Digital Regionalism: The Visegrád and Western Balkans Funds as Civil Society Diplomacy

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Introduction – Western Balkans' trajectories under the spotlight

In extenso, the Western Balkans (WB6) can't be merely conceptualised as an amalgamated border or a centripetal nation-states' conglomerate but rather as a primary nexus of tactical interests and embedded regional civil society (CS) networks. This conceptualisation surfaced within IR discussions when the EU's normative-driven uniformising regional approaches were first established in 1996 (Marcu 2021). Thus, Wb6's inter- and intra-regional integration took prominence throughout the continental agendas, since transcending often diametrical regional dynamisms, through structured CS engagement, constitutes, *per se,* one of Brussels' fundamental objectives (Zweers et al. 2022).

However, despite sporadic unitary endeavours, each regional actor followed a distinct path towards the broader European family, owing to a multiplicity of transitional processes and disparities in domestic or transnational civic infrastructure's evolution (Venic-Alujevic 2021; Zimmerbauer et al. 2025). Consequently, the European bloc's initial *en bloc* approach to Wb6 consolidation and integration evolved into a nuanced framework that incorporates localised pathways, acknowledging specificities of both statal and societal actors; a notion already refined by other forums like Visegrád Group (V4).

Furthermore, due to recent geopolitical modulations and shifting continental security architectures, Wb6's significance, as a pivotal node of power dissipation

and dispersion, facilitated by expansive cross-border civic networks, gained precedence as IR's pressing priorities (Dabrowski-Myachenkova 2018; Klemenc et al. 2021; Szczerba 2022). This strategic reorientation stems from regional rivalries, compounded by variables like the US's fluctuating engagement and the EU's expansionist deceleration, as Wb6 temporarily became a power vacuum, where non-dominant interest groups and CS undergo constant reconfigurations (Lika 2021; Lika 2024; Barbullushi 2023). Thus, Member States' (MS) or tertiary influence spheres coalesced within Wb6's relative boundaries, reinforcing or eroding its European orientation through asymmetric mechanisms, heavily reliant on CSOs as intermediaries of soft power (Panagiotou 2021). To counteract status-quo revisions and avoid collective bandwagoning with other players or self-centred deviations, the *West* intensified interactions and broadened incentives through multilevel CS partnerships, with V4 spearheading its own initiatives (Janebová-Végh 2019).

An analysis of Brussels' positions referring to Wb6 integration reveals that MS maintain singular positions, albeit increased collective CS and public engagement (Jazić 2024). These grassroots collaborations rest on economic interests, historical ties, immigration concerns, broader IR imperatives, societal connectivity, etc. (Ker-Lindsay et al. 2017). According to Schimmelfennig (2025) and Sedelmeier (2005), MS assessed the anticipated geo- economic/political ramifications of regional expansion, calibrating approaches to fit emergent multilateral formats.

Across these external vectors and multi-actor synergies, some regional tendencies remain driven by transnational organisations' efforts, frequently with greater efficacy and ROI ratios than those of more established counterparts, particularly as such processes are inexorably linked to European undertones and mobilising capacity of civic structures (Soproni 2023). Accordingly, V4 efforts facilitate the consolidation and alignment of fragmentary power units into a relatively stable axis through institutionalised CS networks. These developments consequently precipitated a rather frail order, whether observed as an autonomous regional security complex or sub-complex, predicated upon a carousel of alliances, power dynamics, inter-state configurations, public mobilisation, and civic (re)organisation, all necessitating highly-calibrated foreign policies to reach common trajectories and European sentiments (Lika 2021). Moreover, given Wb6's position as the EU's (core) periphery, immediately situated to the continent's Eastern mid-point frontier, delineated by a Visegrád-Mediterranean axis that delineates the multispeed area, all while being flanked by MS, the region can't disregard Brussels' centrifugal magnetism. This entails not only a shared heritage but a collective future, anchored in comprehensive transition, participatory governance models, and sustained civic consolidation (Kashukeeva-Nusheva 2024).

Hence, the primary catalyst for change will invariably remain how Wb6 engages with tertiary powers, particularly those diverging from European values (Lange 2022). These demands enhanced programmatic and operational involvement from unionist structures and regionalised CS, as integration emanates from the

continent, but progress depends on it becoming a priority among all actors, especially CSOs or informal interest groups (Soproni 2024). However, cross-regional cooperation patterns may independently surface, as localised constellations like V4 could harmonise various MS' positions towards Wb6 and pioneer initiatives, notably through digital regionalism and CS diplomacy (Schou-Hjeholt 2019; Zimmerbauer et al. 2025).

