1. INTRODUCTION

The end of Cold War left Central Europe facing rediscovered tensions, but with little training in co-operation. Bilateral, regional and sub-regional co-operation,² both at the intergovernmental and trans-frontier levels for example between the BENELUX countries and between Nordic Countries, has been an integral part of the process of European integration since 1945, but it was relatively underdeveloped in Central Europe.

Since the end of Cold War, countries of the Central Eastern Europe [CEEC] have been searching for their new identity. In the course of self-identification, they have decided to build a coalition first of political and then of economic nature. The co-operation, which called itself Visegrád group, on one side aimed to be perceived by other European states as a single voice on the way to further integration with Western Europe. On the other side – it acted as a backyard for practising democratic mechanisms. In both cases such co-operation was truly welcomed in the Western world.

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² Regional co-operation means collaboration of states within definite region for affirmation of peace, security, stabilisation and economic development. Narrowing this form of collaboration to a part of region is described as sub-regional co-operation. Smolski, Marek and others. 1999. Słownik Encyklopedyczny Edukacja Obywatelska. Wyd. Europa.
In December 2002 in Copenhagen, the European Council confirmed readiness of all candidates countries of Visegrád group to access the European Union, but yet it seems, that there is still a lot to be done for regional co-operation to be effective. Even though the process of overcoming artificial dividing lines in Europe through incorporation of CEEC into the European Union has just recently come to an end,³ one may start to wonder what should come next. The CEEC countries – and to be more specific – Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, which are members of Visegrád group, accepted in European Union may not necessary find a will to co-operate closely with each other in order to achieve common goals. Instead they may prefer to concentrate on their own national interests. Or – to take the other side of the coin – they may want to follow example of Nordic and BEN-ELUX countries and try to impose their interest on the European arena en bloc. There are few possibility for the future of the Visegrád group.

On the following pages, I would like to analyse possible after-enlargement scenarios, which are to be verified from now on in relation to the Visegrád co-operation and try to guess the role of Poland in this grouping in the enlarged Union. In order to introduce the above mentioned aspects I will explain the historical background of this co-operation and present two forms of it: political and economic constructions with special attention given to the first of the mentioned forms. While doing so, I will draw attention also to the Copenhagen summit of December 2002 – which by some may be considered as the true end of Visegrád group, for other as a push towards more effective co-operation among the Four in the enlarged Union.

While working on this paper, I have noticed two facts worth mentioning. On one side the area of my current interest in its complexity seems to be rather extensive. On the other, though contrary to my assumptions, it seems that the subject at the present time is neither of primary nor secondary concern to the scholars.

Due to the lack of recent literature focusing on a place of Visegrád group in enlarged Union my research may not necessary be completed, however, I believe it may become a contribution to the discussion which will soon surely arise in relation to the CEEC co-operation with European structures in a bigger EU.

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³ One may consider that this process has already come to an end with Copenhagen summit in December 2002. However, it is the 1st May 2004 that enlargement is completed and the CEEC are integrated (whether partially or fully) into European Union.
2. 1991 AND THE NEED OF CLOSER CO-OPERATION

Visegrád Group was created in Hungarian city of Visegrád on February 15th, 1991. Originally group was called Visegrád Troika (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland). From 1993 onwards ‘Visegrád Four’ has been used as an unofficial name (a split of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic occurred in 1993).⁴ During a meeting in Visegrád, President of CSFR – Vaclav Havel, the Prime Minister of Hungary – Jozsef Antall, and the President of Poland – Lech Wałęsa, signed a declaration on a close co-operation of those countries on their way to the European integration.

The co-operation had a political character and was intended to facilitate the countries’ transition from a totalitarian regime to a plural and democratic society. The basic objectives included:⁵

1) full restitution of state independence, democracy and freedom
2) elimination of all existing social, economic and spiritual aspects of the totalitarian system
3) construction of a parliamentary democracy, a modern State of Law, respect for human rights and freedoms
4) creation of a modern free market economy
5) full involvement in the European political and economic system, as well as a system of security and legislation.

