



FEATURES OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF HUNGARY AND THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

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The study aims to explore the changing perception of the Visegrad countries' external relations in the current security environment, with a special focus on Hungary. The study aims to challenge perceptions of the group's divergence by shedding light on the presence of shared partners in their external contacts, notwithstanding recent accusations that show frictions in the Visegrad Group's collaboration and even call into question the group's very existence. By identifying the common and significant partners in external relations, both collectively and separately, the study seeks to illustrate the cooperation and the orientation of each country towards the East or the West, with a particular focus on Hungary's position in this regard. The study also aims to support the hypothesis that these common strategic partners can provide valuable insights into the future direction of Visegrad Cooperation. Through the analysis, the study provides a comprehensive picture of the Visegrad countries' external relations and their impact on regional cooperation and security, illustrating the cooperation and highlighting Hungary's position in the international world order.²

Key words: international relations, foreign policy, security, Hungary, Visegrad Group

JEL: Z00, Z18

1 INTRODUCTION

Hungary's geopolitical position fundamentally determines the scope for our country's foreign policy. It is an accepted statement in the literature that both regionally, in Europe and globally, Hungary and the other Visegrad countries are between great powers. In addition, the historical background and the close relations with neighbouring

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partner countries, which were institutionalised in the Visegrad Cooperation in 1991, strongly influence the foreign relations of the countries of our region.

The security policy of the V4 countries has also developed in a space that was once a territorial barrier between empires, and later a revival of cooperative relations due to its location between ideological blocs. Today, however, many are sceptical that the current security environment in the V4 countries will remain very similar. Currently, the foreign and security policies of all these countries are based on NATO's strategic plan (2022). NATO is seen as the main guarantor of their security, so despite the global international challenges of recent years and decades, the United States of America remains the dominant world power (Usiak 2018).

The topic is also dealt with in more detail by several national authors (Nyilas, Stepper 2023a, 2023b). However, since the studies that emerged from the 2020 surveys (Szabó, 2021), the world power structure has partially changed, a new world order has emerged, and thus interesting changes in the transformation of external relations can be observed. In February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine under the banner of "special operations", in violation of international law and disregarding the prohibition of violence. The case could fundamentally change the current world order, especially given that the Soviet Union itself was once involved in its creation. Dealing with the regional consequences of such a war is likely to take generations, not years. It is therefore worth drawing cautious conclusions in the light of the level of influence that current events will have on political and foreign policy decision-making in the Visegrad countries in the years ahead.

Yet this is what the present study attempts to do, based on the changes in the direction of Hungarian foreign policy as described by Balázs Orbán in his book *Huszárvágás* (Orban 2023). In his latest book, Balázs Orbán highlights Hungary's role in international politics as a keystone state, i.e. as a nation that connects states. But the role of the keystone state is twofold. As well as being responsible for shaping its own region, it must also develop extensive relations with opposing powers. In other words, Hungary's foreign policy interacts first in its own region, for example by meeting the foreign policy objectives of the Visegrad countries. According to Balázs Orbán, Hungary is well placed to play a leading role, based on its geography, political traditions and values, and its refusal to be part of any bloc.

The constellation of the most important strategic allies in Hungary's position has also changed over time, but there are also clearly permanent partners in the country's international relations, which the study presents in detail. In order to understand Hungary's regional role, it is worth considering the strategic objectives and security perceptions of the other Visegrad countries. The study argues that the regional perceptions of security are very similar and that, as a result, there will always be regionally specific characteristics in the foreign policy constructed within the domestic framework, regardless of ideological and biopolitical differences. If we were to focus

only on the latter, it could indeed be said that the Visegrad Cooperation is in crisis. The paper therefore focuses on the former, starting from the foreign policy-strategic philosophy of Hungarian foreign policy based on regional realities and placing it in the context of Visegrad security perceptions.

2 METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The aim of this paper is to summarise the findings of a longer study. The overall motivation of the research itself is to present the development of Hungarian and Visegrad foreign relations in recent years. The position of some major powers, such as the United States, China or Russia in the region is a popular topic in professional analyses (2023). Thus, the study and the research examine the common points of the Visegrad countries' external relations, also from the point of view of these great powers.

