POLICY PAPER

Hungary
External Relations

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Executive summary

The first ten years in the EU was a period of accommodation to and “internalization” of membership which included the realization of the three foreign policy priorities set following the regime change in 1989/1990; namely integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions and organizations, good relations with neighbours and ethnic Hungarian minorities outside the borders of Hungary, both within the EU framework and bilaterally. The achievements of the past ten years were symbolized by and reflected in the Hungarian EU Presidency which took place in a very different international environment changed by the global economic and financial crisis and the Arab Spring. The new Hungarian foreign policy formulated in the 2010-2014 government cycle reflected these changes and tried to formulate answers to these global challenges by initiating a “global/eastern opening”. The new foreign policy strategy, on the one hand, aimed at expanding the sphere of Hungarian foreign policy activities, while on the other hand, focused on economic relations, while maintaining and emphasizing other elements of external relations (e.g. classical diplomacy, cultural relations, etc.). The “eastern opening” policy will likely remain at the core of the Hungarian foreign policy activities of the present government period (2014-2018), and maybe even beyond. Therefore, the main task of Hungarian foreign (and trade) policy will be to “interpolate” its “eastern opening” interests into EU external relations.

Retrospectively – 10 years in the EU

1. Three top policy priorities

The first ten years of EU membership posed two challenges to Hungary’s foreign policy. First, Hungary had to adapt to being an EU member, i.e. EU membership had to be internalized and turned into “domestic” policy. Second, following the accession previous bilateral relations had to be continued and pursued both in a bilateral and a multilateral (EU) format.

Hungary’s top priorities in the first ten years of EU membership in the field of external relations partly originated from the membership itself and partly from the top priorities of Hungarian foreign policy after the regime change in 1990/1991. These priorities were integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions and organizations, good relations with neighbours and ethnic Hungarian minorities outside the borders of Hungary. Thus, these priorities were included Hungary’s EU Presidency in the first half of 2011 (accidentally including activities related to the Arab Spring and the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy), the Eastern Partnership (the ENP’s eastern dimension) and Hungary’s direct southern neighbourhood, the Western Balkans.

The Hungarian EU presidency in the first half of 2011 was considered in Hungary as a symbol of the completion of Hungary’s membership. At the same time, it also reflected the national consensus over EU membership since it was the Socialist Party-led government which prepared the Presidency, but it was the incoming FIDESZ-led government who actually had to handle it. The Presidency, besides overlapping with the introduction of the much debated new Hungarian constitution, proved to be a foreign policy challenge in two important aspects; namely that this was the EU presidency after the Lisbon Treaty when the European External Action Service started to operate. This meant that external relations belonged to the competence of the EEAS and the Presidency had only a support role. This included the substitution/representation of Lady Ashton – upon her request – in some twenty cases, and representation of the European Union by the Hungarian embassies in several countries, including Belarus, Cuba, Iran and Libya. On the other hand, this was the period...
when – beside the global economic-financial crisis as well as the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima - the events of the "Arab Spring" unfolded in the southern neighbourhood of the EU. Handling the unexpected political, economic, security and social problems raised by the Arab Spring posed specific challenges to both the EU at large and Hungary. The Hungarian Presidency provided all support to the EEAS, and continued handling those questions of external relevance which, while complementing the EEAS activities, remained outside their scope. The most relevant case in point were the humanitarian issues related to the Arab Spring. Top Foreign Ministry officials, including Foreign Minister János Martonyi, visited Libyan refugee camps both in Tunisia and Egypt. The Hungarian embassy in Tripoli was open and working throughout the Libyan civil war (and has been operating ever since), representing the EU, the EU member states and others. Ambassador Béla Marton’s work was praised and acknowledged by the EEAS, and he was asked to represent the EU in Tripoli further, even during the Polish Presidency.3

