



V4 CONNECTS

PRESIDENCY
PROGRAMME



HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY 2017/2018 OF THE
VISEGRAD GROUP



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*PROGRAMME OF THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY
OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP 2017/2018*



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FOREWORD

From July 2017 to June 2018, Hungary is holding the rotating Presidency of the Visegrad Group for the fifth time. The importance of the Visegrad Cooperation, based on the principles guiding the V4 since its founding in 1991, namely mutual trust, flexibility, and a focus on common traditions, values and interests, has been growing recently. In the previous 26 years the Visegrad Group has been actively representing regional interests, since 2004 within the European Union, while contributing to the prosperity and stability of the continent via their economic performance, cooperation aimed at facilitating connectivity, support towards the neighbouring Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions, as well as a responsible approach to the unprecedented migration crisis. The V4 countries constitute stability and growth in the European Union, and have the legitimate intention to contribute substantially and as equal partners to the dialogue on the future of the EU.

Efficient regional cooperation in the V4 and V4+ framework remains essential, especially in light of the changes and challenges affecting our region and the whole continent. Under the Hungarian Presidency, crucial issues such as the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, the ongoing debate on the future of the EU, including the social dimension – with significant impacts on the European competitiveness –, discussions on the EU's post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy will require constant V4 coordination and proactive presentation of common positions. Meanwhile, the Presidency will strive for reinforcing the Visegrad Group as a stabilising factor in relation to current external challenges such as the migration crisis and the volatile security environment in our southern and eastern neighbourhood.

In this context, the Hungarian Presidency will focus on areas in which the Visegrad Cooperation can deliver tangible results and added value based on specific common objectives in fields ranging from EU policies to global issues, in the following thematic structure:

1. European Visegrad
2. Regional Visegrad
3. Digital Visegrad
4. Global Visegrad

The Hungarian Presidency builds on the goals and achievements of previous V4 Presidencies. The priorities also reflect a proper balance, as necessitated by current political developments and actual needs, between tasks related to the V4's common voice in the EU, preserving the importance of traditional policies (Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy), cooperation with neighbouring and other European countries, as well as V4 activities related to global partners, global issues and the further strengthening of the V4 brand.

The motto of the Hungarian Presidency, *V4 Connects*, reflects the significant positive impact of the Visegrad Cooperation in connecting the four countries in terms of politics, economy and culture, while also referring to the Presidency's focus on our tasks related to connectivity: improving energy and transport links in our broader region, and working on a well-connected, innovative region ready for the digital age. Equally important is the V4 Presidency's commitment to further improving dialogue, trust and cooperation between the V4 and other partners within the EU and globally. The *V4 connects* countries, governments, people, ideas and values in an inclusive and open manner. The V4 is determined to build on the power of *connectivity* in the broadest possible sense in order to find common solutions to challenges affecting the Visegrad Group as part of the broader European community.

The ability to renew and adapt to new realities, while preserving the basic V4 principles, has always been a strength of the Visegrad Countries and the V4 format. Accordingly, along with planned joint actions, the Hungarian Presidency stands ready to swiftly coordinate adequate joint V4 responses to unexpected developments.

1. EUROPEAN VISEGRAD

DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND COORDINATION ON EU MATTERS

The countries of the Visegrad Group have been members of the European Union for more than 13 years, and all countries succeeded in fulfilling the role of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. The V4 is a **group of Member States taking part actively and responsibly in the common decision-making processes**. Ideas and suggestions of the Visegrad countries, based on common European values and interests, **represent important added value** to the European integration. On this basis, the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2017-18 will work for a **strong, well-functioning European Union with the aim to avoid further fragmentation**. The functioning of the European Union should be aligned with today's social and economic realities: first of all, **instead of 'more Europe' we should focus on creating a 'better and stronger Europe', a more efficient Europe**. To reach this goal, it is necessary that the European Union takes into account the opinion of every Member State and pays more attention to the **voice of European citizens**. After the Rome EU Summit it is necessary to **protect and consolidate the achievements of the integration**, with special regard to taking full use of the potential of the four fundamental freedoms, and to **strengthen the role of Member States within the Union**. The European Union can only be strong with the support of its citizens, and can function the best in symbiotic relation with the interests of its Member States.

It is important that the European Union focuses on **economic growth, job creation and competitiveness**. The synergies stemming from the positive interactions of national and EU-level solutions can ensure the appropriate **cohesion, convergence and competitiveness**. Political unity can be best preserved by **respecting national and**

regional diversity, history, culture and traditions within the EU. Enhanced cooperation, fully in line with the Treaties, can in certain cases contribute to this goal.

Building on the Declaration of the **Rome Summit** held on 25th March 2017, the Visegrad Group considers it important to continue the **discussion on the future of the European Union** during the Hungarian Presidency. Concluding the series of V4 conferences on the Prime Ministers' level discussing the future of the EU, started in Prague in June 2016, the Hungarian Presidency plans to hold a major event dedicated to this topic, with the participation of the Visegrad countries and other partners. Presenting and representing the **V4 countries' pro-European as well as realistic narrative** in an open and pragmatic way is a key priority of the Hungarian V4 Presidency.

→ V4+ conference on the future of the European Union

In the context of the Rome Declaration the Presidency will focus on the following **principles of cooperation between EU Member States**:

- **Subsidiarity**: The solution to current challenges lies in a 'strong Europe of strong nations', where decisions are taken as closely to the citizens as possible. The Visegrad Group is interested in a European Union in which common policies support the achievement of national undertakings in accordance with the Treaties, as Member States are capable of tackling certain issues more effectively, taking into account the regional and local dimensions of the subsidiarity principle. Strengthening the role of national parliaments within the EU is a priority as it would enhance the legitimacy of the EU decision-making. In deciding whether national or EU-level steps are necessary, it is the potential contribution of any proposal to the competitiveness and security of the Member States and the continent, which should primarily be considered;

- **Cooperation:** For the sake of ensuring European political unity, it is necessary that every Member State aims at embracing the common objectives and principles. Therefore, the EU should focus on issues which unite us. In strategic questions directly affecting Member States and EU citizens the guiding principles should be mutual trust, common objectives, the equality of Member States and sincere cooperation. Respecting the strategic leadership role of the European Council is indispensable. In issues determining our common future, consensus at the level of Heads of State and Government is necessary;
- **Competitiveness and economic convergence:** It is in Europe's fundamental interest to make Member States and European market actors more competitive. The economic strengthening of the continent depends on the deepening of the internal market and the development of the industry, enterprises, research, development and innovation, more and more determined by digitalisation. Economic convergence among Member States and regions contributes to a better and more balanced functioning of the internal market and the competitiveness of the whole Union by gradually diminishing differences in development. The dynamic V4 market is an important vehicle of the economic growth of all the Member States of the European Union – it is the purchasing power of the V4 countries and their citizens that creates jobs and thus economic prosperity in many other Member States of the EU. To maintain that mechanism is, therefore, a vital interest of not only the V4 countries but the entire EU. Cohesion and Regional Policy are the primary tools in this context. They are not 'charity' but investment tools in the purchasing power of the converging economies. Informal negotiations preceding the publication of the Commission's proposals on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will peak during the Hungarian Presidency. In this process, it is an important goal

of the V4 to preserve the current role of traditional common policies such as Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policies. The Visegrad Group stands for an approach based on competitiveness as regards initiatives connected with the social dimension. All the new projects related to the social dimension should remain open also to non-Eurozone members of the Union. Avoiding the handing over of competences from Member States, social aspects, economic policy considerations and the principle of competitiveness cannot be separated;

- **Security:** Europe has to give a solid answer to the growing challenges coming from the deteriorating security environment. We should step up more effectively in order to strengthen the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy to improve our resilience, capabilities and coherence, complementing NATO's related efforts. The Visegrad countries have also been strong advocates for the protection of external borders since the beginning of the migration crisis, because the V4 considers the proper internal and external functioning of the Schengen system as one of the main prerequisites of European security as well as a precondition of economic growth and prosperity. The V4 is committed to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries as well as to the deepening of the economic integration and political association of, and cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, since these contribute to Europe's security and stability. Achieving progress in this context is also important in terms of the EU's credibility;
- **Predictability:** The European Union should be a reliable and constructive partner in the external dimension and should formulate credible and realistic undertakings towards its own citizens. We are responsible for keeping our own rules and regulations, for which the Lisbon Treaty provides an adequate basis. European citizens expect that the fundamental balance of the

internal market's integrity, a cornerstone of the EU, is not harmed. This applies to all the four freedoms and in particular to the freedom of movement, a highly important value for the V4, which clearly demonstrates the advantages of integration among our citizens.

