

Overcoming the East-West Divide: Czech and Polish Perspectives (March 7, 2016)

Working summary

1st panel

Vít Dostál

- There are many interpretations of what the East-West divide is
- a) just a discussion within the EU which is not supposed to make us worried
- b) fragmentation of the EU – there are several voices within the EU; group thinking, several circles that do not communicate with each other
- c) disintegration – not only parallel discussion, but also parallel solutions
- d) our self-marginalization – did we pretend to be more western than we actually are?, we do not feel that much attached to the West and prefer to preserve our own views
- e) another element of the enlargement fatigue – the E-W divide as a failure of the West which did not digest the eastern enlargement and still does not accept us as equals
- Existing divisions in Europe are not anything new, but they are more emotionalized right now
 - Old vs. new Europe before the 2003 war in Iraq
 - Eastern policy and stance towards Russia during the war in Georgia or the Bucharest summit 2008
 - Negotiations of the constitutional treaty (Lisbon treaty)
 - But it was the refugee crisis which marked the highest level of tensions
 - Due to the feeling that it is the destiny of the EU which is at stake?
 - Or is Central Europe getting more sensitive to any signs of the paternalistic approach of the West?
- Is the V4 able to come up with some suggestions or solutions at the EU level instead of pure pessimism which we have been witnessing lately?

Marek Cichocki

- The E-W divide is just one of many divisions we have in the EU, not convinced whether this one is currently the most important one that we are facing, but it should be definitely kept in mind in the context of the current migrant crisis
- The E-W currently as a divide as a revolt of some countries of our region against some (German) convictions or suggestions how to tackle the crisis
- Our understanding of the European integration has been shaken
- The existing vision of the EU integration, the current way of development ceased to be true because of the crises, we have lost illusion encapsulated in the constitutional treaty that we are able to shape a coherent and united EU which would move in one direction
- The end of the idea of ever closer Union
- What should be the common idea afterwards? At the same time not to lose the idea of the EU as a whole
- Sources of the current divisions lay in the crises we have gone through
 - 1 - economic crisis
 - The future of the Eurozone, the crisis of the common currency
 - On the one hand, there is a serious division within the Eurozone between the North and South; German austerity policy rather strengthened the difference
 - The Eurozone has to be transformed profoundly - but by whom? and how?
 - No coherent plan; even the so-called plan of 5 presidents (the EC plan) does not offer any clear vision of what should be really done to tackle the euro crisis

- According to Cichocki, it is necessary to transform the Eurozone into a real economic, fiscal and political union – we should more think about how such a transformation might affect the functioning of the EU as such
- Also demographic changes affect social coherence of the member states, and influence their ability to develop in social and economic terms
- EU budget – the structure does not correspond with the current needs; necessity to rethink how to distribute the EU funds
- Single market
 - Should be the fundament of the European integration
 - Should be perceived as a common good
- 2 – security crisis
 - Geopolitics
 - The Mediterranean and the Middle East, and Eastern Europe – the EU not prepared to act
 - The Lisbon Treaty did not equip the EU with necessary instruments to face such geopolitical challenges
 - According to Cichocki, some mechanisms should be rethought – e.g. the EU diplomatic service, some competences of the High Representative – are they really needed?
 - Refugee and migration crisis
 - Challenge not only for the social cohesion of the EU member states
 - Challenge also for the Schengen area and the ability of the EU to protect its external borders
- 3 – sovereignty and legitimacy
 - Widespread crisis of democracy as such in the EU – democratic deficit on 2 levels
 - Shrinking trust in the EU institutions
 - Increasing problem of democratic deficit on the level of national democracies
 - Structural crisis of the EU
 - Some EU member states represent different goals and ideas how the EU should develop
 - More difficult to keep the EU together as a whole
 - Increasing differentiations within the EU (different social and economic models, politics)
 - Necessary to find more flexible mechanism to manage these increasing differences
 - Crisis of the political leadership
 - Ineffective German leadership in the EU started to be a problem
 - The EU lacks leadership
 - Problem of the EU identity – we lost the sense of what it means to be a European
- Let's perceive the crises we are facing as a chance, not as a problem

Tomasz Grosse

- 4 basic dividing lines between the East and the West
 - 1 – geopolitics or historical tradition
 - Historically, Central Europe internally fractured, for a long time geopolitically dependent on outside powers
 - Central Europe has been of secondary importance for the European integration until now (vs. Franco-German engine)

