

The Visegrád Group and the railway development interest articulation in Central Eastern Europe

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Abstract

This paper intends to advance thinking on the catalysts of V4 railway policy making by offering an overview of the nature and directions of spillovers triggering joint Visegrád railway projects. The Czech, the Hungarian, the Polish and the Slovak governments help each other adopt international railway traffic standards and legislation as the Visegrád Cooperation provides a forum to agree on lobbying positions within international organisations. By citing real-life examples of V4 railway cooperation supporting the neofunctionalist or the liberal intergovernmentalist theoretical frameworks, the paper shall contribute to the better understanding of the spillover phenomena in Central Eastern Europe, while seeking answers on how international railway policies shape the Visegrád Cooperation's transport strategies through different spillovers. The paper concludes that in Visegrád countries, spillovers are primarily driven by governmental actions that serve as mediators of market, civil society, and financial needs. However, spillovers would hardly take place without the EU's legal-institutional framework.

Keywords: transport, spillover, integration, development, neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism

Introduction

The emphasis of the research is on the relationship, interactions as well as dynamics between the Visegrád Group's¹ railway policies and the wider conceptual, legal-institutional context of the European Union's relevant policies. EU transport

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¹ The Visegrád Group consists of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. Hereafter the following name variations for will be used: Visegrád Group, Visegrád Four, V4, Visegrád countries, Visegrád states, Visegrád region and Visegrád area.

projects, funds, regulations, and directives have spilled over into the creation of denser rail connections and more reliable train services in the V4 area. Interstate transport cooperation demonstrates the intertwining of integration circles among Visegrád countries as spillovers in this field materialise in a relatively short time, in a concentrated manner, and with a clear regional focus. Spillovers deriving from EU financial tools and development policies are key factors in comprehending the nature and dynamics of the Visegrád cooperation. The research tries to identify the motives of governments and interest groups to invest political capital in interstate mobility cooperation by identifying the common objectives and driving forces.

The intention of Visegrád governments to upgrade and complete transportation routes have spilled over into an interconnected railroad network; their main scope, however, has been to better exploit the business opportunities of the Eurasian freight services that are slowly shifting from road and maritime routes to rail. This paper concludes that, as opposed to core EU states, in Visegrád countries, higher governmental actions serve as mediators and advocates of market, civil society, and financial etc. actors as far as transport cooperation is considered. However, in the Visegrád zone, spillovers would barely take place without the EU's legal-institutional framework.

At the time of finalising the paper, investigations conducted by academic literature and databases did not yield results for spillover analyses with V4 focus. This paper shall therefore contribute to the better understanding and operationalisation of spillovers in Central East Europe („CEE”) by offering a synthesis of findings of the neofunctionalist and liberal intergovernmentalist theoretical schools. The research continues the investigations on finding answers for the viability of the V4 cooperation after these countries' EU accession. By citing real-life examples, the paper provides an approach to identifying and analysing spillovers in intergovernmental policy-making by addressing political, regional, sociological, and transportation literature. The comprehensive research of spillovers might be essential to understand the evolution of the Visegrád countries' cooperation after their accession to the European Union. As an expected additional contribution, the paper offers an analysis and identification of motives behind V4 policy making in the field of rail transport.

In order to have a global conceptual framework, this paper brings together the findings of Ernst B. Haas, Frank Schimmelfennig, Simon Hix, Sonia Mazey, Arne Niemann, and Carolyn Rhodes for the neofunctionalist perspective, while the allegations of Walter Mattli, Andrew Maitland Moravcsik, Daniel Wincot, and again Niemann were summarised for the liberal intergovernmentalist approach. With the aim of identifying the system of references in the spillover literature, the „snowball method” was followed. The research proposes a quantitative synthesis of rail transport cooperation in Visegrád countries explaining the relationship between different variables and the correlation of the case study subject and its circumambieny. The focus is on cooperative intergovernmental policies

collectively elaborated by V4 states. The corpus of the investigation material for real-life examples consists of the online available Eurostat databases. Railway policies imply further integration at politics level and therefore, the evolution of the V4 political leaders' intentions and endeavors to develop the regional transport system is examined through discourse analysis of V4 presidency programs and related publications of specified international organisations and media sources.

1. Conceptual framework: CEE railway integration through spillovers

This section concentrates on identifying and analysing the primary effects that anticipate, in time or place, and trigger (or at least have certain effects on) common railway development initiatives in the Visegrád countries.² Such phenomenon is called spillover: an abstract term that has become an influential concept in international relations studies, creating theoretical and methodological approaches in order to understand how foreign presence interferes in intergovernmental political actions and the extent to which such spheres are connected. If one tries to trace the spillover process, the involvement of both political decision-makers and different stakeholders has to be analysed. Ernst B. Haas (1961, p. 6) thought was that spillovers might be seen as „*ever-expanding islands of practical cooperation*”.³ Haas (1961, p. 383) calls the „invisible” processes leading to unexpected multisectoral synergies ‘spillovers’. Governments do not necessarily exercise control over such integration process: state authorities normally just react by transferring powers from national to supranational levels rather than proactively shape crossborder cooperation already initiated by sub-state actors (Mattli and Slaughter, 1998, p. 183). Leon Lindberg cited situations when actions related to specific goals create unique circumstances in which the initial goals can be reached exclusively by taking further steps in other, seemingly unrelated fields of actions, which, in turn, create conditions for more and more coordination. This is how spillover works in intergovernmental politics (Rosamond, 2005, p. 11).

