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Visegrád Turns Ten

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Introduction

Eleven years after its formal creation and eight years after its apparent demise, Visegrád is back. Persisting charges of "dilettantism" notwithstanding,[1] leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary have recently engaged in a flurry of activity self-consciously recommitting their countries to the regional initiative embraced by their predecessors at the outset of the postcommunist era.

However, the striking parallels in the articulated vision of the principal proponents as well as in the range of substantive areas subject to cooperation raise the uncomfortable question of whether Visegrád's Second Coming will meet a similar end as the First. Just as shifts in the internal and external forces driving regionalism did in the original Visegrád by 1994, the cycle of national elections and decisions on Euroatlantic integration through the end of 2002 may sorely test its successor. Whether last year's commemorations of the framework's tenth anniversary prove to mark a new springtime or merely another Indian summer will depend not only on the outcome of those factors but also on current advocates' success in building a broader constituency and firmer institutional basis to help Visegrád weather and adapt to changes in the context that has nurtured its revival.

Along with practical implications for the countries' mutual relations, Visegrád's meaningful persistence in the years ahead would carry significance for academic debates on regional cooperation in Central Europe and beyond. More tangibly, it would enhance members' capacity to shape the emerging European order and balance or bridge emerging rifts in U.S.—West European relations, especially should those strains intensify.[2]

Push-Me Pull-You

As part of the rising interest in the so-called new regionalism, since 1990 a small literature has emerged on the Visegrád group as well as on Central and East European cooperation more broadly. Although many of these efforts have been quite insightful, they have also remained limited in scope and mostly ignored Visegrád's recent reinvigoration.

Several contributions are worthy of note. Rudolf Tőkés, who served as an advisor to the first postcommunist government in Hungary, provided an able insider's account of Visegrád's early dynamics in 1991.[3] Four years later, Zoltán Bárány succinctly surveyed the reasons for its lapse.[4] Valerie Bunce supplied one of the most sophisticated, extended treatments in 1997. Stressing the need to account for both the rapid rise and the sudden breakdown of the original Visegrád, Bunce pointed to the interplay among changing leadership

commitments, intraregional political alignments, and broader international incentive structures as decisive in each instance. In her estimation, the fact that these factors worked first in favor of, and then against, cooperation was a predictable accompaniment of the overall shift from "abnormal" to "normal" politics in the region. The temporary unity of the immediate postcommunist period inevitably gave way to a more sober recognition and calculation of differentiated interests, leaving Visegrád "only a short-term engagement."[5]

Visegrád's resurgence as well as the successful persistence of other cases of regionalism (especially the European Union, the phenomenon's most advanced example) belie the notion that cooperation on this level need be rare or uniformly unsuccessful. However, given the skepticism and inertia such efforts must typically overcome, it is true there must be sufficient "internal push" and/or "external pull" for specific regional frameworks to progress and endure.

While more detailed elaborations of these dynamics exist, for the purposes of this paper internal push is considered strong when the governments of countries involved become actively committed to a program of regional cooperation as an inherently valuable instrument for advancing important political goals or expressing basic political values. Push is weak when governments view regionalism as unimportant, unnecessary, or counterproductive. External pull is strong when shared external challenges call for a coordinated approach and/or when powerful external actors come to perceive and treat the region as a distinct unit, in part conditioning the extension of material, institutional, or other benefits on demonstrations of regional cohesion. Pull is weak when there is a lack of obvious common external issues and/or important outside actors signal indifference or opposition to a strong regional approach. [6]

In practice, of course, the strength or weakness of both intra- and extraregional factors lies on a continuum of possible values rather than a simple binary scale, and each can affect the other. Indeed, as externally sponsored initiatives are rarely sufficient to spur real cooperation in and of themselves, the main contribution of outside stimulus is often to provide positive or negative reinforcement to internal forces for regionalism.[7] Nonetheless, separate attention to the two sets of factors provides a useful frame of reference for understanding not only shifts in Visegrád's fortunes over the past decade but also its prospects in the years ahead.

In both the initial and current incarnations of Visegrád, the idea of a distinctive Central European identity embraced by well-placed leaders has been a key element of internal push. While this was arguably not necessary and certainly not sufficient for launching and maintaining successful cooperation, by embodying specific interpretations of a shared historical trajectory and mission

it did create a strong presumption for regionalism as a possible, desirable, and indeed natural means of addressing certain crucial issues after communism. External pull has come in the form of shared problems in relations to the former Communist East (especially Russia, initially, but also the Balkans) and variable encouragement from the Euroatlantic West.

Accordingly, whether the pessimistic conclusions voiced by Bunce and others ultimately prove mistaken or merely premature will depend on whether today's Visegrád will be more successful than its forerunner in maintaining internal and external bases of support. Given emerging shifts in both domestic political alignments and European integration, Visegrád's meaningful persistence in the years ahead may depend on how well current governments have managed to broaden its appeal beyond a narrow elite and build up an institutionalized structure for its work. Such factors can reinforce both internal and external perceptions of distinctive commonality or, alternatively, supply a foundation for continued cooperation "after identity," when original conceptions of a region may have faded.[8]

The Rise and Fall of Visegrád Mark I

The Founders' Vision

For its initial advocates after 1989, what became the Visegrád Triangle of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary represented both a means to address practical problems of these countries' postcommunist transition and a way to "give expression to the idea of Central Europe."[9]

During the late 1970s and 1980s, several of these countries' most prominent dissident intellectuals had articulated a shared vision of a regional identity based on four principle tenets. First, *Central Europe* signified a protest against Soviet domination, Communist dictatorship, and the resulting "East European" political identity imposed on their countries during the Cold War. Second, as the flip side of the first point, the idea of Central Europe represented a claim of historical belonging to Western culture and civilization. Third, Central Europe embraced the ideal of a vibrant civil society to promote a vision of the region as a zone of diversity, tolerance, creativity, humanity, freedom, truth, and solidarity. To an extent this represented an idealized notion of the Habsburg past, but it carried greater significance as a strategy of "antipolitical" opposition to totalitarian communist regimes as well as a critique of the partisan politics, crass materialism, and banal popular culture seen developing in the West. Finally, as a "higher tier

of identity," Central Europe signaled a rejection of the chauvinistic nationalism that had led to ruinous intolerance and rivalry during the interwar period and other points in the past.[10]

Its intellectual promoters not only wrote about the idea of Central Europe but also strove to translate it into personal, transnational practice. They protested one another's arrests, trials, and imprisonment and frequently cited one another's essays and activities in their own writings. Clandestine border meetings between Czech and Polish dissidents gave birth to the group Czechoslovak-Polish Solidarity. Many individuals involved also forged links with their Hungarian counterparts through coordinated demonstrations and joint statements on human rights. Poland's Adam Michnik later described such experiences as building "a common identity" among those involved.[11]

The revolutions of 1989 suddenly elevated many of the same dissidents into top positions in their respective countries' governing elites. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in Czechoslovakia, whose new president, Vaclav Havel, publicly appealed for close trilateral cooperation during the "return to Europe" in speeches to the Polish and Hungarian parliaments in January 1990. As Havel told his listeners, "We have the [historic] chance to transform Central Europe ... into a political phenomenon."[12]

Due to insufficient preparation and bad timing, the countries' initial follow-up summit in Bratislava in April 1990 proved a disappointment. However, over the ensuing months several external factors helped sustain internal diplomatic efforts toward trilateral cooperation.

First, by the fall of 1990 a rising reactionary trend beset the Soviet Union. Soviet officials became less accommodating in troop withdrawal talks, put off discussion of change in the Warsaw Pact, and threatened economic measures to retain a sphere of influence over Central Europe. Domestically, such trends led to the dramatic resignation of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in December and lethal actions by Soviet special forces against the Baltic independence movements in January 1991. At the same time, the deepening fissures within Yugoslavia presented another source of threat to regional stability as well as a potent reminder of the volatility of mobilized ethnonationalism.

In part to counter the spread of such instability, as well as to simplify relations with these countries by dealing with them as a group, during this period the West explicitly encouraged trilateral cooperation among Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. By the end of 1990 the European Community extended its PHARE aid program for Poland and Hungary to Czechoslovakia and, more significantly, singled out the three countries to begin negotiation of association agreements. Among other occasions, in November NATO Secretary

General Manfred Wörner emphasized the importance of triangular cooperation in meetings with Hungarian leaders in Budapest. After talks with Vaclav Havel in Prague that same month, U.S. President George Bush likewise stressed to reporters that the United States also did "not want to see Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary off in some kind of no-man's land."[13] Other U.S. officials were said to link demonstrations of regional cooperation with increased economic assistance.[14]

Against the backdrop of such stimuli, the countries convened a more fruitful second summit in Visegrád, Hungary in February 1991. Near the ruins of a royal palace where kings of their countries had met in 1335, Havel, newly elected Polish President Lech Walesa, and Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall signed a wide-ranging declaration of cooperation among their countries. The trio reiterated and refined their commitment at subsequent meetings in Krakow (October 1991) and Prague (May 1992). During these years frequent trilateral talks also took place at the level of experts, ambassadors, and cabinet ministers or deputy ministers.

Areas of Cooperation

Given the relatively brief duration, other consuming demands of transition, and the new governments' general inexperience, much of Visegrád Mark I remained in the realm of declaratory intent. Nonetheless, the substantive agenda for cooperation was notably comprehensive in scope and reflected of prior discourse surrounding "Central Europe." Although some of the areas overlapped, this agenda can be broken down into dealings with the East, with the West, and with one another.

