Chapter 4

Regional strategic culture in the Visegrad-countries: Poland and Hungary

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Regional culture?

There is a basic assumption in mainstream scholarship that strategic culture per se is primarily nationally rooted and thus ought to differ from one state to another. In this article we argue, however, that regional analogies can be detected in countries' national strategic perceptions. These convergences are anchored in the joint geopolitical space subject to the same historical events on the international arena. In addition to shared experience, the vicinity of countries in a region equally matters because it can reveal the multiple political-economic-cultural interactions and interlinked-ness of development. Close connections, on the other hand, make the consciousness of the shared experience clearer – which eventually magnifies the regional angle. The regional gaze translates the changes of the international arena for the domestic sphere. Shared regional experience, however, does not result in similar interpretations, meanings or emphasis on the national level. Still, we can detect resembling notions especially in reflections on Russia.

We analyze a peculiar example of regionally anchored strategic culture that displays also other common denominators, such as in-between-ness and centre-periphery dynamics. The Visegrad-countries (including Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) are situated between the German-speaking West and the Russia-dominated East. Furthermore, regarding the centre-periphery interaction, these countries oriented towards great Eastern or Western

centers.[1] We argue that, in contrast to mainstream literature, strategic culture in the Visegrad-countries did not go through profound changes after 1989 but instead, its core emerged already after the First World War. The post-imperial Central European political geography dominated by small and middle-sized states set a strategic framework to operate within. Since then, strategic culture evolved within geopolitical constrains which determined the regional dimension of the decision-making process. We investigate those elements in the strategic culture that are regionally coded in the perceptions of two Visegrad-countries. We selected the most dissimilar states of the region, the mid-sized Poland and the non-Slavic, relatively small Hungary. We also evaluate what kinds of variables are unique and particular to national strategic cultures and how these divergences correlate with regional convergences.

We align with Colin Gray stating that strategic behavior is always culturally coded and influenced by historical experiences and prevailing ideologies.[2] Strategic culture in IR scholarship has been generally related to military security issues and strategic predispositions of superpowers.[3] Our analysis concentrates on a wider notion of security bearing relevance on the formulation of national strategies. Subsequently, we discuss a) threat perceptions; b) development scenarios; c) ideas of integrity. These are all state-strategies reflecting on how the decision-making apparatus chooses allies and identifies potential enemies. We claim that these are characteristically area-bound factors, which evolved simultaneously and can be found in the core strategic culture of all Visegrad-states, affecting political decisions. According to Stephen Walt, common political, economic and cultural priorities create strong bonds between countries.[4] Shared historical experiences help build trust between countries.

We follow Gray also in assuming that the notion of strategic culture combines both an ideational and a behavioral component, which provide context to understanding particular

strategic choices and their overt and covert rationales.[5] We distinguish between long-term strategic culture and short-term strategic behavior. Strategic culture is rooted in historical experiences, traditions and national values and not prone to fast transformations. Strategic behavior operationalizes strategic culture and thus is more apt to changes and can adjust to quick turns in the international security environment. Strategic behavior is oriented to ensure the means for the aims of core strategic culture but it may also eventually induce gradual updating of the strategic culture.

We acknowledge the intersecting layers of time, which is why we do not identify strategic culture with continuity and strategic behavior with change. While past experiences, traditions and values have an undoubted impact on the perceptions of current affairs, nevertheless, the meaning of 'traditions' is always updated in present usages, for future goals.

We agree with Alan Bloomfield that strategic culture is never monolithic, thus, there are always various groups representing distinctive subcultures and competing interests.[6] The prevailing strategic line is dependent on the ruling elite's ability to convince different domestic actors that they are offering a solid option. The norms and values articulated by the elite, which are examined in this article, are situated on a historical continuum, feeding from interpretations of history and projecting themselves into the future.

The Relevance of the In-Between Experience

The Visegrad coalition has served as a common strategy to achieve coinciding goals of national interests. The regional alliance expanded the individual countries' elbowroom and,

furthermore, the image of a concerted group lent more weight on the international arena. The geopolitical location between East and West provided maneuvering potential to take advantage of the needs of the neighboring great powers. Russia and Germany both perceived themselves as trend-setter centers that entailed model-applier peripheries. In any center-periphery structure, however, the center is stuck in its roles but the periphery is more flexible to search for an alternative center if the old one is not profitable enough. This is especially tempting if there are other options in the vicinity.[7]

The history of the Visegrad community began with the realization that there existed common interests, and joining forces was the most effective way to protect them. Thus, in 1335 the Polish king Casimir the Great, the Bohemian (Czech) king John Luxemburg and the Hungarian king Carl Robert met in the Hungarian royal palace, at that time in Visegrad, and created a customs union to stand up against Austria's staple rights that harmed these countries' economic relations with Western markets. Over the centuries the geopolitical realities of the region changed dramatically, nevertheless, similar historical experiences resulted in resembling strategic perceptions.

The First World War was a turning point creating a new international environment.[8] Visegrad countries that had lost independence in the 16th century, re-emerged on the map now that the great empires disintegrated. Regaining sovereignty required a fresh definition of national interest and models of international behavior. The new countries, however, had to adjust to international expectations because they owed their existence to regional games of the great powers. This resulted in an awakened interest towards regional co-operation, but at the same time, the individual states had divergent networks of trade and security with Western Europe.

Thus, from the prespective of security the dilemma was which direction, the regional or the Western gaze, would drive the national interests best.

