

## Central and Eastern European issues as seen through the eyes of Czech students

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### Summary:

This article focuses on the different understanding of some Central and Eastern European issues among young generation. The notion of Eastern Europe, the existence of the Visegrád Cooperation Group and the initiative of Eastern Partnership is being observed through the eyes of Czech university students. The main goal is to investigate the awareness and knowledge level of a selected group of Czech students about the existence and activity of V4 Group and its potential to act effectively in pursuing the EaP initiative. The awareness of the so called "Eastern Europe" among European as well as Czech population also varies. To get relevant answers a questionnaire was carried out among a reference students group of the University of Economics in Prague.

### Keywords:

Visegrád Cooperation, Eastern Europe, Eastern Partnership, students questionnaire

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The year 2009 was a year of many anniversaries. From the many we remembered the beginning of the Second World War, the establishment of NATO, the Velvet revolution, the fall of the Berlin wall, the Eastern EU enlargement, NATO enlargement etc. When we think about the nature of these events one common point stands out: all these events have something to do with the issue of borders. On this occasion, there were many commemorative events on the academic as well as popular level taking place throughout Europe. However, one conference theme<sup>1</sup> made a significant impression with its accuracy, as it went „Borders on our mind, borders of the mind“. And exactly this motto is quite suitable characteristics for the situation in the Visegrád countries. The reason why is quite obvious. Their position in the central part of Europe together with historical development has somehow predetermined this territory to be concerned with the question of borders throughout the whole history. Only from the latest events, let us mention the Velvet revolution and the symbolic return of Visegrád countries back to Europe, by means of joining the EU, NATO and other European and transatlantic organizations. The last biggest event was the Schengen entry of nine new Member states that was described as the final incorporation of these

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<sup>1</sup> It was a theme of the international CEEISA conference in St. Petersburg in September 2009.

post communist countries back to Europe and as the confirmation that these new member states are full fledged members of the EU as well as the so called “Western” world. Europe has thus been unified.

In this article, the Visegrád countries are in the focus of the attention. First, the Visegrád Four Group is looked upon as a group balancing between Central and Eastern Europe. Second, the Group is presupposed to play a special role vis-a-vis the Eastern Partnership. In order to manifest this Group’s role, we have to have a substantial knowledge about the Group itself as well as about the initiative. However, it is not the aim to give a comprehensive analysis of three mentioned concepts (Eastern Europe, V4 and Eastern Partnership) now; we only present a brief introduction into these concepts. The main goal is to investigate the awareness and knowledge level of a selected group of Czech students about the existence and activity of V4 group and its potential to act effectively in pursuing the EaP initiative. The awareness of the so called Eastern Europe among European as well as Czech population also varies. Moreover, different thinking of Eastern Europe is crucial for the eventual unity of Europe. While analyzing the results of this study, we can get a partial picture of the general attitude of Czech young generation towards (regional) political matters. Thus, this article tries to provoke a question about the awareness and knowledge level of students and its shortages.

## **1. Visegrád Group, Central-Eastern Europe and the Eastern Partnership**

First, I would like to focus on the Visegrád Group itself and debates on this issue, later very briefly on the notion of Eastern and Central Europe and last on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a new initiative that aims at cross-bridging the borders between the European Union and the Eastern Europe and the role of the Visegrád Group in its implementation.

The Visegrád Group<sup>2</sup> was established as a unique regional project of a loose political structure uniting four Central European countries and facilitating their “return back to Europe”. They all shared common far and recent history, culture and identity of belonging to Central Europe. They all realized that they need to implement overall political, economic and social transformation of their economies and societies that would be rather painful. The jointly perceived needs, interests and goals resulted in close cooperation and coordination. They created loose cooperation platform based on joint meetings of state representatives called the Visegrád Group. Visegrád Group since 1991 has not only served as a dialogue

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed information about the V4 see the official web site [www.visegradgroup.eu](http://www.visegradgroup.eu), or the monography of VYKOUKAL, J. *Visegrád – možnosti a meze středoevropské spolupráce*. Praha: Dokořán, 2003. ISBN 80-86569-34-9 or of LUKÁČ, P. *Dejiny a zahraničná politika v strednej Európe*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2004. ISBN 80-7149-594-8.

facilitation platform but also as a trademark of good cooperation practice in the eyes of Western countries. The main goals of the V4 Group were to fully and speedily integrate the countries into the EU and NATO.

