



## PROGRAMME OF THE PRESIDENCY

### Introduction

Celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021, Visegrad Cooperation has stood the test of time and continues to provide a successful framework for regional cooperation in Central Europe. The challenges and crises affecting Europe and the world, including the COVID-19 pandemic that has profoundly impacted all aspects of life, further increase the importance of the V4 format. The Visegrad countries have helped each other in different challenges, which demonstrated the strength of regional solidarity and cooperation. Collaboration during the current crisis and the following recovery can be a solid basis for successful cooperation in the next thirty years, to which the V4 countries committed themselves also in the Prime Ministers' joint declaration issued on 17 February 2021 to celebrate the Visegrad Group's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the shared goal of the Visegrad countries to be among those who benefit from the global economic and political changes. With its population of 64 million, the V4 is an indispensable actor in the post-Brexit European Union. As NATO and EU members, thirty years after the regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe the V4 represents one of the most dynamic regions in the Union, based on high economic growth and employment, rapid digital transformation and robust investment. The Visegrad countries feel responsible for Europe's future, preserving its values and principles, and supporting the EU's further enlargement. We are interested in a stable and secure Europe, continuing V4 cooperation in addressing current challenges, e.g. climate change, digital transformation and migration. A Europe founded on the values of respect for human dignity and human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, equality and the rule of law, with a thriving civil society and a free media, as well as regional diversity, and the respect for shared values and principles. A Europe that fully utilizes the potential of green economy and digitalisation to remain globally competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Visegrad countries are ready to cooperate with the parallel Slovenian and French, as well as with the upcoming Czech Presidencies of the Council of the European Union, with the 2021 Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and the Polish Chairmanship in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2022.

In these difficult times, the main task of the Visegrad Group and thus of the sixth Hungarian V4 Presidency from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022 is to reinforce cooperation so as to contribute to common European solutions and our region's and Europe's resilience, security and stability, as well as to post-pandemic economic and social reopening and recovery. At the same time, our main goals include representing the V4's constructive ideas in the European Union and strengthening V4+ partnerships in the context of a revitalising diplomatic life after the pandemic.

The reopening of the borders enables the citizens of the V4 countries to discover the unique cultural and touristic treasures of the safe and geographically close Central European region, having in mind the restrictions that currently apply to global travel. In support of relaunching the economy, the Presidency will facilitate initiatives in this regard, which also contributes to strengthening people-to-people connections.

**Priorities of the Hungarian V4 Presidency:**

- 1. Stability**            *(EU coordination and Europe's future; MFF, Next Generation EU and cohesion; security and stability)*
- 2. Reopening**        *(In the economy; In the society)*
- 3. Partnership**      *(Parliamentary dimension; European V4+ cooperation; Global V4+ cooperation)*

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# 1. STABILITY

*Representing common positions within the European Union in areas of common interest; joint contribution to the stability and security of our continent.*

## V4 coordination in the European Union

The long-established V4 cooperation has retained its relevance even after the achievement of its Euro-Atlantic integration objectives. Acting together in a coherent and consistent way in the V4 and V4+ frameworks enables the broader Central European region to channel its common voice into the EU decision-making.

One of the key elements of the V4's success is that the four countries are able to identify areas in which their interests coincide, and represent common positions on the EU-level. One of these areas is the **discussion about the future of Europe**. The Hungarian Presidency will continue the dialogue and common thinking on this issue.

The objectives set out in the V4 Prime Ministers' 2018 joint declaration "**Stronger Together**" as well as those in the **2021 Declaration of the V4 Prime Ministers on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Group** remain the cornerstone of the European policies of the V4. All four countries remain interested in a **strong and efficient European Union**. We firmly believe that the **Member States** must be involved as deeply as possible in the Union's decision-making processes based on the principle of subsidiarity, proportionality and equality. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU in January 2021 represents a profound loss for the EU, from which the right conclusions must be drawn.

With regard to **EU policies**, emphasis should be placed on areas where there is a **consensus** among Member States so that real progress can be achieved (e.g. enhancing economic cooperation, enhancing tax administrative cooperation, improving competitiveness).

The **internal market** and the **Schengen system** are **key achievements** of the EU that have been seriously jeopardised because of the coronavirus pandemic; and we need to restore their proper functioning as soon as possible. The EU must adapt to the changes caused by the pandemic in all areas, finding its **global role** in the new world order. Europe also has to put more emphasis on **international assistance and solidarity** by bringing the help where it is needed. The **Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans** is essential in ensuring the region's stability. Therefore, supporting the EU enlargement process, including the integration efforts of the Western Balkan partners, is a priority for the Hungarian Presidency.

The Hungarian V4 Presidency is committed to the motto "**United in Diversity**" that refers to the close cooperation among Member States, which is based on national and regional diversity as well as national identities, which ultimately unite Member States along their shared values and principles.

In line with the above, **the Hungarian Presidency will continue to coordinate V4 positions** to enable joint action at different EU levels. In doing so, the V4 will cooperate constructively with all partners, **Member States and EU institutions, including the rotating Presidencies of the Council of the European Union**.

- V4+ high-level dialogue with the incumbent Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- Consultations of the V4 Prime Ministers before European Council meetings
- V4 consultations before the meetings of the General Affairs Council and the Foreign Affairs Council
- Coordination of V4 positions within the Council's preparatory bodies
- Issuing joint political statements and non-papers based on V4 position coordination, in order to strengthen the region's voice in the EU

**During the Hungarian V4 Presidency, V4 and V4+ coordination within the European Union will focus on dossiers under negotiation in the following areas:**

- Implementation of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and the Next Generation EU recovery package
- Advancing the debate on migration
- Schengen reform
- Internal market
- Climate and energy policy, sustainability
- Digitalisation
- Employment and social policy
- Agriculture
- International development policy

Conference on the future of Europe

The Presidency also supports V4 cooperation and proactive participation in the context of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, as mentioned in the 17 February 2021 declaration of the V4 Prime Ministers, and aims to involve the incumbent **Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the common thinking**.

In this structured dialogue, the Presidency will focus on the following basic principles:

- Strategic thinking: as the European Union's economic power is challenged by global developments, strategic thinking is of paramount importance. Instead of a reactive approach to crises, proactivity is needed in areas where the Member States' positions coincide, with special regard to increasing competitiveness, just climate transition and digitalisation. Part of the strategic approach is to accelerate the integration of countries wishing to join the EU and to involve them in the debate on the future of the continent.
- Respecting the Treaties: principles declared in the Treaties, such as respect for the Member States' respective national and constitutional frameworks, the inter-institutional balance, the Member States' equality, and subsidiarity must be fully taken into account during the Conference. EU decisions must be taken as close to the citizens as possible. The inclusion of national parliaments in the process is also a priority and can further strengthen the legitimacy of the Conference. We expect all parties to the Conference to fully respect the Treaties and the commonly agreed rules.
- The culture of inclusiveness, transparency and consensus: the Conference must be based on inclusiveness, openness and transparency. Our citizens and their active participation and contribution must stay at the centre of our efforts. An effective feedback mechanism to ensure that the ideas expressed during the Conference events result in concrete recommendations for EU action is crucial. The outcome of the Conference should be reflected in a report to the European Council in 2022.

## Multiannual Financial Framework, Next Generation EU, cohesion

During the years before the epidemic, the V4 states achieved significantly higher economic growth than the EU average, showed successful and sustainable convergence, in which **cohesion policy** has an indisputable role to play. In the current situation, it is extremely important for the Member States to strengthen their economies and regain their pre-crisis competitiveness, to which the **MFF** and the **Next Generation EU** resources can effectively contribute; their proper utilization is of key importance. The main priority of the Hungarian V4 Presidency is to **share the first experiences related to the start of the new MFF period**, with a view to ensuring the continuation of effective implementation. As a result of the collection and evaluation of experiences, joint V4 positions can be successfully represented internationally, including at EU decision-making forums. Negotiations about the next, 2021-2027 financial period of the **European Economic Area's Financial Mechanisms** are expected to start during the Hungarian Presidency; therefore, our aim is to explore the possibilities of a coordinated action in this area as well.

