

PROGRAMME OF THE HUNGARIAN V4 PRESIDENCY

2005/2006

Hungary takes over the Presidency of the Visegrád Group from Poland for the period of 2005/2006. 2005 will be the first full year of the V4 countries as member states of the European Union. The first few months passed since accession have confirmed that close co-operation among the four member countries will continue to be of outstanding importance also in the framework of the European Union. While continuing the projects that have been launched, the Hungarian Presidency will focus on the new challenges and wishes to contribute to the achievement of the common goals of the V4 countries by setting the following priorities:

1. Strengthening the V4 identity and developing a V4 communication strategy with a view to bringing the V4 even closer to citizens.
2. Enhancing the V4 cohesion, capacity of consultation and co-operation on issues figuring on the EU agenda and on major international issues in other fora; consistent representation of adopted common positions on issues of common interest.
3. Promoting transformation and modernisation efforts in Central and Eastern Europe; contributing to efforts to improve the EU's competitiveness, particularly in infrastructure development and R&D.

We deem it important for the Visegrád consultation and co-operation framework – the fundamental goals of which continue to be the efficient assertion of interests and the achievement of a stronger Central European identity - to retain the flexibility and openness along the lines of ad hoc “variable geometries”.

We wish to strengthen confidence in the importance of co-operation in the region by further raising public awareness of the potential inherent in V4 co-operation and by supporting specific projects producing tangible benefits for local communities

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will act as general co-ordinator of the Hungarian Presidency.

Summary of the major Programmes foreseen

- Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers marking the beginning of the Hungarian Presidency in July 2005 (including the adoption of the Programme of the Presidency). The Ukrainian Foreign Minister will be invited to join parts of the session.
- Ministerial Conference on the Western Balkans, scheduled to take place in Budapest in October 10-11, 2005, to which the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Slovenia and other states of the region would also be invited.

- Informal meeting of the Prime Ministers to take place prior to the EU Summit in December 2005 either in Budapest or at the venue of the Summit.
- Meeting of the Heads of State scheduled for the year 2006 in the Czech Republic.
- Third meeting of Foreign Ministers in March 2006.
- Regular working sessions of State Secretaries and Political Directors responsible for European affairs on the most important issues dealt with at EU fora.
- Regular, monthly meetings of national V4 co-ordinators.
- Consultations at the level of Directorates of the Ministries concerned, as required by issues figuring on the EU agenda.
- Summit meeting at the level of Prime Ministers marking the closure of the Hungarian Presidency, to be held in Hungary in June 2006.

I. Foreign and European Policy dimension of the Visegrád co-operation

It is the firm intention of the Hungarian Presidency to ensure that the members of the Visegrád Group provide a valuable contribution to the shaping of EU policies and the fulfilment of their goals, as well as further help to the development of the process of integration.

In order to increase the ability of the Visegrád Group 4 to assert its interests, it is essential to enhance V4 internal cohesion, in particular with regard to issues figuring on the EU agenda. Referring to the difficulties of the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty, we deem it important to conduct close consultations on this issue. Through the operation of multi-level consultation mechanisms adjusted to the EU's decision-making timetable, the Visegrád countries must strive to develop common positions and joint actions. Common positions should be represented consistently and adopted actions should be implemented as agreed. Where interests coincide, similar coordination could be useful in international organizations, as well.

Hungary will aim to deepen V4 co-operation in this dimension in the following fields:

1. **Foreign and Security Policy**
Lead agency: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

We are convinced that the V4 countries are able to provide significant added value to the shaping of the **Common European Foreign, Security, and Neighbourhood Policy**. This is supported by a growing international interest in the positions and activities of the Visegrád Co-operation.

