

## VISEGRAD MEETS VISEGRAD: THE VISEGRAD FOUR AND THE WESTERN BALKANS SIX<sup>5</sup>

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### Abstract

Enlargements of the European Union (EU) over the recent decade have not just expanded its territory or increased the headcount of its Single Market; by almost doubling the number of its Member States (MSs) the EU faces multifaceted implications beyond any doubt. Having been challenged by multiple transformation, the Central and East European Countries (CEECs) assumed their rights just like obligations associated with EU membership upon completion of transitional periods intended to allow for as much a smooth integration process as possible. Accession to the EU reinforced their prestige internationally to the extent of intensity of their participation (i.e. in terms of “mere“ EU membership, or even complemented by a single currency in the Euro Area, and/or single external EU border in the Schengen Area). Gradually, they aspire to maximise their inward financial flow from the common EU budget while simultaneously “catching up“ with the “Western“ degree of political and economic development; post-Cold-war democracies increasingly engage in institutional representation, coalition building and pursuit of own interests amidst the EU arena, too. In this respect we streamline our focus to the Western Balkans and the shaping concept of the so-called *Western Balkans Six* with the aim to hint prospects of cooperation inspired by the *Visegrad Group* alias the *Visegrad Four (V4)*.

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**Key Words:** European integration, European Union enlargement, Visegrad<sup>6,7</sup>, Visegrad Four, Western Balkans Six

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## Introduction

*“In everyday usage the word “integration” denotes the bringing together of parts into a whole. In the economic literature the term “economic integration” does not have such a clear-cut meaning. Some authors include social integration in the concept, others subsume different forms of international cooperation under this heading, and the argument has also been advanced that the mere existence of trade relations between independent national economies is a sign of integration.”*

Bela Balassa (1961) in Nelsen, Brent F. - Stubb, Alexander (eds.). *The European Union – Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. – comprehensively revised and updated). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 180.

European integration theories<sup>8</sup> drawing on related disciplines such as political sciences, international relations, economics, sociology, etc., are further formulated in the framework of the so-called *European (integration) studies* exploring political, legal, economic, social, etc. aspects of the European integration process – in the context of methodological pluralism M. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni states that “[n]o single method or approach is likely to lead, on its own, to a complete understanding of the European integration process”<sup>9</sup> – alongside real-life developments. As a matter of fact, the 1990s witnessing “centrifugal” disintegration of a number of federal statehoods in Central and Eastern Europe marked parallel “centripetal” attempts of now-independent successor states for (European) integration. Following the (geo-)political commitment of the EU MSs vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe, the reality of its “catching-up” in (geo-)economic terms fostered progressive engagement of CEECs in the respective stages of economic integration as defined by B. Balassa<sup>10</sup>. *Interdependence*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hungary

<sup>7</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>8</sup> For realist, intergovernmentalist, and institutionalist approaches; neo-functionalism and supranational governance; constructivist perspectives; sociological perspectives on European integration; multilevel governance see Jones, Erik - Menon, Anand - Weatherill, Stephen (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 3-75.

<sup>9</sup> Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette (ed.). *Debates on European Integration – A Reader*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006, p. 466f.

<sup>10</sup> in chronological order: “*Declaration on Co-operation Between the Republic of Poland, the Czechoslovak Federal Republic and the Republic of Hungary on the Path for Advancing Towards European Integration*” (15 February 1991) alias **international (Visegrad Group) cooperation**; “*Agreement Establishing the Customs Union Between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic*” (29 October 1992) alias **customs union**; *the Central European Free Trade Agreement* (21 December 1992) alias **free trade area**

<sup>11</sup> originally a catchword of the 1970s

intensified, as J. Pelkmans puts it: “*The splitting up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, while keeping a customs union between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is a dramatic example of how ‘deep’ economic interdependence gradually becomes with the highest stages of economic integration and how costly disentanglement can be*”<sup>12</sup>.

M. Dangerfield phased out stages of *Visegrad Group* development as **Visegrad I-III** and the **Central European Free Trade Agreement** (CEFTA). In its initial phase<sup>13</sup> (*prior to 1993*) **Visegrad I** experienced multifaceted transformation, including formation of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic as a result of the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. The so-called **CEFTA** era (*1993-1998*) and the **Visegrad II** (*1998-2004*) years were targeted firstly on follow-up transition from federal to independent statehood<sup>14</sup> in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia (e.g. in currency terms), and secondly, on compliance with the *acquis communautaire* driven by the prospect of joining the EU. Following the 2004 EU accession of V4 countries, the **Visegrad III** phase (*since 2004*) has been marked by more structuralised interaction and perceived by other regional groupings as an inspirational role model of cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the pre-accession period was characterised by intensive rivalry among candidates for EU membership – including the V4 countries originally split into two rounds of accession negotiations. Despite the fact that EU accession talks with Slovakia were launched two years after they had been initiated with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1998, terms and conditions of enlarging the Union to all ten 2004 “New<sup>16</sup> MSs” were anchored in a single Accession Treaty signed in Athens in 2003. In the same year, the so-called *EU perspective* for the Western Balkans was reiterated at the Thessaloniki European Council (Annex 1).

“*Concernant les pays d’Europe du Sud-Est, l’UE met en place, dès novembre 2000, un outil de préadhésion : l’Accord de stabilisation et d’association (ASA)*<sup>17</sup>. *Il s’agit d’aider les pays concernés à se réformer, à la fois économiquement et politiquement, en prenant en compte leur situation spécifique d’instabilité suite aux guerres. [...] La mise en place des ASA*

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<sup>12</sup> Pelkmans, Jacques. *European Integration – Methods and Economic Analysis*. Essex: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *alias* V3 specified in Annex 1

<sup>14</sup> *alias* V4 specified in Annex 1

<sup>15</sup> see also Fawn, Rick. Visegrad: Fit for purpose? In *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. Vol. 46, 2013. ISSN 0967-067X, p. 348.

<sup>16</sup> Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

<sup>17</sup> Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA)

*était un geste fort pour affirmer la vocation européenne de ces États. Toutefois, elle suggérait que l'intégration des Balkans occidentaux se ferait de manière différenciée, pays par pays, et non de manière globale, créant une concurrence de fait entre ces pays. Le pari de l'UE était de considérer que l'exemple des « bons élèves » les plus avancés vers l'adhésion pourrait servir d'émulateur politique pour les pays moins avancés.*“

Cattaruzza, Amaël - Sintès, Pierre. *Atlas géopolitique des Balkans – Un autre visage de l'Europe*. Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2012, p. 69.

In an earlier paper<sup>18</sup> we indicated the group of *candidate countries* for EU membership as the one comprising the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey, whereas Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99 (in line with the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence) represented the so-called *potential candidates*. However, Albania succeeded to “upgrade” its status to a candidate country, and Iceland “*requested not to be regarded as a candidate country*”<sup>19</sup>, since. Now, we streamline our focus in a comparative perspective to the Western Balkans and the shaping concept of the so-called *Western Balkans Six (WB6)* with the aim to hint prospects of cooperation inspired by the *Visegrad Four*.

### **“FYROM trilogy” as an *intermezzo* between the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement rounds**

*“Montenegro’s proposal for a Western Balkans Six grouping (bringing together Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) is a constructive initiative, drawing on the positive experience of the Visegrad Four. It is important that such initiatives are complementary and add value to existing arrangements, and that they are regionally owned and driven. Active participation in the Danube and the [...] Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategies can also support economic and social development and promote EU integration.*“

European Commission. *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014*. Brussels, 16 October 2013, COM(2013) 700 final, p. 13.

