

The Visegrad Group (V4) is an informal regional form of cooperation between four countries - Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. It was established on 15 February 1991 in the Hungarian castle town of Visegrad where the presidents of Poland (Lech Wałęsa) and Czechoslovakia (Václav Havel), and the prime minister of Hungary (József Antall) signed a joint declaration setting up the goals and conditions for mutual cooperation. Since 1 May 2004, when all V4 countries became members of the European Union, the Visegrad Group has been operating within the EU, being a forum for developing common positions of the V4 countries on EU issues. However, despite the existence of this cooperation mechanism within the V4, little is still known about its effectiveness and profitability in the EU legislative process. The literature lacks systematic, comprehensive and empirical studies on this subject, having mainly focused on the historical evolution of the V4, the V4 economy or the V4 positions in selected EU policies (e.g. energy or migration). However, as practice shows, the V4 countries are often unable to reach a common position, thus voting differently on important EU legislative acts in the Council of the EU. Examples are Directive 2018/957 on the posting of workers, Directive 2020/1057 on the posting of drivers, Decision 2015/1601 on a temporary relocation mechanism or Directive 2011/77 on the protection of copyright¹. Hence, the question arises why this is happening and what factors determine such situations? Similarly, existing research has failed to explain whether the above-mentioned cooperation, especially building a coalition in EU lawmaking, brings any benefits to the V4 countries, increasing their bargaining success in negotiations over EU legislation.

The project seeks to resolve these issues. Its purpose is to answer two research questions. First, what are the possibilities and determinants of cooperation between states within the Visegrad Group in EU lawmaking? In other words, what factors cause the V4 countries to take a more or less coherent policy positions in negotiations on EU legislative proposals? Second, is the above cooperation profitable? More specifically, does building the Visegrad coalition, understood as bringing preferences closer or working out a common position on EU legislation, increases the bargaining success of the V4 countries in EU lawmaking?

Two empirical studies will be conducted to answer these questions. The first, relating to the first research question, will identify factors influencing the quality of cooperation within the V4, measured by the level of the V4 countries' voting cohesion on EU legislative acts in the Council, a main intergovernmental and legislative EU institution. These determinants will be derived from the main theories of EU decision making, such as cleavage theory, political economy theory, *relais actors* theory or theory of blocking coalitions. In particular, the effect of the following factors will be examined: the ideological positioning of the V4 states' governments (left/right), their attitude towards European integration (pro/anti EU), the economic interests of these countries, the nationality of the rapporteur, commissioner and presidency responsible for negotiations on a proposal, or the overall level of member states' opposition to a proposal. The impact of the above factors will be investigated using a statistical technique called logistic regression, based on a dataset comprising the Council voting results on EU legislative acts adopted in the period 2009-2019.

The second empirical study will test the hypothesis, derived from the theory of building blocking coalitions, that forming a Visegrad coalition (i.e. a cooperation involving the approximation of preferences or presentation of a common position on EU legislation) significantly increases the bargaining success of the V4 countries in the EU legislative process. It will also be examined whether the influence of this coalition depends on additional factors, such as: the extremity of the V4 countries' preferences vis-à-vis other member states or the proximity of their positions to pivotal actors, e.g. the countries holding the highest voting power in the Council (Germany, France) or the European Parliament. These issues will be investigated using a statistical technique named multiple linear regression, based on a dataset consisting of member states' policy positions and the outcomes of negotiations on 205 legislative issues decided in the EU between 2004 and 2015.

What will be the impact of the research project? Primarily, it will reveal the factors determining the effectiveness of cooperation (in terms of voting cohesion) between the V4 states in the EU legislative process. Owing to this, it will be possible to identify the main problems of the V4 cooperation within the EU, and to find solutions to them. In addition, the project will assess the profitability of the Visegrad coalition by examining whether its formation translates into a higher level of the V4 states' bargaining success in EU lawmaking. Hence, it will be possible to empirically verify the validity of the demand for deeper cooperation within the V4, a postulate often expressed in public debate in Poland. Moreover, the project will produce quantitative predictive models that will enable decision-makers to predict the voting cohesion and success of the V4 countries in negotiations on future EU legislation. This will allow to estimate when a cooperation within the V4 is possible and profitable, and when it is not. The project will also propose a new theory on the role and functioning of the V4 in EU lawmaking, as well as check if the existing theories of EU decision-making likewise apply to the Visegrad Group, a smaller and more informal grouping operating within the EU.

¹ On the first and second proposal, Poland and Hungary voted against, while Czechia and Slovakia were in favour. In the case of the third proposal, Poland supported it, whereas the other V4 countries opposed it. The last proposal was supported by Poland and Hungary, while Czechia and Slovakia voted against it.