



Czech Presidency  
of the Visegrad Group  
2015/2016

## Programme

for the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group  
2015–2016



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Programme  
for the Czech Presidency  
of the Visegrad Group  
2015–2016

**V 4 Trust**

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ISBN 978-80-7441-023-9

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## ■ Introduction

In 2016, the Visegrad Group (V4) will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. The world, and in particular the political map of Europe, looked quite different then and now. Nevertheless they had one thing in common: the need to strengthen mutual trust and solidarity. The fact that the Visegrad Group has chosen these two goals as a basis of its cooperation proves the timelessness of its focus. By means of the selected slogan, the Czech Presidency has decided to highlight this fact, as well as the V4's commitment to continue these efforts.

The unique level of mutual trust within the V4 derives from an open exchange of opinions as well as from informal, multilayer contacts (established from the working level to the highest one) which may often be vitally effective. This trust bounds to be used with an emphasis on efficiency and substantiveness in carrying out the Presidency. And that is especially true at a time when not only economic but also armed conflicts have returned to Europe.

The Czech Presidency (CZ V4 PRES) aims to concentrate on keystone themes having a specific practical impact. This translates into narrowing down the agenda according to the actual objectives and needs. That is the only way to avoid the risk of exchanging the mutual cooperation quality for its quantity.

The Czech Presidency programme intends to expand cooperation in areas where joint efforts may bring tangible results and thereby reinforce trust in the Visegrad cooperation meaningfulness as well as among the Visegrad partners themselves. The programme will continue to be based on the document "Guidelines on the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation" (the Kroměříž Declaration of the V4 PMs) in which all the relevant Ministries have identified promising topics and forms of V4 cooperation.

The priorities listed in the first part of the programme summarise the most important and most promising areas of the current Visegrad cooperation upon which our Presidency will be focused. The specific objectives and activities in the individual areas are listed in the second half of this programme.

In accordance with the aforementioned "Guidelines", the programme of the Czech Presidency pays attention to continuity with common projects launched under previous presidencies, tying directly into the SK V4 PRES 2014–15 by continuing with many of its initiatives, while expecting the relatively broad consultations undertaken with Poland being a sound basis of future continuity through the PL V4 PRES 2016–17.

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## ■ Thematic Priorities of the Czech Presidency 2015–2016

### 1. Togetherness

Cooperation in all the areas listed in this programme naturally contributes to the internal cohesion of the Visegrad region. The Czech Republic will continue to reinforce the stability and togetherness of Central Europe, primarily through targeted **cooperation among its citizens, NGOs, businesses** and other players in the Visegrad countries. Aside from coordinating on the EU matters and on specific sector cooperation projects (see below), an important task of ours is to develop “infrastructure among people” (in a broad sense) and thus further contribute to mutual understanding as well as to an open, unbiased debate on common interests and to a reflection on relations within the broader Central European region.

In this regard, the **International Visegrad Fund (IVF)** plays an integral role in maintaining and strengthening the ties among the Visegrad countries. It has become a respected and invaluable tool for Visegrad cooperation both internally and externally and it plays an important role in supporting promising interpersonal contacts within the Visegrad region and its nearest vicinity. At the same time, the IVF represents a key V4 instrument in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans where it helps to achieve set objectives (transferring experience with transition, supporting civil society, etc.). During its Presidency, the Czech Republic will actively support efforts to find new donors to the IVF and in this regard it is planning i.a. to organise a meeting with the past, present and potential IVF partners and donors.

In terms of the well-established **Think Visegrad** platform, we expect that a “mid-term session” will be held (in February 2016 in Prague, partly also as a seminar in Brussels) to reflect on the course of the Presidency to date. We believe it will provide an impulse to set up a regular schedule of such meetings.

The already vibrant cooperation within the Visegrad professional community should be further strengthened by a high-level conference dedicated to important EU, which will take place in fall 2015 (in the margins of the V4-Western Balkan Ministerial meeting) under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim of the CZ V4 PRES will be to include a significant Visegrad dimension in other relevant **conferences**, seminars and academic meetings organised by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its partners (e.g. the “Forum 2000” conference, the continuation of the “Foreign Policy on Human Rights for the 21st Century” conference as well as of the “Prague Agenda” conference, and others). The thematic focus of these events should include also the cooperation within the Visegrad and Central European region in general and should have participants also from the Visegrad countries.

The intensification of personal contacts should be our goal in other areas of the Visegrad cooperation as well. To expand the established schedule of meetings at the executive level, we wish to follow up on the work of the HU V4 PRES and the SK V4 PRES in **deepening parliamentary contacts**, both at the level of national parliaments and in the European Parliament where we would like to make use of the “Friends of the V4” Group.

The internal cohesion also requires an external presentation of the **Visegrad brand**. The CZ V4 PRES will continue to increase promotion of the unified V4 brand, particularly in the area of tourism (a project of the new “Discover Central Europe” brand, as well as under the Sustainable Tourism Strategy in the Carpathians), in the economic area (joint presentations of companies from the Visegrad countries at exhibitions and trade fairs in favourable foreign destinations) and in cultural spheres (e.g. a joint

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presentation of the V4 countries at international performing arts festivals or book fairs). We will strive to increase cooperation with commercial entities and intensify cooperation with the V4 countries embassies in source destinations. In this regard, the Czech Republic will attempt to expand cooperation in promoting the tourist potential of a broader Central Europe, e.g. the V4 countries together with Germany and Austria. Specific activities in the field of tourism, for which the Ministry of Regional Development is responsible in the Czech Republic, are included in the second part of this programme.

Togetherness in the Visegrad Group will be further strengthened by enhanced **cooperation among the public service media organizations**, building also on the preliminary agreement of public television and radio directors of the V4 countries (reached at their Budapest meeting in March 2015) about regular meetings and enhanced cooperation in the future. Such media cooperation is also to facilitate the representation of common interests in the European Broadcasting Union as well as the implementation of joint programmes in order to strengthen ties among the countries.

As already mentioned, a key event of the CZ V4 PRES will be the **commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group formation** (15 February 1991). On this occasion, the Czech Republic will organise, in cooperation with its Visegrad partners, an informal meeting of the V4 Foreign Ministers which is also to include a meeting of renowned academics, former politicians and important representatives of civil society from the Visegrad countries who will contribute to a strategic reflection on the Visegrad cooperation. Their ideas should serve as a basis for the V4 Foreign Ministers to debate about the strategic direction of the V4 cooperation. The 15th anniversary of the launch of the International Visegrad Fund (June 2000) represents another suitable opportunity to present the most successful projects and positive examples of cooperation among the V4 countries.

