

Visegrad Platform for Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Civil Society

18th Forum 2000 Conference; October 12 –15, 2014

1st WORKSHOP:

The current and future capacity of the V4 countries' support for democracy in third countries: democratic values vs. economic interests

Sunday, October 12, 2014

16:00 – 18:00

Klementinum, Hotel InterContinental, Prague

2nd WORKSHOP:

Ukrainian case study: the V4's past and future involvement in a transitioning country

Tuesday, October 14, 2014

15:00 – 17:00

Klementinum, Hotel InterContinental, Prague

The “Visegrad Platform for Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Civil Society” is a long-term project aimed at bringing together leading policy makers, academics and civil society practitioners for the purposes of fostering an expert regional debate about democracy assistance and human rights. The first of a series of workshops took place in September 2013 within the framework of the annual Forum 2000 Conference. A policy paper compiled from the workshop discussions was presented and debated in May 2014 at the Central European University in Budapest. The dominating topic of the given debates was not only the role of the Visegrad countries and the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) in supporting democracy in third countries, but also the interpretation of the so-called Arab Spring and its prospects from the perspective of democracy assistance.

The current developments in Ukraine – which were hardly imaginable for participants of last year’s workshops – will presumably overshadow follow-up debates about the Arab Spring this year. For this reason, it would be instrumental to recall some of the general discussion points and conclusions from the previous debates to encourage further constructive scrutiny of the events that are taking place in the Visegrad Group’s (V4) immediate neighborhood.

In a reflection of the Arab uprisings and transitions in general, discussants emphasized that amidst an ongoing transition it is necessary to clearly identify the indigenous society’s myriad demands and expectations for the nascent political system. In this sense – needless to say – every transition is unique and is embedded in the political culture of the respective society. The revolutions of 1989 are thus hardly comparable in substance to the Arab Spring uprisings, even though the process of popular mobilization may bear many similarities. Each transition desires a fresh perspective and flexible reactions from the part of democracy assistance implementers. Only when some form of long-term consensus among various groups within the given society is reached, can democracy become successfully consolidated.

Other key words resonating during the debates were “perseverance” and “patience”. In evoking Ralf Dahrendorf’s memorable proposition that it takes nearly three generations for civil society to firmly take root, participants stressed that there exist no “quick fixes” to the installation of a fully functioning democratic system. While free and fair elections may seem a victory for democracy in a transitioning state, they can become meaningless without the rule of law and an accountable government.

In less general terms, the V4 and its international fund were acclaimed as an important factor in broadening the region’s infrastructure of democracy assistance. Apart from each V4 state’s own efforts in supporting democracy abroad, the IVF provides a comprehensive instrument for assisting democratic developments in places where such support would be politically too sensitive for Visegrad governments.

Transitional experience is taken as a major asset of the Visegrad Group, however there seems to be a lack of expertise and experience exchange among democracy assistance stakeholders of the respective V4 governments. In this vein, it was suggested to create a formal dialogue on the level of V4 Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which would include relevant civil society representatives and address transitional experience. It was also proposed, for example, that other V4 states could follow the example of the Czech MFA, which has in its organizational structure the Department for Human Rights and Transition Policy. This entity provides, among other activities, indispensable political support and expertise to non-governmental organizations. Lastly, in light of the above-mentioned proposition of Dahrendorf, the V4 should not forget about upholding and consolidating intra-Visegrad democracy.

The current and future capacity of the V4 countries' support for democracy in third countries: democratic values vs. economic interests

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 and its aftermath have undoubtedly rendered national governments all the more keen on seeing their economies and GDP grow. Facing demands for increased growth and job creation from their constituencies, political leaders react by adopting various policies to reach higher growth rates – despite the fact that some of these policies are rather short-term and lack adequate long-term perspectives. This trend is not only manifested in the realm of domestic politics, but certain aspects of it can also be observed on the foreign policy front.

In a sense, this shift in foreign policy is partly displayed in the current approach to foreign affairs by the government of the Czech Republic. On the one hand, its ambiguous stance vis-à-vis Russia's involvement in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis (when compared, for example, to the more resolute stance of the Polish government in the matter), the increasing efforts to broaden (economic) ties with Beijing in exchange for less overt critique of China's human rights violations and the downgrading of the Tibet question, create the impression that the Czech Republic is slowly moving away from its traditional role as a human rights and democracy advocate – a tradition epitomized by Vaclav Havel's presidency. On the other hand, this approach is perceived by some as a necessary trade-off for boosting the Czech economy. A similar approach to foreign policy can also be identified in Slovakia and even more so in Hungary.

Although one cannot authoritatively declare that this shift (or reorientation) in the Visegrad region's foreign policy is based solely on the premises of economic interests, the accompanying actions and statements of respective policymakers nevertheless point to this proposition. Consequently, this approach to foreign policy may have significant effects on the V4 democracy assistance efforts in third countries.

In general and simplistic terms, democracy assistance can be divided into two basic forms – *developmental* and *political*.¹ While the developmental approach emphasizes support for governmental institutions and their capacity to foster good governance and socioeconomic development – that is, the procedural aspects of democracy – the political approach focuses on the more normative aspects of democracy, such as political and individual liberties and civil society. In practice this means that the developmental approach follows a “top-down” path to democracy, whereas the political approach follows a “bottom-up” path.

