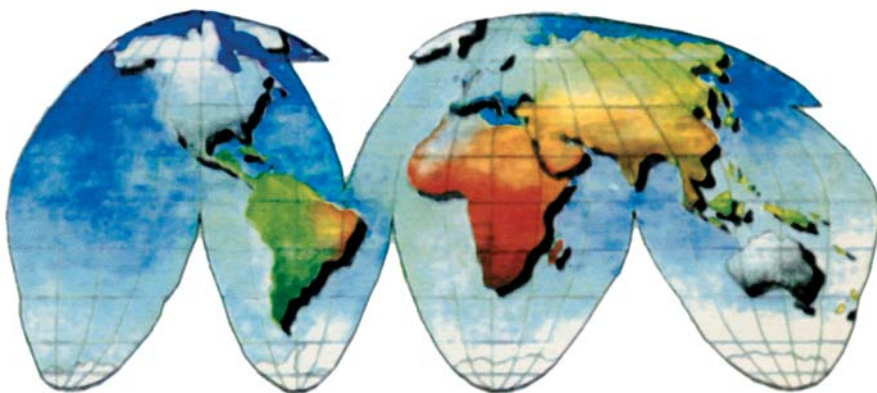


# International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs

Vol. XXII, No. 1 - 2 | 2013



## **TWENTY YEARS OF SLOVAK EUROPEAN POLICY**

Maroš Šefčovič

**Twenty years of Slovakia**

Juraj Marušiak

**Slovakia's Eastern policy – from the Trojan horse of Russia  
to “Eastern multivectoralism”**

Jakub Groszkowski

**European policies of the Visegrad countries**

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# International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs

## Contents

Vol. XXII, No. 1 –2 | 2013

Maroš Šefčovič <b>Twenty years of Slovakia</b> .....	3
Simon Gruber <b>Slovakia as seen from an Austrian perspective: on the way toward a level playing field</b> .....	9
Július Lőrincz <b>Slovakia in the Western Balkans: experiences and challenges</b> .....	21
Juraj Marušiak <b>Slovakia's Eastern policy – from the Trojan horse of Russia to “Eastern multivectoralism”</b> .....	42
Jakub Groszkowski <b>European policies of the Visegrad countries</b> .....	71
Thierry Chopin <b>Which kind of federalism for the European Union in times of crisis?</b> .....	91
Martin Vlachynský <b>Competing Europe: how harmonization and integration can harm progress</b> .....	105

**Book reviews**

Tomáš Profant

**Critical international political economy. Dialogue, debate and dissensus** ..... 122

Maja Ružić

**Russian foreign policy: the return of great power politics** ..... 128

**Contributors** ..... 132

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Maroš Šefčovič

## Twenty years of Slovakia

*Abstract: The Czechoslovak “divorce” on January 1, 1993 brought high hopes and great expectations, as well as worries. Both the political elite and citizens were in search of answers to many questions concerning Slovakia’s future and its role in the globalized world. The author argues that Slovakia has achieved much in a short period of time and has taken its place both in the world and in Europe. Slovakia has chosen the right EU path. As the author concludes, despite the fact that Slovakia still has its own issues to tackle, being part of the EU makes this task easier.*

This year marks 20 years for the newly established Slovakia – they have been 20 momentous years for our young country and for all Slovak citizens. For me personally, Slovakia’s new beginning dates a few months further back – to the middle of 1992 – when the definitive decision was taken (by the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic) to split Czecho–Slovakia into two separate republics.

From the very outset, huge efforts were made to keep Czech and Slovak relations as close as possible in order to make the separation as simple and trouble-free as possible for our citizens. A series of bilateral treaties were agreed in order to ensure that both new successor countries would maintain their position in the world: both of them guaranteed succession to the international agreements signed by Czecho–Slovakia, effectively declaring to the world that they would continue to play a responsible role in Europe and on the global stage.

As January 1, 1993 approached, we all had high hopes and great expectations. But we had our share of worries, too. How would Slovakia cope once she was on her own? Could we build the necessary government capacity quickly enough? Could we get all the right structures in place in time,

and would they work? How would our country get along with others on the international stage?

It was clear that of the two new republics being created that day, the Czechs had a head start. If they were still in the “Premier League,” we were now looking for promotion from the “Second Division” (as happened with our national ice-hockey team). They inherited a team that was already in place and functioning well. We, on the other hand, had to build ours virtually from scratch.

With the prospect of EU and NATO membership ahead, it was vital to ensure that we kept to the Copenhagen criteria – the prerequisites that apply to any country seeking to become a member of the European Union – including democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights, and a fully functioning market economy. Yet despite the enormous efforts involved in creating a new nation state, adherence to these principles was never questioned, and indeed gave us the necessary impetus and motivation to overcome our early democratic problems quickly and efficiently.

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*Slovakia's request to join the EU was made in 1995, but we were not included in the first round of negotiations alongside our Czech neighbors and others.*

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Nevertheless, it took some time to convince our future partners of our readiness to join. Let us not forget that

Slovakia's request to join the EU was made in 1995, just two years after independence, but we were not included in the first round of negotiations alongside our Czech neighbors and others. It was not until 1998 that our credibility on the international stage began to grow and we finally met the Copenhagen criteria, leading our Western allies to reconsider their positions on our potential membership in both the EU and NATO.

It is worth remembering that in 1998 our acceptance into both organizations was by no means a foregone conclusion. Europe was already suffering from “enlargement fatigue,” and it required a major diplomatic effort on the part of Slovakia to convince Western Europeans and the USA that the next enlargement of both NATO and the EU should indeed take place.

With this in mind it is hard to underestimate the personal contribution made by then Czech President Václav Havel. In 2001, during his speech in Bratislava on Europe's new democracies, and specifically their potential role in NATO and the EU, he made a very strong case for Slovakia's entry. This

explicit support made people in Western Europe and the USA sit up and listen, and indeed eventually paved the way for our NATO accession.

Slovakia's journey towards the EU really began in 1998. Being delayed three years longer than many of its neighbors, Slovakia had to work harder than most to transpose the body of EU laws (known as the *acquis*) into national law within the required time. It became the country's top political priority, and it is still a source of pride to that whole generation of Slovak civil servants that the Slovak Republic was in fact one of the first to complete this transposition ahead of accession.

Looking back now, what was achieved in such a relatively short time is nothing short of miraculous. More than 100,000 pages of EU laws needed to be transposed, and Slovak laws harmonized in line with them. Furthermore, our entire military structure needed to be overhauled in order to be ready for NATO. What was achieved was only possible due to the fact that our citizens clearly supported these efforts, and politicians from all sides were on board working towards the same goal.

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The reason for this cross-party support was, I suppose, that it was clear at that time which way the political wind was blowing in Slovakia: what Slovak citizens wanted from their politicians was a guarantee that they would orient the country towards Western European values. Given the constant scrutiny of the Slovak electorate, it was natural that support for this approach was not only unwavering but also shared on all sides of the political spectrum.

Moreover, I think it is fair to say, this unwavering support for the EU continues to this day, nearly a decade after Slovakia became a full member state. Indeed, Slovaks have traditionally been strong supporters of the EU, regardless of which political party is in power, and the country has always been a committed proponent of the European project as a whole.

This is not to say that the transition to EU membership was an easy one. It was clear that we needed a change of mental attitude in our diplomats and civil servants in particular. After years of complying with European decisions, here we were finally, at the top table, helping to shape those same decisions. And, I would argue, we are still adjusting to this change in thinking: only when Slovakia holds the rotating six-month EU presidency (in the second half of

2016), and is effectively in charge of setting the EU's political agenda for half a year, will we really see the full experience.

Another thing that is often forgotten is just how difficult it was to become an EU member state. The accession requirements have got tougher with each round of enlargement, and I would argue that the newer member states like Slovakia had to be far more careful than many of their predecessors in the way they transposed EU rules into national law. I believe it is also fair to say that we are still better at doing this today. Just have a look at the results on the transposition score-boards.

In fact, the relationship between older and newer member states is still developing, even a decade later. One could argue that we got off on the wrong foot – with difficult public debates in some of the older member states (generated by referenda) putting the entire enlargement under question. Some countries were suffering from “enlargement fatigue,” while in many of the then-15 member states there was a real fear that enlargement would somehow bring a decline in social standards.

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*In many of the then-15 member states there was a real fear that enlargement would somehow bring a decline in social standards.*

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Not surprisingly, Slovakia and the other new members did not take kindly to these concerns about the so-called “race to the bottom” or social dumping. And it was not just social standards that were on the firing line: we heard concerns that enlargement would also bring a drop in environmental standards as well, and that lower taxation rates would lead to an exodus of businesses

from the older member states. It was as if the aftershock of globalization was somehow being blamed on enlargement.

Relations between old and new were also strained over the Schengen system of border-free travel. Here, I assume, old-time instincts kicked in in many of the older member states, who feared an influx of low-cost workers, organized criminals and benefit seekers from the East swamping their social systems. As a result, many of them tried to delay the decision on opening up Schengen to the new member states. It took a considerable diplomatic effort from Slovakia and others, but in the end we succeeded: the majority of the new member states are now fully-fledged members of Schengen. Moreover, we have been able to dispel many of these fears – to put it simply, the enlarged Schengen works. The wave of job seekers, criminals and benefit



claimants that the Western nations feared failed to materialize, and it is fair to say that inter-EU immigration has enriched the lives of citizens in both old and new member states over the last decade.

Symbolically and politically speaking, it was so important for “ex-iron curtain” citizens in many of the new member states to have the right to travel freely across EU borders, precisely because this right was so often refused them in the past. I am glad that our diplomatic efforts were successful and that we, in our own small way, helped contribute to the biggest border control freeze that the world has ever known.

Obviously, free movement within the EU is only one of the journeys Slovaks have made over the last decade. We have also taken the path of the euro, joining the single currency along with 16 other (mostly older) member states. This is a journey into the heart of the EU, where Slovakia finds its rightful place.

It is also a journey that our Czech neighbors have yet to take. Of the two nations formed by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, it is clear that most people would have expected the Czech Republic to be the first to join the single currency, given the head start it had in terms of infrastructure, governance and economic development. But most people underestimated Slovakia’s commitment to enforcing the macroeconomic discipline needed to join the euro – and I am glad that Slovak support for the single currency remains just as strong now, in more difficult times, as it was from the outset.

The logic behind joining the single currency was clear: if Slovakia wanted to attract investors, especially from the rest of Europe, it had to be part of the bigger, stronger currency. We have certainly, along with many of our eurozone counterparts, undergone a huge test over the past few years, as the crisis has exposed the structural flaws in the single currency, largely as a result of member states’ failures to carry out the reforms necessary to bolster it. Indeed, it has been difficult at times to hear doomsayers predicting the death not only of the euro but also of the EU as a whole.

In many ways, the crisis has contributed to the rapid maturing of Slovakia – like any 20 year-old, we are now keen to assume a more mature, adult role in

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*We have also taken the path of the euro, joining the single currency along with 16 other (mostly older) member states. This is a journey into the heart of the EU, where Slovakia finds its rightful place.*

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the world. And with that, naturally, comes more responsibility: in this particular case, a shared responsibility for the preservation of the single currency.

The crisis has certainly tested Slovakia's maturity, but we have shown ourselves more than capable of facing up to the challenge and giving our wholehearted political and financial support to the euro. Obviously, as a small economy, it could be argued that Slovakia had little choice but to contribute to the common goal of economic and fiscal stability – however, doing so had a potentially huge political cost which, thankfully, we were prepared to pay.

And we were right to take that risk. Despite constant predictions of the demise of the euro, the single currency is still with us, and Slovakia has not crumbled under the weight of a eurozone collapse. Indeed, we should see the first signs of growth in the eurozone this year, as well as a greater stability, which will be important for everyone.

Slovakia still has its own issues to tackle – youth unemployment, for example – but being part of the EU makes this task easier than before. EU support for programs designed specifically to get young people into work, training or education – using money yet unspent from Slovakia's share of cohesion funding – is already starting to bear fruit.

These last 20 years have been nothing short of momentous for Slovakia and its citizens. In less than a generation, we have seen the creation of new state, its growing pains, its sometimes difficult teenage years, and its ultimate blossoming into maturity at the heart of NATO, the EU and the euro. Who would have thought, just 20 short years ago, that our country would one day share responsibility for the second most important currency in the world? Or that the old enemies of Soviet days would one day become our treasured partners in NATO?

Slovakia has achieved so much in such a short space of time, taking our place in the world, in Europe, in the euro. The next 20 years are unlikely to see such momentous changes. As with any young adult, the 20s and 30s are the age when you discover your true path in life, deepen your relationships with friends and neighbors, and find the maturity needed to overcome hardships and difficulties.

This, I believe, will be Slovakia's path for the next two decades: settling into our role in the heart of Europe and the euro, deepening our integration with the other member states, maturing as an economy, flourishing as a people.

I am proud to have played a small part in some of the events of the first 20 years of Slovakia. I hope to have the chance to contribute even more during the next 20.

Simon Gruber

## **Slovakia as seen from an Austrian perspective: on the way toward a level playing field**

*Abstract: This article analyzes the establishment of Slovakia on the international stage from an Austrian perspective, as well as the current Austrian cooperation with Slovakia. Over the past 20 years a close and neighborly relationship has developed. Through its EU, Schengen, and Eurozone memberships, Slovakia may overcome the asymmetry that initially characterized this bilateral relationship. There exists a great overlap in the foreign and European policies of the two countries. As members of the Eurozone and champions of closer integration, Slovakia and Austria should carry out a more systematic dialogue over their common interests. Nuclear power remains a potential problem for their bilateral relationship as the two countries hold starkly antithetical standpoints on the topic. Slovakia's image deficit continues to make the pursuit of its interests difficult within the bilateral relationship.*

**D**uring the mid-1970s, residents of the village Kittsee, which is situated on the eastern border of Austria, observed something odd from their humble one-family homes. Just a few kilometers away, on the Slovak side of the border, a gigantic pre-fab housing estate was being built – Petržalka. What kind of people were moving into these high-rises, what was their daily life like, what did they think when they looked over at Austria? The village inhabitants did not know. For them the world ended where Kittsee stopped. Their children went to Vienna seeking work. The population was steadily

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*The author is an employee of the Austrian Embassy in Bratislava and a lecturer at the Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts. In this article, the author presents his personal views, not the official positions of the Republic of Austria.*

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declining. Their fate as a sleepy town on the periphery of Austria seemed to be pre-ordained, but then suddenly everything changed completely. The contrast with the here and now could not be greater: Kittsee is booming. Thanks to immigrants from Slovakia, it is the fastest growing community in Austria. Petržalka and Kittsee are connected by a bicycle path. In the spring of 2013, a shopping center opened in Kittsee which specifically targets a Slovak clientele. The property prices in the village have exploded in the past few years. More than three-quarters of kindergarten children have Slovak as their mother tongue.<sup>1</sup>

Do bilateral relations reflect the increasing closeness between Austria and Slovakia that can be observed, for example, in Kittsee? What view did Austria have of Slovakia and its activities in the international arena over the past 20 years? Slovakia knew it had to make the best use of relatively favorable geopolitical conditions to develop constructive relationships with its Central European neighbors. Since the end of the Mečiar era, the Slovak foreign and European policies have been characterized by a relatively high degree of continuity, which makes Slovakia a reliable partner for Austria in a number of areas of shared interest. From an Austrian point of view, because of the high interdependence between the two countries, their foreign, domestic and economic policies intertwine with one another, which will be taken into account in the following analysis. In the following pages, it will be of interest to note Austria's view of the partition of Czechoslovakia and the efforts of Slovakia related to EU accession; the level and the dominant themes of the current bilateral relationship; and factors responsible for all the region's potential not being exhausted within the bilateral and multilateral framework.

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*Since the end of the Mečiar era, the Slovak foreign and European policies have been characterized by a relatively high degree of continuity, which makes Slovakia a reliable partner for Austria in a number of areas of shared interest.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. Thanei, "Kittsee: kleines Dorf am Rande der großen Nachbarstadt," *Neue Pressburger Zeitung*, March 2013.

## **The partition of Czechoslovakia and the EU accession process**

As the division of Czechoslovakia became more and more likely during the course of 1992, in Austria the positive feelings which had initially developed in the “*annus mirabilis*” of 1989 had already largely dissipated. The end of the iron curtain revealed the entire scope of the socioeconomic differences between Austria and the former Eastern Bloc. In Yugoslavia there was open warfare, while the brief battles in Slovenia took place in the direct vicinity of Austria’s borders. Austria was therefore very interested in stability and an economic upswing for Central Eastern Europe. In contrast to some other western states, in Austria there was the realization that Czechoslovakia was a federation in which Slovakia sought greater independence. Austrian politicians had visited Bratislava already in November and December 1989. The first Austrian–Slovak cooperative projects had already been up and running since 1990 in the areas of culture and education. Within “the Pentagonal,” in which Czechoslovakia worked together with Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Yugoslavia (the Slovak Ministry of Culture was responsible for the field of culture, education and tourism), an opportunity arose by which Slovakia could make itself more visible, at least in the Central European context. The real pioneering role of the Austrian–Slovak relationship, however, was actually performed by Austrian businesses, which after 1989 expanded quickly into the former Eastern Bloc states, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, it must be stated that after 1989 the wider Austrian population quickly lost interest in its Eastern neighbors, and tended to display a defensive basic attitude.

Austria took a neutral position on the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Although the division did not reflect the trend toward European unification, it was nonetheless crucial for Austria that the separation occur peacefully and in an orderly fashion, as was actually the case. Because of its good contacts and information, Austria held fewer doubts about the ability of Slovakia to survive than did many other countries. Anticipating a future of prosperous cooperation with great potential, Austria recognized Slovakia immediately. On July 13, 1993 Austrian President Thomas Klestil, who in any case was on close personal terms with his official colleague Michal Kováč, was the first foreign head of state to visit the Slovak Republic.

The historical context offered a positive starting point for the development of relations between the two states. Within the borders of the Habsburg monarchy, Austria and the area of present day Slovakia were not only part

of a customs, economic and currency union, but also comprised one Central European region of culture, science and education. The Austrian–Slovak relationship historically was less encumbered than Austria’s relationship with the Czech Republic. In the first place, Slovakia was not affected by the violent repression of the Bohemian estates as a result of the Thirty Year’s War, which led to lasting Czech resentment vis-à-vis Austria. Secondly, the Beneš Decrees, one of the subjects hanging like a shadow over Austrian–Czech relations,<sup>2</sup> are less virulent for the Austrian–Slovak relationship. The decrees were indeed also applied in Slovakia; the number of individuals affected, however, was much lower than in the Czech lands, and the expulsions occurred without excesses.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Slovakia was able to make a conciliatory gesture, in that on February 12, 1991 the Slovak National Assembly passed a “Resolution on the expulsion of Slovak Germans,” in which regret was expressed over the expulsions and the principle of collective guilt was rejected.<sup>4</sup>

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In the 1990s, Austria championed the European future perspective of Slovakia. Austria, as the only “Western” country bordering Slovakia, was particularly interested in the political and economic stability of its neighbor. Slovakia was already in the 1990s of great importance to Austria as a trading partner and investment target. At the beginning of 1997, Austrian companies owned about 1,500 subsidiaries and joint ventures in Slovakia.<sup>5</sup> For reasons of security policy as well, tying Slovakia to European structures was far more preferable than letting the country drift into an uncertain future.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P. Bruna, “Nevraživé susedství? Problémy současných česko-rakouských vztahů a jejich příčiny,” Association for International Affairs *Research Paper*, No. 4, 2012, pp. 10–1.

<sup>3</sup> J. Spetko, *Die Slowakei. Heimat der Völker*, Vienna, Munich: Amalthea Verlag, 1991, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> “Vyhlásenie Slovenskej národnej rady k odsunu slovenských Nemcov,” approved by the Slovak National Council on February 12, 1991, Resolution No. 78. Available online: [http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v\\_k-odsunu-nemcov.htm](http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v_k-odsunu-nemcov.htm) [accessed on June 1, 2013].

<sup>5</sup> “Brüssel bezweifelt EU-Reife der Slowakei,” *Wirtschaftsblatt*, April 15, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> E. Busek, “Slowakei nicht ausgrenzen!” *Der Standard*, December 12, 1997.

As Slovakia became increasingly isolated due to the autocratic governing style of Vladimír Mečiar, it placed strong hopes on good relations with Austria, and saw its neighbor as an advocate among Western institutions. Austria was able to meet at least some of these expectations, even if in the face of adverse circumstances the commitment was somewhat less enthusiastic than, for example, the activities of the Scandinavian countries on behalf of the Baltic states. In any case, Austria did not take part in the politics of ostracism which Germany, Great Britain and some other countries practiced. Despite strong reservations about the practices of the third Mečiar government (1994–1998), bilateral contacts continued. In the mid-1990s Austria even tried to act as intermediary between Slovakia and Hungary by organizing several trilateral meetings between the prime ministers of Slovakia and Hungary and the chancellor of Austria. In 1997, and during its Council presidency in 1998, Austria advocated the beginning of accession negotiations with all candidate countries, including Slovakia, and at the very least succeeded in getting a not too unfavorable formulation into the final communiqué of the European Council's meeting in Luxembourg.<sup>7</sup>

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*Despite strong reservations about the practices of the third Mečiar government, bilateral contacts continued.*

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Its clear support for Slovakia's joining the EU did not prevent Austria from taking strong positions in the accession negotiations.<sup>8</sup> EU expansion was a controversial issue in Austria. During the spring of 2001, nowhere was public support for expansion as low as in Austria.<sup>9</sup> Politicians therefore saw themselves forced to demand a seven year transitional period with respect to the free movement of workers, which brought a great deal of disappointment in Slovakia. A second troublesome area was the proximity of nuclear power plants to the border – Bohunice and Mochovce in Slovakia, but even more so Temelín in the Czech Republic. Austria used the accession process to push for an immediate closing of the

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<sup>7</sup> S. Gruber, *Wilder Osten oder Herz Europas? Die Slowakei als EU-Anwärterstaat in den 1990er-Jahren*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010, pp. 257–62.

<sup>8</sup> S. Gruber, "Vetokeule" gegen das "Geschenk der Geschichte?" Deutschland und Österreich im Prozess der 'EU-Osterweiterung,'" in M. Gehler, I. Böhler, *Verschiedene europäische Wege im Vergleich. Österreich und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945/49 bis zur Gegenwart*, Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2007, pp. 548–68.

<sup>9</sup> "Standard Eurobarometer 55," European Commission, October 2001.

two older blocks in Bohunice, which as a result was formally written into the accession treaty with Slovakia.<sup>10</sup>

## **Current bilateral relations**

Currently there is intensive political contact between the two states. The frequency of meetings at the highest levels has also increased in the last few years, and is now roughly at the level of Austrian visitor exchanges with Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. The two foreign ministers, Michael Spindelegger and Miroslav Lajčák, who also have a good relationship privately, met with each other five times during the summer months of 2012 alone. In the past few years most Austrian ministers have either invited their counterparts from Slovakia or travelled themselves to Slovakia.

It appears that particularly during times of crisis there is a desire to intensify the bilateral exchange of ideas. In the spring of 2012, Austria and Slovakia established a work group to handle bilateral and regional issues. The work group, which meets approximately four times a year, is made up of the heads of the Central Europe departments of the Austrian and Slovak foreign ministries, as well as the two bilateral ambassadors. The talks are for discussing various topics of a bilateral nature in an open and trust-building way. An “early warning system” was thereby set up to identify foreseeable difficult issues. Incidentally, since 2010 an analogous work group has existed between Austria and Hungary. Once a year, Slovakia organizes a so-called discussion forum with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany, for an informal exchange of views on European and foreign policy issues, in which think tanks and independent experts also take part, in addition to representatives of the respective foreign ministries. Such a format is still missing with Austria.

In important questions relating to foreign and European policies, Austria and Slovakia pull in the same direction. For example, although Slovakia, unlike Austria, has not recognized Kosovo, the two countries pursue similar interests precisely with respect to the Western Balkans. This expressed itself in the joint visit by foreign ministers Lajčák and Spindelegger to Macedonia in the summer of 2012. Already in 2011, the two ministers had travelled together to Croatia during the decisive phase of the accession negotiations. Austria sees

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<sup>10</sup> M. Sajdik, M. Schwarzingler, *EU-Erweiterung: Hintergründe, Entwicklung, Fakten*, Vienna: Verlag Österreich, 2003.



Slovakia as a “pragmatic non-recognizer” of Kosovo, as Bratislava is clearly very committed to a positive development for Kosovo. A similar confluence of interests also exists in policy positions having to do with the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Here too, for example, Austria and Slovakia are working to tie Ukraine and Moldova more closely to the EU. There are also certain diplomatic activities of Slovakia, however, which are naturally met with more skepticism by Austria. Among these are the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF), which has been organized alternately between Prague and Bratislava since 2007, and the Friends of Cohesion summit meeting, which took place October 5, 2012 in Slovakia to advocate for the position of net-recipient countries during the negotiations of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework. Positions also diverge with respect to the common agricultural program, as agriculture in the two countries is structured very differently. Despite interest on the Slovak side, bilateral cooperation in the military field has been trending downward since Slovakia joined NATO, and is being replaced by more multilateral approaches; for example the Partnership for Peace, trilateral exercises, etc.

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*It appears that particularly during times of crisis there is a desire to intensify the bilateral exchange of ideas.*

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Austria is not a part of the Visegrad Group. Despite the heterogeneity of its membership, this group's importance has risen in recent years as a forum for working out common positions in questions of foreign policy and energy policy, but also as a cooperative forum on security issues. In this regard, the V4 states wish to put together the EU Battlegroup in 2016. Various efforts by Austria to increase its influence in Central Europe have not been very successful over the past two decades. The Central European Initiative lost its practical relevance because of an increase in the number of its members. In comparison to the V4, the Regional Partnership initiated by Austria in 2001 (Austria, Slovenia, and the V4 countries) has a marginalized existence.<sup>11</sup> At least from the Slovak perspective, this is not because of any antipathy towards Austria, but rather due to the fact the V4 was founded earlier, is unified by the common experience of a socialist past, and has been

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<sup>11</sup> P. Luif, “Austria and Central Europe,” *Perspectives* Vol. 18, No. 2, 2010, p. 102.

maintained over time. The Hungarian proposal to bring Austria into the V4 encountered little enthusiasm from the other V4 states, including Slovakia.<sup>12</sup> In one aspect of Slovakia's immediate foreign policy interactions, therefore, Austria is only marginally integrated (through the V4+). On the other hand, Slovakia shares with Austria commonalities which are not found in the other V4 states. Like Austria, Slovakia is a member of the eurozone and hence closer to the "center" of the EU than the other V4 countries.<sup>13</sup> Even more Slovak–Austrian agreement can be found in questions relating directly to the EU. Both countries have taken part up to now in the steps for overcoming the

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*When Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, during the gas crisis in 2009, announced that the nuclear power plant Bohunice would be started up again, he caused needless excitement.*

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financial crisis (six-pack, two-pack, European Stability Mechanism, Fiscal Compact). Both Austria and Slovakia are in favor of a further deepening of fiscal and economic integration. Both affirm the need for the introduction of a financial transactions tax. As small states with relatively solid fiscal policies, and as open, export-dependent economies, both countries need an EU internal market that will not be weakened, and European supranational institutions that will not be pushed into the background by a new inter-governmentalism. In comparison to these fundamental questions about the

future, the apparent difference between the interests of net-payer Austria and net-recipient Slovakia, as well as differences of opinion over the common agricultural policy, appear to be of lesser relevance.

One particular feature of Austria is its decided rejection of nuclear power, which also reverberates through its foreign policy activities.<sup>14</sup> Whereas for Austria, the rejection of nuclear power (ever since the referendum against its nuclear power plant in Zwentendorf in 1978) has signified a broad, strong consensus loaded with emotion – which only deepened with Chernobyl in 1986, Fukushima in 2011, and the occasional media campaign – in Slovakia,

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<sup>12</sup> "Kukan: Slovensko je proti rozšíreniu Vyšehradskej štvorky," *Sme*, January 25, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> J. Rupnik, "The euro crisis: Central European lessons," *eurozine.com*, March 30, 2012. Available online: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-03-30-rupnik-en.html> (accessed on June 1, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> U. Plassnik, "Österreichische Außenpolitik vom Kalten Krieg zur EU," *Europäische Rundschau* Vol. 41, No. 2, 2003, p. 14.

one views nuclear power with very different eyes. Slovakia has not always put enough thought into the foreign policy implications of its energy policy. Austria, for example, felt it was ignored in the Slovak decision to complete the Mochovce nuclear power plant. When Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, during the gas crisis in 2009, announced that the nuclear power plant Bohunice would be started up again, he caused needless excitement. In the 1990s also, bad feelings perhaps could have been avoided if Slovakia had acted more proactively.

In light of the sensitivity of the topic, the politics of both countries is presented with the challenge to find a *modus vivendi* with their neighboring country. Increasingly in the last few years, this seems to have been working. Bilateral consultations at the expert level are closely held. Austria forgoes unrealistic demands such as calling for the closing of modern facilities, and instead asks for complete transparency. Slovakia for its part has developed more understanding for Austria's special sensitivity, and recognizes that the security needs of Austria are not mutually exclusive with its own interests. The problem therefore is not "solved" but remains instead a continuing task for both parties. Depending on developments on both sides (the starting up of new blocks in Mochovce, the eventual decision regarding the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Slovakia, media and political party reaction in Austria), the topic could again move more strongly into the center of the bilateral relationship and become a litmus test of its quality.

From the Slovak standpoint a very special interest comes into play with respect to cooperation with Austria in the area of transportation infrastructure. The fact remains there is need for improvement here. Through the completion of several cross-border transportation projects over the past few years, the distance between both countries – both literally and figuratively – has gotten smaller. In 2007 the connecting motorway between Vienna and Bratislava was completed. (Slovakia had pushed for completion of the 22 km missing portion between Parndorf and the border since the beginning of the 1990s.) Two years later, in March 2009, Hainburg was connected to the Bratislava municipal public transportation network.

Some projects were finished only after a long start-up period. The transportation infrastructure north of the Danube is still insufficient. Above all, an automobile bridge is lacking between Angern and Záhorská Ves, where at the moment there is only a ferry operating. The chances are good that such a bridge will be built using EU funds as a part of cross-border cooperation during the 2014–2020 program period.

The same applies to rail transport. Improvements are being made, especially with passenger trains, which now travel more frequently between Vienna and Bratislava-Petržalka. But at the same time, cost-intensive projects – such as the connection from the Vienna Airport to the eastbound rail spur in the direction of Bratislava, or the electrification of the northbound line from Gänserndorf to the border – are held back in the face of current cost-cutting. There is no lack of ideas for further projects. For example, there are studies underway as to whether an extension of the wide-gauge freight rail line from Russia in the direction of Eastern Slovakia and up to the Slovak–Austrian border area is feasible, and whether it would be economically viable.

