

**REPORT ON THE CZECH PRESIDENCY
OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP
July 2011 – June 2012**

Introduction

In recent years, Visegrad cooperation and coordination of positions on various issues has become a natural process and a matter of course, both for the countries of the Visegrad Group and for their partners in the European Union. To continue and, if possible, to deepen this process is the general aim of every country presiding the Visegrad Group, and the Czech Republic is no exception.

The Czech Presidency undertook to translate this general aim into practical, tangible results in key areas of cooperation. Its programme identified the following main priority areas: the EU multiannual financial framework, energy, Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans, and armed forces cooperation. Naturally, the Czech Presidency organized joint action in many other areas, with special emphasis on those where the V4 need to develop their cooperation and coordination on important EU issues.

As regards the multiannual financial framework (MFF), the expert-level dialogue and exchange of views was intensive and regular. An important step forward in coordinating V4 positions was the joint statement adopted at an informal ministerial meeting held in the V4+Slovenia format with Germany as an observer (Prague, 22 March 2012). The statement was presented at the April meeting of the EU General Affairs Council (GAC). It deals with issues arising in the process of MFF negotiations, as well as issues related to strategic programming and implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy. Many of the V4 proposals outlined in this statement were later reflected in the compromise proposals of the Danish EU Presidency.

Energy was on the agenda of both Prime Ministers summits (14 October 2011 and 22 June 2012), which by itself attests to the importance of this topic. The summits proved the existence of a broad consensus among the V4 on practically all key issues, ranging from route diversification to a rational approach to the energy mix.

As regards the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the launch of the new *Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Programme* (V4EaP) was unquestionably one of the main achievements of the Czech Presidency. The programme is established within the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and will considerably broaden the range of IVF activities vis-à-vis the Eastern partners, whose successful transformation and cooperation with the EU are a lasting priority and a matter of vital interest to the V4. The programme will offer scholarships to EaP countries and support projects promoting democratization, social and economic transformation, regional cooperation and civil society. The resources earmarked for the V4EaP in the IVF budget amount to about EUR 1.5 million.

The V4EaP programme has attracted the interest of some non-V4 partners who value the IVF's experience and would like to use the IVF as a vehicle for their own activities supporting

transformation in EaP countries. There is an arrangement on cooperation with the Netherlands; the US Emerging Donors Challenging Fund has been cooperating since the past year, and Japan has expressed interest as well.

As regards the Western Balkans, a proposal to establish a separate fund for the Western Balkan countries was presented by the Czech Presidency at a V4 ministerial meeting with Western Balkan countries (Prague, 4 November 2011). The proposal draws on the existing experience with regional cooperation and the work of the IVF. The response of the Western Balkan partners has been mostly favourable: three countries of the region have already expressed an interest to participate, and more countries will certainly follow. Since regional ownership of the proposed fund (including its budget) is of central importance, the Czech Presidency and the IVF Secretariat assessed the level of interest in each country of the region and facilitated a debate among the Western Balkan countries on the project.

V4 armed forces cooperation is traditionally intensive and wide-ranging. During the Czech Presidency it centred around the Visegrad Group European Union Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) that is to be established in 2016 (the final decision was taken by the V4 Defence Ministers in Litoměřice on 4 May 2012) and on cooperation in capability development. The basic parameters of the V4 EU BG were agreed by the V4 Chiefs of General Staff at their meeting in the beginning of April 2012.

An important initiative in the field of security was the declaration *Responsibility for a Strong NATO*, made by the V4 ahead of the NATO summit in Chicago. The declaration was presented by the V4 Foreign and Defence Ministers during the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting in Brussels on 18 April 2012. It reaffirms the commitment of V4 countries to continuing the implementation of the NATO Strategic Concept and sends a clear signal of their readiness to contribute in concrete terms to the three core tasks of the Alliance – collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.

Think Visegrad, a V4 think-tank platform, is to be established in the nearest future. The platform will facilitate cooperation between V4 think-tanks and provide a mechanism for elaborating independent long-term or ad hoc analyses on issues relevant to all V4 countries, as well as analyses based on assignments from individual V4 governments. The platform will be fully financed by special IVF grants. In the future it might also serve as a point of liaison between NGOs in V4 countries and think-tanks and other important NGOs in third countries.

Like all recent V4 Presidencies, the Czech Presidency continued the series of regular activities and top-level meetings that have already become a tradition. In the past “Visegrad year” these included a V4 Presidents summit (7-8 October 2011) held symbolically in the Hungarian town of Visegrad where the V4 group was founded twenty years ago. A regular conference of the Presidents of V4 Parliaments, developing the V4 parliamentary dimension, took place in Prague on 15-16 September 2011. On the government level, the most important events were the two Prime Ministers summits (an informal summit in autumn and an official one in summer) and the autumn and spring meetings of the Foreign Ministers. These events form the backbone of the V4 coordination mechanism (for details on the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers meetings see below). In addition there was a large programme of events organized by individual government institutions and ministries, as shown in the following overview:

Government Office

The focus was on an exchange views and coordination of positions on issues discussed by the European Council and GAC. These included, in particular, the current situation of the EU and Eurozone (growth, consolidation, competitiveness), the MFF, Cohesion Policy, and certain issues related to energy (including external energy relations), justice and home affairs and external relations (mainly the European Neighbourhood Policy).

