



**Executive Report**  
**on Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group,**  
**July 2008 – June 2009**

The programme of Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group coincided with a period of immensely dynamic developments in the European Union and globally, as a result of the world economic crisis. General expectations notwithstanding, the Lisbon Treaty had not been enacted following rejection by Irish citizens, and a failure to close ratification procedures in a number of other European Union member states. In August 2008 the world witnessed the Russian-Georgian crisis, whereas in early 2009 the Russian-Ukrainian energy crisis broke out, with adverse impact on other Central and South European countries (particularly painful for Visegrad Group partner states). Consequently to all these circumstances, numerous international structures, NATO and the EU included, verified their agendas, thus also affecting actions taken by the Polish V4 presidency. Furthermore, the crisis environment enforced a postponement of some meetings and consultations. A separate challenge had been that of presidency programme implementation coinciding with Czech presidency in the EU, which – for reasons of related activities – imposed certain limitations to Visegrad-format contacts. Meetings of Regional Development and Environment Ministers having been shifted to July 2009 are an example illustrating the case.

In light of aforementioned circumstances, it ought to be admitted that the Visegrad dialogue under Polish presidency was very intense. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been particularly active, having organised 22 meetings and consultations for experts and political directors, through to levels involving undersecretaries of state and Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Action was taken to the purpose of intensifying Visegrad co-operation on the one hand (as proven by the first-time meeting of department directors responsible for public diplomacy at Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and by the revival of development policy and consular matter consultations), and to increase the effectiveness of co-operation on the other (i.a. the Ministry of Infrastructure initiated the setting up of specialised task forces commissioned to draft positions in specific areas; Ministries of Justice signed a Memorandum on information exchange and close co-operation to implement the e-justice programme, among others; strategy departments of Visegrad Group Ministries of Foreign Affairs initiated a debate concerning future Group operating mechanisms).

In implementing priorities defined for Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused in particular on issues concerning the preparation and implementation of the EU Eastern Partnership Programme, initiated by Poland and Sweden, albeit in close co-operation with Visegrad partners. Consultations were organised

to resolve the ultimate form of the project, with potential beneficiary states (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) attending.

Considerable importance was attached to contacts of Visegrad Group experts and institutions responsible for development policy implementation. The objective of four consultation rounds, including one with Swedish partners in attendance, was that of exchanging related good practices in individual Visegrad Group countries, but also of designing mechanisms enabling the future launch of joint Visegrad assistance programmes in selected countries. A major step was made in that direction under Polish presidency.

Security policy-related dialogue was initiated, focusing i.a. on issues concerning the place of Ukraine in the European security policy.

The free flow of persons was considered a matter of major importance. The problem was debated by non-governmental organisations (i.a. at a visa policy conference organised by the Batory Foundation) and by consular experts alike. In the course of a consular department directors' consultation, the topic of liberalising visa regime traffic in Eastern Partnership and West Balkan countries was discussed. In early April 2009, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and of Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, and Italy submitted a letter of appeal to high representatives of the EU, concerning the need to liberalise visa regime traffic with West Balkan states. The postulate is to be enforced under Swedish presidency in the EU Council, albeit the actual form and extent as yet remains unknown.

The International Visegrad Fund was a crucial instrument strengthening the Visegrad Group's unity and promoting the Group in third countries under Polish presidency. In 2008, project execution rules were designed as part of the so-called V4+ programme, addressing countries identified as Visegrad Group priorities under Czech presidency in the Group – i.e. Belarus, Serbia, and Georgia. Belarus was the programme's first beneficiary, with a project focusing on media promotion of efficiently co-operating Central European countries with a successful system transformation story. Furthermore, a Polish initiative saw the launch of a scholarship programme for Belarusian students in 2009, offering up to 80 semesters of scholarships in Visegrad Group countries as part of the first stage.

Upon Polish initiative, the Fund's work was introduced for the first time to EU partners in Brussels, i.a. thanks to the Fund's deputy director having attended a conference on the EU scholarship system addressing West Balkan countries. Visegrad Group achievements in the field were presented at the event.

Dialogue with external Visegrad Group partners continued. Apart from intense contacts with Baltic States, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as with future Swedish EU presidency (C. Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended Visegrad Group ministerial meetings twice – in November 2008 and May 2009), meetings and consultations proceeded with Israel, Japan, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Benelux countries, and – for the first time – with Russia. The Hanoi meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Japan on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 resulted in a quality change to co-operation format: decisions were passed to launch a number of joint projects, including the so-called *Green Visegrad*.

Throughout the previous year, political and expert contacts on EU-related matters intensified considerably.

Meetings of Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group countries formed a special part of Visegrad co-operation. Upon invitation by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, not only had they attended the regular presidency-related meetings, one each in the autumn and at the close

of Polish presidency in the Group, but they also met on the occasion of nearly all European Council sessions, during an event celebrating the anniversary of the Nobel Prize having been awarded to Lech Wałęsa, former chairman of the Solidarity Trade Union and former president of Poland (Gdańsk, December 2008), as well as during the official introduction of the EU currency in Slovakia (Bratislava, January 2009). All these occasions served as opportunities to exchange opinions on current affairs, and primarily to draft joint positions, later presented at EU level meetings.

Given the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis then in progress, the issue of energy security became the prime topic during the Visegrad Group session in Bratislava. The matter was also made part of the agenda of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting (May 21<sup>st</sup> 2009). During the meeting of Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group countries closing Polish presidency in the Group (Cracow, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009), a decision was passed to establish a Visegrad task group of governmental plenipotentiaries for energy security.

On June 3<sup>rd</sup> a meeting of Speakers of V4 Parliaments took place in Warsaw to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of political transformation in Central And Eastern Europe.

