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1. Introduction

In early April 2014, shortly after the EU introduced the first wave of sanctions against Russia in the form of asset freezes and travel bans following the annexation of Crimea and the emerging conflict in eastern Ukraine, the Visegrad countries released a joint statement calling for international law to be respected and a decrease in tensions between the affected countries. Furthermore, they stated that

"The Visegrad countries believe that the recent military actions by Russia are not only in violation of international law, but also create a dangerous new reality in Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are appalled to witness a military intervention in 21st century Europe akin to their own experiences in 1956, 1968 and 1981." (quoted according to Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine 2014)

as well as

"The Visegrad countries are in solidarity with the people and the Government of Ukraine and reiterate their strong commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. It is more important than ever to ensure that the Government takes measures which unify the country, and that it protects the rights of all Ukraine's citizens, including those of cultural, national and linguistic minority groups, in the spirit of inclusiveness." (quoted according to Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine 2014))

These statements suggest that in early April 2014, the Visegrad countries had a clear and unified perception of the Ukraine crisis as well as Russia's foreign policy including a common goal to restore Ukraine to her rightful borders. It is all the more surprising to see that when it came to the question of imposing further, economic sanctions on Russia, the Visegrad countries had very different ideas about how to deal with the conflict in the east. According to information originally published by Reuters, only three weeks after the joint statement of the Visegrad countries as quoted above, Poland and the Czech Republic were in favour of economic sanctions while Hungary was opposed to economic sanctions and Slovakia was listed as remaining neutral to the question (Kelley 2014). During the following months, it also became evident that the governments of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were sending mixed signals on the issue to the public, though when Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the president of the Czech Republic Milos Zeeman

and the Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico openly criticised the EU's mainstream policy, none of them actually refused Brussels's sanction regime.

The main puzzle this analysis is trying to solve is the question why the governments of the Visegrad states seemingly favour different government policies with regard to sanctions of EU member states against Russia despite their previously presented joint statement that suggested unity on the questions raised by Russia's increasingly belligerent administration and the fact that their historical experiences with the Soviet Union were relatively similar. This analysis will attempt to identify the endogenous variables that shape governmental positions in this foreign policy area and also try to explain how and why some of the Visegrad countries' governments appear to be unable to form a unified government stance.

This paper assumes that government policy is shaped by domestic politics, i.e. by dominant, collectively shared ideas, by interest groups within the country or by domestic institutions and thus it will argue that governmental positions of the Visegrad group diverge because societal interests and ideas differ between the countries. Thus, we will start by introducing the societal approach as theoretical framework to explain government positions of the Visegrad governments. In the following chapter, the Ukraine crisis will be contextualized and embedded in the broader picture of Russia – EU relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Additionally, it will present the historical background that the Visegrad members share with the Russian Federation in order to understand the perception of Russia by the population in these countries. The next chapter will attempt to explain why the states of the Visegrad group favoured their respective approaches to the question of sanctioning Russia by applying the previously introduced framework. In chapter five the findings will be summarized and compared in order to present an explanation of the divergence of government policy within the Visegrad states and offer angles that could explain the internal disunity some of the governments of the V4 have been showcasing.

2. The Theoretical Framework – Societal Approach

The societal approach is an advancement of domestic politics theories, for example the liberal theories of International Relations, theories of domestic sources of foreign economic policies and the varieties of capitalism theory (Schirm 2015: 2; Schirm 2013: 690). The societal approach assumes that the main goal of governments is to stay in office and that they therefore tend to follow societal demands and preferences in democratic political systems. These demands can for example consist of pressure from certain lobby groups or the dominant public opinions (Schirm 2013: 690). This means that there are societal influences on governmental preference formation that exist prior to international strategies (Schirm 2013: 690). The framework argues that these societal influences on government preference formation are either based on dominant societal interests, here defined as sectoral material considerations based on cost-benefit calculations that depend on potentially volatile economic circumstances, or on dominant societal ideas, which shall be defined as value-based collective societal expectations about appropriate governmental positions and behaviour. While societal ideas and interests interact with each other and can also constitute one another, we will try to keep them separate in our analysis to be able to identify sui generis characteristics of our two variables (Schirm 2015: 2). It has to be kept in mind that while ideas and interests can reinforce each other, they also can compete against each other in shaping government positions. The societal approach argues that in case of ideas and interests competing against each other, ideas will come out on top if the problem at hand does not directly influence cost-benefit calculations, but instead affects the broader framework regarding the influence of politics on the economy (Schirm 2015: 2). It also argues that interests will shape governmental positions if the issue in question influences cost-benefit calculations of a specific, well organized economic sector (Schirm 2015: 2).

When comparing states, it is important to note that countries can end up having diverging governmental positions on global governance, if societal ideas and/or interests differ between them. In this case divergence is expected even when close cooperation between these states preceded the issue at stake (Schirm 2013: 691).

Summarizing, the societal approach provides us with a theory that should be able to explain divergences of governmental positions between member states of the European Union when it comes to financial governance. Especially because of the Euro zone being in turmoil, the rise of Euroscepticism within member states and the subsequent weight these kinds of decisions can be assumed to carry in the eyes of the government's voters, it makes sense to suggest domestic-level variables to explain the divergences outlined in the introduction. It can also be assumed that the

public's interest in government positions concerning foreign policy influencing national economies might be especially high due to the global financial crisis.

While domestic institutions are also assumed to be able to play a role in government preference formation (Schirm 2015: 2), we will not consider them in this paper because societal ideas and interests seem to be a lot more likely to shape government preference formation in the question of supporting or opposing economic sanction on Russia. In the context of the societal approach, domestic institutions are considered to be codified forms of interests and/or ideas. Since this foreign policy area does not seem to threaten to affect or change institutions or institutional influence directly, this paper does not expect them to influence governmental preference formation within this context.

As has been pointed out in previous publications, potentially relevant indicators for the previously introduced variables have to be identified in order to operationalize the societal approach (Schirm 2015: 3). In order to present a plausible explanation for diverging governmental positions, the positions of examined states have to correspond to these indicators and divergences have to be observable in cross – country comparison.

To present an empirical examination of the independent variables, ideas should be investigated as attitudes towards the government utilizing policy potentially affecting the nation's economy negatively in order to influence another state's belligerent foreign policy decision making in the context of the EU as foreign policy actor reacting to the Ukraine crisis. These ideas are influenced by the historical and political context of the subject's relationship with the other state, which also have to be considered. As has been pointed out during previous operationalizations of the societal approach (e.g. Schirm 2015: 3), public opinion poll data seems to be best suited to provide empirical findings for this variable. Evidence for the interest variable might most easily be located in statements of influential business expectations on the questions of sanctions concerning governmental positions as well as data on economic competitiveness (Schirm 2015: 3).

