

"The Visegrad Group in the Post-Lisbon EU: Getting Closer to Move Further"

**Date and Place: 30th April 2014,
the Mirror Hall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague**

Welcome and opening remarks

Petr Kratochvíl, Director, Institute of International Relations, Prague

As the first speaker, Mr. Petr Kratochvíl took the word and thanked all who had come to this conference. The conference was not focused on a particular topic but on a strategic vision for the four countries of the Visegrad group. This conference was a conceptual analytical conference which tried to answer the question: In what direction will the V4 go? The important thing according to Mr. Kratochvíl was to have a broad look at the situation and to think about the future. In other words: “Let us look where we stand and look where we go.”

Petr Drulák, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Petr Drulák settled first the complexity of the V4 cooperation but he immediately highlighted the first function of this cooperation - to establish a common voice in the discussion with other partners in the world. This common position is expected by external actors who are interested in Central Europe. There is already some success to put on the behalf of this cooperation. For instance, there is the cooperation with Japan or future one with South Korea, but also with the Visegrad Fund. The reputation of V4 outside Europe is important. This initiative has been able to attract. The Visegrad Fund has been abounded by funds from other countries. Sweden and Switzerland are two examples, which express the highest trust for the V4.

According to Petr Drulák the importance of the 2nd internal function of this cooperation should not be forgotten. The original aim of the V4 was to develop trust between member states and to improve the cooperation of administration. This aim could be seen as an achievement in a way because the trust between members of the V4 is higher than between EU member states.

The V4 is a strategic instrument for Central European countries. The idea of one pillar of those four was inspired by the Benelux example. In this perspective, it is not enough and it could be improved. An explanation of this uncompleted cooperation is that each country has its own options. If we look at the Czech Republic, the V4 cooperation is one possibility among the others. Poland also has several options, for instance, the Baltic Dimension or the Triangle of Weimar. Hungary gears its

cooperation through the Hungarian minorities' perspective. Probably the options are narrower for the Czech Republic. One possibility could be a Central European dimension overcoming the East/West division by the development of a common sense of Central Europe. The idea could be to create a Central Europe partnership with Austria or like-minded countries.

Panel I: The V4 and the EU – Ten Years of Mutual Experience

*Chair: **Michal Kořan**, Deputy Director, the Institute of international Relations, Prague*

Slovakia - Milan Nič, Executive Director, the Central Europe Policy Institute (CEPI), Bratislava

Hungary - Dániel Bartha, Head of the Central Europe Programme, the Central European Policy Institute (CEPI), Budapest

Poland - Roderick Parkes, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw

Chair: Michal Kořan

Mr. Michal Kořan presented the Panel I underlining the importance of V4 member state meetings of all new members of the EU since 2004. In the last five years the V4 got closer. It was not a natural development, but a strategic choice. The V4 acted as a strategic actor on the Eastern Partnership and on the Western Balkan dimension. The three questions that could be asked for this Panel are, firstly, what is the capacity of V4 members to put cooperation before self-position to increase their self-restraint? The 2nd question concerns the contribution of this group to the EU policy (on widening or deepening), which the V4 members advocate for solidarity in the EU. So, what will be the results of it in the future? Finally the 3rd question, what answers are there to the rise of populism movement in whole Europe, proposed by the V4?

Hungary - Dániel Bartha:

Mr. Dániel Bartha wants to remind that the V4 is not the only option for cooperation. If we look at the last 10 years of V4 cooperation, the leadership was not sure. Recently, we can see the development of a Polish leadership. Three dimensions should be presented. Firstly the situation of the EU generally, which is worse than the situation of the V4. Secondly, the V4 is strong, when its economy is strong (for instance, in 10 years Poland and Slovakia double their GDP). The crisis impacted the V4 - especially Hungary. The EU provides one point of growth to Hungary, which is similar to other new member states. In other words, without the EU it would not probably have its current growth. The situation of Hungary since 2004 improved, but in comparison to others, it is not as good as it should be. The government has done a lot of efforts to get out of the crisis. The unorthodox measures, criticized by the EU, were successful. The government failed to reform the social system with its present condition. The system will not operate well in the future. For Hungary and the V4, the solidarity is definitely an important dimension of the EU. The emigration to Austria, Germany and England is important amongst the V4 members. Thus, more solidarity could be an answer to this phenomenon. This element leads to the third dimension - crucial for the V4 - the after cheap labour force period. When the time of cheap working force is over, what will be the future of Hungary or V4?

