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**A Tale of Two Europes**

**How the refugee crisis reopened the dichotomies of “East” vs. “West”**

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## **Abstract**

The conflict over the right way to tackle the so-called refugee crisis in Europe has proved that relations between the EU and the Visegrád Group have changed. The political dispute surfaced most clearly regarding the different proposals for a quota-based refugee relocation system – a decision which was refused by the V4. The bloc consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia first articulated its common position on migration in September 2015 and several times afterwards. On the basis of these statements, one can summarise their approach as follows: (1) Protecting the external borders of the EU and underlining the importance of fulfilling the obligations for the EU acquis; (2) Effective management of the root causes of migration flows, which could help reduce the number of migrants; (3) Refusing Germany’s open-door migration policy. Although an increasing number of EU member states share a similar approach, the V4 as the whole started to be perceived as a coalition known for obstructing practices. The split on the issue gave life to a new wave of speculation about the increasing split between “old” and “new” Europe and the possible shift of the latter eastwards. Furious politicians and public opinion in Western Europe continued to remind the Visegrád countries of their lack of solidarity and burden sharing on the refugee crisis. Despite the multiple transformations Eastern Europe has undergone since 1989, the Group emerged again as an ideal type – an unsympathetic not-quite-European subject mired in paranoia about foreigners, exaggerated concerns about self-determination and self-preservation, and timeworn claims of historical suffering. An analyse of the actual situation of the Visegrád countries with regard to the irregular movement proves that whereas they uniformly reject the idea of compulsory relocation within the EU, in general the Group is far from homogenous. As argued in this thesis, it is increasingly fractious. Hungary and Poland significantly differ from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Even within the Group, Hungary may have acquired a specific position with its total denial of the fact that irregularly arriving persons may need protection within the EU. The seemingly simple story of uniformity among the Visegrád countries on the issue of immigration is revealed as a much more complex aggregation of diverse political views.

## **Abstrakt**

Spor o tom, jak správně zacházet s takzvanou uprchlickou krizí v Evropě vedl k tomu, že se vztahy mezi Evropskou unií a Víšegrádskou skupinou změnilly. Politický spor se vyhroutil poté, co byl návrh o zřízení systému kvót pro přerozdělování uprchlíků V4 odmítnut. Koalice, která se skládá z České republiky, Maďarska, Polska a Slovenska, poprvé vyjádřila svůj postoj ohledně migrace v září 2015 a následně stále častěji. Na základě těchto vyjádření se dají shrnout následující požadavky: (1) Chránit vnější hranice Evropské unie a zdůrazňovat význam plnění povinností Evropské unie; (2) Účelně řešit hlavní příčiny migrační vlny, které by pomohlo snížit počet migrantů; (3) Odmítnout německou migrační politiku „otevřených dveří“. I když většina států Evropské unie zastává stejný názor, V4 byla na počátku sporu vnímána jako koalice, která se proslavila svou taktikou kladení překážek. Kvůli nesouhlasu s tímto postojem vznikla nová vlna spekulací o vzrůstajícím rozštěpení mezi „starou“ a „novou“ Evropou a i o možném posunutí hranic směrem na východ. Mnozí politici i veřejné mínění v Západní Evropě neustále vyčítali Víšegrádským zemím nedostatek solidarity a chybějící spolupráci při řešení uprchlické krize. I když Východní Evropa prošla od roku 1989 několika změnami, Víšegrádská skupina vznikla jako klasické seskupení – nesympatické neevropské paranoidní smýšlení o cizincích, přehnaný důraz na svobodné rozhodování a sebezachování. Analýza aktuální situace Víšegrádských zemí však dokazuje, že když se jedná o přemísťování uprchlíků mezi Evropskými zeměmi, není tato skupina zdaleka homogenní. V této diplomové práci byl prozkoumán tento vzrůstající rozpor. Maďarsko a Polsko se jednoznačně odlišují od České republiky a Slovenska. Mezi Víšegrádskou skupinou získalo Maďarsko speciální postavení tím, že zcela odmítá fakt, že by osoby, které přicestovaly nelegálně, potřebovaly ochranu Evropské unie. Domněle jednoduchý znak stejnorodosti Víšegrádských zemí byl v souvislosti s tématem imigrace odhalen jako komplexní seskupení různých politických názorů.

**Key words:** Migrant Crisis; Asylum Policies; Visegrád Group; East-West dichotomy

**Klíčová slova:** Migrační krize, Azylová politika; V4; Dichotomie Západ-Východ

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### **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About the Topic

A record 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the 28 member states of the European Union, Norway and Switzerland in 2015 – nearly double the previous high water mark of roughly 700,000 that was set in 1992 after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union. About half of the refugees trace their origins to just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Conflicts, both fresh and long-standing, in each of these states have led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>1</sup> This has been described as a refugee crisis.

A crisis is a moment of truth.<sup>2</sup> They tend to bring out the open conflicts that are either dormant or quietly simmering beneath the surface, waiting for an opportunity to publicly reveal themselves. The conflict over the right way to tackle the refugee crisis in Europe has proved that relations between the EU and the Visegrád Group have changed. The political dispute surfaced most clearly regarding the different proposals for a quota-based refugee relocation system. First, in September 2015, the member states agreed to relocate 120,000 refugees from Greece and Italy – a decision which was refused by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Poland, despite its previous rhetoric, voted in favour of the proposition. Nonetheless, after the change of government in Warsaw, the V4 stood united against a new proposal submitted by the European Commission in May 2016.<sup>3</sup>

The split on the migration issue has opened up speculation about Central Europe possibly drifting away from the EU in a less “Western” and less liberal direction. This perception was there even before the migration crisis and has been fuelled by different factors, such as the friendlier attitude towards Vladimir Putin – especially controversial in light of the sanctions policy after the annexation of Crimea. The conflict between Hungary and the European Commission and, above all, certain political statements such as Orbán’s speech in Tusnádfürdő in 2014 on the end of the liberal democratic paradigm in Europe and the need for

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Connor, Philipp (2016): Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015, online at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/> (26 July 2017)

<sup>2</sup> cf. Van Middelaar, Luuk (2016): The Return of Politics. The European Union after the crisis in the Eurozone and Ukraine, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.54, p.496.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy: Conflicting narratives and interpretative frameworks, in Pol Morillas (ed.), *Illiberal democracies in the EU: The Visegrad Group and the risk of disintegration*, Barcelona: CIDOB editions, p.21.

illiberal solutions, gave life to a new wave of speculation about the increasing split between “old” and “new” Europe and the possible shift of the later eastwards.<sup>4</sup>

Popular media has been quick to highlight the possibility of a “new Cold War” and to reinforce the notion of key dividing lines in Europe. The high profile of the V4 on the crisis has earned it more coverage than ever before in the 25 years of its existence. Yet most of the coverage was predominantly negative. The migration crisis has given an unsettling new direction to an old alliance, as *The Economist* remarked in January 2016 under the catchy headline “*Big, bad Visegrad*”.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, many different narratives have been formed. Viktor Orbán and Angela Merkel laid out the two main contrasting narratives and their profound political implications. The former declares that he is shielding his country (and European civilisation) from an existential threat, whereas the latter says that European solidarity and the importance to European values of a shared commitment to universal human rights demand that asylum be offered, and on generous terms for the matter.<sup>6</sup>

Eastern European hostility to refugees has been a favourite subject of politicians, columnists, and public intellectuals ever since. Leftist and liberal print and online media filled with commentaries that accused Eastern Europeans of lacking compassion tried to shame them into moral maturity. Despite historical and political differences between Eastern European member states, Eastern Europe emerged as an ideal type – an unsympathetic not-quite-European subject mired in racialised paranoia about foreigners.

One of the strongest condemnations has come from the Polish-born historian Jan Gross. In the German newspaper *Die Welt*, he asserted that the European Union’s Eastern states had “proven to be intolerant, narrow-minded, and xenophobic.”<sup>7</sup> “Have the Eastern Europeans no sense of shame?” he wrote. “For centuries their forbears emigrated en masse to escape from material misery and political persecution.” Gross argued that Eastern Europe’s xenophobia, in contrast to Germany’s more welcoming attitude toward migrants and refugees, is connected to

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Cichocki, Marek (2017): The West’s polymorphic crisis and their impact on the Visegrad Group, in Pol Morillas (ed.), *Illiberal democracies in the EU: The Visegrad Group and the risk of disintegration*, Barcelona: CIDOB editions, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> *The Economist* (2016): *Big, bad Visegrad*, online at: <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21689629-migration-crisis-has-given-unsettling-new-direction-old-alliance-big-bad-visegrad> (26 July 2017)

<sup>6</sup> cf. Rupnik, Jacques (2016): *Surging Illiberalism in the East*, in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.27, p.83.

<sup>7</sup> Gross, Jan (2015): *Die Osteuropäer haben kein Schamgefühl*, in: *Die Welt*, online at: <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article146355392/Die-Osteuropaer-haben-kein-Schamgefuehl.html> (26 July 2017)



its reluctance to confront its populations' active and even enthusiastic participation in the extermination of Europe's Jews and other ethnic minorities. "German society, which has become conscious of its historical crimes, has learned through them how to approach moral and political challenges like the current influx of refugees," he concluded. "Eastern Europe on the other hand, has yet to come to terms with its murderous past." Only when it does so will it start to treat refugees better, he wrote.

The old divides, which seemed to have been overcome a long time ago, now occur anew with great intensity. The enduring belief that Europe is deeply divided between West and East with regard to certain values (modernisation, open society, tolerance and liberalism) has been brought back to life, questioning the success of integration after the enlargement in 2004.

The symbolic and political boundary processes marking out East and West within Europe possess both deep histories and durable afterlives. In exploring the causes of the growing divide, the genealogy of the so-called East-West crisis and the politics of the V4 countries, the thesis that Central Europe is turning away from the EU will be evaluated more critically.

## **1.2 Research Question and Assumptions**

The refugee crisis has sparked bitter reactions among the governments of the Visegrád countries. Their opposition to the relocation of refugees suggested by the European Commission and their opposition to Germany's handling of the crisis have been the most prominent examples of the formation of the V4 alliance. The different political, economic and social actors of the European public interpreted the four countries' stance from various perspectives, framing it in different contexts: some saw it as consequence of the "illiberal" tendencies in the region while others considered the Visegrád approach as proof of the European East-West divide.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the research question is as follows: **Is this common agenda signalling a return of the East-West rift in Europe that reigned during the Cold War?**

Firstly, one must relativise the importance of the Group as a cooperation structure between the four member states. Formally it has been up and running since 1991 but it is relatively rare for it to define a strong joint position. The refugee question seems to have been a notable exception. But even regarding this question, the V4 has not managed to maintain a common stance. There are significant differences from one country to another which are manifested in

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, p.19.

contradicting priorities and policies. When one tries to systematically analyse the different policies, it becomes evident that almost all of them resonate with the main schools of International Relations (IR) and foreign policy analysis (FPA).<sup>9</sup>

To establish a hypothesis, this thesis further aims to answer: What is the criticism of V4 countries with regards to the refugee crisis? What is their alternative agenda? How has the V4 common voice and strategy been articulated?

It is clear that this European discord reflects major differences in opinion between the countries of Central Europe and their other partners within the European Union. These differences are related to political culture, perception of European identity and the place of Europe in the world, and even to the meaning and scope of certain common values. But to conclude **“that there has been a return to an East-West rift seems to be more a cliché than a serious analysis of the situation.”**<sup>10</sup> **There is no such thing as a “bloc versus bloc” situation that reigned during the Cold War. There is no Iron Curtain dividing Europe into two parts.**

The historic heritage of the dual structure remained. Despite the multiple transformations Eastern Europe has undergone since 1989, the East continues to be Europe’s negative “Other” which is selectively reproduced in geopolitical discourses and institutional practices. It would be easy to dismiss the deconstructive and historical literatures on Balkanism, European Orientalism, and European Easternism as obsolete. This thesis, however, will highlight the enduring power of these concepts as categories of practice or meaning. The language of “Eastern peripheries” continues to resonate as a way to denote deep asymmetries. As a label to denote cultural, political, and economic difference “Eastern Europe” is alive and well.

The empirical data to develop the theoretical framework has been taken from books, reports and documents of researches, specialised institutions and international organisations. In addition, the information examined is going to consider relevant articles, news and websites that dissect the subject of study. This framework allows to conduct a discourse analysis of speech acts in the political sphere.

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Ibid. p.19.

<sup>10</sup> cf. Macek, Lukas (2015): Refugee Crisis: a new East-West rift in Europe?, in: European Interview, Vol.88, online at: <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/entretiens-d-europe/ee-89-en.pdf> (30 May 2016), p.4.

### 1.3 Research Structure

The research is divided into five main chapters:

First of all, the “Theoretical and Methodological Foundation” will give an overview of relevant theories and methodology on which this inquiry is based. To discuss how divergent policies emerged between the V4 and the rest of the EU, this chapter focuses on the main schools of International Relations and foreign policy analysis. Using consistent frameworks, one can set up three separate narratives on the subject: state interests and geopolitics, domestic politics and party competition, and social values. A description of the selected methodology will be presented in order to understand how the empirical part of the research is going to be pursued.

Thereafter, the third chapter will provide an analysis of the general considerations of migration in Europe. This section will be focused mainly on the so-called migrant crisis during 2015, and it will present the key developments of the refugee inflow in Europe throughout the year. Furthermore, it highlights the most salient policy and legislative initiatives taken by the EU in this area and identifies the main challenges associated with them from a variety of perspectives. It critically examines how the member states responded to the most controversial idea: the establishment of a temporary relocation system.

When it was recognised across Europe that a crisis was afoot and that something had to be done to cope with the large numbers of migrants trying to enter Europe, the European Commission proposed quotas to distribute the burden between the member states. Most East European member states opposed the relocation system. This was the first time the V4 appeared on the international scene as a united front to be reckoned with. Furious politicians and public opinion in Western Europe continued to remind the Visegrád countries of their lack of solidarity and burden sharing on the refugee crisis. Finger pointing within Europe over the crisis has sharpened all the cardinal points of Europe’s symbolic compass (East/West). It has reactivated longstanding notions of the West’s desirability. The fourth chapter will ask – to say it in the words of Leon Marc: “Does the West ever give up to need an East?”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the fifth chapter is dedicated only to the Visegrád Group. It will observe four countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary – both individually and as a unit. The chapter describes the main pillars on which the Visegrád cooperation was

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<sup>11</sup> Marc, Leon (2009): *What’s So Eastern about Eastern Europe? Twenty Years After the Fall of The Berlin Wall*, Trowbridge: Oldcastle Books, p.161.

established – the non-governmental structures as well as the dependence on political willingness for reaching a consensus. Weakening and revitalisation phases of cooperation and a comparison of the pre-accession and post-accession period with the year 2004 as a turning point will be presented. In the end, selected case studies will be developed, based on national perspectives on migration, to later analyse the proper discourse between the V4 governments and the European Union. The conclusion will summarise the main findings and will return to the assumptions in this introduction.

#### **1.4 Migration in Global Politics: Concepts and Terminologies**

Even the question of which terminology to use is a dilemma in the context of the refugee crisis, for the words used to describe the persons arriving have themselves become intensely politicised. It is clear that the people who moved into the European Union have, as always been made up of a mix of refugees and economic migrants. The distinction does not imply that the one constitute legitimate grounds for immigration into the EU and the other does not, but clearly the host country's humanitarian responsibility in terms of granting asylum or right of residence is different in these instances.

Since the aim of this inquiry is to analyse the split on the migration issue, it becomes essential to understand the terminologies along with its complexes and differences that are going to be used during the research.

Furthermore, the terms will not be used fully consistently, for this paper is primarily an analysis and summary of national political discourses on the crisis, and in many instances when discussing national discourses or the statement of individual actors, it would have seemed peculiar to use a term that was at odds with the communication of the given speaker. In short, migrants and refugees are often used as interchangeable terms in this text, and, given the complexity of the issue, neither term implies the author's identification with any particular political agenda.

The International Organization of Migration (IOM) defines the following concepts as such:

***Migration:*** The movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.

**Migrant:** Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.

**Asylum Seeker:** A person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments.

**Refugee:** A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself to the protection of that country.

**Irregular Migrant:** A person who, owing to unauthorised entry, breach of condition of entry, or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country. [...] The term "irregular" is preferable to "illegal" because the latter carries a criminal connotation and is seen as denying migrants' humanity.

(IOM, 2011)<sup>12</sup>

The European Union defines the following concepts as such:

**Illegal/Irregular entry:** Crossing borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the country.

**Illegal/irregular stay:** The presence on the territory of an EU country of a non-EU citizen who does not fulfil, or no longer fulfils the conditions for entry, stay or residence in that country.

(European Commission, 2015)<sup>13</sup>

The 1951 Geneva Convention defines a *refugee* as someone who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to, or

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<sup>12</sup> International Organisation of Migration (IOM) (2011): Glossary on Migration, in: International Migration Law Series, No.25, online at: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms> (26 July 2017)

<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2015): Glossary, online at: [http://ec.europa.eu/immigration/glossary\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/immigration/glossary_en) (26 July 2017)

owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, the OECD defines an *asylum seeker* as “a person fleeing persecution and conflict, and seeking protection under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, “a refugee is an asylum seeker whose claim has been endorsed.”

“Under the terms of Article 14 of the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights, all people have the right to see asylum from persecution in other states.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that this does not automatically guarantee a refugee status. Because, “in practice, the term state sovereignty means that states decide whom they will admit and recognise as a legitimate asylum seeker.”<sup>17</sup> According to Peoples and Vaughan-Williams *irregular migrants* “are those who have not met the criteria for admission to a given state: these individuals can be further classified in terms of ‘clandestine immigrants’ (because they have crossed the border illegally) or ‘illegal migrants’ (if they have overstayed a formerly legal visa).”<sup>18</sup>

The EU “Regulation (EC) No. 862/2007 on Community statistics on migration and international protection”, defines *immigration* as the action by which a person “establishes his or her usual residence in the territory of a Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another Member State or a third country.”<sup>19</sup>

The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years, reaching 244 million in 2015, from 222 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000. “Nearly two thirds of all international migrants live in Europe (76 million) or Asia (75 million).” In this regard, migration is increasingly seen as a challenge for Europe. According to the September 2016 Eurobarometer survey, it is still considered by society as the most important issue, whereas in 2014 it ranked fourth.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) (2016): Glossary, online at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (26 July 2017)

<sup>15</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016): Glossary of statistical terms, online at: <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2274> (26 July 2017)

<sup>16</sup> Peoples, C.; Vaughan-William, N. (2010): Critical Security Studies. An Introduction, New York: Routledge, p.136.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.135.