However, in order to explore the foreign policy stance of the Visegrad countries, with a particular emphasis on Hungary, and to put the analysed studies in context with the views of experts who are active participants in both academic life and political and governmental life, I will analyse interviews with two or three people per country. Given the specificities of social science, it is clear that, however in-depth the interviews, the results may not be representative, but they can provide a guide to understanding the external relations of a country or region. At the same time, it should be taken into account that elections were held in Poland and Slovakia in 2023, which also made it necessary to review the conclusions of the interviews and thus included them in the present study.

The research's working premise was also that, while modifications in communication priorities can and do occur, domestic political changes naturally impact the V4 dynamics but do not really alter the strategic trends. Still, one can only draw rather cautious conclusions: the Visegrad countries have a significant set of external relations in common. And the common strategic partners in the external relations of the four countries can guide the 'foreign policy' of Visegrad cooperation.

Cooperation between the Visegrad countries has been criticised in recent years (Bayer – Cienski 2022). Its purpose, relevance and its very existence have been repeatedly questioned, based on the fact that the four countries are fragmented and lack cooperation based on common interests. One of the aims of this study is to point out the opposite, by referring to the existence of common strategic partners. This research focuses on the four countries of the Visegrad Cooperation in the Central and Eastern European region, and also the Hungarian perception of foreign relations. The study, and thus the hypotheses, focus on the events of the past years, especially on the years 2022–2024.

It is particularly true in the case of the V4, where there are arguably characteristics that are regionally interpretable and policy decisions have a regional character (Buzan – Waever 2003). Maintaining security is a priority for Hungarian society as well, so in the course of the research I examined attitudes towards it. The methodology is "constructivist" in the sense that it uses and synthesises relevant elements

of existing theories, and constructivist in the sense that it focuses on the regional emergence/construction of national security strategies.

3 LITERATURE ON REGIONAL SECURITY AND VISEGRAD COOPERATION

One of the central questions of the research is whether, despite the differences between the V4 countries, they offer a common regional solution to the security challenge. The scientific pillar of the research is based on the international and domestic literature and scientific results of research on regionalism, regional political, economic and social cooperation, while the policy pillar is based on the growing political, economic, defence, social and environmental cooperation efforts of the countries in the region.

In addition to the strategy documents of the four countries, I will analyse joint declarations and jointly published documents of the countries concerned, and will also draw on domestic and international literature.

The theory of securitization was already introduced in Barry Buzan's book „Security: A New Framework for Analysis” (Buzan – Waever, and Wild 1998) in the late 1990s, but in recent years it has become a prominent element in security studies and international literature. Barry Buzan, in a book published in 2003, is also relevant to this research. In „Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security” (Buzan – Waever 2003), Buzan and Wæver argued for a broader approach to security studies, identifying a number of security sectors beyond the typical military and political arenas on which realist security analysis focuses. The international literature used in this thesis also includes Thierry Balzacq's „Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve” (Balzacq 2011), which attempts to develop a new framework for analysing the process of securitization, enhancing our understanding of the emergence, evolution and dissolution of security issues, and the original theoretical concept of Barry Buzan et al. was subject to a number of criticisms, which were summarized and responded to by Balzacq.

In addition to the international literature used in the study, Hungarian researchers have also published in the relevant scientific field. Ferenc Gazdag and Éva Remek's book „A biztonsági tanulmányok alapjai” (Gazdag – Remek 2011) deals with the fundamental issues of security research. They discuss in detail the different dimensions of security, such as political, economic, environmental and social security, as well as security threats and security challenges, and also address the specific problems of each security field. Ferenc Gazdag also discusses in detail the multidisciplinary approach to security studies, including political, social, economic, legal and military dimensions. The books he has edited and written are widely recognised in the field of security studies. Thus, in addition to theoretical foundations, he also places great emphasis on practical application in security studies, and his work also examines the practical aspects of security policy.

Péter Rada, Péter Marton, István Balogh and Péter Stepper (2015) provide a comprehensive overview of security theories and definitions. They present different

approaches to security, such as realist, liberal, radical, critical and postcolonial theories. They focus on the debates surrounding the definition of security and related issues.