Cooperation in regard to the East initially focused on cutting lingering imperial ties to Moscow. Accordingly, the countries worked together to dismantle the Warsaw Pact and Comecon as well as to coordinate their positions on Soviet troop withdrawals and new bilateral treaties. They also arranged emergency consultations during the January 1991 crackdown against the Baltic independence movements and the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow. Later they discussed ways of dealing with nontraditional threats from former Soviet states such as mass migration and nuclear proliferation. By the end of 1991 the Visegrád countries also agreed to coordinate their recognition of Yugoslav republics as independent states. They later issued a special statement supporting broader international recognition of Macedonia in particular.

Cooperation toward the West emphasized advancing relations with the major Euroatlantic institutions. For example, Visegrád representatives exchanged information while negotiating association agreements with the European

Community, coordinated positions in a series of joint meetings with community representatives as part of the special "political dialogue" established by those agreements, and met with counterparts from the Benelux countries to learn from their experience of multilevel integration. Similarly, they issued a number of joint appeals for closer relations to NATO, including in successive speeches at NATO headquarters on behalf of all three countries by Havel, Walesa, and Antall from March to October 1991. They also advanced the so-called Dienstbier Plan for Western financing of exports from their countries to the Soviet Union.

Among themselves the Visegrád states sought to address a full range of shared concerns, including social, environmental, and educational issues. As one example, backing from Hungarian-born financier George Soros enabled the creation of a Central European University with faculties in each of the countries. In the realm of defense and security, they discussed political and social aspects of military reform, explored possibilities for joint defense production and procurement, and concluded a series of synchronized bilateral agreements on subjects such as doctrine development, training exercises, inspections, and other confidence-building measures. Finally in economics, in December 1992 the countries signed the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) to phase out mutual tariffs by 2001.

Strain, Stress, and Decline

Despite Visegrád's initial progress, the course of political developments during this same period brought a gradual waning of the power and influence of its original promoters across the region. Shifts within Poland and Hungary through early 1994 had only modest effects on regional relations, but the June 1992 elections in Czechoslovakia soon disrupted Visegrád's internal momentum.

In Budapest, the government led by the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum served its full term from May 1990 to May 1994. Although Prime Minister Antall died of lymphoma in December 1993, his successor, Peter Boross (Antall's interior minister) had neither time nor inclination for dramatic changes in foreign policy. President Árpád Göncz and the major opposition parties — the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), and the Hungarian Socialist Party — were, if anything, more enthusiastic about Visegrád than the government. More broadly, until the approach of the spring 1994 elections (which would be won by the Socialists) a "tacit consensus" on foreign policy persisted.[15]

Poland had half a dozen governments during this time, but with only minor exceptions, foreign policy represented "the single issue on which Poland's fractious and divided political scene ... managed to reach a lasting consensus."[16] Until October 1993, all had roots in Solidarity and retained the same foreign

minister, Krysztof Skubiszewski. Hanna Suchocka, prime minister from July 1992 to October 1993, wrote late in her tenure that the Visegrád group "continues to be the most important regional initiative for Poland. . . . cooperation among our countries should not only grow in the political and economic fields, but also in the area of security."[17]

The return of the communist-successor Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the former satellite Polish Peasant Party to power after the September 1993 elections marked a watershed in Polish politics. Nonetheless, although Skubiszewski left office and the new government showed increased interest in reviving economic relations with Russia, there was no fundamental shift in policy. The governing parties' coalition agreement listed membership in the European Union and NATO as well as regional cooperation as priority goals. In addition, Lech Walesa remained president until December 1995, with supervisory authority over national security and foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, however, following two years of mounting controversy over the "Slovak question," Czechoslovakia's 1992 elections brought to power leaders with irreconcilable visions for the country's future. Vladimìr Mečiar, whose Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) received roughly a third of the vote in Slovakia, in essence demanded the transformation of the country into a confederation. Václav Klaus, whose Civic Democratic Party (ODS) received a similar proportion of the vote in the Czech republic, insisted the only alternative to a "viable" federation was separation. Though opinion polls showed large majorities in both republics opposed a breakup, the two men quickly agreed to divide Czechoslovakia into separate states as of January 1, 1993.[18]

The dissolution of the Visegrád group's most multinational state in itself contradicted the ideal of overcoming ethnic and national differences through cooperation. It also replaced the federal government of former dissidents with two more nationally focused states whose leaders lacked strong commitment to "Central Europe." Klaus and Mečiar had risen to political prominence through the Civic Forum (OF) and Public Against Violence (VPN), the sister umbrella movements that led the Velvet Revolution in their respective republics. However neither had been active in the dissident movement prior to 1989, and by early 1991 each had become a political opponent of many of the most prominent figures who had.

Meciar had first become Slovak premier in June 1990. However, disagreements over the extent of demands for republic autonomy and charges that he had been a secret police informer led others in the VPN leadership to

orchestrate his ouster the following spring. Under the banner of his HZDS, however, Mečiar swept back into office in 1992 by presenting himself as the persecuted champion of Slovaks' national aspirations.

Meciar's second government expressed continued verbal support for Visegrád cooperation, but it repeatedly became enmeshed in controversies that undercut that framework. Internally, developments such as Mečiar's efforts to fill state posts with loyalists and exert greater control over the media sparked accusations of authoritarianism. In external affairs, Mečiar's remark to a Slovak heritage organization in August 1992 — that if "the West should close the door to Europe to [Slovakia], it will be necessary to turn to the East"[19] — raised questions about the republic's foreign policy orientation. More specifically, unexpectedly protracted disputes over the division of federal assets and settlement of mutual debts strained Slovakia's relations with the Czech Republic through much of 1993, while still more serious disputes over the Gabčikovo-Nagymaros hydroelectric project and the rights of Slovakia's six hundred thousand ethnic Hungarians did the same with Hungary. Among other charges, Meciar more than once insisted that Hungary had simply seized on the Gabčikovo issue as a vehicle for irredentism and was "not a trustworthy partner."[20] In turn, Istvan Bába, deputy state secretary for Central European affairs at the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, pointed to Slovakia's alleged violation of a Danube water flow agreement mediated by the European Community and remarked that "under these circumstances I find it difficult to envisage cooperation in the Visegrád framework."[21]

Defections from within the HZDS triggered a no-confidence vote and Meciar's second removal from office in March 1994. However, early elections six months later brought him back for a full four-year term during which outside unease with his style of rule only grew. In the single most dramatic example, in August 1995 Meciar apparently ordered the secret police to kidnap President Michal Kováč's son.[22]

Mečiar's counterpart in the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, was a professional economist who had served as Czechoslovakia's federal finance minister and chief economic policymaker from December 1989 to mid-1992. His election as chairman of the Civic Forum in fall 1990 precipitated the split of that broad grouping into the more tightly organized, neoconservative Civic Democratic Party, led by Klaus, and the looser, more socially democratic oriented Civic Movement, headed by Foreign Minister Jirì Dienstbier together with many of the other most prominent former dissidents. Despite considerable personal animosity, both sides continued to work together in government.

Klaus voiced some skepticism in cabinet meetings (where he was the sole representative of the ODS), but it was not until the spring 1992 election campaign that he and other members of his party engaged in direct, sustained public criticism of the country's foreign policy as unrealistic and misguided. For example, in a book-length interview, Klaus belittled attempts "to create some kind of troika between Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, in place of an unambiguous shift toward the West."[23] In mid-April, deputy party chair (and future foreign minister) Jozef Žieleniec remarked that "integration with Poland and Hungary is not necessarily a precondition for Czechoslovakia's return to Europe" and if this were "pursued vigorously, it would be counterproductive."[24]

Klaus' criticisms of Visegrád in particular were amplified after the Czech Republic officially became independent in 1993. In a speech in Austria on January 7, Klaus criticized the Visegrád group as an "unnecessary experiment."[25] In an interview for the French paper *Le Figaro* the next day, he denigrated Visegrád as an "artificial creation of the West,"[26] a charge quickly denied by the Polish and Hungarian foreign ministers.

While such dramatic statements drew the greatest attention, elsewhere Klaus and other Czech officials presented more nuanced critiques. For example, Czech leaders frequently argued that they opposed not Visegrád cooperation per se but merely its formal institutionalization. They also challenged the equation of Central Europe with the Visegrád countries and argued that regional relations should place greater emphasis on more economically advanced countries such as Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. A third line of criticism was that the Visegrád framework had not actually accomplished anything significant or, at best, had only been useful as a means of dealing with the vanished Soviet threat. In order to be effective it thus needed a shift of focus from grandiose declarations to "concrete" (essentially economic) matters where its countries shared mutual interests.

Finally, however, Czech leaders argued that Visegrád could serve neither as a substitute for, nor even as a forum for closely coordinating efforts to gain membership in, Western institutions. In relations with the European Community and NATO, the four countries would have to focus on their internal preparedness and be judged as potential members individually. At least in tone and emphasis, this was the most significant departure from previous Czechoslovak policy, because coordinating the "return to Europe" had been a chief motivation for Visegrád from the start.

The Czechs' policy reflected the judgment that overly close links to the other Visegrád states would only slow their own progress in relations with the West. As Jaroslav Šedivý, then director of planning and analysis at the Czech

Foreign Ministry, explained in fall 1995: "After the division, Klaus and other economists analyzed our situation and that of our neighbors. They saw we were relatively better prepared, so there was an advantage to a go-it-alone policy."[27] During this time, the Czech Republic's unemployment rate, inflation rate, and foreign debt were all substantially lower than those of the other Visegrád countries. It consistently balanced the government budget, while in 1993–1994 Poland and Hungary had to scramble to meet IMF targets for their deficits. Finally, especially in comparison to Poland, its relatively small agricultural sector presented a lower potential burden for the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

Czech leaders also perceived their country's political situation and strategic position to be less problematic than those of the other Visegrád countries. Especially before Roma issues rose to greater prominence, the Czech Republic seemed a small, ethnically homogenous state that, with few conationals beyond its borders, lacked the kind of tensions that existed, for example, between Hungary and Slovakia. Meanwhile, Poland's potential as a partner for the West was seen as further compromised by its turbulent domestic politics ("like Italy" in the words of one official) and by more intense Russian opposition to that country's inclusion in NATO.

