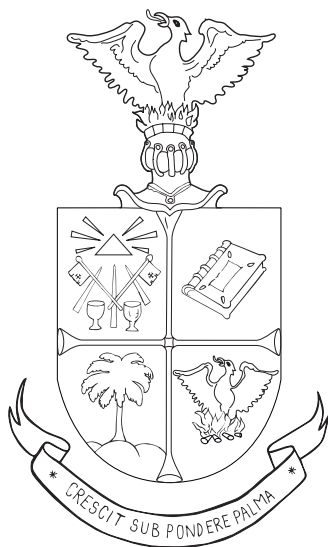


# **Karoli Mundus I.**



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edited by:  
Osztoivits, András



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Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar

Törő, Csaba<sup>1</sup>

## THE AIMS AND MEANS OF HUNGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN SUPPORT OF EU ENLARGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICE

### *Continuity in Hungarian foreign policy with respect to the Western Balkans*

The last official comprehensive Hungarian foreign policy strategy – published 8 years ago, right after the Hungarian EU Presidency in 2011 – declared that Hungary intended to extend its assistance to the countries of the Western Balkans region “by sharing experiences regarding EU accession, the use of EU funds, institutional capacity-building and democratic transition”. In the context of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, Hungary stressed the importance of progress in the accession of Serbia and Montenegro while recognising the urgency of the inclusion of North-Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo into the integration process in order to safeguard the security and stability of the region.

It also fully and actively supported NATO membership for Montenegro placing the entire Adriatic littoral under the transatlantic security umbrella. The stability and consolidation of market economies and democratic political institutions and the improvement of the investment environment, including legal certainty, in the Western Balkans have been all expressly and consistently determined as Hungary foreign policy. Hungarian foreign policy toward its southern neighbourhood has reflected the conviction that the possibility of enlargement, the extension of the perspective of membership, remains the only truly effective geopolitical instrument of the European Union in South Eastern Europe. Decisive external influence over the political, social and economic conditions in the remaining cluster of Western Balkans countries outside the Union can only be exercised effectively by the EU through the sole incentive and ultimate reward of the perspective of membership in exchange for sustained pacification, reconciliation and cooperation across the still fragmented region. For this reason, Hungary continues to maintain its unconditional political endorsement of the EU aspirations of all the six Western Balkans states (WB6) in the region.

With respect to the security of the region and sustainable conflict resolution efforts, Hungary stated its commitment to continued participation in the multinational

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1 Associate Professor, Institute of Social Science and International Studies

peace support operations in the Western Balkans within the framework of KFOR and EULEX in Kosovo, as well as EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>2</sup>

*Institutional and diplomatic Hungarian assistance in pursuit of EU aspirations in the Western Balkans*

In pursuit of practical support and assistance for the EU integration aspirations and efforts of Western Balkans countries, successive Hungarian governments over the last 15 years have offered to share the country's experience of administrative and legal, as well as institutional adaptation for EU membership as a form of practical assistance through the transfer of knowledge of and insights into accession preparations. Besides the diplomatic and political means of endorsement within diverse formats (for instance EU summits) and fora (such as the Visegrad Group or the Council of the EU) for policy coordination of the European Union, capacity-building initiatives have also been offered by Hungary as pragmatic and targeted tools to bolster certain state structures and functions necessary for the implementation of EU accession tasks in each country of the Western Balkans.

The parliamentary dimension of institutional capacity-building represents one of the areas where Hungary has gained prominence and demonstrated effective support for the preparation of respective national institutions in various states of the region.<sup>3</sup> As the result of successful applications for the implementation of EU-financed Twinning projects, the Hungarian National Assembly has led and conducted an impressive number of parliamentary capacity-building programmes (seven accomplished between 2010 and 2017) – in partnership with several parliaments from other EU Member States – in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (one still ongoing there), Croatia and Kosovo throughout the last decade as the result of systematic and continued engagement.<sup>4</sup>

As another visible and distinct instrument of direct and practical assistance from the Hungarian government to its partners in the Western Balkans, Hungarian diplomats, as EU integration advisers, have been assigned to the Foreign Ministries or other government units in charge of coordinating the legislative and policy measures required by EU accession preparations in each state in the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) in the last couple of years. In the course of their daily and direct collaboration with the host government institutions, these EU advisers have been deployed to act as a conduit

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2 *Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*, MFA, 2011, pp. 22-23

3 Horváth Zoltán: A magyar Országgyűlés intézményfejlesztési tevékenysége a délkelet-európai térség parlamentjeiben, különös tekintettel a Nyugat-Balkánra, *Parlamentári Szemle*, 2017/1, pp. 139-145

4 *Evaluation of the Twinning instrument in the period 2010-2017*, Final Report 2010-2017, European Commission, 2019, pp. 191

for the transfer of Hungarian experience, knowledge and perspectives in support of all (diplomatic, legal and technical) aspects of national preparations for the pursued EU membership by the host countries.

