

THE FIRST STEP IN THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF VISEGRAD COOPERATION: THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND (2000-2021)

Georgina Szabó¹

Abstract

The central theme of my work is the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), which is the first step in the institutionalization of the Visegrad Cooperation. My goal is primarily to present the creation, goals, operation, and results of this organization, for which, I must first explain the main antecedents of the creation of the Visegrad Cooperation and the peculiarities of its operation. The Visegrad Cooperation, established in 1991, acts as an intergovernmental interest conciliation forum that has not been institutionalized. It is run by annual rotating presidencies and meetings held by representatives - of different levels - of the Member States, which allow it to have flexible and voluntary based cooperation and the conciliation of shared interests between the Member States before meetings of international organizations, thus acting more effectively. The primary task of the International Visegrad Fund, established in 2000, with headquarters in Bratislava, is to support cultural, educational, scientific, and research activities and mobility between the Member States, using the financial means at its disposal, which it implements primarily in various grants and scholarships. Today, it operates not only in the Visegrad region, but it formed a cooperation with other countries. Of these, it provides significant subsidies to the states of the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans. The scope of duties of the Fund and the financial background required for this are constantly expanding, which is a good indication of the organization's success.

Keywords

Visegrad, cooperation, Fund, institutionalization, operation

Introduction

With the disintegration of the bipolar world order, the Soviet Union lost its leadership position in the East-Central-European region, which led to the rearrangement of the geopolitical status region-wide. (Bujnová, 2006: 49) The Euro-Atlantic integration and distancing from the Soviet Union have become the decisive aspiration of foreign diplomacy in the later

1 Eötvös Loránd University – Faculty of Humanities

56	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

Visegrad countries (Orosz, 2011: 431). As a result of this, following the 1989/1990 regime change, the circumstances have become favorable for the emergence of new cooperation based on the free collaboration of sovereign countries (Szilágyi, 2010: 2).

The President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, proposed in the Polish Sejm on 25 January 1990 to convene a meeting with Poland and Hungary, soon held in Bratislava. The forum's focus was the economic and political transition and the topic of security policy. The reasons for this were that, at the time, the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA still existed, and Soviet troops were stationed in the territories of all three participating countries. Their main goal was to establish a united position against the Soviet Union, paying particular attention to the withdrawal of Soviet troops as soon as possible (Boros, 2003: 75).

In 1990, Hungary's primary focus was the operation of the Quadragonale, established in 1989 in Budapest, (Kopeček, 2005: 110) with the participation of Austria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Italy (Győri Szabó, 2011: 345). However, when it became clear that a significant part of the problems, such as the situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, could only be resolved bilaterally, and with the break-up of Yugoslavia, the implementation of the operation was halted, so Hungary also began to focus on Visegrad Cooperation (Kopeček, 2005: 110).

A Central European summit was also held on April 9, 1990, as Havel said, to "coordinate our return to Europe" (Dunay, 1997: 12). However, no agreement was reached on the agenda for the meeting, which resulted that only with the accession of Czechoslovakia, the Quadragonale was expanded into the Pentagonale as a result of the meeting. Nevertheless, it can be observed that during this broader meeting, a separate discussion was held between the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary (Dunay, 1997: 12–13).

In 1990, these countries disagreed on several topics with each other. One prime example is the Warsaw Pact, which many believed should be terminated as soon as possible. However, when communicating with the Soviet leadership, the countries became uncertain about how openly they dared to take their opinions (Dunay, 1997: 13).

The Visegrad Cooperation

Following the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, some significant milestones in the struggle of Central European intellectuals for human rights can be observed in all three states. Among them, we could mention the Czechoslovak opposition Charter '77 movement, the creation of the Polish Solidarity trade union in 1980, and the reburial of the martyrs of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in 1989. Succeeding these precedents, at the beginning of 1990, the now freely elected leaders of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary united against the communist system and took a joint stand in favor of maintaining their solidarity with each other (Jeszzenszky, 2021: 9).

On 19 November 1990, (Jeszzenszky, 2003: 332) in the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the signing of the Paris charter (Gazdag, 2004: 198) took place, during which Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall raised the idea of a potential meeting, which by his envisages could be held in Visegrad early next year. The first preliminary meeting of foreign ministers took place on 21 January 1991, which

attracted widespread interest (Jeszenszky, 2003: 332). Subsequently, an informal meeting was held in Budapest in early February 1991. As a result, on 15 February 1991, in the city of Visegrad, the Visegrad Declaration, could be signed (Szilágyi, 2010: 2) by the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary. (Visegrad Declaration, 1991) Following the historical precedent of a royal meeting in Visegrad in 1335, it was József Antall who proposed the name Visegrad Cooperation (Szilágyi, 2010: 2).

The Visegrad Declaration is essentially a political declaration. Due to the absence of international legal norms, (Kiss, 1991: 6) compliance cannot be enforced. Despite the general wording and the lack of binding force, cooperation objectives have been mainly achieved (Rusnák, 2003: 45).