The member countries of the Visegrád Co-operation, now members of the EU, are able and willing to shape common foreign and dimensions of neighbourhood policies in relation to the neighbouring regions – Ukraine, other CIS states and the Western Balkans – which are undergoing tremendous political and social transformation. Such a contribution could help these regions to get closer to European values. Enhancing democratic processes is a shared interest of both EU-members and NATO-allies. In this context, the role of the Visegrád Co-operation in the processes **of mediation of values, stabilisation and in sharing experiences** is being given further added value. By making use of the political frameworks of Visegrád

Co-operation, the Hungarian Presidency will seek suitable forms to carry out the above responsibilities, harmonising the national ambitions of the member countries.

- a) This role is particularly important with regard to neighbouring **Ukraine**. Over and beyond the harmonisation of our bilateral programs supporting reform, there is need for high-level meetings that are easy to communicate, do a good service to Ukraine's endeavours for integration, and demonstrate our readiness to cooperate. For this reason we wish to invite the Ukrainian Foreign Minister to the foreign ministerial meeting that will introduce the Hungarian presidency in July, and the president or prime minister of Ukraine to the top-level V4 meeting due to take place in early 2006.
- b) The **Western Balkans** is another important region to be targeted by the V4 countries. In October 2005, a Ministerial Conference on the Western Balkans would be arranged, linked to the meeting of the V4+2 Foreign Ministers and the countries concerned. We are also planning to organise another policy planning consultation in an extended format in Budapest at the turn of 2005-2006 with a view to assessing the integration perspectives of the Western Balkan countries.
- c) The Visegrád group will continue to deepen its co-operation with neighbouring CIS states within the broadest possible scale of activities. A particularly useful aspect seems to be the transfer of its own experience gained in the social transformation process.
- d) In order to strengthen **transatlantic relations** we deem it important to maintain our current practice of preliminary political consultations linked to **NATO** summits. Accordingly, Hungary is ready to arrange a round of consultations in Budapest at the level of Directors for Security Policy of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs prior to the December 2005 meeting session of NATO Foreign Ministers.
- e) Experience has shown that positions and interests of the Visegrád countries in the field of **European Security and Defence Policy** are close but could be exploited in a more effective manner. Regular substantive consultations and timely exchange of views through all the levels (from expert level to political ministerial level) should serve as a suitable tool and bring necessary results in this regard.
- f) The positions of the Visegrád countries as well as of Austria, Slovenia, and the Nordic Council states concerned (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) contain several **identical elements regarding the now emerging European External Action Service**. Therefore, it would be expedient to consult and, where possible, co-ordinate the formation of our views to be represented at EU forums and to define shared priorities. Consultations on the subject should start in the second half of 2005, taking account of the EU decision preparation.
- g) The Visegrád countries, Austria and Slovenia have expressed similar converging views on some agencies and institutions, for example the Institution for the Gender Equality, Fundamental Rights Agency etc. Hence, the

Hungarian Presidency is considering arrangement a consultation under the V4+2 framework where a common position to be represented in the EU decision-making process could be shaped. The proposed date of the consultation is July 2005.

- h) Establishment of a team of V4 experts in language issues and policy that would open a political and expert discussion on language communication and problems in the enlarged EU. It should concentrate on analysing current national and EU language policies, protection and sound development of national languages and cultures, guaranteeing language rights on official and citizen levels, searching solutions for equal, non-discriminatory and effective interethnic language communication in the EU. The team would prepare a report on the topic that would be presented at a ministerial meeting.

2. **Financial Perspective, Lisbon Process**

Lead agency: Office for European Affairs

The countries constituting the Visegrád Group have a common stake in the preservation and consolidation of the achievements and internal cohesion of European integration. In the context of further EU enlargement, the reform of existing common internal policies, and new EU policies to be shaped to counter the new challenges, the V4 countries should ensure that these are in the greatest possible harmony with their own interests.

Among the issues, which are already on the EU agenda or are to be included during the coming year, the **financial perspective** for 2007-2013 and the **Lisbon Process** are outstanding elements due to their particular significance.