The new government position had its domestic critics, but the ODS's absolute majority within the cabinet, the divided nature of the parliamentary opposition, and public indifference toward the issue allowed Klaus' basic attitude to remain state policy. Even the election of Václav Havel, one of Visegrád's founding fathers, as Czech president in January 1993 did not produce a serious challenge. Though Havel issued a pointed defense of the Visegrád grouping and Czechoslovakia's post-1989 foreign policy in general in a speech to parliament that February, elsewhere his public statements adhered more closely to the government line.[28]

At the same time, weakening Western treatment of the Visegrád countries as a privileged regional unit during 1993 removed external counters to the grouping's centripetal tendencies. First, at their June 1993 summit in Copenhagen, leaders of the European Community refused the now four Visegrád countries' request to continue "political dialogue" with them as a separate group apart from Romania and Bulgaria, which had signed association agreements of their own in February and March, respectively. This change ended a practice of coordinated talks that, according to Hungarian diplomat Tibor Kiss, had become "the main binding motive for the Visegrád cooperation as such."[29]

Second, contrary to some prior hopes that NATO would simply extend full membership to the Visegrád states as a bloc, by fall the United States was promoting a new Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative as a program of evolutionary, individualized relations with the alliance, open on a formally equal basis to all nonmember states in Europe. Accordingly, the symbolic endpoint of Visegrád Mark I came at the January 1994 summit in Prague at which U.S. President Bill Clinton discussed the just formally approved partnership with Visegrád leaders. On the one hand, American officials continued to speak in favor of regional cooperation, and the very initiation of a summit with the four countries conveyed a certain continued recognition of them as a special group. On the other hand, however, given the structure of PfP itself as well as the fact that most working meetings at the summit were conducted bilaterally, then-Slovak Foreign Minister Jozef Moravčik interpreted the new U.S. attitude as "in Prague together but in the future individually."[30] The Czechs themselves also pointed to the PfP's terms in refusing calls from Poland in particular for a joint statement and more coordinated standpoint at the summit.

These differences produced a wave a verbal sparring, with the sharpest exchanges between Klaus and Lech Walesa. Contrasting the Czech government's generally upbeat acceptance of the PfP with his own demands for more immediate and explicit security guarantees, the Polish president said "the Czechs would go along even if Brussels offered them membership in the Soviet Union."[31] Walesa also placed responsibility for a suboptimal summit result on the Czechs' perceived lack of solidarity. Klaus attributed such criticism to "disappointment that the American side chose Prague as the site of the meeting." He repeated his opposition to "empty regionalism" and said, "I would be a bad politician, if I did not place Czech interests above the common interests of...the Visegrád group."[32]

Expressing the depth of disappointment this breakdown caused for many other former dissidents, Poland's Adam Michnik lamented that "it looks like the greatest political chance of the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians in the 20th century may be wasted."[33]

Visegrád Mark II

Post-Visegrád Cooperation (1994–1998)

Some partial efforts to sustain or revive aspects of Visegrád persisted even through the nadir of the mid-1990s. Two private media initiatives spanning all four countries, the monthly print supplement *Central European News* and the English-language radio program *Central Europe Today* expressly identified with Visegrád's goals of advancing closer relations and mutual understanding in the region. On the presidential level, in April 1994 Havel initiated a new round of meetings with his regional counterparts (including those from Germany, Austria, Slovenia, and later also Italy and other countries) under the so-called Litomýsl process. [34] Government ties also continued through CEFTA, uniquely beloved by Klaus, which began its own tradition of annual prime ministerial summits in November 1994. Moreover, the1997 NATO Madrid summit's formal invitations of membership to three "Visegrád candidates" — Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary — served as a catalyst for a series of trilateral gatherings of those countries' top political and military officials. In contrast to the ambiguous signals three years earlier, U.S. officials in particular now reemphasized the need for group unity and coordination in order to advance both the invitees' technical preparation for, and existing members' legislative ratification of, alliance enlargement.[35]

While such efforts helped preserve Visegrád's legacy and ideals, each remained more limited. Even at their peak, the media efforts reached a limited audience and proved difficult to sustain. In 1995 Havel advisor Pavel Seifter characterized the creation of Litomyšl as an admission that "Visegrád is dead."[36] CEFTA contributed to a steady rebound of regional trade, but by the outset of 1998 the combination of its own actual enlargement (to include Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria) and the EU's initiation of "fast track" pre-accession negotiations with select candidates (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia) retarded the further "deepening" desired by some members.[37] As for trilateral, NATO-related cooperation, in addition to having always excluded Slovakia, the affirmative vote of the U.S. Senate in April 1998 largely completed its purpose in respect to enlargement ratification. Moreover, it was already being viewed as of limited prospective utility beyond its participants' formal accession the following year due to the decided separation of Poland and the Czech Republic into the alliance's central command and Hungary into its southern one.

More serious, full-blown efforts to reestablish Visegrád thus awaited another turn of the region's political cycle.

A New Beginning

Over a compressed period of eleven months from fall 1997 to fall 1998, national elections brought new governments to each of the four Visegrád states. First, in October 1997, descendants of the Solidarity movement returned to power in Poland in the form of a coalition between Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), itself a combination of more than thirty center-right parties, and the Freedom Union (UW), a classical European liberal party including many top officials from the governments of the early 1990s.

While the outgoing leftist government had also proved open to regional cooperation, some observers viewed its replacement as even more internally committed, given such factors as the ethnic Czech heritage of the new AWS prime minister, Jerzy Buzek, and especially the presence and influence of the new UW foreign minister, Bronislaw Geremek, who had been a leading dissident and outspoken early advocate of Visegrád. Accordingly, Geremek spoke of the framework's "renewal" at a NATO-related press conference with his Czech and Hungarian counterparts in December 1997.[38]

The results of the May 1998 elections in Hungary had a somewhat more mixed impact on that country's foreign policy. On the one hand, the new prime minister, Viktor Orbán, had been part of the young democratic opposition in the 1980s and had even written his university thesis on KOR (Committee for the Defense of Workers) and the Solidarity movement in Poland. On the other hand, during the campaign Orbán's Fidesz party strongly criticized the sitting, Socialist-led government's willingness to compromise on issues such as the rights of ethnic Hungarians abroad and the Gabčikovo dam project. After the vote Fidesz formed a coalition with the more stridently nationalist, sometimes anti-Semitic, Smallholders Party as well as the remnants of the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

Meanwhile in the Czech Republic, Klaus's government had narrowly retained power after elections in the summer of 1996. However, by November of the following year mounting economic reversals, party corruption scandals, and intracoalition bickering brought about its collapse. In a somber state-of-the-nation address to parliament two weeks later, President Havel broke his extended reticence on the topic to list the "vanity"-inspired neglect of Visegrád among the country's recent failings.[39] Though the "half political" caretaker cabinet that served until early elections the following June itself made regional cooperation a matter of increased emphasis,[40] Havel's criticism was most actively picked up and amplified by the opposition Social Democrats and the chairman of their foreign policy committee, Jan Kavan.

Kavan had been an exchange student at Oxford at the time of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and spent the remainder of the "normalization" period in British exile. Though identified as a secret police collaborator under Czechoslovakia's postcommunist lustration law in 1991 (a charge of which he was finally cleared in 1996), in the 1980s Kavan had helped establish the journal *East European Reporter* and otherwise worked to foster links and wider Western awareness among the region's civic activists. In 1995, he identified with Visegrád as an attempt to do the same "on a state level."[41]

Kavan served as chief author of the Social Democrats' foreign policy program statement released in February 1998. The document repeatedly faulted the Klaus government's neglect of regional diplomatic opportunities and stressed the party's own agreement with the "motivation and vision" behind the original Visegrád group.[42]

The June elections brought the Social Democrats into power, but as a minority government unexpectedly dependent on the toleration (codified in a so-called Opposition Agreement) of Klaus's ODS. Nonetheless, Kavan became foreign minister and, given Prime Minister Miloš Zeman's general lack of interest, the main driving force behind Czech foreign policy. Once confirmed in office, Kavan moved quickly to follow up on his previous endorsements of Visegrád in August 1998 talks with Bronislaw Geremek.[43]

The sentiment for renewal gathered further momentum that September with the ouster of Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia's elections. Meciar's HZDS again placed first with 27 percent of the vote, and total votes for it and Slovak National Party together slightly exceeded those received by the parties in 1994. However, the collapse of the far-left Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS), the HZDS's other junior partner, and the increased turnout by young voters in particular propelled the combined opposition to 58 percent of the vote and a solid, three-fifths majority in parliament. On the basis of this showing, by the end of October this diverse "coalition of coalitions" (including the major ethnic Hungarian grouping) had formed a new government headed by Mikuláš Dzurinda. Mečiar belatedly attempted another comeback in presidential elections the following May but was defeated by Košice mayor Rudolf Schuster.

