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

- Visegrad Group
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FOREWORD

From July 2017 to June 2018, Hungary is holding the rotating Presidency of the Visegrad Group for the fifth time. The importance of the Visegrad Cooperation, based on the principles guiding the V4 since its founding in 1991, namely mutual trust, flexibility, and a focus on common traditions, values and interests, has been growing recently. In the past 25 years, the Visegrad Group has been actively representing the regional interests, since 2004 within the European Union, while contributing to the prosperity and stability of the continent via their economic, performance, cooperation aimed at facilitating the broader European challenges affecting our region and the whole continent. Under the Visegrad Group as part of the broader European Union, the V4 countries constitute stability and growth in the European Union, and have the legitimate intention to contribute substantially as equal partners to the dialogue on the future of the EU.

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

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

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

The Hungarian Presidency builds on the goals and achievements of previous V4 Presidencies. The priorities also reflect a proper balance, as necessitated by current political events and actual needs, between tasks related to the V4’s common voice in the EU, preserving the importance of traditional policies (Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy), cooperation with neighbouring Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions, as well as a responsible approach to the unprecedented migration crisis. The V4 countries constitute stability and growth in the European Union, and have the legitimate intention to contribute substantially as equal partners to the dialogue on the future of the EU.

The ability to renew and adapt to new realities, while preserving the basic V4 principles, has always been a strength of the Visegrad Countries and the V4 format. The countries of the Visegrad Group have been members of the European Union for more than 13 years, and all of them have participated in fulfilling the role of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. The V4 is a group of Member States taking part actively and responsibly in the common decision-making processes linking the European Union with other European countries, as well as V4 activities related to global partners, global issues and the further strengthening of the V4 brand.

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

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

1. EUROPEAN VISEGRAD

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

The countries of the V4 Visegrad Group have been members of the European Union for more than 13 years, and all of them have participated in fulfilling the role of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. The V4 is a group of Member States taking part actively and responsibly in the common decision-making processes linking the European Union with other European countries, as well as V4 activities related to global partners, global issues and the further strengthening of the V4 brand.

The Hungarian V4 Presidency plans to hold a major event dedicated to this topic, with the participation of the Visegrad countries and other partners. Presenting and representing the V4 countries’ pro-European as well as realistic narrative in an open and pragmatic way is a key priority of the Hungarian V4 Presidency.

V4+ conference on the future of the European Union

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

• Subsidiarity: The solution to current challenges lies in a ‘strong Europe of strong nations’, where decisions are taken as closely to the citizens as possible. The Visegrad Group is interested in a European Union in which common policies support the achievement of national undertakings in accordance with the Treaties, as Member States are capable of tackling certain issues more effectively, taking into account the regional and local dimensions of the subsidiarity principle.

Strengthening the role of national parliaments within the EU is a priority as it would reinforce the legitimacy of the EU decision-making. In deciding whether national or EU-level steps are necessary, it is the potential contribution of any proposal to the competitiveness and security of the Member States and the continent, which should primarily be considered.
Cooperation: For the sake of ensuring European political unity, it is necessary that every Member State aims at embracing the common objectives and principles. Therefore, the EU should focus on Christine the Commissioner and the strategic questions directly affecting Member States and EU citizens. The guiding principles should be mutual trust, common objectives, the equality of Member States and sincere cooperation between Member States. Strategic leadership role of the European Council is indispensable. In issues determining our common future, consensus at the cooperation. Respecting the strategic leadership role objectives, the equality of Member States and sincere cooperation on issues which unite us. In strategic questions and principles. Therefore, the EU should focus State aims at embracing the common objectives political unity, it is necessary that every Member Presidency. In this process, it is an important goal Framework (MFF) will peak during the Hungarian investment tools in the purchasing power of the primary tools in this context. They are not ‘charity’ but the entire EU. Cohesion and Regional Policy are therefore, a vital interest of not only the V4 countries States of the EU. To maintain that mechanism is, important in terms of the EU’s credibility; Europe has to give a solid answer to the challenges coming from the deteriorating security environment. We should step up more effectively in order to strengthen the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy to improve our resilience, capabilities and coherence, complementing NATO’s related efforts. The V4 countries have also been strong advocates for the protection of external borders since the beginning of the migration crisis, because the V4 considers the proper internal and external functioning of the Schengen system as one of the main prerequisites of European security as well as a precondition of economic growth and prosperity. The V4 is committed to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries as well as to the deepening of the economic integration and political association of, and cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, thus these countries, Hungary and other Member States of the EU. To maintain that mechanism is, therefore, a vital interest of not only the V4 countries but the entire EU. Cohesion and Regional Policy are the primary tools that Hungary and other Member States of the EU use to ensure that these tools are not ‘charity’ but investment tools in the purchasing power of the converging economies. Informal negotiations preceding the publication of the Commission’s proposals on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will peak during the Hungarian Presidency. In this process, it is an important goal of the V4 to preserve the current role of traditional common policies such as Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policies. The Visegrad Group stands for an approach based on competitiveness as regards initiatives connected with the strategic questions. Although new projects related to the social dimension should remain open also to non-Eurozone members of the Union. Avoiding the handing over of competences from Member States, social aspects, economic policy considerations and the principle of competitiveness cannot be separated.

