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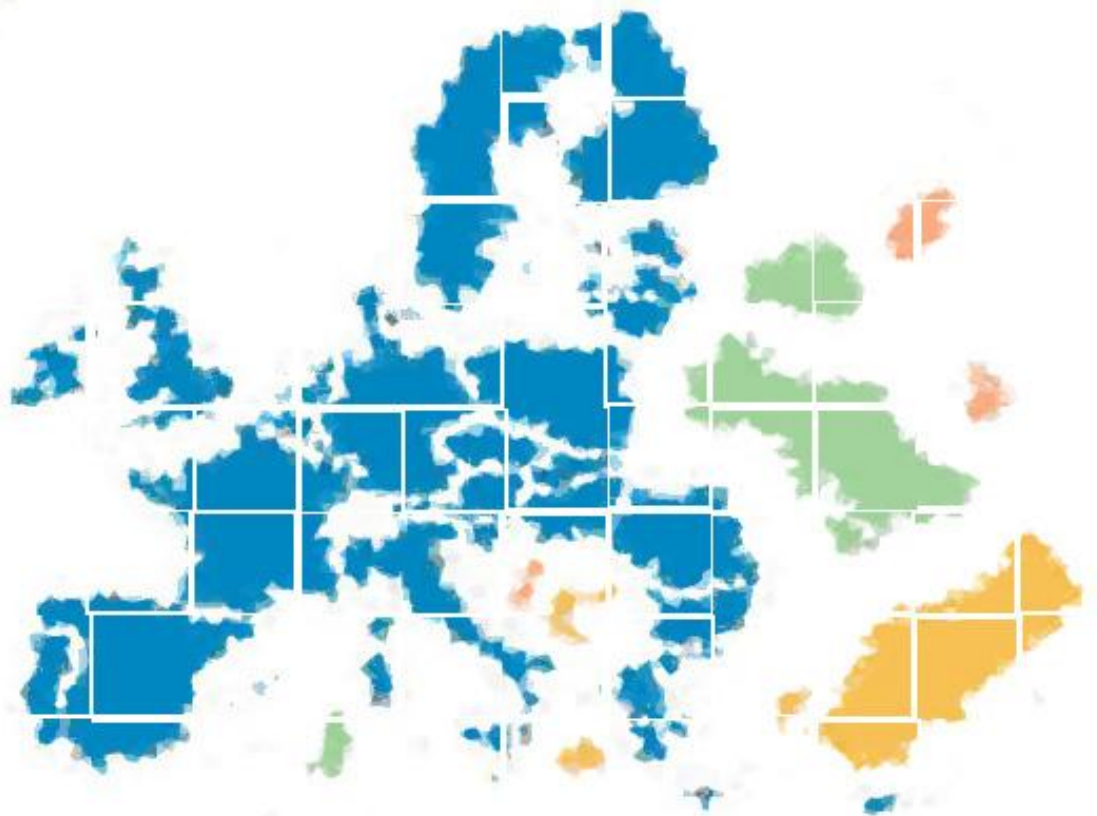
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Hungary's Western Balkan policy in the Visegrad context

Beáta Huszka



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Abstract

While analyzing the Visegrad engagement in South East Europe, this paper will focus on two aspects of foreign policy: bilateral relations between the Visegrad Four and the Western Balkan countries, and the Visegrad contribution to the EU's foreign policy in the region. In particular, those few issues and instances will be concentrated on when the Visegrad countries – individually or in a joint enterprise – managed to make use of an emerging policy niche and adopted an original course of action by which they not only differed from the EU's main policy line but also managed to influence it.

This paper will argue however, that even though all four states in general share a pro-enlargement stance, in practice the main divide between devoted supporters of Euro-Atlantic enlargement to South Eastern Europe and those preferring to take a more cautious approach by demanding tough conditionality lie elsewhere than on the borders of the Visegrad group. It will be further argued that in the area of dealing with the so called high policy issues, such as the constitutional reform in Bosnia, the Macedonian name fiasco or the challenge of North Kosovo, the large (and old) member states together with the United States dictate the agenda. At the same time, the engagement of the Visegrad Four at a lower policy level is expected and appreciated in the EU, which is where they might bring something new to the table with regard to the EU's Western Balkan strategy.

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Introduction

Hungary, together with the other Visegrad countries, has been well-known for its pro-enlargement stance since its accession to the European Union. While traditionally Hungary and Slovakia focus primarily on South Eastern Europe also known as the Western Balkans, Poland is more eager to divert attention towards the Eastern Partnership countries, primarily to Ukraine and Belarus. The Czech Republic occupies the middle ground: it shows interest in both regions, yet not as intensively as the other three states. However, despite the four countries' somewhat diverging foreign policy priorities they usually manage to develop a balanced approach within the framework of the Visegrad cooperation as they tend to back each others' special agendas while expecting support for their own in exchange.

Despite strong policy preferences, the question may be raised here whether the Visegrad countries are only passive “policy takers” (being new member states) or whether they have made to transition to “policy makers”, able to shape the EU's external actions by adding new vision and impetus to it, and by asserting their own policy interests through the EU bodies and policies.¹ It is a relevant question considering that especially Slovakian and Hungarian politicians frequently emphasize their countries' special position and competence regarding the Western Balkans owing to their countries' deeper historical, social and economic ties and closer geographic proximity to the region than those of their Western European counterparts.

While analyzing the Visegrad engagement in South East Europe, this paper will concentrate on two aspects of foreign policy: bilateral relations between the Visegrad Four and the Western Balkan countries, and the Visegrad contribution to the EU's foreign policy in the region. In particular, those few issues and instances will be concentrated on when the Visegrad countries – individually or in a joint enterprise – managed to make use of an emerging policy niche and adopted an original course of action by which they not only differed from the EU's main policy line but also managed to influence it.

This study will also raise the question whether there is a “Visegrad synergy”; i.e. to what extent are these countries able and willing to represent a single policy towards South East Europe, and whether there exists a unified and coherent Visegrad strategy in the making allowing for a more effective assertion of their interests. This paper will argue that even though all four states in general share a pro-enlargement stance, in practice the main divide between devoted supporters of Euro-Atlantic enlargement to South Eastern Europe and those preferring to take a

¹ David Král, “Enlarging EU foreign policy. The role of new EU member states and candidate countries,” EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, June 2005, 3.

more cautious approach by demanding tough conditionality lie elsewhere than on the borders of the Visegrad group. As will be demonstrated throughout this study, Hungary and Slovakia, the Western Balkans' most committed and vocal allies among the Visegrad Four tend to team up with other enthusiastic drivers of enlargement outside of the Visegrad group, above all with Slovenia and Austria.² The Czech Republic can be also counted on as a reliable backer of initiatives when it comes to South Eastern Europe, yet it is a rather quiet supporter hardly ever being at the forefront of such endeavors. By contrast, in reality Poland's approach is often marked by suspicion and the fear that focusing too much on the Western Balkans could divert attention away from the Eastern Partnership. Poland's political leaders tend to link the two issue areas by viewing them as competing policy agendas, which is why Poland often appears to be a reluctant and rather passive advocate of the Western Balkan states' Euro-Atlantic integration process.

It will be further argued that in the area of dealing with the so called high policy issues, such as the constitutional reform in Bosnia, the Macedonian name fiasco or the challenge of North Kosovo, the large (and old) member states together with the United States dictate the agenda, which also means that it is fairly difficult for the Visegrad countries to make their voices heard concerning these issues. Although there were a few politicians especially from Slovakia and the Czech Republic who received high positions in some of the EU's Balkan missions, they implemented rather than designed EU policy during their tenures. At the same time, the engagement of the Visegrad Four at a lower policy level is expected and appreciated in the EU, which is where they might bring something new to the table with regard to the EU's Western Balkan strategy.³

The first part of the paper will introduce the main features of the individual countries' Western Balkan policies in a comparative perspective including the role they play in the EU's internal dynamics. As the main focus of this paper is Hungarian policy, the discussion about Hungary will be the most extensive, followed by presenting Slovakian, Czech and Polish engagement in the region. The second part will deal with the Western Balkan dimension of the Visegrad cooperation. The countries' approach to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence will be analyzed in a separate section as this issue caused considerable turmoil in all the states in question.

² Although when it comes to migration issues, the Austrians display a rather cautious approach. In addition, usually Italians, Bulgarians and Romanians are also part of this pro-enlargement group. However, Italians at certain times can get involved in "great power politics", while the Romanians and Bulgarians as newcomers do not enjoy yet such a great leverage. Author Interview with a Hungarian diplomat, Budapest, 13.05.2010.

³ Author interview with László Márkus, Budapest, 20. 04. 2010.

Hungary

Since the beginning of transition, Hungarian foreign policy has been guided by three fundamental aspirations: Euro-Atlantic integration, good neighborly relations and support for Hungarian minorities living across the Hungarian borders. The country's Western Balkan policy is also embedded in the nexus of this tripartite agenda. Although different governments of Hungary have assigned varying importance to these three policy goals and prioritized them differently, these three principles remained defining for Hungarian foreign policy in general and also specifically related to the Western Balkans.⁴ Hungary as an EU member supports the EU's agenda for the region within the frames of CFSP and enlargement policy while acting as an ardent advocate of the EU and NATO integration of the Western Balkan states. The Western Balkans will be naturally a priority area of the forthcoming Hungarian EU presidency as well. Specifically, finishing Croatia's accession process, settling the Macedonian-Greek name dispute and helping Serbia and Montenegro to move along their accession path will be the main goals the presidency is aiming for.⁵

Altogether, Hungarian foreign policy in the Western Balkans follows two fundamental paths: on the one hand it acts within the European framework through participating in policies targeting the region. On the other hand, Hungary manages its own bilateral relations, which are most intensive with its direct neighbors, Serbia and Croatia. While it strives to maintain good neighborly relations with Serbia and Croatia and bilateral relations with the other Western Balkan countries, it also backs Hungarian minorities in their struggle for their minority rights in Serbia and Croatia. These three fundamental policy goals could be also linked according to the following logic: Hungary supporting the respective countries' EU membership aspirations contributes to better bilateral relations; and good neighborly relations in turn generally benefit Hungarian minorities living there.

However, during the last two decades these three aims did come into conflict at certain moments, such as when Hungary allowed NATO to use Hungarian airspace without limitations to attack Yugoslavia in 1999, or when it decided to recognize the independence of Kosovo. It can be argued that in both instances Hungary tried to follow the mainstream EU-Atlanticist policy line, which conflicted with immediate Hungarian foreign policy interests. Both assisting the NATO intervention and recognizing Kosovo went against narrow Hungarian foreign policy

⁴ Imre Szilágyi, "The Hungarian Government's Western Balkan Policies since the 2006 Elections," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 17 (2008), 4; Pál Dunay, "Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Era of Transition (1990-2004)," *Foreign Policy Review* (2004), 200.

⁵ Magyarország EU elnöksége, EurActiv.hu, <http://www.euractiv.hu/intezmenyek-jovo/linkdossziek/magyarorszag-eu-elnoksege-000086>.

interests as such moves posed the danger of poisoning relations with Serbia and carried the risk of contributing to a nationalist backlash in Serbia against the Hungarian minority. Moreover, the Orbán government failed in its efforts to prevent the bombing of Voivodina and to save Hungarian minorities from the dire consequences of the war, which only strengthened the internal opposition within Hungary primarily represented by leftist-liberal groups against participation in the NATO intervention. Thus, in this case, placing NATO's preferences over Hungarian policy interests did not bring about any immediate policy gains from Hungary's perspective.

While assessing Hungary's contribution to the EU's Western Balkan policy, it can be argued that among the Visegrad Four Hungary became the most active and vocal advocate of its southern neighbors' accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures, yet it failed to assume a leadership role in formulating and implementing EU strategies for the region. In practice, Hungarian foreign policy has been maneuvering in relatively narrow political space in the Balkans, and as a result most of the time Hungary has been following rather than shaping EU policy. As Tamás Magyarics argued in his strategy paper, a lack of ideas and means have characterized Hungarian Balkan policy, which went along with rising and unfulfilled expectations on behalf of the EU. As he noted, Hungarian Balkan policy is a political concept existing only in political statements, which is why we need some initiatives with real content. Hungarian foreign policy towards the Western Balkans at present is composed essentially of political statements about the need of the region's speedy Euro-Atlantic integration.⁶

Yet, somewhat contesting this position, this paper will maintain that while Hungary indeed has hardly been able to influence the so called high politics in the Balkans, it has managed to make a valuable contribution at a lower level of policy making. On the one hand, its role as an outspoken driver of further enlargement proved to be decisive at critical moments within the EU's institutions helping to sustain a positive dynamic, thus keeping the enlargement process moving forward. On the other hand, Hungary provided practical assistance to the Western Balkan states in several areas to help them prepare for their NATO and EU membership. Thus Hungary's Western Balkan policy can be characterized as a meaningful, yet subtle involvement.

It should be mentioned here that in contrast to Hungarian politicians, Czech and Slovak diplomats played an active role to foster peace in the region. For instance, Jiří Dienstbier, former foreign minister of the Czech Republic was appointed as the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the former Yugoslavia in 1998. In addition, a Czech-Greek initiative tried to prevent the bombing of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict.

⁶ Tamás Magyarics, "A szomszédsági kapcsolatok helye a magyar külpolitikában," 19.02.2007, www.hvg.hu.

