



Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group

Executive summary

Poland took over the Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) on 1 July 2012.

On 15 June 2012, the Polish Council of Ministers adopted the Presidency Programme by a circulation vote. The document was accepted by the V4 prime ministers at the V4 summit meeting in Prague on 22 June 2012.

Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski inaugurated the Polish V4 Presidency by paying working visits to Bratislava, Prague and Budapest on 4-5 July 2012. This novel way of taking over the presidency was welcomed by the V4 partners and demonstrated Poland's serious approach to regional cooperation. During the meetings, the V4 partners discussed priorities of the Polish Presidency and agreed that it was necessary to place special emphasis on drafting joint V4 positions on key EU issues (Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-20, Cohesion Policy). They also welcomed the Polish Presidency's focus on developing cooperation in defence, energy security, Eastern policy and EU



enlargement, especially in the Western Balkans. Moreover, they underscored the need to enhance the region's internal cohesion in terms of infrastructure, people-to-people contacts and cooperation among civil societies. Continued improvement of V4 countries' international standing and the consolidation of the effects of EU enlargement was an equally important challenge. To streamline the process of consultations on the European agenda issues, ad-hoc videoconferences and traditional meetings between V4 European affairs ministers ahead of meetings in Brussels were held. Such an approach made it possible to discuss and draft common positions on current items on the EU agenda.

As regards **energy security**, intensifying the process of building a regional V4 natural gas market was identified as a priority. Recognizing the fact that existing cooperation on integrating the infrastructure had been successful, the Polish Presidency suggested that a more vigorous debate about integrating V4 national natural gas markets be launched and a plan to establish a common natural gas market in the region be drafted. Members of the V4 High-Level Group on Energy (HLG) welcomed this initiative. On 31 October 2012, the V4 energy (economy) ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the integration of the V4 regional gas market. The Memorandum set out a timetable of actions leading to the *Road Map towards a Regional V4 Gas Market* to be adopted at the end of the Presidency. Prior to signing the Memorandum, analyses of market liquidity by national energy regulation authorities were completed in January 2013, followed by the drafting of guidelines for a V4 gas market model, which was carried out by an external consultant (a project co-funded by the International Visegrad Fund and completed in May 2013). On 15 May 2013, the HLG V4 meeting agreed on a Road Map. The V4 prime ministers expressed their intention to adopt the document during the V4 summit on 16 June 2013. **Key priorities of the Road Map** are:

A/ to maintain coordinated support for developing key gas infrastructure in the region, i.e. the necessary interconnectors between the V4 countries and internal gas networks to ensure a free flow of gas in the region;

B/ to continue work on an optimal market model for the region – a “no-regret” open approach that takes account of changes in the market and challenges likely to occur in the coming years (coordinating implementation of EU gas network codes in the region, drafting an operational study to implement the multi-coupled market zones model in the V4 and to take decisions about its future shape and progress). This should result in standardizing national gas market regulations in the V4 and thus guarantee optimal use of the gas transmission infrastructure being created;

C/ to establish the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration and to use it as an institutional basis of cooperation. The forum should serve to strengthen cooperation between decision makers and gas sector representatives with a view to developing an optimal market model.

Future presidencies need to continue implementing the Road Map's priorities. Energy ministers, national regulation bodies and transmission network operators should play a key role in this process.

In November 2012, the V4 energy ministries sent a joint letter to Commissioner G. Oettinger, commenting on the work to select Projects of Common Interest (PCIs).

Moreover, the V4 Working Group on Nuclear Energy was set up, which met for the first time on 5 March 2013 in Warsaw. Its agenda included development of nuclear energy in V4, its long-term funding and R&D cooperation potential.