Security: Europe has to give a solid answer to the challenges coming from the deteriorating security environment. We should step up more effectively in order to strengthen the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy to improve our resilience, capabilities and coherence, complementing NATO’s related efforts. The V4 countries have also been strong advocates for the protection of external borders since the beginning of the migration crisis, because the V4 considers the proper internal and external functioning of the Schengen system as one of the main prerequisites of European security as well as a precondition of economic growth and prosperity. The V4 is committed to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries as well as to the deepening of the economic integration and political association of, and cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, thus these countries, Hungary and other Member States of the EU. To maintain that mechanism is, therefore, a vital interest of not only the V4 countries but the entire EU. Cohesion and Regional Policy are the primary tools that Hungary and other Member States of the EU use to ensure that these tools are not ‘charity’ but investment tools in the purchasing power of the converging economies. Informal negotiations preceding the publication of the Commission’s proposals on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will peak during the Hungarian Presidency. In this process, it is an important goal of the V4 to preserve the current role of traditional common policies such as Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policies. The Visegrad Group stands for an approach based on competitiveness as regards initiatives connected with the strategic questions. Although new projects related to the social dimension should remain open also to non-Eurozone members of the Union. Avoiding the handing over of competences from Member States, social aspects, economic policy considerations and the principle of competitiveness cannot be separated.

Competitiveness and economic convergence: It is in Europe’s fundamental interest to make Member States and European market actors more competitive. The economic strengthening of the continent depends on the deepening of the internal market and the development of the industry, enterprises, research, development and innovation, more and more determined by digitalisation. Economic convergence among Member States and regions contributes to a better and more balanced functioning of the internal market and the competitiveness of the whole Union by gradually diminishing differences in development. The dynamic V4 market is an important vehicle of the economic growth of all the Member States of the European Union – it is the purchasing power of the V4 countries and their citizens that creates jobs and this means that these countries, Hungary and other Member States of the EU. To maintain that mechanism is, therefore, a vital interest of not only the V4 countries but the entire EU. Cohesion and Regional Policy are the primary tools that Hungary and other Member States of the EU use to ensure that these tools are not ‘charity’ but investment tools in the purchasing power of the converging economies. Informal negotiations preceding the publication of the Commission’s proposals on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will peak during the Hungarian Presidency. In this process, it is an important goal of the V4 to preserve the current role of traditional common policies such as Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policies. The Visegrad Group stands for an approach based on competitiveness as regards initiatives connected with the strategic questions. Although new projects related to the social dimension should remain open also to non-Eurozone members of the Union. Avoiding the handing over of competences from Member States, social aspects, economic policy considerations and the principle of competitiveness cannot be separated.

Predictability: The European Union should be a reliable and constructive partner in the external dimension and should formulate credible and realistic undertakings towards its own citizens. We are responsible for keeping our own rules and regulations, for which the Lisbon Treaty provides an adequate basis. European citizens expect that the fundamental balance of the internal market’s integrity, a cornerstone of the EU is not harmed. This applies to all the four freedoms and in particular to the freedom of movement, a highly important value for the V4, which clearly demonstrates the advantages of integration among our citizens. The Hungarian V4 Presidency will continue the coordination of positions of the Visegrad countries in several areas, such as::

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

The political context of the Hungarian Presidency will be significantly influenced by negotiations on the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. The V4’s objective is defining and representing our common interests while maintaining the unity of the EU-27. The V4 shall work for a fair and mutually beneficial agreement that adequately ensures balance between rights and obligations. One of the most important objectives of the Visegrad Group is to protect the rights and interests of citizens of the V4 countries living in the United Kingdom. Brexit cannot provide grounds for the weakening of the acquis concerning the free movement of persons or the providing of services related to the free flow of workforce in the EU-27. After Brexit it is important to make sure that the closest possible relations between the EU and the United Kingdom are maintained. It is a key interest of the Visegrad Group that financial aspects of Brexit are settled in a satisfactory manner and the existing obligations are observed by all parties. We are interested in an agreement regulating trade and investments cooperation between the EU and the United Kingdom that is balanced, based on mutual benefits and preserves as much of the current cooperation openness as possible. It is also an important joint goal of the V4 that the United Kingdom, a NATO member and an important European and global actor, remains closely connected to the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy including the Common Security and Defence Policy.

COOPERATION WITH EU PARTNERS

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

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

The Hungarian Presidency aims to strengthen the cooperation of the Visegrad Group with Austria and Slovenia, partners with which the Visegrad Four can effectively coordinate positions on numerous issues such as migration, security, the stability of the Western Balkans.
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and EU enlargement, digitalisation and innovation. In the field of defence policy, the Hungarian Presidency will strive to strengthen cooperation in the V4+ Slovenia and V4+ CEDC (Central European Defence Cooperation) formats, focusing on Slovenia’s potential contribution to the V4 EU Battlegroup, and, in the case of CEDC (building also on Hungary’s Presidency in the CEDC starting in January 2018) with an emphasis on capacity development and coordinating positions on managing the migration crisis, also taking into account the role of armed forces.

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

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

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

RESPONSIBLE HANDLING OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS
Since the beginning of the mass migration crisis in 2015, the Visegrad Four have assumed a responsible position towards this complex problem and stood up for a comprehensive answer to the situation, with an adequate focus on stemming migration and underlining security as a key aspect of the future solution. This also applies to the V4’s joint action for the protection of the Schengen area, support to Western Balkan countries, if necessary, by sending additional forces, equipment and sharing expertise.

