

Hungary's Foreign Policy Perspective of Central Europe

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The concept of Central Europe emerged as the intellectual framework and as a more and more pronounced means of expression for political aspirations seeking historical and cultural arguments to underpin separation from the Soviet bloc after the mid-eighties and the affiliation with the Euro-Atlantic system of institutions after the early nineties (which was motivated by the hope to 'return to Europe'). And yet Hungary has failed to formulate her conceptually coherent 'regional policy' in respect of Central Europe up to the present day. This virtual contradiction stems from the pragmatic aspects of Realpolitik; casting away communist regimes and identifying Euro-Atlantic integration as a strategic goal, the countries of the region looked upon various forms of regional cooperation (Visegrad, CEFTA) as 'antechambers' in the course of transition and preparation, and wished to avoid even the faintest impression that regional arrangements are an alternative to EU accession and NATO enlargement. Although in terms of scope, concept, direct objectives and methods, Hungary's neighbourhood policy, which is one of Hungary's foreign policy prerogatives and has close ties with national policy and integration issues, cannot be identified with a complex regional policy, but it offers results and lessons even on a regional scale.

Apparently, it has taken more than a decade and a half after the eastern enlargement of the EU for unique motifs and interests to mature (and get formulated in Hungarian approaches to foreign policy), such that have placed revisiting and revising the concept and content of Central Europe on the agenda (inside the EU) along with the areas and methods of cooperation in the framework of the European integration.

Initial Premises: How to Define Central Europe in the Early 21st Century?

It is close to impossible to define Central Europe in purely geographic terms. The area wedged more or less between the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea is not a geographic category first of all. The size of this region, which has its own unique historical

track record characterised by partially overlapping factors of civilisation, culture, economy and politics, keeps changing across periods of history and depending on the perspective of analysis. *Central Europe is a functional concept*. The basic considerations laid down by István Bibó¹ and later by Jenő Szűcs² indicate that, paradoxically, the distinctive features of this region, which is identified by so many different names, are indeed of transitional in nature and relativity. It derives its transitional nature from the pendulum movement between the 'western' and 'eastern' archetypes of Europe's development across the ages (it is a ferry-of-a-region to paraphrase poet Endre Ady's allegory of Hungary), whilst its relativity emanates from the nature of its relationship to the power centres (Germany, the Hapsburg Empire/Austro-Hungary, Russia/Soviet Union) that determined the spheres of interest in the region with differing manner and intensity across periods.

The *semantic confusion* of the names used to denote the region – Eastern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Europe, Intermediate Europe, the region of small states (or *Kleinstaaterei* with a pejorative edge) – reflects the relativity of views both in terms of time and content. *Nomen est omen: The interpretation of Central Europe has been changing constantly in the course of history both in terms of geography and content*. Coined in the 19th century, the classic term referred to the middle section of the continent spanning between German and Russian linguistic areas and in political terms it indicated the relationship that existed between a part of this amorphous territory and the Hapsburg Empire (various aspirations to retain, restructure or explicitly replace the *Donaumonarchie*) and Germany (Mitteleuropa and later the "large space economy").

In addition to drastically redrawing political relationships in Europe after World War II, in effect, the *Yalta division lines* eradicated the notion of Central Europe at the same time. Central Europe disappeared from actual politics and the intellectual arena for long decades. "The Yalta arrangements imposed a strict and exclusive dichotomy, which Western Europe confirmed covertly by classifying the parts of Central, Eastern and Central and South East Europe that were brought under Soviet influence after 1945 under the single heading 'Eastern Europe'. The European Economic Community completed the semantic fraud by monopolising the title 'Europe' without a distinctive adjective."³

Central Europe revived at a completely new intellectual and emotional plain in the mid-eighties. This revival was set in the conceptual framework of countries forced to endure Soviet dominance, was benchmarked by the relationship with the Soviet Union, drew its motivation from the need to be differentiated and separated from the Soviet dominated sphere and the desire to return to its roots in European civilisation and culture (and in an increasingly less latent manner to European political roots). "Three different basic situations evolved in Europe: the Western European, the Eastern European and a third one, which was also the most complicated, a Europe, which is geographically located in the middle of Europe, was characterised by western culture and was politically set in the East."⁴

