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SUMMARY

The origin of the Visegrad cooperation was to transform this group from a NATO membership-delaying group into a NATO membership promoting pressure group, and it worked. However, the European Union accession talks did not favor such cooperation, since the Commission followed – rightly so – a strictly bilateral approach and in the process of joining. Security, where the interests still were close to each other, hardly played any role in the accession process. Since accession to EU IN 2004, there were occasions, where the Visegrad countries acted together, but several security issues, like the relationship to Russia proved even divisive: the Visegrad countries were as divided as the NATO and the European Union.

On the other hand, the some successes of the Visegrad cooperation within the European Union in last years opened the eyes of these leaders to recognize that common initiatives and/or support to individual or partially supported initiatives by the other Visegrad countries are tremendously helpful.

REGIONAL SECURITY INTEGRATION: NORDIC AND VISEGRAD EXPERIENCE

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Security seemed to become less and less important after the fall of Communism and the Soviet Union. Many well established democracies did not understand, why the new democracies, that have just come out from under the Soviet and Warsaw treaty umbrella, are so "paranoid", why they put so much emphasis on security, why don't they understand that the military threat is over and – most importantly – why do they all desperately want to join NATO (even more desperately than joining the European Union).

Then came the war in Yugoslavia and then in Kosovo and after that September 11, 2001. Security again became very important for everybody. Yes, it is a different type of security, not the "old" one, when the "West" faced a huge, but simple threat that was easy to counter: tanks and aircraft were faced with tanks and aircraft, maybe helicopters. Nuclear weapons with nuclear weapons, conventional weapons with conventional weapons, but also with nuclear weapons. The whole situation was very dangerous, but also very stable – at least compared to the current one. Deterrence worked, the enemy was easy to recognize, the threat was easy to present to the public

and therefore the efforts aimed at securing the "West" was relatively easy to sell. Transatlantic relations were also bound to prevail, since the United States, whose number one, two, three, etc. security priority was the containment of the Soviet Union, especially in Europe, was very well aware of the fact that Europe could never be defended against a Soviet attack without the Europeans. And Europeans also knew they have no chance to survive without the United States.

This was the origin of the Visegrad cooperation. The idea came, as so many others, from overseas. The Americans suggested we, the new democracies, especially the – then – most advanced ones, should cooperate and thus bridge the gap between the end of the Warsaw Treaty and the eventual NATO membership – sometimes in the future. The Visegrad countries did not like the idea. We thought – rightly so – that this was aimed at delaying NATO membership. But we had no choice. And then came the genial idea: let's transform this group from a NATO membership-delaying group into a NATO membership promoting pressure group. It worked: the Visegrad countries were the first to join NATO as early as 1999.



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“ Security, where the interests still were close to each other, hardly played any role in the accession process. ”

The security cooperation of the Visegrad countries extended to several related areas, like the CFE Treaty and others. But that was the end of it. The European Union accession talks did not favor such cooperation, since the Commission followed – rightly so – a strictly bilateral approach and in the process of joining the European Union the Visegrad countries had much more diverse and in several cases different interests. Security, where the interests still were close to each other, hardly played any role in the accession process.

After NATO accession (and during European Union accession as well as since 2004) the Visegrad countries found several areas of cooperation within the European Union. None of these was a security issue. There were several occasions, where the Visegrad countries acted together also in security related areas – like their approach to the Iraq war (the letter of the eight) and the debate around MAP participation of Georgia -, but there was no real security issue, where the Visegrad countries closed their ranks as closely as they did during the NATO accession process. Several security issues, like the relationship to Russia proved even divisive: the Visegrad countries were as divided as the NATO and the European Union.

