

Visegrad Group and its Presence in the Mashriq Region

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Abstract: *This paper provides an outline about Hungary's, Poland's, Slovakia's and Czechia's relationships to the Mashriq region, especially Jordan, Israel and Egypt. The Central and Eastern European countries are considered both individually and collectively in the Visegrád group (V4). Therefore quantitative and qualitative indicators are examined. As one result it was found that in most cases the V4 had no common interests and consequently did not formulate common positions. But finally, the results of this work suggest that the migration crisis has indeed increased the interest of the Visegrád countries in the Mashriq and has accelerated their involvement to some extent both in the Mashriq region and within the European Union.*

Keywords: *Visegrád group, Mashriq region, diplomatic relationships, Eastern Neighborhood Policy, Middle East, migration crisis*

Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the foreign policy of the Visegrád countries, Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, focused mainly on accession to NATO and the European Union (Marek 2011: 310). The interest in cooperation with other regions of the world was only marginal in those days. Only with the ascension to international organisations and the implementation and internalisation of all requisite legislations did the cooperation of the Visegrád Group initially intensify with neighbouring states as well as regions of Central and Eastern Europe in the European Neighbourhood Policy (Cabada – Waisová 2018). With the onset of the 'European Migration Crisis' in 2015 and

the compulsory resettlement scheme for refugees with a quota regulation for each Member State proposed by the European Commission, a controversy arose inside the Union. In particular the V4 countries, often supporting different stances on international issues, held similar positions at that time.

During the Arab Spring and the instability in the Southern Neighbourhood of the European Union (Middle East and North Africa region) the resulting migratory pressure on the external borders of the EU, the Visegrád countries declared their full commitment to effectively addressing the causes of migration flows and participating in common EU measures. In particular, the V4 was concerned with attempts to combat the causes of migration in the migrants' home countries, which contributed, among other things, to various cooperation initiatives with countries in the Mashriq region (Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories and Syria). By virtue of similar characteristics such as a common history, geographical proximity and a similar structure of national economy and political alliances, the question arises what intentions if any the Visegrád alliance has at the international level to realise common interests in the region of the Mashriq. In particular, it had to be clarified whether there was something of a substantiated non-interest of the V4 in the region and how this changed in the course of the Arab Spring and enabled a joint commitment of the Visegrád Group.

This paper is largely based on quantitative and descriptive characteristics such as statistics, economic indicators and content-related analysis of relevant documents. Thus, the work primarily deals with two in-depth definitions: the Visegrád Group and the region of the Mashriq, which are ultimately essential for the comprehension of this paper. Next, the role of the Visegrád countries' accession to the European Union in the context of international cooperation is considered. Subsequently, quantitative characteristics from the fields of diplomacy and economics will be used and interpreted. The final part of the paper deals with more descriptive topics such as the V4 Development Assistance / Cooperation and the content analysis of joint statements and brief summaries of V4 meetings with the Mashriq states of Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

Definition

The Mashriq (Arabic *mashriq* – المشرق, 'East' or 'Land of the Sunrise') is a supra-regional territory made up of the current states of Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories and Syria. The counterpart to the Mashriq is the Maghreb region (Arabic *maghrib* – مغرب, 'West' or 'Land of the Sunset'). During the Arab expansion in the 7th century CE, the Mashriq was the seat of the caliphate, the 'representative of the Messenger of God', Allah (Clancy-Smith 2013: 98). After that, many dynasties dominated the region over several centuries until the Ottomans finally began to govern the area from

Istanbul in the 16th century. Even before the end of the First World War in 1918, the victorious European powers decided in the Sykes Picot Agreement of 1916 to divide the area into British (Israel, Jordan, Iraq) and French (Lebanon, Syria) spheres of influence (Ansary 2010: 300). A year later, the British assured the Jews of the establishment of a 'national homeland' (Balfour Declaration: 2 November, 1917). As a result, the Israeli state was founded in 1948, whereby more and more Mizrahi Jews (those from the Middle East) immigrated into the region (Jewish Virtual Library 2018). Ultimately, the European colonialists arbitrarily redrew the borders of the individual Mashriq countries, regardless of cultural or ethnic circumstances, which is still regarded as a cause of conflict in the region (Deutschlandfunk 2014).

