

TRENDS OF VISEGRAD EUROPEAN POLICY

Pavína Janebová
Zsuzsanna Végh



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MAIN FINDINGS

- Germany continues to be the most frequently mentioned important non-Visegrad partner in all four Visegrad countries, though relations are now perceived to be worse than two years ago in the case of Hungary and especially Poland.
- The quality of relations between Visegrad countries is predominantly seen as “good” or even “very good,” with the exception of Polish-Czech relations, although the respondents often do not consider the Visegrad countries to be among each other’s closest allies in the EU.
- Stakeholders in the region overwhelmingly consider EU membership to be beneficial.
- Differentiated integration is seen as the most probable and at least somewhat beneficial scenario for the future of the EU across the Visegrad countries by the most stakeholders.
- Coordination in the EU is seen by the majority of V₄ respondents as a successful area of Visegrad cooperation, however, cooperation in the field of infrastructure is considered to be successful by slightly more stakeholders.
- The overwhelming majority (over 85% in each case) of respondents expect environmental and climate issues, energy policy and the digital agenda to become more salient in the coming five years for the EU, and similarly, most respondents expect these issues to rise on their country’s EU agenda, as well.
- The majority also expects the importance of the EU’s common foreign and security policy and its common security and defense policy to grow in the next five years and would even support the introduction of qualified majority voting in foreign policy.
- EU enlargement and relations with the EU’s Eastern neighborhood remain high on the Visegrad countries’ agenda and the majority of stakeholders in all four countries would welcome the V₄ itself doing more in these relations.
- There is clear support for accepting the current candidate states from the Western Balkans into the EU in the next ten years.
- Support for the sanctions policy towards Russia and rejection of accepting the annexation of Crimea remain the clearly dominant positions.
- There is a significant shift compared to 2019 to a more optimistic direction in all countries regarding how relations may develop between the US and the EU in both economic and security fields under the Biden administration.
- Caution regarding Chinese activities posing a threat both to the EU and the individual countries prevails.



INTRODUCTION

The profile of the Visegrad Group has risen especially since 2015, mainly because of its stances concerning EU migration and asylum policy following the peak of the so-called migration crisis. Now however, in the fall of 2021, it seems reasonable to assert that despite the high level of political identification of the V₄ political leaders with the project, the group has struggled recently to find common themes to pursue on the EU agenda.

This report is based on the results of a survey conducted in the summer of 2021 among the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak foreign and EU policy communities. By asking members of the four states' foreign and EU policy stakeholders for their informed opinions, we aim to find out whether there is the potential for a common approach and in which areas the Visegrad Group can work together and (positively) contribute towards EU integration. We do not presume that the Visegrad Group should always act as a unified block on EU-related issues, nor that the V₄ is or should be the main alliance for the participating states. Instead, the project aspires to bring reliable data to contribute to the ongoing debate about the Visegrad Group and its role in the EU.

The text is structured in the following way: After a brief methodological note, we present and analyse the Visegrad countries' foreign policy stakeholders' views on their country's key bilateral partnerships and alliances in the EU. Then we move on to analysing their positions regarding future developments of EU integration in terms both of institutions but also specific policies and expectations about their prominence on the EU agenda and in their countries' EU policies. We review their evaluation of the performance of the Visegrad Group in various areas and expectations about the future of the cooperation. The third part of the report is then focused on questions on the EU's external relations - relations with the regions of the Western Balkans and the Eastern neighbourhood, with the US, Russia and China but also on the question of EU enlargement.

This publication is the latest contribution in a series of research papers on trends in the opinions of foreign and EU policy stakeholders, conducted by the Association for International Affairs and its partners since 2011. It was undertaken with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the International Visegrad Fund and in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. The aggregate results of the survey are available in an interactive form on the project website trendy.amo.cz where the full dataset can also be accessed.



NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted over an approximately 2-month period between June and August 2021 via the on-line survey tool SurveyMonkey.¹ The responses were anonymized. In total, 2340 representatives of foreign and EU policy communities of the Visegrad countries were approached with the survey. The survey was addressed to civil servants, politicians, researchers and analysts, journalists and selected business representatives. Some of the respondents approached could not be placed in any of the 5 categories.

Among the respondents approached during the project, the following categories were represented:

- members of the lower and upper chambers (where applicable) of the parliament sitting on relevant committees
- government ministers
- members of the European Parliament
- senior state administration employees specializing in foreign/ EU affairs
- ambassadors accredited to foreign countries and to international organizations and their deputies
- researchers and analysts focusing on foreign policy, European Union and security policy (think-tanks, academia)
- journalists reporting on foreign and European policy affairs
- representatives of trade unions and employers'/ employees' umbrella organizations
- representatives of relevant political parties dealing with foreign policy and European issues.

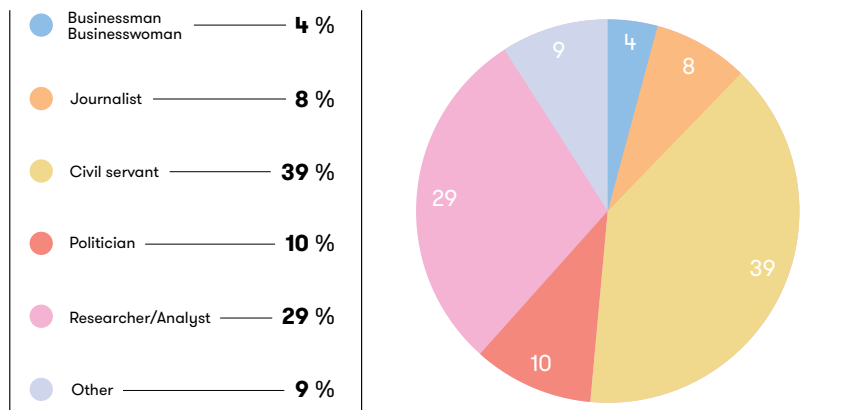
Before answering the survey, each of the respondents was asked to state their occupation. Respondents in each of the 4 countries were working with a survey in their native language (i.e. in Czech, Hungarian, Polish or Slovak). The questionnaires were returned by 489 people which is about a 21% response rate. Of the 4 countries, the Slovaks and Czechs were the most responsive (response rate of 34% in the former and 26% in the latter case, or in absolute numbers 116 and 163, respectively). In the case of Hungary, 20% (108) of the approached stakeholders responded. As in the previous editions of this survey, the lowest response rate was from the Polish foreign- and EU policy community - merely 12% (102). This number, however, is an increase of 5 percentage points on 2019, when the last Trends research was conducted. Still, in absolute numbers, the numbers of respondents from individual countries are comparable. Of course, the resulting data have to be interpreted with the limited size of the respondents group in mind.

In terms of the overall composition of the respondents who returned the questionnaire, civil servants are the most widely represented, making up 39%, followed by researchers and analysts who represent 29% of the overall number of respondents. Politicians comprise 10% of respondents, journalists 8% and businesspeople 4%. Finally, 9% of respondents were not able to fit themselves into any of the categories.

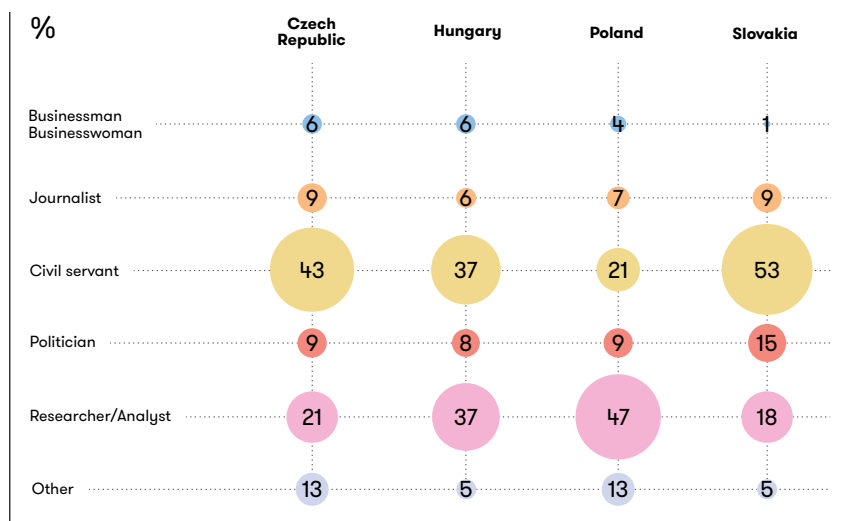
¹ "SurveyMonkey: The World's Most Popular Free Online Survey Tool," www.surveymonkey.com.

RESPONDENTS AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS

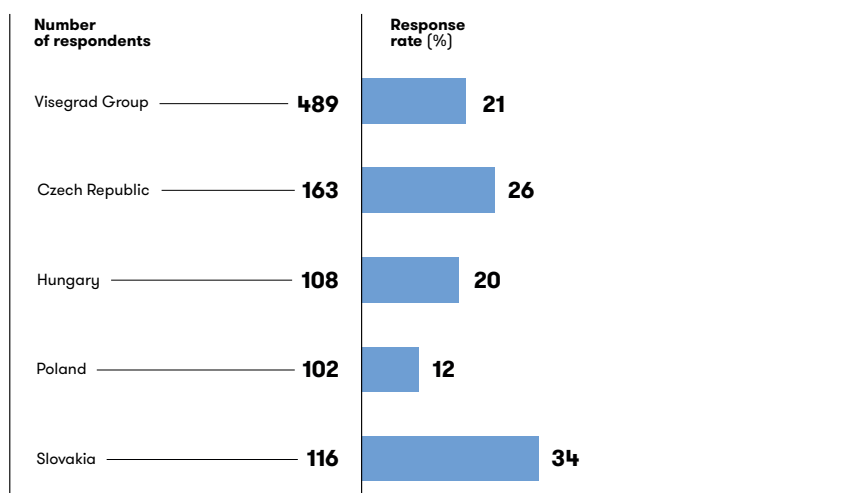
Share of respondents who identified themselves as...



Share of respondents who identified themselves as...



Number of respondents and response rate



The survey consisted of 22 questions focusing on the following areas:

- 1) Partners and allies in the EU
- 2) European Union - membership and institutions
- 3) EU policies
- 4) EU external affairs
- 5) Visegrad cooperation
- 6) Current issues

In the majority of the questions, respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agree or disagree with a certain statement, evaluate the importance of particular issues or relations with certain partners, both at the present time and in the near future or estimate the probability of specific developments. It was possible to answer “I don’t know” in every question. The common Visegrad results were calculated as the arithmetic mean of the values of the four countries on each given question. Where possible and appropriate, we compare between the results of this year’s survey and the previous editions of Trends of Visegrad European Policy or Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy.²

² “Trends - AMO Survey,” trendy.amo.cz.