## **Inter-Ministerial Co-operation of Visegrad Group Countries**

### **Financial Matters**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Finance*

Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, the Ministry of Finance planned for ministerial-level, and, should the need arise, expert-level meetings to discuss the intended mid-term review of the European Union budget, and to exchange experience concerning preparations to join the euro zone. Developments on international financial markets during the second half of 2008 and early months of 2009, and adverse economic phenomena rapidly spreading around the globe resulted in the European Commission postponing works concerning the EU budget review, and announcing publication of the document recognised as the basis of the aforementioned review no earlier than November 2009. Concurrently, the Ministry had to reevaluate its joint actions with the other V4 partners, focusing in practice on active participation in EU forum initiatives in the field of counteracting and preventing crisis-related phenomena. Notwithstanding the above, experience exchange with regard to preparations preceding euro zone entry continued, albeit not in Visegrad Group format, but rather in bilateral contact, in consequence of the diversified extent of partners' commitment to preparatory works in question. The official event to celebrate Slovakia adopting the euro was an excellent opportunity to exchange experiences concerning the introduction of the euro, as the guest list included all Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries.

### **Economic Matters**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Economy*

The Ministry of Economy organised two Visegrad Group consultation meetings, focusing on key aspects of European economic policy. Details follow:

**September 5<sup>th</sup> 2008 – Energy Expert Group meeting.** The group discussed the following: 3<sup>rd</sup> liberalisation package (proposed amendments to the Electricity Market Directive, to the

resolution establishing the Agency for the Co-operation of Energy Regulations [ACER], and to the resolution on cross-border electricity trading), regional and cross-border co-operation in the field of electricity transmission, and the climate-and-energy package (draft Directive on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources, and draft Emission Trading Scheme [ETS] Directive). Meeting attendants exchanged information on expectations concerning the second strategic energy review (SER II), and on the entire energy delivery security package, which the European Commission had intended to publish in November 2008. The Czech party tabled a tentative activity outline for their presidency in the area of energy. Moreover, the issue of assistance for the coal sector restructuring exercise was discussed in light of the resolution of the European Parliament and European Council on state aid for the coal sector, which shall remain in force through year-end 2010. It was agreed that Visegrad Group countries shall co-operate on the EU forum on energy issues, co-operation fields to include the 3<sup>rd</sup> liberalisation package, the climate-and-energy package, and the energy security policy. The subsequent group meeting is to take place in 2009 in the Czech Republic.

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 – Expert meeting on small and medium-sized small enterprise policies.** The purpose of the meeting was to exchange experience and good practices in the area of policies affecting business and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The group discussed the following: business development policies and small and medium-sized enterprise-related policies in individual Visegrad Group countries, forms of funding highly innovative SMEs, and new instruments of SME support. The meeting of the group enabled the collection of information concerning key business policy aspects, specifically with regard to work on conclusions to the *Small Business Act for Europe*, in progress at the European Union level, and as part of the Competitiveness and Growth Working Group.

Both meetings resulted in the establishing and strengthening of working relations with representatives of ministries responsible for matters of business development and energy policies, and in the collection of key information in the field; furthermore, they served as an excellent platform to exchange information on policies adopted by individual states with regard to energy and SMEs.

### **Regional Development**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Regional Development*

Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, the following regional development areas were recognised as prime topics: strategic programming, the cohesion policy, regional policy, and synchronising Visegrad Group activities within European Union boundaries.

Meetings organised at the ministerial and expert level were an opportunity to exchange experience in the field of drafting and implementing national long-term social-and economic development strategies, and of strategic programming systems operational in Visegrad Group countries. Upon Polish initiative, Visegrad Group countries established closer co-operation with Bulgaria and Romania – hence numerous V4+2 format meetings under Polish presidency.

The close of the 2004-2006 accounting period was an opportunity to organise consultations in the area of closing programmes of the previous financial perspective. The task force of experts discussed former experience with regard to implementing 2004-2006

programmes, highlighting problems encountered by member states with regard to the 2007-2013 financial perspective.

During her Visegrad Group presidency, Poland dealt with a number of crucial issues concerning the future of the Cohesion Policy, and of the EU's sectoral policies and their interrelations, also in the context of public consultations of the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion*. Group partners debated potential solutions to increase the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy's implementation instruments, and to improve its overall efficiency in achieving community objectives. Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, member states drafted and presented the European Commission with a joint letter, containing proposals of changes to the Cohesion Policy implementation system. Strengthening the force of impact of Visegrad Group countries in European institution decision processes had been among the chief objectives for Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group.

The Ministry of Regional Development focused on issues concerning the programming and future of the Cohesion Policy, and on practical aspects concerning the operational programmes execution during the 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 programming periods. The Programme of the Future of European Regions until the Years 2020 and 2050 was discussed alongside the format of recognising the spatial dimension as part of regional policy. Moreover, the following issues were assigned special importance: conditions of implementing regional programmes co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund in the 2007-2013 perspective in areas of transport, environmental protection, rural areas, land recultivation, and housing; decentralisation-related matters, and adapting public statistical systems to the needs of regional development monitoring.

**July 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> 2008, Leszno near Warsaw – Visegrad Group experts' agreement and consultation meeting.** Taking over Visegrad Group presidency from the Czechs required the drafting of detailed topics and formulae for future meetings organised by the Ministry of Regional Development, which was the precise purpose of the experts' agreement and consultation session. The Polish party supported the cause of making Bulgarian and Romanian representatives part of the talks, and of organising V4+2 format meetings.

**September 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2008, Książ – Post-2013 Future of the Cohesion Policy and Territorial Cohesion in Visegrad Group Countries meeting.** Meeting attendants focused on the future shape of the cohesion policy implementation system, and debated added value potentially contributed by the Lisbon Treaty-introduced territorial dimension of cohesion. According to the Visegrad Group, thanks to investments targeting improved competitiveness and sustainable development, the Cohesion Policy is efficient in implementing the Treaty-described objective of supporting convergence between EU regions. Meeting participants emphasised that in striving for an improvement in policy implementation and evaluation, greater importance ought to be attached to the monitoring of its effectiveness, and more competencies ought to be assigned to member states. Moreover, Visegrad Group countries acknowledged that the current community debate concerning territorial cohesion should point Cohesion policy investments in the direction of developing the specific potential of all EU regions.