The Hungarian V4 Presidency will continue the **coordination of positions of the Visegrad countries** in several issues on the European Union's agenda, to ensure effective joint action on various levels. Under the Hungarian Presidency, V4 countries are determined to work constructively with all partners, Member States and EU institutions, including the rotating Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. To this end, the Hungarian Presidency will

- organise coordination meetings of the V4 Prime Ministers before meetings of the **European Council**;
- hold V4 consultations before **General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council** meetings;
- coordinate V4 positions in the **Council of the European Union** and during its preparatory bodies (Ministers, Sherpas, Secretaries of State, Coreper);
- represent common positions of the Visegrad Four by preparing joint declarations and non-papers, in line with the current EU and V4 agenda.

The political context of the Hungarian Presidency will be significantly influenced by **negotiations on the United Kingdom's exit from the EU**. In this field, our main objective is **defining and representing our common interests while maintaining the unity of the EU-27**. The V4 shall work for a fair and mutually beneficial agreement that adequately ensures balance between rights and obligations. One of the most important objectives of the Visegrad Group is to **protect the rights and interests of citizens of the V4 countries living in the United Kingdom**. Brexit cannot provide grounds for the weakening of the *acquis* concerning the free movement of persons or the providing of services related to the free flow of workforce

in the EU-27. After Brexit it is important to make sure that the closest possible relations between the EU and the United Kingdom are maintained. It is a key interest of the Visegrad Group that **financial aspects of Brexit are settled in a satisfactory manner** and the existing obligations are observed by all parties. We are interested in an agreement regulating **trade and investments cooperation** between the EU and the United Kingdom that is balanced, based on mutual benefits and preserves as much of the current openness as possible. It is also an important joint goal of the V4 that the United Kingdom, a NATO member and an important European and global actor, remains closely connected to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy including the Common Security and Defence Policy.

COOPERATION WITH EU PARTNERS

The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group is open to **dialogue and joint projects based on mutual interests** with countries of the EU, with special regard to neighbouring countries, as well as other European and global partners.

Germany is one of the key partners for the Visegrad Group. For the sake of increasing European competitiveness, facilitating digital economic transformation and enhancing the stability and security of Europe, the Hungarian Presidency supports **consultations in the V4+Germany format**. The Hungarian Presidency is ready to organise a summit of the Heads of Government of the Visegrad countries and Germany, in line with the intention of the parties declared at the V4+Germany summit in Warsaw in August 2016.

The Hungarian Presidency aims to strengthen the **cooperation of the Visegrad Group with Austria and Slovenia**, partners with which the Visegrad Four can effectively coordinate positions on numerous issues such as migration, security, the stability of the Western Balkans

and EU enlargement, digitalisation and innovation. In the field of defence policy, the Hungarian Presidency will strive to strengthen cooperation in the V4+Slovenia and V4+CEDC (Central European Defence Cooperation) formats, focusing on Slovenia's potential contribution to the V4 EU Battlegroup; and, in the case of CEDC (building also on Hungary's Presidency in the CEDC starting in January 2018) with an emphasis on capacity development and coordinating positions on managing the migration crisis, also taking into account the role of armed forces.

The Hungarian Presidency will continue the effective high-level political dialogue between the **V4 and the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8)**, in cooperation with the Swedish Presidency of the NB8, particularly on topics such as the Eastern Partnership, regional security, energy and transport infrastructure.

In addition, the Presidency will promote **consultations with the Baltic countries**, to discuss joint positions on EU matters with a special regard to the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework and to identify further possibilities of cooperation. The Hungarian Presidency also aims to further strengthen V4+Baltic cooperation in the field of defence, building on the rotating V4 military presence in the Baltic States during 2017, as well as on examining the possibilities for a potential joint V4 contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.

In order to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation after the United Kingdom's exit from the EU, the Hungarian Presidency will take steps to prepare the framework of **post-Brexit V4+UK relations**, while respecting the principle of EU-27 unity.

The Hungarian Presidency will continue the cooperation of the **Visegrad Group plus Romania and Bulgaria in the field of spatial planning and territorial development**, in line with the six states' ministerial declaration and

strategic document adopted in 2014 during the previous Hungarian V4 Presidency. The Presidency aims to coordinate positions as regards the regional dimension of cohesion policy.

With regards to cooperation in the field of **agriculture and environment**, the aim of the Hungarian Presidency is to extend the existing **V4+Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania cooperation to Croatia** as well. In the field of **water management**, the Presidency intends to **involve also Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia in the ongoing V4+Bulgaria+Romania cooperation**. (See details in section 'Cooperation in the field of agriculture, environment and water issues' in Chapter 3).

Building on synergies between the **2017 Hungarian Presidency of the Danube Region Strategy** and the 2017–18 Hungarian V4 Presidency, the Presidency aims to stimulate cooperation between existing and planned macro-regional strategies. Moreover, the Presidency will look into synergies with other formats of regional cooperation in which all V4 countries participate.

RESPONSIBLE HANDLING OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Since the beginning of the mass migration crisis in 2015, the Visegrad Four have assumed a **responsible position towards this complex problem** and stood up for a comprehensive answer to the situation, with an adequate focus on **stemming migration and underlining security as a key aspect of the future solution**. This also applies to the V4's joint action for the protection of the Schengen borders and thus the whole of Europe, representing V4 common positions in the political debates, as well as supporting countries on the Western Balkans route and crisis regions in countries of origin. In order to strengthen European security and stability, the goal of the Hungarian Presidency is to continue, where appropriate, the above-mentioned activities,

identify further topics of possible V4 cooperation related to migration and broaden acceptance of related V4 positions within the EU. The EU should be capable of giving comprehensive and effective answers to the challenges of migration. Since migration is one of the most pressing and important issues on the agenda of the EU, decisions which determine the migration policy of the EU and its future asylum system must be taken at the European Council level by consensus. The Presidency will advocate the position that stemming migration must begin outside the EU's borders. In order to effectively represent our joint interests in the context of CEAS negotiations, including the future shape of the Dublin Regulation, regional coordination is also important. The V4 strongly opposes any proposal on introducing a mandatory and automatic distribution system in line with the corrective distribution system in the Dublin proposal. Commitment towards aspects of **humanitarian aid and development assistance** in the context of the migration crisis is also an important part of the V4's complex approach to migration (*related activities are detailed in Chapter 4 'Global Visegrad'*).

The main goals of the Hungarian Presidency related to migration are the following:

- Coordination of positions in **EU legislation** and relevant policy actions (reform of the asylum system, relocation, migration compacts etc.);
- **Border control cooperation** with third countries on the Western Balkans migration route; management of the EU external borders and **protection of the Schengen area**; support to **Western Balkan countries**, if necessary, by sending additional forces, equipment and sharing expertise;
- Continuing permanent consultations started by previous V4 Presidencies, e.g. in the framework of the **V4 Migration Crisis Response Mechanism** announced in November 2016.
 - Meetings of the V4 Ministers of Interior (second semester of 2017, first semester of 2018)

- V4 consultations before the Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings
- Meeting of the Chiefs of V4 border control authorities

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE COOPERATION

The **internal stability guaranteed by the regulatory environment** is of utmost importance for Europe, thus during the Hungarian presidency of the V4 a strong emphasis will be put on questions related to the everyday life of citizens. Enhancing legal aid and victim support, and arranging the life of families with international connection by means of regulation are essential for ensuring legal certainty.

In the field of justice cooperation, the Hungarian Presidency will facilitate high-level consultations and the sharing of expertise and good practices in the V4 and V4+ format in the field of **victim protection and legal aid**.

- Conference of V4+Benelux Ministers of Justice (autumn 2017)

The Presidency initiates high-level dialogue in connection with the 2201/2003/EC Regulation concerning **jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgements in matrimonial matters** and the matters of parental responsibility, and its revision.

- Thematic conference with the involvement of senior officials (autumn 2017)

2. REGIONAL VISEGRAD

INTRA-V4 RELATIONS; PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION; INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

Regular dialogue between the **Parliaments of the V4 countries** represents an important dimension of Visegrad Cooperation. In this framework, the Hungarian Presidency will provide the necessary fora for discussing cooperation possibilities and current European developments, supporting endeavours of the Presidency.

- Formal and informal meetings of the Presidents of Parliaments of the V4
- Meetings of Parliamentary Committees of the V4 countries dealing with foreign affairs, defence, economic and EU affairs

The Hungarian Presidency supports the **successful functioning of the International Visegrad Fund**, the V4's common institution working for strengthening the relations in the V4 region. The Presidency will initiate the renewal of the Fund's **mobility scholarship schemes**, including providing possibilities for researchers and start-ups. The Presidency will encourage **result-oriented projects** related to entrepreneurship and innovation. Another goal of the Presidency is to stimulate the creation of **V4 expert networks** and enhance strengthening relations between business actors and associations, based also on the experiences of the Think Visegrad – V4 Think Tank Platform. Concerning the Fund's **activities related to the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans**, the Hungarian Presidency plans to continue effective dialogue with current and potential **external donor partners** of the Fund, with a view to improving and possibly widening the cooperation.

