

TRENDS OF VISEGRAD FOREIGN POLICY

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Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy

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Fifteen years have passed since the Visegrad countries joined the European Union. Moving from the main purpose of a joint return to Euro-Atlantic structures, the Visegrad Group has become a visible platform for dialogue and cooperation in Central Europe.

Even though the perceptions of the Visegrad Group within the EU have often been labeled as a coalition against something, there are several policy areas where the V4 countries can positively contribute to the European Union agenda. The results of the Visegrad Trends 2019 have indicated a rising importance of the issues of climate change, cyber security, energy security and instability in the EU neighborhood. The Visegrad countries can positively contribute to all of these rising issues. Especially in the area of cyber and energy security, there is broad experience and expertise. Furthermore, the Visegrad presidencies indicated further areas of importance as the integration of the Western Balkan countries and the development of the Eastern Partnership, innovation and artificial intelligence, social and economic convergence and cohesion policy.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is very grateful to have the Association for International Affairs (AMO) as a renowned partner in the field of International and European affairs. The current study provides again a unique insight into the European policy cultures and agendas of the four states. This year, we are also celebrating the 30th anniversary of the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. It is a good opportunity to remember that freedom is never secured forever and can be lost. Thus, we should once more deeply acknowledge and cherish the freedoms gained through the process of European integration. We hope that the study of Visegrad Trends 2019 will help to better understand the challenges we face today and to find common European solutions to these challenges.

Matthias Barner

Resident Representative for the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Main findings



- ➔ The overall perception of the quality of relations with Germany has improved since 2017.
- ➔ Perceptions of the importance of Austria between Poland and the rest of the Visegrad Group differ.
- ➔ Hungarian respondents perceive relations between Hungary and Russia as both more important and better than respondents from the other V4 countries.
- ➔ Polish respondents perceive the quality of relations between Poland and Israel as worse than the respondents from the other Visegrad countries.
- ➔ A great mutual relationship between the Czech Republic and Slovakia persists.
- ➔ The quality of the relationship between Hungary and Poland is mutually assessed as very good, i.e. better than the relations of either country to the Czech Republic or Slovakia.
- ➔ Perceptions of the overall quality of relations of the Visegrad countries to one another differ.
- ➔ Cyber security, climate change, asylum and migration policy, energy security and instability in the EU's neighborhood are expected to grow in importance on national foreign policy agendas.
- ➔ While the overall perception of the Visegrad Group is positive for all respondents, Hungarians seem to be the most enthusiastic, while Czechs are the least.
- ➔ Not many respondents are in favor of enlarging or abolishing the Visegrad Group.
- ➔ Coordination in the EU is evaluated as the most successful area of Visegrad cooperation and also the one that is wished to grow the most in importance in the next 5 years.
- ➔ Membership of the European Union is seen to be almost unanimously beneficial in all Visegrad countries.
- ➔ The importance of both the EU and NATO are expected by a significant majority of stakeholders to increase in the next five years.
- ➔ The overwhelming majority expects climate and environmental issues, asylum and migration policy, the digital agenda, CFSP/CSDP, relations with the UK, and energy policy to gain more or somewhat more attention on the European agenda in the next five years. Most appear as priorities set out by Ursula von der Leyen.



- ➔ Differentiated integration is the most widely expected scenario ahead of the European Union among Visegrad stakeholders, while a rollback to the Single Market is seen to be probable or somewhat probable by the least number of respondents.
- ➔ The Visegrad Group overall is not perceived as a concerted, constructive or especially influential actor in the European Union.
- ➔ The importance of enlargement policy is expected by most to decrease, but there is still optimism that some Western Balkan countries could accede to the EU in the next ten years.
- ➔ No major shift is expected in the EU's eastern neighborhood relations regarding its importance in the next five years. But concerning its finalité politique in the ten-year term, some – especially Slovak – respondents could foresee starting accession negotiations.
- ➔ There is no widespread appetite to immediately suspend sanctions against Russia. Visegrad stakeholders overwhelmingly think those should remain in place until Russia fully respects Ukraine's territorial integrity.
- ➔ According to Visegrad stakeholders, the EU should primarily contribute to the resolution of instability in its neighborhood by providing humanitarian assistance and via engagements in EU civilian missions.
- ➔ EU-US relations, but not bilateral ones, are expected to worsen in the field of economy and trade, while both EU and bilateral ties in security and defense are mostly foreseen to remain of the current quality.
- ➔ Visegrad stakeholders regard China's actions as a threat to their country's and the EU's security.
- ➔ The UK would still be welcome to stay in the EU, but if it leaves, it should land softly. Most Visegrad stakeholders would prefer the foundations of the new ties to be laid by the EU.



In the past five years, the Visegrad group has gained visibility as a block of states who do not hesitate to voice their criticism of various policy initiatives coming from Brussels, especially on the handling of the issue of migration, which has gained prominence since 2015. The loudly and at times rather crudely voiced opposition to the approach favored by EU institutions and some of the “older” member states resulted in an image of the Visegrad Group as an uncooperative and rebellious actor – and also gave it a certain sense of unity in the eyes of other EU member states. Even though the salience of the migration issue has largely subsided, the sense of a deeper divide or schism between the “old” and the “new” Europe persists.

The purpose of the Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy research was to take a look at the views of the foreign policy communities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia and see to what extent the Visegrad countries’ foreign policy elites agree on various issues and also where they disagree. An on-line survey consisting of 21 questions was addressed to more than 1,900 people, out of which approximately 23% responded.

The questions focused on several areas, helping us to draw a comprehensive picture of Visegrad foreign policy stakeholders’ views. Among these topics, the European Union has of course been prominent. We also asked about bilateral relations of the Visegrad states, key issues of international politics, international organizations and the evaluation and future of Visegrad cooperation itself. The aggregate results are available in an interactive form on the project website trendy.amo.cz where the full dataset can also be accessed.

The present paper is structured in the following way: After a brief methodological note, we analyze the results regarding the most important bilateral partners of the Visegrad countries, both in the Visegrad Group and outside of it. We then present a more general overview of the successes and failures of the Visegrad Group as perceived by the survey respondents, as well as possible future developments. The next part of the paper is devoted to the European Union. First, we focus on the survey results regarding the future developments of the EU. Then we take a closer look at the respondents’ assessment of the role of the Visegrad Group in the EU. A section focused on EU external relations is also included. The final part of the paper is devoted to conclusions and final comments. Where possible, we try to compare this year’s results with the results of the 2015 Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy and 2017 Trends of Visegrad European Policy.



Note on Methodology

The survey was conducted in August and September 2019 via the on-line survey tool SurveyMonkey . The responses were anonymized. In total, 1970 representatives of Foreign-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.

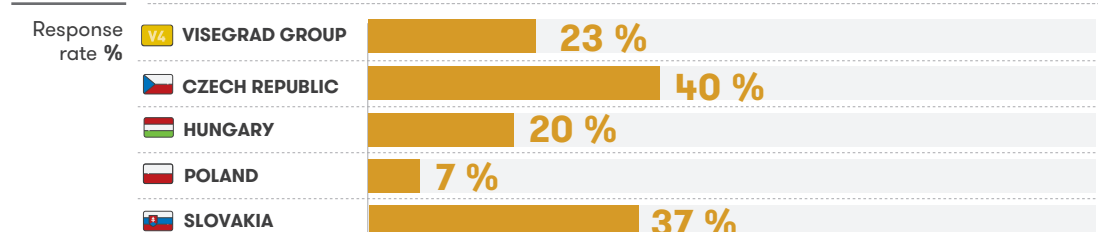
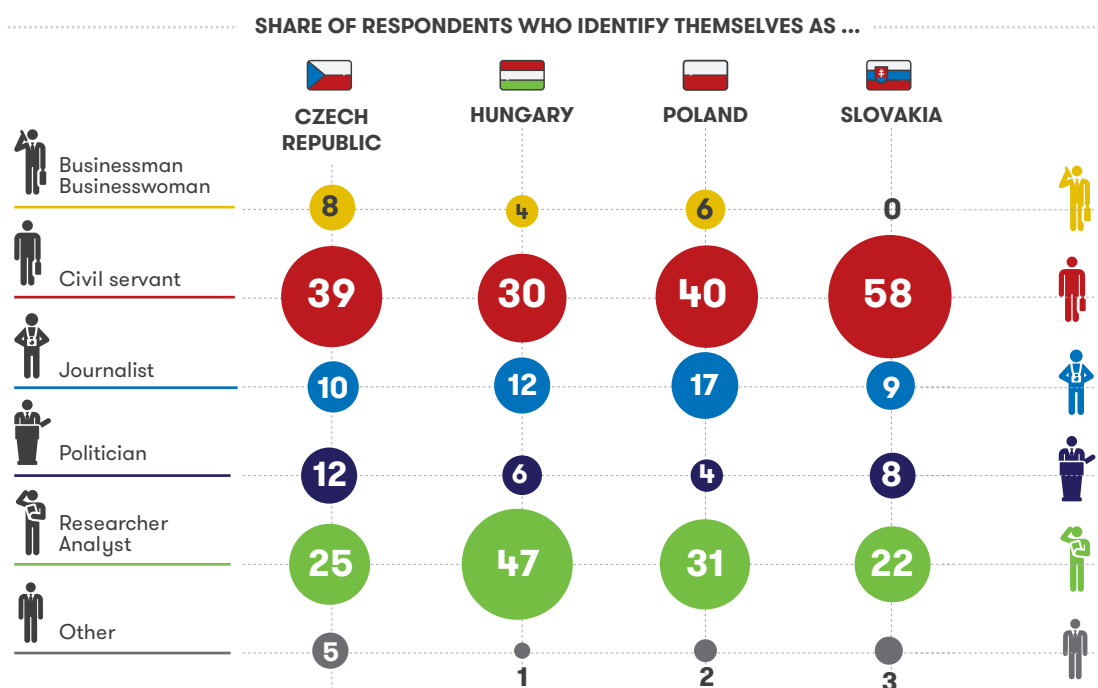
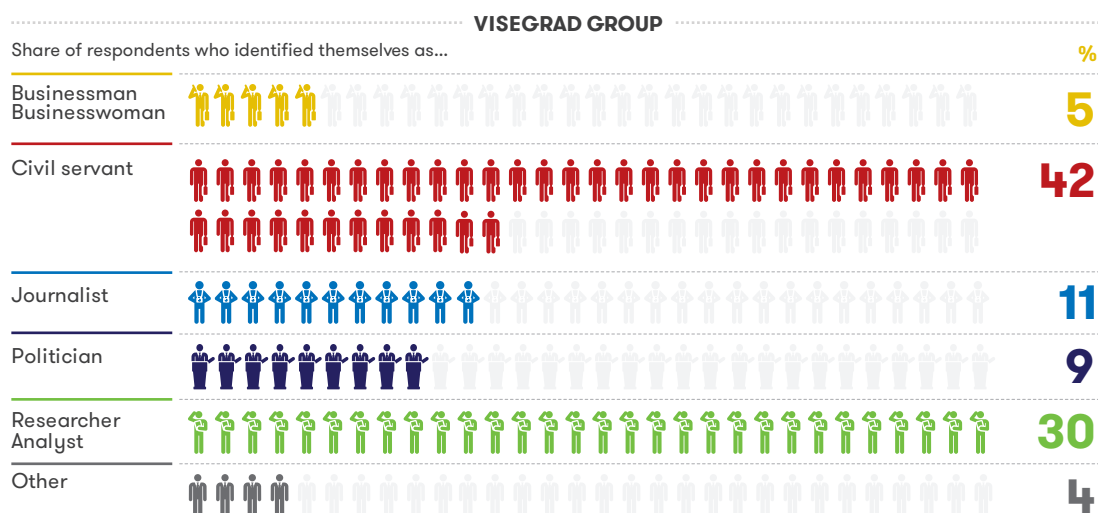
Among the respondents approached during the project, the following categories were represented:

- ➔ 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/international affairs
- ➔ ambassadors accredited to foreign countries and to international organizations
- ➔ 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 his or her 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). Questionnaires were returned by 451 people which equals about a 23% response rate. Of the 4 countries, the Czechs and Slovaks were the most responsive (a response rate of 40% in the former and 37% in the latter case). 20 % of the approached Hungarians responded. Out of the approached Polish respondents only 7% responded, which not only makes the lowest percentage response rate but also the lowest number of responses in absolute numbers. However, the absolute numbers of responses in the 4 countries are still comparable.

In the overall composition of the respondents who returned the questionnaire, civil servants are the most represented, making up 42%, followed by researchers and analysts who represent 30 % of the overall number of respondents. Journalists comprise 11% of the respondents, politicians 9%, businesspeople 5% and finally, 4% of the respondents were not able to fit themselves in any of the categories.

RESPONDENTS AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS:





The survey consisted of 21 questions, focusing on the following broader area:

1. Bilateral issues
2. Important issues for international relations
3. International organizations
4. European integration
5. Visegrad cooperation
6. Transatlantic relations
7. EU external affairs.

In majority of the questions, respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a certain statement, evaluate the importance of particular issues of relations with certain partners, both at the present time and in the near future or estimate the probability of specific developments. In a few cases, respondents were asked to choose one or a multiple of listed options. There was one open-ended question. It was possible to answer “I don’t know” to any question. The common Visegrad results were calculated as the arithmetic means of the values of the four countries on each given question. Where possible and appropriate, we compare between the results of Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy , undertaken in 2015, and Trends of European Foreign Policy , undertaken in 2017. Given that the latter only covered the EU, there are no available data e.g. for bilateral relations between the Visegrad countries and the US from that year.

Bilateral partners and allies of the Visegrad countries



Three questions in the survey asked about bilateral partners of the Visegrad Group members. The respondents were asked to name the five states (both European and non-European), most important for their country's foreign policy. They were also asked to assess the importance as well as quality of their country's relations with 20 selected countries.

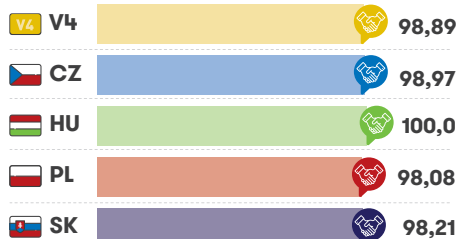
The debate which started with the migration crisis grew, over time, to signal a deeper division between the so called old and new member states, or at least the four of them gathered in the Visegrad Group. Germany, with the open-door policy towards refugees stated by the Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015, soon became the one state that the Visegrad countries (and their leaders) tended to define themselves against. Nonetheless, given the geographical proximity, Germany continues to represent a crucial trade partner for all four Visegrad countries and they are to a large extent dependent on Germany in terms of economy.

The importance of Germany was largely confirmed by the survey results. Nearly all respondents (98.9% to be precise) listed Germany as one of the most important partners for their country's foreign policy. Asked to evaluate the importance of Germany for their country's foreign policy on a 4-stage scale from "important" to "unimportant", the vast majority of respondents went for the first option. Evaluating the quality of relations with Germany on a 5-stage scale from "very good" to "very bad", Germany ended up in sixth place in the common Visegrad result – 1.9, behind the four Visegrad states and the USA. Relations with Germany were better evaluated in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia (average rating of 1.5 and 1.3, respectively) than in the case of Hungary and Poland (average rating of 2.2 and 2.7). The overall results are slightly better than they were for the same question in the 2017 survey when the common Visegrad rating was 2.4. The improvement can likely be attributed to the topic of migration losing its prominence in the last year or two.

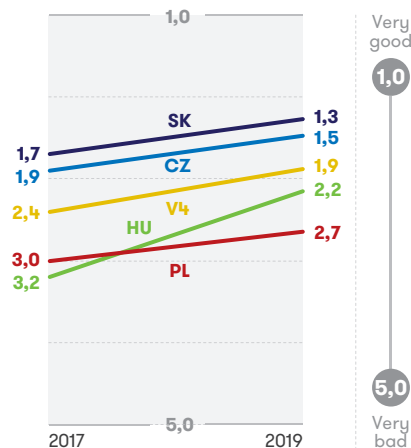
GERMANY AS PARTNER

%

Share of respondents who picked **Germany** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



Average rating obtained for **Germany** in the question:
Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with the following countries (very good = 1, very bad = 5).





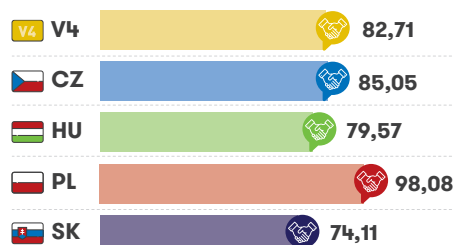
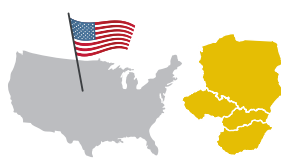
Since Donald Trump took the presidential office, the US foreign policy strategies, style -as well as some of the priorities – changed. The Trump administration often acts unilaterally and in a confrontational manner. Although the level of uncertainty typical for the time immediately after President Trump had assumed office has largely subsided, there still is a palpable tension in transatlantic relations, related mostly to trade, but also security issues. However, recently there has been a certain renewal of interest of the US administration for the Central European countries, mainly connected to the Russian and Chinese influence over these states.

According to the survey results, the US proved to be considered one of the most important bilateral partners for all four Visegrad states. Nearly 83 % of all respondents listed the US as one of the 5 most important partners for their country's foreign policy. This year's result is almost identical to the one from the 2015 survey. As before, the highest mention rate – 98 % - was in the case of Polish respondents. Otherwise, 85% of the Czech respondents, 80% of the Hungarian respondents and 74% of the Slovak respondents mentioned the USA as among the five most important bilateral partners. Out of all four groups of respondents, nearly 90% evaluated the USA as an "important" partner for their country's foreign policy. Regarding evaluation of the quality of mutual relations, the average Visegrad result was 1.9, which is slightly better than the 2015 result (2.1). While the Czech, Polish and Slovak respondents' evaluation of the quality of their country's relations with the USA was more or less at the same level (1.7 for the Czech Republic, 1.5 for Poland, and 1.7 for Slovakia), the Hungarian respondents seem to assess US-Hungarian relations a bit worse – 2.4. However, that is still an improvement on 2015 when the result was 2.9. The overall worse perception of the quality of relations with the US probably results from the American administration's criticism of the decline of democratic standards and rule of law in Hungary which however subsided to a certain extent in the last few years.

USA AS PARTNER

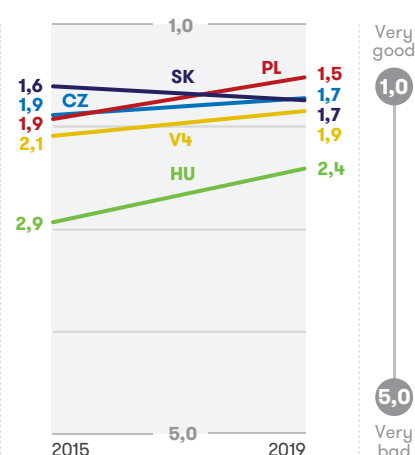
%

Share of respondents who picked the **USA** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



Average rating obtained for the **USA** in the question:

Evaluate the quality of your country's relations with the following countries (very good = 1, very bad = 5)



Apart from Germany, the USA and fellow Visegrad countries, other countries mentioned by more than 20% of the respondents as one of the five most important bilateral partners for their country's foreign policy were France (average frequency of mentions 40%), Austria (29%), Russia (28%) and the United Kingdom (26%). China

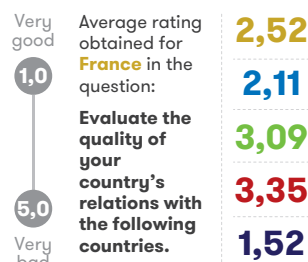
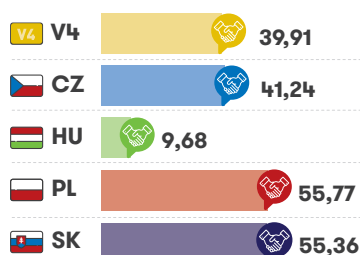
was mentioned only by 13% of respondents on average, although significantly more often in the case of Poland and Hungary than by the Czech and Slovak respondents.