Continuing permanent consultations started by previous V4 Presidencies, e.g. in the framework of the V4 Migration Crisis Response Mechanism announced in November 2016, the goal of the Hungarian Presidency is to continue, where appropriate, the above-mentioned activities, identify further topics of possible V4 cooperation related to migration and broaden acceptance of related V4 positions within the EU. The EU should be capable of giving comprehensive and effective answers to the challenges of migration, with an emphasis on the necessity of the position that stemming migration must begin outside the EU’s borders. In order to effectively represent our joint interests in the context of the future shape of the Dublin Regulation, regional coordination is also important. The V4 strongly opposes any proposal on introducing a mandatory and automatic distribution system in line with the corrective distribution system in the Dublin proposal. Commitment towards aspects of humanitarian aid and development assistance in the context of the migration crisis is also an important part of the V4’s complex approach to migration-related activities are detailed in Chapter 4 ‘Global Visegrad’.

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

- Coordination of positions in EU legislation and relevant policy actions (reform of the asylum system, relocation, migration compacts etc.).
- Border control cooperation with third countries on the Western Balkans migration route, maintaining an adequate focus on stemming migration and underlining security as a key aspect of the future solution. This also applies to the V4’s joint action for the protection of the Schengen area, support to Western Balkan countries, if necessary, by sending additional forces, equipment and sharing expertise.
- Continuing permanent consultations started by previous V4 Presidencies, e.g. in the framework of the V4 Migration Crisis Response Mechanism announced in November 2016.
- V4 consultations before the Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings.
- Meeting of the Chiefs of V4 border control authorities.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE COOPERATION

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

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

- Conference of V4+Benelux Ministers of Justice (autumn 2017).
- Thematic conference with the involvement of senior officials (autumn 2017).

The Presidency will facilitate high-level consultations and the sharing of expertise and good practices in the V4 and V4+ format in the field of victim protection and legal aid.
The Hungarian Presidency supports the J
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Hungarian Presidency 2017/2018 of the V isegrad grou P
stimulate the creation of
innovation. Another goal of the Presidency is to
oriented projects
related to entrepreneurship and
start-ups. The Presidency will encourage
including providing possibilities for researchers and
relations in the V4 region. The Presidency will initiate the
V4’s common institution working for strengthening the
functioning of the International Visegrad Fund
Formal and informal meetings of the Presidents of
supporting endeavours of the Presidency.
regular meetings of the Presidents of the V4
countries dealing with foreign affairs, defence,
economic and EU affairs.
The Hungarian Presidency supports the successful
functioning of the International Visegrad Fund, the
V4’s common institution working for strengthening the
relations in the V4 region. The Presidency will initiate the
renewal of the Fund’s mobility scholarship schemes,
including providing possibilities for researchers and
start-ups. The Presidency will encourage result-
oriented projects related to entrepreneurship and
innovation. Another goal of the Presidency is to
stimulate the creation of V4 expert networks and
enhance cross-border relations between business
actors and associations, based also on the experiences of
the Think Visegrad – V4 Think Tank Platform.
Concerning the Fund’s activities related to the Eastern
Partnership and the Western Balkans, the Hungarian
Presidency plans to continue effective dialogue with
current and potential external donor partners of
the Fund, with a view to improving and possibly widening
the cooperation.
Building upon the rich historic, cultural heritage and the
diverse relations of the Visegrad Four, the Presidency’s aim is
to strengthen regional cohesion by bringing the societies
closer, as well as to jointly promote values of the V4 region
externally. To this end, intra-V4 projects will be launched and
several cultural events will be held worldwide.
In relation to the European Year of Cultural Heritage in
2018, ongoing parallel activities with the Hungarian
V4 Presidency, the Presidency aims to promote the Year
in the V4 region, including the presentation of sites in the
V4 region awarded with the European Heritage Label, sites
already on, or nominated to, the UNESCO World
Heritage List, as well as the promotion of the region’s
architectural heritage.
Furthermore, the Hungarian Presidency will pay special
attention to V4 consultations on current issues of
cultural diplomacy. The Presidency will initiate talks on
the following issues: EU financial resources in the field
of culture; EU strategy for international cultural relations;
the role of culture and creative industry; V4 participation
in the reconstruction of destroyed monuments in the
Middle East; utilising the Central-European Cultural
Platform (PCCE; V4+Austria) in strengthening the cultural
dimension of the Eastern Partnership. In the field of
cultural diplomacy, Hungary also continues to suggest
that the V4 countries, too, support the establishment of
the International Museum on Communism
in Washington, D.C., initiated by the Victims of Communism
Memorial Foundation.
The Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group provides an
opportunity to the V4 to exchange experiences and
jointly present their achievements regarding the
protection of national, ethnic and religious minorities
and their cultural heritage, including the preservation of
Jewish cultural heritage, thus also underlining the
region’s commitment to Europe’s cultural and religious
values as well as to fighting anti-Semitism.
The Presidency will continue V4 discussion on higher
education. (TBC)
Regarding youth and family policy, the Hungarian
Presidency concentrates on the sharing of expertise
and good practices of the V4 countries as well as the
discussion on common challenges.
→ Conference on youth policy in the town of Visegrad,
with the participation of representatives from the V4 and
the Eastern Partnership countries, focusing on
digitalisation
→ Conference on family policy and demography (TBC)
→ Thematic conference on family and children focusing
on the topic ‘infant in the family’ (TBC)
The Presidency will hold consultations on nutrition
and healthcare issues, the development of the public
healthcare system and disability policies, to facilitate the
exchange of experience on results and current challenges.
Long-term V4 cooperation on e-health and fair pricing will
be further encouraged.
The Presidency will support discussion on the diaspora
policies of the Visegrad countries, to facilitate the
sharing of experience and best practices and joint
thinking on tackling the related social challenges faced
by the V4.
In the field of sport which has an important role
in strengthening intra-regional social relations, the
Hungarian Presidency will, inter alia, support the ongoing
V4 initiatives and facilitate projects (e.g. in the framework
of the Visegrad Fund) related to sports.
→ Organising the V4 Olympic Hopes Competition, held
regularly for more than 20 years
→ Organising the 6th V4 Bicycle Race, with the active
involvement of the civil society
In order to foster mutual awareness and further improve
mutual perceptions inside the V4, the Presidency will
continue to support the cooperation of the V4 countries’
public media organisations.
Furthermore, the Hungarian Presidency will organise the
annual V4 Good Government Forum.

SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD: WESTERN BALKANS AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
The Visegrad Four, as a group of countries traditionally
committed to supporting the Western Balkans both in
European political fora and in the form of joint projects,
will actively facilitate initiatives aimed at strengthening
the region’s stability, security and economy under the
Hungarian Presidency. This is especially important in light
of today’s growing challenges affecting the region. The
key to the stability of the Western Balkans is the Euro-
Atlantic integration of the region’s countries, therefore
supporting the EU and NATO enlargement processes,
including related efforts of the countries involved, is a highly
important goal of the Presidency. Although enlargement
is one of the EU’s most efficient policies, it is receiving
limited focus amid current problems dividing Europe.
The Commission’s Enlargement Package, published in
November 2016, will not be followed by a new assessment
in 2017. Therefore, assessing the enlargement process
with the participation of the Western Balkan countries
under the Hungarian V4 Presidency will be crucial.
→ Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the
V4 countries’ Eastern Partnership
→ Consultations on questions related to the Western
Balkan countries’ Euro-Atlantic integration, transport
and energy infrastructure development (Connectivity
Agenda), stability and security
→ Coordinating in Brussels of positions on EU and NATO
enlargement and Western Balkan issues
Concerning the Eastern Partnership ( EaP) for the Western Balkans, cooperation, stabilisation and modernisation in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood becomes irreversible and gains further momentum. Therefore, the Visegrad Group remains a staunch supporter of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy as a key tool to foster this process. Despite the existing challenges, the Hungarian Presidency is committed to keeping the EaP high on the EU agenda and will strive to reach its full potential. Taking this into account, the Visegrad Group wishes to contribute to a successful Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2017, in line with the goals of the Estonian EU Presidency. First and foremost we have to endeavour to present a clear perspective to our partners regarding their aspirations concerning the future of their relations with the EU and offer a European perspective for the interested partners. In order to maintain and strengthen the partnerships’ commitment to necessary reforms, with a focus on key agenda, concrete deliverables and new objectives at the summit are crucial. A productive summit would be one where the achievements and implementing the necessary reforms arising from the Association Agreements should remain in focus. It should be thoroughly analysed how the EU can support and subsequently evaluate progress in the countries on which the agenda started. Especially the transformation of the economy, the fight against corruption, public administration reform and strengthening civilian security which should contribute to enhancing resilience of the Western Balkans countries it is vital that the EU can support and subsequently evaluate progress in the countries on which the agenda started. Especially the transformation of the economy, the fight against corruption, public administration reform and strengthening civilian security which should contribute to enhancing resilience of the Western Balkans countries it is vital that the EU can support and subsequently evaluate progress in the countries on which the agenda started. Especially the transformation of the economy, the fight against corruption, public administration reform and strengthening civilian security which should contribute to enhancing resilience of those countries against security threats. V4 stands ready to further support the activities in the framework of NATO cooperation with Ukraine (Comprehensive Assistance Package), Georgia (Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, New, Practical Ways to Intensify Efforts, Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative), and Moldova (DCBI), having in mind the transformational potential of these programmes. Fostering connectivity with special emphasis on energy, infrastructure and cross-border cooperation contributes significantly to stability and economic development, as well as mobility between the EU and the Eastern Partnership. Eastern Partnership policy should focus equally on Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in the future. Any genuine commitment from these countries to build closer relations will be supported by the Visegrad Group. With the V4+Russia format and the V4+Belarus common agenda, building closer relations with the EU and strengthening trade and economic cooperation should be maintained. Our strategic relations with Russia should be further developed and reinforced within a framework of key agenda, concrete deliverables and new objectives, comprehensive agenda (including common infrastructure projects). The V4 will pay attention to the human rights situation in the EaP partner countries.

