



Report

Responsible Global Leadership - How
can the V4 countries contribute to a
stronger Europe on the global scale

29.10.2020



November
2020

On October 29th 2020, Think Visegrad in Brussels and Brussels Office of EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy organized an online debate named “**Responsible Global Leadership – how can the V4 countries contribute to a stronger Europe on the global scale**”. The debate was organized through an online platform Zoom and it was live streamed on Facebook page of EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. The debate was hosted by **Žiga Faktor** (Head of Brussels Office, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy) who opened the discussion with words of welcome. The panel discussion was chaired by **Jana Juzová** (Research Fellow, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy). Participating speakers at the debate were **Aleš Chmelař** (Czech Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Issues), **Vladimír Bartovic** (Director, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy), **Márton Ugrószdy** (Director, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade) and **Lukasz Ogrodnik** (Analyst, PISM).

Aleš Chmelař, Czech Deputy Minister on Foreign Affairs and European Issues, started the discussion with a keynote speech, where he stressed out that the Visegrad countries should be seen as added value to Europe in many respects. He firstly focused on the historic importance of these four countries in Europe, the value of cooperation of the V4, which will soon celebrate its 30th anniversary. In his opinion, an identity problem or what we could call an existential crisis emerged after the integration of the V4 in NATO and in the EU, but through synchronizing its strengths and working on its common interests, the V4 countries have managed to keep the cooperation even in times of crisis. Mr. Chmelař also stated, that the communist past has made these countries very realistic and down to earth, even if sometimes Western and Southern Member States misunderstand them.

Márton Ugrószdy followed up on the opening statements by stressing the realistic approach of the V4 countries is a very important aspect of their contribution in the European Union, which is due to the fact, that Central and Eastern Member States have a completely different history and therefore agreeing on everything within the EU is impossible.

He sees however, that open discussions is crucial for a positive outcome regardless of differences among the EU Member States.

Another way the V4 countries contribute in decision-making in Europe is through their open and inclusive approach regarding enlargement policies. They have expressed support for the integration of the Western Balkans since they have many geopolitical reasons to collaborate with this region. The European Union cannot have global ambition if this part of Europe is not integrated in the Union. It is important to note that even within the V4 countries, the V4 is not fully united in foreign policy. While Slovakia focuses predominantly on the Western Balkans, Poland is more focused towards the Eastern neighborhood policy, which is vital as well, stated Lukasz Ogrodnik.

The discussion then turned towards the challenges of the turbulent times which have a large impact on Europe and the V4. The topics discussed by the panelists involved role of V4 in European Foreign Policy and a growing risk of Russian and Chinese influence in the region. The upcoming presidential election in the United States could determine the ability of Europe to act as a global actor. Election of candidate-president Biden would open a huge opportunity in the era of trade exchanges, restore peace and have fruitful talks on the possibility of a trade treaty. This could mean for Europe to be better prepared when facing Russia and China. As for contribution in foreign affairs, Vladimir Bartovic was calling for a stronger stand on Turkey and the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh by the V4 countries.

Vladimir Bartovic further examined the reasons of the lack of action of the EU as a global leader. The governance is one of the issues, since it is hard to agree unanimously. The EU has all the reasons to be a global leader, because it is one of the biggest economies, it is one of the biggest donors of the development aid around the world, but it lacks the power to act quickly. It takes ages to decide on a unified decision. A recommendation would be to adopt the rule of the qualified majority in foreign affairs as well.



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Panelists were also expressing their ideas on how can Europe emerge stronger out of the COVID-19 pandemic and what role can the V4 countries play. Fight against Covid-19 showed the dependency of Members States and especially during the first wave of Covid-19, Chinese influence in the region was very visible. Later on, we could see that, for example the Czech Republic received help from the EU and NATO and the reliance on our political partners should be a primary focus. Another point that Ogrodnik makes is the potential of the Visegrad group that gives room for other regional cooperation such as the Central 5 that has proved very successful with Covid-19 crisis management.

All the speakers agreed, that they believe that the V4 countries should be more courageous and they should not hesitate to participate and propose their ideas even on European issues that may be sectorial, such as climate change. It is important to note that the image the V4 countries have in the EU is a serious issue and the countries need to be more diplomatic and flexible. An enlargement of the V4 format is not necessary, since many Visegrad plus formats are available.

Mr. Chmelař concluded the discussion by stressing that the only way for the V4 countries to maintain their political capital and to also improve the way they are perceived by other Member States is by not insisting on always being on the opposition, on always disagreeing. They should learn from some of the founding members, who know how to disagree in a diplomatic way, without losing their political capital. Finally, the deputy minister said that the potential of the V4 is there but there is still some work to do in order to improve and better contribute in the European Union as a global actor.



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About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

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About EUROPEUM in Brussels

Building on a long history of EUROPEUM in Prague, we opened our office in Brussels in January 2016. EUROPEUM has been the first think-tank from the Central Europe to branch out to the heart of the European Union. Our motivation has been to follow the debates on EU policies and politics from close and to contribute to them by strengthening the voice of the Czech Republic and other central and east European countries. At the same time, we would like to use our Brussels presence to boost discussions on the EU back in the region, through introducing research by Brussels-based experts, offering their perspective at local events, cooperating with the media, etc.

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Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union