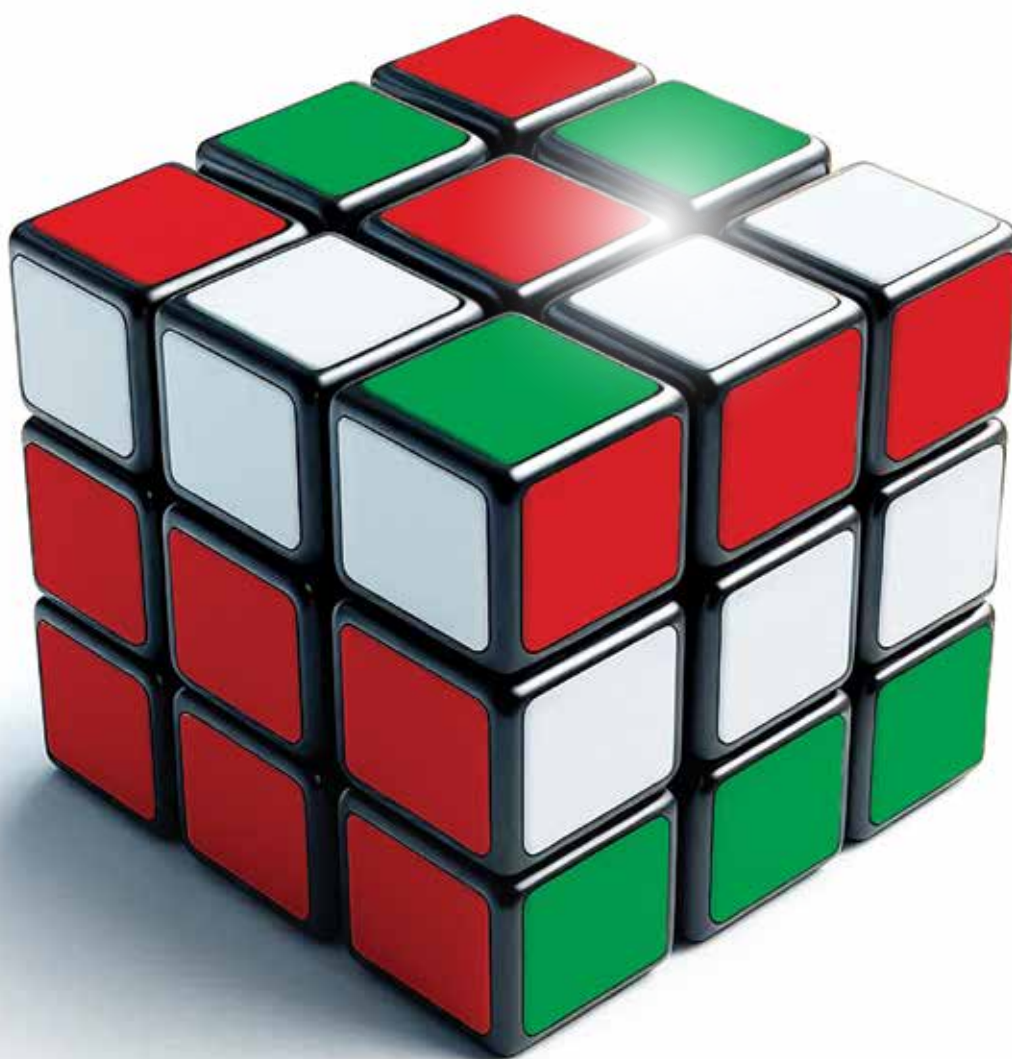


DUAL VOICES OF EXPERTS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

POLAND AND HUNGARY

REPORT





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**DUAL VOICES OF EXPERTS
IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**
POLAND AND HUNGARY

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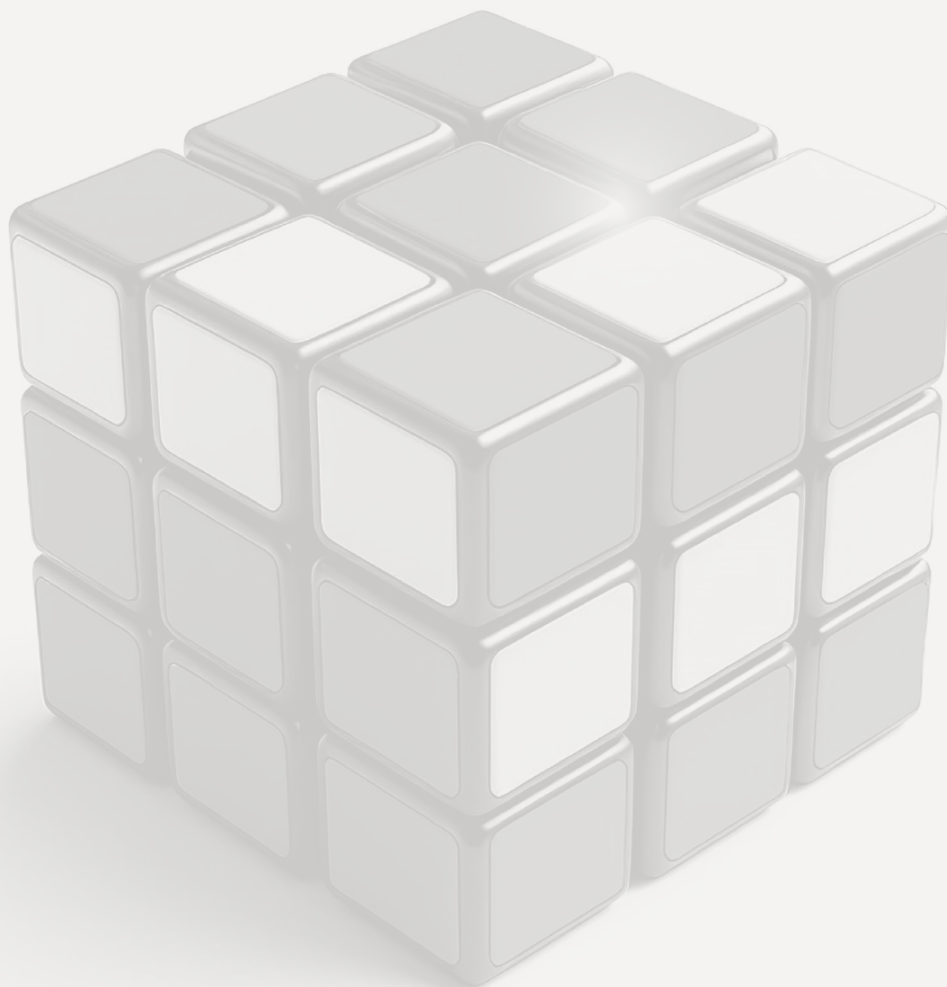
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TREATY CHANGES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION – CAN THE FEDERALISATION OF THE EU STILL BE STOPPED?

PROF. TOMASZ GRZEGORZ GROSSE



The treaty changes proposed by the European Parliament in November 2023 aim to centralize power in the EU at the expense of national democracies. They significantly increase the influence on EU decisions of the largest Western European countries. This may further strengthen the role of Berlin and Paris in integration processes at the expense of smaller Central European countries. All the more so because the importance of sanction mechanisms in the proposals for treaty changes is growing. The role of left-wing values, defined as European and imposed from above by Brussels, is also increasing. All this should worry the countries of Central Europe, and the voice of Polish and Hungarian experts may mobilize this region to stop these negative changes.

FEDERALIZATION OR BUILDING A SUPER-STATE

The initiative was prepared by the largest factions in the European Parliament. They form the so-called mainstream political movement or are referred to as Euroenthusiastic forces. The narrow group that developed the proposals was headed by the famous federalist Guy Verhofstadt. The other creators were German MEPs: Sven Simon, Gabriele Bischoff, Daniel Freund, and Helmut Scholz. The MEPs were heading straight – even in terms of naming – towards the idea of a European “super-state”. The head of the European Commission was to be referred to from now on as the President of the European Union, and the Commission – as the EU Executive.

The MEPs proposed transferring the climate negotiations conducted on the international stage to the EU level in their entirety, as the so-called exclusive competence of the Union. This was no coincidence. The climate policy of the European Union was one of the flagships of this organisation in the 21st century. It was to completely rebuild the economic model in the community, including covering a number of economic sectors that had been largely free of climate ambitions until then¹. In practice, it introduced a number of regulations that restricted economic freedoms in the internal market. In addition, it had a fundamental constitutional significance, as it centralized management to a large extent, and its numerous programs, fees, and taxes accompanied the introduction of fiscal federalism. According to experts² the transfer of new exclusive competence to the EU allowed, in the name of „climate protection”, to influence the shared and exclusive competencies of the Member States in other areas. In the event of any doubts in this respect, the Union obtained exclusive competence to conduct „global negotiations” and conclude treaties „on climate change”, which would then have to be binding on the Member States. As a result, the Union could influence the Member States within their competencies.

1 A. Bongardt, F. Torres, *The European Green Deal: More than an Exit Strategy to the Pandemic Crisis, a Building Block of a Sustainable European Economic Model*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2022, vol. 60, no. 1, 170–185.

2 J. Kwaśniewski, *Polityka klimatyczna*, [in:] J. Kwaśniewski (ed.), *Po co nam suwerenność?* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu na rzecz Kultury Prawnej Ordo Iuris, Warszawa 2024, 25.

EU parliamentarians announced the transfer of further powers from the Member States to the EU. This was about recognizing seven new areas as so-called shared competences, which in practice meant giving priority to EU bodies in this matter. These include public health, cross-border transport infrastructure, industrial policy, scientific policy in the field of recognition of academic degrees, competences and qualifications, and energy policy. This was another example of the centralization trend dominating the proposals of the MEPs. The centralization of powers in the field of industrial policy will cover the mining, energy, and arms sectors, which is particularly risky for Poland and Hungary in the era of geopolitical threats.

The limitation of national sovereignty is the recognition of foreign policy, external border protection policy, external security, defence policy, and civil defence as “shared competences”. In the case of defence policy, many strategic decisions were transferred to the EU, primarily concerning arms procurement on behalf of the Union and its Member States. Therefore, we can expect growing pressure from Brussels to limit the purchase of weapons in non-European countries. In turn, Article 79 of the TFEU explicitly includes economic immigration as an EU competence. Until now, this was the exclusive competence of the Member States, which is why the compulsory relocation mechanism caused such controversy. Giving the Union powers concerning external borders may further limit national authorities in the control of their own borders. It leads to the EU institutions taking over responsibility for who is allowed into the country and who is not. The most striking example of how far centralisation has gone in the discussed project was the recognition that all EU countries must adopt the euro currency. They must do so regardless of how economically unprofitable it would be for them or how contrary to the preferences of local voters.

THE GROWING DOMINANCE OF BERLIN AND PARIS OVER CENTRAL EUROPE

The European Parliament project assumes a change in the procedure in as many as 34 areas of public affairs – from unanimity to majority voting³. The current method of qualified voting within the so-called double majority has been maintained, i.e. at least 55% of Member States representing at least 65% of the EU population. This is a system that privileges the most populous countries of Western Europe. Germany and France together have approximately 34% of the demographic potential of the Union. Interestingly, according to the project, majority voting was also to be the rule in the European Council from now on.

Eliminating unanimity primarily deprives smaller countries and those that have limited influence on the decision-making process in the EU of their influence on legislation. This applies especially to countries from Central Europe accused by EU institutions of violating so-called European values. At the same time, the majority method of decision-making serves the Member States with the largest population in the EU. It is therefore hardly surprising that majority voting was also promoted by German and French experts⁴, in addition to German MEPs. This was in line with previous, repeated calls by political decision-makers from Berlin and Paris on the same issue⁵.

The majority decision-making method in budget, tax and joint debt matters in the EU is controversial. In the context of an international organisation, such plans may be treated as undemocratic. They allow for a situation in which voters will have no influence on the taxes that apply to them because their national governments will simply be outvoted on this matter at the EU level. The possibility of taking out and repaying

3 European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2023 on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties (2022/2051(INL)).

4 *Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century*, Report of the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform, Paris-Berlin - 18 September 2023.

5 P. Jacqu , *Olaf Scholz relance la bataille pour faciliter les prises de d cision au niveau europ en*, Le Monde, 09 mai 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/05/09/olaf-scholz-relance-la-bataille-pour-faciliter-les-prises-de-decision-au-niveau-europeen_6172652_3210.html [27.08.2024].

joint debt in the EU is equally controversial. Some governments and their voters – even if they oppose taking out such loans – will be obliged to repay them, according to the proposal of the European Parliament. This is not only inconsistent with basic democratic standards, but also takes away the sovereignty of smaller or less influential EU members who are easier to outvote. Majority voting in relation to foreign policy, especially in relation to sanctions, security and defence policy, is controversial, given the serious differences of opinion on this matter between Member States.

Another proposal to change the treaties is to strengthen sanction mechanisms for states that violate the rule of law and other EU values. In practice so far, the described mechanisms have usually served to discipline unruly national governments, i.e. those that opposed the domination of Western European countries, the increasingly strong centralisation of power in the EU, as well as to push leftist and liberal values as European and binding on everyone without exception.

CENTRALIZATION INCREASES THE MONOPOLY OF LEFTIST AXIOLOGY

The European Parliament resolution on amending the treaties referred at the very beginning to the communist manifesto Ventotene of June 1941. It called for the introduction of a centralized European state that would implement the socialist revolution⁶. It is no wonder that in the discussed proposal for the revision of the treaties the role of left-wing political ideas has significantly increased as the basis for so-called European values. This is incompatible with the democratic standard of political pluralism. In all places of both amended European treaties, the principle of equality between women and men has been replaced with gender equality. Another borrowing from left-wing axiology is the reconciliation of economic development with social progress. Another example of the same tendency is the inclusion of environmental crimes among crimes with a European dimension prosecuted ex officio (so-called crimes with a cross-border dimension), which left-wing circles particularly strongly insisted on.

In addition, the area of family law with cross-border effects has been included in the „shared competences” to be voted on by a majority vote. This may result in a redefinition of marriage and family in the Member States towards respecting the idea of gender, same-sex marriages and enabling them to adopt children. Moreover, education policy is also to become a „shared competence” with a majority decision-making procedure, which would henceforth be based on a new leftist interpretation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In other words, Brussels can disseminate gender ideas and sexual education for children and young people to a greater extent in national education systems.

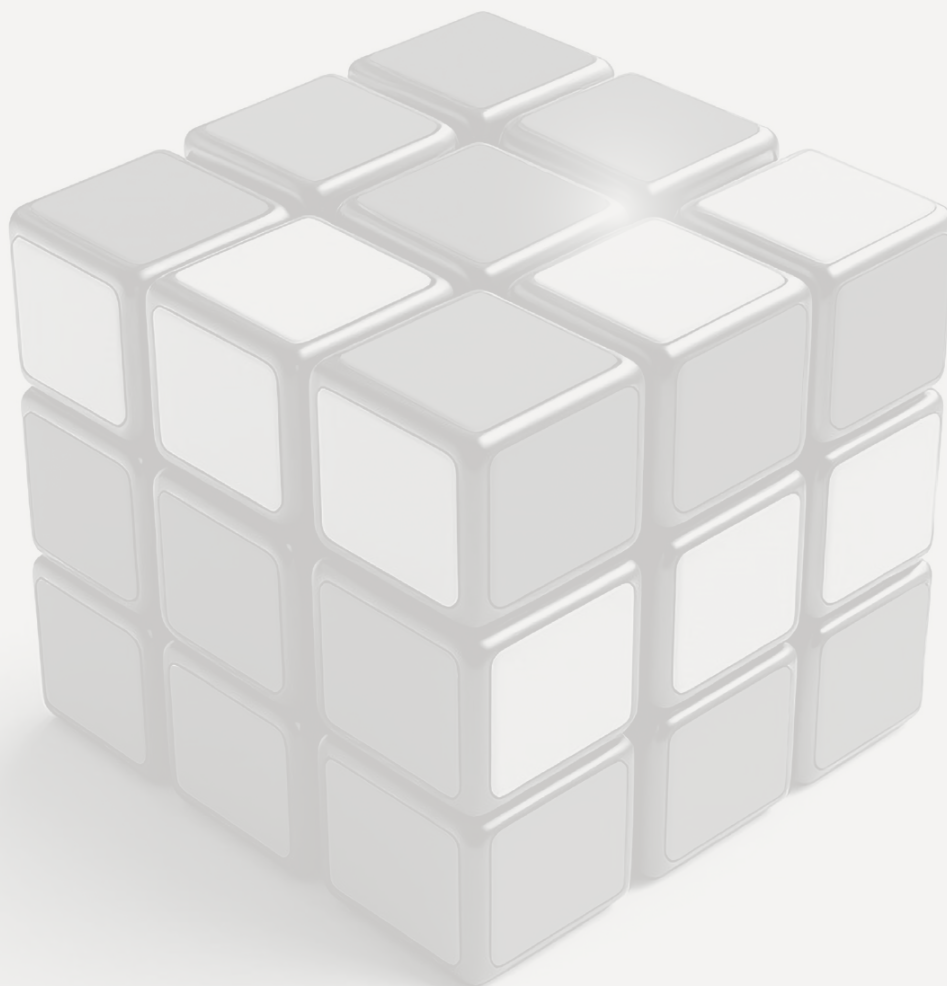
6 E. Rossi, A. Spinelli, *The Manifesto of Ventotene*, 2013, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1997/10/13/316aa96c-e7ff-4b9e-b43a-958e96afbecc/publishable_en.pdf [27.08.2024].

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 The treaty changes pushed by German and French politicians are intended to strengthen the power of EU institutions over national democracies, as well as increase the power of Paris and Berlin over other capitals. They further marginalize the role of Central Europe in integration processes. They lead to a further monopoly of left-wing values in the Union at the expense of the political pluralism necessary for true democracy. This requires a response from the countries of Central Europe, as well as conservative circles that support the cultivation of national democracies in accordance with the model of the Europe of Homelands.
- 2 The voice of Polish and Hungarian experts should mobilize conservative circles, especially in Central Europe, showing the negative consequences of the treaty changes for our region.
- 3 The construction of a super-state that limits democracy in Europe should be stopped, and at the same time, an alternative vision of European integration should be developed. It should be a decentralized and subsidiary vision. Strengthening national democracies, and respecting their systemic, cultural, and constitutional traditions. It should also respect political pluralism, i.e. the possibility of presenting diverse political values and free public debate. Instead of coercion and sanctions, it should be based on mechanisms of voluntary cooperation. The basis of integration should be the free exchange of goods, workers, capital, and services in the internal market and not top-down regulations that restrict the freedom of economic exchange in the EU.

THE TREATY AMENDMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION – CAN THE FEDERALISATION OF THE EU BE STOPPED?

PHD BALÁZS TÁRNOK



What have the previous treaty amendments achieved in the European Union, particularly the significant reforms implemented by the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties? When might the amendment of the EU treaties come back on the agenda, and what role could the Conference on the Future of Europe play in this process? What factors influence the direction for or against treaty amendments, and what is Hungary's position on this issue? Treaty amendments are inherent to the nature of European integration; as long as integration is not stuck, periodic reviews of the fundamental legal framework are necessary. Thus, the question is how to carry out a rational review process that enhances the EU's efficiency and competitiveness without unduly diminishing the competences of Member States.

The treaties that provide a "constitutional framework" for the European Union and its predecessors have been amended multiple times over the past decades¹. Many view these amendments as a deliberate move towards federalization—a process by which more national competences are transferred to the European Union, thereby weakening the framework of nation-states. Others argue that periodic revisions of the treaties are necessary to enhance the efficiency of the EU's functioning, primarily due to the Union's continuous expansion and to address the challenges raised by certain regional political developments.

This paper examines the outcomes of treaty amendments that implemented significant reforms and explores the circumstances that motivated Member States to pursue these changes. It also considers the factors that may influence the next possible treaty amendment. Since unanimity among Member States is required for treaty modifications, it is crucial to take into account the critical voices emerging in the European political sphere. In this context, analyzing Hungary's position is essential, as it is one of the most vocal opponents of the Union's federalization.

MAASTRICHT AND LISBON: STEPS TOWARD FEDERALIZATION OR EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING?

Among treaty amendments, the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties stand out for substantially altering the EU's legal framework, as well as for the prominent political circumstances that led to the creation of these new treaty frameworks.

The Maastricht Treaty², signed in 1992, not only amended the treaty establishing the European Economic Community (renaming the organization as the 'European Communities') but also introduced the concept of the European Union as a political entity. Many consider this treaty a major step toward the federalization

1 https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/founding-agreements_en

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11992M/TXT>

of the EU.³ It established the EU's pillar structure: the first pillar, the European Communities, became a supranational one, while the other two pillars—Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Justice and Home Affairs—were based on intergovernmental cooperation. The Maastricht Treaty further reinforced the federal nature of the EU by creating the institution of EU citizenship and setting the goal of establishing an Economic and Monetary Union, which included the criteria (known as the Maastricht criteria) for Member States to adopt the common currency, the euro.

The political context of the Maastricht Treaty included the collapse of the Soviet Union and the democratic transitions in Central European countries, as well as the reunification of Germany. The latter caused concern among the French and British political leaders, also members of the EEC, but an agreement was eventually reached that linked German reunification with the deepening of European integration.

The direct precursor and impetus for the Lisbon Treaty was the unprecedented enlargement of the EU in 2004, when ten new Member States joined simultaneously ('Big Bang enlargement'), followed by the accession of two more states in 2007. Of these 12 new Member States, ten were from Central and Eastern Europe, bringing significantly different economic, political, and policy capacities and realities compared to the existing EU Member States. The near doubling of the EU's membership necessitated a comprehensive treaty amendment. The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe⁴, signed in 2004, would have been a significant step toward a federal European state; however, it was rejected in referendums in the Netherlands and France, leading to the failure of the treaty amendment. Nonetheless, EU leaders decided to preserve the most important reforms in a new treaty, resulting in the Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007.

The Lisbon Treaty⁵ delineated the competences between the Union and its Member States, abolishing the pillar structure established by the Maastricht Treaty. It increased the legislative role of the directly elected European Parliament, thereby enhancing the principles of citizen participation and democracy. The European Council, functioning as the EU's supreme political decision-making body, was established as an independent EU institution. The Treaty also defined the EU's symbols and enshrined common European values. Although the Lisbon Treaty avoided terms reminiscent of a federal EU, it retained the most critical elements for decision-making and institutional functioning from the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Conference on the Future of Europe⁶ could serve as a significant reference point for the next treaty amendment in the EU. In 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a large-scale series of events where politicians and citizens would jointly discuss the medium- and long-term future of European integration⁷. The conference began on 9 May 2021 and concluded a year later. Delegates from EU institutions, citizens, civil society organizations, representatives of local and regional interests, national parliaments, and government officials shared their views on the potential directions for the EU.

3 See: David McKay (1996): *Rush to Union: Understanding the European Federal Bargain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; John Pinder (1998): *From closed doors to European democracy. Beyond the intergovernmental conferences*. in: Martin Westlake (ed.): *The European Union beyond Amsterdam. New concepts of European integration*. London: Routledge. pp. 47-60.

4 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2004%3A310%3ATOC>

5 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2007%3A306%3ATOC>

6 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/hu/policies/conference-on-the-future-of-europe/>

7 Emmanuel Macron: Pour une Renaissance européenne. Élysée, 4 March 2019. Online: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/03/04/pour-une-rennaissance-europeenne>

The final report, adopted during the plenary session, was presented on the 9th of May, 2022⁸. The document proposed both policy and institutional reforms. Among the recommendations were the abolition of unanimous decision-making (with the exception of enlargement policy and changes to EU core values), the expansion of the European Parliament's powers, the introduction of transnational party lists in European Parliament elections, and enhancing the legitimacy of the European Commission President. Based on these reform proposals, the European Parliament officially initiated a review of the treaties in June 2022⁹.

FACTORS INFLUENCING TREATY AMENDMENTS

Although treaty amendments have not yet been placed on the agenda, it is likely that sooner or later they will become unavoidable, particularly given that the last major treaty amendment was signed nearly 20 years ago in 2007. It is therefore worth examining the factors that could influence the move toward or against amending the treaties.

The Russia-Ukraine war has created a new geopolitical situation, prompting the European Union to reassess its role. Changes in the security architecture may lead to political and strategic shifts that Member States might wish to address through a revision of the EU frameworks. The need to enhance the EU's global political role, potentially requiring treaty amendments to lay the groundwork for a more effective foreign policy, could become a driving force—should the Member States choose to pursue this path. Notably, even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, strengthening the EU's global political influence was a priority. This was evident when Ursula von der Leyen, upon taking office in late 2019, set the goal of establishing a "geopolitical Commission"¹⁰, a strategy that is likely to gain further momentum during her second term as Commission President.

The importance of advancing EU enlargement is growing, both concerning Ukraine and Moldova—countries of significant security relevance, with accession negotiations beginning in June 2024—and regarding the long-neglected Western Balkans. The EU may have an interest in keeping both regions within its sphere of influence, with enlargement serving as a key instrument. Should enlargement proceed with even a few of these states, it could, similar to the 2004 enlargement, necessitate the establishment of new rules.

However, it is also evident that the debate between federalist and sovereigntist perspectives is intensifying across Europe. In recent years, sovereigntist voices have gained strength, with national sovereignty becoming increasingly prominent as a political narrative. This trend was clearly reflected in the results of the 2024 European Parliament elections, where sovereigntist forces made significant gains. Among the current national governments, Hungary represents one of the most pronounced sovereigntist positions, making it important to consider Hungary's stance on treaty amendments.

HUNGARY'S POSITION ON TREATY AMENDMENTS

Hungary's stance on treaty amendments is primarily guided by a resolution adopted by the Hungarian Parliament in July 2022¹¹, shortly after the publication of the final report from the Conference on the Future of Europe. According to this resolution, while the revision and amendment of the treaties are deemed necessary, Hungary advocates for a different approach than the one suggested in the conference's concluding

8 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16054-2023-INIT/hu/pdf>

9 European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2022 on the call for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties (2022/2705(RSP)).
Online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0244_EN.html

10 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech_19_6408

11 32/2022. (VII. 19.) OGY határozat az Európai Unió jövőjével kapcsolatban képviselendő magyar álláspontról.
Online: <https://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/MKPDF/hiteles/MK22119.pdf>

statement. Hungary seeks a form of less integrated European cooperation than currently exists and aims to strengthen the role of national sovereignty within the EU.

The Hungarian Parliament's resolution calls for the removal of the objective of 'ever-closer Union' from the treaties. It also insists on the explicit enshrinement of the European Commission's political and ideological neutrality and calls for a reassessment of the powers exercised through EU institutions under the principle of subsidiarity.

The Hungarian Parliament has also made specific proposals regarding EU policies. The country is committed to the creation of a common European army and considers it important that support for families is recognized as a goal in the treaties. Moreover, the Hungarian Parliament seeks to guarantee the right of every nation to decide who they wish to live with within their own country.

One of the most significant and controversial aspects of Hungary's position is the proposal to replace the direct election of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) with a system where national parliaments delegate representatives. This would reduce the supranational character of the European Parliament. Additionally, Hungary advocates for the future inclusion of legislative initiative rights for national governments and parliaments at the EU level, and for the ability of national parliaments to block EU legislation.

Interestingly, while the Hungarian Parliament suggests narrowing certain EU competences, it also proposes expanding others. The resolution asserts that autochthonous national minorities living within the EU should be afforded treaty-based protection, even though this is currently considered a Member State competence.

Hungary's proposals are seen as radical, particularly in their call to get rid of the direct election of MEPs and to partially reverse the deepening of EU integration achieved thus far. The likelihood of these proposals being realized is low, and they are more likely intended as a signal that the current Hungarian legislature will not support EU Member States and institutions in any efforts to transfer powers away from the Member States or to weaken the capacity for national interest representation.

CAN THE FEDERALISATION OF THE EU BE STOPPED?

The global order is undergoing significant changes, and Europe is striving to find its place in this evolving landscape. Security considerations are becoming increasingly important, and the EU needs to consolidate its influence in the region. This necessitates the promotion of EU enlargement, not only towards the East but also towards the Western Balkans. Achieving this requires an efficient organizational and decision-making structure, implying the necessity of treaty amendments. If we consider the institutional and political contexts of previous treaty amendments, the current geopolitical challenges, and the functioning issues within the Union, and if we assume that integration will not come to a halt, we must conclude that treaty amendments are inevitable. Based on past experiences and formal logic, this will likely lead to further deepening of integration. Therefore, the federalization of the EU does not seem preventable, but the pace at which this happens is crucial. The failed federalization attempts by European leaders in 2004-2005, which overlooked the need for organic institutional development, highlight the risks of making too large a leap in this direction. It would be a significant mistake for the leaders of Member States to ignore this important lesson, as well as the growing resistance to unnecessary EU centralization efforts, as indicated by the 2024 European election results, and attempt another federalist leap.

What can therefore be done for a rational review process of the treaties that enhances the EU's efficiency and competitiveness without undermining the competences of Member States?

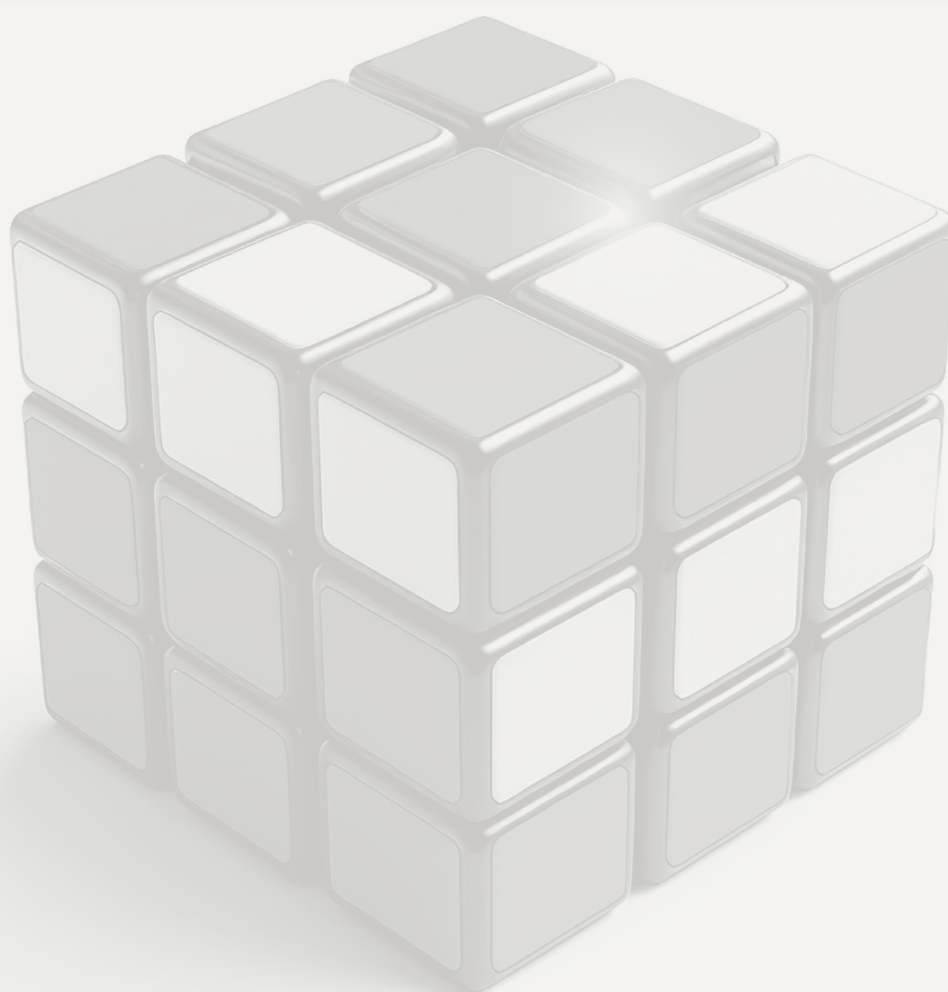
PROPOSALS

- 1 It is crucial that narratives opposing irrational and efficiency-threatening centralization efforts are present in the EU discourse at both political and expert/academic levels. The political climate in Europe cannot be ignored, but public information cannot be limited to political rhetoric. This is where the expert and scholarly community plays a role, providing clear but credible information to the public on the constitutional dilemmas arising from treaty amendments.
- 2 It is important to coordinate and jointly represent the region's key interests in a future treaty review. During the more successful periods of the Visegrad Group (V4), high-level political consultations on regional interests were regular, but the current crisis of the group makes the future of such coordination uncertain. Nonetheless, it is critical to foster joint research efforts among think tanks and university research institutes that analyse EU policies in Polish-Hungarian cooperation, ideally within the V4 framework.
- 3 It is critical during a possible review process to consider how many Member States back a given proposal. In this approach, it is also relevant which Member State presents the proposal. A state that enjoys the necessary trust on behalf of other EU Member States should take the lead. Due to Hungary's lack of this trust, it should carefully consider which proposals it presents itself and which proposals it supports by coordinating with other Member States, rather than acting as the initiator.
- 4 Hungary currently has no interest in a treaty amendment process, as its position is too far removed from what seems to be the majority stance, as seen, for example, in the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Certain circumstances, such as actual enlargement or changes in the geopolitical and security situation, might force Hungary into a compromise. The EU provides for the right to opt out, allowing a country to refrain from participating in certain areas of EU cooperation, thus preventing deadlock and facilitating agreement.¹² It is worth examining which areas could be subject to such an opt-out and preparing for its consequences.

¹² Denmark currently exercises such an opt-out in the area of economic and monetary union, while Ireland does so regarding the Schengen Agreement.

EVALUATING THE POTENTIAL RECOMMISSIONING OF THE NORD STREAM 1 AND 2 GAS PIPELINES – THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE

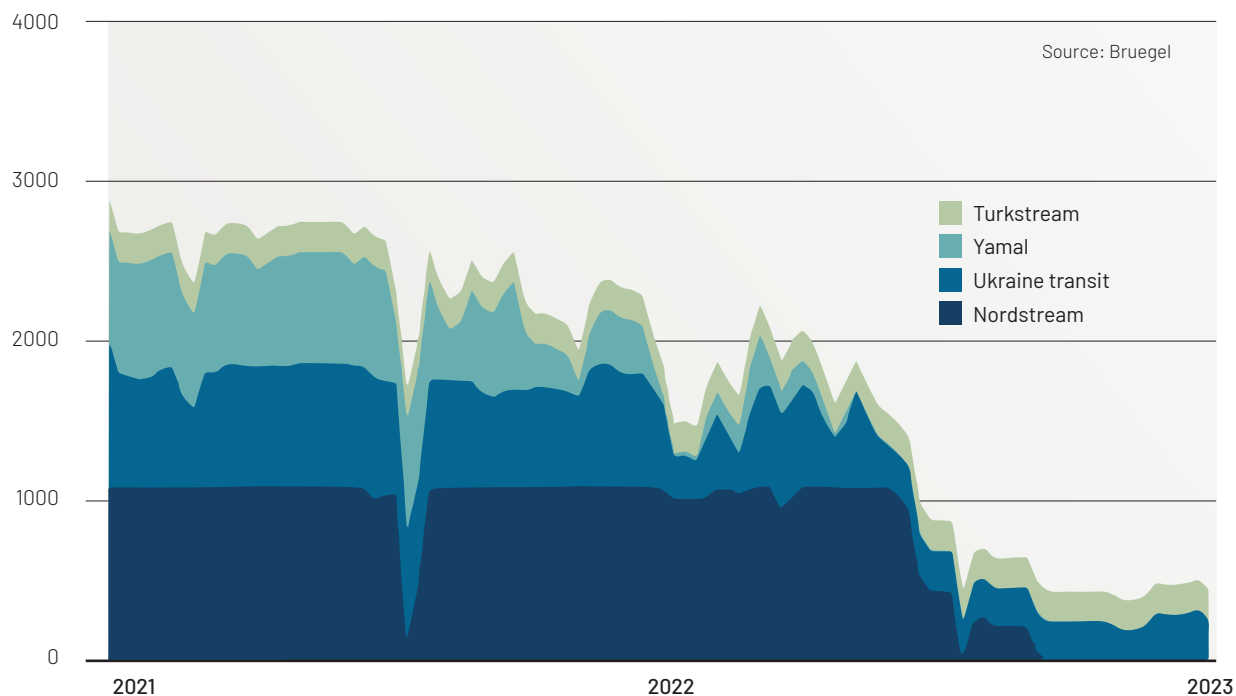
RAFAŁ LIBERA



The Nord Stream gas pipelines have been a source of significant geopolitical tension within Europe. These pipelines, which directly connect Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, have historically been seen as tools of Russian influence over European energy markets. This aspect has particularly been brought to the fore in the run-up to and following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Nord Stream 1 was opened in 2011 and had the capacity to transport 550 TWh (or 55 billion cubic meters (bcm)) of gas per year. It thus represented roughly a third of all gas exported by Russia to Europe in 2021 (1550 TWh; the Yamal-Europe pipeline amounted to 300 TWh) and was the biggest single source of Russian gas imports to Europe at the time (representing, for example, 67% of Germany's total gas imports in 2021)¹.

FIG. 1 **RUSSIAN GAS EXPORTS TO THE EU27 MILLION CUBIC METERS PER WEEK**



¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/europes-messy-russian-gas-divorce>

Nord Stream 1 was eventually shut down in August 2022 by Gazprom. Nord Stream 2, meanwhile, was never commissioned due to the German government's refusal to approve its certification in the aftermath of Russia's invasion. Both were subsequently damaged in a series of explosions undertaken in September 2022 by unidentified suspects.

Poland, with its long and complex history with Russia and its growing role in the European energy landscape, has a vested interest in the potential recommissioning of these pipelines. This article explores whether recommissioning the Nord Stream pipelines is beneficial from Poland's perspective and what measures should be taken if it is not.

THE STRATEGIC RISKS OF RECOMMISSIONING NORD STREAM

Poland has long opposed the Nord Stream projects, viewing them as a threat to both its energy security and broader European stability. The recommissioning of Nord Stream pipelines would allow Russia to reinstate its leverage over Europe's energy supply, a situation that has been effectively diminished since the start of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent EU sanctions.

Poland's opposition is based on several strategic considerations:

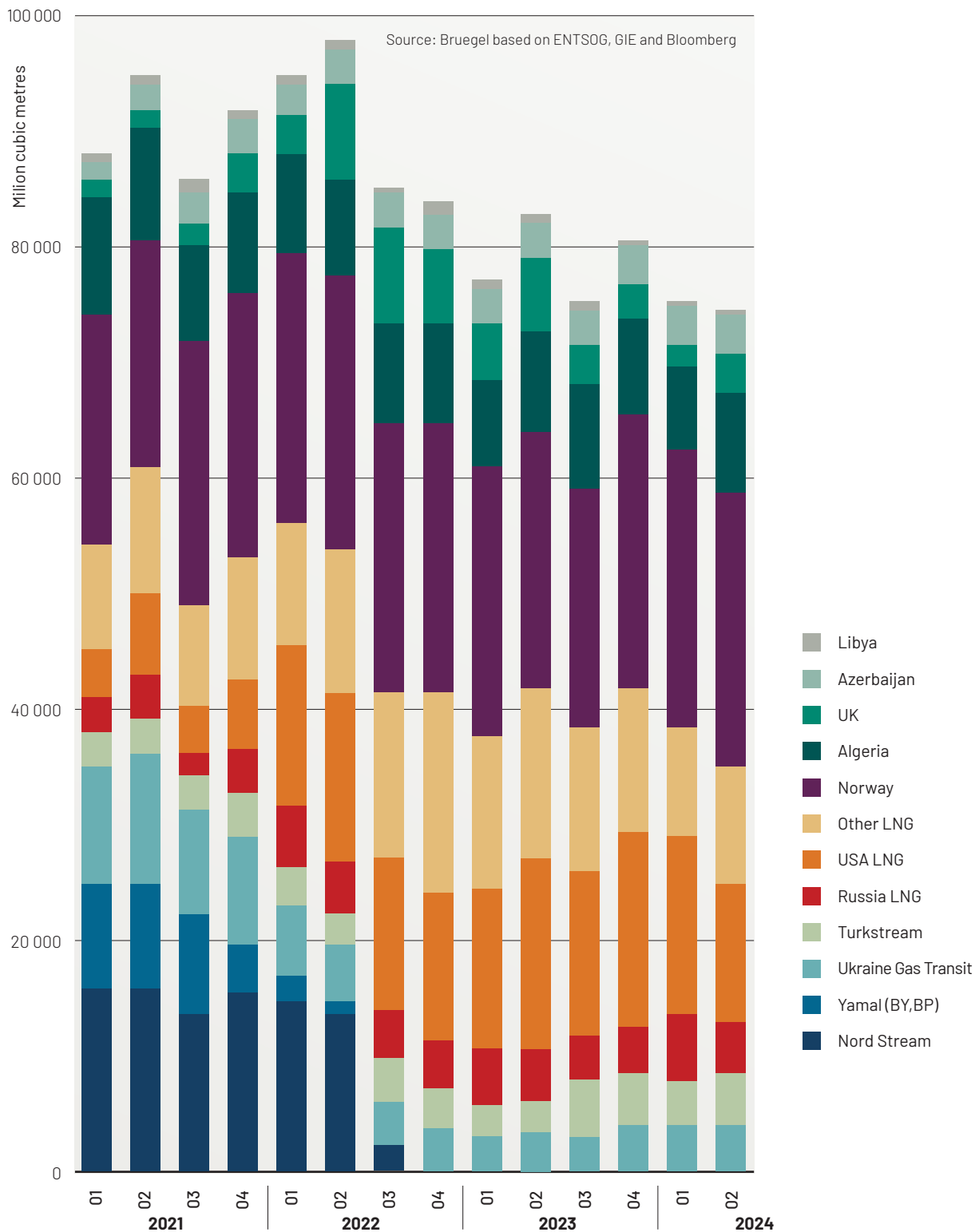
1. **Energy Dependency and Political Leverage:** Prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia supplied over 40% of the EU's and 55% of Germany's natural gas, with Nord Stream 1 being a central conduit. Recommissioning Nord Stream 1 and certifying Nord Stream 2 could potentially re-establish Russia's dominance in the European gas market, allowing it to use energy supply as a political tool (which it had done successfully prior to 2022)². Poland has been particularly vocal about not allowing Russia to regain this leverage, as it could lead to renewed attempts at dividing the EU member-states by manipulating gas supply and prices, reminiscent of the energy blackmail tactics used by Russia prior to and in the first months following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

In other words, the EU will fail to manage effectively its energy trilemma of security, affordability and sustainability if it allows Russia to divide and rule the EU energy market yet again. As the post-February 2022 energy crisis in Europe has clearly demonstrated, what is required is more collaboration and interconnection within the EU as well as more diversification in terms of supplies.