The 'Zeitgeist' of the interwar period set a new ideational frame. The war-winning great powers shaped the new world order, favoring collective security.[9] The League of Nations aimed to maintain peace and control over the Continent. Since the League lacked authority to reinforce decisions, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania formed the "Little Entente" – a security alliance in 1920, mostly against war-losers Hungary and Bulgaria, to prevent territorial revisions of the post-WWI arrangements. The alliance was supported by France, seeking influence in the region. France needed also Poland in order to build a strong Central European buffer zone, the Cordon Sanitaire, against Soviet Russia. The Little Entente was not only a security alliance, but also a new framework for economic cooperation. Including Poland, however, was problematic because the French initiative did not take into consideration the troubled Czech-Polish relationship, and the Polish-Hungarian friendship (Poland opposed the planned economic penetration of Hungary).[10]

All these interwar options faded away after the Second World War. The communist order cut the area off from its Western contacts and created a new alliance, the Eastern Bloc, with dramatic effects on strategic perceptions. The Soviet sphere of influence offered some advantages, seldom mentioned. The satellites enjoyed cheap energy and raw materials much below global market prices. The Comecon alliance served as common market for inferior national products. The Soviet military apparatus contributed a great deal to national army infrastructures – which would otherwise have been a costly national endeavor. The Soviet grip loosened by the late 1970s, making Moscow practically unable to realize strategic goals

against the satellites' will, as was the case with Russian aims of deepening economic integration.[11]

The collapse of the communist system in the "miraculous" year 1989 was again a milestone around which similar national strategic discourses centered. The reawakened Visegrad union in 1991 aimed to further EU membership with concerted actions. The countries joined the NATO and the EU at the same time, sharing yet another powerful experience affecting strategic culture. Similarly, EU-criticism begun to rise in the 2010s simultaneously and a gradual pragmatism vis-à-vis Russia re-emerged. Once again, mutual interest within and against the European Union increased the significance of the Visegrad union.

Poland – bandwagoning vs. great power aspirations

Poland's modern strategic culture has been deeply marked by the country's historical trajectory and the uneasy geographical neighborhood of stronger powers, notably Germany and Russia, but also the Ottoman Empire and Habsburg Austria. This historical heritage has not only influenced Polish strategic thinking per se; its presence marks the political and intellectual meta-discourse on Poland's geopolitical location. Poland geographical "in-betweenness", persisting memories of the loss of sovereignty in the 18th century – contribute to its changing security culture. At times, Poland cautiously chooses to ally itself with "great powers" foregoing its own geopolitical ambitions – behavior of a typical peripheral state adjusting to its security environment; at times, however, it tries to actively shape that environment, displaying geopolitical agency worthy of a bigger international player.

The rare instances of Polish scholarship dealing explicitly with the notion of strategic culture, tie it to rich military traditions, historical memory, the role of the military in national culture or the idea of a "traditional hatred towards war", supposedly deeply ingrained in the nation's character.[12] However, such generalizations and essentializations of the "Polish national character" fall short of interpreting Poland's actual international behaviour. Polish willingness to participate in NATO operations oversees contradicts the image of a *war-hating nation*.[13] Nonetheless, it speaks to another traditional notion present in strategic thinking: the country's self-designation as a "freedom loving nation" with a mission of assisting oppressed peoples, which in turn goes back to the Polish experience of the partitions (1772, 1793, 1795) and the interwar geostrategic orientation.

This is sometimes explained through the so-called "Entente strategic disposition", pointing to the deeply entrenched need of allying oneself with Western powers to gain a strategic advantage, in the form of direct military assistance, with respect to Russia and Germany.[14] Other authors call this disposition simply "bandwagoning"; as the pronounced Polish Atlanticism and strong alliance with the USA after the fall of Communism – within and beyond the NATO framework. Whatever reasons – economic, political, strategic – are given to account for this behaviour, the explanations always include a "residual fear of Russia" most pronounced in Poland and the Baltic states.[15]

History-driven security perceptions: Poland between Germany and Russia

The historical perception of Russia as a threat appears relatively clear-cut and has been analyzed by multiple authors.[16] The representations of the 19th century Russian imperial

heritage are important elements in Polish memory culture. Out of the three partition zones Poland was split into during 1772–1918, the Russian partition zone is regarded today as the most oppressive, backward, underdeveloped or even "barbaric". The Austrian and Prussian zones are perceived as agents of modernity, industrialisation and Western influence, despite their own history of repression and the proverbial Galician poverty within the Austrian zone.[17]

The subject of Russian imperial atrocities has been represented in countless literary works and products of both higher and popular culture since the 19th century, whereas any mention of the actual dynamic economic development of the Russian zone, as well as the possibilities used by Poles to climb up the career ladder in various institutions of the Russian Empire have been thoroughly silenced.[18] Two most prominent examples of the latter include prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, who became imperial foreign minister and tsar Alexander's I confidant, and Aleksander Wielopolski, president of the State Council of the Congress Kingdom of Poland appointed by tsar Alexander II.[19] Polish botanists working in the Russian-annexed Caucasus are exemplificatory of career possibilities provided by imperial Russia to Polish professional elites.[20]

Much in the same manner, the ephemeral Russophile currents present during the interwar era, and the Polish-Soviet friendship of the Communist period have been almost fully replaced by a general attitude of mistrust or outward hostility. The history-driven fear of Russia is only fortified by recent events, especially the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea. According to a Pew Research Center survey in 2015, the Polish public viewed Russia with more suspicion than any of the other surveyed NATO member states: 70% of the respondents

regarded Russia as a major military threat to its neighbours compared to the NATO states' median of 49%.[21]