² In the proposed research the term ‘spillover’ is used for events that occur because of something else that has happened in a seemingly unrelated context. It has to be put down, however, that one cannot find a consistently recognised academic definition of the term itself.

³ In order to narrow down the high number of hits in research engines and to identify the relevant articles contextual, so-called ‘intext’ searches have been run. The number of advanced research tool hits could be decreased below 30 results. As far as the technical terms are concerned, the following keywords have been searched in accessible academic online databases: spillover (and versions: spill-over, spilling over, spill(s)(ed) over into) integration, interstate, multi, trans, and supranational, overlapping membership, cooperation area, dependency level, coalition building, joint coordination, multidimensional integration, practical cooperation, transport cooperation/coordination, mobility policy(ies), regional transport, path-dependency(ies), infrastructure investment(s), further integration, transport integration.

Transport development policies pull states together amid mutual trust. Such process leads to some sort of unification among governments (Parent, 2009, p. 520). The degree of functional specificities affects the intensity of integration. In Haas's words: „[t]he more specific the task, the more likely important progress toward political community.” Besides being sufficiently defined and mutually respected, railway-related standards, laws, regulations, unification initiatives have to be economically important for all states considered, in order to have enough potential for spilling over from one decision-making area into others.

Haas claims that regional integration is a self-reinforcing process where spillovers are always present. Automaticity is another important and inherent element of spillovers: international integration is a self-sustaining, rational and teleological course of actions that are not necessarily reliant on other extraneous factors. Haas directly states that political spillover is the way in which decision-making activities are redirected from national levels to a new, inter- or supranational centre by the creation of transnational organisations or alliances (Fesel, 2015, p. 10). As Frank Schimmelfennig (2018, p. 19) puts it: „*political spillover increases domestic demand for integration*”.

V4 ministries (responsible for transport policies and state infrastructures) and a number of business entities operating in the railway sectors of Visegrád countries are members of specialised international associations and/or organisations like, for example, the International Rail Transport Committee („CIT”) or the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail („OTIF”). Both entities help its members implement international rail transport law.⁴ There are two very clear illustrations of railway unification within the EU too. Firstly, it is essential to mention the endeavour to create a network of internationally coordinated transport corridors (TEN-T lines, RFCs) that run across various member states with differing technical parameters used for rail traffic operation. Secondly, the member states' efforts to introduce standardised and unified traffic management and train control systems (ERTMS⁵, ETCS) for train operations on all major European railway lines also leads towards stronger cohesion among EU regions (by significantly shortening

⁴ At the time of finalising this paper, the following V4 companies have CIT membership: the Czech railway transport company ČD and freight services provider IDS Cargo; the Hungary-based railway passenger transport companies MÁV-Start and GYSEV, as well as the cargo shipping entities CER Hungary, FLOYD, FOXrail, GySEV Cargo, Hungarian Railway, Magyar Magánvasút (MMV), Metrans Danubia, and Train Hungary Magánvasút; the Polish PKP and the freight companies CTL Logistics and Koleje Dolnośląskie; as well as the Slovakia-based Carbo Rail, Central Railways, Express Group, LOKORAIL, LTE Logistika Transport Slovakia, METRANS Danubia, Prvá Slovenská železničná, Railtrans International, Slovenská železničná dopravná Spoločnosť (SŽDS), ŽSSK and ŽSSK Cargo (members.cit-rail.org/secure-media/files/members_2018-05-01.pdf?cid=41744).

⁵ Read more about ERTMS, 2019. *About – In Brief* (www.ertms.net/?page_id=40).

travel times, decreasing operational costs, enhancing traffic security, boosting business relations and tourism, creating stronger social linkages, etc.).

However, it is essential that centripetal forces outweigh the centrifugal ones. The Visegrád countries' rail networks are important parts of the European rail market due to their favourable geographical situation. Given their land-locked positions (except for Poland) and the increasing level of Asia-Europe rail traffic, the strengthening of these countries' railway relations towards Eastern Asian countries is definitely advantageous for the region's performance in terms of international trade balances. In order to decrease energy consumption and environmental pollution, Visegrád governments follow EU tendencies and adopt new transport policies giving special focus to channelling the growing transport demand into more environmentally-friendly modes⁶. As a result, rail freight transport market has started to grow in the Visegrád region and in 2017, the Czech, the Hungarian, the Polish and the Slovak railway systems reported promising figures for the intensity of use mostly driven by freight utilisation (Duranton *et al.*, 2017, p. 8). More liberalisation on the freight market leads to the establishment of more cargo shipping companies which, in turn, increases competition in the rail freight sector. Such companies initiate lobby activities at national and international decision-making fora for better services and infrastructural circumstances. Governments then start to invest in the modernisation of rail infrastructure and rolling stock for the collateral benefit of citizens.

Trade links between Europe and the Far East are slowly shifting from road or maritime routes to rail. Such endeavours are supported by EU policies too.⁷ The roughly 10,000 km distance between Chinese and EU ports may be covered in 15 days by train through the Trans-Siberian route, as opposed to an average maritime trip of 30 days (Farkas *et al.*, 2016, pp. 4-8). Thus, the common V4 goal is to forward more goods on the railways⁸. These states have, however, become competitors on the east-west freight transport market and such circumstance made statespersons ask the old IR question: „whether to cooperate or not?” (Tóth, 2018a, p. 170).

