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The engagement of Visegrad countries in EU-Africa relations

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The Engagement of Visegrad Countries in EU-Africa Relations

Oskar Chmiel

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Bonn, July 2018

Oskar Chmiel

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Abbreviations

ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
AU	African Union
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EUR	euros
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
EC	European Commission
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NGDO	non-governmental development organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
V4	Visegrad Four
VG	Visegrad Group

Executive summary

The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, commonly referred to as the Visegrad Four (V4) states, developed friendly relations with several African states both during and after the wave of independence. After the transition from Socialist to democratic systems at the beginning of the 1990s, the focus of the Visegrad countries had shifted to the West. The foreign policies of the V4 mainly focused on the accession to NATO and then to the EU, to the relative neglect of other aspects and regions, including Africa. As one of the conditions for acceding to the European Union (EU) in 2004, the members of the Visegrad group acceded to the EU-Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Cotonou Partnership Agreement. They also became part of the regular Africa-EU Summits of Heads of State and Government, and became influential actors in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy that covers relations with North Africa as well as with the Central and East European region under the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

Discussions on EU-Africa relations strongly emphasise the engagement and interests of certain (founding) EU member states who have traditionally been vocal in this sphere. On the other side, there is a widely spread perception of the V4's lack of interest in Africa. Nevertheless, while facing the recent turmoil induced by the migration crisis, the V4 governments often declare the intention of greater commitment to development cooperation and humanitarian aid, especially in African migrants' countries of origin.

This paper discusses the recent engagement of the Visegrad countries in the EU-Africa relations, with a key focus on four main issues (the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations; the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy; the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa; and the European Development Fund). Furthermore, it identifies prospects for the Group's future engagement.

The Visegrad countries' foreign policy, as well as economic priorities, primarily lie somewhere else and not in Africa. Their focus on the EaP is one of the reasons why the V4 engagement in the shaping of EU-Africa relations has been limited. Since their interests are elsewhere, they try to balance the EU's focus within its external relations. Also, the V4 countries often point to their lack of interests and expertise in this region. Seemingly, there are too many technical and political limitations for a considerable increase of the V4 engagement in Africa in the near future.

This paper's findings suggest that the migration crisis indeed reinforced the increasing interest of Visegrad countries in Africa, and to some extent accelerated their engagement – both in this region and in the EU arena. However, the tendency to (re)engage in Africa had been initiated before the migration crisis, and it was a result of higher interest stemming from security concerns and from the desire to diversify economic ties.

The overall conclusion of this paper is that the V4 have not managed to effectively translate their joint positions on EU-Africa relations into collective action within the EU. In most of the cases they did not share interests and, in consequence, did not formulate joint positions. This could particularly be observed in the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations. Nevertheless, along with the emergence of the current migration and refugee crisis, a new field for joint engagement of the V4 appeared. Since joint efforts could help to overcome

the lack of capacities for greater development cooperation and diplomatic representation, there is now potential for the Visegrad countries cooperation on the ground.

1 Introduction

The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, commonly referred to as the Visegrad Four (V4) states, developed friendly relations with several African states both during and after their wave of independence. After the transition from Socialist to democratic systems at the beginning of the 1990s, the focus of the Visegrad countries shifted to the West. The foreign policies of the V4 mainly focused on the accession to NATO and then to the EU, to the relative neglect of other aspects and regions, including Africa.

Subsequently, EU accession appeared to be an opportunity to reconnect with the African continent. When they gained membership of the European Union in 2004 among the 10 “new” member states,¹ the V4 had spent years and considerable investment in implementing and internalising all legislation required, which in “EU-speak” is referred to as the “*acquis communautaire*”. A more exotic component of this *acquis* concerned the European Union (EU)-Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA). This refers to an international agreement signed in 2000 by the EU member states and the 78 countries who are members of the ACP group, and which governs cooperation in the fields of development, political dialogue, and trade. The agreement runs until 2020, and negotiations on the future of ACP-EU cooperation are intended to commence 18 months before it expires. For the EU13,² the process of preparing the EU’s mandate for the partnership renewal negotiations is the first time they can co-decide on this key feature of the EU’s external action.

Since the Cotonou Agreement was signed almost two decades ago, the new EU-ACP negotiations have been held in a different setting. One of the most meaningful changes was the EU’s enlargement: “[W]here political interests based on historical relations were still important in a partnership with the EU15, it is argued that this is no longer the case with the EU28” (Tindemans & Brems, 2016, p. 3). The specific history of EU-ACP relations strongly emphasises the engagement and interests of the EU member states which have been traditionally vocal in this sphere. Conversely, while the foreign policies of the majority of EU13 members focus on the Central and East European region under the Eastern Partnership (EaP), they generally have limited interest in Africa – and practically none in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Within the EU13, a distinct role among these states is played by the Visegrad countries which share history, geographical localisation, similar structures of their economies, and some political alliances (Kugiel, 2016, p. 7). In 1991, the then three countries of Czechoslovakia,

1 These were Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

2 The EU13 consist of the ten states that joined the EU in 2004, together with Bulgaria and Romania which joined in 2007, followed by Croatia in 2013.

Hungary and Poland established the loosely-institutionalised, sub-regional, and intergovernmental Visegrad Triangle³ with the aim to facilitate their cooperation and their ultimate integration with NATO and the EU. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Visegrad Triangle was named the Visegrad Group (VG), since the grouping was then comprised of four countries, as both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were members. Once NATO and the EU entry had been accomplished by 2004, it was argued that current “cooperation within the EU [was] the most important subject for them in the V4 format” (Kugiel, 2016, p. 8). Given that their combined population of 65 million was not crucial, in the EU Council the V4’s “total voting weight equals that of France and Germany combined” (Basora, 2011, p. 3). Even if at the end of the day voting rights are not decisive, this clearly shows a potential, especially if the Group coordinated its positions on specific topics of common interest with other EU member states, as has been observed in some successful V4-plus meetings (Basora, 2011, p. 3).

Delivering on this potential of joint V4 action, however, hinges on having clear common interests and a common agenda. When it comes to foreign policy cooperation, the focus on the VG agenda has been mainly limited to their Eastern neighbours. The V4 have presented many joint declarations on cooperation with the Eastern European countries, in order to contribute to the discussions on the strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and ultimately to convince their EU colleagues that “a clear differentiation between eastern and southern neighbours within the European Neighbourhood Policy was needed” (Marcinkowska, 2016, p. 38).

Although one cannot inscribe the success of putting more emphasis on the EaP in the EU’s agenda solely to the merit of the Visegrad Group, its supportive role in facilitating policy alliances with other EU states which were seeking to gain advantages for the Eastern dimension of the ENP was important (Dangerfield, 2009). Consequently, due to the similar characteristics, interests as well as constraints for their positions in the international arena, the question whether the V4 may cooperate in order to realise their national and shared regional interests, either in the global environment (e.g., Kugiel, 2016), at the European and regional level (e.g., Adamczyk, 2015; Czyż, 2018; Nyzio, 2017), in a broad field of development policy (e.g., Drązkiewicz, 2008; Szent-Iványi & Tetenyi, 2008; Krylová, Milérová & Sládková, 2011; Kugiel, 2012b; Kosowicz, 2013; Végh, 2014) or in a particular region, such as Africa (e.g., Kopiński, 2012; Kosowicz, 2012) has already been posed several times. The idea has been the subject of many seminars and conferences, and is frequently a matter of concern for the NGOs from the Visegrad countries. For their part, the V4 governments also recognised the potential for cooperation in the field of development aid and regionally-oriented common action. In consequence, the VG formulated many joint

3 The Visegrad Group cooperation is usually based on concrete projects and maintains a flexible and open character. Its cooperation mechanisms are based on the annual presidency of each member state, annual (one-off) presidential summits and official prime minister meetings twice a year. Ministerial meetings and working groups are held depending on the needs (Adamczyk, 2015, pp. 85-86). Besides, before every EU summit, the V4 arranges a meeting to find a collective voice on specific issues. The VG has only one permanent institution, which is the International Visegrad Fund “founded in 2000 as an instrument to develop civic dimensions of cooperation and strengthen public awareness” (Dangerfield, 2009, p. 1737) with an annual budget of approximately EUR 8 million (all Visegrad countries equally share the contributions to the Fund) which finances hundreds of Visegrad cooperation projects and mobility programmes across Central and Eastern Europe.

declarations as well as actions in the EU arena, even if they were mostly about the Eastern Partnership region, which remained a traditional sphere of their interests.

In the second half of 2016, a few years after the EaP was launched, the controversies surrounding the migration crisis and the mandatory system of refugee relocation proposed by the European Commission gained particular attention in the EU's politics. Although the members of the V4 differ in their approach to many international issues, their attitude towards this crisis is very similar and has thus seemed to reunite their forces (Nyzio, 2017). Indeed, while facing the developments following the Arab Spring, growing instability in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, the subsequent migratory pressure on the EU borders, and the recent turmoil induced by the so-called migration crisis, the V4 governments often declare their "full readiness to strengthen engagement in effective management of the root causes of migration flows", and to "further contribute to joint EU actions" (Government of the Czech Republic, 2015). However, their approach differs significantly from the EU's mainstream vision, while Poland and Hungary have been placed under additional scrutiny in relation to institutional reforms respectively pursued or considered by their governments. From the beginning of the crisis, the V4 governments supported the voluntary character of the distribution of responsibilities and refused to take any refugees while pointing to their perceived national security, economic, and cultural concerns related to such influx of foreigners. On these grounds, they considered the mandatory quotas system to relocate migrants as an infringement of EU member state sovereign decisions. Instead, they insisted on more efficient border protection, also in connection with the readmission of irregular migrants. What is noteworthy, in the context of migration crisis, is that the Visegrad countries use the VG as a platform for support in negotiations in Brussels.⁴ Furthermore, the V4's attempts to tackle migration causes in the migrants' home countries have already resulted in a few, first and long-anticipated joint VG initiatives in development assistance to Africa.

Three empirical and analytical gaps in the literature prompted this paper. First, there is a need to critically question the perception of V4 non-interest in the African continent. Second, there is limited evidence on the extent to which the V4 have managed to effectively translate their joint positions on EU-Africa relations into collective action in the EU. Third, it remains unclear as to whether the current so-called "migration and refugees crisis" has enabled – or rather hampered – joint engagement of the V4.

As per these gaps in the literature, the aim and ambition of this paper is first and foremost a descriptive one. However it is also a formative one through enabling and informing further research on the Visegrad states' engagement in EU-Africa relations. To this end, a variety of research methods were employed. The study was based on a literature review, on an analysis of policy documents, statistics and economic indicators, as well as on 22 semi-structured interviews with the EU and EU member states' officials, European Parliament staff, as well as the academic and civil society experts.⁵ Given that interviewees agreed to contribute to this study under the condition of anonymity, the findings are reflected in the text without being directly attributed to individual persons. Additionally, it benefited also from the author's observations during the V4 Political-Scientific Symposium on Africa Policies and

4 See for example "Interview: Role of Poland in the Visegrad Four", www.esjnews.com/interview-role-of-poland-in-the-visegrad-four.

5 These included 9 EU member state officials, 8 EU officials, 2 Members of the European Parliament assistants, 2 experts from a Visegrad country, and 1 NGO representative from a Visegrad country.