### **Ambivalences and possibilities**

That such transportation projects take so long to be realized, and that the Austrian boulevard press so easily calls into question the quality of Slovak nuclear power plants, does not have to do directly with Slovak politics. Rather it has to do with the result of an ongoing ambivalence among the Austrian public with respect to Slovakia. The nonexistence of border controls since Slovakia joined the Schengen zone is viewed negatively by 38 per cent of those queried in the Austrian border zone, with only 31 per cent viewing it positively.<sup>15</sup> The contrast with the Slovak public, who almost without exception viewed it positively, is obvious. In order to improve the “subjective feeling of security amongst the public,” the Austrian Government repeatedly extended the stationing of Austrian troops at the borders with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary up through the end of 2011.<sup>16</sup> In the last few years the feeling among the Austrian populace has improved somewhat. In 2001, only 39 per cent of those asked in the area of Lower Austria’s border with Slovakia described the dismantling of the iron curtain as good, 33 per cent as bad.<sup>17</sup> Ten years later, in the summer of 2011, the portion of those surveyed in the same region who described the taking down of the iron curtain as a

<sup>15</sup> “Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik: Gelebte Nachbarschaft in der Grenzregion,” Das Meinungsbild in grenznahen Gemeinden in Niederösterreich, Oberösterreich, dem Burgenland, der Tschechischen Republik, der Slowakei und Ungarn, Vienna 2012, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> “Letzte Patrouille: Bundesheer beendet Grenzraumüberwachung,” Austrian Armed Forces, December 12, 2011. Available online: <http://www.bmlv.gv.at/cms/artikel.php?ID=5873> (accessed on June 1, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> “Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik,” op. cit., p. 17.

good thing had increased to 58 per cent, while only 17 per cent described it as bad.

The ongoing existence of reservations on the Austrian side of the border, which is perceived with a certain sensitivity in Slovakia, permits one to draw the conclusion that the border has not yet disappeared in people's minds. The four decades during which the iron curtain existed are still having their effect. The ongoing differences in economic performance between the two countries also make unbiased contacts between individuals difficult. Austria is the second largest investor in Slovakia. The approximately 2,000 Austrian firms present in Slovakia employ almost 40,000 persons, while barely 1,000 people work in the 123 Slovak companies operating in Austria.<sup>18</sup> There are 16,000 caregivers from Slovakia working in Austria.<sup>19</sup> When we look at the difference in purchasing power, Slovakia's Gross Domestic Product per person is only 57 per cent that of Austria.<sup>20</sup> The OECD predicts that not even by 2060 will the economic level of Slovakia fully match that of Austria.<sup>21</sup>

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Media reporting in Austria does only a little to present a more differentiated picture of its neighbor. With few exceptions, the Austrian media have no correspondents in Slovakia. In most cases reporting on Slovakia is rather superficial. In the 1990s, Mečiar's excesses were a welcome topic, and later the introduction of a flat tax in Slovakia, and the situation of the Roma. Often

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<sup>18</sup> See Österreichische Nationalbank web site: <http://www.oenb.at/isaweb/report.do?lang=DE&report=950.5> [accessed on June 1, 2013]; and Statistik Austria web site: [http://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/statistiken/unternehmen\\_arbeitsstaetten/auslandsunternehmenseinheiten/inward\\_fats/O67224.html](http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/unternehmen_arbeitsstaetten/auslandsunternehmenseinheiten/inward_fats/O67224.html) [accessed on June 1, 2013].

<sup>19</sup> See M. Bahna, "Odchody za pracou v období ekonomickej krízy: Slovenské opatrovatelky v Rakúsku," 2011. Available online: <http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/podujatia.php?id=1384&r=1> [accessed on June 1, 2013].

<sup>20</sup> See "Bis zu sechsfache Unterschiede beim BIP pro Kopf in den Mitgliedstaaten im Jahr 2011," *Eurostat Press Release* 180/2012, December 13, 2012. Available online: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/2-13122012-AP/DE/2-13122012-AP-DE.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/2-13122012-AP/DE/2-13122012-AP-DE.PDF) [accessed on June 1, 2013].

<sup>21</sup> See "Looking to 2060: Long-term global growth prospects," *OECD Economic Policy Papers* No. 3, November 2012, p. 24.

in the case of criminal acts which occur in Austria, the Slovak origin of the criminal will be cited. Nonetheless, there was reporting this year about Košice, the European Cultural Capital for 2013. In comparison, reporting in Slovakia about Austria is not only somewhat broader, but also more multi-faceted.

For Slovak foreign policy, this finding means that it could be worthwhile to spend even more effort than previously on public diplomacy and “nation branding.” Slovakia should make itself more visible in Austria and be connected with positive associations. The Slovak Institute in Vienna should be provided with sufficient means so that it can be noticed in the hard-fought Vienna cultural landscape. A good look should be taken particularly at Lower Austria, as federal states are often the decisive actors in Austrian infrastructure projects.

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*The political relations between the two countries, whereby the necessary conditions for the successful handling of cross-border challenges and problems are fulfilled, are intensive and constructive.*

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In the past 20 years, Slovakia has developed itself into a close partner with Austria. The Slovak foreign and European policies have proven themselves through their longevity. As a consequence of Slovakia’s strong pro-European orientation, there are numerous congruities with Austria. The political relations between the two countries, whereby the necessary conditions for the successful handling of cross-border challenges and problems are

fulfilled, are intensive and constructive. The Austrian–Slovak relationship has also had a strategic dimension consistently over the past 20 years. Austria has had an eminent interest in a Western-oriented Slovakia. The two countries joined the EU, the Schengen area, and the Eurozone at different points in time, during which interval a consolidation of the Central European region took place. Today as well, both countries are confronted with a strategic question of the highest order: the future of the European Union and its formation. In this respect Austria, which has no “natural” allies in the EU, and Slovakia should seek a more systematic dialogue.

Július Lőrincz

## **Slovakia in the Western Balkans: experiences and challenges**

*Abstract: Slovakia's engagement in Western Balkans was initially motivated by its efforts to contribute to the solving of a crisis that had evolved into open war in its own neighborhood – the most devastating and bloody conflict on European soil since the end of the Second World War. Slovakia's motivation in the region was also strengthened by its human, cultural, historical – and perhaps also mental – proximity to the predominantly Slavic nations of the Western Balkans and it was conducted by leaders who were operating in a wider international context: leaders who aimed at bringing peace, stability, and democratic change to the countries of the Western Balkans. In 20 years, Slovak foreign policy was focused mainly on supporting reforms, rule of law, and integrating these countries and their societies into Euro-Atlantic structures.*

**W**hen talking about the foreign policy of Slovakia, its priorities (usually the Western Balkans) are generally mentioned in the same breath. This has become a time-proven custom – maybe even a cliché – but it is anything but a meaningless association based only on fiction or wishful thinking. Over the last twenty years, during which, together with its foreign policy, our independent democratic state itself has been formed, the legitimacy and reality of this association has been demonstrated. Slovakia's interest in this part of Southeastern Europe has been fully expressed (both at the state level and in civil society) in various activities of our foreign policy, not only within the countries of the Western Balkans, but in the wider European and global contexts as well. Without a doubt, Slovakia's engagement was initially motivated by its efforts to contribute to the solving of a crisis that had evolved

into open war in its own neighborhood – the most devastating and bloody conflict on European soil since the end of the Second World War:

To put it more simply, one may say that the dominant factor in Slovakia's foreign policy in the region was – and still is – that during the early years it was conducted by leaders who were operating in a wider international context: leaders who aimed at bringing peace, stability, and democratic change to the countries of the Western Balkans. Slovak foreign policy was focused mainly on supporting reforms, rule of law, and integrating these countries and their societies into Euro-Atlantic structures.

### **Historical and mental proximity**

Slovakia's motivation in the region was also strengthened by its human, cultural, historical – and perhaps also mental – proximity to the predominantly Slavic nations of the Western Balkans. This is not merely an empty, nice-sounding claim. History offers a large number of notable facts to support this argument. In the sixteenth century, for example, Serbian “seagulls” that were “able to construct a war ship [the Seagull], cleverly maneuver it and fight on the waters” defended Komárno against the Osman incursions, as Serbian historian Gavril Vitković has written. And not only this. The southern part of Central Slovakia [Lučenec, Fiľakovo], and Žitný island as well, were known for their population of Serbs, who were present both in physical and economic terms. And, in the second half of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, the townsmen of Komárno “were Hungarians and Serbs. There were only a few Germans...”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, almost 250 years ago the first big wave of Slovak immigrants arrived at what is known today as Vojvodina. Besides their economic contribution to Serbia, these Slovaks founded (for example) the region's first successful theatre – only later was the Serbian National Theatre established in Novi Sad. The head of our diplomatic mission in Belgrade during the years 1995–2002, Miroslav Mojžita, recalls how Yugoslav President Vojislav Koštunica, during his ceremonial speech at a banquet in Bratislava, “named fourteen great Serbian personalities who studied in Slovakia at the famous Evangelical seminary in Bratislava”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> L. Cerović, *Srbi na Slovensku*, Báčský Petrovec: Kultúra, Spolok srbsko-slovenského priateľstva Nový Sad, 1999, 64 p.

<sup>2</sup> M. Mojžita, *Belehrad. Poznámky 1995–2001*, Bratislava: Dilema, 2003, 173 p.



Similarly, we could mention past episodes of Slovak–Croatian relations that were also very fruitful. It was due to these good relations that Croatian aristocrats were able to build their numerous mansions all across Slovakia (to mention only two: the Grassalkovich palace in Bratislava, the current residence of the Slovak president, and the famous mansion in Topoľčianky). We could mention the name of the first archbishop in Zagreb, Juraj Haulík, or the creator of Croatian scientific terminology, another Slovak, Bohuslav Šulek. Another example is Štefan Moyses, who co-founded the Slovak Foundation (Matica Slovenská) while working in Zagreb (inspired by the founder of the Croatian Foundation and the Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts, Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer). There are many similar examples of such proximity and solidarity right up to the present day. You will not find a language other than Slovak into which so many theatre plays from Western Balkans countries have been translated. Ján Jankovič also has translated works of internationally recognized authors from the Western Balkans – the Serb Dušan Kovačević, and the Croat Miro Gavran.

### **Birth of a strategy**

Let us, however, return the Slovak foreign policy and to one of its characteristic elements – its orientation towards the Western Balkans. Pavol Demeš, who led the Slovak Ministry of International Relations from April 1991 to June 1992, has just recently recalled in a private interview how he searched for staff for this ministry, which was created back in the times of the federal republic. He said that he considered it a great success that he was able to find three people in particular: Svetozár Bombík, Dušan Škvarna, and Miroslav Mojžita.

Svetozár Bombík was one of the most outstanding representatives of the students' movement during the revolutionary changes of November 1989, and later became the youngest deputy in the Slovak national council. After he died,<sup>3</sup> Adam Bžoch wrote about him that “he was swept from his school desk directly into the centre of the political happenings of November 1989. He brought with him a strong zeal and ideals, and successfully implemented them within the sphere of Slovak foreign policy.”<sup>4</sup> He was behind the publishing

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<sup>3</sup> Bombík tragically died in a car crash in January 1995.

<sup>4</sup> A. Bžoch, “Kniha odročených politických nádejí,” *Sme*, February 8, 1996. Available online: <http://www.sme.sk/c/2103177/kniha-odroceny-ch-politicky-ch-nadej-i.html> (accessed on June 9, 2013).

of the first Slovak scholarly foreign-policy journal *International Issues*, as well as the creation of the Slovak Institute for International Studies, where he was also the first acting director. Both in his studies and his articles, as well as in his practical work, he proceeded on the assumption that Slovakia had always been and still is a part of the sphere of Western culture and civilization. He was furthermore a promoter and supporter of a wider Central European cooperation, including in context of the Western Balkans. Dušan Škvarna is a

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*You will not find a language other than Slovak into which so many theatre plays from Western Balkans countries have been translated.*

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wise and respected historian who now works at the University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica. Miroslav Mojžita was already at that time an experienced diplomat with a good knowledge of the practical structure and functioning of the office that oversaw the foreign policy of the country. Aside from this he possesses a great ability for analytical thinking that can rarely be called into question, a quality he put to good use while serving as the Slovak ambassador in Belgrade and later Sarajevo.

At the beginning of the nineties, both Škvarna and Mojžita were able to link their work with our positive tradition and presence in this part of Europe. Their advantage was that they did not rely only on tradition, but were thinking also from a wider perspective. Inspired by debates not only with prominent Slovak political scientists, but also with representatives of political parties – and also based on their personal reflections – they coauthored an article for the journal *International Issues* called “National interests of the Slovak Republic.” Although the title was quite simple, the article was very up-to-date and characteristic of those times.

In the part entitled “Other neighbors and the Balkans” they wrote:

[T]he location of Slovakia creates good conditions for its becoming once again a natural and important crossing of the roads heading from west to east and from north to south. [...] There are great reserves, mainly in the northerly direction of our foreign policy, that should not only bring about an economic effect, but also strengthen the stability of Central Europe. Despite there being a number of question marks, it is important for us to maintain our ties with Yugoslavia and those countries that were part of it not so long ago. In spite the fact that,

in the past, these countries saw mainly Czech capital flowing into their economies, the doors are currently opening up to a whole new range of business initiatives. Moreover – in what is historically known as the Kingdom of Hungary – Romania, Croatia and Serbia had once completely or partially been formed together with Hungary, Slovakia and Ruthenia, and even today they form a geographical entity in the Carpathian basin which is relatively closed. This factor could help create stronger ties between us. Moreover, this is also likely due to the fact that in every country mentioned you can find a national minority (sometimes smaller, sometimes larger) from the other countries that form the region.<sup>5</sup>

### **A desire to maintain Yugoslavia**

It should be underlined that in their 1992 article the authors mention “Yugoslavia and countries that were part of it not so long ago” – suggesting that, even then, there were still a lot of questions about the future composition of the Western Balkans. This isn’t anything exceptional: even such an expert as the American diplomat Warren Zimmermann – who knew the region very well, was twice US ambassador in Belgrade (1965–1969 and 1989–1992), and witnessed the breaking up of the federal state “from his windows” – was not always confident in predicting developments on the ground. He collected his observations in an exceptionally good book that focuses on the last years of Yugoslavia (and was published almost simultaneously in New York and Belgrade).<sup>6</sup>

I mention this because even in 1991 the prevailing opinion among Slovak ruling circles was that it was necessary to do whatever it takes to keep Yugoslavia together, and that this option was still available. The leadership in Bratislava was sending signals to the parts of Yugoslavia that had shown a tendency to become independent, and which (in the spring of 1991) were preparing themselves for referendums on their independent existence (i.e. Croatia and Slovenia, and later also Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Slovaks

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<sup>5</sup> D. Škvarna, M. Mojžita, “Národné záujmy Slovenskej republiky,” *Medzinárodné otázky/International Issues* Vol. 1, No. 2, 1992, pp. 44–55.

<sup>6</sup> W. Zimmermann, *Origins of A Catastrophe – Yugoslavia and Its Destroyers*, New York: Random House 2006. Serbian version: W.Zimmermann, *Poreklo jedne katastrofe*, Belgrade: Dan Graf, 2006.

were trying to persuade them to change their aims and find a solution within Yugoslavia. Perhaps this was partly connected with the fact that, at this same time, the question of a change in internal relations or possibly the divorce of Czechoslovakia – between the two parts of the centralized and asymmetric federation – was already being discussed. But the situation back home was not nearly so advanced as the alarming problem in Yugoslavia.

I can support the previous assertion – about the dominating character of Slovak official signals towards individual republics – by a bit of unconventional personal testimony of a negotiation meeting in Ljubljana, between a Slovak delegation led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar and a Slovenian delegation

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led by Prime Minister Alojz Peterle. It was February 1991. Both countries were still part of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia respectively. I do not know how, but three of us journalists from Slovakia somehow got into the room where the negotiations were being held (our Slovenian hosts mistakenly thought we were part of the official, unusually large Slovak delegation). I think we must have looked like advisors or reporters – we were wearing suits and ties – and hence they gave us seats at small tables in corners of the meeting room.

And so we listened. And we could not believe what we were hearing.

For the first ten minutes the talks focused on the bilateral relations between our two countries, and then, for another 50 minutes, they discussed whether or not Slovenia should break away from Yugoslavia. Our Slovenian hosts clearly and rationally set forth their stance as to why it was no longer possible to remain in the Yugoslav federation with all power centralized in the hands of the Serbian leadership. Our delegation, led by Mečiar, was acting as the advocate of Yugoslavia, and warned them that Europe would not accept the independence of Slovenia or Croatia. Vladimír Mečiar, later regarded as the “father of Slovak independence,” emphasized that Slovakia would not break away from Czechoslovakia under any conditions, and that we were instead trying to democratize the Czechoslovak federation. Only the then-vice chairman of the Slovak government, Ján Čarnogurský, reassured our Slovenian hosts that the Christian-democratic parties of Europe understood the efforts of Slovenia to gain independence.

Because both parties agreed that this part of their negotiations should remain strictly confidential, we – that is, I and my two journalist colleagues – also decided to keep our mouths shut. If anything had gone public, I do not think we could ever have attended such a forum again. Only now am I writing about it for the first time – I believe that after more than twenty years I am allowed to do so. The history of the subsequent years showed us that our Slovenian colleagues were also right with respect to Slovakia and its future status.

A few months later, in June 1991, I was with a journalist colleague in Slovenia, at the end of a longer trip all around the now-disintegrating Yugoslavia. We had started our journey in Borovo Selo in Croatia, near Vukovar, where many Serbian and Croatian police and civilians died during an armed conflict at the beginning of May. Later we went to Belgrade, where we spoke with perhaps the most famous of Tito's prisoners, his former co-combatant Milovan Djilas. He predicted a war between Belgrade and Zagreb, but he still did not believe there would be war in the whole of Yugoslavia, because – as he said – “nobody could win it.” He did not discount it completely, but said that “if war breaks out also in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the population is completely mixed, it will be the end of Yugoslavia.” And he was right.

Immediately after returning home, I mentioned him in my commentary on the pages of *Pravda*, as the attack on Slovenia was underway. I wrote:

Force will not really solve anything, but it seems that Djilas has underestimated the rationality of his townsmen. Those who decided to send the army to Slovenia have discovered not only their own limitations, but also their inabilities, their malignant dependency on emotions, and their alienation from the kind of thinking that not only takes into consideration the reality close at hand, but is also able to reflect on wider perspectives and take into account historical experience.

Many of them knew that this development was fatal –; and, as the hero of the antifascist resistance – Serbian intellectual and former politician Koča Popović – has said, the tone is set by the “bureaucratic center and fierce nationalism” – however, they still wanted to avoid the the worst scenario.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. Lőrincz, “Djilas sa prerátal,” *Pravda*, June 28, 1991.

## An attempt to stop the bloodshed

On the brink of the summer of 1992, the last Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jozef Moravčík, tried to save whatever could still be saved based on the goodwill of the conflicting parties in the Western Balkans. The CSFR was at that time presiding over the CSCE (the ancestor of the OSCE), and Moravčík decided to make a tour across the capitals of the new states (in the mutilated Yugoslavia he visited Belgrade and Podgorica). He unsuccessfully tried to persuade the local ruling political structures – those that were not totally in a state of hatred – to sit at the negotiation table and resolve their conflict by political means. Minister Moravčík was accompanied by a number of journalists (including myself), and we – together with the man who would be

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*Slovak citizens from the very beginning were among the soldiers wearing UN helmets and the observers from European political structures.*

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the last Czechoslovak and later first Slovak ambassador in Belgrade, František Lipka – were able also to visit the besieged and still being-bombed Sarajevo, as we moved about in an armored vehicle. In Croatia the UNPROFOR units were already deployed on the ground, and both Czech and Slovak soldiers were actively trying to keep the two fighting sides away from each other.<sup>8</sup>

From a human perspective, perhaps the most appalling impression that was left on those who took part in this mission was of a member of the Bosnian Serb leadership, the then Vice-President of the Republic of Srpska, Biljana Plavšić. At the insistence of Jozef Moravčík (essentially a Slovak politician in the service of the calmly separating Czechoslovakia and an envoy of Europe) that the fighting parties should secure at least a cease fire so that people could return to their homes before the rainy autumn and cruel winter started, Mrs. Plavšić – otherwise a very well educated woman and formerly a university professor – cynically and cold-bloodedly refused the appeal. She replied: “We Serbs are used to harsh and tough conditions – we will survive in the deep snow and find something small to eat, we will not die.” Her statement was made in the luxurious hotel Hyatt in Belgrade where she was living comfortably, paid by government money. The cost of her apartment

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<sup>8</sup> “Former Yugoslavia – UNPROFOR,” prepared by the Department of Public Information, UN – as of September 1996. Available online: [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unprof\\_b.htm](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unprof_b.htm) [accessed on June 6, 2013].

for one night was higher than what a simple Bosnian Serb would earn in one month.

Slovak citizens from the very beginning were among the soldiers wearing UN helmets and the observers from European political structures. They are included among those who have dedicated their personal knowledge, as well as their professional and human qualities – often risking even their own lives – in order to quell the conflict and promote peace and security in the Western Balkans. Their presence was an important component of the gradually forming long term strategy that was realized and is still being realized in the actual practice of Slovak foreign policy in the Balkans. And what is also important is that this strategy is being carried out systematically and in a complex manner, especially during those times when there is a clear understanding and cooperation between the state (represented by the ministry of foreign affairs) and the non-governmental organizations.

### **Influence of domestic turbulences**

Of course, as with anything else, this was not – neither could it ever be – an easy and unproblematic process. Furthermore, in this case, various turbulences of Slovak domestic politics have found their way to the surface. Miroslav Mojžita writes specifically about some of these problems, in his book in which he relates his time at the head of the Embassy in Belgrade. He states, for example, that when he arrived at his post as chargé d'affaires in June 1995, he knew almost nothing about the initiative of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar to organize a secret meeting in Bratislava between Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman and (probably) Alija Izetbegović – the three most powerful actors in the war torn region.

Speaking figuratively, Mečiar was unsuccessfully trying to run ahead of the leading powers and the conference on Bosnia held in Dayton. Mojžita, apparently, was not “good” enough to be informed about such an initiative by the Prime Minister: Mečiar could not forgive him for the fact that for a certain time Mojžita had worked in the office of President Michal Kováč. Therefore – surprisingly even to the diplomatic community in Belgrade, and despite the expectations of the Yugoslav leaders – he was not promoted by Bratislava to the post of ambassador until March 1997.

Our countrymen in Vojvodina learned that Mojžita’s candidacy was not approved also due to the fact that – in the view of the leadership of the Slovak

National Party (SNS) that was then part of the ruling coalition – Mojžita was “nationally lukewarm.” The chairman of SNS Ján Slota presented his own personal opinion on appropriate “national pride” when he came to Belgrade during the 1997 Serbian presidential elections and campaigned for the radical Vojislav Šešelj. And while at the Slovak embassy, they both verbally attacked the Hungarians who were present, and stated that the Hungarians are a genetically defective nation. Ján Červenák of Báčšsky Petrovec cooled him down a bit when he claimed that “Slovaks and Hungarians get along very well in Vojvodina, and that he resolutely disapproves of such statements against his Hungarian friends.” He also stated that none of them wishes to hear such words in their presence ever again, especially on the grounds of the Slovak embassy.<sup>9</sup>

The person of Vojislav Šešelja is also connected with another “distortion” of Slovak foreign policy. At the time when it was supposed to be decided whether our representative will have the opportunity to assume the function of chairman of the United Nation’s General Assembly, and whether we will receive an invitation to join the North Atlantic Treaty (Madrid 1997), Šešelj received an invitation from the Slovak National Party to visit Slovakia. Šešelj, although holding a diplomatic passport, was not granted visas by EU countries and it was well known that his trip to Slovakia would cause resentment in other countries in the region, due to his aggressive nationalism. This was especially true in those countries where Slovakia had been seeking acceptance for a long time, including Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and Macedonia. Even representatives from the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia viewed Šešelj’s trip – during which he also talked with ministers of the Slovak Government – as a regrettable affair. Miroslav Mojžita wrote in his diary from his time at the embassy in Belgrade: “The Russian ambassador noted that when Šešelj visited Moscow after he was invited by Žirinovsky, he did not meet with representatives of the Russian government.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Activities of the non-governmental sector**

So even though these kinds of “contributions” to Slovakia’s foreign policy were seen in the Western Balkans, luckily it was only marginally; and, as we saw, they were met with refusal. It is also characteristic that these excesses

<sup>9</sup> M. Mojžita, *Belehrad. Poznámky 1995 – 2001*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.



happened mainly in the Slovak–Serbian context and during times when both countries were ruled by authoritarian leaders – Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia and Slobodan Milošević in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (in Serbia and Montenegro). Both countries were heading towards international isolation, and both experienced the mobilization of the non-governmental sector and opposition against such policies.

The outstanding joint effort of these countries, which was built on experience from their own societies, was very well described by the young historian and analyst, (the unfortunately now late) Pavol Lukáč:

In both cases, it was also the weakness and fractionalism of the political opposition that was not able to resist nondemocratic practices in an efficient way. After autumn of 1998, when the strength of the unity among variously oriented political parties was demonstrated, together with effective support from the third sector, people also began to think about a “Slovak model” for Serbian society.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the 1990s, and also later, Slovakia’s engagement in the process of finding solutions to Serbia’s deep crisis was both exceptional and exciting. Our embassy in Belgrade under Miroslav Mojžita was practically the only place where people from the ruling Milošević government could meet with representatives from the opposition, as well as where personalities of the democratic opposition held a dialogue together – not only at the Serbian level, but also at the Serbian–Croatian. It was under these conditions and this roof that the concept of the Bratislava process (1999–2002) was born. A number of Slovak civil society activists were present when this concept was formulated, including Pavol Demeš (who was thanked for his efforts by Milošević’s official

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<sup>11</sup> P. Lukáč, *Boli sme pri tom*, in: M. Mojžita, *Belehrad. Poznámky 1995 – 2001*, op. cit., pp. 223–31.

Belgrade by being labeled a *persona non grata* and refused further entry visas), Balász Jarábik, Marek Kapusta, Pavol Lukáč, and others. The Bratislava process was a series of conferences and seminars at which, for the first time, the political parties of the Serbian opposition, civil society organizations, and independent media met in order to achieve democratic changes in their country. Later, after the crucial elections and events of September and October 2000, they gained political standing.

It is quite understandable, therefore, that in the years following the democratic handover of October 2000 in Serbia, as many as three Slovaks received the country's highest honor – the Order of the Yugoslav Star: The first was Miroslav Mojžita, then Pavol Demeš, and last but not least, Miroslav Lajčák. When the government's then Vice-Chairman for the Foreign Policy of Serbia and Montenegro, Vuk Drašković, was presenting this high honor to Demeš, he said with a smile: "You see, Pavol, I am giving you the only thing that remains from Yugoslavia – the Order of the Yugoslav Star." At that time, neither Tito's SFRY nor Milošević's Federal Yugoslav Republic existed any longer, and the Union of Serbia and Montenegro was slowly dying as well. The honors were too slow to keep up with the fast pace of change.

## **Suspicion of Serb-centrism**

The focus of Slovakia's non-governmental sector and its established network of contacts, as well as the activity of official Slovak foreign policy, may create the impression that when it comes to the relations and advancement of Slovakia within the Western Balkans region, there is a kind of Serb-centrism taking place. What needs to be realized is that what was happening in Serbia at the end of the eighties – including its relationship with Kosovo, which lost most of its rather extensive autonomy due to Milošević's leadership – undoubtedly played a crucial role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The importance of Serbia's influence in the West Balkans is obvious. Even nowadays it is very clear – mainly in connection with the broadening of the process of normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo – that it is impossible to re-establish stability in the region, and integrate it as a whole into modern Europe, without it. After all, regaining stability is of the utmost importance for the political, economic, social, and cultural ambitions of the continent globally. That is why the activities of Slovak non-governmental organizations were focused on helping the democratic powers of Serbia in the nineties.

Slovakia is very fortunate to have had in Belgrade such ambassadors as František Lipka since the beginning of its autonomous existence. Jiří Dienstbier has said that Lipka “penetrated the most secret recesses of Balkan society.” Another important person was Miroslav Mojžita, who was no mere spectator of Slobodan Milošević’s defeat. Then we had Miroslav Lajčák, who became internationally recognized thanks to the successful enactment of the referendum concerning the status of Montenegro, and soon after was a special envoy of the EU and High Representative of the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These people undoubtedly helped create the concept of Slovak foreign policy. Their attitudes and activities exemplified our interest in the Western Balkans, and their accomplishments demonstrated that our relationship with this region consists of more than mere declarations, and that our influence there is well-founded and real. This was manifested by the nomination of foreign minister Eduard Kukan for Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Kosovo issue (with M. Lajčák as his assistant), after the bombing of Serbia by NATO forces.

The presence of all these men in Belgrade (after whom the Slovak embassy was led by another experienced ambassador, Igor Furdík, with the position being held today by Ján Varšo, a well-established ambassador as well) can indeed create the impression that the attention of Slovak diplomacy was concentrated on Serbia, but it is clear that all the main conflicts in the former Yugoslavia have their roots in Belgrade, or at the very least are somehow related to it.

## **Relations with other countries**

It is true, however, that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, there was no individual Slovak embassy until the end of 2004. There was an accredited ambassador from Zagreb, and from time to time ambassadors from Belgrade visited Sarajevo for work purposes. This, however, could not amount to a full-value representation, and therefore created a kind of imbalance. Slovakia, of course, does not have the capacity of a China, a Russia, or a US, who can afford to have representatives in every single country of the Western Balkans. These days, however, this is regarded as one of the priority areas of our foreign policy.

In the first half of the last decade, we were also actively participating in discussions taking place within the diplomatic community, over whether or not to give Croatia candidate status for membership in the EU. Slovak politicians

and ambassadors such as Mikuláš Dzurinda, Eduard Kukan, Ivan Mikloš, Ján Figeľ, et al. were traveling to Zagreb very often, as debates with our Croatian partners about moving Croatia closer to the EU were taking place almost continuously. Along with Austria, Hungary, and partly also the Czech Republic, it was mainly Slovakia that fought vigorously for Croatia's acceptance as a member of EU. Hence it was a great Slovak achievement when on July 1, 2013, Croatia became a full member of EU.

The referendum concerning whether Montenegro would become an independent country or remain a part of Serbia was an outstanding experience. It was led directly by Special Representative of the EU, Miroslav Lajčák, and chairman of the referendum election board, František Lipka. Lajčák demonstrated his masterful skill when dealing with Podgorica and Belgrade. He persuaded Montenegro's political elite that it was crucial to gain at least 55 per cent plus one vote of the electoral vote in favor of Montenegro's independence, in order to prove the trustworthiness of the election result.

