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**FRAMING INTEGRATION AS AN ACT OF  
SOVEREIGNTY: FOCUS ON THE VISEGRAD  
COUNTRIES**

BA thesis

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## **Abstract**

The current decade has been remarkably challenging for the whole European Union. The outburst of the migration crisis and the increase of nationalism in the Central-Europe has put the future of the European Union under concern. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the change of positions and statements of the Visegrad countries toward the European integration, based on the challenges and critical questions that EU is facing. The empirical part is constructed through critical discourse analysis, bases on the theory of constructivism and uses supranational governance and intergovernmental approach as competing ideas of European integration. The materials used for the analyse are the official statements and annual reports of the Visegrad Group.

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## **Introduction**

In 2000 the European Union (EU) adopted a motto “United in Diversity” that symbolises how Europeans have formed a union to work together for peace and prosperity, while simultaneously being enriched by numerous distinctive cultures, traditions and language (EU 2017a). The member states have accepted the founding principles of the European Union and by signing the treaties, each of them have an obligation to contribute achieving the common goals of the union. However, the negative developments across the world are constantly challenging the unity of the region.

The European Union has been facing many difficult issues in the recent decade. The global financial crisis in 2008 had a highly negative consequence on EU markets followed by Greek debt crisis in 2009, the beginning of largest migration crisis since the Second World War in 2015 and Britain’ decision to leave the EU in 2016 are only a few examples of recent happenings. In addition, Europe is witnessing a rise of nationalism in many member states of the EU for example France, Germany, Hungary and Poland. These factors have impacted the integration process between the member states. There is a lot of information circulating in the media that states the connection between emerging crises and rising nationalism. Furthermore, in critical situations where credible decisions are necessary, not all member states favour the power of the EU over national governments and accept the idea of sharing sovereignty. This can cause contradictions that can develop into tensions and arguments between the supporters of different views and have a negative effect to the unity by restraining the further integration and threatening the peace of the region.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the change of positions and statements of the Visegrad countries toward the European integration, based on the challenges and critical questions that EU is facing. The Visegrad Group (V4) consists of four Central-European countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. All of the states are also part of the European Union. The reason behind choosing these countries is the fact that Visegrad Group countries have voiced a lot of objection to the recent decisions of the EU and many political developments in these countries, the strengthening of the far right political elite in particular, highlights the importance this

issue even more. In this thesis the analysis is based on one critical issue: the migration crisis.

It has been almost three years since the beginning of the biggest migration crisis in the recent past. The number of refugees and migrants who have arrived to the EU is over 1 million, most of them from Syrian war but also from other conflictual countries. The European Union has agreed on several methods to find solutions. The main steps included are attempts to resolve the root causes and increasing humanitarian aid inside as well as outside of the EU borders. Furthermore, refugees are being relocated within the EU, resettled from neighbour states and people who do not need protection are returned to their home countries. Last but not least, the European Union is focusing more on the protection of external border by improving security and coast guard. In March 2016 the EU signed an agreement with Turkey. According to that, the asylum seekers departing from Turkey to Greek islands can be sent back to Turkey. “For every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek island after an irregular crossing, the EU will take in a Syrian from Turkey who has not sought to make this journey in an irregular way” (European Union 2016).

The recent events in Visegrad countries confirm the shift towards nationalism. In Poland far-right Law and Justice Party became unexpectedly successful in May 2015 and the presidential elections was won by Andrzej Duda who was supported from the same party. The main views of his campaign included reduction of EUs’ influence and focusing on the national sovereignty and interests. In the Czech Republic the far-right parties began to gather popularity only since 2015 and further there has been a rise of far-right attitudes along with racism and xenophobia. The Prime minister controversially emphasised the need to help refugees but at the same time rejects the mandatory quotas. Very critical opinions of refugees and the EU approach on the issue have come also from the president and Tomio Okamura with strong anti-immigrant views. In Hungary the anti-European views and far-right parties reach back to previous decade and are still visible in the slowly raising popularity of nationalistic Jobbik party with its leader Gábor Vona who, although pro-Islam, is strongly against immigration. The same views are supported by ruling Fidesz party among its leader Viktor Orbán. In Slovakia, there was an unexpected success of Neo-Nazis in the 2016 elections, whose leader Marián Kotleba is also strongly objecting migration and the

EU as a whole (Kolár 2016). According to the standard Eurobarometer Survey conducted in May 2016, 67% of Czechs, the same percentage of Hungarians, 51% of Poles and 59% Slovaks mention immigration as the top concern at European level but not in national level. The survey also revealed that only approximately third of Europeans (33%) trust the EU (Eurobarometer 2016: 7, 14).

As proved above, the refugee crisis and the rise of far-right parties among Visegrad countries is a very visible issue that can be connected. The main research question of this thesis is to find out whether and how the understanding of European integration changes among the Visegrad Group when facing with refugee crisis. To find out how it is manifested, I have proposed a hypothesis, which can be found on chapter 1.4.

Thesis consists of three parts. The first section is theoretical and focuses on the views of social constructivism that emphasises the importance of ideas and highlights that identity is socially constructed. The second section of theory emphasises on approaches of intergovernmentalism and supranational governance as the competing ideas of European integration. The construction of hypothesis is also included in the theoretical part. The second part of the theory focuses on methodology and includes the theoretic framework of critical discourse analysis and empirical materials. The materials used are the annual reports and joint statements of the Visegrad Group and reflect the views of the group towards the EU. The third part of the thesis is analysis that consists of three sections. The first analyses the occurred EU policies and Visegrads' views based on these policy areas which emerged before the refugee crisis and highlight the approaches that support the supranational governance or intergovernmentalism. The second part of the analyses focuses on the period from the start of the refugee crisis until 2016. The idea here is same as in last part: to highlight the statements supporting supranationalism or intergovernmentalism within the emerging EU-level policies. The analysis ends with the comparison of two periods in order to highlight the results and conclude whether the conducted hypothesis was confirmed.

# 1. Theoretical approaches

## 1.1. Constructivism in European Studies

Constructivism, also known as social constructivism, is based on the idea that constant interconnection between social agents forms and recreates social reality. The material world is not something categorized. As a result, the objects of our understanding are unable to appear separately from interpretation and language (Saurugger 2014: 146). Human agents only exist together with their social environment and its system of meanings that is shared collectively (Risse 2004: 160). “Constructivism links the production and reproduction of social practices and emphasizes their location in specific contexts” (Saurugger 2014: 146). In explaining the constructivist views, this thesis is mainly focused on the approaches of Thomas Risse, Alexander Wendt, Ben Rosamond and Sabine Saurugger.

Constructivism as a social theory was adapted to international relations in the 1980s and constructivist approaches appeared in European integration context at the end of the 1990s to a great extent as a favour of Nicolas Onuf and Alexander Wendt who used constructivism frameworks to explain social phenomena (Saurugger 2014: 145). Unlike rationalists, constructivists find accurate that in the world of politics structural features, such as anarchy, are not permanent and independent from the interaction of states. Anarchy is rather constructed socially, understood inter-subjectively, and reproduced through the interaction of states. Thus, “state behaviour does not just derive from anarchic international environment; it also helps to making it” (Rosamond 2000: 172). According to Wendt, “anarchy is what state makes it” (Wendt 1992). Constructivism has a wide range of definitions, but in brief, it is possible to state that constructivists in international relations support the approach according to which the structures of world politics are created through social interactions, that countries are active and powerful actors instead of static subjects, their identities cannot be seen as homogenous, but “(re)constituted through complex, historical overlapping (often contradictory) practices and therefore variable, unstable, constantly changing” (Knutsen 1997). There is a fine line between domestic politics and international relations and, therefore, it is hard to distinguish them (*ibid*). In modern world, the approaches of international relations are often dominated by the materialist ontology. Neorealists, as well as a large part of neoliberalists, often emphasise the

importance of material aspects, like power and interests, but do not see the considerable role of ideas. Only a small part of international life functions only based on material forces, because ideas and culture are as important in shaping it. (Wendt 1999: 371). The raised attention on less rational elements makes constructivism a suitable theoretical approach in this thesis.

