

# How to ask about the V4 identity, if there is any, from the historic and contemporary point of view?

After the events of 1989, the Central European countries found themselves in a similar situation. Their totalitarian regimes had ceased to exist and left the new political representations with a number of rather difficult tasks, among them financial and economic transformation, creating new democratic political institutions and last but not least, return their countries “back to Europe”. Three of those countries decided to try to establish a framework for cooperation in achieving this goal. What was the main motive behind the Visegrad declaration?

The original Visegrad declaration from 1991 claimed that “[t]he similarity of the situation that has evolved over the past decades has determined convergent basic objectives for these three countries”<sup>1</sup> and that “[t]he identity of objectives, as well as similarity of ways of achieving them in many fields poses identical tasks before the three neighboring countries.” From this point of view, the cooperation seems to be of rather instrumental character. However, at the same time, the declaration mentions the traditional, historically shaped system of mutual contacts, cultural and spiritual heritage and common roots of religious traditions of these the then-three Visegrad countries. Question is – do these attributes build a common identity? Of course, identity is a tricky concept and nobody really knows what it does or does not encompass. One of the most common assumptions about identity is that it is based on the sense of distinction between “us” and “the others”<sup>2</sup>.

If there was such a thing as “Central European identity”, then on what basis should e.g. Slovenia be excluded from the group? Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are certainly not the only Central European countries, sharing the above mentioned characteristics. Therefore, speaking about 1991, there is a clear difference between the Central European identity and the Visegrad one, because the latter clearly stems from the former. But, in the course of 25 years of more or less working cooperation and the common transformation experience, has a unique Visegrad regional identity

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<sup>1</sup> Visegrad Declaration 1991. On-line <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>.

<sup>2</sup> Laclau, E. (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*. London: Verso.

developed? Do Czechs, Hungarians, Poles or Slovaks after those 25 years feel closer to each other not only than to Germans, French or Japanese, but to Slovenians?

To make the thing even more complicated, there have been also voices claiming that the cooperation among the three and later four countries is rather defying history, given the conflicts between Hungarians and Slovaks or the fact that the relations between Czechs and Slovaks were not always free of problems.<sup>3</sup> Even now, we can see obvious differences in perception of certain historical personalities or events. This leads us to an impression that the Visegrad cooperation developed in spite of historical experience rather than because of it.

Therefore, when trying to assess the presence or absence of special Visegrad identity, one may come to a conclusion that, unlike the national or even European identity, the Visegrad one does not come “naturally”. Some kind of mutual identification is more likely to develop on the basis of practical involvement in Visegrad projects and cross border cooperation. But given how young the whole project is, it is certain that many years will be needed for citizens of the countries involved to achieve a sense of identity and it is still questionable if that ever will be achieved at all.

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<sup>3</sup> Bútorá, M. (2011). A Miracle Called Visegrad. On-line: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/the-visegrad-book/butora-martin-miracle>.