Clearly the most important events were the two V4 Prime Ministers summits held in Prague on 14 October 2011 (the main points are outlined in the Czech Presidency's Communication concerning the MFF and the Cohesion Policy) and on 22 June 2012 (the key documents are a letter of the V4 Prime Ministers to the Presidents of the European Council, European Commission and of the European Parliament outlining the V4 priorities for the upcoming June European Council, and a joint statement taking stock of the outgoing Czech V4 Presidency).

Another V4 Prime Ministers meeting was called by the Czech Prime Minister Nečas ahead of the informal European Council on 30 January 2012. The Prime Ministers met at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic in Brussels to coordinate V4 positions on issues on the Council agenda (action to boost growth and jobs within the Union, and the new fiscal treaty). At the end of the Czech Presidency, the V4 Prime Ministers met at the Czech Permanent Representation ahead of the European Council on 28 June 2012; the guest at this meeting was the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz.

In advance of the June Prime Ministers summit that concluded the Czech Presidency, the Government Office, in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, organized two videoconferences (4 and 20 June 2012) of the V4 State Secretaries for EU affairs to discuss the preparations and the documents that were to be approved by the Prime Ministers during the summit.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EU affairs

The V4 State Secretaries for EU affairs met in Prague on 7 October 2011. The focus was on preparations for the informal V4 Prime Ministers summit scheduled for 14 October 2011. The State Secretaries discussed the MFF, the situation in the Eurozone, and energy security including nuclear energy. They took stock of the recent EU EaP summit and discussed the developments in Ukraine and in the Western Balkans.

The Directors General of the EU Sections of V4 Foreign Ministries met in Warsaw on 16 February 2012. They expressed appreciation for the organization and management of the Czech Presidency, were briefed on the priorities of the upcoming Polish Presidency, and discussed EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Poland agreed that the practice of coordinating V4 positions in advance of European Council meetings would continue under the Polish Presidency.

The V4 Foreign Ministers held an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on 19 April 2012 on the margins of a NAC meeting. They discussed the Swiss Government's decision to re-establish limitations on free movement of citizens from some EU Member States and outlined their views in a joint statement.

Eastern Partnership

A meeting of the V4 and EaP Foreign Ministers with guests from Denmark (EU Presidency), Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and with High Representative Ashton and Commissioner Füle, took place in Prague on 5 March 2012. The meeting focused on the EaP, namely on the V4 EaP programme and the EaP roadmap. A seminar of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was held on the eve of the ministerial meeting (2 March 2012), and its conclusions and recommendations were presented to the ministerial meeting on 5 March.

The V4 Foreign Ministers issued a joint V4 statement on V4/IVF activities in respect of the EaP, and another joint statement with the Foreign Ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

On the margins of the V4-EaP ministerial meeting, the V4 Political Directors met the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, Philippe Lefort.

Western Balkans

The main event was a meeting of the V4 and Western Balkan Foreign Ministers with Commissioner Füle, the EEAS Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia, Miroslav Lajčák, and with the Slovenian Foreign Minister as a special guest (Prague, 4 November 2011). The participants expressed their support for further enlargement of the EU to include Western Balkan countries, discussed new opportunities for V4 cooperation with the Western Balkans, assessed the situation in the region, and exchanged views on the future of its European integration. The main result was a proposal to establish a separate fund for the Western Balkans modelled on the IVF.

After the ministerial meeting, representatives of the Czech Presidency and the IVF Executive Director held consultations in individual Western Balkan countries.

A working meeting with Western Balkan representatives took place in Bratislava on 12-13 April 2012. The meeting agreed on the basic parameters for the Western Balkans fund and on the next steps. By the end of the Czech Presidency, participation in the fund, including the payment of the basic contribution for 2013, was officially confirmed by Macedonia and Kosovo and unofficially by Albania. The other countries are considering their participation.

Cooperation in V4+ formats

In addition to the main priority regions, cooperation in V4+ formats was developed with some additional countries and groups. During the Czech Presidency, there were consultations and joint activities with Japan and the United States, and negotiations with Benelux, Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Georgia.

V4+Japan

V4+Japan is already a traditional format for political consultations and joint projects. The Political Directors from the Foreign Ministries of V4 countries and Japan held their regular meeting in Tokyo on 19-20 December 2011. The meeting confirmed the interest of both sides to continue the dialogue, mainly as regards regional security issues. During their visit to Japan the V4 Political Directors met with representatives of the Japanese Defence Ministry and participated in a panel discussion on *The EU and Japan seen from Central Europe* at the Tokyo Foundation, a leading think-tank. The panel was an important public diplomacy event, open to the local public and streamed live on the web. It fully met the main purpose – to show the Japanese expert community that V4 countries remained relatively unscathed by the European crisis.

Another important event was the V4+Japan energy seminar in Tokyo on 11 – 13 April 2012. The seminar and accompanying programme was organized by the Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Czech Embassy in Tokyo. The topics were energy efficiency, renewable resources and nuclear security and safety. The seminar was attended by about seventy representatives of Japanese government authorities, V4 countries and senior representatives of Japan's energy and nuclear sector. The main aim was to exchange information and above all to identify areas for potential cooperation.

A joint tourism presentation of the V4 under the logo *European Quartet, One Melody* was held in Tokyo (16 May 2012) and in Osaka.

A festival of contemporary films from V4 countries took place on 14-17 February 2012.

