

by Jacek Kucharczyk, Research Director, Institute of Public Affairs, Poland, and Jeff Lovitt, Executive Director, Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS)

New kids on the block Can the Visegrad Four emerge as effective players in international democracy assistance?

As active new donors in international democracy assistance, the new EU member states have limited financial resources, but their fresh transition experience brings advantages over the practices of more established European democracies

SUMMARY

- The democracy assistance programmes of the Visegrad countries remain modest in financial terms, but the democracy know-how and commitment of their NGOs involved in democracy assistance is high-level
- Visegrad democracy assistance budgets have more than doubled in recent years, the growth is continuing, and some progress has been made in grant-making procedures
- V4 countries need to better strategise their assistance programmes and make the whole process more transparent. They should also clearly distinguish democracy assistance programmes from other official development aid (ODA) activities.
- Visegrad governments should continue their peer pressure on target-country politicians for further democratisation, and in the western Balkans and Ukraine remain advocates of the respective countries' European aspirations
- Visegrad countries are well placed, through their EU accession experience, to assist neighbouring countries in the European integration process
- Sustainable partnerships should be built with local actors in target countries, and Visegrad embassies in these countries should increase their direct support to local NGOs

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This Policy Brief draws on the research undertaken for the PASOS project, *Evaluation of the Democracy Assistance Policies and Priorities of the Visegrad Countries*, a project involving PASOS members: EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Czech Republic, Center for Policy Studies at the Central European University, Hungary, Institute of Public Affairs, Poland, and Institute for Public Affairs, Slovakia.

The research included an assessment of Visegrad Four countries' democracy assistance practices in Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, and Ukraine.

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- Visegrad countries should significantly improve the co-ordination of democracy assistance programmes, and set up a joint Visegrad Democracy Fund
- Visegrad countries' democracy assistance should become aligned with EU and other big donors' activities. This can be achieved by providing matching funding for grants from larger donors, including the EU, as well as through support for the newly established European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership.
- The capacity of Visegrad civil society groups needs to be strengthened so that they gain the attention of EU institutions, and can become significant players in international democracy assistance.

New players with fresh transition experience ...

The support given during the 1990s to the emerging democracies of Central Europe in the process of their transition to full-fledged democracies was arguably the greatest achievement of the European Union to date. Ten former communist countries are now members of the EU, and more are expected to follow in the coming decade.

The success of the Visegrad Four countries, plus Slovenia and the Baltic states, has propelled them into the position of stable market economies with an increasing interest in spreading the benefits of democratisation to their eastern neighbours and, in the case of the Czech Republic, even further afield.

The zeal to spread the successful central European experience of democratic transition is far from exhaustion, and the new EU members show a particular interest in securing a greater place for democracy promotion on the agenda of the EU, in particular in the context of the EU's eastern neighbours. Concerns over a backlash against the "freedom" and "anti-terrorism"

agenda of the current Bush Administration in the United States resonate in the Middle East, but less so in other parts of Asia and Africa, or in the former Soviet bloc¹.

Likewise, in central Europe the memories persist of the strong US support (both US government and George Soros's Open Society Institute) to dissident movements, such as Charter 77 in then Czechoslovakia and Solidarity in Poland, when there was much less EU engagement in the communist bloc. The recent US support for a NATO membership action plan for Georgia and Ukraine reiterated that the US continues to engage more actively than the EU in many countries where democracy is not yet consolidated.

"In our country, there will be no pink or orange, or even banana, revolution," commented Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko after the election of Viktor Yushchenko as President of Ukraine in January 2005. "All those coloured revolutions are pure and simple banditry," said Lukashenko, who proceeded to have countless opposition figures arrested during the 2006 presidential election campaign in Belarus.

One of the opposition presidential candidates, Alexander Kazulin, has still not been released. Three of the Visegrad Four countries border on Ukraine, while Poland also borders with Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. The need to end autocratic rule, and to support consolidating democracies, will remain high on the Visegrad countries' agenda so long as tyranny persists on their doorstep.

With their intimate knowledge of the EU accession process, the Visegrad Four (V4) countries are also in a position to draw on the "soft power" credibility of the EU, but at the same time on their own experience of engagement with US democracy promotion.