One of the objectives included creation of a modern free market economy. This goal obtained a more institutionalised form.

In June 1991 the members of Visegrád group signed the agreement with OECD. In May 1992, presidents: Lech Wałęsa, Jozsef Antall and Vaclav Havel decided that ten years later there would be no customs imposed among group members. In December 1992 the first ‘child’ of Visegrád group was established – namely: CEFTA.

Since then – there have been two types of regional co-operation – political and economic. It is hard to separate trade from politics. CEFTA could be an example of such separation although “decisive impact [on creation of the collaboration] did not come from economic, but from political and security considerations.”⁶

Throughout the years economic co-operation has developed itself away from political collaboration. While in the course of 90’s political construction was

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⁴ www.visegradgroup.org
⁵ Declaration on co-operation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European Integration. Visegrád, the 15th February 1991.
dangerously falling apart,\textsuperscript{7} CEFTA was unveiling its wings to strengthen its existence. Two factors played “catalytic role”.\textsuperscript{8} “On the one hand, the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [CMEA]\textsuperscript{9} generated the idea of regional co-operation in order to avoid the adverse impacts of the abolition of the old trading system and save at least part of the traditional co-operation network. In addition, the abolition of the CMEA automatically imposed MFN treatment on intra-regional trade, which was clearly inferior both to the previous CMEA system and to the trade framework offered by the EC in the Association Agreement.”\textsuperscript{10}

From the Visegrád group countries’ perspective, CEFTA has been created in order to repair trade relations between the countries of the region and not only focus on the relation with western countries. As perceived by Brussels it was a “school of a good trade prior to the accession of the new member states.”\textsuperscript{11}

Today it is know that economic co-operation among CEEC has achieved its objectives although not to its full extend.\textsuperscript{12} CEFTA members are partners belonging to second ten of the exporters and importers among themselves. The contribution of the CEFTA members to the trade relations with Poland comes out to be only 10 %.\textsuperscript{13} Only Czech Republic appears to be in first ten exporters and importers in relation to Poland. It is still the European Union that plays the crucial role in the trade relations with CEFTA countries.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{7} The political construction was falling apart until Prime Ministers’ summit in Bratislava in 1999. During this meeting, the revitalisation of the group occurred and the elements of co-operation were clearly specified. www.visegradgroup.org Contents of Visegrád co-operation approved by the Prime Ministers’ summit Bratislava, 14th May 1999
\textsuperscript{8} Inotai 1995: 162
\textsuperscript{9} The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [CMEA] was created in 1949 by Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Poland, Romania, Hungary Soviet Union. From 1962 Mongolia became a member, then Cuba (1972) and Vietnam (1978). The CMEA practically ceased to exist in 1989, although formally it was abolished in 1991.
\textsuperscript{10} Inotai 1995:162
\textsuperscript{11} Inotai 1995:162
\textsuperscript{12} Pawlicki, Jacek. 2001. \textit{CEFTA jest najlepszym owocem współpracy politycznej grupy Wyszehradzkiej [CEFTA is the best fruit of political co-operation inside the Visegrad Group]}, "Gazeta Wyborcza." 12. 01. Webside: www.gazeta.pl
\textsuperscript{13} Op. cit. Pawlicki
\textsuperscript{14} Op. cit. Pawlicki
3. POLITICAL CO-OPERATION IN THE VISEGRÁD GROUP

The co-operation of the Countries of Visegrád – was of a ‘symbolic value,’ as was said by Janos Martonyi, exemplifying at the same time the flexibility and the capacity for self – accommodation of the Central European thinking.

The political co-operation, established in the form of Visegrád group sent “an important and positive message towards the international community.” Looking back it is possible to admit that the group proved that the Central European region “was able and ready to co-operate in fundamental issues; that it accepted the internationally valid rules of the game and that it did not tend to aggravate local and regional conflicts – the consequences of which would had spread beyond the area.”