The debate over spillover phenomena between IR theoreticians emerged primarily in relation to the theoretical approaches of regional integration, which is nothing but crucial in building up an interconnected railway area. According to the neofunctionalist logic, intergovernmental cooperation is an incremental process, driven by the demands of certain interest groups (political parties, sectoral lobby

⁶ More info about Interreg-Danube, 2014. Cooperation *program n. 2014TC16M6TN001 under the European territorial cooperation goal* (interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/default/0001/08/a9e4aac01e011b947d260cb6ba467b74f1728d51.pdf, accessed on 06-12-2019).

⁷ Shift2Rail promotes the competitiveness of the European rail industry. Its research and development programs are carried out under the Horizon 2020 initiative in order to develop the necessary technology to complete the Single European Railway Area (Shift2Rail, 2019).

⁸ Read more about CER, - *Decision and working bodies* (cer.be/about-us/how-we-work/decision-and-working-bodies, accessed on 06-12-2019).

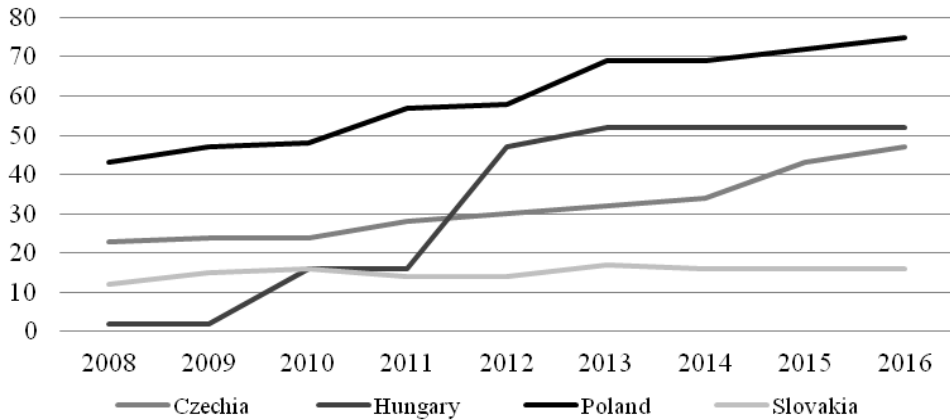
organisations, financial or business entities, civil organisations, etc.) and supranational institutions (European Union bodies and committees, grants, funds, initiatives, etc.). Governments try to respond to such demands following the functional logic. Supranational institutions themselves become motors of integration. The process results in a highly interdependent net of linkages between different policy areas.

2. Theory in practice: the role of spillovers in V4 railway policies

Neofunctionalism is the first classical narrative of European integration. Neofunctionalism is a theory of regional integration building on the work of Ernst B. Haas („The Uniting of Europe”, 1958) and Leon Lindberg. Neofunctionalists claim that governments may but not always exercise control over the integration process. Multi, trans, and supranational actors (interest groups, corporations, civil society organisations, etc.) are able to shape the integration process in their own interest creating a variety of path-dependencies that push interstate cooperation beyond the levels of intergovernmental negotiations and decision-making (Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 2). Haas (1961, pp. 9-19) says that „*the upgrading of the parties' common interests relies heavily on the services of an institutionalised mediator, whether a single person or a board of experts with an autonomous range of powers. It thus combines intergovernmental negotiation with the participation of independent experts and spokesmen for interest groups, parliaments and political parties. It is this combination of interests and institutions which we shall identify as «supranational».*”. In the case of V4 politics, one can barely find a decisive institutionalised element in their interstate cooperation (except for the International Visegrád Fund) yet there are numerous specialised expert group meetings, ministerial conferences where railway-related topics can be addressed. In order to maximise the spillover effect, the institutions of regional integration have to be given specific functional assignments so that they can overcome the autonomous evolution of the separate fields of common concern.

The V4 cooperation introduced regular and *ad hoc* ministerial conferences and experts group meetings of rail professionals in order to harmonise their positions on EU railway policies whenever their interests coincided. V4 representatives request that the opening of the rail market to competition happened in line with the interests of the relatively weak CEE economies⁹. However, the number of railway enterprises doing business in the V4 region has grown significantly .

⁹ Joint Declaration of the Ministers Responsible for Transport in the States of the V4 (5–6 February 2004) (visegradgroup.eu/2004/joint-declaration-of-the, accessed on 06-12-2019).