Building upon the rich historic, cultural heritage and the diverse relations of the Visegrad Four, the Presidency's aim is to **strengthen regional cohesion** by bringing the societies closer, as well as to jointly **promote values of the V4 region** externally. To this end, intra-V4 projects will be launched and several cultural events will be held worldwide.

In relation to the **European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018**, organised in partial overlapping with the Hungarian V4 Presidency, the Presidency aims to promote the Year in the V4 region, including the presentation of sites in the V4 region awarded with the European Heritage Label, sites already on, or nominated to, the UNESCO World Heritage List, as well as the promotion of the region's architectural heritage.

Furthermore, the Hungarian Presidency will pay special attention to V4 consultations on current issues of **cultural diplomacy**. The Presidency will initiate talks on the following issues: EU financial resources in the field of culture; EU strategy for international cultural relations; the role of culture and creative industry; V4 participation in the reconstruction of destroyed monuments in the Middle East; utilising the Central-European Cultural Platform (PCCE; V4+Austria) in strengthening the cultural dimension of the Eastern Partnership. In the field of cultural diplomacy, Hungary also continues to suggest that the V4 countries, too, support the establishment of the **International Museum on Communism** in Washington, D.C., initiated by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.

The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group provides an opportunity to the V4 to exchange experiences and jointly present their achievements regarding the **protection of national, ethnic and religious minorities and their cultural heritage, including the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage**, thus also underlining the region's commitment to Europe's cultural and religious values as well as to fighting anti-Semitism.

The Presidency will continue V4 discussion on higher **education**. (TBC)

Regarding **youth and family policy**, the Hungarian Presidency concentrates on the sharing of expertise and good practices of the V4 countries as well as the discussion on common challenges.

- Conference on youth policy in the town of Visegrád, with the participation of representatives from the V4 and the Eastern Partnership countries, focusing on digitalisation
- Conference on family policy and demography (TBC)
- Thematic conference on family and children focusing on the topic 'infant in the family' (TBC)

The Presidency will hold consultations on **nutrition and healthcare issues**, the development of the **public healthcare system** and **disability policies**, to facilitate the exchange of experience on results and current challenges. Long-term V4 cooperation on e-health and fair pricing will be further encouraged.

The Presidency will support discussion on the **diaspora policies** of the Visegrad countries, to facilitate the sharing of experience and best practices and joint thinking on tackling the related social challenges faced by the V4.

In the field of **sport** which has an important role in strengthening intra-regional social relations, the Hungarian Presidency will, inter alia, support the ongoing V4 initiatives and facilitate projects (e.g. in the framework of the Visegrad Fund) related to sports.

- Organising the V4 Olympic Hopes Competition, held regularly for more than 20 years
- Organising the 6th V4 Bicycle Race, with the active involvement of the civil society

In order to foster mutual awareness and further improve mutual perceptions inside the V4, the Presidency will continue to support the **cooperation of the V4 countries' public media organisations**.

Furthermore, the Hungarian Presidency will organise the annual **V4 Good Government Forum**.

SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD: WESTERN BALKANS AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Visegrad Four, as a group of countries traditionally committed to **supporting the Western Balkans** both in European political fora and in the form of joint projects, will actively facilitate initiatives aimed at strengthening the region's stability, security and economy under the Hungarian Presidency. This is especially important in light of today's growing challenges affecting the region. **The key to the stability of the Western Balkans is the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region's countries**, therefore **supporting the EU and NATO enlargement processes**, including related efforts of the countries involved, is a highly important goal of the Presidency. Although enlargement is one of the EU's most efficient policies, it is receiving limited focus amid current problems dividing Europe. The Commission's Enlargement Package, published in November 2016, will not be followed by a new assessment in 2017. Therefore, **assessing the enlargement process with the participation of the Western Balkan countries** under the Hungarian V4 Presidency will be crucial.

- Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4+Western Balkan countries (2017)
- Consultations on questions related to the Western Balkan countries' Euro-Atlantic integration, transport and energy infrastructure development (Connectivity Agenda), stability and security
- Coordinating in Brussels of positions on EU and NATO enlargement and Western Balkan issues

- Sharing of V4 expertise in EU-integration to support capacity building, via e.g. the V4 Civil Servants Mobility Program
- Supporting events in the Western Balkans dealing with European orientation & integration
- Supporting the effective functioning of the Western Balkans Fund which has been set up with the assistance of the Visegrad Group
- Organising a thematic 'Western Balkans Diplomatic Days' programme in Budapest

Concerning the **Eastern Partnership (EaP)**, for the Visegrad countries it is vital that **stabilisation and modernisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood** becomes irreversible and gains further momentum. Therefore, the Visegrad Group remains a staunch supporter of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy as a key tool to foster this process. Despite the existing challenges, the Hungarian Presidency is committed to keeping the EaP high on the EU agenda and will strive to reach its full potential. Taking this into account, the **Visegrad Countries wish to contribute to a successful Eastern Partnership Summit** in November 2017, in line with the goals of the Estonian EU Presidency. First and foremost we have to endeavour to present a **clear perspective to our partners regarding their aspirations concerning the future of their relations with the EU** and offer a European perspective for the interested partners. In order to maintain and strengthen the partners' commitment to necessary reforms, **coming up with a forward-looking agenda, concrete deliverables and new objectives** at the summit are crucial. A productive summit would also enhance the credibility of the EU's policy towards Eastern Partner countries. **Close cooperation between EU institutions, Member States and our Eastern Partners** is important during the implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy. The Hungarian Presidency emphasises the importance of synergies between EaP projects of the EU and the V4, such as cross-border cooperation, connectivity agenda (including common infrastructure

projects). The V4 will pay attention to the human rights situation in the EaP partner countries.

As regards **Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova**, consolidating the achievements and implementing the necessary reforms arising from the **Association Agreements** should remain in focus. It should be thoroughly analysed how the EU can support and subsequently evaluate progress in the processes which have been already started, especially the transformation of the economy, the fight against corruption, public administration reform and strengthening civilian security which should contribute to enhancing resilience of those countries against security threats. V4 stands ready to further support the activities in the framework of **NATO cooperation with Ukraine** (Comprehensive Assistance Package), **Georgia** (Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, New, Practical Ways to Intensify Efforts, Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative), and **Moldova** (DCBI), having in mind the transformational potential of these programmes. Fostering connectivity with special emphasis on energy, infrastructure and cross-border cooperation contributes significantly to stability and economic development, as well as mobility between the EU and our Eastern Partners. **Eastern Partnership policy should focus equally on Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia** in the future. Any genuine commitment coming from these countries to build closer relations will be supported by the Visegrad countries. With the support of the V4, the commitment of **Belarus** to building closer relations with the EU and strengthening trade and economic cooperation should be maintained. Our strategic relations with **Azerbaijan** should be further developed through strong treaty-based ties with special focus on the energy sector. Therefore, swift progress in the negotiations on a new EU-Azerbaijan framework agreement is particularly important. Concerning **Armenia**, a tailor-made approach should be followed, respecting the country's foreign policy decisions. V4 should encourage Yerevan and EU partners to smoothly ratify

and implement the EU–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement after its signature.

- Meeting of V4+Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers, in preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit; close cooperation between EaP Special Envoys of the V4 Countries
- Supporting discussions concerning EaP on the EU fora and keeping EaP high on the agenda
- Supporting projects in or related to the Eastern Partnership region (Visegrad Fund)
- Supporting governmental capacity-building in the EaP by sharing V4 best practices, e.g. by the V4 Civil Servants Mobility Program
- Defence policy cooperation in the V4+Ukraine and V4+Moldova formats, focusing on examining possibilities for joint work on defence sector reform, sharing experience on cyber defence and hybrid war, resilience and a potential involvement in the V4 EU Battlegroup (in the case of Ukraine)
- Supporting EU actions aimed at strengthening the resilience of our partners in the neighbourhood to internal and external threats, in line with the priorities of the EU Global Strategy. Highlighting the importance of strategic communication efforts in the EaP (and Western Balkan) countries. In the context of the EU-Russia relations, the V4 will follow five guiding principles agreed by the Council of the EU in March 2016

DEFENCE, FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY, NON-PROLIFERATION, INTERNAL SECURITY

V4 cooperation should be more efficient and visible within the framework of international organizations dealing with security issues. NATO remains the guarantor of security, credible collective defence and deterrence in the Central European Region. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence on the Eastern Flank will improve the Alliance's defence

and deterrence posture in this region while providing security to all Allies. The difficult security environment requires NATO as well as the European Union to continue efforts to adapt its policies, capabilities and instruments and to further enhance their cooperation. Preserving the unity of positions, coherence of actions, and improving cooperation among our countries should be at the heart of our endeavours within the framework of NATO and the EU.