On the question of euroscepticism, Mr. Dániel Bartha said that the attitude - according to Hungarians being eurosceptical - seems not to be true. In fact, the EU had a positive effect on

people. The trust in the EU according to polls is higher than the average in other EU member states. Hence, the population supports the EU policies. The trust in the EU is higher than in Slovakia, but that could be explained by the personality of the Slovakian Commissioner. A more current question has to be mentioned and it is the viability of the eastern partnership after the Ukrainian crisis. This question is crucial for the future of V4.

Poland - Roderick Parkes

Mr. Roderick Parkes explained that the last decade was much more difficult than the accession proceeding period. The integration doesn't stop with membership. The countries of V4 have to understand that the process continues. Different phases succeeded, the first movement was the enthusiasm. Some difficulties rose after 2004, which led to a wake up process. The crisis of 2008 helped by replacing the East/West division by the North/South division and changed the relation between the West and the East. Paradoxically, the crisis improved the situation in Poland. The relations with Germany became even deeper than with France. Poland doesn't seem to be anymore a kind of satellite state of United Kingdom. The option of V4 is interesting for Poland because of Warsaw's fears to be dropped, when relations between France, Germany and Poland are going well.

The position of Poland evolved with the new division between Western countries and emerging countries. It found itself legitimated to say that they have interests as an emerging power rather than the classic division East/West. Poland has many options, including bloc of emerging countries, V4, Western Block UE/US and so on.

Before 2004, the group promoted the idea of solidarity embarrassing the West. It was a good proof for the EU that the V4 were able to cooperate. After 2004, things changed. The group could not offer alternatives to the EU policy. This failure is related with the case that V4 did not matter enough to offer alternatives. If we look at the current situation, the V4 seems to matter enough. They can play a role in the Brussels policies. The question is the usefulness of an initiative, which could re-launch or divide EU.

Slovakia - Milan Nič

According to Mr. Milan Nič, if we compare the region of the V4 with the Balkans, we are lucky not to have international interference during the last decade in our region. The Balkans had a terrible decade, meanwhile the V4 countries succeeded in their integration to the EU. From this point of view, the V4 is successful. Even more for Slovakia, it was supported by V4 members. Slovakia became even a member of the Euro zone in 2009. From 2003 to 2014, the development in Slovakia was important with a strong growth. The improvement of Slovakian economy is even more important than in Poland. Among the V4, Slovakia started at the bottom to finish at the top.

On the political side, there is a wide consensus on the membership within the Eurozone, which also advocates for further integration, for instance, on the fiscal field. The logic is deepening the Eurozone without keeping integrating more non-members. The Flip side of the wide consensus is the important eurosceptic movement due to the lack of discussion on the common central position. The debate on the Eurozone membership is rare, because, so far, the results are good, but the risk of passive consumerism of EU policies is high.

Slovakia and other V4 members need to find a new model of growth, a different model not based on cheap labour force. Several challenges have to be faced, the improvement of competitiveness, innovation and creativity and also the emigration of the best students to richer countries. One other challenge should be mentioned and solved on the regional level, it is the inclusion of Roma population, which is a young population excluded from the labour market. This challenge is bigger than one country can afford. So, to improve the integration of Roma population to education system and then to labour market, the help of the EU and V4 is needed without it, the economy will suffer. On the domestic level, this issue is very sensitive. The political class is not prepared for that. So the solution will not come from this level. The solidarity of V4 members on the “Roma challenge” is crucial. We can regret that there is a lack of solidarity of Czech Republic and Poland for this issue.

Discussion:

Michal Kořan, who referred to Daniel Bártha’s speech about solidarity, asked Milan Nič about his position of Slovakian politics on the future, which so opened the discussion.

Mr. Nič was talking about the Ukrainian crisis and its effects, which it can have on Slovakia, because of having shared borders. He also mentioned that in spite of 10 years in the EU, there are no political preferences in Slovakia about the EU and the contributions in foreign policy are unequal, regarding the other V4 states.

After Milan Nič, Daniel Bártha took the floor and followed up to his comment on foreign policy. He said that Hungary is more provincial in foreign policy than Slovakia and he continued a little discussion about this topic. He expressed his conviction that the debate has to be broader, even though it would be artificial.