The 2006 so-called *renewed consensus on enlargement* emphasised that the forthcoming EU enlargement rounds would rest on three central aspects: *consolidation*<sup>20</sup>; *conditionality*<sup>21</sup>; and *communication*<sup>22</sup>. Prospective

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<sup>18</sup> Čiderová Denisa - Repášová Vladimíra. Geo-heterogeneity in the Context of the EU. In *European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 9, No. 25, 2013, pp. 1-22. ISSN 1857-7881 (print), 1857-7431 (online).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission website (Enlargement):

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/check-current-status/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/check-current-status/index_en.htm)

<sup>20</sup> as post-2004-enlargement consolidation in the EU

accession of twelve CEECs and Turkey to the EU spread into three intervals: eight CEECs<sup>23</sup> together with two Mediterranean<sup>24</sup> countries entering in 2004; two CEECs<sup>25</sup> joining them in the EU in 2007; and, Turkey negotiating its membership in the EU in the position of a candidate country. Another then-a-candidate country – Croatia – stretched the EU further into the Balkans region when becoming a “New MS” in 2013; yet, another then-a-candidate country – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – has been expecting launch of its EU accession talks since the Commission’s 2009 proposal on passage to the second stage of the association in terms of the SAA. FYROM applied for EU membership in 2004, was granted candidate country status in the following year, and witnessed the so-called *European Partnership* a year later. Thus, such “trilogy” occurring as an *intermezzo* between the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement rounds (further reinforced through FYROM’s 2008 so-called *Accession Partnership*) seemed to be promising an early prospect of a “New MS”. Nonetheless, FYROM has been prevented from being engaged in EU accession negotiations in the context of the so-called “name issue” and the related Council’s position, as the Commission puts it: “*It remains essential that decisive steps are taken towards resolving the ‘name issue’ with Greece. The failure of the parties to this dispute to reach a compromise after 19 years of UN-mediated talks is having a direct and adverse impact on the country’s European aspirations. Resolute action is required, as well as proactive support from EU leaders. The Commission recalls its view that, if the screening and the Council discussions on the negotiating framework were under way, the necessary momentum could have been created which would have supported finding a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue even before negotiating chapters were opened.*”<sup>26</sup> Both, the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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<sup>21</sup> as persistent post-2004-enlargement conditionality

<sup>22</sup> as ongoing communication: “*For their part, Member States, together with the EU institutions, should lead an informed debate on the political, economic and social impact of enlargement policy*”, the European Commission claims (European Commission. *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-2015*. Brussels, 8 October 2014, COM(2014) 700 final, p. 1).

<sup>23</sup> see footnote 12

<sup>24</sup> see footnote 12

<sup>25</sup> Bulgaria and Romania

<sup>26</sup> European Commission. *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-2015*. Brussels, 8 October 2014, COM(2014) 700 final, p. 23; in this respect the General Affairs Council pursued its view at the meeting in Brussels on 16 December 2014 (Council of the European Union. *Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process*. Brussels, 16 December 2014, p. 9) as follows: “*With a view to a possible decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council will revert to the issue anytime in 2015, on the basis of an update by the Commission on implementation of reforms, including in the context of the High Level*

(*alias* FYROM), and the case of Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 (in line with the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence) have been closely linked to the United Nations. Due to the fact that accession of CEECs to the EU was not compatible with their continuous participation in CEFTA (as if “CEFTA 1.0”)<sup>27</sup>, transformation of the latter to the so-called *CEFTA 2006* (as if “CEFTA 2.0”)<sup>28</sup> stretched it to South-Eastern European (SEE) countries including Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999) as illustrated in Figure 1 below. Albeit acknowledging engagement of the respective depicted countries in a number of international organisations<sup>29</sup> and initiatives<sup>30</sup>, we zoom-in our attention to potential “lowest common denominators” resulting from involvement in overlapping forms of cooperation with full (CEFTA 2006), major (CEI, EUSAIR), minor (UfM, EUSDR) and individual (BSEC) participation.<sup>31</sup>

Fig 1 Visualisation of the context of cooperation: focus on the Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans Six

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*Accession Dialogue, and on tangible steps taken to promote good neighbourly relations and to reach a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue.”*

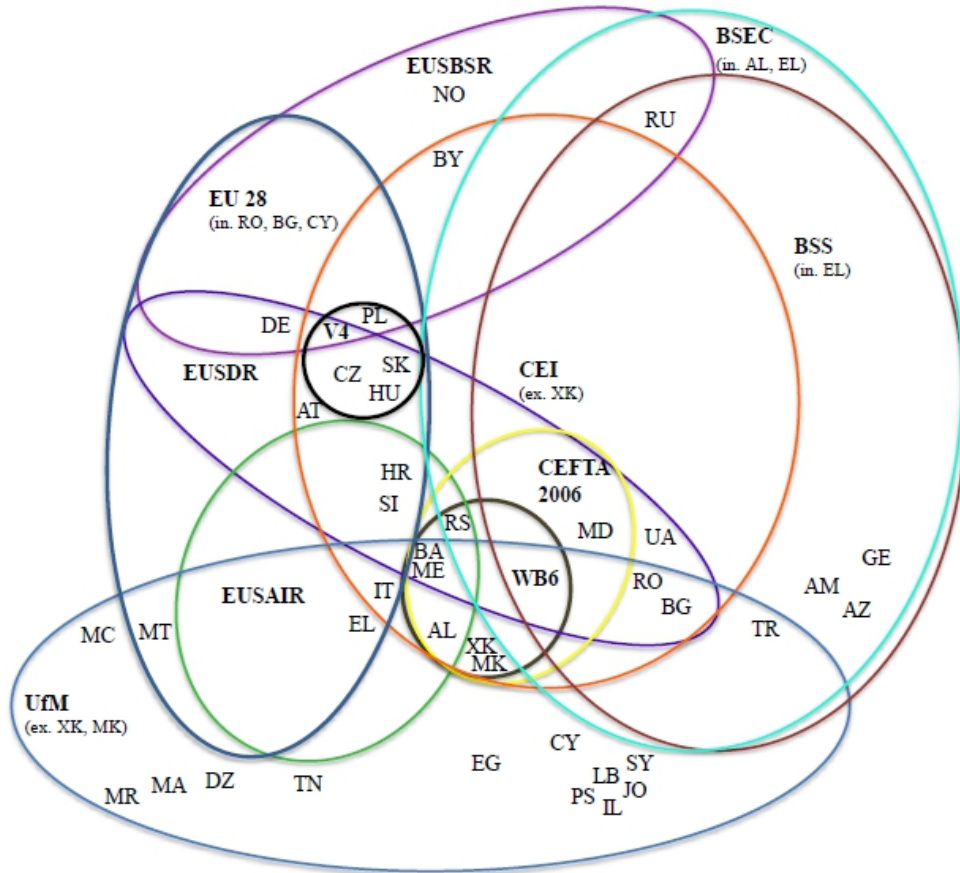
<sup>27</sup> Čiderová, Denisa - Dionizi, Brikene. EU Accession Experience and Perspectives: The Case of Slovakia and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999). In Hoti, A. - Kosír, I. (eds.), *European Perspectives of the Western Balkans countries I., Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999)*, 2015 (in press)

<sup>28</sup> Čiderová, Denisa - Dionizi, Brikene. EU Accession Experience and Perspectives: The Case of Slovakia and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999). In Hoti, A. - Kosír, I. (eds.), *European Perspectives of the Western Balkans countries I., Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999)*, 2015 (in press)

<sup>29</sup> such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE

<sup>30</sup> such as the South-East European Cooperation Process

<sup>31</sup> Analogically to the V4 region, the Western Balkans region is involved in two macro-regional strategies of the EU, namely the EUSBSR (addressing e.g. deterioration of the environmental state of the Baltic Sea) and the EUSDR (responding to e.g. unused potential for improved navigability and water quality for an attractive Danube Region) in the case of the first, while the EUSDR and the EUSAIR (referring to e.g. economic, social and environmental diversity and fragmentation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region) in the case of the latter (European Commission. *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies*. Brussels, 20 May 2014, COM(2014) 284 final, p. 2).