The other top priority for Hungary was related to the other dimension of the European Neighbourhood policy, namely the Eastern Partnership, where Hungary’s direct neighbourhood overlapped with that of the European Union.4 This factor, originating from the geographical position of the country, has been shared by three out of the four Visegrad countries, providing an opportunity to jointly represent shared concerns and interests within the EU. The close cooperation among the Visegrad four had a profound impact on the development of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), turning it from a set of bilateral relations between the EU and the partner states to a more institutionalized cooperation with a multilateral dimension.5

The EU partnership gave Hungary the chance of moving from a policy-taker into a policy shaker in the neighbourhood. Out of the six partner countries, Hungarian interests have come to be focused only on Ukraine and Moldova. Ukraine and Moldova received considerable political support from the Hungarian government, which was manifested in the form of high-level visits and initiatives. Out of the two, however, Ukraine has received much more attention as well as more diverse attention. Ukraine has a key strategic role in the Hungarian geopolitical thinking since it is a transit route through which Russian oil and gas reaches Hungary. Other considerations include the prevention of smuggling and organized crime, cooperation during natural disasters (e.g. the flood of the River Tisza), and high on the agenda of the present government is also the fate and well-being of the some 150,000 ethnic Hungarians in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine bordering Hungary. This has an impact on the Hungarian official development assistance (ODA) activities as well, since in the case of Ukraine it is clearly focused on the Hungarian-populated territory.6

In Moldova, however, the focus has been much more directed towards the support of Moldova’s independence and territorial integrity but gradually it was complemented by training programs, capacity building, consultations and scholarships aimed at supporting Europeanization and modernization of Moldova. The strong focus on territorial integrity illustrates that the political motivation of counter-balancing Hungary’s minority-related tension with Romania still featured high on the Hungarian agenda.7

The third priority for Hungary was geographically located in Hungary’s direct southern neighbourhood, the Western Balkans.8 While originally it should have been one

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3 In more details Erzsébet N. Rózsa: „Libya and the Hungarian EU Presidency“, MKI Györgyelmész 2011/14, https://www.academia.edu/739899/Libya_and_the_Hungarian_EU_Presidency
6 Ibid.; András Rácz: Divided Stands the Visegrad? The V4 have been united towards the Ukraine crisis but remain split concerning Russia, 24.6.2014, http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/428/divided_stands_the_visegrad
7 Ibid.
8 Szentiványi Gábor: A Balkán térség és a magyar külpolitika – Transcript of the lecture by the Political Director of the MFA (his/her name?) entitled The Balkans region and Hungarian foreign policy on November 20, 2008 at a conference under the same title organized by the National Strategic Studies Program Committee of
of the target neighbourhoods of the European Union as well, the states of the Western Balkans were seen as potential EU members, thus the region was left out of the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy. 9

Hungarian perception of the EU enlargement was based on the perception that further enlargement, especially in its direct neighbourhood, would serve Hungary’s political, social, security and economic interests well. 10 With Slovenia and Slovakia joining the EU together with Hungary, and Romania in January 2007, apart from the relatively short border with Ukraine, the accession of Croatia, meant an end to Hungary’s peripheral geographic position within the EU. (The eventual accession of Serbia, which is also among Hungary’s priorities, would complete this process.) Besides the general considerations, such as transport corridors, pipelines, migration and the stability of the Balkan states, the presence of a still relatively significant – some 250,000-260,000 - Hungarian minority in Serbia, and to a smaller extent in Croatia, made the successive Hungarian governments the champions of Croatian and Serbian integration. It is considered in Hungary partly a success of the Hungarian foreign policy activities that Croatia joined the EU in 2013, and that Serbia could start the accession negotiations with the EU in January 2014.