Hungary's geopolitical position has always played a crucial role in shaping its foreign policy. The country's location between major powers in Europe has influenced its strategies and alliances throughout history. Several authors, including Balázs Orbán in his book *Huszárvágás* (2023), highlight Hungary's role as a „keystone state“ – a nation that acts as a bridge between different powers. Orbán argues that Hungary's geography, political traditions, and values make it well-suited to play a leading role in regional politics, particularly within the Visegrad Cooperation, established in 1991 as a platform for collaboration among Central European countries.

The region's security policy has evolved from a barrier to a zone of cooperation, reflecting the complex historical and geopolitical realities of Central Europe. However, the Visegrad Cooperation has faced criticism in recent years. Usiak (2018) discusses how the V4 countries, despite their varied historical experiences, now view NATO as the main guarantor of their security. This reliance on NATO, particularly the United States, underscores the continued importance of traditional security alliances, even as global power dynamics shift.

Security perceptions also play a significant role in shaping foreign relations within the V4. Szabó (2021) and Radványi (2009) have conducted extensive research on the perceptions of major powers like the United States, Russia, China, and Germany in Hungary and the broader V4 region. In the study of „A magyar biztonságpercepció elemzése“, Alex Etl analyses the perception of security and the perception of security among Hungarians. In the study he analyses the general security perception of Hungarian society, the main security challenges and attitudes towards security policy. The analysis shows that the Hungarian perception of security is complex and that, in addition to the general perception of security, many other factors influence the extent to which people feel safe in the country.

4 PERCEPTIONS OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND REGIONAL STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In the context of international relations, perceptions are the culmination of people's views and beliefs regarding the politics, culture, economic status, and general behavior of other nations. These views could impact how the people and government of a nation evaluate and respond to other nations, which could have an impact on diplomatic, economic, and military ties (Hermann 1986).

In the period covered by this study, several surveys have addressed the issue of security perceptions (Szabó 2021). However, the world power structure has changed partly during these years, a new world order seems to be emerging, and thus interesting changes in the transformation of external relations can be observed. In the next chapter, the paper analyses the recent surveys on perceptions of foreign relations in society and

compares them with the changes in the foreign relations of the four countries under discussion, highlighting the importance of common strategic partners. External relations can be significantly influenced by both the prime minister and the party in power in a given nation. With parliamentary elections in two countries in 2023, the study also looks at their impact on international politics.

In the following chapter, the paper will discuss in detail Hungary's role in the changes in foreign relations, but in order to understand Hungary's regional leadership, it is worth taking into account the strategic goals and security perceptions of the other Visegrad countries, so the paper will first present and analyse them. The study argues that the image of security in the region is very similar, and that as a result, there will always be regionally characteristic features in the foreign policy constructed within the domestic framework, regardless of ideological and political differences.

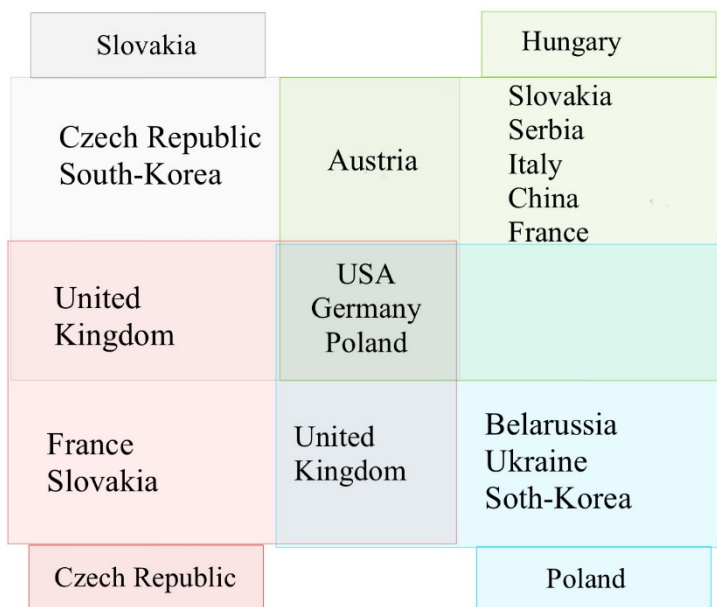
László Szabó, in his above-mentioned publication, published in 2021, analysed the perception of four countries: the United States, Russia, China and Germany. The questionnaire was conducted in 2020, and when asked how they perceived Hungary's international relations, Russia was the most prominent country, closely followed by China. Germany was significantly behind, followed by the United States of America. Although László Szabó's research focused on social perceptions, there is an interesting difference between the views and positions of government officials, academics and political actors and those of society at large.