Legend: AL – Albania; AM – Armenia; AT – Austria; AZ – Azerbaijan; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; BG – Bulgaria; BSEC – Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation; BSS – Black Sea Synergy; BY – Belarus; CEFTA 2006 – Central European Free Trade Agreement; CEI – Central European Initiative; CY – Cyprus; CZ – Czech Republic; DE – Germany; DZ – Algeria; EG – Egypt; EL – Greece; EUSAIR – EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region; EUSBSR – EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; EUSDR – EU Strategy for the Danube Region; EU28 – European Union; GE – Georgia; HR – Croatia; HU – Hungary; IL – Israel; IT – Italy; JO – Jordan; LB – Lebanon; MA – Morocco; MC – Monaco; MD – Moldova; ME – Montenegro; MK – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; MR – Mauretania; MT – Malta; NO – Norway; PL – Poland; PS – Palestinian Authority; RO – Romania; RS – Serbia; RU – Russian Federation; SI – Slovenia; SK – Slovak Republic; SY – Syria; TN – Tunisia; TR – Turkey; UA – Ukraine; V4 – Visegrad Four; WB6 – Western Balkans Six; XK – Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999.

Source: Authors.

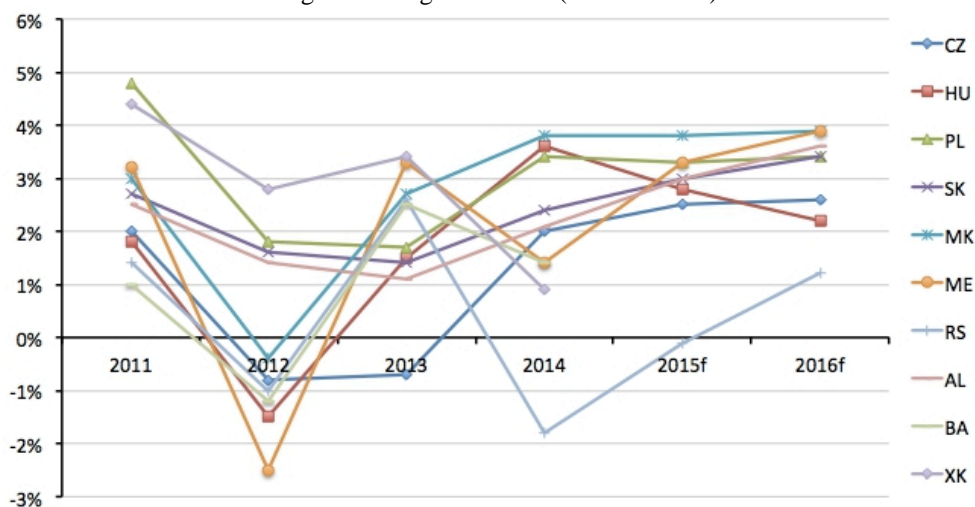
As both consolidation (the EU<sup>32</sup> & the Western Balkans<sup>33</sup>) and conditionality (the Western Balkans<sup>34</sup> & the EU<sup>35</sup>) remain an imperative, reflection of hard and soft data will follow next.

<sup>32</sup> in the context of the global economic crisis

### Visegrad Four and Western Balkans Six: Focus on hard data

The period of 2011-2014, including a forecast for 2015 and 2016, has witnessed declines as well as regaining strength in terms of *GDP growth* (Figure 2a) for both the V4 and the WB6 regions.

Fig 2a GDP growth in % (2011 – 2016f)



Source: European Commission. Spring 2015 European Economic Forecast. In *European Economy*. No. 2, European Commission, Brussels, May 2015; European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CCEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015.

Major drop in GDP growth (in %) was recorded in 2012 in most countries, but had a particularly severe impact in Hungary (-3.3pp) within the V4, and in Montenegro (-5.7pp) among the WB6 participants. Although 2013 proved to be a year of recovery for most countries (with the exception of Poland and Serbia), the 2016 forecast expects Slovakia and Albania to recover the most in comparison to the year 2011. Forecasts for 2015 and 2016 do not cover Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999; still, data available imply modest, but stronger recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although GDP growth implies similarities between the V4 and the WB6, one cannot claim the same in the case of the *unemployment rate* (Figure 2b).

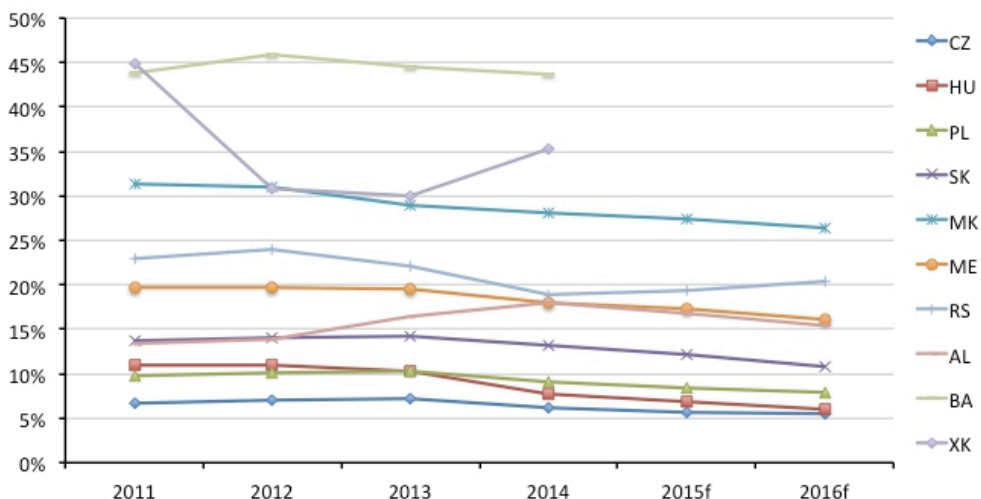
Fig 2b Unemployment rate in % (2011 – 2016f)