The renaissance of a crossroad in Europe's heart – Visegrád Group's repositioning

After their EU adhesion, Visegrád countries embarked on a bifurcated journey (responsibility and opportunity) to simultaneously shape Brussels' frameworks and use them as pillars for outward advancements (Strážay, 2012). Thus, we can notice that V4 took the spotlight as one of Europe's significant regional configurations, functioning as a bearer and epicentre for various integratory formats, both within and outside the EU's agenda, through institutionalised civic development, structured social partnerships, or transnational NGO networks. To an extent, it shaped macro-regional strategies towards WB6.

Built upon previous accomplishments and representational brokerage, which, *redde caesari quae sunt caesaris,* encompasses admirable achievements, V4's reputation enables it to be an exemplar beneficiary and mediator of Europeanisation, especially across Wb6 and EaP, through CS and cross-border initiatives, as it attempts to redefine itself as a transformative cooperation alternative (Lehoczki 2022). This strategic roadmap entails supporting the EU's Eastern and South-Eastern enlargement, incorporating it within the ENP, and implementing regional norms and resilience-building programs to address the commonality of challenges faced through internationalised CS structures and grassroots cooperation.

If not permanently aligned, as suggested by the „V2+2" or „V3+1" appellations, which indicate divergences amongst members who are „not playing the same notes" or times where „the romance is long gone" (Mikuláš Bek and Eugeniusz Smolar quoted in Byer-Cienski, 2022), V4 nonetheless maintained its regional aspirations through long-term CS diplomacy efforts (Dlhopolec 2022). Thus, V4's engagement with Wb6, including digital regionalism manoeuvres, is driven by the following frameworks:

- Political and Institutional – enlargement desiderates incorporated in foundational statal documents; supportive EU or IR-based stances; cyclical engagement with decisional vectors and CS representatives.
- Organizational and procedural knowledge sharing – sectoral cooperation and project-focused mechanisms; state-building and civic capacity strengthening support; CS-facilitated information exchange like IVF-WbF partnership, ThinkV4, and V4+2 grants.

- Collective norms – harmonised collaboration for interconnection; collective resilience measures involving networked applications, PPP and CS interest groups; transnational joint interactions (Strážay 2012)

Similarly, scholars concur that CEE's successful regional co-creationist patterns can be extended across Wb6, especially when contributing to cohesive transnational CS linkages (Kaniok-Hloušek 2025). Hence, Tomáš Strážay (2012: 57) considers V4 as an ideal candidate for this function, particularly due to its capacity to „share institutional and procedural know-how" and its civic consolidation expertise. Similarly, Mokrai (2024) asserts that both regions converge as equal partners, in part due to increased IVF and WbF, as international CS actors support local groups. As exclusive institutional structures, connecting both regions and leading in CS diplomacy, their relevance escalated, as cooperation was expanded and refocused on civil mobilisation or participatory policies, especially in digital regionalism (Zakota 2024). In this regard, a comprehensive analysis of their evolving function and impact, as civic actors, is thoroughly justified (Szabó 2022).

Also, as V4 independently pursues a broad range of specialised initiatives, leveraging IVF and WbF as platforms for CS diplomacy, its functionalist and institutionalist approaches to digital regionalism offer a more operational framework for cross-border bridging. This southern reorientation, primarily through „joint financial pools" aimed at „civil society strengthening, good and digital governance and agricultural development", became increasingly pronounced in the last presidential cycle from 2018-2022 (Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka 2011:2). As greater authority has devolved to regional international organisations, like IVF and Wbf, which function as civic intermediaries and norm entrepreneurs, they assumed more proactive roles in bilateral coordination, consolidated influence through participation-driven governance, especially in virtual spaces, and became *sui generis* players, even if Schmidt (2023) argues the phenomenon is a geopolitical marriage of necessity.

Moreover, analysts contend that the EU' „strategic" or „geopolitical interest" in Wb6 was introduced to maintain heightened regional focus, frequently without substantive actions, while V4 approached it more „unpretentiously" through logical appropriateness and solidarity via a brokerage of wider publics (structured civic engagement) (Çela et.al. 2020; Holányi 2024). This is attributable to V4's position between the *West*, and its „separation of power in policy and strategy", and *East*, with its „fusion of power", which explains its Wb6 project-based rapprochement and particular emphasis on digitally enabled CS engagement (Hornat 2021:83). The V4 Panel of Eminent Personalities (2016) conceptualised Wb6 cooperation and enlargement as a „strategic imperative" and „moral duty", underscoring regional interconnection through formal and informal civic partnerships, aspect evidence by IVF and WbF's recent efforts to reshape public perceptions through digital means.