The role of Miroslav Lajčák and František Lipka during the referendum on independence in Montenegro and Lajčák's position in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the UN's high representative can be mentioned as further examples of active diplomatic engagement in the region. In this context, the absence of a similarly visible activity is apparent from Hungary's side. However, it is less well known that in 2004 Kálmán Kocsis, Hungary's former ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina became the supervisor for intelligence reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was entrusted with the implementation of this reform process meaning monitoring, advising and assisting the BiH authorities in all aspects of the implementation of the law on the state intelligence service.⁷ Furthermore, within the framework of a twinning program, Hungary assisted Bosnia in carrying out the reform of its confidential data protection system i.e. harmonization of the legislation on confidential data protection with the EU standards, training of BiH personnel handling confidential data and installation of an EU-conform security infrastructure on the state level for safeguarding and securing the transmission of secret data.⁸

In addition, Hungary played a key role in Croatia's and Montenegro's NATO accession process also through providing mentoring services to both countries. While Hungary just a year ago finished its mission in Croatia, it recently started a similar program in Montenegro, which also implied extending its representation in Podgorica to serve as a NATO contact point.⁹ According to a recent agreement, Hungary as a NATO member will also assist Serbia in improving its military capabilities.¹⁰

As a NATO and EU member, Hungary has also contributed to various missions in Bosnia, Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. Already in 1995, Hungary participated in the IFOR mission to Bosnia, followed by SFOR in 1996 and the EUFOR/ALTHEA missions in 2004. Hungarian troops are also present in Kosovo under NATO's umbrella and took part in shorter NATO military missions in Macedonia and Albania. Moreover, Hungary delegated 50 experts to the EU's EULEX mission in Kosovo.¹¹ Yet in Bosnia Hungary did not manage to convert its military engagement into a stronger presence after its military mission was over. In Kosovo, similarly it is not yet clear how Hungary could, through participating in various missions, strengthen its position in the province.¹²

⁷ Website of SFOR, <http://www.nato.int/sfor/media/2004/ms040618.htm>.

⁸ Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Closing ceremony of the twinning project "Capacity building of the Ministry of Security through the establishment of the National Security Authority," 13.02.2010, <http://www.delbih.ec.europa.eu/?akcija=vijesti&akcija2=pregled&jezik=2&ID=626>.

⁹ Péter Dunai, "A sorok szorosabbra zárását igényelték a NATO-vezetők Zágrábban," *Népszabadság*, 09. 03. 2009.

¹⁰ "U.S. not pressuring Serbia to join NATO," *B92*, 9.3.2010.

¹¹ Ádám Patheő, "Magyarország és a Balkán," *MEH-MTA*, 26. 03. 2009.

¹² Oszkár Füzes, "The main elements of Hungary's Balkan Strategy," *The Analyst* 4 (2007), 37.

The main features of Hungarian Western Balkan policy in the post-transition era

During the Yugoslav wars and the Kosovo conflict, Hungarian foreign policy was hardly inventive and original: it adjusted itself to the course dictated by great powers. Moreover, until Milošević was in power, bilateral relations with Serbia stayed cool regardless of what kind of government was in power in Budapest. At the same time, since the early 1990s enthusiastic and often uncritical support of Croatia has tended to characterize Hungary's Balkan policy owing to the special historical relations between the two countries. During the Yugoslav wars, obvious Hungarian sympathies for Croatia and Slovenia were reflected also by the so called Kalashnikov affair, during which Hungary was caught selling arms to Croatia. Yet, as it was being feared that the affair could put the Hungarian minority into jeopardy, which was practically a hostage of Milošević's Serbia, the right wing government had kept a low official profile and a neutral line during the Yugoslav conflicts.¹³ Accordingly, the Antall government, despite the Slovenian request in January 1991 was not among the first states to recognize Slovenia and Croatia, but rather waited for the other European countries until January 1992.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Hungarians in Serbia could not be spared from the consequences of the war, even if were rarely subject to outright ethnic violence. Between 1991 and 2002 the number of Hungarians decreased by 14,5% that is by roughly 50 thousand people in the Voivodina. Although this could be explained partially by the decreasing population trend characterizing the Hungarian community even before the war, still the demographer Károly Mirnics estimated the number of those who fled Serbia because of the wars in the early 1990s to lie between 40 and 60 thousand.¹⁵

It is also noteworthy that Hungary did not join the EU countries in their isolation of Tudjman's Croatia. Relations were rather cordial during the Tudjman era reflected by a number of high level meetings between the two countries' leaders including visits of prime minister Viktor Orbán and president Árpád Göncz to Croatia.¹⁶ Moreover, Viktor Orbán was among the few heads of states and governments who participated at Tudjman's funeral.¹⁷

Hungary's diplomatic maneuvering space widened somewhat with the weakening and the eventual fall of the Milošević regime. In 1999 the first

¹³ Ibid, 36.

¹⁴ Imre Szilágyi, "Hungary's Relations with its South-Slav Neighbors After 1990," *Foreign Policy Review*, 2005, 189.

¹⁵ Even before 1991, the Hungarian population was declining by a 10% rate per decade on average. "2006. évi jelentés a vajdasági magyarok helyzetéről," Website of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, <http://www.nemzetpolitika.gov.hu/data/files/84190142.pdf>, 11; Károly Mirnics, "Ámítás és Hiszékenységünk," *Forrás*, June 2004., <http://www.forrasfolyoirat.hu/0406/mirnics.html>.

¹⁶ Magyar Külügyi Évkönyv 1999, 101, 158.

¹⁷ Adam LeBor, "Final snub to Tudjman as leaders shun funeral," *The Independent*, 14.12.1999.

Hungarian initiative was launched, termed the Szeged process, within the framework of the Stability Pact (now called Regional Cooperation Council), which aimed at supporting democratic forces in Milošević's Yugoslavia. This authentic Hungarian initiative reflected Hungary's eagerness to see a democratic turn in the neighboring Serbia.¹⁸ After 2000, fostering democratization and the promotion of European integration became the main profile of the Szeged process, and its programs were extended to all countries of the region though Serbia remained the main focus.¹⁹ In 2004 its goals were somewhat modified as it was redesigned to support the European integration of the region.²⁰ Within this framework, the Opportunity for Stability Public Foundation distributes MFA funds to NGOs for community development and intercultural communication in the region, especially Serbia. The Budapest Forum is another pillar of the Szeged process, which was launched as a Regional Partnership program at Hungary's initiative with the aim to share experiences of EU accession with the Balkan countries, (which will be discussed in more detail in a latter section of this paper).²¹

Within the Western Balkans, Croatia and Serbia are the most important countries from Hungary's perspective. The other states enjoy less attention, reflected by the fact that for instance a Hungarian prime minister visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2006 for the first time since 1918.²² Montenegro is an exception in this regard, as it has been a priority country for Hungarian diplomacy. The first EU head of state to pay a visit to Podgorica was the Hungarian president Ferenc Mádl in 2004, and Hungary was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with newly independent Montenegro. In addition, Hungary closely assisted Montenegro in its NATO accession preparations. This strong political interest in Montenegro is certainly connected to Hungary being the top investor in the country, owing to the presence of a few big companies such as Magyar Telecom, Hunguest Hotels and OTP.²³ It is worth to note that Hungary acquired key economic positions in Montenegro through the capital investments of MATÁV in 2005 and Hunguest Hotels in 2004 before independence, thus before the political situation of the republic could be regarded as stable and unambiguous. This is a very peculiar development considering that at the same time big Hungarian capital investments avoided Serbia often referring to the insecure and unstable nature of the Serbian investment climate. This remarkable Hungarian capital expansion to Montenegro

¹⁸ Imre Szilágyi, "Hungary's Relations with its South-Slav Neighbors After 1990," *Foreign Policy Review*, 2005, 192.

¹⁹ Investing in the Western Balkans: Hungarian Strategies for Furthering Regional Economic Cooperation and Development, Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs & Central European University, Budapest, February 2005, 18.

²⁰ Ádám Patheő, "Magyarország és a Balkán," MEH-MTA, 26. 03. 2009.

²¹ Áron Horváth, "Hungarian Minorities, the Balkans ... and the Far East," In: Jacek Kucharczyk and Leff Lovitt (ed.), *Democracy's New Champions*, PASOS, Prague, 2008, 66.

²² Imre Szilágyi, "The Hungarian Government's Western Balkan Policies since the 2006 Elections," 12.

²³ Data from the Ministry of National Development and Economy, Országismertető, <http://nfgm.gov.hu/feladataink/kulgzd/orszag>.

could be partially explained by the fact that in 2005 the Hungarian and the Montenegrin governments signed a framework agreement about financial cooperation, based on which Montenegro was included in Hungary's Officially Supported Export Credit program. Accordingly, Montenegro received a 15 million EUR loan on favorable terms from Hungary, which could be used for the development of education infrastructure with the participation of Hungarian entrepreneurs.²⁴ Inviting Montenegro to participate in the export credit program might have been a factor that boosted MATÁV's chances to win the tender for the majority shares of Telecom Montenegro in the spring of 2005.²⁵ In the region Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only other country which received such a credit from Hungary in 2004 and 2007 for the development of the water purification infrastructure.²⁶ When the idea emerged to launch subsidized credit programs, Serbia was naturally among the target countries, however the Serbian and the Hungarian government could not agree on the kinds of projects which should be financed by it. In 2001 and 2002 the issue was put on hold as the Paris Club wrote off part of Serbia's debts and privatization took off in the country after which Serbia became less interested in taking more loans.

In 2008, three states from the region were among the five biggest beneficiaries of Hungarian development assistance: Kosovo (1.24m EUR), Serbia (1.22m EUR) and Montenegro (1.07m EUR). Hungary granted a total 3,87m EUR to the region in the form of development aid.²⁷ For Hungary, which is the second largest donor among the Visegrad Four in terms of official development assistance after the Czech Republic, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are strategic priority countries, while project based assistance is granted to Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. Although the sectoral focus of development aid is different in each country, programs aimed at democratic transition were financed in Serbia, Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo, education was supported in Serbia and Croatia.²⁸ In Serbia for example, besides education, projects were also supported in the area of healthcare and water management, the strengthening of civil society, public administration and the development of agriculture and industry.²⁹ Within Serbia, Voivodina is a priority region for Hungary.³⁰

²⁴ "Montenegróban építhetnek iskolákat magyar vállalkozók," FigyelőNet, 22.11.2005.

²⁵ After MATÁV's successful bid, the Hungarian government was more willing to accept the Montenegrin government's state guarantee for the export credit program. "Mától a Matáv a Telekom Montenegro tulajdonosa," SG.hu, 29.03.2009.

²⁶ "Montenegróban építhetnek iskolákat magyar vállalkozók," FigyelőNet, 22.11.2005; Kötött Segélyhitelezés, Website of the Ministry of National Development and Economy, 17.08.2009.

²⁷ Beszámoló a magyar nemzetközi fejlesztési együttműködés 2008-ban megvalósított tevékenységéről (Report about the activities of the Hungarian international development cooperation in 2008), Budapest, March 2009.

http://www.kum.hu/NR/rdonlyres/D2DB5DD4-42B2-4D3B-BB59-3F6808D15F03/0/Beszamolo_2008_KB_utan_modositott_vegleges_gya.pdf.

²⁸ Report about the activities of the Hungarian international development cooperation in 200, 8,14.

²⁹ Ibid, 27.

³⁰ Pontis Foundation, ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four, Western Balkans Case Study, December 2009, <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/en/14521>, 8.

Bolstering Hungary's economic presence in the Western Balkans has become a Hungarian foreign policy priority, as it might strengthen the economy's competitiveness and Hungary's position in the region. This aspiration was also spelled out in Hungary's official foreign policy strategy.³¹ Hungary's constant positive trade balance has characterized trade relations, which used to dominate bilateral economic relations with the countries of the region. Yet, in the last few years Hungarian investors mostly motivated by new market opportunities stepped up their activities in South East Europe, which attracted the majority of Hungarian capital exports.³² Hungarian capital expansion after 2000 was to a large extent due to growing investments in the Western Balkan countries.

In 2008, Hungary was the fourth biggest investor in Croatia owing to MOL's acquisition of INA shares, with the stock value of Hungarian investment reaching 2,1 billion EUR. Besides MOL, OTP Bank, Dunapack, Zalakerámia, Fornetti, Duna-Dráva Cement and Dalmácia Holiday are the most important Hungarian companies active in Croatia. In addition, energy cooperation is an important aspect of Hungarian-Croatian relations, which also serves as a means for Hungary to lessen its vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia. Hungarian and Croatian gas pipelines will be connected in 2010, as part of a gas pipeline running from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic. Hungary also wants to participate in building a coastal terminal on the Croatian island of Krk, which could receive liquefied gas by tanker from countries such as Qatar. The construction of the latter would have "strategic importance from the aspect of Hungarian and Central European energy security". As the Hungarian government speaker remarked, "the terminal would mean the opening of a new, *independent* energy source for Hungary [italics added]."³³ Although the Croatian prime minister, Jadranka Kosor agreed in late February 2010 with Russia to receive gas from South Stream, under the pressure of Hungary and other countries Croatia resisted the Russian attempt to gain control of the pipeline between Hungary and Croatia.³⁴

As was mentioned above, in Montenegro Hungary is the single biggest investor, with OTP Bank and Magyar Telecom carrying out the largest investments. Hungary ranked as the second biggest investor in Macedonia due to Magyar Telecom's acquisition of the Macedonian telecommunication company, Maktel. In Serbia, according to the stock value of investments Hungary stood in the 9-10.th place, with the "Conti Tech Rubber Industrial" ltd., Betonút construction firm, OTP Bank, MOL and Fornetti being the most significant investors present.³⁵ In Bosnia

³¹ See the following documents: Külügyminisztérium: Magyarország Külkapcsolati stratégiája; Gazdsági és Közlekedési Minisztérium: Stratégia 2007-2010.