¹ *The Backlash Against Democracy Assistance, A Report prepared by the National Endowment for Democracy for Senator Richard G. Lugar, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, National Endowment for Democracy, 8 June 2006*

The democracy assistance programmes of the V4 countries remain at a relatively early stage in their formation, but the democracy know-how of the countries goes far beyond their governments' own programmes.

There are a number of dynamic V4 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), for instance Pontis Foundation and People in Peril in Slovakia, People in Need in the Czech Republic, and the organisations active under the umbrella of "Grupa Zagranica" in Poland, working to strengthen non-governmental forces and human rights campaigners in autocratic regimes, for instance in Belarus, Cuba, and Burma.

At the same time, other NGOs such as the government-supported International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT) in Hungary, are building up expertise in supporting democratic structures in both governmental and non-governmental sectors, particularly in the western Balkans, but more recently also in Belarus.

Moreover, consultants and even some diplomats from the new member states, notably the Visegrad countries and the Baltic states, have a high reputation in the western Balkans and in Ukraine, as they perceive the European integration process through applicants' eyes, and they are more likely to understand and even speak the local language. Consultants from the V4 countries are also increasingly hired by US and other western governments and development agencies, as they are competitive and have an intimate understanding of the transition process.

... but effective funding structures and policies not yet in place

There is no single V4 approach to funding or modes of democracy assistance, and co-ordination of their still modest resources is

limited to the International Visegrad Fund - with a budget of € 5 million in 2007, only a fraction of which goes to democracy projects.

Moreover, the respective V4 governments are only now beginning to set up development aid agencies, let alone democracy assistance agencies (with the exception of the Transition Policy Department at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Moreover, small grants administered by embassies are blunted by slow, centralised decision-making processes, combined with limited embassy staff resources in recipient countries.

In fact, the V4 countries are still going through a transition in their own civil society sectors, where capacity is still being developed to be able to engage effectively on the international stage, for instance to gain the attention of EU institutions in Brussels, and to be robust enough to be major players in development aid and democracy assistance abroad.

Nevertheless, a consistent conclusion from the research conducted by PASOS was the need for more funding to go directly to NGOs and individuals in the *recipient* countries, where there is the absorptive capacity. Where the capacity is lacking, a priority should be to build sustainable partnerships with local actors - and to use the limited resources of the V4 governments to maximum effect, for instance as matching funding for grants from larger donors, including the EU.

In 2006, more than € 10 million was deployed by the V4 governments in the field of democracy assistance, with a strong focus on support to Ukraine and Belarus. This ranks as a tiny drop in the aid business, compared for instance with the estimated € 340 million provided in the same year by Sweden (24% of Swedish ODA), the EU's most generous per capita supporter of democracy around the world, but the 2006 figures rank better alongside France, whose € 52 million allocated to "governance" represented just 0.7% of France's official development assistance (ODA).

This compares with € 6.5 million committed towards democracy assistance by Poland, amounting to **30% of Polish ODA**, and an average of € 1.9 million per annum in Slovakia from 2004-2007, amounting to **32% of Slovak ODA**.

In the Polish case, the funding for democracy assistance in 2006 more than tripled compared with 2005 (€ 1.87 million).

In recent years, the V4 governments' democracy assistance budgets have more than doubled, with particularly strong growth in the case of Poland and the Czech Republic, reflecting their respective governments' high-profile engagement in democracy promotion, particularly in the case of Belarus, but also in Burma and Cuba in the case of the Czech Republic.

The available information for 2007 indicates that V4 budget allocations to democracy assistance continue to rise.

Democracy assistance in the Czech Republic in 2006 amounted to € 2 million (**1.56% of Czech ODA**), up from € 0.57 million (0.52% of ODA) in 2005, while in Hungary - after a fall in ODA during budget cuts in 2006 - democracy assistance rose from € 0.65 million (**0.6% of ODA**) to an estimated figure of € 1.25 million in 2007.

Support in European integration is clear-cut niche for Visegrad Four

The democracy assistance programmes of the V4 countries remain at a relatively early stage in their formation. Notably, there is a limited quantity of funding and projects emerging from the V4 countries for democracy assistance towards some of the target countries, and assistance is spread too thinly.