That is the origin of the current interpretation of the term 'Central Europe'. The end of the Cold War, the fall of the former communist regimes in the satellite states and the radical change of the geopolitical status of the region combined to create a new historical situation that lends Central Europe a modern message and meaning. *Interpreted functionally "the new Central Europe" covers the group of former communist countries that have successfully accomplished EU accession to become members of the European Union (or are specifically scheduled to join in the near future), but these countries also need to make major efforts in the future to ensure economic and social convergence, to solidify their position in the European integration and to get organically embedded in Europe.* This working definition does not, however, imply staked-out borders and a list of countries. The watershed of civilisations proposed by Toynbee and Huntington is not an absolute criterion in the functional interpretation of the new Central Europe, and the European construction has also surpassed the legacy of the Schism, which had marked the borders of what used to be the Occident. Borders are ignorant of the relations evolving historically form culture and mentality, and the latter are not separated by clear lines of division but are present as intermingled tones along "border areas".

The current image of the region and its relational vectors still display the marked features left by the imprints of factors of force that heavily influenced the development of the region across the ages as well as their present-day consequences. *The various layers of Central Europe's stormy history are superimposed on one another,* which is true even if Germany and Austria refuse to position themselves as a part of Central Europe in political terms, though, they are traditionally grouped with this region. Being forced into Eastern Europe Russia has more limited international levers (and ambitions) than previously, any yet Russian foreign policy shows revived self-confidence with its power politics eliciting historically rooted sensitivities, while the dependence on Russian energy resources is a reason for security, political and economic concerns in the region.

The separation of Central Europe continues to be relative in the present day and age both in terms of form and content. The countries of the region fail to form a legally distinct subset in the European Union. Simultaneously, EU enlargement tends to coincide with regionalisation inside the EU, which does not amount to getting divided into parts in the organisational sense, but forecasts the conscious formation of nodes of interest and vectors of advocacy in line with the specific features and status of different regions. *The fundamental challenges the new Central Europe faces is real convergence, the need to close its backlog within the framework of the European Union, a shared responsibility that is supposed to create identical paths and common interests for a region which is separated by historical fault lines.*

The Status of Present-Day Central Europe

No analysis of the current condition of the region and its actual potential (and willingness) for cooperation can ignore *that the historical experience of Central Europe is Janus-faced*. We should beware of the misleading nostalgia which is based on recalling the intellectual ferment of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the world of coffee houses, the coexistence of ethnic groups and multiculturalism but also on reminiscences that render the time more beautiful through the filter of distance. We would also be naive to trust some kind of foredoomed automatism between EU accession and the creation of a desired new regional *modus vivendi*.

The devastations of the 20th century left serious scars on the face of Central Europe. Although it failed to create true peace in the region, the nation state fiction called to existence by the system of treaties closing World War I survived the realignments following World War II and the Cold War, and even the enlargement of the European Union seems to have failed to neutralise narrow-minded nation state reflexes. The composite ethnic mosaic of the region has lost much of its complexity due to the holocaust and the Aliyahs, the forced displacement of millions of German and ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav war. The total capitulation of Hungarian communities outside the Trianon borders reduced by about a million due to resettlements and assimilative pressure. The tempests of the past century “scattered” (or at least manhandled) Central Europe’s unique cultural unity; the national cultures of the region exhibit the consequences of having been socially and intellectually alienated from each other. The German language has lost its function of connecting the cultures of the region and the major cities of Central Europe have ceased to exist as venues for multilingual coexistence.