³² András Majoros, "Délkelet-európai tőkebefektetések Magyarországról," Műhelytanulmány 34, Public Foundation of European Comparative Minority Research, Budapest, 2008, 5.

³³ "Bajnai energiaügyben tárgyal Zágrábban," HírExtra.hu, 16.01.2010.

³⁴ "Energy security in Europe, Central questions," *The Economist*, 6.03.2010.

³⁵ Data from 2008 from the website of the Ministry of National Development and Economy, Országismertetők, <http://nfgm.gov.hu/feladataink/kulgazd/orszag>.

and Herzegovina and Albania the amount of Hungarian capital invested is rather negligible as compared to the other countries even though in Bosnia Hungary is the 13th biggest investor as a result of business transactions by MOL, Transelektro Rt (energy sector), MAL Rt. (aluminum industry), and Zenon Systems ltd. (water purification).³⁶ It should be added that Hungarian investment in the region is highly concentrated as a few big companies carry out most capital transactions in each country.³⁷ Although small and medium sized enterprises also began entering these markets, the size of their investment so far has not been significant.³⁸

Bilateral relations with Serbia and the Hungarian minority in Voivodina

Relations with Serbia have been more tense and ambiguous than with Croatia ever since regime change in 2000. Serbia is a very important country from Hungary's point of view owing to its political and economic weight relative to the other Western Balkan states, its status of a direct neighbor, and the presence of 290 thousand ethnic Hungarians living in its northern province. Hungary fostered good relations with the democratic opposition in Serbia already before Milošević was ousted, and since 2000 it developed cordial bilateral relations with the democratically elected governments. Hungary's utmost interest is Serbia's fast Euro-Atlantic integration, which is repeatedly emphasized by Hungarian politicians in various EU forums. Yet, no matter how much Hungary has been pushing for Serbia's speedy EU accession, bilateral relations in certain periods were marked by serious tensions. During 2003-2004 the increasing number of atrocities committed against ethnic Hungarians in Voivodina caused controversies between the two states, while quite recently Hungarian recognition of Kosovo cooled bilateral relations. In general, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Voivodina remains an important consideration of Hungarian diplomacy seriously influencing Hungarian foreign policy towards Serbia regardless of the political coloring of the incumbent government in Budapest.

Therefore, it will be argued that Hungarian diplomacy stands up for the minority and is even willing to take the risk of political confrontation when the conflict is confined to the bilateral level, as was the case during the so called ethnic incidents in Voivodina. Yet, when representing the interests of Voivodina Hungarians would mean going against the will of NATO or the EU majority, Hungarian governments tend to back off from pushing this national agenda, which is illustrated by Hungary's policy towards Kosovo.

³⁶ Data from the website of the Ministry of National Development and Economy, Országismertető, <http://nfgm.gov.hu/feladataink/kulgazd/orszag>

³⁷ András Majoros, 40.

³⁸ Ibid, 42.

Experience suggests that whether a right or left wing government is in office in Budapest it does not seem to have a bearing on Serbian-Hungarian relations. It is an interesting fact of life considering that traditionally right wing governments assign a higher importance to the protection of the Hungarian minorities than left wing governments at least on a symbolic level, which can negatively influence political relations with the neighbor countries. The well known quote from József Antall, Hungary's first post-transition conservative prime minister explicitly said that although constitutionally he was the prime minister of 10 million Hungarians, in spirit he wished to be the premier of 15 million.³⁹ As opposed to Antall, the subsequent left wing government led by Gyula Horn subordinated the issue of Hungarian minorities to the other two main foreign policy goals, i.e. Euro-Atlantic integration and good neighborly relations. Horn made it clear that he saw himself as the prime minister of 10 million Hungarians and signed basic treaties with Romania and Slovakia, which were fiercely contested by the right wing opposition.⁴⁰ Obviously, relations with Serbia which at the time was still part of Yugoslavia remained constrained until the fall of Milošević.

Yet peculiarly the subsequent right wing government led by Viktor Orbán between 1998-2002, which opted for confrontation with Romania and Slovakia over the issue of Hungarian minorities, managed to develop very good relations with the Đinđić government in Serbia. During Orbán's term, the relative weight of priorities shifted again: the minority issue dominated neighborhood relations while "mild" Euro-scepticism characterized the government's attitude towards Hungary's EU integration process. Although on the whole the government supported Hungary joining the EU and managed the negotiations leading up to accession, it emphasized the protection of Hungarian national interests throughout the process and that "there was life outside of the European Union".⁴¹ At the same time, Hungary's relations with the United States also deteriorated owing partially to the government's failure to distance itself from extreme nationalists in Hungary. Orbán's policies, especially the so called status law granting special privileges to Hungarians living in the neighboring countries on an ethnic basis, and his rhetoric about "the reunification of the nation across the borders" put relations with Slovakia and Romania under considerable strain. Interestingly, the status law which targeted ethnic Hungarians in Voivodina as well did not poison relations with Serbia as opposed to Romania and Slovakia as Serbia had no objections against the law.⁴² Bilateral relations between the two countries were marked by good will, pragmatism and an emphasis on the economic dimension. The development of bilateral

³⁹ Quoted in Endre Gömöri, "Hungarian foreign policy from Antall to Gyurcsány," *The Analyst* (2006/2), 69.

⁴⁰ Balázs Kiss, Csaba Zahorán, "Hungarian Domestic Policy in Foreign Policy," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* (02/2007), 48.

⁴¹ Pál Dunay, 207.

⁴² "Jó kapcsolatok Magyarországgal," Website of the Alliance of Voivodina Hungarians, 21.10. 2001, http://www.vmsz.org.rs/article.php?lg=hu&id_article=2840.

relations between the two countries was demonstrated by a number of high level visits and the introduction of an ambitious economic cooperation program. The latter included the construction of the Budapest-Belgrade highway, the common development of the Danube tourism, the establishment of a guarantee fund for SMEs, the signing of a free trade agreement and cooperation in the energy sector.⁴³ It is likely that good personal rapport between two prime ministers explains how Serbian-Hungarian relations could improve while relations with the other neighbor countries remained tense.

While under the Orbán government which was usually accused of nationalism, Hungarian-Serbian relations took a very positive turn, this did not continue during the subsequent socialist governments led by Péter Medgyessy and Ferenc Gyurcsány. The Hungarian and the Serbian government got into a conflict over the situation of the Hungarian minority in Voivodina despite that fact that the issue of Hungarian minorities was not the highest priority of the Hungarian socialists. In the fall of 2004, they campaigned against offering dual citizenship to Hungarian minorities by alluding to living standards concerns of Hungarian citizens, and closed the Office of Hungarian Minorities Abroad, the task of which was taken over by a state secretariat in the Prime Minister's Office.⁴⁴ The nationalist turn in Serbia after the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, which coincided with the rise of ethnic incidents mostly targeting ethnic Hungarians in Voivodina explains this cooling of relations better than the behavior of the Hungarian governments. The escalation of ethnically motivated incidents was to a large extent due to the unfolding anti-minority political climate characterizing Serbia at the time. As Bieber and Winterhagen argued, the initial weak state reaction to inter-ethnic violence reflected a general skepticism against minorities and a lack of sensitivity to their problems.⁴⁵

It can be argued that Hungary's political activism in response to the rise of ethnic incidents in Voivodina represented a successful attempt to use European institutions in an effective way to further Hungarian interests. Hungary managed to put Serbia under international pressure so that it finally made an effort to contain the violence. Although during this period bilateral contacts including high profile visits were hardly about anything else than the incidents seriously annoying the Serbian party, Hungary's diplomatic efforts were key to convince Serbia that it needed to do more to protect its citizens. During this case, Hungary managed to assert its special national interests i.e. to protect ethnic Hungarians through using institutional channels in the EU and the Council of Europe, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

⁴³ "Orbán Viktor Belgrádban: több történt mint az elmúlt 10 évben összesen," MTI, 19.11.2001.

⁴⁴ Balázs Kiss, Csaba Zahorán, 58-60.

⁴⁵ Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, "Ethnic Violence in Vojvodina: Glitch or Harbinger of Conflicts to Come?," *ECMI Working Paper #27*, April, 2006, http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_27.pdf, 26.

Despite all the minority protection efforts of the provincial government of Voivodina, ethnically motivated violence was on the rise in 2003 and 2004. This coincided with the electoral success of the Serbian Radical Party, having gained the highest share of the votes in Voivodina during the 2003 parliamentary and the 2004 local elections. In 2003 the minority government led by Vojislav Koštunica was formed with the outside support of the Serbian Socialist Party. These political developments represented a nationalist turn after the three years rule of the Đinđić (after March 2003 the Živković) government, and were somewhat surprising considering that during the 1990s Voivodina was mostly spared from ethnic violence.⁴⁶

The incidents included nationalist graffiti, damaging objects of symbolic value to religious or ethnic minorities, damaging private property, verbal attacks, physical attacks and fights. It should be stressed that only a minority of the incidents included violence against individuals, and no killing occurred. Yet the incidents could not be regarded as only isolated cases, but were part of a widespread phenomenon in Voivodina. The victims were persons belonging to national minorities, the majority of them being ethnic Hungarians. Most of the perpetrators were young people between the ages of 15 and 25, and acted mostly spontaneously, without much organization.⁴⁷ Various institutes presented different numbers of incidents, which reflected not only their political leanings but also the difficulty of defining what exactly could be called an incident. The Provincial Secretariat for Regulations, Administration and National Minorities recorded 206 incidents between December 2003 and November 2004.⁴⁸ The Ombudsman for Voivodina counted 76 incidents between January and September 2004.

As was concluded by a study prepared by Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, this upsurge of violence could be associated with the alarming distance between ethnic groups and the high ethnocentrism of youth. They further argued that the incidents reflected deeper inter-ethnic divides and “a new form of grassroots nationalism,” which, if remaining unaddressed, may lead to new waves of ethnic tension and may “radicalize the political scene”.⁴⁹ Thus, the incidents revealed deeper social problems that were aggravated by the nationalist backlash at the centre in Belgrade and the nationalist attitude of the media.

The weak response of the justice system until October 2004, marked by the low number of perpetrators arrested and by light sentences, showed

⁴⁶ With the exception of some Croat villages, such as Hrtkovci. Humanitarian Law Center, *Human Rights Violations in the Territory of former Yugoslavia 1991-95*, Belgrade, 1997, 83-105.

⁴⁷ The research of Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen demonstrated this point. Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 11.

⁴⁸ Data from Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 9.

⁴⁹ Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 26

the attitude of central authorities who did not treat the resolution of this problem as a priority. International attention was needed for central authorities to take firm action, after which the frequency of incidents dropped sharply.⁵⁰

The incidents were much politicized within and outside of Serbia. The rhetoric of the biggest Hungarian party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (AVH), became increasingly dominated by the incidents. Owing to the intense propaganda of the Hungarian parties, the Hungarian government also got extensively involved demonstrated by the many occasions when prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, foreign minister László Kovács, president László Sólyom and others brought up the problem to their Serbian counterparts. For instance, foreign minister Kovács mentioned the issue during a meeting after the inauguration of the newly elected Serbian president Boris Tadić. The subsequent press conference held together by Kovács and the Serbian foreign minister Drašković was also dominated by this topic, just as the visit by Tadić to Budapest in September 2005, etc. After the government failed to address the issue on a bilateral level with Serbia and the state union, it turned to the EU and the Council of Europe.⁵¹ As a result, the Council of Europe raised its voice several times in 2004 against the violence in Voivodina. The Secretary General, the Committee of the Ministers of the CoE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE addressed the problems in Voivodina in 2004 in several resolutions.⁵² Moreover, in a resolution drafted by its Hungarian members, the European Parliament in September 2005 condemned the violence and called for the restoration of Voivodina's pre-1990 autonomy. The resolution reflected the view according to which central authorities mostly ignored the incidents and failed to react properly, implicitly legitimizing calls for more autonomy for Voivodina.⁵³

Serbian media initially mostly ignored the problem and hardly reported it. This was true even of the regional media in Voivodina, such as *Dnevnik*. After the issue attracted international attention, local media began to blame the Hungarian party and Nenad Čanak, a prominent Serbian pro-autonomy politician, for inciting inter-ethnic tensions.⁵⁴ Until the fall of 2004, Belgrade officials mostly denied the ethnic character of the violence and questioned its significance by making references to the young age of the perpetrators. Facing intense international criticism, the government put some pressure on the police

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Bemutakozott Goran Nikičić, a Vajdasági Szociáldemokrata Liga magyarkanizsai polgármesterjelöltje," *Magyar Szó*, 08-09-2004.

⁵² Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, ResCMN(2004)12, 17.11.2004, see <https://wcm.coe.int.>; Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 1397, Functioning of the democratic institutions in Serbia and Montenegro*, 2004.

⁵³ European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on the defense of multi-ethnicity in Vojvodina*, P6_TA(2005)0369., 29-09-2005,

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?val=433738:cs&lang=mt&pos=1&phwords=&checktexte=checkbox>.