Most of the democracy assistance projects pursued by the V4 donors are not large in scope, especially when compared with those supported by other international donors active in this field, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Delegation of the European Commission to the respective countries (in the case of Ukraine and Bosnia-and-Herzegovina, for instance).

However, the relatively low visibility of V4-sponsored projects may also indicate that these projects are poorly targeted, in that they do not fill the gaps in democracy assistance projects sponsored by big donors, in other words they do not sufficiently draw on the comparative advantages of the V4 countries' experience.

V4 countries should narrow their focus to a specific set of issues where their contribution could provide most 'added value' to democracy-building efforts.

Thus, in strategising their democracy assistance to the target countries, the V4 countries should take into account the following factors:

- i) the level of monetary commitment by V4 countries for democracy assistance;
- ii) the weak areas of democracy, where V4 transition experience would be useful for promoting change; and
- iii) the activities of other international actors in effecting change in weak areas of a given country's democracy, in order to ensure the efforts of the V4 countries are complimentary.

Moreover, the *V4 countries should co-operate with local actors* already active in democracy-building in order to better formulate an effective strategy for achieving the desired goals of their democracy assistance policy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISEGRAD FOUR COUNTRIES IN DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE:

1. *The V4 countries are potentially key actors in helping neighbouring countries with the EU integration process.* They are regarded positively by local stakeholders. As such, if the V4 countries decided to focus their democracy assistance work in this area, this would undoubtedly be well received by local actors.

2. *Visegrad governments should co-ordinate more on funding, and engage in common advocacy at the Brussels level to strengthen EU policies towards the eastern neighbours* - and the implementation of those policies.

3. The priorities of V4 governments do not differ much from the priorities of USAID, the EU, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) or other big donors. *The value of V4 support rests on the fact that V4 government and NGO experts have democratisation experience that is easily applied.*

4. *Continuity and coherence of joint projects, and the variety of co-operation areas:* Whereas the co-operation with NGOs from old EU member states has an ad hoc nature and the scope of projects is limited, the co-operation with V4 NGOs has continuity and coherence, and meets target countries' needs. Joint projects have covered various aspects of democratisation.

5. *The role of the V4 embassies in promoting democracy should be given more prominence,* and should be strengthened in future democracy assistance policies of the V4. The work of the V4 embassies is generally regarded very positively.

6. *One of the crucial issues for the development of democracy is the strengthening of the civil society/NGO sector.* This could prove to be an area on which the V4 countries could focus their democracy assistance policies. However, since a plethora of international actors have been very active in addressing this particular issue, V4 activities in this area require substantial co-ordination with other international actors involved, as well as careful prioritising in terms of the types of assistance and organisations that should be supported.

7. *The V4 countries should significantly improve the co-ordination of their democracy assistance programmes, and set up a joint Visegrad Democracy Fund either in individual countries or in regions, such as the western Balkans.* Grants provided by most embassies are very small. If all four embassies in a given target country were agreed on a particular project they wanted to support together, there is not a mechanism or resources to do so. Co-operation could take the form of setting up a permanent committee of ambassadors, which would meet regularly in order to exchange information and co-ordinate their priorities in this area.

8. *The establishment of long-term partnerships with select NGOs in the target countries.* V4 democracy assistance programmes should help to build a vibrant and sustainable civil society. In order to achieve this aim, their funding should not be limited to support for individual projects. A revised approach should include the establishment of long-term partnerships with select NGOs, which might then receive some multi-year institutional funding, enabling institutional development of these NGOs as well as helping them build the capacity, sustainability and co-funding in order to be able to bid successfully for grants from larger donors.

9. *V4 democracy assistance programmes should encourage co-operation between V4 civil society and target-country NGOs by funding projects that incorporate the participation of a V4 partner, but do not require the V4 partners to be the lead or the participation of at least three V4 partners (as in the case of the International Visegrad Fund).* Additionally, V4 programmes could encourage regional co-operation by instituting trilateral projects, with the participation of two NGOs from non-V4 countries and one V4 partner. Feedback during the research indicates that both embassies and target-country NGOs consider that the V4 countries could encourage stronger local ownership of projects.

