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**Uneven and combined. A historical sociological approach to the
European collective identity crisis**

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse the current EU crisis from the perspective of international historical sociology. By re-reading Jenő Szücs' essay 'The Three Historical Regions of Europe' [1983] through the lens of the concept of 'uneven and combined development' [Rosenberg 2016], I argue that the countries that have assumed a prominent role in the EU as part of the Visegrád 4 coalition, have been shaped by two hegemonic powers to the East and West respectively. Supplementing the concept of uneven and combined development with a constructivist understanding of state identity, interest and action, I argue that the V4 cooperation is an act of emancipation from the East-Central European region against a perceived Western hegemony, triggered by the multi-level European crisis.

1. Chapter: Europe in a crisis? A Literature review

The point of departure for this work's argumentation is that the EU crisis cannot be reduced to Central and Eastern European states' internal characteristics but must be perceived as a broader, multilevel issue. The focus is here mainly on structural problems of the EU as an entity in the global capitalist system specifically, and not the domestic situation of the individual countries. The following part will thus cover interpretations of the current situation of the EU ranging from the contradictions inherent to the idea of 'Europe', the institutional issues of the EU, and the development of the EU under the hegemony of ordoliberalism, to the economic crisis and its aftereffects, the EU's identity crisis and the crisis of Central and Eastern Europe.

1.1 Contradictions inherent to the idea of 'Europe'

Ágnes Heller touches on the inherently contradictory and even hypocritical nature of Europe. Europe – and with that, the European Union – is evidently made up of nation-states. She argues that national movements were progressive and often liberating: Emerging in feudal and estate-based societies, they had a unifying effect, integrating the lower strata of society into the political society, whose membership was exclusive to the nobility before. Nevertheless, while on the one hand, nationalism is based on the principle of universalism, it is also by nature exclusionary. Universalism itself gained a reputation of being hypocritical when the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was signed by states that practice the opposite. Heller argues furthermore that the EU does not have an identity comparable to national identity; it is not one political unit, only an economic and cultural union. The EU furthermore does not have a constitution, and thus the political organisation of the individual states is outside of the legal scope of the EU, allowing the rise of Bonapartist forces, as in Hungary. [Heller 2019]

Hans Joas writes further that the notion of a federal Europe was already an idea in Nazi Germany, developed by, inter alia, Carl Schmitt. Schmitt aimed to develop a sort of Monroe Doctrine for Europe. He imagined a world divided into *Großräume* (literally 'large spaces') made up of multiple countries and regions

under the dominance of a more powerful state. The idea for Schmitt was, of course, that Germany could govern over CEE without any foreign interventions and legal repercussions. After World War II, Europe was imagined to be a project to secure peace between the European countries. However, on a global dimension, European powers were still pursuing their colonial projects in Africa for economic benefits, settlement spaces for their growing populations and power pursuits. For Joas, it seems evident that France probably would not have signed the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) if its colonial interests had not been guaranteed in it. His argument is thus that the European project cannot be said to be inherently peaceful and ‘progressive.’ [Joas 2020]

1.2 Institutional issues of the EU

Offering a perspective from EU policy studies, Steven Blockmans argues that European representative democracy is in “a crisis of both efficiency and legitimacy.” [Blockmans 2019a: 2] Citizens perceive actions taken as inadequate and too slow, and both internal and external political actors openly undermine governments. “without a clear understanding of who is responsible for the unexpected political complications our societies face, it seems only natural for constituents to lose confidence in the system of representation meant to legitimise such a regime.” [Gutiérrez-Peris and Sánchez Margalef 2019: 19]

This crisis has divided EU citizens, not in North and South or East and West, but “between those systems in which citizens feel represented and those in which they do not.” [Blockmans 2019b: 359]

Sophia Russack [2019] writes further that while the European Parliament (EP) has expanded its influence in the last decade, this development is not mirrored in its elections, which regularly hit all-time low voter turnouts. The EP is still widely regarded to be of second-order behind national parliaments, as it still lacks the right to propose new laws, making it less powerful than its national counterparts. Furthermore, the electoral system among the EU member states is too diverse, so that “EP elections can be described as 28 national elections rather than a transnational contest.” [Russack 2019: 50] At the same time, voters do not understand the translation of national parties to the EU level, as Europarties are not

transnational parties, but assemblies of national parties – thus not creating a pan-European democratic space. To make things more complicated, the status of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) is less dependent on their actions on the EU level but determined by the position of their national party at home. Citizens don't support a specific MEP, but voice their support for their preferred national party, taking away from the elections as an instrument to hold MEPs accountable. [Blockmans 2019a; Russack 2019]

1.3 The hegemony of ordoliberalism

Hauke Brunkhorst [2014] claims that the reconciliation and pacification narrative used today to describe the beginnings of the European project distracted from a shift in the foundational idea of a unified Europe. He writes that the original idea of a union of the European nation-states was meant to symbolize and secure the emancipation from fascism which had wreaked havoc on the continent in the first half of the 20th century. It was based on a 'Kantian constitutional mindset', i.e. autonomy, self-government, democratic representation, normative rhetoric and radical change. While the original vision has been preserved in particular institutions and laws, the Kantian mindset has come under pressure by a so-called 'managerial mindset' over time. This one emphasizes the rule of law, professionalism, instrumental rationality, the interconnection of law and economics, gradual change and watered-down promises. It is the means of communication that is exclusive to experts and politicians.

He further describes how any possible alternatives left of a social-democratic capitalism, as they came up in Southern Europe in the 1970s or the post-communist countries in the 1990s, were oppressed early on. In the 1950s, the original idea of a European economic constitution was to strengthen workers' rights and democratize the economic sphere. Quickly overtaken by ordoliberalists, the European Economic Community (EEC) instead became a competitive and anti-planning economic constitution independent from any parliaments and nation-states, while the political constitutions remained limited to the nation-states. A grave consequence of this economic constitution, becoming especially apparent during the financial crisis of 2007-08, was the establishment of hegemonial structures within Europe: a centre

with an enormous export surplus and the periphery. In the 1960s, the Kantian constitutional mindset counters the dominant economic rule with a legal constitution. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that equality of the member states shouldn't be limited to the political but also include the economic, social and cultural spheres, establishing the obligation to solidarity between the member states. However, according to the principle of *effet utile*, EU laws should be implemented on a national level to have the best possible effect for the European community, leaving the member states to their own interpretations. The political constitution in the 1970s finally joined law and politics structurally. Looking ahead, Brunkhorst argues that the progressing parliamentisation hints at a future welfare constitution, if only for the sake of saving European democracy and social peace from too harsh social inequalities. [Brunkhorst 2014]

Brunkhorst argues that the root problem of the current EU crisis is the hegemony of the economic constitution that is founded on the principles of ordoliberalism, which preserves the unequal distribution of economic means and power in favour of a ruling elite. Democracy, equality and rule of law are only insofar realized in the EU as they serve economic interests, i.e. the creation and advancement of the Common Market. In its current state, free markets and property rights are restraining basic laws of the EU and its member states, when from the perspective of the Kantian constitutional mindset this should be reversed. It is not a problem exclusive to the EU, but a consequence of progressing social differentiation, and can be observed in other regions of the world as well. However, specific to the EU's situation is that there is no unified public outside the European Parliament and that the representation of the member states inside the Parliament is distorted in favour of small countries, two factors considerably weakening its democratic legitimacy. Brunkhorst concludes by arguing that the only solution to this problem would not be the disintegration of the Union (that would be problematic as the member states are too connected), but the trans-nationalization of class struggle. [Brunkhorst 2014]

1.4 The hegemony of Germany

Claus Offe writes that the current crisis has developed out of the global financial crisis, state debt crisis, economic and unemployment crisis and an institutional crisis of the EU (what may be labelled as a legitimacy or democracy deficit). He adds the notion of a “crisis of crisis management”¹ [Offe 2016: 15], i.e. the problem of who should or could lead the EU out of its crisis if there were in fact a solution to the crisis. This is what he understands as a trap: The situation that the EU is in is not sustainable for the present nor future, there is no way out, and as of now there seems to be no instance that has enough legitimate power to guide the Union out of its crisis. Simultaneously, member states are essentially ‘entrapped’ in the Eurozone, because returning to a national currency is lawfully bound to leaving the EU and has unpredictable consequences not only for the leaving state but the entire Eurozone (the case of Brexit was still different because the UK never joined the Eurozone). [Offe 2013, 2016]

The European Council, the highest instance in the EU decision-making process, works on the basis of intergovernmentalism, so it relies on the principle of unanimity and veto rights. According to Offe, both limit the efficiency and legitimacy of the Council, as the members (heads of governments) were elected to govern their respective countries, not the EU. Institutionally, the problem of the principle of intergovernmentalism is that there are no supranational actors that could create a collective identity and consequently collective solidarity. Thus, national governments are more inclined to act in their own interest than that of the entire Union. As there is no higher instance that can shape opinions, create EU-wide consensus and mobilize citizens, there is no “us-narrative” in the EU and the public discourse is dominated by a ‘nationals of country X’ versus the ‘others of country Y’ narrative. There is not only a skewed sense of solidarity among the member countries; rather than perceiving solidarity as acting for the good of all members, the public discourse often talks of charitable donations. Anti-EU forces have become especially powerful in those countries that have been the ‘winners’ of the crises, as fears grow that they will have to bear the costs of the mistakes of ‘the others.’ Whereas many problems are in fact pan-EU matters, structural problems of

¹ Own translation, original: „Krise des Krisenmanagements“

the EU are often interpreted as ‘wrong behaviour’ of individual states (an example being the Greek government-debt crisis). [Offe 2013, 2016]

The EU can be said to suffer from a democracy deficit insofar as it is missing democratically legitimized institutions that have big enough scope for political action that is equal to its impact. Offe identifies the global financial crisis of 2007-08 as the root of the Eurozone crisis, as it distinctly demonstrated the discrepancy between the range that causalities can have and the range of control mechanisms that the EU technocracy has: a crisis and its consequences that transcends the limitations of national borders and thus escapes the control of national governments, while the EU does not have any financial power (i.e. power to raise and redistribute taxes): “The scope of functional integration is much wider than the scope of social integration, or what we are passively *affected by* is beyond our collective capacity to *act upon*. The European political economy is (at best) experienced by its citizens as a community of *fate* but not as one of *fate control*. Markets and the currency are international, while democratic politics remains essentially national and framed in the code of what has been called ‘methodological nationalism.’” [Offe 2016]

The Eurozone suffers from two major flaws: it is made up of heterogeneous parts and the Euro intensified the differences between the national economies of the member states. The EU does not have enough democratically legitimized political power that would have been necessary to homogenize and reduce the differences between the economies. What happens when such differences aren’t balanced, is that “one unleashes pressures and economic constraints on the poorer, less productive participant, the one with higher unit costs of labour and hence lesser competitiveness in international trade, and deprives them of the possibility of *external* adjustment of their national currencies.” [Offe 2013: 597] The problem was not the financial crisis per se, but rather the institutional inability of the EU to deal with a global crisis like that and to deal with the heterogeneity of the Eurozone. Instead of ‘smoothing over’ the differences between the economic conditions of the member states, the EU and the Euro especially aggravated them and turned them into political conflicts between the member states. [Offe 2016]

One last problematic factor according to Offe is Germany's central role. Germany is the strongest actor in the EU in several spheres: economically, because of its massive export surplus; politically, as seen when it subjected Greece to the austerity regime; institutionally, as the European Central Bank is shaped after the Bundesbank, implicitly giving Germany an advantage among the economic and institutional unevenness of the Eurozone, and thus essentially manifesting German leadership. Because Germany has an individualistic understanding of the Union it doesn't use its powerful position to act as a distributing and reforming force, as other countries would prefer [Offe 2016], but, as Wolfgang Streeck proclaims, acts as the hegemon of a "late twentieth century technocratic, anti-democratic, elitist chimera of a centralized European neoliberal empire" [Streeck 2021]. He defines the EU as "a hierarchically structured block of nominally sovereign states held together by a gradient of power from a centre to a periphery." [Streeck 2019b]. Germany "conceives of itself, and wants others to do the same, as a benevolent hegemon doing nothing else than spreading universal common sense and moral virtues to its neighbours, at a cost to itself that is, however, worth bearing for the sake of humanity." [Streeck 2019b] Certain values give this empire legitimacy political liberalism - democracy, constitutional governance, individual liberty - wrapped in economic liberalism. The hegemon preserves its power and the empire by forming alliances with elites in the non-hegemonic countries whom the hegemon helps to stay in power through ideological, monetary and military means. In exchange the elites keep up the asymmetries that benefit the centre. However, because it is a liberal empire, the hegemon lacks the military power to keep countries from leaving, as seen in the case of Brexit. The situation is a convenient one for Germany, writes Streeck: after World War II, pursuing national interests were taboo for Germany; now it is able to do so under the cover of the EU. While sovereignty may be a weapon that small countries can use in defence against hegemonic power, Germany wasn't allowed to be sovereign and patriotic after World War II. Because this attitude became the German norm, it made this mindset the ideal for a new post-national world order and expected other countries to adopt it. However, other countries, because they don't have the same historical

experience, never considered giving up their sovereignty to such a degree. [Streeck 2018, 2019b]