The circle of communist-era dissidents in Slovakia had always been restricted even in comparison to that in the Czech lands, and accordingly only a handful of officials in the new government had extensive background in that milieu.[44] Nonetheless, many had experience in, or close contact with, their country's emergent civic groups during their efforts to resist and dislodge Meciar's "illiberal democracy" and consciously looked to regional counterparts for inspiration and advice.[45] Among other examples, several of these Slovaks had

met privately with Václav Havel after a February 1998 Litomyšl meeting in Slovakia's High Tatras. Others had traveled to Warsaw with Prime Minister-to-be Dzurinda for talks with Polish representatives in June.

Both during and after the elections a central political theme for the new governing parties had been that Mečiar's misrule had not only corrupted Slovakia's internal political and economic life but also driven it into international isolation. Reidentification with the country's Visegrád partners presented one of the most promising means of rehabilitating its image and making up lost time in Euroatlantic integration. Accordingly, the official program statement submitted to parliament in November 1998 stressed the government's commitment to "make use of all possibilities for intensifying relations with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary and ... to participate actively in the revival and development of Visegrád cooperation."[46]

Such sentiments were embraced and encouraged by the other three countries. While Slovak parties continued to negotiate the details of their coalition agreement, a previously scheduled mid-October summit of Prime Ministers Buzek, Zeman, and Orbán in Budapest formally announced the "revival" of cooperation under the Visegrád label and invited Slovakia to "re-occupy the chair" again reserved for it.[47] Three weeks later Václav Havel visited Bratislava and, recalling the grouping's initial brainstorming session, suggested a spring summit there to consummate that offer "where this cooperation began in 1990."[48]

With Prime Minister Dzurinda relishing his role as host, this meeting took place in May 1999. Harkening back to the grouping's earliest precedents, the closing declaration hailed the opportunity "to revitalise the co-operation of the Visegrád Countries in its full historic dimension ... in the region of Central Europe."[49] The following year's statement would even more directly stress the intent to "promote regional integration, cohesion and solidarity in Central Europe" as well as "strengthen the Central European identity."[50]

Achievements of Visegrád Mark II

Beyond the formal declaration's emotive recommitment, the Bratislava summit's major contribution to what can now be termed Visegrád Mark II came in the form of an accompanying document on "the content of Visegrád cooperation." This was intended to provide both a specified agenda (largely similar to the Western, Eastern, and intraregional foci of Mark I, though with some new areas of emphasis) and a structured means for pursuing it.

One key feature of the latter was a commitment to meetings on "bi-, tri-, and quadrilateral" bases at regular intervals among high-level state officials, including biannual summits (one formal, the other informal) of all four prime

ministers. These have since occurred on schedule in Slovakia's Tatras (October 1999), Prague (June 2000), Karlový Vary (October 2000), Kraków (May–June 2001), Tihany, Hungary (August 2001), and Esztergom (June 2002). Though the fact that Slovakia had yet to fill the post prevented the Visegrád heads of state from joining the Bratislava summit, the "contents" document also specifically encouraged presidential meetings. These have taken place in Slovakia's Tatras (December 1999), Pszczyna, Poland (January 2001), and Castolice, Czech Republic (August 2002).[51] Finally, the most frequent parliamentary contacts have been among representatives of committees for foreign affairs, defense, and European integration, who have met on eight occasions.

Equally important to the resumption of such meetings were the decisions to establish a rotating chairmanship (filled from May 1999 to June 2000 by the Czech Republic, and then for successive twelve-month terms by Poland, Hungary, and currently Slovakia) as well as to designate individual "Visegrád coordinators" within each country's foreign ministry to prepare for summits and otherwise oversee the framework's ongoing activities.

As in the early 1990s, the goals of integration into NATO and the European Union remain priority features of the new Visegrád's activities toward the West. Indeed, cooperation in many other areas is also self-consciously designed to be "complementary" to these efforts.[52] Regarding NATO, of course, one crucial difference from the past is that rather than promoting the membership aspirations of all the Visegrád states, now the three already inside the alliance are promoting the candidacy of the fourth, Slovakia.

Help here has come in two principal forms, the first being diplomatic support. Coming almost exactly two months after the others' accession, the Bratislava declaration emphasized that "it is in the interest of all Visegrád partners ... that Slovakia [also] become a full member of NATO ... as soon as possible." Slovak officials themselves have seized on this and similar subsequent expressions of group solidarity to advance the notion that their country's inclusion in the alliance would amount not to a new round of enlargement but merely "completion" of the last one. Moreover, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian representatives have also worked within NATO structures to keep the alliance's "open door" policy visibly on the agenda during a stretch of years in which larger powers' priorities have lain elsewhere.

A second, partially overlapping form of assistance has focused on Slovakia's technical preparation for NATO membership. The June 2000 Visegrád annual report credits the others' assistance with making a "significant contribution" to Slovakia's Membership Action Plan.[53] Public information and opinion cultivation have been particularly relevant areas for advice, especially given that Slovaks'

support for NATO membership reached a low of 35 percent during Operation Allied Force and has only recently returned to a majority.[54] In May 2001, the Polish, Czech, and Slovak Defense Ministers announced plans to establish a joint peacekeeping brigade. As an interim step, 100 Slovak troops have joined a Czech unit in the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).[55] All four countries are also pursuing joint efforts to upgrade their Soviet-made Mi-24 attack helicopters to NATO standards.

Comparable expressions of "solidarity" have occurred in relations with the EU, for which all four states remain candidates.[56] On a technical level this has meant a regular exchange of information and views among the countries' chief accession negotiators (and others), with a special emphasis on "Third Pillar" issues such as the Schengen border control regime. Higher profile activities have included joint meetings (outside the regular summit schedule) between the four Visegrád prime ministers and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Gniezne, Poland, April 2000), French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (Budapest, May 2000), British Prime Minister Tony Blair (Warsaw, October 2000), and Belgian Prime Mininster Guy Verhofstadt (Bratislava, December 2000). The June 2001 Visegrád annual report cites the repetition of the "four-plus-one format" as proof the "voice of Visegrád is heard in Europe."[57] The Krakow summit declaration issued that same time also anticipates the countries' continued cooperation within the EU even after accession, and talks have again taken place with Benelux representatives on their experience in this regard.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Visegrád states have devoted proportionately less of their current joint effort toward Russia or other countries of the former Soviet Union than at the beginning of the 1990s. The June 2000 Prague summit declaration did express hope for further democratization and "a peaceful political settlement of the Chechen conflict" as well as willingness to "to contribute and be helpful in the implementation of EU strategy towards Ukraine and Russia."[58] Regarding the former, representatives of the Visegrád and Ukrainian foreign ministries discussed "policy planning" in Warsaw in autumn 2000, and the following spring Visegrád officials presented their views on the EU's nascent "Strategy for Ukraine" to union officials in Stockholm and Brussels.[59] In July 2002 the Visegrád and Ukrainian defense ministers also discussed Ukraine's potential preparation of a NATO Membership Action Plan.[60]

On the other hand, Visegrád states have devoted relatively more attention than in 1991–1993 to developments across the former Yugoslavia. Occurring as it did in the middle of NATO's Allied Force bombing campaign against Serbia, the May 1999 Bratislava summit declaration called on Belgrade to cease its "deliberate policy of oppression, ethnic cleansing, and violence" in Kosovo.[61]

Subsequent statements and discussions have focused on Visegrád state involvement with the Southeastern Europe Stability Pact and overall efforts to advance peace, stability, and democracy in the region. Most recently, in March 2001 the Visegrád foreign ministers called for a peaceful resolution of the violence in Macedonia.[62]

The promotion of ties among "civil societies" (to include "everyday contacts" among citizens as well as local governments and nongovernmental organizations) remains a chief "added value" of intraregionally focused cooperation among the Visegrád states themselves.[63] The highest profile initiative in this regard to date has been the establishment of an International Visegrád Fund to foster projects in the fields of "culture, science and research, education, youth contacts, cross-border cooperation and sports." Each country pledged a quarter million euro to the fund at the June 2000 Prague summit and twice that amount a year later in Krakow. During the fund's inaugural year grants were awarded in two rounds to seventy-five projects. Other notable developments have included the creation of a Coalition of Visegrád Think Tanks by representatives of nineteen research institutes from the four countries meeting in Warsaw in December 2000[64] and the holding of a regional youth meeting in Visegrád itself in July 2001.

The countries' Roma (Gypsy) minorities have become a new area of focus. Although Poland's Roma population is relatively small, that of each of the other three partners reaches into the hundreds of thousands.[65] As elsewhere across Europe, these Roma disproportionately experience social and economic problems including high unemployment, racial discrimination, and violence. The condition of the Roma and perceived inadequacies of the governments' response have generated increasing scrutiny from international human rights groups as well as U.S. and European officials, especially since thousands of Roma from the region began seeking political asylum in the West. At the initiative of Slovak President Rudolf Schuster, in January 2001 a regional center was opened in Kosice with the aim of coordinating efforts among central governments, localities, and Roma organizations in the areas of health, culture, and education.[66]

Somewhat surprisingly, meetings among environmental and cultural ministers have rivaled those of the foreign affairs resort as the most frequent cabinet-level events of Visegrád II, occurring at least each yearr since May 1999. Key areas targeted for coordination among the former have included preparation to meet EU standards, preservation of natural areas, the Kyoto Protocol and other efforts to address global warming, and environmental aspects of privatization and regional economic development. As part of these efforts, the four countries' geological surveys are to work closely together.[67]

In addition to continuing activity within CEFTA, cooperation in the economic realm has included a joint trade and investment fair held in New York in February 2001. The June 2001 Kraków summit also welcomed a Polish "knowledge-based economy" initiative for stimulating development in this area over the coming decade, while the informal follow-up at Tihany in August focused on needs and opportunities for regional infrastructure development.

