

Can the V4's Priorities Shape "Europe's Priorities"? (2) **The Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027**

Alakíthatják-e a V4-es prioritások „Európai prioritásait”? (2.)
A 2021–2027-es időszakra szóló többéves pénzügyi keret

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Abstract: The proposal on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027 has been defined along “Europe’s priorities” by the European Commission (2018) and will be the first long-term budget for the European Union of 27. In the political debate of the budget, the Visegrád Group or V4 countries represent a strong alliance on several dimensions. The research objective was to decide whether the V4’s priorities could shape Europe’s Priorities in the MFF 2021–2027 and to see how the priorities in the proposal were reflected by the members’ communication or opinion in the EU institutions. To this end, it implemented a multi-qualitative design: data elaboration (from a former research) and data generation (semi-structured interview), to which thematic analyses were applied. The most important conclusions were that the individuals’ opinion at the EU institutions could differ from the organisational manifestation, which had the potential for the V4 countries to enforce their interests in the debate; the Visegrád Group had a strong “enforcement capability” to shape Europe’s priorities (i.e. in Migration and Border Management); compromise on behalf of the EU member states would be needed the most at discussing the migration. The paper had a complementary function to the formerly published research with the same title, and provided implications mainly for the Visegrád Group, the EU institutions and the EU member states.

Összefoglalás: A 2021–2027-es többéves pénzügyi keretre vonatkozó javaslatot az Európai Bizottság „Európa prioritásai” mentén határozta meg (2018), s az az Európai Unió 27 tagállamának első hosszú távú költségvetése lesz. A Visegrádi Csoport vagy V4-ek számos dimenzióban erős szövetséget képviselnek a költségvetéssel kapcsolatos politikai vitákban. A kutatás célja az volt, hogy kiderüljön, vajon a V4-ek prioritásai alakíthatják-e Európa prioritásait a 2021–2027-es többéves pénzügyi keretben, és lássuk, mennyiben tükrözi a javaslat prioritásait a tagok kommunikációja vagy véleménye az uniós intézményekben. E célból multi-kvalitatív designnal dolgoztam: adatfeldolgozással (egy korábbi kutatásból) és adatgenerálással (félstrukturált interjú készítésével), amelyeken tematikus elemzést alkalmaztam. A legfontosabb következtetés, hogy az egyének véleménye eltérhet az uniós intézményekben történő szervezeti megnyilvánulástól, ami a V4-ek számára lehetőséget jelent az érdekeik érvényesítésére a vitában; a Visegrádi Csoport erős „kikényszerítési képességgel” rendelkezik Európa prioritásainak alakításában (a migráció és a határigazgatás téren); kompromisszumra leginkább a migráció megvitatásakor van szükségük az EU-tagállamoknak. A tanulmány kiegészíti a korábban ugyanezen címmel közzétett kutatást, és főként a Visegrádi Csoport, az EU intézményei és az EU tagállamai számára jelent hozzájárulást.



INTRODUCTION

The current study is the second part to the author's former writing, [Can the V4's Priorities shape "Europe's Priorities"? The Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027](#). Its research context is the upcoming long-term budget of the European Union (EU), the [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2021–2027](#). The significance of the study is increased by the fact that [this is going to be the first budget for the EU of 27](#), while its actuality is given by the [ongoing debate on the political priorities of the framework](#). The research focus reflects on the [European Commission's \(EC\) proposal on the MFF](#), defined as "A Modern Budget for a Union That Protects, Empowers and Defends" which was determined along "Europe's priorities". In the debate, the [Visegrád Group or V4 countries](#) (i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Poland) represent a strong [historical alliance on several dimensions](#) from geography through politics and economics to culture.

The [original research objective](#) continues in the current study by focusing on the fourth research question and extending the study to a fifth one. Hence, it aims to „decide whether the V4's priorities can shape „Europe's priorities" in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027" and reply „How could the V4 enforce its interests in the debate?" and „How the priorities in the EC's proposal are reflected by its (or other EU institutions') members' communication or opinion?".

The reason is that the first („What are the EC's priorities in the MFF 2021–2027?") and second questions („How are the EC's priorities related to Europe's priorities?") were replied by content analysis on the secondary data from the European Commission's official communication ([Communication from the Commission. A new, modern Multiannual Financial Framework for a European Union that delivers efficiently on its priorities post-2020; Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Region. A Modern Budget for a Union that Protects, Empowers and Defends](#)), and the third question („What are the V4's priorities in the MFF 2021–2027?") was replied by thematic analysis on the semi-structured personal interviews with officials from the permanent representations of the V4 countries (Czechia, Hungary and Poland).