The first ten years were also characterized by an active Hungarian role in the implementation of the Common Security and Defense Policy. In 2014, some 7,000 Hungarian troops were participating in 12 civilian and 4 military missions. While the most “unique” participation consisted of the EU mission in Georgia where Hungary is the only international participant (albeit with a symbolic, 7-person police group monitoring the peace after 2008), the most important missions for Hungary are those in its direct neighbourhood – the Balkans. The EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia-Herzegovina has 160 Hungarian troops making Hungary the third biggest contributor to the mission. In Kosovo, beside the 200 troops stationed there in the framework of NATO’s KFOR, 40 Hungarian police and civilian experts are working in the EULEX Kosovo. In its eastern neighbourhood, Hungary was leading the EUBAM mission in Moldova. Hungary has also been participating in the out-of-area mission of the EU – in the EUPOL in Afghanistan, the EU Training Mission in Somalia and the EU Training Mission in Mali, and the EEUJUST LEX in Iraq was led by a Hungarian general until December 31st, 2013. 12

Other Hungarian foreign policy priorities were reflected in the program of the Hungarian Presidency, which included – beside the completion of the above mentioned Croatian accession – the support of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen system, the Roma strategy introduced in the EU agenda by the Hungarian Presidency, and the Danube Strategy. 13

Generally it can be stated that Hungary has remained in the policy taker position within the European Union although in some important questions it could be a policy shaper. Among the most outstanding successes of the Hungarian foreign policy, the successful coordination and completion of the EU presidency has to be noted, especially since it coincided with the introduction and passing of the

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11 Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, MFA of Hungary, December 2011, p. 22.
13 Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, MFA of Hungary, December 2011
new constitution, which caused much political criticism, both domestically and abroad.

Hungary was definitely successful in putting and keeping the Western Balkans on the EU agenda, and achieving Croatia’s accession in spite of the “enlargement fatigue”, the starting of the accession negotiations with Serbia and the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo. The inclusion of the Roma strategy initiated by the Hungarian EU presidency was also a success, in spite of the fact that the implementation is lagging behind. Although the Danube Region Strategy was based on previous ideas, thanks to Hungarian support it has developed into a many-faceted cooperation (with 11 priority areas) and was endorsed by the member states in 2011. At the moment the Danube Region Strategy is coordinated by a Ministerial Envoy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Where Hungary failed to achieve a break-through was the issue of Hungarian minorities abroad. For Hungary, with ethnic Hungarian communities living outside the borders of Hungary, the minority issue has been of paramount importance through all the government periods since the regime change in Central Europe. While the fact that all Central European states were aiming at trans-Atlantic integration, was probably the most important security guarantee for all countries in the region, however, this in itself was not enough to grant the minorities their community rights. Upon joining the European Union, Hungary hoped that the issue could be raised to the EU agenda and solutions could be found in that format. While the general situation of the ethnic Hungarian minorities has improved after the regime change, it is mostly on an individual basis, and not as a member of the minority community as such.

With regard to coalition-making, from the Hungarian point of view the Visegrad cooperation and even cohesion have become increasingly important, especially with regard to catching-up economically with the mainstream EU. But in this regard, some hesitance is perceived on the side of the EU. While the EU favours the use of a regional approach, it usually does not like regionalism itself, i.e. if there is a pre-coordination by the V4.

Looking forward – the next ten years

Out of the three top priorities of Hungarian foreign policy in the past ten years, two – the Eastern Partnership and the Balkans – will remain top priorities. It is in the context of the first EU Presidency where the change is most relevant: as mentioned above, while the Presidency was symbolically understood as the “arrival” of Hungary in the European Union, it also signaled a new phase in Hungarian foreign policy thinking. The Orbán government coming into office in 2010 took over the preparation for and the management of the EU Presidency from the previous socialist government. The new government simultaneously started the elaboration of a new, broader foreign policy called “global opening” in the Foreign Ministry’s rhetoric, while termed “eastern opening” by the Prime Minister. In the course of the government cycle 2010-2014, this