<sup>33</sup> in the context of the global economic crisis

<sup>34</sup> in the context of the European Union membership

<sup>35</sup> in the context of the Euro Area membership

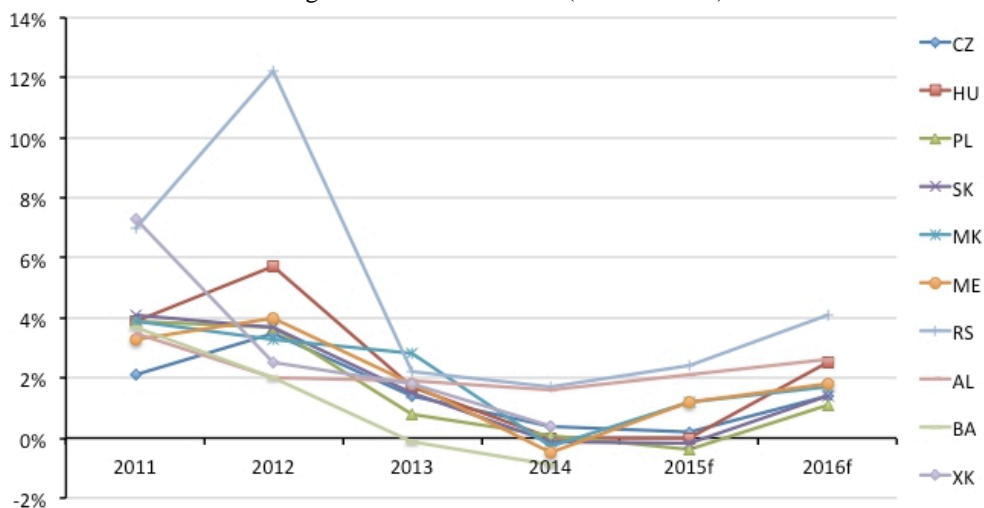




Source: European Commission. Spring 2015 European Economic Forecast. In *European Economy*. No. 2, European Commission, Brussels, May 2015; European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CCEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015.

Within the V4, Slovakia is the one most concerned with joblessness; nevertheless, the 2016 forecast expects a decline of the unemployment rate (when compared to the initial 2011 level) of 5pp and 2.9pp for Hungary and Slovakia, respectively. One must conclude that the situation in the WB6 region regarding unemployment is alarming, especially in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina where it was registered in the interval from 43.6% (2014) to 45.9% (2012). Contradictory developments are documented between 2011-2014 in Albania (joblessness climbing up) and in Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 (joblessness sliding down). Overall, optimistic trends are envisaged for FYROM, Montenegro and Albania, since the 2015-2016 forecasts regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 are not available.

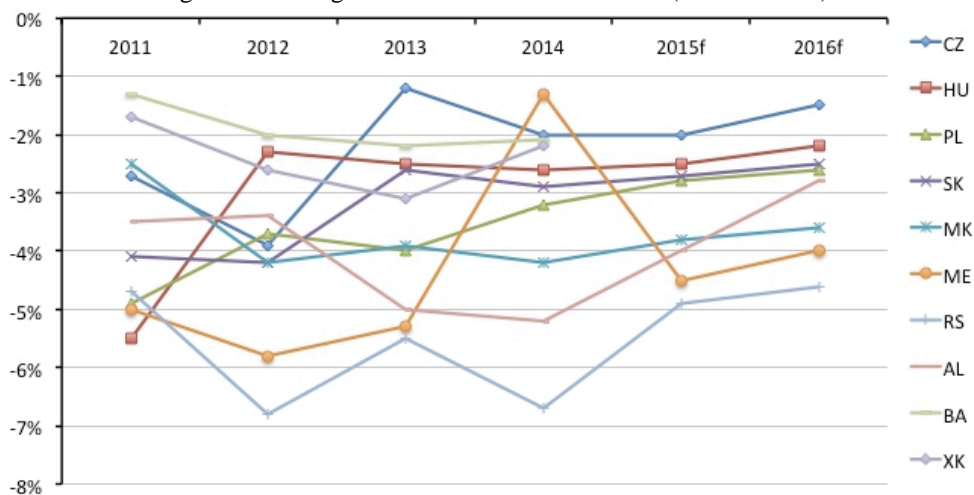
Fig 2c Inflation rate in % (2011 – 2016f)



Source: European Commission. Spring 2015 European Economic Forecast. In *European Economy*. No. 2, European Commission, Brussels, May 2015; European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CCEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015.

*Inflation rate* (Figure 2c) has experienced volatility in the interval from -0.9% to +12.2%, namely: on the scale from -0.1% (Slovakia in 2014) to +5.7% (Hungary in 2012), and from -0.9% (Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014) to +12.2% (Serbia in 2012). Overall, both the V4 and the WB6 saw weakening inflation in the years 2011-2014; yet, intensifying inflationary tendencies are forecasted for 2015-2016 in all countries in the sample (with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/19 not covered by the prognosis).

Fig 2d General government balance in % GDP (2011 – 2016f)



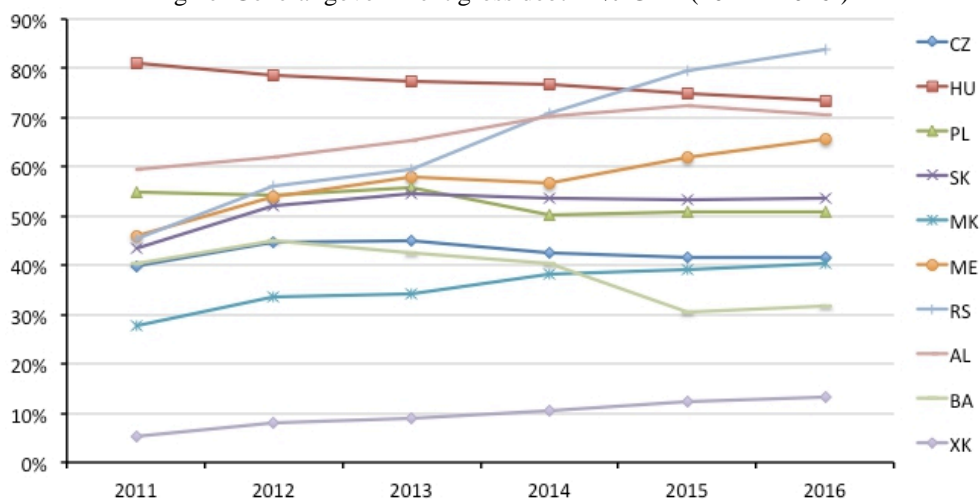
Source: European Commission. Spring 2015 European Economic Forecast. In *European Economy*. No. 2, European Commission, Brussels, May 2015; European Commission. 2015 Economics Reform Programmes (Part I) of Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*: The Commission's overview and country assessments. *European Economy – Occasional Papers*. No. 229, June 2015; European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CCEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015.

In the case of the *general government balance* (Figure 2d), countries of the V4 and the WB6 are characterised by a budgetary deficit, oscillating in the interval from -1.2% to -6.8%, namely: on the scale from -1.2% (the Czech Republic in 2013) to -5.5% (Hungary in 2011), and from -1.3% (Montenegro in 2014) to -6.8% (Serbia in 2012). Prevaingly, the V4 and the WB6 regions are foreseen to experience improving general government balance in 2015-2016 – albeit with the exception of Montenegro<sup>36</sup> – as data for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/19 have not been disclosed. *General government gross debt* (Figure 2e) demonstrated a diverse, but frequently continuous upward trend throughout 2011-2014 (including forecasts for 2015-2016 in both the V4 and the WB6). The spread, however, reflects considerable discrepancies within the two regions under consideration when the forecast represents a range of the general government

<sup>36</sup> For details see European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CCEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015, pp. 18-20; European Commission. 2015 Economics Reform Programmes (Part I) of Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*: The Commission's overview and country assessments. *European Economy – Occasional Papers*. No. 229, June 2015, pp. 37-52.