Two crucial factors in the context of constructivism in international relations, and in European studies as well, are norms and interests. Norms co-create actor performance, not only through formulating or shaping certain behaviour, but also enabling it. When international norms are socialized and revealed in the frames of the community, the internalization of these norms, values, and rules by those within is resulted. Constructivist categorise norms into two types. The first ones are regulatory norms, which fix how a state should and should not behave. The second set are constitutive norms which form state functions, identities and interests while not being legal tools by definition. However, international law might formalize those. Both norms, constructed by social interaction, are stable and flexible within the social interaction that formulated these and, at the same time, they have a constituent impact on how individuals and organizations behave (Saurugger 2014: 150). The definition of interests is also complex: constructivist do not believe that state interests are a sum of individual interests of national actors or interest groups, also that it is the interests of an elite (Saurugger 2014: 151). Member states commitment to European integration can be understood as a regulative value based norm, while the wish to preserve national sovereignty expresses the interest of a country and belongs to the set of constitutive norms.

Based on the work of Christiansen, Joergensen and Wiener (1999), as well as Checkel (2007), Sabine Saurugger emphasises on thus three predominant inputs of empirical research in the area that has invested into the European integration theory. First, accepting the concept of simultaneous creation of agency and structures has contributed to further explanations among Europeanization and transformation of European countries. Second, which is connected to the first, stressing on the co-constitutive elements of judicial European law, rules and policies provides a chance to learn how European integration shapes social identities and interests of actors. Third, by focusing at different forms of communication, researches are able to conduct more

detailed analyses on the discursive approaches of the EU as well as how the actors understand the ideas of European integration. These approaches of European integration contribute to the idea of the EU being a process and not only the final outcome. The research of European integration focuses on defining the reasons for longstanding changes in social, political and economic affairs (Saurugger 2014: 151-152).

Therefore, the main conceptual approaches to the integration in the European studies are: socialization and learning, the social construction of European identity, and actor-centred constructivism. The first approach sees European integration as socialization and learning process that creates a shift in the preferences of actors (Saurugger 2014: 151-152). Saurugger, using Antje Wiener's idea (2006; 2008), has implemented that the European integration in constructivist analysis is connected by two things: social construction of institutions and the successful implementation of rules, norms and legal principles. This has led to a widely accepted "understanding of how the establishment of norms at the EU level leads to a higher level of norm compliance at the national level" (Saurugger 2014: 153). The benefit of learning is the power to acknowledge various layers where reality is created and, thus, learning lets researchers integrate into European integration one of the biggest challenges in the study. "Reality is constructed by the individual, the group to which it belongs, the media or, more generally, by the messages transmitted on several levels: locally, regionally, nationally, Europe-wide or more internationally" (Saurugger 2014: 154).

The second approach, social construction of European identity connects more with this thesis and, therefore, will be explained in next sub-chapter. The third perspective, actor-centred constructivism, assumes that the way actors behave is influenced by beliefs and views created by certain power constellations. The main question here is: "to what extent exactly ideas shape policy outcomes?" (Saurugger 2014: 156). Even in international sphere, where political leaders encounter with difficult issues, they do not immediately know the right or perfect answer for solving the situation. In order to find solutions, problems need to be clarified first. In this context, it is visible how ideas affect the actors: Problems must be interpreted in order to be solved. Here we can see how ideas influence actors: contrasting ideas create different understandings of issues and different construction of solutions (Saurugger 2014: 156-157).

## **1.2 Social construction of a European identity**

An important key is that “constructivism is not a substantive theory of integration, but rather ontological perspective on meta theory” (Risse 2004: 174). The constructivist approach of European identity, as socially constructed, arose from the ambition to find out whether it is possible to detect a common European identity within the EU, and if so, how it has been established. In the constructivist analysis, the first presumption is similar to neofunctionalism: the result of the European integration process causes the formation of transnational identity. In the analysis, the constructivist set an assumption that in order to recognize the visibility and legitimacy of the European political system, identification with the EU to some extent is required. Nevertheless, the idea is not to assume that it is possible to be only European or feel a sense of belonging just with the nation state, but to prove the existence of multi-level identity (Saurugger 2014: 154-155). People can identify themselves with the EU and their home country, but also based on their gender or other sub-groups of the society. Thomas Risse defines both Europe and nation as imagined communities and emphasises people do not have to select only one identity, but can have both. The most separating situation arises between those, who feel a sense of belonging only with their nation and those, who see and feel themselves being part of both nation state and Europe. In order to support the idea of policy-making on the European level, it is unnecessary to have people or communities who are willing to replace national identity with the European one. The only precondition is the combination of two-level identities that complete each other (Risse 2004: 167). “European identity is not a fact, but rather a construction in a specific time and place, the context of which changes according to the political and social context in which it is embedded” (Risse 2004: 171) This approach explains the idea of Euroscepticism in constructivist studies, because identity building is not smooth, but controversial. One of the possible outcomes is the rise of opposition to some policies and also to integration of Europe (Risse 2010).

The stronger the member states of the EU identify themselves as part of the European Union, the more they feel connected with the European community and, therefore, are more willing to adapt the decision made in the EU level. However, since identities are socially constructed and when the political and social context changes, the identities can change as well. According to Thomas Risse, it is not definite that the European

identity coexisting with the national one is sufficient to further European integration in the long run, especially from the social perspective. Although, the identities may not be influenced by everyday policymaking in the EU, they do matter in bigger decisions that determine the course of the union (Risse 2010: 182, 203). Moreover, changing identities through persuasion and without crises or critical junctures is almost impossible (Risse 2010: 100). In the context of this thesis it is possible that the refugee crisis has influenced the construction of social identities which has led to the weakening of European identities among Visegrad group. Their attitudes toward European integration might also change: as a result of refugee crisis, it is seen as a threat to nation-state sovereignty.

### **1.3 Competing ideas of European Integration**

In constructivist studies, ideas always matter, but in order to do that, they have to be shared by wide range of people or other groups, such as organisations, policymakers, social groups or society. Ideas include a strong social component, but simultaneously they are mental constructs of individuals, “sets of distinctive beliefs, principles and attitudes” which determine the general orientations for behaviour and policy (Tannenwald 2005: 15). According to Wendt, ideas are not more important nor autonomous from power and interests. In opposite, power and interests consist of ideas and influence their formation. For power and interest explanations, ideas are presumed and, to that extent, do not compete with ideational explanations at all. “The meaning of the distribution of power in international relation is constituted in important part by the distribution of interests, and that the content of interests is in turn constituted in important part by ideas” (Wendt 1999: 135-136). The main perception of this thesis is to focus on two common European integration approaches – intergovernmental and supranational. Instead of using these as classical theories, I will adopt them as two competing ideas of European integration. Similarly to other theories, many different approaches of these ideas exist. Here, only a few of these will be explained to distinguish the main principles of both approaches.

Intergovernmentalism, like many other theoretical approaches of European Integration, is state-centric and aims to determine whether the sovereignty in Europe can still be seen on national level or it is being shifted to the European level (Bickerton 2012: 22). The intergovernmental approach presents integration as “series

of bargains” or, as some others have stated, it refers to co-operation between the sovereign member states of the union at any chosen level based on their common interests. This cooperation is also known as pooled sovereignty and does not threaten the sovereignty of the countries in any significant way, because the states have the full control over the degree and nature of actions. It helps the states to adapt the restrictions that international environment is causing and by this, strengthens them (Saurugger 2014: 55, Bickerton 2012: 22). In liberal intergovernmentalist views, institutions are seen as mechanisms to make sure that commitments made for member governments are credible, that is a way of assuring other governments, with whom deals are made, will stick to their side of the bargain (CIVITAS 2016). The study of economically rational actors revealed that the main focuses of liberal intergovernmentalism are political and social interactions in economic integration. Overall, the theory looks for explaining dynamics of European integration and understanding why sovereign states have agreed to transfer certain decision-making to supranational institutions, which continuously increased their powers to the level of controlling internal economic policy of the country (Saurugger 2014: 67). “Tensions between members on issues of Eurozone governance, or on defence matters, are taken as a proof that the EU remains a fissile coalition of self-interested governments (Bickerton 2012: 23)”.