Under the leadership of the Egyptian officer and statesman Gamal Abdel Nasser, the loose confederation of the United Arab Republic was founded between Egypt and Syria in 1958 and held only until 1961. With Israel's defeat of Egypt in the Six-Day War in 1967, more and more concurrent tendencies prevailed in the region. These disputes over the recognition of various frontier regions, not only between Egypt and Israel, but especially the Autonomous Palestinian Territories and Lebanon, complicate the political situation in the Mashriq region these days. Also because of this, the Mashriq is not scientifically defined. The individual states deal differently with the conflict with Israel, so while peace agreements exist between Israel and Egypt as well as Jordan, the countries of Iraq, Lebanon and Syria largely insist on their negative or hostile stance.

In addition, other points of potential conflict exist, especially around minority issues, whether ethnic (e.g. with Kurds) or religious (e.g. with Christians or various other confessions such as Druze or Shiite). Islamist movements continue to appear in different forms and within different events with varying political and social influence in every Mashriq country. Strongly traditional lifestyles contrast with a great acceptance of Eurocentric cultures. Three wars since 1980 and a civil war between 2003–2011 have created an ongoing Syrian Civil War and the highly fragile Iraqi state, and has triggered unprecedented flight and migration movements in the region, particularly to Jordan and Lebanon. As a consequence, the number of immigrating refugees and asylum seekers to the European Union has increased. Their journeys commonly follow various routes, such as the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes or across the Balkans, where border crossings to the European Union often took place via Hungary (Weber 2017: 13–15).

Impact of the Visegrád countries' membership in the European Union

The process of transformation and the societal change in the countries of the Visegrád Group, which culminated in European integration, included basic

social and political conditions as well as international development efforts by the candidate countries. Thus, the 'process of Europeanisation' in social and political science as well as in historical science can be seen as an essential factor for the revival of the development policy of the Visegrád states (see Beichelt 2009).

'Europeanisation' is generally understood as the process by which candidate countries adopt formal and informal European rules and guidelines (see Graziano and Vink 2007: 7, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 7). The 'basic model of Europeanisation' (see Cowles – Caporaso – Risse-Kappen 2001: 6–12) implied that regulations and directives issued by the European Union may not be compatible with the relevant legislation of the individual nation states. Depending on the significance of the discrepancy, nation states are forced to adopt the European conduct and recommendations (see Toshkov 2012: 91–109). In such cases, they act differently statically or dynamically, which leads to cyclical target-performance comparisons. Their national, institutional and political results regularly try to balance or adapt (see Hille – Christoph 2006: 531–552).

Conditionality and socialisation (see Checkel 2001; Schimmelfennig – Sedelmeier 2005) are the two essential elements for a progressive Europeanisation. The Member States therefore undertake to comply with the strict legislation implemented by the EU institutions. In addition, the Union can formulate explicit conditions for candidates during the accession process. Non-compliance with such requirements may result in the termination of the accession process. On the other hand, the constructivist approach of Europeanisation emphasises the importance of long-term socialisation and social learning. This involves the internalisation of European values and formal rules, as well as the gradual development of the conviction of the exclusive rightness of this mode of behaviour. While Europeanisation through conditionality can occur quite explicitly and quickly, social learning is a slow process and much more difficult to identify in practice. However, the two approaches, which are based on different theoretical backgrounds, are not mutually exclusive. In policy areas where conditionality and coercion are not possible, social learning can be the only option for Europeanisation.

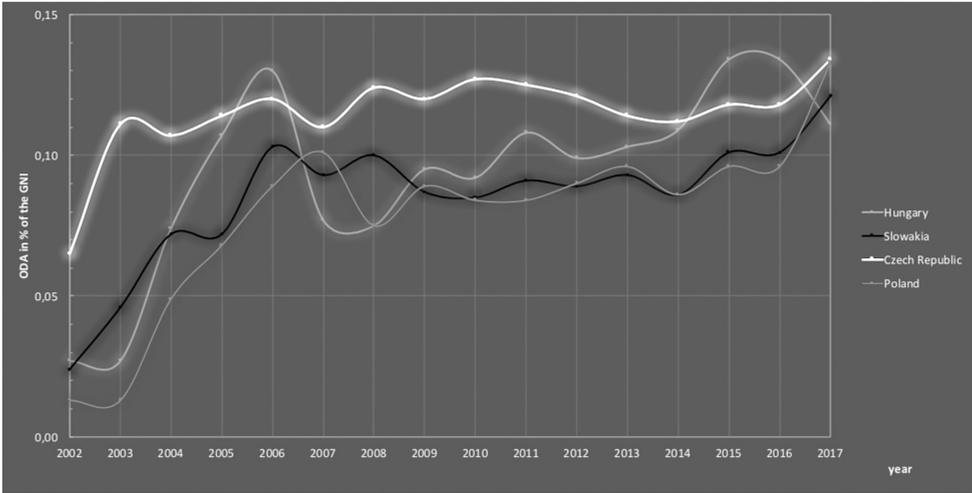
Within the development policies of the individual Member States, the EU also seeks to increase its influence and to stipulate explicit criteria, in particular in the context of accession negotiations of new members such as the Visegrád countries (until their accession in 2004). The EU's influence on the Member States refers to different sources of law. The European Union's development policy is regulated in Art. 177–181 TFEU (primary law) as well as in acts of law in the form of directives, regulations, decisions and recommendations (secondary law). The objective of European development policy under Article 177 TFEU is to promote the sustainable economic and social development of developing