V4+Benelux

Cooperation with Benelux also has a long tradition. In recent years it has involved mainly regular consultations and exchange of views on EU issues. The Foreign Ministers met after a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in Luxembourg on 10 October 2011 to discuss current issues and national positions (EaP, Middle East peace process, EEAS, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Southern Neighbourhood – Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and Yemen).

The V4 and Benelux Political Directors held consultations on the margins of the January FAC, mainly to take stock of the work of the EEAS.

The Directors General of the EU Sections of Foreign Ministries held informal consultations in Prague on 14 May 2012, mainly to exchange views on current EU issues (economic and financial situation in the Eurozone and in the EU, working methods of the FAC, GAC and the European Council, MFF negotiations, EU enlargement, situation in the Western Balkans, and the ENP).

V4+United States

The V4 Political Directors held consultations with US representatives in Washington on 20-21 March 2012. The programme included meetings at the Department of State and the Department of Defence, participation in a strategic think-tank roundtable organized by the CEPA, SAIS and Atlantic Council think tanks, and meetings with senior officials from the EU Delegation and experts from the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Committee on Armed Services.

During and with the support of the Czech Presidency, the IVF began to cooperate on projects with US partners. It entered into an agreement with the Emerging Donors Challenge Fund on the co-funding of projects in selected EaP countries (autumn 2011), and into an agreement with the CEPA think tank on a fellow exchange programme in the field of international relations (spring 2012).

Other meetings of the V4 Political Directors

A working visit to Israel and the Palestinian Territories took place on 4-6 September 2011. In Israel, the V4 Political Directors met government members (Deputy Prime Minister Libermann, Deputy Prime Minister Meridor) and a number of senior representatives of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. At the Foreign Ministry in Ramallah, the V4 Political Directors met

Ahmad Al Deek (adviser to the Foreign Minister) and senior representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Consultations in Georgia took place on 20-23 November 2011. In Tbilisi, the V4 Political Directors met senior representatives of the Georgian Foreign Ministry and representatives of the Interior Ministry. They also visited the Field Office of the EU Monitoring Mission in Former Yugoslavia (EUMM) in Mtskheta and met the officials of the South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Line.

A visit to Serbia and Kosovo took place on 18-20 January 2012. During their working visit to Belgrade on 18 January 2012, the V4 Political Directors met a number of senior representatives of the Serbian government and NGOs. The leading Serbian daily Politika published a whole-page interview with the V4 Political Directors concerning mainly regional cooperation. The consultations in Kosovo were on a similarly high level.

Security policy

The V4 declaration *Responsibility for a Strong NATO* was presented by the V4 Foreign and Defence Ministers during a NAC meeting in Brussels on 18 April 2012, ahead of the May NATO summit in Chicago. The declaration reaffirms the commitment of V4 countries to continuing the implementation of the NATO Strategic Concept and sends a clear signal of their readiness to contribute in concrete terms to the three core tasks of the Alliance – collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.

Cooperation in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian aid

A meeting of the V4 Deputy Foreign Ministers/Ministers for Development with Commissioner Piebalgs took place in Prague on 5-6 October 2011. The purpose was to present to V4 countries the planned communications from the Commission concerning the future of the EU development policy and budget support. The meeting discussed two relevant topics: the financial instruments that would support EU external action under the MFF, and the joint programming of development assistance

On 30 March 2012, the Foreign Ministry in cooperation with the General Directorate of the Fire and Rescue Corps organized a meeting that brought together officials from the V4 Foreign Ministries who are in charge of the humanitarian aid provided by their countries abroad, and officials from the V4 civil protection and crisis management structures who are responsible for the sending of rescue workers and in-kind aid abroad. The meeting identified opportunities for V4 cooperation in providing humanitarian aid abroad.

Consular cooperation

The directors of the Consular Departments of V4 Foreign Ministries held consultations in Prague on 22 June 2012. They discussed consular protection of EU citizens abroad, opportunities for cooperation in consular crisis management, the future of the Visegrad House project, issues related to the visa process (e.g. VIS roll-out, issues related to members of the families of EU citizens), visa process outsourcing and other consular issues, and exchanged experience regarding cooperation between honorary consulates.

Cooperation of analytical departments

Analysts from the Foreign Ministries of V4 countries and Denmark held consultations in Prague on 24 April 2012. They discussed the current development of European integration and the developments in Eastern Europe (including EU-Russia relations and the EaP). They

also took stock of the trio EU Presidency of Hungary, Poland and Denmark, and of the Czech V4 Presidency.

V4 cooperation within the United Nations

The directors of the UN Departments of V4 Foreign Ministries held consultations in Prague on 25 April 2012. They followed up their previous consultations in Bratislava in 2011, and took stock of the main (autumn) part of the 66th session of the UN General Assembly (GA). They also reviewed the priority topics for the 67th UN GA session and discussed issues such as the presidency of the 67th UN GA session, the current V4 candidatures, and budget issues.

Cooperation between internal audit departments

The directors of departments responsible for internal audit at the V4 Foreign Ministries held consultations in Prague on 30 November 2011. They discussed the functions and powers given to auditors by national legislation and by the internal regulations of their ministries, and the action they were taking in the fight against corruption. They also exchanged practical experience, including examples of audit practice, and experience regarding the implementation of conclusions and recommendations from audit reports, cooperation with external audit authorities, with the police and other security structures.

