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VISEGRAD GROUP'S FOREIGN POLICY, ITS CONTRIBUTION TO EU COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND ITS IMPACT TOWARDS WESTERN BALKANS' COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This paper analyzed and explained how regional formats of cooperation and establishment of Visegrad Group have had essential importance in realizing their fortified strategic goals. Also, this paper highlighted Visegrad Group's contribution to the EU' Common foreign and security policy after becoming EU' full-fledged members in 2004, strengthening their mutual cooperation in defense field. This article has shown how Visegrad Group has made impact on certain Western Balkan' regional initiatives in order to resolve their bilateral issues and establishing fruitful regional formats of cooperation as prerequisite of becoming full members of the European Union. The paper concluded that concept of regionalism can strongly contribute to achieve their projected goals, as well as development on essential regional collaboration based on inclusive approach relying on European norms and principles. This paper used methodology on qualitative research, based on available literature, official documents and media statements needed for this kind of research.

Key words: Visegrad Group; EU' Common Foreign and Security Policy; Regional cooperation; Western Balkan; European Union

1. INTRODUCTION

Unexpected events that happened in the 90's triggered Central Europe' countries to find new models of cooperation in order to accommodate for new geopolitical reality on both regional and global level. In that regard, the establishment of the Visegrad Group contributed to resolving their mutual disputes and fulfilling their strategic goals: full-fledged membership in the European Union and NATO. After taking some time for reflections, Visegrad Four agreed that from essential interest to continue with its cooperation now with promoting of regional voice of Central Europe on the level of the European Union and to offer all necessary help to Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership 'countries how to make their strategic goals to become more predictable. Some negative aspects that have been pointed-out during certain stages of cooperation were repaired defining Visegrad Group as European project, and after their accession they are taking part in some important defense projects related to EU' Common

security and defense policy. Although certain stages of cooperation have been marked with unwanted developments Visegrad Group in its the most difficult times find all necessary solutions in order to achieve all strategic goals and promoting common regional position on the level of the European Union. In order to promote a broader picture of the Central European Region beyond. Visegrad Four has had national interest to transfer positive experiences of the most successful achievements of this regional format such as International Visegrad Group as a trademark of Visegrad cooperation and exclusion of the bilateral issues of the agenda of V4 in certain regional initiatives of the Western Balkans. In that context this paper will analyze how establishment of this successful regional format contributed to achieve their strategic goals and resolve their bilateral issues and how their defense cooperation has given strong contribution in EU' Common Foreign and security policy. Finally, this paper will explain how regional cooperation based on European norms creates strong contribution in realizing their strategic goals and objectives.

2. THE ROOTS OF THE VISEGRAD COOPERATION

Subregional groupings that emerged onto the European scene after 1989 have to varying extents played useful, albeit low profile, roles in the interrelated processes of constructing the post-cold war security order and enlarging the EU eastward.¹ At initiative of then President of the Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel accepted by Prime Minister of Hungary, Jozsef Antall and President of the Poland, Lech Walesa was established Visegrad Cooperation (Visegrad Three), and the inaugural meeting of the Visegrad Group took place in Bratislava 1990. Initiators of this format of cooperation held informal discussions around the themes of the „coordination of the policies” and synchronizations of steps on the „road to Europe”.² The first declaration establishing the Visegrad Group signed by the representatives of the Visegrad-Three (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland) in Visegrad, Hungary set up basic goals of this regional initiative and created the basis for the further development of joint activities, including full involvement in the European economic and political system.

3. THE MAIN STAGES OF THE VISEGRAD COOPERATION BEFORE ACCESSION INTO EUROPEAN UNION

3.1. Visegrad1 (1990-1992)

By early 1991 the immediate mission of the Visegrad 4 was crystallized, following initial period of debate on future integration and security strategies in the context of the disruptive effects of the strategic earthquake in 1989.³ According to the agenda, co-operation was focused to two key objectives: complete clearance with the security and integration structures of the former Soviet Union and accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures (European Union and NATO.) Consequently, with signing of the first declaration, the Visegrad Group had set up basic goals of this regional initiative and created the basis for the further development of joint activities, including full involvement in the European economic and political system.⁴ According to Rusnak, the Visegrad Group had remarkable start in 1991 with joint success in clearing the Soviet Union legacy in

¹Dangerfield, M. 2008. The Visegrad Group in expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation.