**October 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> 2008, Cracow – Meeting of Ministers of Regional Development of Visegrad Countries, Bulgaria, and Romania.** The Ministers exchanged experience concerning the implementation of European Union funding during the 2004-2006 period, and discussed recommendations with regard to funds disbursement as part of the 2007-2013 financial perspective. Meeting participants agreed that the Cohesion Policy's efficiency should not be judged against macroeconomic indices only, as they cannot serve

to recognise all its positive effects in economic and social areas: only such effects overall prove the Policy to be an equalising mechanism as well as a European public good. Ministers declared future co-operation to instigate more efficient procedures, and to reduce the administrative burden of beneficiaries and institutions involved in Policy implementation; moreover, they emphasised the need to develop a good practice exchange network including all European Union member states. In pursuit of principles of partnership, proportionality, subsidiarity, and shared competence, the Ministers recognised that the Cohesion Policy implementation system could be adapted in a form advantageous to all member states, extent of funds allocated notwithstanding. The Cracovian meeting resulted in the drafting and presenting the European Commission with a joint letter, containing proposed changes to the Cohesion Policy implementation system. In this document, Visegrad Group countries expressed their support for the following, among others:

- The establishing of a political-level forum to discuss issues of strategic importance,
- A revaluation of the system of competence sharing by the national and EU levels, resulting in member states' accountability for the correctness of individual operations, with the European Commission supervising the enforcement of general management and control principles,
- An improvement in the quality and clarity of the system's legal framework,
- The introducing of lump-sum mechanisms in expense reporting,
- The unification or harmonisation of regulations concerning all structural funds, to the effect of enabling integrated investment planning in the future.

Furthermore, the letter addressing the European Commission resulted from Visegrad Group countries co-operating with other EU member states, thanks to which the Commission took specific action to the purpose of improving the Cohesion Policy implementation system: it proposed regulatory amendments, and established a task force to reflect on the Cohesion Policy system, consisting of experts representing member states.

**February 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Expert meeting on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.** Representatives of Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, and Romania met in Warsaw to discuss their positions on the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion* adopted on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 by the European Commission. The publication of the *Paper* initiated a territorial cohesion debate, which ought to result in specific decisions and legislative measures. Meeting participants were in agreement that territorial cohesion should not be limited to matters concerning regions with specific geographical circumstances. All countries recognised that territorial cohesion shall be achieved once the endogenous potential of individual territories is put to use. In recognising the territorial impact of EU policies, the majority of the Visegrad Group expressed support for a territorial impact study to be carried out. Moreover, the majority of the Visegrad Group expressed their satisfaction with the fact that the *Green Paper* highlights EU policies of considerable territorial influence, the proper co-ordination of which remains among key elements of discussions concerning territorial cohesion and the Cohesion policy's future.

**February 20<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – The Global Economic Crisis and the Cohesion Policy expert meeting.** Given the fact that the current financial and economic crisis remains a serious challenge for Visegrad Group countries and for other EU member states, the Polish

presidency organised a meeting, in the course of which representatives of the European Commission and of nineteen EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) exchanged opinions with regard to the Cohesion Policy as a response to the economic downturn. Structural funds are of key importance to new member states, in that they stimulate the economy at the regional and national levels. It was declared concurrently that a focus on growth-supporting measures (research and development, innovation, selected infrastructural investments, and active instruments boosting employment) ought to be recognised as an incentive for the economy in times of crisis, enabling a return to the growth path on the one hand, and achievement of long-term Cohesion Policy objectives on the other. Member states emphasised the need for a comprehensive improvement of Cohesion Policy enforcement mechanisms, at the community and national levels alike.

**February 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Implementing European Union Funding in the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective expert meeting.** The meeting was attended by representatives of Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Lithuania, and Estonia. In a meeting to discuss the technical aspects of EU funding implementation, matters concerning the use of European Social Fund monies and the implementation of infrastructure-related programmes and projects were raised. Discussion participants pointed out that local specificity determines development barriers and Cohesion Policy implementation challenges in each individual country. Notwithstanding, they emphasised the common nature of numerous challenges, such as the decentralised and multi-tier management system, the pre-implementation preparation of large key projects and consequences to the use of funds assigned, and the enforcement of public procurement rules and procedures. The meeting was also an opportunity to raise the following issues: compliance audits, exceeding infrastructure project expense budgets, and European Commission monitoring service audits. During the European Social Fund session, attendants debated factors determining the efficient implementation of employment, social policy, and education projects against their 2004-2006 financial perspective experience, and the first stage of the 2007-2013 programmes implementation.

**May 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Second European Funds Forum.** In the course of the Visegrad Panel organised as part of the Second European Funds Forum on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak representatives presented projects and initiatives co-financed with European Union funding in areas of human resources, culture, and tourism. The panel was attended by Visegrad Group country representatives of public administration, local and regional governments, and of other institutions and organisations involved in the implementation of aforementioned projects. Panel participants were in agreement that all projects resulted in accelerated social and economic development in the region, increased employment, and increased social, economic, and territorial cohesion with European Union member states. Furthermore, a *European Territorial Co-operation and European Neighbourhood and Partnership Programmes in the Visegrad Group Countries* discussion panel was organised as part of the Second European Funds Forum. The panel was attended by representatives of institutions responsible for implementing European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) programmes, and by programme beneficiaries from Visegrad Group countries. Experience concerning 2007-2013 ETC and INTERREG III (2004-2006) programmes execution was discussed alongside the role and place of such programmes as part of the European fund system, and their future within the framework of the subsequent financial perspective.

Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland), Bulgarian and Romanian representatives invited as part of the Visegrad Panel also attended the exhibition section of the Second Funds Forum, as an opportunity to present their regions and institutions.

**July 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> 2009, Sopot – Meeting of Ministers of Regional Development of Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, and Romania – summary of the Polish V4 presidency.** Action taken by the Ministry of Regional Development under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group shall be summarised during the Sopot meeting of Ministers of Regional Development of Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, and Romania on July 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> 2009.

