



Hungarian Presidency 2013-2014 of the  
**VISEGRAD GROUP**

**REPORT**  
**OF THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY**  
**OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP**  
**JULY 2013 – JUNE 2014**



MINISTRY OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE  
OF HUNGARY

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The Castle of Visegrád, Hungary

## **Visegrad Cooperation then and now**

The renewed partnership of the countries of the Visegrad Group (V4) dates back to 1991, when Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland signed the Declaration on Cooperation. Meeting in the picturesque city of Visegrád, Hungary, the signatories made a historic reference to the covenant of the monarchs of Hungary, Bohemia and Poland there in 1335, which achieved mutual trust, stability and prosperity in the region in for decades that followed.

The Visegrad Group countries have long shared common ground in history, culture, religion and economy. Over the course of the centuries this shared past has been marked by a striving for unity as well as notable frictions. As geopolitical realities have driven the currents of history in Central Europe, our nations have learnt that these troubled waters can be better sailed if we cooperate.

At the end of the Millennium, being on the Eastern border of the European Union and facing complex transformational challenges, cooperation was essential to heal historic wounds and seize political and economic opportunities. The original aim of the Visegrad Cooperation was the same as of its historic predecessor, but toned for the new era: completion of the transformation process and Euro-Atlantic integration. Since then, the content of cooperation has gone through a series of renewals, sharing more information, involving more policy areas, connecting more stakeholders, pursuing a multitude of common objectives. After fulfilling the original goals of EU and NATO integration, the Visegrad countries now strive to create an innovative and highly competitive core of a future Europe, based on their common cultural and intellectual heritage.

By now the V4-states are all seasoned members of the European Union, experiencing both the advantages and difficulties of this joint endeavour. The EU-accession did not miraculously close the development gap between the different regions of Europe; countries of the Visegrad Group need strong cooperation to achieve results at the negotiating tables in Brussels on issues of cohesion policy, development of energy and transport infrastructure, economy, and common foreign and security policy.

Cooperation among Central European countries is a key factor in boosting growth in Europe: the region has a unique potential for economic development and the enhancement of its competitiveness. Geopolitically, the Visegrad-region is as central as ever, in a position enabling the transfer of transition experience and practical assistance for countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans.

The bond among the V4 is sewed by common values and joint interests, instead of binding paragraphs and offices. Cooperation of the Visegrad countries is not institutionalized; it has no official statute, seat, secretariat or budget. The single institution related to the V4 is the International Visegrad Fund, established by the four countries in 2000, which effectively fosters people to people contacts in Central Europe. The absence of a V4 institutional infrastructure is compensated by the rotating presidencies' agility and ability to promptly react to the changing economic and political environment, moreover, to proactively take the initiative for practical projects aimed at the development of Central Europe.

## **The Hungarian V4 Presidency 2013-14**

The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group between 1 July 2013 and 30 June 2014 came at a time for reflection on the progress Central European countries had made since reclaiming freedom: it was 25 years ago that the communist regimes were toppled. On the other hand, we also celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the V4 countries' accession to the European Union, which was the ultimate political step in the process of Europe's reunification. On this double occasion, the Hungarian Presidency emphasised the important role the Visegrad Cooperation played in these common achievements of Central European nations, and, based on this experience, aimed to find new ways to deepen and extend the activities of the Visegrad Group.

V4 presidencies are built on one another. Continuing with important endeavours of the previous Polish V4 Presidency, Hungary proposed six priorities when taking over the lead in the summer of 2013:

- energy security,
- development of the North-South transport infrastructure,
- security policy,
- economic cooperation,
- foreign policy initiatives,
- the creation of a parliamentary dimension.

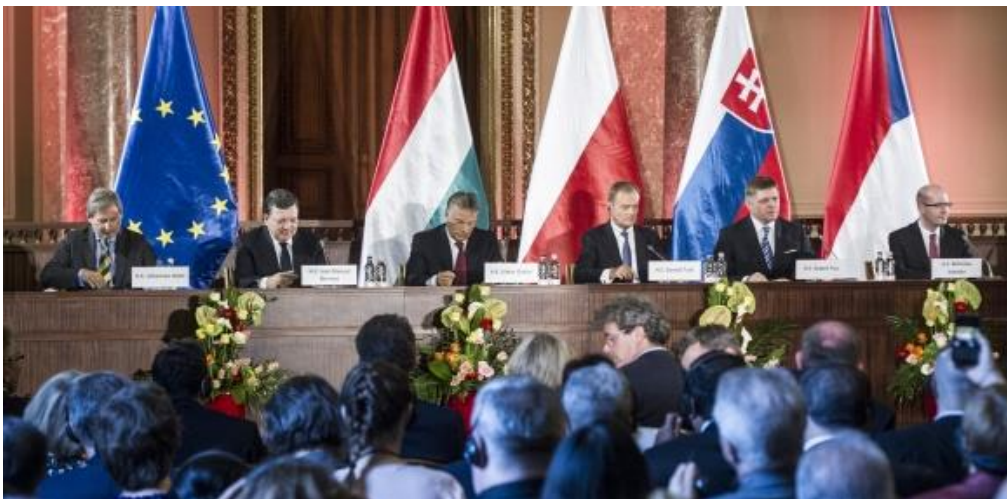
Summing up the main impacts of the Hungarian Presidency, firstly it has to be noted that cooperation in the V4 framework has been both broadened and deepened in the year behind us. At the same time, our cooperation proved flexible enough to enable taking joint diplomatic measures quickly and promptly, which resulted in an increasing international acknowledgement of the V4. Another important impact was the growing significance of the Visegrad Group as a policy shaper within the European Union. The four countries have been stepping up their efforts in a coordinated way, and speaking with one voice in relation to issues where a common position or converging preferences were identified, be it Common Foreign and Security Policy topics or EU sectorial issues. Global interest in the V4 has increased as well.

### **Cooperation with various stakeholders**

Cooperation within the Visegrad Group has multiple layers. The four heads of government, as well as ministers and experts of several line ministries hold regular consultations and discuss international developments, European legislation and common V4 projects that are envisaged or already being implemented in various fields. Representatives of the four Ministries of Foreign Affairs consult even more frequently, including the four national V4 coordinators (NVC) who deal with all aspects of the cooperation on a daily basis operatively.

During the Hungarian V4 Presidency the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries consulted several times, as necessitated by developments in the volatile international environment. At their first meeting during the Presidency in October 2013 in Budapest, the heads of government agreed on the goals of the Hungarian Presidency to be achieved and exchanged views on the planned EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. After the Vilnius Summit disappointed the European parties and unleashed unexpected developments in Ukraine, the V4 Prime Ministers convened on 29 January 2014 and issued a joint statement expressing

their common positions concerning the unfolding events in Ukraine. They met again during the GLOBSEC Conference on 15 May 2014. The Prime Ministers also consulted regularly on the margins of European Council meetings, achieving unity of efforts on important foreign and security policy issues. The Hungarian Presidency was closed and summed up by the V4 Heads of Government at their Budapest meeting on 24 June 2014, with the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn also present. They discussed, among other topics, the absorption of European funds for regional development in Central Europe, and the perspectives of European integration.



Meeting of V4 Prime Ministers and President of the European Commission in Budapest

The V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs met on nine occasions during the Hungarian Presidency. In April 2014, V4 Foreign Ministers jointly participated in a conference on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the four countries' EU-accession, and exchanged views on their respective countries' national experience in EU integration, as well as common future challenges.

Furthermore, meetings among the Ministers of Agriculture (V4 + Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia; V4 + Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia), Ministers of Economy (V4 + Central European Initiative countries; V4 only meeting), Ministers of Health, Ministers of Justice (Central European Justice Ministers' Meeting), Interior Ministers, Ministers of Defence, Ministers of Environment (V4 + Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania) and the Ministers of Culture were also important events moving the V4 agenda forward. EU state secretaries, European directors and political directors of the four diplomatic services consulted even more frequently.

The heads of the four states also convene each year (under a chairmanship rotating differently than the V4 political presidency). Under the Hungarian Presidency, V4 presidential meetings were chaired by the Czech Republic. During 2014, celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the iron curtain, presidents of the V4 countries together with the president of Germany decided to visit cities where the freedom of Central Europe had been forged, attending commemorative events in Warsaw, Budapest, Leipzig, Prague and Bratislava.

Consultations also took place among the four countries' respective legislative bodies. Various committees of the four Parliaments had held meetings occasionally in the past. On the initiative of the Hungarian Presidency, the V4 speakers agreed in 2014 to start a more structured and regular cooperation (the 'Parliamentary Dimension' of the V4), with genuine parliamentary 'ownership' in setting the agenda and inviting committees to participate.

The judiciary branch of government is also occasionally involved in V4 cooperation. During the Hungarian Presidency the V4 Prosecutor Generals met in Balatonlelle on 17 May 2014 in

order to lead consultations on the issue of establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. Furthermore, a joint training was held for prosecutors and judges from the V4.

Various governmental institutions also decided to discuss issues in the Visegrad format. Director Generals for Disaster Management met in Budapest on 16-18 October 2013. Heads of the Aviation Authority of the National Transport Authorities held consultations in Budapest on 3-4 December 2013. A high level meeting of state tourism's leaders was held in Budapest in February 2014. Chief Medical Officers of V4 countries met in Szilvássvár in May 2014.

Presidents of the four national chambers of commerce and industry convened in Budapest to promote entrepreneurial co-operation and trade relations, exchanging experiences on cross-border cluster-type cooperation and on increasing competitiveness of small and medium size enterprises, also exploring options of joint activities on third markets.

The V4 region's think tanks and research institutions are also involved in cooperation. Financed through the International Visegrad Fund, the "Think Visegrad" project's participating institutions provide the V4 countries' governments with analysis on various current topics, a practice successfully carried on during the Hungarian Presidency.

Despite being a non-expanding alliance, the Visegrad Group has always been open towards external partnership with third countries, provided that common interests and shared values existed and a V4 consensus was reached. The V4 has become a trademark. Furthermore, it is viewed by many as a model for efficient regional cooperation. A growing number of countries and international organisations are willing to cooperate with the Visegrad Group.

The Visegrad countries have always been vocal and active in supporting our partners in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership region. The Visegrad Group's solidarity, transfer of experience of our democratic transition and Euro-Atlantic integration are cornerstones of the V4's foreign affairs. During the Hungarian Presidency, "Visegrad Plus" (V4+) meetings and consultations took place in various formats: V4 Foreign Ministerial meetings with Western-Balkans countries, Austria and Turkey (Gödöllő, 31 October 2013); with Eastern Partnership countries (Budapest, 28-29 April 2014); and with Ukraine on a joint V4 visit to the country (28 February 2014). V4 Political Directors held extended consultations in Ukraine (3 October 2013), Moldova (23-24 January 2014) and Georgia (28-29 May 2014), as well as in Albania (25 November 2013), Macedonia (26 November 2013) and Podgorica (27-28 March 2014).

The Visegrad Group cooperates with other important partners to jointly pursue common goals in the Euro-Atlantic family. During the Hungarian Presidency, V4+ Foreign Ministerial meetings were held with Bulgaria, Greece and Romania (Budapest, 24 February 2014), the Nordic-Baltic-8 group (Narva, 6-7 March 2014, co-chair: Estonia) and with Germany (Budapest, 13 March 2014). The V4 European Directors met in both semesters with their Benelux partners (Budapest and The Hague) and the Political Directors jointly visited the United States (Washington, D.C., 22-24 April 2014).

More and more overseas partners show interest for consultations and cooperation with the V4 as an important element of the European political landscape. V4+ Foreign Ministerial meetings were held with Japan (ASEM Summit, Delhi, 10-12 November 2013) and with Egypt (GLOBSEC conference, Bratislava, 15 May 2014). V4 Political Directors also met their counterparts from Japan, Israel, Palestine, the Republic of Korea and Turkey.

Through the cooperation with the Visegrad Group's various stakeholders mentioned above, our common objectives set out by the Presidency have been reached; Hungary managed to pass the V4 to the Slovakian Presidency at the end of June 2014 in a fit shape.

## **Impacts and results of the Hungarian Presidency**

Under the Hungarian Presidency, the Visegrad Group has achieved the following results in the priority areas of the presidency programme.<sup>1</sup>

### Energy Security

Central Europe's strength depends greatly on the extent to which it can reduce its energy dependence. A key to energy independency is the completion of European market integration based on the construction of the missing North-South energy interconnectors in the region. An important element of this infrastructure is the Hungarian-Slovak natural gas interconnector, inaugurated in March 2014 by the two Prime Ministers. The Hungarian Presidency, in order to contribute to further progress in energy market integration in the Visegrad region, followed the Energy-roadmap agreed upon at the end of the previous Polish Presidency by compiling the toolkit for it: providing the necessary financing, reinforcing institutional framework, developing gas market models. The Nabucco project's failure has lent special importance to these steps.

Gas market integration, together with the development of the V4 energy infrastructure are necessary preconditions for an efficient gas market. Its realisation would encourage the development of diversification projects and increase the competition on the supplier side. Growing market liquidity is a key to the reduction of prices in order to approach the European average. The V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration (V4 Gas Forum), one of the most important tools in this respect, held its first session in Budapest on 29 October 2013 with the participation of representatives of the relevant V4 ministries, regulatory authorities and delivery system operators, as well as representatives of the European Commission. This body aims to provide political support and an institutional background for efficient coordination among the Visegrad countries in the field of energy infrastructure development, transposition of EU regulations and the soonest possible implementation of market integration.

At the Visegrad Prime Ministers' Summit of 14 October 2013, the heads of government agreed that European production of shale gas was desirable. V4 countries also support nuclear energy use and expect the EU to consider nuclear energy as one of the supported low carbon technologies, helping Central Europe increase its nuclear energy capacity. The V4 Prime Ministers agreed that every country had the right to define its own energy-mix, produce energy from the most convenient sources available; and there should be no discrimination in the EU regarding nuclear energy.



Visegrad Prime Ministers' Summit /Photo: Gergely Botár/

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed list of meetings and a selection of joint V4 and V4+ statements adopted under the Hungarian Presidency, see Appendix (separate document).



Representatives of the Visegrad Countries adopted two joint statements at their meeting held on the occasion of the EU Energy Council meeting in Brussels, 12 December 2013. The parties reinforced their support for the objectives, fields of activity and organisational structure of the V4 Gas Forum. They committed themselves to share experience to advance the implementation of the single market as soon as possible. According to the V4 Joint Statement on Energy, the signatories advocate the complementary use of all low carbon emission technologies, in line with their respective energy-mix.

The coupling of the day-ahead power markets of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic has been functional since 2012, proving to have been an important step towards energy market integration in the region. The Hungarian Presidency further promoted the now active and mutually beneficial cooperation among V4 countries (national regulatory authorities, transmission system operators and other stakeholders). A Declaration of Intent was signed on 11 July 2013 in support of the future extension of the integrated electricity market.

The joint view of the Visegrad Group on energy-prices and costs was also formulated in a declaration. New legislative proposals tabled by the European Commission have been closely monitored and V4 coordinated action has been applied where appropriate. In order to improve the flow of information and cooperation within the V4, the Hungarian Presidency has regularly called for consultations prior to Transportation, Telecommunications and Energy Council meetings, as well as prior to the Energy Working Party meetings.

The Hungarian Presidency also pursued the exchange of views and initiated cooperation with external partners. On 6 November 2013 Hungary presented the concept of „Connecting Corridors” in Brussels to promote the development of energy interconnectors in the region. Speakers highlighted the importance of building the missing interconnectors and infrastructure among their countries and secure diversification options via pipelines and access to the LNG market.

On 13 November 2013 a conference titled “Development of Energy Cooperation: Integration of energy markets in the Visegrad 4 and Ukraine” was organised in Kiev in cooperation with the Kyiv International Energy Club. Participants reconfirmed the significance of the ongoing cooperation in the electricity and natural gas sector, praising the continuation of market integration among the countries.

In Budapest, 24 February 2014, the V4, Bulgarian, Greek and Romanian Foreign Ministers reconfirmed their joint commitment to achieve a common European energy market, and expressed their support to the Greek EU-Presidency’s aim to reconcile the goals of competitiveness of the European industry, as well as the security and sustainability of energy supply with the long term goals discussed for climate change.

As part of the Hungarian V4 Presidency’s agenda to promote energy diversification and US LNG exports, Hungary co-hosted a two-day conference with the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. titled “American Energy Prowess in a Strategic Foreign Policy Perspective” on 28 April 2014. Participants discussed ways to strengthen European energy security and the transatlantic alliance through reinforced energy ties.

A forum focusing on the potential of Energy Cooperation of the Visegrad Group with the Eastern Mediterranean took place at the University of Cyprus, on 7 May 2014. Speakers introduced the features of the energy market in Central Europe and presented the aspirations of Visegrad countries concerning diversification and market integration with a view to reduce the vulnerability and dependency of the region. They also elaborated why Visegrad 4 was an ideal destination for new entrants in the LNG market.

## Development of the North-South Transport Infrastructure

Central Europe is in need of guarantees for adequately developed infrastructure. In the V4 countries, East-West transport links are more developed than North-South network elements. As regards road transport, it is primarily motorways that are missing, while the railway network, with most of it constructed before World War I, is lagging behind the desirable level of quality. The lack of sufficient cross-border transport links fundamentally hinders the economic development of entire regions, which is a great burden on Central Europe's competitiveness. Therefore, North-South road and rail development projects have to be managed as European programmes. Mindful of these considerations, the Hungarian V4 Presidency 2013-14 dealt with transport infrastructure development as a strategic common priority, being the first to do so in the Visegrad Group's history, thus paving the way for the issue to become an area where long-term cooperation can bring tangible benefits for the V4.

The Presidency worked out a proposal to adopt a programme aimed at better harmonising transport infrastructure development in the region, identifying and removing transport bottlenecks, and improving access between the V4 countries by decreasing travel times. On 14 October 2013, the V4 Prime Ministers in Budapest agreed to assign the relevant ministries to work on a roadmap targeted at improving North-South transport connections.

As a long-term framework for this assignment, V4 partners in March 2014 set up the High-Level Working Group on Transport, responsible for coordination on the development of transport infrastructure in the region. The Working Group's task is to jointly prepare for the negotiation of the EU's 2021-27 Multi-annual Financial Framework Agreement in order to ensure that the well-developed East-West European transport infrastructure is adequately complemented with the development of North-South corridors. Since its establishment the Working Group has discussed, inter alia, possibilities of harmonising the use of Connecting Europe Facility funds among the V4, as well as the planning of 2014-2020 EU Transport Operational Programmes. The Group is to deal also with transport security, the environmental aspects of infrastructure development and intelligent transport systems in the future.

At their meeting in June 2014 in Budapest, the V4 Heads of Government endorsed a roadmap prepared by the High Level Working Group, for coordination on transport network development in the V4 in the following years.

Under the Hungarian Presidency, high level representatives of the V4 ministries responsible for transport held several fruitful coordination meetings before the meetings of relevant EU bodies (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council) and reached common positions on issues such as the Fourth Railway Package or Single European Sky regulations. Furthermore, representatives of the V4 Aviation Authorities, as well as V4 experts on Combined Transport had meetings in Budapest. Heads of the four national railway companies also convened, agreeing on closer cooperation to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of the region's railway networks.



Executives of V4 railway companies /Photo: MÁV.Co/

## Security and Defence Policy

The Hungarian Presidency has both continued the work started by previous presidencies and launched new, genuine initiatives in the field of security and defence cooperation which has thus become a leading area in V4 sectoral cooperation. The Presidency's focus on the importance of the security and stability of Europe and its neighbourhood was further reinforced by the crisis and armed conflict in Ukraine.

V4 cooperation on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was highly visible during preparations for the December 2013 European Council. The four Ministers of Foreign Affairs and also the four Prime Ministers issued joint letters to express their opinion and vision related to the CSDP's role and place in international crisis management, as well as to formulate their expectations related to the debate preceding the European Council.

The Prime Ministers at their October 2013 Summit tasked the V4 Defence Ministers to deepen defence cooperation among the four states with concrete measures. As a result, a Long Term Vision for V4 defence cooperation as well as a Defence Planning Document was elaborated. The Four Defence Ministers also agreed on annual joint military exercises of the armed forces from 2015, with the first such exercise planned to be, linked with NATO's Trident Juncture 2015 exercise, the validation test for the V4 Battle Group.

Under the Hungarian Presidency preparations for the Battle Group have advanced. The Battle Group shall be on stand-by in the first half of 2016 according to the agreement the Ministers of Defence signed in Visegrád, 14 March 2014. Should this close cooperation prove successful, the V4 Battle Group may later become the basis of a regional force deployable in NATO, EU or other missions, the possibilities of which are already examined by the V4 defence ministries.

On 24 June 2014, the V4 Prime Ministers adopted the Budapest Declaration on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation, tasking the Defence Ministers to further enhance defence cooperation by preparing an Action Plan, elaborating the V4 Training and Exercise Strategy, exploring possibilities of enhanced cooperation among V4 defence industries, exploring options of the common development and procurement project of universal modular tracked platform and wheeled armoured personnel carriers.

As far as V4+ relations in this field are concerned, an expert-level meeting of Security Policy Director Generals from Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad and the Nordic-Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), held in Budapest, 21 January 2014, as the first consultation in this format. A Visegrad plus Japan Security Seminar held on 4 February 2014 in Tokyo provided a good opportunity for high level exchange on the topic of V4-Japan cooperation in the field of security policy, and to explore how East Asia's and Central Europe's security is interlinked in our global age.

Hungary as the holder of the V4 Presidency was co-organiser and co-sponsor of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bratislava Global Security Forum (GLOBSEC) held 14-16 May 2014. A highly visible V4 presence was ensured at this highly-noted event as both a Prime Ministerial and a Foreign Ministerial meeting were convened.

## Economic Cooperation

Whereas certain Visegrad countries were less battered by the 2008 American subprime crisis and its European aftershocks than others, and one V4 partner is a member of the Economic and Monetary Union while the others use national currency, all four realise that close cooperation within the Visegrad Group on economic issues is essential.

The four Ministers of Economy met in Budapest in September 2013 to discuss European Union issues, crisis management experience, as well as options of cooperation for small and medium-sized enterprises in the V4. The parties agreed to coordinate their actions in the EU Competition Council, to examine possibilities of opening V4 representations in third countries, and to promote cooperation between V4 small and medium size enterprises on foreign markets. At their later meeting in June 2014, the Ministers initiated a joint analytical team to coordinate economic activity, make proposals for joint V4 investments and for entering procurement tenders of third states jointly.

Small and medium size enterprises play a crucial role in the V4 economies. Indeed, if this sector is successful, the whole economy can be considered successful. Taking this into consideration, the interactions between small and medium size enterprises constitute a key factor in the economic development of our region.