Supranational governance has its roots in neo-functionalism and is a less state-centric alternative to liberal intergovernmentalism (Saurugger 2014). Neo-functionalist approaches stress the many possible ways of spill-over whereby “the cumulative weight on individual decision biases outcomes in favour of greater supranationalism” (Bickerton 2012: 22-23). The supranational idea refers to sharing the sovereignty of a state, meaning that in certain policy areas, member states of the union have decided to delegate their decision-making rights to the institutional body that stands above the nation state. In this case countries agree to accept the majority decisions and with this may suffer from some loss of national sovereignty (Nugent 2003: 502–503). To a large extent, this definition can be used to describe the nature of the EU- states agree on certain policy areas where the decision-making is delegated to the institutions of the European Union. Bodies that are called supranational must satisfy set criteria: to a certain degree, they are independent from the states that created them; their orders and reached resolutions are legally binding on the member states as well as on natural and

legal persons; their measures are superior over national ones and they differ from other international organizations by the extent of their power (Majone 2005: 43).

The main theorist of liberal intergovernmentalism, Andrew Moravcsik did not see strong supranational institutions as direct opposite of intergovernmentalism. He believed that by joining all, except the most minimalists of regimes, means losing national autonomy to some extent in exchange for certain advantages. That decision increases the political risk to all the member states: “In the intergovernmentalist view, the unique institutional structure of the EC is acceptable to national governments only insofar as it strengthens, rather than weakens their control over domestic affairs, permitting them to attain goals otherwise unachievable” (Moravcsik 1993: 507) After the establishment of the European Union, one can argue, the member states behaviour have shifted more towards the supranational approach along with the EU itself and the concept of shared sovereignty is more and more acceptable with the deepening of integration. According to Stone Sweet and Sandholtz theory of supranational governance, intergovernmental politics is considered as the perfect type of international bargaining between these states where the EU works as a very strict international regime. The supranational governance is the end of the intergovernmental continuum and represents centralized control of governance power over policy areas across the involved member-states (Rosamond 2000: 127). It is clear that in the reality there is a certain balance between these two fundamentally different approaches that can be referred as two-level games. Based on the approach of Robert Putnam, this means that states are acting simultaneously in two levels. At the national level the power-holders are trying to increase the support of domestic groups while at the international level “the same actors seem to bargain in a ways that enhance their position domestically by meeting the demands of key domestic constituents” (Rosamond 2000: 136). In the EU many member states are strongly interested in domestic benefit of the union-level decisions but in some cases they are willing or should be willing to accept with less self-profit and focus on the larger context.

In the EU characteristics, both approaches can be seen. In defence of intergovernmentalism, it can be implied that the decisions of most public policy areas are still mainly taken at the national level; European Council rarely uses majority voting for decision making, instead, all important decisions need the approval of

minister in the Council of ministers; the Commission and the European Parliament, seen as two most supranational institutions, are restricted in their powers to make decisions. On the supranational side, the arguments are that the Commission is very important legislator in the secondary and regulatory decision-making; norm changing and treaty reforms have increased the policy spheres where qualified majority voting is now common; the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam has considerably broadened the influence of the European Parliament over EU decision-making and the decision that have binding force constitute the EU law which in some cases takes precedence over national law (Nugent 2003: 504–505) It can be concluded, that European Union is a mix of supranational and intergovernmental approach.

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

The recent challenges the EU is currently facing have raised concerns that there is a connection between the crises and remarkable rise of nationalism. In terms of critical times that demand credible decisions, the EU's supranational approach and shared sovereignty is not necessarily accepted by all of the member states. Furthermore, in these critical times dissatisfied member states seem more likely to favour national sovereignty over the integration. In this thesis, the theory of member states favouring national sovereignty over integration in crisis is tested with Visegrad Group countries.

The Visegrad Group was formed in 1991 and consists of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. All of these countries became the members of the EU in 2004, but the V4 continued to exist inside the union. The purpose of this group has overall been the same since the establishment: Central-European cooperation to reach set goals and common interests. The Visegrad Group favours the European integration efforts and aims cooperation with all the countries in order to ensure the democratic development in all parts of Europe (International Visegrad Fund 2017). Recently, the V4 has taken a seemingly different approach to the policies of the EU. An article, published in *The Economist* on January 28<sup>th</sup> in 2016, states the Visegrad Group has made a turn from accelerating integration towards illiberalism by taking extremely strong anti-migrant views. The loudest of voices has been Viktor Orban, the prime minister of Hungary and after the elections in Poland were won by far-right nationalist conservative Law and Justice party, the negative attitudes towards refugees took over in there as well. Slovakia and Czech Republic have been more modest, but

also disagree with the EU's migration policy (The Economist Newspaper Limited: 2016).

As illustrated above, the V4 has shown a lot of dissatisfaction with the recent decisions of the EU and recent political development in these countries and strengthening of the far right political elite in particular seem to compose a real threat to the European Integration. Therefore, to test the theory, the set hypothesis is:

**Keeping all the other factors constant, when critical issues are at stake at the European level, countries of the Visegrad Group are more likely to favour national sovereignty over the integration.**

Through conduction of discourse analysis, the goal of this thesis is to find a change in the attitudes of V4 in terms of the crisis where critical issues are at stake. Critical issues are defined here as nationally sensitive problems and decision that go against national interests. It is expected that before the crisis, the countries are fully or mainly supporting the European Integration as the supranational idea of integration. However, when a crisis appears, the balance changes and now the Visegrad Group are expected to favour more national sovereignty, as the intergovernmental idea of integration, over the European integration. This would show that, when some decisions go against the national interests of the V4, they prefer the intergovernmental approach. The result of the conducted analysis will confirm or disconfirm the set hypothesis.

It is presumed that before the crisis, the countries are acting according to the regulatory norms and do what they should do, thus supporting the supranational approach while after the crisis they still turn to constitutive norms such as interests and thus their interests favour more the intergovernmental idea.

This hypothesis also contains certain limitations. First, the refugee crisis is the critical issue focused on in the thesis. Although other recent critical happenings may have, to a small degree, contributed to the change of attitudes towards the integration, the current research focuses only on the change occurred with the refugee crisis. Second, the change is analysed only as a shift in attitudes among the whole V4 and, hence, it is not possible to distinguish the changes between these four countries. Third, the

findings of these thesis do not mean that the same result will be found when testing the existing theory with other member states or unions of member states within the EU regardless of the political developments in these countries.

It is important to take into consideration that migration topic has been discussed in the EU level before the current crisis. The asylum policy was supranationalized to a large extent already with the Lisbon Treaty. According to Thomas Risse, the amount of asylum seekers at that time did not contribute into supranationalisation of the policy, rather it is a spill-over from other policy areas (Risse 2010: 220).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Critical discourse analysis**

In order to find whether there is a connection between socially constructed European identity and change of ideas towards the integration among Visegrad countries and how this is expressed, critical discourse analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough is used. The approach of Fairclough is a suitable method, because it focuses on the concept of social practice. Here, it is understood as “relatively stabilised form of social activity” (Fairclough 2003: 205). Each of such practices is a reflection of multiple components in a composition that generally contains discourse as well. Therefore, CDA is a method for analysing dialectical connection between discourse and other aspects of social practices. It is specially interested in fundamental changes happening in modern social life. Since the aim of this thesis is to find how the discourse effects the changes in the society, this method is appropriate.

In social practices, discourse appears in three main ways. First, it is a part of broader practice. In addition, discourse emerges in representations – a process of social construction of practices. Social actors of any practice produce representations of others and at the same time of their own reflexive practices, including self-construction by incorporating other practices into their own. These are differently represented by other social actors based on their positioning within the practice. Thus, representations enter and form social processes. Discourses involve representations of how things are in the present and have been during the past, but also how things might or should be in the future through imagining. Third, discourse figures in a way of taking part in the process of identity-creation (Fairclough 2003: 206). Discourses as imaginaries might be established as new ways of being, new identities. The social formations depend upon the change of the subject. Through social practices the representations of self, others and different situations are positioned and reproduced (Fairclough 2003: 208).

In the empirical part of the thesis the critical discourse analysis is used in two time periods. The first part of the analysis focuses on integration as a social practice before

the migration discourse appeared. The main aim here is to detect the aspects of the text that support the intergovernmental or supranational integration approaches. According to the hypothesis, it is expected that the pre-migration discourse includes more elements of supranational approach since the integration process was seen more positively. At the same time, it must be taken into account that the pre-migration time period can contain some influences or after waves of recent events and critical happenings in the EU such as the Eurozone crisis that might have imbalanced the intergovernmental and supranational attitudes towards the integration. In the context of the thesis, any event besides migration crisis is not separately focused on, but possible factors that could affect the outcome of the hypothesis are still highlighted.