3. **Schengen**

Lead agency: Ministry of the Interior

For details see the chapter on co-operation in Home Affairs

Mechanism for co-ordinating Foreign and European policies

With a view to the above goals, regular top-level and expert level **co-ordination and consultations** on Foreign and European policy are planned to be held, in accordance with the EU and NATO timetable for decision-making. These will include:

- a) Three meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers,
- b) Working meetings of Political Directors prior to meetings of Foreign Ministers,
- c) Meetings of State Secretaries for European Affairs,
- d) Regular consultations with the participation of the competent Directorates of the Ministries concerned, and at least one consultation of Policy Planning Directorates of Foreign Ministries in the V4 format, to which Austria and Slovenia could also be invited depending on the topics agreed on,
- e) Continuation of the previous practice of coordination between COREPER Ambassadors, especially prior to meetings of the General Affairs and External Relations Council,
- f) Regular coordination between V4 diplomats in Brussels and in other capitals.
- g) In accordance with the practice to date, the parliamentary dimension of the Visegrád Co-operation will also be maintained. The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly is planning to host a meeting of V 4

Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs, EU-integration and Defence in Budapest.

We wish to lay great emphasis on close co-operation with the country holding the EU Presidency.

Without the formal enlargement of the V4, the Hungarian Presidency will strive to involve other Central European countries and EU member states in the harmonisation of policies on certain issues of common interest. Austria and Slovenia are our natural allies on several issues, and useful co-operation could be developed with the Benelux Group, the Baltic States, and the countries of the Nordic Council. The Visegrád countries also wish to take their share in the strengthening of transatlantic co-operation and will to this end submit an initiative to hold consultations in a V4-USA framework (at the level of foreign policy planners, specialised Foreign Ministry directorates and senior Foreign Ministry officials).

II. Sectoral dimension of V4 co-operation

Sectoral co-ordination has been given a prominent role in the Visegrád Declaration signed in May 2004 (Kroměříž).

The Visegrád framework for consultation and co-operation is of open, flexible and ad hoc nature also in this dimension. In certain sectors, co-operation now also involves Austria and Slovenia, and a dialogue with the Benelux Union, the Baltic States, the Nordic Council, Canada, Japan, Ukraine and other countries in the region.

Sectoral co-operation is essentially being aimed at promoting modernisation in Central Europe, assisting the development of (often backward) regions along the common internal borders of the V4 countries, and reducing the dividing effect of state boundaries, which exert a constraining impact on economic co-operation. Cross-border co-operation schemes and actual local initiatives should be supported through available public means, including the exploration of EU funds available for local government and entrepreneurial initiatives, first and foremost in the field for regional transport infrastructure financing and investment promotion.

ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

Lead agency: Ministry of Economy and Transport

In the present, qualitatively new stage of already joint EU membership of Visegrád countries, it would be worthwhile and beneficial to continue the practice of regular consultations on macro-economic as well as cross-sectoral levels. EU accession as a matter of course imposes additional new rules and regulations, but at the same time creates fresh opportunities for coordinated joint action in Brussels, for regional co-operation and exchange, as well as for expert discussions between Ministries.

Energetics

Favourable earlier experience prompts us to carry on our co-operation in the energy sector in the usual structured manner. Expert discussions are recommended to deal with the following subjects:

- Exchange of information on the energy policies and privatisation strategies pursued by the individual countries and their schemes relating to the opening up of their energy markets, as well as legal harmonisation tasks deriving from EU-accession.
- Interconnection of electricity grids; co-operation between CENTREL and UCTE; the effect of the accession of additional countries to UCTE on the V4 states; discussion of opportunities for joint action; harmonisation of tariffs in the case of cross-border transports.
- New developments in the process of the liberalization of the natural gas market; co-operation in the construction of pipelines and natural gas storage.
- Co-operation in the maintenance of oil stocks with a view to compliance with relevant EU rules for obligatory storage of EU oil products; projects relating to the linking up of the pipeline systems.

