

THESIS BOOKLET

Tóth, Bálint László

Railway cooperation among V4 states

The role of political spillovers in rail transport integration between the Czech
Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and the Slovak Republic

(1999–2021)

PhD. dissertation

Supervisor:

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Assistant Professor

Budapest, 2023

Department of International Relations

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1. Research history and justification of the topic

In recent decades, numerous analyses in the field of political science and international relations dealt with possible explanations for the durability and flexibility of the intergovernmental cooperation format of the Visegrad Group, from a politics-level approach.¹ However, the examination of policy-level factors might likewise provide valuable findings for understanding the persistence of this four-party decision-making mechanism in East Central Europe. It is indispensable identifying the factors that have motivated Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak decision-makers to continue and further deepen the quadripartite sectoral policy integration, taking into account cohesive and repulsive forces. The examination of the V4 cooperation's transport policy aspects means the linkage in the logical chain where the hereby presented dissertation connects to research history.

With the intention of contributing to the limited academic literature on the motivations of sectoral projects involving the governments and state authorities of V4 countries, the topic of railway cooperation was chosen as a case study of this research for multiple reasons. First, the development of transportation networks has always been high on the agenda of the Visegrad Group's annual presidencies. Second, the strategic characteristics of the four countries' railway networks make this transport mode a historically important pillar of the ECE region's transport system. Third, at the time of writing, the EU's cohesion and regional development policies as well as climate goals prioritize the development of cross-border railway services over other modes of transport. The above features enable the researcher to conduct a comprehensive study of the multi-level international sectoral policy making's external and internal factors.

The preliminary theoretical starting point of the research suggests that the co-decision-making of the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovakian governments and authorities takes place in a *sui generis* format: it is important that the lack of institutional elements – which is a specific original characteristic of the V4 cooperation – is compensated for by an international organization's mutually respected legal–institutional framework, for a consistent and effective regional policy integration.

As national (political, business, and cultural) elites align their objectives and desires in reaction to supranational activities, political spillover raises domestic demand for further integration (Schimmelfennig 2018). The process when sectoral integrative measures cascade onto additional (broader/deeper) collaborative actions in other fields by the decisions

¹ See Bársony 1998; Žantovský 2006; Somogyi 2006; Bútor 2011; Światłowski 2015; Gyárfášová and Mesežnikov 2016.

of the partner governments is referred to as political spillover. So railway cooperation demonstrates how the circles of practical integration are progressively entwined in case of the Visegrad format regional co-decision-making.

Therefore, the Visegrad Four collaboration might be described as a multidimensional network of areas of practical cooperation, in which specific joint projects imply further integration through political spillovers. The V4 negotiating platform serves as a tactical tool for advancing the political objectives of its members inside the institutional framework of the European Union. It is critical that the collective benefits outweigh the individual losses (Haas 1961; Caporaso 1992). According to Andy Smith (2004), inter-state sectoral cooperation exemplifies the intertwining of integration circles at public policy levels, while political spillovers from existing integrative mechanisms are critical to understand the nature and dynamics of cooperation at politics level.

The dissertation helps the better understanding of sectoral integration in East Central Europe through identifying and interpreting the European Union's political spillovers in the Visegrad Group cooperation. Furthermore, the research also provides a comprehensive picture on the Visegrad forum's functioning within the EU policy making and implementation procedures when it comes to our region. In order to highlight the added value of the thesis research, it is important to stress that at the time of finalizing the research, investigation conducted on accessible academic literature and databases/libraries did not yield any results for spillover analyzes with V4 focus. The hereby presented dissertation provides a detailed overview and analysis of the regional public policy integration of the four East Central European states through the example of their railway development efforts. The research achieves this goal by examining the practical aspects of the Visegrad Cooperation, and by focusing on the spillover effects of EU community institutions and legal/financial structures that encourage further cooperation.

2. Research methods

The above line of argument suggests that top–down political spillover effects of the EU’s regional and cohesion policies might, at least in part, explain the deepening and broadening of railway cooperation among the governments of V4 countries. Thus, it is essential determining the role of EU policies and funds in motivating incumbent political leaders of the four states to harmonize and combine their respective railway development endeavors. To this end, analyses presented in the dissertation seek to identify if the European Union, as a legal–political framework and a financial source, could be considered a driving force promoting railway policy cooperation among the V4 states?²

The research rests on three methodological pillars: qualitative conclusions of integration theory analyzes are supported by the quantifiable results of keyword-based content analysis of Visegrad Four official documents. Whereas correlations identified in the examined corpus (the intensity of co-occurrence of dependent and independent factors) are confirmed from practical points of view by structured interviews with Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak experts dealing with international railway strategies.

2.1. Conceptual framework

The study’s conceptual framework is based on international relations integration theories that assign key role to spillovers in explaining the gradual transfer of state or sub-state sovereignty towards supranational spheres. The spillover phenomenon principally fits in the toolbar of reasoning of the neofunctionalist and liberal intergovernmentalist international relations schools of thought – with the former being principally associated with Ernst B. Haas, and the latter being predominantly related to Andrew M. Moravcsik. Political spillover is the way decision-making activities are redirected from national to inter- or supranational levels by the creation of specialized organizations or alliances (Fesel 2015).

At the same time, political spillover promotes domestic demand for integration, as stated by Frank Schimmelfennig (2018). Haas (1961) highlights, however, that in order for the process to take effect, convergent policy goals must override conflicting decision-making aspirations among the governments of partner states. While liberal intergovernmentalists argue that

² With the aim of identifying EU driven political spillover mechanisms in the strengthening of sectoral interdependencies among Visegrad Group states, the dissertation focuses on correlations and interactions between joint Czech–Hungarian–Polish–Slovak cooperative governmental measures for railway development on the one hand, and the Communitarian financial/political/legal/institutional toolkit triggering such quadripartite projects on the other.

the more the states are independent, the better they can shape the directions and depth of international cooperation, neofunctionalists claim that governments do not have the tools and authority to control the integration process. Both theoretical approaches are on the opinion that integration in one field necessarily leads to further centripetal actions at other levels and areas (Niemann 2006).

2.2. Content analysis, text mining, co-word occurrence tests

The aim of this research is to prove that the strengthening and institutionalization of railway development policies among V4 states results (spills over) from integrative EU incentives, upon the decision of the incumbent governments of the four countries. The emergence of joint railway development initiatives and the regular appearance of quadrilateral professional railway negotiations clearly indicate sectoral policy integration between the four states, however, this does not in itself explain the EU's role in all of this. By adding to the equation the EU's political, institutional, and financial incentives available in the same time frame, a certain logical relationship can be assumed between the trigger factors and the triggered V4 actions.

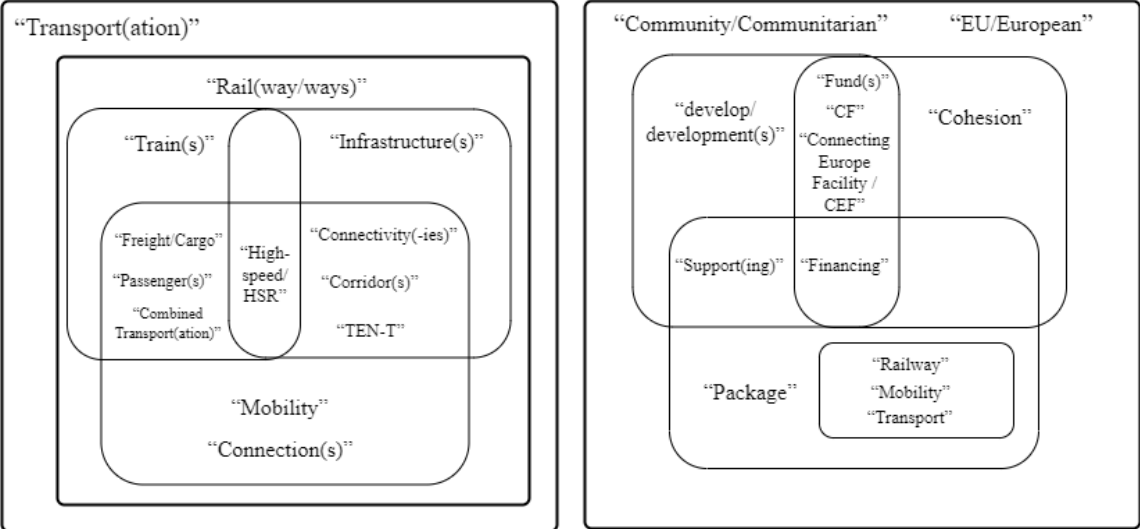
After a detailed description of the development of the Visegrad format railway cooperation, as well as the presentation of the relevant policies and legal frameworks of the European Union, there is nothing left but to prove that the incumbent governments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia consciously decided to coordinate certain aspects of their transport policies precisely because of the opportunities and coercive forces arising from their countries' EU membership. With the help of the content analysis using the text mining method, the political intention to develop the quadrilateral railway cooperation can be identified in the official communication of the decision-makers of V4 countries. The process' external and internal triggering factors are reliably indicated by the tendentious co-occurrence of specific keywords. Content analysis involves breaking down texts into relevant bits of information to allow for further categorization. The exploration of relationships between dependent and independent variables is greatly facilitated by data sets summarizing the co-occurrence of selected keywords, while the interactions and time dimension of the process can be displayed on diagrams and figures. (Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017).

As part of the research, *memoranda* of understanding, presidency programs, *communiqués*, and other official V4 documents issued between October 1999 (the earliest available source) and March 2021 (the latest available source at the time of finalizing) is subjected to keyword-based content analysis, with the aim of revealing any possible direct logical relationship between the independent and dependent variables: the availability of targeted incentive EU

instruments and the number of railway development initiatives in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.³ By a text-as-data approach and subsequent quantitative analysis, research of the aforementioned corpus focuses on identifying keywords related to V4 rail transport cooperation on one hand, and references to specialized EU funds and policies (that might support such endeavors) on the other. By the delineation of the evolution of concrete integrative steps made by the governments of the four countries in the field of railway development in the past decades, this research includes explanations for the reason of the simultaneous accumulation of certain keywords at different points on the time scale. The keyword-based content analysis, therefore, quantifies dimensions (variables) of content in official texts (Benoit 2011).

The text mining process involves the counting and co-occurrence indexing of the bag-of-words clusters selected as independent and dependent variables. As demonstrated on *Figures 1–3*, the bag-of-words containing terms covering railway transport is used as independent variables, while keywords referring to EU supporting mechanisms (funds, directives, institutions) are selected as the dependent ones.

Figure 1: Venn diagram of bags-of-words used as research filters⁴



³ The analysis involves documents identified in the online archive of the Visegrad Group. The key criteria for text selection are that it shall be issued and/or signed by politicians representing governments of V4 states (ministries, state secretariats, ministerial, prime ministerial and presidential offices) on the one hand, and to explicitly contain transport and/or railway related keywords.

⁴ All figures, tables, diagrams presented in this dissertation are the Author’s own representation.

Figure 2: Keyword-based filtering of textual corpus

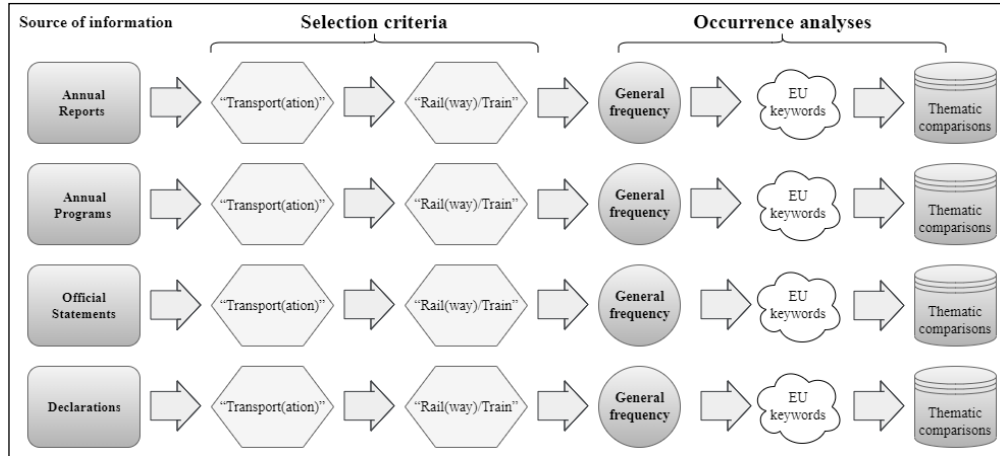
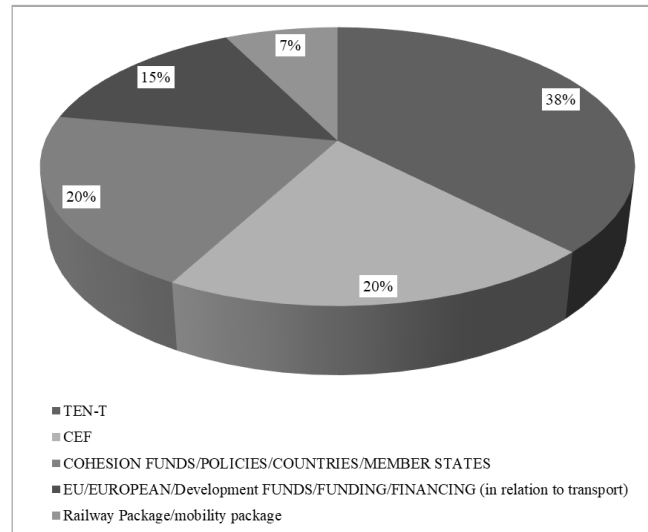


Figure 3: Occurrence of EU-related keywords, January 1999 – March 2021

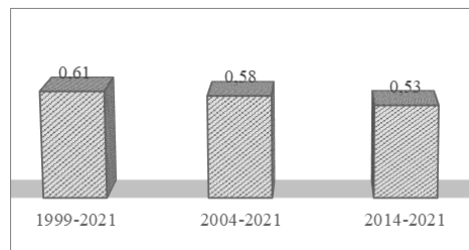


As a second step, the occurrence analysis concentrates on the general frequency ratios and accumulation of the selected research terms, in order to demonstrate the intensity (political dimension) of railway development efforts, with quantifiable data sets. The third step is to identify the role of EU structures in the deepening of the V4 rail transport integration by making thematic comparisons between the occurrence proportions of EU-related terms and of the ones alluding the relevant Visegrad Group endeavors (see Franzosi 2004).

Mane and Börner (2004) argue that co-word occurrence content analysis measures the strength of associations between keywords based on how often they occur together in the same text. In that sense, the strength of a selected keyword pair (contextual relevance/dimension) varies from *0* for those that never appear together to *1* for the ones that always do so. The higher this value is, the more the examined text mentions the elements chosen as dependent variables.

If the index's numerical value is higher than *I*, it means that within the associated word pair, the dependent one is even more important for the text drafter than the base term since it appears more often than the latter in the given corpus. To illustrate the evolution of the intertwining and cascading V4 railway efforts, the frequency test of the selected keywords is effectuated in annual breakdowns. The co-occurrence index (*Ey/Ix*) of terms related to railway infrastructure (*Ix*) and EU mechanisms (*Ey*) in the examined official documents of the specified time illustrates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in this case (*Figure 4*). Based on the logic of Mane and Börner (2004), if the co-word occurrence index value is *0*, it means that during the selected period, there were no official railway related V4 documents that made any mention to the EU's political, financial, or legal tools (*Ey*).

Figure 4: Co-word occurrence index of mentions to railway infrastructure and the EU-related references, October 1999 – March 2021



2.3. Structured interviews

Research of international relations integration theory literature helps understand the logic of creating intergovernmental decision-making mechanisms through sovereignty transfer. Throughout the thesis paper, the directions and dimensions of railway policy coordination among Visegrad states is presented by the content analysis of official V4 documents, while a comprehensive systemization as well as analysis of statistical data retrieved from publicly available EU transport databases serves to reaffirm the major conclusions of the text mining. The last logical element in the research chain is the presentation and assessment of structured interviews conducted with experts working at state-owned railway undertakings or research institutes based in V4 countries (four respondents from each country).

The interpretation of the practical, real-life points of view of rail transport experts gives a bottom-up dimension to the research that concentrated on the impact of high-level decision-making on the integration of railway networks in the Visegrad region. *Sixteen* professionals expressed their opinion (based on their every-day experiences) about the effectiveness, opportunities, and limits of EU funds in railway development projects in the Visegrad region. The elaboration of dichotomous and multiple-choice, as well as semi open and open-ended

questions helps determining how and to what extent various factors in the responses come together to form a coherent narrative (Galletta 2013). In their international political economy paper, Hong Liu and Guanie Lim (2022) argue that structured interviews play a crucial role in uncovering potentially invisible mechanisms linking dependent and independent variables. By adopting the aforementioned research approach to the Visegrad Group's political reality, the current analysis reflects on the role of state-owned railway businesses in the development of the ECE transport market.⁵

2.4. Practical suggestions

Based on the research experiences related to the dissertation, the major practical suggestion for further analyses about the role of political spillovers in the strengthening, deepening, and stratification of regional intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms is the following: as spillover is a process and not a static phenomenon, in order to trace it, one must focus on its triggering factors on the one hand, and on its effects on the other. Once a potential political spillover effect is identified between two or more successive acts of intergovernmental cooperation, in order to understand its nature and evaluate its impact, one shall analyze the geopolitical, legal/institutional and economic circumstances (cost-benefit assessment) of the multilateral decision-making leading to further inter-state synergies.

⁵ One can compare responses between interviewees in a uniform setting by asking a specific set of questions in a specific order with the aim of reducing potential biases leading to less ambiguous analyses (Young *et al.* 2018). The first *six* questions of the questionnaire cover the EU's role in the transformation of the V4 railway systems, while the last *four* inquiries address attitudes towards national development strategies. By the logical division of the questionnaire, the respondents' opinions on infrastructure development and market trends can be separated.

3. Results of the dissertation research

The research results shed light on the practical and political contexts of intergovernmental regional railway cooperation, with particular regard to the European Union's organizational and financial structures, which the governments of the V4 states can rely on in their quadrilateral transport related decision-making, in the absence of their own relevant institutional frameworks. The EU-rooted political spillovers in the transport policy integration of the Visegrad Cooperation go beyond the purely financial impact of Communitarian funds: they involve the creation of common V4 format intergovernmental and expert-level platforms, which in time eventually lead to the gradual elimination of legal and technological barriers between individual national railway networks.⁶ Government-level interference between different policy areas result in the integration of railway policies in the V4 region.⁷ The European integration's political spillover effects on the railway cooperation between the governments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

3.1. The role of the European Union in the formation of the Visegrad Group's railway development strategies

The implementation of the European Union's transport policy directives, cohesion goals, and regional development endeavors require strategic cooperation between the incumbent governments and authorities of Visegrad Four states. That is the way how the different sectoral aspects of the European integration give birth to new forms of tighter regional cooperation (Cram 2001; Somogyi 2006): the institutional/organizational/ political/budgetary pillars of the single market spills over into new forms of joint policy planning, coordination, and implementation among the V4 states.

Policy coordination between the four states is normally implemented within EU structures, and there are only occasional examples of sectoral integrative steps that are (partially) independent of community strategies. The systemizing ideas and organizational background of the railway cooperation is provided by the institutional and legal toolkit of the European Union, at the first place (visegradgroup 2002; 2018). The driving force of regional railway

⁶ In case of the railway policy coordination in the Visegrad format, governmental actions serve as mediators between sectoral actors from the different partner states (see Moravcsik 2005).

⁷ In the 1999–2021 period, incumbent governments of the Visegrad countries explicitly aimed at harmonizing their transport modernization policies with the most effective utilization of EU cohesion funds (visegradgroup 2013; see Edis 2007).

policy coordination among incumbent V4 governments is the spilling over of new cooperative mechanisms deriving from preexisting integrative structures of the EU, such as the four freedoms, sustainability goals, mobility directives, labor/human rights, energy supply chains, tourism, and so on (visegradgroup 2013).⁸

In order to accomplish their primary transport development goals, governments of the four countries need to adopt to Communitarian railway *acquis*.⁹ When it comes to formulating new Communitarian railway *acquis* or regulation, governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia tend to hold preliminary four-party negotiations to harmonize their positions before EU-level decision-making, in order to achieve more favorable positions.

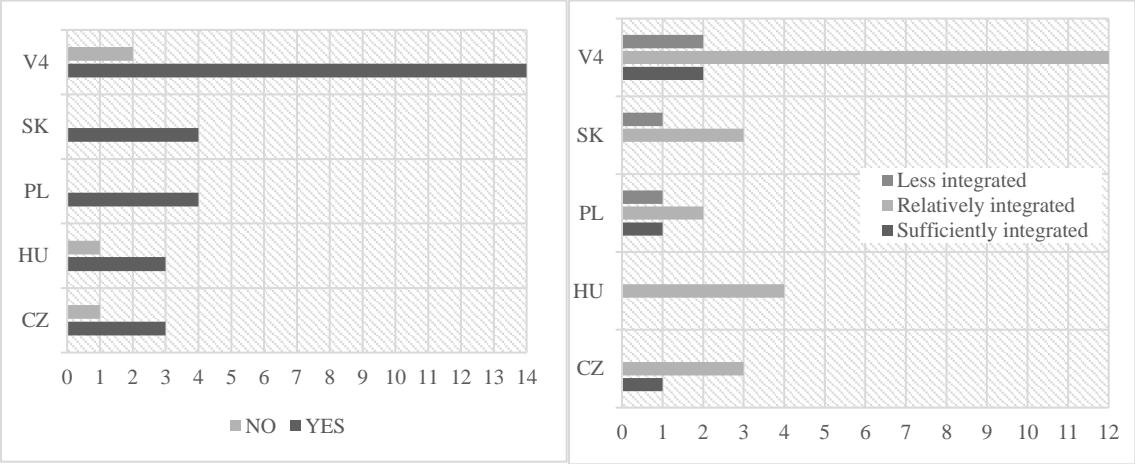
The EU's railway *acquis* (packages, directives, regulations, and white papers) provide the starting and reference points for determining the direction of the Visegrad states' development policies as far as the joint coordination of track-based traffic is considered (Pollak and Slominski 2015).¹⁰ A direct correlation, a clear system of interdependence between cause and effect occurs in cases where the EU and V4 development goals completely overlap (the latter results from the former). In exchange, when the Visegrad Four railway strategies set an – at least partially – new direction for the development of the ECE transport network compared to the EU policies, the spillover effect of the European policy integration is indirectly identified in the sectoral cooperation: instead of deepening the cooperation at the well-tried EU integration platforms, the Czech, the Hungarian, the Polish, and the Slovak governments achieve their common goals by creating new cooperation structures (visegradgroup 2017; 2018). In any case, the Visegrad region's railway cooperation is based on the European Union's institutional system, both in terms of its instruments and direction. The overwhelming majority of the interviewed railway professionals reaffirmed that in theory, the development projects in their country are in line with the European Union's transport strategies. Furthermore, major part of professionals considered their country as already relatively integrated within the European railway network (*Figures 5–6*).

⁸ In an effort to have a greater say in how specific sectoral policies are implemented, international institutions encourage the transfer of state authority to supranational organizations. International cross-policy ties are thus formed by the integrative measures' political spillovers, strengthening the structures of transnational organizations and supporting the creation of inter-state alliances (Martin 1995; Snidal 1995; Abbott and Snidal 1998).

⁹ At the same time, representatives of the four states routinely seek opportunities for cooperation to assert their shared interests in the decision-making processes within the European Union. In this sense, the primary goal of the incumbent V4 governments has been stressing the unique market and technical characteristics of the ECE transport systems when formulating EU railway legal documents (visegradgroup 2007; 2015b; 2016; 2017).

¹⁰ Since the time Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia joined the EU, spillovers of cross-border cooperative actions between sub-state, governmental, or supranational actors have increased the need for a dense, reliable, interoperable, and safe transport network in the ECE region (visegradgroup 2004a; 2009).

Figures 5–6: Railway development projects in my country are in line with EU transport strategies; my country is integrated within the European railway network



In order to provide a fast, secure, and interoperable transport grid in the eastern part of the EU, the Visegrad Four tend to formulate common negotiating and lobbying positions at EU *fora* related to the development of new international corridors in the region, the modernization of old lines, or the upgrading of national infrastructures with interoperable European technological solutions (visegradgroup 2004b; 2007; 2015a). The Visegrad cooperation offers a forum for the participating governments to agree on joint interest articulation positions on funding mechanisms or regulation procedures initiated by various EU bodies and organizations.

3.2. The role of communitarian funds in the implementation of V4 railroad investments

The financial resources necessary for the planning and implementation of railway development investments in the ECE region are primarily provided by the cohesion fund of the European Union (European Commission 2023; visegradgroup 2002; 2018). The EU’s transportation initiatives, legislation, and guidelines led to the need for more modern and reliable train services: over the past decades, a number of railway projects have been implemented (partially or entirely) from available Communitarian funds, which greatly contributed to the integration of the transport infrastructure between the four countries. (visegradgroup 2009; 2010).

The accumulation of references in official V4 documents to EU financial support mechanisms for railway development largely coincide with that of the agenda items for cohesion policies (see *Figures 7. and 8.*). In the examined period, 3 times out of 5, the European Union’s transport support mechanisms are referenced in official V4 written communication in the context of regional railway cooperation. Consequently, railway integration among V4 states has been related to the availability of EU financial resources for infrastructure development (see *Figure 9*). Railway-related initiatives have been mentioned

together with references to EU tools most commonly in the 2014–2020 MFF period, as *Figures 7–8* demonstrate. Visegrad states recorded shares of EU funding for railways (per line-km) way beyond EU average levels in the referenced timeframe, as displayed on *Figure 10*.

Figures 7–8: References to cohesion policies and EU transport development funds in official V4 documents, 2003–2021

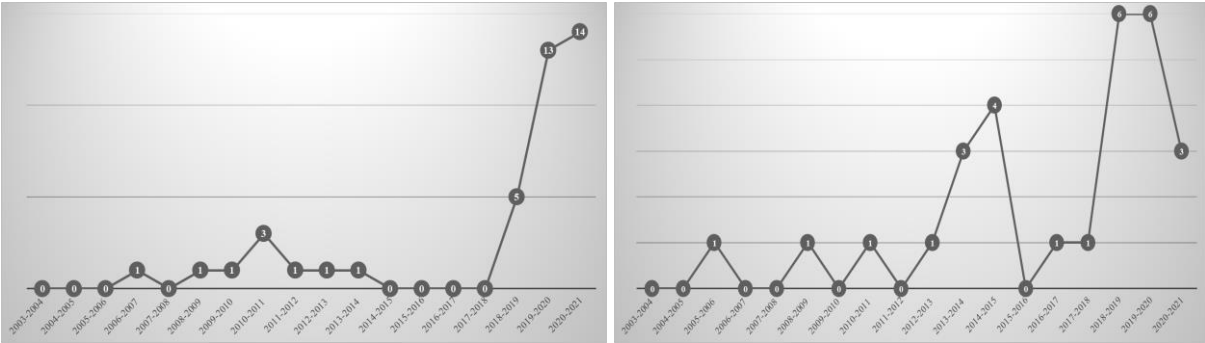


Figure 9: Proportion of references to EU cohesion/development funds for transport and to V4 railway initiatives, 2003–2021

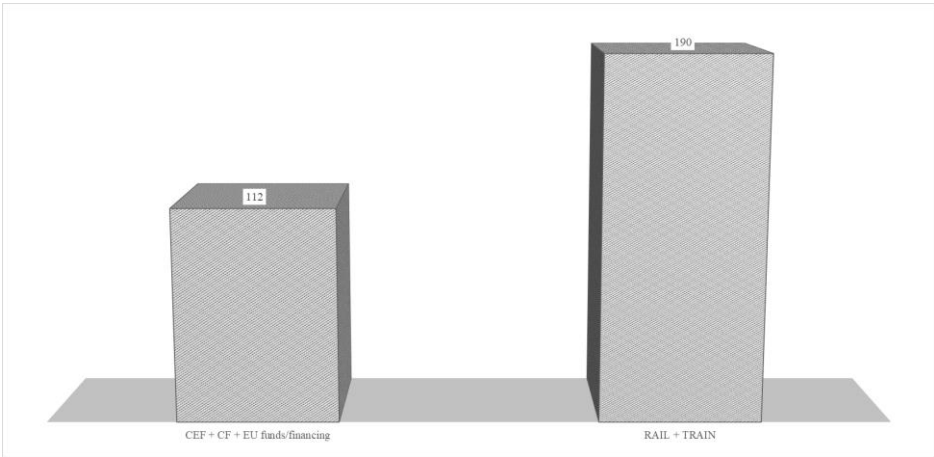
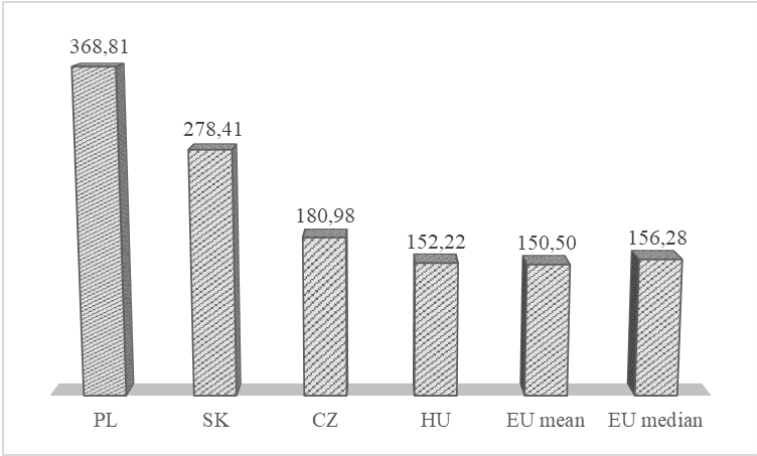


