2011, p. 15).

27 Furthermore, the intergovernmental dialogue develops inter alia by joint meetings of governments (CFP, 2015, p. 12).

#### 5.1.1.2 Relations with Poland

Poland is the second biggest neighbouring country of the Czech Republic. According to the 1993 CFP, in addition to the cultural proximity and large Polish minority, the Czech Republic and Poland are connected by the effort to find an optimal relationship with Germany (CFP, 1993). Other Concepts from 1999 and 2003 report a positive trend in the development and improvement of relations (CFP, 1999, p. 21) or in a cross-border cooperation, transport infrastructure, commercial and cultural relations (MFA CZ 2003a, p.10). Nevertheless, in Concepts from 2011 and 2015, Poland is situated behind Germany in the overview list of neighbouring relations.

The Czech-Polish relationship has a strategic nature. Shared priorities are at a regional, the EU, and NATO level. Security, energy, Eastern politics, economy and trade are the key areas of cooperation (MFA CZ 2011a, p.15). The current 2015 Concept highlights the strategic partnership with Poland and the extension of the interest in culture and the environment. Political dialogue takes place at joint meetings of the governments within the Visegrad and EU framework <sup>28</sup>.

#### 5.1.1.3 Relations with Hungary

The 1993 CFP states that the tradition of CZ-HU relations is deep and that the Czech Republic has an interest in developing friendly and cooperative bilateral relations (CFP, 1993). However, the Czech-Hungarian relations<sup>29</sup> are developing with regard to the specific relations with Slovakia. In 1999, the CZ placed the achieved level of relations with Hungary to the level of relations with the other neighbours (CFP, 1999, p. 22). Yet in other Concepts, Hungary is listed as last in the line-up of neighbours and the Czech-Hungarian partnership receives the

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<sup>28</sup> The Czech-Polish Forum helps the development of civic and social contacts (MFA CZ 2015a, p.13).

<sup>29</sup> Hungary represents for the Czech Republic a “honorary neighbour” to which the intensity of contacts at the political level and cooperation at various levels of society must correspond (CFP, 2015, p. 13).

least amount of attention (CFP, 2003, p. 10). Overall, Hungary is identified as a close, culturally and economically and politically important partner in the region, with which the Czech Republic is working intensively on all levels. The objective of the Czech Republic is to maintain political will for closer and more concrete cooperation (CFP, 2011, p. 16). Overall, the Concepts stress the cooperation within V4.

#### **5.1.1.4 Relations with Neighbours**

The Czech FP remembers the interwar period during which the relations with neighbours were not optimal, thus it strives for their development and for a “balanced, conflict-free and partnership and cooperation with neighbouring countries”<sup>30</sup> (CFP, 1993). The Czech Republic and its neighbours form a single legal, economic, security and political environment (CFP, 2011, p. 15). All of the Czech neighbours are EU members, and with the exception of Austria also NATO members. These neighbourly relations are influenced by Euro integration and progressively attain a character of intra Union relations (CFP, 1999, p. 9).

The CZ puts emphasis on good neighbourliness (CFP 1999, 8). It is in its interest to actively contribute to the region in order to be stable, prosperous and respected part of Europe. The CZ seeks to deepen cooperation at the state level and also at the societal level (CFP 2011, p. 15). According to the CFPs from 2003 and 2011, the development of good neighbourly relations and enhanced regional cooperation is the fourth fundamental priority of the Czech foreign policy (CFP 2003, 5; CFP 2011, 7). In addition, bilateral relations and regional cooperation are among the main tools of the Czech FP (CFP 2011, 6).

In all of the analysed Concepts the Czech interest in good neighbourly relations with all neighbours has been present. However, the quality of the Czech neighbourly relations varies and neighbours can be divided into two groups: Western neighbours and the Visegrad countries.

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<sup>30</sup> Germany, Poland, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary



The Western neighbours, Germany and Austria, are a developed and wealthy countries as well as major economic and political partners. Germany is the economic “engine of the EU” and a European political leader, moreover the open Czech economy is highly dependent on German economy. The relations with Western neighbours are overcoming the burden of history but at the same time are also asymmetrical. However, the Czech interest in them is not the same as the interest of Germany and Austria in the Czech Republic. Even in the 2015 CFP, Germany and Austria remain the centre of attention (CFP 2015, 12).

Furthermore, the Visegrad countries have a special importance for the Czech Republic (CFP 1999, 20–21). Bilateral relations with the Visegrad countries are influenced by cultural and linguistic proximity, by the 40-year dependence on the USSR, and by the “collective return to Europe and the Atlantic civilization” (MFA CZ 2016e, p.7). The Visegrad countries are undergoing the resembling economic and political transformation (CFP 1999, 20–21). All of this affects the common view of the world, foreign policy preferences, shared concern about prevailing on the “periphery” of Europe, “mediator” or “shock absorber” (MFA CZ 2016e, p.15) between the superpowers, and the fear of losing national sovereignty. However, Visegrad does not constitute “a politically, economically, and, to some extent, even culturally undifferentiated whole”<sup>31</sup> (Holý 1996, p.329).

Generally, bilateral neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries are more balanced and have potentially greater prerequisites for development. At the same time, bilateral relations do not reach the same level, for example the Czech interest in Slovakia is permanently increased. The level of the Czech-Slovak relations is unique and it is constantly deepening. On the other hand, the relationship with Poland is strategic and over the long term it develops successfully on the political and social levels. Poland is the sixth largest state in Europe, it

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31 For example, the Visegrad countries differ in their relation to Russia (Nad' et al. 2010, p.147; McDonagh 2014; Palaščíková 2014; Rácz 2012), the “degree of openness to Brussels”, or in “diverting away from the rules of liberal democracy and the rule of law” (Pehe 2016b).

overcame the financial crisis in the best manner from the EU states, it has large market and military power, yet, unlike Germany it is not perceived as a regional leader. However, the CZ realizes that the Czech-Polish relationship is vital for the Visegrad cooperation.

Least convincing is the Czech interest for Hungary. For several years, Hungary has been placed behind Austria, and the Czech-Hungarian relationship is moderately evaluated and it has been given less attention. An increased Czech interest in Poland and Hungary is observed after the establishment of the independent Czech Republic, in relation with the negotiation talks with NATO and the EU, or in the recent years in connection with the cooperation of V4 in the EU policies.

### **5.1.2 Regional Level of Relations**

The analysis of FP Concepts shows that the Czech Republic and the Visegrad countries are meeting in a number of regional initiatives. In addition to V4 (Visegrad Group 1991), those are for example the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) (MFA CZ 2009a), the Central European Initiative (CEI) (MFA CZ 2008) or the so-called Slavkov Triangle (MFA CZ 2015c). Analysis of FP Concepts clearly demonstrated compliance with the claim that the Visegrad cooperation has a place in the Czech Foreign Policy and that it is the basic platform for regional cooperation (MFA CZ 2015b). The Visegrad cooperation can be divided into two periods: until the year 2004, when the coalition's goal was an integration into the European area (CFPs 1993, 1999, and 2003) and after the Visegrad countries joined NATO and the EU (CFPs 2011, and 2015). The Czech interest in the coalition cooperation is present in each of the analysed documents which means that for the Czech Republic this cooperation is not losing justification (CFP 2003, p.11), but a different perception of the content and meaning of coalition cooperation exists.

The 1993 CFP considered significant the “practical regional cooperation” with the Visegrad countries in the case of a common interest or in collectively solvable regional problem. The Concept moved away from the initial ideas of cooperation and criticized the “hypertrophy of far-reaching political declarations and of little practical results” (CFP 1993). The dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czech self-centeredness, and pragmatic approach to cooperation have caused a serious decline in the Group. The Visegrad cooperation received mainly economic dimension in a form of a joint project: CEFTA. This project had its justification in the fact that the Czech Republic and the Visegrad partners strived for faster liberalization of trade relations in Central Europe, while they feared clash with saturated, highly competitive and largely protected Western markets (CFP 1993). According to the following Concept, V4 and CEFTA presented a specific contribution to strengthening stability in the region (CFP 1999, p.22). With the change in political leadership, the Czech Republic rediscovered an added value in V4.

The joint invitation of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to the accession negotiations with NATO became the impetus for the revitalization of V4. The cooperation was resumed in the second half of 1998 based on the Czech initiative. Slovakia officially joined the Group, which, due to the support of the coalition, overcame the postponement in the integration process (CFP 1999, pp.22–23). Concepts from 1999 and 2003 perceived V4 as a versatile civic and cultural cooperation, as the development of contacts at all levels of state and local governments (CFP 1999, pp.22–23). Strengthening of the civic dimension of cooperation and cross-border cooperation is one of the priorities of the Czech Republic (CFP 2003, p.11). These Concepts support common V4 foreign contacts with, for example, Benelux and the Nordic Council (CFP 2003, p.11). The Czech Republic also has an interest in regional cooperation in

the wider context, such as regular meetings of the presidents of Central European countries<sup>32</sup> (CFP 1999, p.22), CEI or in other initiatives that would contribute with new valuable elements to the existing cooperation within region (CFP 2003, p.12).

In 2004, the Visegrad countries became members of NATO and the EU, therefore the V4 coalition fulfilled its initial political and economic goal. The Group agreed to preserve their cooperation and stated that their cooperation “will continue to focus on regional activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region” (Visegrad Group 2004b). Furthermore, V4 decided to work in a specific institutional framework based on the same principles of voluntariness, equality and mutual benefit. Seven years after the entry into the EU, the 2011 Concept acknowledged V4 with its International Visegrad Fund (IVF) as a major regional grouping, but it nevertheless emphasized the necessity to implement specific projects and to strengthen the relationship between civil societies. Apart from this, the Czech Republic is interested in strengthening the impact and V4’s positions in the EU and beyond (CFP 2011, p.16). In the 2015 Concept, other countries of the Visegrad Group, i.e. Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, as well as Germany and Austria as a neighbouring countries occupy the most important place in Central Europe according to the Czech Republic (CFP 2015, p.12).

Regional cooperation is an integral part of the Central European policy of the Czech Republic and the Visegrad Group remains as its basic platform (CFP 2015, p.13). The 2015 Concept seeks a balance between the practical regional cooperation with concrete projects and tangible results that are focused on projects of regional or common interest and conception of V4 as an information-consultation platform with the possibility of getting to know each other and building of mutual respect and trust. According to the Concept, the main objective of the V4 is to build internal cohesion, to increase its influence within the EU and NATO and in other

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<sup>32</sup> the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia

international organizations, the promotion of shared priorities in the foreign policy and other sectoral issues (CFP 2015, p.13). The CZ remains open to other forms of Central European cooperation, including cooperation with Slovakia and Austria in the so-called Slavkov format in areas of common interest, including neighbourly cooperation, energy, transport and education CFP, p.13).

### **5.1.3 Multilateral Level of Relations**

The CZ and the Visegrad countries meet and have an opportunity to cooperate within the EU and NATO, or in European fora (OSCE and Council of Europe) and in the international organizations (UN, WHO, OECD, IMF, WB), etc. Since its entry to the EU, the Czech Republic considers the EU as a framework of its FP (CFP 2011, p.4). Despite the fact that V4 is not an EU sub region it is closely linked to the European policy. A large part of the V4 programs (Sectoral Policies) are related to the practical implementation of European policies at the state level. Therefore, the EU is considered as an exemplary case during the observation of the Czech relationship with the Visegrad countries at a multilateral level.

Based on the analysis of all CFPs, certain link is evident between the Czech interest in V4 and its interest in Euro integration. The 1993 CFP supports the “activities that contribute to maintaining political and economic stability in Central Europe”, but at the same time it pointed out that the involvement of the Czech Republic “should not hinder the fulfilment of its prime objective, which is the membership in the European Community, NATO and the Western European Union”. The Czech Republic had concerns that the regional cooperation could be considered as an alternative to the Central European integration, therefore, that it could become an obstacle to Euro integration of the country<sup>33</sup>. The document rejects “further

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33 Therefore, in a search for “elements of common interest” with the Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic wants to avoid “steps that would question the attempts for the involvement in the European context”.

institutionalization of the Visegrad Group as well as an attempt to create a parallel structure alongside the integration of the European community and NATO” (CFP 1993). This approach was one of the reasons for distrust of the V4’s capabilities which directed the Visegrad cooperation in clusters such as CEFTA and CEI. From the Western perspective, the initial V3 cooperation<sup>34</sup> was mainly the first evidence of cooperation among the post-communist countries.

Despite the fluctuations in cooperation, it is possible to argue that the pursuit of integration in NATO and the EU has helped the regional cooperation. The Czech Republic realized that the regional cooperation can benefit the integration and that the joint entry into NATO and later the EU creates conditions for further deepening of versatile relations with the Visegrad partners (CFP 1999, p.21). According to the 1999 CFP, during the preparations for negotiations on accession to the EU, the Czech Republic placed emphasis on cooperation with Poland and Hungary. Regular meetings with the chief negotiators served as a mean for exchange of information and practical experiences from the negotiation process, for the preparation and submission of position papers etc. The aim of these meetings was also to prevent unnecessary mutual rivalry and contribute to the induction of mutual trust (CFP 1999, p.15).

Further, mutual cooperation has gradually increased with the integration process. The Czech Republic was determined to dedicate considerably greater attention than before “to the multilateral dimension of its foreign policy, at the global, European and regional scale” (CFP 1999, pp.28–29). Moreover, the Czech interests “take a European and Euro-Atlantic character” (CFP 1999, p.24). From the Concept of 2003, it is clear that before joining the EU, the Czech Republic felt confident. It considered the membership in NATO and the EU as “strengthening

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<sup>34</sup> Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary

and consolidation of its international position and security” (CFP 2003, p.3). Within these organizations, or through them, the Czech Republic received “new ways of promoting the interests” (CFP 2003, p.3).

The 2003 document does not specify the position of V4 after its members joined the EU, but it argues that the justification of the V4 cooperation will not be lost (CFP 2003, p.11). Unlike the previous Concept, the connection of the Visegrad cooperation with Euro integration fades away. Hypothetically, the direction of the Visegrad cooperation could be sought in the claim of the Czech Republic, that during the debate on the future of the EU it will support further expansion and deepening of the integration, “while respecting national and cultural identity of individual states and regions based on the principle of subsidiarity” (CFP 2003, p.6). Furthermore, in defending of its interests and promotion of its standpoints the Czech Republic will develop its cooperation with like-minded countries.

In addition, the 2011 CFP is a landmark in the Czech’s understanding of the V4’s role at the multilateral level. The Czech Republic perceives the EU as a “key area” but at the same time as a “tool for the promotion of the Czech’s objectives and interests” (CFP 2011, p.8). The Lisbon Treaty “created a more complicated environment for decision-making in the EU” and “puts more stress on the Czech Republic in promoting its interests” (CFP 2011, p.9). In connection with this, the value of potential allies has increased. The 2011 document emphasized strategic relationships with Slovakia and Poland on the basis of proximity of preferences within the EU and NATO (CFP 2011, p.15). The interest in Hungary had the same direction (CFP 2011, p.16). According to the CZ, the tasks of V4 is strengthening of regional relations, specific regional projects and the promotion of common interests in the international environment (CFP 2011, p.16).