3. Historical Foreign Policy Contexts: Russia, the EU and the V4

3.1 EU- Russia Relations: The Road to the Ukraine Crisis

The relationship between Russia and the EU can be divided into three phases. The first phase started in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Haukkala 2015: 26). After the fall of the Soviet Union the European Union and Russia had to redefine their relationship. The EU pressed for the economic and political integration of Russia into modern Europe, while Russia needed to regroup and consolidate her new role in eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, negotiations between the EU, who wanted to lock Russia into an institutional arrangement to ensure Russia would develop towards a more democratic and westernised country, and Russia, who expected sizeable trade concessions as well as political support as reward for having ended the cold war, began. At this point, the goal of both parties was the gradual increase of cooperation and partnership between them. During the negotiations, the actions of both actors lead to the introduction of democracy and human rights as essential elements into the agreement (Haukkala 2015: 27/28).

Despite the relationship between Russia and the EU starting off optimistic, they repeatedly fell into crisis during the following six years, which has thus been called Times of Troubles (Haukkala 2015: 28). Russia's foreign policy had changed towards a less integrationist approach and the situation inside Russia became increasingly unstable, which resulted in the wars with Chechnya. These conflicts not only highlighted the lack of European values in Russia's politics, but also illustrated the fact that several EU members were still very much interested in doing business with Russia, which made finding an EU encompassing policy line hard to accomplish and ultimately ineffective.

During the beginning of the Putin era, relations improved for a while. This trend did not last for a long time, as the colour revolutions swept through Eastern Europe and Chechen terrorism emerged, both of which led to Russia adopting a relentless approach to dissent, ultimately increasing centralization in the country. Three main reasons can be pointed out for the growing rift between Russia and the European Union. The most obvious one is the difference in underlying world-views between Russia and the EU, which continued interaction made seem increasingly problematic (Haukkala 2015: 31). Another reason is the fact that the interaction between the two actors unearthed seemingly incompatible interests. For Putin and his staff, it does not seem like the EU can offer something Russia needs or wants (Haukkala 2015: 31). Lastly, the EU's expansion into Eastern Europe provoked the Russian administration and transformed the shared neighbourhood into a

sphere of competition, increasing difficulties for strategic partnership between the two actors (Haukkala 2015: 31).

Especially the growing activities of the European Union in Eastern Europe forced Russia to react. With the EU expanding eastwards and attempting to accumulate contractual agreements with states that previously belonged to the Russian sphere of influence, competition over influence in these areas became more and more fierce. In 2010, Russia formed the Eurasian Customs Union and continued to put effort into developing it in order to establish an economic union, which has to be interpreted as a direct response to the EU's expansion towards Russia's borders (Haukkala 2015: 32). The Russian response implied that another conflict between the EU's values and norms and Russian interests was on the rise, basically establishing a new dualism for the first time since the end of the cold war. However, the emerging bipolar system in Eurasia was not perceived as a desirable status quo by either party, which caused the EU and Russia to found the Partnership for Modernization in 2010, hoping to bridge disagreements and bring the relationship between each other forward. Despite these efforts, no actual progress was made in spite of both parties being genuinely interested in improving their relationship (Haukkala 2015: 32-33). The lack of results in these endeavours left the Russian Federation and the EU disappointed and disillusioned.

The mounting tensions between the EU and Russia culminated in the Ukraine conflict. The EU had planned to sign a series of agreements with Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine during the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013 as a precursor to a broader free trade area. Russia reacted by putting economic and political pressure on these countries beforehand, easily dissuading Armenia from signing agreements with the EU and pressuring Moldova to follow suit. Similar strategies were employed with regard to the most important object of desire. Russia employed sanctions against the Ukraine and also offered a well-filled gift basket in the form of discounts on natural gas, trade concessions and loans as a reward if the Yanukovych-led government was to back away from the European Union and their free trade area. The Ukraine distanced herself from the EU and Brussels acknowledged this development as a fait accompli, being forced to settle for Moldova and Georgia (Haukkala 2015: 33). Despite the EU's willingness to let go of the issue, it turned out to not be the end of the conflict, because domestic unrest flared up and eventually led to the ouster of the Ukrainian government in February 2014. Russia reacted decisively and sent military forces to seize the Crimean peninsula, utilizing a referendum to incorporate this area into the Russian Federation and securing access to the port in Sevastopol. Uprisings in Eastern Ukraine followed, further destabilizing the country. Despite the role Russia is playing in the Ukrainian unrest not being entirely clear, it seems likely that there is substantial influence exercised by Putin's administration (Haukkala 2015: 34). On the stage of the world public,

Russia has began a powerful information campaign against the West and the Ukraine, which has been coupled by military muscle flexing along the borders of NATO members, including military games and violations of airspaces (Haukkala 2015: 34).

The EU reacted to Russia's actions by imposing restrictive measures against the Russian Federation. The goal was to de-escalate the conflict in the Ukraine and secure the Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Official News Website of the Institutions of the European Union 2017). The EU first implemented diplomatic measures in March 2014, cancelling the planned G8 summit in Sochi and instead planning a G7 meeting in Brussels as well as moving to suspend negotiations of Russia joining the OECD and the International Energy Agency. The EU – Russia summit was cancelled as well. Additionally, the EU implemented asset freezes and visa bans against persons and entities considered to have taken part in actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity (Official News Website of the Institutions of the European Union 2017). In July and September 2014, the EU implemented economic sanctions, i.e. sanctions targeting sectoral cooperation and exchanges with Russia. These measures included prohibition of financial exchange between EU nationals and Russian banks and major defence and energy companies, as well as an embargo on arms, arms-related material and dual-use material to and from Russia. The EU also prohibited the export of equipment and technology that could be used for deep water oil exploration (Official News Website of the Institutions of the European Union 2017). The Russian Federation retaliated by banning food imports from the EU in August 2014.

With regards to the Ukraine, the EU has moved forward with the agreements that were originally scheduled to be signed in Vilnius in November 2013, which have been signed by the new Ukrainian government. As a response, Putin's administration has repeatedly tried to pressure the Ukraine, attempting to ultimately overturn these agreements and regain their influence in the former Soviet space. This seems like a possible long term outcome, because the EU has mainly provided political and symbolical support without offering solutions for the military and economic problems of the conflict-torn country, so it remains to be seen, if and how long the Ukrainian government manages to fend of Russian pressure (Haukkala 2015: 36). When considering EU – Russia relations, it is possible to read the Ukraine crisis as a culmination of bigger rifts between these foreign policy actors and subsequently understand it as a proxy conflict between them (Haukkala 2015: 37).