On the occasion of the Visegrad meeting, in addition to József Antall, Czechoslovak President Václav Havel and Polish President Lech Walesa represented the states (Takács, 2006: 141). In addition to establishing the cooperation, they also decided on the name Visegrad Cooperation after József Antall raised it based on historical antecedents. They defined that the main aim of the cooperation was to achieve European integration, (Szilágyi, 2010: 2) which they desired to fulfill later, primarily through admission into two international organizations. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was considered essential for security policy, (Tarasovič, 2011: 72) and the European Community (EC) was imperative for political and economic cooperation (Grúber, Törő, 2010: 52). Recognizing the need for the implementation of European integration, the three countries have also set out their goal to distance themselves as soon as possible from the Eastern policy pursued by members of the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA (Jeszenszky, 2003: 333). However, care was taken not to set the terms of cooperation too strictly since that could easily have led to a reduction in the willingness to cooperate. That is why only common goals were put on paper at the time, and the alliance was created as a mere forum for consultation (Hamberger, 2010: 43). Therefore, the cooperation was not institutionalized. Its functionality was managed by its three later, from 1 January 1993 – with the separation of Czechoslovakia – by its four-member States, (Szilágyi, 2010: 3) which ensured its operation through regular meetings of representatives (Paroubek, 2006: 14). They agreed that the Heads of Government would hold annual meetings and, if necessary, Foreign Ministers and experts would consult with each other (Takács, 2006: 141). The main argument against the establishment of an institutional system was that it could hinder accession to Western institutions (Orosz, 2011: 434). In reality, one of the reasons for the lack of institutionalization was that the newly independent states wanted to relinquish their sovereignty as little as possible (Boros, 2003: 77) for the sake of regional cooperation (Dunay, 1997: 22). As for the created close cooperation, members repeatedly stated that it was not directed against anyone else (Láng, 1991: 4).

It was favorable for Visegrad states that Gorbachev soon announced the abolishment of the military organization of the Warsaw Pact (Jeszenszky, 2003: 333) and the termination of the CMEA without a successor. Both institutions were dissolved as of 1 July 1991 (Győri Szabó, 2011: 349). Therefore, the Visegrad countries have successfully overcome the first obstacle – even if many external other factors played a role in this – the abolition of the Warsaw Pact and the liquidation of the CMEA have been achieved. In addition, an agreement was reached to withdraw the Soviet troops (Boros, 2003: 76).

58	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

The 1991 Visegrad Declaration stated only that „The cooperation of the signatories will be realized through meetings and consultations held at various levels and in various forms” (Visegrad Declaration, 1991).

On 14 May 1999, a declaration entitled Contents of Visegrad Cooperation was adopted in Bratislava, (Bujnová, 2006: 50) setting out the structure of intergovernmental cooperation. According to this, the presidential tasks were provided to each country on a rotating basis with a one-year mandate in the following order: the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. The prime ministers hold a formal meeting in the country holding the presidency each year about the main issues and an informal discussion. Other members of the government shall consult as necessary. The Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs meet twice a year, the primary purpose of which is to prepare the Prime Ministers' meetings and develop draft recommendations for the strategy to be followed in the cooperation. The ambassadors meet at least four times a year in the country holding the presidency and primarily discuss the status of the Visegrad Cooperation. The Visegrad coordinators meet twice a year, as needed, alternately in each country. Their main task is to coordinate the cooperation and prepare meetings between the Secretaries of States and the Prime Ministers (Contents, 1999).

An annex to this document was adopted on 29 June 2002 in Esztergom, clarifying the role of the V4 presidency and setting out certain principles within the external and internal dimensions of cooperation. The latter stated that meetings of experts could take place at any time as necessary and that it was not required to convene them in the current Presidential country. The ministries themselves can organize the cooperation between the individual ministries. Concerning the country holding the presidency, it was stated that a document must be drawn up at the beginning of the presidency about its priorities. Then expert consultations must be initiated in this regard. The Prime Ministers will later assess the implementation of the document at their summit and, if necessary, take the crucial political decisions in this regard (Annex, 2002).

An essential role in the functioning of cooperation is that the Visegrad countries often coordinate their position before the meetings of international organizations - e.g., EU, NATO, Council of Europe – of which they are members as well (Szilágyi, 2010: 5). As a result of this, for example, in 2016, they could harmonize their position regarding the refugee crisis before attending the European Council conference (Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments, 2016).

The Visegrad Three, on 21 December 1992, in Krakow, signed the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), (Jeszenszky, 2003: 336) which established a multilateral free trade area between its members, (Dunay, 1997: 20) with a view to developing economic cooperation between the Member States (Kopeček, 2005: 111). CEFTA aimed at the gradual dismantling of barriers of trade between the Visegrad countries over a period of ten years, (Inotai, 1993: 10) partly due to association agreements with the EU, which resulted in higher tariffs between the Visegrad countries than with other countries (Illés, 1992: 23).

CEFTA is organisationally independent of the Visegrad Cooperation, (Orosz, 2011: 435) although only these countries could initially be members of the zone. This rule was amended in 1995 because of the admission of Slovenia (Takács, 2006: 142). As a result, the organization was expanded with Slovenia in 1996, Romania in 1997, Bulgaria in 1999,

Croatia in 2002, Macedonia in 2006, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro in 2007 (Orosz, 2011: 436). An increase in trade flow accompanied the organization's expansion but, at the same time, hindered the deepening of cooperation (Dunay, 1997: 30).

