

Chapter 4

Title **Chinese Interest Towards the Visegrád Four?**

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Chinese Interest Towards the Visegrád Four?¹

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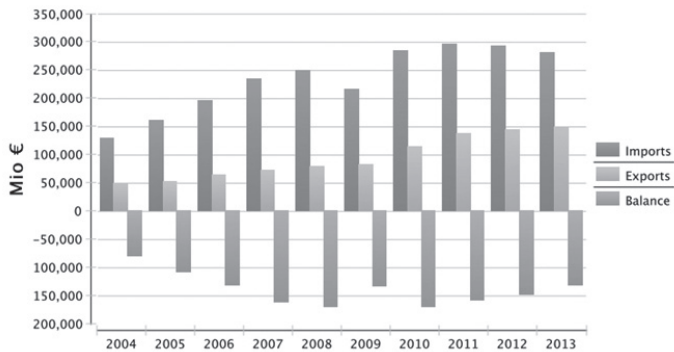
Introduction: It was in 1975 when the European Union (at that time the **EU-China** European Communities) and the People's Republic of China **relations** established diplomatic relations. Until today, despite their **through** differences, the Community and the Asian giant have deepened this relationship by a common aim of building up global **diplomatic** strategies. "Since 1998, an annual EU-China summit is held **lenses** between European heads of state/government and Chinese leaders to discuss bilateral, as well as global issues and since October 2003 the EU and China have acknowledged each other as 'strategic partners.'" (Casarini, 2006: 7) The diplomatic connections look healthy and intensive between European countries and Beijing while the trade rates also indicate growingly strong ties: "Since 2004, China has become the EU's second biggest trading partner (after the U.S.) and, according to Chinese sources, the EU has become China's biggest trading partner – ahead of the U.S." (Ibid.)

It is clear, therefore, that in the past few years relations between Europe and China has deepened, but it is not yet visible that much, whether the common stakes or the conflicting interests will dominate these relations. It is so because behind these numbers and summits there are still a lot of problems and worrying characteristics.

¹ This paper was originally submitted to visegradplus.org upon the call for papers aiming at expanding and spreading the knowledge regarding the Visegrad+ countries. The present chapter is a modified version of the original paper.

Figure 1.
Total goods:
EU Trade flows
and balance,
annual data
2004-2013

Source:
Eurostat
Comext,
European
Commission



Among the problems we can name the increasingly negative views among the European public due to China's growing economic and military power: Europeans have become much more critical of China and the EU has serious concerns about the human rights situation in Beijing. The Asian giant "has now overtaken the United States as the greatest perceived threat to global stability in the eyes of Europeans, according to the opinion poll commissioned by the Financial Times. The poll, carried out by the Harris agency [in 2008] found that 35 per cent of respondents in the five largest EU states see China as a bigger threat to world stability than any other state."²

Beside close economic connections we have to notice another thing: it is a new trend that because of internal problems (and the lack of integrity) the EU is not an ultimate global partner for China. Beijing seeks bilateral connections with each country in the community. It is therefore true that import and export rates are growing and we count them together as EU imports and exports but the community cannot emerge and act as a global power, which can make decisions. (Inotai, 2010) In addition, the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has not (yet) solved this problem either. So, as we can see

² Europeans View China as Biggest Threat to Global Security. Atlantic Review. <http://atlanticreview.org/archives/1058-Europeans-View-China-as-Biggest-Threat-to-Global-Security.html>

today, while China is a global player, the European Union is just a ‘bunch’ of countries in the international political arena and the countries seek connections on their own – naturally based upon their national interests – instead of forming a single EU strategy for international relations.

Go global From this perspective it is relevant to consider what Poland
Central (together with Italy, Spain and Sweden) proposed in the
Europe? so-called “European Global Strategy” (EGS).³ Recent devel-
Can the V4 opments in the affairs of the western Mediterranean region,
make moves for example, may also underline how timely the initiative is,
together? seeking to create a vision for the European Commission and
the European Parliament and for coordinating the foreign
policies of the EU member states (Parkes – Sobják, 2013).
The EGS can strengthen the outstanding role of the Visegrád
Four (V4) in bridging the widening gap between the Euro-
pean Union and its neighboring countries (Ibid).