<sup>19</sup> European Union (2007): Regulation (EC) No. 862/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 on community statistics on migration and international protection and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 311/76 on the compilation of statistics on foreign workers, online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:199:0023:0029:EN:PDF> (26 July 2017)

<sup>20</sup> United Nations (UN) (2015): International Migration Report 2015, online at: [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf) (26 July 2017)

## 2. Theoretical and Methodological Foundation

This chapter is going to introduce the reader into the theoretical scope and the methodological means on which the research is based. Due to the highly politicised debates regarding migration, it is useful to interpret Visegrád migration policy through the different schools of thought of International Relations Theory. To do so, the neorealist, the neoliberal and the constructivist narrative will be presented. To gain insight in the selected methodology, the last section will explain how to conduct a discourse analysis.

### 2.1 Geopolitics and Intra-European Competition: The Neorealist Narrative

This interpretative framework is based on the work of Zsuzsanna Csornai, Nikolett Garai and Máté Szalai who tried to systematically analyse the different narratives about V4 migration policy. During the workshop “*Illiberal democracies, the Visegrad group and future prospects of the EU*” in 2016, the authors discussed how divergent policies emerged between the V4 and the rest of the EU.

First, they consider migration policy as a consequence of state interests and geopolitical circumstances using neorealist reasoning. The second group of narratives uses domestic party politics as the best explanatory factor of the V4’s foreign policy on migration issues, echoing the neoliberal institutionalist approach. The third category, which uses the basic principles of social constructivism, explains the Central European bloc’s approach to migration based on particular identities and norms in the Visegrád Group.<sup>21</sup> After setting up three narratives, one is able to compare them on the basis of their explanatory value. (Annex1)

Many considered the cross-border movement of people a consequence of globalisation – the victory of the new world order over the traditional state system. Nonetheless, after a closer examination, one can clearly see that geopolitical considerations did not cease to shape state responses to migration. “Across the world”, argues Roderick Parkes, “countries are not only trying to reassert control of their borders but to use people flows and differences of population size of geostrategic gain.”<sup>22</sup>

Interpreting migration policies based on these premises is also in accordance with the most mainstream traditions of IR theory and, specifically, neorealism. Neorealism derives from

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<sup>21</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, p.19.

<sup>22</sup> Parkes, Roderick (2016): European Union and the Geopolitics of Migration, online at: <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/butiken/ui-paper/2015/european-union-and-the-geopolitics-of-migration---rp.pdf> (26 July 2017), p.1.

classical realism. States are primary actors because there is no political monopoly on force existing above any sovereign. To ensure state security, states must be in constant preparation for conflict through economic and military build-up.<sup>23</sup> Migration has not been on the top of the agenda for this school of thought, since it was considered to be part of “low politics”. Nevertheless, after 1990 – due to theoretical advancements and the growing volume of the cross-border movement of people – the question became securitized in the West, especially after 2001 and was considered to be related to state security and sovereignty.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Jef Huysmans argues:

“In Western Europe – but also elsewhere – we have recently witnessed an offensive of security language in the societal and internal-affair sector. The multiple references in political and academic debates to a new security construction that relates terrorism, drugs, immigration, and asylum has generated a new agenda.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the level and process of securitisation differed in the various European states to a great extent. Parkes presents a very thorough analysis of how geopolitics shape national considerations regarding migration policy through two factors. Firstly, the different types of borders inside the EU shape national regulatory traditions regarding border control policy. In this regard, Zsuzsanna Csornai, Nikolett Garai and Máté Szalai distinguish between three categories<sup>26</sup>:

- states with no external borders, which experience non-EU migration through major air and seaports (Germany, Great Britain, France);
- states with massive external sea borders (Italy, Spain); and
- states with massive external land borders (Hungary, Poland)

These geopolitical circumstances affect the way in which governments perceive the phenomenon of mass migration. Members of the last two categories are more likely to consider influx of people a security threat since they are the ones that experience the crossing of external European borders. From their perspective, mass migration primarily means an external process which challenges the control over the state’s territory and they react by emphasising the physical safety of borders. On the other hand, countries without external

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<sup>23</sup> cf. Mearsheimer, John (2014): *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: Norton, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Hyndmann, Jennifer (2012): *The Geopolitics of Migration and Mobility*, in: *Geopolitics*, Vol.17, pp.246-247.

<sup>25</sup> Huysmans, Jef (2000): *The European Union and the Securitization of Migration*, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.38, p.751.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): *V4 Migration policy*, p.22.



Schengen borders are those which have the biggest air and seaports and have their own set of problems, which is why migration is securitised more in connection with terrorism and not the movement of people itself.

Secondly, geopolitics also play its part through economic forms. As Hyndman put it, “the demand for skilled labour in most countries of the global North has created a competitive global market place for potential migrants with expertise and profession background [...]. So migrants are welcomed in, or at least their labour is.”<sup>27</sup> That is why there is a strong urge for such states, especially Germany, to distinguish between labour migration and irregular migration as securitisation only affects the second category, not the first.<sup>28</sup> This differentiation is non-existent in the Visegrád countries, which do not serve as a destination for labour migration, which is why securitisation has reached a higher level.

These circumstances play a huge role in shaping security perceptions. However, they are not enough in themselves to describe the Visegrád stance on migration since Slovakia and the Czech Republic do not share the same attributes as Poland or Hungary. That is why another aspect will be introduced as well.

“The four are increasingly aware of the prospect of their being marginalised in the emergent EU setup”<sup>29</sup>, which urged them to tighten their grip on the pursuit of common interests. From this perspective, migration was basically a tool to increase the leverage of the Visegrád countries which caused political tensions. According to the neorealist argument, the distribution of power determines international relations, thus conflict is caused by changes in the balance between states. The V4 lacks the material resources to question the leadership of Germany, France or the UK, but in the framework of the migration crisis, their bargaining power is much higher than usual. Due to the routes of the movement of people, the four Central European countries are among the strongest stakeholders in the management of the crisis. Their geopolitical allocation became a capability and changed the European balance power in this policy area, which automatically creates conflict from the neorealist perspective.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> cf. Hyndmann, Jennifer (2012): *The Geopolitics of Migration and Mobility*, p.245.

<sup>28</sup> Parkes, Roderick (2016): *European Union and the Geopolitics of Migration*, p.10.

<sup>29</sup> Gostynska, A.; Parkes Roderick (2012): *Executive Summary*, in Agata Gostynska; Roderick Parkes (eds.), *Towards a V4 Position on the Future of Europe*. Report of the Polish Institute of Internal Affairs, online at: [https://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=12601](https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=12601) (26 July 2017), p.5.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): *V4 Migration policy*, p.24.

## 2.2 Domestic and Party Politics: The Neoliberal Narrative

Following the neoliberal school of thought, the actions of states cannot only be interpreted by states' capabilities and power, as neorealists argue. Foreign policy can also be understood as a given set of state preferences in the form of "national interests" that grow out of domestic political movements. Neoliberals argue that, on the one hand, states represent a subset of domestic society whose interests are taken into account by officials, who, on the other hand, define state preferences and act according to these preferences in world politics. Therefore, domestic politics do matter when formulating foreign policy choices, since political institutions shape those choices.<sup>31</sup>

When analysing the migration crisis and the different interpretations of V4 policy choices, the neoliberal narrative invites to take a closer look at the literature of party competition and the role of niche parties in the domestic political system of a state in order to understand the possible reasons behind the reactions of the Visegrád countries' governments.

According to the party competition theory of Abou-Chadi regarding niche party effects on mainstream parties, there is a connection between the emergence of niche parties and the politicisation of immigration by mainstream politics.<sup>32</sup> Green parties, ethnic regionalists and radical right-wing parties are also commonly referred to as niche parties. However, there are three generally accepted attributes that characterise such political groups: (1) they usually raise issues that are not part of the traditional class cleavage; (2) they address only a very limited number of issues and sometimes even look like they are single-issue parties; (3) the issues advocated by niche parties intersect with traditional lines of cleavage and cause a shift in partisan alignment.<sup>33</sup>

Party competition theories suggest that parties do not only have different policy positions, they also prioritise different issues in order to become the owner of a particular issue. A party owns an issue if voters consider the given party the most competent and effective problem-solving actor on the issue. Usually, immigration is not necessarily and exclusively connected by voters to only one party.<sup>34</sup> However, before the refugee crisis, immigration was usually addressed by radical right-wing parties who could thrive in the political environment of the

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<sup>31</sup> cf. De Mesquita, B.; Smith, A. (2012): Domestic Explanations of International Relations, in: Annual Review of Political Science, Vol.15, pp.161f.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Abou-Chadi, Tarik (2016): Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts. How Green and Radical Parties Differ in Their Impact, in: British Journal of Political Science, Vol.46, pp.417f.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Wagner, Markus (2011), Defining and measuring niche parties, online at: [https://homepage.univie.ac.at/markus.wagner/Paper\\_nicheparties.pdf](https://homepage.univie.ac.at/markus.wagner/Paper_nicheparties.pdf) (26 July 2017)

<sup>34</sup> cf. Abou-Chadi, Tarik (2016): Niche Party Success, pp.417f.

European Union by advocating issues like national sovereignty, international terrorism and globalisation after the financial crisis.<sup>35</sup>

In the wake of the crisis, immigration became a top priority issue. As radical right-wing parties increased their support among voters, party competition increased as well. This means that if radical right-wing parties gain support from the voters, pressure starts to mount on conservative and moderate right-wing parties forcing them to move their position stance on immigration to the right in order to avert further success of the radical right-wing parties. In such a way, mainstream parties tend to politicise immigration, elevate it into their own political agenda and adopt more restrictive immigration policies to counter the possible electoral loss they might suffer. This strategy is called the accommodative or adversarial strategy, which is based on the spatial logic of party competition and is used to trigger partisan realignment.<sup>36</sup> By examining the results of the latest outcome of the elections in the V4 countries and comparing them to the previous elections in the given countries, it is striking that radical right-wing parties became stronger by acquiring higher percentages of support in the general elections.<sup>37</sup>

Contrary to the neorealist narrative, the neoliberal school interprets V4 migration policy in the framework of domestic political competition, not of geopolitical struggles. Governing parties in Central Europe tried to prevent radical right-wing parties from owning the issue and therefore built up their own strategy against the mass movement of people.<sup>38</sup>

### **2.3 Social Norms and Xenophobia: The Constructivist Narrative**

Constructivism is the claim that significant aspects of International Relations are historically and socially constructed, rather than inevitable consequences of human nature or other essential characteristics of world politics.<sup>39</sup> In order to interpret the presented dispute, constructivism is a useful tool to trace back the causes of the difference between V4 migration policy and that of the rest of the West.

One possible interpretation emerged which explains policy variation with social norms that are generally present in post-communist Central Europe. According to this narrative, the lack

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<sup>35</sup> cf. Kallis, Aristotle (2015): Islamophobia in Europe: The Radical Right and the Mainstream, in: *Insight Turkey*, Vol.17, p.27.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Abou-Chadi, Tarik (2014): *Niche Party Success*, pp.417f.

<sup>37</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): *V4 Migration policy*, pp.24-25.

<sup>38</sup> cf. *Ibid.* p.25.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Jackson, P.; Nexon, D. (2002): *Whence Causal Mechanisms? A Comment on Legro*, in: *Dialogue IO*, Vol.1, pp.81-101.

of historical experience with migration and the socialist past made the societies of the Visegrád region more hostile to foreigners, which is also reflected at foreign policy level.<sup>40</sup>

However, data does not support the conception of Central Europe as a xenophobic bloc. As the Carleton University political scientist Stephen Saideman has pointed out, levels of racial culture, or religious intolerance can look radically different depending on which question you ask.<sup>41</sup> A 2009 Pew Global Attitudes Report on Europe, for example, at first blush suggested that intolerance was greater in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe: Asking whether those surveyed agreed or disagreed that it is “good to have different races, religions, and cultures” in society, Pew found that a higher percentage of respondents said no in Eastern Europe than in countries such as France, Britain, Spain, and Germany.<sup>42</sup>

But when Pew’s researchers drilled down to perceptions of specific groups, they encountered different results. Only 15 per cent of Czech respondents, 13 per cent of Ukrainian, and 29 per cent of Hungarian respondents held unfavourable views of Jews (the most controversial minority group in that region). Meanwhile, 27 per cent of British respondents and 46 of Spanish respondents copped to unfavourable views of Muslims, whereas 29 per cent of French respondents said that they had unfavourable views of North Africans. In other words, Western European respondents looked more tolerant in theory, but when pressed on the groups they were most sensitive about, they appeared just as prejudiced as, if not more prejudiced than Eastern Europeans. The broader question may have failed to bring to mind the particular group to which they felt most hostile.<sup>43</sup>

Quantitatively, norms related to migration and foreigners are constantly changing in European societies, and there are huge differences in this regard inside the V4 too. According to Nyíri, “surveys refute the simplistic but popular notion that Eastern Europe is a homogeneously xenophobic region [...]. Indeed, differences in levels of xenophobia between individual Eastern European countries are as great between individual Eastern and Western European countries.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, this research also points out that social values related to xenophobia

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<sup>40</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, pp.25f.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Saideman, Stephan (2013): Comparative Xenophobia, online at: <http://saideman.blogspot.co.at/2013/05/comparative-xenophobia-part-i.html> (26 July 2017)

<sup>42</sup> cf. Pew Global Attitudes Report (2009): Two Decades After the Wall’s Fall, online at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2009/11/Pew-Global-Attitudes-2009-Pulse-of-Europe-Report-Nov-2-1030am-NOT-EMBARGOED.pdf> (26 July 2017)

<sup>43</sup> cf. Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Nyíri, Pár (2003): Xenophobia in Hungary: A Regional Comparison. Systemic Sources and Possible Solutions, Working Paper Series, Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, online at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/cps-working-paper-xenophobia-in-hungary-2003.pdf> (26 July 2017), p.30.

and intolerance have changed rapidly in these societies since 1990, which would suggest that they are not quite fixed.

Consequently, the social constructivist narrative should not be based on the generalised xenophobia in the Visegrád countries, but more in the easily changeable nature of such values in the region, which can urge politicians to implement more “national” policies. In his text *“Is Eastern Europe Uniformly Anti-Immigrant? Not so fast.”* Rovny’s research on the political divisions in each country explains that these differences are related to how political camps developed after communism. Through an analysis of the causes of immigration salience and the reasons behind immigration and integration policy positions of various parties in Eastern European countries, this research finds that which party – left or right – adopts more socially liberal policy positions depends on its relationship to communist federalism and the most politically notable ethnic group in the country. According to this narrative (Annex2), there are three patterns that influence migration outcomes: (1) countries with a transition to democracy by seceding from a communist federation which contain a federal diaspora; (2) countries in which a prominent ethnic minority is present other than the ethnicity of the federal centre; (3) countries with ethnic homogeneity. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland belong to the third group. The theory suggests that in these ethnically homogeneous countries party competition is not influenced by ethnic minority topic.<sup>45</sup> The second pattern describes Slovakia where the left-wing has a tendency to oppose migration. The established patterns do not clarify why some countries are more restrictive than others.<sup>46</sup>

Two other important factors affected policy outcomes: the current governments’ political ideology and the geography of the country, which determines whether a migration route crosses or not. From this point of view, a government of left or right-wing conservatives tends to produce negative rhetoric towards migration regardless of whether their country is on the Balkan migration route or not. However, in the case of Bulgaria – which is on the Balkan migration route – the liberal government also has a negative stance.<sup>47</sup>

By examining the dataset provided by Rovny, one can conclude that there is negative rhetoric regardless of the government’s colour and whether the migration route crosses the country or not. Secondly, where other minorities are present other than the ex-Soviet federal ethnicity, it seems like the variables of conservatism or being on the route may both influence

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<sup>45</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, p.26.

<sup>46</sup> cf. Rovny, Jan (2014): Communism, Federalism, and Ethnic Minorities: Explaining Party Competition Patterns in Eastern Europe, in: World Politics, Vol.66, p.669.

<sup>47</sup> cf. Ibid. pp.670f.

governments to be negative because of the example of Bulgaria. In countries where a federal diaspora exists, conservatism seems to cause negative positions.<sup>48</sup>

Rovny's model is somewhat more adequate for interpreting the present process and invites to assume that conservatism coupled with ethnic homogeneity is behind a more restrictive governmental policy towards migration in Visegrád countries.

As was stated in the first pages, one aim of this research is to determine the reasons why the V4 developed this migration policy and why other states in the EU did not. The seemingly simple story of policy uniformity among Eastern European countries on the issue of immigration is now revealed as a much more complex aggregation of diverse political views. While neorealists attribute the phenomenon to geopolitical exposure and intra-EU struggles, neoliberals focus on domestic party competition and constructivists on norm distribution. After setting up the narratives one is able to compare them on the basis of their explanatory value.

## **2.4 Methodological Scope**

Language plays an active role in the performance of human activities as well as for the creation of social identities.<sup>49</sup> While many people have the perception that language is only means of communication, this inquiry contemplates that the implications of the language and the way it is use is much more extensive and in any case neutral. Discourse analysis considers the way in which the discourse is a social practice that shapes the social world. A discourse as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world”<sup>50</sup> creates the meaning of things. Accordingly, the image of a conflict between “East” and “West” proclaimed by politicians, public intellectuals and columnists is going to be analysed. The main focus is put on the extent to which the current situation is actually rooted in the old tenets of the Cold War and post-Cold War division into Western and Eastern Europe.

Discourse analysis must be considered not just as a method, but also as a perspective “on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social sciences”<sup>51</sup>, and moreover, as a related compilation of approaches to discourse that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions and

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<sup>48</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, p.27.

<sup>49</sup> cf. Jorgensen, M.; Phillips, J. (2002): Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method, online at: <http://www.rasaneh.org/Images/News/AttachFile/27-3-1391/FILE634754469767402343.pdf> (26 July 2017)

<sup>50</sup> Paul Gee, James (2005): Discourse Analysis. Theory and Method, London: Routledge, p.12.

<sup>51</sup> Jorgensen, M.; Phillips, J. (2002): Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method

a body of research claims and studies. Discourse is used “to engage in discursive activity and to access different discourse to generate new meaning that help-or hinder-to enactment of particular strategies.”<sup>52</sup>

This thesis reflects on the need to consider discourse “as a part of (the) local and global social and cultural contexts.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, it is going to focus on the speech acts produced in the political sphere. Specifically, on the discourse of the following heads of the states: the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, during parliamentary debates, press conferences and public speeches. The discourse of other governmental representatives will also be taken into account. The empirical data will be extracted from media coverage: articles, reports, interviews; in their electronic format, and both from international and local media of the specific country. Furthermore, official state websites and press releases will be used. On the other hand, in order to complement the information, official data from the European level will be used as well.

The aim is to evaluate the general political perception of these countries towards migration throughout 2015, regarding the growing number of asylum applications received and the inflow of people entering into EU borders. The actors chosen are considered as relevant and influential as voices of the state towards public opinion. Moreover, not only the discourse will be assessed, but also the main policies that those governments have carried out regarding migration will be analysed. Since the study aims to make a qualitative analysis, it is going to be used similar material between the units, in order to draw comparable conclusions.