FRANCE AS PARTNER

%

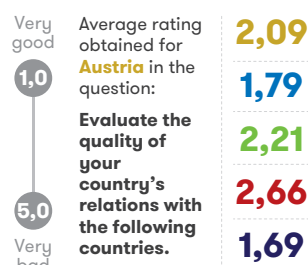
Share of respondents who picked **France** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



AUSTRIA AS PARTNER

%

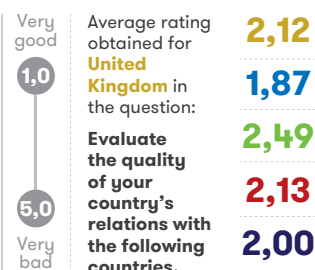
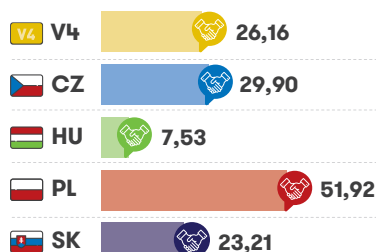
Share of respondents who picked **Austria** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



UNITED KINGDOM AS PARTNER

%

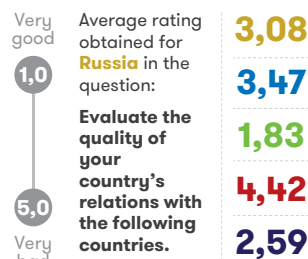
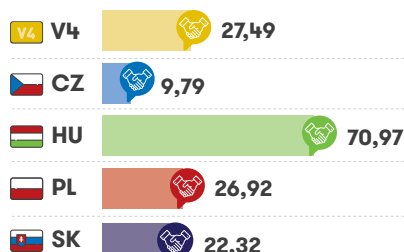
Share of respondents who picked **United Kingdom** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



RUSSIA AS PARTNER

%

Share of respondents who picked **Russia** as one of the five most important partners for their country's foreign policy.



France was considered less important for Hungarian respondents (mentioned by 10% of them compared to 41% of the Czech respondents, 56% of Polish ones and 55% of Slovak ones). The quality of mutual relations is however assessed as worse in



the Polish case – the average rating among Polish respondents is 3.4, followed by 3.1 for Hungarians, 2.1 in the case of Czechs and 1.5 in the case of Slovaks. All of these values show a slight improvement since the 2017 survey but are, in the case of the Hungarian and Polish respondents, still worse than in 2015.

While Austria is perceived as a rather important partner for the Czech Republic (mentioned among the five most important partners by almost 40% of the respondents), Hungary (34%) and Slovakia (21%), interest in Austria seems to be virtually non-existent among the Polish respondents. That is confirmed by the evaluation of importance of selected states on a 4-stage scale. While most of the Czech, Hungarian and Slovak respondents evaluated the relations of their country with Austria as “important” or “somewhat important”, most of the Polish respondents evaluated them rather as “unimportant” or “somewhat unimportant”. The assessment of the quality of relations of their country with Austria was also the worst in the case of Poland (2.7) although the difference from the assessment by the Hungarian respondents (2.2) is not that significant. The Slovak and Czech assessment in this regard is nearly identical – 1.7 and 1.8 respectively. Overall evaluation of the quality of relations with Austria shows a slight improvement since 2017 in the case of all four Visegrad countries. This might result from the political direction that the Austrian coalition government consisting of Sebastian Kurz’s Christian Democrats and the far-right Freedom Party took after the 2017 elections when there were certain hopes on the side of the Visegrad leaders for a deeper cooperation, especially on the issue of migration.

Hungarian respondents consider Russia to be a more important partner for Hungarian foreign policy than the respondents in the other three countries with nearly 71% mentioning it among the five most important partners (compared to a mention rate of 10% in the Czech Republic, 27% in Poland and 22% in Slovakia). Hungarians also perceived the quality of relations between their country and Russia as better (1.8, compared to 3.5 by Czech respondents, 4.4 by Polish respondents and 2.6 by Slovak respondents). This is hardly surprising, given the friendly nature of contacts between the Hungarian and the Russian leader.

There are differences among the respondents from all four Visegrad states regarding their perception of the United Kingdom as an important partner for their country. The United Kingdom was listed among the five most important partners by 52% of the Polish respondents, 30% of the Czech respondents, 23 % of the Slovak respondents, but only 8% of the Hungarian respondents. These results differ dramatically from the Trends of Visegrad European policies conducted back in 2017 when the United Kingdom was considered one of the three most important partners for their country in the EU by 47% of the Polish respondents, 20% of the Hungarian, 16% of the Czech and 4% of the Slovak respondents. While these differences can probably at least partly be attributed to different contexts in which the question was asked (European in 2017 vs. global in 2019), we see that especially in the case of Hungary and Slovakia, the change of perceived importance of the United Kingdom is noticeable also compared to the 2015 survey. While 94-96% of the Czech, Polish and Slovak respondents evaluated the United Kingdom as “important” or “somewhat important” for their country’s foreign policy, only 78% of the Hungarian respondents did. Instead, almost one fifth of them assessed the UK as “somewhat unimportant”



(compared to 2-6% in the case of the other three groups of respondents). As for the perceived quality of the relations, the average Visegrad evaluation improved from 2.6 in 2017 to 2.1 in 2019. The Czech respondents rated the relations of the Czech Republic with the United Kingdom with 1.9, Slovak 2, Polish 2.1 and Hungarian 2.5. In the case of the former three, that means a slight improvement since 2017 while the latter value stays the same.

Among other interesting findings, let us mention that Israel seems to be regarded as more important by Czech respondents, out of which almost one fifth mentioned it among the five most important partners. However, when evaluating the importance of Israel on the scale, most of the Hungarian and Polish respondents also assessed it as “important” or “somewhat important”. On the other hand, 27% of Slovak respondents evaluated Israel as “somewhat unimportant”. While Czech and Hungarian respondents assessed the quality of their country’s relations with Israel as rather good (a rating of 1.3 in the Czech case and 1.6 in the case of Hungary), according to Polish respondents the relations between Poland and Israel are in a much worse shape, rated at 3.4. Their infamous escalation followed a diplomatic dispute in February 2019 regarding the Holocaust.

Ukraine seems to be much more important according to Polish respondents, than it is to respondents from the other three countries. Hungarian respondents consider the quality of relations between their country and Ukraine as much worse than the rest of the Visegrad countries. Hungarian respondents also named Italy among the five most important partners for their country more often than the Czech, Polish and Slovak ones, probably resulting from the ideological closeness of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the former Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Matteo Salvini.



Bilateral partners within the Visegrad Group

The mutual perception of importance among the Visegrad countries is strong, according to expectations. The strongest perceived relationship in this regard is the one between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. 81% of Czech respondents mentioned Slovakia as one of the five most important partners for the Czech Republic while 90% of Slovak respondents mentioned the Czech Republic.

Of the three Visegrad partners, Hungary was mentioned the least often by Czech respondents with only a 7% rate. Czech Republic was mentioned by 14% of Hungarian respondents answering the same question. Judging by the Hungarian responses, the most important fellow Visegrad partner for Hungary is Poland (mentioned as one of the five most important partners by nearly 80% of respondents). Slovakia was mentioned by 19% of Hungarians. For Polish respondents, Hungary was also mentioned the most often of the other Visegrad countries, although only by 31% - which means that France or the United Kingdom was listed more often. Only 4% of Poles mentioned Slovakia, which is less than e.g. Sweden. The overall perception of mutual importance of the Visegrad partners is however confirmed by placing them on a scale, where all of the states were generally placed in the “important” or “somewhat important” category by most respondents. However, for each of the Visegrad states, there are partners – or allies – considered more important by the respondents than the fellow Visegrad members. According to Czech respondents, Germany and the USA are more important for Czech foreign policy than any of the three remaining Visegrad states. Hungary is considered to be less important for the Czech Republic than Austria, France, the United Kingdom, Israel, Russia and even Ukraine. In the case of Hungary, Poland scores behind Germany and the USA regarding perceived importance, but more people chose “important” when assessing the importance of Russia than that of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. For Polish respondents, apart from Germany and the US, it is Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Russia and France that are more important than the other Visegrad states. For Slovak respondents, the other Visegrad states are seen as the most important partners, together with the USA and France.

Moving on to the quality of the relations, the mutual perception among the Visegrad states is between “very good” and “good”. The only cases of the evaluation exceeding a value of 2 is the perception of Polish respondents of the relations between their country and the Czech Republic and both Slovak and Hungarian respondents of the relations between Slovakia and Hungary. Again however, the quality of relations with some states outside of the Visegrad Group has been evaluated as the same or better than with some of the other Visegrad states. The Czech respondents evaluated the relations of the Czech Republic with Slovakia as the best of all 20 selected countries. However, relations with Israel and Germany were assessed as better than with Poland. Hungary came seventh in the evaluation, behind the USA and Austria (although the difference is not big). The quality of Czech-Hungarian relations was assessed on a similar level as with the United Kingdom and Canada. According to the Hungarian respondents, the quality of relations with Poland is evaluated as the



best of the 20 countries. However, the Czech Republic and Slovakia come eighth and ninth behind Israel, Italy, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and China. According to the Polish respondents, the quality of relations with Hungary and the Czech Republic is the second and fourth best, after the US and the United Kingdom. In the case of Slovakia, the Czech Republic ranks first regarding the quality of mutual relations. Poland comes in fifth place, preceded by Germany, France and Austria. Hungary did not make it into the first ten, ending up in eleventh place behind the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Romania and Serbia.

Asked whether the V4 members should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing their country's foreign policy interests, 55% of Poles, 54% of Hungarians, 48% of Slovaks and 40% of Czechs agreed or somewhat agreed. The Czech respondents were the only ones who more often disagreed or somewhat disagreed to such a proposition, Slovaks' opinions being more or less balanced.

