

Together, but Still Separated? Migration Policy in the V4 countries¹

VIKTOR GLIED AND ŁUKASZ ZAMĘCKI



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Abstract: *The migration policies of the V4 countries present many similarities that seem to be the effect of congruent historical and economic determinants. During the migration crisis in 2015–2016, the Visegrad states partially coordinated their political communication using the same communication panels, which strongly impacted domestic political relations. The V4's approach was a refusal of the open-door policy promoted by Germany and Sweden, and the European Union. Our main findings are that the migration crisis strengthened the cohesion among V4 countries, although the source of this cohesion was clearly a populist stance toward the possible implications of uncontrolled migration (migrants and refugees). This communication style and the resulting political tensions were reflected in the V4 states' resentment based on a sense of shared historical experiences rooted in Central European location and shared experience of the repercussions of communism. In this sense, a strong commitment to the idea of a sovereign nation-state, and a reluctance towards postmodern values are also important factors. This study charts the changes in V4 migration policy since 2015, highlighting the crucial developments in V4 countries' negotiations with the European Union. It also deals with the foreign and domestic effects of the migration crisis and the V4 states' discourse of migration, which was complemented by a debate on the future of the EU that became especially important in Hungary and Poland.*

Keywords: *Visegrad Group (V4), migration, crisis, populism, European Union*

Introduction

Central argument of this paper is that from 2010 onwards, European co-operation needs to face a complex crisis (Dinan – Nugent – Paterson 2017: 1).

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Instead of politically and economically deepening the Community, we can hear about financial rescue packages, a two- and three-tier Europe, lagging regions, the crisis of liberal democracies, the crisis of legitimacy and democracy in the European Union (EU), axiological crisis, terrorism, the failure of multiculturalism, the rise of populist anti-immigration forces, unrest, and the insufficient degree of the integration of those arriving in the European Union. Although the EU has always experienced progress and development in the wake of crises, one of the most vocal challenges has been the “migration crisis” over the last years. Due to the horrors of the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, hundreds of thousands of refugees set out for Europe after 2013 in the hope of survival, peace, and a better life. The influx of migrants hit an unprepared EU and as a consequence, divided the whole continent both politically and socially.

Member States have reacted differently to the complex crisis. The European Commission did not take note of migratory pressures for a long time (until April of 2015), while the former socialist countries that joined the EU in 2004 sought to draw domestic political benefits from crisis, sharply criticizing Brussels’ hesitation. Migration as a new political topic was pronounced, as European politics and the topic of migration mutually captured each other by the 2010s. Certain political forces have sought to forge political capital out of social concerns caused by increasing migratory pressure and anomalies of cohabitation. Although the issue is exceptionally diverse, politics builds upon the most basic fears, evoking instincts in the European population that lie within the *fear/threat – security – protection/defence* triangle. Therefore, the migrant crisis was quite effectively thematised and securitized by Central European and Balkan governments, creating a complex narrative that provided a parallel reality along with reality and fiction, misrepresentation, and concealment, all in all, a one-dimensional explanation bubble that is an acceptable and traceable interpretive framework for the average news consumer. These explanations focus on the coexistence with Muslims, the relationship between the Islamic religion and Christianity and the compatibility of different cultures. Populist, Eurosceptic, and anti-immigration voices have played a major role in this discourse and their success can be explained by the fact that two or three decades after the democratic transition, indifference, disenchantment, and the overwhelming need for radical reforms pervaded Central European public opinion.

The paper analyses the political debates that have arisen within the European Union concerning the migration crisis that began in 2015, primarily through the political lens of the two “opinion leaders”, i.e., Hungary and Poland within the Visegrad Four² (Visegrad Countries – V4). It seeks to scrutinize elements of this prolonged debate, examining the ways in which the challenges of migration and integration have risen to the level of the political agenda, and also

2 Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia.

looking at how the V4 countries have defined their positions differently from the core countries of the EU. Furthermore, the study explores the highlights of the migration crisis and the ensuing political discourse, and it seeks to explore how the tension between Brussels and the V4 countries escalated during the complex response of the EU to the crisis.

The debate included, on the one hand, a profound difference in attitude, stating that in 2015 “*who was a refugee in Brussels, a migrant in Budapest and Warsaw*”, and, on the other hand, the leaders of the EU and the V4 states, and occasionally those of Austria and Italy used conspicuously different communication strategies in terms of style and semantics.

Elements of political populism and nationalism, which appeared at the level of both words and actions, were central in their double speak and behaviour. The title of this study, “*Together, but still separated*” refers to the fact that although the Visegrad countries coordinated their positions on mass migration and various other issues (e.g. the crisis in Ukraine and Russia’s role in it, or the explosions in the Czech Republic in 2014), there were differences in their reactions to them. In order to understand how and why the debate escalated to the point where it challenged even the future of the whole EU, we must interpret and explain the V4 countries’ mentality and political rhetoric of their political leaders. Overall, the paper explores the political rhetoric and discourse used by the V4 states, focusing on the role of Hungary and Poland – the two countries that have gone the furthest in criticizing the way the EU operates.

Theory and practice in the context of V4

As the political steps of the V4 countries and the migration measures of the EU and the V4 have been examined in a number of studies, this paper applies discourse analysis to study the success of the political communication of the V4 governments and, therefore, the success of populism, in different dimensions of reality’s interpretations.³ In this context, the study cannot ignore the elements of populism and nationalism that markedly affected the communication of the V4. The study analyses official government statements and parliamentary debates representing the governments’ position during the migration crisis in all V4 countries, and it also examines all joint statements of Visegrad Group. Statements were collected from publicly available databases in the national languages of the V4 states.

As a basic method, we employ the language use and the goal-driven use of symbols described by Murray Edelman (1967). The result of this analysis indicates that this discourse creates a sense of an effective and dynamic Visegrad co-operation instead of a lenient, hesitant and incapable Brussels. We also

3 For an analysis of the legal aspects and the tensions between EU law and national laws of the V4, see Mohay 2021 in this volume.

relied on Harold Lasswell's (1949) work on the language of politics, Kenneth Burke's (1969) study of political action, and Erwin C. Hargrove's (1998) narrative analysis, in which he examines elements of reality explanations. Overall, our study finds that the fundamental semantic element of the discourse of V4 countries was the need to protect the Central European population from the effects of the mass migration of different religions and cultures. While invasion and mass migration are the so-called *dangers* (Karyotis, 2012), the word *protection* builds on people's need for security and their instinctive fear which among the population of the region – especially in Hungary and Poland – are embodied in a high degree of xenophobia (Szalai – Göbl 2015). These fears indicate the importance of preventive action for the public, thereby legitimizing the actions of a proactive party. The V4 governments' appropriation of the definition of actors involved in the migration process, and the creation, shaping and transmission of their own narrative, are also part of the discourse building all elements around the concepts of *threat and security* (Balzaq 2011). It is worth noting that according to Pew Research Center polls, both nations – Hungarians and Poles – were among the most concerned societies in Europe, afraid that an influx of refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism and therefore it is a significant threat to their country.⁴ In connection with border protection and building a fence, the Hungarian government's discourse was partly based on the historical concepts of "Hungary, the Fortress of Christianity" and the "Bastion of Europe" (Pap – Reményi 2017: 240; Pap 2020: 149), which are strongly present in Hungarian political thinking and can add visual elements through well-known novels and films, and by creating a cognitive connection with maps, statistics and figures (Allen 2007). One can observe a similar narration in Poland – Poland's mission is to uphold the Christian foundation of society (Jarosław Kaczyński speech on 10 November 2019⁵) and immigrants bring diseases (Jarosław Kaczyński speech on 12 October 2015⁶) among other threats (Jarosław Kaczyński speech on 16 September 2015⁷).