3.2 Russia and the V4

The relationships of the Russian Federation with other post – Soviet states have developed very differently. In a policy paper of the European Council on Foreign Relations published in 2007, the authors rank the European member states in five tiers based on their approach to Russia. With the four Visegrad countries in three different groups, it is evident that their foreign policy approach to Moscow already differed before the Ukraine crisis. In 2007, they considered Hungary and Slovakia to be the most friendly of the V4 vis-a-vis Russia, considering them to be 'Friendly Pragmatists' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 2). They are assumed to keep relatively close relationships with Russia and to be more interested in business interests than political goals. The paper considers the Czech Republic to be a Frosty Pragmatist, meaning they are also interested in business opportunities, but still speak out against Russia on other issues if they deem it necessary (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 2). Poland is considered to be a New Cold Warrior, a state that has an overtly hostile relationship with Moscow (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 2). It is notable that Leonard and Popescu see the V4 distributed among the three least Russia friendly tiers, which might have its roots in their shared history.

The Polish – Russian relationship has always been especially volatile due to the conflict ridden shared history going back to the middle ages, which warrants paying extra attention to their relationship in the recent past. Even in the post-Soviet era, the Poles have been viewing Russia as an enemy, while Russians have been seeing Poland as their sphere of influence (Cheremushkin 2003: 1). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ten years of estrangement between Poland and Russia followed. Cheremushkin sees the reason for that estrangement in Poles being able for the first time to openly hate Russia (Cheremushkin 2003: 5). During that time, Poland's objective was Western integration, which in this context also meant the independence and westernisation of the Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania (Kucharczyk and Fuskiewicz 2015: 105). After 2001, a process of rapprochement between the Russian Federation and Poland began, with Putin visiting Warsaw and President Kwasniewski's visits to Moscow. This process was quickly interrupted and relations worsened again. Two major reasons can be named. Firstly, the eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004 added eight former Soviet bloc members to the democratic West, which made Moscow visibly uneasy. It was followed by disputes about historical issues, as well as a treatment of the Polish president that was considered respect less in Warsaw during his visit to Moscow in May that year (Bernstein 2005). The next step was the colour revolution in the Ukraine, where Poland backed the anti-Russian candidate, Viktor A. Yushchenko, which upset the Russians even further. At that point, it seemed like the ice age between both countries would last for a long time (Bernstein

2005). These issues continued to dominate the Russian – Polish relationship for years to come. The war between Russia and Georgia in early 2008 also alarmed Polish foreign policy (David 2016: 33). With the crash of the Polish Air Force Tu-154 in April 2010 in western Russia that killed the Polish President Lech Kaczynski and his wife, as well as the president's senior staff and the entire command of Poland's armed forces, another point of contention over the official inquiry emerged to worsen the relationship between both countries once again (Bobinski 2010). Poland has seen Russia as a threat for a long time, fearing Russian expansionism, which is seen to best be opposed by soft containing their neighbour and reducing Russian's influence on the European energy sector. In the eyes of Poland's political elite it is of major importance to keep Ukraine independent and as integrated into the Western world as possible (Kucharczyk and Fuskiewicz 2015: 106).

In line with their description as friendly pragmatists, Hungary and Slovakia are rarely interested in setting EU policy themselves and just tend to follow the mainstream line of the bigger, more influential nations. They do not promote Russian interests in the EU, but they are very much interested in keeping a good relationship with the Kremlin to be able to profit from Russia's economic growth. Especially Hungary's ambitions to become a gas hub for Russian companies underlines their economic interests (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 38). These ambitions have helped to undermine progress regarding a common European approach to energy security in the past. Hungary is very dependant on Russia's crude oil and gas.

Historically, the perception of Russia in Hungarians' eyes has been pretty similar to that of Poland. The communist dictatorships and the Soviet occupation left their marks on the public. After 1989, the political left kept its contacts with Russia, which was seen with concern by the political right (Gyori 2015: 53). During the first Orban government between 1998 and 2002, Hungary's foreign policy kept its distance from Russia. During his time in the opposition from 2002 to 2010, Orban cautioned the government against the growing influence of Russia in Hungary in the wake of the Paks expansion project and the South Stream pipeline (Gyori 2015: 53). This marks a sharp contrast to today, where the right-wing Fidesz party currently presents itself as quite Russia-friendly to the public and the media, who often consider Orban to be the closest ally to Putin within the EU (Verseck 2015).

Slovakia has been in a comparable situation. With Russia supplying almost all of her gas and oil, Slovakia has been economically dependant on Russia to a certain point and has also occasionally supported Russia when opposing certain aspects of European energy policy (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 38). Overall, Slovakia's public is the most friendly to the Russian Federation of all V4 countries. This was a result of a survey conducted in 2011, where Slovakia's respondents were the only ones that stated to have a higher amount of trust in Russia than the US (Mesezniko and

Gyarfasova 2015: 156). After 1989, two main affinity lines emerged. Nationalists and leftists promoted a pro-Russian role, even being isolationist, anti-Western or anti-Europe at times, underlining the ethno-national and linguistic connections between Russia and Slovakia (Mesezniko and Gyarfasova 2015: 146). Soviet rule was perceived in a brighter light than it was in other Visegrad countries. The Soviet programs aimed at reducing the socio-economic disparities between Czechia and Slovakia and accelerated Slovakia's modernization and industrialisation, increasing healthcare, state education and overall living conditions, which lead to a less negative perception of Soviet rule in Slovakia (Mesezniko and Gyarfasova 2015: 147). On the other side of the fence were centre-right parties and other pro-Western groups within Slovak society, citing ideas based on moral values, especially freedom, democracy and human rights (Mesezniko and Gyarfasova 2015: 146). Despite the dependencies and economic partnerships with the Russian Federation, Slovakia supported increasing the EU's influence in the common neighbourhood, perhaps due to them being aware of the delicate nature of the EU – Russia relationship and the resulting political and economic uncertainty east of their borders or perhaps due to the possibility of a European project improving energy security in Eastern and Central Europe ultimately aimed at reducing the area's dependence on Russia's coorperation.

The Czech Republic finds herself in a similar position as Hungary and Slovakia. It also imports about three-fourth of its gas from Russia, with roughly one fourth being imported from Norway (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 43). Overall, it is less dependant on the Russian Federation economically and has criticized Moscow more openly regarding democracy and human rights issues (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 43).