Public diplomacy

A conference of historians *My Hero, Your Enemy: Listening to Understand* took place at the Foreign Ministry under the auspices of Minister Schwarzenberg on 1 – 3 December 2011. The conference was organized by the Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in cooperation with partner organizations from V4 countries, and funded by a special IVF grant. The conference brought together historians and other experts from V4 countries to discuss the perception of common history in the V4 region where views on certain personalities and events continue to differ, sometimes radically, from country to country. The conference contributed to one of the Czech Presidency's priorities: to enhance the internal cohesion of the V4 and to facilitate mutual understanding between our citizens. An important part of the programme was an exchange of views on ways the history of neighbouring countries is taught at schools in the V4 region.

The process leading to the establishment *Think Visegrad*, a V4 think-tank platform, was set in motion shortly before the end of the Czech Presidency. The main purpose of the platform will be to facilitate cooperation between V4 think tanks and to provide a mechanism for elaborating independent long-term or ad hoc analyses on issues relevant to all V4 countries, as well as analyses based on assignments from individual V4 governments.

Economic diplomacy

A conference on *Strengthening the Partnership between V4 Countries and the World Bank Group* took place at the Foreign Ministry on 21 March 2012. Representatives of the World Bank, World Bank Institute, International Finance Corporation (IFC) and of Austrian financial institutions presented to participants from V4 countries opportunities for cooperation in the area of development assistance, and opportunities for the participation of the V4 business community in IFC activities. The conference was followed by a seminar on 22 March 2012 during which IFC representatives presented to the V4 business community the opportunities available to private businesses in the infrastructure, energy and engineering sectors.

V4 activities organized by Czech embassies

Most Czech embassies organized events to promote Visegrad cooperation and the Czech Presidency in their countries of accreditation. Space does not permit a complete list; however, the following is a selection of the most visible events:

One of the important events was the conference on *Strategic Energy Challenges: V4 and Bulgaria and Romania: Common Interests, Common Actions*, held in Sofia on 26-27 April 2012. The conference was organized by the Paneurope Movement – Bulgaria in cooperation with the Czech Embassy in Sofia and funded by an IVF grant. It was attended by about 200 representatives of government institutions, the diplomatic corps, academic and business communities as well as NGOs.

On 2 May 2012, representatives of V4 countries met in Washington with the local think-tank community to discuss the declaration of V4 Foreign and Defence Ministers *Responsibility for a Strong NATO* and the DAV4 expert group report *Towards a smarter V4: How to improve defence collaboration among the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*. Several V4 events took place in Bucharest. An exhibition entitled *Visegrad Group Countries on Stamps and in Pictures* was opened in Bucharest on 7 December 2011. Another exhibition, *Voices of Freedom: Radio Free Europe in the Cold War Era*, was opened in Bucharest on 12 March 2012. This exhibition was staged by the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Czech Centres to mark the 60th anniversary of Radio Free Europe. The accompanying events included a panel discussion on *Radio Free Europe: its legacy in Central Europe and its impact today* and the screening of Alexandru Solomon's film *Cold Waves*. On the Czech Embassy's initiative, the Romanian NGO Resource Centre for public participation – CeRe and the Czech NGO Keynote organized a workshop on the social and economic integration of the Roma, held in Bucharest on 21-22 June 2012. The workshop was funded by grants from the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (German Marshall Fund) and the IVF.

Ministry of Transport

The cooperation was very intensive and successful, focusing on the strategic proposals currently under discussion in the EU Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE): the TEN-T review and the financing of transport networks through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). The existing close V4 cooperation builds on the previous joint V4 action regarding TEN-T maps (Slovak Presidency) and can be expected to continue in the context of the ongoing CEF negotiations under the Polish Presidency.

The most important event organized under the Czech Presidency was the Transport Ministers meeting in V4+ format in Prague on 20 March 2012. The meeting was attended by the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport, Siim Kallas, V4 Transport Ministers and ministers of Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The main topic was the TEN-T review and CEF development.

Another important event was the Ministerial Conference on Eastern Partnership in Transport held in Krakow as part of the Polish EU Presidency programme. The conference brought together the EU and EaP Transport Ministers for the first time, and created an institutional platform for their cooperation – the Transport Panel - which continues to meet regularly. The process was initiated by the Communication from the Commission *The EU and its neighbouring regions: A renewed approach to transport cooperation*. The V4 made a joint declaration on issues raised in the communication.

Ministry of Finance

The cooperation focused mainly on the MFF. The Deputy Finance Ministers and State Secretaries met twice to discuss the MFF, and there were also two meetings of senior representatives of the tax administration authorities of V4 countries, Slovenia and Austria (a format known as V4+2 or V6).

Cooperation developed in the following areas:

1. MFF
2. Consultations on national fiscal frameworks
3. Customs cooperation
4. Cooperation between tax administration authorities
5. Cooperation between V4 countries and international financial institutions
6. Exchange of information on the development and implementation of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms for 2009-2014

Ministry of Culture

A conference on the role of culture in the future cohesion policy took place in Mikulov on 6-7 October 2011. The conference was organized by the Culture Ministry jointly with the Regional Development Ministry. The programme included a separate meeting of V4 Culture Ministers who outlined their conclusions in a joint statement. Regarding the statement, the priority is to develop cultural infrastructure by transforming cultural monuments into centres of education, methodology development and innovation.

The V4 Culture Ministers held their 22nd meeting in Prague on 1 June 2012. Their joint communiqué underlines the opportunities for promotion of the V4 at major international art and culture events, and ways to support culture in V4 countries, with respect to the challenges brought about by the current economic situation in the EU and with respect to the social and economic potential in the area of culture.