### **Home Affairs and Administration**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Home Affairs and Administration*

The Ministry of Home Affairs and Administration organised the following meetings under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group:

**October 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2008, Szklarska Poręba – Meeting concerning the VGS (Visegrad Group System) II Information Exchange System Development.** Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian experts summarised VGS II-related co-operation to date, and reviewed the issue of illegal migration in the region following Schengen zone expansion to include Visegrad Group countries. It was decided that as of November 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, the exchange of purely statistical information shall be replaced by an exchange of analytical information and of related queries. The decision stems from the development of other European statistical information exchange systems (such as CIREFI, FRAN, ICONet), enabling the use of statistical data similar to that exchanged within VGS II. Experts concluded that today it would be more useful to exchange analyses, and to ensure online consultation via e-mail, fax, and telephone.

**November 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> 2008, Warsaw – Meeting of Vice-ministers and secretaries of state responsible for co-ordinating public administration.** Meeting participants confirmed that continuing works to the purpose of public administration reform remains a priority for Visegrad Group states, and concluded that co-operation between the countries facilitates access to information and experience exchange, and enables an opportunity for joint design of future development directions. Ministers emphasised the need to continue co-operation in areas of developing the information society and the pan-European e-government system, which would i.a. include all residents of Visegrad Group countries. They also confirmed their interest in a Council of Europe initiative to implement the *Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level* of potential impact on public administration. All partners concluded that Visegrad Group-based co-operation is extremely useful, and may prove helpful in presenting joint initiatives and projects on the European Union forum.

**December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, Zakopane – Meeting of migration experts.** The meeting was called to discuss the following issues: migration in the Visegrad Group region, new challenges stemming from changing political conditions (i.a. EU and Schengen zone expansion), EU immigration policy development (Global Approach to Migration [GAM] towards the East and South-East, the operation of current and the establishing of future partnerships for mobility, VIS- and SIS II-related matters), and migration-related priorities for the Czech presidency in the EU. The meeting closed with the adoption of a *Concluding statement*:

- Meeting participants believe that negative scenarios accompanying the Schengen zone expansion to include Visegrad Group countries had not come to pass,



- It would be worthwhile to consider the option of organising a separate meeting for countries of the region, focusing on experience with regard to the outstandingly dynamic migration from Asian countries (India, China, Vietnam, Pakistan, Afghanistan) to the Visegrad Group region – all countries confirmed the phenomenon of an increased share of immigrants from outside Europe, from Asia (Vietnam, China) in particular, which gives rise to an urgent need to organise national foreign persons' integration systems,
- A positive response should be drafted to the Czech proposal of embracing joint projects with the use of European Union funding – i.a. to draft joint endeavours, such as a continuation of the *Capacity Building in Ukraine* project implemented as part of GDISC, and to use project-related experience to develop similar solutions for South Caucasian countries, and long-term for Belarus as well,
- The “visibility” of Polish migration services in debates and activities in the area of implementing the GAM towards the East and South-East should be increased – all countries of the region are involved in the execution of the *Global Approach to Migration towards the East and South-East*, and recognise the need for more intense co-ordination of measures taken by countries of the region, and for lobbying on EU forums for greater EU commitment to protect her eastern boundaries, and for improved relations with eastern neighbours.

***On May 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> 2009 a meeting took place as part of the Salzburg Forum, focusing on the issue of mass event security in the context of preparing for Euro 2012.*** Given the fact that the Visegrad Group comprises a relatively small number of countries, whereas the topic is of interest to representatives of many states, the idea of organising such a meeting for the Visegrad Group only had not been followed up on. This does not, however, alter the fact of the topic frequently arising during sessions of other groups attended by all Visegrad Group countries, among others.

***Conference of police negotiators and psychologists*** shall be organised after the expiry of Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group. For cost optimisation reasons, the conference has been postponed to the second half of 2009, and is to take place on September 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> 2009, at the Police Training Centre in Legionowo, Poland. The conference shall be attended by experts-practitioners in the field from all over Europe, including representatives of all Visegrad Group member states.

***A VGS II Information Exchange System development meeting*** is to take place in Poland during the second half of 2009, to the purpose of evaluating the use of the new information exchange co-operation system, and of discussing topics identified above.

<p><b>Justice</b></p>
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<p><i>Responsible authority: Ministry of Justice</i></p>
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It ought to be emphasised with regard to the Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group as concerns Ministry of Justice competencies, that the programme has been modified against the Presidency Programme of April 2008. Changes introduced stemmed among others from current events, from the agenda of activities planned at the European Union level, and from postulates offered by partners.

***May 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 2009, Wroclaw – Meeting of Ministers of Justice of the Visegrad Group countries.*** Discussions concerned the following, among others: matters of proceedings

security extended to individuals taking part in criminal proceedings, in specific recognition of the extraordinary status of the victim. Moreover, the treatment of perpetrators and victims of crimes sexual in nature was debated, with special significance assigned to issues considered a priority by the Minister of Justice – prevention and counteracting sexual abuse of children. Furthermore, opinions were exchanged concerning the resolution currently debated at the EU level, namely that on establishing the European Private Company as an instrument greatly facilitating business operations for small and medium-sized enterprises, specifically important in times of the current financial crisis.

The meeting closed with the signing of a memorandum on the exchange of information and experience concerning the use of information technology in justice. This document carries special importance in light of the e-justice initiative-related activities in the EU.

The memorandum shall enable the execution of detailed projects in the area of computerising the justice system, while providing the Visegrad Group Ministries of Justice with an opportunity to strengthen regional co-operation.

In the memorandum, Ministers committed i.a. to exchange experience by way of the following:

- Exchange of information on information technology solutions planned, in progress, and implemented, including related legal regulations,
- The appointment of plenipotentiaries authorised to disclose and acquire information described as part of efforts to achieve memorandum-listed targets,
- Exchange of expert forces,
- The organisation of working meetings, conference call-based in particular,
- The appointment of joint task forces to the purpose of analysing legal and organisational solutions forming part of individual Ministries' legal systems, and of designing recommendations and sample solutions to optimise benefits of new information technology solutions with no impact to sovereign legislation competencies of any Ministry,
- Exchange of information technology solutions and projects, as well as the establishing of a system to lend or transfer information technology hardware and software.

Notably, co-operation between Visegrad Group Ministries of Justice has been strengthened, in particular in the scope of drafting joint positions with regard to measures taken at the EU level.

