

Peter ŠAJDA:

## *Globalisation and Regional Identity*

### *How can the Nordic Region Enrich the Visegrad Four?*



*In the history of humankind there have frequently appeared phenomena that have affected large portions of populations within countries, regions, or have even*

*reached a global significance. Such developments, being trends or megatrends, shape local and global history to a great extent. Strong trends, however, rarely remain as they are, without giving rise to parallel trends and counter-trends. If globalisation is to be viewed as a particular development, the question is to be posed, which trends accompany this megatrend and which trends appear to be counter-reactions to it.*

#### TRENDS AND COUNTER-TRENDS

It need not be expounded that globalisation is a broad and ambiguous phenomenon. In terms of international relations, it is often stated that this trend favours big and rich countries. Since this article does not primarily focus on the connection between the world economy and the phenomenon of globalisation, the economic effects of globalisation are not going to be analyzed in particular. The allegation that globalisation brings profit mostly to larger units has been acknowledged in many cases. Interregional cooperation has given rise to such organizations as the UNO, NAFTA, CEFTA, SEATO or the system of the EU.

#### STATE-FRAGMENTATION

It is, however, necessary to mention the fact that the modern Europe of the 1990s presented us with a significant counter-trend, whose roots go historically further than just to the origin of the Cold War. The phenomenon of state-fragmentation, which played an important role in the early 1990s, put an end to the multi-national states of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as it affected the territory of the former Soviet Union. In this connection a single case of de-fragmentation appeared, namely the unification of Germany.

Consequently especially Central Europe, the Baltic region and the Balkan region are predominantly composed of countries, whose population is between 2-11 million inhabitants (Poland and Romania being the

only exceptions). Since most of these countries are national states (even if they have considerable minorities), their national and linguistic identity, especially in Central Europe and in the Baltic region, is in most cases clear. The Balkan countries have to be analyzed case by case, since their internal situation has often been affected by factors completely missing in Central Europe and in the Baltic region. The former Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic countries, also require individual analyses.

#### VISEGRAD: SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL EUROPE

There has been a lot of discussion on which countries belong to the region called Central Europe. Depending on the chosen aspects (cultural, economic, historical, linguistic, religious, etc.) there have been several suggestions. Nevertheless the cooperation of the Visegrad Four (Poland, Hungary, Czech republic, Slovakia) has introduced a unit that defines itself as a region. Symbolically the *Visegrad Declaration* (1991) took place in the Magyar city of Visegrad, where in 1335 the Kings of Hungary, Poland and Bohemia gathered to further their economic and political cooperation. All of these countries have some significant aspects in common and especially in connection with their joining the EU these four countries decided to form a region of their own. Although the Visegrad cooperation as such is a recent notion, the cooperation between the four countries has a long and rich tradition.

#### COMMON HERITAGE

There are undoubtedly several very important aspects these four countries have in common, nevertheless, there are substantial differences, too. It is worthwhile to mention at least some of the most important characteristics that the V 4 have in common and make them a compact region.

The countries have formed various state units in the history, which still influences the national consciousness of the region. Historically and culturally can all these countries claim the heritage of the Habsburg Danubian monarchy, even if their positions in the monarchy were different (only the South-Eastern part of Poland belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire).

Religiously all these countries share the Latin Christian heritage, having large Roman Catholic majorities and historically important Protestant minorities. All of them have slight Orthodox minorities.

Linguistically, Polish, Czech and Slovak belong to

the group of West Slavic languages, Magyar has retained its distinct Finno-Ugric identity.

Between the late 1940s and the late 1980s these countries belonged to the Soviet sphere of interest, being members of the Warsaw Pact and the Comecon. All the four countries had significant democratic underground movements and personalities.

All the V 4 countries are EU candidate countries + Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic are members of NATO.

Apart from the already mentioned differences, the most significant difference within the region is the fact that the Polish market is larger than the three other markets together.