In 2023, a study published on Policy Solutions showed how the Hungarian public perceives their nation's place in the world, and how Hungarians assess the most important international issues, conflicts and actors. Respondents were asked about what goals should guide Hungarian foreign policy and with which countries we should work closely, and attitudes towards the Russian-Ukrainian war were also a key focus. It is interesting to note that while in László Szabó's research Germany repeatedly came third or fourth and Russia first, one of the key findings of the study published in Policy Solutions (2023) was that Hungarians would prefer closer relations with Austria and Germany rather than Russia. In general, the survey conducted and analysed by the authors of the study also shows that respondents stressed the importance of cooperation with Western allies in foreign relations. All of this is based on data for 2023, so it can be said that, compared to 2020, society is turning from the East (Russia, China) towards the West (Germany, Austria). However, for the sake of completeness, it is essential to add that the Russian-Ukrainian war has had a major impact on public opinion, so the shift from East to West is certainly partly due to this event.

Lajos Radványi (2009), Alex Etl (2020), György András Deák and Zoltán Felméry (2022) discuss the evolution of the Hungarian perception of security in several issues of the journal *Nemzet és Biztonság*, and the Strategic Defence Research Institute has also conducted several studies and surveys on the subject. Alex Etl's 2020 study showed that Hungarians do not see the international actions of a country as a military

threat, such as Russia's military threat, the weakening support of the United States towards NATO, or the growing influence of China in the region. Furthermore, Alex Etl's work and studies partly confirmed my hypothetical statement that the common strategic partners in the Visegrad countries can serve as a guideline for the future of cooperation, since Alex Etl's study (2020) emphasized that Hungarian society thinks in a regional framework in the military dimension of security, since his questionnaire analysis showed that for Hungarians the most important military partner is the Visegrad Group. But my in-depth interviews have shown that government officials and academics do not necessarily think so.

Figure 1: Strategic partners based on a summary of interviews from the academic and government sectors.



Source: processed by author.

The four-point stacking chart that can be seen above, shows which countries are considered to be of high priority in the area of security and defence policy. Although the chart combines interviews with academic and governmental actors, it is clear that the United States, Poland and Germany appear as a prominent common set. It is also clear that, while Hungary is clearly open to the policy of opening up to the East, the same cannot be said so clearly for the other three countries.³

³ However, in this section, it is also essential to mention the prominent impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the region, as the four countries have reacted differently to the war. Hungary has

The higher number of countries listed below Hungary reflects differences in the positions of academic and governmental actors, with a higher number of different answers to the question of which five countries are key to Hungary and the region and are of key security and defence importance.

A further difference is that while in László Szabó's 2020 study the United States of America did not occupy a more prominent place in the ranking of the interviewees, it clearly emerges from the interviews as a common and indispensable set of issues. In contrast to Alex Etl's research, which found that respondents prioritised the importance of the Visegrad Group in the dimension of military security, the interviews showed the opposite. Although the eight interviews cover a narrow range of academic and governmental actors, only cautious conclusions can be drawn from the results. However, in their view, the Visegrad Group and its cooperation is currently in decline, and they were further sceptical about the idea of cooperation as a significant military and security factor in the region. However, the higher level of representation and emphasis among academic actors that the current downturn is only temporary, mainly caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war, puts cooperation in a positive narrative.

In contrast to what I had previously discovered, a report released in 2024 by the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies revealed some intriguing distinctions. Not only did it include the Visegrad countries, but it also examined Romania's security and threat assessment using data from 1,000–1000 respondents. The relevance of national defense cooperation with foreign nations was used to score the respondents' responses in one study chapter. In this instance, it was determined that, generally speaking, Poland favored preserving closer ties with Anglo-Saxon nations, whereas the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia view one another as their main defense cooperation partners, along with Germany.

In terms of changes in foreign relations, we can see notable differences from 2020, but only after a few months of differences in 2023, a disparity becomes evident as well. Additionally, respondents from the governmental and academic sector, that I spoke with had differing opinions about the nations and their priority in international relations with the V4. The Czech Republic is the nation that has a distinct western direction, according to the fourth set chart I have given contrary to the research by the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies that have found that it is Poland that exhibited a similar tendency.