Central Europe as a ‘cohesive medium’ is plastic in social, cultural, economic and political terms. The contradiction between common fate and division overshadows the modern history of the region. István Bibó highlighted this paradoxical relationship between the nations occupying the region in 1946 in the wake of the painful experience of the first half of the 20th century: “...although their fate and character are identical, historical experience and situations that would unite them have failed to occur.”⁵ In a 1984 essay of major impact about Central Europe being “twisted away from its own (yet again painful) fate”, Milan Kundera makes reference to the capacity of “large common situations” to shape the course of history to draw forward looking conclusions about the region as a whole: “Although they lack of solidarity, are isolated and self-contained” the nations of Central Europe “share great common existential experiences.”⁶ The shared burden of the Soviet rule and the communist era followed by the euphoria of the political changes and the elevated feeling of new horizons opening with EU accession have failed so far to strengthen a strong sense of regional togetherness capable of

penetrating even the deepest layer of politics and society to eradicate lack of trust and suspicion: the tendency and mechanisms of *Kleinstaaterei* to disagree continue. The post-communist transition elicited rationalisation tendencies in several of the countries of the region, which brought with them the disruption of existing state structures in the case of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (among vastly different circumstances). Slovakia is trying to reduce to practice principles of building a nation state, which are rooted in the 19th century, whilst the Czech president attracted the attention of Europe by anachronistically connecting the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which is designed to set the future course of building Europe, with the issue of the Beneš Decrees.

With borders originally relative and continuously changing, this region *has never been homogeneous*; the successor states of the 'Danube Monarchy', Poland, the Baltic and certain parts of the Balkans that are directly or indirectly related to Central Europe each have their own historical, economic, cultural character and mentality. *Intraregional differentiation* has not disappeared in the past two decades: it took on new features (the fall of communism and the quality of the transition that followed; the direction and rate of economic development; the different measures of success in seizing the opportunities created by EU accession; membership in the Euro Area and the perspective of introducing the Euro). Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, Bratislava, Vilnius, Ljubljana and Zagreb (a deliberately non-exhaustive list) use different lenses to view the concept, the content and the size of Central Europe and hence their collective conscious shows different emphases and depths.

Accession to the EU has failed so far to eliminate the historical (semi)peripheral character of the region, moreover *we are running the risk of recreating a unique form of centre-periphery relationship this time within the framework of the European Union*. Although the classic theory of centre and peripherals⁷ cannot obviously be applied mechanically to conditions existing internally in the European Union, there are hardly any signs yet of the *whole* region embarking on an expedited path of conversion, which was typical, for instance, of Scandinavia and Finland in the first half/two thirds of the 20th century and propelled these countries to the vanguard of economic development and social welfare in Europe. Despite their fundamental geographic, geopolitical and civilisation related differences, one wonders why none of the countries of Central Europe, each of which demanded international attention in 1989–90, has managed to set out on a path of innovation that delivered rapid and spectacular success in the Far East to countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, which started at low levels of development comparable in order of magnitude (at least in Asian dimensions) and had set out to develop democratic political systems in the eighties, and have moved them to the centre of global economic development. Except for Slovenia and the Czech Republic, the countries of our region spend less than one percent of their GDP on research and development, which falls way short of both the OECD average of 1.85 percent and the EU mean of 1.93 percent.⁸

The countries of Central Europe are equally dependent on the global (including EU) centres of power, which determine the direction and parameters of their development through trade, capital investment, technology and innovation. Germany and Austria (and the Nordic countries in the Baltic region along with Italy in the region of former Yugoslavia and in certain parts of the Balkans) have developed strong economic, commercial and financial positions and, in the meantime, *no organic circulation evolved inside the region itself*. Only 15% of the exports of the new member states is destined for in each other's countries.⁹ Organised forms of regional economic cooperation (CEFTA) obviously ceased to exist upon EU accession, whilst other instruments and incentives have limited significance. The total GDP of the group of Central European countries increased by 42 percent between 1989 and 2007 (i.e. before the international financial and economic crisis), which corresponds to annual average growth at two percent.¹⁰ This average, which hides major differences across countries and periods, also incorporates the decline in the wake of 'transformational recession' in the early nineties, as a result of which regional economies managed to reach output levels typical of the period before the political changes more or less by about the turn of the millennium. Thereafter, the regional average of annual GDP growth reached 5 percent (and surpassed the EU average), but the onset of the international financial crisis in autumn 2008 yet again highlighted the vulnerability of regional economies along with their inability to adjust themselves in ways required for recovery.¹¹ Having a large internal market, Poland is the only country in the region (and essentially in Europe) that managed to avoid the recession. The rate of *per capita real convergence of incomes* in the new member states of the EU falls short of social expectations (and shows wide regional deviations); 20–25 additional years are still required to halve the difference that separates them from the EU15 in this respect.¹² The dilemma of delayed development is partially compensated for by Slovenia and the Czech Republic, countries where industry is traditionally developed and where the per capita gross domestic product is (yet again) higher than in Portugal, the country with the lowest per capita GDP in the EU15, only to demonstrate that the centre–periphery relationship also exists along a North–South axis.¹³