The second part of the analysis focuses on social practices of integration in the migration discourse. The aim here is similar to the first part: the elements referring either to intergovernmental or supranational idea of the integration are distinguished. According to the hypothesis there should be a change of balance between two approaches and intergovernmental elements such as turn to national sovereignty should be now more visible than supranational idea. The last part of the analysis compares the findings of two previous chapters and makes conclusions whether the set hypothesis is confirmed or disconfirmed.

## **2.2 Research design**

Since the aim of this thesis is to investigate the connections between the changes of Visegrad understandings towards the integration, the best way to do it is by analysing the different annual reports and official statements<sup>1</sup> of Visegrad countries. All of the used materials are published on the official webpage of the V4, accessible for everyone and in English. In the case of annual reports, the author of each report is respectively the Visegrad member state whose term of presidency it concludes. The authors of official statements are ministers from different policy fields as well as heads of the governments or presidents of the V4. Many of the meetings held include other countries outside of the group and in these cases the joint statements express the common visions of all participants. It is important to note here that every chairing country is free to choose a way of conducting the annual report and there is no

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<sup>1</sup> The official statements include joint statements, declarations, communiqués, letters and memorandums.

standard way of doing it. This results in publishing reports with very different amount of information and details.

All of the reports and statements are represented jointly, this means that they express the common views of the representatives of four countries: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Czech Republic. Thus, it is not possible to distinguish the views of the different countries and all documents are observed as subject to the V4 as a whole. These publicly released statements on the webpage of the Visegrad Group are suitable for analysis due to the fact that they include the common views, aims and interests of the Visegrad countries towards the European Union. These highlight how the Visegrad countries see their own role in the EU and also exposes the expectations towards the union they are part of.

To make the discourse analysis as apparent and detailed as possible, also to create suitable conditions for comparison, the first observed time frame includes documents from the year 2009 until 2014. The observable period starts in the end of 2009 which marks the beginning of a new era in European Union: on 1<sup>st</sup> of December the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force. The purpose of this treaty is to make EU more democratic and efficient as well as to give more power to the EU institutions (European Union 2017b). This treaty indicates to the increased support of member states for more supranational union. Therefore, the first text under analyse is the 2009/2010 Annual Report of the Visegrad Group that covers the period between July 2009 and June 2010. All together five Annual Reports are analysed in this part: 2009/2010, 2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. In addition, three reports out of five include selected texts of documents and joint statements adapted in the V4 meetings during that period. Due to a lack of suitable material, these texts are included in the analysis. The annual report of 2009/2010 and 2011/2012 consists of only the summary of activities and decisions during respective presidency while annual reports of 2010/2011, 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 includes other documents as well. The annual report of 2013/2014 ends the observable period because the year of 2015 already marks the beginning of the migration crisis in European Union.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the two annual reports and official statements, released during the migration crisis. During the 2014/2015 presidency, the

peak of the migration crisis in October 2015 emerged, when around 7000 migrants per day crossed the sea from Turkey to Greece (European Commission). The analyse concludes with the annual report of 2015/2016 since the next report will be published not before the summer of 2017. The first analysed report includes the joint statements of the Visegrad Group while the other document consists of only a brief summary of events and decisions in 2015 and 2016. In order to slightly balance the amount of analysed texts between first and second period, the official statements published between July 2015 and June 2016 available in the homepage, are added to the analysis. The first analysed joint statement is released on 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 and the last on 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2016.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1 Views of the Visegrad Group 2009-2014**

Between 2009 and 2014, five annual reports of the Visegrad Group were published to highlight the main areas of the cooperation between the members and also with the European union. In this chapter, these documents are analysed in order to find out whether more emphasis is on supranational or intergovernmental views during that timeframe.

During the observed 5-year period, the focus of the Visegrad Group in the area of the European Union affairs has been relatively stable. On larger scale, the reports highlight the same policy areas where Visegrad express their approval of European-level decision making and within these support the theory of European identity and supranational approach of integration. In the 2012/2013 report foreword, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Radoslaw Sikorski noted: "In the early years of our EU membership, key areas of Visegrad cooperation began to crystalize. One central theme was European policy, in particular ways of speeding up the economic development of our countries, i.e. the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy (Polish Presidency 2013) Reports revealed that now the main policy areas between Visegrad and EU are economy, energy security, transport, climate, agriculture, cohesion, EU enlargement and neighbourhood, defence and security, as well as free movement of people. This quite impressive list indicates that European Union has moved beyond the initial boundaries and has become something bigger than the economic community of the region. Nevertheless, cooperation on these policy areas do not mean that Visegrad countries did not express their expectations and disagreements towards certain decisions and documents when the interests of the group were not taken into account. These are the areas where the intergovernmental approach is most favoured and felt more as a threat to the national sovereignty.

The report from 2009/2010 highlights the field of agriculture as one of the most favoured policies managed in the EU level. The Visegrad group clearly states that problem with the dairy market, supermarket chains and future of post-2013 Common

Agricultural Policy (CAP) “shall not be solved at member state level but at European level” (Hungarian presidency 2010). Views on the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy re-emerge on the 2012/2013 report regards with the reform of CAP for 2014–2020. Overall, the Visegrad ministers support the reforming the policy, because “the reform gives a possibility for changes of the CAP conducive to more effective, fair, market and development-oriented policy supporting competitive position of the EU agriculture and its sustainability” (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 32). At the same time, they are not satisfied with some of the reform draft proposals, stating they require more “simplified, cost effective and non-discriminatory solutions” (*Ibid*). Moreover, in new proposed elements of the payment system they state “support to young farmers and small farmers scheme should be voluntary for the Member States” and in requirements under greening they stress “share of agricultural land devoted for ecological focused areas /.../ could be controlled at regional or national as well as farm level” (*Ibid*). In 2013/14 report the Visegrad Group also underlines the need for “larger flexibility to member states /.../ to reduce the existing differences in the sensitive sectors” (Hungarian Presidency 2014, Annex: 11). The two-sided approach to the CAP shows that the relations between Visegrad and EU are more complex than they may seem: from one side, the statements towards CAP supports the supranational approach; on the other side, it also includes intergovernmental elements.

Connected with the financial decisions being part of the EU budget, the cohesion Policy (CP) is another example of Visegrads’ EU affairs. The 2010/2011 report, in the light of EU new Budget Review, the V4 (among other ministers from the region) highlight the cohesion policy as an important instrument in the EU budget to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives and “an engine for the harmonious development and economic and social growth of the whole European Union” (Slovak Presidency 2011, Annex: 53). Therefore, they support the current approaches for Cohesion Policy funding. In the Bratislava declaration Visegrad considers the Cohesion Policy as “one of the main factors helping to narrow the existing regional gaps/disparities in individual member states” (Slovak Presidency 2011, Annex: 27). However, similarly to CAP here the Visegrad also state their requirements regarding to the future EU Cohesion policy. Namely that the less developed regions should be able to access a wider range of priorities than developed ones and the “distribution of resources

between the priorities has to be decided by Member States according to their specific needs and objectives” (Slovak Presidency 2011, Annex: 53-54). Same pattern was repeated in the 2012/2013 yearly report, where V4 (among Slovenia) supported the significant progress toward Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 Regulatory Package, but still insist implementing their perspectives in negotiations over the next thematic blocks of CP (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 34-36). In 2013/2014 report the negotiations over the EU cohesion policy are closing and Visegrad is satisfied with the results by stating: “Exchanging experiences of bilateral negotiations with the European Commission, and coordinating positions so that the individual negotiating strategies mutually support each other and the common Visegrad objectives, were important factors in reaching an outcome favourable for the Central European EU Member States” (Hungarian Presidency 2014: 15). This shows that, although V4 favours issues of the cohesion Policy to be solved in the EU level, they still are very much interested that their concerns are taken into account. Here, the elements on supranational and intergovernmental are once again intertwined.