Based on the previous studies, regardless of the year in which the individual surveys were conducted, it can be said that, in most cases, the four countries see each other as their top strategic partner when it comes to security and defense issues, even though the priorities of external relations have changed over time for both Hungary and

been criticised more for 'only' providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine and for distancing itself from the supply of arms.

the Visegrad countries as well as the Western and Eastern interests have changed over the previous years.

It's interesting to note that while regional cooperation may be even more important, the United States does not seem to be a strong common strategic partner in the most recent study. Recent developments demonstrate that, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the significance of regional cooperation cannot be overstated. Without a doubt, the V4s will continue to be relevant, and in the modern world, regional policy cooperation is necessary to offer adaptable and locally successful solutions to (even) global concerns that emerge in many regions.

It is still possible to argue that membership in the Euro-Atlantic Alliance is in Hungary's and the region's best interests, in addition to the significance of regional cooperation. However, as the last more than two decades have demonstrated, this community can only be prepared to face challenges if its members can fairly and equally represent their interests. Therefore, we couldn't declare that the United States failed to appear as a significant strategic partner among the Visegrad countries due to the influence of the liberal world order led by the United States.

Bilateral relations are often driven by strategic interests. These strategic interests may vary depending on party politics and ideology. Elections therefore play a crucial role in shaping these dynamics, striking a balance between domestic governance and international strategic interests. My previous assertion that the United States remains a dominant player in the region is borne out by the Polish and Slovak elections of 2023, which were not influenced by them.

The historical and contemporary aspects of the relationship between Poland and the United States of America are multifaceted, reflecting the complex interplay of geopolitical interests and historical events (Jones 2023). Poland's strategic partnership with the United States of America was truly consolidated with NATO membership in 1999, driven by common security interests and Poland's central role in East-Central Europe (Shevchuk – Tykhonenko 2023). Poland has also recently developed a strong pro-American security policy, and ongoing geopolitical tensions, particularly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have further increased Poland's strategic importance for US interests in Europe. Thus, the US-Poland relationship remains a critical element of the regional security dynamic. This is evidenced by political communication before and after the 2023 Polish elections. Former Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki criticised what he said was growing anti-Americanism among EU countries and said his country would seek to develop closer ties between Europe and the United States (Cienski 2023). Mateusz Morawiecki has also made several trips to the United States to discuss strengthening economic and defence cooperation between the two countries, which he sees as a country capable of guaranteeing security in Europe (2023). On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of NATO membership, Donald Tusk and Andrzej Duda met Joe Biden in Washington, where Prime Minister Donald Tusk stressed that Poland and the

United States share a common position on security issues, including the need to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia (Bayer 2024). The United States also announced at the same time that it would provide Poland with a USD 2 billion loan to buy 96 Apache helicopters. NATO, and therefore the United States, is clearly one of the main guarantors of security for Poland (2024).

Similar conclusions can be drawn for the Slovak parliamentary elections in 2023. The importance of the United States in Slovakia's foreign policy is determined by several key factors. Slovakia's geopolitical orientation has changed significantly since independence in 1993, and the United States is consistently recognised as a key partner, especially in official documents and government interactions (Filip – Gurnák 2023). In 2021, the then Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg issued a joint press statement in which Heger announced that his government's pro-European and pro-Atlantic stance made his country's membership in NATO a priority. It is the main pillar of their security and defence (2021). On 12 January 2022, Eduard Heger's government adopted a draft framework defence agreement with the United States, which, among other things, regulates the status of US soldiers and allows the US to use and modernise Slovak military infrastructure. The agreement was aimed at, among other things, strengthening defence cooperation between Slovakia and the United States and within NATO, creating a legal framework for an expanded and deepened partnership, and improving defence capabilities (Lukasz 2022).