The question how united the V4 can be in terms of acting on the global stage either with regard to the Eastern Partnership of the European Union or in fostering Chinese relations is worth being visited from several aspects. *First*, we may agree with Dariusz Kałan (2013) underlining that “even though the V4 as a whole has aspirations to create an active and compatible role in the East, each Visegrád country also pursues its own policy rooted in a historical and social background, particular economic and geopolitical interests as well as temporary political goals.” One good example of diverging interests was the inability to construct a joint (V4) standpoint on the Ukrainian crisis. *Second*, as for the Chinese connection, sharing Thomas Bondinguel’s argument (2008) about mutual or ‘reciprocal indifference’, “China simply was not a priority [for Visegrád] in political and foreign policy terms all the way into the 2000s.” Hungary’s case confirms this view as after the change of the political system towards

³ See: <http://www.euglobalstrategy.eu>

the end of the 1980s, it was obvious for the country (similarly to others of the former Soviet Bloc) that major (re)orientation in the foreign policy will be directed towards the European Union, with the aspiration to gain membership as soon as possible, demonstrating the firm move “back to Europe”. Three Hungarian foreign policy pillars covered European accession (as top number-one priority for the country), joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), therefore, strengthening the trans-Atlantic alliance,⁴ and neighborhood policy with a heavy focus on Hungarian communities across the Carpathian basin (and beyond). Developing relations with Moscow and the “East” was put aside at a fast pace, which may be explained as part of the strategy of keeping distance from “Soviet ties”, and demonstrating that the countries were ready to rejoin the European community. *Third*, on China’s side up until the turn of the century Central Europe was far from being a foreign policy priority, in particular with the unfolding events on Tiananmen Square in the summer of 1989 and the follow-up international isolation (though only for a couple of years) for the Asian giant. “At the turn of the century, however, things started to change and there were tell-tale signs that both China and Central Europe were maturing politically and started to find their place on the world stage” (Bondinguel, 2008: 4).

Is it possible, after all these, to foster natural alliances between the V4 and China, which pursues a very pragmatic and expansionist foreign policy all across the globe? First of all, can it be imagined that the V4 acts as an attractive regional group/community for China, or only bilateral linkages stay strategically interesting for Beijing?

The future of group dynamics certainly depends on the interest of the participating states, whether or not all of them

⁴ While the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, Slovakia got membership in 2004, when all four Visegrád countries joined the European Union.

want to establish closer cooperation as an intra-regional formation within the European Union. They have a natural overlap of their immediate foreign policy interest zones: the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership states, and they are also vulnerable to internal divisions as a result of divergent positions towards the most significant players in the international arena, that is, the US, China, and [Russia] (Sobják, 2012: 124). Although there are unanimous success stories for the members, for instance, in the field of civil society, cultural and academic projects funded by the International Visegrád Fund (IVF), as Anita Sobják (2012) notes, divisions are deep as far as positions in shaping the future of the European Union are concerned, therefore, expectations from the Visegrád Group should not be too high, but rather remain within the horizons of what can be deemed realistic (Ibid: 138-139). The IVF has been a commitment, which is taken seriously by all the members of the group, and can provide a good ground for further “expansion of thought” to support regional cohesion. The numerous grass-roots initiatives can reach out to the public at large, as well as include key decision-makers, together with lobby groups, think tanks, academics who all can contribute to “more Visegrád” within the Community. This can then reflect former Hungarian Foreign Minister Martonyi’s thinking about the interest of Central Europe that the countries of the region do not compete with each other but that their interests are jointly represented towards the other regions.⁵ Despite the grandiose comments and official documents, however, the participants of the Visegrád Cooperation have let each other down, or had been played out against each other by Western states several times, not to mention the Agricultural Agreements of the EU accession negotiations or as it happened in the case of the Climate Quotas. For a healthy cooperation, each of the members needs to recognize the fundamental importance

⁵ Interview with János Martonyi, ‘Global Opening...’

of such a forum, especially in an ever-forming Community, where such a regional platform could be more successful in supporting of several common interests. In a “multi-speed” EU such cooperation can really find its momentum.