## 2. Energy

Energy has long been an important cross-sectional topic for Visegrad. In light of the current foreign affairs events, such as the Ukrainian crisis or instability in the Middle East, its relevance has grown even further.

The activities of the Czech Presidency will build on the work done by the SK V4 PRES. The Czech Presidency will try to continue in prospective projects or create new ones that can be further developed during the Polish Presidency in the second half of 2016. The CZ V4 PRES will continue the cooperation within the framework of two already existing Working Groups – the V4 Working Group on Energy and the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration.

The key priority of the Czech Presidency in the energy policy field is an implementation of the Energy Union project. Other priorities will include cooperation with third countries (Eastern Partnership, Energy Community) and an internal gas market.

### a) Energy Union and Cooperation within the EU

The key objectives for the V4 coordination in the EU will be tied to the formation of the **Energy Union** as outlined in the European Council conclusions from March 2015. In cooperation with its Visegrad partners, the Czech Republic will seek for a balanced approach to the three strategic objectives of the European energy policy – security, competitiveness and sustainability. The Czech Republic will support a comprehensive Energy Union that will use synergies between its individual dimensions to their maximum

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extent. At the same time, the Czech Republic intends to advocate for such setting of the Energy Union, which will respect the existing division of competences under the EU primary law. The CZ V4 PRES will strive to promote those priorities on which the Visegrad countries agree in the long term.

After the publication of the Energy Union Communication, the EU activities on the Energy Union focus on the implementation of its five pillars according to the schedule outlined in the Energy Union Roadmap.

An initiative on the new electricity market design should be launched in the second half of 2015. This initiative should be one of those specific European Commission activities which are to be further elaborated during the CZ V4 PRES. In the Czech Republic's view, all the V4 countries should take an active part in this initiative.

In this regard it is also important to cooperate with other partners in the region, in particular with Germany and Austria, whose markets are directly connected with the V4 countries markets. In recent months, Germany launched cooperation with its neighbours within the „Electricity Neighbours“ platform. The CZ V4 PRES will strive to strengthen the links between this platform and the V4 Group.

Regarding natural gas, the CZ V4 PRES will focus on the Commissions' strategy on LNG and gas storage (the „Liquefied Natural Gas and Storage Strategy“) in particular and alternatively on the revision of the Security of Supply Directive (in natural gas). The CZ V4 PRES considers this issue to be of utmost importance to increase the energy security of the entire region.

The completion of the European energy infrastructure shall be equally important. In 2015, the European Commission plans to establish the „Energy Infrastructure Forum“. The V4 countries should actively participate in its activities as the issue of interconnection of national electricity systems has become crucial in the CEE region. At the same time, the CZ V4 PRES will urge for full political support of respective projects from the V4 region in the second list of Projects of Common Interest of the EU. These projects can contribute to increasing the energy security of all four members of the Visegrad Group.

Another important issue is the area of heating and cooling. In this regard, the CZ V4 PRES will coordinate positions of the V4 countries and advocate their interests in the preparation and negotiation of the proposed European strategy for heating and cooling.

The Czech Republic (Ministry of Industry and Trade and Ministry of the Environment) will also coordinate the positions of the V4 countries on the European Commission's legislative proposals that will implement the conclusions of the October 2014 European Council (the 2030 climate-energy package). In the Czech Republic's opinion, this will primarily mean setting up the parameters of the governance framework. To this end, we will organize a meeting of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers responsible for energy. Another platform convenient for this purpose seems to be an ad hoc coordination before the Transport, Telecommunication and Energy Council meetings. In the area of climate protection, activities will primarily concern 2030 climate and energy framework legislation and its implementation that has to be in line with October 2014 European Council conclusions and preparations for the climate change conference in Paris (COP 21/CMP 11). The meeting of V4 environment ministers will also deal with these topics.

Furthermore, the CZ V4 PRES will coordinate the positions of the V4 countries towards the European Commission and EU Council Presidency during the negotiations of legislative proposals in the field of nuclear energy. For this purpose, the Czech Republic will initiate coordination meetings before



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the sessions of the EU pro-nuclear group and before the EU negotiations on the 2030 climate-energy targets. The Czech Presidency will promote the role of nuclear energy as a reliable low-carbon technology, in accordance with the technological neutrality principle. We also need to emphasize the necessity of continuing research in this area. The EU should support research in the field of all promising energy technologies, including the nuclear one. The CZ V4 PRES will continue to advocate for maintaining the ENEF in the existing format.

#### **b) External Dimension and Energy Security**

Cooperation of all V4 members with third countries is necessary in order to ensure security of energy supply. This definitely concerns Ukraine and other countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Energy Community. With regard to Ukraine, the CZ V4 PRES will support the Energy Community efforts to modernize the Ukrainian energy sector and to implement the rules stemming from its membership in the Energy Community. It will also promote cooperation within the ENTSO-G and ENTSO-E organizations.

Energy will be the central topic of a high-level conference which will take place in Brussels at the start of the Czech Presidency (14 July 2015) under the auspices of the Czech Prime Minister. The conference will inter alia focus on greater involvement of Members of the European Parliament in the V4 cooperation.

The V4 activities in the field of energy policy could serve as a good example of cooperation among the countries within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Priority Area 2, „To encourage more sustainable energy.“

#### **c) Internal Gas Market**

The V4 natural gas market completion would represent a significant contribution to an increase of the energy security of all the V4 countries, significantly dependent on a few suppliers of natural gas. Integration of the gas markets is a long-term V4 priority. A fundamental precondition for its completion is addressing the remaining lack of completed infrastructure, specifically in the North-South gas corridor. In this regard, the CZ V4 PRES will focus both on making an inventory of tasks and on a targeted removal of all legislative and regulatory barriers preventing the commercial integration of the V4 gas markets.

For this purpose, the Czech Republic will organize two conferences. The first one is to be attended by experts from the V4 countries and will focus on identifying real successes and shortcomings of the work within the V4 Group. The second one is to be attended by the V4, Austria and Croatia and will evaluate the progress in completing the North-South gas corridor and the state of play of the related projects. During the CZ V4 PRES, an analytical document mapping out the progress and gaps in the gas markets integration in the V4 will be issued, as will a document mapping progress in building the North-South gas corridor. The issue of integrating natural gas markets is also one of the current priority topics of the International Visegrad Fund strategic grants for 2015 with which the CZ V4 PRES will cooperate.