<b>Transport and Logistics</b>
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<i>Responsible authority: Ministry of Infrastructure</i>
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***September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, La Rochelle – Informal meeting of the Ministers of Infrastructure of the Visegrad Group countries*** (accompanying the informal meeting of the Ministers of Transport of European Union member states).

***October 9<sup>th</sup> 2008, Luxembourg – Informal meeting of the Ministers of Infrastructure of the Visegrad Group countries*** (accompanying the European Council session on Transport, Telecommunications, and Energy).

The purpose of both meetings specified had been to exchange opinions on matters forming part of EU meeting agendas, to define priorities for future co-operation, and to discuss organisational issues concerning Visegrad Group activities in the area of transport.

The governmental crisis in the Czech Republic resulted in the meeting of Ministers of Transport of the Visegrad Group countries planned for April 2009 being shifted to June 2009, with intended topics for debate including the following:

- Capacity for accelerating the European Commission's reimbursement procedure in case of large infrastructure-related projects,
- Potential joint action in the course of the TEN-T network review,
- Forms of Visegrad Group co-operation at the EU level.

**September 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, Warsaw – co-ordination meeting at the level of department directors responsible for international co-operation at Ministries with transport competencies in Visegrad Group countries.** It was agreed that a network of liaison points be established to the purpose of improving the efficiency of information exchange and current matters approval procedures. Co-operation priorities were also debated during the meeting.

**October 29<sup>th</sup> 2008, Bratislava – Road Infrastructure Tolls Task Force meeting.** In the course of the Task Force meeting, parties presented information on key developments and problems in the area of Task Force work in their respective countries. Furthermore, the issue of proposed amendments to the so-called Eurovignette Directive (1999/62/WE) were discussed. During subsequent proceedings in the European Council and its executive authorities, presenting a related uniform Visegrad Group position proved impossible.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, Warsaw – Conference on the Marco Polo European Programme for Promoting Intermodal Transport,** attended by representatives of transport operators interested in programme participation, and by a European Commission representative. The Polish party also invited Visegrad Group partners to attend. Conference proceeding conclusions enabled the drafting of a joint position of Visegrad Group countries on changes to the rules of programme execution, thus opening an opportunity for a greater number of entities from Visegrad Group countries to benefit from related assistance. As a result, in the course of proceedings at the European Council and its working groups, significant amendments were introduced to the draft resolution on the second Marco Polo programme edition to the benefit of businesses from Visegrad Group countries.

A Rail Transport Task Force meeting shall be held in Poland in June 2009.

<p><b>Environmental Protection</b></p> <p><i>Responsible authority: Ministry of Environmental Protection</i></p>
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**September 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2008, Budapest – 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Ministers of Visegrad Group Countries.** The agenda included a discussion on community legislation to promote the abatement of motor vehicle-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and prevent illegal waste transfer between member states. The Ministers also raised the issue of “ecological tax” application in member states. Furthermore, the following matters were made part of the agenda upon initiative of Polish partners:

1. *Status quo* of merit-related preparations for the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Changes, and the 4<sup>th</sup> session of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP14/COP-MOP4).
2. Climate-and-energy package.
3. Genetically modified organisms and related procedures in European Union member states.
4. Drafting the new Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive.

A joint position was drafted in the course of the meeting. The Ministers, aware of climate changes and greenhouse gas emissions abatement as major environmental challenges, expressed their conviction that efforts ought to be supported at the EU level to establish a regulation format ensuring that those challenges are met, in particular by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels in motor vehicles.

The Ministers confirmed the necessity to continue focusing on preventing illegal waste trading, and on enforcing EU legislation in the field of waste transportation. They also decided to strengthen co-operation between national authorities responsible for the monitoring of cross-border waste transportation within the Visegrad Group framework.

The Ministers exchanged opinions on the environmental importance of tax systems and various financial mechanisms. They resolved that such approach is of key importance to the process of transferring to the use of sustainable production and consumption schemes.

The Ministers acknowledged a presentation by the Czech minister on the topic of preparations for the upcoming Czech presidency in the EU, and resolved their readiness to assist in the execution of Czech presidency programme objectives, if needed.

The Ministers acknowledged a presentation by the Polish minister on the topic of preparations for the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and for the 4<sup>th</sup> session of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. The Ministers emphasised that the event ought to constitute a major step towards the 2009 Copenhagen conference, and the future global consensus concerning post-2012 activities.

The Ministers acknowledged that the energy-and-climate package carries tremendous importance to all member states, whereas related works should conclude no later than by March 2009. The V-4 countries supported the Polish initiative concerning the issues of emissions auctioning and carbon leakage beyond EU territory.

With regard to GMO, conference participants concurred that an in-depth debate on the subject shall be indispensable, as suggested by France under her presidency. Europe needs credible research to study the risk of GMO introduction to the environment, to the purpose of proving conclusively that the use of genetically modified organisms in food and fodder carries no risk to human or animal health.

On request of Czech partners – current EU presidency holders, the Environmental Ministers Meeting closing the annual period of Visegrad Group presidency was postponed to July 2009. The agenda of the meeting shall cover the following issues:

1. Municipal waste thermal processing experiments – energy in Renewable Energy Source classification.

2. The place of environmental protection, including *Natura 2000* locations, in the debate on the post-2013 future of the Common Agricultural Policy.
3. Drafting the new Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive. Exchange of information concerning key Directive-related issues, and presentation of individual country positions on the following:
  - Directive enactment deadlines for existent large combustion plants (LCPs), and potential derogations for installations with shutdown planned for the years 2016-2025,
  - Recognition of BREF reference documents as legally binding, and the consequent limitation to the principle of flexibility made part of the IPPC Directive currently in force.
4. Challenges stemming from the draft Directive on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe (the CAFÉ Directive).
5. Continuing the debate on illegal waste transfer between member states, as raised during the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Budapest in 2008.
6. Draft of the new Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive to replace the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment of the European Parliament and European Council (2002/96/WE) of January 27<sup>th</sup> 2003.
7. Debate on the options of collecting waste equipment in volumes equivalent to 65% of the equipment brought to the market.
8. Debate on merit-based preparations for the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Changes, and the 5<sup>th</sup> session of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP15/COP-MOP5).
9. Discussion on the International Environmental Management process.
10. Presentation of experience relating to Czech presidency in the European Union.