In accordance with the **Action Plan of the Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation** (July 2016 – June 2018) the Hungarian Presidency will pursue the following areas of cooperation:

- **Defence policy cooperation:** In the field of policy dialogue and cooperation, the Hungarian Presidency's goal is the strong representation of the V4 region's interests in NATO and EU fora by discussing strategic defence policy issues and coordinating positions, including those on strengthening the NATO's Eastern Flank, and on challenges related to the migration crisis; and the V4's active participation in the debate about reviewing the EU Battlegroup (EUBG) concept;
- **Operational cooperation:** Besides the successful realisation of the rotating V4 military presence in the Baltic countries in 2017, the Presidency primarily aims to coordinate preparations for the V4 EUBG's next standby period in 2019, and examine possibilities for potential joint V4 contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence as well as future V4 cooperation in EU and NATO operations;
- **Joint capability development:** It is important to continue and deepen V4 cooperation in military capability development and defence planning. The Presidency will continue the expert level and political consultations about the possibilities of regional capability development. Our long-term goal is to identify those areas of cooperation where the V4 countries can effectively contribute to the defence capabilities of NATO and EU;

- **Defence industry cooperation:** The Presidency's goal is to discuss possibilities for cooperation on coordinating defence procurement, and strengthening cooperation between defence industries;
- **Joint trainings and education:** The backbone of cooperation in this area is the continuation of the joint participation in military exercises and trainings included in the V4 Mid-Term Training and Exercise Plan (MTEP), which will be updated also by the Hungarian Presidency. In defence education, the possibility of starting joint courses on operational, general staff and staff officer levels can provide opportunities to deepen V4 cooperation.

The Hungarian Presidency will seek to **update the Action Plan of the Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation** (July 2016 – June 2018).

In order to reach the above goals, the Presidency will organise the following events:

- Meeting of the Ministers of Defence (on the margins of the Defence FAC in November 2017, and in April 2018)
- Meeting of State Secretaries (Senior Body; October 2017 and March 2018)
- Meeting of Defence Policy Directors (DPD; July 2017, March 2018)
- Meeting of National Armaments Directors (winter 2017, summer of 2018)
- Meeting of Chiefs of Defence Staff (Q2 2018)
- Conference of heads of military national security services (Q2 2018, April–May)
- Meeting of foreign and security policy advisors of the V4 Heads of State and Government (November 2017)

Expert level events:

- V4 Planning Group session (October 2017, April 2018)
- V4 Information Security Directors Meeting (spring 2018)

- V4 workshop of defence experts (Q4 2017)
- Sessions of V4 EUBG working groups (Q3 2017, Q1 2018)
- Session of the working group 'Life Cycle Management' (LCMG; end of 2017, Q2 2018)
- V4 training conference (Q3 2017, Q2 2018)
- V4 high visibility military exercise (BRAVE WARRIOR; 22 June – 22 July 2017)
- V4 rotational training in the Baltic countries (TRAINING BRIDGE 2017)

The Hungarian Presidency places special emphasis on the **coordination of V4 standpoints in every area of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.**

- Regular consultations of V4 Ministers before Foreign Affairs Council meetings
- Political and expert consultations on various topical issues
- V4 security policy consultations (concerning NATO, CSDP, non-proliferation)
- Organising an export controls seminar in the V4+Ukraine format

In the field of **cyber security**, the Presidency's goal is to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure, especially with the aim of revealing and averting risks and attacks coming from the cyberspace. The Hungarian Presidency will carry on the cooperation between cyber security organisations and network security centres of V4 countries, for which information-sharing on incidents is indispensable. In cooperation with the rotating Chair of the Central European Cyber Security Platform, the Hungarian Presidency will organise expert meetings and joint exercises and trainings related to incident management. The Presidency also plans to hold consultations aiming to formulate joint V4 positions on current topics of the EU's agenda, in particular on the implementation of the Directive on Security of Network and Information Systems (NIS), and the revision of the Cybersecurity Strategy of the EU.

- V4+USA Cyber Workshop in Washington, D.C. (first semester of 2018)
- V4 conference in Brussels on the NIS directive and the review of the EU's Cybersecurity Strategy, with the participation of the V4 Ambassadors of the Permanent Representations to the EU

The Visegrad Group needs to be committed to the further improvement of **joint actions in the fight against terrorism**, with special regard to the EU-level implementation of PNR (Passenger Name Record) systems, and the **intensification of information-sharing** in the V4 and V4+ frameworks. In order to reach these goals the aim of the Presidency is, while fully respecting data protection rules, to actively contribute with all V4 countries to further work at the EU-level on the interoperability of systems and databases. The use of **biometric identification** in the asylum procedures and as regards border control should be intensified among the V4 and V4+ partners. The application of this method is also worth considering in relation to international public transportation.

Based on the **V4 non-paper on enhancing cooperation against terrorism**, signed in Prague on 19 January 2016, the Presidency plans to take joint actions in the following fields:

- Initiating EU-level regulations concerning various **web-based communication applications**, and improving the cooperation between operators of these platforms and national security agencies;
- The unified definition, among V4 and V4+ partners, of **key counter-terrorism systems and facilities**;
- Elaborating a common definition of **civilian targets**;
- Defining parameters of **technical equipment and tools** used to detect dangerous substances.

The Hungarian Presidency will strengthen V4 cooperation in the field of **disaster management**, concentrating on risk

management, disaster prevention, increasing resilience and consequence management.

- Meeting of V4 Director Generals for Disaster Management (Q2 2018)

ENERGY POLICY, ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE, CLIMATE POLICY

In the spirit of continuity, the 2017/2018 Hungarian Presidency will build on the programmes of previous V4 Presidencies including the Hungarian Presidency in 2013-14, setting the **strengthening of the North–South interconnections** as a priority. Continuing the work in relation to infrastructure development connected to the **North–South Gas Corridor**, the completion of the corridor remains to be a priority of the Hungarian Presidency. In line with aspirations of the Energy Union, finishing the corridor would bring significant benefits in terms of the **security of supply and market integration**, not only for the V4 but for the whole Central European region, while also serving as a good example for successful regional cooperation. Another goal of the Presidency is the joint **discussion of current energy and climate policy issues on the EU agenda** from a regional perspective.

Building on the achievements of the CESEC Ministerial Meeting held in Budapest in September 2016, the Hungarian Presidency will organise **high-level energy diplomacy meetings and business forums to enhance the political focus on the completion of the North-South Gas Corridor**, giving new impulses to the expansion of ongoing infrastructural and market development projects and also opening northern and southern gates for the global energy market.

- Meeting of V4+ Ministers of Foreign Affairs (preferably in the format of V4+Western Balkans and V4+Eastern Partnership), with the participation of the European Institutions;

→ Promoting LNG as an available option for gas diversification in Central Europe by V4+ joint appearance of Ambassadors-at-Large for energy security at the Budapest LNG Summit in October 2017

In terms of energy policy, the Hungarian Presidency plans to achieve progress in areas of cooperation which are **in line with the goals of the Energy Union**, closely linked to the dimensions of **energy security and internal energy market** and important for all Visegrad countries. Specific goals of the Hungarian Presidency are:

- Formulating a joint position on the amendments of the **governance-, electricity- and renewable energy-related draft legislations of the Clean Energy for All Europeans package**;
- Joint V4 action related to **unintended cross-border electricity loop flows** in the CEE region;
- Coordinating V4 actions aimed at implementation of the new security of Gas Supply regulation cross-border cooperation and solidarity mechanisms;
- Preparing a V4 cooperation agreement on **crude oil stocking**;
- Identifying joint **V4 large-scale infrastructural and energy projects** contributing to diversification of sources, suppliers and routes in line with Energy Union goals, to be realised with the involvement of EU funding (cohesion, CEF, EFSI), to counterbalance projects hampering the development of liquid and secure gas markets in the region.