EU enlargement and Neighbourhood are the policy areas that most frequently emerge from the analysed V4 Annual Reports regarding to European affairs. Here, the Visegrad holds a stable position through years, clearly stating that they are in favour of the further EU enlargement and the cooperation with the neighbouring countries of the EU is essential. Visegrad Group has held numerous meetings with the Western-Balkan countries, also with Eastern-European states like Armenia and Georgia. These have showed their support to Belarus and Ukraine in times of crisis, ensuring strengthening ties between these countries and the EU. In the 2010/2011 report, the Visegrad Group highlights: “In their final statements, the V4 Ministers supported visa liberalisation for citizens of Western-Balkan countries, the EU and NATO enlargement, and settlement of some pending regional problems” (Slovak Presidency 2011: 5). In the event of the Croatian Accession to the EU, the Visegrad countries stated that “Since their accession to the European Union, the V4 countries have been providing strong political support to the EU enlargement process by keeping this issue high on the EU’s agenda “(Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 60). They also stress regional cooperation as European integration cornerstone and intend to continue developing and strengthening the European integration process (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 60-61). According to the V4 statements, it can be concluded that in

terms of enlargement and neighbourhood, the Visegrad Group is strongly in favour of further European integration and, thus, support the supranational idea.

Security of the region is another policy field where Visegrad group has taken a firm position on its views. V4 supports and stresses the necessity of EU Common Security and Defence Policy and, therefore, indicates to the supranational idea of integration. The subject of defence has been discussed by the Visegrad Group leaders through the analysed period between 2009 and 2014 in numerous meetings and conferences. For example, in the Annual Report of 2012/2013, during the GLOBSEC international conference the Visegrad ministers “informed the public about the adoption of a joint declaration, which called for strengthening Europe’s Common Security and Defence Policy by, among others, supporting the European defence industry “(Polish Presidency 2013: 16). Intentions of forming a common Visegrad Battle Group is another common step stated already in 2009/2010 report and formed into a firm plan in the upcoming reports. In the 2012/13 report they declare that creating an EU V4 Battle Group would be their contribution to the Common Security and defence Policy of the European Union (Polish Presidency 2013: 28). A report published year later states if the Battle Group is successful, it may be used in future NATO, EU or other missions (Hungarian Presidency 2014: 11). None of the analysed documents highlighted any V4 objections to the EU policy in this field and no elements supporting the intergovernmental approach were found.

In terms of environment policy, Visegrad countries have also agreed to take common action as a union in order to achieve collective goals. In the year 2012/2013 report, Visegrad Group welcomes the progress EU has been made to reach the goals for climate policies up to 2020 and starts to form the common vision for policies beyond 2020 (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 44). The V4 informs that “the Ministers recognise that the sharing of efforts in reaching Union’s climate and energy targets amongst the Member States was designed with good faith but could be improved and reflect changing conditions better” (Polish Presidency 2013 Annex: 47). Visegrad countries find that EU should have a common vision in the issues of climate change in the future as well and, therefore, in 2014 they state: “the proposed 2030 climate and energy policy framework is an appreciated step forward to low carbon economy, taking into account the three key elements: sustainability, competitiveness and

security of supply in a balanced way.” (Polish Presidency 2013 Annex: 47). The Visegrad Group also supports the EU Emission Trading Scheme, establishment of proper carbon-leakage rules and clearly states that “a final decision on the climate and energy policy framework should be taken by the European Council” (Hungarian Presidency 2014, Annex: 61). However, in the field of environment, the V4 also have some ambitions to make their own decisions. This statement is supported in the latter report when the conclusion after the meeting of ministers declares: “discussing a number of topics and issuing a common declaration, they highlighted the importance of subsidiarity and sovereignty of countries with regard to the cultivation of genetically modified organisms” (Hungarian Presidency 2014: 23). Here, the preserving sovereignty, instead of sharing it by allowing the decision making happen in the EU level, supports the intergovernmental approach.

Another reason, why attitudes of the Visegrad countries to the EU environment policies are mixed, is the fact that there is a strong connection between slowing down the climate change and energy security of the region. This, in turn, is related with the threat to regional economic growth. The V4 joint letter sent to the European Commission in 2012 underscored that the EU climate policy should take into account energy security of the Member States, while also noting the policy’s crucial importance for the competitiveness of the European economy (Polish Presidency 2013: 22). The wish to guarantee the energy security is already stressed in the first analysed report, dating back to 2009/2010, and implementations on the field are continuous through all analysed years. As stated in 2012/2013 report, the need for ensuring energy security in European level is connected with the energy crisis in 2009, when Russia stopped the gas supplies to Central Europe (Polish Presidency 2013: 20). The Visegrad strongly favours the creation of common EU energy policy and “stresses the need for the development of the energy policy of the European Union implementing the objectives as agreed in the Treaty of Lisbon” (Slovak Presidency 2011, Annex: 43). In 2010/2011 annual report the V4 ministers expressed their support for “the need to further develop the regional energy sector as part of the EU energy market” (*ibid*). Next year the Visegrad countries and the European Council promised to cooperate closer and more comprehensively in the terms of EU Energy 2020 strategy (Czech Presidency 2012: 11). From 2012/2013 Some conflicts regarding to energy security rise: “For economic benefits and against the

environmental considerations the Visegrad countries favour the use of fossil fuels in a large scale and request freedom to create their own energy mixes” (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 46). While discussing the framework proposed for 2030 climate and energy policy, it was agreed that “there is no need for any legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency target in order to ensure cost-efficiency and avoid competition of different policy measures” (Hungarian Presidency 2014, Annex: 33). In addition, V4 expects that EU fully supports the use of nuclear energy and classifies it as favoured low carbon technology (Hungarian Presidency 2014: 8). In conclusion, the V4 finds Energy issues suitable to solve on the EU level, but simultaneously do not agree on some solutions which brings out both supranational and intergovernmental elements.

In the field of economic relations, Visegrad is firmly interested in strengthening the ties with the EU even further. Internal market and industrial policy are only a few examples: “concrete actions should be taken to create a single market for digital services; to strengthen the transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructures of the single market; to enable the full potential of free movement of services; and to create the most advantageous conditions for entrepreneurs /.../ More competitive Europe with a strong industry and ambitious industrial policy is possible” (Polish Presidency 2013, Annex: 38). Through the reports Visegrad emphasises the free movement of goods, people, capital and services as one of the cornerstones of European Union. When it comes to sharing sovereignty in the EU level, economy is the easiest field to do it in the sake of establishing common goals and with no doubt also to increase the financial benefits of individual member states.

The conducted analyse between the years of 2009 and 2014 highlights that the visions of Visegrad Group regarding the EU affairs are more complex than it may seem. At first, it looks that Visegrad is supporting the EU integration by all means and thus favouring the supranational idea of the union over the intergovernmental. However, the more in-depth analyse revealed that among the Visegrad–EU affairs, there are also statements that do not support the decision making in the supranational level. Instead, these are in favour of preserving national sovereignty on some policy areas and thus favour the intergovernmental idea. In the field of economy, security and defence as well as EU enlargement and neighbourhood the Visegrad Group supports the further

integration without any significant issues. When it comes to agriculture, cohesion policy, environment and energy, the stances of both supranational and intergovernmental can be detected.

### **3.2 Views of the Visegrad Group 2014-2016**

This part of the analysis consists of two annual reports between 2014 and 2016 and are the latest, since the next report will be conducted at the beginning of July 2017. These reports include the beginning and evolving of migration crisis, that is a difficult challenge for the whole European Union. The main purpose of this part is similar to latter: to analyse the attitudes of Visegrad Group towards the EU affairs to highlight the views supporting supranational idea or on the contrary, favour the intergovernmental approach.

Analysed annual reports of the observed period reveal that to a large extent Visegrad Group continues improving the already existing policy areas in terms of EU affairs. For 2014/2015 period, Slovak Presidency chose a motto: “Dynamic Visegrad for Europe and Beyond” and highlighted the interest to strengthen the competitiveness and economic growth as well as better coordinate the positions in European affairs (Slovak Presidency 2015: 4, 6). 2015/2016 report states that the focus was on clear and achievable priorities and instead of broadening the agenda, the focal point was on the already existing areas of cooperation (Czech Presidency 2016). The highlighted areas of EU affairs include Security and Defence, cohesion, energy, EU enlargement and environment. From the agricultural side, the focus has shifted to organic food production and the debates about completing the EU digital single market have intensified. However, finding common solutions for the biggest migration crisis since the Second World War overshadows all the other policy areas and influences the EU-Visegrad balance. Both reports highlight this fact as well (Czech Presidency 2016; Slovak Presidency 2015: 6). V4 attitudes towards certain decision among the European Union, especially the migration crisis, remain controversial.