- 2 – political autonomy – strong attachment to sovereignty within the region, particularly after communism
- 3 – economy
 - Visible in cohesion policy – Central European competitiveness based on low protection costs
 - Middle income trap
- 4 – culture and ethnicity
 - Visible during the migration crisis – Central European objections to German proposals for solving the crisis
 - Less experience with post-colonialism, more ethnic homogeneity
 - Afraid of significant number of non-European immigrants
- Recommendations for political action
 - Central Europe should cooperate to have a bigger impact on the EU policy
 - Counteract disintegration processes in the EU
 - Ability to overcome, at least to tolerate conflicts of interests in Central Europe
 - Strengthen bodies that support cooperation in Central Europe such as the V4
 - Strive for greatest possible loyalty and solidarity

Lukasz Pawlowski

- Cichocki's statement about the ineffectiveness of German leadership – what was meant by that?
- Sikorski's 2011 speech

Marek Cichocki

- The EU currently absent of political leadership
- Germany not able to take other countries on board, not able to provide the leadership that was expected and wanted by many; even if it tries, the offered solution is not able to unify the EU
- Period of post-German leadership
- Search for other solutions

Jiří Schneider

- Are divides per se wrong? They are natural, they cannot be overcome, they can be balanced
- The EU project based on trade-offs - this construction has disappeared, collapsed (Germany-France, South-North)
- How to create cohesion other than by trade-offs?
- Mantra of ever closing Union no longer valid because it was based on trade-offs that are non-existent
- Central Europe traditionally served as a source of emigration
 - In Western Europe – mixed – the most capable people leaving Europe to the US, Israel etc.; influx of migration from former colonies to Europe seen as a paradise, target countries
 - Primitive response – to renationalize the Community – call on emigrants to come back to their country and rally behind the national flag
- What kind of possible trade-offs exist in Europe to serve as a basis for a future European contract, making Europe resistant to any shocks and crises?
 - Crisis as a chance, crisis can make us stronger
 - Single market as the basis?
 - Rhetoric of Kaczynski and Orban – bringing nationals back not by making their country more attractive, but by appealing to the national market
 - Contract should be based on values, entailing also a clause on absorption capacity (workers from within the common market as well as newcomers)

Jan Macháček

- Sikorski – in fact not appealing to German leadership per se, but giving enough respect to EU institutions in the context of the economic crisis
- Crisis always positive? If the negative image of Central Europe is to take ground and become deeply rooted, it will deepen the crisis

Roman Joch

- Several crises
- The main divide not between the East and the West, but between supporters of different political forces
 - Russian threat
 - Poland, Baltic states, but also Sweden and the EU
 - Vs. Slovakia, Hungary
 - Migration crisis
 - Austria closer to the V4 than Germany
 - East Europeans more attached to their sovereignty
 - But also Baltic states, the UK
 - Ethnically more homogeneous
 - But Iceland
- Abandoning common rules
 - Constitution is for dangerous times, not normal every-day times
 - Obey the rules whatever they are
 - If they are not convenient, let us change them, but do not break them unilaterally
- Feeling in the East that the Western Europe has made more mistakes

Michal Kořan

- Useless to discuss the E-W divide, not helpful
- The debate reemerged somehow, when did it happen? When did Central Europe begin to be incorporated into the East again?
- The Easternness nowadays used in political debates to legitimize, to explain the position of Central Europe – a completely new element
- Such debates only reaffirm our identity (both ways) – why do we need this?
- Contemporary debates about the E-W divide completely different from those in the 1980s and 90s, completely new meaning
- Avoid such debates as much as we can

Jiří Schneider

- Crises could be for good, though not necessarily
- The eastern enlargement based on the requirement that “you accommodate to our standards”, we were supposed to accept the rules agreed before – not solid ground for a trade-off
- How we should define a new contract between the old members and the new members taking into account positions of the societies?

