

# Today 's position of Visegrad countries within the EU

The Issue of European Council

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# The European Council

- Since 1974: political premium on the highest level
- Lisbon Treaty, Dec 1 2009: legal status as the EU institution
- Nowadays:
  - *impetus, mediator, forum for the further development and appeal institution*
  - lead in defense policy, settling issues at lower level, negotiation of treaty changes, formal ratifications of important documents
  - appointing of its own President, suspending membership rights, change the voting system through the Passerelle Clause

# European Council as a meeting point



Today composed of **23 Prime-Ministers**, **2 Chancellors** and **2 Presidents** of all the 27 Member States of the EU together with the **President of the EC** and **President of the European Commission**.

The Presidency is being held by **Poland** at the moment.

# European Council is an intergovernmental institution

- **Rather a political than a legal institution**
- Works on a basis of diplomacy and negotiation among member states high representatives
- Searches for common synergies of member states national interests
- **President of the EC** is elected by the EU political leaders, having no active vote, being mediator inside and representative outside
- **Counterbalance to the European Commission**; its existence is very much advocated by middle and small-sized states

# The Visegrad group and the European Union

- The V4 comes with a plan to consultate and cooperate on *current issues of common interest*, such as:
  - Wider Europe- New Neighborhood Policy
  - EU strategy towards Balkans
  - Preparation to join the European Monetary Union
  - Searching for new forms of cooperation within the European Economic Area
  - EU cohesion policy, EU energy policy
  - Roma communities



# Is it a coincidence?

**Štefan Füle, CZ**, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.

**Janusz Lewandowski, PL**, European Commissioner for Financial Programming and Budget.



# The Visegrad group and the European Council

*A welcome and beneficial intergovernmental cooperation*

- On the level of the EC, the V4 political leaders traditionally join together to defend their shared ideas concerning
  - Composition of the EU budget (2004, 2010)
  - National representation in the EU diplomatic services (2010)
  - Sustainance of the European Social Fund (2010)
  - Faster acceptance to the Schengen area (2007)
  - EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EU Strategy for Danube
- They become advocates of the Southeast enlargement of Croatia and Eastern Partnership with Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. They stress the importance of cooperation with NATO and common work in Justice and Home Affairs policy area.

# The Visegrad group and the European Council II.

- They traditionally establish a *consultative forum*, „*mini-summit*“, being held a few days before an usual EC summit starts.
  - With an invitation open for the President of the European Commission
- The ministers of V4 countries cooperate together in different Council formations
- On lower level, the V4 official representatives co-act on the Platform for Permanent Representations in Brussels
- *The Visegrad group wants to be seen, heard and listened*



# Visegrad group cooperation loopholes



- Political statements are often to be found very general and rather idealistic
- Political positions and steps are very much influenced by changes of local leaders, populism and prejudices
- The V4 countries have different interests in some areas, such as
  - Agriculture
  - Minorities
  - Macroeconomic policy
  - Relations towards Russia, Croatia or Turkey

# The Visegrad group cooperation needs a complete brainstorming

- Focus on particular issues of its most common interest
- Create a stable position, visible and clear policy, division of tasks and roles, short- and long-term goals
  - in an environment based on inputs, communication cannals (know-how exchange) and outputs
  - With large stable donors and locally targetted projects
- If overlapping issues emerge, the realistic compromises/opt-outs must come along

# The Visegrad group cooperation needs a complete brainstorming II.

- To spread the particular idea, work with other like-minded countries (Austria, Slovenia...) or in V4+ format
  - Offer an added value of the project



- the V4 + Prime Ministers meeting (CZ, SK, PO, HU, SLOVENIA) concerning the issue of Kosovo (2007)

# The Visegrad group cooperation needs a complete brainstorming III.

- Do not forget the *inclusion of civic society* inside the V4 (esp. young generation), *NGOs* and *promotion of the ideas abroad* (V4 embassies, artists, national companies, PR analysts, lobby), which helps to build an *assertive and inspirational Central European voice*.



# A famous history? A satisfactory present? A better future?

- The European Council is a political arena of 27 players having different national interests.
  - It is also a starting point where big decisions over the European Union are taken
- A smart strategy over the negotiation process is essential:
  - Define your interest
  - Find adequate partners/supporters
  - Iniciate/oppose/support/change the way of policy making!

# A famous history? A satisfactory present? A better future? II.

- Nevertheless, the outcome of the EC meetings is a common decision
  - The negotiation should follow the line of a common EU interest
  - Aspects of solidarity and added value should not be forgotten
- At the end of the day, the European Union is about people, living inside the Community borders
  - Political ideas, projects and outcomes become more acceptable if people in general acknowledge them

# A famous history? A satisfactory present? A better future? III.

- Visegrad group cooperation needs concrete aims, member states partners and people as supporters of the Visegrad idea
  - A true belief in the common European Union is everything
- As to remember, the V<sub>4</sub> is about to meet three political challenges:
  - A question of the EU budget for a period of 2014-2019
  - Polish Presidency 2011
  - Hungarian Presidency 2011
- Are these countries aware of their potential and are they smart enough to make the best of it?

