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BOOK REVIEW: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES. SLOVENIA'S ROLE IN VISEGRAD GROUP

Jana Arbeiter*

European Perspectives. Slovenia's Role in Visegrad Group. 2015. Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans. ISSN 1855-7694, October 2015, Volume 7, Number 2 (13).

The idea of a special issue devoted to the Central Europe was triggered last year, when various discussions were taking place in Slovenia within the framework of preparing and accepting the new Foreign Policy Strategy. The Central Europe as a region was on numerous occasions highlighted and put in the spotlight of special interest. Thus, the idea of collecting different views from the V4 and other countries on the role of Slovenia and the Central Europe became real, once it got the support of the International Visegrad Fund. We gathered papers from V4 countries, as well as from Slovenia, Austria, Canada, etc.

The role of Slovenia in Central Europe is of significant importance in Slovenia's internal political debate. Central Europe is often defined by geographical, economic, ideological, and other factors, and is, therefore, is much broader term that cannot be only exclusive to Visegrad Group countries. As Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia **Karl Erjavec** stated in his introductory part to the volume, *„for Slovenia, the V4 and the rest of Central Europe are central to its economy and to its geographic position on the route to the Adriatic, with Koper as the Mediterranean port of Central Europe. This, however, does not mean that contacts are reduced to business interests: rich cultural links are being restored across Central Europe. The new strategic papers of Slovenian foreign policy (the Declaration and the adjacent strategy paper) presented in July of this year are quite clear about this. The Declaration defines Slovenia as a Central European and Mediterranean country, lying at the*

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heart of the Alpine-Adriatic-Danube region, and the meeting point between the Western Europe and the Western Balkans.” (p. 7)

The papers tackle different aspects and views, but the focus on the Central Europe stays in all of them. Articles are focused on historical facts, economic relations and also energy issues. Several articles explain why Slovenia is or is not the Central European country and how and why the V4 Group should enlarge. All the authors to a certain degree expressed their reservations regarding Slovenia's entry to the Visegrad Group, both politically as well as in the field of public opinion. Somehow all the authors pointed out that there were some origins of different forms of cooperation in the Central European region, like for example V4+, which unfortunately does not work in a form as it should, according to some authors, and does not (yet) lead to some degree of permanency.

The volume is composed of seven articles, five review articles and two book reviews. In the first part, major attention is devoted to the already mentioned geographical, legal, political and economic perceptions of Central Europe and Slovenia's role in it. However, this part is not only limited to these already mentioned aspects. The remaining articles explore also existing level of coherence among Visegrad countries as well as Slovenia. They examine is in regards to countries' positions on Ukraine crisis (*Lenč*); current perspectives of foreign policy of Slovenia (*Orosz*); logistic and transport aspects and their connections to competitiveness of national economy in Slovenia and Visegrad Group (*Kramar, Sternad, Cvahte*) and the challenges ahead in regards to the future of nuclear energy in Visegrad Group countries (*Zakaria*). The second part comprises a very useful set of policy recommendations **from Daniel Bartha, Andrej Rahten, Anna Visvizi, Zlatko Šabič** and, last but not least, also from the former Chancellor of Austria **Erhard Busek**. In the last part of this volume a review of two books – *Democracy, peace, and security* as well as *Geopolitics: Europe of Sarajevo. 100 years later and other foreign policy essays* – are presented.

Authors agreed that extended Visegrad Group could indeed take advantage of a greater number of votes within the European Union, as well as in the wider global diplomacy and the economy. Unfortunately, countries of the V4 Group are not fully unanimous regarding the expansion of Visegrad Group and there is also a lack of will and institutionalised proposals to expand Visegrad Group, which results in purely theoretical assumptions what would be possible if Visegrad Group expands.

The authors also offer several interesting recommendations regarding the future of V4 cooperation with Slovenia and possible political and diplomatic initiatives undertaken by both sides. For example, **Brglez, Arbeiter** and **Udovič** point out in their contribution that Slovenia "*must, if it really wants to legitimize itself as a Central European country, make few steps in the direction of more intensive integration with core Central European states.*" (p. 29). Another concrete way for strengthening the existing ties between V4 and Slovenia is suggested by **Dan Bartha** (p. 165), especially "*through further support of the policies of the V4 towards the Western Balkans. A serious deepening of this cooperation could be channeled through the Visegrad Fund, which has a long-term problem to balance the size of Eastern Partnership programs with Western Balkan programs, due to the lack of external funding. By joining thematic IVF programs, also financially, Slovenia could not only secure to be part of the policy processes vis-a-vis the Western Balkans, but they could strengthen institutional ties, cooperation culture, and relationship with the civil society, by ensuring that Slovenian NGOs can join Visegrad projects.*"

Especially, unique attention should be devoted to the set of 7 points – "*European to do list*" with broader European agenda formulated by **Erhard Busek** (p. 144-145). They include the following: (1) need for strategic concepts for the future: climate change, natural catastrophes, infrastructure, and high unemployment rates; (2) the anticipation of problems (especially concerning migration, the relations to other parts of the world, the necessity for brain circulation); (3) Europe as a center of excellence; (4) networking; (5) dialog of the artists, intellectuals, scientists etc. on European narratives; (6) better knowledge about Europeans, but also about the others around Europe and, finally, (7) identification of new European values.

Moreover, authors more or less agreed that it would be somehow necessary that Central European regional cooperation should expand and 'update' but not necessarily in a format of Visegrad Group, even though that this would be the easiest way to achieve the desired objective. However, the problem arises that Visegrad Group was not very open to new members and has not expanded yet, meaning that regional cooperation should take place in a similar forum, e.g. plus (+) format, which should be formalised.