As regards **the climate and energy policy**, the V4 focused on developing a common position in discussions about global climate change negotiations and the European climate and



energy policy framework after 2020. During the Conference of the Parties to the 18th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Doha (COP18/CMP8, December 2012), the V4 countries drafted a common position on moving Assigned Amount Units (AAUs) from the first to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. In its expanded format that included Bulgaria and Romania (V4+BG+RO), V4 agreed on guidelines for developing a joint position on a post-2020 climate and energy policy framework. In this context, the V4+BG+RO countries adopted a common position which states that the discussion on European climate and energy policy should be conditioned by the results of negotiations of a new global and legally binding agreement on climate change. Given the lack of ambitious solutions by the world's largest emitters, who are the EU's competitors, this approach should ensure predictability for investors and allow the EU to remain competitive. Decisions about the future of the climate and energy policy should be based on analyses of its impact on the development of individual member states and economic sectors. Another issue that was recognized was the need to ensure affordable energy prices for industry and households. This would help avoid negative phenomena such as *fleeing* emissions and energy poverty. It was agreed that climate and energy policy goals can be achieved in an economically effective way by means of the common energy market, energy efficiency and reliance on domestic energy sources, both conventional and alternative. Another example of close cooperation in climate and energy policy were joint comments to the European Council Conclusions of 22 May 2013 devoted to energy issues. As a result, the Conclusions included the European Council's commitment to formulating guidelines for further work on the climate and energy policy framework after 2020 in the context of a new global agreement on climate. In addition, the V4 countries often coordinated their positions on climate ahead of the Environment and Energy Council meetings.

Poland counts on further constructive V4 cooperation in EU climate and energy policy, especially in the context of the upcoming climate summit to be held on 11-22 November 2013 in Warsaw, and the European Council debate – scheduled for March 2014 – on possible actions on climate and energy policy after 2020.

Close cooperation, ad-hoc meetings and videoconferences produced tangible results in the form of **common positions on other current issues raised in the EU**. The Polish Presidency coincided with the final negotiations of the future EU budget and the principles that will govern **the EU cohesion policy** during the next programming period. A great success of the Polish Presidency was an initiative that led to the adoption in Katowice on 11-12 October 2012 by the V4 and Slovenian regional development ministers of a joint declaration on key aspects relating to negotiations of 2014-2020 cohesion policy regulations. On 16 October 2012, the document was presented to Member States (MS) and the European Commission at the General Affairs Council meeting. The declaration represented an important contribution to the EU debate, presenting a single position of countries from this part of Europe. The signatories' goal is to ensure that Cohesion Policy remains a development policy that benefits all EU countries and regions, has a positive impact on the labour market and contributes to the growth of the European economy making it more innovative and competitive.

Poland actively used its V4 Presidency to agree a common V4 position on the **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. Given considerable disparity between V4 standpoints, identifying common agenda proved challenging. Each European Council meeting was preceded by a prime ministers meeting. Meetings of the General Affairs Council, which is directly tasked with the MFF negotiations, were in turn preceded by meetings or videoconferences of the European affairs ministers. The cooperation resulted in joint positions on such issues as the shape of cohesion policy and the system of direct subsidies.



V4's readiness to continue cooperation on the common agenda until the completion of Council negotiations brought positive results, which are manifested in the European Council Conclusions of 7-8 February 2013. In particular, it was possible to secure necessary changes in terms of access to EU funds by, among other things, applying the *n+3* rule to cancellation of liabilities and recognizing non-recoverable VAT as eligible costs.

Moreover, V4's working cooperation during the Polish Presidency focused on updating the V4+Romania+Bulgaria (V4+RO+BG) Common **Spatial Development** Document and enhancing the territorial approach. While updating the Common Document, its thematic scope was expanded and the document itself renamed V4+RO+BG Common Spatial Development Strategy.

V4's engagement in the current EU agenda culminated in the meeting of the V4 prime ministers, the German chancellor and the French president (for the first time in this format) on 6 March 2013. **The future of the Economic and Monetary Union and boosting competitiveness of EU economies** were on top of the agenda. The meeting demonstrated that the V4 countries, which pursue sound economic and financial policies, had become actively involved in the debate on the future of the European integration, alongside Germany and France.