As the V4 countries' Chambers of Commerce and Industry represent businesses of the region in a comprehensive way, Hungary hosted a meeting of presidents of the four national chambers. The presidents signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 10 April 2014, besides identifying key sectors of cooperation, including automobile, electronic, food, energy, tourism, logistics and innovative industries. The chambers also agreed to encourage cross-border projects and make efforts to achieve more efficient and better coordinated utilisation of EU funds. The annual organisation of a major business forum is also envisaged by the Memorandum. The V4 Chambers of Commerce and Industry also decided to establish a think tank studying further opportunities for cooperating in the fields of economy and energy.

Economic recession strongly affects the employment situation in Europe. Each country tries to shape its institutional system and toolset in order to enhance the efficiency of the labour market through closer cooperation of labour market participants, rationalisation of government bodies, process optimising and decreasing bureaucracy. The significant increase in youth unemployment across Europe is the most alarming. The V4 are seeking new employment opportunities, forms and solutions which improve the access of young people to the labour market. It is very important that countries share good practices aimed at leading people in a difficult situation back to the primary labour market. In a quickly changing economy there is a special need for forecasting certain employment trends and labour market demand, thus ensuring the opportunity for vocational education and training system, and for different stakeholders in the labour market to develop appropriate adaptive capacities.

Bearing the above in mind, during the Hungarian V4 presidency, a seminar of experts was organised on 28 November 2013 and the heads of the responsible ministries consulted on the margins of the 9 December 2013 EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council. Here a programme-plan was introduced, aiming at increasing mobility of vocational students and their instructors within the V4 region. As financing may be drawn from the European Social Fund's operative programmes currently in the planning phase, Hungary proposed to the incoming Slovak Presidency to continue the related coordination within the Visegrad Group.

On 25-26 February 2014, heads of the four national labour offices met in Budapest. The V4 heads of the Public Employment Services stated in a joint Declaration of Intent their wish to cooperate in mutually relevant labour market topics, using the following tools: analysis and exchange of information on labour market trends, development and sharing of best practices on employment policy tools and training models, also in cooperation with other actors.

An effective instrument for job-creation in our region is a reinforced focus on industrial policy. A strong basis for V4 cooperation on industry policy is the similar history, socio-economic situation and economic structure of the countries. Acknowledging the need to ensure cohesion between the EU energy, climate and industry policies, which have strong influence on the competitiveness of industry, the Visegrad Group has enhanced cooperation within the EU Competitiveness Council on issues concerning further development of the internal market and sectors of the European industry.

The V4 countries are well positioned for re-industrialisation but they are even stronger in the field of creativity and have a remarkable potential in the field of research and innovation. A fundamental condition for supporting creativity and innovation is the strong guarantees of intellectual property rights. Interests of V4 countries are almost identical regarding the issue of collective rights management. Coordinated V4 lobbying during the Hungarian Presidency was successful in the European and global institutions, thus the establishment of the Visegrad Patent Institute to be based in Budapest is imminent.

V4 Ministers responsible for research, development and innovation signed a joint declaration in December 2013 to increase cooperation in the European Research Area. V4 countries will coordinate their positions to gain mutual benefits such as the better use of resources of the Horizon 2020 Programme. The Ministers also agreed on coordination of the parties' respective bilateral cooperation agreements in the field of science with the United States of America. The ministerial meeting also resulted in an agreement to continue the EUROSTARS joint programme that supports innovative small enterprises. As the European Parliament was about to amend the rules of the programme and decrease common funding, the V4 lobbied intensively and successfully to keep the Council's agreement in force.

The ClusterCOOP Project, initiated on the basis of an earlier memorandum on V4 cooperation in the field of clusters and led by the Hungarian Ministry of National Economy in the framework of the EU's Central Europe Programme, was aimed at strengthening cooperation between clusters of the participating countries and regions, helping create adequate framework conditions, and facilitating the establishment of new branches of industry in Central Europe by means of innovation, international contacts and a good support scheme. The project, involving clusters from not only the V4 countries but also Slovenia, the German Baden-Wurttemberg and the Italian Piedmont as well, has received full support for its activities which had started in 2011, and was successfully concluded by March 2014. As one of the results, a database about clusters in the region is now available, helping the building of connections in wider Central Europe.

Following the Polish Presidency in highlighting the sector of creative industries, Design Terminal, the state agency for Hungarian creative industries, shared its best practices about platforms for promoting works of young talents in technology, urbanism, fashion and design. In June 2013, Design Terminal organised a special fashion show which promoted the works of the 'Gombold Újra' Central European fashion competition's winners. A year later, the Terminal hosted the '3D Printing Days' where young Central-European entrepreneurs and innovators presented their inventions.

## Foreign Policy Initiatives

The Visegrad Group has become a highly visible and active partner in the foreign policy field. The Prime Ministers consulted on foreign policy issues at all four summits and on the margins of European Council meetings during the Hungarian Presidency. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs met on nine occasions, seven of which were extended “Visegrad+” meetings, including consultations with Ministers or Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Kosovo<sup>2</sup>, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States of America. The Political Directors convened a dozen times, including joint visits to European and overseas countries.<sup>3</sup>

It had been a clear intention of the Hungarian Presidency to pay special attention to Common Foreign and Security Policy issues in the first place, but the Ukrainian crisis made the Group’s joint efforts indispensable. As the tragic events were unfolding, the joint visits and prompt V4 declarations based on shared views among the Visegrad Group over the developments in Ukraine resulted in the increasing visibility of, interest in and expectations towards the V4. In this context, under the Hungarian Presidency the Visegrad Group went on successfully with issuing joint positions and taking concrete actions.

Cooperation in the Visegrad Group to manage the Ukrainian crisis is ongoing. As the issue is complex, various stakeholders have been actively supporting the efforts. The Prime Ministers met in Budapest on 29 January 2014, the Presidents of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments in Visegrád, 30-31 January 2014, and the Interior Ministers convened on 25 February 2014 in Budapest to discuss the situation in Ukraine and its possible effects on the Visegrad region. Furthermore, the Foreign Ministers jointly visited Kiev and Donetsk on 28 February 2014. They welcomed the declared readiness of the Ukrainian leadership to offer inclusive solutions to all regions and national and linguistic minorities and create the conditions for free and fair elections, and expressed their expectations in this regard. The support was general to the unhindered activities of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and its leading role in assisting Ukrainian authorities in de-escalating tensions.

The Ukrainian developments dominated the agenda of the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Nordic-Baltic countries on 6-7 March 2014 in the Estonian city of Narva, co-chaired by the two groups’ presidencies, Estonia and Hungary. The Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Germany also consulted in Budapest, on 13 March 2014. Several further V4 consultations on various levels were convened to better assist the economic and political stabilisation of Ukraine.

Moreover, the ability of the V4’s only institution, the International Visegrad Fund to assist Ukraine was considerably strengthened under the Hungarian Presidency, with the support of the Visegrad Group countries. The Fund’s relevant programmes were bolstered by doubling the scholarships for Ukrainian students, as well as by launching a civil servant mobility program involving Ukraine and aimed at improving professional know-how sharing and network building of public officials for the sake of promoting good governance.

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<sup>2</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

<sup>3</sup> Kyiv, 3 October 2013; Tirana, 25 November 2013; Skopje, 26 November 2013; Chisinau, 23-24 January 2014; Tokyo, 27-28 March 2014; Washington, D.C., 6-7 May 2014; Ankara, 26-27 May 2014; Tbilisi, 28-29 May 2014; Seoul, 12-13 June 2014; Budapest, with the political director from the Palestine Authority (6-7 May 2014) and Visegrád, with the political director from Israel (15 July 2014).

## *European Union Affairs*

Cooperation within the V4 on European Union issues has become more structured during the Hungarian Presidency, resulting in the V4 negotiating on questions on the Council agenda more united and strong than before. At the beginning of the V4 Hungarian Presidency, the partners agreed on a joint priority list of EU-issues which then proved to be fundamental for carrying on regular consultations on ministerial and expert levels, through personal meetings and video-conferences. Special attention was paid to presenting coordinated Visegrad views – and when needed, proposals for amendments – over the course of drafting European Council conclusions, thus increasing the „political firepower” of this region substantially. This practice is to be continued by the Slovak V4 Presidency.

Besides frequently convening the State Secretaries for EU Affairs, the regular consultations of the V4 European Directors was re-started during the Hungarian Presidency in order to monitor the changing EU-agenda and to coordinate appropriate V4 policy. The V4 European Directors also met their Benelux counterparts two times under the Hungarian Presidency to discuss a wide range of pressing European issues.

Three of the most important European issues the Visegrad Group dealt with extensively during the term of the Hungarian Presidency were the free movement of persons within the European Union, the fate of cohesion policy and the ongoing European enlargement and neighbourhood policies. The V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs declared in a joint statement on 29 November 2013 that the free movement of persons is a cornerstone of EU integration – an indispensable functional building block of a truly integrated Single Market, one of the inseparable fundamental freedoms: the free movement of goods, capital, services and workers; selective application of these core freedoms by Member States would lead to the erosion of the Single Market, an important source of growth for the entire Europe.

The V4 countries had been in close cooperation regarding the cohesion policy of the EU in the 2014–2020 period ever since the release of the European Commission’s proposal on the next Multiannual Financial Framework in June 2011. The Visegrad Group had played a crucial role in shaping the compromise during the Council debates under the Polish, Danish, Cypriot and Irish EU presidencies. During the first part of the Hungarian Presidency, the Visegrad Group focused on the preparation for the programming period of the new financial framework. Areas of cooperation were identified related to the multiannual programs, while the V4 countries shared their knowledge concerning the planning and the implementation of programmes. The close cooperation of the Visegrad Group resulted in strengthening the legal guarantees in the area of macroeconomic conditionality, necessary for better predictability in the application of the more rigorous rules established for the new period. Another important element during the negotiations was concerning the “ex ante conditionality”, as the V4 agreed that ex ante preparation of sectorial strategies might confuse planning and absorption.

V4 experts cooperated extensively in order to exchange experience on the absorption of the still available funds before the closure of the 2007-2013 period and on the transition to the 2014-2020 programme period. The preparation and planning of resources for the 2014-2020 period was a priority of political-level consultations, as well. Exchanging experiences of bilateral negotiations with the European Commission, and coordinating positions so that the individual negotiating strategies mutually support each other and the common Visegrad objectives, were important factors in reaching an outcome favourable for the Central European EU Member States. V4 expert meetings were often enlarged to a V4+ Croatia and Slovenia format, including our Southern partners in the common endeavour.

As 2014 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement round, Budapest hosted a special seminar on 28-30 April 2014 to deliberate and reflect on the achievements and experience of the European accession and the ten years that followed. The panel-discussions of both Visegrad policy-makers of 2004 and incumbent V4 Foreign Ministers attracted strong interest. Andrassy University of Budapest, the only university outside the German speaking area operating entirely in German, also organised a conference on 10-11 April 2014.



International Conference in Budapest  
Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the EU Enlargement of 2004

EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy remains to be important priorities for the Visegrad Group. The Hungarian Presidency was committed to supporting the EU's enlargement process at all possible fora, maintaining the well-functioning practice of enlargement related V4 dialogue — both in Brussels and in the capitals — in accordance with the Council's schedule. The Visegrad Group was also keen to assist the countries involved in the preparatory phase, with particular attention to the Western Balkans, in launching joint actions on both expert and political levels. The Visegrad Group also put an emphasis on regional cooperation among the countries aspiring for EU membership.

### *V4 and the Western Balkans*

Building on the model worked out by the previous Hungarian V4 Presidency and endorsed by the following presidencies, an extended summit between V4 and Western Balkan Foreign Ministers was held for the fifth time in autumn 2013. Austria, Turkey, Lithuania in her capacity of Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and EU Commissioner Füle also participated at the ministerial meeting in Gödöllő, 30 October 2013, focusing on the European integration of this region. The consultations allowed for effective dialogue as V4 countries argued for the necessity of fulfilling the EU accession criteria in the Western Balkans and partners from the Western Balkans drew attention to their societal and economic difficulties hampering the process.

With Croatia becoming the newest member of the EU in July 2013, a new opportunity emerged in outreach to the Western Balkan region. Figuratively speaking, the Western Balkan region took a step closer not only to the EU, but also to the Central European region. V4 countries have thus been able to continue supporting the Western Balkan region by taking the positive example of Croatia in advocating the continuation of the integration process within the EU. The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group welcomed the granting of EU



candidate status to Albania, the start of accession negotiations with Serbia and the continuing Belgrade-Pristina talks, as well as the opening of new negotiating chapters with Montenegro.

In January 2014 the V4 Ministries of Interior signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the V4 Good Government Forum to promote cooperation in the field of public administration development. Annual meetings of the Forum aim to support third countries, particularly countries of the Western Balkan and the Eastern Partnership region to promote the exchange of information and sharing best practices. The V4 parties agreed to examine the possibility of using EU-funded instruments, e.g. TAIEX for securing financial resources for conducting the meetings.

Twinning, a European Commission initiative financed through the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)<sup>4</sup> funds, promotes cooperation between the public administration of EU Member States and of the beneficiary countries. More specifically, in the IPA region including the Western Balkans, twinning aims to provide support for the transposition and implementation of the EU legislation. The Visegrad Group aimed to create a network among the V4 in order to make easier joint applications, through 'Member State Consortia', for the Twinning projects launched by any country in the Western Balkans on one hand, and the European Commission on the other hand. Such project activity would significantly strengthen cooperation among the countries of the V4 and the countries in the Western Balkans. Aiming at the focused and priority-based deployment of the IPA funds, the Hungarian Presidency hosted a meeting for Western Balkans and V4 experts on IPA with a special attention to IPAIL.

Several V4 consultations were held in the region on Political Director and expert levels. The V4 Political Directors visited Tirana 25 November 2013, Skopje 26 November 2013 and Podgorica 27-28 March 2014.

During the Hungarian Presidency, preparations continued for setting up the Western Balkan Fund based on the model of the International Visegrad Fund, as well as the establishment of an expert network on rule of law and fundamental rights initiated by the previous Polish Presidency. The Western Balkans Fund will support projects in culture, science and education, motivate cross-border civic cooperation and facilitate the exchange of experience among countries in the region. Cooperation on the rule of law could also contribute to improving the investment climate in the Western Balkans countries. As a result of the diplomatic efforts of the Visegrad countries, Albania, Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia expressed its intention and financial commitment to establish the Fund.

### *V4 and the Eastern Partnership*

The Hungarian Presidency was committed to systematically pursuing the strategic goals of the Eastern Partnership as an essential part of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. V4 countries are firm promoters of the Eastern Partnership policy, wishing to enhance V4 cooperation along the already established guidelines and to cover tasks and projects which support the development and implementation of the Eastern Partnership. Intensive coordination on political and expert levels with countries of the Eastern Partnership helped to pinpoint and manage specific problems hindering the improvement and deepening of relations. The V4 Political Directors visited Moldova (23-24 January 2014) and Georgia (28-29 May 2014). The Eastern Partnership coordinators of the V4 Foreign Services consulted regularly to initiate and prepare programmes and projects. The Hungarian Institute of International Affairs

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<sup>4</sup> IPAIL within the new Multiannual Financial Framework

organised a conference on Eastern Partnership in March 2014, and several other events dealt with the topic throughout the year, e.g. at embassies of V4 countries.

The Visegrad Group – Eastern Partnership informal foreign ministerial meeting was convened for the fifth time on 28-29 April 2014 in Budapest. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad and Eastern Partnership countries, as well as the representatives of the EU Presidency, the Commission, the European External Action Service and the Nordic-Baltic countries discussed the future of the Eastern Partnership in light of the new challenges and mid-term tasks to be dealt with halfway between the Vilnius and Riga Summits. All speakers confirmed the validity of the Eastern Partnership policy, and stressed the commitment to implement the goals set in the Vilnius Declaration. They noted a substantial change in the geopolitical context of the realisation of these goals, and agreed in the need to adapt to the changed environment and to react jointly and effectively to the new challenges ahead. V4 Ministers stressed that a perspective of European integration, close political association and economic integration remain the best stimuli for deep reforms. The Ministers encouraged partner countries to make full use of the “more for more” principle, and expressed support to additional EU funding in support of reform efforts.



V4 – Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting

The V4 Ministers expressed their readiness to share the Visegrad countries’ experience in economic and political transition through a better and enhanced use of International Visegrad Fund instruments, to provide more targeted assistance in capacity and institution building, joint projects serving good governance, judiciary and police reforms, strengthening civic society, transparency and freedom of media for all.

The International Visegrad Fund’s special Eastern Partnership Programme is continuing to pinpoint key fields for cooperation. The Hungarian Presidency, continuing efforts of its predecessors, aimed at gaining additional support for V4 Eastern Partnership Programme from third countries, securing financial contribution from Sweden and a renewed commitment from The Netherlands. New development projects were commenced under V4+Japan joint financing.

During the Hungarian V4 Presidency, various Hungarian Embassies in Western European capitals organised V4 seminars and conferences to highlight important Central European insights for government and non-governmental experts over the developments over our Eastern borders.

### *V4+ Consultations with Other Partners*

The Hungarian Presidency was also active in continuing V4 cooperation with countries in Europe and other continents, as well as with international organisations.

Croatia and Slovenia are natural partners for the Visegrad Group, representing a Southern connection for Central Europe. Besides the close cooperation among diplomats – the Hungarian Presidency was the first to invite Croatian and Slovenian officials for the meeting of National Visegrad Coordinators in February 2014 – meetings are held regularly among Ministers of Justice and Ministers of Agriculture, laying strong foundations for the cooperation among experts of these fields.

Other natural partners for the Visegrad Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe include countries also on EU's Eastern borderline: Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. The Hungarian Presidency was the first to convene a Foreign Ministerial Meeting with these partners (Budapest, 24 February 2014) and seek cooperation for developing energy- and transportation connectivity, managing migration issues and supporting partners in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership region.

Turning to the North, the Visegrad Cooperation is joining hands with the Nordic-Baltic-8 countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden. Hungary co-chaired the second V4+NB8 foreign ministerial meeting organised in Narva, Estonia on 6-7 March 2014. The Hungarian Presidency aimed for useful Visegrad–Nordic-Baltic cooperation also on the expert level: Budapest hosted the first meeting of Security Policy Director Generals on 21 January 2014, and the Hungarian Embassy in Stockholm organised an experts' seminar on fostering cooperation among regions of the EU's Baltic-Sea and Danube Region Macro-regional Strategies on 2 April 2014.



Foreign Ministers of V4, Nordic and Baltic Countries /Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland/

The Hungarian Presidency also hosted the first V4 Foreign Ministerial Meeting with Turkey 30 October 2013, where issues of energy-security, transportation and support to the Western Balkans were discussed.

At the first ever V4+Egypt Foreign Ministerial Meeting (at the Globsec Conference in May 2014), the parties discussed issues of fighting terrorism, the Human Rights and economic situation in Egypt, as well as the regional and international political environment. The V4

partners agreed to provide Egypt with experience on Central European transition. The cumulated experience of the Visegrad countries on transition, as well as on regional and cross-border cooperation is also sought for by various other partners ranging from Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, through the Union for the Mediterranean to the Republic of Korea.

One of the most important external partnerships of the V4, V4+Japan cooperation plays a special role among the V4+ formats, following a pre-arranged work-programme linked to the EU-Japan consultations' calendar. Under the Hungarian Presidency, the biannual meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad countries and Japan was held on the margins of the Asia-Europe Meeting in Delhi 11 November 2013, where partners agreed on joint development projects in the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership countries: developing energy infrastructure in Serbia, supporting small and medium size enterprises in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, developing the health sector in Moldova. A joint seminar of experts was also held prior to the Ministerial Meeting, titled „The Project on Establishment and Promotion of Mentoring Service for Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Western Balkans”. In the field of Research and Development, the parties began to draft a partnership agreement between the Japanese Science and Technology Institute and the International Visegrad Fund.

2014 also marks the V4+Japan Exchange Year, with various programmes to strengthen the bonds among citizens, cultural programmes and scientific seminars. In the first half of the Exchange Year under the Hungarian Presidency, various events were held including a Security Policy conference and a Student Forum, a Tourism seminar, a gala concert entitled ‘European Quartet, One Melody’, the concert of the Hungarian Philharmonic Orchestra were organised in Tokyo.



Logo of the Exchange Year /Design: Ms Szilvia Hunyadvári/

Following the example of Nordic countries, and the previous Czech initiative to establish a Visegrad House in the Republic of South-Africa, V4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary Generals on their regular meeting held in Budapest, 20 February 2014, examined the concept of the so-called diplomatic co-locations. The Hungarian Presidency focussed on a closer cooperation in Cape Town and on the possible establishment of another “Visegrad House” in Ho Chi Min City, Vietnam.

#### Creation of a V4 Parliamentary Dimension

Meetings among various V4 Parliamentary Committees had been convened regularly in the past. The Hungarian Presidency proposed to create the V4's parliamentary dimension, taking as example the long-established and well-structured parliamentary cooperation between the Nordic Countries. This new bond will well reflect the strengthening networks among the four societies, further enhancing their development.

Presidents of the four Parliaments' Foreign Affairs Committees at their meeting in Visegrád 30-31 January 2014 tabled an official proposal, which was finalised at the Meeting of V4 Speakers on 28 February 2014 in Budapest. According to the Speakers' agreement, prior to the annual meeting of the V4 Speakers of Parliaments, the Parliament of the incumbent V4 Presidency may call for a V4 Plenary Meeting, where the Speakers would be accompanied by a maximum of ten representatives of appropriate Parliamentary Committees covering the agenda items of the Speakers' Meeting.



Meeting of the Speakers /Photo: Parliament Press Office/

The Presidents also agreed to strengthen V4 cooperation in EU forums of national Parliaments. Moreover Parliaments of the Visegrad Group will actively support the Eastern Partnership. The Speakers also agreed on a joint declaration over Ukraine, echoing the earlier concerns of the Presidents of the Foreign Affairs Committees expressed in their Joint Statement in Visegrád, 31 January 2014. Furthermore, the Speakers signed a joint letter to the President of the Myanmar legislation, offering support in the review process of the country's constitution.

Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy of the Visegrad Group convened in Budapest in February 2014 to exchange their views on the possibilities offered by the EU cohesion policy for the period of 2014–2020, aiming to raise the dynamics of social and economic development of all EU member states, including less developed countries and regions. In addition, they discussed the impact of the development of big cities on the capacity of regions to attract resources, and analysed further opportunities for developing cross-border cooperation. The committee chairs issued a Joint Statement of their findings.

Committees on European Affairs of the four countries held two of their regular meetings during the Hungarian Presidency. On their meeting in Gdansk, 8-10 September 2013, Representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments with the participation of representatives of the Georgian European Integration Committee exchanged views on Eastern Partnership, the EU-US free trade area, the regional policy in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. At their next meeting in Bratislava, 25-28 April 2014, representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments discussed the 2014 European elections and the Union's institutional renewal, the situation in Ukraine, social entrepreneurship and social economy, the tools for growth support, as well as the fight against extremism and human rights protection.