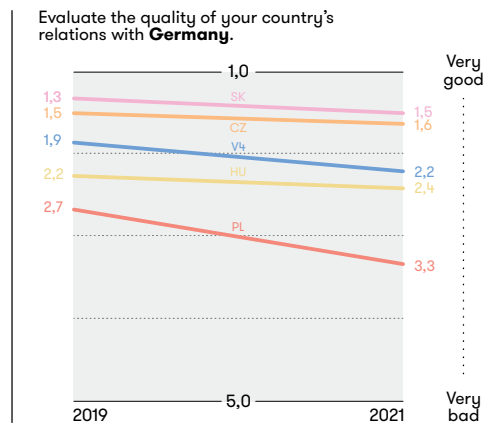
BILATERAL PARTNERS AND ALLIES

Perceptions regarding bilateral relations of the Visegrad states with other EU member states, as well as with each other, were assessed based on three questions in the survey. The respondents were asked to select the three **most important partners** for their country, the three **closest allies** and finally to evaluate the **quality of their country's relationship** with a list of selected EU member states. The results show that despite obvious political affinities between some of the V4 states' political leaders, and the mutual alliances indeed staying strong, they are by no means exclusive or even necessarily stronger or better than with other EU partners.

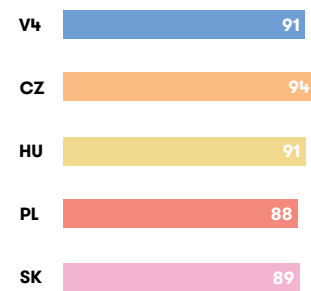
Unsurprisingly, **Germany** was identified as one of the most important partners by 91 % of all respondents (the highest share, 94 %, was from the Czech respondents, whereas the lowest, 88 %, from Poland). With the exception of Slovakia, where respondents mentioned the Czech Republic as the most important partner the most often, Germany was mentioned the most often by respondents from each Visegrad country. Looking at the results for the question that asked about the closest allies of the Visegrad countries, there is a clear distinction from the previous question. This signals that whereas **Germany's importance** in the eyes of the Visegrad states' foreign policy communities is stable, given the economic ties and Germany's key position in the EU, the perception of **political agreement between Germany and the Visegrad states is not that positive**. Overall, 39% of all respondents mentioned Germany as one of their country's three closest allies (47 % of the Czechs, 43 % of the Slovaks, 39 % of the Poles and 28% of the Hungarians).

This is also confirmed by the evaluation of the Visegrad countries' relations with Germany. The respondents were asked to evaluate the **quality** of their country's relations with Germany on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (very bad). **For the whole V4, the average value is 2.2, i.e. close to "good"**. The number is 0.3 higher (i. e. worse) than in 2019 (still better than in 2017 though, when the average evaluation was 2.4). **Polish respondents, out of all four Visegrad countries, perceive bilateral relations with Germany the worst** – 3.3, corresponding to a somewhat worse than neutral evaluation (a value 0.6 higher than in 2019 and even 0.3 higher than in 2017). The average values of the Hungarian respondents' perception is 2.4 (slightly worse than 2.2 in 2019). The Czech respondents' average evaluation of the Czech Republic's relations with Germany is between "very good" and "good" – 1.6 (up 0.1 compared to 2019), whereas the Slovak respondents' average answer is 1.5 (0.2 higher than in 2019).

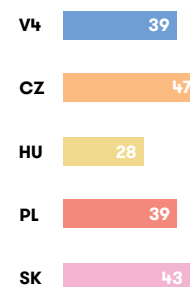
Germany as partner and ally



Share [%] of respondents who picked **Germany** as one of the three most important partners for their country in the EU.



Share [%] of respondents who picked **Germany** as one of the three closest allies for their country in the EU.



The relatively worse perception of Hungarian and especially Polish respondents of their country's relations with Germany presumably reflects the continuing debate around questions of rule of law that reached one of its peaks at the end of 2020 with the conflict about the rule of law mechanism linked to the new EU multiannual financial framework and COVID-19 recovery fund. Although it was Germany, holding the presidency of the Council of the EU at that time, who managed to negotiate a compromise preventing the EU budget from being blocked by the two countries and faced criticism for succumbing to the threats of the Hungarian and Polish governments, it is also true that when it comes to the crucial issues on the EU agenda for the upcoming years (for example climate policies, democracy and rule of law, migration, EU strategic autonomy and the role of the US in European defence), the positions of the current (and very likely any future) German government will be very different from the ones of both the Polish and Hungarian ones. Another conflictual issue in relations between Poland and Germany has been the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.³ Compared to Poland and Hungary, there are no serious problems in the relations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards Germany. On the other hand, these relations do not exactly show an abundance of common themes or initiatives to cooperate on.⁴

Asked whether the Visegrad Group should cooperate more closely with Germany, there however seems to be an all-Visegrad consensus that that would be a desirable direction, with 82% of all respondents agreeing or somewhat agreeing on average, and the shares being more or less similar for all four countries.

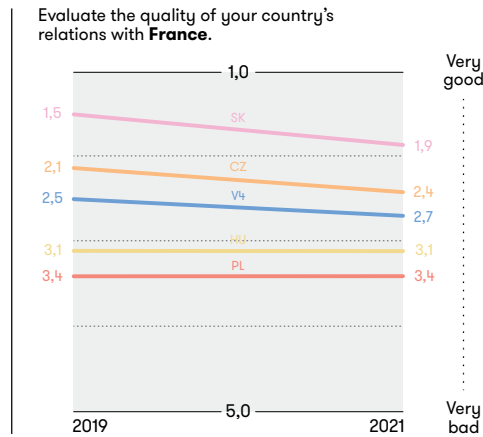
France as another big European player, was mentioned as one of the three most important EU partners for their countries by 37% of respondents overall, with the biggest share of people mentioning France among the Polish respondents (61%), followed by 41% of Slovaks, 27% of Czechs and only 16% of Hungarians.

Identifying the closest allies for their countries in the EU, only 4% of respondents mentioned France (none of them Hungarian). The quality of relations with France has been evaluated on average to

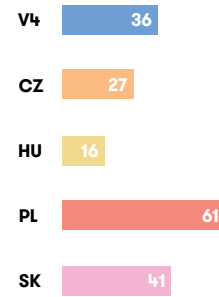
³ Henryka Moscicka-Dendys, "A new era in Polish-German relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, 21 September 2021, ecfr.eu/article/a-new-era-in-polish-german-relations/.

⁴ Jakub Eberle, Pavlína Janebová, "Německo," in *Agenda pro českou zahraniční politiku 2021*, eds. Pavlína Janebová, Vít Dostál, Pavel Havlíček (Prague: AMO, 2021), amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AMO_Agenda_2021.pdf.

France as partner and ally



Share (%) of respondents who picked **France** as one of the three most important partners for their country in the EU.

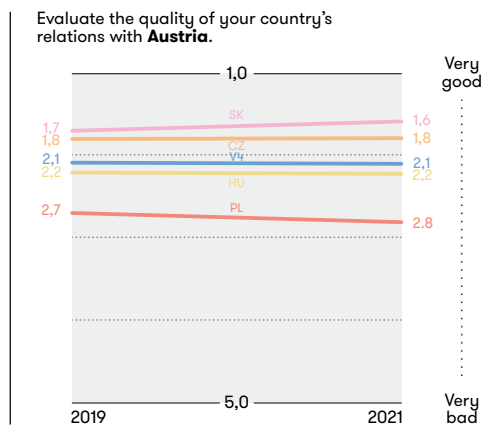


be 2.7, i.e. close to “neutral”, which is worse than in the case of Germany and also slightly worse than in 2019 (2.5). Looking at the answers by respondents from individual countries, we see that the Slovaks are most positive about the mutual relations (1.9, or “good”) whereas it is again Hungary (3.1, i.e. “neutral”) and especially Poland (3.4, i.e. between “neutral” and “bad”) who evaluate their countries’ relations with France relatively worse. In the case of Poland and Hungary, the values are practically the same as in 2019, whereas in the case of Slovakia, it is slightly better (1.5 in 2019).

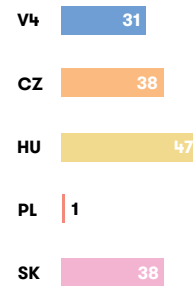
Share (%) of respondents who picked **France** as one of the three closest allies for their country in the EU.



Austria as partner and ally

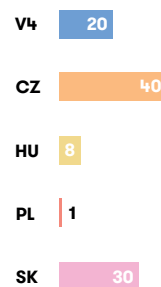


Share (%) of respondents who picked **Austria** as one of the three most important partners for their country in the EU.



When it comes to Austria, Polish respondents as usual do not mention it as one of the most important partners / closest allies to the same extent as the respondents from the other three countries. What is interesting, however, is that only **8% of the Hungarian respondents perceive Austria as one of the closest allies** for their country, compared to 40% of the Czechs and 30% of the Slovaks. That corresponds to Sebastian Kurz’s government’s pronounced supportive stance on issues like rule of law and the mechanism attached to the EU budget. At the same time, howe-

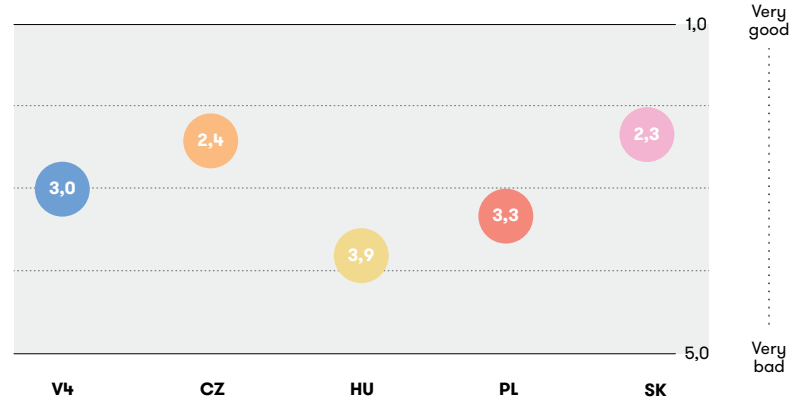
Share (%) of respondents who picked **Austria** as one of the three closest allies for their country in the EU.



ver, it is not in line with the supposed – at least tacit – sympathy of Sebastian Kurz towards Fidesz’s migration policies. Compared to the 2019 results regarding the evaluation of quality of mutual relations however, we do not see significant differences – they are perceived on average as “very good” or “good” by the foreign policy professionals in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, and closer to “neutral” by the ones in Poland.

