

REPORT

OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY
OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

JULY 2012 - JUNE 2013

Visegrad 4
Integration
& Cohesion

Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group
July 2012–June 2013

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WARSAW 2013



Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

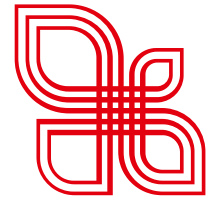
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“Over the last year, we have strengthened
the Visegrad brand and ties within the Group.
We are a force for good changes
in the European Union”

Minister Radosław Sikorski during a symbolic hand-over
of V4 Presidency to the Hungarian partners

Budapest, 26 June, 2013

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to present to you the *Report on the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2012 – June 2013)*, which sums up yet another chapter in the growing regional cooperation between Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

Visegrad cooperation traces its origins to the joint struggle for democratic change and to the contacts – deemed illegal at the time – between the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity and the Polish-Hungarian Solidarity.

Having regained freedom, we signed the Visegrad Declaration of 15 February, 1991, which moved our cooperation up to the intergovernmental level. Over the two decades that followed, we continued to cement our place on the political map of Europe.

Today we can safely say that the Visegrad Group is Central Europe's most effective regional cooperation forum – and one which still carries untapped potential.

The societies of Visegrad countries share an enthusiasm for European integration, a desire to determine their own fate, and a belief that security and development must be fostered collectively. They are not afraid of the changes and challenges brought by globalization, but are willing to take active part in shaping a united Europe. At the same time, they represent the points of view and sensibilities of Central European nations. Indeed, the Visegrad Group is like a club of gentlemen that stands ready to cooperate on important matters with all those who share its values.

While drafting the Report, our intention was not only to list the achievements of the Polish Presidency of the V4, but also to showcase the Presidency's objectives and remind readers of the roots of Visegrad cooperation. I believe we have managed to create a thought-provoking document.

I hope that you will enjoy reading the Report, and that it will help you better discover the Visegrad Group.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sikorski', written in a cursive style.

Introduction

One of the priorities of Poland's foreign policy is to engage in regional activity through the Visegrad Group (V4, Visegrad 4), which constitutes a unique form of regional cooperation and is an inseparable part of Central Europe's political architecture. Each V4 country has the same chance to use this diplomatic tool, and the potential for action is especially great during the rotating Presidency, which runs – quite untypically – from early July to late June of the following year. On 1 July, 2012, Poland took over this role for the fourth time, drawing on over twenty years of achievements and striving to give the V4 a new political impetus.

The origins of the Visegrad cooperation date back to February 1991, when President of Poland Lech Wałęsa, President of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Václav Havel and Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary József Antall signed the Visegrad Declaration, which laid foundations for a permanent – as it later transpired – form of cooperation of the three post-communist countries.

Visegrad Declaration and other policy documents are available on the following website:
<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations>

The principal objective of the new initiative was stated in the very title: “Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration.” The three leaders made it clear that our cooperation was designed as a handy

tool for integrating with Western European and Transatlantic institutions, paving the way for a “return to Europe.” This overarching goal determined and affected the forms of cooperation in Central Europe.

The Visegrad Group's first success was to make our countries stand out from the whole post-communist region. In a way, the Visegrad Declaration urged Western political leaders to begin seeing in our region a stable and responsible partner. This was especially important at that particular moment in European history, i.e. shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed and at a time when former Yugoslavia was about to plunge into civil war. In this crisis situation, we sent a clear signal that we intend to play a constructive role in the international arena. The Visegrad Declaration represented a security guarantee, and was especially important to our Western neighbours who had feared that Central Europe would be the next problem, turning into a region of

perpetual crisis, chaos and instability. This scenario was not difficult to imagine for those who knew a little about the history of our region.

The Visegrad Group was established as a cooperation platform, the aim of which was the integration with Western institutions. When signing the Declaration, the leaders did not decide to institutionalize the Visegrad Group. This means that until today the V4 is not an international organization, has no official statute, secretariat, budget nor any bureaucratic structures.¹ The lack of institutional infrastructure has proved a wise decision that makes it easier to respond to various challenges and crises, and promptly react to the changing political environment. The institutional weakness has thus turned out to be a political asset. During their meetings, presidents, prime ministers or individual ministers tried and continue to try to reach common positions and find a joint approach to new challenges.

Surprising as it may seem, even the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1993 enhanced the Group's image. Something that could have sparked a serious crisis ultimately came to pass without any major adverse effects. The world was relieved to learn that the "Velvet Revolution" would be followed by a "Velvet Divorce."

One more fact should be mentioned when looking at the origins of the V4 and trying to understand the source of its success. All our early documents underlined the strength of our historical ties, the common experience of struggling against communism, and the desire to return to the family of Western democracies. But in the early 1990s there was as much that united us as divided us. Poland had a unique experience of the Solidarity movement, which in 1980 had brought together a third of the country's adult population. On the other hand, Poland, which was about to embark on a democratic transition, was economically bankrupt in contrast to Czechoslovakia or Hungary, whose economies were relatively healthy. This should be born in mind when looking at the place our countries take in Europe and the world today.

A great success of the Visegrad cooperation was no doubt the fact that it helped speed up the integration processes of our countries. However, it also produced another – if somewhat unexpected – result. It could be argued that the Visegrad Group has been instrumental in putting the concept of "Central Europe" back on the international agenda. The Visegrad cooperation has been an effective way of emancipating our region from the post-communist space. We have recovered our identity and some freedom to act in the international arena. The V4 has also made it much easier for our countries to reorient their foreign policies towards integration with Western European and Transatlantic institutions.

¹ Except for the International Visegrad Fund.

In May 1992, the Prague summit decided that the V4 would jointly submit the application for admission to the European Communities (now the European Union), which occurred in December 1992.

But Visegrad cooperation was not only a winning streak. After 1993, regional ties visibly weakened, primarily due to the political crisis in Slovakia and the attitude of the then government in the Czech Republic. In both cases we saw clear attempts to reject the Central European identity. Under Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, Slovakia tried to act as a bridge between East and West. At the same time, Václav Klaus, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, was sceptical about the very idea of V4 cooperation. In his opinion, the Czech Republic was part of Western Europe rather than Central Europe. This attitude hindered cooperation in the hitherto format and called into question the Group's future existence.

A turning point came in 1998 when the Visegrad Group once again became a much-needed forum for consultations and a support instrument in the international arena. This was due to the general election in Slovakia which removed Prime Minister Mečiar from power. In 1998, Slovakia was in a very difficult international position, having been excluded from the first group of countries invited to open membership negotiations with the European Union and NATO. Reports by the international organization Freedom House put Slovakia in the group of "partly free" countries, along with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The re-launch of Visegrad Group cooperation proved an effective tool that facilitated Slovakia's return to the negotiating table. The success of diplomatic support provided to Bratislava enhanced the image and prestige of the entire Visegrad Group and its individual member states. This was of great importance to the accession negotiations with the European Union, which were about to begin. This good fortune and the image of a strong regional centre of political cooperation led third countries to request membership of the V4. The Group was an attractive club that raised the profile of its members and made it easier for them to conduct an effective policy. Lithuania, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia were all mentioned among its potential new members. Leaders of the V4 countries decided, however, that the Group would not expand to include new states. Instead, V4 candidates were offered close cooperation in specific areas. This is how the cooperation format called "Visegrad Plus" (V4+), which enables third countries to take active part in the Visegrad meetings, was created.

In May 1999, the summit of V4 prime ministers in Bratislava adopted a document entitled *Contents of Visegrad Cooperation*, which re-defined the framework and methods of regional cooperation. At the same time, the idea of introducing a rotating Presidency of the Visegrad Group appeared. In mid-2000, Poland took over the first Presidency, followed by Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This order has been retained ever since then.

The creation in Bratislava of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) in 2000 was another milestone in the history of cooperation of the states of our region. The choice of the secretariat's location was no coincidence, as Slovakia is the only country that shares a border with all other V4 members. Moreover, given the ongoing negotiations with the EU such location sent yet another clear signal that Slovakia was part of Europe and that it sought integration with the Communities.

Information about **the International Visegrad Fund (IVF)** are available on the following website:
<http://visegradfund.org/>

Today, the IVF is the only international institution of the Visegrad Group. It has its own statute, seat and budget, and its managerial positions are filled on a rotational basis. Today's budget of IVF consists of 7.000.000 EUR², which consist of equal contributions by V4 countries,

makes it possible to fund e.g. the annual Visegrad Summer School, a series of conferences devoted to Memorial Sites, film festivals and other cultural events, as well as scholarships. The Fund also supports joint activities of organizations from the V4 countries addressed to the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries. IVF-funded projects are very important for building a common Visegrad identity and creating a positive image of our countries in the whole of Europe.

The moment of accession to the European Union in 2004 was especially challenging for the Visegrad Group. This meant after all the achievement of the objective set in the founding declaration of 1991. Consequently, different groups began calling into question the point of continuing cooperation in the V4 format. On 12 May, 2004, prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries dispelled these doubts in the Czech town of Kroměříž, issuing a declaration which emphasized that the EU enlargement is "a significant step towards the reunification of Europe."

It soon became clear that an organized form of regional cooperation offers a handy tool for asserting our interests and place in the European arena. Consultations among V4 political leaders and individual ministers ahead of meetings of various European bodies proved to be a particularly effective instrument. On a number of occasions, such consultations helped produce common positions on important European issues and provided mutual support during EU negotiations. On the other hand, this also made the V4+ format even more attractive, as it helped to better reflect interests in a wider, regional dimension and fostered cooperation with our Southern and Eastern neighbours.

In the early years of our EU membership, key areas of Visegrad cooperation began to crystalize. One central theme was European policy, in particular ways of speeding up the economic development of our countries, i.e. the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy. Apart from European policy, other frequently discussed

² The IVF budget in 2013

topics included national security and military cooperation. Another area of Visegrad cooperation were relations between our region and its closest neighbours. Much attention was paid to promoting integration aspirations of the Western Balkan countries and to fostering the European community's cooperation with the EU's eastern neighbours.

Ensuring energy security became a topic that the Visegrad Group successfully put on the EU agenda. The energy crisis caused by Russia's stopping of gas supplies to Central Europe (January 2009) highlighted the need for European solidarity in this regard. The Visegrad Group countries also sought to identify areas of regional energy cooperation that would contribute to diversifying energy supplies. This led to the adoption of the Energy Declaration at the V4 summit in Budapest in February 2010. The document emphasised the role of diversifying energy supplies, expressed support for the European southern energy corridor project and invited other Central European countries to become involved in energy cooperation in the V4+ format.

The desire to promote the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy's led in May 2009 to inaugurating the Eastern Partnership Programme in Prague, and in 2012 to the launch of the Visegrad for the Eastern Partnership (V4EaP), a special programme in the framework of the International Visegrad Fund.

With all this baggage of experience, Poland took over its fourth Presidency of the Visegrad Group on 1 July, 2012.

Objectives of the Polish Presidency of the V4

The priorities and objectives of Poland's V4 Presidency are laid down in its programme entitled *Visegrad 4 Integration and Cohesion*, presented at the Prague summit ending the Czech Presidency in June 2012. The Polish Presidency set itself the objectives of further enhancing our region's constructive cooperation for an integrated Europe, emphasizing the need for European unity, strengthening our countries' position in the international arena, demonstrating the value of regional cooperation during the ongoing economic crisis in Europe, consolidating the effects of EU enlargement and expanding the network of connections among V4 countries and their societies. The Polish Presidency also wanted to call attention to the fact that our region stands for a successful political and economic transformation.

Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

is available on the following website:
[http://www.visegradgroup.eu/
documents/presidency-programs](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs)

Furthermore, the Polish Presidency programme featured elements relating to the EU economic crisis. The document noted that, that the prolonging crisis affects not only the public finances, but is a crisis of confidence – as it revives national egoisms in place of the European solidarity, threatening to restrict civic liberties and

freedoms, placing protection of own economies ahead of a deepened single market, and challenging the rationale of further enlargement of the European Union.

Poland also clearly defined the most important challenge facing the V4 in the coming years, i.e. the region's insufficient infrastructure links, especially along the North-South axis. Countries of our region may be relatively well linked to Western Europe through a transportation network, but the lack of connections between V4 members curtails investment, hampers economic exchange and people-to-people contacts, and keeps mutual stereotypes alive. Therefore, the Presidency set the goal of creating vertical communication routes, so that full advantage can be taken of our geopolitical location and cooperation potential between Central and Northern Europe.

Apart from transport infrastructure, other challenges identified by the Polish Presidency were energy policy and ensuring energy security of the V4. The ambition of the Presidency was therefore to prepare a plan for setting up a regional gas market.

Traditionally, a lot of emphasis was placed on the V4's involvement in the Western Balkans, stressing the importance of completing the region's integration with the EU. Another focal points were Eastern Partnership countries and ways of bringing them closer to the EU. This is because it will be up to the Group and the actions it takes to convince our Eastern neighbours that they build civil society, adopt European standards and deepen economic cooperation.

An important item on the Presidency's agenda was the continuation of the V4's dialogue with third countries, in particular with the United States on security issues and with South-East Asian countries on the economy, research and development.

