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• Visegrad Group
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— REPORT

on the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

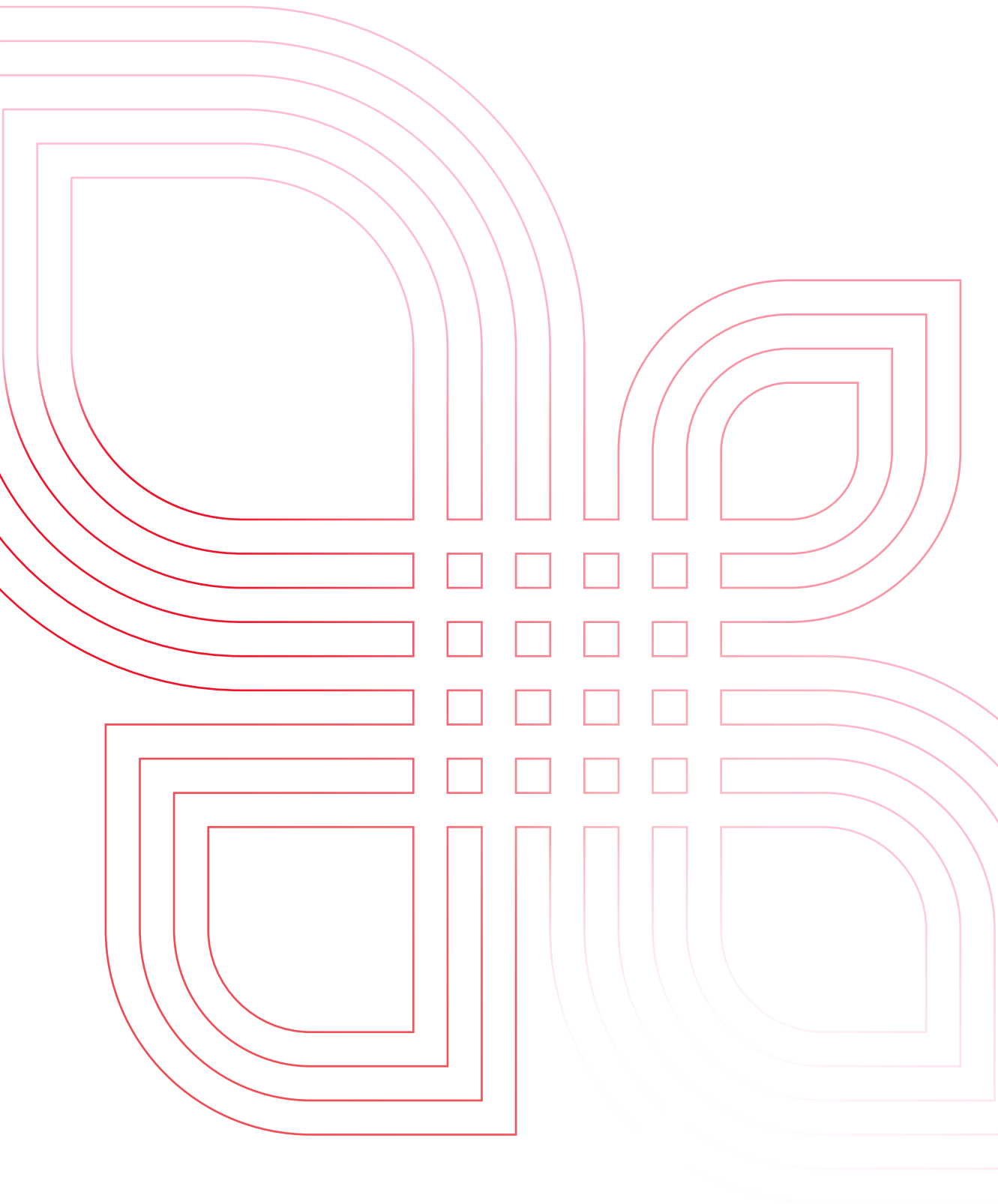
JULY 2020 —

JUNE 2021

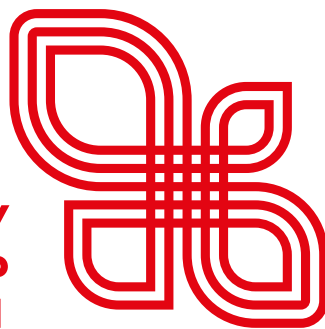


Polish Presidency
of the Visegrad Group
July 2020–June 2021

years
of V4

**Polish Presidency
of the Visegrad Group**
July 2020–June 2021



R E P O R T

on the Polish Presidency
of the Visegrad Group

JULY 2020 - JUNE 2021

WARSAW 2021



Photo by Krystian Maj/Chancellery of the Prime Minister

” The Polish presidency has shown that it has the power to unite. We play as a team and we can achieve ever more together. ”

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki during the Visegrad Group summit concluding the Polish Presidency (Katowice, 30 June 2021)

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Dear Readers,

Poland's one-year chairmanship of the Visegrad Group, which ended on 30 June 2021, fell during the difficult period of our struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic. Quite naturally, this was also one of the key themes of our Presidency. In order to coordinate our fight against the pandemic even better, in October 2020 we established the Virtual V4 Centre for COVID-19. However, in the context of the pandemic, we focused not only on streamlining our cooperation within the V4, but also on solidarity with our closest partners. During the Polish Presidency, we implemented, among others, the second edition of the V4 East Solidarity Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries, funded from the International Visegrad Fund, which supported local capabilities to fight the pandemic.

Poland's Presidency was also special because on 15 February 2021 we celebrated the 30th anniversary of Visegrad interstate cooperation, even though its roots go back even further, i.e. to the times of our joint struggle for democratic transformations in our countries. We celebrated the anniversary in a symbolic way, not only through special murals in the capitals of our four countries, but above all through a series of high-level political events, including summits of V4 presidents and prime ministers and a teleconference of the speakers of the Group's parliaments. During the anniversary summit of the Visegrad Group prime ministers, with the participation of the President of the European Council, held in Kraków on 17 February 2021, the prime ministers adopted two important declarations. The first one was an anniversary declaration outlining the main areas of V4 cooperation for the future. It also includes the decision to increase the budget of the International Visegrad Fund to 10 million euros per year in order to reinforce the cooperation of the Visegrad youth, under the motto of 'Generation V4'. The text of the declaration as well as other important initiatives of

the Polish Presidency can be found on the websites of the Polish Presidency and the Visegrad Group (the addresses can be found in this report). The second significant initiative adopted by the prime ministers during the Kraków summit was a declaration on mutual cooperation on digital projects. On this basis, the first meeting of the V4 Virtual Office for Digital Projects was held in June 2021.

Over the past 30 years, the Visegrad Group has contributed to the development of an unprecedented degree of cooperation between our countries and to the achievement of our strategic goals, i.e. accession to NATO and the European Union. The intensive period of the Polish Presidency of the V4 has confirmed that the Group is an important platform for joint initiatives and actions in areas where the interests of our four countries converge: above all with regard to EU policy as well as relations with European neighbouring states. The main advantages of this most developed form of regional cooperation in Central Europe, which is one of Poland's priorities in foreign policy, include its flexibility, enabling quick crisis response, and intensity. During the year of Polish Presidency of the V4, more than 80 high-level political meetings were held and more than 30 joint initiatives and documents were agreed and adopted. We are united by the awareness of similar social and economic challenges that we face, the belief that the Central European interests and sensibilities should be taken into account in further development of the European Union, and the will to actively pursue common objectives in European and foreign policies, enabling us to ensure optimal conditions for further dynamic development of our countries and the EU as a whole.

This report will acquaint you with a number of specific initiatives of the Visegrad Group implemented during the Polish Presidency in areas such as: negotiations of the new EU financial framework, Eastern policy, migration policy, health, infrastructure, climate and environment, EU enlargement policy, defence cooperation, social policy, economy, culture, agriculture and finance. I do hope that this report will also help to raise further awareness of the scale and scope of Visegrad cooperation which represents an important dimension of Poland's European and foreign policy.