Industry

In the period after EU accession, it is particularly important for the Visegrád countries to coordinate their positions and planned measures as part of their endeavours for joint stances. In order to further develop our relations, we are planning to introduce regular consultative meetings of senior officials and experts of the Ministries of Industry of the member countries. We see good opportunities to enhance relations in the following sectors: supply of automobile spareparts, heavy chemical industry, petrochemical industry, and small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Small- and medium-sized enterprises

The Hungarian Presidency would like to lend a new impetus to the convergence of SMEs and to the coordination of V4 schemes in this field. We therefore suggest discussions to be held on the following subjects:

- Closer co-operation and exchange of experience on EU Programmes and methodology devised for SME convergence.
- Application of the new definition of SMEs provided in Recommendation 2003/361/EC of the European Commission and the relevant findings of the member countries.
- Experience gathered in the use as well as planning practices of European Structural Funds.

Advancement of the economy

More efficient use of EU funds requires consultation and some degree of co-operation. To this end, we foresee an examination of the following possibilities:

- Sectoral co-operation in enhancing competitiveness, in harmony with the EU's Lisbon strategy.
- Co-operation with regard to the EU's financial planning period starting in 2007 and to accessible structural supports, which could help the V4 countries forge a common or similar platform.
- Continuation of the exchange of views between representatives of competent Ministries on the implementation of the operational programmes for economic development for the period 2004-2006, and development of a common position

for EU negotiations on the period starting in 2007, in certain cases also regarding additional operational Programmes.

AGRICULTURE

Lead agency: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

We wish to carry on with the co-operation existing in the agricultural field.

A ministerial meeting will be held simultaneously with the 74th National Agricultural and Food Expo from August 27 to September 4, 2005 in Budapest, which could offer a good opportunity to discuss some strategic issues of the Common Agricultural Policy, or the position of agrarian trade in the EU framework, like the definition of international criteria of the sustainable farming of agricultural land. We continue to attach importance also to co-operation in the expert groups and working groups of the European Commission.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

Lead agency: Ministry of Economy and Transport

We wish to arrange expert meetings in the following fields during the Hungarian Presidency:

- Combined transport of goods
- Traffic safety
- Consultation on electronic toll systems
- Railway transport
- Application of the Galileo system in transport

The schedule for the meetings will be prepared in autumn 2005 by experts from the Ministries of Transport of the member countries.

The four-party ministerial meeting is planned for early 2006.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Lead agency: Ministry of Economy and Transport

National Office for Research and Technology

Research and development forms an important part of the third priority of the Hungarian Presidency. Co-operation in this area between the Visegrád countries could also enhance participation in relevant EU-Programmes; moreover, sharing experiences could provide mutual benefits to the member states for domestic development and improvement. In addition to exchange of ideas between experts, two higher-level meetings of State Secretaries are planned to be held in autumn 2005 and in spring 2006, respectively. The topics on the agenda of the Competitiveness Council will be worth paying attention to in the course of these meetings.

Suggested fields of co-operation:

- Continuation of work on a common V4 position, regarding the EU R&D policy, particularly to the FP7 issues
- Consortium-building possibilities for researchers and entrepreneurs under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP)
- Creation of EU-centres of excellence for Greenfield investment
- R&D infrastructure – co-ordinated development of the region's scientific instrument pool, mutual use of heavy equipment; industrial parks, logistic

- centres, innovation centres, technological incubators – methodological coordination, adoption of best practices, and possibilities for cross-border co-operation between the organizations concerned
- Study of possibilities for regional co-operation in innovation, e.g. within the framework of the INTERREG regions of knowledge
 - Competitive bidding for R&D financing from national funds and EU Structural Funds – methodological coordination, mutual adoption of best practices
 - Comparison of the planned Programmes for R&D and innovation planned in the Second National Development Plan
 - Provision of capital for innovation purposes – seed capital, early-stage capital, risk capital. Methodological coordination, mutual adoption of best practices
 - Co-operation between industry and the university/academic sphere, sharing experience in the field
 - Mobility of young researchers – organized exchange of R&D scientists and engineers under 30 for one-month periods
 - Elaboration of support Programmes to encourage researchers to return to their home country
 - Consideration of the introduction of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and of the elaboration of an objective monitoring system

The Second Technology Foresight Summit is planned to take place in Budapest in March 2006.