When it comes to the last point, a part of the answer to the gas deficit that the EU found itself in 2022 was increased import from alternative sources such as piped gas from Norway (which displaced Russia as the biggest exporter of gas to the EU) and LNG from the United States, as well as other countries.

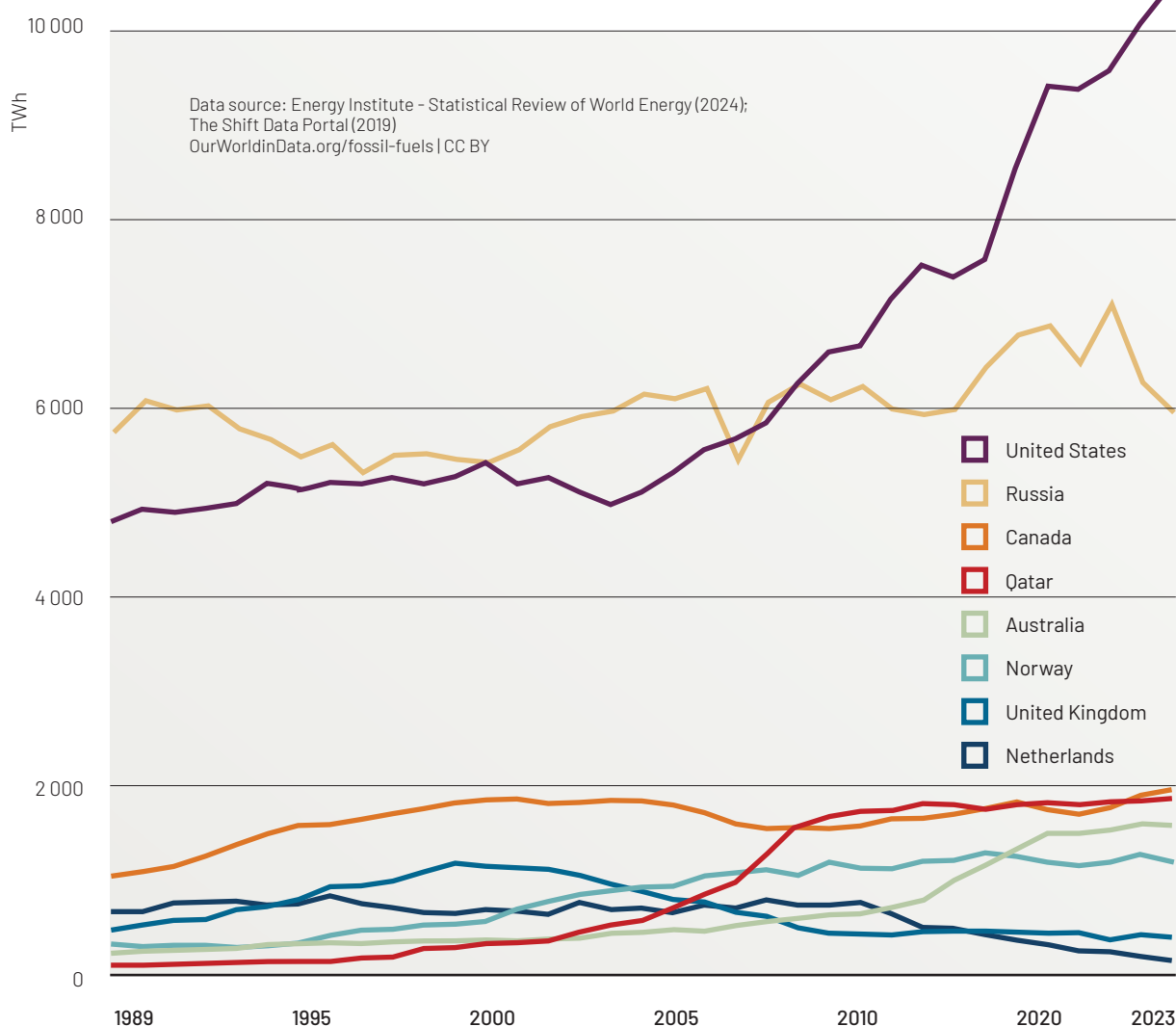
2 Balázs R. Sziklai, László Á. Kóczy, Dávid Csercsik, *The impact of Nord Stream 2 on the European gas market bargaining positions*, Energy Policy, Volume 144, September 2020, 111692; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421520304201#>

FIG. 2 **DIFFERENT SOURCES
OF NATURAL GAS IN EUROPE**



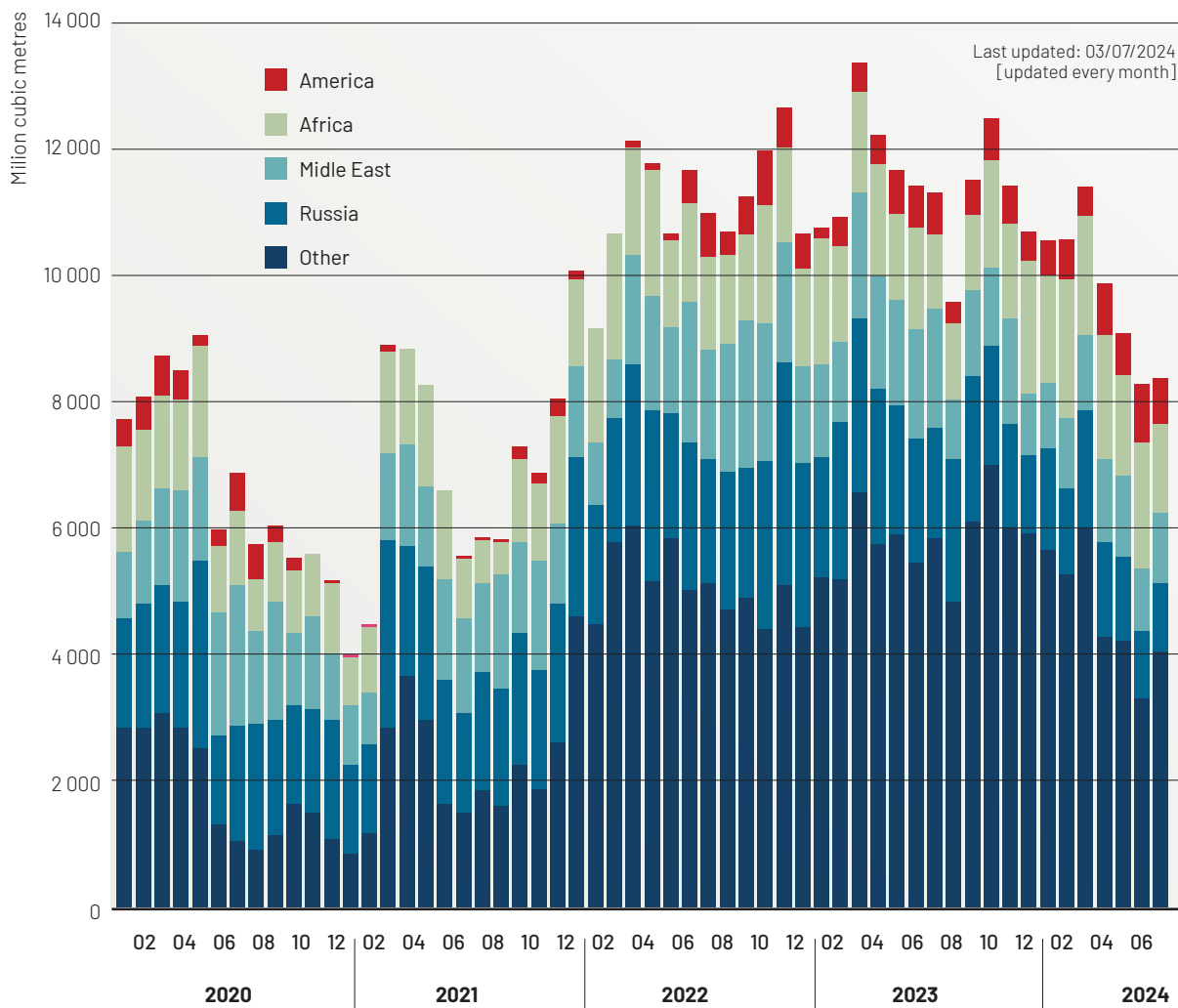
The crisis coincided with an increase in gas production and LNG export capacity in the United States which meant that the US exporters were able to capitalise on the increased demand from Europe. Considering the depressed demand from China at the time, LNG found its way into Europe in volumes never seen before. Given that most of that new gas was purchased on the spot market, it was significantly more expensive than, for example, what Germany used to pay for Nord Stream gas. At the time, however, ensuring the security of gas supplies from actors who would not (i) use those supplies as a political weapon to destabilise the region; and (ii) use the proceeds from the sales to fund their war machine, was of paramount importance.

FIG. 3 **GAS PRODUCTION
MEASURED IN TERAWATT-HOURS**



The United States has since become a strategic supplier of LNG to the EU (more than doubling their exports between 2021 and 2022) thus strengthening the economic ties underpinning our transatlantic alliance.

FIG. 4 LNG SUPPLIES TO THE EU BY SOURCE (BRUEGEL)³

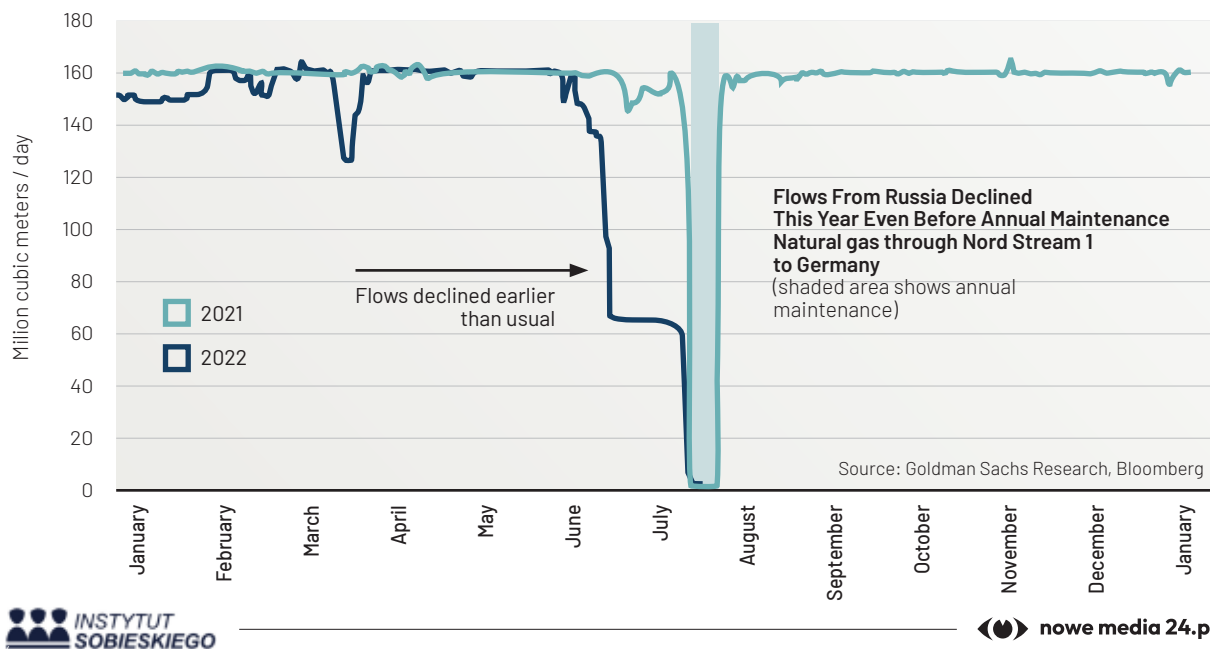


It must be noted that when it comes to the diversification of supply, Poland was a trailblazer in the EU having successfully planned its decoupling from Russia years before the 2022 crisis. The Świnoujście LNG regasification terminal has been operational since 2015, while the Baltic Pipe project connecting Poland to gas reserves on the Norwegian continental shelf was in the works for many years prior to its opening in late 2022. As a result, Poland was well-prepared for what caught many other EU member-states by surprise, namely Russia's weaponisation of energy.

2. Economic Impact: Starting in the summer of 2021, Russia began coercing the EU into approving Nord Stream 2 by decreasing the volume of pipeline gas sent to Europe and refusing to replenish the storage levels at German facilities owned by Gazprom.

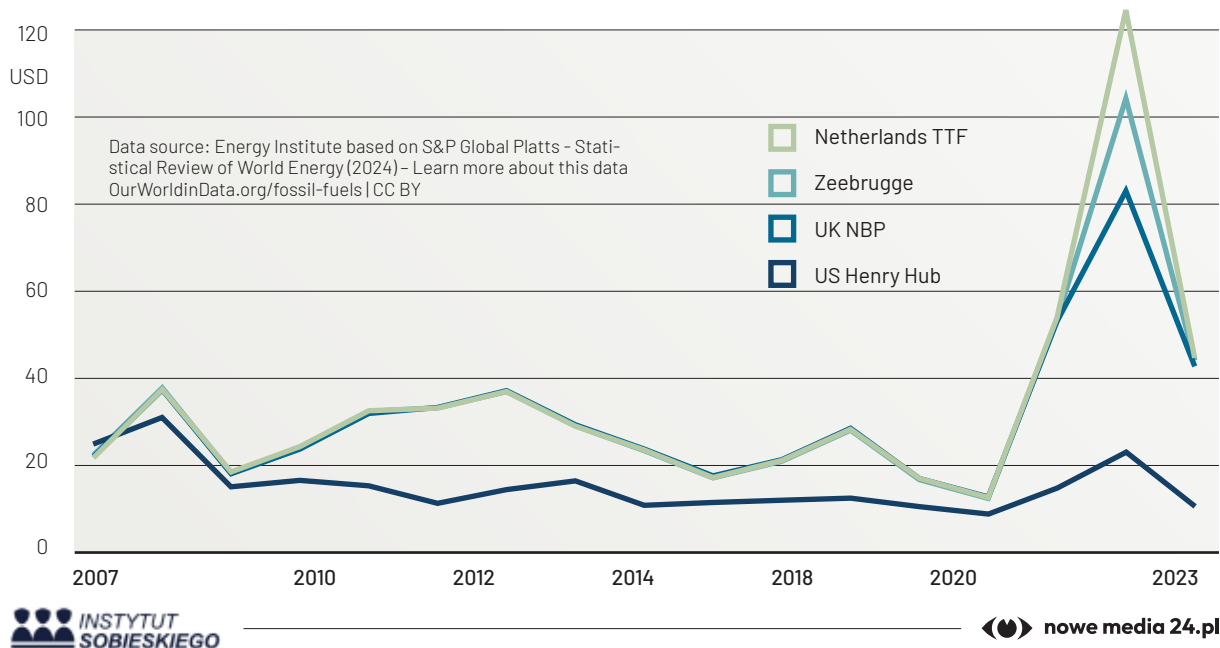
3 <https://www.bruegel.org/dataset/european-natural-gas-imports>

FIG. 5 **GAS FLOWS THROUGH NORD STREAM 1 DECLINED ALREADY IN THE SUMMER OF 2021**



It was thereby able to influence the benchmark Title Transfer Facility (TTF) price⁵ and make the EU's energy system not only less secure but also less affordable.

FIG. 6 **NATURAL GAS PRICES**
NATURAL GAS PRICES ARE MEASURED IN US DOLLARS PER MEGAWATT-HOUR (MWH). THIS DATA IS NOT ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION.



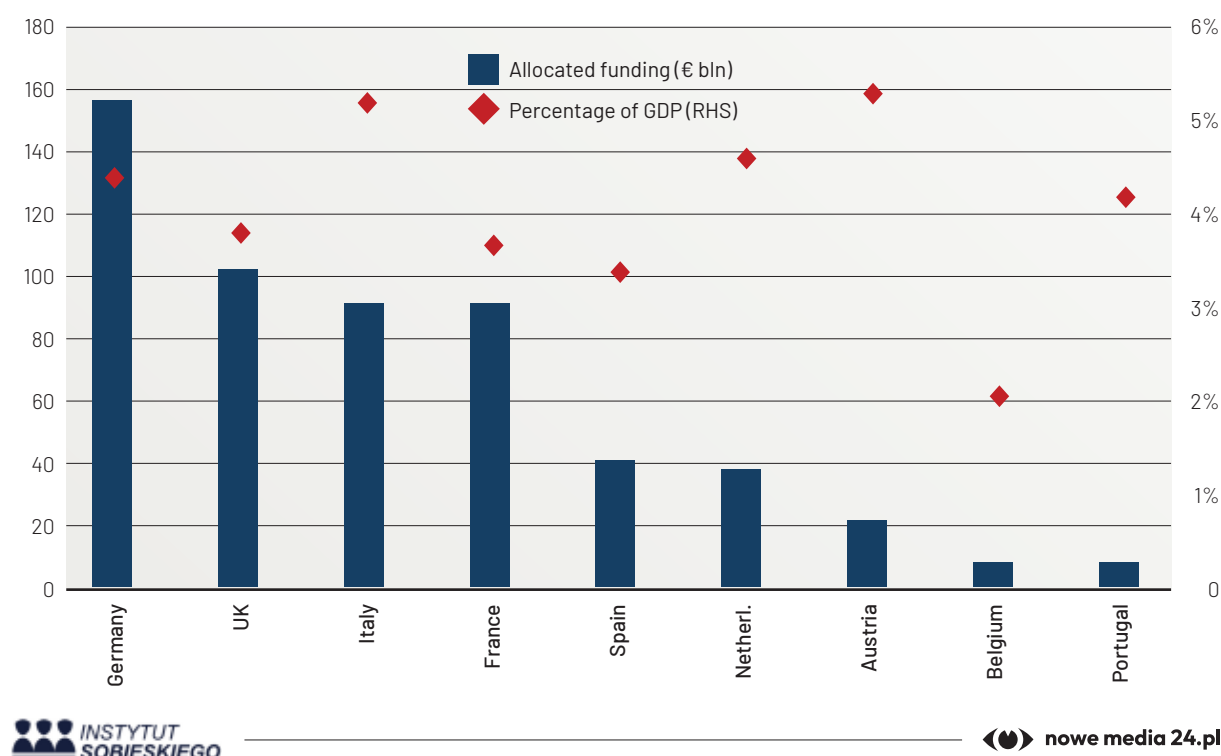
4 <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/what-happens-if-russia-cuts-off-gas-to-europe-index>

5 Dutch index that sets the market gas price in Europe

It is estimated that since September 2021, the EU member-states have spent over €650 billion to address the impact of the energy crisis caused by Russia's aggression⁶.

The EU has invested considerable capital into developing and implementing its new energy strategy – REPowerEU, the central plank of which is reducing the dependence on Russia's fossil fuels. Nord Stream's comeback would undermine those significant investments made, on the one hand, to protect the EU energy consumers from rapid price increases and, on the other hand, to ensure the EU energy system is more diversified and resilient.

FIG. 7 **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE ENERGY CRISIS AMONG SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, SEPTEMBER 2021 TO JANUARY 2023⁷**



As noted above, Poland has made significant investments to diversify its energy sources, be it through LNG infrastructure, such as the Świnoujście regasification terminal and the upcoming Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Gdańsk, or the Baltic Pipe project transporting Norwegian gas to Poland. All of these projects have been recognised by the EU as Projects of Common Interest. They are designed to reduce dependency on Russian gas and strengthen Poland's role as a regional energy hub.

Prior to February 2022, gas in Europe flowed from East to West. In response to Russia's invasion and the crackdown on Russian gas imports, the gas (in the form of LNG) started flowing in much greater volumes from West to East, as well as southbound from Norway. Given the number of newly commissioned LNG regasification terminals (such as Wilhelmshaven in Germany) and those coming onstream

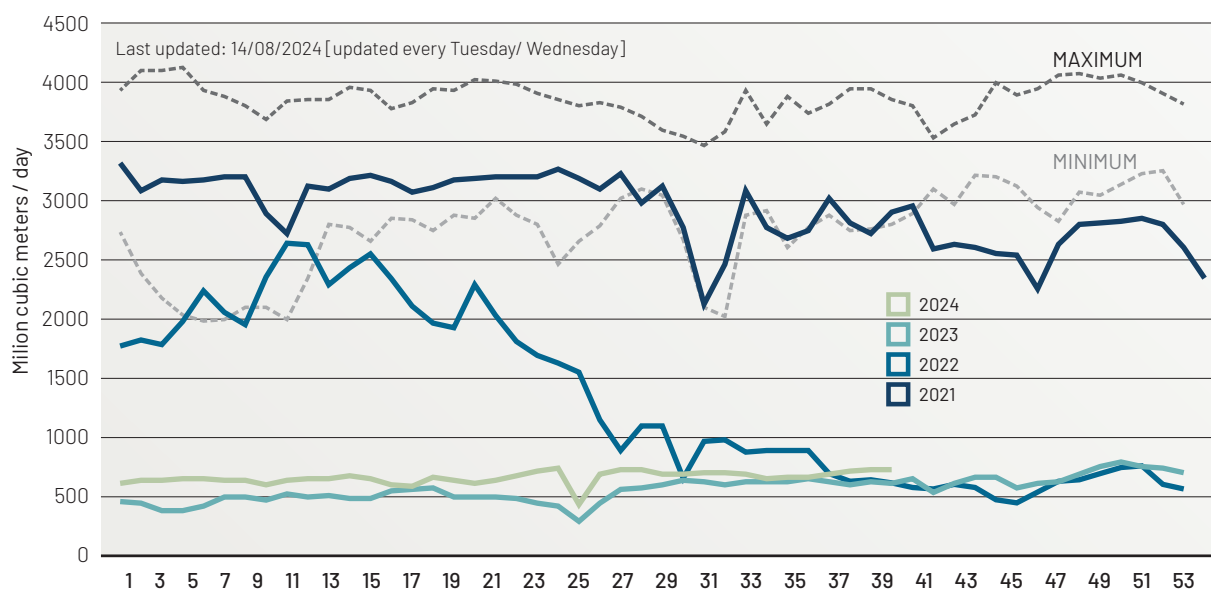
⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/how-is-eu-electricity-produced-and-sold/>

⁷ Source: Sgaravatti et al. (2023). Accessed via: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/european-energy-crisis-and-consequences-global-natural-gas-market#:~:text=The%202022%20Russian%20invasion%20of,focus%20shifted%20towards%20energy%20security> (Germany adopted fiscal measures of €158 billion, Italy & France approx. €90 billion each)

shortly, the European gas network in the last two years has undergone a comprehensive overhaul. There is now no place for Nord Stream in this new system and for a malicious actor such as Russia to play a prominent and destructive role within it. Any decision that would re-establish Russia's influence over the EU energy market would in the end come back to bite Germany and other EU member-states. While in short-term Russia could offer the EU a carrot in the form of cheaper gas, eventually it would return to its old tricks – making the 2022-24 infrastructure investments less economically viable, and the sacrifices endured worthless.

3. Regional Security Concerns: The Nord Stream pipelines bypass Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, which traditionally had served as transit states for Russian gas. Reopening these pipelines could weaken CEE countries economically and politically, increasing their vulnerability to Russian influence. For Poland, maintaining the current status quo, where Russia's ability to project power through energy supply is diminished, is crucial for regional stability.

FIG. 8 **NATURAL GAS IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA OVER THE YEARS (BRUEGEL)⁸**



Unlike with Russian oil exports which found alternative customers (primarily in Asia, with India now being the chief importer of Russian crude), Russian gas has limited alternative markets as most Russian pipeline investments were aimed at flooding Europe with molecules. Historically, sales of gas to the EU constituted a significant portion of Russia's budget. Reestablishing Nord Stream, and that source of revenue, means more money for Russia to project its power in Europe and engage in a kinetic conflict on EU's borders as well as hybrid warfare within the EU.

8 <https://www.bruegel.org/dataset/european-natural-gas-imports>

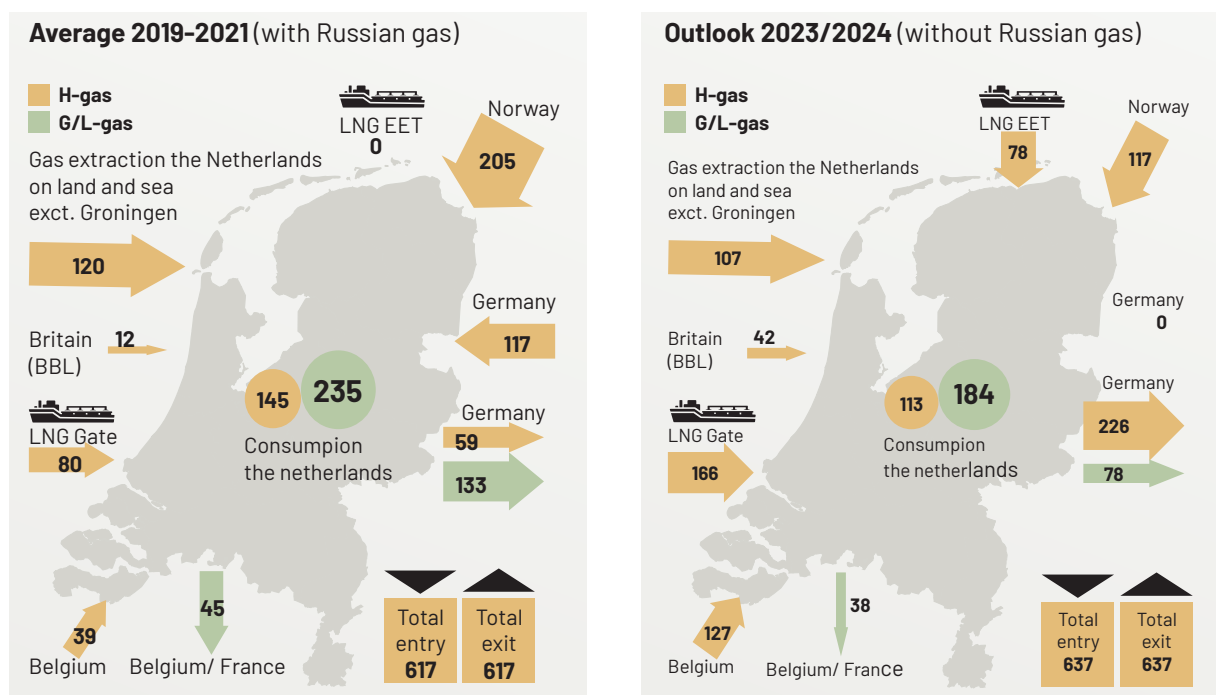
ALTERNATIVES TO RECOMMISSIONING NORD STREAM

Given the strategic risks, reopening the Nord Stream pipelines is not in Poland's, and the EU's, best interest. Instead, several measures can be taken to block these pipelines from being recommissioned and thereby further ensure energy security:

Strengthening the EU Energy Solidarity: Poland should continue advocating for a unified European energy policy that prioritises diversification and reduces reliance on Russian energy. Initiatives like REPowerEU, which aims to end dependency on Russian fossil fuels by 2027, are crucial. Poland can play a key role in pushing for the acceleration of these policies, ensuring that Europe does not backtrack on its commitments under pressure from short-term economic considerations.

A true energy union also makes sense from the point of view of member-states such as the Netherlands which nowadays heavily relies on imports for its gas consumption (up to 75%). In light of the decommissioning of the Groningen field and overall declining domestic production, this dependence will only increase⁹. As such, the Netherlands would be one of the beneficiaries of a well-functioning European internal gas market with robust interconnection and storage facilities that would allow customers, traders, and governments to respond adequately to global price signals.

FIG. 9 **NATURAL GAS VOLUMES (IN TWH) IN THE NETHERLANDS (GASUNIE)**

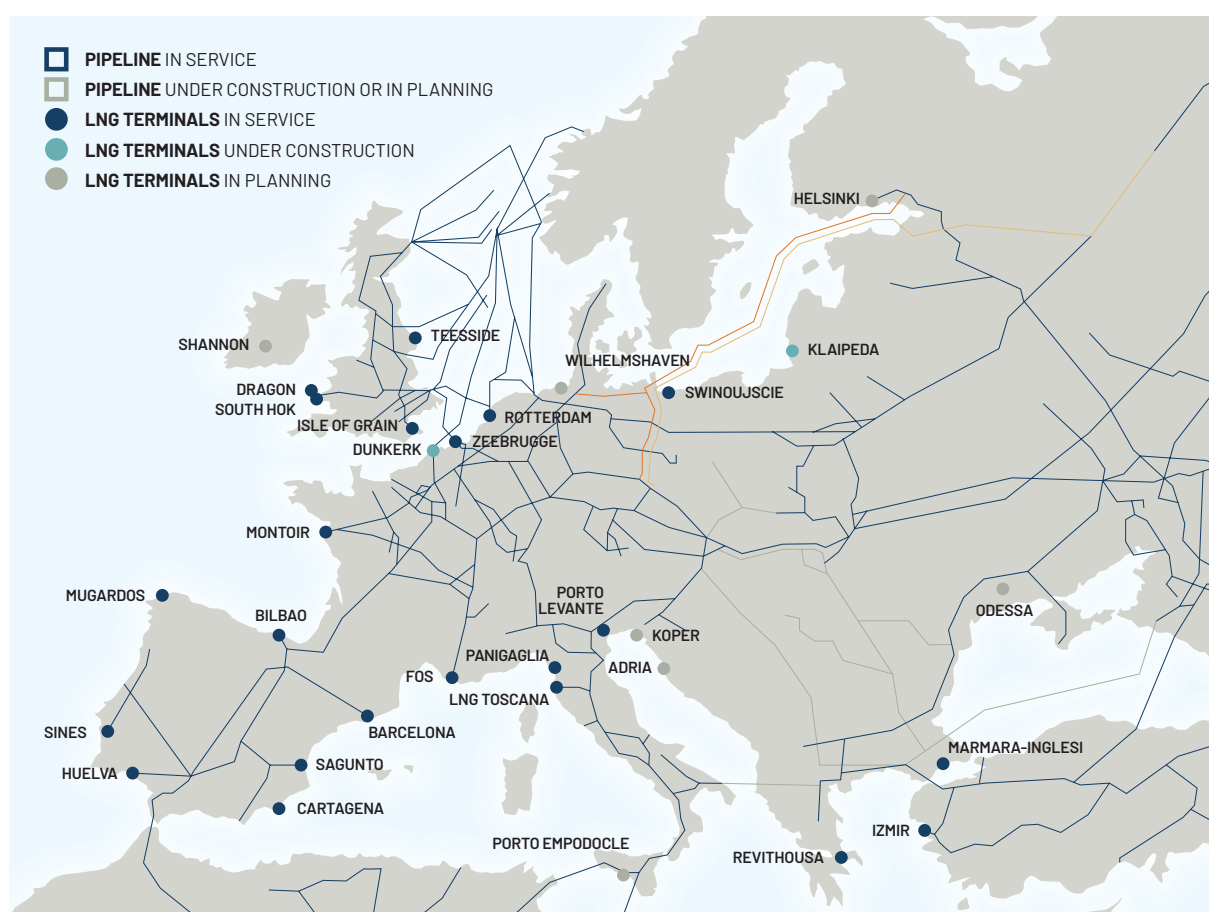


9 <https://www.gasunietransportservices.nl/en/news/advice-on-the-security-of-natural-gas-supply-following-closure-of-the-groningen-field>

Energy solidarity between, for example, Germany and CEE also makes sense from an economic perspective. In the first half of 2022, Germany's trade with the V4¹⁰ totalled €187 billion (2021: €167 billion). This exceeds the €148.9 billion in trade with China for the equivalent period, making V4 Germany's biggest trading partner and signalling considerable economic interdependence¹¹. In other words, what is good for Poland and V4 in terms of energy supplies is bound to be good for Germany as well.

Enhancing Infrastructure and Interconnections: Investing in infrastructure that supports alternative gas sources is essential. Poland's expansion of LNG facilities and the Baltic Pipe, which delivers Norwegian gas to Poland, are critical components of this strategy. Additionally, enhancing interconnections with neighbouring countries will create a more resilient and integrated European energy network, reducing the need for Russian gas altogether.

FIG. 10 **MAP OF THE EUROPEAN NATURAL GAS PIPELINE NETWORK AS OF 2018¹²**



In 2022, imports through Norway's pipeline infrastructure exceeded 1170 TWh while the total LNG imports amounted to 1500 TWh. With the replacement of Russian gas with diversified LNG and gas from Norway,

10 Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia

11 <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe-0>

12 Source - DIW 2018, based on Kai-Olaf Lang and Kirsten Westphal, "Nord Stream 2 - Versuch einer politischen und wirtschaftlichen Einordnung," SWP Studie S21(2016); ENTSO-G, Capacity Map (2017); <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/gas-pipeline-nord-stream-2-links-germany-russia-splits-europe>

the importance of Poland (as well as Germany) as the gas security hub for its landlocked neighbours has only increased.

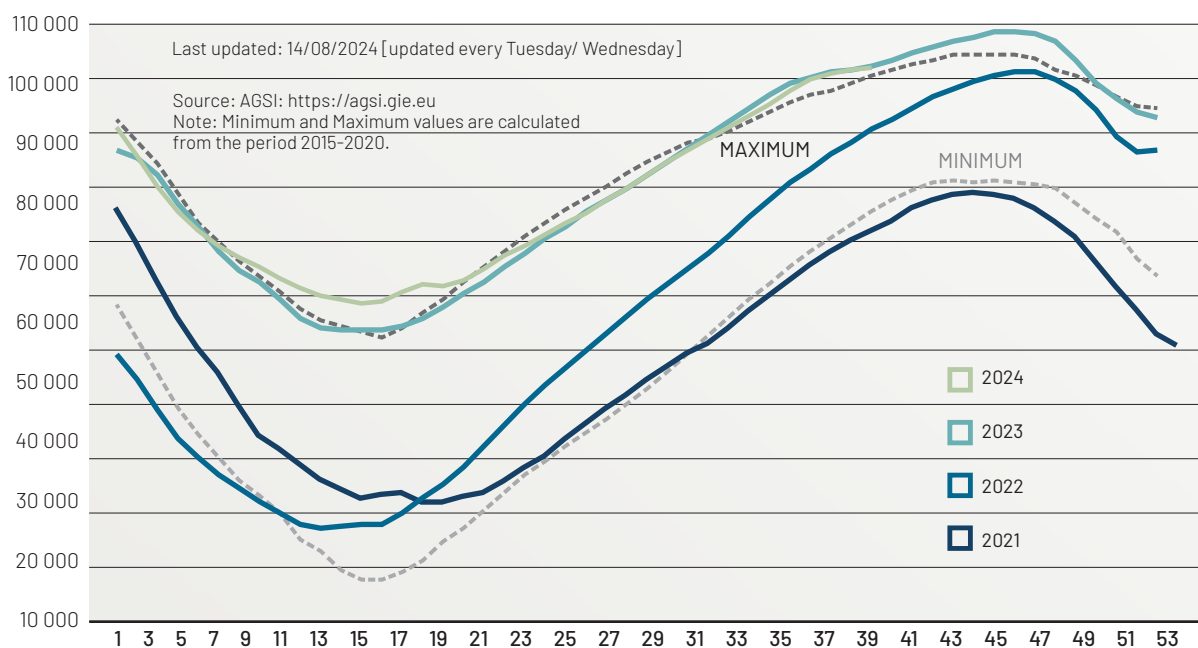
Poland, via the Baltic Pipe, can import up to 100 TWh of Norwegian gas. Interconnectors between Poland and Lithuania and between Poland and Slovakia have now been operational for a couple of years. The Polish-Slovak interconnector provides greater flexibility to Slovakia and, utilising the Slovakian transmission system, has the ability to supply gas to Hungary and Ukraine.

The Polish-Lithuanian interconnector has the potential to play an important role as part of the European Commission's Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan¹³ which has the objective of creating open and integrated energy markets in the region.

Such gas interconnections enable more efficient gas storage across borders. High gas storage, in turn, enables any price volatility on the LNG spot market to be mitigated.

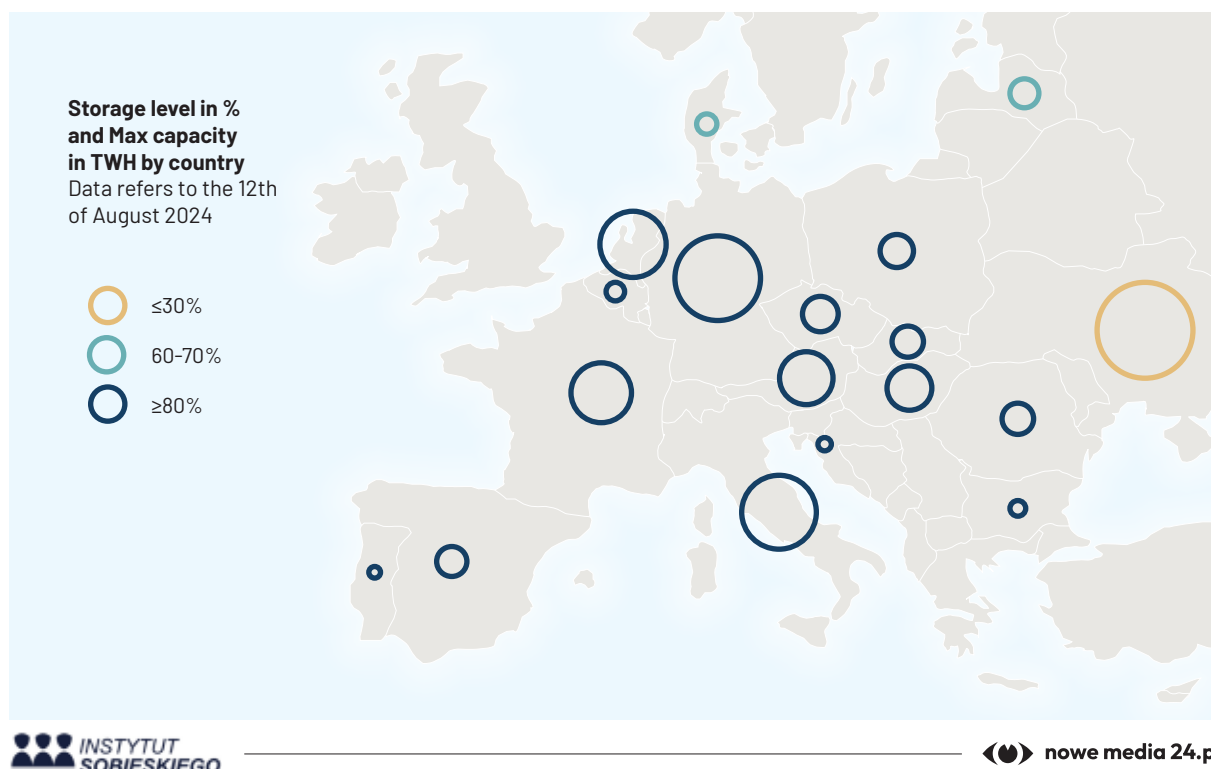
Low gas storage levels prior to 2023, were one of the cardinal sins of the EU energy policy. As has been often the case prior to the pandemic with many industries, the system was skewed toward "just in time" deliveries, with little regard for contingency and resilience. This has now changed dramatically with storage levels rising to unprecedented levels.