Vít Beneš

- There are many divisions in Europe (North vs. South, Anglo-Saxon vs. non-Anglo-Saxon, catholic vs. protestant)
- The language matters – the E-W divide dangerous, it revives old schemes of thinking on both sides of Europe
- Accepting the language of the East and the West erases Europe as such, as well as Central Europe (Kundera and his struggle to overcome the E-W divide)
- Using and justifying the language of East and West to give a new and completely positive meaning to the East

- e.g. Hungarian discourse
- Iraq war - the discourse of new Europe – also an attempt to depict East Europe (new member states) in a new positive connotation
- Contract
 - The EU based on contracts, but contracts need flexibility
 - Germany is not that powerful just because of its size, but also thanks to its flexibility
 - The V4 needs to be flexible, should be able to build coalitions beyond the V4 – revive the idea of the Weimer triangle, as well as Slavkov cooperation – let's not isolate ourselves
 - Was the contract between the old and the new members really unequal?
 - Part of the contract was that we will accept the Western economic model
 - On the other hand, the old members expected to embrace new democracies – even in the Copenhagen criteria (in this sense we also did not meet expectations – new democracy as understood in the 1990s nowadays often perceived as wrong and requiring correction)
 - We know the West better than the West knows us
 - Dangerous because this reinforces the perception of our authoritarianism

Maciej Ruczaj

- Is there really a positive definition of the East?
- We accept categories which were created in Western debates – scapegoating, putting the blame on Central Europe and the V4 as a mythical embodiment of the East; Orientalization of our part of Europe
- We did not propose a positive definition of Easternness, we were put into a scheme of not our own making
- Invoking nasty historical reminiscences

Michal Kořan

- Blaming each other of who was the first one to invoke the notion of the East does not lead anywhere, should be avoided
- Orban was probably the first one who made a pretext for us being labeled as Easterners by claiming that Hungarian nation does not belong to the decadent West
- Get rid of labels, we got ourselves cornered

Kryštof Kruliš

- Some differences on the ground (TTIP research)
- Differences between civil societies in Western Europe and post-communist societies (lagging behind)

Anita Sobják

- Orban – his vision is very convincing and coherent, but to what extent is it accepted by the society?

Piotr Wysocki

- We are losing the term Central Europe
- During the 1980s, we did not want to be Easterners, so we invented Central Europe
- Where is Central Europe gone?

Marek Cichocki

- If we lose Central Europeaness, we discover that we have different understandings of the West (Czechs/Poles/Hungarians...)
- The concept of the West – Enlightenment definition
 - Concept of Orientalization – mirror image of the West – concept of the East

- After WWII, the West associated with free-market capitalism and liberal democracy – this is what we aspired to become part of after the fall of the iron curtain
- At the beginning of the 90s, there was a debate in Poland between political forces and the Church, to what extent is the Polish society willing and capable of absorbing Western values
- The main problem is not that the West criticizes us, but that we are disoriented
 - The Western Europe, the US is not what it used to be, it ceased to be a clear point of orientation
 - Russia is still Russia..

Tomasz Grosse

- The starting point of the debate about the E-W divide in the West which started to criticize us for our approach to the migration crisis, reviving negative stereotypes
- Superiority of the West towards us taken as a normality
- The West was accustomed to propose solutions for us which we were expected to accept
- Not symmetrical relationship
- Usually passiveness of Central Europe, lack of ideas how to have a positive impact on politics
- Only if we elaborate some common attitudes to the European crisis, we would have impact

2nd panel

Lukasz Pawlowski

- Why are we discussing the E-W division again? Because the myth of the West is dried out
 - 25 years ago we knew that not everything in the West was perfect, but we were willing to sacrifice the loss even of part of our identity to be like the West
 - The end of history, the West like the model
 - Nowadays, even if we assume that after some 10 years we will be like the Germans, not all the people in Poland would be happy about that
 - Waszczykowski's statement that he opposes mixing cultures, the Western world made up of vegetarians and cyclists,..
 - Even at the highest level, the Western model is not perceived as the one that suits us
 - The myth of the West shuttered
- Is there anything positive about the East?
 - We try to overcome the perception of the West created during the Enlightenment
 - We are the proper West, defenders of the original values that lie at the bottom of Europe
 - In a sense, this is a variation of what Putin says – he claims to be the true defender of the Western values, but not in the Enlightenment terms, but in very conservative religious terms
 - Also in Poland, there is a perception that the West is not the true representative of the Western values because it forgot its true roots
- How to overcome the divisions and what could be the Czech-Polish contribution?
 - Difficult to answer because the Polish foreign policy is very erratic, difficult to make any forecasts
 - 3 paradoxes characterizing the Polish foreign policy at the moment
 - 1 – narrative of getting into the center of Europe, but in fact Poland is effectively marginalizing itself
 - Waszczykowski's expose hinted a reshuffling of Poland's allies
 - Instead of siding with Germany, the UK and Hungary as Poland's greatest allies
 - 2 – FP was promised to be more coherent thanks to one-party government with a parliamentary majority
 - In fact, less coherent
 - Several centers of power which send different signals
 - 3 – FP was supposed to be subjected to a more long-term planning
 - In fact, FP became the function of domestic policy,
 - For the sake of short-term domestic games, often personal, signals that are sent abroad are confusing
 - E.g. the letters sent to the EC were aimed at the domestic market, not to persuade anybody in the West that we are a reliable partner – very disturbing in the long-run