After the autumn of 2023, Slovakia also saw a change of government after the elections, but with Robert Fico, the key role of the United States of America was questioned by many because of its Russian-friendly policy. Fico also pledged before the elections that if elected Slovakia would stop sending arms shipments to Ukraine and distanced himself from Ukraine's NATO membership, saying that Ukraine's membership would only guarantee a third world war (Starcevic 2024). All of this could suggest that Fico's policy stance could potentially steer US foreign policy in Central and Eastern Europe towards a more isolated and less cooperative framework (Ahmatovic 2024). However, key factors influencing bilateral relations include Slovakia's strategic position in East-Central Europe and its commitment to NATO, so that ultimately the United States remains a key international partner for Slovakia. Although parts of the Slovak political scene have blocked the adoption of a defence agreement with the US for many years (Lewkowicz 2022), the US remains Slovakia's most important strategic partner in the area of military security and a critical ally for Slovakia, especially for security and geopolitical stability in Central and Eastern Europe (Rada 2023).

5 HUNGARY: BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

The studies and the analysed interviews in the previous chapter clearly show that Hungary has in recent years placed particular emphasis on its relations with the countries of the region, and the Visegrád countries have thus also played a significant role in

Hungarian foreign policy. The chapter also showed that, in addition to Hungary's policy of opening up to the East, maintaining channels of communication with Western countries was also of paramount importance for Hungary's international manoeuvrability. The next chapter aims to provide the background to this and to highlight the importance of Hungary's geopolitical position.

The Western-established global world order is in crisis; changes are already visible, such as the eastward shift of the global economic center, and as a result, China has become global. Its political import is also recognized. Therefore, the complicated issues resulting from the shifting global order and the ensuing uncertainty are the greatest challenge of our day. Numerous scenarios for the evolution of the global order have been presented in both national (Rada 2023) and international (Brannen 2020) literature in this regard, and we are unsure which of them will ultimately come to pass.

In Central and Eastern Europe's political and economic landscape, the Visegrad Four are significant players (Bak-Pitucha 2023). Due to the fact that dependency often determines how well an international system functions, links and networks are crucial in the global context. Therefore, it is insufficient for nations to concentrate on a single kind of relationship; instead, all relationships must be seen as a network while emphasizing the growth of relationships.

Hungary has acknowledged this and has rejected blockchain and started to follow the keystone state idea, and connectedness as a strategic strategy in recent years. Hungary has been dependent on other countries on several occasions, which has not suited its political or economic objectives. If we start only for historical reasons, it appears that Hungary could not have been abundant in success in a situation of dependence, so learning from historical examples, taking into account Hungarian interests, a similar situation should be avoided. The countries in our region are globally open, export-oriented (Nowak – Malgorzata 2021) and are building their economic growth on foreign operating capital investments. For us, connectivity is the way forward, but each country needs to have alternative strategies that connect them to their region's closer federal networks.

The region's history, its proximity to Russia, and its integration into Western institutions such as NATO and the EU make the security environment more complex. Regional cooperation, on the other hand, is an effective tool for strengthening the security of the Central and Eastern European area, as is the case with the countries of the Visegrad Cooperation, as they can unite their resources and jointly respond to common threats. Hungary pays priority to subregional cooperation, but does not refuse dialogue and cooperation with Western and Eastern great powers, such as the United States or China.

In the media, they tend to highlight even minor disagreements among the leaders of countries and amplify them, thereby referring to the deteriorated relations between the countries. It is important to note at this point that political will, ideology, in most cases can indeed act as a determining and influential factor in relations between countries, but

the contradictions that may arise can be overwritten if the international environment, international interest or cause so requires. In this case, party politics can fall behind and mutually beneficial relationships can be established independently. All this further reinforces the essence of connectivity, i.e. the need for a country to have an extensive network of connections. Together with this thought process, the network is also a key word, because if a state follows the strategy of connectivity, it is not enough to focus on one type of relationship, but all the relationships must be interpreted at once as a network, thinking about focusing on the development of relationships.

A shift in the global balance of power can force countries to rethink their external relations, just as a shift in economic relations, such as the emergence of new trading partners or investment opportunities (see China), can also change a country's external priorities, as has been the case for Hungary in recent years. And changes in the international security situation can even affect sub-regional cooperation and alliances, as is the case among the Visegrad countries. Last but not least, a country's domestic political transformation, such as a new ideological orientation that may result from an election, can also transform foreign policy priorities and the choice of strategic partners. The changing world order therefore directly influences the choice of strategic partners of countries. As the global balance of power shifts, countries seek to forge new alliances and partnerships to adapt to new circumstances and to put their countries in the best possible position, both politically and economically. The new world order thus requires new strategies, partnerships and diplomatic directions. However, given the unpredictability of the changing world order, it is essential to emphasise what Balázs Orbán also stresses, namely the importance of connections and connectivity, and thus network thinking for international relations.