Netherlands as partner and ally

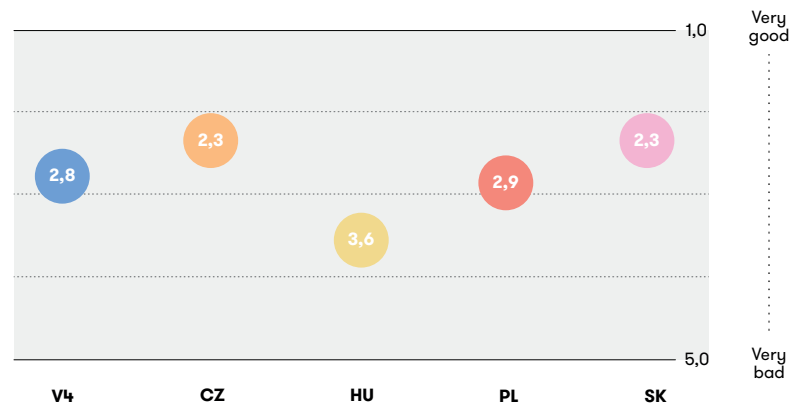
Evaluate the quality of your country’s relations with **Netherlands**.



Overall, we see that the bilateral relations that are evaluated as the best (other than intra-Visegrad ones) are with **Croatia** (1.9) and **Slovenia** (1.9), whereas those with the **Netherlands** (3.0), **Sweden** (2.8) and **France** (2.7) come out as worst. Somewhat interestingly, relations with France and Sweden are evaluated relatively worse (compared to other states) by Czech respondents as well, although the three countries are to cooperate as the EU presidency trio in 2022-23. This prospect is not at all reflected in the number of Czech respondents mentioning France or Sweden as the most important partner / closest ally of their country.

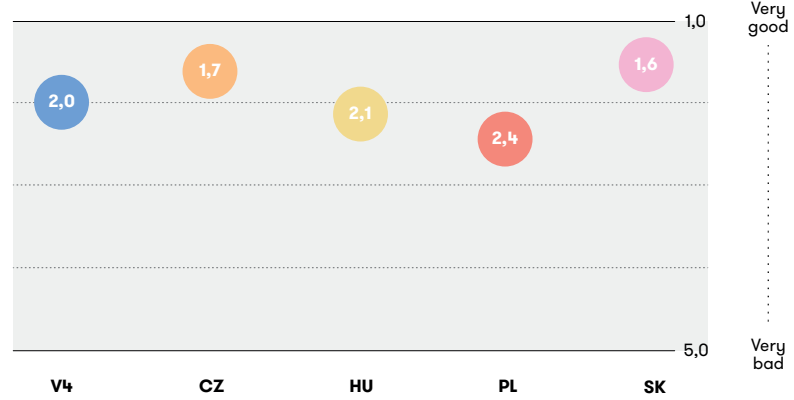
Sweden as partner and ally

Evaluate the quality of your country’s relations with **Sweden**.



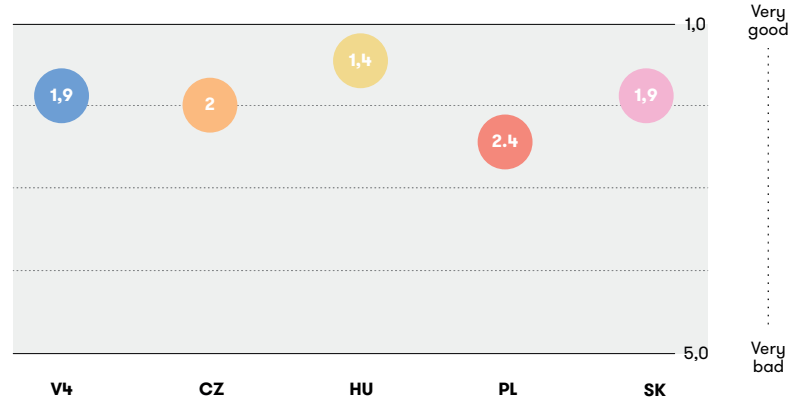
Croatia as partner and ally

Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with **Croatia**.



Slovenia as partner and ally

Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with **Slovenia**.



BILATERAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE VISEGRAD GROUP

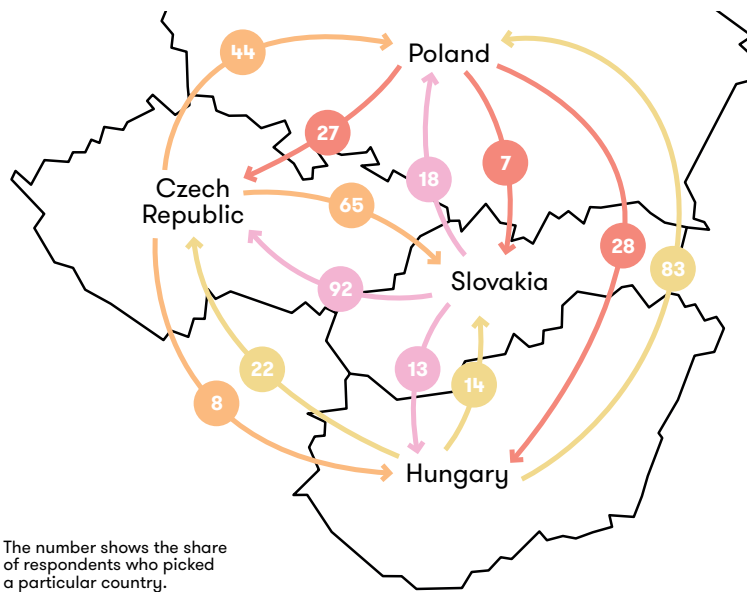
Interestingly, when it comes to mutual perceptions among the four Visegrad states, the shares of respondents who consider the Visegrad partners to represent the most **important partners** for their country are **lower** than of those who identify them as the **closest allies**. Looking at the numbers, the traditional above-standard level of relations between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is confirmed. The Hungarian respondents mentioned Poland as one of their country's most important partners quite often, as opposed to the other way around: Hungary represents one of the most important partners for Poland according to 28% of Polish respondents, which is only one percentage point more than the Czech Republic. 85% of Polish respondents however recognize Hungary as one of Poland's closest allies, whereas the share for the Czech Republic is only 17%. **Overall, the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the one hand, and Hungary and Poland on the other consider each other to be the closest allies from the list of selected countries.**

Turning to the evaluation of the quality of mutual relations, we see that they are mostly seen as “**very good**” to “**good**” within the Visegrad Group. The exception to this is the perception of **Polish respondents regarding their country’s relations with the Czech Republic**, which, with an average value of 3.1 is rather **neutral** – almost 1.0 higher - i.e worse - than in 2019 (2.2). The Czech respondents’ perception of Poland has also become somewhat worse than in 2019, albeit not so radically (1.7 in 2019, 2.1 in 2021).

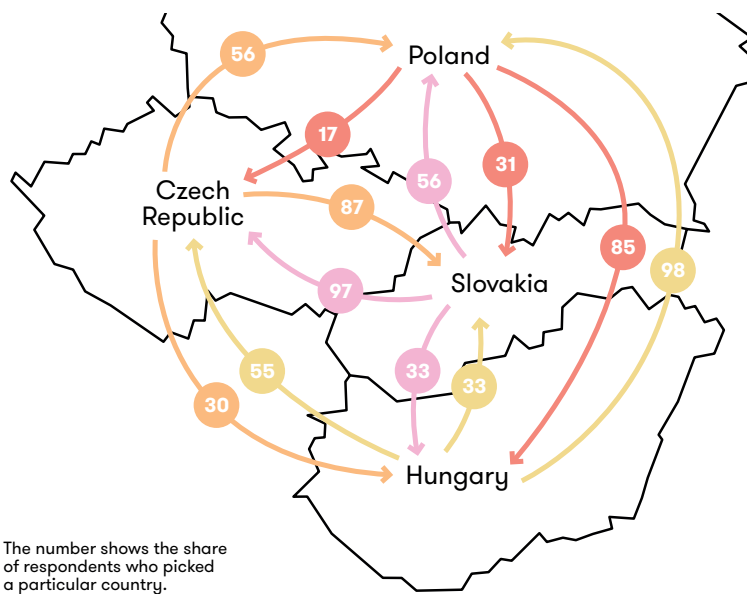
Intra-Visegrad Relations

(%)

Which countries are the **3 most important partners** for [your country] in the EU?



Which countries are the **3 closest allies** for [your country] in the EU?

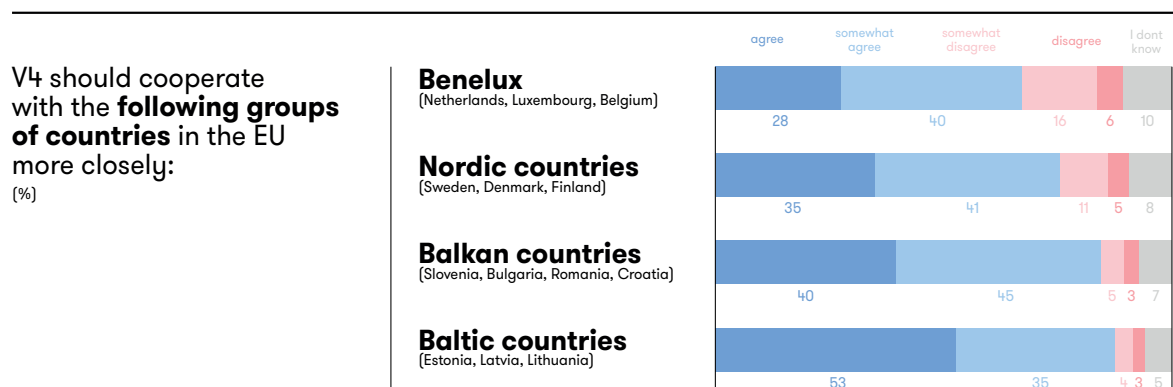


This is probably a reflection of the conflict concerning the Turów coal mine⁵ on the one hand, that in 2021 disrupted what can most accurately be described as stagnation in mutual relations, and on the other, the Czech stakeholders' polarised views of Polish domestic developments.⁶

Looking at the rankings of the closest allies by respondents from individual Visegrad countries, we see that **other Visegrad countries are by no means always in the leading positions**. Among Czech respondents, not only Slovakia (87%) and Poland (56%), but also Germany (47%) and Austria (40%) are considered to be among the closest allies by more stakeholders than Hungary (30%). Relations with both Germany and Austria, but also Croatia, are also seen as better in terms of quality. Slovenia was mentioned as one of the closest allies for Hungary by more respondents (56%) than both the Czech Republic (55%) and Slovakia (33%), with the quality of mutual relations also evaluated to be better. Polish respondents consider Lithuania (40%) and Germany (39%) to be closer to Poland than both Slovakia (31%) and the Czech Republic (17%). Finally, Slovak respondents mentioned Germany as one of the closest allies for their country more often (43%) than they did Hungary (33%). The quality of bilateral relations with Austria and Germany is evaluated by Slovak stakeholders as better than that with Poland and Hungary, the latter even ending up in last place from the selected countries.

Among the four groups of respondents, to the biggest extent it is Hungarians (63%, which is a value similar to the 2017 research results – 61%) who agree or somewhat agree that the V4 members should be the **first partners for coalition building when pursuing their country's European policy interests**, whereas only 35% of Czechs (compared to 53% in 2017), 47% of Poles (compared to 54% in 2017) and 50% of Slovaks agree or somewhat agree (69% in 2017).

