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## Joining of the Visegrad Four Countries the EU (on the Example of relations with the Czech Republic and Slovakia)

The turn of the XX-XXI centuries was marked by important changes in the contemporary system of international relations. Europe has received a new impetus to increase its status on the world stage as a centre of power in the form of the European Union. Significant geographical expansion of the EU and deepening of integration processes took place not least, from one hand, taking into consideration the support of the Federal Republic of Germany; and on the other hand, thanks to the strategic line of the post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, first of all the Visegrad Group. The successes of the countries in the region require Ukraine's attention to their successful practice.

In the early 90's of the XX century 13 independent states emerged in the post-socialist space of CEE. Árpád Göncz, the first president of post-socialist Hungary, became one of the initiators and organizers of the Visegrad Group, which included Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland, which agreed to pursue a coordinated policy. This group is named after the place of the first meeting of the presidents of these countries – Visegrad – a Hungarian city located 40 km north of Budapest. With the creation in 1991 of the Visegrad Association, which had a historical analogue, this form of cooperation has become one of the key catalysts for the European integration of these countries<sup>1</sup>. In January 1993, Czechoslovakia split into two sovereign states, each with its own concept of political and economic reform. It is believed that the Czech Republic was the most consistent among the CEE countries to carry out market reforms based on conservative-liberal ideas.

The modern historic period is characterized by a number of new attributes and dimensions, in particular on the European continent: the emergence of new

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<sup>1</sup> Ukraina v Yevropi: poshuky spilnoho maibutnoho [Ukraine in Europa: die Suche nach einer gemeinsamen Zukunft]. Za red. ANDRII KUDRIACHENKO. Kyiv. Phenix. 2009. S 149.

democracies on the international arena, advancement of integration processes and the considerable enlargement of the European Union that has turned from the Western European organization into a continental formation<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to take into account the appropriate approaches to these processes in sustainable democracies. Thus, having achieved the strategic goal of the German unification, German politicians faced the need to adjust relations with the CEE countries, which sought to join the integration process on the continent. For Bonn, and then Berlin, the primary imperative was the formation of relations with the immediate eastern neighbours of Germany – the Visegrad countries. From the very beginning, the foreign policy of the united Germany towards this group of countries provided for the establishment of bilateral partnerships with them, enshrined in the relevant treaties. During the 1990-s and at the beginning of the XXI century Germany supported the integration aspirations of the Visegrad countries to European structures, helped these countries become members of the Council of Europe, gain associate membership in the EU, and eventually membership in integration associations. Compared to the previous historical period, the format, content and direction of bilateral relations have changed.

German-Czech and German-Slovak relations, both in terms of historical heritage and from a strategic perspective, began to be filled with new content and eventually covered almost all areas of bilateral cooperation<sup>3</sup>. With German support, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been more successful in joining the European Union and NATO. One of the forms of cooperation between the parties was cooperation within the euro regions. Due to this, the function of borders was strengthened in a combination of constructive efforts. Germany supported the signing of the Central European Free Trade Agreement between Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic on December 21, 1992 in Krakow, which entered into force on March 1, 1993.

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<sup>2</sup> ANDRII KUDRIACHENKO. Ukraine and the Visegrad Four: Current Status and Prospects for the Cooperation. 20. Münchner Bohemisten-Treffen (2016). Forum für Tschechien- und Slowakeiforschung, Exposé Nr. 18.

<sup>3</sup> VIKTORIJA SOLOŠENKO. Spiwrobitnyztwo Federatiwnoii Respubliki Nimeččyny z krainamy Višegradskoi grupy (na prykladi vidnosyn iz Čechieju ta Slowaččynoju) [Zusammenarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland mit den Ländern der Visegrád-Gruppe (am Beispiel der Beziehungen mit Tschechien und Slowakei)]. In: Universitet 2011. № 5. S. 42-54.