⁵⁴ This view was promoted by Večernje Novosti. Source: Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 36-37.

to respond more firmly, which also brought about an increase in judicial procedures. Consequently, the number of cases noticeably decreased afterwards.⁵⁵ Recognizing that the incidents reflected deeper social problems, the Provincial Secretariat for Regulations, Administration and National Minorities in 2005 initiated a project promoting multiculturalism and tolerance, targeting young people.⁵⁶ The program was not supported by republican institutions, but received funding from the Hungarian government, the OSCE mission, the US embassy and a private company. The number of ethnic incidents was reduced significantly in 2005, yet their frequency was still higher than in 2003.⁵⁷ However, even afterwards from time to time attacks on Hungarians in Voivodina could be heard of, for instance in the spring of 2009, which prompted Hungarian diplomacy to raise its voice again.⁵⁸

It should be stressed, however, that apart from these periods described above, minority issues in general did not disturb good neighborly relations with Serbia owing to Serbia's quite progressive minority protection regime, which is usually praised by Hungarian political leaders. An exceptional case was the cancellation of the visit of president Sólyom to Serbia in March 2009. Sólyom is a frequent visitor to places where Hungarian minorities reside and is a loud advocate of the idea that Hungarian minorities are part of the Hungarian nation. In 2009 he was supposed to celebrate the national holiday of the 15th March in Voivodina. He planned to lay a wreath at a monument commemorating those Hungarians who were slaughtered by the Serbian partisans in 1944-45, which allegedly prompted the Serbian authorities to put pressure on Sólyom to shorten the visit. In addition, the law on Voivodina's statute had been waiting for final adoption in the Serbian parliament for months at the time due to disagreements among the parties about the autonomy issue, which was a further reason why the Serbian president was against Sólyom taking part in the celebrations. Allegedly, the Hungarian president was expected not to touch upon this subject during his stay in Serbia.⁵⁹ At the same time, Voivodina Hungarians counted on him to address this and other sensitive issues, so the Hungarian president decided "for the sake of maintaining good relations with Serbia" to retreat from his original plan and cancelled his trip altogether.⁶⁰

However, by October 2009, when Tadić came to Budapest for bilateral negotiations, the tension between the two presidents had apparently been resolved. They came up with a joint initiative according to which the Hungarian and the Serbian Academy of Science should form a committee

⁵⁵ Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 26-27.

⁵⁶ Provincial Secretariat for Regulations, Administration and National Minorities, *Promotion of Multiculturalism and Tolerance in Vojvodina*, Novi Sad, February 2005.

⁵⁷ Data from Florian Bieber and Jenni Winterhagen, 38.

⁵⁸ "A magyar diplomácia sürgette a szerb hatóságok fellépését," 9.04.2009. <http://www.vajma.info/universal.php?rovat=cikk&ar=vajdasag&id=8345>.

⁵⁹ "Sólyom Kontra Vajdasági Magyarok," www.hvg.hu, 11.03.2009.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

of historians in order to investigate the events of 1944/45.⁶¹ At the same time, in December Sólyom made it clear that Hungary does not want to interfere into the issue of Voivodina's autonomy which it considers to be Serbia's domestic business.⁶²

Finally, on November the 30th, the Serbian parliament ratified Voivodina's autonomy statute, which defined Voivodina as an autonomous province and an inseparable part of Serbia. Accordingly, Voivodina with the consent from the Serbian government can open representative offices in European regions and in Brussels. However, Novi Sad became the "chief administrative centre", not the capital of the province.⁶³ Although by the fall of 2010, Voivodina acquired over two-thirds of its competencies as stipulated by the new statute, the Serbian state so far has failed to restitute property to the province and local governments, which remains a serious obstacle of practicing economic autonomy.⁶⁴

⁶¹ "Érdekünk a történelmi nézeteltérések tisztázása," *Magyar Szó*, 12.10.2009.

⁶² "Kisebbségpolitikából kitűnő," *Magyar Szó*, 11.12.2009.

⁶³ "Serbian Parliament ratifies Vojvodina statute," SETimes. com, 01.12.2009.

⁶⁴ Official: No separatism in Voivodina, *B92*, 03-10-2010.

Slovakia

Similarly to Hungary, the Western Balkans is a top priority of Slovak and Czech foreign policy as well.⁶⁵ Although in 2006 with the change of government Slovakia's foreign policy priorities have somewhat shifted towards a more pro-Russian direction (amidst cooling relations with the United States), in practice much of the previous foreign policy line has been continued. This was demonstrated for instance by Slovakia joining the Schengen area in 2008, the euro zone in 2009, its sustained participation in the EU's CFSP operations and NATO missions, and its ongoing support for further EU enlargement especially regarding the Western Balkans.⁶⁶ Similarly to Hungary, Slovakia has taken part in EUFOR and EUPM missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in EULEX in Kosovo.⁶⁷ Demonstrating that the region is high on Slovakia's foreign policy agenda, the largest share of the state's official development assistance is channeled to the Western Balkan countries, among them to Serbia.

In contrast with Hungary, Slovak politicians have managed to shape and lead EU policy initiatives through the engagement of a few high profile diplomats such as Eduard Kukan who served as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Balkans between 1999 and 2001, as well as Miroslav Lajčák who as the EU's representative helped to manage the referendum on independence in Montenegro in 2006, and in the following year took up the post as the UN High Representative and the EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Montenegro, Lajčák was entrusted with ensuring the conditions and monitoring the process of the referendum, while another Slovak diplomat, František Lipka became the chair of the Montenegrin referendum committee in March 2006.⁶⁸ Quite recently, Lajčák announced a new EU plan aiming to enhance technical cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina indicating that Slovakia is still active in trying to shape EU high politics in the Western Balkans.⁶⁹

Yet, as a few local analysts have argued, these contributions to the EU's Balkan policy were due to personal merit and effort, rather than being a demonstration of a well articulated foreign strategy.⁷⁰ Moreover, the

⁶⁵ Milan Šagát, "Slovak Foreign Policy towards the Western Balkans: Potemkin Villages," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 3 (2008), 46-47.

⁶⁶ For instance, the Slovak prime minister, Fico echoed the arguments of Putin against the American missile shield. Martin Bútor, "Which way forward Slovak foreign policy?" *The Analyst* 2 (2007), 61-64, 67.

⁶⁷ Imre Szilágyi and Tomáš Strážay, "New Dimensions of Cooperation: Hungary and Slovakia's Joint Involvement in the Western Balkans," Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava 2009, 22.

⁶⁸ Milan Šagát, "Slovakia's Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans in 2006," *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* 1 (2007), 113.

⁶⁹ "Lajčák prepares plan for Kosovo," *B92*, 2 May 2010.

⁷⁰ Milan Sagat, "Slovak Foreign Policy towards the Western Balkans: Potemkin Villages," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 3 (2008), 56.

diplomats implemented EU policy rather than designing it. Although Lajčák as the high representative for Bosnia had the ambition to push through fundamental institutional reforms to overcome the fragmentation of state institutions by introducing new regulation (which would have made it much more difficult than before for one party or entity to boycott decision making in the common institutions), his efforts failed in the end. In a similar way, the police reform as originally proposed by him was also rejected by the Bosnian Serbs because these measures were perceived as threatening the existence of the Serbian entity.⁷¹

At lower administrative levels, Slovak diplomats have been underrepresented in EU bodies and international organizations dealing with the region, thus weakening Slovakia's overall political leverage. This counterbalances the advantages of the sustained continuity of Slovakia's high diplomacy guaranteed by the personality of Lajčák as foreign minister and Eduard Kukan serving as the chairman of the delegation responsible for relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo in the European Parliament. Moreover, Slovakia has failed to convert its good political relations in the region into a strong Slovak economic presence, as Slovak investments still lag much behind those of the other Visegrad countries. For instance, in 2008 Slovakia ranked as the 35th biggest investor in Serbia with its 1,47 million USD direct investment according to its yearly investment balance, while Hungary stood at the 13th place with 32 million USD, while Poland on the 15th with 24,8 million USD. In Croatia, similarly, in 2009 Slovak investments merited the not so impressive 32nd place with 26,7 million EUR invested in the country.⁷² In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovakia stood at the 27th place.⁷³ For this reason, in 2009 economic cooperation gained a new emphasis in Slovakia's Western Balkan policy, demonstrated by the presentation of a new government proposal in the field of economic diplomacy and the opening of the Slovak-Serbian Economic Forum, among others.⁷⁴

Similarly to Hungary's Szeged process, Slovakia also launched in 1999 the so-called Bratislava process, which was meant to provide support for the democratic opposition forces in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia through organizing a series of conferences and workshops. At the same time, Slovak NGOs became very active in Serbia in the early 2000s and have remained very involved since. As a result civil society development became a key dimension of Slovak engagement in Serbia and the region. This followed from developments of the 1990s, when mobilization carried

⁷¹ For the quote see "Conclusion of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska 01-1720/07", 5.11.2007. Cited in International Crisis Group, "Bosnia's Incomplete Transition: Between Dayton and Europe", *Europe Report* N°198, 9.03.2009, 13.

⁷² Croatian National Bank: Statistics, Foreign direct investment in Croatia by the country of origin, <http://www.hnb.hr/statistika/estatistika.htm>.

⁷³ Július Lőrincz, "Slovakia and the Western Balkans. The Year 2008 – Before and After," *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* 1 (2009),

⁷⁴ Imre Szilágyi and Tomáš Strážay, 23.

out by Slovak civic organizations played a crucial role in bringing about a quasi-regime change in Slovakia in 1998. As a result, Slovak NGOs gained an international reputation of staging effective resistance against authoritarian practices and endorsing democratic values, which is why some of them were invited to Serbia in the early 2000s by OSCE and Freedom House to monitor elections. Owing to their experience from the 1990s, Slovak civic groups were well prepared to implement democracy assistance projects abroad.⁷⁵ In 2001-2002 Slovak NGO representatives were present as election observers in Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Azerbaijan, etc.

When the situation stabilized in Serbia, Slovak NGOs stayed active there and in the rest of the region but had to look for new donors and had to reshape their engagement profile. They began running programs aimed at institution and democracy building, and increasing citizens' political involvement. This coincided with the launching of the official development assistance (ODA) program in Slovakia in 2003, part of which was meant to finance democracy-building, the promotion of shared European values and the dissemination of transition experiences.⁷⁶ Since then, Slovak NGO activities in the recipient countries have been to a large extent financed by the Slovak government through ODA (though not exclusively, as they receive funding also from international donors).⁷⁷ In 2002, within the framework of the Bratislava process, Slovakia established the Bratislava-Belgrade Fund (BBF) to channel development aid to Yugoslavia (later to Serbia and Montenegro), in order to promote civil society, infrastructural investments and regional development and assisting the country's Euro-Atlantic integration.⁷⁸ Subsequently, Slovakia's development aid program was extended also to Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁷⁹ Projects aimed at sharing Slovakia's EU accession experiences with the Western Balkan states are being carried out primarily by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association and the Pontis Foundation.⁸⁰

As was noted already, the greatest proportion of Slovak development assistance targets Serbia. In 2008, 56% of all Slovak ODA benefited Serbia, which also demonstrates how much Serbia is a priority of Slovak foreign policy as compared to the other countries in the region. Serbia

⁷⁵ Grigorij Mesežnikov, "Exporting Democracy (not only Democracy...)," In: Jacek Kucharczyk and Leff Lovitt (ed.), *Democracy's New Champions*, PASOS, Prague, 2008, 115.

⁷⁶ Author interview with Tomáš Strážay, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 27.04.2010.

⁷⁷ Grigorij Mesežnikov, 116.

⁷⁸ Lessons Learned from Building a Civil Society in Slovakia –Spreading Democracy and Stability in Central and Eastern Europe (Round Table at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London), 9.11.2005, <http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/vasaryova.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Remarks presented by the President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič at the 12th meeting of the Presidents of Central European States, "How to complete the process of European integration," Zagreb, 14.10. 2005, Website of the President of the Slovak Republic, <http://www.prezident.sk/?remarks-presented-by-the-president-of-the-slovak-republic-ivan-gasparovic-at-the-12th-meeting-of-the-presidents-of-central-european-states-how-to-complete-the-process-of-european-integration-zagreb-14-10-2005>.

⁸⁰ Milan Šagát, "Slovakia's Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans in 2006," *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy*1 (2007), 116.

and Montenegro are so called program countries of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (Slovak Aid). These two countries not only receive more resources, but special strategy papers are also prepared about them. Within Serbia, most resources are allocated to Voivodina. Assistance focuses on three areas: the promotion of civil society; the development and reconstruction of basic infrastructure; and assisting the countries in their efforts to join international associations and organizations. However, in the last few years aid money has been channeled away from supporting civil society to infrastructure development reflecting the aspiration of the government to strengthen Slovakia's economic position in the region and to help small and medium enterprises enter the regional markets. In 2007, 16 out of the 17 approved projects were granted for infrastructure development signaling that the Slovak government is making an effort to promote Slovakia's economic interests.⁸¹ In 2008, 24 out of the total 35 projects were implemented in Serbia, complemented by a mere 5 in Montenegro, 3 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 3 in Macedonia. These programs focused on building democratic institutions, implementing good governance, creating a business friendly environment, environmental protection, agriculture and food security.⁸² In 2008, altogether 2,315 m EUR was allocated to the Western Balkans: 1,73 m EUR to Serbia, 0,325m EUR to Bosnia, 0,166m EUR to Montenegro and 0,094m EUR to Macedonia.⁸³

Much like Hungarian foreign policy, Slovakia has built very close relations with Croatia while devoting a great attention to Serbia as well. The importance of Serbia from the aspect of Slovakia can be explained by several factors, such as the presence of the Slovak minority in Voivodina, the fact that Serbia is the Balkan state closest to Slovakia, but also that the two countries share the experience of living under an authoritarian regime ostracized by the rest of Europe, and last but not least owing to "the strong pan-Slavic sentiments among Slovak politicians; the image of Serbs as our Slavic brothers, who are the target of unmerited international condemnation..."⁸⁴ In addition, the consideration that the stability of Serbia is key from the aspect of overall regional stability and that most problems in the Western Balkans somehow are related to Serbia underpin the prioritization of Serbia high on the Slovak foreign policy agenda.⁸⁵ It seems that the current government sustains Slovakia's overall Balkan strategy that its predecessors have developed. Slovakia's engagement in the region has had an important social impact due to its contribution to the civil sector, yet economically it is a smaller player than Hungary as it devotes fewer funds and carries out less investment in the Western Balkans.