All this is perfectly in harmony with the Copenhagen School's securitization model, which identifies migration as a threat and a security challenge (Buzan – Wæver – Wilde 1998). Official Hungarian narratives deliberately build on the

4 Poushter, Jacob (2016): European opinions of the refugee crisis in 5 charts, Pew Research Center: available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/16/european-opinions-of-the-refugee-crisis-in-5-charts/> (12th December 2016)

5 Prończuk, Monika (2019): Kaczyński: Poland has a "historical mission" to support Christian civilization, Notes from Poland: available at: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2019/11/12/kaczynski-poland-has-historical-mission-to-support-christian-civilisation/> (10th November 2019)

6 Cienski, Jan (2015): Migrants carry 'parasites and protozoa,' warns Polish opposition leader, Politico.eu: available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-asylum-poland-kaczynski-election/> (2nd January 2016)

7 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2015): Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 100. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 16 września 2015 r., available at https://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/Stenolnter7.nsf/0/A8CA0F4060DE3B1CC1257EC200722812/%24File/100_a_ksiazka.pdf (11th January 2016)

previously mentioned background knowledge of society. The Hungarian Prime Minister calls himself a “captain general of the borders” fighting the Ottoman armies, defending not only Hungary but also Germany and, in general, the Christian world against “Muslim invasion”. In Polish right-wing parties’ narratives, Poland is a defender against threats coming from “the expansion of other cultures,” and it is symptomatic that during debates about immigration and the refugee crisis, the figure of king Jan III Sobieski, who stopped the Ottoman invasion at Vienna in 1683, is recalled.⁸ The Slovak party SMER, in power during the migration crisis, used the slogan “We protect Slovakia” in the election campaign, and politicians in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic linked the issue of migrants with terrorism.

Communication did not lack elements of populism. There have been extremely effective arguments against migration, blurring the concepts of legal and illegal; of irregular and mass migration; and of refugee and economic migrant. Populism, populist rhetoric, and populist political attitudes serve extremely diverse purposes: fundamentally mechanisms of the technology of power. Populism dominates the agenda with its themes, subordinating everything to political communication. It creates and shapes alternative narratives, taking a series of tactical steps that build on the fury, frustration, resentment, or even the “people’s” need for revenge (Müller 2016). Eatwell and Goodwin have a similar view (2018: 8), saying that populist leaders like Viktor Orbán profess in their rhetoric that they want more democracy, more power to the ordinary people, however, they introduce a new approach to democratic values (i.e. “illiberal democracy”) and multiculturalism, arguing that real democracy means that we, Christian Europeans preserve and protect our culture, our religion and our civilizational achievements. From this point of view, the term “liberal” indeed includes everything that causes democracies to gradually lose the support of the population. Eric Kaufmann (2019: 226–227) asserts that the mass migration flow that began in 2014 gave a significant boost to populist parties⁹ (as well as mindset), and these parties were able to build a complete political-economic crisis around the existing migration phenomenon, thereby exploiting a pre-existing concern that strained European host societies below the surface of political correctness.

8 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2015): Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 100. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 16 września 2015 r., available at https://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/Stenolnter7.nsf/0/A8CA0F4060DE3B1CC1257EC200722812/%24File/100_a_ksiadzka.pdf (11th January 2016).

9 Various studies show the probable impact of the migration crisis on the increase in support for radical right-wing parties in Europe, possibly due to its media coverage, and, to a lesser extent, increased personal exposure and interactions of Europeans with immigrants – cf. e.g.: Barone, Guglielmo – D’Ignazio, Alesio – de Blasio, Guido – Naticchioni, Paolo (2016): Mr. Rossi, Mr. Hu and Politics. The Role of Immigration in Shaping Natives’ Voting Behavior. *Journal of Public Economics* 136(C): 1–13; Halla, Martin – Wagner, Alexander F. – Zweimüller, Josef. (2017): Immigration and Voting for the Far Right. *Journal of the European Economic Association* 15(6): 1341–1385; Steinmayr, Andreas. (2020): Contact versus Exposure: Refugee Presence and Voting for the Far-Right. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*: 1:47.

Our study draws on Canovan's (1999) definition of populism as a content-wise incomplete set of reactions to perceived or real events that affect basic emotions, which are simply articulated, aimed at polarization and political gain. All of this is heavily imbued with an exclusionary identity politics, the creation and use of the distinction *We* and *Them*, whereby populists constitute the people, the nation, and anyone who expresses a different opinion is simply not part of the group, but part of a fallen political elite, potentially an alien and a traitor (Bayer 2008:42). According to Taguieff (1995), the emphasis is on the image of the people "endangered by a stranger" and on a critical and radical anti-elitism. These elements of populist rhetoric all appeared in the discourse of V4 governments in some form.

East and West both "respond" – Similarities and differences in communication

From the end of 2014, a wave of hundreds of thousands of migrants reached the Balkan states and Hungary. People from various regions of Asia and Africa, but mainly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, migrated towards Western Europe via Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million people made their way to Europe via the Balkans (Glied 2020). According to the statistics of Hungarian authorities, 132.000 people were registered to cross the border by 31 August 2015, but according to the police's statistics, many more, almost 400.000 people crossed the Hungarian-Serbian, Hungarian-Romanian, and Hungarian-Croatian borders by September 2015 (Glied – Pap 2016).

The issue of migration, complemented by related topics such as the coexistence of different cultures, has dominated the European political agenda since the early spring of 2015. Recognizing the potential for instant political profit, large-scale politics deftly positioned the migrant crisis and created additional interpretations alongside already existing ones, causing a revival of the debate on immigration and terrorism. Instead of preparing for and dealing effectively with the problem, there was a communication battle that intrinsically blocked rational initiatives and an honest dialogue at a European level.

However, the influx of migrants in the Balkans and Central Europe posed a severe problem of overburdening national and EU level asylum systems. The principle of the European community's migration policy had long been characterized by solidarity. However, as a result of the accelerated and intensified migratory pressures at the turn of the 20th – 21st century, member states often lacked shared commitment, fair "burden-sharing," and cost-sharing for border control. The EU should have developed a common, forward-looking, and effective migration policy capable of strengthening co-operation between member states and mitigating the challenges posed by immigration at the beginning of

the 2000s, but this did not happen (Glied 2020). Experts and politicians argued against creating a common immigration policy claiming that migration should remain primarily a nation-state competence, as immigration is geographically unevenly distributed within Europe and has different social and economic effects that Community policies cannot address.