“Marching West” meets the “Eastern Turn”? How attractive is the V4 for China? Undoubtedly, “by entering the EU, the four Visegrád countries have been exposed to and included into the Brussels strategy towards China” (Bondinguel, 2008: 5). Due to their membership, therefore, all Visegrád countries have become “interesting” for China – as part of the EU markets. They can also be targets of China’s “peaceful rise” and the “charm offensive”, which uses soft elements in a smart strategy to convince anybody that no “China threat” exists any longer. Power for our discussion is used as Joseph S. Nye (2004, 2011) suggests, i.e. in a broader and more comprehensive way than any actor thought in the course of history when focussing only on either military might or increasing economic strength. The intention here is not to challenge either the realist or the liberal approaches to international relations, but to draw attention to the increasing need in global politics to include other, and explicitly ‘softer’ elements in the diplomatic game than simply coercion by military means. China’s Confucius Institutes and classrooms coupled with the increase in the number of scholarships offered by the Chinese state to foreign students, for example, has been successfully contributing to a more positive China image and collaborations. The first Confucius Institute in the Central European region was the Confucius Institute at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Budapest, Hungary, which was opened on December 7, 2006. It is not surprising that there is an enthusiastic moment in building closer ties with China even if we look at the increasing number of students studying Mandarin, as a result of more than a dozen institutes or classrooms in the V4 countries since 2007.

Table 1.
Confucius
Institutes and
Classrooms
in the V4
countries

	Confucius Institute	Confucius Classroom
Czech Republic	1	1
Hungary	2	3
Poland	4	1
Slovakia	1	0

Source:
Confucius
Institute Online.
Download at:
http://www.chinesecio.com/m/cio_wci

As Shannon Tiezzi (2013) commented, China's "march West" concept now possesses a new leg to the "New Silk Road" outreach across the European continent with the "1+16" framework, i.e. China plus the 16 Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). Former Chinese Premier Li Keqiang "emphasized that China intends for its '1+16' engagement to 'supplement' the EU framework, not tear it down. Accordingly, both he and the European ministers were quick to note [at the November 2013 China-Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE) leader's meeting] that all economic deals will follow applicable EU regulations" (Ibid). However, there are some critical voices drawing our attention to what the non-EU member countries among the 16 CEECs may offer China; Turcsányi (2014) explicitly says that "China may just prefer to deal with [them] which are not subject to EU and OECD regulations that China finds unfavorable." In addition, continues Turcsányi, from a geo-economic perspective, "the countries in South-Eastern Europe may have useful position for China due to transport routes." In fact, at the same time, the Visegrád Four represents the most developed and economically attractive entities among the 16 CEECs. "They constitute roughly 4/5 of China-CEE16 trade and receive the bulk of Chinese investments in the region" (Ibid).

Figure 2.
China's FDI
in the EU-27
by country,
2000–2011
(USD million,
number of
deals)