Figure 1. Number of railway enterprises in V4 Countries

Source: own representation based on Eurostat data¹⁰

In Haas's point of view (1961, p. 11), political spillover takes place when an intergovernmental coordination in one given policy area constrains specialised decision makers to become informal advocates of broadening the spectrum of common decision-making in other areas, too. Experts and bureaucrats with significant interstate bargaining positions and influence may therefore become important supranational actors in international organisations or other types of interstate alliances. Their decisions involve more and more people creating interbureaucratic contacts that drive towards consultation-based intergovernmental policy making schemes and hijack the decision-making in a pro-community direction. In terms of regulation, organisation, and international standards, railway traffic is at the forefront in the field of transport. The membership of V4 states (through their authorised ministries, national authorities or operators) in numerous international railway organisations can be seen as an independent variable whereas the common rail transport endeavors of these four countries might be interpreted as outcomes dependent on such overlapping memberships. The functioning of railway organisations like CER, the Warsaw-based Post-Soviet intergovernmental forum called the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways („OSJD”), the Coordinating Council on trans-Siberian Transportation („CCTT”), or the global railway organisation, the International Union of Railways („UIC”)¹¹ implies the involvement of assistants delegated by member undertakings or government bodies. Such platforms give places to interbureaucratic contacts through overlapping

¹⁰ Eurostat, Railway enterprises - by type of enterprise, data retrieved from appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=rail_ec_ent&lang=en.

¹¹ UIC, List of members, available at vademecum.uic.org/en.

memberships. One of the primary roles of such delegates is to be the advocates of the strategic interests of their entities.

The neofunctionalist Simon Hix (2005, p. 286) claims that, as a coordinator of process standards regulations, the specified EU bodies became responsible for the overview of product standard-setting procedures too due to societal expectations and the lobbying of interest groups. Railway undertakings of V4 countries are members of the Belgium-based lobby organisation, the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies („CER”) that represents the interests of European railway operators and infrastructure companies all through the EU policy-making procedures.¹² Such business entities and non-governmental organisations are likewise represented in different European specialised working groups and bodies.¹³ Political spillover explains the significant role of supra and subnational actors in the integration process. These entities pressurise governments for more integration in order to pursue their own interests. Pressure groups and political parties are therefore also considered to be important actors. This is the way decision-makers transfer their loyalties from the state or sub-state entities towards intergovernmental organisations.

The operation of the above-noted railway lobby organisation (CER), for instance, starts at the level of working groups made up of experts and assistants delegated by member companies. Their elaborated draft reports and projects are then discussed and decided at the high-level meetings of chief executives from railway undertakings. As a third phase, CER’s general assembly acts as a decision-making body where all member organisations take one seat and are represented by their management. The general assembly provides guidance to the organisation on how to advance on specific policy issues and how to advocate them at the meetings of the European Parliament’s specialised committees, working sessions, or at other fora of international railway-related decision-making procedures (CER, 2019a)

Since their accession, Visegrád countries’ railway undertakings have always been active in CER activities. Since January 2016, in its weekly publication (CER Monitor) distributed among its members, CER has published 2 V4-related, 14 Slovakia-related, 30 Hungary-related, 45 Czechia-related, and 46 Poland-related articles. As a comparison, in the same period, the research of CER Monitor publications identified 52 Germany-related, 44 Italy-related, 35 Netherlands-related,

¹² The Czech Republic is represented in CER by ČD and the infrastructure manager SŽDC. The Hungarian CER members are the national railway company MÁV, the Hungarian-Austrian GySEV, the railway capacity allocator VPE, as well as the railway association HUNGRAIL. Poland’s CER undertakings include the national railway company PKP and the rail freight business operator Rail Polska. Slovakia is represented by its rail infrastructure manager ŽSR and the national rail passenger operator ŽSSK as well as the freight services provider ŽSSK Cargo (CER, 2019b).

¹³ At the time of writing, Slovakian organisations are not present in European Federation for Transport and Environment (transportenvironment.org/members, accessed: 06-12-2019).

and 32 France-related articles, which means that the V4 presence in CER activities is relatively high.

Table 1. Major international railway organisations in CEE

Name	Founded	Members	Year of accession
UIC	1922	ČD (CZ)	1922
		MÁV Zrt. (HU)	1922
		PKP SA (PL)	1922
		GYSEV (HU/AT)	1976
		Instytut Kolejnictwa (PL)	2002
		ŽSR, ŽSSK (SK)	2002
		ŽSSK Cargo (SK)	2004
		VPE Kft. (HU)	2005
		SŽDC (CZ)	2006
		GYSEV Cargo (HU)	2009
		RegioJet (CZ)	2012
		WagonService (SK)	2012
		Ministry of Innovation and Technology (HU)	2012
		FOXrail (HU)	2013
OSJD	1957	CZ (ČSSR)	1957
		HU	1957
		PL	1957
		SK	1993
CCTT	2006	MÁV Zrt. (HU)	2006
		PKP SA (PL)	2006
		ŽSSK Cargo (SK)	2006
OTIF	1999	Ministry of Transport (CZ)	1999
		Ministry of National Development International Relation Unit (HU)	
		Ministry of Infrastructure and Development The Department of Railways (PL)	
		Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development (SK)	
RNE	2004	SŽDC (CZ)	2004
		MÁV Zrt. (HU)	
		VPE Kft. (HU)	
		GYSEV (HU/AT)	
		PKP SA (PL)	
		ŽSR (SK)	

Source: own representation

The debate over spillover phenomena between international relations theoreticians emerged primarily in relation to the theoretical approaches of regional integration. The two competing theories of EU integration are neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism. Andrew Maitland Moravcsik (2005, p. 7) considers neofunctionalism only a framework of thinking about regional integration theories. Liberal intergovernmentalism maintains that the deep and overlapping cooperation of governments of different countries is driven by the states, especially by those which are relatively less dependent on others (Wincot, 1995, p. 598). Bigger economies therefore have a bigger bargaining power, Moravcsik claims. For example, Spain and France continuously push for stronger cooperation in the research and development related to high-speed railway operation, while East European states would normally prefer to deal with the upgrading of their obsolete conventional lines (Railway Gazette, 2019) (RailwayPro, 2019). Within the V4 region, Poland's economic interests seem to prevail as far as the creation of international freight corridors is considered (Via Carpathia, Amber corridor/RFC-11, Małaszewicze dry port, etc.).