The mistrust, hostility and fear of Russia are manifest nowadays on manifold levels: in post-1989 history schoolbooks, in official pronunciations of politicians (especially of the Law and Justice (PiS) governments), in right-wing and left-wing media outlets where also public intellectuals depict domestic political cleavages as due to Russia's malicious influence.[22] Despite the official cracks between Warsaw and Brussels caused by the erosion of the rule of law and the PiS governments' anti-Western rhetoric, Russia still remains the main "foe" towards which the public and political sphere position themselves. Although Germany is also represented as a threatening power, this view is clearly not shared by all political actors; the liberal opposition regards Germany as a symbol of the economically developed West towards which Poland should strive. Russia and the "East", on the other hand, are unanimously condemned by the government and the opposition alike. The Russophobe disposition of the Polish political and intellectual elites goes so far as to prompt accusations against their adversaries of actually serving Russian interests and even acting as Putin's proxies. More balanced voices criticizing the Russian hysteria are isolated and often accused of blind and unnecessary Russophilia.[23]

The Polish historical position between the West, perceived as a civilizational ideal, and the "barbaric" East to which all possible resemblance is rejected, has recently undergone some changes. The shift in the dominant reading of Poland's geopolitical place is marked by a gradual abandonment of over-enthusiastic pro-Western attitudes and a re-evaluation of the region's actual peripheral position with regard to the West. As in times when Moscow was the centre, stirring up opposition, Brussels now appears as a centre imposing its norms and

values on the Eastern European periphery. As Zarycki notes, this new engagement with Poland's symbolic status in international politics and the geopolitical legacy of the interwar period translates into new cleavages on the domestic political scene, transforming the post-Communist vs anti-Communist opposition into a juxtaposition of the liberal and national conservative camps. This division also leads to the rediscovered interest in history, including the history of grass-root geopolitical thought[24].

Furthermore, the societal perceptions that have been stable since the early 1990s are now changing. The traditional divide between the negative perception of Russia as a state and a more positive perception of Russians as people, has shifted towards pronounced anti-Russian attitudes. The last results of the regular Polish-Russian programme measuring public attitudes showed a deep regression towards negative and threat-laden perceptions of both the Russian state and the Russians.[25] It seems that the attitudes of the ruling elite both facilitate and are conditioned by such changes; cumulatively, the popular and the official dimension fuel each other, contributing to the rise of Russia as the main geopolitical and existential threat contemplated in Poland.

Poland's place in Europe after 1918

This historically unequivocally negative image of Russia in the Polish culture and public space translates into perceptions of Russia as an eternal threat and shapes the broader strategic culture of the country. After the re-emergence of Poland as a sovereign European country in 1918, these threat perceptions were accommodated into the security policies of the young state. At this point, two overarching strategic concepts competed for prevalence in foreign

policy, commonly identified with two emblematic figures of the era, Marshall Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, a conservative politician and leader of National Democratic Party

The two visions of Poland's place in Europe, foreign and domestic policy, geopolitical constraints and possibilities, are called the *federative* (Piłsudski) and *incorporative* (Dmowski) strategies. Piłsudski identified Russia, both its imperial and Communist incarnations, as the main source of instability and threat to Poland. In order to keep it at bay, his strategic concept intended to create a (con)federational unit which would unite Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. In contrast, Dmowski's strategic vision permitted cooperation with Russia to contain possible German expansion and argued for restraining Polish territorial ambitions only to lands with clear Polish ethnic majority. The federative or "Jagiellonian" vision of Polish geopolitical reach went bankrupt after establishing the Polish Eastern border in 1921 with the Treaty of Riga, ending the Polish-Soviet war. Polish negotiators from Dmowski's camp rejected Soviet territorial concessions to Poland in the East, in order to secure an ethnically more compact and thus internationally more feasible Polish state.

However, with no buffer zone established between Poland and the USSR, new geopolitical strategies were formulated in Piłsudski's circles, centered on weakening the threat posed to Poland by the Soviet Union. Some of the prominent Polish intellectuals even advocated for an alliance with Germany against Russia, which resulted in the Polish-German non-aggression pact of 1934 and the Polish participation in the partition of Czechoslovakia. This is sometimes explained as a consequence of Polish "great-power security orientation", combined with an anti-Russian "obsession of the Polish elite".[26]

Intermarium and the Promethean vision

One of the most important Polish strategic ideas of the interwar period was The Intermarium (Międzymorze) concept. It envisaged a creation of a broad coalition of Central and Eastern European states with Poland at its centre, ranging northwards from Finland and all the way south to Romania and Greece. Such a coalition was supposed to have a defensive character; again, the USSR and Germany were seen as the main threats to the existence of small to middle-sized European countries, almost all of them freshly emerged from the turmoil of the WWI.[27] The Intermarium can be assessed as a reactive strategy seeking to strengthen the cumulative military capacity and geopolitical weight of small countries caught in-between the politically turbulent Russia, later Soviet Union, and the European West.

As an offshoot of the Intermarium concept, Piłsudski's political establishment worked in accordance with the so-called Promethean vision, a strategy aimed at an internal destabilization of the Soviet Union by financing independence movements in selected Soviet republics, mainly the Caucasus and the Ukrainian SSR. It was believed that any strengthening of Polish geopolitical power could come only at the expense of the USSR.[28] The Promethean idea drove Polish foreign policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s until the breakout of WWII, with foreign ministers and diplomatic stuff actively engaged in financing national movements of the small nations "trapped" within the USSR.[29] A prominent subject of such activities was Georgia; after its forcible incorporation to the Soviet Union in 1921. Poland, alongside France, provided refuge for some prominent Georgian émigrés, and even accepted exiled officers from the crushed Georgian army to the Polish military with unchanged ranks.