The co-operation was actually launched on the EC’s advice and established only between the certain countries although, as underlined, from the beginning it was open for other “new democracies living under conditions similar to theirs.” The implicit aim though, was to make sure not to have “enlargement, which would delay their [Visegrád group] accession to the EC.” Till now the number of countries has not however increased since the Four have found it difficult to work together and would have found it impossible in case of further enlargement of their group.

One of the reasons why the political co-operation has not been permanently successful, is the prevalence of national interests over the regional ones. In declaration of 1991, the countries stated: “The signatories of the Declaration shall jointly undertake the following practical steps: 1) in accordance with the interests of the particular countries they shall harmonise their activities to shape co-operation and close contacts with the European institution and 2) shall hold regular consultations on the matters of their security [...]”

Statement proposed in such way has naturally become an ‘open gate’ for those, who needed to leave the coalition ‘just for a moment.’

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16 Inotai 1995: 166
17 Inotai 1995: 166
18 Inotai 1995: 162; Izik Hedri 1993: 11
19 Izik Hedri 1993: 12
21 Declaration on co-operation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in striving for European Integration. Visegrád. 15th February, 1991
Each country in 12-year history of Visegrád group has left the coalition in order to achieve its own national goals prior to lobbying for regional interest. Poland does not belong to the exception and there are reasons for that.

4. POLAND AND THE VISEGRÁD GROUP

Poland is the biggest country as far as population is considered (38.8 millions) among the four, accounting for almost 60% of the population of whole Visegrád Group (64.7 millions in total). Such size does play a role. Karel Sztindl, ambassador of Czech Republic in Poland admitted in an interview given in 1999: “There are some people, who think, that forty-million Poland does not have to take into consideration the dwarfs like Czechs or Hungarian. This arrogance, however is only small but irritating margin. Both in Warsaw and in Prague political power does realise, that we have common interests and therefore both honestly wish to cooperate in manner profitable for every side.”

In addition to the size of the population, the Polish primary interests are different from those of its partners. There are common grounds such as education, culture, science, technology, environment and infrastructure, however they are not the core of political activity.

Poland, being a large size country, is agriculture orientated, whereas the other countries focus more often on the industry. This difference played a major role in specifying approach towards the negotiations with European Union over the accession of candidate states and conditions of future existence in enlarged Union.

During the final negotiations in Copenhagen in December 2002, the goal of Visegrád group did not change, however the final conditions on which states were to integrate into the EU did alter depending on a given country. As it was stated by the Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller: “Our [Polish] objective is not only to join

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22 The same applies to the area of the country. Poland has the biggest surface: 58.6% of Visegrád (312.7000 km squared), Hungary 17.4 % (93.0000 km squared), Czech Republic 14.8 % (78.9000 km squared) and Slovakia 9.2% (49.0000 km squared) of the whole area of the Visegrad group. Source: Inotai 1995:173.


25 All mentioned elements come from document: Contents of Visegrád co-operation approved by the Prime Ministers’ summit in Bratislava, 14th May 1999.

26 For Poland, agricultural sector was one of the last chapters to be closed in the course of negotiations.
the EU but also to join under the best possible conditions.”²⁷ Until the final negotiations occurred one could speak more less of the same tactic among members of the Visegrád group – but at the final point the national interests prevailed²⁸ as it could be seen in the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit²⁹ and daily press cover of this event – which stated in Poland:³⁰ “We still want more then they are giving to us,” “A common tactic, solidarity only in words,” “Everybody was looking at Poland” and in the Czech Republic: “Eight CEEC respond with a mix of celebration and realism to their invitation to join the European Union,” “Czechs slam Poles as East Europe EU unity fractures.”

In January 2003 – hence few weeks after the negotiations – the Visegrád group revitalised itself. Again – there has been a number of official statements supporting the future existence of such regional co-operation.³¹ The Polish newspapers stated: “The wonderful feeling of freedom,” “Our regional co-operation cannot end together with full membership of or countries in NATO and the European Union,” “Like BENELUX,” “Poland and Hungary to lobby for Warsaw – Budapest motorway corridor.”

