



VISEGRAD YOUTH FORUM 2020



Visegrad Group as Regional Cooperation: the Austrian Perspective

On the 18th of November 2020, Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) in cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic Center (EAC) in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia organized an online discussion: Visegrad Group as Regional Cooperation: the Austrian Perspective. It was also a side event of the flagship project of Euro-Atlantic Center, Visegrad Youth Forum, which aims to discuss the issues of international relations mainly focusing on the V4 agenda. Invited speakers were Emil Brix, Director of the Vienna School of International Studies, Vienna, Austria, Gerhard Eisl, Head of Unit of the Macroregional strategies of the EU, Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Vienna, Austria, Claudia Gamon, MEP, European Parliament / NEOS, Austria. Moderator of the discussion was Daniel Martínek, IDM. Due to the current epidemiological situation, the discussion took place online.

What are the opportunities and limits of cooperation between Austria and Visegrad countries? Can the enlargement of the Visegrad Four really add value to its member states and to Austria? Or other cooperation formats, such as the Austerlitz format, need to be intensified? Does Austria's integration into V4 format represent the future of Central Europe and beyond? These are the questions, which were discussed by speakers within the whole event.

At the beginning of the discussion Mr. Brix summarized 30 years of Visegrad cooperation. Based on the Visegrad cooperation was the Central European Initiative, which still exists until now. Visegrad group is based on post-communist countries, which had similar problems in the last 30 years. Definition of the rule of law as well as issues of independence of justice are not on the same line within V4 countries. It is time to reach out, as V4+ format, but beyond post-communism, eastern part of tradition. Common history of V4 and Austria can be input for future cooperation. Reason of the establishment of the V4, was primarily that V4 will integrate into the euro-atlantic structure, which was successful, as Mr Eisl said. There are differences





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between Austria and V4 countries, mostly in Austria's HDP, opinion on nuclear power. From the aspect of economic V4 countries and Austria are very connected and important trading partners. Cooperation of countries in general was used mainly for the political pressure in the last ten years, as Mrs. Ganon said. Regional cooperation is the future.

Currently the Visegrad group face huge divisions in negotiations on the future EU budget and recovery fund because of the Poland and Hungary veto. Austria fully supports this mechanism, as well as Czech Republic and Slovakia. As an opinion of Mr. Brix, sovereignty is still mostly on each country of the EU. We are a very heterogeneous area in European Union, as Mrs Ganon said. Focus on the rule of law is the basic of the negotiations. Veto of Hungary and Poland is irresponsible because we talk about money that will go to the European citizens and it is completely unacceptable. Preserve our credibility when it comes to European values. Mr. Brix said that we should make the instruments we have, the courts and treaties, relevant.

European Union is an unfinished project, it is not yet fulfilled, and society is not truly an open society. The influence of Victor Orban (influence for other politicians) is also in the region, which is not in the V4 area, as Mrs. Ganon said. History plays a role in our political behaviour, as Mr. Brix said about. Question from the audience was related to the current pandemic, which has shown that we have to work and cooperate together to face this Covid-19 crisis, as Mr. Eisl said. Austria does not politically discuss joining the Visegrad cooperation. Hungary and Poland profit from the European Union, Mr. Ganon does not think that they would wish to exit the EU. If the European Union will not reform, there will be a lot of space for euroscepticism. Role of the Central Europe can strengthen by strong mutual interest, frankly dialogue, but we can say that the further European Union goes, the further Central Europe goes.