The last speaker was Mr. Parkes, who were talking about the increase of populism in Europe. He mentioned that the Ukrainian crisis came in a good time, because it has revived the debate of the Eurozone. On the other hand, the European population has the fear of immigrants and in his opinion it will be interesting, where it will go.

Mr. Kořan gave thanks to the discussants and gave the floor to Madame Gostyńska from the Polish institute. Her question was related to Roderick Parkes. She asked about the future of the Visegrad group within the European Union. If – in spite of much political capital spent - the EU institutions failed in maintaining legitimacy, which finally pushed the V4 to do things by its own.

Michal Kořan thanked for this question, but he stressed out that this should be discussed on political level.

Milan Nič answered first and said that for Bratislava it is a big success to be in the Eurozone, because it has a positive effect to Slovakian economy. He believes that the crisis came in the right time too and it will motivate European leaders to be more courageous and fair. Lastly, he expressed his opinion that we should cooperate more on regional level too and he gave an example with Sweden.

The very last speaker was Daniel Bártha, who made a little comment on Hungarian preference to focus on the cooperation within the V4 after the Ukrainian crisis.

Michal Kořan then gave thanks to all discussants and invited the audience to the second panel.

Panel II: The V4 and the Future of the EU

Chair: **Tomáš Strážay**, the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign policy Association, Bratislava
Czech Republic - Martin Ehl, Chief International Editor at Hospodářské noviny (Economic daily)
Slovakia - Juraj Marušiak, the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava

Hungary - Zoltán Gálik, the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Budapest

Poland - Agata Gostyńska, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw

Chair: Tomáš Strážay

Mr. Tomáš Strážay presented the Panel II asking the question of the preference of V4 countries for one type of the EU. Different positions could be found among the society, journalists, academic institutional members, think tank, and political class.

Czech Republic - Martin Ehl

According to Mr. Martin Ehl on the economic point of view, the common interest of V4 persists. The belief in never ending growth was shaken by the crisis. So the period is quite pessimistic for the people despite that economist articles seem to be still optimistic. According to Mr. Martin Ehl Poland is living its most prosperous period. We can extend this assumption to the V4, some use the term of “Golden Age.” Now the time is prosperous but the question is for how long? For most economists the disaster would be the end of the EU. There is no discussion about EU in the V4 countries, but the western countries are more and more interested in a possible common position among the V4 members.

Mr. Martin Ehl explained from the business perspective that this region is currently a consumer of ideas rather than producer. The need for innovation and creativity is crucial. The cheap labour force factor is on the wine. V4 start to be too expensive. Hence, this potential of cheap labour force is almost done. The challenges are the quality of public administration and how the public spends money. If we look at the first wave of Polish emigration and the reasons to leave at the time, one point was the burden of public administration and that especially for small business. In the future other countries will provide cheaper labour force. Even after 10 years the V4 are still weak. The political class has no future vision. Several goals were achieved, for example, UE, NATO and OECD membership but it's not enough from Mr. Martin Ehl's point of view. The solution is not big investment, but a support to innovations and emulative companies, linked with the amelioration of public administration. The Copenhagen criteria were the early start of a process, but we can still look at them to reform countries and to prelaunch development. The example of other post-communist countries can be analysed - for instance Estonia. This country created a government fund composes of private and public money to support start-ups, established not only in Tallinn but also in London.

Slovakia - Juraj Marušiak

Mr. Juraj Marušiak started by reminding the position of the 1st Minister of Slovakia in December 2000 after the signature of the Nice's treaty. He had some optimistic expectation for the V4 in EU regarding this new treaty. If we look at the external policy of the V4, two aspects of the EU

influence this policy: The Common Foreign Security Policy and the Neighbourhood policy. The V4 members defend their common interest on these two areas. The influence of the V4 had some results on the EU energy policy and on the EU eastern policy. The accession of Croatia was also the result of the pressure of V4. Indeed the Western Balkan is a priority for V4 members especially for Czech Republic. Recently the soft power of V4 changed into a hard power with the negotiations on the eastern partnership. The V4 also had results with the V4 fund. Different negotiations were held on the behalf of the V4 group, for instance, negotiation for Visa liberalization with the USA or negotiation of the constitutional treaty. All these elements show that V4 group is an interesting framework for its members, but also for external actors. The V4 is attractive because of its flexible system with a mutual interaction.