Szymon Szykowski vel Sęk

*Government Plenipotentiary for the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group
and the 30th anniversary of Visegrad cooperation*



Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group in numbers:

4

murals commemorating the 30th anniversary of Visegrad cooperation, celebrated on 15 February 2021, were initiated by the Polish Presidency in the four V4 capitals: Warsaw, Bratislava, Budapest and Prague

8

locations, i.e. Warsaw, Katowice, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Rogalin and Wadowice, hosted the main events of the Polish Presidency

12

months – the period for which Poland held the V4 Presidency

18

meetings of the V4 Virtual Centre for COVID-19, established during the Polish Presidency to improve coordination and information exchange on activities related to fighting the pandemic

80+

high-level political meetings

30+

joint initiatives and documents agreed and adopted during the Polish Presidency

MORE THAN

**1,3 million
reads**

of social media messages posted by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in connection with the 30th anniversary of Visegrad cooperation and the Jubilee Summit of Prime Ministers in Kraków

**EUR
10 million**

the annual budget of the International Visegrad Fund, which finances joint projects in the V4 countries as well as in the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans, after the increase decided by the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries at the initiative of the Polish Presidency

The Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

While developing the programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group, we divided our goals into four main thematic areas: “Strong V4 in a strong Europe” (implementation of common interests in the EU and in foreign policy), “Return to normality” (fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences), “People-to-people contacts and V4 cohesion” (developing cooperation between V4 societies and strengthening the V4 Group cohesion) and “Digital V4 - e-V4” (developing cooperation in the digital sector). The main activities of the Visegrad Group in these priority thematic areas during the Polish Presidency are presented below. We also invite Readers to visit the website of the Polish Presidency of the V4, which provides chronological multimedia records of the key milestones completed during the Presidency as well as the V4 website, containing selected documents agreed and adopted during the Polish Presidency.



Link to the website of the Polish
Presidency of the V4 2020–21
www.gov.pl/web/V4presidency



Link to the list of selected documents adopted
during the Polish Presidency of the V4 on the
Visegrad Group website
www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements



1. Strong V4 in a strong Europe



Photo by Krystian Maj / Chancellery of the Prime Minister

” [We declare] our readiness to further jointly contribute to the success of the European project based on our common goal of a secure, prosperous and stable European Union, composed of strong and resilient Member States and supported by effective European institutions acting in line with the principles of equality, mutual respect, subsidiarity and proportionality.”

an excerpt from the Jubilee Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group adopted at the V4 Jubilee Summit with participation of the President of the European Council (Kraków, 17 February)

The jubilee summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries in Kraków



Photo by Krystian Maj / Chancellery of the Prime Minister



Photo by Krystian Maj / Chancellery of the Prime Minister





Photo by Krystian Maj /Chancellery of the Prime Minister

The **Jubilee Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group, attended by the President of the European Council**, was held on 17 February 2021 in Kraków. During the summit, three decades of the Visegrad cooperation were summed up, tasks for the future were defined and joint declarations were signed: the anniversary declaration and the digital declaration. Leaders discussed issues from the current EU political agenda, such as combating COVID-19, the EU climate and migration policy as well as the situation in the EU neighbourhood, mainly in Eastern Partnership countries.

The anniversary declaration signed by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group during the jubilee celebrations confirms the successful development of the V4 cooperation over the past 30 years. It is **one of the most extensive declarations adopted at the level of prime ministers in the history of V4. It defines specific fields of cooperation within the Group, ranging from social and economic issues and innovation, through elements related to sustainable development and environmental protection, energy and transport, to cooperation in internal and external security as well as the international agenda.**

The Prime Ministers of the V4 countries also adopted a **decision to increase the budget of the International Visegrad Fund to 10 million euros starting from 2022** in order to reinforce the social dimension of the Visegrad cooperation, primarily in youth mobility, under the slogan “Generation V4.”

The V4 Prime Ministers noted the positive experience of the **V4 Information Exchange Centre for COVID-19**, established during the Polish Presidency of the V4. On this basis, they declared the intention to continue exchanging information and best practices in the area of civil protection, crisis management, natural disaster and risk management, also with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, and coordination of the crisis response capacities of the V4 countries.

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries also adopted a **declaration on strengthening cooperation in cross-border digital projects** and took part in an online panel discussion on the dynamically growing digital creative sector in Central Europe. In this way, the Visegrad Group showed its modern **face of a leader in modern technologies, digital agenda and the gaming sector**.

The President of the European Council Charles Michel was the honourable guest at the V4 Prime Ministers' Summit. Together with the Prime Ministers, he discussed the crucial issues on the EU's current political agenda, including the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, relations with the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia, migration and climate policy. The leaders of the V4 countries stressed, among others, the Group's determination to engage in further joint efforts in the Eastern policy. In turn, President Michel declared that the V4's commitment in this area would be leveraged in EU work.



Video coverage of the summit of the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoC8UVpsGNI>



Video on 30 years of Visegrad cooperation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CNvYm9dtKM>



Coordination and joint efforts in European and foreign policy

The Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group continued the tradition of coordination meetings of the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries before all European Council sessions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings were held both in-person and via videoconferencing. Apart from the topics related to the agenda of specific European Council sessions, the meetings also enabled the ongoing coordination of activities in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Coordination meetings of ministers of European affairs were held regularly before the meetings of the General Affairs Council, and so were the ongoing coordination meetings of the V4 before the ENVI and TTE (Energy) Councils at the level of ministers or deputy ministers.

The key areas of the Visegrad Group's activity within the thematic area "Strong V4 in a strong Europe" during the Polish Presidency:

The Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU



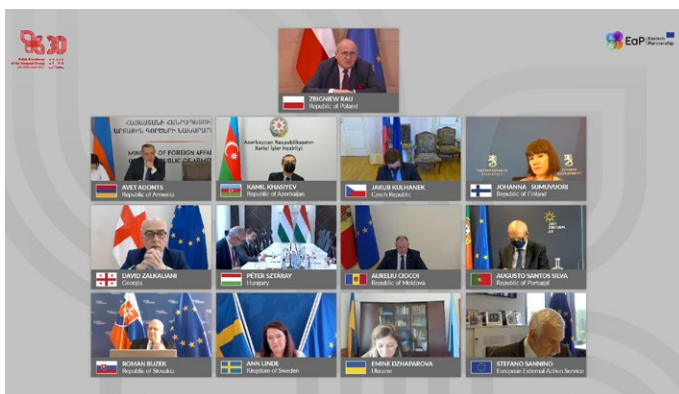
Coordination meetings of V4 Prime Ministers prior to European Council meetings
Photo by Krystian Maj /
Chancellery of the Prime Minister

Since the Polish Presidency of the V4 coincided with the finalisation of EU negotiations concerning the adoption of the new Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU for 2021–2027, the question of programming of the new financial framework was the subject of intense coordination of positions and actions of the Visegrad Group countries, with a special focus on cohesion policy and the Recovery Plan for Europe. These activities **contributed to the adoption of solutions within the EU that benefit our region.**

Eastern Policy



Summit of V4 Prime Ministers in Lublin, 11 September 2020
Photo by Krystian Maj /
Chancellery of the Prime Minister



Videoconference of foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership, 29 April 2021.
Photo by Tymon Markowski /
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Eastern policy was an important priority of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group. We were involved in **supporting the civil society in Belarus**. Apart from initiating sanctions against those involved in electoral fraud and repression against the civil society, Poland also proposed drafting a positive agenda to encourage Belarus to undertake democratic reforms. The proposal to prepare an **Economic Plan for a Democratic Belarus** was presented by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and accepted by the V4 prime ministers



during the summit in Lublin (11 September 2020).¹ The idea was supported by the remaining EU leaders, which is why provisions regarding the need to develop such a plan were included, among others, in the European Council conclusions of 2 October 2020 and the EU Council conclusions on Belarus of 12 October 2020. The V4 proposal was implemented by the European Commission, which presented the outcome of its work on 28 May 2021.²

Another important event of the Polish Presidency was the **videoconference of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries**, enabling a discussion about the future of the EU Neighbourhood Policy in the East and, in particular, security issues. At the invitation of Minister Zbigniew Rau, the meeting was also attended by the foreign ministers of Portugal, Finland and Sweden, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi, and the Secretary General of the EEAS Stefano Sannino. During the videoconference, the Visegrad Group ministers adopted a joint statement on the future of the Eastern Partnership, stressing that the EU policy towards its Eastern partners must be credible, dynamic and attractive. It should reflect the common values that are the foundation of the Eastern Partnership. The ministers declared their will to maintain the support and further development of the Eastern Partnership after 2020.