15 Prioritási területek – Duna Régió Stratégia [Priority areas – Danube Region Strategy], http://dunaregiostrategia.kormany.hu/prioritasi-teruletek
16 Interview with Prof. Ferenc Gazdag on regionalism and the V4 within the European Union, (October 21, 2014)
17 See e.g. Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, MFA of Hungary, December 2011, p. 9
program, which ultimately has been called the "eastern opening", began its implementation and as it unfolded, its main focuses became increasingly visible. On the one hand, in spite of the term "eastern", it has been firmly stated by the Prime Minister that this policy would complement (and not divert from) Hungary being part of the western world. On the other hand, this policy was a reaction to the changing global environment and Hungary’s place in it. The EU membership offered a historical chance that Hungary could capitalize on the global role played by the EU. However, as a consequence of the global financial crisis the EU's position has weakened and the success of EU crisis management can still be labeled only "relative". The "eastern opening" policy, therefore, was meant to adapt to and improve Hungary’s position by amending the Hungarian foreign policy with a much stronger economic focus and by expanding and/or strengthening Hungarian external activities in regions where Hungarian relations were significantly downscaled after the regime change in 1990. Although the geographic scope of the "east" has not been defined, areas of focus were identified as Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – primarily some states in the Caucasus and Central Asia; East Asia – mainly China; and the Arab states. However, gradually Africa and Latin America have been added to the focus. The "eastern opening" began its implementation through the establishment of several trading houses (representing Hungary in the given countries) and joint (bilateral) economic committees, and organizing economic forums. The embassies have been charged with an increased economic activity, which included the establishment of the position of economic attachés at every Hungarian embassy. When the third Orbán government came into office – following a brief period – Péter Szijjártó, so far in charge of the "eastern opening" policy in the Prime Minister’s Office, was appointed to the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The change in the name of the ministry (from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade) also intended to reflect this expanded focus.

The "eastern opening" policy will remain at the core of the Hungarian foreign policy activities in this governmental period (2014-2018) as well as in the foreseeable future, therefore, the main task of Hungarian foreign (and trade) policy will be to "embed" its "eastern opening" interests into EU external relations. The "eastern opening" will mean, beside the strong economic focus, special attention to selected states. Since the geographical scope – as indicated above – to a great extent overlaps with those of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the implementation of Hungarian foreign policy goals will support the ENP, while the ENP may offer possibilities for Hungary as well. However, there will be cases where Hungary may take a strong position on states, causing divisions among EU members, or even where Hungary has some potential to forward the implementation of EU aims. While Hungary will in most cases play the policy taker over issues that belong to selected "eastern opening" targets, Hungary may/will undertake a policy shaper role. Therefore, it is to be expected that Hungary will pursue a more ambitious foreign policy over selected questions of the "eastern opening" policy.

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22 At the moment there are 44 joint economic committees operating.
23 At the moment 16 trading houses are operating (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Turkey, UAE, Saud-Arabia, Jordan, Singapour, Vietnam, Laos, Macedonia, Ghana, Brazil, Armenia and Montenegro), but by the end of the year this number will be 25, and next year further increased. Magyar Nemzeti Kereskedőház [Hungarian National Trading House], http://www.tradehouse.hu/index.php?l=en
24 Interview with Levente Benkő, Head of the Department of the EU CFSP, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, November 6th, 2014

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In some cases, where a certain rift is visible within the European Union, Hungary may – and even wishes to – try to bridge these, especially when these could complement other Hungarian foreign policy considerations. For example, there has recently been a disagreement among EU member states over the relationship between the EU and Egypt regarding the ousting of President Mursi from office in July 2013. While majority of the EU members consider this as an anti-democratic move which necessarily puts obstacles in the way of EU-Egypt cooperation, there is a group of some 8-10 members – among them Greece and Cyprus –, who think that other considerations, namely the stability of Egypt and the anti-terrorist cooperation of the Sisi government, are more important in the present regional context. For Hungary, Egypt has been one of the most important traditional partners in the Middle East since 1928 and it has remained in the focus of Hungarian attention even after the regime change in 1989-90. This was manifested by the high level visits of Prime Ministers József Antall and Viktor Orbán, the latter was the last international visitor who met Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Orbán opened two joint factories and left in the morning of the day the Egyptian Arab Spring started.25 After the interruption by the Arab Spring events, Hungary’s main interest in Egypt is stability and a secure environment for economic cooperation. Therefore, Hungary gave clear support to the Greek-Cypriot position in the Political and Security Committee meeting when the issue was raised. This was also done with the understanding that this support could partly make up for the cooling of Hungarian-Cypriot relations due to the closure of the Hungarian embassy in Nicosia.26

Such ad hoc coalitions are to be expected in the next ten years on a regular basis. Outside the European Neighbourhood Policy geographical area, the Hungarian “eastern opening” will focus on such issues belonging to the EU external relations scope as Turkey, Kazakhstan, Iran and China.