²Cottey, A. 1999 “The Visegrád Group,” In Andrew Cottey, ed., Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan.) 69–89, 70

³21. Hyde-Price, Adrian. 1991. European Security beyond the Cold War (London: Sage/RIIA.), ix.

⁴Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and the Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration, 1991. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>

Central Europe, and initial positive steps for collective access to the European Union were recognized by the European Union with signing of the European Agreements in December 1991.⁵ The initial success of the Visegrad Group at this early stage was significant and related to their contribution to the abolition of the Warsaw Pact, and the persistence of creating a replacement of Mutual Economic Aid, so that Visegrad Group, first V3 and then V4 can be regarded as an European Project.⁶

3.2. Visegrad slow-transit phase (1993-1998)

Contrary to the first phase of cooperation, the next years of cooperation can be named phase of slowdown of Visegrad cooperation. First of all, one of the main reasons for the negative development of this regional format was the coming of power of Vladimir Meciar and Vaclav Klaus in two new independent states, after dissolution of Czechoslovakia: Slovak Republic and Czech Republic. In that context, the division of Czechoslovakia was instrumental since the leaders of the newly independent Czech and Slovak Republic were both-for different reasons counter-productive for VG cooperation.⁷ Although this period was characterized as period of slowdown, for some factors contributed to overcome this situation. First of all, establishment of Central Europe Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), was a successful case of subregional cooperation in the economic field and act as a useful surrogate for the dormant Visegrad Four (V4).⁸ Also CEFTA, played a key role in bringing about the reconvening of the Visegrad Forum and its role recognized by Czech Republic in Prague session in 1998 that CEFTA can develop some political dimensions along the lines of the Visegrad Accord and paved the way for the first meeting of Visegrad 2 in May 1999.⁹ Second, pressures connected to NATO accession in particular stimulated de facto revival of Visegrad Group cooperation a trilateral albeit ultimately trilateral because of Slovakia's exclusion from the process.¹⁰ Third, it can be argued the 1993-97 period was, at least in part, something of hiatus relations with the EU. Following the achievement of associate status in 1991 and 1993 EU Copenhagen Summit decision to give associated Central and Eastern Europe states a membership perspective, the political cooperation was relaxed and outweighed by the competitive individualistic tendencies and practical EU pre-accession related to cooperation agenda could be, and was, pursued via CEFTA.¹¹

3.3. Visegrad 2 (1998-2004)

The second half of 1998 and governmental changes in Czech Republic and Slovak Republic represented the reviving process of Visegrad Cooperation, coming in power pro Visegrad Group political leaderships.¹² Some circumstances impacted to renewal of Visegrad Cooperation and creating positive results in order to realize their strategic projected aims and goals. The revived

⁵Rusnak, U. 2001. One year experience of the International Visegrad Fund activities. *Central European Political Science Review*. 2:5:244-51

⁶Damjanovski, S. 2023, Visegrad Group's regional cooperation as a response to complex security environment".

⁷Dangerfield. 2008. The Visegrad Group in expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation.

⁸Cottey, A. 1999 "The Visegrád Group," In Andrew Cottey, ed., *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan).

⁹Dangerfield, M. 2002. Subregional Cooperation in The Central and Eastern Europe: Support or Substitute for the return to Europe?" In Cameron Ross, ed, *Perspectives on the Enlargement of the European Union* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill).

¹⁰Prague Post, 07 June 1995. [http:// www.praguepost.com](http://www.praguepost.com)

¹¹Dangerfield. M. 2008. The Visegrad Group in expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation.

¹²Dangerfield. M. 2008. The Visegrad Group in expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation.

inaugural meeting of Visegrad Group was held in Bratislava with a goal to create a framework for the expansion of the scale and scope of the operation.¹³ First of all, common interest of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, was their concerns about Slovakia setback related to NATO accession talks and hoped that Slovakia after departing of Vladimir Meciar, the country will fulfilled all required tasks and soon will be equal partner with other three Visegrad' countries. Also, the scope of cooperation was expanded in many fields such as: Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Education Culture Society, Cross-Border Cooperation.¹⁴ A second key feature of the revived cooperation was establishment of a quasi-institutionalized structure of the intergovernmental cooperation necessary to serve and facilitate the expanded range of activities of various political levels.¹⁵ The 2000 year marked an important step in the institutional development of Visegrad cooperation. In that sense, the establishment of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF), was a clear sign of a consensus among the V4 leaders to further intensify cooperation and extend the scope of activities, that means Visegrad Four had acquired its first institution.¹⁶ Above mentioned positive results in revival phase of cooperation and strong Slovakia's determination to fulfill required accession criteria created positive outlook into European Union and on 1 May 2004, Poland Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic got EU invitation for full-fledged membership.

4. VISEGRAD GROUP'S SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EU'COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

After some period of reflection Visegrad Group' countries agreed to continue their cooperation on new cooperation, based on Visegrad Group's interests of European level and strengthening Central European identity with signing of Kromeriz Declaration in 2004.¹⁷ Since the very beginning, the efforts to develop and strengthen regional cooperation in the field of security and defense have been in the heart in Visegrad cooperation which focus has been shifted with accession to EU and NATO in 2004 with clear intention to join projects and activities in the framework of NATO and European Union with the aim of contributing to the European and Euro-Atlantic security.¹⁸ In that context with establishment of the Treaty of the European Union and creating of Common Foreign and Security policy as its third integral intergovernmental pillar, Visegrad cooperation substantially increase defense cooperation in many aspects, mainly in Common Security and Defense policy, formed in 1991 as an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. This instrument has been the main policy framework through which member states can develop a European strategic culture of security and defense and strength international peace and security.¹⁹ As a result of a changing geopolitical climate with decision on the EU Council in Helsinki 1999 was identified the need for the EU to have rapid reaction forces available that would represent an essential tool within EU crisis management.²⁰ In that regard, EU

¹³<http://www.visegradgroup.org>

¹⁴ <http://www.visegradgroup.org>

¹⁵15 Dangerfield.M. 2008. The Visegrad Group in expanded European Union: From Pre-accession to Post-accession Cooperation.

¹⁶<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/bibliography/visegradarrival-survival-120628>

¹⁷Visegrad Declaration 2004, Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after accession to the European Union 12 May 2004. <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1>

¹⁸<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/visegrad-group-defense>

¹⁹<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/enFTU-5.1.2.pdf>

²⁰Urbanovska,J. 2014. Visegrad Four EU Battle Group: Meaning and Progress.

BG Concept the EU battlegroup can be defined as,, the minimum military effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operation’’²¹The motivations of the V4 countries to establish mutual battlegroup were increased by the more and more frequent demands to provide military capabilities for the EU, associated with the increasing number of security challenges coming from the European neighboring, as well as the rise of the pooling and sharing initiatives and persisting curtailing of defense expenses.²²

5. VISEGRAD GROUP REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THEIR IMPACT ON REGIONAL COOPERATION IN WESTERN BALKAN AS PREREQUISITE TO EU’MEMBERSHIP AND ITS EUROPEANIZATION

The Kromeriz Declaration adopted in 2004, the most important strategic document regarding to cooperation of Visegrad Four after accession into European Union very clearly and without any doubt pointed-out that Western Balkan’s accession into European Union is one of the highest priorities of the Visegrad Group.²³From then to day Visegrad Group contributed to alleviate the way how Western Balkans use positive experiences of Visegrad cooperation.On the joint Visegrad- level as well as in their own foreign policies, the Western Balkans have a special position: the V4 countries provided them support on their path of European Integration with transfer of know-how based on V4’s own successful experience with political and economic transformation, regional cooperation and Euro-Atlantic integration.²⁴In that context regional cooperation is the utmost importance for political stability, security, and economic development of WB states. With regard to the security dimension, regional cooperation contributes to the solving of key security challenges in the region, since many urgent issues, such as organized crime, corruption, illegal migrations etc., can only be efficiently tackled with a cross-border approach.²⁵In that sense, European Union recognized the momentum that regional cooperation among Western Balkan states can be defined as a credible solution for resolving difficult issues on bilateral basis and enabling credible EU perspective, the European Union launched in June 1999 the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) based on four pillars: contractual relationships, trade relations, financial assistance and regional co-operation.²⁶Accordingly that, The Stabilization and Association Process reflects on fundamental shift of strategy towards Western Balkan and provides the mechanisms for integration countries in the region in similar fashion to the enlargement framework adopted in Central Europe Eastern Countries.²⁷In that context strong confirmation about fortified guidelines in The Stabilization and Association Process came from EU-Western Balkan Summit’s conclusions held in Thessaloniki 2003where was confirmed EU perspectives on Western Balkan countries, with strong emphasis on European

²¹Quille, G. 2006. The EU Battlegroups [online]. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2006, p. 5 [cit. 2014-01-17]. Available from:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede030909notebattlegroups_/sede030909notebattlegroups_en.pdf

²²Urbanovska, J.2014.Visegrad Four EU Battle Group: Meaning and Progress.

²³<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412-1>

²⁴Juzova, J.2019.Think Visegrad in Brussels.,Visegrad in the Western Balkans: Losing ground?

²⁵European Commission.2003. EU-US Summit, Washington,25 June

2003.http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2003/November/tradoc_114831.pdf(21.05.2013)

²⁶<http://www.neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/stabilisation-and-association>

²⁷http://www.cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8447/SPS_2008_03.PDF

Union credible and predictable perspective in the Western Balkan region.²⁸ Although very encouraging conclusions from the Thessaloniki Summit triggered some positive expectations towards full-fledged membership in the European Union on Western Balkan, some negative happenings inside European Union about its internal reforms issues and unpredictable geopolitical ambient on both regional and global level, forged the stalling of EU perspectives on Western Balkans countries.

5.1. The Berlin Process

Taking into consideration certain setback relating to process of EU enlargement of Western Balkan triggered by internal and external reasons, but also with strong intention to decrease third actors' interference primarily from Russian and Chinese side to certain countries of the Western Balkan region, at initiative of the former Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, regional initiative The Berlin Process was launched in 2014. Its main purpose has been to support Western Balkan countries to make progress in their EU accession path and resolve their bilateral disputes and internal issues, in order to achieve reconciliation within and between the societies in the region and economic sustainable growth²⁹. *In prima facie*, the purpose of the Berlin Process is to advance EU's agenda in these dimensions: economic growth and connectivity; good neighborly relations and regional cooperation; civil society development and people-to-people connectivity.³⁰ In that regard Bonomi,³¹ points-out that this regional format turned out to be successful at the beginning considering fragile bilateral relations among countries of the Western Balkan. There was improvement in relations between Serbia and Albania, resulting first visit ever on anyone Albanian Prime minister to Serbia after 68 years. Also, significant result was achieved between Greece and Macedonia with signing of The Prespa Agreement in 2018 as one of the most significant foreign relation achievements during The Berlin Process, under auspices of the United Nations.³² Despite these important achievements, little has been achieved with regards to the original four objectives of The Berlin Process. With exception of signing of Prespa Agreement between then Republic of Macedonia and Greece, which enabled long-waiting full-fledged NATO membership for Republic of North Macedonia, no great progress has been achieved in resolving of open bilateral and internal issues. This is most evident in the tense relations between Serbia and Kosovo. In that context reconciliation between and within society in the region has hardly progressed ever.³³ According to Jovanovic and Holzer³⁴ to eliminate some detected weaknesses some important changes should be made: First, important changes should be officially designate the support and acceleration of the Western Balkans countries' accession to the EU as the first and most important objective of The Berlin Process; the second, related

²⁸http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_03_163

²⁹ See Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, Berlin, 28 August 2014, <http://www.archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/meta/startseite/final-declaration/by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634> Accessed on 26.10.2021

³⁰ Flessenkemper, T. 2017. The Berlin Process: Resilience in the EU waitingroom. In S. Lange, Nechev, Z. and Trauner. (Eds.), *Resilience in the Western Balkans* (pp.23-30). European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07086.7>

³¹ Bonomi, M. 2019. OffTrack: The EU's Re-engagement with the Western Balkans. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19665>

³² <http://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-02-13/statement-at-tributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-prespa-agreement>. Accessed on 26.10.2021.