The V4 has experienced some turbulent times when the political will to mutually cooperate on a regional platform diminished as the V4 was seen as a brake and obstacle of faster individual advance towards the EU and NATO. However, as the EU and NATO enlargement became tangible, these tendencies were overshadowed by joint cooperative approach towards European and Transatlantic integration. In 2004, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia reached their ultimate post Cold War goals and became full members of the European Union and NATO. However, this historical turning point has brought about a new wave of questions and debates about the existence of the Group. Many academic scholars, political representatives or citizens have doubted the necessity of such loose, virtual and often quarrelling Group and suggested its dissolution. However, the prevailing main stream attitude has stick up to the V4 Group and enforced its continuation. The V4 has reevaluated its goals and has adapted them on the situation within the EU and NATO. Still, it must be said that the V4 is still searching for its place in European agenda and looking for ways of maximum utilization of existing platform of cooperation in a new environment.

However, the debate about the V4 existence has been alive since and has not had any outright answer. Still, the reality is that the Visegrád Group still exists and has a great although unused potential to become a strong and established coalition within the enlarged EU.

One very negative fact that to a great degree undermines the potential of the V4 Group is the low level of awareness and knowledge among Visegrád citizens about this structure. Many formal and informal surveys<sup>3</sup> permanently show that the awareness level about the Visegrád Cooperation is very low, especially among Czech population. The highest knowledge and positive attitude tends to be in Slovakia, as the Slovak Republic thanks to Visegrád for helping the country to get back on the European track after the 4 year autocratic and pro-Eastern rule of Prime Minister V. Mečiar. Slovakia has ever since taken the leadership in promoting the common cooperation. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, has always had a rather reserved and cold relationship towards the V4 Group. It has often stressed, especially through its former Prime Minister and current President V. Klaus, the interest in economic cooperation only (if any) and political Visegrád Cooperation took as an artificial creation induced by the West. That is why the awareness level is rather low and mostly negative or indifferent. Poland and Hungary represent rather stable members as far as the attitude is concerned.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the survey of Olga GYARFÁŠOVÁ Visegrád as Viewed by Citizens. Available at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=923&articleID=4067&ctag=articlelist&iid=1> (25.4.2010).

When it comes to the awareness level, Polish citizens and politicians take Visegrád as a useful regional tool (sometimes seen as a tool of regional hegemony) with positive connotation of common historical, cultural and ethnic ties. Hungary uses V4 as a tool to bring closer their Balkan Neighbours and especially to unite Hungarian minorities living in surrounding countries.

Thus, we come out of the premise that the awareness level of the Visegrád citizens is rather small as far as the V4 is concerned.

Moreover, while the notions of Central and Eastern Europe is known and understood by the older generations that experienced geopolitical changes of the late 80s and early 90s, younger generations are quite distant from such debates about the labelling of V4 countries as Central or Eastern Europe. However, Central Europe has a significant meaning not only from a geographic point of view, but especially because of the history that hides behind. We are not talking only about the old history of belonging to great empires under Europe-wide ruling dynasties, but mostly about the history of last decades. Last two decades have become a symbol of a successful transformation from the planned to market economy and from communism to democracy. Later on, the Central European countries have managed to come near the Western integration structures in a relatively short time and eventually became full members only 15 years after the collapse of the global system. Central Europe is thus well perceived as a big success. On the other hand, Eastern Europe has rather negative connotation as it evokes instability, poverty, underdevelopment, non democracy, old regime and other issues. It is obvious that we cannot compare Belarus with Czech Republic, or Kazakhstan with Slovakia. However, the boundary between Eastern and Central Europe is still rather blurred and the Eastern Europe thus has very differentiated and sensitive meaning.