Unlike the Intermarium idea, which, although ambitiously sketched, was clearly a defensive strategy, the Promethean activities were an attempt at an actual change of the security environment and thus not characteristic of small states. Some Promethean elites even spoke of the realization of "Polish interests as a great power" ("mocarstwowy interes Polski").[30] Moreover, this policy was legitimized by the ambition to spread Western European, Latin civilization – exemplified by Poland – to the East.

The Promethean traditions found an elaborate and somewhat unexpected continuation in the foreign policy of the late Polish president Lech Kaczyński, who reinvigorated Polish-Georgian diplomatic and cultural ties after coming to office in 2005. He strongly advocated internationally for the Georgian cause during the Georgian-Russian war in 2008.[31] It seems that the Promethean ideas were so ingrained within the broader strategic culture of the country as to produce the now almost proverbial notion of the Polish-Georgian friendship or even brotherhood.[32]

This unexpected revival of the Promethean element in Polish strategic culture exemplifies the ease with which the anti-Russian sentiments have been taken up both by the general public and politicians after 1989 and especially after the EU accession in 2004. Outright anti-Russian rhetoric might well have been a hallmark of the PiS goverment, but it was during the office term of the liberal Civic Platform that the EU's Eastern Partnership policy was inaugurated on the initiative of Poland and Sweden in 2008. This project, aiming at post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, was regarded in Russia as an anti-Russian move and president Medvedev warned about the dangers of forming a coalition of states from the "anti-Russian belt" already in 2009.[33]

The Eastern Partnership can be interpreted as a continuation of Promethean traditions and an attempt to pull the post-Soviet republics out of the Russian influence, which would create a buffer belt of sovereign states between Poland and Russia – this time realized with the help of the EU. Obviously, Poland's insistence on a coherent EU Eastern policy is also a move enhancing Poland's role within the EU itself. Poland's advantage of being an EU member empowers the country with respect to its Eastern neighbours, at least as long as they aspire for EU-accession.

Another vital aspect of the Eastern Partnership is its energy policy dimension. Polish officials advocated on numerous occasions that by tying the post-Soviet republics closer to the EU, Poland can gain an advantage of diversifying its energy sources and diminishing the dependence on Russian imports.

Selective remembering and strategic continuity

It is essential to note that the first democratic governments after 1989 were cautious in their foreign policies, both with respect to Russia and Germany.[34] The unification of Germany revived traditional fears of German expansion and raised worries about the former German territories granted to Poland after WWII. The sole guarantor of the Polish western border was the Soviet Union, which explains the conciliatory policies of the Mazowiecki government (1989–1991) and Wałęsa's presidency (1990–1995) towards the Soviet Union and later Russia. However, at the same time, it was vital to secure a settlement on withdrawing the Soviet Army from Poland that was perceived by the public as an occupational force.[35] The

withdrawal of troops (in 1991–1993) would suggest an ease in Russophobic attitudes, nonetheless, there was a strong drive to achieve lasting military security against the unstable Russia by striving for NATO-membership.[36]

Reflecting on the USSR as a guarantor of Polish security in the Cold War architecture was also debatable since the geographical expansion of Poland to the West came at the cost of losing its eastern territories. Thus, while the western border was protected by the Communist camp, Poland's eastern provinces were incorporated by the USSR.

Burning historical issues silenced during the Communist period, such as the Katyń massacre were re-opened after 1989. The process of "historical reconciliation" was initiated by presidents Wojciech Jaruzelski and Mikhail Gorbachov already in 1990. In 1993 Boris Yeltsin even presented an apology for the massacre of captive Polish army officers in 1940. However, this gesture is nowadays largely forgotten and never gained a status comparable to the legendary Warsaw Genuflection of Willy Brandt (i.e., begging forgiveness for the Nazi crimes during WWII) in 1970.

Such selective remembering is characteristic of the overall post-Communist framework within which the strategic culture has been shaped with respect to Russia. Historical resentment and symbolic self-identification of Poland as a victim of Russian imperialism seem to play a significant role in the dominant Russophobic current both in high-brow politics and popular culture. For example, after the catastrophic crush of the presidential aircraft near Smolensk on its way to commemorate the Katyń massacre in 2010, the Polish Minister of Defense, Antoni Macierewicz openly accused "Russian decision makers" of causing the accident.[37]

The strength and symbolic prestige of the recycled geostrategic concepts from the past persist until this day. Poland's concentration on its Eastern neighbours, rooted in Piłsudski's geopolitical ideas and in the "Giedroyc-Mieroszewski doctrine" (developed by Polish émigré figures after 1945 and postulating cooperation with nations historically tied to Poland: Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) have become the backbone of Polish strategic thinking. It is now supplemented by a programmatic anti-Russian element, which was not present in the original concept.[38] Moreover, while Giedroyc is regarded today as the founding father of post-1989 Polish "Eastern policy", only some of his ideas were actually implemented, despite his name being frequently used to legitimize it[39].

The appeal of historical lineage in geopolitical strategies provides rationale for the newest initiative, the *Three Seas Initiative* (Trimarium), promoted by president Jerzy Duda. The concept inevitably evokes the interwar Intermarium concept, although its adherents argue that it is principally an infrastructural and technological project aiming to modernize the EU's eastern flank.[40] The Trimarium delineates the geopolitical space between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas, and envisages cooperation of the Visegrad countries, the Baltic republics, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Austria.