The political relations of the region reflect economic realities. Central Europe fails to form a coherent group inside the EU even as regards weighted vectors of political relations, and *radial relations with Brussels and large member states of basic importance are typical* also in this respect. It flows from the above that neither of the states in this "extrovert" region is influential enough to become the driver of regional self-organisation through its sheer weight. Despite its size, Poland is no exception as it fails to possess the levers and capacities needed to play a leading role in the region *on its own*, not to mention having it accepted by others.

The Need for Interest Based and Differentiated Central European Cooperation

Sceptical as it may seem for the superficial observer, the global picture described above questions neither the topicality nor the feasibility of Central European cooperation. On the contrary, it shows that historical nostalgia and voluntarist theoretical arrangements will not help: *it takes joint representation of common issues and a pragmatic value-based approach to build a functional and truly flexible network of Central European cooperation, which (with EU and NATO membership granted) must gradually take root both in public thinking and in political practice.* The preparations for EU membership and the accession talks themselves also proved that unique paths individual countries followed and the strategies they adopted to set themselves apart from and overcome their 'rivals' may earn temporary and partial benefits but will adversely effect the capacity of a whole group of countries to assert their interests in general. EU accession is a necessary but in itself insufficient condition precedent to the granting equal status to and to implementing convergence in the region. Strengthening regional cooperation sets the stage for avoiding the recurrence of past situations when questions determining the fate of Central Europe were decided instead of and without us by other power factors.

Several national interests of the countries of the region are expressed with regional strings attached, including economic and social conversion, implementing and financing complex cross border developments, strengthening our position within the European integration, obtaining the capacity to influence EU policies in merit and the need to display a unique foreign policy image. The security identity of Central Europe has distinctive features that also have geopolitical relevance for questions such as the nature of transatlantic relations, the presence of the United States in Europe, the basic functions of NATO and the strategy of energy security.¹⁴ *Regarding these focal issues, our interests are identical or compatible and it is extremely doubtful if exclusively individual strategies are sufficient to assert these interests efficiently in the international field of force.* All that is not equal to the naive assumption that each national interest can be harmonically matched with or fitted to another nation's interests, and yet there is a clearly definable set of interests, which change from time to time, that should be represented jointly for practical reasons.

New Central European cooperation must be constructed realistically *starting from facts*, rather than in a declarative manner. The '*small circles*' of regional solidarity, which may support our new European house, will only have a chance to get created if they are *based exclusively on interests* and on objectively selecting common issues and thinking soberly together to represent them.

*Asserting the interests of the countries of the region may not get manifested in experimenting with some kind of 'separate regional way'. Our region has irrevocably surpassed its historical status of *Zwischeneuropa* with the eastern enlargement of the EU and NATO. Power relations also make it evident that regional cooperation may not lead to a marked clash of interests with the prominent players of the European Union, as the European framework and the widest possible cooperation between EU institutions and member states are prerequisites for successfully solving the tasks facing the new Central Europe. The parties that entertain certain reservations concerning the idea and the practice of coordination among "new" EU member states should be aware that the Central European initiative does not at all question the unity of the EU and cannot be used to divide the European Union or NATO in any strategic issue.*