*Hungarian contribution to the reinforcement of core state functions in the Western Balkans*

In the light of the dramatic experience of the hardly controllable flood of migrants in 2015, it became a key Hungarian foreign policy interest to provide actual support – by bilateral measures and also through the allocation of potential EU resources – for Western Balkans countries to perform vital state functions. In the southern security foreground of Hungary, the institutional capabilities of each state to mount effective control and protection of their respective borders constitute the prerequisite for the prevention and containment of another wave of potential migrant influx through the Balkans trail into the European Union across Hungary. Therefore, from the perspective of Hungarian border protection and national security, it is essential that all of its southern neighbours should maintain and enhance the effectiveness of their border control functions. The Hungarian foreign policy aim of support for stable and cooperative partners in the region assumed a new dimension and required the use of new and flexible measures to reinforce vital state functions in the Western Balkans, where the floodgates to withstand the pressure of a sudden surge in mass irregular migration proved highly fragile.

Using its own resources, Hungary delivered technical assistance and dispatch police contingents both as part of coordinated reinforcement by the Visegrad Group and also in a bilateral manner in several rounds following the acute migrant crisis in 2015. In the last few years, Hungary demonstrated on several occasions the consistency of its active support, by means of recurrent deployments of police forces, for the border protection efforts of Western Balkans countries straddling the migration route through the Eastern Mediterranean and South Eastern Europe. After the peak in the migrant crisis in 2015, a new pattern for the illegal flow of people emerged in the region leading from Greece via Albania and Macedonia through Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, Slovenia and Austria.<sup>5</sup> Even if the trail of uncontrolled migration appeared to be mainly diverted from Hungary, the risk of another wave of uncontrolled large scale population movement migration has been perceived as a real source of threat to Hungarian sovereignty and security.

In order to create a forward line of protection for Hungarian security, the reinforcement of national borders and their control in the southern neighbourhood of Hungary became a priority in its foreign policy towards the countries most exposed to relentless mass movements of people across their territories. The frontiers for the containment of irregular migration in the Western Balkans could be bolstered both

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5 *Hungary supports border protection efforts of countries lying on new migration route*, 7 June 2018, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/news/hungary-supports-border-protection-efforts-of-countries-lying-on-new-migration-route>

by technical assistance and also by the deployment of extra personnel at the borders under increased threat and pressure. Hungary was willing to provide actual human and psychological reinforcement for the overstretched capacities of the affected states. In demonstration of its commitment, Hungary has sent police contingents to Serbia and North Macedonia as the extension of preventive and protective measures to the southern borders of its neighbours, which have constituted an extended Hungarian security perimeter for the last three years.

In line with its stated national security interest in strengthening the performance of border control and protection capabilities in the region, Hungary repeatedly sent police units to its immediate southern neighbour, Serbia, and also further “upstream” into North Macedonia, with a difficult frontier in the chain of national borders along the migratory path from the EU gateway (Greece) towards the centres of migrant gravitation within the European Union. In a sequence of reinforcement assistance measures, Hungary has dispatched contingents of its police officers to “frontline countries” of the Western Balkans as small auxiliary forces of law and order deployed in response to the anticipated danger of a new wave of migrants across the South East European “front yard” of Hungarian and EU security.<sup>6</sup> Hungarian police officers take part in joint operations with their host countries by performing patrol duties to prevent and uncover attempts to cross state borders illegally without detection and also assisting in the apprehension of people smugglers and irregular migrants within the territories of North-Macedonia and Serbia. In carrying out their assigned duties, they rely on their own service equipment and exercise their right to take police action under the supervision of the local police authorities.<sup>7</sup>

During the recent years since 2015, it has evolved into a permanent feature of Hungarian foreign assistance towards both countries to regularly dispatch Hungarian police units in order to undertake joint operative tasks with local forces. These contingents contribute to the protection of borders between Serbia and North Macedonia as well as North Macedonia and Greece by investigating and preventing illegal entry into Serbian or Macedonian territory. The provision of limited, but actual complementary constabulary capabilities in the Western Balkans neighbourhood of Hungary as a particular and targeted form of capacity-building is intended to enable more efficient performance of vital state functions (border control) in Serbia and in North Macedonia which are deemed critical for Hungarian national security.<sup>8</sup>