In order to meet these policy goals, the Hungarian Presidency will organise the following main events related to the field of energy:

- Expert meeting (2nd half of 2017, and 1st semester of 2018)
- Cooperation in supply crisis management; organising a regional exercise (2nd half of 2017 / 1st half of 2018)
- Meeting of Ministers/State Secretaries (2nd semester of 2017, 1st semester of 2018)

- Visegrad Gas Forum (November 2017)
- Conference of the V4 development banking institutions related to EFSI (spring 2018)

In the field of **climate policy**, the Hungarian Presidency sets the following goals:

- Regarding the decisive stage of **review of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)**, in order to ensure the ETS's effective functioning after 2020 in line with the European Council Conclusions agreed in October 2014, in order to find synergies between European climate, energy and industrial policies and to avoid collisions of European policies with national priorities, the Hungarian Presidency supports closer V4 cooperation in information and position sharing. The Presidency also aims to support expert discussions and coordinate positions (where possible) so as to facilitate finding the equilibrium between economic growth and meeting climate policy goals and achieve well balanced legislative package, in relation to **sectors not regulated by the ETS** (transportation, agriculture, waste management, buildings) and the proposal concerning the **emissions and sinks from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF)**;
- With respect to the negotiations elaborating the implementation rules of the **Paris Agreement**, not prejudging its outcomes, the Hungarian Presidency supports V4 cooperation on this process. In case there is any proposal to increase EU ambitions, the Hungarian Presidency will ask for V4 country views on a possible rise of previously agreed EU emission reduction goals, with special regard to effects on 'carbon leakage' and 'investment leakage' which are highly important to the V4. In the context of the Facilitative Dialogue, if applicable, the V4 should support pressuring other parties with lower ambition levels to raise their commitments to have a level playing field among parties, since the EU and its Member States submitted one of the most ambitious commitments;

- The Presidency initiates examining **closer V4 cooperation in the field of international climate financing**, underpinned also by the Czech, Polish and Hungarian presence in the Board of the Green Climate Fund. The size of available projects and the technical sources required may exceed the capacities of individual countries; thus chances of the subjects from the V4 countries to become project implementers could be improved by sharing experience on technological and financial details and connections within the frame of a project to be proposed during the Hungarian Presidency,

→ Coordination meetings (one per semester) of high-level officials responsible for climate policy and environmental protection and/or finance and/or development to discuss the topics mentioned above and examine regional possibilities to participate in or to provide proposals of climate assistance projects (an addition to V4 coordination meetings before Environment Council meetings)

TRANSPORT POLICY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In the field of transport, the main priorities of the Hungarian Presidency are the **strengthening of the major North–South transport connections**, the improving of the **permeability of borders** between the V4 countries and the deepening of **cooperation between V4 transport experts**.

The Presidency will continue the consultations of transport experts on current EU legislation, especially in the following topics:

- Close and continuous V4 coordination concerning the **EU 'Road Package'**, with special regard to its social aspects. In the discussion on the 'road initiatives', preparation and active presentation of the common V4 position at the EU fora is envisaged. It is particularly

important to work out solutions within these initiatives that will not lead to the fragmentation of the transport market in the EU and will ensure its smooth functioning;

- Cooperation and consultations on Aviation Package '**Open and Connected Europe**' with a view to seek for the most constructive, competitive and fair solutions for the EU and enabling the elimination of connectivity gaps within the EU;
- The formulation of a **joint regional position** concerning the revision of the **92/106/EEC Directive on Combined Transport of Goods**. Significant changes are expected concerning the supportability of given methods of transport; it is important that the railway receives a better position, and that Central European specificities are taken into consideration;
- Joint action concerning the revision of the **NOISE TSI directive** so as to avoid possible competitive disadvantages for the Visegrad Group;
- Joint action concerning the **Train Drivers Directive**;
- Cooperation and consultations on the revision of the regulation 1371/2007 on **rail passenger rights** and obligations;
- Joint action concerning the revision of the **Clean Vehicle directive (2009/33/EC)**.

'**V4 Rail Roundtable**' could serve as a platform to establish common Council positions for expert discussions on transport. Increasing the **competitiveness of rail freight transport along the North–South corridors** is a strategic interest for our region, in order to exploit railway infrastructure developments. It is important for the Hungarian Presidency to contribute to utilising synergies between the Hungarian V4 Presidency and the 2017 Hungarian Presidency of the **Danube Region Strategy**.

For a successful cooperation, the sharing of experiences and best practices among V4+CEE enterprises dealing with terminals, railway freight transportation and railway operators is highly important.

→ CEE FUTURAIL 2017 conference of Central and Eastern European rail freight transport managers (November 2017)

It is a priority for the Hungarian V4 Presidency to **jointly prepare for the post-2020 EU financial period**, building also on the High-Level Working Group (HLWG) established during the 2013-2014 Hungarian Presidency. During the negotiations concerning the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, our goal is the **harmonisation of V4 positions, and the incorporation of CEE viewpoints** since preserving the key role of the transport sector is a common interest of the Visegrad Group, serving the strengthening of the countries' economy.

It is necessary to **map the railway connections of the Visegrad region**. An assessment was already prepared following the announcement of the 2013 Action Plan; the Hungarian Presidency aims to foster the **reviewing of the results of the assessment and to define possible development directions** which may be harmonised with the V4 countries' strategies on transport development. Based on this it will be necessary to facilitate, via expert consultations, the **removal of technical and legislative obstacles, which is necessary for unblocking transport bottlenecks**. The Hungarian Presidency will provide an opportunity to summarize V4 experiences and discuss ways of cooperation.

→ HUNGRAIL Hungarian Railway Conference with high-level V4 participation

During the Hungarian Presidency the V4 will endeavour to further develop cooperation on **inland waterway transport**. Rivers are important elements of international, multimodal transport corridors as they provide low emission, economically feasible and easier access to the V4 and EU markets.

The V4 continues to consider the Three Seas Initiative as a possible channel of political cooperation between the Visegrad Group and other countries of the Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea region, providing forum to discuss, inter alia, transport and energy issues.

Further objectives of the Hungarian Presidency in the field of transport:

- To build **traditional and alternative fuelling stations** (electric, LPG, LNG, CNG) along North-South routes;
- Expert consultations on the state of play in electro-mobility in the V4 countries (number of vehicles, outlook on the future of this sector, state subsidies);
- Sharing the experiences concerning the development and support of innovation in the field of electro-mobility;
- Expert consultations on the experiences of **public road toll systems** in the V4 countries;
- Sharing experiences on **financing** developments, reconstructions and operation, in relation to various financial constructions (e.g. PPP, EFSI, CEF);
- Sharing experiences on **cross-border transport development** projects (Interreg);
- Developing **cross-border sub-regional passenger transport**, with an emphasis on
 - the sharing of continuously updated timetables between the countries;
 - examining the possibilities of establishing a common tariff system including cross-border public services;
- Examining the **possible launching of a 'VisegRail' initiative** aimed at fostering intra-Visegrad tourism by offering regional railroad tickets and season tickets;
- Organising a professional conference on **cycling** during the second half of 2017;
- Sharing experiences concerning the use of awareness-raising methods – conference on the

'Passing 7 borders by bicycle' (series of events), the 'Mary's Way' (CEE pilgrimage route) and the Maria Marathon (ultramarathon trail) with the participation of civil society, local municipalities, EGTCs and experts (1st half of 2018).

- Exploring potential synergies between the Visegrad Group and the **Eastern Partnership** countries in terms of transport connectivity.

3. DIGITAL VISEGRAD

Increasing the **competitiveness of Central Europe** is a key priority for the Hungarian Presidency, with special regard to meeting the challenges of the **digital age**. This chapter features those important current priorities and objectives of the V4, which are related to the broader topic of competitiveness.

COMPETITIVENESS IN THE EU: MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK, COHESION POLICY, AGRICULTURAL POLICY, SOCIAL DIMENSION, DIGITAL SKILLS

The V4 countries are interested in an **economically stable European Union**. In order to ensure sustainable economic growth, the competitiveness of the Union must be improved. This requires a proper investment environment which favours job creation and equal accessibility of digital technologies and skilled labour, indispensable for the countries' prosperity. To effectively **represent V4 interests in the European Union**, the Hungarian Presidency will further strengthen **cooperation concerning economy-related EU issues** such as the Economic and Monetary Union, the Capital Markets Union, the Single Market including the Digital Single Market, the banking union, taxation and customs, as well as the joint fight against recently spreading protectionist tendencies in some Member States. **Respecting the competences of Member States and competitiveness are key aspects in the debate on the social dimension**. The question of social benefits cannot be handled without taking into consideration the aspects of competitiveness and economic policy.

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

According to the current MFF regulation the European Commission should present its proposals for the post-2020 **Multiannual Financial Framework** by 1 January 2018. However, based on information from the

Commission, the publication of the substantial MFF proposals might be delayed due to uncertainties related to handling the financial aspects of Brexit until the end of the first half of 2018. As the conclusion of the Brexit negotiations will influence the future MFF greatly, it is important to maintain in this process the proper financing of policies set out by the Treaties including the **Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy**. Therefore, Hungary is ready to take a leading role in harmonising the positions of the V4 and other like-minded countries.

- Meeting of senior officials (autumn 2017), aimed at identifying common interests and channelling them to the Commission by finalising the V4 non-paper, as well as identifying the main decision points related to the reflection paper on the future of the EU's budget elaborated on the basis of the White Paper
- Meeting of senior officials (spring 2018) aimed at identifying common interests before the publication of the Commission's proposals, working out a joint strategy to represent these interests, and updating the V4 non-paper

Cohesion Policy

Cohesion policy **contributes significantly to the economic performance and convergence of the V4 and the EU**. The cohesion report will be published by the Commission after the June 2017 Cohesion Forum; the presentation of the Commission's proposal concerning post-2020 regulation is expected by 2018. The Hungarian Presidency aims to **respond, also by a joint ministerial declaration in the V4+Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia format, to EU-level developments and represent the region's interest**.