countries, in particular the most disadvantaged developing countries, their harmonic and gradual integration into the world economy and the fight against poverty. In addition, European development policy seeks to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights in the affected areas. Within this framework, given commitments to the United Nations and other relevant international organisations are considered and will be implemented in the objectives.

According to Art. 178 TFEU, the guiding principle is that development policy should be taken into account in all pursued policy areas of the European Union whenever developing countries could be affected. The shared competence between the Union and the Member States is laid down in Art. 180 TFEU (as f.e. measures such as aid programmes; the formation of international organisations and conferences).

In the Treaties of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997) and Lisbon (2009), which form the legal basis for the commitment to coherence, complementarity and coordination (in short: the three C's) of the joint and nationally external, security, economic and development policies, qualitative requirements have been implemented. In terms of quantitative requirements and the OECD's 2030 Agenda, the European Union has reiterated its objectives of increasing development aid to 0.7% of the gross national income (GNI) of each Member State, with new members such as the Visegrád countries receiving a separate target of 0.17%. In 2017, the European Union provided 0.50% of GNI for ODA grants (Official Development Assistance), a decrease of 0.03% of GNI compared to the previous year. The decrease is due to reduced aid funds compared to the previous year, lower expenditure on migration and flight, as well as the repayment of loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB). Within the Visegrád Group, the increase in ODA subsidies since the EU accession can be seen graphically (see Figure 3). This ultimately speaks for the revival of development aid in the post-socialist countries of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. There is also a percentage adjustment of ODA expenditure relative to the GNI, which shows that the will to realise the target of 0.17% of GNI for 2030 is quite realistic (European Commission 2018).

Figure 2: ODA of the V4 in % of the GNI



Source: elaboration of the author – based on OECD data, www.data.oecd.org

Almost all of the requirements (conditionality) that the EU expresses towards Member States in the context of international development fall into the category of ‘soft law’ (non-binding agreements) – they are mainly recommendations. Although the EU could have formulated conditions during the accession negotiations of the Visegrád countries, it did not. It is well documented that international developments were neglected during the accession negotiations and that no special requirements were made. The Central and Eastern European countries must set themselves the task of developing such a development policy themselves, because without explicit conditions, there was no reason for the Visegrád countries to adopt the practices advocated by the EU. The really ‘tough’ requirements (such as binding rules (regulations, directives) that the Member States must comply with) that the EU has in the area of development cooperation are either very technical, such as the classification of aid projects and reporting on specific topics, e.g. political coherence; or in connection with financial issues, for example, the contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF).

Diplomatic relations of the V4 countries in the Mashriq region

The presence of diplomatic missions of the Visegrád countries in the Mashriq has changed massively, especially during the last decade. Conflicts in the region, such as the state of conflict in the Middle East, the Iraq war of 2003 or the civil war in Syria, which has continued since 2011, have frequently led to temporary

closures of consulates and embassies. But it also shows that countries with diplomatic missions are *de facto* prioritised. For example, in comparison to the rest of the Visegrád Group, Slovakia in particular is under-represented in the Mashriq, which in turn can be interpreted as a lack of willingness to cooperate and develop economically. Furthermore, limited material and human resources can be identified among the Visegrád states (Chmiel 2018: 7). Obviously, the diplomatic focus and ultimately the development cooperation is in the near neighbourhood (ENP), such as the EU candidate countries in the Western Balkans or the six post-Soviet states Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (EaP) (Chmiel 2018: 2; Kopiński 2012: 42; Castillejo: 2016: 5). Currently, Czechia, Hungary and Poland each maintain five embassies in the Mashriq and Slovakia three (see Table 1).