Governments of third states are more prone to tolerate the developmental approach on their territory, as the support is mostly aimed at governmental institutions and thus the ownership of the process of development is left within the local authorities' hands. The political approach, however, is prone to be perceived as covert interventionism in domestic affairs, due to the fact that it circumvents governmental institutions and provides support to non-governmental organizations and civil society.

There is no broad consensus on which of the two approaches is more effective in fostering democratic governance, but general unanimity exist over the claim that both approaches are

¹ See Thomas Carothers, “Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental?” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 2009, pp. 5–19.

complementary and are both proportionally needed to ensure a successful consolidation of democracy.

Presumably, in the event of the V4 governments' increasing emphasis on economic diplomacy and the extension of trade with authoritarian regimes (such as China or Azerbaijan), the political approach to democracy assistance will be played down as the support to civil society becomes politically too sensitive. Hence, the International Visegrad Fund – being a more neutral actor than national governments – has the potential to fill this void in civil society support. Similarly, a Visegrad initiative to set-up a private fund for democracy support in third countries would be instrumental.

Oversight by civil society organizations is needed in order to create accountable government in transitioning countries. However, the growth of civil society is primarily ensured by following the political approach to democracy assistance in third countries; maintaining only the developmental approach to democracy assistance is not enough to ensure a fully-fledged democratic government. In effect, the V4 states need to explore the options of working together and complementing each other's efforts in democracy assistance, without downgrading their emphasis on the normative aspects of democratic governance.

- What role should economic interests play in democracy assistance?
- Do the V4 countries possess the necessary democracy assistance infrastructure needed to effectively carry out democracy support policies?
- Can V4 democracy assistance still function effectively if value-based goals give way to material-based interests?
- What can the V4 countries still learn from each other and how should this mutual learning be carried out?
- Is there room for more cooperation amongst the V4 countries in democracy assistance?
- Would private involvement (such as a private democracy assistance fund) in democracy support activities of the V4 countries be conceivable?

Ukrainian case study: the V4's past and future involvement in a transitioning country

In recent years, Ukraine has been one of the major recipients of official development aid (ODA) from the Visegrad states. It received a yearly average of 18 million USD, which is nearly 11% of the total annual bilateral ODA of the V4 states. For comparison, Afghanistan received an average of 32 million USD per year from the V4 states.² Since its founding in 2000, the International Visegrad Fund has provided over 2.2 million EUR in grants and scholarships to Ukraine, which is the highest amount of all third countries the IVF supported.³ These numbers indicate that stability and good governance in Ukraine is indeed a goal of the V4 governments – not only because of Ukraine's proximity to the Visegrad region, but also due to historical and cultural ties. Hungary, for example, has been supporting organizations and local authorities in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, which is inhabited by a significant Hungarian minority.⁴

Despite their common interest in supporting stability in Ukraine, the Visegrad states have not found much common ground in providing a unanimous reply to the ongoing developments and to Russia's involvement in the crisis. Divergent perspectives on the Ukrainian crisis and its prospects may be detrimental to any future joint efforts of the Visegrad states in providing effective democracy assistance to the country. At the same time, the current situation in Ukraine may further demonstrate the unwillingness of V4 states to conduct steps, which may in any way be perceived negatively by Moscow. This reluctance is closely linked to the above described increasing prominence of material (i.e. economic) interests of V4 governments over the normative or value-based aspects of foreign policy.

The Maidan protests, attended mainly by politically non-affiliated demonstrators, generated a notable civic awakening in Ukraine.⁵ This means that Ukrainians are increasingly prone to overseeing political processes in their country from a critical viewpoint and being more vocal about their needs when the government becomes disconnected from society. This is a good sign for civil society and it lays the required groundwork for the consolidation of a democratic political system. However, it must be noted that a spontaneous growth of civil society organizations and associations may not be immediately good for democracy,⁶ especially in the case of Ukraine, where two clearly defined camps with countervailing demands stand against each other. The increased number of civil society initiatives may further increase the polarization of society, and parties providing assistance to civil society should take this matter into account. In this sense, it is necessary that democracy assistance and any developmental aid are extended into all of Ukraine's regions and not only to the "pro-European" regions.

Whatever the outcomes of the Ukrainian crisis, in the future the V4 countries will need to take a nuanced but active approach in supporting democratic initiatives in the country, as their engagement could play a vital role in consolidating a democratic political system. The V4 has transitional experience from a politically and culturally similar background as Ukraine, which

² Five-year average calculated from 2007 to 2012. Data retrieved from www.aidflows.org

³ International Visegrad Fund, *Annual report 2012*, p. 16.

⁴ Zsuzsanna Végh, *Visegrad Development Aid in the Eastern Partnership Region*, Center for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, February 2014, p. 14.

⁵ As many as 92 % of protesters were not affiliated with or mobilized by any political organization.