- V4+4 informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy
- Meeting of Director Generals
- Conference on monitoring and evaluation

- Expert working group meetings on the progress of 2014–20 programmes evaluation and on current issues (financial tools, national best practices, comparison of practices of the Commission desks), and V4+4 coordination before meetings of Council preparatory bodies

Common Agricultural Policy

The European Commission is planning to present its plans concerning the new framework of the Common Agricultural Policy for the years 2021–2027 in autumn 2017. **Jointly discussing the proposals** is an important goal of the Hungarian Presidency.

- V4+Croatia+Romania+Bulgaria+Slovenia Meeting of Ministers for Agriculture

Social dimension

According to the Visegrad Group's position, **competitiveness and economic convergence** are key aspects in the debate about the social dimension. Only sustainable economic growth resulting in real economic convergence can contribute to social welfare, the most important conditions of which are

- enhancing competitiveness;
- increasing employment rate and improving the quality of employment (improvement of education and healthcare conditions);
- supporting digital transition through training and incentives;
- increasing capital stocks through investments.

Hungary supports that the related **negotiations focus on the competitiveness of the whole EU and the state of the Internal Market**. Structural reforms tailored to national specificities are the most effective in reaching the goals mentioned above. Compulsory social standards can be counterproductive by undermining convergence based on improving competitiveness.

Swiss Contribution

The Hungarian Presidency will initiate **joint V4 action concerning the prolongation of the Swiss Contribution**. It is a joint V4 priority to reach an agreement concerning releasing the post-2017 funding of the Swiss Contribution as early as possible. The Presidency aims to ensure the effective representation of regional interests in this context.

- V4 expert consultations

ECONOMIC POLICY, LABOUR MARKET, INDUSTRY

It is a key priority of the Hungarian Presidency to contribute to **improving the competitiveness of the V4 and the EU**, and to discuss important topics such as **Industry 4.0** issues of the reindustrialisation of Europe **and other current EU topics** related to economy and economic policy.

- Meeting of Ministers of Economy and Finances and, connected to the ministerial meeting, meeting of the V4 Chambers of Commerce

A key element of the success of any Industry 4.0 or other digitalization initiative is the availability of **digitally competent labour force**. Hence, cooperation on the development of the digital labour market is also of high priority. Owing to the fact that the digitalization exempts civil servants and civil officials, it is essential to enhance international cooperation and training programmes in order to improve the effectiveness and competitiveness of public administration.

Further V4 cooperation is important as regards the proposed amendment to the **Posting of Workers Directive** (96/71/EC).

The Presidency aims to discuss the strengthening of **cooperation in the field of labour policy** cooperation inside the V4 and with the EU, concerning especially the

mutual challenges on the labour market (Brexit, the free movement of workers and services).

→ Meeting of Ministers of Labour

Concerning **undeclared work**, the Presidency supports the exchange of information, the sharing of good practices, the presentation of solutions and the legal background in the V4 countries, and the strengthening of V4 representation of interests in the European Platform tackling undeclared work.

→ Meeting of Directors of V4 Labour Inspectorates

Concerning the field of **occupational safety and health**, the aim of the Presidency is to coordinate and exchange the good practices in the following areas: the effects of improving working condition on competitiveness; the role of the state in supporting SMEs in providing safety in the workplace.

→ Meeting of Directors of V4 Agencies for occupational safety and health

The Hungarian Presidency encourages **V4 cooperation in the field of the healthcare industry** and organises a thematic forum with the participation of V4 senior managers and experts responsible for the healthcare industry. Goals are to strengthen the cooperation tied to V4 health economy and Industry 4.0, to take joint action concerning process control, to cooperate in the fields of healthcare robotics and nanorobotics, to foster joint R+D to create innovative products. Regarding the latter, coordinated export and trade activities are also to be proposed by the Presidency.

→ Forum entitled 'The role of digitalisation in health economy'

The Hungarian Presidency will initiate cooperation between the V4 **public procurement authorities**.

DIGITALISATION

The V4 should assume a greater role for the V4 in **fostering and setting the agenda in international cooperation in the field of digitalisation**. This, as well as the follow-up on the Warsaw Declaration on mutual cooperation in research, innovation and digital affairs, signed on March 28th 2016 by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries, will be facilitated inter alia by organising a major related conference during the Presidency, providing a platform for defining new regional tasks and activities.

In order to enhance the **V4 countries' digital competitiveness and the implementation of the EU Digital Agenda**, the Hungarian Presidency supports creating a **regional dimension of cooperation in the field of digitalisation**, which can supplement national and EU-level strategies. Digitalisation is, and will remain in the forthcoming decades, the main driving force of competitiveness. Only a **'Digital Visegrad' can maintain and improve the region's competitiveness and economic strength**. To this end, the V4 should also work together to address unjustified barriers to free flow of data such as data localisation that throttle economies of scale and thwart the growth of V4-based companies that should compete on the European and global level.

V4 countries play a significant role in the **European automotive industry**. To preserve and develop this position, priorities of the Presidency are the implementation of **regional investments and joint projects**, concerning especially the infrastructure, intelligent transportation systems, e-mobility, as well as connected and automated vehicles.

A key priority of the Hungarian Presidency related to digitalisation will be the **creation of a 'Visegrad Good Practices Platform'** dealing with autonomous vehicle

manufacturing. The platform will provide opportunities for V4 SMEs with best practices to introduce themselves and present the best practices already available. Within this framework, R+D+I activities will be discussed focusing on three areas: production and manufacturing/technology, product development, and the development of new types of services/business models (sharing economy).

In the field of **industry digitisation**, the Hungarian Presidency will facilitate **active regional involvement in the Commission's Digitising European Industry (DEI) initiative** (V4, Austria, Germany, Central and Eastern European countries), in terms of presenting national and regional projects, monitoring, best practices, and major projects enabling the dissemination of digital innovations. It is particularly important to focus on the topic of the analysis of big data generated by sensors of fast-moving vehicles, and the necessary cooperation between autonomous vehicles (5G edge computing).

One of the most important goals of the Presidency is to continue **V4 coordination connected to EU policies and legislative packages**, concerning especially the work on the new Electronic Communications Code, the free flow of data initiative, the mid-term review of the European Digital Single Market Strategy and the possibility to lower the value-added tax amount on internet access services.

→ Expert consultations, in line with the progress of the EU Council's work

→ V4 digital workshop held in Brussels in 2018, with the involvement of the Permanent Representations

Following the practice of former Presidencies of the recent years, the Hungarian Presidency is also planning to organise a **V4+USA expert dialogue** on policy issues concerning the emerging new technologies, and industry development plans. A separate discussion could take place to handle the concerns of tax collection being undeterministic for international

companies selling virtual goods like advertisements or cloud services and for non-traditional, sharing economy business models.

→ Thematic workshops

The immediate and fundamental **digitalisation of our education systems** is inevitable in terms of the chances of emerging generations on the labour market. The Hungarian Presidency encourages all initiatives in the region that are aimed at improving digital skills. Digital skills are becoming the most important differentiators on the labour market. Competitiveness and employability depends on acquired digital skills. It must be a shared goal for V4 countries to set up a common understanding and description of digital skills, based on the Digital Competence Framework to achieve interoperability and mobility. However, it is of mutual interest to parallel develop digital industries in V4 countries to provide job opportunities to reduce brain drain.

→ Conference on the synergies and possible collaboration between industry, vocational education and higher education, presenting good practices in terms of work-based dual education in the fields of ICT, robotics and electro-technology. The conference should reflect also on the fields of adult learning and training initiative under the Umbrella of the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition.

The strengthening of the **region's ability to attract talents** is a key factor in building start-up ecosystems. Therefore, it is the goal of the Presidency to encourage the development and strengthening of a modern, internationalised **higher education sector**, the launching of **educational and training programmes** in the sphere of Industry 4.0 focusing on the technological fields of data sciences and artificial intelligence, thus contributing also to **intra-V4 mobility**.

Key priority is given to the elaboration of **EIT Digital Professional School Programs**, and to student mobility building on them, as well as the creation of **university-based spin-off/start-up** companies and the speeding-up of **accelerator programmes** strengthening the innovation ecosystem of the V4 region.

The Hungarian V4 Presidency initiates the establishment of a **'V4 Smart Platform'**. Serving the comfort of the citizens and helping the public administration, the aim of the platform is the **creation of interoperable e-services** that can be jointly introduced in V4 countries. As a framework system supporting these services, the Platform can foster meeting public demand by the construction of a unified, cross-border digital space based on reciprocity.

Another goal of the Hungarian Presidency is to **deepen intra-V4 relations in the field of e-commerce** by developing the cooperation between postal services.