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6 *Hungary to send 20 police officers to patrol Serbian border*, 4 October 2016, <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungary-to-send-20-police-officers-to-patrol-serbian-border/>

7 *Hungarian police officers sent to Serbia and Macedonia to patrol borders*, 3 May 2017, <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungarian-police-officers-sent-to-serbia-and-macedonia-to-patrol-borders>

8 *Hungarian police force continues to help North Macedonia and Serbia tackle migrant crisis*, 3 April 2019, <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungarian-police-force-continues-to-help-north-macedonia-and-serbia-tackle-migrant-crisis/>

Beyond its support on the basis of bilateral collaborative arrangements with its direct or indirect neighbours, Hungary also sought to reinforce state capacities in the Western Balkans through Central European cooperative initiatives and offers. In 2016, the governments of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries declared “their willingness to provide the most exposed countries of the Balkans region, in general, with adequate means of practical support based on the actual needs”.<sup>9</sup> Aligned with possible occasional partners, the V4 continues to prove the most convenient and primary choice for the mobilization of political support and available resources of like-minded Central European partners in the pursuit of the Hungarian foreign policy aim of strengthened external border protection in the Western Balkans region. At their summit in 2018, the V4 and Austria agreed on their coordinated and joint efforts to “provide the necessary human resources and technical support pool in order to implement targeted border policing activities with the countries of the Western Balkans”.<sup>10</sup>

### *Hungarian participation in the stabilisation and security of the Western Balkans*

Hungary has declaredly and consistently conducted an active policy of direct participation in multilateral endeavours to sustain the conditions of peace and security in its southern neighbourhood in order to prevent conflagration and deterioration in potentially (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and actually (Kosovo) volatile situations in the most difficult former conflict zones of the Western Balkans. Hungarian contributions to NATO and EU operations in the region represent the most tangible measures of assistance and the tools of effective pursuit of its own security interests in the maintenance of regional security and post-conflict stabilisation.

In planning future Hungarian foreign military deployments in crisis management operations, the Western Balkans region is foreseen to remain the main area of engagement for the Hungarian defence force in the performance of post-conflict peace- and state-building responsibilities. In Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina already more than 500 Hungarian soldiers serve in peace support operations in those countries, under NATO and EU flags respectively.<sup>11</sup> With the accomplishment of Hungarian military deployment in Afghanistan, the former Western Balkans conflict zones will stay at the foreseeable centre of Hungarian expeditionary security missions representing direct benefits for and added value to the foreign policy objectives of Hungary in its immediate neighbourhood.

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9 *Joint Statement on Migration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group*, Prague, 15 February 2016

10 *Visegrad Group and Austria Summit Declaration on “setting up a mechanism for assistance in protecting the borders of the Western Balkan countries”*, Budapest, 18 June 2018

11 *Western Balkans region continues to remain main area of peacekeeping responsibilities*, 2 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-defence/news/western-balkans-region-continues-to-remain-main-area-of-peacekeeping-responsibilities>



a) *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

From the perspective of Hungarian foreign policy, peace and security in the Western Balkans has been consensually identified as a fundamental interest of Hungary. The stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains one of the decisive elements in the regional fabric of security – besides Kosovo – as it is still considered the most vulnerable in the region from both a political and economic perspective. In the long-term, the inclusion of BiH into the organisational structures of European and Transatlantic integration – namely the EU and NATO – would underwrite its security and stability as a viable multinational and sustainable state entity. In the meantime, until its integration is accomplished, external multinational guarantees – in the form of military operation – on the ground remain necessary, together with active engagement of and support from both organisations, as well as their willing and able Member States. Among them, Hungary has become one of the most reliable and prominent contributing states to the continued stabilising presence of the European Union (EUFOR) in collaboration with NATO.