As regards Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, consolidating the future of our relations and implementing the necessary reforms arising from the Association Agreements should remain in focus. It should be thoroughly analysed how the EU can support and subsequently evaluate progress in the countries on which the agenda started. Especially the transformation of the economy, the fight against corruption, public administration reform and strengthening civilian security which should contribute to enhancing resilience of those countries against security threats. V4 stands ready to further support the activities in the framework of NATO cooperation with Ukraine (Comprehensive Assistance Package), Georgia (Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, New, Practical Ways to Intensify Efforts, Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative), and Moldova (DCBI), having in mind the transformational potential of these programmes. Fostering connectivity with special emphasis on energy, infrastructure and cross-border cooperation contributes significantly to stability and economic development, as well as mobility between the EU and the Eastern Partnership. Eastern Partnership policy should focus equally on Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in the future. Any genuine commitment from these countries to build closer relations will be supported by the Visegrad Group. With the V4+Russia format and the V4+Belarus common agenda, building closer relations with the EU and strengthening trade and economic cooperation should be maintained. Our strategic relations with Russia should be further developed and reinforced within a framework of key agenda, concrete deliverables and new objectives, comprehensive agenda (including common infrastructure projects). The V4 will pay attention to the human rights situation in the EaP partner countries.

Meeting of V4+Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers, in preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit, close cooperation between EaP Special Envoy's of the V4 Countries
Supporting discussions concerning EaP on the EU fora and keeping EaP high on the agenda started.
Supporting projects in or related to the Eastern Partnership region (Visegrad Fund)
Supporting governmental capacity-building in the EaP countries through the Enhanced Partnership Agreement after its signature.

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

• Defence policy cooperation. In the field of policy dialogue and cooperation, the Hungarian Presidency’s goal is the strong representation of the V4 region’s interests in NATO and EU fora by discussing strategic defence policy issues and coordinating positions, including those on strengthening the NATO’s Eastern Flank, and on challenges related to the migration crisis, and the V4’s active participation in the debate about reviewing the EU Battlegroup (EUBG) concept.

• Operational cooperation. Besides the successful realisation of the rotating V4 military presence in the Baltic countries in 2017, the Presidency primarily aims to coordinate preparations for the V4 EUBG’s next standing by period in 2019, and examine possibilities for potential joint V4 contribution to NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence as future V4 cooperation in EU and NATO operations.

• Joint capability development. It is important to continue and deepen V4 cooperation in military capabilities. In this context, the Special Presidency will continue the expert level and political consultations about the possibilities of regional capability development. Our long-term goal is to identify those areas of cooperation where the V4 countries can effectively contribute to the defence capabilities of NATO and the EU.
Defence industry cooperation. The Presidency’s goal is to discuss possibilities for cooperation on coordinating defence procurement, and strengthening cooperation between defence industries.

Joint trainings and education. The backbone of cooperation in this area is the continuation of the joint participation in military exercises and trainings included in the V4 Mid-Term Training and Exercise Plan (MTEP), which will be updated also by the Hungarian Presidency. In defence education, the possibility of starting joint courses on operational, general staff and staff officer levels can provide opportunities to deepen V4 cooperation.

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

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

- Meeting of the Ministers of Defence (on the margins of the Defence FAC in November 2017, and in April 2018)
- Meeting of State Secretaries (Senior Body; October 2017 and March 2018)
- Meeting of Defence Policy Directors (DPD; July 2017, March 2018)
- Meeting of National Armaments Directors (Q3 2017, Q2 2018)
- Meeting of Chiefs of Defence Staff (Q2 2018)
- Conference of heads of military national security services (Q2 2018, April–May)
- Meeting of foreign and security policy advisors of the V4 Heads of State and Government (November 2017)

Expert level events:

- V4 Planning Group session (October 2017, April 2018)
- V4 workshop of defence experts (Q4 2017)
- Sessions of V4 EU/EUG working groups (Q3 2017, Q1 2018)
- Session of the working group ‘Life Cycle Management’ (LCMG; end of 2017, Q2 2018)
- V4 training conference (Q3 2017, Q2 2018)
- V4 high visibility military exercise (BRAVE WARRIOR; 22 June – 22 July 2017)
- V4 rotational training in the Baltic countries (TRAINING BRIDGE 2017)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hungarian Presidency will strengthen V4 cooperation in the field of disaster management, concentrating on risk management, disaster prevention, increasing resilience and consequence management.

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

ENERGY POLICY, ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE, CLIMATE POLICY

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

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

- Meeting of V4+ Ministers of Foreign Affairs (preferably in the format of V4+Western Balkans and V4+Eastern Partnership), with the participation of the European Institutions;
Promoting LNG as an available option for gas diversification in Central Europe by V4+ joint appearance of Ambassadors-at-Large for energy security at the Budapest LNG Summit in October 2017. In terms of energy policy, the Hungarian Presidency plans to achieve progress in areas which are important for all V4 countries. Specific goals of the Hungarian Presidency are:

- Formulating a joint position on the amendments of the governance-, electricity- and renewable energy-related draft legislations of the Clean Energy for All Europeans package.

- Joint V4 action related to unintentioned cross-border electricity loop flows in the CEE region.

- Coordinating V4 actions aimed at implementation of the new security of Gas Supply regulation cross-border cooperation and solidarity mechanisms.

- Preparing a V4 cooperation agreement on crude oil stocking.

- Identifying joint V4 large-scale infrastructural and energy projects contributing to diversification of sources of energy supply and routes in line with Energy Union goals, to be realised with the involvement of EU funding (cohesion, EFSD, EFS), to counterbalance projects hampering the development of liquid and secure gas markets in the region.