	Country	Investment Value (USD million)	Rank Compared to FDI from the Rest of the World*	Number of Greenfield Projects	Number of Acquisitions	Total Number of Deals
1	France	5,722	+2	46	24	70
2	United Kingdom	3,684	-1	69	26	95
3	Germany	2,543	-1	113	33	146
4	Sweden	2,251	+4	14	6	20
5	Hungary	2,065	+14	14	4	18
6	Netherlands	1,164	0	32	15	47
7	Belgium	847	-3	12	3	15
8	Greece	714	+14	5	0	5
9	Italy	554	-2	31	16	47
10	Austria	391	+1	6	5	11
11	Romania	299	+4	13	1	14
12	Poland	190	-3	15	1	16
13	Spain	187	-8	22	1	23
14	Czech Rep.	76	0	10	1	11
15	Finland	48	+1	1	4	5
16	Portugal	47	+1	5	0	5
17	Bulgaria	47	+1	6	1	7
18	Luxembourg	46	-5	1	1	2
19	Ireland	44	-9	6	1	7
20	Denmark	30	-7	6	1	7
21	Latvia	3.8	+5	1	0	1
22	Cyprus	3	-1	0	1	1
23	Estonia	0	-	0	0	0
	Lithuania	0	-	0	0	0
	Malta	0	-	0	0	0
	Slovakia	0	-	0	0	0
	Slovenia	0	-	0	0	0
		20,957		428	145	573

Source:
Hanemann–
Rosen, 2012: 38

Chinese infrastructure projects in the region China is about to break into new markets, regarding infrastructure projects and planning to enter competitions in all regions of the world, a business where references are essential. The lack of Chinese infrastructure projects in the European Union is visible but should not be surprising: without successfully finished railway, motorway (etc.) projects outside of China, the reliability of their companies is questionable – especially after a failed project in Poland. Before analyzing the planned participation of Beijing in the V4 countries, where the Chinese presence might be the strongest in the Union regarding these projects, we have to underline: those reference investments are underway, from Central Asia to Central America, their companies are building motorways and railways to further boost their participa-

tion in this sector. Beside the well-known, raw material- and resource-motivated projects in Africa, the very first projects of China has just finished in the Middle East: a high-speed rail link between Istanbul and Ankara in Turkey⁶, cutting the 533-km journey between the two cities from a typical seven hours to three and a half and a metro-line infrastructure (in an international consortium) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, becoming the highest capacity of any metro in the world. China won another high-speed rail project in November 2014 in Mexico, as they were the only bidders for the line connecting the capital of Mexico City with Queretaro, a manufacturing city 210 km to the north.⁷ According to the Turkish project, analyst Idris Gursoy noted, that the new railway line “paves the way for the Chinese companies to enter into other big infrastructure projects in Turkey”.⁸ But as a finished contract, it may pave to way to European projects as well.

The very first infrastructure project in Europe, which was about to help Covec Group (China Overseas Engineering Group, an enormous Chinese state conglomerate with an annual turnover of 25 billion dollars, and the world’s third largest construction company⁹) in entering the European market, was a motorway project in Poland, the A2 motorway, connecting Warsaw with the German border. The Chinese

⁶ R. Sweet, ‘Turkey’s new high-speed rail: victory for Erdogan – and China’, *Global Construction Review*, 29 July 2014, at <<http://www.globalconreview.com/news/turkeys-new-high-speed-rail-victory-erdogan0938346/>>, 4 November 2014.

⁷ C. Richards, ‘Why China Won Mexico’s High-Speed Rail Project’, *The Diplomat*, 4 November 2014, at <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/why-china-won-mexicos-high-speed-rail-project/>>, 4 November 2014.

⁸ R. Sweet, ‘Turkey’s new high-speed rail: victory for Erdogan – and China’, *Global Construction Review*, 29 July 2014, at <<http://www.globalconreview.com/news/turkeys-new-high-speed-rail-victory-erdogan0938346/>>, 4 November 2014.

⁹ ‘The motorway that China couldn’t build’, *VOX Europ*, 16 June 2011, at <<http://www.voxeurop.eu/en/content/article/716731-motorway-china-couldnt-build>>, 4 November 2014.

company was criticized from the very first moment, since they had submitted a price that was less than half of the planned budget, making it impossible for local companies to compete with them. The outcome was disastrous: Covec abandoned the project a year later, leaving an unfinished project behind. Their entrance to the European market was a failure: they were unable to build the motorway for that fee, “the idea of importing construction equipment and building materials was a blunder: China is too far away, and the machines are not certified for use in the EU. The Chinese parent corporation did not supply funding as planned, and Covec was forced to wait for payment from the [Polish institutions] before it could move forward. Worse still, the Chinese had not factored in the impact of rising [...] prices”, making it obvious: the European market is different than the relations they got used to at home, or in China and Asia.