## V4 Achievements and Results in Other Sectors

### *Regional Development and Tourism*

Traditionally, one of the key focuses of the Visegrad Group is regional development. Hungary continued on the path paved by the previous Polish Presidency. As negotiations concerning the European Union's 2014–2020 cohesion policy legislative package were closing, the emphasis shifted to programming, EU Member States conducting bilateral negotiations with the European Commission. The Visegrad Group focused on main concerns and issues of the period: on one hand, regular V4 consultations ensuring joint representation of common interests during the bilateral negotiations with the Commission on the 2014–2020 implementing acts, Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes. On the other hand, implementation experiences were discussed and the outcome of evaluations was shared within the Visegrad Group as the end of the 2007–2013 period approached.

V4 countries, Bulgaria and Romania prepared a Common Spatial Development Strategy which promotes more harmonised and efficient spatial development of this region, and is suitable to be the basis of a common platform to influence the relevant processes of the EU. The V4+2 Strategy, adopted by Ministers and State Secretaries responsible for Regional Development in Budapest 15-16 April 2014, provides more possibilities for taking advantage of the special characteristics of Central and Eastern Europe and for enhancing territorial cohesion through planning cooperation. The V4+2 delegations agreed that strengthening small and medium size enterprises and increasing employment are necessary for the development of the Central European region. It is of utmost importance to devote financial support and develop infrastructure to connecting regions and economic centres by the state borders. This cooperation reflects long term strategic goals so the issue remains a priority under the incoming Slovak V4 Presidency.

At the high level meeting of state tourism's leaders, held in Budapest in February 2014, participants discussed and approved two promotion campaigns of the Visegrad region, targeting third markets, prepared by the V4 tourism-marketing organisations and built on branding, common touristic products, E-marketing and social media communications. During the Hungarian Presidency, the Visegrad Group appeared as one of the main health and medical touristic destinations in the region, rich in natural thermal and healing waters. A wide range of services were presented during the SPA-CE 2013 Trade Show in Hungary, where the region's service providers had an opportunity to present and promote their services. Furthermore, a mobile phone tourist guide application with content in Visegrad languages and English was created as a useful tool benefiting those visiting the V4 capitals.



QR code of the mobile phone app (link: <http://pocketguideapp.com/en/v4?l=en>)

## *Agriculture and Environmental Protection*

During the Hungarian Presidency, the Visegrad Group Ministers for Agriculture met twice, joined by their partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia and discussed, among other topics, the EU Common Agricultural Policy reform, with special attention to the next programming period, the protection from genetically modified organisms and the fight against food waste. An Expert Meeting was also convened on the latter issue.

At their meeting in Budapest on 8 May 2014, V4 Ministers for Environment met with their partners from Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Discussing a number of topics and issuing a common declaration, they highlighted the importance of subsidiarity and sovereignty of countries with regard to the cultivation of genetically modified organisms, and consulted on the European Commission's proposal on reducing air pollution and climate policy issues. The Visegrad Group has been paying particular attention to the global climate agreement to be adopted in 2015, and its preparations at the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in Warsaw, in November 2013. Through regular consultations of V4 experts and two informal ministerial meetings in November 2013 and February 2014, the Hungarian Presidency was able to coordinate a united position of the Visegrad Group, represented at all EU Council meetings dealing with this issue.

On the occasion of Hungary's V4 Presidency, the Ministry of Rural Development of Hungary organised for the second time a Nature Conservation Workshop in Budapest, 27 May of 2014 with the participation of Czech, Polish and Slovak experts.

## *Health Sector and Social Affairs*

Modernisation, human resources for health and the implementation of the directive on cross-border healthcare were high on the agenda of the Hungarian Presidency Programme, discussed during the Meeting of Ministers of Health of V4, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia in September 2013, where delegations selected areas for further cooperation and possible joint projects. Chief Medical Officers of V4 countries also met during the Hungarian Presidency (Szilvásvárad, May 2014), exchanging their views and experiences on preventing contagious diseases, with special emphasis on the International Health Regulations.

All V4 countries are affected by demographic challenges. In order to improve the demographic situation, the issue of women's employment and the reconciliation of work and family life were among the priorities of the Hungarian EU presidency and were also on the agenda of the Czech V4 Presidency. Moreover, the period of the Hungarian Visegrad Presidency coincided with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations' Year of Families. Thus a thematic workshop of experts was organised in Budapest 27-28 February 2014, titled "Supporting families in policy-making". The consultation aimed at pinpointing areas of possible cooperation among the Visegrad partners on reinforcing the role of families, thus improving the demographic situation. The experts paid special attention to national programmes for senior and challenged citizens, too. Participants of the meeting called for further, more senior level consultations and the foundation of a Visegrad Alliance for Families.

V4 experts held a successful forum on national social inclusion strategies in Budapest, 11 December 2013, where participants from the governmental and non-governmental sector as well as international organisations exchanged views in an open debate. The speakers agreed that V4 countries may form an effective alliance in the attainment of the target of harmonisation and standardised accountability in this European policy process.

## *Home Affairs, Justice and Public Administration*

Consultation on Home Affairs on the EU agenda is regular, traditionally in a wider V4+ format, the Salzburg Forum (V4 countries, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia). During the Hungarian Presidency, partners were active in coordinating views on the 2015-2020 development of the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, appearing on the agenda of the June 2014 European Council.

V4 cooperation is also noteworthy in the area of disaster management. The Hungarian Presidency held the regular meeting of disaster management director generals in Budapest, 16-18 October 2013. Participants discussed the issues of critical infrastructure protection and flood protection. The Visegrad Group published a Joint Declaration on 31 March 2014 on the importance of solidarity and cooperation in the field of disaster management.

The traditional meeting of V4 Ministers of Justice was expanded to the Meeting of Central European Ministers of Justice in May 2011, when the participants decided that the traditional annual event would take place every half year and Croatia and Slovenia would be included in the cooperation as well. The Meeting of Central European Ministers of Justice under the Hungarian V4 Presidency was organised in Veszprém, 7 October 2013. Partners agreed to coordinate positions concerning European insolvency proceedings, the European prosecutor and the EU justice scoreboard.



Meeting of Central European Ministers of Justice /Photo: Burger Zsolt /

The Hungarian Presidency also focused on training judges and prosecutors, organising a course for officials from the Visegrad countries, but also one for experts in Montenegro, in the framework of Visegrad cooperation with the Western Balkan countries in the area of justice. Moreover, the 'V4 Balkan Public Administration Development Workshop' was organised on 16-18 September 2013 with the aim of sharing the V4 countries' best practices in the area of Human Relations, E-Government and Development of Regional Administration for experts from countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey.

In the area of Public Administration development, the Hungarian Presidency organised the 'Public Administration Leadership Forum' in Budapest, 31 January 2014. Referring back also to the successful workshop in September, the V4 participants signed a memorandum on establishing a Good Government Forum (see above in the Western Balkans section).

In the framework of the Civil Servants Mobility Program – a project financed by the Visegrad Fund and initiated under the Hungarian Presidency in reaction to urgent Ukrainian needs for the support for reforms – the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice organised a training for Ukrainian government officials entitled 'Democracy, Constitutionality, Good State'.



At the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Ministers responsible for culture (Fertőd, 11 June 2014) the participants agreed to coordinate positions in multilateral organisations such as UNESCO, and to support the increased focus of the EU2020 Strategy on culture. The V4 dialogue continued in the Working Group for Cultural Heritage among experts, and the Hungarian Presidency organised a Colloquium of Library-Information Employees from the V4 Countries on the various practical and legal aspects of digitalisation.

With the purpose of building trust and understanding among the new generations, and efficiently contributing to the support of the economic competitiveness of the European Union through promoting the technological and scientific progress in the Visegrad countries, the Hungarian Presidency emphasized the importance of the V4 cooperation in the fields of educational and scientific mobility of students, scholars and researchers. Besides promoting cooperation in the field of higher education, fostering relations between governmental and non-governmental organisations, corporations, educational institutions and schools providing vocational education and training has also been a top priority of the Visegrad Group.

V4 policy makers and experts on higher education convened to discuss the better promotion of International Visegrad Fund grants, scholarships and joint degree programmes. An expert meeting was held in Budapest in June 2014 on developing the International Visegrad Fund's Joint Degree pilot project.

### **Fostering cooperation among citizens; strengthening the V4 brand abroad**

Besides the several high level political meetings and the various consultations among experts during the Hungarian Presidency, strengthening people to people relations within the V4 is essential in Visegrad Cooperation. Despite our common Central European history and the remarkable cultural heritage, everyday people are still too little aware of the Visegrad bond. The Hungarian Presidency was ready to go the extra mile for building trust and increasing mutual understanding among people in the Visegrad Group through organising various cultural and sport events.

The Hungarian Presidency Programme put emphasis on presenting the rich diversity of cultures and languages in Central Europe. Maintaining on-going joint projects and paying attention to the finalisation and future implementation of the EU Creative Europe Programme (2014–2020), the Hungarian Presidency worked along the jointly accepted priorities on preservation and utilisation of cultural heritage.

The Presidency successfully strengthened the sense of togetherness through various dimensions of culture: gastronomy, fashion, films and architecture. Introducing popular Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak recipes in a V4 publication, organising the V4 Week of Jazz in the Budapest Music Centre, presenting works of young artists in the Art Market Budapest 2013, films at the BuSho – Budapest Short Film Festival, presenting creations of young fashion designers at the Central European Fashion Days as well as home designs from the V4 countries at the Association of Hungarian Architects all enabled common thinking and personal meetings to exchange ideas among people from the V4 region.

Sports also promote international understanding. The Hungarian Presidency continued with the initiative of the Polish Presidency, and organised the Visegrad Bicycle Race 13-18 May 2014, the home stretch being, naturally, by the hills of Visegrád. The four national bicycle associations were active in the organisation of this official race, open to both professional and amateur cyclists, supported by the International Visegrad Fund.



Visegrad 4 Bicycle Race /Photo: Zoltán Vanik/

Education and an increased outreach towards younger generations are also essential in fostering a stronger and more integrated Central Europe. The Hungarian Presidency put the spotlight on the successful scholarship and grants programmes of the International Visegrad Fund in the field of education, science and research. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted an International V4 Alumni Achievement Conference in November 2013. Former participants of International Visegrad Fund grants and scholarships were invited, with the aim of fostering closer cooperation in the region and encouraging the mobility of scholars and other individuals. The Conference was a unique forum for former project participants of the various grants for presenting the long term impact of their joint work with institutions and organisations from the other V4 countries.

With the hope of initiating a tradition, 70 Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak young people from 7 religious denominations convened for the Faith and Unity in Central Europe International Ecumenical Conference in autumn 2013. The Hungarian Presidency also organised a workshop in the spring of 2014 to foster the establishment of a youth network of inter-regional cooperation for Christian-Jewish dialogue without prejudice.

The Visegrad brand, besides it being promoted internally, is also worth introducing in third countries. Whether due to our region's past and present geopolitical situation, the V4 countries exemplary transition to democracy and market economy or the second-to-none culture and creativity of Central Europeans, interest towards our region is on the rise in the rest of Europe and overseas.

During the Hungarian Presidency, Visegrad partners cooperated in dozens of capitals to jointly promote Central Europe through exhibitions, concerts, seminars and conferences. Visegrad events on the fate of the Eastern Partnership (Bratislava, Madrid, Rome), or on the Energy Security situation of our region (in Berlin, Brussels, Kiev, Sofia, Stockholm, Washington, D.C.) attracted many local and international experts.

The various anniversaries during the term of the Hungarian Presidency also provided ample opportunity to present the Visegrad brand to our partners. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of democratic changes, as well as the 15<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our countries' accession to NATO and EU were all commemorated in a forward looking way, be it the travelling Visegrad Karma poster-exhibition, seminars or concerts.

## **Conclusions and Perspectives**

2013 and 2014 have been exciting years for Central Europe. Recovering from an economic crisis, arriving at important junctures in the European Union such as the debate on the next financial framework, and facing tragic geopolitical developments in our Eastern neighbourhood, countries of the Visegrad Group stood their ground firmly. It is precisely in difficult times and a complex security environment that the true strength of the political bond forged in Visegrád shows that we are more than fair-weather friends.

Despite economic and geopolitical challenges in our region, the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency have been achieved.

Emphasis was given to gas supply diversification and results have been achieved in the gas market integration of the V4 countries, which are a prerequisite for strengthening the V4's common energy security.

To address the economic necessity of establishing the North-South interconnections within the whole of Central Europe, major steps related to coordinated development of the regional North-South transport infrastructure were taken in terms of setting up a relevant High Level Working Group and the adoption of a related Roadmap.

In the field of Security and Defence Policy the preparations to make the so called V4 EU Battlegroup operational by the first half of 2016 were successfully continued. Cooperation in military planning, training, exercises and partnership among defence industries have been initiated as well. The next steps were laid down and adopted by the V4 Prime Ministers in the Budapest Declaration on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation.

Agreements have been achieved in the field of economic cooperation to facilitate joint access to third markets for the V4 small and medium size enterprises. A V4 expert group for economic analyses has been established for better coordination of common investment programs and joint participation on third market procurements. Research and Development cooperation has been launched in the framework of the Horizon 2020 program. The V4 Chambers of Commerce and Industry agreed to hold regular business fora and support the business partnerships in the region.

The Presidency was successful in implementing the traditional V4 Foreign Policy agenda. The Visegrad Group contributed to the support of the Western Balkan countries' Euro-Atlantic integration and did all its best to secure stability and the European orientation of the Eastern Partnership countries. To this end, important meetings took place on the political level (e.g. the V4 Foreign Ministers' meetings with their colleagues from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership respectively) as well as practical projects financed by the International Visegrad Fund and its co-financing partners were launched. The V4's profile as an inclusive grouping open to external partnerships was further raised under the Hungarian Presidency, underpinned by intensive cooperation in the V4+ format.

The V4 took quick and prompt actions in reaction to the Ukrainian crisis. Numerous joint diplomatic steps were taken and also the International Visegrad Fund's focus on Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership was strengthened. Events in our neighbourhood boosted the rapid reaction capability of the V4, leading to increased international acknowledgement of the V4.

During the Hungarian Presidency, V4 cooperation has been successfully extended into the sphere of national Parliaments by creating a structured cooperation referred to as parliamentary dimension.

Cooperation yielded significant results in numerous policy areas such as disaster management, employment policy, tourism, agriculture and environment protection. The Visegrad Group remains to be an efficient format for practical cooperation in an increasing numbers of policy fields, both on political and expert levels.

Finishing the Hungarian V4 Presidency at the end of June 2014 certainly does not mean Hungary taking the backseat in the Visegrad Cooperation. As there are still plenty of challenges and even more opportunities in Central Europe, Hungary keeps on working with the Visegrad partners to achieve our common goals under the following presidencies.

Naturally, Hungary will pay special attention to issues which were dealt with during her Visegrad Presidency and are likely to pose further tasks for the Group in the future. The Visegrad countries have agreed during the Hungarian Presidency to:

- Concentrate on opening further opportunities for small and medium size enterprises of the Visegrad countries to better cooperate with each other, becoming the true engines of growth and creativity. Continue V4 coordination for increasing mobility of vocational students and their instructors within Central-Europe.
- Develop the necessary interconnectors for North-South transit corridor of natural gas.
- Follow the Roadmap of harmonisation of the development of national transport infrastructure in order to effectively improve North-South connectivity in the Visegrad region.
- Work on the establishment of the joint V4 Battle Group, prepare the Action Plan of the V4 defence cooperation and elaborate the V4 Training and Exercise Strategy during the Slovak Presidency.
- Pursue further the V4 – Bulgarian – Romanian cooperation in the area of Regional Development.
- Continue with regular V4 consultations among the Prime Ministers prior to European Council meetings as well as V4+ meetings with partners from Berlin, Paris and Bern.



**APPENDIX**

**to the**

**Report of the Hungarian Presidency**

**of the Visegrad Group 2013–2014**



MINISTRY OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE  
OF HUNGARY

# Hungarian V4 Presidency 2013–14

## calendar of events

### HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS

DATE	LOCATION	EVENT
26 June 2013	Budapest	Official handing-over ceremony of the Visegrad Group Presidency with the participation of PL Foreign Minister Sikorski and HR Minister of Justice
22 July 2013	Brussels, BE	Meeting of V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the margins of FAC
25-26 August	Balatonfüred	Meeting of V4 Ministers of State in charge of EU Affairs
30-31 August	Balatonkenese	Meeting of V4 Chief Advisors on security policy
19 September	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Ministers of Agriculture
24 September	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Ministers of Economy*
26-27 September	Budapest	Meeting of V4+ Ministers of Health
30 September	Brussels, BE	Meeting of V4 Ministers of State in charge of EU Affairs preceding the GAC
3 October	Kiev, UA	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Ukraine
3-4 October	Veszprém	Meeting of the Central European Ministers of Justice (V4+ HR,SI Ministers of Justice)
10 October	Luxembourg	Meeting of V4 Ministers of Transport on the margins of the Transport Council
11 October	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Ministers for Climate Policy
14 October	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Prime Ministers
21 October	Luxembourg	Meeting of V4+SI+HR+AT Political Directors on the margins of FAC
30-31 October	Budapest	Meeting of V4+ Western Balkans Ministers of Foreign Affairs*
7 November	Budapest	Meeting on programming cohesion policy for 2014-2020
10-12 November	Delhi, India	Meeting of V4+ Japan Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the margin of 2013 ASEM
12 November	Budapest/ Gödöllő	Meeting of V4+ BENELUX European Directors
14 November	Brussels, BE	6th Meeting Strategic Group on International Energy Cooperation)
14-15 November	Berlin, DE	Meeting of V4 national coordinators, podium discussion and IVF expert meeting
18-19 October	Salzburg, AT	Meeting of the Heads of Intellectual Property Offices of the group "Visegrád countries and their Friends"
19 November	Brussels, BE	Meeting of Secretaries of State on the margins of GAC
19 November	Brussels	Meeting of V4 Defence Ministers on the margins of FAC
25 November	Tirana, AL	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Albania
26 November	Skopje, MC	Visit of V4 Political Directors to FYROM
27 November	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Secretaries of State for Transport
3 December	Brussels, BE	Breakfast of V4 Ministers for Research and Innovation in Competitiveness Council
9 December	Brussels, BE	Working breakfast of V4 Ministers of Employment Policy prior to the EPSCO Council
9 December	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Ministers for Research and Innovation
12 December	Brussels, BE	Meeting of V4 representatives held on the occasion of the Energy Council meeting (signing the V4 Gas Forum Memorandum of Understanding)

19 December	Brussels, BE	Meeting of V4 Prime Ministers on the margins of the European Council
23-24 January 2014	Chisinau, MD	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Moldova
29 January	Budapest	Extraordinary meeting of V4 Prime Ministers on the issues concerning Ukraine
30-31 January	Budapest	Meeting of Foreign Affairs Committees of the V4 National Assemblies
31 January	Budapest	Establishment of the V4 Good Government Forum
4-5 February	Budapest	6 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy of the V4 National Assemblies
4-5 February	Budapest	V4 high level meeting on Tourism
7 February	Budapest	Informal meeting of V4+RO+BG Climate Change Ministers
12 February	Budapest	Meeting of high level representatives of the V4 Ministries of Interior
20 February	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Secretaries of State of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs
20-21 Febr. 2014	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Chief Advisors on Security Policy
24 February	Budapest	Meeting of V4+ RO + BG + EL Ministers of Foreign Affairs
25 February	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Ministers of Interior
28 February	Kiev/ Donetsk UA	Joint visit of the V4 Foreign Ministers to Ukraine (PL was represented by a Deputy State Secretary)
27-28 February	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Speakers of National Assemblies
6-7 March	Narva, EE	2nd Meeting of V4+ NB8 Ministers of Foreign Affairs
12 Marc	Budapest	V4+OECD high level Conference on Corporate Governance (in cooperation with Ernst&Young)
13 March	Budapest	Meeting of V4+ DE Ministers of Foreign Affairs
13-14 March	Visegrád	Meeting of V4+CEDC Ministers of Defence
27-28 March	Budapest	Governmental High-Level Meeting of V4 Countries Regarding Higher Education
27-28 March	Tokyo, JP	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Japan
27-28 March	Podgorica, MN	Visit of V4 European Directors to Montenegro
10 April	Budapest	Meeting of the Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry
16 April	Budapest	Meeting of V4+RO+BG Ministers for Cohesion Policy
22-24 April	Washington	V4 PDs – US political dialogue
28-29 April	Budapest	Meeting of V4 + EaP Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Commissioner Füle; Conference on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the accession of Hungary to the EU
6-7 May	Budapest	V4 Political Directors + Palestine political dialogue
7-8 May	Visegrád	Meeting of V4+ RO+ BG+ HR Ministers of Environment
14-16 May	Bratislava, SK	GLOBSEC, meetings on the margins: V4 Prime Ministers, V4+Egypt Ministers of Foreign Affairs
17 May	Balatonlelle	Meeting of the V4 Chief Prosecutors
14-17 May	All V4 countries	2 <sup>nd</sup> V4 Bicycle Race
26-27 May	Ankara, TR	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Turkey
28-29 May	Tbilisi, GE	Visit of V4 Political Directors to Georgia
3-4 June	Brussels	Meeting of V4 defence ministers on the margins of the NATO defence ministers' meeting
10-11 June	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Senior Security Advisors
11-12 June	Balatonószöd	Meeting V4 Chiefs of Defence
11-12 June	Fertőd	24 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of V4 Cultural Ministers
12-13 June	Budapest	Meeting of V4+RO+BG+SI+HR Ministers of Agriculture

12-13 June	Seoul, RoK	Visit of V4 Political Directors to the Republic of Korea
16 June	Budapest	V4+DE Heads of State meeting
16-17 June	Stockholm, SE	Meeting of the V4+NB8 Foreign Affairs Committees' Chairpersons on regional implications of the crisis in Ukraine
17 June	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Ministers of Economy
24 June	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Prime Ministers - including a meeting with EC PRES Barroso and Commissioner Hahn
27 June	Budapest	Closing Ceremony and Concert of the Hungarian V4 Presidency
30 June	Bratislava, SK	Meeting of the Hungarian and Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs

\*Meeting back to back with CEI meeting

## EXPERT MEETINGS

DATE	LOCATION	EVENT
22 June 2013	Budapest	Central European Fashion Days
2-3 July	Budapest	V4 workshop on experiences of the 2007-2013 programming period
8-9 July	Tirana	Expert seminar on the fight against cybercrime
9 July	Washington	Roundtable discussion on LNG and energy security in the V4 countries - "Prospects of US LNG Exports: The Allies' Perspective"
17-19 July	Tiszafüred	Expert meeting on implementation of cohesion policy in V4+ SI, HR, RO, BG
22 July	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Transport Ministries' EU directors
26 July	Budapest	„20 years of Visegrad Cooperation” Presentation of the Strategic Research conducted in the framework of the „Think Visegrad” project (MKI)
1-4 August	Kecskemét	Meeting of the V4 + SE, AT Air Force commanders
5-6 September	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Tourism Working Group
8-10 September	Balatonöszöd	Meeting of V4+ BG, HR, RO Certifying authorities
10 September	Budapest	Meeting of the Steering Committee on the preparation of the V4 Alumni Achievement Conference
10 September	Podgorica, MN	Expert seminar on the implementation of EU law and the Court of Justice of the European Union
16 September	Brussels	Meeting of V4+SI+HR Patent Experts
16-17 September	Visegrád	Meeting of the V4 Defence Policy Directors
16-17 September	Brno, CZ	Joint simulation exercise „Better Cooperation for Better Visegrad Battle Group”
16-18 September	Budapest	Multi-country workshop for the experts of the Western Balkan countries - “V4 Balkan Public Administration Development”
19 September	Vilnius	V4 Meeting at the informal TTE
24-25 September	Podgorica, MN	Expert seminar on the criminal judicial cooperation
26-27 September	Budapest	Meeting of the National V4 Coordinators
26-27 September	Budapest	High level meeting of the V4+AT, SL, HR State Health Services
26-27 September	Budapest	Consultation of V4 Senior officials of UFM and Raising Awareness - Finding Common Ground: the V4 and the Maghreb Conference (organised by the HIIA)
11 October	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Heads of MFA Western Balkans Departments
2-3 October	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 experts on Combined Transport
3 October	Zakopane	Meeting of Visegrad Group Customs Director Generals
7 October	Budapest	Seminar on countering violent radicalisation of youth
16-18 October	Budapest	Meeting of Disaster Management Director Generals on flood



2013		prevention and critical infrastructure
22-23 October	Budapest	EUBG meeting
28 October	Budapest	V4 Energy Group Kick-off Meeting, Presentation of the V4 Gas Storage Modell
29 October	Budapest	Kick-off Meeting of the V4 Gas Forum
6 November	Budapest	V4+ Japan ODA expert seminar
6 November	Brussels	Seminar on Post-Shah Deniz Decision: What's the way forward for Central and South-East Europe?
13 November	Kiev, UA	Conference „Enhancing Regional Energy Cooperation: V4 + Ukraine and the Ukraine Energy Market Integration”
13-14 November	Podgorica, MN	Expert seminar on the fight against corruption
14-15 November	Berlin, DE	Meeting of National Visegrád Coordinators, podium discussion and IVF expert meeting
19 November	Kiev, UA	Development of Regional Energy Cooperation: Energy market integration of the V4 countries and Ukraine
20 November	Podgorica	Expert seminar on data protection
22 November	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Transport Ministries' EU directors
25-26 November	Budapest	Conference on digitalization in libraries
26-29 November	Bydgoszcz, PL	Meeting on V4 Training Coordination
28 November	Budapest	Expert seminar on the rule of social partners in apprenticeship schemes of the V4 countries
28-29 November	Budapest	Consultative meeting of the V4 countries' sport administration bodies and Steering Committee of the Olympic Hopes competition
3-4 December	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 National Armaments Directors
3-4 December	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Aviation Authorities
10 December	Budapest	Workshop on R&D infrastructures, JPI and ERA-NET
11 December	Budapest	Monitoring System of the National Social Inclusion Strategies in the Member States
12 December	Bratislava, SK	Meeting of the National V4 Coordinators
12 December	Budapest	“Visegrad Debate on Serbia – Kosovo” – a CEPI-project, funded by the International Visegrad Fund, hosted by the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs
12 December	Brussels, BE	Energy Council: V4 breakfast + signing of the Gas Forum ToR and Joint Statement, distribution of Joint Statement to Member States
9-10 January 2014	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Tourism Working Group (MT Zrt.)
21 January	Budapest	Meeting of V4+ NB8 Security Policy Directors
22 January	Visegrád	Consultation of V4+ cy Planners
4-5 February	Tokyo, JP	V4+Japan Security Seminar and Student Conference in the framework of the Exchange Year
4-6 February	Budapest	Meeting of V4 + CEDC training chiefs of unit
4-7 February 2014	Liptovsky Mikulás, SK	Meeting of V4 Military Medical Leaders (Surgeon Generals)
10-11 February	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Defence Policy Directors
12 February	Budapest	Senior officials' meeting of V4 Ministries of Interior
17 February	Budapest	V4 Energy Group + Gas Forum Meeting
25 February	Budapest	Meeting of the National V4 Coordinators +HR, SI contact persons
25-26 February	Budapest	“Making the change!” Meeting of the Heads of Public Employment Services with participation of the Centre of Public Employment Services of Southeast European Countries
27-28 February	Budapest	Supporting families in policy-making in the context of the twentieth anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family
4 March	Brussels, BE	Energy Council – V4 breakfast
4 March	Tokyo, JP	V4+Japan Gala Concert and the Opening of the Exchange Year

4-6 March	Budapest	2-day seminar on youth policy
19 March	Bratislava, SK	1. V4 Transport HLG
20 March	Budapest	V4 conference on competition rules
26-27 March	Warsaw, PL	V4 EUBG experts' meeting
31 March - 1 April	Budapest	Defence Planning Expert Seminar
2 April	Stockholm, SE	The Visegrad Group Presidency Seminar in Stockholm on the experiences of the implementation of the EU Baltic Sea and the Danube Region Strategies- Sharing best practices.
7 April	Warsaw, PL	Meeting of the National V4 Coordinators
9-10 April	Warsaw PL	Meeting of the V4 Deputy Defence Ministers
14-15 April	Budapest	Workshop on the safety risks of food supply (food loss/food waste)
23-24 April	Warsaw, PL	Meeting of the V4 Cultural Heritage experts' Working Group
28 April	Washington D.C., USA	Conference on American Energy Prowess in a Strategic Foreign Policy Perspective
7 May	Nicosia, CY	Forum on Visegrad Group - Eastern Mediterranean Energy Cooperation
12-13 May	Szilvásvárad	Meeting of the V4 Chief Medical Officers
12-15 May	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Prison Service Director Generals
15-16 May	Athén	Informal Energy Council - V4 breakfast
19-23 May	Budapest	Civil Servants Mobility Programme: Seminar for Ukrainian experts "Democracy, Constitutionality, Good State"
28 May	Budapest	V4 Transport Expert's meeting
28-30 May	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Border Policing Director Generals
29-30 May	Balatonfüred	Meeting of the V4 railway companies' chairpersons
30 May	Budapest	Meeting of V4 Consular Directors
1 June	Tokyo	V4+Japan Children's Day in Kodomonosiro in the framework of the Exchange Year
3 June	Berlin, DE	Consultations of the V4+DE Directors of Strategy and Planning
5-6 June	Tápiószele	Workshop of V4+AT, RO, BG, HR, RS, SI, UA Experts on Plant Genetics
10-11 June 2014	Fertőd	Expert level meeting prior to the 24 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of V4 Cultural Ministers on 11-12 June
12 June	Prague, CZ	Meeting of the National V4 Coordinators
12 June	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 Directors of the MFA International Organisations' Departments
13 June	Brussels, BE	Energy Council - V4 breakfast
24 June	Budapest	Meeting of the directors of the organisations participating at the CECSP (Central European Cyber Security Platform) 2014 exercise with the attendance of the V4 countries and Austria
27 June	Bratislava, SK	Meeting of the experts on WB and representatives of the IVF
30 June - 1 July	Budapest	Meeting of the V4 National Armaments Directors
15 June	Budapest	V4+ RO, BG, HR meeting on Natura 2000 sites
7-11 April 9-13 June 28 July - 1 August 1-5 September	Budapest (HU) Valbadon (HR) Kromeriz (CZ) Cracow (PL)	4 five-day seminars for Polish, Czech, Croatian and Hungarian prosecutors and judges (21 participants per event): English language training of judges and prosecutors on judicial cooperation of the EU in the field of criminal matters

## **Selected documents agreed and adopted during the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2013–2014**

### Table of contents in chronological order<sup>1</sup>

2013

1. Conclusions of the V4 European Affairs Committees, Gdańsk, 10 September 2013
2. Declaration of V4+ Ministers of Agriculture, 19 September 2013
3. Joint statement of V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Ukraine, 2 October 2013
4. Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government On Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation; Budapest, October 14, 2013
5. Joint Statement of V4 Prime Ministers on the International Visegrad Fund, Budapest, October 14, 2013
6. Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Western Balkans, Gödöllő, 31 October 2013
7. Joint Press Statement on the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group plus Japan, Delhi, 11 November 2013
8. Conclusions of the meeting of State Secretaries/Deputy Ministers responsible for Transport of the Visegrad Group Countries, Budapest, 27 November 2013
9. V4 Joint Statement on the Free Movement of Persons, 29 November 2013
10. Joint Statement on the Enhanced Collaboration of the Visegrad Countries within the European Research Area at the Meeting of Ministers of the Visegrad Group responsible for Research and Innovation, 9 December, 2013
11. Statement of Visegrad Foreign Ministers on the situation in Ukraine, 12 December 2013

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12. Joint statement of V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the situation in the Ukraine, 23 January 2014
13. Joint Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries on Ukraine; Budapest, 29 January, 2014
14. Joint statement of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments, Visegrad, 31 January 2014
15. Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the V4 Good Government Forum among the Members of the Visegrad Group, January 31, 2014
16. Joint Statement of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy of the Parliaments of the Visegrad Group Countries, Budapest, 5 February 2014

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<sup>1</sup> More documents are available on the [www.visegradgroup.eu](http://www.visegradgroup.eu) and the <http://v4hupres.gov.hu/statements> internet sites and other government sites.

17. Joint Statement of the informal meeting of ministers and representatives responsible for climate policy of the Visegrad Group Countries, Bulgaria, Romania, 7 February 2014
18. Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine; Budapest, 24 February, 2014
19. Statement of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group on the occasion of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrád Group and Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, Budapest, 24 February 2014
20. Joint V4 Interior Ministers' Statement on Ukraine; Budapest, 25 February, 2014
21. Joint Statement of the Speakers of V4 Parliaments, Budapest, 27–28 February 2014
22. Statement of the V4 Prime Ministers on Ukraine, 4 March, 2014
23. Joint V4 Foreign Ministers' Letter on Ukraine to Ashton and Füle, 5 March, 2014
24. Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 and the Nordic-Baltic countries, Narva, 7 March 2014
25. Long-term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening Their Defence Cooperation, Budapest, 14 March 2014
26. Letter of V4 and CEDC Defense Ministers to EU's HR/VP Catherine Ashton Budapest, 9 April 2014
27. Memorandum of Understanding between the V4 presidents of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Budapest, 10 April 2014
28. Conclusions of the Meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments, Bratislava, 28 April 2014
29. Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of V4+EaP Countries; Budapest, 29 April 2014
30. What Unites Us (joint article of V4 Foreign Ministers in the Visegrad countries and in the German Tagesspiegel), 5 May 2014
31. Joint Statement of the Visegrad Countries, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania on Environmental Policy, Budapest, 9 May 2014
32. Declaration of the Prosecutors General of the Visegrad Group, Balatonlelle, 17 May 2014
33. Memorandum of Understanding concerning the roadmap for determining the future development of the transport networks of the Visegrad Group Countries; Budapest, 24 June 2014
34. Budapest Declaration on the New Opening in V4 Defense Cooperation; Budapest, 24 June, 2014

## 1.

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **of the Meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments with the participation of representatives of the Georgian European Integration Committee** Gdańsk, 8-10 September 2013

Representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments:

#### **With regard to the Eastern Partnership**

- recall the main goal of the Eastern Partnership, which is to bring the Eastern European countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) closer to the European Union through political association, economic integration and increased mobility, thus reinforcing the stability and prosperity on the European continent. The next stage of the process should be the perspective of membership of these countries in the EU;
- note that the Eastern Partnership has proved to be an efficient tool helping the Eastern partners to reform their states in order to achieve deep and lasting democracy;
- emphasise the need to ensure adequate funding of the Eastern Partnership under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, taking into account the "more for more" principle, which will also be applied within the framework of the new European Neighbourhood Instrument;
- express their support for the ambitious plan of signing an association agreement with Ukraine, including an agreement on a deep and comprehensive free trade area, during the November summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius. They also emphasise their support for initialling analogous agreements with Armenia, Georgia and Moldova at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius. They express their support for intensifying negotiations on the association agreement with Azerbaijan;
- welcome with appreciation the progress of the visa liberalisation process and express their hope for a prompt introduction of a visa-free regime with Moldova and then, consistently, with other Partnership countries;
- emphasise the need for further development of the Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarus;
- encourage the European Commission and the European External Action Service to take ambitious actions for the achievement of the Eastern Partnership goals and to further develop the programmes related to people-to-people contacts and youth exchange. They particularly emphasise the need for opening the "Erasmus +" and "Creative Europe" programmes for participants from the Eastern Partnership states.

#### **With regard to the project of creating the EU-US free trade area**

- welcome with appreciation the initiative of preparing the **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership** (TTIP). Such agreement may contribute to increased trade between the EU Member States and the United States;
- expect that once the European Union and the United States find a way to unify technical and regulatory standards which restrict access to their respective markets, a process will start to adapt the production of other participants of the international trade system to the same standards;
- believe that signing an agreement in the context of the world crisis will provide a significant pro-growth stimulus and may contribute to improving the competitiveness of the transatlantic area and help create new jobs;
- encourage EU entrepreneurs to join the work of the European Commission related to preparing that agreement by participating in the consultations aimed at defining the priorities in such areas as: exchange of goods, services and investment, public procurement, regulations, protection of intellectual property rights etc.

### **With regard to the regional policy in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020**

Bearing in mind the consequences of the current economic and financial crisis as well as the political consensus that enabled the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020:

- believe that budget cuts should not be used as an excuse for limiting the EU's existing regional policy, which has ensured a significant stream of investment to Member States' regions and is an important tool for anti-crisis measures;
- underline the need for a better use of EU funds in order to achieve social, economic and territorial cohesion of European regions and achieve the objectives of intelligent, sustainable and socially inclusive development;
- indicate the need for greater support for the regional policy in less developed states and regions.

### **With regard to the 2014 elections to the European Parliament**

Bearing in mind the growing influence of the European Parliament on the EU legislation and thereby on the lives of its citizens and recognising the importance of the upcoming EP elections:

- express their support for all measures aimed at increasing citizens' involvement in the elections to the European Parliament and increasing voter turnout. Therefore they postulate that throughout the election campaign EU citizens should be informed, as broadly as possible, of the powers and role of EU institutions, in particular the European Parliament;
- underline a necessity to promote the European citizens' initiative as a tool of citizens' active participation in the EU decision making process and an important step towards European civil society.

## 2.

### **Declaration of V4+ Ministers of Agriculture**

**September 19, 2013**

Common Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia on the CAP reform and on the transitional measures for the year 2014

#### ***Having regard to the cap reform:***

- We welcome the balanced political agreement on the CAP reform under the Irish Presidency.
- We appreciate the good cooperation between the EU institutions during the negotiations. However, we ask the European Parliament to accept the Council proposals relating to the MFF negotiations as the council offer has been made as a package compromise and opening of the other issues would not be suitable as it would protract the final stage of negotiations.
- We wish success to the Lithuanian Presidency and underline our willingness to help the Presidency. We encourage the Presidency to clearly defend the Council mandate.
- We welcome the prolongation of the SAPs and the transitional national aid, which reflects the requests of a group of member states.
- We welcome the possibility of higher transfers from the II pillar in case of member states receiving direct payments below 90% of the EU average, the voluntary coupled payments (15%) and the 20% decoupled payments in case of the switch to the BPS.
- We underline that a larger flexibility to member states can help to reduce the existing differences in the sensitive sectors. Therefore we encourage the commission to take into account this request in the legislation process of the delegated and implementing acts.
- We underline the importance to involve member states in the legislation procedure of the implementing and delegated acts. We reiterate the importance of the non-paper of the commission on the 'consultation of national experts in the preparation of delegated acts (article 290 of the TFEU) in the field of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)'.  
'
- We also highlight the importance of simplification in the implementing and delegated acts.

#### ***Having regard to the transitional measures proposed for 2014***

- We support the Lithuanian Presidency to reach an early agreement on the transitional measures so that sufficient time is available for their implementation.
- We welcome the commission's proposal, especially the possibility to finance certain rural development measures in 2014 both from the current and also from the new budget. We would welcome broadening scope of the measures, which can be financed from the new budget, by inclusion of investments, support to young farmers, support to farmers participating in quality schemes, support for setting up of producer groups to those measures.
- We support that transitional measures should provide that all multiannual commitments, especially early retirement of farmers, undertaken to beneficiaries under rural development programmes for the period 2007-2013 or earlier should be eligible for an EAFRD contribution in the 2014-2020 programming period.
- We support an increase of the optional coupled support under article 68 of regulation 73/2009 in order to maintain production in sensitive sectors in Member States.
- We underline the importance of smooth implementation therefore we encourage the commission to provide the necessary coherence between the transitional measures and the delegated acts.
- We underline that the transition should not cause any disadvantage to the existing programmes.
- We declare our willingness to cooperate closely to promote agreement on the above mentioned issues.

### **3.**

#### **Joint statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**

2 October 2013

The Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia emphasize the importance of developing strong ties between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, which is essential for stability and prosperity on the European continent. The Ministers express their appreciation of the determination of those Eastern Partnership countries – Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – which, despite some internal challenges, are progressing in the process of implementing political, social and economic reforms. The pace of reforms determines the intensity of cooperation, therefore partners most engaged in reforms benefit more from their relationship with the EU, in line with the “more for more” principle. They welcome the European choice and aspirations of these countries.

As to Ukraine, the Visegrad countries note the serious progress made in the reform process since the December 2012 Foreign Affairs Council as well as in the process of absorbing European standards and getting closer to the EU. The Ministers welcome the fact that European integration is a common desire of the Ukrainian leadership, opposition and civil society. Visegrad countries share the belief that through the process of implementing the Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA) Ukraine will not only make a substantial step towards fulfilling her European aspirations but will also contribute to strengthening sustainable democracy and stepping up economic modernization.

Visegrad countries are strongly in favour of Ukraine’s swift transition to the second phase of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan between the EU and Ukraine, with the ultimate goal of abolishing the visa regime, as soon as Ukraine meets the respective criteria.

Visegrad countries are committed to work together with Ukraine, in order to exploit the full potential of the Eastern Partnership and to establish the necessary political conditions for signing the AA/DCFTA and to assist in its widest possible provisional application soon after. They welcome the approval of the Association Agreement by the Government of Ukraine. At the same time, at this final stage of the preparation of Vilnius Summit, the Ministers expect the Government of Ukraine to intensify efforts on remaining open issues, above all the adoption of the legislation reforming the functioning of the Prosecutor’s office, improving the electoral legislation and addressing the issue of selective justice.

With a view to the above, Visegrad countries are convinced that the EU and Ukraine should seize this historic opportunity. They unequivocally support the signing of the AA/DCFTA in Vilnius and its widest possible provisional application which would equally serve the interests of Ukraine and EU Member States. The Ministers believe that the implementation of the AA/DCFTA is not in conflict with and not directed against the interests of third countries.



#### 4.

### **Budapest Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government On Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation**

14 October 2013.

We, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, reconfirm our commitment and determination to strengthening security and defence cooperation among our countries in order to contribute to the improvement of the ability of NATO and the EU to respond to security challenges. Based on the efficient work done by the previous Visegrád Presidencies and the long-sustained efforts of the Heads of Government in this field, we declare our will to deepen and concretise our security and defence cooperation. We will continue to closely coordinate our positions regarding major security policy issues in the run-up to the upcoming debate of the December European Council on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, during the expected follow-up debates on EU strategic outlook and in preparation of the next year's NATO Summit.

We highly appreciate the dialogue between the V4 and partner countries also on defence related issues, which we commit to take forward.

We strongly believe that regional initiatives and projects offer an effective way to mitigate capability shortfalls efficiently and to avoid overlaps. Therefore, we will seek to further improve practical cooperation among our armed forces and defence industries.

This process is rooted in the achievements made so far by our countries' cooperation, and aims to increase synergy among the Visegrád countries.

The joint Visegrád EU Battlegroup to be on stand-by in the first half of 2016 is our most specific contribution to further enhance the EU's rapid reaction capacities. At the same time, the Visegrád EU Battlegroup is an asset that will not only contribute to the EU's role in the field of crisis management but will also serve as a driver of our capability development efforts and increased cooperation. It will provide ample opportunity to increase cooperation with regard to training, joint exercises and the development of capabilities of our defence forces which could be used either by the EU or NATO.

Furthermore, we, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád countries task our Defence Ministers to enhance our defence cooperation to:

- Draft a long-term vision for our defence cooperation strategy, that would also streamline our common capability development efforts
- Strengthen cooperation in the field of training and exercises of the armed forces in the V4 format. We envision that joint V4 military exercises are organised on an annual basis, harmonized with NATO, EU and national exercises, as they will provide an excellent tool to increase the interoperability of our armed forces
- Explore the possibility to create a framework for an enhanced defence planning cooperation on the V4 level in order to identify new promising areas of defence cooperation among our countries.

We, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád countries, task our defence ministers to report back to us at the end of the Hungarian presidency about the progress achieved in these areas.

## **5.**

### **Joint Statement of V4 Prime Ministers on Enhancing the Activities Covered by the International Visegrad Fund**

**October 14, 2013**

We, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries, at our meeting in Budapest on 14 October, exchanged views on the results and perspectives of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF).

We emphasized the importance of the activities supported by the IVF and confirmed that it has been playing an ever growing role in the facilitation and promotion of closer cooperation between citizens and institutions within our region, as well as between citizens and institutions of the V4 and other countries, especially of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans.

We discussed the ways to strengthen cooperation of strategic character to be supported by the IVF, and agreed on the need to give a substantial answer for growing interest towards the Fund's grant system.

In this spirit, acknowledging the versatility of the IVF, we have agreed to increase its current annual budget of 7 million euros to 8 million euros by an additional annual contribution of 250 000 euros per country, starting from 2014.

In order to comply with this expectation, we tasked the relevant national authorities to take the necessary measures.

Furthermore, to match the growing need of supporting the development of the Visegrad Cooperation and to guarantee the most effective spending of the IVF funds, we find it advisable to commission an in-depth review of the activities financed by the IVF up to now.

## **6.**

### **Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the Western Balkans**

Gödöllő, 31 October 2013

The Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4) together with the Western Balkan counterparts took place under the auspices of the Hungarian Presidency of the V4 on 31 October 2013 in Gödöllő, Hungary. The meeting was also attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania on behalf of the current Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the State Secretary of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the Deputy Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs of the United States as special guests of this year, as well as the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy.

The participants emphasised the significance of the annual meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 dedicated to the Western Balkans which has become a genuine consultative framework for the region in the course of the last five years.