Ministry for Regional Development

There were several V4 expert and ministerial meetings, including meetings in the V4+Slovenia format. The aim was to identify any problematic points in the draft MFF in advance of the publication of the draft new Cohesion Policy legislative package. The joint V4+Slovenia declaration signed on 22 March 2012 was presented at the GAC meeting in Luxembourg. In January 2012, Prague hosted a seminar on *the Role of evaluation in preparing and implementing the 2014+ programming period* attended by the head of the Commission's DG REGIO Evaluation Unit and Czech evaluation experts, and a seminar on the implementation of large-scale projects in V4 countries and Slovenia. A seminar on monitoring systems, attended by representatives of V4 countries and Slovenia, took place in Prague in May 2012.

Cooperation between V4 countries, Bulgaria and Romania in the area of spatial planning continued with a seminar to update the Common Spatial Development Document of the V4+2 countries.

Joint V4 promotional activities under the logo *European Quartet – One Melody* continued under the Czech Presidency. Promotional events staged in Russia, United States, India, China, Japan and Brazil included presentations at several trade fairs, roadshows, a number of promotional visits for travel agencies and journalists. Deputy Ministers responsible for tourism met in Prague in February 2012 to approve and sign a Marketing Plan and a Protocol on cooperation in the field of tourism for 2012.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

As regards education, the most important event organized under the Czech Presidency was the Education Ministers seminar on the reform of tertiary education and mobility of students and teachers, held at Palacký University in Olomouc on 14-15 November 2011.

As regards science and research, the focus was on the sharing of existing infrastructures and the building of a database of technological innovations. A conference of the Central European Research Infrastructure Consortium (C-ERIC) on *Research infrastructures in Central Europe, especially in V4 countries*, took place in Prague on 19 December 2012. Work was also in progress on joint V4 positions on the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (Horizon 2020), the Union of Innovation initiative and the drawing of funds under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), with special emphasis on cooperation with EaP countries.

As regards youth, the focus was on preparations for V4 cooperation with EaP countries. A preparatory meeting in Georgia in July 2011 was followed by an expert seminar on V4-EaP cooperation in Prague on 21-23 May 2012.

As regards sport, the V4 Steering Committee of the *Olympic Hopes* held its 18 meeting in Prague on 29-30 November 2011.

Ministry of Defence

The focus was on the ongoing effort to interlink V4 activities with current trends and initiatives on a broader regional scale as well as within NATO (Smart Defence) and the EU (Pooling and Sharing).

The V4 EU BG project plays an important accelerating role in V4 defence cooperation. It has the potential to generate further projects and to improve the interoperability of V4 defence forces.

During the Czech Presidency, Prague hosted several expert meetings on issues relevant to the Czech Presidency's priorities – the V4 EU BG, cooperation with partners, sharing of experience from operations abroad, CBRN and logistics, in particular the establishment of a Multinational Logistics Coordination Centre and the building a Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG).

An important communiqué of the V4 Defence Ministers on the building of the V4 EU BG and on the alignment of the V4 defence planning processes with the NATO Defence Planning Process was signed in Litoměřice on 4 May 2012.

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

There is no tradition of V4 ministerial meetings. Cooperation continued at expert level, focusing on the cross-cutting topic of ESF funds and their use in different areas of social and employment policy. There were four V4 expert seminars to share information, experience and examples of good and bad practice, and to formulate common positions in advance of EU meetings. The results of each seminar are outlined in a joint communiqué.

Ministry of Industry and Trade

Cooperation was most intensive in the field of energy. During the Czech Presidency the High Level Group of Energy held three meetings to coordinate national positions ahead of TTE meetings and formulate V4 positions on the Commission's proposals (e.g. on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure). In the Memorandum of Understanding on North-South Interconnections in Central-Eastern Europe, the countries of the region and the European Commission express their support for closer and more comprehensive cooperation, with regard to the EU Energy 2020 strategy and the February 2011 Conclusions on Energy of the European Council.

CEE 4 Invest, a project initiated by the Czech Presidency, will facilitate cooperation between V4 investment promotion agencies, joint promotion events targeting investors from third countries, and joint support of business and investment in the region.

Ministry of Justice

The most important event organized under the Czech Presidency was the meeting of Central European Justice Ministers (V4 + Slovenia and Croatia) in Kroměříž on 24 – 25 May 2012. The meeting discussed the current problems in the field of justice: ways to reduce the prison population, patents courts, and the enforcement of execution orders.

Ministry of the Interior

Asylum and migration

The most important event was the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the Prague Process held in Poznan in November 2011. The conference was attended by ministers from EU countries, CIS countries (including Russia), Western Balkan countries and Turkey. The Action Plan adopted at the conference is based on the "Building Migration Partnerships" Joint Declaration of the Prague Process.

Security policy

The V4/Austria Working Group on Combating Extremism met in Prague on 14-15 November 2011. The meeting was attended by representatives of police forces and security structures.

Police cooperation

V4 cooperation continued mainly between criminal police services (Criminal Police and Investigating Service of the Czech Republic Police) and immigration police services (Foreigners Police Service of the Czech Republic Police). As part of the Czech Presidency programme, the Foreigners Police Service of the Czech Republic Police co-organized a

conference of the heads of border management services in Budapest on 21- 22 September 2011. The conference discussed Schengen national strategies of border security, illegal migration from the Balkans, and preparations for Schengen evaluations.