- ➔ Ministerial meeting on cohesion policy (online or in-person) (1<sup>st</sup> half of 2022)
- ➔ Three expert-level consultations (MFF Assessment Conference, RRF experiences)
- ➔ Directors' consultation of on EEA Financial Mechanisms (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021)

## Security and Stability

*Migration, border protection and Schengen, tackling the pandemic, crisis management, interior affairs, cybersecurity*

**One of the basic goals of V4 cooperation is to strengthen the security and stability of our region.** This is facilitated by the traditionally close and effective cooperation on home affairs and internal security, which the Hungarian Presidency will pursue in the following areas.

Since the events of 2015, **migration** has occasionally been discussed at the EU's highest political level. Despite the political interest, many issues remain unresolved and migration continues to pose a serious challenge. Regarding the **new Pact on Migration and Asylum** presented by the Commission on 23 September 2020, the Hungarian V4 Presidency will strive for the coordination of positions. Special attention should be paid to identifying those solidarity instruments that are in line with the 'flexible but mandatory solidarity' principle. Moreover, the V4 should preserve its unity on the need of maintaining the package approach until everything is agreed. Partial agreements are not an option to reach our common goal for laying the foundations of a long-term common asylum system. We are convinced that the EU's migration policy and future asylum system must be discussed and decided by the European Council based on consensus. Stemming migration flows should start outside the EU's borders. Strong action should be taken against human trafficking, and the protection of the EU's external borders must be strengthened. Prevention and return are key issues. Feasible partnership agreements must be established with North African countries, the effective implementation of the EU–Turkey Statement & Action Plan should continue and the Western Balkan partners should be assisted in the return of illegal migrants residing on their territories.

In addition to a long-term strategy, it is essential to assist the **countries of origin and transit** of migration at the EU level. It is important to improve living conditions in these countries in order to prevent further migration crises, and to assist those who flee their home due to violent conflicts, including persecuted Christian minorities. The Hungarian Presidency will

work to maintain and strengthen **V4 international development cooperation related to the external dimension of migration** and to successfully implement ongoing joint projects in Libya, Morocco and Kenya. The Presidency also supports examining the feasibility of additional V4 projects, contributing to increasing the international role of the Visegrad countries. When taking initiatives we should also not forget about the Eastern Partnership countries.

The Hungarian Presidency will also strengthen V4 cooperation on **border- and alien policing** with a particular focus on the proper implementation of bilateral readmission agreements.

The Presidency is committed to **restoring the unity of the Schengen area**. The proper external and internal functioning of the Schengen system is not only one of the key steps to economic recovery, but also an essential element of the fundamental freedoms of the EU.

Given our experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening the region's **resilience to crises** is a presidency priority, in line with the Joint Declaration of V4 Prime Ministers issued in Cracow on 17 February 2021. Accordingly, the Presidency will continue **V4 cooperation in fighting COVID-19**, building on the experiences of the virtual V4 Information Exchange Centre for COVID-19, established in 2020. Multi-level cooperation in **disaster management** will also continue, with a view to examining ways of an enhanced cooperation in this field.

In the field of **cybersecurity**, the Hungarian Presidency will continue V4 coordination related to home affairs and defence, including cyber issues on the EU agenda. Cooperation between **national cyber-security organizations and network security centres** aimed at strengthening the resilience of **critical infrastructures, especially in the health sector**, and detecting and countering risks and attacks from cyberspace, are important goals. In addition, based on the successful coordination between the EU Member States' special envoys/coordinators for cybersecurity, the Presidency will examine the launching of a regular regional consultation on **cybersecurity/cyber-diplomacy**. The Hungarian Presidency will also initiate a consultation on the margins of a summer university planned under the CASPA project. We support **V4+ cooperation** in the field of cybersecurity with interested external partners such as the United Kingdom.

As members of our alliance system, the V4 must remain committed to strengthening the fight against radicalisation, **terrorism and violent extremism**, which will be a topic for expert level consultation under the Presidency. Addressing the root causes of terrorism locally, and finding the right balance between operational and humanitarian action is in our strategic interest. The Visegrad countries should also monitor the security risks posed by returning terrorist fighters, the spread of online terrorist content, the increasingly sophisticated forms of terrorism financing, and the possible use of new technologies for terrorist purposes.

Consultations between the V4 countries' foreign ministries' security policy directors will also continue during the Hungarian Presidency.

Taking into account the Polish Chairmanship in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2022, the Hungarian V4 Presidency will also conduct expert-level consultations on the OSCE in order to identify possibilities to support the Chairmanship-in-Office.

In addition to the above, the Presidency will continue the successful V4/V4+ cooperation related to **fighting organized crime, human trafficking and drugs**, as well as **law enforcement** and **counter-terrorism**.

- ➔ Meetings of Ministers of Interior (coordination of positions on EU affairs; defining the directions for home affairs cooperation) (Autumn 2021, February 2022, June 2022)
- ➔ Executive and expert-level meetings and conferences in the fields specified in this chapter (see *Event Calendar*)

### *Defence policy and military cooperation*

The successful, multi-layered **V4 defence policy and military cooperation** will continue during the Hungarian Presidency, contributing to the security of our region, NATO and the EU as well.

The Presidency aims to make progress in the areas of cooperation identified in the **V4 Action Plan** updated during the 2020-21 Polish Presidency, with particular focus on the V4 flagship defence projects: the **V4 EU Battlegroup (EU BG)**, the **V4 Joint Logistic Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ)**, and **joint exercises**. In this framework, our goal is to prepare for the next stand-by period of the **V4 EU BG in the first half of 2023**; to support the implementation of the first **qualification exercise of the V4 JLSG HQ**, which is our common NATO capability target; and to strengthen the tradition of joint **V4 trainings and exercises**. There is also a potential in **benefitting from joint procurements**, so the Presidency supports the continuation of the related efforts. We will also examine the possibility of **joint participation in missions and operations**.

The Hungarian Presidency is ready to review and, if necessary, streamline our existing V4 defence cooperation mechanisms, to support the effective implementation of the goals set out in the new **Long Term Vision** for V4 defence cooperation revised in 2020.

**V4+ high-level dialogue with our strategic partners** (e.g. the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and France), as well as cooperation with the **non-V4 countries of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC)** will continue, with a special focus on emerging challenges.

The Presidency also plans to deepen cooperation related to the **social and cultural aspects** of defence cooperation (e.g. territorial defence forces, V4 cadet programmes, Military Chaplain Services and the maintenance of war graves). As part of this, we will initiate an exchange of views and best practices about, among other things, the creation and development of **reserve forces** (e.g. questions of training, and their role in crisis situations).

**NATO's successful military adaptation** is crucial. The process will arrive at a critical phase during the Hungarian V4 Presidency, so coordinating V4 positions and representing our region's unique perspectives is a priority. Due to its geo-strategic situation, Central Europe is the region where the **utilisation of the 360-degree-approach is an imperative**. In this respect, emphasis will be given to both consolidating the V4 military presence on the eastern flank, and addressing the challenges emanating from the south.

The Presidency will promote the increasing of **V4 contribution to NATO's command and control structures** in our region, and deepen cooperation in the framework of the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin, the Headquarters Multinational Division Northeast in Elbląg and the Headquarters Multinational Division Centre in



Székesfehérvár. We will launch a discussion also about the role of the **Centres of Excellence** in the V4 region. **Increasing the readiness and availability of our forces**, especially in the context of the NATO Response Force and the NATO Readiness Initiative, will also be a priority.

**The stability of the Western Balkans and Eastern European countries is critical for the V4.** In this context, the Hungarian Presidency's aim is to explore how the Visegrad countries can, in cooperation with these regions, help tackle the challenges faced by the Western Balkans and Eastern partners. This is also underpinned by the fact that Hungary will hold the position of the commander of the KFOR mission for a year, from November 2021.

The V4 will continue supporting the strengthening of **transatlantic cooperation**. We emphasise the importance of the United States' continued political and military commitment to NATO and Europe's security. At the same time, the V4 will continue increasing investment in our own security to reinforce NATO's overall capabilities and contribute to the operations and missions of the Alliance. Our objective is to meet the goal of spending at least 2% of the GDP on defence, as decided at the NATO 2014 Summit in Wales.