By contrast to neofunctionalists, liberal intergovernmentalists consider supranational institutions (and exogenous pressures in general) to be of limited importance in the integration process, (Mattli, 1999, pp. 10-11). Liberal intergovernmentalism gives the leading role to political and state leaders in the process of regional coalition building. Such approach prioritises bargaining and converging preferences between heads of states (or governments) over bottom-up integration initiatives (power-based approach). There are cases when government involvement in regional railway integration leads to previously unexpected but surely advantageous results. Spillover is the way in which the initial integrative steps taken by civil society groups, lobby organisations, supranational business actors and other crossborder entities give rise to unexpected, yet automatic moves toward regional integration (Moravcsik, 2005, p. 5). Supranational institutions then start to support the delegation of state powers to supranational bodies in order to increase their influence over policy outcomes (Hix, 2005, p. 43). These behaviours are like linkages that mutually support each other.

As governments (or state-owned railway companies) opt for joining a specialised international organisation in order to facilitate crossborder rail traffic for purely economic reasons, their decision implies the need for building up a mutually interoperable transport grid in the region, which makes it easier for logistics companies to do international business and citizens can also benefit from faster and safer train connections, which leads to the densification of intraregional social ties.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of National Development of Hungary, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development of Poland, and the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of Slovakia represent the V4 Countries in the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail („OTIF”) that promotes the improvement and facilitation of international rail traffic by offering a

3. The impact of EU institutions and tools on railway projects in the Visegrád zone

Transport cooperation shows how non-converging economic interests within the V4 can be offset by shared values and political will. In terms of freight transport, the four states are competing against each other on the Eurasian corridors. As far as the railway infrastructure is considered, these countries have clear short-term economic benefits if they concentrate their efforts and resources on the development of east-west transport corridors. At the same time, however, the V4s have decided that the development of north-south transport linkages is also particularly important to them. Cooperation in this respect is indispensable between governments, ministries, administrative authorities, infrastructure managers, lobby organisations, research centres, etc.

The V4 railway collaboration is an example of the viability of the V4 formula: policy coordination is only effectuated where strategic interests meet. From 2012 on, V4 presidency programs have included general discussions on the construction of future high-speed passenger rail lines („HSRs”) in the region¹⁵(MZV, 2014). Given the need for a fast north-south train service, during their February 2016 bilateral negotiations, the prime ministers of Hungary and Poland agreed to improve rail connections between their countries¹⁶. At the June 2018 V4 summit in Budapest, the Prime Ministers of the four countries agreed that the upgrading of their conventional railway lines must follow the guidelines of the European Union; however, the creation of HSRs is mostly driven by government decisions *„[r]ecognizing the importance of improving the connectivity and accessibility of the major cities and regions of Central Europe in order to promote economic development, territorial cohesion and sectoral cooperation in areas such as employment, culture and tourism”*¹⁷.

Since the very beginning, the principal challenge for all Visegrád states has been to turn their relations, despite their traditionally different foreign policies, into a common strength. Visegrád countries have felt compelled to find common grounds in specific EU-related issues. After the 1989-1990 regime changes, for example, rail infrastructure needed to be improved in order to open up V4 economies and attract

framework for cooperation in order to agree upon uniform legal regimes and systems of technical compatibility and harmonisation. OTIF also strives for the elimination of barriers to border crossings between its 50 member states (OTIF).

¹⁵ MSZ, 2012. Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrád Group (July 2012 – June 2013) (visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2012-2013-polish).

¹⁶ MTI / Miniszterelnök.hu, 2016. The alliance between Poland and Hungary is a historic one. miniszterelnok.hu/the-alliance-between-poland-and-hungary-is-a-historic-one.

¹⁷ Visegradgroup.eu, 2018. Joint declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád Group countries for cooperation to develop a high-speed railway network in Central Europe. (visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements, accessed: 06-12-2019).

trade partners to the region. Visegrád states have gone through a deep economic liberalisation amid profound political transformations required for their accession to Euro-Atlantic organisations. Railway-related reforms in the region have thus basically followed Brussels' requirements and legislative measures. The enlargement of the EU to 25 members in 2004 reinforced the need for the creation of trustable corridors and logistics terminals. Incumbent Visegrád governments have followed EU tendencies and prioritised the channelling of the growing transport demand into rail (Interreg-Danube). By doing so, statespersons had to decide whether to compete or cooperate as far as the creation of freight transport routes in the CEE region was concerned.