While in the beginning the Euro did not benefit Germany as much, this changed after 2008, when Germany's industrial-heavy and export focussed economy proved to be less sensitive to the global financial crisis. Southern European economies on the other hand were driven by domestic demand rather than exports and used inflation strategically to devalue public debt, as to be able to borrow more money; they also had a larger public sector and a heavily regulated banking sector. These factors made the countries less competitive on the international market but created and secured social peace domestically. These uneven economic systems combined together in one currency union created according to Streeck "inequality from diversity." [Streeck 2015: 15] While initially Brussels hoped that the Euro would be able to create a new shared identity, Streeck argues the currency actually divided Europe into "surplus and deficit countries, North and South, Germany and the rest." [Streeck 2015: 12] Angela Merkel's decision in August 2015 to accept a large number of refugees further divided Europe into East and West: the EU members broke the liberal-imperial consensus "never to embarrass a fellow government, in particular that of the hegemon" [Streeck 2019b] for domestic reasons: "Non-hegemonic member states must be ruled by elites that consider the center with its particular structures and values as a model for their own country to emulate – or in any case must be willing to organize their internal social, political and economic order so as to make it compatible with the interests of the center in holding its empire together." [Streeck 2019a]

1.5 The EU's identity crisis

If democracy can build on two conceptions of its polity - "ethnos", that is a homogenously and territorially defined peoples, and "demos", a collective institutionally defined through civil rights - Maurizio Bach observes the change from an institutions-focussed (i.e. EU expansion) politics that emphasizes "demos" to identity politics (i.e. nationalism and populism, wielding results such as Brexit) that relies on the dominance of the conception of "ethnos." [Bach 2019]

The development of the EU from the 1980s until the 2010s was driven by the hope to realize a “political and societal unity of Europe” [Bach 2019: 423] by neutralizing the aggressive potential of ethnic and national unevenness. This undertaking was legitimized through hope for economic prosperity, adjustment of living conditions and better social cohesion among Europeans. Pacification was to be accomplished through de-nationalization and the introduction of trans- and supranational organs (for example the European Court of Justice), cutback on international borders, liberalization of the European Single Market and enlargement of the EU. [Bach 2019] Today the EU has permeated its member states in almost all policy dimensions, inter alia, the market, labour, migration, education, science, environment. With the construction of a supranational legal system, EU law has become superior to national law and the EU’s common market, which is ruled by the principle of competition, is hierarchically above the national economies. [Bach 2015]

As a result, peace within Europe had in fact been secured and ethnic and national matters had at least until 2008 and 2015 been largely side-lined. [Bach 2019] However, as we have been able to observe in that last years, nationalist parties have been gaining momentum in a large number of countries. Why is it, that even under a supranational project like the EU, nation states appear to be so resilient? Bach argues that especially in Europe the national reference point will most likely always prove to be prominent because of Europe’s history and, speaking with Norbert Elias, its resulting “social habitus.” Europe and the EU’s specific problem is that it wasn’t created on a blank canvas but was built on the legacies of its many members. Their historical experiences include long struggles for independent nation states. This struggle and the concept of the nation state has subsequently been anchored in the social habitus, that is the personality, behaviour, thinking and feelings of a specific group of people (for example citizens of a nation state). [Bach 2019: 426]

The national character is characterized by collective membership, reference to territory, culture and language, a tendency to feelings of moral and cultural superiority and emotional ties. It establishes a sense of togetherness and feelings of solidarity among the collective and produces the modern *homo nationalis*. [Bach 2019: 427] Bach argues that the national character is an essential part of modernity

and the basis of democracy, because only with the establishment of nation states could democratic systems arise. It is reproduced every day in the media and other national institutions and structures as “everyday nationalism.” [Bach 2019: 427] That way, the national permeates the unconscious and conscience of its members, affecting their everyday behaviour and acting as a sort of “social belief system” (a term Bach borrows from Elias again [2019: 428]). The problem for the EU is that, if democracy needs identification with the nation state to function, there is no collective European identity that could ground its democratization. The EU doesn’t have a societal and cultural basis like the nation states have, which is why the attempt to implement an EU constitution in 2005 failed. While constitutions can be an important reference point for identity if they create the basis of specific social values and norms, the EU’s values are either derived from its members or simply too universal (democracy, rule of law, market economy) to create a specific European identity – identity creates a collective ‘us’ contrasted with ‘them’. [Bach 2015]

Bach argues, that the EU won’t be able to replace the nation states in the foreseeable future. With the EU not having a demos and thus not being a proper democracy, its people are already politically organized in nation states that they identify with, and currently there is no observable tendency that people prefer the EU over their countries, as election turnouts demonstrate. Because the EP is much weaker than the national parliaments, democratic legitimacy has always been secured by the nation states, not the EU. Society and state are connected through intermediaries, like political parties, which also doesn’t work on the EU level as there are no proper political parties, as mentioned earlier. The processes of centralization and bureaucratization have further disassociated legitimacy and governance in the EU and consequently started to de-legitimize the nation state, without the EU having the ability to replace it because it is “rather an authoritarian and technocratic political order [...] than a transnational democracy.”² [Bach 2015: 189] It has broken up the association of society with the nation state and broken the identity monopoly that the state used to have, because it has so much influence and

² Own translation, original: „eher eine autoritäre und technokratische Ordnung [...] als eine transnationale Demokratie.“

because elites are aiming to replace national identities with an EU identity. [Bach 2015]

In that sense, Bach argues, the rise of populism and nationalism can be seen as a reaction to EU integration. Especially in times of crises the national habitus will come to the surface because it is sensitive to feelings of (real or perceived) loss and humiliation, but it would be false to believe that crises produce nationalism. [Bach 2019] While most citizens don't identify with the EU as an object of collective norms and values for behaviour, the project of a European collective identity has been driven by European elites. The failed EU constitution can be seen as an attempt to constitute a collective reference point, for example. But Bach argues that the EU was never meant to be something to identify with or meant to replace the nation states (as previously mentioned, the European project started out as a means to secure peace and quickly transformed into a predominantly economic project). As collective identities can become instruments for exclusion and not just have positive effects, an EU identity won't be necessary until there's a true EU-wide welfare and redistribution program. [Bach 2015]

1.6 Central and Eastern Europe's solitude

According to Ivan Krastev, it was the refugee crisis that changed Europeans' perspective on globalization and revealed different attitudes among European countries regarding questions of cultural and ethnic diversity and immigration. It shifted the public discourse from promoting democracy and inclusion to demanding security and with that exclusion, and strengthened feelings of national solidarity. On the one hand, there is a feeling of a (worldwide) disappointment with globalization: it seems to be the case that promoting democracy in the world has not led to worldwide peace, but rather the opposite, as the wars in the Middle East and the resulting migration streams indicate. Furthermore, the ability to now compare oneself not just to one's fellow members of the imagined community, but to make comparisons on a global scale, uncovered the existing and further growing global inequalities and the fact that where one is born does matter, realizations that contradict the basic assumptions of liberalism. On the other hand, there is a widespread disappointment with and within the EU: effects of EU membership

have not been as overwhelmingly positive as expected; the feeling of being a loser of the EU sinks in, both perceptions especially prominent in the post-communist countries of CEE. [Krastev 2017a, 2019]

Krastev points out that one big factor that constitutes the current EU crisis is the conflict between globalists and nativists, or a ‘crisis of meritocracy’. Today’s elites are “everywhere people” [Krastev 2017a: 43], i.e. their habitus is cosmopolitan, they can basically live and work anywhere. Furthermore, their meritocratic networks are horizontal, i.e. meritocrats are only connected to each other. In the EU this makes citizens feel that Brussel’s meritocratic elites have lost touch with their home countries they are supposed to represent. [Krastev 2017a] This creates according to Krastev a fear of disloyalty and abandonment, a fear, populists know to take advantage of when they build their political programme not on “competence, but intimacy” [Krastev 2017c] through means such as nationalism or religion.

Krastev observes this conflict not only on a societal scale, but also internationally. For him, cosmopolitan thinking is the greatest divider among the EU member states – especially between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe – with open societies on one side and closed societies on the other. According to Krastev, cosmopolitanism in Western societies is an answer to the guilt they feel for their respective colonialist and fascist histories. Historical experiences and collective memory among the EU member states are highly uneven: CEE’s historical experiences differ vastly from those of Western Europe in several aspects that Krastev deems relevant in today’s crisis. First, cosmopolitanism evokes memories of communism’s forced internationalism. While 1968 in the West stands for cosmopolitan values, in CEE the ‘68 movement represents anti-Soviet, nationalist sentiments. Second, their respective experiences with multiculturalism: CEE has historically – and that meaning, pre-nationally – been multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. But independent central and eastern European societies with their own elites and middle class only came to be with the emergence of ethnically and culturally homogenous nation states. And third, CEE’s relatively recent experience of systemic collapse has central and eastern Europeans interpret the EU’s current situation in a more pessimistic light than their Western counterparts. [Krastev 2017a]

The second grave factor reviving the East-West divide is what Krastev refers to as the ‘imitation imperative’. With what Francis Fukuyama called the “End of History” began for Krastev “an age of imitation.” [Krastev 2019: 68] After the fall of the Berlin wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, CEE started to imitate the West as to return to ‘normality’, i.e. to live, consume and be governed like the West – a process known under a number of names, but essentially standing for “modernization by imitation and integration by assimilation.” [Krastev and Holmes 2019] Specifically Germany as the US’ poster child for liberal and democratic development was chosen as the role model for CEE’s post-1989 development. This turned out to be problematic for two reasons: first, regardless of the role model, comes the general imitation problem, namely the implicit assumption that the imitation must be inferior to the original and must seek validation from it. Krastev uses political psychology to make the point that authoritarianism, chauvinism and “overheated particularism” [Krastev 2019: 69] are reactions to the humiliating implications of the imitation imperative, i.e. the process of denying one’s own identity and trading it for an apparently superior one. They represent “a refusal to be judged by foreigners according to foreign standards” [Krastev 2019: 77] and reflect “popular resentment at the perceived slights to national and personal dignity that this palpably sincere reform-by-imitation project entailed.” [Krastev and Holmes 2019] The second problem was trying to imitate specifically Germany’s transition to liberal democracy. Krastev writes that “the reformers underestimated the local impediments to liberalization and democratization and overestimated the feasibility of importing fully worked-out western models.” [Krastev and Holmes 2019] The role that nationalism played in German and CEE history respectively constitutes one obvious obstacle in that attempt. While German society after 1945 was built on the rejection of any kind of nationalism, in CEE nationalism (specifically ethnonationalism) played a decisive role after 1918 and during the 1989 revolution. Communism, on the other hand, denounced national identities in favour of internationalism. Nationalism thus has positive connotations in CEE and is perceived as compatible with liberalism. [Krastev 2019]

Where does the sudden turn against the Western model stem from? One caesura in recent history was of course the global financial crisis. According to Krastev and

Holmes [2019] this event had not only economic, but also ideological effects, in that it made CEE citizens question liberalism and capitalism as political and economic models, the Western elite's abilities and knowledge and with that the entire model it had emulated for the past decade. Furthermore, the shocks of the financial crisis aggravated the process of mass emigration of central and eastern Europeans that had started after the opening of the Iron Curtain: "More Central and Eastern Europeans left their countries for Western Europe as a result of the 2008-2009 financial and economic crises than all the refugees who arrived in Western Europe as a result of the war in Syria." [Krastev 2019: 64] The out-migration of a large amount of people, especially young people, had "profound economic, political and psychological consequences." [Krastev and Holmes 2019] Such consequences include a declining intelligentsia and student body, a lower gross domestic product (GDP) and worse performance of liberal parties in elections. Together with low birth-rates and the presence of liberal values, such as acceptance of LGBT+ community or emancipation of women [Krastev 2019], the demographic decline instils in the people who have been left behind a "demographic panic." [Krastev and Holmes 2019] Krastev and Holmes interpret the hysteria around non-existent refugees in CEE using a concept psychologists call "displacement", i.e. when an unacceptable threat (demographic decline) is replaced with one that is easier to manage (immigrants invading the country).