The Hungarian Presidency is committed to further increasing **the relevance and credibility of the European Union as a security provider** underpinned by the necessary means and capabilities, while assuring complementarity and avoiding duplication with NATO, in line with the single set of forces principle. It is our goal to integrate V4 objectives and interests in elaborating the Strategic Compass, a document crucial to the coherent and output-oriented development of CSDP.

At the same time, we will pay particular attention to fulfilling commitments related to **ongoing defence initiatives**, including the successful implementation of **Permanent Structured Cooperation** (PESCO) projects. The Presidency will also focus on the follow-up of the CARD report, exploiting the potential of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in order to seek the possibility of implementing regional projects in the V4/V4+ format, and launching the robust implementation of the European Peace Facility (EPF).

The V4 must keep up our coordinated efforts to strengthen **EU-NATO cooperation** and facilitate progress in the field of **military mobility** as well. Enhanced cooperation in relation to **hybrid and cyber threats**, as well as emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) is increasingly important.

- V4 meetings of Defence Ministers (September 2021 and April 2022)
- V4+CEDC meeting of Defence Ministers (on the margins of the September V4 meeting)
- V4+US meeting of Defence Ministers (on the margins of the NATO Defence Ministerial Meeting, 21-22 October 2021)
- V4 meetings of Chiefs of Defence (October 2021 and May/June 2022)
- V4+Germany+France meeting of Defence Ministers (on the margins of the EU Defence Ministerial Meeting, 16 November 2021)
- V4+UK meeting of Defence Ministers (on the margins of the NATO Defence Ministerial Meeting, 16-17 February 2022)
- V4 security conference on the Western Balkans with the participation of Defence Ministers (on the margins of the April 2022 V4 Defence Ministers' meeting)
- Consultations and events on various levels covering security policy, defence policy and planning and military topics (see event calendar)

## *Judicial cooperation*

The Presidency will continue V4 **judicial cooperation**, via expert level consultations.

- V4 expert meeting on civil law cooperation (spring, 2022)
- V4 expert level conference about the implementation of the EU Strategy on victims' rights 2020-25 (2022 Q1)
- Bilateral exchanges of good practices on victim assistance among V4 countries

## 2. REOPENING...

*Supporting social reopening and the relaunching of the economy in the V4 region through sustainable, digital and innovative regional solutions.*

### ...In the economy

The economic restart after the COVID-19 pandemic will be followed by **major economic development projects in Europe**, utilising the available dedicated EU financial means. In this process, **V4 and broader regional partnerships** can effectively complement national efforts. The relaunching of the economy will increasingly rely on **green and circular economy and digitalization**. The Hungarian V4 Presidency wishes to contribute to this endeavour on a regional level in the following fields.

#### Economic policy, financial cooperation

Under the Hungarian Presidency, the main goal of V4 cooperation in the field of economy and finance is **crisis management** and the **sharing of economic policy expertise and good practices in managing post-pandemic economic recovery**. The V4 have been able to maintain the relative stability of their national budgets even during COVID, which, along with the proper management of sovereign debt, has contributed to maintaining financial stability. The Presidency will initiate **coordination concerning relevant initiatives on the EU fora** to ensure that new EU-level fiscal rules and financial solutions are in line with V4 interests. V4 cooperation started during the Polish Presidency in important fields like joint action against **tax fraud**, the **taxation of digital economy**, an efficient and fair **climate transition**, and other issues on the **ECOFIN** agenda where V4 interests are similar.

→ Meeting of V4 Ministers of Finance on current priority topics

We will continue to elaborate a coordinated V4 position on the establishment of **the planned EU-level anti-money laundering supervisory authority**, building on the V4 position elaborated in 2020.

→ V4 expert consultation on the EU anti-money laundering system (Q4 2021)

Continuing the traditionally good V4 cooperation in the field of **financial regulation**, the Presidency will put a special emphasis on **financial digitalization, fintech** and **raising financial awareness**. The Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union, banking crisis management and non-performing loans also remain important topics for discussion.

→ V4 expert consultation on financial regulation (Spring 2022)

The Presidency will facilitate V4 consultation also about the **reform of the revenue side of the EU budget**. The introduction of new own resources that are simple, transparent, fair and efficient, provide sufficient and stable revenues in the longer term, respect the fiscal sovereignty of the Member States and do not harm national budgetary interests, is a common V4 interest.

→ V4 expert consultation on new own resources (2nd half of 2021)

The Hungarian Presidency will initiate a V4+ exchange of experiences and the presentation of good practices related to the **Territorial Agenda 2030** document's implementation that starts in 2021, as well as to territorial programme planning and the fulfilment of territorial dimensions.

→ V4+ territorial cohesion expert meeting (October 2021)

During the Presidency, V4 consultation continues about the progress of the **competitiveness operational programmes** and on current issues concerning EU funds.

→ V4+ international conference on the use of EU funds (Autumn 2021/Spring 2022)

The Presidency also supports V4 coordination on **reducing regional socio-economic disparities**, which is a priority for all V4 countries in the 2021-2027 EU planning period.

We will continue the effective **V4 cooperation in the field of tax and customs, law enforcement and fighting crime**, by stepping up the work of tax and customs thematic expert groups in the fight against fraud and enhancing administrative cooperation in the field of tax, and operational activities.

→ Executive and expert level meetings of V4 tax and customs authorities, V4+ coordination, continuing the V4 training program and initiating an exchange programme

In 2022, the Presidency plans to organise a **V4+ conference and business forum** on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hungary's membership in the IMF and the World Bank, with the high-level participation of representatives of these institutions.

The Presidency also facilitates V4 expert dialogue on human capital challenges related to **debt management, public finances and ageing society**.

→ V4+Slovenia+Romania Public Debt Management Workshop (November 2021)

→ Budapest Pension Seminar with V4+ participation (23 September 2021)

→ Public finance seminar with V4+ participation (May 2022)

The Hungarian Presidency supports the strengthening of cooperation among **V4 central banks**.

→ Meeting of V4 Central Bank Governors and conference on the "*Transition to a greener economy – Challenges and opportunities*" (July 2021)

The successful cooperation of the **Platform of V4 Export Credit Agencies**, launched during the previous Hungarian V4 Presidency, will continue to coordinate positions on export credit-related developments within the EU, OECD and the Berne Union.

→ CEO level Meeting of V4 Export Credit Agencies

The Hungarian Presidency supports the cooperation of the **V4 national development banks** and their regional partners, aimed at exchanging experiences and showcasing results related to the implementation of **InvestEU** and other financial instruments under the cohesion funds, involving representatives of the EU institutional framework as well.

- Executive and working level meeting of V4+ development banks

Cooperation between the V4 countries' **competition authorities** will also continue under the Hungarian V4 Presidency.

### Energy and climate policy

Recently, significant progress has been made in several **energy infrastructure projects** that are of strategic importance to the V4 region (access to Liquefied Natural Gas through the Świnoujście and Krk LNG terminals, gas interconnectors, nuclear new build projects, high-voltage electricity networks etc.). As a result, our region's energy security has dramatically improved. While the V4 reiterates the need to further expand regional networks, the focus of the Hungarian Presidency shall be on topics related to **new challenges**.

The Presidency will place great emphasis on discussing energy and climate related issues on the **EU agenda**, especially on a Fit for 55 package, as well as on **V4 and V4+** cooperation at various levels. Attention shall be raised to the unique geographical, economic and social circumstances and the historical heritage, especially concerning the underlying differences in natural resources and current energy mixes that shape policy-making in every Member State, including the V4 countries.

- V4 high-level discussion on energy and climate priorities with the respective Slovenian and French Presidencies of the Council of the European Union; expert consultations on EU topics (throughout the Presidency)
- V4+Germany+Australia meeting of ministers responsible for energy (2022)
- Consultation of the heads of national energy regulatory authorities
- Expert-level consultations covering current climate and energy-related issues (see *event calendar*)
- V4 high-level panel discussion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Budapest LNG Summit (6-7 December 2021)
- Preparation for the 26<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26)

Tackling **climate change** is undisputedly one of the most pressing challenges of the coming years for the Visegrad countries, the European Union and for the whole world. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that significant and urgent changes are needed to achieve the emission reduction targets set out in the Paris Agreement, as the Earth's average surface temperature is rising, making 2020 one of the all-time warmest years. In line with the Paris Agreement and the 2050 EU climate neutrality targets, the Hungarian Presidency will initiate cooperation on the most urgent related issues of regional importance, in the following topics.