The fourth research question had to be examined in a mixed-design interview matrix by using the primary data from the V4 representatives and the secondary data from the EC as the representatives of the European Commission or the Parliament did not agree to an interview on the topic at the time. However, since the submission of the research ([first part](#)) to EUROPEUM, an internet-mediated interview could be taken with a member of the European Parliament (MEP), which offers an excellent opportunity to compare the primary and secondary data from the EU's institutions, and to re-analyse and complete the final results of the first part.

Therefore, below a brief reminder is taken on the main findings related to the first two research questions, then the interview matrix is elaborated from the first part and completed with the results of the thematic analysis taken on the new interview. Similarly, a matrix displays the enforcement capability of the V4 countries in the view of the refreshed findings.

MAIN FINDINGS ON [THE EC'S VS EUROPE'S PRIORITIES IN THE MFF 2021–2027](#)

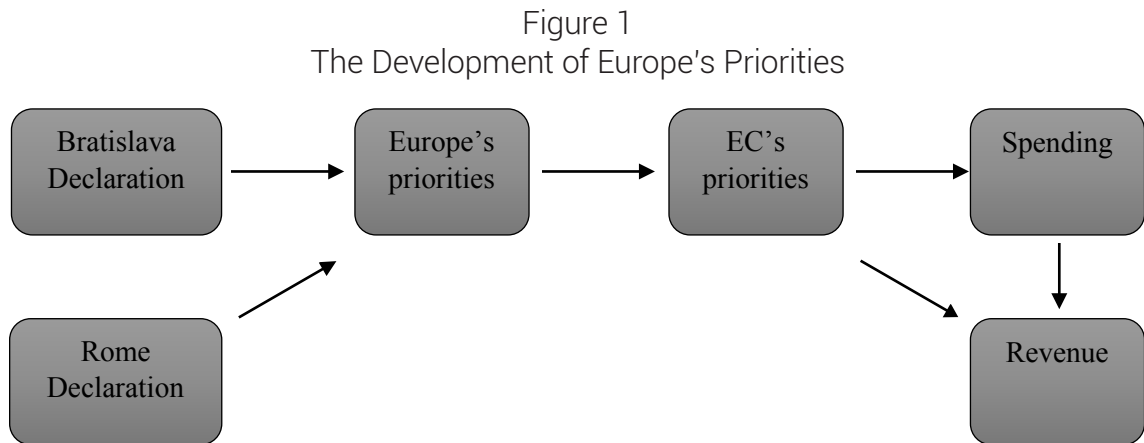
The main findings on the EC's versus Europe's priorities in the MFF 2021–2027 revealed that the EC referred to the priorities of the budget in three different ways in the examined documents, where (1) the Union's political priorities were represented by the European Institutions, (2) Europe's priorities concerned two declarations ([Bratislava Declaration in 2016](#), [Rome Declaration in 2017](#)) signed by each of the member states, and (3) the Europeans' priorities accounted for the Union's citizens' views. Therefore, the political priorities meant only a set of the entire priorities. Furthermore, along the examination of the declarations, the member states' priorities were found to be different from the EC's priorities, concluding that the priorities set by the EC were later simply named as "Europe's priorities".

The EC's "key crossing priorities" did not cover all headings, which referred to a "prioritization" among the spending priorities. The following five headings were given a higher priority over the other seven ones: Single Market, Innovation and Digital; Cohesion and Values; Migration and Border Management; Security and Defence; Neighbourhood and the World. Herein, two main contradictions could be found: (a) higher priority for Cohesion Policy versus proposal on cutting its budget – which, on the other hand, could also reflect that cutting the budget did not necessarily equate a decrease in the political importance –; (b) cutting the budget of CAP and Cohesion Policy versus proposal on establishing new Own Resources – which referred to that if these new resources would have been there to finance predominantly the new priorities in the MFF, the need for reducing the budget of traditional policies was not well-justified.

Among the headings with lower priorities, the proposal on increasing the budget of the European Public Administration completely lacked in explanation: (1) the declarations did not take into account the member states' will to increase the resources for the administration, hence making it fall out of the scope of Europe's priorities; (2) the new priorities did not necessarily extend the old priorities, instead reconfigured them quite significantly, while the proposal was described as a consequence of new priorities; (3) the comparison of the number of programmes in the present and future budgets revealed that the [MFF 2014–2020 included 50 programmes under 6 headings](#), while the [MFF 2021–2017 proposes 42 programmes under 7 headings](#).