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Because of this move, he earned the respect of both the Slovak and international public – and the same goes for Lipka, who managed to effectively lead the referendum election board, which contained an equal ratio of supporters and opposers of Montenegro's independence. His great accomplishment was that the members nearly always

arrived at agreement, while he had to make use of his decisive “golden vote” only once.

In the years following, Montenegro has become, so to say, Slovakia's twin. Our government and non-governmental organizations, in cooperation with Montenegro's partners, are paving the way for Montenegro's entry into the EU and NATO. The activity of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in this regard is praiseworthy, as they regularly organize the National Convention on the EU in Montenegro, as well as the activities of the Slovak Atlantic Commission. They have also organized “NATO speaking tours” around the country.

So far, we have not succeeded in breaking the ice in a similar way in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During his aforementioned position in Sarajevo from 2007 to 2009, Miroslav Lajčák brought about exceptional results in stabilizing the country's orientation, but a starting point has not yet been found for moving the country from stagnation to Euro Atlantic structures. In 2011, while working as Managing Director at the European External Action

Service (EEAS), he even organized, with the support of the EU and the US, several private negotiations in Berlin between leaders of important political parties from Bosnia and Herzegovina and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, with the aim of revitalizing a rational path for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is frustrating that in this country, where unemployment affects 43 per cent of the population, its leaders have set their own particular interests over the needs of their country and its people. The latest example of such behavior was when deputies were not able to amend the law regarding personal identification numbers, even two years after the constitutional court had decided on the issue. As a consequence, since February 2013, the law is no longer valid and newborn babies do not receive their own personal identification number, without which they cannot be registered at the registry office. One of the negative consequences of this situation is that these babies are prevented from receiving basic health care.

Macedonia is still being blocked by Greece, which prevents it from advancing in the Euro-Atlantic integration process due to their quarrel over the name of Macedonia. Slovakia is trying to encourage as much as possible the reformist and integration efforts of this country. In recent months Slovakia has revitalized its contacts with those who have such ambitions, thanks to the foreign ministry's CETIR program. In discussions with delegations from Macedonia (consisting of people from the foreign service and from parliament, as well as professionals from the field of health care and social insurance), people from our foreign ministry were trying to help Macedonians to formulate and implement policies in the area of reform and integration, in which the Slovak model served as a successful example. In addition to experts from the ministry of foreign affairs, delegates from the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation, the Institute for Public Affairs, and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association were also present at the meetings.

## **Our big moments**

On the basis of what has been said in the preceding paragraphs, we can agree with the analyst Milan Nič when he talks about the five "big moments" of Slovakia's engagement in the region. The first is connected with the fall of Milošević's regime on October 5, 2000, which opened the way for Serbia to begin moving toward European structures; the second, a crucial Slovak contribution to Europe's decision to open the way for Croatia to join the

EU; the third was the non-violent separation of Montenegro from Serbia by referendum in 2006; the fourth, the activity of Miroslav Lajčák as the EU's Special Representative and Assistant to the United Nations Secretary General Special Envoy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and we should also mention his work as Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia at the European External Action Service). And finally there is the fifth moment, which does not seem to have been so distinctively successful. It was the negative attitude of the Slovak Republic towards Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008.

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Certainly, the contribution of development aid and activities coming from the Slovak non-governmental sector, and its cooperation with partners in countries of the Western Balkans, are not negligible. Worthy of mention are the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, the Open Society Foundation, the Pontis Foundaton, the Slovak Atlantic Commission, and many more. Thanks to the work of our NGOs, for example, the Serbian public were able to obtain books about the policies, legislations and standards of the European Union (published by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in cooperation

with the European Movement in Serbia). The organizing of the Serbian security forum in Belgrade – inspired by the model of GLOBSEC in Bratislava – was one of the most successful examples of Slovak–Serbian cooperation. The first forum in 2001 was also supported by the Slovak government, and organized by the Slovak Atlantic Commission, led by the former ambassador to the US, Rastislav Káčer, and Director of the German Marshall Fund for Central and Eastern Europe, Pavol Demeš.

## **The situation is changing**

The 18<sup>th</sup> Summit of Central Europe (June 12–13, 2013) in Bratislava, at which 20 presidents – including Tomislav Nikolić from Serbia and Atifete Jahjaga from Kosovo – were present, was an opportunity to observe a new situation, even for Slovakia. These presidents had already met one another before, but this was their first meeting in a multilateral forum and in a country

which did not recognize Kosovo's independence. It was not an easy task, and even Miroslav Lajčák became personally engaged in order to make the event a success. In anticipation of this summit he went to Belgrade, where he discussed the presence of both high representatives (from Belgrade and Pristina) with the president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić. It is worth mentioning that an equal representation of politicians from Serbia and Kosovo is also reasonable because of the treaty recently approved (on April 19) in Brussels, the "first agreement on principles governing the normalization of relations" (it was approved by politicians both in Belgrade and Pristina). In the fourteenth point of the Treaty, it is stated that "neither of the parties will block or encourage the blocking of the other party in its relation to the European Union."

According to the former Slovak ambassador to the US, Rastislav Káčer, Slovak doubts about inviting Atifete Jahjaga to the summit (because of possible problems) were irrational. He said: "It would have been a big mistake not to invite her. Boycott does not solve anything." He implied that it would not be right to bury our head in the sand when talking about Kosovo's independence, even though Slovakia does not officially recognize it as an independent country. "Belgrade and Pristina are discussing these matters. Moreover, most of the countries participating in the Central European summit have recognized Kosovo as an independent country." He added that he believes the people of Serbia and Kosovo will, one day, find a mutually satisfying solution, which will then open the door for Slovakia to change its negative attitude towards Kosovo's independence.

In 2007 Ján Kubiš, the former Slovak Foreign Minister, almost lost his position when he claimed that the process of Kosovo's independence was inevitable. Several politicians demanded his dismissal. This statement was in the end corrected by an unfortunate statement made by the Slovak parliament in March 2007. According to this statement,

the total independence of the Kosovo province is not a good solution for the region's stability, which has been tormented by crisis and numerous tragedies for long years ... the solution for the future status of Kosovo has to be in accordance with the legitimate demands of Serbia.

Not a word was said about the Albanians who "also" live in Kosovo, who, mainly in the nineties, became victims of the violent policies of their own country against its citizens. Their human rights were violated in a way which has rarely been seen in Europe since the end of World War II.

Neither did Slovakia take these facts into consideration in 2008, when deciding whether to approve the declaration of Kosovo's independence. The International Court of Justice did take them into consideration, however, and on July 22, 2010 arrived at the decision that "Kosovo's declaration of independence does not violate international law." An independent Kosovo is now recognized by 100 member states of the UN – more than half of its members. It is also recognized by 23 of the 28 member states of the EU. Slovakia, however, is not among them. This attitude raises questions among those in Europe who appreciate the role of Slovakia in dealing with the crisis in the Western Balkans. Questions are also being raised by those living in the region, where most of the countries that know the situation well have approved Kosovo's independence. What also needs to be said, is that many people in Serbia already know that it does not make sense to live under the illusion of Kosovo's eventual return to Belgrade. They quite logically perceive the path to the European Union as the only reasonable alternative.

## **Unused potential**

In the preceding paragraphs, many of Slovakia's activities in the Western Balkans have been mentioned. We could, however, add one more not very pleasant fact to this list. Despite the political gains we have made in the Western Balkans, they did not produce any economic benefits for Slovakia. The economic benefit had already been mentioned in 1992 by Škvarna and Mojžita as one of the expected results of our activities in the Western Balkans. Beyond all the political and diplomatic activities – which have earned Slovakia a good reputation as a qualified partner when solving problems in the region – there are still many potentials that are unrealized. We are not always able to profit from our diplomatic activities. Other countries are able to gain much more in economic terms, they know how to make use of their potential, and, most importantly, they participate in promising development projects. Slovak organizations/businesses, for reasons unknown, do not participate in big privatization projects in Croatia. Citizens of Baltic countries are more interested in the privatization of their hotels than are Slovaks (who claim that that's where we have our sea). Montenegro, Macedonia and other countries could tell a similar story. At the same time, these countries offer good conditions for conducting business in various ways – although the competition is stiff as well.



The situation changed for the better when Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák literally made a breakthrough with the concept of economic diplomacy. Slovakia's Minister of Economy Tomáš Malatinský has recently been assured (during a meeting in Serbia of the Joint commission for economic cooperation between the two countries) of the big potential for Slovak businesses in Serbia. The potential is mainly in the fields of energy and transport, where the possibilities are for the building and reconstructing of roads and railways, and the modernization and innovation of vehicles – locomotives, cars, trams and buses. Slovakia is now among the 20 most important countries in terms of the value of foreign direct investments in Serbia. In the last eight years, the total amount of Slovak investment has reached 129 million euros. And although this might be the extent of our capacity, there is surely still more room for pursuing our ambitions.

### **Integration and reconciliation**

What is to be done next in the Western Balkans? With a newly independent Kosovo, the map of the Western Balkans has now been defined. And yet some politicians in the Republic of Srpska – one of the two entities which according to the Dayton treaty of 1995 compose the common state of Bosnia and Herzegovina – are continually and provocatively expressing their inclination to disengage from the common entity. Although this option does not seem realistic, it is obvious that the malfunctioning of this state and both its entities is paralyzing this society and its obvious ambition to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. (According to some statistics, more than 80 per cent of the population wishes to join EU). The stagnation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the most distinct sign of this, and shows that the situation in the Western Balkans is still delicate – especially now, when the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade is slowly moving towards an outcome in which the new reality and interests of their citizens will be respected.

The enlargement process of the EU in Southeastern Europe should not stop after Croatia's EU accession. In spite of some problems within the European Union itself, this region may yet find there its stability, security, perspective, and even its way to prosperity – especially in the Euro-Atlantic structures. Europe should not disappoint these hopes – and in this regard, Slovakia bears partial responsibility as well. This concerns not only its relationship with the new EU member, Croatia, but also the ambitions of Montenegro, Macedonia,

Serbia and Albania. This applies not only to Slovakia's official policy, but also to the non-governmental sector. Even though the circumstances might change, the actual principle remains the same. The core of Slovak development aid in the Western Balkans has traditionally been directed towards the support of democratic reforms, the integration process, the business environment, and civil society.

It is also in the interest of Slovakia to prevent the Western Balkans from becoming a victim of "enlargement fatigue," during the hard times that are now affecting the EU. Slovakia, therefore, should be constantly engaged in supporting the continuation of the enlargement process of both NATO and the EU. It should contribute to its quality, keeping it focused on the advancement of civil society, cultivating the kind of political environment in which both the state itself and dialogue within society can flourish. This will be mutually beneficial – not only for the countries of the Western Balkans, but for us too.

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A final appeal to the present and to the future is appropriate to this topic. Relations between these countries are still not settled. They are still influenced by the heritage of bloody war and nationalism. Not that the majority of citizens would not want to live in peace, without destructive conflicts – but normal life demands reconciliation. The officials of these countries have apologized for their past crimes; but this is not enough, because real justice in the rhetoric and actions of ordinary daily life is missing. Only a little is being done to respect others

– to search for understanding and tolerance between people, and for a liberating self-reflection, which could contribute to the building of constructive relationships. No one from outside, not even from Slovakia, can solve this problem – the responsibility is on the shoulders of the countries in the region. They can be helped in this, however, by the building of a platform for the enabling and support of a discussion among the parties involved. This is an area with great potential for the activities of non-governmental organizations, associations, and movements.

Slovakia's foreign policy in the Western Balkans has been effective and reliable when it has been able to progress with a kind of symbiosis between the governmental and non-governmental sectors. In this way it has earned

very good results. It has contributed to security, stability, and democratic changes, as well as to understanding and cooperation between the countries in the region. Even in the European arena, it has shown that it can be a qualified and systematic actor in the Western Balkans, and that it is able to produce, so to speak, a political added value. The problem could be, partially, that it has been relying on a relatively small number of people – people who are undoubtedly very qualified, as was already indicated. On the other hand, the Slovak ambassadors who have been working in this region are now therefore well-known – the international community respects their opinions, and international institutions have appointed them to important posts.

Juraj Marušiak

## **Slovakia's Eastern policy – from the Trojan horse of Russia to “Eastern multivectoralism”**

*Abstract: Slovakia's relations with the states of Eastern Europe not only have a bilateral impact, but contain geopolitical, security and economic dimensions as well. This article analyzes the domestic, bilateral and multilateral aspects of relations between Slovakia and Russia before and after the parliamentary elections of 1998, when Slovakia adopted a pro-Western course aimed at EU and NATO membership. The article also focuses on bilateral relations with Ukraine, where Slovakia is among the most active supporters of Ukraine's future EU membership. The final sections analyze the Eastern policy of Slovakia – particularly within the framework of the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Visegrad Group – as well as Slovakia's relations with the new Eastern European partners, such as Belarus, Moldova and Georgia, as target countries of Slovakia's “soft power.”*

**T**he Eastern policy of Slovakia – in particular Slovak–Russian relations – is a multilayer phenomenon, which not only has a bilateral and interstate impact, but contains geopolitical, security and economic dimensions as well. At least in the 1990s, the Russian factor played an important role in the shaping of Slovakia's civilization identity, being present directly (in the conflict over the foreign policy orientation of the country) and indirectly (in the conflict related to the character of the regime) in the domestic political discourse, as well as becoming a component of the political cleavages within

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Slovak society. As with Slovak–Hungarian or Slovak–Czech relations, Slovak–Russian relations contain a considerable historical dimension which cannot be ignored. Unlike the political experience of Slovakia's other Visegrad neighbors, the civilizational and geopolitical dilemma in Slovakia became – during the first years of independence – the political cleavage which was interconnected with its one other important political dividing line: the conflict over the character of the regime.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Slovakia's relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova have not only bilateral implications, but sub-regional, European, and geopolitical impacts as well. Since the establishment of an independent Slovakia in 1993, therefore, its Eastern policy has gone through several phases, which were generally connected with domestic political changes.

### **First years of independence**

During the early years of independence, there was lack of consensus among political elites regarding the content and priorities of Slovakia's Eastern policy. There were two conceptions current. The first, shared by national populist-oriented political parties in power from 1993 to 1998 (with a short break from March to December 1994) – as well as by a certain part of the conservative opposition (in particular the leader of the Christian Democratic Movement, KDH – Ján Čarnogurský) – promoted a vision of Slovakia as a bridge between the East and West. These parties focused their attention in the East mainly on Russia. Although an overwhelming majority of the opposition did not dispute the importance of good relations with Russia, they advocated instead the primacy of Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO.

The Western choice finally outweighed the alternative geopolitical conceptions only after the parliamentary elections of September 1998. Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (Movement for Democratic Slovakia, HZDS) and other ruling politicians had already suggested a balanced foreign policy orientation between the West and the East in July 1992, after the adoption of the Declaration of the Sovereignty of Slovakia: "If they don't want us in the West, then we'll turn to the East."<sup>2</sup> Pan-Slavism became one of the

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<sup>1</sup> V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, "Cleavages in contemporary Czech and Slovak politics: between persistence and change," *ISPO Working Paper* 2005-01. Available online: <http://ispo.fss.muni.cz/ispo-wp-2005-1> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>2</sup> E. Ademi, *Opposing Europe: Euroscepticism in Macedonia, a real threat or a bluff?*, Bratislava: Pontis Foundation, 2012, p. 10. Available online: [http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset\\_cache/link/0000034671/Opposing%20Europe.pdf](http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000034671/Opposing%20Europe.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

sources of inspiration for the foreign policy of the ruling parties HZDS and SNS. According to the intellectual representatives of this anti-Western option – such as Vladimír Mináč (writer, publicist and former parliamentarian from Democratic Left Party, SDĽ) – the romantic aspects of the Slovak national character orient Slovakia toward the East rather than the West.<sup>3</sup> The idea of Pan-Slavism, or (more precisely) close relations with Russia, had drawn

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its inspiration also from the historical traditions of Slovak foreign policy thinking – for example from the ideas of Ľudovít Štúr<sup>4</sup> or Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, who regarded Russia as a protector of the interests of the oppressed Slavic nations in Central and Southeastern Europe.

Former Prime Minister Ján Čarnogurský (1991–1992) brought a different vision of Slovak relations with Eastern Europe. Čarnogurský promoted Slovakia's EU membership and integration into European security structures; he expressed

reservations, however, concerning Slovakia's accession to NATO. On the other hand, it was his view that the Slavic areas of a united Europe should hold a distinctive position in Europe with its center in Moscow. Nevertheless, he did not perceive relations between Western Europe and Russia as adversarial, and he promoted their close cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Čarnogurský openly stressed Slovakia's Slavic identity, its cultural ties with Russia, and its potential to become a bridge between East and West in order to overcome the mutual suspicions between Russia and Western Europe.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the other Slovak political parties did not approve of the vision presented by Čarnogurský. The opposition – including within his own party, KDH – supported NATO membership as a guarantee of Slovakia's security,

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<sup>3</sup> V. Mináč, "Tu žije národ," in V. Mináč, *Súvislosti*, Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1976, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Ľ. Štúr, *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti*, Bratislava: Slovak Institute for International Studies, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> J. Čarnogurský, "Odpovede na otázky ruského spisovateľa Sergeja Chelemendika," in J. Čarnogurský, *Videné od Dunaja*, Bratislava: Kalligram, 1997, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> J. Čarnogurský, "Európske kultúrne tradície a nové geopolitické usporiadanie," in J. Čarnogurský, *Videné od Dunaja*, op. cit., p. 360; M. Žiak, *Slovensko: Od komunizmu kam?*, Bratislava: Archa, 1996, pp. 167–8.

and did not perceive relations with Russia as a real alternative to the Euro-Atlantic option.

Both governments of Vladimír Mečiar (1992–1994 and 1994–1998) stressed Slovakia's integration into the EU and NATO as a key foreign policy priority.<sup>7</sup> The main factor in bilateral Slovak–Russian relations was the high level of Slovak economic dependence. In fact, before 1990, more than 30 per cent – and possibly even 40 per cent – of Slovakia's industrial capacity was oriented towards the Soviet market, including the military industry, i.e. the branch of most strategic importance.<sup>8</sup> The first bilateral agreements between Slovakia and Russia contained the assumption of a future “special relationship” between the two countries. The basic treaty (on friendship and cooperation) – signed on August 26, 1993 during the visit of Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Bratislava – associated European security exclusively with the OSCE and refused a “new division of Europe.” The treaty on military cooperation signed on the same day assumed this standard level of cooperation as well.<sup>9</sup> Due to the growing tension at the time between the Slovak government and representatives of the EU and NATO – who criticized Slovakia for its growing authoritarianism and failure to meet the political criteria for membership in both structures – the importance of bilateral relations with Russia gradually increased during the second half of the 1990s. For the ruling elite, the Russian model of transformation – with its non-transparent privatization, strong influence of oligarchs, state control of the public media,

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<sup>7</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky,” Bratislava: Government office of the Slovak Republic, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> A. Duleba, “Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours,” in G. Fóti, Zs. Ludvig, eds, *EU–Russian relations and the Eastern Partnership – Central-East European member state interests and positions, East European Studies, 1. szám*, Budapest: MTA Világgazdasági Kutatóintézet, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> I. Samson, “Der widerspruchsvolle Weg der Slowakei in die EU. Die Slowakei vor der Marginalisierung in Zentraleuropa?” *ZEI Discussion Paper, C 31*, Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung./Center for European Integration Studies, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1999, p. 26.

and politicization of power structures – became an attractive and inspiring model.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, Slovakia assumed a “Russian view of the security architecture of Europe,”<sup>11</sup> while official representatives of the country openly expressed their remoteness from the EU. Mečiar, for example, during his visit to Moscow in October 1996, said:

The Slovak Republic is aware of its geopolitical value. Indeed, we do want to integrate with Europe; this doesn't mean, however, that we have to agree with the West in everything. In international politics we strive for a balance between the East and the West.<sup>12</sup>

Slovakia supported the position of Russia, for example, in issues related to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Belarus, as well as in the context of bilateral relations with Ukraine, where Slovakia had given weight to Russian interests.<sup>13</sup>

However, unlike the minor coalition partners – the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Union of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS) – HZDS had never conceptualized the Russian vector of its foreign policy. Mečiar's political rapprochement with Russia was understood as a compensation for deteriorating relations with the West. However, SNS and ZRS – and even some representatives of the business and intellectuals associated with the HZDS – promoted the idea of the neutrality of Slovakia, backed by Russia.<sup>14</sup> They highlighted the negative aspects of European integration,<sup>15</sup> for example

<sup>10</sup> See for example: A. Duleba, “Democratic consolidation and the conflict over Slovakian international alignment,” in S. Szomolányi, J.A. Gould, eds, *Slovakia: problems of democratic consolidation*, Bratislava: Slovak Political Science Association, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1997, pp. 209–30.

<sup>11</sup> A. Duleba, *The blind pragmatism of Slovak eastern policy. The actual agenda of Slovak-Russian bilateral relations*, Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 1996, pp. 28–9.

<sup>12</sup> I. Samson, “Der widerspruchsvolle Weg der Slowakei in die EU,” op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> A. Duleba, *Koniec súčasnej strednej Európy? Ukrajina a Slovensko po prvej vlne rozšírenia NATO*, Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 1998, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> K. Wolf, “Žiadne NATO, žiadna druhá vlna. Slovensko vyradené z procesu integrácie do civilizovaného sveta,” *Domino Fórum*, May 2–8, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> I. Rojková, “Správa zo seminára Integračný šok,” in *Národný rozmer a európska integrácia. Zborník príspevkov z 5. zasadnutia Stálej konferencie slovenskej inteligencie, konaného v dňoch 27. – 29. novembra 1996 v Častej-Papierničke 5*, Bratislava: Stála konferencia slovenskej inteligencie Slovakia Plus, 1997, pp. 91–2.



threats to the country's independence in consequence of EU membership, but they also stressed the importance of development of trade with Russia in order to increase the amount of Slovak export: "A unilateral political and economic orientation towards the EU cannot help us in the foreseeable future."<sup>16</sup> The idea of a close alliance with Russia as the alternative to European integration was openly supported only by SNS, which maintained close relations with the radical right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Representatives of SNS participated in the Congress of Slavic and Orthodox nations organized by LDPR. The congress presumed the establishment of Pan-Slavic military forces.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, the character of bilateral relations between Slovakia and Ukraine was determined by relations with Russia. Although Ukraine is the only ex-Soviet state which shares a 98 km-long border with Slovakia, the Mečiar Government perceived this nation mainly as a transit country, a "gate to the Russian market."<sup>18</sup> At the same time, in the first half of the 1990s Ukraine was interested in being more actively involved in Central European regional cooperation – for example, joining the V4 Group and CEFTA.<sup>19</sup> What prevailed in Slovakia, however, was a rather negative perception of Ukraine that was associated with organized crime, a cheap labor force, political instability, and an unreliable business environment.<sup>20</sup> The different dynamics of Slovak–Ukrainian relations, as compared to those with Russia, was confirmed by the fact that the first contact between the countries at the level of prime ministers took place only in June 1995, during Mečiar's visit to Kiev.<sup>21</sup> However, as Alexander Duleba has stressed, Mečiar's increased attention to Ukraine and his attempts to revitalize bilateral relations in

<sup>16</sup> A. Bonko, "Medzinárodné aspekty oživenia slovenskej ekonomiky", in *Napĺňanie suverenity a upevňovanie štátnosti Slovenskej republiky. Zborník príspevkov z 3. zasadnutia Stálej konferencie slovenskej inteligencie, konaného v dňoch 5. - 7. decembra 1994 v Častej Papierničke 3*, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> K. Wolf, "Od Žirinovského k Le Penovi," *Domino Fórum*, August 15–21, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> A. Duleba, "Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours," op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> M. Menkiszak, M.A. Piotrowski, "Polska Polityka Wschodnia," in R. Kuźniak, K. Szczepanik, eds, *Polityka zagraniczna RP 1989 – 2002*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ASKON, Fundacja Studiów Międzynarodowych, 2002, pp. 223, 227.

<sup>20</sup> V. Hudak, "Relations between Ukraine and Slovakia: recent history and future opportunities," in J. Clem, N. Popson, eds, *Ukraine and its Western Neighbors*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2000. Available online: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=90427> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

1995–1996 were connected with a general “turning to the East,”<sup>22</sup> rather than with the perception of Ukraine as a potential autonomous actor in the post-Soviet area.

The Eastern policy of Slovakia in its first years of independence up until 1998 may be characterized as both Russo-centric and full of contradictions between its officially proclaimed foreign policy priorities and its concrete acts. The intensification of relations with Russia were perceived not only as a compensation for deteriorating relations with the West – which in the end was the cause of Slovakia’s disqualification from pre-accession negotiations with both NATO and the EU – but also as the potential alternative to the Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course. The growing distance from the EU and the increasingly closer ties with Russia – including Yeltsin’s openly declared political support for Mečiar<sup>23</sup> – contributed to the consolidation of the pro-Western and pro-democratic political forces. Russia’s growing political and security influence in Slovakia raised concerns with the latter’s neighbors as well. In regard to Slovak–Russian relations and to Slovakia’s indifferent and even negative perception of regional cooperation with Hungary and the Czech Republic, the ambassador of Poland to Slovakia, Jerzy Korolec, stated in 1997 that “Polish and Slovak interests in the area of security are not identical.”<sup>24</sup> The fear of the consolidation of Russia’s influence in Slovakia was one of the important reasons for the support of the Visegrad Group countries – and particularly Poland – for Slovakia’s NATO accession.<sup>25</sup>

### **“Blind pragmatism” abandoned**

The foreign policy of Slovakia changed. The new ruling centrist coalition (a block of center-left and center-right political parties), led by Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, declared its preparedness to meet the criteria for EU and NATO membership. After the deep conflict within Slovak society caused

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<sup>22</sup> A. Duleba, “Democratic consolidation and the conflict over Slovakian international alignment,” op. cit., pp. 209–30.

<sup>23</sup> “Jeľcin Mečiarovi: Chceme, veľmi-veľmi chceme, aby ste vyhrali voľby,” *Sme*, May 29, 1998, pp. 1, 2, 5, 7.

<sup>24</sup> J. Korolec, “Stosunki ze Słowacją,” in *Rocznik polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1997*, Warszawa: MSZ RP 1997, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> J. Komornicki, “Úvodné slovo veľvyslanca Poľskej republiky v SR,” in I. Samson, T. Strážay, eds, *Európska bezpečnosť a proces rozširovania NATO*, Bratislava: Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2000, p. 6.

by the decision of the Slovak government to allow flights of NATO air forces over the territory of Slovakia during the Kosovo crisis in 1999, EU and NATO membership became (beginning in 2000) the consensual priority of Slovak political parties. The only exceptions were the right-wing SNS and radical left KSS (Communist Party of Slovakia).

The aim of the new government was to build balanced, mutually advantageous relations with Russia, which was still considered the de facto monopoly supplier of strategic energy resources.<sup>26</sup> However, after the Slovak government adopted its new foreign policy course, the intensity of bilateral relations decreased. Russia had probably expected the Mečiar Government with its pro-Russian orientation to remain in power, and therefore had not built ties with the former opposition. The new Slovak government abandoned the unrealistic idea of building an economic and geo-strategic bridge between the West and Russia: it refused all projects of neutrality, the idea of a free trade zone with Russia (which had been discussed before 1998), and the idea of Slavic solidarity – all of which were characterized by Duleba as “blind pragmatism,” taking into account the state interests of neither Slovakia nor Russia.<sup>27</sup>

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On the other hand, from the Kosovo crisis until the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Russia opposed the continuation of NATO enlargement. The period of “silence” in mutual relations ended only after the visit of Slovak President Rudolf Schuster to Moscow in November 2001.<sup>28</sup> At this time, Russia came to terms with NATO enlargement and cooperated with the US within the framework of the anti-terrorist coalition. Therefore, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated after the meeting with Schuster: “Our relations are not burdened by any problems, and are being developed dynamically on the political, economic and cultural levels.”<sup>29</sup>

Bilateral economic and military technical cooperation continued even after 1998, and in 2001 the Russian oil giant YUKOS acquired 49 per cent

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<sup>26</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky”, Bratislava: Úrad vlády SR, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> A. Duleba, *The blind pragmatism of Slovak eastern policy*, op cit., pp. 44–6.

<sup>28</sup> A. Duleba, “Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours,” op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

of the stock of Transpetrol Company, which controls Slovak oil pipelines. Paradoxically, the first big Russian investment in the Slovak economy took place not under Mečiar's Government, which kept close political ties with Russia, but under the liberal pro-western government of Dzurinda. However, Dzurinda's governments did not consider relations with Russia a particular foreign policy priority, and the political dimension of these relations was perceived as part of the Eastern policy of the EU. The Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2015 mentions Russia only in connection with Slovakia's support for efforts at creating four common spaces in the framework of the EU.<sup>30</sup> Although the rapprochement between Russia and the US took only a short time, and Slovakia supported the US invasion of Iraq as well as the so called Orange Revolution in Ukraine, bilateral Slovak–Russian relations maintained an appropriate character, which was epitomized by the hosting of the summit of the US and Russian presidents (George Bush and Vladimir Putin), which took place in Bratislava on February 23–25, 2005.

### **Were the elections of 2006 the pro-Russian turning point?**

On the eve of the Bush–Putin summit in Bratislava, Robert Fico – who in 2005 was the leader of the main opposition party, “Smer – Social Democracy” – reached out to the sharp critics of the allegedly one-sided pro-American foreign policy of Dzurinda's government. He called for the shaping of Slovakia's own policy towards Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, China, etc., and for friendly and balanced relations with Russia. After the parliamentary elections of 2006, the new government of Smer–SD, SNS and HZDS – led by Fico – proclaimed as its priority the “activation of relations with Russia.”<sup>31</sup> One of the first foreign policy steps taken by Fico's new government was the withdrawal of Slovak troops from Iraq, which was considered a pro-Russian step<sup>32</sup> even though

<sup>30</sup> “Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2015,” Bratislava: National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky,” Bratislava: Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2006, p. 55. Available online: [http://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/979\\_programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-slovenskej-republiky-od-04-07-2006-do-08-07-2010.pdf](http://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/979_programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-slovenskej-republiky-od-04-07-2006-do-08-07-2010.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>32</sup> “Slovakija: glavnyi soyuznik Rossii v centre Evropy,” [“Словакия: главный союзник России в центре Европы”], *Pravda.ru*, October 6, 2008. Available online: <http://www.pravda.ru/world/europe/european/06-10-2008/286105-slovakia-0/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

similar decisions were adopted by other EU member states as well. The new Slovak government adopted a critical stance to the placement of US missile shield bases in Poland and the Czech Republic, and during his visit to Moscow in May 2007 Fico repeated his reservations concerning this project.<sup>33</sup> As a NATO member, however, Slovakia accepted the incorporation of the ABM shield into NATO's defense system.<sup>34</sup> After the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, Slovak Prime Minister Fico and President Ivan Gašparovič one-sidedly accused Georgia of responsibility for the conflict – although, together with other EU members, Slovakia expressed its critical view towards Russian recognition of the independence of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>35</sup> Both Slovakia and Russia refused to recognize the independence of Kosovo; this stance of Slovakia, however, could hardly be described as pro-Russian. The resolution adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic<sup>36</sup> was motivated by support for the principle of the territorial integrity of Serbia, and by fear of the territorial separatist claims of ethnic minorities. Together with the other V4 countries, however, Slovakia declared its support for Poland in relation to the sanctions against Polish agricultural products unilaterally imposed by Russia.<sup>37</sup> Thus the declarations that were sometimes in accordance with Russia's political position were not always accompanied by practical steps. Slovakia was taking part in the so called Corfu process – which particularly in the years 2009–2010 was intensive – however, it did not support the initiative of then Russian President

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<sup>33</sup> Y. Shcherbakova, "Moskva i Bratislava: otnosheniya v pervom desyatiletii XXI veka," ["Москва и Братислава: отношения в первом десятилетии XXI века"], in L. Shishelina, ed., *Russia nad Central Europe in the new geopolitical realities, VIII International scientific conference*, December 3–4, 2010, Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Europe, 2011, p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> J. Marušiak, "Rossiya v slovatskoy politike posle 1989 g." ["Россия в словацкой политике после 1989 г."], in L. Shishelina, ed., *Russia nad Central Europe in the new geopolitical realities*, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157–8.