The current Concept from 2015 confirms the Czech interest in increasing the impact of V4 within the EU, NATO and other international organizations and the promotion of shared

priorities in the foreign policy and other sectoral issues (CFP 2015, p.13). At the multilateral level, the CZ seeks to coordinate its standpoint with Slovakia (CFP 2015, p.12) and Poland (CFP 2015, p.13). The Czech Republic also co-creates and actively promotes policies such as: the EU's enlargement policy, the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership (EaP), a common visa, asylum and immigration policy of the EU (CFP 2015, p.5) which are also a platform for the international cooperation within V4.

The analysis of documents supports the conclusion that the Czech Republic gradually realizes the significant importance of the Visegrad cooperation at regional and multilateral levels. After it overcame fears that V4 may be accepted as an alternative integration, the Czech interest focused on the ways of utilizing the group as a tool for promoting its interests and its position on the multilateral level. The question is whether the current V4's attitude towards the EU's migration and asylum policy does not confront once again the Czech's interest for V4 and Euro integration.

#### **5.1.4 Conclusion – Criterion of Relevance**

Based on the analysis of the CFPs it was discovered that the relationship between the Czech Republic and the Visegrad countries is different from the country's relationship with the other neighbours on the basis of its cultural and historical potential, complexity and multilevel. The Czech interest in the Visegrad's FP dimension has long been present at three levels of relationships: neighbourly-bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels. Despite the fact that at times and at certain levels the interest is changing in its intensity and content, the Czech Republic considers the Visegrad countries as good neighbours. Moreover, it is determined to further develop and deepen these relations. In a long term, V4 has established itself as an essential platform for the regional cooperation and as a tool for promotion of Czech interests at



the multilateral level. The CZ continuously supports this trend. Based on the analysis, it can be argued that the Visegrad dimension of the Czech FP is a relevant interest of the Czech Republic.

With the ongoing Euro integration of the CZ and the Visegrad countries, and a multi-layered content of the Visegrad policy, the regional levels of good neighbourly and coalition relations have shifted to the multilateral level. Despite the observed fluctuation of the Czech interest, there is a reflection of the integrational changes. In the last few years, a stabilization of interest in bilateral cooperation and coalition cooperation in the EU and NATO has been minimally apparent. The process of Europeanization<sup>35</sup> of the Czech Foreign Policy represents an adaptation of a political, normative and institutional EU models. In addition, it includes the ability to exercise and influence preferences of the Czech policy within the EU and through it also in international relations in general.

## **5.2 Criterion of Consensus**

In the first part of the analysis, the relevance of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation was demonstrated. In the second part, arguments confirming the broad political support for this policy were looked for. Based on the analysis of selected relevant documents, and similarly to the previous section, three levels (bilateral, regional, and multilateral) of the Czech relationship with the Visegrad countries were distinguished. The second part of the analysis seeks to provide the most comprehensive picture of consensus of the Czech political scene, and that is why the condition of legitimacy of national interest was analysed in 3

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<sup>35</sup> Europeanization can be understood as the level of involvement, interaction, and communication within the EU, as well as the impact of the integration process on the nation-states (Svítíl 2008, p.12). The Europeanization of the Foreign Policy also influences the content of the Visegrad policy that focuses on the implementation of the EU policies or which focuses on the ENP and EaP. At the same time, with the deepening of Euro integration, national interests are coming to the fore (Fiala 2006, pp.51–61). The society responds to globalization factors by searching for its national identity. In connection with this, the regional integration construct seems to be an acceptable intermediate step to a greater integration.

reference groups of policy makers: the government, political parties, and the President. Therefore, the analysis of consensus has 3 levels: 1) consensus at the level of the governments of the Czech Republic, over time; 2) consensus at the level of parliamentary parties, over time; and 3) consensus at the level of Head of state, over time.

### **5.2.1 Consensus at the level of Government**

The support for the Visegrad policy from the ruling policy-makers is analysed in the program documents of the governments and coalition agreements. A substantial part of the analysed documents is focused on the domestic policy. Nevertheless, all the documents contain a separate section for the foreign policy, in which there is a section dedicated to the good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

#### **5.2.1.1 Bilateral level of neighbourly relations**

Already in the Preamble, the Policy Statements of the 1st and 2nd Václav Klaus's government are focused on restoring of relations and efforts to normalize dialogue of neighbourly relations (Klaus 1996, p.1; Klaus 1992, p.1). In connection with the "national emancipation of Slovakia" and the dissolution of the Federation, the development of Czech-Slovak relations caused "another very serious complication on the path" (Klaus 1992, p.1). Despite of this, relations with Slovakia soon reached a good, mutually beneficial level with practical results, such as the Customs Union (Tošovský 1998, p.2), and CEFTA (Klaus 1996, p.3; Zeman 1998, p.24). The following programs of ČSSD focused on achieving (Zeman 1998, p.4) and maintaining excellent relations (Špidla 2002, p.28) as well as strategic dialogue with Slovakia (Sobotka 2014, p.17).

At the same time, the CZ has without any rational reasons declared itself "as a sort of a valedictorian of Central Europe" (Zeman 1998, p.3). This fact, until 1997, has limited the promising development of relations with Poland and Hungary which were confined to a

mutually beneficial economic cooperation within CEFTA (Klaus 1996, p.3; Zeman 1998, p.24). After 1998, the Policy Statements of ČSSD are referring to the necessary development and expansion of these relations in terms of the future integration of the Czech Republic into the EU and NATO (Tošovský 1998, p.2; Zeman 1998, p.23; Špidla 2002, p.27). Thus, Poland is continuously becoming an important partner (Špidla 2002, p.28) with which the CZ has established a strategic dialogue (Sobotka 2014, p.17). This contrasts the Czech interest in relations with Hungary which are usually associated with the Central European regional activities (Špidla 2002, p.28; Sobotka 2014, p.17). According to the Policy Statements, mutually beneficial cooperation, good and partnership relations with neighbours are among the key priorities of successive Czech governments (Klaus 1992, p.4; Klaus 1996, p.3; Zeman 1998, p.23).

Caretaker governments also stressed the importance of good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries in connection with the integration of the Czech Republic into European structures (Tošovský 1998, p.2; Rusnok 2013, p.2; Fisher 2009, p.3). The centre-right government of Nečas (ODS) aimed at further development of relations and cooperation with the neighbouring countries in all areas of common interest. The government of Nečas had also an interest in developing relations with other countries of the Central European region (ODS et al. 2010, p.12).

#### **5.2.1.2 Regional Level of Relations**

The support for the regional cooperation can already be found in the programs of the first governments (Klaus 1992, p.4). This policy is associated with shared responsibility of the CZ for the stability in Central Europe (Klaus 1996, p.3; Zeman 1998, p.24), even though during the period of centre-right governments of Klaus the economic cooperation of Visegrad prevails. Before joining the EU, the coalitional government of the Prime Minister Špidla (ČSSD) approved the annex to the governmental program: “The key priorities of the Czech Foreign

Policy in 2004” which appreciates the Visegrad cooperation, the regularity of the meetings at the highest political level, the development of practical cooperation between government ministries and civil contacts. This document praised the work of IVF, for example due to a program of the Visegrad scholarships for postgraduate students from V4 countries (MFA CZ 2004b, p.4). The government of Prime Minister Špidla, as the only of the governments, stated among its priorities the Czech Presidency of the V4 (2003/2004). This government supported the concretely focused V4 cooperation at all levels, the development of civil contacts, and cooperation in V4+ format (MFA CZ 2004b, p.9).

Programmes of the subsequent centre-left governments granted priority to an effectively “functioning Visegrad cooperation” and to the cooperation in Central Europe (Špidla 2002, p.28; Gross 2004, p.23; Paroubek 2005, p.29; Sobotka 2014, p.17). Active participation of the CZ in V4 is a priority for the current Czech foreign policy (ČSSD et al. 2014, pp.28, 51). However, the program<sup>36</sup> of the current government of the Prime Minister Sobotka (ČSSD) does not contain information about the current Czech presidency<sup>37</sup> of the V4 (2015/2016).

On the contrary, there is a striking deficit of the Visegrad policy in the documents of the centre-right governments of Mirek Topolánek (ODS). Programs, coalitional agreement and the working program of the Czech EU Presidency (MFA CZ 2009b) prepared by Topolánek’s cabinet did not mention the policy of good neighbourly relations, regional cooperation nor the Czech presidency of V4 (2007/2008). At the same time, the proposed program of the Czech V4 Presidency (MFA CZ 2007a) characterized V4 as “a natural part of regional policy in Central Europe”, which went through the “most intensive periods of cooperation, characterized in

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<sup>36</sup> “Cooperation in all the areas listed in this programme naturally contributes to the internal cohesion of the Visegrad region. Aside from coordinating on the EU matters and on specific sector cooperation projects, the Czech Republic task of develop “infrastructure among people” and thus further contribute to mutual understanding as well as to an open, unbiased debate on common interests and to a reflection on relations within the broader Central European region” (MFA CZ 2015e).

<sup>37</sup> It is the second V4 Presidency, under the leadership of ČSSD. In addition, this Presidency correlates with the 25th anniversary of V4.

particular by the principles of voluntariness, responsibility and solidarity”. Moreover, the Topolánek’s government “aim[ed] to raise broader awareness of the Visegrad Group’s activities in its own member states and in other countries”. However, from the available media sources it was found that the Prime Minister attended scheduled V4 meetings.

In 2006, V4 celebrated its 15th anniversary. It was a period during which the political situation in most of the Visegrad countries was agitated, which was reflected on the tense Slovak-Hungarian relations (Vilček 2006). After the meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers, Topolánek argued that the priorities of the coalition agreements are respected by all of the V4 governments, and that V4 works regardless of who is currently in power (ČTK 2006). Further, the Czech Republic was a presiding country of V4 in 2007/2008. In 2008, Topolánek saw the promotion of common priorities at the EU as successful (EurActiv.cz 2008).

The Visegrad states agreed on the issue of energy security, but they differed in their stance to the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (Křešnička 2008). But in the following year, V4 supported the Czech EU Presidency. In an interview, Topolánek said that the power of V4 in the European Commission and in the European Parliament is “relatively high” and that he wished for the Visegrad countries “to be able to agree on more issues than it was the case until now” (EurActiv.cz 2009). Given this, it is possible to presuppose an interest in V4 even during the rule of Topolánek’s governments. It is also possible to argue that this interest was not featured in the program due to domestic issues, bilateral conflicts in V4, problematic Lisbon Treaty, and due to the preparations for the Czech EU presidency.

Furthermore, in its program, the centre-right government of Prime Minister Nečas (ODS) sought to ensure the security and prosperity of the Czech Republic in a stable international system. To achieve this goal, the government wanted to actively cooperate “with all relevant partners, in particular with the countries of Central Europe”. The government stated the specific content of the Visegrad cooperation in the Presidential program V4 (2011-2012)

“Innovative Visegrad” (MFA CZ 2011b). This program promoted “the vision that the cooperation among the V4 countries should be guided towards a Visegrad”. According to the programme, “respected and competitive as a community of countries acting as a reliable, innovative and effective partner not only within the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, but also in relation to third countries, other regional groupings and other international organizations”. The cooperation must be especially in relation to the actual needs V4 citizens (MFA CZ 2011b).

### 5.2.1.3 Multilateral Level of Relations

The “anchoring” in a stable environment is important for the Czech Republic (Nečas 2010, p.2). All of the Czech neighbours are the EU members, and except for Austria, they are also members of NATO (Gross 2004, p.23; Paroubek 2005, p.28; Sobotka 2014, p.16). The government of the Prime Minister Špidla (ČSSD) which led the Czech Republic to the EU, lists among its priorities the cooperation with the Visegrad neighbours “within the EU and NATO, the Visegrad Group, and other multilateral fora” (MFA CZ 2004b, p.8). This pro-European government introduced discussion about the prospective role of the V4 countries in Central Europe and in the EU and it defined the terms “continuity” and “future” V4 in the new European environment (MFA CZ 2004b, p.4). “Considering the possibility and opportunity of joint V4 presentation in Brussels to mark the occasion of accession to the EU” (MFA CZ 2003b). Part of the Visegrad cooperation is related to the harmonization of entry into the Schengen system (MFA CZ 2004b, p.9).

Programs of the following centre-leftist governments continuously build on the integration policy. They deem the full-fledged membership in the EU to be “a major opportunity and a challenge” (Gross 2004, p.22; Paroubek 2005, p.27) and they support the promotion of further integration (Gross 2004, p.2; Paroubek 2005, p.3; Sobotka 2014, p.16). Moreover, these

governments considered the participation in NATO and the European Security and Defence Policy as the Czech contribution to strengthening of security (Zeman 1998, pp.22–23; Gross 2004, p.20; Paroubek 2005, p.25; Sobotka 2014, p.17). However, their programs do not address specifically the Visegrad cooperation at the multilateral level. The cabinet of the Prime Minister Sobotka (ČSSD) mentioned the theme of Visegrad in its pro-European strategic document “Concept of the Czech Republic’s policy in the EU” (Government CZ 2015) which stated that the government wanted to be a strong and reliable partner within the cohesion policy in relation to the closest V4 partners. The Program of the incumbent government did not focus on the Czech presidency of V4 (2015/2016), although the government dealt with the Presidency intensively and successfully (Think Visegrad 2016). The motto “V4 Trust” (MFA CZ 2015e) indicated that for the Czech Republic the trust among the V4 countries is a key to success. The comprehensive program presented among the key themes of collaboration the common European policies such as energy, EaP, common defence, the 2030 climate-energy package etc.

Moreover, the Program of the centre-right government of Mirek Topolánek (ODS), advocated a common policy towards the closest EU’s Eastern neighbours (Topolánek 2006, p.2; Topolánek 2007, p.18). In connection with this, during the Czech presidency of the EU (2009), the government supported the Polish initiative and organized an inaugural EaP summit in Prague (MFA CZ 2009b, p.30). In the V4 Presidential Programme (2007/2008), Topolánek’s government specified the Visegrad cooperation at the EU level (MFA CZ 2007a) – “The Visegrad Group will focus on continuously relevant current political issues such as Schengen cooperation, energy security or further development of a mechanism of mutual support and coordination in acquiring headquarters of the European Union and international bodies including nomination of key personnel for these bodies, issues concerning the EU budget, required to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria etc.”

The program of the following centre-right government of Nečas (ODS) promoted a self-confident, engaged, realistic and clear foreign policy<sup>38</sup>. The cooperation with V4 at the Union level was discussed in the context of consultations on negotiation of the conditions for drawing from EU funds (Nečas 2010, p.40). At the multilateral level, the Visegrad cooperation was elaborated on in the Presidential program of V4 - “Innovative Visegrad”. The government of Nečas supported “personal meetings or teleconferences at the relevant levels before sessions of the European Council” and other European institutions. According to the program, the V4 countries could present more common proposals more often and promote them through a concerted effort. A major Visegrad theme is energy and coordination of common positions towards the EU. Another priority is strengthening of the Trans-Atlantic relations (Including EU-US relations) through intensive cooperation between the United States, support an increase of V4 activities within the EaP and the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective for the Western Balkans (MFA CZ 2011b).