The migration crisis of 2015–2016 deeply divided European public opinion. Fault lines emerged to various extents among European core states, however, most markedly between Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and Western European states (Trauner 2016). A group has emerged within the EU that has developed its own proposals and called for alternative migration and asylum policies. The Visegrad Four coordinated their positions along their shared challenges. The obvious differences in migratory pressure became blurred, and the intention to curb massive, irregular, and illegal migration already brought short-term political benefits, especially domestic ones. Among the sharp critics of EU crisis management, the Hungarian government was at the forefront, criticizing the slowness of Brussels' decision-making and urging effective protection of the Community's external borders. It has become clear that the debate over the management of migration goes beyond this issue, and it is evident that there must be an honest and comprehensive discourse on the functioning of the European Union and the future of the Community. The discourse on migration and coexistence is constantly gaining new momentum due to terrorist actions, the rise of populist anti-immigration parties, tensions between newcomers and host societies, and the apparent failure of multiculturalism.

The migration crisis has triggered politically motivated action on two levels, and it has also created a new narrative (Bauerová 2018: 113–114). One level of political action is the strengthening of the cohesion of V4 countries who have a history of nearly 700 years of co-operation. The crisis created political goals that helped the group to define themselves and create a common political will. Another level of political action is the ongoing debate between the V4 countries and the EU, with the V4 countries' argument for the need to protect common values such as Christianity and the sovereignty of states. Researchers (Hanley, 2012; Stępińska et al. 2017; Naxera 2018; Havlík 2019; Naxera et al. 2020) agree that the governments of the V4 countries (ANO2011, Smer-SD, Fidesz-KDNP, Law and Justice (PiS)) began to use similar elements in their communication after 2015 with similar political success.

Looking for common features of the Central European political attitude, we can define three discursive segments:

1. *Ideological determination*: a sense of shared historical experiences including the difficulties of being a Central European state (existing between two empires), the communist past, the regime change and the difficulties of subsequent periods (frustration stemming from the sense of “being a loser”) (Krastev 2007:62);

- a. feelings of revulsion against national minorities (Roma minority, Hungarian minority, German minority, etc.);
- b. the decline of liberal democracies unable to provide answers to challenges, and as a result, a need for a new, alternative direction.
2. *Communication style featuring particular markers of populism and demagoguery*: themes include the will of the people as opposed to the technocratic elites of Brussels and forces that control them (George Soros and NGOs aided by foreigners supporting/helping migrants; migrants in Budapest and Warsaw, refugees in Brussels) (Kacziba 2020);
 - a. the protection of common European values and Christianity; the impossibility of harmonious coexistence with other religions and civilizations, especially with Islam;
 - b. the EU's democratic deficit – “the decisions are made over our heads”;
 - c. common European solutions that are effective but respect national sovereignty (Bauerová 2018:101).
3. *The nature of the discourse*: one-sided, addressed directly to and referring to the people; it is characterized by doublespeak, in other words, politicians communicate different content for their citizens and EU forums;
 - a. Simplified messages and a proactive, competent attitude that can be interpreted within the threat – danger (migration, migrants) – security – protection (government, state) matrix (Glied 2020).
 - b. V4 governments prefer to use the word “crisis” in their communications, which the media also adopted (Pachocka 2016:102).
 - c. On the one hand, this has been applied to the phenomenon of mass migration, i.e. an influx of refugees at Europe's borders, and, on the other hand, to the structural problems of the EU, which have also raised questions about the Community's future.

This discourse has gradually created parallel communication dimensions. The gap between the position of Western and Eastern European states is defined by significant historical and cultural differences resulting in distinctly different political thinking. Summarizing the historical events and political attitudes behind these differences, we can identify several fault lines that determine the European perception of mass migration, the interpretation of the problem itself, and the nature of the proposed solutions.

1. Colonization and the maintenance of the colonial system in the 19th and 20th centuries meant an almost infinite amount of raw materials and labour at a low price for France, Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands.
2. Rejection of the inclusive and open Willkommenskultur mainly represented by Germany and the selective migration sacrificed on the altar of solidarity.
3. Rejection of the compulsory refugee relocation mechanism/scheme, in other words, the *quota*.

4. Strengthening the external border protection of the European Union, rethinking contradictory agreements of border protection, law enforcement, migration and asylum-seeking that are dysfunctional in a crisis, putting the common European migration policy on a new footing.
5. Rejection of the new EU migration pact and the solidarity advocated by Brussels.

In order to understand the significant differences in opinions, we must first explore the attitudes that have defined the successful Eastern European policy of the rejection of migration and migrants. What we are interested in is the ways in which a topic not traditionally present in Central European political discourse could become a defining domestic political element and part of public discourse through political communication. Some elements of this topic are common in all V4 countries, while others can be interpreted exclusively in Hungarian and Polish relations. In this study we deal with the latter.

According to Strnad (2018), the V4 countries showed an unprecedented unity during the migration crisis, which signifies a common identity, a common political orientation. All this stems from their perceived common historical ordeals and from being stigmatized by Western member states of the EU who criticise the V4's policies for not respecting the rule of law and for being toxic, illiberal, nationalist, prejudiced and Eurosceptic. Since the beginning of the crisis, the political attitudes of the Visegrad countries have changed several times, which is reflected in the fact that they have been variously called V2 + 2 (the Czech Republic and Slovakia + Poland and Hungary) and V3 + 1 (referring to Slovakia's unique, individual policy).

Kořan (2012) points out that V4 co-operation stems primarily from the fact that the EU made decisions about foreign policy issues concerning them without consultation, thus the migration crisis created an opportunity for real joint action. It was also an important aspect that Hungary, located on the migratory route, played a more significant role than its real political and economic weight would allow both in the protection of the external borders of the EU and in influencing other Visegrad countries. A related analysis also revealed that Brussels did not welcome any dissenting opinions, complaining that the "new" entrants of Eastern Europe are interested in maintaining rather than resolving the crisis through constructive solutions. It was also suggested that the tone of Poland and Hungary is unacceptable to Brussels, and that the two countries' offensive and arrogant language use sets back real debates rather than advancing them. The Czech Republic and, most importantly, Slovakia, however, used less harsh terms and were open to agreement. Brussels argued that the V4 co-operation is only temporary, based on a specific topic with no common ground other than the rejection of migrants. However, the leaders of the Visegrad countries have repeatedly emphasized that their joint action is guided not only by fictional aspects but also by very real political goals, even

if they envisage achieving them differently. Their intention was clear: to change their role of a policy taker who follows the decisions taken in Brussels for the role of a policy shaper whose voice and requests are taken into account.