The V4 countries demonstrated their strong and continuous support for maintaining the momentum of the enlargement process. The ministers underlined that the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU is a mutual interest of both the EU and the aspirant countries. The enlargement process has a stabilising effect and transformative power to the benefit of all partners. The participants shared the same view: the enlargement process needs to be credible and consistent and should remain based on the principles of conditionality and individual performance.

The participants exchanged views on the current situation in the Western Balkan region and welcomed the findings of the detailed and balanced Enlargement Package recently published by the European Commission which offers a coherent strategy for the EU enlargement process in the coming year, emphasizing, among others, the importance of economic governance and competitiveness.

The V4 member states welcomed the significant progress of Montenegro in the course of the accession negotiations. They expressed their support to the start of accession negotiations with Serbia not later than in January 2014, ideally soon after the adoption of a negotiation framework not containing new conditions, as well as to the negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo\*, while stressing the significance of the on-going dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and the implementation of the agreements reached. In this respect they have emphasized their continued support to the process and the work done by the EEAS and personally by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission Catherine Ashton. The V4 countries attached great importance to the widest possible participation in local elections in Kosovo on November 3rd and emphasized that creating the necessary environment is important in that regard. The participants expressed their hope and support for overcoming the obstacles hindering Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's progress in its integration process by emphasizing the need for a decision on the start of the accession negotiations. The V4 member states view positively the progress reached thus far by Albania and the recommendation of the European Commission to grant EU candidate status to the country in December. The V4 countries expressed their commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European future while voicing their concern over the lack of progress on its European path.

The Ministers took stock of the ongoing V4 activities directed at the Western Balkan region and explored the ways and means how the Visegrad Group can more intensively support these countries on their path towards the EU membership.

The V4 countries reaffirmed their readiness to share their experience of transition and European integration. Regional cooperation is a relevant instrument for fostering genuine dialogue, reconciliation, stability, prosperity while being an important EU membership pre-condition for the Western Balkans. For this reason, the V4 countries attach great importance to the transfer of their know-how on cooperating in regional frameworks.

The V4 countries endeavour to provide concrete project-based assistance to the Western Balkans. In the framework of the “Visegrad+” the International Visegrad Fund has already been increasing its activities towards the Western Balkan countries by financing the first projects submitted by non-governmental organisations from the region and will continue to do so aiming to promote the European integration and values. Strengthening the rule of law and democratic governance remains crucial for the Western Balkans on their way towards accession to the EU. To this end the V4 countries together with their Western Balkans partners continue to develop the V4–Western Balkans Expert Network on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights to promote reform process and provide technical assistance with particular focus on public administration reforms and national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights. In order to intensify the local cooperation and encourage the development of effective regional cooperation among the countries and other stakeholders in the Western Balkan region, the V4 encourages the Western Balkan countries to step up the preparations for setting up a regional fund based on the model of the International Visegrad Fund. The new fund would pursue grant-making activities to the benefit of the local civil society by supporting projects in culture, science and education, promoting cross-border cooperation and the capacities of civil society organisations.

The V4 countries underlined the importance of the continued engagement of NATO and the EU, towards the stability and security of the Western Balkan region. The V4 remain firmly committed to NATO’s “open door” policy and will thus continue to support the endeavours of all the countries of the Western Balkans striving for NATO-membership. Besides upholding their political support, the V4 countries continue to be ready to do so also by actively sharing their own experience of Euro-Atlantic integration.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

## 7.

### **Joint Press Statement**

#### **5th Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group plus Japan**

Delhi-NCR, India, 11 November 2013

On 11 November 2013 in Delhi-NCR, India, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Japan met for the fifth time in this format. The Ministers, reaffirming that the V4 plus Japan partnership is based on shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, reviewed the progress in their cooperation since the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Budapest in June 2011 and in the implementation of the Joint Statement adopted by the Prime Ministers on the occasion of V4 plus Japan summit meeting in Warsaw in June 2013. The meeting concentrated on the following topics:

#### **I. Cooperation in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Western Balkans**

The Ministers discussed the developments in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans and reaffirmed their commitment to support the evolution of these countries towards sustainable democracies and market economies. In this regard, Japan fully supported related initiatives of the International Visegrad Fund programs in countries of the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans.

#### **Official Development Assistance (ODA) cooperation**

The Ministers reaffirmed their willingness to cooperate in the field of Official Development Assistance. The V4 and Japan appreciated the successful V4 plus Japan ODA Seminar which took place on 6 November 2013 in Budapest, with a special focus on development cooperation in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. As a result of the Seminar, both sides decided that the V4 countries would dispatch experts to take part in specific development projects being implemented by Japan in the energy field of Serbia, in the SME capacity building of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro and in the health care field of Moldova. Both sides welcomed the involvement of V4 experts in first joint V4 plus Japan ODA projects in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.

#### **Events related to the Eastern Partnership**

The Ministers highlighted the role of the EU's Eastern Partnership in the transformation of the Eastern Partnership countries to sustainable democracy and a market economy. They reaffirmed the will to coordinate activities of the V4 and Japan in the areas of democracy, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, enabling the progress of reforms, and facilitating the establishment of a market economy in the countries concerned. Japan reiterated its support for the EU Eastern Partnership Policy. They expressed their hope that the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in Vilnius on 28 and 29 November will be successful.

The V4 and Japan reconfirmed the importance of the growing interest in the Eastern Partnership among citizens of both sides, especially among young people.

#### **II. Cooperation in the security areas**

#### **Interlinking Security in East Asia and Europe**

The Ministers reconfirmed the close linkage of security in East Asia and Europe, which was recognized by the leaders during the V4 plus Japan Summit Meeting, and expressed their willingness to enhance mutual understanding of their respective security concerns in the regions. Japan stressed its resolve to proactively contribute even more to peace and stability in the region and the world, based on the principle of international cooperation. The V4 welcomed Japan's commitment to regional and global security issues, crisis management and peacekeeping efforts and underlined its interest in exploring the scope for enhanced cooperation with Japan in the security field. Both sides reaffirmed the importance of adhering to the universally recognized principles of international law, including the

1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In this regard, they acknowledged the importance of maintaining effective export controls of arms and dual-use items and technologies.

### **North Korea**

The V4 and Japan reiterated their grave concern over North Korea's nuclear and missile development programs, including its uranium enrichment program. Both sides strongly urged North Korea to take concrete actions towards denuclearization as well as to fully comply with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement. Both sides also strongly urged North Korea to address without delay the human rights concerns.

### **Dialogue on security issues**

For the purpose of further deepening mutual understanding, the V4 and Japan reiterated the importance of putting more emphasis on discussions concerning security issues within the V4 plus Japan framework.

The Ministers also welcomed the V4 plus Japan Security Seminar to be held in 2014 in Tokyo.

Japan expressed its intention to dispatch governmental official to the well-established forum in Central Europe on global security "GLOBSEC BRATISLAVA" to be held in the spring 2014 in Bratislava to further deepen the understanding of the security situation of East Asia in Europe.

### **Cooperation in the UN**

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed the importance of the UN reform, with particular emphasis on the Security Council. Both sides reemphasized the necessity to improve its effectiveness, transparency and representativeness in order to reflect the reality of today's international community in view of 70 years anniversary of UN in 2015. In this respect, both sides reiterated their will to work together to achieve reform of the UN Security Council, including increasing the number of the permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, as it was confirmed on the V4 plus Japan Summit Meeting held in June 2013 in Warsaw.

### **III. Cooperation in the fields of economy, energy and climate change**

The Ministers expressed their intention to enhance economic relations under a common goal to develop result-oriented cooperation. They reconfirmed the importance of improving their investment environment and further strengthening overall economic relations, including promoting Japan-V4 trade relations based on scientific findings as appropriate.

The V4 and Japan expressed their willingness to enhance cooperation on energy security. Japan reaffirmed its duty to contribute to strengthening worldwide nuclear safety by sharing knowledge and lessons learned from the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Both sides consider energy efficiency important, pay special attention to the use of renewable energy sources and promote together the development of innovative technologies in the field of energy.

#### **Climate change**

The Ministers confirmed their resolve to work together towards a new, fair and effective international agreement to be established by 2015 applicable to all Parties of the UNFCCC. They expressed their support to the Polish COP19/CMP9 Presidency to lead the negotiations transparently and inclusively with full participation of all Parties, respecting legal procedures and acknowledging variety of interests and opinions represented by the Parties to the UNFCCC.

### **IV. Japan – EU relations**

The V4 and Japan confirmed the importance of the Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) as a comprehensive and forward-looking document, and expressed their desire that the agreement should appropriately reflect the EU-Japan relations as like-minded global partners sharing fundamental values and principles.

The Ministers reaffirmed that the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) / Free Trade Agreement (FTA), negotiated in parallel with the SPA, should substantially improve access to markets for Japanese and V4's companies in a balanced manner and thus strengthen economic relations between both sides.

The V4 and Japan committed themselves to working towards that goal and striving to the earliest possible conclusion of both EPA and SPA.

#### **V. Perspectives of Cooperation in the Field of Science, Technology and Innovation**

Being faced with common challenges the V4 and Japan recognized crucial role of international science, technology and innovation cooperation on the road toward knowledge based economies and societies. In this respect, both sides expressed their intention to support closer interaction of our scientific communities via bilateral links as well as within the V4+Japan schemes adding value to and reflecting well developed EU-Japan science and technology cooperation. The Ministers underlined the need to identify appropriate conditions for the execution of science and technology cooperation.

Both sides praised the results of the first V4+Japan science and technology workshop which was organized by the Slovak Academy of Science, International Visegrad Fund and Japan Science and Technology Agency in July 2013 in Slovakia, and strongly encouraged the follow-up seminars being held in the future in Japan and in V4 countries. In this context, both sides welcomed the Polish proposal to organize the science and technology workshop on advanced materials in Warsaw in September 2014.

#### **VI. Promoting people-to-people contacts**

The V4 welcomed the recent decision that the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020 will be hosted by Tokyo. Both sides expressed their willingness to strengthen their relations through sports exchange by taking opportunity of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020.

#### **V4 plus Japan Exchange Year 2014**

The Ministers expressed their praise and support for the forthcoming V4 plus Japan Exchange Year, an initiative that will receive significant impetus from the Goodwill Ambassadors recently announced by each country.

As relevant events of the Exchange Year, the V4 and Japan decided to hold the V4 plus Japan Joint Concert in March 2014 and Tourism Seminar in April 2014 in Tokyo. In addition, both sides welcomed the holding of the Japanese Study Conference scheduled in February 2014 in Budapest.

The Ministers presented the logo of the V4 plus Japan Exchange Year 2014.

#### **VII. Conclusion**

The Ministers reiterated their willingness to continue to meet in this format on a biennial basis using such occasions as ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting for the further strengthening of the V4 plus Japan relationship. Their next meeting should be held in 2015.



**Conclusions of the meeting of State Secretaries/Deputy Ministers responsible for Transport of the Visegrad Group Countries**

Budapest, 27 November 2013

High Level Representatives of the Ministries responsible for Transport of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic,

REAFFIRMING the importance of the cooperation of the Visegrad Group Countries in the field of Transport Policy,

DESIRING to further strengthen economic and social ties between the Visegrad Group Countries by providing more efficient transport connections in the Region,

BEARING IN MIND that regional interests need to be clarified and articulated in a timely manner so that community decisions on short, medium and long term policies can duly take them into account,

RECALLING the meeting of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries in Budapest, on 14 October, where the importance of the North-South transport connections of the Visegrad Group Countries was emphasised,

agreed to:

1. jointly evaluate the situation of transport connections between the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic in 2014,
2. identify those projects that can eliminate bottlenecks already in the period of 2014-2020,
3. take a determined common planning effort in order to identify those projects that can optimise transport links between the Visegrad Group Countries in a longer term, after 2020,
4. consider establishing a High Level Working Group, consisting of the representatives of the Ministries Responsible for Transport of the Visegrad Group Countries, in order to systematically oversee the activities described in Paragraphs 1-3,



### Joint Statement

**by the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad countries  
– Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia –  
on the Free Movements of Persons**

The EU has been built on the four inseparable fundamental freedoms, i.e. the free movement of goods, capital, services and workers. Free movement of persons is a cornerstone of EU integration – an indispensable functional building block of a truly integrated Single Market. The single market however is “single” not only in terms of geographic extension but also by virtue of its cohesion. It is characterised by a delicate balance between its ingredients. The free movement of persons is as essential as the rest of the “freedoms”.

Available data show that migrants from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK have been hugely beneficial for the British economy. They are younger and economically more active than the average British workforce (80% under the age of 44, 70% active), they also contribute to UK national revenues far in excess of the social benefits they use. They are also more likely to return home than those arriving from developing countries or conflict-ridden hotspots outside the EU.

The V4 countries recognise, however, that generous national welfare systems can and have been subject to abuse by some. However, such abuses must and can, as a priority, be tackled effectively under the existing EU legal framework.

The V4 countries have always regarded the United Kingdom as a champion of the Single Market and a friend of the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the EU. Selective application of these core freedoms by Member States would lead to the erosion of the Single Market, an important source of growth for the entire Europe. The V4 countries hope that any measure to be introduced in this context by the United Kingdom, or any other Member State, will be compatible with the legal requirements of the European Union.

The V4 countries remain committed to solve the pressing problems faced by societies everywhere in the EU, not just those subject to immigration: unemployment, abuse of the welfare state, tax avoidance and a decline in public order and public safety. However this can only be done commonly and on the basis of robust data and analysis.



Jan Kohout



János Martonyi



Radosław Sikorski



Miroslav Lajčák

## **10.**

### **Joint Statement on the Enhanced Collaboration of the Visegrád Countries within the ERA**

Budapest, 9 December 2013

We believe that together the Visegrád countries have a near perfect combination of size, resources, location, skills, and ambition to become a major hub for innovation within Europe and internationally. It is only by acting together that we can achieve the necessary scale of RDI to impact global markets consistently and significantly. This forum provides an excellent opportunity to build bridges to jointly overcome these gaps.

Addressing the issue of the regional dimension of research and innovation, the following intervention areas should be considered: the stimulating role of financing from the national budgets, the role of cohesion policy and smart specialisation, and the actions under Horizon 2020. Possible synergies resulting from their respective coordinated implementation shall help reducing these regional disparities.

It is our belief that the success of the process of spreading excellence and widening participation in ERA activities, and thus closing the research and innovation divide, will depend on enhanced strategic cooperation and collaboration between our countries. Therefore we believe that it is us, the “widening countries”, who have to increase synchronisation of our respective policies, incentivize collaboration of our organizations, and even perform joint actions to achieve these widening targets.

The V4 countries are facing several common challenges in the field of research and innovation – but then again, we have several common strengths and opportunities as well. Therefore we strongly believe that our countries can play a pioneer role in the widening process. The main instrument to implement this is better transnational coordination of our policies, and even dedicating our resources to joint transnational activities.

The policy areas where these common actions should be established or strengthened in the near future, are the following:

- The V4 countries are vitally interested in joint identification of the grand societal challenges which are common to them, and in assessment of the available research potential at transnational level to tackle them.
- The ERA reforms must be rooted in the governance cycle of the European semester in order to set national research policies in the broader economic context, therefore the V4 countries aspire to mutually inform each other on their national ERA reform measures annually.
- The V4 countries recognize that transnational joint programming initiatives contribute to thorough ERA integration of policies and of activities of research performing organizations, therefore agree on promoting and aligning their participation in these initiatives.
- Significant research infrastructures provide the most efficient basis for stairway to excellence, and present the most apparent area of possible synergies between H2020 and cohesion policy measures, therefore it is important to harmonize our existing and future research infrastructure roadmaps. Moreover, necessary steps should be taken to encourage the collaboration between V4 countries' institutions during the operational phase of these infrastructure hosted by any of our countries.
- Smart specialization is another tool where transnational cooperation enables regions and states to make use of the opportunities arising from the complementarities and combined strengths of our innovation systems. The V4 countries agree on exchange of views and information resulting from respective S3 processes.
- As all V4 countries experience similar difficulties and opportunities arising from the relative development of their capital regions, finding and applying the relevant policies should be ground for mutual learning. It is of utmost importance for our beneficial integration to the ERA to secure international visibility and significance of the research potential of our capital cities.

The Ministers of the V4 countries responsible for research and innovation express their commitment to engage in cooperation in the above mentioned areas. The Ministers decide to enhance strategic harmonisation of their efforts and to form an expert process to analyse the situation, investigate good practices, reveal concrete cooperation opportunities, and identify areas for further action.

The provisions laid down in the Joint Statement will continue to be the subject of annual evaluation done by the Ministers during their meetings in the framework of the Visegrád Group Presidency.

Signed in four identical copies in English language on 9 December 2013.

Zoltán Cséfalvay

*Minister of State for National Economy of Hungary*

Dusan Caplovic

*Minister of Education Science Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic*

Štys Dalibor

*Minister of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic*

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska

*Minister for Science and Higher Education of Poland*

## **11.**

### **Statement of Visegrad Foreign Ministers on the situation in Ukraine**

12 December 2013

The countries of the Visegrad Group reconfirm their strong interest in the political stability and economic prosperity of Ukraine and follow with great concern the events witnessed in the streets of Ukrainian cities since the time of the Vilnius Summit. The Foreign Ministers highlight their deep belief that the right of the people to demonstrate and express their opinion peacefully is one of the basic principles of the OSCE and the Eastern Partnership, which should be respected.

We strongly reiterate that the use of force, particularly by a government on peaceful protesters, is unacceptable and we call on all parties to refrain from violence. We also call on the Ukrainian authorities to launch a prompt investigation against those responsible for brutality against peaceful demonstrators and demand that the wrongdoers are held accountable. The ministers also urge the Ukrainian authorities to release all those who have been arrested without any evidence of violating the law.

The Visegrad countries believe that it is in the interest of both the Ukrainian government and the opposition to preserve stability and to work for the fastest possible peaceful resolution of the current crisis. The ministers urge the political leaders to seek a solution through dialogue, involving the representatives of the government, civil society and the opposition. They call for European Union mediation between the parties.

The Visegrad countries lend full support to HR/VP Ashton's endeavour in Kiev to help Ukraine find a constructive way out of the current crisis and to confirm the importance of the intensive EU - Ukrainian dialogue.

The Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad countries confirm their conviction that every country has the right to make a choice on the country's engagement it seeks with the European Union, free from outside pressure. In adopting such a decision, the political leadership has a responsibility to take into consideration the opinion of the people.

The Visegrad countries reconfirm their position voiced at the Vilnius Summit that the door remains open for Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union as soon as our Ukrainian partners will be able and ready to do so. The Visegrad countries are committed to continue providing assistance to Ukraine in strengthening its relations with the European Union, reform course and its modernisation.

## **12.**

### **Joint statement of V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the situation in the Ukraine**

23 January 2014

The Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia were shocked by the news that clashes between protesters and riot police resulted in casualties in Kyiv. We strongly condemn the killing of demonstrators which cannot be justified by any reason.

Ukraine has been witnessing a permanent and deepening internal political crisis for the past two months. As neighbours of Ukraine, V4 countries voice their strong concern with the fast escalation of the conflict and express their deepest condolences to the relatives of the victims.

Violence never contributed to resolving political crises and it can only aggravate the already complicated and dangerous situation. Therefore, the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group resolutely call on all parties to stop the escalation of the crisis and refrain from further violence as well as to enter into meaningful and credible dialogue. This is the only way to find a solution acceptable for the whole Ukrainian nation.

The Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group underline that the fundamental rights of Ukrainian citizens – including freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media – must be fully respected and protected.

### **13.**

#### **Joint Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries on Ukraine**

29 January 2014

The Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia express deep concern about the dramatic development of events in Ukraine. We strongly condemn the cycle of violence which has already resulted in several fatalities. This cannot be justified by any reason.

The Visegrad Group countries, as neighbours of Ukraine, are convinced that the use of force cannot contribute to the resolution of political conflicts. A further escalation of the crisis endangers the future of Ukraine and threatens with a complete destabilization of the country. In this regard, we are also concerned about the role played by extremist groups in the events.

Therefore, we, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries are convinced that all responsible Ukrainian stakeholders—including the authorities, the opposition and representatives of civil society—should be guided by their historical responsibility to preserve a stable, democratic and unified Ukraine. We call on all sides to stop immediately the spiral of violence. We call upon the authorities to respect the right of Ukrainians to peaceful assembly and to the freedom of expression. The cancellation of the laws passed on 16 January is a promising first step towards a possible compromise, which can contribute to finding a way out of this crisis.

We believe in the paramount importance of developing civil society, the mobility of students, independent media, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. In this regard, introducing a visa-free regime with Ukraine as soon as possible has particular importance. We are ready to further mobilize the International Visegrad Fund to finance projects supporting development of civil society in Ukraine, facilitate people-to-people contacts and offer scholarships for Ukrainian students in V4 countries. We also call for the increase of the Erasmus+ Programme budget in order to expand the opportunity for Ukrainians to study in the EU from their current level of only a few dozen students. Only a genuine and meaningful national dialogue can offer a way out of the crisis and pave the way for the rebuilding of trust and lead towards a stable, democratic and prosperous Ukraine.

**14.**

**Joint statement of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments  
31 January 2014**

The representatives of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Parliaments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia had an extensive discussion on the situation in Ukraine on 30-31 January 2014 in Visegrád, Hungary, and issue the following statement.

Reiterating the declaration issued by the extraordinary meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group, we express deep concern about the dramatic development of events in Ukraine. We strongly condemn the violence used by government forces, which cannot be justified by any reason. As neighbours of Ukraine, we are convinced that the use of force cannot contribute to the resolution of political conflicts. A further escalation endangers the future of Ukraine and threatens to completely destabilize the country. We are also concerned about the role played by extremist groups on both sides.

We are convinced that the authorities, the opposition and representatives of civil society should all be guided by their historical responsibility to preserve a stable, democratic and unified Ukraine. We call upon the authorities to respect the right of Ukrainians to peaceful assembly and to the freedom of expression. The cancellation of the laws passed on 16 January is a promising first step towards a possible compromise. Eventually, only a genuine and meaningful national dialogue can offer a way out of the crisis and pave the way for the rebuilding of trust and lead towards a stable, democratic and prosperous Ukraine.

We emphasize the significant role of Ukraine in the community of European nations. We also support the hopes of the majority of Ukrainians for the country's European perspective.

We believe in the paramount importance of civil society and independent media. V4 countries are ready to further mobilize the International Visegrad Fund to finance projects supporting civil society in Ukraine.

Visegrád, 31 January 2014

**Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the V4 Good Government Forum  
among the Members of the Visegrad Group**

The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice of Hungary, the Ministry of Administration and Digitization of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as “the Participants”),

- having acknowledged the importance of implementing “good government”,
- in order to promote the cooperation among the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (hereinafter together referred to as “the Members of the Visegrad Group”) in the field of public administration development,
- have decided, on the basis of common understanding, to sign the present Memorandum of Understanding:

I. The Participants are prepared to establish the V4 Good Government Forum aiming to support Target Countries, i.e. Western Balkan countries, Eastern Partnership countries and other third countries in the field of public administration development.