The region also needs cooperation between *Germany* and *Austria*. These countries carry so much weight in the region through intensive economic relations, cultural patterns and multiple threads of social ties, that they are valuable and important factors for creating structures, despite the fact that they are reluctant due to historical reasons to revive traditional Central European concepts and do not regard themselves as a part of Central Europe after half a century of divergence following World War II. We cannot ignore the role and influence of the Nordic states and Italy in areas that are transitional between, on the one hand, Central Europe and the Baltic Region, and on the other hand between Central Europe, the Balkans and the region of the Black Sea. The points connecting the new Central Europe with areas lying in the south-east and the east are of growing importance for the region as a whole, as our region has a major role to play in promoting the European integration of the Western Balkans and in motivating the euro conform trends of development in the eastern neighbourhood of the EU by actually implementing what is frequently referred to as the region's "bridging role".

The system of regional cooperation does not involve geographic contours drawn 'once and for all' due to the plasticity of what Central Europe is and where its borders lie, the internal differentiation of the region and the various levels at which the countries of the region have the potential and the willingness to cooperate. Grouping, classifying and selecting potential partners according to formal criteria will only narrow down the room available for manoeuvring and will trigger unwanted sensitivity.

The harmonised representation of Central European interests *does not necessarily require a new structure of regional policy, what it entails though is purging the formalities of the existing forms and frameworks of cooperation (which are differentiated both in terms of theme and composition) and it requires that activities be practically coordinated with a view to results, and "organised" in terms of content.* Central Europe already has (partially overlapping) structures in place for intraregional and interregional cooperation along with collaborative and relational ties, consultation forums, including the Visegrad Group, V4 + B3 (at present still a potential rather than a true forum for meetings between the

Visegrad countries and the Baltic States), Regional Partnership (V4+Australia+Slovenia) and the Central European Initiative (CEI) that turns towards the East and the South East for cooperative relations. A differentiated approach to Central European cooperation assumes that various countries participate with different intensity and in different composition in the activities of a regional forum; indeed, it is expressly advisable for a differentiated network of cooperation to build on the unique affinities ('external valence') of the member states of the region. That allows the integration of ties with, for instance, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) with its target area in the Western Balkans, Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) to complement regional networks. It follows from the core philosophy of partially overlapping cooperation networks that it is worth focussing on opportunities for and the facilitation of mutual connections rather than on aspects of prestige and competition in complex development programmes and projects that cover the region or some of its parts, such as the Danube strategy and the Baltic cooperation.

The maintenance of multidimensional ties and forms of cooperation should be complemented by a *coherent regional strategy* designed to synthesise the network of interests and cooperation efforts. On the one hand, this networking approach takes into account *frameworks of cooperation and consultation forums constructed to reflect the needs of individual issues* (which is comparable to the most diversified forms of „*géometrie variable*” applied in the system of creating ad hoc coalitions among EU member states), on the other hand it focuses on *specific content* and results in a “businesslike” manner rather than adhering to formal institutional and etiquette driven preferences, which are still typical.

The major common or reconcilable interests of Central European EU member states are related to their place and role in the European integration. These interests can be classified around the following nodes:

- issues promoting economic and social convergence (shaping EU policies, preparation for the 2014–2020 budgetary cycle, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the future and the utilisation of the structural and cohesion funds, etc.);
- the questions relating to energy security, the case of major investment projects to ensure the diversification of energy supply and the interconnection of regional systems;
- infrastructure projects of regional scale (North–South transportation corridor);
- complex regional development programmes (e.g. Danube strategy);
- financing various forms of cross-border cooperation;
- asserting interests arising from unique security policy sensitivities (EU–USA relations, relationship between NATO and the CSDP, the evolution of transatlantic cooperation, the nature of relations with Russia);
- displaying foreign policy profiles typical of the countries of the region (EU enlargement, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership).