The failure shifted the planned infrastructural presence of China in Europe, but by now there are further projects, especially in Hungary. The first idea about Chinese participation covered the whole railway network, connecting Budapest with the Airport and the county capitals.¹⁰ Later on the Hungarian government wanted to build a bypass at Budapest for freight traffic, using Chinese credit and technology.¹¹ As the project is still under planning, at the end of 2013 another railway project emerged: the Budapest–Belgrade high-speed rail link, upgrading the existing infrastructure with the cooperation of the Chinese partner. The three sides have agreed on the project in Romania¹², the total value of the

¹⁰ ‘Hungary sets sights on China’s high-speed rail tech’, People’s Daily Online, 1 March 2014, at <<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7303756.html>>, 4 November 2014.

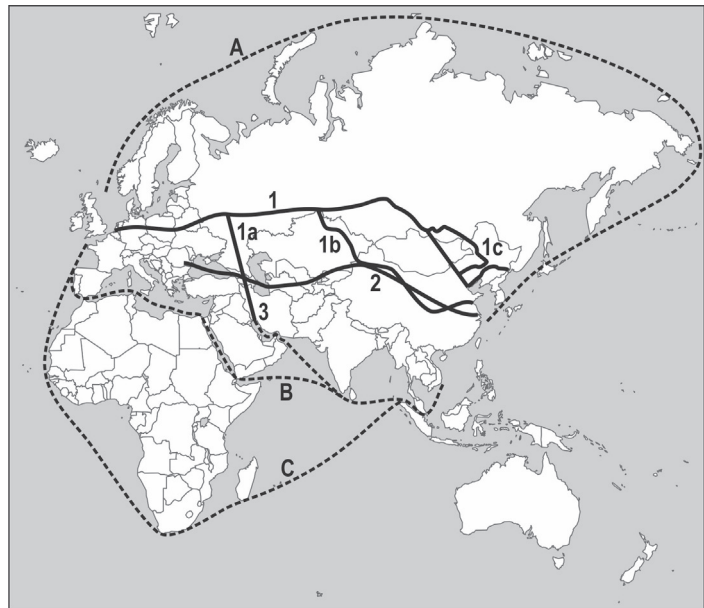
¹¹ ‘Hungary plans to build new railway using Chinese funds’, Reuters, 27 February 2013, at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/27/hungary-railway-idUSL6N0BR6ZP20130227>>, 4 November 2014.

¹² D. Landry, ‘China in agreement to build Hungary/Serbia rail link’, Budapest Business Insider, 26 November 2013, at <<http://www.bbj>

project would amount to nearly \$3 billion. China is clearly pushing for their presence in Europe, as Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqianq noted, “most CEE countries see a need to upgrade and renovate their railway lines, roads, ports and other transportation facilities. China is making rapid progress in the manufacturing of transportation equipment, especially in the field of high-speed railway. We are fully capable of undertaking transportation infrastructure projects with high quality in CEE countries.”¹³

What gives further importance to this project is the planned “New Silk Road”, emerging in China and arriving in Europe to send goods in the shortest time in the safest way: as well as the mentioned Turkish project, the Budapest–Belgrade railroad line is also thought to be a part of it, giving importance to the affected countries.

Figure 3. Main maritime routes and planned railroads between China and Europe, the “New Silk Road”



Source:
Erdősi, 2013: 19

[hu/politics/china-in-agreement-to-build-hungary-serbia-rail-link-\[updated\]_72523](http://hu/politics/china-in-agreement-to-build-hungary-serbia-rail-link-[updated]_72523), 4 November 2014.

¹³ Ibid.

As a summary, we have to express, that Chinese presence in the infrastructure sector in the region (and Europe) is still inconsiderable: though both sides (the CEE countries and Beijing) have expressed their desires for cooperation in several projects, the very first such Chinese involvement is still far away.