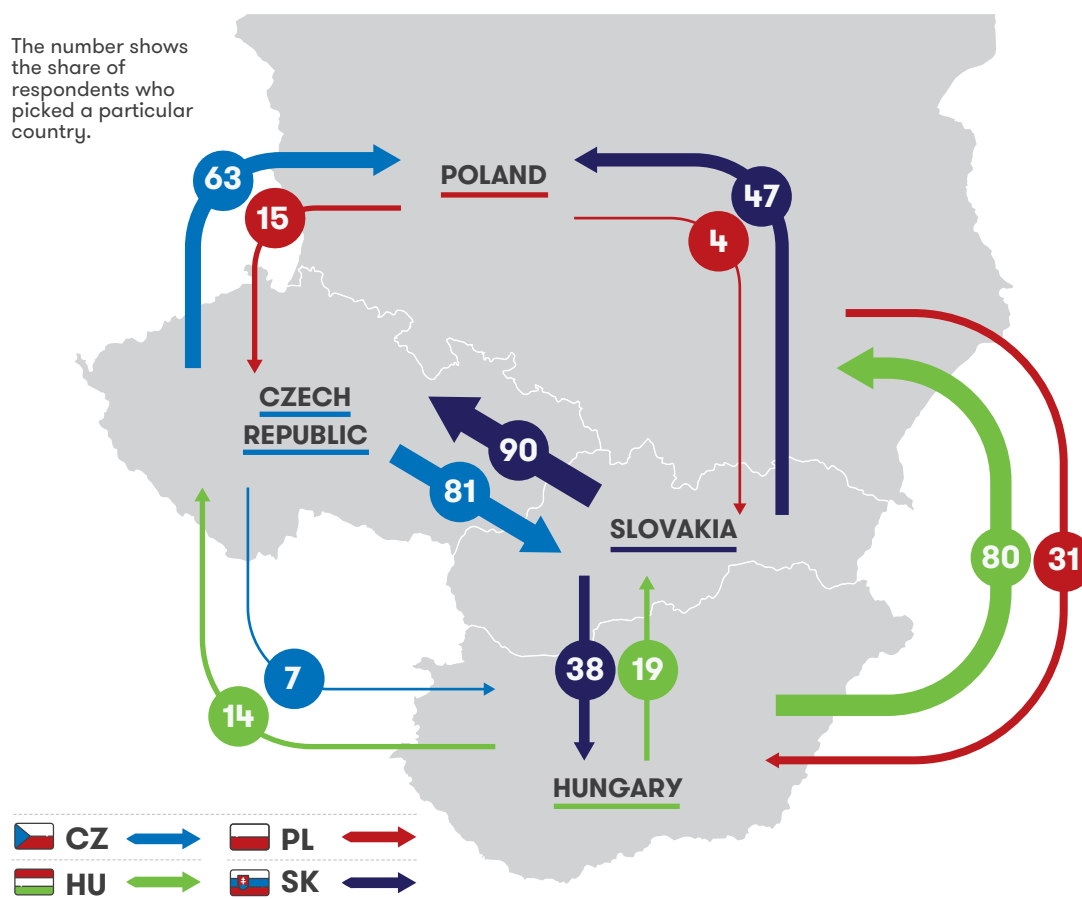
INTRA-VISEGRAD RELATIONS

%



WHICH COUNTRIES (BOTH EUROPEAN AND NON-EUROPEAN) ARE THE 5 MOST IMPORTANT PARTNERS FOR [YOUR COUNTRY]'S FOREIGN POLICY?

The number shows the share of respondents who picked a particular country.



From the above-mentioned data, we may assume that the mutual sense of importance is strong among the Visegrad countries but does not really compete with the partnership with the US and Germany. Also, the mutual preferences in the Visegrad Group are rather differentiated, showing a better mutual perception between the Czech Republic and Slovakia on one hand and between Hungary and Poland on the



other. There are also other important partners for the Visegrad Group. Especially the Hungarian foreign policy vectors seem to differ a bit, judging by the perceptions of the Hungarian respondents. Hungarian foreign policy is perceived as finding good partners not only outside of the Visegrad Group, but also outside of the liberal democracies' club (see Russia, Turkey). As for the European Union, Austria is considered to be an important and good partner for the Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians. Results regarding the importance of the United Kingdom mirror the earlier verbalized displeasure over Brexit, given the often-shared priorities about the future of the EU between the UK and Visegrad countries.

Future important topics



The survey asked the respondents to evaluate the likely developments in importance of fifteen selected topical issues over the next five years in their country's foreign policy agenda. Each issue was to be put on a five-stage scale ranging from "more important" to "less important". The results align with the answers to the question regarding future importance of EU policy agendas, elaborated upon further in this paper.

IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED ISSUES FOR THE V4 COUNTRIES

%



COMPARED TO NOW, HOW IMPORTANT WILL THE FOLLOWING ISSUES BE FOR [YOUR COUNTRY]'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?



**ASYLUM AND
MIGRATION
POLICY**

Share of answers
Somewhat more important
and More important.

**INSTABILITY
IN THE EU'S
NEIGHBORHOOD**



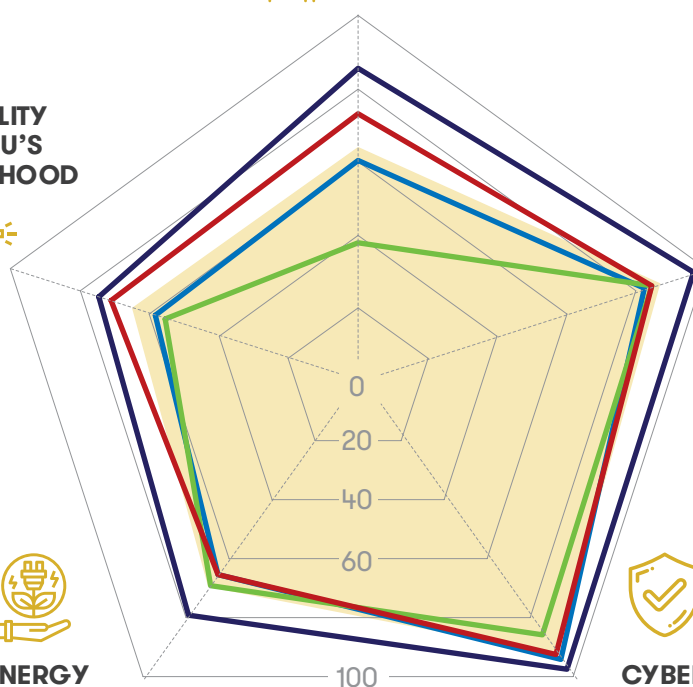
**CLIMATE
CHANGE**



**ENERGY
SECURITY**



**CYBER
SECURITY**



Among the topics that are seen as prospectively gaining in relevance in the near future, cyber security is the most prominent with 92% of respondents opting for the "more important" or "somewhat more important" category. Similarly, 87% of respondents thought so about climate change.

The other three issues, where the combination of "more important" and "somewhat more important" evaluation scored more than 60% of respondents, were Asylum and Migration Policy, energy security and instability in the EU's neighborhood.

Interestingly, while the importance of Asylum and Migration Policy is expected to grow or "somewhat grow" by 60% of Czech respondents, 73% of Polish and 85% of Slovak ones, only 37% of Hungarian respondents are of the same opinion. Moreover, 8% of Hungarians believe that the importance of the issue is going to decline.



While one third of Czech and Polish respondents and 45% of Slovak respondents believe that promotion of human rights and democracy will be more important for their country in the next five years, only 18% of Hungarian respondents agree. Similarly, only 23% of Hungarians expect upholding international law and norms to become more important in the next five years, compared to 47% of Czechs, 42% of Poles and as much as 68% of Slovaks. Finally, while 38% of both Czechs and Poles and 54% of Slovaks think that spread and use of weapons of mass destruction will grow in importance, only 18% of Hungarian respondents agree.



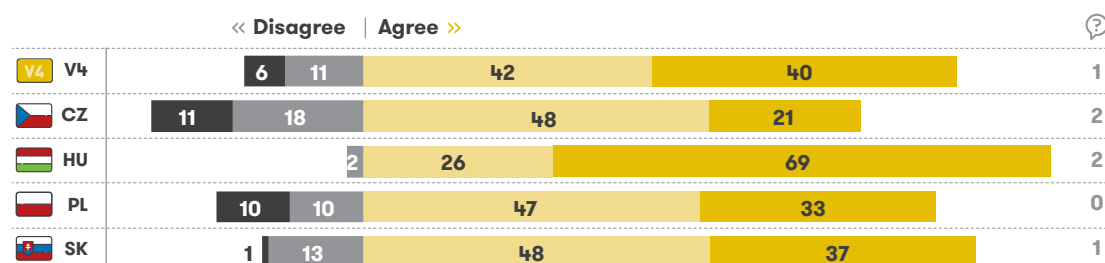
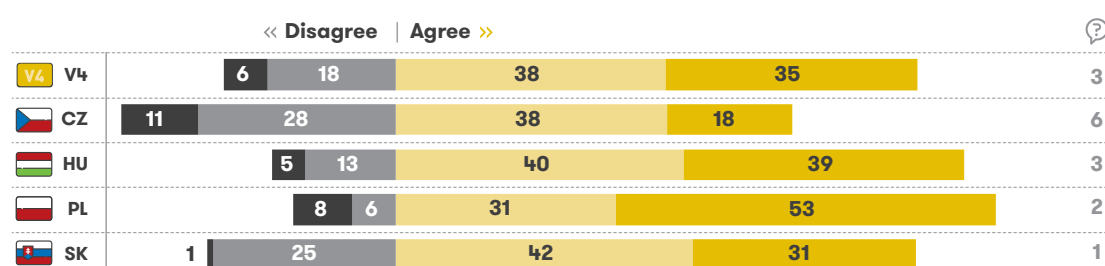
The majority of respondents believe that participation in the Visegrad Group is important for their countries. Among them, Hungarians stick out with 95% of people agreeing or somewhat agreeing to that claim. The largest percentage of respondents disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing is to be found among Czechs – 29%. When it comes to whether participation in the Visegrad Group is beneficial for pursuing their country's national interests, it is also the Hungarians who overwhelmingly agree or somewhat agree (89%). The rate is a bit lower in the Polish (81%) and Slovak (71%) case. Only 48% of Czechs agree or somewhat agree that the participation of the Czech Republic in the Visegrad Group is beneficial for pursuing Czech interests. Interestingly, the rate of respondents who agree or somewhat agree to participation in the Visegrad Group being beneficial for pursuing their country's interest declined by 10 percentage points in the case of the Czech Republic but increased by 5 pp in the case of Hungary and 10 pp in the case of Poland compared to the 2017 survey.

Not many respondents believe that the Visegrad Group could represent an alternative to the EU core for their country's future. Still, the number of Hungarians who believe that (34%) is a bit higher than in the other three groups (14% of Czechs, 10% of Poles and 12% of Slovaks) and grew by 12 pp since 2017.

It seems that the Czech respondents are also the least enthusiastic about the Visegrad Group more often striving for a joint approach, with only 55% agreeing or somewhat agreeing, compared to 79% of Hungarians, 84% of Poles and 73% of Slovaks.

Hungarians and Poles are more in favor of further institutionalization of the Visegrad Group by creating a single secretariat – 51% of Hungarians and 53% of Poles agreeing or somewhat agreeing, as opposed to only 21% of Slovaks and 12% of Czechs. Regarding strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of Visegrad cooperation, it is again Hungarians and Poles who are most in favor with 53% of Hungarians and 57% of Poles agreeing or somewhat agreeing. 80% of Hungarians think that the Visegrad Group should incorporate more areas of cooperation, while 61% of Poles, 54% of Slovaks and 49% of Czechs agree. It is noteworthy that compared to 2017 there was a slight increase in numbers of respondents in all four countries who are opposed to that. There is not a great deal of enthusiasm about enlarging the Visegrad Group, nor is there for abolishing the Group. The biggest support for abolishing the Visegrad Group is among the Czech respondents, however only at about 18%. The Czechs also seem to have the biggest appetite for leaving the V₄ – 16% of the respondents agree or somewhat agree to the Czech Republic leaving the Visegrad Group.