FIG. 11 **EU27 GAS STORAGE ON A WEEKLY BASIS (IN MILLION CUBIC METRES)**



13 Participating members: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Sweden.

FIG. 12 **EU GAS STORAGE LEVELS OVER THE YEARS**



As of August 2024, Poland's storage facilities are 92% (with a capacity of 38TWh), Hungary's are 86% full (capacity: 70TWh), Germany's are 92% full (capacity: 255TWh), while the Dutch storage stands at 83% out of a total of 143 TWh.

Legal and Diplomatic Measures: Poland, along with its EU allies, should support legal and regulatory actions that would keep the risk of Nord Stream being recommissioned to a minimum. This includes leveraging the EU competition law, as Poland's Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK) did when it imposed fines on Gazprom for Nord Stream 2's implementation without proper approval.

Diplomatically, Poland should continue to build alliances within the EU to maintain strong opposition to any potential reopening of the pipelines, as well as build coalitions to not only expand interconnections (as discussed above) but also enhance the mandate for joint gas purchases (thereby strengthening EU member-states bargaining position vis-à-vis LNG suppliers).

When it comes to gas imports from Russia, there is still more work to be done as Russian LNG has not been impacted by any of the sanctions. In fact, Russian LNG imports to the EU keep rising. In 2023 alone, Russia sold 20 bcm of LNG worth €8.2 billion to the EU¹⁴.

14 <https://www.ft.com/content/3398bbf1-747e-4d88-b948-e72bc14e9271>

FIG. 13 **2023 EU GAS IMPORTS BY SOURCE¹⁵**

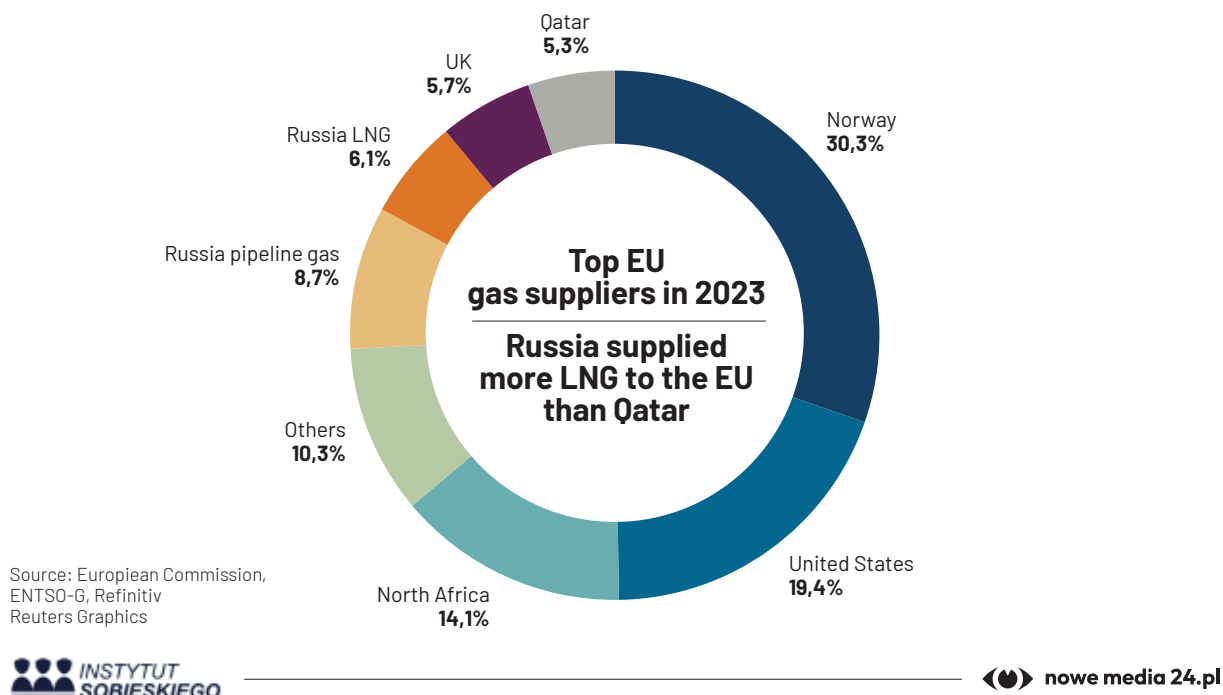
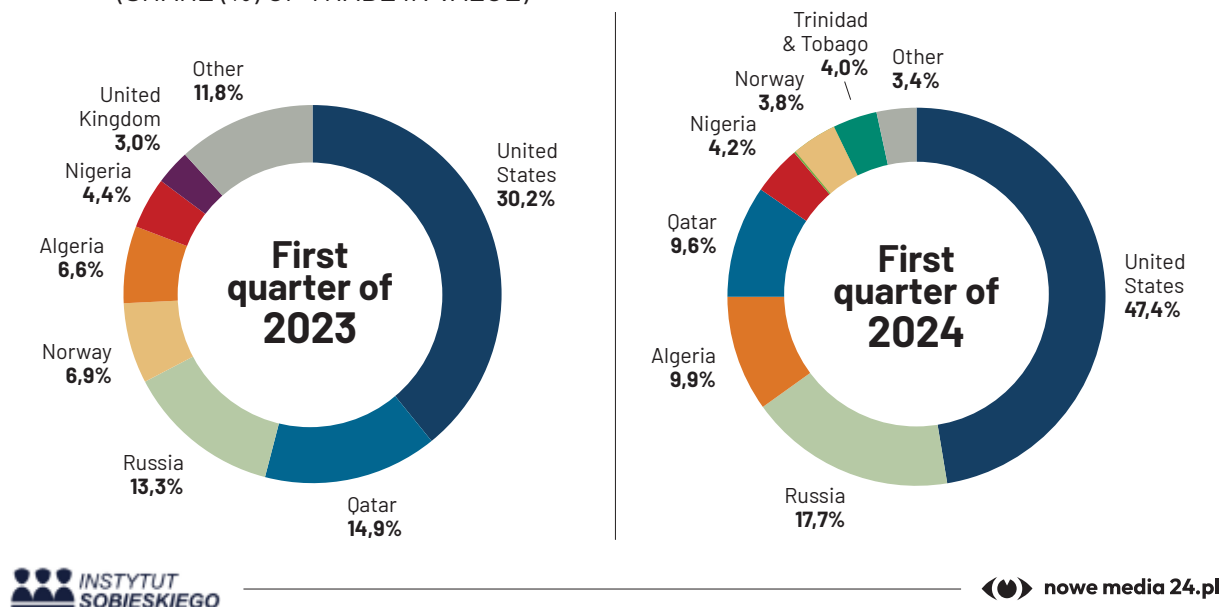


FIG. 14 **EU IMPORTS OF LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS BY PARTNER (SHARE (%) OF TRADE IN VALUE)**



In June 2024, the EU announced the 14th set of sanctions against Russia which will ban the re-export of Russian LNG to other countries but will not prevent member states from buying Russian LNG. The EU should help the buyers of Russian LNG by enabling them to trigger force majeure clauses in their long-term supply contracts.

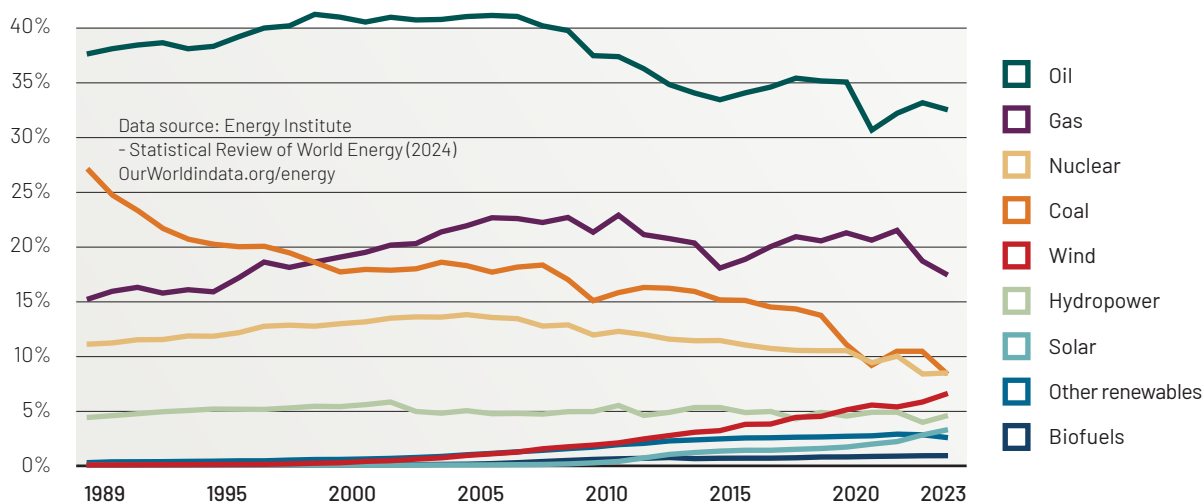
15 <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/new-west-east-route-keeps-europe-hooked-russian-gas-2024-04-03/>

Finally, while the Groningen field may be now closed, the EU should not actively discourage member-states with proven reserves to increase domestic gas production. Poland, in particular, should look at increasing the output of its existing fields, so that these reserves can be utilised while gas still forms an important part of the country's energy mix.

Promotion of Low-Carbon Energy and Innovation: In line with the REPowerEU objectives, Poland should continue its transition to low-carbon energy sources. Pending the adoption of commercial-scale battery storage, further integration of renewables (happening across the EU) into the electricity system is dependent on reliable and agile backup generation that provides adequate flexibility during peak demand. Gas-fired power plants are the optimal providers of such flexibility and, with adequate storage levels and inter-connections, would be best placed to underpin a viable capacity mechanism.

One of the reasons that the EU was able to withstand the 2022 energy crisis was the significantly decreased consumption of gas across the continent and across different market verticals. While the LNG and Norwegian gas imports have increased considerably, the overall trend across the EU points toward a smaller role for gas in the European energy system in the future.

FIG. 15 **SHARE OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION BY SOURCE, EUROPEAN UNION (27)**
MEASURED AS PERCENTAGE OF PRIMARY ENERGY USING THE SUBSTITUTION METHOD

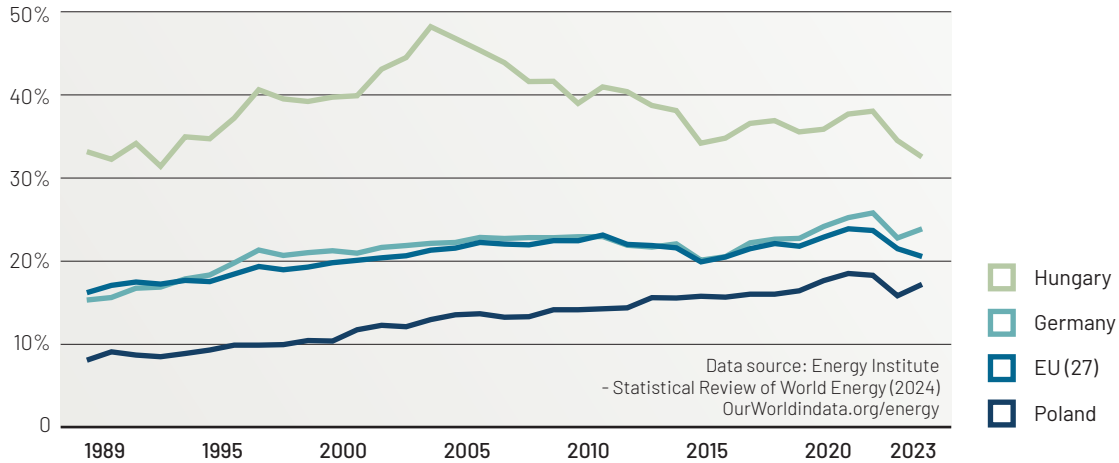


1. Primary energy: Primary energy is the energy available as resources - such as the fuels burnt in power plants - before it has been transformed. This relates to the coal before it has been burned, the uranium, or the barrels of oil. Primary energy includes energy that the end user needs, in the form of electricity, transport and heating, plus inefficiencies and energy that is lost when raw resources are transformed into a usable form. You can read more on the different ways of measuring energy in our article.

2. Substitution method: The 'substitution method' is used by researchers to correct primary energy consumption for efficiency losses experienced by fossil fuels. It tries to adjust non-fossil energy sources to the inputs that would be needed if it was generated from fossil fuels. It assumes that wind and solar electricity is as inefficient as coal or gas. To do this, energy generation from non-fossil sources are divided by a standard 'thermal efficiency factor' - typically around 0.4. Nuclear power is also adjusted despite it also experiencing thermal losses in a power plant. Since it's reported in terms of electricity output, we need to do this adjustment to calculate its equivalent input value. You can read more about this adjustment in our article.

One of the countries that limited its gas consumption most steeply since 2022 was Hungary.

FIG. 16 **PRIMARY ENERGY CONSUMPTION**
MEASURED AS PERCENTAGE OF PRIMARY ENERGY USING THE SUBSTITUTION METHOD

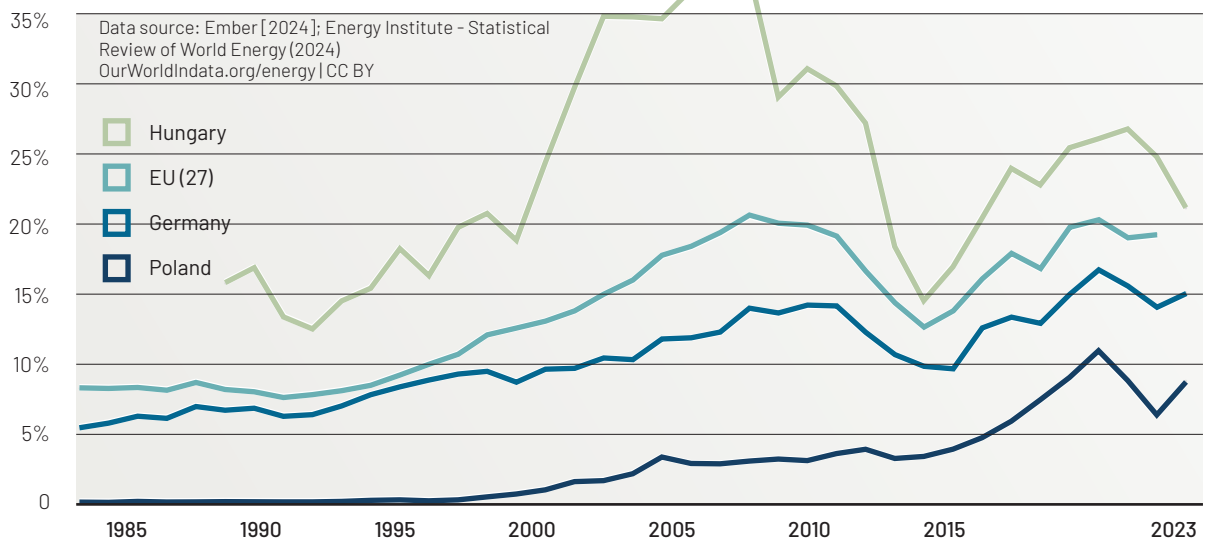


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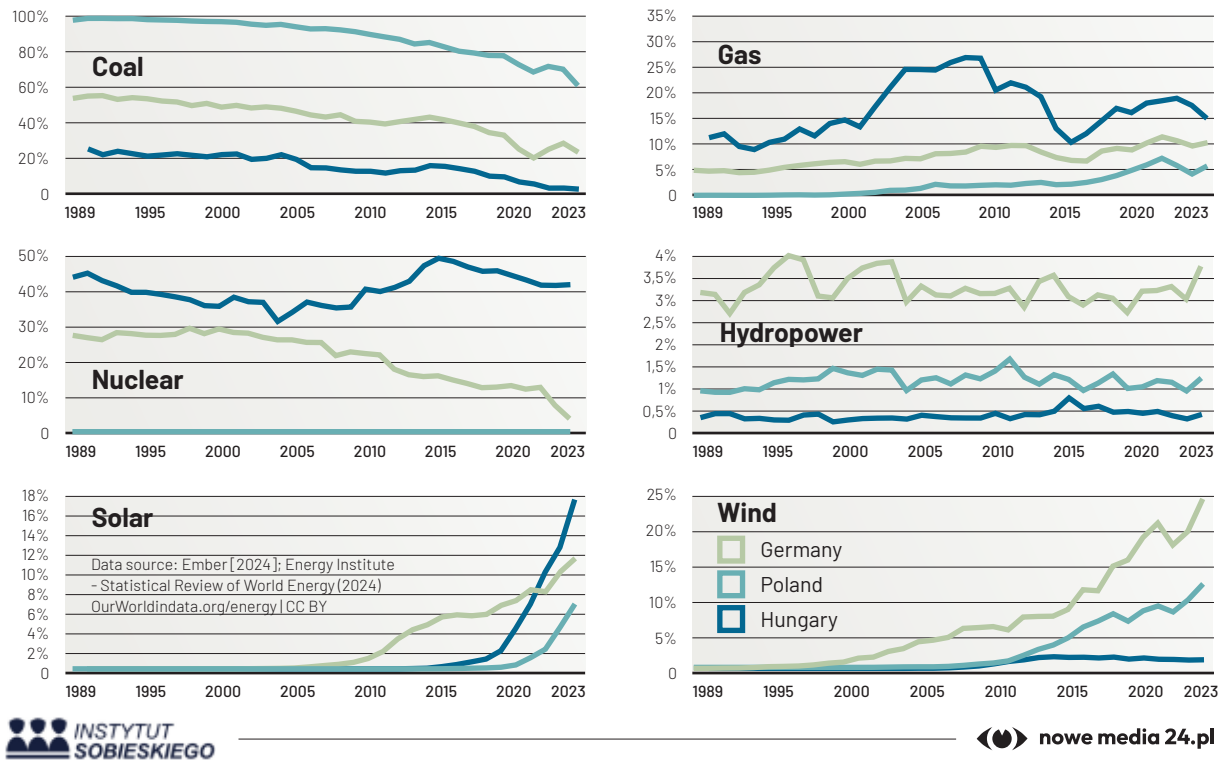
This trend of reduced gas consumption is highly visible when it comes to Hungary's gas-fuelled electricity generation.

FIG. 17 **SHARE OF ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION FROM GAS**
MEASURED AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ELECTRICITY



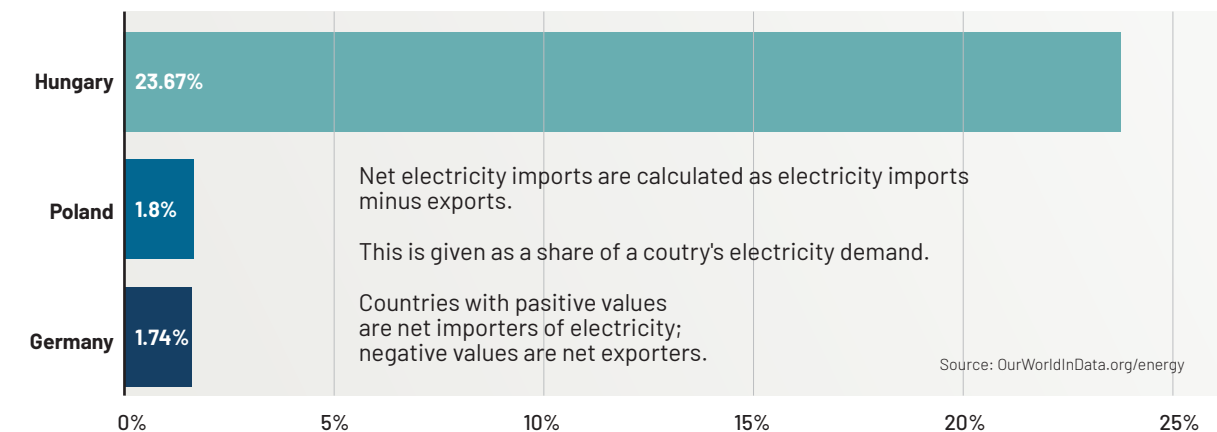
Nonetheless, in 2023 Hungary still produced more than 20% of its electricity from gas – a noticeably higher proportion than is the case in Germany or Poland. On the other hand, Hungary has seen a rapid deployment and rise of solar PV in its electricity mix – an intermittent generation source that, until battery storage becomes widely available, needs to be balanced by either stand-by gas production or electricity imports.

FIG. 18 **SHARE OF ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION BY SOURCE**



In comparison with Poland or Germany, Hungary imports a much higher percentage (almost a quarter) of its electricity demand.

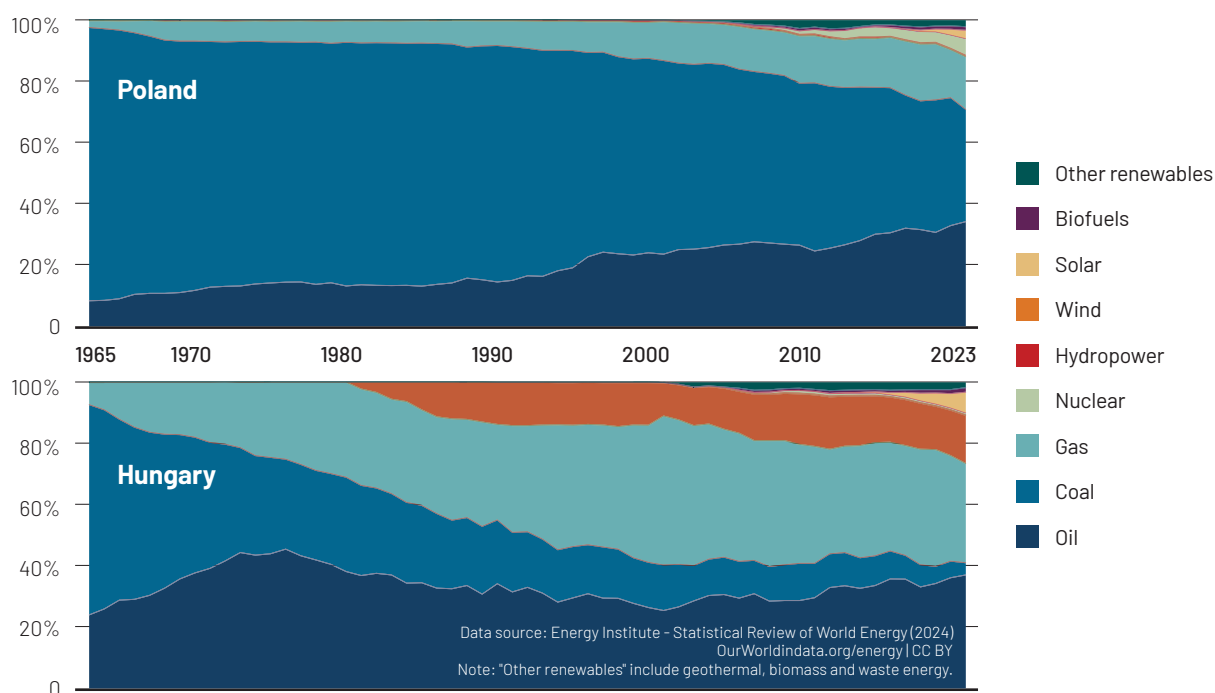
FIG. 19 **NET ELECTRICITY IMPORTS AS A SHARE OF ELECTRICITY DEMAND, 2023**



A big proportion of Hungarian electricity imports comes from Slovakia (with three new interconnectors coming online in 2021). As such, there is significant potential for cooperation within V4 not only when it comes to cross-border gas flows (as discussed above), but also electricity trading.

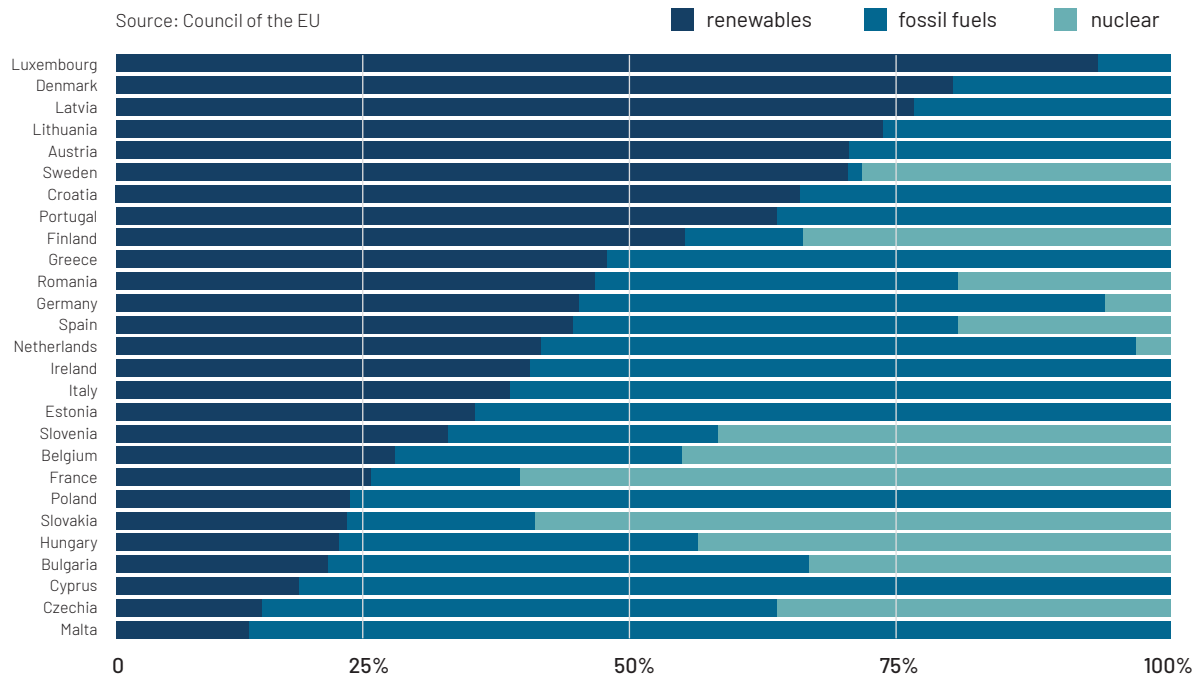
One aspect where Poland's electricity landscape differs markedly from Hungary's, and the rest of V4 for that matter, is the lack of any nuclear power generation. This is meant to change with the first generation of Polish nuclear new build projects (based on American, Korean, as well as small modular reactor (SMR) technology) due to be connected to the grid by 2035. Around the same time Poland should have roughly 20GW of capacity coming from offshore wind farms operated on the Baltic Sea. All these projects are designed to replace Poland's coal-fired power plants that are already well past their original life expectancy. However, when combined with the rapidly growing renewable generation (backed up by gas-fuelled power plants), Poland has the potential to become, for the first time, a major net electricity exporter.

FIG. 20 ENERGY CONSUMPTION BY SOURCE



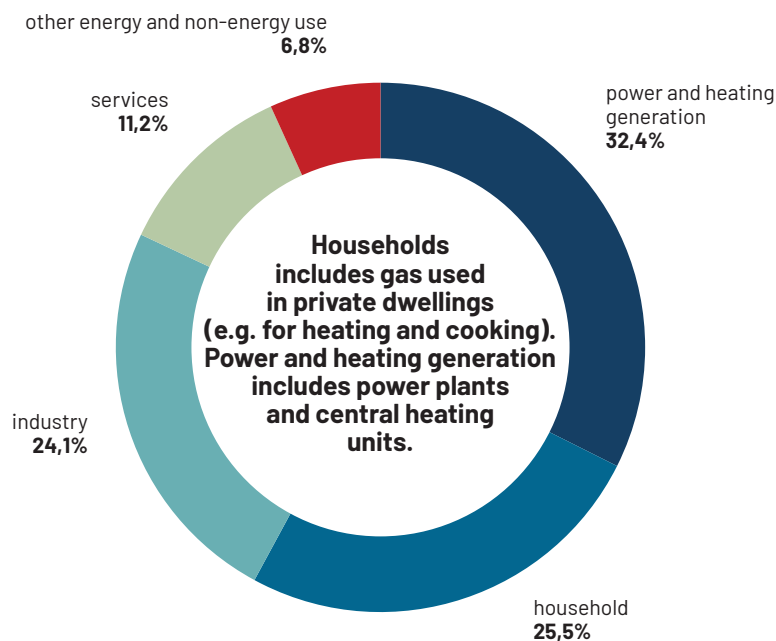
On the other hand, Hungary (which currently produces over 40% of its electricity through nuclear power), is planning an expansion of its Russian-designed Paks plant with additional two reactors of 1.2GW capacity each. With this investment, Budapest aims to increase the share of nuclear in its electricity generation to 60%.

FIG. 21 **HOW DOES ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION DIFFER BETWEEN EU MEMBER STATES?**



Apart from power generation, gas in the EU is used heavily to heat buildings. In fact, over 30% of households in the EU are heated using gas¹⁶.

FIG. 22 **GAS CONSUMPTION IN THE EU BY MARKET SEGMENT**



Source: Eurostat

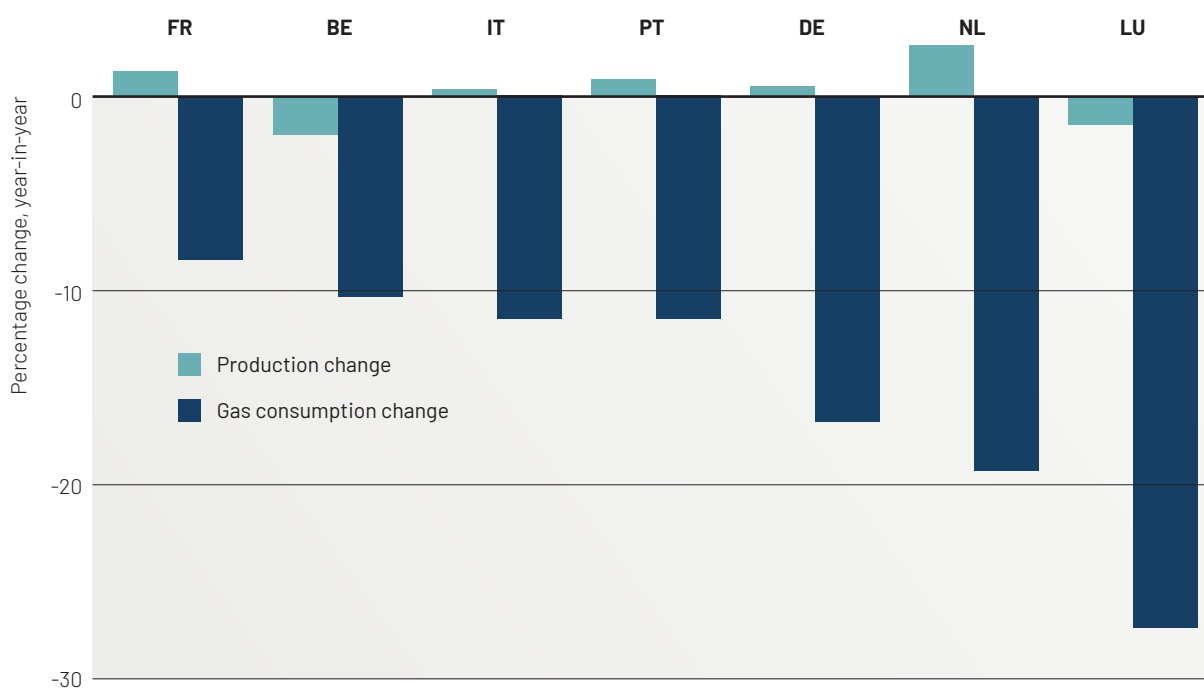
16 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-gas-supply/#0>

The heating demand curve is highly seasonal with gas consumption in winter being roughly 2.5x the level it is in the summer. As such, it can be effectively managed with adequate storage and cross-border flows (as discussed above).

Given that major investments have been made since 2022 to accommodate and integrate alternative sources of gas, the reduction in the role of gas in the EU energy system should be gradual, so that the impact on the EU consumers and the EU's industrial competitiveness can be properly managed¹⁷. A case in point is the final version of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive adopted in May 2024 (as part of the Fit for 55 package) which moderated the previously unrealistic targets that were being proposed in earlier drafts. A more phased approach when it comes to the adoption of heat pumps and biogas to replace natural gas in the EU heating system is essential to ensure public opinion's support for the energy transition.

The final piece of the puzzle is industrial use. Contrary to what was feared in the first months of 2022, a significant reduction in industrial gas consumption has not resulted in a corresponding drop in the overall industrial output.

FIG. 23 **IMPACT OF REDUCED GAS CONSUMPTION IN 2022/23 ON INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT¹⁸**

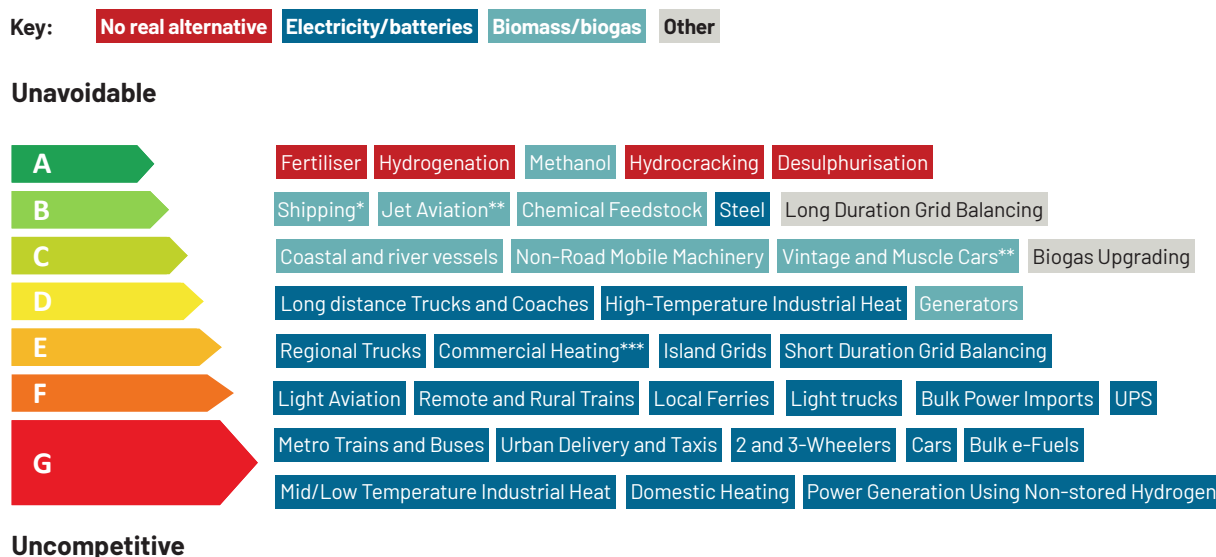


There are, however, significant exceptions – the chemical, iron, and steel sectors. At one point up to 20% of EU's fertiliser production was put on hold. The CEE region is a major fertiliser hub with Poland accounting for 13% of the output¹⁸. In fact, roughly 35% of gas consumed in Poland is used by the industry, primarily by chemical and steel plants (Grupa Azoty is the single biggest consumer of natural gas in the country).

¹⁷ According to certain estimates, by achieving the Fit for 55 and REPowerEU objectives the EU could reduce gas consumption by 1550 TWh; <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe-0>

¹⁸ <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe-0>

This is where hydrogen comes as a potential solution. While certain applications of hydrogen advocated by politicians are more of a 'pipe dream', according to Michael Liebreich, a leading expert on clean energy, fertiliser and chemical feedstock production is exactly where hydrogen could be a viable replacement for natural gas. These sectors should be prioritised by Poland and other EU member states when it comes to investment in hydrogen solutions.

FIG. 24 **HYDROGEN LADDER 5.0**²⁰

Source: Figure Michael Liebreich, Hydrogen Ladder (October 2023)

CONCLUSION

The recommissioning of the Nord Stream gas pipelines poses significant strategic risks that outweigh any potential short-term economic benefits. The pipelines represent a direct threat to Poland's energy security and the broader stability of the EU. Instead of reopening these pipelines, Poland and the EU should focus on enhancing its energy infrastructure, strengthening the EU energy solidarity, and accelerating the transition to low-carbon energy. By doing so, Poland can safeguard its interests and contribute to a more resilient European energy landscape.

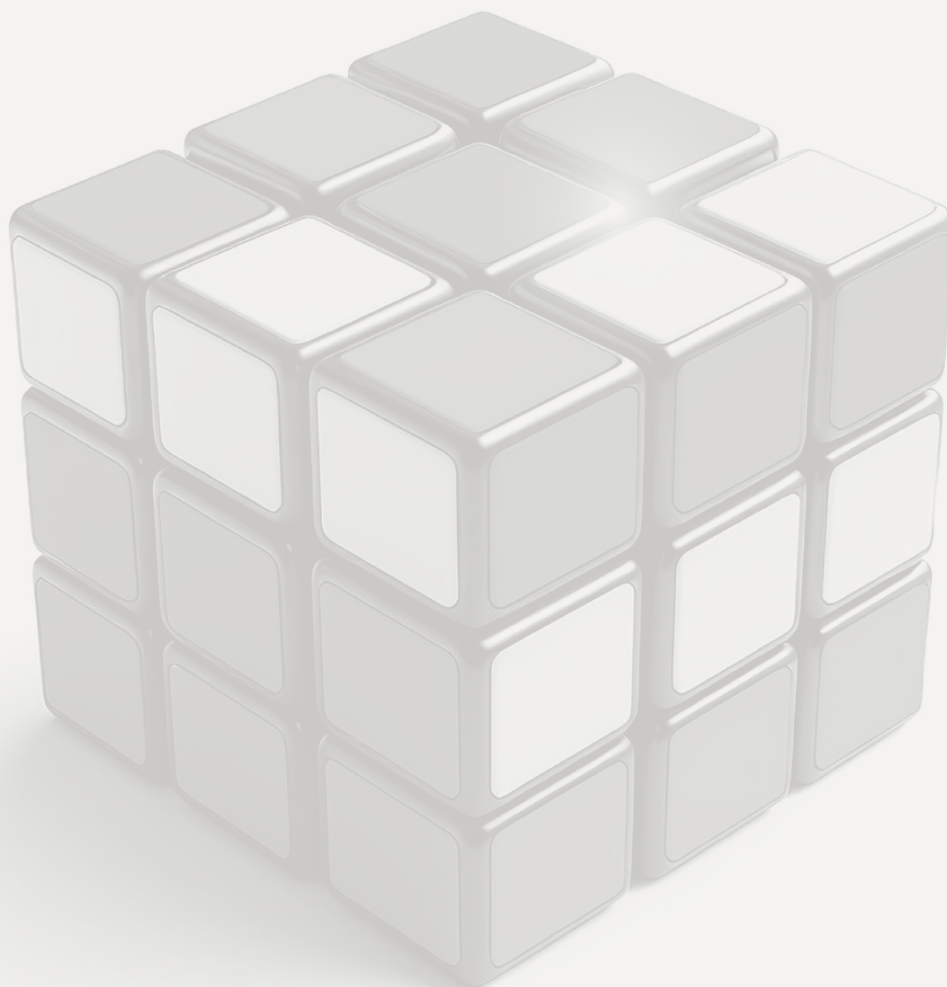
We need a strategic vision for Poland's and the CEE's energy future with a long-term perspective that prioritises energy security, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability. We should therefore reject short-sighted solutions like Nord Stream in favour of building a diversified, innovative, and independent energy system that can withstand future geopolitical and economic challenges.

While the permanent closure of Nord Stream may be bad for Russia, it is definitely good for Poland, good for Central and Eastern European states, and good for the EU as a whole.

¹⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hydrogen-ladder-version-50-michael-liebreich/>
under License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**ENERGY INTERESTS OF POLAND AND HUNGARY
- SHOULD NORD STREAM 2 BE REACTIVATED
IN THE FUTURE? IS IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BLOCK
THE RETURN OF THIS GAS PIPELINE TO EUROPE?**

DR. JÁNOS MATUZ



Poland has consistently opposed the Nord Stream projects, viewing them as contrary to its national interests, while Hungary has maintained a neutral stance. Due to the current geopolitical climate, including sanctions on Russia, it is unlikely that the pipelines will be recommissioned anytime soon. The article highlights wider concerns about the loss of Europe's global competitiveness, especially compared to the US and China, to which high energy prices are unfortunately a major contributor. Both Poland and Hungary are urged to diversify their energy sources and expand renewable energy and nuclear power capacities in response to the present challenges.

NORD STREAM

Poland has always opposed the construction of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines linking Germany to Russia and, as Rafał Libera summarizes in his study of 11 September 2024¹, would consider it contrary to Polish interests to restart them: "The recommissioning of the Nord Stream gas pipelines poses significant strategic risks that outweigh any potential short-term economic benefits."

Hungary has always taken a neutral position on the construction and operation of the Nord Stream pipelines. Germany has the right to decide on its energy mix and the sources (domestic production or imports) of its energy mix, of course taking into account its international commitments, most importantly the sanctions against Russia. Subsection 2 of Article 194 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) declares that it is the Member State's right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy resources, its choice between different energy sources, and the general structure of its energy supply.