As Dangerfield (2014) noted, despite such evolutions, V4's robust intergovernmental character remains prominent, even across its CS dimensions, as, beyond collective

mechanisms, members leverage V4-Wb6 cooperation to their benefit. These fluctuations become discernible across presidential cycles, especially when it comes to IVF and WbF's online narratives, as institutionalised civic actors, and when compared to other forms of summit diplomacy like Bucharest 9 or 3SI (Błaszczak 2024). Yet, V4's dualism exemplifies a broader trend in post-accession fora-driven diplomacy across CEE: an interplay between supranational alignment and strategic autonomy, particularly within digital realms, where organised societal actors operate as diplomatic multipliers (Kuus 2018; Błaszczak 2024). Nonetheless, across these variable geometries, which juxtapose V4's intensive regional projections and public framings with Wb6's all-inclusive, granular, sustainable, and gradual processes, transformational capacities continue to emanate from Europe's centre, establishing a crossroad for international CS diplomacy flows and digital regionalism (Zimmerbauer et al, 2025).

Silicon sovereignty and algorithm ambassadors – a journey through digital diplomacy

Joseph Nye's (2004:29) definition of soft power as „the capacity to obtain what you want by attraction more than coercion or payment", „born from the cultural attractiveness of political ideas and the politics of a state", forms the basis of deciphering V4's outward digital stances, especially toward wider publics. Yet, despite conceptual elasticity, soft power remains built upon influence projection and cultural, political or ethical resonance, which where restructured by digital technologies' advent and the latter's empowerment of direct or networked outreach to organised (foreign) civil constituencies, meaning it fails to account for autonomous digital spheres or agency of societal actors across IR communication (Nye 2008; Fan 2008; Lahrenn-Bılgın 2023). Notably, even across the limited technological space of pre-/post-Cold War CEE transition, Western soft power permeated authoritarian regimes and captured youth's imagination through bottom-up approaches, facilitation of civic mobilisation and associative platforms (Ramet 1994). This cultural and ideological allure catalysed aspirations for freedom, mobility, and liberal-democratic prosperity, etc., which can easily be replicated today via transnationally connected CS infrastructures and digitally focused interventions (Nye 2004:31).

Public diplomacy (PD), key channel of soft power, primarily when digitally oriented, became focused on public participation, Hans Tuch (1990:33) noting it became „a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies". Yet, as Jan Melissen (2005:34) mentioned, PD's form rather than substance shifted towards civic spaces, making it „old wine in a new bottle". This *new bottle* now consists of online media that facilitate audience engagement through real-time, interactive, and networked communication, as public imagery construction steadily relies on CS intermediation and regional diplomacy.

Diplomacy's digital transition surfaced a myriad of conceptual, taxonomical, and methodological challenges, especially vis-à-vis CS incorporation in IR ecosystems (Olubukola 2017). Contemporary technologies expanded the actors' capabilities to access global(ised) audiences, primarily social substrata, with emergent digital *demos* requiring novel tools and strategies for meaningful civic integration (Bjola-Holmes 2015:35). As Hocking, et al., (2012:36) argued, digital diplomacy' success rests on continuous public interaction, which synthesizes diplomatic practice with network theory, data analytics, behavioural insights and turns CS stakeholders as co-constituents of IR to ensure broader outreach, accelerated informational diffusion and increased sophistication. Thus, most actors established digital diplomatic mechanisms, enhanced institutional virtual presence, and expanded services to better suit the needs of CS (Bjola-Holmes 2015:38).

Before the analysis of IVF and WbF's empirical evidence, as institutionalised CS platforms, within regional digital diplomacy architectures, across the 2018-2022 presidential cycle, we must achieve conceptual clarity. Kampf, Manor, and Segev (2015:12) posit that PD's social integration constitutes a new mode to facilitate long-term relational cultivation with foreign groups through civic intermediaries and associational networks. Also, Hayden (2012:3) noted that traditional PD objectives (informing, educating, and engaging) were reinvigorated by collaborative principles, relationship-building, and attentive listening, particularly vis-à-vis narratives disseminated by actors operating as CS connectors. In turn, PD moves from omnidirectional information transmission to multidirectional, participatory processes, digital commonalities, and institutionalised CS interactions (Stivachtis 2023).