CULTURE

Lead agency: Ministry of Cultural Heritage

Key events of cultural relations include the Ministerial Meetings to be held twice a year, and quarterly consultations between experts of Ministries four times each year. The schedule:

- Autumn 2005: Ministerial Meeting and consultations at expert level, Czech Republic
- January 2006: consultations at expert level, Hungary
- Spring 2006: Ministerial Meeting and consultations at expert level, Hungary

It is recommended for the Ministerial Meetings to sustain the practice of the consultations on issues to be included in the agenda of the Council Meeting of EU Cultural Ministers. Furthermore, it could be useful to exchange information on the cultural aspects of National Development Plans.

The V4 cultural ministers' meeting approved various joint projects. Their implementation will be in process also in 2005-2006.

- In 2006, young industrial designers from the Visegrád countries will show their works at a joint exhibition in London organised by Hungary with professional coordination provided by the Hungarian University of Applied Arts.
- The continuation of the Visegrád Library project approved by Ministers of Culture during their meeting in Banska Bystrica.
- Ministers could agree on the adoption of the Polish project aiming at the joint release of a series of records with works by less known composers from the member countries.

In 2006, the traditional V4 folklore festival will be organised by Hungary.

EDUCATION

Lead agency: Ministry of Education

The Presidency deems it important to continue the “incoming”, “intra-Visegrád”, and “outgoing” scholarships granted under the continually expanding Visegrád Scholarship Programme. Given the year-by-year increase of the number of applicants, we trust that the Programme will only gain in popularity during the Hungarian Presidency. As the applications sent in this year indicate that future politicians and experts show a growing interest in the Central European region, “intra” type scholarships (those that promote greater mobility within the Group) will enjoy priority in the Scholarship Programme.

As a new element of the Scholarship Programme, we welcome the Ukrainian scholarship scheme, which we hope will introduce a long-standing practice. As of 2005/2006, grants from the International Visegrád Fund will be awarded to 32 young Ukrainians for one year of postgraduate studies at a V4 university.

We also welcome and support the initiative of Oxford University to create a permanent lecturership in “East-Central European History” and wish to continue the work that has started to survey existing possibilities and coordinate plans.

CO-OPERATION IN HOME AFFAIRS

Lead agency: Ministry of the Interior

Schengen

We recommend the following subjects for discussion in the Working Group for Schengen Co-operation:

- Issues related to the setting up of a Border Management Fund and a Return Fund;
- Production and control technologies related to documents with biometric identification;
- SIS II and VIS strategic management;
- Issues concerning the implementation of the Schengen acquis (cross-border traffic, co-operation in Schengen evaluations, preparations for the lifting of internal border controls);
- Continuation of co-operation in the application of the Dublin II Regulation, in particular in the field of practical application of the Regulation in the transfer of applicants for asylum;
- Co-operation with neighbouring third countries (joint Programmes, EU projects);
- Co-operation with the Salzburg Forum.

In view of the fact that the competent Council Working Group plans to start the Schengen evaluation of the V4 countries in February 2006 by checking compliance with data protection requirements, we suggest a series of consultations to be held on relevant experience by the Ministries concerned (Ministries of Interior, Ministries of Foreign affairs, Offices of EU

Affairs) or at least a conference to be arranged with the Nordic States, which have recently undergone similar Schengen evaluations.