There is relatively large support for cooperation of the Visegrad Group with third parties or creating a broader format of cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe (although, interestingly, the support for the latter is the lowest with the Hungarian respondents, with more of them rather disagreeing to it compared to 2017). While this might be interpreted as support for maintaining the V₄+ format, the survey unfortunately does not give us enough further information to elaborate on what the “broader format of cooperation” could be or what third parties would be most desirable to work more closely with.


TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP?
→ PARTICIPATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP IS IMPORTANT FOR [YOUR COUNTRY].

→ THE V4 SHOULD MORE OFTEN STRIVE FOR A JOINT APPROACH.


ANSWERS: — Disagree — Somewhat disagree — Somewhat agree — Agree — I don't know

The area of Visegrad cooperation that was evaluated by the respondents as the most successful (of a list of selected areas) was coordination within the EU, evaluated as successful or somewhat successful by 56% of respondents on average (see below). Another area where Visegrad cooperation was perceived as rather successful was culture and education, evaluated by 51% of respondents as successful or somewhat successful). On the other hand, areas considered mostly somewhat unsuccessful or unsuccessful were defense (by 51% of respondents) and research and development (by 47% of respondents). The positive and negative views were rather balanced in the case of cooperation regarding the EU's Eastern neighborhood, energy policy, infrastructure and Western Balkan countries' rapprochement to the EU. Cooperation in the area of defense was regarded as unsuccessful mainly by Polish (63%), Czech (57%) and Slovak (48%) respondents, while only 34% Hungarians agreed.

Slovak respondents were the most positive about the role of Visegrad in the EU's Eastern neighborhood, with 63% evaluating it as successful or rather successful while in the case of the other three countries, the "unsuccessful" or "somewhat unsuccessful" rating prevailed. Slovaks (62%) and Hungarians (51%) have more positive views about Visegrad cooperation regarding energy policy (evaluating it "successful" or "somewhat successful") than the Czechs and Poles (both 29%).

Areas that should gain the most relevance for the Visegrad Group in the next 5 years according to stakeholders, are coordination within the EU, energy policy, infrastructure and research and development. Especially Hungarian and Slovak respondents also wish the EU's Eastern neighborhood to be more important for the Visegrad Group in the next five years.

The European Union



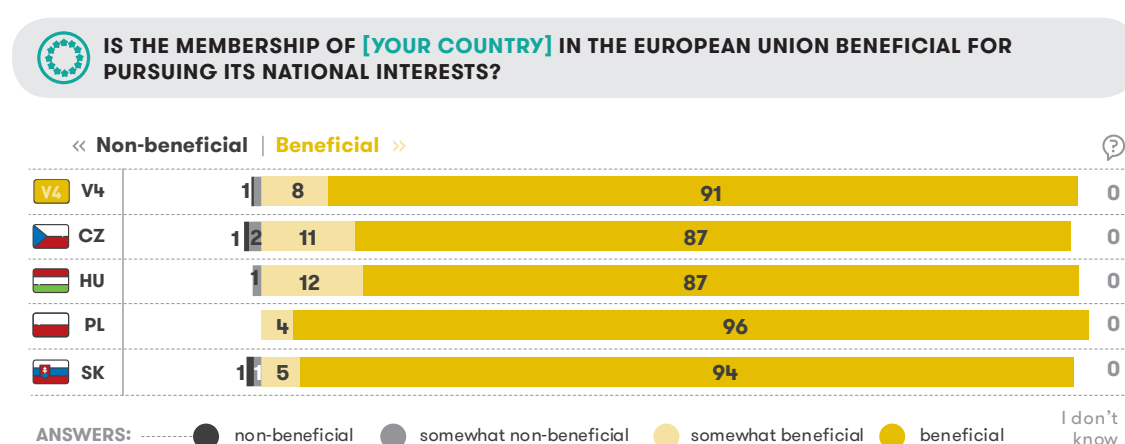
With the start of the new institutional cycle, that is the European parliamentary elections in May and the setting up of the new European Commission in the autumn under the prospective leadership of Ursula von der Leyen, 2019 has been a tumultuous and highly political year for the European Union. Conducted a few months after the EP elections but still before the planned new Commission setup was announced in September, these developments gave the overall European backdrop to the Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy survey. In this light, a significant part of the questions naturally asked stakeholders about EU matters, among them the benefits of their country's EU membership, their expectations concerning the future development of the Union, future importance of various policy areas as well as concrete developments regarding various aspects of the external relations of the Union. The following section will highlight the main takeaways focusing on two key themes: the expected future development of the EU and the Visegrad stakeholders' expectations regarding external affairs.

The future development of the EU

After a steady decline in EP election turnout ever since the vote has been held every five years since 1979, the trend turned, and voter participation increased this time around reaching 50.62%. The increased interest in European affairs showed to different degrees in the Visegrad Group where turnout reached its highest ever since the four countries joined the EU 15 years ago. Nonetheless, their turnout still remained below the European average with Poland and Hungary taking a lead in the group with 45.68% and 43.36% respectively, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia lagging significantly behind with the lowest turnouts in the whole EU, 28.72% and 22.74% respectively.

EU MEMBERSHIP

%



Similarly, it is in Poland and Hungary where the EU is seen rather positively by the majority of the population (54% and 52% respectively), whereas in the Czech



Republic and Slovakia, the EU is viewed less positively (29% and 36% respectively), rather neutrally by the biggest share of the population. This division is especially interesting to note considering that it is in the two countries that have serious conflicts in the EU, including their ongoing Article 7 procedures, that the population shows more enthusiasm toward the Union.

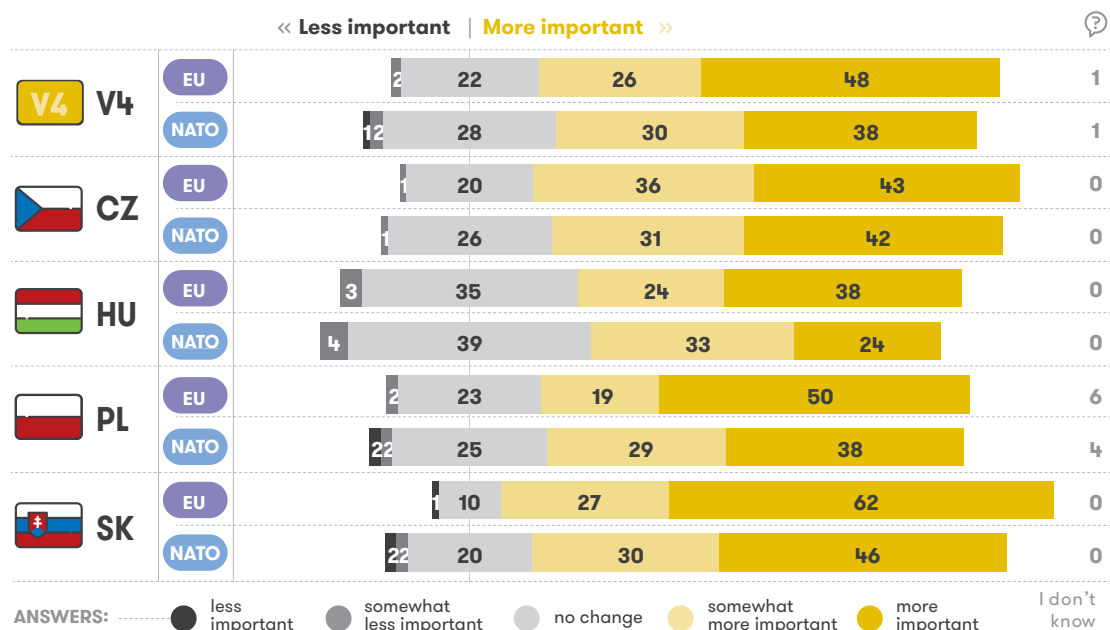
Despite such differences among citizens' views as well as on the level of high politics, the surveyed stakeholders in all four countries evaluated the EU similarly: overwhelmingly positively. On average, 99% of all respondents believe that membership in the EU is beneficial or somewhat beneficial for their country. What's more, in Poland, there was not even a single respondent who would have doubted the benefits of being part of the Union. Furthermore, a clear majority in all four countries (75% on average) thinks that the EU is going to be even more or somewhat more important in the next five years. This opinion is shared by as many as 89% of respondents in the only Eurozone member, Slovakia. The share of those who expect the EU to become more or somewhat more important for their country outweighs those who expect NATO's importance to increase (68% on average, with again Slovakia at the forefront with 76%). This suggests that while security and defense concerns run high in the region, the spectrum of international challenges is certainly wider and concerns areas where the EU is seen as the adequate platform to act.

FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF THE EU AND NATO

%



COMPARED TO NOW, HOW IMPORTANT WILL THE FOLLOWING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS BE FOR [YOUR COUNTRY] IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?



Indeed, a variety of sectoral issues as well as regional priorities are expected to rise on the EU's agenda in the coming five years. In her political guidelines published in June, Commission President-designate Ursula von der Leyen herself identified six rather broad areas she believes deserve attention in the next



five years. These include a European Green Deal with environmental and climate policy, and sustainable development at its core; the harmonization of social fairness and prosperity under the label of ‘an economy that works for the people’; the promotion of the digital agenda to make Europe fit for the digital age; the contentiously named priority of ‘protecting our European way of life’ encompassing asylum and migration policy, external borders, internal security, Schengen-related regulations as well as the rule of law; strengthening Europe in the world through trade, international development, enlargement in the Western Balkans, relations with the United Kingdom and strengthening European security; and finally, a new momentum for European democracy by strengthening cooperation with the European Parliament, channeling people’s views through consultations and potentially opening the treaties. Several of these topics have featured among the twenty areas we asked respondents to evaluate regarding their expected future importance, and many of them indeed are among the issues which are widely expected to rise to the top of the EU’s agenda.

Nine in ten Visegrad stakeholders expect environmental and climate issues to become more or somewhat more important for the EU in the coming five years, which reflects a close alignment with the earlier discussed prospective national priorities. Just like on the national agenda, the importance of asylum and migration policy as well as energy policy are widely expected to rise at least somewhat on the European agenda as well, with 79% and 73% of respondents sharing these views. Whereas significant differences were found regarding the prospective importance of asylum and migration on the national agenda among the V4, the variation is big but not as striking when it comes to the EU level: 90% of Slovak, but only 70% of Czech respondents expect that the policy will receive more or somewhat more attention.