The Presidency aims to have permanent consultations about the **European Green Deal and the review of the 2030 EU climate policy framework**, to help ensure a balanced and fair set of rules supporting just transition for every member state. The negotiations on the Fit for 55 legislative package will be crucial in this regard. Coordination of **V4 energy regulators** on regulatory issues arising from the European Green Deal, in particular on the future of natural gas, should be considered. The EU has set **climate neutrality by 2050 as a goal**, meaning to reach a balance between remaining GHG emissions and removals by nature. Therefore, maintaining and enhancing natural sinks like forests via sustainable forest management, sharing best practices on current forest-related issues in the region like ageing structure of forests or calamities, and other practices is a priority task.

- Review of the actions taken to achieve the 2030 climate target

The **Fit for 55 package** is a key set of documents to implement the 2030 climate target, which includes the revision of the current climate policy architecture composed of the ETS, ESR and LULUCF pillars. The IA by the European Commission has shown that the V4 countries would be especially affected by its implementation. Therefore, close V4 coordination and joint actions will be crucial to ensure a successful outcome of the package for the region.

**Just Transition in the V4 countries:** by ensuring the sharing, repeating and adapting of good practices, V4 coordination on projects eligible for funding under various EU just transition programmes (Just Transition Fund, Structural Reform Support Programme, LIFE Programme) can effectively help reach our common goals.

**The security of electricity supply** is a priority in EU markets, which can be enhanced via developing a flexible, resilient and smart electricity grid, and regional discussions on the challenges and critical issues related to the integration of renewable energy sources as well as the need to ensure zero/low-emission baseload, e.g. in the form of nuclear energy, which will allow for more effective solutions. Developing a flexible, resilient and smart electricity grid is essential; electrification will likely be the backbone of all major energy developments and investments in the coming decades. Further cooperation on **regional projects of common interest** should also be assessed.

**The role of gas in the Energy Transition:** the V4 countries agree on the role of natural gas and its existing infrastructure in energy transition; the Hungarian Presidency aims to coordinate positions in this area especially in the context of Taxonomy Regulation (and its delegated acts). The role and potential of decarbonised gas and the related infrastructure development should be explored also on a regional level, with a view to identifying possible projects of common interest.

**Nuclear energy:** the V4 are convinced that nuclear energy plays a key role in a green transition towards a climate-neutral EU, both medium and long-term. The V4, in cooperation with other like-minded countries, will follow the examination of nuclear energy by the EU, and is of the opinion that it should be finalised to ensure a level playing field among investments classified as sustainable by the EU **Taxonomy** Regulation (and its delegated acts). The Presidency will encourage V4 and V4+ cooperation on the topic of nuclear energy. Cooperation will also involve sharing best practices in the field of radioactive waste and spent fuel management.

- ➔ Ministerial-level meetings on the implementation of nuclear energy cooperation (2021)
- ➔ Expert consultations on nuclear energy in the V4 countries (2021)

**Regional Hydrogen Projects:** the future role of hydrogen in a carbon-neutral European Union still needs to be further discussed, to which the Presidency will actively contribute by initiating V4 and V4+ cooperation.

- ➔ Establishment of a joint V4 hydrogen working group to monitor EU hydrogen projects (2021)
- ➔ Supporting the V4 Energy Think Tank Platform and consultations (e.g. on hydrogen economy and technologies) (2022)

**Decarbonizing the Western Balkans:** in line with the shared V4 foreign policy priority of supporting the Western Balkans, as well as the common European climate goals, the Hungarian Presidency aims to lend V4 assistance to the energy transition process of the Western Balkans, including via cooperation with the **Western Balkans Green Centre (WBGC)** established by Hungary in 2019.

→ V4 + Western Balkans meeting of Energy Ministers (2022)

#### Transport and mobility

The Presidency will continue the work aimed at improving connectivity in the V4 region, with special regard to the missing **North-South transport links**.

Promoting **railway as a sustainable means of transportation** is a priority, also given that 2021 is the European Year of Rail. It is an especially important goal of the presidency to facilitate progress in the **V4 High Speed Railway project**. The need for recovery after the crisis caused by the pandemic makes this new, environment-friendly, reliable, safe, fast and modern transport link between the four countries even more important. Apart from technical cooperation, the Presidency will focus on **promoting the project in the context of the Trans-European transport network (TEN-T) review**, and on launching negotiations to lay the foundations for the project's future **EU funding**.

→ Ministerial meeting and working group meetings on V4 high-speed rail links

Besides the railway sector, current mobility-related topics such as **e-mobility**, the transformation of the **automotive sector** and the growing impact of the intensifying presence of **robotisation** on the region's economic performance will also be on the V4 agenda under the Hungarian Presidency.

→ V4 ministerial meeting on the margins of the RDI conference "Vehicle of the Future, Future of the Vehicle Industry" (to be held on the occasion of completing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of the ZalaZone Proving Ground in 2022)

The Presidency supports V4 cooperation in the **planning of national transport strategies** in order to strengthen key regional connections. Within this framework, the Presidency will support the comprehensive coordination of the Member States' actions and strategies concerning the TEN-T revision, also in the **Via Carpatia transport corridor**. Representing an important milestone, Hungary is expected to complete all required developments on its territory related to the Via Carpatia transport corridor during the Presidency. Poland plans to complete its further important sections. At the same time, support will be given to activities carried out in other countries during the continuation of the Via Carpatia construction.

Traditional V4 cooperation will continue on the **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**, in particular to share experiences related to the first call results of the CEF2 2021-2023 working programme, and to prepare for the next call phase.

→ Expert-level consultation on the first experiences of CEF2 implementation (2022)

Hungary is committed to continuing cooperation on the negotiations on the draft proposals of the **Single European Sky** and will aim for V4 position-coordination where it is possible.

**Decreasing or eliminating legal and administrative barriers** can strengthen internal mobility and cohesion in the V4 region and improve the living conditions of citizens living in border areas. The Presidency will continue expert cooperation in this area, taking into account the successful practices of the Benelux Union and the Nordic Council, and the results of a V4 project launched during the previous Hungarian V4 Presidency by CESCO.

- ➔ Consultations on harmonising sectoral legislation, managing administrative and legal barriers, EU instruments (e.g. ECBM) and the digitalization and administrative simplification of public procurement procedures (2021)

The Presidency will also continue the coordination of all possible V4 common activities in light of the analysis conducted by the European Commission, which shows the negative impact of the provisions of the Mobility Package on climate and environment, through examining possibilities for coordinating the positions of the V4 countries.

### Digitalisation

Building on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the February 2021 Joint Declaration of the V4 Prime Ministers on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects and the 2020-21 Polish Presidency's "Virtual Office for V4 Digital Projects" initiative, the Hungarian Presidency will give priority to **the development of digital V4 cooperation**, in the following priority structure:

#### **1. EU legislation – with a focus on a prosperous and innovative digital economy and society**

- Coordination of V4 positions on the topics set in the **Digital Compass 2030** with special emphasis on the directions of common development (digitalisation of industry, infrastructure developments, importance of digital skills, e-government)
- Coordination of positions on the **Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act** encompassing new rules regulating online trading platforms
- V4 consultation on unleashing the potential of **data economy** and on the forthcoming Data Act; establishment of a common European data framework. Coordination of positions on safety, liability and fundamental rights issues related to artificial intelligence, especially the proposed Regulation on Artificial Intelligence
- Review of the **eIDAS Regulation** and any other solutions related to e-identification, as crucial for the development of common market

#### **2. Sharing good practices and exchanging experiences in areas of strategic importance**

- **New digital trends** caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and their economic and societal impact
- Access to **open-source software** in national languages, efficient data government and regulatory framework, digital consumer protection
- **Digital regional development**, experiences of the Hungarian "smart city, smart village" programs
- **Digitalization in healthcare**, in health preservation and **sport**
- Supporting the digital transformation of **SMEs** through the European Digital Innovation Hubs and the Digital Europe Programme
- **Cybersecurity** (in accordance with the security aspects indicated in Chapter I.)



