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Chapter 6

Complementarities and Opportunities for Cooperation between the V4 Countries and Brazil

The previous chapters have shown that the Visegrád countries and Brazil have accumulated extensive connections over a long-term history of their – mainly bilateral – relations. The V4 countries and Brazil mutually consider each other as a potentially important partner, and are searching for opportunities to strengthen their relationship. Despite extensive traditional ties, wide-ranging political, diplomatic and social connections, and some emerging economic achievements, there is still a lot of room for improvement in the relations between the Visegrád countries and Brazil in several areas.

6.1 Political and diplomatic cooperation

All countries of the Visegrád Group have embassies in Brazil, and all of them have general and/or honorary consulates. Brazil has embassies in all V4 capitals as well. Bilateral diplomatic relations are stable and continuous, and have been quite active in the last years. Considering high level visits and political dialogues, it is clear that neither does Brazil treat the Visegrád Group as an entity, nor do the V4 countries behave like it. However, in the last decade there were some common initiatives and cooperation, mainly in the framework of the Visegrád+ formation, but also in the area of defence policy and related industries.

In the case of the Czech Republic, economic interests have always outweighed political-diplomatic ones. The reason behind that is possibly the lack of conflict of interest between the sophisticated and productive Czech industry and the Brazilian agricultural sector. Brazil's relations to Hungary seem more diplomacy and education-dominated as Hungary is less relevant for Brazil regarding industrial production. Surprisingly Poland (compared to its size) had the least deep relationship with Brazil, which may be due to the competitive agricultural

production. Slovakia chose the strategy to negotiate with Brazil in the framework of V4 countries, which can be explained by the short interval of time after gaining independence in 1993.

Even though bilateral ties with some V4 countries are active, it cannot be stated for the whole group. It has to be underlined that the embassy of the V4 rotating presidency is always coordinating common consultations and organising events to promote the Visegrád Group. In our opinion, in spite of these existing efforts, high level political dialogue should be organised regularly in the framework of Visegrád+ to enhance further political and diplomatic cooperation between the partners.

Furthermore, a coordinated “Brazil Strategy” from all Visegrád countries would be welcome, with concrete project and cooperation proposals like that of the Hungarian Government (see the end of Chapter 2.1).

6.2 Economic cooperation

From Brazil to the European Union trade and investment are intense, which cannot be seen in the statistics for Central Europe (including the Visegrád Group) because of the so-called Rotterdam effect. The goods are not arriving directly to these countries, but through European intermediaries (mostly Dutch and German companies).

In the case of trade and foreign direct investment towards Brazil, the “Custo Brasil” is an existing burden but there are many more and sometimes bigger obstacles for economic cooperation. The geographical and cultural distance, as well as the asymmetry in size, remain factors that will always limit bilateral trade and investment. “Political friendship”, intensive diplomatic activities and a possible (EU–Mercosur) free trade agreement might nevertheless have the potential to overcome some of these limits. Some companies’ success stories (such as Comarch, Synthos, Richter Gedeon, Embraco, Embraer, Seko Group, Stefanini, Graphisoft and eSky/eDestinos) show that in the IT sector and with regards to knowledge-based, high added-value products (for example pharmaceuticals, chemical industry or machinery) there is room for cooperation for the business partners.

It would be an interesting initiative to organise a Joint Economic Committee with Brazil on the V4 level; its decisions could be supported by the national export promotion agencies of the parties.

6.3 Cultural, educational and scientific cooperation

The two regions have had more than two hundred years of shared history in cultural and educational relations, initially enhanced by individuals from the Jesuit Order and other religious missions, as well as immigrants from Central Europe (the former Habsburg and Russian Empires), rather than through bilateral relations. This has changed after the First World War, where there was a mix of formal influence from the new national states and the hundreds of thousands of immigrants arriving in several waves, mostly during the turbulent years in the first half of the 20th century.

Mutual interest was expressed and bilateral ties have been strengthened since the early 2000s, when the Visegrád countries joined NATO and the EU, and Brazil became a rapidly emerging economy. The big boost for educational cooperation kicked in with the *Ciência sem Fronteiras* program. The influx of Brazilian students to the region followed events such as the creation of BRICS, the world football championship and the Rio Olympics, all of which raised public interest in Central Europe towards Brazil. With the economic problems mounting in Brazil and in the EU, the exchange programs slowed down significantly. If the parties want to create mutual knowledge and respect between the people of the two regions, it has to start from education. In times characterised by a lack of funds, a joint project (possibly financed by the International Visegrád Fund) could be initiated to identify possibilities in primary and secondary education in Brazil and in the Visegrád countries, for increasing the quality and quantity of historic, cultural and scientific matters about the other region in the educational programs. In times of more generous budgetary possibilities, university exchange programs could be enhanced as well.

6.4 Cooperation in tourism and sport

In tourism and sport, there are many potentials to develop. Despite the fact that the Visegrád countries are still an unknown region for most of Brazilians, and Brazil is perceived as a very unfamiliar place for people from the Visegrád countries, there is an opportunity window for cooperation and the creation of joint projects to strengthen ties.

In terms of touristic flows, the level of visitors from the Visegrád Group to Brazil is still very low. The same phenomenon can be observed regarding

most countries of Europe, since Brazilian tourists prefer to visit more popular destinations like France, Germany or Spain instead of exploring Central European countries. The case of Poland seems to be a little bit different, as the latest statistics present an increasing flow of Brazilian tourists in recent years, but these figures still show a big room for improvement. In this context, it is necessary to strengthen efforts to promote Brazilian tourism in the Visegrád countries and vice versa. Aiming to foster tourism from V4 to Brazil and vice versa, joint actions as tourism roadshows or gastronomy events etc. could be organised in big Brazilian cities about the V4 countries and in V4 capitals about Brazil. One negative factor is that there are no direct flights from Brazil to the capital cities of the Visegrád countries. But the biggest challenge is the general lack of knowledge about the Visegrád countries in Brazil and vice versa.

In case of the Czech Republic and Hungary, some efforts have been made in order to spread the knowledge of the Czech and Hungarian languages, mostly among the descendants of émigré families. Both states have launched state-funded programs to send professors and language teachers to Brazil. In the field of sport, Hungary has more extensive connections to Brazil in comparison to the other Visegrád countries, as many Brazilian players live in the country, and play for Hungarian teams. Family ties have a stronger role in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Brazil, some prominent figures have Czechoslovak ancestors like the former president Juscelino Kubitschek, whose mother was half Slovak and half Czech.

Sports diplomacy could be an effective tool to strengthen ties between Brazil and the Visegrád countries, including cooperation and exchange programs between the two regions' football clubs. It is important to use mass media to promote Brazil as a tourist destination in the Visegrád countries and vice versa. TV spots and announcements in magazines can be good strategies, as well as organising photo exhibitions of Brazilian natural sites or artefacts from ancient Brazilian cultures. Considering the importance of prominent Brazilian figures in the Visegrád countries (like Eduarda Idalina Amorim in Hungary), and also the outstanding role of Visegrád citizens in Brazil, like János Schiffer (Hungarian volleyball player) or Milan Rastislav Štefánik (Slovak astronomer), it is important to encourage the academic exchanges in order to facilitate the rise of prominent scholars and academic figures to strengthen ties between countries. The promotion of tourism, and cultural and educational cooperation are goals where regional cooperation (Visegrád Group and Brazil) has the ability for providing valid support.