We deem it important to continue the co-operation on border safety between the V4 countries and Austria, focusing on the following tasks:

- There is a continued need to lay particular emphasis on to be laid on harmonised preparation for Schengen. We therefore suggest an exchange of individual schedules elaborated and approved by the border control authorities. Joint examination of some priority topics at expert level, in one of the active working groups or forums, is also necessary. Such a topic could be, for instance, the implementation of measures to be taken for the abolition of controls at the internal borders.
- Joint action and co-operation in the execution of the tasks formulated in the multi-annual Hague Programme aimed at “strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union”. Priorities in this regard include border control, SIS, visa policies, legal and illegal migration, refugee matters, and joint action against organized crime and particularly against trafficking in human beings. In the interest of the coordination of the priorities in the Hague Programmes, it is advised to set up a special forum for experts as a useful venue of translating international experiences into effective national systems complying with EU requirements.
- In order to make border-crossing a simple procedure and to facilitate the development of a system of international relations between civil communities, Hungary has prepared a plan for possible border crossing points for suggestion.
- Particular attention should be given to the implementation of the aims of the Four-party (Hungarian-Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian) Work Plan.

Public administration

Hungary will host the meeting of State Secretaries and Deputy Ministers in charge of public administration matters of the V4 countries in the second half of 2005.

Meetings of three working groups (on Modernisation of public administration; on Information systems in public administration; on Training in public administration) are planned for the first half of 2006 in Hungary.

We wish to focus on the following topics in the field of co-operation in public administration:

- Regionalism, the role of the regions;
- Microregional-level studies;
- Study of the laws on administrative procedures of the member countries; strengthening the role of public administration as a service provider.
- Modernisation of public administration;
- Search for the best forms of co-operation between state and self-governments

Disaster-management

For the first half of 2006 a meeting of General directors, an expert workshop and staff exercises are planned to take place.

Resumption of the fruitful co-operation between V4 offices and the Dutch partner organization is to be considered.

DEFENCE

Lead agency: Ministry of Defence

It would be recommendable to co-ordinate views on defence policy matters at various levels, taking into account in particular the meetings of Defence Policy Directors held prior to NATO and EU defence ministries and and mainly V4 session of Defence Ministers.

High-level expert consultations could be held in the following fields:

- Exchange of views of Intelligence Directors at a regular annual meeting;
- Regular consultations on possible joint V4 action on matters concerning the National Armaments Directors (NAD) and the operation of the European Defence Agency
- Regular conferences of the Chiefs of Staff on issues pertaining to the military, armed forces restructuring, and experiences from participation in operations.
- Possible additional areas of consultation include: prevention of epidemics, protection against weapons of mass destruction, utilization of information technology for logistic purposes, and the findings from strategic defence reviews.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Public health

Lead agency: Ministry of Health

Co-operation schemes involving the Visegrád states and other countries of the region can fit in the implementation of EU's health strategy, with special emphasis to be laid on the problem of patient mobility. Co-operation regarding the provision of, compensation for and access to cross-border health care services is planned in the following areas:

- Purchase of cross-border health care provisions and services, including patient rights and obligations;
- Health technology assessments;
- Information and e-health, including data protection;
- Impact analyses in health care;
- Health insurance and quality.

Lead agency of the following issues:

Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

Youth

The Visegrád countries should meet their reporting obligations on "Youth Participation and Information" due to be completed by the end of 2005, through a joint research project. Hungary suggests the co-ordination of a joint bidding for EU financing, in certain cases involving Slovenia. Only civil researchers would be foreseen to participate in the application process.

Drug prevention

Any future action should be aimed at the creation of regional co-operation based on the implementation of the joint projects discussed in October 2004 in Bled:

- Reduction of harmful effects of drug use;
- Treatment in prison;
- The Schengen system;
- Synthetic drugs of abuse.

Special attention should be devoted to the financing of joint projects.

Social equality for women and men

We regard gender equality as an important social issue, not least for its economic implications. In this field, we plan to hold:

- meeting(s) of the Ministers concerned;
- exchanges of experiences by responsible government officials and NGOs;
- a meeting devoted to the feminine aspect of migration, perhaps involving non-V4 countries;
- Consideration of inviting calls for applications specifically addressed to women under the International Visegrád Fund scheme.