During the Polish Presidency, the Visegrad Group also actively responded to **threats from the East**. In this context worth mentioning are, for instance, the **joint statements of the V4 prime ministers on the poisoning of A. Navalny** (12 September 2020) and on **sabotage at an ammunition depot in the Czech Republic** (26 April 2021).

¹ The proposal presented by the V4 assumed, among others, the EU involvement in cooperation with international and European financial institutions (IMF, WB, OECD, EIB, EBRD) in macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reforms; support for programmes aimed at energy security, attracting direct foreign investments, the development of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, striving to introduce visa-free travel in the nearest future.

² The final version of the Plan provides for the mobilisation of a EUR 3 billion package by the EU in the event Belarus commences democratic transformations. The package will be a mix of grants and loans to support public and private investment to help Belarus in stabilising its economy, reforming its institutions to make them more democratic and enhancing the country's resilience to crisis events.



Photo by Ministry of Interior and Administration

The V4 leaders also discussed and exchanged information on migration issues and border protection, both in the context of the negotiations on the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** and in the context of current events (the situation in Spain's Ceuta, events in Belarus). During the Polish Presidency, **the V4 maintained a coherent and unified position on migration and asylum policy**, striving for a compromise based on the June 2018 conclusions of the European Council, in particular in the context of maintaining a balance between responsibility and solidarity as well as voluntary character of the most controversial tools for supporting Member States, such as relocations. The leaders' engagement provided an impulse for the **joint non-paper** of 16 December 2020, prepared by the Polish Presidency of the V4 and **adopted by the interior ministers of the V4 countries as well as Estonia and Slovenia**. In the document, the ministers expressed the position that the solidarity mechanism should remain open and expressed in a sovereign manner. In a situation of migratory pressure, support is essential but it must be flexible and ensure the freedom to choose the means according to the countries' capacities. The leaders also agreed that future solutions should ensure effective control over migration flows to and within the European Union, which is crucial to the proper functioning of the Schengen area in order to provide an adequate response to possible migration crises, both those in the Mediterranean area as well as in the east of the Union. It is essential for the European Union to have the tools to put pressure on third countries which do not cooperate in the sphere of migration.

Other events held during the Polish Presidency of the V4 included a **ministerial conference of the Visegrad Group countries as well as Austria, Denmark, Estonia and Latvia on the shape of EU migration policy** (4 December 2020), **four videoconferences of deputy ministers of the interior** (29 July 2020 5 October 2020, 13 November 2020, and 23 March 2021), as well as a meeting of representatives of the V4 and Serbia on border protection



(28 April 2021) and a **meeting of experts from the Visegrad Group countries as part of work on the V4 Migration Analysis Centre.**

Climate and environment



Photo by Ministry of Climate and Environment

The first six months of the Polish Presidency saw **intensified activity of the Visegrad Group in the EU** in the area of climate and energy policy. **Several meetings were held among the V4 countries as well as in the extended format including Bulgaria and Romania, both at the ministerial and expert level.** These meetings aimed to develop a common position on the following issues of the EU climate and energy policy:

- 1) legislative work on the European Green Deal, including, among others, negotiations on the draft regulation on the European Climate Law and the Just Transition Fund;
- 2) sustainable financing (taxonomy) in the field of nuclear energy;
- 3) European Emissions Trading System (EU ETS).

As a result of these meetings, on 13 July 2020 the climate and environment ministers of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria and Romania handed over a **joint letter on the impact assessment of the 2030 EU climate target** to the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans. In January 2021, under the auspices of the V4 Presidency, at the initiative of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union and Business and Science Poland, with the cooperation of the Polish Ministry of Climate and Environment, a high-level online debate was held under the following title: One step for energy transformation, a huge leap for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE): a Hydrogen Outlook on climate neutrality. The debate was attended by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Climate and Environment of Poland.

On 19 March 2021, at Poland's initiative, the prime ministers of the V4 countries as well as France, Romania and Slovenia sent a joint letter to the European Commission on the **role of nuclear energy in the EU climate and energy policy**. The letter was sent in the context of the ongoing discussion on the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Financing Initiative. Its signatories stressed that all the available zero- and low-emission technologies which contribute to climate neutrality and, at the same time, support other energy policy objectives should be recognised as well as actively supported by the European Union.

Forestry was a significant item on the climate and environmental agenda of the Polish Presidency in the V4. A **meeting of deputy ministers responsible for forestry** of the Visegrad Group countries as well as Bulgaria and Romania was held on 13 May 2021 to discuss forestry and forest management against the background of the European Green Deal.

On 7 June 2021, a **meeting of environment and climate ministers of the V4 countries as well as Bulgaria and Romania** was held. The meeting was devoted to the current key issues on the EU agenda: the "Fit for 55" collection of policy measures prepared by the EC as well as the EU strategy on biodiversity.

At the end of the Presidency, on 16 June 2021, a **meeting of deputy ministers of energy of the Visegrad Group** was held to discuss issues such as the financing of technologies and fuels for the energy and climate transformation (including natural gas and nuclear energy), plans for the development of hydrogen technologies in the context of EU and national strategies as well as the regulation on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure (TEN-E).





Photo by Sebastian Indra /Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Meeting of the V4+Western Balkans foreign ministers, Poznań and Rogalin, 28 June 2021
Photo by Tymon Markowski/Ministry of Foreign Affairs



QR code and link to video coverage of the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans in Poznań and Rogalin:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TMzvwoRltw

During the Polish presidency of the Visegrad Group, the V4 traditionally supported the European aspirations of the Western Balkan countries, a region of importance in the context of stability and security of Europe as a whole. On 28 June 2021, a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the V4 countries and the Western Balkans was held in the historic palace in Rogalin. At the invitation of the Polish party, the meeting was also attended by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues. The ministers discussed ideas on how to accelerate the pace of the EU enlargement policy, show solidarity in supporting the efforts to rebuild a strong Europe in the post-pandemic period, and how to draw on the experience of Central Europe in building an effective regional partnership. The foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group expressed their continued support for the integration efforts of the Western Balkans, both politically and by sharing their experiences from the pre-accession period and 17 years of EU membership. They also called for the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia as soon as possible and for further progress in accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss the post-pandemic situation. The head of Polish diplomacy stressed the importance of the EU's solidarity and cooperation with the region in this regard. He also recalled the Polish assistance provided to the countries of the region during the pandemic. During the discussion on the development prospects of regional cooperation, the participating representatives of the Western Balkans expressed their interest in drawing on the good experience of the Visegrad cooperation and the forms of cooperation developed within its framework. In the presence of the ministers, **the executive directors of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) signed a memorandum of understanding on technical support from the IVF to the WBF.** Numerous projects are implemented each year through the International Visegrad Fund, targeted at partners from the Western Balkans. The Fund also offers scholarships to students from the Western Balkans at universities of the V4 countries. On this occasion, the foreign ministers of the V4 countries adopted a joint statement on the support to the European integration of the Western Balkan countries. Before the meeting in Rogalin, the heads of delegations laid wreaths at the Monument to the Victims of June 1956 in Poznań.

The Visegrad Group countries, together with Austria, also approached the European institutions in May 2021 with a **request to include the Western Balkans in the Conference on the Future of Europe.** Balkan issues were also discussed by the ministers of foreign affairs in both the V4 and V4+Japan formats as well as by the deputy ministers of foreign affairs in the V4+UK and V4+Spain formats.





Photo by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development



Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group plus Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia (V4+7), 27–29 September 2020 in Poznań

Photo by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

On 27–29 September 2020, during the POLAGRA FOOD International Trade Fair for Food in Poznań, **a meeting of the ministers of agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Slovenia (V4+7) was held with the participation of Janusz Wojciechowski, EU Commissioner for Agriculture.** The agenda of the meeting included the future of the EU Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 and the application of new technologies in agriculture to counteract the negative consequences of climate change, such as droughts. During the meeting, **ministers of**

agriculture of the V4+7 countries adopted a joint declaration on the essential elements of the EU Common Agricultural Policy reform in connection with the negotiations of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027.