Many authors, especially American and European ones, use – instead clear division between these two concepts – the name Central-(and)Eastern Europe. On one hand, they avoid the chance of an offensive addressing of a particular country that sees itself on the other island. On the other hand, they mix countries of a distinct political and economic development and compare incomparable.<sup>4</sup>

From our understanding, the Visegrád countries want to be called Central European. They have strived hard since the end of 80s to get rid of the labelling “Eastern Europe” and to be renamed to “Central Europe”. The concept of Central Europe contains more than just pure Geography. It also covers their transformation success and European ambitions and achievements.

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<sup>4</sup> There has been a great debate about the Central versus Eastern Europe especially around the Eastern enlargement period and later with the introduction of the Eastern Partnership. Some opinions can be also seen in Eurobarometer surveys, e.g. the one on the Views on European Union Enlargement from February 2009 or Eurobarometer 71 Future of Europe from January 2010. Both available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

The Eastern Partnership<sup>5</sup> (EaP) combines in a way elements of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Visegrád countries. We come out of the premise that easily speaking, it offers the Central European experience to Eastern European neighbours through the intermediary of the Visegrád Group.

The EaP is a very ambitious project that offers the Eastern European countries closer partnership with the EU. When you look at the map of Europe, you see the region of so called “Central-Eastern” Europe that borders with the countries included in the framework of the EaP. Let us point out only Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and to a certain extent the Czech Republic. These four countries grouped in the so called Visegrád Group V4 possess desirable preconditions to become active supporters of the EaP implementation. These include

1. geographic, ethnical and cultural proximity;
2. similar historical experience;
3. know-how and own experience of the transformation process and accession into the European and transatlantic organizations; and
4. established platforms for regional cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, they have on several occasions stressed their commitment to the Eastern Partnership as it concerns their national as well as European interests. The pursuing and supervision of the EaP can thus be seen as a good concretization of future Visegrád Group activity that is quit limited and stagnant at the moment.

## **2. The awareness level about the Eastern Europe, the V4 and EaP**

Because the question of borders and which countries belong to Europe and which don't is still very accurate and also because of the authors national background, I decided to make a small survey at the University of Economics in Prague (UEP) among students to find out how do they think about borders in Europe. The main aim of the survey was to validate the premise of low awareness and knowledge level of Czech young generation about mentioned regional issues. A questionnaire of several questions concerning the issues of Eastern Europe, EaP, V4 was prepared. There were two rounds of this questionnaire carried out, one in the summer semester 2008/2009 and the other in the winter semester of 2009/2010. Both times 100 students of “International trade” were asked to fill out the questionnaire forms. I am well aware that this is not big sample of students to give a complete precision. In spite of the fact that there were only

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<sup>5</sup> For further information see [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/eastern/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/index_en.htm).

<sup>6</sup> For more details see ZELENIČKÁ, Z. Eastern Partnership - What Role for the Czech Presidency in Pursuing the Eastern Partnership? Prague: Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, Nakladatelství Oeconomica, Working Papers, Volume III, č. 6/2009. ISSN 1802-6591.

100 students asked, the answers were very interesting and also representative for the young generation.

## 2.1 Methodology

As far as the selection of the respondents is concerned, a representative group consisting of students was chosen. It is important to mention that majority of the students asked were of Czech origin, with some Slovak students (about 10%). The first as well as the second reference group was made of students of 1st and 2nd grade students of the Masters programme International trade. These students study international and European affairs with the emphasis on the economy, commerce and trade, but don't necessarily study international and European politics, or international relations theory.

However, they should know about the European integration (economic and political since these are interconnected) and other regional processes in Europe. I supposed that they should have some, although not too deep, knowledge about the issues I was about to ask, acquired through education at the university. However, I also supposed this reference group might know more about asked topics as it concerns Central-European territory and has had significant impact on the political development of this area.