### 3. Proposals for specific projects in the field of digitalization

- Building on the 2021 February Declaration of the V4 Prime Ministers on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects and on the “**Virtual Office for V4 Digital Projects**” initiative, the Presidency will examine the possibilities of project-based cooperation in the field of digitalization (e.g. supercomputers, single digital gateway to access e-government services, cooperation between European Digital Innovation Hubs, etc.)
- Continuation of the **V4 Smart Platform project** (V4SP 2.0) launched during the previous Hungarian Presidency, aimed at introducing interoperable e-services in the V4 region (transport, mobility, tourism, mobile payments). Following the V4 dialogue in 2017-18 and the release of a “White Paper”, **V4SP 2.0 aims to launch a pilot project** during the Presidency

### 4. Foundation of a “Visegrad Group data asset network”

- Strengthening the global **data-driven economic position** of the Visegrad countries
- Facilitating cooperation and promoting the exchange of experiences in **data asset reuse**
- Promoting the use of data and digitalisation to improve **living standards** and safeguard the **environment** for future generations
- Exploitation of data to ensure that **public administration** and public services are not only efficient but also personalized and proactive
- Protecting **national and public data** while addressing their market value
- Raising awareness of the **impact of data on society** and launching a data economy to achieve data-driven decision making
- Exchanging good practices of data exploitation such as launching national public data portals
  - ➔ Expert workshop on legislative issues in the field of digitalization at the EU Permanent Representation in Brussels
  - ➔ Workshops on the implementation of joint digital projects (*see event calendar*)
  - ➔ Exchange of experience on digital solutions to overcome the economic and societal difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
  - ➔ Highlighting digital challenges and solutions in the V4 region at the Think.BDPST conference (14 October 2021)

#### Science and innovation; start-ups; space cooperation

In view of the rapid technological development, coordination between V4 countries regarding their **participation in the EU R&I framework programmes** should be further strengthened. The Presidency’s activities will primarily focus on widening the aspects of the **Horizon Europe** Programme by exchanging good practices and coordinating activities, including by **revitalizing the V4 Horizon Europe Task Force** launched under the previous Hungarian Presidency.

- ➔ V4 Horizon Europe working group meetings (2021-22)

Besides the International Visegrad Fund, the **Visegrad Patent Institute** is the only permanent intergovernmental organization established by the V4, which will celebrate the fifth anniversary of its operation on 1 July 2021. The Presidency will organise a hybrid conference on this occasion.

The Hungarian Presidency will continue the **ongoing scientific and technological cooperation of the V4 with the Republic of Korea, Japan and Israel** (*details in the chapter on V4+ partnerships*).

We encourage cooperation between **research laboratories** to further increase the international scientific recognition of the region.

- Expert consultation to review joint research opportunities, and to examine opportunities for joint participation in IPCEI projects
- Expert conference to promote the networking of V4 research laboratories (2022)

The Presidency also plans to discuss the possibility of **new initiatives**, such as the Visegrad Advanced Research Project Agency, the V4 Innovation Research Centre, a V4 Credit Rating Agency, a Common V4 Basic Research Network and a Common V4 Applied Research Network.

Continuing the discussion started under the previous Polish Presidency on a mechanism allowing V4 countries to conduct common negotiations and purchases of access to scientific information, including access to research publications and bibliographic data delivered by international publishers and data providers, is also planned.

To facilitate the development and networking of **start-ups in the V4 region**, the Presidency will continue to support V4 and V4+ programs in this field. The Presidency supports the Visegrad Fund's successful **V4 Start-up Force** mentor program Fund and its development. In addition, a four-stage **thematic start-up competition** and business investor workshop will take place in the V4 countries with a planned focus on the globally emphasized issue of sustainable growth, which will be concluded by a **regional start-up and innovation event** in Budapest, also connected to the Planet Budapest 2021 Sustainability Expo and Summit.

- V4 start-up competitions and business investor workshops in V4 countries (Q3 2021)
- Regional start-up and innovation days in Budapest (December 2021)

The Hungarian Presidency aims to **strengthen V4 space cooperation** by adopting a memorandum of understanding on the effective cooperation between V4 space industries, research institutions and universities, and on regular discussions on space issues on the agenda of the EU and other multilateral organisations. The Presidency will also initiate joint V4 participation at international events to promote Central European space capabilities. Interested external partners, such as Israel, will also be involved in the sharing of space industry experiences.

- Signing a joint Declaration of Intent on space issues (2021)
- V4 panel at the International Astronautical Congress (25-29 October 2021 / TBC)
- V4 Space Industry Day (January/February 2022)

#### Sustainability and circular economy; urban matters

**The Presidency is committed to achieving sustainability goals.** In this respect, regional cooperation and the promotion of V4 countries' results are important priorities, which will be facilitated also by the **Planet Budapest 2021 Sustainability Expo and Summit** that aims to contribute to the **sustainable development turn** in collaboration with the V4 countries, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This flagship event of the Hungarian V4 Presidency will present innovative and pragmatic sustainability solutions from the region, involving decision-makers, researchers, businesses, the education sector and the youth in the discussions.

- Planet Budapest 2021 Sustainability Expo and Summit, linked to the annual meeting of the V4 Heads of State, featuring V4 corporate, start-up and youth programmes (29 November 2021 – 5 December 2021)

Another highlight of the Presidency, the “**One with Nature**” **World of Hunting and Nature Exhibition 2021** (to be held between 25 September – 14 October 2021) aims to draw attention to the importance of the conservation of nature, sustainable nature utilization and to the benefits and necessity of sustainable and multifunctional forestry, wildlife- and fisheries management. On the margins of the World Expo, the international initiative World Conservation Forum 2021 will be launched to provide a forum for various sectoral actors to discuss the topics above.

- V4+Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia meeting of Ministers of Agriculture, linked to the “One with Nature” conference (September/October 2021)

The transition to a **circular economy** is a key sustainability issue and a major economic and social challenge for all V4 countries. We need to implement a model that takes into account the life cycle of products, prioritises more durable products and keeps materials in the economic cycle for as long as possible (refuse, reduce, repair, reuse, redesign and recycle), generates a minimal amount of completely non-recyclable waste possible thanks to innovation and new technologies or approaches. **The Presidency’s goal is to coordinate V4 positions and identify common interests** and priorities related to the EU’s new Circular Economy Action Plan, the European Green Deal, directives dealing with waste management and processing, and other relevant documents and regulations in order to reach climate-neutral, resource-efficient and circular economy.

- High-level and expert-level consultations (*see event calendar*)

The European Industrial Strategy, based on the European Green Deal, was updated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, V4 coordination remains essential. The **digital and green transformations of the industry**, if carefully implemented and financially supported, can boost the competitiveness of V4 countries without jeopardizing their achievements. Technology neutrality, fairness and solidarity, as well as a secure and affordable energy supply must also be taken into account when realising **sustainable production and the decarbonisation of the industry**. The Presidency aims to develop a coordinated V4 position based on these common interests. Special attention will be paid to supporting the transition of **energy-intensive industries**.

Today, a successful economy must be not only internationally competitive but environmentally conscious as well, contributing to meeting societal needs and demands. Rising demand for green goods and services is creating new employment opportunities, also bringing about a greater demand for new qualifications. The Presidency encourages V4 dialogue on experiences related to **green business opportunities and acquiring the related professional competencies** (e.g. waste management, eco-architecture, sustainable fashion, etc.).

- V4 Greenovation high-level conference to present green, sustainable and innovative solutions (2022)
- Conference on Green Skills Education in the V4 Vocational Education and Training System (March 2022)

In reference to the V4 Prime Ministers' jubilee declaration on 17 February 2021, the V4 states will continue their cooperation in **urban matters**, also in view of the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the World Urban Forum (WUF), to be held in Katowice, Poland from 26-30 June 2022 under the auspices of the UN-Habitat. As the first-ever WUF held in this part of Europe, this occasion is an excellent opportunity for V4 cooperation and the presentation of the Visegrad countries' achievements and experiences in urban matters. The Hungarian Presidency will facilitate this cooperation with its programs.