In order to meet these policy goals, the Hungarian Presidency will organise the following main events related to the field of energy security and internal energy market and important for all V4 states.

- Expert meeting (2nd half of 2017, and 1st semester of 2018)

- Cooperation in supply crisis management; organising an annual conference of energy security and internal energy market and important for all V4 states.

- Visegrad Gas Forum (November 2017)

- Conference of the V4 development banking institutions related to EFSI (spring 2018)

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

- Regarding the decisive stage of review of the EU Emission Trading System (ETS), in order to ensure the ETS’s effective functioning after 2020 in line with the European Council Conclusions agreed in October 2014, in order to find synergies between European climate, energy and industrial policies and to avoid collisions of European policies with national priorities, the Hungarian Presidency supports closer V4 cooperation in information and position sharing. The Presidency also aims to support expert discussions and coordinate positions (where possible) so as to facilitate finding the equilibrium between economic growth and meeting climate policy goals and achieve well-balanced legislative package, in relation to sectors not regulated by the ETS (transportation, agriculture, waste management, buildings) and the proposal concerning the emissions and sinks from land use, land use change and forestry (LUUCF).


- V4 summit meeting of Ambassadors-at-Large for energy security at the Brussels summit in December 2015.

- Joint V4 large-scale infrastructure projects in the field of energy (residential and transportation, agriculture, waste management, buildings) and the proposal concerning the emissions and sinks from land use, land use change and forestry (LUUCF).

- Joint V4 large-scale infrastuctural and energy projects contributing to diversification of sources of energy supply and routes in line with Energy Union goals, to be realised with the involvement of EU funding (cohesion, EFSD, EFSI), to counterbalance projects hampering the development of liquid and secure gas markets in the region.

- Expert meeting (2nd half of 2017, and 1st semester of 2018)

- Cooperation in supply crisis management; organising a regional exercise (2nd half of 2017 / 1st half of 2018)

- Meeting of Ministers/State Secretaries (2nd semester of 2018)

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- Conference of the V4 development banking institutions related to EFSI (spring 2018)

In the field of sustainable growth, the Hungarian Presidency sets the following goals:

- Joint V4 action related to unintentioned cross-border electricity loop flows in the CEE region.

- Coordinating V4 actions aimed at implementation of the new security of Gas Supply regulation cross-border cooperation and solidarity mechanisms.

- Preparing a V4 cooperation agreement on crude oil stocking.

- Identifying joint V4 large-scale infrastructural and energy projects contributing to diversification of sources of energy supply and routes in line with Energy Union goals, to be realised with the involvement of EU funding (cohesion, EFSD, EFSI), to counterbalance projects hampering the development of liquid and secure gas markets in the region.

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- With respect to the negotiations elaborating the implementation rules of the Paris Agreement, not prejudging its outcomes, the Hungarian Presidency supports V4 cooperation on this process. In case there is no agreement on increased EU ambitions, the Hungarian Presidency will ask for V4 country views on a possible rise of previously agreed EU emission reduction goals, with special regard to effects on ‘carbon leakage’ and ‘inherent leakage’ and the proposal concerning the emissions and sinks from land use, land use change and forestry (LUUCF).

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- V4 Rail Roundtable could serve as a platform to establish common Council positions for expert discussions on transport. Increasing the competitiveness of rail freight transport along the North–South corridors is a strategic interest for our region, in order to exploit railway infrastructure developments. It is important for the Hungarian Presidency to contribute to utilising synergies between the Hungarian V4 Presidency and the 2017 Hungarian Presidency of the Danube Region Strategy. For a successful cooperation, the sharing of experiences and best practices among V4+CEE enterprises dealing with terminals, railway freight transportation and railway operators is highly important.
It is a priority for the Hungarian V4 Presidency to jointly prepare for the post-2020 EU financial period, building also on the High-Level Working Group (HLWG) established during the 2013-2014 Hungarian Presidency. During the negotiations concerning the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, our goal is the harmonisation of V4 positions, and the incorporation of CEE viewpoints since preserving the key role of the transport sector is a common interest of the Visegrad Group, serving the strengthening of the countries' economy.

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

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

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

- To build traditional and alternative fuelling stations (electric, LPG, LNG, CNG) along North–South routes;
- Expert consultations on the state of play in electromobility in the V4 countries (number of vehicles, outlook on the future of this sector, state subsidies);
- Sharing the experiences concerning the development and support of innovation in the field of electro-mobility;
- Expert consultations on the experiences of public road toll systems in the V4 countries;
- Sharing experiences on financing developments, reconstructions and operation, in relation to various financial constructions (e.g. PPP, EFSI, CEF);
- Sharing experiences on cross-border transport development projects (Interreg);
- Developing cross-border sub-regional passenger transport, with an emphasis on – the sharing of continuously updated timetables between the countries; – examining the possibilities of establishing a common tariff system including cross-border public services;
- Examining the possible launching of a ‘VisegRail’ initiative aimed at fostering intra-Visegrad tourism by offering regional railroad tickets and season tickets;
- Organising a professional conference on cycling during the second half of 2017;
- Sharing experiences concerning the use of awareness-raising methods – conference on the ‘Passing 7 borders by bicycle’ (series of events), the ‘Mary’s Way’ (CEE pilgrimage route) and the Maria Marathon (ultramarathon trail) with the participation of civil society, local municipalities, EGTCs and experts (1st half of 2018);
- Exploring potential synergies between the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership countries in terms of transport connectivity.