<sup>36</sup> "Vyhlásenie Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky k riešeniu budúceho štatútu srbskej provincie Kosovo," approved by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on March 28, 2007, Resolution No. 309. Bratislava: National Council of the Slovak Republic 2007. Available online: [http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v\\_ku-kosovu309-20070328.rtf](http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v_ku-kosovu309-20070328.rtf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>37</sup> "Statement of the 5th meeting of the European Union Affairs Committees of the national parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries," Visegrad Group, January 15–16, 2007. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2007/statement-of-the-5th> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

Dmitry Medvedev to create a new architecture and institutional framework for European security.<sup>38</sup>

Slovak–Russian relations at this time became a topic of political dispute within the country. Slovakia's center-right opposition criticized some of the outcomes of President Medvedev's visit to Bratislava in April 2010, particularly the common declaration of the presidents of both countries, according to which Slovakia recognized the "decisive contribution of the nations of the USSR . . . in the liberation of Europe from fascism." The two presidents condemned any attempt to "clear the Nazis and their collaborators of guilt."<sup>39</sup> This common declaration was presented as a success of Slovak

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diplomacy, and a declaration of Russia's support for Slovakia in the matter of the so called Beneš Decrees. The center-right opposition raised objections, however, because the declaration did not touch upon an event of such significance to the history of bilateral relations as the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army in August 1968.<sup>40</sup> Unlike in Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary, issues related to the heritage of the Communist past are seldom raised by Slovak authorities. One

exception was the request of Prime Minister Iveta Radičová (2010–2012) for Russia to return the original of the so called invitation letter of 1968, on the basis of which Warsaw Pact military troops occupied Czechoslovakia and suppressed the Czechoslovak attempt at a liberalization of the communist regime.<sup>41</sup> However, Radičová's declaration and request represent an exception to the bilateral agenda; its main feature is rather the effort to avoid issues of the past. Generally speaking, Slovakia is not very actively

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<sup>38</sup> M. Peško, "The Corfu process – an opportunity to establish a new security arrangement in Europe or just another stalemate?" in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2009*, Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2010, pp. 53–68.

<sup>39</sup> "Sovmestnoe zayavleniye Prezidenta Rossii Dmitriya Medvedeva i Prezidenta Slovakii Ivana Gashparovicha," ["Совместное заявление Президента России Дмитрия Медведева и Президента Словакии Ивана Гашпаровича"], April 7, 2010. Available online: [http://news.kremlin.ru/ref\\_notes/509](http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/509) (accessed on July 13, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> "Zmienka o okupácii stranám chýbala, prezidentovi a Smeru nie," *Sme*, April 8, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> M. Miháliková, "Radičová chce od Putina pozývaci list z roku 1968," *Sme*, May 13, 2011.

involved in criticizing the state of human rights in Russia. Unlike the center-right parties in Slovakia, Fico has developed a cooperation between his own political party Smer–SD and United Russia, in whose congress he took part, in September 2011.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, Fico's Government has stressed the development of bilateral projects for economic and infrastructural cooperation. Its desire to preserve Gazprom's interest in continuing the transit of Russian natural gas through Slovak territory, and to keep gas prices favorable, were the reasons that Fico "accused Ukraine of responsibility for the disruption of supplies to the Slovak Republic"<sup>43</sup> after the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine in January 2009. Nevertheless, this crisis became an impulse for Slovakia and other V4 countries to develop common projects for alternative routes of gas transport to Central Europe. Slovakia succeeded in recovering control of the Transpetrol Company, after the bankruptcy and liquidation of its former owner, the YUKOS Company, owned by imprisoned Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Another energy project, discussed during Fico's visit to Moscow in November 2009, was a pipeline from Bratislava to the Austrian oil refinery OMV in Schwechat.

The meetings of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation are a very important mechanism of bilateral cooperation between Slovakia and Russia – according to some commentators, they play even the key role.<sup>44</sup> An important role in bilateral economic relations is played by Slovakia's de facto full dependence on Russian supplies, not only of oil and natural gas,<sup>45</sup> but also of nuclear fuel for power plants.<sup>46</sup> The governments of Mečiar and Fico actively supported the modernization of existing nuclear power plants as well as the construction of new facilities with

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<sup>42</sup> M. Miháliková, "Ficovi vyčítajú Putina," *Sme*, September 23, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> A. Duleba, "Slovak Foreign Policy after EU and NATO Accession," in: M. Majer, R. Ondrejcsák, V. Tarasovič, T. Valášek, eds, *Panorama of global security environment 2010*, Bratislava: CENAA, 2010, p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> J. Marušiak, "Rossiya v slovatskoi politike posle 1989 g.," op. cit., p.162.

<sup>45</sup> About 97 per cent of the total domestic consumption of natural gas in Slovakia (approximately 7 billion m<sup>3</sup>) is covered by the import from Russia, similarly 98 per cent of the total domestic consumption of oil. See E. Kašťáková, "Spolupráca medzi Slovenskom a Ruskom v oblasti dodávok zemného plynu, ropy a jadrového paliva," in *Vedecké state Obchodnej fakulty 2012*, Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Ekonóm, 2012, pp. 283, 286.

<sup>46</sup> Almost 100 per cent of nuclear fuel comes to Slovakia from Russia. Nuclear power plants currently provide more than 55 per cent of the total domestic production of the electricity in Slovakia. See *Ibid*, p. 286.

the help of Russian companies.<sup>47</sup> This economic dimension was an important part of the agenda of Russian President Medvedev's visit to Bratislava in April 2010. Besides energy issues, the outcome of the negotiations was a memorandum of understanding on the creation of the common research company "Cyclotron Center." However, the construction of the center – which has been dragging on since 1996 when the first supply contract was signed – is still not finished. Since the Slovak parliamentary elections of 2010, Slovakia has not received a confirmation from Russia concerning the possibility of the capital entry of Russian companies into the project through the formation of a joint venture.<sup>48</sup>

The subsequent project, which was a result of Fico's visit to Moscow in 2009 – the project of a broad-gauge railway from the Ukrainian border to Bratislava and Vienna with the participation of Russian Railways and the Ukraine and Austrian company OBB – produced controversial reactions among political elites. This idea was first raised during the third Mečiar Government in the second half of the 1990s. According to the opposition, this broad-gauge railway project is in the interests only of the particular commercial entities involved, not in the national interest of Slovakia.<sup>49</sup> The Government of Radičová

refused the project, and the European Commission has decided not to co-finance it.<sup>50</sup> However, the relevant memorandum of understanding was signed in July 2012 by the directors of the railway companies in Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> The new challenge will be the increasing presence of Russia – and businesses owned by Russians – on the global market. One consequence of this was the acquisition of Volksbank International by Russia's largest semi-state bank, Sberbank. In February 2012, therefore, the Ľudová banka in

<sup>47</sup> V. Kuzmin, "Energo-slavyanskiy dialog" ["Энерго-славянский диалог"], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, May 5, 2007. Available online: <http://www.rg.ru/2007/05/05/slovakia.html> (accessed on July 13, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> "Slovakia puts cyclotron project on hold, waiting for Russia's response," *SITA News Agency*, July 27, 2010. Available online: <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-233115342/slovakia-puts-cyclotron-project.html> (accessed on July 13, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> J. Marušiak, "Rossiya v slovatskoi politike posle 1989 g." op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>50</sup> D. Krajanová, "Brusel na širokorozhodnú trať peniaze nedá," *Sme*, June 6, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> "Širokorozhodná má ísť cez Slovensko, štáty podpísali dohodu," *Pravda*, July 5, 2013.

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Slovakia – the daughter company of Volksbank – became part of the Sberbank Europe AG group.<sup>52</sup> The interest of other Russian investors in acquisitions in Slovakia – such as Russian Railways (interested in Cargo Slovakia)<sup>53</sup> and Severstal (interested in the US Steel company in Košice)<sup>54</sup> – shows that the main Russian investments to the Slovak economy in the future will come from state-owned or pro-government businesses. Such businesses are focused mainly on those segments of the economy with strategic importance for the country, which could increase the dependence of Slovakia on the political decisions adopted by Russia's political elite.

The amount of Slovak direct investment in Russia is relatively low, about 37.5 million US dollars.<sup>55</sup> The most important Slovak investor in Russia is the company Matador Púchov, which founded the tire factory Omskshina in Omsk. The next most active Slovak company in the Russian market is SES Tlmače, which produces energy machinery. The foreign trade between the two countries has had a positive dynamic, especially since Slovakia's accession to the EU. The single exception was the decline in 2009 caused by the global economic and financial crisis. In 2012, Slovakia's total exports to Russia reached the amount of 2.62 billion euros, while total imports reached 5.868 billion euros. More than 90 percent of Slovakia's imports were of energy raw materials. A very high adverse balance of trade with the Russian Federation is a persistent problem, reaching 3,248 billion EUR in 2012.<sup>56</sup> In the first half of 2012, Russia became the second largest importer to Slovakia (following the Czech Republic), and its share of total Slovak imports was 9.9 per cent, while the Russian share of Slovak exports was only 3.8 per cent, only ninth

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<sup>52</sup> "About Sberbank – Sberbank Europe AG," Sberbank Slovensko, a.s. – official website 2013. Available online: [http://www.sberbank.sk/en/about\\_sberbank/profile-sberbank\\_europe\\_ag](http://www.sberbank.sk/en/about_sberbank/profile-sberbank_europe_ag) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>53</sup> D. Krajanová, "Do letiska a Carga má vstúpiť investor," *Sme*, June 24, 2010; "Slovenskému Cargu môže pomôcť spojenie s Rusmi, nie zlúčenie s Čechmi," *TASR – Teraz.sk*, February 27, 2013. Available online: <http://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/slovensko-cesko-cargo-omadej-rusko/38763-clanok.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>54</sup> "Vláda presviedčala U. S. Steel," *Pravda*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> "Slovakia. Obzor torgovykh otnosheniy s RF" ["Словакия. Обзор торговых отношений с РФ"], *Integrated Foreign Economic Information Portal*, Moscow: Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2013. Available online: [http://www.ved.gov.ru/exportcountries/sk/sk\\_ru\\_relations/sk\\_ru\\_trade/](http://www.ved.gov.ru/exportcountries/sk/sk_ru_relations/sk_ru_trade/) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>56</sup> "Ruská federácia – ekonomická informácia o teritóriu," Moscow: Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Russian Federation 2013. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/App/wcm/media.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ID\\_335EB2FC79DA1EA1C125783B0048DBF5\\_SK/\\$File/130530\\_EIT\\_Rusko.pdf](http://www.mzv.sk/App/wcm/media.nsf/vw_ByID/ID_335EB2FC79DA1EA1C125783B0048DBF5_SK/$File/130530_EIT_Rusko.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

place among trade partners.<sup>57</sup> Cooperation in the area of culture, which had only marginal importance in 1990s, has had a positive dynamic in the post-integration period.<sup>58</sup> An important part of these bilateral trade relations is the cooperation between regions – for example, with the Astrakhan region (Astrakhanskaya oblast), between the Banská Bystrica region and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, etc.<sup>59</sup>

Slovak–Russian bilateral relations since 1998 have been based first and foremost on the business interests of both countries. Slovakia is interested in keeping close relations with Russia and avoiding open confrontation. Hence it has not been involved in campaigns criticizing the state of human rights and democracy in Russia. The Slovak Republic did not, however, undermine the common EU policy towards Russia – even though Slovakia (especially under Fico) is considered by some of the radical left or nationalistic Russian media as Russia's main ally in Central Europe.<sup>60</sup> A similar view was shared by the head of the Department of Slovakia and Czech Republic at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Victor Kolesnikov, at the end of 2008:

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Slovakia is convincingly becoming one of Russia's most reliable partners in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. This country did not allow itself . . . to become engaged in the hostile campaign against Russia. Bratislava has appealed for the taking into account of Russia's

<sup>57</sup> "Vývoj zahraničného obchodu SR za prvý polrok 2012," Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> "Rusko-slovenská kultúrna a humanitná spolupráca, štúdium ruštiny na Slovensku," Bratislava: Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Slovak Republic, 2013. Available online: <http://rusemb.sk/svk/Rusko-slovenske-vztahy/russian-language/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>59</sup> "Rusko-slovenské vzťahy – regionálna spolupráca," Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Slovak Republic, 2013. Available online: <http://www.rusemb.sk/svk/Rusko-slovenske-vztahy/66/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>60</sup> "Slovakija: glavnyi soyuznik Rossii v centre Evropy," ["Словакия: главный союзник России в центре Европы"], *Pravda.ru*, October 6, 2008. Available online: <http://www.pravda.ru/world/europe/european/06-10-2008/286105-slovakia-0/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

interests in the resolving of all important problems of European and global security.<sup>61</sup>

During the post-integration period, however, the view of the Russian elite on Fico changed. Although he is still considered an “old friend of Russia,” they became aware of his commitment to European integration as a key priority of Slovakia's foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> Therefore we can agree with the characterization of Slovakia offered by Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, according to whom Slovakia belongs to the group of so called “friendly pragmatists,” i.e. the mainstream of EU members.<sup>63</sup> In spite of certain verbal declarations of representatives of Fico's governments – and disputes related to concrete business or infrastructural bilateral projects – we can identify a high level of continuity in the main trends in bilateral Slovak–Russian relations across particular Slovak governments.

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The closeness of these bilateral relations, particularly between Robert Fico and Vladimir Putin, is not an obstacle to their increasing Europeanization. The development of relations particularly with Russia and with other BRICS countries is among the priorities of the second Fico Government, which was formed after the parliamentary elections of March 2012.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, however, the government supports strengthening the role of the EU in shaping a common policy towards Russia. In December 2012, therefore,

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<sup>61</sup> M. Bútora, “Zahraničná politika Slovenska na prahu nového desaťročia,” in M. Bútora, M. Kollár, G. Mesežnikov, Z. Bútorová, eds, *Kde sme? Mentálne mapy Slovenska*, Institute for Public Affairs, Kalligram 2010, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> F. Lukyanov, “Slovaki vybrali ES i «starogo druga Moskvu»,” [“Словаки выбрали ЕС и «старого друга Москвы»”], *Ekho planety* No. 11, 2012. Available online: [http://www.ekhoplanet.ru/world\\_500\\_15267](http://www.ekhoplanet.ru/world_500_15267) [accessed on July 13, 2013]; V. Trukhachev, “Vozvrashcheniye Roberta Fico,” [“Возвращение Роберта Фицо”], *WIN.ru*, March 15, 2012. Available online: <http://win.ru/geopolitika/1331756253> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>63</sup> M. Leonard, N. Popescu, *A power audit of EU-Russia relations*, London: European Council on Foreign Relations 2007, p. 36. Available online: [http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR-02\\_A\\_POWER\\_AUDIT\\_OF\\_EU-RUSSIA\\_RELATIONS.pdf](http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR-02_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-RUSSIA_RELATIONS.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>64</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky,” Bratislava, Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2012.

Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák addressed his lecture to the Russian Council for International Affairs predominantly as the representative of an EU member state. In regard to bilateral relations, however, he not only reminded his audience of positive moments such as the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, but also mentioned the Soviet intervention and suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968.<sup>65</sup>

## Discovering Ukraine

The Dzurinda Government recognized Ukraine as Slovakia's biggest neighbor and declared it an object of its permanent attention. Improvement in the countries' bilateral relations, however – previously of much lower intensity than those with Russia – did not come immediately with the change of Slovakia's government. The reason for this was the competition between the two states over their position within the United Nations. Slovakia withdrew its candidacy for the chairmanship of the 52nd General Assembly of the UN in 1997, and in exchange expected Ukrainian support for its candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 1999. Ukraine, however, submitted its own candidacy.<sup>66</sup> Slovakia supported the project of the gas pipeline Jamal 2, and the construction of the connection between the pipeline systems Jamal and Brotherhood, which would have bypassed the territory of Ukraine. This project was refused both by Poland and Ukraine, according to whom it might damage the interests of Ukraine.<sup>67</sup> Subsequently, in 2000, Slovakia introduced a visa regime for the citizens of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. This step was prompted by the need to harmonize its visa policy with the EU, and also by the threat of the introduction of a Schengen type border with the Czech Republic. However, it had a negative impact on bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations as well. The resulting problem was Ukraine's unwillingness to revoke the previous readmission treaty.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "The speech of Minister of Foreign and European Affairs M. Lajčák at the Russian Council for International Affairs," December 12, 2012. Available online: [http://www.foreign.gov.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ID\\_COB1D004B5A332B2C1257627003301E7\\_SK&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/{vw\\_ByID}/ID\\_44E201536806E89BC1257AD200520027](http://www.foreign.gov.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw_ByID/ID_COB1D004B5A332B2C1257627003301E7_SK&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/{vw_ByID}/ID_44E201536806E89BC1257AD200520027) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>66</sup> V. Hudak, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> V. Hudak, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> A. Duleba, "Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours," *op. cit.*, p. 36.

An improvement in relations took place after the visit of the Ukrainian Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko.<sup>69</sup> The crucial breakthrough, however, took place after the visit of Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski to Bratislava in 2002, who stressed the importance of promoting democracy in Ukraine and its future European perspective, and appealed to Slovakia to follow the Polish policy of advocating Ukrainian interests in the West. Subsequently, in 2003, the Slovak government included Ukraine and Belarus in its framework for the official development assistance of the Slovak Republic.

After the so called Orange Revolution in 2004, the Slovak government supported Ukrainian ambitions to join the EU and NATO, and in October 2005 adopted its Proposal for Assistance to Ukraine, containing more than 40 activities and exceeding the framework of the EU–Ukraine Action Plan adopted in 2005. Slovakia also followed decisions taken by Poland and Hungary and introduced an asymmetric visa regime with Ukraine, under which Ukrainian citizens did not pay fees for Slovak visas until 2007, when Slovakia joined the Schengen area.<sup>70</sup> The role of Slovakia in supporting the Ukrainian transformation was valued by its partners in NATO; because of this the Slovak Embassy in Kiev held the position of NATO's contact embassy from 2007 to 2010.

However, bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations deteriorated during the last years of Victor Yushchenko's presidency for several reasons. The first instance was the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Prime Minister Robert Fico, as the single representative of an EU member state, condemned Ukraine alone as responsible for the crisis. Fico also threatened a reassessment of Slovakia's support for Ukraine's EU integration.<sup>71</sup> The Ukrainian decision to introduce an import levy of 13 per cent on cars and refrigerators in 2009<sup>72</sup> – which impacted the car industry in Slovakia at the peak of the economic crisis – also contributed to the setback of bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations. Signs of improvement came only after Miroslav Lajčák's meeting with Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Petro Poroshenko in Brussels in

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> O. Sushko, "EU-Ukraine relations and the visa liberalisation process. Ukraine. In-depth research," *NO VISA Program*, Prague: PASOS, November 2011. Available online: [http://novisa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/In-depth-research\\_ukr-fin.pdf](http://novisa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/In-depth-research_ukr-fin.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>71</sup> M. Tóda, P. Procházková, "Fico hľadal plyn v Moskve. Zatiaľ ho nemožno čakať," *Sme*, January 14, 2009. Available online: <http://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/4262838/fico-hladal-plyn-v-moskve-zatial-ho-nemozno-cakat.html#ixzz2Z4OpZ9xX> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>72</sup> "SR – Ukrajina: Vláda žiada zrušenie ukrajinskej dovoznej prirážky," *SITA*, July 30, 2009.

December 2009, when Lajčák confirmed Slovakia's commitment to defending Ukraine's interests within the EU.<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, in March 2010, Slovakia's government decided to abolish the fees for long-term visas for citizens of Ukraine.<sup>74</sup>

After this period of complicated relations, an improvement in Slovak-Ukrainian relations took place only after the leader of the Party of Regions, Victor Yanukovych, won the presidential election in Ukraine. Although the in-

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tensity of bilateral contact has increased,<sup>75</sup> this has been complicated by domestic political developments in Ukraine. Ukraine officially backed away from its aim of joining NATO after Yanukovych's election victory. Although the Ukrainian government continues to express its commitment to EU integration, its imprisonment of opposition leaders (former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and former Minister of Interior Yuriy Lutsenko<sup>76</sup>), its centralization of power, and its attempts to control the media,<sup>77</sup> have all caused a slowing-down of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU. The treatment and sentencing of Yulia Tymoshenko

has resulted in Ukraine's EU Association Agreement not yet being signed.

Along with Poland, Slovakia is among those EU members that have promoted the continuation of political dialogue with Ukraine and its EU integration process, in spite of authoritarian trends within the country. One example is the trilateral meeting of the presidents of Ukraine, Slovakia, and

<sup>73</sup> "M. Lajčák: Ukrajinu bude Európa posudzovať podľa plynu a volieb," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 8, 2009. Available online: <http://www.mzv.sk/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/C735CD314BE0E1D6C12571BF0023C7C5/058739C185DBFF6CC1257686004E5B1E> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>74</sup> "Slovensko zruší poplatky pre Ukrajincov za dlhodobé víza," *TASR*, March 3, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> M. Drach, "Slovachchyna hotova do onovlenniya vidnosyn iz Ukrainoyu," ["Словаччина готова до оновлення відносин із Україною"], *Radiosvoboda.ua*, June 17, 2011. Available online: <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/24237435.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>76</sup> Yuriy Lutsenko was pardoned by the President of Ukraine and released from the prison in April 2013, Yulia Tymoshenko remained in prison.

<sup>77</sup> J. Marušiak, "'Putinizácia' Ukrajiny," *Pravda*, January 9, 2012.

Poland on May 11 – 12, 2012 in Yalta, after the cancellation of a scheduled meeting of Central European presidents.<sup>78</sup>

Slovakia also actively supports a liberalization of the visa regime between the EU and Ukraine. A practical example of this is the Slovak government's decision to liberalize its visa regime with both Ukraine and Russia in December 2012.<sup>79</sup> This liberalizing of multiple and long-term visas is aimed at business travel, tourism, and those people having family relations within Slovakia. The decision has significantly improved the prestige of Slovakia in Ukraine. In January 2013 alone, Slovak diplomats issued six thousand visas to Ukrainian citizens, twice as many as in December 2012.<sup>80</sup>

The events at the beginning of 2009, when Slovakia was cut off from gas supplies, demonstrated the importance of Ukraine from the standpoint of Slovakia's energy security. A significant contribution to the strengthening of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU will be the introduction of the capability of the reverse flow of gas through Slovak gas transport systems to Ukraine.<sup>81</sup>

In Ukraine, Slovakia is perceived as a successful example of transformation and EU-integration. Hence Ukraine is one of the biggest recipients of Slovakia's transformation aid in the field of political and economic reform know-how.<sup>82</sup> Slovak NGOs have played an important role in Slovakia's democracy assistance and transformation aid to Ukraine – for example, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, which (together with the National Institute of Strategic Studies in Kiev) organizes in Ukraine the National Convention on the EU.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> R. Minarechová, "Gašparovič faces Ukrainian challenge," *Slovak Spectator*, May 14, 2012.

<sup>79</sup> "Zjednodušujeme vydávanie víz pre východoeurópanov," *TA3 TV – official website*, December 21, 2012. Available online: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1011727/zjednodusujeme-vydavanie-viz-pre-vychodoeuropanov.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>80</sup> "Slovak multiple entry visas: Beginning of spring of European-Ukrainian relations?," *ForUrn*, February 5, 2013. Available online: <http://en.for-ua.com/comments/2013/02/05/131032.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>81</sup> "Ukrajina testuje dovoz plynu cez Slovensko," *TASR – Teraz.sk*, May 16, 2013. Available online: <http://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/ukrajina-testuje-dovoz-plynu-cez-sr/46309-clanok.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>82</sup> M. Drach, "Slovachchyna hotova do onovlenniya vidnosyn iz Ukrainoyu," op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> National Convention on the EU in Ukraine project – official website. Available online: <http://www.euconvention.org.ua/about-the-project/> [accessed on July 13, 2013]; "V Slovakkii 1 janvaria otmetili Den Respubliki. 'Dogoniyushchaya' modernizatsiya nashikh dobrykh sosedey," *Korzo News*, January 1, 2013. Available online: [http://korzonews.info/region/v-slovakkii-1-janvarja-otmetili-den-respubliki-dogonijajucshaja-modernizacija-nashih-dobryh-sosedey\\_\\_72991#sthash.wS1Bfq12.dpuf](http://korzonews.info/region/v-slovakkii-1-janvarja-otmetili-den-respubliki-dogonijajucshaja-modernizacija-nashih-dobryh-sosedey__72991#sthash.wS1Bfq12.dpuf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

## Multilateral context of Slovakia's Eastern policy

Along with the other V4 countries and the Baltic States, Slovakia was among those EU members which were highly interested in the shaping of a new EU Eastern policy after the 2004 enlargement. According to the Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2004–2015, the future EU integration of Ukraine and the democratization of Belarus are among the key elements of Slovakia's foreign policy priorities.<sup>84</sup> The main reasons for this were the immediate proximity of Ukraine, the high intensity of economic cooperation between the two countries, and the need for stability on the Eastern borders of the EU in order to avoid the peripherization of the region of Central Europe. These states, therefore, cited the need for a specific approach to the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy. Hence Slovakia welcomed the decision of the European Council (June 19–20, 2008) to charge the European Commission to draft the EU Eastern Partnership Program. Although Slovakia stressed mainly the building of a free trade zone and the liberalization of the visa regime

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within the framework of the Program, Slovakia's then Foreign Minister Ján Kubiš presented a more ambitious vision of the EaP, stating that it would be "very good preparation for the future unification of all parts of Europe in one European project."<sup>85</sup>

In the first stage of the EaP, Slovakia emphasized that the program should not be understood as an anti-Russian project, and advocated the prospects of the future possible participation of Belarus. During his visit to Moscow in September 2009, Miroslav Lajčák accepted the participation of Russia in some EaP projects.<sup>86</sup> His statements may have exercised a certain influence

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<sup>84</sup> "Medium-Term Foreign Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2015," Bratislava: National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2004.

<sup>85</sup> B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski, eds, *Eastern Partnership: the opening report*, Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Relations, 2009, pp. 47–9.

<sup>86</sup> "Vystúpenie M. Lajčáka na Moskovskom štátnom inštitúte medzinárodných vzťahov," Bratislava: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 8, 2009.



on the head of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, who – after a meeting with then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Sergey Martynov – expressed the hope that the EU's endeavor towards the East would not impair Russia's interests. Lavrov did not exclude the possibility of Russia's participation in certain EaP projects.<sup>87</sup>

The establishment and implementation of the EaP has become an important agenda of V4 cooperation. The Visegrad Group countries are among those EU states that are like-minded with the countries of the EaP, and their contribution to the EaP is made mostly in the context of the Visegrad Plus format, when particular “third countries” are taking part in certain meetings or common activities of the V4. During Slovakia's presidency of the Visegrad Group, this framework was used for dialogue not only with Eastern Neighbor countries, but also with other EU members in order to increase their support for the EaP. Present at the V4 summit in Bratislava in February 2011 – the beginning of Hungary's EU presidency – were Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Austrian Chancellor Werner Feymann. The prime ministers of the V4 countries declared their support for the continuation of the Eastern enlargement of the EU,<sup>88</sup> and along with representatives of Austria and Germany adopted a declaration on Belarus in which required the release of political prisoners and the end of political persecutions.<sup>89</sup> On March 3, 2011, the Eastern Partnership was the main topic of the meeting of the foreign affairs ministers of the V4 and Germany in Bratislava, who expressed their support for taking gradual steps toward a full visa free regime with individual partners (subject

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Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/zenevasm?MT=/App/WCM/ZU/ZenevaSM/main.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ID\\_621F5291AE4A5FD4C125715B004FFE51\\_SK&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&HM=50-spravv&NCH=Y&OB=1001&PAGE\\_VSETKYSPRAYVIEWMCEA-6PZDKU=20&DS=Y&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ID\\_D1EDE6004BA0BEB3C1257677005711CF](http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/zenevasm?MT=/App/WCM/ZU/ZenevaSM/main.nsf/vw_ByID/ID_621F5291AE4A5FD4C125715B004FFE51_SK&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&HM=50-spravv&NCH=Y&OB=1001&PAGE_VSETKYSPRAYVIEWMCEA-6PZDKU=20&DS=Y&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/vw_ByID/ID_D1EDE6004BA0BEB3C1257677005711CF) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>87</sup> “Rusko sa možno zapojí do Východného partnerstva EU,” *Webnoviny.sk*, November 25, 2009. Available online: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/svet/rusko-sa-mozno-zapoji-do-vychodneho-/25435-clanok.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>88</sup> “Communiqué of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group,” Bratislava: Visegrad Group, February 15, 2011. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/communique-of-the-prime> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>89</sup> “Statement by the Heads of Governments of Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia on Belarus,” Bratislava: Visegrad Group, February 15, 2011. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/statement-by-the-heads> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

to certain political and technical criteria being met), as well as the further liberalization of the visa regime with Eastern Neighborhood countries. The joint statement of the V4 prime ministers was focused as well on the sharing of transformation experience. They called for an increase of financing of the EU's policy towards the Eastern Partners in the next financial perspective, and for the implementation of the principle "more for more" – i.e. for specific financial support for the most advanced partners implementing the EU acquis.<sup>90</sup>

One of the outcomes of Slovakia's V4 presidency was the decision to involve the International Visegrad Fund in the support of EaP initiatives. This task was completed, however, during the subsequent Czech presidency of the group, as the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program was initiated at the summit of V4 prime ministers in June 2011, with the aim of enhancing cooperation between the Visegrad region and the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).<sup>91</sup> This program was launched in 2012, and with its current budget of almost 3 million euros (after the contribution of the Netherlands) is now the Fund's biggest grant program.<sup>92</sup> The result of Slovakia's presidency of the Visegrad Group in 2010–2011 was a significant deepening of the V4's involvement in the EaP Program.