The Presidency set itself the objective of strengthening regional defence cooperation, including by intensifying preparations to set up the Visegrad Battle Group.

A separate chapter was devoted to developing contacts among V4 citizens. This can be seen as a conclusion drawn from a opinion poll that was conducted in all V4 countries in late 2011. The poll showed that despite extensive political cooperation we still know very little about each other, and that stereotypes continue to play an important role in mutual perception.

By formulating its principal objectives this way, the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group wanted to achieve one more thing, namely to demonstrate that the European policy along the North-South axis can supplement the East-West vector that dominates today.

In the course of over twenty years, the Visegrad cooperation has had plentiful opportunity to prove itself in action. The programme of Poland's V4 Presidency was an expression of realism in international relations. The Visegrad Group is a community of interests, which does not imply unanimity on every issue and all the time. However, the scale of cooperation and its achievements so far have strengthened the conviction that the Visegrad Group is an important element of cohesion which impacts the region's stability and strengthens the entire European Union.

Highlights of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

The V4 Presidency was symbolically handed over by the Czech Republic at the V4 prime ministers' summit in Prague on 22 June, 2012.

Between 4 and 5 July, 2012, Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski paid working visits to the capitals of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, where he presented the objectives of the Polish V4 Presidency. It was the first time in the V4's history that a presidency had been inaugurated this way. Minister Sikorski's visits to the Visegrad capitals emphasized the region's importance for the Polish foreign policy and underscored Poland's high expectations for the beginning presidency. They also reflected the ambition to make the Visegrad Group a regional brand recognizable no less than the Benelux or Nordic cooperation.

The V4 foreign ministers met again on 25 October, 2012 in Warsaw. The meeting was also attended by their counterparts from the Western Balkan countries. The Warsaw get-together continued the tradition of annual meetings with ministers from the Balkan region, which had been organized by previous presidencies.

This time, invitations to attend a discussion with the Balkan partners were also extended to foreign ministers of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle. On the initiative of the Polish Presidency, the participants decided to establish the V4-Western Balkans Expert Network on the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, whose aim is to support transformation processes in the Balkans and provide support in EU accession negotiations based on Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian experiences.

On a joint Polish-Swedish initiative, on 20 February, 2013 Gdansk hosted a meeting of foreign ministers from the V4, Nordic and Baltic countries. The first event to be organized in such format, the meeting was designed as a permanent platform for discussing cooperation potential and challenges facing Central and Northern Europe. The countries representing the two regions were especially interested in defence

policy, economic growth, developing energy and transport infrastructure, relations with eastern neighbours and the EU enlargement.



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Western Balkans countries, Warsaw 25 October, 2012. The V4 Ministers laying flowers at the monument to Ryszard Siwiec, who commit suicide by self-immolation during a national harvest festival taking place on 8 September, 1968 at the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw in protest against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20-21 August 1968. He was the first self-immolation protester from Central and Eastern Europe. FOT. MFA PL/SEBASTIAN INDRA, MARIUSZ. KOSIŃSKI.

Co-hosted by the Polish Presidency in Bratislava on 18 April, 2013, the GLOBSEC international conference offered another opportunity for V4 foreign ministers to meet. During the conference, the ministers informed the public about the adoption of a joint declaration, which called for strengthening Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy by, among others, supporting the European defence industry.

The last meeting of foreign ministers to be held during the Polish Presidency of the V4 took place at the Cracow summit of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership (EaP) on 17 May, 2013. The Cracow meeting was also attended by chief of EU diplomacy Catherine Ashton, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle, and foreign ministers of the current and future EU Council presidencies, i.e. Lithuania and Ireland. The participants discussed preparations in the run-up to the EaP summit in Vilnius in November 2013, pointing out that the Eastern Partnership is an effective instrument for facilitating democratic transformation in

our eastern neighbours. The ministers also stressed the need to fully open to the EaP countries such European programmes as “Erasmus” and “Creative Europe”.



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Eastern Partnership countries, Lithuania, Ireland, attended by HR C. Ashton and Com. Š. Füle, Cracow/Wieliczka, 17 May, 2013. Sightseeing of the “Wieliczka” Salt Mine. FOT. MFA PL/JUSTYNA CIEŚLIKOWSKA

The foreign ministers of Poland and Hungary met again in Budapest on 26 June, 2013 to mark the symbolic hand-over of the Visegrad Group Presidency to Hungary. It was also an opportunity to announce the *Joint Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Croatia on the Occasion of the Croatian Accession to the European Union*.

One of the most important events during Poland’s V4 Presidency was the summit of the Visegrad Group prime ministers with French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which took place on 6 March, 2013 in Warsaw. According to Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the meeting was an expression of common concern for the unity of Europe and the future of European integration. The discussions focused on negotiations over the EU’s multi-annual budget for 2014-2020, restoring economic growth in the EU and the potential of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy. The politicians also pointed to the positive experience of the Weimar Battle Group cooperation as a model for the planned Visegrad Battle Group.

At the end of the Polish V4 Presidency, the V4 prime ministers met again at the Royal Castle in Warsaw on 16 June, 2013. The heads of governments of the Visegrad Group countries adopted the plan and principles for creating a regional gas market by 2018. This is another important step towards implementing one of the priority projects for our region – the creation of a regional gas market – which the V4 countries have consistently pursued also within the EU. Moreover, Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzō Abe was invited to attend the Warsaw summit to mark the tenth anniversary of establishing the V4+Japan cooperation. The discussion focused on the potential for economic and scientific cooperation between the V4 and Japan and the implementation of joint projects to benefit the Eastern Partnership. A joint Visegrad-Japan statement on the *Partnership based on common values for the 21st century* was adopted. Moreover, the two sides decided that 2014 will be *V4 plus Japan Exchange Year*. The June meeting was also an opportunity to present the priorities and programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group, which began on 1 July, 2013.



Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group with Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe, Warsaw 16 June, 2013. FOT. THE CHANCELLERY OF PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND/MACIEJ ŚMIAROWSKI

Another highlight crowning the Polish V4 Presidency was the meeting of the V4 state presidents on 2 July, 2013. At the invitation of Poland’s President Bronisław Komorowski, the presidents of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary came to Wisła, where they summed up achievements of the Polish Presidency and familiarized themselves with plans of the Hungarian Presidency for the next year.

On the second day of the meeting, the V4 presidents were joined by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, with whom they discussed the state of cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union ahead of the November summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius.

The Polish V4 Presidency attached special importance to defence issues. Minister of National Defence Tomasz Siemoniak invited his counterparts to visit Gdynia on 28 February, 2013. Participants of the meeting, one of whom was NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow, had the opportunity to watch anti-terrorist exercises of the Polish Navy and the "Formoza" Marine Special Operations Unit.

The March summit of the prime ministers, attended by the German chancellor and the French president, was also accompanied by a meeting that brought together V4 defence ministers, French Defence Minister Jean Yves Le Drian and German Deputy Defence Minister Christian Schmidt. In their joint statement, the ministers emphasized that at a time of financial crisis it is international cooperation that makes it possible to maintain defence capabilities and carry out tasks set by the Chicago summit's Toward NATO Forces 2020 initiative. The V4 ministers also signed a memorandum on special forces cooperation.

On 4 June, 2013, V4 defence ministers met again in Brussels on the sidelines of a NATO defence ministers' meeting. In their statement the ministers stressed that the key priority is to prepare the Visegrad Battle Group so that it achieves its operational capability in the first half of 2016 and becomes an important part of Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy.

The issue of regional defence cooperation was also raised by the V4 Chiefs of General Staff. At a meeting in Sopot in mid-April 2013, they reaffirmed their common position on key issues relating to security and defence cooperation. The second part of the meeting was attended by Ukraine's Chief of General Staff. The assembled commanders identified three areas of cooperation with Ukraine: participation in the Visegrad Battle Group, conducting joint exercises and military staff training, and the V4 countries' support for the transformation of the Ukrainian armed forces.

Throughout the Polish Presidency, the ministries of economy and environment were closely concerned with the future of energy and climate policy. This was also the central theme of a meeting of environment ministers from the V4 countries, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania, which took place in Sobienie Królewskie near Warsaw between 18 and 19 April, 2013.

The ministers reached a common position which was put forward in a joint statement summing up the two-day meeting. It was emphasized that the new framework of

climate and energy policy should take into account economic issues and their impact on the competitiveness of individual member states' economies, including their ability to create new jobs.

Energy and climate policy and its impact on industrial policy was the main topic of a joint letter that the V4 economy ministers sent to the European Commission and the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council in December 2012. The document underscored that the EU climate policy should take into account energy security of the Member States, while also noting the policy's crucial importance for the competitiveness of the European economy.

The V4 economy ministers addressed similar issues in their joint non-paper on the energy and climate policy after 2020. They drew EU partners' attention to the fact that future activities in this area must not reduce the competitiveness of European economies. To ensure this, the energy market should be fully integrated and the Member States need freedom to create their own energy mixes.

This explains why economy ministers devoted so much attention to energy matters during the Polish V4 Presidency. At the first meeting of V4 economy ministers in Warsaw on 31 October, 2012, the discussion focused on the regional cooperation in this sector, and the participants declared their determination to continue working on integrating the regional gas market within the V4.

The cooperation among V4 economy ministries proved seminal also in other fields. Among other things, the ministers agreed about the need to promote our region in third markets and highlight Central Europe's economic potential. On the occasion of the European Economic Congress in Katowice, an informal meeting of the V4+ with the participation of ministers from Romania, Croatia and the Baltic states was organized on 13 May, 2013. The ministers discussed the situation of the car industry in Central Europe during the financial crisis.

Related to the economy were also issues addressed by the ministers for employment and social affairs. During a meeting in Cracow on 17 May, 2013, they discussed the problem of youth employment and the impact labour laws have on maintaining economic growth.

As regards regional development, the V4 countries discussed the future shape and functioning of Europe's cohesion policy in the new multiannual financial framework. On 11 and 12 October, 2012, regional development ministers from the V4 countries and Slovenia met in Katowice to discuss this issue.

They pointed out that funds provided under the cohesion policy are the key instrument of development policy in our region, as they have a positive impact on the

labour market, bolster economic growth, and create opportunities for enhancing the innovativeness and competitiveness of our economies. Finally, the ministers adopted a joint declaration summarizing the two-day meeting.



Meeting of Regional Development Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia, Katowice, 11-12 October, 2012. FOT. MINISTRY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Moreover, a joint document on spatial development was drafted. Apart from the V4 countries, representatives of Romania and Bulgaria also took part in the discussion. The work led to the drafting of the preliminary version of the *Common Spatial Development Strategy of the Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria and Romania (V4+2)*, which will be part of a new edition of the European Spatial Development Perspective. The document identifies chief transportation axes and possible limitations caused by socio-economic conditions or environmental protection considerations, and indicates on this basis potential development axes.

Developing infrastructure that connects V4 countries with each other is crucial if Visegrad cooperation is to thrive in the future. Between 24 and 25 April, 2013, the V4 transport ministers met in Wieliczka and Cracow to exchange experiences in implementing infrastructure investments and discuss possible forms of cooperation on using European funds from the new 2014-2020 budget. The transport ministers of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Croatia were also invited to participate in the meeting. This broad format demonstrated that an inter-regional cooperation could be successful in the future. An additional highlight was the signing by the Polish and Slovak ministers of a declaration about the construction of the

Zwardoń-Skalite expressway. An important step towards realizing the North-South transport axis, the investment will significantly improve the existing network of Polish-Slovak road connections.

Ministers of agriculture focused on food safety and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the context of the new EU budget perspective. At the beginning of our presidency (2-3 July, 2012), Jasionka near Rzeszow hosted a meeting of the V4 agriculture ministers, with the participation of Romania and Bulgaria. The conference adopted the *Common Statement of Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria and Romania on key elements of CAP reform*. The ministers called for simplifying the system of grants for rural areas, and for reducing the negative impact that differing subsidy levels have on agricultural competitiveness in the European Union.

The agriculture ministers met again in Cracow on 16 and 17 May, 2013. Apart from Bulgaria and Romania, this time also Slovenia was represented. The officials discussed more proposals for CAP reform, the draft of the so-called tobacco directive and its consequences for tobacco producers in Central Europe.

On 6 June, 2013, Chief Veterinary Officers and food safety experts from the V4 countries met in Cracow. The first such conference in the history of Visegrad cooperation, the meeting was aimed at strengthening cross-border and regional cooperation of veterinary services.

The comparison of legal solutions and a discussion about mechanisms that help the public administration better prevent diseases and improve living standards dominated the agenda during a meeting of V4 health ministers in Warsaw on 26 April, 2013. On this occasion, experiences in health policy implementation were also exchanged.

The V4 ministers of culture met in Cracow between 11 and 14 June, 2013. It was a culmination of ministerial and expert consultations that had been conducted for over a year on digitization and making cultural goods available to the public. During the Cracow meeting of ministers, the winner of the 2012 International Visegrad Prize was also announced. The Prize was awarded to the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra for its contribution to developing cultural cooperation between the V4 countries. The ministers also signed a joint communiqué on cultural cooperation between the countries of the Visegrad Group.