At the moment, the V4 joint risk assessment (developed during the Slovak V4 Presidency) is being finalized under the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration. A joint V4 preventive action plan and eventually also emergency plan will be further developed with the aim to increase security of gas supply in the region.

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As for the topic of new energy sources for the V4 region, the CZ V4 PRES will follow up on the HU V4 PRES and the SK V4 PRES in the form of the V4 + USA. consultations and conferences in Washington, D.C., and Prague dealing with broader issues of energy security, including the import of energy resources from the USA. This is closely linked with the Energy Union project and with the issue of potential LNG deliveries to Europe.

### 3. European Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement Policy, Transition Support and Development Aid

The most important area of the Visegrad Group foreign policy activities has been focused on the countries of **Eastern and South-Eastern Europe**. Under the Czech Presidency, the V4 will pursue activities to support the European orientation and, with respect to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the European perspective of the Eastern Partnership countries in accordance with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the revision of which the V4 countries will actively take part in.

Concerning the South-Eastern European countries, the spotlight will be put on their efforts under the EU integration process. For the Eastern Partnership countries as well as the Western Balkans, it is essential to continue in the reform process, both economic and in terms of good governance, including support of civil society and respect for human rights. Furthermore, it is necessary to continue cooperation in the area of education, public administration, boosting awareness about the EU among broad segments of the population, and the independent media support. The V4 countries are prepared to support the Eastern partners on their European path, to cooperate on these reforms, to provide assistance and experience and to that end to combine their efforts with like-minded countries (e.g. Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the Baltic states, etc.).

In terms of the **Eastern Partnership** (EaP), the Visegrad Group is ready to play an active role in implementing the goals set in the Riga Declaration and continue presenting ideas and formulating the EU policy towards the EaP countries. The CZ V4 PRES plans i.a. to build on the V4's Civil Servant Mobility Programme operated by the International Visegrad Fund and to organize seminars/study programmes, under the V4 auspices, for participants from Moldova, Georgia and mainly Ukraine. These seminars/study programmes will focus on implementing the AA/DCFTA and on the reform processes in general. Specifically, we would like to organize, for example, a seminar which would help clarify and specify the mutual expectations from both the Ukrainian as well as the EU sides. The IVF strategic grants (the "V4-Ukraine Conference/Forum" project announced for 2015, or projects under the Emerging Donors Challenge Fund) and ongoing projects at the government level (e.g. the "V4 Road Show" – series of knowledge-sharing and networking roundtables in Ukraine started under the SK PRES in 2015) should serve as a basis of such a seminar. Besides this, we will carry out additional activities towards Ukraine in the fields of education, transport, environmental protection and healthcare (see the next part of the programme). The CZ V4 PRES will seek to continue with existing projects as well as to generate new ones also in those EaP countries which have not signed the AA/DCFTA (i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus), including joint Visegrad consultations. Further activities for Ukraine and other EaP countries (including joint trips of the Foreign Ministers etc.) will be proposed flexibly depending on development of the situation.

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The **Western Balkans**, including the region's clear prospect of the EU membership, also remains a priority for the Visegrad Group's foreign policy activities. Such importance will be expressed, above all, by a traditional meeting of the V4 Foreign Ministers and their partners from the Western Balkans, with Croatia and Slovenia also being invited by the CZ PRES. The primary goal of the CZ V4 PRES will be to complete the work started and carried out under previous Presidencies, particularly to facilitate progress in launching the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) with its seat in Tirana and to sum up the project initiated by the CZ V4 PRES 2011–12. The Czech Republic will strive to organize an independent event dedicated to the WBF (in the margins of the V4 + Western Balkans Ministerial meeting or separately). The Western Balkans countries will also participate in events of the Visegrad cooperation on the area of environment and could be invited to some of the judicial education events organized by the Czech Ministry of Justice (Judicial Academy). The IVF will continue providing funding to projects related to the Western Balkans.

Aside from this, we will focus again on an effective application of the V4 countries' transition experience as part of development **cooperation**. In particular, this will include activities to celebrate the European Year for Development declared for 2015 as well as an active participation in discussions on the Millennium Development Goals fulfilment and the new form of development cooperation for 2015, including formulating sustainable development objectives. Another V4 countries coordination topic will be a joint endeavour to equalise/increase capacities and opportunities for the V4 countries to benefit from the European Development Fund and from the EU External Action financial instruments.

#### 4. Security and Defence Cooperation

The Czech Republic will be taking over the Presidency at a time when the world is undergoing fundamental changes of its security environment with direct consequences for both the Euro-Atlantic as well as global security and stability, with an armed conflict taking place in Ukraine, in the immediate vicinity of the V4. The Czech V4 Presidency will actively reflect this development in its activities, supporting measures that address this change and strengthening the common defence capabilities of the Visegrad countries and the organisations of which the Visegrad countries are members.

Defence cooperation within the Visegrad Group received a significant impulse when, in spring 2014, the Defence Ministers signed a **Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening Their Defence Cooperation**. The Czech Republic will actively promote the fulfilment of individual Vision priorities based on the tasks laid down in the Action Plan. In particular, we will push for progress on the question of building up a permanent V4 military structure (a permanent regional modular force) and harmonising national defence and acquisition plans, with the goal of making space for common acquisition projects, as well as to continue the common armament development projects, with a view to examine future new cooperation areas. We will also focus on a joint V4 airspace protection.

A great attention will be devoted to the V4 cooperation within **NATO**. Around the changeover of the Czech and Polish V4 Presidencies, a NATO Summit will take place in Warsaw. The Czech Republic will strive for an ambitious text of a joint V4 declaration for the Warsaw Summit, tying in to the similar V4 declaration for the Summit in Chicago. In this context, a series of consultations between representatives of Defence and Foreign Ministries within the V4 is planned, as well as with key allies, in particular, the USA. Our further ambition will be to continue implementing the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) so as to

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deliver its individual measures even before the Warsaw summit. We will push for an active involvement of the V4 in implementing the individual measures of the RAP with an emphasis on a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and on further strengthening of the role of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin.