<b>Health</b>
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<i>Responsible authority: Ministry of Health</i>
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Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, Ministry of Health representatives attended the following meetings:

***October 21<sup>st</sup> 2008, Brno – Meeting of Ministers of Health of the Visegrad Group countries.*** In the course of the meeting, issues of reforming health care systems in the regions were debated alongside related priorities for the Czech presidency in the European Union. Originally, the meeting was to be organised in June 2008, as part of the Czech presidency in the Visegrad Group.

***November 17<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> 2008, Warsaw – Conference of Visegrad Group countries on control in medical products advertising.*** The conference was attended by experts from Visegrad Group countries, the Netherlands, and Norway.

***December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, Prague – Financial Stability and Long-term Care Workshop organised by the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic.*** The Workshop was attended by experts representing WHO, OECD, international non-governmental organisations, and the Visegrad Group.

Moreover, the following events in the field of health care are planned under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group:

*June 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> 2009, Hungary – Meeting of Visegrad Group experts to discuss public health problems.* The Chief Sanitary Inspector is to attend.

*June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Meeting of representatives of Ministries of Health of the Visegrad Group countries, Georgia, and Ukraine.* The meeting shall focus on issues relating to effective HIV/AIDS prevention methods, and on potential Visegrad group co-operation in the field.

<b>Culture</b>
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<i>Responsible authority: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage</i>
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Visegrad Group Ministries' of Culture activities focused on the following projects:

**1. *The Visegrad Anthology*** – The *Visegrad Anthology* project continued. Texts by young writers from the Visegrad Group were translated into Arabic, and published by the *Sphinx* Egyptian publishing house (December 2008). In January 2009, the publication was presented at the Cairo Book Fair, and at the Alexandrian Library.

The *Anthology* shall also most probably be translated into Spanish, and published as an audio-book. Its English translation is available on the web.

**2. *Digitisation Colloquium of Library-Information Employees.***

The meeting was organised on July 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2008 by the Moravian Library in Brno (*Digitisation as a Method of Protecting Documents and Making them Accessible to the Public*). The purpose of the colloquium was to exchange experience in the field of digitisation perceived as a method of documents protection as well as of improving access thereto. Its subsequent edition shall be organised by the National Library in Warsaw in 2010 (*Colloquium of Library-Information Employees from the Visegrad Group*).

Moreover, a two-day workshop for a group of 30-40 specialists representing Visegrad Group national libraries is to be organised. The list of participants is to be expanded to include V4+ format participants. A variety of topics shall be raised in the course of workshops, with regard to digitisation and digital resources accessibility. Meeting attendants shall be asked to prepare brief presentations on various issues serving as a basis for debate. The workshop agenda also includes a presentation of achievements of the *Polona* Digital National Library.

**3. *Cultural Heritage Task Force in V4 Countries.***

Under Polish presidency, the 2006 Polish initiative (Cracow) to establish an expert panel continued. The second expert meeting took place on September 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> 2008 in Cracow, with a purpose to revive the debate on common problems relating to the cultural heritage of historical cities and sites made part of the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and to define measures concerning preparations for the 2009 educational programme and the 2010 scientific conference.

**4. *Workshops for Young Specialists in the Area of Heritage Protection.***

On July 9<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2009, the first edition of the Visegrad Summer School for young specialists in the field of national heritage protection will take place. The School targets topics tied in with Central European cultural space. Visegrad Group audiences apart, interested individuals from third countries may attend as well.

The School forms part of a Polish project announced during the Olomouc meeting of Ministers of Culture of Visegrad Group countries. The International Cultural Centre in Cracow shall be operating the School in a summer curriculum format.

**5. Conference on the Management and Conservation of Facilities Listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites** – in the course of the June 2008 meeting in Olomouc, the Polish party presented a proposal to organise an international conference in 2010, to focus on issues relating to cultural heritage and historical cities landscape protection in Visegrad Group countries. The International Cultural Centre in Cracow was appointed as the organiser of the endeavour. The purpose of the conference is to exchange experience and strengthen co-operation between institutions responsible for heritage protection. The conference shall enable the drafting of a joint strategy and of criteria to design legislation conforming to UNESCO standards. Details of the conference agenda shall be outlined during subsequent meetings of the panel of cultural heritage experts representing V4 countries.

Aforementioned meetings apart, the following events took place under Polish presidency:

**July 2008, Brno – Second Colloquium of Library-Information Employees from the Visegrad Group**

**September 2008, Cracow – Second meeting of the Task Force for Cultural Heritage in V4 Countries.**

**May 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of Visegrad Group countries.** During the meeting, projects in progress were evaluated: the *Visegrad Anthology*, *Visegrad Library*, *Colloquium of Library-Information Employees on Digitisation*, and achievements of the *Task Force for Cultural Heritage in V4 Countries*. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage tabled a new initiative – a research project drafted at the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, focusing on political theatre in Visegrad Group countries. The project is to be implemented in co-operation with theatre institutes and scientific centres of individual countries. The first stage would comprise a conference on the political theatre phenomenon before and after 1989, with the next stage involving a conference to study post-1989 dramatic writing in Visegrad Group countries. The final outcome of the project would involve a publication on post-1989 theatre and drama in V4 countries. Furthermore, in the course of the meeting the Ministers debated on culture in Visegrad Group countries in times of economic crisis. On the occasion of the meeting, György Spiró was presented with the 2008 Visegrad Cultural Award.

## **Sport and Tourism**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Sport and Tourism*

### **1. Sport**

In conformity to the programme defined for the presidency, co-operation in the field of sports was based on expert experience exchange. The series of expert meetings on a variety of issues concerning sport in Visegrad Group countries continued as a follow-up to the 2008 Hungarian initiative. All meetings base on the assumption that all Visegrad countries are similar in their social and economic circumstances, and in an equally short-term EU membership. Co-operation of Visegrad Group countries in the field of physical culture and sport comprises the following: exchange of information and drafting uniform positions for purposes of international forums (Council of Europe, EU, UNESCO,

WADA), and the exchange of so-called good practice on a variety of sports- and physical culture-related areas (such as sports financing, sports and health, sports infrastructure management).