10. *In order to better utilise their specific know-how regarding the transition to democracy and European integration processes, the V4 countries should help strengthen independent think-tanks/policy research institutes in target countries,* whose management and researchers could be trained through study visits and internships in their V4 counterparts and who would collaborate with such V4 counterparts on future project work. The emergence of effective independent think-tanks can provide an important stimulus to wider public debate and public participation in democratic decision-making.

11. *The V4 countries should build on their successful initiatives in providing scholarships and study visits to V4 countries for young democracy activists,* and also assist the emergence of a new generation of democratically oriented citizens by supporting youth and NGOs engaged in activism for democracy. In addition, long-term internships in NGOs should be supported.

12. *Through sharing their own experience, the V4 countries could make a significant contribution to the strengthening of dialogue between political actors and civil society groups.* V4 NGOs could share their experience of establishing civic dialogue with government in their respective countries. This should include NGO/public administration co-operation at other levels of government, and not just the state level.

13. *The V4 countries are uniquely placed, through sharing the know-how acquired in their own EU accession, to assist neighbouring countries in the process of European integration.* EU candidate and Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) signatory governments receive an annual report on the respective country's progress towards fulfilling EU requirements for the accession process. There is a section within the report that addresses issues related to democracy strengthening. That report could be used as an inspiration for the setting of the priorities of V4 democracy assistance related to EU integration. V4 grants should also assist target-country NGOs in bidding for EU grants, for example, by providing local NGOs with the required matching funding.

14. *V4 countries should continue their peer pressure on target-country politicians for further democratisation,* and in the western Balkans and Ukraine remain advocates of the respective countries' European aspirations, at the same time promoting/supporting the idea of using what is on offer from the EU (e.g. deep free trade, border management and migration, etc. both within the EU and the respective countries). They should provide more expert support to alignment with EU norms and standards in the framework, for instance, of the EU-Ukraine enhanced agreement (especially regarding the rule of law and independent judiciary), and identify areas of alignment with the EU *acquis communautaire* that could be supported from funds within bilateral assistance.

Target countries for democracy assistance

Czech Republic	Slovak Republic	Poland	Hungary
<p>Data available for 2005-2006. In 2004, only projects in Iraq</p> <p>Ukraine Belarus Moldova Georgia Serbia Bosnia and Herzegovina Iraq Cuba Burma</p>	<p>Serbia (including Kosovo) Ukraine Belarus Montenegro Afghanistan Kazakhstan Kenya Kyrgyzstan Bosnia and Herzegovina Sudan Macedonia</p>	<p>Ukraine Belarus (non-ODA official bilateral assistance) Moldova Georgia Afghanistan Angola Iraq Palestine Authority Vietnam</p>	<p>2004-6: Serbia Montenegro Bosnia and Herzegovina Vietnam Macedonia Moldova Mongolia Ukraine Kyrgyzstan Palestine Authority Ethiopia Yemen Cambodia Laos Afghanistan Iraq</p> <p>2008: Serbia Belarus Moldova Albania Cuba Palestine Authority North Korea</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISEGRAD FOUR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE POLICIES TO BELARUS:

1. *V4 governments should co-ordinate more, and continue the pressure on Belarus for democratisation and human rights at the bilateral and multilateral level, including EU, OSCE and Council of Europe.* Such pressure should be accompanied by the positive incentives addressed to Belarus including the prospects of EU membership of Belarus under the condition of fulfilment of respective criteria if it will be the wish of the Belarusian people.

2. *Co-operation with today's Belarusian authorities should be developed only after a significant improvement of the situation in the field of human rights.* As recent developments have shown, a minimum requirement of the international community should be not only the release of political prisoners but also serious measures towards the liberalisation of public life, and at least the abolishment of the so-called "counter-revolutionary laws", adopted in 2005.

3. *It is necessary to increase co-operation in policy towards Belarus between the V4 states in information exchange and co-ordination of donor policies.* On the political level, their natural partners are Lithuania, Latvia and the Scandinavian states, and the V4 should try to establish at least a consultative forum on donor policy together with German donors as well. Such an approach would increase the "European" dimension of the V4 donor policy towards Belarus and increase the EU presence in the country.