Limitations

The outlined range of activities notwithstanding, several inhibiting factors have continued to limit Visegrád Mark II. Among these have been several high-profile diplomatic disagreements among the four countries, including in core areas of their common agenda. For example, though all four states have stressed the need for mutual support regarding EU integration, the Hungarians (whose recent robust economic growth and higher rated EU progress reports have made them the kind of frontrunner the Czechs perceived themselves to be earlier) have in particular insisted on individualized, case-by-case evaluation of EU candidates.[68] Similarly, the outspoken Czech condemnation of the inclusion of Jörg Haider's far-right Freedom Party in the Austrian government in early 2000 contrasted sharply with Hungary's early and warm welcome for a visit by that government's prime minister. The Czechs themselves were also first to break ranks with other partners by accepting EU timelines for allowing foreigners to buy land,[69] but contrariwise held out for more favorable terms than received by the others on labor mobility. Meanwhile, Polish officials have been notably cooler toward the nascent European Security and Defense Policy than others in the region.[70]

Other bilateral strains emerged in 2001. Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski canceled a planned visit to Prague in March to protest an unconsulted Czech decision to insert criticism of U.S. sanctions into what was to have been a jointly sponsored United Nations resolution on human rights in Cuba.[71] During the summer, Slovakia joined criticisms of the Orbán government's new "status law" extending special rights and social benefits to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries. In turn, Budapest termed Slovakia's new plan for regional administration "the worst possible" and expressed understanding for the Hungarian party's threats to leave the government in response.[72]

In addition, since the demise of Visegrád I the focus of the countries' regional cooperation has continued to broaden beyond ties with one another. For example, although the EU itself formally erased the distinction at the end of 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary continue to hold separate strategy sessions without Slovakia under the aegis of the so-called Luxembourg Group (also

including Estonia, Slovenia, and Cyprus), the original "fast-track" countries identified in 1997 as most ready to begin accession negotiations with the union. For its part, since May 2000 Slovakia has participated in the "Vilnius Nine" (now "Ten" with the addition of Croatia) group of countries seeking admission to NATO.[73]

Beyond these examples, Poland has been especially active in forging additional links with its neighbors. It has stepped up activities not only within the Weimar Triangle with Germany and France (which held its first prime ministers' summit in 1997) but also formed joint peacekeeping units with Germany and Denmark, Lithuania, and Ukraine. With American support, Poland has placed special emphasis on its relations with this last country, seen as a linchpin for stability in the post-Soviet space, as well as the other Baltic states. Indeed, even the Visegrád enthusiast Bronislaw Geremek pointedly paid his first ministerial visits to Kiev and Vilnius rather than Prague, Budapest, or Bratislava.

For its part, Hungary has similar arrangements with several of its neighbors. In May 1997 in Budapest the Italian, Hungarian, and Slovene prime ministers agreed to cooperate in areas ranging from a Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest transit corridor to a joint military brigade and training exercises, to Italian support for the others within the EU and NATO; Croatia also joined this grouping in August 2000. Also in May 1997, Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Severin announced that a combination of his country, Hungary, and Austria had also been launched, and a Hungarian-Romanian peacekeeping battalion was established the following year.[74] Perhaps with some initial reluctance, Hungary has also participated in the U.S.-backed Southeast European Cooperative Initiative since 1996.

Beginning in 1995, Austria also assumed a mediating role between Hungary and Slovakia via (nearly) annual trilateral summits and other meetings. Through the late 1990s, gatherings of the Austrian and Visegrád interior ministers also took place occasionally to discuss cross-border problems such as organized crime. In spring 2001, Vienna sought to expand on these precedents by proposing a new "strategic partnership" among the Visegrád countries, itself, and Slovenia. Though reminiscent of not only the old Habsburg Empire but also a short-lived Czech suggestion for "four-plus-one" relations in 1993, this new proposal initially generated open skepticism and annoyance among the Czech and Polish governments in particular. Nevertheless, in June an inaugural meeting of foreign ministers in Vienna's Hofburg Palace did produce agreement on a scaled-back "regional partnership."[75]

These alternative fora are not inherently antithetical to Visegrád. Indeed, Visegrád Mark I coexisted with the emergent (and still existent) Central European Initiative, and as early as 1995 Jan Kavan envisioned a revived Visegrád as a

nonexclusive regional "core" whose members would also engage other countries individually and collectively.[76] Consistent with this thinking, the 2001 annual report on Visegrád activities stressed the group's support for various forms of "good-neighborly partnership."[77]

Nonetheless, the proliferation of different groupings tends both to blur the distinctiveness of any one of them and to place competing demands on governmental resources. As Pawel Swieboda of the Polish president's office observed in 1998, "the density of [regional] meetings is reaching its upper limit."[78]

The Future of Visegrád Mark II

The Swinging Political Pendulum

Beyond existing shortcomings, however, Visegrád is now facing shifts in the internal and external situations that overall have favored it the past few years. To begin with, just as the regional elections of 1997–1998 breathed new life into the framework, so those of 2001–2002 have threatened a negative reversal of fortunes. In none of the countries has a notably more pro-Visegrád leadership been likely to emerge, while in several the opposite outcome has been a genuine possibility.

Three major trends have appeared, all of which could potentially challenge Visegrád. First, just as the political pendulum has been swinging to the right across much of Western Europe, three of the four recent elections in Central Europe have been victories of varying magnitudes for parties of the left. The new leaders, some of whom made campaign appearances on one another's behalf, have pointed to this alignment as a positive force for cooperation. Nonetheless, as previously discussed, where their parties are communist descendants, there tends to be a weaker connection to Central Europe as an ideal. Second, though for now outside government, forces of populist nationalism retain a serious, even rising, presence in these countries.[79] Third, in part as a result of the preceding factor, the new coalitions' ability to govern effectively, or perhaps even retain office, remains in question.

In Poland, the outcome of voting again promises to have the least impact on regional relations. Coming on the heels of Aleksander Kwasniewski's convincing first-round reelection as president in October 2000, the communist-successor SLD fell just shy of an outright majority in parliamentary elections held in September 2001. Its 41 percent showing placed it fully twenty-five points ahead of its nearest rival. As a result the SLD returned to power with its partner from 1993–1997, the Polish Peasant Party, but this time with its own relative position greatly enhanced. The same pairing proved basically sympathetic to

regional ties during its last term in office and seems likely to continue to be so now. On the other hand, Prime Minister Leszek Miller has outspokenly assigned priority to Germany as the (his) preferred "first partner" for Poland.[80]

In contrast, neither of the previously governing parties, Solidarity Electoral Action or the Freedom Union (which had withdrawn from the government in May 2000), qualified for seats. Public dissatisfaction with rising unemployment and the coalition's keystone efforts to reform the country's tax, education, pension, and regional administrative systems pushed support for them below the minimum thresholds needed for representation.

Many of those parties' previous supporters turned to one of four alternative forces. The first of these was the newly established, center-right Civic Platform of former Foreign Minister Andzrej Olechowski, whose second-place finish was impressive but below earlier expectations. The other three were Self-Defense, the League of Polish Families, and Law and Justice, primarily rural-based groupings warning of the negative impact of looming EU accession. The increasingly confrontational tactics of Self-Defense's colorful leader Andrzej Lepper in particular have included dumping foreign grain to block roads and railways and issuing tart denunciations of President Kwasniewski, Prime Minister Miller, and other officials. Though Lepper was stripped of parliamentary immunity and convicted of libel, such tactics have bolstered Self-Defense's nationwide popularity and threatened the remaining base of the SLD's junior partner, the Polish Peasant Party.[81]

In contrast to the relatively minor impact so far of the Polish elections, the campaign in Hungary proved the single greatest threat to Visegrád Mark II. First, in mid-February incumbent Prime Minister Viktor Orbán suggested in a radio interview that Hungary could veto Slovakia's membership in NATO if that country persisted in disputing the new Status Law on external Hungarians.[82] Appearing before the Council of Europe the following week, Orbán then agreed that formal abolition of the so-called Benes Decrees, under which Czechoslovakia's post–World War II government had expelled nearly three million ethnic Germans as well as a smaller number of Hungarians, should be a condition of Czech and Slovak entry to the European Union. Orbán amplified that argument after returning to Budapest.

Reaction from Czech and Slovak leaders came swiftly. The Slovak Foreign Ministry described Orbán's comments concerning NATO as "inappropriate, at best," while Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda characterized those on the Benes Decrees as "counterproductive" and "leading nowhere." Similarly, a Czech government spokesman criticized Orbán's "deviation" as an attempt to "change the postwar agreements in Europe." An ODS member of parliament applied

U.S. President George W. Bush's phrase "axis of evil" to link Orbán to politicians with similar sentiments in Austria and Bavaria. Finally, Prime Minister Zeman defended the decrees as directed against a German "fifth column," which prompted German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to cancel a visit to Prague in March.[83]

This strain in relations struck Visegrád at a particularly inauspicious time. On a symbolic level, Orbán's remarks on NATO coincided with the eleventh anniversary of the original Visegrád summit. More substantively, both sets of comments fell amidst a serious attempt to coordinate the countries' response to EU plans, announced at the end of January, to impose new limits on agricultural and regional development payments to prospective new members for a full ten years from their date of entry.