**September 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, Poland – Regional Conference for sports administration representatives from Visegrad Group countries, and guests from other Central European countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, and Ukraine).** The conference focused on the *Social Role of Sport – Importance of Sports Clubs*. During the first part of the meeting, representatives of all participant states delivered presentations on sports club systems in their respective countries, including the legislative framework, funding systems, structure, the social role of clubs, and volunteer work. During the second part of the conference, regional co-operation current affairs were debated. Issues concerning sport in the European Union and Council of Europe were discussed, alongside future opportunities for regional co-operation in the area.

**March 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2009, Budapest – Meeting of sports infrastructure experts, and debate on the programme of preparations for the Olympic Games in London.** It does seem that future sports-related co-operation shall base on regular expert-level meetings to discuss individual matters, and enabling the launch of common activities.

A separate field of V4 countries' sports-related co-operation is that of a system of *Olympic Hopes* competitions for gifted young athletes, resulting from the memorandum of co-operation signed in 1994 in Zakopane by four Visegrad Group countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary Republic, the Slovak Republic, and the Republic of Poland. The purpose of establishing the *Olympic Hopes* system was to enable young athletes to participate in competitions abroad in order to expand their experience in and contact with international tournaments. Important aspects of participation in such competitions include the lack of high costs of travel to distant countries, and an initiative to integrate young people from neighbouring countries. According to the memorandum, competition schedules and agendas are supervised by the Steering Committee convening annually in one of the member states to discuss reports drafted following the given year's tournaments, and to approve the event agenda for the upcoming year. Signatories to the memorandum are Committee members. Poland is represented by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, which – in agreement with the Polish Sports Association – drafts tournament reports as well as proposals to organise competitions for the next year. In 2009, the Republic of Hungary is the organiser of the 16<sup>th</sup> *Olympic Hopes* Steering Committee meeting. Poland shall be the 2010 co-ordinator of *Olympic Hopes* Tournaments.

The 2009 sports activities schedule provides for 34 tournaments (25 for official, and 10 for non-official show purpose disciplines). Poland is the organiser of the following events:

<b>Official Disciplines</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date</b>
Baseball	Żory, Rybnik	16-21.06
Biathlon	Wisła	31.01-01.02
Kayaking – slalom	Cracow	05-06.09
Trampoline	Śrem	06-07.03
Curling	Warsaw	25-29.08



Softball	Miejska Górka	04-05.07
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## 2. *Tourism*

Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, tourism-related co-operation included the following activities:

- The joint *European Quartet – One Melody* website ([www.european-quartet.com](http://www.european-quartet.com)) was updated,
- The education programme for American audiences was continued, involving a joint presentation on V4 member states, and tourism product promotion,
- A *West Coast Roadshow* was organised in the US,
- Participation in the ITB Asia International Tourism Fair in Singapore,
- Specialist workshops were organised in Russia (Krasnoyarsk, Rostov-upon-Don),
- Participation in the CITM Fair in Shanghai (joint exhibition stand),
- A study tour was organised for Russian tourism journalists,
- Participation in the JATA fair in Tokyo (September 2008, joint exhibition stand),
- Further copies of the map promoting the V4 region were printed.

The Polish Tourist Organisation organised two working meetings for National Tourist Organisations representatives, in Stare Jablonki in the summer, and in Warsaw in January 2009.

***March 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> 2009, Cracow - High Level Meeting, Polish Tourist Organisation and Ministry of Sport and Tourism.*** The meeting was preceded with a working session of National Tourist Organisations representatives to the purpose of drafting a joint marketing plan of promotion campaigns on third markets in 2009. In light of tourism carrying significant importance in the economies of all the four countries, representatives of the V4 Group drafted a joint position, and concluded as follows:

1. Meetings of V4 Group representatives shall be organised regularly to the purpose of strengthening relations, and exchanging current information and experience in the area of crisis counteracting measures and specific solutions.
2. There is a need to continue synchronised activities to the purpose of increasing the number of tourist arrivals to Visegrad Group countries, from third markets in particular, by way of drafting a joint marketing plan and organising joint marketing campaigns on those markets.
3. Greater importance should be assigned to joint marketing and promotion campaigns, addressing in particular the Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, United States, and Japan. Furthermore, the validity of analysing the capacity for launching similar campaigns on new Asian markets and in South America should be researched.
4. It is recommended to continue works to the purpose of improving the joint [www.european-quartet.com](http://www.european-quartet.com) website, in include four language versions: English, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian.

The meeting concluded with the signing of a Protocol regulating joint Visegrad Group promotion campaigns with regard to tourist arrivals from third countries in 2009.

### ***Ministry of Science and Higher Education***

In the field of higher education, co-operation with Visegrad Group countries primarily took on the form of the Visegrad Scholarship Programme of the International Visegrad Fund. The Programme enjoys increasing interest, of Polish students and citizens of V4 neighbouring countries alike. In the academic year 2009/10, the following scholarships were awarded as part of the Visegrad Scholarship Programme:

- *Intra-Visegrad* scholarships – to 16 Polish citizens in V4 countries, including 11 scholarships in the Czech Republic, 1 in Slovakia, and 4 in Hungary,
- *Outgoing* scholarships – to 5 Polish citizens,
- *Incoming* scholarships – to 14 individuals, including 6 to Russian citizens, 2 to Macedonian citizens, 2 to Serbian citizens, 2 to Georgian citizens, and 1 to an Armenian citizen,
- Scholarships for Ukrainian citizens – to 15 individuals at universities in Poland,
- Scholarships for Belarusian citizens – to 9 individuals at universities in Poland.

***April 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Meeting of the Visegrad Scholarship Programme Selection Committee.***

In 2008, the *Visegrad University Studies Grant* programme was launched as a first-time initiative, with the main objective of supporting the development of university courses and/or curricula, in particular in the field of social or humanist studies tied in with Visegrad Group countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary).