- Conference series with the participation of postal services and representatives of the region's successful web shops, supporting the opening of regional web shops to the international markets, and the increasing of the selected universal post services' participation in e-commerce

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND START-UPS

The Hungarian Presidency will coordinate the work of the **Horizon 2020 V4 Task Force and continue the discussions** with a view to facilitating a more successful Central European participation in the Horizon 2020 tenders. The Task Force's main goal is to draw a V4 standpoint that is harmonized with the H2020 Programme, to define common interests. This allows taking a joint position during the Programme's half-time evaluation, and also during the formation of the next EU R+I Framework Programme. Selected issues negotiated in the Task Force: analysis of

the initiatives on widening participation, identification of the biggest challenges for increasing the share of EU-13 Member States in Horizon 2020; suggestions on the contents and instruments of the next EU Framework Programme (e.g. the amount of financial allocation, synergy with EU structural funds, thematic priorities); possibilities of opening up closed research/innovation networks; strengthening the participation in wide-scope projects.

To discuss the possibilities and the practical realisation of a V4 R+D initiative, the Presidency organises a **V4 R+D+I conference** (autumn 2017).

The Hungarian Presidency will continue the ongoing science & technology cooperation with the **Republic of Korea, Japan and the USA**, including the organisation of joint scientific and innovation workshops and supporting common R+D programmes and projects. The Presidency continues the V4+Korea Knowledge Sharing Program whose common V4 topic for 2017-2018 is SME innovation.

- Thematic workshops in Budapest and in V4+ partner countries
- Two thematic events in the framework of the V4+Korea Knowledge Sharing Program

Hungary will assume an active role in **implementing the V4 Start-up and Innovation Memorandum**, including the reinvigorating of the work of the **V4 Innovation Task Force** by involving experts and business actors. The goal of the Task Force will be to share the experiences of innovative national programmes supporting SMEs/start-ups; to share already established good practices in the field of regional cooperation; to realise joint promotion and network-building actions; and to facilitate the joint participation on workshops, start-up events, and fairs organised abroad.

- V4 Innovation Task Force sessions

Taking into account the last **Memorandum signed during the November 2016 Budapest Digital Summit**, the Hungarian Presidency initiates the organisation of **thematic workshops in the V4+ Austria+Germany+Slovenia format**, with the joint participation of start-up associations and angel investors of the region. The aim is to present the activities of regional start-ups to as wide of a circle of potential investors as it is possible. It is highly important to put industrial start-ups into position, and to strengthen B2B relations.

- The organisation of professional workshops
- Continuing e.g. the initiative 'We4Startups' (USA), the participation of V4 start-ups in international competitions, promotion events both in the V4 Countries and outside the region

Recalling, inter alia, the Warsaw Declaration of 28 March 2017, in order to facilitate cooperation among V4 start-ups, the Hungarian Presidency's goal is to encourage the building of a **regional start-up ecosystem** with the help of intra-V4 start-up mobility, with the possible involvement of the International Visegrad Fund.

The Hungarian Presidency will launch the event series **'V4 Start-up and Innovation Days FastLane'** to discuss the role of the state in developing a V4 innovation ecosystem and the measures to encourage the development, events will be organised in the four countries in four topics throughout the series—this all is aimed at avoiding brain-drain affecting the region.

- Events and their focus: Warsaw—Digital Health; Bratislava—Smart City; Prague—Smart cars; Budapest—Fintech

In order to help convergence between the activities of **digital start-ups** as important economic actors in the V4 region and **current demands of large companies**, the Hungarian Presidency will organise events focused on research and development, with the potential involvement of Google.

Within the framework of the International Visegrad Fund's Strategic Grants, the Hungarian Presidency will support the 2018 instalment of the strategic conference **think.BDPST — Connect to the Future** on innovation and new technologies, in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental actors.

At the community level, the European Commission's **'Urban Agenda for the EU'** Program brings together all activities of the 'Smart City' development activities that use various digital technologies in creative ways. The Hungarian Presidency wishes to encourage a more active V4 participation in the work of the Urban Agenda, and takes the lead in giving impulses to the cooperation.

Hungarian Presidency supports the successful operation of the **Visegrad Patent Institute**, a joint V4 institution set up in Budapest in 2016, in terms of promoting its activities and achievements.

Concerning **Benchlearning**, the Hungarian Presidency supports the dialogue among V4 national employment services and institutions.

AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER ISSUES

In the past few years, EU Member States have faced significant challenges in the field of agriculture. Farmers had to face animal illnesses causing epidemics of magnitudes unseen before. The extreme weather conditions resulting from climate change have also added to farmer's losses.

The conclusions of the talks on **Brexit** influence greatly the future of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU—as its consequence, a completely new configuration will be created.

Europe needs a Common Agricultural Policy that can provide effective solutions to tackling different crises, resulting in the European agricultural sector and food industry's ability to remain a competitive player on the global level.

The European Commission will present its proposals on the Post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy in the autumn of 2017. Jointly representing the regional interests concerning the future of the Common Agricultural Policy and Brexit is also a high-priority goal of the Hungarian Presidency.

The aim of the Presidency is to broaden the already existing **V4+Slovenia+Bulgaria+Romania cooperation in the field of agriculture and environmental issues with Croatia**.

Besides the coordination on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, the Hungarian Presidency's further goals for cooperation are:

- **Digitalisation of agriculture:** The digitalisation of the agriculture is an unstoppable process which will receive considerable attention in the EU, which makes regional consultation on the topic important;
- In line with governmental political priorities, the strengthening of V4+4 cooperation related to the work of Rome-based **UN organisations** (FAO, IFAD, WFP) working with food and agriculture;
- Taking joint action against **food waste**;
- Taking action to **reduce landfilling and increase separate collection and recycling** to reach the EU waste targets;
- Jointly fighting against **unfair trading practices**. During the Hungarian V4 Presidency, we plan to conclude negotiations on the Commission's suggestions, and their contents;
- Discussion about taking joint action against using double standards in the food industry;

- **BIOEAST:** Concerning agricultural R+D, taking joint action in the EU Horizon 2020 framework to increase the amount of resources that are currently underused;
- Continuation of the discussion on the **trade in agricultural land**;
- **Cooperation in the field of forestry:** Exchange of information, preparing common suggestions concerning forest policy, mutual presentation of best and successful practices, preparing common actions to increase forest adaptability to climate change as well as their mitigation potential, strengthening of commercial relations, joint participation in cross-border EU tenders;
- **Cooperation in the field of hunting:** The creation of a voluntary joint policy in this field and taking joint action in the European Union. The facilitation of hunting tourism between V4 Countries;
- **Cooperation in the field of fisheries management:** Taking joint action in the FFF Group (Friends of Freshwater Fishies), an informal working group of countries dealing with freshwater aquaculture;
- Preparation of the new Common Fishery Policy (CFP) at the EU-level with regard to the needs of V4+Bulgaria+Croatia+Romania+Slovenia;
- **Biodiversity mainstreaming;** validating the aspects of biodiversity in sectoral policies;
- Coordinating actions concerning fulfilling the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG), strengthening inter-state economic, scientific, educational and other relations;
- Sharing best practices concerning **adjusting to climate change** in the field of agriculture;
- Sharing experiences on the practical execution of the **transition to green economy** (facilitating eco-innovation, increasing resource efficiency);
- Discussion of tasks and other steps stemming from the European Commission's **Circular Economy Package**;
- **Waste prevention** including reuse and fostering recovery;
- Experience-sharing on the tasks on **asbestos** decontamination;

- Clean air protection;
- Exchange of experience among V4+4 countries regarding the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 implementation, with particular focus on performance framework indicators at the end of 2018, Programme closure, and innovation.

As regards **water issues**, the Hungarian Presidency, having regard to the review of the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) due in 2019, continues the formulation of the V4+Bulgaria+Romania joint position, initiated under the Polish Presidency, in order to appropriately represent the regional interests of Central Europe on the EU forum. In the field of cooperation in water management, the Hungarian Presidency plans to extend the existing V4+2 framework to Austria, Slovenia Croatia and the Baltic states, namely in the following fields:

- Validating the aspects of water management and water protection in sectoral policies (e.g. agriculture);
- Experiences of the practical application of environmental analysis according to Article 4, paragraph 7 of the Directive;
- Practical experiences on water price policy formulation, and on the principle of cost recovery (Article 9 of the Directive), with a special focus on agricultural water management;
- Experience-sharing of climate change adaptation regarding water management, drought treatment;
- Issues in connection with responses to water damage, flood risk management, and their consistency with river basin management plans.

TAX AND CUSTOMS COOPERATION

The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group continues the activities of the expert groups that are taking actions against financial frauds, and the accomplishments started by the 2016-2017 Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group.