II. Within the V4 Good Government Forum the Participants wish to promote the exchange of information and opinions among the Members of the Visegrad Group and intend to invite Target Countries to share information, best practices and experience with them.

III. The Participants endeavour to encourage and facilitate, as appropriate, the organization of one meeting of the V4 Good Government Forum each year by the country holding the rotating presidency of the Visegrad Group. The meetings are conducted with the participation of the Members of the Visegrad Group and optional group of Target Countries to be defined by the organizer country. The Participants intend to examine the possibility of using EU-funded instruments, e.g. TAIEX for securing the financial resources for the purpose of conducting the meetings.

IV. The Participants desire to cooperate under the present Memorandum of Understanding in close coordination, based on the principles of equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit.

V. The cooperation under the present Memorandum of Understanding will commence upon the day of its signature.

The present Memorandum of Understanding was done in Budapest on 31 January of 2014 in English in four original copies.



## **16.**



**HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**



### **6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy of the Parliaments of the Visegrád Group Countries**

*Budapest, 4-5 February 2014*

#### **JOINT STATEMENT**

The participants of the meeting exchanged their views on the possibilities offered by the EU cohesion policy for the period of 2014 - 2020, aiming to raise the dynamics of social and economic development efficiency of all EU member States, including less developed countries and regions. In addition, they discussed the impact of the development of big cities on the capacity of regions to attract resources and analysed the further opportunities for developing cross-border cooperation.

**Regarding raising the efficiency of convergence for less developed regions, the participants concluded the following:**

- In the Visegrád countries similar territorial transformations have taken place in many respects, and though the extent of regional inequalities is different in these countries, the transformations have resulted in similar regional structures and area types.
- On the whole, it can be concluded with regard to the effects of the developments of the EU programming period 2007 - 2013 that territorial cohesion was improved thanks to the contribution of EU funds. Nevertheless, the efficiency and, in particular, the effectiveness of the use of resources needs to be improved in each V4 country.
- Therefore, in order to implement the cohesion policy more effectively, in the next programming period greater emphasis must be put on achieving the best possible use of resources, on the effective use of EU funds and on ensuring sustainability, both economically and in terms of environmental protection.
- It is a priority task to finalize the ongoing 2014 - 2020 programming successfully and to develop the Operational Programmes effectively following the submission of Partnership Agreements.
- Overall target is to ensure efficient institutional system to promote economic growth and job creation.
- Due to macroeconomic conditionalities and the stricter sanctions applied in the cohesion policy, proper implementation and, as a means of prevention, the efficient flow of information between the member states will be even more important in the future.
- The integrated and territorially-based approach must be used at all levels of governance for the purpose of solving economic, social and environmental problems effectively. During the implementation of this, local characteristics, challenges and results need to be taken into consideration and, at the same time, the intensification of cooperation and coordination among all levels of governance needs to be encouraged.
- Effective means of realising some of the objectives could be the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).
- The participants appreciate the fact that during the negotiations concerning the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the cohesion policy, an 85% EU co-financing rate could have been

maintained for less developed regions, with the V4 cooperation playing an important role in achieving that.

- The participants welcome the development of a *Common Spatial Development Strategy of the V4+2 Countries* to be drawn up by the V4 countries together with Romania and Bulgaria, in line with the European Union document titled *Territorial Agenda 2020*, which was adopted during the Hungarian EU presidency. The coordinated and joint exploitation of the special features of the East-Central European area, as well as the effective representation of the interests of the area in European processes may become possible as a result of the territorial planning cooperation.

**Regarding the development of big cities, the delegations agreed on the following:**

- In accordance with the document entitled *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020*, adopted by EU Ministers, and recognising the effects of cities on territorial cohesion, the development of a polycentric network of cities, integrated approaches, the improvement of relations between urban and rural areas and the development of functional urban areas should be supported.

- The poles of development and the zones of metropolitan growth include the most developed regions and metropolitan areas of the V4 countries. The majority of the economic and innovation potential of the V4 countries is concentrated in these areas.

- The importance of regional centres and regional capital cities is increasing, since they are the centres of development of their respective areas and are also instrumental in the dissemination of innovative economic and technological results. The attraction of cities and the exploitation of their development potential can be increased by creating place-based economic profiles (smart specialisation).

- The development of urban areas is also of high priority in the development documents of the V4 countries with respect to the period between 2014 and 2020. It is important to draw up these documents as soon as possible and to implement the principle of sustainability in them.

**Regarding territorial cooperation, those present emphasized the following:**

- The participants welcome the favourable processes that started in the border areas after the abolition of frontiers and the strengthening of an increasing number of cities in previously underdeveloped areas, which carries significant development potential.

- The territorial integration achieved through cross-border cooperation may reduce economic, social and ecological division and can increase employment and the mobility of workers.

- In addition to the projects successfully implemented until now, it is recommended to strengthen the cooperation in the following fields in the period of 2014 - 2020: improvement of the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises; the promotion of resource efficiency; sustainable transport, employment and the mobility of workers; and institutional cooperation.

- The participants welcome the increasing significance of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programmes, which as objective 2 of the cohesion policy in the period of 2014 - 2020, provide an opportunity for Member States to develop and participate in cross-border, transnational and interregional programmes that serve exchange of experience, transfer of knowledge and creating common solutions contributing to the competitiveness and growth of the V4 regions.

- The participants underline that the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) can play an important role in cross-border cooperation in the future, as a mean for strengthening cohesion through increasing legal certainty and stability.

- By coordinating the tackling of regional development challenges at the V4+2 level, the *Common Spatial Development Strategy of the V4+2 Countries* to be accepted this spring will contribute to macro-regional cohesion as well as the regionally more balanced development of the countries participating in the cooperation, thereby also promoting the territorial cohesion of the European Union.

- Implementation of the Strategy encourages the territorial focus of sectorial policies that have an influence on the development of areas and it can be an important factor in increasing global competitiveness, which means that it supports the achievement of the objectives identified in the

document titled *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020*, in accordance with the common challenges and opportunities of the V4+2 countries.

- For the purpose of supporting the achievement of the above objectives, the participants urge the strengthening of personal relations and consultations among Members of Parliaments representing the border regions.

**As regards the future cooperation of the committees on public administration and regional development of the V4 member countries**, the participants agreed that the regularity of the meetings of specialised committees should be maintained, experiences should be exchanged and opportunities for the further development of the cooperation should be continuously discussed.

Budapest, 5 February 2014

Signatories:

***Ivo Bárek***

Chair of the Committee on Public Administration,  
Regional Development and the Environment  
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic

***Dr. Láng Zsolt***

Chair of the Committee on Local Government and  
Regional Development  
Hungarian National Assembly

***Tomasz Makowski***

Deputy-Chair of the Committee on Local  
Government and Regional Policy  
Sejm of the Republic of Poland

***Janusz Sepioł***

Chair of the Local Government and State  
Administration Committee  
Senate of the Republic of Poland

***Tibor Glenda***

Vice-Chairman of the Committee on  
Public Administration and Regional Development  
National Council of the Slovak Republic

## **17.**

### **JOINT STATEMENT<sup>2</sup>**

#### **of the informal meeting of ministers and representatives responsible for climate policy of the Visegrad Group Countries, Bulgaria and Romania**

**7 February 2014, Budapest, Hungary**

Representatives of Environment Ministries of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia

- reaffirming the importance of the cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries together with other countries of the region in the field of climate policy;
- bearing in mind the previous meetings of Visegrad Group ministers responsible for climate policy; and
- recognizing the importance of the internal and international climate and energy policy agenda in shaping the EU's 2030 climate and energy policy framework

have agreed as follows:

The 19th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 9th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, which took place 11-22 November 2013 in Warsaw, laid solid foundations for a new, global climate change agreement to be adopted in Paris in 2015. Although negotiations were challenging, the Polish COP Presidency has succeeded in achieving some key political goals. Most significantly, the Polish COP Presidency has commanded for conducting the process in a transparent and inclusive manner which contributed to rebuilding trust amongst Parties.

First and foremost, Representatives have welcomed the fact that the Warsaw COP has maintained the focus on global mitigation action and set out steps towards Lima and Paris. They strongly believe that the new global climate change agreement can only be efficient and balanced if all Parties make adequate commitments to reduce their emissions, on the basis of equity, and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, bearing in mind that the responsibilities and capabilities evolve over time. In accordance, they are of the opinion that the EU should continue to further encourage others to share the burdens and to raise their ambition in view of meeting the goal of keeping global temperature increase below 2°C, because no unilateral effort could resolve a global problem such as climate change.

In terms of mitigation objectives, the Warsaw COP delivered a realistic outcome. Paragraphs 2b and 2c of the Warsaw ADP decision are balanced enough to keep all Parties at the table, as they do not prejudge the legal nature of the new agreement and provide an achievable timetable for Parties to have enough time to assess their circumstances and needs, and put forward contributions in due time before COP21 in Paris with the information identified in 2014 in Lima.

The Warsaw COP has also achieved significant results, especially with the establishment of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, The Warsaw Framework for REDD+ and securing resources for the Adaptation Fund.

However, it has also shown that a lot of work needs to be done in these areas if we want to bring developing countries on board by the Paris COP.

With regards to the Commission's proposal on the 2030 climate and energy policy framework, Representatives have agreed that:

The proposed 2030 climate and energy policy framework is an appreciated step forward to low carbon economy, taking into account the three key elements: sustainability, competitiveness and security of supply in a balanced way. The upcoming political debate in Europe should be based on further national impact assessments. The set of proposed indicators is a step in the right direction, but collective effort for the non-ETS sector must be allocated among the individual Member States in a fair, equitable and

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<sup>2</sup> This Joint Statement represents only preliminary views of the Visegrad Group Countries, Bulgaria and Romania on "A policy framework for climate and energy in period from 2020 to 2030".

transparent manner on the basis of robust data, reliable calculations and fair burden sharing, corresponding Member States capacities.

Representatives agreed that the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target should be set at a realistic level and in the light of the progress in relevant international negotiations as well as economic circumstances, while achieving it in a technology-neutral and cost effective way. Besides that it should respond to the challenges of industrial competitiveness as well as relevant state-aid rules. In this context, the Commission's intention that the emission reduction target should, as a priority, be realised by domestic EU action is supported. In order to reach this target cost effectively, intra-EU flexibility mechanisms – including innovative financing schemes – should be introduced, especially in the non-ETS sector, as an integral part of the climate and energy policy framework.

Representatives agreed that there is no need for any legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency targets in order to ensure cost-efficiency and avoid competition of different policy measures (for instance EU ETS and RES supporting schemes). In line with the Commission's findings they expressed its concern that the effort could put disproportionate burden on the lower income Member States, therefore it is urgent to find a solution to this problem.

The new climate and energy policy framework should fully respect the division of competences between the Commission and the Member States in the EU's energy policy. Especially, Member States' choice of their energy mix should not be compromised or prejudiced through new governance models. The Representatives voiced their concerns about the proposed governance mechanism which might lead to new powers for the Commission to oversee national energy policies in general. Lisbon Treaty provisions about division of competencies between the Commission and the Member State must be maintained.

Representatives noted that it is stated in the Commission's Communication that the EU ETS shall remain the core element to fulfill the European emission reduction commitments until 2030, therefore the efficient operation of the system should be ensured, including proper carbon-leakage rules to be applied. As regards the Market Stability Reserve proposal recently published, before further deliberations, additional assessments and more clarifications are needed about its effects on national economies and on the EU economy as well.

Representatives welcomed the intention to have first political discussion on this issue on the 2014 March European Council. Quantitative policy targets should only be defined after a thorough analysis is made and relevant Council formations have reflected on the subject based on a broader policy debate. The discussion of the framework has to be conducted in the context of the international climate change negotiations and its agenda. A final decision on the climate and energy policy framework should be taken by the European Council.

Done in Budapest, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2014.

For Bulgaria

For the Czech Republic

For Hungary

For Poland

For Romania

For Slovakia

## **18.**

### **Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine**

24February 2014

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad countries—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia—have discussed the recent developments in Ukraine.

First and foremost they welcome the fact that violence could be stopped as a result of the agreement reached by the sides on 21 February and express their condolences to the families of all those who were killed in the senseless bloodshed last week and throughout the conflict. They also welcome the election of the new Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada as an important step towards consolidation, as well as the release of Yulia Timoshenko, which finally addressed an important issue of selective justice long sought by the European Union.

Nevertheless, the situation remains volatile in the country. The Ministers reiterate their strong interest in maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call on all actors to refrain from any action that could undermine this. All Ukrainian political forces must continue to engage responsibly in a substantive dialogue to establish an inclusive national government that could restore law and order on the entire territory of the country. A sustainable and inclusive consolidation process must also include constitutional reform and preparation for free and fair elections, as well as the respect of European democratic values, including the rights of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, as included in the relevant documents of the Council of Europe.

The Ministers fully support the efforts of High Representative Catherine Ashton regarding the contribution of the European Union to a lasting solution to the political crisis and the work of the European Commission to stabilise the economic situation in Ukraine. The stabilisation of the Ukrainian economy is a key aspect of the consolidation process: the international financial institutions must be able to provide much needed macroeconomic assistance to the country. The Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad countries are ready to visit Ukraine to share their transitional experiences with the new inclusive government. The V4 countries are also ready to establish a coordination of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Ministers reiterate their strong support for Ukraine's European perspective—based on the sovereign decision of the Ukrainian people—and remain committed to continue providing assistance in strengthening its relations with the European Union, including the signature of the AA/DCFTA, the country's reform process and modernisation. In the field of energy security, the Visegrad countries are ready to resume and develop the reverse flow of natural gas supplies to Ukraine. The share of [Eastern Partnership](#) allocations within the [International Visegrad Fund](#) is to be increased. Further steps are needed in the area of mobility: the Visegrad countries call for a speeding up of the visa-liberalisation process and for the increase in the number of scholarships available for Ukrainians in the Erasmus Plus program.

Finally, the Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia pay homage to the Foreign Minister of Poland, Mr Radosław Sikorski, who was instrumental in brokering the deal, along with Ministers Steinmeier and Fabius, which managed to end the violence and contribute to the stabilisation of the country.

## **19.**

### **Statement of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group**

24 February 2014

The following statement was issued on the occasion of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrád Group and Bulgaria, Greece and Romania in Budapest on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

The Foreign Ministers of the Visegrád Group and Bulgaria, Greece and Romania met in Budapest today in order to discuss issues of common interest to strengthen the cooperation between their countries and to exchange their views on current international developments, in particular the situation in Ukraine.

#### **Eastern Partnership and Ukraine**

Ministers welcome the fact that violence could be stopped in Ukraine as a result of the agreement reached by the sides on 21 February and express their condolences to the families of all those who were killed in the senseless bloodshed last week and throughout the conflict. They also welcome the election of the new Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada as an important step towards consolidation as well as the release of Yulia Timoshenko, which finally addressed an important issue of selective justice long sought by the European Union. Ministers pay homage to the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and Poland who brokered the deal, which managed to end violence and contribute to the stabilisation of the country.

Nevertheless, the situation remains volatile in the country. The Ministers reiterate their strong interest in maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call on all actors to refrain from any action that could undermine this. All Ukrainian political forces must continue to engage responsibly in a substantive dialogue to establish an inclusive national government that could restore law and order on the entire territory of the country. A sustainable and inclusive consolidation process must also include constitutional reform and preparation for free and fair elections, as well as the respect of European democratic values, including the rights of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities. In the respect the repeal of the 2012 language law by the Verkhovna Rada on 23 February is an unwelcome development which could jeopardise the chances of consolidation in the country.

The Ministers fully support the efforts of High Representative Catherine Ashton regarding the contribution of the European Union to a lasting solution to the political crisis and the work of the European Commission to stabilise the economic situation. The stabilisation of the Ukrainian economy is a key aspect of the consolidation process: the international financial institutions must be able to provide much needed macroeconomic assistance to the country.

Ministers reaffirmed the message of the European Union that the Association Agreement (including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) does not constitute the final goal in EU-Ukraine cooperation and that further steps are also needed in the area of mobility, including the speeding up of the visa-liberalisation process for Ukrainian citizens.

Ministers confirmed that the Eastern Partnership remains a strategic direction of the European neighbourhood policy and expressed their interest in further deepening relations and cooperation between the EU and all Eastern Partners with the aim of reaching the goals of the Vilnius Declaration. They emphasized the importance to provide maximum support to the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, the countries in the forefront of reform efforts, in order to allow for signature of the Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with them as soon as possible, but no later than the end of August 2014.

## **Energy and climate**

The Ministers reconfirmed their joint commitment to achieve a common European energy market and their support to the Greek EU-Presidency's aim to reconcile the goals of competitiveness of the European industry as well as the security and sustainability of energy supply with the long term goals discussed for climate change. They expressed their support to further enhance cooperation in energy security issues as an increasingly important aspect of foreign affairs and an integral part of their cooperation and agreed on the importance of connecting energy infrastructures, as well as promoting genuine gas-to-gas competition and competitive gas prices for their consumers. They highlighted the importance of building the missing interconnectors and infrastructure between their countries and secure diversification options via pipelines and access to the LNG market.

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges of our age. The forthcoming years will be decisive in relation to the major decision concerning our common efforts to tackle climate change both at the international stage and within the European Union. The Visegrád Countries, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece share the commitment that the international community should not spare efforts in order to arrive to a substantial and meaningful international climate agreement in 2015 in Paris.

The Visegrád Countries, Romania and Bulgaria have a long standing cooperation in the field of climate policy. Together with Greece, holding currently the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, they believe, that the new EU climate framework must be balanced, efficient and adequate, which takes into account the competitiveness of the European economy and the different circumstances of the Member States. The Visegrád Countries, Romania and Bulgaria will continue to coordinate their position during the forthcoming negotiations to which they invite Greece to join in.

## **Migration**

Ministers exchanged views on several aspects of the growing migratory pressure experienced by the EU. They agreed that preventing and reducing irregular migration in an efficient, yet humane way and granting international protection to those fleeing persecution or serious harm are equally important principles. They agreed that the growing common migration-related challenges require joint efforts. Ministers put special emphasis on taking effective measures to combat the aiding of illegal immigration. In this regard they welcomed the ongoing cooperation of our countries in the framework of the FIMATHU project funded by the EU and aimed at fighting illegal trafficking in human beings.

They agreed upon the need to follow the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Syria and stressed the need to coordinate efforts in order to be able to address arising humanitarian needs.

## **Western Balkans**

During the working lunch, Ministers have reviewed the situation of the countries of the Western Balkans and expressed support for their European integration. They discussed the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with particular emphasis on the causes and possible consequences of the social unrest in the country. They shared the view that the political elite of the country should address the difficulties of economic and social nature that led to demonstrations. They reiterated their commitment to the European future of the country, supported the continuation of EU facilitation and underlined the necessity to overcome the stalemate in the European integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



**20.**

**Joint statement of the Interior Ministers of the Visegrad countries  
25 February 2014**

The Interior Ministers of the Visegrad countries convened on 25 February 2014 in Budapest to discuss the situation in Ukraine. The goal of the meeting was to discuss the home affairs' implications as well as the migration and security consequences of the crisis on the Visegrad countries.

The Interior Ministers of the Visegrad countries thereby express their condolences to those injured throughout the conflict and to the families of the casualties.

The Interior Ministers have confidence that the public order and security will shortly be restored in Ukraine. Therefore they welcome the steps and measures taken to stabilize the situation.

The Ministers also agree to introduce an enhanced coordination among the V4 Interior Ministers to react to possible mass influx of persons from Ukraine.

The Ministers support the early reinstatement of stability and order in Ukraine. They also agree that they jointly address the interim Minister of Interior of Ukraine to share the information on public order and security in Ukraine and cooperate with the V4 counterparts. The Ministers reinforce their commitment to continue their cooperation with Ukraine in the area of migration, border management and police cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership and in their bilateral and other relations.

## 21.

### **Joint Statement of Meeting of the Speakers of the Visegrád Group Parliaments 28 February 2014**

The statement was accepted as follows:

Jan Hamáček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, Milan Štěch, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, László Kövér, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, Ewa Kopacz, Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Bogdan Borusewicz, Marshal of the Senate of the Republic of Poland and Renáta Zmajkovičová, Deputy Speaker of National Council of the Slovak Republic held consultations in Budapest about the new framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Visegrád Group (hereinafter: V4), about the parliamentary possibilities of the joint representation of interests within the EU, and also about the role of the V4 parliaments' cooperation in the support of the Eastern Partnership.

The Speakers, in connection with the development of a new framework for parliamentary cooperation in the V4,

- based on over 20 years of development of the V4 cooperation,
- considering its role in the stability and prosperity of the region,
- building on the common historical heritage,
- and recognizing the significance of joint action and representation of interests, and of an integrated Central European region in both Europe and the world,

came to the following conclusions:

- They find that the proposal brought up by the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrád Group concerning the fostering of cooperation between the parliaments of the V4 Member States and the necessity of strengthening the parliamentary dimension of the V4 is substantiated.
- They welcome and accept as a starting point the proposal developed by the foreign affairs committees on 30 January 2014 in Visegrád concerning the renewal of the parliamentary dimension of the V4.
- As a new framework of the parliamentary cooperation, supplementing the regular meeting of the Speakers of the Parliaments held annually in the country of the rotating V4 presidency if decided so by the presiding country, a joint plenary session composed of the representatives of committees appropriate to the agenda of the meeting of the Speakers will be held the day before the meeting. The delegation of each country will consist of a maximum total of 10 members.
- The chairperson of the respective committee of the host country will inform the participants of the Speakers of Parliaments conference about the results of the above mentioned meeting .
- The rotational V4 presidency will ensure advance preparation of the substantive aspects of the V4 parliamentary dimension meeting.
- The technical operating details of the V4 cooperation under the new parliamentary dimension will be discussed by the competent administrative offices of the parliaments on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding adopted by the V4 foreign affairs committees in Visegrád on 30 January 2014.

The Speakers of the V4 parliaments, in connection with the joint representation of interests within the EU:

- Emphasize that in addition to the cooperation within the framework of monitoring of the principle of subsidiarity, the key elements of inter-parliamentary cooperation within the EU are the annual Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, the Conference of

Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union, and the Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

- Deem important the joint sessions organised by the European Parliament's specialized standing committees attended by respective members of national parliaments.
- Will focus their attention on the further development of cooperation between the Visegrád Group countries, the strengthening of democratic legitimacy while respecting EU and national competences as defined in the Founding Treaties amended in Lisbon, increasing the level of transparency in decision-making and the promotion of the joint representation of interests.
- Agree that - at the initiative of the head of the parliamentary delegation of the country holding the V4 presidency - the delegations attending the aforementioned EU inter-parliamentary conferences will hold consultations to agree a common position in connection to the points on the conference agenda. The head of the delegation of the country holding the V4 presidency will present the common position at the given conference. The delegations reserve themselves the right to present their own position independently.