The fear of national and cultural disappearance is furthermore exploited by populists and CEE governments that really despise Western Europe and the EU not for taking in refugees, but for their open borders and thus depriving CEE of its most productive forces. Anti-Western and illiberal rhetoric should thus also be seen as an attempt to make Western Europe look less appealing to CEE citizens: "Citizens will stop leaving for the west only if the west loses its allure. Dispraising the west and declaring its institutions 'not worth imitating' can be explained as imaginary revenge born of resentment. But it has the collateral benefit of serving the region's number one policy priority, by helping discourage emigration." [Krastev and Holmes 2019]

The EU made such development possible because it failed to create a collective identity, leaving a vacuum that was only waiting to be filled by populists and

conspiracy theorists. As economic policies have largely become EU matter, Brussels has become to represent the destructive forces of the markets and global capitalism rather than a shield that could protect small countries from global impacts. Meanwhile globalization has been eroding the political and economic foundations that were established after World War II, with unknown consequences for the future. In that sense, an anti-globalization rhetoric is not only voiced by the actual ‘losers’ of globalization, but perhaps even more so by the middle class, the “threatened majorities” [Krastev 2017b], who cannot be sure of their future economic security. [Krastev 2017a: 96] Looking for someone to blame, they convince themselves that this must be a conspiracy by global elites and immigrants, who are looking to replace the already demographically declining society. [Krastev 2017a:b]

As Krastev (and Holmes) show, the circumstances that lay the foundation for the rise of populism specifically in CEE stem from different root problems: on the one hand recent developments and events, such as the global financial crisis and the resulting outmigration of Central and Eastern Europeans and the migration crisis since 2015. Both events undermine the Western political system, the model of CEE development since 1990 and the system many CEE citizens leave their homes for, fuelling resentment against and abandonment of the West and its values. On the other hand, there are results of processes that reach farther back into history, that have been embedded deeper into the social habitus of the societies, such as rejection of cosmopolitanism and distrust in politicians as consequences of their Soviet past, or disdain of pluralistic societies, rooted in histories of national struggle. It is this unevenness inside Europe and CEE’s specific path dependence that have resulted since 2015 in a “clash of solidarities”, rather than a lack of solidarity in the East. [Krastev 2017b: 15]

1.7 Summary

It is widely accepted that the European Union is under pressure from the inside (populists, right-wing forces, organised crime, and increasingly the V4 group) as well as the outside (predominantly Russia and China) as well as global forces (economic crises, climate change). Without assuming that the EU is an inherently

morally superior project, it is also widely accepted that the dissolution of the EU and the Eurozone is not a realistic solution to the problems of the Union but would have unpredictably high costs and lead the continent into chaos.

The presented analyses should have emphasised the multi-level character of the EU's crisis. Arguing from the standpoint of sociology, political science, EU studies, philosophy, the authors have discussed:

how the EU is ineffective in working together because the principle of intergovernmentalism promotes an individualistic rather than unified approach to EU policies; how democratic legitimacy is both founded in and still provided by the nation-states and their parliaments rather than the EU and the EP; how there is no European identity and unified demos that is comparable to the national identities and societies of the member states and how there is also no higher instance that could shape EU-wide consensus or promote feelings of solidarity; how the uneven historical experiences influence individual political positions and actions, specifically when it comes to the concepts of sovereignty, multi-culturalism and nationalism; how the EU has given priority to its economic commitments rather than its original values and ideals;

how the EU's failure to deal with its uneven foundation has caused political conflicts between the member states; how Germany's export focussed economy has created a centre-periphery relationship, if not hegemonic structures, in the EU; and how emotions of actual or perceived loss, humiliation and fear of cultural disappearance have provided a platform for populists to rise to power in post-communist countries.

Based on this abstraction, one could argue that the most essential characteristic of the EU is also its Achilles heel, namely the uneven and combined nature of the Union. Still, this does not explain why V4 as a political entity has gained such momentum. The following chapter will thus trace the development of the V4 countries as a historical region back to the very beginnings of Europe as a concept, using the theoretical framework of uneven and combined development.

2. Chapter

In order to understand the V4 countries role in Europe and in the EU better, I will contextualize V4's relationship with Western Europe in historical development using the specifically historically and internationally focussed concept of "uneven and combined development". While recently discussed as a theoretical concept in (and of) International Relations (IR), the idea of uneven and combined development was initially penned by Leon Trotsky to explain the Russian Revolution of 1917. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels famously formulated in *The Communist Manifesto* how the industrial revolution would transform England: the rise of capitalism and the struggle of the two subsequently emerging opposing classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat would eventually lead to a revolution, out of which a socialist society would emerge. However, Leon Trotsky observed in his contemporary Russia, which was at the brink of collapse, that the features that Marx and Engels had found necessary for a society ready to revolutionise did not exist: the working class was not dependent on capitalist employers, but an oppressive state; the industry was rapidly industrializing, but Russia's state forms still had archaic features [Cooper 2013; Rosenberg 2010, 2016a]

What Trotsky thus found was "an entirely new 'combined' social formation in which the latest conquests of capitalist technique and structure root themselves into relations of feudal or pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and subjecting them and creating peculiar relations of classes." [Trotsky, as cited by Davidson 2016: 47] Based on this observation, he argued that development was not, in fact, unilinear but instead uneven and combined. It entails that, one, multiple societal units exist simultaneously; two, they have developed differently – geographically, socially, historically, with different outcomes in terms of geopolitics and social structure – and three, they interact. Interactions can range from cultural encounters to trade relations to wars, invasions and colonization. In the modern period, this final consequence of the multiplicity of societies was intensified by both the pressures and possibilities of industrial capitalism: because it deepened the unevenness of the countries, it also made

Western European countries so powerful that other countries, indirectly forced to keep up if they wanted to avoid being consumed by the Western empires, imitated the industrial societies – Trotsky called this effect of uneven development and coexistence of the 'whip of external necessity.' Another consequence, however, was that the 'less developed' countries (in Trotsky's case Russia) did not have to go through all the stages of development that the societies it was keen to imitate had gone through but could instead implement the newest achievements at once, "massively compressing and accelerating the process." [Rosenberg 2016a: 23] [Rosenberg 2016b]

The effect is that of combined development, "a peculiar mixture of backwards elements with the most modern" [Trotsky, as cited by Davidson 2016: 36], "a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" [Trotsky, as cited by Davidson 2016: 40]. The resulting new form of society differed from its previous form as it implemented foreign new concepts, but it differed from the 'model' for its development as well because of its previous, uneven development. This process is thus "not repetition but combination" [Rosenberg 2016b: 142], an "interactive process of change" [Rosenberg 2016a: 23] that produces a unique hybrid formation. Apart from its 'domestic' effects, uneven and combined development is dialectic in character: the hybrid structures are transformed by and transform themselves the larger system, i.e., the international system. [Rosenberg 2016b] The process thus reproduces itself.

One debatable point of the use of uneven and combined development as a theoretical concept is the question from what point on it is possible to speak of uneven and combined development. On one side, Justin Rosenberg argues that it is not limited to the modern period and is not inherently linked to the rise and development of capitalism but can be applied as a transhistorical concept. He points out processes of uneven and combined development before Trotsky described it himself: the emergence of societal and with that political multiplicity, going back to times of hunter-gatherer-bands [Rosenberg 2010]; the emergence of the first Russian state; or how uneven and combined development

only made "the rise of the West" - and with that capitalism - possible. [Rosenberg 2016a]

On the other side, Neil Davidson argued that uneven and combined development is a specifically modern phenomenon, as only industrial capitalism's dynamic and its expansion logic could make combination the way that Trotsky described it possible: "Until the advent of capitalism, societies could borrow from each other, influence one another, but were not sufficiently *differentiated* from each other for elements to 'combine' to any effect." [Davidson 2016: 36] Moreover, because of its inherent need to constantly increase economic activity, expand into new territories and make self-reliant economies interdependent, capitalism made combination at a certain point even inescapable. "What is decisive is that former levels of stability are disrupted by the irruption of industrial capitalism and all that it brings in its wake: rapid population growth, uncoordinated urban expansion, dramatic ideological shifts." [Davidson 2016: 37] He further identifies three possible situations of 'external necessity' that lead to combination. One, military competition, which was for example the impetus for Turkey and Russia to partially modernise. Two, imperialist pressure in countries that were not colonized but defeated and subsequently industrialised with foreign capital under the protection of foreign governments, as happened in China and post-Ottoman Middle Eastern countries. And three, colonization. [Davidson 2016]

At this point it may prove useful to turn to a region whose historical experience has been shaped by military and imperialist pressure as well as interactions comparable to colonization by both Western Europe and Russia. In 1981 (the English translation was published two years later) the Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs published a brilliant historical analysis of *The Three Historical Regions of Europe*, in which he describes the creation of East-Central Europe (ECE) as a result of the uneven and combined development of Western and Eastern Europe, albeit without using the theoretical concept.

The concept of multiple regions in Europe has been discussed in different variations over time. Oskar Halecki [1950, 1952] differentiated between western, west-central, east-central and eastern Europe. Gerard Delanty, due the complexities

of the 20th century proposes a six-fold classification, systematically dividing Europe into North Western, Mediterranean, Central, East Central, South Eastern and North Eastern Europe. [Delanty 2012] Historical regions may be defined as spaces with “a common historical experience that can be discerned in the *longue durée* and that common features of the region’s history are more significant than the differences.” [Delanty 2012: 11]

What makes Szűcs' work especially interesting for assessing the EU's V4 ‘problem’, is his analysis of specifically East-Central Europe as a dynamic region shaped by the rise of feudalism, absolutism and capitalism in Western and Eastern Europe respectively. The tripartite of Europe goes back to the Middle Ages, with the first internal border of Europe being the Carolingian Empire's eastern border at around 800 AD. With the Great Schism of 1054, a second line, more eastern, emerged. While the "West" expanded east- and northward, to include Northern and East-Central Europe, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe rose under Byzantium's influence. Speaking in today's territorial terms, Szűcs' East-Central Europe is roughly composed of those countries that make up the V4 group, i.e. Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, thus differing from the notion of *Mittleuropa* or Central Europe, which often includes the German speaking countries and post-Habsburg territories. While initially Brandenburg-Prussia and Austria as the Habsburg Monarchy are part of Szűcs' ECE concept, they can be excluded from a contemporary perspective of ECE on the basis of their developments in the 20th century: Austria was not part of the Eastern bloc and East-Germany joined West-Germany in 1990. The V4 are thus the only countries of ECE that would continue their specific east-central development as independent states even after 1989, exemplified maybe best in the V4 cooperation on EU level.

Albeit focussing on these three historical regions, Szűcs does not rule out the existence of more historical regions in Europe, for example, Scandinavia being a possible separate region. However, he argues that the development of ECE as a region and the nation-states that would later evolve out of it were mainly shaped and determined by its position between two regions that would expand and become independent global powers, who interacted with and to some degree imitated each other.