Yet, as scholarly consensus evades digital diplomacy's ontological status, particularly regarding CS partners and public empowerment, Riordan (2016:10) cautions that it should be considered as an instrumental tool within comprehensive strategic frameworks, rather than an autonomous objective. Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, and Sharp (2012:5) mention persistent paradigmatic ambiguity, particularly across transnational formats and social networks. Hence, Bjola (2016:298) contours a structured framework based on the shifting power asymmetries (statal/non-statal actors) driven by emergent digital solutions, digital diplomacy's alignment with soft power goals, innovative consular services delivery, virtual crisis communication expansion, and digital regionalism's operational effectiveness through structured CS cooperation. Regarding international organisations, Clarke (2014) sees digital diplomacy as a response to socio-technical realities, a multi-actor enterprise rooted in civic participation.

Similarly, Manor (2016) traces diplomacy's digital turn to shifts that empowered civic actors, from countering extremist narratives and social-movement mobilisation to citizen-driven journalism and fragmented media ecologies that demand society-oriented engagement. Hayden (in Manor 2016) notes that MFAs must cultivate a new PD, calibrated for social media employment to engage transnational civic networks. Yet, despite digital diplomacy's proliferation, few studies assessed its

strategic outcomes, especially through quantitative indicators (Kampf et al. 2015; Manor 2016; Spry-Lockyer 2022). Bjola (2016b) cautions that, while diplometrics provides insight into digital engagement, it overlooks long-term impact and policy alignment, particularly salient for regional actors like IVF and WbF when viewed as CS platforms and public forums.

The rise of constant (inter)connectivity de-professionalised IR's influence, particularly for transnational actors like IVF and WbF, whose publics are broader and increasingly represented by organised CS or social collectives (McClory 2017; Ünver 2017; Kuus 2018). Klavins (2012) noted that accelerated informational flows enabled immediate responsiveness and decentralised influence, while citizens transcended from passive recipients to active co-creators of narratives through participatory governance, with policy legitimacy and efficacy reliant on broad public engagement where CS acts as both mediator and agenda-setter (Ünver 2017; Matiuta 2023). Tom Fletcher's (2013) metaphor of the „digital tiger" captures diplomatic identity's transformation, as IR actors adapt to increased direct civic interaction and „iDiplomacy" turns daily practice into virtualised functions. International organisations become conceptual spaces, symbolic civic communities with transnational reach, challenging statal primacy as the sole subject of international law (Pyteľová 2012). Yet, Justinek (2018) warns that such tools can't substitute core drivers of diplomacy, chiefly authentic engagement with organised CS, which must remain central.

Method and design

The research stems from these assumptions: (1) Wb6's increased relevance across European architectures and transnational CS ecosystems; (2) V4's reorientations towards Wb6 through structured partnerships with formalised CS; (3) digital regionalism's proliferation as a socially enabled power dispersion mechanism. The paper explores how V4, via its institutionalised civic platforms, engaged with Wb6 during the 2018-2022 presidential cycle, particularly how IR were conducted using digital regionalism techniques in virtual spaces to mobilise civic interest and build overarching narratives.

Research Question

How has the V4, through IVF, as a formalised transnational civic entity, developed and communicated its foreign policy approaches regarding Wb6, between 2018-2022, through official digital channels? What tendencies emerged from these public interactions? Thus, we seek to understand both the substance and presentation of V4's collective digital regionalism engagement, using international civic structures and public forums.

Research Framework

A mixed methodological comparative-driven approach is used to demonstrate that digital diplomacy between international organisations' structures, functioning as civic intermediaries, can be measured and provide valuable insights into regional CS engagement trends. The work is delineated by spatial/temporal boundaries, institutional scope, and platform selection.

The temporal framework examines direct V4-Wb6 interactions across the 2018-2022 presidential cycle (Slovak-Slovak Presidency), enabling a comprehensive assessment of policy continuity and change in their public-civic dimensions. Also, this avoids disruptions from contested electoral processes or the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Institutionally, the study focuses exclusively on the official digital accounts of IVF and WbF, as sole permanent structures of both groups that operate on similar grounds and act as *sui generis* expressions of regional CS, ensuring in-depth analysis of collective IR through social engagement rather than singular positions. This prioritises concrete initiatives by these civic-public actors over broader, often unimplemented presidential declarations. Platform selection focuses on Meta (Facebook and Instagram) and Twitter due to their widespread use in diplomatic communication and capacity to engage diverse audiences across both regions, including CS.

While other regional actors like 3SI and B9 engage in digital regionalism with the Wb6, we focus on V4 elements to avoid diluting the comparison, as these actors have incomparable foundational operational models and summit diplomacy practices, particularly vis-à-vis institutionalised CS engagement. Despite fluctuations in V4's commitments or international standing, the study provides stable, replicable, and scalable insight into digital diplomacy conduct and social mobilisation processes, without inferring excessively into behind-curtain motivations. The paper functions as an atemporal observer of digital diplomacy drivers without portraying V4 as exceeding its actual capacity or explaining its full spectrum of Wb6 engagements.