Additionally, the Rusnok’s caretaker government supported the Visegrad cooperation in order to promote common interests within the EU decision-making bodies (Rusnok 2013, p.2) and the Fišer’s Government - in connection with transport connection, energy security or support for the European project GALILEO (Fisher 2009, p.8)

In general, the Czech governments consensually promote good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries. However, the right-wing governments give less space to the Visegrad cooperation, and have a reserved approach towards the V4 opportunities at regional or multilateral level. These governments welcome practical results and promote mutually beneficial relationships. The political parties on the centre-left attach greater importance to V4 as such. If the support is not specifically highlighted in the government program, it is present

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<sup>38</sup> The government insisted on a strict application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the EU, on more support and compensation to the new Member States (Nečas 2010, p.14; ODS et al. 2010, p.13).



in other government documents. None of the political parties is opposed to the V4 format and they conscientiously fulfil their obligations arising from the V4 institutional framework. After accession to the EU, a consensus on the role of the V4 as a means of promoting Czech interests at Union level was created and the interest at least for the consultation and coordination of positions prior to the meetings of the EU is evident.

### **5.2.2 Consensus at the level of parliamentary political parties**

The support of the Visegrad policy by the parliamentary political parties was analysed through the election programs of the last elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2013. The Visegrad policy is not the main topic of the electoral programs of the political parties, nevertheless, part of the foreign policy documents briefly mentions this policy. It was found that the program of political party ÚSVIT does not include foreign policy part and the party does not deal with the FP. Furthermore, [in the available documents] there were not found any relevant documents about the views of this party towards the Visegrad policy. This populist party was formed before the elections in 2013, and in 2015 the party dissolved into two parts. According to the latest public opinion poll, the party lost the public support (Červenka 2016). For these reasons, the political party ÚSVIT is not included in the result of a consensus of parliamentary political parties. Other parliamentary political parties, including KSČM, have alternately been part of the coalitions analysed above which means that their support and loyalty to the Visegrad policy is reflected in the consensus at the governmental level.

#### **5.2.2.1 Bilateral level of neighbourly relations**

For all the parliamentary parties the development of good relations with the neighbouring countries has been a key issue in the long term (ČSSD 2013, p.32; KDU-ČSL 2013, p.11; TOP09 2013, p.24). The 2013 program of ODS claims that under its leadership the

neighbourly relations have reached “the highest level”. At the same time, the party claims that the socialization of cooperation with Slovakia and Poland at the level of public officials contributes to a faster and higher quality of the cooperation (ODS 2013, p.28). Furthermore, according to the program of ANO, good neighbourhood policy and cooperation with the Visegrad countries is a pragmatic way of how to “push for more” (ANO 2013, p.16). KSČM emphasizes the exceptional bilateral relations and closer cooperation with Slovakia, based on equality and mutual benefit (KSČM 2013, p.9).

#### **5.2.2.2 Regional level of relations**

The electoral programs of KSČM (2013, p.9), ČSSD (2013, p.32), ANO (2013, p.16), and TOP 09 (TOP09 2013, p.24) from 2013 contain an explicit interest in cooperation within V4. For example, the governmental party KDU-ČSL promotes good neighbourly relations, but in its program it does not explicitly mention the Visegrad cooperation. KDU-ČSL is a smaller party but with a stable support which is focused on domestic policy, agriculture and Christian values. In the interview for the Czech national TV, the Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Ondřej Benešík (KDU-ČSL), confirms the rationale of V4 for example in the areas of energy, the political will to seek and find common interest which can with greater success be pursued in the EU (ČT 2015). The Chairman considers the different opinions of the Visegrad countries, for example on Russia, as nuances and he perceives the meaning of the cooperation in the common interest to communicate, to reach agreements. In the same interview, the Chairman of KSČM, Vojtěch Filip, argues that V4 has the potential in the extension of the format V4+2 (V4 with Austria and Slovenia) or even in the format V4+3 (V4 with Austria, Croatia and Slovenia). The Visegrad Group, which Filip does not consider as a coalition addressing ad-hoc topics, could successfully and in perspective cooperate in the areas of transit transport and energy. Overall, the Visegrad countries differ from their different historical

background, and therefore the KSČM chairman welcomes the will to agree and understand each other. According to him, the common V4 positions within the EU strengthens (ČT 2015).

On the other side, the topic of the Visegrad cooperation is not mentioned in the program of ODS (2013). This topic is also missing from the 2010 election program of ODS “Solutions that help”, when ODS became the governing political party. This electoral program from 2010 generally formulates that ODS will face protectionism and social engineering on a European level through purposeful Foreign Policy program which will be based on good neighbourly relations in the region (ODS 2010, p.46).

In order to understand the relationship of ODS towards V4, additional data on cooperation of ODS (Nečas’s government 2010-2013) with V4 was sought in the discourse (Kupka 2010; ČTK 2012; Visegrad Group 2012). It was discovered that according to the former PM Nečas, the Visegrad cooperation is not about political proximity of the cabinets, but primarily about pragmatic common interests (EurActiv.sk 2010a). ODS has a reserved approach towards the Lisbon Treaty (Bartoš 2009), the agreement on the fiscal union (Vlada.cz 2012) or the Euro (ODS 2014). Its stance during the Czech Visegrad Presidency (2011/2012) was not identical to the stance of the political elites at that time (ČT24 2009; Pehe 2009; EurActiv.cz 2011a).

In the views of ODS there is a track of Euroscepticism of the former Chairman and President Václav Klaus (Holuša & ČTK 2009; Mediafax 2012; Polochová 2009; ČT24 2012). This stance dates from the time of the first Czech government, when the Prime Minister was Václav Klaus and the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was taken by Josef Zieleniec (ODS). They both perceived the Czech Republic as a leader in the Central European transition, moreover they were convinced that for the Czech Republic in its road to the EU and NATO it is better to proceed individually, so that it is not slowed down by “slower” Visegrad partners (Gančarčíková 2007). Since the government of the Prime Minister Zeman (ČSSD) and the

Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Kavan (ČSSD), the situation has changed and the Czech Foreign Policy re-established the importance of Visegrad as a natural platform for mutual cooperation in Central Europe (Lukášek 2001). Possible reasons for a weaker reflection on the “V4” theme in programs of ODS is pragmatism or the lack of liberal conservative partners in V4. Nowadays, ODS does not reject the Visegrad cooperation, it only considers the relations with closes neighbours as more important than for instance relations with Hungary. In the comparison with ČSSD, ODS sees V4 less idyllically. It supports concrete close cooperation mainly in the topics of energy security and migration policy (Fiala 2016a).

### 5.2.2.3 Multilateral level of relations

ČSSD promotes a comprehensive approach to foreign relations on a “multilateral, bilateral, and regional level”. The party also promotes a comprehensive development of an “allied cooperation with the closest neighbours” (ČSSD 2013, p.32). These relationships are, according to ČSSD, contributing to strengthening of the EU and to the development of “mutually beneficial alliance” between the US and the EU in the area of security (ČSSD 2013, p.32). In its program, TOP 09 wants to utilize “all possibilities of regional alliances” among the Visegrad countries which would contribute to the “coordination of positions” during the negotiations regarding the EU and European security (TOP09 2013, p.24). In addition, ANO supports the multilateral level Visegrad cooperation as a mean of promotion of national interests (ANO 2013, p.16). Although the election programs of ODS, KDU-ČSL, KSČM do not contain specifically the topic of V4, it does not mean that they reject it (MFA CZ 2015f). It is assumed that these parties are less convinced about the potential of V4 coalition in practice.

Overall, the parliamentary parties fully support good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries. None of the political parties is opposing the coalition cooperation. ČSSD has the friendliest attitude. ODS underwent the biggest shift towards the support of the Visegrad

policy. With the change of leadership, the Euroscepticism of ODS is gradually shifting away from a policy of Czech-centrism of its founder Vaclav Klaus. Other political parties see the V4 strength in its flexibility, openness and pragmatism. Among the main values is the willingness to agree on a joint promotion of interests at EU level. The lack of the Visegrad policy in the election programs is a result of the fact that the Czech voter appeals mainly to domestic issues or controversial foreign policy with a direct impact on the society. The evidence is the activity of political parties in connection with the Visegrad migration policy. Moreover, these parties fully support the common position of V4 towards the migration issue and even call for the creation of a strong rejectionist position. The parties even support a possible legislative step – joining the Slovak and Hungarian lawsuit in the European Court of Justice (Echo24 & ČTK 2016; Fiala 2016b; ČTK 2015a; ČTK 2016a)

### **5.2.3 Consensus at the level of the Heads of State**

All three Czech Presidents have influenced the development of the Czech domestic and Foreign Policy as well as Czech image abroad. In order to understand the impact of the Presidents on the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy, it is important to determine on which topics their views correspond and on which they differ. This part of the analysis will be based on relevant interviews and publications.

#### **5.2.3.1 Václav Havel – the 1<sup>st</sup> President**

Firstly, it is important to emphasize the role of Václav Havel as a visionary and a signatory of the Visegrad Group. In his speech in the Polish Parliament (25 January 1990), Havel offered a vision of the future of the Central European region – a “genuine friendship” between Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. This friendship would be based on “good understanding”, on “lessons learned” from a common destiny and also on “shared ideals”.

During the “return to Europe”, these Central European states would coordinate their efforts, help each other, and would not compete in their road to the European structures. However, in his vision, Havel does not specify the “institutional form” of the Visegrad cooperation (Havel 1990).

The first step towards the realization of his vision was the Visegrad Declaration and the establishment of the Visegrad Group (15 February 1991). In his speech in 1993, Havel praised the first results of the project Visegrad – “network of bilateral agreements” or the jointly concluded association agreements with the European Community (Havel 1993b). President Havel did not consider the Visegrad only as a policy of good neighbourly relations or regional cooperation. His interpretation builds on the integration of democratic traditions of the first Czechoslovak Republic. For Havel, the Visegrad policy means identifying newly emerging regional entities in Europe. Furthermore, Havel emphasized that Central Europe is not a “poor renegade” and it has a lot to offer to the Western Europe (Havel 1990). At the same time, according to Havel, the Visegrad Group does not have to be the only integration structure. Havel considers regional communities as “building blocks of a future European architecture” which contribute to the integration process. Furthermore, he proceeds from the understanding of the specifics of the Visegrad mentality and realizes that “strange concerns” of the Visegrad states cause “discomfort and surprise” in the West and provoke the Western “reservation” to the Visegrad Group (Havel 1994c). Therefore, Havel in his foreign speeches emphasized the V4’s ability to integrate and successfully cooperate (Havel 1991; Havel 1993a). In addition, Havel defended the extension of the European Community and a deeper Europe-wide political and economic integration (Havel 1993b).

At the end of 1994, an unexpected turn occurred. In an interview for MF DNES newspaper, Havel said: “The time when we had to demonstrate our unity through great manifesto gestures, because we needed to collectively abolish the Warsaw Pact, break away

from the Soviet hegemony and expel troops from our countries has passed. Now it is time for a more ordinary work. The regional cooperation is shifting into the practical realm” (Havel 1994d). According to Havel, “[t]he Visegrad cooperation should not be institutionalized. An impression that it is a block or that it is an alternative to integration into Western Europe should not develop” (Havel 1994d). This perspective corresponds to the concept of the 1993 Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic. Havel’s interest in the Visegrad cooperation receives surprisingly a pragmatic bilateral and regional dimension.

Havel did not exclude an “exchange of experience and eventual cooperation” if it is “favourable for all parties” (Havel 1994d). In his 1994 speech, Havel confirms his position but adds that “now is the time for a more specific and permanent regional cooperation that nobody problematizes and everyone is aware of its urgency” (MFA CZ 2015f, p.73). This implies that President Havel took a “time out” in a political struggle with the former Prime Minister Václav Klaus (ODS), who had a different perception of the V4 cooperation. Another possible explanation is Havel’s realization that “the creation of a new order” in Europe will not be an “easy task” and that a “time of a general joy” from the fall of the Iron Curtain has passed. Havel argued that he once again felt “competition of diverging interests” and a “new game” of powerful (Havel 1995). It seems that on the road to NATO and EU, the idealized “genuine friendship” of the Visegrad did not fulfil his expectations.

Despite this, Havel did not lose interest in the Visegrad topic. In its reflections, he builds on the conviction that the European continent can be well be arranged only “if in its political architecture everyone finds its most natural place” (Havel 1994b). The Czech Republic and the Visegrad countries, according to Havel, “fundamentally belong” to the “Western civilization circle”, to its values and traditions (Havel 1993a). Havel’s interest is reflected to the wider regional cooperation - between the Visegrad countries, Germany, Austria, and Slovenia (Havel 1993b). He expected that a broader cooperation would remove the “dividing line” between the

candidates and the members of the European integration structures (Havel 1994d), moreover it will ensure “peace, security and order in Central Europe” which is vital for whole Europe (Havel 1993a).

A certain “historical shift” in Havel’s integration efforts (Havel 2002) was the meeting of the Presidents of the Visegrad countries with Germany, Austria, and Slovenia in Litomyšl (Havel 1994a). Havel’s vision received here a new position on a higher integrational level. “A new international association will not arise from it”, wrote Havel and appreciated the “human dimension” of the meeting (Havel 1994a). Havel did not perceive it as an asymmetrical meeting of two negotiating parties, where one is fighting “for its place in the sun”. He evaluated it as a meeting of countries which belong to a “certain specific historical-cultural space” (Havel 2002). This was a promising start to the revitalization of Havel’s vision of Visegrad. To achieve this, according to Havel, it is necessary to remove the “remnants of mistrust or fear” and to strengthen trust and friendship with Germany (Havel 1995).

Also, the development of bilateral relations with Slovakia was in Havel’s centre of attention. Havel welcomed the change of political leadership in the Slovak Republic (1998) and said, that “only now without any limits we and as true partners we can participate in the creation of a Europe where mutual respect and the principle of equality and cooperation of all exist” (Havel 1999). Toward the end of his term of office, Havel noted that “Czechs and Slovaks are today perhaps closer than ever”, their common goals are tying them together, moreover they are jointly invited to the EU (Havel 2003).

#### **5.2.3.2 Václav Klaus – the 2<sup>nd</sup> President**

Unlike his predecessor and ideological rival, Václav Klaus does not perceive the establishment of the Visegrad Group as an ideological grouping of four post-communist states on their “road to Europe”. Klaus argues that Western Europe needed a “fixed buffer zone



between East and West”, thus it invented and promoted the V4 project. Furthermore, he argues that, “they wanted to leave us aside” from the European community (Grabinsky 2003). According to Klaus, the Western Europe established “its integration project as a club of chosen” and “nobody talked” about the membership of the Visegrad countries “at that time” (Klaus 2016). Klaus, alike to Havel, sensitively perceives the position of the Czech Republic in the European area. In an interview for MF DNES newspaper, he argued that in the 1990s the Visegrad countries were placed in “insulting” position of “students” who must learn how to integrate. “We, at least some of us, fought with all possible means” this status of pupils, said Klaus (2016). At the same he feared that V4 would become a “substitute” for a full membership in the EU and NATO (Klaus 2010). Nevertheless, Klaus acknowledges that Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation exist, but asks “what weight does this concern has in comparison to our other interests” (Klaus 2003). Therefore, he advises to “not overestimate the Visegrad Group” (Grabinsky 2003).