Civil protection and fire protection

The heads of V4 civil protection services met in the Czech Republic at the end of the Czech Presidency. They discussed joint V4 action on these matters in the EU and NATO and exchanged national experience.

Ministry of Health

The Health Ministers of V4 countries and Austria met in Prague on 13 April 2012. They discussed the challenges facing healthcare systems during the economic crisis, as well as the implementation of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, and the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to the transparency of measures regulating the prices of medicinal products for human use and their inclusion in the scope of public health insurance systems ("Transparency Directive").

Ministry of Agriculture

V4 Agriculture Ministers met during the Bread Basket international agricultural fair in České Budějovice on 24-25 August 2011, and during the SALIMA 2012 international food fair in Brno on 28-29 February 2012. As has already become a tradition, the V4 meetings were attended by the Agriculture Ministers of Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania.

The first meeting adopted a joint declaration on the future of complementary national direct payments and a joint press communication on renewable energy resources. The second meeting adopted a joint statement of five EU Member States (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia) on rural development. Poland and Slovakia did not endorse this statement.

Ministry of the Environment

The Environment Ministers of V4 countries, Bulgaria and Romania met at Zbiroh Castle on 7-8 November 2011. They discussed the need for an analysis of options to move beyond the 20% greenhouse gas emission target, and preparations for the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17) and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP7). The results are outlined in a joint statement. Another ministerial meeting in the V4+Bulgaria and Romania format was held in Warsaw on 6 February 2012. The main topics were derogations and climate change.

The Czech Presidency hosted two expert seminars: a seminar in the V4+Bulgaria and Romania format, held in Prague on 7 December 2011 to formulate a common position on the MFF and Cohesion Policy, and a seminar in V4+Bulgaria format on *Sharing green economy - best practices towards Rio+20 and beyond*, held in Prague on 9 May 2012 to exchange practical experience and concrete examples of transition to green economy in Central European countries.

Overview of the most important events and joint documents

President

- 7-8 October 2011, Budapest/Visegrad – V4 Presidents summit

Parliament

- 15-16 September 2011, Prague, conference of Presidents of V4 Parliaments
- *Final statement from the conference of Presidents of V4 Parliaments, 15 -16 September 2011, Prague*

Government Office

- October 2011, Prague, expert meetings on the EU multiannual financial framework
- 14 October 2011, Prague, V4 Prime Ministers summit
- 30 January 2012, Brussels, informal V4 Prime Ministers meeting
- 25 May 2012, Prague, meeting of V4 State Secretaries and Ministers for EU affairs – coordination in advance of a GAC meeting and a Friends of Cohesion meeting
- 4 June and 20 June 2012, videoconferences of V4 State Secretaries for EU affairs – preparations for the V4 Prime Ministers summit
- 21-22 June 2012, Prague, V4 Prime Ministers summit
- 28 June 2012, Brussels, informal V4 Prime Ministers meeting with the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz
- *Czech Presidency communication on the EU multiannual financial framework and Cohesion Policy, 14 October 2011, Prague*
- *Joint letter of V4 Prime Ministers to the Presidents of the European Council, European Commission and of the European Parliament in advance of the June European Council, 22 June 2012, Prague*
- *Joint statement of V4 Prime Ministers, 22 June 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- 4-6 September 2011, Tel Aviv/Ramallah, working visit of V4 Political Directors to Israel and the Palestinian Territories
- 5-6 October 2011, Prague, meeting of V4 Deputy Foreign Ministers/Development Ministers with Commissioner Piebalgs
- 7 October 2011, Prague, meeting of V4 State Secretaries for EU affairs
- 10 October 2011, Luxembourg, V4+Benelux Foreign Ministers meeting
- 4 November 2011, Prague, meeting of V4, Slovenian and Western Balkan Foreign Ministers with Commissioner Füle and the EEAS Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia, Miroslav Lajčák
- 20-23 November 2011, Tbilisi, working visit of V4 Political Directors to Georgia

- 30 November 2011, Prague, consultations of V4 directors of internal audit departments
- 19–20 December 2011, Tokyo, V4+Japan Political Directors consultations
- 18-20 January 2012, Belgrade/Pristina, working visit of V4 Political Directors to Serbia and Kosovo
- 23 January 2012, Brussels, V4+Benelux Political Directors consultations
- 16 February 2012, Warsaw, meeting of V4 Directors General of EU Sections
- 5 March 2012, Prague, meeting of V4, EaP, Danish, Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian Foreign Ministers with High Representative Ashton and Commissioner Füle
- 20-21 March 2012, Washington, working visit of V4 Political Directors
- 30 March 2012, Prague, meeting of V4 representatives responsible for the provision of humanitarian aid abroad
- 19 April 2012, Brussels, extraordinary meeting of Foreign Ministers
- 24 April 2012, Prague, consultations of analytical departments of the Foreign Ministries of the V4 and Denmark
- 25 April 2012, Prague, consultations of V4 directors of UN departments
- 14 May 2012, Prague, consultations of V4+Benelux Directors General for EU affairs
- 22 June 2012, Prague, consultations of V4 directors of consular departments

- *V4 statement on Ukraine, 9 August 2011*
- *Joint statement of the V4 and Slovenia on the Western Balkans, Prague, 4 November 2011*
- *Joint statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on V4/IVF activities in respect of the Eastern Partnership, Prague, 5 March 2012*
- *Joint statement of the V4, Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian Foreign Ministers , Prague, 5 March 2012*
- *Responsibility for a Strong NATO, Brussels, 18 April 2012*
- *V4 Statement on Quantitative Limitations for Residence Permits, Brussels, 19 April 2012*