⁸¹ Milan Šagát, 60.

⁸² Július Lőrincz, 87.

⁸³ Pontis Foundation, ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four, Western Balkans Case Study, December 2009, <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/en/14521>, 7.

⁸⁴ Milan Šagát, 55.

⁸⁵ Milan Šagát, 110.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the political right (ODS) stressed the importance of NATO membership before the country's EU accession, while the political left (CSSD) put more emphasis on the need of joining the EU. Balkan policy is also viewed through these prisms as ODS supported NATO enlargement to the Western Balkans in order to strengthen transatlantic links, while perceived further EU enlargement as a means to widen the European free economic space.⁸⁶ According to David Kral's analysis, in the post-accession era Czech politicians have been lacking vision in terms of what could be the added value of the Czech Republic to the EU's foreign policy. The last foreign policy strategy was adopted for the period of 2003-2006, while the security strategy has not been amended since 2003. This signals the low salience of foreign policy issues in Czech public opinion. In addition, Czech politicians hold diverging views on key topics such as transatlantic relations, contacts with Russia, the question of the Middle East and Kosovo's recognition (to be discussed in greater detail in the last section), which often sends contradictory messages to the EU and other partners about the directions of Czech foreign policy. President Klaus especially tends to represent his own foreign policy course, often running against to that of the government.

Nevertheless, there is a general consensus within the political elite on the need for further enlargement, specifically to the Western Balkans while the Eastern Partnership is also considered as a high priority by all the main political players. Both the Western Balkans – especially Croatia's accession process and visa liberalization for the region – and the Eastern Partnership were among the foreign policy priorities of the Czech EU presidency.⁸⁷ It is worth pointing out here that the idea of the Eastern Partnership was originally a Czech proposition in 2007-2008, even if it was the Polish-Swedish version which was finally accepted at the European level.⁸⁸ In Filip Tesar's opinion, however, in practice the Czech Republic is more involved in the EU's eastern neighborhood than in the Western Balkans. As Czech politicians are better informed about the Eastern Partnership countries they are also more active in this area.⁸⁹

Within the Western Balkan region, Croatia and Serbia enjoy the most attention from the Czech Republic, similarly to the other Visegrad

⁸⁶ Filip Tesar, "The Balkan Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy: Cornerstones and Political Context," unpublished manuscript, 13.

⁸⁷ Jan Richter, "Balkans among Czech EU presidency foreign policy priorities," *Český rozhlas*, 9 January 2008, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/99413>.

⁸⁸ Interview with Elsa Tulmets, "Was the Czech EU presidency's Eastern Partnership summit a success?," *Radio Praha*, 12.05.2009, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/116173>.

⁸⁹ Author Interview with Vladimír Bartović (EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy) and Filip Tesar (Institute of International Relations), Prague, 27.05.2010.

states.⁹⁰ It should be also noted that Czech NGOs which have a considerable influence on Czech foreign policy (particularly under right wing governments), have been active in the field of human rights and humanitarian assistance in the Western Balkans.⁹¹

Just as the other Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic also participates in various EU and NATO missions throughout the region. It contributes to the EULEX mission in Kosovo, 321 Czech troops serve in KFOR in Kosovo,⁹² and until June 2008 Czech soldiers participated in the EU's Althea mission in Bosnia Herzegovina and the EU's Concordia Mission in Macedonia which was completed in December 2003.

At the same time, Czech investment is rather insignificant in the region; the single biggest deal was recorded in Albania, where the Czech energy company ČEZ won a tender in 2008.⁹³ ČEZ has recently entered a tender process in Kosovo as well.

Currently, the Czech Republic devotes the most resources within the Visegrad group to the region in the form of development assistance, 4.913m EUR per year,⁹⁴ out of which most funds have been channeled to Serbia (2.88m EUR) and Bosnia (1.453m EUR). Yet, this might change in the near future, as Serbia most likely will not be among the priority countries from next year on. So far, resources were directed to the southeast and the central parts of Serbia, focusing on the sectors of industrial development, transport, environment, health and social care. In Bosnia the northeast of the country has attracted most Czech assistance, mainly in the fields of industrial development, transport and agriculture. In Kosovo, health care and environmental protection were chosen as priority areas.⁹⁵ In addition, in 2005 the Czech Republic launched a Transition Promotion program, which is a special budget line for democracy assistance outside of the framework of official development assistance. The majority of these funds are channeled towards projects implemented by Czech NGOs. In 2007 five such projects were running in Serbia, and three in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁹⁶

While evaluating the Czech Republic's involvement in the Western Balkans, it is worth to look at the Czech EU presidency's achievements, which was arguably the "only boost to foreign policy thinking" in the

⁹⁰ Filip Tesar, 1.

⁹¹ David Kral, "From the Euro-Atlantic consensus to a deep identity crisis?", presentation given at a workshop organized by CENS, CEU, Budapest, May 2010.

⁹² NATO Kosovo Force, 26.02.2010.

http://www.nato.int/kfor/structur/nations/placemap/kfor_placemat.pdf.

⁹³ Filip Tesar, 8.

⁹⁴ Data for the year of 2008. Source: Pontis Foundation, ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four, Western Balkans Case Study, December 2009, <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/en/14521>, 7.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁶ Vladimir Bartovic, "Limited Resources, Global Ambitions," In: *Democracy's New Champions*, 29-49.

recent period.⁹⁷ The main goals of the presidency were speeding up Croatia's EU accession negotiations (which were stuck at the time due to Slovenia blocking the process), opening negotiations with Macedonia and convincing the Netherlands to ratify the SAA with Serbia.⁹⁸ The most important event of the Czech presidency from the aspect of South East Europe was an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Hluboká nad Vltavou in March 2009. The statement issued at the event reinforced the South East European states' EU membership perspective, including that of Kosovo, called for helping Kosovo's economic and social development and its integration into regional initiatives, and pressed for the continuation of visa liberalization in the region.⁹⁹ Yet, the overall record of the presidency in terms of accomplishments was rather weak given that the breakthrough in the Croatian-Slovenian border dispute happened well after the presidency, in November 2009. Similarly, the big decisions about visa liberalization were made before the presidency (giving road maps to the applicants between May and June 2008) and afterwards (in July 2009 when the European Commission approved visa free travel for citizens of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia from January the 1st of 2010). It could be also added here that there is a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality regarding Czech visa policy. Officially the Czech Republic supports visa liberalization for all the Western Balkan countries and the eastern neighbors, but in reality it applies a very strict procedure of granting visas.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, it was a real success of Czech diplomacy during the presidency that Montenegro's application for candidate status had been unblocked in the Council in April 2009. At the same time, Albania's application was also accepted. In addition, Štefan Füle became the new commissioner for enlargement which beyond any doubt was another diplomatic triumph for Prague. However, despite these recent achievements, Czech foreign policy has run out of steam since the presidency as it is lacking clear preferences, and is not pressing for any particular agenda in the Western Balkans, as some analysts have argued.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Quote from David Kral, "From the Euro-Atlantic consensus to a deep identity crisis?", presentation given at a workshop organized by CENS, CEU, Budapest, May 2010.

⁹⁸ Czech Republic, *The EU New Member States as Agenda Setters in the Enlarged European Union*, Country Report, European Policy Initiative, 2009, http://eupi.osi.bg/fce/001/0070/files/CzechRepublicCountryReport_OSI-Sofia_EuPI_April2009_.pdf, 32.

⁹⁹ Czech Presidency of the European Union, *EU Presidency Statement, Declaration by the Presidency on Western Balkans*, 2.04.2009, <http://www.eu2009.cz/en/news-and-documents/news/eu-presidency-statement-14119/>.

¹⁰⁰ David Kral, "From the Euro-Atlantic consensus to a deep identity crisis?", presentation given at a workshop organized by CENS, CEU, Budapest, May 2010.

¹⁰¹ Author Interview with Vladimír Bartović and Filip Tesar, Prague, 27.05.2010.

Poland

As was mentioned above, Poland is not deeply engaged in the Western Balkans, especially if compared to the other Visegrad countries. This is understandable, as Ukraine and Belarus are Poland's main foreign policy priorities. For instance, in 2010 the greatest share of Polish development aid targeted the Eastern Partnership countries and Afghanistan.¹⁰²

At the same time, Poland has a strong presence in the EU and NATO missions in the Balkans: Warsaw participates in KFOR with 284 troops, while providing 120 policemen for EULEX. 203 Polish soldiers served in the EU's EUFOR Althea mission in Bosnia constituting one-tenth of the entire mission even if in the beginning of 2010 the majority of them were withdrawn.¹⁰³ Poland also contributes police officers and civilian experts to EUPM. In general and at a European level, in exchange for other Visegrad members' support for Polish initiatives targeting the Ukraine, Poland backs the Visegrad countries' policy in the Western Balkans.

Yet, as was argued in the introduction, despite the general pro-enlargement rhetoric Poland shows far less enthusiasm towards the Western Balkans than Slovakia, Hungary or even the Czech Republic. This is the case despite the fact that 69% of Polish people are in favor of enlargement (the EU average is 44%).¹⁰⁴ According to Polish analysts, every initiative, including the Danube strategy, pointing towards South East Europe is viewed by the Polish political leadership with suspicion, as such initiatives might divert funds and attention away from the Eastern Partnership countries. It can be argued, however, that Polish foreign policy is not necessarily negative but rather passive towards the region. It tries to follow the EU mainstream and gets engaged in the Western Balkans mostly through participating in EU or NATO missions or the Visegrad cooperation rather than on its own initiative. General disinterest in the region was reflected by the foreign minister's yearly statement on Polish foreign policy for 2009, which did not even mention the Western Balkans.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the prime minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, has not had a meeting with a prime minister from the region within the framework of a bilateral agenda since he has taken office in the fall of 2007. The late president Kaczyński had been politically more active, having met with Željko Komšić, the presidency chairman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Croatian president Stjepan Mesić, and the Serbian president, Boris Tadić.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Presentation of Agnieszka Lada, Research Fellow, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw at the workshop organized by CENS, CEU, Budapest, May 2010.

¹⁰³ Tomasz Żornaczuk, "Western Balkans in Poland's Foreign Policy," *Panorama of Global Security Environment 2009*, CENAA, Bratislava 2009, 237-248: 240.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 238.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 239.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 244.

In addition, Polish support for policies targeting the Western Balkans appears sometimes fairly reluctant. For instance, the Polish government agreed to support the declaration reaffirming the European perspective of the Western Balkan states adopted by the Visegrad countries' foreign ministers in October 2009 on the condition that in the spring a Visegrad summit will be held on the Eastern Partnership. This indicates that Poland often backs proposals aiming to help the Western Balkans in order to gain something on the Eastern Partnership front. Moreover, signaling their general lack of interest in the issue, Poland was not represented at a ministerial level at the October Visegrad event.¹⁰⁷ According to sources, enlargement will not be among the main priorities of the Polish EU Presidency starting in July 2011.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, it was certainly not a sign of political good will when Poland failed to sign a declaration which called for granting free visas to Serbian citizens. The declaration was initiated by France in April 2008 and was joined by 17 EU members including the Visegrad states. According to the official Polish reasoning, Serbian citizens were already enjoying a rather generous visa regime in Poland.¹⁰⁹ The state's neglect of the Western Balkans is also reflected by the low intensity of economic relations. For instance, Polish exports to the region amount to 0.7% of all Polish exports, and investments are also minimal (around a total of 70 million USD in 2007).¹¹⁰ In 2009, Poland occupied the 26th place among foreign investors in Croatia with a total investment value of 65,7 million EUR. Hungary was in the 8th place with 2307 million EUR, while Slovakia in the 32nd place with 26,7 million EUR (the Czech Republic was not among the 34 biggest investors in Croatia so the value of its investments was not published by the National Bank of Croatia).¹¹¹ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Polish businessmen interested in the region are often faced with indifference from their government, which usually fails to help them in terms of lobbying and creating connections, or helping them to access necessary information, not to mention providing them financial support.

It can be argued that Poland's participation in the Visegrad cooperation and the Regional Partnership shapes its Western Balkan policy considerably. Owing to its membership in these regional forums it participates in specific initiatives. Within the frames of the Regional Partnership following the Budapest declaration in 2005, Poland took on the task of sharing experiences with the Western Balkan countries about how to absorb EU funds. Polish experts have always been active organizing workshops, training sessions and study visits within this

¹⁰⁷ Author interview with a Hungarian diplomat, Budapest, 13.05.2010.

¹⁰⁸ Author Interview with Adam Balcer, Demos Europa, Warsaw, 19.05.2010.