For several years, Hungary has been one of the participating countries with an uninterrupted presence in the BiH theatre of international military operations, first under NATO, then EU command. The Hungarian proportion and significance expanded over the years. Currently, Hungary furnishes the 2nd largest contribution to the EU Operation ALTHEA and regularly holds positions (such as chief of staff) at the operational command level. By virtue of its continuous and significant contribution, Hungary has demonstrated its active commitment to the preservation of stability and state unity in BiH, which extends well beyond political and diplomatic declarations. Within the EUFOR military contingent, its central component, the manoeuvre unit – Multinational Battalion (MNBN) – representing its rapid response capacity currently comprises Hungarian, Austrian and Turkish troops.<sup>12</sup>

Through sustained engagement in the provision of military means of security in the longest running EU military crisis management operation, the direct “investment” of Hungary through its military personnel and resources in collective peacekeeping and stabilisation endeavours in its southern neighbourhood represents a rewarding course of action with tangible returns for Hungarian foreign policy and external security priorities.<sup>13</sup>

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12 *EUFOR Operation ALTHEA European Union Military Operation Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)*, Mission Factsheet, July 2019, [http://www.euforbih.org/eufor/images/pdfs/Mission\\_Factsheet\\_0719.pdf](http://www.euforbih.org/eufor/images/pdfs/Mission_Factsheet_0719.pdf)

13 *The peace and stability of Bosnia-Herzegovina is in the fundamental security interests of Hungary*, 17 May 2016, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/the-peace-and-stability-of-bosnia-hercegovina-is-in-the-fundamental-security-interests-of-hungary>

## *b) Kosovo*

In the other theatre of post-conflict stabilisation in the Western Balkans, Hungary has also been actively involved in international peace support in Kosovo through its contribution to the multinational forces under NATO command (KFOR) in the country. For years, the Hungarian Defence Forces have provided a significant military presence in the form of the Tactical Reserve Battalion (KFOR Tactical Manoeuvrable Unit, KTM) placed under the direct control of the KFOR Commander as an emergency response unit. In case of any eruption of disturbance or conflagration of violence in Kosovo, the Hungarian troops are designated to be deployed as “emergency responders”.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to its responsibility and readiness within Kosovo, the Hungarian military presence stands ready as reserve capability, not only for KFOR but also for the EU military crisis management operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Interestingly, the tactical reinforcement unit that happens to be comprised of solely Hungarian troops is also assigned to shore up the military units serving in Operation ALTHEA – coincidentally with a large component of Hungarian soldiers – in the event of a deterioration or destabilisation of security in BiH. While the size of KFOR has been reduced as the situation has improved and NATO priorities changed, Hungary not only maintained its engagement, but it even became more significant as the focus of the Hungarian contribution to international peace support operations shifted onto the Western Balkans in recent years.<sup>15</sup>

After the significant reduction of Hungarian military presence in Afghanistan within ISAF and besides the Hungarian unit participating in the international training mission in Iraq, the Western Balkans clearly remained the constant area for active and distinct Hungarian engagements in multilateral post-conflict operations under EU and NATO flags in accordance with the stated strategic foreign policy objectives of Hungary in the region.

### *Hungarian support for EU enlargement reinforced through the Visegrad Group*

The advancement of the EU membership aspirations of Western Balkans states, as a Hungarian foreign policy aim, has been reinforced through the participation of Hungary in the formation of clear and consistent support by the Visegrad Group (V4) for EU enlargement in the region. Vocal endorsement and promotion of the perspective of EU integration for all the six countries in the South East European neighbourhood of the Union has remained a constant feature of the shared V4 approach with regard to the strategic objectives and rationale of future EU enlargement.

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14 KFOR Tactical Reserve Battalion, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/units/ktm>

15 *Hungary will be increasing the number of its military personnel in the KFOR*, 15 November 2018, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-will-be-increasing-the-number-of-its-military-personnel-in-the-kfor>

The Visegrad countries have consistently and unreservedly supported EU enlargement for years collectively in their coordinated positions. Presenting their unified stance on that matter, the V4 cluster has invariably and repeatedly confirmed its commitment to the support of the accession aspirations of the WB6 countries for more than a decade. In May 2019, the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group held the 10<sup>th</sup> annual congregation with their Western Balkans counterparts.<sup>16</sup> On each occasion, it has been confirmed that the Central European quartet sustains its unconditional endorsement of the enlargement process towards the aspirants from South Eastern Europe.

In their joint letter to the President of the European Council, the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group warned that any “further delay in making a positive decision” would result in a serious deterioration of stability in the region and limit the ability of the EU to perform “an active role in our own neighbourhood”, and calling for a “decisive discussion” among EU heads of state and government at their summit in October 2019.<sup>17</sup> It was just the latest example of commendable and direct diplomatic engagement by the V4 countries at the highest level in support of EU enlargement.