At the same time (on 13 and 14 June, 2013), Rzeszów hosted the ministers of justice from the V4 and Croatia. The meeting's agenda included the rights of witnesses in court proceedings, the Common European Sales Law and the concept of a European Public Prosecutor's Office.

This was also the first Polish V4 Presidency that put embassies to widespread use when implementing its programme. Several dozen projects aimed at promoting Central European regional cooperation were organized in various places around the world. In Beijing and Tokyo, the Polish Embassies organized expert seminars on cooperation opportunities between Asian countries and our region. The Japanese seminar also served to promote the idea of the Eastern Partnership. The Polish Embassy in Indonesia helped launch a Visegrad Course at the prestigious University of Indonesia in Jakarta. Seminars and conferences also took place at a number of Polish diplomatic posts, including in Moscow, Kyiv, Berne, Madrid, Rome and Riga, while the Polish Embassy in Bucharest co-hosted a conference on energy security in Central Europe. These are but a few examples from a long list of projects carried out by the Polish diplomatic posts.



Inauguration of the Visegrad course at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, 19 March 2013.
 FOT. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN JAKARTA.

An important dimension of Visegrad cooperation were also numerous joint consultations of MFA political directors from the Visegrad Group countries with partners from Japan, the United States, Russia, Israel and Benelux.

The Polish Presidency also featured an important social dimension, which was to promote regional cooperation and closer people-to-people contacts between V4 countries' citizens.

A novelty of the V4 Presidency was the 1st Visegrad Bicycle Race, which came to an end in Cracow on 18 June, 2013. The fastest cyclist to complete the 533-kilometre-long route was Andrzej Kaiser of the Corratec Team.

The race kicked off in Budapest the previous day, and took the riders across all four Visegrad countries. To mark this occasion, Polish diplomatic posts in Bratislava, Budapest and Prague organized festivals and events to promote cycling and the idea of Visegrad cooperation.



Minister R. Sikorski during the 1st Visegrad Bicycle Race awards ceremony, Cracow, 18 May 2013.

FOT. MFA PL/JUSTYNA CIEŚLIKOWSKA

On 26 July, 2012, i.e. shortly after the Polish V4 Presidency began, four universities from the V4 countries signed an agreement on establishing an academic consortium that brings together political sciences and international studies faculties. The purpose of the agreement is to begin, as of the 2013/2014 academic year, joint two-year Master's degree studies *Europe in the Visegrad Perspective*. Under the project, students will spend one semester at each university, gaining an opportunity to learn about the culture and history of the countries of our region. The project's leader is the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, its other partners are: the University of Pécs (Hungary), Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic) and the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia).

When discussing major events during Poland's Presidency of the Visegrad Group, one should also mention its parliamentary dimension, which is no less important than other aspects of the presidency. In mid-June 2012, the Polish Senate adopted a special Resolution On Taking over the Presidency of the Visegrad Group by the Republic of Poland on 1 July, 2012. The Senators stressed the importance of cooperating with third countries in the V4+ formula and called on parliamentarians from other Visegrad

countries to support their governments' efforts to reinvigorate regional cooperation. In late January, 2013, V4 parliamentarians representing administration, local government and regional development committees met in Warsaw. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a joint declaration which emphasized the importance of cohesion funds for further dynamic development of our region.



Meeting of the presidents of parliaments of the Visegrad Group, Warsaw, 12-13 April 2013.

FOT. RAFAŁ ZEMBRZUSKI

In April 2013, Warsaw hosted a meeting of V4 parliaments' presidents. During the talks, they emphasized that Visegrad cooperation is instrumental for an effective presentation of our position in the European debate. The presidents summed up the meeting in a common position. They expressed their satisfaction with the way Visegrad cooperation had developed, but also urged the V4 governments to consistently deepen and broaden the areas of mutual cooperation.

Summary of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

The Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group has demonstrated that even in an environment of new challenges and difficult European debates about the future of the integration process the V4 remains a constructive force that contributes to the unity of our continent. A case in point is the success of our joint endeavours during negotiations of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020. The involvement of the V4 countries in the Friends of Cohesion group helped to convince the EU net contributors that scaling back the EU's cohesion policy – the continent's major growth engine – would be a false economy. We have not repeated mistakes made before our accession in 2004. Back then, the V4 negotiated individually and our countries received different treatment, which led to mutual animosities. We came stronger out of the most recent negotiations, and this strength was noticed in many political centres.



Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group on the margin of the European Council, Brussels, 13 December 2012. FOT. THE CHANCELLERY OF PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND/MACIEJ ŚMIAROWSKI

The ability to act together is fast becoming the essence of European integration, especially during a crisis. This explains why our closer defence cooperation, including

efforts to set up the Visegrad Battle Group as the region's contribution to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, meets with so much approval.

The Polish V4 Presidency coincided with the crystallization of the project to build a common natural gas market. All four countries are aware of their geographical location and dependence on external sources of energy. The sense of energy insecurity is common not only to the Visegrad Group countries, but also to other Central European states. Our regional cooperation provides an opportunity to enhance this security, while also representing a good platform for establishing strategic cooperation with the Baltic countries, the Balkan countries, Romania and Bulgaria.

Apart from traditional areas and forms of Visegrad cooperation, the Polish Presidency has also explored new territory. One new initiative was the extended meeting of representatives of Central and Northern Europe. Held in Gdansk, the discussion of foreign ministers from 12 countries (V4, Nordic and Baltic countries) focused on the economy and policy issues, and touched on defence as seen from the regional perspective. The meeting has demonstrated that, although seemingly diverse, our countries look at many issues in a similar way.



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic countries, Gdansk, 20 February 2013. FOT. MFA PL/JUSTYNA CIEŚLIKOWSKA

The traditional area of the V4's activity is its nearest eastern and southern neighbourhood. But here, too, new interaction instruments have been tried. The meeting of V4 foreign ministers and Balkan partners announced that an expert network on the rule of law and fundamental rights will be created to provide

maximum practical assistance in strengthening the democratic transition in South-Eastern Europe. The meeting of ombudspersons from the V4 and Balkan countries in Warsaw on 12 and 13 March, 2013 can be seen as a launch pad of this network. As regards the Eastern Partnership countries, the V4 established – as part of its International Visegrad Fund – the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme, which implements numerous projects that help pass on experiences of political transformation to East European countries. The programme received additional support from the Dutch government. The Polish V4 Presidency also undertook practical cooperation with Japan’s government to support democratic change in the EaP countries.

As the Visegrad Group receives more credit for being a reliable and effective partner at the European and international levels, ever more partners are willing to intensify cooperation with us. This is corroborated by the highest-level meetings, such as the summit of V4 presidents with the president of Ukraine, the March summit of V4 prime ministers with the French president and the German chancellor, the June summit of V4 prime ministers with Japan’s prime minister, or the meetings of foreign ministers discussed above, but also by cooperation among individual ministries, and cooperation at the lower, expert level.

It is also worth noting the Visegrad Group’s growing attractiveness for the neighbouring countries in the region. The Visegrad Group has come to stand for Central Europe’s regained subjectivity in the international arena. It is here that the “Visegrad Plus” format is most effective. It not only creates a basis for ad-hoc collaboration to achieve specific goals, but also enables the region’s full incorporation into the process of European integration. Thus, the V4 also becomes an important bridge between the Nordic and the Baltic countries, and countries in the Balkans and at the Black Sea, such as Bulgaria and Romania. The legacy of the previous political era is not only a division of the continent along the Iron Curtain, but also a fragmentation of the area east of the Curtain, which we have not overcome yet. This fragmentation – both political and cultural – rekindled nationalisms, which in turn resulted in tensions and sometimes tragedies, but also left behind poorly integrated markets and a disastrous condition of infrastructural links. The V4 activity provides an opportunity to build up across-the-board cooperation along the North-South axis in the political, economic, transportation (including transportation corridors along the eastern border of the European Union), and energy dimensions. Cooperation along the North-South axis is no less important for Europe’s development than cooperation along the East-West line which has been dominant so far.

Far from being the exclusive domain of governments, the Visegrad cooperation is increasingly becoming a field of activity for parliamentarians. Support that the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group received from the Polish Senate, as well meetings of parliamentary presidiums and committees demonstrate that the parliamentary

dimension of the Visegrad cooperation still has a significant potential and represents an important task for the future.

An important aspect of Poland's V4 Presidency was also the emphasis placed on strengthening people-to-people contacts among our countries. We need a broader cultural and scientific cooperation and more common sporting events. Only this way can we overcome traditional stereotypes and the lack of mutual interest among our societies. We see this kind of activity also as contributing to the integration of Europe.

The above calls for strengthening the role of the International Visegrad Fund as a special instrument which can support regional cooperation, particularly in the civil dimension, for the sake of mutual acquaintance and cohesion of V4 societies. To achieve this and to make the Fund more involved in efforts to develop cooperation with third parties, we need to seek even greater synergy of undertaken measures.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the Polish Presidency has made the Visegrad Group stronger, more united and more determined to play an active European role. The readiness declared by Polish leaders to support the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group, which began on 1 July, 2013, is a testament to the fact that regional cooperation remains a constant and important part of Poland's foreign policy.

Today, the V4 is not only a "good brand," but also an active creator of the regional policy and an increasingly attractive club. The Visegrad Group has become an integral part of our countries' foreign policies, an effective tool for voicing and asserting the region's interests in Europe and around the world.

The Visegrad cooperation was aptly summarized by Zbigniew Brzeziński, who said that it is *"an informal but disciplined group of countries, which has a vision of what it wants to achieve, and can effectively influence the attitudes of much bigger players on the European and global levels."* The Polish Presidency has strived to stay as true to this message as possible.

Appendix

Selected documents agreed and adopted during the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2012/2013

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1. Common Statement of Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria and Romania on key elements of CAP reform

In the context of negotiations on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2014-2020 ministers of agriculture of **the V4 plus Bulgaria and Romania** would like to express their common position on the following issues.

1. The reform gives a possibility for changes of the CAP conducive to **more effective, fair, market and development-oriented policy** supporting competitive position of the EU agriculture and its sustainability.
2. In the context of discussion on **Multiannual Financial Framework**, consistency should be assured between EU objectives and tasks defined in the EC legislative proposals on CAP after 2013. Support should also be given to proposals resulting in faster convergence of direct payments between Member States, which should not negatively affect direct payments envelopes of any Member State with rates below average in 2013. Development gap of individual Member States together with their past performance (allocation for the period 2007-2013) should be the leading principles in defining objective allocation criteria for rural development support.
3. Draft legislative proposals require **more simplified, cost-effective and non-discriminatory** solutions, therefore:
 - it should be possible for a Member State to maintain single area payment scheme (SAPS) combined with solutions to sensitive sectors as a good, simple and well established alternative to the system based on the allocation of payment entitlements, however, in case of shift from SAPS to a new payment scheme based on entitlements there should be equal possibility for all Member States, to differentiate value of entitlements,
 - in order to target support to active farmers, no direct payments shall be granted to land used for non-agricultural activity (e.g. airfields, golf courses, football pitches),
 - due to variety of farm structures within the EU countries such new elements of the payment system as support to young farmers and small farmers scheme should be voluntary for the Member States,
 - capping of direct payments shall not affect competitiveness of EU farmers,
 - equal possibility to set the percentage limit for coupled support should be provided for all Member States to prevent distortion of competition.
4. **Requirements under greening** should be feasible both for farmers and administration and should create real added value for sustainability of agriculture, climate and biodiversity, therefore:
 - share of agricultural land devoted for ecological focused areas should be revised. Moreover, these areas could be controlled at regional or national as well as farm level,
 - non-compliance with greening obligations should result in sanctions related to greening component of payments only,
 - list of “green by definition” exemptions should be broadened to involve all relevant situations in order to keep administrative costs at reasonable level ,

- an increase of the area triggering obligation for crop diversification to 20 ha is another factor important for simplification and control of administrative cost of the greening,
- obligation for maintaining permanent grassland should be applied at regional level, as its application at farm level will not bring additional environmental benefits,
- alternative solutions for enhancing environmental performance of the CAP should also be considered in the course of further debate.

Rzeszow, 2-3 July, 2012

2. Joint Statement by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands (Benelux) and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia (Visegrad Group) on situation in Ukraine

Ukraine, as a European country, shares a common history and common values with the countries of the European Union. The EU acknowledged the European aspirations of Ukraine and welcomed its European choice. We recognize and support the wish of Ukraine to establish close cooperation with European institutions. The gradual convergence of Ukraine with the EU in political, economic and legal areas would contribute to further progress in EU-Ukraine relations. In this respect, the Association Agreement along with the provisions of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which have been negotiated between the EU and Ukraine, define fundamental opportunities for Ukraine to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy into a market economy.

The last years, Ukraine has made efforts in the area of democratization, positioning itself in the EU neighbourhood policy. However, the past year saw some regressive tendencies as regards Ukraine's democratic achievements. We have been witnessing deterioration of the situation in the areas of the rule of law and human rights as well as of the overall state of democracy. The imprisonment and trials of Yulia Tymoshenko and other politicians of her government proved to be a serious symptom of those negative tendencies. These politically motivated cases clearly illustrate the failings of the judicial system in Ukraine to uphold international standards for fair, transparent and independent trials. We hope that Ukraine's government will take the necessary steps to make selective justice a thing of the past. Other issues which contribute to the development of a democratic society, such as freedom of and equal access to media or rule of law, remain to be further fostered strengthened. The lack of progress in these domains remains a serious impediment on the road to democratization in Ukraine.