¹⁰⁹ Tomasz Żornaczuk, 238.

¹¹⁰ European Stability Initiative, Debating EU Enlargement - Poland, <http://www.esiweb.org/enlargement/?cat=23#awp:?.cat=23>.

¹¹¹ Croatian National Bank: Statistics, Foreign direct investment in Croatia by the country of origin, <http://www.hnb.hr/statistika/estatistika.htm>.

framework, however no funds were approved for the year of 2009 for such purposes, again reflecting that the Western Balkans was not the highest priority.¹¹² As opposed to the other Visegrad countries, for Poland the Western Balkans is not a priority region from the aspect of development assistance either. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia only receive small grants from the respective Polish embassies. In addition, a few development projects were financed in the region, worth 127,504.28 EUR in 2008. One supported the economic activity of women in Kosovo and two other targeted Macedonia, specifically education and the development of the finance sector.¹¹³

However, at particular moments, Poland has expressed a clear pro-enlargement stance regarding the Western Balkans. When in April 2008 Macedonia was not invited to join NATO due to the Greek opposition, Poland backed Macedonia, disapproving of mixing in bilateral issues with conditionality requirements for NATO and EU membership. In a similar manner, Poland was in favor of continuing accession negotiations with Croatia when those were blocked by Slovenia owing to the maritime issue.¹¹⁴ In addition, Poland facilitated an important event during its Visegrad presidency in October 2008 displaying a pro-active approach towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. A meeting of political directors from Visegrad foreign ministries with a representative of the British Foreign Office, Bosnian authorities and Miroslav Lajčák in Sarajevo was meant to draw the attention of Bosnian politicians to the Visegrad cooperation, and to boost Lajčák's reform efforts in Bosnia as a high representative.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, not considering Poland's negative approach to the French visa initiative in April 2008, Poland supports granting a visa free regime to the Western Balkan countries and backs their Euro-Atlantic integration, even if it throws its real weight only behind the aspirations of Ukraine.¹¹⁶ There are two key issues on which Polish and the future members' interests converge: the EU's agricultural policy and energy security. As in the Western Balkan countries relatively many people are involved in agriculture, once these states become EU members they can be expected to support preserving the Common Agricultural Policy. In addition, EU enlargement to South East Europe could increase the possibilities of diversifying energy supplies, which would be a welcome development from the Polish point of view.¹¹⁷ In February 2010, at an energy summit meeting in Budapest of the V4+ including representatives of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia

¹¹² Tomasz Żornaczuk, 244.

¹¹³ Pontis Foundation, ODA Evaluation in the Visegrad Four, Western Balkans Case Study, December 2009, <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/en/14521>, 8.

¹¹⁴ Tomasz Żornaczuk, 240.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 243.

¹¹⁶ Piotr Kaźmierkiewicz of the Institute of Public Affairs, cited in European Stability Initiative, Debating EU Enlargement – Poland. <http://www.esiweb.org/enlargement/?cat=23#awp::?cat=23>.

¹¹⁷ European Stability Initiative, Debating EU Enlargement - Poland, <http://www.esiweb.org/enlargement/?cat=23#awp::?cat=23>.

and Romania besides the Visegrad states, the participants adopted a declaration calling for the creation of north-south interconnections through all V4 countries, between the planned Croatian and Polish liquefied natural gas terminals.¹¹⁸

Altogether, as several analysts have noted, Polish neglect of this region will not pay off in the long run. The EU failing in the Western Balkans could weaken support for upgrading the Eastern Partnership policy, and it is very unlikely that aspirations to bring Ukraine into the EU could ever materialize without success in the Western Balkans.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Declaration of the Budapest V4+ Energy Security Summit, Budapest, 24.02.2010, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=859&articleID=27720&ctag=articlelist&iid=1#_ednref1.

¹¹⁹ Author Interview with Adam Balcer, Marta Szpala and Tomasz Żornaczuk.

Shaping EU Policy

Lobbying for the integration of Western Balkan states into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, by all possible means and in all possible forums is probably the most defining feature of Hungarian and Slovak foreign policy related to the region. Hungary together with some other EU members such as Slovakia, Slovenia and Austria can be counted on to represent the voice of the Western Balkan countries in the EU, and fight against the enlargement fatigue characterizing some other member states. Thus Hungary and Slovakia have pressed for speeding up EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, advocated the countries' invitation to NATO's Partnership for Peace program, later to NATO itself and have been pushing for visa liberalization. In practice this means that Hungarian and Slovak politicians in different EU bodies, conferences, meetings etc. repeatedly raise the issue of enlargement and call for a sustained effort to continue the process. This kind of engagement can be important in critical moments such as in March 2005, when the European Council was about to decide whether to open membership negotiations with Croatia. Hungary and Slovakia speaking up on behalf of Croatia probably helped to avoid a longer suspension of Croatia's EU accession process.

On 17 March 2005, the EU Council of Ministers decided not to launch accession negotiations with Croatia referring to Croatia's non-compliance with the requirement of cooperation with the ICTY based on the opinion of the chief prosecutor at the time, Carla del Ponte. This decision was fiercely opposed by Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Austria. Hungarian prime minister Gyurcsány accused the member states that lobbied for postponing the opening of the negotiations – specifically Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden – of applying double standards with regards to candidates. According to the Hungarian premier's reasoning, no evidence supported the case against Croatia, being based only on rumors and allegations. At the same time, the member states pushing for a delay wanted the EU to stick to its principles and not dilute the requirement of full cooperation with the ICTY. In this case, Hungary and Slovakia openly went against the EU mainstream, upsetting the British and others who were surprised by the fact that the Hungarian prime minister believed the Croats more than the Hague tribunal and the EU.¹²⁰ It also created the impression that Hungary was offering uncritical support for the Croats.¹²¹ In April 2005 the Central European countries finally had their way, when the European Council agreed to reexamine the performance of Croatia. Mainly thanks to the efforts of Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Slovenia, an EU mission was sent to Croatia in order to explore the sincerity of Croat efforts to arrest the general Ante

¹²⁰ Nick Thorpe, "Hungary backs Croatia in EU spat," *BBC News*, 14 April 2005.

¹²¹ József Juhász, "Croatia and the European Union," *The Analyst* 1 (2005), 63.

Gotovina. This allowed for reopening the issue in the summer of 2005, which was followed by the launch of negotiations in October 2005. In the end, accession negotiations were opened before Ante Gotovina was captured and extradited to the Hague, which happened a few months later, in December 2005.¹²²

Furthermore, it was to a great extent the merit of Hungarian and Slovak diplomatic efforts that Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia could join NATO's Partnership for Peace Program in November 2006 in Riga.¹²³ Hungarian and Slovak diplomats pushed for the acceptance of these countries amidst loud protest from the ICTY, by making the case that accession of these countries to PfP will better enable NATO to oversee their process of meeting the demands of membership.¹²⁴ It is also worth mentioning that during the April 2008 NATO summit, Hungary with some others called for inviting Albania, Croatia and Macedonia into the ranks of the organization.¹²⁵ The initiative was only partially successful since Macedonia's accession was put on hold owing to Greece's insistence while Albania and Croatia were invited to join the alliance at the summit. Particularly the Czech Republic together with Slovenia and Turkey openly protested against excluding Macedonia from NATO enlargement.¹²⁶

Furthermore, at the initiative of Hungary in April 2009, the foreign ministers of eight EU member states among them Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia signed a letter addressing the Czech EU Presidency, in which they called for speeding up the visa liberalization process of the Western Balkan states, and asked the European Commission to give its opinion about the countries' performance by May 2009.¹²⁷ The letter was meant to boost the Czech presidency's efforts to accomplish something in the area of visa liberalization during its term.¹²⁸ In the end, however, the European Commission's proposal about granting a visa free regime to Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro from January 2010 came only after the Czech presidency was over, in July 2009.¹²⁹

¹²² David Král, "Enlarging EU foreign policy, The role of new EU member states and candidate countries," EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, June 2005, 33.

¹²³ "The Balkan region and Hungarian foreign policy," state secretary Gábor Szentiványi's presentation held at the conference 'The Balkan region and Hungarian foreign policy,' 20.11.2008. Retrieved from the website of Balkan-Studies Center, <http://www.balkancenter.hu/?page=konfanyag>.

¹²⁴ Milan Šagát, "Slovakia's Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans in 2006," *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* 1 (2007), 115.

¹²⁵ Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "A magyar diplomácia három nyugat-balkáni ország NATO-csatlakozását szorgalmazza – Göncz Kinga az atlanti szövetség külügyminisztereinek brüsszeli tanácskozásán." 6.03. 2008, www.kum.hu.

¹²⁶ Filip Tesar, 3.

¹²⁷ "Magyar kezdeményezésre nyolc uniós tagállam azt szorgalmazza, hogy az EU törölje el a nyugat-balkáni országokra vonatkozó vízumkényszert," www.kum.hu, 4.4.2009.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ "The Commission proposes visa-free travel for citizens of three Western Balkan states," Website of the European Commission, Enlargement, News about "visa", http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/whatsnew/visa_en.htm, 22.07.2009.

Moreover, Hungarian politicians actively assisted enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn in his efforts to prevent the alienation of Serbia from the EU in the face of the EU's refusal to ratify the SAA with the republic. During the January 2008 presidential elections the stakes were clearly high, as Serbian citizens practically had to decide whether they wanted to keep Serbia on the track of European integration. The main challenger of the pro-EU Boris Tadić was the Radical Party candidate Tomislav Nikolić who argued that the EU did not want Serbia in its ranks. This rhetoric had considerable resonance among the wider population, given that the EU had firmly refused implementing the SAA with Serbia. However, the EU significantly boosted the electoral chances of Tadić who subsequently won the race by *initialing* the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia in November 2007, shortly before the elections. The EU played the same card again before the May 2008 parliamentary elections as the SAA was *signed* (though still not ratified) in Brussels in April 2008. All this took place while in January 2008 the Netherlands and Belgium had made it clear that they were against ratifying the SAA with Serbia as ICTY prosecutor Serge Brammertz confirmed a few days earlier that Serbia was still not fully cooperating.¹³⁰ The lobbying efforts of Hungarian diplomats and the backing of the other Visegrad states was key in implementing this smart strategy, which helped to keep Serbia on the European path at the time when Kosovo declared independence, and also satisfied those member states that were against the ratification of the SAA with Serbia.¹³¹

By contrast, it was the success of Czech diplomacy that some of the older member states could not derail Montenegro's accession process, as was mentioned already. Angela Merkel suggested "a consolidation phase" for enlargement after Croatia's accession, and in December 2008 asked the European Commission to delay its opinion on Montenegro's application for membership.¹³² Montenegro's application was blocked in the Council not only by Germany but also by the Netherlands, Spain, France and Belgium.¹³³ Nevertheless, in April 2009 the European Council invited the Commission to submit its opinion on Montenegro's application, which allegedly was the merit of the Czech Presidency's lobby efforts.

Since April 2009, Hungarian diplomacy has been particularly active in the Western Balkans owing to then foreign minister Péter Balázs's interest in the region. For instance, at a meeting of the foreign ministers of Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Serbia in March 2010, the participants declared that visa liberalization should be extended to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, and the decision was made that the Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 will propose to invite Western Balkan ministers as observers to the informal meetings of EU Councils related to issues

¹³⁰ "Serbia, EU sign SAA," SETimes.com, 30 April 2008.

¹³¹ Author interview with László Márkus.

¹³² Risto Karajkov, "Brake on EU Enlargement Dims Hope for the Balkans," World Politics Review, 14.05.2009.

¹³³ "Montenegro filed EU membership application, but what happens now?," Montenegro Open, 06.03.09.

with beyond-the-EU implications (e.g. transport, energy etc.).¹³⁴ Although most high level meetings and visits carry the single message that Hungary is committed to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries, some very specific initiatives also accompany this general rhetoric. In April 2010 during the meeting of the presidents of Croatia, Serbia and Hungary, the presidents agreed to continue cooperation in several areas, such as forming a new Euro-Region along the common border of the three countries under the name the Danube-Drava-Murau region, identifying common goals under the Danube strategy, possibilities of connecting energy capacities and developing new railway and road connections which might include the rebuilding of the Constanza-Rijeka railway line.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Joint Declaration, Of the Foreign Ministers of Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Serbia on the EU-integration of the Western Balkans. 13-04-2010, http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/kum/en/bal/actualities/spokesman_statements/Joint_decl_100413.htm.

¹³⁵ Trilateral Joint Action Plan of Croatia-Hungary-Serbia.

The Visegrad Cooperation

Hungary also uses various regional initiatives to promote its agenda in the Western-Balkans. For instance, the Western Balkans became a priority of the Visegrad Cooperation under the Hungarian Visegrad presidency between July 2009 and June 2010, and remained a priority area under the Slovak Presidency as well.¹³⁶ Previously, the Eastern Partnership countries used to dominate the Visegrad cooperation's external agenda. Thus Hungary placing more emphasis on the Western Balkans was a new step forward towards a more balanced approach.¹³⁷

The Visegrad countries regularly coordinate their positions before EU summits, which can increase their political leverage in the EU, and which (probably for the same reason) provoked an angry reaction from president Sarkozy in November 2009.¹³⁸ Such Visegrad coordination occurred in March 2009 before the Brussels European Council forum, when the Visegrad Four discussed how to handle the economic crisis. In the fall of 2009 they addressed the Czech demand for an exemption from part of the Lisbon Treaty and climate change issues.¹³⁹ Quite recently, the Visegrad states called for getting a fair share in the EU's new diplomatic corps, in the European External Action Service (EEAS) fearing that they would be squeezed out of the EU's foreign policy.¹⁴⁰

Adding to this list, it was a major achievement that during the Hungarian V4 presidency the member countries coordinated their activities concerning the Western Balkans and presented a united policy towards the region. The Hungarian Presidency set as its goal granting a NATO Membership Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina, (which was fulfilled in April 2010). The presidency also lobbied for Macedonia's NATO integration, as well as for the further development of NATO-Serbia relations, in particular via the Partnership for Peace.