Building on criticism of the EU's perceived violation of "the principle of equality" at an initial meeting of representatives in Budapest February 3, the four prime ministers had planned to release a joint statement at a summit later that month (eventually scheduled for February 27 in Keszthely) emphasizing the unacceptability of the offered ten-year transition period as a condition of admittance. By February 24 Zeman and Dzurinda had decided to boycott the gathering over the Benes Decrees dispute. Poland's Leszek Miller, already piqued over Orbán's early announcement of the planned joint statement, agreed to follow the lead of his Czech and Slovak counterparts, forcing cancellation of the summit as well as a separate meeting of culture ministers.[84]

The issue continued to play a small role during the final months of the Hungarian domestic election campaign. The socialist opposition leader, László Kovács, attacked the government's "clumsiness" for harming regional relations, while Foreign Minister János Mártonyi stressed the relatively greater accomplishments of Visegrád under the Fidesz-led government than its Socialist predeccesor.[85]

At the end of two extremely close rounds of voting in April, the Socialists had edged out Fidesz in the party preference vote, 42 percent to 41 percent, but, based on a strong showing in direct mandate races, Fidesz outnumbered the Socialists in parliament 190 to 188. The failure of either the remnants of the Smallholders or the Hungarian Justice and Life Party, whom Orbán had left open as possible partners, to qualify for seats threw the kingmaker role to the only other party to do so, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats. Despite having suffered politically from their previous coalition with the Socialists, the Free Democrats' deepening aversion to Orbán and Fidesz made their decision to return to that formation predictable.

The new prime minister, Péter Medgyessy, is not a formal member of any political party but served as finance minister in the Socialist–Free Democrat government of the mid-1990s. The postelection revelation of his service for the Communist-era secret service while working as an economic official in the 1970s and 1980s has led Fidesz to demand his ouster and prompted a parliamentary investigation. It is also noteworthy here, however, that in the first months of 1990 he was author of a proposal for a Visegrád-like subgrouping of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary within the old Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).[86]

The change in government in Budapest paved the way for renewed summits of the Visegrád prime ministers together with their Benelux counterparts in Trencin, Slovakia, in May and by themselves in Esztergom, Hungary, at the end of June.[87] Putting a punctuation mark behind the earlier breach of relations, Medgyessy at the June meeting emphasized the countries' intention to focus on the "present and future." The leaders' closing press conference also featured the type of critical statement regarding EU funding initially discussed in February.[88]

A similar pattern of a late surge in poll support pushing a socialist party into government over the leading center-right alternative also took place in the Czech elections in June. Though slipping slightly from their level of support in 1998, the Czech Social Democrats, led by Vladimìr Špidla, widened the gap between themselves and the second place ODS. Prior to the vote leader Vladimìr Špidla had pointedly rejected service in a government with Václav Klaus, and the unreformed Czech Communists, who finished an unexpectedly strong third, remain political pariahs. The Social Democrat's logical choice as their partner in government was thus the only other formation to qualify for parliament, Koalice, itself a combination of the Christian Democrats and Freedom Union.

Of the likely scenarios going into the election, this outcome was one of the more favorable for the further development of Visegrád. First, the still Visegrád-skeptical Klaus and the ODS, who had led many polls though the spring, did not emerge as a senior party of government. Second, though the major components of Koalice had belonged to the earlier Klaus-led coalitions, several of its leading figures had been prominent dissidents; its original June 2001 electoral program, "Joint Responsibility," pledged to "place extraordinary importance on deepening cooperation in the Central European region, especially within the framework of the so-called Visegrád Group."[89]

Several considerations temper this assessment, however. First, with only 101 of 200 mandates, the governing parties command the narrowest of possible majorities. Second, open differences within Koalice, largely responsible for a precipitous drop in its support in the first half of 2002, were deepened by its

disappointing electoral performance. The two sides have formed separate caucuses within parliament and, based on their stronger showing in the preference vote, the Christian Democrats plan to run independently in future local and national contests. Third, though Social Democratic program documents continue to back "further development" of Visegrád, changes in leadership may lessen the intensity of support. Miloš Zeman's decision to turn over the party chairmanship and the prime minister's post to Spidla has also meant the departure of Jan Kavan, a principal architect of Visegrád Mark II, from the Foreign Ministry. Moreover, the selection of Kavan, now a rank-and-file member of parliament, as the new president of the United Nations General Assembly will deprive the government of an effective majority during his periods of service in New York.[90] In conjunction with the refusal of a leading Freedom Union deputy, Hana Marvanova, to support increasing taxes, Kavan's absence already brought defeat for the government's first major piece of legislation, a flood relief package in September 2002.

The final and prospectively most difficult internal test for Visegrád, however, took place two weeks later in Slovakia's elections. Almost from its inception, the Dzurinda government had been plagued by internal disunity, economic hardship, and plummeting popularity.[91] According to most polls leading up to the vote, the confusing array of alternatingly proliferating and merging parties that made up the government would collectively win fewer than half the votes and seats they did in 1998, with the lion's share of the balance standing to going to Vladimir Mečiar's HZDS and to Smer ("Direction"), a new party established by former deputy chair of the Communist successor Democratic Left Party (SDL) Robert Fico in late 1999.[92]

Unexpectedly, however, the highly fractured voting results allowed the three predominantly center-right forces in the outgoing government (the SDKU, Hungarian Coalition, and Christian Democrats) to claim a new majority in combination with the Alliance of New Citizens (ANO). The latter is another recent addition to the Slovak political scene, established in the spring of 2001 by Pavol Rusko, owner of the popular TV Markiza. Like those of its new coalition partners (but unlike either the HZDS or Smer), ANO's party program specifically lists Visegrád as a foreign policy priority.[93] One of its leading members, Culture Minister-designate Rudolf Chmel, also served as Czechoslovak ambassador to Hungary during the framework's formative period.

While Mečiar and the HZDS had striven to project a more moderate, responsible image, most potential interlocutors both at home and abroad continued to view them as irredeemable. Further weakening the party in the summer of 2002 were the defection of several senior members who formed an alternative

Movement for Democracy (HZD) and revelations of undeclared loans for construction of Meciar's residence from a Swiss businessman. Damage from the latter was compounded by footage of Meciar punching a journalist who'd inquired about the matter. Though the HZDS managed to retain the top spot in elections, its 19% showing was by far its weakest and may signal its end as a defining force of the Slovak political scene.

Even more surprising was Smer's disappointing third place finish behind Dzurinda's SDKU. A few of the latest pre-election polls had predicted Smer would eclipse the HZDS, and even short of that Fico had for some time been the odds-on favorite to become the next Prime Minister.

Observers differed on the likely character of a Fico-led government. On the one hand, while by no means from the dissident milieu (he actually joined the Communist Party in 1987), Fico's relative youth (37), modish dress, fluency in English, and experience as a lawyer representing Slovakia at the European Court of Human Rights suggest a figure well positioned to lead his country's integration into modern Europe. His leftist background and identification with "Third Way" pragmatism might also have aligned well with the other current Visegrád governments.[94]

On the other hand, a substantial part of Fico's rise derived from a decidedly populist political style that has included appeals to antiminority sentiment. For example, while still with the SDL he publicly opposed the inclusion of the SMK in government and has since continued to charge that party with pursuing its own interests over those of the country as a whole. He also stresses welfare cuts and tougher police tactics as the main remedies for the various problems of Slovakia's Roma. Finally, Smer's election campaign emphasized defense of Slovak sovereignty in face of the accession demands of the European Union.[95]

Focusing on this side of Fico's persona, domestic critics as well as some EU officials have equated him with Meciar or Austria's Jörg Haider. Even a more apt analogy to the similarly aged Viktor Orbán, who for most of his term as prime minister managed to balance flirtation with nationalism with respect for the broader requirements of European integration, would have likely meant new complications in relations with Hungary in particular and thereby also Slovakia's broader integration prospects and further progress within Visegrád.

For now, however, Fico has chosen to bide his time as the "respectable" opposition (besides Smer, the HZDS and unreformed Communist Party of Slovakia are the only parliamentary parties outside the government).[96] Similar to Hungary and the Czech Republic, Slovakia's new government controls only a narrow majority (78 of 150 seats). Moreover, though more ideologically coherent than its predecessor, the coalitions continues to harbor significant personal and

programmatic differences in particular between the Christian Democrats and both their former deputy chair Dzurinda and the ethnic Hungarians. The ambitions and behavior of Rusko, a former communist and ally successively of Meciar and President Schuster's SOP whose new party was fined for misusing its connections to Markìza during the campaign, are also somewhat unknown quantities.

Euroatlantic Decisions

As in the past, the impact on Visegrád of internal changes will occur in conjunction with external developments. These will entail not only public signals of support but also the intended and unintended consequences of policies on Euroatlantic integration.

Though the future of Visegrád is hardly a burning issue in the West, the leaders of key countries have made clear their general support for the types of intraregional bridge- building it represents. Perhaps the most direct signals for Visegrád have come in the form of the successive meetings noted above of the German, French, British, and Benelux prime ministers with their Visegrád counterparts as a group. In addition, EU Commissioner for Enlargement Günter Verheugen has on a number of occasions expressed the hope that the Visegrád states will join the EU together. A recent U.S. example was the participation of several senior State Department and National Security Council officials as well as members of Congress in meetings with Visegrád deputy foreign ministers as part of an April 2001 conference on "Visegrád Contributions to Trans-Atlantic Cooperation" organized by the influential Center for Strategy and International Security in Washington, D.C.[97]

NATO has now scheduled a summit for November 2002 in Prague that is explicitly to consider, among other issues, the question of further enlargement. Despite increasingly public differences on other international issues between the U.S. and many European members, the alliance now seems to have reached consensus on inviting at least another seven (Bulgaria, Estonia, Lativia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) into its ranks. This offer could still carry the proviso that actual accession take place on an individual basis as countries fulfill detailed technical criteria, but the first additional members would probably enter by 2004 or 2005.[98]

The accession of Slovakia, generally judged the best-qualified candidate after Slovenia,[99] would constitute a real victory for Visegrád. However, it would also remove a principal motivation behind the framework's revival.

