

The Middle Europe Best Side Story

by Jozef Dominik

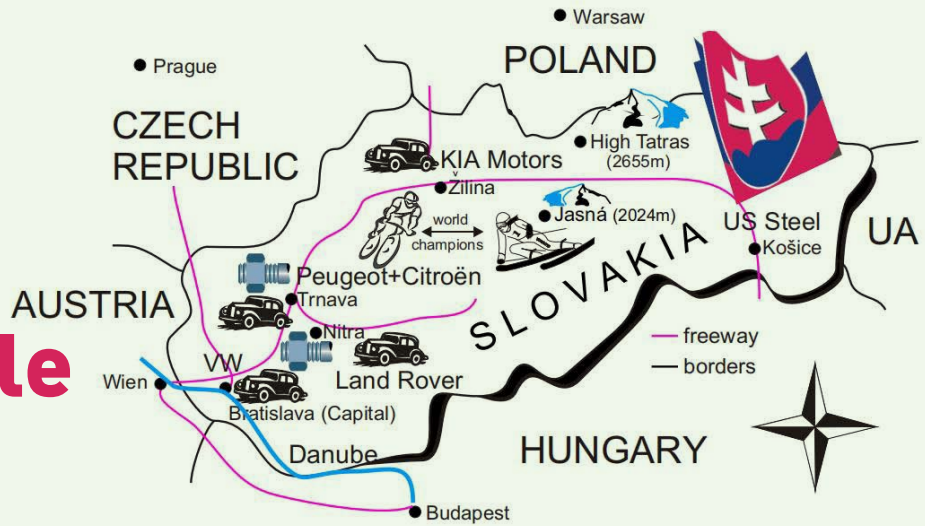


Fig. 1 Middle Europe

When we look at the simplified map of middle Europe (see Fig. 1) we can notice several interesting things: First of all it is a high concentration of car production in Slovakia. It is mainly due to the availability of relatively cheap labor, the stable political situation after joining the European Union, the fact that they are part of the free European market, and they have a good infrastructure and are close to the Western European market. In all Visegrad Group (V4) countries (CZ, SK, PL, H), the industry has traditionally had a strong role and position. The outputs of the automotive industry are crucial for the economic situation and represent an important share of the region's exports.

In last decade, the region of the V4 countries has become the center of car production in Europe (Fig. 2 & Table 1). If it is taken into account that the average car contains about 2,500 various screws, nuts and washers then the total fasteners consumption is enormous. Only a small part of this is paid for by domestic production. The vast majority is imported. The reason is logical. Automotive production is characterized by a high degree of mechanization and automatization. This fact places specific requirements on screw connections. For example, one mounting direction or nutless connection is a matter of course.

Slovakia continues to be the world leader in the production of cars per capita (Fig. 2), which means that it has produced about 200 passenger cars per 1,000 inhabitants. The share of the automotive industry in the total industry reached about 49%, generating up to 275,000 jobs.

The automobile industry became the economic "workhorse" for many countries in Central and East Europe (Table 1) after the inflow of foreign capital in the 90s of the previous century. It has become the centre of the prominent investors' interest also in Central and East Europe.

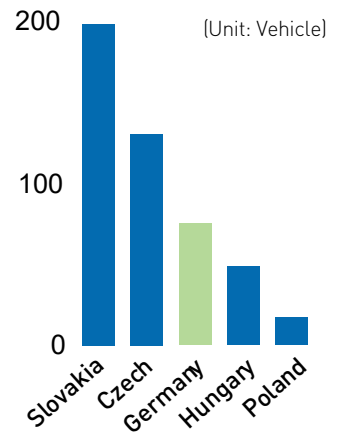










Fig. 2 Car production per capita (Source: www.oica.net/category/production-statistics)

Table 1. Characteristics of V4 Member Countries

Country	Area (km ²)	Population	Car Production	Currency
  Slovakia	48,845	5,554,324	about 1,000,000	Euro
  Czech	78,866	10,256,760	about 1,000,000	local
  Hungary	93,030	10,075,034	about 520,000	local
  Poland	312,685	38,625,478	about 870,000	local