In October 2009, V4 foreign ministers held a meeting in Budapest together with representatives of Belgium and Spain, during which they reaffirmed their commitment to the EU and NATO accession of the Western Balkan states, reiterated that Bosnia-Herzegovina can join the EU only as a unit, and called on the Western Balkan countries to meet the conditions of EU membership. Although sometimes it is difficult to see the significance of such declarations, it carries a weight in the EU bodies when the four countries manage to speak in a single voice,

¹³⁶ Author interview with Pavol Ivan, Visegrad Coordinator of Slovakia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bratislava, 27.04.2010.

¹³⁷ Presentation of Tomáš Strážay, at the workshop organized by Central European University, CENS, Budapest, May 2010.

¹³⁸ "Sarkozy warns Visegrad countries not to make a habit of pre-summit meetings," www.euobserver.com, 14.11.2009.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Rettman, "New EU states make bid for more diplomatic clout," www.euobserver.com, 10.3.2010.

sustaining the impetus for enlargement.¹⁴¹ The Visegrad group with the lead of Hungary played a key role in pushing through the decision in December 2009 to unblock Serbia's interim trade agreement.¹⁴² Yet, the value added of the Visegrad countries' engagement is not only that they lobby for enlargement in the EU but also that they offer practical assistance for the countries in question to prepare for their EU and NATO membership. Under the Hungarian Presidency, initiatives aimed at sectoral cooperation and coordination were meant to further this second goal. Expert consultations were organized on border surveillance, migration, and programs to assist the Western Balkan countries to achieve a visa free regime in the EU and to develop a public administration that effectively addresses the requirements of EU integration. Ministerial meetings were arranged to improve energy interconnections in the region and on the incorporation of the Western Balkan countries in the program of Trans European Transport Networks.¹⁴³

Overall, South East Europe has been attracting more attention from the Visegrad 4 than had been the case before. Still, on the whole, Ukraine and the other Eastern Partnership countries dominate the V4 external agenda.¹⁴⁴ Lately, at the level of political declarations the emphasis has shifted somewhat towards the Western Balkans owing to the efforts of Hungary.¹⁴⁵ Yet, resources of the International Visegrad Fund concentrate much more on the Ukraine and Belarus than on South East Europe. The Visegrad countries set up the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) primarily with the aim to enhance cohesion and cooperation among the V4 countries, yet IVF programs also have an external dimension. The fund offers scholarship programs to citizens from candidate and future candidate countries, supports the sharing of accession and transition experiences of the V4 countries, and promotes civil society development in the Western Balkans and the eastern neighborhood. However, funds targeting states outside of the V4 cooperation made up less than 10% of the total funding since 2000, and even within that 10% Ukraine and Belarus were the biggest recipients, with Ukraine being the single biggest beneficiary. These two countries have attracted 60% of the Visegrad fund's external assistance, while the Western Balkans only slightly over 10%, reflecting the priorities of the Visegrad cooperation: that externally the Visegrad 4 as an organization assigns the highest importance to Eastern Partnership countries, rather than those of the Western Balkans.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ "Western Balkan EU hopefuls top item at Budapest V4 summit," Politics.hu., 7.10.2009.

¹⁴² Author interview with László Márkus.

¹⁴³ Key Areas of the Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2009-2010, Website of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kum/en/bal/foreign_policy/V4_presidency/visegrad_cooperation.htm.

¹⁴⁴ Author interview with Tomáš Strážay, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 27 April 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Visegrad Fund 2010, 10 years, International Visegrad Fund, 2010; Author interview with Peter Vágner, executive director of the Visegrad Fund, Bratislava, 27.04.2010.

In late 2009, the Visegrad Four decided that they would coordinate development assistance granted to the Western Balkans region.¹⁴⁷ The amount of assistance the Visegrad countries provide is small as compared to big donors such as USAID or SIDA, yet if this aid was better coordinated, it could make a more significant impact.¹⁴⁸ So far there have been a lot of negotiations on this topic, yet not much has been agreed on.

Other regional initiatives

The Quadrilaterale, which was more of an informal communication mechanism among Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Italy, has also aspired to help the Western Balkan countries to prepare for EU membership. The initiative was concluded in February 2010, after which discussions on infrastructure and transport were transferred to the Regional Cooperation Council and the Central European Initiative, while defense and internal affairs will be addressed in NATO and within the frames of EU policies.¹⁴⁹

The Regional Partnership, which is a cooperation forum, was set up in 2001 by Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Slovenia in order to coordinate interests concerning the EU's internal matters and CFSP issues. At the Regional Partnership's Budapest Forum in October 2005, the members initiated the formation of six working groups to assist the Western Balkan countries in their accession process to the EU and to help them meet the requirements of EU membership.¹⁵⁰ Within the Regional Partnership, Hungary is responsible for home and justice affairs, Slovakia is in charge of civil society development, Poland shares its experiences in how to absorb EU assistance funds, while the Czech Republic lends support in the field of visa liberalization and participating in the single market.¹⁵¹

The Central European Initiative founded in 1992 is a further forum running programs in the Western Balkans. It is a large cooperation forum with 18 members from Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe including the Visegrad Four. The CEI Trust Fund at the EBRD finances so called Technical Cooperation projects, which are offered as grants or concessional loans in order to facilitate EBRD projects and their implementation.¹⁵² The Western Balkans and the European

¹⁴⁷ "A Visegrádi Csoport kiáll a nyugat-balkáni országok integrációs törekvéseinek támogatása mellett – a V4 külügyminiszterek közös budapesti nyilatkozata," www.kum.hu, 6.9.2009.

¹⁴⁸ Pontis Foundation, Visegrad Four: Donor Coordination for Serbia, Recommendation Brief, September 2009, http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000023291/090930_V4Workshop_Brief.pdf, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Quadrilateral Initiative concludes on a note of success, website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy, 05.02.2010.

¹⁵⁰ The Austrian Foreign Ministry, The regional partnership, <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/foreign-ministry/foreign-policy/europe/neighbourhood-policy/regional-partnership.html>.

¹⁵¹ ESI, Debating EU Enlargement.

¹⁵² Central European Initiative, 1989-2009, <http://www.ceinet.org/sites/default/files/attachments/docs/CEI%20Booklet%201989-2009.pdf>. 55.

Neighborhood Policy states became the main targets of the CEI Trust Fund. For the coming period, the CEI Trust fund committed 530,000 EUR targeted toward projects in the entire Western Balkan region (which even compared to Hungary's or the Czech Republic's ODA does not seem as a very significant sum). The projects focus on three sectors – transport, SME support, and general development.¹⁵³ Lastly, the V4 states also participate in the Regional Cooperation Council, which is the heir of the Stability Pact.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ CEI Trust Fund, The Secretariat for CEI Projects Announces new Commitments, June 2010, <http://www.ceinet.org/content/cei-trust-fund-0?tab=4>.

¹⁵⁴ “The Balkan region and Hungarian foreign policy,” state secretary Gábor Szentiványi's presentation.

The Kosovo-recognition fiasco

Hungary

Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and the following recognitions caused a lot of turbulence not only in the EU but also within the Visegrad group, which will be the last topic to be addressed by this paper. Although every country but Slovakia has recognized Kosovo, the issue was surrounded by controversies everywhere while causing deep divisions within the EU.

The Ahtisaari plan designed by the UN special envoy, former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, which implied granting limited and conditional independence for Kosovo, was put on the table February 2007. Negotiations between the Albanians and the Serbs had been going on for a year already before the plan's presentation. By July 2007 it was fairly visible that the diametrically opposing stance of the two parties offers no common ground for a compromise. In addition, by July 2007 the majority of EU member states and the US embraced the Ahtisaari package, which was unacceptable to Russia thus its veto in the UN SC was guaranteed.

Hungary's recognition of Kosovo put Hungarian-Serbian relations under significant strain. From early 2007 on, the Hungarian government was trying to find a way of how to approach the Kosovo problem. Its initial position as of February 2007 expressed in a letter by prime minister Gyurcsány to EU officials changed fundamentally by early 2008. Moreover, the official stance on the issue shifted several times throughout the year between 2007 and 2008. Altogether, Hungary's communication regarding the Kosovo status settlement was confusing and ambiguous, marked by continued dithering. Although Hungary was clearly in a sensitive situation due to the Hungarian minority's presence in Voivodina, the government's motives explaining these shifts remained unclear. On the whole, as István Szent-Iványi, a liberal member of the European Parliament remarked, "the constant modification of the Hungarian position made a bad impression," in light of which Hungary did not appear as a reliable and accountable partner.¹⁵⁵

Initially, the Hungarian government insisted on the need for a UN Security Council resolution on Kosovo's status, emphasized the importance of respecting and protecting the minority rights of Kosovo Serbs, and suggested that the Kosovo status settlement should be coupled with speeding up Serbia's EU accession process. The latter meant reopening negotiations on the SAA with Serbia, which were suspended in 2006 due to Belgrade's insufficient cooperation with the

¹⁵⁵ "Szent-Iványi kontra Tálas," www.hvg.hu, 18.06.2008.

Hague Tribunal.¹⁵⁶ Yet the government soon stopped insisting on a UNSC resolution, and in July 2007 the prime minister began to stress how Kosovo's independence was unstoppable, and suggested to follow the lead of the United States.¹⁵⁷ It can be argued that this policy shift was still understandable, as in July 2007 in the face of the threat of a Russian veto it became clear that a UNSC resolution could not be expected on the Ahtisaari plan. Therefore, it was a logical move from the part of Hungary in July 2007 to stop calling for a UN SC resolution.

However, subsequent steps of the Hungarian government were rather difficult to account for. In November 2007, during a visit of president Vojislav Koštunica to Budapest, prime minister Gyurcsány retreated from his previous position and warned that each party in the negotiations should refrain from making unilateral steps, and a compromise solution should be found.¹⁵⁸ This could be interpreted as opposition to the Ahtisaari plan given that Kosovo's declaration of independence could hardly be anything else than unilateral taking into account Serbia's opposition to it, and that the possibilities of seeking a compromise by that time had been exhausted. A month later, in December, the Hungarian premier again changed his opinion and reasoned at a European Council summit meeting in Brussels that the status quo in Kosovo was unsustainable, thus implicitly suggesting the need for independence.¹⁵⁹ He also dropped his previous idea that the United States should take the lead during the settlement process, now stressing that the EU should assume that role. He argued that "we cannot expect the United States to assume a leading role on this issue, too. The European Union must take a leading role in this respect." In January 2008, the prime minister again sounded as if accepting the option of unilateral independence emphasizing how Kosovo's situation was non-sustainable.¹⁶⁰ He also argued with reference to Kosovo at a Visegrad meeting that "without the true alternative of self-governance and independence peace cannot be sustained in the region."¹⁶¹ Hungary at the end closely cooperated with some of Serbia's neighbors, and recognized the independence of Kosovo jointly with Croatia and Bulgaria. Moreover, Hungary became an active contributor to the settlement process owing to its participation in the International Steering Group

¹⁵⁶ Hungary Supports a Settlement in Kosovo which Contributes to the Stability of Serbia, Kosovo and the Whole of the Western Balkans, www.kulugyminiszterium.hu.

¹⁵⁷ Address of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány to the Annual General Assembly of Heads of Diplomatic Missions held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 July 2007," www.miniszterelnok.hu. Imre Szilágyi, "The Hungarian Government's Western Balkan Policies since the 2006 Elections," 21.

¹⁵⁸ "Kompromisszumos megoldás szükséges Belgrád és Pristina között," 13.11.2007, www.miniszterelnok.hu. Cited in Imre Szilágyi, "The Hungarian Government's Western Balkan Policies since the 2006 Elections," 21.

¹⁵⁹ Az Európai Tanács kész vezető szerepet játszani a nyugat-balkáni regionális stabilitás megerősítésében és Koszovó jogállásának rendezésében – Gyurcsány Ferenc miniszterelnök sajtótájékoztatója a brüsszeli EU-csúcs eredményeiről, www.kum.hu, 14.12.2007.

¹⁶⁰ A koszovói status quo nem tartható fenn, www.miniszterelnok.hu, 14-12-2007.

¹⁶¹ Nincs egység Koszovó ügyében, www.miniszterelnok.hu, 10-12-2007.

overseeing the implementation of the Ahtisaari plan.¹⁶² This group included those countries which had pushed for an independent Kosovo, and set up those international institutions such as the International Civilian Office which supervised the creation of the new state.