Historically, the relationship between the Russian Federation and the Czech Republic has been complex, with the invasion of 1968 being a deciding factor, marking the moment when the Soviet Union surpassed Germany as a security threat to Czechoslovakia in the perception of her citizens (Kratochvíl and Rihackova 2015: 14). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Czechs saw westernisation and joining the NATO as the most important guarantees for a preserved independence and Russia was not treated as a foreign policy priority (Kratochvíl and Rihackova 2015: 14). After the start of the Yugoslavian wars and the First Chechen War, the Czech Republic pushed for NATO membership in order to increase national security, which was realized in 1999 (Kratochvíl and Rihackova 2015: 16). For Russia, the eastern enlargement and the expansion of the NATO into the eastern neighbourhood raised suspicions towards the EU, which did not spill over into the bilateral relationship of the two countries, however, so that Putin's first term in office saw relatively friendly relations (Kratochvíl and Rihackova 2015: 17). In the following years, bilateral relations deteriorated. The Czech Republic has been supporting the EU being active in Eastern

Europe and together with Poland hosts a US missile shield as a response to a perceived military threat from Russia. This missile shield has led to a major dispute between the Czech Republic and Russia, which led the Kremlin to compare the developing situation to the Cuban Missile Crisis and to threaten to start pointing missiles at Prague ((Leonard and Popescu 2007: 46). On the other side of the fence, the war against Georgia and the Ukraine crisis contributed to the Czech Republic's dwindling trust in the Russian Federation (Kratochvíl and Rihackova 2015: 17). In the Czech Republic's public life, two approaches to Russia were vocalized: A value based anti-Russia/pro-Western approach as well as an economically pragmatic approach.

4. Applying the Framework

4.1 Poland: The New Cold Warrior?

Poland's overall stance in 2014 regarding the Ukraine crisis comes with little surprise. The fact that Warsaw has been pushing for economic sanctions against an increasingly belligerent Russian administration is perfectly in line with the previous relationship between these nations and also mirrors the overall view that has been dominating their relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union: Poland is very quick to mistrust Russia's intentions, especially if military actions are taken, as was seen during Russia's war with Georgia in 2008.

The same turned out to be true during the Ukraine crisis. With the Ukraine being geographically close to Poland, it does not come as a surprise that 88% of respondents to a public opinion poll conducted by CBOS in 2014 said they were following the crisis closely (CBOS 2014). The majority of the representative sample thought that the UN, the EU, the NATO and the USA ought to increase their involvement in the crisis and to increase attempts to try and solve it (CBOS 2014). However, nearly half of the populace felt that the measures undertaken by the Polish government were appropriate, with 20% feeling that they are insufficient and 26% estimating them to be excessive (CBOS 2014). When asked about sanctions, 67% of respondents were in favour of increasing the economic pressure on Russia with only 20% being opposed to the idea (CBOS 2014). When asked about the possibility of weakening sanctions, only 12% of respondents were in favour, while 74% rejected the option (CBOS 2014). It should be noted that CBOS also pointed out that there was an unusually high amount of farmers favouring to weaken sanctions against Russia (CBOS 2014).

All in all, public opinion in Poland was likely to support even more sanctions against Russia. This shows that support for economic sanctions against Russia in September 2014 was exceptionally high in Poland, which means that, utilizing the previously introduced framework, we can conclude that the approach of utilizing economic pressure to further political goals against Russia enjoys widespread support among the Polish populace and could be a driving force in governmental preference formation in Poland, if there is no well-organized sector lobbying against the sanctions.

For the variable of interests, it seems to be most prudent to look at the Polish sector that was affected most by Russia in retaliation of the implementation of sanctions against Moscow by the European Union in summer 2014. Only one day after the EU imposed economic sanctions, Russia banned food imports from Poland, hitting Poland's agricultural sector citing sanitary concerns (Szary 2014). This was intended as an effective move to retaliate against Poland. Poland is the biggest producer of apples in the European Union and for Polish agriculture, the Russian market is worth over 300 million Euros, spanning annual amounts of 700,000 tons of apples (Szary 2014). Poland is lucky in the sense that it has a large domestic market and has less of an export-driven economy than the other V4 countries, only netting 46% of their GDP through export (Kruliš 2015: 14). Despite this fact however, Russia was number six on the list of Poland's export destinations in 2014 with a share of 4.3% of Polish export value, worth $9.3 billion (Kruliš 2015: 14) The banned value of Polish exports to Russia was estimated to be 832 million Euro, collapsing apple prices and affecting other products such as mushrooms and tomatoes (Kruliš 2015: 14). Chief economists still estimated this effect on the entirety of the Polish economy to be marginal in macroeconomic terms (Szary 2014). It is still clear that Poland's relatively big agricultural sector was hit by Russia as a direct result of the EU imposing economic sanctions on the Russian Federation. As a result, there have been complaints from the Polish Peasant's Party about the tough approach Warsaw took towards Russia concerning the Ukraine crisis (Szary 2014). Additionally, Miroslaw Maliszewski, head of the Association of Polish Fruit-Growers said that Poland had gotten "carried away" (quoted according to Szary 2014), when reacting to the Ukraine crisis, possibly forgetting about the vulnerabilities of domestic sectors.

So far, our analysis has shown that we have a strongly supported idea variable, seeking to grant the Polish government a mandate to use economic means for political gains vis-a-vis Russia concerning the Ukraine crisis, as well as a well organized interest group, whose chairman was also a member of the Sejim (Szary 2014), that has a substantial interest in reducing the burden on the Polish agricultural sector. Our framework initially predicted that in such cases, the lobbying of the interest group should prevail over dominant domestic ideas, which did not seem to happen here. There are several answers to that question. The most obvious one is time. Apparently, the agricultural sector

did not expect Moscow to retaliate by banning Polish fruit imports and thus did not start lobbying effectively against economic sanctions on Russia before the Polish government and the EU had actually imposed these sanctions. At that point, it was clear that the Polish agricultural sector was confronted with a fait accompli: There was no way for the Polish government to weaken the sanctions on Russia and thus give the Kremlin a chance to reverse the ban on Polish food imports. Despite the fact that the Polish government could not weaken the sanctions after they were imposed, the interest group of the Polish agricultural sector began their lobbying efforts. They criticized the government directly for their approach (Szary 2014), causing two separate reactions. The first one was the statement of the newly elected premier Ewa Kopacz in autumn 2014, where she stated that she planned to take a more pragmatic and less interventionist approach towards the Ukraine crisis and instead focus on Poland's security (Sobczyk and Wasilewski 2014). This is interesting, because a few weeks prior, the public opinion poll of CBOS (see above) showed that there was widespread support among the populace for the approach taken by the previous prime minister. We can assume that this shift in policy was caused by effective lobbying, predominantly carried out by the Polish agricultural sector. Obviously, the statement alone did not improve the economic situation of the affected sectors, so the government was forced to take additional steps to appease the lobbyists. Newer research initiatives show that agricultural food exports from Poland to Russia dropped from 900 million Euro to about 350 million Euro for the time frame of August to April in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 (European Parliament Research Service 2015: 7). The Polish farmers received substantial financial help from the European Commission's schemes of exceptional emergency market measures, where the Polish government, in the form of Agricultural Minister Marek Sawicki, lobbied for the interests of his agricultural sector (Kruliš 2015: 15). Additionally, the Polish Agency for the Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture also provided financial relief to affected farmers (Kruliš 2015: 15). Poland started to promote her agricultural products outside of the EU, co-funded by the European Union, as a medium term response to the food ban (Kruliš 2015: 15). These measures proved to be effective and in early 2015 the Association of Polish Fruit-Growers stated that the Polish apples harvested during the 2014 season had found outlets (Kruliš 2015: 16)

As a result, it is obvious that the societal approach also worked in this case: Domestic ideas were the dominant influence in governmental preference formation until the agricultural sector realised that economic sanctions on Russia would result in a backlash damaging Polish exports at which point lobbying picked up. However, the Polish government was not able to weaken the sanctions against the Russian Federation anymore, because they had already been ratified at a supranational level, so the public statement by the new prime minister did not help the lobbying groups. In the

end, the government and the lobbyists had to work together to control the damage done to the Polish agricultural sector, reducing the efficiency of Russia's sanctions. This way, the government was able to appease the Polish agricultural sector while still following the preference of the Polish public.