However, even in view of Germany's supportive policy of transformation in the region, the problems of German-Czech and German-Slovak relations at the turn of the century remain insufficiently studied in both domestic and foreign historiography. German researchers paid much more attention to German-French and German-Polish relations. Only some aspects of German-Czech and German-Slovak cooperation in the 1990-s–2000-s were analyzed by R. Beushausen, D. Blumenwitz, M. Vítková, H. Lemberg. An important addition in this context is the work of Slovak researchers A. Vavrin, D. Golner, which examines the relations between Germany and Slovakia in various fields. In domestic research, as it was rightly stated by Gorbachev, a number of aspects of the peculiarities of German-Czech and German-Slovak relations remain unexplored today, there is no comparative approach.

The analysis shows that the formation and development of German-Czech relations during the democratic changes had a significant impact on the atmosphere and the whole course of events on the continent. This was confirmed by the establishment in February 1990 of a joint German-Czechoslovak historical commission, the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation by Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1992, and the discussion at the highest level of the inherited aggravating problems of the Sudeten Germans in April 1993. In January 1997, the German-Czech Joint Declaration on Bilateral Relations and their Future Development was signed. In this document, Germany and the Czech Republic recognized that “past injustice belongs to the past”; Germany acknowledged its responsibility for the Munich Agreement of 1938; The Czech Republic apologized for the post-war brutal evictions of Sudeten Germans. At the same time, the issue of returning property to deportees (Germans) remained open. I note that in the Czech Republic, as in Poland, national law clearly prohibits the deported Germans in the post-war period to buy land.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the inherited historical aggravating components of German-Czech relations were largely overcome under the rule of the “red-green” government coalition led by G. Schroeder. In addition to the political will of two leaders, this was facilitated by the activities of a bilateral commission of historians, the German Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation Foundation, the payment of financial compensation to victims of Nazism, the closure of the Temelin nuclear power plant, and so on.

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<sup>4</sup> A. YU. MARTINOV. Obiednana Nimechchyna: vid «Bonnskoi» do «Berlinskoi» respubliky (1990 – 2005) [Vereinigtes Deutschland: von "Bonn" bis "Berlin" (1990 – 2005)]. Kyiv. “Korporatsiia“, 2006; S. 280.

An important basis for increasing cooperation was the unequivocal support of Czechoslovakia for the process of German unification, economic and democratic reforms in the Czech Republic, and the openness of its economy to German business and tourism. In 1990, Czechoslovakia in the late 1990-s was visited by more than 40 million German citizens. The number of Czechs who visited Germany in 1995 was 16 million. Since the 1990-s, Germany has become the Czech Republic's leading economic partner. During 1993-2002 German entrepreneurs invested 11.4 billion of euros into the Czech economy, which accounted for a third of all foreign investment. The largest German investor was the automobile concern Volkswagen, which began cooperating with the Czech car plant Skoda. The main links to which investments were directed were the production and sale of cars and electrical goods, support for various industrial projects.

Germany has also played a significant role in supporting the Czech Republic's integration intentions towards NATO and the EU. Thus, the German Bundeswehr became the largest partner of the Czech army. Beginning in 1994, there were joint exercises of the armed forces of Germany and the Czech Republic<sup>5</sup>.

German-Czech cultural relations developed more balanced than German-Polish ones during the period under study, primarily because they were not burdened by the issue of mutual return of cultural values. The German-Czech agreement on cultural cooperation entered into force on June 15, 2001. The agreement was reached on cooperation in the fields of media, youth exchange, cooperation between sports associations, schools, and cooperation between partner cities was resumed. As a part of the German-Czech cultural cooperation, the festival of Czech art and culture was held regularly in Berlin, which includes musical and theatrical performances, various exhibitions and video projects. All this contributes to the formation of the new and multidimensional relations between two states.