The method of non-probability convenience sampling<sup>7</sup> was chosen due to its easy, cheap and quick use. The one disadvantage is the uncertainty of generalization of the findings on the relevant population. However, for the use of this paper such method was sufficient and gave an overview of the general tendencies. The sample size was designed at 100 students as a representative sample from about 300 students of this programme taking one particular course at the particular semester (There were altogether 247 students in the first period, 320 in the second period). The group was fairly homogenous as it contained students of one programme. Other differences (age, sex, ...) within the groups were not relevant.

The survey was carried out twice throughout one year of 2009. The reason was to observe possible differences in outcomes due to significant political events taking place in the year 2009 with an important impact on the Czech society. Namely, it was the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2009 and the official launch of the Eastern Partnership at the end of this Presidency. It was supposed that the Czech Presidency would increase the interest in regional and European matters among general public. Moreover, the media coverage on regional and European matters increased significantly due to the EU

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<sup>7</sup> The methodology was based on the work of Eileen KANE *Doing your own research*. London: Marion Boyars, 1990. ISBN 0-7145-2843-9.

Presidency office. It was also supposed that because of Czech Presidency regional issues (regional cooperation) would be raised especially with the stress on Eastern European matters. The role of the Czech Republic as well as the Visegrád Group was supposed to strengthen due to special preconditions and historically induced characteristics of these states vis-a-vis Eastern Europe.

Respondents had sufficient time to complete the questionnaire; maximum of 30 minutes was needed.

The questionnaire had a form of open-ended questions with sufficient space to write their own answers. The method of open-ended questions was chosen to give the students chance to express their opinion in the way and in the words they prefer. Compared to the multiple choice questions, this method demands more creativity from the students' side. Moreover, it needs more time and work to analyze the results due to greater variety of answers. However, the method of open questions was used as the answers better describe the knowledge level of students than the limited pre-given answers of multiple choice method.

There were several questions in the questionnaire in three basic areas:

- What does the „Eastern Europe“ mean to you?
- What do you know about the Visegrád Group?
- What do you know about the Eastern Partnership?

In this questionnaire, the thesis about the great potential of the Visegrád Group in the realization and implementation of the EaP policy was followed. The main task was to find out how much do the students of 1st and 2nd grade of the Masters programme of International trade at the UEP know about these issues and how do they make connection between them. In the questionnaire, students were asked about three issues in following order: Eastern Europe, Visegrád 4, and the Eastern Partnership. I think that all these three sets of issues have the same denominator – one of borders in Europe and what according to them belongs to Europe, or in other words to the EU and the rest of Europe.

### 3. Analyzing the results

After collecting of filled questionnaire forms, I started with the evaluation process. Because the answers to the open questions were various, I sorted them into several categories according to the main idea or the point the respondent was trying to make. I assigned the answers to these categories and finally came with a percentage of total sample. In each table, there are two numbers according to two questionnaires of summer and winter semester. The summer semester 2008/2009 is labeled as “Period 1”, the winter semester 2009/2010 is labeled as “Period 2”.

### 3.1 “What does the „Eastern Europe“ mean to you?”

The exact wording of the first question was “What does the „Eastern Europe“ mean to you?”. The results were as follows:

**Table 1: Percentage value for the question “What does the „Eastern Europe“ mean to you?”**

Answer	Percentage from 100 students Period 1	Percentage from 100 students Period 2
Anything to the east of the Czech Rep.	21 %	19 %
Anything to the east of the Slovak Rep.	11 %	9 %
Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, ...	23 %	29 %
Countries of former Soviet block	36 %	36 %
Czech Rep., Slovak Rep., Poland, and further to the east ...	5 %	5 %
No answer	4 %	2 %

Before analyzing the answers to the first question about the “Eastern Europe”, we need to say that there is no single answer even among the scientists what the ‘Eastern Europe’ actually is. Considering this factor the answers about the nature of the Eastern Europe were to a certain extent subjective but very interesting.