2.1 Middle Ages

Szűcs defines the Western model by its differentiation of state and society, i.e. the existence of autonomous sectors of society; the civilizational framework of Latin Christianity; its lack of a High Culture; and the emergence of a "plurality of small spheres of freedom." [István Bibó, as cited by Szűcs 1983: 145] As Szűcs [1983: 145] writes: "Those rights grew in parallel with the higher levels of the hierarchy, to such an extent that the ruler himself could do nothing substantial without the *consilium et auxilium* of his vassals. It was precisely the sum of those collective rights legitimated by custom that were called 'freedoms'." Two developments were decisive for the West's fate: One, the disintegration of the Roman Empire, and the church's subsequent independence, out of which the idea of an independent Christian society, the power of the people, and the separation of the sacred and secular were born. These concepts came to be decisive ideas for later developments, such as the emergence of nation-states, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the social contract. Two, the establishment of vassalage as a system of protection after the dissolution of public power. While personal dependence was not a new concept, what made the Western European version stand out was its incorporation of the "free elements" of society and the fact that it "supplanted the 'state' formula with that of 'social' relation." [Szűcs 1983: 140] Feudalism's 'contractual' nature, the notion of mutual obligations, and human dignity later became important reference points for the social contract as well. Furthermore, the multiple small provinces with their own law laid the basis for general legality and the predominance of law as custom, as well as provided a sort of shield against descending exercise of power. These developments would eventually produce a new type of society-state relation, one characterized by the division of power, as administrative, military, legal, and fiscal power was wielded by the feudal lords and the monarch's power "derived from divine grace hovered empty over the whole social fabric." [Szűcs 1983: 142]

Meanwhile, seeking to unite his peoples and establish a respectable outward identity, the Kievan Rus adopted Orthodox Christianity under Vladimir the Great in the tenth century [Ševčenko 1960]. Szűcs dates the drawing of a second line dividing Europe back to the Great Schism of 1054, although Ihor Ševčenko [1960]

writes that relations between Kiev and its Western neighbours remained friendly for at least 20 years longer. With the integration into Byzantine's diplomatic strategy, the Rus adopted not only Orthodox Christianity, but also the Cyrillic Alphabet and Byzantine commercial law. [Rosenberg 2006] Ševčenko interprets sources speaking of Kiev and Greece's relations from that time as expressions "of the concept of unity, of membership in and sharing of an only, and therefore the highest civilization, now embracing Byzantium and Kiev alike." [1960: 35] Kiev's social structure and division of power before the Mongolian invasion decisively differed from its Western counterpart. The state was divided into districts that were governed by princes with the help of a council of nobles. The nobility, albeit playing a significant role in administration and military, did not have a corporate identity. The mass population made up of peasants were subordinates of their local princes - not the nobility - whom they paid tributes to. And while cities as economic, non-agrarian, centres existed, they were not autonomous or self-governing. Unlike Western Europe, which followed the tradition of Roman law, Kiev did not adopt the Romans' secularized understanding of reign and thus did not develop the differentiation of state and society as the West had. [Landsteiner 1993; Szűcs 1983]

East-Central Europe's rulers "having realized the dangers and advantages of the expansion of the West" [Szűcs 1983: 151] adopted Latin Christianity, with which the notion of the 'West' spread among their lands. While 'civilizationally' belonging to the Western tradition, state and society, however, were more similar and more connected to the Eastern Rus than the West. Szűcs therefore argues that until the 13th century ECE was developing an Eastern-style pre-feudal society: "At least until about 1200 there appeared to be in formation an autochthonous 'Eastern European' feudalism culturally oriented in two directions but drawn together by common structural features." [Szűcs 1983: 152] That development was put on hold when the expanding West and the Mongolian invasion defeated the Byzantine Empire and cut off Russia from its Black Sea trade routes. With Kiev's political disintegration, its invasion by the Mongols in 1240, and North-Eastward movements shifting the political centre of the Kievan state to Muscovy [Rosenberg 2006] coinciding with the Western powers' 'internal' expansion into East-Central Europe, ECE 'became Western.' The Western colonizers brought more advanced

inventions such as heavy ploughs and new cultivation methods, increased population and drove urbanization. [Szűcs 1983] On the one hand this increased revenue of agrarian production, on the other hand, to recruit new settlers, the newcomers were given certain privileges according to Western laws that were afterward also extended to the native population. [Blum 1957] This subsequently practically destroyed the pre-feudal Eastern system and replaced it with what "a recent attempt at typology has called 'state serfdom'." [Szűcs 1983: 152] The emergence of new social strata (nobility and burgesses), independence of the church, the creation of servitude and a homogenized peasantry, arose organically in the West over a span of 500 years. In ECE, this process happened under the circumstance of compressed temporal development, "marked by the specific temporal contraction and rapidity of development." [Szűcs 1983: 153] In just one and a half centuries, ECE caught up to the West and became part of "the Eastern margin of Western Europe in the structural sense", a "truly explosive transformation." [Szűcs 1983: 152f.] Another difference was the way the structures developed: while spontaneously arising 'bottom up' and in sequence in the West, in the east-central region they were implemented in parallel, 'top down' by 'reform rulers' such as Béla IV, Charles IV or Casimir III.

What Trotsky called the 'privilege of historical backwardness' made it possible for Hungary to implement the new structures much quicker than Western Europe, which had to go through all the stages of development: "ready-made patterns and models did help to speed up the internal sequence of events." [Szűcs 1983: 153] Szűcs argues similarly to Trotsky, however, that the results were much more than just imitations, dependent and built on earlier 'uneven' development: "the forms they took were in some places inorganically truncated or raw, in others still unarticulated, rough or mixed, or in yet others demonstrating here and there various archaic features or differing from their pattern in their proportion to one another." [Szűcs 1983: 153] One such effect of ECE's uneven and combined development under compressed temporal conditions was the parallel emergence of vassalage and the estates system. In the West the stratified character of the vassalage laid the basis for the estates system that would develop later. The Hungarian version of the vassalage (*familiaritas*), however, lacked the fief, the institution, the ceremony, the

contractual character, the cultural and legal functions of territorialism, and the human dignity aspect. As a result, Hungarian became a literary language much later than the Western languages did, it lacked a local knight culture, and the vassalage had more of a service character and represented an "archaic patriarchal" [Szűcs 1983: 154] type of relationship. A second type of 'combined outcome' was the disproportionately big noble stratum. Because the free landowners had organized themselves into a corporate entity much earlier than the Western model intended, it included even those who were privileged but uneducated. Thus, while in the West only 1% of the population were nobles, Hungary's nobility made up 4-5% and Poland's even 7-8% of the population. A third result was the emergence of hundreds of towns with an incomplete social structure. While for Western towns the creation of a stratum of free town citizens was characteristic, the towns in ECE "represented a higher degree of peasant 'freedom' rather than a lower degree of burges freedom" [Szűcs 1983: 154]. The east-central European town citizens were also not included in the newly emerging 'political society' that was to act as the ruler's partner and had an autonomous standing; it was solely comprised of the overgrown nobility. The distortion of the social structure that emerged in ECE in the Middle Ages (compared to the social structure of the West) can be summarized as follows: "every 20th to 25th person in Hungary at the end of the Middle Ages was a nobleman, whereas only every 100th Frenchman was; at the same time every 40th to 50th person in Hungary was a free citizen while every 10th was in France." [Szűcs 1983: 156]

Szűcs notes that of course there was differentiation inside the region as well. Bohemia for example can be regarded as having been more 'Western' than Hungary and Poland. But nonetheless, what was characteristic for the entire region was the hybrid, combined character of its political and social development, and the Eastern "modifications to the structure of the Western type of models and norms [that] could be detected in almost everything." [Szűcs 1983: 156]

2.2 Early modern times and the age of absolutism

By the end of the 13th century, Western Europe experienced first structural limitations to its growth, which evolved into a socioeconomic, monetary, and

agrarian crisis. The results were a shrinking populace, deserted villages, and anarchical conditions, which resulted in the creation of the absolutist state. The relations of dependence between the nobility and the peasantry were disintegrated and one part of the nobility integrated into the towns through the sale of offices, effectively homogenizing the burgess and noble strata. While raising money for the state, it also opened the way for the bourgeoisie to become part of the state apparatus, providing a vehicle for social mobility and building a bureaucratic system. The other part of the nobility had its privileges secured and remained separate from the state. Consequently, the state had gained control over the estates' freedoms and could further be the promoter of structural change. Under its protection could then emerge a capitalist economy. However, it would be wrong to conceive of the ruler's power as literally 'absolute'; it was rather "uncontrolled" [Szűcs 1983: 165]. The people had transferred their rights to the ruler, and he could do nothing without reason. Szűcs infers that "[t]he centralization was not strong enough to homogenize the subjects thoroughly, but it was effective enough to encourage the relativized traditional 'freedoms' to begin to approach one another underneath: their innate content became more homogeneous in proportion to the strengthening of the new bourgeoisie." [1983: 164] Eventually, with the French Revolution and the wave of the peoples' seizures of power it inspired, the society gained supremacy over the state and transformed the 'small spheres of freedom' into "a unified *liberté*" [Szűcs 1983: 165]. [Landsteiner 1993; Szűcs 1983]

Decisively contributing to overcoming the crisis were also the urban centres as the focal points of the economy. They recovered quickest by using the ECE region, which was hit by the crisis with a delay of circa one and a half centuries, as both a market to sell products and a provider for raw materials, mainly metals. According to Szűcs, "the regions beyond the Elbe paid in the long run for the West's recovery from the crisis." [1983: 158] Lack of space to expand into, military pressure from the Ottoman Empire, and being the weak part of the Western world economy brought ECE after 1500 once again closer to Russia, which had freed itself from the 'Mongol Yoke' in 1480. The role of the state in East and West was similar in certain aspects, for example, in the development of regional world economies, reorganization (and early modernization) of the society, development of the

bureaucracy, army and state administration, and protection of the economy. However, the previous uneven development of both regions had produced uneven results regarding their economic and political strength. Balancing the West's military strength meant that Russia required more monetary means and thus a stronger state apparatus, for which it found a model in Western European absolutism. [Rosenberg 2006; Szűcs 1983] The emergence of Russian autocracy can thus be argued to have been dependent on two events: one, the development of the West and military pressure that Russia felt from it (in Trotsky's terms, the 'whip of external necessity'), and two, Russia's own expansionary project. After the fall of the Golden Horde, Muscovy annexed the other principalities that Kiev had split into, expanded westward into Eastern Europe and eastward into Siberia. Economically, that meant the creation of a Russian world economy, in which the state had a monopoly on the key industries. Because of the size of the newly acquired lands, Muscovy saw it necessary to radically limit the peasantry's mobility, to be able to both create an army and keep the masses peaceful, which then evolved into a system of serfdom (at that time serfdom was already in decay in the West). Unifying and controlling the lands thus meant politically the creation of an autocratic system, with the Tsar at the centre as the principal power upon which all the other groups depended. [Fehér 1989; Szűcs 1983]

The autocratic system was ideologically supported by the declaration of the "mystic 'truth' of power" [Szűcs 1983: 166]: "On behalf of Ivan III, monks went to work around 1480 digging out from manuscripts the elements of the Byzantine, autocratic mysticism of the state, centring it around the mission of the 'Tsar of all the Russian' to be God's vicar on earth, accompanying this with the identification of Moscow as the 'Third Rom' and of the function of the subjects as being 'service' to that." The result was a "state ideology that crystallized out of the indissoluble trio of autocracy, orthodoxy and the Russian people" [Szűcs 1983: 166] The nobility was "nationalized" [Szűcs: 164] by the Tsar and turned into service nobility, effectively merging social rank and bureaucratic hierarchy and did not have political participation rights. As Ferenc Fehér writes, the noble stratum was essentially as oppressed as the peasantry, creating an "equality of nullity" [1989: 437] but of course, enjoyed better economic standing. Moreover, the towns were not

autonomous entities, and the church was subordinated to the Tsar. When Russia in the 18th century joined the European world economy through Peter the Great's 'window to Europe', the state had to concern itself with enlightenment and ensure that the Russian people were 'civilized' but remained subjects and did not become 'civiles'. As a result, "the Russian nation remained both in theory and practice a social framework subordinate to the 'freedom of the state' (Marx)." [Szűcs 1983: 167]

One decisive difference between the Western states and Russia was that, following the feudal crisis, the West eliminated serfdom. It compensated its disappearance with the absolutist state, whereas the East prolonged it and utilized absolutism (i.e. autocracy) to secure it, as Perry Anderson famously argued. While Eastern Europe fed the West's demand for agricultural goods, its nobility shifted the burdens of the crisis onto the peasantry - that is why in Russian history, the peasantry was the 'disturbing' element, not the nobility - which followed the emergence of 'second serfdom' in the 1490s. [Szűcs 1983] The development of the Western absolutist states happened gradually, and absolutism itself was only a short but decisive period as it laid the foundations for further structural changes. In the Eastern regions, however, that development, implemented from above as a consequence of 'external necessity', happened forcefully at once, lasted much longer and "integrated the whole of Eastern Europe." [Szűcs 1983: 163] The Russian variant of absolutism was to be the structure for future development itself. In that sense, Russian autocracy was "more effective" than Western absolutism, outliving it by more than 100 years, organizing a much bigger nation-state than any of the Western absolutist states ever was, with a functioning bureaucracy and the ability to defend itself against Western invasions. [Fehér 1989; Szűcs 1983]