On 4 July 2003, members agreed that the CEFTA membership of those Member States that joined the EU would automatically be repealed (Arday, 2015: 3). Thus, with the accession of the Visegrad countries to the EU in 2004, the founders lost their membership in the organization, and today it continues to operate in another region in the Balkans without them (Orosz, 2011: 436).

On 9 June 2000, the prime ministers signed a declaration of the establishment of the first real institution in the cooperation, the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), (Szilágyi, 2010: 3) which was based in Bratislava (Hamberger, 2010: 45).

In 2015, the Visegrad Four set up a non-governmental body, the Visegrad Patent Institute, (The Visegrad Group (V4), 2015) intending to strengthen regional cooperation between the Member States in the field of intellectual property and innovation (Declaration of the Prime Ministers, 2021). The organization began operations on 1 July 2016, its headquarter is located in Budapest, but it also has offices in the other Contracting States. The organization can be seen as a kind of international research and preliminary examination body. The Visegrad countries, citizens of Serbia and Lithuania, and others with headquarters located in these countries can utilize it. The organization performs a kind of preliminary examination task concerning patent claims, which allows the applicant to assess the realistic chances of patenting or remedying any shortcomings in the patent application. However, patents can still only be granted by entitled national or regional patent offices (Visegrádi Szabadalmi, 2022).

The Member States have deliberately rejected the expansion of Visegrad Cooperation (Bujnová, 2006: 54). Still, they have not ruled out the possibility of cooperating with other countries, groups of nations, and regional organizations on specific issues within the framework of the V4 + format (Grúber, Törő, 2010: 60).

Since the organization is not institutionalized, there is no guarantee that the Visegrad countries will be able to reach a common position on the questions that arise or will be able to demand cooperation. From time to time, issues arise in which member states have different opinions. If we think about the past period, the Czech Republic and Slovakia distanced themselves from Hungary primarily because of its politicization towards Brussels, and Poland because of its relationship with Russia (Jeszenszky, 2021: 12). In the past, however, the member states were always able to set aside these kinds of differences of opinion. They usually seek to assert their common interests by adopting and issuing a declaration (Szilágyi, 2010: 5). Of the regional co-operations, the Visegrad Four are not the first to insist on the interest of the reconciling nature of the organization. They have developed a similar system (Szűcs, Hollandia, 2005: 23) – among others – through joint meetings serving somewhat modeling the Benelux countries (Jeszenszky, 2003: 334) and the countries of the Nordic Council (Horváth, 2005: 209).

Collaborations similar to the Visegrad Group

The Benelux States and the Nordic Council may have served as a model for both the Baltic States and the Visegrad Cooperation in the process of forming their regional cooperation. The annually changing rotating presidency system, the little attention paid to institutionalization, the consultative nature of the forums, the deliberate rejection of further enlargement, the need to create a kind of free trade zone between its members, the prior consultation of the positions to be taken in the European Union are all such factors, which – although with occasional differences due to the specificities of the organizations, but – clearly characterizes, or at one time described the collaboration of all four association. This exemplary role is reinforced by the fact that occasionally direct meetings were held between these organizations, in the beginning often transferring integration experiences. The establishment of cooperation between the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) dates back to the agreement of establishing the customs union on 5 September 1944 (Circular, 1944). This was followed by the Treaty on the Benelux Economic Union, signed in The Hague on 3 February 1958, which aimed at ensuring the free movement of people, goods, capital, and services, and a coordinated solution to economic, financial, and social issues. (Benelux) After the GATT and the EEC began to take over the cooperation tasks in the 1950s, negotiations between the Member States became contingent and formal for a long time. Its activities were re-evaluated after the end of the Cold War, albeit with different objectives, (Szűcs, Hollandia, 2005: 24) in 1992, an agreement was reached between the three states to give a political dimension to cooperation (Szűcs, A kisállamiság, 2005: 94–95). The three Member States have set up a consultation system, which will allow them to reconcile their views before multilateral negotiations, to represent their interests more effectively (Szűcs, Hollandia, 2005: 23). Cooperation between the countries of Northern Europe dates back to the founding of the Northern Association in 1919, followed by the establishment of northern cooperation after the Second World War, for which, as a forum, the Nordic Council was established in 1952 with the participation of four countries, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, (Horváth, 2005: 209) to which Finland joined in 1955 (Urkuti, 2005: 524). Since 1970, the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands, since 1984, Greenland has also been represented in the cooperation. (The history of the Nordic Council) Cooperation took place only at the interparliamentary level, no supranational institutional system was established (Horváth, 2005: 209). Its headquarter is based in Helsinki (Boden, 2001: 445). In 1971, the Nordic Council set up a secretariat, which has been operating in Copenhagen since 1996. (The history of the Nordic Council). In accordance with the annually rotating presidency followed by the Nordic Council, (Blahó, Prandler, 2014: 445) meetings are held in different Member States each year. However, it has no real decision-making power. It can only make recommendations to the governments of the Member States (Horváth, 2005: 209). The Nordic Investment Bank was established in Helsinki in 1975, (The history of the Nordic Council) and in October 1999, the five Scandinavian states opened a joint embassy in Berlin. (The history of Nordic co-operation) Its activities mainly cover economic, legal, social policy, cultural, and transport coordination topics. Thanks to the work