The Hungarian Presidency aims to foster the further development of cooperation on inland waterway transport. Rivers are important elements of international, multimodal transport corridors as they provide low emission, economically feasible and easier access to the V4 and EU markets.

‘HUNGRAIL Hungarian Railway Conference with high-level V4 participation

During the Hungarian Presidency the V4 will endeavour to further develop cooperation on inland waterway transport.

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

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

The V4 countries are interested in an economically stable European Union. In order to ensure sustainable economic growth, the competitiveness of the Union must be improved. This requires a proper investment environment which favours job creation and equal accessibility of digital technologies and skilled labour, indispensable for the countries’ prosperity. To effectively represent V4 interests in the European Union, the Hungarian Presidency will further strengthen cooperation concerning economy-related EU issues such as the Economic and Monetary Union, the Capital Markets Union, the Single Market including the Digital Single Market, the banking union, taxation and customs, as well as the joint fight against recently spreading protectionist tendencies in some Member States. As a response to the increasing capital stocks through investments.

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

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

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

V4+Croatia+Romania+Bulgaria+Slovenia Meeting of Ministers for Agriculture
Social dimension
According to the Visegrad Group’s position, competitiveness and economic convergence are key aspects in the debate about the social dimension. Only sustainable economic growth resulting in real economic convergence can contribute to social welfare, the most important conditions of which are:

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

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

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

V4 expert consultations

ECONOMIC POLICY, LABOUR MARKET, INDUSTRY

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

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

A key element of the success of any Industry 4.0 or other digitization initiative is the availability of digitally competent labour force. Hence, cooperation on the development of the digital labour market is also of high priority. Owing to the fact that the digitalization exploits civil servants and civil officials, it is essential to enhance international cooperation and training programmes in order to improve the effectiveness and competitiveness of public administration. Further V4 cooperation is important as regards the proposed amendment to the Posting of Workers Directive (96/71/EC).

The Presidency aims to discuss the strengthening of cooperation in the field of labour policy cooperation inside the V4 and with the EU, concerning especially the
Concerning undeclared work, the Presidency supports the exchange of information, the sharing of good practices, the presentation of solutions and the legal background in the V4 countries, and the strengthening of V4 representation of interests in the European Platform tackling undeclared work.

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

The Hungarian Presidency encourages V4 cooperation in the field of the healthcare industry and organises a thematic forum with the participation of V4 senior managers and experts responsible for the healthcare industry. Goals are to strengthen the cooperation tied to V4 health economy and Industry 4.0, to take joint action concerning the digitalisation, to cooperate in the fields of healthcare robotics and nanorobotics, to foster joint R+D to create innovative products. Regarding the latter, coordinated export and regional projects, monitoring, best practices, and major projects enabling the dissemination of digital innovations. It is particularly important to focus on the topic of the analysis of big data generated by sensors of fast-moving vehicles, and the necessary cooperation between autonomous vehicles (5G edge computing).

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

DIGITALISATION

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

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

V4 countries play a significant role in the European automotive industry. To preserve and develop this position, priorities of the Presidency are the implementation of regional investments and joint projects concerning especially the infrastructure of fast-moving vehicles, and the necessary cooperation between autonomous vehicles (5G edge computing).

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

A key priority of the Hungarian Presidency related to digitalisation will be the creation of a ‘Visegrad Good Practices Platform’ dealing with autonomous vehicle manufacturing. The platform will provide opportunities for V4 SMEs with best practices to introduce themselves and present the best practices already available. Within this framework, R+D+I activities will be discussed focusing on three areas: production and manufacturing technology, product development, and the development of new types of services/business models (sharing economy).

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

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The strengthening of the region’s ability to attract talents is a key factor in building start-up ecosystems. Therefore, it is the goal of the Presidency to encourage the development and strengthening of a modern, internationalised higher education sector, the launching of educational and training programmes in the sphere of Industry 4.0 focusing on the technological fields of data sciences and artificial intelligence, thus contributing also to intra-V4 mobility.
The Hungarian V4 Presidency initiates the establishment of a ‘V4 Smart Platform’, serving the comfort of the citizens and helping the public administration, the aim of the platform is the creation of interoperable e-services that can be jointly introduced in V4 countries. As a framework for this purpose, the Platform can foster meeting public demand by the construction of a unified, cross-border digital space based on reciprocity.

Another goal of the Hungarian Presidency is to deepen intra-V4 relations in the field of e-commerce. The role of the state in developing a V4 innovation ecosystem and achieving the participation of V4 start-ups in international tenders.

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

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

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

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

→ Thematic workshops in Budapest and in V4+ partner countries

→ Two thematic events in the framework of the V4+Korea Knowledge Sharing Program

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

→ V4 Innovation Task Force sessions

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

→ The organisation of professional workshops

→ Continuing e.g. the initiative ‘We4Startups’ (USA), the participation of V4 start-ups in international competitions, promotion events both in the V4 Countries and outside the region

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

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

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

The Hungarian Presidency wishes to encourage a more active V4 participation in the work of the Urban Agenda, and takes the lead in giving impulses to the cooperation.