Holmes and Castañeda assert: “How displaced people are framed reveals a great deal about anxieties in Europe regarding diversity and change within a paradigm of limited good [...] informed by debt, austerity, and neoliberal disassembling of social systems.”<sup>54</sup> The authors also highlight how “political statements project these anxieties onto displaced people by morality delineating the deserving refugee from the undeserving migrant while casting both groups as outsiders threatening the well-being of an imagined homogenous Europe.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hary, C.; Palmer, I., Phillips, N. (2000): Discourse as a Strategic Resource, in: *Human Relations*, Vol.53, p.1228.

<sup>53</sup> Jorgensen, M.; Phillips, J. (2002): *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*

<sup>54</sup> Holmes, S.; Castañeda, H. (2016): Representing the “European refugee crisis” in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death, in: *Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, Vol.43, p.13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p.13.

### 3. International Migration in Europe

#### 3.1 Background

Migration is a phenomenon as old as the world history. After the Second World War, migrant workers were required in order to help for the reconstruction of Europe.<sup>56</sup> The 1990s was the onset of a period in which the technological developments, including cheaper and faster transportation, as well as the rapid spread of information with the beginning of the Internet revolution contributed to a noteworthy rise in global migration.<sup>57</sup> It occurred simultaneously with the growth of European countries' economies, becoming welfare states –a context that enabled the configuration of a new sense of national identity. From this standpoint: “Over the generations it took to construct such societies, there was an accreditation of collective memories or myth by which the welfare state became part of the national identity.”<sup>58</sup>

Migration as a security issue has been mainly connected with the illegal benefit of the welfare system. The OECD has asserted that migration flows tend to concentrate in countries with the most favourable economic conditions.<sup>59</sup> A strong labour market seems to be the most important element for refugee groups, creating a type of migrant known as Michel Foucault's concept of “*homo oeconomicus*”, that is to say “an asylum seeker who carefully calculates and analyses the risks and gains of choosing a particular destination of refuge.”<sup>60</sup>

In this sense, the transformation of the world into a globalised economy has encouraged international mobility, as the division of labour has provided incentives for societies from developing countries to seek for better opportunities in more industrialised countries.<sup>61</sup> According to the UN Report on International Migration, “high-income countries host more than two thirds of international migrants”<sup>62</sup> nowadays, and two thirds of those live in Europe or Asia. The growth of European economies together with a deepening of self-conception as homogenous nation-states laid the foundations that allowed the onset of a security approach towards migration in Europe. In a world conceived as scarce in resources, migrants and

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<sup>56</sup> cf. Huysmans, Jef (2000): *The European Union and the Securitization of Migration*, p.753.

<sup>57</sup> cf. Peoples, C.; Vaughan-William, N. (2010): *Critical Security Studies*, p.135.

<sup>58</sup> Heisler, M.; Layton-Henry, Z. (1993): *Migration and the links between social and societal security*, in Wæver Ole (ed.), *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p.153.

<sup>59</sup> cf. OECD (2015): *International Migration Outlook*, online at: [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2015\\_migr\\_outlook-2015-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2015_migr_outlook-2015-en) (26 July 2017)

<sup>60</sup> Kmak, Magdalena (2015): *Between citizen and bogus asylum seeker: Management of migration in the EU through the technology of morality*, in: *Social Identities. Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol.21, p.396.

<sup>61</sup> cf. Heisler, M.; Layton-Henry, Z. (1993): *Migration and the links between social and societal security*, pp.149f.

<sup>62</sup> UN (2015): *International Migration Report 2015*



asylum-seekers are seen as “rivals to national citizens in the labour market and the distribution to the social goods.”<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, notions that connect non-regulated migration with social disorder have leaded its link with criminality. Nevertheless, there is not a casual link between immigration control and a decrease in crime, which makes the argument poor in causality. This connexion is boosted because the distinction between migrants and asylum-seekers is getting weak within the political discourse in which asylum-seekers have been divided between the “genuine” and the “bogus”.<sup>64</sup> The former refers to the refugee who flees from poverty, persecution or war, and the latter to the person who calculates the advantages of asking for asylum. The concept of “bogus” asylum seekers has been increasingly embedded in the EU discourse on migration, especially since the 1990s. The Commission reported in September 2015:

“Strengthening the Common European Asylum System also means a more effective approach to abuses. Too many requests are unfounded: in 2014, 55% of the asylum requests resulted in a negative decision and for some nationalities almost all asylum requests were rejected, hampering the capacity of Member States to provide swift protection to those in need.”<sup>65</sup>

According to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees, the EU has to offer protection or refuge to those asylum seekers fleeing from vulnerable and dangerous circumstances (as war, persecution or dictatorial oppressive regimes). In the case of economic migrants (referred as “bogus” asylum-seekers), looking for prosperity and better economic conditions, even if fleeing from poverty, the EU is not obligated to provide asylum or protection, applying its sovereign right to decide over migration issues.

### **3.2 Emergence of the Refugee Crisis 2015**

With the term “European migrant and refugee crisis”, we refer to the massive and unplanned influx of people trying to reach EU countries in 2015. Whilst the scale of recent population movements should not be underestimated, this is not the first time that hundreds of thousands of people have been on the move in Europe looking for a better life for themselves and their children. Many of today’s scenes are reminiscent of the last major period of unrest in Europe

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<sup>63</sup> Huysmans, Jef (2006): *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, London: Routledge, p.77.

<sup>64</sup> cf. Ceyhan, A.; Tsoukla, A. (2002): *The Securitization of Migration in Western Societies: Ambivalent Discourses and Politics*, in: *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol.27, p.28.

<sup>65</sup> European Commission (2015): *Questions and answers on the European Agenda on Migration*, online at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-15-4957\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-4957_en.htm) (26 July 2017)

when conflict ripped apart the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, leading not only to the creation of more than half a dozen new countries in the Western Balkans but also the displacement of huge numbers of people, including 1.2 million Bosnian refugees. Fifty years earlier, the Second World War created an estimated 60 million refugees. This mass movement of people did not stop with the end of the war but continued as Europe reorganised itself to accommodate the new political structures established in its wake.<sup>66</sup>

The current crisis has historical precedents but should also be understood in a global context. Research funded by the European Commission more than a decade ago found that the majority of those seeking asylum in the EU during the 1990s came from just ten countries in which there was well-documented conflict, persecution and human rights abuse.<sup>67</sup> These trends have accelerated in the twenty-first century. According to the UNHCR, wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people to flee their homes than at any time since records began: the number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 had risen to staggering 20 million compared to just over 50 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade before that.<sup>68</sup> Fighting across parts of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa continued through 2015, resulting in millions of individuals being forced to flee, either within or outside their country.<sup>69</sup> It is no surprise then that, of those who crossed the Aegean in 2015, 50 per cent were from Syria, 20 per cent from Afghanistan, 7 per cent from Iraq, 5 per cent from Eritrea, 2 per cent from Iran and 1.6 per cent from Somalia.<sup>70</sup> Indeed around 90 per cent of those arriving across the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas in 2015 originated from the world's top ten refugee-producing countries.

The answer to the significant increase in migration to Europe over recent years lies, in large part therefore, with the conflict in Syria, which began in March 2011 but has escalated over the past five years, drawing in countries within and outside the region and closely associated with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). More than 12 millions Syrians have been forced to leave their homes and Syria is now the largest source country of refugees, with a refugee population of 4.2 million by mid-2015, replacing Afghanistan as the main source of

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<sup>66</sup> cf. Crawley, Heaven (2016): Managing the Unmanageable? Understanding Europe's Response to the Migration 'Crisis', in: *Human Geography*, Vol.9, p.13.

<sup>67</sup> cf. Castles, S. (2004): Why migration policies fail, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.27, pp.205f.

<sup>68</sup> cf. UNHCR (2015): World At War. UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014, online at: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html> (26 July 2017)

<sup>69</sup> cf. UNHCR (2015): Mid Year Trends 2015, online at: <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html> (26 July 2016)

<sup>70</sup> cf. IOM (2016): Mixed Migration: Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information 2015, online at: <http://doe.iom.int/docs/Flows%20Compilation%202015%20Overview.pdf> (26 July 2017)

refugees worldwide, a position that the latter country was unfortunate enough to hold for more than three decades. Many of these people live in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon or in urban setting within Turkey. The numbers of refugees in these countries far exceed those in the countries of Europe, particularly given the size and relative poverty of the existing population: for example, around 1.5 million refugees are living in Lebanon, a country half the size of Wales.<sup>71</sup>

However, Syria is not the only country dealing with conflict and human rights abuse. In the past years, at least 15 conflicts have erupted or reignited eight in Africa (Côte d’Ivoire, Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, North-Eastern Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Burundi), three in the Middle East (Iraq, Yemen and Syria), one in Europe (Ukraine) and three in Asia (Kyrgyzstan and several area of Myanmar and Pakistan).<sup>72</sup> Aside from Syrians, most of those arriving in Greece are refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. In Italy, the origin countries of migrants are more diverse – Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Gambia, Mali and Senegal – but the conditions they leave behind are equally difficult. Human Rights Watch has described the situation in Eritrea as “dismal”<sup>73</sup>. In Nigeria the militant insurgent group Boko Haram has killed civilians, abducted women and girls, forcefully conscripted young men and boys, and destroyed homes and schools, displacing hundreds of thousands of people.

It is important to acknowledge that there are also significant numbers of people for whom migration to Europe forms part of a livelihood strategy in the context of poverty, underdevelopment and a lack of opportunity. For many millions of people, migration for work is an everyday part of life. The dynamics of labour migration vary regionally but in the European context it is clear that substantial shifts in the skill levels of some parts of the European Union, combined with an overall ageing population, is driving demand for both high- and low-skilled labour. All the signs suggest that the population of the EU will fall by around 50 million people in the next 35 years and with it the number of people in the active labour force. The shrinkage of the workforce will have significant implications for the balance between tax receipts and social welfare expenditure, not least because the ageing population will also lead to higher costs for pension and social-care provision. To date the political leaders of the EU have largely refused to acknowledge this gape, arguing that low-skilled migration from outside Europe drives down wage rates and creates additional pressure on

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<sup>71</sup> cf. UNHCR (2015): Mid Year Trends 2015

<sup>72</sup> cf. UNHCR (2015): World At War. UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014

<sup>73</sup> cf. Human Rights Watch (2017): Eritrea, online at: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/eritrea> (26 July 2017)

health, education and welfare systems. As a result it is difficult, if not impossible, for workers from outside Europe to secure the right to work legally. Instead they have joined the ranks of refugees unable to secure access to international protection without first entering the territory, creating an unprecedented demand for the services of the agents, smugglers and traffickers who facilitate the complex and increasingly dangerous journey to Europe.<sup>74</sup>

In terms of recent migration flows and trends, the so-called refugee crisis was utterly predictable. Events associated with the Arab Spring in late 2010, the ousting of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi the following year and, of course, the Syrian civil war meant that the exodus of millions of people from the region was almost inevitable. As long as these countries do not find peace and, as Cohen points out, "even the world's poorest recesses [receive] image of prosperity and security [in Europe]"<sup>75</sup>, the influx of refugees and asylum seekers will not lie down. In the longer term, shifting patterns of work and leisure associated with globalisation and increased communications have revolutionised knowledge and perceptions of other parts of the world and accelerated access to information about how and where to travel. European politicians and policymakers should not have been surprised when people started to arrive through irregular means in much larger number than previously and yet they were.<sup>76</sup>

The crisis is testing the EU like no other event since the creation of European Communities in the 1950s. The challenges in this context are tremendous and may be an even "bigger issue for the European Union than the recent Greek debt crisis"<sup>77</sup>, as German chancellor Angela Merkel put it in August 2015. The EU member states have accounted over 1.2 million first time applications in 2015, a number more than double that of the year 2014. For the whole year, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Austria have received two thirds of the applications. Despite the fact that Germany accounted the highest number of first time applicants, Hungary as a transit country has recorded the highest number of first time applicants relative to the number of inhabitants (17,699 applicants per million inhabitants), followed by Sweden (16,016), Austria (9,970) and Germany (5,441).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> cf. Crawley, Heaven (2016): *Managing the Unmanageable?*, p.16.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen, R. (2015): *The Migrant Crisis in Calais Exposes a Europe Without Ideas*, in: *The New York Times*, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/04/opinion/roger-cohen-the-migrant-crisis-in-calais-exposes-a-europe-without-ideas.html> (26 July 2017)

<sup>76</sup> cf. Crawley, Heaven (2016): *Managing the Unmanageable?*, p.16.

<sup>77</sup> *Newsweek* (2015): *Merkel: Refugees could be bigger challenge than Greek debt crisis*, online at: <http://www.newsweek.com/merkel-refugees-could-be-bigger-challenge-greek-debt-crisis-363665> (26 July 2017)

<sup>78</sup> Eurostat (2016): *Asylum statistics*, online at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics) (26 July 2017)

However, this thesis argues that the refugee crisis is not a reflection of numbers – which pale into insignificance relative to the number of refugees in other countries outside Europe – but rather a crisis of collective action between the EU’s national governments. The conflicting responses to the crisis are symptoms of long-term difficulties with asylum policies. As a result of disagreements at the national level over the past years and decades, common EU institutions in the areas of immigration and asylum are weak. EU politicians are still struggling to come to terms with the dynamics of migration to Europe, the complexity of motivations driving people forward, the role of different institutions, including governments, international organisations, NGOs and civil society. But this is only part of the story. Just as importantly, there has been a spectacular level of non-implementation in relation to those policies which have been agreed on. As Crawley states: “Five emergency migration summits to ‘solve’ Europe’s crisis have done little other than to demonstrate that it is incapable of doing so, in turn creating an unprecedented political crisis that threatens to undermine the foundations of the Union itself.”<sup>79</sup>

### **3.3 Common Asylum Policy in the EU**

The different approaches to the current refugee crisis are surprising for two reasons. First, all destination countries included in this work are signatories to the Geneva Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the United Nations Convention against Torture, which formally obliges them to apply uniform standards to all applications for asylum. Second, since 1999, the EU has continuously made efforts to harmonise standards and procedure within the framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This being said, the observed variation in immigration and asylum policy suggests that European destination countries are interpreting their formal obligations differently in reaction to the crisis.<sup>80</sup>

The EU has been concerned with migration policy ever since its inception. The Treaty of Rome provided already for an “internal” migration policy by establishing the freedom of movement of labour. Since then, policy relating to migrants coming from outside the EU has become gradually more institutionalised at the EU level. At its meeting in Tampere in 1999, the European Council adopted the first multi-annual programme of priorities in the field of justice and home affairs, which included the aim of establishing a common EU asylum and

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<sup>79</sup> Crawley, Heaven (2016): *Managing the Unmanageable?*, p.15.

<sup>80</sup> cf. Stegall, Lisa (2015): *Immigration and Asylum Policy in Europe*, online at: [http://www.ibei.org/file-32716\\_32716.pdf](http://www.ibei.org/file-32716_32716.pdf) (26 July 2017), p.3.

migration policy. Further programmes were agreed in The Hague (2004) and Stockholm (2009).<sup>81</sup>

According to the European Commission, the goals of the CEAS can be summarised as follows: First, it aims to ensure that the rights granted to refugees and asylum seekers under international law are respected by all EU member states in equal measure. Second, it seeks to harmonise standards and procedure regarding applications for asylum throughout all the EU member states in an attempt to foster fairness and effectiveness. Third, the CEAS is supposed to be impervious to abuse. In this context, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees outlines how the EU has adopted a number of legislative measures. The Dublin Regulation determines the member state responsible for examining an individual asylum application. The Reception Conditions Directive sets out the conditions for receiving asylum seekers, including housing, education and health. The Asylum Procedures Directive lays out standards for asylum procedure and is an important contribution to international law since this issue was not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Qualification Directive establishes what subsidiary protection should be granted to people facing risks of serious harm. The EU also has also set up a European Refugee Fund to provide financial support for the asylum systems of member states. Eurodac is a EU-wide information technology system that was created to compare fingerprints and to determine whether an asylum seeker has lodged a claim in another member state.<sup>82</sup>

However, as Peter points out, “rules are one thing, putting them into practice EU-wide is another challenge.”<sup>83</sup> Despite these moves towards the supranationalisation of migration and asylum policy, this process has not been uniform and unproblematic. Although member states have been willing to limit their sovereignty on the issue of free movement of EU citizens, agreement on measures related to immigration from outside of the EU has been much more difficult.<sup>84</sup> This unwillingness has manifested itself in various ways. As highlighted above, particularly legal migration policy (the decision to admit migrants to a country) has implications for social welfare and employment policies, which are central to national

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<sup>81</sup> cf. Reslow, Natasja (2010): Explaining the development of EU migration policy, online at: <http://www.jhubc.it/ecpr-porto/virtualpaperroom/008.pdf> (26 July 2017), p.1.

<sup>82</sup> cf. Stegall, Lisa (2015): Immigration and Asylum Policy in Europe, p.7.

<sup>83</sup> Peter, L. (2015): Why Is the EU Struggling With Migrants and Asylum?, in: BBC, online at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24583286> (26 July 2017)

<sup>84</sup> cf. Koslowski, R. (1998): European Union Migration Regimes. Established and Emerged, in: C. Joppke (ed.), Challenge to the Nation-State. Immigration in Western Europe and the United Nations, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, p.154.

sovereignty and therefore “too important to be left to the European Commission”<sup>85</sup>. Member states will limit the delegation of power to the supranational level in order to maintain discretion over migration policy. Cooperation at the EU level will therefore only be possible where preferences overlap. From this standpoint, Androvičová argues that the migration policy of the EU “is based on intergovernmental approach [...] only those measures are put into practice on which all of the strong states agree – and usually these are mainly restrictive.”<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, the diminishing of internal borders has to bring, on the other hand, reinforcement at the external border in order to guarantee a sufficient level of control within the free movement area. The logic of the Schengen Zone reinforces securitisation acts when it comes to migration and elevates member states with external borders into a special role. Several authors<sup>87</sup> have argued that the European enlargement has acted as a EU buffer zone for the core, which can be also observed from the migration scope in which the periphery countries have had a pre-emptive role in stemming the incoming migration influx.

### **3.4 Burden Sharing and Solidarity Mechanisms**

The debate on migration and asylum revolves around two issues: the management of third country nationals entering the EU, very much framed as “fight” against irregular migration through the intensification of border controls and promotion of cooperation with countries of origin and transit on the one hand; the increasing number of asylum applications in the EU and their unequal distribution among member states on the other hand.<sup>88</sup> The latter has provoked discussions about the meaning and scope of solidarity and sharing, underpinning the further development and implementation of the EU’s common policy on asylum. What is greatly debated with regards to sharing practices in the EU is whether there is a solid legal basis, from which an obligation to share can be extracted.