The question of what exactly motivated the government to go with the EU mainstream and recognize Kosovo remains. According to a Hungarian diplomat, the main reason was that Hungarian politicians cannot say “no” to the Americans. Even if Hungary's general sensitivity to the cause of minorities, and therefore sympathies for the Albanian side provided some reasons for recognition (which incidentally were hardly ever mentioned), Hungary's primary foreign policy interest was staying on good terms with Serbia, not least in order to protect the Hungarian minority in Voivodina from becoming a target of a possible nationalist outbursts. At the same time, not following the majority of member states was an option, given that the EU had no unified position on the Kosovo issue and five member states refused to recognize Kosovo without facing any subsequent reprisals. Moreover, Hungary had already diverged from the EU majority concerning some other matters, for instance energy policy or regarding the Iraq invasion.¹⁶³ Besides, as Hungary placed great emphasis on the protection of Kosovo Serbs it could have conditioned recognition on Kosovo's ability to demonstrate in practice that its minority protection regime functions well. Altogether, while it is not clear what Hungary gained by the quick recognition of Kosovo, and what would have been the cost of conditional postponement or non-recognition, fast-track recognition hid some very real and imminent dangers.

It is worth mentioning that Hungarian politicians often drew parallels between the situation of Kosovo Serbs and Voivodina Hungarians, stressing that both minorities deserved their rights to be protected. Such analogies were presented for instance while addressing the ethnic incidents in Serbia in 2004 and 2005.¹⁶⁴ In light of this rhetorical connection established by Hungarian politicians, it was not an overblown assumption that Hungarians could have become a target of a nationalist backlash in Serbia after Hungary recognized Kosovo. Although such a scenario did not materialize, it was the luck, rather than the merit of Hungarian diplomacy. In addition, after a temporary cooling of bilateral relations manifested by the recall of the Serbian ambassador from Budapest, contacts normalized fairly soon, as in July 2008 the ambassador returned to his previous post. This, however, was not a special gesture towards Hungary, but towards the EU. After the extradition of Karadžić in July, the Serbian government was hoping to

¹⁶² Magyarország is részt vesz a Koszovó demokratikus fejlődését figyelemmel kíséző nemzetközi testületben, amely február 28-án alakult, www.kum.hu, 3.03.2008.

¹⁶³ A kormány széleskörű társadalmi egyeztetést követően elfogadta az Európa-politikai stratégiát - a külügyminiszter nyilatkozata a kormányzóvivői sajtótájékoztatón, www.kum.hu, 1.08.2007.

¹⁶⁴ “A szerb elnök szerint nem lehet büntetlenül etnikai bűncselekményeket elkövetni,” *Népszabadság*, 3 October 2005.

receive a candidate status by the end of the year, which is why the ambassadors were sent back to those EU member states which recognized Kosovo, among them to Hungary.¹⁶⁵

Slovakia

The issue of Kosovo's recognition dominated Slovakia's Balkan policy as well between 2006 and 2008, and even became the subject of heated political arguments. Partially owing to Slovak pressure, the presentation of the Ahtisaari plan in the UNSC was postponed in November 2006 until after the Serbian elections in January 2007.¹⁶⁶ After Ahtisaari published his report in February 2007 practically suggesting independence for the province, Ján Kubiš, the incumbent Slovak foreign minister responded by saying that "We cannot stop it [Kosovo's independence]. And I think that it would be even dangerous."¹⁶⁷ However, the foreign minister and the prime minister split on the issue, and as a result the Slovak government sent contradictory messages about its stance on the Kosovo settlement question. Prime minister Robert Fico and president Ivan Gašparovič gave voice to the view that Slovakia will never recognize Kosovo.¹⁶⁸

After heated debates in the Slovak parliament in March 2007, a resolution was adopted in favor of Serbia and against the independence of Kosovo.¹⁶⁹ According to the official reasoning, "the issue of not recognizing Kosovo has been based on the principle that (in our opinion) this step is in conflict with international law."¹⁷⁰ It should be also mentioned that prominent figures of the opposition such as Mikuláš Dzurinda, Pavol Hrušovský, Ján Čarnogurský had also called for Slovakia's non-recognition of Kosovo. Therefore, there was a wide political consensus behind this particular policy line, which ran against the majority of EU member states. It was supported by all the major parties except for the Hungarian Coalition.¹⁷¹ Slovakia in essence took advantage of the fact that the EU could not adopt a single position on this question, and thus divergence was allowed.

Although Slovakia has not opened an embassy in Pristina, diplomatic relations soon began to improve between Slovakia and Kosovo. In

¹⁶⁵ This did not include all the member states, such as Poland and Denmark that did not have an appointed ambassador from Serbia, and some others such as the Baltic states, Ireland and Luxembourg where Serbia is represented through another member state. "Visszatérnek állomáshelyükre a szerb EU-nagykövetek," *EurActiv.hu*, 25.07.2008.

¹⁶⁶ Milan Šagát, "Slovakia's Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans in 2006," *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* 1 (2007), 117.

¹⁶⁷ J. Kubiš, "Samostatnosť Kosova sa už nedá zvrátiť", SITA (February 6, 2007). Cited in Milan Šagát, 51.

¹⁶⁸ Július Lőrincz, 88.

¹⁶⁹ Milan Šagát, 50-51.

¹⁷⁰ Head of the Political Affairs Directorate General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Igor Slobodník, *Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic*.

Foreign Policy in 2008, cited in Július Lőrincz, 91.

¹⁷¹ Július Lőrincz, 89.

September 2008 the minister of foreign affairs, Ján Kubiš, visited Pristina and met with Fatmir Sejdiu, the president of Kosovo and the foreign minister. Importantly, Slovakia participates in the EU's EULEX mission and in the KFOR operation in Kosovo, and has decided to recognize passports issued by the Kosovar government.¹⁷² In addition, Slovakia grants Schengen visas to Kosovo citizens and receives students from Kosovo.¹⁷³

Czech Republic

In contrast to Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland recognized Kosovo's independence, however in both countries the issue caused significant political turmoil. In the Czech Republic, the Kosovo question divided the government as various ministers held opposing views on the matter. While foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg and prime minister Mirek Topolánek supported recognition, the smaller coalition partners, the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and the Greens, as well as a significant part of the prime minister's party, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) opposed it.¹⁷⁴ According to the Christian Democrats' reasoning, recognition could harm good relations with Serbia while they also expressed concerns about the situation of the Kosovo Serb minority. Jiří Paroubek, the leader of the opposition Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the communists and state president Klaus were also against recognition. Opposition mps even organized a petition against recognition, which was signed by more than 50 deputies.¹⁷⁵ This strong political resistance somewhat mirrored public opinion, which was in general more favorable to the Serbian than to the Albanian side. At the same time, protagonists within the political elite were strongly motivated by their pro-American bias.¹⁷⁶

In the end, Karel Schwarzenberg triumphed and the government reluctantly recognized Kosovo's statehood in May 2008. The prime minister had tried to push through recognition in the Czech government before the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. Although he did not succeed at the time, after the Serbian parliamentary elections in May 2008 encouraged by the pro-EU outcome the government went ahead with recognizing Kosovo. However, the issue has remained highly contested in domestic politics. Many in the Czech Republic sympathized with Serbia as the deputy premier, Alexandr Vondra reckoned at the time. President Klaus reasoned along similar lines by pointing to "the traditional friendly relations between the Czech and Serbian nations,"

¹⁷² Július Lőrincz, 91.

¹⁷³ Presentation of Tomáš Strážay, Budapest, May 2010.

¹⁷⁴ "Government not to recognize Kosovo for the time being, Topolánek," Tanjug, Prague, 25.03.2009, http://www.mfa.gov.rs/Bilteni/Engleski/b260308_e.html#N10.

¹⁷⁵ Czech Republic, The EU New Member States as Agenda Setters in the Enlarged European Union, Country Report, European Policy Initiative, 2009, http://eupi.osi.bg/fce/001/0070/files/CzechRepublicCountryReport_OSI-Sofia_EuPI_April2009_.pdf, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Fipil Tesar, 2.

and emphasizing that the Serbian nation “has always sided with us in time of difficult historic trials”.¹⁷⁷ He even said that he felt ashamed because of the decision, and refused to appoint the Czech ambassador to Kosovo.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, after the fall of Topolánek's minority government, the vice president of the new Czech parliament, Vojtěch Filip hinted at the possibility of reexamining the Czech recognition.¹⁷⁹ (Nevertheless, the foreign ministry has subsequently denied the possibility for such a move.)

Poland

Poland recognized the independence of Kosovo in February 2010 mainly to follow the main Euro-Atlantic policy line. As an official of the foreign ministry commented, it was “an expression of Poland's solidarity with the Euro-Atlantic community.” However, since the president opposed recognition as in his opinion Kosovo's independence could ignite separatism in Georgia, Poland chose not to open a diplomatic mission in Pristina.¹⁸⁰ As president Kaczyński argued, “[t]here is a close cause-and-effect relation between the recognition of Kosovo's independence and Russian decisions on South Ossetia and Abkhazia”.¹⁸¹ The decision was most likely also influenced by the ongoing negotiations with the Americans about the deployment of the anti-missile shield. Polish relations with Serbia were not much affected by the recognition however, reflected by the fact that both the Polish ambassador in Belgrade and the Serbian ambassador in Warsaw remained in their places.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Poland is among those countries which have presented an argumentation on the Kosovo case in front of the International Court of Justice. According to a Polish analyst, this is more of a demonstration targeting the Polish public than an expression of Polish enthusiasm for Kosovo's independence. As the issue was highly controversial in Poland, by arguing in front of the international court the Polish government intended to persuade its citizens that it had good reasons for recognizing Kosovo.¹⁸²

On the whole, Kosovo's independence caused internal divisions in every country and the Visegrad states did not behave as a united block in this case. While Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic decided to follow the Euro-Atlantic mainstream, Slovakia kept its opposing stance. Whereas Slovak politicians emphasized legal arguments as to why

¹⁷⁷ “Czech President Klaus concerned about development in Kosovo.” *ČeskéNoviny.cz*. 2008-02-22. http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=298381.

¹⁷⁸ Filip Tesar, 11.

¹⁷⁹ “New Czech Government could withdraw recognition of Kosovo,” *Tanjug*, 27.03.2009, <http://www.emg.rs/en/news/serbia/83632.html>.

¹⁸⁰ European Stability Initiative, *Debating EU Enlargement – Poland*.

¹⁸¹ “Poland won't open embassy in Priština,” *B92*, 25 September 2008.

¹⁸² Author Interview with Tomasz Żornaczuk, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw, 20.05.2010.

independence was unacceptable, probably their general fear of secessionism was the main reason explaining their negative attitudes owing to the presence of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. While Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia managed to give a response to Kosovo's independence, which did not contradict their national foreign policy interests, Hungary made a decision which potentially could have had serious negative consequences for the state and its citizens.

Conclusions

Altogether, the Visegrad countries' value added to the EU's Balkan policy is twofold: on the one hand, they keep enlargement on the EU's agenda, and make sure that the process is moving forward, which in itself is a crucial contribution. Acting as committed drivers of enlargement can make a difference especially at critical times when some member states lobby for a slow down or when decisions are being made about whether a country could move to a more advanced stage along its accession path. Viewed from this angle, the often heard rhetoric of Hungary and Slovakia about their commitment to the Western Balkans' European future gains a new significance.

On the other hand, the practical assistance the Visegrad states have offered to the Western Balkan countries has been key during their preparation for EU and NATO membership. Hungary has been particularly active as a NATO member in the field of military and security services, helping to reform the state intelligence service and the secret data protection system in Bosnia, as well as granting mentoring services to improve military capabilities to Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia. In addition, Hungary sustains the most intense economic relations with the region, and has become a leading investor well ahead of its Visegrad partners.

Recognizing the importance of the economic dimension of foreign policy, Slovakia has recently made fostering business relations a key priority in its Western Balkan strategy. At the same time, owing to its special political legacy, Slovakia's policy niche has been democratization and civil society development traditionally carried out mostly by Slovak NGOs. The similarity between Slovakia's and Hungary's foreign policy rhetoric and priorities concerning the Western Balkans is striking, and in practice the two countries often act together in the EU bodies. Yet, this convergence hardly ever gets noticed at the level of political public discourse. Despite the recent period of tensions between Slovakia and Hungary, the two countries seem to be each others most natural allies in the Western Balkans, which could be one starting point for building trust and better relations in the future.

While for Hungary and Slovakia the Western Balkans is clearly a top foreign policy priority, the Czech Republic shows a lower level of interest in the region. It is more of a silent supporter, rarely being at the front line of new initiatives or confrontations. The Czech EU presidency was an exceptional time in this regard, as the government actually had a Balkans agenda that it tried to implement (if without much success for reasons that were beyond its control). Poland shows the most skeptical attitude towards Western Balkans' Euro-Atlantic integration, which it only reluctantly supports. Polish foreign policy is often characterized by

the fear that directing too much attention and resources to South East Europe might overshadow the eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy.

Finally the question should be revisited whether there is a Visegrad synergy effect concerning South East Europe. As was demonstrated throughout this paper, supporters of the Western Balkans have managed to influence EU policies while acting together, yet such alliances have not been confined to the Visegrad group. The most committed allies of South East Europe include other states than the Visegrad countries, such as Slovenia and Austria, while among the Visegrad Four Slovakia and Hungary are the ones that can be always counted on. While the Czech Republic and Poland also tend to back initiatives targeting the Western Balkans, they are hardly a leading force, much less so than Slovenia or Austria. Therefore, the circle of the most committed allies of South East Europe does not overlap neatly with the Visegrad group. From the Western Balkan states' point of view, this should not be a problem as long as there are a number of countries in the EU which are supporting their cause. However, it could be a good opportunity for the Visegrad group to enhance its political weight and visibility if the four states could represent the interests of South East Europe in the EU bodies in a more coherent and unified way.

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