The Polish Presidency also saw a more intensive **security and defence** cooperation, which was one of the topics discussed by the V4 prime ministers with the German chancellor and the French president. The meeting reaffirmed the desire to develop defence and military cooperation based, among other things, on regional cooperation mechanisms, including the Visegrad Group and the Weimar Triangle. The V4, Germany and France confirmed their intention to transform *Smart Defence* and *Pooling and Sharing* initiatives into an effective response to cutting defence budgets, while assuming at the same time that this should not be made at the expense of national defence commitments.

On the same day, Warsaw hosted defence ministers who met in the same format and adopted the declaration *Cooperation in Developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities*. In their statement, the ministers underscored the need to strengthen European defence cooperation and maintain the pillars of European security – a strong NATO and an effective EU, based on further development of the Common Security and Defence Policy. In addition, the V4 defence ministers signed a memorandum of understanding on setting up the Visegrad Battle Group, whose stand-by is due to begin in 2016.

At a meeting in Bratislava on 18 April 2013, the V4 foreign ministers approved a joint statement pointing out the need to enhance Common Security and Defence Policy's (CSDP) effectiveness urging the European Council to review the current condition of CSDP and adopt strategic guidelines and calendar of their implementation so as to ensure the systematic development of CSDP. The declaration is based on three *baskets* that are to be discussed by the European Council: increasing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP, enhancing the development of military capabilities and strengthening Europe's defence industry.

In addition, on 4 June 2013 the V4 defence ministers adopted a joint statement on the sidelines of NATO defence ministers' meeting that was held in Brussels. The document is concerned with V4 cooperation, describes actions taken by the Polish Presidency and sets out guidelines for the Hungarian Presidency. The statement sums up the existing V4 defence cooperation and reaffirms future priorities: (1) EU Battle Groups; (2) military exercises and joint training as a part of NATO's Connected Forces Initiative (CFI), (3) logistic support of operations, (4) countering cyber threats, (5) CBRN battalion, (6) obtaining and operating weaponry and



military equipment. Air and missile defence is another area where cooperation could possibly be advanced.

The V4 defence ministers also agreed to discuss joint positions ahead of important NATO and EU meetings. They stressed the fact that NATO member states need to become more broadly involved in fulfilling the Alliance's principal task, i.e. collective defence. Moreover, the ministers promoted the Connected Forces Initiative and its practical implementation – the 2013 STEADFAST JAZZ exercises.

Talks among the V4 Chiefs of General Staff (Sopot, 17-18 April 2013) focused on setting up the Visegrad Battle Group. The Polish Presidency suggested that stands-by of the Visegrad Battle Group be renewed on a regular basis (e.g. every three years). Furthermore, in the EU Poland launched a bold discussion about conditions under which the EU Battle Groups can be deployed for real action.

The Polish Presidency successfully implemented all **foreign policy** priorities, such as enhancing cooperation in the framework of the **Eastern Partnership (EaP)**. On 17 May 2013, Krakow and Wieliczka hosted a meeting of the V4 and EaP foreign ministers, which was also attended by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, and officials from Ireland and Lithuania (current and in-coming EU PRES). The event was an important stage in preparations for the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013. The meeting offered a platform for a comprehensive discussion on the EaP's achievements thus far, the vision of the policy's further development, especially in the context of the 3rd summit. The agenda also included democratization issues and implementation of reforms by the EaP countries. Moreover, ministers of V4, Lithuania and Ireland adopted a joint statement in which they emphasized the importance of the Eastern Partnership and the need to bolster it further. The document also voiced expectations towards the 3rd EaP Summit.

As regards the EaP, a new and very positive element was establishing cooperation with the Japanese side. On 4-5 February 2013, Tokyo hosted a V4 + Japan seminar on the Eastern Partnership. The seminar, attended by government officials from V4, EaP and Japan, highlighted the priority role the EaP plays in V4 policy, and added more impetus to the V4+Japan dialogue on the EaP. The seminar participants also discussed democracy issues, good governance, sustainability, economic cooperation and integration in the EaP context. The seminar was preceded by a meeting of V4 and EaP representatives with Japanese government officials and business leaders. The meeting featured presentations about the International Visegrad Fund, the Visegrad Group's V4EaP programme addressed to the Eastern Partnership countries, and achievements of Japan's assistance programmes. A discussion about the possible coordination of V4 and Japanese activities towards the EaP was also initiated on that occasion.