Finally, Figure 1 on the development of Europe's priorities is elaborated, which was drawn up along the results of the content analysis. It reflects that the two declarations led to set Europe's new priorities (or challenges and objectives), which were adapted by the EC to extend the old ones, and to propose the overall priorities of the MFF. These first determined the spending, then the revenue side of the budget, where the spending priorities partially mirrored Europe's priorities.



PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION FROM THE EU INSTITUTIONS

The primary data was collected through an internet-mediated interview with a MEP from the CONT Committee on Budgetary Control in August, 2018. Due to the internet-mediation, the interviewer errors and effects could be minimized and no participant feedback was necessary; on the other hand, the chance for interviewee errors remained relatively high. The structure of the interview followed the one taken with the officials from the permanent representations of the V4 countries in the form of a semi-structured interview, while the interview questions were modified to meet the objective of the research. Similarly, in consistency with the other interviews, it is presented anonymously. The interview extract with the member of the European Parliament can be read below.

1. The Commission's Communication has set the budget to „Europe's priorities“. The budget has 7+ headings (I. Single market, innovation and digital; II. Cohesion and values; III. Natural resources and environment; IV. Migration and border management; V. Security and defence; VI. Neighbourhood and the world; VII. European public administration; VII+. Instruments outside the MFF ceilings.), under which 17+ political clusters are listed from 1. Research and Innovation to 17. European Public Administration (the 17+ e.g. EU Solidarity Fund, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund). Among the 17+ political clusters of the budget which 5-5 do you consider with a relevantly higher and lower priority currently for Europe? Please explain why.

High priority

§ Research and Innovation; Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values; Single Market; Regional Development and Cohesion; Environment and Climate Action

§ Explanation: To secure prosperous and sustainable living conditions for Europeans, we have to invest in future. That means investing in education, research and innovation, single market as a means of unrestricted transfer of basic EU freedoms. Investment to improve the environment for future generations is vital facing recent climate changes.

Low priority

§ Economic and Monetary Union; Space; European Public Administration; External Action; Defense

§ Explanation: Higher integration of Member States is welcomed, but for now I do not believe is the right time to tighten economic and monetary actions given the diverse economic situation of Member States. I believe that stabilization and diminishing regional disparities must come first. Focus on internal issues should be of highest priority. Mentioned political clusters are, in my opinion, marginal topics that can be resolved quickly and therefore can be given lower priority.

2. In which 5-5 clusters do you see the most and the least convergence among the member states of the European Union? Please explain why.

The most

§ Border Management (in the means of removing internal borders and higher protection of external borders); Regional Development and Cohesion (the EU funding of Regions, the cohesion policy, is crucial to remove disparities between not only regions but also member States – based on statistical data we can assume, that the “scissor” effect is trickling away); Research and Innovation (due to forced – and vital – cooperation of different stakeholders in the area, the convergence is undergoing an evolution); Agriculture and Maritime Policy (due to common efforts to protect our maritime and agriculture against external shocks, the united approach to face such is helping the convergence among member States even though the difference in national subventions are lowering the over-all effect); Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values (due to unified acknowledging of education, experience, social aspects of life and personal values).

The least

§ Single Market (due to protectionist efforts of Member States); Economic and Monetary Union (due to different economic backgrounds and efforts of Member States and almost zero enforcement of meeting the set economic and monetary values); Migration (due to different views on future aspects and effects of economic and non-economic migration); Crisis Response (given the nature of difference in crisis types among the member States and different perception of them); Environment and Climate Action (due to economic interests of Member States, the convergence rate is not the same across Europe).



3. Do you see any possibility for compromises in the clusters with the least convergence? If yes, by what kind of considerations or under what conditions? If not, please explain why.

I believe there is always a possibility for compromises, especially when it concerns our ability to remain a strong economic leader in the world. We have to continue changing our point of view on the EU as entity, that is simply giving and taking based on actual needs. The right point of view is focus on future, where only strong and united global players will be successful. We have to aim at European added value as an investment in future of all Europeans – the future of Europe is not via single countries protecting theirs concerns but as a strong and united union of member states, that cherish values and are not afraid to invest in future gains.