African Studies with the participation of diplomats from each of the Visegrad countries, a special event closing the 5th African Studies Conference in Pécs, Hungary, in May 2018.

The paper is structured as follows: Firstly, it provides a brief overview of the Visegrad countries' relations with Africa. The second part assesses V4 development assistance performance, with a focus on Africa. The third part discusses the general V4 ambitions as regards their influence on the EU agenda, and examines four cases of V4 engagement in EU-Africa relations. The paper concludes by summarising the recent actions of the Visegrad countries, examining the prospects for the future developments, and providing recommendations towards improving their engagement in the EU-Africa relations.

2 Visegrad countries' engagement in Africa

2.1 Brief overview of historical links

Although none of the Visegrad countries were involved in the colonisation of Africa, the V4 developed friendly relations with many countries of that continent both during and after their wave of independence. The Visegrad countries, which were part of the Eastern Bloc controlled by the USSR, had to subordinate their development aid to the Soviet interests and were thus supportive of decolonisation and some African states to prompt their adoption of Socialist ideology. Under the ideological considerations of solidarity, the V4 had provided development assistance, expertise, military equipment and academic exchanges to their African partners. Indeed, during the Socialist era, all Visegrad countries provided scholarships which allowed thousands of Africans to study and obtain a diploma there,⁶ which today is regarded as a promising link to foster relationships, while many of the former students are now in administration or business positions in African countries.

For instance, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) states that “since the 1960s, over 4,000 African students graduated at Polish universities, and therefore they are potential Polish lobbies in their home countries. Thus, [the] mobilisation of Africans who graduated at Polish universities seems very important for building new contacts” (Rzeczpospolita Polska, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, n. d.). Likewise, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Hungarian scholarship programme provided thousands of African students with the opportunity to obtain a diploma at a Hungarian university and, moreover, this mission is continuing today. Furthermore, in Czechoslovakia, around 20,000 students from developing countries pursued university studies or higher education (Exnerová, Jelínek, & Kaplan, 2005, as cited in Opršal, Harmáček, & Syrovátka, 2016, p. 330). Also, economic cooperation mattered and this resulted in Africans gaining positive experience with products imported from the V4, such as Hungarian Ikarus buses⁷ (Tarrósy & Morenth, 2013, p. 83). In addition, countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, Angola, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, along with Eritrean revolutionaries and the Biafran regime, were supplied with arms from Czechoslovakia (Pick, 1979, as cited in Opršal et al., 2016, p. 330).

6 Based on Tarrósy (2014).

7 During the Communist era in Hungary, Ikarus was a leading bus manufacturer in the Eastern Bloc. However the largest clients for the buses were located not only in the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European countries but also in such African countries as Egypt and Angola; see <http://web.archive.org/web/20130612192224/http://busexplorer.com/WorldBus/Ikarus-Text.html>.

After the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the foreign policies of the Visegrad countries mainly focused on accession to NATO and then accession to the EU, which resulted in a limited interest in cooperation with African countries.

It is worth noting that the EU, along with its well-established political, legal, and economic ties with Africa, could serve as an important point of departure for the V4 re-engagement in this region. In fact, while the V4 generally did not seem interested in Africa prior to the EU accession, it may have been their membership in this organisation that provided some incentives to direct their attention towards this region sporadically. The case of the Czech Republic may serve as an example, while

the most important events, agenda and strategic choices during the actual period [i.e. 2007-2009] originated at the EU level. This is attested by the Czech ‘boycott’ of the Lisbon EU-Africa Summit as a protest against the human rights violations by the Zimbabwean government in 2007, the approval of the first strategy document towards Africa by the Governmental Committee for the EU in 2008, and the successful Czech presidency in the Council of the EU in the first half of 2009 [...]. (Horky, 2010b, p. 286)

Furthermore, the situation changed in 2009, when the economic crisis revealed the V4 trade dependence on their Western European partners. Hence, the economic motivation (along with several other factors, such as the political and security concerns) resulted in raising awareness among the Visegrad countries about the necessity to increase their engagement in African countries as well as to diversify their trade links with them. Moreover, the fact that all of the Visegrad countries benefitted from the positive image of European countries *without* a colonial past and had some previous economic and political experience with African countries may constitute a comparative advantage and thus reinforce the current re-engagement. Indeed, this year, the Hungarian VG presidency organised the first-ever V4+ summit with Egypt and aimed at initiating a foreign policy planning dialogue in the format of V4+ African Union. Additionally, the joint examination of opportunities for V4 cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa – for instance in the fields of accessing EU development funds as well as the joint realisation of development projects – was on the presidency agenda (Visegrad Group, 2018). These recent developments will be discussed further in the following sections.

2.2 V4 diplomatic representation in Africa

The diplomatic representation of the Visegrad countries in African countries has been changing, especially recently, when new constraints – but also opportunities – have appeared. Diplomats emphasise that the countries where embassies are located are *de facto* prioritised. Therefore, the limited diplomatic representation in African countries is seen as one of the primary constraints for a higher level of business and development engagement. Such a situation is often linked with the generally limited resources of the Visegrad countries. Indeed, most of the interviewees acknowledged that the V4 do not have as many human and material resources at its disposal as are needed (some of the embassies are sometimes severely understaffed, while the limited number of trained, diplomatic personnel speaking French makes V4 cooperation in a number of African countries more difficult). It is clear that, when facing such a situation, it is then “a question of priorities” where resources are deployed and of where the embassies are located; hence the V4 priorities are in their near neighbourhood in the EaP, and not in Africa.

Currently, the Czech Republic has 12, Hungary 10, Poland 12, and Slovakia 6 embassies in African countries (see Table 1). All of the Visegrad countries are listed among the non-African states accredited to the African Union (AU).⁸ Besides, in 2010 the VG opened the first and, so far, the only Visegrad House in Cape Town which is operated jointly by all Visegrad countries.⁹ Against this backdrop it is important to note that in the last ten years the Visegrad countries' representations in African countries have faced many changes, while some embassies have closed (due to the financial constraints), been suspended (such as the Polish embassy in Libya) or re-opened.

This being the general picture, a few recent trends show some differences within the V4. First of all, Poland recently re-opened embassies in Senegal (in 2016) and Tanzania (in 2018). Hungary, in turn, had only two embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2010 (in Kenya and South Africa), while now it has six of these posts. Such an increase in representation on the continent happened alongside a major shift in Hungarian Africa policy which occurred when the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reorganised into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2014 with emphasis laid on external economic aspects (which resulted in the creation of a separate Africa department), and was followed by the "Opening to the South strategy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary, 2015) in 2015, which planned to open four new embassies (Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Angola) and six trading houses (Ethiopia, Angola, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Kenya). Also, it is likely that in the future more attention will be paid to the Sahel region. Likewise, the Czech Republic has announced its plans for greater involvement (and representation) in the Sahel because it is striving to tackle security concerns and aims at enhancing economic cooperation. Since Zambia became one of the Czech Republic's priority countries for development cooperation from 2018 onwards, the country transferred its embassy from Harare to Lusaka last year, which at the same time meant its returning to the country after almost twenty-five years of absence. Overall, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic plan to open more embassies on the continent in the close future. Slovakia does not intend to open any more in the foreseeable future.

8 As of 28 August 2014. The full list of organisations and countries is available at <https://au.int/en/organs/Non-African-States>.

9 The project was a Czech initiative which resulted in the first, and so far only, Visegrad House. The joint foreign mission of the V4 operates in the building which earlier housed the Consulate General of the Czech Republic. Each member state takes turns for a week to execute diplomatic and consular activities, to maintain direct relations with the South African legislature, and to follow the work of the parliament in its jointly used official premises. During the subsequent years, the idea to open more "Visegrad Houses" was still on the agenda (for example, in Ho Chi Minh City), nevertheless – so far, without success. Based on http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/kum2005/Templates/HirSablon.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRORIGINALURL=%2Fkum%2Fen%2Fbal%2Factualities%2Fspokesman_statements%2FVisegrad_eng_100325.htm&NRNODEGUID=%7BF1A34EDE-0B7D-414F-B4D1-574C8A46B7BC%7D&NRCACHEHINT=NoModifyGuest&printable=true.

Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Algeria	Algeria	Algeria	Egypt
Egypt	Angola	Angola	Ethiopia
Ethiopia	Egypt	Egypt	Kenya
Ghana	Ethiopia	Ethiopia	Libya
Kenya	Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria
Libya	Kenya	Libya (currently suspended)	South Africa
Morocco	Libya	Morocco	
Nigeria	Morocco	Nigeria	
Senegal	Nigeria	Senegal	
South Africa	South Africa	South Africa	
Tunisia		Tanzania	
Zambia		Tunisia	

Source: Author's elaboration based on
[www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/diplomatic_missions/czech_missions_abroad/index.html?zn=A-C](http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/diplomatic_missions/czech_missions_abroad/index.html?zn=A-C;);
www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/missions;
www.ms.gov.pl/pl/informacje_konsularne/polskie_placowki/mapa_placowek_na_swiecie/;
www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/slovenske_zastupitelstva-vsetky_zastupitelstva.

2.3 V4 participation in stabilisation and peace missions

Prior to their accession to NATO and the EU, the participation of the Visegrad countries in stabilisation and peace missions was mainly limited to UN peacekeeping operations. Along with the EU and NATO entry, their commitment shifted towards the involvement within these organisations; however, it should be emphasised that in general the V4 were primarily engaged in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Nowadays, all V4 countries are involved in major missions of the UN, EU and NATO. Nevertheless, there are certain differences in the perception of some security issues among the V4, especially given their slightly different geographic locations and historical experiences (Jandova, 2016). Since 2007 the Czech, Slovak, and Polish (together with Croatian) forces have formed a NATO Multinational Military Police Battalion. Moreover, within the EU framework, the four Visegrad countries decided in 2011 to contribute to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and hence to create a V4 EU Battlegroup by 2016, which was the first joint VG initiative of that kind (Paulech & Urbanovská, 2014). Additionally, there is the Visegrad Group Military Education Platform (VIGMILEP) that allows synchronisation and interoperability of the V4 countries' Professional Military Education systems.

In Africa, the V4 armies operated most recently in the Central African Republic and Mali. Nevertheless, even before their accession to the EU and NATO, the Visegrad countries had already been contributing to a number of peacekeeping operations, usually led by the UN (see Annex II). For instance, when in 1968 the Nigerian authorities were accused of genocide during the Biafran war, they approached the United Nations, the Organisation of

African Unity, and four governments (Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) with a request to form a team of observers to investigate the validity of these allegations in the war zone (Gaj & Zuziak, 2011, p. 42). It was of note that Poland was the only state of the Communist Bloc in this committee.

Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Visegrad countries have been increasingly involved in such missions. Hungary took part in its first operation in Namibia and Angola at the beginning of the 1990s. Similarly, Czechoslovakia was involved in Angola and Namibia, while both the Czech Republic and Slovakia maintained their engagement after the dissolution of the country in 1993. Currently, the rationale behind the Visegrad countries' engagement is to a great extent caused by their international obligations within such organisations as the UN, EU, and NATO. Also, security matters, combating terrorism and addressing the root causes of migration crisis are among the factors that prompted the Visegrad countries to strengthen their contributions to operations in Africa. Consequently, the V4 have so far taken part in the EU operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Poland, Hungary); Sudan (Hungary, Slovakia); Chad and the Central African Republic (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland); and Mali (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland). Furthermore, there are ongoing operations with contributions from the Visegrad countries in Western Sahara (Poland, Hungary); Somalia (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland); the Democratic Republic of Congo (Czech Republic, Poland); and the Central African Republic (Hungary, Czech Republic). A full overview is provided in Annex II.