On the other hand, though the outcome of the Slovak elections seems to have been favorable in this regard, their occurrence just two months before the summit long threatened to leave NATO unwilling to commit to membership for

a country whose democratic stability remains in question. In February 2002, U.S. ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, explicitly conditioned Slovak inclusion on the absence of Mečiar and the HZDS from the new, postelection government. This would have left Visegrád a tangible raison d'être, but especially if the new governments of the other three states are any less enthusiastic about the framework to begin with, they could also simply have lost patience or hope for their again-excluded neighbor.

Meanwhile at the Nice summit of December 2000 the EU also announced its intention "to welcome those new Member States which are ready [i.e., have completed accession negotiations] as from the end of 2002," with hoped-for entry in time for the 2004 European Parliament elections.[100] Though less than an iron-clad commitment, this was matched by the assignment of prospective voting weights to each of the East European applicants as part of a broader interim overhaul of the union's decision-making procedures.

Leaders of both the EU Commission and member states have remained publicly confident about issuing invitations at their December 2002 Copenhagen summit, but a range of thorny issues remains to be addressed. First, Irish voters face a second referendum on the Nice treaty in October after voting against it in June 2001. Second, the modalities for the accession of the divided island of Cyprus, which Greece insists must be part of the next wave of enlargement, are still disputed with Turkey. Third, further decisions concerning some key financial questions have been postponed until after the September elections in Germany. Fourth, though not yet official policy, leading politicians in Germany and Austria continue to link EU admission to concessions by the candidate countries on postwar expulsions as well as the shutdown of Soviet-design nuclear plants.

As with Slovakia's NATO candidacy, however, one can see possible negatives for Visegrád from almost any decisions the EU might make. In the short term, at least, a prevaricating nondecision might prove least disruptive, but it would raise serious questions about the point of continued cooperation to meet EU norms and standards. A decision to accept at least one but not all the Visegrád countries could allow the selected vanguard to play the type of advocate role the three NATO entrants have played for Slovakia, but it would also mean the disruption of trade ties within CEFTA, the introduction of stricter Schengen-mandated border regimes between the newly inside and remaining outside countries, and the differentiation of priorities in EU relations as invitees shift their immediate focus to ratification. Finally, acceptance of all four countries (probably along with others) would avoid these problems but again raise the issue of continued stimulus for cooperation.

In short, current external encouragement for Visegrád in the context of Euroantlantic integration, though present, is both a weaker force than in the early 1990s or even amidst the last NATO enlargement (when it compelled even the Klaus governments to participate for a time) and likely to weaken further after 2002.

Survivor?

Unlike Mark I, Visegrád Mark II seems set to outlive the electoral terms of the governments that launched it. Whether it can continue to overcome the actual and potential obstacles to its survival in the future may hinge on how well its current supporters build on the efforts of its revivers over the past few years to buttress the framework against their departure. Modest progress has been made in each of the two areas identified as crucial. First, though public support for and even awareness of Visegrád remains uneven, the type of regional projects supported through the Visegrád Fund should help create a group of citizens outside of government who have directly benefited from the framework's existence. Second, the steps toward greater institutionalization — such as the regularized meetings, dedicated coordinators, and small functional offices — can help build desire and expectation for continuation of the framework's activity within the civil service and political classes.

These types of developments are not robust enough to withstand a confluence of worst-case internal and external scenarios after 2002. However, they have already shown their ability to boost efforts to preserve and adapt a Visegrád whose demise was not otherwise over-determined. Such an opportunity and capacity for self-transformation will be key for the longer-term viability of the Visegrád framework. From what at times could seem no more than the pet project of a small circle of critical intellectuals or a temporary support group for Euroatlantic enlargement, Visegrád would have to be seen by upcoming generations as a useful component for advancing their countries' still varied but distinctive values and interests within an integrated European and Euroatlantic context. In the words of J. F. Brown, such a Visegrád could still never compete effectively against Brussels, but it might be able to "compete against others in Brussels" and "occasionally even get its way."[101]

Notes

1. J.F. Brown, The Grooves of Change: Eastern Europe at the Turn of the Millennium (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 238.

2. See Heiko Borchert and Mary Hampton, "The Lessons of Kosove: Boon or Bust for Transatlantic Security?" Orbis 46 (Spring 2002): 369–389; Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," Policy Review No. 113 (June/July 2002): 3–28; and the author's "Whose Trojan Horses?", Perspectives No.18 (Summer 2002): 66–70.

3. Rudolf Tőkés, " From Visegrád to Krakow: Cooperation, Competition, and Coexistance in Central Europe," Problems of Post-Communism 40 (Nov-Dec. 1991): 100–14.

4. Zoltán Bárány, "Visegrád Four Contemplate Separate Paths," Transition, Aug. 11, 1995, 56–59.

5. Valerie Bunce, "The Visegrád Group: Regional Cooperation and European Integration in Post-Communist Europe," in Peter Katzenstein, ed., Mitteleuropa: Between Europe and Germany (Providence: Berghan Books, 1997), 284.

6. See, for example, Lousie Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell eds., Regionalism in World Politics:Regional Organization and International Order (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Edward Mansfield and Helen Milner, eds., The Political Economy of Regionalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., Security Communities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

7. See Charles King's discussion of "regionalism from abroad" in "The New Near East," Survival (Summer 2001): 61–63.

8. Compare to Robert Keohane, After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)

9. Author interview with Martin Butora, human rights advisor to Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel, 1990–1992, (Bratislava, Nov. 23, 1995). Dr. Butora is currently Slovakia's ambassador to the United States.

10. George Schöpflin, "Central Europe: Definitions Old and New," in George Schopflin and Nancy Wood, eds., In Search of Central Europe (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989): 27. Other key contributions included Melvin Croan, "The Politics of Cultural Identity in Contemporary Eastern Europe," Eastern European Politics and Societies 3 (Spring 1989): 176–197, and Timothy Garton Ash, "Does Central Europe Exist?" New York Review of Books 33, Oct. 9, 1986: 45–52.

11. Adam Michnik, "An Embarrassing Anniversary," New York Review of Books 40, June 10, 1993, p.19. See also Janusz Bugajski and Maxine Pollack, East European Faultlines: Dissent, Opposition, and Social Activism (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

12. "President Václav Havel's Speech to the Polish Sejm and Senate, January 25, 1990," East European Reporter 4 (Spring/Summer 1990): 56.

13. Foreign Broadcasting Information Service Daily Report on Eastern Europe , Nov. 19, 1990, 29.

14. See for example the comments of Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier, Československá zahraničnì politika : Dokumenty (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1991): 45. For further discussion of U.S. support for the idea of Visegrád during this period, see Robert Hutchings, American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–1992 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 165–8.

15. Alfred Reisch, "Consensus on Hungary's Foreign Policy Frayed by Elections," RFE/RL Research Report, May 20, 1994, 42.

16. Louisa Vinton, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy, 1989–1993," in Ilya Prizel and Andrew Michta, eds., Polish Foreign Policy Reconsidered (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 23.

17. "Poland's European Perspective," NATO Review 41 (June 1993): 5.

18. For more on the causes and process of the split, see Jiri Musil, ed., The End of Czechoslovakia (Budapest: Cental European University Press, 1995).

19. Československá zahraničnì politika: Data (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1992), 518.

20. Ibid, 641–643.

21. "Roundtable: [Slovakia's] Relations with the Czech Republic and Hungary," RFE/RL Research Report, Dec. 11. 1992, 36.

22. See Sharon Fisher, "Kidnapping Case Continues to Complicate Political Scene," Transition, June 28, 1996, 40–43.

23. Karel Hvizdala, Prvni zprava (Prague: Cartonia, 1992), 67.

24. Jan Obrman, "Czechoslovakia Overcomes Its Initial Reluctance," RFE/RL Research Report, June 5, 1992, 21.

25. Česká zahraničnì politika: Dokumenty (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), 27.

26. Česká zahraničnì politika: Data (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), 9.

27. Author interview, Prague, Sept. 25, 1995.

28. Jirì Pehe, who served as Havel's chief political and foreign policy advisor from 1997 to 1999, suggested in late 1995 that although Havel pursued a more independent role on some other

foreign policy matters, Visegrád was "such an important issue for Klaus that he probably told Havel: 'We simply are not going to do this, and you're going to look foolish if you keep pushing for it in public,'" (author interview, Prague, Dec. 4, 1995).

29. Tibor Kiss, "Prospects of the Political Dialogue After the Copenhagen Summit: A Hungarian View," in Barbara Lippert and Heinrich Schneider, eds., Monitoring Asssociation and Beyond (Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 1995), 278.

30. Author interview, Bratislava, Nov. 22, 1995.

31. RFE/RL News Brief, Jan. 11, 1994.

32. Česká zahranični politika: Data (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994), 39; Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report on Eastern Europe, Jan. 11, 1994, 6; and Česká zahraničnì politika: Data (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994), 17.

33. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report on Eastern Europe, Jan. 11, 1994, 26.

34. The June 2001 meeting, the largest to date, included the heads of state of Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia.

35. For example, regional journalists who covered the Madrid summit report that many of the points in the joint statement presented there by Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, Czech President Vaclav Havel, and Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn were essentially scripted by the Americans.

36. Author interview, Prague, Oct. 17, 1995.

37. Pointing to the latter factor, in June 1998 Marcela Šajtlavová of the Slovak Ministry of Economy complained that "CEFTA is stagnating" (author interview, Bratislava, June 22, 1998). For further discussion of CEFTA's evolution as well as extensive statistical information see Martin Dangerfield, Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: The Political Economy of CEFTA (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2000).