The Eastern Partnership was a priority of Robert Fico's government as well as of Iveta Radičová's. After the parliamentary elections of March 2012, the new government's Manifesto recognized the EaP as one of "the areas of specific interest to Slovakia" along with the Western Balkans, and declared its support in both bilateral and multilateral formats. The new government decided to support the continuation of the "enlargement of the area of stability, democracy and partnership, with particular emphasis on the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership." Robert Fico delivered a strong message in support of the EaP at the security and policy forum Globsec in Bratislava in April 2012, which was considerably different to the threats he pronounced in 2009 to stop support for Ukraine's EU integration ambitions. In his view "the Eastern Partnership was created not to replace,

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<sup>90</sup> "The Visegrad Group and Germany foreign ministers statement on the Eastern Partnership," Bratislava, Visegrad Group, March 3, 2011. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-visegrad-group-and> (accessed on July 13, 2013).

<sup>91</sup> "Joint statement on the enhanced Visegrad Group activities in the Eastern Partnership. V4 prime ministers' summit," Bratislava, June 16, 2011. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/joint-statement-on-the> (accessed on July 13, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> "Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program – information," Visegrad Fund – official website. Available online: <http://visegradfund.org/v4eap/> (accessed on July 13, 2013).

but to promote, European integration.” At the same time, Fico stressed that the condition of success for Eastern Partners is a “strong commitment to carrying out reforms and an adherence to principles and values cherished in the EU.”<sup>93</sup> The EaP is among the priorities of Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák as well. From December 2010 until his return to the post of minister, he worked as the EEAS's Managing Director for Russia, the Eastern Neighborhood, and the Western Balkans.

### **The new East European partners of Slovakia**

The challenges resulting from Slovakia's participation in the shaping of the EU's Eastern policy brought about an intensification of bilateral relations with the countries of the region. Significant changes took place in relations with Belarus. Before 1998, Slovakia provided moderate support to the emerging authoritarian regime of Aleksander Lukashenko, disapproving of this country's exclusion from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in line with the position of Russia. On the other hand, Slovakia never recognized the constitutional changes of 1996 and the introduction of Lukashenko's regime of personal power.<sup>94</sup> Belarus, which before 2003 was on the margin of the attention of Slovakia's political elite, has become a target country of Slovak development aid focused on the promotion of democracy and economic transformation. Because of the violation of human rights and democratic principles by Belarusian state authorities, and the resulting sanctions imposed by the EU against the highest representatives of state power in 1997, the official contacts with Belarus are limited to low-ranking state officials (state secretaries).<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, there are active Slovak

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changes of 1996 and  
the introduction of  
Lukashenko's regime of  
personal power.*

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<sup>93</sup> “Statement by H.E. Robert Fico Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic at GLOBSEC 2012 – Bratislava Global Security Forum,” Bratislava: Government Office of the Slovak Republic, April 12, 2012. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/prejav-predsedu-vlady-sr-roberta-fica-na-fore-globsec-v-anglickom-jazyku/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>94</sup> M. Gniazdowski, “Białoruś w słowackiej polityce zagranicznej. Implikacje dla współdziałania w Europie Środkowej,” *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny* Vol. 30, No. 2, 2006, p. 40.

<sup>95</sup> A. Duleba, “Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours,” op. cit., p. 10.

NGOs in Belarus focused on democracy assistance and economic reforms. One of the most active Slovak NGOs in Belarus is the Pontis Foundation.

The importance of Slovakia's political presence in Belarus increased during the Portuguese EU Presidency in the second half of 2007, when the Slovak Embassy assumed the role of the EU Presidency's local representation, as Portugal does not have a diplomatic mission in Minsk.<sup>96</sup> Moderate changes took place during the short period of political liberalization in the years 2008–2010. During this time, in September 2009, Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák paid a visit to Belarus. After the presidential elections in December 2010, however, following the suppression of a political demonstration of the opposition, communication between Belarus and the EU decreased. The condition set by the EU for a renewal of dialogue is the release of those political prisoners arrested and sentenced after the demonstrations in December 2010. The government of Iveta Radičová (2010–2012) strongly emphasized the protection of human rights, and in January and March 2011 then Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikuláš Dzurinda made sharp statements supporting a policy of personal and economic sanctions against the regime's representative, Aleksander Lukashenko.<sup>97</sup> His proposals, however, were not approved by the EU's Foreign Affairs Council in April 2011.<sup>98</sup>

Although Robert Fico in June 2003 paid a visit to Belarus with a delegation of businessmen from the Nitra region, and met then Speaker of the House of Representatives (the lower house of the Belarusian parliament) Vladimir Konoplev,<sup>99</sup> when he became Prime Minister the policy of supporting dialogue at the level of civil society was maintained.

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<sup>96</sup> "Local EU Presidency," The Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Minsk - official website, 2007. Available online: <http://www.mzv.sk/minsk> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>97</sup> "Dzurinda podporuje sankcie," *Pravda.sk*, April 3, 2011. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/238037-dzurinda-podporuje-sankcie/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>98</sup> "3082nd Council meeting. Foreign Affairs. Press Release," 8741/1/11 REV 1, PRESSE 96 , PR CO 22 , The Council of European Union, April 12, 2011. Available online: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/121506.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/121506.pdf) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>99</sup> "9 iyuniya 2003 goda sostoyalas vstrecha slovakikh parlamentariyev s deputatami Palaty predstaviteley Natsionalnogo sobraniya Respubliki Belarus" ["9 июня 2003 года состоялась встреча словацких парламентариев с депутатами Палаты представителей Национального собрания Республики Беларусь"], National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus - House of Representatives, June 9, 2003. Available online: <http://house.gov.by/index.php/,0,703,,0,,0.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

Relations with Moldova were on the margin of Slovakia's foreign policy both because of the low level of bilateral trade and a certain stagnation in the reform process after the electoral victory of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova in 2001. The situation changed only after the parliamentary elections of 2009, the result of which was the establishment of a pro-European coalition. Moldova's Foreign Minister Iurie Leanca paid a visit to Bratislava in February 2010 and expressed Moldova's interest in Slovakia's transformation experience, as well as in an acceleration of the EU integration process. Since 2009, Moldova has been involved in SlovakAid programs as a project country.<sup>100</sup> In June 2011, at the end of the Slovak V4 presidency, a working meeting of Visegrad Group prime ministers with Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat took place.<sup>101</sup> As a result of Slovakia's activity in Moldova, an embassy was opened in Chisinau in July 2013.<sup>102</sup>

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Transformation aid is the main component of relations between Slovakia and Georgia as well. Besides this, the most important component of bilateral Slovak-Georgian relations is Slovakia's support for the territorial integrity of the country, as declared by Miroslav Lajčák during his official trip to the Southern Caucasus states in April 2013.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> J. Marušiak "The Czech Republic and Slovakia: partnership with Moldova for transformation and Europeanization," in M. Kosienkowski, W. Schreiber, eds, *Moldova: arena of international influences*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012, p. 45.

<sup>101</sup> "Annual implementation report of the programme of the Presidency of the Slovak Republic in the Visegrad Group (1 July 2010 – 30 June 2011)," Bratislava, Government Office 2011. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/v4-annual-report-2010> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>102</sup> "Minister M. Lajčák navštívi Moldavsko," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, July 7, 2013. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ministerstvo&NCH=Y&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/\[vw\\_ByID\]/ID\\_FEE79E670A059D18C1257BA1002E7514](http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw_ByID/ministerstvo&NCH=Y&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/[vw_ByID]/ID_FEE79E670A059D18C1257BA1002E7514) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>103</sup> "Minister M. Lajčák vyjadril podporu územnej celistvosti Gruzínska," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 8, 2013. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw\\_ByID/ministerstvo&NCH=Y&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/\[vw\\_ByID\]/ID\\_A5AB980641DF16BEC1257B47003F3C38](http://www.mzv.sk/servlet/content?MT=/App/WCM/main.nsf/vw_ByID/ministerstvo&NCH=Y&OpenDocument=Y&LANG=SK&TG=BlankMaster&URL=/App/WCM/Aktualit.nsf/[vw_ByID]/ID_A5AB980641DF16BEC1257B47003F3C38) [accessed on July 13, 2013].

## Conclusions

Slovak relations with East European countries are among the most important components of Slovakia's foreign policy. They have undergone significant changes as compared to the first years of Slovak independence. The rather unrealistic expectation that Slovakia would become a "bridge between the East and West" was replaced beginning in 1998 by a consistent course towards integration with the EU and NATO. Although at times certain politicians (mainly national-conservative and center-left) declare their sympathy with the idea of Slavic solidarity,<sup>104</sup> such statements generally refer to a common historical and cultural heritage rather than to the present shaping of a geopolitical alternative for Slovakia. On the other hand, given that such statements continue to give rise to conflicts and polemics within Slovak society,<sup>105</sup> we may admit that Slovak–Russian relations are still a dividing factor within Slovakia; although not, of course, to the extent they were in 1994–1998. Whereas the third Government of Vladimír Mečiar (1994–1998) regarded the East European way of transition as a potential alternative to the EU and its Western path of development, such ideas are not supported by the political mainstream in Slovakia today.

The territorial scope of Slovakia's Eastern policy has been changed as well. A Russo-centrist perception of the post-Soviet areas with little attention paid to neighboring Ukraine – typical for the Mečiar era – has been replaced by a more differentiated approach. Not only has an intensification of relations with Ukraine taken place, but other states of the former USSR have become priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy as well, such as Belarus, Moldova and Georgia. Slovak policy towards these latter three states, however, is very specific. They are neither important trade partners of Slovakia nor imminent and direct security challenges. In spite of this, the presence of Slovak transformation aid in these countries is rather high, and is appreciated by the local authorities (or, in the case of Belarus, by local NGOs and the democratic opposition). These countries are target states of Slovakia's soft power, Slovakia being perceived by their political elite as a successful example

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<sup>104</sup> "Fico na Slavíne pripomenul Kollára," *Sme*, May 9, 2007. Available online: <http://www.sme.sk/c/3285712/fico-na-slavine-pripomenul-kollara.html> [accessed on July 13, 2013]; "We need to maintain Slavic unity with Russia – Slovak president," *Russia Today*, May 11, 2010. Available online: <http://rt.com/politics/slovakia-president-russia-gasparovic/> [accessed on July 13, 2013].

<sup>105</sup> See for example: M. Kusý, "Chorá a prekonaná idea," *Sme*, May 11, 2007.

of transformation and integration into the EU. On the other hand, Slovakia's interest is the establishment of stable, predictable and democratic regimes in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, in order to prevent the marginalization of the region of Central Europe.

Paradoxically, support for the EU integration of the EU's Eastern neighbors is not an obstacle to good relations with Russia, which are based mostly on economic grounds due to Slovakia's dependence on Russia's energy raw materials. Security reasons, however, and an interest in preserving the outcome of World War II, are also important. The particular interests of certain business circles to develop common infrastructural projects with Russia play an important role as well. Slovakia supports the deepening of EU integration; however it opposes the exclusion of Russia from the dialogue on the future of Europe. This pragmatic, non-ideological approach, avoiding conflicts with Russia, allows Slovakia to develop a "multivectoral" Eastern policy – simultaneously developing a dialogue with Russia and actively supporting the EU Eastern Partnership – although Russia has raised objections to this approach. The other significant feature of Slovakia's Eastern policy is an openness to dialogue. Slovakia opposes such steps or measures as would cause the international isolation

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*Slovakia supports the deepening of EU integration; however it opposes the exclusion of Russia from the dialogue on the future of Europe.*

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of the Eastern neighbors and the subsequent enlargement of the gap between them and the EU. Slovakia regards EU integration as an unclosed and unfinished process, and support for the prospective EU-integration of the states of the EU's Eastern Neighborhood remains an agreed upon priority of Slovak governments. From this point of view, the main priority is the future accession and continuing Europeanization of Ukraine and Moldova.

Since 2002, and after Slovakia's EU accession, Slovak political elites realized that the country's particular interests in the areas of the former USSR are not viable purely within the framework of bilateral relations. Therefore Slovakia is among those EU members which favor a strengthening of the common Eastern policy of the EU. The interest of Slovakia in the Europeanization of the policy towards East Europe increased after the gas crisis in early 2009, particularly with regard to energy security issues. Slovakia is included among advocates of the EU's Eastern Partnership. Its activity in this area was

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particularly visible during its presidency of the Visegrad Group (2010–2011), when Slovakia presented its own initiative for strengthening V4 engagement in the Program. As the role of the multilateral framework in shaping and implementing the priorities of Slovakia's Eastern policy is increasing, we can now speak of its Europeanization and "Visegradization." On the other hand, the "Visegradization" of relations with Russia is currently possible only in an indirect way – for example through the cooperation of Visegrad countries in the field of energy security, or by their participation in the shaping of the EU's common policy towards Russia – since as of this year (2013), multilateral negotiations or meetings between the V4 and Russia have not taken place.



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Jakub Groszkowski

## European policies of the Visegrad countries

*Abstract: The growing importance of the Visegrad Group within the EU arena gives Central European states a real opportunity to take part in shaping the future of the continent. So far, the V4 has been active mostly on issues concerning cohesion or EU neighborhood policies, and there has not been much room for strategic thinking about the future of the EU. The Visegrad states prefer to tackle the dilemmas of EU institutional reform alone, or in ad hoc coalitions with other states. This paper demonstrates that even though there are important discrepancies between V4 members regarding their EU policies, there is still a significant list of priorities shared by all V4 states – e.g. support for community method, applicability of the same rules for all member states, openness of the eurozone reform process to non-eurozone members, and strengthening of the single market. This set of priorities, however, does not constitute any common V4 vision of the post-crisis EU. The paper argues that the Visegrad Group can provide a stable, proven-in-practice coalition for the turbulent times of the crisis. Unfortunately, the uncertain course of events in the markets does not help leaders to abandon the perspective of a single electoral term. This seems to be a major obstacle to articulating active and courageous visions. Nevertheless, in order to retain its growing international position, the V4 must try to develop a common stance on the future shape of the EU.*

In recent years, the Visegrad Group (V4) – consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – has become one of the most dynamic coalitions in the EU. The V4 demonstrated its influence on the EU's decision making process when it formed the basis of the "Friends of Cohesion" coalition, which secured a substantial sum of money for the poorer EU regions during negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014–2020. Other

joint projects of the V4 will be finalized within the coming years. These four former communist states (among others) are striving to create a common regional energy market, prepare the V4 Battle Group, and lobby for an active EU policy towards the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership states. In contrast to the growing cooperative activity in these areas, however, the governments of V4 countries clearly have differing attitudes towards the ongoing institutional changes within the EU and the eurozone. This paper aims to ascertain what kind of EU each of the V4 states wants to build, and what position they hope to occupy within it. Another goal of this paper is to take a closer look at how each of the V4 states is formulating its response to the economic and financial crisis of the EU. Lastly, this paper will try to answer the question of what these plans mean for the future of the V4.

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*The EU is widely seen among V4 states as a body which gives them more prestige and power in international politics.*

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The list of common goals compiled during the historical Visegrad summit in 1991 focused on four main issues: the creation of democratic states; integration within European political, economic and security structures; the disintegration of the Soviet sphere of influence in Central Europe; and the internal cohesion of the region. Essentially, apart from the last one, all of these goals were achieved by 2004 when all V4 members joined the EU.

However, if the objective “full involvement in the European political and economic system, as well as the system of security and legislation” is taken literally, we cannot be so confident that this task has been completed. The diversity of approaches among V4 states with respect to recent forms of integration has been clearly visible in recent years. Slovakia joined the eurozone in 2009 while Hungary was plunging into a debt crisis; two years later (in 2011), both the Czech Republic and Hungary (together with Sweden and the UK) opted out of the Euro Plus Pact; and in 2012, the Czech Republic refused to sign the fiscal compact (along with the UK), contrary to the decision of the other V4 members. What is behind these decisions? How deep are the disagreements between V4 members when it comes to EU policies?

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<sup>1</sup> The case of former Czech president Václav Klaus was to a certain extent exceptional, nevertheless his influence on Czech EU policy to a certain extent came from his authority among right wing MPs, who followed his decisions.

This paper will focus on government policies, as the presidents of V4 countries typically have limited powers as far as EU policy is concerned. Moreover,<sup>1</sup> the current presidents of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary come from the same political circles as their respective prime ministers.<sup>2</sup>

## **The concept of the EU – or where are we and where do we want to go?**

In order to identify the reasons for the different trajectories of EU policies found within the respective V4 states, one must take a closer look at the concept of the EU that each of these governments is working with. In many aspects these concepts overlap. In Central Europe, the EU is usually conceived in four ways, as:

1. an area of common values,
2. an area of common interests,
3. a lever for development, and
4. a collective instrument enhancing the position of the single state in international politics.

One thing that all V4 leaders openly declare is their devotion to the idea of European unity and the set of values attached to it – especially stability, the rule of law, solidarity, freedom of movement, and security. Membership in the EU is therefore presented as a choice for civilization, and sometimes described as a choice without any alternative. Besides being an area of common values, the EU is also presented as an area of strong economic links. Particularly in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, leaders tend to stress that the vast majority of their export goes to other EU countries.<sup>3</sup> In point of fact, Germany is the main foreign trade partner of all V4 states. The EU is often presented (particularly in Poland and Slovakia) as a lever for economic

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<sup>2</sup> While this text was being prepared, the Czech government fell, and the president nominated Jiří Rusnok as the new Prime Minister: Unfortunately, Rusnok's cabinet was not formed and his detailed views on the EU remained unknown at the time this text was finished. This text, therefore, is based on documents and speeches provided by the previous Czech government.

<sup>3</sup> "Strategie působení ČR v EU. Aktivní politika pro růst a konkurenceschopnou Evropu," Government of the Czech Republic, May 15, 2013. Available online: <http://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Strategie-pusobeni-CR-v-EU.pdf> [accessed on June 30, 2013]. "Slovensko by podľa premiéra Fica bez EÚ neprežilo," *Webnoviny.sk*, September 22, 2012. Available online: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/slovensko-by-podla-premiera-fica-bez-e/545916-clanok.html> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

development and modernization, especially through the investment of EU funds. The EU is also widely seen among V4 states as a body which gives them more prestige and power in international politics. For those countries situated on the EU's Eastern border (close to the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership states), this is of high importance. Especially in their relations with Balkan and post-Soviet states, the EU gives V4 countries a chance to put through an agenda which may gain the support of the whole community. Single member states as well can use the authority of the EU to enhance the power of their voice, especially in talks with Western Balkan or East European states. Being a part of the EU is also useful for V4 members when it comes to disputes with global players, especially Russia. Central European states, largely dependent on Russian raw materials, strive for a common EU policy vis-à-vis crude oil and natural gas exporting countries. This is linked to the concept of a common EU energy policy and the creation of a single European energy market, which is supported by the V4. In order to realize this plan, new gas network interconnections are under construction, partly financed by EU funds. In June 2013 the Road Map towards the Regional Gas Market<sup>4</sup> was accepted by all V4 prime ministers. Nevertheless, all of the V4 states reserve the right to decide upon the national energy mix, especially as to whether or not to use atomic energy, or coal power plants. It is striking that while in the western part of Europe energy policy is mainly linked to climate change, in Central Europe it is associated rather with the security of supplies.

The above mentioned issues have allowed the V4 to find plenty of topics to cooperate on. Let us now look at other specific issues which make it more difficult for these countries to find a common language. Further problems appear when each country attempts to define the current level of European integration.

### **Czech Republic**

The Czech government claims that the current number of areas of responsibility which have already been moved up to the EU level is sufficient. Prague asserts that EU institutions have to comply strictly with the defined division of responsibilities between the EU and member states. The Czechs have no doubt that regulations concerning social policy (including pension systems), health care, and family policy, as well as laws dealing with education,

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<sup>4</sup> "Road Map towards a Regional Gas Market among the V4 Countries," Visegrad Group, June 16, 2013. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/v4-road-map-eng> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

research and development, should remain under the cognizance of the state, due to different historical and cultural traditions.<sup>5</sup> This, however, does not exclude the possibility of cooperation between the Czechs and other countries. The Czech Republic is willing to take part in international projects, especially in the area of research and development. This, however, clearly shows what the Czechs tend to emphasize: cooperation is very different from harmonization or integration. Prague is very cautious also towards tax harmonization, especially when it comes to direct tax; there does seem to be some room, however, for negotiations on harmonization at the lower level of tax rules.

The Czech Republic objects to the transfer of new areas of responsibility from the state to the community level. Nevertheless, Prague claims that some policies under EU supervision are often not integrated enough. The most important of these, according to the Czech government, is the single market – in particular the services and digital market.<sup>6</sup> Prague also supports the idea of a strong EU involvement in energy policy and trans-European infrastructure. Similarly, the Czechs back development of the CSDP concept – however, their engagement in this issue is much less visible<sup>7</sup> than their support for the single market.

## **Hungary**

While the current Czech policy towards the EU has been to a certain extent ideological and influenced by the thinking of the UK's Conservative Party, the approach of Hungary has been strongly linked to recent disputes between Budapest and Brussels. Since 2010, when Victor Orbán's Fidesz party came to power in Hungary, EU institutions have strongly criticized the shape of reforms introduced by Budapest on three occasions. The first of these was because of the media law, the second when the central bank's independence was endangered, and the third more recently when the parliament passed constitutional changes which had previously been deemed unconstitutional by the court.<sup>8</sup> The Hungarian government is allergic to any critique of

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<sup>5</sup> "Strategie působení ČR v EU...", op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> J. Gotkowska, O. Osica, eds, *Closing the gap? Military co-operation from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea*, Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2012, pp. 63–6. Available online: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/Closing\\_the\\_gap\\_net.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/Closing_the_gap_net.pdf) [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>8</sup> A. Sadecki, "Hungary: Controversy over constitutional changes," *CeWeekly*, March 13, 2013. Available online: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/ceweekly/2013-03-13/hungary-controversy-over-constitutional-changes> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

national reforms coming from EU institutions. Hence its tendency to accuse the European Commission and other bodies of double-standards in their dealings with member states. It is therefore not surprising that Budapest supports the “Europe of nations” concept, and demands equal treatment and equal rules for all 28 members of the EU.<sup>9</sup> Hungary claims its reforms are in accordance with European values and law, even though Prime Minister Viktor Orbán admits that the country “is traveling its own path.”<sup>10</sup> One of the phrases promoted by Hungarian politicians is the “constitutional identity” of an EU member state, which should be respected by other members as well as by EU institutions. Although this concept has not been set out in detail,

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*In the main issues on the European agenda Budapest goes usually along with the EU majority.*

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it may be assumed that any constitutional change passed by the Fidesz government will be regarded by that government as an element of Hungarian “constitutional identity.”<sup>11</sup> The Hungarian foreign minister has stressed that EU law does not have absolute primacy over national law, and that the constitutional courts of member states and the European Court of Justice should remain in permanent dialogue.<sup>12</sup>

Despite an often harsh rhetoric about the EU in response to the criticism, the government is focused primarily on internal affairs. In the main issues on the European agenda Budapest goes usually along with the EU majority.

According to the Hungarian foreign minister, Hungary now has two priorities with regard to the EU. The first is the development of the EU’s economic and monetary union, and the second the creation of a strong common security and defense policy (CSDP).<sup>13</sup> Budapest’s policy in these areas, however, seems

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<sup>9</sup> “Orbán: Hungary emerging from ‘hole’ dug by Socialists amid ‘clear and transparent constitutional values.” *MTI*, May 30, 2013. Available online: <http://www.politics.hu/20130530/orban-hungary-emerging-from-hole-dug-by-socialists-as-constitutionalism-reigns/> (accessed on June 30, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> “We reject the application of any kind of double standard,” *miniszterelnok.hu*, April 20, 2013. Available online: [http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/in\\_english\\_article/we\\_reject\\_the\\_application\\_of\\_any\\_kind\\_of\\_double\\_standard](http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/in_english_article/we_reject_the_application_of_any_kind_of_double_standard) (accessed on June 30, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> J. Martonyi, “The EU at the Crossroad: Views from Central Europe,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, July 5, 2012. Available online: [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kulkepviselet/PL/hu/Hirek/120710martonyi\\_beszed.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kulkepviselet/PL/hu/Hirek/120710martonyi_beszed.htm) (accessed on June 30, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

to be rather reactive and inconsistent. Hungary decided to opt out of the Euro Plus Pact in 2011 (together with the Czech Republic, Sweden and the UK) because of the vague threat that the pact may lead to the harmonization of taxes. Nevertheless, Budapest agreed to join the Fiscal Compact which introduces more specific rules (although for eurozone members only). As far as the CSDP is concerned, Hungary is active in high level discussions on this issue, while at the same time expenditures on defense are constantly being reduced.<sup>14</sup> For the Hungarian army, with a budget share of around 1 per cent of GDP, it may be difficult to fully participate in any of the CSDP projects that exceed political declarations.

### **Poland**

When comparing Poland to the other V4 states, one can identify four important factors which have a significant influence on Polish policy towards the EU. Firstly, (1) Poland as the biggest state in the region aspires to a more influential position within the EU than the other so called “new member states.” Its larger size also translates into a stronger internal market, which (2) makes Poland less dependent on export than the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovakia. Poland is rapidly catching up to the EU’s average level of GDP per capita – having started at a much lower level, however: from 51 per cent in 2004 to 66 per cent only nine years later.<sup>15</sup> (3) It still has, therefore, the lowest GDP per capita among the Visegrad states (although last year it came up even with Hungary). Last but not least, (4) Poland has a long border with the EU’s Eastern neighbors – Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast), Belarus and Ukraine – and there are a considerable number of Polish natives living in Belarus and Ukraine. One of Poland’s declared goals in foreign policy is to build a competitive, open and secure Union of solidarity.<sup>16</sup> From this general declaration one can conclude what the priority issues are for Poland regarding the EU: the future of the single market, the enlargement and neighborhood policy, CSDP, and cohesion policy.

From the Polish perspective, the EU plays a crucial role as a driving force in national economic development and the modernization process. Polish

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<sup>14</sup> J. Gotkowska, O. Osica, eds, op. cit., pp. 73–74.

<sup>15</sup> “GDP per capita in PPS,” Eurostat, June 26, 2013. Available on-line: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>16</sup> “Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012-2016,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, March 2013. Available online: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/d31571cf-d24f-4479-af09-c9a46cc85cf6:JCR> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

authorities declare its EU membership a huge success – nevertheless, they claim there is still a big development gap between Poland and Western European countries, which should be bridged for the sake of European cohesion and competitiveness. Poland needs the EU not only to improve areas like R&D, but also to modernize its basic hard infrastructure (roads, railways and energy grids). This challenge applies also to rural areas. In Poland it is widely believed that the country was able to survive the worst of the economic crisis without serious turbulence thanks to the EU funds which were made use of without much difficulty.

Another specific topic very important for Poland is energy policy. Poland is an advocate of a common EU energy policy. It has stated, however, that what

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*In Poland it is widely believed that the country was able to survive the worst of the economic crisis without serious turbulence thanks to the EU funds.*

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should be promoted are not only renewable energy sources, but also the EU's own raw resource base, including fossil fuels. Poland has tried to convince other member states and the European Commission that it is not in the EU's interest to relinquish its fossil fuels for the sake of reducing emissions.<sup>17</sup> This is also due to the fact that other (usually fast growing) regions of the world have no will to reduce their level of emissions. Poland advocates for each country's right to define its own energy mix. This does not mean

that Poland refuses to address the problem of CO<sub>2</sub> – it does, however, want to shift the current emphasis from a “low-coal economy” to a “low-emission economy.” The reason for this is that the Polish economy is gravely dependent on fossil fuels, with about 90 per cent of its electricity production based on brown and black coal.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, cost of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in Poland's case is significantly higher than in many western European states. Furthermore, Poland has no plans to diminish the role of coal in its energy policy. In June, key Polish state-controlled companies – key energy firm PGE and major EU coal miner Kompania Węglowa – signed an agreement concerning a project

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Prezentujemy charakterystykę rynku energii elektrycznej opracowaną na podstawie monitoringu rynku prowadzonego przez Prezesa URE w 2011 r.,” Energy Regulatory Office, April 24, 2012. Available online: [http://www.ure.gov.pl/portal/pl/424/4584/Prezentujemy\\_charakterystyke\\_rynk\\_u\\_energii\\_elektrycznej\\_opracowana\\_na\\_podstawie\\_.html](http://www.ure.gov.pl/portal/pl/424/4584/Prezentujemy_charakterystyke_rynk_u_energii_elektrycznej_opracowana_na_podstawie_.html) (accessed on June 30, 2013).



to build two coal-fired power units in Opole. Polish PM Donald Tusk called this a symbolic return to coal as a source of energy.<sup>19</sup>

Another EU policy in which Poland is at the forefront concerns EU relations with its neighbors, especially in the East. Poland has been interested in the transformation of Belarus and Ukraine since the early nineties. After joining the EU, therefore, relations between Brussels and the Eastern neighbors were chosen as a niche for Poland also to demonstrate its diplomatic skill. The process of bringing the Eastern partners closer to the EU has been rather sluggish, and bristling with difficulties. Nevertheless, Poland believes that the enlargement process should be continued, because the promise of membership motivates these neighbors of the EU to implement difficult reforms. Poland, as co-author of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) concept – which was launched in 2009 by the EU's Czech presidency (and remains a priority for all V4 states) – is doing its best to keep the EaP high on the agenda, both in the EU and among the Eastern partners. Recently, however, interest on both sides seems to be declining.

Among the Visegrad states, Poland is the most devoted when it comes to strengthening the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). First of all, Warsaw is unique in the region with its defense budget strictly defined at 1.95 per cent of GDP. Given this level of spending, Poland is more convincing (during debates on the future of the CSPD) when arguing that the EU should eventually acquire military capabilities. Poland claims that the CSPD should have enhanced command structures and instruments (including EU battle groups) in order to form forces that beneficially complement NATO's. Nevertheless, Warsaw also perceives the development of the military and civil defense capabilities of EU member states as vital. Poland promotes the idea of CSDP reform – both in the Weimar Triangle format and the Visegrad Group – in order to gather a strong team of like minded states. In Central Europe, however, the economic crisis has triggered a strong cost-cutting trend, which in the long run may lead to the irretrievable loss of military power in certain areas. Poland therefore wants to play the role of advocate for preserving Europe's defense potential.