The variety of issues predicted to rise on the EU’s agenda cover areas of both exclusive and shared competences, therefore it is also interesting to see how the Visegrad countries expect the European Union as an institution to develop in the future. Like the Trends of Visegrad European Policy survey in 2017, the current research also asked stakeholders to evaluate how likely the realization of the five scenarios put forward in the European Commission’s White Paper on the Future of the European Union in March 2017 is. Two years ago, the scenario most widely perceived to be probable or somewhat probable to unfold was that of the differentiated integration (“Those who want more, do more”), while the rollback of the integration to the single market (“Nothing but the Single Market”) was most widely seen as not likely to materialize. These perceptions still hold, with 87% thinking that the EU will (somewhat) probably move in the direction of differentiated integration and 30% expecting a devolution of the European integration back to the single market. Compared to 2017, the share of those who expected the scenario of “Doing less more efficiently” to materialize has increased by about half. Currently, on average 74% thinks this scenario is to various degrees probable, whereas in 2017 the proportion was only 49%. This trend is somewhat at odds with the expectation that the EU will broaden its focus to pay more attention to areas that so far have received less joint attention (like climate change) or have gradually been on the rise over the past years already (like digital agenda).



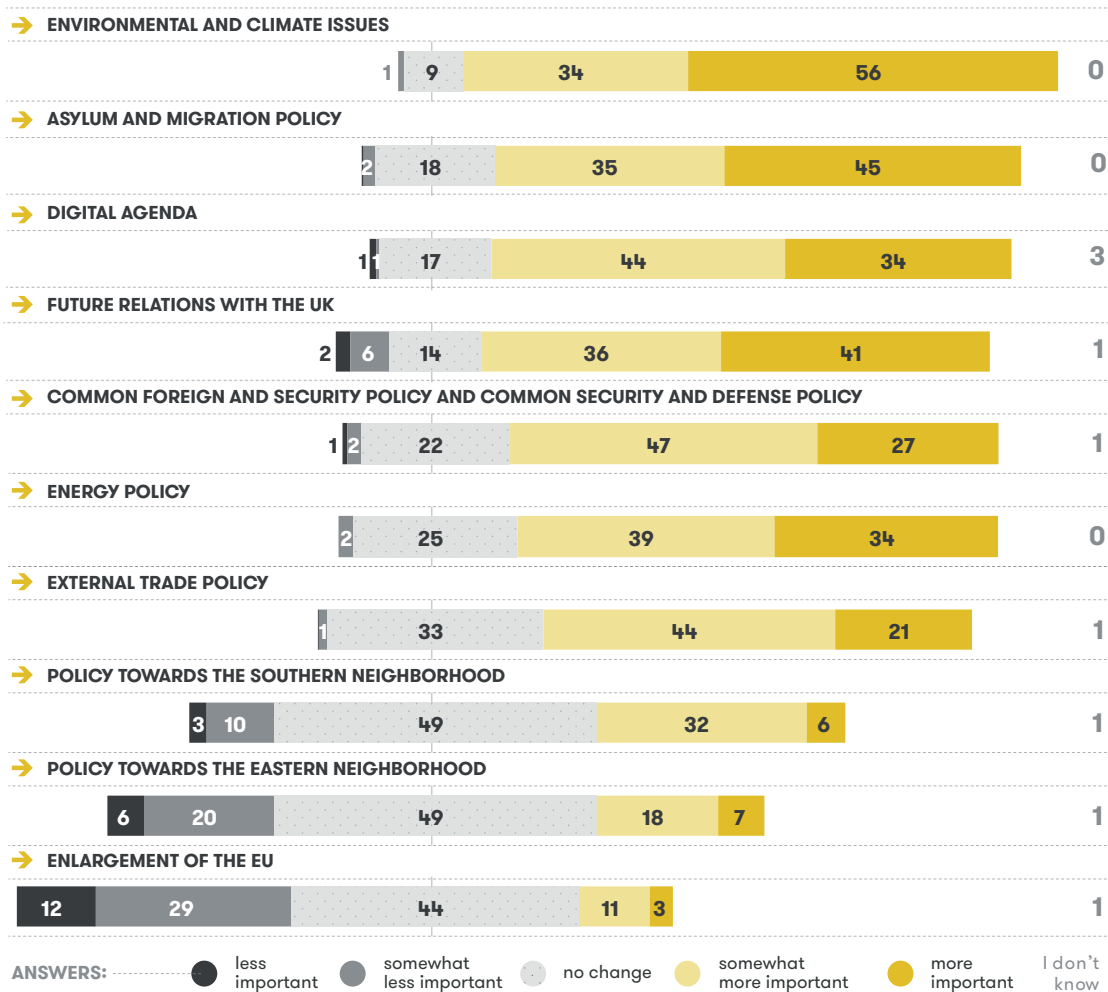
FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED EU POLICIES

%



HOW IMPORTANT WILL THE FOLLOWING ISSUES BE FOR THE EU IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

« Less important | More important »



About three-quarters of the respondents foresee that the digital agenda (78%), future relations with the UK (77%) and the Common Foreign and Security as well as the Common Security and Defense Policy (74%) will be taken at least somewhat more seriously in the EU in the coming five years, and on average more than 60% predict that external trade (65%), internal security (64%) and the development of the Eurozone (62%) will rise at least somewhat in importance. Although there are naturally differences among the expectations of the Visegrad stakeholders, it is quite striking in the case of internal security: only 46% of Poles expect it to become more or somewhat more important as opposed to 76% of Hungarians. The somewhat related issue of Schengen is predicted to become more or somewhat more important only by 44% of Poles as opposed to 64% of Slovaks and 60% of Hungarians.

Somewhat contrary to von der Leyen's goals to emphasize social fairness, only in Slovakia does the majority of respondents (54%) think that social policy will become at least somewhat more important in the EU, while the majority in the

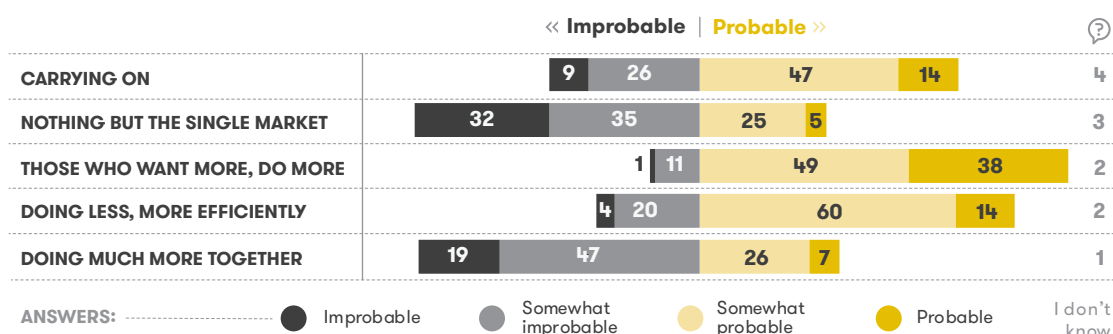


Czech Republic and Hungary think that the importance of the area will remain the same. In Poland, respondents are divided, with slightly more respondents leaning toward increasing importance. Another area where the priorities of the published political guidelines and the expectations of the Visegrad Group are far from aligning is the question of enlargement. While von der Leyen expressed her wish to send a positive message to the Western Balkans, on average 44% of the Visegrad stakeholders think that the importance of the issue will not change, 42% is of the opinion that it will actually fade from the agenda. National differences are not striking.

The variety of issues predicted to rise on the EU's agenda cover areas of both exclusive and shared competences, therefore it is also interesting to see how the Visegrad countries expect the European Union as an institution to develop in the future. Like the Trends of Visegrad European Policy survey in 2017, the current research also asked stakeholders to evaluate how likely the realization of the five scenarios put forward in the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of the European Union in March 2017 is. Two years ago, the scenario most widely perceived to be probable or somewhat probable to unfold was that of differentiated integration ("Those who want more, do more"), while the rollback of integration to the single market ("Nothing but the Single Market") was most widely seen as not likely to materialize. These perceptions still hold, with 87% thinking that the EU will (somewhat) probably move in the direction of differentiated integration and 30% expecting a devolution of European integration back to the single market. Compared to 2017, the share of those who expected the scenario of "Doing less more efficiently" to materialize has increased by about half. Currently, on average 74% thinks this scenario is to various degrees probable, whereas in 2017 the proportion was only 49%. This trend is somewhat at odds with the expectation that the EU will broaden its focus to pay more attention to areas that so far have received less joint attention (like climate change) or have gradually been on the rise over the past few years already (like the digital agenda).



IN YOUR OPINION, HOW PROBABLE ARE THE INDIVIDUAL SCENARIOS, INTRODUCED IN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S WHITE PAPER ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE IN MARCH 2017 TO MATERIALIZE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?



The scenario of a differentiated integration is seen most widely to be (somewhat) probable in all Visegrad countries, but proportions vary: in Poland this view is shared by 96% of the respondents, in Slovakia by 88%, in the Czech Republic by 82% and in Hungary by “only” 81%. Whereas “Doing less more efficiently” is the second most widely expected development on average, rather than this, “Carrying on” without major changes is expected to happen by more Polish stakeholders. As mentioned, devolution to the Single Market is regarded as a likely scenario by the least people on average, but the proportions of those differ quite significantly: while in Poland 38%, in Hungary 33% and in Slovakia 32% consider it at least somewhat likely, in the Czech Republic only 15% would consider it a probable or somewhat probable development. Additionally, diverging from the average, among Hungarian stakeholders this was actually not the prospect which finished last, albeit it came close. The scenario that the least Hungarian respondents consider probable or somewhat probable is that member states will share more power to “Do much more together” (31%). Interestingly, still more Hungarian stakeholders find this development likely than Czechs (25%). Although this scenario, along with the possible development of returning to the Single Market is seen as probable or somewhat probable least widely in Poland, that still means 38% of respondents in this case.

The Hungarian respondents group is the only one where the opinion prevailed that the Visegrad Group is a concerted actor in the EU (i.e. “agree” and “somewhat agree” options chosen by 60% of respondents). 60% of Czech, 65% of Polish and 69% of Slovak respondents disagreed or somewhat disagreed with such a statement. Regarding the issue of the Visegrad Group as an “influential actor” in the EU, we got similar results – 59% of Hungarians think that the Visegrad Group is influential in the EU, while 40% disagree. At the same time, 38% of Czech respondents, 33% of Polish ones and 50% of Slovak ones agree or somewhat agree and 61%, 65% and 50% somewhat disagree or disagree. However, when it comes to whether the Visegrad Group plays a constructive role in the EU, 46% of Hungarians agree or somewhat agree to that, while 53% somewhat disagree or disagree. Still, this is the most positive opinion regarding the question among the Visegrad Group – about two thirds of Poles and Slovaks and nearly three quarters of Czechs disagree with the Visegrad Group being constructive in the EU.