During the Polish Presidency, V4 actively supported in the EU the European perspective for the **Western Balkan (WB)** states. Warsaw hosted a V4 + WB ministerial meeting (25 October 2012), during which Poland put forward the idea to create a *V4 – Western Balkans Expert Network on the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights*. The proposal was endorsed by the V4 and the Western Balkan partners. The network's task is to support the Western Balkan countries' integration with Europe by providing expert advice, sharing experience and offering technical assistance relating to the rule of law and fundamental rights. On 12-13 March 2013, ombudsmen of the V4 and WB countries met in Warsaw to start cooperation through this network. Minister Radosław Sikorski and Professor Irena Lipowicz, the Civil Rights Commissioner, assumed patronage over the event. The discussion focused on major challenges



facing ombudsmen in the 21st century and ways to forge closer cooperation among ombudsmen.

V4's growing international position is evident from the great interest for the **V4+** meetings. Besides the already mentioned meeting of V4, France and Germany, another example of the innovative approach is the summit of foreign ministers of the **V4, Baltic and Nordic countries (V4+B3+N5)**, which was held in Gdańsk on 20 February 2013. The participants agreed that the Central and Northern European countries must play an active part in consolidating the EU and the whole European continent. They recognized the need for the Nordic, Baltic and V4 countries to cooperate. They also stressed that the regions should have better transportation and energy links with each other. Moreover, the ministers discussed relations with Eastern European partners, including preparations in the run-up to the EaP Summit. They underscored that the EaP has a key role to play in the future integration of the European continent and endorsed European aspirations of the certain Eastern European partners. The participants also agreed that the V4, Nordic and Baltic countries should play a major role in promoting democracy, the rule of law and security, and that cooperation between our countries will help improve security in a volatile international environment. The ministers confirmed their interest in holding more meetings in this format in the future (Estonia will host the next one in 2014).

The **V4+Japan** meeting of prime ministers was equally exceptional in that it reaffirmed the growing attractiveness of the Central European countries.

Consultations with **Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia**, which have been part of the V4 agenda, have produced tangible results with respect to agreeing positions concerning the current EU agenda. The V4+ format has also proven right in relation to Croatia in foreign policy, as well as cooperation involving sectoral ministries (e.g. agriculture, regional development, health, labour).

The V4+ format also proved successful during consultations by political directors who held talks and consultations with the Benelux countries, Israel, Japan, the United States, Russia and Moldova during the Polish V4 Presidency.

When summing up the Polish V4 Presidency, one should mention the substantial input to the V4 cooperation provided by foreign ministries. Consultations by consular departments focused on mutual visa representations or the creation of the so-called Visegrad Houses. Consultations by territorial, planning or development policy departments were equally productive. The National Visegrad Coordinators (NVCs) played a very significant role in the development/drafting of common positions. Thanks to their systematic meetings, they coordinated and encouraged individual ministries to closer cooperation in the V4 context. Closer cooperation was also manifested in meetings of MFA Directors General who discussed the organisation and infrastructure aspects of foreign service work and the European External Action Service.

Even though the Visegrad Group is primarily an informal political bloc, **economic cooperation** is an important factor in its operation. In addition to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the integration of the V4 regional gas market, another major achievement during the Polish Presidency was a joint V4 letter on industrial policy addressed to the Cypriot Presidency of the EU Council, the Irish Presidency and the European Commission on 10 December 2012. Two V4 economy ministers' meetings organised under the Polish V4 Presidency significantly contributed to the further development of the V4 countries' cooperation in this sector. The first ministerial meeting organised on 31 October 2012 in