Consideration of the terms “solidarity”, “fair sharing of responsibility” and adding to the list “burden-sharing”, “balance-sharing”, “balance of efforts”, “loyal cooperation” can lead to considerable confusion. Some of the uncertainties are purely terminological, others relate to

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<sup>85</sup> Henson, P; Malhan, N. (1995): Endeavours to Export a Migration Crisis: Policy-Making and Europeanisation in the German Migration Dilemma, in: German Politics, Vol.4, p.137.

<sup>86</sup> Androvičová, Jarmila (2013): Immigration in Current Political Discourse. The Case of Slovakia within the European Union, in: Annual of Language Politics and Politics of Identity, Vol.7, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> cf. Del Sarto, R.; Steindler, Ch. (2015): Uncertainties at the European Union’s southern borders: actors, policies, and legal frameworks, in: European Security, Vol.24, p.371.

<sup>88</sup> cf. Karageorgiou, Eleni (2016): Solidarity and sharing in the Common European Asylum System: the case of Syrian refugees, in: European Politics and Society, Vol.17, p.197.

substance, namely the existence of legal obligations or the lack thereof, and whether they refer to the simple allocation tasks/obligations, or in fact point to situations where states are supposed to contribute more than their original obligations, in solidarity with others who are exposed to particular pressures.<sup>89</sup> Is protection of refugees a public good, which should be produced as a result of collective effort? What type of burden-/responsibility-sharing should take place? These questions have been haunting scholars for decades.

Solidarity may mean a collective duty to perform where one member of the collective fails to perform according to its obligation. In that sense it is built on the expectation that every participant in a cooperative venture contributes its own share. That meaning of solidarity may be linked to the duty of loyal or sincere cooperation as enshrined in Article 4 (3) of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), referring to the expectation that each member state will perform according to the requirements of the relevant *acquis*.<sup>90</sup>

However, solidarity may have a second, substantively different meaning, whereby it refers to a gesture of assistance, when one actor goes beyond what may (legally) be expected from it in order to help the other actor who seeks external assistance. In this sense solidarity may be required by moral (or political) norms but it certainly is more than simply meeting the existing concrete legal obligations and responsibilities.<sup>91</sup> The preambular paragraph of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 is the usual starting point for establishing a duty/expectation of solidarity in the second sense:

“Considering that the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries, and that a satisfactory solution of the problem of which the United Nations has recognized the international scope and nature cannot therefore be achieved without international cooperation.”<sup>92</sup>

Referring to the “unduly heavy burden” assumes “due burden”, which again may be due as a legally undertaken responsibility or as a political-moral expectation assuming that countries have fair shares of the burden; but a situation may arise (e.g. mass influxes or internal difficulties) when providing asylum becomes so onerous that it can no longer be expected from the country. As a principle of law, solidarity is frequently seen as a vague normative command which does not lead to justifiable obligations but has an element of corrective

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<sup>89</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus? The Responses of the EU and the Visegrad Countries to the Post-2015 Arrival of Migrants and Refugees, online at: [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte\\_wp\\_17.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte_wp_17.pdf) (26 July 2017), p.3.

<sup>90</sup> cf. Klamert, Marcus (2014): *The Principle of Loyalty in EU Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.40.

<sup>91</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> UN (1945): Treaty Series, Vol.189, online at: [https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/UNTS/Volume 189/v189.Pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/UNTS/Volume%20189/v189.Pdf) (26 July 2017), p.137.



justice, a drive to achieve or restore a fair allocation of duties by way of cooperation and assistance.<sup>93</sup>

Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establishes a clear connection between solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, when it treats them as aspects of a single principle applicable to several policies in the area of freedom, security and justice, including asylum policy:

“The policies of the Union set out in this Chapter and their implementation shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States. Whenever necessary, the Union acts adopted pursuant to this Chapter shall contain appropriate measures to give effect to this principle.”<sup>94</sup>

As Nagy points out, beyond doubt, the rule enshrined in Article 80 is binding: the policies and their implementation “shall be governed” by the principle and EU acts “shall contain appropriate measures” to realise solidarity and fair-sharing.<sup>95</sup> “Sharing of responsibilities” is usually understood as the polite term for what was and still is frequently referred to as “burden-sharing”. The use of “responsibility” instead of “burden” acknowledges that asylum seekers and refugees enrich society even if – especially in the early period of their presence – they may burden the social support system and, for lack of integration, create tensions based on cultural or habitual differences, and sometimes even political animosity.<sup>96</sup> However, it should be recalled that Hathaway establishes a meaningful difference between “burden-sharing” and “responsibility-sharing” by using the first expression to the allocation of costs and the second to the placement of persons.<sup>97</sup>

Allocation of responsibilities may be different from a fair sharing of responsibility. Allocation of responsibility is assigning competence or duty to act. Since its inception in 1990 the Dublin System has been a system of allocating responsibility for refugee status determination procedure, but it was never a system aimed at fairness or genuine burden/responsibility-sharing. This was clearly admitted by the Commission in 2016: “The current Dublin System was not designed for situations of large-scale uncontrolled arrivals and does not ensure a

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<sup>93</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): *Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?*, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> EU (2012): Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 326, online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:12012E/TXT> (26 July 2017)

<sup>95</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): *Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?*, p.4.

<sup>96</sup> cf. Türk, V.; Garlick, M. (2016): *From Burdens and Responsibilities to Opportunities: The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and a Global Compact on Refugees*, in: *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol.28, pp.656-678.

<sup>97</sup> cf. Hathaway, James (2016): *A Global Solution to a Global Refugee Crisis*, in: *European Papers*, Vol.1, p.98.

sustainable and fair sharing of responsibility for asylum applicants across the Union.”<sup>98</sup> An attempt to take into account the dysfunctional effect of the rules on allocating responsibility for the determination of refugee status is reflected in Article 78 (3) TFEU, which states that:

“In the event of one or more Member States being confronted by an emergency situation characterised by a sudden inflow of nationals of third countries, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may adopt provisional measures for the benefit of the Member State(s) concerned. It shall act after consulting the European Parliament.”<sup>99</sup>

The conclusion of the above is that solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility in Article 80 TFEU make room for more than an allocation of tasks; they enable fairness and assistance beyond existing legal obligations. As the Dublin Regime ignores the size of the task assigned by it to the individual member states, it is neither an expression of solidarity nor a fair sharing of responsibility.<sup>100</sup>

### **3.5 The EU’s Response to the Refugee Crisis**

The calls for more solidarity resound loudly and clearly in times of crisis. Politicians, public intellectuals and academics alike tend to evoke the issue. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, entitled his 2015 “State of the Union” speech: “*Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity*”<sup>101</sup> and in his 2016 speech he claimed that “solidarity is the glue that keeps our Union together”, reminding us especially of the word “solidarity”<sup>102</sup> which is mentioned 16 times in the treaties. In order to deal with the increasing migratory pressures, the EU appealed to solidarity. Therefore, a common approach as a community was needed.

In Spring 2015 the gravity of the refugee crisis pushed the Union to attempt an overhaul of its asylum rules. The first action in this direction came in April 2015, in the wake of the boat disaster that killed 800 people in the Mediterranean Sea, when the Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council approved a 10-point action plan, highlighting the need to consider “options for an emergency relocation mechanism”.

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<sup>98</sup> EC (2016): Questions and Answers: Reforming the Common European Asylum System, online at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-16-1621\\_it.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-1621_it.htm) (26 July 2017), p.1.

<sup>99</sup> Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?, p.4.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Nagy points out, that solidarity has many other relevant aspects (in respects of the refugees, the local communities, those left behind by the asylum seeker, etc.).

<sup>101</sup> EC (2015): State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity, online at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-15-5614\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm) (26 July 2017)

<sup>102</sup> EC (2016): State of the Union 2016: Towards a better Europe. A Europe that protects, empowers and defends, online at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-16-3043\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-3043_en.htm) (26 July 2017)

In May 2015 the European Commission drafted the “EU Agenda on Migration”, elaborating on a comprehensive response to the migration emergency and setting political priorities. One of the most sensitive and controversial ideas of the Agenda has been the establishment of a temporary “relocation system” to redistribute asylum seekers among member states, together with a “resettlement system” to welcome an additional number of 20,000 migrants from outside the EU. The Dublin regulation, which established regulations for assessing protection claims in the first country a migrant is registered in, put the weight of the migration pressure upon recipient countries, namely Italy and Greece. Counter to this, the Commission proposed a model to allocate responsibility between member states on the basis of a new criteria that is including GDP, population, unemployment and other similar indicators. In its proposal, the European Commission established a mandatory quota system to redistribute 40,000 migrants received in Greece and Italy to other member states.<sup>103</sup> The proposal which Angela Merkel supported since its first draft immediately sparked criticism among some countries. It soon became clear that the proposal stood no chance of being unanimously accepted.

The massive exodus from Syria during summer 2015 and the member states’ diverging reaction to it was a watershed in crisis management. In August, Merkel declared that Germany would open borders to Syrian refugees, triggering an even larger influx of people trying to reach the country as well as fuelling growing frustration among the Balkan countries. In early September, thousands of refugees marched from Budapest because they had not been allowed to leave Hungary by train. As Germany was welcoming migrants in Munich, Orbán was accusing Merkel of “moral imperialism”<sup>104</sup> for her open-arm refugee policy. At this point, two camps revealed opposing strategies for solving the crisis. It seemed that the Visegrád Group, under the leadership of Orbán, insisted that the EU’s efforts should be directed toward strengthening its external borders and stopping the flow of migrants coming from the Aegean by building walls and fences. Merkel opposed the idea of fences that would keep civilians out and could potentially leave Greece alone to deal with the crisis, and strengthen the understanding of “fortress Europe”.<sup>105</sup>

Tensions among member states surged and turned into an open conflict during the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 14 September. On this occasion, the relocation proposal was forced

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<sup>103</sup> cf. Toygür, I.; Benvenuti, B. (2016): The European Response to the Refugee Crisis: Angela Merkel on the Move, online at: [http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IlkeToygur\\_BiancaBenvenuti\\_FINAL.pdf](http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IlkeToygur_BiancaBenvenuti_FINAL.pdf) (26 July 2017), p.2.

<sup>104</sup> cf. Bender, Ruth: Orban Accuses Germany of ‘Moral Imperialism’ on Migrants, in: WSJ, online at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/orban-accuses-germany-of-moral-imperialism-on-migrants-1443023857> (26 July 2017)

<sup>105</sup> cf. Toygür, I.; Benvenuti, B. (2016): The European Response to the Refugee Crisis, p.2.

through and adopted by a qualified majority: the Council agreed to redistribute 160,000 Syrian refugees, a sharp rise from the 40,000 initially proposed, who are in Greece, Italy, and Hungary to other member states within a time span of two years. On paper, the proposal had won. However, the tense atmosphere revealed the deep divisions among countries, with the V4 fiercely opposing the plan, claiming that the relocation would draw more migrants to Europe and disrupt society. Slovakia went so far as to push ahead with legal action over refugee quotas by taking its complaint to the European Court of Justice. During fall 2015, the decision of several countries, including Austria, Sweden, France, and Germany, to close their borders and suspend Schengen regulations further complicated the situation. This opened a troubling debate over the future of the Schengen, as many started suggesting that the visa-free area was collapsing under the weight of the refugee crisis. In addition, member states did little to actually implement the plan, and the relocation/resettlement programme fell short of expectations.<sup>106</sup> In its first report on the relocation and resettlement plan published in mid-March 2016, the Commission called on member states to increase their pledges and shorten the time needed to process applications. However, the second report, published in April, stated again that progress is unsatisfactory, especially concerning the relocation programme.<sup>107</sup>

Since no unanimous agreement was achieved over how to manage refugees in EU territory, efforts were pointed at addressing the issue with countries of origin and transit. As the Eastern and Balkan route became increasingly important during 2014-2015, one actor was identified as the provider of the solution to the European chaos: Turkey. To avoid border closure, the EU regarded Turkey as a potential partner. In the European Council meeting of 15 October, EU leaders, together with Turkey, drafted the EU-Turkey joint action plan. It included significant political and financial incentives for Turkey in return for its cooperation in preventing illegal migration to the EU. In addition to the EU-Turkey deal, during the Valletta Summit on migration in November 2015, EU leaders met their counterparts from African countries to step up cooperation with the countries of origin. The EU agreed to set up a fund to assist these governments in managing migration and refugees. By the end of November, it seemed that energy to address the refugee crisis would be directed toward finding a solution

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<sup>106</sup> cf. Toygür, I.; Benvenuti, B. (2016): *The European Response to the Refugee Crisis*, p.3.

<sup>107</sup> cf. *Ibid.* p.3.

with third countries in order to assist both origin and transit countries in keeping refugees from entering Europe.<sup>108</sup>

On 7-8 March 2016, EU leaders met with Turkey once again. The summit was expected to follow up on the November 2015 agreement and according to the declaration drafted by the EU ambassadors, EU leaders were expected to close the Balkan route. However, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union then, together with German and Turkish prime ministers, substituted the draft agreement with a new deal. According to the new text, under the so-called “one for one” principle, one Syrian refugee from Turkey would be resettled in Europe for every one refugee that is readmitted to Turkey. Europe would take up to 72,000 Syrian refugees, although Turkey would accept many more from the Greek islands. Europe would also commit to pay up to an additional 3 billion EUR<sup>109</sup> to Turkey in order to manage the refugees in its territory, lifting the visa requirement for Turkish people by the end of June and opening five negotiation chapters in Turkey’s accession process. The new plan was finally adopted in the 17-18 March meeting. However, the situation is not as resolute as it might seem.<sup>110</sup>

Even if the plan can be considered as an improvement toward a shared European response to the migrant crisis, the real issue is its implementation. The relocation of migrants from Turkey to Europe will follow the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme proposed by the European Commission in late 2015. This means that the final decision on whether or not to welcome any migrants rests with participating states.

In reality, the relocation of asylum seekers is far behind schedule and some member states formally breach the binding decision. According to the state of play on 17 May 2017, 5,789 asylum seekers from Italy and 13,107 from Greece have been relocated. In its tenth report on relocation and resettlement, the Commission did not show signs of abandoning the scheme. Instead, it declared that: “It is crucial that all Member States urgently intensify their efforts and meet the monthly relocation targets – at least 3,000 relocations from Greece and at least 1,500 relocations from Italy.”<sup>111</sup> The poor performance of the Visegrád countries was highlighted when the Commission noted with disappointment that in respect of the relocation from Italy, “Hungary, Austria and Poland are still refusing to participate [...] the Czech

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<sup>108</sup> cf. Ibid. p.3.

<sup>109</sup> cf. Ibid. p.4.

<sup>110</sup> cf. Ibid. p.4.

<sup>111</sup> EC (2017): Tenth Report on Relocation and Resettlement (COM/2017/202), online at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material_en) (26 July 2017)

Republic has not pledged since May 2016 and has not relocated anyone since August 2016, [...] and Slovakia is relocating on a very limited basis.”<sup>112</sup> The assistance offered by the V4 to Greece was similarly unacceptable, with Slovakia and the Czech Republic altogether relocating 28 persons in clear need of international protection, and Hungary and Poland none. The Commission’s eleventh report again highlighted Hungary’s and Poland’s inaction. It also stressed that those member states which do not meet their obligations by September 2017 (the expiry date of the decision) will still be under an obligation to relocate their share.<sup>113</sup>

No ambiguity was left as to the consequences of not conforming to the binding relocation decision: “If Member States do not increase their relocations soon, and if the pressure on Greece and Italy is not alleviated, the Commission will not hesitate to make use of its powers under the Treaties.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> cf. EC (2017): Eleventh Report on Relocation and Resettlement (COM/2017/212), online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52017DC0212> (26 July 2017)

<sup>114</sup> cf. EC (2017): Twelfth Report on Relocation and Resettlement (COM/2017/260), online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52017DC0260> (26 July 2017)

## 4. Reinventing the East-West Hierarchy

### 4.1 Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis

An early consequence of standing united against the EU-proposal was that the Visegrád Group got more media attention than ever before in the 25 years of its existence. Yet most of the coverage was predominantly negative, accusing them of lacking compassion and shaming them into moral maturity. With it came the symbolic and political boundary processes marking out East and West within Europe.

Throughout the events of 2015-2016, the media played a central role in providing information about the new arrivals and in framing different narratives. The complexity and duration of the crisis created a climate of uncertainty about its political, economic and societal implications, which left ample room for mass media to help shaping the understanding of who the refugees are and what their arrival means for the respective country, since it is in particular in times of uncertainty that people orient themselves towards medially communicated interpretations. Moreover, with regard to integration of refugees and asylum seekers into society, it has been demonstrate that media coverage contributes to the construction of socially shared understandings and dominant representations of newly arriving people, which have further consequences for attitudes, emotions, and behaviour towards them.<sup>115</sup>

In their report *“Media coverage of the “refugee crisis”*, Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski analyse three different periods as important points on a European mediated narrative of the crisis. Separated by two-month intervals, they serve to capture the dynamically changing frames surrounding the dramatic situation. The first period is named “careful tolerance”. By July 2015, Europe experienced three months of the refugee crisis in the media, starting from reports about mass drowning in the Mediterranean in April and May (adding to previous, but less mediated reports about similar tragedies between January and March). The European Council agreed on measures concerning relocating refugees from Greece and Italy to other EU member states, while the Hungarian government announced its decision to start building a physical barrier along its Serbian border. July was a dynamic period in crisis, with stories about humanitarian efforts on the Mediterranean interweaving with anxieties fuelled by stories of migrant violence. Europe appeared to want to help refugees more than not, but remained careful about negative consequences.

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<sup>115</sup> cf. Boomgaarden, H.; Greussing, E. (2017): Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe’s 2015 refugee crisis, in: *Journal of Ethic and Migration Studies*, pp.1f.

At the beginning of the second period called “ecstatic humanitarianism” in September, after photographs of a drowned Syrian boy washed up on a beach in Turkey made headlines in the European press, narratives changed significantly. Descriptions of measure to help refugees dominated over measures to protect the country. Refugee emotions were most frequently featured in the narratives, compared to the other two periods, and there were more mentions of positive consequences of the migrant arrivals than in July or November (“fear and securitisation”). For a while at least, Europe appeared from the narrative as a place of (relative) solidarity to the plight of asylum seekers<sup>116</sup>, exemplified particularly by the German chancellor Angela Merkel who – in September 2015 – stated: “I am completely convinced: the opportunities are far greater than the risks. We just have to recognise them, and use them [...] I am convinced that we can do it.”<sup>117</sup> As Merkel emphasised the duty of offering asylum and showed solidarity with European humanism, at the same time Orbán, the louder of the V4 members, replied that in building the fence he was acting on behalf of protecting European civilisation. This has led to the conclusion that there are at least two versions of what Europe stands for.