### COMPARABLE REGIONS

When we look upon the Visegrad Four as a region, it is understandable that a region of this size would look for other regions of a comparable size in Europe that would in some measure share similar characteristics. In Europe there are basically two other regions that are composed of countries of a comparable size and characteristics. These are the Benelux region (the *Benelux Customs Union* was put into effect in 1948) and the Nordic region (The *Nordic Council* was established in 1952). Since the scope of this article does not allow to treat both cases in full, let us focus on the case of the Nordic region with its similarities and differences compared to the V 4 region.

### THE NORDIC COUNCIL

First of all it is worthwhile to mention that it is in some sense equally difficult to define the Nordic region geographically, as it is in the case of Central Europe. Since the Visegrad region has close ties with countries like Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, etc., as they culturally belong to Central Europe, it resembles the Nordic region, which could in its broadest vision include Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Greenland and the Baltic countries. Nevertheless, let

us consider the members of the Nordic Council - Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland - the representatives of the modern Nordic identity.

The Nordic region can be considered one of the richest and most stable regions of modern Europe. Historically, however, the political positions of the respective countries within the region were just as different as those of the Visegrad countries. Nevertheless the Nordic heritage is shared by all of them, even if from different points of view.

Religiously the Nordic countries share the Protestant (Lutheran) tradition, having tiny denominational minorities, as well as Moslem communities.

The linguistic structure of the Nordic region could not be more similar to the Visegrad region than it is, Finnish being a language of Finno-Ugric origin (like Magyar) and the other languages being North Germanic languages of mutual intelligibility (Icelandic is a special case, being a non continental language).

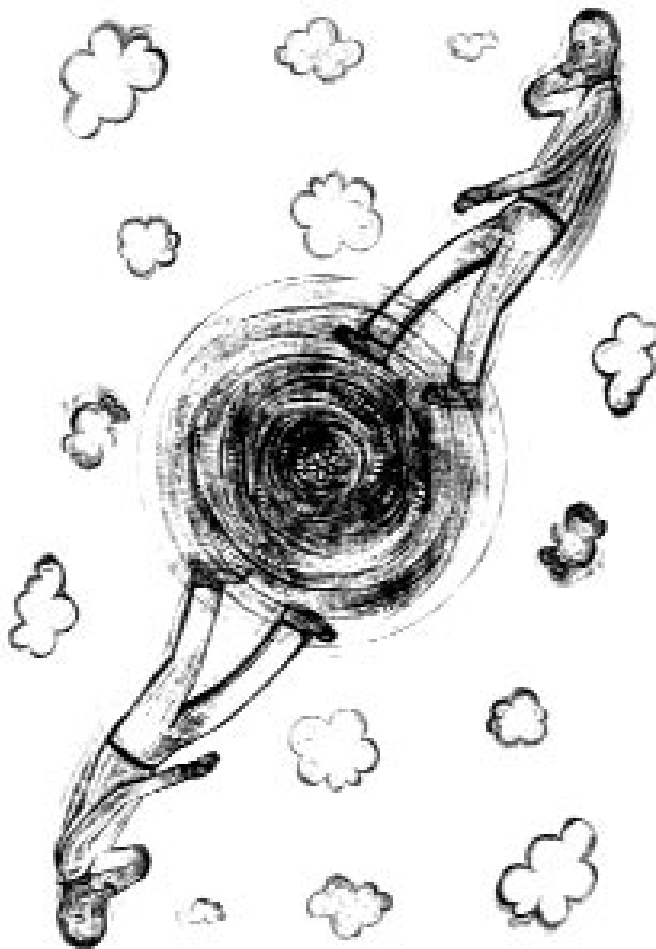
From the late 1940s till the early 1990s the Nordic countries followed different foreign and military policies. Even though all of them developed a strong social democratic tradition, Denmark, Norway and Iceland became politically a part of Western Europe, Sweden remained

neutral and Finland established close ties with the Soviet Union, mostly because of its geographical position.