Ministry of Transport

- 24-25 October 2011, Krakow, conference "Eastern Partnership in Transport" and meeting of V4 and EaP Transport Ministers
- 20 March 2012, Prague, meeting of V4, Slovenian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Transport Ministers with the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport, Siim Kallas, on TEN-T review and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)

- *Joint V4 statement on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, Prague, 20 March 2012*

Ministry of Finance

- July and September 2011, Prague, V4 videoconferences on the EU multiannual financial framework

- 5 October 2011, Prague, V4 working meeting on EU spending from 2014 to 2020 – EU Cohesion Policy
- 13-14 October 2011, Wroclaw, V4+2 senior-level meeting of tax administration authorities - EUROFISC
- 1 December 2011, Prague, V4 meeting of heads of central tax administration authorities
- 23-24 February 2012, Wroclaw, V4+2 working meeting of tax administration authorities – VAT risk management
- 21 March 2012, Prague, conference on "Enhancing the Partnership between V4 Countries and the World Bank Group"
- 22 March 2012, Prague, seminar for V4 business community on investment opportunities in the infrastructure, energy and engineering sectors
- 13 April 2012, Budapest, V4 working meeting on the development and implementation of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms for 2009-2014
- 29 June 2012, Prague, V4 working meeting on crisis management in the financial sector
- 7 October 2011, Prague, meeting of V4 Deputy Ministers and State Secretaries on the EU multiannual financial framework
- 7-8 December 2011, Krakow, meeting of the working group of V4 customs authorities and the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF) on the under-invoicing of textiles and footwear
- 25 May 2012, meeting of V4 Deputy Ministers and State Secretaries on the EU multiannual financial framework
- 1 June 2012, Prague, V4 meeting on the reform of national fiscal frameworks
- 6 June 2012, Hluboká nad Vltavou, V4+2 senior-level meeting of tax administration authorities – organizational changes in V4+2 tax administration
- 5-7 October 2011, Budapest, first meeting of the V4 customs authorities working group on mineral oils

Ministry of Culture

- 6-7 October 2011, Mikulov, conference on the role of culture in the future Cohesion Policy
- 6-7 October 2011, Mikulov, V4 Culture Ministers meeting
- 31 May 2012, Prague, expert meeting of V4 Culture Ministries to take stock of their cooperation in the past period
- 1 June 2012, Prague, 22nd V4 Culture Ministers meeting
- *Joint statement of V4 Culture Ministers on the importance of culture within the framework of the future EU Cohesion Policy, 7 October 2011, Mikulov*
- *Communiqué of V4 Culture Ministers on opportunities for promoting the V4 at major international art events, 1 June 2012, Prague*

Ministry for Regional Development

- July 2011, Zbiroh, meeting of heads of V4 tourism promotion centres and coordinators – V4 Marketing Strategy
- September 2011, Prague, V4+Slovenia expert meeting on the Cohesion Policy

- October 2011, Prague, V4+Slovenia State Secretaries meeting on the Cohesion Policy
- November 2011, Mariánské Lázně, meeting of heads of V4 tourism promotion centres and coordinators – tourism marketing
- January 2012, Prague, seminar on the “Role of evaluation in preparing and implementing the 2014+ programming period” attended by the head of the Commission’s DG REGIO Evaluation Unit and Czech experts
- February 2012, Prague, meeting of Deputy Ministers responsible for tourism with heads of V4 tourism promotion centres and V4 coordinators
- March 2012, Prague, meeting of the V4+Bulgaria and Romania steering and working group to update the Common Spatial Development Document of the V4+2 countries
- March 2012, Prague, meeting of V4 and Slovenian Directors General on preparations for the 2014-2020 programming period
- May 2012, Prague, V4 working meeting to share experience regarding the Commission's unequal treatment of the EU Member States
- May 2012, Prague, V4+Slovenia seminar on monitoring systems
- *Czech V4 Presidency non-paper on the role of the Cohesion Policy in the new EU multiannual financial framework, 10 October 2011, Prague*
- *V4 protocol on cooperation in tourism, 14 February 2012, Prague*
- *V4+Slovenia joint declaration on the Cohesion Policy, 22 March 2012, Prague*
- *Marketing Plan and Protocol on cooperation in the field of tourism for 2012, 13 February 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

- 18 July 2011, Brussels, informal V4 meeting of with the Director General of DG Research and Innovation, Robert-Jan Smits, on the Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation
- 14-15 November 2011, Olomouc, V4 ministerial meeting on tertiary education reforms and mobility of students and teachers
- 29-30 November 2011, Prague, 18th meeting of the V4 Steering Committee of the “Olympic Hopes”
- 19 December 2011, Prague, C-ERIC conference on research infrastructures in Central Europe with focus on V4 countries
- 21-23 May 2012, Prague, meeting of V4 and EaP youth experts
- *Joint conclusions from the ministerial meeting on tertiary education reforms and mobility of students and teachers, 15 November 2011, Olomouc*
- *Joint statement of EU12 Education Ministers (V4+Belgium, Estonia, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Slovenia) on Horizon 2020, addressed to the Presidents of the European Commission, European Council and the European Parliament, and to the Chair of the ITRE Committee, 23 May 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Defence