#### **4.2 A Western View: “Eastern Europe’s Compassion Deficit”**

According to Dace Dzenovska, the recent sequence of crisis in Europe suggests that every crisis produces “Europeanness” anew. During the sovereign debt crisis in Greece, Greek Europeanness came to question, because Greece refused to behave like a responsible economic subject. Instead of willingly tightening belts, cutting the state budget and restructuring debt, Greece’s left-leaning politicians and citizens protested the austerity measure proposed by European and international financial institutions.<sup>118</sup>

However, in the midst of Europe’s refugee crisis it was Eastern Europeans who emerged as rogue subjects refusing to “play by the rules”<sup>119</sup>. When it was recognised in public and political discourse across Europe that a crisis was afoot and that something had to be done to cope with the large numbers of refugees trying to enter Europe, the European Commission proposed quotas to distribute the burden between the member states. As discussed above,

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<sup>116</sup> cf. Georgiou, M; Zaborowski, R. (2017): Media Coverage on the “refugee crisis”: A Cross-European perspective, online at: <https://rm.coe.int/media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis-2017-web/168071222d> (26 July 2017), p.8.

<sup>117</sup> Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel (2015): online at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Regierungserklaerung/2015/2015-09-24-regierungserklaerung.html> (26 July 2017)

<sup>118</sup> cf. Dzenovska, Dace (2016): Eastern Europe, the Moral Subject of the Migration/Refugee Crisis, and Political Futures, online at: [http://nearfuturesonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Dzenovska\\_05.pdf](http://nearfuturesonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Dzenovska_05.pdf), p.1.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p.1.



most East European countries opposed the relocation system. In contrast with older European Union member states, Eastern European states did not have significant numbers of residents with Middle Eastern, African or Asian background and were determined to keep it that way. There were protests in many Eastern European cities against accepting refugees. Arguments against accepting refugees that came forth from the Visegrád countries voiced concerns about cultural incompatibility, racial and religious difference, security threats, inability to distinguish genuine refugees from economic migrants, negative experience with integration in other European Union member states and localities, lasting socialist legacies of population resettlement that continued to undermined post-socialist polities, poor economies, impoverished populations and imposed solidarity by Europe that invoked memories of old directives.<sup>120</sup> The governments very quickly adopted an extremely hard attitude, which became a non-negotiable question of principle. They closed the door early and hard so that political domestic cost of a U-turn would not become too high. This is a particularly powerful factor in those countries which tend to foster a certain inferiority complex within the EU and which are constantly on the look-out for anything which might – directly or indirectly – seem like a diktat on the part of the powerful. Obviously, the traumas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Munich, Yalta and kowtowing to Moscow for 40 years – are also part of this.<sup>121</sup>

This was the first time the V4 appeared on the international scene as a united front to be reckoned with. Despite historical and political differences between Eastern European member states, the Visegrád Group emerged as an ideal type – an unsympathetic not-quite-European subject mired in paranoia about foreigners, exaggerated concerns about self-determination and self-preservation, and timeworn claims of historical suffering. In his text “*Central Europe in the European Union: A Story of Hypocrisy*”, Michael Kořan argues that in autumn 2015, “it has become something of a rule that when a Central European country makes it to the front pages of a big international newspaper, it is not cause of celebration.”<sup>122</sup> Different pasts and presents were obfuscated by a moralising discourse. Disagreeable politics and attitudes were traced to moral failures, which amounted to failed Europeanness. The failed Europeanness of Eastern Europe was juxtaposed to Europe proper, exemplified and led by Germany, and thus the moral goodness was characterised by compassion as a political virtue that demands and

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p.2.

<sup>121</sup> cf. Macek, Lukas (2015): Refugee Crisis: a new East-West rift in Europe?, pp.1-3.

<sup>122</sup> Kořan, Michael (2015): Central Europe in the European Union: A Story of Hypocrisy, in: Visegrad Insight, Vol.2, p.72.

legitimizes emergency humanitarian measures which go hand-in-hand with the increasingly repressive European regimes.<sup>123</sup>

But how is one to become European? Judging from the commentaries directed at Eastern Europe, it means leaving the past behind while at the same time learning from it. The past has to be left behind in the sense of ceasing to make political claims on the basis of historical injury. At the same time, one must learn from the historical experience of victimhood and/or complicity with crimes against humanity that Europe embraces as its painful heritage. For example, those commenting on Eastern European reactions to the refugee crisis asked whether Europeans have no shame refusing to accept when thousands of their compatriots benefited from the kindness of others during the long 20<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the strongest condemnations has come from the Polish-born historian Jan Gross. In the German newspaper *Die Welt*, he wrote: “Have the Eastern Europeans no sense of shame?” “For centuries their forbears emigrated en masse to escape from material misery and political persecution,” he argued.<sup>124</sup> Ivan Krastev’s article “*Eastern Europe’s Compassion Deficit*” published in *The New York Times* was of a similar nature. He asked: “What’s the matter with Eastern Europe?” Krastev argued that just three decades ago, “Solidarity” was its symbol. Today, a more appropriate symbol would be a bumper sticker reading: “Eastern Europe: Where Donald Trump comes off looking good.” What came after Communism and liberal reforms was pervasive cynicism. Faced with an influx of migrants and haunted by economic insecurity, many Eastern Europeans feel betrayed by their hope that joining the European Union would mean the beginning of prosperity and an end to crisis, while many government leaders fear that the only way to regain political support is by showing that you care for your own, and not a whit for the aliens, he concluded.<sup>125</sup>

Another noteworthy example is an article written by Paul Hockenros. It was titled “*The Stunning Hypocrisy of Mitteleuropa*” and published in *Foreign Policy* in September 2015. First, he too asked: “The countries of Central Europe have a long history of relying on the kindness of others during their darkest hours. So why are they so heartless when it comes to today’s refugees?” He argued that in Central Europe, historical memory is conveniently short when it wants to be. Few of the 28 countries in the European Union have been as affected over the course of their histories by emigration as have the Central European ones: Hungary,

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<sup>123</sup> cf. Dzenovska, Dace (2016): Eastern Europe, the Moral Subject of the Migration/Refugee Crisis, p.2.

<sup>124</sup> Gross, Jan (2015): Die Osteuropäer haben kein Schamgefühl

<sup>125</sup> Krastev, Ivan (2015): Eastern Europe’s Compassion Deficit, in: *The New York Times*, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/opinion/eastern-europes-compassion-deficit-refugees-migrants.html> (26 July 2017)

the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland have all seen their citizens pack their bags and flee abroad. “But you wouldn’t know it by their calls to fortify the EU against refugees as if they were criminals and by their stubborn refusal to accept those fleeing war, and discrimination – much like so many *Mitteleuropäer* have in the not-so-distant past,” he wrote. Viktor Orbán’s harsh anti-migrant rhetoric is one of his main concerns. This racism and xenophobia are atrocious on their own – refugee crisis or not – and speak volumes about the state of democratic culture in these countries a full quarter-century after Communism’s demise. In the early 1990s, one might have forgiven the illiberal attitudes that formed under dictatorships. Democratic political culture is not something that became reality the day the walls fell. “But after more than a decade with Hungary in the EU, we might have expected that some of these Communist-era hangovers should have mellowed and disappeared,” Hockenos stated. His conclusion might be the most pessimistic of all cases presented: “And so, unexpectedly, the EU has yet another task on its long list: preparing the post-Communist European nations for the responsibility of providing refuge for political refugees in desperate straits. It seems tolerance and civic values in these countries are less advanced than we assumed. Illiberal values, it seems, have been passed from one generation to the next, and it will take more than the arrival of tens of thousands in need of compassion and succour to change this sad state of affairs.”<sup>126</sup>

Examples provided of acts of kindness include states in Europe, North Africa and Australia taking in post-World War II refugees fleeing the Soviet regime or refugees fleeing the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring or the Polish Solidarity movement. Overlooking the fact that some of these acts of kindness were often entangled with the sorting of people into fit/unfit or deserving/undeserving objects of kindness, these commentators wondered why Eastern Europeans could not see the irony in refusing assistance to those in need when they had received it themselves. As Dace Dzenovska points out, becoming European in the context of the refugee crisis means properly locating oneself in the post-World War II and post-Cold War terrain of suffering and compassion. A mature European subject is thought to be compassionate and extend assistance towards less fortunate others rather than privilege one’s own historical suffering.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Hockenos, Paul (2015): The Stunning Hypocrisy of Mitteleuropa, in: Foreign Policy, online at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/10/the-stunning-hypocrisy-of-mitteleuropa-refugees-poland-hungary-czech-republic/> (26 July 2017)

<sup>127</sup> cf. Dzenovska, Dace (2016): Eastern Europe, the Moral Subject of the Migration/Refugee Crisis, p.5.

The refugee crisis has also reinvigorated discourses of “Easternism” within Europe, revealing both old and new, overlapping and intersecting, peripheries on the axis of North-South, West-East. While in the context of the fading Cold War division, categories like “East” and “West” lost their traditional referents, this did not necessarily result in the creation of a unified European continent shaped by principles of cooperation and solidarity and a cosmopolitan outlook, but in the reclassification of places and spatial relations and a reconfiguration of hierarchies. Despite the multiple transformations Eastern Europe has undergone since 1989, the East continues to be Europe’s negative “Other” which is selectively reproduced in discussions about geopolitics and institutional practices. Rather than a stable location, “Europe” from this perspective appears as a flexible constellation, with states sliding in and out of Europeanness depending on how they deal with the past, whether they follow political recommendations by European institutions and adopt certain economic and democratic principles. Classificatory processes are rooted in unequal power relations.<sup>128</sup>

Popular media has been quick to reinforce the notion of key dividing lines in Europe. Natalie Nougayrède, for example, published a story titled “*Healing Europe’s east-west divide is central to a lasting refugee solution*” in *The Guardian*, pointing out that “ten years after many eastern European countries joined the EU, a political and cultural gap divides the continent – and its scale may well have been underestimated.”<sup>129</sup> A more complex analysis of the East-West divide within the EU in the context of a major crisis of migration into Europe came from Jacques Rupnik. He argued that the CEE region has presented a picture of democratic regression that combines two main features: (1) a departure from the rule of law as the foundation of liberal democracy; and (2) a recourse to nationalism as the principle source of political legitimation, complete with hardened identity politics. To explain the latter, he used the theoretical framework of Hungarian political thinker István Bibó who argued in his work “*The Misery of the Small States of Eastern Europe*” that democracy would find itself endangered by fascism “when, following the cataclysm or an illusion, the cause of the nation separates from that of the freedom, where a historic shock generates the fear of seeing freedom threaten the cause of the nation.”<sup>130</sup> The migration wave of 2015 was framed by CEE political elites as such shock. The “cause of freedom” (in this case the freedom of movement) – embodied by German chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision to open the borders of the EU –

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<sup>128</sup> cf. Pfoser, Alena (2017): Nested Peripheralisation: Remaking the East-West Border in the Russian-Estonian Borderland, in: East European Policies and Societies and Cultures, Vol.31, p.27.

<sup>129</sup> Nougayrède, Natalie (2015): Healing Europe’s east-west divide is central to lasting refugee solution, in: *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/03/europe-east-west-divide-refugee-eu-leaders> (26 July 2017)

<sup>130</sup> Bibó, István (1986): *Misère des petits Etats d'Europe de l'Est*, Paris: L’Harmattan, p.115.

was seen as a threat to national identity. This kind of identity politics has deep historical resonance in CEE societies. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these countries have been lands of emigration, not immigration. While Western Europe, with its postcolonial legacies and economic migrations from the southern shores of the Mediterranean, set about trying to transform itself to accommodate “diversity”, Central and Eastern Europe’s closed societies had no such experience. According to Rupnik, “this is a key to understanding the current East-West contrast.” “1989 was their triumph. For a time, there was hope that Central and Eastern Europe would help to redefine the identity of a reunited Europe. But prosaic matter of economic integration and EU accession soon came to the fore, and that illusion vanished”, he concluded rather negatively.<sup>131</sup>

### **4.3 The Virtues of Eastern Europe, Then and Now**

Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council made an interesting observation at the 2011 EU-US Summit: “Since the end of the Cold War, there is no East anymore.” Adding that “there is still a West.” Van Rompuy continued, “The EU’s priority is its neighbours, to the south and to the east.”<sup>132</sup> In his estimation, then, the “East” as a meaningful discursive configuration no longer exists. For politicians like Van Rompuy, the putative shift from a political economy of “transition” to one of “integration” rendered the notion of Easternness within Europe as a historical artefact. The symbolic and political boundary processes that have marked out East and West, however, possess both deep histories and durable afterlives, as recent events demonstrate. Finger pointing within Europe over the refugee crisis has sharpened all the cardinal points of Europe’s symbolic compass. The language of Europe’s negative “Other” continues to resonate as a way to denote deep asymmetries. “Eastern Europe” is still a metaphor that Western discourse has unwittingly conflated with physical space. In geographic terms, east is always east of the observer’s privileged position, but this is not true of “Eastern Europe”. Within this paradigm, the terms “East” and “West” express little more than binary opposition. Typically, then, the term “Eastern Europe” as it appears in Western discourses denotes nothing more than the seam-side of Western modernity, a negation that, in a Foucauldian turn, affirms the West. The

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<sup>131</sup> Rupnik, Jacques (2016): *Surging Illiberalism in the East*, pp.84ff.

<sup>132</sup> Van Rompuy, H. (2011): Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council following the EU-US Summit, EUCO 146/11, online at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/cc/126393.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/cc/126393.pdf) (26 July 2017)

rhetoric is inherently spatial, describing a world, with specific images and tropes repeatedly, even obsessively re-enacting the same basic opposition.<sup>133</sup>

At a special forum on the topic of “*Recursive Easts, Shifting Peripheries: Whither Europe’s “Easts” and “Peripheries”*”, several authors argued the continued urgency and value in studying the operation of Easternisms and process of peripheralisation within the European context. The forum took as its starting point the supposed “obsolescence” of both the notion of Eastern Europe and the scholarship to this topic. EU enlargement and the process of NATO expansion led some scholars and politicians alike to proclaim that not only was the “transition” out of state socialism in Eastern Europe over but that Eastern Europe no longer was a meaningful political or cultural designation. Even those observers like Hungarian sociologist Elemér Hankiss who recognised the persistence of an East-West divide within Europe nonetheless argued that “it does exist but [it] is only one among the many dividing lines that criss-cross Europe and it may not be the most important one – or at least its importance is rapidly decreasing.”<sup>134</sup> In short, Eastern Europe had been largely deconstructed out of existence.

In most histories of Europe, as well as of the Cold War, 1989 marks a radical rupture in both time and space. Heonik Kwon contends, “after 1989 works in most contemporary analytical discourse as an indicator of the novelty of knowledge – a sign that the presented discourse is about aspects of the world here and now and not about the defunct order of things from the closed, non-existent era.”<sup>135</sup> Such a view certainly informed Van Rompuy’s contentions about the disappearance of the East note earlier or the triumphalism that marks a history of the Council of Europe, in which the fall of the Berlin Wall represents “year zero” for a Europe in which “East-West division was brought to an end by the ‘autumn of the peoples’.”<sup>136</sup> By contrast, during the two decades following the Cold War’s end, many scholars of Europe instead remarked upon the enduring power of the boundaries marking out East and West, as well as the ways in which such distinctions were being reinscribed, challenged and subverted.

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<sup>133</sup> cf. Paloff, Benjamin (2014): *East Is Always Further East*, in: *East European Policies and Societies and Cultures*, Vol.28, p.690.

<sup>134</sup> Hankiss, E. (2011): *The East-West Divide in Europe: Does It Exist?*, online at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/281-the-east-west-divide-europe-does-it-exist> (26 July 2017)

<sup>135</sup> cf. Ballinger, Pamela (2016): *Whatever Happened to Eastern Europe? Revisiting Europe’s Eastern Peripheries*, in: *East European Policies and Societies and Cultures*, Vol.31, p.50.

<sup>136</sup> Kwon, H. (2010): *The Other Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, p.4.

In both their contributions and their limitations, these works point the way forward for deepening our understanding of these boundaries.<sup>137</sup>

Some of the initial lines of debate had been laid out before 1989 by intellectuals like Milan Kundera and György Konrád who hailed from states typically classified during the Cold War as belonging to Eastern Europe. Opposed to the political and cultural inclusion of their societies in a Soviet-dominated Eastern sphere, Kundera and Konrád sought to resurrect an older geographic identity as *Mitteleuropean*. Catalysed by Kundera's provocative 1984 piece, "*The Tragedy of Central Europe*", this debate centred on the salience of a Central European identity, as well as the historical responsibility of Germany, on the one hand, and Russia/the Soviet Union, on the other hand, in "kidnapping" nations like Czechoslovakia and Poland from their supposedly genuine, European trajectories.<sup>138</sup> As Peter Bugge has demonstrated, this controversy not only reflected competing visions of the historical nature of the region but itself has a deep history, drawing upon older discourses mapping out Europe, the East, and the idea of a "virtuous middle"<sup>139</sup>. The concept does underscore that the East is never a fixed location but a characteristic ("East Europeanness") attributed differently in different circumstances. *Mitteleuropa* serves as an example of such redefinition and multiplication of Europe's internal East. Although the Central European question opened up the possibility of an ambiguous "betwixt and between" space between East and West, in practice the claim to a Central European identity usually served less a regional variant of non-alignment than a strategy of "reclaiming" a Western European heritage and a denial of Easternness. Central Europe's chief reason for being was – and is – to be distinct from Eastern Europe.<sup>140</sup> In 1986, Timothy Garton Ash, an early and important figure in the literature on the East/West symbolic axis that would flourish in the 1990s, concluded, "We are to understand that what was *truly* 'Central European' was always Western, rational, humanistic, democratic, sceptical, and tolerant."<sup>141</sup> In the face of this tendency to assert a *Mitteleuropa* distinct from the East only then to elide it with Western Europe, Ash not surprisingly titled his essay in the form of a question: "*Does Central Europe Exist?*" Other scholars, like Iver Neumann, implicitly

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<sup>137</sup> cf. Ballinger, Pamela (2016): *Whatever Happened to Eastern Europe?*, pp.50f.

<sup>138</sup> For a summary of these debates, cf. Ash, T. G. (1990): "Mitteleuropa?", in *Daedalus* 199, Vol.1, pp.1-21; Kopeček, M. (2002): *Politics, Antipolitics and Czechs in Central Europe: The Idea of the Visegrad Cooperation and Its Reflection in Czech Politics in the 1990s*, in A. Bove (ed.), *Questionable Returns*, p.1-13.

<sup>139</sup> cf. Bugge, P. (1999): *The Use of the Middle: Mitteleuropa vs. Střední Evropa*, in: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'Histoire* 6, pp.15ff.