Bilateral neighbourly relations with the closest neighbours are the most important for Klaus. “Pretending that Hungary is a more important partner than the two neighbouring states is for me is a little bit artificial, although there is nothing anti-Hungarian in it”, he said. Equally important for Hungary is for instance “the cooperation of the Danubian countries” and for Poland are the “relations with Lithuania” (Grabinsky 2003). Klaus also defined factors which unite the Visegrad countries: common interests and disagreements arising out of territorial position between ambitious Germany, seeking Russian power, a cold Baltic and restless Balkans. Following the common experience with communism, the V4 states are connected by “a different level of sensitivity” to particular conflicts (Klaus 2006). The aforementioned emphasis on bilateral relations is also reflected in Klaus’s perception of the V4 as a grouping of “four sovereign, neighbouring Central European countries that in many respects have a similar past and present” (Klaus 2006). The attenuation of bilateral relations with Poland during

his term as the Prime Minister, Klaus explained by the fact that there was not a civil right party in Poland, therefore there were “difficulties in finding a political partner” with whom he could act “as an equal”. At the same time, Klaus emphasized the “extraordinary relations” with the Polish President Kwaśniewski (Grabinsky 2003) and the “extraordinarily good friendship” with the President Kaczyński (Klaus 2013).

Yet, Klaus is critical to the V4’s coalition cooperation and identifies it as “a purely formal cooperation, devoid of a content” (Grabinsky 2003). “Phrases have always existed, but not the specifics” he wrote (Klaus 2015b). According to Klaus, CEFTA is a unique case of “genuine interest in cooperation” of V4. He argues that other “specific common interest” of V4 was not advocated (Klaus 2015b). Therefore, he recognizes V4 as a platform for discussion (Klaus 2016), an opportunity for getting to know each other, and for seeking common interests in the European integration process (Klaus 2015b). Additionally, Klaus is also critical of the V4’s cohesion which has never been “quite strongly tied” and “to a large extent it was ‘game’ on the Visegrad Four” (Klaus 2015a). He sees the cause on the part of Hungary, which in the 1990s had a “feeling of an exclusive status” and in Poland which strives for the role of a “regional power” (Klaus 2015b). However, Klaus does not mention the Czech errors that did not contribute to cohesion of the Group.

A weak institutionalization of the Group is according to Klaus an “advantage” (Klaus 2006), reflecting the same point of view that Havel formulated earlier. Furthermore, Klaus also criticizes other regional groupings. He described the so-called Pentagonal as an “illusory attempts” because the Western countries of Central Europe “made it clear” that they do not want to “fraternize”. The participation of Germany, Austria and Italy at the annual meeting of Presidents of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe Klaus considers as “formal” (Klaus 2015b). Nevertheless, in recent years, Klaus’s relationship to V4 has changed. He argues that by joining the EU and NATO, the Visegrad cooperation “acquired a new Foreign Policy dimension” which

allows for common interests and priorities to be promoted, to strengthen the position of its members in the EU, to defend the “right to manage their own affairs”, to enforce its position on energy security, Foreign Policy etc. Klaus even recognizes that V4 can contribute to political and economic stability in the region, to the prosperity and competitiveness of its states (Klaus 2010). Nevertheless, he blames V4 for its lack of courage to stand up “against the mistakes of the Western Europe and America” (Klaus 2015a). In addition, Klaus sees “some hope” for unification of the Group in V4’s cohesive approach to addressing the migration crisis (Klaus 2016).

#### **5.2.3.3 Miloš Zeman – the 3<sup>rd</sup> President**

Opinions of the current Czech President, Miloš Zeman, on the Visegrad coalition range between the perspectives of Havel and Klaus. Zeman does not consider V4 as an “institutionalization of a regional bloc”, and as a marginalization of the region. Like Havel, Zeman perceives the Visegrad cooperation as an effort to “stabilize Central Europe”, and as an optimization of conditions for a “conflict-free European integration”. The regional cooperation based on “the principle of solidarity” Zeman considers as “a means of overcoming nationalist confrontation” (ČSSD 1996). During the Zeman’s term as the Prime Minister, V4 was perceived as an added value.

Zeman’s Government significantly contributed to the development of “extraordinary relations” with the Slovak Republic and to the revival of “good relations” with Poland and Hungary (Government CZ 2002). As a contribution to the development of the Czech-Polish relations, in 2016 the Czech and Polish President exchanged the highest state honours of their countries (ČTK 2016g). Furthermore, the progress in relations with Slovakia, Poland and Hungary “allowed to recover the idea of the Visegrad cooperation” (Government CZ 2002, p.158).

Here it is necessary to emphasize the Zeman's role in the revitalization of the Visegrad Group with, the meeting of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary on October 21, 1998 in Budapest. Zeman, Buzek and Orban signed a joint declaration that reaffirmed the commitments of the Visegrad Declaration from 1991. The Prime Ministers agreed on the regular meetings, on cooperation with third countries, and on helping Slovakia to join the integration processes (MFA CZ 2000b). On May 14, 1999, in Bratislava, Prime Ministers renewed the V4 cooperation and adopted a program of concrete cooperation - Contents of Visegrad Cooperation (Visegrad Group 1999).

Zeman's positive relationship to the Euro integration also affects his vision of regional cooperation. He has been supporting all forms of regional cooperation with the countries of Central Europe (Government CZ 2002). Nowadays, Zeman promotes his "favourite project" the Danube - Oder – Elbe (Zeman 2014b) and he is also a supporter of the "extension of the Visegrad cooperation" - to include Austria and Slovenia (ČTK 2013). He expects a "strong new impetus" from the enlargement of the Visegrad Four (Zeman 2013).

Cooperation with neighbours at the multilateral level is important for Zeman (Government CZ 2002). He considers V4 as "the possibility of promoting common interests" in the EU or NATO (Zeman 2015b). At the same time, Zeman is sensitive to the identification of the Czech Republic in Europe. He defined the return of Czechs to Europe as "a return to the old family than as an entry in to a new family", because "for ages" Czechs have been a "part of the European culture" (Evropské Noviny 2014). Further, as a euro-federalist, Zeman supports the Czech Republic's entry into the "hard integration core" of the EU. According to him, a lack of "closer integration" will divide the EU into two parts - the "hard core" and on the "underdeveloped Southern Europe" (ČTK 2014a). He explains the Czech relationship to the Czech EU through Czech scepticism that is based on the Czech mentality and on a "low level of religiosity" (Evropské Noviny 2014).

Zeman, who often uses witticism, said that if Germany is the “engine” of the EU, he would be happy if the Czech Republic could “at least become a gearbox” (Zeman 2014a). His vision corresponds to the “Europe of a Scandinavian-type” with a “Scandinavian model of a welfare state” in all the member countries of the EU (Evropské Noviny 2014). In connection with the migration crisis, Zeman supports the V4 attitude, and he has established himself as a radical opponent of a European policy on this issue (Zeman 2015a; ČTK 2016b).

#### **5.2.4 Consensus - Conclusion**

The Czech presidents have been active on the political scene throughout the existence of the country. After his retreat, Havel became a symbol of the historical changes. Klaus has become known for his Euroscepticism and Zeman is likely to remain in the consciousness due to his individuality and populism. Despite the fact that these personalities differ significantly in their opinions, for all of them the concept of the Visegrad policy has changed, developed and got closer to the realistic position - V4 as a Group of individuals but despite all the differences, a group of very close neighbours who are willingly seeking a way to each other, seeking common opinion and interest positions, and who are helping one another to find an optimal position in the European environment. The central point of the conflict was between the President Havel and Prime Minister at the time, Klaus. The dominant position of Klaus significantly influenced the direction of the Visegrad policy.

After the demise of the second Klaus’s government and split of the right-wing ODS, the government was led by ČSSD. There was a revitalization of V4 and the Visegrad policy fell under the competence of Prime Ministers (Visegrad Group 1999). The most striking interest in the Visegrad policy was given by the Government of Špidla (ČSSD 2002-2004). This government was closest to Havel’s opinions. President Klaus stepped out of ODS and gradually distanced himself from ODS. At the same time, he had conflicts with the governments led by

ČSSD which led to the disunity of the Foreign Policy. After 2007, three coalitional governments were led by ODS. Logically, the Czech Foreign Policy was right-wing oriented. However, the attenuation of the Visegrad policy was not repeated.

This analysis came to the conclusion that good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad states have consensual support. Arguments about the promotion of regional cooperation, a concrete cooperation within V4 can be traced in various governmental documents or in the discourse of the political parties. The Czech interest in the Visegrad policy develops and receives more support. Deepening of the V4 cooperation, which takes place on many levels of meeting, reduces the risk of the political influence of a political individual. Bilateral relations remain an essential foundation for the Visegrad policy, but not a sufficient argument for the Czech Visegrad policy. Because of the complexity of the Visegrad relations, the Group is resistant to political changes. The policy makers are always able to find their interest in cooperation; they are able to change the intensity or the content of the interest but the V4 policy as such remains.

The initial interest in the joint return of the Visegrad countries to Europe takes on a more concrete form with the interest in consultation and coordination in the process of negotiation and preparation for membership in NATO and the EU. After the entry of the Visegrad countries into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures, the interest of in Foreign Policy cooperation with the V4 countries in the Western Balkans, or in the post-Soviet space emerges. The interest in the Visegrad cooperation in advancing the interests of the Czech Republic at the EU level is growing. The Czech interest ranges between Havel's idealized vision of building a regional entity and V4, as an added value one the one hand and as a purely pragmatic cooperation in a case of common interests on the other. V4 is still a project of the political elites which has the ambition to create a network of relations between the Visegrad community.

The work proceeds from the assumption that the formation of interest is a process that never gets maximal support at all three levels. Therefore, the enhanced support and the expansion from bilateral to regional and multilateral level is considered as convincing. Moreover, the high degree of political will for cooperation, which after 2004 persists and grows, is regarded as an argument. Therefore, this thesis evaluates the Czech Visegrad interest in the Visegrad politics as consensual. It has been found that this policy is relevant and consensual, and therefore it is possible to claim that the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation is intrinsically legitimate.

### **5.3 Criterion of Acceptability**

In the previous part of the work, the first sub-question was answered. The internal legitimacy of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation was proven. Moreover, what constitutes this interest was also found. In this part, arguments for an answer to the second sub-question are looked for.

#### **5.3.1 External Acceptability – the Visegrad countries**

From the available data of the questionnaire “Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy 2015” (AMO.cz 2015), data that indicate the importance and quality of bilateral relations with the Czech Republic, as well as data on the perception of the Visegrad states’ functioning and development of V4 were selected.

##### **5.3.1.1 Bilateral level of neighbourhood relations**

The questionnaire posed a question to respondents from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary: “Q2: *Which countries are the 5 most important partners for your country’s foreign policy?*” Based on the selection of relevant responses, it was found how often the V4 countries’ elites have ranked the Czech Republic among the “most important partners”.

Respondents identified 28 countries among the most important. According to the frequency (%) of a selection of “most important partners” the Czech Republic’s placement in the overall list of international partners and the Visegrad states was calculated. The results are presented in the Table 1.

Based on the Q2: “Which countries are the 5 most important partners for your country’s foreign policy?”						
State	Placement of the CZ according to the Visegrad partners (rank)		How often do the Visegrad states evaluate each other as an important partner (frequencies in %)			
	The whole list	Visegrad	CZ	SK	PL	HU
CZ	-	-	-	76,9	87,8	5,4
SK	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	82,1	-	65	45,5
PL	8 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	17,6	7,8	-	0
HU	13 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4,0	20,8	59,4	-

**Table 1 The most important FP partners (author)**

Further data on the evaluation of bilateral relations of the Visegrad states were obtained from responses to the question “Q3: Evaluate the importance of the following countries for your country”. The Visegrad respondents were given a list of 18 states and five possible answers (*important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, unimportant, I don't know*). From the relevant evaluation of all the Czech Republic’s neighbours a classification of countries of Central Europe (Germany, Austria, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary. Slovenia was not included among the important partners of the Visegrad states) was calculated. The position was calculated based on the positive response “important” and “important + somewhat important”. The classification of all the Czech’s neighbours and the final evaluation are presented in the Table 2.



Placement of Central European states based on Q3: "Evaluate the importance of the following countries for your country". (ranking)												
State	Placement of the Czech Republic		Placement of Slovakia		Placement of Poland		Placement of Hungary		Placement of Germany		Placement of Austria	
	Important	important + somewhat important	important	important + somewhat important	important	important + somewhat important	important	important + somewhat important	important	important + somewhat important	important	important + somewhat important
CZ	-	-	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
SK	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	-	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
PL	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	4 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
HU	5 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	-	-	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>

Table 2 The Evaluation of the importance (author)

The last group of data on bilateral relations of the Visegrad states with the Czech Republic were obtained from respondents' answers to the question "*Q4: Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with the following countries on a scale of 1 to 5*". 1 is the best and 5 is the worst evaluation of the relationship. The grading of the quality of bilateral relations in Central Europe is summarized in the Table 3 below.

Based on the Q4: "Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with the following countries on a scale 1 to 5". (averages of grading by respondents)						
Country	CZ	SK	PL	HU	GER	AU
CZ	-	1,1	1,8	2,4	1,3	2,1
SK	1,1	-	1,7	2,4	1,4	1,6
PL	2,5	2,5	-	2,8	1,6	2,6
HU	2,2	2,5	2,5	-	2,1	2,4

Table 3 Quality of relations (author)

### *CZ-SK relationship*

Slovak respondents rank the Czech Republic as the 2<sup>nd</sup> among the "most important partners" in the overall list, just behind Germany. Unequivocally "Important" for Slovakia is its relationship with the Czech Republic also in the CEE region. The Czech Republic ranks the partnership with Slovakia as the fourth most important, behind relations with Germany, Poland and the US. The evaluation of relations within Central Europe points out to the fact that for the

Czech Republic, the Czech-Slovak relationship as important or nearly as important as the relationship with Poland. Regarding the quality of the Czech-Slovak relations, both countries evaluate this relationship with the highest grade from all of the relationships.

### ***CZ-PL relationship***

For Poland, the Czech Republic is the eight “most important partner”, after the US, France, Great Britain, Russia and Sweden. However, among the Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic places as first. In the context of Central Europe, Poland ranks the Czech Republic after Germany. The quality of the Czech-Polish relationship with a final mark of “2,5”, along with Slovakia and Romania, has placed the Czech Republic as 8th on the overall Polish list. On the other hand, for the Czech Republic, the partnership with Poland is very important. Poland is second in the Czech’s overall list of the most important partners, as well as within the Central Europe. Therefore, in 2015, the Czech respondents rated Poland as the most important Visegrad partner. The Czech Republic evaluates the quality of the relationship with Poland as the 4th best in the overall ranking with grade “1,8”.