The fundamental question of asserting interests effectively within the EU boils down to the dilemma of relevance, which is also the cornerstone of Central European cooperation. The following series of data are indicative of orders of magnitude, actual capacities and relative backlog: the consolidated territory of new (formerly communist) EU member states is twice the size of France and the total population is 20 million more than that of Germany. In contrast, their gross domestic product falls almost ten percent short of that of Spain and corresponds exactly to that of Italy if calculated at purchasing power parity. If we narrow the same data down to the Visegrad countries, we find that the territory of the four countries is somewhat larger than Spain, the population equals that of France and their consolidated GDP is only somewhat higher than that of the Netherlands, but fails to reach the level of Spain when calculated at purchasing power parity.¹⁵

The Visegrad countries carry more consolidated weight under the Nice voting ratios of majority decision-making, which are still in effect in the EU, than the combined weight of any two large member states (for instance German and France), whilst the new “Eastern” members have been allotted 101 of the total number of 333 votes. Starting 2014, the Lisbon Treaty will introduce a dual-majority system of voting based on 55 percent of the member states and 65 percent of the population, which (besides granting more favourable status to large member states) *continues to offer promising bargaining positions to be used by Central European member states for asserting their interests in case coordination is targeted and member states form flexible coalitions.* (The consensus principle continues to prevail as regards the common foreign and security policy.)

It is obvious that the data listed above cannot be automatically converted into voting positions, and no one can realistically expect Central European member states to develop a coordinated “block like” position in each question. Nevertheless it is easy to see that *one may not neglect the likelihood that Central European countries will coordinate their voting behaviour also along broader lines of power inside the EU* as part of the continuous formation of *ad hoc* coalitions of different composition. Viewed from the perspective of asserting unique Central European interests and convincing allies from outside the region, consulting and possibly coordinating their positions on issues placed on the EU agenda for a decision is the eminent interest of the countries of the region, which they ought to treat as a non formalised area of their cooperation. The preliminary discussions among Visegrad countries is a convincing example how the harmonised representation of well-selected common interests can increase the weight of a whole group of countries.

Hungary in Central Europe

Hungarian foreign policy must view and treat Central Europe in a coherent manner, i.e. *regional policy should be added as an equally important dimension to the relations maintained with the countries of the region and to the important aspects of European policies pursued in Brussels.*

Hungary has capabilities that render the country suitable for and interested in playing an active role in regional politics. Due to sheer geographic position, i.e. central location in the Carpathian Basin, Hungary is a regional player that *acts as a connecting link between the northern and south-eastern subdivisions of Central Europe.* Due to the same reason Hungary also lies at the intersection of the North–South and East–West axes of major future infrastructure and economic development projects (North–South transportation and energy connections, Nabucco Gas Pipeline, South Stream, Danube Region Strategy, etc.) and is therefore most directly interested in developing complex regional development programmes and in promoting intraregional cooperation to help implement and raise external funds for such projects.

Hungary maintains balanced relations with each external factor that may influence the region, an asset which Hungarian foreign policy must capitalise on also in regional terms. Unlike our relations with several other Central European countries, Hungarian–German and Hungarian–Austrian relations are not emotionally burdened with the legacy of the past. Aspirations to soberly reconcile utilitarianism with pragmatism have a more pronounced presence in the content and general atmosphere of Hungary's relationship with Russia than in the case of Russia's immediate neighbours in the region.

Hungary has a vested interest in ensuring that shared stakes arising from regional cooperation replace and override the narrow frameworks and reflexes of nation states. With the population of Hungarian communities outside the borders added, we are the third largest nation in Central Europe (after the Polish and the Romanian). Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries should be looked upon as social capital whose functions may be beneficial for all the players involved in broader regional cooperation. The core components of Hungarian foreign policy (including nation policy, neighbourhood policy and Europe policy) may find the critical mass of mutual interests that may strike a balance among these relational directions by bringing into play an active regional policy geared to establishing broad and wide-ranging regional cooperation and to launching comprehensive development programmes with multiple country coverage.