Discussions of future of the enlargement and EU Neighbourhood Policy, especially toward Western Balkans but also Eastern Partnership proved to be on the agenda in both analysed reports. The annual report of the Slovak presidency states: “The V4 countries expressed their full support for the integration of Balkan countries into the

EU and NATO in the medium term” (Slovak Presidency 2015: 7). In the Joint Statement on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Visegrad Group published in 2016, the V4 highlights: “We have unequivocally advocated for the EU enlargement as a means of expanding the area of stability and prosperity. It should be considered our moral duty, as countries which have used the opportunities opened by our own memberships, to keep the doors to the EU open for future candidates” (Visegrad Group 2016a). These statements clearly indicate that the V4 is supporting the idea of further integration and thus supranational approach.

Security and Defence is another area strongly and frequently represented in both of the reports. On EU level they mainly promise to fully committed and work towards more effective Common Security and Defence policy (Slovak Presidency 2015: 33-35). As a V4 contribution to the security of Europe, they emphasise the importance of EU V4 Battle Group that can be a beneficial asset to use in future EU missions. Furthermore, they even wish to increase their contribution in a longer term stating: “/.../ we welcome the Polish initiative to form another V4 EU Battlegroup in the second semester of 2019. /.../To further enhance the V4 defence cooperation, we task our Ministers of Defence to /.../ work further on establishing the permanent V4 modular force for NATO and EU rapid response formations as well as operations” (Slovak Presidency 2015, Annex: 34). In a joint statement issued September 4, 2015 the Visegrad Group assures to increase their participation in the EU security by bigger financial, technical and expert assistance (Visegrad Group 2015a). The V4 states that the strengthening the area of security and defence is connected with migration crisis, unstable Eastern Neighbourhood and other recent happenings (Slovak Presidency 2015, Appendix: 36). However, in the context of this analysis, it can be confirmed that Visegrad attitudes support the supranational idea of integration.

As one of their priorities among economic affairs in 2014/2015, the Visegrad Group raises the important issue of Digital Agenda (Slovak Presidency 2015: 20). The V4 sees this as a step of taking the idea of EU Single Market into a new level and making it fully operative and more beneficial for all member states. In 2014/2015 report, they highlight: “The EU Digital Single Market Strategy provides an opportunity for the Visegrad countries to become digital by default. “We agree to cooperate in negotiations on the Digital Single Market Initiatives from the very first stage” (Slovak

Presidency 2015, Annex: 25). The Annual report of 2015/2016 underlines again the progress in deepening digital agenda and this fact is supported by the many meetings held in the field of digitalisation processes and EU Digital Single Market (Czech Presidency, 2016). In a joint statement after the Britain' decision to leave the EU, the Visegrad emphasise that one of the goals of the union should remain to carry out the still incomplete single market as one of the four basic freedoms of the EU (Visegrad Group, 2016b). It is clear that in terms of economic improvement and larger benefits, the Visegrad Group strongly favours strengthening and as well, broadening the economic activity within the EU borders and even finds, that EU should focus more on doing it. Sharing sovereignty in this case is seen as a profitable decision and refers to supranational idea.

In the field of energy, the V4 still feels part of a very vulnerable region and thus needs to solve the issues in this policy area. The Annual report of 2014/2015 indicates increased focus on energy security and creation of common vision towards achieving EU energy policy objectives (Slovak Presidency 2015: 4, 12). The Visegrad Group sees the EU as a main contributor of finding solutions for the energy issues on the European level (Slovak Presidency 2015: Appendix, 23). Furthermore, to make energy more affordable, the V4 is willing to give EU additional legislative power by stating: “/.../ we highlight the importance of /.../ strengthening EU legislation related to security of supply and transparency of all gas agreements, while the confidentiality of commercially sensitive information needs to be guaranteed, as well as full implementation of the legislation and guaranteeing competitive and affordable energy prices” (*Ibid*). A joint statement in the occasion of the Visegrad Group Summit in December 2015 also confirms the important role of the EU in this field: “Lastly, we agree that energy and energy security are one of the top priorities for the Visegrád region as well as for the European Union as a whole” (Visegrad Group, 2015b). However, the Visegrad countries firmly object all attempts of the EU to fix an allowed energy mix for member countries by stating: “The V4+ countries also maintain their position that any decision on climate and energy policy must respect that it is the sovereign right of every Member State to freely choose its most suitable energy mix as provided in the Treaty” (Slovak Presidency 2015: Appendix, 62). From the last report, it can be concluded, that in terms of energy cooperation, even the V4 can have different views: “However, on some issues the V4 were unable to find a

common position, which only confirms the trend towards fragmentation of V4 energy cooperation” (Polish Presidency, 2016). The attitudes towards EU energy policy areas tend to be mixed. Overall, the Visegrad is supporting finding solutions to energy issues on the European level and even agrees that EU should have more legislative power over the area which clearly indicates supranational vision. However, simultaneously they strongly insist keeping the right to choose their own energy mix by emphasising on the sovereignty and thus support the intergovernmental approach of European integration.

In the area of cohesion policy, the Visegrad group continued to shape their common positions on EU Cohesion Policy programs for the 2014-2020 programming period. The main discussion took place in 2015 May, when Visegrad among with Slovenia and Croatia agreed to accept the idea of improving EU Cohesion Policy under an ambitious Investment Plan for Europe. The V4 states: “We UNDERLINE that the new European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) will complement and be additional to the EU Cohesion Policy programmes which remain the most important drivers of investment in our countries and which considerably facilitate private investments” (Slovak Presidency 2015: Appendix, 58). The V4 also highlights the importance of financial instruments, to meet the objectives of Cohesion Policy, which go further than 2014–2020 programming period and agree that “bringing the best value for money should be the top priority in implementation of Cohesion Policy” (Slovak Presidency 2015: Appendix, 59). The year 2015/2016 report states that although Cohesion Policy was supposed to be one of their thematic priorities as well, it was set aside: “/.../ the review of the Cohesion Policy envelopes for 2017–2020 did not take place due to the absence of a Commission proposal” (Czech Presidency, 2016). Nevertheless, several other meetings regarding to Cohesion Policy were still held. In one of the meetings, the V4 agreed to support addressing the migration challenges by allocation financial sources from the EU budget, but without affecting for example, the cohesion policy (Visegrad Group, 2015b). Since Visegrad Group highlight the importance of Cohesion Policy to the member states and there are no direct objections in any V4 statements in regarding to the Cohesion policy during the analysed term, it can be concluded that here the supranational idea of integration dominates.

In environmental field, Climate change, Clean Air Package and Waste Package were the main topics under discussion in the European level (Slovak Presidency 2015: 17). In the framework for EU's Climate and Energy policy the V4 supported clean air package to further reduce air pollution as well as Circular Economy and Waste Package proposal while agreeing that "prevention of waste generation is one of the key elements from the side of the resource efficiency approach" (Slovak Presidency 2015, Annex: 63-64). The V4 also agrees that the EU should have a common position in the 2015 Paris Climate conference (Slovak Presidency 2015, Annex: 63). In addition to agreements, the Visegrad Group voices their dissatisfaction towards the conditions in the environmental field as well. They highlight that the level of pollutants reduction in the Clean Air Package is too ambitious, the Waste Package should consider with different base line of EU members and the recycling targets are overly ambitious as well. Furthermore, they emphasize: "The introduction of any legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency targets at EU or national level is not desirable" (Slovak Presidency 2015, Annex: 62-64). The complex attitudes prove that Visegrad approves environment and climate policy as something to deal with EU level supranationally. Accordingly, in some directives they do not want to agree with legally binding decision and thus support intergovernmentalism.