Political success is influenced by several factors (FitzGerald et al. 2019: 8), and the relevant literature defines two basic areas/groups of such factors. One area is related to political effectiveness, i.e., what a political entity manages to accomplish compared to its original goal (McConnell 2010; Elster 2015). In our case, political success means the efficiency and effectiveness of political communication regarding domestic political goals (increasing the popularity of governing parties and dominating public discourse), i.e., making the issue of migration an important part of the political agenda. On the other hand, political success also means the strengthening of the pressure group of the V4 countries within the EU to offer an alternative and a reference point for other countries, and to be able to influence community policy, forcing it to change.

Changes in V4 migration policies

The Trends of Visegrad European Policy project,¹⁰ which sought to reveal the changes taking place in 2015–2016 using an online survey, helped unravel the changes in the V4-EU relationship. Responses showed that the majority of the V4 countries had the impression that the EU and Germany, in particular, were responsible for the escalation of the migration crisis. Responses also revealed an East-West fault line, the differences in the policies of the old member states and Central European countries, and a network of relations in which the Czech Republic and Slovakia form a pole more committed towards Germany, while Hungary and Poland are more interested in strengthening V4 co-operation, although they all see Western European countries as their partners. Except for the Slovak respondents, the populations of the other three countries were dissatisfied with their country's ability to assert their interests within the EU.

In order to interpret properly the migration and asylum policies of the Visegrad countries, we find it worth examining the volume of migratory pressures. Hungary is located on the so-called Balkan (or Eastern Mediterranean) route, which was exposed to high levels of Asian and Middle Eastern migration, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic are not directly transit states. In Poland, refugees mainly from the Ukrainian crisis sought refuge. This can be traced in the number of applications for asylum filed in 2015¹¹ and 2016¹².

10 Dostál, Vít – Végh, Zsuzsanna (2017): Trends of Visegrad European Policy. AMO, Prague, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. <https://trendy.amo.cz/trendy2017/home> (14th November 2018).

11 Asylum in the EU Member States. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6> (Downloaded 21st November 2020).

12 Asylum applicants in the EU. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/asylum2016> (2nd January 2021).

Table 1: Number and changes in numbers of applications for asylum (2015–2016) (Expressed in percentage in 2015)

Number of applications for asylum	2015	Change compared to 2014 (%)	2016
Hungary	174 435	+323	28215
Slovakia	270	+18	100
Czech Republic	1235	+31	1200
Poland	10 255	+83	9780

Source: Eurostat, 2016. Asylum in the EU Member States Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015 – Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis: top citizenships. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6> (17 March 2019)

Following the catastrophe on the Mediterranean Sea on 19th April 2015, which caused the death of hundreds of North African migrants, the European Commission declared a refugee crisis, focusing on the need for all EU member states to play a part in dealing with the influx of refugees. A relocation quota was first mentioned then, which would have distributed a total of 60.000 asylum seekers among EU member states, considering the host country's GDP, population and unemployment rate. The European Commission then swiftly adopted on 13 May 2015 a document to manage the crisis caused by mass migration. The *European Agenda on Migration*¹³ has identified four areas where specific action is needed. Western and Eastern countries of the EU agreed that it is necessary to identify and reduce the causes of illegal migration, and to protect the external borders. There has been, however, serious disagreement in terms of assistance, asylum and migration policy, which has led to incompatible positions over time. The first debate took place immediately after 27th May, with the EC launching its first act to manage the migration crisis, including the urgent relocation of 40.000 beneficiaries of international protection from Italy and Greece and 20.000 from outside the EU.¹⁴

Important decisions were made at the EU summit on 25–26 June 2015¹⁵ in order to manage the migratory pressure, but Donald Tusk, President of the European Council and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, saw the enforcement of a mandatory relocation (distribution) quota as the key to the solution, even though the problem escalated beyond the need to accommoda-

13 A European Agenda on Migration. Brussels, 13th May 2015. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf (12th December 2015).

14 European Commission makes progress on Agenda on Migration. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_5039 (3rd October 2016).

15 European Council, 25–26 June 2015. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2015/06/25-26/> (3rd March 2017).

tion of a few tens of thousands of asylum seekers. While the adoption of the quota met with serious resistance – Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called it downright insane – heads of state and governments agreed that the solution would be to help end the civil war in Syria and Libya thus solve the problems that triggered mass migration in the first place. During the summer of 2015, more migrants arrived in the Balkans and Hungary via Greece than ever before. That year, Hungary received the second largest number of applications for asylum, only second to Germany (441.800), but if we compare the number to the country's population, Hungary also preceded Sweden, Austria, Finland, and Germany. Thus, it is not surprising that the most heated dispute erupted in Hungary and between Hungary and the EU.

The emerging individual policy of the V4 countries took shape during May-June 2015 in joint statements and programmes (Juhász 2018: 34). A summit closing the Slovak Presidency of the V4 countries was held in Bratislava on 19th June 2015, where Prime Ministers made the Bratislava Declaration,¹⁶ criticizing the European migration strategy, emphasizing that the planned strategy does not take into account the interests of all EU member states, their diverse geographic challenges, the migratory pressure along the Balkan route, and the difficulties posed by the mandatory nature of the relocation mechanism (quota).

At their extraordinary summit in Prague on 4 September 2015, the V4 heads of government clarified their position on the migration crisis. The joint statement¹⁷ emphasized that the migration crisis was a European problem that needed to be addressed at a European level. They added that in order to avoid maritime accidents resulting in the deaths of thousands, the problems of refugees must be resolved at the original source of the problem, but at the same time, the protection of external borders must be strengthened. The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland pledged solidarity to Hungary, a country exposed to the highest migratory pressures. The Czech Republic and Slovakia expressed their willingness to provide a railway corridor for migrants passing through Hungary to Germany. Viktor Orbán emphasized in several statements that a common and acceptable solution to the migration crisis must be found. This was reaffirmed at the V4 Summit in Prague on 3rd December¹⁸ where participants drew attention to the ineffectiveness of common policies and the fact that the Schengen Convention became dysfunctional. At the meeting, the possibility of creating a so-called “mini-Schengen” arose, with the participants stressing that this does not serve the European integration.

16 Bratislava Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government for a Stronger CSDP, 19 June 2015 in Bratislava, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/bratislavadeclaration> (13th May 2018).

17 TRUST. Joint Statement of the Summit of Heads of Government of the Visegrad Group Countries. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=279>. Prague, September 4, 2015. (2nd August 2017).

18 Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Countries, Prague, 3rd December 2015, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/joint-statement-of-the-151204> (17th October 2017).

Migrants entered the Schengen zone without hindrance before the completion of the 175 km long fence system (border barrier) on the Hungarian-Serbian border (15th September 2015), and before strengthening the Bulgarian fence and introducing stricter border protection measures in Macedonia. However, after restrictive measures were introduced, migration flow shifted towards less resistance on the roads towards Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, as well as Italy. Authorities were unable to enforce immigration rules; the masses passing through the Balkans and Central Europe wanted to reach Western Europe (mainly Germany), even people who had been granted asylum in one of the countries mentioned above wanted to leave as soon as possible (Glied – Pap 2016).