I do not think that in the current environment of sanctions, the recommissioning of the Nord Stream pipelines could be on the agenda in the foreseeable future. This would require significant changes in the war in Ukraine, in the international landscape and in the sanction packages currently in place. Hungary has always taken a cautious stance on sanctions against Russia but has not blocked their adoption, and Hungary also voted for them. Hungary has defended and is defending its energy security, and its stance is that the EU should not adopt sanctions that would punish the EU primarily for its own sake and would not contribute in any meaningful way to ending the war.

I do not think that Poland, or even the V4 countries together, would have a significant influence on the recommissioning of the Nord Stream pipelines, just as Poland did not have a significant influence on their

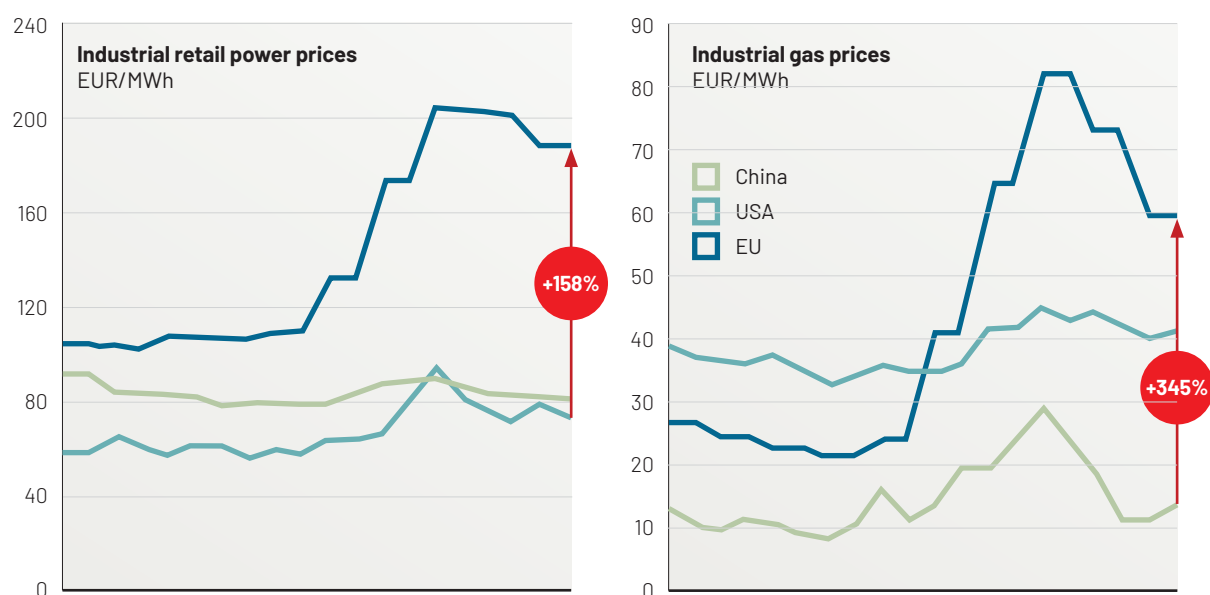
¹ Libera, Rafał: <https://sobieski.org.pl/en/evaluating-the-potential-recommissioning-of-the-nord-stream-1-and-2-gas-pipelines-the-polish-perspective/>, 11 September 2024

construction and management. However, recommissioning is a theoretical issue in the foreseeable future and a lot has to change in the world to get it on the agenda.

It is obvious that the blowing up of the Nord Stream pipelines has caused legal, financial, political, reputational, and every other potential kind of damage to Germany in the first place. Looking at the graph of energy prices, it is also obvious that the war in Ukraine and the replacement of Russian pipeline gas with LNG gas has caused enormous damage to the European Union as a whole. As Mr. Mario Draghi, the former president of the ECB phrased in his Report, which was published in September 2024: "But this source of relatively cheap energy has now disappeared at huge cost to Europe. The EU has lost more than a year of GDP growth while having to re-direct massive fiscal resources to energy subsidies and building new infrastructure for importing liquefied natural gas"².

Electricity prices are 1.58 times higher than those in the US and China, natural gas prices are 3.45 times higher in the EU than in the US and we are happy that the prices have fallen significantly from their peaks.

FIG. 1 **PRICES IN THE EU, USA AND CHINA**



Source: European Commission, 2024. Based on Eurostat (EU), EIA (US) and CEIC (China), 2024 (Mario Draghi: The future of European competitiveness, September 2024)

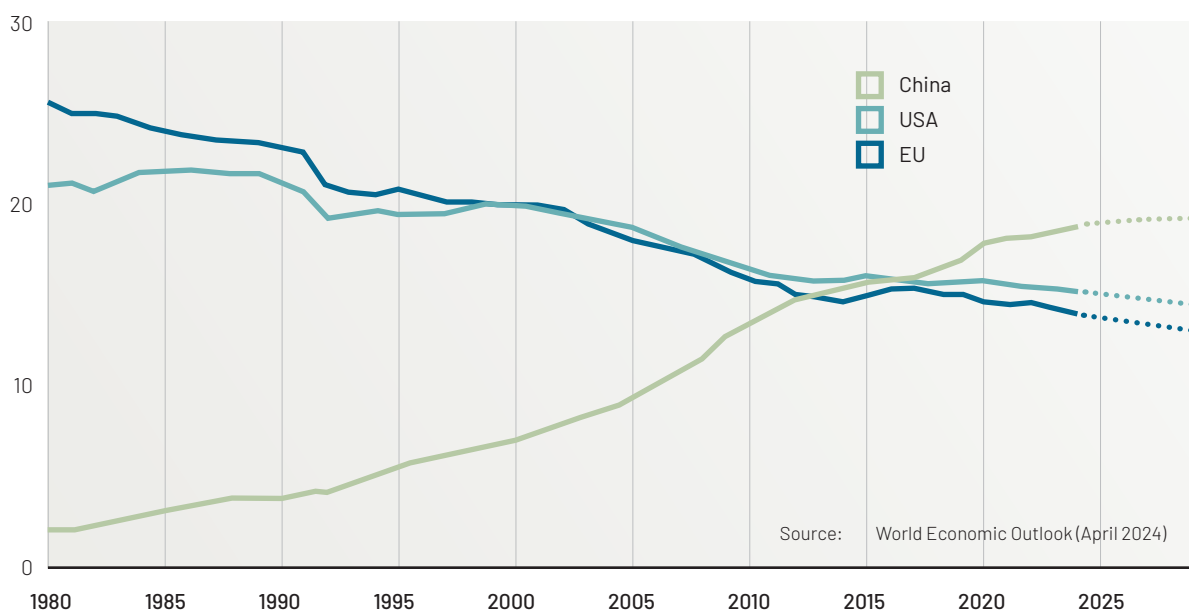
Therefore, unfortunately, it is not the future of the Nord Stream pipelines (over which we have no real impact) that we need to worry about, but the future of Europe! It is in the interest of Poland, Hungary and all Member States to have a strong Europe. Unfortunately, today the opposite is true: Europe has perhaps never been so weak. And unfortunately, the trend is also very negative: Europe is getting weaker every day, while our competitors, the United States and China, are getting stronger!

FALLING COMPETITIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY IN EUROPE

“Across different metrics, a wide gap in GDP has opened up between the EU and the US, driven mainly by a more pronounced slowdown in productivity growth in Europe. Europe’s households have paid the price in foregone living standards. On a per capita basis, real disposable income has grown almost twice as much in the US as in the EU since 2000³”. Mr. Draghi in his report raised the alarm: we are lagging behind and need to improve our competitiveness mainly by raising productivity! He prescribed three remedies: (i) Europe shall accelerate innovation and find new growth engines; (ii) Europe must bring down high energy prices while continuing to decarbonize and shift to a circular economy; (iii) Europe can no longer rely on others for its security. He is right in this respect, but we are at least two decades too late, and we need to catch up now!

The largest economy in the world today is China with about 19.01% of world GDP. The United States is the second largest, with 15.5% of world GDP. The EU was in third place, with 14.7%. (Based on PPP standard.). In 1980, the EU was the largest economy with its 25.84% share, the US was the second with 21.31% and China had a 2.26% share.⁴ China passed us in 2017, and all future estimates indicate the growing share of China in the world GDP. And, unfortunately, not only in GDP but in many other areas the Chinese share is growing, such as research and innovation, commerce, and defense. Neither the Member States, nor the EU is able to defend itself, we all rely on NATO, and within NATO, primarily the US military forces. This fact in itself raises the question of the sovereignty of the Member States and the EU, but this topic is beyond the scope of this article. At this point, it should be noted that Poland spends the most on defense as a proportion of GDP in NATO, 4.12%, while, still, one quarter of the 32 NATO Members are below the expected 2% defense spending⁵.

FIG. 2 EU, USA AND CHINA GDP BASED ON PPP (PERCENT OF WORLD)



3 Mario Draghi: *The future of European competitiveness*, September 2024

4 Data source: IMF Datamapper

5 *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)*, Press Release, NATO, 12 June 2024

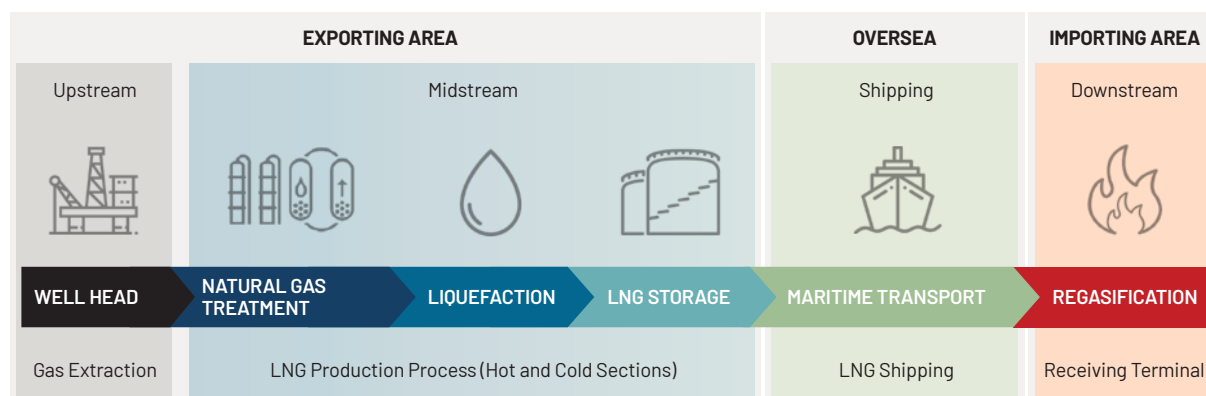
High energy prices are hindering economic growth and investment, increasing the exodus of Energy-intensive industries (EIs)(chemicals, basic metals, non-metallic minerals, and paper), which can lead to a vicious circle.

The EU' Green Deal is far more ambitious than the non-binding aims of the US and China, which results in higher investment costs in the EU than in the US and China, and naturally these higher investment costs burden mainly the EU companies. Additionally, the EU is the only major player that applies significant CO2 prices. As a result, the EU must focus more than ever on balancing its decarbonization goals with competitiveness.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION OF LNG VS PIPELINE NATURAL GAS

The EU is the biggest global gas and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) importer but a systematic review for the sustainability of LNG has not been in focus unfortunately in the Western Hemisphere. There is no holistic life cycle environmental, economic, and social impact assessment for the LNG industry considering the entire value chain activities from gas extraction/processing to final consumption⁶. In 2022, US LNG shipments were around 50% more expensive than average pipeline gas imported into the EU, but we do not know the environmental impact difference between the US LNG shipments and the Russian pipeline natural gas import. Mitigating methane emissions is vital in meeting global climate targets, but there is a lack of understanding of emissions and abatement opportunities to enable this. The natural gas supply chain is a key emission source, where methane emissions from liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipping have just started to be measured⁷.

FIG. 3 **LNG LIFE CYCLE**



Source: Hussein Al-Yafei, Saleh Aseel, Murat Kucukvar, Nuri C. Onat, Ahmed Al-Sulaiti, Abdulla Al-Hajri: A systematic review for the sustainability of global liquefied natural gas, Energy Strategy Reviews, 2021

6 Hussein Al-Yafei, Saleh Aseel, Murat Kucukvar, Nuri C. Onat, Ahmed Al-Sulaiti, Abdulla Al-Hajri: A systematic review for sustainability of global liquefied natural gas, Energy Strategy Reviews, 2021

7 Paul Balcombe, Dalia A. Heggo, and Matthew Harrison: Total Methane and CO2 Emissions from Liquefied Natural Gas, Carrier Ships: The First Primary Measurements, Environmental Science and Technology, 2022

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Nuclear energy contributes both to the energy sovereignty of the EU and its climate goals. These two factors gave a new impetus to the nuclear industry in the EU in recent years, which it deserved a lot. There are 100 reactor units in 12 Member States with an average age of 38 years⁸. In 2023, nuclear reactors contributed 23% of the electricity production in the EU, while in 2004 they produced 34% of the electricity. Out of the 100, there are 56 reactors in France, while the last three nuclear power plants were shut down on 15 April 2023⁹ in the largest economy of the EU, in Germany. France intends to increase its nuclear power plant fleet in the future, while Germany has chosen to cover its energy needs with the increase of the capacity of renewables. There are 59 nuclear reactors under construction in the World, 25 are built in China, and only three in Europe (France, Slovakia, and Hungary). There are serious plans to build new reactors in Poland but we have to note that the average time to build nuclear power plants was over 10 years in 2023 and construction periods are continuously growing.

KEY FACTORS IN ENERGY POLICY

Whether a country has access to the sea or not is (also) a key factor in energy policy. Hungary is one of the five EU Member States (along with Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Luxembourg) that does not have one. This is obviously a serious disadvantage in terms of energy sovereignty. Poland has had an LNG terminal in Świnoujście since 2015 and it plans to finish its floating FSRU (Floating Storage Regasification Unit) in the Gdańsk region in 2027/2028. In addition to the LNG terminals provided by the seaports, Poland has access to the North Sea gas fields through the Baltic Pipe with a capacity of 10 bcm per year since 27 September 2022, one day after the explosions of Nord Stream 1 and 2. The Baltic Pipe Project was recognised as a Project of Common Interest of the European Union. With this successful diversification, Poland is able to import natural gas from Norway and Russia through Baltic Pipe and Yamal and from any LNG exporter in the World.

In terms of energy policy, Hungary has the advantage of being in the middle of Europe and having seven neighbours. Hungary has bidirectional interconnection points with Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as a unidirectional entry point from Austria. Our disadvantage is the existing limits of capacities. To develop interconnectors and establish new capacities, the expansion of both the Hungary-Slovakia and the Romania-Hungary interconnectors became part of the latest, fifth edition European Union list of Projects of Common Interest (PCI). Regarding the Romania-Hungary interconnector, expansion of its existing capacity in the direction of Romania-Hungary increased to 2.6 bcm in 2023. Upgrading to a level of 4.4 bcm could make a significant contribution to Hungarian supply source diversification efforts since in the mid-term either Romanian Black Sea gas, gas from Azerbaijan, or Greek and Turkish LNG may arrive in Hungary via this route. Slovenia is Hungary's only neighbouring country without a direct natural gas interconnector to Hungary. Negotiations on the Hungary-Slovenia project for a new Hungary-Slovenia interconnection are ongoing between the two countries¹⁰.

8 Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

9 The nuclear phase-out in Germany, 31 January 2024, Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management, Germany

10 Natural Gas Transmission - Natural Gas Transmission - Our Businesses - MOL Group

FIG. 4 **NATURAL GAS PIPELINE SYSTEM OF HUNGARY**



The energy mix of Poland and Hungary is very different from each other. The share of natural gas is more than double that of Poland's, while Poland has the highest solid fuels ratio in the EU.

TAB. 1 **SHARE OF ENERGY PRODUCTS
IN TOTAL FINAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION, 2021 (IN %)¹¹**

	Poland	Hungary	EU
Total petroleum products	35.3%	30.4%	34.6%
Electricity	16.7%	19.1%	22.8%
Natural gas	15.1%	32.6%	23.3%
Renewable energy	12.1%	10.9%	11.8%
Derived heat	8.1%	5.7%	4.9%
Solid fuels	12.7%	1.4%	2.6%

Source: Eurostat¹¹

¹¹ Shedding light on energy in the EU – 2023 edition – Eurostat (europa.eu)

Hungary produces most of its electricity from its nuclear power plant (44.3%), while Poland makes it via fossil fuels (82.5%). Since Hungary is a landlocked country in the Carpathian Basin, its wind energy potential is relatively low, while wind is the strongest renewable energy source in Poland. Poland has also become a frontrunner of solar energy in the CEE region, it made huge investments in solar energy and through the first seven months of 2023, solar-powered electricity generation in Poland was 11.3 Terawatt hours (TWh) and was 5.8 TWh in Hungary¹²).

TAB. 2 **PRODUCTION OF ELECTRICITY BY SOURCE, 2021 (IN %)**¹³

	Poland	Hungary	EU
Fossil fuels	82.5%	35.5%	36.5%
Nuclear	0.0%	44.3%	25.3%
Wind	9.1%	1.8%	13.4%
Hydro	1.3%	0.6%	12.1%
Biofuels	4.3%	5.7%	5.3%
Solar	2.2%	10.5%	5.7%
Other	0.6%	1.6%	1.8%

Source: Eurostat¹³

Both countries are making serious efforts to increase their renewable energy sources. Poland plans to build nuclear power plants for 2035, Hungary works on the lifetime extension of its Paks Nuclear Power Plant 1 and intends to build Paks Nuclear Power Plant 2 for 2033/2034. However, a country's energy mix cannot be changed overnight, but persistent and consistent professional work and a broad social consensus, regardless of changes in government, can change it substantially in the long term. Now the big question is – how quickly can we make the change? As Mr. Draghi emphasized – and I agree with him in this respect – the EU faces an existential challenge now. In order to raise productivity, which is the key to success, „Europe must bring down high energy prices”. Therefore Poland, Hungary, and all other Member States shall do everything to bring down the high energy prices to handle the existential challenge we are facing.

12 <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/poland-hungary-become-key-new-drivers-europes-solar-growth-maguire-2024-08-20/#:~:text=Both%20Poland%20and%20Hungary%20-%20the>

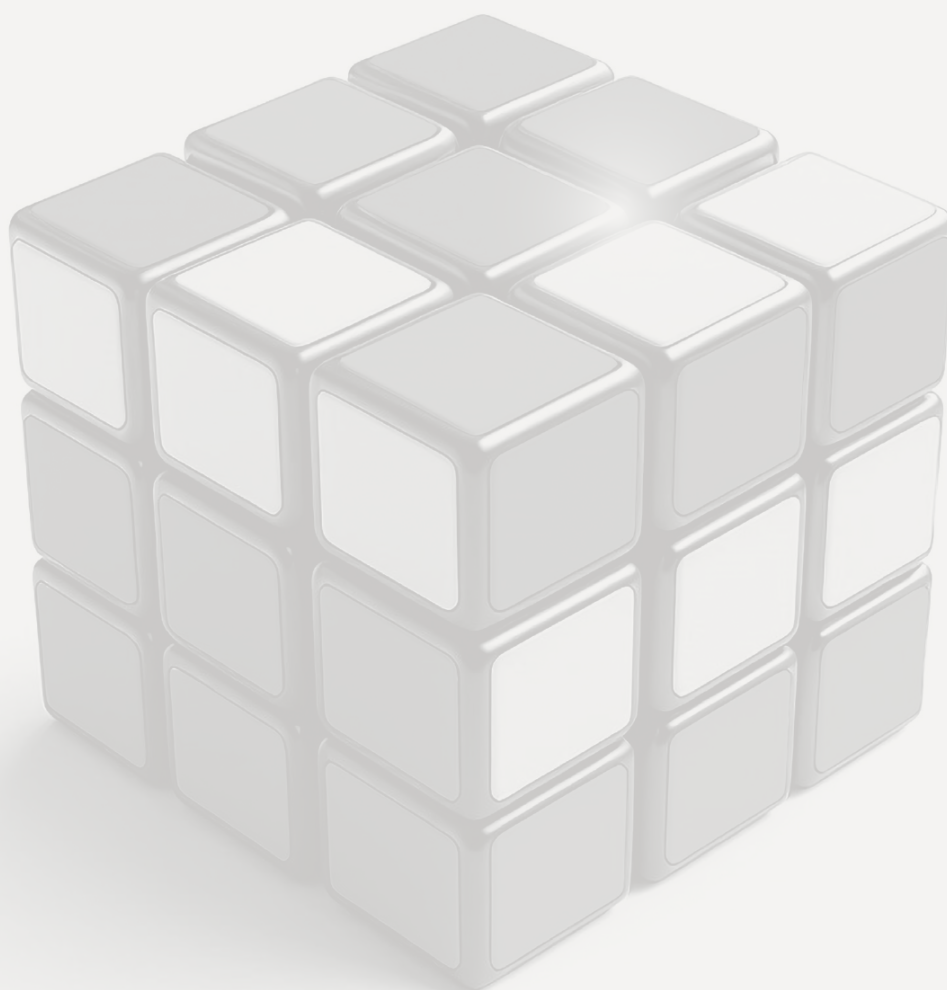
13 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/energy-2023>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Neither the V4 together, nor the V4 individually, have any meaningful influence on the Nord Stream project, nor did they have any when it was built and put into operation. Moreover, I do not consider its relaunch a realistic option in the current international context. On the other hand, Europe's competitiveness gap with the US and China is very worrying and Draghi's expression of an existential challenge is not at all an overstatement. At current European energy prices, it is not possible to produce competitively and the longer they stay with us, the worse the consequence will be. Therefore, reducing energy prices is in the interest of all Member States, including Poland and Hungary.
- 2 The primary interests of both Poland and Hungary are (i) to expand all their energy networks and their capacities to diversify supply and to increase the security of supply; (ii) to increase the share of renewable energy sources; (iii) to develop their national energy networks; (iv) to develop their nuclear power plants. On these issues, there is a need for a regular exchange of views among decision-makers, experts, and academics.

SEARCHING FOR SYNERGY BETWEEN THE HUNGARIAN AND POLISH ENERGY POLICIES – NUCLEAR POWER AS A POTENTIAL AREA FOR STRENGTHENED COOPERATION

URSZULA KUCZYŃSKA



When it comes to meeting climate goals, Hungary is one of the EU leaders. This is largely due to the structure of the Hungarian energy mix, in which nuclear energy plays a huge – and growing – role. Thanks to its position as a frontrunner in this EU priority area, Hungary retains a negotiating margin within the EU that allows it to pursue its multi-vector foreign and economic policy. Poland should be inspired by Hungarian solutions and the direction of its energy and environmental transformation, drawing on Hungary’s experience also in the area of nuclear energy. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that Hungarian energy policy is still based on close cooperation with Russia, recognised unanimously by most other NATO and EU countries as a potential threat. Therefore, the enticement and strengthening of cooperation between Hungary and Poland must be separated from issues related to the applied technologies, and focus needs to be placed on cooperation among industrial actors as well as regulatory, financial, and organisational issues, which are the key to the successful implementation of infrastructure projects, including nuclear projects.

For every independent and self-determining state in the world, the energy generation sector is of utmost strategic importance. It is a sector that is subservient to all others but, at the same time, allows for their existence and development.

Energy supply and consumption per capita correlate strongly with living standards^{1 2} and drive the economic development of regions³ and countries^{4 5}. Accounting for the present trend driving the electrification of new activity areas, such as individual transportation, and how much electric energy is required to apply the digital solutions that are becoming mainstream as well as the rising popularity of AI applications to perform tasks of increasing complexity, this relationship may only be strengthened.

For this very reason, the vast majority of countries strive to maximise their energy security, i.e. to guarantee their ability to meet domestic energy demand uninterruptedly and continuously, the elements of which are energy independence and diversification of generation sources.

1 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421513006447>

2 https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Variables-reflecting-socioeconomic-status-and-standard-of-living-are-strongly-correlated_fig3_225183204

3 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276497630_Energy_and_Economic_Growth_Is_There_a_Connection_Energy_Supply_Threats_Revisited

4 <https://robertbryce.substack.com/p/powering-the-unplugged>

5 <https://robertbryce.substack.com/p/powering-the-unplugged>

MAIN EU LIMITATIONS

The present EU energy policy is shaped by two key factors. The first is the requirement of decarbonisation, driving – through a system of charges and taxes – the need for modernisation in the form of resignation from generation technologies based on burning fossil fuels. The second is Russia's war with Ukraine, which has provided an additional incentive to accelerate and increase pressure for such defined modernisation. The imposition of sanctions on the purchases of raw materials from Russia meant that energy dependence on coal, gas, and oil – most of which before 2022 largely came from Russian suppliers in the EU market, had to be reduced. It also forced to move away from the use of Russian nuclear fuel in European nuclear reactors, including reactors of Russian design, as well as freezing, of not abandoning⁶, cooperation with the Russians on nuclear projects in Europe. Suffice it to say that WVER-type facilities operating in the Ukraine⁷, the Czech Republic⁸, or Slovakia⁹ have all switched to American nuclear fuel produced in Sweden.

Hungary has not followed its European partners pursuing its own multi-vector foreign and economic policy instead. Hungary opted to minimise the risk of an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine by, among other things, consistently opposing the economic sanctions imposed on Russia. Moreover, in terms of economic sanctions, the Hungarian government managed to negotiate an exception: in exchange for the Hungarian vote in favour of sanctions on the import of Russian natural gas¹⁰, Hungary was given the green light to expand the Paks nuclear power plant in cooperation with Rosatom. Two new reactors of the III+ generations built in the VVER-1200 technology¹¹ will double the installed capacity of the plant. If one takes into account that the Paks NPP already covers more than 40% of the country's domestic electric energy demand, it becomes clear that the implementation of this project will give Hungary and its economy a huge boost of – obviously – energy. It is the flagship infrastructural project of Victor Orban's cabinet. More interestingly, the forward march of nuclear power in Hungary may not stop there. Plans to build another facility, an SMR reactor, also in cooperation with Russia are already taking shape¹².

THE GAP IN STARTING POSITIONS

The Polish power generation may envy Hungary their results. The sector's GH emissions are well below the European average (181 gCO₂/kWh in 2022 to 265 gCO₂/kWh in 2022) and well below the Polish (681 gCO₂/kWh in 2022)¹³. Hungary was also one of the first EU countries to commit to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, formulating its energy policy accordingly and aiming to achieve 90% of energy production from low-carbon sources (new nuclear plants and RES) by 2030¹⁴. Energy prices, both wholesale and retail, are also much lower in Hungary. This is not difficult though, given that prices in Poland are among the highest in the EU (next to Italy and Ireland), burdening Poland with the risk of losing foreign investment, among other things^{15 16}.

6 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/finland-signals-russian-backed-nuclear-project-faces-halt>

7 <https://www.wsj.com/world/the-american-company-trying-to-keep-ukraines-nuclear-reactors-online-e636917a>

8 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/czechia-replaces-russian-nuclear-fuel-imports-with-us-imports/>

9 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/slovakia-to-continue-de-russification-of-nuclear-fuel/>

10 <https://babel.ua/en/news/108352-hungary-agreed-to-new-sanctions-against-the-russian-federation-in-exchange-for-unhindered-construction-of-the-npp-by-rosatom>

11 <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-07-04/russias-nuclear-project-hungary-frances-growing-role>

12 <https://dailynewshungary.com/russia-may-build-a-third-nuclear-power-plant/>

13 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/indicators/greenhouse-gas-emission-intensity-of-1>

14 <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/hungary-energy>

15 <https://wysokienapiecie.pl/91533-polska-ma-najdrozszy-prad-w-europie-na-import-wydamy-3-mld-zl/>

16 <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/polska-ma-najdrozszy-prad-w-europie-przemysl-podnosi-alarm-to-grozi-katastrofa-7056852056554016a.html>

The ease and speed with which Hungary hits the targets of the European energy and ecological transition, which are and will remain one of the EU's highest priorities in the coming years, gives Budapest a certain margin to use when negotiating other issues. Victor Orban's cabinet is obliquely making use of this margin by pursuing a multi-vector policy, which goes against the grain of the virtually unanimous European policy of economic and political ostracism towards Putin's Russia. The negotiated exception for the expansion of the Paks NPP is the best example.

The reason for the disparity between GH emissions from the Hungarian and the Polish energy sector as well as the glaring difference in energy prices becomes clear when one looks at the energy mix structure in both countries. The large share of nuclear power, biofuels, and waste in the Hungarian energy mix has for years meant low dependence on natural gas, oil, and coal, even if these still come from Russia. Such an outcome is the result of a simple strategic decision taken by Hungary decades ago and analogous to that taken by France¹⁷ in the 1970s. Faced with a lack of its own fossil fuel resources, Hungary decided to produce energy differently, taking advantage of developments in global nuclear technology.

The fundamental difference between a nuclear power plant – even if built by a Russian company using Russian technology – and imported fossil fuels is precisely this: a nuclear power plant will always produce energy on its site, supplying the host country's energy grid. Nuclear fuel can be safely accumulated and stored to create a stockpile sufficient to cover its needs for years to come. Nuclear fuel can also be purchased from a variety of suppliers without depending on any geographical direction. Meanwhile, fossil fuel power plants will stop producing energy when the fuel supply to its boiler runs out. Neither natural gas, coal nor oil can be stockpiled in quantities sufficient to keep the plants running for several years.

NUCLEAR POWER ABSENT FROM THE POLISH ENERGY MIX

Nuclear power will only supply the Polish national grid in about a decade. The Polish Nuclear Power Programme assumes the construction of 9 GW of installed capacity in two locations¹⁸. However, a number of nuclear projects not covered by the PNPP and led by some local governments¹⁹, joint-stock companies²⁰, private entities²¹ and state-owned companies²² alike, have sprung into existence in Poland. One of the projects provides for the construction of a full-scale nuclear reactor, the others foresee implementation of the entire range of SMR technologies offered by a number of potential suppliers, with GE-Hitachi's BWRX-300 technology being the black horse. Assuming that all of these projects are implemented, they will add a total of 12.5 GW of nuclear power to the Polish grid and, according to some estimates, there is still room for more in the Polish electric grid. The Hungarians are also planning to build a small SMR reactor, in cooperation with the Russians²³.

APPROACHES TO NUCLEAR POWER IN HUNGARY AND POLAND

The Hungarian and the Polish approach to nuclear is – simultaneously – very similar and also very different.

17 <https://energetyka24.com/atom/analizy-i-komentarze/plan-messmera-jak-francja-zostala-atomowym-mocarstwem>

18 <https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/program-polskiej-energetyki-jadrowej>

19 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/pod-legnica-ma-powstac-polska-elektrownia-jadrowa-podpisano-porozumienie/kpv9mjg>

20 <https://www.zepak.com.pl/pl/o-firmie/biuro-prasowe/aktualnosci/15212-pge-pak-energia-jadrowa-otrzymala-decyzje-zasadnicza-w-sprawie-budowy-elektrowni-jadrowej.html>

21 <https://osge.com/>

22 <https://forsal.pl/biznes/energetyka/artykuly/9496707,projekt-smr-w-kghm-wciaz-aktywny-zaskakujacy-zwrot-w-strategii-na-naj.html>

23 <https://dailynewshungary.com/russia-may-build-a-third-nuclear-power-plant/>

Poland sold one of the reactors to be placed in the unfinished Żarnowiec NPP to Hungary in 1992, after abandoning the Żarnowiec NPP project. It is still used as a training centre at the Paks NPP²⁴.

Both the authorities and the societies of both countries are clearly convinced of the legitimacy of nuclear energy in their energy mixes^{25 26}.

However, there is also a fundamental difference in this regard: a difference between the pragmatic approach of the Hungarians, experienced in the implementation and operation of nuclear facilities, and the more idealistic rather than practical or factual approach of the Poles, inexperienced in the matter. In Poland, nuclear projects are still plagued by an inability to consistently implement commitments once made.

ROOM FOR COOPERATION

Both parties, Hungary and Poland, would benefit from cooperation between nuclear regulators, central administration units responsible for nuclear energy management as well as organisations implementing nuclear projects. However, such cooperation would require remaining at a technology-neutral level: Poland excludes the participation of Russian entities in nuclear projects on its territory and had made this decision for political reasons and due to national security concerns long before Russia's attack on Ukraine. From a strategic point of view, however, it would be valuable for the Polish side to become more familiar with Hungarian legal conditions as well as financial and organisational solutions applied to nuclear as this may help overcome the mode of thinking of nuclear projects as something too big for us to afford and too complicated to manage in Poland.

Such cooperation would also provide both partners with the opportunity to improve their competences and develop their human capital in the nuclear field. Understanding and familiarising oneself with solutions applied in other countries of the region is valuable knowledge, which, due to certain similarities in social attitudes and conditions, and political and organisational cultures, may find practical implications for project implementation.

Nuclear power, however, is about much more than building the reactor itself. Almost 80 Polish companies operate in the global nuclear power market as suppliers of various goods and services²⁷. Establishing contacts between these entities and those operating in the same market, but coming from Hungary, could be both a development impulse for the domestic industry in Budapest and Warsaw, and a way to broaden the pool of potential partners in the nuclear projects being implemented in both countries.

While Hungary is much further down the successful road to energy and ecological transition than Poland, thus a source of positive examples and inspiration, Hungary has much to gain by strengthening cooperation with Poland as its partner within regional organisations and within the EU, where both countries have common interests and socio-economic battles to win together.

24 https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elektrownia_J%C4%85drowa_%E2%80%9E%C5%BBarnowiec%E2%80%9D

25 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1359745/hungary-support-for-nuclear-power/>

26 <https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/kolejny-rekord-niemal-90-polakow-za-budowa-elektrowni-jadrowych-w-polsce>

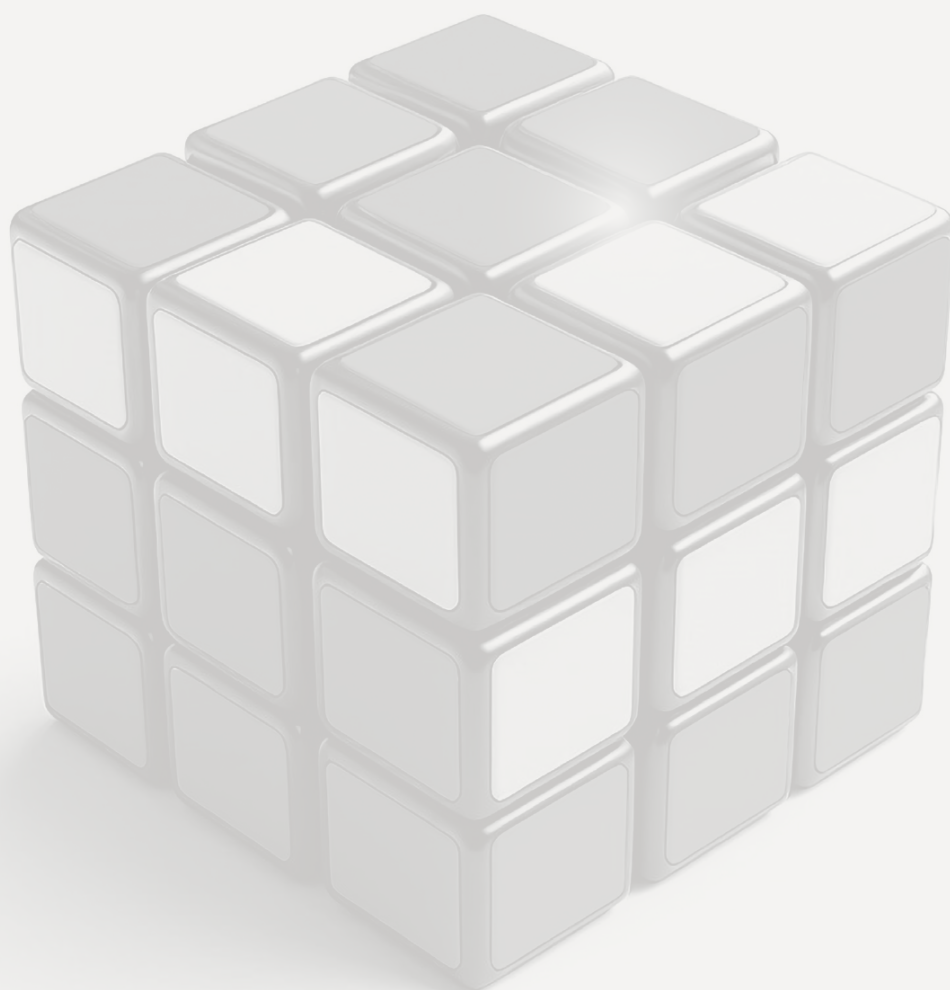
27 <https://www.gov.pl/web/polski-atom/nowy-katalog-polskich-firm-dla-sektora-jadrowego>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Establish and strengthen cooperation between central administration units responsible for nuclear power projects, nuclear regulators, and organisations planning implementation and implementing nuclear projects in order to familiarise themselves with the organisational and financial solutions applied;
- 2 Create a cooperation platform for Hungarian and Polish industry representatives present in the global nuclear market in order to expand the pool of potential partners for nuclear projects in both countries and mutually support the development of national organisational and industrial capacities in this area;
- 3 Build and develop competences of a pool of experts familiar with solutions applied by other countries in the region, a knowledge important due to similarities in social attitudes, political, and organisational cultures;

THE DUAL CHALLENGE OF THE POLISH ENERGY SYSTEM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FUTURE SUPPLY CHAINS

GÁBOR PAPP



Geopolitical turmoil hand in hand with the accelerating green transition had challenged European countries unprecedentedly. Poland has its unique position within these global circumstances, since coal production and consumption is still an important factor in the country's energy mix. At the same time both renewables and nuclear energy pose as a valuable substitution with their inherent advantages and disadvantages. One of the key aspects is the potential upcoming changes related to Poland's supply chains in the upcoming years for which the country must prepare. Hungary with its experiences regarding nuclear power could be an exceptional partner for Poland to achieve its goals.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has brought the question of energy again to the centre of attention. Within a short time, the EU had come up with the Versailles Declaration¹ which had already contained the issue of energy. Then in the framework of the REPowerEU Plan², the EU declared to reduce its dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the clean transition. However, not much has been told so far about nuclear energy in the framework of this strategy. However, some recent events like the creation of the Nuclear Alliance in 2023 or the first Nuclear Energy Summit held in Brussels in March 2024 may foreshadow that some changes would be about to arrive.

Even though nuclear energy has several advantages (like emission-free electricity, long-term reliable operation, system stability³ and is not or at least far less affected by weather conditions like solar or wind energy production) the possible increase in both interest and demand could have led to consequences which may pose challenges like buildout and/or improvement of electricity grids, deployment of new technologies or the transformation of supply chains.

POLISH NUCLEAR ENERGY ASPIRATIONS

Green transition aspirations and recent geopolitical events like the Russian-Ukrainian war and the tensions around the Red Sea pose unprecedented challenges for European countries in terms of energy security. Poland has a unique situation between these countries since it is the biggest hard coal consumer accounting for more than 40% of the EU's overall consumption⁴. Even though both Poland's hard coal production and electricity production from coal had dropped, the latter by a record amount in 2023, hard coal still accounted for 61% of Poland's electricity production⁵. To decrease and replace this quantity with other

1 Consilium. Versailles Declaration. Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government. Versailles. 11. March. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54773/20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf>

2 European Commission. REPowerEU Plan. Brussels. 18. May. 2022. Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:fc930f14-d7ae-11ec-a95f-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

3 World Nuclear Association. Economics of Nuclear Power. Last update: 29. September. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/economic-aspects/economics-of-nuclear-power>

4 Eurostat. Coal production and consumption statistics. July. 2024. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Coal_production_and_consumption_statistics#Consumption_and_production_of_hard_coal

5 Dr Paweł Czyżak. Changing course: Poland's energy in 2023. EMBER. 7. February. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://ember-climate.org/insights/in-brief/changing-course-polands-energy-in-2023/>

resources is probably Poland's biggest chance and challenge at the same time from the energetic point of view since renewables and nuclear energy both come up as a potential substitute with their respective advantages and difficulties.

According to the latest related document the Energy Policy of Poland Until 2040 adopted in 2021, "The first unit ... of the first nuclear power plant is scheduled to be commissioned in 2033. In the following years, five more units are planned to be commissioned at intervals of 2-3 years"⁶. Related technology provider was not explicitly appointed in the document, but currently, from the announcement of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in October 2022, it seems that Poland's first nuclear reactors going to be Westinghouse's AP1000 models. Constructions are destined to start in 2026 in the Pomerania province⁷.

RENEWABLES...

Renewables are also an important part of the cited document for enhancing energy security and generating economic competitiveness in the long run since "the use of RES will result in the decrease in the wholesale prices of energy, as well as the reduction of costs accompanying the emission of pollutants"⁸. Power generation from renewables hit a record-high percentage in Poland in 2023 accounting for 27% of total production⁹. More than half of this was produced by onshore wind power, while photovoltaics was responsible for 25%¹⁰. Photovoltaics deployment had been accelerated during the last years¹¹ while significant offshore wind power infrastructures planned to be installed as early as 2026¹².