If governments decide to coordinate their decision-making procedures in one given policy area, it is not necessarily a response to external shocks, global or regional events that have significant ripple effect on the wider international community. For example, state-owned railway infrastructure managers and capacity allocation bodies doing business in the Visegrád Area joined RailNetEurope (RNE) in order to facilitate the provision of international business services.¹⁸ The tightening of relationships in one given policy area may occur as the result of an „endogenous growth” of the jointly coordinated decision-making of states as part of a wider and multidimensional integration process (Moravcsik, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, political spillovers may be confused with path-dependencies. Instead of scrupulously elaborated large jumps, synergies may be intensified with a number of small incremental changes, causal mechanisms. According to the neofunctionalist logic, governments are not always able to control the integration process (Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 2) (Rhodes and Mazey, 1997, p. 242). However, the Visegrád countries' local non-political (financial, non-governmental, labour, religious, etc.) elites and domestic pressure groups do not have enough bargaining power for interest articulation. Therefore, certain conditions have to be met so that a policy area could spill over into other field(s) of integration:

- it is essential that the centripetal forces outweigh the centrifugal ones
- the lack of institutional elements in the V4 cooperation (except for the International Visegrád Fund) has to be balanced by the legal-institutional framework of the EU or interstate professional working groups.

As opposed to core EU states, in the case of Visegrád countries, spillovers between two policy areas are primarily driven by higher governmental actions that serve as mediators and advocates of market, civil society, and financial etc. actors and needs. Therefore, the convergence of integration areas within the V4 countries naturally involves political-level decision-making.

¹⁸ RNE was founded in 2004 and, by now, has jurisdiction over 230,000km of railway lines operated by the 34 member companies registered in 25 different countries (RailNetEurope, 2019, RNE Network Members. rne.eu/organisation/rne-network-members).

The liberal intergovernmentalist approach explains how regional integration results from a direct decision of national governments. Moravcsik (The Choice for Europe, 1998) emphasised national governments to be key elements in the process of integration. In the case of transport integration, the implementation of government projects is relatively easy to track by the media coverage of modernised or newly constructed infrastructures, the inauguration of newly launched services, etc. These are well-documented processes both at EU and member state levels. Additionally, such data is publicly accessible.

Neofunctionalists claim that the dynamics of the integration process makes politics path-dependent and spillovers autonomous often bypassing governmental control. However, liberal intergovernmentalism rejects the idea that supranational organisations are on an equal level of political influence as national governments, whereas this paper's proposition is that in the Visegrád zone, spillovers would rarely take place without the EU's legal-institutional framework. The EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (through its distinct specialised pockets for mobility development such as the Connecting Europe Facility – „CEF”; Shift2Rail, Cohesion Funds, etc.) provides the main tools for V4 railway cooperation. The major directions of such V4 endeavours are, in turn, delineated by the EU Railway Packages (Tóth, 2018b, pp. 162-163).

The European Union's budget and its priority areas may be seen as independent variables, while the Visegrád countries' railway projects (triggered by EU investment priorities) could be taken as their dependent ones. The European Union's Structural Funds have given an important stimulus to regional policies since the 1990s. The usage of such financial tools of the EU have been linked to strict regulatory requirements that have spilled over into domestic and regional policies. The national and regional authorities managing Structural Funds and the different projects across the EU have been required to comply with Brussels' evaluation obligations in planning and commissioning assessment studies. If states intend to avoid friction within a certain group of countries, rules are needed for the formation of partnerships. Specific EU bodies would assume responsibilities to monitor the working of the cooperation.

The Visegrád states have put emphasis on the exchange of experiences in the implementation of railway transport constructions co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility, a EU funding instrument that promotes targeted infrastructure investments including the development of trans-European transport, energy and digital services networks (European Commission, 2019a). As net recipients of EU structural funds, Budapest, Bratislava, Prague and Warsaw have always been active players in the informal „Friends of Cohesion Policy” club and managed to get the highest amount of EU funds per capita for the 2014-2020 multiannual financial period. The EU Cohesion Policy spilled into the improvement of the region's public transport by purchasing new rolling stock, upgrading railway infrastructure or

constructing new sections, etc. The whole regional railway integration process is mostly powered by the EU's development funds and policies.

The deployment with the second level of the European Train Control System (ETCS-2) and various rehabilitation as well as construction projects on key rail corridors have been at the centre of the Visegrád countries' infrastructure development strategies supported by EU funds¹⁹ (MZV, 2014, p. 5). The governments of the Visegrád states have realised that ensuring interoperability between the different lines and the elimination of bottlenecks in the region's network are essential for the competitiveness of rail²⁰. Over the past decade, joint railway development initiatives have constantly been on the agenda of V4 presidency programs.²¹ Since 2014, multilevel V4 meetings have paid attention to the traffic problems caused by the bottlenecks in the area. The 2014-2015 Slovak Presidency, for instance, strived to coordinate the activities of a High Level Working Group („HLWG”) on transport connections between Visegrád countries with the aim of implementing the previous V4 agreements facilitating cross-border rail traffic (MZV, 2014). Several HLWG meetings focusing on the progress achieved in that field have been held²².

Rail Freight Corridors („RFC”) illustrate well the bottom-up initiatives leading to interstate cooperation. The creation of jointly coordinated freight shipment routes with homogeneous technical and legal parameters were mere responses to concrete operational and market-driven demands. In 2012-2013, the Visegrád governments elaborated a common position on the implementation of the EU regulation n. 913/2010 that created a competitive European rail freight network. The list of initial routes included five RFCs crossing V4 territories (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018, p. 29).²³

¹⁹ Visegradgroup.eu, 2013. The Hungarian Presidency in the Visegrád Group (2013–2014). (visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/20132014-hungarian, accessed on 06-12-2019).