On 21 April 2021, a videoconference of **ministers of agriculture of the V4 countries plus Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia (V4+4)** was held. The discussed topics included the 'Farm to Fork' strategy and the CAP Strategic Plans. The **ministers of agriculture of the V4 countries as well as Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania adopted a joint declaration on opportunities and challenges for farms in the light of the 'Farm to Fork' strategy.**

Other events organised during the Polish Presidency included: an expert meeting of Paying Agencies of the V4 countries plus Croatia and Romania (21–22 October 2020), and a webinar focusing on the role of Central and Eastern Europe in research and innovation in European food systems (24 June 2021).

Conference on the Future of Europe

One of the areas of interest for the Polish V4 Presidency was the discussion on the future of European integration. The Conference on the Future of Europe, officially inaugurated on 9 May 2021, is a platform for discussing challenges and priorities facing the EU. As a forum for discussing the future of the European project, the Conference aims to give a voice to citizens, whose ideas and suggestions will ultimately be incorporated as recommendations to the EU in the final report in the spring of 2022. Citizens play a key role in the Conference, which is an opportunity for them to become directly involved in the public and pan-European dialogue and to present their views on the kind of Europe they would like to live in.

The Polish Presidency of the V4 strived to make the voice of the citizens of the V4 region heard in Europe and their opinions and interests taken into account in the debate. The Polish V4 Presidency also commenced the coordination of the Visegrad Group's position vis-à-vis the Conference. To that end, it organised coordination meetings in the form of videoconferences on 5 May and 16 June 2021.





The first meeting of the heads of diplomacy of the Visegrad Group countries during the Polish Presidency in the V4 (Wadowice, 7 July 2020). Photo by Tymon Markowski / Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (Łódź, 14 May 2021). Photo by Tymon Markowski / Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Meeting of foreign ministers of V4 countries, Rogalin, 28 June 2021. Photo by Tymon Markowski / Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Intensive V4 dialogue on foreign policy continued during the Polish Presidency.

The **ministers of foreign affairs of the V4 countries met four times in the V4 only formula**: on 7 July 2020, they **inaugurated the Polish Presidency at the level of heads of diplomacy in Wadowice**, on 27 August 2020 they coordinated their positions on the sidelines of the Gymnich meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU Member States in Berlin; on 14 May 2021 in **Łódź, they discussed the possibilities of strengthening the Visegrad cooperation in international organisations** while on 16 June 2021, they jointly took part in the **V4 panel entitled “A view from Central Europe: Future of the EU” and a joint press conference during the GLOBSEC 2021 conference** in Bratislava.



Video coverage of the meeting of MFAs of V4 countries in Łódź
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb59fWcd_No

During the Polish Presidency, numerous meetings of foreign ministers **in the V4+ formula** were also held. Apart from the aforementioned meetings with the ministers of foreign affairs of the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries, the following meetings were held:

- **Meeting of the heads of diplomacy in the V4+France formula** on the sidelines of the GLOBSEC 2020 conference (Bratislava, 8 October 2020), discussing the issues on the current European agenda, including migration policy;
- **Meeting of heads of diplomacy in the V4+USA formula** (Brussels, 23 March 2021) devoted to transatlantic and NATO cooperation;



Photo by Ministry of Foreign Affairs



- **Meeting of heads of diplomacy in the V4+Japan formula** (Warsaw, 7 May 2021) discussing, among others, the status of EU-Japan relations, prospects for V4 cooperation with Japan, also with regard to the Western Balkans, relations with the United States and the security situation in Europe and Asia.



Photo by Tymon Markowski /
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Video footage from the meeting of foreign ministers
of V4 countries and Japan:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVBFDR0Mf9I

Consultations of the ministries of foreign affairs in the V4+ formula were also conducted **at the level of deputy ministers:**

- On 2 December 2020, a videoconference was held, gathering deputy ministers of foreign affairs in the **V4+Spain** formula, who discussed, among others, current issues related to the EU's neighbourhood policy, relations with the Western Balkans countries, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, asylum and migration issues as well as the Conference on the Future of Europe and transatlantic relations.



Photo by Tymon Markowski /
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- On 14 January 2021, a videoconference of deputy ministers of foreign affairs in the **V4+UK format** was organised, focusing on Eastern policy, relations with the Western Balkan countries, countering disinformation, the Group's relations with London after Brexit and transatlantic relations.
- On 15 April 2021, the deputy ministers of **V4+Central Asia** held a videoconference consultation on current challenges in regional, international and security policy.



Security



Meeting of V4 Defence Ministers, 20–21 June 2021.
Photo by Leszek Chemperek / Ministry of National Defence

Security cooperation was an important priority of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group.

On 14 December 2020, a videoconference of defence ministers of the V4 countries was held to discuss key issues on the NATO and the EU agenda, as well as the **V4 Defence Cooperation Plan** developed during the Polish Presidency, aiming to operationalise long-term goals in this area, as adopted in Prague in June 2020.

The heads of defence ministries of the V4 countries met again on 20–21 June 2021 in Gdynia and Elbląg, where they summarised the 12 months of cooperation under the Polish Presidency. They discussed the progress of joint defence projects as well as the results of the NATO summit in Brussels. The meeting took place at the headquarters of the **Multinational Division North East**, where soldiers from all the V4 countries cooperate on a daily basis. The ministers signed a **letter of intent on establishing cooperation between military academies in the field of strategic communication** with the intention of raising awareness of the national, regional and global StratCom environment in their respective countries. On 23 June in Kraków, Chiefs of Staff of the V4 countries signed a **Memorandum of Understanding regarding the establishment of the EU Visegrad Battle Group in 2023**.³

³ This will be the third duty of the EU Visegrad Battle Group. The previous ones took place in 2016 and 2019.



Photo by Leszek Chemperek / Ministry of National Defence

Other selected meetings under the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group in the field of security and defence:

- a **meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the V4 countries** (Warsaw, 29–30 September 2020), dedicated to a discussion on defence capacity building, the development of cyber forces, joint exercises and training, and cooperation of the armed forces during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chiefs of Staff also exchanged opinions on the operational deployment of V4 forces in the context of NATO and EU responses to security threats, and discussed the role of the V4 countries in the NATO Response Force and the Readiness Initiative, both of which are crucial for the Eastern Flank. After the meeting, they also visited the 1st Warsaw Armoured Brigade in Wesola near Warsaw, where they were joined by **the Chief of the General Staff of Ukraine** General Ruslan Khomchak. The topics discussed included the preparation of the V4 Battle Group, which is expected to be ready to operate under the EU flag in 2023.
- a **meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the V4 countries and Ukraine** (Kraków, 22–24 June 2021) to sum up the Polish Presidency and discuss plans for the Hungarian Presidency of the V4. The Chiefs of Staff signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the EU Visegrad Battle Group in 2023 and **adopted an updated V4 Exercise Plan for 2021–2023** to enhance the interoperability of the armies of the V4 countries. On 24 June, at the invitation of the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, the heads of defence of the V4 countries were joined by General Ruslan Khomchak, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The talks in the V4+ formula concerned the security situation on NATO's Eastern Flank and the military cooperation of the five countries.



- a **videoconference of operational commanders of the V4 countries, Ukraine and Romania** (20 January 2021), which enabled the discussion of operational cooperation and prospects for engagement in exercises in 2021–2023.
- a **videoconference of national cybercrime contact points** (21 April 2021) to discuss cooperating methods in the fight against cybercrime.
- **regional online workshop of Financial Intelligence Units from the V4 countries plus Austria and Slovenia** (15 June 2021), organised by the Polish Ministry of Finance. The workshop participants discussed the current challenges for the anti-money laundering and countering terrorist financing (AML/CFT) system in our region and in the EU.
- a **videoconference of Directors General of Civil Protection of the Visegrad Group** (24 June 2021) organised by the National Headquarters of the State Fire Service of Poland. The meeting focused on the involvement of civil protection in supporting the activities of other sectors, based on the experience of the COVID-19 response.
- **“Cyber Security for Justice” conference** (3–4 December 2020) organised by the Polish Ministry of Justice. The conference was devoted to the exchange of experience in this area between the V4 countries and was combined with the announcement of results of the “153+1” cyber security competition for secondary school students.