2.4 V4-Africa economic relations

Although African states are not traditional trading partners for the Visegrad countries, the V4 is currently focusing on the economic aspects of the relationship. While the political dimension initially conditioned the cooperation during the Socialist era, cooperation was also a means to diversifying the dependency on the Soviet Union. After the transformation of the political, economic and social system of 1989, the V4 focused primarily on their relations with the West, which resulted in their economic dependence on Western European markets. As a consequence, economic relations with African states also decreased. Only the recent economic crisis, which severely affected Western European economies, induced a need among the Visegrad countries to diversify their trade relations – a similar desire may also be reflected in the positions of most of the African countries, creating an interesting synergy. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the increasing exchange in trade between the Visegrad and African countries since the 2000s, with the most noticeable growth in the case of Poland.¹⁰ Moreover, Polish foreign direct investments (FDIs) have been growing significantly over the last years (see Table 2). As a consequence, the Visegrad countries have become aware of the business opportunities in African states, leading to the enhancing of economic relations between the four Central European and African countries in general.

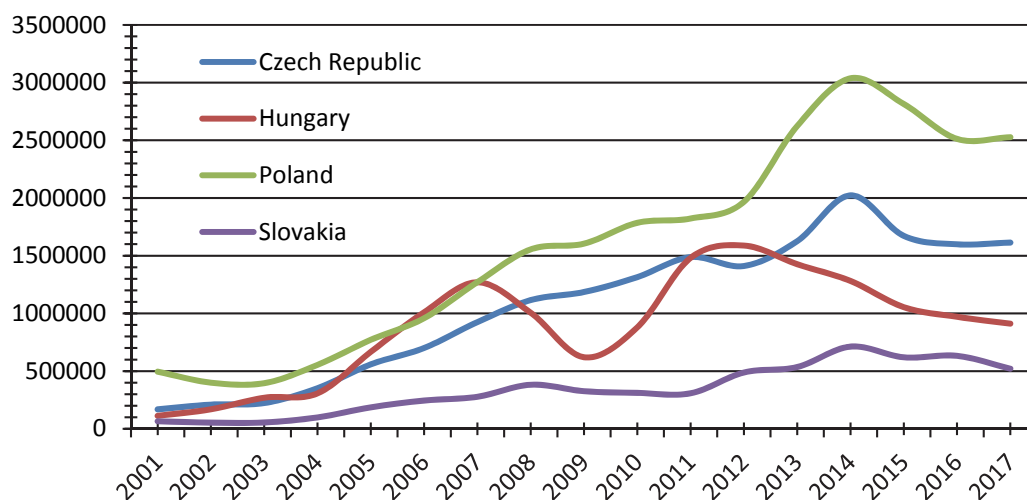
These trends may be explained by a growing number of differing trade-related activities, such as trade missions, export promotion programmes, diplomatic representations, economic

10 It is worth noting, however, that in the period 2014-2016 the exports from Visegrad countries to African countries decreased considerably (see Figure 1). As Cibian notes, while referring to all CEE countries, such a situation potentially occurred “due to lower global commodity prices that affected the purchasing power of African countries” (Cibian, 2017, p. 18).

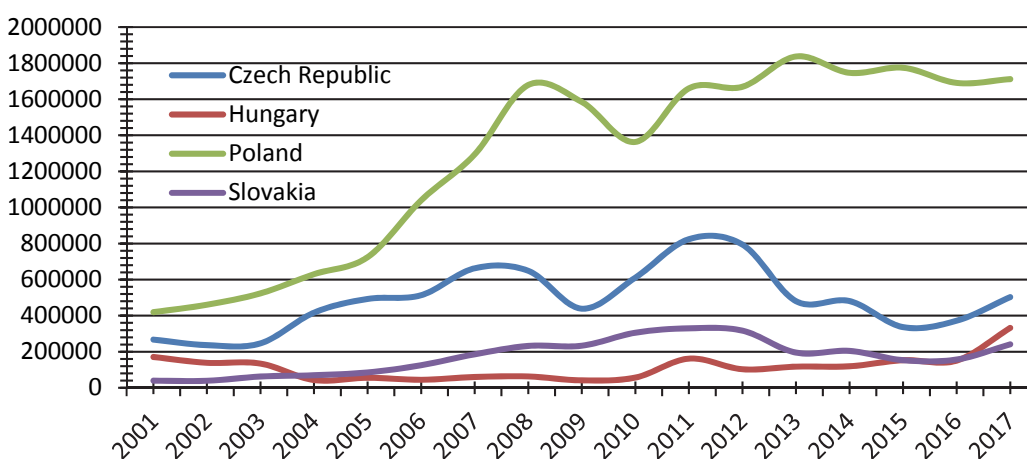
attachés, and honorary consuls in Africa. The Hungarian strategy of “Opening to the South” is a good reflection of the intention of the countries in the region to enhance and diversify their economic relations. Naturally this includes Africa, as a promising direction for new opportunities. In a similar vein, in 2013 the Polish Ministry of the Economy along with other partnering institutions launched an export promotion programme entitled “Go Africa” which aimed at boosting economic cooperation.¹¹ The programme selected six priority markets: Nigeria, Angola, South Africa, Algeria, Kenya and Mozambique, where the activities are focused on three areas: diplomatic support, information activities, and financial support. In the period during which the programme was in operation, exchange via trade was growing: in the period 2012-2014 alone, the value of trade between Poland and African states increased by 26 per cent, while the increase in sales to the countries in which actions were undertaken in accordance with the programme was particularly visible (Wnukowski, 2015, pp. 1-2). Furthermore, Poland recently introduced a new model of export promotion based on the activity of the Polish Agency for Investments and Trade (PAIH) which is acting through the Foreign Trade Offices (TO). So far, there are only two TOs in Africa (in Nairobi and Cairo), but there are plans to open more (in Addis Ababa, Algiers, Casablanca). Also, in the Czech Republic, the growing interest of Czech businesses in African countries was putting pressure on the political representation to increase engagement in the African agenda. Consequently, this increased interest and an emphasis on economic diplomacy in particular resulted in mutual official visits. Indeed, in order to facilitate market entry, the Czech Republic reopened some embassies (in Dakar in November 2013 and Nairobi in 2014) (Horký-Hluchář & Rudincová, 2015, pp. 270-271).

The Visegrad countries’ trade with African countries focuses primarily on South Africa and on North African countries; yet, there are plans for continued expansion in the other regions too. Although economic cooperation is growing, it is still meagre (see Figures 1 and 2), while many perceive African countries to be a challenging market, due to such constraints as security concerns, language barriers (namely, French or Portuguese), the well-established, competitive positions of the Western firms, and a relatively small number of companies which are middle-sized and globally export-oriented in the Visegrad countries.

11 For a comprehensive study of the business opportunities in Polish-African relations, see also Bonikowska & Rabiej (2013).

Figure 1: Exports from Visegrad countries to Africa (thousand US dollars)

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from the International Trade Centre, www.trademap.org

Figure 2: Imports to Visegrad countries from Africa (thousand US dollars)

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from the International Trade Centre, www.trademap.org

Table 2: The foreign direct investment (FDI) positions of Visegrad countries in Africa (million US dollars), 2003-2012

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Czech Republic	3.3	0.2	0	0	0.3	0.5	1.3	0	C	0.6
Hungary	2.5	0	0	0.2	0	1.1	3.8	6.8	2.3	4.1
Poland	40.0	66.0	90.1	124.5	131.6	161.9	174.1	197.1	200.7	226.7
Slovakia	0.0	8.8	8.2	8.5	7.8	10.1	C	5.3	C	C

Note: C: Non-publishable and confidential value

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from OECD.Stat at <https://stats.oecd.org>.

3 Visegrad countries' development aid

All Visegrad countries made a specific contribution to African development under the Communist regimes and, at that time, such cooperation had been maintained primarily due to the ideological motivations mirroring Cold War logic. For example, according to some estimations, in the 1980s the Czechoslovak development assistance amounted to between 0.7 and 0.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). It should be noted, however, that at that time the methods for such a calculation were different from current standards and that it is not known to what extent this estimation takes military support into account (Pavlik, 2016, p. 38). After the fall of Communism, however, not only were these ties disrupted but the V4 countries became the recipients of aid receiving significant foreign assistance from many countries and international organisations, such as the EU (mainly in the form of pre-accession support under PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD), IMF, OECD, and the World Bank. As a result, development cooperation was suspended and a shift could be observed only with the beginning of the new millennium. Indeed, the EU accession has been pressurising the V4 to re-engage in development cooperation and increase funding, as contributing to the EU's development policy is part of the "acquis communautaire".¹² This was done by means of the general contributions of the V4 to the EU's Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), but also by additional contributions to the inter-governmental European Development Fund (EDF) that serves to implement the Cotonou Agreement. One should also not disregard the early efforts, provided predominantly by religious Christian organisations (especially Polish and Slovak ones) which were continuing the work started in Communist times and were becoming increasingly involved in the development projects (Drażkiewicz, 2008, p. 4). Moreover, all Visegrad countries have been involved in providing humanitarian aid around the world for many years now.

Since they joined the EU, all Visegrad countries have made substantial progress in arranging their development policies and are currently members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC; the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia gained membership in 2013, Hungary in 2016). Two of the V4 countries established development aid agencies which implement the projects under the control of MFA (in the Czech Republic, the Czech Development Agency, and in Slovakia, SlovakAid). Besides, all of them created legal frameworks and institutional structures for development policy, while the MFA plays the central role in coordinating the activities of the involved governmental organisations in Poland and Hungary. However, it is still noticeable that some line ministries also have a great deal of influence in this area (Lightfoot & Szent-Iványi, 2017). Although it is possible to see an increase in aid spending, the multilateral channel continues to play "first fiddle" (and its overwhelming part is directed towards the EU; see Annex III). Moreover, all of the Visegrad countries are shareholders in the two major European development banks – the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) – while a Slovak national, Vazil Hudák, is the Vice-President of the EIB, and a Hungarian national, András Simor is the Senior Vice President, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer at EBRD. All of this, however, did not mean any significant change in terms of net Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a percentage of gross national income, which remains at a low level and does not match the EU's target of 0.33 per cent, which was set for the new member

12 As Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot (2017, p. 246) note: "[D]espite the soft nature of the *acquis* in this area, the accession process encouraged accession countries to launch their official bilateral development policies between 2001 and 2003".

states (its value ranged in 2017 from 0.11 per cent in Hungary up to 0.13 per cent in the Czech Republic and Poland; see Annex III).