<sup>140</sup> cf. Kuus, Merje (2004): *Europe's eastern expansion and the reinscription of otherness in East-Central Europe*, in: *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol.28, p.480.

<sup>141</sup> Ash, T. G. (1986): *Does Central Europe Exist?*, in: *The New York Review of Books*, online at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/10/09/does-central-europe-exist/> (26 July 2017)

broadened the question – asking “Does Europe exist?” – by directing their attention to how Europeans have defined themselves, past and present, in opposition to eastern “Others”.<sup>142</sup>

On Europe’s southern and eastern peripheries, the wars in the former Yugoslavia made painfully clear the potentially tragic consequences of such “Othering” processes. This, in turn, prompted a veritable flood of publications analysing the rhetorics of “Balkanness” and “Balkanisation” operating within the region and without. Negative understandings of Balkanness typically invoked “eastern” traits ranging from the Byzantine and Orthodox heritage to the Ottoman past as explanations for violent ethno-nationalism and atrocities. Critical scholars like Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden brought to light the ways actors within the region imputed Easternness to their neighbours, thereby seeking to align themselves politically and culturally with Europe and the West. The process by which each group envisions “the cultures and religions of the south and east of its more conservative or primitive” thus produced a scenario of what Bakić-Hayden called “nesting orientalism”.<sup>143</sup> Many of the political mechanisms designed to erase these East-West divisions – including European enlargement and the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 – have, in reality, further nourished a sense of difference. In post-accession Poland, for example, the losers of transition (including workers from socialist agricultural and industrial projects) have now been interpolated into the orientalist framework as a new series of “Others” – what Buchowski deems “stigmatized brothers”.<sup>144</sup>

As these comments suggest, rapid and often dramatic transformations on the ground served as a key impetus to the scholarship on bordering practices of Easternness in the European context. Edward Said’s “*Orientalism*” (1978) had helped set the terms of the debate for the scholarship dedicated to the regional variants of Easternness. The most influential works in this vein, notably Larry Wolff’s “*Inventing Eastern Europe*” (1994) and Maria Todorova’s “*Imagining the Balkans*” (1997), focused on the discursive construction of Europe’s internal “Others” in the Eastern European and Balkan hinterlands. Both implicitly and explicitly, these works highlighted the question of the applicability of notions of colonialism and postcolonialism to Eastern/postsocialist Europe. To put it in overly simplified terms, Wolff sees Orientalism as a guiding principle for the idea of European alterity from 18<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>142</sup> cf. Neumann, I. B. (1999): *Uses of the Other. “The East” in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

<sup>143</sup> Bakić-Hayden, M.; Hayden, R. (1992): *Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics*, in: *Slavic Review*, Vol.51, p.920.

<sup>144</sup> Buchowski, M. (2006): *The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother*, in: *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol.79, p.467.



Enlightenment thinkers onward whereas Todorova posits Balkanism as a modern phenomenon that operates in a manner quite distinct from Orientalism.<sup>145</sup>

Said famously defined Orientalism as a discursive configuration and “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’”. For Said, “Orientalism [exists] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>146</sup> Although Said firmly located Orientalism in the post-Enlightenment period, Wolff identifies the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a critical moment for the articulation of Western European identities in opposition to Eastern Others, in this instance along Europe’s peripheries rather than Said’s Near East. In Europe, this shifted the primary axis of differentiation from North/South to East/West. In tracing how Enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire supposedly invented a “backwards” realm within Europe whose civilisational deficits were measured in terms of distance from Paris, Wolff’s analysis takes clear inspiration from Said’s work. Indeed, Wolff contends, “One might describe the invention of Eastern Europe as an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization.”<sup>147</sup>

Other students of Easternisms, notably Michal Buchowski, have argued for an increasingly deterritorialised approach. With the Cold War’s end, Buchowski contends, the logics of the East make most sense in terms of social space and class inequalities, a point echoed by Adamovsky with his contention that “Euro-Orientalism is a form of class ideology.”<sup>148</sup> For Buchowski, contemporary European Orientalism proves a “refraction, a derivative or correlate of a phenomenon covered by such concepts of globalization, the expansion of multinational capital, flexible capitalism, transgressions, migrations, transnationalism or the media-covered global village.”<sup>149</sup> Buchowski’s statement highlights the salience of periphery as a local category of meaning and practice in many European contexts, including but not limited to those marked out as “Eastern”.

The concept of Eastern Europe persists precisely because of this flexibility, which makes it supremely convenient for both Western and Eastern European constructions of Europe. Neither the “East” nor “periphery” have disappeared as meaningful signifiers in European symbolic geographies but rather have changed and transformed. According to Susan Gal, a

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<sup>145</sup> cf. Ballinger, Pamela (2016): *Whatever Happened to Eastern Europe?*, p53.

<sup>146</sup> Said, E. (1978): *Orientalism*, New York: Verso, pp.2-3.

<sup>147</sup> Wolff L. (1994): *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.7.

<sup>148</sup> Adamovsky, E. (2005): *Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France 1810-1880*, in: *Journal of Modern History*, Vol.77, p.617.

<sup>149</sup> Buchowski, M.: *The Specter of Orientalism in Europe*, pp.465-466.

distinction such as West-East or centre-periphery “can be produced repeatedly by projecting it onto narrower contexts or broader ones. Or it can be projected onto different social “objects” – activities, identities, institutions, spaces and interactions.”<sup>150</sup> A series of events – notably the financial crisis that began in 2008, Crimea’s annexation by Russia in 2014, and the refugee crisis that became acute in 2015 and 2016 – reinvigorated these concepts in both media and scholarly discourse. The enduring belief that Europe is deeply divided between West and East has been brought back to life, questioning whether the leading political figures in Central Europe accomplished to internalise the basic principles of European integration (modernisation, open society, tolerance and liberalism).<sup>151</sup> Accordingly, Central European governments, namely those that actively opposed the EU quotas as a part of the solution to the immigration crisis, have found themselves in the spotlight of a very heated exchange. As presented in the section above, the attention often had a simplistic or moralising tone. But it also had a common thread: stressing the distinct approach of the Visegrád Group to the main issue of today – the Otherness of what used to be the “Other Europe”.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> cf. Ballinger, Pamela (2016): Recursive Easts, Shifting Peripheries: Withher Europe’s ‘Easts’ and ‘Peripheries’, in: East European Policies and Societies and Cultures, Vol.31, p.6.

<sup>151</sup> Kořan, Michael (2015): Central Europe in the European Union, p.73.

<sup>152</sup> Rupnik, Jacques (2015): The Other Europe. Face to Face with Its Contradiction, in: Visegrad Insight, Vol.2, p.67.

## 5. The Visegrád Group: United in Defence

### 5.1 The Rise of the Visegrád Group

The Cold War period saw widespread understanding and agreement about where the borders of a divided Europe were to be found and which ones were most important. The borders that divided Europe also divided the world.<sup>153</sup> They created the geopolitical division between East and West. The Central and Eastern European region was treated as a homogenous entity matching Russia's co-called zone of influence. As perceived by the West, Europe ended at the Iron Curtain and everything located beyond this border was part of the group of satellite states within the Soviet Union's sphere of interest.

The question of CEE regionalism, in fact, remained complex throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The notion of a common territorial identity among citizens with different mother tongues was suppressed in state propaganda, which presented the historical regions as "actually" ancient Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Romanian lands. Moreover, the depiction of the relationship between territory and ethnicity was one-dimensional and because of socialist states' hierarchical centralism, the regions did not evolve into collective actors.<sup>154</sup>

As the late 1980s became the age of debates about the division of the CEE region, new questions and problems arose. Given the political transformation and collapse of the Soviet Union, historical forces demanded the reorganisation of the spatial structure. The new democracies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, thus, set out to pursue a new mode of Central European cooperation symbolised by their formation of the Visegrád Group.<sup>155</sup> Attempting to move past old debates and misunderstandings related to the history of this region, the political leaders of the three (later four) Central and Eastern European countries began to focus on this all new form of cooperation. Regional integration was useful since there was no external actor who could assist with the transformation and orientation. Accepting Haas review of regional integration, the Visegrád cooperation might be seen as a good example of a process whereby nation states "voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with

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<sup>153</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, in: Politics in Central Europe, Vol.12, p.115.

<sup>154</sup> cf. Ibid. p.116.

<sup>155</sup> cf. Ibid. p.117.

their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among.”<sup>156</sup>

The processes of regional integration that emerged after World War II were originally most concerned with trade and economics. In contrast, the “new regionalism” wave of the 1980s was a multi-dimensional process entailing aspects of politics, diplomacy, security and culture alongside economic cooperation. The natural course of the Visegrád Group would have been some kind of permanent institutional structure, however the founding partners concentrated on a looser approach entailing a less institutional structure. As there was no existing model for such habitual use, only limited rules were adopted. The V4 operates as a diplomatic framework for regional intergovernmental cooperation until today, without its own institutions or formal structures. Thus the V4 often acts as an ad hoc coalition to reinforce regional positions where they exist and bring them together through an established set of producers. The cooperation continues to lack in the following elements: (1) an organised structure; (2) fixed and written rules of cooperation; (3) official headquarters (Through a special annual rotation system, each member state takes on the tasks of the presidency.); (4) a strict agenda (Annual meetings take place among different experts and sectorial policy representatives at ministerial level.); (5) more than one functioning organisation (The Group’s organisation, the International Visegrád Fund (IVF), is based in Bratislava and has an annual budget of 8 billion Euro that is paid by the four member states.)<sup>157</sup>

The aims of this Visegrád integration may be understood in various ways. While the Group was established partly for practical reasons, as Schmidt remarks, there was another explanation for this alliance: They believed in the idea of Central Europe, which Havel and the new Hungarian President Árpád Göncz, had preached in the 1980s, and wished to preclude any return to the petty nationalisms of the interwar years. But it was also because this tight regional cooperation would win their countries’ favour in the West.<sup>158</sup>

The great challenge of CEE countries initially was moving away from traditional isolationism. The next step entailed joining or activating membership in multilateral economic institutions and encouraging various regional initiatives. At the outset, there was common agreement across Europe that the political objective for the CEE countries was the

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<sup>156</sup> Haas, E.B. (1970): The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing, in: International Organization, Vol.24, pp.609-610.

<sup>157</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, p.120.

<sup>158</sup> cf. Ibid. p.118.

introduction of democracy based on a multi-party political system, respect for human rights and the principles of a market economy.<sup>159</sup> Despite the integration process, the issue of independence continued to occupy a central position. When it came to planning future cooperation, historical experience also proved very helpful. Václav Havel, the former President of Czechoslovakia, put together a cooperation initiative that referred to the success of a historic meeting of Bohemian, Polish and Hungarian kings in 1335. In a message to the Polish and Hungarian prime ministers and presidents, he put it like this: “We should not compete with each other to gain admission into the various European organizations. On the contrary, we should assist each other in the same spirit of solidarity in which, in darker days, you protested [against] our persecution as we did against yours.”<sup>160</sup> In initiating the cooperation, Havel aimed to break free of the isolation in which the Central and Eastern European countries found themselves after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These states had only just begun to confront the challenges of independence and were reluctant to give up this position and take on a Euro-Atlantic orientation. The CEE countries were also waiting to be invited and received into the European Community but in the early 1990s, there was no sign of the acceptance of their efforts. The cooperation focused on economic, cultural and security issues but its chief task was helping member states on the transformation path. The inauguration meeting organised by Havel took place in Bratislava in 1990, its main task was the development of a security policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union called for a new orientation within foreign policy.<sup>161</sup>

The V4 countries were not satisfied with mere association with the European communities, and as such, in the mid 1990s, they submitted their official EU membership applications. In order to become a member of the European Union candidate states should satisfy some conditions which were developed by the Copenhagen European council in 1993. There are three different groups of conditions. The guarantee of stability of democratic institutions as well as institutions supporting the rule of law and human rights including protection of national minorities in the countries is the first of them. All these requirements are stated in “The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”. The second basic guidelines set includes economic requirements. It requests the existence and a well-functioning economy based on market principals. Moreover, economic systems should be able to cope with the pressure of the huge competitiveness within the Union as well as control the market forces on

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<sup>159</sup> cf. Ibid. pp.118f.

<sup>160</sup> quoted in Ibid. p.118.

<sup>161</sup> cf. Ibid. pp.118-119.

states and EU level. The last set of rules consists of the capacities to take obligations of the EU-membership and adopt national laws according to the main legal acts of the Union. Having been quite efficient in its negotiation process, the V4 managed to finish its accession negotiations on 13 December 2002. The Accession Treaty between the V4 states and the EU was signed on 16 April 2003 in Athens and they all acceded to European Union structures on 1 May 2004. Since that time, all these countries have been treated as full European Union members and have, thus, had the right to participate in creating the EU's future. The success of the Visegrád Four has been based on the effectiveness of their cooperation, and this is also what may guarantee the Group's survival. The size and influence that these countries may achieve if they are united by common aims cannot be ignored. According to the data, if the V4 were a single country, its total population would make it the fourth largest in Europe. From the standpoint of economic potential, the Group is the world's 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy.<sup>162</sup>

## **5.2 Previous Tensions and Divisions**

In the first decade of its existence, the V4 cooperation experienced several conflicts and downturns. The very first obstacle came in 1993 when the number of original founders increased with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Immediately after the territorial changes in 1993, the Czech Prime Minister, Václav Klaus announced that his country's aims would supersede the common interest. Klaus went so far as to suggest that the Czech Republic would no longer be interested in the Visegrád cooperation since the focus should instead be on cooperating with Western Europe. Klaus's view can be explained by the fact that even in the mid-1990s, he was convinced that the Czech Republic belonged to the West more than to any other formation, and he dismissed Central Europe as a geopolitical category.<sup>163</sup> Klaus claimed that the Visegrád Group was an artificial product of the West.<sup>164</sup> This position harmed cooperation with the Czech Republic's neighbours.

As the V4 states checked off their final goals of transforming into market economies and achieving Euro-Atlantic integration through the acceptance of invitations to join NATO and later the European Union, new questions and cleavages emerged regarding the cooperation

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<sup>162</sup> cf. Ibid. p.121.

<sup>163</sup> cf. Ibid. p.122: In several respects, Klaus was correct. The Czech Republic's geographical position is different from that of the other three member states. The country is located to the west of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. While there are several models of Europe's inner borders, the location of the Czech state is generally treated as "Central" while the other three countries represent "East Central" or "Central East" Europe. At the same time, the locations given to the Visegrad Group member states are highly dependent on the expert making the pronouncement.

<sup>164</sup> cf. Lázár, Andras (2014): Post-EU-Accession Visegrad Cooperation. Results, Rhetoric, Prospects, in: Biztpol Affairs, Vol.2, pp.22f.

itself. Breakdowns and setbacks, usually attributed to ideas of solidarity and coordination being overridden by competitive attitudes and national ambitions during the EU accession negotiations, prompted many to seriously doubt the chances of the Group's survival.<sup>165</sup> Pessimistic views were shared about this highly painful, if illuminating failure of Central European cooperation. In the face of these doubts, the V4 members concluded the 2004 Kroměříž Declaration, which set out a framework and goals for future cooperation, taking account of the fact that the original V4 objectives of some 15 years earlier had now been fulfilled.<sup>166</sup>

Though European integration was the ultimate proof of the legitimacy of the V4 cooperation, it also raised concerns about the cohesion of the member states. In this regard, Poland emphasised its own distinct aims and interests in seeking out a position in the EU and NATO as a strong partner to the US in the war in Iraq. This difference in Poland's position recalled an old quandary of the V4 states. Here some Czech commentators maintained that instead of strengthening ties with Poland, it would be reasonable for the Czech Republic to focus on Central Europe and the historic connection with Austria and Slovenia instead.<sup>167</sup> Czech President Miloš Zeman and his Slovak counterpart, Ivan Gašparovič, also discussed the prospect of enlarging the Visegrád cooperation by inviting new member states to join. While Zeman supported enlargement through the entry of Slovenia, Gašparovič opposed this move, maintaining that no conclusion had ever been reached on the expansion of the V4, a reputable and important "brand" in Europe, which should continue to cooperate according to its traditional alignment. Earlier, in 2007, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico had expressed the same opinion, arguing that the Visegrád Group enjoyed a high level of political "added value" and so there was no reason to enlarge it.<sup>168</sup> The view in Hungary was similar to the one in the Czech Republic, however, Poland insisted the Group not to accept new members. Instead of focusing on the "restoration of the Habsburg monarchy", as Polish experts usually accused their Hungarian colleagues of doing, Visegrád Group members have, thus, gradually turned east, involving the Eastern Partnership member states in the cooperation and beginning to orientate themselves towards the Balkan peninsula.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> cf. Ibid. p.23.

<sup>166</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, p.122.

<sup>167</sup> cf. Ibid. p.123.

<sup>168</sup> cf. Lázár, Andras (2014): Post-EU-Accession Visegrad Cooperation, p.24.

<sup>169</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, p.125.

Since about 2008, the Group has been facing growing difficulties. In a way, this could have been expected in the light of the fact that the original goals of the Alliance had been achieved, that political leadership in each country has undergone changes, that the relations with Russia soured, and that the EU has sunk into a major economic recession. The problems escalated and divisions widened in the 2010s.<sup>170</sup>

It would seem that the priorities of the V4 states have been closely determined by the internal and external challenges the European Union is facing. It must, however, be pointed out that these priorities have been partly derived from the specific internal problems and geopolitical location of each V4 state. Among other things, the war in Crimea has called into question attitudes to Russia, and the regions economic policy has been affected by the embargo on Russian products since 2014. Visegrád Group members have accepted this restriction ambivalently given the effects on energy security: After all, all these states were dependent on gas supplies from Russia and a huge share of their export activity focused on the Russian market. The crisis in Ukraine has shown that member states' interests may vary. While Polish foreign policy has tried to ensure that Poland avoids all cooperation with Russia, Hungary has made moves to strengthen ties through economic cooperation. At a meeting of prime ministers in Bratislava in May 2014, the Polish Prime Minister expressed his negative standpoint to the Hungarian partner, claiming that the V4 cooperation is more than a symbolic representation of a common past and future and threats from Russia cannot be ignored. Hungary's position on the question facing the new Ukrainian government about whether to give "full collective rights" and dual citizenship to Hungarian living in the Zarkarpattia Oblast has also impeded the chances of agreement among the Group. Orbán has himself expressed his support for maintaining the territorial integrity of Ukraine; in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, this aligns with Russian rhetoric since it suggests that the government in Kiev is undemocratic and guilty of discriminating against ethnic minorities in Ukraine. Orbán has also been blamed for the pending Hungarian position on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Although Hungarians diplomats co-authored both the Visegrád Group and EU declarations which condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as Sadecki points out<sup>171</sup>, the Hungarian Prime Minister has emphasised Hungary's neutrality regarding the Ukrainian-Russian conflicts and tried to avoid any friction in relations with Russia.