### ***CZ-HU relationship***

Lastly, there is the Czech-Hungarian relationship. Both Hungary and the Czech Republic consider their partnerships as 13<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> “most important” in the overall list of partners. Germany, the US and Russia are more important partners for the Hungarian respondents. In the Hungarian list of importance Poland is 4<sup>th</sup> and Slovakia is 8<sup>th</sup>. Even Serbia and Turkey have placed before the Czech Republic in Hungarian respondent’s evaluation. In the Visegrad framework, as well as in Central Europe, the CZ-HU partnership is considered as least important. Yet, the quality of the existing relationship is rated with a good grade, and even within Central Europe, Hungary assessed the Czech-Hungarian relations as second best.

### ***CZ-AT and CZ-GER relationship***

The analysis of the data shows that in the international arena, the Visegrad countries bilaterally consider themselves as the “most important partners”. But it is not possible to expect that the most frequently selected “most important partners” – Germany and the US – will reciprocate the evaluation of the Visegrad countries’. Germany definitely leads among the most important partners in Central Europe. The quality of these relations is highly evaluated, especially from perspective of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. On the other hand, the position of Austria among the Central European states is not so convincing.

Geographic proximity plays a key role in the evaluation of the partnership. While, in the evaluation of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, Austria is placed as 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> “most important partner” in the overall list, Austria was not even included in the Polish list. According to the Visegrad countries, Austria places as last in the evaluation of importance together with Hungary. Despite the fact that the quality of the relationship is assessed with lower mark, the relations with Austria are on a very good level. Nevertheless, this asymmetrical relationship with Germany and the ambiguous perception of the relationship with Austria is not the optimal foundation for an equal partnership in a wider regional grouping.

### ***Conclusion of bilateral level of neighbourhood relations***

Based on the analysis of bilateral relations with the Czech Republic, in relation to their importance, quality and reciprocity, it is possible to argue that from the perspective of the Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic has an exceptionally good position within the region. Even among the 28 candidates for the place of the most important partner, the Czech Republic, except in the case of Hungary, is evaluated by the V4 countries very well. Exceptionally well and reciprocally is rated the Czech-Slovak relationship. This relationship is superior and exceptional in the Visegrad and in Central Europe. On the other hand, the evaluation of the quality of the Czech-Polish bilateral relations is somewhat lower. From the Czech Republic’s

and Polish perspective, there is a difference in the perception of the importance and quality of the Czech-Polish relations. Nevertheless, the Czech-Hungarian relations have the largest reserves. From a global perspective, it is possible to agree that “bilateral relations within the Visegrad Group are now perceived as excellent—which has not always been the case and is part of the success of EU integration and Visegrad cooperation”(Nič & Dostál 2016).

Based on these data, it is possible to argue that the policy of good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries is mutually acceptable.

### 5.3.1.2 Regional level of relations

Proving of acceptability of the Czech interest is complemented by an analysis of the perception of V4 from the perspective of the Visegrad states. From the survey “Trends of the Visegrad Foreign Policy 2015”, three answers to three propositions were selected Q12: *1) The participation in the Visegrad Group is important for your country. 2) The V4 cooperation should be further institutionalized through the creation of a single secretariat. 3) The V4 should enlarge.* The Visegrad respondents were given a choice between five possible answers: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, I don’t know. The answer I don’t know received insignificant support and is therefore ignored. Frequency (%) of responses is generalized to “agree” and “disagree”. The results are presented in the Table 4.

Based on the Q12: To what extent do you agree with the following propositions about the future development of the Visegrad Group? (sums of agreements and disagreements; in %)						
	<b>1/ The participation in the Visegrad Group is important for your country.</b>		<b>2/ The V4 cooperation should be further institutionalized through the creation of a single secretariat.</b>		<b>3/ The V4 should enlarge.</b>	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
CZ	91,7	0,9	29,8	69,4	21,0	74,2
SK	98,4	0,8	39,4	58,1	19,7	77,1
PL	78,0	20,0	51,0	38,7	48,0	46,0
HU	95,9	4,1	53,6	43,5	25,8	73,2

**Table 4 The importance, institutionalization, and enlargement of V4 (author)**

The V4 members consider their participation in the group as important <sup>39</sup>. However, the frequency of answers is inversely proportional to the size of the states. The smaller the state, the greater the emphasis on the importance of this coalition. This is shown in the case of Poland, where the approval is less convincing. Furthermore, the V4 states either oppose or are undecided about the institutionalization of V4. On the one hand, Poland and Hungary have for some time acknowledged some kind of strengthening of the institutionalization (Ehl 2003). On the other hand, there is the significantly negative attitude of the Czech Republic which has been around since the times of the PM Václav Klaus. The freedom and the flexibility of the format are considered by the Czech Republic as a very positive aspect of the coalition relationship. Respondents from Poland and Hungary are hesitant to the institutionalizations. For some time, Poland and Hungary have found some inspiration from the model of the Nordic Council (Ehl 2003).

The V4 members refuse the expansion of the coalition, only the position of Polish respondents is undecided. Nevertheless, V4 is not an exclusive/closed club and it successfully cooperates with third parties in V4 + format (MFA CZ 2016a). In addition, the Czech President Zeman welcomes the suggestion of the President of Poland for a wider V4 cooperation and creation of “a kind of axis which would connect the north and south of Europe. This axis could play even more significant role in the European Union than the Visegrad group is playing today” (ČT24 2016).

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39 V4 has a stable institutional framework in which the Czech Republic has a very great importance for the functioning of the coalition (Government CZ 2016c). The Czech-Slovak partnership brings stability to the coalition. At the same time, the Czech-Polish relationship is also significant for the functioning of the coalition and the countries seek to further their common positions.

### 5.3.1.3 Multilateral level of relations

Furthermore, data related to the Visegrad cooperation at EU level were selected from the dataset. The questionnaire offers the same five possible answers to the proposition *Q11: 1) The participation in the Visegrad Group is beneficial for pursuing your country's national interests. 2) The V4 members should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing your country's foreign policy interests. 3) The Visegrad Group is an influential actor in the EU.* The Visegrad respondents were given the choice of five possible answers: agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, I don't know. Responses were processed in the same manner as in the previous table.

Based on the Q11: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the role of the Visegrad Group in the European Union? (sums of agreements and disagreements; in %)						
	<b>1/ The participation in the Visegrad Group is beneficial for pursuing your country's national interests.</b>		<b>2/ The V4 members should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing your country's foreign policy interests.</b>		<b>3/ The Visegrad Group is an influential actor in the EU.</b>	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
CZ	84,3	13,7	81,8	16,8	44,2	55,2
SK	91,0	7,3	94,3	5,7	70,2	28,9
PL	80,0	20,0	45,0	52,0	20,0	78,0
HU	92,8	7,2	84,6	14,4	45,4	50,6

**Table 5 Benefits and the influence of V4 (author)**

With a significant predominance the Visegrad states agree that membership in V4 is beneficial for promotion of their interests. The frequency of responses varies with the size of the state. Slovakia and Hungary vigorously promote the assertion of the importance of V4. A slightly smaller proportion of positive responses comes from Poland. Support of a statement: “the V4 members should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing your country's foreign policy interests” is not so straightforward. This disagreement prevails among the Polish respondents. The Slovak Foreign Policy relies the most on the coalition cooperation. The Czech Republic comes closer to the Slovak and Hungarian opinions.

Slovakia is the only Visegrad state that believes that V4 is an influential actor in the EU. Respondents from other Visegrad countries do not share this view. Poland is the biggest sceptic. “Overall, Visegrad was seen internally as an important regional grouping, capable of articulating its members’ national interests on the EU level” (Nič & Dostál 2016). Poland repeatedly speaks of a “greater cooperation outside the framework of the so-called Visegrad triangle ABC - the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas” (ČT24 2016). Sometimes, Poland does not hide its larger ambitions (MFA PL 2016). The Visegrad countries consider the Polish dominance, after the divergence of national interests, as second among the difficulties in achieving successful cooperation within the Visegrad Group (Q 15). Although the Visegrad partners do not consider the coalition to be an influential player in the EU, they nevertheless expect that V4 will at the multilateral level contribute to resolution of issues of international importance, such as energy policy, the Eastern policy and migration (Q 13) <sup>40</sup>.

The data analysis from “Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy in 2015” has shown that the Czech’s Visegrad politics at all three levels of relationships is compatible with the national interests of the other Visegrad countries.

### 5.3.2 External Acceptability – Other countries

Based on the available data on the official V4 website (<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar>) a table which includes the number of all the V4 meetings with all reported partners (governments and regional groupings) from the period 2000-2015, was created. This table does not contain bilateral meetings which were initiated by V4 outside the multilateral level of cooperation of the European Community.

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40 The Visegrad countries consider as somewhat successful the cooperation in the areas of culture and education, coordination within the EU, energy policy or the Western Balkans (Q14). Unlike the Polish respondents, the Polish President Duda argued that in the last year V4 has clearly demonstrated that it “lives” and that it is “strong and able to speak with one voice” (ČT24 2016).

### 5.3.2.1 Non-European partners

The table of meetings (**Appendix G**) shows that in the context of non-European partners V4 met most often with Japan (6x) and it newly builds a relationship with South Korea. V4 met with US at high level only 2x. Irrespective of the fact that the Visegrad relations with the US are mainly developed on national bilateral level, the events in the Czech Republic and the Visegrad cooperation is in a long-term interest of the US. According to the “Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy in 2015”, the Visegrad countries agree that the US is one of the most important non-European partner (Q2), that relations with the US are very important (Q3), and that the quality of the relationship can be described as admirable (Q4). Generally, the V4 countries are pro-American, moreover they promote the development of transatlantic relations as well as deepening of cooperation between the EU and NATO (Government CZ 2016c). The number of high-level meetings is small, but it is supplemented by negotiations at the expert level (MoD CZ 2016) and cooperation within NATO (MFA CZ 2012a).

#### *Acceptability by the USA*

The Czech Republic also had an important influence on the development of the relationship between V4 and the USA. George Bush was the first US President who visited the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution and who on 17 November 1990 appeared on the Wenceslas Square along with Václav Havel. In January 1994, Bill Clinton visited Prague and discussed with the V4 partners the issue of advancement of relations and offered the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP) which opened the possibility for the V4 countries to join NATO (ČT 1994). It is also important to note that a significant role in V4's entry into NATO was played by Madeleine Albright (which has a Czech origin) (Pacner 2014). Furthermore, due to the building of a US radar in the Czech Republic, President George W. Bush visited Prague on June 6, 2007 (MF DNES et al. 2007). The Treaty about the establishment of a radar base was then signed in Prague on July 8, 2008 by the Czech MFA, and the US Secretary of State



Condoleezza Rice. The US has also discussed the establishing of a US missile defence base with the Poland.

At the Prague EU-US Summit (5 April 2009), the US President Obama met with High officials from the Czech Republic and Poland. In his speech he praised the Velvet Revolution: “It showed us that peaceful protest could shake the foundation of an empire [...]and that small countries can play a pivotal role in world affairs” (Obama 2009, p.1). The US president assured the countries that US will never “turn its back” to Central Europe and invited the countries to cooperate together as NATO members to “strengthen our cooperation with one another, and with other nations and institutions around the world” (Obama 2009, p.2). One year later, again in Prague, Obama and Russian President Medvedev signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (IDnes.cz 2010). On December 3, 2012, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Prague. The official reason for her visit was energy security, including cooperation in the civilian nuclear area (MFA CZ 2012b).

### 5.3.2.2 European Partners

#### *Acceptability by the European Union*

Data collected from the V4 pages show that High EU officials are frequent guests at the V4 meetings. Leading representatives of the EU, the ENP Commissioner, the High Representative of the European Union, or the Heads of State or Government of the country taking over the EU presidency in the next six months are traditionally invited to the Visegrad Group meetings <sup>41</sup>. According to Nicolas Sarkozy, V4 “guarantees interconnectivity of agendas

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41 Among the guests were, for example: the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso (Novinky.cz 2009; EurActiv.sk 2010b; MFA SK 2011a; ČTK 2014b); the President of the European Council, Van Rompuy (MFA SK 2011a); the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy (during the French EU Presidency) (ČT24 2008); the European Commissioner, Štefan Füle (Government CZ 2009; Marini 2012); the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton (MFA CZ 2012c; MFA SK 2011b); the Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs (MFA CZ 2011d), the European Commissioner for ENP, Federica Mogherini (MFA CZ 2014a; MFA MD 2015); the Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič (MFA SK 2015a) and others.

and an enhanced coordination of regional cooperation” (Government CZ 2008). Catherine Ashton also positively assessed and supported the V4 cooperation (MFA CZ 2012e). The High Representative, Federica Mogherini, described V4 as a format “which can always contribute” with its work and discussions within the EU. According to her, this is “particularly important” at a time when the EU is facing internal and external challenges (ČT24 & ČTK 2016).

At the same time, V4 also took criticism from the EU. Regular meetings of V4 before the EU summits, where the Group coordinates their opinions on various of issues that are crucial for Central Europe show that the Visegrad coalition still has the potential to enhance its level of cooperation. In 2009, the former President of France, Sarkozy, described the regular pre-summit meetings as “contrived”, and which could “raise questions”<sup>42</sup>. On this, a former Czech PM Nečas reacted by saying: “No one is surprised by regular bilateral meetings between France and Germany, so why should one be surprised by meetings between our four EU countries?” (EurActiv.com 2010). Nevertheless, the EU recognizes the Visegrad Group.

V4’s participation in ENP, in the Western Balkans (MFA CZ 2015d) and in the EaP (MFA SK 2015c), are areas in which the EU recognizes the Visegrad’s stance. The European Commissioner for ENP is present at meetings of the V4 countries with countries of EaP and the Western Balkans. The outcomes of V4+ Energy Security Summit (Visegrad Group 2010) were taken into consideration in the planning and implementation of the European energy policy. The attitude of V4 affects the European solutions to migration crisis (Government CZ 2016b).

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42 For instance, another French President, Jacques Chirac, reacted sharply on the Czech and Polish support of George Bush in 2002, saying that Central European states “missed an opportunity to remain quiet” (Aktuálne.sk 2009). The President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, said that it is not possible to at the same time draw finances from the Structural Funds and reject solidarity with others, for example by not adopting migration reallocation quotas (ČTK 2015c). In the past, even the Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker were critical of V4. They criticized the Visegrad countries for a lack of solidarity with refugees. Juncker compared migrants to the people who fled to the West from communism. Faymann compared the Hungarian approach to refugees to the Nazi deportations (ČTK 2016f).

Moreover, the newly established EU V4 Battle Group constitute a contribution to CDSP (MFA SK 2015b; Nad' et al. 2016).

### ***Acceptability by the Western European states and regional groupings***

From the Western partners, according to the number of meetings, the length and the intensity of the relationship, we can highlight the Visegrad's relations with the Benelux countries, Austria<sup>43</sup> and Germany. There is a traditional long-term cooperation between V4 and Benelux, which is considered as an inspiration model for V4 and as a source of positive experience in solving similar issues within the EU. Cooperation with the Benelux countries is among the priorities of the Visegrad coalition (Visegrad Group 2016a).

The increased frequency of meetings with Germany since 2011 corresponds to the period when the position of Poland in the EU was growing and when the former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Sikorski "called for more German involvement".