²⁰ DTCP, 2014. A stream of cooperation – 2014TC16M6TN001 (interreg-danube.eu/media/download/57, accessed on 06-12-2019).

²¹ The research's discourse analysis as regards V4 railway policies involved a research of available Visegrád Group presidency programmes and was carried out on a time horizon from 2008 until 2019. It can be stated that the different railway-related topics are frequently and consequently mentioned in such documents as one of the most important pillars of the V4 transport development aims. The topics reflect the actual EU railway strategies: TEN-T projects, ETCS-proliferation, elimination of bottlenecks, (re-)opening of border-crossings, and high-speed railway constructions.

²² Visegradgroup.eu, 2015. V4 Trust-Program for the Czech Presidency of the Visegrád Group (July 2015 – June 2016) (think.visegradfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Think-Visegrad_Czech-V4-Presidency-Mid-term-review.pdf, accessed on 06-12-2019).

²³ RFCs are cross-border governance structures involving ministries, infrastructure managers, railway undertakings and logistics terminals.

Map 1. Rail Freight Corridors 2018

Source: RNE, 2019

A practical example for the illustration of supra-state (EU) policies spilling over into regional railway unification is the Union's support for the homogenisation of traffic management systems in Europe. All V4 countries take part in the cooperation launched in 2005 by the European Commission, manufacturers, infrastructure managers as well as undertakings from the rail industries of EU Member States to deploy the European Rail Traffic Management System („ERTMS”) on the key rail network of the Community.²⁴ Therefore, the EU's

²⁴ ERTMS is an automatic train protection and safety standard allowing the construction of an interoperable railway system in the EU amid compliance with speed restrictions and signalling status. The Association of the European Rail Industry („UNIFE”) elaborated ERTMS in close cooperation with the European Union, railway stakeholders and the GSM-

economic, social, and territorial cohesion strategies have been used in the V4 region as financial tools and coordinating mechanisms of initiatives aimed at harmonising technical and safety regulations of the railway networks²⁵. Since 2009, these four states have agreed to intensify their efforts in supporting the development of the ERTMS deployment in the region²⁶.²⁷

As far as railway modernisation is considered, the interest articulation activities of V4 states as regards the use of European international financial tools is decisive. Research conducted in articles published from January 2016 until November 2019 by the Brussels-based European railway lobby organisation (CER) in its weekly periodical (CER Monitor) identified 14 hits for the term „CEF” (and its name variant „Connecting Europe Facility”) to be mentioned in relation to V4 railway projects out of the total 73 articles written on the topic of CEF funds. Additionally, in the above-noted timeframe, the term „Cohesion Fund” (and its name variant „CF”) appeared in relation to railway developments in Visegrád countries in 7 different CER Monitor articles out of the total 24 publications written on the broader topic of Cohesion Funds. Research of the aforementioned sources and in the above-indicated timeframe yielded 12 results for the term „Rail Freight Corridor” (and its name variant „RFC”) out of which a total of 6 articles were found to be related to V4 mobility cooperation. The term „EIB” (or its name variation „European Investment Bank”), in turn, was identified 27 times in CER Monitor publications, out of which 6 were written in the context of railway modernisations in the Visegrád zone. Last but not least, in the above-noted timeframe and sources, a total of 7 articles contained the term „European Regional Development Fund” (or its name variation „ERDF”), out of which 2 articles focused on projects launched in V4 countries.

A multimodal Trans-European Transport Network („TEN-T”) equipped with innovative transport technologies strengthens the internal market, increases competition, generates higher employment rates, reduces congestions, cuts emissions of greenhouse gases and boosts transport safety and speed. Since their accession to the EU, V4 states have supported undertakings designed to strengthen

R industry in order to replace the different national train control and command systems in the EU (ERTMS, 2019).

²⁵ Interreg, 2014. Cooperation Programme V-A Slovakia-Hungary 2014-2020 (www.palyazat.gov.hu/download.php?objectId=1081471, accessed on 06-12-2019)

²⁶ Visegradgroup.eu, 2009. Programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group (July 2009 – June 2010) (visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2009-2010-hungarian-110412, accessed on 06-12-2019)

²⁷ According to recent deployment plan deadlines, the system on the core network corridors passing through the V4 Region will be implemented within a five-six-year term (European Commission, 2017: 3/10-27).

the cooperation in the areas of TEN-T systems²⁸. Visegrád countries have become integral parts of some of the priority transport axes, and the creation or enhancement of such routes is given a special priority in their Cooperation (Lackenbauer, 2004, p. 152). In addition, the creation of crossborder traffic routes promotes and prioritises community spirit over national interests, giving rise to European added values. As opposed to RFCs, TEN-T policies follow top-down tendencies in a sense that initiatives, the elaboration works and the decisions related to the creation of such lines are all normally made by EU bodies primarily based on community interests.

Moravcsik (2005, p. 8; p. 359) assumes there is a social scientific consensus claiming that the primary motives of integration of states have been rather exogenous than endogenous. The pursuit of economic interests (the development of rail transport network and services) is one of these external fundamental forces underlying integration. One must not forget about the economic and political pressures arising from the ever-changing technological and industrial circumstances. Shifts in trade links, national security concerns, and directions of diplomacy may also push governments for stronger integration on the basis of convergence of state interests (Moravcsik, 2005, p. 360).