Handicapped persons

Steps should be taken to promote access for handicapped persons to cultural, educational and youth facilities. To this end, it would be useful to examine the experiences of the countries concerning relevant utilisation of the Structural Funds of the EU, particularly the European Social Fund, in the period between 2004 and 2006.

Roma affairs

The Decade of the Roma Integration Programme also affects the V4 countries, which are expected to work out a long-term strategy for achieving significant improvement within the next ten years in the situation of the Roma population living in deep poverty.

The Programme has four priority areas: education, employment, health and housing. Cross-border co-operation and joint initiatives will have a vital role in all of these areas, since significant Roma population live along the borders of the Visegrad countries.

It is also of utmost importance to present Roma interests duly in budgetary planning both at the national and at the Union levels in all of these priorities.

We propose that the V4 Governments shall join up to have the Roma development goals appear as characteristically as possible in the EU Financial Perspective for 2007-2013.

In order to revise National Action Plans and co-ordinate their implementations, the Hungarian Presidency is planning to organize a meeting for the respective ministers of the Visegrad countries.

EMPLOYMENT POLICY

Lead agency: Ministry of Employment and Labour

A competitive economy requires a flexible and efficient labour market. The development of such a labour market is another important area where the Visegrád countries should co-operate and complement their own activities with the joint projects that have been launched together with the Benelux states. Co-operation is recommended on the following subjects:

- Exploration of possibilities for the development of cross-border employment relations, study of best practices
- Exchange of data on labour market (within V4 and also with the Benelux states);
- Novel forms of employment (e.g. teleworking), possibilities of their state support; the Benelux example;
- Exploration of employment opportunities in the Benelux states.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Lead agency: Ministry of the Environment and Water

International co-operation is indispensable for the protection of the environment, and co-ordinated action by the V4 countries on topical issues is particularly important in our region. In light of the key role of the civil sphere in environmental affairs, we encourage the submission of applications on environmental issues to the Visegrád Fund.

A meeting at the level of Ministers of Environment will be held in spring 2006, with the possible participation of Croatia and Ukraine as observers. Consultations of the ministers concerned will be held before the meetings of the EU Council, as appropriate. Furthermore, additional informal consultations between the units co-ordinating international relations, the EU co-ordination units, and the environment attachés posted to Brussels are planned to be held. The Visegrád co-operation could, among other things, be instrumental in the preparation of Bulgaria and Romania for accession to the EU regarding the environmental chapters.

The meetings will focus on the following topics:

- V4 priorities in the implementation of the environmental chapters of EU neighbourhood policy and related action plans (e.g. cross-border Programmes and projects) and in the establishment of the related Financial Instrument;
- Visegrád co-operation and shared interests in promoting the entry into force and implementation of the Carpathian Convention on sustainable development in the Carpathian region;
- Exchange of opinions on global and regional affairs, preparation for the meeting of the UN Committee on Sustainable Development, and for the seventh conference of Ministers of the Environment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe;
- Development of a common position on the EU regulations for the forthcoming period: authorisation of the distribution of GMO products within the Community; draft regulation on the registration, evaluation, licensing, and limitation of chemical substances (REACH, POP); draft regulation on financial instruments serving environmental purposes (LIFE+), and co-operation in the field of NATURA 2000 and the preservation of biological diversity.