When evaluating the performance of the Visegrad Group regarding coordination within the EU, 73% of Hungarians, 60% of Slovaks, 50% of Czechs and 43% of Poles find it successful or somewhat successful. Respondents from all four countries believe that coordination in the EU will be more important or somewhat more important in the next 5 years.

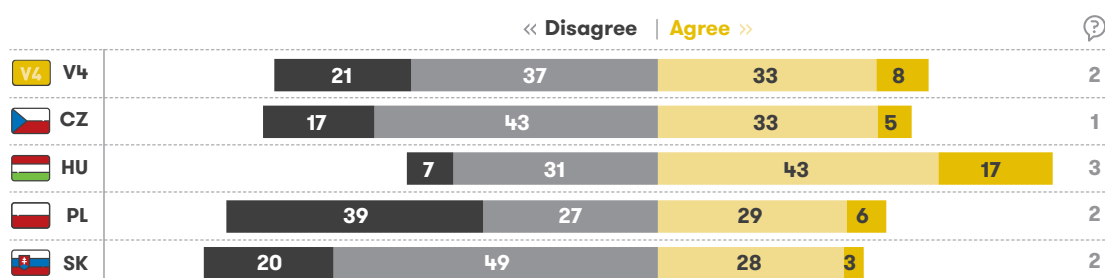
VISEGRAD GROUP IN THE EU

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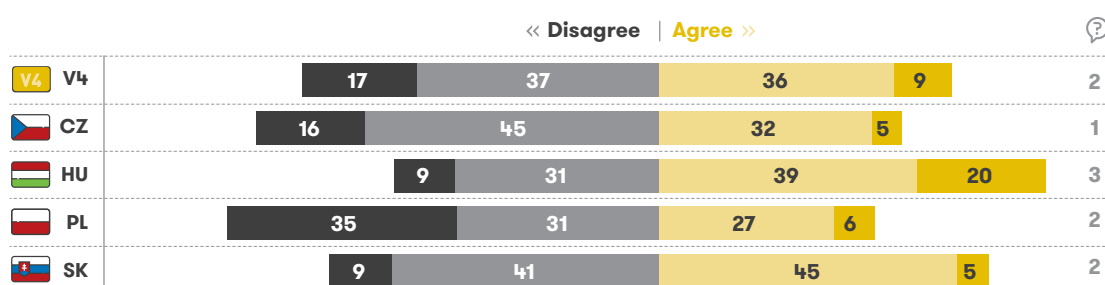


TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION?

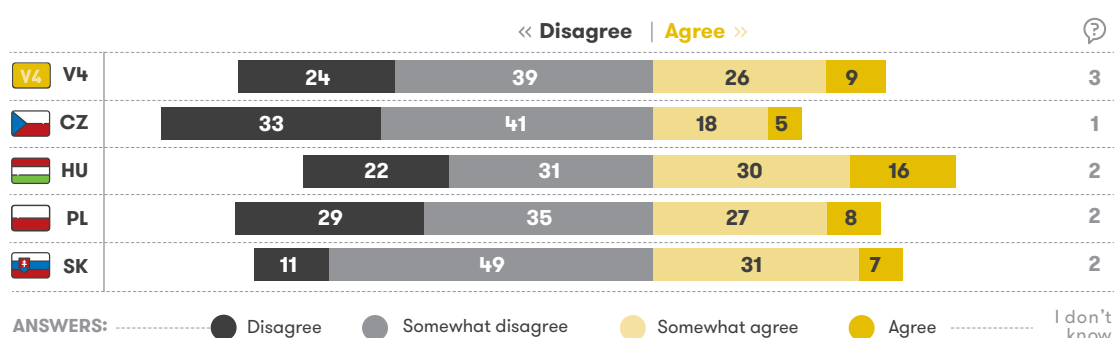
→ THE VISEGRAD GROUP IS A CONCERTED ACTOR IN THE EU.



→ THE VISEGRAD GROUP IS AN INFLUENTIAL ACTOR IN THE EU.



→ THE VISEGRAD GROUP PLAYS A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN THE EU.





The EU's external relations

Following the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States, the European Union was confronted with the need to invest more into its security. With continued instabilities in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Russia and China seeking to expand their perceived and actual influence, albeit usually by different means, the European Union must strengthen its role on the global stage to be able to stand up to the competition. This very goal was highlighted by Ursula von der Leyen among her key priorities. In her political guidelines, she devoted specific attention to the EU's global role in trade and international development, relations with Africa, the Western Balkans and the United Kingdom. She also underlined the need to develop security and defense cooperation further while preserving the central role of NATO in Europe's collective defense. Future relations with the eastern neighborhood countries were additionally addressed in her mission letter to the Commissioner-designate (at the time still Hungarian László Trócsányi).

As mentioned before, several of the above and related issues are indeed expected to rise on the EU's agenda in the next five years according to the Visegrad stakeholders as well, with the notable exception of enlargement. Although Visegrad countries are typically known for advocating the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU, they clearly don't expect the issue to gain in importance. In practical terms, after the Juncker Commission, which declared that there would be no enlargement under its tenure, this does not suggest much optimism with regards to adopting new members to the European family any time soon. However, in a 10-year period, on average two-thirds of Visegrad stakeholders still expect that some Western Balkan countries could join the EU. Although the difference is small, it is interesting to note that Hungary is the least (63%) and Slovakia is the most (67%) optimistic in this regard.

Besides enlargement, the other external affairs topic that normally enjoys the attention of Visegrad countries' own foreign policies and support in the EU framework as well is the development and rapprochement of the EU's relations with partners in the eastern neighborhood. They, however, do not expect that the policy will increase in importance on the EU's agenda in the coming five years, rather, they assume that it will receive the same attention as now. In the longer term, however, relations are expected to intensify as on average 41% of the respondents consider it at least somewhat possible that the EU will start accession negotiations with Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine during the coming decade. Slovak respondents are the most numerous who agree that this could happen (51%), whereas Hungarians are much more skeptical (28%).

With the war in eastern Ukraine still ongoing and Crimea still occupied by Russia, relations with Kyiv are without doubt the most central question in the eastern neighborhood. In the past few years, due to a debate over the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, Budapest's relations with Kyiv have significantly worsened, as reflected in the evaluation of the Hungarian respondents, noted earlier. Hungary has been blocking Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO, which, on top of Budapest's cordial ties with Russia, has raised concerns in Ukraine. When it comes to maintaining sanctions against Russia though, Hungary has so far refrained from vetoing. Preferences of Hungarian stakeholders show that among them there is actually quite a lim-



ited appetite to terminate the sanctions immediately. Only 15% agree at least to some degree. The idea is slightly more popular among Slovak stakeholders (17%) and is massively opposed in Poland, where only 4% would get rid of the sanctions against Russia immediately. On average, three-quarters of the respondents agree or agree somewhat that sanctions should be maintained until Russia entirely withdraws from Ukraine (including Crimea), and only an average of 14% agrees or agrees somewhat that Crimea's annexation should be accepted as the status quo.

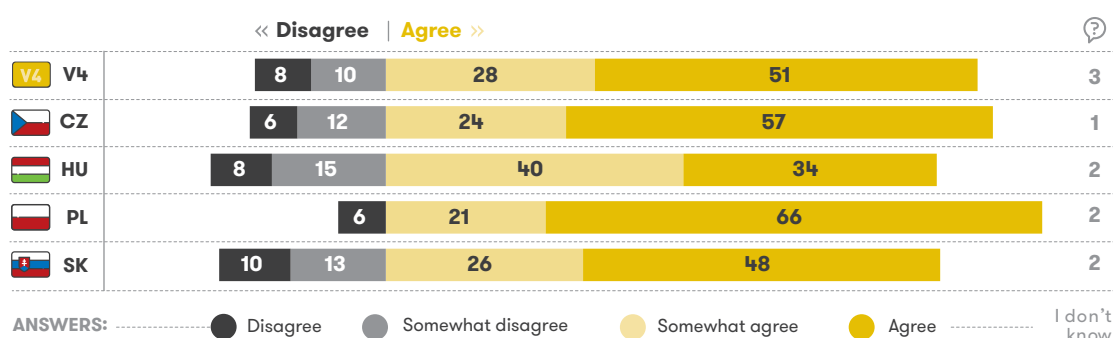
EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

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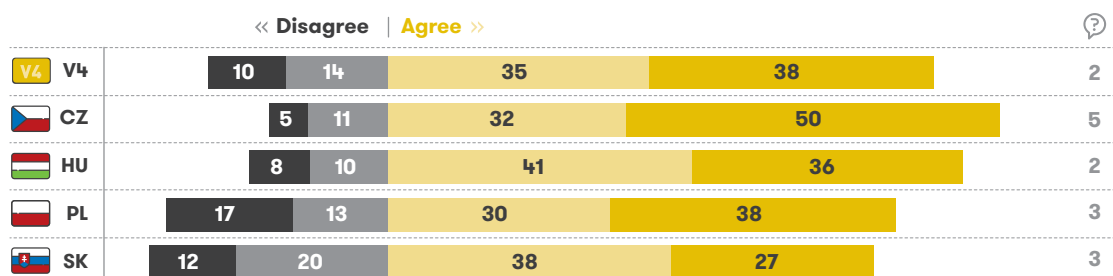


TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS?

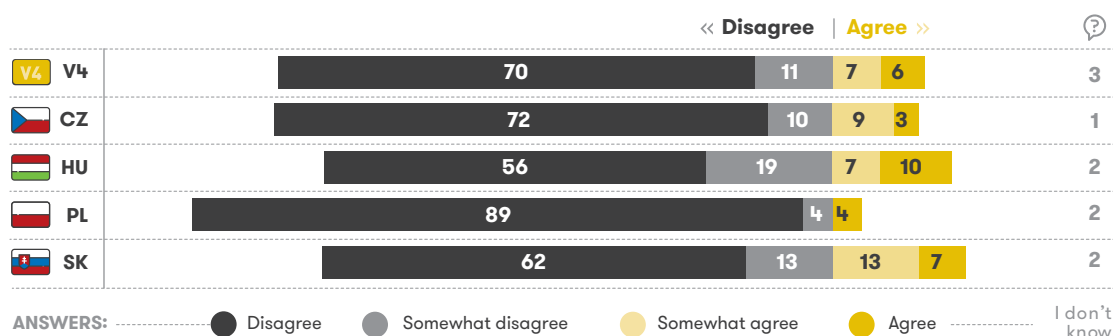
→ THE EU'S SANCTIONS POLICY VIS-A-VIS RUSSIA SHOULD BE KEPT UNTIL RUSSIA FULLY RESPECTS THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF UKRAINE (INCLUDING CRIMEA).



→ THE EU'S SANCTIONS POLICY VIS-A-VIS RUSSIA SHOULD BE KEPT UNTIL SOME KIND OF AGREEMENT IS REACHED BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE.