Generally, Polish strategic culture is permeated by historical considerations, both on the levels of political strategy and the discursive level of public perceptions of the Russian threat. It is questionable how well such an orientation might serve Polish interests in the long run, especially given the recent conflicts with Brussels and the alleged "failure" of the Eastern Partnership project. History-driven attitudes undermine even the realist energy policy projects which would enable the country to capitalize on its in-between position. This was the

case with the abandonment of a transit gas pipeline project running through Polish territory. Similarly, the Russian-German Nordstream cooperation was perceived as a geopolitical security threat in Poland. Ever since the interwar era it has been acknowledged that the Polish geopolitical potential would be always dependent on the German-Russian relationship, as argued by the political thinker Adolf Bocheński in his book "Between Germany and Russia", in 1937.

Although positioned in-between the Western European core and Russia, Poland seems to be unable to successfully derive real advantages from its location. The anti-Russian orientation is deeply ingrained in the traditional strategic culture, and often suppresses more pragmatic foreign policy considerations. This may prove especially problematic, as the culturalist traditionalist discourse of the ruling elites advocates for rejecting the Western liberal values, but does not attenuate its Russophobic rhetoric. The disharmony between peripheral in-betweenness and great power geopolitical aspirations clearly undermines any possible advantages Poland could derive from its position as Russia's neighbour.

Hungary – advantages of being a small country

Russia has represented in the Hungarian strategic thinking both a considerable resource as well as downright threats and tiresome dependencies. Hungary being a relatively small Visegrad-country, strategic interest relied on a careful double-evaluation of the advantages which East and West offered. Perhaps the most important continuity the ever-changing political elites maintained was a strategic behavior pattern: they could adjust effectively to new international circumstances and utilize their bargaining capability vis-à-vis the needs of

greater powers. Practically, this meant that benefits could be gained even in times of direct threat to sovereignty.

According to the mainstream literature, the goal of the Hungarian foreign and security policy has been the preservation of the nation since the end of WWI.[41] This conception is related to the Treaty of Trianon (1920) regulating the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy [42]to cede 72 % of its territory and 64 % of its inhabitants, out of whom 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians, to neighboring countries. After the collapse of state socialism, the national conservative administrations (PM József Antal 1990–1994; PM Viktor Orbán 1998–2002, 2010–) addressed the importance of Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries as the key issue of Hungarian foreign policy. Lajos Radványi, on the other hand, stated that Hungarian threat perceptions were predominantly related to domestic social security.[43] In contrast, Péter Tálas and Tamás Csiki argued that since the early 1990s the changing political elites overlooked matters of military safety and defense, which is why Hungary lacks a "consistent strategic culture".[44]

This article claims however that the Hungarian security dilemma comprised a much broader perception than the limited concept of military security. The key concern was to safeguard the country's development, and the elbowroom it required. Hence, sovereignty was important because it guaranteed the freedom to decide about development policy. Economic success was furthermore linked to legitimacy and political stability. Thus, pragmatic partnerships ensuring advantages overrode worries about military security.

Fragmentation in strategic culture, which Tálas and Csiki called for, was actually due to the divergent understanding of development patterns among the successor political elites and the flexibility of strategic behavior.

Strategic culture was shaped by historical experiences triggering changes in this broad concept of national security, i.e, development. There are biased memories in the Hungarian historical consciousness, vividly present also in public discourse, about various encounters with Russia representing either vital periods of crisis with grave consequences for the nation's existence, or important turning points regarding the Hungarian development. These moments have also an important place in the national remembrance and thus political decision-makers often evaluate the significance of these events for contemporary usages.

Development Scenarios after 1918

There is a considerable fluctuation in the Hungarian strategy regarding the crucial patterns of societal development. The main dilemma is whether the indigenous national path or the application of a foreign model would serve the country's best interest. In times of direct outside pressure, the ruling elite has been prone to switch towards a foreign model, however, these models became 'nationalized' and adjusted to the domestic situation when immediate pressure diminished. It can be argued that only those foreign models could survive that were compatible with the existing Hungarian political culture. Thus, the prevailing tendency has been towards the realization of an endemic national path with the help of foreign applications, and often by alliances.

The need to come up with a sustainable development scenario occurred after the country regained independence in 1918. The loss of the Austro-Hungarian empire's resources and markets required geopolitical and economic re-positioning. The left-wing offered the new Eastern model. In 1919, as part of the Bolsheviks' mission of a worldwide revolution, the returning prisoners of war established a short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic, a replica of the Bolshevik-project in Russia. After the downfall of the communists, the new administration had to prove its reliability to Western powers for the sake of Hungary's territorial integrity, hence, a conservative rule was introduced – fit for contemporary Western requirements. By mid-1930s the main trade partners and allies became Germany and Italy, with a consequence of moving towards an authoritarian governance and turning fiercly against the USSR.

After WWII and the communist take-over, a swift Marxist-Leninist modernization was carried out: rapid industrialization, urbanization and a social upheaval of the poorest segments of society – with harsh centralization of power and Moscow-loyal cadres placed in power. While the Stalinist years were a close copy of the Soviet system, the post-1956 era, and especially from the mid-1960s onwards, there opened up a considerable elbowroom for different choices. This new leverage made possible the gradual departure from the Soviet model and a strive for applying socialist market economy and a more liberal attitude towards society. The mix of Eastern and Western elements was a rather typical in-between development scheme and in the Hungarian case a very efficient one too, because it created a head start for the country in the early 1990s.[45]