4.2 Hungary: The Balancing Act

Before the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, Hungary had been looking for markets in the east and also increased efforts to commit Russian investors and companies to projects in the energy sector. Looking at a weak economy and years of stunted economic growth, Budapest finally managed to score a big foreign investment, when Russia agreed to expand Hungary's only nuclear plant in early 2014 – a deal worth 10 billion Euro (Szakacs 2014). With the EU's sanctions targeting Russia's banking sector, Russia's state nuclear corporation reported that international contracts might be affected by the sanctions, endangering the project in Hungary (Szakacs 2014b). Another point of interest for Hungary's government is Hungary's dependence on Russia's oil and gas. Russia supplies 89% of Hungary's crude oil and 57% of her natural gas (Hegedűs 2016: 2). This dependency makes Hungary vulnerable to Russian price tempering within the energy sector (Hegedűs 2016: 2) Luckily for Hungary, the impact of the Russian food import ban affected the country to a much lesser degree than Poland, only affecting roughly 1% of the country's farming exports (Szakacs 2014).
Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Hungary opposed sanctions against Russia mostly out of economic reasons, resulting in Viktor Orban fiercely criticizing the decision of the European Union to impose sanctions since the Hungarian government feared their impact on economic relations with Russia and the overall economic prospects of central and eastern Europe as a result of a possible trade war between the EU and Russia (Byrne 2014). Ultimately though, Hungary did not veto the EU sanctions (Hegedűs 2016: 2).
To apply our framework to Hungary, we will first look to public opinion polls. When asked in April 2014, only 31% of Hungarian respondents agreed that their country should do everything possible to support Ukraine to achieve political and economic stability and only 34% agreed that their nation should do everything possible to prevent further Russian expansion into the Ukraine (IPSOS 2014). Furthermore, only 32% of respondents supported the economic sanctions against Russia and only 33% agreed with sanctions targeting influential members of the Kremlin (IPSOS 2014). In contrast, 49% of Hungarians wanted to stay out of the crisis and to leave it up to others to solve the conflict (IPSOS 2014). All in all, the dominant domestic idea seems to be a more careful approach,

ultimately rejecting an active role in the Ukraine crisis, especially at the costs of Hungary's own economic growth. This is probably in part due to the economic entanglements between the Russian Federation and Hungary. However, it should also be pointed out that Hungarians' support for Russia should not be overstated. Hegedűs points out that Orban's pro-Russian rhetoric may be at odds with the public's attitude towards Russia, stating that Hungarian's do not harbour a lot of pro-Russian sentiment and still have strong reservations about Russia, which probably stem from their shared past (Hegedűs 2016: 3). Despite a certain "aloofness toward a "big neighbour"" (quoted according to Hegedűs 2016: 3), Hegedűs shows that Hungarian voters are less pro-Russia than their current government (Hegedűs 2016: 3) and points out that existing pro-Russian sentiments might be the result of party-controlled public broadcasting and private media outlets (Hegedűs 2016: 3). This, however, does not change that the Hungarian public does not back the EU's approach to the Ukraine crisis and mostly agrees with Viktor Orban. Thus, the Hungarian public did not support economic sanctions against Russia in 2014, which makes this the dominant domestic idea, relevant for government preference formation.

Finding statements of actors of the Hungarian industry proves quite difficult. It is still possible to find hints of Hungary's economy preference in the English speaking press. The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK) drafted a proposal in summer 2014 aiming at retaining Hungary's exports to Russia (Budapest Business Journal 2014). The head of the MKIK's chapter dealing with Hungary-Russia trade relations criticised the embargo since it could have indirect effects on Hungary's economy due to German companies that usually import products from Hungarian firms to process and then ship them to Russia (Budapest Business Journal 2014). During 2014, the MKIK organized regular meetings with their Russian counterparts in order to improve trade despite the sanctions (Budapest Business Journal 2014).

It is likely that Hungary's lobbyists do not need to invest as much energy into changing their governments preferences regarding the Ukraine crisis, simply because the Hungarian government is already painfully aware of their country's dependency on Russia regarding energy supplies. As a result of this awareness, the government and the population are already very likely to oppose economic sanctions against Russia, even if Russia ultimately did not exert pressure on Hungary directly by increasing gas and oil prices during the Ukraine crisis. It is interesting to note that despite the Hungarian prime minister's public criticism of the sanctions, Hungary did end up implementing EU policy, showing that Hungarian foreign policy makers are not interested in isolating themselves beyond a certain point. Budapest's rhetoric so far may have turned a few heads, but that was all it did. With Hungary even contributing significantly at NATO level towards the alliance's engagement in Ukraine (Feledy 2015 :78), Viktor Orbans 'loyalty' to Moscow may be

nothing more than a masquerade, made necessary by Hungary's economic dependence. This is supported by the fact that Orban used to be an anti-Russia politician while he was part of the Hungarian opposition between 2002 and 2009 (Feledy 2015: 71). Since the Russian Federation cut off the Ukrainian gas pipelines for the first time in 2006, Hungarian governments have been very aware of the risk of having Moscow cut off gas and fuel supplies in winter. This fact may explain, why the Hungarian public and the interest groups supported the prime minister's pro-Russian approach to the Ukraine crisis, though it has to be noted that Hungary's government did follow EU policy in political decisions. It is interesting to see that the Hungarian government has been using a form of doublespeak approach: Orban seemed to defend the Russian position, seemingly destabilizing the EU from within, while Hungary's Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi supported the EU line, stressing the need for a peaceful solution and the importance of the Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Feledy 2015: 75).

Summarizing, Hungary is in a tough spot politically, almost forced to employ anti-sanction rhetoric publicly, for fear of Russian retaliation through gas price manipulation, while fulfilling their duties as member of the EU and the NATO in order to not isolate themselves within these organisations. As a result, we can conclude that both variables, interests and ideas aligned in this case and the response of the Hungarian government was to be expected.