In the case of the **EU**, a fundamental starting point for the CZ V4 PRES will be the June meeting of the European Council on defence issues. The Czech Republic will focus on coordinating the implementation of the European Council conclusions concerning the CSDP, including the implementation of shared V4 positions on priority issues, especially within the context of updating the European Security Strategy. Under the Czech Presidency, the process of preparation of the Visegrad EU Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) to be on stand-by in the first half of 2016 will be completed. The ambition is to leave in place a more stable V4 structure capable of deployment under both the EU and NATO. In this regard, preparations will also continue for putting the V4 EU BG on standby in 2019. During the COMMON CHALLENGE certification exercises in 2015, we will also seek to organise a discussion at the level of Defence Ministers with the goal of testing the efficiency of national decision-making mechanisms in the case of deployment of the V4 EU BG.

**Cyber security** is also a prospective topic for the Visegrad cooperation. The CZ V4 PRES will push to deepen and increase the efficiency of cooperation within the Central European Cyber Security Platform (CECSP). This will particularly include harmonising the positions of the V4 countries on fundamental topics of cyber security, including their positions within international organisations, organising expert workshops and introducing standards and secured channels as part of communication among the CECSP states. The V4 will also continue in the practice of cooperation among specialised police units and national “centres of excellence” focused on research in the area of cybernetic crime.

Professional Military Education (PME) is another very important area of the Security and Defence Cooperation within the V4. The CZ V4 PRES will foster activities of the Visegrad Group Military Education Platform (VIGMILEP), a platform that allows synchronization and interoperability of the V4 countries’ PME systems and thus enhances the PME quality of every individual member.

The CZ V4 PRES will deepen **defence cooperation in the V4+ format**, in particular, with France, Germany and the USA. We will also actively support the strengthening of ties between the V4 and NORDEFECO.

## 5. Active Practising of the Solidarity Principle in the EU

The Czech Republic will continue in the current practice of **close cooperation and coordination** of positions of the V4 countries both before important EU meetings, as well as during regular meetings at the political and expert level. The EU topics represent a firm component of cooperation among the V4 Prime Ministers who will continue in the established schedule of coordination meetings.

The main areas of coordination talks are comprised of economic policy (incl. the social dimension, internal market and digital agenda), transport, energy, climate protection, asylum and migration. The Czech Republic will also react to an ad hoc development and discussions at the European level by addressing other topics as necessary. Picking up where the SK PRES left off, the Czech Republic plans to initiate activities leading to an acquisition of a greater public support for the idea of the European integration.

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What holds a special importance for the CZ V4 PRES is the aspect of **solidarity in the European integration**. It includes both the social dimension of integration and the cohesion policy. The two following priorities of the Czech Presidency (the development of infrastructure and the fight against tax fraud) have an EU dimension as well, but since they also have a strong cross-border and regional dimension, we present them separately.

**a) The Social Dimension of Integration**

The Czech Republic's goal will primarily be to coordinate the V4 position on legislative proposals and initiatives of the European Commission and other Member States which are to have a social impact. This approach will be pursued in the interest of increasing employment, free movement of labour, worker protection and mitigating the negative impact of social exclusion and poverty. And at the same time, it will be undertaken, i.a., in accordance with the Commission's plans to support growth and competitiveness and in the context of discussions on strengthening the role of social indicators within the European semester. Establishing conditions for a healthy population represents an equally important component of this plan, being one of the factors that contribute to an increased employment, employability, work productivity and social inclusion

Aside from defining the shared positions and expert consultations under the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs and Health, a guarantee of protecting social and employee rights will stand as an important theme in other relevant areas of cooperation among the V4 countries. A social factor in the context of competitiveness will be important also for the cooperation on transport, as one of the priorities of the Czech Presidency in this field will be the social aspects of the road freight transport (details see in the following section of the programme).

**b) EU Cohesion Policy**

In light of the importance of the **Cohesion Policy** for the Visegrad countries, it will be the goal of the CZ V4 PRES to thoroughly discuss the future of the Cohesion Policy and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). They both represent the key EU investment instruments for boosting growth and employment as well as a major driver of innovative economy and competitiveness. In addition to coordinating the positions of the V4 countries, it is necessary to share the sustainable and measurable results of the Cohesion Policy in the EU countries and contribute to a unified Commission approach towards all Member States. The CZ V4 PRES also wants to follow up on the LV EU PRES and help simplify the administration of the Cohesion Policy's implementation at the EU level, maximise the use of funding, complete and close the 2007–2013 period and ensure a smooth start of the implementation of new programmes in the 2014–2020 period (for which we would like to use a one-off meeting at the level of Minister or Deputy Minister responsible for the Cohesion Policy).

Aside from this, the Czech Republic will endeavour to make use of the possibilities of joint cross-border projects funded under the **Investment Plan for Europe**. In connection with this, we want to increase the efficiency of coordination in generating appropriate joint projects. The V4's activities should not only be focused on creating joint projects (among the V4 members and with third partners), but also on the preparation and support in realising projects only within some of the V4 countries.

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A specific list of meetings organised by the CZ V4 PRES (especially by the Ministry of Regional Development) on the abovementioned themes is contained in the second part of this programme.

## 6. Digital agenda and Development of Infrastructure

A **digital agenda** includes much more than just infrastructure development. However, both topics are closely related and both are associated to cooperation in the EU as well as to the V4 internal cohesion. The Digital Agenda for Europe is one of the priorities of the EU's broader Europe 2020 political strategy as well as one of the key EU policies. In this area, the CZ V4 PRES will follow-up on the activities already launched during the SK V4 PRES and continue with the work of "V4 Innovation Task Force".

Our primary focus will be on areas that have the potential to increase the competitiveness of innovative start-ups and help create new jobs, in particular, increasing digital literacy and e-skills, improving the regulatory environment for cross-border electronic sales, simplifying the conditions for setting up new businesses, supporting research and the development of digital technologies. Within the international context, the CZ V4 PRES intends to organize a presentation of innovative solutions and companies from the V4 countries, in cooperation with the global telecommunications company AT&T, a joint presentation of robotics/artificial intelligence companies, and a V4 conference on internet governance in Washington, D.C. Furthermore, a general awareness raising activity on V4 start-ups is to be pursued in order to promote cooperation between the US and the V4 companies. The V4 countries will aim at progressing with the idea of establishing a joint V4 cooperation platform in Silicon Valley (e.g. knowledge dissemination, exchange of best practices and experiences, increasing visibility through networking events, start-up presentation events, visitor groups) with the objective to support V4 start-ups and to attract investments to the Visegrad region. In order to keep a successful V4 cooperation platform, it is suggested for all V4 countries to have a permanent representation on the ground.