Kateryna Pishchikova, Olesia Ogryzko, *Civic awakening: The impact of Euromaidan on Ukraine's politics and society*, FRIDE, Madrid, 2014, p. 3.

⁶ See, for example, Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic", *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3, April 1997, pp. 401–429.

can serve as a vantage point for further assistance and consultations with the government in Kyiv. Even though the experience is not all-encompassing, Ukraine can learn both from the positive, and perhaps even more so from the negative, aspects of the Visegrad states' transitions.

- What steps should the V4 states collectively take to address the Ukrainian crisis?
- What will be the most effective democracy assistance tools after the end of the crisis in Ukraine?
- Was the V4's support for Ukraine's democracy prior to the crisis sufficient? Could the group have done more?
- How important is democracy in Ukraine for the V4?
- Should the V4's approach to Ukraine be different than its approach to other Eastern Partnership countries, given current developments?
- A coordinated and mutually agreed response of the V4 states to the crisis in Ukraine is lacking – is this an indicator of future divisions within the Visegrad Group?

List of workshop participants

Part I

1. *Marianne Abrahamsen, Denmark*
2. *Jiří Čištecký, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic*
3. *Jeremy Druker, Executive Director, Transitions Online, Czech Republic/USA*
4. *Martin Ehl, Chief International Editor at Hospodářské noviny, Czech Republic*
5. *Jørgen Ejbøl, Chairman, JP/Politikens Newspapers, Denmark*
6. *Petr Fleischmann, Advisor, Foreign Affairs Committee, Senate, Czech Republic*
7. *Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy, USA*
8. *Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu, Youth Activist, Azerbaijan*
9. *Yevhen Hlibovytsky, Founder, Pro-Mova, Ukraine*
10. *Natalia Churikova, Senior Broadcaster, Ukraine Service, RFE/RL, Ukraine/Czech Republic*
11. *Khadiya Ismayilova, Journalist, Activist, Azerbaijan*
12. *Pavel Kafka, Central European Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic*
13. *Michal Kaplan, Director, Czech Development Agency, Czech Republic*
14. *Irena Kalhousová, Chief Analyst, Forum 2000 Foundation, Czech Republic*
15. *Jakub Klepal, Executive Director, Forum 2000 Foundation, Czech Republic*
16. *Maciej Kuziemski, Lech Walesa Institute, Poland*
17. *Lucia Najšlová, Editor in Chief of V4 Revue; the Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic*
18. *Šimon Pánek, Co-founder and Director, People in Need, Member of the Forum 2000 International Advisory Board, Czech Republic*
19. *Marc Plattner, Vice President for Research Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, USA*
20. *Wojciech Przybylski, Editor-in-Chief, Respublica Nowa, Poland*
21. *Katarzyna Renes, Project Manager, Villa Decius Association, Poland*
22. *Małgorzata Róžańska, Manager of the Literary Bureau, Villa Decius Association, Poland*
23. *Ye Kyaw Swar Myint Sai, Co-Founder, Yangon School of Political Science, Burma*
24. *Jiří Schneider, Senior Fellow and Director of Special Projects, Prague Security Studies Institute, Czech Republic*
25. *Uffe Riis Sørensen, Member of the Board of The Jyllands-Posten Foundation, Denmark*
26. *Tomáš Strážay, the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Slovakia*
27. *Enrique tet Horst, Diplomat, Former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Venezuela*
28. *Alexandr Vondra, Politician, Diplomat, Czech Republic*
29. *Vlad'ka Votavová, Director, Association for International Affairs, Czech Republic*
30. *Christopher Walker, Executive Director, International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, Member of the Forum 2000 Program Council, USA*
31. *Karla Wursterová, Executive Director, International Visegrad Fund, Slovakia*
32. *Anna Zamejc, People in Need, Czech Republic*
33. *Qianfan Zhang, Professor of Law, Peking University, China*

Part II

1. Jiří Čištecký, *Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic*
2. Jeremy Druker, *Executive Director, Transitions Online, Czech Republic/USA*
3. Martin Ehl, *Chief International Editor at Hospodářské noviny, Czech Republic*
4. Mátyás Eörsi, *Senior Advisor to Secretary General, Community of Democracies, Hungary*
5. Carl Gershman, *President, National Endowment for Democracy, USA*
6. Yevhen Hlibovytsky, *Founder, Pro-Mova, Ukraine*
7. Natalia Churikova, *Senior Broadcaster, Ukraine Service, RFE/RL, Ukraine/Czech Republic*
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15. Katarzyna Renes, *Vila Decius Association, Poland*
16. Mikola Riabchuk, *Political and Cultural Analyst Ukraine*
17. Ye Kyaw Swar Myint Sai, *Co-Founder, Yangon School of Political Science, Burma*
18. Jiří Schneider, *Senior Fellow and Director of Special Projects, Prague Security Studies Institute, Czech Republic*
19. Tomáš Strážay, *the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Slovakia*
20. András Stumpf, *Journalist, Heti Válasz*
21. Enrique tet Horst, *Diplomat, Former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Venezuela*
22. Christopher Walker, *Executive Director, International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, Member of the Forum 2000 Program Council, USA*
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