The involvement of state actors in regional railway integration was also evident in 2009, when the Visegrád Group declared its readiness to promote the European integration of countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU also by facilitating the construction of reliable road, rail and energy networks in the region²⁹. V4 governments agreed that the future EU Member States had to be linked to the Community via fast and reliable transport routes, therefore, they suggested programs for the intensification of the four countries' efforts to support the development of international rail freight corridors and road infrastructure within the TEN-T network³⁰. The bargaining power of these four states combined in this case was sufficient to enable them to be the advocates and promoters of the extension of the TEN-T core network towards the Western

²⁸ Visegradgroup.eu, 2008. Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrád Group (July 2008 - June 2009) (visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2008-2009-polish-110412, accessed on 06-12-2019)

²⁹ MFA, 2009. The Visegrád Group stands ready to promote the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans. visegradgroup.eu/2009/the-Visegrad-group (accessed: 06-12-2019); Visegrad.info, 2010. Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership countries meeting in Budapest (visegrad.info/enp---eastern-dimension/fe_event/foreign-ministers-of-the-easternpartnership-countries-meeting-in-budapest.html, accessed on 06-12-2019)

³⁰ The Slovak Presidency in the Visegrád Group (2010–2011), visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2010-2011-slovak-110412 (accessed: 06-12-2019); Annual Implementation Report of the Program of the Presidency of the Slovak Republic in the Visegrád Group (1 July 2010 – 30 June 2011). Annual Reports of the Visegrád Group's Presidencies.

Balkans in order to ensure closer integration of those six states in the EU (European Commission, 2015).

All things considered, intergovernmental cooperation sometimes evolves from „trial and error situations”, as a mere result of many unsuccessful experiments of collective policy making (Kühnhardt, 2008, p. 143). Neither the neofunctionalist, nor the liberal intergovernmentalist framework is fully satisfactory on its own; however, they mutually explain each other’s weaknesses (Mattli and Slaughter, 1998, p. 183). The claims of both intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism meet in Arne Niemann’s view, who says that „*functional integration of one task inevitably leads to problems which can be only be solved by integrating yet more*” (Niemann, 2006, p. 17). Both neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism prioritise supranational or national elites and interest groups over the population (Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 20).

Conclusions - Neither neofunctionalism nor liberal intergovernmentalism

Neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism mutually explain each other’s weaknesses. Both frameworks say that functional integration in one field leads to further integration. Both neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism prioritise supranational or national elites and interest groups over the population. Intergovernmental negotiations are natural elements of dynamically and ever-changing linkages between states (and different government levels). Both approaches have to be reshaped and updated in some ways to better fit the political landscape of the Visegrád region. There are cases when the „community spirit” of two or more states cannot be derived from a positivist „sense of belonging” philosophy, nor can it be explained by win-win situations when governments realise that the shifting of power to supranational levels does not necessarily hurt state interests. Sometimes, intergovernmental cooperation evolves as a result of many unsuccessful experiments of collective policy making.

In the case of the V4 region, the liberal intergovernmentalist theoretical framework describes how spillovers between two policy areas are primarily driven by higher governmental intents (as opposed to core EU states). Therefore, the convergence of integration areas within the V4 countries naturally involves political-level decision-making that could be a sharp difference *vis-à-vis* Western European countries. However, the interest articulation activities of V4 states as far as European international financial tools are concerned shows us that spillovers would hardly take place without the EU’s legal-institutional framework.

The intention of the incumbent Visegrád governments to upgrade and add new connections to the existing east-west and north-south transportation routes have spilled over into an interconnected railroad network within the Visegrád area; their main scope, however, has been to better exploit the business opportunities of the Eurasian freight services that are slowly shifting from road and maritime routes to

rail (Tóth, 2018, p. 158). The rail freight transport market has started to grow in the region, and for 2017, the Czech, the Hungarian, the Polish and the Slovak railway systems reported promising figures for the intensity of use mostly driven by freight utilisation. The improvement of rail linkages stimulates economic development by boosting business relations and tourism. Transport cooperation also shows how non-converging economic interests can be offset by shared values and political will. Visegrád states compete with each other on the Eurasian freight corridors; however, the V4s have decided that the development of North-South transport linkages is also particularly important to them. The V4 railway collaboration is therefore an excellent example of the viability of the V4 formula: policy coordination is effectuated where strategic interests meet.

EU institutions have launched investment initiatives in regional transport connections strengthening the internal trade within the V4 Region and its economic connections to other Member States (Tóth, 2018b, p. 162). Such projects spilled into the demand for constructing denser rail connections and launching more reliable train services. Traffic network development can be interpreted in a century-long historical perspective, while its topicality and relevance will most probably remain always constant. Railway integration in the V4 region is thus an ongoing process driven by bottom-up and top-down spillovers deriving from gradual decisions and actual, concrete economic interests of sub-state, state or supra-state actors.

As this study only provides a general insight to railway development interest articulation in Visegrád states, future research should be focused on the political motivations of each infrastructure projects present in the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. Further papers could investigate the possible impacts of railway developments on the employment, cultural and business relations, travel habits, tourism, and environmental protection in the Visegrád area.

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