Another subject of discussion within the V4 will be the **Digital Single Market Strategy**, published by the European Commission in May 2015, as well as the expansion of next-generation access networks (NGA). This could be supported, inter alia, from the ESIF funds, as all the V4 countries currently focus on supporting the construction and modernisation of the NGA networks in the current programming period.

Though it also includes much more, **territorial development**, where we want to pursue a more coordinated approach by the V4 countries, is also closely linked with the infrastructure development. We intend to consult major projects through coordination of national territorial development documents from the V4 countries. The planned European regional conference of the UN European Economic Chamber, the "European Habitat", which will be a preparatory event for the global conference in 2016, also provides a context for a more intense cooperation in this area. Under the CZ V4 PRES we want to organise the first meeting of the V4+ Ministers responsible for housing and obtain an input from the Central European region into this conference.

As far as cooperation on **transport infrastructure** is concerned, the CZ V4 PRES will focus on establishing a platform which would ease the exchange of information on the implementation of cross-border transport projects and the related connections within the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T). In accordance with the "Memorandum of Understanding concerning the roadmap for determining the future development of the transport networks of the Visegrad Group Countries", adopted by the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries

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on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2014, the CZ V4 PRES will also focus on the elaboration of the indicative list of transport projects to be realised after the year 2020. For specific activities in the transport sector, see the following part of the programme.

## 7. Combating Tax Fraud and Evasion

A cross-border tax fraud and evasion currently represent a serious problem for all the V4 countries as well as at the EU level. Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of tax collection is one of the key topics of both the EU and regional cooperation and for this reason this CZ V4 PRES priority is closely tied to coordination within the EU as well as to cross-border cooperation within the Visegrad Group and the broader Central European region.

From the perspective of the Czech Republic, the most urgent problem is fraud committed during the collection of the **value added tax (VAT)**, particularly in the case of a “carousel fraud”<sup>1</sup>. Regional cooperation, justified by the cross-border scope of organised crime, is an appropriate means to intensify the fight against such illegal activities. Specific results and as prompt progress as possible to be achieved in the EU-wide solutions for the future of the VAT and tax fraud need to be encouraged.

In the context of combating tax fraud and evasion the issue of a very complex and ambitious project BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) must also be emphasized, consisting of fifteen different actions (measures) and being developed under the auspices of the OECD. However some of its elements are analysed within the framework of the EU, including the consideration of the possibility of their incorporation into the scope of the EU. Mutual cooperation and coordination of the V4 in this regard seems to be more than useful.

Cooperation within the V4 Group is also crucial for the fight against fraud and evasion in the field of **excise taxes** (e.g. smuggling and counterfeiting of tobacco products or the abuse of denaturants and mineral oils). Although in this area, legally binding instruments for mutual cooperation have been developed (see Council Regulation No 389/2012), the Czech Republic considers closer cooperation within the region of the Central and Eastern Europe, and especially the V4, to be a priority in the fight against tax evasion.

Joint discussions and preparations of data exchange and of a consistent methodology for the establishment of common thresholds for the V4 countries for the purposes of a risk analysis will continue.

The Ministries of Finance and Interior are planning specific activities in this area. Those activities include both regular meetings at expert and higher levels on the up-to-date topics linked to the tax fraud detection concerning the excise taxes and the VAT, as well as enlarging cooperation to countries outside the V4 (see more in the following part of the programme).

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<sup>1</sup> *Carousel fraud makes use of the fact that delivery of goods to another EU Member State is exempt from the VAT. The obligation to pay the tax accumulates with the first trader who obtains the goods from another state and sells them within the same state in which the trader operates.*



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## ■ Activities of Ministries in Individual Areas of Sectorial Cooperation During the Czech V4 Presidency

### Office of the Government

In light of the growing significance and scope of the EU agenda, EU topics have long represented one of the key priorities of cooperation among Visegrad Group Prime Ministers. In terms of content, this cooperation is focused on issues related to the European Council.

The main areas on which cooperation among V4 Prime Ministers focuses are as follows: the effective functioning of the EU and its institutions, support for economic growth and employment (investment, the internal market, digital agenda, social dimension), coordination of economic policies (including the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Economic and Monetary Union), energy and energy security, asylum and migration and the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. Aside from these areas, the European Council also deals with current CFSP issues that cannot be predicted in advance, but will no doubt be the subject of discussion among V4 country Prime Ministers.

#### Specific meetings planned:

- **the Prime Ministers** of the V4 countries will discuss these topics at two V4 summits (a formal and informal summit) and will continue in the tradition of regular meetings on the sidelines of European Council sessions with the goal of coordinating their positions;
- in order to prepare the PM meetings regularly before each V4 summit, or before every General Affairs Council, the **State Secretaries for the EU** (or their equivalents and the PMs' sherpas), will meet in person and/or through videoconferencing. Aside from this, the state secretaries for the EU will meet twice during the Presidency with the aim to consult the current European issues;
- **the European Directors** responsible for coordinating European policies will meet for consultations twice during the Presidency in order to prepare the meetings of the state secretaries for the EU (or their equivalents and the PMs' sherpas). Also invited to these two meetings will be the directors responsible for implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester, the directors responsible for institutional issues and for informing about European affairs with the goal of deepening V4 cooperation in these areas as well;
- twice during the Presidency, consultation of **Secretaries of Security Councils** will take place led by the Offices of the Government (V4 CZ, SK, HU) / President's Office (PL) attended by Representatives of the Foreign Ministries and Ministries of Defence.

### Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Czech Foreign Ministry will coordinate the Czech Presidency, particularly in the above priority areas. Cooperation in other sectoral policies will be the full responsibility of the relevant Ministries. Evaluation of their cooperation will be (in accordance with the annex to the document "The Content of Visegrad Cooperation") the subject of the agenda for the V4 Prime Ministers' summit at the end of the Presidency.



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The Czech Presidency will continue with the useful **V4+** format. In the interest of maintaining the dynamics and intensity of cooperation with the already established partners, it will investigate, along with the other V4 Foreign Ministries, the value of all proposed meetings.