Vít Dostál

- The points also well describe the problems of the Czech foreign policy
- Poland is lacking a clear FP strategy right now
 - A lot of mentions about a strengthened cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries
 - But the Intermarrium vision does not entail any clear projects, any specific initiatives

Anita Sobják

- Refugee/migration crisis
- Deepening divisions within the societies across Europe, on the domestic political scene in most of the countries
- What is different in Central Europe is the fact that refugees used to be a non-topic – nowadays, easy to sell it to the electorate and capitalize on that
- Truly the E-W divide?
 - Schengen zone
 - Despite what the media suggest that the West wants to shut the internal borders, whereas we want to keep the borders open, it is in everyone's interest to strengthen the external border and save the Schengen as it is
 - No genuine threat, the Schengen is far from lapsing
 - Common European border and coastguard
 - The greatest controversy over the level of competition given to the EC
 - Problem of national sovereignty; cleavage between the EC and the member states
 - Turkey - Turkey's interests (Ankara is trying to maximize its profits) vs. EU member states
 - Mandatory quota relocation mechanism
 - Not as dividing as it used to be in September
 - The very proposal has failed
 - Not an issue any more, not even started to be implemented
 - More attention should be paid to readmission agreements (either non-existent or not implemented) – common position across the member states

Roman Joch

- Isn't it too early to evaluate Polish FP now?

Lukasz Pawlowski

- Some damage has already been done – many changes were officially announced, not just guesses
 - Intermarrium
 - Reshuffling of the list of allies

Tomáš Pojar

- No FP in the CR, really provincial, degradation for a decade after the EU entry
 - Problem in many more countries – e.g. Germany
- Many more divides in the EU than the E-W divide
 - Brexit
 - Eurozone
- Visegrad
 - Not always useful, it has its limits, often disagreements (agricultural policy, foreign affairs – Russia, Israel, migration crisis)
 - Let's not overplay the V4 card
 - Need to get another partner to push an issue through
 - PL-CZ cooperation as the driver of the V4, there will always be something on the table with Slovaks but it is not that relevant, almost never agreement with Hungary
- In the West, Central Europeans are depicted as troublemakers, but in fact vetoes come from CEE only rarely
- Debate in Germany on the V4 and Poland is very negative
- Communication barrier because of inability to speak English

Jiří Čistěcký

- Too early to evaluate Polish FP – until now only rhetorical exercise
- Resembling the CR
 - ČSSD government – also a lot of talks about reshufflings, but no dramatic change of FP priorities, though some new formats like Slavkov
 - FP non-consistent
 - Number of stakeholders – causing confusion abroad
- Migration crisis and its impact on Central Europe
 - Long-term psychological impact connected with the disillusion from the Western model
 - Criticism coming from Europe hand in hand with the inability to do anything led to a conviction that we must be cautious about any solutions offered by the West
 - This will limit the will of citizens to support any new contract or trade-off with the EU
 - Bolstering nationalism and reinvigorating old stereotypes
- V4
 - Neither underestimate it, nor overestimate it
 - Inability to find a consensus on some topics, even of strategic importance like energy policy
 - But there were also times (like between 2008-13) when political representations were on the same page and able to push through some issues
 - What is new is that many countries in the West started to think that the V4 has become a geopolitical player
 - Need to overcome block-thinking
 - The potential of the V4 lies in the Czech-Polish cooperation
 - Hard security as a common ground? All are instinctive Atlanticists, though rhetoric might differ

Michal Šimečka

- Part of the problem of sensationalizing Eastern Europe is that our leaders when explaining our position on migration crisis were the first to invoke this definition – our mentality, experience is different
- Our leaders were complicit in enforcing this narrative of division by evoking our cultural difference
- The issue of the permanent relocation of refugees is not going to dissipate – especially given the Hungarian referendum, any future Slovak government will not be willing to accept a large number of refugees
- What could be a common basis for the V4? The EU needs to preserve the community method of decision-making (beneficial due to our small size, most are outside the Eurozone)

Tomáš Pojar

- Under the community method we do not have any voice..