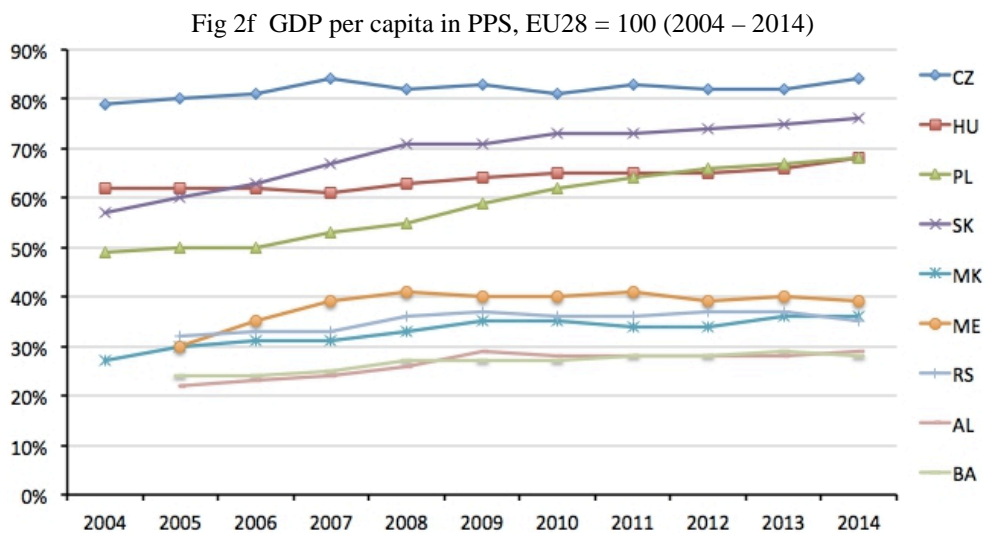
gross debt from 12.4% (13.4%) to 79.6% (83.7%) for 2015 and 2016, respectively.

Fig 2e General government gross debt in % GDP (2011 – 2016f)



Source: European Commission. Spring 2015 European Economic Forecast. In *European Economy*. No. 2, European Commission, Brussels, May 2015; European Commission. 2015 Economics Reform Programmes (Part I) of Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*: The Commission's overview and country assessments. *European Economy – Occasional Papers*. No. 229, June 2015; European Commission. EU Candidate & Potential Candidate Countries' Economic Quarterly (CEEQ) 2nd Quarter 2015. *European Economy – Technical Paper*. No. 002, July 2015.

According to GDP per capita in *Purchasing Power Standard (PPS)* in the period 2004-2014 (Figure 2f), in which the EU28 equals 100, Poland and Slovakia registered significant progress – boosting from the level of 49% (57%) in 2004 to 68% (76%) in 2014, respectively; still, among the V4 countries the Czech Republic continues to be ahead. Accessible data for the period 2005-2014 (except for FYROM with data coverage over 2004-2014; and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 where data are non-available) document the degree (GDP per capita in PPS stretching from 22% to 41%) of “catching-up” of the WB6 participants with their V4 counterparts.



Source: Eurostat. GDP per capita in PPS. [Http://:europa.eu](http://europa.eu), 6 August 2015.

In summary, GDP growth (in %) is in the phase of gaining momentum in the V4 just like in the WB6; the rates of joblessness registered for Montenegro and Albania more or less follow the V4 pattern; negative figures symbolise decelerated rate of inflation, gradually rising in both regions again; general government balance has been marked by ups and downs with the outlook of consolidation; and, the general government gross debt in V4 countries levelled off (besides steady fall recorded in Hungary in the context of the so-called *convergence criteria*) while on average it has been augmenting across the WB6 region.

Recently released *Discussion Paper* of the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission provides evidence of significant real convergence accomplished by a majority of the CEECs joining the EU in 2004 and 2007 vis-à-vis the Euro Area in its 12-Member-State composition. Nonetheless, there is a substantial real convergence gap in terms of average GDP per capita in PPS between those CEECs that have enlarged the EU from 15 MSs to 27 MSs, and advancement of these countries from Central and Eastern Europe in terms of their real and nominal convergence was not just disproportionate, but even not gradual or smooth<sup>37</sup>. Since the CEECs as EU MSs with the so-called *derogation* have

<sup>37</sup> “In general, CEE10 [Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia] countries which entered the EU with lower income levels seem to have converged somewhat faster.”, p. 25. In Forgó, Balázs - Jevčák, Anton. Economic Convergence of Central and Eastern European EU Member States over the Last

become committed to adopting the common currency, their compliance with the convergence criteria continues to be monitored<sup>38</sup>: out of the V4 and the WB6 it is Slovakia (as an official member of the Euro Area) along with Montenegro and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 (on the basis of unilateral euroisation with no separate legal tender) that use the euro as their currency.

### **Visegrad Four and Western Balkans Six: Focus on soft data**

Being a part of the European Union (i.e. V4) – or being shortlisted (i.e. WB6) for it – influences and defines perceptions and reflections regarding values, possibilities and obligations that come with the EU membership (Annex 2).

When asked if they personally feel as citizens of the EU, answers within the V4 reflect to some degree the EU28 average: the respondents feel to be the citizens of the EU to the largest extent in Slovakia (75%), more or less followed by Poland (74%) and Hungary (67%). The Czech Republic, however, proves its traditional scepticism when scoring the most where respondents do not feel as citizens of the EU (38%).

When the matter of image that the European Union conjures comes into question, one must conclude that the EU candidate countries (among the WB6 participants) see the Union much more positively than the V4 in the position of its MSs. The most favourable perception of EU image within the WB6 sample of the EU candidate countries is in Albania (75%), with its counterpart in the V4 being Poland (53%). FYROM (59%) and Montenegro (49%), as well as Hungary (43%) and Slovakia (38%) come next, while the least positive image of the EU was communicated by the respondents of Serbia (43%) and the Czech Republic (37%). The latter two also share their negative approach regarding the EU image with 22% of Serbia's respondents and 20% of survey participants in the Czech Republic seeing the Union in a "totally negative" light. Again, Albania and Poland record the lowest percentage in this context: 7% and 2%, respectively.

When asked to express their personal opinion regarding the EU, respondents within the WB6 sample of the EU candidate countries view it (in a descending order) through the prism of: economic prosperity (Albania 59%, FYROM 35%, Serbia 28%, Montenegro 24%); freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU (Albania 58%, FYROM 48%, Serbia 43%,

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Decade (2004-2014). In *European Economy – Discussion Paper*. No. 001, European Commission, Brussels, July 2015. ISSN 2443-8022 (online).

<sup>38</sup> For details see European Central Bank. *Convergence Report June 2014*. Frankfurt am Main: European Central Bank, 2014. ISSN 1725-9525 (online); European Commission. The 2015 Stability and Convergence Programmes – An overview. *European Economy – Institutional Paper*. No. 002, European Commission, Brussels, July 2015. ISSN 2443-8014 (online).

Montenegro 42%); the euro as the common currency (Albania 33%, Montenegro and Serbia 23%, FYROM 12%); peace (FYROM 34%, Montenegro 31%, Albania 29%, Serbia 21%); and finally, its stronger say in the world (Albania 39%, Serbia 26%, Montenegro 21%, FYROM 17%). Peace is the value that represents the EU the best in Montenegro with 37%; all the remaining categories scored the most in Albania: human rights (50%), democracy (38%), the rule of law (38%) and individual freedom (25%).<sup>39</sup>

It goes without saying that the EU (continuously) faces a number of challenges – no doubt, among the V4 countries some of the challenges appear to be more pressing than others: economic situation is regarded as the most alarming by Hungary (26% vs EU average of 27%), unemployment by Slovakia (24% identical with the EU average), and rising prices/cost of living by Poland and Slovakia (both 14% vs EU average of 9%).