With no doubt it can be implied that the migration crisis was the biggest issue in the agenda for the both analysed reports and caused many heated debates. For the Slovak Presidency, the migration problem arose in the second part of the chairing, while for the Czech Presidency, the crisis overshadowed all other policy areas (Slovak Presidency 2015: 6; Czech Presidency, 2016). Although in the European agenda since the Lisbon Treaty, the migration now rapidly became the EU level issue. To a large extent, V4 shows their solidarity in the issue: they express regret over the lost lives in the Mediterranean Sea; they are willing to contribute financially and through sending humanitarian aid to the zone of crisis and intensify the protection control over the external borders of the EU; they agree that it is crucial to find effective solutions on the root causes of migration. In a 2015 joint statement the V4 highlights: ". In the spirit of shared European values of humanism, solidarity and responsibility, the countries of the Visegrad Group have continuously taken an active part in defining and implementing many measures in response to the migration challenges" (Visegrad Group, 2015a). Furthermore, the V4 welcomes the European Agenda on Migration as

an attempt to a comprehensive framework to find solutions (Slovak Presidency 2015: 28). However, accepting the mandatory migration quotas to ensure the more balanced relocation of the refugees is the EU approach the V4 have been fully objecting since it was introduced (Slovak Presidency 2015: 6). In addition, the Visegrad Group expresses their disappointment towards the EU for not finding “adequate solutions to migration pressure from and via the Western Balkan route as well as the Eastern route” (Slovak Presidency 2015: 26). The 2015/2016 Annual Report indicates, that the V4 demands toward voluntary solidarity measures came under criticism and therefore the “V4 brand” lost some of their good reputation (Czech Presidency, 2016). However, even in the terms of migration policy it would not be possible to see the Visegrad attitudes as a fully intergovernmental approach because of objecting the mandatory migration quotas. In other fields, the group is giving their contribution to tackle the root issues and find long term solutions to the migration crisis.

The analysed period between 2014 and 2016 has proven to be very turbulent in terms of Visegrad and EU relations, but still full of cooperation. At the beginning it might seem, that the crisis changed the V4 attitudes toward the EU integration to a large extent, but the conducted analyse proved no radical changes. Again, different policy areas proved to contain supranational as well as intergovernmental ideas of the integration. In the field of EU enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Digital Single Market, Security and Defence, as well as Cohesion Policy, the statements of the V4 supported further European Integration and thus indicate to supranational idea. The mixed approaches to different issues could be seen in the policy areas of environment, energy and migration where elements of both—intergovernmental and supranational—were visible.

### **3.3. Comparison of the two periods and results**

The period between 2009 and 2016 has been very productive time for the Visegrad Group in the terms of strengthening their position among the European Union. The V4 has developed their cooperation between each member state and capability to

shape common views towards the EU policies. The main purpose of this chapter is to compare the two analysed periods, in order to highlight the similarities and differences in the statements of Visegrad Group on the EU level.

One of the policy areas, where Visegrad Group have a consistent vision between the 2009–2014 and 2014–2016 is the EU enlargement and Neighbourhood. The Visegrad group is a strong supporter of the EU enlargement and find it essential to strengthen the ties between the neighbouring countries of the V4 as well as European Union to ensure the stability and prosperity of the region. Here, the Visegrad Group statements support the supranational view in both analysed periods and the emerging migration crisis do not have any impact on their common views.

Another area where Visegrad wants European Union to join forces and work together for a common goal is the security and defence. V4 strongly emphasise their contribution to the EU Common Security and Defence policy by creating the EU V4 Battle Group and support the European defence industry. The reports of 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 revealed the V4 intention to create another Battle Group by 2019 and establish the permanent V4 modular force for NATO and EU rapid response formations and operations. The views supporting common efforts to ensure the security of European region did not change after the beginning of migration crisis. On the contrary, it can be implied that in terms of critical issues that could threaten the safety of 28 member states like the migration crisis makes the V4 aspire even stronger and more integrated EU Common Security and defence Policy. There is no change in attitudes toward this field between the two periods and hence it leans toward supranational idea of European integration.

The economic field combines many different policy directions the Visegrad Group supports with the aim to ensure the further increase of benefits for the member states. In the first analysed period, the V4 concentrates on implementations of the internal market and industrial policy, more precisely on the ambition to create the single market for digital services, to strengthen different infrastructures, provide prosperous conditions for entrepreneurs and develop free movement in all areas. In the second analysed period, the V4 focuses more on deepening the digital agenda and supports the EU Digital Single Market Strategy and overall emphasises on establishing the still

incomplete single market as one of the cornerstones of the EU. In conclusion, it can be implied that economic affairs between the EU and Visegrad countries aspire for further EU integration, regardless of the migration crisis. Thus, here the supranational idea is supported.

The next area of EU–Visegrad affairs is the EU Cohesion Policy which provides the member states the financial instrument through different projects to promote their further development. This is also one of the reasons, why Cohesion Policy is an important asset for V4. During the first analysed period, the V4 supported the current for the cohesion funding and highlighted the policy as one of the main elements to decrease the gaps between and within member states. However, the negotiations on the future objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy expressed the V4 requirements. They demanded the accession of more priorities for less developed regions and the right to decide on the member state level how the resources between priorities will be distributed. The next analysed period stressed less attention to the policy area due to migration crisis but overall the Visegrad group agrees with the new EU directions in the field in terms of European plan for investment and emphasises the importance to meet the objectives of Cohesion Policy beyond the 2020 vision. Between the 2009 and 2014, the mix of intergovernmental and supranational ideas is visible in the attitudes of Visegrad Group toward the EU policies. The years 2014–2016 included only V4 statements of supporting the EU on the cohesion policy areas and supranational elements. In the discourse of migration crisis, the attitudes toward EU indeed changed to a certain extent but not from supporting the integration to prefer sovereignty. The slight shift was from mixed elements of both ideas to more supranational approach.

As one of the most overwhelming issues of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the V4 and EU have built a solid base for achieving the common goals in terms of environment and climate change. During the first period under examination the V4 overall supports achieving goals for EU climate policies for 2020 and beyond. They support the EU Emission Trading Scheme, having a common vision of the whole EU in climate change and clearly highlight that the final decision of climate framework should be taken on the EU level. On the other hand, the Visegrad countries do not support the EU's supranational position in terms of Genetically Modified Organisms and wish to keep

their sovereignty of decision making in this field. During the next period, the pattern continues: Overall they support the effort of the European Union to solve environmental issues by agreeing the necessity of Clean Air Package, Waste Package and Circular Economy and emphasized taking a common EU position for the Paris Climate conference. The V4 is dissatisfied with overly ambitious targets for climate change, not counting with the different member states situations and do not agree with establishing any legally binding renewable energy or energy efficiency targets. In the field of environment, the attitudes of the V4 continuously include elements of supranational and intergovernmental approach through both periods and the migration crisis do not have any influence in this policy area.

During the first period, the V4 asks EU to take into account the energy security of the member states in the process of shaping EU Climate Policy. Ensuring the energy security is one of the longest ambitions of the Visegrad Group during the analysed years, dating back to the first report. The V4 approves the need for common EU energy policy and affirms contributing towards EU Energy 2020 strategy. However, V4 stances on the energy field are not entirely pro-European. By indicating it as the threat to economy the Visegrad Group strongly favours the extensive use of fossil fuels and demand freedom for member states to create suitable energy mixes. The second period outlined the increased focus of the energy security. In order to make energy more affordable, the V4 is even willing to give more legislative power to the EU in this area while stating that energy and energy security are top priority areas for the Visegrád Group and also to European Union. Nevertheless, they still strongly continue to object the idea of fixed energy mix and emphasise the sovereignty of a country to choose it freely. Similar to the environment policy area, the declarations toward the EU energy politics are continuously controversial and thus both periods contain elements of supranational as well as intergovernmental integration approaches. The migration crisis has not changed the V4 attitudes so far.

Visegrad Group also finds it necessary to cooperate with the European Union in the areas of agriculture. Moreover, during the first analysed period, they declare that Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 should be solved at the European level. They also support the policy reforming for the 2014-2020 period. Despite generally agreeing to let the EU tackle the agricultural issues, the V4 still do not agree with the

EU's supranational power in some cases. In supporting young farmers and small farmers scheme the Visegrad Group highlights the need to decide on member state level and give more flexibility to the individual actors in sensitive sectors. The second period of analyse is less focused on agriculture but the remaining activity express a shift towards the organic food production and debates on the issue will continue in the future. Since the V4 have not specified their positions toward the agricultural policy in the second analysis, the final conclusions on the change of attitudes cannot be done.