Also, although the 2018-2022 period might appear dated, examining recent timeframes would introduce higher margins of error due to broader global contexts significantly altering digital regionalism and civic engagement results. Given extensive literature addressing the theoretical foundations, we prioritise concrete measures over discussions of Wb6 EU accession, V4 evolution, or soft power evolution. While comparing digital diplomacy data, CS activities, country-level processes, and „real" analogue world insights would prove valuable to understand the *status quo,* these analyses are partitioned into separate works due to journal limitations.

Data Collection

Extraction systematically identifies, codes, and indexes all IVF and WbF accounts across selected platforms. Every post within the timeframe is manually collected

and filtered, creating a comprehensive dataset of digital communications. Posts are standardized and tagged based on multiple criteria, with non-English content translated using 3rd party software to ensure consistency.

Analysis Framework

Initial qualitative assessment classifies posts by relevance to V4-Wb6 relations, using keyword search and topical congruence, categorizing content into thematic domains – political cooperation, economic incentives, cultural exchanges, CS partnerships, etc. Sentiment analysis follows, using a 5-point scale (very negative to very positive) to measure tonal variations in V4-Wb6 relations and societal engagement. While reductionist, it establishes a baseline for monitoring public relations without interpretative spiralling, observing exchanges between civic-public constituencies. Temporal trend analysis maps communication patterns chronologically, identifying shifts in messaging frequency, content emphasis, and rhetorical strategies, with special attention to V4 presidencies.

Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

Linguistic barriers pose a challenge, as translation may not fully capture diplomatic nuances or CS terminologies. The timeframe may not reflect long-term IR and CS development trends, while an exclusive focus on Meta and Twitter overlooks other social communication mediums. The analysis doesn't account for content redistribution, audience reach variation, or exposure duration across these spaces. By focusing on IVF/WbF accounts (see *Inclusion Map 1*), the study excludes national and sub-national interaction that may shape V4's approaches, as they are addressed in separate works. These limitations are mitigated through cross-verification of translations, contextual interpretation, and transparent methodological reporting, enhancing reliability within the defined scope.

Results and discussion

A. Collective and international organizations – Visegrád Group

IVF's official accounts have created a total of 57 relevant posts, spread across all three platforms during the established timeframe, formed by 3 posts starting from January 2018, 16 in 2019, 11 in 2020, 13 in 2021, and 14 until October 2022.
Out of these, we identify 41 total posts on Meta's Platforms (33 on Facebook and 8 on Instagram), coagulated into 2 across the entirety of 2018, 10 in 2019, 6 in

2020, 11 in 2021, and 12 by autumn 2022. The activity on Twitter Inc. consists of 16 posts discovered, with 1 during 2018, 6 in 2019, 5 in 2020, 2 in 2021, respectively 2 by the third quarter of 2022.
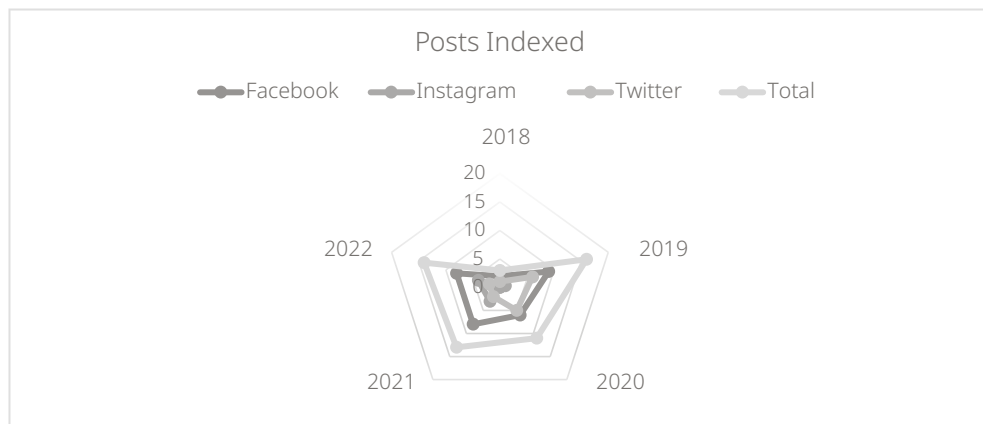

Fig.1. Posts Indexed for Visegrad Group

Furthermore, we have a collective percentual variation of 354%, formed by the cumulative values of 235% and 67% associated with Meta's platforms, respectively 523% present in Twitter Inc.'s solutions.