Looking at the results, more than one third of respondents answered that under “the Eastern Europe” they understand countries of the former Soviet block. The answers varied in the later account of what countries they meant under “former Soviet block”, most of them mentioning Russia, Baltic countries, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine. 23 % of students explicitly mentioned countries as Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Baltic and Balkan states. In the second period, this number increased to 29 %. The reason for such difference could be seen in the events connected with the evaluations of the Czech Presidency of the Council and the launch of the Eastern Partnership. More attention was paid to the successes and failures of the Presidency and its impact on foreign affairs. 21 % and respectively 19 % answered that Eastern Europe starts to the east of the Czech Republic, whereas 11 % in the first period and 9 % in the second one said it starts to the east of the Slovak Republic. More than 5 % included the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the category “Eastern Europe”.

However, there were not many differences between two periods as far as the first question is concerned. The question about Eastern Europe is a very subjective and a consistent one not undergoing any dramatic changes throughout the time. Every opinion is based on the past education, personal experience and knowledge as well as on the general mood and position towards this issue.

At this point it would be wise to note that the Central European countries as they are now called (especially Czech Rep., Slovak Rep., Poland, Hungary) have strived hard to get rid of the name "Eastern Europe". Such name was used during the Cold war era to describe countries belonging to the then Soviet block. After the fall of the Iron curtain and the Velvet revolution, the return back to Europe, or even better to the Western Europe, became a leading idea of the next decade. The entry of Visegrád countries into the Council of Europe, EU and NATO has also had a symbolic meaning as their recognition as Central European states, leaving the label "Eastern Europe" for the countries behind the eastern borders of the EU. Such historical development, still fresh in the minds, has left some impact on the thinking of people in these countries. That is why, they often look at the question of "Eastern Europe" from two angles: first answering the question with the historical development in mind and thus saying Eastern Europe could also mean today's Central Europe; second disavowing from the label "Eastern Europe" as a synonym for Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary, pushing such label further to the east on Ukraine, Belarus and others.

However, we also have to keep in mind the age of the respondents. Most of them were born shortly before or during the revolutionary year and thus had no direct experience with the strive to be renamed from Eastern Europe to Central Europe. Their answers were thus influenced by their education stressing the Western orientation of the Republic.

As an attempt to generalize the answers, we could say that:

1. the Eastern Europe for us – Central-Europeans – starts behind and to the east of our borders, let it be to the east of the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Poland;
2. "mental borders" between Central and Eastern Europe still persist;
3. the Visegrád countries don't want to be called Eastern Europe any more.

The general attitude stemming from the answers was in such manner that we want to belong to the West, Eastern Europe does not interest us.

### 3.2 "What do you know about the Visegrád Group?"

The second question was concerned with the Visegrád Group. The question was as follows: "What do you know about the Visegrád Group?"

**Table 2: Percentage value for the question “What do you know about the Visegrád Group?”**

Answer	Percentage from 100 students Period 1	Percentage from 100 students Period 2
Unclear answer, nothing	9 %	11 %
Economic cooperation of Czech Rep., Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania	5 %	3 %
Economic cooperation of the 4 prior to the EU entry	23 %	25 %
Political, cultural and economic cooperation group of Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary	27 %	32 %
General cooperation of Czech Rep., Slovakia, Poland, Hungary	36 %	29 %

When it comes to the V4 group, the results were quite shocking. The reason is that these were especially Czech or Slovak students who were questioned, that means students from countries that have belonged to the Visegrád Group since 1991. The V4 group has played an important role in the eliminations of borders between the West and the East, the Old and the New Europe. The probable reason is that the activity of the group is not as visible as it could be. And the truth is that the mutual conflicts between the member states attract more attention and thus result in counteraction of positive actions of the group.