of the Nordic Council, passport controls between the Member States were abolished in 1952, and in 1954, the common labor market was created to ensure the free movement of workers across borders. In 1962, in the Helsinki Agreement, they decided to expand their cooperation in the legal, cultural, financial, social, transport, and environmental protection fields. In 1966, the idea of establishing the Northern Economic Community (NORDEK) was modeled based on the EEC. However, some Member States have decided that they wish to join the European Communities, and because of this, the idea did not become a reality (Horváth, 2005: 209). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 reshaped the region's political map. In 1994, Finland, Norway, and Sweden held referendums on membership of the European Union, as a result, Finland and Sweden became members of the Organization on 1 January 1995. However, Norway voted no. (The history of Nordic co-operation) However, as members of the EU, the northern European states have also maintained the importance of their cooperation. Their consultation forums are a good opportunity for them to develop a common position on the European Union topics (Horváth, 2005: 209).

In 1971, following the example of the Nordic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, based in Oslo, was established with the same membership. This, like the Nordic Council, implements intergovernmental cooperation in the same areas. However, the difference is that its decisions are binding on the Member States (Horváth, 2005: 209).

We can also mention the cooperation of the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), which operated for the first time between the two world wars from 1934 to 1940, (Boden, 2001: 443) then brought back to life at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Horváth, 2005: 76). The Baltic states decided in the late 1980s that they start developing closer cooperation to achieve the following common goals: national self-determination rights, state sovereignty, independence, demilitarization of the territory, economic protection, common market, coordinated foreign policy and foreign trade, and the establishment of a common information system. To this end, the Baltic Council was established in July 1989, and its primary task was to make decisions that sought to promote the independence of states. Following the international recognition of the independence of the Baltic States, the Baltic Assembly was established in Tallinn on 8 November 1991 (History. Formation). A free trade agreement was signed between the three states on 13 September 1993, (History. International inclusion) which governed customs duties and quantitative restrictions between the Member States (Boden, 2001: 443). In October 1993, the Baltic Assembly turned to NATO with the request to work out the conditions for the accession of the Baltic States. In 1994, formal talks with the European Union also began. In the same year, by Scandinavian pattern, the Baltic Council of Ministers was created to ensure cooperation between executive bodies (History. International inclusion). The period up to 2004 in the life of co-operation was fundamentally about joining NATO and the European Union (History. European). The period 2005–2007 was about setting new directions after joining NATO and the EU. During this time, the most important areas of cooperation were: education, research, culture, environment protection, information technology, common labor market, and migration (History. Institutional reforms). The Baltic Assembly operates in a consultative nature only. Its decisions have no binding force (History. European). The secretariat of the organization ensures its continuous operation (Secretariat).

62	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

Targets and operation of the International Visegrad Fund

The objectives of the Fund are defined as follows: „The objectives of the Fund shall be pursued through financial support of activities, in particular in the following areas:

- promotion and development of cultural cooperation;
 - promotion and development of scientific exchanged, research and cooperation in the field of education between the Contracting Parties;
 - promotion and development of exchanges between young people;
 - promotion and development of cross-border cooperation;
 - promotion and development of tourism of the Contracting Parties” (Agreement, 2000).
- Another objective of the Fund was to strengthen relations between the Contracting Parties, the development of cooperation, and the joint presentation of these states in third countries (Agreement, 2000).

The governing bodies of the Fund include the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Council of Ambassadors. The Executive Director and their Deputy shall be responsible for implementing the decisions, while the Secretariat shall perform the administrative tasks (Szilágyi, 2010: 6).

The Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs shall appoint its president from among its members for a term of one year. The presidency shall rotate among the contracting states in the order of the English alphabet. The Conference of Foreign Ministers shall determine the amount of the contribution and the due date for each of the Contracting Parties. In addition, it approves the plans for the activities of the Fund, the budget of the Fund, the annual statements, clearance, and the Rules of Procedure of the Secretariat, which also has the right to amend. The Council of Ambassadors may also submit a proposal to amend the latter. It shall take its decisions unanimously. It shall hold at least one meeting a year to review the implementation of the assigned tasks. The time and place of the meeting shall be scheduled by the President of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Agreement, 2000).

The Council of Ambassadors – based on statements and reports submitted by the Executive Director – shall prepare a program of activities of the Fund, a draft budget, and a report on the implementation of the previous year's program and the use of the budget, which are submitted for approval to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. It shall take its decisions unanimously. It meets at least once every six months but meets more frequently if it is necessary to achieve its targets. The Chairperson of the Council of Ambassadors shall decide on the place and time of the meeting. They adopt the Rules of Procedure, but the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs approves it (Agreement, 2000).

The Executive Director, who also has a deputy, is responsible for implementation. They are both appointed by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs for a term of three years and are eligible for re-election once. The rules and guidelines for the activities of the Executive Director are set by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Council of Ambassadors. The Executive Director attends meetings of the Council of Ambassadors with the role of advisor. Administrative tasks are performed by the Secretariat, which the Executive Director also heads. The official language used by the Fund is English (Agreement, 2000).