4. *An enhanced V4 co-operation could be formalised in Belarus. In order to avoid duplication and inadvertent competition among them, the V4 countries should co-ordinate their policies but also pool resources by setting up a special fund for Belarus.* In effect, the activities of such a fund could be less politically controversial in Belarus than the activities of national governments, especially Poland. Thus it would be less vulnerable to propaganda attacks by the Lukashenko regime. It should not be a replacement for national priorities or national funding by the individual V4 governments, but supplementary to them, and a forum for knowledge exchange and co-ordination.

5. *A new democratic elite should be fostered in Belarus.* Towards this goal, scholarship programmes should be made an even greater priority for V4 democracy assistance. Priority should be given to students expelled from Belarussian universities for political reasons. This could also be handled either by a dedicated V4 Fund for Belarus or through the International Visegrad Fund, as for example is currently the case in Ukraine. Scholarship programmes should be prioritised: law, sociology, political science, EU studies, international relations, public administration, law, economics and public policy should be the priorities. In addition, long-term internships in NGOs, government institutions, media and commercial companies should be supported. Again, beneficiaries of such internships could include people who have lost their jobs due to political reasons.

6. **Donors should abandon the requirement of recipients providing their own financial contribution.**

A persistent problem of several donors, e.g. SIDA or the European Commission, is the requirement for co-financing, even though this requirement now appears less frequently than in the past. This is a case of double standards by donors, which encourages 'creative accounting' and other dubious practices. Other obstacles are posed by excessive red tape. Larger organisations are able to ensure their own contribution thanks to their offices or personnel, including volunteers but, on the other hand, such a requirement excludes smaller organisations from obtaining a grant. The European Radio for Belarus broadcasting project is a special case, because the donors' project-financing structure often meets the needs of the given project in a very limited way, as more than 50 per cent of the budget comprises rental costs of sound broadcasting transmitters on the territory of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia.

7. In spite of the current isolation of civil society in Belarus, the attempts to overcome this isolation must not be abandoned. **New target groups demanding political and economic changes should be identified**, like small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, young urban professionals, environmental activists, etc.

8. Given the current situation of civil society in Belarus, a diversification of the donors' policies is required. **There is a need to involve a wider spectrum of Belarusian NGOs in discussions about future policies on democracy promotion in Belarus, including cultural or community initiatives. As well as the "traditional" NGOs focused on human rights protection, Belarusian society needs alternative projects focusing on the country's future** - a necessary condition of which would be the creation of a new democratic elite prepared for a change in the political constellation. Democracy assistance should be focused on long-term activities and, in the current political situation in the country, it should focus on the process of gradual change of the political and economic climate in Belarus. Another field identified by our research in need of support is free information exchange, i.e. independent media available to a larger share of the Belarusian population.

9. **Consultation on the V4 level between the officers responsible for democracy assistance policy and the representatives of V4 and Belarusian NGOs will contribute to increasing the transparency of the donors' policies** towards Belarus.

10. **Continuity of successful projects supported in the framework of democracy assistance is needed.** It will improve the credibility of the Belarusian NGO sector as well as the reputation of the western donors' community.

11. **An increased share of the financial resources designed for Belarus projects should go directly to the Belarusian partners.** Donors' media initiatives in Belarus, for instance, should seek to involve greater local ownership.

12. **V4 governments should expand small grants programmes provided directly by their respective embassies** or - if established - by the International Visegrad Fund for Belarus.

13. **Engage representatives of Belarusian NGOs in the discussion of assistance priorities of the V4 countries in order to match their priorities more to the needs of local society**, and to improve V4 knowledge of domestic political developments.

14. **There is an unmet need for underground survival training.** There have been countless trainings on advocacy and media work, but next to no training on how to protect sensitive computer data from raids by the authorities.

15. **Raise the level of quality of project proposals demanded by V4 donors in order to increase the transparency and responsibility on the part of Belarusian civil society.** In the case of newly established organisations without experience in project management, some "positive discrimination" could be allowed for a first project, if combined with project management training for subsequent applications.