“ The successes of the Visegrad cooperation – where it happened – in the European Union opened the eyes of these leaders to recognize that common initiatives by Visegrad countries are tremendously helpful. ”

The situation has significantly changed by now. First of all, the Governments and to some extent the policies of the Visegrad countries are in the process of change. All Visegrad countries elected center-right Governments, which have developed – well before the elections – good relations, including good personal relations between their leaders. Even more importantly, the successes of the Visegrad cooperation – where it happened – in the European Union (hopefully) opened the eyes of these leaders to recognize that common initiatives and/or support to individual or partially supported initiatives by the other Visegrad countries are tremendously helpful. In fact, this is the only way of putting together successful policies vis-à-vis other members of the European

Union (maybe also NATO). Don't misunderstand: this is not to suggest that the Visegrad group should become and advocate of a “third way” within the European Union. On the contrary: this is the recognition of the requirement to successfully promote, if necessary push our national interests to become common interests of the European Union within the European Union, which, ultimately, strengthens the European Union. As many other members have done to for many years.

It should not mislead us that some members – especially those, who exercise cooperations within the European Union following the same way their national interests - are nervous, when they see that a new cooperation is emerging. They see that this is the very EU-conform way of interest promotion and it is not surprising that they do not like it. They do not like it short term, but long term they will recognize that this is part of the process of maturization of the “new members”, which will make them just like the old members.

In the new situation, however, we believe, there are some security issues, where Visegrad countries share interests and therefore, where their closer cooperation would be useful. The first such area is energy security, where all share the problem of dependence on foreign sources of oil and gas, these external sources being largely Russian. It is – mildly speaking – stupid to suggest – as some do – that this is part of the “Russia paranoia”. Not only the concrete events of the last few years, where the problem became a real one for several days or even weeks, showed that, but also in principle: too much dependence on one single source of energy is always dangerous. Diversification of energy sources and different transit routes is not a political issue, although in this special case, of course, there are some political considerations behind as well. Visegrad countries can find faster and cheaper solutions (some of them only temporary) to this problem through cooperation than building expensive new pipelines, which lasts years or decades.

“ Cooperation of Visegrad countries to address problems of migration is also essential. These countries are not targets of immigration, but they are very important in transit. ”

Second, cooperation of Visegrad countries to address problems of migration is also essential. These countries are not (yet) targets of immigration (this will change in the next few years), but they are very

important in transit. Similarly, international organized crime uses the territory – and in many cases the criminal networks of these countries – for their own purposes and only through their cooperation can this problem be attacked. This cooperation, as much as cooperation in other areas, must ultimately be integrated into the European Union- and NATO-wide cooperation of European countries, but the Visegrad countries should be the nucleus of such cooperation.

Thirdly, all Visegrad countries suffer of the fact that participation in international missions – be it NATO or European union – puts a multiple burden on those countries, who are willing and capable of fulfilling what they feel is their obligation vis-à-vis the international community. If we decide to contribute military force to a, NATO- or European Union-led international mission, we will have to contribute the troops, their equipment, and logistics, take the political responsibility vis-à-vis our own publics and pay all the expenses of the participation. This is not only unfair and unjust, but is also deterring more and more countries from such decisions. Therefore, both NATO and the European Union will have to think how to reform this system and move towards more common action: common planning, common logistics and common financing.

The Visegrad countries are strongly interested in such progress. Therefore, we believe, such an initiative by them would be in their national interest and would have much more chances to success than the current situation, when no one country dares to come up with such “revolutionary” ideas.

These are just a few ideas, where security cooperation between the Visegrad countries could be strengthened and would be strengthened in such a way that would make the NATO and the European Union stronger and more effective.

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Globsec Paper Series provides Slovak and broader security community with policy recommendations by decision and opinion- makers throughout Euro-Atlantic. Their aim is to foster the discussion on current international security issues and transatlantic agenda bringing upon critical assessment the topic.

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The Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAC) is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organization which deals with national and international security issues. Aim of the Slovak Atlantic Commission is to support constructive and active involvement of the Slovak Republic in international affairs with emphasis on cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic community, support of transatlantic cooperation and effective implementation of foreign and security policy of SR through building a net of individuals and institutions (state, non-governmental and private), unified in strong security community. The Slovak Atlantic Commission represents a net of leaders who bring ideas to power and give power to ideas.