→ THE EU SHOULD ACCEPT THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA AS THE STATUS QUO.



The southern neighborhood received increasing attention in the V4 primarily due to the refugee and migration crisis and as a source of instability and insecurity. The previ-



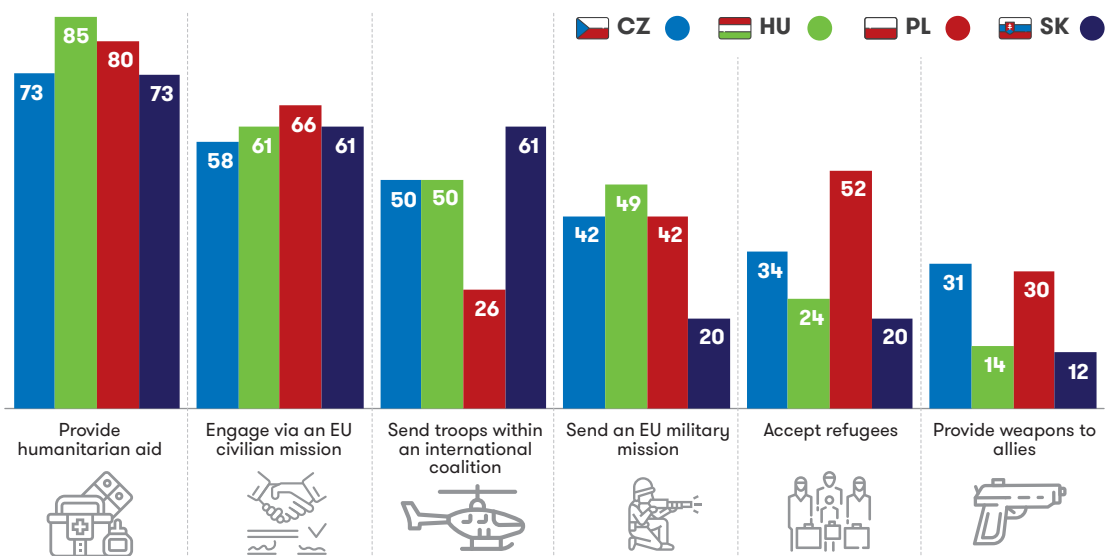
ously discussed expectation across the V4 that instabilities in the EU's neighborhood will rise on national foreign policy agendas is likely also due to this broader region. On the EU agenda, however, respondents generally expect that the importance of the southern neighborhood will remain as it is now. Stakeholders were also asked what the EU should do to address security challenges in its neighborhood and were offered a variety of possible answers from military intervention through civilian support to accepting refugees or just doing nothing. The most popular step in all countries was providing humanitarian aid, followed by engaging in the region via civilian missions. The third most accepted tool among Czech, Hungarian and Slovak respondents is sending troops within an international coalition. In the third place, Polish respondents would rather have that the EU accepts refugees. Accepting refugees, perhaps not surprisingly, is not widely supported though. While 52% of Polish respondents think the EU should help in such a way, only 34% of Czech, 24% of Hungarian and 20% of Slovak stakeholders think likewise.

ADDRESSING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE EU NEIGHBORHOOD

%



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TOOLS SHOULD THE EU CONSIDER USING IN ADDRESSING SECURITY THREATS IN ITS NEIGHBORHOOD?



Beyond the direct neighborhood, the questionnaire surveyed perceptions about the transatlantic relationship, too. Ties with the United States are not only important for the Visegrad states, as reflected in the respondents' evaluation discussed earlier, but are central for the European Union as well both in terms of its security and economic ties. While both of these topics are overwhelmingly expected to become more important in EU-US relations, the Trump Presidency brought ample uncertainties in both regards. In light of the breakdown of TTIP negotiations and the recent introduction of tariffs on certain European products, it is no surprise that the majority of Visegrad stakeholders on average expect that relations between the EU and the US in the field of economy and trade will worsen at least somewhat in the next five years (53%). 23% expects no particular change, while only 19% expects at least some improvement. Regarding security and defense, there is no sign of similarly strong pessimism: only 24% expects relations to worsen or worsen somewhat across the V4. While the biggest share of



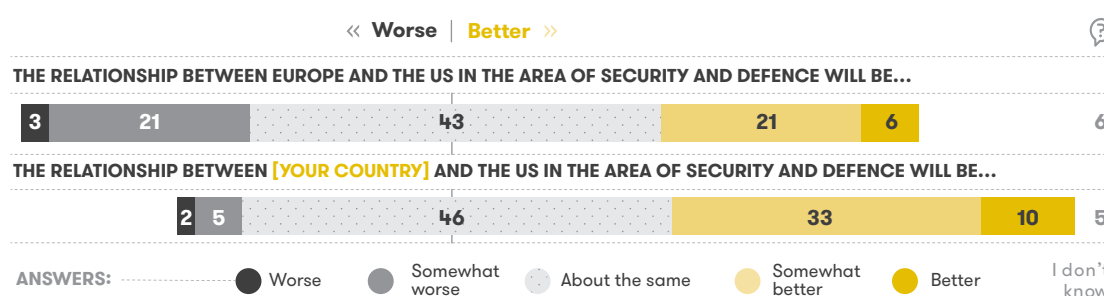
Czechs (45%), Poles (38%) and Slovaks (58%) expect no change in EU-US relations in security and defense, Hungarians mostly (44%) expect relations so actually improve at least somewhat. In this field, the majority of Hungarians and Poles expect bilateral ties to positively develop with the US, while the majority of Czechs and Slovaks don't expect change. The most typical assumption regarding bilateral economic and trade ties is also a lack of change in all Visegrad countries.

FUTURE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

%



IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WILL TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS LOOK LIKE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS IN THE COURSE OF THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? (V4 average)



The issues of trade and security have become central in the EU's relations with China over the years, while the Central European countries are showing increased interest in cooperating with Beijing in hopes of investment. However, perceptions and interests regarding trade with China apparently significantly differ among the Visegrad countries. While over 70% of Polish and Slovak, and 60% of Czech respondents agree at least to some extent that the EU should adopt protectionist measures in response to Chinese exports, only 34% of Hungarians are of this opinion. In this light, it is no surprise that there is no unequivocal support for trade liberalization with China: Poland with only 9% of the respondents in favor clearly stands out, but also few Czechs (25%) and Slovaks (29%) are positive about the idea. Hungarians (40%) are more supportive but are clearly not united behind such a step either. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority in all four countries agree somewhat or fully that Chinese activities pose a security threat both to their own country and to the EU. A clear majority would also be fully or somewhat in favor in all V4 states of their country speaking up against human rights violations in China, with support for the step ranging between 89% in the Czech Republic and 59% in Hungary.

Finally, with the date of Brexit drawing closer (unless a prolongation is agreed again), the survey asked stakeholders what type of Brexit they think the EU should strive for under present circumstances. As stakeholders overwhelmingly consider their country's ties with the UK important, and in practice significant numbers of citizens from the Visegrad countries live, work and study in the UK, it is no surprise that respondents preferred a moderated, "soft" Brexit, or actually for the UK to stay in the EU. Nonetheless, if Brexit went through, to regulate relations they overwhelmingly preferred an EU-UK deal (96% on average fully or somewhat in favor), as opposed to possible regional or bilateral agreements with the United Kingdom (35% and 41% respectively fully or somewhat in favor). Ad hoc handling of relations is clearly rejected with 86% of Visegrad respondents fully or somewhat opposing this possibility.



Just like its previous editions, this year's "Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy" research attempted to acquire an informed insight into the foreign policy communities of the four Visegrad Group states. Although the chosen method of data collection necessarily resulted in a limited size and varying composition of the sample, and the results cannot be considered to capture preferences or intentions of the foreign policy executives, the survey and following analysis managed to bring valid data about opinions and tendencies of a significant number of foreign policy professionals in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, which we hope will feed into the foreign policy debate in the Visegrad Group. The key conclusion is, that in spite of its considerably compromised image since 2015, the Visegrad Group states' foreign policies are still perceived as firmly embedded in the European Union and the Euro-Atlantic framework in general.

Notwithstanding some harsh rhetoric aimed at "Brussels", coming from the V4 capitals, the EU is regarded by stakeholders from all four countries not only as important, but also as beneficial. The majority of respondents believe that its importance is going to grow in the near future. Coordination in the EU has been evaluated as the most successful area of Visegrad cooperation, even though only by 56% of respondents on average. Coordination in the EU is also widely expected to gain even more relevance in the coming years. On the other hand, the Visegrad Group is not considered to be particularly concerted in its actions and positions on the EU level. Somewhat self-critically, many respondents also do not consider the Visegrad Group to be constructive or even influential in the EU. There are, however, variations in the prevailing opinions among the respondents from single countries.

Variations also appear in the opinions of the Visegrad countries' foreign policy stakeholders on Visegrad cooperation itself. It is not very surprising that in several areas Hungarian respondents proved to be the most optimistic about it, given that in recent years, Hungarian governmental representatives were rather loud in praising the platform and tried to make Visegrad one of the main tools of their foreign and European policy. Czechs on the other hand seem to have the most reservations about the V4. However, the overall perception of Visegrad cooperation by respondents from all four countries remains positive. Furthermore, the strength of relations among the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia on the multilateral level reflects the respective bilateral relations, even though a slight mutual preference is clear between the Czech Republic and Slovakia on one side and between Hungary and Poland on the other. However, the "exclusivity" of mutual relations among the Visegrad states is not to be overestimated.

Apart from the fellow Visegrad countries, there are other – and often more important – bilateral partners for the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, the main ones being Germany and the US. After a perceived deterioration in the quality of mutual relations between the Visegrad states and Germany measured by our 'Trends of Visegrad European Policy' survey in 2017, an apparent consequence of the heated debate about migration, the average perception has improved. There are nonetheless differences between the perception of Czechs and Slovaks on the one



hand and Hungarians and Poles on the other. Hungarians tend to see the relations of their country towards Russia, Turkey, Italy or China in a better light than the rest of their Visegrad partners do, which confirms the different foreign policy path that the Hungarian government decided to take. In spite of that, not even Hungarian respondents expressed much support for abandoning sanctions against Russia and they also tend to perceive China as a threat in terms of security.

The results confirm that as much as the Visegrad Group can be perceived by some actors as a sort of unified and institutionalized actor – and even though it is often presented as such by some, especially the prime ministers – the interests and preferences of the Visegrad states do not necessarily align. While the Visegrad Group is an immensely useful platform in pursuing interests the participating states share, the role it plays in its countries' foreign policies should not be overestimated.

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