Table 1: Embassies, Consulates and Representative Offices of the Visegrád countries in the Mashriq states (as of November 2018)

	Hungary	Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland
Egypt	embassy: Cairo consulate: Alexandria	embassy: Cairo no consulate	embassy: Cairo consulate: Alexandria	embassy: Cairo no consulate
Iraq	embassy: Baghdad consulate: Erbil	no embassy no consulate	embassy: Baghdad consulate: Erbil	embassy: Baghdad consulate: Erbil
Israel	embassy: Tel Aviv consulate: Jerusalem	embassy: Tel Aviv consulate: Jerusalem, Haifa	embassy: Tel Aviv consulate: Jerusalem, Eilat, Haifa	embassy: Tel Aviv consulate: Jerusalem, Haifa
Jordan	embassy: Amman Konsulat: Aquaba	embassy: Amman no consulate	embassy: Amman no consulate	embassy: Amman no consulate
Lebanon	embassy: Beirut consulate: Sidon	no embassy no consulate	embassy: Beirut no consulate	embassy: Beirut no consulate
autonomous area Palestine**	no embassy consulate: Betlehem representative office: Ramallah	no embassy consulate: Betlehem no representative office	no embassy no consulate representative office: Ramallah	no embassy no consulate representative office: Ramallah
Syria*	embassy: Damascus consulate: Aleppo, Latakia	no embassy consulate: Latakia	embassy: Damascus consulate: Aleppo, Latakia	embassy: Damascus consulate: Aleppo

* temporarily closed

** Of the 193 member states of the United Nations, 137 (71%) recognized the state of Palestine as an independent state, including the V4. Although the capital of Palestine is given as Jerusalem, Ramallah is actually the political, economic and cultural center of the Palestinian territories.

Source: elaboration of the author – based on data from the directory of diplomatic and consular representations; www.embassypages.com

Within the group, Hungary is most commonly represented by consulates in the region (see Table 1). Hungary and Slovakia even have consular missions in the city of Bethlehem, which holds special religious importance for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and which is located in the West Bank and belongs to the Palestinian Autonomous Territories. In addition, all Visegrád countries except Slovakia have diplomatic representation offices in Ramallah, although the officially designated capital of Palestine is Jerusalem, as indicated by themselves. But so far, the current political, economic and cultural centre of the Palestinian Autonomous Territories is Ramallah. In opposition to Germany, the Visegrád states have official diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Autonomous Territories (see Table 2).

Table 2: Nature of Palestinian External Relations and UN Resolution on the Recognition of Palestine as an Observer State (2012)

	Hungary	Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland
Palestine's type of external relations	diplomatic relations	diplomatic relations	diplomatic relations	diplomatic relations
UN Resolution* about the recognition of Palestine as an observer state (2012)	rejection	abstention	abstention	abstention

* Since November 29, 2012 (UN-Resolution 67/19), the state of Palestine has the status of an observer State at the United Nations.

Source: elaboration of the author – based on the vote of UN resolution 67/19, original copy under www.web.archive.org and data from the directory of diplomatic and consular missions, www.embassypages.com

And despite the fact that Hungary is the only country that has a consular representation in the Palestinian Authority besides Slovakia (which could be interpreted as recognition of the Palestinian state) it is the only country in the Visegrád Group that rejected Palestinian observer status as a non-member state of the United Nations (see Table 2). The Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia participated in the resolution of the vote in November 2012 (see Table 2).

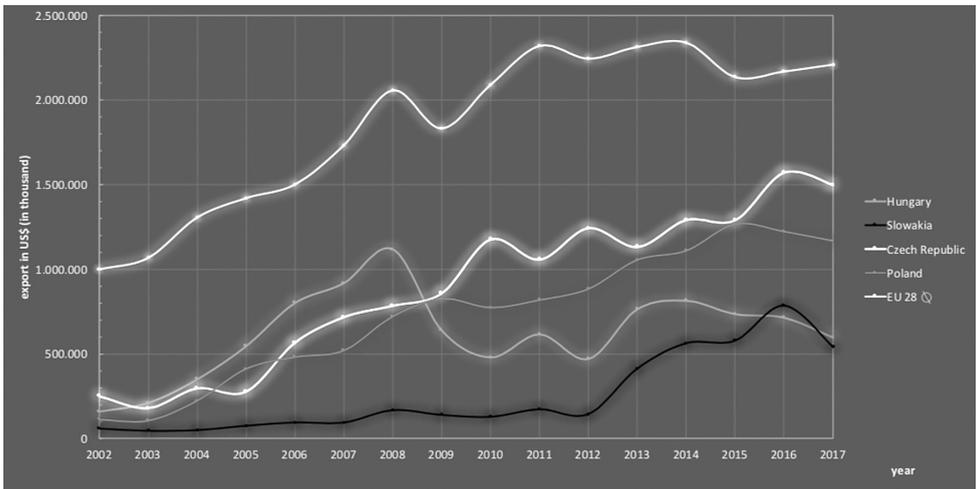
V4's economic relations with the Mashriq states