4.3 The Czech Republic: A Country Divided

With the two previously introduced main narratives of Czech foreign policy both being very visible and in conflict in the Republic's public life, public opinion as well as political elites remain divided on foreign policy vis-a-vis Russia during the Ukraine crisis (Kratochvil and Rihackova: 2015: 23). These foreign policy line divisions can also be observed within the governing coalitions parties making a clear and bold foreign policy almost impossible (Rihackova 2015: 26). Especially the division between President Milos Zeman and the newly elected government showcased the Czech Republic's division very well, with the president being distinctly pro-Russia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pressing towards a return to EU-mainstream policy (Rihackova 2015: 25). The Czech civil society sector invested substantial resources into helping the Ukraine during the Maidan (Rihackova 2015: 34). Overall, the Czech Republic seems to have stabilised within the EU mainstream supporting the Minsk agreements as well as sanctions against Russia (Rihackova 2015: 34).

To apply our framework to the Czech Republic we will again first look at public opinion polls. In September 2014, the CVVM (Czech Public Opinion Research Centre, formerly part of the Czech Statistical Office, now staffed by lecturers of Prague University) asked the Czech public about their opinion on the Ukraine crisis. The first notable result was that only 47% of respondents said they were interested in the events in the Ukraine, which was 13% less than the value measured during the occupation of Crimea, but the same value the poll returned in June 2014 (Adamec 2014). Since June 2014, the perception of the Ukraine crisis as a threat to world peace, as a risk to European security and as a threat to the Czech Republic increased by 12%, 13% and 16% to 69%, 73% and 65% respectively (Adamec 2014). Only 39% of respondents reported to have their own opinion on the crisis (Adamec 2014). It is also notable that the role of all involved actors was predominantly seen as bad with Russia leading at 82% (Adamec 2014). The majority (73%) of the Czech Republic's public rejecteed the possibility of their country actively engaging in Ukrainian affairs and preferred the involvement of the UN, the EU or the NATO instead (Adamec 2014). It is quite telling that only 48% of respondents have at least an idea about the EU's sanctions on the Russian Federation, with 41% of those respondents agreeing with them and 39% being against them (Adamec 2014). There is also no clear divide among party lines, with right-wing respondents being only a bit more likely to be in favour of sanctions than left-wing voters at 59% to 39% (Adamec 2014). These results show us that the interest in the events in Ukraine was not that high among the Czech public in 2014, though its perception as a security risk increased between summer and autumn of 2014. The Czech populace preferred for their country to stay out of the conflict if possible. Despite there being no clear response to the question of imposing sanctions on the Czech Republic, it is interesting to note that Russia's role in the conflict was seen as overwhelmingly bad and that Russia's action were seen as a threat to security. The lack of a distinct idea on how to approach the subject among the Czech population can be explained by both pro and anti-Russian sentiments being vocalized loudly in the public space. While most Czech media adopted a pro-Western stance (Holubec 2015), pro-Russia stances were still voiced publicly by the minister for industry and trade Jan Mladek (Groszkowski 2015), the president Milos Zeman (Foy and Oliver 2015) and several other politicians (Holubec 2015). Additionally, new media sources that usually target younger people have intensified their activity online (Groszkowski 2015). Contemporary scholars have also noted an increase of pro-Russian propaganda on the net as well as an increase in support for these outlets by Czech politicians (Kratochvil and Rihackova: 2015: 23).

Summarizing, there is no dominant idea regarding using economic sanctions as a response to the behaviour of the Russian administration. Apparently, the Czech public was as split on the question of sanctions as the government.

For the interest variable, several statements of interest group representatives can be found. The most interesting reaction to the sanctions against Russia was an appeal to the Czech government issued by the representatives of 200 Czech engineering companies. They declared they feared that the sanction against the Russian Federation could reverse the expansion in the engineering industry that took place in the previous years (Klekner 2014). Additionally, the president of the Association of Engineering Technology Miroslav Sabart urged the Czech government to "adopt a more cautious attitude to this situation" (quoted according to Klekner 2014). The Czech Defense and Security Industry Association president Jiri Hynek warned that sanctions on dual-use item exports to Russia were not well defined and could mean practically anything, including software and engineering products (Holonova 2014). He also pointed out that certain Czech engineering companies might be harmed massively by the sanctions, because they predominantly exported to Russia (Holonova 2014). Hynek weakened his argument by pointing out that ongoing contracts with Russia would stand despite the sanctions (Holonova 2014). There were no signs of activity from lobby groups regarding the Russian retaliation that banned the import of EU-produced agricultural products. The reason for the lack of reaction in this sector has to lie with the fact that the impact on the GDP and total exports of the Czech Republic is statistically negligible (Krulis 2014: 6).

Ultimately, the interest groups could not sway the governments opinion, which in this case means the prime minister and the foreign minister whose influence on Czech foreign policy has to be considered the most impactful. Our framework suggests that interest groups should be able to influence government policy if a well organized sector is affected directly. In this case this did not happen, however, presumably because despite the engineering sector being well organized, the impact the sanction had on it were rather small, with ongoing contracts not being affected and the Czech Republic only shipping 3.7% of their overall exports to Russia before the sanctions were applied (Krulis 2014: 16). Overall, the direct, short-term impact on the Czech economy was limited, but there might be long-term effects based on Russia reorienting herself towards imports from non-Western countries, or from Czech supplies that usually are exported to other EU countries that exported goods to Russia themselves (Krulis 2014: 16). Because of these effects either being relatively small or relatively hard to predict, lobbying can be assumed to be a lot less effective than if it was a response to huge losses for certain sectors. Additionally, it might also be hard to influence governmental preference formation, if the government is as divided as the Czech Republic's government is on foreign policy issues. It has to be noted though, that Milos Zeman's stance on Russia could be influenced by certain ties to pro-Russian lobby groups (Foy and Oliver 2015). Despite the Czech foreign ministry ultimately not giving into the lobbyists demands, the Czech Republic did react to the grievances of her industrial actors and worked quickly to develop

measures as a response to the sanction regime, mostly focussing on the preservation of Russia as an export market for Czech products and the migration to new markets (Krulis 2014: 17). Overall, the sanctions against Russia did not directly weaken the Czech Republic's economy much. With a divided public and government and a comparatively weak case for effective lobbying, the government of the Czech's followed mainstream EU-policy, while trying to reduce the impact of the sanctions on the affected industrial sectors.

4.4 Slovakia: The Isolationist Approach?

The political landscape in Slovakia during the Ukraine crisis appears to be similar to the one of the Czech Republic. The government was divided on the issue, though the roles of the offices seem to be reversed: Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico seems to clearly be opposed to the EU mainstream policy regarding the Ukraine crisis, while Slovakia's foreign minister Miroslav Lajcak has been active in promoting Ukraine's European integration (Duleba 2015: 161). Despite Prime Minister Fico announcing his country's opposition to sanctions against Russia in early 2014 (B.C. 2014), Slovakia ultimately supported sanctions, but still followed a double-track approach trying to maintain good relations with both Russia and the Ukraine (Duleba 2015: 171).