In the wake of the last setback in October 2019 in the continuation (with Montenegro and Serbia) or in the eventual launch (with Albania and North-Macedonia) of the EU accession process with every eligible partner in the region, the Visegrad countries reiterated their concerted drive for a revitalised EU enlargement avenue for the Western Balkans. The Visegrad quartet continues to deliver a reliable and steady support base within the Union for the EU membership aspirations of all Western Balkan countries despite their diverse political and economic conditions prior to the opening of the actual accession process. For this very reason, the V4 cluster fully supported the proposed redefinition by the European Commission of the EU accession process, in order to make the accession process more effective and credible by allowing the Western Balkans to move forward based on real progress in fundamental reforms.<sup>18</sup>

The shared V4 commitment to the enhanced credibility of the EU accession process in South East Europe reflected and represented the guiding priority of Hungarian foreign policy: ensuring stability, security and prosperity in the region through sustained motivation for ever-closer integration of Western Balkans societies, economies, institutions and political structures with the EU. With respect to the transformation of the South East European EU neighbourhood through inclusion, the Visegrad Group remains the primary platform for amplifying the sound and effect of Hungarian endeavours on shaping a common EU policy to that end.

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16 *V4 Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on the Western Balkans*, Bratislava, 28 May 2019

17 Alexandra Brzozowski: Visegrad 4, North Macedonia in last-ditch effort to change French enlargement veto, *Euractiv.com*, 17 October 2019

18 *Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 countries on the Western Balkans*, 27 February 2020, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/joint-statement-of-the-200323>

*Certain relevant areas for targeted Hungarian efforts through the Visegrad Group (and other friends) for continued EU enlargement*

With respect to the future direction of their continued support for the EU accession of Western Balkans countries, the Visegrad governments could be advised to intensify their efforts to engage all potential and willing member states – primarily the Friends of Enlargement, the so-called Tallinn Group and every other possible partner – inside the Union in three crucial aspects of continued EU enlargement process.

First, the geopolitical and strategic rationale underpinning the expansion of the European Union into South Eastern Europe should be reinforced as the principal objective of EU enlargement prevailing over the ideological vision of social engineering in pursuit of model post-national European countries in the Western Balkans prior to their EU accession.

Second, it will be inevitable to change the tone and perspective of the discourse on the nature and reason of enlargement at all levels of intergovernmental coordination and decision-making (from working groups of the Council to the heads of state and government in the European Council) and in the supranational organs (European Commission and European Parliament) of the European Union as well as within EU member states. Relying on the experience and evidence of 15 years of EU membership in the wake of the largest act of enlargement in the history of the EU integration, V4 countries should take the lead in changing the perception of EU enlargement and insist on its honest explanation as a mutually beneficial strategic bargain for all sides. In response to the profoundly wrong and incorrect interpretation of the extension of EU membership as an act of charity and generosity by wealthy EU members towards less prosperous countries, the Visegrad Group should recall and stress repeatedly the evident example of the multiple trade, investment and labour benefits offered by the accession of Central and Eastern European states to the single European market and most EU members in a variety of forms.

Third, the Visegrad countries need to make concerted efforts to ensure that the necessary financial resources will be available in the next budgetary cycle for EU enlargement. In order to secure sufficient funds for pre-accession financial assistance, the final size and structure of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should include the appropriations for the material support of EU accession to cover the considerable expenses of transformation and adaptation as well as reinforce the administrative, institutional and structural capacities of EU candidates from the Western Balkans for the years of their membership preparations. Without adequate budgetary resources, EU enlargement, as the most successful policy instrument for the external relations of the European Union so far, would be practically deprived of its most effective facilitating tool and incentive for the implementation of often costly reforms in candidate countries.

### *Concluding remarks*

Practically, the six Western Balkans state are already integrated to a large extent into the EU in various aspects of their economic reality: their exports, the provenance of foreign direct investment, the ownership of most institutions in their financial sectors and also the main destination of emigrants from its population. Nevertheless, no assurance can be given on the date when any or every candidate from the Western Balkans (or anywhere else) would eventually become an EU member. Maintaining the momentum of their aspirations and efforts to proceed towards integration into the European Union is not a panacea for all the problems of the Western Balkans, but it is the most effective tool that EU members or institutions could possibly find to keep these countries on track and to inspire regional stability as well as cooperation. Any unjustifiable, therefore unnecessary delay in EU enlargement to the Western Balkans is a politically short-sighted manifestation of the collective inability of the Union as a political alliance to assume responsibility for shaping its own immediate strategic environment.