- Besides the tasks of the permanently growing working group dealing with mineral oil frauds and fighting against frauds (Chess Knight), the Presidency manages the work of the V4 regarding Action 8.6.2 dealing with excise (mineral oils) cooperation (Customs Cooperation Working Party, CCWP);
- Continuing the work of the team focussed on creating and monitoring a joint V4 methodology in the establishment of fair prices, to fight the under-invoicing of services;
- Continuing the coordination of the V4 Training Program, a Hungarian initiative. Following V4 agreements: in order to continuously broaden the scope of cooperation in the field of duty and to broaden the number of involved states in the cooperation, the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary continues its innovation and coordination work;
- Continuing the proposal put forward by the Program of the Polish Presidency: Based on its Hungarian equivalent (EKAER, Electronic Public Road Trade Control System), the initiation of creation of a V4 monitoring system for the road carriage of goods. Examining the possibility of involving issues of e-consignment notes (that is closely related to the transport of goods), and the possible creation of an Automated Number Plate Recognition System (ANPRS) in the Visegrad Countries. To discuss these, a V4 conference will be held in Budapest;
- Coordinated V4 actions in tax issues in various EU fora, based on common interests;
- Experience-sharing on qualifying taxpayers;
- Discussing the barriers concerning customers that are to become taxpayers. Furthermore, the V4 joint review of tax authority services, including tax authority actions taken both before and after entering new entities into register;
- With the help of professional coordination, the broadening of sectorial cooperation of Visegrad Countries' tax authorities in the fields of:

- International taxation and transfer pricing;
- Summaries of domestic VAT reports and reporting data on online services;
- With the aim of risk-management, the utilisation of information collected during automatic information-sharing.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The goal of the Hungarian Presidency is to launch discussion on the **balance of work and family and ‘family mainstreaming’**.

Regarding the **EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies**, the Hungarian Presidency proposes the deepening of professional contacts between the V4 countries, and—in the framework of European Roma policy cooperation—the sharing of experiences of experts and decision-makers of countries facing similar challenges concerning social inclusion.

- Conferences for sharing good practices, with special regards to complex housing programmes in settlements, early childhood programmes, and area development programmes aimed at integration (TBC)

In relation to the topic of **women in business**, the Presidency's aim is to discuss the concrete possibilities of moving forward (instead of quotas, strengthening the participation of women in the economy by organising the society appropriately, the creation of family-friendly economic environment), and to establish a professional platform for women in business in the Central-Eastern European region (international network-building).

- V4+ conference ‘Added Value— Women for Central-Eastern Europe’ (2018)

The aim of the Hungarian Presidency is to develop the **financial consciousness of the citizens** of the region, and to help and encourage the acquisition of financial knowledge. Our goal is to share the experiences and to exchange the best practices of national programmes.

Concerning the protection of **consumers’ interests**, the Hungarian Presidency initiates negotiations and the sharing of best practices concerning measures related to consumer protection in e-commerce. In this field, the Presidency highlights especially the practices concerning the right of withdrawal from the side of consumers and enterprises, and between consumers (C2C). Besides, the Presidency's aim is also to consult on alternative methods (including online forms) of consumer disputes.

4. GLOBAL VISEGRAD

V4+ PARTNERSHIPS AND JOINT INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Hungarian V4 Presidency supports **cooperation with global partners**, inter alia in the framework of the V4+ formats included in this chapter, with a view to further improving the **region’s visibility and possibilities** in terms of foreign policy, economy and tourism.

The past few years have shown that events in the Middle East and North Africa directly affect Europe and thus the V4 region. Having this in mind, the **Hungarian Presidency will organise the first-ever V4+ summit with Egypt, an important regional actor with a stabilising role, and with Israel, a key economic and political partner for the V4 countries**. The summits will be aimed at discussing global and regional challenges as well as possibilities of cooperation in the future.

- V4+Egypt Summit, 2nd half of 2017
- V4+Israel Summit, 2nd half of 2017

In the formats of **V4+Japan and V4+Republic of Korea**, the Hungarian Presidency will continue the successful **political dialogue** on foreign and security policy, the **cooperation in the field of R+D**, and the organisation of **joint thematic events**. Concerning the V4+Republic of Korea format, the Presidency will continue the **sharing of Central European expertise in political transition**, as well as the implementation of the Knowledge Sharing Program in the field of innovation. The Presidency will also facilitate V4 discussion on the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile programme and will promote peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The Hungarian Presidency aims to strengthen **V4+USA** ties under the new US administration.

- Symposium on the new US administration’s security and stability policy concerning the Central and Eastern European region (Budapest)
- CEPA Forum in Washington, D.C., in cooperation with the Hungarian V4 Presidency
- Foreign policy planning consultation in the framework of V4+USA
- Atlantic Council V4+USA Energy Envoys Consultations in Washington, D.C. (June 2018)
- V4+USA Cyber Workshop in Washington, D.C. (first semester of 2018)
- V4+USA Business Forum in Budapest, in cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in Hungary
- V4 participation in US-wide commemorations on the centennial of the Bolshevik Revolution, organised by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, founder of the International Museum of Communism in Washington, D.C. (November 2017)

Within the framework of the V4’s global activity, the Hungarian V4 Presidency initiates high-level consultation in the **V4+Central Asia format**.

The Presidency continues the regular consultations at the level of **Political Directors**, especially with the following partners: countries of the Western Balkans, Turkey, USA, Canada, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea.

The Hungarian Presidency initiates foreign policy planning dialogue in the format of **V4+African Union** to discuss Africa’s situation and its impacts on European security and stability.

The Hungarian Presidency supports the joint examination of opportunities for **V4 cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa**, e.g. in the fields of accessing EU development funds and jointly realising development projects. The Presidency also facilitates consultations on the V4 countries’ policies towards Africa.

- Diplomatic–scientific symposium on V4 policies and cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa organised on, or around, 25 May ('Africa Day')

The Hungarian Presidency contributes to the common thinking on potential areas of cooperation with the **Pacific Alliance**, one of the most dynamic regional organisations of the Latin American region.

- Expert level meeting to examine possibilities of cooperation

The Hungarian Presidency supports the mitigation of the **humanitarian challenges in the countries afflicted by the migration crisis** as countries of origin, and will facilitate the discussion of potential common V4 projects. The main related goals of the Hungarian Presidency are: consultation on the role of **V4 countries as emerging donors** in international development; consultation about **financial aspects of international development and humanitarian aid** policy; providing **assistance to forcibly displaced** people living in and outside of refugee camps, especially in the region of origin; **improving living conditions in countries of origin** so as to prevent further migration crises; examining possible common steps in **tackling root causes of migration** (e.g. unemployment, lack of education and infrastructure); protection of persecuted **Christian minorities**.

- Meeting of the directors responsible for international development policy
- Expert meetings on international development and humanitarian assistance

The Hungarian Presidency supports the coordination of V4 positions and will examine possibilities of joint statements in **international fora** (e.g. UN, CoE).

- Expert consultation about issues concerning the UN and regional organisations (discussing the possibilities of joint negotiating positions)

- V4 joint session of national inter-ministerial committees for humanitarian law

TOURISM; PROMOTION OF THE REGION

The Hungarian Presidency aims to **promote the Visegrad Group outside the region** in terms of culture, economy and tourism.

To further strengthen the V4 brand, the Hungarian Presidency will support holding **V4-focussed business promotion events** and side-events worldwide.

Budapest will be the first V4 capital to host the **World Export Development Forum** (24–26 October 2017), a gathering of export development experts, politicians and business people, which will also provide opportunities to promote the V4.

Within the framework of the successful **V4 cooperation in the field of tourism**, the goal of the Hungarian Presidency is twofold: to support adaptation to the new trends of tourism (the increased value of security, the growing role of social economy, the spread of innovative marketing tools); to strengthen and present the **V4 brand in source markets**, using an experience-based approach. Among the target markets of V4 tourism cooperation an emphasis will be put on the USA, Canada, potential source countries of Latin America, Russia, the former CIS countries, and the countries of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the intention is to ensure a stronger and more focused marketing presence in China, India, the Republic of Korea and Japan, countries generating the most dynamic tourist traffic to the V4 region. After defining the consumer segments in our source markets more accurately, the Presidency proposes **compiling and promoting experience packages** for longer stays (7–10–14 days) that also present the many faces of the V4.

An important objective of the Hungarian Presidency is to further boost the intra-Visegrad tourist traffic. The main tool for this is the formation of joint product and package offers.

- Meeting between high-level state officials for tourism (beginning of 2018)—in preparation to this: an informal meeting of V4 Secretaries of State for Tourism and a press conference linked to the World Travel Market 2017 in London
- V4 professional conference on topics of mutual interest in order to assess and make effective use of the new trends of tourism (e.g. tourism and security; spreading of sharing economy in the field of tourism; connection between sports and tourism)



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