... AND THEIR CHALLENGES

The growing share of renewables within electricity production is a welcome change from the climate point of view, however, a further increase of RES accompanied by the appearance of nuclear energy would pose a significant challenge to Polish energy systems by the early 2030s for which the country must prepare in advance. According to Forum Energii's report, "over 90% of offshore wind turbine components installed in Europe in 2019 were manufactured on our continent"¹³. While this number may look pleasant at first, it has to be noted that the market of permanent magnets which are essential to these infrastructures is heavily dominated by China, similar to the rare earth market itself, of which dysprosium, neodymium, praseodymium, and terbium are essential components of these magnets. Even though Europe has quite a good market share on the different levels of the global supply chains regarding wind power infrastructures face to face with China for example compared to photovoltaics,¹⁴ China's overall dominance in both sectors should implicate that growing need and therefore growing deployment of renewables comes sooner or later with higher Chinese influences as well. From this latest point of view

6 Republic of Poland. Ministry of Climate and Environment. Energy Policy of Poland until 2040. 2021. p.57. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.pl/web/climate/energy-policy-of-poland-until-2040-epp2040>

7 World Nuclear Association. Nuclear Power in Poland. Last update: 7. May. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://wna.origindigital.co/information-library/country-profiles/countries-o-s/poland>

8 Republic of Poland. Ministry of Climate and Environment. Energy Policy of Poland until 2040. 2021. p.60. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.pl/web/climate/energy-policy-of-poland-until-2040-epp2040>

9 Forum Energii. Energy Transition in Poland. 2024 Edition. June. 2024. p.33. Retrieved from: <https://www.forum-energii.eu/en/transformacja-edycja-2024>

10 Forum Energii. Energy Transition in Poland. 2024 Edition. June. 2024. p.36. Retrieved from: <https://www.forum-energii.eu/en/transformacja-edycja-2024>

11 Forum Energii. Energy Transition in Poland. 2024 Edition. June. 2024. p.30. Retrieved from: <https://www.forum-energii.eu/en/transformacja-edycja-2024>

12 Forum Energii. A race against time When will Polish offshore wind energy come into play? 20. May. 2024. p.4. Retrieved from: <https://www.forum-energii.eu/en/offshore-stan-gry>

13 Forum Energii. A race against time When will Polish offshore wind energy come into play? 20. May. 2024. p.3. Retrieved from: <https://www.forum-energii.eu/en/offshore-stan-gry>

14 Carrara et al. Supply chain analysis and material demand forecast in strategic technologies and sectors in the EU – A foresight study. JRC Science for policy report. 2023. p.46, 62. Retrieved from: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC132889>

deploying nuclear energy could be a tool for mitigating further Chinese influence as well, whereas, as it stands, nuclear technology and infrastructure will be provided by a friendly country or at least not by a systemic rival just like the EU refers to China¹⁵.

At the same time, the parallel use of renewables and nuclear technology for energy production could pose some internal systemic challenges, for example related to the economy and raw materials. According to the World Nuclear Association "The integration of intermittent renewables with conventional base-load generation is a major challenge facing policymakers in the EU..."¹⁶. One of the key aspects is related to wholesale market prices. "At high levels of renewable generation ... the nuclear capacity factor is reduced and the volatility of wholesale prices greatly increases whilst the average wholesale price level falls. The increased penetration of intermittent renewables thereby greatly reduces the financial viability of nuclear generation in wholesale markets where intermittent renewable energy capacity is significant"¹⁷.

Moreover, serious grid expansions - which look to be the case in Poland in the future - need raw materials as well, especially copper. Poland is the biggest copper producer within the EU¹⁸, but it is still an open question whether the country would be able to meet its growing demand internally or whether copper import would rise which may lead to growing raw material dependency as well.

What makes the whole question even more complicated is the question of Small Nuclear Reactors (SMRs). Thanks to its many advantages¹⁹ and the fact that the technology has not economically scaled up yet, there is an observed kind of rush between actors to become one of the early providers and, parallelly with this, investigations are ongoing in many countries for mapping the chance of the technology's implementation. From this point of view, it is an important development that in 2023, ORLEN Synthos Green Energy managed to reach an agreement for joint investment in developing SMR technology with American and Canadian companies²⁰. Not only because Poland may be able to deploy a fleet of SMRs in the future but also because the country would gain valuable experiences and therefore could potentially become an important actor in this sector in the future, which in turn may bear European-wide impacts.

Finally, by applying nuclear energy, uranium supply and nuclear waste management are also factors and further aspects of the supply chains that need to be considered. Lastly, another aspect that has to be taken into account is the social acceptance of nuclear energy. Even though according to the findings, public support has been quite high²¹ in Poland recently, the country has no experience regarding the coexistence of (local) society and nearby nuclear power plants. Here comes the territory where Hungary could serve as an exceptional partner to share its own experience about this, since in the region of Paks local communities and the power plant have lived in a prosperous coexistence for more than 40 years²².

15 European Commission. EU-China – A strategic outlook. Strasbourg. 12.Mars.2019 Retrieved from: <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>

16 World Nuclear Association. Economics of Nuclear Power. Last update: 29. September. 2023 Retrieved from: <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/economic-aspects/economics-of-nuclear-power>

17 World Nuclear Association. Economics of Nuclear Power. Last update: 29. September. 2023 Retrieved from: <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/economic-aspects/economics-of-nuclear-power>

18 Bruno Venditti. Energy Shift Visualizing Copper Production by Country in 2023. Elements. 10. May. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://elements.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-copper-production-by-country-in-2023/>

19 Joanne Liou. What are Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)? International Atomic Energy Agency. 13 September. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/what-are-small-modular-reactors-smrs>

20 ORLEN. Agreement signed in Washington to develop SMR technology that would be deployed in Poland. 23 Mars. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.orlen.pl/en/about-the-company/media/press-releases/2023/march-2023/Agreement-signed-in-Washington-to-develop-SMR-technology-that-would-be-deployed-in-Poland>

21 World Nuclear Association. Nuclear Power in Poland. Last update: 7. May. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://wna.origindigital.co/information-library/country-profiles/countries-o-s/poland>

22 Ahonnan az áram fele származik. MWM Paks Atomerőmű. Retrieved from: <https://atomeromu.mvm.hu/hu-HU/Rolunk>

This coexistence was also highlighted recently in a podium discussion by Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó²³.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Boost R+D joint activities between Poland and Hungary. This could not only be mutually beneficial from the scientific point of view but also may have the potential to strengthen the overall relation between the countries resulting in a kind of spillover effect.
- 2 Since the Hungarian city of Paks is a good example of how local society and nuclear power infrastructures could beneficially coexist, these experiences may worth to be channelled into study tours or other initiatives from which Hungary and Poland could mutually profit. Even though already existing technologies in Hungary and previsions ones in Poland are different and of course there are many confidential issues related to these subjects too, on one hand, some good practices could be potentially learned from Hungary while on the other hand, Polish SMR updates could provide valuable information to Hungary too.
- 3 Both countries need to consider the restructuring or the evolving of the old-new supply chains and treat these changes as a matter of geopolitics. Meanwhile, supply chains could also provide a field of cooperation for Poland and Hungary on bilateral and multilateral levels as well.

23 TelePaks TV. Pódiumbeszélgetés Szijjártó Péter külgazdasági és külügyminiszterrel. 15. April. 2024. Find it on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CSEf7JMWgU>

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENLARGEMENT POLICY. IT'S TIME TO REGAIN CREDIBILITY

PHD SPASIMIR DOMARADZKI



Over the past two decades, the European Union's enlargement policy has transformed from an enlargement effort into a tool for managing its immediate surroundings. Thus, the enlargement policy has lost its credibility in the eyes of the candidate countries. Enlargement is not an attractive topic within the EU either, and European societies are cautious about the prospect of new members. Today, in the face of a return to rivalry in international relations, the enlargement policy must regain credibility, both within the EU and towards the countries queuing for membership.

TOWARDS THE POLISH PRESIDENCY

Although the details of the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union have not been officially presented to this day, it can be concluded from the expose of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski that its main theme will be broadly understood security. Among the main aspects will be the strengthening of the transatlantic community and the emphasis on the inextricable link between the European project and democracy and the rule of law. Enlargement policy is also one of the priorities. Importantly, from the Polish perspective, the eastern and Balkan directions of enlargement reinforce each other. Poland's goal in the context of enlargement policy is to synchronize the foreign policy of the candidate countries with EU values¹.

Minister for European Affairs, Adam Szłapka, also mentions the main Polish priorities to include strengthening transatlantic cooperation, EU enlargement, and broadly understood security in many dimensions, i.e. m.in energy security, defence and defence industry, border protection, counteracting hybrid threats, as well as mass disinformation².

A BRIEF DIAGNOSIS OF THE WEAKNESSES OF THE EU'S ENLARGEMENT POLICY

The enlargement policy is, at least formally, considered one of the most important and successful policies of the European Union. The justification for this argument is the fact that since the 1950s, the process of European integration has consistently included other countries. It was only the formal exit of the United Kingdom in 2020 that put an end to the belief in the one-way and borderless process of enlargement of the European Union.

However, while Brexit can be considered a shock in the history of the European Union, or an exception to the rule of a permanently effective policy of the European Union aimed at further enlargement, the

1 Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the tasks of Polish foreign policy in 2024, available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/libia/informacja-ministra-spraw-zagranicznych-o-zadaniach-polskiej-polityki-zagranicznej-w-2024-r>

2 Senate: Szłapka: preparations for the Polish presidency of the EU Council are going according to the calendar, Local Government Portal, 24.07.2024 <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/polityka-i-spoleczenstwo/senat-szlapka-przygotowania-do-polskiej-prezydencji-w-radzie-ue-ida-zgodnie-z-kalendarzem,559220.html>

policy of enlargement of the European Union itself is undergoing a kind of metamorphosis, which is moving it further and further away from its essence, i.e. the process of admitting new countries. There are many reasons for this and due to the narrow scope of this text, I will mention only some of them casually.

Already at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Otton Anastasakis³ pointed out that the European Union's enlargement policy was changing its weight. While the main goal of the 2004/2007 enlargements was to complete the process of joining the countries that expressed their desire for membership, after the fifth wave of enlargement, the European Union is placing much more emphasis on the path to membership itself. From the perspective of the last fifteen years, the effects of this change are more than visible. Only Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, and with Brexit included, the Union shrank rather than expanded.

What is more, the „waiting room” for membership, in which the countries of the Western Balkans have been since the Thessaloniki summit in 2003, has become a kind of permanent state in which the candidate countries endure. Moreover, with the return to open geopolitical competition with Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova were also included among the candidate countries, which in practice even undermined the logic of the enlargement policy itself, which until 2022, even if only formally, had so far differed from the neighbourhood policy.

It is a logical contradiction that in the case of the Balkan states, the conflicts of the 1990s were a justification for their different treatment and a longer path to the EU, while in the case of Ukraine, it turned out that it was the full-scale Russian aggression that led to obtaining the status of a candidate country. A status that even the Association Agreement between Kiev and Brussels did not provide.

An extremely important, albeit scrupulously marginalised, problem of enlargement policy is enlargement fatigue, which has evolved over the last twenty years. At first, it manifested itself in the fear of an influx of workers or impoverishment among the societies of the countries already belonging to the EU. The European elites decided that the best remedy for this problem was silence and time. However, time has not dispelled fears, and subsequent crises have had a negative impact on the prospect of further EU enlargement. The economic and migration crises have overshadowed social tensions within the European Union, but have not solved their foundations. What is more, the tangible development of new EU members and the prolonged stagnation in the so-called „old” Union also fuel demanding attitudes. Little has been done to dilute the pre-accession stereotypes that still divide Europe into , east’ and , west’ or , old’ and , new’. It is therefore no coincidence that, whenever they are asked, the populations of the , old’ Member States in particular are sceptical about the prospect of further enlargements⁴.

Another factor is the process of politicization of the integration process. Supporters of deepening integration dreamed of politicising the integration process, which they saw as the most effective tool for transferring further competences to the EU level. However, when it turned out that the Treaty of Lisbon expanded and strengthened the EU institutions in relation to nation-states, politicization also took the face of „resistance to the European dictate”. Interestingly, the more resistance to EU decisions, the more fiercely EU institutions try to impose their vision.

3 Anastasakis, O. (2008) *The EU's political conditionality in the Western Balkans: towards a more pragmatic approach*, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 8(4): 365–377.

4 Fragmentary ECFR surveys published in December 2023 indicate that there is no clear majority support for membership of any of the candidate countries. Mared Gwyn Jones, Public opinion split on EU enlargement as leaders gear up for crunch decisions, Euronews, 12.12.2023, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/12/12/public-opinion-split-on-eu-enlargement-as-leaders-gear-up-for-crunch-decisions>

Until now, the next stages of the integration process have been determined by successive treaties. However, when it turned out that, for over a decade, there had been no goodwill to adopt another treaty, the EU institutions began to implement the policy of *fait accompli*, using all possible non-treaty tools, including blowing up the administration, using judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union⁵ to overinterpret the provisions of the Treaties or abuse their competences. The enlargement policy fell victim to these actions and became hostage to political bargaining on treaty reform.

Allegedly, such a reform is necessary for the smooth functioning of the EU, although it completely ignores the fact that the UK's exit has left an institutional gap that the „waiting room” states could quickly fill. In this sense, the enlargement policy has become hostage to a blind effort to deepen integration and, above all, to weaken the role of the state in the integration process. This can be seen in the proposals of pro-federal think tanks, combining enlargement policy with treaty reform, which, from promoting qualified majority voting (QMV) to abandoning full integration in favour of staged integration, seek above all to weaken the role of the member states at the expense of EU institutions. As if further EU enlargement without deepening integration was not possible at all.

An equally important problem is the instrumentalisation of enlargement policy at the national level. The politicization of the integration process has caused that today the attitude towards the EU positions voters on the political scene. Recognising the potential of politicising the integration process at the national level, politicians have begun to use the European Union in their political rhetoric. Some, like President Macron, have gone even further, using EU policies for their own political ends, such as vetoing the start of negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in 2019.

Enlargement policy has also become hostage to bilateral relations between member states and candidates. Although this thread is not a novelty in the integration process, it is now a convenient justification for the lack of progress in relations between the European Union and the candidate countries.

Equally important is the decline in public support for membership among the societies of the candidate countries. At the same time, the justification that this is due to Russian propaganda⁶ completely obscures the fact that the societies of the Balkan countries are tired of the prospect of endless enlargement. Moreover, the recent elections in North Macedonia in April and May 2024 have shown that challenging the negotiating framework with the European Union is an effective electoral strategy.

Looking at the EU's relations with the candidate countries of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova, one can get the impression that today „European values” play the role of a „protective shield” against accession to the Union, rather than an expression of common principles constituting the basis for cooperation. Thus, today we are dealing with the instrumentalisation of enlargement policy as a tool of everyday politics and not as the overarching objective of the European Union. Moreover, the desire to use enlargement policy as a justification for deepening the integration process also makes it a hostage within EU politics.

Until now, the European Union has consistently based its relations with candidate countries on the principle of conditionality, which is justified when there is a sincere desire on the part of the candidate to join. Then, the pressure is a natural consequence of the liberal institutional conviction that, firstly,

5 See. Judgment of the Criminal Code of 5 May 2020, file ref. no. 2 BvR 859/15, 2 BvR1651/15, 2 BvR 2006/15, 2 BvR 980/16, ECLI:DE:BverfG:2020:rs20200505.2bvr085915; Magdalena Baińczyk, Commentary on the judgment of the Criminal Code of 5 May 2020 on ECB bonds, *Studia Prawnicze. Dissertations and Materials* 2020, No. 2 (27), pp.257-271

6 Support for Serbia's membership in the EU is declining. *Pro-Russian sympathies are growing*, Bankier.pl, 30.04.2024, <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Spada-poparcie-dla-czlonkostwa-Serbii-w-UE-Prorosyjskie-sympatie-rosna-8738495.html>

the candidate countries uncritically strive for membership at all costs and, secondly, that the European Union is unchangeable in relation to them. From the perspective of the last decade, both of these assumptions seem passé.

Both the new enlargement methodology of 2020 and the concept of enlargement and internal reforms of the European Union of 2024 are not attempts to make the enlargement process more dynamic and implement the enlargement process for countries in the „waiting room” for membership but steps justifying the lack of enlargement. Emphasising the rule of law in a situation where there are countries in the European Union that have not yet managed to reform the judiciary, fight corruption or organised crime is an example of hypocrisy rather than credibility and has a negative impact on the perception of the European Union in the candidate countries. Moreover, taking into account the current mood in the European Union countries, linking the reform of the European Union with enlargement depreciates the enlargement policy and deprives it of any subjectivity.

HUNGARY, POLAND, ENLARGEMENT POLICY

The current Polish-Hungarian relations are based not so much on separate priorities as on their interpretation. While both countries condemn Russian aggression and advocate for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, they see relations with the Ukrainian authorities in a completely different way. Moreover, there is public awareness in Poland that the severing of economic ties with Russia entails social and economic costs, while the Hungarian authorities believe that condemnation and cooperation with the Russian Federation go hand in hand. However, the Hungarian veto, blocking the payment of funds to Poland related to the costs made for Ukraine, remains incomprehensible and serves only Russian interests.⁷

A similar discrepancy should be emphasised in the context of the relations between the two countries and the EU institutions. While the European Commission has completed the Article 7 procedure against Poland, relations between Budapest and Brussels remain difficult. Moreover, in specific cases, such as the Georgian „law on foreign agents” and the de facto Hungarian reluctance to support Ukraine, these are serious enough issues that negatively affect the willingness to cooperate between Poland and Hungary. There is, therefore, a fear that in this case too, the enlargement policy is becoming hostage to different visions not only of integration but also of relations with Brussels and its neighbours, which will have negative consequences for the efforts to renew the enlargement policy.

Given the nuances in the approach of Poland and Hungary to enlargement policy, it seems realistic to concentrate energy at points of convergence. First of all, it concerns efforts to regain the subjectivity of the enlargement policy, to free it from the muzzle of discussion on the reform of the European Union, and to hold an honest debate on its legitimacy. All the more so because delaying or not enlarging will make candidate countries a source of potential geopolitical instability.

⁷ Hungary is blocking billions for Poland. Kaczyński reacted, WP Wiadomości, 11.07.2024
<https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wegry-blokuja-miliardy-dla-polski-kaczynski-zareagowal-7047949117201312a>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Both Poland and Hungary are among the countries that unequivocally support the policy of further enlargement of the European Union. At the same time, they differ in their attitude towards Ukraine, but they agree on the vision of enlargement to include the countries of the Western Balkans. Since the enlargement policy is a clearly defined priority of the foreign policy of both countries, the successive presidencies of the Council of the European Union should be used to emphasise the need to increase the importance of this policy in the hierarchy of priorities of the European Union.
- 2 First of all, it is necessary to return to the subjectivity of this policy, separating it from the discussion for the reform of the European Union. Restoring the policy of extension to the primary objective of the integration process is essential to regaining its credibility. In addition, the lack of a clear vision and political will to change the treaties demotivates candidate countries, which see that the lack of progress in reforming the EU is tantamount to a lack of progress in the enlargement policy.
- 3 Second, both Hungary and Poland can use the time to emphasise the need to return to clear, measurable, and unambiguous membership criteria. This is a step necessary not only to improve the enlargement policy but, above all, to regain the credibility of the European Union among the countries that have been on the path to membership for more than two decades.
- 4 Thirdly, an effort should be made to return to the internal EU discussion on the objectives and limits of the enlargement process. Today, there is no social awareness on this subject, and in Western European countries it is even a taboo subject. This debate must go hand in hand with increased dynamism in relations with the candidate countries.
- 5 Fourthly, it is necessary to be critical of the current state of relations between the EU and the Western Balkan countries. The situation regarding the fight against corruption or the captured state in the Western Balkans is no better than the one in Ukraine. For more than a decade, the term that best describes the state of these relations has been 'stabilitocracy', which is equidistant from democracy and membership in the European Union. A return to competition in Europe requires consolidating efforts to complete the process of European unification within the European Union and the demarcation of its borders. Certainly, this is an easier task in the context of the Western Balkans than in Ukraine. Nevertheless, an effort should be made to convince societies and elites that a completed community based on the same principles, rights, and opportunities consolidates peace in Europe and reduces the possibility of external entities influencing political processes in Europe. Even if not all members are always up to the task of being members of this community.

THE EU NEEDS A CONSISTENT AND MERIT-BASED ENLARGEMENT POLICY – A HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE

PHD PÉTER PÁL KRÁNITZ



The Hungarian Presidency of the European Council (July–December 2024) considers enlargement as one of the most successful policies of the EU and strives for a consistent and merit-based process of accession. It is set to become one of the most pro-enlargement presidencies in the history of the EU, as it aims to close old and open new negotiating chapters with candidate states in the Western Balkans. It will prioritize established economic and political criteria for accession rather than nursing larger member states' own foreign political goals.

Hungary took over the Presidency of the European Council in July 2024 and vowed to follow a consistent and merit-based enlargement policy. Accelerating candidate states' accession – in line with the revised methodology of 2020 set forth by Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, based on the reports of the European Commission, while taking into account the European Union's capacity to absorb new members – has been put forth as one of the top priorities of the Hungarian Presidency¹.

The Hungarian government has been an outspoken advocate for enlargement for more than a decade and considers it one of the most successful policies of the EU. It believes it is essential to keep enlargement balanced and credible in order to shake up, or even maintain the policy's momentum. The long-delayed integration of the Western Balkans promises not only geopolitical benefits for the EU but great economic potential too, while failing to do so may result in unforeseen geopolitical consequences. Accession of the Associated Trio – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia – would also significantly strengthen the European bloc, however, it is hampered by serious challenges that need to be faced sincerely and thoroughly.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF ENLARGEMENT – CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Europe rediscovered geopolitics. Enlargement has been put forth by European decision-makers as a key foreign policy tool to tackle the challenges of the “New Cold War” and the overall global geopolitical transformation, to establish a secure Eastern neighbourhood. It granted Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia candidate status in 2022 and 2023². Although Hungary is in full alignment with this policy and supports every candidate state's right to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty, it believes that geopolitics should not overwrite existing criteria for accession as it compromises the credibility of the EU. The Cyprus model may provide legal frameworks for the accession of candidates with contested territories³, however, accession of a country that is fighting a full-scale war on its territory means importing the conflict into the economic-political bloc, and is therefore undesirable. Although the EU is not a military alliance, the Treaty of Lisbon includes

1 Programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2024 (2024, June 18). Retrieved from: <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/32nhoe0p/programme-and-priorities-of-the-hungarian-presidency.pdf>

2 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy (2023, November 8). Brussels: European Commission.

3 [Josep Borrell:] European Political Community: Press remarks by the High Representative. European Union External Action (2023, June 1) Retrieved from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-political-community-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-upon_en

a mutual defence clause, providing that if “a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power”, which poses undeniable security threats with regards to the swift accession of Ukraine, a country invaded and engaged in a deadly war⁴. Established and secured frameworks for peaceful conflict management – such as the Geneva International Discussions or the OSCE Mission to Moldova – should therefore be set as a criterion for accession talks, during which Copenhagen conditions should enjoy utmost priority. Candidate states’ fight against corruption and striving for the rule of law, and human and minority rights are considered by the Hungarian Presidency as other key premises for meaningful accession talks.

The recent momentum in the EU enlargement is considered by many a mere showcase of geopolitical aspirations rather than a consistent and reliable foreign policy, which is especially contentious from the standpoint of the EU’s partners in the Western Balkans. Never has there been such a great delay in a successful round of enlargement as since Croatia’s accession in 2013. Countries such as Serbia, Montenegro, or Albania were promised membership over a decade ago, but accession talks have since been hampered by a series of vetoes from larger EU member states like France or the Netherlands who are in constant debates over the need for the infamous reform of the union, the transition to a qualified majority voting (QMV) system as a precondition for further enlargement. The same member states who are the loudest advocates for Ukraine’s swift accession and for more assertive European foreign politics are the ones that have for years delayed the accession of reliable candidates. The Western Balkans is the region where the EU could achieve immediate results and make strong geopolitical statements, unlike the one made by Charles Michel in Bled in 2023 on the timetable for Western Balkans accession.⁵ In this turbulent international environment, without any sustainable progress in accession talks, 2030 seems like a weak prospect. The Hungarian EU Presidency believes it is time to shake up EU enlargement in the Western Balkans.

The candidate state with probably the most significant geopolitical influence on the security architecture of the European continent, with the largest military force of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Eastern hemisphere, an emerging great power, Türkiye, has been a candidate for full membership for over a quarter of a century and has never been further away from accession than it is today. Instead, Ankara is closer and closer to applying for membership in BRICS, which, in the long run, could potentially have catastrophic consequences for European security. The Hungarian government considers the European disassociation with Türkiye a great geopolitical mistake, therefore, the Hungarian EU Presidency is set to prioritize steps towards the reestablishment of the integrational procedure – the EU-Türkiye Association Council is expected to meet again during Hungary’s presidency – to upgrade and expand the customs union between Türkiye and the EU, and to advance visa liberalization for Turkish citizens⁶.

Escaping the trap of inconsistent and meritless enlargement

EU’s enlargement today suffers from a deficit in consistency and credibility. The fact that Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate status at a record pace, just four months after their application for membership, and the decision to open accession talks was made less than 18 months later, while Northern Macedonia had to wait 17 years for such a decision, shows that swift accession was a matter of political will all along. However, even in the light of Russia’s aggression and the sudden momentum of European

4 Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016M042>

5 “Speech by President Charles Michel at the Bled Strategic Forum.” European Council Press Releases (2023, August 28). Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/08/28/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-bled-strategic-forum/>

6 “FM: Hungary’s EU presidency will prioritize customs union between EU and Turkey.” About Hungary (2024, February 16). Retrieved from <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/fm-hungarys-eu-presidency-will-prioritize-customs-union-between-eu-and-turkey>

geopolitics, enlargement has been taken hostage by certain member states' own foreign political interests and, in some cases, corrupted into direct interference in candidate states' domestic affairs, such as the freezing of Georgia's EU accession by Germany on accounts of alleged anti-democratic policies⁷. The Hungarian government considers it a mistake and views the much debated Georgian legislation on "transparency of foreign influence" not as anti-democratic, but on the contrary, as democratic, as it seeks to ensure transparency in the civil sector, which is a fundamental democratic and European value⁸. The real reason behind recent Western attacks on the Georgian government is that it refuses to unconditionally and fully align with the US demand of decoupling and de-risking, and refuses to yield to the reformation of power blocs within the international arena as it understands that a New Cold War could have catastrophic consequences for a country on the frontiers of continents, world religions, and great powers.

On the other hand, the EU has turned a blind eye to the erosion of democracy and the rule of law in Ukraine despite all the warnings of civil society and the opposition⁹. The Zelensky administration has banned political parties – along ten others, the largest opposition party¹⁰ – postponed elections despite the expiry of the president's term¹¹, blatantly represses freedom of speech (banning opposition TV channels¹², forcefully drafting journalists critical to authorities and mounting political pressure on editorials¹³, etc.), banned the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for alleged ties to Moscow¹⁴, banned Russian and Belorussian music and books in Ukraine¹⁵, permitted the destruction of dozens of statues depicting Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and other cultural memory sites¹⁶, and the list goes on. Not to mention the raging corruption in the country and the fact that its economy is in ruins – without foreign support, government debt would increase to 100% of the GDP¹⁷. Yet, if an EU member state's government raises its concerns and points out the hypocrisy of the EU, it is labelled as anti-European and pro-Russian¹⁸.

Inconsistent and meritless practices of the EU in handling enlargement are destroying its credibility. Scepticism towards the EU is growing, most strikingly among the youth in the Western Balkans countries¹⁹. While EU membership becomes more distant in the eyes of Western Balkans decision-makers and the public, the influence of external actors such as China, Türkiye, or the Gulf States is growing.

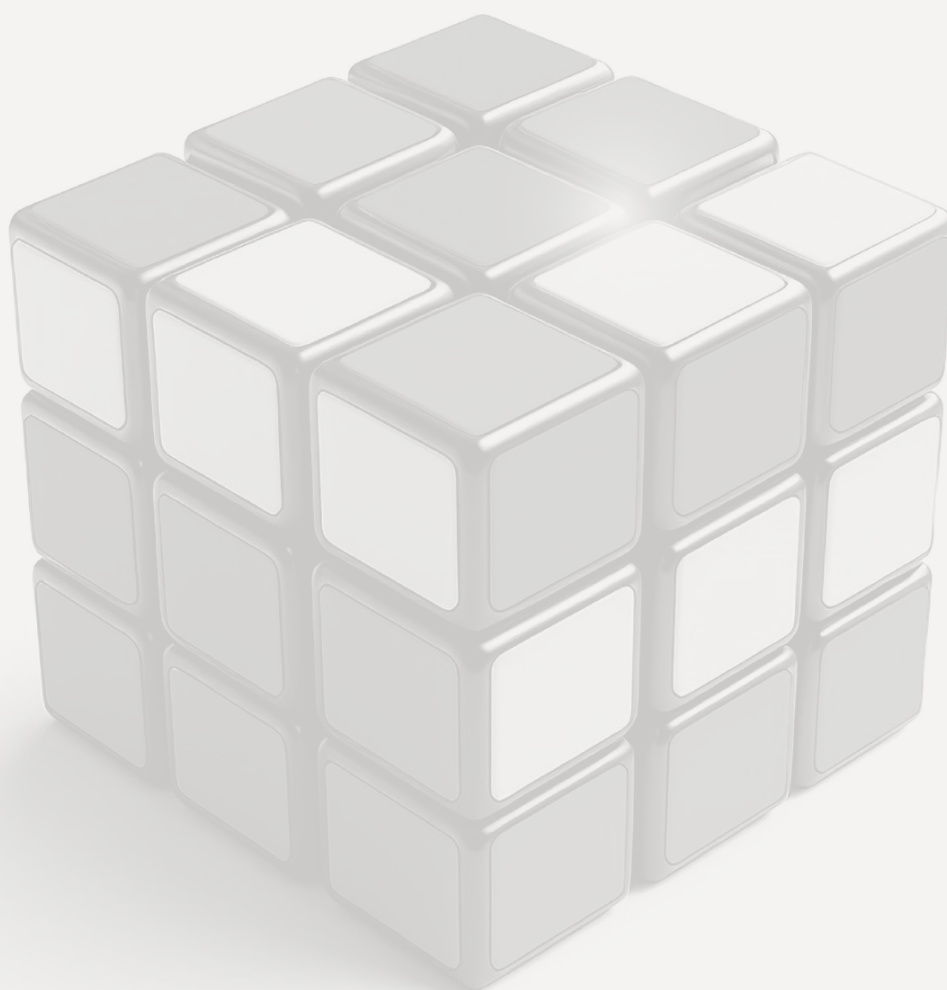
- 7 »Ambassador Fischer: "If Agents' Law Passes, Germany Will Not Vote to Open EU Accession Negotiations with Georgia" « Civil Georgia (2024, May 22). Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/archives/608712>
- 8 See the commentary of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Political Director, Balázs Orbán: "Our intention is not to veto #Georgia's Law on the Transparency of Foreign Influence, but to encourage the introduction of similar laws across the EU!" (2024, May 17) Find it on X: https://twitter.com/BalazsOrban_HU/status/179135226226215318.
- 9 Thomas d'Istria: "Ukrainian opposition is increasingly critical of the Zelensky administration." Le Monde (2024, March 19). Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/03/19/ukrainian-opposition-is-increasingly-critical-of-the-zelensky-administration_6634789_4.html
- 10 Volodymyr Ishchenko: "Why did Ukraine suspend 11 'pro-Russia' parties?" Opinion. Al Jazeera (2022, March 21) Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/21/why-did-ukraine-suspend-11-pro-russia-parties>.
- 11 Mariana Budjeryn: "Safeguarding Ukraine's democracy during the war." Brookings Commentary (2023, July 1). Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/safeguarding-ukraines-democracy-during-the-war/>
- 12 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called on Ukrainian authorities over a year ago to reincorporate three opposition TV news channels – Espresso, Channel 5 and Pryamyi – are quickly reincorporated into the national system of digital video broadcasting (DVB-T2), from which they have been excluded for the past year. Find the statement at: <https://rsf.org/en/three-ukrainian-tv-news-channels-barred-digital-video-broadcasting-past-year>
- 13 Andrew E. Kramer – Maria Varenikova – Constant Méheut: »"A Big Step Back": In Ukraine, Concerns Mount Over Narrowing Press Freedoms.« The New York Times (2024, June 18). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/18/world/europe/ukraine-press-freedom.html>
- 14 "Ukraine adopts 'historic' law to ban Moscow-linked Orthodox Church." Al Jazeera (2024, August 21). Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/21/ukraine-adopts-historic-law-to-ban-moscow-linked-orthodox-church>
- 15 Daria Nynko – Alexander Savitsky: "Ukraine bans music, books from Russia, Belarus." Deutsche Welle (2022, June 29). Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-bans-russian-music-and-books/a-62305280>
- 16 Yevheniia Moliar: "Ukraine must stop destroying its cultural heritage." The Spectator (2023, March 11). Retrieved from: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/ukraine-must-stop-destroying-its-cultural-heritage/>
- 17 Daniil Monin: "Will Ukraine Default on Its Debts?" Focus Ukraine (2024, July 3). Retrieved from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/will-ukraine-default-its-debts>
- 18 "Hungary, not Poland, does business with Russia says Polish deputy FM." Polish Press Agency (July 20, 2024) Retrieved from: <https://www.pap.pl/en/news/hungary-not-poland-does-business-russia-says-polish-deputy-fm>
- 19 Balkan Barometer. Retrieved from https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings/2/

CONCLUSIONS

- 1 Hungary is against QMV reforms in the EU. Member states must realise that this debate is bottomless and should not be set as a precondition to enlargement. The Hungarian Presidency of the European Council is set to become one of the most pre-enlargement presidencies. It strives to open new accession chapters with Serbia and to close as many as possible with Montenegro, and to make all possible preparations for the second intergovernmental conference in Albania and North Macedonia. It is an advocate for the start of genuine negotiation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and calls for the withdrawal of the German veto on starting accession talks with Georgia too. The Hungarian Presidency will attempt to deconstruct artificially created obstacles of accession talks and fight the hypocrisy and double standards that took enlargement hostage. Copenhagen criteria should be prioritized over geopolitics and member states' own foreign policy agendas, otherwise, enlargement will fail, and the European family will further polarize.
- 2 Although current Hungarian and Polish governments disagree on many aspects of enlargement, those mentioned above in particular, the two countries share most of their geopolitical risks and needs and therefore could easily find common grounds to shape the future of our shared family of nations in Europe. Since there is minimal dialogue on a governmental level, it is up to academia and civil society to engage in a constructive dialogue on how to survive the challenges of the 21st century.

CIVIL PROTECTION IN POLAND AND HUNGARY. SEARCHING FOR GOOD PRACTICES

PHD TOMASZ PAWŁUSZKO



The safety of civilians became an important task for the EU countries in the 20th century. In addition to military security systems, non-military security systems such as rescue, firefighting, and crisis management mechanisms have become key protective institutions. Nowadays, these systems are collectively called “civil protection”. This analysis presents challenges for the civil protection systems of Poland and Hungary.

The main goal of this text is to diagnose the civil protection systems of Poland and Hungary in light of contemporary European challenges. Over the last decade, Europe has experienced several major crises, such as the migration crisis, the pandemic crisis, and the war crisis. In addition, fires and floods remain a serious challenge in our region. Numerous crises led to the development of civil protection institutions. However, this process remains unfinished. This short analysis includes a discussion of the general shape of civil protection institutions in Poland and Hungary. Then, the condition of these systems was assessed and key challenges for the future were identified. The analysis also includes final recommendations.

WHAT IS CIVIL PROTECTION?

Civil protection covers non-military security systems. The dynamic development of these systems began in the 20th century when European countries began to create institutions in order to protect civilians against the effects of wars and natural disasters¹. In the second half of the 20th century, such institutions as civil defense, rescue systems, and fire brigades were developed. Formations ensuring public order have become separate non-military security systems. Their task is to protect against prohibited activities². These tasks are performed mostly by police formations, intelligence services, and various departmental inspections. Modern civil protection is based on the cooperation of these two groups of institutions.

In the 21st century, the issue of civil protection has also gained an important position in the European Union. In October 2001, the European Commission established the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The Lisbon Treaty raised civil protection to the level of EU fundamental rights. The legal basis for EU cooperation in the field of natural disaster prevention is Art. 196 of the Treaty of Lisbon. However, civil protection still remains the responsibility of the Member States. The EU plays a supporting and coordinating role. In 2013-2014, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was reformed and, among others, the Emergency Response Coordination Center (ERCC) was established³. In Europe, civil protection focuses on supporting countries in issues such as supplies (medicines, shelter items, water purification), organization of rescue support, analytical support, and repatriation of EU citizens.

1 P. Szmitkowski, *System ochrony ludności w Polsce – historia i współczesność*, Colloquium, no IV/2012, pp. 133-156.

2 See J. Trocha, *Propedeutyka ochrony ludności w Polsce. Problemy. Możliwości. Perspektywy*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuki Wojennej, Warszawa 2020.

3 *Civil Protection*, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection_en

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have led to increased cooperation between Member States and strengthened the position of institutions responsible for the protection of civilians. By the end of 2023, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism had been activated over 700 times (including 340 times in Europe). Under the mechanism, states made their resources available to partners because none of them had created a fully self-sufficient civil protection system.

CIVIL PROTECTION INSTITUTIONS IN POLAND AND HUNGARY

Poland and Hungary inherited their civil protection systems from the communist era. Concern about the possible participation of Eastern Bloc countries in a nuclear war led to the development of civil defense institutions⁴. Civil defense tasks included, for example, alerting the population, evacuating, providing shelters, food, and medicine, protecting property, and burying the dead. Civil defense was militarized and its task was to ensure the safety of civilians during increased states of defense readiness. In peacetime, civil defense deals with rescue and planning activities. In communist countries, civil defense did not include, for example, terrorism, the fight against organized crime, or epidemics, because it was believed that these threats remained the same both in times of war and peace. As a result, the civil defense system did not gain the same importance as the army and police. It was a system of cooperation between various institutions in states of higher defense readiness, rather than a separate organization⁵.

After the end of the Cold War, reforms of the civil defense system began. The subject of civil protection was transferred from the ministries of defense to the ministries of interior affairs. In Poland, reforms of this system ended in failure⁶. The head of OCK (Chief Commander of the State Fire Service) did not receive a separate office and did not become the superior of regional heads (voivodes). Financing and recruitment to protective formations collapsed. As a result, in 2007, a separate "crisis management" system was organized, based on the Government Security Center (RCB)⁷. In each voivodeship, county, and commune, a crisis management system was organized under the management of local authorities. The Polish state began to develop crisis management plans and critical infrastructure protection plans.

During the pandemic and migration crisis, the crisis management system also failed and the Polish government was looking for various substitute solutions⁸. Currently, Poland does not have effective regulations for times of crisis and natural disasters. In 2022, the old regulations on Civil Defense were abolished. Attempts to pass a new civil protection law have been ongoing for several years, but without success⁹. Prevention in the field of civil protection is basically non-existent (7 educational videos on the RCB website), and the training system works only to a small extent, as indicated by the reports of the Supreme Audit Office¹⁰. The main problem of the entire system is the dispersion of responsibility and lack of funds for the development of formations and a base of protective materials.

4 *Civil protection in Hungary*, June 2009, <https://www.iaem.org/portals/25/documents/HungaryEM.pdf>

5 M. Kopczewski, P. Szmitkowski, *Civil Defense In Poland – Transformation Process After 1989. Current State And Modernization Proposals*, *De Securitate et Defensione*, no. 1(6) 2020, pp. 75–87. G. Sobolewski, *Systemic Approach to Civil Protection in Poland*, *Safety and Fire Technology*, vol. 54, 2019, pp. 116–131.

6 F. Krynojewski, *Obrona cywilna Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Difin, Warszawa 2012; R. Ostrowska, *Civil defense in Poland from a historical perspective*, *Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces*, 2021, Volume 53, Number 3(201), pp. 496–506.