16. *Strike a balance between financing project implementation and institutional development of NGOs.*

17. *Sustain the even-handed approach generally adopted by V4 donors in their approach towards Belarusian partners, so that they do not adopt the approaches of less constructive donors or partners who have a tendency to discount local needs and conditions.*

18. *Regular independent monitoring of project implementation* in order to increase the transparency of the democracy assistance provided to Belarus.

19. The V4 countries should repeatedly make use of the comparative advantage of V4 NGOs related to the fact that they come from transition countries and can better appreciate the conditions of working in a country like Belarus, with an autocratic regime not dissimilar to the communist regimes in central Europe in the 1980s. In particular, *the 'negotiated transitions' to democracy in 1989 could provide lessons and offer inspiration for democratic change in Belarus.*

20. *Establish mechanisms for quick funding decisions or more flexible institutional and project funding* - so that projects can be put into action quickly (in particular, ahead of the parliamentary elections due in October 2008)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISEGRAD FOUR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE POLICIES TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

1. *The V4 countries should significantly improve the co-ordination of their democracy assistance programmes, and set up a joint Visegrad Democracy Fund for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).* Co-operation could take the form of setting up a permanent committee of ambassadors in BiH, which would meet regularly in order to exchange information and co-ordinate their priorities in this area. A long-term and potentially more effective solution would be to set up a joint Visegrad Democracy Fund for BiH, or joint grants from the Visegrad embassies (to economise on their grant administration costs, and to pool their limited resources). Centralisation of grant decision-making in their respective capitals should be decentralised on the proviso that Embassy staffing is strengthened to manage the process, or a joint agency established to manage the grants procedure. Such a fund would support projects by BiH NGOs active in democracy-building, implemented in co-operation with V4 civil society organisations.

2. *The role of the V4 embassies in promoting democracy in BiH should be given more prominence, and should be strengthened in future democracy assistance policies of the V4.* The work of the Slovak, Hungarian and Czech Embassies in BiH is regarded very positively. The NGO recipients of projects sponsored by these embassies have spoken highly about the co-operation of the respective embassy representatives. Moreover, the Slovak, Hungarian and Czech Ambassadors have consistently been praised for their involvement in issues related to democratisation in BiH. Their knowledge of the local language also marks them out in a positive light, so the embassies should be given a higher profile in V4 democracy assistance efforts.

3. *The establishment of long-term partnerships with select NGOs in BiH.* V4 democracy assistance programmes should help to build a vibrant and sustainable civil society in BiH. In order to achieve this aim, their funding should not be limited to support for individual projects. A revised approach should include the establishment of long-term partnerships with select NGOs, which might then receive some multi-year institutional funding, enabling institutional development of these NGOs as well as helping them build the capacity, sustainability and co-funding in order to be able to bid successfully for grants from larger donors.

4. *V4 democracy assistance programmes should encourage co-operation between V4 civil society and BiH NGOs by funding projects that incorporate the participation of a V4 partner.* Additionally, V4 programmes could encourage regional co-operation in the Balkans by instituting trilateral projects, with the participation of at least one NGO from BiH, one from a V4 country and one from another Balkan country. V4 countries should move away from the approach where primary funding goes to partner NGOs from V4 countries to supporting more BiH NGOs, and building up local ownership and local institutional capacity.

5. *In order to better utilise their specific know-how regarding the transition to democracy and European integration processes, the V4 countries should help strengthen independent think-tanks/policy research institutes in BiH,* whose management and researchers could be trained through study visits and internships in their V4 counterparts, and who would collaborate with such V4 counterparts on future project work. The emergence of effective independent think-tanks can provide an important stimulus to wider public debate and public participation in democratic decision-making.

6. *The V4 countries should provide scholarships and study visits to V4 countries for young democracy activists*, and also assist the emergence of a new generation of democratically oriented citizens of BiH by supporting youth and NGOs engaged in activism for democracy.

7. *Through sharing their own experience, the V4 countries could make a significant contribution to the strengthening of dialogue between political actors and civil society groups in BiH.* Although substantial progress has been made on this issue with the adoption of the Agreement between the BiH Council of Ministers and the NGO Sector, implementation of this agreement will be difficult. V4 NGOs could share their experience of establishing civic dialogue with government in their respective countries. This should include NGO/public administration co-operation at other levels of government, and not just the state level.