The Foreign Ministry will be the co-organiser of an event to commemorate the **25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group**, which we currently envision as an informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers from the V4 countries and potentially appropriate partners along with a public appearance (lecture, press conference) and presentation of the successful projects of the V4 and IVF. We want to work closely with our Visegrad partners on preparing the exact form of the celebrations inside and outside the V4. The Foreign Ministry is also a partner for the conference "**Prague European Summit**" dedicated to European values and integration, which will take place in the margins of the V4 + Western Balkans ministerial meeting.

**The Foreign Ministry plans to realise the following:**

- *at the level of **Foreign Ministers**, there will be at least 3 meetings in the V4+ format: with the countries of the Western Balkans (+ Croatia, Slovenia) with the Eastern Partnership and with the NB8 (to take place in the presiding country of the NB8, Latvia). Further ministerial meetings can be organised ad hoc as needed. Our goal, however, must be to avoid needless proliferation of ministerial talks. The Czech Foreign Minister also plans to represent the Visegrad Group as the V4 PRES at traditional events (e.g. the 7<sup>th</sup> CEPA Strategy Forum in the USA);*
- *at the level of **Deputy Minister/Political Directors** several meetings and consultations in the V4+ format (Germany, Switzerland, USA, Benelux, France, Western Balkans etc. – see the Annex) will be carried out, meetings with donors and partners of the International Visegrad Fund in the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the IVF and the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group, V4 consultations before the NATO summit, etc. Further consultations and discussions in the V4+ format will be organised according to the mechanism laid down by the "Guidelines" in the Kroměříž Declaration, as well as based on circumstance and need;*
- **expert consultations** based on the established V4 consultation schedule and on current issues will take place. The Directors of the competent Foreign Ministry departments will primarily consult on EU issues, security policy, V4 activities concerning the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and cooperation in other V4+ formats, on political planning, human rights issues, consular cooperation and education of diplomats.

See a detailed overview of meetings in the Annex to this programme.

## Ministry of Transport

The main topic of the CZ V4 PRES will be the **safety of the road traffic**. The aim of the meeting of the Ministers of transport of the V4+ countries with participation of the representatives of the European Commission will be to discuss the possibilities of regulation in this field on the European level. The other goal is to improve the awareness and to exchange experience from successful projects and to decrease the number of traffic accidents and to mitigate their consequences. The CZ V4 PRES will initiate a discussion

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between the member states and the European Commission on the exchange of best practices and the support for common (shared) campaigns to promote traffic safety.

In the transport sector the CZ V4 PRES will further focus on these areas:

- **Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T):** The CZ V4 PRES will establish a platform for exchange of information on implementation of cross-border transport projects and the related connections, both within the V4 and with neighbouring countries;
- **Rail Transport:** The CZ V4 PRES intends to discuss the impacts of the measures of the “Fourth Railway Package” on the railway sectors of the V4 countries. It will also look for the possibilities of improving the railway transport both with respect to the infrastructure and the quality of lines amongst the V4 countries;
- **Social Aspects of the Road Freight Transport:** The CZ V4 PRES will coordinate the steps regarding the European regulation in the road freight transport. The CZ V4 PRES will take an active role in the European debate on the road haulage market with particular emphasis on its social dimension with regard to the revision of the road package to be published by the EC in 2016. The declared aim of this regulation is to prevent an unfair competition and the so-called social dumping; nevertheless, there is a significant risk that the proposed measures will be too restrictive and will lead to a substantial reduction of the competition in the road freight transport and to a disruption of the European internal market. The V4 countries should make sure that the prepared measures would tackle only real problems and not serve only as a mean to limit the competition.

**For this purpose the Ministry of Transport is planning to organise:**

**Road Traffic Safety:**

- *a meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the V4 (+ neighbouring countries. i.e. Germany, Austria and possibly others) and the European Commissioner Violeta Bulc (March 2016)*

**TEN-T:**

- *several meetings of the V4 High Level Working Group for transportation (V4 HLWG), based on the goals set forth under HU PRES 2013–14 and the progress achieved so far;*
- *a high level meeting V4 + Ukraine on the implementation of the rail corridors (June 2016);*
- *possibly also a meeting of the Ministers of transport of the V4 and the European Commission with the participation of coordinators of the corridors (possibly also Russia and Germany) on the implementation of the TEN-T and its corridors relevant for the V4 countries (as a follow-up to the meeting held in Bratislava). Another topic of the meeting will be the evaluation of the first call of the CEF (November 2016);*

**Rail Transport:**

- *meetings of railway experts with possibly other participants;*

**Social Aspects of the Road Freight Transport:**

- *a meeting of Deputy Ministers of Transport of the V4+ countries (SI, LV, LT, EE, HR, BG, RO, IE, ES, PT, EL etc.);*

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### **Other Regular Activities:**

- *meetings of the Ministers of Transport of the V4 countries before every meeting of the Council of the European Union (on the same day as the TTE Council meeting)*
- *organising ad-hoc expert meetings to prepare common positions of the V4 countries to the European legislation drafts and to the EU strategic documents (revision of the White Paper, the Aviation Package, the Road Package, the Fourth Railway Package etc.);*
- *further coordination meetings on cooperation in space activities with the focus on the activities in the ESA and COPUOS (October 2015).*

## **Ministry of Finance**

A fundamental priority for the period of the CZ V4 PRES is deepening cooperation among V4 countries in the fight against tax evasion and fraud in the field of excise tax and VAT. The V4 finance ministries, in cooperation with other relevant ministries, will also focus on reviewing the cohesion envelopes for the period 2017–2020 and deepening cooperation among V4 countries in the area of fraud through the import of undervalued goods (in particular textiles and footwear from Asia).

The V4 finance ministries, in cooperation with other relevant ministries, will also discuss and coordinate their approach regarding the negotiations of international investment protection agreements, including agreements negotiated on the EU level.

