



EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE V4 COUNTRIES

EARLY YEARS 1991-2004

- 1991- 3 countries signed the Visegrad Declaration
- In 1993 – dissolution of Czechoslovakia – V4
- Slovakia chose to balance its foreign policy between Russia and Europe (Under Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar) - this slowed their accession to NATO
- The remaining 3 countries pro-Europe
- Focus on EU and NATO accession
- Positive and negative highlight the underlying historical differences between the countries (i.e. Hungarian investigation into the Benes Decrees)

A large, light blue puzzle piece is centered on a bright yellow background. The puzzle piece has a complex shape with several interlocking points. A dark grey rectangular box is overlaid on the puzzle piece, containing white text.

WITHIN THE EU 2004-2014

V4 countries active within the EU, often challenging it based on their shared history

From 1999 cooperation on illegal migration, economic relations, science, technology

The 2004 EU accession raised questions about the significance of the V4 cooperation

The group tried to move forward by giving structure to itself

Established a rotating one year presidency – better coordination

They started advocating for stronger neighbourhood policies in the EU – especially after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004-2005)

EU NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

- Based on cultural closeness and common historical experience, the V4 wanted to provide the Eastern neighbours with stronger support in the implementation of reforms to bring them closer to the EU
- Negotiations on Eastern Partnership (EaP) began in 2008 with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine
- Implementation of the EaP was good for the V4 because they could show their influence within the EU and extend their cooperation with these countries through for example the International Visegrad Fund

CHANGE AMONGST THE V4

- Energy security started to become an issue after the 2008-9 Ukraine gas crisis when gas supply was stopped by Russia for 13 days
- The Czech Republic called for a comprehensive energy policy and a move away from Russian energy dependence
- In 2011 Hungary deviated from this when its gas company MOL signed a contract with Russian oil firm
- Hungary's relations with Russia different from the other three countries and got worse during the Crimean crisis of 2014, when Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said of EU sanctions against Russia that they are like "shooting oneself in the foot".



EUROSCEPTIC SHIFT 2014-?

- Rise of Eurosceptic parties in Hungary (Fidesz) and Poland (PiS)
- The annexation of Crimea in 2014, the migration crisis of 2015-2016, Brexit cause the V4 to question previous positions
- Viktor Orbán called his system an illiberal democracy and accused Brussels of Hungarophobia
- Other leaders have accused the EU of interfering in domestic politics
- Nationalist agenda of certain leaders have contributed to this shift (Milos Zeman, Robert Fico, Andrzej Duda)
- Also, while these countries have adapted certain benchmarks of democracy (rule of law, economic policies) many think that they have not truly internalized them

POSITION ON RUSSIA

- No common position because of differing threat perceptions (also economic interests)
- This has been an issue ever since 2008 in the conflict between Georgia and Russia, in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and since the 2022 Ukraine Crisis
- In 2014 the Hungarian government consistently called for the lifting of sanctions against Russia which were thought to be bad for Hungarian economy
- The dynamics of the V4 have changed because of this: V3+1 – Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, V2+V2 – Czech Republic and Slovakia + Hungary and Poland



CHANGES IN DYNAMICS

- May 2024 saw the 20th anniversary of EU accession for the V4 countries
 - Relationship strained because of the war in Ukraine
 - Poland strongest supporter of Ukraine, Hungary does not give military aid
 - Change in the political leadership in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland
 - They are distancing themselves from Hungary
 - Challenge for the V4 but it is too early to see in what way this conflict will develop
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- Source and further reading: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/a-divided-visegrad-four-navigates-relations-with-the-european-union>