What followed was the existence of two distinct models of state-society relation, "while in the middle a number of variant models reflected the desperate attempts of East-Central Europe in the zone between two faintly drawn, permeable borders on each side." [Szűcs 1983: 161] The region's combined character – deformed Western structures confronted with Eastern economic and geopolitical conditions – did not lead to the emergence of one hybrid ECE model but several possible variants. Szűcs identifies three models: two 'extreme' cases - Poland and Brandenburg - and a

middle ground model, that of the Habsburg Monarchy. Poland's structure was that of "a 'Western-type' noble society running the state on a kind of 'anti-absolutist' basis." [Szűcs 1983: 168] The nobility subordinated the elected leader to the Sejm, excluded the towns from political participation, and implemented anti-mercantilist policies that gave trade into the hands of foreign merchants. Following the economic depression at the end of the 17th century, the freedom of the nobility paralyzed the state and the ruler and did not lead to a military revolution. The resulting military defeats eventually ended in the annihilation of Poland at the end of the 18th century, deeming the nobility's attempt "to preserve the medieval 'Western' structure when 'Eastern European' conditions were more and more predominant [...] a complete failure." [Szűcs 1983: 169] The other extreme was the case of Brandenburg-Prussia, which was initially the smallest formation in the region. The Hohenzollerns and Junkers abandoned the Western pathway and instead created "a model of absolutism whose military and bureaucratic structure approximated to the Eastern model more closely than that of any other European absolutist state" that "they put [...] into practice with the precision characteristic of the West." [Szűcs 1983: 169] Prussia managed to effectively integrate the nobility into the bureaucracy and army of the state, "making the Junkers an exemplary Western variant of the 'service noblemen' in the East" [Szűcs 1983: 169] Thus, Prussia became a model absolutist state and a military power that proved to be politically and economically successful enough to unify the hundreds of territories into one state. However, Germany's distorted development, i.e. its unity 'from above' and its 'Eastern' initiative to democracy, would eventually end in fascism.

The Lands of the Bohemian Crown and Kingdom of Hungary were integrated into the Habsburg Monarchy. This split of the ECE region may be explained by the fact that Poland and Brandenburg had access to the Baltic Sea and thus could integrate Europe's world economy earlier. In contrast, Bohemia famously does not have a coast [Sayer 1998], and the Hungarian and Bohemian political society accepted their 'defensive', non-expansive position in Europe and sought protection from Habsburg instead. While its agrarian structure was similar to those of Western powers, the political system was clearly Eastern, except that the autonomy of the individual regions was never abolished. The temporal rhythm of development was

similar to the development of the West, with the establishment of an absolutist state only in the 17th century but implemented with 'Eastern brutality,' for example 1620 in Bohemia and 1670 in Hungary. Enlightenment values were imposed from above like in Russia, entrapping people in the ruling elite's version of it. Eventually the region would modernize and capitalize in a semi-Western way. Being politically left out of the West and its world economy following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Habsburg instead established a smaller scale version of the world economy and the accompanying division of labour in its own dominion.

Bohemia, which had already shown substantial economic potential in the 16th century, represented the 'Western' part of Habsburg's economy with a mercantilist industry and a peasantry subordinated to the nobility. After the Battle of the White Mountain 1620 the Bohemian nobility had been replaced with Habsburg loyal aristocrats, effectively putting Bohemia under an absolutist government. It developed a bureaucracy and military system under the control of cadres that didn't fit into the Western category of the office-buying nor into the Eastern category of the service nobility. Bohemia's society was also ethnically heterogeneous, thus initially lacking a nation-forming drive. Exactly this fact, the missing Czech elite stratum, would later become the basis for national struggle in the 19th century [Hroch 2000; Szűcs 1983: 173]: "So over the centuries it was mainly in Bohemia, under a foreign dynasty, with an aristocracy that remained foreign, and with an autochthonous nobility of diminishing significance, that East-Central Europe's most bourgeois modern nation would be formed, almost unawares – as the result of the Habsburg absolutism's only unintended and indirect 'nation-forming' activity; for it did not even cement the mass of the *Österreichische Erbländer* into a real 'Austrian nation'."

Hungary, on the other hand, was largely an exporter of agrarian produce, the 'Eastern' part of the economy, both due to its location and strong Estate's system. Through the integration into Habsburg in 1526, Szűcs argues that Hungarian political development got stuck in a deadlock during the crisis of feudalism. While the West's answer to the crisis was national absolutism and the East's answer was imperial autocracy, Hungary's distorted Western structure, marked by the fact that it was product of uneven and combined development, turning once more to the

Eastern European model, could only end in an East-Central variant solution “that in principle excluded the state from effectively overcoming the crisis by following either the clearly Western or the clearly Eastern model.” [Szűcs 1983: 174] The result was that Hungary's noble society saw no other possibility than to stick to its medieval model of royal and estates power, even under the new conditions. While in the West developed the idea of the people’s sovereignty, in Hungary the medieval idea of the Holy Crown was the essence of political thought and preserved the nobility’s status as the only members of the realm's 'body.' The nobility still conceived of itself as the nation and kept the peasantry in its inferior position through the division of labour, having accepted Habsburg’s compromise first in 1526, and then again in 1867, sacrificing the peasantry’s freedoms and establishing a second serfdom to secure its own power and meet the West’s demand for agrarian products. nobility hardly suffered from being under the Habsburg and was later even granted an organ of central government, the Governing Council. While stronger than its Bohemian and Prussian counterpart, but weaker still than the Polish nobility, Hungary's nobles never benefited from the fruits of a revolution 'from above' - enlightened absolutism, a capital city, modern state structure, economic organization, political culture - all which would have built the basis for modern nation state institutions as it did in the other regions in the 17th and 18th century. In the 18th and 19th century, Hungarian development should become further warped in a process of Europeanization, as Hungary was eager to return to the path of Western development. [Szűcs 1983]

This reading of Jenő Szűcs’ essay through the lens of Trotsky’s concept of uneven and combined development should have emphasized the three moments of uneven and combined development that significantly shaped East-Central Europe and in turn greater European development: the first such moment happened with ECE’s adoption of Western European civilization, i.e. Latin Christianity, to avoid becoming forcefully Christianized by the West, i.e. out of ‘external necessity’; meanwhile, the structural development of ECE was at first similar to the Eastern region because of its close economic and diplomatic ties, showing beginnings of an Eastern pre-feudal system. ECE experienced its second moment of uneven and

combined development when the Kievan Rus became 'temporarily unavailable' due to the Mongolian Invasion. ECE was colonized by the West, left the Eastern path and implemented Western inventions and structures, compressing 500 years of development into only 150. This was made possible by the region's 'privilege of historical backwardness' which followed the emergence of distorted, incomplete or hybrid structures, not exact copies of the imitated model, just as Trotsky characterized for uneven and combined development. This development materialized in ECE as surface level vassalage and estates systems, overgrown noble strata and hundreds of towns lacking free citizens. Recalling at this point the debate around whether UCD is necessarily limited to the modern period, I would argue - following Szűcs - for its use as a transhistorical concept [Szűcs 1983: 156]: "Yet in terms of the basic elements one feels there is an argument for applying even in the Middle Ages the notion 'East-Central Europe' to the entire region, in which inclusion 'East' mean that modifications to the structure of the Western type of models and norms could be detected in almost everything."

Entering the early modern period, ECE experienced its third moment of uneven and combined development when following the independence and expansion of Russia ECE 'became Eastern' again. This development was largely due to two factors: one, the geopolitical pressure both Russia and ECE experienced from the Ottoman Empire; and two, both regions' economic situation of being the provider of agrarian produce for Western Europe. As a consequence, Bohemia and Hungary joined the Habsburg Monarchy, while Poland and Brandenburg would diverge into different directions, either in the Polish case eventually disappearing completely or become a powerful state, eventually too powerful for its own good, as the Prussian case would show in the 20th century. During its 'Eastern turn', the East-Central nobility accepted a strong state, which lawfully bound the peasantry to the soil and eradicated the relative freedom they enjoyed before. A decisive difference between the regions that would impact was that the East-Central nobility had a clear understanding of itself as representatives of the country and its freedom in the political body of the state. The Russian nobility did not perceive itself that way, as the Tsar claimed a monopoly on the political sphere; whereas in the West the idea of the political society included other strata as well (the burgesses and then later

spread to the rest of society). While initially splitting ECE into three developmental models, it generally “followed from the hybrid structure sustained for almost four centuries that its dissolution was followed by mounting chaos and not relaxation. This absolutism was unsuited by nature to making its 'peoples' into modern nations, either clear state-nations or clear linguistic nations, although in both the West and the East that was one of the fundamental historic tasks of absolutism – by which it is not implied that the results were equally ‘perfect’ everywhere.” [Szűcs 1983: 172]

The Eastern turn thus distorted ECE’s economic and social development further because it built upon Western structures that were already ‘combined outcomes’ themselves. It contained chances for both liberal progress as well as reproduction of old structures that would play out differently in the individual countries. What this reading of ECE’s history demonstrates is that the consequence of multiplicity, the existence of the international, outcome of uneven and combined development cannot be foreseen and are contingent, i.e. historical development does not follow a unilinear logic: “There is simply too much differentiation, or, rather, too much uneven and combined development, too many multiple unique social forms and indeterminate outcomes, which negate attempts for logical induction to successfully account for real social causality. The task instead is to highlight contradictions and the social forces they lock in interaction and conflict.” [Cooper 2013: 594f.] Going by this interpretation, I will in the next chapter apply the concept of uneven and combined development onto another one of ECE’s ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ turn respectively; the Eastern turn being the ‘Soviet style’ modernization process of ECE after World War II. And the breakdown of Soviet imperialism and state socialism, the transition to capitalism and liberal democracy and the eventual EU accession as the Western turn.

3. Chapter: Visegrad’s uneven and combined economic development

3.1 Pre–1989 economic development

Before World War II, the economic structure of ECE was comparable to the state of development that Szücs had described: while the region was integrated into the international economy, it was – as a provider of mainly agricultural produce and raw material for the West – part of its periphery. After 1945 the region experienced another ‘Eastern turn’. As part of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence post–1945, the V4 countries developed rapidly after the Soviet model. State socialism eliminated the bourgeoisie, landowners and entrepreneurs, collectivized farms, nationalized factories and enterprises, and replaced the market with a centrally planned economy. There was also a general shift of the production sphere from a focus on traditional agriculture (especially prevalent in Poland, Hungary and the Slovakian lands) to the industrial and service sector, specifically to metallurgy, machinery and pharmaceuticals. The countries thus became ‘modern’ under socialism, i.e. less agrarian, and more industrial and urban; there was significant economic growth (as shown in *Table 1*) and an increase in the quality of life, with life expectancy, the mean number of school years and non–manual occupation increasing while infant mortality decreased. [Boyer 2015; Janos 2000]

Table 1: Indices of GDP Growth, 1937–89

	1937	1950	1975	1989
Czechoslovakia	100	104.2	262.5	327.3
Hungary	100	100.0	263.9	309.6
Poland	100	102.9	334.5	366.3

[Janos 2000: 346]

However, by the 1960s, the overly controlled economy and the principle of “accumulation before consumption” [Boyer 2015: 184] proved to be too inflexible for further economic growth, a matter intensified by the unrealistic plans imposed on the societies by the “unprofessional managers” [Pánek et al. 2019: 586] at the top of the states. Dissatisfaction with the status quo spread through the population, and the Socialist governments saw themselves forced to implement reforms to ease the rising tensions. Subsequently, the government allowed some forms of private property, implemented few market elements, and granted individual participation in the system. [Boyer 2015] The reforms also entailed social policies and programs to promote consumption (such as price subsidies) to revive the populations’ trust in and loyalty to the system. The Socialist reforms thus opened up the Eastern bloc further towards countries with other political and economic systems. Poland and Hungary already had limited trade agreements with the European Community for their agricultural products in the 1960s; and Czechoslovakia’s share of trade with the West constituted almost 30% of its overall trade in 1969. [Karlás and Kratochvíl 2004] While officials for ideological reasons propagated the self-sufficient character of the Eastern bloc, the reality was that certain raw materials for Eastern industrial production were only available on the world market, and especially Hungary was interested in trading with non-socialist countries. [Steiner 2014]