### **Co-operation of Academies of Sciences in Visegrad Countries**

*Responsible authority: Polish Academy of Sciences*

On May 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> 2009, Presidents of Academies of Sciences in Visegrad Group countries met in Warsaw to exchange opinions on the condition of science in times of global economic crisis, and on the role science should play in overcoming the same. It was concluded that Academies should continue co-operating in the future.

### **Agricultural Policy**

*Responsible authority: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development*

In the field of agriculture, Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group coincided with an ongoing health check of EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which closed with final compromise as of November 20<sup>th</sup> 2008. As part of the final stage of the check, the French presidency initiated a debate on post-2013 CAP format. The continued debate concerning the future and overall simplification of the CAP was further reflected in the priorities of the Czech presidency in the first half of 2009.

All factors described impacted the process of defining areas of co-operation and discussion by and between the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ministries of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, and Romania. In conformity to former assumptions, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development organised two meetings in Poland at the level of Agriculture Ministries of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria, and Romania.

**September 16<sup>th</sup> 2008, Poznań – Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture of Visegrad Group countries in the occasion of the POLAGRA International Food Industry Fair.** The meeting focused on the following issues, among others:

- Common Agricultural Policy health check,
- Post-2013 CAP future,
- Priorities for the French presidency,
- Current agricultural affairs.

Talks resulted i.a. in the adoption of two joint declarations, later presented at the EU level:

- Position on the allocation of non-disbursed CAP budget expenses to the purpose of covering differences between the EU-15 and the EU-12 in terms of capacity offered by Article 68 in the area of specific assistance, including the dairy sector and risk management instruments,
- Position on the expected Common Agricultural Policy health check results.

**April 29<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture as an accompanying event to the Agriculture and Rural Areas – Five Years after Polish Accession to the European Union international conference.** On this occasion, the meeting focused on:

- Future of the CAP – with particular attention paid to the direct subsidies system,
- Renewable energy sources,
- Criteria of delineating Less Favoured Areas (LFAs).

This meeting also closed with the adoption of a joint declaration concerning CAP's future. Moreover, the Polish party suggested an expert-level meeting to be organised with representatives of different Ministries of Agriculture in attendance, to the purpose of a more detailed exchange of experience in the field of renewable energy acquisition.

Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, co-operation of Visegrad Group member countries flourished also at the European Union authority level, in particular within the framework of work undertaken by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. During the Council session of March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, Poland tabled a motion concerning VAT eligibility classification for purposes of Rural Areas Development Programmes. The motion raised the issue of unequal treatment of public entities under EU law, as public entities implementing operations co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund are not entitled to any form of VAT reimbursement. They can account for VAT payment as a deductible expense, which is not an option for public entities implementing activities co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The Polish motion was supported by co-financed by the European Visegrad partners and by Romania. In their interventions, representatives of these countries highlighted the necessity for clarity in legislation, as identical entities are extended different treatment under current European laws pertaining to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and to the European Regional Development Fund, respectively.

### **Defence Policy**

*Responsible authority:* Ministry of National Defence

Under Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, numerous meetings were organised, and a memorandum on an agreement to co-operate in the area of armaments was drafted and adopted, four annexes included (protection against weapons of mass destruction, air defence, the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Soldier* project, and strategic transport). Options for co-operation in two further areas were debated (non-lethal weapons, and Mi-17 helicopter modernisation).

Interest was confirmed to establish a Joint Combat Group, within a time perspective of “no earlier than 2015”). Detailed talks are to proceed after 2010, after transparent rules of using the force are defined, and experience in the area of earlier projects is solidified.

A decision was passed to strengthen V4 countries’ co-operation in Afghanistan, i.a. by initiating a process of experience exchange with regard to participation in NATO operations (setting up of PRTs, OMLTs, etc.).

A Military Training Base Catalogue of V4 countries was drafted under Slovak chairmanship. It shall serve as base for designing joint training proposals for the year 2010, and subsequent periods.

The will to continue exchanging experience concerning Visegrad Group participation in the helicopter initiative was sustained.

Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian interest in participating in a debate concerning conclusions and experience in the area of the Czech Ministry’s of Defence participation in preparations preceding the upcoming Czech presidency in the European Council was confirmed.

***May 28<sup>th</sup> 2009, Warsaw – Meeting of the Ministers of Defence of Visegrad Group countries.*** The Ministers discussed matters relating to the current military agenda, i.a. results of the NATO Strasbourg-Kehl Summit, EU-NATO relations, and international military EU and NATO operations. Moreover, the debate comprised NATO military capacity in times of economic crisis. The second part of the meeting was attended by the Ukrainian Minister of defence, with whom i.a. the Eastern Partnership, the situation in Ukraine and Georgia, and multinational military capacity initiatives were discussed.

## **Conclusions**

Results achieved by the Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group enable a conclusion that albeit deprived of institutional bodies (with the exception of the International Visegrad Fund), the Group remains an effective structure with considerable coalition capacity, put to the use of pursuing proprietary interest, as well as of co-creating the European Union as an organisation of greater solidarity with all her member states.

A crucial stage in Visegrad Group co-operation had been achieved in the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group with Japan (Hanoi, May 25<sup>th</sup> 2009), in the course of which decisions were made to implement joint projects in the V4+Japan format. Such activities should continue and develop in the future as part of V4+ co-operation projects.

The process of developing regional identity and Visegrad Group countries’ promotion was greatly supported by activities of the Visegrad Summer School (Cracow, July 2008), and by the programme of supporting the development of university seminars or M.A. curricula relating to Visegrad Group countries, launched by the International Visegrad Fund in 2008. Immense expectations tie in also with the Visegrad Summer School for specialists in

the area of national heritage protection, initiated by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National heritage in 2009. Such activities should continue in the future. The IVF's role was acknowledged by the Prime Ministers' decision to raise its budget from 5 mln € to 6 mln € as of 2010.

High praise offered by numerous meeting and consultation attendants should not be considered an excuse for abstaining from reflections concerning proper course of action to make Visegrad Group co-operation yet more effective and visible in Europe and globally.

In times of the closing Polish presidency and in the future, Visegrad Group countries should become ambassadors of countries awaiting integration with the European Union.