The limited resources assigned to development cooperation are one of the most obvious constraints for the Visegrad countries' aid policies. According to a comparative assessment of development aid using the Commitment to Development Index,¹³ in 2017 the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland ranked poorly, coming 19th (ex aequo), 21st, and 22nd, respectively. It is a widely held opinion that, in order to increase spending on development cooperation, it is necessary to improve global education (that is, education to open people's eyes and minds to the realities of the globalised world¹⁴), since this issue generally does not catch the attention of the public and in consequence is not "politically attractive". According to the Eurobarometer study published in April of last year (European Commission, 2017), since the last survey in 2015, respondents in Hungary and Poland "have become more positive in their attitudes to development aid" (p. 82). Indeed, while the majority of respondents in each EU member state agree that tackling poverty in developing countries is also in the EU's interest, the most significant increases were observed in Hungary (+13 percentage points (pp); up to 78 per cent) and Poland (+12 pp; up to 84 per cent), whereas the Czech Republic had the lowest level of agreement (65 per cent), followed by Estonia and Slovakia (both 71 per cent) (European Commission, 2017, p. 23). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the surveys conducted by the EU generally show meaningful support for development aid (recently more in Hungary and Poland than in the Czech Republic and Slovakia), this question is still absent in the political discourse in the Visegrad countries (see also Kugiel, 2012b, p. 112).

If one looks at the V4 lists of priority countries for development cooperation (see Table 4), or of the top recipients of their bilateral aid (see Annex III), it is clear that geographical proximity, security concerns, and strategic interests play a significant role in aid disbursement. Hence, the Visegrad countries' priorities are primarily located in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and Central Asia, and mostly belong to the category of lower-middle-income countries, which resulted in a limited focus on Africa. As Kopiński argues, "[I]t is rather the lack of strategic vision in foreign policy and the ad hoc style of formulation of such policy" (2012, p. 42) which explains this relative lack of interest in enhancing development cooperation with African countries. Furthermore, the aid allocation rationale in the V4 may partly also be explained by a certain degree of path dependence in V4 foreign aid policies – as argued earlier by Szent-Iványi and Tétényi (2008). Indeed, many partners from the Communist era were introduced again on the country priority lists when V4 development cooperation was re-launched, for instance, Angola, Ethiopia, Mongolia, Yemen, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Sudan, and Mozambique (Szent-Iványi & Tétényi, 2008, pp. 579-580). For all of these reasons, the Visegrad countries often emphasise the need to maintain a balance in the EU's priorities between its Southern and Eastern neighbours. As a result, when the EU tried to increase its new member states' engagement

13 The Commitment to Development Index ranks 27 of the world's richest countries and measures hundreds of indicators across seven policy areas: aid, climate, finance, migration, security, technology, and trade.

14 Based on the definition of global education of the Maastricht Declaration on Global Education 2002 which states that "Global Education is education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Global Education is understood to encompass Development Education, Human Rights Education, Education for Sustainability, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention and Intercultural Education; being the global dimensions of Education for Citizenship" (Europe-wide Global Education Congress, 2002).

in Africa, as stated in the 2005 European Consensus on Development,¹⁵ it turned out that these states “supported the focus on Africa as long as support was also provided for countries they regarded as priorities” (Lightfoot, 2010, p. 339-340).

The four Visegrad countries exhibit similar approaches in their development cooperation programmes, especially because of their common perception of their “transition experience” which is seen as a comparative advantage in comparison to other donors, and which can be shared in relations with their partners. Such a situation provides a field for joint interventions by applying the Visegrad countries transition experience to shared priority countries, in turn contributing to the harmonisation and coordination of EU donors (Krylová et al., 2011, p. 6). Accordingly, the first, small joint V4 project was carried out in 2011 with the aim of supporting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Moldova. In the next year the Visegrad 4-Eastern Partnership programme (V4EaP) was launched by the International Visegrad Fund, aiming to share lessons learned from the transformation experience, among others things (Kugiel, 2012b). Additionally, there are already several examples of Visegrad countries’ joint programming, for example, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have experience in joint programming in Moldova. Nevertheless, further enhancement of joint programming seems unlikely, since the timeframes of development cooperation strategies in V4 countries differ significantly (Kosowicz, 2013).

The Visegrad countries also take part in the EU Joint Programming in Africa (see Table 3), but their limited capacities and the lack of trained people on the ground may seriously endanger this. What is more, there is not a single case of a country on priority lists that would overlap for all of the V4 countries, not even as regards the EU Joint Programming. It is noteworthy, however, that all Visegrad countries implement projects in Kenya and Ethiopia.¹⁶ These two partners were perceived as a possible ground for the V4 cooperation in development projects implementation. In sum, where V4 development cooperation in Africa is concerned, Brudzińska, Prouza, Tarróssy and Czerep (2017, p. 6) argue that “if [the] V4 [Group] want[s] to have [a] bigger impact on the ground, it should find specialised niches and priority countries where it can jointly offer its long-lasting contribution”.

Table 3: Participation of Visegrad countries in EU Joint Programming in Africa	
Czech Republic	Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya
Hungary	Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia
Poland	Ethiopia
Slovakia	Kenya
Source: Author’s elaboration based on https://jptracker.capacity4dev.eu/donors/list	

Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Visegrad countries have already gained long-term experience on African soil (for instance, Czech NGOs in Ethiopia; Slovak NGOs in Kenya; Polish missionaries and NGOs in Cameroon and the Central African Republic) (Brudzińska et al., 2017, p. 3). In every Visegrad country there is an NGDO (non-governmental development organisation) platform (Czech Republic: FoRS; Hungary: HAND; Poland: Grupa

15 The European Consensus on Development defined a shared policy framework and common principles within which the EU and its member states each implement their development policies, and was mainly focused on poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals; see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r12544>.

16 See Kosowicz (2012).

Zagranica; Slovakia: MVRO), and all of them have been cooperating for years, sometimes through the organisation of joint events (for example, Visegrad Regional Seminars on Global Development Education) and the realisation of joint projects (also financed by the EU). It is essential, however, to stress that the cooperation between the NGOs from the Visegrad countries has so far mainly been limited to consultations and especially to the organisation of workshops and events in V4 countries to strengthen public support for development cooperation. Hence, there are reportedly almost no technical or operational joint actions on the ground.

The first OECD DAC Peer Review of the **Czech Republic** assessed that, although Czech development cooperation has limited resources and presence, its support for the less-developed countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe through sharing the democratisation and market transformation experience is significant (OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], 2016). Indeed, during the Czech EU Presidency in 2009, one of its priorities concerning development policy was the Eastern dimension. As Horký argues, although success in this field was restrained, as both the working party and the Directorate General on Development were usually focused on the ACP countries, this activity “helped to raise the awareness of the territorial priorities of the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries” (Horký, 2010a, p. 354). As Opršal, Harmáček, and Syrovátka (2016) state, the Czech Republic has never had a separate strategy focused on aid to Sub-Saharan Africa, and the region was of marginal interest to the country. The thematic list of priorities in the Czech development cooperation strategy for 2018-2030 includes good democratic governance, sustainable management of natural resources, economic transformation and growth, agriculture and rural development, and inclusive social development. In addition, cross-cutting priorities are described (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2017). The country’s priority list mentions two African countries, Ethiopia and Zambia, where the Czech Republic opened development cooperation offices. Among the Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic is the one which is the most advanced in terms of elaborating country strategy papers as it had five of such papers for all of its programme countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Moldova, Mongolia) during the 2010-2017 period (Szent-Iványi & Lightfoot, 2015, p. 69). As Zambia became one of the Czech Republic’s priority countries for development cooperation from 2018 onwards, the country transferred its embassy from Harare to Lusaka last year.

The scorecard published by the European Council on Foreign Relations in 2014 praised **Slovakia** for development aid, stating that the country’s performance was significantly better than in previous years (ECFR [European Council on Foreign Relations], 2014). In its development cooperation strategy for 2014-2018, Slovakia gives priority to such sectors as education, healthcare, good governance and the building of civil society, agriculture and forestry, water and sanitation, energy, and support of market environment development. Furthermore, “sectoral priorities for programme countries are set individually and defined in the strategies for development cooperation of the SR [Slovak Republic] with these countries” (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2013). In Africa, the development aid of the country focused on Kenya and South Sudan (see Table 4). It is noteworthy that Slovak development assistance had long-lasting cooperation with Kenya and that the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic adopted a country strategy paper for this partner (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, n. d.). Although Slovakia’s remarkable progress in development cooperation could serve as a model for the other Visegrad country, Poland (see Kugiel, 2012a), this has never materialised.

Unlike Slovakia and the Czech Republic, **Poland** has not established a development aid agency. As stated above, in Poland the MFA coordinates the activities of other government organisations (mainly other line ministries) which are involved in aid (Lightfoot & Szent-Iványi, 2017). The first DAC Peer Review of Poland stated that the country has been an important partner for such countries as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, through sharing its transformation experience. The study added that, in general, Poland should increase its strategic focus and the scale of its aid allocations (OECD, 2017). As regards its engagement in Africa, Poland has embassies in each priority country (see Tables 1 and 4). They are entitled to execute small grants projects in other countries where there are no Polish embassies. According to the current programme of Polish development cooperation, good governance, democracy and human rights, human capital, entrepreneurship and the private sector, sustainable agriculture and rural development, as well as environmental protection are the thematic priorities. On the other hand, in Africa, Poland's development cooperation focuses on supporting three areas: human capital, environmental protection, and entrepreneurship and the private sector (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, 2015). Even though in most of the Visegrad countries the share of ODA directed towards African states has not increased significantly throughout the last years, in Poland such growth was noticeable (see Table 5). In fact, among the top ten recipients of Polish ODA in 2010, there was only one African country (Angola), while Polish bilateral ODA to Sub-Saharan Africa was only a small fraction (USD 2.60 million) of its total value (USD 83 million). It is therefore worthy of note that six years later, out of ten major recipients of Polish ODA, four were located in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Angola), and in general, the region was already positioned high on the list of aid disbursements.¹⁷ Although this trend may generally be seen as a notable change, it should be also emphasised that, in 2015, Ethiopia (in 2016 the country was the top recipient of Polish bilateral ODA, see Annex III) and Angola received substantial funds in the form of preferential, tied loans, which still represent a significant portion of Polish bilateral development assistance (in 2015, 17 per cent; in 2014, 20 per cent; in 2013 approximately 30 per cent; and in 2012 approximately 40 per cent) (Grupa Zagranica, 2016). One of these tied aid credits worth USD 14 million supported the construction of the Academy of Fishery and Marine Sciences in Namibe, Angola. Nevertheless, the overall engagement of Poland in bilateral development aid in African countries is still relatively small.

Similarly to the other V4 countries, the primary focus of **Hungarian** development aid is in the neighbouring countries, as well as in the countries whose status came from the commitments in international coalitions (such as Afghanistan), and where it has ties from the Communist past (for instance, Vietnam). The education sector takes up the substantial part of the country's development aid, which is spent on such activities as training, exchange programmes, and scholarships (Leiszen, 2013, p. 3). Hungary's sectoral priorities in its international development cooperation strategy embrace institutional development, green growth, environmental and climate protection, and human development. The strategy did not provide a specific list of priority countries and only mentioned priority regions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary, n. d.). Also, Hungary is currently interested in giving tied aid credits to its African partners; Kenya, namely, will be first to benefit from this, and negotiations with Ghana and Nigeria are at an advanced stage.

17 In 2015, Poland's bilateral aid given to Sub-Saharan African countries amounted to USD 42.92 million, whereas at the same time the aid provided to European countries amounted to USD 45.99 million. In total, Poland's bilateral ODA in 2015 amounted to USD 100.18 million.