How high and realistic are CEE's hopes in the Chinese economy? Diplomatic and economic relations are evolving and becoming more intensive from year to year between European countries and Beijing, and the financial crisis of the Community just accelerated these events. All member states try to secure an outstanding place in the framework of cooperation with Beijing, so does Budapest and other CEE capitals, as well. And even if Europeans have become much more critical of China according to some surveys¹⁴ and the EU has serious concerns about the human rights situation in Beijing, the race for China and for Chinese investments has started.¹⁵ Beijing appears not only as an investor, but also as a lender and savior, an economic partner that could help find a way out of the crisis.

It is useless to compare, for instance, Budapest to the Western countries of the Community, but in its closer vicinity, Hungary is competitive. If we focus specifically on investments or trade relations, Hungary plays a prominent role in the region's relations with China. The country plays a particularly important role in China's foreign policy, as it is

¹⁴ See, for instance: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2007/06/27/chapter-3-views-of-china-and-its-increasing-influence/>.

¹⁵ The Asian giant has now overtaken the United States as the greatest perceived threat to global stability in the eyes of Europeans, according to the opinion poll commissioned by the *Financial Times*. The poll, carried out by the Harris agency [in 2008] found that 35 percent of respondents in the five largest EU states see China as a bigger threat to world stability than any other state. See in: J. Wolf, 'Europeans View China as Biggest Threat to Global Security', *Atlantic Review*, 16 April 2008, at <<http://atlanticreview.org/archives/1058-Europeans-View-China-as-Biggest-Threat-to-Global-Security.html>>, 4 August 2013.

not only the most popular regional destination for Chinese immigrants, but also Hungary is the only country that has a Bank of China branch in the region. What is more, there is a Hungarian-Chinese bilingual elementary school¹⁶ since the fall of 2004 – again a highly important soft “element” in successful outreach. Liu (2013) also confirms that: “Among the four Visegrád countries, Hungary has always led the China–CEE cooperation [and] is wishing to play the forerunner role and acts as the ‘bridgehead’ of [the] cooperation.”

The case of Hungary shows that the country has been establishing itself as a regional partner of China for years now and already the second Orbán government’s foreign policy openly declared its turn towards China – continuing and obviously extending bilateral relations previously enacted by the left-wing governments headed by Péter Medgyessy (2002-04), Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004-09), and Gordon Bajnai (2009-10).¹⁷ The visit of Wen Jiabao in the summer of 2011 seemed to mean an advantage for Hungary, compared to other countries in the region. The Chinese Prime Minister and Viktor Orbán signed twelve agreements, including a one-billion-euro extra credit or potential infrastructure investments. During this visit there was a shocking step of the Hungarian government against the protesters of Free Tibet movement: although Orbán stated that they did not lock up anybody, the demonstrations were banned and local Tibetans summoned to attend the government immigration offices on that day.¹⁸ As Orbán noted in another interview in *The Economist*, the government has the right to stop demonstrations that disrupt diplomatic relations. The Hungarian state has the right to pursue foreign policy in the national interest. Additionally, the reporter added: Perhaps, but other countries do allow protests within sight of visiting foreign

¹⁶ See: <http://magyar-kinai.hu>

¹⁷ D. Kałan, ‘Relationship of a Special Significance?...’, p. 61.

¹⁸ ‘Orbán and the Wind...’

delegations, including those such as the Chinese whose feelings are famously prone to injury. His didn't.¹⁹

But Hungary's so-called leadership in the region is very fragile, and many countries are willing to offer the Asian country immediate and full partnership; for example, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland or Romania – all of them are ready to act in this way. Clearly, China sees the Central European countries as a gateway to the European Union. [...] Hungary would [definitely] like to become a hub for the Chinese economic presence in the region.²⁰

Turcsányi (2014) rightly warns that high hopes about the “rapid increase of investments” need to be seen in a realistic way; expectations need to be realistic and the V4 countries should have to “plan their China-policies accordingly”.