The relatively correct answer that the Visegrád Cooperation is a form of unique mainly political cooperation between four countries was not as often present as was expected at the beginning (only between 27 % and 32 %). About one third of the students described V4 as a general type of cooperation without any further explanation what does this cooperation really include. The small difference in numbers between the first and the second period is negligible. 23 % and respectively 25 % answered with the economic cooperation which is not correct because the original idea of this cooperation has been the political, later also cultural dialogue, consultations and cooperation. The focus on economy in their answers could be influenced by their field of study – International trade – as they confused the economic platform CEFTA with the V4. Of course, consultations on economic issues have also been part of the V4 agenda, but the overarching idea is the political cooperation of these four countries.

The relatively low number of correct answers can be explained by the indifferent way of teaching about regional structures. From the experience, we can say

that Visegrád Group is not included in the teaching curriculum as an important regional structure. On the contrary, the information on the Group is influenced by the position and attitude of the teacher to this Group that is mostly indifferent, negative or skeptic.

The small improvement in the knowledge about the Visegrád Group and its political activity could be partially explained by the inclusion of a lecture on the V4 Group in the curriculum of the subject in the first mentioned semester and the know-how passed onto the students of the next semester. However, we cannot take this case as a relevant improvement practice.

### 3.3 “What do you know about the Eastern Partnership?”

The last question was about the Eastern Partnership policy. The EaP is a relatively new initiative aiming at the enhanced dialogue and partnership between the EU and the so called Eastern European neighbours. The Visegrád countries (with the exception of the Czech Republic) border on Eastern neighbours what makes them important intermediary agents in facilitating the dialogue between them and the EU. The question “What do you know about the Eastern Partnership?” was meant as a check of the awareness of students about their closest neighbourhood and developments there.

**Table 3: Percentage value for the question “What do you know about the Eastern Partnership?”**

Answer	Percentage from 100 students Period 1	Percentage from 100 students Period 2
Nothing	88 %	70 %
I’ve heard it; but don’t know exactly, something to do with Eastern Europe	5 %	14 %
Cooperation platform for Eastern Europe to come closer to the EU	7 %	16 %

The results of this question were really surprising. On overall, students knew very little about individual V4 group and EaP, so we can suppose they have not made any connection between these two issues (EaP and the V4). The majority of them (88 % and 70 % respectively) have never heard of such think as the

Eastern Partnership or European neighbourhood policy. This might be because these are relatively new policies, especially the EaP, and not enough attention and media coverage was given to these topics, except the time around May when the declaration on the EaP was signed in Prague during the Czech Council Presidency. In media we have heard about the gas crisis, about the situation in Ukraine, Belarus or tension between the EU and Russia. But there has been no or only a little connection made between these issues and the EaP.

However, there has been some information on these policies in media and an investigative and interested student could have noticed the debate and general discourse about the EaP. The low interest and consequently little knowledge of the issue of the Eastern Partnership could result from the focus of their studies as well as from the missing interpretation from the lecturers and teachers.

The other factor is that after I spoke to several teachers at the faculty, they told me that they don't really cover these topics, since they are new and still developing or there is not enough time to cover all the policies in the semester.

However, we see a small improvement in the correct answers as well as in the awareness level of the Eastern Policy. To explain this situation, we can mention again the reflections on the Czech Presidency of the Council during the second half of the year. Because the first period intersected with the first half of the year 2009 and the questionnaire was carried out at the beginning of the year – that is at the beginning of the Czech Presidency – students had not had enough time and relevant information to learn about the EaP. On the contrary, the second questionnaire was carried out later in the year 2009, i.e. after the Presidency and in the period of popular evaluation of the previous term by foreign as well as domestic commentators. That is why students have had more opportunities to encounter the topic of EaP and thus get a better insight in this issue.

However, the second results were still quite unsatisfactory as far as the knowledge level is concerned. This shows at the disinterest of students as well as apathy in Czech or foreign political affairs.