2. Return to normality



Photo by Krystian Maj /Prime Minister's Chancellery

” This is our common intention, and we want to stress it very strongly. We do not want to shut down the economy. However, we are humble in the face of the epidemic, which is why we will coordinate our actions in the best possible way to make sure the economy works like a locomotive at top speed to help us get out of the crisis. ”

*Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki
during the meeting of prime ministers of the
V4 countries in Lublin on 11 September 2020*



Health

Since the beginning of the Polish Presidency, the exchange of information and coordination of activities in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic was among the priority areas of cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries.

On 9 October 2020, a **virtual V4 Centre for COVID-19** was established as a platform for regular videoconferences of experts from all ministries from the Visegrad Group countries involved in fighting against the pandemic. During the Polish Presidency, the Centre held a total of 18 meetings. Topics discussed included the restrictions planned for introduction in the individual V4 countries, restrictions at national borders, the situation in the health services and issues related to the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group in the field of health was summed up at the **videoconference of health ministers** of the V4 countries on 28 June 2021.



The meeting inaugurating the V4 Virtual Centre for COVID-19, 9 October 2020.

Photo by Sebastian Indra /Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Post-pandemic economic recovery



Meeting of ministers of the economy of the V4 countries and France, 21 June 2021. Photo by Aleksandra Majchrzak-Kucharska /Ministry of Economic Development and Technology



Agenda 2030 Forum in the V4+ format, 6 June 2021. Photo by Joanna Wilczak-Wyszowska / Ministry of Economic Development and Technology



Efforts to ensure optimal conditions for bringing Europe back on the path of economic growth were of crucial importance during the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group.

To inaugurate the Polish Presidency of the V4 in the field of economy, the Polish Ministry of Development organised an online meeting of V4 economy ministers on 23 September 2020 during the Impact'20 conference. **A joint communiqué on economic cooperation to put Europe back on the path to growth** was adopted during the meeting.



Online meeting of V4 Economy Ministers on 23 September 2020 during the Impact'20 conference.
Photo by Jacek Domański /Ministry of Economic Development and Technology

In the communiqué, ministers highlighted the key role of the Single Market in ensuring the prosperity of EU citizens and called on the European Commission to counter all forms of internal protectionism in the trade in goods and services. While stressing the need for an ambitious trade policy, including an indispensable reform of the WTO, the ministers indicated the need to diversify supply chains and industrial production, which is indispensable for the EU to achieve strategic autonomy. On this occasion, the meeting participants invoked the **so-called Warsaw Declaration for cooperation on digital issues, announced by the V4 Prime Ministers on 28 March 2017**, declaring intensified cooperation in the development of artificial intelligence and innovation centres.

On 2 June 2021, the **Agenda 2030 Forum** for Sustainable Development was attended by the V4 ministers responsible for economic issues together with respective ministers from Romania and Bulgaria. Representatives of the stakeholder community from the V4+ countries interested in sustainable development were also invited. The meeting provided a forum for exchanging ideas and sharing of good practices in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals in our region as well as an incentive for private

entities and civil society to spread the knowledge about sustainable development and to undertake sustainable initiatives in public-private partnerships. The panel discussion touched upon the impact of the pandemic on economic growth and its structure, the reorientation of public policies and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The adopted **Outcome Document** points out that only a sustainable approach to recovery will enable the achievement of the ambitious goals set out in Agenda 2030.

On 21 June 2021, a **meeting of the Ministers of Economy of the V4 countries and France** was held in Kraków. The meeting focused on the EU policy on resilience and economic recovery after the pandemic in the context of strategic autonomy and the strengthening of competitiveness, with a particular focus on pharmaceutical sovereignty of the EU. The participants discussed the most important instruments covered in the updated industrial strategy of the European Union and discussed the economic situation of their respective countries. They also presented the main assumptions behind the National Recovery Plans. The ministers agreed that it would be necessary to join forces to increase the production capacities of European strategic industries and build capabilities for green and digital transformation, with resilient and stable supply chains, based on national and European technologies. It is also necessary to build industrial policy instruments and solutions within industrial policy to secure our economies in the event of any future crisis.

The ministers also took part in a panel discussion on challenges faced by the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. One of the discussed topics was last year's experience, which highlighted the European countries' overdependence on key supplies from third countries that are essential for drug production. In consequence, this may lead to shortages of medicines in our region.

In order to highlight the role of the pharmaceutical sector in building an innovative and resilient economy and in improving access to safe and effective medicines, the ministers **signed a declaration on mutual cooperation for the development of the pharmaceutical industry**. The aim is to coordinate actions to enhance competitiveness and develop the pharmaceutical capabilities of the V4 countries and France under the implementation of the priorities set out in the EU pharmaceutical strategy, in particular in the development of manufacturing infrastructure, new active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) and medicines, as well as cross-border pharmaceutical projects.

Other initiatives of the Polish Ministry of Economy during the Polish Presidency:

- On 15 February 2021 a **videoconference on hydrogen/IPCEI** was held to strengthen cooperation between the V4 countries on the potential joint implementation of projects in hydrogen technologies and systems based on the IPCEI instrument.



— On 27 April 2021, a **meeting of deputy ministers responsible for tourism and presidents of national tourism organisations of the V4** was held. During the meeting, the participants exchanged information on the current status of tourism economies in each V4 country and discussed actions to rebuild tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, on 27 January and 2 March 2021, the Polish Tourist Organisation held **videoconferences with representatives of national tourist organisations** of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, aiming to discuss current cooperation in the field of tourism and to develop a joint promotion plan for the so-called 'third markets' in 2021.

On 4 September 2020, the **V4 Finance Ministers** held a meeting in Warsaw. During the event, the ministers discussed efforts to tackle the negative economic outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the current economic challenges in Europe and cooperation in the area of VAT, including mobility of the digital market. Ministers pledged to cooperate in the region and to strengthen relations within the EU and on the international arena. The talks also covered the issues of global minimum taxation, combating tax fraud and fighting economic crime, especially with regard to income tax and VAT. Ministers also addressed the issue of greater effectiveness of EU anti-money laundering regulations, including the establishment of a new EU anti-money laundering supervisory centre in one of the V4 countries. They pointed out that joint efforts should be taken, among others, with regard to tax issues in the digital economy. These are priority issues given the serious role of the digital market in times of the pandemic and they require a model for administrative cooperation of V4 countries to be developed. At the end of the meeting, a **declaration on continued economic cooperation** was adopted, especially focusing on taxation of the digital economy sector and the exchange of international tax information.



Meeting of V4 finance ministers, 4 September 2020
Photo by Ministry of Finance

Ministers of finance met two more times during the Polish Presidency:

- on 15 April 2021, a **videoconference** was held to focus on: the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, the new system of the EU's own resources and the budgets of EU countries, including V4, after the pandemic. The ministers discussed the economic recovery after COVID-19, also in the context of fiscal policy. During the videoconference, the ministers decided to submit **a joint letter** to the European Commission regarding the **delegated act on taxonomy**. In the letter, the ministers took a detailed position in three areas: nuclear energy, gas technologies and the modernisation of infrastructure (storage, distribution and transmission). It was stressed during the discussion that the delegated act must provide a comprehensive tool for sustainable transformation and create a level playing field for all countries in this regard. In the ministers' opinion, the aim of the sustainable financing initiative must be to enable the transformation of the entire economy, including the industrial sectors. Failure to include gas or nuclear energy would represent a risk for the financing of these investments.
- On 22 June 2021, the ministers held an **on-site meeting in Warsaw**. It provided an opportunity to take stock of activities undertaken during the Polish Presidency and to discuss fair taxation of the economy undergoing digitalisation, also in the context of the ongoing OECD work in this sphere. The ministers agreed that the common position on taxation will be maintained during the Hungarian Presidency.

Moreover, the following expert events also took place during the Polish Presidency:

- On 27 May 2021, the National Tax Administration of Poland organised **a virtual expert meeting on e-services for citizens and entrepreneurs in the V4+ formula, with Austria and Slovenia**.
- On 22–23 June 2021, the National Tax Administration organised **a virtual expert meeting on transfer pricing monitoring, also in the V4+ formula, with Austria and Slovenia**.
- In March 2021, the V4 countries **amended the Trenčín Declaration**, a joint declaration by the V4 customs administrations adopted on 17 September 2015, with regard to the introduction of risk profiling for textile and footwear products imported from Asian countries.