8. *Finally, the V4 countries are uniquely placed, through sharing the know-how acquired in their own EU accession, to assist BiH in the process of European integration.*

The BiH government receives an annual report on the country's progress towards fulfilling EU requirements for the accession process. There is a section within the report that addresses issues related to democracy strengthening. That report could be used as an inspiration for the setting of the priorities of V4 democracy assistance related to EU integration. As mentioned above, V4 grants should also assist BiH NGOs in bidding for EU grants, for example, by providing local NGOs with the required matching funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISEGRAD FOUR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE POLICIES TO CUBA:

1. *Putting Cuba on the list of priority countries receiving democracy assistance, as well as earmarking substantial funding for this purpose, would enable the NGOs from V4 countries active in Cuba to diversify their funding from US sources*, which has often constrained the effectiveness of their actions and allowed the Cuban regime (as well as its sympathisers in Europe and elsewhere) to try to discredit their work in the eyes of the Cuban and international public.
2. *V4 countries should lobby together for greater EU engagement in supporting democratic developments in Cuba. Such lobbying to build a coalition of like-minded countries is urgently needed to contain an EU political trend increasingly in favour of a 'wait and see' position in light of the economic reforms Raul Castro is planning.* Any diplomatic achievement in Brussels will be the result of co-ordinated efforts. V4 countries should try to build a broader coalition of like-minded EU members in favour of democratic Cuba.
3. *Improving relations with more moderate elements of the Cuban establishment in view of a potential negotiated transition to democracy should not be ruled out.* Nevertheless, any such improvement must be accompanied by continued moral, political and material support for dissidents.
4. V4 countries should insist that *any significant assistance to, and political improvements in relations with, the Cuban government must be accompanied by visible improvements in human rights conditions* on the island.
5. *V4 embassies on the island should be given an increased role in implementing democracy assistance in Cuba*, as well as serve as 'windows to the world' for Cubans.
6. *The lack of co-ordination among the current (mainly US) donors affects the effectiveness of democracy assistance.* More contacts among donors and implementers would translate into better exchanges of good practices and improved understanding of the real needs of the Cuban opposition and population. This should also be a lesson to any prospective providers of democracy assistance for Cuba, such as V4 governments.
7. *The duplication of assistance to the same organisations, and for similar projects, should not be a taboo any more. A virtuous competition of ideas and solutions to problems can only be an asset*, provided that it is preceded and followed by better co-ordination among the donors themselves.
8. *The monitoring of the actual use of the funding must be carried out in a more structured and effective way*, provided that this increased transparency does not present a security risk.
9. *When possible, the transfer of money to Cuba should be carried out in Euros and not in US dollars.* The Cuban authorities apply a 20% tax on the currency exchanges from dollars (but not from Euros). That means that 20% of US money bound to Cuban dissidents goes to the regime.
10. *It is necessary to have better co-ordination among the actors engaged in Cuba. This would have an immediate positive outcome in terms of the effectiveness and relevance of the assistance delivered to Cubans.* The problems of duplication, or prolonged absences, of support to different dissidents must be tackled urgently. At the same time, the NGOs continue to be free to choose among the representatives of the opposition whom they help.

11. *The selection of goods to be delivered to dissidents must be conceived in a more responsive way, making sure that they meet the real needs of the dissidents.* In working towards this goal, it is advisable to increase, when possible, communications with the recipients, in particular during the period immediately before delivery.

12. In general, communications with dissidents must be improved. *Cubans have to be more involved in the decision-making process,* according to which assistance projects are determined.

13. The cultural appetite of the Cuban people is increasing. *Access to cultural material is more important than ever.* Taking into account the difficulties of bringing these goods to the island, the diversity of the material delivered needs to be increased. Again and again, multiple copies of the same books can be found on the shelves of independent libraries. The delivery of films banned by the authorities is more important than ever - such films can send important messages to bigger and not necessarily politicised groups of Cubans. Two examples of films about the former East Germany (GDR) with this potential are 'Goodbye Lenin' and 'The Life of the Others'. The recent 'liberalisation' of DVD players represents an important opportunity in this sense.