Central European “Go global” and “Eastern Turn” policies in an age of inter-polar relations – Concluding remarks When a country like Hungary – a middle-sized European state –, or another such Central European country makes attempts to become more open to the global world, it recognizes that it is the only valid and plausible behavior in the long run, keeping in mind that it wants to keep fostering its national interests first and foremost. This attitude is easy to validate as inter-polarity expects that countries behave in such a way; in fact, the changing “post-American” international context, the fading away of the “unipolar moment” and the evolution of the multipolar set of relations have an impact on Europe and the foreign and neighborhood policy of these states.²¹ Although multipolarity and the debate whose interpretations have stirred in scholarly communities – also offering the ground for Grevi's theory – does not necessarily presuppose the existence of three or more states of basically equal power capabilities, according to Smith (2012). It does, however, suggest a widespread acceptance

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ T. Matura, 'Sino-Hungarian Relations in 2010', *HIIA Papers*, No. 8 (2011), p. 7.

²¹ See L. J. Kiss, 'Magyarország...', p. 18.

and inculcation of the belief that there is essential equivalence amongst several states.²² William Wohlforth (2007) warns us to remain cautious enough with today's multipolar mania²³, so that we can profoundly relate the position of the emerging actors to that of the US and foresee the potential redistribution of power in the international system in an increasingly multipolar environment. One of the most decisive arguments of Fareed Zakaria about a "post-American world" draws our attention to the "rise of the rest", meaning the growing influence of emerging powers coming from the Global South. We can agree with him that this rise is at heart an economic phenomenon, but it has consequences for nearly every other sphere of life. His "post-American world" is not an anti-American world, but one defined and directed from many places and by many people.²⁴ A world increasingly possessing more centers of gravity, one that is better referred to as "interpolar", as the context embraces the concept of a transnational setting with more "poles" or powers interwoven in deepening interdependence, in an interest-driven, problem-oriented and pragmatic way.²⁵

Although in recent years international media have been engaged with the "rise of the dragon" from the Far East, Zakaria is again right when he claims that it is not [only] China that is rising. Emerging powers on every continent have achieved political stability and economic growth and are becoming active on the global stage.²⁶ In our case, looking at the V4 countries and their redefined foreign policies about the global world, we can unanimously pose the questions:

²² M. A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order. The US, Russia and China*, Cambridge 2012, p. 54.

²³ W. Wohlforth, 'Unipolar Stability. The Rules of Power Analysis', *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2007), p. 46.

²⁴ F. Zakaria, *The Post-American World. Release 2.0*, New York 2012, p. 4.

²⁵ See: G. Grevi, 'The Interpolar World: A New Scenario', *ISS Occasional Papers*, No. 79 (2009), at <<http://www.iss.europa.eu>>, 18 March 2013.

²⁶ F. Zakaria, *The Post-American World...*, p. xii.

What are their relations with these entities? How can they get engaged with processes generated by these emerging forces? How can V₄ countries envisage their place and role in an interpolar order?

There is no doubt that every country of the “Global North” – and as long as the V₄ countries are member of the European Union they are considered to belong to the more developed part of the world – needs to have an idea how to position the emerging powers in their foreign policy priorities, or, to look at it from the opposite direction, how to position themselves with regard to the dynamics generated by these actors.

Pragmatic foreign policy is the key connecting thread in any potential Chinese expansionist idea also in Central Europe. Pragmatic cooperation, however, as Liu (2013) emphasizes, will involve further efforts, and “Chinese relevant executive institutions should make good preparations to cope with appeals from different countries properly”. For China, it will be vital to strengthen its image in CEECs so that it can represent a strategic alternative partnership for countries of the region. “Currently, China still needs soft power instruments to support its strategic layout. Therefore, it is urgent to construct and extend soft power.” (Ibid) This kind of pragmatism is also needed on the Central European side, coupled with the challenge of a new group dynamics within the V₄, which may become a shared priority at a certain point in the coming decade.

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