At the end of the summer of 2015, Central European/Balkan and Western European political positions and rhetoric on the future of migrants became radically divided. In the spirit of traditional political correctness, Western politicians focused on solidarity and common solutions, while front-line countries demanded the halting of migration, easing pressure, and closing the borders. The European Commission presented its second package of proposals on 9th September 2015 to alleviate the crisis. The package required the distribution of 120.000 refugees (plus those 40.000 people who entered in May) to be resettled urgently.¹⁹ The failure of the plan was signalled by the fact that by the end of 2016, only a few thousand people had been relocated. The Commission raised the idea of a hotspot system (controlled border crossing points) to be set up in the front-line countries during September and October, thus speeding up asylum procedures.²⁰ Angela Merkel and other Western European leaders spoke about the humane treatment of refugees and solidarity within the EU, while Viktor Orbán called for immediate action and summarized his plan at the end of September²¹: common border protection, a system of selective immigration, partnership with sending and transit countries. The reception of the package was ambivalent in European political circles. It became clear that the crisis could not be resolved without Turkey, and it was also clear that Greece, Italy and Hungary needed help to strengthen the EU's external borders.

Of the many meetings and conferences held between 2015 and 2021, and of the packages of measures and the proposals aimed at resolving the refugee crisis, only a few provided real answers. One of them was the commitment of the EU's member states to increase their political and financial role in curbing migratory flows through Turkey to the European Union. The EU committed € 3 + 3 billion to Turkey to improve the situation of the large number of refugees

19 Migrant crisis: EU ministers approve disputed quota plan. 2015. 09. 22. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34329825> (17th January 2016).

20 Refugee Crisis: European Commission takes decisive action. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5596_en.htm (22nd January 2016).

21 Index. Megmagyarázzuk Orbán 6 pontját. 23. 9. 2015. https://index.hu/belfold/2015/09/23/megmagyaraz-zuk_orban_6_pontjat/ (27th December 2015).

in the country. Another such step was the building of the fence system on the Turkish-Bulgarian, Turkish-Greek, Macedonian-Greek and Hungarian-Serbian borders, which physically slowed down the transition of illegal migrants. Viktor Orbán said that he did not like the idea of the border barrier, but as long as there is no better solution, it will stay there. Even left-wing representatives acknowledged that the Hungarian government's communication regarding migration was so dominant that it created a sense that only a political communication distant from European values can bring political benefits.²² Important elements of their communication included Brussels' impotence in connection with migration; the failure of an inclusive and integrative political attitude, and the dangers of the coexistence with the Islamic religion.

The quota and the deepening of the crisis

The quota was the proposal that defined the political agenda for the longest period. Hungary did not make an official offer to take in those entitled to asylum (1294 people). Poland was also reluctant and finally rejected the quota (5082 people). The Czech Republic (1591 people) made the same decision, taking over 12 people from Greece (Juhász 2018:36). In June 2017, the EC initiated an infringement procedure against these three Visegrad countries. Although Slovakia also rejected the quota and, like Hungary, challenged the Council's decision, it agreed to relocate 16 people. The tone of Bratislava, holder of the rotating EU presidency in the second half of 2016, was moderate and Slovakia showed willingness to compromise and implement measures of solidarity within other versions, but jointly. V4 proposed the option of a so-called effective (flexible) solidarity, which would make solutions dependent on the size of the influx of migrants.²³ Essentially, each member state could choose the way in which it would contribute to a common European settlement: either opting for a financial contribution, intensified border assistance, or the taking in of refugees. A statement to this effect was adopted on 21st November 2016 by the Interior Ministers of the V4 countries in Warsaw,²⁴ but the initiative was rejected by the majority of EU countries including Malta holding the rotating presidency at the time.

One of the priorities of the V4 countries was the protection of external borders, but it was emphasized from the outset that this could not be imagined without controlling and regulating mass migration. To this end, it was consid-

22 Lengyel Tibor: Ilyen áron nem akarok választást nyerni. <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20151112-lendvai-ildiko-mszp-kovacs-laszlo-tisztujitas-osszefogas-menekultek-valasztas.html> (4th February 2019).

23 New Pact for Europe. National Report, Slovakia, 2017. Slovak National Reflection Group. <https://www.newpactforeurope.eu/documents/NPE-FINAL-report-Slovakia-online-version.pdf?m=1512482527&> (11th April 2018).

24 Joint Statement of V4 Interior Ministers on the Establishment of the Migration Crisis Response Mechanism. In Warsaw, November 21, 2016. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-v4> (2nd May 2017).

ered necessary to set up and coordinate a hotspot system, which would have been operating in the countries of origin and distribution, and as a second-level filter at the EU's external borders to determine whether a migrant is eligible for asylum or not. By 2015–2016, the Balkan corridor had been stabilized, and in January 2016, the idea of launching a co-operation program with Macedonia and, through Frontex with Greece was raised. The program included mutual assistance in border protection and counter-terrorism.²⁵

Within the European Union, the Visegrad countries took similar political positions on the migration crisis, while Austria, Slovenia and Croatia also agreed with them merely on certain issues. The political communication of these governments was partly similar, and like Hungary, they also exploited the refugee crisis in their domestic party politics. At the same time, these countries differed on a number of important issues, such as their individual relationship with the European Union, the implementation of certain Community policies, or the assessment of Russia's growing influence in the region.

By the summer and autumn of 2016, Hungarian communication on migration policy – and the Hungarian Prime Minister himself – had become a point of reference for European radical-populist parties. The Dutch, French, German and Austrian elections were approaching, and anti-immigration parties' potential coming to power – which the Hungarian Prime Minister openly hoped for – became an important issue. Anti-immigration and anti-Brussels communication panels, complemented by the theory of networks funded by George Soros transporting refugees to Europe, also appeared in the Macedonian, Romanian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovak, Czech, Polish and Moldovan political rhetoric.

The crisis also affected Austria. After some hesitation, Vienna announced in January 2016 that it would tighten its border control. Chancellor Werner Faymann said his country would temporarily suspend the Schengen Agreement, and would check all those crossing the border and reject economic migrants. However, this was no longer enough for Austrian voters. With a change in party preferences and the 2017 election victory of Sebastian Kurz and the Austrian People's Party, a centre-right, highly immigration-critical party came into power in a Central European country fully committed to the West. Chancellor Kurz's views on migration issues were very similar to those of the Hungarian government. Austria's situation, however, differs from the Visegrad countries and thus from Hungary in that more than 700.000 immigrants live in Austria, who have a serious social weight and thus waging a virtual war against them can pose a real political risk.²⁶

25 Joint Declaration of Ministers of the Interior. Meeting of Interior Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia. 19. 1. 2016. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-declaration-of> (26th November 2017).

26 It is also an important factor that Vienna has traditionally paid more attention to Berlin than to the Visegrad countries regarding political and economic issues.

As the debate on the mandatory resettlement quota remained on the agenda in Brussels, on 15th April 2016, the Hungarian Prime Minister announced another ten-point Action Plan in Lisbon called “Schengen 2.0”.²⁷ Just as in the previous package, a number of proposals were clearly unacceptable to the majority of the member states, thus, once again, we must consider the initiative primarily a means of communication. This time, Hungary was not alone since Slovakia also announced that it would try to prevent the implementation of the refugee quota through legal measures. From this campaign, the Hungarian government expected domestic political reinforcement, which could be successfully communicated on the European stage as well.