On the 1st of May this year, Poland and other Visegrád countries have entered the European Union. The questions which may be asked at this point looking at the experience of approaching the Union by the 4V, are following: Will Visegrád group exist in enlarged Europe and if so – how will it look like? What could be the common interest of such coalition?

²⁹ The outcome of the Copenhagen Summit achieved primarily in the course of final negotiations is that for example Slovakia will receive in the year 2004–2006 the amount of 750 mln euro netto direct transfers from Brussels, Czech Republic – 170 mln euro netto, while Poland have obtained the amount of 6,4 mld euro netto. Source: Bielecki Jadwiga and Andrzej Niewiadomski. 2002. Wspólna taktyska; solidarność tylko w słowach [a common tactics, solidarity only in words], “Rzeczpospolita” 12 December
³⁰ All mentioned titles are included in my bibliography at the end of the paper.
5. THE VISEGRÁD GROUP IN ENLARGED UNION?

The Visegrád countries, after years of transformation both on internal level and international arena have entered the European organism in which cooperation is a base for self-development. Will they find the strength and willingness to cooperate?

- Their co-operation has few paths to choose in near future.

Scenario 1. Visegrád group will cease to exist in enlarged Union

This would be a scenario, which in my opinion will not occur.

The Visegrád group is of a political character. The European Community, with existing regional coalitions such as BENELUX and Nordic countries, will not oppose functioning of another interest group. Instead, it may provide support to deepen regional co-operation among the CEEC since, to mention few of the arguments, it is easier, more transparent (as far as visibility of national interests is concerned) and more efficient to find solution with international coalition of states then to cope with each state separately.

Since the Visegrád group is of political character, the heads of state will always find profitable to underline similarities with neighbouring countries. A year ago – the politicians of the Four countries met to discuss future common interests which included: joint air defence (Czech and Slovak co-operation), raising the economic level in respective countries, best possible use of EU funds, armament industry, joint projects as transportation, unified build up of a Schengen border, response to globalisation and fight against international terrorism.³² As Hungarian chancellery minister Elmer Kiss stated: “The Visegrád co-operation will be necessary even after the EU accession. [...] In the run up to the accession, the politicians of the Visegrád group countries approach more or less identically the issues that affect all of us. It is obvious that following the entry new, co-operation opportunities will present themselves because there will be such shared interests in the Central European region that will have to asserted in the EU’ decision-making mechanism, too.”³³

Just recently in November last year, Rudolf Schuster, the president of Slovakia declared: “Visegrád has lived, lives and will live after the accession to the Union.”³⁴

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³³ Visegrád Four co-operation needed even after EU entry – Hungarian minister. Text of report by Hungarian radio on 7 December. BBC Monitoring European. 7 December 2002.
The opinions of politicians from the Visegrád group about their co-operation, despite the weak moments in history (such as the Copenhagen summit) and sometimes less favourable commentaries in press articles,³⁵ are rather constant and show their will to co-operate. Thus, another scenario shall be considered.

II Scenario. The Visegrád Group will become an active participant of political life of the European Union.

In this scenario, the Visegrád Group may either become a ‘dwarf’ (not influencing the EU politics) or a ‘giant’ on the European political scene. Becoming a giant would mean that “the Visegrád group and BENELUX will rule the EU.”³⁶

Already during the V4 summit in Slovakia in December 2002 Prime ministers decided in their official statement to “redraft their agreement and present their interests in the EU as a bloc similar to the BENELUX states.”³⁷

This stated has been reaffirmed by each president of Visegrád country in November 2003.³⁸

According to some,³⁹ in order to act as giant, the Visegrád Four needs a further institutionalisation. One of the proposals suggests to appoint Vaclav Havel as an ambassador of the Visegrád Group in Brussels.⁴⁰ The other one includes: the establishment of a permanent committee made up of ambassadors of the V4 countries and according to current needs, other representatives of the governments of the four countries which could be involved.⁴¹