Mr. Juraj Marušiak explained that we can expect that the V4 become a stable structure of common negotiation with the EU as an answer to the old member hostility and divergence of interest among EU members. The V4 already showed its ability to produce ideas on the energy policy, East policy or defence policy. The central Europe states are the guardians of the memories of totalitarian regimes. Their view should count in the EU debates. V4 miss a long vision strategy. This project can be successful only with the EU. It should advocate for EU and shape it more attractive. The V4 members according to Mr. Juraj Marušiak will never be leaders of EU, but have to participate to the negotiation more actively.

Poland - Agata Gostyńska

Mrs. Agata Gostyńska underlined that the V4 agenda was shaped by the common interest of its member. In the past it was the economic development with the accession to the EU. After the crisis some new discussions rose advocating for the development of new field of unexpected actions. The traditional cooperation moved to a new one, which is more linked with economic governance and political cooperation.

According to Mrs. Agata Gostyńska the future EU debates are going to be determined by three issues: the question of deepening through federalization, the new relations established between EU member states and the democratic legitimacy of EU. The current elections at the European Parliament are a reality checking for those ideas discussed from decades. The Agenda of EU is also shaped by the possible British referendum and the UK proposal for reshaping EU. The British proposal could find a fertile ground in the V4, but they should also propose new solutions. The V4 members should strengthen their positions and that for instance on the banking union or on the economic and monetary union. The development of inter-governmentalism as answer to the economic crisis weakened the V4 position and increased the differentiation among the EU.

Mrs. Agata Gostyńska highlighted the effects of the crisis on EU institutions. The EU Parliament on the economic and monetary union has been relegated. The Commission has been silent as agenda settler. The effects on V4 positions are direct, because these institutions were mostly advocating for small countries.

It has been stressed that the Eurozone need a reform for proper institutions, dedicated one, and the change for more inter-governmentalism as an answer to the crisis led the V4 member to adopt a common position prepared with pre-meeting to strengthen the defence of common interest. According to Mrs. Agata Gostyńska this organization of pre-meeting before EU council is the best

option for V4 members in order to be stronger. The scope of V4 discussion on this platform should be even wider in her perspective.

On the issue of legitimacy, the V4 should, according to the speaker, support a more democratic process for the EU and the Eurozone advocating for more transparency. There are two options for more democracy: Increase National Parliament power or increase EU parliament power. The importance for more democracy is linked with the future modification of the vote system at the Council of EU. In November 2014, the big State in terms of population will benefit from this reform. In this context the former cooperation of small states will need more allies among the EU institutions or among the EU member states. One solution for the transition period could be in reinforcing the intergovernmental V4 cooperation to develop trans-regional cooperation in order to engage in the debate of legitimacy and boost it. The EU parliament elections are not sufficient. The gap between the people and the EU has to be filled. The V4 should discuss the instruments of EU to increase legitimacy.

The current solution is the personalization of election. This election is also a challenge for the V4. The V4 advocate a strong Commission. It is not sure that the personalization will lead to a stronger commission. The risk of change to a partisan institution is important.

Hungary - Zoltán Gálik

Mr. Zoltán Gálik started reminding that the debt crisis is not over. The waiting period is not finished. We were waiting for the German election and then for the EU parliament election for what will we wait after?

About the position of Hungary Mr. Zoltán Gálik explained that just after his electoral victory Mr. Orban settled that Hungary will stay in EU. On this point the situation is clear. About the foreign policy priorities, in the past, Hungary was focused on the Euro Atlantic integration. Now it focuses on the regional integration with the V4 states and other neighbours. The position of Hungary about EU can be declined in six points: 1st supporting stable Euro, 2nd Preserving structural regional policy, 3rd preserving agricultural policy, 4th Strengthen Europe, 5th Supporting Common Energy Policy, 6th well functioning Common Foreign Security policy. The idea is a strong Europe as a block.

In the recent context several important debates occurred on legal and political issues. The government is willing to have a more constructive role. Hungary expects a new phase: More Europe and less Europe and a change in the economic governance. The current changes emerged from outside EU treaties. In the future, treaties should be reformed. For instance, the fiscal pact will not perform without a treaty reform. The British want to open the treaties to delete the mention of an “ever closer union” repatriating powers. This, in the view of Hungary, is possible only if we have, in the same time, more Europe according to the speaker.