After the collapse of state socialism, the main dangers were perceived as underdevelopment of the region: creating risks of domestic social tensions and eventually conflicts between

neighboring countries.[46] The central debate was about how to reach Western development. The leftist and liberal parties opted for a fast adoption of the Western model whereas the national conservatives claimed that there were no giant leaps forward, hence development should be based on national traditions to be sustainable.[47] As it turned out, massive Western financial help was offered only for those countries which chose the Western model. Hence, the discussion over the options and methods of a national evolutionary scenario was marginalized. Hungary drove for full integration with the West as the main modernization strategy of the country.[48] Viktor Orbán's first national conservative administration (1998–2002) perceived Hungary's development as being attached to the West because it was identified with the future whereas the East was with the past.[49] Actually, NATO membership was conceived as primarily important for the country's Western integration and not for military security.[50]

The national conservatives' Western orientation changed gradually. The re-elected PM Orbán announced that the year 2008 marked the dawn of the Western liberal era and a new beginning for Hungary.[51] The prolonged European financial crisis induced a search for counterbalancing solutions for the EU-option. The new magnetism of Russian governance for the Hungarian administration could be detected in the political line as well as in official declarations after 2010. Orbán has openly advocated his admiration of progress of regimes such as Russia, China and Turkey.[52] The PM declared that human rights-centered individualism was out-dated because the idea of the nation should come first. As in the Putinist governance model, Orbán curbed the freedom of media, weakened the democratic division of power by decreasing the role of Parliament and making continuous attempts to influence the judiciary, attacked civic organizations as foreign agents, manned the Supreme and Constitutional Courts, Public Prosecutor's Office and the police. The Putinist strong-

hand policy has been tempting for the political elite because it represents a unique stability of power for one party, without risking a decline in economic growth, living standard and thus social unrest.

Nevertheless, the left-wing and liberal opposition maintain the Western inclinations as the ultimate modernization model which contributed to the post-communist democratization and capitalist transformation of the country. The liberals keep reminding of the underlying contradiction of the current strategic culture: the strengthening of the Eastern line and Hungary's membership in Western institutions.

Threats on the Elbowroom of Development

Sovereignty-concerns represent a constant dialogue about how the integrity of domestic rule can be guaranteed: by allying with the West or East. Ironically, until WWII Hungary's main enemies came either from the South (Ottoman Empire) or the West (Habsburg Empire). Nevertheless Russia has acquired a special place in the Hungarian political discourse. It produced a versatile image of Russia, ranging from friendly ally to threatening enemy, rooted in the memory of historical encounters. These most valued events of historical consciousness are freedom fights, and the question is what role Russia played in them.

A relatively positive reading of Russian intentions is related to early 18th century freedom fights (1703–1711) against the Habsburg Empire, after it subjugated Hungary in 1699. The campaign, led by the count Ferenc Rákóczi, coexisted with the Nordic war (1700–1721) between Sweden and Russia, and the Spanish succession war (1701–1714) between France

and Austria. Rákóczi turned for help to the Russian Czar. Peter the Great needed the well-connected Rákóczi's contacts with the France for his own war, and decided to support Hungarian independence.[53] Rákóczi's maneuvering to counter-balance a threatening nearby enemy by exploiting Russia's special needs for Western alliance established a core element in the Hungarian strategic culture: it is a reminder of what a geopolitical position of in-between-ness could mean at best. Remembering Rákóczi's fight launches a 'positive' memory of Russia being a strategic partner. This particular image was utilized in the 1940s and 1950s by Soviet propaganda, attempting to modify Hungarian attitudes towards the Soviet cause and the Hungarian communist administration's dependence on Kremlin's support.[54]

The Hungarian historical consciousness preserves a different experience of Russia, gained in 1848–1849: an independence fight against the Habsburg rule, the memory of which is respected by a national day. The fight was lost because of tsar Nikolai I who came to the rescue of a fellow absolute ruler, Franz Joseph, to regain dominance over Hungary. Although Russia's interference sealed Hungary's destiny, nevertheless, the Hungarian hatred was towards the Austrians, and the Russians were still seen as the noble enemy. Thus, the Hungarian army surrendered to the Russians and not to the Habsburg forces.[55] This benevolent interpretation of Russian intentions re-emerged during the 2010s turn in the Hungarian strategic behavior. This can be detected for example in the modest criticism of Russian involvement in the Ukrainain crisis. Furthermore, it even downplayed another central memorypiece of how Russia can turn into a very concrete threat.

The memory of the 1956 revolution, also a national holiday, combined different segments of the nation against an overwhelming enemy. Due to the temporal closeness of this event, it

bore relevance on the wide national consensus (of 85 %) about joining the NATO in 1999 as seeking shelter against the unstable, and thus unpredictable Russia.[56] Against all expectations, the people in power do not seem to remember the Soviet imposed system. The image of Russia has been transformed and it is not identified with the USSR anymore in current political or public discourse. The facelift of Russia was assisted by the departure of the Red Army in 1991, the paying off Soviet times' debts to Hungary (1992–1997) and also by the vanishing of the 1956-generation. Furthermore, NATO and EU membership provide a feeling of security and the Russian threat diminished.