Regarding potential cooperation of the Visegrad Group with other groups of countries in the EU, the V4 respondents are most enthusiastic about the **Baltic countries** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; 88%), followed by the **Balkan countries** (Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia; 85%). The majority of respondents however seem to be in favor of closer cooperation also with the Nordic (76%) and Benelux (68%) countries.



⁵ The issue that has caused considerable tension in Czech-Polish relations concerns a Polish brown coal mine close to the Czech border. The Czech Republic has been pointing out the negative impact of the mine on the environment. After the failure of efforts to resolve the issue through diplomacy, the Czech Republic filed a lawsuit with the Court of Justice of the EU which ordered an immediate stop to the mining until a decision is made. In spite of this, Poland continued mining which resulted in the CJEU setting a financial penalty for each day that mining continued. As of the beginning of October 2021, bilateral talks to solve the dispute are ongoing.

⁶ Vít Dostál, "Polsko," in *Agenda pro českou zahraniční politiku 2021*, eds. Pavlína Janebová, Vít Dostál, Pavel Havlíček (Prague: AMO, 2021), [amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AMO_Agenda_2021.pdf](https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AMO_Agenda_2021.pdf).



DEVELOPMENTS OF THE EU AGENDA AND GOVERNANCE

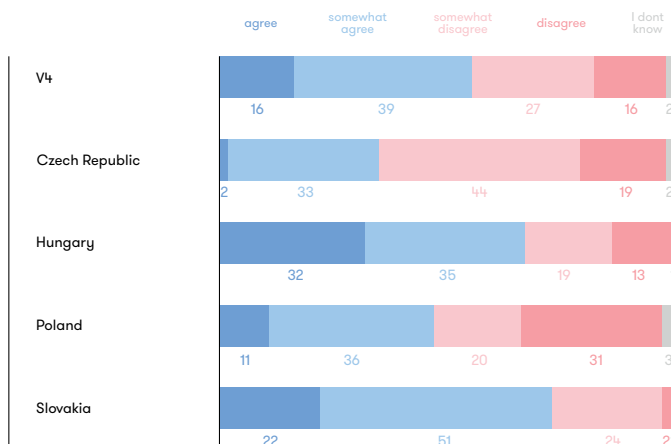
By mid-2021 when this survey was conducted, the EU institutions that took office in 2019 had settled in their place, but negotiations on the new multiannual financial framework and post-pandemic recovery package, the so-called Next Generation EU, had only been closed relatively recently. The new budget lays down the financial instruments for the implementation of such plans as the Green New Deal, while the unprecedented recovery package puts in place resources for the support of EU member states to restart and help their economies recoup after a year and a half of lockdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, political discussions as the current Commission and Parliament assumed office in 2019 prompted the launch of a new series of deliberations about the way ahead for European integration in the framework of the Conference on the Future of the European Union, which starting in 2021, raises important questions about EU governance again. Against this backdrop, we surveyed Visegrad stakeholders concerning their views and expectations on European integration, future important topics and potential paths ahead to provide a timely assessment on their perception about their countries' roles in the EU.

Visegrad countries' relations with the EU, especially those of Hungary and Poland, have not been devoid of conflicts over recent years, but membership in the Union continues to be regarded positively across the region. Like the results of our Trends of Visegrad European Policy survey conducted in 2017 showed, stakeholders in all four states overwhelmingly still consider their country's **membership in the European Union more beneficial than any other form of cooperation would be**. While close to 99% in Hungary and Slovakia, and 97% in the Czech Republic see membership as the best option, Poland lags somewhat behind with "only" 92% of respondents – a small drop of 4 percentage points compared to 2017 – agreeing at least somewhat with this view. Despite this overwhelming "approval rating", to what extent the four countries can make good use of this cooperation is more contested.

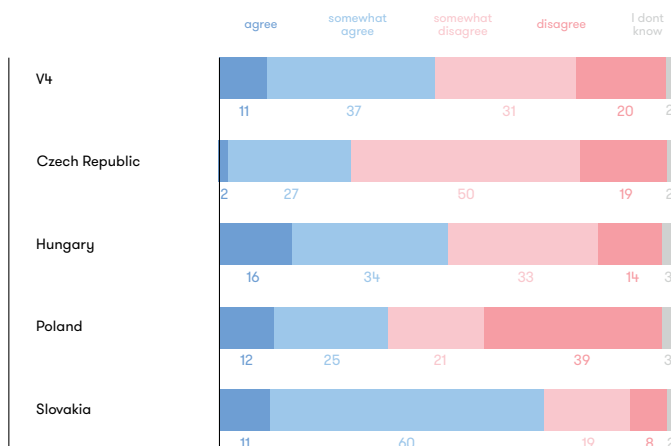
EU membership is more beneficial to [your country] than any other form of relationship with the EU.
(%)



[Your country] is **able to define well its interests** in the European Union.
(%)



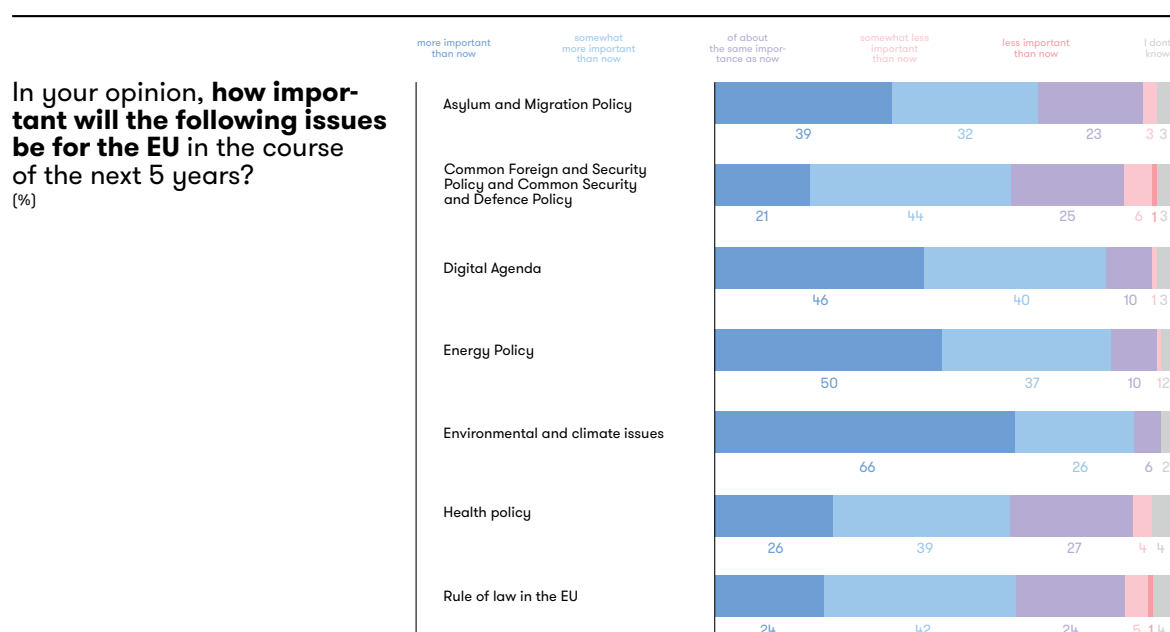
[Your country] is **able to successfully assert its interests** in the European Union.
(%)



When it comes to the ability to **articulate national interests in the EU**, the four stakeholder communities believe that their governments do a better job than they did four years ago when this question was last surveyed. Critical opinions still hold in the Czech Republic and Poland: only 35% of Czech and 47% of Polish respondents agree at least somewhat that their governments can define national interests in the EU well. In Hungary and Slovakia, however, the majority expressed satisfaction with their country's performance in this regard (67% and 73% respectively). Defining interests well does not always translate into achieving them though. Only 29% of Czechs, 37% of Poles, but with 51%, a slight majority of Hungarians share at least partly the view that their respective governments **assert their country's interests successfully on the EU level**. The exception to this trend is Slovakia, which stood out with the highest proportion of respondents seeing Slovak interest-articulation overwhelmingly positively already in 2017 (85% at that time). Here, the difference is minimal between those who think the government can articulate interests and pursue them successfully (as high as 72% for the latter).

FUTURE IMPORTANT ISSUES

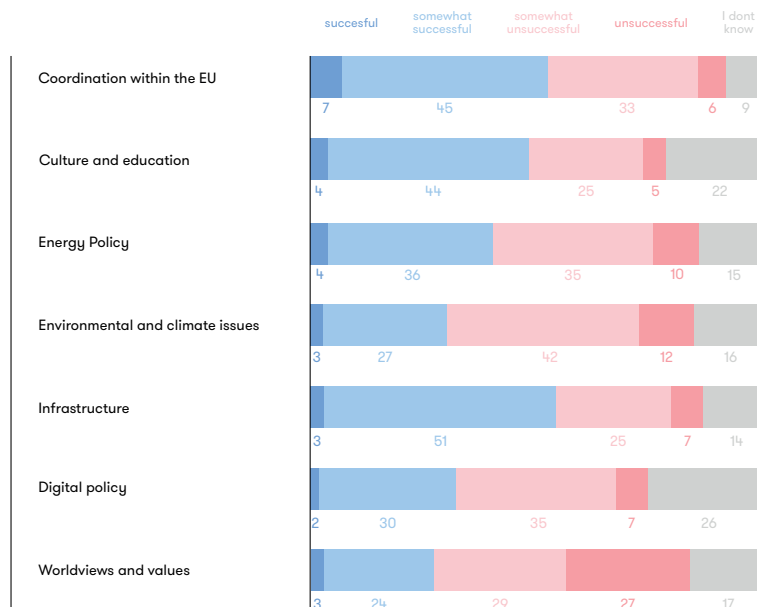
Estimating the importance of selected policy areas for the EU in the course of the following 5 years, **environmental and climate issues, energy policy** and the **digital agenda** are most widely expected to grow in importance (i. e. more than 85% of respondents in the entire V4 think that these will be “more important” or “somewhat more important” than now). More than 60% of the respondents also expect **asylum and migration policy, rule of law in the EU, common foreign and security policy and common security and defense policy (CFSP and CSDP)** and **health policy** to be more important in the next 5 years than now. Looking at the expected developments in the importance of selected issues in the individual V4 countries’ EU policies, we see that it is exactly the three areas mentioned above – environment, energy and the digital agenda – that are expected to gain prominence. In many of these areas, the V4 has not tended to fit in with the EU mainstream.



These results also closely align with preferences regarding the importance of selected issues for Visegrad cooperation in the same time span – according to the majority of respondents in all four countries, **environmental and climate issues, energy policy and digital policy** should be more important for Visegrad cooperation in the next 5 years. In addition, the majority of Hungarian respondents also think that the V4 should focus more attention on cooperation in research and development. A majority of the Polish respondents think that other than climate, energy and digital policies, the EU's eastern neighborhood, infrastructure and research and development should be more important for the Visegrad Group.