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<sup>19</sup> "Premier o polskiej energetyce," The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, June 26, 2013. Available online: <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-tusk-jeszcze-latem-ruszy-budowa-blokow-elektrowni-w-opolu.html> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

## **Slovakia**

Slovakia is the only eurozone member of the V4 states. Slovak authorities like to emphasize that the country has reached the highest possible level of EU integration, and that they want to go even further. Slovakia claims that as a small, open economy on the edge of the EU it has no alternative but to stick with the core of European integration. In 2011, the export of goods and services reached almost 90 per cent of Slovak GDP.<sup>20</sup> With an open market and key sectors of the economy privatized (including banking and energy), the Slovak economy is already strongly integrated with foreign markets. The government believes that it is high time to supplement this integration of markets with a set of regulations and institutions that will make it less vulnerable to crisis. Although Slovak authorities openly admit that their influence on decision making within the EU and the eurozone is limited, they nonetheless do not

consider the associated loss of sovereignty as necessarily a bad thing. Prime Minister Robert Fico distinguishes between positive and negative instances of loss of sovereignty. An example of the former is membership in the Schengen area; while the latter, he claims, would be exemplified by the granting of EU institutions the right to control national budgets.<sup>21</sup>

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*Unlike Poland, Slovakia is focused more on the Western Balkans than on the Eastern Partnership.*

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At the same time, however, Slovakia is searching for mechanisms which can secure its position in relation to the interests of countries like Germany or France. Bratislava believes that deeper integration should go hand in hand with the strengthening of EU institutions, which can impose the same rules no matter how big and influential the state. Slovakia also tries to engage other countries from the region in the core of integration – especially other V4 states, as well as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (B3). In this regard, Bratislava emphasizes that all EU countries – including those outside the eurozone – should be able to fully participate

<sup>20</sup> "Program podpory zahraničného obchodu na rok 2013," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, March 25, 2013. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/app/wcm/media.nsf/vw\\_byid/id\\_75e78daeb40afe76c1257b58003e4847\\_sk/\\$file/program%20podpory%20zahrani%20c4%8dn%c3%a9ho%20obchodu%202013.pdf](https://www.mzv.sk/app/wcm/media.nsf/vw_byid/id_75e78daeb40afe76c1257b58003e4847_sk/$file/program%20podpory%20zahrani%20c4%8dn%c3%a9ho%20obchodu%202013.pdf), [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>21</sup> "Prednáška Roberta Fica na FPV a MV UMB v Banskej Bystrici," Government Office of the Slovak Republic, April, 22, 2013. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/prednaska-roberta-fica-na-fpv-a-mv-umb-v-banskej-bystrici/> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

(if they wish to do so) in the building of new institutional mechanisms and structures.<sup>22</sup>

Although Slovakia is among the poorest countries in the eurozone, it still has to contribute (in cash or as guarantees) more than 14 billion euros as its share of stabilization funds.<sup>23</sup> Politicians have a difficult task to perform, therefore, when it comes to explaining to citizens why they should support richer (measured by GDP per capita) but more heavily indebted societies. In recent years, there has been a turbulent debate on the Slovak political scene over how to understand the term “solidarity”. The current government claims that Slovakia, as a net beneficiary of EU funds, has an obligation to support richer, indebted countries, and to assume its share of responsibility for the future of the eurozone – especially since Slovakia still receives more money from the EU than it sends to Brussels. However, some politicians in Bratislava still make the claim that transferring money from the “poor and responsible” to the “rich and irresponsible” has nothing at all to do with solidarity.<sup>24</sup>

As do other V4 states, Slovakia claims that the process of EU enlargement is still unfinished, as countries willing to join the community remain outside the club. Unlike Poland, however, Slovakia is focused more on the Western Balkans than on the Eastern Partnership.<sup>25</sup>

## **The preferred way out of the economic crisis of the EU**

The diagnoses made by V4 members concerning the causes of the current economic and debt crisis are pretty much the same. Typically, they mention a lack of trust and confidence, together with the unpreparedness of EU institutions. They view eurozone reform, therefore, as inevitable. All V4 states agree also on what they seek: stability in the market, economic growth, and a

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<sup>22</sup> “Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico’s Speech at the International Conference GLOBSEC 2013, Bratislava, Slovakia,” Government Office of the Slovak Republic, April 18, 2013. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/slovak-prime-minister-robert-ficos-speech-at-the-international-conference-globsec-2013-bratislava-slovakia/> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>23</sup> “Začína proces ratifikácie trvalého eurovalu,” *EuroInfo.gov.sk*, February 3, 2012. Available online: <http://www.euroinfo.gov.sk/zacina-proces-ratifikacie-trvaleho-eurovalu/?pg=2> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>24</sup> R. Sulík, “Začína proces ratifikácie trvalého eurovalu,” *SMEblog*, March 20, 2013. Available online: <http://richardsulik.blog.sme.sk/c/323846/Cyprus-najhlupsie-a-najnebezpecnejsie-rozhodnutie-eurozony.html> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>25</sup> “Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico’s Speech...,” op. cit.

lower unemployment rate. Neither is there any dispute regarding support for the community method rather than intergovernmental agreements, or the need for openness of the eurozone debates to all prospective single currency area members. What is the most difficult to agree on is whether to remain outside the eurozone and tackle the crisis with all the national monetary and fiscal instruments at hand, or to stick to the core of integration in order to get through future turbulences in the global market with the help of strong allies.

### **Czech Republic**

The Czech recipe for stability and growth in the EU is based on the reform and completion of the single market. It includes (among other points) the reduction of bureaucratic constraints concerning workforce mobility, further deregulation, and more flexibility in the goods and services markets. The Czech Republic perceives the EU single market as the core of European integration. Prague believes that during the current economic crisis, a performing single market is the best pro-growth instrument that Europe can hope for. Therefore, it is particularly important to complete this project, to keep it open to all EU members, and to maintain the same rules for all participants.<sup>26</sup> Along with a strengthening of the single market, Prague appeals for stronger support for innovations, and the effective coordination of national structural economic policies at the EU level. An important point is that the Czech Republic is advocating for coordination, not for unification based on treaties and sanctions. Prague believes that economic policy should remain a national responsibility, especially in questions of taxes or social systems. As former Prime Minister Petr Nečas has remarked, the EU needs to reach a common goal – i.e. competitiveness – but it does not have to use a common means to achieve this.<sup>27</sup> The Czech Republic points to differing yet successful economic strategies, like those of the Dutch and Scandinavians, which should not be merged. On the other hand, Prague warns against a possible moral hazard for some EU countries – especially a situation in which the state postpones structural reforms until it receives external money for their implementation.

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<sup>26</sup> "Strategie působení ČR v EU...", op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> "Projev předsedy vlády ČR na národním fóru o budoucnosti EU," Government of the Czech Republic, April 25, 2013. Available online: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/vyznamne-projevy/projev-predsedy-vlady-cr-na-narodnim-foru-k-budoucnosti-eu-25-dubna-2013-105975/> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

The Czech Republic argues that all drafts of new EU institutions should be discussed at the EU28 level, even though the member states do not necessarily have to agree on everything. Czechs support the idea of flexible integration, based on an enhanced cooperation rule.<sup>28</sup> Although Prague does not want to participate in a closer integration as of now, at the same time it does not want to slow down reform of the eurozone. On the contrary, a stable and well performing eurozone is very much in the interest of the Czech Republic. Therefore, Prague supports actions aimed at coordinating budgetary and economic policies – as well as shared responsibility for debts, which should be introduced as a consequence of the two preceding policies. What is important for the Czech Republic, however, is that eurozone reform must lead neither to the dismantling of the single market nor to a weakening of the cohesion policy.

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*The Czech Republic argues that all drafts of new EU institutions should be discussed at the EU28 level.*

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Prague is convinced that the European semester is a satisfactory method for coordinating the national economy and fiscal policies. It claims that any new instruments must be implemented only within the framework of the treaties. Potentially new instruments exceeding the treaty framework may be supported by the Czech Republic only with strictly defined roles for the relevant actors and institutions. The Czech Republic will not support the further deepening or spreading of the so called open method of coordination with regard to national economies.<sup>29</sup>

## **Hungary**

The Hungarian government is fully aware that eurozone stability plays a crucial role in the state's economy. It also believes that at present the eurozone is irreversible, as there is no real alternative to further integration. Budapest claims that in order to revive the single currency area, the eurozone needs strict supervisory and monitoring mechanisms for the financial system,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> "Strategie působení ČR v EU...", op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> J. Martonyi, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> "Towards A Genuine Economic And Monetary Union," EUCO 120/12, PRESSE 296, The President of The European Council, June 26, 2012. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/focuson/crisis/documents/131201\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/focuson/crisis/documents/131201_en.pdf) [accessed on June 30, 2013].

a consolidation of fiscal policies, and rigorous economic coordination. Additionally, the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the whole system must also be increased.<sup>30</sup> At this point Budapest generally agrees with the thesis put forth in Herman Van Rompuy's report "Towards a genuine economic and monetary union," published in June and revised in December 2012.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Hungary supports the idea of revitalizing Europe through the completion of the single market. Furthermore, Budapest has appealed for a boosting of investment in education, R&D, and innovation, as well as climate protection and social inclusion.<sup>32</sup>

A specific point to be noted in the Hungarian approach is an accent on social cohesion during the crisis. Budapest wants the EU to support deeper cooperation among member states in their effort to strengthen regional and internal cohesion. Hungary argues that social cohesion offers a competitive advantage. As Budapest claims, there is no external competitiveness without the internal cohesion of the EU. To make it sound even more serious, Hungarians claim that "giving up the 'European dream' could entail giving up the unity of Europe as well."<sup>33</sup>

Budapest in recent years has had some negative experiences with some financial market institutions. Therefore, for example, it has also called for limiting the power of credit rating agencies in the EU. Budapest claims that the political actors granted democratic legitimacy, should control the markets, not the other way around.

### **Poland**

Poland believes that the real cause of the EU's current economic and debt crisis is a lack of confidence – and in order to regain confidence, the EU needs to integrate more, using new institutions, procedures and sanctions. Poland argues that there is no other solution but integration, and any other scenario the EU offers will lead to a dismantling of the union. And this will bring about an "apocalyptic" outcome.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, December 2011. Available online: [www.kulugyiintezet.hu/doc/files/kiadvanyok/egyeb/Hungary s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.pdf](http://www.kulugyiintezet.hu/doc/files/kiadvanyok/egyeb/Hungary's%20Foreign%20Policy%20after%20the%20Hungarian%20Presidency%20of%20the%20Council%20of%20the%20EU.pdf) [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> R. Sikorski, "Poland and the future of the European Union," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, November 28, 2011. Available online: <http://www.mfa.gov.pl/resource/33ce6061-ec12-4da1-a145-01e2995c6302>JCR> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

Poland strives to maintain a coherence between the eurozone and the EU as a whole. In this regard, Warsaw argues that community institutions must remain central. Poland's current priority is to remain engaged in discussions concerning the future of the eurozone, as a non-eurozone member of the EU. Warsaw does not claim the right to participate in decision making, but wants to sit at the same table with the eurozone states.

Not surprisingly, Poland supports the development and completion of the single market, including the creation of a single digital market and a single energy market. Warsaw also backs further enhancement of the labor market, with recognized professional qualifications of workers and the transfer of their pension rights; as well as the creation of European research space.<sup>35</sup>

Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski also has a concept of what the EU should eventually look like. Minister Sikorski conceives the future EU as almost a federal state with a strong European Commission (the smaller but charismatic economic supervisor); the European Parliament (the more democratic institution that people can identify with); and even a single, popularly elected leader at the head of the EU. At the same time, Sikorski believes that questions about rates of income as well as corporate and VAT taxes should remain national prerogatives, as should questions about national identity, culture, religion, lifestyle, and public morality.

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*Poland's current priority is to remain engaged in discussions concerning the future of the eurozone.*

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### **Slovakia**

Slovak authorities claim that a lack of trust among markets and citizens, economic stagnation, and high unemployment are the most urgent problems the EU has to tackle. Slovakia does not propose any unique road map to get on the growth path; basically it supports the concept of four building blocks drafted by President Herman Van Rompuy in the report "Towards a genuine economic and monetary union."<sup>36</sup> The president of the EU Council argues in his text that the eurozone has to deepen integration in three areas: financial (banking union), budgetary (fiscal union), and economic, and additionally it has to strengthen its democratic legitimacy and accountability. What is important

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<sup>35</sup> "Polish Foreign Policy Priorities..." op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> "Towards A Genuine..." op. cit.

for non-eurozone states, claims Van Rompuy, is that this process should be open, transparent, and fully compatible with the single market in all its aspects. Nevertheless, the document suggests far reaching reforms which would definitely broaden the institutional gap between eurozone members and the rest of EU28. Slovakia treats this report as a good draft, but has some minor reservations. Basically, Bratislava supports strict rules for economic policies, budgetary discipline, and the idea that these policies would be better supervised at the EU level. Similarly, Slovakia backs the concept of contractual arrangements between member states and EU institutions regarding the reforms the country is committed to implementing. Bratislava is skeptical, however, about solidarity mechanisms aiming to help countries undergoing structural reforms. Bratislava is afraid of possible moral hazard in such cases. An issue of crucial importance for Slovakia, as a small state, is the applicability of the same rules to all member states, whatever their particular agreement. This pertains, for example, to the agreed pace of consolidation of public finance.<sup>37</sup>

### **Planned date of entry to the eurozone**

In order to better understand the approaches of V4 members to the current eurozone situation, it will be useful to have a look at their declarations regarding plans for their accession to the third stage of the Economic and Monetary Union. Slovakia, of course, does not have this dilemma – what is important is that the country serve as an encouraging example for its neighbors. Slovakia was hit hard by the financial crisis in 2009, when its economy declined by 4.9 per cent. Last year, however, Slovakia was among the fastest growing economies in the EU. All the major political forces in Slovakia support the country's membership in the eurozone and basically agree on the need of further integration, even though this entails tangible costs. Abandonment of the eurozone is not a topic for serious discussion in Slovakia. Prime Minister Robert Fico has claimed that if Slovakia were to exit the single currency area, it would cause a 40 per cent devaluation of all Slovak assets. Although the accuracy of this assessment is not necessarily high, no Slovak leader seems in any hurry to check it.

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<sup>37</sup> "Prednáška Roberta Fica...", op. cit.



### **Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic is definitely not attracted by the example of Slovakia. Prague claims that the financial and economic crisis has revealed important shortcomings in the way the economic and monetary union functions. Furthermore, Prague claims that the obligation to join the eurozone, as accepted in 2004, related to a completely different body – definitely not a eurozone with rescue funds and prospects of further integration, which might include political union. Therefore the Czech Republic wants to organize a referendum before the final decision on eurozone accession.<sup>38</sup> The government's attitude corresponds with popular opinion. Since the beginning of the economic turbulences in Europe, the vast majority of Czechs have declared that they do not want to join the eurozone – the results of the last poll show 77 against 18 per cent.<sup>39</sup> The Czechs are clearly not afraid of multi-speed European integration, and they have deliberately chosen a position outside the integration core. It seems that Prague is looking for a place within Europe similar to that occupied by Denmark or Sweden. In recent years, the Czech Republic has attached a high importance to the condition of public finances, and has striven to create an image of a country of good economic health, conducting a responsible budgetary policy, not dependent on European funds, and even capable of supporting indebted Western European countries.<sup>40</sup> This strategy is certainly more comfortable in the mid-term. It is not improbable, however, that within a dozen years the eurozone (or its future replacement) will begin to defend its group interests, which may be contrary to those of the other EU members.

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*The Czechs are clearly not afraid of multi-speed European integration, and they have deliberately chosen a position outside the integration core.*

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<sup>38</sup> "Strategie působení ČR v EU...", op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> "Občané o přijetí eura – duben 2013," *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.*, May 3, 2013. Available online: [http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com\\_form2content/documents/c1/a7005/f3/pm130503.pdf](http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7005/f3/pm130503.pdf) [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>40</sup> In January 2012 the Czech government decided to grant a loan of 1.5 billion euros to the International Monetary Fund, within the framework of support for Eurozone countries agreed earlier in the European Council summit.

## **Hungary**

Hungary is aware of the multi-speed integration in the EU, and it does not perceive it as an issue. The real problem, Budapest claims, is the threat of a multilevel or multiple structure, with parallel institutional frameworks, a growing differentiation, and a fragmentation or even disintegration of what we know today as the EU.<sup>41</sup>

It does not seem that Hungarians can see any way to avoid this scenario, other than taking part themselves in further integration. On the other hand, the government in Budapest is far from willing to harmonize its economic policy with other European experts. Hungarians are aware that sooner or later they will not only have to join the eurozone, but also “catch up in every possible sense.”<sup>42</sup> Given its current high level of public debt, Hungary is a long way from being able to meet the convergence criteria. Prime Minister Orbán has stated that Hungary will not join the eurozone before 2020, and added that it is now not clear whether it is better to opt in or out.<sup>43</sup> The government made the introduction of euro even more difficult, writing into the constitution, adopted in 2011, that forint is a national currency of Hungary. What is clear is that Budapest prefers to undertake its fiscal and economic reforms independently, at least until the end of the crisis.

## **Poland**

Poland's perspective is slightly different, as its macroeconomic indicators are closer to those required for eurozone accession. Warsaw enjoys the possibilities provided by an independent fiscal and monetary policy, and is in no rush to take part in rescue funds prepared for indebted states. Poland believes that it is best to wait for the eurozone to stabilize and its reforms to be finalized.<sup>44</sup> Through participation in subsequent cooperation frameworks (Euro Plus Pact, Fiscal Compact), Poland wants to stay close to the eurozone and to keep an eye on the ongoing institutional changes within it. The current government in Poland is determined not to stay outside the single currency

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<sup>41</sup> J. Martonyi, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> “Orbán rules out Hungary joining Eurozone before 2020,” *RealDeal.hu*, March 6, 2013. Available online: <http://www.realdeal.hu/20130306/orban-rules-out-hungary-joining-eurozone-before-2020/> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

<sup>44</sup> “Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the goals of Polish foreign policy in 2013,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 20, 2013. Available online: <http://msz.gov.pl/resource/b67d71b2-1537-4637-91d4-531b0e71c023:JCR> [accessed on June 30, 2013].

area permanently, and seems to be watching for the most convenient moment to enter. Nevertheless, Poland will not be able to join the eurozone without changing the constitution. This amendment is blocked by the opposition and it is likely that opponents of Polish eurozone membership will prevent the constitutional change also in the next term.

## Conclusions

When they chose to move from within the Soviet sphere of influence to that of the West, the signatories of the Visegrad declaration of 1991 focused on the geopolitical aspects of the future of Central Europe. Able to afford a more pragmatic approach, their political successors were focused on money, especially after the 2004 EU accession. When it comes to money driven politics the V4 has recently shown, during negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework, that it is able to successfully cooperate. However, the question of institutional reforms within both the eurozone and the EU poses a harder challenge. In the short term it is a question of money – and, of course, lending money to insolvent banks or states is usually not good business. But in the longer term current changes raise geopolitical questions, and the choice is not so obvious as it was in 1991.

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*Coalitions made by single V4 members – for example with Sweden or the UK in the past – were not so long lasting as the Visegrad cooperation.*

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Having looked at the priorities of the V4 states with respect to their European policies, it is not clear whether their governments are able to look beyond one electoral term. Taking into account how much the economic crisis has accelerated the course of events, it is quite understandable that politicians think more in terms of tactics than strategies. The Czech Republic devotes its attention to the single market; Poland, thanks to its bigger capacity, is keeping an eye on institutional reform within the EU and the eurozone, while at the same time caring about the future of the CSDP and the EaP; Slovakia is mostly engaged in eurozone issues, with special attention paid to rescue funds; and Hungary is mostly focused on disputes revolving around the EU's reservations concerning the shape of national reforms. Even though some of

these issues (such as the single market) overlap, this does not translate into important cooperation.

The current challenge is too important for Central Europe to ignore the potential of the V4. Countries are aware that, alone, they are too weak to significantly influence institutional changes within the EU – hence they support the community method and want to enhance EU institutions in order to weaken the more ambitious and powerful states. This is important – nevertheless, in the EU it is coalitions that make a difference in the decision making process. None of the Central European states is condemned to cooperate with the V4 only. Nevertheless, coalitions made by single V4 members – for example with Sweden or the UK in the past – were not so long lasting as the Visegrad cooperation. Therefore, most probably Central European states will retain their (growing) position in Europe only if they stick together – either in the inner circle of integration, or in the outer ring. When divided, they will have to build new forms of cooperation, most likely on an ad hoc basis. The Visegrad Group has the potential to speak with one voice on strategic issues. What it needs is a vision.

Thierry Chopin

## **Which kind of federalism for the European Union in times of crisis?**

*Abstract: The question of the future of the eurozone has become more and more acute. The member states have opted for an intergovernmental decision making process which favors their national interests and weakens those institutions which represent the common interest, such as the Commission and the European Parliament. At the same time, and under the pressure of the financial markets, member states have taken measures which aim at a stronger fiscal solidarity and a strengthening of the rules of supervision. This middle way is without a doubt the result of Europe's paradoxical situation: the combination of a strong divergence of opinion amongst member states (which has led them to the decision to keep the right of veto over European decisions) with, concurrently, a strong economic interdependence.*

The question of the future of the eurozone has become more and more acute. The choice seems to be simple: on the one hand, evolution towards a more integrated political-economic system at the eurozone level; on the other, the option of national retreat, which could potentially lead to the break-up of the eurozone. Since the beginning of the crisis, however, a middle way has emerged. The member states have opted for an intergovernmental decision making process which favors their national interests and weakens those institutions which represent the common interest, such as the Commission and the European Parliament. At the same time, and under the pressure of the financial markets, member states have taken measures which aim at a stronger fiscal solidarity and a strengthening of the rules of supervision. This middle way is without a doubt the result of Europe's paradoxical situation: the combination of a divergence of opinion amongst member states (which has

led them to the decision to keep the right of veto over European decisions) with, concurrently, a strong economic interdependence.<sup>1</sup>

But this third way seems to be growing more and more fragile. It suffices to browse the blogs and opinion polls to observe that many citizens condemn this seizure of the debate, as well as a decision making process that gives special importance to the decisions taken by national diplomats, who are put under pressure by the markets. As for investors, they are worried by the amount of uncertainty resulting from this intergovernmental decision making process. The consequence is a general irritation in response to a never ending economic and political crisis.

Under these circumstances, some fundamental debates have arisen about the future of European integration: debates on political union, fiscal federalism, and the status of countries outside the eurozone – that of the United Kingdom in particular. In Germany this debate has entered the highest political sphere, but it must also reverberate throughout the whole

European Union and especially in France. In this regard, it is remarkable that French President François Hollande has recently announced that he is willing to take the initiative on European matters, notably on questions relating to a “European economic government” and “political union,”<sup>2</sup> but without specifying any content.<sup>3</sup> The reorganization of the European Union, however, requires a departure from imprecision, vague terms, and ambiguous intentions, in order that the debate may proceed on a sound footing.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is part of a body of work that was begun several years ago and undertaken at the Robert Schuman Foundation and the CERI (Centre for International Studies and Research – Sciences Po). This work has led to the publication of several studies, notably: T. Chopin “Europe afterwards. Recommendations for a global strategy to settle the crisis,” *European Issues*, Policy Paper by the Robert Schuman Foundation (with J.-F. Jamet), No. 243, June 2012; “A political union for Europe,” *European Issues*, Policy Paper by the Robert Schuman Foundation (with J.-F. Jamet and F.-X. Priollaud), No. 252, September 24, 2012; “Political union: from slogan to reality,” in the *Schuman Report on Europe: State of the Union 2013*, Springer, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> F. Hollande: “Germany has announced several times that it is ready for a political union, for a new step in the integration process. France is equally willing to provide content to this political union. [...] It’s not anymore a matter of political sensitivity but a matter of urgency.” Preliminary speech of the president during a press conference on May 16, 2013.

## **Federation, political Europe, political union: what are we talking about?**

In the course of several months, and because of the effects of the euro crisis, the concept of a “political European Union” has departed from purely academic discourse<sup>4</sup> and has entered the political arena.<sup>5</sup> In a shift brought on by the crisis, the concept of a “political Europe” has been replaced in the public debate with a call for a move towards a “fiscal federalism” or towards projects on “political Union.” Such a program, even if desirable, requires certain precautionary measures and conditions in order to avoid the rise of new disillusionments similar to those that grew out of the invocation of abstract slogans referring to a political Europe or a Federal Europe.

When Joschka Fischer gave his speech on the future of the European Union at Humboldt University on May 12, 2000, he made the case for a “Federation” of Europe, which had been called for by Robert Schuman as early as 1950. Jacques Delors’ definition of Europe as a “Federation of nation states” was even more successful, becoming simultaneously a political slogan and a taboo term with negative connotations.

However, what is at issue is not an “ideological” approach to Federalism, but rather a demystifying of this concept so as to regard Federalism as a system of organizing power that rests on the principle of dividing powers among different levels of government. The problem is that the predominant discourse incorrectly equates Federalism

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the only exception was the proposal to create a “real president” to head this “economic government,” one who is appointed for a long term mandate and whose only task would be presiding over the economic government.

<sup>4</sup> See the works of de Simon Hix, for example *What’s wrong with the European Union and How to Fix it?* Cambridge Polity Press, 2008; Cf. T. Chopin, “The limits of the functionalist method: politicisation as an indispensable means to settle the EU’s legitimacy deficit,” in O. Cramme, ed., *An EU “fit for purpose in the global age,”* Policy Network Vol. 1, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Goulard, M. Monti, *De la démocratie en Europe. Voir plus loin,* Flammarion, 2012.

with the Federal State.<sup>6</sup> The concept of a state is problematic, and not of great help when it comes to European Affairs. The European Union cannot be regarded as a state, and the jurisdictions of individual member states and their various administrative levels can cause conflicts in the distribution of power. The European Union was founded on the refusal to entrust the Union with sovereign powers (e. g. France's rejection of the European Defense Community in 1954, which thwarted a common European defense policy), in order to protect each nation's sovereignty. The European Union since then has devoted itself to redistribution policies (CAP, Cohesion Policy), which generate conflicts of appropriation.

Nevertheless, at a less theoretic and more empirical level, one can easily observe that the European Union already has some federalist instruments at its disposal: a single currency, a central bank, a common budget, and a parliament elected by direct universal suffrage. Moreover, and despite the failure to establish a constitution for the European Union – which at first led national political elites to abandon every reference to a “federalist” future for European integration – the current crisis seems, by some sort of ruse of history, to be pushing for the federalization of European economic policy: the establishment of a European Stability Mechanism (ESM); the strengthening of the European Central Bank (ECB), itself a federal institution par excellence; and the strengthening of mechanisms of economic governance (six-pack, “fiscal compact,” two pack), are all elements which hint at an authentic fiscal “federalism,” which is essential in order to overcome the current crisis.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, one can clearly see the double inconvenience of the unfortunate term “federal leap,” with its daunting connotation suggesting a “leap into the unknown” (never very reassuring), and its discrepancy with the reality of the European Union which, as mentioned earlier, already has some federalist traits.

However, even if the notion of a federation can be applied to some extent to the European Union, one has to take into account that the use of the word itself is not equally shared amongst member states and that its acceptance varies from state to state. Some member states like Germany and Belgium feel at ease with this political concept given the fact that their contemporary political and legal culture rests on a system of power sharing,

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<sup>6</sup> A different viewpoint against this dominant theory is expressed in O. Beaud, *Théorie de la Fédération*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Pisani-Ferry, *Le réveil des démons. La crise de l'euro et comment nous en sortir*, Paris, Fayard, 2011.



thus placing them at the core of the federal idea. Conversely, and also for reasons of political culture, the term is regarded as taboo in France, deemed incompatible with the “obsession for unity” of power which characterizes the political and administrative centralization of France.<sup>8</sup> In the United Kingdom, the term is even considered an insult (an “f-word”), while in other member states – most notably in Central and Eastern Europe – the concept evokes the past experience of submission to the Soviet Union, which presented itself as a federation (though its political form was in fact very close to that of an empire). For many countries of the Western Balkans the use of the term is also problematic, as it reflects the history of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The term “political Europe” (usually used in France) is for its part rather ambiguous and contradictory.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the term refers to an ideal type of “federalism” which extends beyond national sovereignty in favor of common political institutions – first and foremost the European Commission – which should reflect and guarantee the common European interest. On the other hand, the concept evokes the political will of certain member states – most notably France – to maintain and secure a global presence on the political scene, which is accompanied by a discourse of national exceptionalism. Seen from this second perspective, the member states – and more particularly the capitals of large states (Berlin, London and Paris) – must play a leading role, which leads to an intergovernmental logic and the supremacy of the Council over the European Commission.

This confusing political vocabulary can cause some harmful misunderstanding in European matters. If one takes the economic sector as an example, this confusion clearly affects the discussion concerning the

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<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, according to a Eurobarometer study carried out in autumn of 2012, the majority of French respondents (55 per cent) declared themselves in favor of a “Federation of nation states” which represents a much higher approval rate than in Germany (46 per cent). Perhaps, this paradox might be explained by the ambiguous nature of the term.

<sup>9</sup> I thank Nicole Gnesotto for having shed some light on this contradiction in “L’Europe politique a-t-elle un avenir?” in N. Gnesotto, M. Rocard, *Notre Europe*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2008.

reform of EU governance. The proposal of an “economic government”<sup>10</sup> is less consensual than it seems, and points to a real problem: the need to clarify, to simplify, and to legitimize the economic policy of Europe. But the political division evoked by this debate is the same division that the national political cultures of Europe have been experiencing. Whereas the term “government” is used synonymously with politicization and state interventionism in France, it alludes to the wish for independently adopted governing rules in Germany, and raises the specter of a federal state in the United Kingdom and Central Europe. Given the fact that member states have difficulty finding a consensus on a common political and economic system – meaning a consensus on a common federal concept – they can agree neither on a common governing structure, nor, in the end, on a collective administration of the European Union’s common public goods (macro-economic stabilization policies, climate and energy issues, European defense policy, etc.).<sup>11</sup> However, reaching agreement on these questions is a matter not only of necessity but of utter urgency!

### **The federalism of crisis...**

Recently, the eurozone debt crisis has put the question of a Federalist Europe back on the agenda.

The current crisis highlights the incomplete nature of European integration, and most notably of the eurozone. Member states find themselves in the midst of a flood – having left the shores of monetary policies and national markets, without having reached the other bank of fiscal integration, and of a common voice embodied by clear political leadership and buttressed by democratic legitimacy.

As Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa has pointed out, this intermediary state can persist during times of political calm. In the context of the current crisis, however, and given the exceptional circumstances, Europe is confronted both with a risk and an opportunity: either the breaking up of the eurozone and the dismantling of the European Union, or a new evolution towards more integration at the fiscal and political level.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. J.-F. Jamet, *L'Europe peut-elle se passer d'un gouvernement économique ?*, La documentation française, 2e édition, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> See the works of Stefan Collignon on the “European Republic,” notably *The European Republic. Reflections on the political economy of a future constitution*, Beterlsmann Foundation, 2003.