More efficient management of migration, harmonization of asylum procedures and the unification of standards determining the conditions of admission are constantly on the agenda in the European Union. The *Second Amendment to the Migration Package* published in July 2016²⁸ was immediately rejected by the Visegrad countries, who feared it would abolish member states’ competence on various issues and would ignore social attitudes and customs regarding immigration policies as well as differing asylum regulations. The proposal continued to include the unification of the relocation system, which was in itself sufficient to strengthen the unity of the protesting countries. It is not a coincidence that the proposal never reached a serious stage of negotiation due to the resistance of the V4 countries, although the issue remained on the agenda.

While in 2015 the V4 countries voted in favour of a common European solution, stressing the need to address the problems where they arose and uniformly rejecting the mandatory relocation quota, the 2016 Warsaw Summit strengthened the critical tone of the Visegrad countries, and their communication focused prominently on the inevitable internal reform of the European Union. According to Viktor Orbán, “*in the field of fundamental values – such as national traditions, Christianity, security – there has already been an agreement among the Visegrad countries.*”²⁹ At the same time, it is revealing that there was no mention of Russian-Central European relations, which were treated as a sensitive topic.

At the Central European Summits in March and June 2017, the previously drastically different positions of the V4 countries and Western European member states started to get closer, and the negotiations took place in a much calmer atmosphere. Viktor Orbán stated that “*it is not easy to be a good European as a Central European, as the countries of the region have different historical heritage*

27 Orbán will tour EU capitals with his K‘Schengen 2.0’ plan. 2016. 04. 18. <http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/orban-will-tour-eu-capitals-with-schengen-2-0-plan/>. (1st February 2018).

28 COM(2016) 468 final 2016/0225 (COD) Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union Resettlement Framework and amending Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council. European Commission, Brussels, 13rd July 2016.

29 Orbán: Az EU drámai helyzetbe jutott. [EU got in a dramatic situation] 2016. 07. 21. <https://mno.hu/kulfold/orban-az-eu-dramai-helyzetbe-jutott-1353019>, (14th January 2018).

*and different instincts on several issues, and different traditional values”.*³⁰ These thoughts refer to earlier statements of the Hungarian Prime Minister, in which he drew attention to the fact that Central European countries had never had a colonial empire, so throughout history they did not have to face mass immigration of different religions and cultures, therefore, they did not commit colonial crimes, unlike some Westerner countries that may feel a historical remorse. Budapest continued to oppose the introduction of the quota, but other Central European leaders also took a similar stand. The Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło stated on 28th March 2017 that *“Eastern EU member states will never accept the dictates of Brussels and will not give in to extortion.”* The Czech Prime Minister also firmly refused to link discussions of resolving the migration crisis with the disbursement of EU funds. The Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico stated, *“This is blackmail that the Slovak government rejects.”*³¹ In response, on 13 June 2017 the European Commission initiated legal action against Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic after the three Central European countries refused to implement EU decisions on the compulsory distribution of refugees.³² The EC decided to initiate the infringement procedure after the Visegrad countries announced that they would not implement the 2015 refugee quota agreement. In September 2017, the Court of Justice of the European Union dismissed the action brought by Hungary and Slovakia for the annulment of the second quota resolution. Hungary claimed that the migration crisis could not be resolved but only postponed by relocation quotas. The biggest tension was still caused by the question of the quota. Hungary continued to maintain its position that *“Westerners want to get rid of their unwisely admitted migrants by distributing them among countries that have defended themselves and not allowed them in, such as Hungary”.*³³ Viktor Orbán responded to the steps taken by Brussels on 22 June 2017 during the EU summit. The main topic of the two-day meeting was the management of illegal migration. There was a consensus among member states on the need to protect the EU’s external borders and to stop illegal immigration, and to work together with sending and transit countries.³⁴

30 Orbán: nem könnyű jó európainak lenni. [It is not easy to be a good European] 9. 3. 2017 <https://mno.hu/belfold/orban-nem-konnyu-jo-europainak-lenni-1389465>, (17th January 2018).

31 EURACTIV. Visegrád Four slam ‘blackmail’ by Brussels on migrants. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/visegrad-four-slam-blackmail-by-brussels-on-migrants/> (2nd January 2018)

32 EU opens sanctions procedure against Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic over refugees. 13. 06. 2017 <http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eu-opens-sanctions-procedure-against-hungary-poland-and-czech-republic-over-refugees/> (18th March 2018)

33 Orbán beszólt Macronnak. [Orbán teases Macron] 22. 06. 2017. http://www.napi.hu/magyar_gazdasag/orban_beszolt_macronnak_videoal_642203.html. (15 March 2018)

34 Az EU-csúcs legnagyobb eredménye az unió védelmi dimenziójának erősítése. [The biggest achievement of the EU summit is the strengthening of the Union’s defense dimension.] 2017. 23. 06.2017. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/az-ules-legnagyobb-eredmenye-az-unio-vedelmi-dimenziojanak-erositese> (26th March 2018).

It is still unclear what the future of the quota will be but the argument that the mandatory relocation mechanism has failed has repeatedly appeared in the communications of the Hungarian, Polish and Slovak governments. In October 2018, the question of the quota re-emerged, and Angela Merkel said she was unaware of a solution that would permanently abandon the system of mandatory relocation, although Donald Tusk quasi admitted that the mechanism would not be enforceable.³⁵ Sebastian Kurz argued that mandatory solidarity should be strengthened, which would entail the allocation of EU funds to the joint protection of external borders.

Pact on Asylum and Migration – A possible solution, but for what purpose?

In the absence of agreement, on 23rd September 2020 the Commission presented a new Pact on Asylum and Migration³⁶, which promised better and faster procedures throughout the whole system and attempted to strike a balance between solidarity and a fair distribution of responsibilities among member states. The draft recognizes that the current migration system is not working and that a predictable and reliable migration management system is needed. An important part of the pact is the pre-accession screening of those wishing to enter the EU, as well as the introduction of health and safety checks and fingerprinting with fast procedures on the borders. The second pillar is the fair sharing of responsibilities and solidarity, i.e., member states must act responsibly and in solidarity with each other. In the event of migratory pressure, each member state is obliged to provide their share of solidarity, that is, a so-called flexible contribution from member states. In addition, the EU will seek mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries and speed up the return system and related legal procedures. The latter is an important element, as in seven out of ten cases the migrant turned out not to be entitled to reside in the territory of the EU.

What divides the member states more than anything is the relocation mechanism in any form. While the Visegrad countries, Austria, Slovenia and the Baltic states reject any kind of quota, the Mediterranean countries would make it compulsory to distribute refugees, and the core states would like to break the deadlock and push for a compromise that could be an effective solution. The V4 countries insist that migration should be handled outside the EU and that in

35 Barigazzi, Jacopo – Herszenhorn, David M. (2017): Tusk to ask EU leaders to declare mandatory refugee quotas 'ineffective'. Politico. 7 December 2021. www.politico.eu/article/donald-tusk-to-ask-eu-leaders-to-declare-mandatory-refugee-quotas-ineffective/ (4th November 2019).