4. Concerning the Visegrád 4 (V4) countries' interests or priorities, in which 5-5 clusters do you see the most and the least convergence towards Europe's priorities? Please explain why.

As the V4 countries are Member States of the EU, I believe that Europe's priorities are converging to the V4 countries' interests or priorities. Recently, the Migration and Border Management priorities were taken into account by the EU institutions as well as continuing efforts in single market's freedoms compliance.

5. Do you see any possibility for compromises in the clusters with the least convergence on behalf of either the V4 or the other member states of the European Union? If yes, by what kind of considerations or under what conditions? If not, please explain why.

See previous answer.

COMPARISON OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA FROM THE EU INSTITUTIONS

The matrix (Table 1) displays the comparison of primary and secondary data from the EU Institutions. Upon collection, the generated data has been structured and cleaned for the matrix. The secondary data was elaborated from the [first part of the research](#) that had been based on the EC's proposal.

Table 1
Matrix for the Comparison of Primary and Secondary Data from the EU
Institutions

	EU primary	EU secondary
<i>Higher priority for the EU</i>	1, 3, 5, 7, 9	Headings: I, II, IV, V, VI. Or key crossing: digital economy, sustainability, security, migration, human capital and skills, support for small businesses and innovation
<i>Lower priority for the EU</i>	4, 6, 13, 15, 17	Headings: III, VII, VII+
<i>Most convergence among EU member states</i>	1, 5, 7, 8, 11	Europe's priorities -Bratislava Declaration, 2016: migration and external borders; internal and external security; external security and defence; economic and social development, youth. -Rome Declaration, 2017: a safe and secure Europe; a prosperous and sustainable Europe; social Europe; a stronger Europe on the global scene. (The content of the declarations is not extensive as they omit budgetary or executive considerations.)
<i>Least convergence among EU member states</i>	3, 6, 9, 10, 14	Allocation method
<i>Compromise on the least</i>	Always.	-
<i>Most convergence between V4's and Europe's priorities</i>	IV (10-11), 3	-
<i>Least convergence between V4's and Europe's priorities</i>	-	-
<i>Compromise on the least</i>	See previous answer.	-

The clusters with higher priority suggested by the primary data show similarities with the findings in the secondary data (prioritized headings, not the key crossing priorities): clusters 1 and 3 (Research and Innovation, Single Market) correspond to the first heading, clusters 5 and 7 (Regional Development and Cohesion, Investing



in People, Social Cohesion and Values) correspond to the second heading. However, cluster 9 (Environment and Climate Action) would correspond to the third heading, which was not found in the secondary data with higher priority, and no clusters from headings IV-V-VI were suggested by the interviewee. This choice was explained by the fact that securing 'prosperous and sustainable living conditions for Europeans', the EU had to invest in future. Herein, the investment referred to an 'unrestricted transfer of basic EU freedoms' on one hand, and to the improvement of the environment for future generations, on the other hand.

The clusters with lower priority suggested by the primary data do not show similarities with the findings in the secondary data, except at cluster 17 (European Public Administration), which corresponds to the heading VII. The clusters 4, 6, 13 and 15 (Space, Economic and Monetary Union, Defense, External Action) do not have linkages to the secondary data. The choice on these was explained by the given diverse economic situation of the EU member states which made the interviewee believe that it was not 'the right time to tighten economic and monetary actions', even though their higher integration was welcomed. In the opinion of the interviewee, stabilization and diminishing regional disparities had to come first, and internal issues should have had the highest priority, while the chosen political clusters were considered to be such marginal topics that could be resolved quickly, hence, could be given a lower priority.

The clusters where the most convergence can be found among EU member states, in the opinion of the interviewee, show similarities in three cases with the secondary data (herein, [Bratislava](#) and [Rome Declarations](#)): clusters 5, 7 and 11 (Border Management); and differ in two cases: clusters 1 and 8 (Agriculture and Maritime Policy). The clusters where the least convergence can be found, completely differ from the secondary data, since those only referred to the allocation method. The highlighted clusters are 3, 6, 9, 10 (Migration) and 14 (Crisis Response).

To the question whether there is a possibility for compromises in case of the clusters with the least convergence, the official replied that 'always', especially when it concerned the EU's ability to remain a strong economic leader in the world. 'We have to continue changing our point of view on the EU as entity, that is simply giving and taking based on actual needs. The right point of view is focus on future, where only strong and united global players will be successful.'