### ***Acceptability by the Northern European states and regional groupings***

The most frequent Visegrad meetings are with the Nordic and Baltic countries. The V4 cooperation with Northern partners occurs mainly as a cooperation between regional groupings of V4, Nordic Council (N5) and B3. The Nordic Council has experienced a successful cooperation within the EU, it willingly participates and in many aspects it is considered as a model for V4. The Visegrad Group identifies cooperation with the Nordic Council as a priority (Visegrad Group 2016a). However, this is not mutual. V4 does not belong among the regional international partners of the Nordic Council. Despite of this, N5 strongly cooperates with Poland and B3. The connecting element is the attitude towards Russia. During the recent 2016

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<sup>43</sup> Austria was the first Western country, which after the fall of communism opened its borders and allowed the "first trip behind the Iron Curtain" (Mareš 2001). Austria has also become the first member of the European Union which has expressed a favourable opinion to the V4's proposal for a construction of a fence at the northern borders of Greece (ParlamentníListy.cz 2016).

meeting between V4, B3, and N5, states primarily focused on discussing relations to Russia and Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership project and energy security (ČTK 2016c).

### ***Acceptability by the Southern European states***

A common Visegrad FP towards the Balkans is also reflected on the number of meetings. Here V4 meets most often with Romania, Bulgaria, or Slovenia. For instance, at the V4 summit in Prague, the V4 Prime Ministers supported early membership of Romania and Bulgaria into Schengen (Čr. ČTK 2016). Considerations of political leaders of the Balkan states about creating a Balkan group based on the Visegrad model among Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia (mediapool.bg 2014; mediapool.bg 2015), or in a wider format between Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia and Greece (Monitor 2015) have appeared in the media discourse repeatedly.

The above mentioned facts confirm the acceptability and importance of V4 for Southern European countries. At the same time, the Western Balkans is a priority interest of V4. This is reflected on the annual high-level meetings between V4 and Western Balkans (Visegrad Group 2016a). A stable development of a democratic Balkan region<sup>44</sup> is in the V4's interest (MFA CZ 2016e, p.6).

### ***Acceptability by the Eastern European Countries***

The most sought partnership for the V4 countries in Eastern Europe is Ukraine. After the establishment of EaP at a summit in Prague in 2009, V4 has organized regular meetings with the countries of this initiative. The Czech Presidency of the EU (2009), the appointment of the Czech Euro-Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle

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<sup>44</sup> The Visegrad Group also contributes with its experience and it serves as an example and inspiration for cooperation in the Balkans. The recent establishment of the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) in Tirana, Albania, based on the experience of a 15-year functioning of the International Visegrad Fund shows the success of the cooperation between the Western Balkans and V4 (ČTK 2015b).

(2010), and the Hungarian and Polish EU Presidency (2011) created exceptionally favourable constellation for a beginning, promotion and development of EaP. V4 offers “its knowledge and experience, as well as financial resources” with an aim to “facilitate the transformation of countries that are undergoing a period of transition” (MFA CZ 2016c). In this respect, the role of the IVF is extremely important (MFA SK 2015c).

The Visegrad cooperation with Eastern European countries is also heavily influenced by Russia <sup>45</sup> which is a critical factor for cohesion of the Visegrad Group (Teraz.TV 2014; McDonagh 2014).

### **5.3.3 External Acceptability – Conclusion**

The analysis of the meetings, supported by the relevant data from the discourse, supports the argument that V4 has a name in the international environment and that it also constitutes an important platform for the development of neighbourly cooperation. Moreover, V4 is also a sought consultation and discussion forum. Based on this, the analysis shows that the Visegrad cooperation is acceptable for all the democratic international partners.

In other words, the analysis has showed that the Czech legitimate interest in the Visegrad cooperation is acceptable for the Visegrad neighbours and for other international partners. Therefore, the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation has external legitimacy.

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<sup>45</sup> Russia uses every opportunity (ZN.UA 2015a; Radio Liberty 2015; REGNUM 2015; RIA Novosti 2016; Latuchina 2016) to emphasize its traditional ties to the V4 countries, their understanding for the Russian politics (Nowicki 2014) and that Russia is not isolated in Europe (ZN.UA 2015b).

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand the process of formation of Czech interest in the Visegrad policy as well as to understand the reasons for the current Czech emphasis on this policy. The Czech interest has for a quarter of a century been overcoming various fluctuations and turbulence of relations with the Visegrad neighbours. “In the mid-90s, the Czech society was a valedictorian of democratic consolidation and transatlantic integration. It was less interested in the cooperation in the region. However, today, the situation is different. At the level of political elites can be seen more interest in the Visegrad cooperation which is reflected in the public opinion” (ČTK 2016d; Gyárfášová & Mesežnikov 2016). Even, an opinion survey of the Czech political elites from 2015 reported a growing interest in the Visegrad cooperation (AMO.cz 2015). Moreover, the motto of the 2015/2016 Czech V4 presidency “V4 Trust” also proves the current interest of the Czech Republic in deepening of the Visegrad cooperation. This Presidency program (see MFA CZ 2015) does not contain any controversial geopolitical themes and emphasizes common interests and preferences. The current attention and the unusual media coverage of the Visegrad policy in the Czech Republic were the motivations for choosing this thesis topic in particular. This study is focused on the significance of the Visegrad relations for the Czech Republic from the perspective of the Czech interest in this policy.

The main research question was formulated on the basis of the topic: **“What is the significance of the Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic’s FP in the context of the Czech national interests?”**

Based on this complex question two parallel and complementary lines of analysis emerged. First of all, it was necessary to determine whether the Visegrad Dimension is part of the Czech national interest, therefore, that it is a component of the overall national interest which forms the basis for the positionalization of the Czech Republic within the international

environment. Parallel to this, the understanding of the position and importance of the Visegrad policy in the context of the overall Czech Foreign Policy was sought by specifying the content, structure and chronology of the changes of the Czech interests.

The logic of the research of the Visegrad policy was built on the concept of national interest, according to the interpretation of Petr Kratochvíl (Kratochvíl 2010c; Kratochvíl 2010b; Kratochvíl 2010a). The Kratochvíl's analytical framework operates with concepts such as internal and external legitimacy. Based on his concept, the national interest can only be a policy which is demonstrably legitimate. On the basis of the chosen analytical framework the main research question was divided into two sub-questions:

**1/What is the Czech interest for the Visegrad policy, and does this interest have internal legitimacy?**

**2/ What is the external legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy?'**

The analytical part of the thesis is divided into two parts that correspond to the sub-questions. In the first analytical section dedicated to the internal legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy, arguments for criteria that characterize the internal legitimacy were sought: the "Criterion of Relevance" and the "Criterion of Consensus". The analysis has found that the Visegrad policy is part of all the policy documents of the Czech foreign policy and that the Visegrad cooperation has played an important role in the process of transformation and integration of the Czech Republic. At the same time, the Visegrad relations are considered to be a stabilizing factor in Central Europe by Czech political elites. Because it represents a long-discussed and advocated policy which is important for the Czech community, the analysis has concluded that the Czech Visegrad policy meets the Criterion of Relevance.

Arguments for the Criterion of Consensus were sought in the political support for the Visegrad policy. The political consensus proceeds from a dialogue across the political spectrum. Given this, the declared interest of three groups of policy makers - Governments, political

parties and Presidents - were analysed. It has been found what constitutes the consensus of the interests, and where there is a lack of consensus. By analysing a large amount of key governmental and party documents, interviews and speeches, it was concluded that the Visegrad policy has been in the long term and widely supported, thus it meets the Criterion of Consensus. Based on these two criteria, it has been assessed that the Czech Visegrad policy is a relevant and consensually supported policy among Czech political elites. Based on the concept of national interest, this work argues that Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation has internal legitimacy.

In the second analytical part which deals with the external legitimacy of the Czech Visegrad policy, arguments for the third criterion for the legitimacy of national interest were sought. Acceptability of the Visegrad policy means that implementation of this Czech policy which is based on internally legitimate interest, is compatible with the national interests of other states. In the case of the Czech Visegrad policy it concerns the acceptability for two reference groups: the Visegrad Partners and Other Partners. The empirical argumentation was looked for in the publicly available dataset “Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy” (AMO.cz 2015) and in the available information about meetings at a higher level between V4 and foreign partners which are publicly available at the official website of the Visegrad Group.

It has been found that Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary evaluate adequately the relations with the Czech Republic and that the Czech Visegrad policy is compatible with the national interests of the Visegrad countries. In the case of Other Partners, the acceptability of the V4 policy was analysed and it can be considered as the realization of Czech interests. The analysis of meetings, which was supported by relevant data from the discourse, has provided sufficient argumentation to the claim that V4 has its place in the European environment and that it is acceptable to all democratic international partners. Therefore, this work argues that the Czech



interest in the Visegrad cooperation meets the Criterion of external Acceptability and that it has external legitimacy.

According to the concept of national interest by Petr Kratochvíl and based on the proven internal and external legitimacy, the Czech Visegrad Policy has been defined as part of the Czech national interest. During the analysis it was also found that the Czech Visegrad policy creates three levels of relationships: Bilateral, Regional, and Multilateral Level. These relations are mutually interconnected and influence each other. Therefore, it was necessary to proceed with a comprehensive analysis of the Czech interest. During the analysis of the Relevance, Consensus, and Acceptability it was distinguished between:

- 1) the Czech interest in neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries;**
- 2) interest in regional cooperation within the Visegrad Group;**
- 3) interest in cooperation with the Visegrad partners at the European multilateral level.**

Independently of changes of the political elite, the Czech policy makers have found space for its own structure of the Visegrad policy and they consensually support the overall dimension of the Visegrad policy. Consequently, over time, the Czech interest changes its intensity and structure, but as a whole it remains. Even though that the Visegrad policy does not constitute the main topic of the Czech Foreign Policy, the Visegrad dimension is stable and relevant.

During the analysis it was found that even though the quality of the neighbouring relations differs, the Czech relations with the Visegrad neighbours are strategic and generally at a high level. There is a Czech consensual interest in its further development and deepening of these relations. Unlike relations with the Western neighbours, the Visegrad relations are not historically burdened and they are also mutually balanced. Good neighbourly relations are an essential foundation but nonetheless they are not a sufficient argument for explanation of the

interest in the Visegrad policy. The coalition relations within the Visegrad Group have become a crucial element of Czech Visegrad politics. After the integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, due to its size and limited capacity, the Czech Republic has evaluated V4 as an added value for its Foreign Policy. The Czech interest in Visegrad has built on the existing coalitional and personal contacts. The high level of communication with the Visegrad countries has contributed to mutual trust and towards today's excellent neighbourly relations.

During the 25 years, the Visegrad Group has for the Czech Republic become the core platform of regional cooperation. The coalition has lacked strong new topics for a long time, but gradually the energy security, a common policy in the Balkans and in the post-Soviet space have turned into such topics. It has been found that the Czech Republic is rediscovering the importance of the basic principles of the coalition cooperation - equality, mutual benefits, flexibility and informality of the relationships. This is connected to the Czech disinterest in greater institutionalization of the coalition. Thus, the Czech Republic considers the V4+ framework as optimal format for cooperation with the third parties.

Different opinions and interests of the Visegrad partners are balanced out by the political will to negotiate and seek common interests and attitudes. Furthermore, the Czech politicians agree on the importance of strengthening of ties between the citizens of the Visegrad states. The Czech Republic expects from the coalitional cooperation to be more specific and to have practical results. After 2004, there logically exists the possibility for a joint participation of V4 within the EU and NATO. According to the analysed documents, this option has been partially and sporadically utilized. It has been found that during the Europeanization of the Czech Foreign Policy, the emphasis of the Czech interest in the Visegrad cooperation has shifted from bilateral to regional, and afterwards to the multilateral level.

The Visegrad dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy is a process that reflects on the presence of the Czech Republic in the changing international environment. In order to be able

to understand the Czech interest, it is important to identify trends of its development and to find possible links in the domestic and European politics. The Czech interest in the Visegrad policy has been shaped by political balancing between the successes and disappointments of the Visegrad cooperation, between national interests and international obligations, and also between the expectations and realistic positionalization of the country. Over a long period of time, none of the Czech policy makers position themselves against the Czech Republic's Visegrad policy. There is a demonstrable relation between the structure and content of interest on the one hand and the political orientation of the Czech policy makers on the other hand<sup>46</sup>.

Based on the analysis of the Czech interest in the Visegrad policy, a correlation between the interest in the Visegrad cooperation and the uncertainty of the Czech Foreign Policy in the European environment has been found. The Czech European policy is ambivalent – the Czech Republic insists on its EU membership while it also fears the loss of identity and sovereignty. The clear interest Czech Republic's is to actively influence the decision-making in the EU according to its own fundamental interests and priorities. During the analysis it was not possible to overlook the fact that all policy-makers of the Czech Foreign Policy sensitively perceive the position of the Czech Republic in Europe and that they expect their country to find “its most natural place” (Havel 1994b) in the architecture of Europe where it “essentially belongs” (Havel 1993a). The current identification of the Czech Republic and its role in Europe does not match

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<sup>46</sup> The left-leaning Social Democrats have been the greatest supporters of the Visegrad Policy at all levels. They perceive the goal of V4 in sectoral cooperation, in the spread of European values and in the European Neighbourhood Policy. In Havel's manner the party welcomes the creation of a regional entity and deepening of contacts in the societies. Over time, in the interest of the ČSSD there is an evident emphasis on concretization of the cooperation and on practical results. The larger the ideological shift away from the political centre to the right is, the interest of the policy makers emphasizes pragmatism of the relationship and concrete results of the cooperation. The biggest change in the perception of the regional cooperation has come from ODS. After parting ways with its founder and chairman Václav Klaus, ODS withdrew from politics of the “Czech valedictorianship” and the “Czech-centrism” as well as it reduced its Euroscepticism. ODS politicians are pragmatically finding rational reasons for deepening of cooperation with the Visegrad partners. They perceive V4 as an emancipatory tool to strengthen national positions in the EU.

the ideas of T. G. Masaryk, who said that the Czech nation has a specific task “on behalf of humanity as a whole” (Beneš & Harnisch 2015, p.156).

The specifics of the Czech mentality and its proximity to the mentality of the Visegrad countries, the idealized expectations about post-communist development, and the still existing division between the Western and Eastern EU Member States creates space for the Czech interest in regional integration construct, just like the V4. For the Czech Republic, V4 does not represent an alternative integration grouping, however, it is perceived a platform of voluntary and equal partnership, which is open to debate, confrontational attitude and to a search of common interests. A symbiosis of competition and cooperation, the will to search for a consensus and the ability to “disagree” (MFA CZ 2016e) creates, in a specific institutional framework, a specific coalitional format which constantly looks for its “raison d’être” (Kaňan 2014) in all government policies where there is a common interest (Lajčák 2015; MFA CZ 2016e).