It is worth emphasizing that Ukraine's performance, notably in reaction to respect for common values and the rule of law, will be of crucial importance for the speed of its political association and economic integration with the EU. The Association Agreement including its DCFTA has the potential to secure deeper long-term future relations with the EU on the basis of increased trade opportunities, approximation to the EU *acquis* and the overall modernization of Ukraine's institutions and governance. Although the EU attaches great importance to deepen its relations with Ukraine, we recall that the visible improvement of the rule of law in Ukraine is essential for the signing of the Association Agreement.

We call on the government of Ukraine to ensure that the upcoming election, conducted next month in October, will be in line with the standards of the Organisation for Security and

Cooperation in Europe, including full cooperation with monitoring missions. Compliance with the standards of OSCE should strengthen the credibility of Ukraine in its forthcoming OSCE presidency. By means of democratic elections in October, Ukrainian leaders will regain political confidence from the citizens and the civil society of their country, and from Europe as a whole.

New York, 25 September, 2012

3. Joint Declaration of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia on the negotiation process of the Commission's Proposals for the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 Regulatory Package

The Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy (CP) in the Visegrad Group and Slovenia met in Katowice, the Republic of Poland, on 11-12th October, 2012 to discuss the progress in the negotiations of the future Cohesion Policy regulatory framework published by the European Commission (Commission) on 6 October, 2011. The Director General for Regional Policy and Urban Policy and Member of the European Parliament also participated in the meeting.

BEARING in MIND the development challenges faced by the European Union (EU) and the need to ensure highest possible effectiveness and efficiency of investments financed from the EU budget, UNDERLINING that Cohesion Policy post 2013 is one of the key EU investment policies to support the objectives of the Europe 2020 which is a result of its integrated nature and adaptability to territorial contexts as well as of the new regulatory elements that aim for its enhancing strategic orientation and focus on results,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the partial general approach on ten negotiating blocks agreed upon by the Danish Presidency at the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 April and 26 June, 2012 and the Joint Declaration of the Visegrad Group of Countries and Slovenia on the Commission's Proposals for the Future Cohesion Policy Regulatory Package agreed in Prague, on 22 March 2012,

The Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia HAVE AGREED on the following:

General remarks

1. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia WELCOME and STRONGLY SUPPORT the significant progress of the Council's negotiations achieved due to the efforts of the Danish Presidency and LOOK FORWARD to substantial further progress under the Cypriot Presidency.
2. It shall be underlined again that it is of utmost importance for the EU at large to start the implementation of new programmes and projects from the very beginning of 2014. For that reason, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia CALL ON the Cypriot Presidency to avoid re-opening of already agreed thematic blocks unless it is necessary for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) or as a result of the Financial Regulation negotiations.
3. Additionally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia STRESS the necessity of the Council's Structural Actions Working Party to contribute to the negotiations on the MFF concerning elements related to Cohesion Policy post 2013 and the discussion on the concept of better quality of spending. In this regard, we INSIST that the current system of VAT eligibility should be kept and extended to all Funds of the Common Strategic Framework (CSF); that the current co-financing rates for the less-developed and the former Convergence regions including for the European Territorial Cooperation programmes should be maintained.

Programming

4. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia AGREE that the CSF should provide a strategic guidance to Member States in the programming process especially with regard to territorial and sectoral coordination of the EU's resources and policies which should be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in its entirety. At the same time, it should not introduce any additional obligations as regards programming and implementation above those already agreed by the Council in its partial general approach.
5. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia CONFIRM that the country-specific recommendations of the Council (CSRs) are important means to keep the delivery of Europe 2020 objectives on track. In this respect, CSRs constitute one of the elements that the Member State should take into account during the programming process. However, the relevance of the CSRs for Cohesion Policy is determined during preparation of the National Reform Programme where it is decided whether the CSR will be implemented through national policies or with the help of the European Funds and afterwards in the Partnership Agreement. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia UNDERLINE that the longterm stability and structural character of CP have to be respected.
6. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia EXPRESS the opinion that in order to ensure clear and coherent regulatory framework for the CSF funds, provisions shall also refer to specific cases of implementation, like projects implemented under national programmes and involving regions of various categories or phasing and bridging financing which need transparent transitional provisions.
7. To this end, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia also EMPHASISE that capital regions are important catalysts of the Europe 2020 objectives and engines of economic growth with functions in service of the whole country. Such capital regions are often stricken by internal disparities, with their relatively high development level resulting from the statistical effect of the capital. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia, therefore, STRESS that addressing the issue of capital regions with customized solutions is indispensable for facilitating progress towards the Europe 2020 goals and for enhancing competitiveness both at regional and national level.

Financial Management and Management and Control

8. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia UNDERLINE that the positions of Member States regarding the financial management and control systems of the next programming period were clearly articulated during the negotiations of the Financial Regulation. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia therefore INSIST that this debate must not be repeated and any amendments to be introduced shall be limited only to the issues resulting directly from the Financial Regulation, especially as regards irregularities and corrections.
9. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia UNDERLINE that any corrective measure should aim for ensuring the legality and regularity of the concerned programmes' transactions. To this end, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia BELIEVE that net correction does not increase effectiveness in this regard but on the other hand will hamper the progress towards goals set in the Treaty.
10. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia CALL for more flexibility in the implementation to facilitate the achievement of better results, e.g. the application of the decommitment rule should be more flexible compared to the proposed provisions and maintaining of a sufficient level of pre-financing should be ensured.

11. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **MAINTAIN AND UNDERLINE** their opinion that procedures, especially criteria, for designating programme authorities shall be more focused on the principles of result orientation, sound financial management and simplification.

Further progress in the negotiations

12. Taking into account the programming processes that have already been launched by Member States, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia **UNDERLINE** the need for a quick presentation by the Commission of all delegated and implementing acts, which in many cases will directly affect national implementation systems. We also **CALL ON** the Commission to provide as soon as possible timeframes and information on the content of those acts and – where possible – to involve Member State experts in these processes.
13. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **ENCOURAGE** the Commission to allocate sufficient capacity for the negotiation process on the legislative package and programming documents and at the same time to ensure equal treatment to all Member States with a view to that as well as timely adoption of the whole set of Partnership Agreements and operational programmes. We **COUNT** especially on the effective cooperation with the Commission when putting into practice the new CP elements, such as ex-ante conditionalities or performance framework and when translating the new intervention logic into the operational programmes.
14. Above all, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia **UNDERLINE** that the common, fair, and transparent approach of the Commission to all Member States is a fundamental principle and a crucial condition of successful implementation of CP. General requirements and procedures used for requests and decisions addressed to Member States should be the same in all similar cases (e.g. major projects, state aid issues, etc.), taking into account an individual nature of each case. Otherwise uncertainty and delays in the implementation may occur.
15. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **ARE DETERMINED** to coordinate their negotiation efforts in order to enforce the above common proposals and translate them into practice. We **MUST** strive to finish the negotiations of the legislative package as soon as possible after the closure of the MFF negotiations.
16. Additionally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia **INVITE** the acting Cypriot and the upcoming Irish Presidency to inform the Member States of the negotiations with the European Parliament in a timely, regular and exhaustive manner.
17. Finally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia **OFFER** their constructive cooperation and support in order to reach a good compromise between all co-legislators.

Katowice, 12 October, 2012

4. Declaration of the V4 Economy Ministers

The Ministers of the Visegrad Four Countries (Martin Kuba, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, Zoltán Cséfalvay, Secretary of State of National Economy of Hungary, Waldemar Pawlak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy of Poland, Tomáš Malatinský, Minister of Economy of Slovakia) responsible for economy support further development of regional

cooperation in energy sector, consider the internal market as a leading achievement of the European integration and underline the need of a joint economic promotion on the third markets.

During their meeting on the 31st of October 2012, the Ministers expressed their support for:

THE DEVELOPMENT of **mutual cooperation in all areas of energy and energy security** in particular, and developing rules of cooperation in elaborating common V4 opinions in the context of EU institutions and initiatives:

- **The regional gas market integration** – recognizing the need for improvements in order to deepen the regional gas market integration with emphasis put on diversification of gas sources for the region and understanding the critical role of infrastructure in achieving that goal, the V4 Countries agree to enhance close cooperation at all levels (especially in the *North-South East* gas group established under the *Regulation on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure*) and to work towards meeting the aims reflected in the *Memorandum of Understanding on North-South Interconnections in Central-Eastern Europe* signed in Brussels in November 2011.
- Identifying the importance of secure crude oil supplies to the region, the V4 Countries see the need of continuous cooperation in this regard. This shall especially include exchange of information on the current state of supplies as well as common presentation of regional problems at the forum of the European Union. The V4 Countries recognize the importance of TAL pipeline for the region crude oil supply security. The V4 Countries wish to deepen its cooperation in the oil sector with the view of stable, predictable and uninterrupted development of the oil sector in the region.
- **The electricity market** – the Ministers confirm that the V4 Countries are in favor of the completion of the internal energy market in the EU by 2014. Any market obstacles should be removed soon and effectively. They confirm that an issue of unplanned loop flows should be treated as serious market barrier hampering effective electricity cross-border exchange in CEE region and prevents from implementation of open, integrated and flexible energy markets. The V4 Countries are of the opinion that the reason for that barrier is, beside insufficient infrastructure in Germany, a current bidding zone design in the CEE and lack of appropriate flow based allocation rules. The Ministers recognize that a correction of bidding zones is the most appropriate tool to reduce limits in cross border trade in the whole CEE region in the medium term and is necessary for an efficient functioning of the Flow Based Market Coupling. The Ministers stress that any decisions on future redesign of bidding zones should be taken as soon as possible to decrease possible risks to transmission system of all V4 Countries. From the short term perspective, the V4 countries recognize the unplanned loop flows as a real and actual threat to the energy security and therefore call for an urgent need to find a feasible short term solution. From the long term view it is necessary to strengthen electricity infrastructure which is indispensable for good functioning of electricity market.
- The Ministers underline the importance of mainstreaming **nuclear power** as an equivalent source of energy (e.g. on a par with renewable or conventional – mainly coal, lignite and gas-power) on the EU agenda.
- The Ministers confirm that **the EU climate and energy policy** should respect energy security of individual EU Member States. Any proposal of EU legislation can not reduce

the competitiveness of the EU Member States and the EU economy comprehensively. V4 Countries underline that climate action activities should be perceived in global perspective. Otherwise a negative processes such a carbon leakage or decreasing of EU competitiveness could occur. The V4 Countries therefore call for global agreement on climate change.

- The V4 Countries stress that energy efficiency is the key element in reducing the CO₂ emission. The efficient use of energy has also a big impact on security of supply, job creation and reduction of fuel import dependence. The potential of energy efficiency needs to be exploited.
- The Ministers support EU *Emissions Trading Scheme/ETS* as a market-based instrument for implementation of the climate and energy policy of the European Union.
- The Ministers support the V4 cooperation while negotiating conclusion to the Communication "*Renewable Energy: a major player in the European energy market*". Renewable energy may constitute an important element of the European energy market if prices for the consumers at affordable level and energy security through reducing demand for imported energy will be ensured. Further increase of deployment of RES should respect differences between the countries and be conditioned by corresponding infrastructure development.

INCREASING the importance of *internal market*. The V4 Countries consider the internal market as a leading achievement of the European integration, as well as a key factor that will enable EU's return to the path of economic growth. Yet the Single Market is still far from being completed. Therefore concrete actions should be taken to create a single market for digital services; to strengthen the transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructures of the single market; to enable the full potential of free movement of services; and to create the most advantageous conditions for entrepreneurs. The Single Market Act II, currently under preparation by the Commission, should concentrate particularly on the aforementioned goals.

The V4 countries express their willingness to cooperate closely on legislative proposals presented both under SMA I and SMA II.

EMPHASIZING the role of *industrial policy*. More competitive Europe with a strong industry and ambitious industrial policy is possible. Industry must be placed at the centre of attention if Europe is to remain a global economic leader and provider of solutions to the challenges that face our societies.

Europe needs industry and an approach that includes whole value chain, from infrastructure and raw materials to after-sales services. Such an approach is essential to increase productivity in manufacturing industry and associated services and to underpin the recovery of growth and jobs. Promoting entrepreneurship, competitiveness and innovation, as well as creation and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises should be at the core of the EU industrial policy. In the light of the new Communication on industrial policy the instruments that influence the situation of industry base in the EU are to be discussed. Therefore the V4 Countries underlined the importance of competitiveness as well as the internal market rules which should not be hampered. They also expressed their willingness to enhance cooperation within the Competitiveness Council on issues concerning further development of the internal market and the sectors of European industry.

