

## **Ways to deepen internal cohesion of the V4: Slovak and Polish perspectives**

### *Research Proposal*

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#### Main goals

The celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group in 2016 provides a good opportunity to evaluate achievements and lessons learned, but also to set new priorities for the foreseeable future. The study is aimed to identify the ways and instruments that would lead to the deepening of internal cohesion of the V4. In this context it assesses the approaches of two rather different V4 countries: Poland and Slovakia. Slovakia is the smallest V4 country, but also the most integrated EU member. On the other hand, Poland is the biggest among the V4 countries and also an influential EU member state. The question is to what extent are these differences projected in countries' perceptions of Visegrad cooperation and generally what role does the V4 play in their foreign and European policies.

The crisis in Crimea/Eastern Ukraine presents a concrete case in which Slovakia and Poland's national positions differ. Poland has taken one of the most critical positions towards Russia in the entire EU and from this point of view it differed significantly from other three V4 countries. In addition, Polish society is united in the support for Ukraine. The Slovak society is more divided and this division is also reflected by political elites. Nevertheless, on the Group level the V4 countries have been able to agree on joint statements condemning the aggression of Russia and supporting Ukraine on its way to European structures. This can be taken as a sign that there is a will to look for common denominators also in areas that are considered as problematic. The question however is to what extent the differences in country positions on important issues influence the work and effectiveness of the Group as such.

In light of the above it is useful to summarize – once and again – similarities and differences in the positions of particular V4 countries. Though the study takes into consideration only two out of four cases, it can be considered as a contribution to the debate on the future shape of V4 cooperation. The V4 is currently characterized by the weak institutionalization and by the existence of informal structures. Therefore it is not possible to speak about a coherent block of countries, but rather about a coalition of those who are willing to cooperate. Under such institutional design, differences in country positions can be considered as a natural component of cooperation. Therefore, the proper exploitation of already existing tools of cooperation seems to be a more adequate way to deepen the internal cohesion of the Visegrad Group than a radical change of institutional design. The cooperation can be further enhanced by the introduction of innovative measures that would make the V4 better prepared for future challenges.

#### Working timetable

15 April – 10 May research fellowship in Warsaw, conduction of structured interviews with the representatives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant think tanks based in Warsaw

Late April – work-in-progress presentation in the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in Warsaw

10 May - 10 June Finalization of the study