To the question on the most and least converging clusters between the V4 and Europe's priorities, the interviewee replied that actually, the latter ones were converging to the former ones, e.g. 'the Migration and Border Management priorities were taken into account by the EU institutions as well as continuing efforts in single market's freedoms compliance'.

RE-ANALYSIS OF ENFORCEMENT CAPABILITY

The results of the interview with the MEP are displayed in the fourth column, the results of the V4's priorities as an alliance are in the second column of the matrix (Table 2). The enforcement capability mediates between these priorities (mediator variable). The priorities determining the MFF, budget size and new resources were not impacted by the primary data, hence, they are not displayed below but can be retrieved from the [first part of the research](#).

Table 2
Matrix for the Results and the Enforcement Capability

	V4 interest or priority	Enforcement capability?	Europe's interest or priority in the view of the interviewee
<i>Cohesion Policy</i>	Maintaining, keeping united, top priority	=	High priority (most converging)
<i>Common Agricultural Policy</i>	Maintaining, top priority	→	Most converging
<i>Migration</i>	Increasing, top priority	→ ? ←	Least converging (Europe converged to V4)
<i>Border Management</i>	National level, top priority	→	Most converging (Europe converged to V4)
<i>European Public Administration</i>	Maintaining or decreasing, low priority	=	Low priority

In two cases, the priorities set by the V4 and the MEP are similar: Cohesion Policy and European Public Administration. And although the interviewed MEP did not refer to the level of budget, it can be further assumed that where low priority was indicated, the official would propose a low(er), where high priority was indicated, the official would propose a high(er) budget.

In the rest of the cases, the MEP did not list the indicated clusters into the groups of high or low priority, only referred to them as the most or least converging areas within the EU. Therefore, where the Common Agricultural Policy and the Border Management were indicated as the most converging areas, it is assumed that the



V4's interest is in line with most EU member states' interest. As a conclusion, those two clusters are top priorities, of which budget should be maintained or increased. And where the Migration was indicated as the least converging area, it can be assumed that it does not mean such a top priority for the other EU member states as it is for the V4. As a conclusion, compromise is needed the most in that case (on behalf of all concerned parties or entities).

The fact that according to the MEP, Europe's priorities were already converging to the V4's priorities in case of the Migration and Border Management, refers to a strong enforcement capability on behalf of the V4 Group. And it also raises the questions whether the member states do not agree on the Migration since it was implemented in line with the V4's priorities, and whether they would agree more, or most member states would agree better if the cluster of Migration was approached by a non-V4 but a European view or interest. In the remaining clusters, no enforcement capability is needed or was detected since the V4's priorities were either the same as the ones indicated by the MEP, or were among the most converging areas.

Nevertheless, that matrix should be carefully evaluated since its last column is based on a single MEP's opinion, while the [former matrix](#) was built up along the EC's documents, therefore, it meant to represent the opinion of the entire EC. The difference herein appears at all displayed clusters, which could reflect the aforementioned individual-organisational or an EP-EC opinion difference.

CONCLUSION

This policy paper generated primary data on the EU institutional opinion concerning Europe's priorities and their convergence among the EU member states, and well as to the V4's priorities. Therefore, it had a complementary function to the formerly published research based on secondary data from the EC and could show how the individuals' opinion at the EU institutions could differ from the organisational manifestation. This difference offers the opportunity and has the potential for the V4 countries to enforce their interests in the debate like in the Cohesion Policy and the European Public Administration. However, it has equal potential for other member states as well.

Besides the altering findings, the paper highlighted that the Visegrád Group had a strong enforcement capability to shape Europe's priorities (i.e. in Migration and Border Management), which confirms former results, where the V4 could additionally shape the concept of priorities determining the MFF (in overall) and the new resources, besides the budget of the clusters.

According to the evaluation, compromise would be needed the most at discussing the Migration, on behalf of the EU member states. Nevertheless, the interviewed MEP believed that there was always a possibility for compromises in areas with the least convergence, especially when it concerned the EU's ability to remain a strong economic leader in the world.

These findings offer practical implications for the concerned entities (i.e. Visegrád Group, EU institutions and EU member states) and should be interpreted together with the first part of the research, since the main limitation of the second part is that it was based on one interview from the EP. Therefore, future research should primarily target to take or elaborate interviews with more officials from the EU institutions and/or to search for more possibilities and means for the enforcement capabilities of the V4 countries.