7 Government Center for Security, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb>

8 A. Podolski, (et al.) *Wirusowe zarządzanie kryzysowe 2020*. Raport IBK, Warszawa 2020.

9 H. Izdebski, *Projekt ustawy o ochronie ludności oraz o stanie klęski żywiołowej – uporządkowanie stanu prawnego czy kontynuacja zmiany ustroju bez zmiany Konstytucji?*, Fundacja im. S. Batorego, May 9, 2022, <https://www.batory.org.pl/publikacja/projekt-ustawy-o-ochronie-ludnosci-oraz-o-zanie-kleski-zywiolowej-uporzadowanie-stanu-prawnego-czy-continuation-of-system-change-without-changing-the-constitution/>

10 *Polska nie ma skutecznego systemu ochrony ludności*, Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 21.01.2019, <https://www.nik.gov.pl/aktualnosci/polska-nie-ma-skutecznego-systemu-ochrony-ludnosci.html>

In Hungary, the National Directorate General for Disaster Management (BM OKF, Belügyminisztérium Országos Katasztrófavédelmi Főigazgatóság) was established in 1999¹¹. The structure was created in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Currently, it operates on the basis of the reformed Act of 2011¹². This institution was based on the demilitarized competences of the fire brigades¹³. In the operational structure, the key decision-making bodies are the General Inspectorate of Firefighting and the General Inspectorate of Civil Protection. The local fire brigade structures, supported by the local government and non-governmental organizations, are subordinated to the headquarters. The Directorate General is responsible for fire protection and civil protection and can use a large pool of assets for this purpose (which its Polish counterpart does not have). The directorate is responsible for civilian crisis planning and defense management. It regulates and manages the fire brigade systems, technical rescue, material reserves, and public information (prevention and training). It also deals with water protection and the safety of civilian nuclear energy¹⁴. It controls the preparation of local and company plans.

The National Directorate General for Disaster Management controls numerous regional training bases, the Disaster Management Education Center, the Disaster Management Institute of the National University of Public Services, the Disaster Management Museum, and the Disaster Management Research Institute. In addition, it publishes a monthly magazine and teaching materials, organizes education, and runs a sports association. Similar structures in Poland practically do not exist or operate independently of the Government Security Center (e.g. at the Fire University in Warsaw). Poland is a large country and therefore its system is decentralized and based on regional crisis management centers. In a crisis situation, local authorities are responsible for managing the network of professional organizations, ensuring the evacuation, and alerting the population. The fire brigade has a servant role in the Polish system. However, conclusions from the Ukrainian war indicate that such a system may be ineffective in the event of an armed conflict. The fire brigade does not have the competence to build shelters, create evacuation places, warn, alarm, or transport goods¹⁵. In the event of a military crisis, firefighters will perform their basic firefighting tasks.

PROBLEMS OF CIVIL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

There are two types of problems with civil protection systems. These are external and internal problems. The former results from threats, and the latter results from the shape of the security system. Threats in Europe have evolved. In the first decade of the 21st century, EU authorities were mainly concerned about fires and floods. This can be seen when analyzing the competences of rescue authorities in Poland and Hungary. In the second decade, the catalog of threats expanded significantly. In addition to natural disasters and natural disasters, there were problems related to mass population movements (uncontrolled migrations, refugees, mass hospitalization, and conflicts). These problems require a response from the ministries responsible for internal security.

Currently, there are at least three main models for organizing the civil protection system in Europe¹⁶. The first model comes from the Cold War. This model is based on the militarization of civil defense structures.

11 Belügyminisztérium Országos Katasztrófavédelmi Főigazgatóság, 11/08/2024, <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/2/bemutakozas>

12 2011. évi CXXVIII. törvény – a katasztrófavédelemről és a hozzá kapcsolódó egyes törvények módosításáról, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/act_on_disaster_management_CXXVIII_2011_en.pdf

13 L. Kozári, System of Hungarian System Management, Defense Technical Information Center Compilation Part Notice, ADP013436 (Unclassified), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADP013436.pdf>

14 Hatósági tevékenység ismertetése, 10/08/2024, <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/78/hatosagi-tevekenyseg-ismertetese>

15 F. Krynojewski, Obrona cywilna nie może działać jak pospolite ruszenie, Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, 21.09.2022, [access: 12/11/2023] <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/samorzad/artykuly/8552326,wywiad-franciszek-krynojewski-obrona-cywilna-straz-pospolite-ruszenie.html>

16 The national disaster management system, European Commission, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system_en

This is an expensive solution and often requires the establishment of a separate ministry and separate protective formations. Structures similar to this model operate today in Spain, France, and Russia. The second model is based on expanding the financing and competences of rescue services that have material reserves in case of crises. This model can be observed in Germany, Hungary, and, theoretically, in Poland. The third model is the Scandinavian model, which is based on mass training of citizens to support a few protective formations. This concept is popular in countries with small populations.

The main problem of the Polish system is the lack of current statutory regulations. This means underfunding and heavy burdens on local authorities. The decision-making system during a crisis and higher states of defense readiness is unclear to citizens. The strategic documents are lengthy, over-theorized (KPZK)¹⁷, and imprecise (National Security Strategy), and their assumptions are implemented to a small extent¹⁸. Polish rescue systems are modern, but they struggle with staffing problems (age, staff salaries). Moreover, the universal training system requires serious reconstruction. Crisis situations in Poland were therefore solved using ad hoc solutions. Due to the size of the country, Poland should consider establishing separate protective formations within the existing rescue and firefighting system (KSRG) on the basis of the volunteer fire brigade (OSP). These formations will require additional financing, equipment and material base.

Hungary's situation is better than Poland's. The civil protection system is more centralized and has a clear legal basis, competence structure, and institutional base. However, the scale of the challenges remains significant because the Hungarian emergency system also deals with nuclear energy, water supply, safety engineering, industrial supervision, training, and certification processes. The system seems well prepared to respond to technical threats, as well as in the event of natural disasters.

The main problem of Hungary, like Poland, is insufficient preparation to respond to mass population movements (mass evacuation or uncontrolled migration). Both Poland and Hungary have had to use military assistance in recent years to address migration and health crises. The army is an external security institution, it is not subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and does not have sufficient police powers. Therefore, there is still space for improvement in terms of developing civil protection personnel and increasing the involvement of NGOs and citizens.

17 *Krajowy Plan Zarządzania Kryzysowego*, Rządowe Centrum Bezpieczeństwa, 09/08/2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb/krajowy-plan-zarzadzania-kryzysowego>

18 See more: T. Pawłuszko, *Kryzys Obrony Cywilnej w Polsce. Perspektywa instytucjonalna*, *Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego – National Security Studies*, vol. 30, 4/2023, pp. 41-62, <https://doi.org/10.37055/sbn/175516>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Poland and Hungary should review cases of the use of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to identify shortfalls and increase the capacity of their emergency services in the future. It should be assumed that crises in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Turkey, and the Balkan countries may directly affect the internal security of Poland and Hungary.
- 2 Poland and Hungary may increase the scope of bilateral consultations on increasing civil protection capacity in connection with migration problems. The catalog of common issues may be expanded in the future (critical infrastructure, river protection, securing railways and roads, the Via Carpathia, development of nuclear energy in Poland).
- 3 Poland and Hungary can develop training systems and increase the resilience of societies to crises by using good practices to strengthen situational awareness.
- 4 Poland and Hungary should ensure counterintelligence protection in the area of critical infrastructure, which may be penetrated by actors aimed at potential provocations and triggering further international crises in Eastern Europe.

CIVIL PROTECTION ON THE EASTERN FLANK OF NATO: THE CASE OF HUNGARY AND THE POSSIBLE COOPERATION WITH POLAND

PHD ATTILA DEMKO



The 2014 and 2022 waves of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine have permanently changed the European security landscape, and both Poland and Hungary had to reconsider their level of preparation in civil protection in case of an armed conflict. What was deemed highly unlikely by the national security strategies of both countries before 2014, a major war in Europe at their doorstep, became a reality. Beyond that, climate change and mass migration have also posed major challenges on their own – and the vulnerabilities of both countries can be used by malign external players in case of a hybrid conflict. However, there is still a low awareness of the importance of civil protection against military and hybrid threats, especially in Hungary. The two countries have a different size and geopolitical positions, but there are plenty of similarities and thus possible ways to cooperate and share good practices. This paper aims to analyze the current situation and offer recommendations.

The 2014 February aggression of Russia against Ukraine has changed the European security landscape, and that change became final with the 2022 February large-scale aggression of the Russian Federation. The largest conventional war since 1945 is being waged next to or near the Polish and Hungarian borders, a war that can transform into an even larger war, with the possible use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including nuclear weapons. Polish and even Hungarian airspaces were already affected, and in Poland, civilian lives were lost. Both countries need to upgrade their civil protection systems to meet the new realities of armed conflict. This paper will compare the challenges facing the two countries regarding the issues mentioned above from a Hungarian perspective.

CIVIL PROTECTION IN HUNGARY AGAINST MILITARY THREATS

Before discussing civil protection against military threats, we must briefly discuss the history of civil-military relations (Civ-Mil or CMR) in Hungary as there is a marked difference between Poland and Hungary in this field. After the 1956 revolution and war for freedom, the Communist regime made a significant effort to distance the society from the military, as close relations were considered a security threat to the system. Military spending was generally significantly lower in Hungary than in Poland, and that hindered preparedness in civil protection. After 1962, it was no longer obligatory to build shelters in new housing, thus most of the building stock of Hungarian cities lack such facilities nowadays¹. Fortunately, out of three subway lines in Budapest, two (M2 and M3) were designed to shelter 220,000 people out of the 2.1 million inhabitants living in Budapest at the time². Also during the Communist era at least some level of training and awareness in civil protection reached a large segment of the population.

¹ E. Haiman, Még mindig szükség lehet bunkerekre, bár a legrégebbiek ma már múzeumként működnek, <https://novekedes.hu/elemezsek/meg-mindig-szukseg-lehet-bunkerekre-bar-a-legregebbiek-ma-mar-muzeumkent-mukodnek>

² The system was built to withstand a nuclear strike. It has its own water supply, and independent energy supply for 72 hours, a ventilation system and temperature conditioning between 16-27 Celsius, depending on the season. See: A. Kasza, A fővárosi metró alkalmazási lehetőségei és korlátai a katasztrófák elleni védekezés területén, <https://nkerepo.uni-nke.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/12360/ertekezes.pdf;jsessionid=504578F25BA92888660196032A2427D0?sequence=1>

Civil protection training for the general population gradually ceased to exist after the fall of the Warsaw Pact. Awareness became minimal among the wider population, despite the Yugoslav wars at Hungary's southern doorstep. The education system almost completely neglected the teaching of civil protection. There were some positive changes after Hungary joined NATO, with booklets distributed to students on civil protection. A new modification of the law on civil protection (Crisis Management Law 2011) was accepted by the Hungarian parliament in 2011, and in 2012 the establishment of a database about who can be mobilized for civil protection duties started. According to the Crisis Management Law, civil protection is led by different civil protection organizations which "perform the civil defense tasks specified in this law to be carried out during an armed conflict through its voluntary and mandatory personnel". These organizations can be divided into central, regional, settlement, and workplace civil defense organizations, but depending on the character of the crisis, the central crisis management can decide the level of intervention³.

The government has strengthened efforts to develop the civil protection system beyond the new legislation by increasing funding. In the last few years, there is also a new drive to establish a system of ten military high schools, some of which are already functioning. Apart from teaching homeland defense, civil protection is also included in the curriculum.

However, much more needs to be done as the awareness of the general public of civil protection duties, facility locations, and emergency protocols is still very low. The 2014 and 2022 attacks on Ukraine have only gradually started to change public attitudes. That can be partially explained by the different geopolitical positions of the countries. While Poland has a shared border with Russia, and already lost civilians due to the effects of the war⁴, Hungary's exposure is much smaller. The neighboring Ukrainian region of Subcarpathia (with a substantial Hungarian population and close relationship with Hungary), was attacked only once by the Russian Federation, and Hungarian airspace was breached by a Ukrainian drone also only once⁵.

Beyond raising awareness, more funding is needed to establish new and upgrade old facilities. As stated earlier, the underinvestment in shelters and infrastructure goes back to the 1960s, but it became particularly acute after 1990, and that had a profound negative effect on preparedness in case of armed conflict. The fourth subway line (M4) built between 2006–2014, despite being sufficiently deep (unlike line M1), lacks the shelter facilities M2 and M3 have, and the tunnels were built without the needed reinforcing.

CIVIL PROTECTION AGAINST RELATED THREATS

Beyond the direct effects of armed conflict, there are indirect effects too. There is an ongoing migration crisis on the borders of both countries. In Hungary, civilians were affected by violence connected to migration as far as Budapest and the western border with Austria. While in the case of Hungary, no involvement of state players in mass migration is proven, in the case of Poland, the migration crisis is a clear case of Russian and Belarusian hybrid warfare⁶.

The 2015 (and ongoing) migration crisis in Hungary and the 2021 (and ongoing) migration crisis in Poland focused attention on border security and civil protection tasks related to the mass movement of people. That is a positive effect, as both countries had prior experience before the full-scale war in Ukraine and the mass movement of people.

- 3 2011. évi CXXVIII. törvény a katasztrófavédelemről és a hozzá kapcsolódó egyes törvények módosításáról Forrás: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100128.tv> - Wolters Kluwer - Minden jog fenntartva! <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100128.tv>
- 4 Polish experts confirm missile that hit grain facility was Ukrainian, Reuters, September 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-experts-confirm-missile-that-hit-grain-facility-was-ukrainian-media-2023-09-26/>
- 5 G. Delauney, Mystery drone from Ukraine war crashes in Croatia, BBC, 11 March 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60709952>
- 6 M. Gros, Poland to bolster eastern borders to curb irregular migration from Belarus, May 11, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-belarus-border-illegal-migration-donald-tusk/>

But such a crisis can also negatively affect military forces, as police forces not only lack the necessary personnel, but similarly the equipment to deal with the crisis. In the case of Hungary, the Hungarian Defence Force (HDF) was tasked with building the fence system and managing it in cooperation with the police. That not only used up resources originally allocated for the military but also disrupted training and maintenance cycles.

Speaking less directly on the topic, a few words are required on how naturally occurring events can be used as a weapon by a malign foreign country. Fortunately, in terms of natural disasters, both countries are in a relatively good situation. Hungary has one of the lowest rates of risk of natural disasters in the world (an aggregate score of 0.94). Poland's risk measure is somewhat higher (an aggregate score of 4.22) but in global comparison is also low⁷. Still, the increasing frequency of floods, wildfires, and other natural disasters mainly due to human-induced climate change is a challenge for Poland and Hungary – and it can be furthermore a man-provoked challenge.

Just one example: the increasing frequency of dry conditions makes setting deliberate fires more feasible. 'Fire as a Weapon' (FAW) was used since the start of warfare, Hungary however experienced few such attacks due to its relatively humid climate. The situation is rapidly changing. Hungary nowadays is especially prone to heat waves, and the frequency of the events is growing. While in a less severe form, Poland is facing a similar future. Preparations must be made in the civil protection system of both countries to counter such threats, as increasing vulnerabilities due to climate change can be used by malign external players in a possible hybrid war.

CONCLUSION

While the Hungarian government's rearmament and military industrialization program is exemplary not only regionally, but on a European level, Hungary needs to do more in civil protection against military and hybrid threats. Increased shelter maintenance, raising of awareness and more frequent exercises are needed to ensure the safety of the civilian population. There should be more cooperation between Poland and Hungary, as the threats they face are similar despite the somewhat different geopolitical environment.

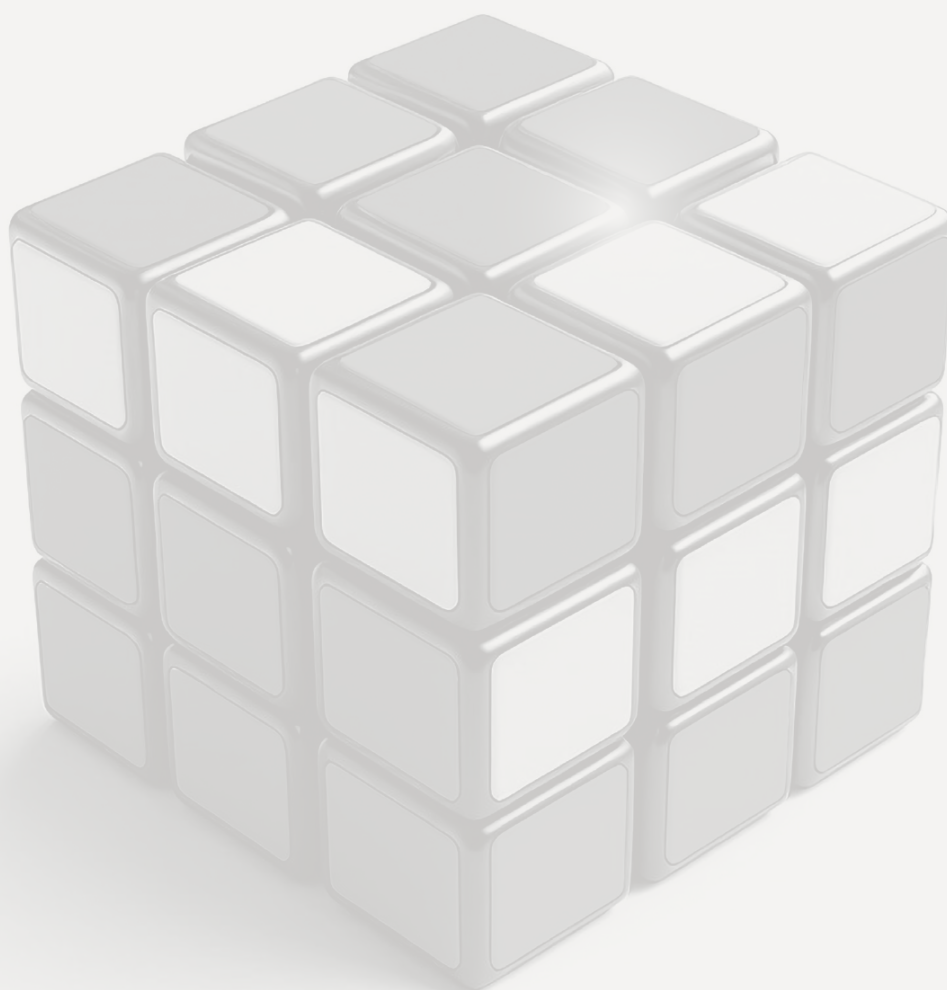
RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Sharing of lessons learned from the war in Ukraine – how to defend the civilian population against large-scale drone warfare, attacks on energy facilities, and how to prepare for lack of water, electricity, and heating.
- 2 Sharing of lessons learned – how to handle large scale population movements, migration, refugees, internal refugees.
- 3 Sharing of lessons learned – how to counter possible hybrid warfare or lower the effects of such attacks with investment in civil protection.

7 See *Natural Disaster Risk by Country 2024*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/natural-disaster-risk-by-country>

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE EUROPEAN CIVIL SERVICE: PROSPECTS WITH THE POLISH COMMISSIONER FOR BUDGET AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ANGELIKA GIERAŚ



European policy is shaped by the effective execution of political, diplomatic, and administrative actions. Strong political leadership cannot exist without robust administration, and vice versa. This article aims to diagnose the problem of unequal national representation within the civil service of the European Union's institutions. Disparities in representation are significant, to the extent that in the foreseeable future, Scandinavian countries may face an absence of representation in the European civil service. Although EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantee equal opportunities and prohibit discrimination, practical reality reveals that not all nationalities enjoy the same chances for employment and advancement within the EU institutions.

Since Poland's accession to the European Union two decades ago, it has become the fifth most populous EU member state. Membership brings specific obligations but also considerable privileges, including the opportunity to work within international structures, such as the EU institutions and agencies operating worldwide. The European Commission, for example, has delegations in 139 countries across various continents¹.

The EU recruits permanent staff through open competitions organized by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO). Two primary types of competitions—general and specialized—are published in all 24 official EU languages. Candidates must meet specific requirements to apply, such as holding citizenship of one of the 27 EU member states, having fluent knowledge of one official language, and at least B2 proficiency in one of the three EU working languages (English, French, German). For male candidates, an additional requirement is to have a regulated relationship with military service in their home country.

However, Poland's representation within the EU's administrative structure remains disproportionate to its share of the overall EU population. This phenomenon is concerning, as it may lead to a lack of legitimacy in the EU decisions and foster a sense of marginalization in states with a disproportionately low administrative representation. Underrepresented countries have voiced concerns, citing EU institutional failures in recruitment processes. The issue is complex: on one hand, EU institutions struggle to balance employment among citizens of different member states; on the other hand, member states—particularly those that joined the EU in 2004—have not developed sufficient mechanisms to support their citizens in securing EU administrative roles.

In this context, both numerical representation and issues of national discrimination that hinder Central and Eastern European citizens from advancing to high-level positions in the EU are significant. Research

¹ The complete list of delegations where EU officials work: EU in the World | EEAS (europa.eu), accessed on 01/08/2024.

by the European Democracy Consulting² points to the growing exclusion of this region from senior positions, while Western European candidates consolidate their dominance within EU structures. In 2023, no citizens from Central and Eastern Europe were appointed to management roles, and 73 percent of new appointments went to Western European citizens. Western Europe secured 1.5 times more posts per capita than would be expected, whereas Central and Eastern Europe occupied only a small portion of its expected share³. The study, examining appointments to senior positions within EU institutions and advisory agencies, highlights a widening division between the „old” and „new” EU, underscoring disproportionate representation at the highest levels. Such imbalances can reinforce the image of the EU administration as exclusive, negatively affecting perceptions of the EU as a community.

A cause—and a consequence—of this phenomenon is the insufficient representation of Central and Eastern European citizens in the EU’s administrative system. Limited representation in lower-level roles reduces the pool of candidates for senior positions, exacerbating the disparity. Results from a European Democracy Consulting survey indicate that the situation has worsened over the past three years. Since 2021, Western Europeans have acquired over 51 percent of managerial positions.

The EU’s struggle to attract candidates from affluent Scandinavian countries is also noteworthy, as the proportion of Swedish and Finnish citizens in the EU administrative structures is steadily decreasing. This highlights the EU’s challenges in achieving geographical and national representation balance. Creating mechanisms to encourage citizens from these countries to join EU institutions is essential, yet currently, no steps are being taken in this direction.

Prospects with the Polish Commissioner for Budget and Public Administration In November 2024, hearings for candidates for the new European Commission (2024–2029) will take place. A Polish candidate is expected to be nominated as Commissioner for Budget and Public Administration. While public attention centers on his budget planning and negotiation skills, his supervisory role over the EU administration, including the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), is equally crucial. A Central and Eastern European representative in this role could bring a fresh perspective to the issue of the region’s underrepresentation. Actions taken by the Commissioner over the next five years could contribute to balancing national representation within EU administrative structures. A key goal should be to reduce the existing disparities in national representation. The Commissioner could initiate a policy to suspend hiring from overrepresented countries and instead recommend preferential employment of candidates from underrepresented countries. Such a step could significantly improve representation within five years, fostering a fairer EU civil service in which each member state has proportional participation aligned with established national quotas.

2 European Democracy Consulting (EDC) is an organization that provides expertise to strengthen democracy in Europe. It focuses on various aspects of democratic governance, including elections, political parties, and institutional reforms. EDC offers data analysis, visualizations, and policy recommendations to assist policymakers, institutions, and non-governmental organizations in improving democratic processes and transparency.

3 GRELO2024, Tableau Public, European Democracy Consulting, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/eudemocracy/viz/GRELO2024/Mandatesproratasincdate>

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

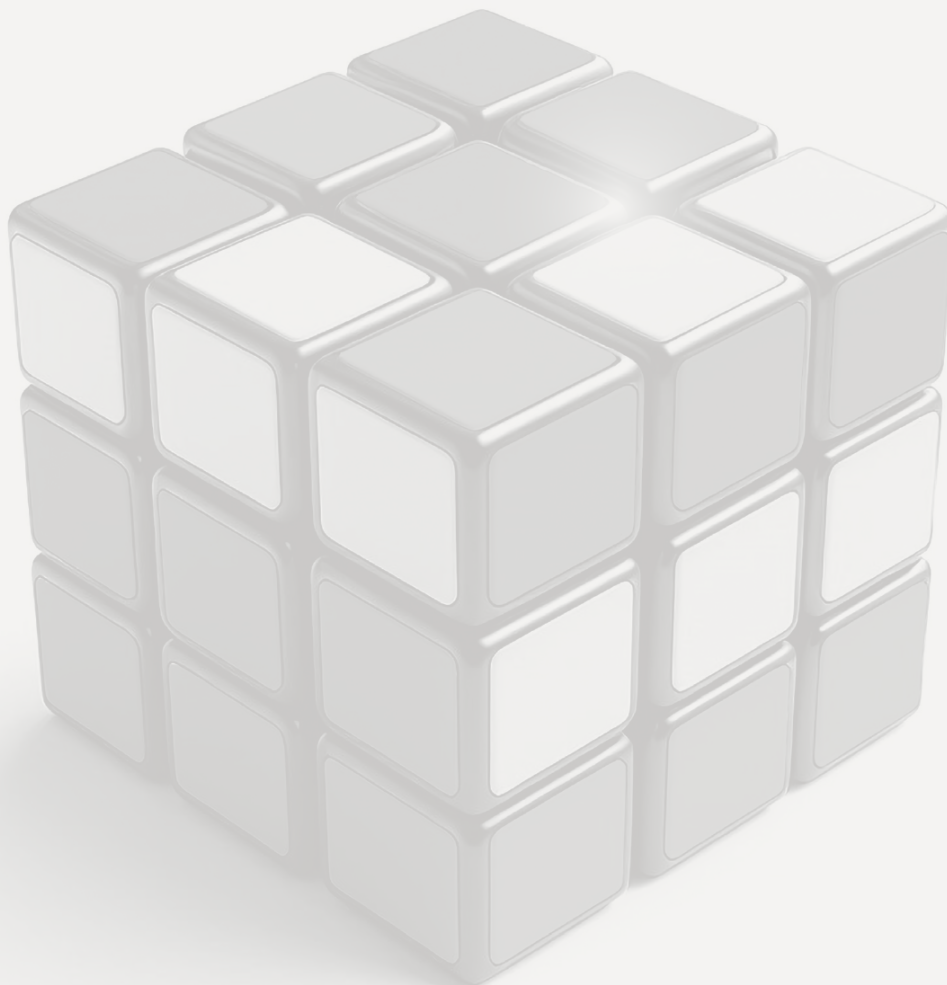
The EU law upholds the principle of geographical balance⁴ among member states, which should also apply to the EU personnel. Discrimination based on nationality is, in principle, prohibited by the EU treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and employment regulations. According to these regulations, EU institutions are obligated to hire staff representing the widest possible geographical range. To address national representation disparities within the EU civil service, the following actions are recommended:

- 1 Promote the issue of low Central and Eastern European representation within the EU public administration as a political agenda item. A member state's presidency period presents an excellent opportunity to advocate for this cause.
- 2 Establish an effective national-level training system for prospective EU civil servants, utilizing EU funding for this purpose. Severely underrepresented countries should develop a transnational program to train candidates for EU institutions, fostering a coalition to support this initiative at the EU level.
- 3 EU institutions should increasingly consider the nationality of job candidates. Until national representation imbalances are addressed, candidates from underrepresented countries should be given priority in hiring for EU administrative roles.

4 Article 9 of the Treaty on European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016ME%2FTXT>

REPRESENTATION OF POLES AND HUNGARIANS IN THE EU CIVIL SERVICE: TOO FEW, TOO LOW? THE NEED FOR AN IMPARTIAL AND GEOGRAPHICALLY BALANCED EU HR SYSTEM

RODRIGO BALLESTER



The balanced representation of every European Union (EU) nationality in the European civil service is a matter of significant concern, as it touches upon the principles of fairness and geographical balance that underpin the European project. Twenty years after the 2004 enlargement, many “new” Member States, certainly Poland and Hungary, remain underrepresented within the EU civil service, especially among top jobs, while other countries are overrepresented. This not only questions the equitable distribution of influence but also challenges the commitment to collaboration within the EU’s civil service and the fair representation of the cultural and political diversity of every Member State. In this context, it is vital to analyze the causes of this disparity (be them national or European) and explore strategies to increase the presence of Polish and Hungarian officials in the EU civil service. This paper will assess the current state of representation, identify challenges faced by Polish and Hungarian candidates, and propose recommendations for improving their representation.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN EU INSTITUTIONS

Human Resources (HR) within EU institutions is not just a neutral recruitment process, but a strategic factor determining the composition and, consequently, the effectiveness, political orientation, and cultural diversity of the European civil service. The Statut des Fonctionnaires¹ (Staff Regulations), the foundational legal framework governing the rights, duties, and conditions of EU officials, is designed to ensure (among other aspects) a merit-based and transparent recruitment process and the impartiality of EU civil servants. However, while these regulations set high standards for professionalism, they fall short in addressing the need for greater representation from underrepresented Member States. As a result, particularly in higher positions, there is room for political influence, ignorance of geographic balance, and even outright abuses. This underrepresentation evokes concerns about the fair distribution of influence among Member States and challenges the EU’s commitment to a broad and balanced representation within its civil service².

Despite the comprehensive nature of the Statut des Fonctionnaires, challenges persist in achieving a truly representative civil service across all EU institutions, particularly in the most relevant and highest-ranking positions within the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC), and the Council of the EU (CoEU). For instance, in the European Commission, high-level appointments—such as Directors-Generals, Deputy Directors-Generals, and Directors—are ultimately decided by the President’s cabinet and are heavily influenced by the support and lobbying of national governments. They are therefore, to

1 EUR-Lex. (2024, January 01). STAFF REGULATIONS OF OFFICIALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. Publications Office of the European Union (OP). Document 01962R0031-20240101. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:01962R0031-20240101#tocId3>.

2 Directorate General for Human Resources and Security. (2022, April 05). Communication to the Commission: A new Human Resources Strategy for the Commission. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/document/3d1dc4df-7995-44b8-bf08-396930fb8c9d_en?filename=C-2022-2229-EN.pdf

a large extent, of a political nature. These key positions are disproportionately filled by individuals from Western and Northern European countries. This, combined with the permanent nature and associated privileges of these roles, has led to the emergence of a European Mandarin³ class that consolidates influence and perpetuates regional, if not ideological, dominance within the EU's upper echelons. Senior management, in administration grades AD 16, AD 15, and AD 14⁴, oversee major departments and play critical roles in policy formulation and implementation. As a result, the perspectives and contributions of Central and Eastern European member states, including Poland and Hungary, are marginalized from the leadership strata of EU institutions.

These high-ranking positions wield considerable authority, exerting influence through both their official roles and informally cultivated networks, which can often lead to abuses. More critically, the centralization of nominations within the President's cabinet, particularly in the hands of the head of the cabinet, grants excessive power that can result in arbitrariness. A notable example of such abuse is Martin Selmayr, who, after serving as Commissioner Viviane Reding's Head of Cabinet and Chief of Staff to Jean-Claude Juncker, controversially "appointed himself" Secretary-General of the European Commission in 2018⁵. In fact, in a brazen instance of rule-bending, Selmayr was first appointed Deputy Secretary-General in a College meeting and then, just minutes later, promoted to Secretary-General⁶, catching all the Commissioners by surprise. This appointment faced severe criticism from the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, and the European Parliament, and sparked accusations of nepotism.

His appointment also elicited concerns about a German-dominated EU executive⁷ advancing national interests. It is worth mentioning that the strategic position of Head of Cabinet to the President of the Commission has been held by German nationals since 2009: Johannes Leitenberger served from 2010 to 2014 under the Barroso II Commission, Martin Selmayr from 2014 to 2019, and, currently, Bjorn Seibert since 2019—and likely until 2029. This pattern highlights the influence of countries with stronger historical ties and networks in the West over decision-making processes while underscoring the significance of the EU's HR policies, especially concerning senior appointments, in shaping power dynamics and the distribution of influence across the Union. This imbalance warrants a closer look at how these dynamics impact Member States like Poland and Hungary, where low senior management representation in the EU civil service raises questions about equity and fairness within the institutional framework.

3 Amies, N. (2007, September 21). A Mandarin's Expose. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/former-eu-mandarin-spills-the-beans-on-commission-intrigue/a-2790009>.

4 European Commission. (n.d.). Managers at the European Commission. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/jobs-european-commission/job-opportunities/managers-european-commission_en#seniormanagers.

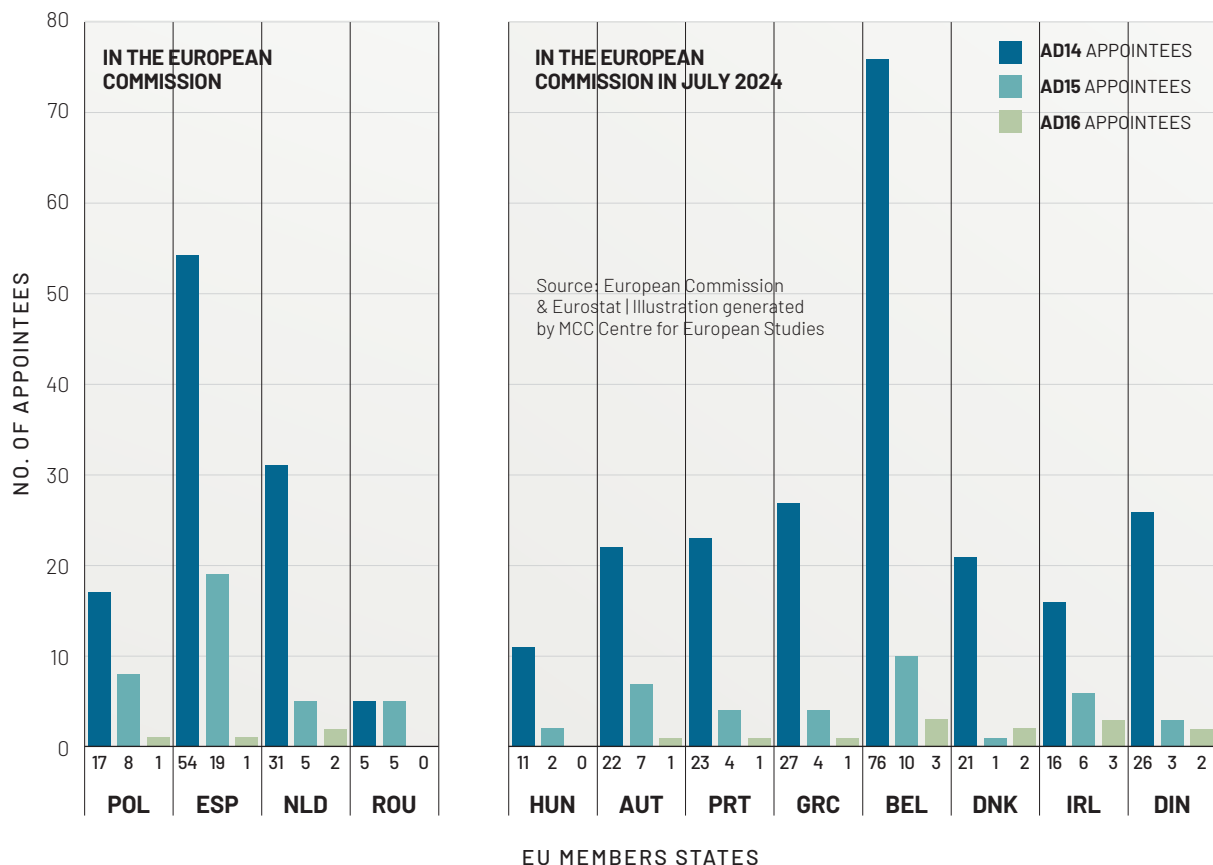
5 European Commission. (2019, July 24). European Commission appoints temporary Hors Classe Adviser in the Secretariat-General and new Head of Representation in Austria. European Commission Press Corner. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4511.

6 European Ombudsman. (2019, February 11). Decision in the joint inquiry in cases 488/2018/KR and 514/2018/KR on the European Commission's appointment of a new Secretary-General. European Ombudsman. <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/decision/en/109855>. Note: Moreover, an inquiry by the European Ombudsman identified four instances of maladministration in the process of his appointment.

7 Eder, F. (2019, July 06). Exclusive: Martin Selmayr to leave powerful Commission post 'next week'. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/martin-selmayr-to-leave-powerful-european-commission-post-next-week-secretary-general/>.

CASES OF POLAND AND HUNGARY:

FIG. 1,2 DISTRIBUTION OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT APPOINTEES:



The analysis of Polish and Hungarian representation within the European Commission reveals a significant imbalance. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of senior management appointments in the European Commission⁸. In Figure 1, Poland is contrasted with Spain, the Netherlands, and Romania—countries of similar population sizes. Figure 2 examines Hungary alongside countries with comparable populations (Austria, Portugal, Greece, and Belgium) as well as smaller Northern and Western European nations (Denmark, Ireland, and Finland), which nevertheless exhibit higher representation in senior civil service roles.

The data reveals that despite their larger or equivalent populations, Poland and Hungary are significantly underrepresented in senior positions within the European Commission. Hungary, for instance, has only 13 appointees between ranks AD14 and AD15 – not a single appointee at AD16 –, while Poland, despite being one of the EU's most populous countries, has only 26 appointees. In stark contrast, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands have significantly higher numbers, particularly at the AD14 level, with 76, 54, and 31 appointments respectively. This disparity points to a broader geopolitical divide, where

⁸ Directorate-General for Communication. (2024, July). Commission Staff: Statistical Bulletin HR - July 2024: Officials, Temporary Agents and Contract Agents by First Nationality and Grade. European Commission.
https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/organisation-european-commission/commission-staff_en#hr-key-figures.

countries traditionally seen as part of the “European core,” such as Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands, are better represented. This can be attributed to their longer-standing EU membership and more established networks of influence, which facilitate smoother and more favorable career progression to senior roles.

From a political standpoint, the underrepresentation of Central and Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and Romania, contributes to a growing sense of disenfranchisement and the impression that the East-West divide is consolidated through HR processes too. This has the potential to fuel double-standard grievances among national governments if not, arguably, among some influential circles of public opinion. The challenges these newer – but no longer new – Member States encounter in asserting their influence within the EU’s institutional framework highlight a critical area of concern for the Union’s cohesion and equitable representation for which both sides can be held accountable.

INCREASING POLAND AND HUNGARY’S REPRESENTATION

The limited presence of Poland and Hungary in the EU’s civil service stems from a complex interplay of factors that must be tackled by both the EU and the respective nations. From the perspective of the EU dynamics, political friction and an increasing ideological bias within the EU civil service discourage candidates who view it as politically skewed and lacking in intellectual diversity, with an overemphasis on legal, political, and economic expertise at the expense of fields like hard sciences and humanities. Moreover, “older” Member States benefit from established networks and institutional familiarity, holding a competitive advantage and exacerbating an East-West divide already compounded by perceptions of superiority. Additionally, ongoing disputes between the EU and the governments of Poland and Hungary create a less welcoming environment for potential candidates from these countries. Also, changes in the concours system, which now focus more on skills and group dynamics rather than on knowledge, add another layer of uncertainty that may discourage applicants. Finally, the long-term appeal of Brussels and Luxembourg as work locations may be diminished due to factors, including climatic conditions, language barriers, geographical distance, cultural differences, and increasing security concerns in Brussels.