Although the Mashriq is not a traditional trading region for the Visegrád countries, the Visegrád Group now focuses on security and economic aspects of relations. Following the political, social and economic transformation of the communist system in 1989, the Visegrád countries focused mainly on intensifying relations with the West, which led to strong economic dependence on Western European markets (Marek 2011: 310).

As a result, economic ties with the countries of the Middle East declined following the membership application. The trade conditions associated with EU accession and the recent global economic and financial crisis which hit Western European economies hard in 2009 prompted the Visegrád countries to diversify their trade relations. These led to positive synergy in both regions (see Chmiel 2018: 10, 29).

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the increasing trade exchange between the Visegrád and the Mashriq countries since 2000. The Czech Republic has the strongest export growth and Poland the strongest import growth.

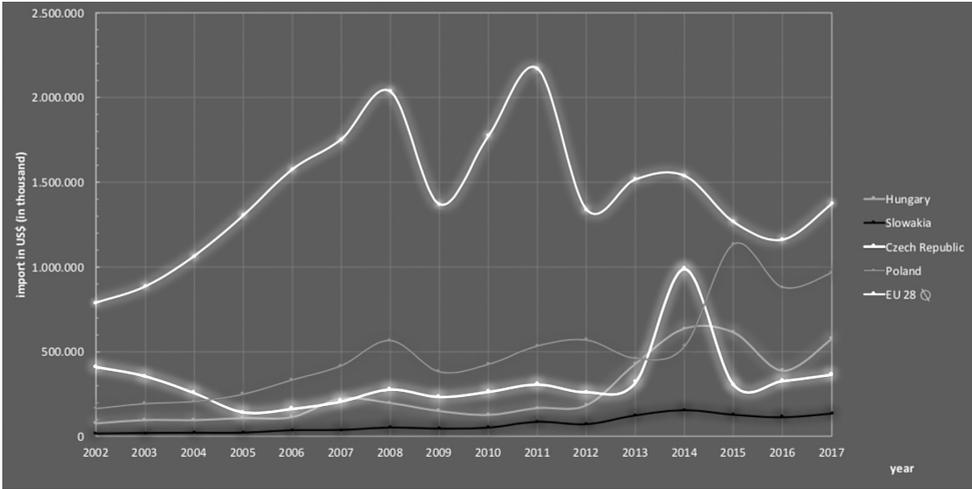
Figure 3: Export of V4 countries to the Mashriq in US \$ (in thousand)



Source: elaboration of the author – based on data from the International Trade Centre, www.trademap.org

In particular, products around the car and transport industry are exported, as is equipment from entertainment electronics and agricultural products. The import of Middle Eastern products into the Visegrád region has also increased in recent years, albeit with great fluctuations and national differences. In addition to organic materials, especially hand-made products such as ceramics or glass, pharmaceutical products and laboratory equipment often come from Israel (trademap.org).

Figure 4: Import of V4 countries from the Mashriq in US \$ (in thousand)



Source: elaboration of the author – based on data from the International Trade Centre, www.trademap.org

Contrary to constantly growing import and export figures, foreign direct investment by the Visegrád Group rarely increases in either the Middle East or elsewhere. This continues to hamper the deepening of economic relations between the four Central European states and the countries of the Mashriq.

Although economic cooperation is growing, it is far below the European average (see Figures 1 and 2). However, the Visegrád Group is well below the mean value in a Europe-wide comparison. This will be further negatively affected by security concerns and language barriers, but also by the more competitive positions of western companies and the relatively small number of medium-sized businesses in the Visegrád countries (Chmiel 2018: 11).