Czech Republic	Hungary¹⁸	Poland	Slovakia
Partner countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Moldova, and Zambia	Priority regions: Africa and the Middle East, Asia/ Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans	Belarus, Georgia, Mol- dova, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, Myanmar, Palestine, Afghanistan	Programme countries: Afghanistan, Kenya, Moldova
Specific countries: Afghanistan, Palestine, Ukraine, and Syria			Project countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Ukraine
In the countries whose priority status terminates in 2017 (Mongolia, Kosovo and Serbia), there will be a trans- ition period (2018-2020).			A country with exceptional humanitarian and development needs: South Sudan
Source: Author's elaboration based on Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary, n. d.; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, 2015; Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2013			

Year	Poland	Czech Republic	Hungary	Slovakia
2000	1.4	0.4
2001	0.9	1.4
2002	0.8	2.3	...	0.6
2003	0.8	3.4	0.0	3.7
2004	11.8	4.9	0.1	0.9
2005	1.4	5.8	9.6	22.6
2006	90.3	7.9	0.0	18.8
2007	3.9	6.4	15.1	18.4
2008	8.8	7.6	0.1	20.9
2009	9.6	8.3	0.7	0.2
2010	2.6	6.9	0.8	1.7
2011	2.9	7.6	0.6	1.9
2012	2.9	7.3	0.8	2.6
2013	35.9	6.2	0.9	2.4
2014	33.3	5.9	0.8	1.6
2015	41.6	6.9	3.0	1.6
2016	80.3	6.3	6.3	2.5
Source: Author's elaboration based on ODA disbursements, http://data.oecd.org .				

18 The Hungarian development cooperation strategy for 2014-2020 does not provide a specific list of priority countries and only mentions the priority regions, while "the list of partner countries may get modified within the time frame of the Strategy, in accordance with the changing income status and the advancement of the EU accession process [...] Programme countries should be identified within the group of partner countries, where we will provide long-term, comprehensive, programme-based development assistance [...] Partner countries will be selected based on policy considerations following broad-based consultations. The list will be reviewed from time to time" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary, n. d., p. 10).

4 Visegrad countries' engagement in EU-Africa relations

4.1 Introduction: the potential that the V4 group offers to its members

The Visegrad countries have a similar recent history, geographic localisation, economic and social conditions. Because of this, they share the same expectations as regards EU policies, which provide a potential area for cooperation between them. Nevertheless, in the VG the differing interests and perceptions of threats have so far prevailed. It seems, however, that the V4 are gradually being able to work out a common position regarding issues like migration, energy security, and the future of the EU common market (Kuzelewska & Bartnicki, 2017, p. 109). Moreover, the declarations included in the VG presidency programmes reflect that the four countries would like to see a balance in the EU's priorities between its Southern and Eastern neighbours. The joint efforts of the Czech EU and the Polish VG Presidencies contributed to the creation of the EaP initiative (Krylová et al., 2011, p. 5). Furthermore, the V4 often point to the importance of the Western Balkans and could play an important role in the integration of new member states in the case of future EU enlargements. To enhance cooperation and communication within the V4 about foreign policy matters on the European agenda, the four countries hold meetings at the relevant levels before sessions of the European Council, the General Affairs Council (GAC), and the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC).¹⁹ Thus, for such a small EU member state as Slovakia, the Visegrad format may be the most effective way of shaping EU policies and decisions, while

on the EU level, the V4 [Group] has helped Slovakia build effective coalitions, supporting for instance, the continuation of solid EU cohesion policy; more focus on energy security issues; EU funding for regional interconnectors; and upholding the EU principle of freedom of movement against recent Dutch and British efforts to limit EU migrants' rights to social protection. (Nič, Slobodník, & Šimečka, 2014, p. 13)

Indeed, the V4 have the potential to form meaningful coalitions in the EU forum to support initiatives favourable to the four countries or to block decisions which they do not support. For example, when voting by a qualified majority in the EU Council, the Visegrad countries together have 58 weighted votes out of 345 and a potential of about 64.1 million people of the total EU population (that is, 502.5 million, and thus comparable to the potential of a country like France). However, the V4 countries very often differ in their policy on the functioning of the EU, as they tend to see different roles for themselves in the region and within the EU. Again, as a result it has often been difficult so far for the V4 countries to work out common positions and push them through in the EU arena consequently (Kubin, 2014).

In the following sections, the analysis focuses on four main issues (the EU's post-Cotonou negotiation mandate; southern dimensions of the European Neighbourhood Policy; the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa; and the European Development Fund). These subsequently form the basis for the assessment of the recent developments in the V4 engagement in EU-Africa relations.

19 See, for example, the Czech Republic VG Presidency Programme "Innovative Visegrad", available at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/innovative-visegrad>.

4.2 The EU's post-Cotonou negotiation mandate

In September 2018, negotiations are due to start between the EU and the ACP States. These will aim to organise their relations after the Cotonou Partnership Agreement expires. What is also important is that this agreement will fundamentally shape the future relations between the EU and Africa. Along with this year's opening of talks on the partnership renewal, the V4 Group had the opportunity to exert an impact on the framework of the EU-Africa relationship for the very first time. Against this backdrop, the following subsection will analyse the positions and contributions of the Visegrad countries in the EU's post-Cotonou negotiation mandate discussions.

When referring to the Visegrad countries' positions in the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations, one should bear in mind that the precise information on this issue is confidential. Nevertheless, while searching for similarities and coordination between the V4, it is noticeable that they are generally sceptical about the efficiency of the EU-ACP relationship. Overall, they perceive it as a relationship based primarily on historical links, or as a "relic of colonialism". Oftentimes, in their opinion, the ACP group is "inefficient" or "artificial" and does not provide significant development results. Also, the V4 generally perceive the EU's partnership with the ACP countries through the prism of relations with Africa, since they attach most of the importance to this region, while the Pacific and Caribbean seemed distant. The greater interest in Africa stems from security and migration concerns as well as business opportunities. Besides, some V4 diplomats additionally pointed to the importance of political dialogue, human rights and civil society in the relationship with the ACP countries. As Box 1 notes, the group had similar engagement during the 2017 AU-EU summit, which focused on their most prioritised questions.

Box 1: V4 engagement at the 2017 AU-EU Summit

Migration and security issues dominated the AU-EU Summit which took place on 29-30 November 2017 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. For the Visegrad countries, the priorities during the summit were migration, peace, security, youth and economic relations, which was not different from the approach taken by other EU member states in general.

On the other side, an EU official acknowledged that, although some groups of countries were indeed focused on particular questions (for instance, Nordic countries pushed for human rights, while others pushed for greater emphasis on trade and business), the V4 were not really involved.

Contrary to this point of view, another EU official revealed that among the most important issues for the V4 during the summit were references to the ENP. Besides, it is worthy of note that during the summit Slovakia announced its commitment to allocate EUR 1 million to the EU Trust Fund for Africa, while the Czech Republic launched a joint project with Italy in Côte d'Ivoire, which aimed at the prevention of migration and focused on the reintegration of refugees and the situation of stateless people (the Czech Ministry of Interior contributed EUR 1 million to the project).

Source: Author

In general, within the V4 there is a clear desire to move towards a more pragmatic, "non-ideological", economic partnership of equals with African states while emphasising business relations, and a need to finish with the obsolete donor-recipient relationship. An observation by a Hungarian diplomat, who stated during the V4 Political-Scientific Symposium on Africa Policies and African Studies in Pécs that "we basically eliminated the word 'help' from our vocabulary, and we emphasise that we are looking for business in Africa" may serve as an example.

Such a perception induced a general disinterest in the continuation of the EU-ACP partnership, and according to some, the V4 could be seen by some EU member states who are in favour of discontinuing the partnership as instrumental. Nevertheless, since the relations with the ACP countries are not a top priority for the V4, there was also a desire to retain a flexibility of positions, most probably, in order to pursue bargaining for the sake of other interests that were more relevant to them. Indeed, the preparation of the EU post-Cotonou negotiating mandate coincided with preparations for other, crucial negotiations within the EU, such as the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This, in turn, resulted in a situation where the V4 usually did not present concrete positions and were mostly not “pushing hard” in the debates on the post-Cotonou agreement.

Indeed, when in April 2018 the negotiations focused on a few points of divergence between EU member states (such as the duration of the future agreement, the frequency of common EU-ACP Council of Ministers meetings, and the publication of the mandate), the V4 positions on each of these issues were slightly different. For instance, in reference to the duration of the new partnership agreement, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were somewhat flexible and ready to agree on certain consensual solutions. Poland, however, together with such countries as Germany opted for a limited duration.

Seemingly, Hungary and Poland were the two countries among the V4 which were the most active in these negotiations. Indeed, when the migration issue came to the fore, Hungary was the most vocal among the Visegrad countries. In fact, the country engaged similarly during the negotiations on the New European Consensus on Development in 2017, when it threatened to veto the text in relation to proposed paragraphs on migration. This time around, Hungary opposed the accord on the mandate because of the chapter regarding readmission of illegal migrants who were nationals of the ACP states. Several compromise engagements were unsuccessful, and for several weeks no agreement was reached at the level of the EU ambassadors. In consequence, the mandate was not adopted during the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meeting on 28 May as initially planned. Then, as a condition for giving the mandate to the EC, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó indicated three points that Hungary would like to see concerning the migration chapter in the post-Cotonou agreement:

First, a chapter which reflects the reality. Second, a chapter which is balanced in a way that makes it very clear that illegal migration is a security threat to Europe; and third – the goal regarding illegal migration must be stopping it.²⁰

Interestingly, although the Visegrad countries mostly presented a common stance on the migration crisis (see, for example, the joint declaration of the V4 Interior Ministers of 5 October 2017: Visegrad Group, 2017), in the case of the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations, the rest of the four did not back Hungary’s veto officially.²¹ Hence, it is interesting to observe that Poland and Hungary did not present the same positions on migration in the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations – although, this lasted only until a particular moment: During the meeting of the European ambassadors to the European Union

20 Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tMQHzzpso4&feature=youtu.be.

21 The Hungarian government often refers to the importance of V4 cooperation or to a special relationship with the Poles in this context, but according to a diplomat in Brussels, “the Hungarians have no real ally”; see <https://444.hu/2018/04/26/magyarorszag-megvetozta-az-eu-afrika-csucs-megallapodasat-oriasi-afelhaborodas>. Besides, it is noteworthy that in the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations, Hungary did not ask for support of its position on the migration chapter from any of the Visegrad countries.

(Coreper) on 7 June 2018, Poland did not so much join Hungary in blocking the mandate, but urged the other EU member states to find a compromise on the issue of regulations concerning migration.²² This may prove that Poland held a somewhat flexible position during the negotiations and for most of the time even did not support Hungary on the country's opposition towards the inclusion of specific references on migration in the new ACP-EU deal. It therefore seems that only with the pressure mounting from the dispute on the rule of law, Poland seized the opportunity to pursue bargaining concerning this question. This impression was seemingly confirmed when on 20 June the Polish ambassador placed a reservation on the text in the mandate regarding sexual and reproductive health rights.²³ It was finally resolved that the mandate would be adopted on 22 June with a unilateral declaration on the matter by the Polish government.