Videoconference of ministers responsible for cohesion policy in the V4+4 countries, 25 February 2021.
Photo by Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy

In the context of the **work on the National Recovery Plans (NRPs), a videoconference of ministers responsible for cohesion policy in the V4+4 countries** was held on 25 February 2021. During the meeting, ministers discussed one of the key elements of the anti-crisis package under NextGenerationEU, i.e. the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the National Recovery Plans designed for its implementation.

During the **videoconference entitled “European Funds as a tool for building an innovative economy in the Visegrad countries”** held on 25 March 2021, representatives of the V4 had the opportunity to discuss business support instruments in the 2020+ financial framework, in particular in the field of research, development and innovation.

In turn, **the 14th International Evaluation Conference entitled “New realities: Challenges for cohesion policy and evaluation in the post-pandemic era”** was held on 27–28 May 2021. The discussion focused on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the implementation of public interventions.

The Polish Presidency also saw continued active **cooperation between the statistical offices of the Visegrad Group** countries. On 14 October 2020, a videoconference of the heads of the national statistical offices was held, resulting in the adoption of Annex IV to the **“Agreement on Cooperation between the Statistical Offices of the Visegrad Group Countries,”** which defined the detailed areas of in-depth cooperation during the Polish Presidency of the V4. The following events took place under this cooperation: a working meeting on the Global Value Chains (GVCs) (1 June 2021) and a working meeting on the analysis of mirror data on trade in goods using microdata (28 June 2021). In turn, the seminar entitled **“The Challenges for Cross-Border Statistics in the Context of Information**

Needs of V4+ Countries” was held on 30 June 2021, and was attended by the presidents of national statistical offices of the **V4 countries and Ukraine**.

During the Polish Presidency a joint publication was issued, entitled **“V4 Towards Europe 2020,”** summing up the progress made by V4 countries since 2010 versus the European Union. The study contains a set of indicators monitoring the implementation of goals formulated within the Europe 2020 Strategy in employment, R&D, climate change, energy, education, as well as poverty and social exclusion.



On-line version of the report:

V4 towards Europe 2020



3. People-to-people contacts and cohesion of V4



The infrastructural map of V4 countries prepared by the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) and Polkart Cartographical Publishing House for the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Mural powstał z okazji 30-tej rocznicy powstania Grupy Wyszehradzkiej, z inicjatywy polskiej prezydencji w Grupie. Prezentowany jest w czterech stołach partnerów tego ugrupowania: Bratysława, Budapeszt, Praga i Warszawa.



Photo by Sebastian Indra /Ministry of Foreign Affairs

” The Visegrad Group stands for numerous projects, not only political but also social ones. The Visegrad Fund, which has operated for over 20 years, has supported more than 6,000 joint projects. This mural, which we are unveiling in Warsaw today, is also an element of dialogue with our societies.”

*Secretary of State Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk
during the unveiling ceremony of a mural
celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group,
Warsaw, 25 June 2021.*

The social dimension of Visegrad cooperation

Developing the social and interpersonal dimension of Visegrad cooperation, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, was an important priority of the Polish Presidency. It should be remembered that the V4 is not only about politics and economy. The V4 also runs the **International Visegrad Fund (IVF)**, which has granted over 2,400 scholarships and enabled the implementation of over 6,000 joint projects since 2000, primarily in the V4 countries, but also in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans.



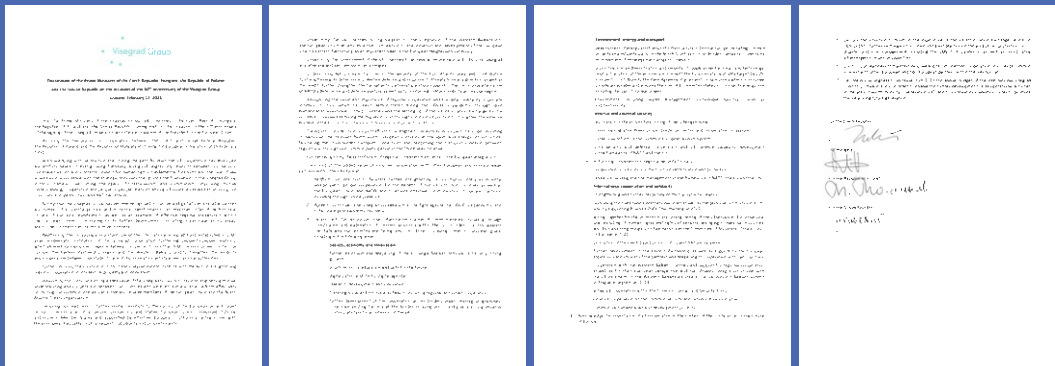
Video spot promoting the International
Visegrad Fund
[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=vcJVRPLAhb0&t=108s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcJVRPLAhb0&t=108s)



Website of the International Visegrad Fund
<https://www.visegradfund.org/>



During the Jubilee Summit of the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries held on 17 February 2021 in Kraków, the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries decided, at the initiative of the Polish Presidency, to further strengthen the social dimension of the Visegrad cooperation and **increase the budget of the International Visegrad Fund by a quarter, up to 10 million euros annually, starting from 2022**. These funds will be primarily allocated to the development of youth cooperation between our countries, under the slogan **“Generation V4.”**



Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group, signed in Kraków on 17 February 2021.

The Polish Presidency also implemented a number of **promotional initiatives** devoted to the 30th anniversary of Visegrad cooperation and seeking to raise awareness of the history, goals and scope of collaboration within the Visegrad Group, as well as of its key areas of activity at present. Selected initiatives are highlighted below:

1. Video spot to mark the 30th anniversary of Visegrad cooperation which tells the story of the V4, from the earliest days to the present, also covering activities aimed at the societies of the V4 countries. The spot draws on archival footage as well as specially prepared 3D and 2D animations.

V4 PRESIDENCY @V4_PRES · Feb 15
 The #VisegradGroup celebrates its 30th birthday!

We have achieved much together, but above all we have built friendship among our #V4 nations.

For all these years and for many more to come, we wish to thank our partners:

🇵🇱 Dziękujemy! 🇨🇪 Děkujeme! 🇭🇺 Köszönjük! 🇸🇰 Ďakujeme!

33K views have joined V4FD and the Group. 0:08 / 1:30

2.

An international poster competition to mark the 30th anniversary of V4

was organised by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Association of Applied Graphic Designers (STGU). Out of more than 500 entries submitted by artists from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary and qualified for the competition, the international jury granted awards and honourable mentions to 12 posters. The competition also had a dedicated website, and was a basis for a thematic exhibition and a calendar for 2021.



3.

An anniversary stamp issued by the Polish Post at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Designed by Agnieszka Sobczyńska, it was also used by the national post offices of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. A dedicated postage stamp was designed in each of the V4 countries. The stamp entered into circulation on 15 February 2021, i.e. on the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation.



1.



<https://youtube.com/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CNvYm9dtKM>

2.



<https://v4postercompetition.eu>

3.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=mliqEoCw6p0 (PL version only)



4.

The exhibition to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation

prepared by the International Visegrad Fund jointly with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The exhibition focuses on the history of the V4 and political cooperation, but it also brings current information about the Fund's activities.



5.

Murals to mark the 30th anniversary of V4 in the capitals of the Visegrad Group countries

The Polish Presidency proposed that murals be created in the four capitals of the Visegrad Group countries to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation and the Polish Presidency of the V4. The project, designed by Magda Mischczak, was implemented in collaboration with the National Centre for Culture, Poland, and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport and the participation of the Polish Institutes in Bratislava, Budapest and Prague. The murals in Warsaw, Bratislava and Budapest were unveiled at the end of June, whereas the Prague mural was officially unveiled in the second half of July 2021.



Video spot showing how the murals in V4 capitals were created:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeQBauVU5E0E

6.

The map of infrastructural connections between the V4 countries

The map was commissioned by the Polish Presidency and prepared by the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) and Polkart Cartographical Publishing House. A digital version of the map was made available to Polish school through the Educational Information System (SIO) database. In addition, the Hungarian side plans to provide 50,000 printed versions of the map to Hungarian schools.



Dozens of projects were carried out by Polish diplomatic missions across the world: from New York to Tokyo and from Reykjavik to Canberra. They included webinars, conferences, symposia, cultural and culinary projects, as well as lifestyle projects.