As we can observe, the constellation of important strategic allies in Hungary's position has changed over time, but there are also clearly emerging permanent states in the country's international relations. Furthermore, while the diversity of strategic partners varies based on the specific international environment, security policy developments and individual respondents, they consistently come from a spectrum of nations, so as a result we can observe both Eastern and Western nations, as well as those from our region and sub-region.

6 CONCLUSION

Although there are apparently significant differences in the foreign policies of the four countries under study in the 21st century, the perception of foreign policy shows that there are three countries that are considered common strategic partners. These are the United States, Germany and Poland. The United States plays a prominent role in the region and in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Poland has embarked on unprecedented military developments and has set itself the goal of becoming a major European land power (Karnitschnig, Kosc 2022). Finally, Germany's military power and its attitude to war are

not negligible from a security policy point of view, so my second hypothesis, that there is a significant common set of perceptions of the Visegrad countries' foreign relations, is confirmed.

War is not part of the basic functioning of the world, it is not inherent to society. So the question arises, in an extremely fast changing world, can there be an ideal state of the world? I think it is important to note that the world will not be perfect if humans do not exist, nor can a national park only survive and flourish if humans do not enter it. The key word here is harmony. You have to be able to live in harmony. The world is in a state of constant change, in which human beings, and in our case the relations between states, have an important role to play. People must be the caretakers of the world, or rather good caretakers. We must also nurture the relationship with strategic partnerships. So common strategic partners can also be a guideline for the future of Visegrad cooperation. Regardless of the social position, strategic documents, such as national strategy papers, provide clear guidance for the foreign policy of a country or region, with which my expert interviews can be aligned. As a result, my third hypothesis, that the joint strategic partners can provide guidance for the future of Visegrad cooperation, has been confirmed.

The Visegrad Group is currently facing a complex political and security situation. On the political front, the unity of the group might be under strain. Despite these challenges, the Czech Republic, which holds the presidency (2023) of the Visegrad Group from 2023 to 2024, continues to regard the Visegrad format as a traditional, Central European platform for cultivating good neighborly relations. From July 2024, the priority task (2024) of the Hungarian EU Presidency will be to maintain and promote dialogue with the countries of the West and the East, and to promote peace to end the war between Russia and Ukraine by creating and maintaining communication corridors.

There are also major differences in the strategic preferences of the V4 countries about the use of military force in foreign policy (Kolmasová 2019) for example, even while its highest officials or professionals from the academic sector recognize the value of sub-regional cooperation and seek to enhance it. Thus the function and activities of the Visegrad Group will probably be impacted by current regional developments, including evolving security challenges, changes in geopolitics, and the dynamics of European integration. Their strategic partners will likewise be impacted by these continuing developments.

In conclusion, the Visegrad Group is at a crossroads, with its unity tested by differing political alignments and its role in European security under scrutiny. Even though the Visegrad Group's member nations had some disagreements, the partnership remained a long-lasting one in Central Europe. The group's future will likely depend on how it navigates these challenges and maintains its commitment to regional cooperation and European integration.

Furthermore, the role of the Visegrad Cooperation in the political and economic environment of Central and Eastern Europe is of paramount importance, as sub-regional

relations are a prerequisite for successful participation in the international system (Rada, Vass, Izmindí 2023). Recognising this, and in order to avoid exclusive dependence, Hungary has started to adopt connectivity and a network approach as an indispensable strategy. By adopting the keystone state strategy, Hungary is therefore trying to avoid a repetition of past dependency situations and, in line with this, is focusing on developing its relations in order to respond most effectively to the challenges of the changing world order and the possible scenarios mentioned above. In the future, joining closer alliance networks in the region and developing alternative strategies will also be essential for the country's stable political and economic development. Global openness, an export-oriented economy, and the attraction of foreign working capital, alongside balanced connectivity and connectivity, will therefore provide Hungary with the right strategic direction in international relations.

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