V4 is still a “fragile entity” which functions on the basis of a “continuous political will” (Kořan 2011b). For the Czech Republic, the Visegrad cooperation has a large and still unused potential. However, in this context, the Visegrad cooperation is beneficial for the self-confidence of the Czech Republic. Achievements of the coalition will strengthen the visibility of the brand among the V4 partners (MFA PL 2012). V4 confidently strives for an image of a “constructive, responsible and respected partner in Europe” (Visegrad Group 2011b), which “after years of fumbling” has found “the meaning of its existence” not only in promoting of its “own preferences in the European context” (Kořan 2011b), but in its own ambitious projects that realistically contribute to the integration and stability of Europe. Thus, the Visegrad cooperation has a purpose if its Europe oriented. The recent statement made by the Czech Prime Minister, “V4 needs the European Union just like the European Union needs the Visegrad countries”, gives hope that the current confrontational style of communication with EU solution

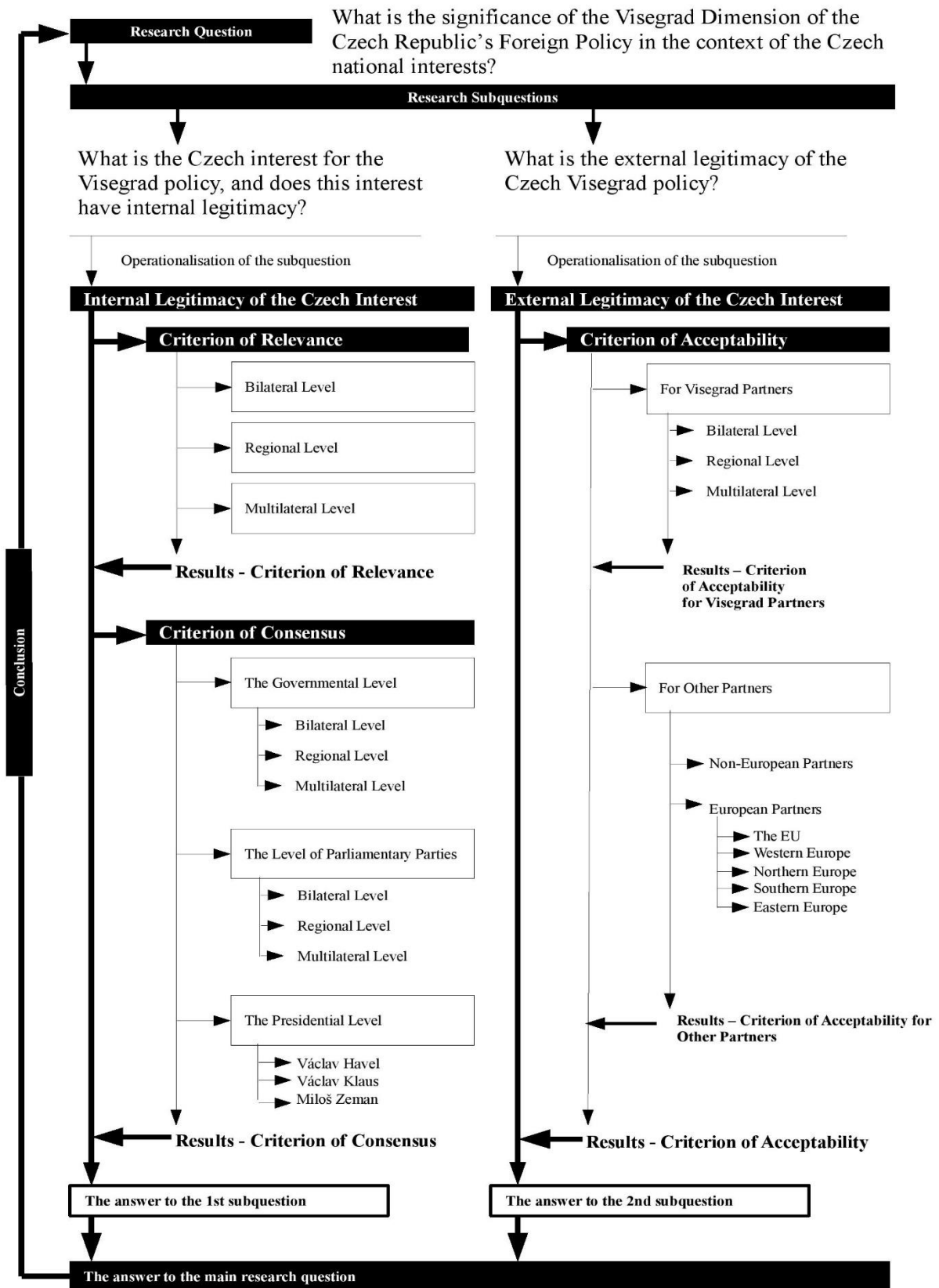
to the dilemma of the EU or V4 has come to an end (MFA CZ 2016c). In a period of uncertainty, V4 seems to be an acceptable intermediate step towards European integration in the perspective of the Czech Republic.

Based on the presented work it is possible to argue that the Visegrad policy is the Czech national interest which has consistently been present throughout the Czech Republic's existence. The Visegrad policy is associated with the behaviour of the Czech Republic both in the region and in Europe and it is related to the overall positionalization and integration of the Czech Republic in the European area as well as with the efforts of the Czech Republic to play a role of an important political player in Central Europe.

The biggest obstacle for the researcher dealing with the Visegrad policy is the availability of data dealing with this policy and the Visegrad Group in general. Unfortunately, many documents regarding this cooperation are not public, and the same applies for the studies financed by the Visegrad Group (e.g. studies by Think-Visegrad which are financed by IVF). This thesis encountered the same problem. Hopefully, the current 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation, together with the increasing interest in this topic by academics and public could bring more publicly available sources which can be used by young researchers focusing on the Visegrad policy. Furthermore, I believe that additional research on the intensity and content of the Visegrad relations would be important for understanding the behaviour of the Czech Republic in Central Europe but also as a part of the integration of the European community.

## Appendix A

### Visegrad Dimension of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy



## Appendix B

### *The 1993 Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy*

The Concept from 1993 was created after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Geopolitical conditions as well as internal conditions of the Czech FP have changed. The new Czech state has espoused democratic traditions and the “historical legacy from the period of Czechoslovak statehood of Masaryk's First Republic”. This document claimed, that from the geopolitical perspective, the Czech Republic moved relatively closer to a “zone of stability in Western Europe” and moved away from the “unstable Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” (CFP, 1993).

### *The 1999 Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy*

The 1999 CFP was composed after crucial integration events. The Czech Republic joined NATO, signed the European Association Agreement with the European Commission, applied for a membership and opened accession negotiations with the EU. The Concept from 1999 is the first fully evaluated position of the Czech Republic in the international environment. This document reflected on the multilevel nature of international relations, where the juxtaposition of “elements of order and integration with elements of chaos and fragmentation” existed. The document stresses that “security is indivisible”, and requires rapid, collective response to threats and expects synergies of foreign and security policies (CFP, 1999, p. 16).

At the same time, the Concept shows significant support for the European integration. The Czech Republic advocates the vision of a united, democratic, socially just and moderate Europe of free citizens and cooperative regions (CFP, 1999, p. 3). The Czech Republic is ready to participate in all activities that increase confidence in international relations (CFP, 1999, p. 6) while it is aware of its limits (CFP, 1999, p. 7).

### ***The 2003 Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy***

Another Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy was adopted in 2003, shortly before the Czech Republic joined the EU. Thus, in this document, the Czech Republic acts from a position of a democratic, politically, economically and socially stable Central European country. In its FP, the Czech Republic seeks not only its particular interests but also takes responsibility for the development of Europe and the entire international community (CFP, 2003, p. 3). Furthermore, it advocates the legacy and values of the European civilization, as well as tolerance and solidarity (CFP, 2003, p. 4). In its relations, the Czech Republic promotes the principles of international law and mutual benefits (CFP, 2003, p. 4). It also seeks collective security primarily by political and peaceful means (CFP, 2003, p. 2). In addition, the 2003 CFP recognizes that the Czech Republic is due to its size, open economy and lack of raw materials, largely dependent on international cooperation and membership in NATO and the EU (CFP, 2003, p. 3).

### ***The 2011 Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy***

The following 2011 CFP closes the twenty-year period of the Czech's "return to Europe" and it specifies priorities and proposes new commitments for the Czech Republic. The international position of the Euro-Atlantic civilization has changed, new global players have emerged, the interest in Central Europe has declined, and the EU adopted the Lisbon Treaty (CFP, 2011, p. 3). This document defines the main Czech and European interest: "maintaining the influence" of European and Euro-Atlantic civilization in shaping the international order, "strengthening its economic development and competitiveness". The 2011 CFP considers this interest as a "framework of Czech interests" (CFP, 2011, p. 4) and Euro-integration as the obvious choice without other alternatives (CFP, 2011, p. 9). At the same time, the Czech



Republic considers the EU as a “pragmatic political project” (CFP, 2011, p. 8) and promotes cooperation “based on the principle of mutual benefits” (CFP, 2011, pp. 5–6). The document emphasizes the Czech’s commitment to “actively influence the EU decision-making according to its own core interests and priorities” (CFP, 2011, p. 9), moreover it emphasizes the intrinsic desire to preserve “distinctive identity and sovereignty of the Czech state” (CFP, 2011, p. 4). NATO, based on strong transatlantic ties, remains the pillar of security. The Czech Republic considers the EU and NATO as natural partners, and encourages the deepening of their cooperation (CFP, 2011, pp. 11–12).

### ***The 2015 Concept of the Czech Foreign Policy***

The 2015 CFP reflects several trends of the internal environment: changing power relations and the movement towards multi-polarity, increased influence of non-state actors and a high degree of interconnectivity (CFP, 2015a, pp. 1–2). According to the document, the Czech’s membership in the EU and NATO, a reference to the humanistic thinking of T. G. Masaryk, Prague Spring and Charter 77, and the traditional support of human rights worldwide, represent the values of the Czech FP (CFP, 2015a, p. 3). Moreover, for the first time, a specific document is dedicated to the Czech policy within the EU the Policy Concept of the Czech Republic in the EU (MFA CZ 2015a, p.2).

The 2015 Conceptions notes that the Czech Republic enjoys the best relations with its neighbours in the history and that the Czech economy is among the 40 richest countries in the world (CFP, 2015a, p. 3). The document also considers the EU membership as a source of prosperity (CFP, 2015a, p. 6) and the limits of the Czech possibilities as motivating factors for an active involvement of the Czech Republic at the multilateral level (MFA CZ 2015a, p.3). Concept of FP is again turning to the policy of promotion of human rights, development cooperation and humanitarian aid (MFA CZ 2015a, pp.8–9). The Concept focuses on the

branding of the Czech Republic abroad (MFA CZ 2015a, p.11). The situation in the vicinity of the EU's border, the supply of strategic raw materials, terrorism and organized crime are considered as safety risks (MFA CZ 2015a, p.5).

## Appendix C

The majority of the Czech government are coalitions. This one the one hand poses risks to the stability and at the same time it offers the possibility of continuity in the fundamental policies. The table of the governments of the Czech Republic shows a change of the centre-right and centre-left leadership of the state at regular intervals. After 5 years of dominant position of the right-wing ODS (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Government of Václav Klaus), in 1998 an eight year social-democratic period began (Ministers Zeman, Špidla, Gross, Paroubek). From 2006 until 2013 the government was once again led by ODS (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Government of Minister Mirek Topolánek and the Government of Petr Nečas). The current coalition of Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD) balances at the centre of the political spectrum because of a strong position of the coalition partner ANO.

During the existence of the Czech Republic there were 16 political parties in the Chamber of Deputies out of which seven dissolved. Currently, there are 7 legitimate parliamentary political parties in the Chamber of Deputies: 3 governmental (ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL) and 4 oppositional (KSČM, TOP 09, ODS, ÚSVIT). According to the number of participations in the Government, the KDU-ČSL is the most frequent coalitional partner (7 coalitions). ČSSD has participated in five Governments and ODS in four. As for the new parties, TOP 09 and ANO have participated in the governmental coalitions only once. KSČM and ÚSVIT have never been part of the governing coalitions. These parliamentary parties represent a broad ideological spectrum, starting from the Communist KSČM left to the radical right ÚSVIT.

The Programs of all the political parties include a special section dedicated to the foreign policy. The only exception is the program of the party ÚSVIT, which does not deal with Foreign Policy. Only TOP 09 has a generic title “Foreign Policy”. Titles of the foreign policy sections of other election programs try to draw attention to the party’s orientation in the international

arena. For example, KSČM, which strongly opposes Czech's involvement in NATO, has called its Foreign Policy program "Yes to the world, no to the weapons". A strongly pro-integration and pro-European ČSSD has a title "International cooperation". Party ANO is pragmatic, with an emphasis on national interests and therefore its Foreign Policy section of the program has a title "YES to the decent international position of the Czech Republic". KDU-ČSL and ODS emphasize their relationship towards the EU and the programs with Foreign Policy section are titled "EU Foreign Affairs" or "Foreign Policy and the EU". KDU-ČSL is pro-European but nevertheless is sceptical of the Turkish EU membership and towards the European migration policy. Today's ODS is realistically slightly Eurosceptic, which means that it is critical of the European bureaucracy and it is against the Czech Republic's entry into the monetary union. ODS sees the EU membership mainly through the lens of the Czech national interests.

The Czech Republic has had three Presidents since the dissolution of the federation: Václav Havel, Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman. When it comes to their views, those are three influential but differing personalities. The last president of the Czechoslovakia and the first President of the Czech Republic (1993-2003) was Václav Havel, a playwright, dissident and founder of the Civic Forum. The second President economist Prof. Václav Klaus (2003-2013) was a founder and chairman (1991-2002) of the most influential Czech right-wing party ODS and also the first Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (1993-1998). He was an honorary chairman of ODS during 2002-2008 and then left the party. The third, and the current President is a former chairman (1993-2001) of the most powerful Czech left-wing party ČSSD and also a former Prime Minister (1998-2002), a forecaster, Miloš Zeman. After 2001, Zeman relinquished the position of a chairman of ČSSD and retired from an active political life. In 2003 he unsuccessfully run for the Czech Presidency and in 2007 he stepped out of the of the Social Democrats ranks. Finally, in 2013, Zeman returned to politics as the third President of the Czech Republic.

## Appendix D

The list of governments of the Czech Republic, Policy Statement of the government of the Czech Republic, and coalition agreements. Policy Statements of the government and the content of coalitional agreements are freely available on the official web page of the Czech government (<http://www.vlada.cz/>).

	Prime Minister	Time Frame	Composition of the Government	The Minister of Foreign Affairs	Policy Statement of the Government
1	Václav Klaus – ODS	02.07.1992 - 04.07.1996	ODS, KDS, KDU-ČSL, ODA	Josef Zieleniec - ODS	13.07.1992; 18 pages; Policy statement of a centre-right government was adopted during the ongoing debates about the division of Czechoslovakia. The Czech-Slovak relationship received a considerable attention from the very beginning of the document. Bilateral neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are included in section III. foreign policy. Generally, the program focused on the transformation processes, building of the rule of law and market economy. From the Policy statement, it is clear that “the government and the entire Czech public faces a number of challenges” and it is determined to put “all effort to establish the Czech Republic as a full-fledged state formation”. (17)
2	Václav Klaus – ODS	04.07.1996 - 02.01.1998	ODS, KDU-ČSL, ODA	Josef Zieleniec – ODS; Jaroslav Šedivý – Non party-member	June 25, 1996; 12 pages; Policy statement of the centre-right government; Preamble mentions relations with Slovakia, Part II. is Foreign policy, Section III. is Homeland security. Neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, with an emphasis on CEFTA are the focus of Section II. of Foreign policy. The program is dedicated to the ongoing transformation of the state and building of a market economy, privatization, development of a dialogue with NATO and the opening of negotiations for the EU membership in 1988. The government was dedicated to the continuous preparation for the “Czech Republic to be among the successful and prosperous European countries and to make it a full member of integrated Europe in the foreseeable future.”(12) The cabinet resigned due to a split in the party (an affair with the funding).
3	Josef Tošovský – nestraník	02.01.1998 - 17.07.1998	caretaker government	Jaroslav Šedivý – Non party-member	27.1.1998, 5 pages. After the collapse of the coalition a caretaker government was appointed as a temporary constitutional solution to the complex domestic political situation. The task of the government was to lead the country to early elections. The policy statement mentioned the Visegrad countries and regional cooperation in Section I. of Foreign Relations. The government decided on the accession to the Washington Treaty and on the acceleration of the preparations of negotiation talks with the EU (2).