- V4+Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia **Urban Matters Working Group** meeting (2022)

### Agriculture and environment protection

**The Hungarian Presidency will continue the successful agricultural and environmental V4 cooperation**, involving our traditional regional partners.

In the face of unprecedented challenges (COVID-19, animal diseases, climate change) and changes stemming from Brexit and the CAP reform, **European farmers want to remain globally competitive players**. The farmers' fair income and the profitability of their business must be supported in a way that also serves long-term goals of **sustainability and environmental protection**.

Cooperation on the **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a priority for the Presidency**. In the context of the CAP reform package (the 3 regulations: CAP Strategic Plans, Horizontal regulation and Common Market Organization and delegated acts), **high-level V4 dialogue is envisaged for the second half of 2021**, also supporting the Slovenian EU Presidency. V4 consultation is also needed on the **preparation of national CAP strategic plans**, including greening, forestry measures and agroforestry, to be implemented from 2023. A discussion on sustainable forest management will also be further developed, especially in the context of the new EU Forest Strategy.

- V4+ Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia meeting of Ministers of Agriculture within the framework of the "One with Nature" international exhibition (September/October 2021)
- V4+ Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia meeting of Ministers of Agriculture (2022)

The V4 and its Hungarian Presidency are committed to achieving **sustainability** goals and thus support high-level cooperation in the related issues, including **sustainable food production and sustainable aquaculture**.

- V4+Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia meeting of Environment Ministers (November/December 2021)

We will support **V4+ dialogue** and the coordination of positions in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit, with a view to transforming food systems by 2030 and making them more sustainable, under the item "Shift to healthy and sustainable consumption patterns" (Action Track 2). We will continue to pay due attention to dealing with the dual quality of food, in order to reach equal quality of food products for all consumers across the whole European Union.

- Launching a V4+ dialogue and adoption of a joint declaration

The Presidency's goals include V4 cooperation on the strategies under the **European Green Deal**. We will coordinate our positions and share experiences both at the political and expert levels related to the "**Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy**, the **Biodiversity Strategy**, the **EU Forest Strategy**, the **EU Soil Strategy**, the **Common Fisheries Policy**, as well as in the fields of **animal health**, **fisheries** and **freshwater aquaculture**, the long-term vision for **rural areas**, **minor crops** and on the **International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**.

- V4+ consultation of forestry experts on biodiversity, climate policy and EU Forest Strategy
- V4+ Chief Veterinary Officers meeting
- "Friends of Freshwater Fishes" working group meeting
- Expert-level working group meeting on the coordinated implementation of CITES rules

Sustainable systems require new government policies addressing multiple challenges simultaneously. V4 cooperation will continue in the **BIOEAST initiative** aimed at helping V4+ countries develop a **biomass-based economy** via a common strategic framework for research and innovation. This will also enable the region to highlight its interests during preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit.

- International BIOEAST Conference and adopting a joint position

The Presidency will continue close V4+ cooperation in **water management**, paying particular attention to the management of extreme hydrological conditions, the forecasting and mitigation of the effects of floods and droughts, and the implementation of climate adaptation measures.

#### Employment, labour and social issues

The Presidency will launch discussions on the **effects of the COVID pandemic** on the labour market.

We will continue cooperation between the V4 countries and like-minded partners on the **free movement of workers, posting, social security coordination and road transport**.

Concerning the role of **national minimum wage systems and social partners**, the Hungarian Presidency plans to exchange V4 experiences and information, in light of the Commission's October 2020 proposal for a draft directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU, which Member States' experts are negotiating in the relevant Council working group. The V4 will emphasise that all activities in this field at the EU level must be in accordance with the principle of conferral, subsidiarity and proportionality.

We encourage enhanced V4 coordination regarding occupational safety and health in the **Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC)**.

The cooperation of **V4 labour authorities** will continue. In this context, the Presidency will examine the possible adoption of a common V4 strategy related to the work of the European Labour Authority (ELA), and organise consultations about the **posting of workers**.

- Expert-level consultations - meeting of labour inspectors, discussion on the future of the labour market, occupational safety and health leaders meeting.

Concerning the employment and social aspects of the **working conditions of platform workers**, which are high on the EU agenda, the Hungarian V4 Presidency provides an opportunity for the exchange of best practices within the V4 and between Member States in general.

The action plan on the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, published in March 2021, will be a topic for discussion on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of its adoption, at a high-level conference where V4 countries could evaluate progress and present their national steps taken, as well as potential alternatives to the actions proposed in the action plan.

Within the **social dimension**, the Presidency also facilitates V4 discussion and the exchange of experiences and good practices related to aspects seriously affected by COVID-19, such as improving the living conditions of **people with disabilities, long-term care, disadvantaged or disabled workers' care** (supporting employment, occupational rehabilitation), and **foster parenthood**.

- ➔ Conference on Foster Parenthood linked to the Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (28 September 2021)
- ➔ Expert consultation on supporting the independent living of people with disabilities (Autumn 2021)

#### Public administration

The Hungarian Presidency will continue the successful **V4 Good Governance Forum** conference series, aimed at discussing developments and good practices in public administration development.

- ➔ V4+Bulgaria, Romania Good Governance Forum on the topic “Experiences of Digital Governance in the Visegrad Countries” (14-15 October 2021)

## ...In the society

### Tourism

The touristic cooperation of the V4 countries dates back 18 years. Although the international tourism sector has suffered huge losses due to the COVID-19 epidemic, reopening and recovery is already being planned by all countries. The aim of the Hungarian Presidency is to coordinate the touristic activities of the V4 countries during the post-pandemic reopening, as well as to promote the region's cultural heritage and touristic offers among the V4 countries themselves, and on third markets. An important goal is to improve online V4 touristic content (e.g. the discovercentraleurope.com webpage), in line with the official comprehensive V4 online presence.

- Promotion campaign of cultural and touristic values of the V4 countries within the region
- Joint V4 touristic promotion activities on third markets
- High-level meeting on tourism (2022, Keszthely)
- International conferences on health-tourism, and meetings, incentives, conferences & exhibitions (MICE) tourism
- V4 cooperation in cultural and creative industries (e.g. fashion and design)

### International Visegrad Fund

The Hungarian Presidency supports the **International Visegrad Fund's** activities that aim to strengthen intra-V4 relations, boost regional competitiveness (e.g. in the start-up, science and innovation, and tourism sectors) and promote the V4 brand internationally. Furthermore, in line with the V4 Prime Ministers' decisions, after the increasing of the Fund's budget from 2022 there will be a special focus on **youth mobility programmes** and the effective **online promotion of the Visegrad Group and the Fund**. The Presidency also encourages joint projects in the field of **youth talent support**, which is a key social and competitiveness issue for the whole V4 region.

### Demography

**Addressing demographic challenges e.g. by supporting families**, which is also a question of sustainability, is of paramount importance for Europe and thus the V4. In this spirit, the Hungarian Presidency supports the organisation of events focusing on this topic, e.g. a high-level V4 segment at **the Budapest Demographic Summit (23-24 September 2021) on the relationship between the family and sustainability**, to provide a platform for common thinking for decision-makers, experts, and representatives of civil society, churches and the economy.

- V4 conference of ministers responsible for family policy (2021, Budapest)
- V4 family policy conference of demography institutes (12 November 2021, Budapest)

### Culture, education, film, sports

Since the beginning of Visegrad Cooperation, strengthening **cultural, educational, scientific and sport** relations between the four countries has been an important goal, to which the Hungarian V4 Presidency also pays special attention. This is even more important after more than a year of restrictions on mobility due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the field of **higher education**, given the challenges caused by the epidemic, the Presidency aims to exchange best practices of the V4 countries' institutions to strengthen cooperation in **digitalization, distance learning, virtual collaboration and digital methodology development**.