Crucial challenges from the national point of view show different results: Slovakia considers joblessness as the pivotal challenge (57%), sharing its worries with Montenegro and Albania (both 55%); for Hungary and Albania it is represented by the economic situation (26% and 38%, respectively); and for the Czech Republic along with Albania it's embodied in rising prices/cost of living (24% and 32%, respectively). Mostly on a par with the EU28 average (42%), the case of unemployment is regarded as top challenge for each country – be it EU MSs or candidate countries.<sup>40</sup> The national economy reflected rather negatively in the eyes of respondents from Slovakia (77%) and Serbia (90%); vice versa, responses from the Czech Republic and Albania were optimistic (43% and 35%, respectively).

The survey has shown that more positive opinion on the future (“*The impact of the crisis on jobs has already reached its peak*”) does slightly win over the negative one (“*The worst is still to come*”) in terms of the EU28 average (48% and 42%, respectively), across the V4 and the WB6 EU candidate countries. The outlook is seen as the most enthusiastic in the Czech Republic (61%) and Albania (74%), whilst Hungary (40%), FYROM and Montenegro (both 46%) share their gloomy vision of the future.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For key values of the respondents themselves see QD6. in Annex 2.

<sup>40</sup> In general, respondents just like the EU28 average (27%) are personally far more preoccupied with the rising prices/cost of living (rather than with joblessness), which particularly those representing the Czech Republic and Montenegro in the sample find to be the supreme challenge (both 39%).

<sup>41</sup> Expectations for the following twelve months related to the economic situation and employment in the EU and nationally are on the EU28 average mostly the same; the V4 and the WB6 EU candidate countries comprehend the situation somewhat similarly. The Czech Republic and Serbia consider the following twelve months in the EU to be the same (57% and 35%, respectively), Hungary and Albania go even further when hoping for an improvement (27% and 59%, respectively). The economic situation in the Czech Republic and Serbia is believed by their respondents to experience no change in status quo (58% and

And, finally, it is interesting to compare the EU28 average and the V4 responses with regard to the most positive outcome of EU integration. The free movement of people, goods and services within the EU is taken as the most beneficial by the EU28 average (57%) and Slovakia (76%);<sup>42</sup> 58% of the respondents from the Czech Republic perceive peace as the crucial aspect in comparison with the EU28 average of 55%.<sup>43</sup> Slovakia with its 43% – almost a double of the EU28 average (23%) – regarding the euro as the key asset of the EU does not come as a surprise.

Tab 1 Introduction of the euro in the MSs that have not yet adopted the euro currency

	2015-2016	2017-2018	2019-2020	2021 or later	Never	Don't know
TOTAL	3%	10%	35%	21%	12%	19%
 BG	4%	17%	36%	12%	2%	29%
 CZ	2%	10%	39%	16%	20%	13%
 HR	2%	22%	36%	22%	6%	12%
 HU	1%	10%	38%	28%	11%	12%
 PL	2%	9%	34%	20%	10%	25%
 RO	5%	13%	41%	22%	3%	16%
 SE	1%	4%	18%	27%	35%	15%
<b>Highest percentage per country</b>		<b>Lowest percentage per country</b>				
<b>Highest percentage per item</b>		<b>Lowest percentage per item</b>				

Legend: BG – Bulgaria; CZ – Czech Republic; HR – Croatia; HU – Hungary; PL – Poland; RO – Romania; SE – Sweden.

Source: European Commission. Introduction of the Euro in the Member States that have not yet adopted the common currency. *Flash Eurobarometer 418*. May 2015, p 13.

36%, respectively); however, 22% of respondents from the Czech Republic as well as from Slovakia, and Albania (46%) consider economic prospects in their countries to be improving. Hungary (29%) and FYROM (38%) prepare for the worst. Employment situation on the national level will continue to be the same, as stated by respondents of the Czech Republic (56%) and Montenegro (37%); or will perhaps become better (Czech Republic 21% and Albania 42%); or may rather worsen (Hungary 32% and Serbia 40%). Personal job situation in the following twelve months remains unchanged for Poland (62%) and FYROM (50%); it appears to improve in the case of Slovakia and Albania (18% and 45%, respectively), but is felt as rather deteriorating in Hungary and FYROM (19% and 20%, respectively).

<sup>42</sup> Economic power of the EU is prominent on the scale of the EU28 average (20%) just like across the V4 (CZ and HU 25% each, PL and SK 23% each).

<sup>43</sup> Political and diplomatic influence of the European Union in the rest of the world was acknowledged on the EU 28 average (19%), too.



Views concerning introduction of the euro and expected date of its adoption expressed by the V4 respondents from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland correlate (Table 1), with the most common beliefs suggesting the interval 2019-2020. Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania follow a similar pattern; however, their expectations regarding the period 2017-2018 exceed those of the non-Euro-Area V4 members considerably. Despite the fact that – unlike the United Kingdom and Denmark – Sweden has not been granted an opt-out, and introduction of the single currency has not taken place as a result of rejection in a referendum, over a third of Swedish respondents remains sceptical about euro adoption.

## Conclusion

*“The V4 was not created as an alternative to the all-European integration effort, nor does it try to compete with the existing functional Central European structures. Its activities are in no way aimed at isolation or the weakening of ties with the other countries. On the contrary the Group aims at encouraging optimum cooperation with all countries, in particular its neighbours, its ultimate interest being the democratic development in all parts of Europe.”*

Visegrad Group profile, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about>

The Visegrad Group cooperates on an ad-hoc or regular basis with other regional bodies and single countries in the region or beyond, alike: first and foremost with the *Benelux*, the *Nordic Council of Ministers*, the *Eastern Partnership* and the *Western Balkans*. The regions of the Visegrad Four<sup>44</sup> and the Western Balkans<sup>45</sup> share the legacy of multiple transformations. The CEFTA format of (the primary degree of) economic integration stretched over the years to a number of countries in the Central and East European region; yet, both the EU and the Western Balkans pursue the prospect of the so-called *European perspective* of the Western Balkans. With the 2015/2016

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<sup>44</sup> with population nearly 70 million; cf. Bost, François - Carroué, Laurent - Colin Sébastien - Girault Christian - Humain-Lamoure Anne-Lise - Sanmartin Olivier - Teurtrie David (eds.). *Géoéconomie-géopolitique 2014. Images économiques du monde*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, pp. 197 – 202; and, Bost, François - Carroué, Laurent - Colin Sébastien - Girault Christian - Humain-Lamoure Anne-Lise - Sanmartin Olivier - Teurtrie David (eds.). *Géoéconomie-géopolitique 2015. Images économiques du monde*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2014, pp. 203 - 208.

<sup>45</sup> with population nearly 20 million; cf. Bost, François - Carroué, Laurent - Colin Sébastien - Girault Christian - Humain-Lamoure Anne-Lise - Sanmartin Olivier - Teurtrie David (eds.). *Géoéconomie-géopolitique 2014. Images économiques du monde*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, pp. 197 – 202; and, Bost, François - Carroué, Laurent - Colin Sébastien - Girault Christian - Humain-Lamoure Anne-Lise - Sanmartin Olivier - Teurtrie David (eds.). *Géoéconomie-géopolitique 2015. Images économiques du monde*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2014, pp. 203-208.