Polls in 2007 and 2009 prove that the Slovak public was not very concerned about developments in Russia (in contrast to other EU countries like Poland) with the exception of 72% of respondents expressing concern about Slovakia's dependency on Russian gas (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 156). Another poll conducted in 2011 questioning respondents about the trustworthiness of the US and Russia showed that Slovakia was the only country of the Visegrad states that trusted Russia more than Americans (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 156). These findings are in line with our expectations lined out in the section looking at the history of the Russian-Slovak relationship, with Slovakia's perception of Soviet rule being less negative than that of other Visegrad countries.

Concerning the Ukraine crisis, 83% of respondents to a poll conducted in June 2014 were in favour of the Ukrainians democratically deciding their future without the interference of the Russian Federation (Adamec 2014b). However, when the question was phrased differently and the Ukraine was described as Russia's sphere of influence only 64% of respondents disagreed with the notion that Russia was entitled to interfere in the conflict (Adamec 2014b). Only 59% of respondents agreed that if Russia attacked a NATO member state Slovakia would be obliged to participate in their defence, while 24% disagreed (Adamec 2014b). When asked about the increase of NATO's

military presence in Central and Eastern Europe, 46% agreed that increasing it might be necessary, while 38% disagreed. Energy security followed the trend of previous polls, suggesting that 71% of respondents thought it was important for Slovakia to decrease her energy dependence on Russia (Adamec 2014). Another survey conducted by the FOCUS polling agency found out that more than half of Slovakia's populace did not know what was happening in Ukraine and almost half of the respondents did not think that sanctions against Russia were the appropriate response to the conflict (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 158). These results are in line with the wide range of opinions articulated in Slovakia's public life. Robert Fico and his party's representatives have pointed at the internal problems the Ukraine faces as well as largely made "pragmatic" statements to the public (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 149). The Communist Party of Slovakia has taken a more radical approach, clearly being anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 149). In contrast, the Slovak President Andrej Kiska has openly pressed for more cooperation between the Visegrad countries and NATO as well as being distinctly in favour of sanctions against the Russian Federation (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 150). The opposition centre-right parties reacted similarly to the president's approach, preferring a pro-Ukraine stance and signalling approval for the sanctions (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 150). The population of Slovakia is also exposed to a wide range of opinions in their media, ranging from a pro-Europe/pro-Ukraine standpoints over a pragmatic, national interest focused approach to radically pro-Russia/anti-Ukraine interpretations of the crisis (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 153). Overall, it can be said that the Slovak public does not clearly support either side of the argument, so that the approach of the Slovak public to the crisis is one less critical of Russia, but instead characterized by pragmatic interests over value-based positions (Meseznikov and Gyarfasova 2015: 158). Hence, we can conclude that there is no strong idea variable present that could influence governmental preference formation on the issue of sanctions. We can however conclude, that there is a very strong public interest in not getting dragged into this conflict in a way that would jeopardize Slovakia's energy supply. A very valid fear to have, as has been showcased by prior foreign policy crises that endangered Slovakia's supply of natural gas especially during the 2009 crisis (Mesik 2015: 180). Despite Slovakia's efforts undertaken since 2009 to diversify her gas supply, she was still relatively dependant on the Russian Federation. Though the completion of Eustream in 2011 reduced that dependency and ensured that Slovakia would be prepared for any short term gas supply problems (Mesik 2015: 180/181).

Interest groups in Slovakia were reasonably active in 2014. The Slovak Agricultural and Food Industry spokesman pointed out that while the direct impact of Russia's retaliatory food ban might be negligible, the redirection of embargoed goods to European markets could increase pressure on

domestic markets, possibly threatening their existence (Balogova 2014). Additionally, the Slovak Association of Travel Agencies warned that Russia's clothing its airspace to EU airlines could negatively impact domestic travel agencies (Balogova 2014). Peter Mihok, the head of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, warned that a number of Slovak companies could be affected directly, with losses potentially being even higher if Slovak companies that serve as sub-contractors for larger companies were also considered in estimations (Balogova 2014). These statements showcase that multiple sectors of Slovakia's economy were very worried about the sanctions and a possible trade war between Russia and the EU, with expected losses of up to 2% of the country's GDP if worst case scenarios were considered (Balogova 2014).

But how successful were the interest groups? On first glance, Slovakia's government was not swayed notably. The overall stance of the government stayed rather pragmatic or even pro-Russia in rhetoric, but also followed EU mainstream policy in Brussels. In short, Slovakia employed a double-track approach, trying to not isolate herself within the EU, but still keeping reasonably well relationships with both the Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Ultimately, the direct impact of the sanction regimes of either the EU or Russia on the economy of Slovakia was relatively minor, despite the clearly articulated fears of Slovakia's industry (Krulis 2015: 12). The shrinking numbers of Russian tourists were compensated by an increase of non-Russian guests (Krulis 2015: 12). As Kruils 2015 points out, the lobby groups might have had significant impact on Slovak government behaviour during the drafting of the sanctions in Brussels, excluding subsidiaries of Russian financial institutions as well as reducing the coverage of dual-use goods and technology that are produced in Slovakia and exported to Russia (Krulis 2015: 12/13).

In Slovakia's case, the interest groups could successfully lobby for their interests and influence the government to diplomatically protect Slovakia's industries during the drafting of the sanctions package. The interests of the lobby groups were compatible with the ideas among the general public on how the Ukraine crisis should be approached by the government, which meant that while the public was split on the question of sanctions, it was in agreement that the government was to keep the economic exposure and vulnerability of the country to a minimum, in order to guarantee a stable supply of oil and gas from Russia.

5. Of Western Values, Energy Security and "Pragmatic" Approaches

The Ukraine crisis and Russia's rapid response to it put the EU in a tough spot. Previous disputes with the Russian Federation had showcased that a unified European response was hard to implement, since several European nations were very protective of their economic ties to Russia. As a result, the EU was not taken seriously as a foreign policy actor by the Russian Federation. When the subject of sanctions as a response to Moscow's behaviour came up within the EU, member states knew that the EU needed to appear united to be considered a potent foreign policy actor, which meant that once the desire for sanctions was to be implemented, member states had to follow EU mainstream policy in order to not isolate themselves massively within the EU. At the same time, the comparatively weak economic situation of the Visegard countries and especially their dependency on Russian gas and crude oil has put them between a rock and a hard place, despite improvements that had been made in the area of Energy Security since the 2009 crisis.