At the same time in the West, the 1973 Oil crisis put a temporary stop to Europe’s economic prosperity and led to a period of economic decline and high levels of inflation. Leading industrial sectors, such as iron, steel and textile, collapsed and subsequently, employment dropped significantly. Consequently, Keynesianism as the previously dominant economic and political program, forfeited in credibility; and with the rise of the middle class and white-collar workers, left parties lost a substantial base for support, providing the grounds for the rise of a new ideology, namely neoliberalism, which would merge with neoconservatism. The new principle of market fundamentalism was implemented by figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, restructuring the entire global economy: markets were argued to be most efficient when self-regulating and not subjected to state intervention. There was a push for privatization, and the mixed

economy was effectively dismantled. The financial markets and banking sector were heavily deregulated, and the separation of commercial and investment banking demolished, allowing banks to give out more loans than they had deposited. Financial innovations like derivatives and securities and the rise of hedge funds essentially turned the global financial market into one big ‘casino’. [Strange 1986] By the early 1980s, the Western global economy had recovered from its crisis. In the meantime, the industrial structure of the West had transformed significantly: deregulation had allowed Western corporations to outsource large parts of their production, shifting the economy’s focus onto service, research and high-tech industries. [Berend 2015]

While the West shifted from an industrial economy to a service and technological/digital industry and entered the age of post-modernity, the Socialist economies, with their commitment to central planning, were unable to replace their extensive growth models with intensive ones; the East was from thereon significantly ‘lagging behind’ the West in technological advancement. [Berend 2015; Boyer 2015] The collapse of the Bretton Woods System and the oil crisis in 1973 were reasons for global price instability and a sharp increase in raw materials prices on the global market – but the Socialist planned economies were dependent on both stable prices and imports of raw materials from the West. [Germuska 2014, 2019] The combination of all these factors – the stagnation of the Socialist economies in the 1960s and the resulting growing dissatisfaction with the entire system, the increase of import costs and the West’s rapid technological advancement and reorientation towards other markets – led the Socialist countries to borrow money from Western banks (which under the neoliberal agenda had been deregulated) and invest in the imports of modern technologies from the West, hoping that it would increase the standard of living at home and thus ease social tensions, as well as in the long run increase return on exports. However, the Socialist products – because they were technologically ‘backwards’ – were hardly competitive on the world market and did not fit the demand of the West. The returns on exports could consequently not carry the costs of the imports, and the countries descended into a debt spiral. [Germuska 2014; Steiner 2014] An extreme case was Hungary: from 1976 on, the Hungarian National Bank gave 45 billion Hungarian

Forint (HUF) in loans to businesses to buy new technologies and improve their export products. While this measure enlarged the volume of export generally, “only one third of their dollar exports were end-products (all the rest were raw-material and primary product); they were also produced with a high proportion of imports.” [Germuska 2014: 280] In 1985, Hungary’s foreign-trade deficit amounted to – 36,580 million HUF. Both Hungary and Poland accumulated a dramatic amount of foreign debt in their attempts to stay competitive on the world market (Czechoslovakia was an exception, potentially because it had help from the Soviet Union and could evade the debt trap [Boyer 2015]). At the end of the 1980s, Poland had gone bankrupt, with inflation rates reaching 251% [Berend 2015], and had accumulated the largest debt in total of the three ECE countries. Hungary had already faced potential insolvency in 1978 and was thus forced to implement an austerity program – it still had the most debt in per capita terms in 1989. [Batt 2007; Janos 2000]

Table 2: Hard-Currency Indebtedness in East Central Europe, 1971–89
(billions of US dollars)

	Czechoslovakia	Hungary	Poland
1971	0.5	1.1	1.1
1975	1.1	3.1	8.0
1976	1.9	4.1	11.5
1977	2.6	5.7	14.0
1978	3.2	7.5	17.8
1979	4.1	8.5	22.7
1980	4.9	9.1	25.1
1981	4.4	8.7	25.5

1982	4.0	7.7	25.2
1983	3.5	8.3	26.4
1984	4.5	11.0	21.1
1985	4.6	14.0	33.3
1986	5.6	16.9	36.6
1987	6.7	19.6	42.6
1988	7.4	19.6	42.1
1989	8.0	20.4	43.1

[Janos 2000: 293]

The socialist reforms in the 1970s essentially proved to be an import of consumerist culture, which was, however, built onto an economy whose material basis was not designed to provide for that. This ‘combination’ thus forced the states to go into debt and become dependent on foreign capital and imports from the West. The ‘external necessity’ to implement elements of consumerism into the socialist states at all was consequence of the “demonstration effect” [Boyer 2015; Janos 2000: 409] of material culture and prosperity, i.e. communication between the Eastern and Western populations, comparison and resulting dissatisfaction with the status quo in the Eastern bloc. It was especially strong in ECE due to its geographical proximity to the West and further reinforced by the rise of modern telecommunications. [Boyer 2015] Exemplary, the East German population was one of the most privileged among the Socialist societies, and yet there was widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo; the reason being that they did not compare themselves to their farther Eastern’ comrades’, but rather to the West, mainly, of course, West Germans, possible through access to Western media. East Germans had the advantage of speaking the same language as West Germans and Austrians, but Czechoslovakians, Hungarians, and Slovenians could also access them. As

Janos [2000: 356] writes, “[...] the degree of latent or overt dissatisfaction had less to do with the actual standard of living than with such factors such as geopolitical and cultural proximity to the West.” The attempt to combine consumerist culture and a planned economy, however, should aggravate the already weak economic situation of the socialist states, and, as mentioned above, plunge them into a debt crisis and eventually lead to the fall of the entire system: “In sum, then, continued inter- and intraregional inequalities were the principal economic legacies of state socialism in East Central Europe. But this legacy was further burdened with debts incurred by governments eager to shore up the lagging consumer sectors of their economies in fruitless attempts to hold on to political power.” [Janos 2000: 356]

As a result of the economic turbulences and the debt crisis, socialism lost a substantial part of its legitimacy basis, named by Berend [2015] the main reason for the 1989 collapse of the socialist system. Telling is how the economic crisis was perceived in Hungary in the 1980s, namely as a crisis of the hybrid economy that was created during the socialist reforms, or a crisis of the “‘ contradictions’ between ‘the features of institutionalized protectionism, and the [economy’s] avowed orientation toward the world economy.’” [Sálgo, as cited by Janos 2000: 297]

3.2 Post–1989 economic development

In November 1989, as a solution to the economic crisis in Latin America, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank formulated the Washington Consensus with its ten policy recommendations. After the revolution of 1989, it was also offered to the Socialist states, respectively, the programme’s implementation was made conditional for IMF loans and World Bank investments. [Berend 2015] The ten programmatic points of the Washington Consensus called for [Williamson 2002]

1. fiscal discipline
2. increased revenues (primary education and healthcare are investments in human capital) and decreased expenditures (like price subsidies)
3. tax reform, i.e. a broad tax base and moderate marginal taxes
4. market–determined, positive interest rates, to discourage capital flight and encourage saving

5. competitive exchange rates
6. liberalization of imports
7. delimitation of entry of foreign direct investment (FDI)
8. privatization of state enterprises
9. deregulation, to promote competition
10. guaranteed property rights

1989 thus was the moment that the third industrial revolution and the global division of labour was all at once introduced to the ECE countries [Boyer 2015]: “Countries suddenly switching from an entirely state-owned, non-market system to a free trade, private economy opened borders to the flow of goods and capital without state regulations. This was euphorically accepted as *shock therapy*, for it did indeed cause a major shock.” [Berend 2015: 58] Following the ‘shock’ entrance into the global economy, the region experienced significant economic decline. As the countries’ traditional markets had disintegrated and they had reoriented their exports towards the European market, the value of their – in comparison with the Western products – inefficient produce decreased significantly, as the price is determined by the market. In the years 1990–1993, Central and Eastern European GDP dropped by 30% and agricultural output by 50%, increasing unemployment and poverty. [Baláž et al. 2017; Berend 2015; Janos 2000] While it has been contested how severe this effect actually was, in 1995 the GDP of all post-communist countries was lower than in 1989, even if least so in the V4 countries: Poland’s GDP was at 98.6% of its 1989 level, Czech Republic’s 94.1%, Slovakia’s 84.2% and Hungary’s 85.6%. [Åslund 2001: 15] However, there was a psychological effect to it, as disillusionment set in that ECE would not immediately be able to catch up with the West: “As has been the case historically, East Central Europeans felt a sense of deprivation because the downward trend ran counter to widely held expectations that the changes in the domestic and international regimes would bring about a quick, if not instant, rise in the general standard of living.” [Janos 2000: 379] Only in the mid–1990s the economies started to recover from the shock. In 1997, Poland was economically more successful than pre–1989, while the

other Visegrád states reached 90–96% of its economic performance of 1989. [Janos 2000]

Table 3: Average annual growth in GDP (%)

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
1980–1989	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.7
1990–2004	1.2	1.2	2.5	1.7
2005–2013	2.1	0.9	3.9	3.9

[Baláž et al. 2017: 131]

The dissonance between the real economic performance and citizens' expectations also had consequences for the populations' satisfaction with democracy, as democracy and the market economy were established at the same time and thus seemed inherently linked: while in 1989 in all V4 countries the general population was in favour of democracy, in 1996, 43% “were apathetic or cynical in that they could see no difference between the communist past and the democratic present”. [Janos 2000: 389] According to a Eurobarometer Survey, only Czechs' satisfaction with democracy increased between 1991 and 1994 by 16%, while Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians' level of disappointment rose by 7%, 19% and 24% respectively. [Janos 2000: 390]

3.2.1 Privatizations

Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits differentiate three capitalist variants emerging in the post-communist countries: a Baltic neoliberal type, a Slovenian neocorporatist type and a Visegrádian embedded neoliberal type. They write that the specific variant of capitalism that emerged in the Visegrád countries is “characterized by a permanent search for compromises between market transformation and social cohesion in more inclusive but not always efficient systems of democratic government”. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012: 3] At the onset of the transformation, Poland and Hungary had already liberalized economically

and politically under socialism, inherited huge debts (as shown in Table 2) and survived socialism as nation-states. While Poland asked for debt relief, Hungary did not – this should later influence their emerging ownership structure and transformation: Hungary followed the path of foreign-led capitalism, which was characterized by exports and foreign privatizations. Poland was considered to be less reliable for foreign capital, so there were fewer foreign investments right from the start, its privatization process happened thus slower with fewer foreign shares, and the modified voucher privatization happened in spurts. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Janos 2000]

Czechoslovakia came out of socialism with a one-party system and still strictly planned economy, hardly any debts and a relatively stable economy. In 1993, Czechoslovakia split into two states, the Czech and the Slovak Republic respectively. In the Czech Republic, privatization was implemented under Václav Klaus in the form of voucher privatization. This form of “Czech Capitalism” should eventually fail and end in a recession in 1996, but only after concentrating a lot of wealth in the hands of few individuals, increasing corruption, weakening the international legitimacy of the Czech economy, and accepting a devaluation and floating of the Czech koruna. [Myant 2007] The economic development of the second half of the 1990s and the 2000s was then determined by the dominance of foreign firms “with a share in industrial output rising from 14.4 per cent in 1997 to 48.6 per cent in 2003 and a 70 per cent share of industrial exports.” [Myant 2007: 118]

Slovakia’s privatization model after its split from Czechia was the most nationalist model. It was mainly built on ‘insider deals’, meaning that a lot of enterprises were sold to friends and loyal managers of political elites; its downfall later was due to the downfall of the Mečiar government. Regardless of their different trajectories, at the end of the 1990s, all four states had adopted a foreign-led capitalist model, with all of them having ‘suffered’ from “spontaneous privatization”, i.e. well-connected persons could acquire enterprises before anyone else, providing the grounds for corruption. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Janos 2000]

3.2.2 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

After the opening of the economies towards foreign capital, V4 was under competitive pressure to attract FDI: in addition to competing with each other and the other post-communist countries farther east, they were also competing with other EU members, specifically Spain, Portugal and Greece. The V4 had several advantages that attracted a great influx of FDI: they had the geographical advantage of being close to both the Western European countries and Russia, and the labour costs were lower still than in the Southern countries, while simultaneously the share of technical secondary education among the population was higher. Due to the implementation of the Washington Consensus' programmatic points (as mentioned above), they enjoyed stable macroeconomic conditions and had developed financial systems. Furthermore, they were able to show strong industrial traditions and manufacturing industries, especially in car manufacturing. [Baláž et al. 2017]