Czech Presidency in the Visegrad Group assumed upon recent completion of the 2014/2015 Slovak Presidency in the V4, as well as with the upcoming so-called 2016 Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union there is room for contemplation whether the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia will sign the European Union Accession Treaty in the course of the 2016 Slovak Presidency<sup>46</sup> in the Council of the EU; or whether EU accession negotiations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999 (in line with the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence) will have already been initiated by December 2016, bearing in mind that EU MSs holding the Presidency in the Council of the European Union for a period of six months experience top visibility resulting from (exogenously invoked) crisis management and (endogenously fuelled) Presidency-specific initiatives. As a matter of fact, turbulent developments brought about by both the global political (as well as security-related) status quo and the unfolding multidimensional global economic crisis lead to a growing number of ad hoc summits attended by EU heads of state or government; smooth combination of compatibility to the EU goals alongside with being a driving force for V4 regional targets is enabled by regular V4 meetings taking place before the European Council summits. Indeed, the V4 follows and strongly promotes the European idea whilst advocating for own regional interests; by formulating its approach in the motto: “...*regional cooperation for European integration and bridge between macro-regions...*“ the Central European Initiative supports its MSs on their so-called *European path* when promoting their alignment to EU standards, and the Regional Cooperation Council complements it through the Euro-Atlantic dimension. In the complexity of overlapping forms of international cooperation depicted above two mainstream avenues of common interest may be identified: firstly, in the field of transport and energy (EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR, BSS, BSEC, RCC) in the context of environmental protection (V4, EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR, BSS, BSEC); and secondly, in the area of education and research (V4, EUSBSR, BSS, BSEC, UfM, RCC) alongside culture (V4, EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR, RCC).

Latest initiative alternatively referred to as: “*Yugoslavia version 4.0*“, “*Western Balkans Six*“, “*G6*“, “*Western Balkans Six + 1*“ and “*WB6 + 2*“ varies in its concept – depending on whether Slovenia and/or Croatia are involved in the advancing coordination (in 2014 hosted in Berlin and in 2015 taking place in Vienna).

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<sup>46</sup> Čiderová - Kovačević - Fejesová, 2015 (in press)

Whilst participants of the “*Western Balkans Six+*”<sup>47</sup> develop regional cooperation, the so-called “*Regatta approach*” established prior to the “Big Bang” 2004 EU enlargement continues to monitor progress achieved on their individual European path based on the respective country’s own merits. It goes beyond any doubt that in the context of strategic interaction between the *Visegrad Four* and the *Western Balkans Six* in the framework of EU-accession-related-knowledge-and-best-practice-transfer there is a great potential and room to manoeuvre for the *Think Visegrad – V4 Think Tank Platform* as a network for structured dialogue on issues of strategic regional importance providing recommendations to V4 governments as well as their Presidencies in the Visegrad Group.

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<sup>47</sup> cf. V4 or V4+ format, p. 390. In Törő, Csaba - Butler, Eamonn - Grüber, Károly. *Visegrád: The Evolving Pattern of Coordination and Partnership After EU Enlargement*. In *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 66, No. 3, 2014, pp. 364-393. ISSN 0966-8136 (print), ISSN 1465-3427 (online).

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European Union website:

<<http://europa.eu>>

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR):

<<http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu>>

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR):

<<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/about>>

EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR):

<<http://www.danube-region.eu/about>>

European External Action Service (EEAS):

<<http://eeas.europa.eu>>

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC):

<[www.bsec-organization.org](http://www.bsec-organization.org)>

Visegrad Group (V4):

<[www.visegradgroup.eu/about](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about)>

Annex 1 Timeline: Visegrad Four and Western Balkans Six in a comparative perspective  
(1990 – 2015)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Visegrad Four</i>	<i>Western Balkans Six</i>
<b>1990</b>	<b>CS</b> Agreement between the EEC and the EURATOM and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation <b>CS, HU &amp; PL</b> Visegrad Group (V3); <b>CS</b> Europe Agreement signed between the Community and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (16 December 1991); <b>HU &amp; PL</b> Europe Agreement	<b>XK</b> as Republic of Kosovo
<b>1991</b>		<b>MK</b> declared independence
<b>1992</b>	CEFTA	<b>BA</b> independence; <b>RS &amp; ME</b> as new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (State Union of Serbia and Montenegro)
<b>1993</b>	<b>CZ &amp; SK</b> independent countries; Visegrad Group (V4); Copenhagen European Council: Copenhagen criteria; <b>CZ &amp; SK</b> Europe Agreement	Copenhagen European Council: Copenhagen criteria
<b>1994</b>	Essen European Council; <b>HU &amp; PL</b> applied for EU	Essen European Council
<b>1995</b>	<b>SK</b> applied for EU	<b>BA</b> Dayton/Paris
<b>1996</b>	<b>CZ</b> applied for EU Luxembourg European Council: <b>CZ, HU &amp; PL</b> bilateral intergovernmental conference to be convened in 1998;	
<b>1997</b>	<b>SK</b> preparation of negotiations to be speeded up in particular through analytical examination of EU <i>acquis</i>	
<b>1998</b>	<b>CZ, HU &amp; PL</b> accession negotiations launched	
<b>1999</b>	Helsinki European Council	<b>XK</b> UNSCR 1244/1999 Feira European Council: all SAP countries “potential candidates” for EU membership; Zagreb Summit: SAP launched
<b>2000</b>	<b>SK</b> accession negotiations launched	<b>MK</b> signed SAA
<b>2001</b>		
<b>2002</b>	Copenhagen European Council: <b>CZ, HU, PL &amp; SK</b> completion of accession negotiations for 2004 EU enlargement	

<i>Year</i>	<i>Visegrad Four</i>	<i>Western Balkans Six</i>
<b>2003</b>		Thessaloniki European Council: EU perspective for the Western Balkans reiterated
<b>2004</b>	<b>CZ, HU, PL &amp; SK</b> joined the EU	<b>MK</b> applied for EU;
<b>2005</b>		<b>AL</b> European Partnership <b>MK</b> candidate country status
<b>2006</b>		<b>ME</b> declared independence; <b>MK</b> European Partnership; <b>AL</b> signed SAA;
<b>2007</b>	<b>CZ, HU, PL &amp; SK</b> joined the Schengen Area	CEFTA 2006; <b>ME</b> European Partnership, signed SAA <b>XK</b> unilaterally declared independence, EULEX;
<b>2008</b>		<b>MK</b> Accession Partnership; <b>ME</b> applied for EU;
<b>2009</b>	<b>SK</b> joined the Euro Area; <b>CZ</b> Presidency in the Council of the EU	<b>RS &amp; BA</b> European Partnership; <b>RS &amp; BA</b> signed SAA. <b>RS</b> applied for EU <b>AL</b> applied for EU
<b>2010</b>		<b>ME</b> candidate country status; <b>XK</b> ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence and UN General Assembly resolution
<b>2011</b>	<b>HU &amp; PL</b> Presidency in the Council of the EU	<b>RS – XK</b> EU-facilitated dialogue launched <b>ME</b> accession negotiations launched;
<b>2012</b>		<b>RS</b> candidate country status; <b>XK</b> declared end of supervised independence, SAA feasibility study; <b>BA</b> High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process
<b>2013</b>		<b>RS – XK</b> First agreement of principles governing normalisation of relations
<b>2014</b>		<b>RS</b> accession negotiations launched; <b>AL</b> candidate country status;
<b>2015</b>		<b>XK</b> SAA initialled <b>XK</b> European Commission proposal for SAA

Legend: AL – Albania; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; CS – federation of CZ & SK; CZ – Czech Republic; EU – European Union; HU – Hungary; ME – Montenegro; MK – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; PL – Poland; RS – Serbia; SAA – Stabilisation and Association Agreement; SAP – Stabilisation and Association Process; SK – Slovak Republic; XK – Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999.