Our analysis shows, that Poland was in a comparatively comfortable spot when the EU first applied economic sanctions against Russia. Poland's relationship with Russia had always been difficult with Polish foreign policy being cold and potentially hostile towards Russia. This behaviour enjoyed wide support amongst the Polish public, as Polish citizens still saw Russia as a threat and feared Russian expansionism. These fears were fuelled further by the Georgian war and the Ukraine crisis. With interest groups not being predicted to be affected majorly by the sanctions the EU planned to implement, the public's wish for the EU to punish Moscow prevailed. Russia's retaliatory food ban had a significant impact on Polish agriculture though. Since the decisions on sanctions was not reversible at that point, the government employed measures to soften the blow to Poland's agriculture with the help of EU funding, ultimately finding an elegant solution, which satisfied interest groups by compensating their losses, while being able to keep a policy that enjoyed widespread support amongst the population.

The other three Visegrad members were in a more complicated spot politically as well as economically. Hungary's public also was not very fond of Russia due to historical grievances, but at the same time Hungary's fragile economy had forced the government to look for markets in the east. Another problem was the dependency on cheap Russian gas and crude oil. When the Ukraine crisis unfolded in 2014, the Hungarian public preferred an isolationist approach and disagreed with economic sanctions against Russia, preferring Realpolitik, which was also the preferred approach of Hungary's economy. Viktor Orban, who showcased anti-Russian sentiments before he became Prime Minister for the second time in 2010, adopted this approach and at times presented himself as

a friend to Russia in a way that has been considered to be even more friendly to Russia than necessary. It has to be noted that at the same time that Hungary's Foreign Minister supported EU policy outspokenly while in Brussels, expressing desire for a peaceful solution and the importance of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Overall, it seems like Hungary's government followed a double-track approach: Its rhetoric was distinctly pro-Russian, especially to the world public even earning Hungary praise from Putin, but at the same time, Hungary's foreign policy did not actually stray away from EU-mainstream. With this approach, Hungary reduced the likelihood of Russia retaliating against EU-sanctions by manipulating gas prices or cutting supply off fully, basically achieving the preference of the population by reducing the impact on Hungary's economy as good as possible, while preventing any serious political isolation within the EU.

The Czech Republic's government was confronted with a similar situation. While the Czech's public was split on the question of sanctions, Russia's role was not seen as favourable in the conflict. The public preferred to stay out of the Ukraine crisis, but also viewed itself as a part of the NATO and the EU, which was considered important for national security. Interest groups failed to play a distinct role in the Czech's government's preference formation, because the impact of the sanctions on the economy was considered to be marginal. Milos Zeeman's stance on the sanctions is curious though: Some scholars point at possible corruption and ties to Russia's industry (Foy and Oliver 2015). But another possible way to read the situation might be a similar interpretation to Viktor Orban's rhetoric: Perhaps the Czech president hoped to appease Moscow by having the Czech government appear divided to prevent sanctions specifically targeted at the Czech Republic's weak points. Ultimately though, we will not be able to cast away either theory.

Slovakia's government seems to have followed a similar approach as Hungary with Prime Minister Fico publicly opposing sanctions, while Slovakia ended up supporting sanctions. With the public not directly being Russia-friendly, but certainly the most friendly public of the V4 vis-a-vis Russia, a double-track approach was followed with the goal of maintaining good relations with Russia and the Ukraine. This approach was in line with the Slovak public's stance on energy security, while public opinion polls showed, that the public tended to not support the sanctions, probably because of the awareness of Slovakia's energy dependence on Russia. All in all, the public was split on the issue, being mostly concerned with their own safety and economy. The Slovaks' government was split on the issue as well and ended up favouring a pragmatic approach to the crisis. Interest groups in Slovakia managed to influence government preference formation during the Ukraine crisis. Despite their inability to stop Slovakia from adopting EU-mainstream policy, they were able to push the government to diplomatically influence protecting Russian banks as well as producers of dual-use goods active in Slovakia. It is unclear weather the obvious split of the Slovakian public and

government also served to influence Russia to not increase gas prices or cut off supply, but it is a possibility that has to be considered.

Summarizing, interest groups were able to influence government preference formation where these sectors were actually affected. Since the affected sectors differed by country, it is only natural that policy divergences between the V4 emerged. Additionally, due to differing perceptions of history and thus Russia as a foreign policy actor, differing dominant ideas can also be found within these countries, making further room for diverging government policies. However, it has to be underlined that these divergences occur within a relatively narrow space, since all four countries consider themselves parts of the Western world and prefer the Russian administration to not act aggressively within the shared neighbourhood, while none of them would consider actually defending Russia's interests politically against the EU regarding this issue. The analysis showed that the main difference between the V4 is how prepared they are to sacrifice economic growth and energy security in order to oppose Russia on the Ukraine question, which is decided by the influence of domestic ideas and interests. This difference is increased by how much these countries need the Russian market to secure economic growth as well as energy supply. Government policies of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia could be interpreted as a patchwork, born of disunity within their governments due to differing statements between several members of the same government, but instead this paper would like to suggest that these countries' policies, instead of just being results of political turf wars, were actually thought out responses to the complicated situation these governments were facing. Presenting contradicting positions in Brussels and to the world public increased the chances of pleasing the domestic public as well as domestic interest groups, while preventing isolation within the EU and keeping a unified front.

6. Conclusion

The Ukraine crisis put the Visegrad countries into a tough spot. On one hand, the eastern markets and especially Russia's cheap natural gas and crude oil made them dependent on an at least intact relationship with Russia, on the other hand, the conflict in the Ukraine was perceived as a belligerent act by the Russian Federation, which the EU intended to face in a united manner. When the question of economic sanctions was on the table, Poland was the only member of the V4 that was heavily in favour of them, heeding the demands of the public as well as the political elite, which were not effectively opposed by lobby groups until Russia's retaliatory sanctions were implemented against Poland. The case was cut less clear for the other three members of the Visegrad, whose governments had to face a public that preferred economic security, but at the same time was not too fond of Russia. With the interest groups being affected differently by the sanctions in these countries as well as having differing historical experiences with the Russian Federation and thus different preferences in the public, the responses of the governments differed as well. The Czech Republic ended up closest to Poland's position due to their interest groups only being marginally affected by the sanctions and fell in line with EU mainstream policy despite Milos Zeeman's public statements that could be considered pro-Russian. Slovakia and Hungary chose pragmatic approaches, trying to appease interest groups (and Moscow) as well as addressing their voter's primary concerns especially regarding energy security regarding the crisis, while at the same time making sure that they did not actually act against the interests of the other EU members, ultimately preserving a unified front as well as making sure not to isolate themselves within the European Union. Overall, it can be said that the governments followed dominant domestic ideas and interests when deciding on policy preferences, but this paper has also shown that the Visegrad countries were unlikely to actually stray away from EU policy, balancing public opinion, interest groups' expectations and the diplomatic dynamic of Brussels as effectively as possible.

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