RECOGNIZING the important *potential of open and fair conditions of trade* in supporting economic recovery and growth in the V4 countries and in the EU as a whole. In this context the

Ministers underline the need to continue efforts to fight protectionism in international trade and investment, including in the neighborhood of the EU, and to promote free, open and fair trade whilst asserting the EU interests in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit. They welcome the recent accession of Russia to the WTO which creates a good basis for deepening the trade and investment relations between the EU and Russia and look forward to the full implementation of accession commitments. The Ministers recognize the progress in the DCFTA negotiations with Eastern Partners and support their quick finalization. They hope that conditions will soon allow the application of the Association Agreement negotiated between the EU and Ukraine. They confirm the importance of deepening economic relations with major trading partners and underline their commitment to work toward the goal of launching by the EU negotiations on comprehensive trade agreements with the US and Japan, which are expected to bring substantial benefits for the EU companies.

ENHANCING cooperation among the Visegrad countries for *joint trade promotion in third markets, particularly* in China.

Warsaw, 31 October, 2012

5. Co-Chairs' Statement. Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic states

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic countries met in Gdansk on the 20th of February 2013. During the meeting, hosted by Sweden's Minister Carl Bildt and Poland's Minister Radosław Sikorski, the Ministers agreed that Northern and Central European states must work actively towards strengthening the European Union and Europe as a whole.

Growth in Europe (single market, energy, transport)

Ministers agreed that growth in Europe can be stimulated by strengthening the single market as well as developing energy and transport infrastructure. It was agreed that the internal market stands at the core of efforts to restore growth and competitiveness as well as job creation in Europe and that further co-operation between the Nordic, Baltic and Visegrad countries is called upon. It was highlighted that in order to better use the potential of such co-operation necessary steps should be taken to improve transport and energy connections between these regions.

In that context, Ministers underlined the importance of a fully functioning EU internal energy market, based on diversified, integrated and liberalized energy markets. They further agreed that the common goal also contributing to the security of the region is to ensure stable supplies of energy resources at competitive price. The modernization of existing and building of new energy infrastructure, the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy will go hand in hand in contributing to the security of supply in the region as well as meeting climate policy challenges.

An exchange of views was also held on current developments in the global energy markets, and their implications for the countries in the region. The importance of dialogue and partnership with major energy suppliers, based on a rule and market approach was emphasized.

Eastern Partnership

The Ministers discussed relations with the Eastern European partners, and in particular preparations for the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013. They agreed

that the Eastern Partnership has been pivotal in strengthening integration on the European continent, and expressed their support for the European aspirations and the European choice of some Eastern European partners.

They further called on the Eastern European partner countries to intensify reform efforts in line with the Eastern Partnership Road Map, in order to prepare the ground for an ambitious outcome of the Summit, and committed to jointly push for the EU to respond accordingly.

Hope was expressed that the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements between the EU and the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia would be initiated by the time of the Summit. The Ministers called on Ukraine to demonstrate determined action and tangible progress in line with the EU Council Conclusions of December 2012, in order to pave the way for signing the Association Agreement/DCFTA during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. Moreover, the Ministers highlighted the dynamic development of the Eastern Partnership multilateral cooperation and stressed importance of further strengthening of the flagship initiatives and creating new ones as well as further enhancement of people-to-people contacts and support for youth and students' exchanges and scholarship programmes.

Russia

The latest developments in Russia were discussed. The situation of Human Rights in Russia was considered as worrying. The importance of Russia's continued negotiations with the EU on the New Agreement, which will replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement from 1997, was highlighted.

European Security

Developments in relation to European and International Security were discussed. It was agreed that Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic countries due to their geographic proximity, shared values and interest had an important role to play in promoting democracy, rule of law and security.

Ministers agreed that cooperation between our countries would serve well strengthening our security in a changing international environment. Joint assessment of challenges and joint promotion of our regional security perspective would make our interests more visible and more comprehensible to others in the broader Euro-Atlantic security environment including EU and NATO.

In this context Ministers agreed to look for opportunities to jointly develop capabilities within NATO and EU respectively. Taking into account envisaged limitation of NATO operational engagement after 2014 Ministers called for the development of initiatives which would help to maintain interoperability among Allies' and Partners' forces. The need for tangible exercise and training was mentioned specifically.

Ministers discussed and expressed support for the elaboration of a European Global Strategy. Such a strategy would clarify what values and interests the EU should promote, and how to go about it.

The ministers agreed that Europe had an important role in international conflict prevention and mitigation. To enhance its capacity in this respect, the ministers stressed that Europe needed more flexible tools at its disposal, for example through the establishment of a European Institute of Peace, engaged in peace mediation and informal dialogue.

The European Council on defense in December 2013 was discussed and Ministers agreed that the preparations should focus on tangible measures for improving European crisis management capabilities, taking into account a wide security context and a comprehensive approach.

Ministers also called for staunch support for Iceland's EU aspirations and EU enlargement in general.

Further steps

The Ministers expressed their satisfaction that the meeting in Gdansk was an important occasion for Northern and Central European countries to discuss their engagement in European matters. The Ministers expressed their interest in gradually bringing the Nordic/Baltic and Visegrad regional cooperation closer together.

Gdansk, 20 February, 2013

6. Press statement following the meeting of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries, President of the French Republic and the German Chancellor

The Heads of Government of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of Germany met on March 6, 2013 in Warsaw to discuss the economic developments in the European Union, the future architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union and the strengthening of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The meeting was organised in the framework of the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group.

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

They expressed their satisfaction with the compromise reached on the MFF at the recent European Council, and reaffirmed their determination to reach consensus with the European Parliament.

Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)

They agreed that the transformation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) should be driven by four principles: competitiveness, growth, employment and openness. The process should be inclusive—all member states willing to participate in deeper integration should be welcome.

In this context, they discussed the importance of the so called contracts for competitiveness and growth which could serve as an instruments of implementing necessary reforms to restore balanced growth in the EMU and better prepare willing pre-in economies for the adoption of a common currency in the future.

Competitiveness and Growth

They agreed that improving competitiveness is of primary concern as it is a prerequisite for visibly and decisively contributing to the achievement of sustainable growth and employment.

They stressed their determination to finalize the Single Market by removing remaining barriers, especially in the online services sector. Europe should stay committed to a fully functioning digital single market. Particular focus should be put on such areas as e-commerce and the delivery of broadband. They discussed the issue of tax systems which should reflect the new reality, equally applying to digital and traditional sectors.

They underlined that completing the internal energy market and making it fully operational is paramount, as energy prices influence the EU's competitiveness.

They agreed to focus on reversing the current downward trend of manufacturing industry's contribution to the EU's GDP and stressed its vital role as one of the major drivers of growth and employment.

They acknowledge high priority of EU's trade policy and agreed that it should aim at asserting EU's interests, in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit. They stressed the importance of improving and deepening trade relations with the EU's strategic partners such as the US and Japan, as well as achieving progress as regards the Eastern Partnership countries.

Cooperation on security and defence issues

They reconfirmed their resolve to work actively on strengthening European defence capabilities, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and NATO.

They expressed their conviction of the need to pool military and defence resources, taking advantage of existing regional institutions and mechanisms such as the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Weimar Triangle in order to address the pressures on military budgets exerted by the global financial crisis.

They declared their expectation that the European Council in December 2013 will further guide the development of the EU CSDP in all the areas indicated by the European Council in December 2012.

Acknowledging the value of EU Battlegroups and the creation of the Weimar one that is currently on stand-by, they consider it important that their use be increased and they be further developed. They welcomed the plans to create the Visegrad Battlegroup by 2016.

They expressed hope that closer defence cooperation will help to make the "NATO 2020" vision a reality. With the termination of ISAF operation in 2014, it becomes evident how important allied forces' interoperability is and how essential it is to maintain it. While striving to devise ways how to cooperate more effectively.

They affirmed the need to pay attention to how NATO addresses the challenge of interoperability, intending to focus on training, education, and exercises.

Warsaw, 6 March, 2013

7. Declaration of the Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Defence *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defence Policy*

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, reconfirm our commitment to strengthen the EU's ability to respond to security challenges including through the instruments of military and civilian crisis management. CSDP as a key instrument in dealing with conflict and crises deserves regular attention and support at the highest political level.

The forthcoming December 2013 European Council should express the EU's political determination for a more effective CSDP by taking stock of current state of play and providing further strategic guidance. An adequate follow-up, including a timetable for concrete steps should also be set up to ensure systematic development of CSDP. The EU's approach must be based on political will, financial realism and multinational cooperation.

Strong and stable transatlantic partnership is our shared and vital interest. Strengthening CSDP should go hand in hand with reinforced partnership with NATO.

Increase the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP

The EU's comprehensive approach offers a unique advantage to increase the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP. Civil-military interaction, as well as a greater internal and external coordination and cooperation should be at the heart of our actions. Importance should be given to the whole conflict cycle including conflict prevention, mediation and an enhanced early warning capability.

The upcoming joint Communication on the comprehensive approach by the High Representative and the Commission as well as the revision of the CSDP crisis management procedures and the EEAS review are closely interlinked. Their outcome should provide further impetus to build higher degree of coordination, and to enhance the EU's ability to react quickly and effectively with various CSDP instruments.

CSDP missions and operations have proved their positive impact in various conflicts so far. Further increasing the effectiveness of CSDP should be underpinned by enhancing rapid launch and deployment through better planning, as well as financial, logistics and human resources procedures, and Member States' active contribution to the execution. Better implementation of lessons learned in future CSDP planning is also needed. From this perspective the sustainability of EU operations and missions' achievements should be ensured. We acknowledge the role played by the EU Operations Centre bearing in mind the Council Conclusions from December 2011. We should further explore the possibilities for improvement and synergies in planning of missions and operations.

EU Battlegroups continue to be an important tool for rapid response, transformation of armed forces and enhancement of interoperability. As a result of our joint effort we will provide Visegrad Battlegroup in 2016. We support the work on enhancing flexibility and usability of this rapid reaction capacity, especially further exploring broader use of regional and partnership cooperation. In order to increase the willingness of Member States to use EU Battlegroups, burden sharing of its deployment and redeployment should be ensured.

A more effective CSDP means a more responsive capacity to cope with emerging security challenges. That is why we should be prepared to defend our interests in the field of cyberspace and energy security.

The role of CSDP should be further enhanced in EU's overall partnership policy. Cooperation with partners is necessary to deal with security challenges successfully. Strengthening ties with the Eastern Partners is a particularly promising avenue. The EU and NATO, as natural partners, should work closely together, and their actions must reinforce each other. Further improvement is also needed in the EU-UN relations regarding the crisis management and peace support.

Enhance the development of military capabilities

Capability development is a long term process that requires strong political support, fostering a clear strategic vision and predictable defence budgets. To maximise its effectiveness and efficiency, the capability development should be based on a single set of priorities introduced by the Capability Development Plan as its central element. At the same time, it should make use of the new pattern of European defence cooperation introduced by Pooling and Sharing. Regional initiatives and projects are a particularly promising way of mitigating identified shortfalls and overlaps between EU and NATO as they increase coherence at regional as well as European level. Harmonisation of EU and NATO defence planning should be strengthened.

We appreciate the activities of the European Defence Agency and encourage it to continue to play pro-active role in supporting the Member States in their effort to improve defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and facilitating the defence co-operation among them. To do this effectively, there is a need to preserve Member States' ownership.

Strengthen Europe's defence industry

We need to continue working towards a more competitive and transparent European Defence Equipment Market (EDEM) and strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). It is essential to establish a long term, competent and sustainable EDTIB and to promote European solutions to defragmentation of defence industry based on harmonized equipment and service requirements and defined key industrial capabilities. Equal and fair conditions within the EDEM, including the transparency in procurement procedures, must be reinforced. Wider participation of small and medium sized enterprises as vital drivers of innovation are prerequisites to foster competition. In order to strengthen EDTIB we will support identifying and addressing key technologies and industrial capabilities that should be developed in Europe, as well as areas of technological and industrial non-dependence utilizing prioritised coordinated investments, and enhanced and trusted security of supply. Moreover, investment into defence research and technology should be supported through common projects and programmes with dual use applications and identification of further possibilities of cooperation in Research and Technology, including by examining further alternative funding schemes and opportunities.

Bratislava, 18 April, 2013

8 Concept Paper on the Climate and Energy 2030 Vision. 19th Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries, Bulgaria and Romania

In 2008 the EU has agreed a clear framework to steer its energy and climate policies up to 2020. This framework includes three headline targets for GHG emission reductions, renewable energy and energy savings.

Today the EU is making good progress towards these targets and is generally on track to meet them. At the same time, questions arise how to shape the policy beyond 2020 considering investment certainty and factoring in new EU and global developments such as:

- consequences of the on-going economic crisis with its impacts on capacity of Member States and private sector/companies to mobilise funds for long term investments;
- developments on energy markets in the EU and globally, including renewables, unconventional gas and oil, and nuclear;
- concerns about affordability of energy prices, both for industry and household consumers, and its negative impacts on EU competitiveness;
- insufficient level of commitment and ambition of EU international partners in reducing GHG emissions leading to lack of clear vision as regards global commitment to reduce GHG beyond 2020.

Considering the above context the undersigned ministers believe that initiating debate on 2030 energy and climate policy framework is needed. Wide and inclusive consultation of the framework must be based first and foremost on analyzing the progress towards 2020 objectives and costs of ambitious headline targets for 2030.