Source: *Adapted from Čiderová, Denisa – Dionizi, Brikene. EU Accession Experience and Perspectives: The Case of Slovakia and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999). In Hoti, A. - Kosír, I. (eds.), European Perspectives of the Western Balkans countries I., Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/1999), 2015 (in press); <http://europa.eu>; Europa Publications (ed.). A political chronology of the world. London and New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 11-14, 94-102, 236-240, 357-360, 500-503, 561-566, 620-622, 739-743, 791-800, 810-813.*



## Annex 2 European Commission Standard Eurobarometer 83 (focus on Albania, the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, and the Slovak Republic)

	EU28	CZ	HU	PL	SK	MK	ME	RS	AL
<b>QD1.</b>	<b>For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion. "You feel you are a citizen of the EU."</b>								
Total 'Yes'	67%	62%	67%	74%	75%				
Total 'No'	31%	38%	32%	23%	25%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
DK	2%	0%	1%	3%	0%				
<b>QA9.</b>	<b>In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?</b>								
Total 'Positive'	41%	37%	43%	53%	38%	59%	49%	43%	75%
Neutral	38%	42%	43%	38%	43%	29%	32%	34%	22%
Total 'Negative'	19%	20%	13%	7%	18%	11%	17%	22%	2%
DK	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
<b>QA12.</b>	<b>What does the EU mean to you personally?</b>								
Freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU	49%					48%	42%	43%	58%
Euro	35%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12%	23%	23%	33%
Peace	27%					34%	31%	21%	29%
Stronger say in the world	23%					17%	21%	26%	39%
Economic prosperity	14%					35%	24%	28%	59%
<b>QD5.</b>	<b>In the following list, which values best represent the EU?</b>								
Peace	36%					33%	37%	25%	18%
Human rights	36%					37%	31%	23%	50%
Democracy	31%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	37%	34%	25%	38%
Individual freedom	19%					19%	13%	17%	25%
Rule of Law	18%					29%	30%	24%	38%
<b>QD6.</b>	<b>In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?</b>								
Peace	45%					52%	47%	39%	24%
Human rights	40%					42%	37%	30%	46%
Democracy	26%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	34%	21%	13%	33%
Individual freedom	27%					17%	27%	39%	32%
Rule of Law	15%					26%	25%	15%	39%
<b>QA5.</b>	<b>What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?</b>								
Economic situation	27%	18%	26%	20%	20%				
Unemployment	24%	13%	18%	20%	24%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rising prices, cost of living	9%	10%	9%	14%	14%				
<b>QA3a.</b>	<b>What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?</b>								
Economic situation	21%	19%	26%	15%	24%	32%	36%	37%	38%
Unemployment	42%	29%	45%	53%	57%	54%	55%	53%	55%
Rising prices, cost of living	14%	24%	22%	19%	21%	20%	25%	22%	32%
<b>QA4a.</b>	<b>What do you think are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?</b>								

<i>Economic situation</i>	<b>10%</b>	10%	14%	8%	11%	19%	18%	18%	17%
<i>Unemployment</i>	<b>16%</b>	9%	17%	19%	12%	35%	27%	20%	36%
<i>Rising prices, cost of living</i>	<b>27%</b>	39%	27%	26%	35%	22%	39%	28%	34%

	EU28	CZ	HU	PL	SK	MK	ME	RS	AL
<b>QA1a1.</b>	<b>How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? “The situation of the (NATIONALITY) economy.”</b>								
<i>Total 'Good'</i>	<b>38%</b>	43%	30%	38%	20%	31%	14%	8%	35%
<i>Total 'Bad'</i>	<b>59%</b>	55%	69%	56%	77%	67%	83%	90%	64%
<i>DK</i>	<b>3%</b>	2%	1%	6%	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%

**QC1.** Some analysts say that the impact of the economic crisis on the job market has already reached its peak and things will recover little by little. Others, on the contrary, say that the worst is still to come. Which of the two statements is closer to your opinion?

<i>The impact of the crisis on jobs has already reached its peak</i>	<b>48%</b>	61%	55%	47%	55%	48%	52%	47%	74%
<i>The worst is still to come</i>	<b>42%</b>	33%	40%	36%	37%	46%	46%	44%	24%
<i>DK</i>	<b>10%</b>	6%	5%	17%	8%	6%	2%	9%	2%

**QA2a.** What are your expectations for the next twelve months: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to... ?

		<i>Economic situation in the EU</i>							
<i>Better</i>	<b>24%</b>	14%	27%	17%	24%	49%	36%	33%	59%
<i>Same</i>	<b>44%</b>	57%	50%	53%	51%	23%	33%	35%	19%
<i>Worse</i>	<b>19%</b>	15%	14%	11%	13%	9%	11%	14%	2%
		<i>Economic situation</i>							
<i>Better</i>	<b>26%</b>	22%	21%	19%	22%	25%	38%	24%	46%
<i>Same</i>	<b>48%</b>	58%	49%	50%	52%	31%	35%	36%	33%
<i>Worse</i>	<b>21%</b>	15%	29%	19%	21%	38%	23%	33%	18%
		<i>Employment situation</i>							
<i>Better</i>	<b>26%</b>	21%	20%	15%	20%	24%	34%	22%	42%
<i>Same</i>	<b>46%</b>	56%	46%	54%	51%	34%	37%	32%	33%
<i>Worse</i>	<b>23%</b>	19%	32%	23%	22%	35%	26%	40%	19%
		<i>Personal job situation</i>							
<i>Better</i>	<b>22%</b>	14%	14%	18%	18%	22%	29%	16%	45%
<i>Same</i>	<b>60%</b>	59%	58%	62%	56%	50%	40%	39%	41%
<i>Worse</i>	<b>8%</b>	7%	19%	10%	8%	20%	10%	14%	8%

**QD3T.** Which of the following do you think is the most positive result of the EU?

<i>Free movement of people, goods and services within the EU</i>	<b>57%</b>	70%	56%	64%	76%				
<i>Peace among the EU MSs</i>	<b>55%</b>	58%	45%	53%	46%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>The euro</i>	<b>23%</b>	6%	16%	10%	43%				
<i>Economic power of the EU</i>	<b>20%</b>	25%	25%	23%	23%				
<i>Political and diplomatic</i>	<b>19%</b>	22%	19%	15%	14%				

*influence of the  
EU in the rest  
of the world*

Legend: AL – Albania; CZ – Czech Republic; DK – Don't know; EU – European Union; HU – Hungary; ME – Montenegro; MK – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; MS(s) – Member State(s); N/A – not applicable; PL – Poland; RS – Serbia; SK – Slovak Republic.

Source: *Adapted from* European Commission. *Standard Eurobarometer 83*. July 2015 – Country files: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania.