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TRENDS OF V₄ STATES' POLICIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Pavλίνα Janebová

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The publication was prepared within the research project of the Association for International Affairs (AMO), Trends of V4 States' Policies in Eastern Europe. The project was conducted in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

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MAIN FINDINGS

- There is a perceived deterioration in the quality of bilateral relations of their countries with Hungary by respondents from Poland, Czechia and Slovakia since 2021. The Hungarian stakeholders evaluated their country's bilateral relations with Czechia, Poland and also Slovakia as worse too.
- There was a perceived improvement in Polish-Czech relations, especially among the Polish respondents.
- The quality of relations with Russia was assessed as worse compared to the available data from 2019 in the case of all four Visegrad Group states. Whereas the Hungarian respondents evaluated relations as "good", in the case of the other three countries the evaluation was between "bad" and "very bad".
- While the Hungarian respondents assessed Hungary's relations with Russia as better than with any of their partners in the Visegrad Group, stakeholders from Czechia and Slovakia on the other hand assessed relations with Ukraine, the US and Germany as better than with both Poland and Hungary.
- The Polish respondents also evaluated the quality of Poland's relations with Ukraine and the US as better than with other V4 partners, however, the assessment of relations with Germany stays between "neutral" and "bad".
- Majorities of respondents in all four of the Visegrad countries tend to agree that the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was appropriate.
- On average, only about a third of the respondents in the entire V4 believes that either Ukraine or Moldova will become a member of the EU within 10 years.
- Majorities of respondents in all four of the Visegrad countries agree or somewhat agree that the EU should expand the sanctions if Russia continues its military actions against Ukraine and (with the exception of Hungary) even for the sanctions to include prohibiting the import of natural gas from Russia.
- Majorities of respondents in all four of the Visegrad countries disagree / somewhat disagree with the EU abandoning the sanctions against Russia immediately. There seems to be a shared preference for keeping the sanctions in place until Ukraine's territorial sovereignty is restored, even though there are differences among the countries regarding the details of what that should entail.
- There is an overall agreement among respondents from all four countries that the EU should be a leading actor in the process as well as that the individual countries should be active participants in the process bilaterally.
- Compared to last year, the results of the survey show a decline in perception of the V4 as concerted, influential, constructive, important or beneficial for pursuing the V4 countries' interests. However, there was an increase in support for the countries more often striving for a joint approach in the future as well as approaching the Visegrad partners first when building coalitions.



INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine of 24th February 2022 has fundamentally redefined the political and security context in Europe. The unprovoked brutal actions of the Russian regime against Ukraine have brought about urgent challenges for the European Union in managing assistance to Ukraine, helping millions of people displaced by the conflict and introducing economic sanctions against the aggressor, all whilst battling with the already existing emergencies – economic recession following the covid 19 pandemic, rising energy prices and the climate crisis. One of the greatest tasks for Europe in this situation has been to preserve its unity, in spite of differences in foreign policy priorities and the starting points of the 27 EU member states and the consequences for their citizens' welfare and their businesses' profits. Although the EU's success in this has so far exceeded expectations, some cracks are apparent.

The Visegrad Group (V4) is a fitting example. Formerly (often without proper foundation) perceived as a club of countries that share opinions on many issues tackled at the EU level, the V4 has many times since February 2022 been proclaimed dead. Whereas Poland, Czechia and Slovakia have been at the forefront of the EU's efforts to help Ukraine counter the Russian attacks, Hungary's attitude to these efforts has been lukewarm at best, outright harmful at worst.

This report is based on the results of a survey conducted in the summer of 2022 among the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak foreign and EU policy communities. The text is structured in the following way: After a brief methodological note, we present and analyse the Visegrad countries' foreign and EU policy stakeholders' views, divided into four thematic areas (see below). Drawing on the insight that members of these communities have into the reality of the foreign and EU-policy making in their countries, we aim to explore their opinions on various aspects of the EU, NATO and the individual states' responses to the Russian war in Ukraine, potential future developments, and last but not least, any change – or lack thereof – that the past nine months have brought to the bilateral relations of the V4 states and the cooperation as such.

This publication is the latest contribution in a series of research papers on trends in the opinions of foreign and EU policy stakeholders, conducted by the Association for International Affairs and its partners since 2011. It was undertaken with the kind support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.



A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted during an approximately one-and-a-half month period between August and October 2022 via the on-line survey tool SurveyMonkey¹. The responses were anonymized. In total, 2249 representatives of foreign and EU policy communities in Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia were approached with the survey. The survey was addressed to civil servants, politicians, researchers and analysts, journalists and selected business representatives. Some of the respondents approached could not be placed in any of the five categories.

Among the respondents approached during the project, the following categories were represented:

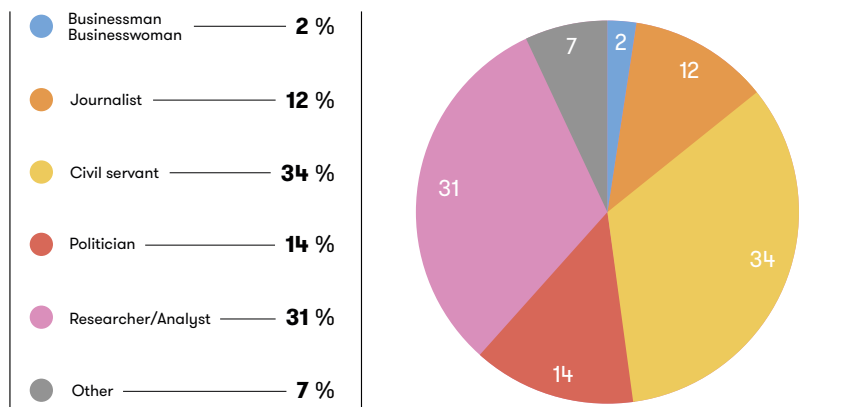
- members of the lower and upper chambers (where applicable) of the parliament sitting on relevant committees;
- government ministers;
- members of the European Parliament;
- senior state administration employees specialising in foreign / EU affairs;
- ambassadors accredited to selected foreign countries (EU member states, countries in the EU's neighbourhood – United Kingdom, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland, Norway, Israel, and further USA, Russia, China, India, Turkey) as well as selected international organisations (UN, OSCE, OECD, NATO, Council of Europe), and their deputies;
- researchers and analysts focusing on foreign policy, the European Union and security policy (think-tanks, academia);
- journalists reporting on foreign and European policy affairs;
- representatives of trade unions and employers' / employees' umbrella organisations;
- representatives of relevant political parties dealing with foreign policy and European issues.

Before answering the survey, each of the respondents was asked to state their occupation. Respondents in each of the 4 countries were working with a survey in their native language (i.e. in Czech, Hungarian, Polish or Slovak). The questionnaires were returned by 381 people which equals about a 17% response rate. Of the 4 countries, the Slovaks and Czechs were the most responsive (a response rate of 28% in the former and 21% in the latter case, or in absolute numbers 86 and 121, respectively). In the case of Hungary, 16% (80) of approached stakeholders responded. The lowest response rate was among the Polish foreign- and EU-policy community - only 10% (94). In absolute numbers, the numbers of respondents from individual countries are comparable. The resulting data however have to be interpreted with the limited size of the respondent group in mind. The survey does not attempt to represent a robust piece of sociological research but rather a glimpse into the thinking of relevant actors and their assessment of their states' policies in the region of Eastern Europe. As such, the results presented in this report provide only a fragment of the overall picture,

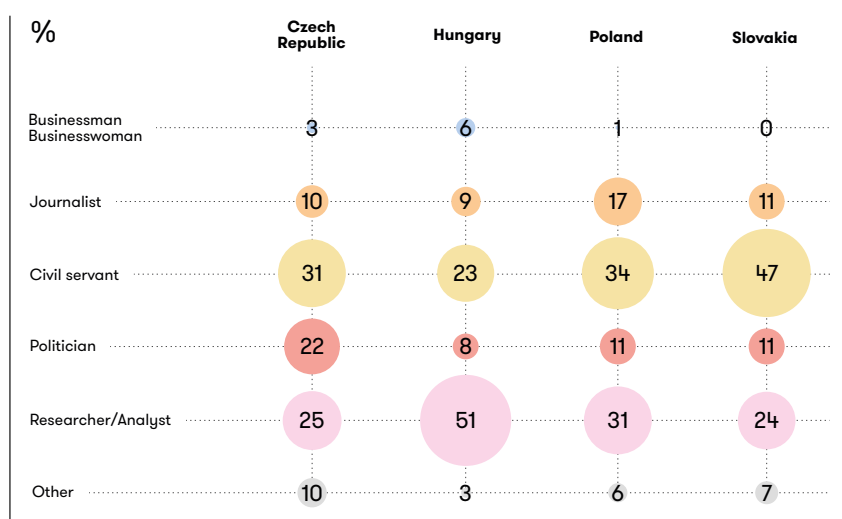
¹ "SurveyMonkey: The World's Most Popular Free On-line Survey Tool," www.surveymonkey.com.

RESPONDENTS AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS

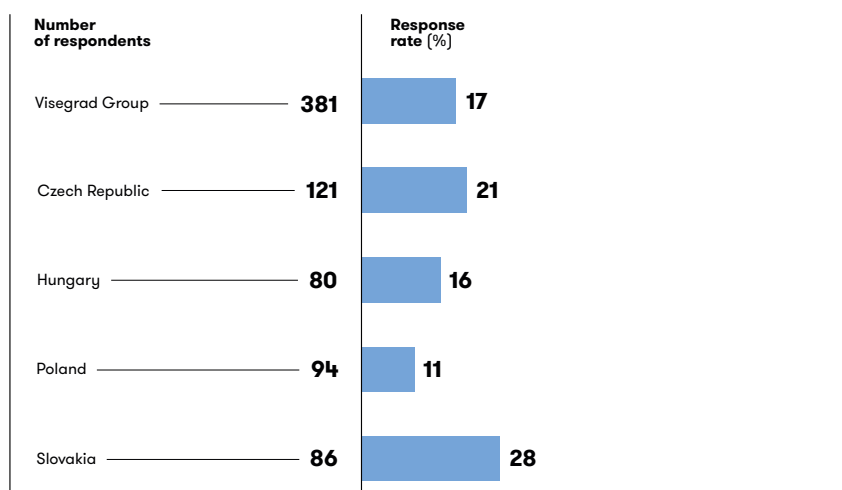
Share of respondents who identified themselves as...



Share of respondents who identified themselves as...



Number of respondents and response rate



but can serve as a starting point for further research into the Eastern policies of the Visegrad countries in Eastern Europe and the cohesion (or a lack thereof) of the V₄ in this regard.

In the overall composition of respondents who returned the questionnaire, civil servants are the most widely represented, making up 34%, followed by researchers and analysts who represent 31% of the overall number of respondents. Politicians comprise 14% of respondents, journalists 12% and businesspeople 2%. Finally, 7% of the respondents were not able to fit themselves into any of the categories.

The survey consisted of nine questions focusing on selected aspects of the V₄ states' and the EU's policies in Eastern Europe in the context of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the profound change of the political landscape it brought not only for the EU's Eastern neighbourhood but for the EU as such:

- bilateral relations among the V₄ states;
- EU, NATO and V₄ states' responses to the Russian aggression in Ukraine;
- the future of relations between the EU, NATO and states in Eastern Europe;
- the current state of V₄ cooperation and its future.

In the majority of the questions, respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a certain statement. While some statements expressed a mere observation, others stated a preference for a certain development. It was possible to answer "I don't know / I prefer not to answer" in all questions. The common Visegrad results were calculated as the arithmetic mean of the values of the four countries on each given question. Where possible and appropriate, we compare the results of this year's survey with previous editions of Trends of Visegrad European Policy or Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy (2019, 2021).²

Even though the period of response collection was relatively short, it is advisable to bear in mind that the situation in Ukraine as well as the policies of EU members states and the EU as such have been developing rapidly and the reality assessed by respondents in August and their perception of it was not necessarily the same as at the beginning of October.

² "Trends - AMO Survey," trendy.amo.cz.

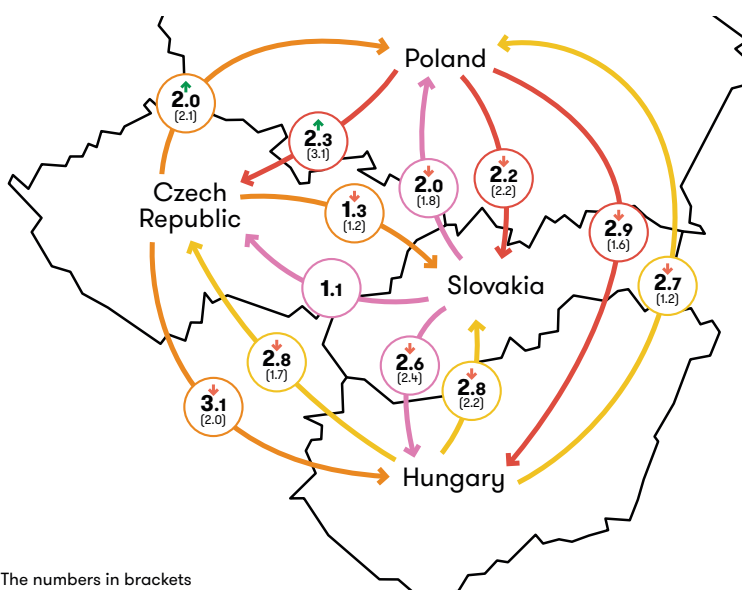


BILATERAL PARTNERS AND ALLIES

Intra-Visegrad Relations

1 (very good)—5 (very bad)
Average rating

Evaluate the quality of [your country's] overall relations with the selected countries.



The numbers in brackets show the 2021 results.

As regards bilateral partnerships of the Visegrad Group countries both between each other and towards other significant players inside and outside of the EU, the respondents were asked to evaluate the quality of their country's overall relations with selected countries on a 5-degree scale from "very good" (1), "good" (2), "neutral" (3), "bad" (4) to "very bad" (5). The final assessment expressed by a number is an arithmetic mean of the evaluations by all respondents.

Looking first at the results regarding the relations among the four members of the Visegrad Group, it is the **relations with Hungary that the respondents from the three remaining countries assess as worst.** The likely cause of this is the attitude of Hungary towards the Russian aggression in Ukraine which has been very different to the other three Visegrad partners, especially Poland and Czechia. Whereas Poland and Czechia have been among the leaders of the EU's efforts to support Ukraine, Hungary has chosen to e.g. not allow the transport of weapons over its territory and to threaten to block some of the sanctions against Russia while bilaterally negotiating with Russia about energy supplies.

Compared to the results of last year's survey, the quality of bilateral relations with Hungary as assessed by respondents from Poland, Czechia and Slovakia was worse. **The biggest decline in the quality of bilateral relations was perceived by the Polish respondents** – from "good"/ "very good" in 2021 to

“neutral” in 2022. The Czech respondents assessed relations between Czechia and Hungary as “neutral”, compared to “good” in 2021. In the case of Slovakia, the decline was not as substantial. Accordingly, **the Hungarian stakeholders evaluated their country’s bilateral relations with Czechia, Poland and also Slovakia as worse than in 2021.** The biggest decline was perceived in Hungarian-Polish relations – from “very good”/ “good” to “neutral” (1.2 to 2.7).

On the other hand, there was a perceived **improvement in the quality of mutual relations between Czechia and Poland.** From the Czech respondents’ point of view, the mutual relations are “good” (2.0) and there was an improvement of just 0.1. The perception, however, still has not quite bounced back to the level of 2019, when the Czech respondents’ evaluation of the mutual relations was at 1.7. The Polish stakeholders evaluated the quality of mutual Polish-Czech relations at 2.3 (closer to “good” than “neutral”) which is a value significantly lower (i.e. better) than 3.11 (“neutral”) in 2021 and also shows that **the quality of relations with Czechia as perceived by Polish respondents is better than with Hungary.** That corresponds to the public image of relations between the two countries and arguably is a consequence of the resolution of the Turów dispute and like-mindedness when it comes to the Russian war in Ukraine.

There has not been much change in the perceptions of relations between Czechia and Slovakia which remain “very good” as seen from both sides. Similarly, relations between Slovakia and Poland remain “good”, based on the responses from both countries.

Further, the respondents were asked to evaluate their country’s relationship with Germany, the US, Ukraine and Russia. The above mentioned differences in policies towards Russia and Ukraine between Hungary on the one side and Czechia, Poland and Slovakia on the other are reflected in the results.

The quality of relations with Russia was assessed as worse compared to the available data from 2019 in the case of all four Visegrad Group states. With Hungary, the increase of the average value was a mere 0.3, resulting in an average of 2.1 (i.e. “good”) in 2022. For Poland there also was not a great increase, however mutual relations were assessed at 4.4, i.e. between “bad” and “very bad” already in 2019. This year’s result of 4.9 shows that the Polish respondents could hardly assess the quality of Polish-Russian relations any worse. Similarly, in the case of Czechia, the shift went from “neutral” / “bad” (3.5) in 2019 to close to “very bad” (4.9) in 2022.

At the same time, **the Hungarian respondents assessed Hungary’s relations with Russia better than with any of their partners in the Visegrad Group, the United States or Ukraine.** Hungary’s relations with Ukraine were evaluated at 4.4, i.e. “bad”. This is the worst perception from all the V₄ countries. Similarly, the Hungarian respondents perceive their country’s relations with the US the most critically (between “neutral” and “bad”), compared to the other three Visegrad countries.

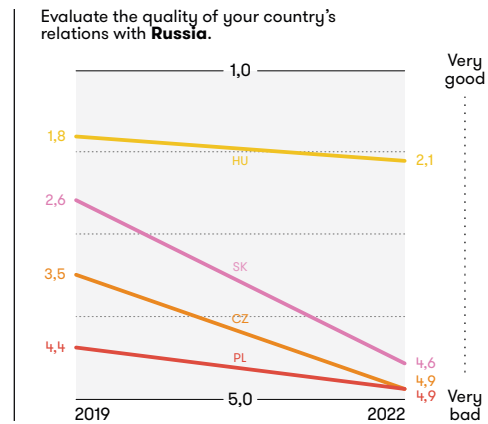
Stakeholders from Czechia and Slovakia on the other hand assessed relations with Ukraine, the US and Germany as better than with both Poland and Hungary. The Polish respondents also evaluated the quality of Poland’s relations with Ukraine and the US as better than with other V₄ partners, however, the assessment of relations with Germany stays between “neutral” and “bad”, slightly worse than in 2021 (and significantly worse than in 2019 when the value was 2.7). Polish critical attitudes towards Germany were aggravated, among other factors, by the perceived lenient approach towards Russia in the ongoing situation and insufficiently decisive support for Ukraine. In the case of Czechia, Hungary and Poland,

there was a deterioration of approximately 0.2 - 0.4 compared to last year's results when it comes to the evaluation of the quality of relations with Germany.

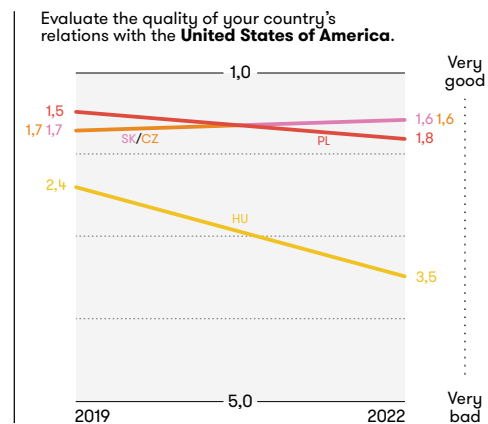
Assessment of the quality of relations with the US remained approximately the same as in 2019 with the exception of **Hungarian respondents** who in 2019 evaluated the quality of Hungarian relations with the US at 2.4 whereas this year, **the average value is 3.5 (i.e. a shift from "good"/"neutral" to "neutral"/"bad")**. This is an even worse assessment than in 2015, when the Hungarian respondents evaluated the quality of mutual relations at 2.9.

All in all, the results confirm Hungary's position of an "outlier" when it comes to relations with Russia, Ukraine and the US, but also show a deterioration of its relations with the other three Visegrad states. On the other hand, the perceived improvement in relations between Czechia and Poland may signify that the door is opening for a more intense cooperation in the future.

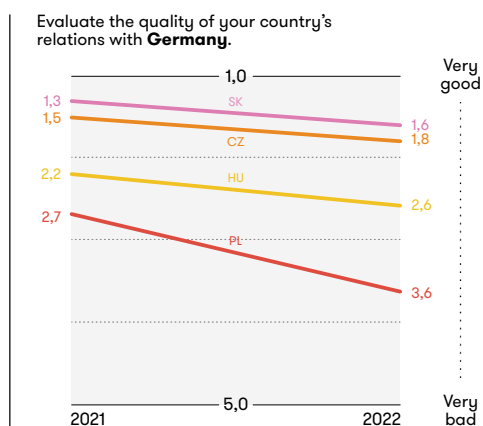
Relations with Russia



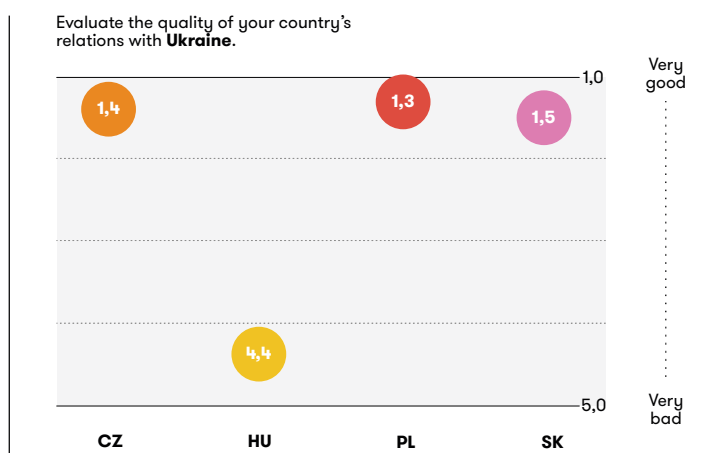
Relations with the United States



Relations with Germany



Relations with Ukraine



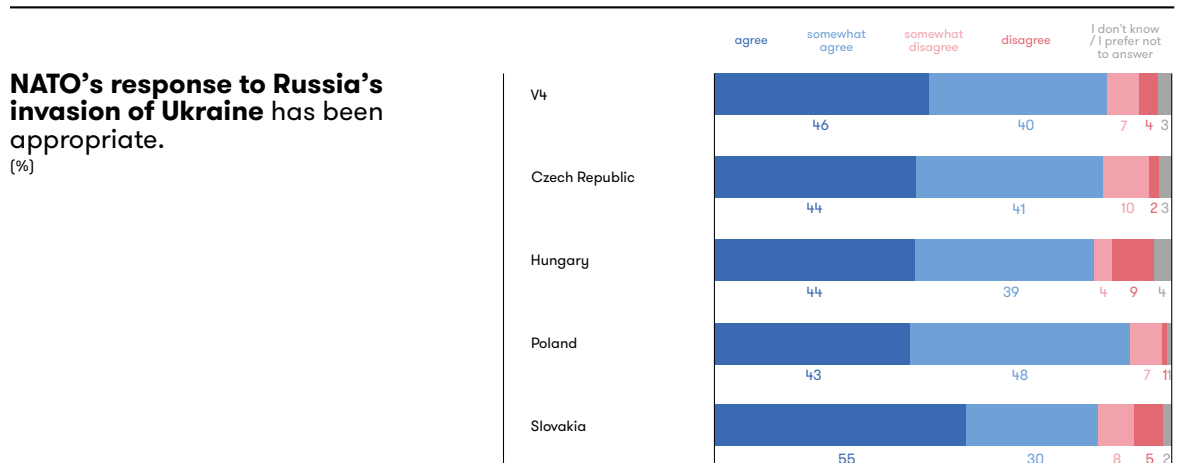
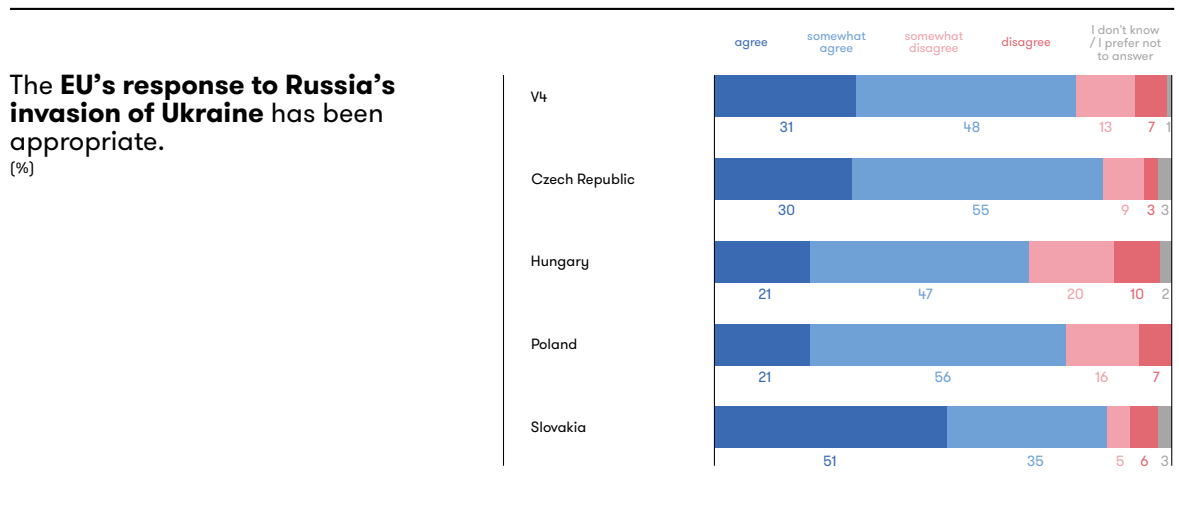
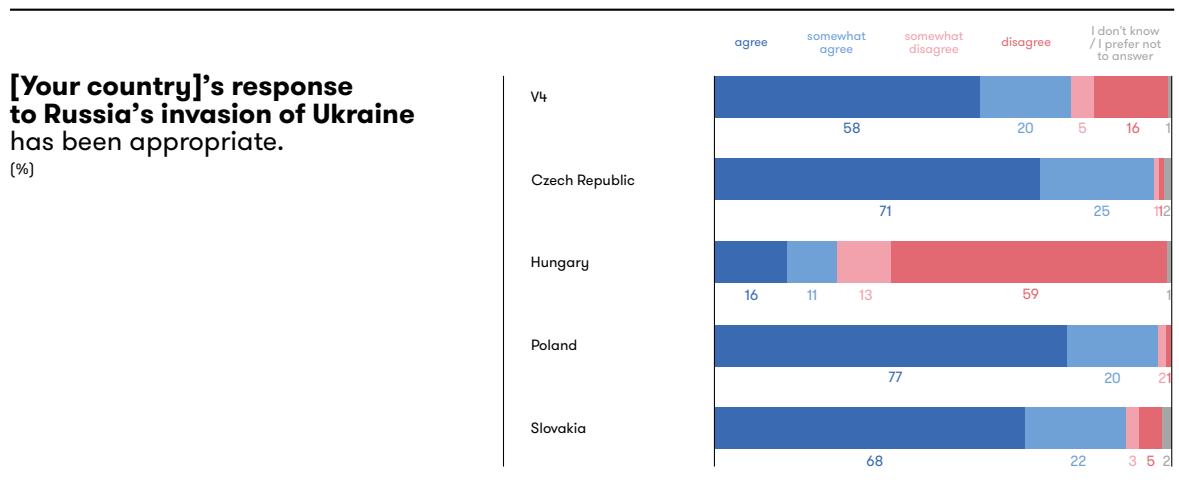
EU, NATO AND V4 STATES' RESPONSE TO THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

In the next part of the survey, the respondents were asked to assess the extent of their agreement with three separate statements regarding the appropriateness of the response of their country, the EU and NATO to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

An overwhelming majority of Czech (96%), Polish (97%) and Slovak (90%) stakeholders participating in the survey agree / somewhat agree that **their country's response was appropriate**. On the other hand, **72% of Hungarian respondents** expressed some level of **disagreement** with such a statement. In light of the apparent foreign policy leanings of Orbán's government this number seems to suggest that a significant portion of the Hungarian participants in the survey were not recruited from people sympathetic to the government.

The response of NATO was also perceived as appropriate by big majorities of the respondents in all four states, most notably in Poland, where 91% of participating stakeholders agreed/ somewhat agreed with the particular statement.

Finally, the response of the EU is seen as appropriate by 85% of the Czech and 86% of the Slovak respondents, whereas in the case of Poland and Hungary, these numbers are somewhat lower – 77% of the Polish stakeholders agree/ somewhat agree with the particular statement and 68% of the Hungarian ones.



FUTURE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU, NATO AND STATES IN EASTERN EUROPE

EU AND NATO ACCESSION

Although three out of four Visegrad states have been vocal advocates for Ukraine's and Moldova's accession to the EU – and even Hungary expressed its support for Ukraine's membership by joining the initiative of the leaders originally of eight EU countries in March 2022³ – the members of foreign policy communities do not seem to hold high hopes as regards the swiftness of the process.

Whereas half of the participating stakeholders from Poland agree / somewhat agree that Ukraine will become a member of the EU within 10 years, this number is only **37%** in the case of **Slovak** and **32%** in the case of **Czech foreign policy stakeholders**. For **Hungary**, only **1 in 5** of the respondents believe in Ukraine becoming an EU member by 2032. Ten years indeed appears to be the minimum time in which it would be realistic to accede to the EU for a country which faced many challenges even before the Russian invasion.⁴

Unsurprisingly, regarding potential **NATO membership**, the numbers are even **lower**. The Polish respondents seem to be the most hopeful in this respect, with one in three agreeing / somewhat agreeing that Ukraine will become a member of NATO within 10 years. In the Czech group of respondents it is one in four, in the Slovak, one in five and in the Hungarian it is even less. Georgia's chances of joining NATO within the next ten years are even slighter according to the Czech, Polish and Hungarian respondents. However, there was a 5% higher share of Slovak respondents who agreed/ somewhat agreed that Georgia will become a NATO member in the given time period than in the case of Ukraine.

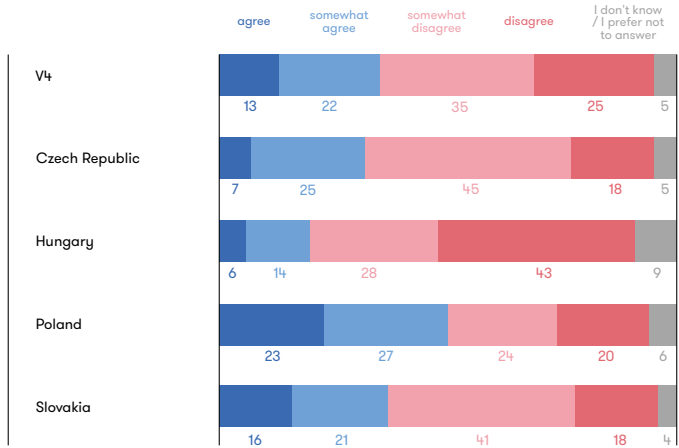
When it comes to **Moldova's EU accession process**, the share of respondents who agree / somewhat agree that it will be successfully finished within **10 years** is a few percent **lower than in the case of Ukraine** in the group of **Czech (30%) and Polish (45%) respondents**. Interestingly, a higher share of the Hungarian respondents seems to be more hopeful about Moldova's prospects for achieving EU membership in 10 years than about Ukraine's – 25% of them agree / somewhat agree with the particular statement.

There seems to be a higher degree of optimism regarding Georgia potentially obtaining EU candidate status. More than 68% of the Polish and Slovak participating stakeholders and 57% of the Hungarian ones agree / somewhat agree that it will happen within the next 5 years. Czechia is thus the only country of the group where a plurality of respondents (48%) disagree / somewhat disagree with such an outlook.

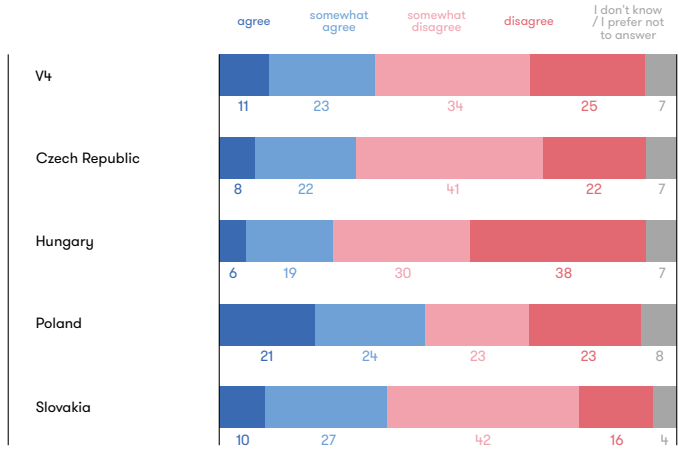
³ "Hungary supports bid for Ukraine to become EU member, says minister," Reuters, March 1, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-supports-bid-ukraine-become-eu-member-minister-2022-03-01/>.

⁴ Matthias Matthijs, "Ukraine Could Become an EU Member. What Would That Mean?," Council on Foreign Relations, June 28, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/ukraine-could-become-eu-member-what-would-mean>.

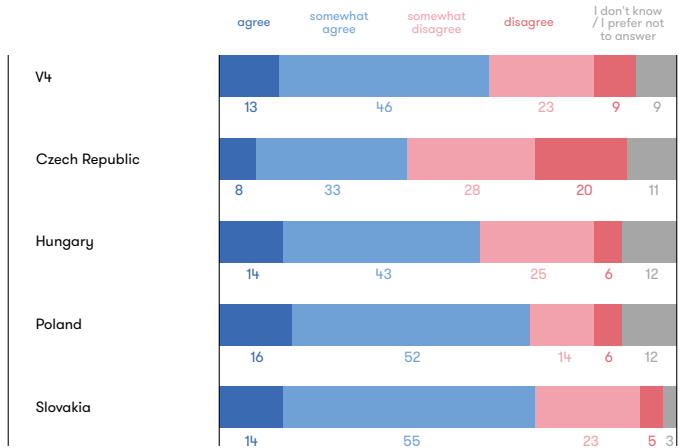
Within 10 years from now, **Ukraine will become a member of the EU.**
(%)



Within 10 years from now, **Moldova will become a member of the EU.**
(%)



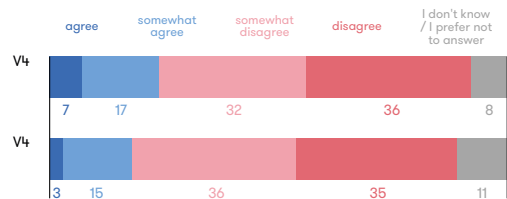
Within 5 years from now, the **EU will grant candidate status to Georgia.**
(%)



To what extent **do you agree** with the following statements?
(%)

Within 10 years from now, **Ukraine will become a member of NATO.**

Within 10 years from now, **Georgia will become a member of NATO.**



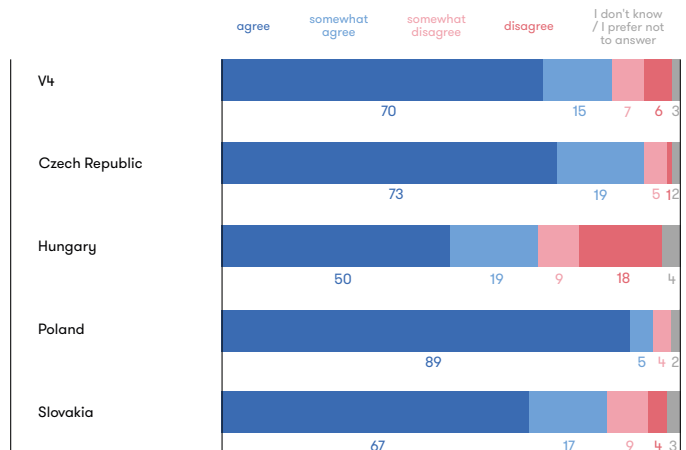
RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Economic sanctions remain one of the key tools available to the European Union to counter the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Although so far seven sanction packages have been unanimously agreed upon by all member states, there have been considerable objections on the side of some member states, particularly regarding whether or not the sanctions should include energy supplies for which many of the EU member states are highly dependent on Russia.⁵ While not being the only one hesitant to commit to the sanctions regarding the prohibition on Russian oil, Hungary has certainly been the most vocal about it.⁶

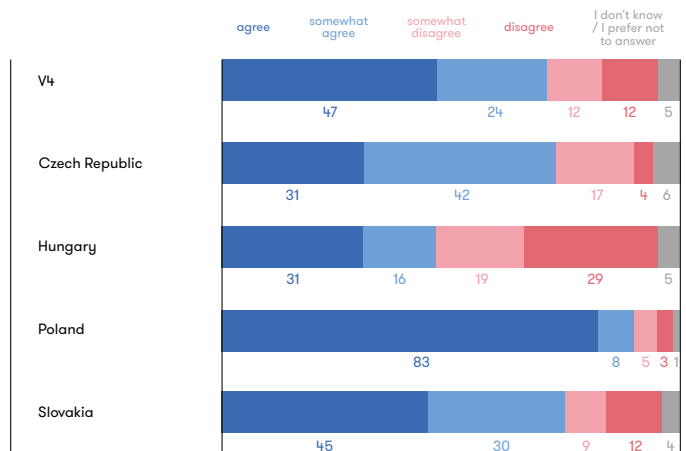
In the survey, the respondents were asked to express their opinions about the **expansion of sanctions if Russia continues its military actions against Ukraine**. 94% of the Polish respondents and 92% of Czech ones agree / somewhat agree with such an approach, compared to 84% of Slovak stakeholders and 69% of Hungarian ones. **Even though the number of Hungarian respondents is quite significantly lower, it is thus still a majority.**

Shares of respondents expressing at least some level of agreement with **including gas supplies in the sanctions** are **lower**. Still, nine in ten Polish respondents would be in favour of it, i.e. only 4% less than for the expansion of the sanctions as such. Among the participating Slovaks, 75% agree / somewhat

The EU should expand the sanctions against Russia, if Russia continues its military actions against Ukraine.
(%)



The EU should expand the sanctions so as to prohibit the import of natural gas from Russia, if Russia continues its military actions against Ukraine.
(%)



⁵ "From where do we import energy - Eurostat," <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/energy/bloc-2c.html>.

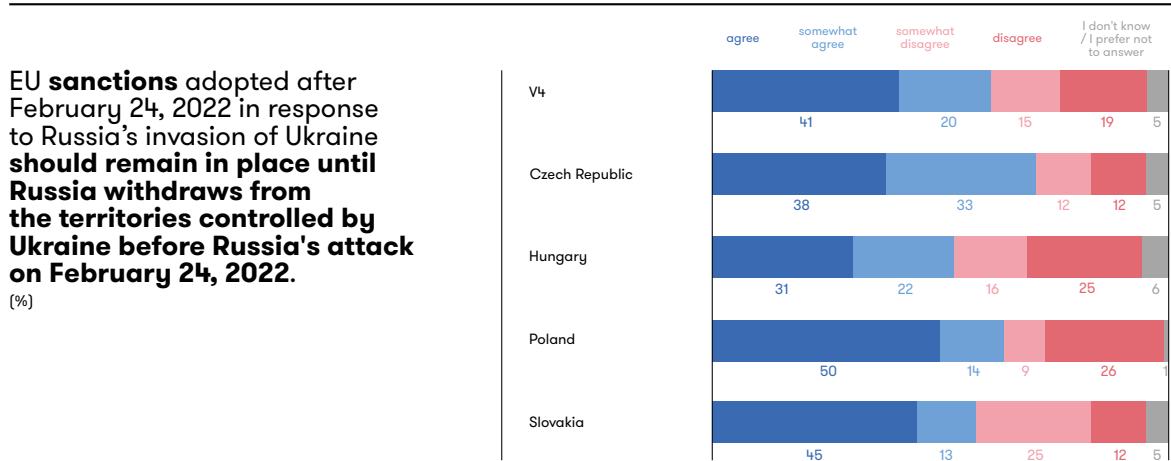
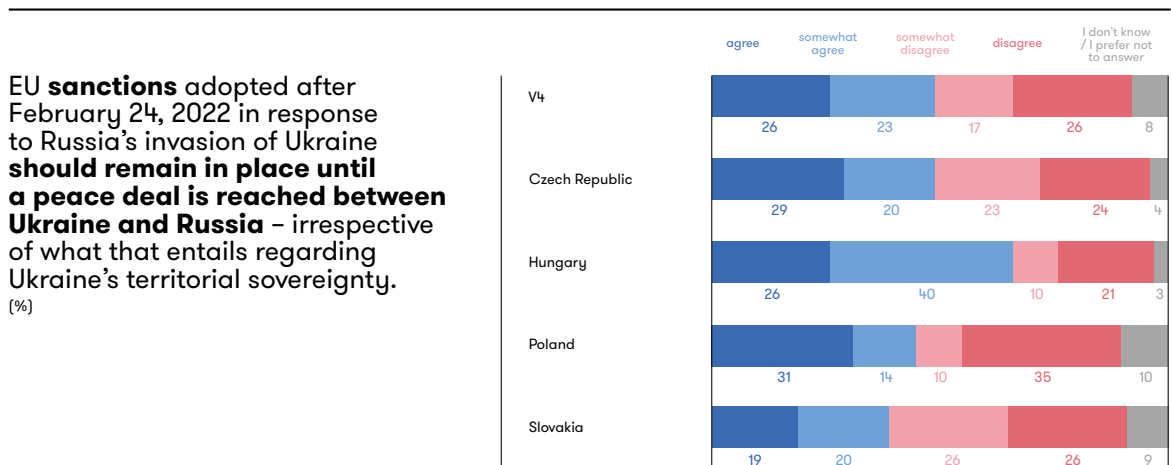
⁶ "Hungary's Orban Blames EU's Russia Sanctions For Energy Crisis, Wants Them Scrapped," Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, September 22, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-orban-russia-sanctions-lifted-ukraine/32046405.html>.

agree, among the Czechs 73%. The Hungarian share of 47% is again the lowest – but still suggests that the country’s official policy line is not particularly supported by the respondents of the survey.

There was an **overwhelming majority of people disagreeing / somewhat disagreeing with the EU abandoning the sanctions immediately** – 94% of the Polish, 91% of Czech, 84% of Slovak and – again a lower but still quite high share – 79% of Hungarian respondents.

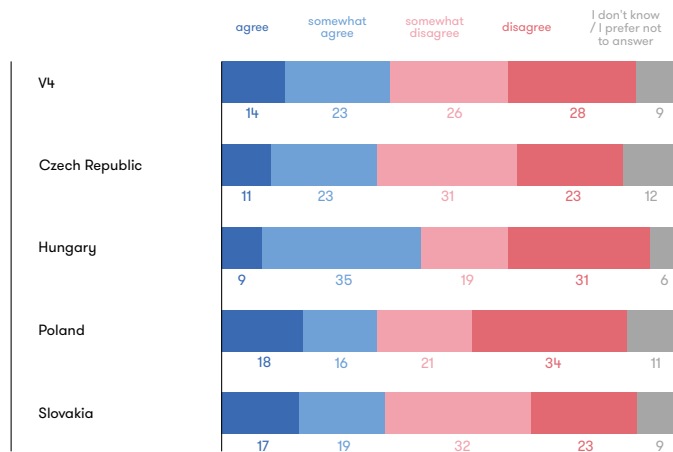
Considering keeping up the sanctions under different scenarios, there seems to be a shared **preference for keeping the sanctions in place until Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty is restored**. Among the Czech respondents, the biggest level of support was found for the scenario of keeping the sanctions up until Russia withdraws from territories controlled by Ukraine before the invasion in February 2022. In the case of Polish and Slovak respondents however, more people agreed / somewhat agreed that the sanctions should remain in place until Ukraine fully regains control over its territory, including both Donbas and Crimea. All in all, among the respondents in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia there seems to be greater support for maintaining the sanctions until Russia leaves both the Donbas and Crimea than only the former. At the same time, in the case of both Czechia and Slovakia, there are almost 30% of respondents who disagree / somewhat disagree.

Hungary, again, is an outlier here. First of all, the share of respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing that EU sanctions should remain in place until a peace deal is reached, regardless of what that means for Ukrainian territorial sovereignty, was higher than the number of people agreeing / somewhat agreeing

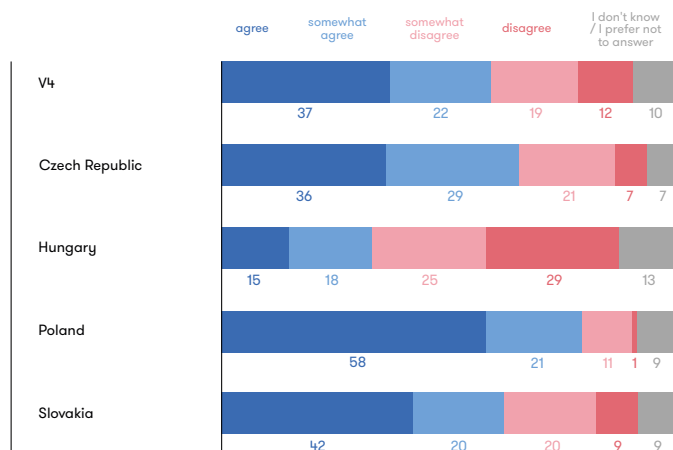


that Russia should withdraw from the territories occupied since February 2022. Also, while 44% of the respondents agree / somewhat agree that the sanctions should stay until Russia gives back Donbas, but not necessarily Crimea, the number of respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing to the sanctions remaining in place until Russia withdraws from both territories is 11% lower. **Hungarian respondents** are thus **the only group** in which the majority **disagrees / somewhat disagrees with conditioning the abandonment of sanctions on Russia withdrawing from Crimea.**

EU sanctions adopted after February 24, 2022 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine **should remain in place until Ukraine regains control of its territory, including the Donbas, but not necessarily Crimea.**
[%]



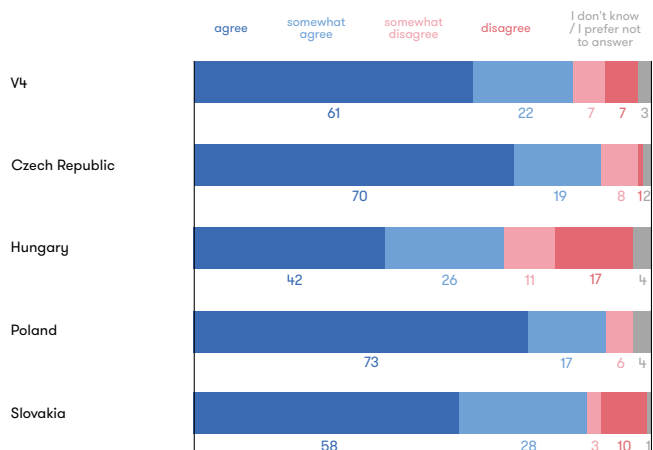
EU sanctions adopted after February 24, 2022 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine **should remain in place until Ukraine fully regains control over its territory, including both the Donbas and Crimea.**
[%]



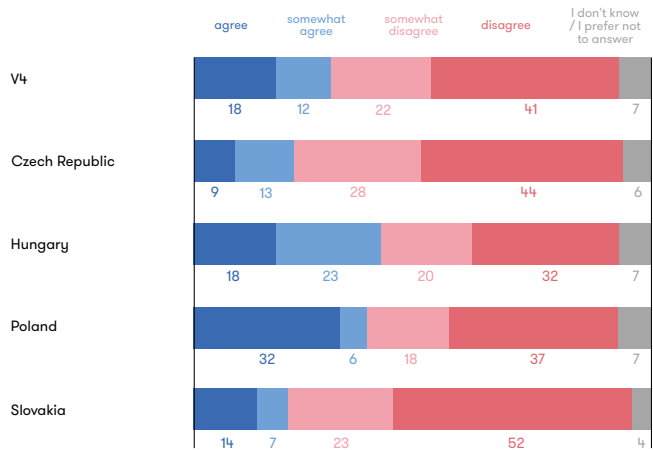
EU SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

When it comes to the specific form of support for Ukraine from the EU as well as from individual countries, virtually **all of the respondents are in favour of providing humanitarian support**. **More than 90%** of the respondents in all countries agree / somewhat agree that the EU should continue to provide **financial support** to Ukraine. Fewer people – although still nine out of ten Polish and Czech respondents, 86% of the Slovak ones and 68% of the Hungarian ones - agree that the EU should **provide funding to Ukraine to reinforce its military**. Regarding military support, there is significantly **greater agreement among the Czech, Polish and Slovak respondents** for providing **military equipment including weapons** than there is for providing military equipment excluding it. In the group of Hungarian respondents, the difference is not as large (16%), while the share of people disagreeing / somewhat disagreeing with providing weapons (33%) is slightly higher than in the other three countries. Nine out of ten Polish and Czech respondents, eight out of ten Slovaks and seven out of ten Hungarian ones agree / somewhat agree with the idea that **their country should be providing training to Ukrainian troops**. Finally, as regards **the post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine**, there is an overall agreement among respondents from all four countries (more than 90%) that the **EU should be a leading actor** in the process as well as that the individual countries should be active participants in the process **bilaterally**. A slight exception to this is Slovakia, where more than 10% of respondents disagree / somewhat disagree with the active bilateral engagement

The EU should provide **funding to Ukraine to reinforce its military**.
[%]

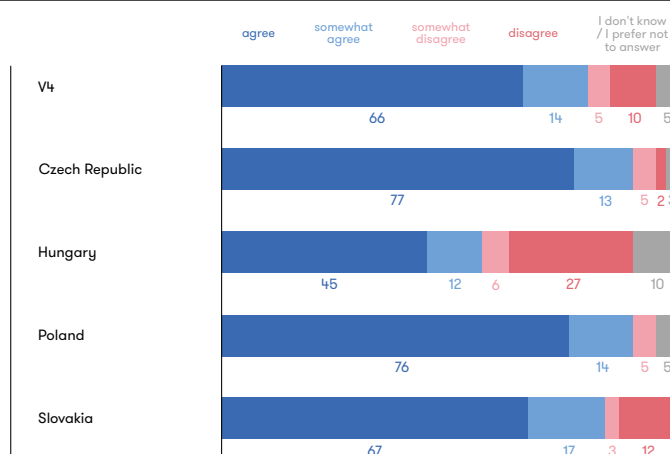


[Your country] should provide **military equipment to Ukraine, excluding weapons**.
[%]



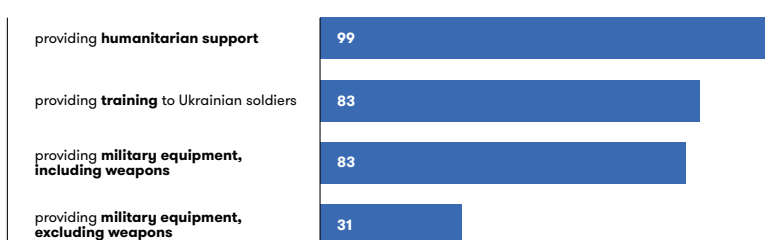
[Your country] should provide military equipment to Ukraine, including weapons.

(%)



Share of respondents agreeing or somewhat agreeing that their country should provide a particular type of support to Ukraine.

(%, V4)

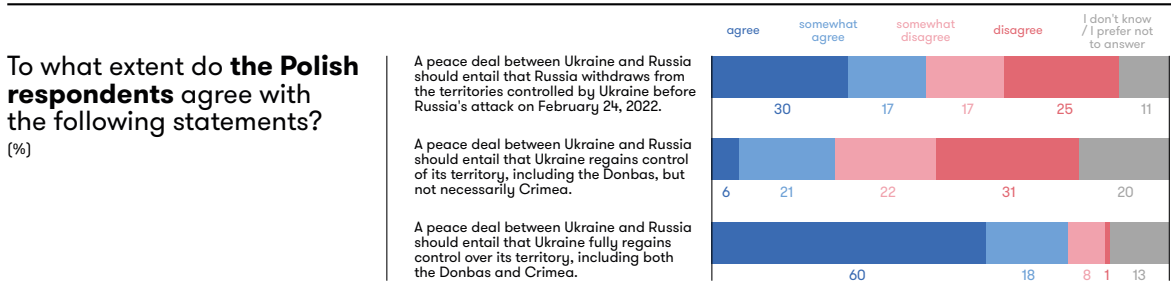


RESOLUTION OF THE WAR

Asked their opinions about a **ceasefire / peace deal** between Ukraine and Russia, a **bigger share of the Hungarian respondents (58%)** than the respondents from the other three countries tended to agree that a ceasefire or a peace deal must be achieved **as soon as possible, irrespective of whether Russia withdraws from Ukrainian territory**. Among the Polish respondents on the other hand the support for this is the lowest among all four countries – 12%.

Mirroring the opinions about keeping up the economic sanctions against Russia, there seems to be significant support for the idea that for a peace deal to be reached, **Ukraine's territorial integrity should be restored completely**. In Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, the most widely supported scenario, agreed / somewhat agreed with by majorities of respondents over 70% is that of a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia entailing Russia withdrawing from both Donbas and Crimea, in addition to all the territories controlled by Ukraine before the invasion on 24 February 2022. Among Hungarian respondents, a lower percentage of respondents tend to agree with this (45%), whereas 39% disagree/ somewhat disagree.

Regarding the scenario of a peace deal entailing Russia withdrawing its forces from Donbas but not necessarily Crimea, the Czechs, Hungarians and Slovaks agreeing and disagreeing are more or less even. Among the Polish respondents however, the share of those in disagreement clearly prevails.

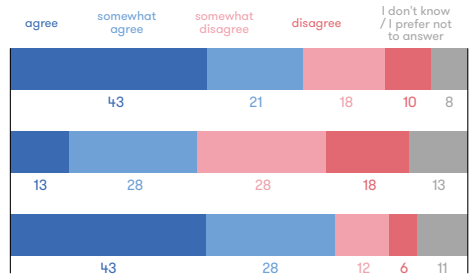


To what extent do **the Slovak respondents** agree with the following statements?
[%]

A peace deal between Ukraine and Russia should entail that Russia withdraws from the territories controlled by Ukraine before Russia's attack on February 24, 2022.

A peace deal between Ukraine and Russia should entail that Ukraine regains control of its territory, including the Donbas, but not necessarily Crimea.

A peace deal between Ukraine and Russia should entail that Ukraine fully regains control over its territory, including both the Donbas and Crimea.





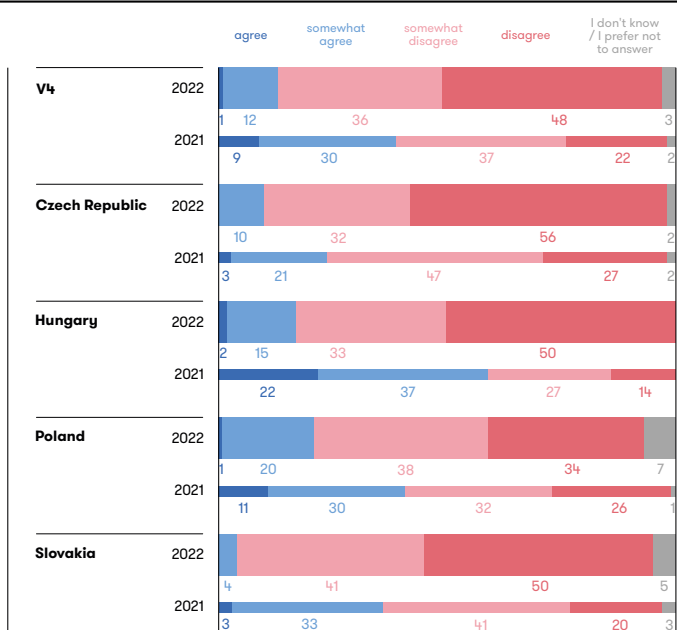
THE CURRENT STATE OF V4 COOPERATION AND ITS FUTURE

In the last segment of the survey, the respondents were asked about their opinions regarding cooperation within the Visegrad Group. In the wake of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the different attitude assumed by the Hungarian government again prompted speculation about the effective end of the format, including calls for individual countries to leave it. The survey indeed brought some interesting results regarding the views of the foreign policy communities on the cooperation.

Looking at the results in comparison with the survey conducted last year, we observe that there has been a **decline in perception of the V4 as a concerted, influential, constructive, important actor** or as an actor **beneficial for pursuing the V4 countries' interests**. Interestingly however, there was also a decline in the perception of the V4 as being disruptive at the EU level. The differences are depicted in the following graphs.

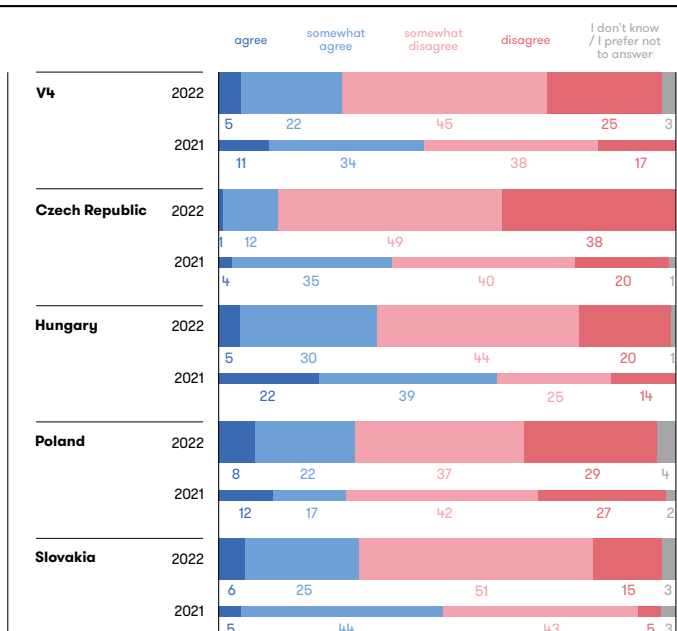
Most respondents tend to at least somewhat **disagree** that the V4 is a **concerted actor** in the EU. A little unexpectedly, **the Polish respondents** are the group in which this position is **the least represented**, meaning that the 21% of them who agree / somewhat agree with the V4 actually being a concerted actor is the biggest share among the four groups. In general, the number of respondents who consider the V4 to be a concerted actor in the EU has declined since 2021, most significantly when it comes to Hungary. Whereas last year, 59% of the Hungarian respondents agreed / somewhat agreed with this assessment, this year it is only 17%. In the case of the Czech respondents, the decline was the lowest – 14 percentage points, but we need to bear in mind that Czechs were quite sceptical about the V4 being a concerted actor already in 2021. In the Slovak case the decline was 32pp and in the case of the Poles 20pp.

The Visegrad Group is a **concerted actor** in the EU.
(%)



Similarly, **not many respondents believe in the V4 being an influential actor** in the EU. Whereas in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia approximately six out of ten respondents disagree / somewhat disagree with such a claim, in Czechia it is 87% of respondents. Again, compared to 2021, the number of respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing that V4 is an influential actor at the EU level has dropped rather significantly in all countries except for Poland. Last year, however, only 29% of the Polish respondents considered the V4 to be at least somewhat influential in the EU. This year's result (30%) is thus actually higher.

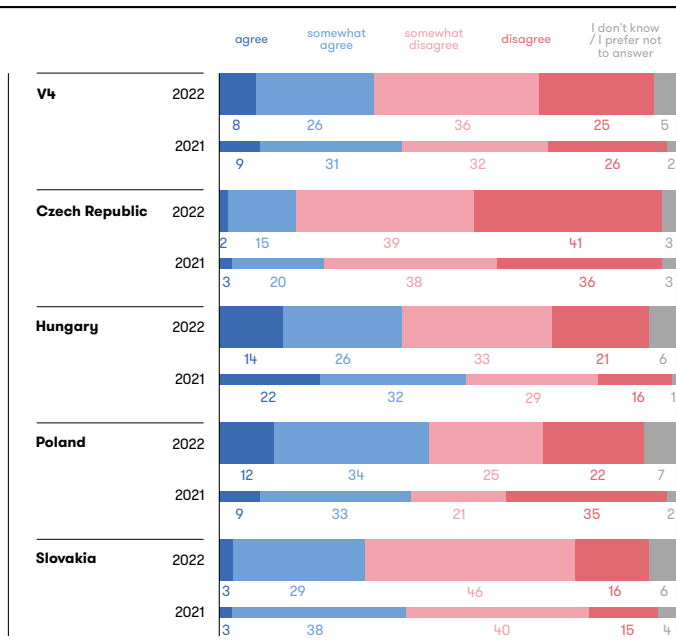
The Visegrad Group is an **influential actor** in the EU.
(%)



Again rather surprisingly, it is **the Polish group of respondents** where **the highest share** of people agree at least to some extent that **the V4 is a constructive force** in the EU. Also, the Polish group is the only one showing an increase in the extent of agreement with the V4 being a constructive actor in the EU

since 2021. **Czechs again are the most sceptical** about such a claim with eight out of ten (somewhat) disagreeing. These findings are mirrored in the answers about the V4 being a disruptive actor at the EU level – Czechs tend to agree the most here whereas the Polish respondents, the least. Of course we can argue that building on the assumption that the Visegrad group as an actor is not very concerted in the EU, especially now given the differing attitudes to the Russian war in Ukraine, it cannot be very disruptive (as opposed to situations where there was a shared position to an issue, like in the case of the migration crisis).

The Visegrad Group plays a constructive role in the EU.
[%]



Asked about the participation in **V4 being important for their country**, Hungarians express the **highest extent of agreement** among all the respondent groups – nine out of ten agree / somewhat agree. In the Polish and Slovak cases, the number of people who think the same is 74% and 73%, respectively. Once again **the Czech respondents are the least convinced about the V4's importance**, with only 45% of them agreeing to the statement above. Regarding participation in the V4 being **beneficial for pursuing their country's interests**, the extent of agreement is somewhat lower in all groups but the number mirror the previous statements in the sense that it is the Hungarians who agree / somewhat agree the most (87%), followed by Slovaks and Poles (71 and 70%, respectively) and only a third of the Czech respondents. Regarding both of these statements there has been a decline in the share of respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing with them. An exception to this is the Polish case – the same as in 2021, seven out of ten Polish respondents agree / somewhat agree that participation in the V4 is beneficial for pursuing their country's interests. At the same time, the share of people who agree / somewhat agree that participation in the Visegrad Group is important for Poland is seven percentage points lower.

Since 2021, there has been **an increase** when it comes to the share of respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing that **the V4 should more often strive for a joint approach in the case of all countries except for Slovakia**. These shares are now quite large – 87% for Poland, 85% in the case of Hungary and 66% in the case of Slovakia. The share of Czech respondents is the smallest – 54%, but it also shows the biggest increase since 2021 – 10 percentage points. Arguably, this is an expression of the desire to bring Hungary on board with the tough stance of the remaining Visegrad states against Russia. In the Czech, Hungarian and Polish respondent group there has also been **an increase** in the share of people who think that **the**

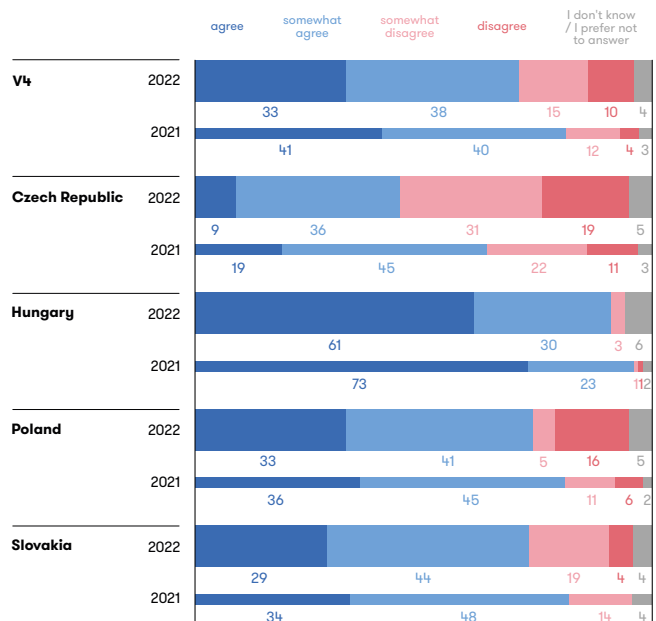
V4 countries should be the first partners for coalition building when pursuing their country's EU policy interests, with especially **Hungarian and Polish respondents being enthusiastic** about this. The Slovak respondents are split about this whereas in the Czech group, disagreement still prevails, albeit to a lesser extent than in 2021. Of course, the statement does not specify that all V4 countries should be approached as first partners, and there is no reason to doubt that the intensity of relations between Czechia and Slovakia will remain high, as well as that of the relations between Czechia and Poland, especially as regards the ongoing war and related issues.

The Hungarian respondents are the most in favour of the V4 incorporating more areas of cooperation. While seven out of ten Poles agree / somewhat agree, **the Slovak and particularly Czech respondents are less enthusiastic.** As for enlarging the V4 to include more states, there has not been much development in any of the countries' foreign policy elites' perceptions, except for a slight increase (6pp)

The Visegrad Group is a disruptive actor in the EU.
(%)



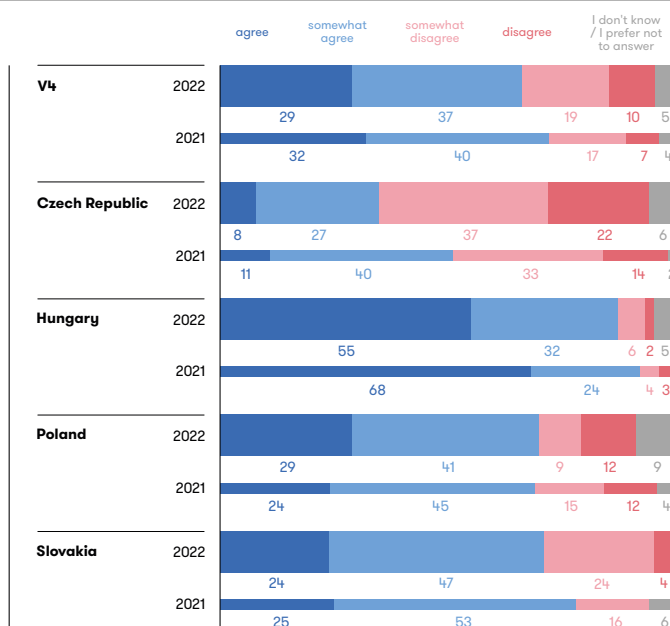
Participation in the Visegrad Group is important for [your country].
(%)



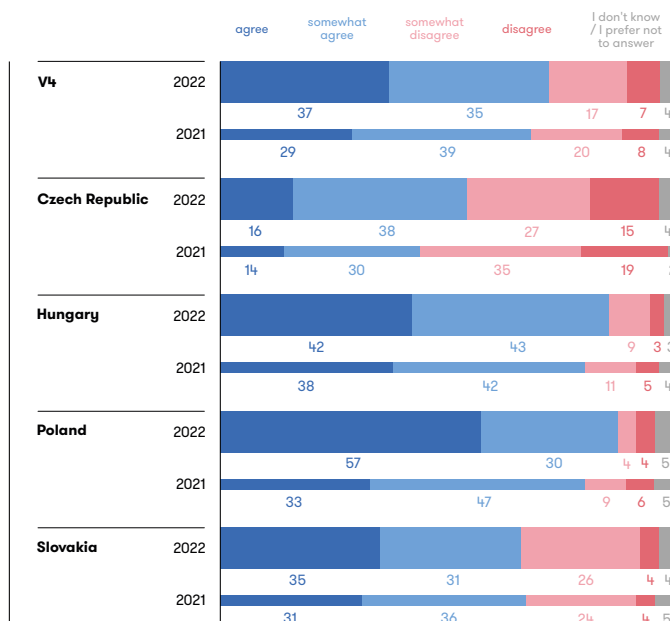
in the share of Slovaks who agree / somewhat agree to such a proposal. There remains quite significant support (above 60% of respondents) for the Visegrad countries creating a broader cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, although the ideas of the individual states about the content of such a format might not necessarily resonate with each other. The possibility of further institutionalisation of the Visegrad cooperation through the creation of a **single secretariat** continues to find **the biggest support among Hungarian respondents** – about 54% agree / somewhat agree with such a development. The share of the Polish respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing is the second highest (43%), however it has decreased 11pp since last year. Among the Czech respondents, the support for such a step is the lowest, with only approximately one in ten respondents agreeing / somewhat agreeing.

Finally, even after the turbulent developments of the past year, there is **not much appetite for abolishing the Visegrad Group**. Only 11% of respondents as an average of all four countries agree or somewhat

Participation in the Visegrad Group is **beneficial for pursuing [your country's] interests.**
(%)

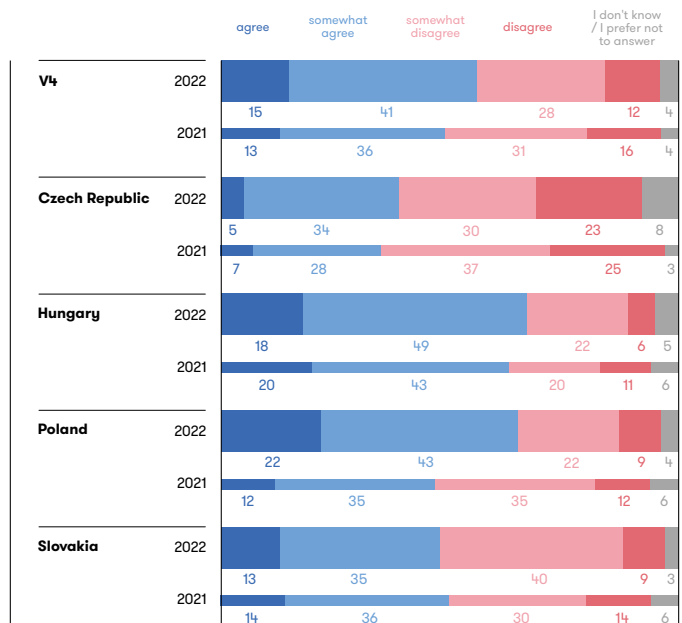


The V4 should more often strive for a **joint approach.**
(%)

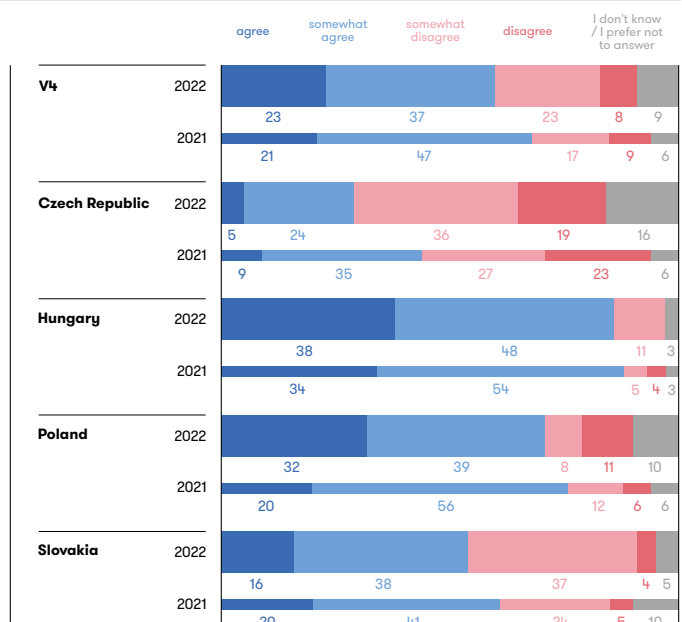


agree to such an idea. Czechs seem to be most in favour of such a step, with 26% of them agreeing / somewhat agreeing. It is also the Czech group of respondents among whom the eventuality of **leaving the V4 finds most support** – 16% (which however is a 5pp decline since 2021). Only 8% of the participating Poles and 6% of Slovaks agree / somewhat agree. None of the Hungarian respondents expressed even some extent of agreement with such a step.

The Visegrad Group members should be the **first partners for coalition building** when pursuing [your country's] EU policy interests. (%)

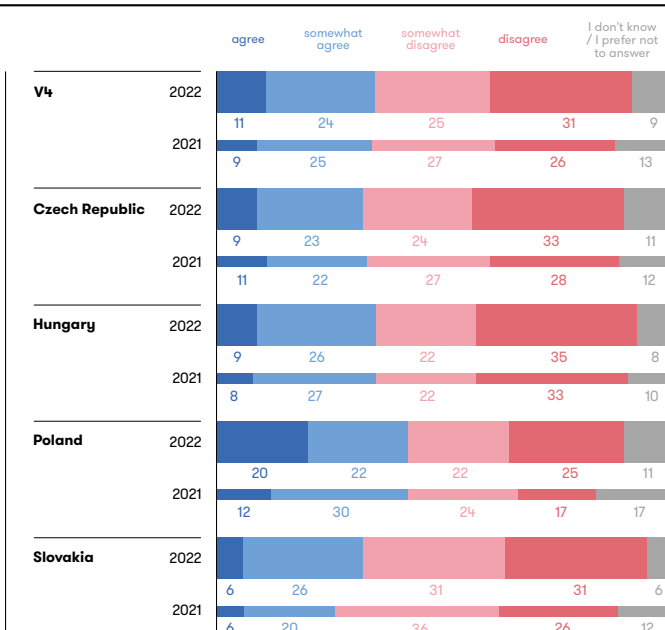


The Visegrad Group should incorporate **more areas of cooperation.** (%)



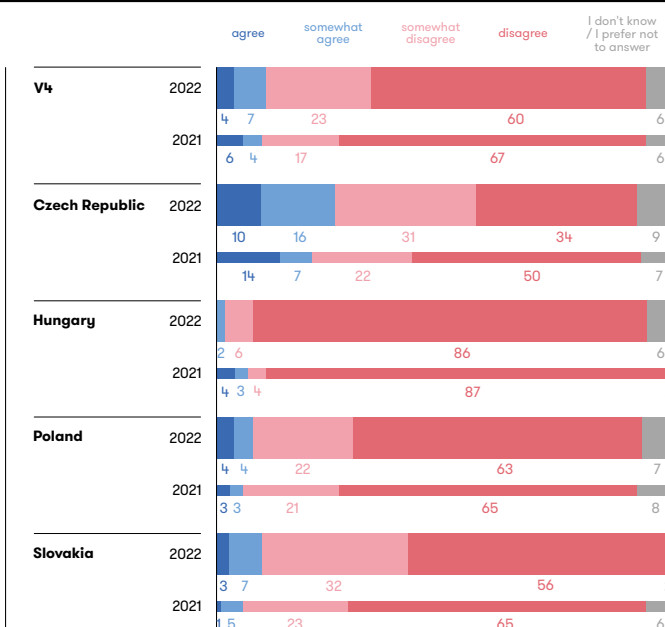
The Visegrad Group should enlarge to include new countries.

(%)



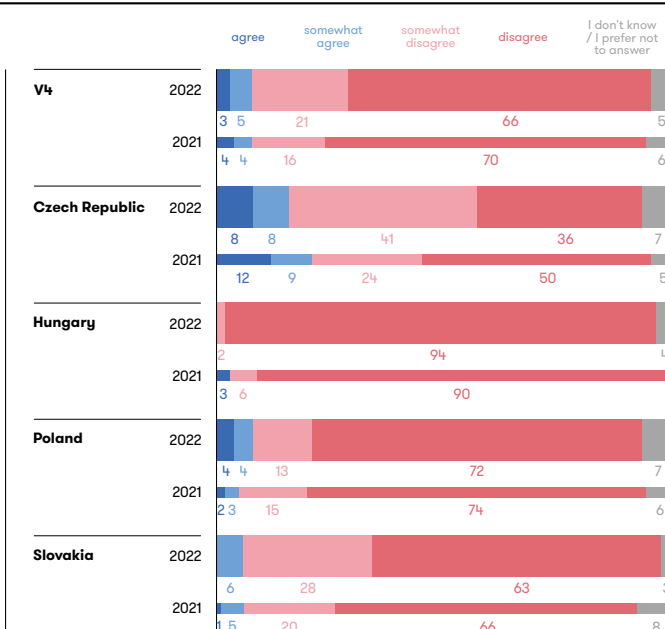
The Visegrad Group should be abolished.

(%)



[Your country] should leave the Visegrad Group.

(%)





CONCLUSION

The aim of the 2022 edition of the “Trends” was to gain an insight into the views of the foreign and EU policy communities of the V₄ states on various aspects of the developments of the past nine months in Eastern Europe and the impact they have had on the bilateral relations of the V₄ states and the cooperation as such. Despite the limited size of the sample as well as the uneven composition of the respondent groups in individual states, we gathered valid data about the opinions and expectations of almost 400 foreign and EU policy professionals. This can serve as a contribution to further research and debate about the role of the Visegrad countries and the V₄ as such in the EU and its Eastern policies.

The results show two noteworthy developments in the bilateral relations among the Visegrad states since last year – first, **a perceived deterioration of the mutual relations of the other three Visegrad states with Hungary** and second, **an improvement in relations between Czechia and Poland**. Differences between the foreign policy orientation of **Hungary on the one side** and **Czechia, Poland and Slovakia on the other** are apparent also when it comes to an evaluation of **the quality of relations with the US, Ukraine and Russia**. These gaps confirm that any space for the Visegrad Group to find common positions in issues linked to the Russian war in Ukraine and its resolution as a dominant agenda at the EU level is limited.

The participating foreign and EU policy stakeholders – despite distinctly supportive attitudes expressed by the governments of at least some Visegrad states – are **not very hopeful about the speed of the integration process of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia** to the EU or NATO. The results however also show an **overall satisfaction with the response of the EU and NATO to the Russian invasion of Ukraine**. Majorities of respondents in all countries also tend to agree that the **EU should be a leading actor in the post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine**, and also see a role for their countries in the process on a bilateral basis.

Some of the opinions and preferences expressed by the Hungarian respondents, especially regarding Hungary’s response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, suggest that the group did not consist of particular supporters of the **Viktor Orbán government’s foreign policy** and lead to the assumption that **its direction is not uncontested**. Still, in other areas, **the Hungarian stakeholders’ opinions** expressed via this survey were **different from the opinions prevailing in the other three groups**. E.g. whereas Polish, Czech and Slovak survey participants seem to be in favour of the demand that Russia withdraw from all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, to be included in a potential peace deal, as well as being a prerequisite for lifting the EU sanctions, the Hungarian respondents are more reserved.

Despite nuances in particular preferences about the conditions for keeping the **EU sanctions against Russia** – and despite some of the rhetoric of the Hungarian government comparing the effect of sanctions on the EU economy to bombs – there is **not much appetite in any of the respondents' groups for abandoning them immediately**. On the contrary, there is quite a surprising extent of support – mostly in the Polish, Czech and Slovak groups of respondents – for **potentially prohibiting deliveries of gas supplies** if Russia continues its military actions against Ukraine.

We see that despite a **decline in the perception** of the V₄ as **concerted, influential, constructive, important or beneficial** for pursuing V₄ countries' interests, **the V₄ is by no means dead**. Instead, it seems that the format is still perceived to have a certain potential, as expressed in the **increase of support** for the countries striving for a **joint approach** in the future as well as approaching the Visegrad partners first when **building coalitions**. That applies particularly to the Hungarian and Polish foreign policy community as represented in this survey, whereas **the Czech one still seems to be the least enthusiastic about the cooperation**. The current situation in the European Union, resulting from the Russian attack on Ukraine, has clearly revealed the **limits of the Visegrad cooperation**, which were always present, although not as visible. The lack of agreement on the currently most salient political issues and apparent cooling of some bilateral relations within the V₄ should not come as a surprise but as an eventuality envisioned in the original concept of the cooperation, previously somewhat clouded by the incorrect image of the V₄ as an unconditional political alliance.

AUTHOR

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