The failure of the European Union constitutional treaty led national political elites to abandon all notions of a “federalist” future of European integration. What we can observe currently, however, is something different. By some sort of ruse of history, the current crisis seems to be pushing the founding members of the European Union towards further integration. The European Stability Mechanism is nothing other than a system which allows certain states in financial difficulties to borrow from other states in a market, thus sharing the risks amongst eurozone countries. The rigorous conditions imposed by this mechanism de facto restrict the sovereignty of those states benefiting from such financial assistance. Furthermore, the crisis has reinforced the role of the ECB, a federal institution of the European Union, whose simple role of lender of last resort is capable of reassuring the markets.

Moreover, both member states and European institutions are now looking for ways to strengthen the European economic governance. The Council and the European parliament have adopted legislative acts in order to ramp up the supervision of economic activities in the eurozone (“six pack”, “two pack”). Furthermore, the heads of state have agreed on an intergovernmental treaty establishing a “fiscal compact” that foresees not only the implementation of tighter rules in order to combat fiscal deficits and public debt, but also possible sanctions against countries which do not respect the rules set out in the pact. These developments offer a hint of a genuine fiscal federalism, even though the word itself seems to be taboo in certain member states.

Necessary as they may be, however, these elements seem insufficient to restore confidence. Not only because such “small steps” – which essentially reinforce preventive policies – are not sufficient to give a comprehensive response to a systematic crisis in full swing; but also because this method does not provide an answer to the challenge of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union and the eurozone. Yet it is this very democratic deficit which fuels mistrust in states weakened by the crisis – towards austerity

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measures regarded as “imposed” by the European Union and by certain members states like Germany – as well as in creditor countries where citizens fear that their assistance will encourage a certain laxity in the “other,” receiving states.

It’s because member states cannot reach an agreement on a common governance of economic and political matters – i.e. federalism – that they seem to be outpaced by the crisis.

### **Towards a project based federalism for the EU?**

If the current crisis is leading to a growing federalization of economic policy, European integration cannot continue to be forced only out of sheer necessity. The project of European integration must be guided by an overarching design and with sufficient political legitimacy. If European policy is to be rendered more purposeful, it is vital to provide this policy with a backbone and to have the audacity to launch a public debate about the content and future of the European project.

In this regard, it seems warranted to define the outlines of an economic government for the eurozone, given the fact that those outlines are still not specified. During each stage of the crisis, eurozone countries have certainly taken a step towards more solidarity, and seem to have understood the necessity to unite their forces. At the same time, however, Europe does not seem to know how to go beyond the simple adoption of tougher rules in order to conceive a real strategy for a way out of the crisis. Different economic and political opinions, and the conviction that an effort has to be made – while not yet having a clear picture on how this effort is to be shared – lead each member state to wait for the other members to make the first move, thus preventing each of them from giving serious thought to our common interest.

The European Central Bank (ECB) is expecting member states to specify their fiscal union (in the process of being elaborated), so that the necessary structural reforms may be implemented and a banking union created. Germany (along with other countries such as the Netherlands and Finland) expects member states in the South to demonstrate their capacity to manage their debt-fuelled public and private economy, and urges them to initiate structural reforms which would help them to tackle fiscal evasion, corruption and corporatism. Germany wants to bring national budgets under

independent control. Furthermore, Germany prefers that a political union form the legitimate basis for a common risk-sharing approach, whereas France favors a growth strategy. The French want a European economic government capable of reacting to crisis situations and for the conducting of anti-cyclical policies. Southern countries weakened by the debt crisis are hoping for the financial solidarity of their partners, and asking for the creation of eurobonds that would help reduce the burden of their borrowing rates.

But what if everyone is partly right? What if, instead of waiting for others to take the first step, we took this step together? This would lead to more advantages than disadvantages, and Europe would come out of this crisis on top. A large number of German expectations have already been satisfied: the common mechanisms of economic surveillance have been strengthened, and the fiscal pact confirms the commitments of the member states. But even if a strengthened supervision is needed in order to avoid a repeating of the errors of the past (excessive accumulation of debt and divergence of competitiveness), this tool cannot resolve the current crisis all by itself. We have to go further:

It is clear that a fundamental reform of European institutions is necessary in order to sketch the outlines of a genuine economic government of the eurozone. This list discusses some of the elements of such a comprehensive solution.

1. The first pillar must outline a true growth strategy resting on concrete propositions, which go beyond mere points of orientation that in actual fact leave the drafting parties uncommitted. These propositions could be organized along different axes, while a combination of them would be suitable to satisfy the differing tendencies within the European Union, thus facilitating the conclusion of a political agreement on a growth pact for Europe: a strengthening of the efficiency of public spending (in order to satisfy countries like Germany, the Netherlands and Finland); the setting up of a real investment plan for Europe (as demanded by France); and, finally, enabling structural reforms, notably in the social and fiscal sectors. With regard to the tension in the markets, this growth pact would also be meant to reinforce financial stability in order to recreate a predictable macro-economic environment within the eurozone, via the creation of a banking union (a supranational banking authority for the eurozone, vested with the power to restructure failing banks and to guarantee the deposits of clients).

2. The second pillar would be meant to ensure the political transparency and democratic legitimacy of the eurozone. The strengthening of European economic governance must go hand in hand with a reflection on political union, a debate which is currently being held at the highest levels in Germany and France. What the trajectory of such a reform would be is well known:
  - responding to the demand of European leadership and to democratic responsibilities;
  - strengthening the legitimacy of the European parliament and its representativeness;
  - implementing article 13 of the fiscal compact, in order to increase the involvement of national parliaments in decisions made at the European level;
  - on a global scale, the states of the eurozone should have a common representation within the IMF and international financial institutions. Moreover, the European Union should look into ways of protecting its interest in a globalized world. This could be done either in reforming the rules of access to European markets, or in strengthening the intellectual property laws of European companies.
3. Thirdly, in order to respond to the need for economic efficiency, a European treasury must be created in order to manage the issuing of the eurozone's public debt. This institution has to be endowed with its own fiscal revenues in order to ensure its credibility. The mutualization of debt would be limited to treasury bonds (i.e. short term eurobills) equal to 10 per cent of the PIB.<sup>12</sup> This European treasury – in accordance with other European institutions and alongside the structural funds which have been partly transformed in order to provide for countercyclical measures – could also issue long term loans that could finance a European investment program.

Each actor in this European psychodrama has got a part of the puzzle; now it is time to assemble the different parts. "A systematic crisis calls for a systematic response." Some reforms can be brought about only by a modification of the treaty. These amendments will take some time but the way forward has been clearly mapped out. It is only natural that these modifications be subject to approval by parliaments or directly by citizens, but the choice must be clear: either to remain within the European Union or

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<sup>12</sup> C. Hellwig, T. Philippon, "Eurobills, not Eurobonds," *vox.eu.org*, December 2, 2011.

to leave. The question still remains whether some countries might defy this ratification process by blocking negotiations or using their veto power. Be that as it may, progress towards more integration cannot be effective without being ready with alternatives in case one or more member states do not ratify a new treaty. Apart from solutions like ratification by a super-qualified majority, one must also reflect on the other possible paths that integration might take within the European Union.

## Two Europes?

According to many observers, the repeated summits involving heads of states and governments within the eurozone these last months has shed some light on the gap between eurozone countries and the rest of the European Union. The crisis seems to have brought back the ghost of a “two-speed Europe,”<sup>13</sup> and in these circumstances the concept of a “variable-geometry Europe” must be revisited.

In order to regain their sovereignty before the markets and their ability to decide on their own future, the member states of the eurozone have come to understand that they need to form a more coherent whole. In fact, stricter common rules on budgetary matters have already been adopted and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) has entered into force, while the project of a banking union has made also some progress in the past few months. The crisis has led to a strengthening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) by means of new rules (such as the Euro Plus Pact and the Fiscal Compact) that were adopted by some states outside the eurozone also.

Moreover, given the transfer of powers implied by such common measures, the question of a political union can no longer be avoided.<sup>14</sup> European decisions must enjoy sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, and decision making processes must be simple and clear enough to be efficient and transparent. Otherwise, the economic union will not receive the support of citizens, and questions about the political vision that justifies European decisions – questions about legitimacy – will remain.

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<sup>13</sup> See J.-C. Piris, *The future of Europe: towards a two speed Europe?*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. T. Chopin, “A political for Europe,” *European Issue*, Policy paper of the Robert Schuman Foundation (with J.-F. Jamet and F.-X. Priollaude), No. 252, September 24, 2012.

From this perspective, advancement towards a more integrated eurozone (notably regarding budgetary issues) raises the question of a stronger differentiation of the European Union, both institutionally and politically. To give an example: the question of creating a specific eurozone assembly has been raised in order to strengthen the legitimacy and democratic control of decisions taken concerning the EMU. The European parliament is obviously worried about potential competition from such an assembly, and would prefer that it be formed as one of its subsidiaries comparable to the Eurogroup, itself a subsidiary of the Ecofin Council; or the eurozone summit, which is a subsidiary of the European Council.

However, if a variable-geometry Europe becomes a necessity, this concept cannot be a panacea because it will lead to an increasingly complex European map. This multitude of differing degrees of integration and institutional arrangements render European integration more and more difficult to understand. This complexity reduces legal security, further complicates the democratic debate, reduces the efficiency of European governance, and feeds into the frustration of member states.

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We suggest<sup>15</sup> that it is time to undertake the project of clarifying just how to align the EMU with the European Union while at the same time satisfying those countries that wish to limit their participation to the single market or to a couple of cooperation programs. More precisely, such an alignment would involve revising the European Economic Area agreement in order to give to EEA member states that are not part of the EU (Norway, for example) equal voting rights over policies in which they are participating – most notably the single market, research programs, and cohesion policies.

This scenario offers numerous advantages.

It would not only correct a democratic anomaly, but also create the status the United Kingdom is looking for: that of participating and maintaining

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. T. Chopin, J.-F. Jamet, "David Cameron's European dilemma," *Project Syndicate*, January 18, 2013; J.-F. Jamet, "Several Europe but which ones? A proposal to rationalise European Integration," in T. Chopin, M. Foucher, eds, *Schuman Report on Europe. State of the Union 2013*, Springer, 2013; T. Chopin "Two Europes," in *Europe in search of a new settlement. EU-UK relations and the politics of integration*, London, Policy Network, 2013.



an influence in the single market, while at the same time retreating from common European policies such as agriculture, taxation, and fiscal federalism. Moreover, the partners of the UK would be assured of the preservation of British influence over the single market, while the EMU would be realigned simultaneously with the European Union. As a consequence, a further integration of the eurozone, as called for by David Cameron, would be made much easier. Last but not least, this solution would provide an alternative to the “in or out” referendum promised by the British prime minister – a referendum that is always risky. The choice would not be “in or out,” but rather whether to remain within the EU (where the UK could continue to promote a liberal reform agenda by seeking the support of a majority, while remaining part of the institutional framework), or instead to find a new type of partnership which would be neither that of Norway (EEA without voting rights) nor that of Switzerland (bilateral treaties). If the debate were to begin on these terms, it would already constitute progress as compared with the simplistic “in” or “out” approach – an approach which opens the door to what is effectively vile demagoguery.

Therefore, two levels of integration can be clearly identified. On the one hand, there is the prospect of a financially and politically more integrated European Union, bringing closer together the members of the eurozone and those countries that have committed themselves to adopt the common currency after having satisfied the preliminary conditions according to article

3.4 of the treaty. (Only two states, Denmark and the UK, have opted out, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule.) On the other hand, there is the possibility of a European Economic Area that offers non-EU members the opportunity to take part in decisions concerning the single market. Needless to say, some states will hesitate between these two options – most notably the UK, which could end up favoring the second one. This second option might also offer a solution when it comes to opening up the single market to new countries without their necessarily having to join the EU.

Certainly, the risk of dividing the member states by irritating those who remain outside the framework, exists. This approach must not be conceived as a private club whose members have the choice of accepting or rejecting new adherents, because this choice would come with a risk – i.e. that this

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choice is based much more on the individual interest of each member of the club than on the common interest of the new, enlarged group. It is therefore vital to ensure that such a differentiated integration approach remains an open process. If this process is coupled with conditions (as it is in the case of participation in the eurozone), those conditions must be legitimate, transparent, and respected.

We are entering a period of reorganization, implying a revival of the construction of Europe.

This construction has to be seen from both a medium and a long term perspective. European leaders must not deal with matters of urgency by postponing their most ambitious ideas. The strength and greatness of politics lies in its uncertainty – which means conceiving a project while creating all the means necessary to bring this project into being. Are Europeans ready to engage in this debate? It is the responsibility of both European and national politicians (and of all actors who want to participate) to take up the challenge.

Martin Vlachynský

## **Competing Europe: how harmonization and integration can harm progress**

*Abstract: The process of competition constantly fuels progress through discoveries of better solutions to the changing and growing demands of mankind. While more often coupled with entrepreneurship, competition is important also in the field of public policies – especially on such a diverse playing field as Europe. In this paper, the author describes the role of social competition and its positive effects, and shows that these effects may be applied not only to the market of goods and services, but also to the notional market of public policies. Finally, his analysis reflects on the current situation in the EU and eurozone, supporting the need for more rather than less competition between public policies in Europe.*

**W**ith the ongoing economic, financial and debt crisis in Europe, the “More Europe!” solution has become a desirable path for a growing number of European and national political representatives. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, has announced that he will lay out plans for a European federation in the spring of 2014.<sup>1</sup>

The exact configuration of this Federal Europe is waiting to be defined by its proponents, and there are several areas to be integrated. A partial unification of national legislations has been part of the integration process since the emergence of European Community. The welfare system has undergone a slow integration for years, and calls for speeding up the process have intensified. And two more integrative processes have recently intensified: fiscal integration and banking union.

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<sup>1</sup> “Federal Europe will be “a reality in a few years,” says Jose Manuel Barroso,” *The Telegraph*, May 7, 2013.

The first signs of fiscal integration appeared with the emergence of the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), and especially with the European Fiscal Compact – the six-pack and the two-pack. With the EFSF and the ESM, the European Union acquired another tool (besides the EU budget) for carrying out fiscal transfers; while the new set of fiscal policy rules brings with it stronger tools for intervention in national budgets (but still doubtful in terms of enforcement). This is only the initial phase of a process which will end with a fiscally integrated Europe, having equal rules on both sides of the budget – revenue (harmonized taxes, central debt emitting via eurobonds) and spending (rules on subsidies, capital investments, etc.).

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*Mutual cooperation has helped mankind to achieve unforeseen advancements. Such cooperation, however, is not the result of integration.*

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The banking union, designed as a three-pillar structure, is already on its way. The first pillar was set in place by the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism under the European Central Bank (ECB). The second pillar, represented by the common resolution fund, is currently a source of friction between member states. The final pillar, a single deposit protection scheme, will be discussed in the future.

The third integrative process in the field of welfare policies is currently in a state of formation, and includes measures such as a European minimum wage<sup>2</sup> and unified labor laws. The question as to whether this process will bring more maneuvering space or less remains open, and depends on whether more flexible standards (such as a differentiated minimum wage), or more rigid ones, will be applied.

Proponents of a deeper integration – or even the creation of a Federal Europe or European super-state – like to emphasize that only those national powers joined in a unified political and economic bloc can overcome the obstacles which have emerged in Europe. The problem, however, is that the terms “cooperation” and “integration” are often used interchangeably in

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<sup>2</sup> “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Towards a job-rich recovery,” COM(2012) 173/3, European Commission. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/danmark/documents/alle\\_emner/beskaeftigelse/jobs.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/danmark/documents/alle_emner/beskaeftigelse/jobs.pdf) (accessed on July 1, 2013).

this context, since the fruits of cooperation are often mistakenly credited to integration.

Indeed, mutual cooperation has helped mankind to achieve unforeseen advancements. Such cooperation, however, is not the result of integration. By definition, cooperation requires a set of independent individuals, not a unified bloc. More importantly, integration, unification and centralization all diminish competition. As will be explained throughout this text, the forgoing of competition in Europe is one of the biggest mistakes we can make when shaping Europe's future. It is not a solution, but rather fuel for the Union's future economic, social, and political problems.

## **Competition as a driving force**

Competition between market agents has been one of the key pillars of capitalism since the work of Adam Smith. He saw competition as a process in which sellers compete with each other by bidding prices down, and buyers compete by bidding prices up. But the definition of competition is not restricted to price competition. As the economist Ludwig von Mises writes, social competition is:

the striving of individuals to attain the most favorable position in the system of social cooperation. As there will always be positions which men value more highly than others, people will strive for them and try to outdo rivals. Social competition is consequently present in every conceivable mode of social organization.<sup>3</sup>

Biological competition (which can be understood either evolutionary or territorially) is predatory. Individuals and species compete to secure biological dominance. While social competition is often described by rhetoric derived from fighting and war, it is nevertheless not a destructive process. Instead, it is more a process of the constant reallocation of resources and the improvement of one's performance in offering value to others. The economic production of any good is connected to an immense cobweb of suppliers and distributors. Being competitive means having the ability to combine the inputs created by others in the most efficient way. Therefore, market competition is

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<sup>3</sup> L. von Mises, *Human action – a treatise on economic*, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, 1996 (4<sup>th</sup> edition), p. 273.

not a “struggle to defend one’s life against predators but a competition over who can be the best cooperator; over who can benefit the most people.”<sup>4</sup> Despite not being a biological process, social competition seems to be inherent in the human species – “one that continues to resurface in the most unexpected manner after efforts to suppress it.”<sup>5</sup>

The definition of entrepreneurship and competitiveness may seem to be blended together after this explanatory *entrée*. And indeed, these two terms are firmly bound together: “Entrepreneurship and competitiveness are two sides of the same coin. Entrepreneurial activity is always competitive and competitive activity is always entrepreneurial.”<sup>6</sup>

One can speak about competition only where scarce resources are concerned. Competition constantly helps us allocate them in a more efficient way, and is thus a driving force of economic growth – not only in the strict terms of the growth of GDP, but also in terms of finding answers to the problems and obstacles that are laid before us. There are at least six interconnected effects of competition which make it a useful process.

*Discovery procedure.*<sup>7</sup> One of the important features of the competitive process is that the outcomes are unpredictable. Nobody would enter competitive process with a solution, if he was sure this solution will be unsuccessful. It serves as a discovery procedure, a pressure which helps entrepreneurs search for unexploited opportunities and utilize them to get ahead of the competitors. If not constrained by external influences – such as patent monopoly or government guarantee – competitiveness remains, even under a monopoly market structure. The fear of new market entrants or the discovery of new substitutes forces leaders to continue the discovery efforts.

*Awarding effectiveness.* Competition is the best means for awarding effective solutions. It does not use cardinal measurements, statistics or evaluations; instead it is backed by the purchase decisions of hundreds or even millions of

<sup>4</sup> D. Krawisz, The Meaning of Competition, *Mises Daily*, April 13, 2010. Available online: <http://mises.org/daily/4233/> [accessed on July 1, 2013].

<sup>5</sup> F.A. Hayek, “Competition as a discovery procedure,” *The Quarterly Journal Of Austrian Economics* Vol. 5, No. 3, Fall 2002, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> I.M. Kirzner, *Entrepreneurship and competition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup> For an examination of competition as a discovery procedure see F.A. Hayek, “Competition as a discovery procedure,” op. cit.

purchasers. Once competition is removed, the effectiveness of any solution will have to be measured by artificial and arbitrarily chosen means.

*Sorts out contradictory knowledge.* Knowledge is dispersed in our society. Nobody knows everything, and all the knowledge of the world cannot be stored and accessed at one place, simply because it is too dynamic. Moreover, we do not have perfect information and existing knowledge can be contradictory. Should this particular functionality problem be solved with a metal or a ceramic part? Competition may be the only way to find an answer.

*Provides feedback.* When making a decision, competition is often the best way of receiving feedback. Movement up or down on the competition ladder is a kind of signaling, which helps to prevent the occurrence of a chain of bad decisions.

*Unique form of coercion.* There are numerous ways to coerce an individual into a certain behavior – be it physical or psychical violence, the justice system, or peer pressure. Competition is one of them. “Competition represents a kind of impersonal coercion that will cause many individuals to change their behavior in a way that could not be brought about by any kind of instruction or command.”<sup>8</sup> For example, if a car maker was building automobiles that would explode after driving certain distance, the car maker would quickly be forced out of business by competition. Even if it was a monopolistic carmaker, substitutes (in the worst case even walking) would be more competitive. Compared to other forms of coercion, competition has certain advantages. It does not require centralized decision, does not impose a cost on others, and respects private property and personal freedom.

*Provides solutions for dynamic situations.* Every problem is set at a certain position in time and space and has a unique set of predispositions. While the scientific method can equip us with a set of problem-solving tools, only competition can configure these as an ideal solution for a particular problem.

The difference between economic competition and the successful procedure of science is that the former exhibits a method of discovering

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

particular temporary circumstances, while science seeks to discover something often known as “general facts,” i.e., regularities in events, and is concerned with unique, particular facts only to the extent that they tend to refute or confirm its theories. Since this is a matter of general and permanent features of our world, scientific discoveries have ample time to demonstrate their value, whereas the usefulness of particular circumstances disclosed by economic competition is to a considerable extent transitory.<sup>9</sup>

While the definitions of competition vary significantly, its importance is recognized by most western governments and implemented in their economic policies. The positive effects of competition are not restricted to the production of goods alone. They can spread to any field in which there exists the possibility of various solutions competing – including the field of public policies.

## Competing policies

The idea of extending the concept of competition from the realm of private production to the realm of public policy can be traced back to the middle of the twentieth century, when in 1956 the American economist Charles Tiebout presented<sup>10</sup> a political theory of his called the Tiebout model. In his work, public policies are described as a basket of goods (welfare, regulatory, etc.) which are made available by governments at various prices (represented by taxes). Consumer-citizens “shop” these public policy baskets by changing their location.

The model is suitable mainly for the United States (where people frequently move between municipalities, and where municipalities have a relatively high degree of independence in governing), but offers us a useful point of view on public policy as a competitive product. Since then, numerous other thinkers<sup>11</sup> have looked at issues of political centralization, central planning, harmonization and integration, from various points of view.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> C.M. Tiebout, “A pure theory of local expenditures,” *The Journal of Political Economy* Vol. 64, No. 5, 1956, pp. 416–24.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the work of Douglas North or Friedrich Hayek.



Consumers (citizens and companies) have several ways to “shop” for public policy – e.g. democratic voting (the most obvious way of showing preferences), or the physical transfer of citizens or companies (also called “foot voting”<sup>12</sup>). Tax competition is probably the most popular interest of researchers, but we can regard any public policy as a subject of competition. A simple comparison of statistics is enough to serve as a demonstration of competition between policy baskets. For example, the infant mortality rate can serve as a comparison of the differing health policies of various countries.

Modern economic theory hails the effectiveness of competitive markets in the production of private goods. The first chapter of this paper indicated the six positive effects of competition. These effects may also be transposed to a different situation, in which the competition in question concerns public policies.

*Discovery procedure.* Achieving a vast majority of public policy goals requires a complex strategy with highly unpredictable outcomes. The most notorious example from economics is the Laffer curve, which describes the relation between the tax rate and tax revenues. There is, however, no single universal shape for this curve, and each policy maker aiming to reach a certain tax revenue has to discover its shape afresh. Whatever the particular goal of public policy – the unemployment rate, the suicide rate, or carbon dioxide levels – there is no available roadmap with predictable outcomes ready and waiting on the bookshelf. It is by putting in place various policies that we actually discover new solutions.

*Awarding effectiveness.* Governments applying effective policies reach their goals sooner and more precisely than those with less effective sets of rules. Companies flock to countries with more efficient business regulations, while people immigrate to countries which offer better sets of policies affecting freedom, security, and economic well-being.

*Sorts out contradictory knowledge.* The twentieth century was witness to a great battle between two economic regimes based on completely opposed philosophical foundations. The socialist central planning of the Eastern bloc collapsed under the pressure of the liberal democracies of the West.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example I. Somin, “Foot voting, federalism, and political freedom,” in J. Fleming, J. Levy, eds, *Nomos* (Symposium on Federalism and Subsidiarity October 12, 2012), *Geroge Mason Law and Economics Research Paper* No. 12-68, forthcoming.

Policies based on faulty assumptions are doomed to fail when they enter into competition with a better set of policies.

*Provides feedback.* Diversity means information. Competition increases the number of signaling pathways. If there is nothing to compare, it is more difficult to tell if we are doing it wrong or right.

*Unique form of coercion.* Countries such as Russia, China and Vietnam were forced into transition not by the power of weapons, but under the pressure of the numbers [i.e. the need for a more effective allocation of resources]. The existence of examples of better policies is a strong source of pressure on policy makers.

*Provides solutions for dynamic situations.* While eliminating redundancy through a concentration of decision and rule making at one centre may lower immediate costs, it also increases the fragility of the system. The more that parallel solutions are competing within the system, the more fault-tolerant the system is. If a public policy becomes outdated, in a competitive system there may already be a new solution waiting. If there is no discovery procedure, low feedback, and a weak set of coercion options for change, the response of policy makers in a dynamic environment will be lower. This feature is especially important when the subjects of the policy are themselves heterogeneous and have different internal dynamics. Douglass North, an American economist studying the history and development of institutions, writes:

Moreover there is not just one set of rules that will provide the proper incentives for productive activity. And finally, the rules themselves must continually change to adapt to new technologies and opportunities. Rules that provide low transaction and transformation costs in one context will be obsolete in another!<sup>13</sup>

Heterogeneous policies allow asymmetrical subjects to choose several different policies to address the same issue, according to their needs, and to swiftly change them as they advance.

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<sup>13</sup> D.C. North, "Institutional competition," *Economic History* 9411001, EconWPA, 1994, p. 8

The harmonization and centralization of policies eliminates these positive effects within the system, which then loses resiliency and fault-tolerance. It deprives the system of crucial information that is generated by heterogeneous systems.

Simply stated, policy competition has two advantages. First, it helps to select more effective policies in the real circumstances of incomplete information, power abuse and low predictability. Secondly, it helps adapt to a changing environment and internal asymmetry, and adds layers of redundancy and resilience. With harmonized and centralized policies, systems are more prone to error.

It is important in this context to mention the following remark of economist Gary Becker:

Competition among nations tends to produce a race to the top rather than to the bottom, by limiting the ability of powerful and voracious groups and politicians in each nation to impose their will, at the expense of the interests of the vast majority of their population.<sup>14</sup>

Competition helps us to leap forward, not to push the competitor back.

## **Policy competition in the European Union**

Policies can be competitive (or on the other hand harmonized) at several levels – municipal, regional, federal, or national. The above mentioned Tiebout model was first applied at the local level. Both centralization and decentralization processes can run at the sectoral level – a typical example is education.<sup>15</sup>

The European Union is an excellent case for analysis. Several countries have resolved the question of the (de)centralization of policies (e.g. the US), but these countries are fairly homogenous at the cultural, economic, and social levels. The European Union by contrast is asymmetric (perhaps a better term is “diverse”), not only with respect to culture and language, but especially economically. The difference between the poorest and richest countries in terms of GDP per capita (measured in purchasing power parity)

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<sup>14</sup> G.S. Becker, “What’s wrong with a centralized Europe?” *Plenty Business Week* (Industrial/technology edition). No. 3584, June 29, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See L. Lundahl, “From centralisation to decentralisation: governance of education in Sweden,” *European Educational Research Journal* Vol. 1, No. 4, 2002, pp. 625–36.

is six-fold; if we exclude the exceptional tiny state of Luxembourg from the statistics, still the difference is three-fold. When we compare the richest and poorest NUTS2 regions, the difference is thirteen-fold. In the US, the maximum difference in per capita income between states (excluding DC) is two-fold.

The European Union could have been an ideal example of the benefits of competition in the field of public policies. One of the more important conditions for enabling a full competition in public policies is the unrestricted movement of persons and capital, so that these can easily reveal their preferences.

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*As time passes and the EU progresses towards a more harmonized, integrated and centralized system, the number of its failures and fragilities is becoming obvious.*

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Now that the lifting of barriers to the flow of persons, capital and goods has become a pillar of the EU, the resulting conditions might suggest that policy competition will soon thrive. Unfortunately, the effort to give everybody the very same structure of entitlements, rights and obligations in each member state has had ill effects. It has made the effect of free movement a hampering rather than a strengthening of competition.

As time passes and the EU progresses towards a more harmonized, integrated and centralized system, the number of its failures and fragilities is becoming obvious. The Lisbon Strategy defined the same solutions for the economic problems of all members: innovation, a learning economy, and social and environmental renewal. This strategy was a failure even before the current economic crisis began.<sup>16</sup> An even more spectacular failure is the EU's cohesion strategy. Despite spending 818 billion euros on cohesion funding since 1989, the difference between NUTS II regions (as measured by unemployment levels) rose between 1990–2011 by 4 percentage points.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Common Agricultural Policy, while far from being a success for the old members,

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<sup>16</sup> C. Wyplosz, "The failure of the Lisbon strategy," *VOX*, January 12, 2010. Available online: <http://www.voxeu.org/article/failure-lisbon-strategy> [accessed on July 1, 2013].

<sup>17</sup> This was not caused by the accession of new members from Eastern Europe, since the highest levels of unemployment are in Spanish regions. For an extensive analysis of regional cohesion (in Slovak), see D. Sloboda, *Eurofondy a regionálne rozdiely v Európskej únii*, Bratislava: Konzervatívny inštitút M.R. Štefánika, 2012.

yields negative results especially for Eastern European members due to the different structure of their agricultural sector.<sup>18</sup>

The case of the eurozone crisis is a good starting point around which to center a more detailed analysis. It is just this ongoing sovereign debt and banking crisis in several member countries of the eurozone that serves as an argument for a deeper integration and transfer of sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> The main line of the argument is as follows. Although the eurozone has one currency, it is asymmetrical in terms of economic performance, as well as in labor, social, tax and business policies, to say nothing of informal institutions like political attitudes towards the fiscal situation. This asymmetry is the cause of the current problem within the eurozone. If we want to solve the problem, we need to address the asymmetry – and that means integrating and harmonizing the member states.

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*The current crisis was ingrained in the euro project. It has forced the same rules onto members which are in reality quite different.*

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The author believes that just the opposite is true. The current crisis was ingrained in the euro project and the tragedy of the commons which it has brought about. It has forced the same rules onto members which are in reality quite different. Instead of competing by creating better policies, governments were incentivized by the euro project to tap the pool of low interest loans and create bubbles in their economies. Further integration will only accentuate these problems, and sink the PIIGS states even deeper.

While far from being ideal, the pre-euro existence of several monetary policies (formally represented by currencies such as the Deutsche Mark and the Frank) drew on the positive effects which are brought about by competition.