Warsaw focused on the current European agenda, energy and energy security as well as promotion of the V4 countries in third countries' markets, with special emphasis on China. The second meeting of Economy Ministers (Katowice, 13 May 2013) taking place during the European Economic Congress had an extended format that included Romania, Croatia and the Baltic Sea countries. It focused on challenges facing the automotive industry in Central Europe and cooperation of the V4 countries in this sector, which is the engine of growth of the region's economics and is now facing serious problems. Furthermore Poland initiated a return to the tradition of using the V4 forum to coordinate the V4 countries' positions on legislative proposals concerning transportation debated by the EU Council. This initiative was aimed at intensifying cooperation in transportation infrastructure. The V4 invited Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia to participate in the coordination meetings to discuss countries' initial positions and to map areas where a common position or support of each others' postulates in the EU Council was possible. This good V4 cooperation also produced, at Poland's initiative, a joint memorandum by the V4 countries in the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE) Council on 11 March 2013, concerning the announced European Commission's legislative proposal to liberalise cabotage.

Visegrad Groups' economic cooperation is also aimed at further enhancing the position of countries in the region as an attractive investment destination. This was the purpose of a conference *Intellectual property and Business. Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises' Forum. Visegrad Group countries – China – How to carry out effective business and investment operations in the Chinese market* which was co-organised by the Polish MFA with the Polish Patent Office in cooperation with the National Office of Intellectual Property of the People's Republic of China (SIPO) in October 2012. The forum was addressed to entrepreneurs and institutions from the business community in Poland and the V4 countries interested in investing in China. In February 2013, a Group for Economic Promotion of the V4 Countries was established to forge closer relations in promoting the V4 region and countries on third countries' markets.

V4 cooperation in tourism (by relevant ministries and National Tourist Organisations) is a model example for many other countries. *European Quartet – One Melody* – this slogan expresses very well the spirit of this cooperation. In March 2013, at a high-level meeting in Wrocław, ministers responsible for tourism and presidents of National Tourist Organisations of the V4 countries agreed on a concrete plan of marketing activities in the US, Asia and selected Arab countries (the Persian Gulf region) for 2013. Possibilities of funding from the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 were also explored.

The Visegrad cooperation in **the parliamentary dimension** was also a source of satisfaction during the Polish Presidency. The Senate of the Republic of Poland passed a resolution on 14 June 2012 in connection with Poland assuming the Presidency of the Visegrad Group from 1 July 2012.

In January 2013, the Public Administration and Regional Policy Commissions of the parliaments of the V4 countries, Slovenia and Croatia met in Warsaw for the fifth time. The meeting was attended by Elżbieta Bieńkowska, Minister for Regional Development. Discussion focused on MFF 2014-2020 from the V4 perspective and challenges facing central and local governments in the V4 countries.

Speakers of parliaments of the V4 adopted a Joint Statement (13 April 2013 in Warsaw) in support for enhanced cooperation in the parliamentary dimension, the development of infrastructure of Central European countries and intensification of broad people-to-people



contacts. They also addressed the initiative to enhance cooperation in the Common Security and Defence Policy. In turn, parliamentary European affairs committees adopted conclusions addressing current issues raised in the EU as regards EU energy policy and energy security and the Danish initiative aimed at enhancing the debate on the role of national parliaments in a closer financial, budgetary and economic union.

The Polish Presidency also emphasized the need to intensify cooperation in **the social dimension**. The most spectacular event was the **1st Visegrad Bicycle Race (17-18 May 2013)**, whose route covered 533 km and led from Budapest through Slovakia, the Czech Republic to a finish line in Cracow. Events such as picnics, bicycle parades, concerts, etc. were organised on the sidelines of the Visegrad Race. The race was recognized as an important event by European bicycle racers. Close to two hundred cyclists took part in the race.

Visegrad studies (cooperation between 4 universities in Cracow /PL/, Pecs / HU/, Brno /CZ/ and Banska Bystrica /SK/), which started enrolment, will also foster better mutual understanding.

The International Cultural Centre organised the **2nd Heritage Forum of Central Europe** titled *The Limits of Heritage* in Cracow on 12-14 June 2013, successive editions of summer training programme for conservation experts and people engaged in the protection and promotion of heritage in the V4 countries. Efforts to intensify cooperation among young people and local governments should be continued.

Other ministries and MFA departments organised meetings and consultations contributing to enhanced V4 cooperation.

Warsaw, June 2013.