If we speak about the Eurozone, Mr. Zoltán Gálik explained that the Eurozone is going to be central. In this context the position of V4 should be discussed. Hungary already reached the criteria to be member of the Eurozone, but for the moment the decision has been delayed. Less and less countries are out of the Eurozone. In this perspective it will be harder and harder to defend the V4

interests out of it. The possibilities to influence the decisions from outside have to be found. The reform of treaties could be a solution.

On the V4 cooperation the first dimension is the cooperation, both within V4 area and within EU. The second dimension is the flexibility of this cooperation with other states out of V4 or out of EU. For Instance, a meeting took place between V4 and Baltic countries on security issue. This cooperation could go beyond it. The President Orban made a proposition for an Energy Union within the V4 countries and beyond, he discussed it also recently with the 1st Minister of Italy.

Discussion:

Question from the audience about a possible prognostic on the appointment of new commission. Which new commissioners with which portfolios would be expected for the member of the V4?

The answer of Mrs Agata Gostyńska is that it is difficult to guess. We cannot know if the V4 will have important or linked portfolio for the moment and for the personality. It really depends on the national political context and it changes a lot. For the president of the commission with the process of personalization each European political party has presented a candidate, who should be appointed as president of the commission, if its party wins the election. It does not seem probable that the council of the EU will counter this process by appointing another candidate from the majority party, but different from the candidate presented for the election. This opposition direct to the Parliament and this process of personalization is too risky for the Council of the EU.

Panel III: The V4 and the Future of the EU's External Environment

*Chair: **Agata Gostyńska**, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw*

Czech Republic - Lucia Najšlová, Editor in Chief of V4 Revue; Charles University Prague

Slovakia - Tomáš Strážay, the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava

Hungary - Zoltán Gálik, the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Budapest

Poland - Anita Sobják, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw

Chair: Agata Gostyńska

Mrs. Agata Gostyńska briefly presented the 3rd Panel as an answer to the question of V4 contribution to EU external relation. What are the V4 added values and common positions?

Czech Republic - Lucia Najšlová

Mrs. Lucia Najšlová started answering directly to the question of the Chair. The V4 group has to close the gap between speeches and reality, the gap between rhetoric and reality. What the V4 can do is to support civil society and to provide scholarship. But it is not enough. The action seems fragmented, without relevant results. It would be better to put more energy on decisive project rather than on too many.

According to Mrs. Lucia Najšlová on the question of eastern neighbourhood policy the idea of V4 on this topic seems clear, but the group does not defend its vision or its project. There is a problem of credibility for the V4 on this topic. There is a need for a more open debate, without short-term economic vision. The reluctance for the adoption of sanction sends the message that the V4 agree with the status quo. The content of the eastern partnership have to be reviewed, and discussed. If we look at the V4 party's political program none of them mentioned the eastern partnership or Ukraine. Ukraine should not come as a surprise in domestic political debates. It is the same about Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership currently negotiated by the EU with the US. These issues should be the main topic of European Union Parliament election. But in fact, it is not the case. The research production on the eastern partnership is not satisfying. The V4 members have to do more to propose a clear vision and strategy. Foreign policy is not interesting for voters. When we look, for instance, at the Czech's polls on the State support to Ukraine only 14% of population approves the position of the Czech State. It seems that the debate about foreign policy among public opinion is focused on domestic questions. There is no demand for east or south neighbouring policy discussions. Our responsibility is to be sure of what we are offering to those countries. Which kind of cooperation is needed in order to not repeat the mistake of negotiations with Turkey?

Slovakia - Tomáš Strážay

Tomáš Strážay explained that we cannot expect from the V4 impossible things. The priority of the V4 is rather the Balkan than east region. In term of external relation he reminded that the V4 also developed some agreements with Japan and soon with South Korea. From another perspective the V4 is an original initiative quite successful and could be an example for other regions.

The work of the V4 is focused on the political level according to Tomáš Strážay. We should not undermine the importance of Political declaration. These political declarations created a framework for other activities, but it is a necessary 1st step. We can wonder why the V4 adopted a 1st declaration on East region and Ukraine so late only in last December. The decision was taken too late. The negotiation on a join position was too long.

The cooperation with Japan is a very good example. Japan is already a traditional partner of the V4 group. Several projects on energy or on development succeed. This mechanism should be improved. We can regret this discrepancy between the political support seen with the Ukrainian crisis and the successful sectorial cooperation.