The Presidency will facilitate coordination between **V4 higher education institutions** concerning the **Erasmus+** programme, the **European Universities Initiative** and the **Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (CEEPUS)** exchange programme, among others. The V4 should play an active role in the next phase of CEEPUS negotiations. At the conclusion of which the signing of the CEEPUS IV Agreement is a realistic goal. **The development of V4+ relations is also important.**

- V4+ Eastern Partnership Higher Education Summit (Budapest, 2021)
- Ministerial and expert level conference and workshops on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education study programmes in the V4 countries
- V4 Rankings of Higher Education Institutions
- Forum of V4 Accreditation Agencies
- Closing event of the PROFFORMANCE international consortium

The Hungarian Presidency supports the enhanced promotion of the **Visegrad Fund's higher education scholarship programmes**, to significantly increase intra-V4 exchanges.

In the field of **culture**, the Hungarian Presidency will continue **joint projects** that contribute to strengthening the V4 cohesion and promoting the region's rich cultural heritage and offers. **V4 cooperation on revitalising the cultural sector** that was gravely affected by the pandemic is an especially important priority for the Presidency.

- Conference of the V4 Ministers of Culture (2022)
- V4 online conference on "The effects of COVID-19 on the cultural sector" (29 September – 1 October 2021)
- Exhibitions; art, literature, ethnography, architecture, museum projects and events throughout the Presidency (*see event calendar*)

The Presidency will also continue V4 cooperation in **cultural diplomacy** and present the V4 region's diversity and cultural values worldwide, boosting the region's touristic attractiveness.

- Meeting of V4 leaders responsible for cultural diplomacy
- Events promoting the cultural values of the V4 countries around the world

The Presidency supports **the cooperation of the former and future European Capitals of Culture** of the V4 countries, also in preparation for the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programs in Hungary.

- Supporting the exchange of experience between ECOC cities in the V4 countries
- Encouraging V4 participation in international cultural and artistic events held in 2021-22, related to the Veszprém–Balaton ECOC project

The Hungarian Presidency aims to examine the possibilities of a **closer cooperation in the film industry**, including the possible establishment of a V4 film coproduction fund and a joint Video on Demand platform.



V4 cooperation in the **sports sector and sport diplomacy** has an important role in strengthening people-to-people contacts in the region, as well as helping economic recovery. In this area, the Presidency will **support ongoing and new V4 initiatives, and professional dialogue.**

- V4 Olympic Hopes Competitions (2021)
- V4 Bicycle Race (July 2021)
- Conference on sport diplomacy, sports economics (September 2021)
- V4 Chess Tournament (also in preparation for the Budapest 2024 Chess Olympiad)
- Conferences on post-COVID economic recovery measures in the sports sector; sports diplomacy; and sport economics
- V4 PARA-TEQ Competition (for disabled people)
- Support for other sports races to be organised by interested sports associations

### Health

The COVID-19 crisis has further increased the importance of **international health cooperation**. The Presidency's goal is that the V4 cooperation contributes to strengthening our region's **resilience to crises, such as the coronavirus pandemic**. V4 cooperation in various economic sectors, especially in the **health industry** and the **pharmaceutical sector** contributes to the post-epidemic economic recovery of Central Europe, in addition to strengthening our strategic autonomy and resilience.

In line with the decision of the V4 Prime Ministers (Lublin, 2020) and their Joint Declaration on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Group (Warsaw, 17 February 2021), the Presidency will **enhance V4 cooperation in the fight against COVID-19** by exchanging experiences, sharing good practices and discussing common challenges. Simultaneously with the suppressing of the pandemic, it is important to discuss also topics like vaccines and antibiotic resistance.

- Conference of the V4 Ministers of Health on current issues and cooperation possibilities (2022)
- Meetings of the V4 Information Exchange Centre for COVID-19 and the further development of this cooperation
- A professional thematic day about challenges and opportunities related to the pandemic

The Presidency will continue and strengthen the **V4+ cooperation for fair and affordable pricing of medicines** (V4+ Fair and Affordable Pricing/FAAP), including the examination of the establishment of a common EU financial fund for medicines of rare diseases (orphan medicinal products) in order to increase access to these medicines and decrease the inequalities in this regard.

- Expert-level meetings on the V4+Lithuania FAAP cooperation framework and the preparation of a concept of tasks to be performed in this framework

V4 consultation on **health issues related to climate change** is also a Presidency priority.

The Hungarian Presidency intends to contribute to the presentation of the **V4 countries' public health prevention programs**, including health promotion at schools, nutrition, tobacco prevention programs, fight against drugs (e.g., REITOX), and early detection

screenings. It is recommended to exchange information on these topics and the related measures.

- ➔ Exchanging experiences of good practices in an online form within the meeting of V4 Health Ministers (2022)

### 3. PARTNERSHIP

*Further strengthening V4+ partnerships and the Visegrad Group's international role in the context of a revitalising diplomatic life after the COVID-19 pandemic.*

#### Parliamentary dimension

The structured dialogue among the V4 parliaments has become a significant dimension of the Visegrad Cooperation on the level of the Speakers of the Houses, as well as among parliamentary committees. The Hungarian Presidency intends to follow suit with the previous initiatives.

- Informal and formal meetings of the V4 and V4+ Speakers of the Houses
- V4 and V4+ meetings of the Chairs of Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence, Economic and EU-Affairs

#### European V4+ cooperation

Constructive, high-level dialogue with the countries holding the **Presidency of the Council of the EU**, namely **Slovenia** and **France**, is an important priority for the Hungarian V4 Presidency.

- V4+Slovenia meeting of Ministers for EU affairs
- V4+France meeting of Foreign Ministers
- Other meetings of sectoral ministers and experts

The V4 countries will also continue their effective cooperation with **Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries** on current items on the EU agenda, sectoral policies and foreign policy.

- V4+Austria meeting of Ministers for EU affairs
- V4+CEDC meeting of Defence Ministers
- Involving regional EU Member States in high-level meetings on EU policies and foreign affairs

**Germany** is one of the key partners of the Visegrad Group. Following the German Federal elections in autumn 2021 and in case of the German side's openness, the Hungarian Presidency is ready for high-level dialogue and joint thematic events.

- V4+Germany meeting of Foreign Ministers
- V4+Germany, France meeting of Ministers for EU affairs
- V4+Germany, France meeting of Ministers of Defence
- V4+Germany consultation of political directors
- V4+Germany, France foreign policy planning consultation (Q1 2022)
- Panel discussion on Central Europe in the framework of the Hungarian-German Forum (Q3 2021)
- V4+DE Youth Symposium on the future of the Central-European cooperation (Spring 2022)

The V4 countries aim to maintain the closest possible cooperation with the **United Kingdom** within the new contractual framework, therefore the Hungarian Presidency supports high-level V4+UK political dialogue and project-based cooperation on issues of common interest, such as supporting the Western Balkans, climate policy, cyber security, and academic and youth mobility.

- V4+UK meeting of Foreign Ministers
- V4+UK meeting of Defence Ministers
- V4+UK political directors' meeting
- V4+UK foreign policy planning consultation
- V4+UK expert-level events in Hungary and in the United Kingdom

The Presidency will continue the **V4+Nordic-Baltic Eight** (V4 + NB8) dialogue of Foreign Ministers focusing on topics like the Eastern Partnership, the integration of the Western Balkans, digitalisation and green transition, security and defence policies, cybersecurity, and tackling COVID-19, in cooperation with the 2021 Finnish Presidency of the NB8.

- Meeting of V4+NB8 Foreign Ministers (September 2021, Finland)

In addition, the Hungarian Presidency continues the **V4+Spain** consultation of State Secretaries for Foreign Affairs on CFSP issues (initiated by the Polish Presidency). We will also address the **Southern EU member states**, and continue the dialogue with the **Benelux countries**.

- V4+Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain meeting of Ministers for EU affairs
- V4+Spain meeting of State Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, October/November 2021
- V4+Benelux political directors' meeting
- V4+Benelux foreign policy planning consultation

#### *Cooperation with partners in the Western Balkans*

The Visegrad Group, as an immediate neighbour of the **Western Balkan region**, is devoted to supporting its stability, socio-economic development and European integration. The coronavirus pandemic has once again highlighted the interdependence between the Western Balkans and the European Union, in particular the Central European region. Given the current challenges and the opportunities the region is facing, the Hungarian Presidency aims at **deepening the cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans**, with special regard to the following areas.