At the same time however, the V4's performance in the area of **environmental and climate issues** was evaluated as (somewhat) successful by only 30% of the respondents, **energy policy** by 40% and **digital policy** by 32%. The areas where V4 performance was evaluated as “unsuccessful” or “somewhat unsuccessful” by most people are **worldview and values** (56%). Environmental and climate issues, however, are the area where the V4's performance was evaluated as (somewhat) unsuccessful by 54%, which is the second highest figure. Looking at the other two issues expected by the most respondents to gain importance in the next five years, we see that the Visegrad Group's performance in both energy and digital policy was evaluated as (somewhat) unsuccessful by a plurality of respondents. Looking at the results for the individual countries separately, this applies to all of them except Hungary, in whose case more people believe that V4 performance is successful than the opposite in all three areas. For example, 60% of the Hungarian respondents evaluate V4 performance in the field of energy policy as (somewhat) successful, compared to 70% of the Polish stakeholders who see it as (somewhat) unsuccessful. Among all respondents, the policies where the V4 has most often been evaluated as “successful” or “somewhat successful” are infrastructure (53%), coordination within the EU (51%) and culture and education (49%).

Evaluate the performance of the Visegrad Group in the following areas.
[%]



FUTURE IMPORTANT ISSUES

Pursuing the most ambitious **climate agenda** in the world, the EU managed to reach an agreement on reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and reducing them by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Poland is the only EU member country which has not joined this commitment but in the course of the negotiations, all the Visegrad countries' attitudes towards decarbonization measures

have been rather lukewarm.⁷ Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary have been very outspoken about being disadvantaged, given the structure of their economies (i.e. orientated towards industry) and energy sectors. While their position regarding the need for the EU decarbonization process to consider the different starting points of the individual member states and the possible social consequences is understandable, what we also observe in the rhetoric of political leaders of the three countries is a reluctance to acknowledge the urgency of the issue and to take up a proactive stance towards the proposed measures. A condition for the member states to be able to access the money from the Next Generation EU fund states that at least 37% of the spending envisioned in their National Recovery Plans needs to contribute to the green transition. Although the Czech and Slovak plan have already been approved by the European Commission as of early October 2021, the plans have been criticized in all four countries by environmental NGOs for setting low ambitions regarding green transition.⁸

Facing the decarbonization requirements and the need to phase out their coal power plants, all four Visegrad countries belong to the “pro-nuclear” camp in the EU (led by France and Poland⁹ and very much in opposition to Germany on this issue), advocating for nuclear energy to be included in the EU green finance taxonomy as a necessity to reach the decarbonization goals. There of course are differences when it comes to suppliers for power plants in different Visegrad countries. Hungary cooperates closely with Russia on the construction of the Paks 2 power plant, which confirms warm relations between the two countries. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, has been moving towards excluding Russia (and China) from the tender to build a nuclear unit in the Dukovany power plant after the revelation of the Russian participation in the explosion of the ammunition depots in Vrbětice in 2014. Poland, meanwhile, is working with the US’ Bechtel and Westinghouse on plans to build the country’s first nuclear power plant, planned to be finished by 2033. In spite of that, energy policy certainly is an area where the V₄ can act together.

As for the last of the areas most widely expected to gain in importance, **digital policies are a field where the Visegrad countries could bring a positive contribution to the EU table.** As noted in a joint declaration of the prime ministers from February 2021, the V₄ intends to undertake joint digital projects, cooperate in research and development in the field of digitalisation, strengthen cross-border cooperation and cooperate in the preparation of relevant legislation at the EU level.¹⁰

Migration is often mentioned as one of the issues where there is agreement between the Visegrad countries and according to the survey results, the members of Visegrad foreign and EU policy communities do not see its importance declining in the near future - only 3% of respondents across the four countries anticipate that **migration and asylum policy** will be “somewhat less important” in the next 5 years. It is, on the

7 Slavomir Hubatka, Nolan Theisen. Slovakia Low Carbon Economy Pathways. Bratislava: Globsec, 2020. globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Slovakia-LCEP_Achieving-more-by-2030_Dec2020.pdf; Romana Březovská, Vendula Karásková. The Future of Europe: What Role for Visegrad Cooperation? Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2021. amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AMO_The_Future_of_Europe_What_role_for_the_V4_final.pdf.

8 Aneta Zachová, Patrik Szicherle, Anna Wolska, Michal Hudec, “Green recovery after covid-19: Last chance for V₄ to Climate Transition?” Visegrad.info, 29 November 2020, visegradinfo.eu/index.php/collaborative/600-green-recovery-after-covid-19-last-chance-for-v4-to-climate-transition; “Zelenější, ale pořád ne dost zelený. Unie může český plán obnovy znovu vrátit,” iRozhlas, 9 June 2021, irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/narodni-plan-obnovy-klima_2106090600_jab; Vlagyislav Maksimov, “NGOs criticise Hungary’s recovery fund’s energy plans,” Euractiv, 15 April 2021,

euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/ngos-criticise-hungarys-recovery-funds-energy-plans/; Juraj Melichar, “Devil in the climate details as Slovakia finalises plan for EU recovery fund,” CEE Bankwatch Network, 30 March 2021,

bankwatch.org/blog/devil-in-the-climate-details-as-slovakia-finalises-plan-for-eu-recovery-fund, Rafał Rykowski, “Latest unambitious domino falls as Poland publishes plan for EU recovery fund,” CEE Bankwatch Network, 25 March 2021,

bankwatch.org/blog/latest-unambitious-domino-falls-as-poland-publishes-eu-recovery-spending-plan.

9 Frédéric Simon, “10 EU countries back nuclear power in EU green finance taxonomy,” Euractiv, 12 October 2021, euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/10-eu-countries-back-nuclear-power-in-eu-green-finance-taxonomy/.

10 Visegrad Group Joint Declaration on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects, 17 February 2021, visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=458.

other hand, expected to gain importance on the EU agenda by 72% of respondents across the four Visegrad countries, showing a slight decline in comparison with 2019 (80%) and 2017 (83%). 57% of the Polish and 54% of the Slovak respondents expect asylum and migration policy to be (somewhat) more important for their country's European policy in the next 5 years than now. These numbers are slightly higher than for the Czechs (48%) and Hungarians (46%). 45% of both Czech and Hungarian stakeholders, 39% of the Slovaks and 31% of the Poles expect the issue to stay of about the same importance for their EU policy as now.

Despite the shared position of Visegrad countries against mandatory relocation mechanism for asylum seekers at the EU level, around half of the respondents in the Czech Republic (52%), Hungary (47%) and Slovakia (50%) and even 68% of the Polish respondents agree or somewhat agree that their country should accept asylum seekers through **some kind of a relocation scheme**. Compared to 2017, the number is 6 percentage points lower in the case of Czechs, 7 percentage points lower in the case of Slovaks, but 8 percentage points higher in the case of Poles. On the other hand, there has only been a 1 percentage point decline in the case of Hungarian respondents, who remain the least in favour of a relocation scheme. There seems to be wide agreement across the foreign and EU policy stakeholders in the V4 that countries participating in the Schengen Area should be more involved in **external border management** (89% of Czechs, 91% of Hungarians, 78% of Poles and 91% of Slovaks agreeing or somewhat agreeing). Although these majorities are considerable, compared to 2017 there has been a decline in the numbers - 5 percentage points in the case of Czech respondents, 6 percentage points in the case of the Hungarians and even 16 percentage points in the case of the Poles. A majority of the respondents across all four countries also (somewhat) agree that by 2024 (i.e. the end of the current European Commission's term), the Schengen Area should be enlarged so as to include **Bulgaria, Romania or Croatia**.

Looking at the current **stalemate in the migration and asylum policy** at the EU level, the stakeholders are not very optimistic about it being resolved by the end of the current Commission's term - a majority of the respondents disagree or somewhat disagree with such a prognosis (57% of the Czechs, 67% of the Hungarians, 69% of the Poles and 66% of the Slovaks).

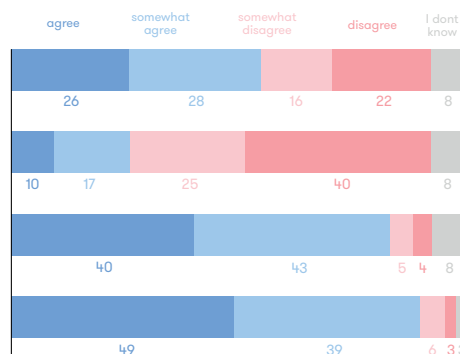
To what extent do you agree with the following **propositions about the EU's asylum and migration policy** and the Schengen Area?
(%)

[Your country] should accept asylum seekers through some kind of a relocation scheme.

[Your country] should negotiate an opt-out from the EU's common asylum and migration policy.

By 2024, the Schengen Area should be enlarged so as to include one or more of the following countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia.

Countries participating in the Schengen Area should be more involved in external border management

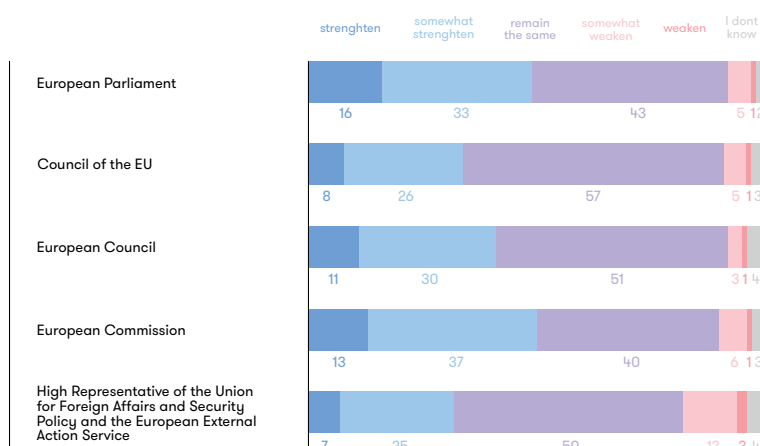


Given the experience from the COVID-19 pandemic and the limited ability of the EU to act, there has been ongoing discussion about strengthening the EU's competences in the area of health policy. Asked about the prospect of more EU integration in health policy in the future, the majority of respondents in all four countries considered such a development probable or somewhat probable - 70% of the Czechs, 79% of the Hungarians, 83% of the Poles and 81% of the Slovaks. Overall, 65% of respondents across all four countries think that in the course of the next 5 years, health policy will be (somewhat) more important for the EU than today.