This neutral attitude towards Russia started to change due to rising EU-criticism after the 2008 financial crisis. Since 2010, EU-critical parties have turned out as the winner parties in relative terms in all EU-elections.[57] The nationalist rhetoric strengthened as a reaction to transnational engagements and particularly to multiculturalism advocated by the EU. The PM Orbán compared the EU to Soviet occupation that the Hungarians would resist, as the traditions of freedom fighting implicate.[58] The refugee crisis in 2015, and the following discussion of compulsory asylum quotas were officially declared as security threats.[59] The increasing EU criticism was perceived as direct involvement in domestic affairs.[60] Similarly, the federalist plans of EU integration run counter to the Orbán administration's understanding of national sovereignty and hence have been strictly opposed.[61]

The government developed a strategy based on a double-scenario. On the one hand, the Visegrad union was to be reactivated along regionally shared issues, such as opposing migration and asylum quotas, the federalist EU-plans and trading sanctions on Russia. The common Visegrad-stand is conceived as an *indigenous regional development*, which is more progressive than that of the Western countries because it is more open to other options.[62]

Hence, Russia now appeared as alternative strategy offering opportunities without pressures on domestic decision-making. Furthermore, Russia was seen as a stronghold against terrorism and uncontrolled immigration. The recalibration of the Hungarian interest from the West (Brussels) to the East (Moscow) became gradually visible in political statements. Consequently, Orbán has been unwilling to make a clear stand against Russia. Russian sympathies are growing also among the people because Russia has been advocating minority rights and even autonomy in Ukraine. The Hungarian ethnic minorities living in neighboring countries has been a long-term goal of the national conservative Orbán administration.[63] The first Orbán government revisited in 1998 the Strategic Principles of Hungary articulating that Hungarian minorities cannot be regarded as the domestic affair of any one country, exclusively.[64] This coherent and long-term policy line resembles Putin's Russkyi mir politics regarding Russian minorities.

Securing Resources of Development

Development requires besides space for maneuver also political stability and access to resources. Both the Soviet Union and the European Union offered considerable and ironically resembling resources for a small country like Hungary. During state socialism, the Warsaw Pact was a security organization maintained by Soviet input and technology – and which did not require as much investments as a national army would have needed if maintained exclusively by national expenditure. Hungarian industrial performance per se was dependent on the cheap raw material and energy the USSR supplied. From military and economic points of view, a mirror-image situation occurred after Hungary joined the NATO and the EU. NATO membership provided Hungary with new technology and modernized the army, which

the country could not have afforded on its own.[65] Hungary has also received massive structural aid to catch up with the Western members of the EU and it benefited from common markets, free movement of workforce, goods and capital.

The change in both cases started to emerge when resources were available with more advantageous terms – elsewhere. In the communist era, the USSR could not offer suitable economic prosperity for the Hungarian leadership after the late 1960s, which is why it turned towards a Western market model even though the country was still dependent on Soviet energy and raw materials.[66] A similar switch in direction became evident as a result of the Orbán administration's frequent clashes with EU-values. Since Hungary is dependent on EU support there was a fear that a non-conformist political line would affect the EU-willingness to continue payments. Thus, the policy of the 'Eastern Drive' was launched in 2013 with the aim to diversify Hungarian foreign trade and to find new sources to compensate EU support.[67]

The Eastern Drive comes with a shadow. The dependence on Russian energy forced the country into an underdog position because the Russian pipeline could easily bypass Hungary in reaching Russia's ultimate aim, the Western markets.[68] Orbán's first administration (1998–2002) vigorously opted for EU plans regarding the Nabucco-pipeline, evading Russia, but it was unrealized. Hence, in 2017 the PM emphasized the importance of Russian trade and energy relations for his country's economic prosperity. Personal cordial relations with Putin played a role in securing gas transfer until 2021 but even more importantly Orbán was able to exploit the anti-Russian atmosphere prevailing in the Western rhetoric.[69] Signs of good bilateral relations surfaced in 2014 in the signing a treaty of a new nuclear power plant in Paks built on Russian loan and technology – binding Hungary to Russia for 30 years.

The evaluation of Russia has been complex and depended on the compatibility of political systems. Those Hungarian ruling parties could benefit the most from the Russian power that shared the same values and model of governance. Political affinity ensured basic trust in interactions and offered elbowroom for Hungary. The political elite has also utilized the country's in-between position. Comparing advantages of East and West, switching from one center to another and adjusting to great powers' needs offered resources in return and expanded the small country's elbowroom. The successful implementation of this strategic culture made central national goals and development possible.

Regional convergence vs. national divergences

Geopolitical situated-ness and shared historical experiences bore consequence on the Visegrad-countries' strategic culture. Common responses to great challenges were due to concurring views on the available *space* and *modus operandi* to realize national interest. Divergences originated from the different *means* applied because the countries were dissimilarly furnished with resources, and they had some special historically rooted national agendas. It can be argued that space and modus operandi are characteristically long-term elements of strategic culture whereas means are typically related to short-term strategic behavior.

Convergences: space and modus operandi

The common regional characteristics of strategic culture are linked to three interrelated concepts: in-between position and its consequence on the centre-periphery maneuvering leading to a 'third way' type of strategy.

In *between-ness* in the East-West divide constitutes one of the most important geopolitical codes in the whole region, determining the countries' overall security cultures. Visegrad's geopolitical potentials seem to be anchored in their relative position between the Germany-dominated EU and Russia, and their ability to position themselves between these two centers of political and military power. Being subjected to influences simultaneously from East and West constitutes also a strategic position: the Visegrad countries are able to acquire knowledge of diverse development scenarios – a great potential for innovative solutions. However, due to historical experiences, instead of taking a self-confident national or regional path they have traditionally turned towards East or West for applicable models.

This *center-periphery* behavior pattern coupled with the strategic position of in-between-ness was noticed by the great powers, with result that the Visegrad area was utilized as sphere of influence and buffer zone between East and West. Being useful, on the other hand, benefited the countries. In order to extract the maximum possible advantage from this situation, the countries from time to time resorted to regionalism, identifying common goals. This occurred especially when the region had not yet switched from one center to another, and was making attempts to squeeze out resources from or to drive common interest together against a reluctant center. Grouping together to strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis a power centre seems to be a characteristic feature of the Visegrad countries' strategic culture. This can be demonstrated by various attempts of regional alliance through time, such as the Little Entente or the Intermarium concept, and lately the common stand opposing the asylum quotas

and federalist plans of European integration. The bargaining power that is achieved through concerted actions towards the EU as centre clearly bears fruit, as it helped withdraw the compulsory migrant quotas.