Besides, Poland's involvement in the negotiations on the mandate for the new partnership agreement negotiations was generally noticeable. The country was part of a like-minded group in the ACP Working Party which included such countries as Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Furthermore, Poland commissioned a study on the post-Cotonou assessment²⁴ which was reportedly influential as regards the new member states – whereas the rest of the V4 have been perceived as somewhat passive. In short, although the positions of the Visegrad countries were similar as regards many issues concerning the post-Cotonou mandate, they did not present a common stance. An example of a certain convergence of V4 positions was the issue of an “umbrella agreement”, the so-called regionalisation of the EU-ACP partnership. Nevertheless, for the most part, their positions were issue-dependent and although the V4 did consult on their positions with their Visegrad counterparts (formally and informally, and mostly on the ambassadorial level), they did not coordinate them or present a common stance. Thus, it seems that in this context the Visegrad countries did not form an alliance or a block. At the same time they did not have any mutual conflicts and generally appeared rather as “agenda followers” than “agenda-setting actors” in these negotiations. Nevertheless, taking into account the fact that the V4 states all have similar opinions as regards the migration crisis – for instance, on such issues as readmissions, or the differentiation between legal and illegal migrants – a post-Cotonou agreement with a greater emphasis on these matters could be considered their success.

4.3 The southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy

Undoubtedly, the V4 pay more attention to the Eastern dimension of the ENP than to the Southern outskirts of the EU. Also, since both migration and the ENP are primary questions for the V4 in this context, they are cautious in supporting a “one-Africa approach”. In the case of the post-Cotonou agreement negotiations, such an approach would foresee strong

22 Moreover, in a conversation with a journalist, a Polish diplomat implied that if the EU refrained from further action in relation to Article 7 of the Treaty on EU, Poland would stop blocking the adoption of the mandate. As regards the new deal, the diplomat reportedly said: “For some countries, this is an important agreement, but we also have important matters” (Szymańska-Borginon, 2018).

23 Such countries as Malta and Poland are usually vocal on the EU arena when the issue of sexual and reproduction health rights (particularly abortion) is discussed.

24 In 2015, the Polish MFA commissioned a study that would assess the future of EU-ACP relations from the perspective of the EU and Poland and which was intended to contribute to the formulation of the Polish position regarding relations with ACP countries after 2020; see www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/.../opis_zamowienia_analiza_umowy_z_Kotonu.pdf.

involvement with North African countries and aims at respecting the existing bilateral association agreements with North African countries and would affect the ENP's southern dimension. In other words, they would not like to see Sub-Saharan Africa added to the ENP and a new policy created because the ENP is their priority. Similarly, when the issue of the EDF "budgetisation" comes up, for the V4, it is once again a question of to what extent this may affect the ENP.

Having said that, since the V4 cooperation with the EaP countries in the context of transferring the experience of democratisation was perceived as their comparative advantage in the field of development assistance, when the Arab Spring occurred, the four countries became motivated towards greater involvement in the North African countries. The Visegrad countries have gained certain different experiences than the old member states and these could provide the EU with a richer and more diverse offer for the dialogue with its partners. As an EU official states, "It would be a mistake to exclude the countries which we might think that do not have the necessary expertise; perhaps the EC should provide them with technical assistance to facilitate their inclusion". After a few years of their activity in this region (for example, the projects realised by the Polish Solidarity Fund PL) however, the V4 "democratisation" projects ceased and nowadays are almost completely non-existent. Transferring transformation and democratisation experiences is perhaps no longer the speciality of V4 since some Visegrad countries (in particular Poland and Hungary) were losing credibility under the allegations of turning their backs on the liberal democratic path, which raised questions about how sustainable the reforms were in these countries. Moreover, the disappointment with the aftermath of the Arab Spring could further undermine activities in this region. This naturally raises concerns about the sustainability of V4 cooperation in sharing experience with African countries, in general.²⁵ One should note, finally, that the argumentation for transferring the democratisation experience may also be problematic, since it is not exclusive to the V4, but also applies to other EU member states located in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as well as Germany.

4.4 The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (EUTF for Africa) was launched at the Valletta Summit on Migration in November 2015. Since then, it has been the EU's main response to the migration crisis. The objective of the fund is

to support all aspects of stability and contribute to better migration management as well as addressing the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration, in particular by promoting resilience, economic and equal opportunities, security and development and addressing human rights abuses. (European Commission, 2015)

Nevertheless, the assumption which constitutes the basis for the fund is doubtful, since there is little evidence that lack of development is fuelling migration (Castillejo, 2016, p. 5). In fact, "the 'root causes approach' still prevails in the government circles of many countries. For destination countries, in particular, the erroneous belief that migration can be stemmed through development often remains a key motivation for engaging in the M&D [migration

25 For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, Slovakia currently cooperates with Kenya on police reform.

and development] area” (Keijzer, Heraud, & Frankenhaeuser, 2015, p. 73). Moreover, the contributions of member states to the Fund were also another controversial issue, and “although 25 member states have contributed – plus Norway and Switzerland – most of them have given relatively small amounts, with many giving the minimum EUR 3 million required to have voting rights, and some less” (Castillejo, 2016, p. 8). On 14 December 2017, against this backdrop, the V4 governments announced a EUR 35 million joint contribution to the Fund,²⁶ in order to assist an EU project aimed at strengthening the protection of borders and preventing illegal migration in Libya (Government of the Czech Republic, 2017). The initial contribution has been made to get voting right for the group, and this could, indeed, be a measure to increase the V4 impact on decision-making within the Fund. The Visegrad Group contribution to the EUTF for Africa may be seen as a significant input since it is the third largest contribution after Germany (EUR 157.5 million) and Italy (EUR 104.0 million). Furthermore, Slovakia was one of the most significant contributors per capita. However, one should also bear in mind that the contribution was made in the context of strong EU pressure on Visegrad countries to accept the mandatory quotas system to relocate migrants arriving in Italy and Greece. Hence, the V4 contribution to the EUTF for Africa may also be perceived as a solution to ease the tension within the EU and to push back the accusations about the lack of solidarity with the other EU member states in tackling the migration crisis.

At the same time, the four countries presented a first V4 joint development project in Kenya, which is supported by the EC under the EUTF for Africa and aimed at addressing the causes of illegal migration and stabilising African countries. The V4 organisations will carry out the four-year project together with their Kenyan partners. It will focus on improving the social and economic conditions of small-scale holder farmers across three counties of Lamu, Kilifi and Kwale. The action is intended to “lead to job creation of 15,000 small-scale farmers and sustainable food security through increased organic production of cashew and sesame value chains, and finally, to export growth of these commodities”.²⁷ Although the decision to start the project was primarily made with the aim of enhancing the capacities of the previously existing SlovakAid project, it is an undertaking that has been realised after years of pleas from the experts and NGOs for a V4 joint effort for development cooperation in African countries (see, for example, Kosowicz, 2013).²⁸ This gives rise to the legitimate expectation that such a project – which at the present time is merely a meagre side-effect of the turmoil caused by the migration crisis and the V4 governments’ move to show their solidarity within the EU – may form the basis of further joint V4 action. Indeed, it is an opportunity to see what may be the results of V4 common development cooperation, and also, a chance to ensure more sustainability of their actions in Africa.

26 Individual contributions to the EUR 35 million pledge made by the Visegrad Group (as of 28 May 2018): Czech Republic: EUR 10,411,624; Hungary: EUR 9,450,000; Poland: EUR 10,550,748; Slovakia: EUR 10,350,000. Data available at https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/euetfa/files/contributions_1.pdf.

27 Author’s email correspondence with Slovak embassy in Nairobi.

28 Naturally, some of the V4 officials maintain that the group wants to realise more of this kind of action in the future. Also, it is noticeable that the V4 governments want to see more involvement of their organisations in the projects financed from the EUTF for Africa. An example of a successful proposal in a tender may be the Czech “People in Need” proposal which was a leading member of a consortium of NGOs which succeeded in the application for the funding of a project with the budget worth EUR 2.5 million.

4.5 European Development Fund

From its creation in 1957 until the present day, the European Development Fund still represents the EU's main development aid instrument to the ACP countries. Throughout the last decades, the Fund has had to face many changes and reforms in order to ensure efficiency and increase control over its operations. Among the most significant ideas was its incorporation into the EU budget (called the EDF "budgetisation"), mainly supported by the Commission and the European Parliament, in order to bring the Fund – among other things – stronger democratic legitimacy as well as an increase in the efficiency and in the effectiveness of EU development aid (D'Alfonso, 2014, p. 1). This idea, however, has not been realised so far. Current discussions within the EU again embraced such questions as the EDF "budgetisation", as well as the proposed, single external action instrument, which the V4 countries would probably opt against²⁹ since EDF inclusion into the EU budget would mean higher contributions. Moreover, merging the existing instruments into the single Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument could decrease the importance of EaP on the EU's agenda. Consequently, understanding the V4 positions in this regard may be facilitated by looking at the data on V4 participation in the EDF development projects (see Annex I and Table 6), which clearly shows the difference between new and old member states, traditionally engaged in Africa. Furthermore, in the perception of some Visegrad countries, the EDF projects are sometimes not only used for development reasons, but also for the sake of particular interests of certain EU member states. It is hence not surprising that this problem is one of the most contested issues, as regards the four countries' engagement in the EU-Africa relations.

The V4 governments often pay attention to the difficulties which their countries face when applying for the EDF funds. They recognise that, although they have limited capacities in the sphere of development cooperation, their ambition is the "inclusiveness" of small EU member states in EU development policy and in the realisation of EDF projects.³⁰ As Kugiel and Wnukowski (2015, p. 34) noted, "experience, knowledge about the functioning of the Fund, greater potential of companies and institutions, as well as ties connecting, e.g. former colonial states with ACP countries favour the acquisition of contracts by entities from these states". Furthermore, among the most serious barriers, the V4 emphasise the lack of their capacities for being eligible to apply for the funds (for example, relatively low experience in the realisation of development projects and financial requirements) as well as for the realisation of the projects.

The relatively low interest in the EDF tenders on the part of their domestic development NGOs and businesses may also be caused by the lack of awareness about opportunities, and a lack of "know-how" and familiarity with application procedures. However, the stakeholders are probably also aware of competition on the part of more qualified entities from the old member states which have historical, well-established links, which may be additionally discouraging. Thus, the lack of involvement from Visegrad businesses and

29 Although the V4 in general are not in favour of such changes, it is not clear to what extent they would oppose it.

30 For instance, the V4 Trust-Programme for the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2015-June 2016) states that "another V4 countries coordination topic will be a joint endeavour to equalise/increase capacities and opportunities for the V4 countries to benefit from the European Development Fund and from the EU External Action financial instruments".

organisations is probably a result of a relative lack of interest in non-European markets along with insufficient knowledge of EDF projects and experience in their implementation.

The lack of support on the part of V4 governments and EU institutions may create a vicious circle of V4 permanent absence in the acquisition of EDF funds. Indeed, the Visegrad countries have only contributed to and implemented the Fund from the 10th EDF, and so far their participation in the realisation of the projects has been minimal, while from 2011 to 2016 the whole group only implemented 57 projects of an approximate total value EUR 8,285,101 which is not even half of the amount that Belgium realised in 2011 alone (158 projects with a total value of EUR 22,617,121) (see Table 6 and Annex I). The V4 influence might perhaps be greater, if the countries cooperated and coordinated their positions, while their voting power (38 votes in total) posits them somewhere between Sweden (29 votes) and the Netherlands (48 votes) (see Annex I). All in all, in the face of such (a lack of) participation and imbalance, “co-ownership” does not really seem to have materialised.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the creation of the EU Trust Fund, which is to a large extent funded out of EDF reserves, uses indirect management by which EU member state organisations are entrusted with the implementation of projects agreed to in the Trust Fund’s governance structures (European Commission, n. d.).