members of European Union and the Visegrad Group V4



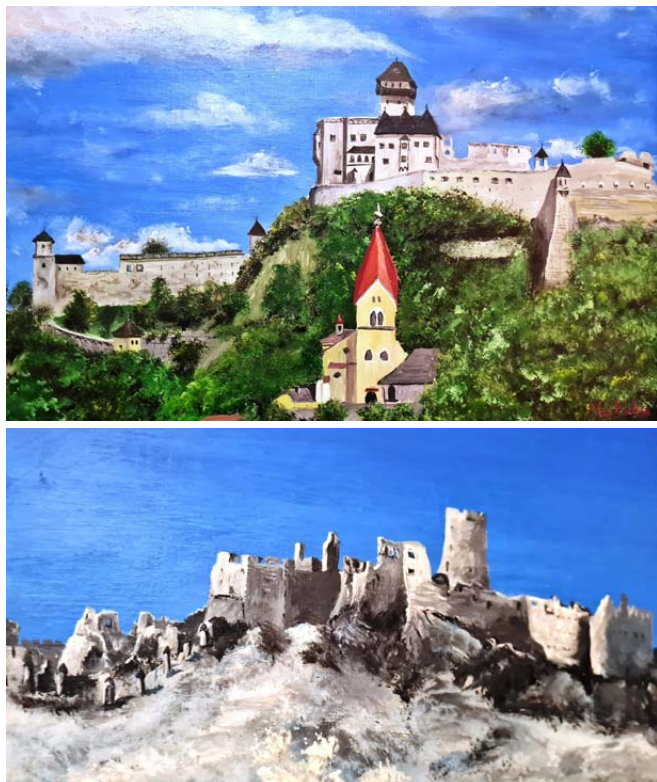


Fig. 3 Castle Trenčín and Spiš ruin (drawn by Makuka)

Of course, it is not only the advanced economies of the V4 member states that attract the attention of foreign investors and visitors. Equally interesting is the history, culture, architecture, sports, nature, spa and gastronomy. Especially Slovakia is full of castles and ruins (Fig. 3) which suggest a rich history. It is similar in the Czech Republic, Austria, Poland and Hungary. It can be said that history has spilled over in Central Europe.

The V4 region is diverse, has a lot to offer and has common interests. One of them is joint promotion in creditworthy markets such as the USA, Canada, Southeast Asia and the Middle East - this is where it is important for them to work together.

The Visegrad (V4) countries were more prepared to face the COVID-19 pandemic, as it reached the region later than in another part of Europe. At present, thanks to the coordinated approach of the V4 countries, life is slowly returning to normal. That is also why the president of the Slovak Republic, Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová, was able to declare that the Visegrad (V4) countries have a reason to continue cooperation. Already in the border areas between Slovakia and Hungary, commuters go on a daily basis. But it is not just about the economic sphere, but also its very developed e.g. bathhouse. Rheumatism is treated in the world-famous spa Piešťany in Slovakia (see Fig. 4, a typical city symbol in the picture below to symbolize healing).



Fig. 4

In 1917, three emperors met in the Piešťany spa - the German emperor Wilhelm II., The Austro-Hungarian emperor and King Charles IV. and the Bulgarian Emperor Ferdinand I.

You can't get around sports, either. Dramatic fights between the holder of a large crystal globe in skiing Petra Vlhová (SK) and Mikaela Shiffrin (USA) attract the attention of the whole world. Similarly, the three-time world champion in cycling Peter Sagan. This is related to favorable conditions for skiing and cycling in Slovakia.

In CZ, there is ice hockey at the top world level. CZ is a multiple world champion and Olympic winner (Nagano) in this sport. Hungary, in turn, boasts a success in swimming and fencing. Poland in athletics and volleyball.

The immense cultural and historical heritage of the V4 countries is also interesting for foreign visitors. Unfortunately, the defined media space does not allow for details, but cities like Prague (CZ), Budapest (HU), Krakow (PL), Levoča (SK) are literally historical architectural pearls. It is worth visiting them. And there are many other sights. I will mention at least the museum of the world-famous founder of pop art Andy Warhol (see Fig. 5) in Medzilaborce in eastern Slovakia. His paintings sell for millions today.

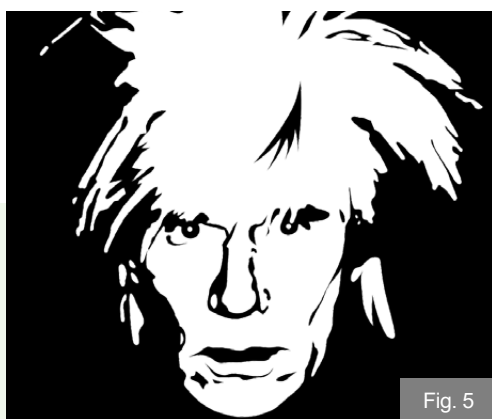


Fig. 5

What to Say in Conclusion?

It is worth visiting the V4 countries which form the core of Central Europe. The proximity of Western markets, especially Germany, the high level of education of the population, and the developed infrastructure attract business partners and foreign investors.

There are other reasons to visit these countries. Rich history, natural beauty, spa, sports, developed tourism, traditional hospitality of the population etc. are attractions that not every country can boast. The arms of the V4 countries are open to visitors. The proximity of the three capitals - Vienna (AT), Budapest (HU), Bratislava (SK), not more than 150 km apart, attracts both investors and tourists. At the same time, Slovakia has the ambition to become a link between the European Union and Ukraine and Russia, as interesting trading partners. It is predestined not only by the geometric position, but also by the knowledge of the language and mentality of the mentioned countries. ■