From 1993 to 2014, the average annual net FDI inflows in the V4 (of gross fixed capital formation) amounted to 14.2% in the Czech Republic, 15.0% in Poland, 21.3% in Slovakia and 23.6% in Hungary. For comparison, the average annual net FDI inflow of the EU28 was 11.6%, India 4.4%, China 8.7% and Latin America 13.9% [Baláž et al. 2017: 141] Most of the foreign capital was invested in the service sector, but almost 20% still went into the manufacturing sector, effectively integrating the V4 into the group of advanced economies who exported cars, machinery, electronics and chemicals; albeit at the lower end of the global commodity chain. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012]

Beside money, the FDIs also brought a considerable amount of knowledge transfer, i.e, technologies and managerial practices (thus the 'privilege of historical backwardness' in the UCD framework). In 2014, FDIs made up 54.9% of Czech Republic's GDP; 36.6% of Poland's; 55% of Slovakia's and 41.5% of Hungary's. [Baláž et al. 2017: 142] The large amount of FDI inflow into the V4 countries had both positive and negative impacts: On the one hand it generally boosted the competitiveness of the individual countries in the world economy and their Multinational Corporations (MNCs); it also significantly increased their total factor productivity, with growth rates being higher than those of the southern countries or the EU15 in the same time span. On the other hand, it invited much speculative

investment in the real estate market, especially so in Hungary, where citizens could take out mortgages in foreign currencies. The result was that Hungary was hit extremely severely during the 2007/08 crisis. [Baláž et al. 2017]

3.2.3 Combination: welfare state, neoliberalism and competition

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic continued their socialist legacies of generous welfare systems even during the implementation of neoliberalism in order to secure political support from the population (Slovakia's development was not contradictory like this, as it early on embraced neoliberalism – lowered taxes and retrenched its welfare system – in that respect). The emerging regimes in ECE were thus internally inconsistent: Czech capitalism, for example, was a compromise, i.e. a hybrid of Czech socialist legacy (welfare program) and neo-liberal thought that was imported from the West through the Washington Consensus. Similarly, in Poland, the emerging system was a compromise between the Socialist nomenklatura and Solidarność. Welfare state and neoliberalism merged into Visegrádian embedded neoliberal capitalism. At least until the late 2000s the countries thus had a good degree of social cohesion and, with the exception of Poland, had generally not more unequal societies than those of the older EU member states. However, policymakers favoured pensioners, allowing a pensioners' boom: more people started to take out disability and early pensions. Not only did it leave children and youth more vulnerable to slip into poverty, but it also increased the share of GDP that was spent on paying pensions in all three countries, while decreasing tax income, as that part of the population consequently became 'non-productive'. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012]

At the same time, the neoliberal agenda, international market competition and competition for FDI further weakened the states' income bases and added to fiscal insecurity: as for TNCs it did not matter much where exactly they placed their production sites in the region, a 'bidding war' ensued between the countries, with them trying to outbid the others by granting corporate tax reductions and special incentives to investors (like government subsidies for infrastructure and employee benefits, promises not to increase social contributions etc.). Subsequently, the welfare state was maintained in order to secure short-term political power at the

cost of fiscal overspending and long-term macroeconomic instability. This was especially severe in Hungary and Poland, which had used the pension systems to control unemployment. While the Czech Republic and Poland retrenched their welfare systems over time, “Hungary became stuck with overgenerous welfarism and its pathologies.” [Bohle and Greskovits 2012: 268]

Quick privatization supported corruption and established a capitalist ruling class that was largely made up of members of the communist ruling elite. Quick capitalization created an over-proportionally international economy that was largely dependent on Western Transnational Corporations (TNCs), Western markets and foreign capital for investment. This reinforced ECE’s position as the West’s ‘workbench’ and made the economy more sensitive to global shocks, for example the financial crisis and subsequent recession in the West. The Europeanization process accelerated these processes even more, because the prospect of the countries becoming EU members led to even more FDI inflow. [Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Serfati 2016]

3.2.4 The 2000s: economic growth and the global financial crisis

As a result of the neo-liberalization of ECE, the countries reached “63% of the per capita GDP level of the EU-15” and “60%–70% of the workforce was employed in previously neglected services.” [Berend 2015: 59] The large majority (80%–90%) of insurance and banking services were handled by big foreign banks. Credits of homeowners rose by 20%–30% in Poland and Hungary. In order to support more prosperity and consumption, the countries borrowed foreign capital: “In 2008, nearly two-thirds of household debt in Hungary was financed abroad, as opposed to only one-third in 2005. Hungary accumulated US\$100 billion of foreign debt. Household debt in Poland tripled in three years and amounted to 12% of the country’s GDP by 2008. From the mortgage debt, 70% was foreign.” [Berend 2015: 59] While there were domestic business activities, the economies of the region were highly dependent on foreign capital (both as credits and investments), and production was export-oriented towards the Western market, making them prone to instability. This became obvious during the global financial crisis in 2007/80. Hungary had to implement austerity measures already in 2006, and in 2007,

international banks started to issue fewer loans to ECE. In the second half of 2008, the Polish złoty lost almost half of its value; the Hungarian forint a third and the Czech koruna a quarter of their respective values. At the beginning of 2009, the GDP of Hungary declined by 8–10% and Poland and Czech Republic's GDP declined by 6%. The Czech and Slovak Republics were generally a better off, while Hungary suffered the worst economic decline of the V4. [Berend 2015: 61]

4. Chapter: Visegrád's Democratization and Europeanization as uneven and combined development

4.1 Emergence of democratic institutions

The economic development went hand in hand with the creation of a legal state and democratic system. Especially the German and US–American political systems were used as templates for democratic restructuring: Germany's electoral laws' "attraction lay in its procedural compromise between the single–member, simple plurality system that the retreating communists preferred (with their organization and support spread throughout the countries) and the system of proportional representation that their opponents desired for reasons of their own." [Janos 2000: 375] Furthermore, the hope was that the electoral threshold for entry into the parliaments would filter out political single–issue groups and help create stable political arrangements. The American model acted "on the institutionalization of legislative–executive relationships, manifest in the popularity of presidential and quasi–presidential government [...] and provided models for constitutional courts, sometimes more powerful than the Supreme Court of the model country." [Janos 2000: 376] Following the trend of doing things the 'Czech way', the model for Czech Republic's post–1989 democratic development was the interwar–period Czechoslovakian democratic system, which in turn drew a lot of inspiration from the US constitution and its separation of powers, as well as French parliamentary tradition: "Constitutional and political traditions of the First Republic were therefore based on two essentially contradictory elements – parliamentarism on the one hand and influential presidency on the other." [Brunclík and Kubát 2016: 8]

As the model of uneven and combined development would predict, the imitation and adoption of electoral laws and political legislations led to some deformed outcomes. While election thresholds worked in other countries to reduce the number of parties entering the parliament, in ECE, with the missing experience of the workings of the system, 20–30% of votes were 'wasted' on parties that failed to meet the respective necessary percentage of votes and thus did not end up entering the parliament. This effectively skewed the distribution of seats in the

parliament: In 1990, the Hungarian Democratic Forum won 42% of seats of the National Assembly with only 24% of votes; in 1994, the Hungarian Socialist Party won 54% of seats with 32.9% of votes; in 1993, the Polish Socialist–Peasant coalition won 65.9% seats of the parliament, with only 35.8% of votes. [Janos 2000: 376] Moreover, the imitation and transfer of political systems, in which presidents enjoyed supreme standing, onto settings that had just rebelled against “the dangers of powerful executive branches in government” [Janos 2000: 376] led to confrontations between parliaments on the one hand and presidents in other. Situations like that arose in Poland, Hungary and especially drastic in Slovakia, where president Michal Kováč and Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar tried to hinder the other’s work or even eliminate them from their office on multiple occasions.

Generally, the V4 countries – with the exception of Slovakia – developed their democracies due to domestic conditions and independently of the EU’s democratic conditionality. Slovakia, Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier write [2005a: 214], was maybe the only country “in which EU democratic conditionality spurred the democratic parties to cooperate for the goal of EU membership and mobilized the electorate in their favor.”

4.2 EU accession

The European Community (EC) and later the EU made membership for the post-communist countries conditional on the fulfilment of two factors: one, the development of a democratic system, which the V4 countries did relatively independent of external incentives (with the exception of Slovakia, as mentioned above). Connected to democratic conditionality were the recognition and compliance with human rights norms, as well as the creation of a market economy, which in the V4 states was already happening on the conditions of international financial institutions. The second step was the adoption of the EU’s *acquis*. Full implementation of the *acquis* was conditional for full EU membership; moreover, the potential member states had to show significant progress in doing so to even start the accession negotiation process. The implementation of the *acquis* can thus be said to be due to external incentives, i.e. a credible EU membership perspective, and that “in the absence of the *acquis* conditionality, the Europeanization of Central

and Eastern Europe would have remained limited and patchy.” [Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005a: 220] The EU *acquis* contains, inter alia, the EU Treaties, the legislations of the Court of Justice, the EU declarations and resolutions, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and any international agreements of the EU and other international actors and agreements between the member states themselves. [European Commission n.d.]

4.2.1 The accession process: The Czech experience

In 1989 and 1990 Czechoslovakia and the European institutions signed trade agreements that would establish a free trade zone between the EC and Czechoslovakia. In 1991, they signed the ‘Association or Europe Agreements’, which was considered a first – albeit informal – step towards accession by the aspiring members. The economic transition of ECE liberalized around 70% of its exports and can be argued to have benefitted mostly Western Europe. The Europe Agreements required altogether eight discussion rounds, and specific issues arose regarding agricultural and textile exports from the V4. They highlighted the asymmetrical relationship, namely that aspiring members could not expect too much from the EC, but – unlike for example in the case of the German unification – there was an element of dialogue even at the early stages of Eastern enlargement.

Czechoslovakia’s “Velvet Divorce” momentarily slowed down the accession process, as the EC did not automatically transfer the Europe Agreements to the two new states: each state signed their own agreement separately in 1993, into which by then, due to the illiberal developments in Slovakia, had been added a suspension clause that would allow the EC/EU to cancel the agreement if it saw necessary. In June 1993, pressure from the post-communist countries made the EU formulate the Copenhagen Criteria. While other countries had already joined before, there had never been such clear formulation of the accession conditions. The effect was the concrete formulation of how and when the CEE countries could join the EU. According to the Copenhagen Criteria, the aspiring members had to commit to liberal democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities in order to be able to join the EU. They also had to establish a functioning market economy and guarantee the ability to deal with free market pressure upon joining

the EU and demonstrate the ability to implement EU membership laws (*acquis*). At the European Council in Madrid in 1995, the EU furthermore decided that accession required the adjustment of the administrative structures of the potential new members.

In January 1996, the Czech Republic formally applied to join the EU. Despite the voluntary character of the application, it was accompanied by an outline of the Czech government's (under Prime Minister Václav Klaus) Eurosceptic opinions. It was "not well received in Brussels", where "it was seen as being a sign of arrogance by someone not in a club passing judgement on the club they wish to join." [Novotná 2015: 101] Even earlier, at the World Economic Forum in 1995, Klaus had argued against the adaptation of the aspiring members' agricultural policies, suggesting that instead the EU should change theirs.

Due to pressure from the side of the CEE countries, the EU initiated three key moments that were to officially start accession negotiations. The Agenda 2000 program, first formulated in 1997 but further expanded in the following years, provided details on the pre-accession process, like financial matters and the process screening laws. In its appendix, Slovakia was determined to not meet the political conditions, while Czech Republic was regarded as fulfilling some of the political and economic conditions but not yet meeting others (minority rights, bank privatization, press freedom are some examples). The Luxembourg European Council in December 1997 opened accession negotiations with the applicants that were meeting a substantial amount of the criteria, among which were Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. It initiated the conversation, how the accession process should move forward, i.e. whether the candidates should start the accession process at the same time but finish at their own pace, if they should be split into groups, or if the enlargement should happen in one wave. While Denmark, Sweden and the UK were warning against splitting the candidates into two groups, France preferred minimal enlargement and Helmut Kohl supported the idea of small group enlargement. Czech Republic and Poland were confident to be among the first countries to join the EU, especially as part of the V4 group; Poland's fast accession was also supported by many EU officials. "[D]etermined to have a leading role in promoting stability, security and economic development in South-Eastern Europe"

[European Parliament 1999], the EU decided at the Helsinki summit in December 1999 to open accession negotiations with all candidates. The message that it sent, was that it depended on the candidates and their actions when they could join the EU, and that the EU would be open for them. The eventual accession date for many of the countries was first decided to be January 1, 2004 but was then pushed back to May 1. On May 1, 2004, ten candidate countries joined the EU, among these all four of the Visegrád countries. [all above in Novotná 2015: 119–154]

4.2.2 Europeanization as uneven and combined development

Following Trotsky's logic, the Eastern enlargement of the EU and the "Europeanization" of the Visegrád 4 can be said to have been a moment of uneven and combined development. By joining the EU, the countries had to restructure their domestic institutions, political and legal system in accordance with EU laws and rules, i.e. they underwent a process of "Europeanization". As an example, "[i]n Hungary's June 1999 parliamentary session, [...] 152 of the 180 laws passed were not subject to any debate because they were part of the *acquis*." [Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005b: 1f.] This happened under compressed temporal circumstances: while the European project had been evolving since the end of World War II for almost half a century, the states that joined the Union in 2004, "Europeanized" in less than 15 years.