At the moment, there is only one formalised functioning structure of the Visegrád group, namely: International Visegrád Fund, which has been created in year 2000. It is a fact that establishment of the Fund, creation of legal framework, equipping it with administrative machinery and providing it with money flowing directly

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³⁷ Visegrád countries to cooperate like BENELUX states, summit agrees. Text of report by Hungarian Duna Tv on 7 December. BBC Monitoring European. 8 December
⁴¹ Party of Hungarian Coalition SMK’s Bugar says only coordinated Visegrád Group can be strong. 2002. SITA Slovenska Tlacova Agentura, 11 December
from the Four, was necessary for revitalising the co-operation. Another sign of will to reaffirm the will to co-operate, can be perceived in this year declaration of creating Visegrád Culture Fund as another organism of the V4.⁴²

On the other hand, until now whichever successes of Visegrád Group one would like to talk about, it has to be admitted that they happened only on the bases of Joint Declaration of 1991 refusing concept of institutionalisation of the co-operation. Therefore it is necessary to remember not to transform the V4 into “bureaucratic machinery” while keeping it alive.

As the recent events show, the V4 has a strong bases for its development. There are common goals to be accomplished in enlarged Europe (inter alia battle for full openness of labour EU markets for the incoming countries) and the politicians seems to be willing to cooperate.

In April 2004, the Czech prime minister, Vladimir Szpidla underlined that among the V4 there is “a common approach to many points.”⁴³

The politicians realise that in the enlarged Union they will be better off while working together: “We do not have to talk with one voice, but in the EU we will do more while acting collectively than individually.”⁴⁴

6. CONCLUSION

The first stage of regional co-operation among CEEC has been terminated. The goals defined 12 years ago have been achieved. They included entry of V4 countries into NATO and accession to the European Union. Now the time has come to redefine the aims and search for common interests but from the wider – European perspective.

More the European Union enlarge – embracing a number of European states – more it will support regional co-operation for the sake of self management and efficiency. The effectiveness of this method is already visible in case of BENELUX and NORDIC countries.

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Until now the Visegrád group has tried to find the balance between national interests and goals of the Central-Eastern Europe. Unfortunately not always with success.

Poland may play an important role in the enlarged Europe and in Visegrád group as it has done so far on regional level. Poland’s contribution to the EU could be for example in form of explanation of experiences from its own relations with East European countries, as Poland is propagating the concept of EU’s Eastern dimension.

Looking at the past experience and its way to the Union, it is possible to presume that Poland will swing away again in order to take care of its own national interests, but it can be believed that it won’t be the only country to do that among the V4. Being in the European Union gives possibility of a range of coalitions not only within the region of Central – Eastern Europe. In such circumstance, it has to be kept in mind that countries of Central-Eastern Europe are examples of new democracies in which this form of co-operation still need to undergo certain transformation as the mentalities of civil societies in the CEEC develop towards democratic model of governance. Thus all coalitions and not only among V4 cannot be excluded as a field for further education in regional co-operation.

Keeping the above in mind, the good prophecy for the future of the collaboration within Visegrád Four is that there is public⁴⁵ and political support of this kind of co-operation on the regional and European level.⁴⁶ Thus, there are two elements essential for its effectiveness. The months ahead will show which of the scenarios will win.

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⁴⁵ "Just what Visegrád means is only known to 52% of Slovaks, 35% of Hungarians, 32% of Czechs and 27% of Poles. Paradoxically over half of those polled (75% in Slovakia, 50% in the Czech Republic and Hungary) said that the co-operation makes sense,” (in:) Visegrád largely ignored by public – poll. CTK Ceska Tiskova Kancelar Daily News. 27 November 2002. "Over half habitants of Slovakia, Poland and Hungary wants further co-operation in the framework of Visgrád Group after accession of their countries to the EU. The need of co-operation after enlargement is declared by nearly half of Czech population". Cited in "Rzeczpospolita", (in:) Tak dla Wyszehradu. [Yes for Visegrád]. Serwis o Unii Europejskiej PAP SA.http://euro.pap.com.pl/cgi-bin/europap.pl?ID=50660


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