The dissatisfaction with existing centres however can launch a search for genuine models of development which the in-between position particularly encourages. There have been several attempts at navigating an independent path between East and West. Constructing a neutral block of Central European states by establishing a joint Polish-Hungarian border at the expense of Czechoslavakia in the 1920s was one of the ideas.[70] The dissident concept of Central Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s offered a new societal model challenging simultaneously the communist dictatorship and consumerist capitalism. Current EU-critical and anti-German discourse of the Polish elites, depicting themselves as depositaries of "true European values", which the decaying West abandoned for the sake of multiculturalism and exaggerated humanitarian universalism, resonates with the earlier ideas. Similarly, the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán predicted the sunset of Western liberal society and offered instead a new concept of 'illiberal democracy', based on Christian Conservatism and national primary values. Under Western pressure, the Visegrad group rejects its previous normative conformity as a "lost Western cousin" and turns to policies deemed by the Western core as "eastern", non-humanitarian and alien.[71]

This new traditionalist, culturalist position is mirrored in all Visegrad countries, devaluating the earlier idea of Central Europe as a region firmly identified with Western values.[72] The simultaneous evolution of "illiberal democracy" in Hungary and Poland, the strengthening of conservative nationalist trends and the rejection of liberal values, the rule of law and human

rights, and embracing of "strong hand" policies, are all signs of a regional consolidation of a new system.

It is worth noting that the often morally frenzied critique coming from more liberal, EU-leaning strategic subcultures within the discussed countries invariably identifies the new course as "Russian-inspired", "eastern" or otherwise beneficial for or characteristic of Putin and Russia, despite the historically ingrained differences of the actual Russia-related stances in the Visegrad countries.

National differences: Playing on East and West

The eastern pole of the Visegrad's security environment plays out in multiple ways in national foreign policies. Divergences occur in different perceptions of Russia as a constant threat or alternatively an opportunity. In this respect Poland stands out from the rest of the Visegrad countries, which tend to maintain a pragmatic attitude towards the possible benefits that can be gained from interacting with Russia. Thus, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia oppose the EU-imposed sanctions on Russian trade as harming national and regional interests.

Poland, a strong supporter of the sanctions, was able to exploit the EU's threat conceptions and moral alert in another indirect way. By acting upon its 'freedom loving' rhetoric during the Ukrainian crisis, Poland earned its prime minister Donald Tusk a prestigious position in the EU as president of the European Council. Despite Poland being obviously more exposed to Russian military threats than the other Visegrad countries, crises in its neighborhood

opened up a new opportunity for the Polish elite to acquire a pro-active role on the international arena. The new geopolitical agency rooted in Polish history-driven security considerations became visible immediately after the EU accession. Poland's engagement in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, during the Russian-Georgian war, all the way up to the Majdan protests in 2013 and the Russian annexation of Crimea exemplify its eastward security orientation and anti-Russian stance. More recently, the Three Seas Initiative served to emphasize the leading role of Poland in the in-between region. Due to its size and traditionally good reputation in the West, Poland may also be more likely to become the leader of the Visegrad-alliance in their common EU-critical policy.

A different question is how well the Visegrad countries are able to utilize the geopolitical in-between situation. The current Hungarian strategic behavior in playing its newly developed "Eastern Drive" is clearly advantageous for the country against EU-pressures. While confrontations with the EU serve Hungary in developing fruitful realtions with Putin, the Russian card can also expand elbowroom in the West, especially since a general EU-critical attitude is spreading. Poland, on the other hand, seems trapped within its symbolic self-identification as a regional big player and its historically motivated orientation towards its former eastern territories, which entangles it in unnecessary conflicts with Russia without providing leverage vis-à-vis the EU.

The Polish elite has traditionally perceived Poland's geopolitical situatedness one-dimensionally, as a threat, and thus comprehended the country's alternatives restrictedly. Hungary has had a more flexible strategic behaviour, characterized by an ability of playing simultaneously a multifaceted game. Regarding elbowroom, Hungary has been more capable of taking advantage of the spatial context than Poland. The limited Polish gaze of prospects is

reminiscent of a small state behavior pattern. Hungary's pliable attitude to geopolitical boundaries provided a wider elbowroom than the country's size would suggest. In both cases, leverage in the West defines leverage in the East. Western pressure would obviously open up new leeway in the Eastern direction, however, membership in Western institutions seems to be a prerequisite of Eastern connections.

The future of the Visegrad-region depends on its ability to balance between the overlapping and colliding interests in connection to transnational challenges common for all: the issues of Ukraine, Crimea, EU-sanctions, migration, environment, economic dependency. A cautious estimation would suggest that the Visegrad countries can indeed consolidate their own political system and act united if they all perceive that their vital interests are being threatened. On the other hand, each of the Visegrad players will probably pursue its own particular interests with respect to Russia, as some countries find it obviously more advantageous than others to ally themselves with some aspects of the Russia's Europe-strategies.

What follows from this analysis of the Visegrad countries is a picture of a region with a joint security potential not fully utilized. Despite the long persisting critique of the Visegrad initiative as politically dysfunctional, the countries have been able to act in unity towards the EU when their security interests were threatened. However, the same is as yet not true with respect to Visegrad actions towards Russia. Visegrad members' security cultures, although formed in historically similar circumstances, do not always translate into concrete similarities in short-term strategic behavior, which impedes the geopolitical leverage the region could otherwise aspire to.

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