INFORMATICS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Lead agency: Ministry of Informatics and Telecommunications

Planned meetings:

- V4+ Regional Telecommunications Regulation Forum, first half of year 2006, Prague;
- V4+ Meeting of Ministers of Informatics, Hungary, depending on the expert conference;
- “European Children – European Identity in the Information Society”, an international students conference and game of adventure examining the meaning of Central European (“Visegrád”) and European identity from an American perspective.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lead agency: National Office for Regional Development

The Hungarian Presidency intends to continue the multi-faceted co-operation of the Visegrád countries in the field of regional development. The aim of this co-operation is the harmonization of national development documents outside the EU framework, and the elaboration of joint positions on territorial issues affected by EU cohesion policies, focusing – in conformity with the declaration of April 2005 – on the following subjects:

- Urban development, urban rehabilitation, urban competitiveness
- Renovation and energetical modernization of buildings
- Cross-border co-operation, transnational programmes in the context of the next programming period
- Financing of road constructions outside the transnational networks

The Office plans to arrange the next meeting of the V4 Working Group for Regional Development in September 2005, where the establishment of a European Cohesion Policy Institute in Budapest, which would deal with analysis, planning and research regarding Eastern European territorial processes.

TOURISM

Lead agency: National Tourist Office

The Hungarian Presidency wishes to carry on the dynamically growing co-operation of the Visegrád countries in the field of tourism both in the form of intergovernmental co-ordination and joint marketing. To this end, Hungary will host the meeting of National Tourism Agencies in July 2005, and the meeting of high-level state tourism administration representatives in February 2006.

We recommend the following areas for consideration:

- Sharing of experiences on the preparation of the EU budgetary period 2007-2013 and its possibilities for tourism (at the meeting of leading government officials);
- Marketing co-operation with ‘European Quartet’ as brand in China, Japan, the USA, and from 2006 probably in India
- Joint study tours from China, Japan, and the USA with approx. 20 media representatives each

- Exchange of statistical information
- Joint participation in the 2005 CITM travel fair in Kunming, China (with support of the Visegrád Fund), with a follow-up workshop in Beijing, and in the travel fair IATA 2005 in Tokyo
- Updating and development of the www.european-quartet.com webpage
- Updating and development of a range of brochures, including the preparation of thematic brochures, maps (e.g. V4 World Heritage Sites)
- Creation and dissemination of V4 itineraries as flyers in English, Chinese and Japanese

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN PATENT OFFICES

Lead agency: Hungarian Patent Office

The next session of the offices taking part in the co-operation scheme is to be held in September or October 2005 in Hungary. The exact place and date of the session will be fixed in May, when the drawing up of the agenda begins.

Plans include co-operation with the Benelux Trademarks Office.

III. Civil dimension of V4 co-operation

Beyond the political and sectoral dimensions, the support of the civil dimension is emphasised in the priorities of the Hungarian presidency. The Kroměříž declaration refers to the “continued strengthening of the civil dimension within the frames of the International Visegrád Fund” as one area of future co-operation. The **International Visegrád Fund** based in Bratislava, the only V4 institution, has been operated successfully for years. As the statutes were updated recently, there is no need for further modifications. Grants from the Fund should be awarded with consideration of the presidency priorities at all times. According to a relevant decision of the prime ministers, the Fund disposes of an annual budget of 3 million Euros from 2005 onwards. Small and standard grants, the Visegrád Strategic Programme, and scholarships as well as the Visegrád Award can be financed from this amount. We regard the Ukrainian scholarship Programme launched in 2005 as being of outstanding significance, as well as we attach particular importance to the Visegrad Strategic Programmes which support projects that will be implemented in all V4 countries.

In addition to the joint projects, most of which are realized by non-governmental organizations, we wish to accentuate the models, conducts and regulations regarding co-operation between the public sector and NGOs within the V4, because civil co-operation will not be able to strengthen the cohesion of the Visegrád countries without parallel economic co-operation.

We deem it important to increase the **reputation and recognition** of the group, particularly concerning the grants and scholarships of the IVF. Public television networks could play a significant role in achieving this goal. Background discussions and regular briefings by spokespersons of the relevant agencies are required to be arranged for the media.

As regards both civil and economic relations, we appreciate and encourage the activity of the **Consultative Council of the Euroregions of the Visegrád Countries**, which, through its success, could improve both the cohesion and the reputation of the V4.