The percentual composition of total posts across all three platforms, especially when put in correlation with all the posts that were emitted within the given timeframe, gives us their representativeness rate. Hence, on Facebook, we can identify 33 relevant posts out of 495, with Instagram's 8 out of 172, on Twitter 16 out of 120, and across all platforms 57 posts out of 787.
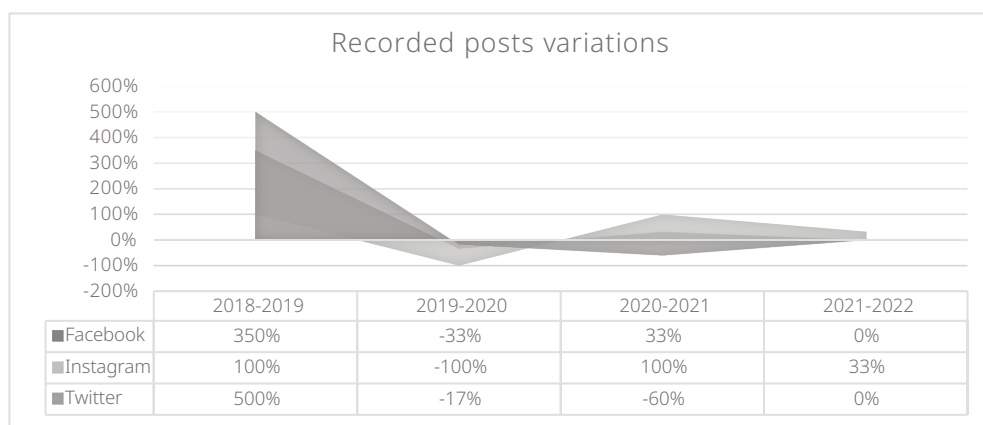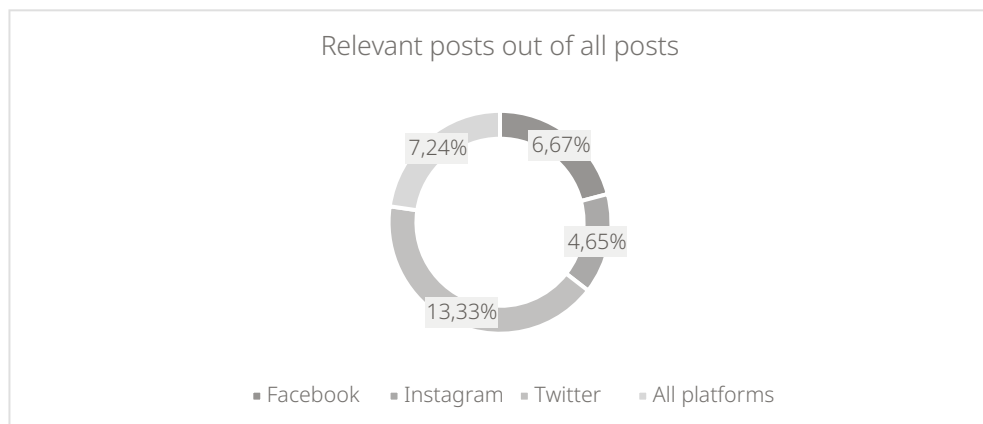

Recorded posts variations

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
■Facebook	350%	-33%	33%	0%
■Instagram	100%	-100%	100%	33%
■Twitter	500%	-17%	-60%	0%

Fig.2. Recorded posts variations for Visegrad Group

Also, we can index the qualitative positivity rates, which represent attributes attached to the already filtered elements, and afterwards analyse modulations that are found across 5-point scales. As the items' weight ranges from very negative to very positive, their mapping showcases how V4-Wb6 positions evolved, with respect to each other and in correlation with the tools employed.

The comprehensive matrix that is formed consists of their absolute and totalled weights (1/-2 – very negative, 2/-1 negative, 3/0 - neutral, 4/+1 – positive, 5/+2 – very positive), their percentual representation between the weight and the total of selected posts, alongside median positivity rates and variations. As such, we have *Table 1- Visegrad in respect to the Western Balkans*.