- 12-13 September 2011, Brno, meeting of directors responsible for defence policy at V4 Defence Ministries

- 12-13 September 2011, Brno, expert meeting on defence capabilities on the margins of the meeting of directors responsible for defence policy
- 20-23 September 2011, Warsaw, meeting of directors of personnel departments at V4 Defence Ministries
- 23-24 September 2011, Prague, meeting of air force commanders from V4 countries and Austria on the occasion of NATO Days
- 29-30 November 2011, Prague, meeting of directors of armaments departments at V4 Defence Ministries
- January 2012, Prague, expert meeting of V4 Defence Ministries on defence capabilities
- March 2012, Prague, expert meeting of V4 Defence Ministries on Afghanistan
- March 2012, Prague, expert meeting of V4 Defence Ministries on capabilities sharing, building of the V4 EU BG, and on Afghanistan
- 12-13 April 2012, Mikulov, meeting of V4 Chiefs of General Staff
- 24-25 April 2012, Prague, meeting of directors responsible for defence policy at V4 Defence Ministries
- 3-4 May 2012, Litoměřice, meeting of V4 Defence Ministers
- 14-17 May 2012, Budapest, meeting of directors of personnel departments at V4 Defence Ministries
- 13-14 June 2012, Prague, meeting of directors of armaments departments at V4 Defence Ministries
- *Joint communiqué of V4 Chiefs of General Staff, 13 April 2012, Mikulov*
- *Responsibility for a Strong NATO, 18 April 2012, Brussels*
- *Joint communiqué of V4 Defence Ministers, 4 May 2012, Litoměřice*

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

- 30-31 January 2012, Prague, V4 expert seminar on deinstitutionalization of care for vulnerable children under three years of age , and the future of the ESF
- 19-20 March 2012, Prague, V4 expert seminar on the employment of older persons (50+) and the role of the ESF
- 23-24 April 2012, Praha, V4 expert seminar on the support of employment, education and training of persons with disabilities, preparations for V4 cooperation and coordination of national positions on the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020
- 11-12 June 2012, Prague, V4 expert seminar on the support of employment of parents with children, reconciliation of work and family life, and the role of the ESF
- *Final communiqué from an expert seminar on deinstitutionalization of care for vulnerable children under three years of age and the future of the ESF, 31 January 2012 Prague*
- *Final communiqué from an expert seminar on the employment of older persons (50+) and the role of the ESF, 20 March 2012, Prague*
- *Final communiqué from an expert seminar on the support of employment of parents with children, reconciliation of work and family life, and the role of the ESF, 24 April 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Industry and Trade

- Three meetings of the V4 High Level group for Energy
- *Memorandum of Understanding on North-South Interconnections in Central-Eastern Europe, signed by the V4, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Romania, Slovenia and the European Commission, 24 November 2012, Brussels*

Ministry of Justice

- 24-25 May 2012, Kroměříž, meeting of V4, Croatian and Slovenian Justice Ministers

Ministry of the Interior

- November 2011, Poznan, second ministerial conference of the Prague Process (asylum and migration)
- 21-22 September 2011, Budapest, conference of heads of border management services
- 14-15 November 2011, Prague, meeting of the V4/Austria Working Group on Combating Extremism
- 29-30 March 2012, Prague, meeting of the heads of V4 civil protection services
- *Action Plan based on the “Building Migration Partnerships” Joint Declaration of the Prague Process, November 2011, Poznan*
- *Joint statement of heads of V4 civil protection services, June 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Health

- 13 April 2012, Prague, meeting of V4 and Austrian Health Ministers on challenges facing healthcare systems during the economic crisis, and the implementation of the EU Directive on the application of patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare
- *Joint position of the V4 and Austria on the EU proposal for a Transparency Directive, 13 June 2012, Prague*

Ministry of Agriculture

- 24-25 August 2012, České Budějovice, meeting of V4, Bulgarian, Romanian and Slovenian Agriculture Ministers during the Bread Basket agricultural fair
- 28-29 February 2012, Brno, meeting of V4, Bulgarian, Romanian and Slovenian Agriculture Ministers during the SALIMA 2012 international food fair
- *Joint declaration of the Agriculture Ministers of the V4, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia on the future of the complementary national direct payments in 2012, 25 August 2011, České Budějovice*
- *Joint press communication of the Agriculture Ministers of the V4, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia on fair competition on the single market of the European Union, renewable sources of energy and the EU Common Agricultural Policy, 25 August 2011, České Budějovice*
- *Joint declaration of the Agriculture Ministers of Bulgaria, the Czech republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia on rural development, 29 February 2012,*

Ministry of the Environment

- 7-8 November 2011, Zbiroh, 18th meeting of V4, Bulgarian and Romanian Environment Ministers on the need for an analysis of options to move beyond the 20% greenhouse gas emission target, and preparations for the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17) and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP7)
- 7 December 2011, Prague, seminar of V4, Bulgarian and Romanian Deputy Environment Ministers on the EU multiannual financial framework and the Cohesion Policy
- 6 February 2012, Warsaw, meeting of V4, Bulgarian and Romanian Environment Ministers on derogations and climate
- 9 May 2012, Prague, expert seminar of the V4, Bulgaria and Romania on "Sharing green economy – best practices towards Rio+20 and beyond"
- *Joint statement of the Environment Ministers of the V4, Bulgaria and Romania, 8 November 2011, Zbiroh*

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