Vít Beneš

- It was for the first time that we referred to the communist period in a positive sense – as a source of justification of how different we are – worrisome
- In the 1990s – back to Europe, skipping the whole communist period
- Now, we are using the communist period for justification of our qualitative difference
- V4 – prevents the countries from feeling isolated, keeping Hungary in the European game, wrong to use the Visegrad for the ostracization of the other countries
 - Should be used as a vehicle for inclusion
 - Do not use it for pushing others who are in a difficult position

Michal Šimečka

- Flipside – the V4 serves as a cover – no leader would dare to use such a rhetoric or act so bravely if he was to be isolated

Jakub Groszkowski

- The V4 is not able to agree on topics when there is no consensus domestically
 - E.g. on Russia, Nordstream II
 - If there are different positions even within countries, how can they speak with one voice?
- V4 often appears to be stolen by Hungary - the best English, best prepared
- Quotas – voluntary? – the West is aware of the fact that Hungary would not accept a single migrant voluntarily
- A new trend of using the blame game to legitimize political powers on the local ground
 - In CEE – we will defend you from a dictate coming from Brussels, Berlin,...
 - In WE – protecting from cheap labor force coming from the East that misuses our generous social programs (the UK)

Vladimír Handl

- Hungarian policy not isolated, appears to be mainstream now
- Perhaps we should downgrade political symbolic of Visegrad in this area? – we are defined by Hungarian policy makers as xenophobic anti-Europeans
- The V4 always rather a project, some of them very practical and ambitious

Vít Beneš

- Let's not downgrade the V4, but rather supplement it
- Let's revive the Weimer triangle, develop Slavkov, build relations with France

Michal Kořan

- Disagreed with downgrading the V4 – we try to imagine a situation without the V4
- Centrifugal tendencies when each of the V4 countries is going in a different direction
 - 2014-2015 – Ukraine – Hungary and Slovakia had a completely different interpretations of what was going on in Ukraine, the CR had no interpretation, but it was still possible to find some common ground, which meant that we did not go into different directions
 - The ability of the V4 to suppress confrontational tendencies in the region should be cherished

Roman Joch

- Nervous about downgrading the V4 without having a substitute
- Orban is not the worst what might happen (Jobbik) - e.g. elections in Slovakia

Jakub Groszkowski

- Neither Slavkov, nor Weimer has the potential to supplement the V4
- Downgrading the V4 as a trademark – e.g. vigorous widening of cooperation to countries like China, South Korea, Japan
- Rather concentrate on everyday European agenda, energy, infrastructure

Jiří Handl

- Meant the same as Jakub – highlight practical projects, downgrade high-profile political events
- Also domestically legitimizes xenophobic debates

Vít Dostál

- Politicians like the V4 and use it precisely for this purpose – as an excuse, to show that we are not that much cornered, or at least that we are cornered together

Jiří Čístecký

- The greatest benefit of the V4 lies in providing stability to Central Europe – the region is historically full of conflict potential, misunderstandings
- Russia – no common position, but all support sanctions (now called into question by Orban, but the time will show what will be the real stance)
- Hungarians stole PR of the V4

Tomáš Pojar

- At the end of the day, the break of common European position will come from the West, not the V4

Vít Dostál

- Recommendation for the Polish V4 presidency – do not overplay the PR if you are not able to deliver on the promises, to realize the projects on the ground

Anita Sobják

- Permanent quotas
 - Impossible not because of the V4 or Orban's referendum, but because most of the countries are against it
 - Hungarian referendum – do not overestimate it – not binding, rather a domestic game; it does not allow him to withdraw from what he committed to in September
- Hungary now not that isolated as a year ago, became a mainstream
- Intermarrium
 - Without any content, no practical proposals
 - But what can be predicted is that there probably won't be that much interest from all the parties involved (fear of antagonizing Russia)
- The East-West divide
 - Not our biggest constrain
 - Fed by our own complexes, we did not achieve what we hoped for from the EU integration

Lukasz Pawlowski

- Language matters
 - Concept of illiberal democracy – easily became part of the mainstream discourse
 - Orban – he can say that he is a democrat, but a different one
- Hungary is using the V4 to elevate its FP, prepared to play between the E and the W and to serve as a bridge between the two entities
- Worried that Hungary might become a leader of the region instead of Poland – compared to Kaczynski, Orban is far more experienced as a politician at the European level, and a true leader of Hungarian FP