14. The success of *projects aimed at training and organising groups of experts,* such as teachers or journalists, should be coupled with other similar initiatives, in particular involving those groups of society that are often neglected. For example, it would be of great importance to *involve youth organisations.*

15. *The spreading of critical thinking inside Cuban society must be increased with the use of new channels and milder, non-politicised messages.* With this purpose and without forgetting the related dangers, it is crucial to encourage dissidents to literally leave their houses and develop some public-oriented activities. Civil society groups must also be increasingly supported. Cuban intellectuals or musicians that already send nuanced messages should be supported. In particular, the potential of music as a revolutionary tool should not be ignored.

16. *The fragmentation of the Cuban opposition is a major problem that must be tackled.* At the same time, it is very important to train dissidents and experts in different sectors not only to act in the current situation, but also to prepare for a transitional scenario.

17. Campaigning in Europe to raise awareness about the real Cuban situation is of enormous importance, but has to be done without forgetting the sensitiveness of Europeans about the topic, manifested often in reactions towards a perceived negative US foreign policy. *The risk of being branded as American mercenaries and ideologically driven is very real, and makes it all the more necessary to take a very cautious approach to the subject.*

18. *Organisations operating in Cuba need to keep a low public profile in Europe to avoid security risks for their missions on the island.* The best solution would be to improve relations between V4 NGOs active in the direct support to Cubans and the ones more active in public awareness campaigning in Europe. This would allow a virtuous exchange of know-how without endangering activities in Cuba.

19. *Lobbying in Brussels must become a priority in particular for the NGOs who specialise in campaigning.* A seat in Brussels and a well-developed network of EU institutions' contacts are a pre-condition for any further action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VISEGRAD FOUR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE POLICIES TO UKRAINE:

1. *Provide more expert support to Ukraine's alignment with EU norms and standards in the framework of EU-Ukraine enhanced agreement* (especially regarding the rule of law and independent judiciary)
2. Increase democracy assistance support to Ukraine, and *resist temptation to shift resources away from civil society development to technical assistance*
3. V4 countries should *impress on the Ukrainian government the need to fund NGOs from the state budget as agents to implement public policy*, as NGOs often have more expertise (including on EU integration)
4. *Build on the opportunity presented by the appointment of a deputy prime minister for European integration* to work with V4 and Ukraine NGOs to move from the current "shallow consensus" in Ukraine to build an "European" awareness of Ukrainian society concerning EU integration
5. Engage with NGOs in the public policy arena to *spread public awareness and debate about NATO membership, and to foster more in-depth Ukrainian policy perspectives towards Russia*
6. *Invest in institutional support to build strong NGOs that can be partners of European organisations and can build the capacity of other Ukrainian NGOs*; this should be combined with money to be spent on enabling Ukrainian NGO leaders to network with, and share experience of, Visegrad/ EU NGOs
7. Since the alignment with the EU *acquis* will have serious financial implications for Ukraine, *identify areas that could be supported from funds within bilateral assistance to Ukraine.*
8. *Encourage government agencies of V4 countries to participate in EU-funded twinning projects with the Ukrainian government, building on the valued V4 experience of making local government work effectively*
9. Study the possibility of a *change of approach to democracy assistance to enable Ukrainian NGOs to apply for MFA funds directly*
10. *Engage the representatives of Ukrainian NGOs in discussions about assistance priorities*
11. *Increase the number of scholarships for Ukrainian students* to enable them to learn about democracy by studying and living in V4 countries
12. *Scholarships should also be targeted at building expertise in parliament, government and the NGO sector.*
13. *Include social aspects of democratisation* (e.g. assistance to ethnic minorities, human rights and minority rights) as assistance priorities.
14. *Engage Ukrainian government and NGOs in assistance initiatives for other countries-in-need* (e.g. Belarus)
15. *Direct V4 democracy assistance to regions of Ukraine that remain underdeveloped and have to date received less assistance.*

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PASOS
Těšnov 3
110 00 Praha 1
Czech Republic
Tel/fax: +420 2223 13644
Email: info@pasos.org
www.pasos.org

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Registered office: Sdružení pro podporu otevřené společnosti - PASOS, Prokopova 197/9, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic
ICO: 26675404