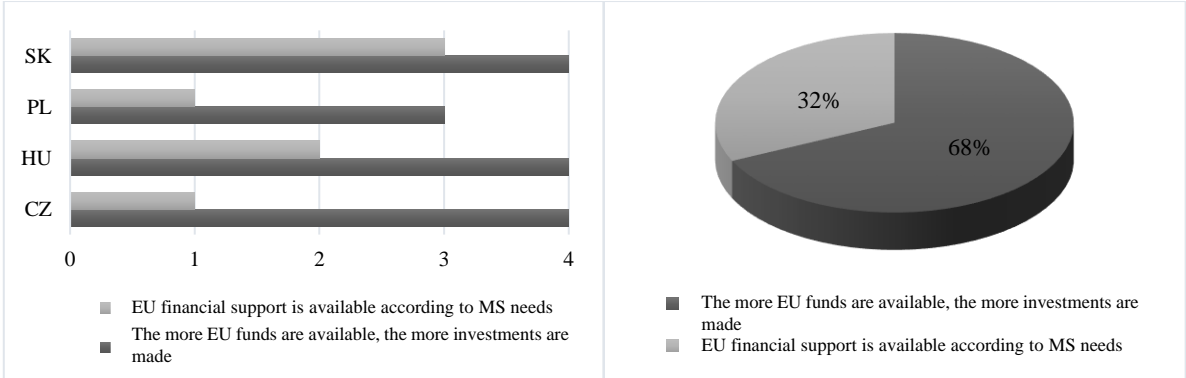
Figure 10: EU railway funding (EUR thousand per line-km, May 2020, European Commission 2023)



The Community’s multiannual financial frameworks provide the main budgetary tools for V4 railway initiatives. As a result, it became a common interest of the governments of the Visegrad countries to coordinate their railway modernization policies by effectively lobbying for targeted EU funds in order to improve the macroeconomic competitiveness of their transport networks.¹¹ Therefore, the availability of the related Communitarian financial resources, policy directives, and legal structures for infrastructure development have been an influencing factor of railway integration among the V4 members. In other words: the research showed a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the growing number of railway investments (co-)financed and legally supported by EU mechanisms and the frequency of V4 governments’ declarations on transport policy coordination. Thus, the four states’ alignment of shared interests produces measurable outcomes.¹²

Such conclusion was reaffirmed by the structured interviews with railway strategy professionals, as all respondents gave positive answers related to the effectiveness of EU financing instruments as far as the development of their country’s railway infrastructure was concerned. The majority of the interviewed experts directly claimed that Communitarian financing was necessary for the European integration of the national railway networks in ECE.¹³

Figures 11–12: There is a correlation between the available targeted EU financing and the number of railway projects in my country



¹¹ Keyword-based text mining clearly evidenced that topics related to railroad modernization appear in the examined text corpus primarily during the MFF negotiations. In the given timeframe, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia were net recipients of EU structural funds and secured the greatest *per capita* funding for 2014–2020 (European Commission 2023).

¹² Rail transport was most widely referenced in the research corpus from 2012 to 2015, and again from 2017 to 2020. Such timeframes correspond to the European Union’s multiannual financial framework for 2014–2020, whose specialized funds were instrumental for the modernization of railway connections in the Visegrad countries. The proportion of terms for the above-mentioned financing instruments or keywords related to EU transport policies that appear in official documents oscillates to the same degree as railway-related notions, particularly in the 2014–2020 period. From 1999 to 2021, altogether about 39% of official texts on V4 railway cooperation mention applicable EU resources. For the 2014–2021 period, however, a higher ratio (42%) could be identified.

¹³ A little over *two-thirds* of those completing the questionnaire argued that increased EU funding might result in a higher number of V4 railway development projects, based on their experience (Figures 11–12).