In connection with the role assumed by the cooperation of the V4 parliaments in supporting the Eastern Partnership, the Speakers:

- Welcome the fact that the Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements forming part of the Association Agreements were initialled at the Third Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013, and give their support to the signing thereof as soon as possible.
- Express hope that the domestic political crisis in Ukraine will be resolved peacefully and necessary reforms will be swiftly re-launched. They emphasize the significant role of Ukraine in the community of European nations and express hope for swift signing of the Association Agreement, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine.
- Confirm that the Visegrád Group countries in their capacity as EU Member States are interested in and actively support the success of the Eastern Partnership, including by further activities strengthening this policy, and stress that it is therefore vital to focus on supporting the Eastern Partnership policy within the V4 framework.
- Declare that in addition to the current efforts made at governmental level, e.g. the meeting of the V4 and Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers scheduled to be held in April within the framework of the Hungarian V4 presidency as well as the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Programme, a joint action by the Visegrád Group parliaments is also needed.
- Will examine the possibility of requesting the observer status for a joint delegation of V4 countries (representing all the members of the Visegrád Group) in EuroNest, the parliamentary dimension of the Eastern Partnership.
- Recommend that a conference should be organised for the European affairs committees of the Ukrainian, Georgian and Moldovan parliaments under the title "The experiences of the association process", at which experience relative to the implementation of the respective Association Agreements could be shared.
- Recommend that appropriate bodies of V4 national parliaments will get in touch with relevant bodies of Parliaments of Armenia and Azerbaijan to support their activities in Eastern Partnership.
- Recommend that in the interest of the development of Ukraine's Transcarpatia province (Zakarpattia Oblast), which borders on three V4 countries, the committees for regional development should invite local representatives of the province to share their specific experience. They encourage the strengthening of personal relationships among members of parliaments in the border regions, as stated in the Joint Statement of the Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy signed on 5 February.

- In coordination with the other V4 parliaments, the Speakers will support their own parliaments to offer to the staff of the Eastern partners' parliaments a possibility to exchange experience on certain specific topics.

The Speakers will inform their own parliaments about this Joint Statement and they will call upon the relevant parliamentary committees to implement the contents hereof. They will also pass information to their own governments in order to ensure consistency between the governmental and parliamentary dimensions of the V4 cooperation.

The Speakers request the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly to inform the leaders of the relevant EU institutions about the contents of this Joint Statement on behalf of the V4 presidency.

**Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries on Ukraine**

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries are deeply concerned about the recent violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the fact that the Russian parliament has authorized military action on Ukrainian soil against the wishes of the Ukrainian government. This represents a serious escalation. We condemn all action threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call on to decrease the tensions immediately through dialogue, in full respect of Ukrainian and international law and in line with the provisions of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

The Visegrad countries believe that the recent military actions by Russia are not only in violation of international law, but also create a dangerous new reality in Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are appalled to witness a military intervention in 21st century Europe akin to their own experiences in 1956, 1968 and 1981.

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries call on Russia to respect its international commitments and legal obligations, including the Budapest Memorandum. We have always recognized historical ties between Russia and Ukraine. Their specific character implies due respect to the legitimate rights of Russian minority population. Nevertheless, any related concerns must be addressed peacefully, through engagement with the government of Ukraine and under the auspices of relevant international organizations, especially that of the OSCE.

The Visegrad countries are in solidarity with the people and the Government of Ukraine and reiterate their strong commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. It is more important than ever to ensure that the Government takes measures which unify the country, and that it protects the rights of all Ukraine's citizens, including those of cultural, national and linguistic minority groups, in the spirit of inclusiveness.

The European Union and NATO should demonstrate solidarity with and assist Ukraine in this difficult moment and stand united in the face of this dangerous development threatening European peace and security.

**Baroness Catherine Ashton**  
High Representative of the European Union  
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

**Mr. Štefan Füle**  
European Commissioner  
for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy

*5 March 2013*

Dear High Representative,  
Dear Commissioner,

At the summit in Vilnius on 29 November 2013 the EU took note of the decision made by the former Ukrainian Government to suspend temporarily the process of preparations for signature of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and Ukraine. We also took note of the unprecedented public support for Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the EU. Furthermore, we agreed that the Association Agreements, including DCFTAs, are designed to support far reaching political and socio-economic reforms and facilitate comprehensive approximation towards the EU, its rules and standards.

We decided at the same time, and repeated on numerous occasions ever since that the EU would remain committed to Ukraine's political association and economic integration, and to signing the AA/DCFTA between the EU and Ukraine, as soon as Ukraine is ready.

Stating its political programme, the new legitimate Government of Ukraine sent a very strong political message by declaring the continuation of the process of political and economic integration with the EU its main foreign policy priority, and expressed its firm determination to sign the AA/DCFTA as soon as possible.

Acknowledging the strong wish of the Ukrainian people and the Government, we the Visegrad Countries firmly believe that it is the moral duty of the EU to start preparations for the act of signature of the AA/DCFTA between the EU and Ukraine without any undue delay.

Sincerely,



Lubomír Zaorálek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic



János Martonyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary



Radosław Sikorski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland



Miroslav Lajčák, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

## 24.

### **Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 and the Nordic-Baltic countries**

Narva, 7 March 2014

In the framework of Nordic-Baltic (NB8) and Visegrad (V4) cooperation, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the NB8 and V4 countries met in Narva on 6-7 March and issued the following joint statement:

The situation in Ukraine is critical. Against a European country an act of aggression has been committed by Russian military forces. Referring to the Statement of the European Council on Ukraine from 6 March 2014, NB8 and V4 Ministers condemn the unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation and call on the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw its armed forces to the areas of their permanent stationing, in accordance with the relevant agreements. The Ministers call on the Russian Federation to revoke the decision of the Federation Council, which is a violation of international law.

We condemn the acts that have further aggravated the situation. The decision to hold an illegitimate referendum in Crimea on accession to the Russian Federation violates the Ukrainian constitution and, as such, is unacceptable.

NB8 and V4 countries are ready to support the Government of Ukraine in their pursuit of reforms and encourage decisions demonstrating their will to ensure inclusiveness, by providing the necessary assistance to build a strong, democratic society based on the rule of law and where human rights are respected, including the rights of national, cultural and linguistic minorities.

To help Ukraine in this period of transition, we support the establishment of a European Union led Observation Mission, which should be deployed as soon as possible. The Ministers welcome the OSCE monitoring mission. They also expressed support to all international efforts to facilitate solution to the crises.

The NB8 and V4 group reaffirms its strong support for Ukraine's, Moldova's and Georgia's goal of further association with the European Union and supports the signing of the Association Agreements in the nearest possible future.

The Ministers noted that energy is a critical part of Europe's security. Therefore, it is essential to accelerate the implementation of goals and activities to increase European energy independence and diversify energy sources. A concrete action plan to achieve this must be established as soon as possible.





**LONG TERM VISION OF THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES  
ON DEEPENING THEIR DEFENCE COOPERATION  
(Visegrad, 14 March 2014)**

As members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union our nations enjoy unprecedented security today. At the same time, as a consequence of changes of extraordinary dynamics and magnitude in the global security environment, Europe has to increase its contribution to enhancing its own security. This challenge should be undertaken in a period when the gap between the defence capabilities and defence budgets of the United States and of European nations is growing, while the security environment in Europe's neighbourhood has become more fragile, and new types of security challenges are emerging.

In order to adapt to the new circumstances and meet these security challenges, it is crucial for all European Allies and EU member states to spend their defence budgets more efficiently and strengthen their defence cooperation as much as possible. Regional cooperation has an added value and an important contribution to make. Recognising this, we set the objective to strengthen European and transatlantic capabilities by deepening our defence cooperation, modernizing our armed forces and better using our available resources by eliminating unnecessary duplications while respecting the national sovereignty of each participating state. We also commit ourselves to at least maintain and once economic situation makes it possible, increase our defence spending in order to better align with the resource guideline in NATO's Political Guidance. Meeting these objectives requires a long term vision for both political and practical cooperation.

The practical cooperation shall focus mainly but not exclusively on three critical areas: 1) capability development, procurement and defence industry; 2) the establishment of multinational units and running cross border activities; 3) education, training and exercises.

- 1) Capability development and procurement remain critical areas of cooperation. Focus should be on the long term planning horizon as it will provide the time and flexibility to achieve convergence of V4 countries' defence plans. We should conduct a deep analysis on defence capabilities assessing the sustainability of our forces, and the most significant capability gaps. Close cooperation needs increased transparency, and the harmonization of defence and procurement plans. Besides strengthening our defence planning cooperation harmonized with NATO's Defence Planning Process, we should pay due attention to Framework Nations Concept and its linkage to NATO's Force Structure. We should also fully exploit possibilities offered by other multinational solutions in the framework of NATO (Smart Defence) and the EU (Pooling&Sharing).

In case of major acquisitions it should be a general rule for us to first examine the possibility of a common or coordinated procurement, be it in quadrilateral, bilateral or trilateral formations. We must capitalize on the fact that the legacy military equipment at our disposal has to be replaced nearly at the same time. Mechanisms of NATO Support Agency and the European Defence Agency should be exploited.

In this endeavour V4 defence industry should be involved as actively as possible preventing our region from turning into a mere market for global defence companies, and promoting it to become an integral part of the European defence industrial base. We



should consider supporting our defence companies to form consortia in order to produce and sell certain products together. While deepening our cooperation, we should also build on ongoing projects and identify and develop niche capabilities where we have recognized competences.

- 2) The establishment of multinational units provides the highest visibility and greatest political benefits. Based on our NATO and EU commitments, we shall strive to establish a regional, modular force that can be regularly offered to NATO and the EU or used outside these frameworks when necessary. This force could become a real multiplier in our military inventories. The V4 EU Battlegroup, scheduled for stand-by in the first half of 2016, constitutes a solid basis to this end. The Battlegroup should be turned into a basis for more permanent cooperation, building on lessons learned achieved during its preparatory phase. The establishment of the Battlegroup serves as a driving force for enhancing V4 cooperation. Possibilities of running cross borders activities (e.g. common air policing) should also be examined.
- 3) Strengthening interoperability is best served by cooperation in the fields of education, training, and exercises. The Visegrad Group Military Educational Program (VIGMILEP) should provide a suitable framework for increased cooperation of V4 institutions of defence education, and the harmonization of their activities. We are committed to organize a common V4 military exercise annually which is a Visegrad contribution to implementing NATO's Connected Forces Initiative. To this end we shall elaborate a V4 Training and Exercise Strategy.

To support the implementation of the objectives set in this document, multi-year Action Plan will be elaborated and will provide description of concrete joint projects and initiatives that are either under way or being considered or are worth exploring for the future as well as target dates for their accomplishment if applicable. Progress on these tasks would be annually presented to the Ministers of Defence. The Action Plan shall be a living document subject to regular updates as specific action plan items are further developed or new items are added. In principle, the Action Plan shall serve as guidance for each V4 presidency. The plan will be reviewed by a senior body on the level of State Secretaries / Defence Policy Directors.

The senior body shall provide strategic guidance recommendations, identify areas of common interest and oversee launching of concrete common projects. It will meet regularly to assess the achieved progress and recommend the next steps to the Ministers. It will also be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the V4 defence cooperation.

Regular harmonization of positions on relevant defence policy and planning issues should continue and become an important element of the cooperation among our countries. The topic of defence policy and defence cooperation should remain on the highest political agenda. This must be complemented with efficient public diplomacy and strategic communication to raise the V4 profile both within our countries and in the eyes of our international partners. Besides consultations among high-level policy-makers direct contacts should be strengthened among relevant subject matter experts in order to foster efficient cooperation.

All four Visegrad countries should benefit from the deepening of the cooperation, thus increasing the cohesion of the V4 group. The Visegrad Group remains open to cooperation



Hungarian Presidency 2011-2014 of the  
VISEGRAD GROUP

with third states or groups of states. Common projects are envisioned mostly with the involvement of countries from our wider region.

Martin Stropnický

Csaba Hende

Tomasz Siemoniak

Martin Glváč



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF HUNGARY

CSABA HENDE  
Minister

03 April, 2014

**H. E. Baroness Catherine Ashton**  
High Representative of the European Union  
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission  
BRUSSELS

**Dear High Representative,**

On behalf of the Defence Ministers of the Visegrád Cooperation (V4) as well as of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) I would like to inform you on the outcomes of our meetings in Visegrád, Hungary on the 13-14<sup>th</sup> of March.

V4 states have taken a significant step towards deepening their defence cooperation as V4 Defence Ministers signed three documents of strategic importance: 1) *the Long Term Vision on Deepening our Defence Cooperation*, 2) *the Framework for our Enhanced Defence Planning Cooperation* and 3) *the Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a V4 EU Battlegroup* to be in stand-by in the first half of 2016.

The Long Term Vision envisions our cooperation mainly, but not exclusively, on three critical areas: 1) capability development, procurement and defence industry; 2) the establishment of multinational units and running cross border activities; 3) education, training and exercises.

As far as capability development is concerned we have decided that in case of major acquisitions it should be a general rule for us to first examine the possibility of a common or coordinated procurement, be it in quadrilateral, bilateral or trilateral formations. In this endeavour we are seeking to exploit the mechanisms of the European Defence Agency and NATO Support Agency. The frameworks and structure of our defence planning cooperation have been elaborated in details in the document on Enhanced Defence Planning Cooperation.

The establishment of the V4 EU Battlegroup has been the focal point of our practical cooperation: we believe that thereby we can reinforce our operational and capability development efforts, as well as contribute to the military rapid response capability of the European Union. With the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding we have moved

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one step closer to the realization of this project. Besides, it was decided that the Battlegroup should serve as a basis for more permanent cooperation and establishment of multinational units, building on lessons learned achieved during its preparatory phase.

We also decided to hold joint V4 military exercises on an annual basis. In order to organize these in a systematic and effective way we are preparing a V4 Training and Exercise Strategy. The first exercise of this kind will be the validation exercise of our V4 EU BG which will take place in 2015 with the aim to be linked to NATO's Trident Juncture '15 high visibility exercise.

As to the cooperation of the CEDC states so far it has produced successful capability development projects for example in the area of helicopter pilot and SOF training, CBRN defence and logistical cooperation. In this format we have considered launching new projects aimed at the creation of a regional cross-border disaster management cooperation, and the establishment of a regional joint terminal air controller (JTAC) training centre.

We discussed the crisis in Ukraine and shared a view that the territorial integrity of Ukraine has to be respected and that constructive negotiations were needed for a peaceful solution.

We also exchanged views on the security situation in the Balkans. We agreed that the presence of the international community in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo plays a key role in preserving stability and security.

Finally, let me express my strong belief that our regional cooperation and defence-related endeavours in Central Europe send a good message to our European and euro-atlantic partners and contribute to the common efforts of the European Union and NATO.

For your information, I send a copy of this letter to every Member State of the European Union.

Yours sincerely,



**Csaba Hende**

**Memorandum of Understanding between the  
V4 presidents of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry  
10 April 2014**

Presidents of the national chambers of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries met on 10 April 2014 in Budapest to discuss the objectives and methods to be used by chambers of commerce and industry to promote entrepreneurial co-operation and trade relations.

After the meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Andrzej Arendarski, Petr Kuzel, Peter Mihók and László Parragh on behalf of the Polish, Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian national chambers in the presence of representatives of the government and the diplomatic corps. In addition to the general objectives, the Memorandum also identifies key sectors of co-operation, including automobile, electronic, food, energy, tourism, logistics and innovative industries. The chambers will also encourage cross-border projects and make efforts to achieve more efficient and better co-ordinated utilisation of EU funds. The annual organisation of a major business forum is also envisaged by the Memorandum.

V4 Chambers emphasize that their countries cannot be competitive without a strong industrial base. New technologies have dramatically changed the economy. Therefore industrialization and innovation have crucial importance. V4 Chambers support and encourage their governments to develop industrial sectors that can significantly contribute to the increase of employment.

**CONCLUSIONS**  
**of the Meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments**  
Bratislava, 27-29 April 2014

Representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the V4 Parliaments:

**With regard to the European elections 2014, Year of the institutional renewal**

- support all activities aimed at the stronger involvement of the citizens of the European Union in the debate on the EU and its future in the context of the forthcoming elections to the EP;
- fully support activities of all relevant participants whose aim is to provide the highest participation of the EU citizens in the elections to the EP in May 2014;
- highlight the role of national Parliaments – with a special focus on the Committees on European Affairs- regarding the regular debate of EU policies and the future of the EU;
- encourage all activities that will increase democratic legitimacy of the decision making process in the EU and which will bring the EU closer to its citizens, while in the area of representative democracy emphasize the strengthening of the role of the parliaments as directly elected bodies, and in the sphere of participatory democracy welcome the *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and other instruments for higher direct participation of the European citizens in public policies.*

**On Ukraine**

- condemn Russia's military intervention in Crimea and the illegal annexation of a part of Ukrainian territory. Those acts are inconsistent with Russia's existing commitments and obligations including the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act and the Budapest Memorandum;
- consider the so-called referendum held on 16 March 2014 in the Crimean Autonomous Republic on its legal status unconstitutional and therefore its results can only be regarded as unlawful and void.;
- strongly support sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries of the Eastern Partnership. Believe that there is no place for any separatist activities and provocations aiming at changing borders in Europe of the 21st century;
- welcome the Geneva Statement of April 17, 2014 in which the participants agreed on initial steps to de-escalate the tensions and to restore security for all citizens of Ukraine. The statements serve as a good basis for the dialogue that will result in finding a solution to the political crisis in Ukraine;
- strongly encourage all sides involved to refrain from violence, intimidation or provocative actions and start negotiations immediately, reflecting the results of the Geneva Meeting;
- call on Russia to fulfil its obligations of Geneva and to contribute to de-escalation of tensions in eastern part of Ukraine;
- call on the Ukrainian authorities, political parties and the civil society as a whole to engage in a genuine dialogue within the country aiming at building an inclusive society where the interests and traditions of all the regions and whole population would be protected, including in the sphere of human rights and rights of persons belonging to national minorities;
- emphasize importance of presidential elections for the strengthening of Ukrainian democracy and political stabilization;
- support Ukraine's on-going efforts to strengthen its political and economic association with the EU and support the need to provide Ukraine with a clear prospect of EU membership;
- invite the Hellenic Parliament to include the point on Ukraine into the LI COSAC agenda as it was already suggested during the meeting of the Chairpersons of the COSAC in January 2014.

**With regard to social entrepreneurship and social economy, the tools for growth support**

- welcome all initiatives of the European Union institutions, in particular of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, supporting and promoting social entrepreneurship and social economy which includes both SMEs

- and large enterprises, cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations, social NGOs etc.;
- point out that social entrepreneurship and social economy are the key elements of the European social model and directly contribute to social and economic cohesion, to a fairer income and wealth distribution, provide innovative employment opportunities and services to millions of individuals including marginalised and disadvantaged persons. Particularly in the current period of economic and social crises social enterprises are able to bring innovative solutions for social cohesion and inclusion, job creation and growth;
  - take the view that the cooperative model of governance which is based on joint ownership and democratic control by their member-stakeholders constitutes an important contribution to economic growth, solidarity and social cohesion;
  - call on the European Commission to pay proper attention to the social economy in all EU policies designed to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as in the relevant initiatives of the EU 2020 strategy.

**With regard to the Tolerant Europe (fight against extremism, human rights protection)**

- condemn all forms and expressions of racism, violence, xenophobia, *anti-Semitism and all other forms of hatred, intolerance and discrimination which lead to suppression of basic human rights and liberties of the EU citizens remembering the victims of genocide stemming from racial violence during World War II as well as all attempts to revive authoritarian or totalitarian ideologies while respecting profound anti-fascist traditions of our nations;*
- *support activities leading to broader social, national, ethnic, racial and gender inclusion and cohesion of the EU societies including the integration into the society of all groups of citizens affected by marginalization or exclusion;*
- *notice with concern that Europe is currently facing increasing nationalism, extremism, xenophobia and ethnic intolerance and that extremist movements are growing stronger especially due to economic, financial and social crises in the EU;*
- *emphasize the need to strengthen the coordination of national policies aiming at holding back/fighting right-wing extremism in the territory of the EU Member States.*



## 29.

### **Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 Countries on the Occasion of the V4+EaP Informal Ministerial Meeting**

The Visegrad Ministers of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the informal meeting of Visegrad and Eastern Partnership countries in Budapest on April 28–29, 2014, discussed future tasks in the light of the new challenges.

The Ministers confirmed the validity of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy and stressed their strong commitment to its vigorous implementation. They noted a substantial change in the geopolitical context of the realization of the goals agreed at the Vilnius Summit and expressed an urgent need to react effectively to the new challenges. They highlighted the importance of:

1. Signing the AA/DCFTA with Georgia and Moldova in June 2014, as agreed by the European Council,
2. Implementing the AA and sign the remaining provisions of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine as soon as possible, right after the presidential elections,
3. Supporting reforms of the most committed EaP Partner Countries and stressing that a perspective of European integration remains the best stimulus for deep reforms,
4. Adjusting relations with each of the six partners to different needs and ambitions, taking into account current geopolitical context.

The Ministers encouraged EaP frontrunners to make full use of the “more for more” principle and expressed support to additional EU funding in support of the implementation of AA/DCFTA by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

The V4 Ministers rejected any military or economic threat against EaP Partner Countries and in this context reiterated their full support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. They condemned the Russian armed aggression and the annexation of Crimea as well as the political and military actions to destabilize the Eastern part of Ukraine. Such a deplorable action undermines the fundamentals of European peace and security and the validity of international legal order and principles. Given the lack of full implementation of the Geneva Joint Statement of April 17 and the recent deterioration of the situation in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the further build-up of Russian troops close to the Ukrainian border, the Ministers agreed that further targeted measures must be intensified against those undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

The Ministers offered an active support to the economic and political stabilization of the country, expressed the need for additional resources to the EU package and their readiness to support, together with OSCE and the Council of Europe, in creating conditions for free and fair elections and for guaranteeing human rights. V4 Ministers welcomed the declared readiness of the Ukrainian leadership to offer inclusive solutions to all regions and national and linguistic minorities, and create the conditions for free and fair elections and expressed their expectations in this regard.

The Ministers welcomed the decisions of the April FAC to assist Ukraine in the field of civilian security sector reform, police and rule of law, including through a CSDP mission. They welcomed the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and its leading role in assisting Ukrainian authorities in de-escalating tensions and expressed support for expansion of the Mission to draw on its full potential and to

strengthen its scope to cover dialogue facilitation and other related tasks. Ministers condemned the detention of a group of OSCE military inspectors and of their Ukrainian hosts in Sloviansk in eastern Ukraine, and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

Regarding the visa liberalization process, the Ministers noted with satisfaction the opportunity of visa free travel for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, reiterated the commitment to achieve the same goal soon for the citizens of Ukraine and Georgia, as well. They expressed readiness for further progress with Armenia and Azerbaijan and welcomed the readiness of Belarusian authorities to negotiate on visa facilitation and readmission agreements, stressing the conviction that mobility of people should be advanced.

