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Democratic Consciousness in C-E Europe-Identity and Differences between the V4 countries and Ukraine

Development of Democracy in the Visegrád Countries after the Democratic transformation

SUMMARY¹

Post-communist countries underwent democratic transitions in various ways. Therefore, the study's main emphasis is on the Visegrád countries and a comparison between the referred states, Austria, and Ukraine. The usage of such comparison is to establish a democratic development benchmark, in which the progress or regress of the Visegrád countries can be measured with relation to their democratic transitions. The study also highlights fundamental democratic structural changes and the traces of the socialism remnants in the Visegrád states. The approach taken in this study combines two methods of evaluation; the first is expert analysis, whereas the second is an analysis based on interviews with citizens of the Visegrád countries. By illustrating the three generations' debate, the shift of research interests in the past three

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generations is comprehensible. The first generation focused on institutionalizing democracy, the second generation widened the realm of research by observing and analysing political and social indicators, whereas the third generation examined and observed the quality of the democracy that has been established in the post-Communist countries. Thus, the quality of democracy is first measured by using expert analysis.

The expert analysis constitutes of two parts, the Freedom House Index and the Democracy Barometer. The Freedom House Index's evaluation focuses mainly on political rights and civil liberties. The outcome of Freedom House Index recognizes the Visegrád countries as consolidated democracies, where their score scores range between 2.14 and 2.86 in the democracy ratings. Despite their performance, Visegrád countries still underperform in the field of rule of law. Moreover, Freedom House's 2013 data clearly illustrates that Poland is the most democratic country, while Hungary is underperforming by being placed last in comparison to other Visegrád countries due to the government's strong grip on independent institutions. Through the Democracy Barometer, with the exception of Slovakia, other Visegrád countries' scores are established on the basis of freedom, control and equality. It is evident, that since the fall of the Berlin Wall opinions on democracy are improving. This stagnated in the '90s and proceeded to decline since the 2000s. The general trend of the Visegrád countries, with the exception of Slovakia, is that they perform worst in the realm of political equality, whereas the control dimension have seen a constant improvement throughout this period. With respects to political inequality, Slovakia's performance started to improve in comparison to that of Hungary, which experienced a drop starting from the mid-90s. On the other hand, Czech Republic and Poland did not experience any change within this dimension. Moving to the development of freedom, the Visegrád countries encountered an average decline after three years of their democratic transformation. Furthermore, Hungary is taking the lead in the domain of freedom

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contrary to Slovakia, which is being placed last. With regards to the control dimension, the Visegrád countries saw an increase in the control dimension at the beginning of the '90s, which was then shifted to a steady decline. The reason behind such deterioration is the limited political party competition in Hungary, the dependence of the judicial powers on the executive branch in Poland, and the unstable governance in the Czech Republic through several time intervals. Still, the Czech Republic maintains a rise in its control index compared to Hungary and Poland.

Just as countless studies and surveys have testified, reinforced with a myriad of experiences with emerging and already established democratic states, the stability of a democratic society ultimately rests on the attitudes and degree of active civic engagement of the citizens. The Post-Communist Visegrád countries are no stranger to the complexity of variables that determine and shape democratization. Theories that claim to explain the democratic attitudes of citizens are manifold, mainly differing in whether they put the emphasis on long-term elements of democracy evaluation, most-importantly the individual's political socialization, or on short-term, temporary factors, such as the governments' ability to generate wealth. According to studies conducted on long-term influences, the cultural environment of the individual in which it was socialized has a considerable influence, together with gender age, class and level of education, in determining its values with regards to the acceptance of a democratic regime. However, there was no evidence found on the generational differences in this regard in Visegrád countries.

Academic theories which link a country's economic performance to its citizen's support for democracy appear to be validated by surveys conducted in Visegrád countries, as these studies affirmed that evaluation of economic performance is the most relevant in Central Eastern Europe, as opposed to Western Europe. The citizens of these emerging democracies gave a higher importance to the state's ability to ensure their welfare, blaming democracy for the recent

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economic decline in their respective countries, with the Poles and the Slovaks having the worst opinions about democracy's influence on the economy. Fortunately these long- and short-term effects do not exclude but complement each other, with certain academics emphasizing the lifelong learning of democratic values, with finding one's way in politics playing an important role in the development of a democracy. Sadly, the interest of citizens in Visegrád countries to seek information and engage themselves politically declined gradually during the ten years following the millennium, with Hungarian citizens showing the lowest degree of participation in demonstrations among the analyzed countries since its democratic transformation. In order to have an even handed account of citizens' attitudes towards democracy, both satisfaction with and support for democracy are to be assessed. The degree and content of citizen support varies, and as such there are people who are in favor of this type of government in general, citizens who are critical of the way it has taken form in their country, and, finally, those who it as not the best form of government. Studies found out that at the turn of the millennium Visegrád Countries were still behind Western Europe as regards the support for democracy, nevertheless showing a high number of people who espouse democracy but are critical of its assumed state in the respective countries. Moreover, when compared to Austria, which has a long democratic tradition, Visegrád countries showed a greater acceptance of military dictatorships or the image of a strong leader, with Poland at the top.

In regards of Visegrád country residents viewing satisfaction with democracy as closely related to the evaluation of the government's performance, surveys evidenced that apart from Hungary, support for democracy decreased in the 1990s. Additional studies concluded that during the turn of the millennium, with the exception of the Czech Republic, all the Visegrád Countries rated the communist regime higher than the current democratic regimes, revealing a lingering sense of general nostalgia for the late communist era in the region.