³³ See Brandle et.al. 2020. Democracy and State of emergency: New Upsurge of the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia (Berlin/Belgrade: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), accessed on 21 November 2022

³⁴ Jovanovic, B. and Holzer, M. 2022. The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Four Recommendations to Achieve Progress.

change should be that the process is to focus not only on actors from Western Balkan states but also on actors from the EU; the third change refers to the idea that The Berlin Process should provide greater financial support for the region in order to increase economic development and decrease social inequalities and the best way to achieve this objective would be a full integration of the Western Balkans; and the fourth area with room for improvement is winning over local actors for The Berlin Process that could be difficult since the process has been in place for some time without any noticeable increase in regional ownership.³⁵ In order to eliminate detected weaknesses and not deviate from European way and wholly adapted to new geopolitical reality, The Berlin Process was relaunched in November 2022, and according to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz' words the Western Balkans should join European Union,, as soon as possible.(2030?)''³⁶The relaunch of the process has been one of the priorities of the new German government for the Western Balkans and Berlin hosted the summit once more in early November in 2022. In that regard, highlight of the Summit was the signing of three important agreements related to Common Regional Market: The agreement on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans; Agreement on Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentist and Architects based on EU rules and the Agreements on Freedom of Movement with ID Cards.³⁷

5.2. Open Balkan Initiative

As a result of backslide of integrative accession process with EU and to speed up regional cooperation inside Western Balkans regional cooperation at initiative of the then Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev, President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic and Prime Minister of Albania in 2019 was launched new regional format based on four freedoms: people, services, capital and goods, which was rebranded with Open Balkan Initiative at the Economic Forum on Regional Cooperation held in July 2021 in Skopje.³⁸ The three leaders, finding their inspiration from similar and successful regional formats, like Benelux and the Nordic Region, expressed their will to strengthen regional cooperation in order to generate economic growth, reduce unemployment, combat illegal immigration, fight transnational organized crime, and improve social benefit of our citizens.³⁹ Oddly enough, the designers of the Open Balkan Initiative take Benelux as their inspiration, the union that belongs to the category of "pioneers", a grouping that suggests that "level of integration" involved is ahead of that of the larger regional cooperation project."⁴⁰ Certainly, it would be more appropriate to compare the Open Balkan initiative to a "complementary instrument" such as Visegrad Group in its first decade.⁴¹ From the very onset to date Open Balkan initiative mainly has been encircled with the shadow of creating some form of domination because of its exclusive character of cooperation and not accepting from Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina..

³⁵ Jovanovic, B. and Holzer, M. 2022. The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Four Recommendations to Achieve Progress

³⁶ http://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C70_Berlin_Process.pdf

³⁷ "Through the Labyrinth of Regional Cooperation: How to Make Sense of Regional Integration in the Western Balkans", February 2023

³⁸ <http://www.skopjediem.com/2021/07/30/mini-schengen-initiative-rebranded-as-open-balkan/>

³⁹ Semenov, A., 2022. Open Balkan: Objectives and Justifications" *Comilla's Journal of International Relations/* No24/124-034/2022/ISSN 2386-5776

⁴⁰ Dangerfield, M. 2004. Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans: Stabilization device or integration policy? *Perspectives on European politics and society*, 5(2), 203-241.

⁴¹ Dangerfield, M. 2008. The Visegrad Group in the expanded European Union: From pre-accession to post-accession cooperation. *East European Politics and Societies*, 22(3), 630-667.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS-THE BERLIN PROCESSAND OPEN BALKANINITIATIVE