While costs' estimates included in the Commission Roadmaps for 2050 have to be treated with caution considering uncertainties in such a long-term horizon, it would be therefore important to prepare in-depth country and sector specific impact analyses of possible headline targets for 2030. An overall, in depth, Member State level cost-benefit analysis would help making this framework solid, equitable and flexible, and acceptable for industry and society... Moreover, without such analyses it is difficult to capture complete implications when following principles of knowledge-based, responsible policy making.

Within this context, the ministers believe that flexible framework is needed to address EU GHG reduction commitments as well as energy policy objectives. Therefore only tools acknowledging Member State differences are appropriate for satisfying properly energy and climate objectives. Furthermore, experience shows that these two policies strongly determine competitiveness of European industry and therefore the 2030 Vision should also fully consider industrial policy objectives like the European Commission's goal for increase in industry's share of the EU GDP.

When discussing new objectives and interplay among them, lessons must be drawn from the current framework: what has worked, what has not worked and what can be improved. Having a share of only about 11% of current global emissions, the EU cannot solve worldwide climate change alone. However, the EU's commitment to tackling climate change is not reciprocated under the UNFCCC. Having said that, the EU should adopt a more realistic approach to its actions. Especially the EU should take into account developments in the international negotiations and the fact that the international community is working towards 2015 global deal and the European negotiation position should not be undermined by tabling one sided offer. Therefore first we need to obtain greater clarity in relation to the intended commitments of the international partners in order to be well-positioned at the final stage of global negotiations. The EU should encourage all major economies to take on commitments and responsibilities. The year 2015 is to be decisive here. We should not put our cards on the table when the game has not started yet for good.

We also need to maximise synergies and deal with trade-offs between the objectives of competitiveness, security of energy supply and sustainability. Especially that present situation has exposed the fact that the objectives of competitiveness and security of energy supply are not addressed fully in the current framework.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that Member States where investments in energy sector are most needed and with the potential for renewables development, energy efficiency improvements and cost-effective GHG emission reductions often have insufficient economic capacity for investment. Moreover, some of these Member States face difficulties in obtaining sufficient public support for changes of industrial processes and energy use that could negatively impact jobs and energy security, and lead to de-industrialization.

The Ministers recognise that the sharing of efforts in reaching Union's climate and energy targets amongst the Member States was designed with good faith but could be improved and reflect changing conditions better. Lack of full implementation of the agreed mechanisms (i.a. no introduction of domestic offsets as well as insufficient interplay between ETS and non-ETS sectors) also adversely impacted the burden sharing arrangements. EU ETS trade mechanisms included in the Effort Sharing Decision have not been used so far but are a good solution and should be enabled and enforced better in the new framework. In general, it should be more flexible and provide for better interlinks between its tools.

Considering the above as well as the burden sharing exercised before the first ETS trading period there is a need to improve the burden sharing arrangements for the 2030 framework. It

should be stressed that differentiated targets (out of the EU ETS) per Member State as well as exemptions or opt-outs and flexibility mechanisms can improve fairness by properly reflecting differentiated national circumstances and optimise costs to meet the objectives.

Current developments in international energy markets and exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbons lead to an increasing divergence of prices in the EU compared to those in the USA where industry gas prices were in early 2013 approximately four times lower to those in Europe. For the USA it means strong stimulation of industry development and its competitiveness while at the same time reduction of domestic GHG emissions. It is clear that considering possible free trade agreement with the USA and the fact that American business is not exposed to additional costs due to climate and energy policy, European industry will be exposed to stronger challenges leading to carbon leakage.

Therefore the Ministers agree that the exploitation and use of indigenous sources of fossil fuels within the EU, both conventional and unconventional, as well as other sources of energy available domestically taking into account all necessary environmental rules can contribute to reducing the EU's energy prices as well as the fuel import bill. Moreover, they might significantly increase the energy security of the Union. Taking that into account, the Ministers underlined the right of each Member State enshrined in the Treaty to shape their energy mix according to their policy objectives.

Furthermore, considering current insufficient commitment and ambition of EU international partners in reducing GHG emissions and rising uncertainty about efforts and the level of commitments that other developed countries and economically more advanced developing nations will make in the on-going international climate negotiations we underline that the 2030 EU climate and energy framework must be more flexible, if we want to avoid the competitive distortions that have been created by the past approach and it must address the above mentioned international imbalances in the approach to climate issues. To sum up: the new climate and energy vision must clearly contribute to the strengthening of industrial competitiveness in the EU and in particular Member States. Without meeting this postulate new climate and energy framework can contribute to the decreased EU competitiveness and further deteriorate the global competitiveness of Europe.

It is essential to apply EU-wide approach in this context in order to preserve virtues of the Internal Market. Fragmented solutions should be avoided at all cost and therefore state aid rules reform should be integral part of 2030 Vision. The rules related to the ETS that enable Member States providing compensation for part of the indirect ETS costs as well as environmental state aid rules allowing targeted exemptions for industries from energy related taxes must be reformed in such a way to minimise intra-EU competition problems they create. Moreover, extensive analysis should be prepared to assess the possibility of introducing carbon border adjustments in case the international competitiveness of European industry would be threatened due to lack of a global level playing field beyond 2020 as regards efforts to address climate change.

The discussion on the Climate and Energy 2030 Vision must be inclusive and properly reflect situation and positions of all Member States. It is essential that this discussion is fact-based and any targets proposed are flexible and can be met at costs acceptable to society and industry. They must also reflect global situation in order for the EU to keep its rightful place as a competitive global player.

The Vision 2030 needs to take into account the three key objectives of sustainability, competitiveness and security of energy supply in a balanced way. The proposed tools need to be well co-ordinated and no objective can be put before the others. The issue of the EU

competitiveness was put to fore over the last years due to the crisis and should become a cornerstone of the new framework.

Therefore, further discussion on 2030 Vision on EU climate and energy framework should be based on:

- the need to balance all three pillars of sustainable development, namely environmental, social and economic.
- the need to assure EU competitiveness on the global market in the light of developments on the global energy markets and climate commitments of EU's global partners;
- affordability of energy price for EU households and industry in the context of energy poverty and carbon leakage;
- the potential of internal energy market, energy efficiency and indigenous energy sources in achieving policy goals in a cost-effective way;

The Ministers of Environment of the Visegrad Group (V4), Bulgaria and Romania look forward to constructive dialogue on the 2030 Vision in the coming months.

Sobienie Krolewskie, 19 April, 2013

9. Joint Statement on the Eastern Partnership of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group, Ireland and Lithuania

The meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership countries as well as of Ireland and Lithuania, holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2013, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, was held in Cracow and Wieliczka on 17 May, 2013 under Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group. The Ministers discussed the Eastern Partnership with a view to the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in November and its significance to the further development of the EaP.

Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group, Ireland and Lithuania

Noted that the Eastern Partnership has proved to be an effective vehicle to support and facilitate democratic transformation of those Eastern European Partners who had embarked on reforms leading towards deep and sustainable democracy.

Expressed their appreciation of the determination of these Eastern Partnership countries which, despite some internal challenges, are progressing in the process of implementing political, social and economic reforms. They reiterated their engagement in further strengthening and developing the Eastern Partnership and reaffirmed their strong commitment to the objectives agreed in the Joint Declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits of May 2009 in Prague and September 2011 in Warsaw.

Stressed the importance of ambitious funding for the Eastern Partnership in the 2014-2020 financial framework. In this context the Ministers emphasized that the pace of reforms determines the intensity of cooperation and therefore partners most engaged in reforms benefit more from their relationship with the EU in line with the “more for more” principle which will also be applied in the new European Neighbourhood Instrument.

Discussed the way forward to the third Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013. They reiterated their support for the European perspective of the Eastern European Partners underlining that deep and sustainable democracy is an important prerequisite for the Partners' ever closer relationship with the EU.

The Ministers of the Visegrad Group reiterated their commitment to sharing experience on reform and transition with the Eastern European partners. In this regard, they underlined the significance of the „Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership” (V4EaP) programme designed by the International Visegrad Fund to facilitate the systemic transformation and democratisation of the Eastern Partnership countries.

Welcomed the substantial progress made in the negotiations of Association Agreements (AA). Reiterated their commitment to the signing of the Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), with Ukraine possibly at the EaP Summit in Vilnius. They acknowledged that the signature should be accompanied by the opening of parts of the Agreement for provisional application. The Ministers expressed their strong support to initialling the AA/DCFTA with the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia at the EaP Summit. They underlined their commitment to advancing the AA negotiations with Azerbaijan.

Recalled a vital importance of deepening economic integration on the basis of DCFTAs and expressed their expectation to make further steps towards the EU – EaP Economic Area, envisaged by the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit in 2011.

Welcomed the progress made in the process of visa liberalisation. They noted with satisfaction the launch of the second phase of the Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation with the Republic of Moldova with a view to achieving a visa-free regime in 2014 and encouraged Ukraine to move forward with the implementation of its first phase benchmarks in order to pass to the second phase as soon as possible. They also welcomed progress made by Georgia in the implementation of the first phase of the Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation as well as signing of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Armenia, expressing hope that Azerbaijan will soon finish negotiations on similar agreements. They expressed hope that Belarusian authorities would respond positively to the invitation to negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. They stressed their conviction that mobility of people should not be held hostage of undemocratic conduct of the authorities.

Reiterated their commitment to the policy of critical engagement towards Belarus emphasising the need to further develop the European Dialogue on Modernisation.

Welcomed further development of the multilateral track of the EaP ongoing within the framework of the thematic platforms and expert panels. Furthermore, with reference to the review of the flagship initiatives, they emphasized the need to broaden their concept and enhance their impact, as well as to put forward new visible initiatives covering important areas of EaP cooperation. They invited the European External Action Service and the European Commission to prepare proposals in this regard in prospect of the Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013 and of bringing a new ambitious stimulus for the post-Vilnius perspective of the EaP.

Appreciated the efforts of the European Commission and the EEAS in implementing the EaP and encouraged them to further develop programmes in the sphere of people-to-people contacts, support for youth and students' exchanges, and scholarship programmes which are of vital importance for strengthening ties between societies across the continent and enhancing cooperation between the Union and the Eastern European countries. In particular, they stressed

the need for full opening of the new comprehensive “Erasmus for All” and the “Creative Europe” programmes for the participation of the EaP countries.

Stressed the importance of broader engagement of society in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership’s objectives. They reconfirmed their support for the EaP Civil Society Forum, underlined the importance of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the EaP and expressed support for the bottom-up development of the EaP Business Forum. They underlined the importance of involving business communities in the Eastern Partnership, in particular in the area of programmes and other initiatives addressed to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Stressed the importance of enhancing visibility of the Eastern Partnership through the preparation and implementation of a visibility strategy envisaged in the EaP Road Map as well as by applying an EaP label to all EU projects and initiatives in the region.

Cracow/Wieliczka, 17 May, 2013

10. Joint statement of the V4 ministers of defence

The Ministers met in Brussels to sum up the defence-related results of the V4 cooperation and set down priorities for the future.

They reaffirmed their determination to further strengthen this cooperation, by building on the political impetus that V4 leaders gave to the defence cooperation at the Summit in Warsaw on the 6th of March, 2013. The joint statement adopted at that meeting by V4 defence ministers and their French and German counterparts, identified principles, means and priority areas for advancing the cooperation in defence area.

Objectives and Principles

The cooperation provides greater defence synergies among V4 states. Over the last 20 years the V4 Group has become instrumental in leveraging the efforts of its individual members, and ensuring complementarity of their activities. As a result, it was also conducive for more deliberate and rational choices regarding their defence and security.

The V4 defence cooperation will continue to strengthen NATO and the EU in performing the full spectrum of their tasks and missions. As collective defence remains NATO’s key task, the V4 countries will make an effort to ensure that the Alliance is able to meet the challenges of modern era. Their active contribution to the NATO efforts in Afghanistan and involvement in cooperation with partners illustrates their willingness to contribute to NATO’s crisis management and cooperative security. The V4 countries also speak with one voice on the future of NATO, supporting forthcoming strategic discussions on the Alliance in the post-ISAF period.

The V4 cooperation will also be aimed at increasing our countries’ contribution to the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. CSDP has proven its utility to contribute to the security of Europe, requiring a comprehensive approach from its Member States, combining military and civilian activities. The defence ministers fully share the objectives of the V4 cooperation expressed by the ministers of foreign affairs in their Bratislava declaration of April 19, 2013.

The V4 countries remain open for cooperation with their neighbours aimed at stability, integration and capability development.

Main areas of cooperation and way forward

We have achieved a lot so far but there is still more room for improvement in a number of areas:

The V4 EU Battle Group which is to be prepared for 2016 is the most prominent and visible example proving that our multinational formations advance the V4 cooperation. It should be a vehicle for an increased cooperation in the area of training, exercises and development of capabilities. The preparation for the 2016 roster will be completed as soon as possible. It will embrace closing the remaining capability gaps, and identifying possibilities for non V4 contributors. The live exercise of the V4 BG planned for 2015 can reinforce their efforts related to the NATO Connected Initiative (CFI). The V4 states will utilize the experiences and knowledge gained throughout the preparation for the stand-by period and will examine whether elements of the battle group could be sustained in the post-battlegroup period.