### **To this end the Ministry of Finance will organise:**

- *regular meetings of the Ministries of Finance of V4 and other states at the expert and higher level on current issues related to the detection of tax fraud on excise taxes and VAT;*
- *in terms of excise tax evasion in connection with mineral oils, there are plans to:*
  - *expand cooperation to include excise tax administrators in other countries (AT, DE, RO, BG, SI, HR and IT);*
  - *exchange information on the transport of specific mineral oils (continuation of Chess Knight III joint custom operations) and make use of other control instruments and joint customs operations;*
  - *hold talks among V4 customs administrations at the level of the general director in order to evaluate the work of individual working groups and set up priorities for the future (autumn 2015);*
  - *realise other specific activities that may arise from V4 expert talks on the preparation of joint inspection drives on the shipment of goods subject to excise tax in July 2015;*
  - *pursuing the objectives set out in the Declaration on prevention of excise tax evasions, which was signed by the Directors General of the customs administrations of V4 countries in Bratislava June 2011, that is, to advocate for the inclusion of products within CN codes 2710 19 91 and CN 2710 19 99 to article 20. par. 1 of Council Directive 2003/96/EC so as to become subject of the provisions of the control and movement of these products in accordance with Council Directive 2008/118/EC;*
- *an expert meeting with the goal of comparing the assumptions and results of internal calculations of the updated cohesion envelopes and discussing the positions and expectations of V4 states in*

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*connection with the upcoming review of the multiannual financial framework (as needed, likely in spring 2016);*

- *a session of the V4 working group for fighting the import of undervalued goods (as needed).*
- *an expert meeting aiming to coordinate common positions towards the Council of the EU Trade Policy Committee with respect to investment protection and dispute settlement provisions included in future trade and investment agreements negotiated currently by the EU Commission. The meeting will also serve as a platform to discuss V4 countries approach to negotiations of their respective bilateral investment protection agreements, as well as their approach to possible solutions regarding the bilateral investment treaties concluded between EU Member States (i.e. the issue of “intra EU BITs”).*

## Ministry of Culture

The Czech Ministry of Culture will focus on prospective forms and projects for Visegrad cultural cooperation during the CZ V4 PRES, i.e.:

- support for a common performing arts presentation strategy for the Visegrad countries and Central Europe abroad. The goal is to utilise the potential of the V4 brand both organisationally and financially. A specific example is the project “Performing Arts Central Europe – Visegrad Countries Focus (PACE V4)”, the coordinator of which is the Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague;
- exchange of experience in the area of library science and using EU structural funds;
- V4 Heritage Academy: the Summer School on management of UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Sites in V4s;
- Heritage Forum of Central Europe: continuation of discussions on current issues in the protection and management of cultural heritage.

In order to meet these objectives the Ministry of Culture will organise the following:

- *meeting of the V4 Culture Ministers (May/June 2016);*
- *traditional workshop focused on exchanging information and experience in the use of structural funds in the field of culture (1st half of 2016);*
- *traditional workshop focused on exchanging information and experiences in the field of library science (spring 2016);*
- *working meeting of the V4 Cultural Heritage Experts’ Working Group.*

## Ministry of Regional Development

Cooperation among the V4 regional and local Development Ministries is a priority for the CZ V4 PRES in the field of the EU Cohesion Policy (see above). The objectives are as follows:

- continuing coordination of spatial development in the countries of the V4 (+2) and potential update of the Common Spatial Development Strategy for the V4 (+2);
- exchanging experiences on the practical implementation of housing policy and phasing of major projects in the 2007–2013 programming period;

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- preparing for the planned European regional conference UNECE “European Habitat” (March 2016), coordination with the broader Central European region;
  - coordination of the V4 in connection with the European Structural and Investment Funds – ESIF (exchange of information focused on wrapping up the 2007–2013 programming period and launching implementation of the 2014–2020 programming period);
  - simplifying implementation of the Cohesion Policy, management of Partnership Agreements with an emphasis on strategic planning (instruments, public strategies) and evaluation activities;
  - continuing with realisation of joint promotion under the Visegrad cooperation project with the goal of increasing inbound tourism from source countries in distant markets;

To this end the Ministry of Regional Development will organise:

- *a round table of Ministers on the social aspects of housing policy – in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Q4 2015 or Q1 2016);*
- *a working meeting to coordinate spatial development in the V4 countries, which will evaluate and propose steps for potential update the Common Spatial Development Strategy for the V4+2 countries from 31 December 2018;*
- *a meeting of the V4 Deputy Ministers responsible for the Cohesion Policy, the goal of which will be to set priorities for cross-border projects and define positions for promotion of these priorities at the EU level;*
- *2 workshops focused on 1) exchange experiences on implementing housing policy (social housing, regeneration of housing stock, including energy savings, financial instruments in housing policy); 2) exchange experiences on the computerisation of public procurement and expanding the potential for use of electronic marketplaces, electronic auctions or dynamic purchasing systems;*
- *conferences attended by representatives of local governments from individual V4 countries on implementing the territorial dimension, ITI instruments and Community Led Local Development (CLLD) with the aim of comparing coordination mechanisms, benefits and risks, including broader discussion of the territorial dimension and integrated tools as conceived by the Commission;*
- *a working meeting of representatives of the managing authorities of the V4 countries on simplifying implementation of the Cohesion Policy (e.g. a meeting of the V4 + Slovenia and Croatia focused on wrapping up the 2007–2013 programming period, launching implementation of the 2014–2020 programming period with a focus on fulfilling the performance framework and the N+3 rules in 2018, setting up selected implementation processes, preparing new projects in the 2014–2020 programming period, involving JASPERS and making use of the first findings from the Independent Quality Review – IQR);*
- *a round table for sharing experience and information on coordinating the drawing of funds from EU programmes at the level of the V4 or V4+;*
- *talks at the level of the responsible technical employees for resolving specific technical problems in the preparation and planning of projects with the interface for ESI funds and EFSI, exchange of experience, etc.;*
- *1–2 marketing working meetings of representatives from national tourist boards of the V4 countries (Q3-4 2015) and 1 high level meeting of state leaders responsible for tourism and representatives of national tourism boards.*

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As for **tourism**, the Czech Presidency will focus on:

- on-line and off-line promotion of the new destination brand “Discover Central Europe” in joint marketing activities of the national tourism boards of the V4 countries;
- increasing cooperation with commercial entities and Embassies of the V4 countries in source destinations;
- expanding cooperation between the V4 countries, Austria and Germany in presenting tourism potential and incorporating joint promotional activities in far destinations.

