



Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group  
July 2016–June 2017

**PROGRAMME**  
**OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP**  
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## Context of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4)

The fifth Polish Presidency of the Visegrad (V4) Group begins in a particular moment. Over the last 25 years, the V4 countries developed a close cooperation based on common values and interests. The V4 has become a **well-known brand** - a **symbol of a successful initiative** for pursuing joint interests and a central element of cooperation in Central Europe.

The year 2016, in which we celebrate **the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Visegrad Group**, provides an excellent opportunity to summarize and analyse to-date achievements. At the same time, the anniversary invites an **in-depth reflection** on further directions of the Group's development and its role in Europe. The 2016 NATO Summit hosted by Poland in July this year may be as well a suitable occasion for enhancing dialogue on security issues within the Group and uniting its voice at Alliance level both during the Summit and while preparing and implementing its main decisions afterwards.

The reflection is more urgent than ever. **Europe faces difficult challenges and problems.** Migration crisis and related challenges for the future of the Schengen area, instability and conflicts in our Eastern and Southern neighborhood, the questions around the United Kingdom's EU membership, economic slowdown and macroeconomic disparities undermining EU's competitiveness or deficiencies in the development of transport, digital and energy infrastructure are regarded as the most important challenges. There is also a risk of a resurging political and economic fragmentation of our continent that could disrupt the European integration project.

Together with all Central European Partners, V4 countries must strive for tackling these challenges. V4 countries play a particular role both in solving specific problems, and in contributing constructively to a further development of the integration process. Therefore, it is necessary to step up cooperation in order to achieve joint objectives. **The Visegrad Group can effectively represent sensitivities of EU Member States from Central Europe** as actively involved in the debate on the shape of the European integration. We have proved many times that the V4 countries are reliable partners when it comes to tackling common challenges. We are ready to continue close cooperation with EU partners in the same spirit with a view to enhancing the ability of the EU to reach compromise and boosting its inner cohesion. It is our shared goal to help the EU overcome the challenges of the day and ultimately make Europe stronger.

The nature and broad scope of current challenges, which exceed the EU area, enables the Visegrad cooperation to effectively inspire cooperation among countries from the region of Central and Eastern Europe, covering the area between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas. The Visegrad Group should play an active role in pursuing a broader agreement in order to solve concrete problems. We should use **institutional synergies** (*cooperation between different levels/formats of cooperation in Europe*), as well as **functional synergies** (*establishing a coalition of countries in order to resolve specific matters*) to a larger extent. The instruments and mechanisms of cooperation with other EU member states and non-European counterparts, which have been developed so far, proved a particular value of the Visegrad Group and its capacity to make a difference.

A challenge for the V4 is also to consolidate **the Group's identity and strengthen its external visibility**. To achieve this goal the Polish Presidency will analyse available instruments, such as the International Visegrad Fund, and propose (in cooperation with its V4 counterparts) their more effective use. Existing instruments and mechanisms of the V4 cooperation should contribute to a larger extent to strengthening cohesion within the Visegrad Group. They should unite us around **a common historical heritage and common European values**.

The priorities proposed by the Polish Presidency are formulated on the basis of experience and best practices of the preceding Presidencies. At the same time, they envisage the necessity to cooperate closely on new challenges and threats, countries in our region are facing.

**Priorities of the Polish Presidency** include the following:

1. **STRONG VOICE OF THE V4 IN THE EUROPEAN UNION:** coordination of the European agenda and cooperation on key challenges.
2. **CREATING SYNERGIES THROUGH EXTENDED DIALOGUE:** developing regional cooperation on the basis of institutional and functional synergies.
3. **SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE REGION:** strengthening cooperation in the field of common security.
4. **V4 IDENTITY AND VISIBILITY:** building unity on the basis of common heritage and values, social aspect of cooperation, as well as effective communication strategies.
5. **COHESION AND CONNECTIVITY:** strengthening cohesion and developing cooperation of the V4 by improving transport connections.

The agenda of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group is **not a closed list**. New and unexpected challenges may determine activities of the Group and make it **necessary to adapt** proposed actions. Joint initiatives and the frequency of meetings will be adjusted to circumstances and the changing international environment, taking into account current European agenda. At the same time, **continuity** of the V4 activities will be ensured, *inter alia* by a close cooperation with the preceding (Czech) Presidency and the following (Hungarian) Presidency.

In order to strengthen **the political dimension of the Visegrad cooperation and to give it fresh impetus**, we plan to organize:

- **a summit of the Presidents** (*autumn 2016*);
- **meetings of the Prime Ministers** (*at least two meetings: in autumn and late spring*), and
- **a meeting of the Speakers of the Parliaments** (*autumn 2016*).

The Presidency is also ready to organise meetings of the Heads of Governments with participation of other countries, whenever it will be necessary to seek agreement on matters requiring a broader region to be engaged.

The Presidency will continue a good tradition of **meetings at the level of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs:** with the countries of the Western Balkans (*in autumn 2016 preceded by a preparatory meeting on directors' level*), with the Baltic and Nordic countries (*in spring 2017*) and with the countries of the Eastern Partnership (*in 2017*). The Presidency does not exclude the possibility of organising *ad hoc* ministerial meetings in other formats to discuss other significant issues, such as - for instance - the implementation of the Warsaw NATO Summit decisions.

Institutions of the government and self-government administrations, as well as civil society organisations and institutions will be involved in implementing the proposed Programme. The parliamentary dimension of the cooperation will also be of particular significance.

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## STRONG VOICE OF THE V4 IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### Coordination of the European agenda

The aim of the Presidency is to further strengthen the position of our countries in the European Union. We should effectively and jointly shape the European agenda, stressing the political importance of V4 cooperation within the EU.

The Polish Presidency will promote initiatives that strengthen **the cohesion** of our region and contribute to its closer internal integration, as well as reinforce its role in shaping the EU agenda, including the foreign policy. In this context, the main task will be to support the process of **coordinating positions of the V4 countries on the current European agenda** both through Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and respective ministries involved in activities at EU level. Activities and initiatives will be undertaken in cooperation with the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council (in the second half of 2016) and the Maltese Presidency (in the first half of 2017).

The coordination of the EU agenda within the V4 will be based on various mechanisms and instruments, including:

- ✓ regular consultations of Prime Ministers on the occasion of European Council meetings;
- ✓ ad hoc consultations of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council meetings (FAC), as appropriate;
- ✓ meetings/video-conferences of the Ministers or State Secretaries for European Affairs on the margin of the General Affairs Council (GAC);
- ✓ working out common comments to guidelines and draft conclusions of the European Council;
- ✓ working out common Lines-to-take for the meetings of the General Affairs Council (GAC);
- ✓ drafting common *non-papers* on issues of key importance for the V4 (e.g. migration, Dublin+, MFF - review and new perspective, Common Foreign and Security Policy, climate policy, energy policy, digital agenda);

The possibility of organising video-conferences of the Prime Ministers before the meetings of the European Council as well as consultations before the COREPER meetings will be considered.

Key areas subject to the strengthened coordination will include the following:

- **Migration Crisis**

**The migration crisis** will remain a strong focus for the V4 countries. The Polish Presidency will concentrate its activities on coordinating the position of the V4 at the EU forum that should enhance solutions to address the migration root causes with emphasis on the effective protection of EU external borders (incl. supporting third countries). A determined joint action is indispensable in order to **strengthen, support and maintain the Schengen area** as one of the foundations of the European integration project.

As regards the reform of Common European Asylum System and specifically the Dublin system within it, the V4 countries should focus on opposing any changes that would result in the introduction of any permanent and compulsory redistribution mechanism or would significantly reduce Member States competencies in this area. Our efforts should be directed mainly at providing help to third countries and deepen the cooperation with them in order to tackle the root causes of the current migratory pressure.

Confident that the external dimension of migration policy should be based on a geographically balanced and comprehensive approach we will also continue V4 cooperation within **the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa**. As a group of

donors, the V4 countries will work out common positions before meetings of the Board and Operational Committees of the Fund.

The Presidency will also continue coordination of the initiative on joint parallel local humanitarian projects in Jordan and Syria.

- **Energy**

**Energy security** remains a key issue for the V4, as a region of great potential, both in terms of the development of the energy market, and significant needs in terms of the immunity to supply disturbances. The main task of the Presidency will be to strengthen the common voice of the V4 in the EU on issues of fundamental significance for the energy security of our region, including the Eastern Partnership and the Energy Community countries.

A special emphasis will be placed, inter alia, on working out solutions on **enhancing the bargaining power of the EU vis-à-vis its external suppliers of energy**, on increasing transparency of intergovernmental agreements and contracts on energy supplies, as well as on improving the level of security and diversification of natural gas sources, suppliers and routes to the EU.

Cooperation in the field of **promoting indigenous sources of energy and development of chosen technologies** such as hydrocarbons (in sustainable manner) renewable energy and nuclear power will be particularly important. Those sources and technologies are of fundamental significance for the energy security of the EU Member States and their competitiveness, including promotion of climate resilience development vis-à-vis 2030 target.

Areas of cooperation:

**1. Energy Security in the Gas Sector**

- ✓ Continuation of work on infrastructure projects along **the North-South Gas Corridor**, securing or acquiring financial support from the EU funds and mechanisms, analysis of the optimization of the use of the infrastructure after the completion of its construction in order to develop the regional gas market.
- ✓ Analysis of possible methods of using new and planned import infrastructure within the V4, incl. the usage of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście.
- ✓ Continuation of common voice on the Nord Stream 2 project.
- ✓ Intensification of activities to use the potential of the voluntary demand aggregation mechanism.
- ✓ Further regional cooperation on security of supply under SoS Regulation.
- ✓ Identification of fields of cooperation and strategy of activities within converging interests during the works on an amendment to the Regulation No. 994/2010 concerning measures to safeguard security of gas supply and the Decision No. 994/2012 establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to intergovernmental agreements between Member States and third countries in the field of energy.
- ✓ Strengthening **the single market for gas**: analysis of opportunities and the potential to integrate markets of the V4 countries within the architecture specified in the updated *Gas Target Model*.
- ✓ Updating The Visegrad Group Road Map towards the Regional Gas Market with emphasis on preparation joint regulatory framework for V4 region and cooperation of Transmission System Operators.

**2. Oil market / Oil sector**

- ✓ Improving cooperation in case of disruptions of oil supply particularly through the enhancement of coordination of intervention measures.
- ✓ Enhancing security of oil supply in Central and Eastern Europe.

- ✓ Discussion on possibility of coordination of the V4 actions with regard to **the phenomenon of a “grey fuel market”** in Central and Eastern Europe, which unfavourably affects the functioning of domestic refineries.

### 3. Electricity Market

- ✓ Working out a common position of the V4 in order to guarantee **equal playing field for all technologies on the energy market fully respecting the principle of technological neutrality and allowing Member States - after consultation with other Member States - to choose measures to safeguard security of electricity supply.**
- ✓ **Next possible steps after lack of implementation of the opinion of the ACER (no. 9/2015):** cooperation to eliminate barriers in cross-border trade in Central Eastern Europe in electricity and threats to the operation security of networks, e.g. the phenomenon of loop flows.
- ✓ Coordination of the V4 common positions on changes to be proposed at the end of 2016 to the European electricity market (**the so-called new market design**).
- ✓ Examination of the needs for potential development **concerning electricity interconnections** of the V4 countries and steps to be taken **aimed at integrating within Internal Energy Market.**
- ✓ Development of electromobility.

### 4. Nuclear Power

- ✓ Promotion of the **technological neutrality principle** with regard to EU energy and climate policy including the Energy Union.
- ✓ Common initiatives to **improve market and regulatory conditions for the development of nuclear power in the EU** in order to recognize significant contribution of nuclear power in achieving competitive low emission economy.
- ✓ Developing V4 cooperation in the field of **research and development in nuclear technology**, in particular in the framework of the *Allegro* project on the Generation-IV reactors as well as industrial applications of High Temperature Reactors in a shorter time frame.
- ✓ Developing V4 cooperation in nuclear capacity building, including human resources development, education and training, knowledge management and knowledge networks.
- ✓ Developing V4 cooperation in the field of safe management of radioactive waste.
- ✓ Promoting industrial cooperation of V4 companies in nuclear power projects.
- ✓ Ensuring the continuation of works of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) as the only EU level platform promoting nuclear energy in the EU.
- ✓ Working out a common V4 position with regard to legislative and non-legislative initiatives of the European Commission and the EU Council in the field of nuclear safety and security.

#### Planned activities/events:

- ✓ Cooperation of involved ministries, regulators of the energy market, transmission system operators and energy companies, as well as disaster management authorities.
- ✓ Strengthening coordination at the level of the European Council and the Council of EU, within the V4 Energy Group and the V4 Gas Forum, as well as at the level of regional (CEN operators) or pan-European initiatives (the Florence Forum).

#### • **Climate Policy and Environment protection**

The Presidency will coordinate the V4 countries with regard to the EU debate on the Climate and Energy Policy Framework (implementation). An effort will be made in order to build broader support for the operationalization of the European Council conclusions on the climate and energy policy framework until 2030.

## Areas of cooperation:

### **1. Implementation of the results of the COP21 - External dimension**

Coordination at the EU level (including the V4+ format) with regard to discussion on the assessment of the COP21 results, including the follow-up meetings and negotiations in 2016. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of EU's competitiveness, which should be primarily taken into account in the course of the debate on the review of the EU ETS Directive and consequent non-ETS legislation. The Presidency will be also coordinating V4 efforts aimed at ensuring that the new Paris Agreement is ratified by all major global economies (in order to confirm that the Paris Agreement will deliver on its goals and keep global level-playing field for the EU economy).

### **2. Implementation of the results of the COP21 EU 2030 Climate and Energy Framework - Intra-EU dimension**

Coordination and discussion on the V4 common views and objectives on the most important issues regarding the EU Climate and Energy Framework until 2030. The discussions and cooperation in the V4 and V4+ format will focus on ensuring a strong contribution of common views (where individual MS position allows) the Member States from Central and Eastern Europe for the negotiations on the draft legislative proposals implementing the conclusions of the European Council Conclusions of October 2014. Consultations on the EU ETS review will cover, inter alia, issues related to benchmarking, free allocation and the use of different financing mechanisms (the Modernisation Fund, Innovation Fund and free allowances allocation for electricity generation granted in accordance with Art. 10c) for projects that are compliant with beneficiary Member States' national policies and priorities.

In terms of the non-ETS and LULUCF proposals the Presidency of the V4 will emphasize the need to examine a broad range of options that would contribute to the cost-effective reduction of GHG emissions, incl., inter alia, flexible mechanisms and/or greenhouse gases carbon sequestration capacity of forests. The Polish Presidency will continue the internal V4 discussion with regard to European Commission proposals on the non-ETS sector inclusion of the LULUCF sector into the EU's climate policy and decarbonisation of the transport sector.

### **3. Climate Change**

The coordination of V4+2 at the EU level will be devoted mainly to the following areas:

- provisions of the 2015 Paris Global Climate Agreement,
- review of the Emissions Trading EU ETS Directive,
- non-ETS and LULUCF legislation.

### **4. Preparation for the COP22 in Marrakesh**

The V4 will exchange the views during the preparation of the common EU position for the COP22 and participation in the COP22 conference.

### **5. Air Protection**

Coordination of the V4 cooperation with regard to the European Commission's infringement procedure against the V4 countries in relation to the infringement of Art. 13(1) of the Directive No. 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 *on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe* (CAFE). Seeking a common solution to address the exceedances of air quality standards and finding common ways of communicating them to the Commission within the context of the infringement procedures. Integrating the air quality protection into other relevant key areas, such as climate policy, energy, transport and health.

### **6. Biodiversity protection**

Coordination of the V4 preparation of a position on biodiversity mainstreaming for a High Level Segment before CBD COP13 in Mexico (3 December 2016). Coordination of V4 position on further activities with regard to the fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. Closer cross-boundary cooperation in harmonizing regional priorities related to the definition of Invasive Alien Species of regional concern.

## 7. Sustainable use of resources

- ✓ Exchange information of the V4+ (Romania and Croatia) on the proposal of the European Commission with regard to **the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons** from unconventional sources in the context of enhancing energy security.
- ✓ exchange of experience on strategic and practical aspects of **draught prevention** (strategic planning, technical and non-technical methods).
- ✓ exchange of experience on the results of public consultations of river basin management plans within the ongoing planning cycle and planned activities in the field of **environmental consultations and education** in the following planning cycle.
- ✓ exchange of experience on **water and sewage management**, in particular the implementation of the provisions of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.
- ✓ common efforts to influence the legislative proposals on **waste management** to define realistic and achievable targets for all countries, and - within the Circular Economy - to create favourable conditions for **the secondary raw materials market**.

### Planned activities/events:

Organization of the 24<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministers of the Environment in the V4+ format (possibly – 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2016).

### • **Multiannual Financial Framework**

An important task will be to increase the influence of the V4 on the debate on **the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020**, which will be a *de facto* introduction to negotiations on the EU's budget after 2020. On the basis of measures undertaken by the Czech Presidency, the Polish Presidency will continue to strengthen the cohesion of the V4 in order to ensure the most favourable course of the debate at the EU level and to achieve the implementation of common priorities.

### • **Digital Agenda - Digital Single Market**

The development of the European economy based on modern digital technologies will be of particular importance. We will be supporting the enhancement of the competitiveness of those technologies globally by implementing the Digital Single Market Strategy (DSM). The V4 countries see great potential represented by the use of modern technologies in order to boost economic growth and job creation. Key DSM initiatives should be implemented in a way that guarantees inclusive growth for the whole EU. If the benefits of DSM are spread as equally as possible to bridge the divide between economic core and peripheries, it will improve European competitiveness on a global scale.

### Areas of cooperation:

1. **Cyber-security:** cooperation to enhance the protection against cyber threats inter alia by means of CSIRT cooperation and the Central European Cyber Security Platform (CECSP); building permanent relations between the CECSP and the V4. Furthermore encouraging cooperation between special Police units and national “centres of excellence” that focus on conducting research in the field of cyber-crime.
2. **Digitisation of the industry:** working out a strategic approach to planning and designing the digitisation of the industry, inter alia on the basis of new technological models, automation, optimization of processes, smart management, intellectual property rights protection as well as interoperability and standardisation. Setting-up a V4 common position regarding EU Commission communication “Digitising European Industry”. Intensifying cooperation between regional research centres, enterprises and government administration in order to work out a multi-level model of cooperation that will facilitate the use of modern technologies by the industry. Exchange of experience within V4 group concerning the absorption of EU funding (i.e. EFSI, Horizon 2020 etc).
3. **E-commerce:** enhancing initiatives that facilitate the development of the e-commerce sector (removing barriers in cross-border e-commerce transactions, especially from entities representing the SME sector and start-ups, and with particular reference to the subject of cross-border parcel

delivery market and geoblocking. Setting-up a V4 common position regarding EU e-commerce package).

4. **E-skills:** deepening regional cooperation in order to enhance knowledge and digital activity of societies through training and education activities; in cooperation with and use of resources of the public administration, non-governmental organizations, researchers and business; scientific exchanges in cooperation with academic centres, social partners and state institutions that are responsible for implementing the strategy for developing digital competences.
5. Exchanging experience between the V4 countries in the fields of **innovations and the functioning of the digital sector**, including in terms of using EU funding. Further development of the V4 cooperation in promoting innovative start-ups coming from the region.
6. **Enhancing the construction and upgrading of broadband networks**, including by using EU funding for the construction of broadband networks, stock-taking and removal of barriers. Setting-up a V4 common position regarding the review of the regulatory framework for the telecommunications sector.
7. **Personal data protection:** exchanging experience in the field of personal data protection.
8. **Development of e-Government:** exchanging experience on solutions necessary to ensure the interoperability of information and communication systems of public entities, common mechanisms of identification and authentication in the systems of the public administration and the adopted model of rendering public e-services.

- **Internal Market – support for economic growth in the EU and employment**

The internal market is currently under great pressure. We will continue to strengthen it, inter alia by removing existing barriers, in particular in the service sector. The key challenge will be to **limit protectionist tendencies**, to ensure the respect of **the four fundamental freedoms** as well as economic growth and employment. V4 will continue to cooperate closely with reference to the initiatives hampering the idea of internal market and European competitiveness, with particular attention to free movement of services **and free movement of workers**.

Free movement of workers is a fundamental right of an individual, inherent in the EU citizenship and being an undisputable value of the Union. The consolidated V4 position on protecting the rights and equal treatment of EU workers and members of their families, as well as exercising their right to free movement should ensure stronger influence on potential further work in this area on the EU level.

Areas of cooperation:

1. Implementation of **the Strategy of the Internal Market in Goods and Services**, including in terms of activities related to the sector of services, small and medium enterprises, start-ups and the single market in goods (geo-blocking, start-ups, services passports, etc.).
2. Consolidation of positions on initiatives concerning the free movement of workers, especially in the scope of coordination of social security systems.
3. Close cooperation and common strategy with reference to the works on the revision of Posted Workers Directive.
4. Coordination of the position of the V4 on the activities of the European Commission in order to terminate intra-EU bilateral investment treaties (**Intra-EU BITs**).
5. **Ensuring equality in competition** for entrepreneurs from the V4 countries who operate on the EU market.
6. Cooperation to **enhance innovativeness** of the V4 countries as an element of economic transformation in order to ensure further economic growth in digital era. Implementation of the provisions of the *Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Cooperation in the Areas of Innovation and Start-ups*.

Planned events:

- ✓ A meeting of V4 cohesion policy and economy ministers, July 2016, Warsaw
- ✓ A closing informal meeting of V4 cohesion policy and economy ministers, June, 2017, Warsaw
- ✓ A meeting of the V4 Ministers for Employment and Social Policy.

## Future of the European Integration

Initiating an in-depth debate in order to work out a common V4 position on **the future of the European integration** will be a significant challenge. The Presidency will support a V4 discussion under the auspices of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs taking into account debates and materials already produced by the previous Presidencies.

A constructive vision worked out by the V4 countries should inter alia take into account proposals regarding the strengthening of the EU's solidarity, flexibility, cohesion and of the subsidiarity principle. Solutions to strengthen the EU's competitiveness and to prevent internal divisions will be of key importance (*e.g. by the criterion of membership in the Eurozone*). The V4 should also work together to make the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) more effective. Enlargement policy will be also an important subject of discussion among V4 participants.

The upcoming referendum in the UK could be one of the key factors in determining further development of the EU. Should UK remain in the EU there will be a need for implementation of the New Settlement for the UK concluded during European Council in February. On the other hand if British people decide to leave the EU a new model for EU-UK relations will have to be established. Regardless of the outcome the V4 countries should work together to establish a common approach to future EU-UK relations.

The Presidency plans to organize at least **two conferences on the future and common heritage of Europe**. Furthermore, it is planned to:

- ✓ organize a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the future of Europe;
- ✓ enhance the cooperation among think-tanks of the V4 countries (a cycle of seminars and conferences).

## Other areas of cooperation

### • Finance

The EU initiatives such as Capital Markets Union, Banking Union, Economic and Monetary Union reform, initiatives in tax and customs area etc., require closer cooperation of the V4 countries (including political and experts meetings) in order to ensure that the solutions adopted at EU level correspond to the interests of the countries of the region.

#### Planned events:

- ✓ A meeting of the V4 Ministers for Finance (in autumn 2016, Warsaw).

#### Areas of cooperation/planned activities:

##### 1. Cooperation of custom administration:

- ✓ Organisation of a periodic meeting of the V4 states' heads of customs services.
- ✓ Organisation of a meeting of the V4 Mineral Oil Working Group.
- ✓ Initiating a preparatory works on establishing V4 monitoring system of movements of goods transported by roads (based on EKAER - system existing in Hungary); examining the possibility of including in the work the e-delivery note project which is in preparatory stage in Hungary.
- ✓ Establishing permanent Task Force for tobacco products (with participation of Germany).
- ✓ Establishing Automated Number Plate Recognition System - ANPRS within the V4 countries.  
Introduction of ANPRS would contribute to increased efficiency of custom controls by providing information on suspicious vehicles carrying goods and persons. ANPRS is already functioning in the Baltic States. Poland has undertaken works on joining this system.

##### 2. Cooperation of tax administration:

- ✓ Closer cooperation within the Visegrad Group in the area of fight against VAT fraud (periodical meetings of tax administration experts).
- ✓ Organisation of experts' meeting on methods of analysing mass data in order to identify entities conducting activities which may lead to tax fraud and evasion.
- ✓ Closer cooperation in the area of international taxation and transfer pricing issues (periodical meetings of tax administration experts in this area).

##### 3. Cooperation between the Financial Intelligence Units on combating money laundering and financing of terrorism:

- ✓ Organization of a periodic meeting of the V4 states' financial intelligence units (with additional participation of the financial intelligence unit of Austria) devoted to the issues of combating financing of terrorism (May 2017).

##### 4. Cooperation in the financial services sector:

- ✓ Organization of experts' periodic meeting in order to discuss issues related to: Capital Markets Union, European Deposits Insurance Scheme, implementation of Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive (a framework for the recovery and resolution of credit institutions and investment firms), Deposit Guarantee Scheme, CRD/CRR review.

### • Agriculture

The Presidency's priorities include the review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2016 and the preparation for the CAP programming after 2020. As it may be expected, the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be a prelude to the debate on the multiannual budget and shape of the EU policies for the following financial perspective.

#### Areas of cooperation:

##### 1. Common Agricultural Policy



Taking into account the amount of spending on the CAP from the EU's budget, it should be expected that the debate on the review of the MFF will also refer to **the effectiveness of spending on the CAP**.

At the same time, obligations arising from the very provisions of the CAP are also important, including the European Commission's presentation of **the review and the potential "upwards" adjustment of environmentally focused areas** until March 2017, or the expiry of **sugar quotas** in October 2017. In this context, the Presidency will initiate a debate at the V4 forum in order to achieve a common position in these areas (important for the review of the current CAP and its future shape).

Furthermore, on the basis of previous experience in implementing rural development programmes and a regular monitoring of the implementation of the RDPs for the years 2014-2020, the Presidency intends to initiate a discussion at the V4 forum on **possible simplifications** of the RDPs 2014-2020. The V4 countries should work out common proposals of solutions to facilitate the implementation of the programmes, including in terms of decreasing administrative burdens and improving mechanisms that allow beneficiaries to use the Programme (which is important in order to ensure a more effective development of rural areas and facilitate access to instruments of the CAP).

## 2. Food safety

Taking into account the development of short supply chains, which is one of priorities of the development of rural areas, the Polish Presidency intends to initiate a discussion on amendments to the currently valid provisions of **the so-called hygiene package**, including the Regulation (EC) No. 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on *laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin* with regard to the possibility of an on-farm slaughtering in order to gain meat, which might be afterwards offered for sale on the local market. Discussion at the V4 forum would be aimed at aligning positions around this topic and working out a coherent approach of countries in the region.

## 3. Efficient crisis response on agricultural markets

Under present conditions, the situation on agricultural markets, in particular on the milk market and pig meat market, often requires to respond effectively and undertake immediate measures in order to stabilise it. In case of relevant tensions and crisis situations, the Presidency intends to initiate a discussion and to undertake initiatives within the V4 in order to work out effective solutions.

At the same time, the Presidency intends to bring into discussion **the effectiveness and future shape of instruments that are valid on agricultural markets**, such as:

- ✓ a need to work out a common position on adjustment of intervention prices with regard to the arable crops and milk markets.
- ✓ Exchange of views on positions of V4 countries with regard to continuation of sugar quota system and achieving a common position on the production charge in the sugar sector.

## 4. Performance of projects in the field of agriculture within the Horizon 2020 Programme

**Better use of the research potential of the V4 countries in the field of agriculture is necessary. The EU's long-term agricultural research and innovation strategy** will influence the programming of financial resources during the last three years (2018-2020) of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme in the field of agriculture, including bioeconomy area. The Presidency will initiate a discussion on possible solutions that would allow to **increase the participation of research and development units from the V4 countries in use of financial resources under the Horizon 2020 Programme**. The Presidency will also initiate an effort to assure that the specifics of the EU member states with a small-scale structure of the agro-food sector will be taken into account. The aim of the Presidency will be to agree common guidelines in this regard.

## 5. Strengthening of the farmers's position in the food supply chain

The structure of the food supply chain makes it particularly vulnerable to unfair trading practices, often harmful for the farmers. The measures taken so far by the European Commission have been focused mainly on the voluntary solutions, the effectiveness of which could be doubtful. As the solutions implemented by the individual countries may be insufficient in the single Community market, the Presidency will seek to reach an agreement within the framework of the V4 – based on the joint statement by the Visegrad Group and further 3 countries agriculture ministers on 19th May 2015- as regards the need for the urgent inclusion of the issue into the work programme of the Community institutions.

## 6. Promotion of European food

The Presidency will seek to stimulate **cooperation among sectoral organisations**, including in terms of ongoing analysis and exchange of information on entities from the countries in the region that are interested in joint promotion, as well as in gaining financial resources from the European Union for **the performance of multinational projects referring to the promotion of agro-food products** on third countries' markets (*inter alia on the basis of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No. 1144/2014*).

### Planned events:

- ✓ two meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture in the V4+ format with Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia (*in October 2016 in Warsaw and in April/May 2017*).
- ✓ meetings at the expert level, seminars and workshops.

## • Demographic Challenges

### Areas of cooperation:

- the ageing of European society - challenge or an opportunity for European countries, progressive consequences of demographic changes in Europe, attempt to work out joint measures to combat the negative effects of an ageing population and to find effective solutions to the development and retention of a competitive workforce;
- family policy.

### Planned events:

- ✓ a meeting of the Ministers of Employment and Social Policy.
- ✓ a meeting of experts in the V4+ format.

## • Health

### Areas of cooperation:

V4 consultations on:

- ensuring fair and affordable prices of medicines.
- challenges for the public health sector in the area of consumer education on diet supplements.
- e-health.

### Planned events:

- ✓ meeting of the Ministers of Health (*in spring 2017*).
- ✓ meeting of experts in the V4+ format (*in autumn 2016*).

## • Science, Technology and Innovation

The Polish Presidency will support further V4 cooperation in the field of science, technology and innovation both in the V4 and V4+ formats, including participation in common European R&I programmes (e.g. in the field of quantum technologies - QUANTERA ERA-NET Co-fund).

The Presidency will enhance activities to improve **contacts between academic communities and businesses** of V4 countries and identify **common strategic topics for the scientific community**.

*The Presidency will initiate a V4 Task Force in view of H2020 interim evaluation.* The aim of this Task Force would be to support the better participation of EU 13 in H2020 and subsequent framework programmes and thus to define common priorities, issues for V4 – and in a broader context for EU13 – countries which could be represented during preparation of the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020. The work of this Task Force shall be in line with and support the informal working group of the S&T attachés of EU13.

Main joint issues may include:

- ✓ analysis of widening package;
- ✓ coordinated action regarding favourable regulation on researcher wages under H2020;
- ✓ maintaining the balance of small and large collaboration projects;
- ✓ analysis of the concentration of scientific networks



## CREATING SYNERGIES THROUGH EXTENDED DIALOGUE

The Polish Presidency will remain open to conducting dialogue and regular consultations with **other partners from outside of the Visegrad Group**. The effectiveness of the V4 functioning requires the basis of the V4 cooperation to be extended in the so-called “V4+” format.

The Visegrad Group should engage partners into actions and build a community of interests and opinions on the basis of natural synergies. Although the cooperation among the four countries of the Visegrad Group remains the most important, it is also advisable to systematically consult and coordinate activities with other **European countries, in particular along the North-South corridors**. Cooperation with **non-European countries will be also important**. The currently used “V4+” format of dialogue reflects expectations both of many countries neighbouring the V4 and of the non-European countries. It also enables to simultaneously maintain a rational and effective framework of the traditional Visegrad cooperation.

During its Presidency, Poland will strengthen cooperation in the “V4+” formula encompassing above all:

- ✓ **dialogue with neighbouring countries from Central and South-Eastern Europe** on EU agenda as well as security policy issues, but also on the framework of a broader and more pragmatic cooperation in the region.
- ✓ **dialogue with Baltic and Nordic countries (V4+NB8)**, in particular in the fields of security, energy, Eastern policy and migration.
- ✓ **dialogue with the Benelux countries (V4+Benelux)**, in particular in the field of economic and investment cooperation, including the sector of new technologies and innovation.

### • **Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policy**

The V4 should work together to ensure that key provisions of the recent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) - such as enhanced differentiation, prioritization, stronger focus on security - are implemented and that the ENP becomes a more political tool. While the ongoing conflicts and instability in the Southern neighbourhood (and their implications for Europe) require an adequate response and engagement by the EU, we should make sure that the challenges in EU’s Eastern neighbourhood are not underestimated.

During the Polish Presidency, **countries of Eastern Europe** (Eastern Partnership - EaP) will remain a priority area of cooperation. Intensification of activities in the fields of security, transport, energy, rule of law, institution building as well as fighting corruption is needed. The V4 will support mobility of citizens of the Eastern Partnership, including by supporting relevant agreements (e.g. short-stay visa waiver agreement) that are currently under negotiation. Strengthening of transport and energy interconnections between EU and the EaP countries will be of special interest of the Presidency.

The V4 countries (together with other “like-minded” EU Members) will play an important role in supporting EU’s engagement in the Eastern neighbourhood taking into account different ambitions of our Eastern partners in their relations with the EU. Cooperation should follow the “more-for-more” approach and focus especially on partners that entered the path of difficult reforms under the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA). As agreed in May 2016, the V4 will intensify coordination with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, to support their reform processes related to DCFTA/AA, and to share V4 experience in this regard. At the same time the V4 will look for ways of increasing cooperation with countries which want to develop relations with the EU in a different way. Thus the V4 will support negotiations of new agreements of the EU with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

The Presidency will pursue cooperation and coordination of V4 positions on **Ukraine** and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine to the extent it may be necessary to deliver effective actions. The Presidency intends to **review and assess activities undertaken by the V4 so far** (including Roadshow initiative). This analysis should in particular cover following areas: security situation in the region in light of the aggressive

Russian policy, assistance to Ukraine and its effectiveness, AA/DCFTA implementation, cooperation in areas of economy, fighting corruption, defence, border management, energy, transport, environmental protection, migrations, education system, as well as at the regional level. The Presidency's intention will be to **prepare recommendations for further activities in areas where cooperation with Ukraine and for the benefit of Ukraine delivers concrete results.**

The Presidency will take steps to establish closer ties with **Belarus**. It will, inter alia, propose to organise a **meeting between Deputy Foreign Ministers of the V4 and Eastern Partnership countries in Belarus** to discuss prospective areas of economic cooperation, to identify most significant obstacles for such a cooperation and to suggest methods of their effective removal (in the framework of Roadshow initiative). The perspectives of cooperation in other areas will however be influenced by the general human rights situation in Belarus (including national minorities rights) and by the way the general elections in Belarus, scheduled for autumn 2016, will be conducted.

The Presidency will strive to strengthen V4 ties with **Moldova** on the basis of mutual respect and effective promotion of common values and commitment of Moldovan authorities to pursue further necessary reforms and ensure that the cases of fraud that affected its banking system are made subject to a thorough, impartial investigation.

The countries of Central Europe have a unique historical experience of their relationships with **Russia**. Therefore, we will continue to cooperate within the V4, as well as with other EU Member States, to ensure compliance with international law and commitments by all countries forming the European community. In this context, we need to follow the five guiding principles of the European Union's policy towards Russia, unanimously agreed by the EU Foreign Ministers in March 2016: in particular full implementation of the Minsk Agreements as the condition for any substantial change in the EU's stance towards Moscow. At the same time V4 supports the EU openness for dialogue on strategic issues on the one hand and trying to live with mutual differences on the other hand. Any topics where no common ground has been found yet (e.g. energy security) should be part of the mutual dialogue. V4 countries are also ready to build people-to-people contacts and promote cooperation in education or research.

The Polish Presidency takes place at the same time when the EU is faced with new challenges, above all due to the migration crisis. These challenges will determine the general approach of the EU Member States towards the integration process of **the Western Balkans (WB)** and Turkey. The enlargement process remains the best tool to bring security, stability and prosperity to this region. It counts among the most effective external policies of the EU. The V4 will continue to support this process. The V4 will remain committed to promoting the enlargement process strongly believing that it serves the best interest of both the EU and the enlargement countries as well. Activities in this area will be conducted in two ways:

- ✓ **by implementing activities directed towards countries of the Western Balkans** - continuation of the *Network of Experts on the rule of law and fundamental rights and Enlargement Academy* projects, as well as other mechanisms of sharing experience of the V4 countries, inter alia in the area of regional cooperation, reconciliation, and transformation. Building up on the V4 experience in the region, promoting the activities of IVF and cooperation with Western Balkan Fund (when fully operational) will be also crucial.
- ✓ through activities (inter alia in the form of political consultations) **to keep enlargement further on the EU agenda**, to facilitate progress of the enlargement countries in their process of integration into the EU and to promote the principles of fair conditionality and a merit based process. Furthermore, it is advisable to initiate sectoral cooperation between V4 and WB experts on issues related to the protection of borders and migration with the possibility of the use of appropriate EU funds.

- **Cooperation with non-European Partners**

The Presidency is ready to continue a practical, results-oriented **cooperation between the V4 and non-European partners**, such as - for instance - China, Japan, Republic of Korea and United States.

We would like to continue the V4+US dialogue on, inter alia, energy security and transatlantic cooperation.

The dialogue at the level of Political Directors in the format V4+ will be continued in relations with European and non-European partners in support of implementation of the Presidency's goals.

The Presidency will be open to examine, and, if agreed on, organise consultations with other partners based on a substantial agenda and the perspective of added value for the V4 region.

Working V4 consultations (at the level of Directors of Departments at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs) will be continued on issues related to the **United Nations system and Human Rights** such as:

- information exchange on candidates and election campaigns in the UN system;
- international peace and security;
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Human Rights and democracy support at the multilateral fora.

- **Other Areas of Cooperation**

The topic of **development cooperation** will be raised by the Presidency, inter alia during regular V4 meetings ahead of Foreign Affairs Councils with participation of Ministers of Development (FAC DEV). Consultations to present a coherent position of the V4 on development policy issues will be continued both on the EU forum and in international organizations.

## SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE REGION

- **Defence Policy**

The Visegrad Group countries must be able to plug in and provide well-coordinated and value added contributions to collective defence. Following the guidance provided in the Long Term Vision, the Action Plan and the V4 Training and Exercises Strategy as well as the New Opening in the V4 Defence Cooperation **the priorities** for the Polish Presidency are the following:

1. V4 contribution to strengthening NATO and the EU capabilities.
2. Capability development and procurement.
3. Strengthening interoperability through education, training, and exercises.

The worsening **security** situation requires a closer V4 cooperation in the framework of **the defence policy**. The Presidency will therefore strive to:

1. Coordinate coherent and decisive actions **of the V4 countries** in addressing **challenges both from the East and the South that could have security implications**, in particular in our immediate neighbourhood, but also for NATO and the EU.
2. Involve the V4 in the main stream of the initiatives aimed at the NATO's long-term political, military and institutional adaptation to the challenges and threats. Particular attention will be paid to the **strengthening of the NATO's defence and deterrence, including in the Eastern Flank**. The Presidency will be leading V4 efforts to participate in NATO's activities in this region, including through assurance measures, reinforcement and enhanced forward presence.
3. The Presidency will focus on coordination of **practical engagement of the V4 in implementation of the Warsaw Summit decisions**. In this regard it will coordinate endeavors on combined V4 exercise activity in the Baltic States in support of NATO's assurance and deterrence measures. It will also continue efforts aiming at enhancing the role of the Headquarters of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin and its foreseen role as a hub for broad V4 cooperation in the field of security and defence.
4. Continue the dialogue on **the development of CSDP (inter alia in the context of the EU Global Strategy)**, with the aim to make synergies and coordinate V4 common positions in the EU, in particular regarding joint formation of the EU Battlegroup.
5. Continue the preparation of the V4 EU Battlegroup for the stand-by in the second half of 2019, with the potential to build a V4 Modular Force at a later stage.
6. Re-invigorate **the V4 defence cooperation** in the areas of capability development, defence industrial and technological programmes as well as strengthening interoperability through trainings and exercises.
7. Coordinate V4 stance on a potential joint **engagement in the missions and operations** of the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN.
8. Emphasize the importance of **strong transatlantic ties** and increase the practical engagement of **the United States** in European security.
9. Step up V4 cooperation regarding implementation of the NATO's and the EU's counter **hybrid threats** strategies, inter alia by strengthening the civil and military capabilities in the spirit of Art. 3 of the Washington Treaty as well as by helping to build resilience in partner countries most exposed to hybrid threats.
10. Explore possibilities for a potential support of the security and defence sector reforms conducted by **Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine**.



- **Internal Affairs/Security**

The Polish Presidency intends to continue and intensify cooperation aimed at improving **internal security** of the V4 countries. **Priority will be given to cooperation of Police and Border Services, particularly on migration and asylum issues, as well as on emergency medical services and civil protection.**

An unprecedented migration pressure is put on all EU borders, including on borders of the V4 countries. Ongoing discussion on institutional changes within the EU in terms of border controls and migrations management should give an additional impetus to a closer cooperation of the V4 countries in order to jointly assess and prevent threats, as well as work out common positions.

The Presidency will play an active role **in the area of civil protection**. The activities will focus on strengthening the capacities to prevent, prepare and react to daily events and disasters in the V4 countries. The Presidency plans to coordinate enhanced cooperation among Ministries of Interior **of the V4/V4+ countries** (Romania, Bulgaria, Western Balkans and Baltic countries) **devoted to the current migration and border agenda.**

The Presidency will host the **V4 Good Government Forum** conference on public administration in the V4 countries.

**A meeting of senior officials of the Ministries of the Interior of the V4 countries (potentially V4+ also) is expected** to coordinate positions on the European agenda, in particular with regard to the:

- ✓ Asylum system reform.
- ✓ Border protection system reform.
- ✓ Schengen area integrity.

**Regular political consultations** will be held between the V4 countries with regard to the current European agenda discussed at the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Councils.

Attention should also be devoted to the issues related to the current revisions of the EU' firearms legislation.

### **1. Border Services Cooperation**

The V4 Presidency will organise **a conference of heads of the Border Services from V4 countries, other EU member states from the region, and partners from Western Balkans**. The conference will assess the current situation with regard to migration as well as ongoing cooperation on that matter (particularly with regard to the so called Balkan route). Border controls in the region, as well as the possible cooperation in the future will also be on the agenda.

A number of **experts' level activities** will also take place:

- ✓ Meeting to exchange best practices and experience related to the performance of re-admission agreements (bilateral and between the EU and a third countries).
- ✓ Elaboration of a common analytical report on the migration situation in the region including final experts meeting from the V4 countries, other EU member states of the region and partners from the Western Balkans.  
Additional consultations are foreseen on possibilities of regular information exchange on internal migration flows (within the Schengen area), identified in particular countries of the V4.
- ✓ Mid management/expert level meeting on combating organized illegal migration with particular emphasis on the Balkan route.
- ✓ Cross-border observation exercise for border units and summary workshop.

## 2. Police Cooperation

### Areas of cooperation/planned activities with Police and other relevant Law-Enforcement Agencies:

1. **Combating organized economic crime** (*incl. excise duty, VAT, money laundering*)
  - ✓ high-level conference and a meeting of experts of the services responsible for combating tax crimes that will serve as a forum to exchange information on threats and implemented solutions sealing the tax system and facilitating the prosecution of tax crimes.
  - ✓ a working meeting of experts from the services responsible for combating illegal trading in tobacco products that will serve to exchange experience, information on threats, trends, as well as to review the cases conducted by specialized services.
  - ✓ a working meeting of experts from the services responsible for combatting illegal trading in mineral oil that will serve to exchange experience, information on threats and trends, as well as to review the cases conducted by specialized services.
2. **Combating drug crime**
  - ✓ an opening conference attended by the heads of the specialized services combating drug crimes;
  - ✓ training workshops with participation of experts from the services specialized in combating trading in meta-amphetamine produced from OTC medicinal products containing precursors of category I (pseudoephedrine and ephedrine).
  - ✓ training workshops conducted by the Central Forensic Laboratory and the Criminal Police Department of the Polish National Police Headquarters on exchanging experience on new psychoactive substances (NPS).
  - ✓ a summary conference attended by heads of units combating drug crimes.
3. **Combating cyber-crime**
  - ✓ a meeting of experts on cyber-crimes, devoted to methods, techniques and tools used by cyber-offenders.
4. **Combating terrorism and extremism**
  - ✓ a meeting of experts to exchange lessons learned regarding anti-terrorist and anti-radicalisation programmes and actual activities undertaken by the respective V4 Police Services.
  - ✓ workshops organised and conducted by experts of the Fingerprints Unit of the Central Forensic Laboratory of the Polish National Police Headquarters on the use of dactyloscopic data gathered in the AFIS and Eurodac systems– exchange of dactyloscopic data within the Prüm and Eurodac systems in order to improve the border security of the V4 countries.
5. **Cross-border observation**
  - ✓ cross-border observation exercises for services performing duties in the cross-border area.
6. **Crisis Management**
  - ✓ crisis management exercises for services performing duties in the cross-border area..

## 3. Civil Protection

**A meeting of the General Directors of Civil Protection of the V4 countries** on the cooperation to increase the immunity of particular countries and the whole region to daily events and disasters particularly for the population protection in case of flood, inland water and extreme weather.

## V4 IDENTITY AND VISIBILITY

The Polish Presidency intends to pay particular attention to **the social dimension of the Visegrad cooperation**. While wishing to remain an efficient and effective instrument of political and sectoral cooperation, the V4 must have a social background as well. In this context, an important task of the Presidency will be to support activities aimed at **enhancing promotion of the idea of the Visegrad cooperation and people-to-people contacts** among the societies of the V4 countries.

The idea of the Visegrad cooperation is steadily catching on with the public in our countries. Through direct contact between youth groups, local governments, scientific, artistic and expert communities as well as entrepreneurs misunderstandings prejudices or stereotypes become less likely. It is also crucial to conduct a more effective public diplomacy and cooperation between the media. Both can be supported by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) as well.

It will be particularly important to engage **public broadcasters** from the V4 countries in promoting social contacts between the V4 countries. Such a possibility is provided by the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding adopted by public TV and radio broadcasters from V4 countries.

A more strategic approach is needed when it comes to the **IVF's** work. Improving the social contacts and facilitating the networking of the civil societies of the V4 countries remains the cornerstone of the IVF's activities. We will also encourage activities to enhance the functioning of the **"Think Visegrad"** platform, e.g. aimed at its extension, both in terms of scope and participation.

In addition, to achieve the above mentioned goals celebration of **the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group** will be continued under Polish Presidency, during second half of 2016. It will serve as an important tool to promote Visegrad cooperation and to stress its inclusiveness towards other potential partners. Relevant activities will be coordinated by the public diplomacy and culture departments of the V4 Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The cooperation will cover potential study visits and meetings of journalists, as well as a more effective use of electronic media.

### • Culture

The priority of the Polish Presidency will be to exchange experience and best practices with regard to **the development of reading**. Particular attention in this regard will be paid to discussion on means of support, forms of promotion as well as on monitoring and assessment methods of studies on reading, conducted in the V4 countries. Support for innovative and comprehensive programmes of promoting common reading practices, as well as for undertakings aimed at promotion of most significant phenomena in contemporary literature will enhance reading competences and stimulate literary needs in V4 countries. It will also influence the establishment of a positive image and prestige of the social activity resulting from reading books.

Furthermore, the Presidency will focus on establishing a coherent image of the V4 cooperation as well as on supporting and pursuing common cultural projects. The crowning event will be the **27th meeting of the V4 Ministers of Culture**.

Polish institutions of culture will carry out the following accompanying events:

- ✓ a debate on political and social issues in the V4 countries, to be held in the framework of the Academy of Solidarity.
- ✓ the International Theatre Festival "NEW EUROPE".
- ✓ "New Visegrad Theatre" – a project referring to the role of the theatre democratic transformations during the last 25 years.
- ✓ the "Recovered avant-garde. Central European theatre experiments of the 1st half of the 20th century as an inspiration for the contemporary Europe" project.

- ✓ a special edition of the international quarterly “Herito” magazine devoted to the culture of the V4 countries.
- ✓ the 4th Heritage Forum of Central Europe: Heritage and Society.

Furthermore, the following V4 projects will be continued during the Presidency:

- ✓ a colloquium of experts on libraries and scientific information.
- ✓ meetings of a national heritage working group.
- ✓ the Academy of Heritage: a summer school devoted to the management of the UNESCO world heritage.
- ✓ cooperation in the field of performing arts.
- ✓ seminars on the use of structural funds of the EU and programmes for culture.
- ✓ consultations on creative industries.
- ✓ the Visegrad Audio-visual Cooperation Initiative.

## • Youth

As far as youth affairs are concerned, cooperation between V4 and Eastern Partnership countries will be continued, in particular in the framework of the implementation of the *Memorandum of Cooperation on Youth* (signed by the Ministers for Youth Affairs on 22 June 2015 in Bratislava). In this context cooperation between youth organizations will be promoted, inter alia exchange of information, organization of common conferences, seminars and study visits.

The Polish Presidency plans to organize a working seminar for representatives of the V4 and the Eastern Partnership countries in order to undertake activities and projects to be carried out by young generation in the context of promoting human rights. Activities carried out in the framework of the campaign of the Council of Europe “No Hate Speech” will be a point of reference in this regard.

## • Tourism and sport

### Tourism

Presidency will continue cooperation in the field of tourism marketing and joint promotional activities carried out by National Tourism Organisations of the V4 countries (based on the annual marketing plan) in selected markets, including: the US, China, India, selected Latin American countries, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Azerbaijan and, to a lesser extent, South Korea and selected countries of Southeast Asia.

The Presidency will focus on the selection of the most effective marketing tools, including itinerant promotional meetings, presentations, workshops, study tours for representatives of the tourism industry, and press trips.

During the Presidency measures will be adopted to increase tourist traffic between the V4 countries.

V4 consultations will concentrate on developing V4 common position on promotional projects undertaken in the framework of the cooperation in tourism of the 16 Central and Eastern European countries with the People’s Republic of China.

### Areas of cooperation/planned activities:

- **High Level Meeting of tourism ministers from the V4 countries** (February or March 2017).
- **working meetings of representatives of tourism marketing organizations** to discuss the implementation of the 2016 marketing plan and preparation of the 2017 marketing plan.

## **Sport**

### Areas of cooperation/planned activities:

The Presidency plans the organisation of two events in the field of **sport**, while being open for discussion of further initiatives strengthening V4 solidarity and a regional togetherness:

- **23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the International Olympic Hopes Tournament Steering Committee** (December 2016 in Warsaw).
- **Meeting of sports ministers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland** on the occasion of Olympic Hopes Tournament competitions organized by the Polish sports association (May 2017).

## COHESION AND CONNECTIVITY

- **Cohesion Policy**

### **Drawing up a list of joint projects, having strategic importance for V4.**

The Presidency will strive to undertake actions relating to the agreed projects and start their implementation. In the long-term perspective, the implementation of those projects will contribute to strengthening political, social and economic relations between V4 member states.

#### **1. Implementation of the 2014-2020 programming period**

The Polish presidency will highly prioritise implementation of the present 2014-2020 perspective, in particular the exchange of experiences and lessons learned from implementation of new mechanisms and instruments of the reformed cohesion policy (i.e. ex ante conditionality, performance reserve and performance framework, territorial dimension, including integrated territorial investments and CLLD).

#### **2. Cohesion Policy after 2020**

The Presidency's main aim will be to align positions of the V4 countries regarding potential directions of the evolution of the Cohesion Policy after 2020. In this context, it will be important to achieve a common vision of the V4 countries, incl. in the extended format, as far as the future role and goals of the Cohesion Policy is concerned (as a pro-development policy or as a compensatory policy). The basis for the discussion will be key elements of the debate on the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020 (e.g. budget flexibility, result-orientation, simplifications, European added value), as well as conclusions of the joint evaluation research project: *"Ex-post evaluation and forecast of the benefits to the EU-15 countries resulting from the implementation of the Cohesion Policy in the V4 countries"*. In the context of numerous processes of the EU that may have an adverse effect on the message on the Cohesion Policy (*higher importance of direct instruments of the EU, increased competition between EU policies on the EU's budget, migration crisis*), there is a need to undertake measures to promote its positive image.

#### **3. Strengthening cooperation in the area of Carpathian region through EU macroregional strategy**

The Polish Presidency plans to hold a debate on the territorial dimension of EU interventions through macro-regional strategies which are "tools" for better addressing the challenges and needs of areas requiring special support. Since the Carpathian region have a number of common objectives, particularly in the context of intensification of the socio-economic development the Polish Presidency will point out the potential of cooperation between Carpathian regions within the framework of EU macro-regional strategy.

#### **4. Implementation of Interreg programmes by the V4 countries**

The Presidency intends to organize a working expert's meeting for those involved in implementation of the Interreg programmes in the V4 member states –possibly accompanied by on-spot visits of projects located in the Polish-Slovak or Polish-Czech border area, implemented within the period 2007-2013. The meeting will contribute to opening a discussion about the territorial cooperation beyond 2020 and can help with defining common objectives to be achieved in the future.

#### **5. Identification of potential simplifications of the European Social Fund (ESF) implementation system**

The Presidency will initiate the discussion on the establishment of possible simplifications to the implementation system of the ESF in order to ensure a maximum contribution of available resources to intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth (*potential simplifications: reduction in administrative burdens for beneficiaries, specification of simplified methods of settling expenses in more detail, or e-administration development*).

#### Planned events

✓ The Presidency will host on 14 of July, 2016 an inaugurating meeting of cohesion policy and economy ministers from the V4 member states and Bulgaria and Romania to set out the priorities in areas, falling within the scope of competence of the Ministry of Economic Development (cohesion policy, innovativeness and economic cooperation). The meeting will be attended by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development. This event will be followed by the working meeting of experts.

✓ The Presidency will host a closing informal meeting of V4 ministers, responsible for cohesion policy in June, 2017, organized in the framework of the Single Market Forum, to examine the achieved results, relating to future of the cohesion policy. The meeting, attended by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development will also serve to assess the actions, taken jointly by Poland with the V4 states in an effort to eliminate barriers, existing on the internal market. The meeting will be held in an enlarged format, including ministers from Romania and Bulgaria.

- **Spatial Policy**

The Presidency will pursue the discussion on updating **the Common Spatial Development Strategy of the V4 countries, Bulgaria and Romania** (in accordance with the ministerial conclusions adopted on 16 April 2014 in Budapest). Furthermore, the debate on the extension of the thematic scope of the cooperation conducted in the V4+2 format with the regional development and territorial scope of the cooperation by new countries - Ukraine and Serbia, in accordance with the conclusions of an informal meeting of the Deputy Ministers that was held in the Low Tatras in Slovakia on 17 June 2015. The above mentioned objectives will be pursued through expert cooperation in the framework of the Steering Group composed of experts from the Ministries responsible for spatial planning and regional development of the countries concerned.

- **Urban Policy**

1. **Implementation of the Pact of Amsterdam**

The Presidency plans to initiate a discussion within the V4 on the implementation of the Pact of Amsterdam and effects of first partnerships within the Urban Agenda of the EU.

2. **Smart Cities**

The coordination of V4+ and exchange of information on implementation of the European Commission initiative Smart Cities and Communities will provide the continuation of the discussion started during the Czech Presidency in 2015/2016.

3. **Initiatives and instruments supporting sustainable urban development**

Discussion on current and future initiatives and instruments supporting sustainable and innovative development of cities, both bigger agglomerations as well as small and medium sized cities that are losing their social and economic functions. Exchange of best practices and knowledge within V4 countries (workshop for national experts and engaged V4+ cities and regions (2016/2017)).

- **Transport**

Areas of cooperation:

1. **Coordination of common positions on current issues of the EU agenda**

Discussion on the coordination of V4 countries positions of the aviation package and road initiatives.

2. **Review of progress made by the V4 countries in the implementation of transport projects of common interest**, which contribute to increase the competitiveness of Central Europe, in particular investments on the TEN-T networks along the North-South axis and the implementation of the provisions of the *“Memorandum of Understanding on the High-Level Working Group Action Plan concerning the roadmap for determining the future development of the transport networks of the Visegrad Group Countries”*, adopted during the Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group on 24 June 2014.

Coordination of the performance of tasks specified in the above mentioned roadmap. The Presidency will coordinate process of updating the map of projects planned to be performed after 2020. It will also coordinate a common position on the list of priority projects that will be presented by the V4 during negotiations on the principles of the financial perspective 2021-2027 as well as during the review of guidelines for the TEN-T network. The Presidency will coordinate V4 countries cooperation to ensure common position on importance of **Via Carpathia road corridor** development.

The coordination of investments, in particular those located in border regions, allows preventing the occurrence of the so-called transport “bottlenecks” and ensuring an optimal use of resources. The key role in this task should be played by the High Level Working Group (HLWG) that was appointed in 2014.

The Presidency plans to continue meetings at the level of the ministers of the V4 countries with participation of the European Commission that will be aimed at increasing the speed of implementing TEN-T corridors that are of particular importance for the V4 countries.

### **3. Performance of projects co-financed from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**

The Presidency will put emphasis on exchanging of experiences in the implementation of actions co-financed from CEF. Special attention will be focused on investments in railway transport and cross-border projects (performance of investments on railway routes leading to the borders, including broad-gauge railway routes at the borders) among V4 countries and Belarus and/or Ukraine.

The aim of the Presidency will be also agreeing common positions and undertaking joint activities in case of problems arising in implementation of CEF projects.

### **4. Performance and coordination of investment projects**

The Presidency will be focused on using of the core TEN-T network “The Baltic - Adriatic „Core Network Corridor, the Rail Freight Corridor no. 5 and the Amber Rail Freight Corridor No 11 in the framework of the work plans prepared by the European Commission for corridors of the core network. A smooth and active cooperation and the involvement of all parties implementing the corridor will remain of key importance.

Moreover, the Presidency will put emphasis on important projects to be performed in the framework of the EU perspective 2014-2020 like improving the availability of seaports from the landside (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, Świnoujście).

### **5. Enhancing cooperation, exchange of experience and promotion of projects related to the airport infrastructure located within the corridors of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T)**

The Polish Presidency will bring into discussion the need to create intermodal transport nodes with the participation of airports, and thus to ensure a higher cohesion and complexity of the transport network of the V4 countries.

### **6. Social Issues in Road Transport**

The Polish Presidency sees the need to further tighten the cooperation on the directions of the development of the European road transport market within the V4, while remaining open to other interested EU Member States (issues related to the social dimension of the road transport). It is important to continue the discussion within the V4 on the effectiveness of the road transport market and further actions to tackle the social challenges facing in the sector.

In the framework of the discussion on “road initiatives”, preparation and active presentation of the common position of the V4 countries at the EU forum is envisaged. The Polish Presidency will also strive to assure the visibility of the V4 position on road transport in all possible fora.

### **7. Road Initiatives**

The Polish Presidency will initiate actions in order to work out common positions of the V4 countries on the processed and planned legislation regarding the road transport sector in the EU. The Presidency will strive to maintain the current engagement of the V4 countries in the EU discussion on road transport, while simultaneously seeking to strengthen its opinion-making role in the European legislation process. 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 on a fair-competition basis. The Polish Presidency will also actively seek the support of other like-minded countries in this respect.

### **8. Road Safety**

The Presidency of the V4 will continue initiatives and activities began by the Czech Presidency in the field of road safety. The discussion with V4 partners and with the European Commission is to be continued with regard to exchanging best practices in the problematic areas of road safety and performing effective projects in this respect. Best practices will be also exchanged in the V4+ format (with active participation of other countries willing to improve road safety).

### **9. Ensuring an optimal air transport connectivity**

Discussion within the V4 on increasing the level of air transport connectivity in the V4 countries will be initiated. The region of Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by a lower amount and poorer quality of air connection, while at the same time it has a higher growth potential than the well-developed western-

European markets. Thus, the Presidency will encourage the V4 to look for potential solutions aimed at reducing the air connectivity gap existing in the Central and Eastern Europe.

#### **10. Inland waterway transport**

The Presidency will also initiate works on cooperation aimed on creating stable conditions for inland waterway transport development and integration into the European waterway network.

#### **11. Cooperation within the Belt and Road initiative**

The Polish Presidency will take into account the possible synergies between the EaP priorities in the field of interconnectivity and the priorities of Belt and Road initiative and try to include them in the framework of the EU-China Connectivity Platform.

- **Postal Market**

- 1. Cooperation on the development of the postal market**

The Polish Presidency will lead the discussion on the possibilities to further integrate the delivery services market on international scale, i.a. through the operators' cooperation - in view of development of digital single market and cooperation with non-EU partners.

- 2. Scope of universal postal service – consumers' preferences**

The Presidency will support exchange of experiences within the V4, joint market research and an extensive discussion on the scope of universal postal services in context of changing shape and volume of the postal market.

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