German-Slovak relations in the 1990-s – at the beginning of the XXI century developed traditionally on a friendly basis. The first Slovak state (1939-1944), which existed under Hitler's control, did not leave a legacy that would complicate relations between the states, as it was in the case of German-Polish and German-Czech relations.

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<sup>5</sup> YU. S. GORBACH. Z istorii nimetsko-cheskykh vidnosyn u 90-kh pp. 20 st. [Aus der Geschichte der deutsch-tschechischen Beziehungen in den 90er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts]. In: Visnyk Kyivskoho slavistychnoho universytetu. Serii: Istorii. 2004. № 18, S. 30.

A very significant role in the formation of German-Slovak relations played The German-Czechoslovak Treaty of Good Neighbourliness of February 27, 1992. The treaty emphasized that “The contracting parties recognize the borders existing between them and confirm that they will not have any territorial claims to each other in the future, strive for multilateral peaceful and partnership cooperation”<sup>6</sup>. The signing of relevant agreements on contract workers, foreign workers and their social security and taxation, on environmental protection, on cultural relations, teacher exchange agreements and cooperation between schools contributed to the further strengthening of bilateral relations.

At all levels of German-Slovak relations – the state, lands, communities – in the early 1990-s. numerous bilateral contacts began to develop and mutual visits intensified. Thus, the number of Slovak citizens who have been employed in Germany for a short or long time has been constantly growing. In 2001, for example, more than 20,000 Slovaks received a work visa in Germany. From the German side, many tourists come to Slovakia: more than 170 thousand annually over the past ten years. According to this indicator, Germany takes the third place after the Czech Republic and Poland.

At the same time, Germany remains Slovakia's main foreign investor, with more than 2.0 billion of euro at the end of 2007, ahead of the Netherlands and Austria. Comparing the spectrum of Germany's relations with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, it should be emphasized that they have not developed as actively as with Poland. Relations with Hungary – developed in a balanced way, resulting from the lack of controversial unresolved issues. Relations between the independent Czech and Slovak republics and Germany were complicated by political differences between the two new states. Germany's economic relations with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, given the state of their economies in the early 1990-s were important, especially given the processes of industrial restructuring, the needs of economic development on the basis of market relations.

An important area of cooperation between Berlin and Prague and Bratislava was the process of EU enlargement to the East. Negotiations on the

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<sup>6</sup> YU. S. GORBACH. Nimetsko-slovatski vidnosyny u 1990-ti pp. 20 na pochatku 21 st. [Deutsch-slowakische Beziehungen in den 1990er Jahren des 20. zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts]. In: Visnyk Kyivskoho slavistychnoho universytetu. Serii: istoriia. 2005. № 20. S. 74.

Czech Republic's joining the EU were launched in 1998, and Slovakia in 1999. After NATO enlargement in 1999, it was about enlarging the EU at the expense of: Central and Eastern European countries. Germany spoke in support of Slovakia, in particular, it also endorsed its aspiration to join NATO.

With the joining the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary the European Union in 2004, the current stage of development of relations between the Visegrad Group countries and Germany began. Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in Paris stressed that Germany and France play a leading role in Europe, while the countries of Central and Eastern Europe occupy an important place in the European policy of Germany. On the side of Germany and France lies “common responsibility” for helping these countries.

Summing up the practice of cooperation between Germany and the Visegrad Group, in particular the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the following should be noted. Germany has been active in strengthening relations both in the united Europe itself and in pursuing a policy of good neighbourliness with the Visegrad Group and taking concrete steps towards democratization and modernization in its neighbours, which are now full members of the European Union. The practice of cooperation between Germany and the Czech Republic and Slovakia is evidenced by a wide range of relationships, the parties' focus on a selective approach, overcoming existing problems and a burdensome historical heritage. However, the vulnerability of the latter problem urgently requires more balanced approaches on each side. Improving the overall political climate in the relations of the countries which policies we have analyzed is one of the tasks of a united Europe in the formation of a common European identity.

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