Based on her traditional relationships, capacities and weight, it seems practical for Hungary to aim for the role of “*smart power*” in Central Europe. Hungarian foreign policy must seek to *occupy a position in the centre of the regional network of relations* by utilising the central geographic location and consciously balances contacts of the country and by developing an originator and coordinator role. Our regional policy should focus

on multilateral groupings performing important activities (Visegrad, various V4 plus formations, Regional Partnership) and high priority bilateral relations (Hungarian–German, Hungarian–Austrian, Hungarian–Polish, Hungarian–Romanian, Hungarian–Croatian, Hungarian–Serb and Hungarian–Slovak), following a pragmatic and flexible method of organisation and partner selection on a case by case basis. The conferences hosted in Budapest at the end of February 2010 on regional energy security and at the beginning of March on the Danube Strategy demonstrated that approaches focussing on content are gaining ground. *Hungary's EU presidency* during the first six months of 2011 will provide an optimal opportunity, room for manoeuvring and competence for Hungary to place the theme of Central Europe objectively on the EU agenda and to draw the clear outlines of her own regional role.

As it is the Visegrad countries that form the 'nucleus' of the new Central Europe both in geographic and political terms, *the V4 Cooperation, coupled with "V4 plus" arrangements, must play the role of a prime mover even at regional level.* The Visegrad group may construct its joint political programme around the theme of motivating and organising Central European cooperation among the new circumstances created by after EU-accession. The Visegrad Fund could be the institutional prefiguration of a future system of cultural and educational policy and incentives aimed at regenerating the worthy traditions of Central European identity and developing it in line with new requirements – through the involvement of a broader group of countries in the region.

Giving higher strategic priority to Hungarian–Polish relations is a key factor of lending dynamism to cooperation in Central Europe, including among the Visegrad countries. This is the platform where the aspirations of Poland and Hungary can coincide, as the former justifiably claims to play the role of a medium-sized power, whilst the latter seeks to broaden her room for manoeuvring, which may lend new content and a new programme to the relations between Hungary and Poland, which are deeply rooted in history and have always tended to carry positive social and emotional content. Poland needs a regional partner who is willing to accept and promote Poland's ambitions of a magnitude that matches her size in both the regional network of relations and in a broader framework of international strategy (Eastern Partnership, EU–Russian relations, transatlantic connections). Special ties with Warsaw may strengthen Hungary's position in the Visegrad group and in the region as a whole, which can have a ripple effect during efforts to give priority to our own foreign policy objectives (for instance in the Western Balkans). Although the bilateral relations themselves demand extra attention and have implications that go way beyond the bilateral terrain, the cooperation between Hungary and Poland may receive broader international relevance in regional policy, energy policy, Europe policy, enlargement policy, neighbourhood policy and security policy. Tightening relations and strengthening trust between Hungary and Poland should obviously not indicate aspirations towards exclusivity neither in terms

of Visegrad nor in a broader Central European sense, it serves to ensure and stabilise on a mutual basis a "hinterland" for the regional and broader international relations of the two countries. Other partners may also affiliate with the various directions and areas of this stronger cooperation based on specific interests and needs. The circumstance that Poland follows Hungary as the president by rotation of the EU in 2011 renders the coordination between Budapest and Warsaw especially topical and important.

The efficiency of cooperation in Central Europe cannot be separated from the problem associated with the quality of bilateral relations between countries in the region, which also poses challenges for Hungarian foreign policy especially towards Slovakia. Multilateral relations have an extra benefit in that they may mitigate and reduce the differences of opinion that arose between certain partners on a bilateral basis, but at the same time there is always a "threshold of tolerance" beyond which bilateral tensions hinder cooperation at regional level. Whenever that happens, it raises the question of responsibility both in terms of actual policy and in a historical sense: Are there any popular and particular domestic policy considerations represented on the narrow horizon of a nation state that are "worth" risking the mutual benefits offered by regional cooperation for all of the partners. *Central European cooperation, including among the members of the Visegrad group, cannot be separated from strengthening the community feeling among regional societies and nations.* Exploiting the potential of regional cooperation demands that the policies formulated at state or government level be aimed at emphasising components of identity that *connect* the nations of Central Europe rather than by manipulative means generate clashes between national identities – which is unfortunately the case at present. Developing a *modus vivendi* that suits the interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, satisfies the need for constructive cooperation between the two countries and meets the requirements of regional cooperation is one of the most complex and most sensitive future tasks of Hungarian foreign policy. The success of Hungarian intentions to consolidate relations and to put them on a fair and rational footing depends at least as heavily on the behaviour of the Slovak party.