38. Petr Zavadil, "Zmrtvychustanì Visegrádu," Lidove noviny, Dec. 18, 1997, 4. Early examples of Geremek's commitment to what became Visegrád cooperation appeared in Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report on Eastern Europe, Jan. 31, 1990, 49 and May 1, 1990, 22.

39. Vaclav Havel, "The State of the Republic," New York Review of Books, 45 (March 5, 1998), 42.

40. See the article by Foreign Minister Jaroslav Šedivý, "Stav ceske zahranicni politky a jeji výhledy pro rok 1998," Mezinárodnì Politika (Jan. 1998), 4–5 and 8. Šedivý denied, however, that a return to "closer cooperation" with Poland and Hungary in particular amounted to "resurrection of Visegrád."

41. Author interview, Prague, Dec. 8, 1995. See also the sympathetic portrait by Lawrence Wechsler, "The Trials of Jan K: Jan Kavan in and out of Czechoslovakia 1992," Calamities of Exile: Three Nonfiction Novellas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 63-136.

42. Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czech Social Democratic Party, "Koncepce zahranicni politiky Ceske republiky," (Feb. 1998), 14.

43. Jan Kavan, "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic," Perspectives No. 12 (Summer 1999), 11.

44. Indeed, many officials from the newly governing parties, especially the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) and the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), had belonged to the Communist Party. For brief profiles of several of the leading figures see Marián Leško, Masky a tvare novej elity: Čitanie o dvanástich politikoch z piatich vládnych strán (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2000).

45. Fareed Zakaria applied the term to Slovakia in "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," Foreign Affairs 76 (Nov./Dec. 1997), 22.

46. Original complete text available at www.government.gov.sk/VLADA/VLADA_1998/PROG_VYHL/sk_programove_vyhlasenie_1998_4_D.shtml.

47. Pavol Lukáč, Ivo Samson, and Alexander Duleba, "Visegrádska spolupráca, regionále iniciativy a vztahy SR so susednymi štátmi," in Miroslav Kollár and Grigorij Meseznikov, eds., Slovensko 2000: Suhrnná sprava o stave spoločnosti (Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs, 2000), 368–369.

48. Česká zahraničnì politika: Data (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs,1998), 278.

49. www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=14may1999.

50. www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=9june2000. The statement of the December 1999 presidents' summit similarly pointed to the countries' "common Central European cultural roots" as the "foundation of this cooperation" (www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=3december1999).

51. The role of presidents has thus been somewhat downgraded from what it was during Visegrád Mark I, when for Czechoslovakia and Poland, at least, presidents were the leading participants. This in part reflects the reduced powers of the presidential office in the constitutions of the new Czech state as of 1993 and of Poland since 1997.

52. Annual Report of the Activities of the Visegrád Group, June 1, 2001; at www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont. php?stranka=2001.

53. www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont.php.

54. One summer 2001 poll registered 41 percent in favor of membership, 46 percent opposed, and 13 percent undecided (RFE/RL Newsline, July 2, 2001), while another showed 52 percent in favor and 39 percent opposed (Sme, Sept. 7, 2001).

55. RFE/RL Newsline, May 23 and 31, 2001.

56. This term is stressed, among other places, in the June 2001 Krakow Summit Declaration (www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=31may2001).

57. www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont. php?stranka=2001.

58. www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=9june2001.

59. www.Visegrád.org/ annual_cont. php?stranka=2001.

60. Emily Woodward, "Slovak Defense Official Says Partnership with Ukraine Not Affected by Air Show Strategy," DefenseNews.com, July 29, 2002.

61. www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=14may1999.

62. www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=8march2001.

63. Prague 2000 summit declaration (www.Visegrád.org/events.php?kdy=9June2001) and the 2001 Annual Report (www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont_cont.php?stranka=2001).

64. Pavol Lukáč of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association characterized the goal of the effort as to "formulate a common vision for Central Europe," Sme, Dec. 13, 2000.

65. Zoltán Bárány presents estimates of 35,000 for Poland, 200,000 for the Czech Republic, 500,000 for Slovakia, and 482,000 for Hungary. "The Socio-Economic Impact of Regime Change in Eastern Europe: Gypsy Marginality in the 1990s," East European Politics and Societies 15 (Spring 2001): 67.

66. Sme, Nov. 23, 2000.

67. www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont.php.

68. Then Prime Minister Viktor Orbán did recently counsel Hungarian diplomats to downplay their country's advantages, arguing that "everyone already knows" Hungary is the best-prepared EU candidate, but continual emphasis of this fact "makes cooperation with the other Visegrád countries more difficult" (RFE/RL Newsline, July 24, 2001).

69. Judy Dempsey, "EU Enlargement Boosted by Czech 'Land Buy' Move," Financial Times, June 1, 2001.

70. Summarizing these differences, Kai-Olaf Lang concludes that "the debates over the form of the future European defense policy again show the East Central European reform states represent anything but a homogenous group of countries with identical interests and compatible priorities" "Novi Členove NATO a jejich Pristupy k Evropske Bezpečne Politice," Mezinárodni Politika (Mar. 2000):18.

71. See Respekt, April 2 and April 23, 2001: both p. 5.

72. RFE/RL Newsline, Aug. 8, 2001.

73. In July 2002 Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski proposed regularized "Group of 13" cooperation among the Visegrád and Vilnius states (www.rigasummit.lv/en/?id=6&page=125)

74. RFE/RL Newsline, May 27, 1997, and Stephen Burant, "After NATO Enlargement: Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Problem of Further European Integration," Problems of Post-Communism 48 (Mar./Apr. 2001): 38–39.

75. For differing reactions see Luboš Palata, "In the Empire's Shadow," Transitions Online, June 6, 2001; Sme, June 7, 2001; Martin Oravec, "Strategicke partnerstvo, ale Visegrádska skupina?" Mezinárodni Politika (June 2001): 22–24; and Jirì Štepanovský, "Kolik strategie lze skryt v jednom regionu?" Mezinárodni Politika (Aug. 2001): 42–44.

76. Author interview, Prague, Dec. 8, 1995.

77. www.Visegrád.org/annual_cont.php?stranka=2001.

78. Author interview Warsaw, June 16, 1998.

79. See Charles Gati, "All That NATO Can Be: To Prague and Beyond," National Interest No. 68 (Summer 2002): 79–88.

80. Claus Christian Mahlzahn and Joachim Preuss, "Erster Partner Deutschland," Der Spiegel, Sept. 3, 2001, 53.

81. "Poland's Populist, Andrzej Lepper," Economist, June 29, 2002, 52.

82. Sme, Feb.15, 2002.

83. RFE/RL Newsline, Feb 15, 21, and 25, 2002; Lidove noviny, Mar. 16, 2002.

84. Respekt, Feb. 11 and 18, 2002.

85. RFE/RL Newsline, Feb. 25, 2002.

86. Vlad Sobell, "In Search of a New CMEA," Report on Eastern Europe, Feb. 9, 1990, 39-42.

87. Although Orban remained in office at the time of the Trenčìn summit, the other Prime Ministers judged his personal participation "unacceptable," forcing him to send a representative in his place (Hospodárske noviny, May 24, 2002). Given the still considerable popularity of Orban and Fidesz within Hungary, however, this exclusion does raise questions for Visegrád's viability should they return to power.

88. Sme, July 1, 2002.

89. From the website of the Freedom Union (www.unie.cz/dokumenty/spolecnaodpovednost290601.html).

90. Lidove noviny (June/July 2002).

91. See Matthew Rhodes, "Slovakia After Meciar: A Midterm Report," Problems of Post-Communism 48 (July/Aug. 2001): 3–13.

92. Sme (July 18, 2001).

93. The ANO program pledges "further to promote very intensive cooperation in the Central European region, especially by means of the Visegrád Four" (www.ano-aliancia.sk/documents/Volebny_program.doc)

94. It may be noteworthy, however, that former Social Democratic Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman campaigned on behalf not of Smer but the Social Democratic Alternative (SDL), another more moderate offshoot of the SDL. Neither the SDA nor SDL are represented in the new parliament.

95. For example, one controversial *Smer* billboard featured a bare-bottomed family with the caption: "Into the European Union!...But not with naked backsides!" (RFE/RL Newsline, July 18, 2002).

96. See for example the transcript of Fico's post-election press conference (http://www.strana-smer.sk/tlac_odd/konferencie/clanok.html?id=826).

97. Thanks go to Aaron Stover of CSIS for providing information on this conference.

98. For more in-depth considerations that come to differing conclusions, see Jiri Sedivy, "Další rozšireni NATO: hledani nejlepšiho ze špatných rešeni?" Mezinárodni Vztahy (Jan. 2001); Jeffrey Simon, "NATO's Membership Action Plan and Defense Planning: Credibility at Stake," Problems of Post-Communism 48 (May/June 2001): 28–36; Thomas Szayna, NATO Enlargement 2000–2015: Determinants and Implications for Defense Planning and Shaping (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); and James Kurth, "The Next NATO: Building an American Commonwealth of Nations," National Interest No. 65 (Fall 2001): 5–16.

99. See Szayna, NATO Enlargement, 100–103.

100. europa.eu.int/council/off/concl/dec2000/dec2000_en.pdf. Cited in John Lowenhardt et al, "A Wider Europe: The View from Minsk and Chisinau," International Affairs 77 (July 2001): 605. See also "Europe's Magnetic Attraction: A Survey of European Enlargement," Economist, May 19, 2001.

101. The Grooves of Change, 239.