Education, training and joint exercises will be given more prominence on the V4 agenda. With the termination of ISAF, maintaining the interoperability of Allies and their ability to execute a broad range of operations will grow in importance. As a result, the V4 will remain committed to the development of CFI and look at the possibilities to cooperate throughout all the stages of its development and implementation. The possibility of a closer V4 cooperation within the Multinational Corps North-East in Szczecin (MNC-NE) will be assessed in order to contribute to the implementation of the CFI. The extent to which the V4 academies and national training centres might be used for the implementation of CFI will be a subject of further analyses. The forthcoming Steadfast Jazz 2013 exercise of the NATO Response Force and the Capable Logistician 2013 exercise are expected to pave the way for the implementation of CFI. The NATO exercises should be properly connected with larger scale national exercises opened for participation of Allies and Partners.

The V4 countries will expand mutual cooperation in the area of aviation training in order to achieve economies of scale and enhance interoperability. The establishment of the Multinational Aviation Training Centre, as a Smart Defence Program, should be fully exploited.

The V4 countries will look for further opportunities to expand and deepen cooperation in **the development of capabilities** for the defence of their territories, and contribution to the operations and missions of NATO and the EU. Although the development of such capabilities remains national responsibility, multinational projects often provide a valuable approach to developing military capabilities in the era of financial austerity. For that reason, the V4 states are committed to NATO Smart Defence and EU's Pooling and Sharing initiatives. The cooperation will be particularly focused on:

- **CBRN capabilities.** The V4 countries have played an active role in the area of CBRN defence. Significance of pooling CBRN capabilities has already increased as it was included into the pool of the most promising Smart Defence programs (tier 1). Successfully implemented, the CBRN battalion will provide vital, certified capabilities to NATO. It may also constitute, just like the Visegrad Battle Group, a vehicle for continuous military cooperation between our states. Having this in mind, our efforts should be focused on implementing the adopted schedule so that the battalion is to achieve the initial operational capability in 2016 and the full operational capability in 2018. The V4 states should also capitalise on experiences gained through participation in the NATO response force, establishment of the Joint CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence and deployments in operations over the last decade.

- **Common Logistics.** The possibility of a common logistic support in multinational operations will be analysed based on the experience drawn from the Capable Logistician 2013 exercise, the Visegrad Battle Group and the Multinational Logistic Coordination Centre in Prague.
- **Countering Cyber Threats.** The V4 countries will tighten their cooperation in countering cyber threats at political and operational level as cyber security becomes extremely vital. Their activities should be closely linked with the NATO Smart Defence Multinational Cyber Capability Development program as well the EDA-led Cyberdefence Project Team.
- **Armament cooperation** as an area for delivering specific projects. The V4 armament policy directors identified the most promising projects on which our cooperation should be focused. Wheeled and tracked platforms, ammunition, personal equipment, C-IED systems were indicated. Furthermore, there is a significant potential for collaboration in developing new capabilities such as unmanned systems and the C4ISR.
- **Air and missile defence** as providing significant capabilities for effective defence both of our countries and NATO. The V4 countries will consider opportunities for enhancing cooperation in this field.

The list presented above is not an exhaustive one. The areas indicated as priorities should be explored further. These projects will be taken forward by the appropriate V4 experts.

The Ministers expressed their gratitude to Poland for its efforts to advance the defence cooperation. It would not have been possible without the achievements of the preceding Presidencies.

The V4 countries declare their continuing support for the Hungarian Presidency to further develop their cooperation.

Brussels, 4 June, 2013

11 ● Road Map towards the regional gas market among Visegrad 4 countries

Visegrad 4 countries, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Republic of Poland and Republic of Slovakia, hereinafter referred to as “the Parties”,

Having regard to the Memorandum of Understanding of 31 October 2012 on gas market integration in the V4 region,

Having regard to the work programme towards the endorsement of this Road Map agreed within the framework of the Visegrad 4 High Level Group on energy security,

Taking into consideration conclusions of the Joint National Regulatory Authorities Report – *Analysis of the current state of market liquidity in the V4 region – state of play and challenges ahead*,

Taking into consideration the results of the conceptual analysis – *The Gas Target Model for the Visegrad 4 region*,

Reaffirming the need for continuous work on the development and enhancement of the key gas infrastructure in our region, based on the North-South axis,

Whereas:

- The instruments of the EU energy policy stress the need for the promotion of regional cooperation for the purpose of integrating national markets at one and more regional levels, as a step towards the creation of the liberalised internal EU gas market.
- The Visegrad Group proved to have a sufficient potential and ability for the promotion of common initiatives and priorities of Visegrad countries at the EU level.
- Sufficient infrastructure, with a special regard given to transmission capacities between V4 countries, is a key prerequisite for the foundation of any integrated market development. Through the flagship V4 project – the North-South corridor in Central-Eastern Europe – key regional priorities with regards to the gas infrastructure have been already defined. Currently the common objective is to overcome any procedural/administrative obstacles to timely implementation of priority projects, guarantee necessary funding under the new financial instrument for the key EU energy infrastructure, namely Connecting Europe Facility.
- Significant barriers to trade that impede the process of any further integration exist between V4 countries. These include inter alia different regulatory regimes, transmission rules and tariff systems, as well as distinct stages of national market liberalisation processes. These obstacles have been accurately diagnosed in the joint report on the market liquidity in V4 countries prepared by the V4 NRAs.
- In order to fully benefit from the new infrastructure in place the solid framework for cooperation on the regulatory and commercial level shall be established. National regulations and legislation should be amended in parallel to the infrastructure effort. This is the key issue in terms of future utilization of the new capacities in the region. This will also help to attract the V4 region towards the diversified external suppliers. This shall be based on the political decision being consistent with business interests and companies' strategies.

Have agreed as follows:

Physical integration of the Visegrad region

1. Infrastructure development and interconnections between the V4 countries is indispensable and fundamental for the credibility of any further integration plans in the V4 region. Thus, the Parties shall take their best endeavours with regard to all defined infrastructure projects leading to creation of physical connections between the V4 countries.
2. In this respect, the Parties reaffirm their political support to ensure a timely and successful development of new, as well as further extension of existing, interconnections between Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, as identified within the North-South corridor in Central-Eastern Europe.
3. In order to ensure the consistence of the political decisions with business interests and companies' strategies the Parties acknowledge the role of the CEE GRIP (Central and Eastern Europe Gas Regional Investment Plan) and invite the TSOs to provide the Central and Eastern Europe with GRI in which they will catalogue in detail all necessary investments to develop North-South Gas Corridor.

Market design for the Visegrad region

4. It shall be assumed that avoiding any proposal of active market integration would be detrimental for the development of the liberalised gas market in the region. However, the

Parties share the opinion that any actions undertaken under auspices of the V4 group shall be open to different developments that may occur in the future. Thus, the Parties decide to take a stepwise, self-learning and open-ended rather than fixed approach to the process and to choose to follow what shall be considered as a “no regret” option which would at any time allow for necessary adjustments to the ongoing progress as regards the physical integration in the region and the development of all relevant potential market externalities.

5. Based upon harmonisation instruments enshrined within the Third Energy Package, taking into account all existing platforms for regional cooperation of NRAs (National Regulatory Authorities) and TSOs (Transmission System Operators) and institutional framework established therein, the Parties hereby conclude to undertake all necessary actions in order to create an optimal regulatory and business environment which will enable them to take the final decision on the advanced market model for the V4 region at the point of time when key data to devise the final strategy will be available.
6. As an initial step and a key regulatory measure within the process, the Parties hereby decide to streamline the cooperation regarding the enforcement of the EU Network Codes, based on the enhanced cooperation between NRAs and TSOs as the “no regret” option for the V4 region. However, any V4 actions towards joint implementation of the EU Network Codes shall take into consideration and result from the impetus given at the European forum to the process of early implementation of Network Codes’ provisions before they become legally binding. Such process has already started in 2012 within the Gas Regional Initiative with the launch of the Roadmap for early implementation of the Capacity Allocation Mechanisms Network Code (CAM NC) for gas which aims at fostering the early implementation of CAM NC through pilot projects at selected cross-border interconnection points in EU Member States. Based on experience gained from this first project-oriented cross-regional CAM NC Roadmap similar approach is currently discussed to be taken for the early implementation of other Network Codes.
7. Having regard the above top-down process, the Parties invite TSOs supported by NRAs to undertake a coordinated actions at the regional level targeted at most coherent and effective implementation of Network Codes. This shall include:
 - the Capacity Allocation Mechanism (CAM NC) with a particular consideration given to a common North-South bundled capacity product combining all relevant interconnection points (IPs) within the V4 region;
 - and possible cooperation on further network codes such as:
 - the Network Code on Gas Balancing of Transmission Networks (BAL NC);
 - the Network Code on Interoperability and Data Exchange Rules (INT NC) in order to improve system interoperability within the V4 and harmonize the technical frameworks inside the V4 region.
8. With regard to high level market models considered for the integration of V4 region i.e. national market areas, cross-border market areas, trading region or market coupling), the Parties invite TSOs to perform an operational study evaluating the feasibility of multi-coupled market zones model in the V4 region. The operational study shall include analysis of legal and technical prerequisites, preliminary requirements for its implementation as well as resulting costs and benefits.

9. Should the results of operational study prove multi-coupled market zones model the best suited model to foster market integration in the V4 region it shall be considered by the V4 Ministers of Energy as a first step towards developing the final regional V4 market design.

Institutional framework for the process

10. The Parties stress the need for the efficient institutional organisation of the process of the regionalisation of the V4 gas market. The top-down approach is envisaged where the leading role is attributed to the V4 Ministers of Energy who shall provide for the necessary political impetus and shall be responsible for the decision-making on the final regional V4 market design in the future.
11. The Parties hereby establish the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration which shall provide political support and coordination among ministries, national regulatory authorities and also transmission system operators and shall navigate the regulatory harmonisation with a goal to assist in the joint implementation of relevant Network Codes and streamlining the cooperation as regards potential for the implementation of the final regional V4 market design.
12. Details regarding the operational structure, as well as Terms of Reference of the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration, shall be agreed by Ministries for Energy.

External dimension of the V4 gas market integration

13. The Parties hereby express their readiness to extend the framework of the V4 cooperation in field of gas market integration in particular towards Baltic States, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova and Croatia.

Timetable of the process

	Task	Timescale	Responsible body
	Central and Eastern Europe Gas Regional Investment Plans (CEE GRIP) agreed	06.2014	TSOs
Infrastructure	Implementation of the key interconnection projects in the V4 region	2017/2018	TSOs
	Poland-Slovakia (subject to FID)	2017/2018	GAZ-SYSTEM S.A./ Eustream, a.s.
	Slovakia-Hungary	2015	Eustream, a.s./ Magyar Gáz Tranzit Zrt.
	Poland-Czech Republic (subject to FID)	2017/2018	GAZ-SYSTEM S.A./ NET4GAS, s.r.o.
Institution	V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration established	06.2013	V4 Summit
	Approving the operational structure and Terms of Reference for the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration	10.2013	Ministers of Energy

	Task	Timescale	Responsible body
Regulatory framework	Actions towards joint implementation of the EU Network Codes initiated:		
	– Capacity Allocation Mechanism	as from 2014	TSOs (with NRAs)
	– Gas Balancing of Transmission Networks		
	– Interoperability and Data Exchange Rules		
Operational study on market coupling in the V4 region agreed, including the following elements:			
– the description and design of the North-South bundled capacity product to be offered to the market	06.2014	TSOs (with NRAs)	
– Form, main milestones and timeline of the V4 market coupling			
	North-South bundled capacity product offered to the market	2015	TSOs (with NRAs)
	Decision on the steps forward in the view of the final V4 market design	06.2014	Ministers of Energy

Warsaw, 16 June, 2013

12. Visegrad Group plus Japan Joint Statement *Partnership based on common values for the 21st century*

The Visegrad Group (V4) plus Japan Summit Meeting, the first discussion by the V4 with an Asian country at this level, was successfully held in Warsaw on 16 June 2013. The Meeting commemorated the 10th anniversary of the V4 plus Japan cooperation. The participating countries were represented by: Prime Minister Petr Nečas of the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, Prime Minister Donald Tusk of the Republic of Poland, Prime Minister Robert Fico of the Slovak Republic.

The V4 and Japan (hereinafter jointly referred to as “both sides”) reviewed the scope of their cooperation and common activities, intending to take further steps to enhance mutual relations in the future.

Both sides decided to mark 2014 as the V4 plus Japan Exchange Year with a view to celebrating the 10th anniversary and further strengthening their close ties.

Recognizing shared universal values and principles, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, freedom, and market-based economy, both sides pointed out that cooperation between the V4 countries and Japan represents an integral part of, and a tangible added value to the EU-Japan strategic partnership.

I. Equal partners united by bonds of universal values

Both sides confirmed that the V4 and Japan, sharing universal values and working together as equal partners on a range of international issues, have attained a new dimension of cooperation, described as “Partnership Based on Common Values for the 21st Century”.

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed that a partnership of countries sharing universal values has become relevant and necessary for peace and prosperity around the world. Japan highly appreciated the V4, which, having successfully accomplished the process of democratization in the early 1990s and having joined the EU in 2004, plays a key role in the EU as a leader in advancing democracy, especially in Eastern Europe.

Sharing their commitment to democracy and the rule of law, Japan and the V4 countries expressed readiness to pool their efforts to promote good governance and rule-driven cooperation in international relations and the global economy.

Significance of the Eastern Partnership

Japan underscored its support for the EU Eastern Partnership Policy, which contributes to the democratization and promotion of market economy in Eastern Europe. The V4 and Japan recognized that Japan and the EU had a common interest in further exploring possible areas of cooperation relating to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and expressed a strong desire to develop Japan-EU relations through V4 plus Japan cooperation.

Japan welcomed the V4’s commitment to sharing experience on reform and transition with the Eastern European partners, as well as the V4 initiative “Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership” (V4EaP) designed by the International Visegrad Fund. The program will facilitate systematic transformation and democratization of the Eastern Partnership countries. The V4 and EaP Program implemented by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) could be a suitable platform for future joint activities of the V4 and Japan. Both sides recognized that the “Visegrad Group and Japan, together for Eastern Partnership” seminar and the Open Discussion held jointly with the Josai University Educational Corporation in Tokyo in February 2013, contributed to strengthening cooperation between the V4 and Japan on the Eastern Partnership.

Japan intends to send a high-level representative to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Vilnius in November 2013 to strengthen future cooperation.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) cooperation

The V4 values Japan’s ODA to developing countries in the world, especially in Eastern Partnership countries. Japan welcomes the fact that the V4 countries have become an integral part of the global donor community.

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed their continuous engagement in promoting democracy and market-based economy around the world. Both sides expressed their intention to share knowledge and experiences in development cooperation and to identify effective ways for exchanging their experience in ODA in EaP countries. In this regard, both sides expressed their willingness to hold an ODA seminar, with a view to building on their existing experience in ODA in EaP countries and the Western Balkans. Furthermore, Japan announced that it would appoint a liaison officer at each Japanese Embassy in all V4 countries to establish an efficient mechanism for communicating information on Japan’s ODA in the EaP partner countries. The V4 welcomed the Japan’s initiative and reiterated their readiness to coordinate their own ODA programs.

Collaboration with relevant organizations and formats

Japan expressed its great appreciation for the V4's role in the Community of Democracies, the International Center for Democratic Transition, and the European Endowment for Democracy. The V4 underlined the positive role that Japan plays in the Community of Democracies and other international fora.

II. Cooperation in the Security Areas

The V4 and Japan discussed security issues in the global and regional dimensions. Both sides reiterated their commitment to cooperating in the United Nations, the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as with other multilateral institutions, to promote and build global security. Both sides stressed that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, cyber-terrorism, proliferation of missiles and missile technology, organized crime and illicit transfer of arms continue to represent a serious threat to international security and economy.

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed the importance of maintaining order on seas and oceans based on international law and the freedom and safety of navigation. Both sides stressed that oceans, as a common good of all peoples, should be open, free and secure, and underlined the importance of upholding these principles on the basis of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Both sides welcomed the development of relationships between Japan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as lying in the common security interest. In this spirit, both sides reiterated their commitment to enhanced political dialogue and greater practical cooperation on common global challenges in areas of mutual interest. The V4 and Japan also confirmed that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Partners for Cooperation play complementary roles in promoting security in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions, as well as in Asia and the Mediterranean region. The V4 and Japan also confirmed that crisis management and post-conflict peace-building activities conducted by the EU under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are of special importance for countries emerging from conflict.

Both sides expressed the view that stability and development in East Asia is indispensable for peace and prosperity of the international community as a whole. The V4 and Japan recognized that security in East Asia and Europe is closely interlinked, and decided to enhance mutual understanding of their respective security concerns in the regions. Both sides concurred on the importance of adhering to the principles of international law, especially in maritime domains. In this regard, they acknowledged the importance of maintaining effective export controls of arms and dual-use items and technologies in the region.

The V4 and Japan expressed their grave concern over North Korea's nuclear and missile development programs, including its uranium enrichment program, and condemned in the strongest terms North Korea's nuclear test on 12 February 2013 and its missile launches in April and December 2012, as clear violations of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. Both sides urged North Korea to take concrete action towards denuclearization as well as to fully implement the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions, including Resolution 2094 and the 2005 Six Party Talks Joint Statement. Both sides also expressed concern over human rights violations in North Korea, and strongly urged North Korea to address without delay the humanitarian concerns of the international community, including the abductions issue.

Both sides reiterated their commitment to supporting efforts to build a stable, peaceful and self-reliant Afghanistan beyond 2014. Given recent developments, the V4 and Japan share concerns

about security and the humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, North Africa and the Middle East.

In relation to Iran's nuclear program, the V4 and Japan reaffirmed that Iran needs to fully comply with its international obligations, including the relevant International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions without further delay in order to restore

international confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Both sides underlined their support for the EU 3 plus 3 talks seeking a comprehensive, negotiated and long-term settlement to the Iranian nuclear issue.

For the purpose of deepening cooperation in the security area, the V4 and Japan expressed their intention to hold a V4 plus Japan Security Seminar during the Hungarian V4 Presidency, which begins in July 2013.

Cooperation in the UN

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed the importance of the UN reform in all aspects, with particular emphasis on the Security Council reform. Both sides stressed the necessity to improve its effectiveness, transparency and representativeness in order to reflect the reality of today's international community. In this respect, both sides reiterated their will to work together to achieve reform of the UN Security Council, including enlargement in both the permanent and non-permanent categories of the Council.

III. Cooperation in the fields of economy, science, technology and innovation

The V4 and Japan reiterated that both sides have a common goal to develop result-oriented cooperation in the fields of economy, science, technology and innovation. Japan recognized that the V4's dynamically developing markets offer attractive opportunities for Japanese companies, and the V4 recognized that Japanese companies operating in the V4 markets contribute to job creation. The V4 emphasized the important role the IVF plays in advancing cooperation in these fields".

Energy cooperation and Climate cooperation

The V4 and Japan discussed their achievements in such fields as nuclear energy, environment, energy saving and renewable energy. The V4 and Japan expressed their great interest in deepening mutual cooperation in the aforementioned areas. Japan reaffirmed its duty to contribute to strengthening worldwide nuclear safety by sharing knowledge and lessons learned from the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The V4 and Japan welcomed the fact that private sectors of both sides demonstrated keen interest in concrete forms of cooperation in nuclear energy and safety. To explore further opportunities of cooperation in energy efficiency, the V4 states are invited to join the upcoming GSEP (Global Superior Energy Performance Partnership) seminar to be organized by Poland and Japan in Warsaw in autumn 2013.

The V4 and Japan expressed their commitment to cooperate in a constructive manner in global climate negotiations in order to deliver by 2015 a new, fair and effective international framework applicable to all Parties, especially in the context of forthcoming Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP19,Warsaw, November 2013).

Expanding trade, investment and cooperation with respect to small and medium enterprises

Both sides expressed their confidence that strengthening economic ties, including trade and investment, as well as exchanging views about small and medium enterprises is necessary for maintaining and developing overall relations between the V4 and Japan.

The V4 and Japan reaffirmed that a comprehensive Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)/Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would improve access to markets for Japanese and V4's companies and thus strengthen economic relations between both sides.

Science, technology and innovation cooperation

Promoting cooperation in the fields of science, technology and innovation in a comprehensive manner mutually benefits the V4 and Japan. The V4 emphasized the important role the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) plays in advancing cooperation in these fields. The V4 and Japan welcomed efforts by the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) and the IVF, together with the Slovak Academy of Science (SAS), to jointly host the "SAS-IVF-JST Workshop" in Slovakia in July 2013.

IV. The V4 plus Japan Exchange Year 2014 for promoting people-to-people contacts

The V4 and Japan underlined the importance of promoting people-to-people exchanges in various fields, such as culture, trade and tourism, jointly by Governments and private sectors. Both sides support the idea of appointing Goodwill Ambassadors to promote the V4 plus Japan Exchange Year 2014.

V4 solidarity after the Great East Japan Earthquake

Close solidarity between the V4 and Japan has been proven by the moral and material support provided by the V4 after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Japan expressed sincere gratitude for the support received from the governments and the peoples of the V4 countries. The V4 expressed admiration for the courage and resilience of the people and the government of Japan during the two post-disaster years, when a remarkable reconstruction was achieved.

With a view to accelerating reconstruction efforts, both sides consider it important that Japan continue to provide sufficient information on food safety and the current radioactivity levels in the affected area in a timely manner, so that trade between the V4 and Japan could be further strengthened.

Culture and education

The V4 and Japan underlined their great appreciation for the ongoing efforts by both governments and private sectors to deepen mutual understanding through various activities that promote their respective national cultures. The V4 praised the "Cool Japan" policy, which aims to foster understanding of Japanese culture around the world. Both sides especially welcomed efforts by the Central European Noh and Kyogen Culture Association to foster young experts and promote student exchanges.

The V4 and Japan expressed their appreciation for the endeavor by educational institutions to develop language education and promote student exchange programs. Both sides also welcomed the fact that more classes of the V4 countries' languages are now being offered in educational institutions in Japan. The V4 and Japan encouraged the Japan Foundation Office in Budapest, the Museum of Japanese Art and Technology Manggha in Cracow, Comenius University in Bratislava and Charles University in Prague to continue to play an active role in the enhancement of the quality of Japanese language and culture education in the V4 region.

The V4 and Japan expressed their intention to support the development of tourism in their respective countries, as a way to achieve better mutual understanding.

Further interaction among young people

Exchanges among young people are the cornerstone of strengthening future relations between the V4 and Japan. In this perspective, the V4 and Japan underlined the value of the Working Holiday schemes that would encourage further people-to-people interactions and contacts between young people.

V. Future dialogues

The V4 and Japan expressed a strong desire to further develop the Partnership based on common values through various dialogues.

To further deepen mutual understanding and cooperation, the V4 and Japan underlined the importance of keeping high level dialogue on a regular basis through V4 plus Japan Summits and Foreign Ministers' Meetings.

Both sides expressed their intention to establish a periodical dialogue between the V4 Presidency and Ambassadors of Japan accredited to the V4 countries, and a dialogue between the V4 Ambassadors accredited to Japan and Japanese authorities for the purpose of pursuing further cooperation in the V4 countries.

Furthermore, both sides expressed their intention to establish the V4 plus Japan Policy Planning Dialogue to deepen mutual understanding of international issues.

Japan announced that it would invite the Prime Minister of Hungary, the holder of the next V4 Presidency, to follow up on the present V4 plus Japan Summit Meeting during his official visit to Japan.

Warsaw, 16 June, 2013

13. Joint Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Countries and Croatia on the Occasion of the Croatian Accession to the EU

The Foreign Ministers of the V4 countries and Croatia acknowledging that

Since their accession to the European Union, the V4 countries have been providing strong political support to the EU enlargement process by keeping this issue high on the EU's agenda and by transferring their unique experience in the field of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Hungarian and then the Polish Presidencies of the Council of the European Union succeeded in giving new impetus to the accession negotiations.

The term of the outgoing Polish V4 Presidency has overlapped with the final phase of Croatia's EU accession, meanwhile Hungary will take over the rotating V4 Presidency on July 1, 2013 – the day Croatia becomes the 28th Member State of the EU. The accession will open a new window of opportunity for Croatia who will become one of the creators of common EU policy thus sharing the responsibility for Europe's future.

Regional cooperation is the cornerstone of the European integration. Following the country's accession to the EU, the V4 countries express their readiness to share their experience relating to the initial stages of EU membership with Croatia. Similarly, Croatia's experience with accession will be extremely valuable for other applicant countries and can contribute substantially to the improvement of regional cooperation.

Underlying the need for closer cooperation contributing to reach stronger positions of the region and towards a strong, stable and democratic Europe, the V4 countries and Croatia, as a new EU Member State intend:

- to further develop and strengthen the European integration process;
- to support EU's further enlargement policy, especially regarding the Western Balkans;
- to actively support the European Neighbourhood Policy, with special emphasis on the Eastern Partnership;
- to pursue joint political and project-oriented activities;
- to step up jointly in tackling regional challenges of mutual concern in the first phase of the cooperation outlined by the Program of the upcoming Hungarian V4 Presidency, particularly to clear the infrastructural bottlenecks in the region and to develop the North-South axis of the region's road and rail transport network and to enhance energy security;
- to encourage the cultural exchange of the V4 countries and Croatia to stimulate people-to-people contacts and intensify the civil society ties;
- to deepen the sectoral cooperation among them.

On July 1st 2013 Croatia will become the 28th member of the European Union. The V4 has been and will continue to be a strong supporter and promoter of the very successful EU enlargement policy that will continue to offer new opportunities for all the concerned. We are looking forward to Croatia joining us in this endeavour.

Budapest, 26 June, 2013

Recommended links:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/>

The Visegrad Group: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/>

The International Visegrad Fund: <http://visegradfund.org/>