V4's development aid / cooperation in the Mashriq region

Unlike in Africa, where the Visegrád countries made a specific contribution to the development of communist countries in Africa during the communist era (Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Republic of Congo), and based primarily on ideological motives that reflected the logic of the Cold War, in the Mashriq there were hardly any aspirations concerning the development of political interests. National relations were mostly diplomatic. In many places, religious organisations participated in development projects instead of the state during the communist period (Chmiel 2018: 13; Drażkiewicz 2008: 4).

In the last consequence after the change of regime, the Visegrád countries themselves became beneficiary countries supported by numerous countries and international organisations (IMF, OECD, World Bank) as well as the European Union (mainly in the form of pre-accession assistance to accede within the framework of PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD), and they received significant foreign aid. Therefore, intensified development cooperation only became noticeable at the beginning of the new millennium. At that time, accession aspirations persisted for the Visegrád states in accordance with the *acquis communautaire* (EUR-Lex 2018), which sets out all rights and obligations for all Member States committed to increasing their funding in that area and getting more involved in developmental work (see also Chapter 3). Within the EU, the financial contributions from the Visegrád countries could be generated as well through the Union's multi-annual financial framework and the European Development Fund (EDF).

Since their accession to the European Union, all Visegrád countries have made significant progress in implementing their development policies and are now members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia became members in 2013, Hungary in 2016). Two of the Visegrád countries have set up development agencies that implement projects controlled by their respective ministries of foreign affairs (in Czechia, the development agency Šumava and in Slovakia, SlovakAid). In both countries, they created the legal framework and institutional structures for development policy, while in Hungary and Poland, foreign ministries play the central role in coordinating the activities of the participating governmental organisations. (Chmiel 2018: 13) However, all of this does not mean a significant increase in official development assistance (ODA) relative to gross national income, which remains at a low level (see Figure 3).

The four Visegrád countries show similar approaches in their development cooperation programmes, especially because of their common historical perception of the transformation process. It is the experience of the system change that gives the Visegrád countries as donor or auxiliary countries an advantage over other states. There is an NGDO platform (Non-Governmental Development Organisation) in each Visegrád country:

- Czech Republic: FoRS
- Hungary: HAND
- Poland: Grupa Zagranica
- Slovakia: MVRO

Despite years of cooperative engagement, especially in the form of regional seminars, it must be emphasised that the cooperation between the NGDOs of the Visegrád countries is mainly limited to the organisation of workshops and

events in the Visegrád region. As a result, there are no technical or operational joint actions onsite (Chmiel 2018: 16).

According to the OECD Development Committee, there is a significant lack of resources and local presence of all Visegrád countries (Chmiel 2018: 2; Kosiński 2012: 42; Castillejo: 2016: 5). Nonetheless, their commitment to democratisation and market transformation is positive, especially in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. The development policies of the Visegrád countries have focused on an eastern dimension in the past decade since for a long time the Middle East and the states of the Mashriq were only of marginal interest and did not contain individual strategies. Thematic priorities of the individual country's strategies included promotion of democracy and human rights, economic transformation and growth, education and health care, environmental and climate protection as well as sustainable agriculture and forestry, infrastructure (energy, water) and rural development, good governance (responsible Governance) and civil society (Chmiel 2018: 16–17).

V4 meetings with Mashriq states

In addition to conferences of the Visegrád Group, where only the member states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) participate, there are also meetings with other heads of state and government. For example, summit meetings have been held with leaders from three Mashriq countries in the past, including Egypt (July 4, 2017), Israel (July 19, 2017) and Jordan (May 9, 2018).

At the beginning of July 2017, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, Polish Prime Minister Maria Szydło and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico met in Budapest with the Egyptian President Abd al-Fattah Said Husain Chalil as-Sisi as part of the Visegrád summit. Topics discussed included terrorism and illegal migration. In a joint final statement, all parties expressed the desire to enter into a more intensively political and strategic dialogue to discuss new ways of coordinating international affairs and shared interests. The Visegrád States and the Arab Republic of Egypt underlined the importance of the strategic partnership between Egypt and the European Union and also reaffirmed their determination to continue to invest in comprehensive, mutually beneficial and future-oriented relations (see Table 3).

In mid-July 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the V4 summit in the Hungarian capital. The final joint statement of five Prime Ministers seeks to intensify relations in the economic, cultural, anti-terror and educational sectors. Furthermore, the relationship between the EU and Israel should be strengthened. The next Visegrád summit will take place at the invitation of Netanyahu in Israel (see Table 3).