Hungary generally supports Turkey’s EU membership: while on the one hand this could be labeled a “safe bet” since the accession process has been locked for years now, Hungary has helped to keep the issue on the EU agenda. There are several reasons underlying this supportive policy, one is Hungary’s stand for the continuation of the EU enlargement in general and with the Balkan states in particular. It should be added that the relations between Turkey and Hungary have bloomed in the past two years, partly due to the position of Hungarian government on the issue, and partly due to the personal capacity of the Hungarian ambassador to Turkey, János Hóvári (2012-2014), who, as a turcologist by training and a “seasoned” diplomat, brought the level and intensity of the relations to new highs. High-level meetings, including that of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Hungary and Viktor Orbán to Turkey,27 and the termination of the visa obligations of Hungarians travelling to Turkey, were the most visible signs for the public.

In Central Asia, Kazakhstan is increasingly developing into a central point of contact and partner for Hungary. In Hungary there has been Kazakh-Hungarian cultural activity for decades, not entirely void of a kind of Pan-Turkic belonging together, which provided a limited, but visible social element to the increasing Hungarian interest towards Central Asia. The EU-Kazakhstan Forum organized last year enhanced interest towards the country, and during the event the special Hungarian channel was noted. The EU forum was complemented by the Hungarian-Kazakh economic forum in Budapest in September 2013.28

26 The embassy was closed not for political, but for financial reasons.
27 Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Hungary in February 2013, while Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán visited Turkey in December 2013.
28 The Hungarian-Kazakh section of the Hungarian Chamber of Trade and Industry was established in 2012 with the participation of some forty companies, and there is an inter-governmental committee on economic cooperation as well between the two countries. ‘Magyar-kazah gazdasági fórum’ [Hungarian-Kazakh Economic Forum], http://www.mkik.hu/hu/magyar-kereskedelmi-es-iparkamara/cikklet/magyar-kazah-gazdasagi-forum_474963
Relations with Iran have started to take a new turn after the November 24, 2013 nuclear deal. In spite of the fact that Hungarian-Iranian diplomatic relations continued even during the sanctions, especially many cultural activities and cooperation on education\(^{29}\) were pursued by both states, official visits were significantly absent. This, however, changed in December 2013, when Deputy Secretary of State for Global Affairs Szabolcs Takács visited Iran.\(^{30}\) This was followed by a visit led by the Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, János Latorcai in November 2014.\(^{31}\) While Hungary has always abided by international and EU sanctions, and continues to do so, building on the continuous activities a new chapter is foreseen in the relations.

Within the “eastern opening” China has become the prime target and partner in all possible formats: bilaterally, regionally and also within the EU context. Bilateral relations have multiplied and are expected to increase further, as several high-level visits attest. A new regional cooperation (16+1) has been formed in which EU members and non-EU-member states try to offer a diverse and balanced format, to the chagrin of the European Union. The cooperation between 16 Central and Eastern European states and China is a strategic partnership for the Chinese side and offers it a foothold in Europe. In return, for the Central and Eastern European partners, China is offering possibilities that ambitious smaller enterprises can afford as well.\(^{32}\) But there are wider formats – EU-China and ASEM – as well, which Hungary is also supporting.

Due to the fact that most of Hungary’s neighbours have become EU members themselves, in its direct neighbourhood, where its most imminent interests are (besides the bilateral, country-to-country relations) a new dimension has evolved for Hungary. EU membership and the EU neighbourhood programs make it possible for Hungary to try and shape the policies of the neighbourhood, especially within the scope of the Eastern Partnership. On the other hand, EU membership also provides an opportunity for a coordinated policy by states with similar interests and concerns. This possibility of convergence of interests is mostly manifested in function, therefore, it is to be expected that Hungary will look for allies when representing its own specific interests in the EU context. Such instances have already been manifest in e.g. the not very successful countering of Jean-Claude Juncker to the position of the President of the European Commission when the Hungarian Prime Minister sided with David Cameron. To a certain extent, the search for allies is reflected in the above mentioned 16 CEE states and China cooperation.