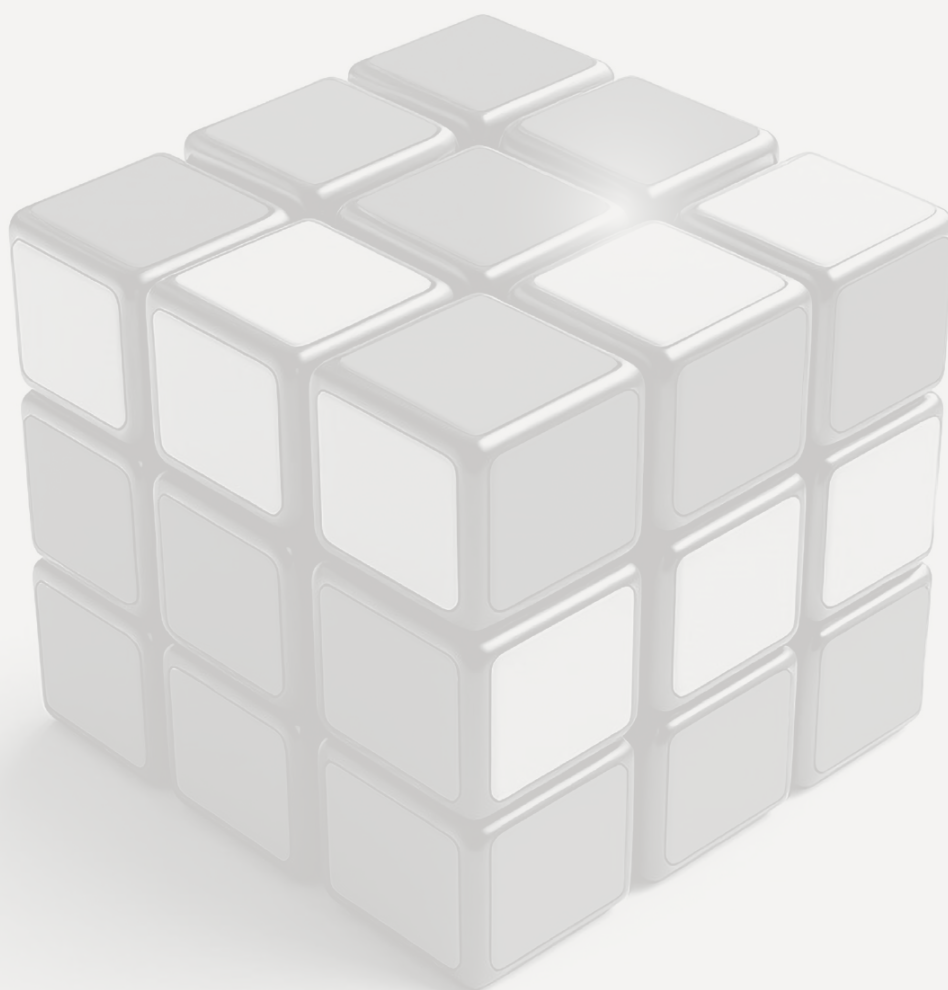
However, it would be remiss to point out that the underrepresentation of Poles and Hungarians in the EU civil service can be attributed solely to the EU. Domestic factors also play a significant role. In both Poland and Hungary, national political polarization preventing a common coordination in Brussels and a strong attachment to the homeland may contribute to a lack of enthusiasm for EU careers. Additionally, these countries could improve their efforts in promoting EU career opportunities and communicating clearly the benefits of working in EU institutions. This dual approach of addressing domestic attitudes and enhancing promotion strategies could certainly help increase representation from these nations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 To gain entry into the EU's administrative apparatus, the following recommendations are proposed:
- 2 Prioritize the stringent enforcement of geographical balance and representation within the EU institutions, especially for senior roles. This should be a primary focus, potentially even taking precedence over gender equality initiatives, to ensure a fair and diverse distribution of high-ranking positions across Member States.
- 3 Implement robust measures to prevent the politicization of senior civil service appointments. Strictly avoid nepotism and conflicts of interest to ensure that nominations are based solely on merit and professional qualifications.
- 4 Reform the concours system to stress knowledge and expertise over skills and personality factors, to ensure a more objective and equitable selection process.
- 5 Improve communication about the long-term career prospects available within EU institutions by clearly articulating the potential for career longevity and advancement in Brussels to attract and retain top talent from across the Member States.
- 6 In essence, a truly effective European Union demands that every Member State's voice is not only heard but equally represented along the hallways, in the chambers, and at the table.

THE VISEGRAD GROUP – DOES THIS COOPERATION (STILL) EXIST?

PHD MICHAŁ DULAK



Due to the informal and thus flexible nature of the Visegrad Group, the question of whether cooperation within it still exists never ceases to be relevant. Even if there were moments when relations at the highest political level were cold, cooperation developed well between the ministers and parliamentarians of the four countries. However, never in its history has the Visegrad Group faced such far-reaching implications for the security of each of its members. Instead of consolidating the cooperation of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, which share a common experience of the oppressive regime of the USSR, the threats posed by the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine have adversely affected the relations between them. There is a serious risk that the deep rift that has emerged between the group's members over their attitude toward Russia could make a return to the previous formula of the Visegrad Group impossible in the future.

HISTORY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

The idea of cooperation between states in the post-Communist Central European region was proposed by the then Czechoslovak President Václav Havel, during a speech in the Diet (lower house of the parliament) of the Republic of Poland on January 25, 1990. He said then: "For the first time in history, we have a real opportunity to fill the great political vacuum that appeared in Central Europe after the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire with something genuinely meaningful. We have an opportunity to transform Central Europe from what has been a mainly historical and spiritual phenomenon into a political phenomenon. (...) What we have to offer are spiritual and moral impulses, courageous peace initiatives, under-exploited creative potential, and the special ethos created by our freshly won freedom"¹. However, despite attempts to provide a deeper justification for the existence of a community of several countries in this part of the continent, the purpose of their cooperation was very utilitarian from the beginning. This was evident in the very title of the declaration signed in Visegrad on February 15, 1991 – Declaration on Cooperation of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration. The ambitions for integration into the political, economic, and defense structures of the West, which were expressed there, have been achieved. Four countries became members of NATO (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in 1999, and Slovakia in 2004) and, above all, the European Union. Thus, on 1 May 2004, the main engine that drives the Visegrad Group was extinguished. The new engine of cooperation was to be launched by the Visegrad Declaration, signed by the prime ministers in Kroměříž several days later – on May 12, 2004. It was agreed then that the Visegrad Group countries would continue to focus on regional activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the identity of the Central European region. From then on, cooperation was based on specific projects while maintaining its flexible and open character. This has been facilitated primarily by the activities of the Visegrad Fund established in 2000

¹ Address given by Václav Havel to the Polish Sejm and Senate (Warsaw, 25 January 1990), https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_vaclav_havel_to_the_polish_sejm_and_senate_warsaw_25_january_1990-en-d639c9ab-79ce-41d9-8767-4a9bd804ec35.html

(the only formal institution of the Visegrad Group). Project cooperation in the V4+ format also developed within it, involving countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, but also Japan, South Korea, and Israel.

However, under the conditions of EU membership, where each country pursues its own national interests, the formula of an informal political agreement between the four countries meant that the Visegrad Group was no longer as useful as before. Therefore, on the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Visegrad Group, it was decided to clarify the scope of cooperation between Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in the European Union. In 2011, the Bratislava Declaration listed important areas of common interest of the four countries, such as European energy security, transport infrastructure, development of the four freedoms of the common market of the EU, deeper cooperation of the group within the CFSP, support of the integration aspirations and Euro-Atlantic ambitions of the Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans, and work for complementarity between the EU and NATO.

Since 2004, the Visegrad Group has thus become a forum for political consultations aimed at agreeing positions mainly on EU issues. At the same time, it should be noted that in practice these positions concern only those topics in which Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary have common interests. When looking for an analogy from everyday life that would illustrate what the Visegrad Group is, we can compare it to a quadruple sculls boat. It is a four-person boat in which each crew member operates two oars. If everyone rows uniformly, then the entire team is moving in one direction. However, if at least one of the members does not row or makes oaring movements opposite to the others, then the boat cannot sail in any direction. Importantly, in such a situation, it does not tip over but fails to perform the task for which it was built.

DYNAMICS OF COOPERATION IN RECENT YEARS

To see whether the Visegrad Group's formula proposed after 2004 has been successful, it is worth taking stock of its successes and failures in recent years.

The Visegrad Fund is certainly a success, and there is no disagreement among Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. After the prime ministers decided in 2021 to increase the fund's budget by €2 million a year, today it has €10 million at its disposal, which is allocated to social projects, including recently also helping refugees from Ukraine. In November 2023, the presidents of the Visegrad Group countries jointly agreed that it is justified to further increase donations from member states².

Another tangible success, this time in the field of security, was the formation of the Visegrad Battle Group. It enables improvement in coordination in the field of defense between the participating countries, as well as to increase the interoperability of their armed forces. So far, the Visegrad Battle Group, under Polish command, has been on six-month duty three times – in 2016, 2019, and 2023. In the last case, during the war in Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Croatia participated in the battle group in addition to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

During the migration crisis in the European Union in 2015 and 2016, the countries of the Visegrad Group unanimously opposed the mandatory refugee admission mechanism proposed by the European Commission. They even succeeded, despite the fact that Slovakia and the Czech Republic accepted small groups

2 B. Bodalska, V4 zwiększy fundusz wyszehradzki?, euractiv.pl, 23 listopada 2023 r., <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/grupa-wyszehradzka/news/v4-zwiekszy-fundusz-wyszehradzki/>

of refugees in accordance with the relocation and resettlement mechanism. As a result, to this day, the countries in the group are still trying to coordinate a unified position toward the EU's migration policy.

With all these successes, it seems that the Visegrad Group has not been able to develop a common position on issues of much greater political importance. First, the group failed to agree on a solution that would enhance the energy security of all countries in the region. Only Poland and the Czech Republic took advantage of the opportunity to diversify gas and oil supplies that arose after Russia attacked Ukraine. Hungary and Slovakia, which are still the most dependent on Russian energy resources, face a huge problem today due to the restriction of the transit of raw materials through Ukraine until the end of 2024. The situation has become so tense that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary publicly accused Poland of hypocrisy³.

The second area where the Visegrad Group has failed to demonstrate effectiveness is the lack of an agreed common position on the future of European integration. Point-wise agreement on certain policies (e.g. migration or deepening the common market) does not constitute a concrete plan for reforming the European Union that the group's countries could implement as part of their national European policies. The best evidence of the failure in this regard is that even Law and Justice and Fidesz, which are declaratively close to each other when it comes to their position towards the EU, did not cooperate within one political group after the last elections to the European Parliament.

WHY IS THE WAR THE MOST IMPORTANT TEST FOR THE VISEGRAD GROUP?

Before the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine, it was normal practice for prime ministers to meet frequently, even informally, for example, before meetings of the European Council to coordinate the positions of the Visegrad Group countries on EU issues. Ministers and speakers of the parliaments also met frequently. From February 24, 2022, to the present (30 months of war), the prime ministers of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary have met only four times⁴. The number of meetings at the level of ministers, who met eight times during the Slovak presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2022–June 2023), was also reduced. In 2022, the meeting of the speakers of the parliaments scheduled for November 25 was canceled because the Czech Republic and Poland announced that they would not participate in it due to Viktor Orban's delay in adopting sanctions against Russia⁵. As a result, the political level of the meetings, which were held more often at the level of deputy ministers or parliamentary committees, has been lowered. The effect of these activities can be seen in the number of joint declarations, conclusions, and positions adopted by the Visegrad Group. After February 24, 2022, 12 of them were adopted, whereas in the whole of 2021, there were 31 such documents. Importantly, after the start of the war, it was more often limited to formulating general conclusions or communiqués after meetings, rather than joint positions or declarations entailing specific commitments.

An analysis of the content of these documents indicates that the issues of regional security that are fundamental for the future of the Visegrad Group were not touched upon. Rather, efforts were made to still find areas where a common opinion could be reached. Therefore, after February 24, 2022, the themes of the V4 countries' opposition to the EU's migration policy, the fight against hybrid threats, including disinformation, and the economic and humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine were raised more often.

3 Hungarian foreign minister accuses Poland of hypocrisy, Polska Agencja Prasowa, 29 lipca 2024 r., <https://www.pap.pl/en/news/hungarian-foreign-minister-accuses-poland-hypocrisy>

4 27.02.2024, 26.01.2023, 24.01.2022, 8.03.2022

5 V4 meeting pulled as Polish, Czech speakers object to Hungary's proximity to Russia, Central European Times, 20 listopada 2022 r., <https://centraleuropeantimes.com/2022/11/v4-meeting-pulled-as-polish-czech-speakers-object-to-hungarys-closeness-to-russia/>

The scale of the decline in cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary is shown by the calendar and document repository available on the official website of the Visegrad Group. In both cases, reporting on the effects of cooperation in the group ends in mid-2023, i.e., when the Czech presidency begins. Today, Polish foreign policy in the region focuses on rebuilding cooperation within the Weimar Triangle. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, even before the meeting of prime ministers in February 2024, clearly declared that for further cooperation to make sense, it must bring specific results⁶.

The divisions between the Visegrad Group countries, which have been accentuated by attitudes toward Russia and the war in Ukraine, will not disappear even after the war ends. However, it does not seem likely that in the short term the leaders of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary will decide to take the radical step of completely abandoning the Visegrad Group format. Cooperation will be maintained at a low political level and around uncontroversial but politically insignificant issues, as the last two years have shown. The Polish presidency of the Visegrad Group, which began on July 1, 2024, will not change anything in this situation, and will even perpetuate the minimalist in means and thematically truncated model of Visegrad cooperation that we have seen since the outbreak of Russia's attack on Ukraine.

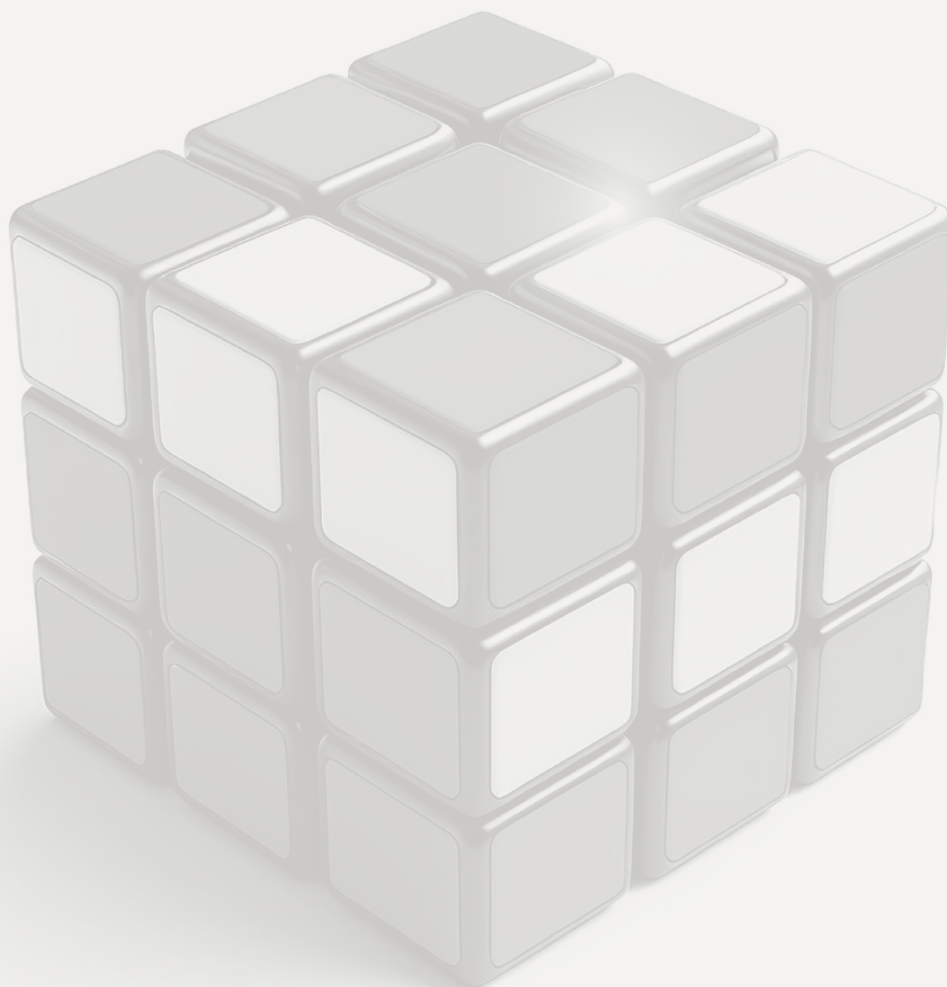
RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Seminars, conferences, and discussions should be organised with experts from Hungary and Slovakia to present fact-based arguments for the consequences of Russia's imperial policy in our region of Europe.
- 2 The cooperation that has developed so far between civil society organisations, academia, experts, officials, and parliamentarians is an important channel of communication on issues important to the region. Efforts should be made to maintain these channels of cooperation, even despite political conflict at the highest political level.
- 3 Parliamentary cooperation is a tool that provides wide opportunities for contacts and raising various topics that can be flexibly adapted to the current needs of the Visegrad Group countries, regardless of the political configurations in other countries. Therefore, during the Polish presidency of the Visegrad Group, the parliamentary dimension of regional cooperation should be given greater importance.

6 A. Zachová, *Visegrad leaders meeting would not bring results, says Czech PM*, euractiv.com, 15 stycznia 2024 r., <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/visegrad-leaders-meeting-would-not-bring-results-says-czech-pm/>

THE VISEGRAD GROUP - DOES THIS COOPERATION (STILL) EXIST? WHAT ARE THE COMMON INTERESTS OF POLES AND HUNGARIANS IN THE V4?

CSILLA VARGA



The Visegrad Group as a regional alliance of four Central European countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, defined itself as a cooperation representing and promoting the region's interests in Europe and beyond. In 2004, the V4 reached one of its main objectives, as the four countries became members of the EU and NATO. Followingly, the cooperation worked together on wide-range of issues from economic areas to the engagement with the European Union. However, after decades of cooperation, differing views came to the foreground between certain countries and the V4, in general, and recently it seems that "working together" and representing views of the named Central European countries is more theoretical than practical. This short overview tries to answer the question whether the cooperation in V4 – especially between Hungary and Poland – still exists and formulate a few recommendations how its work could be improved.

INTRODUCTION

The Visegrad Group, named after the Hungarian town Visegrad where summit meetings of the Hungarian, Polish and Bohemian kings took place in 1335, originally has the aim of settling disputes and launching economic and political cooperation. After struggles of the 20th century including decades under unwanted Soviet influence, the Visegrad countries decided in 1991 to find new forms of political, economic and cultural cooperation, as they expressed their joint intention to become part of the European and Transatlantic communities that has become reality for all the four countries in 2004.¹

Addressing regional challenges, such as migration, security, and economic development, and advocate for their shared interests within the European Union, the V4 during the first phase after its establishment can be characterized as a successful cooperation in Europe. The reason behind its relative success was and could be that on their own, the four countries could easily be ignored on contrast to Germany and France, but unified, representing nearly 65 million citizens, they shaped European policies on various fields such as immigration, agriculture and even foreign policy.

In frame of economic cooperation all countries benefitted from enhanced trade and investment opportunities, promoting economic growth and regional development. The shared cultural heritage and history between the states was a powerful basis that, at the beginning, embedded cooperation fostering mutual understanding and synergies regarding education, language, and cultural exchanges. The four states, after the establishment of the V4 prioritized regional security, particularly in the context of NATO, and cooperated on defense strategies to address common threats. It has to be emphasized as well that the political collaboration of countries initially included aligned political interests, especially concerning EU policies, migration, and sovereignty, advocating for national interests within the larger European context, however,

¹ Official website of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2021/2022:
<https://v4.mfa.gov.hu/page/visegrad-cooperation>

these common political lines have crucially changed, mainly in recent years. Besides the above, energy security, cooperation in energy diversification and infrastructure projects, such as pipelines and energy networks, was also a mutual goal of V4 enhancing energy independence, similarly to regional stability of the region. V4 states sought to maintain stability in Central Europe and the neighboring regions, addressing issues like the rule of law and democracy².

However, already from the beginning of the cooperation, there have been some challenges and differences among them, particularly on issues as the latter, rule of law, democratic values, and responses to EU policies. The V4 from its establishment held and holds regular summits and meetings aiming to maintain and develop their cooperative efforts, as well as established the system of rotating presidency in which framework one of the countries fulfills the tasks of presidency for a year.

RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND HUNGARY IN THE V4

During the past decades of V4 cooperation, it could be observed that while Poland and Hungary shared many interests within the Group, there are also notable differences in their priorities and approaches that became more and more accentuated in recent years. However, it is often considered that the major dividing line in their relationship has been the recent Ukrainian-Russian war starting in 2022, other issues of non-agreement can also be mentioned in which countries follow different political lines.

Regarding EU relations, Poland generally seeks a strong EU presence and influence, focusing on maintaining beneficial relations with Western Europe, particularly on the area of economic cooperation and political alignment. Hungary represents a more nationalistic stance, often prioritizing sovereignty over EU regulations and sometimes pushing back against European institutions on issues such as migration and rule of law. However, both countries face criticism from EU for their judicial reforms perceived as undermining judicial independence and democratic institutions, the answers of countries to the criticism is different. While the Polish government has been and is more assertive in defending its reforms, Hungary has a more established narrative of defending its policies as part of national identity and sovereignty, often framing it as a cultural and ideological battle.

Migration, mainly after the beginning of the war between Ukraine and Russia from 2022, became one of the major differences and disagreements between the two states. Poland has shown a willingness to accept Ukrainian refugees, emphasizing humanitarian assistance while maintaining a strict stance on immigration from other regions. Hungary represents a hard-line stance against immigration overall, focusing on border security and resisting EU relocation quotas, which sometimes puts it at odds with Poland's approach to humanitarian crises. Not only Hungary and Poland, but the V4 grouping has come unstuck after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. On the one hand, the Czech Republic and Poland, as two of the strongest supporters of Kyiv in terms of political and military support, argue for even more and faster arms deliveries to the country. On the other hand, Hungary and Slovakia refuse to send weapons to Ukraine and argue for the importance of peace. Especially Hungary has developed a distinct policy of watering down Russia sanctions, questioning Ukraine's EU integration and at one point blocking EU aid for Kyiv.³ The aim of Hungary is to maintain peace in all circumstances that cannot be realized when sending troops for Ukraine. According to many experts, absent of a major change in the policy of Hungary, being at this point highly unlikely, the unity of V4 will remain in tatters for the foreseeable future.

2 See the objectives of the V4 in Visegrad Declarations available at the official website of the Visegrad Group: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations>

3 See for instance: RadioFreeEurope: The Visegrad Group: When 2 + 2 Doesn't Equal 4, February 27, 2024: <https://www.rferl.org/a/visegrad-hungary-poland-czech-slovakia-disunity/32837670.html>

Another significant contrast between the two countries is their economic focus, since for Poland economic development, trade relations, and infrastructure projects, EU funds, as well as seeking partnerships with Western countries belongs to major political priorities, Hungary- besides the above – also pursues unique partnerships with non-EU countries and emphasizes a more nationalist economic agenda. Last, but not least, political lines of conduct of the two countries towards Russia also shows different picture: Poland generally views Russia as a primary threat, advocating for a strong stance against Russian influence and seeking closer alignment with NATO. Hungary, on the contrary, maintains a more conciliatory approach towards Russia, often emphasizing the importance of economic relations and energy cooperation with Russia leading to tensions with Poland's more hardened stance. Therefore, it can be certainly stated and shortly concluded that Hungary's position vis-a-vis Moscow from spring 2022 significantly worsened the relations with Warsaw. For Poland, Orbán's pro-Russian stance was unacceptable and regarded Russian aggression as a fundamental threat, much more dangerous than any claim coming from Brussels. The relations between Warsaw and Budapest deteriorated rapidly, and these differing and conflictual views shadow, among other issues, the general activity of the V4.

COOPERATION OR ONLY CERTAIN TOLERATION BETWEEN HUNGARY AND POLAND?

The second. However, countries criticise each other more and more often and openly. As already highlighted, differences presently are more characteristic than cooperation. Besides the above, as a crucially important additional aspect it has to be noted that the Polish elections in October 2023 also resulted in systematic change in Polish politics with the ascension to power of the former opposition parties to the long-serving, populist, conservative PiS government. The new centrist government, led by former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, immediately began a program of "de-PiS-ification" of the country's media, courts, and economy in an effort to return the country to normative congruence with EU standards⁴. In the process, the new Polish leadership moved even further away from certain views of Budapest, shortly explained above.

Not only between Budapest and Warsaw, but in the V4 two camps have developed, in general, as mentioned regarding their views on the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as in connection with other issues. On the one hand, Slovakia and Hungary represent almost the same opinions, Robert Fico, the Prime Minister of Slovakia and Viktor Orbán stick to their pro-Russian rhetoric. On the other hand, the Czech Republic and Poland support Ukraine in the war, for instance to purchase up to 800,000 artillery rounds for Ukraine from suppliers outside of Europe. Concerning other topics, it can also be stated that Prague and Warsaw often promote Western efforts, views and political lines. By contrast, Bratislava and Budapest belong to the minority of Member States often being in opposition with the views of Brussels and being openly on the side of Moscow. Consequently, V4 unity is presently not able to show up short-term prospects of meaningful cooperation. In conclusion, with the eruption of the war in Ukraine, cooperation among Visegrad countries has come to a standstill, and the most significant division arose between Poland and Hungary. It is highly likely that in the upcoming period the success of the format will largely hinge on the ways and issues on which Donald Tusk and Viktor Orbán can collaborate, also strongly influencing the success of Central Europe in defending and promoting the region's interests.

4 Robert Beck: The Visegrád Four: Disunity in Central Europe, February 23, 2024, Foreign Policy Research Institute: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/02/the-visegrad-four-disunity-in-central-europe/>.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONS

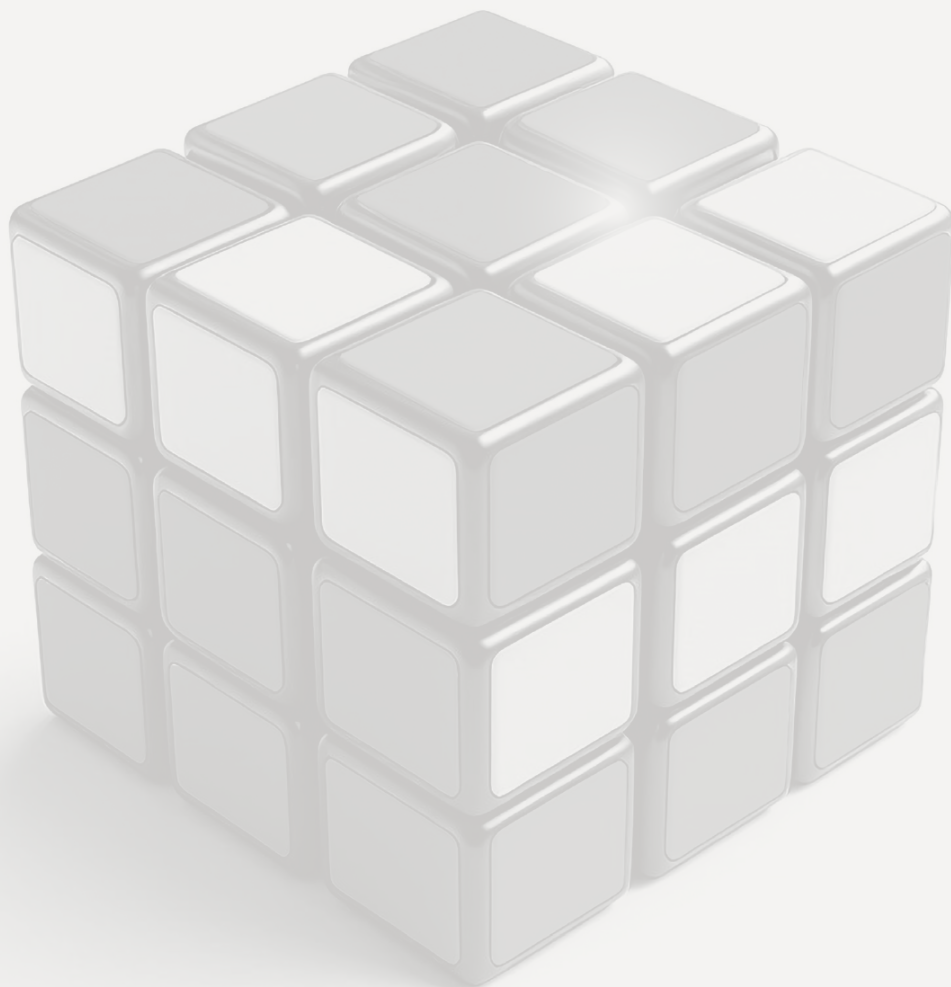
As shortly explained above, V4 as a cooperation still exists, however, currently it became a more formal alliance where the four states are divided into two groups. Disagreements came to the forefront mainly after the break out of the current Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as after the Polish elections of October 2023 that resulted in fundamentally different political lines of the two political leaders. In spite of conflicts and differing views, V4 formally exists, but their cooperation should be continued more effectively and practically in the future. It cannot be neglected that since its establishment, V4 brought with itself significant results for member countries, and in the past, it could effectively represent the interests of these four states in Europe. The possibility to enforce their interests is a powerful tool that could not be left behind and neglected in the future, however, cooperation in the V4 should be reformed and laid on renewed foundations.

As practical recommendations for the Visegrad Group, as well as the cooperation between Hungary and Poland, the following steps, objectives could be realized:

- 1 States and V4 should continue cooperation on those areas that are slightly “more neutral” or void of conflicting opinions, such as certain economics issues, culture, science, infrastructure, business, etc. and that represent the interests for all V4 countries in the EU;
- 2 In spite of differing views on “high political issues”, countries should hold bilateral and V4 meetings in the future as well in order to try reconciling interests, taking stock of problems and mainly for maintaining their relations;
- 3 Discussing their motivation behind their policies and decisions in order to find common understanding that leads to a more successful cooperation.

**BETWEEN SOVEREIGNTY AND SOLIDARITY (?)
THE RELOCATION MECHANISM IN THE EU'S
ASYLUM POLICY**

PHD SYLWIA MAZUR



The European Union is often analysed through the prism of the crises affecting it. Despite their multiplicity (polycrisis) and frequency of occurrence (permacrisis), none of them was as deep as the migration crisis, which culminated in 2015. The most controversial was the temporary relocation mechanism, which, according to some, was a violation of the principle of international law to decide who can enter and stay on the territory of a given country. The reform of the Common European Asylum System introduces a permanent relocation mechanism that can be used from 1 July 2026, and it is to this mechanism that the recommendations at the end refer.

DEFINITION OF RELOCATION

In the EU context, relocation is the process by which beneficiaries of international protection (refugees under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees¹ or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) are relocated to another Member State where they will receive similar protection; or a situation in which persons who have applied for such protection are relocated from the State competent to examine their application to another Member State where their application will be examined. Relocation is different from resettlement, where the transfer of the applicant for international protection takes place from the territory of a third country to an EU Member State at the request of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The following text is only concerned with relocation, which is intended to be an EU mechanism for sharing responsibility/solidarity in a situation where “frontline Member States” are facing an uncontrolled influx of people seeking international protection.

DUBLIN III ORDINANCE – CORNERSTONE OR ORIGINAL SIN?

The abolition of internal borders in the EU required a counterbalance in the form of harmonised regulations at the EU level, which would not only contribute to strengthening external borders and cooperation in the field of migration policies but would also accelerate the path towards uniformity of standards of international protection granted to third-country nationals, m.in. in order to avoid ‘asylum tourism’. One of the objectives of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was to share responsibility for processing applications of asylum seekers in European Union countries, but in practice, Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (the so-called Dublin III)² makes the country responsible for examining the application the first Member State to which a person seeking international protection reaches. This leads to situations in which countries on the periphery of the EU are exposed to migratory pressures. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Dublin III does not include any mechanism that would help to relieve this pressure.

1 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, done at Geneva of 28 July 1951, Journal of Laws of 1991. No. 119, items 515 and 517.

2 Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), OJ L 180, 29.6.2013.

When the number of people arriving in the EU began to rise in the early spring of 2015, it became clear that the inefficiency of the asylum systems of Italy and Greece was affecting the entire European system, which had been reformed just before the crisis. The lack of willingness to resort to the temporary protection mechanism³ meant that the only chance to improve the situation was to use the possibility of adopting an interim measure on the basis of Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It provides that the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may adopt provisional measures for the benefit of a country or countries in an emergency situation characterised by a sudden influx of third-country nationals. This article of the TFEU is a framework article that does not specify what measures may be adopted or for what period.

TEMPORARY RELOCATION MECHANISM

The tragic events in the Mediterranean Sea in April 2015 led the European Commission to present the European Agenda on Migration, in which the Commission proposed for the first time in the history of the EU's migration policy the use of a temporary relocation mechanism based on Article 78(3) TFEU. That mechanism was intended to be a derogation from the rule laid down in Article 3(1) of the Dublin III Regulation, according to which applications for international protection are to be examined by the Member States on the basis of the criteria set out therein. The aim of the interim measures was to reduce the asylum pressure under which Italy and Greece found themselves. Only persons with the nationality of a country for which 75% or more of the citizens were granted international protection were to be relocated to other Member States⁴.

Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523⁵ was adopted unanimously on 14 September 2015 and was to relocate 40,000 persons (24,000 from Italy, 16,000 from Greece) on the basis of a consensus deployment. Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601⁶ was adopted on 22 September 2015 and provided for the relocation of 120,000 persons on the basis of a mandatory allocation set for each of the other Member States. Originally, in addition to Italy and Greece, Hungary was also recognized as a "frontline member state", from which 54,000 people were to be relocated. However, Hungary rejected this qualification and consequently became a Member State of relocation⁷ and was therefore expected to accept the indicated pool of persons relocated from Italy and Greece.

INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE TEMPORARY RELOCATION MECHANISM

Decision (EU) 2015/1601 containing mandatory allocations of persons relocated from Italy and Greece has been controversial from the beginning. The Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary voted against it. Finland abstained from voting, and the United Kingdom refused to take part in the mechanism. Finally, during the two years of the mechanism, about 29,000 people were relocated. Poland and Hungary did not accept any relocated refugees. Hungary did not commit to accept any applicants, while Poland committed in December 2017 to accept 100 people (65 applicants from Greece, and 35 from Italy), but never fulfilled this commitment. The Czech Republic accepted 12 people and stopped there.

3 Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for granting temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and their consequences. L 212, 7.8.2001.

4 At that time, these were Syria and Eritrea.

5 Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection in favour of Italy and Greece. L 239, 15.9.2015.

6 Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection in favour of Italy and Greece. L 248, 24.9.2015.

7 This term is used to define the Member State to which the relocation from the frontline Member State is to take place.

Two cases were pending before the Court of Justice in connection with the temporary relocation mechanism. First, Slovakia and Hungary brought an action for annulment of Decision (EU) 2015/1601. Poland supported the demands of both countries. Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, and the European Commission supported the Council's demands. In a lengthy judgment, the Grand Chamber rejected all the pleas in law and dismissed the actions, finding that Decision 2015/1601 was lawful⁸. In the second case, the European Commission brought actions against Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic for a declaration that they had failed to comply with the other relocation obligations by failing to provide the number of people who could be relocated to their territory. The CJEU agreed with the Commission⁹, although the judgment was only symbolic, as the countries did not suffer any consequences.

Despite defending the relocation mechanism before the CJEU, the European Commission itself noted that the EU system lacks "a well-functioning solidarity mechanism and effective liability provisions".¹⁰

THE NEW PACT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM AND RELOCATION IN THE LIGHT OF REGULATION 2024/1351

In September 2020, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was supposed to reform the CEAS.¹¹ In light of the package approved by the EU Council in May 2024, Dublin III is to be replaced by Regulation 2024/1351 on asylum and migration management¹². In principle, the new act retains the criteria for determining the responsibility for examining an application for international protection, which means that the criterion of the country of first entry continues to prevail (exceptions apply, for example, to a situation where the applicant's family member resides in another Member State; or when the applicant obtained a diploma in another Member State).

However, the Regulation introduces a permanent solidarity mechanism, which is intended to combine mandatory solidarity with flexibility in the area of Member State choice of contribution to the solidarity pool. It includes relocation, i.e. the reception of a person seeking international protection or taking over responsibility for considering such a person's application. In addition to relocation, countries can contribute financially and alternatively to the solidarity pool. The latter type of contribution can mean operational support, capacity building, and support for personnel, facilities, and technical equipment.

In the light of the Regulation, each year the Council (on a proposal from the Commission) will establish this annual solidarity envelope, which will amount to at least 30,000 relocations and EUR 600 million. To this end, the Commission is to take into account qualitative and quantitative criteria (total arrivals, average rate of granting international protection, as well as average return rates in a given year). The implementing act establishing the annual solidarity envelope, including the amounts of required relocations, financial contributions, and specific commitments made by Member States, is to be adopted by a qualified majority, which again could lead to a crack within the Union.

The Commission will exempt countries that are beneficiaries of solidarity from making contributions¹³; and Member States that are under migratory pressure (facing disproportionate obligations and requiring

8 Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber), 6 September 2017. Slovakia and Hungary v Council of the European Union, ECLI:EU:C:2017:631.

9 Judgment of the Court (Third Chamber) of 2 April 2020, European Commission v Republic of Poland and Others, ECLI:EU:C:2020:257.

10 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on asylum and migration management and amending Council Directive 2003/109/EC and the proposed Regulation (EU) XXX/XXX [Asylum and Migration Fund], Brussels, 23.9.2020, COM(2020) 610 final.

11 European Commission, Commission Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, Brussels, 23.9.2020, COM(2020) 609 final.

12 Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on asylum and migration management, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1147 and (EU) 2021/1060 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, OJ L 2024.1351.

13 Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council does not use the term 'frontline country', but uses the term 'beneficiary country'.

immediate action due to the arrival of third-country nationals) or facing a significant migratory situation (as a result of the accumulation of current and previous arrivals).

Finally, it is worth adding that according to the new regulations, it is the beneficiary state, i.e. the country to which the person seeking international protection arrives, that is responsible for checking whether the person does not pose a threat to internal security. If there is reasonable suspicion that this is the case, the person is excluded from the trial. The Member State of relocation may decide to verify the information provided by the transferring State through the hearing of the person concerned. If it is confirmed that a person poses a threat, they are not relocated. However, it is still the beneficiary country that indicates which people can be relocated.

SUMMARY

Due to its location and political situation in the near and distant neighbourhood, the European Union is and will be exposed to migratory pressures. Countries at the EU's borders, which face uncontrolled inflows of third-country nationals, will continue to be in a particularly difficult situation. As first-country countries, they will also be exposed to the overload of their asylum systems, which in turn will affect the functioning of the systems in other Member States. The prerequisite for the functioning of a 'common' asylum system in an area without internal frontiers therefore remains unchanged. However, "common" does not mean "uniform". Member States, due to their different histories, economic situation or reception and integration infrastructure, should be discreet in their choice of solidarity measure. Especially since an attempt to interfere in an area as politically "sensitive" as the rights to accept third-country nationals may seem to the public opinion of some Member States to be too far-reaching a penetration into the sovereignty of the country.

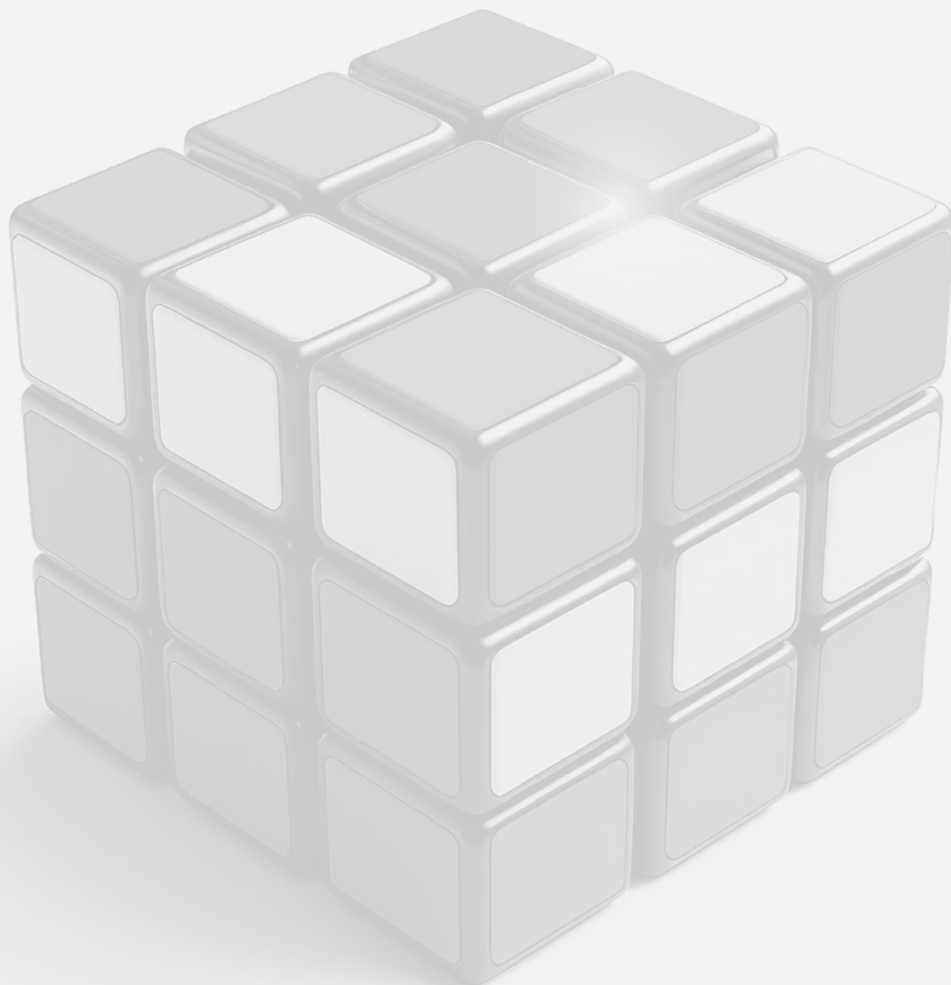
From the perspective of the EU *acquis*, however, the situation is obvious. According to Article 80 TFEU, the EU's asylum policy is based on the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, and the temporary relocation mechanism based on Article 78(3) TFEU is lawful. Moreover, the two judgments cited above may be cited in the future in situations in which a Member State wishes to unilaterally evade the implementation of a decision in the area of migration. The CEAS reform completed this year introduces a permanent relocation mechanism, which means that the chances of re-using Article 78(3) – at least to establish temporary relocation – are low. On the other hand, the fact that the permanent relocation mechanism has been regulated by EU secondary law does not mean that it will be used during the next crisis. Suffice it to say that the temporary protection mechanism remained unused for 20 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Poland is a party to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the New York Protocol of 1967, which means that it should treat beneficiaries of international protection on its territory in accordance with international standards.
- 2 As regards a specific minimum contribution to the envelope (30,000 relocations and 600 000 000 Euro), it is binding only on the Commission and not on the EU Solidarity Forum (representatives of Member States at ministerial or other high political level). It is therefore the forum that will establish the level of solidarity. In addition, it will also be able to indicate other response measures. Therefore, the key for representatives of the Polish government will be the ability to defend the national interest and negotiate with representatives of other Member States.
- 3 Contributing Member States are fully free to choose the types of solidarity measures. Member States may submit their commitments on alternative solidarity measures even if they are not indicated in the Commission's proposal. This means that Poland should be prepared to provide, for example, operational support, personnel support, or technical equipment that can be used as a substitute for relocation.
- 4 The regulation introduces a "permanent EU toolbox of support in the area of migration", which will operate alongside the solidarity pool. This toolkit contains, inter alia others, operational and technical assistance provided by EU agencies; support from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund; measures to facilitate return and reintegration activities, as well as communication, diplomatic, and political strategies. It is in Poland's interest that this set is as effective as possible in mitigating the effects of migration pressures.
- 5 In this context, an enhanced dialogue between Member States located at the EU's southern and eastern borders, whose systems are most vulnerable to migratory pressures, as demonstrated by the crises related to the influx of third-country nationals in 2015 and 2022, will be of particular importance.