In May 2018, the ministers of the Visegrád Foreign Affairs and Trade Group met with their Jordanian counterpart in Amman. The main objective of their

visit was to discuss V4-Jordan relations and current issues at the regional level. Among other things, the VG acknowledged Jordan's resilience and the immense humanitarian aid it has received through a massive inflow of refugees from Syria and Iraq. The Visegrád countries ensured support with regard to difficult challenges by increasing their support for humanitarian and development projects on bilateral as well as the EU level (see Table 3).¹

Table 3: Main Topics of the V4 Meetings with Egypt, Israel and Jordan

	Egypt	Israel	Jordan
cooperation in politics, economy, culture & science	✓	✓	✗
Promotion of the rule of law	✗	✓	✗
EU relations	✓	✓	✓
research and development	✓	✓	✗
mobility in studies and research	✗	✓	✗
special programs in the high-tech industry	✗	✓	✗
energy policy	✓	✓	✗
cooperation in international organisations (UN, NATO, African Union)	✓	✓	✗
combating terrorism	✓	✓	✓
defense and defense technology	✗	✓	✗
flight and migration	✓	✓	✓
role of diplomacy	✓	✓	✗
Middle East conflict (two-state solution)	✓	✓	✗
contribution in the transformation process through the V4	✓	✗	✗
development projects	✓	✗	✓
interreligious peace / dialogue	✗	✗	✓

Source: elaboration of the author – based on publications of the Visegrád Group, www.visegradgroup.eu/ documents

1 No joint statement published.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Visegrád Group has failed to effectively translate its common positions on relations between the EU and the Mashriq states into collective action within the Union. In most cases they had no common interests and consequently did not formulate common positions. With the advent of the current migration and refugee crisis, however, a new field for a joint commitment of the Visegrád countries has emerged. Nevertheless, there are countless technical as well as political constraints on significantly increasing V4 engagement in the Mashriq region in the near future. The lack of knowledge and regional expertise also contributes to the stagnation of development cooperation. Ultimately, facilitating this process requires additional involvement from the Visegrád countries and a clear strategy in formulating their external relations. Furthermore, the focus should be on jointly-initiated V4 development projects in the Mashriq region in order to show synergy effects and cooperation potential.

Moreover, the work has shown that many more questions remain unanswered. For example, are the joint efforts of the Visegrád countries in the Mashriq truly sustainable, or will the focus in the Mashriq region be maintained with a similar intensity as the migration crisis develops (increase or decrease)? This knowledge, in turn, is essential to further debates about the V4 countries' engagement in the Mashriq and should help raise awareness of this issue.

It is important to remember that the foreign policy of the Visegrád countries and the economic priorities are primarily elsewhere. Its focus on Central and Eastern European countries is one of the reasons why the Visegrád countries' involvement in shaping EU-Mashriq relations is limited. Because their interests lie elsewhere, they try to balance the EU's orientation in its external relations. The V4 countries also often point to a lack of interests and expertise in this region.

As the region is not a priority for the V4 countries, they could increase their involvement in multilateral cooperation and make further joint efforts within the Visegrád Group and with EU partners to overcome the many constraints and significant transaction costs. In addition, the V4 could also learn from the experience of other EU Member States. Consequently, not only could the Visegrád and the Mashriq states benefit from such a development, but also the EU itself. Clearly there is a need today to seek more flexible coalitions and networks to support global development (Klingebiel – Tancrède 2018: 1).

In view of the current position of the Visegrád countries on migration issues in the EU, V4 cooperation does not seem to be a possible instrument for promoting sustainable development in the Mashriq. If the four countries continue to focus on strengthening border control and preventing migration, their coordination can indeed be problematic for EU development cooperation with the Mashriq states. Whether the V4 engagement in EU-Mashriq relations is

positive or a challenge for promoting sustainable development depends heavily on their willingness.

Finally, the results of this work suggest that the migration crisis has indeed increased the interest of the Visegrád countries in the Mashriq and has accelerated their involvement to some extent both in the Mashriq region and within the European Union. The tendency to (re)engage in the Mashriq was visible before the migration crisis and was the result of increased interest arising from security concerns and the desire to diversify economic ties. Therefore, it would be advisable to take advantage of the current increase in V4 interest in the Mashriq states and to initiate activities that make this commitment more sustainable, especially in the context of political development cooperation.

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