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Central Europe is the obvious terrain for giving momentum to and for intellectually upgrading Hungarian foreign policy. Our immediate environment is an area of key importance for Hungarian diplomacy and forms a geographic circle where the image we radiate towards our partners and the match between the targeted regional role and the domestic background which it relies on are especially important. This background comprises three levels, and none of them can exist without the other two. In a technical sense, Hungarian foreign policy (including economic and cultural diplomacy and the management of EU affairs) must have a staff of professionals who are well versed in Central European themes and is also capable of confidently handling the related

broader European and international implications. Mutual openness inside the region coupled with motivating interest that can unfold traditional isolation and disperse past practices of deep rooted suspicion are vested interests for Central European societies that cast their eyes eagerly to the West for examples (whilst fostering the feeling of anxiety with western neighbours). That will also require targeted efforts from Hungary in the field of culture, education and the media. The domestic support for Hungary's efficient regional policy rests on the following: by consolidating its economy and ensuring sustainable economic growth, Hungary has to become the heavy-weight of Central European real processes that countries in the region and external parties involved in regional matters equally accept as an attractive example and a recognised and credible partner.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 István Bibó: "A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága" [The Misery of Small East European States]. In: *Bibó István: Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. II (edited by Tibor Huszár – István Vida – Endre Nagy). Budapest: Magvető, 1986. pp. 186–265.
- 2 Jenő Szűcs: "Vázlat Európa három történelmi régiójáról" [A Sketch of Three Historical Regions of Europe]. In: *Helyünk Európában. Nézetek és koncepciók a 20. századi Magyarországon*, vol. II (edited by Iván Berend T. – Éva Ring). Budapest: Magvető, 1986. pp. 515–568.
- 3 Timothy Garton Ash: "Létezik-e Közép-Európa?" [The Puzzle of Central Europe] (Hungarian translation). In: *Közép-európai olvasókönyv* (edited by Péter Módos – János Tischler). Budapest: Osiris, 2005 p. 167.
- 4 Milan Kundera: "Az elrabolt Nyugat, avagy Közép-Európa tragédiája" [The Tragedy of Central Europe] (Hungarian translation). In: *Szamizdat '81–89. Excerpts from the Journal Hírmondó*. Budapest: AB – Beszélő, 1990. p. 28.
- 5 Bibó: *op. cit.* pp. 248.
- 6 Kundera: *op. cit.* pp. 33.
- 7 Immanuel Wallerstein: *A modern világgazdasági rendszer kialakulása* [The Modern World-System] (Hungarian translation). Budapest: Gondolat, 1983.
- 8 *Ibid.* p. 20.
- 9 Dariusz K. Rosati (ed.): *New Europe. Report on Transformation*. Warsaw: Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies, 2007. p. 106.
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 15.
- 11 "East European Economies. Fingered by Fate". *The Economist*, 20–26 March 2010. pp. 29–30.
- 12 *Ibid.* p. 21.
- 13 "The Myth of the Periphery". *The Economist*, 27 March – 2 April 2010. p. 32.
- 14 The foreign affairs institutes of Visegrad countries are organising a series of four international conferences about Creating a Sphere of Security in Wider Central Europe: Sharing the V4 Know-How in Cooperation on Security with the Neighbouring Regions. The Hungarian Institute of International Affairs hosted the second event of the series entitled Past Lessons, Current Issues and Future Prospects of Visegrad Cooperation within NATO and ESDP/CSDP in Budapest on 8–9 April 2010.
- 15 Source: CIA: *The World Factbook*, 2009. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010.
- 16 This essay is based on the author's paper presented at a workshop held with a similar title at the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs on 11 March 2010. The opinions expressed in the essay reflect the author's personal views.