3.3. The role of EU structures in compensating for the Visegrad Cooperation's lack of organizational and institutional elements

Following railway-related EU policies and directives, in recent decades, the intention of the Visegrad states to upgrade and add new connections to the existing transportation routes have resulted an increasingly interconnected network that made it necessary to create new platforms of political interactions between the four governments and the responsible state authorities (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2019). As for the V4 countries, the effectiveness of regional political cooperation in the area of public policy, such as the development of transportation infrastructure, is not influenced by the weakness of institutional structures (Bútorá 2011), since the governments of V4 states collaborate as long as their political steps yield approximately equal benefits for each (Caporaso 1992).

The analysis and assessment of official V4 communication as well as the interviews with local railway traffic professionals together shed light on the paradoxical situation that while EU institutions created a common network of platforms for interest promotion and decision-making within Visegrad states, the communitarian structures and development goals, in themselves, are not always suitable for implementing the region-specific transport development strategies of East Central Europe (see e.g., the need for north–south transportation routes).

V4-focused railway policy schemes are being developed by governmental bodies of the four states – at times as an integral part of EU strategies, and at other times complementing or even challenging them (see e.g., the creation of high-speed railway infrastructures, involving FDI inflows from third countries).

3.4. Relationship to previous researches in the topic

The Visegrad states' railway markets compete with each other on the Eurasian freight corridors; however, the political leadership of V4 states have agreed that the joint development of upgraded and reliable corridors and high-speed linkages is particularly important to all of them, which shows how non-converging economic interests can be offset by shared values and political will (DTCP 2014).¹⁴ Hence liberal intergovernmentalist school of thought seems to better explain the motivations and nature of V4-format sectoral policy coordination, because – as it is discussed later on – in this region, spillovers between policy areas are principally

¹⁴ Transport collaboration exemplifies the viability of the V4 format co-decision-making: government level policy coordination is effectuated if strategic state interests meet and there is enough external motivation (the EU's political/financial mechanisms and strategies, as well as the demands of the single market) with the potential to spill over into tighter cooperation involving other policy areas, such as the creation of specialized four-party bodies for joint rail traffic coordination or development.

driven by clearly expressed governmental intentions and considerations. Liberal intergovernmentalism explains how regional integration results from direct decisions of national governments (Moravcsik 2005). The history of the V4-format railway cooperation showed that market/passenger demands, business needs, and sectoral interest promotion on their own did not prove to efficiently lead or even shape inter-state integration in the field of railway operation. The involvement of state actors (ministries, state secretaries, specialized parliamentary committees, responsible authorities, etc.) was necessary for the EU's integrative processes to spill over onto further deepening cooperation as far as joint transport policy planning was concerned in the Visegrad Group.

3.5. Conclusion

In case of the Visegrad Group's decision-making mechanisms, permanent organizational structures specialized in intergovernmental cooperation are uneasy to be found – except for the International Visegrad Fund. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the cooperation, numerous quadrilateral initiatives, agreements, and declarations have come to light in the most diverse policy areas, including railway development: regular expert meetings, consultations between ministers, state secretaries, and national authorities testify the realization of sectoral integration in the region.

According to the final conclusion of the thesis, the V4 states' railway integration endeavors are implemented as a joint result of high-level and sectoral policy focused intergovernmental decision-making: joint initiatives aimed at the development of track-based transport systems have become a stable and recurring element in the annual presidency programs of the Visegrad Group since the four states joined to the European Union.

As a result of political spillovers of the European transport system's integrative factors, expert-level and intergovernmental consultations on the subject of railways in the V4 format have evolved to be more and more common, as it has become a shared interest of the four ECE economies to coordinate the development of the region's railway capacities. Visegrad Four states have initiated a range of common projects¹⁵, so, the poorly institutionalized negotiating forum of the governments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia serves as a valuable instrument for endorsing interests in railway diplomacy, complementing these

¹⁵ The V4 Rail Roundtable (as a forum for expert debate), the High-level Working Group on Transport Links (that assists in the implementation of the four states' railway agreements), the Forum of V4 Transport Ministers (to promote environmentally friendly and sustainable modes of transportation) and other regular and *ad hoc* meetings of experts or government representatives (on the creation of future high-speed trails, on border-crossings, or on freight transports within the EU) all serve the above purpose.

states' efforts in specific EU bodies or other specialized organizations. The political leadership of the four states recognized the importance of the Visegrad Cooperation in establishing mutually beneficial negotiating positions, when it comes to changes in the technological or legislative environment, at European levels.

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List of own publications related to the topic

1. English language publications (peer-reviewed journal articles)

Bálint László TÓTH (2018):

- a) *The V4 railway cooperation – Is there a homogeneous Visegrád Railway Area?* *Köz-Gazdaság*, 13(3), pp.158-177.
- b) *Visegrád: A Tool that Supports the Implementation of EU Strategies to Enhance the Connectivity and Interoperability of the East Central European Railway Network.* *Foreign Policy Review*, 11, pp.158-181.
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2. Hungarian language publications

2.1. Book chapters

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