THE FUTURE OF INTEGRATION

Although there is variation among the Visegrad governments' attitudes toward the role of the EU in governance and policy making, they tend to be more in favor of **intergovernmentalism** and keeping competences with the member states. To assess stakeholders' views regarding EU governance, we surveyed their views concerning the expected future importance of key EU institutions. Based on the results, we see no clear trends emerging either in a more intergovernmental or more federalist direction. Stakeholder communities tend to be divided between expecting no changes on the one hand and predicting a growing importance in the role of respective institutions on the other. On average, a majority of respondents expect intergovernmental institutions – **the European Council and the Council of the EU – to maintain their importance in the next five years** (51% and 57% respectively), while a plurality of stakeholders across the four countries foresee **a growing relevance for the European Commission** (50%) and the **European Parliament** (49%). Overall, only 4-6% of the respondents expect any of the above institutions to weaken, which is markedly lower than four years ago, when such proportions ranged from 6% (in the case of the European Council) up to 19% (for the European Commission). Conducting the survey not long after the EU's new multiannual financial framework was adopted with the concomitant increase in the EU's future role in member states' recovery from the effects of the covid-19 pandemic, likely contributed to this drop in the number of those who consider the four key EU institutions to be of declining importance, and to more respondents expecting more or at least similar relevance for them in the coming five years.

In your opinion, how will the importance of these EU institutions change in the course of the next five years?
[%]

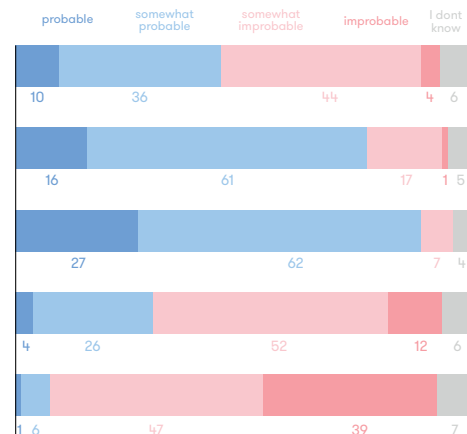


Overall, it appears that the health crisis of the **COVID-19** pandemic and the resulting economic and social consequences were not seen as detrimental to European integration. On average, only 20% of respondents expect integration to loosen as a result of the fallout from the pandemic, while 73% do not consider it likely. Slovak respondents appear to expect some loosening in the highest numbers with 31%, but Slovakia is at a more advanced stage of integration which puts it in a different position in comparison with the other three countries. Regarding the future development of the European Union, we indeed see that scenarios which expect stagnation or predict the **rollback of integration to the Single Market are seen as much less likely** now across all stakeholder communities than four or even two years ago when we surveyed the perceived probability of the five scenarios of the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe published in 2017. This year the average proportion of those who expect no change in the ways the EU functions (that is the Commission's 'Carrying on' scenario) dropped to 30% from over 60% in 2017 and 2019. Against the developments of the past two years, going back to the Single Market is seen as at least somewhat probable by only 8% of the respondents overall, which is a significant drop from 27% in 2017 and 30% in 2019. Interestingly, while four years ago 59% of the respondents overall saw no change in the scope and depth of EU integration as at least somewhat beneficial for their country – with over 70% of Polish and Slovak stakeholders sharing this view – the support for such a scenario dropped to as little as 12% on average in 2021. **Returning to the Single Market is also viewed as increasingly less beneficial** with only one in ten respondents on average looking at this scenario at least somewhat favorably compared to 26% four years ago.

Differentiated integration where willing member states do more in selected areas continues to be seen as **the most probable development** by the stakeholders of all four countries, and except for Slovakia where a slight drop is observed, increasing numbers of respondents consider this development at least somewhat beneficial for their country. **'Doing less more efficiently'**, that is deepening cooperation among all member states in selected areas with perceived added value, is seen as **highly probable** with over 70% viewing it as an at least somewhat likely scenario in all Visegrad countries, which is a sizable increase from 49% on average four years ago. Like the prospect of differentiated integration, this scenario is regarded significantly more favorably now (79% on average) than four years ago (51%) but with no country exceptions. The option of 'Doing much more together' across the board is generally considered less likely than the above two scenarios, but more likely than stagnation or turning back, but its perceived probability has increased in all countries without exception over the past four years (from 24% on average considering it at least somewhat likely to unfold in 2017, to 45% in 2019). This overall picture suggests that stakeholder communities expect and would at least somewhat welcome the **deepening of EU integration in selected areas or based on coalitions of the willing**, whereas **stagnation and reversal**

In your opinion, how probable are the following developments regarding EU integration in the next 10 years?
(%)

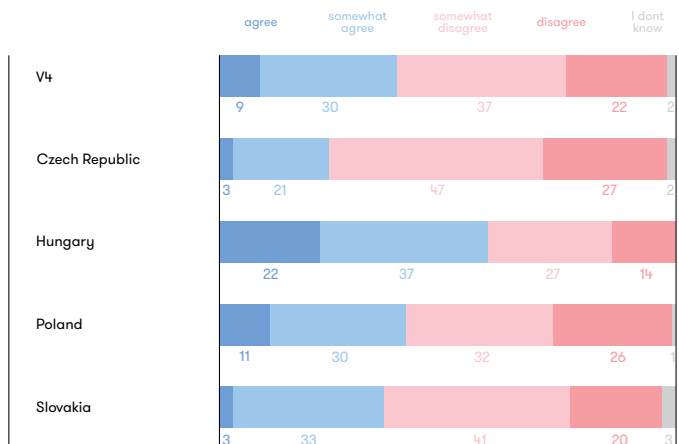
- Member States will move towards sharing more power, resources, and decision-making across the board.
- EU integration will be deeper and faster in selected policy areas with a perceived added value.
- Willing Member States will move towards more integration in specific areas.
- There will not be any significant changes in the scope and/or depth of integration.
- The EU will gradually be reduced back to the single market.



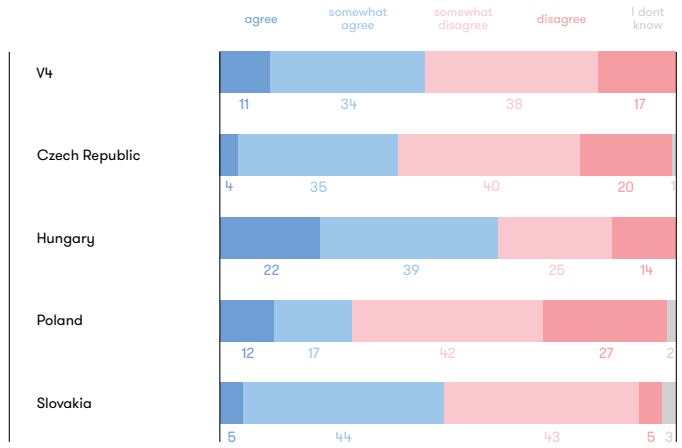
are increasingly less favored among respondents in the Visegrad states now than they were in 2017 in the aftermath of the refugee and migration crisis.

Within the European Union, the visibility of the Visegrad Group has undoubtedly grown over the past six years, albeit its image and role have been far from uncontested. Against this backdrop, different perceptions from the Visegrad stakeholders about the relationship between the V₄ and the EU are notable. Respondents in Poland and Hungary – the two countries with open conflicts with EU institutions – consider it at least somewhat important **that the V₄ countries coordinate more on EU matters** in the next five years (74% and 77% respectively), while Czech and Slovak stakeholders place less importance on prioritizing this on the group’s agenda (38% and 46% respectively). Motivations may differ though in the different communities: whereas 60% of the Slovak respondents think that V₄ coordination in the EU is at least somewhat successful and might not see the need for more in this field, Czechs are divided and lean slightly more toward seeing it as at least somewhat unsuccessful (49%) and potentially are more reluctant to invest further into this. The latter point is supported by the observation that the majority of Czech respondents see the **V₄ as a disruptive actor in the EU** (52% agree at least somewhat, much ahead of the rest of the group) and view it as **a concerted actor** the least (only 24% of the respondents view the V₄ as such, which lags far behind the other three countries’ respondents). The picture is mixed in Hungary and Poland, too: 67% of Hungarian respondents see V₄ coordination as successful already and thus may want to continue, but only 35% of the Polish respondents share this view and thus may want to improve coordination. Indeed, Hungarians are the only respondent group where the majority sees the V₄ playing a concerted, influential, and constructive role in the EU. The majority of Polish stakeholders on the other hand do not see the V₄ as concerted, influential and constructive, but also not as in itself disruptive, which may provide reason for the community to increase coordination and in turn influence in the future.

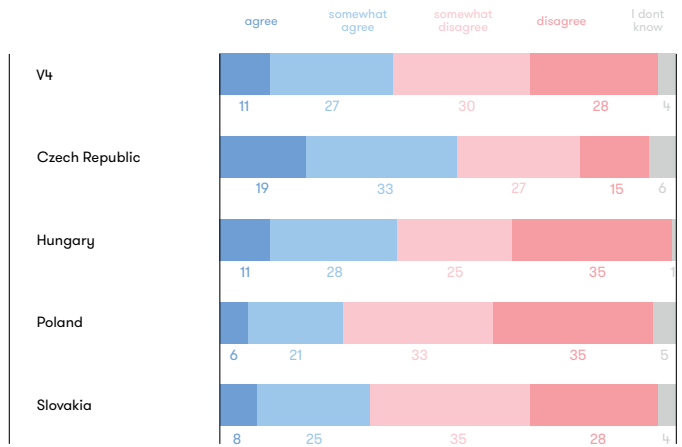
The Visegrad Group is a **concerted actor in the EU.**
(%)



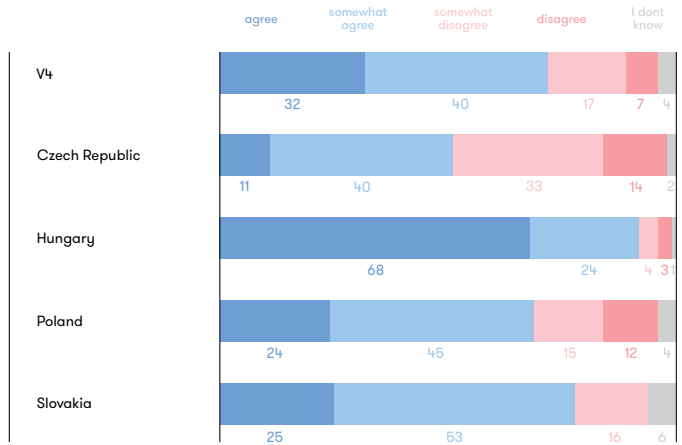
The Visegrad Group is an **influential actor** in the EU.
[%]



The Visegrad Group is a **disruptive actor** in the EU.
[%]



Participation in the Visegrad Group is **beneficial for pursuing [your country's] interests.**
[%]





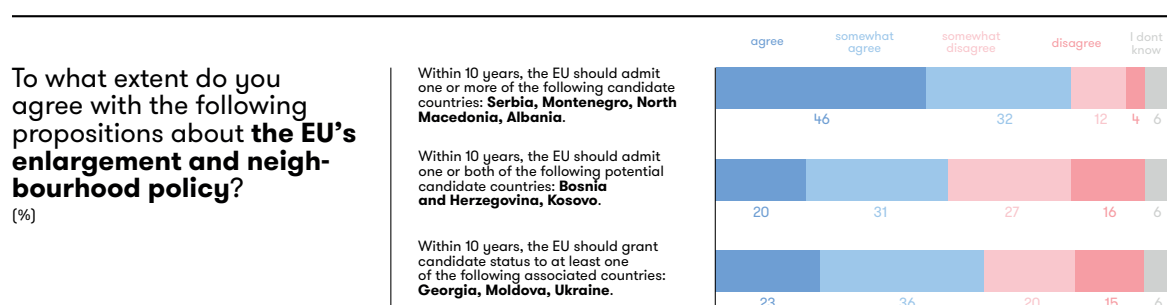
THE EU'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The multitude of conflicts – military or otherwise – that characterized the European Union's neighborhoods and its external relations two years ago continues to fill its foreign policy agenda, with relations with big powers – the United States, Russia and China – still occupying prime place, conflicts in Eastern Europe remaining unresolved and enlargement showing no signs of tangible progress in the Western Balkans. The election of President Joe Biden in the United States may raise hopes that transatlantic relations could improve but the change in power makes calls for European strategic autonomy no less urgent.