The activities of the Fund shall be financed by contributions from the Contracting Parties and other financial sources approved by the Council of Ambassadors. The amount of the first annual contribution to be paid equally by the Contracting Parties shall be 250 thousand euros per country, altogether 1 million euros (Agreement, 2000).

Its budget has been raised several times since then. At the 2001 Prime Ministerial Summit in Krakow, the Visegrad countries decided to double their contribution to the Fund to 500 thousand euros each, for a total of 2 million euros (Prime Ministers meeting, 2001). A few weeks later, a meeting of culture ministers in Wrocław called for at least a third of the amount paid into the Fund to be spent on cultural projects (Communiqué, 2001).

In 2004, the mechanism for allocating the Fund's resources was changed, and from then on, beneficiaries can no longer come only from one of the Visegrad states. At this time, significant resources were reallocated to support the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans (Strážay, A visegrádi, 2011: 43).

At present „The Fund does so by awarding €8 million through grants, scholarships and artist residencies provided annually by equal contributions of all the V4 countries. Other donor countries (Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States) have provided another €10 million through various grant schemes run by the Fund since 2012” (About Us).

The International Visegrad Fund in other regions

IVF plays an important role in developing the relations of the Visegrad Four with other countries (Strážay, Visegrad, 2011: 27).

The Visegrad countries spoke in support of the Eastern Partnership countries – Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine (Joint Statement of Ministers, 2012) – and in 2008 also expressed the view that the EU should take favorable steps regarding the initiative in deepening its relations with these countries. This is mainly done by helping to bring these states closer to EU standards, and it was seen feasible by supporting the creation of a deeper free trade zone. To this end, the Visegrad countries also considered it necessary to establish an institutional structure (Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers, 2008).

The V4s have decided to forge ever-closer ties with partner countries, promoting stability, good governance, and economic development in those countries. (Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers, 2010) The V4s also provide financial support to these countries through the International Visegrad Fund. Within IVF, a new program called Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) has been launched to „In order to support political and socio-economic reforms in the partner countries, facilitating comprehensive approximation towards the European Union, strengthening the regional cooperation among the Eastern European partners and enhancing institutional capacity and civil society” (The Visegrad Group, 2012). An additional 1 million euros has been set aside for this purpose in the Fund's budget from 2012 onwards (Strážay, Visegrad, 2011: 30).

Through the Fund, outside of the V4EaP program and within the framework of the Visegrád + programs, the Visegrad countries support democratization and transformation processes in other countries. The V4 also holds regular consultations with Western Balkans (WB)

64	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia - to support socio-economic transformation and the process of European integration (Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments, 2015).

Following the example of the Visegrad Fund, in 2017, the six Western Balkan countries established the Western Balkans Fund (WBF), in which the Visegrad countries provided significant assistance, in part through the Fund. The organization undertook to support social projects to develop civil relations in which applicants from several Western Balkan countries are involved (Márky, 2018: 71).

The main programs of the International Visegrad Fund

The International Visegrad Fund has launched various programs, thanks to which it can provide multiple grants to potential beneficiaries. An essential consideration in assessing multilateral initiatives is the number of project partners from the Visegrad countries that the applicant has. Its minimum is regulated separately for each program.

The Visegrad Strategic Grants program has objectives such as promoting sustainable cooperation between the Visegrad countries, serving the development of civil society, or promoting the Visegrad region by supporting unique projects. Any legal entity worldwide can apply for this, but it can only be awarded to multilateral initiatives (Rules for Visegrad Strategic Grants).

The Visegrad Grants program seeks to promote sustainable cooperation between the Visegrad countries by supporting ideas. Any legal entity in the world can also apply for this support. Still, only multilateral initiatives can win, and preference during the assessment will be given to applications from the Visegrad countries (Rules for Visegrad Grants).

Within the Visegrad + Grants program, the Visegrad countries provide support through the Fund to the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans. The aim is to support the development of the target countries, which is partly ensured by the transfer of know-how and good practices. The Fund sets thematic priorities regarding the focus of sponsored projects. Any legal entity worldwide can apply to this, but it can only be awarded to multilateral initiatives. In the course of the assessment, the target countries and the Visegrad countries will be given priority (Rules for Visegrad+ Grants).

Scholarship programs are another vital part of IVF activity (Strážay, Visegrad, 2011: 28).

The Visegrad Scholarship Program was established within the Fund to support academic exchange programs and support the education of V4 nationals and foreign nationals in the Member States. It aims to support the mobility of students and researchers between countries (Rules of the Visegrad Scholarship). Following this model, the V4EaP Scholarship Program is intended to provide education for citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries in the Visegrad countries (Rules of the V4EaP Scholarship).

In 2020, the Fund received 817 eligible applications from 16 countries, which resulted in the award of 143 scholarships for 311 semesters at the cost of 1 million 200 thousand Euros. (2020 Annual) In this respect, it is spectacular that most scholarship applications in 2020 came from Eastern Partnership countries, which resulted in 71 scholarships for the region, 66 for the Visegrad countries, and 6 for the Western Balkans (2020 Annual).