36 COM(2020) 609 final. European Commission. Migration and Asylum Package: New Pact on Migration and Asylum documents adopted on 23rd September 2020. Brussels. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0609&from=EN> (4th February 2021).

the return system guarantees should be applied that will create the conditions for the deportation of illegal residents within the EU. However, the proposal was challenged both by human rights activists and opponents of the hotspot system raising issues such as the nature of detention during the inspection period or the costs of maintaining an external hotspot system.³⁷ At the end of 2020, Hungary and Poland were threatening to veto the new EU budget and the recovery fund for weeks, saying legitimate payments could not be tied to the rule of law. Positions were not drawing nearer at the beginning of 2021, but rather moving apart, thus it seems that the Community will still not be able to establish a common migration policy.

Two cases: Hungary and Poland

Among the V4 countries, the Hungarian government was the most critical of the EU's immigration policy. The Hungarian political communication featured all elements of populist demagoguery in connection with the 2015 migration crisis. Hungarian government rhetoric, focusing on the crisis of European liberal democracies and the incapability of the European Union, basically repackaged the debate of "national Europe" vs. "federal Europe", centering around the communication panel of Berlin–Brussels vs. Budapest + the Visegrad Four, and Brussels vs. the effective protection of Europe and the European borders (Glied 2020). In this narrative, the Hungarian and Central European position emphasizing order and defence is in opposition to the German position, which proclaims freedom and equality and claims to be the preserver of European values.

During the migration crisis, the terrorist attack against the editorial staff of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 was the first time the Hungarian prime minister spoke out and made anti-immigration statements saying economic immigration is bad and should be stopped.³⁸ Following the Bataclan massacre in Paris in November 2015, the Hungarian government further intensified this communication. The Prime Minister said there was no doubt about the link between immigration and terrorism, claiming that "*all the terrorists are basically migrants; the question is when they migrated to the European Union*".³⁹ According to Orbán, the West is at war with Islamists in the Middle East, so it is not surprising that its enemies are sending fighters with migrants

37 Thym Daniel: European Realpolitik: Legislative Uncertainties and Operational Pitfalls of the 'New' Pact on Migration and Asylum. 28th September 2020. EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy. <http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/european-realpolitik-legislative-uncertainties-and-operational-pitfalls-of-the-new-pact-on-migration-and-asylum/> (31st January 2021).

38 Orbán: Gazdasági bevándorlóknak nem adunk menedéket. [Orbán: We do not provide asylum for economic migrants] 1. 11. 2015. http://index.hu/belfold/2015/01/11/orban_gazdasagi_bevandorloknak_nem_adunk_menedeket/ (24th April 2016).

39 Kaminski, Matthew: 'All the terrorists are migrants'. Politico. 23. 11. 2015. <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen/> (22 September 2019).

coming here. The first step of the government's communication was to raise awareness, in which the government linked migration to security challenges and terrorism, criticizing the cumbersome decision-making of the EU, Brussels' migration policy that is based on lenient and liberal principles, and Berlin's unconditionally inclusive Willkommenskultur approach (Pap – Glied 2017). There was also a consensus that the integration of a large number of Muslims is almost impossible. Viktor Orbán and Czech head of state Miloš Zeman had the same opinion on this question. They also criticized the policy of multiculturalism, seen as harmful, which determined the coexistence of host societies and newcomers. They emphasized that former colonialist countries left chaos and disorder everywhere, and recruited millions of employees from former colonies after World War II. Colonial powers are the ones responsible for chaos and uncontrolled immigration; at the same time, migration and integration problems are already affecting the whole of Europe with varying degrees of intensity. These issues all appeared in the Hungarian government's communication.

The Hungarian government gradually raised the stakes and directed its communication towards extreme rhetoric. On 24th February 2016 the government announced their decision to hold a referendum on the obligatory *relocation quota* as their next step. The anti-quota referendum proposed by Viktor Orbán (an opportunity for powerful communication). The government basically built the referendum campaign on two narratives. The first one focused on blaming Brussels, and thus the liberal European elite was seen as unable to protect themselves and find a real solution in the crisis. Their slogan was 'Send a message to Brussels to make them understand,' i.e., Hungary shall pioneer in making the leading politicians of Europe explicitly admit that their migration policy (or the lack thereof) and multiculturalism have failed.⁴⁰ The other direction in the government's communication reinforces the civilisation narrative aiming to support the already existing attitude towards the mostly Muslim migrants. The referendum on the quota was held on 2nd October 2016. However, the referendum was invalid, as less than 50% of those eligible to vote participated⁴¹ and the amendment of the constitution was not approved by the National Assembly either. Although the European Commission argued that the referendum and its political message were contrary to EU decision-making mechanisms and pan-European solidarity, the Hungarian government continued their anti-quota and anti-Brussels campaign (Glied – Pap 2016; Kacziba 2020).

40 Kingsley, Patrick: Hungary's refugee referendum not valid after voters stay away. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/02/hungarian-vote-on-refugees-will-not-take-place-suggest-first-poll-results> (18th May 2018).

41 The number of votes required for a valid referendum was 4.1 million, while in the end 3 418 387 valid votes were cast (41.32%). The share of 'no' votes was 98.36 %, while 1.64 % voted 'yes.' The high number of invalid votes shall also be highlighted (6.17 %). http://valasztas.hu/hu/ref2016/1154/1154_0_index.html. (25th August 2017).

During the migration crisis, Poland was the only Visegrad Four country that saw a significant change of governments, which fundamentally modified the narrative of the migration crisis. Until November 2015 Poland was ruled by the centre-right coalition of the Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish People's Party (PSL) (both parties are members of the European People's Party) but on 16 November 2015 Beata Szydło's government formed by the Law and Justice party (PiS; member of the European Conservatives and Reformists) was sworn in.

The right-wing transition of the government in Poland contributed to a stronger cohesiveness of the V4's attitude towards the migration crisis. The preceding government of PO and PSL led by Ewa Kopacz had taken a more favourable position towards the EU refugee relocation mechanism than the other V4 governments. When on 22nd September 2015 the Council of the European Union voted on the relocation mechanism, Poland, as the only member of the Visegrad Four, voted in favour (Romania voted against, and Finland abstained from voting) (Pachocka 2016). In the national debate, PO and Prime Minister Kopacz often raised solidarity arguments referring to Poland's historical traditions and humanitarian values. The official position of the PO-PSL government adopted in June 2015 was an emphatic opposition to the mandatory mechanism of relocation and resettlement programs. The Polish government underlined the lack of precision of the distribution logic and the proposed indicators and pointed out a failure to consider the Eastern direction of migration (from Ukraine), nevertheless there was an indication of the government's willingness to cooperate voluntarily in EU mechanism.⁴²

The government's narrative became more and more assertive with the deepening parliamentary campaign ahead of the elections in October 2015. Prime Minister Kopacz emphasized the need for state control over the refugee entry process to ensure Poles' safety (Pędzwiatr – Legut 2017). The opposition party PiS made the migration crisis an important topic of the electoral campaign boosting Poles' fears of refugees in one of the election commercials.⁴³

Presented as the future prime minister after a possible PiS electoral victory, Beata Szydło strongly rejected the requirement of the relocation of around 10.000 refugees to Poland. With the electoral victory, the rhetoric of right-wing politicians did not change, and the issues of citizens' security were emphasized, particularly after the terrorist attacks in European cities (e.g. Paris in 2015 and 2016). Regarding the international public opinion, the argument

42 Stanowisko Rządu względem „A European Agenda on Migration”: available at http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/SUE7.nsf/7bfa211dcbf982c7c12578630035da9e/a5f0b9201f4aa3c4c1257e62002f3e04/%24FILE/Stanowisko%20Rzadu_pozalegislacyjny_2015_240_ostateczny.docx (3rd January 2021).