MIGRATION POLICY OF THE EU - WAYS TO IMPACT THE EU INSTITUTIONS TO END THE FORCED RELOCATION MECHANISM? POLICY PAPER

DR. BERNADETT PETRI



The Migration Pact has entered a new phase with the adoption of its first Implementing Decision, which now includes concrete figures and rates for migration. The apparently politically motivated decision has established an unfair and disproportionate methodology that severely penalises the most vocal critics of EU migration policy. At the same time, internal tensions are growing, with Poland recently becoming a vocal critic of the Migration Pact, which is an opportunity for the Hungarian government to more forcefully represent its own interests (changing migration policy, maintaining and financing border closures, reviewing fines, unblocking funds) and could open the way for a regional (V3 / V4) position to be developed and represented.

INTRODUCTION - STATE OF PLAY

The Migration Pact was voted by the European Parliament in April 2024, with the aim of supporting Member States facing significant migratory pressure and protecting our external borders¹ - at the expense of other Member States. The Pact aims to strengthen trust and to strike a balance between collective responsibility and solidarity, even if there are some states, certainly Hungary, that do not want to take on the responsibility imposed on them. So far, no quantification has been made of the proportion of solidarity and fairness in the distribution of asylum applications to be examined under the border procedure.

This may have been changed by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/2150² (5 August 2024). The Implementing Decision, which applies from 12 June 2026 until 14 October 2027, determines (i) the corresponding border capacity of each Member State and (ii) the maximum number of applications per year to be examined by Member States in the border procedure. The capacity and maximum number of applications for the period after 14 October 2027 must be adopted by the Commission every three years on 15 October, with the next adoption in 2027. The corresponding capacity and the maximum number of requests per year to be examined by Member States in the framework of the border procedure should be calculated on the basis of the irregular border crossings, including arrivals following search and rescue operations, and the refused entries at the external borders, as reported by Member States to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

1 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_hu

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32024D2150>

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to the Implementing Decision, the **total number of irregular border crossings and refused entries in the EU as a whole is 1,318,040, of which Hungary accounts for 338,978 and Italy for 352,191, representing 25.7% and 26.7% respectively.** On this basis, the Implementing Decision concludes that Hungary has a „sufficient capacity for border processing” of 7,716 persons and Italy of 8,016 persons. The „adequate capacity for border management” of the other EU Member States totals 14.268 persons, i.e. less than the combined capacity of Hungary and Italy. Annex 2 to the Implementing Decision sets out the maximum number of applications per year to be examined by Member States in the framework of the border procedure for the period 12 June 2026 to 12 June 2027 and 13 June 2027 to 14 October 2027. **For the one-year period starting in two years’ time, the maximum number of applications per year to be examined under the border procedure was capped at twice the „corresponding capacity” described in the previous paragraph, and for the following quarter at three times the „corresponding capacity”, i.e. approximately twelve times on an annual basis. In other words, Italy and Hungary together „received” 52.4% of the applications to be examined, while all other Member States received 47.6%.** For the quarterly period from 13 June to 14 October 2027, Hungary and Italy will have to examine a maximum of 23,148 and 24,048 applications respectively, while Germany will have to examine a maximum of 1,122, Austria 123, Belgium 318, France 1,845, Spain 9,903 and Greece 6,564.

The situation will not be any better after 2027 when the review takes place. Due to the specificity of the calculation methodology, the more (and registered!) a Member State protects itself, i.e. protects the security of its citizens, the higher its share of the number of applications to be examined will be. And the reverse is also true: a Member State that is not defending, or is defending but reporting low numbers to Frontex, will have a low share.

In the case of the Implementing Decision, the breaking points were already visible at the time of its adoption: in 2023, during the last round of negotiations, Hungary and Poland (the former right-wing government) took a negative position, but it should also be stressed that four Member States, Lithuania, Slovakia, Malta and Bulgaria, abstained. Earlier, however, at the EU summit, EU heads of state and government decided that they would seek full consensus on the migration pact. Any deviation from this would violate the principle of loyal cooperation enshrined in the treaties, which binds the parties both in their relations with each other and in their relations with the EU.³

Although the Migration Pact is declared to be a confidence-building instrument, and to strike a balance between collective responsibility and solidarity, the first Implementing Decision of the Pact does not even show solidarity, nor does it show any alignment with reality. The calculation methodology places a disproportionate burden on those Member States, including Hungary, which are the most vocal in their opposition to the current EU migration policy and already bear the greatest burden of migratory pressure. Unfortunately, such legislative products will not change migration, will not improve public security and will not strengthen the EU in the world, but will certainly increase internal tensions.

On 12 October, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced at his party’s congress that they will reject the Migration Pact. Poland will be tough and relentless on illegal migration, and will only enforce European migration laws that do not endanger the country’s security. If you want to work or study in Poland, you must respect Polish norms and customs, you must integrate. This is the spirit behind the new Polish migration strategy, which will be presented on 15 October.⁴

3 https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2023/06/a-migranskvotanak-az-unios-egyseg-latja-karat#google_vignette

4 <https://hu.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/10/12/ideiglenesen-felfuggeszthetik-a-menedekjogot-lengyelorszagban-belarusz>

The Hungarian interest is simple and clear:

- the Migration Pact should be completely rethought, and its Implementing Decisions should be in line with reality and Member States' interests. Those who disagree with the Migration Pact should be exempted.
- In the name of the much-vaunted solidarity, the EU funding of border protection costs in Hungary should be resolved – also retroactively – and the solutions and efforts used there should be recognised.
- Hungary should not be disproportionately and unfairly punished by court judgments using migration as a pretext.

SUMMARY

Contrary to previous efforts, the Migration Pact was not adopted by consensus. Its Implementing Decision, applicable from 12 June 2026 to 14 October 2027, sets out (i) the respective border capacity of each Member State and (ii) the maximum number of applications per year to be examined by Member States in the framework of the border procedure. The data show that it does not include the solidarity principle that has been invoked before. The calculation methodology places a disproportionate burden on those Member States, including Hungary, which are the most vocal in their opposition to the current EU migration policy. According to the Implementing Decision, the **total number of irregular border crossings and refused entries in the EU as a whole is 1,318,040, of which Hungary accounts for 338,978 and Italy for 352,191, representing 25.7% and 26.7% respectively.** The disproportionality and unfairness of this calculation is unsustainable and needs to be corrected immediately.

Forcing Hungary to handle a quarter of the applications would place an enormous burden on the Hungarian border and authorities, including the need to build the necessary (but unspecified) capacity. The mass of people accumulated in camps on the Hungarian side of the border would also pose security, health, administrative and logistical challenges, which the EU is also afraid would tie the hands of the Hungarian government in dealing with them. It is also unclear what financial framework the EU will allocate to address this issue.

For other reasons, but fundamentally because of the security issue, Poland is also becoming increasingly vocal in its opposition to illegal migration, which could pave the way for a common V3 / V4 position on migration and joint action.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán recently presented the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency in the European Parliament. One of the priorities he highlighted was the seriousness of the migration crisis, the importance of protecting external borders and the need for the EU to provide substantial support, noting that „the EU asylum system is not working today”. He then proposed a regular summit of Schengen leaders and the full extension of the Schengen agreement to Bulgaria and Romania.

The main objective of the **European Council meeting on 17 and 18 October** was to reinforce and accelerate operational measures in line with and feeding on the comprehensive approach⁵ negotiated and adopted in 2023. The main points of the meeting were enhanced external action, reinforcing control at the EU's external borders, increasing and accelerating the number of returns and the use of migrants as a tool, and combating trafficking and smuggling of human beings.

5 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/hu/meetings/european-council/2023/02/09/>

The increasingly visible increase in migratory pressure **is**, understandably, having a significant impact on **the domestic policies of individual Member States**. One after the other, increasingly radical measures are being taken. Almost day by day, taboos are being broken down. On the one hand, because voters are voicing their concerns about the deterioration of public safety and the , gradual loss of their cultural values’ in general, and are doing so with increasing intensity, as they vote for radical parties classified as extreme right-wing, in increasing numbers year after year. On the other hand, the leaders who have thus come to power, responding to the main demands of their citizens, are presenting their fellow citizens with increasingly radical proposals to solve, or at least alleviate, a gradually growing problem.

Attitudes in Western European countries have also changed significantly in recent times. The **French legislature** also seems to be hardening its tone on immigration policy. The threefold objective of the situation, which calls for concrete and immediate action, is to strengthen controls, increase controls on the issuing of legal residence permits and reduce them, and increase the number of expulsions. It is significant that 40 of the 86 articles of the immigration law⁶ initially proposed by the French National Assembly in December 2023, which was only voted on with great difficulty, were immediately annulled by the Constitutional Court. Ursula von der Leyen herself is also taking a more assertive stance in calling for improved cooperation with countries of origin and transit. In addition to reinforcing the refugee camps in Albania, the Commission President is also pushing for agreements with Senegal and Mali to open new „return centres”, along the lines of the migration conventions with Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon. It can also be assumed that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz did not express his personal convictions when he ordered the closure of the borders. The state elections and the increasingly spectacular success of the AFD, reflecting the increasingly radicalised preferences of the German electorate, have clearly played a role in this decision.⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

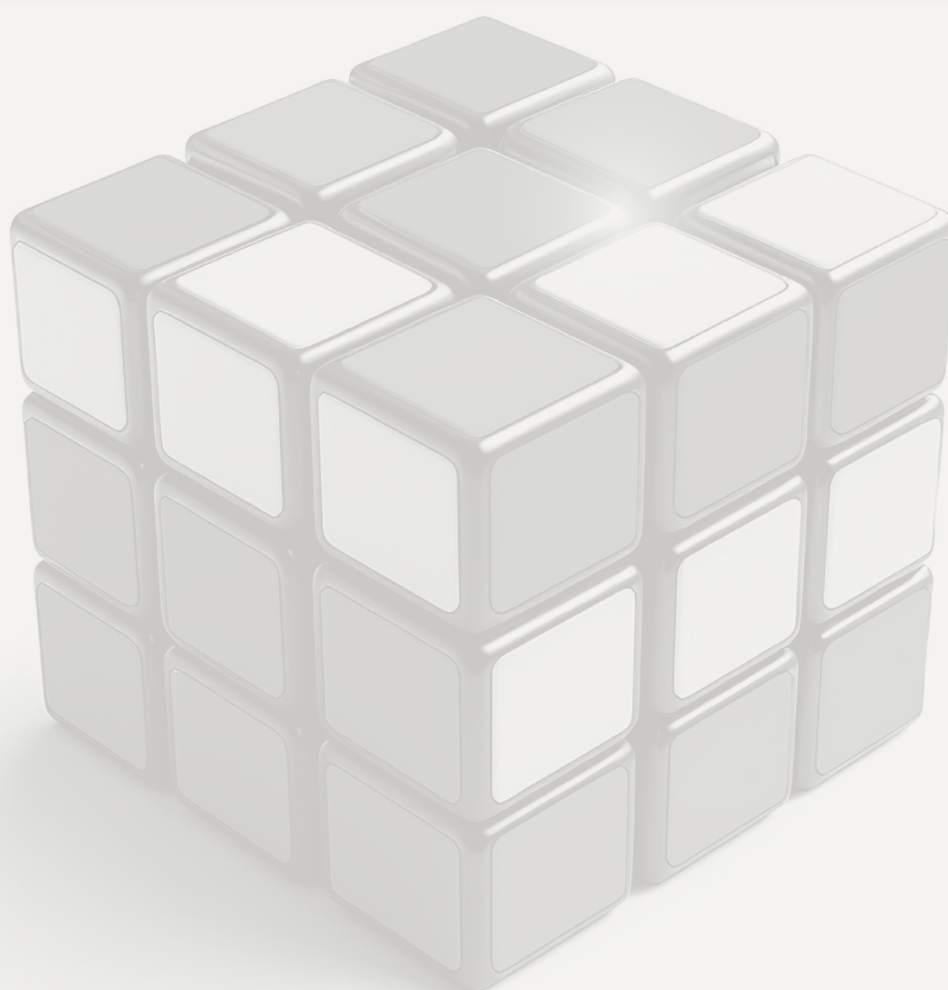
- 1 the Implementing Decision in this form penalises those Member States who protect the EU borders, therefore the EU must fundamentally rethink its own migration policy and change the flawed way of calculating
- 2 the Hungarian government needs more allies among the Member States, recognising that the common interest
- 3 Hungarian and Polish experts should draw attention to the dangers of EU migration policy in every possible forum, and argue their case with data to support their own case
- 4 in the case of migration, the political positions of Poland and Hungary have visibly converged, and there is a need to open up discussions and exchanges of experience at expert level in order to take joint action.

6 https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/immigration/loi-immigration-queles-sont-les-principales-mesures-restantes-du-texte-apres-la-censure-de-40-des-articles-par-le-conseil-constitutionnel_6325998.html

7 <https://www.ludovika.hu/blog/ot-perc-europa-blog/2024/10/17/a-migracio-kerdesez-europai-politika-homloktereben/>

HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU – DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS AND THE PRIORITIES OF THE PROGRAMME

ILONA GIZIŃSKA



The Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council has sparked controversy for months, primarily due to the conflict between Budapest and the EU institutions and the pro-Russian orientation of Viktor Orbán's government. Some concerns were confirmed by the diplomatic actions of the Hungarian prime minister (as part of his so-called peace mission) undertaken shortly after Hungary assumed the presidency. The debate surrounding these actions has significantly overshadowed the substantive goals of the presidency outlined in the official programme. One symbolically significant consequence of Prime Minister Orbán's foreign visits under the EU presidency banner is the diminished status of informal meetings organised by Budapest. The programme itself focuses on strengthening the EU's competitiveness, defense, and cohesion policies, combating illegal migration, addressing demographic challenges, and improving the situation of farmers. The programme clearly attempts to avoid topics that are problematic from the perspective of the divergent approaches of Brussels and Budapest, but which still remain crucial in the EU's context.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF HUNGARY'S EU PRESIDENCY

On the 1st of July, 2024, Hungary assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. This six-month term is the last in the trio with Spain and Belgium and coincides with the end of the EU's five-year legislative cycle. The new European Commission (EC) is expected to be appointed in early autumn and will need time to set its priorities and establish a work plan. As a result, Hungary's presidency is not expected to be a period of intense legislative activity. Despite this, it has proven highly controversial due to Budapest's conflicts with the EU institutions, its practice of vetoing initiatives, and its challenges to EU policies on issues such as support for Ukraine, Ukraine's EU accession, and relations with Russia and China.

Over the past year, there were even discussions about revoking Hungary's presidency. In June 2023, the European Parliament (EP) passed a resolution on "violations of the rule of law and fundamental rights in Hungary and the freezing of EU funds," which questioned Hungary's ability to "credibly fulfill" its role. Despite efforts by the EP and critical statements from many EU politicians, Hungary's presidency went ahead. This is unprecedented, given that agenda-setting and the chairing of ministerial meetings have been entrusted to a member state subject to the procedure under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the conditionality mechanism, under which part of the Cohesion Fund has been frozen.

START OF THE PRESIDENCY IN THE SHADOW OF ORBÁN'S "PEACE MISSION"

In the first days after Hungary assumed the EU Council presidency, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán embarked on a series of foreign visits, which he termed a "peace mission". He visited Ukraine on July 2, Russia on July 5, China on July 8, and finally, from July 9 to July 11 the United States, where he attended the NATO summit and met with Donald Trump. The most controversial of these visits, especially among EU leaders and institutions, was his secretive meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, which was kept under wraps until

the last minute. European Council President Charles Michel and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell emphasised that Hungary's rotating EU presidency does not authorise Orbán to conduct talks with Russia on behalf of Brussels, stressing that the meeting with Putin was purely a bilateral engagement. Orbán leveraged Hungary's EU presidency to create the illusion he was representing the entire European Union, despite the fact that, since the Lisbon Treaty came into force in 2009, this role no longer exists for the rotating presidency.

The misuse of the presidency's mandate sparked a debate within the EU about how to manage Hungary's leadership over the next six months, with some even suggesting Hungary's term be shortened. On July 10, a meeting was held in Brussels to discuss Orbán's visits to Kyiv, Moscow, and Beijing, and was attended by diplomats from 25 EU member states. With the exception of Slovakia, whose representative remained silent, all attendees agreed that Hungary had overstepped its mandate, though no decisions on consequences were made. In protest against Orbán's diplomatic actions regarding Ukraine, several countries, including Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, and Denmark, announced they would downgrade the level of their ministerial representation at the EU Council meetings chaired by Hungary. The EP also signalled its disapproval by not inviting Viktor Orbán to the inaugural session of the new parliamentary term on July 16. Furthermore, the EC announced its intention to boycott Hungary's presidency by not sending commissioners to the informal EU Council meetings organised by Hungary. On July 22, Josep Borrell, the EU's chief diplomat, announced that the planned EU foreign ministers' summit on August 28-29 would be relocated from Budapest to Brussels – a clear diplomatic rebuke. As a result, Hungary's presidency has already generated significant controversy, overshadowing its substantive programme proposals.

PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME – PRIORITIES AND KEY DETAILED ISSUES

On June 19, Secretary of State for International Communications Zoltán Kovács, along with Minister for EU Affairs Janos Bóka, presented the detailed programme of the Hungarian Presidency. The substantive issues outlined in the programme had previously been communicated in very general terms and were not part of Fidesz's electoral campaign for the European Parliament elections. Therefore, the programme's unveiling attracted significant interest. The official slogan of the presidency, "Make Europe Great Again", garnered substantial media attention. According to its authors, the slogan is intended to evoke a proactive presidency and the pursuit of restoring Europe's international competitiveness. However, it is difficult to interpret this slogan other than as a direct reference to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign slogan, especially given Viktor Orbán's strong support for Trump's potential re-election in the upcoming fall elections. The presidency's logo features the Rubik's Cube, a Hungarian invention celebrating its 50th anniversary, symbolising both the complexity of the EU's realities and representing the 27 member states (the same number as the cube's pieces).

PRIORITIES OF THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY:

- New European "Pact for Competitiveness" – Aimed at mitigating the economic challenges of recent years (high inflation and energy prices, rising public debt, fragmentation of international supply chains) by enhancing European productivity, stimulating growth, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Strengthening European Defense Policy – Focused on bolstering defense capabilities, crisis management, and the technological-industrial base of the defense sector, in light of "ongoing and emerging conflicts on the continent and worldwide" (notably, there is no mention of Russia's aggression against Ukraine).

- Consistent and Criteria-Based Enlargement Policy – Recognised as one of the EU's most successful policies, though the priority does not include plans for the so-called "accession trio" (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia). Only the Western Balkans are mentioned, including a planned EU-Western Balkans Summit. There is also no discussion of EU reforms in preparation for admitting new members.
- Reducing Illegal Migration – Emphasises the migratory pressure on countries with external EU borders and the need for cooperation with neighbouring and third countries (countries of origin and transit for migrants), as well as combating smuggling as a criminal activity. However, there is no reference to the EU Migration Pact or the Asylum Directive.
- Shaping Future Cohesion Policy – Promotes strategic debate on furthering EU convergence in the traditional sense of reducing regional disparities in development.
- EU Agricultural Policy Directed Towards Farmers – Advocates for a more farmer-centered approach, recognising them as the guarantors of EU food security who face numerous challenges (decreased competitiveness due to climate change, stricter production rules, and increased imports from third countries). It calls for the goals of the European Green Deal (EGD) to be more balanced, the stabilisation of agricultural markets, and ensuring a decent standard of living for farmers.
- Addressing Demographic Challenges – Although the Hungarian presidency has limited competences in this area, it plans to direct the EC's attention to demographic issues (particularly low birth rates) in terms of the stability of public finances and the EU's competitiveness.

KEY DETAILED ISSUES:

- EU Values and the Rule of Law: The programme emphasises the importance of adhering to the rule of law by monitoring national institutions and broadly defending democratic values, though it does not specify examples of violations. It also highlights the need for candidate countries to respect the rights of national minorities (referencing Hungary's dispute with Ukraine over the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia) and stresses the importance of combating antisemitism and preserving Jewish cultural heritage in Europe.
- Strategic Agenda 2024-2029: The programme commits to initiating the Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029, with a focus on fiscal discipline, the need to explore new budgetary resources (without specifying what these might be), and combating tax evasion.
- Energy and Climate: Energy and climate-related topics are prominently featured, especially the coordination of the implementation of the "Fit for 55" package as part of the EU's goal of achieving climate neutrality. Hungary promotes the development of nuclear energy and the use of geothermal energy, biogas, hydrogen, and biomass, as well as the expansion of transmission networks.
- EU Relations with Third Countries: The presidency's agenda places significant emphasis on the EU's relations with third countries, notably omitting any mention of relations with Russia. Surprisingly, a substantial focus is placed on the partnership with Türkiye, mainly concerning energy security and migration challenges. Regarding China, the agenda reiterates the familiar call for a pragmatic approach and economic cooperation. In addition to the EU-Western Balkans Summit, Hungary will also organise the European Political Cooperation (EPC) Summit, scheduled shortly after the US elections in November, indicating how much Hungary's position, often at odds with the Democratic administration, depends on the outcome. Currently, the programme only touches on transatlantic relations in passing.

- **Military Engagement in the Sahel:** The programme extensively justifies the need for military engagement in the Sahel region, where Hungary plans to send a military contingent as part of anti-terrorism efforts. The mission in Chad is controversial as it stands in contradiction to Hungary's "peaceful" stance on the war in Ukraine.
- **Other Initiatives:** Hungary also plans to engage in a range of actions outside the mainstream political debate during its EU Council presidency. These include enhancing the competitiveness of European higher education institutions, the "Pharmaceutical Package" (aimed at improving the accessibility and affordability of medicines), developing a circular economy, and improving the work-life balance.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAMME AND PREDICTIONS FOR THE PRESIDENCY

The Hungarian presidency programme can be described as broad in scope but superficial and lacking technical detail regarding the implementation of the proposed solutions. The selection of topics suggests an effort by the authors to avoid addressing issues that are crucial from the EU perspective but problematic due to the particularly divergent views of Brussels and Budapest. This approach is seen clearly in the numerous ambiguities in the programme, such as the vague definition of "breaches of democratic principles" that Hungary expects other countries to adhere to during its presidency.

One notably omitted issue is the war between Russia and Ukraine. The programme only addresses it peripherally, focusing on war refugees and the rebuilding of Ukraine, which contrasts with the Belgian presidency's programme that explicitly condemned Russian aggression and called for further sanctions against it. The thematic selectivity of the Hungarian presidency programme is also seen in the absence of direct mentions of Eastern enlargement or the "Migration and Asylum Pact." This omission indicates that Hungary maintains a firm stance on these issues and is unwilling to change its position.

In most areas covered by the agenda (e.g., cohesion policy, EU finances, defence, energy), Hungary operates within the already established EU policy frameworks, without making significant changes or introducing many new initiatives. The attempt to subtly introduce a Hungarian perspective, which diverges from Brussels' approach, is most apparent in international cooperation. Here, Hungary ignores the adopted de-risking strategy and advocates for closer economic partnerships with China. This generally cautious and conventional approach in relation to the EU mainstream is also reflected in the narrative of the programme – there are none of the anti-EU statements which were previously common in Hungarian government communications. The abandonment of extreme rhetoric may reflect an intention for Hungary's presidency to be as constructive and controversy-free as possible. This intention is underscored by the commitment to act as an "honest broker" during its time presiding over the Council of the EU.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLAND

From the perspective of Poland's upcoming presidency in the EU Council, which follows Hungary's, it is beneficial to continue focusing on the aspects of the Hungarian programme that align with Poland's strategic interests, especially those that transcend the differences in security approaches between Poland and Hungary. Key areas to consider include the agricultural, environmental, and energy sectors:

- 1 Both Hungary and Poland seek to balance strategic goals related to the EGD with the standard of living of farmers. Both countries are actively working to stabilise local agricultural markets affected by international political developments.
- 2 There are also shared interests between Hungary and Poland in the green transition process. This includes the need to decarbonise heating systems (including district heating), promote the domestic production of green gases, expand the electromobility sector, and develop Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies.
- 3 Although Hungary is unique among EU countries in its intention to expand nuclear power with Russian collaboration, both Hungary and Poland share a commitment to supporting nuclear energy within the EU. They are both part of the so-called 'nuclear alliance' and recognise the crucial role of nuclear power in the decarbonisation process and in ensuring secure and stable energy supplies.

By focusing on these areas, Poland can build on the momentum of Hungary's presidency while aligning with its own strategic objectives, thus fostering continuity and cooperation in key sectors of mutual interest.

HUNGARY AND POLAND'S PRIORITIES DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

VICTORIA LILLA PATO



This analysis examines the priorities of Hungary and Poland during their presidency of the Council of the European Union, highlighting shared interests and differing approaches. During its 2025 presidency, Poland would focus on strengthening transatlantic relations, EU enlargement, and achieving a just energy transition, while Hungary primarily aims to enhance European competitiveness, strengthen energy security, promote enlargement and neighborhood policy, and develop the EU's defense capabilities. The paper also provides recommendations for potential cooperation between the two countries to effectively represent Central and Eastern European interests.

INTRODUCTION

Hungary and Poland, as two important members of the Central and Eastern European bloc, play a significant role in the political life of the European Union. With a population four times that of Hungary and an area three times larger, Poland falls into the category of large countries. Hungary's GDP in 2023 was 217 billion USD, with a per capita GDP of around 22,000 USD, which matches that of Poland; however, due to its territorial and population advantage, Poland's GDP approached 750 billion USD in 2023. Despite these differences, the two nations share numerous common interests and identity elements due to their historical past and geographical location. The V4 cooperation and the Three Seas Initiative further strengthen regional cooperation with political, economic, and social dimensions. Since the Russia-Ukraine war, relations between Poland and Hungary have weakened compared to previous years, a trend intensified by the government restructuring following the 2023 Polish parliamentary elections. While Poland found a way out of the EU's rule of law debate, Hungary remains affected, leading to significant economic impacts through the partial freezing of cohesion funds and withholding of the RRF. Starting in early 2024, Poland has advocated for a stronger Europe and transatlantic-friendly policy, preparing for its EU Council presidency beginning on January 1, 2025, as the first member of the Polish-Danish-Cypriot trio, led by former European Council President Donald Tusk. Hungary took over the baton from Belgium on July 1, 2024, as the last country in the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian presidency trio, whose effectiveness was strongly influenced by the institutional turnover and the summer recess of eurocracy.

ADVOCACY DURING THE PRESIDENCY

The rotating presidency of the Council is strategically important not only because it allows the presiding country to influence the EU's political agenda but also because it provides an opportunity to advance national priorities and interests on the European stage. The presidency gives Hungary a chance to improve relations with EU partners and consolidate the rule of law debate. Additionally, Hungary seeks an agreement on Hungarian universities excluded from directly managed EU funds,¹ which would be an important

¹ Thomas Brent 2024: Commission clarifies position on Hungary's participation in Horizon Europe. ScienceBusiness, Online: <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/horizon-europe/commission-clarifies-position-hungarys-participation-horizon-europe>

step in supporting domestic scientific life, as the December 2022 European Commission decision restricting access to some RDI funds remains a challenge.² Resolving this issue is particularly important for the European political agenda, as the second von der Leyen Commission aims to ensure the free flow of science and knowledge as a fifth freedom of the single market.³ However, if 21 higher education institutions and their students in one Member State remain excluded from EU mobility and RDI programs, this goal remains an empty phrase.

Poland and Hungary both joined the Club 20 years ago, and thus belong to the widening category regarding directly managed EU funds—such as Horizon Europe, the largest RDI fund. Preparing for the next MFF, the two countries can jointly advocate for further strengthening of the widening conditions. A good example of this is the “Declaration of 15,” signed by ministers from the region, insisting that FP10 retains the “Widening participation and spreading excellence” component and continues to promote research excellence in the EU.⁴

ANALYSIS OF POLISH AND HUNGARIAN PRIORITIES

Hungary presented its 2024 EU presidency priorities on June 18, 2024, by the Minister for European Union Affairs, under the motto “Make Europe Great Again.”⁵ Hungary describes itself as an “honest broker” in international relations and aims to pursue a policy of economic neutrality. At the start of the presidency, the Hungarian Prime Minister embarked on a peace mission, which was not positively received by all Member States and was criticized by the EU.

Hungary identified seven priorities that align with the objectives of the reports on the EU internal market by Enrico Letta in 2024⁶ and on EU competitiveness by Mario Draghi⁷; however, the tools differ on some points. Poland’s priorities were unknown at the time of writing, but based on the policies and stance of the government led by Donald Tusk, we can infer areas likely to feature on the Polish political agenda.

MIGRATION POLICY

Poland and Hungary are geographically similarly affected by the issue of migration, as some of their borders are also the EU’s external borders. The two countries’ migration policies differ from the EU’s central approach, opposing the mandatory quota system for distributing immigrants among Member States, instead supporting voluntary contributions.⁸ The aim of the Polish and Hungarian leadership is to combat illegal migration, strengthen border security, and address the root causes of migration, particularly through development aid in African and Middle Eastern regions. According to Viktor Orbán, cooperation on migration is important, but Member States have the sovereign right to shape their immigration policy.

2 Juliette Portala 2024: Hungary to bypass Brussels in bid to ‘resolve the silence’ over funding ban. ScienceBusiness, Online: <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/research-and-innovation-gap/hungary-bypass-brussels-bid-resolve-silence-over-funding-ban>

3 Mission letter to Ekaterina Zahariava, Commissioner for startups, research and innovation 2024. Online: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/130e9159-8616-4c29-9f61-04592557cf4c_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20ZAHARIEVA.pdf

4 Florin Zubaşcu 2024: EU ministers lobby Zaharieva to keep Widening going in FP10. ScienceBusiness, Online: <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/research-and-innovation-gap/eu-ministers-lobby-zaharieva-keep-widening-going-fp10>

5 EU Council Presidency Priorities Hungary 2024. Online: <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/32nhoe0p/programme-and-priorities-of-the-hungarian-presidency.pdf>

6 Enrico Letta 2024: Much more than a market. Online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>

7 Mario Draghi 2024: The future of European competitiveness. Online: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en?filename=The%20future%20of%20European%20competitiveness%20-%20A%20competitiveness%20strategy%20for%20Europe.pdf

8 Jorge Liboreiro 2024: EU completes reform of migration rules despite Poland and Hungary voting against. Euronews, Online: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/14/eu-completes-reform-of-migration-rules-despite-poland-and-hungary-voting-against>

Donald Tusk retained his predecessor's official stance and rejected the new pact, and on October 15, Poland adopted its migration strategy for the period 2025–2030.⁹

On August 5, 2024, the Commission issued Implementing Decision 2024/2150 on the Migration Pact, which requires Hungary to register 7,716 border crossers from June 2026 to October 2027, and Poland—highest number from the Baltic region—to register 1,564, while Denmark, which will follow the Poles in the presidency, is exempt from the Decision.¹⁰ The place of registration is important because if another EU Member State does not admit the registered person, they must remain in the registering country if they wish to stay within the EU. This will lead to a significant increase in the number of relocated migrants. In this area, the two countries can jointly represent the strengthening of the external dimension of migration, such as effective cooperation with third countries, developing innovative solutions in asylum rules, and the importance of EU funding for external border protection.

ENLARGEMENT POLICY

Poland strongly supports Moldova and Ukraine's EU accession process and pays particular attention to strengthening cooperation between the EU and Serbia.¹¹ This area is also important for Hungary, which pursues a merit-based enlargement policy, particularly promoting Western Balkan integration and organizing an EU-Western Balkans summit during its presidency. The two countries agree that fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria is essential and that enlargement objectives should consider the internal market's capacity to absorb new members. Poland places greater emphasis on Ukraine's accession, while Hungary focuses on the Western Balkans and Serbia and considers the protection of national minorities important in accession negotiations.

COMPETITIVENESS AND COHESION

Hungary has announced a policy of economic neutrality, while Poland supports following the EU's transatlantic direction.¹² Poland focuses on linking industrial policy to common trade policy, access to critical raw materials needed for the green transition, and the challenges of energy-intensive industries.¹³ The Polish and Hungarian governments agree that competitiveness and innovation are fundamental to strengthening the internal market and simplifying EU regulations and reducing administrative burdens, which currently limit the potential of European companies, especially SMEs. Thus, cohesion policy is a central element of competitiveness, based on convergence between regions. In line with these values, Hungary's main goal is the adoption of the Competitiveness Pact, which could serve as a basis for Poland's presidency to establish the Competitiveness Fund. Poland will play a more significant role in advancing legal dossiers as the institutional cycle change will be completed by then. During the Polish presidency, the Competitiveness Fund, along with the Clean Industry Agreement, the Chemical Package (REACH simplification), a new Circular Economy Bill, public procurement reform, and the Clean Trade and Investment Partnership are also likely to be on the agenda.

9 Poland Migration Strategy 2025-2030. Online: <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/uchwala-w-sprawie-przyjecia-dokumentu-odzyskac-kontrolę-zapewnić-bezpieczeństwo-kompleksowa-i-odpowiedzialna-strategia-migracyjna-polski-na-lata-2025-2030>

10 Implementing Decision 2024/2150 Online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32024D2150>

11 Reuters 2024: EU enlargement a key focus of Poland's presidency of bloc. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-enlargement-key-focus-polands-presidency-bloc-says-tusk-2024-10-24/>

12 Viktor Orbán presentation at the University of Public Service on 25 September, 2024. Online: <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-nemzeti-kozszojalati-egyetem-europai-versenykepesseg-magyar-gazdasagi-semlegesseg-cimu-konferenciajan>

13 Republic of Poland 2024: The future of the European economy. Online: <https://www.gov.pl/web/eu/the-future-of-the-european-economy>

ENERGY

Poland advocates for reducing the economic burdens of fossil energy, especially coal, and delaying the implementation of ETS2, rejecting its current form, as the system would significantly increase heating costs.¹⁴ During its 2025 EU presidency, the Polish government is expected to push for ETS2 modification and the national scheduling of the energy transition. Hungary prioritizes the development of renewable energy sources, especially geothermal and nuclear energy, as well as diversifying energy supplies, with the development of the gas network also important to the country.

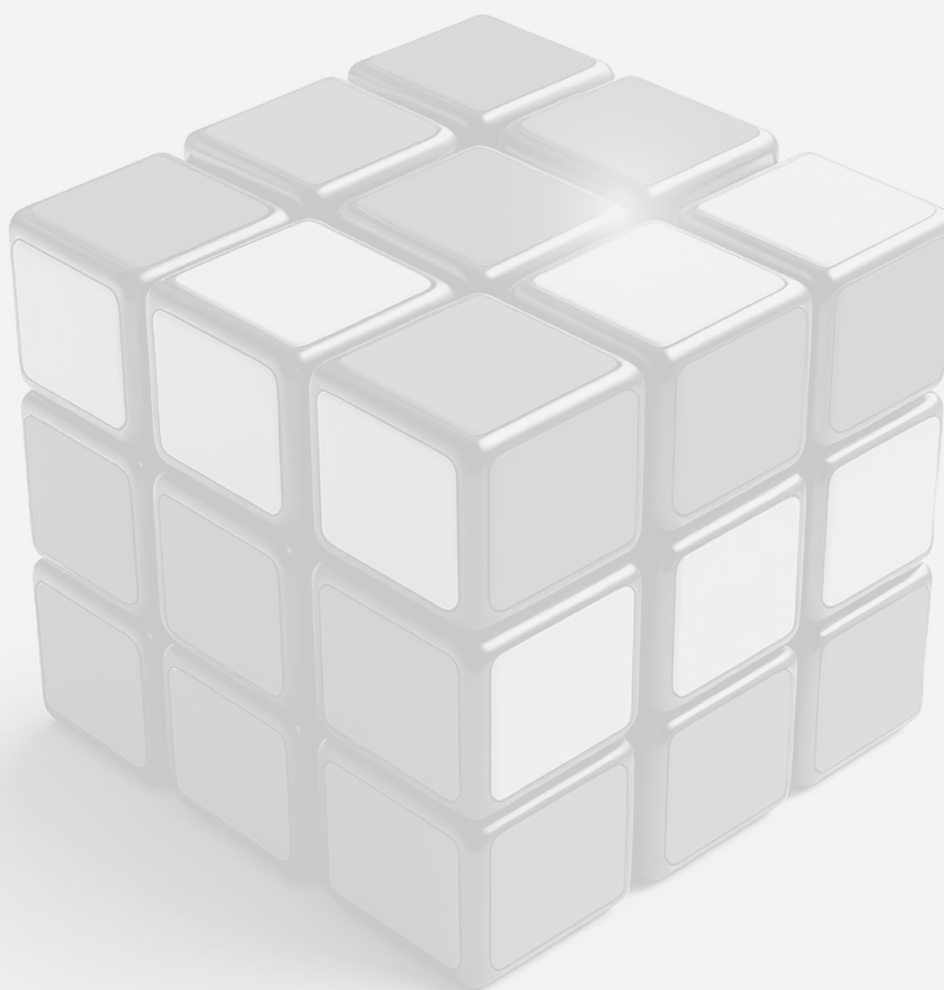
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COOPERATION AREAS BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENCIES

- 1 Cohesion policy: Joint support for cohesion policy reform, advocating cohesion protection during MFF negotiations to promote territorial convergence within the EU.
- 2 Competitiveness: Coordinating between the two presidencies on the creation of the Competitiveness Fund, jointly defining the strategic directions for implementing the Competitiveness Pact, with particular emphasis on developing SME competitiveness, on which both countries share the same position.
- 3 Migration, border protection: Supporting border protection investments and jointly opposing mandatory quotas.
- 4 Just Energy Transition: Cooperation in the green transition could contribute to the economic and environmental sustainability of the Central and Eastern European region.
- 5 R&I: The Central and Eastern European region draws down fewer directly managed EU funds than Western Europe, which is a significant challenge. Hungary and Poland have a common interest in increasing R&I funding absorption. The two countries share the goal of maintaining the “widening country” category and increasing the “widening budget,” especially during negotiations for the next budgetary cycle. It would be essential to maintain a balance between cohesion funds and directly managed EU funds and represent the interests of the Central and Eastern European region in terms of strengthening widening.

Although they differ in territorial size and population, Hungary and Poland, as states of the Central and Eastern European region and, due to their geographical position, as countries forming part of the EU’s external borders, face similar challenges. It is an exciting question whether the above policy recommendations can move beyond high-level political battles and whether substantial cooperation will emerge between the two presidencies, which is a rare, yet excellent opportunity for representing the region’s interests.

¹⁴ Aleksandra Krzysztozek 2024: Poland aims to revise EU green policies during Council presidency Euractive, Online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/poland-aims-to-revise-eu-green-policies-during-council-presidency/>

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The aim was to prepare a joint publication together with Hungarian experts from various fields, representing think tanks, to present a Polish-Hungarian dual perspective on topics such as: EU federalization, energy interests, nuclear energy development, criteria for admitting new members to the European Union, civil defense, representation in EU institutions, migration policy, and cooperation within the Visegrad Group.

The comments were published in a Polish-Hungarian dual format, and the entire report was released in three languages: English, Polish, and Hungarian, to reach a broad international audience.

The mission of the Sobieski Institute is to generate ideas for Poland; therefore, each article concludes with the authors' recommendations. They propose actions they believe are necessary to improve specific policies or collaboration for better integration and security in the Central and Eastern European region, taking into account the unique Polish-Hungarian partnership and the challenges arising from the current geopolitical situation.

We hope that our report will contribute to popularizing the debate on important issues related to the future of the European Union, including its identity, energy security, sustainable development, and enlargement policy, becoming a valuable source of inspiration for decision-makers and opinion leaders in Poland, Hungary, and other countries in the region.



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