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

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

AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER ISSUES

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

The conclusions of the talks on Brexit influence greatly the future of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU— as its consequence, a completely new configuration will be created.
Europe needs a Common Agricultural Policy that can provide effective solutions to tackling different crises, resulting in the European agricultural sector and food industry's ability to remain a competitive player on the global level.

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

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

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

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

**BIOEAST**: Concerning agricultural R+D, taking joint action in the EU Horizon 2020 framework to increase the amount of resources that are currently underused;
- Continuation of the discussion on the trade in agricultural land.
- **Cooperation in the field of forestry**: Exchange of information, preparing common suggestions concerning forest policy, mutual presentation of best and successful practices, preparing common actions to increase forest adaptability to climate change as well as their mitigation potential, strengthening of commercial relations, joint participation in cross-border EU tenders;
- **Experience-sharing in the field of hunting**: The creation of a voluntary joint policy in this field and taking joint action in the European Union. The facilitation of hunting tourism between V4 Countries;
- **Cooperation in the field of fisheries management**: Taking joint action in the FF Group (Friends of Freshwater Fishes), an informal working group of countries dealing with freshwater aquaculture;
- **Preparation of the new Common Fishery Policy (CFP)** at the EU-level with regard to the needs of V4+Bulgaria+Croatia+Romania+Slovenia;
- **Biodiversity mainstreaming**: Validating the aspects of biodiversity in sectorial policies;
- **Coordinating actions concerning fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**, strengthening inter-state economic, scientific, educational and other relations;
- **Sharing best practices concerning adjusting to climate change** in the field of agriculture;
- **Sharing experiences on the practical execution of the transition to green economy** (facilitating eco-transition to green economy and increasing resource efficiency);
- **Discussion of tasks and other steps stemming from the European Commission’s Circular Economy Package**;
- **Waste prevention** including reuse and fostering decontamination;
- **Experience-sharing on the tasks on asbestos decontamination**;
- **Clean air protection**;
- **Exchange of experience among V4+4 countries regarding the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 implementation, with particular focus on performance framework indicators at the end of 2018, Programme closure, and innovation**.

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

- **Validating the aspects of water management and water protection in sectorial policies (e.g. agriculture);**
- **Experiences of the practical application of environmental analysis according to Article 4, paragraph 7 of the Directive;**
- **Practical experiences on water price policy formulation, and on the principle of cost recovery (Article 9 of the Directive), with a special focus on agricultural water management;**
- **Experience-sharing of climate change adaptation regarding water management, drought treatment;**
- **Learning in connection with responses to water damage, flood risk management, and their consistency with river basin management plans;**
- **Exchanging experiences among V4+4 countries concerning the implementation of the Directive;**
- **Continuation of the coordination of the V4 Training Programme, a Hungarian initiative. Following V4 agreements, in order to continuously broaden the scope of cooperation in the field of duty and to broaden the number of involved states in the cooperation, the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary continues its innovation and coordination work;**
- **Continuing the proposal put forward by the Program of the Polish Presidency. Based on its Hungarian equivalent (EKAER, Electronic Public Road Trade Control System), the initiation of creation of a V4-wide monitoring system for the road carriage of goods. Examining the possibility of involving issues of e-consignment notes (that is closely related to the transport of goods), and the possible creation of an Automated Number Plate Recognition System (ANPRS) in the Visegrad Countries. To discuss these, a V4 conference will be held in Budapest;**
- **Coordinated V4 action in connection with tax issues in various EU fora, based on common interests;**
- **Experience-sharing on qualifying taxpayers;**
- **Discussing the barriers concerning customers that are to become taxpayers. Furthermore, the V4 joint review of tax authority services, including tax authority actions taken both before and after entering new entities into register;**
- **With the help of professional coordination, the broadening of sectoral cooperation of Visegrad Countries’ tax authorities in the fields of:**

**TAX AND CUSTOMS COOPERATION**

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

Besides the tasks of the permanently growing working group dealing with mineral oil frauds and fighting against frauds (Chess Knight), the Presidency manages the work of the V4 regarding Action 8.6.2 dealing with excise Mineral Oil cooperation (Customs Cooperation Working Party, CCWP);

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hungarian V4 Presidency supports the joint examination of opportunities for V4 cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa, e.g. in the fields of accessing EU development funds and jointly realising development projects. The Presidency also facilitates consultations on the V4 countries’ policies towards Africa.
The Hungarian Presidency contributes to the common thinking on potential areas of cooperation with the Pacific Alliance, one of the most dynamic regional organisations of the Latin American region.

Expert level meeting to examine possibilities of cooperation

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

Meeting of the directors responsible for international development policy

Expert meetings on international development and humanitarian assistance

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

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

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

TOURISM: PROMOTION OF THE REGION

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

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

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

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

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

Meeting between high-level state officials for tourism (beginning of 2018)—in preparation to this: an informal meeting of V4 Secretaries of State for Tourism and a press conference linked to the World Travel Market 2017 in London

V4 professional conference on topics of mutual interest in order to assess and make effective use of the new trends of tourism (e.g. tourism and security; spreading of sharing economy in the field of tourism; connection between sports and tourism)
V4 CONNECTS

HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY 2017/2018 OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

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