Illumination of the Bratislava Castle on the occasion of 30 years of Visegrad cooperation, February 2021.



Photo by Peter Harum / Embassy of Poland in Bratislava

The V4 Family Houses project included a virtual exhibition on architecture in the V4 countries and a discussion panel with architects from Sweden and the V4 countries.



Source: Polish Institute in Stockholm

Seminar on connectivity and opportunities for cooperation between Japan and the V4 countries organized by the Embassy of Poland in Tokyo at the Josai University, Tokyo, April 21, 2021.



Source: Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tokyo





Competition for young people aged 15-25 years old on the Visegrad cooperation.

Source: Polish Institute in Budapest



Online screenings of animated films for children

Source: Polish Institute in Stockholm



V4 film festival "Visegrad. Rebels of the New Wave", June 17-27, 2021.

Source: Polish Institute in Vilnius



Jazz concert of musicians from V4 countries, Copenhagen, December 7, 2020.

Source: Polish Embassy in Copenhagen



Concert entitled "QUADRIVIUM: Four Roads" organized at the Belarusian National Philharmonic Hall by the Polish Institute in Minsk, 27 May 2021.

Source: Polish Institute in Minsk

Education and science

On 8 April 2021, a **videoconference of ministers of education and science of the Visegrad Group countries** was held. The ministers exchanged experience in implementing solutions that could help to overcome the problems affecting the education and science sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also discussed digital transformation in education and the need to ensure the best access conditions for researchers willing to use scientific / academic content.

Other events organised during the Polish Presidency:

- an **online panel discussion on the cooperation of youth from V4 and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries** within the following EU programmes: Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, as well as the International Visegrad Fund (2 October 2020). The event was organised by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education. The meeting was attended by over 50 participants (leaders and youth workers) from the V4 and EaP countries.
- a **virtual workshop on the internationalisation of science and higher education** (28 May 2021). The meeting was attended by representatives of ministries, executive agencies and the academic community from the V4 countries. They exchanged experience and best practices in the implementation of initiatives to support the Belarusian scientific and academic community in connection with the repressions applied by the Belarusian regime.

Cultural cooperation

On 23 April 2021, **ministers of culture of the V4 countries met at a videoconference**. They discussed, among others, social security and the regulation of the professional status of artists, and also reviewed joint projects carried out under the auspices of the ministries of culture in the Visegrad Group countries. They also selected **the winner of the next edition of the Visegrad Prize** founded by the International Visegrad Fund: the National Centre for Culture, Poland. The ministers adopted a joint communiqué from the meeting.

On 16–18 June 2021, the **6th Central European Heritage Forum** was held virtually with a focus on “Heritage and Development.” The participants of the 6th Forum addressed issues such as the importance of heritage for sustainable development, or civic engagement



and social inclusion, and concentrated on presenting new, actionable tools and policies that address the challenges currently faced by Central European societies.



VI Central European Heritage Forum
Source: International Cultural Centre
(ICC) Krakow

Social policy

A **videoconference of ministers in charge of family and social affairs of the V4 countries** was held on 18 February 2021. The meeting focused on measures to support families, including in particular the provision of childcare for children up to 3 years of age, measures to increase the fertility rate, as well as support for seniors, particularly in the context of COVID-19. A decision was made at the meeting to establish V4 working groups on family policy (its first meeting took place on 28 June 2021) and on seniors' policy.

The **videoconference of the V4 Pro Familia Coalition** was held on 13 May 2021. The conference was opened by the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki. Ministers in charge of family matters in the V4 countries discussed topics such as the future of families and the most effective tools to tackle demographic challenges. At the end of the conference,

the V4 ministers responsible for family issues signed a **joint declaration**, pledging to “take all possible measures, also within the Visegrad cooperation, to ensure the best possible conditions for families.” Under joint V4 activities, the ministers declared their readiness to consider joint research on the family in the context of demographic challenges.

The V4 countries also developed **common positions on the work to amend the EU legislation on the coordination of social security systems**, both at national level and through the permanent representations of the V4 countries to the European Union in Brussels.



Videoconference of Ministers of Family and Social Affairs of the Visegrad Group, 18 February 2021.

Photo by Dominik Łagowski /Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sports

In the area of sports, the V4 countries organise annual youth sports competitions in selected Olympic sports disciplines under the name of **“Tournament of Olympic Hopes.”** Participants represent the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, as well as invited young athletes from other countries. On 15 December 2020, the Steering Committee of the Tournament of Olympic Hopes held an online meeting. The competition is usually held in 47 disciplines but many events were cancelled due to the pandemic.



Infrastructure



Meeting of V4 Transport Ministers, Kraków, 17–18 June 2021.

Photo by Ministry of Infrastructure

Joint **transport projects** were an important topic of the Polish Presidency in the context of joint implementation of infrastructural investments aiming at bridging the gap that still exists between the V4 and the Western European countries in this area, the planned application for CEF funds in the 2021–2027 EU financial framework, as well as the launch of the “military mobility” component and the revision of the TEN-T network.

Despite the pandemic-induced difficulties, the Polish Presidency managed to bring about a number of joint initiatives: **definition of joint priority projects submitted to the TEN-T network in the statement of the V4 transport ministers adopted on 3 December 2020**, adoption of a **joint statement concerning the reform of the Single European Sky (SES 2+)**, subsequently presented during a videoconference of EU ministers of transport on 8 December 2020, or the signing of a **joint declaration in support of the development of rail transport** in Kraków on 18 June 2021.

During the Polish Presidency, the **transport ministers of the V4 countries met four times**: in an online format on 3 December 2020, at an in-person meeting in Kraków on 17-18 June 2021, as well as during two **coordination meetings of ministers before the sessions of the EU Transport Council** (28 September and 8 December 2020).

During the first of these meetings, a joint statement on the planned revision of the EU TEN-T guidelines was adopted, containing **four jointly notified projects proposed to the European Commission for inclusion in the TEN-T network**:

- **Via Carpatia** – inclusion of the entire international road corridor in the TEN-T core network;
- Development of **high-speed railway lines** in the region comprising the V4 countries;
- The “**Solidarity**” **Central Transport Hub** in Poland;
- **Improving inland waterway connections** and navigability on the Oder, Elbe and Danube rivers (including the Váh).

In turn, during the meeting of ministers in Kraków, **cooperation in the field of maritime economy** was discussed, also in the context of the promotion of Polish sea ports (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin and Świnoujście) as well as the **Mobility Package** in the context of the European Commission’s analysis confirming Poland’s position on the negative impact of the provisions of this act on the climate and environment, as well as the adopted **joint statement on the development of railway transport**.

During the Polish Presidency, the following meetings were also held:

- **videoconferences of deputy ministers for railways to discuss high speed railways in V4** (12 and 20 October 2020 and 6 May 2021), where the status of project work was reviewed, the location of the railway lines was defined, and the assumed maximum speeds on individual sections and the crossing points of the state borders were agreed. The Polish party confirmed that the concept of V4 HSR is related to the project of establishing a hub around the central airport near Warsaw and HSR connections with all regions of Poland and the Czech Republic. The first section of V4 HSR will connect Warsaw to the new airport along the CMK line. Its opening is planned in parallel with the opening of the airport. Furthermore, a **policy document entitled “Outline for development of the V4 high speed railway,”** drafted by the Czech side, was agreed and signed at the level of ministers for transport, and then forwarded to the European Commission as a starting point for formulating objectives for future financing of the project, also based on EU funds.
- the **V4+4 videoconference on the CEF programme in the transport sector in the new financial framework and on the implementation of cross-border infrastructural projects** (9 December 2020), where common goals were discussed regarding the implementation of joint projects financed from the CEF, also under the military mobility component. As a result of the coordination of positions concerning the negotiation of the CEF regulation for the new financial framework and the upcoming challenges related to CEF 2.0, two common positions were subsequently developed: a **position**



of V4 and Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia on the priorities of the 2021–2023 work programme within the CEF, and a position of V4 and Croatia, Malta, Romania and Slovenia on the role and scope of technical assistance for the cohesion member states within the CEF.