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<sup>18</sup> See M. Gorton, C. Hubbard, L. Hubbard, "The folly of European Union policy transfer: why the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) does not fit Central and Eastern Europe," *Regional Studies* Vol. 43, No. 10, 2009; and/or N. Valkanov, "CAP – the effects of the implementation of direct payments per acre in Bulgaria," Institute for Market Economics, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> See for example "Einspruch gegen die Fassadendemokratie," *Franfurter Allgemeine*, August 3, 2012. This belief is popular also with IMF – "Thus, the only solution is greater collaboration and deeper integration. The only viable option for Europe's debt crisis is a comprehensive and consistent solution, a cooperative solution, a shared solution." from "What does the IMF prescribe for Europe?," *Debating Europe*, August 9, 2011.

There was the *discovery procedure*. The post war economic situation was unique in several ways. Currencies were no longer directly tied to gold, economies were in ruins and certain institutions like modern central banks were in the process of forming. Monetary strategies and goals were different across Europe. Countries and investors were more or less free to pick a currency and test it against their demands (like stability) and thus discover the best currency for their needs.

Countries with better monetary policies were *rewarded*. Their economies grew, demand for their currencies was high, and interest rates on their bonds low. Similarly, those who used the money benefited. People storing wealth saw inflation eating less of their savings and businesses enjoyed a higher price stability.

It helped to sort out *contradictory knowledge*. A strong stable currency is good – but won't it hurt exporters? The Deutsche Mark as managed by Bundesbank showed that on the contrary it will not. In the 50 years following 1949, the DM grew stronger ten-fold as compared to the British pound, four-fold as compared to the Frank and eight-fold as compared to Italian Lira<sup>20</sup> – and, relatively small [West] Germany was able to become and remain one of the world's three biggest exporters.

*Feedback* on various monetary policies was easy to obtain, due to the abundance of various statistics, but the easiest form of comparison was the mutual exchange rate. But there was also informal feedback. For example, when Montenegro (and several other former Yugoslavian republics as well, more or less informally) adopted the Deutsche Mark – and not the Frank or Lira – as their primary or secondary currency, it thus provided feedback to their issuing central banks.

Some authors see the effort to diminish implicit *coercion* as one of the key driving factors behind the introduction of the euro. The existence of a strong Deutsche Mark was forcing weaker currencies to perpetual devaluation, as well as revealing to voters the lower performance of their central banks and politicians.

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<sup>20</sup> M. Vlachynský, "Menová vojna sa nedá vyhrať," February 15, 2013. Available online: <http://www.iness.sk/stranka/8047-Menova-vojna-sa-neda-vyhrat.html> [accessed on July 1, 2013].

Before the introduction of the euro, the Deutschmark was a standard that laid bare the monetary mismanagement of irresponsible governments. While it's true that the Bundesbank inflated the money supply, it produced new money at a slower rate than the high inflation of other (especially Southern European) countries, who used their central banks most generously to finance deficits. The exchange rate against the Deutschmark served citizens in those countries as a standard of comparison. Governments of high inflation countries feared this comparison with the Bundesbank. The euro was a means of ending these embarrassing comparisons and devaluations.<sup>21</sup>

Investors would demand much higher interest rates on bonds issued by inflating countries, thus curbing the potential public spending sprees of local politicians.

*More resilience.* Having more monetary policies available on the shelf gives you the option to choose a better one once your own becomes a failure. More explicitly, this was the case especially in certain former eastern European countries where weak local currencies were switched for marks or dollars (especially in the Balkans). But we can find a more current example. Despite having formally a single currency, deposits from the European periphery are flowing to the core. The eurozone is not yet completely integrated (for example in terms of a banking union – banks are still safer in some countries than in others), and people react to turbulent conditions by moving their wealth to those countries where they perceive more favorable conditions for its protection.

The introduction of the euro suppressed these positive effects. Peer pressure disappeared. Risk weighting almost disappeared as investors (correctly) anticipated mutual liability for debts. Interest rates in the periphery plunged within the few years leading up to 1999. While the spread between German bonds on the one hand, and Italian, Spanish or Portugal bonds on the other, was 5 per cent or more (with Greece routinely having a double-digit spread), it fell to 1–2 per cent for no other reason than the emergence of euro. After joining the eurozone, periphery countries were flooded with money

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<sup>21</sup> P. Bagus, *The tragedy of the euro*, Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institutue, 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 37.

seeking higher profits with reduced risk. There was no feedback – interest rates remained stable even as governments and enterprises were engaging in the creation of bubbles and deficits.

Local banks were backed by a distant giant called the ECB (rather than by local central banks), a protection which offered them further breathing space to engage in risky activities. Depositors no longer had to decide between Marks and Liras, and deposits flew to the periphery banks, which offered higher returns.

As the crisis started to unveil in 2007 – and again (and especially) after 2010 when the sovereign debt crisis added a new flavor to it – EU officials took steps that were critically mistaken. They further attempted to blend all the problems into one thin mixture which could be spread across the eurozone.

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*After three years of rescue operations, the results are terrible. The EU created two funds worth 1.48 trillion euros, with half of it already committed.*

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After three years of rescue operations, the results are terrible. The EU created two funds worth 1.48 trillion euros, with half of it already committed. Greece went through two quasi-defaults and is expecting a third. Five of the seventeen eurozone members are currently being saved, and at least one other is near the point of asking for help. The Spanish banking system continues to record an increasingly non-performing loans rate. The unemployment rate is breaking historical records month after

month. The Eurozone is in recession. Several countries are able to continue servicing debt only thanks to the activities of the ECB. Radical tendencies within societies are growing.

If our answer is further harmonization and integration – via a pooled banking resolution fund, Eurobonds, active bond purchases by the ECB, and fiscal centralization – the problems will continue to get worse.

There are other solutions. The notion of a common European currency does not inevitably require the abandoning of competition. Indeed, there were several proposals on the table in the late 1980s which hailed the idea of competition in creating a common European currency. Bundesbank, the representative of the strongest member state economy and one of the strongest world currencies, favored the adoption of Nigel Lawson's proposal in 1989. According to Lawson's plan, any member's currency would have been accepted in any member state as legal tender. John Major suggested



that the ECU become a real currency issued by the European Central Bank, but that dual currency circulation still remain in place, so that both the local national currency and the ECU would be legal tender.

The most irresponsible countries should be allowed to restructure their financial systems. A series of sovereign defaults and bank bankruptcies are inevitable in this process. Feeding the local zombie banks is nothing but a waste of the taxpayers' money. A common resolution fund will be no better; it will just draw healthier banks (or those already expensively restructured, as in the case of Slovak banks?) towards their sick counterparts. Ineffective public structures need to be restructured, and black holes in public finances closed. This cannot be done without severing the money pipelines from the EFSF and the ESM, which only help keep these ineffective structures in place. European public sector expenses are built on the boom of 2001–2007, and hence do not reflect the real wealth of the economy. The revenues that states received during this boom will never return, no matter how much we hike taxes or tackle tax evasion.

Instead of further integration, the opposite direction should be taken. People should be left to choose their currency freely. The introduction of dual currency – just as suggested 25 years ago – appears again as a solution to the Greek crisis.<sup>22</sup> This would not mean the demise of the euro – it would only mean that there would be pressure on the euro to outperform potential local rivals in order to justify its existence.

Currency is only the tip of the iceberg. The EU needs to be competitive – not only with those outside, but especially on the inside. An internal competitive search for better solutions is possible only when countries are free to choose their objectives and their goals. The effort to catch up with a leading country in whatever field is not a destructive process, but a form of progress. Giving up competition is giving up progress.

## Final thoughts

Should we harmonize labor laws and minimum wage according to the French or the German model? Germany today boasts half the unemployment level

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<sup>22</sup> See for example E. Kasimati, N. Veraros, "Should Greece adopt a dual-currency regime to resolve its economic crisis?", *Journal of Policy Modeling* Vol. 35, No. 4, July–August 2013, pp. 588–600.

of France. Eight million German workers, however, earn wages below the French minimum wage. With a higher minimum wage, many of them would be unemployed. The actual existence of comparable policies gives us room to consider the impacts of various options, and citizens should be free to choose at the national, regional and municipal levels how they want to address particular problems.

Indeed, several reviews of the harmonization and subsidiarity problem have recently appeared in the EU. The UK government has conducted the *Review of the balance of competences* in regular semesters since July 2012. The United Kingdom also plans to opt out of about 100 measures of the Lisbon treaty regarding the law and crime. In June 2013 the Dutch government released their *Testing European legislation for subsidiarity and proportionality – the Dutch list of points for action*, in which they identified 54 policy areas in which the competition should remain at the local level. There is no reason why we should consider “More Europe!” as the only solution to the current problems of the EU – quite the opposite. Harmonization and centralization have been important contributors to the situation we find ourselves in. Applying an identical set of rules both to inner London and Northwest Bulgaria is nothing but ignorance of the diversity which exists in

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Europe. Different regions have completely differing conditions and priorities, which need to be solved in unique ways.

The problems in the eurozone are a good and highly visible example of the effort to apply the same rules to very different subjects. The same rules for all member states will inevitably mean that at least some countries will get the wrong medicine. This problem will only grow as more policy areas are added to the jurisdiction of Brussels, leading to further economic, social, and national disruption in the EU.

Let us borrow the words of Ottmar Issing, the former chief economist and member of the Board of the European Central Bank, as a final conclusion:

Arguably, in earlier centuries, it was competition within Europe that generated unparalleled dynamism and prosperity across much of the continent. To be sure, this was also a time of wars. However, this does

not mean that centralization is the best – much less the only – way to guarantee peace. . . . This approach – harmonization, coordination, and centralized decision-making – continues to be regarded as a panacea for Europe's problems. It is the sort of pretence of knowledge that the economist Friedrich von Hayek denounced as a recipe for constraining freedom and ensuring economic mediocrity. Indeed, the European project should start from the premise that appropriate institutions, property rights, and competition, together with a growth-friendly tax system and solid fiscal policies, are the basis of economic success.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> O. Issing, "The risk of European centralization," *Project Syndicate*, July 2, 2013. Available online: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-risk-of-european-centralization-by-otmar-issing> [accessed on July 2, 2013].

## **Critical international political economy. Dialogue, debate and dissensus**

By Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney, eds., Houdmills and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. ISBN 978-0-230-28030-4

At this time of global economic crisis, the demand for critical approaches to social sciences increases. The field of International Political Economy (IPE) is no exception. The anthology, edited by Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney, consists of chapters that fit this need very well and show that the critical tradition in IPE not only offers important insights into current global matters, but also show that this tradition is not new at all and indeed should be seen as one of the fundamentals of the field. The challenge for the contributors is to “assess the development of so-called critical IPE and interrogate whether the theoretical innovations that its foundations have been built upon have reached their potential.” (p. 2) They thus employ an approach that shares “a concern that critical IPE has often been less eager when looking to move beyond, for example, Coxian models of analysis.” (ibid) The goal for the authors is to provide an overview of the contributions made by “critical” IPE and also its shortcomings; suggest a variety of theoretical openings for critical inquiries; and place the development of the meaning of critique in IPE within the wider context of social science inquiry (p. 3).

In the first chapter, Lucian M. Ashworth counters the usual understanding of the disciplinary history of IPE (particularly Benjamin Cohen’s *IPE: An intellectual history* from 2008) as originating during the 1970s. He shows how the disciplining of a discipline is achieved by a control over the narrative of the origins of the field of study. This way the radical approaches are marginalized. Ashworth analyzes the work of H.N. Brailsford and the influence of Norman Angell and J.A. Hobson on him to argue that “there was a recognizable IPE prior to 1950 [and] that a major part of this IPE was made up of a critical socialist tradition.” (p. 10) Ashworth, among other things, highlights Brailsford insight that “the great capitalist powers had found a way to dominate others without resort to conquest” (p. 14) thus outlining the basis of neocolonial control already in 1914. The problem with the history of IPE is that it does not take into account developments in the field of international relations (IR), which before World War II in effect was IPE. The 1970s emergence of IPE was thus really a reactivation of the political economy approach that IR had largely abandoned by the 1950s. Such a radically different narrative of the history of IPE gives critical IPE a much greater role. Since “history is one of many sites in which current ideological positions compete,” (p. 26) reminding ourselves

of the fact that critical IPE has existed since the beginnings of IR, destabilizes the assumption about what is and what is not the orthodox IPE.

The second chapter written by Huw Macartney and Stuart Shields criticizes the way space has been dealt with within orthodox and critical IPE approaches. The main problem is that “space is unproblematically assumed to exist *a priori*...” (p. 34) It is predetermined and “social forces struggle over access to it.” (p. 35) There has been an attempt to conceptualize the multiscalarity of capitalism within neo-Gramscian perspectives, but this has not changed the pre-constituted character of social space. On the contrary, it accepts space and scale as epiphenomenal to capitalism following the methodological strategy of “add-space-and-mix.” (p. 38) According to authors a different approach demands understanding of “production, destruction and reconstruction of ... spatial configurations ... [as] immanent to capitalism.” (ibid) “Space and scale are neither ontologically given nor politically and discursively neutral; space and scale embody power relations.” (ibid) An example of a scalar bias could be that e.g. to speak of a transnational capitalist class risks reifying its agency and obfuscating counter-hegemonic resistance by reproducing the myth of its ubiquity. The authors’ counter-hegemonic strategy then aims at de-reifying the agents of globalization by pointing at different spaces (e.g. the state) as simultaneously precondition, mediation and outcome of the conflictual political processes. More empirical examples would, however, make their perspective more approachable.

This applies to the third chapter by Penny Griffin as well. She introduces theoretical underpinnings of poststructuralism at much greater length than necessary. To be so brief in illustrating her argument about the global financial crisis makes it unclear what the actual goal of her contribution is. One can only agree with the statement that “understanding how we are represented... is central to understanding the ‘big issues’ in world politics...” (p. 44) But only one and a half pages about how the list of causes for the financial crisis from the Secretary-General of the OECD excludes systemic flaws and the lack of certainty, which is at the basis of the system, is not enough to persuade those sceptical about the role of discourses in our lives. I can imagine that it might be helpful to readers to have it more thoroughly explained how it works in practice that capital is represented as an “implacable kind of force.” (p. 56)

Randall Germain in chapter four calls for the return of the analysis of subjectivity within the Marxist tradition, otherwise it will be “unable to account adequately for the continued resilience of a neoliberal world order.” (p. 64) The author criticizes William Robinson and David Harvey for their orthodox Marxist approach making culture “a derivative of, rather than determinant to, the economy as understood in material terms.” (p. 69) Even though Hardt and Negri are concerned with “the internal and subjective possibilities of the multitude,” (p. 71)

their radical subjectivist ontology of a multitude is just as useless as the material determination of the class, since multitude is a subject on such a vast scale “that its cultural determination becomes almost vacuous.” (p. 72) Germain therefore turns to Cox and R.G. Collingwood who put emphasis on an understanding of human motivations, thus privileging agency over structure. However, his goal is to conceive of “the possibilities of agency within an already organized, patterned and therefore structured world.” (p. 61) Such an endeavor is of course laudable. It could be useful, however, to speak of a discourse rather than class to allow for a much more varied understanding of structure, which on the other hand will not be as all encompassing as multitude.

In chapter five Ian Bruff criticizes recent debates within IPE for dealing mainly with methodological problems and ignoring ontological issues, which would force us to reconsider notions that we use before actually choosing particular methodology. Such notions are market and state and the alleged dichotomy they seem to create. This unreflective approach (e.g. in Gilpin or Strange) “assumes that states and markets contain impersonal properties intrinsic to themselves, as relatively self-organizing components of society.” (p. 82) The author therefore turns to Gramsci’s understanding of “common sense,” which “helps us to move away from the notion that the state is a “structure” or a “thing;” instead it is the materialization of human thought/action in regularized practices that appear “real” and “state-like”...” (p. 88, 94) Such an approach allows us to denaturalize the decisions and actions taken by humans within the state and inquire more closely into the basis for such decisions and actions. The state/market dichotomy is then perceived as a construction made by everyday decisions rather than something autonomous with intrinsic features. “[T]he state’ exists only because we implicitly accept such “existence” on an everyday basis” (p. 95) Thus, “... the state does not exist” (p. 95) except in our common sense despite very real material effects it has on our lives. Bruff then offers six ways how IPE could make some progress. The crucial is the first one – “acknowledge the necessity of concept formation at every step of the research process...” (p. 97) One wonders how is this supposed to be done in practical research? Should we analyze every possible aspect that we usually take for granted? Or should we maybe look for a less overwhelming task, which does not shy away from reproducing un-deconstructed notions? Such notions need not have substantial impacts in terms of power and, moreover, they may be accepted by actors for whom they constitute a “neutral” terrain.

A very well illustrated chapter six written by Juanita Elias criticizes the lack of engagement with feminist research within the critical IPE scholarship. She reiterates Georgina Waylen’s argument that the problem of IPE is that gender usually just becomes an “adding-on to existing theoretical and empirical research programmes without recognizing the ways in which gender is itself constitutive of

the global political economy.” (p. 100) In her chapter she first demonstrates this problem by showing how feminist authors are excluded from e.g. Mark Blyth’s *Handbook of IPE* to make her case in the second section that feminist approaches are actually very fruitful for our understanding of international political economy. For example, her own research shows how multinational corporations benefit from localized social inequalities using the discourse about women’s natural suitability for monotonous work. This is an approach that makes critical IPE more approachable than theoretical chapters on how taken-for-granted notions are socially constructed. Elias in her conclusion sees one way forward for critical IPE that is already on its way – to engage in the study of everyday micro-politics and thus intersect with feminist approaches. This, however, according to the author, should not preclude macro-topics e.g. how gendered rationalities within the international financial institutions form their policies.

Owen Worth in chapter seven argues “that “critical” IPE is in danger of losing its distinct radicalism...” (p. 129) Worth especially criticizes the watering down of the “critical” in critical IPE as it becomes interchangeable with the British approach to IPE. The term critical is supposed to distinguish it from the orthodox IPE in its aim to change rather than just interpret the world. The British school on the other hand “represents something far broader than that which Cox was asking for...” (p. 124) According to Worth, this tradition merely revisits the methodological debate within IR between Hedley Bull and Morton Kaplan, thus following the realist paradigm with its elitist understanding of politics. Further, the British school is based more on Susan Strange than on Robert Cox. Her critique of positivism and state-centric methodology, however, just simply argues for a wider engagement of the study and does not challenge IPE at a deeper level. Polanyi is then criticized as yet another source that is not radical enough and, especially in his later work, would belong to the social democratic strand of thought. Such a purification of critical IPE is useful in distinguishing between more and less heterodox approaches to IPE and between different dimensions which make up the framework for this difference. On the other hand, excluding poststructuralism or feminist theories because “these approaches have not necessarily been situated within the Coxian definition or the Frankfurt School’s prescription of “critique”” (p. 123) is a way to limit the possibilities for the theoretical evolution of critical IPE.

Anita Fischer and Daniel Tepe in the eighth chapter follow Juanita Elias and criticize critical IPE for not paying enough attention to gender inequality. In the first part they show how Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s notion of social totality reduces this totality to the capital relation. Class, according to Adorno, “is the highest structuring principle... of the social totality.” (p. 136) However, as feminist research has shown, the oppression of women is determined by their class position as much as by their gender (and race/ethnicity) position. Therefore, “[t]he core question in

feminist debate has been to conceptualize interaction at the interstices of both these structures.” (p. 141) This intersectionality in social inequality is for Fischer and Tepe different from the poststructuralist understanding of race, class and gender as identity categories. Critical theory should, according to the authors, aim to enable an analysis of the social totality, which includes the intersectionality of social inequalities and does not reduce this totality to class relations.

Paul Cammack in the last chapter offers a very well argued review of Cohen's *IPE: intellectual history*, which is also criticized in the first chapter by Ashworth. He shows how Cohen's work is “a *construction* of IPE as a field rather than a history of how it *was* constructed.” (p. 149) His construction contains five elements – he presents himself as an objective historian, insists on the novelty of the IPE field (an argument made by Ashworth as well), considers Marxists to be outside the respectable mainstream of Western scholarship, constructs the debate between American and British schools as diverse and inclusive and interprets the history of the field in terms of institutional control. His deconstruction shows how the British school serves the need to present the field as plural and thus allows it to exclude more critical approaches. Cammack goes on to demonstrate how Cohen's engagement with the “really big questions” such as system governance or systemic transformation necessarily fades from view after the British school is presented as the savior of the too narrow American school. It is only the Marxist tradition that is capable of dealing with these big issues. “American IPE cannot address *global capitalism* as a system at all because to do so would be Marxist.” (p. 165) An alliance with the respectable end of the British school will only perpetuate this. Therefore, the author argues for the return to Marxism and provides a list of sources affiliated with this tradition at the end of his chapter. There is one important deficiency in this brilliant review. It completely excludes the question of intersectionality presented in other contributions. Waylen's “You still don't understand” (the question of gender) quoted by Elias (p. 99) seems to be applicable to Cammack's contribution. Just as he shows how Marxism is excluded from IPE, he excludes gender (and race/ethnicity) from his representation of critical IPE.

In general, however, the last chapter represents well the constructivist and critical character of the whole book. The authors certainly succeed in their aim of providing an overview of critical IPE and, what I appreciate just as much, they are not afraid to “stress that critical IPE remains contested” (p. 2) throughout the book. The fact that the chapters are not united by a common theoretical approach is then the result of the quest to question the validity of the American-British IPE schools' debate and not a failure on the side of the editors. On the contrary, the reader can see how diverse critical IPE actually is. The book thus



serves its task very well to bring critical IPE closer to scholars. One may only hope that empirical research will build on its theoretical rigor.

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## **Russian foreign policy: the return of great power politics**

By Jeffery Mankoff, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. 352 p. ISBN 978-1-4422-0825-4

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the superpower struggle that shaped the international agenda for more than fifty years. While the United States emerged from the end of the bipolar competition as the world's only superpower, the successor to the USSR, the Russian Federation, was caught in the process of transition to the new internal and external environment. In the words of the French foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, the United States became known as a hyperpower, the country that had dominance or predominance in all categories of power.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Russian Federation was left to discover its new post-imperial identity and to find a place in what had become a unipolar world order. Faced with a severe internal crisis and challenges of the post-Cold War international context, the foreign policy of the newly established Russian Federation suffered from a lack of long-term direction. Thus, in the absence of a solid policy course, during two decades Russian foreign policy shifted from what was known as the pro-Western approach to a more assertive advocacy of the multipolar world order.

The above presented shift in Russian foreign policy, combined with the country's economic development, energy perspective, international engagement and increased international influence, led some scholars to the conclusion that the contemporary Russian Federation is in fact a fine example of a resurgent power. According to their analysis, the Russian Federation has managed to position itself as one of the major players and challengers in the post-Cold War international order.<sup>2</sup> However, not all scholars support this claim. On the contrary, some scholars point out that when it comes to Russia, it is important to make a distinction between the image and the reality. From their point of view, Russia is far from being a resurgent power and, based on its domestic perspective, is in fact a power in decline.<sup>3</sup> Following the scholars' debate on the role of the Russian Federation in contemporary international affairs, Jeffery Mankoff's book *Russian*

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<sup>1</sup> N. Schofield, *Architects of political change: constitutional quandaries and social choice theory*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> A.E. Stent, "Restoration and revolution in Putin's foreign policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 60, No. 6, August 2008, p. 1089.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ghaleb, *Natural Gas as an Instrument of Russian State Power*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, October 2011, pp. 60–1.

*foreign policy: the return of great power politics* provides valuable answers to the contested question of whether Russia is a resurgent power or not. Through the six chapters of his book, Mankoff offers a comprehensive assessment of the developments and trends in Russian foreign policy, from the collapse of the Soviet Union and Putin's more decisive and independent foreign policy approach, to the recent notions for modernization that have marked Medvedev's presidential term. The assessment follows a coherent and well-organized structure, starting from the analysis of the internal factors that shape overall Russian foreign policy, and then moving to the detailed evaluation of Russia's relations with the United States, Europe, countries in Asia and the Former Soviet Union countries. In the end, the book concludes that Russian foreign policy is led by the neorealist notions of geopolitics and national interest, and that in order to have solid relations with contemporary Russia, the West "need[s] to show Russia that it can have what it most craves – respect, recognition and responsibility for upholding order around the world – without having to resort to force of threats of force to make itself heard." (p. 276)

Although Mankoff concludes that Russian foreign policy behavior is driven by the notion of national interest, that interest is not a given. As he points out in the first two chapters of the book, internal developments and factors, like competing preferences of the political and economic stakeholders, have their own share of influence on the definition of foreign policy. To emphasize this claim, Mankoff states that "Russia in the early twenty-first century is in many ways a state in search of itself." (p. 11) However, although different ideological streams within the Russian political elite have different ideas about foreign policy goals, they all generally agree on the point "that Russia is, and should remain, a power with global interest and global reach." (p. 29) This historically determined identity of Russia as a great power is contested by the public's preference for internal reform and social prosperity. (p. 28–29) The public demand for a more isolationist approach to foreign policy leads to the main dilemma challenging the newly defined national interest of the Russian state: the desire to be one of the powerful states, which determines the fate of the world, and the need to "create a more competitive, respected state." (p. 2) Yet, Mankoff is right in suggesting that "Russia should first lay the foundations at home for this broader vision of its activities abroad." (p. 52)

While analyzing the Russian foreign policy trends, Mankoff shares the generally accepted opinion that from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy (drawing on the foreign policy approaches of the two Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin), can be roughly divided into two distinct eras. This division is emphasized in the following chapters that refer to the developments of Russian foreign policy towards each region and their leading countries. The

analysis offers a thorough evaluation of the Western and the Eastern vectors in Russian foreign policy through four chapters.

The third and the fourth chapters assess the Russian foreign policy's Western vector, its policy towards the United States and the European Union. During Yeltsin's presidency, the perception of the West among the Russian political establishment was quite narrow. The West was mainly perceived as the United States, and the importance of the European Union, and its member states, as strategic partners in Russian foreign policy only increased with Putin's presidency. While US – Russian relations have moved on from the Cold War agenda, Mankoff points out that they still “remain dominated by “hard” security issues” lacking the proper economic foundation and institutional framework which is a fundamental part of the Russian–EU partnership. (pp. 92–3) In addition, the EU is a part of Russia's broader idea of the multipolar world within which Russia and the EU are one of the leading powers.

Russia's (self) image as one of the world's leading powers is further reinforced through its foreign policy towards the Eastern vector, Asian countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Mankoff strongly emphasizes in the fifth chapter that, although mostly neglected during the 1990s, contemporary “China is a regional partner but also a country whose support is necessary for Russia to play geopolitical role to which its elites aspire.” (p. 178) The Russo–Chinese rapprochement is not just based on the commitment to multipolarity and state sovereignty, but also on very developed economic ties, institutional cooperation and a common desire to keep the West from Eurasia. (p. 192) In fact it was the prospect of the NATO expansion to Russia “Near Abroad,” Georgia and the Ukraine, which led to the 2008 Georgian War and the culmination of Russia's more assertive foreign policy. According to Mankoff, the Georgian war, which was a breaking point in Russian foreign policy strategy, led to two conclusions. Firstly, from that moment onwards the West was “more reluctant to challenge Russia's leading role in the post-Soviet, space” considering that Russia was willing to sacrifice economic relations with the West in order to protect its zone of privileged interests. (p. 267) Secondly, Russia became “increasingly conscious of the limits of its power in the [CIS] region, as well as of the need to make itself a more attractive partner for its neighbors.” (pp. 260–1) In contrast to its foreign policy during Yeltsin's presidency, the more independent approach to international affairs has led Russia to the position of regional power with political interests that go beyond the West. Furthermore, in the sixth chapter, with its analysis of the Russia's relations to the CIS, Mankoff acknowledges the point made by Andrei Kazantsev who argues that Russia is pursuing closer alliance with Central Asian countries, not just for ensuring its economic and political influence, but also

with the purpose of making security challenges and threats in the region more tangible.<sup>4</sup>

The main goal of Mankoff's analysis presented in *Russian Foreign Policy* is to outline developments in Russian foreign policy in order to evaluate the impact of its re-emergence as a power and independent actor in the international arena. Although, the analysis provides comprehensive conclusions about the nature of the Russian state in the twenty-first century, the main contribution of Mankoff's work is in the emphasis he puts on the role of economic ties and institutional frameworks as the most important foundations of good foreign policy relations. Although Mankoff ends his analysis with the remark to Western countries that contemporary Russia "can play a constructive role" in dealing with transnational challenges without abandoning its power aspirations (pp. 277–8), he fails to address the issue of the Russian internal challenges that may have a significant effect on its power status. Russia's internal developments pose a legitimate question to the country's ability to pursue a resurgent power status. The fact is that demographic, social, ecological and health issues challenge the very existence of the Russian state, not to mention its international aspirations. Without effectively dealing with these domestic weaknesses, not even assertive foreign policy can provide Russia with the ability to pursue its geopolitical national interests.

However, even though Mankoff does not stress the interdependence between Russian internal and foreign policy, the book itself is a well-developed and extensive analysis of Russian foreign policy from the collapse of the Soviet Union onwards. The book offers a broad and well-written overview of trends and changes, as well as the future perspectives of Russian international aspirations. Therefore, Mankoff's work is a recommended read for academics and political analysts as well as those interested in the role of the Russian Federation as one of the leading powers of the world today.

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<sup>4</sup> A. Kazantsev, "Russian policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 60, No. 6, August 2008.

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Articles should be original and deliver the data that are accurate, meaningful and timely. It should not be under consideration elsewhere. The text should be submitted to editors in the simple Word document format with and abstract summarizing the main points. The length of contributions should not exceed 6,000 words.

Quotation should be clearly gathered in a manageable proportion as footnotes. Footnotes should be presented as follows:

### *Books*

P.J. Katzenstein, *Tamed power Germany in Europe*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 195–6.

### *Articles in journals*

I. Samson, "The Visegrad Four: from loose geographic group to security internationalization?," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 2009, pp. 57–73.

### *Articles in Volumes*

T. Butko, "Unity through opposition. Islam as an instrument of radical political change," in B. Rubin, ed., *Political Islam. Critical concepts in Islamic studies*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 26.

### *Articles in newspapers:*

"David Cameron deploys 10,000 more police to stop London riots," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2011.

### *Articles available online:*

"David Cameron deploys 10,000 more police to stop London riots," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 2011. Available online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/cameron-deploys-10000-more-police-to-stop-london-riots/2011/08/09/glQAqz2B4l\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/cameron-deploys-10000-more-police-to-stop-london-riots/2011/08/09/glQAqz2B4l_story.html) [accessed on August 9, 2011].

### *Documents*

"Joint communication to the European Council, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region. A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean," COM(2011) 200 final, European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, March 8, 2011.

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