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<sup>170</sup> cf. Pakulski, Jan (2016): Introduction, in Jan Pakulski (ed.), *The Visegrad Countries in Crisis*, Warsaw: Collegium Civitas, p.9.

<sup>171</sup> cf. Sadecki, Andrzej (2014): Hungary's stance on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, online at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/> (26 July 2017)



Notwithstanding this situation, the year 2015 saw important changes in the bilateral relations between Poland and Hungary when after eight years of governance, Poland's Civic Platform party (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) lost the country's presidential and parliamentary elections, and these were both claimed by the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) in October 2015. After an extended period of controversial relations between Poland and Hungary, the new governing party and Hungary's FIDESZ (Magyar Polgári Szövetség) have, thus, revived their friendship. While the issue is critical, the Hungarian attitude to Russia remains almost the only point of conflict between the two party leaders. The landslide victory of Poland's conservative PiS has allowed the new political elite in Warsaw to make changes at an unprecedented pace. Though Polish-Hungarian relations have reached a new peak after the change of Polish government, both states have become and remain targets for the European Union. Criticism of government policies from Brussels only adds fuel to the fire and may strengthen the positions of Eurosceptic hardliners within PiS, who believe that Central Europe has to find its own path to prosperity, which should not be based on catching up with Western Europe.<sup>172</sup>

Ruptures, larger than before, seem to have appeared during and after the events of 2015. The most immediate and most important cause of tensions has been the refugee crisis and the anti-liberal backlash it triggered. The crisis has led to a renaissance of the Visegrád Group as the threat of an increasing number of migrants has required a coordinated reaction. The Hungarian Prime Minister was the first to argue for prioritising national interests and this standpoint was soon taken up by the three member states.<sup>173</sup>

Amidst deep divisions between EU-member states on how Europe should approach the refugee crisis, the V4 was able to defend its line of strongly opposing mandatory relocations. Eventually, once the EU-Turkey deal and other measures had achieved a dramatic drop in the flow of migrants, the V4 was able to leave its stamp on the new EU policy approach to the crisis: The roadmap agreed at the Bratislava Summit on 16 September 2016 places emphasis on the protection of external borders and promotes the concept of "flexible solidarity".<sup>174</sup> Andrzej Duda, the Polish President also has drawn attention to the increasing power of the Visegrád Group based largely on the migration crisis. Moreover, Zeman and Duda have

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<sup>172</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, p.132.

<sup>173</sup> cf. Ibid. p.132.

<sup>174</sup> Nič, Milan (2016): The Visegrád Group in the EU: 2016 as a turning point?, in: European View, Vol.15, p.282.

agreed on the importance of strengthening ties with northern and southern states in the CEE region.<sup>175</sup>

### 5.3 The V4's Response to the Refugee Crisis

The strengthening of the V4's cooperation on key EU issues can be traced back to the 2009-2011 period. An important catalyst was the 2009 gas crisis and subsequent coordination on energy, which helped the Group to use EU funding and the EU Commission's regulatory framework to build interconnectors and other missing infrastructure. In addition, the V4's cooperation on the EU agenda was strengthened by the learning experiences of the Czech (2009), Hungarian (2011) and Polish (2011) EU presidencies. Gradually, Visegrád governments were becoming policy-shapers rather than policy-recipients on cohesion, the single market, energy, enlargement, the Eastern Partnership and other EU policy areas.<sup>176</sup> Clear signs of the V4 maximising its clout by working and voting together in Brussels were already apparent in 2014, such as in the appointment of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk as the President of the European Council. Another example was the balanced compromise made over the EU's climate package deal in October 2014 for the Paris global climate conference. Rather than blocking the whole deal, the V4 plus other supporters, such as Romania and Bulgaria, presented a common set of demands for the final deal. Benefiting from the requirement to find a unanimous consensus among all member states, the Central Europeans engaged in detailed technocratic negotiations with the EU Commission and powerful members, and ultimately managed to secure better conditions for the future emission reduction targets for their industries.<sup>177</sup>

At the time Slovakia was holding the rotating V4 presidency, and its permanent representative to the EU Ivan Korčok was quoted by the *Financial Times* as calling it "a realisation moment." "It became so obvious to us all that this group was a tangible and effective way of achieving something. It was like when a small child learns how to ride a bicycle. Now there is high confidence among the members that we can continue to fight and win EU battles."<sup>178</sup>

Members of the Visegrád Group had several incentives in the last years to pursue their interests on the European level collectively. As the migrant crisis settled down and the Brexit

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<sup>175</sup> cf. Schmidt, Andrea (2016): Friends forever? The Role of the Visegrad Group and European Integration, p.132.

<sup>176</sup> cf. Nič, Milan (2016): The Visegrád Group in the EU: 2016 as a turning point?, p.285.

<sup>177</sup> cf. Ibid. p.285.

<sup>178</sup> Foy, H. (2014): EU's eastern members plot joint raid on €315bn Juncker fund, in: *Financial Times*, online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/70e1089a-7ba9-11e4-b6ab-00144feabdc0> (26 July 2017)

vote accelerated the EU reform debate, cooperation intensified once again. During 2015, the V4 articulated a very pronounced and distinctive stance on the highly debated issue. The political dispute surfaced most clearly regarding the different proposals for a quota-based refugee relocation system. First, in September 2015, the member states agreed to relocate 120,000 refugees from Greece and Italy, a decision which was refused by the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Poland, despite its previous rhetoric, voted in favour of the proposition. Nonetheless, after the change of government in Warsaw, the V4 stood united against a new proposal submitted by the European Commission in May 2016.

In the end, the V4 managed to achieve concessions from its EU partners on migration policy. On 16 September 2016 the heads of states of the V4 coined the idea of “flexible solidarity” in a statement adopted at the day of the European Council meeting in Bratislava. This concept should enable member states to decide on specific forms of contribution taking into account their experience and potential. Furthermore any distribution mechanism should be voluntary. “The Visegrád Group countries call for full and timely implementation of the roadmap Back to Schengen.”<sup>179</sup> In November 2016 the Group adopted another joint statement that left no doubt about their stance towards the compulsory distribution mechanism:

“We believe that sharing of responsibilities under the Common European Asylum System, as well as support provided in accordance with the principle of solidarity, should be based on a voluntary mechanism coordinating Member States support provided in order to enhance asylum systems of those Member States that are affected by a large increase in numbers of asylum seekers. We are of the opinion that the EU needs to move beyond the proposals dividing EU Member States and that the EU should find an unequivocal solution which should include a viable and constructive alternative to measures imposing relocation of migrants. At the same time, we are committed to support the common European response to migration crisis with result-oriented and effective solutions that bring us closer to achieving our common goals and normalising the migration situation.”<sup>180</sup>

Five things are notable. First, a return to the Schengen roadmap, as demanded by the heads of states, would entail full participation in the relocation scheme according to the roadmap: “The agreed relocation schemes are essential tools to lessen the strain on the member states under greatest pressure and to restore order to the management of migration.”<sup>181</sup> Second, the V4

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<sup>179</sup> Visegrád Group (2016): Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries, online at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-the-160919> (26 July 2017)

<sup>180</sup> Visegrád Group (2016): Joint Statement of V4 Interior Ministers on the Establishment of the Migration Crisis Response Mechanism, online at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-v4> (26 July 2017)

<sup>181</sup> EC (2016): Back to Schengen. A Roadmap (COM/2016/120), online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0120> (26 July 2017)

texts speak of “sharing responsibilities” but not of a fair sharing of responsibility. If a scheme is based on voluntary contribution then fairness is less likely to be a component than voluntary contributions, which may reflect national preferences and (perceived) interests in an unchecked manner. Third, the insistence of voluntary schemes. Fourth, the replacement of the term “applicant” – a person who had made an application for international protection and is in clear need of international protection – with the neutral term “migrant”. Lastly, one must note the call of a “common European response” clearly rejecting the repeated Hungary’s calls for sorting out the problems by national solutions.<sup>182</sup>

Their approach basically stood against the open-door policy attributed to Germany (and the European Union in general) and thus the Central European countries and their suggestions raised interest all over Europe. Consequently, many different narratives have been formed regarding V4 migration policy. The different political, economic and social actors of the European public interpreted the four countries’ stance from various perspectives, framing it in different contexts. As presented in the section above, some saw it as a consequence of the “illiberal” tendencies in the region while others considered the Visegrád approach as proof of the European East-West divide.<sup>183</sup>

However, an analysis of the Visegrád countries’ documents and actual situation proves that whereas they uniformly reject the idea of compulsory relocation within the EU of persons applying for international protection, in general, the Group is far from homogenous. There are obvious country differences beyond the dissimilarities in size, population and economic power. For the purpose of this thesis, their roles in the migratory movements have to be highlighted.

The countries are in very different positions: Some of them are sheltered from the main migration flows and others are highly exposed to them. Due to its geographical location, Hungary is one of the main transit countries of irregular migration on land towards other member states of the European Union. Eastern and southeastern migration routes cross the territory of the country, with the so-called Western Balkan route being the most active. Prior to the construction of the fence along the two southern borders, Hungary-Serbia and Hungary-Croatia, the country was one of the main entry points for migrants into the EU seeking to move on to other Member States. In 2015, Hungary was the second European Union country, behind Greece, regarding the number of apprehended irregular migrants at its external borders

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<sup>182</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): *Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?*, p.3.

<sup>183</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): *V4 Migration policy*, p.19.

with 411,515 crossings of which 177,000 applied for asylum.<sup>184</sup> The other three V4 countries were not confronted with similar challenges: even Poland registered a fraction of the claims submitted in Hungary. Not only are the figures different, but the constitution of the asylum seeker groups is also varied. Poland and the Czech Republic have taken in larger numbers of Ukrainians who do not appear in refugee statistics but who may have been driven away for similar reasons.

These dissimilarities in the order of magnitude of arriving asylum seekers and other migrants set Hungary apart from the other three countries. The language of securitisation, the discourse on “protecting borders” had very different practical implications for Hungary. Whereas Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic could use the very same discursive turns in almost abstract way, serving domestic political purposes without the need to actually process asylum applications or expand reception capacity, Hungary had to be intensively involved in the field.<sup>185</sup> The situation has only deteriorated since the beginning of the crisis, with the introduction of the unlimited detention of every asylum seeker in March 2017, irrespective of their nationality, background or vulnerability, including children between 14 and 18 years. Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, noted: “The situation for asylum-seekers in Hungary which was already of deep concern to the UNHCR has only gotten worse since the new law introducing mandatory detention for asylum-seekers came into effect.”<sup>186</sup>

Thus, it is unlikely to expect that the Visegrád countries will act as a unified bloc, substantively changing the course of the EU in migration matters. However, the issue is complex. As Vít Dostál remarked: “The Czech republic has a different approach towards the future of the EU. Its position is close to the one of Bratislava and distant to the views of “cultural counterrevolutionaries” from Poland and Hungary. This was visible during the preparation before the Bratislava summit, which in September [2016] started the EU’s reflection process, as all hard-liners’ paragraphs were removed from the V4’s document. One can hardly expect that the V4 would contribute to the debate on the future of the EU with any

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<sup>184</sup> IOM (2017): Migration Issues in Hungary, online at: <http://www.iom.hu/migration-issues-hungary> (26 July 2017)

<sup>185</sup> UNHCR (2017): Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe in 2017, online at: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/17167> (26 July 2017) It is a symbolic illustration of the different weight of Hungary and the other three V4 countries that neither the Czech Republic, nor Poland or Slovakia are mentioned in UNHCR’s more than 100 pages long book on its plans for Europe in 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Pouilly, C (2017): UNHCR urges suspension of transfers of asylum-seekers to Hungary under Dublin, online at: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/4/58eb7e454/unhcr-urges-suspension-transfers-asylum-seekers-hungary-under-dublin.html> (26 July 2017)

strong common position.”<sup>187</sup> This position reverberates among other observers and is not limited to the academia. Andrej Babiš, the Czech Minister of Finance, who also serves as Deputy Premier, reports the same: “But above all, Visegrád is not the platform of the EU. It’s useful, but for issues beyond the EU authority: cross-border cooperation, culture, education, transportation and so on. Honestly, with the competition present within the V4 we cannot create a united platform. [...] And also – what is the opinion of Jarosław Kaczyński in the EU? It’s low. So is the one of Viktor Orbán. Now, the question is: do you really cooperate with someone who doesn’t have any position?”<sup>188</sup>

The centre-left governments in Prague and Bratislava are broader three-party coalitions, and their Social Democratic prime ministers do not want to be part of a conservative revolt against the EU institutions. Although Fico may have personal affinities with some aspects of Orbán’s line, he moderated his anti-migrant rhetoric after the March elections in 2016 as Slovakia took over the EU presidency. In addition, Fico’s political power at home is not as absolutely dominating as that of Orbán or Kaczyński. Furthermore, both Fico and Sobotka, who is considered as a weak Prime minister even by Czech standards, have to deal with strong opponents in the form of the presidents of their countries. A plurality of key decision-makers in both Prague and Bratislava have so far tended to agree on two things – first, on recognising Germany’s centrality in any future EU configuration, and second, on not sharing Polish or Hungarian concerns about this. On the contrary, they do not want to be part of any entrenched, consistent alliance against Berlin or chancellor Angela Merkel (no matter how much they may criticise her refugee policy). The fundamentals of European policy in the respective V4 countries are now diverging. The Czech Republic has always valued its relationship with neighbouring Germany as more important than that with any of its Visegrád allies. Likewise Slovakia is part of the Eurozone, making it more integrated with Germany and core Europe than the other V4 countries.<sup>189</sup>

At a time when the Hungarian government is running a media campaign with the slogan “Let’s stop Brussels”<sup>190</sup> and is conducting a “national consultation” with “questions” such as: In recent times, terror attack after terror attack has taken place in Europe. Despite this fact,

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<sup>187</sup> Dostál, V. (2016): Alleged Czech Discomfort. The Visegrad Group and the cynic reality, online at: <http://visegradinsight.eu/alleged-czech-discomfort/> (26 July 2017)

<sup>188</sup> Zbytniewska, Karolina (2017): Czech deputy PM: A ‘different’ migration is needed, online at: <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/interview/andrej-babis-a-different-migration-is-needed> (26 July 2017)

<sup>189</sup> cf. Nič, Milan (2016): The Visegrád Group in the EU: 2016 as a turning point?, p.288.

<sup>190</sup> Hungarian Government (2017): Ilítsuk meg Brüsszelt! Nemzeti Konzultáció, online at: <https://nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu/> (26 July 2017)

Brussels wants to force Hungary to allow illegal immigrants into the country. “What do you think Hungary should do? (a) For the sake of the safety of Hungarians these people should be placed under surveillance while the authorities decide their fate. (b) Allow the illegal immigrants to move freely in Hungary?”<sup>191</sup> It cannot be expected that the more moderate and pro-EU Visegrád members would associate themselves with such post-truth demagoguery.<sup>192</sup>

All the domestic populism notwithstanding, an examination of formal statements corroborates the impression that, except for the refusal of the binding relocation and resettlement quotas, the V4 countries’ attitude towards the EU reflects preference for collective action. Their statement of 15 December 2016 calls for consensus on internal migration policy. The statement also reflects the shift of the focus to externalisation and “full control of external borders”. It avoids any reference to asylum seekers and refugees. Fair sharing or responsibility is replaced with “the principle of responsibility” which cannot mean other than the expectation that member states return to the faithful implementation of existing obligations, whether on managing their external borders or in applying the Dublin regime.

“The Visegrád countries appreciate important efforts of the Slovak Presidency to broaden consensus concerning the application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility in the context of migration policy. They recognize that good progress has been made in the convergence of views on various aspects, including the external dimension of migration and the protection of EU external borders. [...] They believe that any new European migration policy can only be built for a common area where full control of external borders is ensured and migratory pressures can therefore be resisted effectively.”<sup>193</sup>

The Polish presidency of the V4 hit similar chords in its programme putting more emphasis on externalisation, but maintaining the desire for common EU action:

“As regards the reform of Common European Asylum System and specifically the Dublin system within it, the V4 countries should focus on opposing any changes that would result in the introduction of any permanent and compulsory redistribution mechanism or would significantly reduce Member States’ competencies in this area. Our effort should be directed mainly at providing help to third countries and deepen the cooperation with them in order to tackle the root causes of the current migratory pressure.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> For an English translation, see the Hungarian Spectrum website, online at: <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2017/04/02/national-consultation-2017-lets-stop-brussels/> (26 July 2017)

<sup>192</sup> cf. Nagy, Boldizsár (2017): *Sharing the Responsibility or Shifting the Focus?*, p.13.

<sup>193</sup> Visegrád Group (2016): *Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries*, online at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/joint-statement-of-the-161215-1> (26 July 2017)

<sup>194</sup> Visegrád Group (2016): *Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2016-June 2017)*, online at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/presidency-programs> (26 July 2017)

#### **5.4 Conflicting Narratives: Hungary vs. Germany**

If there was an antithesis to the German policy of admitting migrants generously, it was that of the Hungarian government. In fact, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán began publicly announcing that Hungary was opposed to any type of immigration well before the issue emerged as the top item on the agenda in the European Union. The government spoke relentlessly about the dangers of immigration, and the key message was that the vast majority of new arrivals were economic migrants who were essentially trying to abuse the Hungarian welfare system while taking Hungarian jobs. A crucial aspect of the government's communication was that the "lives of these people are not threatened on account of their nationality, religion or political creed, they leave their home county for economic reasons, they are trying to make an easier living."<sup>195</sup> At this point, the government actively sought to conflate various categories of migrants, consistently avoiding the term "refugee" in order to drive home the idea that those arriving were not deserving of help.