Relevant posts out of all posts

7,24%   6,67%

4,65%

13,33%

■ Facebook   ■ Instagram   ■ Twitter   ■ All platforms

Fig.3. Relevant posts out of all posts for Visegrad Group

The same interpretation matrix can be applied in a collective format by using the posts emitted not by international organizations but by relevant entities from all states involved. This process is done to cumulatively analyse all selected posts and gain a mirrored oversight of the aggregated position and the group's international structures. As such, we have the *Table 2- Visegrad modulations* graph to represent all countries' modulations.

Looking at V4's presidency holders, as agenda setters, we can notice how collective approaches shifted based on national specificities. Therefore, under Bratislava's chairmanship, between 2018-2019, we can observe a total of 8 indexed posts, accumulating a positivity rate of 3.63, split into 3 amongst Meta Inc's platforms and 5 within Twitter Inc's solutions. This is followed by Prague's chairmanship, between 2019-2020, which amounts to a total of 34 posts, and a subsequent positivity rate of 3.41, split into 21 realized across Meta Inc.'s platforms and 12 within Twitter Inc.'s solutions. Afterwards, Warsaw's chairmanship, between 2020-2021, totalled 28 relevant posts, with a median positivity rate of 3.61, split into 2 on Meta Inc's platforms and 12 within Twitter Inc's solutions. Lastly, Budapest's chairmanship,

between 2021-2022, reached 28 total posts, alongside a positivity median rate of 4.03, split into 27 of Meta Inc.'s platforms and 19 within Twitter Inc.'s solutions.

Period		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022
Country Hosting V4 Presidency		Slovak Republic		Czech Republic		Republic of Poland		Hungary		
Total indexed posts		8		34		28		38		
Median positivity		3,63		3,41		3,61		4,03		

Fig.4. Posts Indexed for Western Balkans

B. Collective and international organizations - Western Balkans

WbF's official accounts have created a total of 81 relevant posts, spread across all three platforms during the established timeframe, formed by 17 posts starting from January 2018, 19 in 2019, 11 in 2020, 11 in 2021, and 23 until October 2022.

We can identify 68 total posts on Meta's Platforms (48 on Facebook and 20 on Instagram), coagulated into 11 across the entirety of 2018, 14 in 2019, 10 in 2020, 10 in 2021, and 23 by autumn 2022. The activity on Twitter Inc. consists of 13 posts discovered, with 6 during 2018, 5 in 2019, 1 in 2020, 1 in 2021, and none in 2022.

Also, we have a collective percentual variation of 21%, formed by the cumulative values of 27% and 119% associated with Meta's platforms, respectively, and 18% present in Twitter Inc.'s solutions.
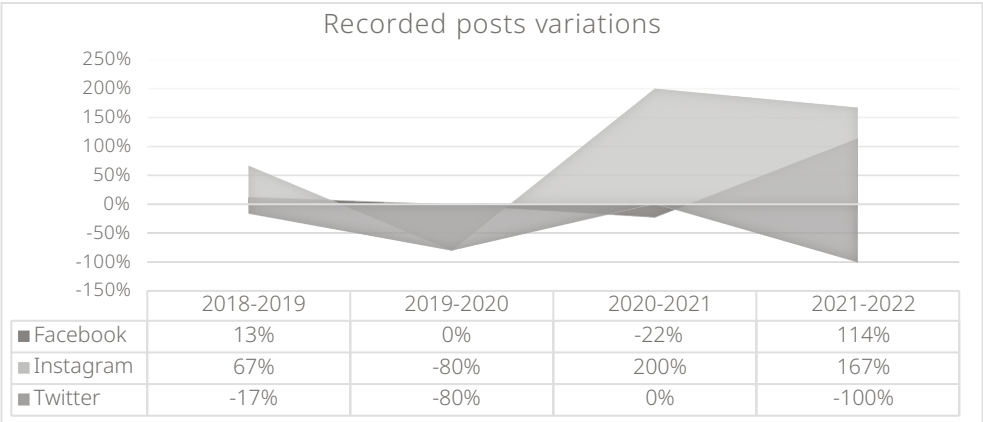

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Facebook	13%	0%	-22%	114%
Instagram	67%	-80%	200%	167%
Twitter	-17%	-80%	0%	-100%