The most complicated policy area for EU and V4 to find a common stance proved to be migration crisis. Between 2009 and 2014, the migration issues covered only a very small amount of the Visegrad agenda and the areas into discussion were including mainly the regional cooperation among V4 members, especially on dealing with the illegal immigration from Western Balkans (Czech Presidency 2012: 11). Although the Common Asylum policy in the EU level had already been established by 2009, there is not much evidence on dealing with the area during the first period. In the 2010/2011 Annual Reports also briefly mention V4 cooperation on migration in a larger scale referring to subsequent migration waves from North Africa and the migration of Roma minority group (Slovak Presidency 2011: 16). The issue of the mass migration arrived into the EU agenda during the second analysed period and since then all the member states including V4 have participated in numerous debates in order to find common solutions. The Visegrad Group has taken a very controversial stance on the issues of migration. On the one side V4 highlights their preparedness to contribute finding solutions and relieve the migration crisis. Furthermore, they welcome the endeavours of the EU to effectively deal with the crisis. In spite of their remarkable contribution to finding solutions, the V4 is categorically disagreeing with the EU on establishing the mandatory migration quotas and sees this as a threat to the state sovereignty. In terms of migration policy, it can be summarized that the crisis did change the V4 attitudes toward the migration—it became part of the EU affairs. Since the Visegrad Group supports finding solutions to the issue in the EU level but do not agree with some EU approach, the supranational as well as intergovernmental idea of European Integration is represented.

In the policy areas of economy, security and defence as well as EU enlargement and neighbourhood, the attitudes of the Visegrad Group support the supranational idea of

integration and the migration crisis do not change the attitudes among these areas, these have remained supranational. In the areas of cohesion, agriculture the stances of the V4 have slightly shifted from being a mix of supranational and intergovernmental elements to support more the supranational idea. In the areas of environment and energy, the attitudes also consist approaches of both integration ideas and continue to do it even after the beginning of migration crisis (Table 1).

Conducted analysis proved that with the emergence of migration crisis the balance between EU and V4 changes. The issues emerging from the first part of the analysis do not witness any drastic change of attitudes throughout the whole analysed timeframe while the migration crisis does. The reason behind it is the fact that other policies cannot be seen as critical issues while the migration problem is an important crisis that can negatively influence the whole European Union. The fact that asylum policy was partially supranationalised with the Treaty of Lisbon, but was not under discussion during the first period, emphasises even more, that the issue has to be critical in order to change the attitudes of the member states to take a turn towards intergovernmentalism. Thus, it can be declared that the conducted hypothesis is proven. The outcome of this thesis also proves, that in times of crisis the constitutive norms can dominate over the regulatory norms meaning that states will make their decisions based on their interests. Furthermore, the emergence of critical issues emphasises that the identities are socially constructed and can change with the context. The findings of the thesis confirm that perhaps the European Identity coexisting with the national one is not enough for the social perspective of European integration after all.

	<b>Before the crisis</b>	<b>After the start of the crisis</b>
Supranat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy, security and defence, EU enlargement and neighbourhood</li> <li>• Migration</li> <li>• Cohesion and agriculture</li> <li>• Environment and energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy, security and defence, EU enlargement and neighbourhood</li> <li>• Cohesion and agriculture</li> <li>• Environment and energy</li> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>
Intergov.		

Table 1. The positions of different policy areas before and after the start of the crisis based on analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the change of positions and statements of the Visegrad countries toward the European integration, based on the challenges and critical questions that EU is facing. The hypothesis of this thesis implied that in terms of migration crisis the Visegrad Group favour national sovereignty over the European integration.

To support the thesis, the critical discourse analysis was conducted based on social constructivist views, which emphasises the importance of the soft powers, for example ideas and identity. To form in-depth analysis, the competing ideas of supranational governance and intergovernmentalism were used. The analysed documents were the annual reports and official statements (2009-2016) of the Visegrad Group. The analysis consisted of three parts. First part focused on the attitudes of the V4 on main EU policies before the migration crisis and the second part analysed the views of Visegrad Group within the refugee crisis. The third part compared the outcomes of the previous parts.

As a result, the hypothesis formed in the beginning was confirmed. The analysed documents highlighted that in critical times the Visegrad Group countries support intergovernmentalist approach within the group and wish to preserve their national sovereignty when it comes to making decisions in alliance with the EU.

Conducted analysis proved that with the emergence of migration crisis the balance between EU and V4 changes. The logic behind that is the fact that migration crisis is a nationally critical issue and therefore the Visegrad countries prefer to maintain their sovereignty and do not support making critical decision in the EU level. The issues among politics in the first part do not highlight a bigger change of attitudes throughout the whole analysed timeframe while the migration crisis does. Other policies, however, are not seen as a threat to national sovereignty. Thus, it can be declared that the conducted hypothesis is proven.

## Resümee

### **Integratsiooni raamistamine kui suveräänsuse akt Visegradi riikide näitel**

Viimasel kümnendil on Euroopa Liit pidanud hakkama saama mitmete tõsiste kriisidega. Majanduskriis, Kreeka võlakriis, migratsiooni- ja pagulaskriis ning hiljutine BREXIT on vaid mõned näited hiljutistest ärevatest sündmustest. Lisaks on üha enam näha natsionalismi tõusu mitmes Euroopa Liidu liikmesriigis, nagu Prantsusmaa, Saksamaa, Ungari ja Poola. Need faktorid on mõjutanud ka liikmesriikide ja EL-i vahelist integratsiooniprotsessi. Avalikus sfääris levib mitmeid väiteid, et tekkinud kriisid on seotud natsionalismi tõusuga. Kriitilistel aegadel, mis nõuavad vankumatuid otsuseid ja tugevaid juhte, ei toeta kõik liikmesriigid tingimata EL-i rahvusülest (supranational) lähenemist ja jagatud suveräänsuse ideed. Veelgi enam, kriitilistes olukordades tunduvad rahulolematud liikmesriigid eelistavat rahvuslikku suveräänsust integratsioonile. See võib põhjustada vastuolusid, mis viivad vastaspoolte vaheliste pingete ja vaidluste tekkimiseni ning ohustavad sellega kogu Euroopa ühtsust, kaasa arvatud integratsiooni tulevikus ja rahu regioonis. Sellise riikide grupi valisin põhjusel, et Visegradi grupp on näidanud üles palju rahulolematust Euroopa Liidu hiljutiste otsuste üle. Stabiilsust ohustavad veel lisaks sealsed hiljutised poliitilised arengud, eelkõige paremäärmusliku poliitilise eliidi tugevnemine Visegradi riikides.

Käesolev bakalaureuse töö käsitleb Visegradi Grupi, kuhu kuuluvad Poola, Tšehhi Vabariik, Ungari ja Slovakkia, suhtumise ja hoiakute muutumist, kui Euroopa Liit seisab silmitsi kriitiliste sündmustega ja väljakutsetega. Piiritlemise mõttes keskendusin töös ühele olulisemale – pagulaskriisile.

Töö alguses püstitatud hüpotees on järgmine:

**Kui Euroopa Liit on vastamisi tundlike ja tõsiste väljakutsetega, siis Visegradi Grupi riigid eelistavad rahvuslikku suveräänsust integratsioonipoliitikale.**

Analüüsitavateks allikateks on Visegradi Grupi aastaaruannetes leiduvad väited ajavahemikus 2009-2016. Nende lahtimõtestamiseks on kasutatud kriitilist

diskursuseanalüüsi ja teoreetiliseks lähtekohaks on konstruktivism. Lisaks sellele oli keskseteks lähenemisteks kaks omavahel võistlevat ideed: rahvusülene valitsetus (supranational goverance) ja valitsustevaheline lähenemine (intergovernmentalism). Materjali analüüsimise meetodiks osutus valituks diskursuseanalüüs. Teoreetilisi lähtekohti kasutades selgus aastaaruannete põhjal püsitatud hüpotees kinnitust.

Migratsioonikriisi ilmnemine muutis tasakaalu Euroopa Liidu ja Visegradi Grupi vahel ning tõi välja Visegradi vastuseisu lubada rahvusülest otsustamist migratsioonipoliitikas. Samas, teiste poliitikavaldkondade puhul ei muutnud Visegradi Grupp oluliselt oma seisukohti üleminekul ühelt võrreldavalt perioodilt teisele. See näitab, et kriitilistes olukordades nagu pagulaskriis, ei poolda Visegradi riigid suveräänsuse jagamist ja Euroopa Liidu rahvusülest võimu teha otsuseid.

Antud töö analüüs oli jagatud kolmeks erinevaks, kuid omavahel põimuvaks, osaks. Esimene osa hõlmas aastaid 2009-2014 ja teine osa 2014-2016. Kolmas osa on võrdlev sümbioos kahest eelnevast osast.

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