4	Miloš Zeman – ČSSD	22.07.1998 - 12.07.2002	ČSSD (in minority)	Jan Kavan – ČSSD19.8.	August 19, 1998; 27 pages; The first Social Democratic government of the Czech Republic was a minority government and it proceeded from “the opposition agreement” with ODS. The Policy statement assessed the development and problems of 1989, it highlighted the dispute between left and right, and proposed measure. The government led the Czech Republic to NATO membership. It promoted the acceleration of adaptation of European legislation and broader cooperation with NATO (4). Good neighbourly relations with the Visegrad countries and coordination of the integration process are part of the section 4.4.3 Foreign Policy.
5	Vladimír Špidla – ČSSD	15.07.2002 - 04.08.2004	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US	Cyril Svoboda – KDU-ČSL	4.8 2002, 32 pages of Policy statement of the government and 14 pages a coalition agreement; the Policy statement of centre-left government offered a space for a broad and effective communication and discussion in the Chamber of Deputies and with the public. It was a strongly pro-European government that advocated the implementation of the principles of the European social model. (1) The government led the Czech Republic to the EU membership. Section 8. (foreign policy) includes neighbourly relations, regional cooperation and specifically the Visegrad cooperation. The coalition agreement stated that the Czech Republic wants to overcome restrictive conditions associated with the initial period of membership and that it wants to participate in the creation of a new European democratic and social model. (2) Section 10. (Foreign and Defence Policy) incorporates neighbourly relations, regional cooperation and specifically the Visegrad cooperation. The government was formed after the parliamentary elections in 2002. After the failure of ČSSD in the elections to the European Parliament, the government submitted its resignation.
6	Stanislav Gross – ČSSD	04.08.2004 - 25.04.2005	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US-DU	Cyril Svoboda – KDU-ČSL	August 24, 2004; The Policy statement has 25 pages and coalition agreement has 7 pages; The Policy statement deals with neighbourly relations and regional (namely the Visegrad) cooperation in Section 10 (Foreign Policy). The coalition agreement in the Section ‘Us and the world’ does not deal with neighbourly relations and regional cooperation. It was the second ČSSD government since the election to the Chamber of Deputies in 2002. The government submitted resignation after the scandal of financing of an apartment of a then-Prime Minister Stanislav Gross.
7	Jiří Paroubek – ČSSD	25.04.2005 - 16.08.2006	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US-DU	Cyril Svoboda – KDU-ČSL	April 25, 2005; 30 pages of a Policy statement. The coalition agreement was vague and left-wing Social Democrats enforced laws with the Communists; the Czech Republic was at a stage of a favourable economic growth. The Policy statement in Section 10. (foreign policy), is dedicated to neighbourly relations and regional and namely the Visegrad cooperation. The Government advocated “participation in the transatlantic and international cooperation based on the principle of equality in international relations, active and constructive participation of the Czech Republic in the process of deepening of European integration”. (3) It was the third ČSSD government since elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2002. After the 2006 elections, the Social

					Democrats had the best result, but were unable to form a coalition.
8	Mírek Topolánek – ODS	04.09.2006 - 09.01.2007	ODS, Non-party members	Alexandr Vondra - ODS	October 3, 2006; 16 pages; The government pursued an active, realistic, and practical foreign policy. The government wanted an “open EU, understandable to people, democratic, effective and globally competitive”. The government supported the EU enlargement and the common neighbourhood policy, deepening of transatlantic ties between the EU and the US. The Policy statement does not deal with neighbourly relations nor with the regional cooperation. The right-wing government was formed after the elections to the Chamber in 2006 and it resigned because of a lack of confidence vote in 2007.
	Mírek Topolánek – ODS	09.01.2007 – 08.05.2009	ODS, KDU-ČSL, SZ	Karel Schwarzenberg - non-party member for SZ	January 19, 2007; The Policy statement of the government has 21 pages and the coalition agreement has 39 pages; a centre-right government put emphasis “on maintaining an open society committed to the values of freedom and democracy, based on the principles of rule of law, market economy, social and environmental responsibility”.(1) The Policy statement or the coalition agreement do not deal with neighbourly relations nor with the regional cooperation. The emphasis is put on the Czech Republic’s accession to the Schengen area at the end of 2007 and on the EU Presidency. The government resigned because of a lack of confidence vote during the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, 2009.
10	Jan Fišer – non party member	09.04.2009 - 13.07.2010	úřednická vláda caretaker government	Jan Kohout - non-party member for ČSSD	June 7, 2009; 7 pages; After the demise of the government, a government of non-party experts was established. It was supposed to complete the Czech presidency in a dignified manner and bring the Czech Republic into the elections to the Chamber in 2010. The section of Foreign policy and the EU cover good-neighbourly relations.
11	Petr Nečas – ODS	13.07.2010 - 10.07.2013	ODS, TOP 09, VV (z 2012 LIDEM-liberální demokracie)	Karel Schwarzenberg – TOP 09	August 4, 2010; The Policy statement has 42 pages and the coalition agreement has 49 pages; Regional cooperation is included in section III. (Foreign Policy, European Union, defence). The Czech Republic is presented as part of a supranational political structures, particularly the EU and NATO. The government considers the anchoring in the EU and NATO as “crucial for the country in terms of a long-term security, stability and international status.” The government will actively participate in projects which “enhance safety, predictability and stability of the international community and thus of the country.” (2) According to the coalition agreement, the Czech Republic will become a legible and reliable partner of the EU and NATO, with an emphasis on the benefits for residents of the country. The coalition advocated deepening of transatlantic ties, promotion of human rights and liberalization of world trade, the single European energy policy, the EU enlargement and NATO. (12) The section on the development of neighbourly and regional relation involves foreign Policy, global crisis and national debt; Government of a budgetary responsibility. The centre-right government resigned because of the case “Nagyová” - allegations of corruption and misuse of powers by a public official, where one of the accused was also a partner

					and later a wife of the then Prime Minister of the Government, Jana Nagyova.
12	Jiří Rusnok – Non-party member	10.07.2013 - 29.01.2014	caretaker government of KDU-ČSL	Jan Kohout - Non-party member	August 7, 2013; 11 pages; the Government of experts or officials included 14 non-party members and one member of the KDU-ČSL. The Government was supposed to lead the Czech Republic to the elections for the Chamber of Deputies in 2013. Foreign policy and the European Union were one of the main political objectives. The Government promoted “deeper integration and strengthening of political and economic weight of the European Union in the world.” (2) The section of Foreign policy and the European Union includes relations with neighbours and the Visegrad cooperation for the promotion of common interests in the EU.
13	Bohuslav Sobotka – ČSSD	19.01.2014 -	ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL	Lubomír Zaorálek – ČSSD	February 18, 2014; The Policy statement has 18 pages, and the coalition agreement has 40 pages; The centre-left government “on the basis of socially and ecologically oriented market economy to prosperity and it will seek to maintain social cohesion in the country”. Improvement of legislation, the creation of the conditions for adoption of Euro, the development of civil society, the fight against corruption “. Active membership in the European Union and NATO in accordance with the interests of the Czech Republic' (4). In the section of Foreign policy there is an emphasis on anchoring in the centre of Europe, on neighbourly relations and cooperation within V4. In the coalition agreement in section 12.3 of the Foreign policy there are neighbourly relations, with emphasis on Germany, the Visegrad cooperation and EAP.



## Appendix E

Number of seats of the parties in the Chamber of Deputies are based according to the election results from 1992-2013. The table was created based on the results of elections to the Chamber of Deputies (<http://www.volby.cz/>)

Name of the party	1992	1996	1998	2002	2006	2010	2013	Activity
LB	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
KSČM	0	22	24	24	41	26	33	✓
ČSSD	16	61	74	74	70	74	50	✓
LSU	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
SZ	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	✓
ANO	0	0	0	0	0	0	47	✓
KDU-ČSL	15	18	20	23	13	0	14	✓
HSD-SMS	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
ODA	14	13	0	0	0	0	0	x
US (2002 US-DU)	0	0	19	8	0	0	0	x
KDS	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
VV	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	✓
TOP 09	0	0	0	0	0	41	26	✓
ODS	66	68	63	58	81	53	16	✓
SPR- RSC	14	18	0	0	0	0	0	x
ÚSVIT	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	divided (2015)

## Appendix F

Election programs of parliamentary parties for the election into the Chamber of Deputies in 2013: KSČM, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, ANO, TOP 09, ODS, ÚSVIT. The table is based on the information from the official websites of the political parties.

Party	Party Chairman	Number of Seats in 2013		Election program for the Chamber of Deputies in 2013
		Chamber of Deputies	Senate	
KSČM	Vojtěch Filip	33	1	<b>The program for the future;</b> 9 pages; The strategic objective of the Communist Party is socialism, democratic society of free, equal citizens, socially equitable, providing people with a decent standard of living. KSČM is permanently delimiting against the questioning of the President Beneš's Decrees (1940-1945), the refusal of separatist efforts violating the European order after the Second World War. KSČM advocates equality between member states in the EU and argues for the dissolution of NATO or for the country's exit from the organisation. Section VI. (Yes to the world, not to weapons) includes the good neighbourly relations and V4.
ČSSD	Bohuslav Sobotka	50	33	<b>We will uphold a well-functioning state;</b> 36 pages; The aim of the social-democratic program is a society that enables a person to develop and use its skills. The basis of this society is a balance between the economy, social sphere and environmental protection. In the section dedicated to the International Cooperation, ČSSD seeks a higher level of international cooperation and integration, and the development of foreign policy on multilateral, bilateral and regional levels, as well as of good neighbourly relations.
KDU-ČSL	Pavel Bělobrádek	14	10	<b>We will put the country in order;</b> 13 pages; The aim of the Christian Democrats is especially the support of domestic and family policy, agriculture and rural areas. The pro-European party promotes the Czech Republic's entry into the monetary union once the Czech Republic is ready. The party supports the EU enlargement, but not the full membership for Turkey. It supports the building of military capabilities in the EU and transatlantic ties. In the section EU and foreign affairs, projects of neighbourly cooperation are supported.
ANO	Andrej Babiš	48	4	<b>Yes, it will get better;</b> the program is in a form of a website; ANO promotes a state which will ensure better conditions for work and life. Section 11 is devoted to the international status of the country. The party advocates a dignified international position of the Czech Republic, the best possible relations with its neighbours, including cross-border and regional cooperation. It considered the EU, NATO, the UN as the most appropriate partners for promotion of Czech interests and for the strengthening of the Czech security. The party also rejects the right-left political inclusion.
TOP 09	Miroslav Kalousek	26	1	<b>We know where we are heading;</b> 32 pages; a conservative and pro-European party. The party opposes undemocratic behaviour of the President and the traditional leftist myths. In the foreign policy section, the party puts emphasis on maintaining good neighbourly relations, on V4 and coordination of positions in the EU and European security.
ODS	Petr Fiala	16	14	<b>I vote for the right;</b> 31 pages; the Right-wing party stresses the importance of economic strength and competitiveness in the international relations. In

				the section Foreign Policy and the EU - Relations with neighbours, ODS supports the promotion of the Czech national interests in Europe and worldwide, both at bilateral and multilateral levels. The party advocates deepening of neighbourly relations, which under the leadership of ODS reached the highest level yet. ODS wants the Czech Republic to be a proud, a self-confident country in Europe, it appreciates the benefits of EU membership, but it emphasizes the Czech national interests. The party is against Euro and major European bureaucracy. (29).
ÚSVIT	Miroslav Lidinský	8	0	The party presents its program in a form of ten major program points. It is as a political movement for strengthening of a direct democracy. The party split in 2016 and lost 6 seats. The movement is Eurosceptic, nationalist and anti-immigrant. The 10-point program does not deal with foreign policy.

## Appendix G

Name	Political function				
	Chairman of the political party	Chairperson of Chamber of Deputies	Minister	Prime Minister	President
Václav Havel	The founder of Civic forum				9. President of Czechoslovakia 29.12.1989 – 20.07.1992  1. President of the Czech Republic 02.02.1993 – 02.02.2003CR
Václav Klaus	The Chairman of Civic Forum 13.10.1990 – 23.02.1991  Founder of ODS and the 1 <sup>st</sup> Chairman 21.04.1991 – 15.12.2002	3. Chamber of Chamber of deputies 17.07.1998 – 20.06.2002	Minister of Finance of Czechoslovakia 10.12.1989 – 2.07.1992	1.Prime Minister of the Government of the Czech Republic ČR02.07.1992 – 02.01.1998	2. President of the Czech Republic 07.04.2003 – 07.04.2013
Miloš Zeman	12. Chairman of ČSSD 28.02.1993 – 07.04.2001  1. Chairman of Strana Práv Občanů 06.04.2010 – 29.05.2010	2.Chairman of Chamber of Deputies 27.06.1996 – 19.06.1998		3.Czech Prime Minister of the Government of the Czech Republic 17.07.1998 – 15.07.2002	3. President of the Czech Republic 08.04.2013 - now

## Appendix H

Non-European partners																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
USA			1													1	2
Korea															1	2	3
Japan			1					1		1	1	1		1			6
Turkey														1		1	2
Israel			1														1
The presence of EU Higher Representatives																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
EU						1	1		1	1	4	4	2	1	2	3	
Western European Partners																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Swiss															1		1
Spain											2						2
Portugal								1									1
France	1								1					2		1	5
UK			1	1		1									1		4
Benelux		1	2	1	2	2	1					1	1				11
Luxemburg																2	2
Belgium			1								1						2
Germany	1											3		2		2	8
Austria	1	1	1		1	2						1	1	1	2	1	12
Northern European partners																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Nordic countries	1			1	1				2	1				1		1	8
Sweden									1							1	2
Baltic countries							1	1			1			1		1	5
Estonia									1					1			2
Latvia									1					1		2	4
Latvia					1				1					2			4
Southern European partners																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Slovenia	1	1	2		1	2		1				3	1	1	1	2	16
Bulgaria							2	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	1	1	17
Romania							2	1	2	1	2	2	3	3	1	2	19
Western Balkans										1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Croatia														3		2	5
Eastern European Partners																	Sum
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	

EaP											1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Moldova								1									1
Ukraine			2			4	1	1	1			1			1	1	12

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