V4 Ministers underscored the importance of strengthening dialogue and cooperation related to energy security. In this context they underlined the need to swiftly implement transparent market rules in the Ukrainian energy sector and activities already in force in EU. They expressed their readiness to strengthen EU energy security, involving Ukraine and other interested EaP countries and respond firmly to any disturbances in the field of energy supply security.

The Ministers appreciated the efforts of the Commission and the European External Action Service in implementing the goals set out in the Vilnius Declaration. They encouraged further action in the sphere of people-to-people contacts, support for the civil society, strengthening and developing the multilateral dimension of the EaP, including flagship initiatives and sectorial cooperation. They invited COM to prepare feasibility study regarding an EaP Economic Area.

They encouraged all partners to take bolder steps towards active cooperation within EaP programs and stressed the need for better EaP visibility. The public of Partner Countries should recognize benefits of closer ties with the EU.

V4 countries stressed that the long-term programming of EU financial support is crucial for structural reforms. At the same time the EU needs to react swiftly to new challenges. In this context, the Ministers encouraged the COM/EEAS to increase flexibility of EU assistance and use of ENI funds allowing speedier, better coordinated and more strategic delivery.

The Ministers expressed the readiness of V4 countries to share experience with better and enhanced use of International Visegrad Fund instruments, to provide more targeted assistance in capacity and institution building for implementing AA/DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, joint projects serving good governance, judiciary and police reforms, strengthening civil society, transparency and freedom of media for all. They are ready to answer special needs in Ukraine by regrouping additional resources and combining force with other relevant institutions and like-minded countries.

The Budapest informal EaP ministerial meeting strengthened the commitment of the V4 to work closely with partners in implementing the strategic goals of EaP and adapting it to new realities and challenges in the region. All these actions could contribute to a successful summit meeting in Riga.

### 'What Unites Us'

*A joint article of the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia has been published in the Visegrad countries and in Germany (Tagesspiegel) on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the European Union's enlargement of 2004, 5 May 2014*

"Europe was in a celebratory mood the night of 1 May 2004. When the fireworks were set off at midnight, the Oder Bridge linking Frankfurt in Germany with Słubice in Poland was thronged with people as the two sides of the long divided European continent were reunited. This picture was mirrored by festivities in many other places in Europe – in the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary – that moved during that special night to the centre of the European unification project. The magnificent welcome extended to the ten new members of the European Union sealed the end of the East-West divide. We can draw courage from these events. They show that even the rifts created by two World Wars and the Cold War were not deep enough to be truly insurmountable.

This success was due above all to the people in East and West who, despite decades of confrontational bloc politics, were not deflected from their pursuit of freedom and peace. They were united by their firm conviction that the rule of law must prevail over the law of the strong. It was especially the people in the countries then joining the EU who demonstrated an admirable courage to embrace change in their political systems, economic structures and everyday life on the basis of European values, in order to make this ideal a reality. Their dogged and ultimately successful efforts to deal with political upheaval, with the restructuring of their societies, and with occasional setbacks on the way, are an invaluable trove of experience for Europe as a whole. They can be a model and stimulus for us when it comes to making the European Union fit for the challenges of our time. For many other reasons but for this as well, the accession of ten new members greatly enriched the European Union.

However, while it is only right to recognise what we have achieved, we have no reason to self-contentedly rest on our laurels. We had thought that fears for our security and peace were a thing of the distant past, but they are being awakened in Europe once again. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the unacceptable and unlawful annexation of Crimea show that peace, political and social stability are not to be taken for granted in Europe, but must be constantly worked for anew. Today, it is vital for us to preserve our European integration, our great bastion of peace, and to apply a forceful and wise foreign policy to prevent a new division of Europe. One of the key principles on which Europe was founded is that of solidarity also towards the neighbours. Now is the time to make it visible.

The key prerequisite is unshakeable unity on the part of the EU member states. Options for action are carefully discussed and weighed up by all EU partners together. The security of each individual member state has a direct impact on the security of all the others. To the external world, we speak with a single voice. It is precisely in times of crisis that the true strength of the political bond between us shows that we are more than fair-weather friends.

The European Union proved this in its response to the economic and financial crisis. Those market participants who betted the Eurozone would collapse misjudged our political will. In the coming years we have to further strengthen the sustainability of the Eurozone while maintaining the unity and integrity of the EU, without raising new internal walls. We need to ensure that Europe experiences a lasting return to growth and employment. In particular, we are committed to fighting the alarmingly high levels of youth unemployment.

We should also speak with one voice on external energy relations. We wish to intensify the EU approach towards energy security and enhance cooperation with our neighbours in the framework of the Energy Community. The situation in Ukraine exposes the importance of advancing the diversification of our energy sources, suppliers and supply routes, of enhancing energy efficiency as well as solidarity among ourselves. Therefore the European Commission has been asked to prepare a comprehensive plan for the reduction of EU energy dependence.

We have already accomplished a great deal in Europe, one example being the single market, which now benefits over 500 million citizens. Free movement of goods, people, capital and services are equally important assets for strengthening Europe's competitiveness. These four freedoms not only benefit economies of member states, but also each and every EU citizen. At the same time, it is not less important that European literature, art and science are emerging out of joint projects across the continent. These human encounters breathe life into the European idea and transform an economic union into a union of shared values, peace and solidarity. These principles were the foundation for the enlargement of the European Union ten years ago and continue to exert their pull on people in Europe's neighbourhood. We will support those of our neighbours who wish to establish closer ties with the EU.

Today, the European Union faces major challenges at home and abroad which require of us the courage to change. We are facing tasks of great magnitude similar to those we had to shoulder in order to heal the divided continent ten years ago. Then and now, our goals can only be achieved by those who truly believe in the idea of Europe and in values on which the European Union is based, who seek common ground and surmount divisions. This inclusiveness has enriched Europe enormously in the past and must inspire us to deal successfully with our shared future."

**Joint Statement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Ministers of Environment of the  
Visegrád Group Countries,  
Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania**

*8th May, 2014, Visegrád, Hungary*

The Ministers of Environment of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Republic of Poland, Slovak Republic, Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia and Romania

REAFFIRMING the importance of the cooperation of the Visegrád Group countries, Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania in the field of environmental protection and climate policy,

BEARING in mind the previous meetings of the Environment Ministers of Visegrád Group countries and Visegrád Group countries, Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania,

NOTING the Program of the 2013/2014 Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group,

RECOGNIZING the potential of the European Union policies and their impact on the environment – hence the need to coordinate national positions related to those policies,

have agreed as follows:

**European policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030**

Regarding the European policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 the Ministers took note of the conclusions of the March European Council. However, the Ministers felt that there are some important missing elements and tasks ahead of the Council and the Commission to make further work for the June European Council. These tasks should be in line with the international climate change negotiations' agenda. There is a need for further analysis by the Commission of the implications for individual Member States of the Commission's proposals.

The Ministers maintained their position that there is no need for any legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency targets, and that the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target should be set at a realistic level to be achieved in a technology-neutral and cost effective way. Besides that, it should respond to the challenges of industrial competitiveness as well as relevant state-aid rules.<sup>1</sup>

In line with the Commission's findings, the Ministers expressed their concerns that the target could put disproportionate burden on the lower income Member States, therefore the

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<sup>1</sup> Croatia does not support this paragraph.

Ministers emphasised the need for agreeing on the rules of fair and equitable effort and burden sharing within EU ETS allocation of EUAs and under non ETS too. The Ministers agreed that proper mechanisms that would allow lower income Member States to be compensated for the excessive burden borne by the implementation of the new climate and energy framework need to be elaborated and agreed upon as soon as possible, before the final decision on the new policy framework for energy and climate is taken. This is one of the key elements to pave the way for a decision on GHG reduction target by the European Council in a timeline allowing a submission of the EU intended contribution in the first quarter of 2015.

The Ministers noted that it is stated in the Commission's Communication of January 2014 that the EU ETS shall remain the core element to fulfil the European emissions reduction commitments until 2030. Bearing that in mind the Ministers agreed that the efficient operation of the system should be ensured, including the elaboration of adequate carbon-leakage protection mechanisms to be applied.

#### **Kyoto Protocol's ambition mechanism based on the Commission's proposed submission**

As for the Kyoto Protocol ambition mechanism, the Ministers concluded that the global GHG emission reduction efforts should be effective, hence global and equitable. While the Ministers appreciate that the EU keeps its leadership position in addressing climate change, the Ministers also emphasised that it is crucial that all Parties do their fair share in this endeavour. Hence, the Ministers encouraged all developed country Parties to join the EU in taking on similarly ambitious mitigation commitments before 2020. Concerning developing countries, the Ministers underlined that the EU should appreciate their efforts to contribute adequately to global emission reduction efforts according to their differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, bearing in mind that the responsibilities and capabilities evolve over time. The commitments of all Parties, shall be nationally determined so as to enable the Parties to tailor their action according to their development needs to grow in a sustainable manner and preserve their competitiveness. The Ministers hope that at the June Ministerial Roundtables in Bonn all Parties will discuss how domestic and international action on climate change, now and in the future, should build a strong foundation for a fair and ambitious 2015 agreement.

The Ministers support the EU's commitment to contribute to the global efforts by reducing its GHG emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 compared to 1990 and to implement policies towards achieving this goal. The Ministers took note of the parts of Assessment Report 5 which were published and are looking forward for further work by the IPCC to feed in global negotiations.

#### **EU Clean Air Policy Package – exchange of opinions on the further development of this dossier**

The Ministers discussed the Clean Air Policy Package of the European Commission and agreed that the V4+ countries should take joint actions during its negotiations. As regards the

proposed aims and consequent reduction commitments, based upon preliminary assessments, V4+ countries consider them to be overly ambitious and disproportionate.

The Ministers considered the application of EU-wide average cost minimisation principle alone for the determination of reduction commitments unacceptable as it would result in higher burden to Member States with lower GDP per capita. In order to reach a more equitable result, other approaches, such as the polluter pays principle, cohesion, economic potential should also be applied.

An increase in pollutant emissions outside the EU as a result of reductions within the EU has to be avoided. In this respect competitiveness of EU Member States should also be taken into account.

V4+ countries do not support inclusion of methane in the NEC regulation before comprehensive assessment of its characteristics and air polluting effects, exploitation of low or negative-cost measures for emission reduction by scientific bodies under the LRTAP Convention.

The V4+ countries would take joint steps to guarantee that emission limit values for medium scale combustion plants are determined in a way that they do not impose any unbearable burden to small medium-sized enterprises and households in their countries.

For the countries of V4+ the sector of small scale combustion is a very important part of the emission reduction by 2030. To achieve maximum reduction, an ambitious Ecodesign regulation for boilers and heaters is a key factor and at least part of the regulation should enter into force before 2022 (preferably on the basis of current technical standards).

### **GMOs**

The Ministers highlighted the importance of subsidiarity and sovereignty of countries with regard to the cultivation of genetically modified organisms, therefore they agreed to express their common and general support for the proposal of a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory. Proposed text, which, was widely discussed at the working group, seems to be satisfactory for both, countries opposing and supporting the cultivation of GM crops. Therefore, the Ministers agreed that it is their common interest that after long standing negotiations this particularly important issue should be resolved as soon as possible, and the Council should come to an agreement in the course of the first semester of 2014 in order to provide Member States with the freedom to decide on the cultivation of GMOs in their territory.

Respecting the different GMO-strategies of the neighbouring countries, the Ministers should cooperate with a view to ensure appropriate information sharing and may take appropriate

measures in order to avoid the unintended presence of GMOs in the border areas. Sharing of experience and cooperation between neighbouring countries are necessary for the successful protection of biodiversity and the interest of farmers in the border areas.

The introduction of national coexistence measures regarding the cultivation of GMOs is of utmost importance. Therefore, the cooperation, the exchange of experience and information among the countries with regard to the respective co-existence measures are crucial in order to ensure the safe use of GMOs and avoid cross-border contamination.

**International context of the V4 environmental cooperation**

The Ministers are looking forward to the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and express their commitment to making this first historical session a success. The Ministers consider the themes of UNEA, both for the Plenary and discussions, of utmost importance. In order to achieve this highest impact of UNEA, we declare our willingness to ensure the appropriate, thus negotiated outcome of the first session. The Ministers are open to participate in an interactive ministerial debate at the first UNEA session.

The Ministers believe that sustainable development can only be achieved by an integrated and balanced approach to all three dimensions - economic, social and environmental. The Ministers agreed that water issues, biodiversity, climate change, sustainable consumption and production, marine issues are subjects that should be incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals and we will take joint action to achieve this.

Done in Visegrád, on 8 May 2014

For the Czech Republic 

For Hungary 

For the Republic of Poland 

For the Slovak Republic 

For the Republic of Bulgaria 

For the Republic of Croatia 

For Romania 



## **32.**

### **DECLARATION OF THE PROSECUTORS GENERAL OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP**

on the reparation and adoption of a Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) opinion concerning the implementation Recommendation Rec(2000)19  
Balatonlelle, 17 May 2014

1. The Prosecutors General of the Visegrad Group welcome the preparation and the adoption of a CCPE opinion on issues which relate to the difficulties concerning the implementation of Rec(2000)19 on the role of public prosecution in the criminal justice system when dealing with the improvement of the prosecution services of the Council of Europe Member States. The adaptation of the principles of Rec(2000)19 to the actual state of play is a must in order to maintain its position and to keep on serving as a common source of reference in democratic states.
2. In our opinion, the main values of Rec(2000)19, first of all independence and impartiality, are to be in the focus of the new opinion too, as their importance has definitely increased in the past years. The independence of prosecution services, the clear standards of their relationship to other institutions and stakeholders are even more important today than they were at the time of the acceptance of the Recommendation.
3. We refer here to the considerable effect of the economic crises on the work of the prosecution services and to the Final Document of the 5th Plenary Meeting of the Network of Public Prosecutors or Equivalent Institutions at Supreme Judicial Courts of the Member States of the European Union (2012) which states: "The current difficult economic and financial environment evokes professional challenges which emphasize the need of good governance. The independence, impartiality, financial autonomy and efficiency of public prosecutors are values that have to be assured and guaranteed under the present circumstances."
4. The role of the prosecution services of the EU Member States in the judicial systems is continuously increasing and not only at the national, but also at the European level. Thus, the status of the prosecution services in a modern state governed by the rule of law, and the current achievements of European integration with special attention to the fast development of judicial cooperation in criminal matters are suggested to be taken into account when drafting the new opinion.
5. We attach great importance to a uniform code of conduct for European prosecutors. The Budapest Guidelines on ethics and conduct for prosecutors (2005) may serve as a starting point for this new document.
6. We underline the importance of the involvement of Member State prosecution services and different organisations of European prosecutors (such as national associations of prosecutors, the International Association of Prosecutors, the Network of Public Prosecutors or Equivalent Institutions at Supreme Judicial Courts of the Member States of the European Union, the Consultative Forum of Prosecutors General and Directors of Public Prosecutions of the Member States of the European Union, and regional networks like the one of the Prosecutors General of the Visegrad Group) in the drafting process.
7. The Prosecutors General of the Visegrad Group will follow, and wish to actively contribute to the preparation of a consolidated text of all relevant principles in an updated manner, referring to the evolutions which have taken place after the adoption of Rec(2000)19. Therefore, The Prosecutors General of the Visegrad Group entrust Péter Polt, the host of this meeting, with presenting this document at the session of the CCPE as rapporteur.

Jaromír ČIŽNÁR  
Prosecutor General  
of the Slovak Republic

Andrzej SEREMET  
Prosecutor General  
of the Republic of Poland

Péter POLT  
Prosecutor General  
of Hungary

Pavel ZEMAN  
Supreme Public Prosecutor  
of the Czech Republic

### 33.

#### MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

concerning the roadmap for determining the future development of the transport networks of the Visegrad Group Countries

The Heads of Governments of the Visegrad Countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and the Slovak Republic,

**recognizing** that an efficient transport system is a fundamental requirement of a competitive and expanding economy,

**in order to** achieve a long-term well-functioning efficient transport network,

**acknowledging** that although substantial improvements in the quality of the network can be accomplished within the financial programme 2014-20, by the end of this programme significant missing links in coherent transport network between Visegrad Countries may still exist,

**stressing** that the Visegrad Group can achieve a much better position in the negotiations on the European Union budget and the rules of using the European financial sources for transport development beyond 2020, than each of the Visegrad Countries could reach individually,

**emphasizing** that the comprehensive and systematic development of transport connections, in particular along the North-South axis results in a higher efficiency than development of separate transport elements,

**based on** the Conclusions of the meeting of State Secretaries/Deputy Ministers responsible for Transport of the Visegrad Group countries signed in Budapest on 27 November 2013, and the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the establishment of the High Level Working Group on transport connections between the Visegrad Group countries, signed in Brussels, on 14 March 2014,

**agree** that further steps have to be taken to coordinate the future development of the transport networks, including the North-South connections of the Visegrad Region, and a solid common approach needs to be worked out before the negotiations on the financial period beyond 2020 begin.

	<b>Deadline</b>
In the framework of this common approach, the Visegrad countries shall establish a joint list of transport infrastructure projects of high importance to all four Visegrad Group Member States, with the intention to present it together during the negotiations on the next EU financial perspective beyond 2020 as well as during the revision of the TEN-T network. In order to attain these goals, the Ministries responsible for transport and the High Level Working Group on transport connections shall elaborate a short-, medium- and long-term programme, with attention to the following schedule: <b>Target</b>	
An inventory of rail, road, port and inland waterway projects on the TEN-T networks of V4 Countries - accomplished until 2007, - accomplished between 2007 and 2013, - and planned developments for the period 2014-2020.	30 September 2014
A list of indicative development plans of V4 Countries for the period after 2020	30 June 2016
Updated maps on the projects planned after 2020	30 September 2016
A common position about a list of priority projects that V4 Countries will represent together during the negotiations on the financial rules of the 2021-2027 period, and the review of the TEN-T network	31 December 2016
Joint letter to the Commission about the projects to be accomplished after 2020	31 March 2017

### **34.**

## **Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation**

**24 June 2014**

We, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, recognize that current security trends in Europe call for even closer regional defence cooperation and multinational programs deeply rooted in NATO and EU policies. The Visegrad Cooperation continues to serve as a platform for coordination of our countries in all European and transatlantic security policy fora.

In our statement in October 2013 we tasked our Defence Ministers to deepen defence cooperation among our countries by drafting a Long Term Vision specifying our shared strategic objectives, strengthening cooperation in the field of training and exercises of the armed forces in the V4 format, and creating a framework for an enhanced defence planning cooperation. We thereby endorse the results achieved and, in particular, welcome the adoption of the Long Term Vision this March. The areas of cooperation stipulated in the Long Term Vision, and subsequently identified opportunities for common V4 defence projects and cooperative ventures provide the sufficient foundation for the New Opening in our defence relations. We encourage further efforts in implementing these forward-looking ideas.

In accordance with the Long Term Vision and other documents approved during the Hungarian V4 Presidency we are committed to make further progress in our defence cooperation. We will use the recently designed structures to identify areas of practical cooperation and pursue specific projects in the field of defence capability development including joint development projects and military equipment acquisitions. In this process we support the involvement of V4 national defence industries as much as possible. At the same time we are open to cooperation with other partners outside the V4 where and when useful.

Cooperation among the V4 national defence industries will be further explored in the field of research and development as well as production, in order to provide efficient solutions for the capability needs of our armed forces and to strengthen our national defence industrial base. An example of a mutually beneficial industrial cooperation project could be the common development and procurement of a universal modular tracked platform or wheeled armoured personnel carrier. In addition to new capability development projects, previously agreed or running regional initiatives including the Smart Defence project on pooling CBRN capabilities and the Joint Logistic Support Group need to be implemented.

We will continue preparation for the V4 EU Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) to be on stand-by in the first half of 2016. The Visegrád Battlegroup serves as a linchpin for our defence cooperation in the area of training, exercises and capability development. The current security situation in Europe underlines our intention to link the V4 EU Battlegroup certification exercise with NATO's Trident Juncture 2015 exercise. Based on the experience gained during the creation of our EU Battlegroup, we see merits in establishing a permanent V4 multinational force.

We endorse the commitment of our Defence Ministers to organize annual V4 military exercises starting from 2015 focused also on collective defence according to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. These exercises will be essential for our armed forces to remain interoperable. In this context, involvement of other regional partners, as well as the U.S. forces is desirable. This is our contribution to NATO's Connected Forces Initiative and also supports the implementation of reassurance measures to enhance our collective defence and deterrence.

The aggression of Russia against Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea have changed the security environment in Europe and made us re-think our defence posture. We are determined to actively and substantially contribute to reassurance measures within the Alliance. These events could also provide stimulus for further cooperation. We recognize the increasing importance of Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) in the region. We also welcome the MNC NE framework

nations' work to enhance its operational capabilities and usability as a platform for regional defence cooperation.

The crisis confirmed that NATO, founded on strong bonds between North America and Europe, continues to be the cornerstone of the transatlantic security and collective defence and an essential forum for security consultations. Keeping the transatlantic partnership strong and stable is in our shared and vital interest. We look forward to the upcoming NATO summit in Wales as an important opportunity to show the strength of the transatlantic relationship and provide a credible and comprehensive outlook for the Alliance beyond 2014.

Healthy partnership also means fair burden-sharing. Here, we commit ourselves to invest sufficient resources in our defence and reverse the negative trends of the past several years. Our ambition is to gradually increase our defence spending towards the threshold of 2% of GDP and allocate appropriate portion of our defence budgets to modernization projects with the aim to develop new defence capabilities. At the same time, we will ensure maximum efficiency of how we spend our defence budgets.

The V4 brand is already recognized by our Allies and Partners. We are committed to continue our common efforts to be a visible element of the global security environment in line with the EU strategic tasks set up by the European Council in December 2013, as well as part of the "European share" in the transatlantic relations by generating our own creative defence solutions.

Therefore, we, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád countries, task our Defence Ministers to further enhance our defence cooperation by:

- preparing the Action Plan of the V4 defence cooperation during the Slovak Presidency;
- elaborating the V4 Training and Exercise Strategy during the Slovak Presidency;
- exploring the possibility of strengthening cooperation among V4 defence industries in the field of research and development and production;
- exploring options of the common development and procurement project of universal modular tracked platform and wheeled armoured personnel carrier;
- exploring the possibilities of forming a permanent V4 modular force which could be used as a Visegrád contribution to NATO and EU rapid reaction forces as well as in crisis management operations, building on the experience and knowledge gained through the preparation of the V4 EU BG.

We, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries, task our Defence Ministers to report back to us at the end of the Slovak V4 Presidency about the progress achieved in these areas.