Country	Number of budgetary commitments						Total
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Czech Republic	0	0	0	1	4	4	9
Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Slovakia	0	0	0	15	9	13	37
Poland	0	1	0	4	2	2	9
France	88	79	83	83	50	102	485
United Kingdom	89	106	104	112	85	132	628
Belgium	158	240	212	218	189	266	1,283
Germany	31	49	39	55	41	67	282
V4 Total	0	1	0	20	15	21	57
EU TOP 4 Total	366	474	438	468	365	567	2,678

Source: Author’s elaboration based on data derived from EC Financial Transparency System

4.6 Discussion of findings

The recent developments point to the fact that stakeholders in Visegrad countries are increasingly discussing and considering their countries’ engagement in Africa. This has induced several initiatives as well as growing diplomatic representation, primarily for the sake of supporting the V4-African states economic relations. Also, there is an expectation that, along with these increasing efforts, more opportunities will ensue for cooperation between the V4 public sectors, businesses, and NGOs. Nevertheless, it is necessary to

emphasise that the Visegrad countries' Africa policies are currently neither consistent nor consequential. As Cibian (2017) puts it in reference to some Central and Eastern European countries (CEE, that is, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), their

policies towards Africa have been defined by domestic political imperatives, despite some awareness of African issues in public institutions, businesses and civil society organisations. The focus by Hungary and Poland on Africa being triggered by the economic and migrant crises is a good example. (Cibian, 2017, p. 11)

Taking this into account – as well as many other constraints such as relative lack of interest and experience on the part of businesses as well as limited capacities for the development cooperation and diplomatic representation – there is still a significant dose of scepticism about any chance for significant changes in the near future.

Although there are some new V4 investments in Sub-Saharan Africa, trade exchange is increasing, and the first joint V4 development project has been recently launched in Kenya, it is not clear whether such activities will be sustained in the future due to the limitations mentioned above. For this reason, a necessity for raising general awareness of EU-Africa relations in the Visegrad societies is seen as crucial by the V4 and EU officials because, if the issue of development cooperation were to get more attention and become “politically attractive”, then probably more resources would be spent in this sphere.

Besides, since the scale and sustainability of the V4 development projects in African countries are not strong, another question is whether engagement in development aid should be increased. Nevertheless, since the joint efforts could help to overcome this lack of capacities, some experts and diplomats see the potential for the V4 countries in cooperation on the ground. It would be important, however, to focus only on those tasks which would be primarily driven by the expectation of greater efficiency and sustainability of aid stemming from V4 cooperation, and not by “visibility”.

Accordingly, the V4 should look for possibilities to pursue joint projects in the countries where they have shared interests and facilities, so where their embassies overlap. So far, however, usually every Visegrad country prefers to act separately outside the group. Thus, it seems that “without improving trust and building up confidence among V4 members, any progress in development cooperation area may be hard to achieve” (Kugiel, 2012b, p. 115). In general, the Visegrad countries recognise that their joint engagement in African countries would make sense but, at the same time, they all have insufficient capacities to act on the ground, which they are undoubtedly aware of.

EU membership provided the Visegrad countries with a vital source of information about the ACP countries, which enhances their business opportunities and investments. Conversely, the greater involvement of the V4 in EU's development policy in African countries may be particularly beneficial for all stakeholders. If the V4 join their efforts and increase engagement in Africa, they could enrich the EU's approach towards Africa as well as diversifying the picture of European actors as perceived in African states. This could facilitate the desired move away from colonial and postcolonial narratives in EU-Africa relations (see Brudzińska et al. 2017). Moreover, a greater feeling of co-ownership between the donors would be desired – which would bring benefits both for the EU and the V4. As Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi argue:

If Europe is to maintain its influence in the developing world, particularly post-2015, it must act in a more concerted and coherent way, and having “reluctant” donors that do not totally share the common view of development policy fatally weakens this unity. (Lightfoot & Szent-Iványi, 2014, p. 1270)

In turn, such a situation could be beneficial both for the African and Visegrad countries, which are seeking to diversify their political and economic ties. Last but not least, for the V4 countries this could be a chance to take the opportunity to expand their influence, both in the EU and in the international arena.

It is essential to remember, however, that the priorities of the Visegrad countries lie somewhere else but not in Africa – this applies not only to the past but also to the present. This lack of priority, blended with generally limited capacities in terms of their diplomatic and economic resources, results in a limited interest and engagement in the EU’s policy towards Africa. Furthermore, the V4’ focus on the EaP means that the V4 countries emphasise that a cautious balance in the EU’s ENP priorities between its Southern and Eastern neighbourhood is crucial.

When one looks at the Visegrad countries VG and EU presidencies’ programmes, it seems apparent that this – still limited – interest in Africa first grew in the Arab Spring (before that event almost virtually no references to Africa could be observed), and later increased, following the start of the so-called migration crisis (see Annex IV). However, this tendency towards a more significant interest in Africa which was induced by the migration crisis was also visible in some other EU member states and not only in the *new* EU member states. Also, although the migration crisis pushed the Visegrad countries towards more consultations and common declarations in the development policy area, this did not bring much coordination between them in the debates on Africa within the EU.

Even though the consultations of the Visegrad countries at the EU-level take place on a regular basis³¹ and there is dialogue and the exchange of information between them, this does not necessarily result in the coordination of their positions, since their opinions may not be in accordance or since they simply do not see the necessity to coordinate actions on some issues. One example is the negotiation of the post-Cotonou mandate. There is in fact a lack of coordination, both at the EU-level as well as on the ground in Africa. In this context one should remember that any possible V4 joint efforts in African countries are usually seen through the prism of development cooperation and that, in the other spheres such as economic and political relations, the Visegrad countries are “friendly competitors” because they bring more or less the same thing to the table: the Visegrad countries are similar to each other and therefore their offers to their partners in Africa are similar too. As a result, it seems that, in this context, “the Visegrad countries share interests, but not priorities”.

Since most of the Visegrad countries often point to their limited participation in realising EU development projects, especially through the intergovernmental EDF, the stakeholders could cooperate on the strengthening of their ability to accept more funds for development assistance from EU funds through forming consortiums (see Kosowicz, 2013). Furthermore, some consultations could be organised with countries which faced similar difficulties in

31 The meetings of the directors of the development cooperation departments from the MFA of each V4 country are held twice per year, and the issues debated are, among others, the EUTF for Africa, and the post-Cotonou Agreement.

applying for the EU's external aid programmes' tenders in the past, such as Sweden or Spain.³² However, it should also be stressed that, among the EU member states, the Visegrad countries are not alone in their poor performance in the development cooperation with African countries (both some new and some old EU member states meet similar constraints).

The migration crisis has also revealed a need to invest further in the development cooperation awareness in Visegrad countries, and specifically in relation to Africa. The work in this area should be continued – also with the aim of making development cooperation and economic relations with African states more “politically attractive” as this would in turn make it easier to put more resources to this purpose. Again, although there is a growing interest in Africa, limited resources and capacities may hamper V4 engagement on the continent and in the discussions on Africa within the EU.

5 Conclusions

The overall conclusion of this paper is that the V4 states have not managed to effectively translate their joint positions on EU-Africa relations into collective action in the EU. In most cases they did not share interests and in consequence did not formulate joint positions. This could particularly be observed in the post-Cotonou mandate negotiations. However, along with the emergence of the current migration and refugee crisis, a new field for joint engagement of the V4 has appeared. Nevertheless, seemingly, there are too many technical and political limitations for a considerable increase in the V4 engagement in Africa in the near future. Such an increase could be even more difficult, without the necessary knowledge and expertise. To facilitate this process, further research on the engagement of the Visegrad countries in EU-Africa relations as well as in the formulation of EU's external relations is needed. Future studies should focus on the examination of possibilities for conducting joint V4 development projects, on assessing the potential synergies between the Visegrad countries, and on their previous performance. It would be particularly important to show the potential of the V4 cooperation in the spheres where it actually exists. Furthermore, this study has shown that there are still many more questions that should be addressed, for instance, whether the V4 joint efforts on the ground in Africa are sustainable and whether they can contribute effectively to the economic growth and sustainable development in African countries. Will the V4's focus on Africa be maintained in the future and will it increase (or decrease) along with the evolution of the migration crisis? Such knowledge, in turn, is essential for the further debates on the V4 countries engagement in Africa and should contribute to raising awareness about this problem, which is a key feature conditioning any change in this regard.

It is essential to bear in mind that the Visegrad countries' foreign policy as well as economic priorities primarily lie somewhere else, but not in Africa. Their focus on the EaP is one of the reasons why V4 engagement in the shaping of EU-Africa relations has been limited. Since their interests lie elsewhere, they try to balance the EU's focus within its external relations. Also, the V4 countries often point to their lack of interests and expertise in this region.

32 For Spanish and Swedish post-accession difficulties in participation in the EU's external aid programmes, see Dimier (2014, pp. 163, 169).

Since the region is not a priority for the V4 countries, in order to overcome the numerous limitations and considerable transaction costs, the Visegrad countries could increase their engagement in multilateral cooperation and put forward more joint efforts – with both their Visegrad *and* EU partners. This has been seen through the joint V4 contribution to the EUTF for Africa and the first joint V4 development project in Africa which was launched recently in Kenya. Furthermore, the V4 could also learn from the experience of the other EU member states such as the Nordic states which introduced an initiative of the Joint Nordic Embassies and pursued a common promotion action, the Nordic Roadshow, in Indonesia.³³ Consequently, such a development could be beneficial not only to the V4 and African states but first and foremost also to the EU itself, while nowadays, there is clearly “a need to look for more flexible coalitions and networks in support of global development” (Klingebiel & Tancredi, 2018, p. 1).

However, taking into account the current stance of the Visegrad countries on questions related to the migration crisis in the EU arena, the V4 cooperation does not necessarily appear as a possible vehicle for the promotion of sustainable development in Africa. Indeed, if the four countries focus their attention on promoting border control and preventing migration or on the prevention of the critical positions of the EU on sexual and reproductive health rights, their coordination may actually be problematic for the EU’s development cooperation with African countries. Hence, whether the V4 engagement in the EU-Africa relations is positive or a challenge to the fostering of sustainable development depends very much on what they agree to promote.

Finally, the findings of this paper suggest that the migration crisis indeed reinforced increased interest of Visegrad countries in Africa, and to some extent accelerated their engagement – both in that region and within the EU arena. The tendency to (re)engage in Africa was visible before the migration crisis and was the result of a higher interest stemming from security concerns and from a desire to diversify economic ties. Thus, this paper would recommend taking advantage of the current increased V4 interest in this matter and pursuing activities that would make this engagement more sustainable, especially within the scope of development cooperation.

33 See, for instance, “Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden on the first joint Nordic Roadshow in Indonesia”, retrieved from <https://www.norway.no/en/indonesia/norway-indonesia/news-events/news2/denmark-finland-norway-and-sweden-on-the-first-joint-nordic-roadshow-in-indonesia/>, or “Official Inauguration of the joint Nordic Embassy” at <http://bangladesh.um.dk/en/about-us/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=a5524455-b137-4d59-9b49-bc90840c4191>.