In this “connected, complex and contested world”, as the EU's Global Strategy puts it, the majority of respondents in all Visegrad countries expect that **common foreign and security policy and common security and defense policy will become at least somewhat more important** in the next five years on the EU agenda (65% on average). In fact, majorities of various sizes – 51% in the Czech Republic, 52% in Poland, 59% in Hungary and 67% in Slovakia – would even support introducing **qualified majority voting** (QMV) in CFSP decision making, which undoubtedly would increase the importance of the policy area and the EU's ability to act more swiftly and decisively. At the same time, Visegrad stakeholders do not expect the office of the High Representative and the European External Action Service to get any more important in the next five years, which suggests that they may not think that QMV in the policy area will be introduced any time soon either. A plurality – and in Poland, the majority (63%) – expect them to retain their current importance. Although a plurality of respondents in all four countries also expect the importance of CFSP/CSDP to rise at least somewhat on the national agenda, those who think it will remain the same form similarly big groups (47% and 41% on average respectively).

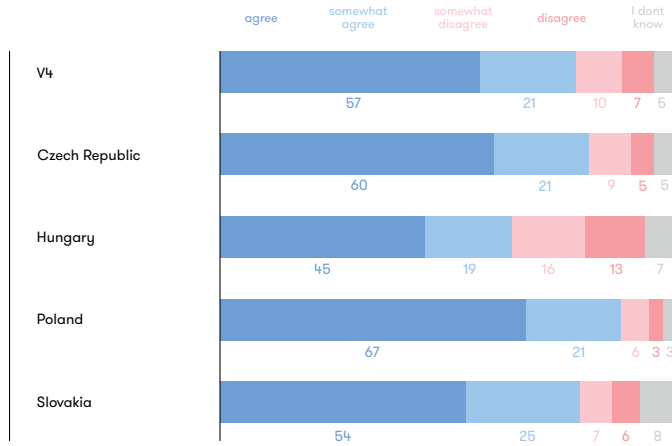
Indeed, the V₄ countries have rarely been drivers of EU foreign policy with the exception of few areas, mainly the immediate neighborhoods. Clear majorities of stakeholders in all four countries would also support V₄ cooperation devoting more attention to the **Western Balkans and the EU's eastern neighborhood** (on average, 59% and 66% respectively), while countries are more divided when it comes to assessing the success of the V₄ in engaging with these regions thus far. Characteristically, Hungarian respondents would support engagement with the Western Balkans the most (75% favor more attention from the V₄), while Poles would advocate most for more V₄ cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries (86%). However, while the majority of Hungarian respondents are at least somewhat satisfied with the V₄'s track record in the Western Balkans (56%), only two in ten Polish respondents think that the V₄ has been at least partially successful in Eastern Europe.

EU enlargement in the Western Balkans is generally supported in the region. The support for the accession of the current candidates – **Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania** – within the next ten years is overwhelming with every 7–8 respondents being in favor of the prospect. Majorities in Slovakia (64%), Poland (52%) and Hungary (50%) are also supportive of admitting the current potential candidates of the region – **Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo** – within ten years, but the majority of Czech stakeholders (56%) disagree at least in part with offering such a prospect. As opposed to the overall support toward the Western Balkan countries, there appears to be somewhat of an enlargement fatigue in relation to **Turkey**. With the exception of Hungary, where respondents are evenly divided on the matter (46% for, 45% against), clear majorities in the region would favor the EU terminating accession negotiations with Turkey. Potential enlargement toward Eastern Europe is also seen generally favorably: an overwhelming majority in Poland (75%), smaller majorities in Slovakia (58%) and the Czech Republic (54%) would support or rather support granting candidate status to **Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine** in the next ten years, while Hungarians again are split on the matter roughly equally.

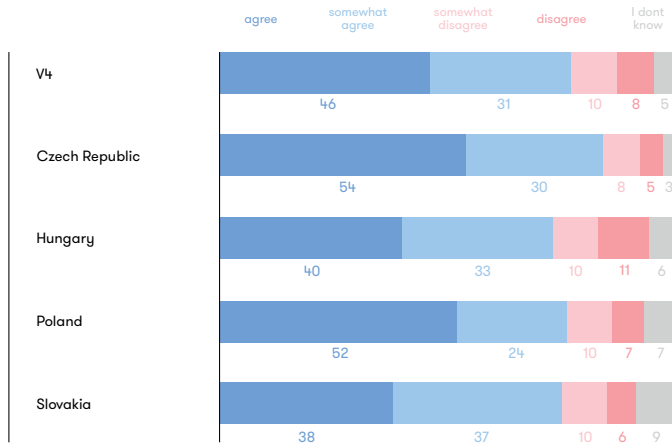


As the **conflict in Ukraine** is still ongoing and with Crimea occupied by Russia, stakeholders were approached again with questions concerning how the European Union should deal with the situation. Seven years after the start of the conflict, clear majorities continue to support **upholding the EU sanctions introduced against Russia**, while dropping the sanctions unconditionally and accepting the annexation of Crimea as the new status quo continues to be rejected. As in 2019, keeping sanctions in place until Russia respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine continues to be the most widely supported policy in Poland (88%) and Slovakia (79%), and received about the same support in the Czech Republic as the option of upholding sanctions until an agreement is reached between Ukraine and Russia (81% and 83% respectively). In Hungary, however, there is a clear drop in support for the first option from 74% to 64%, while support for keeping sanctions in place until an agreement is reached continues to be favored by about the same proportion of respondents (77% in 2019, 73% in 2021). The decreasing support among Hungarian stakeholders for the strictest sanction policy is coupled with an increasing share of stakeholders being open to dropping sanctions immediately: though it still remains only 20% in Hungary, in the other three stakeholder communities the shares actually dropped compared to two years ago. Similarly, Hungary is the only country where a larger share of respondents would like to see the EU strive for a more cooperative approach with Russia now (58%) than in 2019 (40%). Apart from Hungarians, the majority of Slovak stakeholders also share this view (56%), but in their case the tendency for supporting such a policy is decreasing (66% in 2019). Overall, the Hungarian government's generally friendly approach to Russia and conflictual relations with Ukraine finds some resonance in the survey results too, while the other three stakeholder groups have become in fact less accommodating towards Russia in this conflict.

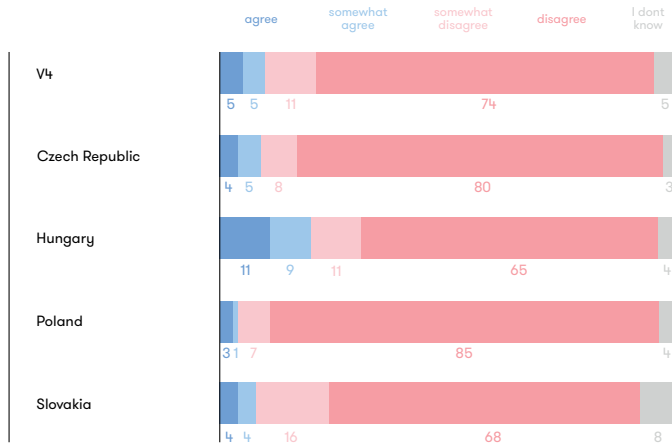
The existing EU **sanctions** vis-à-vis Russia adopted in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea **should be kept until Russia fully respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine** (including Crimea).
[%]



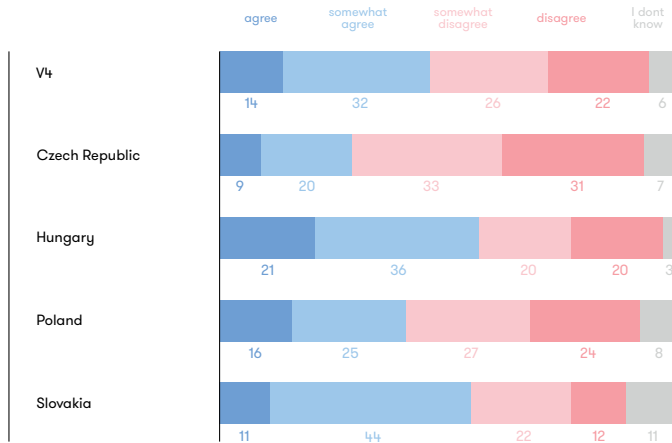
The existing EU **sanctions** vis-à-vis Russia **should be kept until some kind of agreement is reached between Russia and Ukraine.**
[%]



The existing EU **sanctions against Russia should be abandoned immediately.**
[%]



The EU should strive for a **more cooperative approach with Russia.**
[%]



Beyond the direct neighborhood, the questionnaire again surveyed how stakeholders expect relations to develop between the European Union and **the United States** in the next five years across various issues. After the breakdown of TTIP negotiations during the Trump presidency, Visegrad stakeholders were pessimistic overall about the prospects of EU-US economic and trade ties with the majority foreseeing a deterioration in all countries but Poland, where nonetheless a plurality held such views. After the election of Joe Biden to US President, a massive positive shift is visible in attitudes: over two-thirds of respondents in all four countries, as many as 69% on average, expect economic and trade ties to improve at least to some extent in the coming five years. About two in ten respondents on average count on no change, and only about 5% thought that relations would worsen. Two years ago, stakeholders were less pessimistic about the prospects of cooperation in the field of security and defense between the EU and the US than regarding economic relations, though pluralities, except in Hungary, tended to foresee stagnation rather than improvement in this area. But in 2021 under Biden's presidency expectations show a pronounced optimism with 57% on average expecting at least some improvements. At the same time, the overwhelming majority in all Visegrad countries (84% on average) agree at least somewhat that it is time for the EU to rely less on the security and defense capabilities of the United States. In line with this, respondents reject the idea of abandoning cooperation under the CSDP (as little as 6% would favor that on average), even if their views differ on its effectiveness. While 56% of Slovak respondents agree at least somewhat that the CSDP is effective, at the other end of the spectrum only 9% of Hungarian stakeholders believe that to be the case.