The V4 were evidently not forced to join the European Community (EC). Rather the opposite is true: in the beginning the push for Eastern enlargement came mainly from the East itself, while the Western states were somewhat reluctant to let the post-communist countries join them for several reasons: One, due to the EC's consideration of the economic costs and the plan for its geostrategy after 1989 and 1991. Two, it saw its priorities in deepening the European project instead of extending it, with the transformation of the EC into the EU in 1993, and three, if it were to enlarge, it preferably wanted to extend to the countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) first. Especially the Southern European countries and France were not enthusiastic about the idea of Eastern enlargement: Spain for example pushed for financial compensation of lost funds that would go to the

Eastern states and Greece only agreed to enlargement under the condition that Cyprus would also be included in the accession. [Novotná 2015]

The integration into the EU also happened on the basis of asymmetrical power relations between ECE and the EU, as the countries weren't invited to join, but had to apply to the EU for membership. Initially there was no set accession date, which provided unequal grounds of the accession from the start because it left the candidates hanging in the air. It was also intended as a way to put off enlargement for a while, since analysts believed that it would take the countries much longer to implement the rules anyway. The EU also monitored the candidates' progress in meeting EU requirements in Annual Regular Reports, which were by some perceived as 'school exams' or even an 'anti-enlargement campaign', reinforcing the perception of an asymmetrical relationship. [Novotná 2015]

However, Tereza Novotná refutes the claim that the EU accession was a simple one-way flow of conditions from Brussels that the candidates had to accept; while there was a clear power asymmetry, the candidates still had room to negotiate the conditions, and had impact in some areas, as well as "significant adaptation on the part of not just the applicant state but also the accepting entity - that is, the EU." [Novotná 2015: 93] She further argues that compared to the German unification, there was a less severe power difference and that in the case of EU accession there were real negotiations about how to implement the EU rules: Czech Republic for example was granted 19 transition periods from the side of the EU. The implications of such criteria, according to Novotná, was that they gave power to both sides: the aspiring members definitely had to conform politically, economically and legally to an EU consensus. However, the vagueness of the conditions, left relatively much room for moulding them to the country's liking and it also committed the EU to accession, i.e. in case of rejection of a member's accession into the community, the EU needed to provide justification.

From the perspective of uneven and combined development, the possibility of negotiation may be seen as the element that further promotes unevenness: as the implementation of the EU *acquis* could have theoretically be seen as 'homogenizing' force, the possibility for the member states to diversify the method and temporal conditions of the Europeanization process brings the concept of

contingency [Cooper 2013] back in full force. However, it would be useful to overthink the concept of ‘external necessity’ at this point: it was the ECE’s own desire to join the EU, they weren’t forced to join the EU and adopt the EU’s rules: “The new political and economic direction (together with the pertaining directives) came from outside - from ‘Brussels’ and the transnational companies respectively - to a considerable extent; but acceptance seems to have been secured by the relatively high degree of compatibility of ‘democracy’ and ‘market’ with sociocultural patterns and values that were autochthonous but, nevertheless, basically shared with ‘the West’.” [Boyer 2015: 199] While this may be true, there was still an element of “external necessity” that made the countries accept the high costs of implementing the EU acquis: that of the understanding of the ECE region of itself as Central European.

4.3 Identity and ideas as ‘whips of external necessity’

I would like to propose a constructivist understanding of identity here, following Alexander Wendt’s argument that states are “constructed by historically contingent interactions” [1994: 385] and that in understanding state identity, interests and state action it is important to recognize intrinsic and external factors, ideas and material forces. [Wendt 1994, 1999, esp. Chapter 3] States have four basic interests, based on the individuals that constitute them, their physical resources, their shared beliefs and institutions: One, physical security and the maintaining of borders. Two, ontological security, i.e. predictability and stability. Three, recognition by others and four, development, as in progress. These four interests provide motivation for interaction with other states and satisfaction of these interests is dependent on the definition of the self in relation to others. [Wendt 1994] The other component to a state’s identity is its social identities, i.e. the “sets of meaning that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others.” [Wendt 1994: 385] The individual and social structural properties then “enable an actor to determine ‘who I am/we are’ in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations.” [Wendt 1994: 385] Wendt further argues that “[...] social structures have effects that cannot be reduced to agents and their interactions. Among these effects is the shaping of identities and interests, which are conditioned

by discursive formations by the distribution of ideas in the system as well as by material forces, and as such are not formed in a vacuum.” [Wendt 1999: 138]

Material forces that support the motivation of the V4 countries to take up the costs and burdens of implementing the EU regulations may be economic and security rewards, i.e. those satisfying their basic interest as mentioned above. However, the discourse in the 1980s and 90s was largely dominated by the phrase ‘the return to Europe’ and the idea or concept of Central Europe: Czech President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had already formulated in the interwar period the idea or the appeal that East-Central Europe, as he called it, should be an emancipated region between East and West, with its own path of development, and not act as a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. [Kumar 1992] In the 1970s and 80s the discourse on Central Europe was revived by ECE intellectuals: most famous is probably Milan Kundera’s essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe*. [1984] For Kundera there were two types of Europe: one rooted in Ancient Rome and the Catholic Church, the West; and another one rooted in Byzantine and the Orthodox Church, the East. Geographically in the centre of these two he locates Central Europe, which he considered to be “culturally in the West and politically in the East.” The contradiction inherent in the Central European situation after World War II led to a succession of revolts in the 1950s-70s, supported by nearly the entire population, according to Kundera, “a drama of the West – a West that, kidnapped, displaced, and brainwashed, nevertheless insists on defending its identity.” He further argues that ‘being European’ means to Central Europe the participation in Western history, i.e. the civilizational background; that Central Europe is not a state, but rather a culture or a fate; and a family of small nations.

In the works of intellectuals like Václav Havel and György Konrád, the concepts Central or East-Central Europe had positive or sentimental connotations, while Eastern Europe was used in a neutral or negative way [Garton Ash 1990]. Milan Kundera [1984] even spoke of Central Europe being ‘kidnapped’ by the East. The concept of Central Europe presents for the intellectuals a third or a middle way “between western individualism and eastern collectivism” [Kumar 1992: 447], or at least not a “blind imitation” of another country. [Havel 1993: 124] (Both arguments are of course, as the previous parts of this thesis have shown, ‘true’ due

to the region's uneven and combined development.) The idea of Central Europe as a special region was further legitimized and historically grounded by István Bibó's work and Jenő Szűcs [1983], as discussed in Chapter 2, who both argued that the ECE region belongs to the West. The idea was then mobilized as a way to "Return to Europe", as emancipation from the Soviet Empire or the "long revolution against Yalta" [Fehér 1987] on the one hand. On the other hand, it was also used as a means to protest against Western Europe and the European Economic Community's representative monopoly on the concept of 'Europe', where everything that fell under Soviet influence was referred to as 'Eastern Europe' [Fehér 1989; Garton Ash 1990; Neumann 1993]: "The debate about 'Central Europe' was and is a moral appeal to Western Europe on behalf of an imagined community, born of frustration with the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe." [Neumann 1993: 366]

While the concept of Central Europe or East-Central Europe was perceived to be wider than the individual national projects within, it also drew lines between insiders and outsiders. [Neumann 1993] György Konrád for example saw Central Europe separate from Western and Eastern Europe both, but still somehow anchored in the West rather than the East: "Central Europe, says Konrad, unlike the west, still preserves something of the European past. 'We have not yet destroyed the old, green Europe. Here we can still have a great deal of what has perished in the developed West (where life is bleaker for its loss).'" [Kumar 1992: 448]

The Central European intelligentsia found in the 1980s that they had developed a similar tradition of civil disobedience and a similar world view after Yalta; they understood Central Europe as a way of life, a "cultural-political anti-hypothesis", as Konrád called it. For the intellectuals, the Central European experience was a life with defeat, the misfortune of not having gained independence. Typical for the revived Central Europeanism was the view that the past were to be the future and that the real essence of Central Europe was Western: rationality, humanity, democracy, scepticism, tolerance, and a specific priority of human rights; Konrád emphasized liberalism as the most fitting philosophy for Central Europe, and with that democracy; while Havel highlighted a specific Central European scepticism. [Garton Ash 1990; Kumar 1992; Kundera 1984]

The concept of Central Europe can be said to have been a way to consolidate the fact that the region had its roots in Western culture but was still different from it and in relation to the West ‘backwards.’ The solution in such a situation, according to Neuman, is either imitation or total differentiation. I would argue at this point, that after 1989, Central Europe – now replaced by the political cooperation of V4 – used to go the route of imitation: pursuit of democracy, of a capitalist market economy and membership in the European Union, in the hopes to be able to “catch up” with the Western European states. As the analysis using uneven and combined development in the previous chapters has shown, such an attempt at ‘imitating’ a path does usually not work. The result was that Central Europeans felt a sort of disappointment, similar to the disappointment following the economic decline in the 1990s. In the first chapter, reviewing an array of interpretations of the crises that have triggered this feeling, the root for those crises, I would argue, can also be found in the uneven and combined development of the region, and furthermore, the change from “Eastern Empire to Western Hegemony”, i.e. one form of submission to a powerful state to a new one. [Janos 2001]

We can in this sense change Neumann’s abovementioned quote to make it more suitable to the V4 today: “The debate about *Visegrád 4* was and is a moral appeal to Western Europe on behalf of an imagined community, born of frustration with the *Western* [or *German*, as Streeck [2019b] would argue] hegemony in Eastern Europe.” I would thus argue that the pronounced Visegrád cooperation in the last years has been a means used by a specific type of populist politician to emancipate the region from the imitation imperative [Krastev 2017a] that the countries have pursued since the 1989 and now follow Central Europe’s ‘special way.’

This is observable in the rhetoric devices V4 leaders have been using when defending their estrangement from Western Europe: “Differentiation is often made in terms stating moral superiority (civilized versus barbarian, democratic versus authoritarian) or even in terms of ethnicity.” [Neumann 1993: 369] When the Soviet Empire was the hegemon, Konrád for example assumed that Central European culture of morality was superior to the Eastern moral culture. [Fehér 1989] Now Viktor Orbán likes to present himself as the defender of Western Christianity in Europe, since Western Europe “had given up on [...] a Christian Europe, and instead

experiments with a godless cosmos, rainbow families, migration and open societies.” [Reuters 2020] Andrej Babis similarly claims to defend “our civilization” and “our values” against Muslim immigrants. [Kafkadesk 2018]

Conclusion

I hope to have emphasized in this thesis the uneven and combined character of the development of the East-Central European region, the four countries that in recent years have strengthened their cooperation despite having perceived each other largely as rivals in their common history, namely Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. My main argument was that these four countries make up a distinct historical region in Europe, whose institutional change since 800 AD has largely been shaped by external factors, i.e. the multiplicity of uneven societies and states in Europe who interact and in that way drive social change.

I have interpreted the Visegrád 4 cooperation as a backlash to the (perceived or real) Western hegemony in the European Union, on the basis of the historical experience of the region as having been subjected to hegemony of the Soviet Empire from the end of World War II until 1989 and usage of a reformed version of the concept of Central Europe, which had dominated the intellectual discourse in East-Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis solely by myself and I agree with its eventual publication in print or electronic form. All sources and literature have been properly cited. This work has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, July 23rd, 2021

Vanessa Horler