Regionalism, regardless of whether a subnational or cross-border project, is more than functional imperative, following Keating,⁴²it can be interpreted as an articulation of political concerns, as an identity construct as well as a strategy that reflects social and economic interests. In social constructivist readings of regionalism, it is not only relationships between scales that matter but the ways in which regions can become socially meaningful, for example in framing political action, identity-related questions and territorial contexts.⁴³In that regard, regional cooperation as one of the cornerstones of the EU's enlargement policy towards Western Balkans will enable to all countries wishing full-fledged membership of the European Union in predictable times.⁴⁴From the many regional formats that have emerged in Western Balkan region two regional formats attract the most attention: The Berlin Process and Open Balkan Initiative. As was mentioned above, the establishment of Berlin Process has had intention to emphasize equal footing all Western Balkan countries on their way to EU accession and also very essential tool how to bridge over all difficulties that challenge this region. In that context as many commentators point out, this regional initiative which is based on principles and norms of the European Union, represents a regional format that can be monitored by the European Union political and financial institutions. Also, The Berlin Process enables one inclusive not exclusive approach on equal footing that benefit all Western Balkans countries and will make strong contribution in building Western Balkans as a security community, although not all Western Balkan countries share the same goals and objectives. Contrary to the Berlin Process, Open Balkan Initiative was a reaction to certain political elites in the Western Balkan because of unrealized promises (according to some Western Balkan's political elites' statements) of European Union towards Western Balkans 6, and that one credible regional initiative must have a regional entrepreneurship. Some accepted activities by the founders of the Open Balkan Initiative have shown that this regional initiative have exclusive approach and have not accepted from Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the fact that this regional format will be used for some level of domination in the region. Also, Open Balkan Initiative has considered for being a parallel regional institution taken in consideration that main reason for establishment of this regional format is to alleviate business relations in the region economic and trade liberalization relying on four freedoms: people, services, capital, and goods which is consisted one of the four pillars of Common Regional Market, as one of the most significant achievements of the Berlin Process. In that direction, in order to non-trigger some parallel activities and to gain full benefits for all Western Balkans countries, Open Balkan Initiative should be part of the Berlin Process, the regional format that is based on fulfilling principles and norms of the European Union and enable resolving to all complex bilateral and internal issues and to make entire process of Europeanization of their societies strictly monitored by European Union' political and financial institutions.

⁴²Keating, M. 2017. Contesting European Region. *Regional Studies*, 51(1): 9-18
doi:10.1080/003443404.2016.1227777

⁴³Passi, A.and Metzger, J. 2017. Foregrounding the region. *Regional Studies* 51(1): 19-30.
doi:10.1080/003443404.2016.1239818

⁴⁴ Nemeth, F. 2022. Western Balkans. From the Berlin Process to The Open Balkan Initiative. Prospects for the Accession Process.

7. CONCLUSION

Unexpected events happened in 90's in the last century triggered many countries to find new political and security solutions on both regional and global level and also to find essential modus how to accommodate to new global reality. In that regard, Central Europe' countries leading from the very prominent statesmen, Vaclav Havel, Jozsef Antall and Lech Walesa described this state as a unique opportunity to back in Europe and putting to the end an artificial divide of the European continent. In that regard, they agreed that European Union and NATO' membership can be essential response to achieve their political and security aims and also an essential tool to resolve their bilateral issues in order to Europeanization on their societies. The regional format called Visegrad Group acting as complement re-accession instrument category with higher goal full-fledged membership into European Union with their significant achievements before and after getting full-fledged membership of the European Union give some important impetus to countries of the Southeastern Europe. Although with a changeable agenda and promoting regional voice in the EU' institutions and primarily committed to obligations with EU' Common Foreign and Security Policy, Visegrad Group also strongly have paid attention to make Western Balkan's path and their ambitions more predictable. In realizing those goals regionalism as a concept can be considered as a response in resolving some complex matters of historical nature. Taken in the consideration the fact that imposing of regional cooperation can improve resolution of bilateral and internal issues between Western Balkan's countries and also contributing to wards credible European perspective to whole Western Balkan region, Berlin Process Initiative, founded on the European norms and principles enables regional cooperation on equal footing for all Western Balkans six comparing to other regional initiatives, although not all countries share identical national interest's goals. Despite some setbacks from its onset, and some internal matters can challenge European Union even today when geopolitical reality has become more and more unpredictable, this regional format with strong support from the most influential European political and financial institutions can make an essential contribution in resolving their bilateral issues and in realizing in their final goal-full-fledged membership of the European Union. Therefore, Visegrad Group most essential achievement such as exclusion the bilateral disputes and tensions from V4 agenda, increasing impacts of V4 Presidencies, development of International Visegrad Fund as trademark of Visegrad Group, transfer of the best practices from transformation and integration processes have largely impacted regional initiatives in the Western Balkan's region, primarily Berlin Process Initiative with real intention that can make a strong contribution in realizing their fundamental goal: full-fledged membership of the European Union.

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