- a **meeting of the V4 Working Party for Combined Transport** (8 September 2020), which discussed, among others, progress towards the development of infrastructure for intermodal transport, including the capacities of terminals and ports, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the intermodal transport sector.
- an **expert meeting on road safety** (22 April 2021), focused on improving road safety in V4 countries.
- an **expert meeting on EU water management** based on the work of the **V4 Expert Correspondence Group on Water Management** (1 June 2021), discussing the challenges of water scarcity caused by climate change and the new directive on drinking water and water reuse.
- an **expert meeting on the EU transport policy** based on the work of the **V4 Expert Correspondence Group on Inland Waterway Transport** (11 June 2021), devoted to inland waterway transport.

Other important topics of the Polish Presidency included a discussion of **cooperation as part of EU regional strategies** and, in particular, the continuation of talks and work in support of the **development of the Carpathian region and its inclusion in the macroregional strategy** (among others, during an online meeting on the Carpathian Strategy on 14 October 2020), as well as **urban policy**, in particular in the context of Poland being selected as the organiser of the 11th session of the World Urban Forum in 2022 under the auspices of UN-Habitat. The **videoconference of ministers for urban affairs in the formula of V4 plus Romania, Croatia and Slovenia on the sidelines of the Urban Policy Congress in Katowice** (8 June 2021) was devoted to the discussion of the possible involvement of these countries in developing the programme of next year's event, taking into consideration similar experiences and challenges in the transformation of cities located in the countries of the region.

4. The digital V4



Photo by Krystian Maj / Chancellery of the Prime Minister

“ By strengthening cooperation within the Visegrad Group, we will make our voice heard during the decision-making on the EU digital strategy. We have an opportunity to join forces to pursue the interests of our region and stimulate its growth.”

*Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki
on 17 February 2021 in Kraków during the jubilee summit of
Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group.*



During the jubilee summit of the Visegrad Group in Kraków on 17 February 2021, the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries signed a **declaration on mutual cooperation on digital projects (the so-called Digital Declaration)**. The V4 countries committed themselves to:

- build a common framework for cooperation on digital issues, among others by establishing a working consultation mechanism;
- work together to secure EU funding for digital transformation, in particular for joint V4 digital projects;
- establish sustained cooperation between research centres specialising in digital issues, such as computing and data infrastructure, Big Data, Industry 4.0, cloud technologies, high performance computing (HPC), quantum computing, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, machine learning, blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), cyber security, smart and digital skills and competencies, and telecommunications;
- create incentives for cross-border cooperation (including investment and financial opportunities) among enterprises from the V4 countries (especially among innovative SMEs and start-ups);
- coordinate actions to improve the competitiveness and innovation capacity of the V4 countries in digital affairs, and to strengthen digital transformation and accelerate the adoption of key digital technologies by V4 administrations and enterprises;
- build knowledge resources, support the organisation of joint international events by delegating experts and high-level representatives (e.g. to the UN Internet Governance Forum to be held in Poland in December 2021);
- exchange best practices and promote V4 achievements in the field of digitalisation;
- cooperate within the EU to establish and operate effective cross-border digital projects;
- identify global challenges that call for urgent action (e.g. pandemics, natural disasters, etc.) where immediate and joint action by IT experts and digital companies from the V4 countries can contribute to the solutions.

As a result of agreements made by the Prime Ministers, **national coordinators of joint V4 digital projects were appointed in all the V4 countries**. On 26 May 2021, the **first meeting of the virtual secretariat for V4 digital projects, set up at Poland's initiative**, was also held, with the participation of V4 national coordinators. The meeting was hosted by Krzysztof Szubert, the Prime

Minister's Plenipotentiary for European Digital Policy and Coordinator of Digital Cooperation of V4 on behalf of Poland. The meeting helped to identify priority areas of cooperation and to discuss the potential launch of regional projects aimed at accelerating digital transformation processes in the V4 countries. Participants were also invited to participate in the 16th edition of the UN Internet Governance Forum, to be held in Katowice from 6 to 10 December 2021.

On 3–4 December 2020, the **“Cyber Security for Justice” conference** was held. Among others, the participants discussed the opportunities and threats related to the digitalisation of the judiciary and the fight against cybercrime. During the conference, the results of the “153plus1” competition, organised by the Justice Institute (ISW) under the honorary patronage of the Minister of National Education, were announced. The competition was designed for secondary school students to help them develop interest in cyber security in a way that would be attractive and accessible for young people.

In turn, an online **youth seminar on digital inclusion of young people** was held on 30 June 2021. The event was organised by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science. The seminar served as a forum for youth workers and active youth activists from the Visegrad Group, Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries to share experience, engage in networking and discuss important issues related to the digital inclusion of young people.



Key non-governmental cooperation platforms

Presidents



Plenary session entitled "The 30th Anniversary of the Visegrad Group: European and Transatlantic Cooperation"

Photo by Jakub Szymczuk /Chancellery of the President



Unveiling of the commemorative plaque to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation.

Photo by Jakub Szymczuk /Chancellery of the President

A **jubilee meeting of the presidents of the Visegrad Group countries** was held on 8–10 February 2021 at the Polish President’s residence located on the Hel Peninsula at the Baltic Sea.

During the two-day summit, the Presidents took part in three plenary sessions devoted respectively to the following topics:

- summing up 30 years of Visegrad cooperation and discussing the key challenges for European and transatlantic cooperation;
- economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic;
- energy security and climate policy.

The Presidents also unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark 30 years of cooperation within the Visegrad Group. In the evening, a festive illumination was displayed on the facade of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.



Festive illumination on the facade of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. Photo by Igor Smirnow /Chancellery of the President



Parliaments



Photo by Andrzej Hrechorowicz
/ Chancellery of the Sejm



Photo by Andrzej Hrechorowicz
/ Chancellery of the Sejm



Photo by Andrzej Hrechorowicz
/ Chancellery of the Sejm

The parliamentary cooperation during the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group was **highly dynamic**, with a large number of meetings. A total of ten committee meetings were held, **the highest number since the introduction of rotating presidency system within the Visegrad cooperation**. The virtual format, enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, certainly increased the frequency of debates.

During the year, **three meetings of the speakers of the V4 countries** were also held. The last meeting, focused on summing up the Presidency, was organised in an on-site format in the Topacz Castle near Wrocław.

The predominant topics were connected with the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impact, and also—especially at the level of parliament speakers and foreign affairs committees—international affairs, including collaboration under regional initiatives and international organisations, as well as current topics related to issues such as the situation in Belarus, the explosion caused at the ammunition depot in Vrbětice in the Czech Republic, and support for the European integration of the Western Balkan countries.

On 24 February 2021, the **Polish Parliament adopted by acclamation a resolution to mark the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group.**

Parliamentary meetings organised during the Polish Presidency of V4:

- videoconference of the speakers of the V4 parliaments, 12 January 2021;
- videoconference of the speakers of the V4 parliaments, 21 April 2021;
- meeting of the speakers of the V4 parliaments, Topacz Castle near Wrocław, 11 June 2021;
- videoconference of the delegation of the committees for European affairs of the V4 parliaments, 24 November 2020;
- videoconference of the chairs of the administration and home affairs committees of the V4 parliaments, 13 May 2021;
- videoconference of the chairs of the agriculture and rural development committees of the V4 parliaments, 14 May 2021;
- videoconference of the chairs of the health committees of the V4 parliaments, 18 May 2021;
- videoconference of delegations of foreign affairs committees of the V4 parliaments, 8 June 2021;
- videoconference of the chairs of the committees on energy, climate and state assets of the V4 parliaments, 9 June 2021;



- videoconference of the chairs of the committees on physical culture, sport and tourism of the V4 Parliaments, 22 June 2021.



Videoconference of Chairpersons of Foreign Affairs Committees of V4 Parliaments
Photo by Łukasz Błasikiewicz /Chancellery of the Sejm

During the Polish Presidency a number of meetings of chairpersons of foreign affairs committees of V4 countries' parliaments were also held:

- Videoconference of the V4 and the Baltic States (Latvia and Estonia), 6 October 2020;
- V4 videoconference, 15 December 2020;
- V4+B3 videoconference, 29 March 2021.

During the above-mentioned meetings, the chairs of the foreign affairs committees of the V4 parliaments discussed the following issues: fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, energy and economic security, the situation in Belarus and in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, transatlantic cooperation, the Three Seas Initiative and EU-China relations.