Out of the Eastern Partnership countries, four – Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia – will play a significant role in Hungarian foreign policy considerations, partly due to a combination of geographical, geopolitical and economic reasons.

With regards to Ukraine and Moldova, the factors attracting Hungarian foreign policy engagement continue to be the same as in the past ten years. The recent Russian-Ukrainian crisis, however, has come at a very unfortunate moment since Hungary was working on the improvement and development of its relations with Russia. Therefore, a kind of duality is to be expected in Hungarian behavior characterized by enhanced activity in the Eastern

\(^{29}\) There have been several cultural events organized in Hungary, e.g. the Iranian Film Week every second or third year, exhibitions, musical performances, etc. There are some 3,000 Iranian students studying in Hungary, while students of the Department of Iranian Studies at the ELTE University in Budapest regularly take part in different training programs in Iran. In the past few years, some low-scale tourism has also started between the two countries.


\(^{32}\) “In Hungary, not only the larger enterprises, but also the ambitious smaller ones want to cooperate with China. Hungary wants to be a gateway to China’s economic expansion in the region.” - Tamás Nádas, chairman of the Hungarian-Chinese section of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ‘China, Central-Eastern Europe seek more potentials on cooperation’, August 29, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-08/29/c_133604158.htm
In a period spanning more than ten years, Hungarian foreign policy has undergone a series of adaptations followed by a political consensus. Regardless of the ideological underpinnings of the current government, EU membership and the internalization of the possibilities and tasks it entailed have been priorities on the foreign policy agenda. The changed international environment offered possibilities to make use of the new structures, and forced new solutions, including the diversification of the Hungarian foreign policy scope. The “eastern opening” policy may seem ambitious, but it is meant to be an answer to the changed conditions, and for the foreseeable future may remain in the focus of Hungarian foreign policy. The same is valid for Hungary’s foreign policy goals with regard to the Balkans, where it is Hungary’s interest as well as responsibility to turn at least some of the political attention to its direct southern neighbourhood. Nevertheless, as Prime Minister Orbán indicated, in the long run both will complement and not divert Hungary’s Euro-atlantic stance.

Conclusion

In the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Georgia are the target countries with which relations are expected to be strengthened further as proven by the many high-level visits. Out of the two, Georgia at the moment seems to be the more important to the extent that Hungary will propose to the EU to elaborate a specific program tailored to Georgia within the EaP. The Hungarian stance on the openness of the enlargement process will be maintained with regard to Georgia (and in principle the other two Caucasian states as well) with the argumentation that stability of Southern Caucasus is in the interest of the whole EU. Hungary has ratified the EU-Georgia association agreement in 2014 and at the next EaP summit will propose that the visa obligation for Georgia be eliminated. Yet, Azerbaijan also remains a priority mostly due to energy considerations and further increasing economic and trade cooperation.

Interviewed persons:
- Levente Benkő, Head of Dept, MFAT
- Dr István Balogh, Head of Dept, MFAT
- Prof László J. Kiss, IFAT – Corvinus University
- Prof Ferenc Gazdag, National University of Public Service
- Dr Zoltán Gálik, Corvinus University
- Dr András Rácz, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

33 In that Hungary will not stand alone, Slovakia seems to think similarly about the Russian relations and the necessity of finding some kind of middle way in the conflict. András Rácz: Divided Stands the Visegrad? The V4 have been united towards the Ukraine crisis but remain split concerning Russia, 24.6.2014, http://www.filia.fi/en/publication/428/divided_stands_the_visegrad
34 Interview with Levente Benkő, Head of the Department of the EU CFSP, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, November 6th, 2014
35 ‘Gruzianának külön programot kell kínálni az uniós keleti partnerségi programban’ [Georgia must be offered a specific program in the EaP], November 7th, 2014,