Handling the **social and economic challenges and consequences of the pandemic** is a priority in both the V4 countries and in the Balkans, thus the Hungarian Presidency will initiate consultations on cooperation in this field and will provide V4 assistance to the Western Balkan partners. The V4 will support the **EU integration process in the region** by sharing V4 expertise based on the needs of candidate countries and potential candidates. The V4 countries will also continue to provide coordinated political support for the pro-integration aspiration of the Western Balkans partners at the EU level. In order to support integration and strengthen social relations in the Western Balkans, the **International Visegrad Fund** will continue to support projects in the region and will contribute to the **successful operation of the Western Balkans Fund** through the transfer of experience. The Presidency supports the dialogue on possible cooperation in the framework of the **Commissions' Economic and Investment Plan** for the Western Balkans. The exchange of experiences on addressing the **multiple security challenges and threats** that the

Western Balkan region is facing (e.g. migration) is a priority – in this context sharing best practices related to integrated border management is crucial. Building on national practices, the V4 will address the issue of involving the countries of the region in the events of the Conference on the Future of the EU.

- V4+ Western Balkans+ EUPRES+ EUCOM meeting of Foreign Ministers
- V4+ Western Balkans Energy Ministerial meeting (2022); and V4 cooperation on the activities of the Western Balkans Green Centre
- V4 Political Directors' consultation with a partner from the Western Balkans
- V4+UK and V4+DE Heads of Department consultation on the Western Balkans
- V4+ Western Balkans meeting of officials of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry on dealing with economic damages caused by the pandemic
- V4+ Western Balkans Youth Symposium on the Future of the EU (Green, Digital Transition)
- Support for joint projects in the Western Balkans through the Visegrad Fund; V4 contribution to addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in the Balkans

### *Cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries*

Concerning the Eastern Partnership, Visegrad countries consider that it is essential for **the process of stability and modernisation** to become irreversible in the Eastern neighbourhood of the European Union. It is also important that these processes **gain momentum** in the post Covid-19 period. Thus, the **Visegrad Group remains committed to supporting of the policy of the Eastern Partnership**. Partners that are successful in the implementation of reforms must be given the opportunity of closer ties and integration with the EU. In light of the above, **V4 countries aim to contribute actively to the success of the Summit on Eastern Partnership planned for the second semester of 2021** in close cooperation with the objectives of the incoming **Slovenian EU-presidency**. The Hungarian Presidency considers the successful preparation and follow-up of the Summit of utmost importance.

The **implementation of the Eastern Partnership-related projects of the EU and the V4** is a priority for the Hungarian Presidency. Special focus will be on energy security, regional and cross-border cooperation, people-to-people relations, connectivity, infrastructural development and tackling the crisis caused by the pandemic. The Hungarian Presidency, as all Presidencies before, will support the implementation of EU association agreements, with a special emphasis on the **support towards the society in Ukraine**. During the upcoming Ukrainian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, V4+Ukraine expert consultation will take place on the engagement in establishing a joint European (green) **hydrogen supply value chain**. In addition, the **security policy** consultations will continue between the V4 and Ukraine. The V4 will also work together on promoting and later implementing the Economic Plan for Democratic Belarus, which V4 initiative was endorsed by the European Council in October 2020.

- V4+Eastern Partnership+ EUPRES+ EUCOM Foreign Ministers' meeting
- V4+Eastern Partnership country meeting of Political Directors
- V4+Eastern Partnership higher education meeting
- V4+Ukraine expert workshop on hydrogen technologies (2022)
- Supporting the Eastern Partnership countries through the Visegrad Fund

## *Relations between diplomats of the V4 countries, diplomat training*

Through a planned “**V4 Young Diplomats’ Program**”, the Hungarian Presidency aims to provide an opportunity for diplomats from the Foreign Ministries of the V4 countries to make reciprocal study visits in order to increase V4 knowledge and to help networking opportunities.

The Presidency will initiate **cooperation between the diplomatic institutions of the V4 countries** (on the Hungarian side: the Hungarian Diplomatic Academy) by signing agreements (sending and receiving guest lecturers, organizing workshops together, sending publications, accelerating the exchange of information).

### Global V4+ cooperation

**The Republic of Korea** is a major ally for the Visegrad countries on the political, economic and cultural levels. The aim of the Hungarian Presidency is to strengthen the V4+Korea partnership through the highest-level **political dialogue** and the continuation of successful **scientific, innovation** and **foreign policy** projects (e.g. support of the Eastern Partnership through the Visegrad Fund).

- Meeting of V4+Republic of Korea Foreign Ministers
- Meeting of V4+Republic of Korea political directors
- Meeting of V4+Republic of Korea Deputy Defence Ministers
- V4+Korea Knowledge Sharing Program (Opening seminar – Autumn 2021; high-level programme – Spring 2022)

The aim of the Hungarian Presidency is to involve new areas in the cooperation in **V4+Japan format**, in addition to the successful **foreign and security policy dialogue** and joint **international development** and **R&D projects**.

- Meeting of V4+Japan Foreign Ministers
- Consultation of V4+Japan political directors
- Joint thematic expert conferences
- Successful continuation of the V4+Japan Joint Research Program

**V4+Israel cooperation** has developed successfully since the first V4+Israel Summit in Budapest. The Presidency, besides the continuation of the political dialogue, aims to launch a discussion on **possible joint projects** strengthening the multi-level relations between the V4 countries and Israel, as well as to continue the existing **innovation** cooperation (V4 Innovators in Israel programme).

- V4+Israel meeting of political directors
- Continuation and extension of the V4 Innovators in Israel start-up programme
- V4+Israel discussion on possible joint projects (space cooperation, creative industry, sport)

Based on the success of the first **V4+Egypt Summit** in Budapest (2017) and considering Egypt’s regional and global significance, the Hungarian Presidency will continue high-level political consultations in this format, which could also provide a basis for the development of **economic cooperation** (e.g. examination of the possible joint implementation of economic projects in Egypt).

- Meeting of V4+Egypt Foreign Ministers
- V4+Egypt political directors' meeting

The Presidency will support high-level **V4+Morocco** consultations, with a focus on migration.

- V4+Morocco meeting of Foreign Ministers

The Hungarian V4 Presidency aims to enhance the level of cooperation **between the Visegrad Group and India**, following the establishments of contacts during the Polish Presidency, on issues such as global foreign and security policy and cooperation in the field of economy, technology and innovation.

- V4+India meeting of Foreign Ministers

In line with the EU Strategy for Central Asia, adopted in June 2019 and based on recent consultations in this format, the Presidency will continue and develop the **V4+Central Asia cooperation** by holding the second foreign ministers' meeting and identifying opportunities for project-based cooperation.

- Meeting of V4+Central Asia Foreign Ministers

The Hungarian Presidency also aims to strengthen **transatlantic cooperation** through V4+partnerships. We support the strengthening of ties under the **new US administration** and the continuation of foreign policy dialogue with **Canada**.

- V4+USA defence ministers' meeting
- V4+USA political directors' meeting
- V4+USA foreign policy planning consultation
- V4+Canada political directors' meeting
- V4+USA energy diplomacy event in Washington, D.C. on energy transition, with the involvement of the V4 Energy Think Tank Platform (V4 ETTP)
- V430 – Fulbright75 anniversary meeting with V4 and American participation (2021)

The Hungarian Presidency will also continue dialogue with other global partners, such as **Turkey, China, Jordan, Lebanon and Brazil**.

- V4+Turkey political directors' meeting
- V4+Turkey foreign policy planning consultation
- V4+China political directors' meeting
- V4+Brazil political directors' meeting
- V4+Jordan political directors' meeting
- V4+Lebanon MENA directors' meeting

#### *V4 international development cooperation*

V4 cooperation in the field of **international development and humanitarian aid** has strengthened in recent years. Our successful joint projects convey an important positive message about the responsible, global engagement of the Visegrad Group. Therefore, the Hungarian Presidency will continue to focus on the external dimension of migration and, in this respect, to successfully move forward our **joint development projects in Libya, Morocco and Kenya**. The Hungarian Presidency will also explore new possibilities for

cooperation in international development and will encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience in this area.

➔ Dialogue between the V4 director-generals responsible for development cooperation