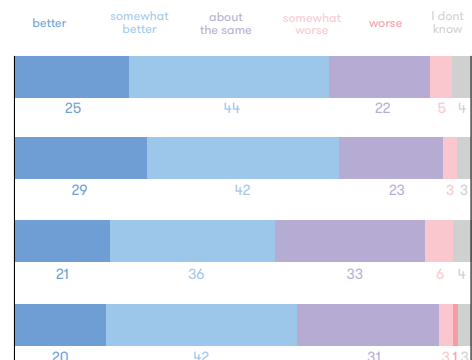
In your opinion, what will transatlantic relations look like in the following areas in the course of the next 5 years?
(%)

The relationship between the EU and the US in the area of **economy and trade** will be...

The relationship between the EU and the US in the area of **climate and energy policy** will be...

The relationship between the EU and the US in the area of **security and defense** will be...

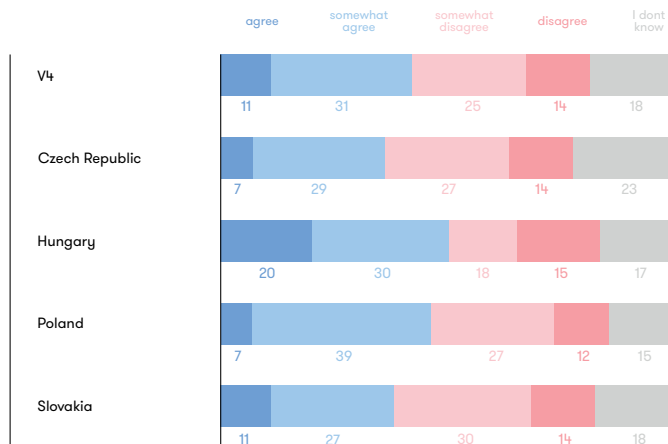
Cooperation between the EU and the US in **supporting multilateralism and the rules-based international order** will be...



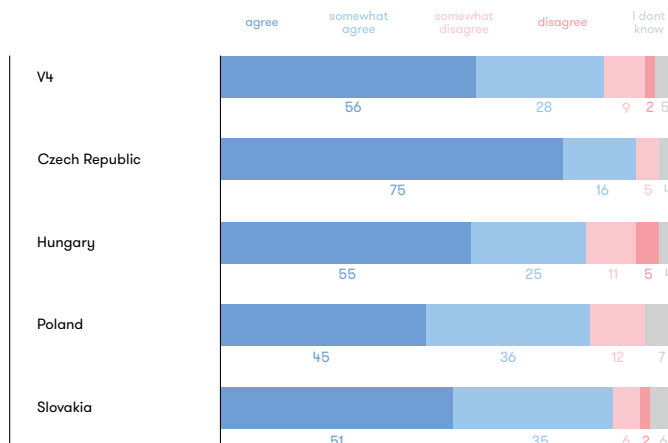
Over recent years, the importance of **China** has only risen on the EU's agenda with economic relations still occupying central stage, but security concerns also increasing in Europe. Two years ago, we found that there was limited support in the V4 countries for liberalizing trade relations between the EU and China and except for Hungary, the majority of stakeholders tended to be in favor of protectionist measures in response to Chinese exports. In the meantime, negotiations on the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment were concluded in December 2020, but the signing of it still awaits. In the V4 countries, stakeholders are also clearly divided on whether the EU should ratify the agreement (on average, 43% are at least somewhat in favor, and 39% are against at least to some extent). Hungarian stakeholders are the most and Czechs are the least in favor of proceeding with closing the deal (50% and 36% respectively). Czechs are also less inclined to seek Chinese investments to their country (only 11% is in favor), while Hungarians and Poles are the most open to such resources even though the enthusiasm is limited in the stakeholder communities (only 33% and 34% are in favor respectively). This should be seen in the context of the communities' threat perception: like in 2019, the overwhelming majority of respondents in all four countries believe that China poses a security threat not only to the EU (87% on average)

but also to their respective countries (84% on average). While we recorded slight drops in the perception of China as a threat in Poland and Hungary over the past two years, the trend is clearly the reverse in Slovakia. The Czech stakeholder community remains the wariest of China with nine in ten respondents considering certain Chinese activities to pose a threat to their country as well as to the European Union.

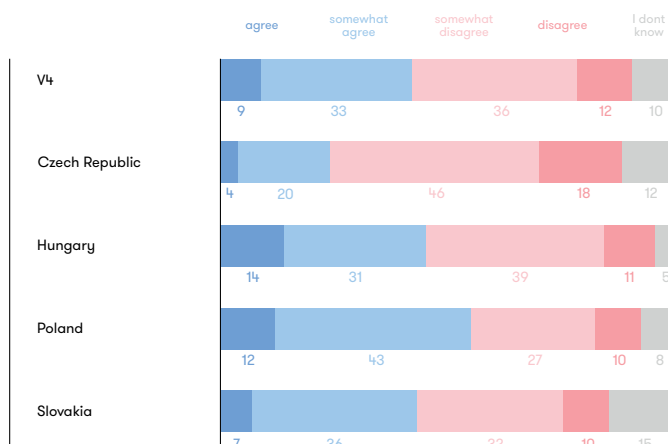
The EU should ratify the investment deal with China.
[%]



Certain Chinese activities pose a security threat to [your country].
[%]



The EU should strive for a more cooperative approach with China.
[%]





CONCLUSION

The aim of the 2021 edition of the “Trends of Visegrad European Policy” survey was to gain an informed insight into the thinking of the four Visegrad countries’ foreign and European policy communities. Although collecting data through a survey of experts necessarily resulted in the limited size and unequal composition of the sample and the results also cannot be considered as representative of the foreign policy executives, the survey managed to gather **valid data about the opinions and expectations of a significant number of foreign and EU policy professionals in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**. With this, we hope to contribute to the debate about the Visegrad countries’ place and future in the European Union as the Conference on the Future of Europe is unfolding.

Like in previous editions, respondents were asked to identify the main partners and closest allies of their own country. **Germany continues to be the most frequently mentioned important non-Visegrad partner in all four countries**, though Berlin is not seen as one of the closest allies by many and relations are now perceived to be worse than two years ago in the case of Hungary and especially Poland. Within the V4, the reverse is often true: **respondents more often see each other’s countries as close allies, especially Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and Poland and Hungary respectively, than as each other’s most important partners**. That being said, the respondents **often do not consider the other Visegrad countries to be among the closest allies for their countries in the EU**. With few exceptions nonetheless, the quality of relations between Visegrad countries is predominantly seen as **“good” or even “very good”**. At the same time, with the exception of Hungary, lower shares of stakeholders believe now than two years ago that their country’s **first partners for coalition building in the EU should be the other Visegrad states**. Hungarian EU and foreign policy stakeholders remain the most enthusiastic about Visegrad cooperation of all four groups of respondents.

This year’s findings continue to confirm that stakeholders in the region see their countries firmly **embedded in the European Union** and overwhelmingly consider EU membership to be beneficial. While more stakeholders appear to be satisfied than two years ago with how their governments manage to define national interests in the EU, this does not automatically translate into evaluating government policies in the pursuit of national interest on the EU level as successful. Compared to two years ago, less respondents are inclined to believe that EU integration is going to stagnate or revert to just economic policies, and they see such scenarios as not beneficial in higher numbers. **Differentiated integration is still seen as the most probable scenario** across the Visegrad countries by the most stakeholders, with respondents seeing it overall positively as a path that would be at least somewhat beneficial for their

countries. Coordination in the EU is still seen by the majority of V₄ respondents (51%) as a successful area of Visegrad cooperation, but as opposed to two years ago, it no longer leads the list. Cooperation in the field of infrastructure is considered to be successful by slightly more stakeholders (53%).

International trends and recent EU policy developments – like the adoption of the Green New Deal, the conditionality surrounding the Next Generation EU package – are reflected in respondents' views about the future agenda of the European Union. The overwhelming majority (over 85% in each case) **expects environmental and climate issues, energy policy and the digital agenda to become more salient in the coming five years** for the Union, and similarly, most respondents expect these issues to rise on their countries' EU agenda, as well. While only three to four out of ten respondents consider the V₄'s track record in these areas to be successful, a clear majority sees room for deepening V₄ cooperation in these fields in the coming five years, as well, even though the individual countries' preferences do not always line up with the European mainstream.

The majority also expects the **importance of the EU's common foreign and security policy and its common security and defense policy to grow in the next five years** and would even support the introduction of qualified majority voting in foreign policy. EU enlargement and relations with the EU's eastern neighborhood are still high on the Visegrad countries' agenda and the majority of stakeholders in all four countries would welcome the V₄ itself doing more in these relations. **There is clear support in accepting the current candidate states from the Western Balkans to the EU in the next ten years**, and with the exception of Czech respondents, stakeholders also rather support admitting current potential candidates to the Union in the course of the coming decade. Majorities in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic would even back granting candidate status to the eastern associated states, while Hungarian respondents are divided on the matter. In Eastern Europe, the conflict in Ukraine continues to dominate the agenda with **support for the sanctions policy and rejection of accepting the annexation of Crimea remaining the clearly dominant positions**. While we see a significant **shift in a more optimistic direction in all countries regarding how relations may develop between the US and the EU** in both the economic and security fields following Joe Biden's election as opposed to our results in 2019 during Donald Trump's tenure, earlier caution regarding **Chinese activities posing a threat both to the EU and to the individual countries tends to prevail** – albeit we see a clear division between Hungary and Poland on the one hand, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the other when it comes to more engagement with China in the field of trade and investment.

This edition's results yet again confirm that **there are differences between how the foreign and EU policy communities of the Visegrad countries see their country's place in the region, in the EU and when it comes to their expectations and preferences in various policy areas**. Despite these differences though, Visegrad cooperation continues to be seen as a **platform stakeholders count on**, albeit compared to two years ago, less respondents see other V₄ states as the first point of contact for intra-EU coalition building.

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ABOUT AMO

Association for International Affairs is a non-governmental non-profit organization founded in 1997. The mission of AMO has been to contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs through a broad range of educational and research activities. Thanks to its activities in the Czech Republic and abroad and 20-year tradition, AMO has established itself as the Czech leading independent institution in the field of international relations and foreign policy.

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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a German political foundation closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). At home as well as abroad, the civic education and dialogue programs aim at promoting freedom and liberty, peace, and justice. Primary concerns are strengthening representative democracy, promoting European integration, expanding transatlantic relations and increasing development cooperation.

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