Fig.5. Recorded posts variations for Western Balkans

With respect to the representativity rate, we can note how on Facebook, we can identify 48 relevant posts out of 881, with Instagram's 20 out of 270, on Twitter 13 out of 373, and respectively across all platforms. 81 posts out of 1524.
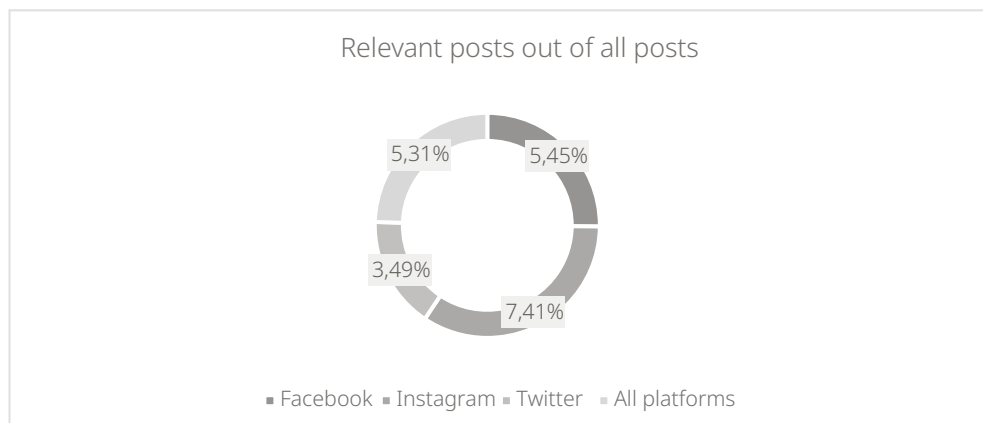
Fig.6. Relevant posts out of all posts for Western Balkans

Thereafter, a qualitative assessment contours the comprehensive matrix and forms *Table 3- Western Balkans with respect to the Visegrad* graph that portrays these aspects.

With respect to collective formats and the aggregated value per country, we have the *Table 4-Western Balkans modulations* graphs to represent all actors involved.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

IVF and WbF's digital interactions reflect distinct, yet interconnected approaches to digital regionalism and CS diplomacy, each characterised by unique tendencies, fluctuations, and patterns. Both institutionalised civic platforms function as pivotal instruments within their social spaces, serving as conduits for increased multilateral cooperation, collective identity reinforcement, transnational CS collaboration, and broader European integratory engagement (Albulescu 2024). Their outward projections illustrate digital regionalism's increased outreach and narrative mobilisation character, particularly via technological means.

Thus, IVF, serving V4's civic interests, leveraged digital platforms to project a structured image of regional cooperation, focusing on political, socio-economic, and cultural ties alongside institutionalised CS partnerships. Its public communication strategy, while consistent, fluctuates with V4 presidencies and shifting priorities toward civic-public engagement (Albulescu 2024). Its digital footprint shows steady growth, with post frequency and engagement varying with geopolitical developments and broader European frameworks, recently supporting citizen-led initiatives (Matiuta 2023). Importantly, generally high positivity rates indicate a favourable public climate, underscoring its emphasis on constructive dialogue, CS-driven diplomacy, and digital regionalism.

Contrastingly, WbF pursues a more dynamic and adaptive digital strategy, marked by higher interaction volumes and broader engagement with civic or associational networks. Unlike IVF' structured trajectory, WbF's presence shows sharper fluctuations, often shaped by regional evolutions and EU enlargement discourse. While engagement on Meta remains strong, declining Twitter activity suggests a recalibration to maximise civic outreach. Sentiment analysis indicates an emphasis on inclusivity, solidarity, and integration, reflecting neighbourhood-driven narratives and community-building strategies.

A comparison of IVF and WbF's digital diplomacy underscores divergent public communication patterns, especially when engaging the 3rd sector. The IVF, positioned as a stabilising force, projects itself as a model of inclusive regional cooperation and EU integration through cross-border CS collaboration. Its messaging aligns closely with EU priorities and reinforces local initiatives, thus consolidating influence via sustained collaborative landscapes. Otherwise, WbF employs digital platforms to bridge internal divisions, coagulate its social groups, and strengthen its role within the EU's frameworks through direct public engagement and MS projection. These divergences reflect distinct operational climates, as IVF operates within an integrated European platform, capitalising on its achievements, while WbF navigates accession dynamics, seeks legitimacy and consolidation of partnerships through a more grassroots-oriented movement. Regardless, both organisations share common tendencies in amplifying regional cooperation narratives and fostering transnational CS collaboration (Zimmerbauer et al. 2025). Each relies on digital tools to construct regional identities and shape external perceptions through sustained CS engagement. Fluctuations in their digital regionalism efforts mirror broader shifts, EU policies, enhanced IR stances, and CS preferences. We observe an intersection between digital diplomacy and regional studies as institutional(ised) digital regionalism becomes a strategic expression of structured transnational CS engagement, thus, quantifiable. Also, socially driven digital outreach functions not only as a communication tool but as a performative act, as virtual spaces became critical arenas for public dialogue where civic networks serve as key interlocutors.

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