Visegrad University Studies Grants is a program that can provide support to certain higher education institutions, research centers, and organizations to organize education on specific topics focusing on the Visegrad countries. This means a series of lessons or lectures on a given topic. It is a one-time grant to those selected University departments, schools, or faculties that submit a completed curriculum for the planned course/program. If applications are from the Eastern Partnership, they will be processed under the program named V4EaP Visegrad University Studies Grant (Rules for the Preparation).

Summary

The Visegrad Cooperation acts as a forum for intergovernmental conciliation of interests between the Member States. Due to its consultative nature, it cannot reach a common ground between the Member States on all issues that arise. Still, the lack of a flexible institutional framework and decisions with binding power contributes to the fact that it has been operating for more than three decades, despite possible differences of opinion, and provides the Member States with the opportunity to take collective action to achieve common goals.

It can be observed, both in the Visegrad Cooperation and in the International Visegrád Fund, that their member states technically lack strong attacks against them in the press and in other media platforms. Although it happens sometimes, that the current political differences between individual member states put cooperation temporarily in the background, in general, it can be stated, that the majority of the main political parties and movements do not doubt the importance of Visegrad Cooperation.

The establishment of the International Visegrad Fund was the first real institution of the cooperation, which was designed to bring V4s closer to people, primarily by supporting projects of non-governmental organizations, local municipalities, universities, and other public institutions (Strážay, Visegrad, 2011: 22). The Fund has successfully handled this task. In 2011 the Visegrad Cooperation, on the occasion of its 20th anniversary, issued a statement within it that assessed the IVF's work in supporting 10-year civil, cultural, scientific, educational, and innovative projects, which were found successful (The Bratislava Declaration, 2011).

This is quantified by the statement issued on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Fund in 2020, according to which, until this date „The International Visegrad Fund has supported close to 6000 grant projects and nearly 4500 semesters of individual scholarships in total worth exceeding 96 million euros, owing to the significant contributions of the four founding states” (Declaration of the Ministers, 2020). The approved aid is mostly evenly distributed among the Member States over the 20 years from 2000 to 2020, according to the following proportions: the Czech Republic 20.41%, Poland 20.39%, Slovakia 20.13%, and Hungary 19.94%. The rest of the subsidies are related to other areas outside the Visegrad Four: the Eastern Partnership countries account for 12.87%, the Western Balkans for 3.52%, and the other countries for 2.74% (2020 Annual). In a statement issued on 17 February 2021 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Cooperation, the Prime Ministers of the Member States reaffirmed the growing role

of the Fund, „which allowed our civil society representatives to implement more than 6000 common projects in Central Europe, the Eastern Partnership region and the Western Balkans, and to strengthen the mobility and cooperation between our students, scientists, innovators, artists as well as local authorities” (Declaration of the Prime Ministers, 2021). At the same time, the goals to be achieved were formulated as follows: „Declare our willingness to increase from 2022 the annual budget of the International Visegrad Fund to 10 million euros in order to enable the further development of its operational activities in the area of youth mobility („Generation V4”) and to increase its visibility in order to promote the V4 among future generations” (Declaration of the Prime Ministers, 2021). The International Visegrad Fund can therefore be considered a successful organization. Its objectives and the programs needed to achieve them are constantly expanding, just like the size of the available financial background, which is essential for this success.

References

2020 Annual Report of the International Visegrad Fund. [online]. Available from: https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads.mangoweb.org/shared-prod/visegradfund.org/uploads/2021/09/V4_annual-report-2020_online.pdf. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

About Us. Visegrad Fund. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/about-us/the-fund/>. (Downloaded 6 April 2021).

Agreement concerning the establishment of the International Visegrad Fund, 2000. [online]. Available from: https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads.mangoweb.org/shared-prod/visegradfund.org/uploads/2018/12/IVF_statute.pdf. (Downloaded 2 April 2021).

Annex to the Content of Visegrad Cooperation, 2002. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/annex-to-the-content-of>. (Downloaded 2 April 2021).

Benelux. [online]. Available from: https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/026961fe-0d57-4314-a40a-a4ac066a1801/c28bd41d-7e26-48bf-b9a6-1cce7cc5eb70/Resources#3bc2b8e0-cb9a-4640-91a6-d2cafb9c0cdc_en&overlay. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

Circular letter from Paul Henri Spaak (London, 9 September 1944). [online]. Available from: https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/026961fe-0d57-4314-a40a-a4ac066a1801/c28bd41d-7e26-48bf-b9a6-1cce7cc5eb70/Resources#7360a69f-943d-442f-98a5-0feeb017a91_en&overlay. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

Communiqué of the Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Visegrad Group Countries in Wrocław (22-23 June 2001). [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2001/communique-of-the>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Contents of Visegrad Cooperation, 1999. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/cooperation/contents-of-visegrad-110412>. (Downloaded 2 April 2021).

Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), 2020. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/declaration-of-the-200609>. (Downloaded 6 April 2021).

Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Visegrad Group, 2021. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/declaration-of-the-prime>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

History. European and transatlantic integration, 1995–2004. [online]. Available from: <https://www.baltasam.org/en/history/integration>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

History. Formation of the Baltic States' regional organisations, 1988–1991. [online]. Available from: <https://www.baltasam.org/en/history/pre-history>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

History. Institutional reforms of regional organisations, 2005–2007. [online]. Available from: <https://www.baltasam.org/en/history/institutional-reforms>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

History. International inclusion, 1992–1995. [online]. Available from: <https://www.baltasam.org/en/history/international-inclusion>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

Joint Statement of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 2012. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-v4-ee-lv-lt>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group, 2010 [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2010/joint-statement-of-the>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries and of Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Sweden, 2008. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2008/joint-statement-of-the-110412-4>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries, 2016. [online]. Available from: <https://eu-brusszel.mfa.gov.hu/assets/64/81/24/95b164b97e2c57345a86225aa5cd650d2e48531a.pdf>. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the Visegrad Group Countries, 2015. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/joint-statement-of-the>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Prime Ministers meeting in Krakow (1 June 2001). [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2001/prime-ministers-meeting>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Rules for the Preparation, Selection, Approval and Implementation of the Visegrad University Studies Grants. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-university-studies-grants/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Rules for Visegrad Grants. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-visegrad-strategic-grants/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Rules for Visegrad Strategic Grants. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-visegrad-strategic-grants/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Rules for Visegrad + Grants. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-visegrad-strategic-grants/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Rules of the Visegrad Scholarship Program. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-scholarship-program/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Rules of the V4EaP Scholarship Program. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradfund.org/archive/documents/visegrad-scholarship-program/>. (Downloaded 5 April 2021).

Secretariat. [online]. Available from: <https://www.baltasam.org/about-us/secretariat>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group, 2011. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava>. (Downloaded 2 April 2021).

The history of Nordic co-operation. [online]. Available from: <https://www.norden.org/en/information/history-nordic-co-operation>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

The history of the Nordic Council. [online]. Available from: <https://www.norden.org/en/information/history-nordic-council>. (Downloaded 15 April 2022).

The Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on the V4/IVF activities towards the Eastern Partnership, 2012. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/on-v4-ivf-activities-twrds-eap>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

The Visegrad Group (V4) Countries Establish a Joint Patent Institute, 2015. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/the-visegrad-group-v4>. (Downloaded 4 April 2021).

Visegrad Declaration, 1991. [online]. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>. (Downloaded 1 April 2021).

Visegrádi Szabadalmi Intézet, 2022. [online]. Available from: https://www.vpi.int/images/documents/VPI_brochure_hu_2022.pdf. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

ARDAY, L. Közép-Európa és a Visegrádi Négyek. *International Relations Quarterly*. [online]. 2015, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 1–5. Available from: http://www.southeast-europe.org/pdf/21/dke_21_m_eu_Arday-lajos_Kozep-Europa-es-a-Visegradi-Negyek.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

BLAHÓ, A. and PRANDLER, Á. *Nemzetközi szervezetek és intézmények*. Budapest, 2014.

BODEN, M. *Krónika kézikönyv: Európa*. Budapest, 2001.

BOROS, F. A „visegrádi együttműködés” és perspektívája. *Külügyi Szemle*. [online]. 2003, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 73–99. Available from: https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/KULUGY_KulugyiSzemle_2003/?pg=592&layout=s. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

BUJNOVÁ, H. A visegrádi szerződés országainak geopolitikai helyzete. *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*. [online]. 2006, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 49–58. Available from: http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00033/00025/pdf/f_t_szemle_2006-2_hb.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

DUNAY, P. Regionális együttműködés Kelet-Közép-Európában: befektetés eredmény nélkül? *Külügyi Szemle*. [online]. 1997, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 10–41. Available from: https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/KULUGY_KulugyiSzemle_1997/?pg=169&layout=s. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

GAZDAG, F. Szövetségtől szövetségig: Magyarország útja a Varsói Szerződéstől a NATO-ig. In: GAZDAG, F. and KISS, J. László (eds.). *Magyar külpolitika a 20. században*. Budapest: 2004, 195–220.

GRÚBER, K. and TÖRŐ, C. A Visegrádi Négyek (V4) Európai Unión belüli együttműködésének szempontjai és eddigi tapasztalatai. [online]. *Külügyi Szemle*. [online]. 2010, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 52–70. Available from: https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/KULUGY_KulugyiSzemle_2010/?pg=265&layout=s. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

70	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

GYÖRI SZABÓ, R. *A magyar külpolitika története 1848-tól napjainkig*. Budapest, 2011.

HAMBERGER, J. Közép-Európa politikai dimenziójának megvalósítási kísérlete: a visegrádi együttműködés (V4). *Külügyi Szemle*. [online]. 2010, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 35–51. Available from: https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Kulugyi_Szemle_2010_02_Kezeep-Eurepa_politikai_di_.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

HORVÁTH, J. (ed.). *Világpolitikai lexikon (1945–2005)*. Budapest, 2005.

ILLÉS, I. Hármaskönyvelés: A „visegrádi hármas” és a gazdasági dezintegráció. *Beszélő*. 1992, vol. 3, no. 45, p. 22–23.