In the perspective of V4 model transfer, Tomáš Strážay thinks that the only region, which seems to fit the model, is the Western Balkan. Before the crisis Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova could adopt the model too. There are some initiatives already implemented through the Regional Council in Sarajevo for instance the Western Balkan Fund created on the model of the V4 fund. The outcomes of this initiative are not so important for the moment. Only three states are participating. The actors from the field draw a pessimistic vision from real level.

Poland - Anita Sobják

For Anita Sobják, the question is what these countries could do if they wanted to. The crisis could be an occasion to wake up and develop a new foreign policy. According to her the economic crisis is over, but has been replaced by the Ukrainian crisis. The question of the effect of this crisis on the

V4 should find answers. What is happening should not be understood as a Russian empire revival. It is rather a desperate action of Russia, which is losing control on former dominated regions. The first point that the speaker developed is how to influence the debate on the EU level. Poland advocated for this eastern partnership the V4 can contribute to reform it. We can imagine to replace the original 6 countries package with a two speed package with a more ambitious partnership for Ukraine and more economic with Azerbaijan. Some new instruments have to be created after the failure of Turkish process, which had discredited EU in the region. In a second approach, Anita Sobják reminds the lack of common position on the Ukrainian crisis in the EU. The preferences of the EU members about external partnership are very different; some look more at South America and other to Maghreb. In terms of Eastern Partnership the V4 could find some allies in the Scandinavian countries.

Several instruments could be used for such cooperation. The V4 fund is one of them, but the bilateral cooperation should not be forgotten. The V4 partnership is growing in term of money. The question is not how to spend the money, but how to get results. Local actors have to be more involved not only the Public administration, but also on all levels including the head of office discussing in English. What is the reality of projects now? It seems that the V4 is not enough visible in its actions for these countries. There is a clear lack of coordination between the V4 and the EU. The joined programs are too rare and the cooperation mechanisms are few. The actions through embassies are important too, but not enough integrated in other frameworks. These works have to be done before claiming for more action.

Discussion:

The Chair Mrs. Agata Gostyńska asked the first question. Mrs. Anita Sobják mentioned in her presentation the need of a two speed partnership. What are the opinions of other panellists about it?

According to other panellists, some questions about the political investment on Ukraine right now are on a shaking ground. A second question rose from the first about the need for the V4 to involve in a certain way Russia in these discussions.

Mrs. Lucia Najšlová replied that yes, there is a need for dialogue with Russia and continued on the first question about two speed partnerships. The question is what partnership to offer? But first we should, according to her, control more carefully if our partner respects our criteria and, if the answer is yes, let the door open. According to Mrs. Lucia Najšlová sometime it seems that we talk about East Partnership just for the sack of Public Relations. The partnership was not serious. We were not serious. The comparison can be done with North Africa. The position of V4 is dual on this subject, showing solidarity with other members from the south such as Greece. In fact, nothing has been done to share the burden of Greece on immigration. After the Arab spring and the revolutions V4 wanted to help supporting civil society projects. These projects are not a total failure, but there is a lack of coordination and too many projects. Again Mrs. Lucia Najšlová highlighted that these projects are just used as Public Relations communication and it's the responsibility of the political actors.

Mrs. Anita Sobják developed the idea of a dialogue with Russia and with Ukraine separating both was not a success. The condition of such dialogue is that Russia has to be clear. Instruments exist already they just have to be used more efficiently. The efficiency of EU should be improved many

times. Even with the EU money support the reforms were not implemented even in pro EU countries like Moldova. The conditionality and the support of experts should be extended. The question now for civil society is not how to get the money, but rather how to spend it?

Tomáš Strážay wanted to remind the importance of a realistic vision on these issues. The V4 is not a State. It is a very weak institution profile and without many resources. It is just cooperation for common interest. Its main objective is to improve the coherence of the region. It is clear to some extent that the eastern partnership is a child of V4 and it is not anymore viable without a reform. There is a significant space for cooperation, but on a small level for instance on sectorial field, training of public servants, energy and public administration. We have to realize the reality of V4. The political declarations are not just paper sheet. Croatia is a member of EU now thanks to the support of V4. About Russia, the cooperation of Russia and V4 seems not probable. Indeed Russia is reluctant to talk even with EU because of a preference for bilateral discussions. According to Tomáš Strážay the lack of debate on these east external relations is the result of history. Before, Ukraine was over shadowed by Russia. So logically the priority for the political class was Russia. It is changing slowly.