## **Conclusions**

The questionnaire carried out at the University of Economics in Prague was seen as a relatively easy and inexpensive way to find out the knowledge level of Masters' students of "International trade". The choice of such representative group was justified by their status as students, the field of their study focusing on the international issues, as well as their origin from the Visegrád countries. University students as future (political) elites of next generation occurring in the phase of winning and learning new knowledge and information about the world around seem to be a justified sample group to get the idea about the aware-

ss about current political and economic developments. Selected students come from the Czech Republic or Slovakia – countries belonging to the Visegrád Cooperation group – a unique cooperation platform in Central Europe. This Visegrád Group has played an important role in the political, economic and social transformation process of these countries and the formation of their foreign policy orientation. The Visegrád platform building on joint problems, ideas and interests has helped the countries to overcome problems of the 90s and thus accomplish their return back to Europe.

After the evaluation of the collected answers we can conclude that students have to a certain extent misleading knowledge about the nature of the Visegrád Group and only a minor knowledge about the Eastern Partnership. The evaluation of the answers to the first question – What does the Eastern Europe mean to you? – is difficult as there is no right or wrong answer. We can only trace the ambition to get rid of the label Eastern Europe for the Visegrád countries and move such label further to the east.

Furthermore, in order to make the thesis of the importance of the Visegrád countries in pursuing the EaP policy and helping the Eastern neighbours to come closer to the EU and thus make the borders more invisible, the civil dimension as an inseparable part of this policy must be strengthened. The civil dimension as the practical and effectual cooperation between people was meant. However, the true cooperation cannot evolve without awareness and knowledge about the existence of such policy among general public.

One of the ways how to spread knowledge is to educate university students in areas of European and international political happening. So, one suggestion is to include the topics of such new policies as the Eastern Partnership in the course syllabus. Furthermore, it would be wise to pay more attention to the promotion of the EaP, either on the governmental or parliamentary level, or on the NGO level. Or/and more positive Visegrád activity in the eastern direction that would be more visible to students and public in general. Moreover, the awareness of the Visegrád Group, its existence and its activity should be also increased as it concerns the region of Central Europe.

The main idea of this questionnaire was to find out the level of knowledge on three issues, i.e. the Eastern Europe, Eastern Partnership and the Visegrád Group. We came out of the premise that the awareness and knowledge level of young generations about mentioned issues is rather small. The goal was completed by conducting and analyzing the answers to open ended questions.

The chosen method of non-probability convenience sampling does not allow us to generalise the answers on the whole population of students, but it has given us a partial picture about the situation among the International trade students of the UEP. Unfortunately, as the results show the awareness level about basic political issues concerning our region is quite low. There certainly is a shortage of

relevant knowledge among university students. However, it is about high time we started to care more for our territory and activity around us in order to become true European citizens.

### **Literature:**

- 1) Kane, E. Doing your own research London: Marion Boyars, 1990. ISBN 0-7145-2843-9.
- 2) Zelenická, Z. Eastern Partnership - What Role for the Czech Presidency in Pursuing the Eastern Partnership? Prague: Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, Nakladatelství Oeconomica, Working Papers, Volume III, č. 6/2009. ISSN 1802-6591.

### **Abstrakt:**

#### **Stredo- a východoeurópske otázky videné očami českých studentov**

Tento článok sleduje rôzne chápanie niektorých stredo- a východoeurópskych otázok medzi mladou generáciou. Problematika východnej Európy, existencia Visegrádskej spolupráce a iniciatíva Východné partnerstvo je stredobodom pozornosti z perspektívy českých vysokoškolských študentov. Hlavným cieľom je skúmať úroveň informovanosti a znalosti vybranej skupiny českých študentov o existencii a činnosti Visegrádskej spolupráce a jej potenciály efektívne vystupovať pri presadzovaní Východného partnerstva. Obdobne budeme sledovať, ako sa povedomie a mienka o "východnej Európe" značne líši i v českom prostredí. K získaniu relevantných údajov a vyvodu vypovedajúcich záverov bol prevedený prieskum formou dotazníka na Vysokej škole ekonomickej v Prahe.

#### **Kľúčové slová:**

Visegrádska spolupráca, východná Európa, Východné partnerstvo, dotazník