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ANNEX

Annex I: Participation in the EDF						
10th EDF				11th EDF		
Country	Votes	Contribution in EUR	Contribution key (%)	Votes	Contribution in EUR	Contribution key (%)
Czech Republic	5	115,678,200.00	0.51	8	243,270,097.00	0.79745
Hungary	6	124,751,000.00	0.55	6	187,477,674.00	0.61456
Poland	13	294,866,000.00	1.30	20	612,359,140.00	2.00734
Slovakia	2	47,632,200.00	0.21	4	114,751,370.00	0.37616
V4 Total	26	582,927,400.00	2.57	38	1,157,858,281.00	3.79551
EU Total*	999	22,682,000,000.00	100	998	30,506,000,000.00	100

*Note: EU Total as for EU 25 in the 10th edition and EU 27 in the 11th edition, respectively.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from internal agreements on 10th and 11th EDF

Country	Total** amount for all beneficiaries (total value of projects in EUR)						
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total value
Czech Republic	-	-	-	52,839.00	529,595.00	766,000.00	1,348,434.00
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	264,000.00	264,000.00
Slovakia	-	-	-	2,030,680.00	1,125,049.00	2,250,995.00	5,406,724.00
Poland	-	125,500.00	-	599,615.00	196,428.00	344,400.00	1,265,943.00
France	98,980,907.00	37,654,545.00	78,051,658.00	76,077,019.00	34,405,186.00	73,041,579.00	398,210,894.00
United Kingdom	70,524,109.00	42,603,607.00	37,724,938.00	62,876,900.00	26,385,162.00	57,496,471.00	297,611,187.00
Belgium	22,617,121.00	45,030,638.00	43,494,716.00	42,574,633.00	16,982,972.00	51,212,720.00	221,912,800.00
Germany	39,382,146.00	40,412,348.00	31,312,498.00	60,550,850.00	35,744,968.00	56,804,644.00	264,207,454.00
V4 Total	-	125,500.00	-	2,683,134.00	1,851,072.00	3,625,395.00	8,285,101.00
EU TOP 4 Total	231,504,283.00	165,701,138.00	190,583,810.00	242,079,402.00	113,518,288.00	238,555,414.00	1,181,942,335.00

**Note: The data concerning the value of contracts only refers to contracts supervised by DG DEVCO and therefore should be treated as an estimate and as an illustration of the position of some member states in contrast to the others, rather than the exact valuation.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from the EC Financial Transparency System

Annex II: Visegrad countries' participation in peace, observation, humanitarian, reconciliation and police operations in Africa		
Year*	Operation and location	V4 countries engaged
1968-1970	OTN – Nigeria	Poland
1973-1979	UNEF II – Egypt	Poland
1989-1990	UNTAG – Namibia	Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland
1991-ongoing	UN MINURSO – Western Sahara	Hungary, Poland
1991-1995-1997	UNAVEM II/III – Angola	Hungary, Czechoslovakia/Slovakia, Poland
1992-1994	ONUMOZ – Mozambique	Czech Republic, Hungary
1992-1993	UNOSOM I – Somalia	Czechoslovakia
1993-1994	UNOMUR – Uganda-Rwanda	Hungary, Slovakia
1993-1996	UNAMIR – Rwanda	Slovakia, Poland
1993-1997	UNOMIL – Liberia	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia
1997-1999	MONUA – Angola	Hungary, Slovakia, Poland,
1999-2005	UNAMSIL – Sierra Leone	Slovakia
1999-2010	MONUC – DRC	Czech Republic, Poland
2000-2008	UNMEE – Ethiopia and Eritrea	Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia
2004-2017	UNOCI – Côte d'Ivoire	Poland
2004-2018	UNMIL – Liberia	Poland
2005-2011	UNMIS – Sudan	Poland
2006	EUFOR – DR Congo	Hungary, Poland
2006	EU Support Operation to AMIS – Sudan	Hungary, Slovakia
2007-2010	MINURCAT – Chad	Czech Republic, Poland
2008-2009	EUFOR – Chad/CAR	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland
2009- ongoing	EUNAVFOR – Somalia	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland
2010- ongoing	MONUSCO – DR Congo	Czech Republic, Poland
2010-ongoing	EUTM – Somalia	Hungary
2011	EUFOR – Libya	Hungary
2011	UNMISS – South Sudan	Poland
2013-2014	EUTM – Mali	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland
2014	Sangaris – Central African Republic	Poland
2014-2015	EUFOR – Central African Republic	Hungary, Poland
2014-ongoing	MINUSCA – Central African Republic	Czech Republic, Hungary

*Note: Since the years of participation in operation may vary depending of particular countries, the time frame indicates the general duration of a given operation.

Source: Author's elaboration based on <http://peacekeeping.un.org>; www.unic.un.org.pl/; www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5717; www.skmponz.pl/; <http://www.mosr.sk/history-of-military-operations-abroad/>; Besenyő, 2012, p. 154

Annex III: Visegrad countries' development cooperation								
Visegrad countries multilateral (M) and bilateral (B) ODA (by calendar year, in million US dollar)								
	Czech Republic		Hungary		Poland		Slovakia	
Year	M	B	M	B	M	B	M	B
2004	44.70	63.58	34.65	35.49	92.62	24.89	17.47	10.72
2005	70.73	64.42	60.79	39.58	156.83	47.96	25.40	31.43
2006	83.17	77.70	65.15	84.34	177.83	121.87	30.36	24.75
2007	97.93	80.95	70.44	33.03	207.10	155.80	39.63	27.60
2008	132.07	117.14	91.49	15.45	288.55	83.99	51.03	40.82
2009	113.68	101.02	87.32	29.60	282.83	92.06	55.57	19.83
2010	148.20	79.36	85.98	28.36	281.71	96.04	53.77	19.94
2011	173.51	76.96	106.58	33.15	326.79	90.68	64.59	21.43
2012	153.20	66.44	96.61	21.77	309.51	111.55	60.73	18.95
2013	153.85	57.04	93.90	34.28	360.01	127.11	69.86	16.17
2014	149.58	62.57	113.93	30.10	369.57	82.28	66.83	16.38
2015	128.89	70.10	108.21	47.34	340.71	100.19	67.71	17.20
2016	186.39	74.75	137.09	18.31	455.32	148.00	86.85	20.26

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from AidFlows, [http:// aidflows.org](http://aidflows.org)

Net ODA Total, percentage of gross national income, 2000-2017				
Year	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
2000	0.03	...	0.01	0.03
2001	0.04	...	0.02	0.04
2002	0.06	0.02
2003	0.11	0.02	0.01	0.04
2004	0.10	0.07	0.04	0.07
2005	0.11	0.10	0.06	...
2006	0.12	0.13	0.08	0.10
2007	0.11	0.07	0.10	0.09
2008	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.10
2009	0.12	0.09	0.08	0.08
2010	0.12	0.09	0.08	0.08
2011	0.12	0.10	0.08	0.09
2012	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.08
2013	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.09
2014	0.11	0.10	0.08	0.08
2015	0.11	0.13	0.09	0.10
2016	0.14	0.16	0.14	0.12
2017	0.13	0.11	0.13	0.12

Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from OECD Detailed aid statistics, <http://data.oecd.org>

Annex III (cont): Visegrad countries' development cooperation					
Top ten recipients of bilateral ODA – Czech Republic, 2016 (million US dollar)			Top ten recipients of bilateral ODA – Hungary, 2016 (million US dollar)		
No.	Country name	Net ODA disbursements	No.	Country name	Net ODA disbursements
1	Moldova	4.08	1	Turkey	11.81
2	Jordan	3.42	2	Lao PDR	3.10
3	Ethiopia	3.23	3	China	2.44
4	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.03	4	Jordan	2.39
5	Georgia	2.77	5	Serbia	2.07
6	Ukraine	2.75	6	Sri Lanka	2.06
7	Afghanistan	2.59	7	Ukraine	1.93
8	Serbia	2.22	8	Vietnam	1.76
9	Mongolia	2.15	9	Nigeria	1.19
10	Iraq	1.87	10	India	1.07
Top ten recipients of bilateral ODA – Slovakia, 2016 (million US dollar)			Top ten recipients of bilateral ODA – Poland, 2016 (million US dollar)		
No.	Country name	Net ODA disbursements	No.	Country name	Net ODA disbursements
1	Kenya	2.11	1	Ethiopia	42.29
2	Ukraine	1.62	2	Ukraine	24.10
3	Serbia	1.07	3	Tanzania	22.90
4	Montenegro	0.58	4	Belarus	19.18
5	Moldova	0.46	5	Turkey	18.13
6	Georgia	0.44	6	Syrian Arab Republic	9.43
7	Kosovo	0.39	7	Kenya	8.80
8	Haiti	0.38	8	Angola	4.33
9	Albania	0.35	9	Moldova	2.14
10	Syrian Arab Republic	0.35	10	Georgia	1.84
Source: Author's elaboration based on data derived from OECD.Stat, stats.oecd.org					

Annex IV: Visegrad Group and EU presidencies		
Visegrad countries VG presidencies		
Year	Country	References to the engagement in Africa
2000/2001	Poland	None
2001/2002	Hungary	None
2002/2003	Slovakia	None
2003/2004	Czech Republic	None
2004/2005	Poland	None
2005/2006	Hungary	None
2006/2007	Slovakia	None
2007/2008	Czech Republic	None
2008/2009	Poland	Meetings of directors of MFA departments for development cooperation – one reference to the COAFR meetings.
2009/2010	Hungary	None
2010/2011	Slovakia	None
2011/2012	Czech Republic	Arab Spring; more visible activities of the V4 in the EU Southern Neighbourhood; transfer of unique V4 experience and knowledge of democracy building, transformation, and reform processes to these countries in supporting the EU concept of the partnership for democracy and shared prosperity
2012/2013	Poland	V4 dialogue with the United States on the democratic process in the Eastern Partnership region and North Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya); V4+ Egypt cooperation; Visegrad House in Republic of South Africa (RSA).
2013/2014	Hungary	Arab Spring, Visegrad House in RSA. The group attaches “significant importance” to many relations, and among them to the “Middle East and Africa”
2014/2015	Slovakia	Southern dimension of the ENP; continuing V4 contacts with the Union for the Mediterranean
2015/2016	Czech Republic	Indirectly: “Another V4 countries coordination topic will be a joint endeavour to equalise/increase capacities and opportunities for the V4 countries to benefit from the European Development Fund and from the EU External Action financial instruments”
2016/2017	Poland	Migration crisis and the EU Trust Fund for Africa
2017/2018	Hungary	Migration crisis, V4+ summit with Egypt and V4+African Union; V4 cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa
Visegrad countries EU presidencies		
01-06.2009	Czech Republic	“The Presidency will oversee the practical implementation of JAES”
01-06.2011	Hungary	Commitment to a strong Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
07-12.2011	Poland	Supporting democratisation and construction of modern state structures in the countries of Northern Africa
07-12.2016	Slovakia	Effective ENP; Stability in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods of the EU; Debate on the future of relations with the ACP states. Policy coherence for development and the migration crisis
Source: Author’s elaboration based on Visegrad countries VG and EU presidency programmes		

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