Meanwhile, sensing that European public opinion was becoming increasingly apprehensive in light of the massive migration stream in the summer and autumn 2015, Orbán sought to target the public beyond Hungary with its anti-migrant communication. The goal was to portray those European leaders who advocated a generous asylum policy – in particular towards refugees from countries where the humanitarian situation was obviously disastrous, pre-eminently Syria – as out of touch with the views and fears of their own populations. Statements by spokespersons of the Hungarian government criticised with growing openness the EU's policy towards immigration, often singling out Germany as the culprit with respect to the difficult situation that had emerged. It is not unusual for the Hungarian government to communicate more differently in domestic discourse than in European public forums. Yet on the migration issue the gap that often characterises the government's domestic and international communication was increasingly small, as Orbán sought to establish himself as the leading voice of the anti-immigration movement in Europe. To this end, the Hungarian government's criticism of European policies grew fiercer over time, also reflecting its frustration with the unwillingness or inability of its European partner to quell the mass influx of migrants. From the Hungarian perspective certain EU countries were allowing an unmonitored inflow of migrants, creating a push factor within the EU, while other countries,

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<sup>195</sup> Györi, Gábor (2016): *The Political Communication of the Refugee Crisis in Central and Eastern Europe*, Budapest: Policy Solutions, p.17.



especially Germany, exercised a pull factor with their open-border policy and willingness to absorb a seemingly unlimited number of refugees.<sup>196</sup>

Angela Merkel, as the head of the largest European economy, has had an essential role in leading the refugee influx in Europe. Facing the growing number of people arriving in Germany, Merkel's government announced that it would stop following the Dublin Regulation for Syrian's asylum seekers. The new approach meant that the country would not return to apply for asylum regardless the way in which they had entered Europe<sup>197</sup>, which relieved the entry countries for some of its responsibility. The open-arms policy of the chancellor put the situation of migration as a priority. In this sense, Merkel claimed, "We can do it"<sup>198</sup>, referring to whether Germany could handle the amount of people arriving, and declared that to accommodate the number of migrants is a "herculean task that now deeply moves us and demands from us a national effort."<sup>199</sup> Merkel declared that the way in which the issue of refugees is treated will decide the future of Europe and whether Europe will be continuing to be accepted as a continent of values and individual freedom. "The refugee crisis is not only a "national effort", but a 'historic test for Europe'."<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the chancellor called for solidarity among other member states stressing the necessity to establish a distribution. Some attitudes towards the migration issue, as the Hungarian erection of a fence on its southern borders, have been highly criticised by the chancellor, described as an un-European behaviour, adding: "There is no tolerance for those who are not ready to help."<sup>201</sup>

Per capita, Hungary became the country with the heaviest flow of migration in the EU, and even in terms of absolute numbers it was second only to Germany – a far wealthier country with eight times the population. Moreover, because many migrants arriving in Hungary were registered by authorities as asylum seekers based on the Dublin Regulation, there also was also an inordinately high number of asylum applications. In reality, this did not change Hungary's status as transit country because most of those who submitted such an application subsequently moved on Germany or other typical destination countries. But the fact that pro

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<sup>196</sup> cf. Györi, Gábor (2016): The Political Communication of the Refugee Crisis, pp.17-19.

<sup>197</sup> cf. Lee, Erica (2015): European Migration Crisis: Germany's Response, online at: [http://www.iiea.com/ftp/Publications/2015/Germany\\_migration\\_crisis\\_Germany%27s\\_response.pdf](http://www.iiea.com/ftp/Publications/2015/Germany_migration_crisis_Germany%27s_response.pdf) (26 July 2017)

<sup>198</sup> Stelzenmüller, Constanze (2015): Angela Merkel stands between triumph and failure, in: The Financial Times, online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/422f277a-765d-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7> (26 July 2017)

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> The Federal Government (2015): Effective procedures, early integration, online at: [https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/10\\_en/2015-10-15-asyl-fluechtlingspolitik.html](https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/10_en/2015-10-15-asyl-fluechtlingspolitik.html) (26 July 2017)

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

forma Hungary had the highest number of asylum applications per capita in 2015 showed the scope of the crisis.<sup>202</sup>

Correspondingly, the authorities were struggling with the management of the huge masses of migrants. Their capacities, which were set for far lower levels of migration, were quickly exhausted, and this was also true of the civil aid organisations. The vast majority of additional funds were poured into the police and the building of the border fence. There was also a key legal problem: For months, the government insisted that it would comply strictly<sup>203</sup> with the relevant EU legal requirement which mandates that each refugee must register as such in the country where he or she first enters the EU. This was very unpopular both with the migrants and the Hungarian authorities, for the same reason: Neither wanted the migrants to stay in Hungary.<sup>204</sup>

Ultimately, there was a two-pronged solution to this dilemma. On the one hand, after a protracted standoff at Budapest's train stations, where thousands of migrants had lived for days or weeks without adequate logistical arrangements, masses of migrants set off on foot towards the Austrian border with Germany as their destination. After a brief hesitation, the German authorities decided to let everyone in, and Austrian authorities, in turn, allowed refugees to transit through their country. At the same time, the Hungarian government announced that it was going to combat the illegal entry of refugees into Hungary by building a 175 km long fence along its southern border, complemented by legislative measures that effectively rendered legal entry for migrants impossible. All countries from which the current refugee streams could approach Hungary were declared safe countries, and news legislation ruled out the possibility of granting asylum to someone who has passed through a safe country on their way to Hungary. In this sense, Viktor Orbán declared: "Today mass migration is taking place around the globe that could change the face of Europe's civilisation. If that happens, that is irreversible [...] If we make a mistake now, it will be forever."<sup>205</sup>

In parallel with sealing off Hungary from migrants, the government became increasingly alarmist in its communication; migrants were no longer just seeking to leech economic benefits, but were "invading" Europe<sup>206</sup>, a process that would destroy the continent unless the

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<sup>202</sup> cf. Györi, Gábor (2016): The Political Communication of the Refugee Crisis, p.20.

<sup>203</sup> cf. Ibid. pp.14-21.

<sup>204</sup> cf. Ibid. p.21.

<sup>205</sup> The Telegraph (2015): Migration threatens European civilisation, says Hungary PM, online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/hungary/11646416/Migration-threatens-European-civilisation-says-Hungary-PM.html> (26 July 2017)

<sup>206</sup> cf. Györi, Gábor (2016): The Political Communication of the Refugee Crisis, p.22.

streams were halted. Orbán now cast himself as the protector not only of Europe, but of Christianity itself.<sup>207</sup> He emphasised: “While I am PM, Hungary will definitely not become an immigration destination. We don’t want to see significantly sized minorities with different cultures characteristics and backgrounds among us. We want to keep Hungary as Hungary.”<sup>208</sup> As Pope Francis was declaring that helping refugees was a Christian duty and that Catholic churches were obligated to offer shelter to those in need, Orbán was arguing that letting in migrants was tantamount to destroying Christianity in Europe. Invoking the Ottoman Empire occupation, the discourse was based on the construction of the migrant as a cultural threat, “Is it not worrying in itself that European Christianity is now barely able to keep Europe Christian?”, demanding the need for securitisation: “There is no alternative, and we have no option but to defend our borders.”<sup>209</sup>

At the end of 2015, Angela Merkel declared her will to significantly stem the number of migrants arriving in both Germany and the EU. She stated in an annual conference of her party that Germany will be “overwhelmed in the long run”, adding, “we want to, and we will, noticeably reduce the number of refugees”, using the slogan: “We can do this”, very similar to the welcoming approach slogan, but in another direction.<sup>210</sup> Despite the fact that Germany’s discourse has evolved and shifted in tone, it has mainly relied on the humanitarian approach. The open-country perspective has been followed by thousands of German volunteers assisting and providing help to the asylum seekers arriving daily in the country. Along with this line, “solidarity” “responsibility” and “*Willkommenskultur*” have dominated Merkel’s discourse to the migrant flow. Her policy has been object to debate and argued as to how Germany has accepted a role of the liberal political hegemony by pursuing unsentimental *Realpolitik*.<sup>211</sup>

In line with the claim of an “invasion”, Orbán’s reasoning took a turn towards the more sinister when it came to identifying the causes. This time, too, the culprits behind the invasion were simultaneously or interchangeably the international left, the Brussels elite and George Soros, who was singled out a while ago as public enemy because of the funding he provides

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<sup>207</sup> cf. Ibid. p.22.

<sup>208</sup> Rettman, Andrew (2015): Orban demonises immigrants at Paris march, in: EU Observer, online at: <https://euobserver.com/justice/127172> (26 July 2017)

<sup>209</sup> Mackey, Robert (2015): Hungarian Leader Rebuked For Saying Muslim Migrants Must Be Blocked ‘To Keep Europe Christian’, in: The New York Times, online at: [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/04/world/europe/hungarian-leader-rebuked-for-saying-muslim-migrants-must-be-blocked-to-keep-europe-christian.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/04/world/europe/hungarian-leader-rebuked-for-saying-muslim-migrants-must-be-blocked-to-keep-europe-christian.html?_r=0) (26 July 2017)

<sup>210</sup> Carrel, P.; Barkin, N. (2015): Merkel rallies her party with pledge to stem refugee inflow, online at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-conservatives-idUSKBN0TX1A820151214> (26 July 2017)

<sup>211</sup> cf. Schwartz, Tobias (2016): Europe’s lonely liberal hegemon. Angela Merkel’s migration policy isn’t driven by morality, in: Politico, online at: <http://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-shock-refugee-crisis-germany-policy-europe/> (26 July 2017)

to Hungarian NGOs, many of which tend to be critical of the government's activities in various policy areas. FIDEZS's propaganda machinery also zeroed in on liberalism as the chief set of values that undermine Europe, in this particular context through its commitment to immigration. This not only created a neat continuity with Orbán's previously formulated objective of building an "illiberal democracy", but also sought to identify the "pro-refugee agenda", as it were, with an ideology – liberalism – that has fallen into considerable disrepute in Hungary. FIDESZ's anti-migrant communication was among the most successful in Europe.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, Orbán has established himself as a presence on the European stage, with the European edition of *Politico* crowning him top among the 28 leading figures of 2015, arguing that "the Orbán brand of politics is a new norm in Europe."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> cf. Györi, Gábor (2016): *The Political Communication of the Refugee Crisis*, p.27.

<sup>213</sup> Waller, Luke (2015): Viktor Orbán. The Conservative Subversive, in: *Politico*, online at: <http://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28/viktor-orban/> (26 Jul 2017)

## 6. Conclusions

The conflict over the right way to tackle the refugee crisis revived talk of an East-West split in Europe and even premature suggestions that EU enlargement was a mistake. Different pasts and presents were traced to moral failures, which amounted to failed “Europeanness”. The refugee crisis reinvigorated the symbolic boundary processes that have marked out East and West in both media and scholarly discourse. Despite historical and political differences between Eastern European member states, Eastern Europe emerged as an ideal type – an unsympathetic not-quite-European subject mired in racialised paranoia about foreigners. The image of the Visegrád Group has deteriorated due to the reluctance of the countries to accept redistribution quotas as part of the solution. Though an increasing number of EU members share a similar scepticism, the V4 as the whole – and unjustly so, given the overall record of the cooperation – started to be perceived as a coalition known for obstructing practices. The crisis has given an unsettling new direction to an old alliance remarked by *The Economist* in January 2016 under the catchy headline “*Big, bad Visegrád*”.

In the introduction, the assumption was made that such talk misconceives the situation. To establish a hypothesis, the thesis tried to answer the following questions: What is criticism of V4 countries with regards to the refugee crisis? How has the V4 common voice and strategy been articulated? The bloc consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia first articulated its common position on migration in September 2015 and several times afterwards. On the basis of these statements, one can summarise V4 migration policy:

(1) *Protecting the external borders of the EU and underlining the importance of fulfilling the obligations deriving from the EU acquis.*<sup>214</sup> Preserving the integrity of the external borders of the European Union has served as a cornerstone. The reasoning behind putting the emphasis on this question is built on the interpretation of the obligations originating from the European legal norms, especially the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Regulation. The migration crisis of 2015 challenged these rules and made their consistent fulfilment quite difficult due to the different approaches implemented by member states. According to the V4’s approach, in order to avoid the collapse of the system, further steps were necessary. This is why Hungary closed its border with Serbia and Croatia, as Slovenia did with Croatia. On the other hand, Visegrád countries also advocate the reform of the Dublin Regulation. But until the member states reach an agreement on that, they have to fulfil the existing rules which require the

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<sup>214</sup> cf. Szalai, M.; Csornai, Z.; Garai, N. (2017): V4 Migration policy, p.20.

protection of external borders. (2) *Effective management of the root causes of migration flows, which could help reduce the number of migrants.* In order to lift the pressure created by the migration crisis, the V4 countries propose to seek solutions outside the EU, an idea that basically consist of two parts. First, one has to identify and deal with the root causes of migration. Second, they propose to increase financial, technical and expert support for the origin and transit countries of migration. (3) *Refusing Germany's open-door migration policy.*<sup>215</sup> On the basis of the above-described points, there is a decisive difference between the migration policies of Germany and that of the V4 countries, who fully disagree with the so-called "open-door policy". The political conflict surfaced most clearly regarding the different proposals for the quota-based refugee relocation system.

As was stated in the first pages, one goal of this paper was to determine the reasons why the V4 developed this particular migration policy and why other states in the EU did not do so. By interpreting the migration policy through the different schools of thought of International Relations Theory, it was possible to avoid superficial analyses and labelling. Using methodological frameworks, one can set up three separate narratives on the subject, namely, explanations on state interests and geopolitics (neorealism), domestic politics and party competition (neoliberalism) and social values (constructivism). Although each narrative provides useful insights on the question, the author believes that it is the neorealist framework which has the most explanatory value. One can explain the Visegrád migration policy without making any reference to domestic politics and social values without any questions left unanswered. Introducing domestic politics, the neoliberal narrative seems adequate. Nonetheless, it is not able to explain why Central European countries were the ones to make the anti-migration alliance. The migration crisis created an international environment in which all parties, especially governmental parties in CEE region, should have reacted to the issue regardless of niche party positions, since the Western Balkan route proved to be a popular migration line to the EU. It is also clear that niche parties started to gain more popularity in other countries inside the EU. Despite the increase of party competition, government reactions did not always shift to anti-immigration sentiments. *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany also gained a lot of support from voters during the last regional elections in 2016, but despite the fact that the German open-door policy changed since the beginning of the crisis, the government's rhetoric did not shift to a negative spectrum as it did in case of the V4 countries. Lastly, the constructivist narrative has the severe limitation that without proper

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<sup>215</sup> cf. Ibid. pp.21f.

research, one can hardly establish a causal relationship between social norms and policy outcomes. Methodologically, one can only analyse the conjunction of these parameters but one cannot prove that they served as a cause of V4 migration policy. The true value of the constructivist narrative is to shed light on the social environment of this policy – Central European societies did not necessarily support their government's approach a priori, but without strong, deep-rotted values in connection with migration they accepted the political narrative.<sup>216</sup>

All in all, geopolitics has a high explanatory value. First of all, disposing over huge external land borders on the edge of the Schengen zone, the four countries – primarily Poland and Hungary – consider migration solely as a security threat in connection with border security. In contrast, the states in the core region of Europe have more differentiated views of migration: As destination countries they consider the movement of labour force an advantageous phenomenon. That is why the level of securitisation is much lower. Second, the crisis of 2015 became a field of the internal struggle of the different European geopolitical blocs. In this regard, the novelty in the current situation is not that migration became a matter of political rivalry but rather the fact that Central Europe became a player besides the traditional core European countries. From this narrative perspective, migration was only a tool and not the aim of the political debates inside Europe.<sup>217</sup> It is clear that this European discord reflects major differences in opinion between the countries of Central Europe and their partners within the European Union. But according to the analysis developed throughout the thesis, it is wrong to assume that the V4 common agenda signals a return of the East-West rift in Europe that reigned during the Cold War. The main hypothesis of the research has been confirmed. The seemingly simple story of policy uniformity among Eastern European countries on the issue of immigration is now revealed as a much more complex aggregation of diverse political views. Moreover, an analyse of the actual situation of the Visegrád Group with regard to the irregular movement proves that whereas they uniformly reject the idea of compulsory relocation within the EU, in general the Group is far from homogenous. There are significant differences from one country to another, which are manifested in contradicting priorities and policies. Hungary and Poland significantly differ from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Even within the Group, Hungary may have acquired a specific position with its total denial of the fact that irregularly arriving persons may need protection within the EU.

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<sup>216</sup> cf. Ibid. p.27.

<sup>217</sup> cf. Ibid. p.24.

## 7. Critical Outlook

Central Europe has been accused of turning back from the integration project and its main principles. The Brexit campaign and the British referendum in June 2016 proved the situation in Europe to be much more complex than the criticism on Central Europe suggests.

First of all the argument indicating that Central Europe countries are the most anti-European and most affected by populism need to be examined critically in light of results presented by the Pew Research Center in its Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey “Euroscepticism Beyond Brexit”. Pew’s findings do not place Central Europe at the front of the anti-European revolt in the EU, which is mostly boosted by the protest electorate and populist movements from the old member states. Greece and France are champions in this regard with respectively 71% and 61% viewing the EU unfavourably. Surprisingly, Poland and Hungary are the top of the list of countries whose public opinion looks most favourably on the EU. Additionally, the people in both countries tend to assess the economic situation in Europe much more optimistically than in case of other member states in the EU where the financial crisis has devastated the social consensus around government policy. In many other questions related to the main challenges of the integration project, the Pew research underlines the existing consistency and inconsistency of views between the Central European and the old members of the EU. There is the same level of criticism of the way the problem of refugees and migrants is handled by the EU and similar scepticism about the pushing of integration into a more tightened form to overcome the crisis.<sup>218</sup>

In many member states an exception prevails that in time of crisis we should rely more on our own states and governments than on shared European institutions which now should return some of their competences to the national level. Therefore, the thesis that Central Europe is turning away from the EU should be evaluated more critically, at least with regard to the societies and the public opinion. The high politics of the Central European leaders’ work can sometimes be confusing, but in principle the whole region should not be perceived as the exception to the common rules but rather as the inherent part of the pan-European problem of the continental post-Cold War order undermined by the current polycrisis.<sup>219</sup>

In the CEE region, post-1989 liberalism meant “democracy, markets, and European integration”. All three are now in crisis, and this crisis is EU-wide. Traditional mainstream

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<sup>218</sup> cf. Stokes, Bruce (2016): Euroscepticism Beyond Brexit, online at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroscepticism-beyond-brexite/> (26 July 2017)

<sup>219</sup> cf. Cichocki, Marek (2017): The West’s polymorphic crisis and their impact on the Visegrad Group, p.11.



parties and the old left-right divide have receded, leaving a vacuum for identity politics and populist parties to fill.<sup>220</sup> Never before has the thesis of Nicolaïdis that the EU is a system of different *demoi* (different democratic communities) creating a specific system of European “*demoicracy*” come to seem as true as it does now in the times of polycrisis.<sup>221</sup> The system suffers from the increasing polarisation caused in different member states by the economic and social consequences of the crisis. Uncertainty about the future, lack of security, the shrinking cohesion of societies, the gloomy perspective for economic growth and sustainable development in Europe makes the citizenry in the member states address their needs and fears with their national governments. The main challenge the EU is facing now is to find the new conditions under which the integration project could regain its vigour and come out from the deepest stagnation in its history. The key dilemma for any attempts undertaken in this direction was once correctly described rightly by the French sociologist Alain Touraine who has argued in his sociology of crisis that each critical situation evaluates the capability of the system to maintain itself as a whole, in unity.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> cf. Rupnik, Jacques (2016): *Surging Illiberalism in the East*, p.84.

<sup>221</sup> cf. Nicolaidis, Kalypso (2013): *European Demoicracy and its Crisis*, in: *Journals of Common Market Studies*, Vol.51, pp.351f.

<sup>222</sup> cf. Touraie, Alain (2010): *Après la crise*, Paris: Seuil.

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