The structure of NATO membership is also similar to the Visegrad case. Denmark, Norway and Iceland being members, Sweden and Finland non-members (like Slovakia). Also in the case of the EU membership Norway and Iceland constitute exceptions to the rule.

### ENRICHMENT FROM THE NORTH

It is obvious from the facts listed above that the Visegrad region and the Nordic region are comparable regions as to their key similarities and differ-



Jorrit de JONG and Sander TURNHOUT

## *Generation X or Generation † ?*

*A Study on some social-literary aspects,  
the reception and meaning of generation X*



*What are the common features of our generation? Is it worth it to speak about generations, or are they only generalisations? A young philosopher and a literary theorist analyse the book, which provided the topic of the 1999 European Regional Assembly.*

### GENERATION NOTHING

In 1996 generation X was, under the name of *Generatie NiX* (nothing), a big hype in Holland. The media were full of negative publicity about the generation born between 1960 and 1980. The themes of generation X: nihilism (apathy), post-modernism - a disbelief in progress - and individualism; were in the Netherlands translated as *nix*; which means nothing. The Dutch version of Generation X was Generation Nothing. We were involved in an initiative to create a more realistic image of the younger generation.

Thereby we took the chances we got to give our opinion about the generation that was constantly accusing us of having a total lack of ideas and ideals. We simply were wondering whether this generation, the babyboomers, were entitled to give that much critical remarks about our generation. We felt, in a way, offended, so we published a lot of articles, gave a lot of workshops and interviews and in the end we wrote a book about it.

### COUPLAND'S NEOLOGISM

Douglas COUPLAND is a young Canadian author who got *Generation X*, his first book published by St. Martins press in the United States in 1991, because Canadian publishers did not see too much in it. First we shall tell something about the features of the book, then I will tell you something about the story. Generation X is not a story as any other.

The tone is often very critical and cynical. On the surface, some aspects draw immediate attention: at first: in the sideline you will find a dictionary with generation-X-neologism in which a lot of neologism are being explained. Besides explaining the function of the dictionary is, again, criticising society. The lemmata I found will make this clear: McJob, ultra-short-term nostalgia, mid-twenties breakdown, option paralysis, historical over- and underdosing.

A few of these lemmata directly criticise a certain situation or fact in American society in the nineties. *McJob* for instance, directly criticises the future

ences. The population of the countries is also comparable (the size of the Polish market can be an advantage to the Visegrad region). The question that is to be posed is how the cooperation of the Nordic countries can enrich the development of the Visegrad region at its present stage.

It can be asserted that the Nordic countries succeeded in surmounting their historical differences to a great extent. Compared to the situation in 1900, when only two of today's five countries were independent states (Sweden and Denmark), these countries managed to uphold reasonable political and economic relations during the era of state-building of Norway, Finland and Iceland.

Another interesting facet of the Nordic regional cooperation is the fact that in spite of all criticism, the ties between the countries were not eliminated by modern political differences (e.g. Finland's non-alignment policy).

The Nordic identity can also be described as a *translingual* identity, since it includes other than just the dominant North Germanic languages. An interesting aspect of the Nordic cooperation is the practice of *minority* policies. It can be an inspiration for the V 4, if the countries decide that the Nordic model is applicable to their specific conditions.

### REGIONALIZATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE

There are certainly a considerable number of agreements and projects that could inspire the Visegrad countries in their development of their regional policy and identity. The mentioned examples represent just an impetus for further consideration. It is noteworthy that also within the framework of ecumenical cooperation in Europe, the Nordic sub-region of WSCF-E was an inspiration for the founders of the Central Europe sub-region, which has been based on the cooperation between the movements of the Visegrad countries so far.

It can be assumed that, if regionalization becomes a strong trend in the globalised world, it is likely to strengthen the position of small countries by forming larger structures that can represent regional interests at the global level. Furthermore it need not be expounded that a global world composed of well-developed regions might be an alternative to a super-power-dominated world of the 20th century.

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