43 Do you want them to still decide about your security? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwsLmngZ0BA&t=33> s. Even stronger anti-refugee rhetoric appeared in the PiS commercial in the campaign ahead of the local elections in 2018 – <https://twitter.com/i/status/1052530980190334977>. It is worth emphasizing that immigration issues are a novelty in the election debates in Poland, (13rd January 2021).

of Poland's considerable effort to accept a million refugees from Ukraine was raised.⁴⁴ In the political discourse, the terms of "refugees" and "economic immigrants" were intentionally used interchangeably. The government's actions aimed at postponing the possible moment of accepting refugees. Anita Adamczyk (2017) notices a number of changes in the law after PiS's victory, including the law granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the Republic of Poland and the act on the Pole's Card. Migration issues were also an important background for the adoption of the law on anti-terrorist activities and the adoption of several ordinances of the minister of the interior and administration.

The government's actions and constant emphasis on citizens' security as an essential value (Podgórska 2019) were symbolically supported by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. On April 12 2016, the Sejm adopted a resolution on Poland's immigration policy opposing "any attempts of establishing permanent mechanisms of allocating refugees or immigrants in the EU".⁴⁵ On 20th May 2016, a resolution was adopted "on the protection of the sovereignty of the Republic of Poland and the rights of its citizens." The resolution aimed to counteract attempts to "impose a decision on Poland concerning the immigrants who have arrived in Europe" and warned of the risks "to the social order in Poland, the safety of its citizens and the civilisation heritage, as well as the national identity."⁴⁶ The rhetoric of PiS politicians went even further: from suggesting that the German government caused the crisis when promoted an open-door policy and suggesting the reluctance of Syrians to fight for their own country and looking for a better life in Europe, by emphasizing concerns for the security of Poles, to suggesting that refugees transmit the parasites (Wiącek 2017).

After the parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015, the Visegrad Four regained its vigour in terms cohesion, which the PiS government welcomed as a "recovery of the group." The group's joint statement on the migration crisis on the 25th anniversary of the formation of V4 was a symbolic act.⁴⁷

Poland presented a typical example of securitization of immigration issues, as the concerns raised do not come from real threats, but merely from constructed beliefs about these threats. Various commentators note that Poland is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the world and the migration crisis

44 European Parliament. (2016): Situation in Poland (debate): available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-01-19-ITM-010_PL.html (13rd January 2020).

45 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2016): Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 1 kwietnia 2016 r. w sprawie polityki imigracyjnej Polski: available at http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc8.nsf/uchwaly/18_u.htm (4th April 2019).

46 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2016): Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej dnia 20 maja 2016 r. w sprawie obrony suwerenności Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i praw jej obywateli: available at http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc8.nsf/uchwaly/548_u.htm (11th April 2019).

47 Visegrad Group. (2016): Joint Statement on Migration: available at <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-on>. More on the Visegrad Group stance toward migrant crisis see: M. Pachocka (2016). (15th May 2018)

has not left its mark on the country, not even to a slight degree as in Hungary. Nevertheless, migration issues have become a source of fierce political debate.

Conclusion

The migration crisis strengthened the cohesion of the V4 countries, although the source of consistency was a populist stance towards migrants and refugees. An even stronger sense of unity was built after the political changes in Poland at the end of 2015. A new V4 identity seems to be created, which is in opposition to the core values of the EU – not only regarding migrant issues but also in terms of these countries' definition of the rule of law, preservation of the sovereignty of states and the preference of more traditional values to progressive ones promoted in the Western-European countries. The Visegrad Four countries and their ruling parties (ANO2011, Smer-SD, Fidesz-KDNP, PiS) began to use similar elements in their communication after 2015 and with comparable political successes. Essential elements of their narration are:

- opposition to the quota system in terms of the relocation of refugees;
- rejection of the Willkommenskultur and blaming Germany for causing the crisis;
- emphasis on the need to strengthen the EU's external borders;
- populist style of communication with citizens regarding the migrant crisis, opposing the EU and having a double speak in communication
- Deeper tensions with the EU are located in:
 - V4 states' resentment based on a sense of shared historical experiences rooted in Central European location and shared experience of the communist era's repercussions;
 - A belief that the struggle with the communist ideological occupier was conducted on behalf of the whole of Europe;
- As a result of the above, a solid commitment to decision-making sovereignty of state;
- experience of political and economic transition and reluctance toward postmodern values.

The V4 states have the grievance of being stigmatized by Western members of the EU and want to be treated as equal partners. The migrant crisis and the associated tensions generated not only a specific communication style but also lead to the rise of far-right groups in all V4 countries.

The V4 countries seemingly showed unity during the migration crisis; their history of closeness and co-operation contributed to this, but the direct reason for tight co-operation was pragmatic: political disagreement with the EU backed by their citizens' concerns, which, as a result, strengthened support for ruling parties. People's fear of refugees was easier to create in Central Europe due to

the region's specific culture and concerns about negative socio-economic effects. At the same time, the members of the V4 countries expressed differing views on issues affecting the functioning of the European Union, such as the rule of law. The engine of the V4's political co-operation was Poland and Hungary, which still lasts, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic already pursued different policies on a number of issues. In a word, these four countries indeed stood together but still remained separated during the emigration crisis. Although the Visegrad Group has a unified voice concerning migration, there is serious disagreement among them over the future of the EU.

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Viktor Glied, PhD in political science, assistant professor at the University of Pécs, Hungary. He is historian and political scientist. His research interests cover eco-policy, civil society, Hungarian and international history in the 20th–21st centuries and migration issues. He is the author and editor of several academic books and studies, furthermore member and contributor of researches that examine different aspects of political science, migration and sustainable development. E-mail: glied.viktor@pte.hu.

Łukasz Zamecki, PhD in political science, assistant professor at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw. His research interests cover comparative politics, democratization and de-democratization processes, contentious politics, Hong Kong politics. He is the author and editor of several academic books, dozens of scientific papers and chapters in collective works. Involved in a few research projects (also as a head). E-mail: lzamecki@uw.edu.pl.