INOTAI, A., DEZSÉRI, K. and SASS, M. Protekcionizmust az EK-től tanulhatnak a visegrádiak: Regionális szabadkereskedelelem: a válság nem erősíti az együttműködést. *Népszabadság*. 1993, 51, 189, 10.

JESZENSZKY, G. A „visegrádi gondolat” és az euro-atlanti integráció, In: GRÓH, G. and KODOLÁNYI, G. (eds.). *A rendszerváltozás a Magyar Szemlében. Válogatás 1992–2002*. Budapest, 2003, 330–337.

JESZENSZKY, G. Visegrád, The Unwritten Alliance. *Central European Papers*. [online]. 2021, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 9-15. Available from: <https://cep.slu.cz/pdfs/cep/2021/01/08.pdf>. (Downloaded 17 September 2022).

KISS, I. Normák és gesztusok. *Beszélő*. [online]. 1991, vol. 2, no. 8, p. 6. Available from: https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/Beszelo_1991_1/?pg=229&layout=s. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

KOPEČEK, M. Közép-Európa és a visegrádi együttműködés a cseh politikai gondolkodásban. *Limes*. [online]. 2005, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 103–120. Available from: https://www.academia.edu/37353772/K%C3%B6z%C3%A9p-Eur%C3%B3pa_%C3%A9s_a_visegr%C3%A1di_egy%C3%BCttm%C5%B1k%C3%B6d%C3%A9s_a_cseh_politikai_gondolkod%C3%A1sban_Limes_2_2005.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

LÁNG, L. Végre, de mi végre? *Beszélő*. [online]. 1991, vol. 2, no. 8, p. 4–5. Available from: https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/Beszelo_1991_1/?pg=227&layout=s. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

MÁRKY, Z. Egyedi-e a V4? – regionális együttműködési minták az EU-ban. In: BALASKÓ, A. (ed.). *A visegrádi négyek jelentősége, struktúrája és értékei*. [online]. Budapest, 2018, p. 52–72. Available from: https://kki.hu/assets/upload/V4_konyv.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

OROSZ, T. A visegrádi együttműködés rendszerváltás utáni rövid története. In: FRICZ, T. and OROSZ, T. (eds.). *Küzdelmes integráció. Az Európai Parlament és Magyarország 2004–2009*. Budapest, 2011, p. 431–452.

PAROUBEK, J. Visegrad Group Celebrates Its Fifteenth Anniversary. In: JAGODZIŃSKI, A. (ed.). *The Visegrad Group – A Central European Constellation*. [online]. Bratislava, 2006, p. 14–15. Available from: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=81>. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

RUSNÁK, U. Visegrád: múlt és jövő között. *Beszélő*. [online]. 2003, vol. 8, no. 3, p. 45–48. Available from: https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/Beszelo_2003_1/?pg=170&layout=s. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

STRÁŽAY, T. A visegrádi négyek és a Nyugat-Balkán – az inspiráció új forrásainak nyomában. *Pro Minoritate*. [online]. 2011, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 39–44. Available from: <https://prominoritate.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ProMino11-3-04-Strazay.pdf>. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

STRÁŽAY, T. Visegrad – Arrival, Survival, Revival. In: DANČÁK, B. et al. (eds.). *Two Decades of Visegrad Cooperation. Selected V4 Bibliography*. Bratislava, 2011, p. 14–38.

SZILÁGYI, I. M. A visegrádi országok együttműködése. *Szolgáti Tudományos Közlemények*. 2010, 14, p. 1–11.

SZÚCS, A. A kisállamiság nagy kihívásai: Luxemburg. In: KISS, J. László (ed.). *A huszonötök Európai*. Budapest, 2005, p. 81–101.

SZÚCS, A. Hollandia: lanyhuló atlantizmus és az európai integráció erősödő kritikája. In: KISS, J. László (ed.). *A huszonötök Európai*. Budapest, 2005, p. 9–35.

TAKÁCS, G. A Visegrádi Négyek és az európai integráció. In: GLIED, V. and TARRÓSY, I. (eds.). *Globális biztonsági kihívások, NATO szerepvállalások és Közép-Európa*. [online]. Pécs, 2006, p. 139–157. Available from: http://www.publikon.hu/application/essay/296_1.pdf. (Downloaded 7 April 2021).

TARASOVIČ, V. The possibilities for cooperation of the Visegrad countries and their Eastern Neighbours in the development of security and defence policy in the EU and beyond: the Slovakian perspective. In: TÖRŐ, C. (ed.). *Visegrad cooperation within NATO and CSDP*. [online]. V4 Papers, 2011, 2, p. 69–72. Available from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133825/Raport%20V4.pdf>. (Downloaded 14 April 2022).

URKUTI, G. Finnország, a későn jött „eminens”. In: KISS, J. László (ed.). *A huszonötök Európai*. Budapest, 2005, p. 518–549.

72	ARTICLES Georgina SZABÓ	The first step in the institutionalization of visegrad cooperation: The international visegrad fund (2000-2021)	
----	----------------------------	--	--

Author

Georgina Szabó

PhD student

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem – Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Eötvös Loránd University – Faculty of Humanities

Múzeum krt. 4., 6-8., 1088 Budapest, Hungary

szabo.georgina@btk.elte.hu