Besides activities included in the separate marketing plan, the Ministry of Regional Development will organize:

- *2 marketing working meetings of representatives from national tourist boards of the V4 countries (Q3-4 2015)*
- *1 high level meeting of state leaders responsible for tourism and representatives of national tourism boards, where the Protocol of V4 cooperation in tourism and the Marketing plan for 2016 will be signed.*

## Ministry of Defence

In order to meet the objectives in the priority area of defence, the Ministry of Defence plans to organise:

High-level meetings:

- *meeting of the V4 Defence Ministers (once during PRES);*
- *the V4 Senior Body (twice during PRES);*
- *the V4 Armament Directors (July 2015);*
- *the V4 Defence Ministry Policy Directors (twice during PRES);*
- *the V4 Defence Ministry HR staff (May–June 2016);*
- *the V4 Chiefs of Defence (once in 2015, once in 2016);*
- *international coordination meetings of military experts from the V4 EU BG (twice in 2015).*

Defence planning meetings:

- *the V4 Planning Group (twice during PRES);*
- *within NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP): 4 bilateral meetings with NATO bodies on evaluating the defence plans of CZ, SK, HU, PL (2015/2016);*
- *within NDPP: 4 multilateral meetings of the Alliance Committee for Defence Policy and Planning to evaluate the defence plans of CZ, SK, HU, PL (2016).*

Other activities:

- *expert-level meetings on MNC-NE (2 in 2015, 2 in 2016);*
- *meeting of Defence Committees of the V4 national parliaments;*
- *joint meeting of the CZ V4 PRES and SE PRES NORDEFECO.*

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## Ministry of Industry and Trade

The Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) will work very closely on the topics listed in the thematic priorities of the Presidency, in particular energy matters, EU affairs, the digital agenda, information society and the development of next generation access (NGA) networks.

Aside from this it will also focus on other specific issues, in particular:

- promotion and support of technical fields of education and polytechnic training at nursery and primary schools;
- Agreement on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); and others according to current need.

In the interest of discussion on the above areas of cooperation among the V4 countries (potentially in an expanded format), the MIT expects to organise:

- *1–2 meetings of Economy Ministers from the V4 countries (end of Q3/beginning of Q4 2015, Q2 2016);*
- *the V4 business forum on the TTIP attended by US companies (depending on the progress of talks, 2016);*
- *round tables or expert workshops (eventually in the V4+ format) in order to exchange experiences and examples of good practice in individual priority areas, especially regarding certain aspects and services of information society at the regional level: digital literacy, e-skills and especially electronic commerce (Q3-4 2015, Q1-2 2016);*
- *drawing up (in cooperation with non-governmental organizations) a comprehensive study for the V4 region indicating the development to date and evaluating the possibilities for cooperation on the digital agenda, information society and NGA, and a high-level conference where the comprehensive study on digital agenda will be presented and discussed (Q2 2016).*

In the field of energy the MIT plans to realise the following:

- *a meeting of Deputy Ministers/ministers responsible for energy before the TTE Council to discuss the opinions of the V4 countries on the governance framework and on the implementation of the 2030 framework (Q3-4 2015);*
- *a meeting of Ministers responsible for energy to discuss European Commission proposals related to the implementation of the Energy Union (e.g. the design of the electricity market in the second half of 2015) during the International Energy Club Conference in Ostrava in September 2015;*
- *ad hoc coordination before the TTE Council or the European Council on specific Energy Union issues or on current topics in the field of energy in the EU;*
- *continue in the V4 Forum for Gas Market Integration and the V4 Working Party on Energy activities;*
- *continue in the V4 countries consultations with Germany on energy issues within the V4+ format.*

The independent activities of companies, trade associations, employers' associations and non-governmental organisations will also help deepen economic relations over the course of the CZ V4 PRES. This includes, for example, the session of the initiative of industrial and employer associations of Central and Eastern Europe (the "CEE Initiative"), in which the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic

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participates. We also expect there to be a meeting of the presidents of the V4 chambers of commerce. Various contact meetings of regional economic chambers will also take place as part of cross-border cooperation, e.g. the traditional event of the Brno Regional Chamber of Commerce entitled “Contact-Contract” and others. The MIT welcomes all these and other potential initiatives and will support them as needed and possible.

Besides working with non-governmental partners (universities, NGOs etc.) and the other subjects of the state service, the MIT will continue in the close cooperation amongst the attachés responsible for the digital agenda. Resulting activities and the eventually accepted concrete measures by the V4 countries will be in agreement with the statements of the Like-Minded Group, too. For this reason, we would like to broaden the cooperation on the digital agenda with other EU countries, particularly the UK, the Netherlands, Romania and the Benelux.

## Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

The main event will be the *meeting of the V4 Labour and Social Affairs Ministers* (if necessary, in the V4+ format) on actual issues in the agenda of the EPSCO Council (posting of workers, maternity leave).

The Ministry will also organise *expert seminars* (at least two) for partners from the V4 countries on some of the following topics:

- social services – system of funding social services, cooperation among social and healthcare services, issues associated with family member care for seniors or seriously ill relatives;
- the issue of long-term unemployment;
- the issue of active and dignified aging, state reactions to demographic developments in society and ensuring conditions for active and dignified aging for seniors;
- implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- system of services for the care and education of preschool children (treatment, accessibility);
- dealing with family debt and inadequate housing, state support for single parents (specifically benefits for single parents, alimony substitution, etc.);
- the issue of institutional care for vulnerable children and the way forward – challenges and possible re-evaluation of care system for young children (reviewing age limits under which children could be placed into institutional care, alternative care services, foster parenting);
- reconciliation of family and career.

## Ministry of Justice

The main event will be the *Ministerial conference of the V4 countries + Slovenia and Croatia (May 2016, Kroměříž)*. The improvement of international judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters will also be the goal of the *meeting of experts from the international departments of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Offices and the Ministries of Justice from the V4 countries (first half of 2016)*.



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The Ministry of Justice will also organise *expert meetings* on the following topics:

- cross-border cooperation on family matters, particularly in the context of the planned review of the Brussels IIa Regulation (February 2016);
- support of an electronic service of documents and electronic communication among the authorities of the V4 member states (April 2016);
- development of restorative approaches in practice (a seminar or another expert meeting of the Probation Services representatives on the topic of mediation between the offender and the victim, as well as on the topic of the family group conferences, September 2015);
- implementation of the European Probation Rules and the Council of Europe Recommendations on the application of electronic monitoring of sentenced persons into the practice of the Probation Services in individual states;
- system measures reducing the recidivism rate of offenders, particularly of persons leaving prison (meeting of representatives of the Probation and Prison Services from the V4 countries).

As part of judicial training, the following events are to take place:

- *events focused on professional language preparation of judges and state prosecutors with an emphasis on the foreign languages most frequently used in cross-border judicial communication within the V4 countries (i.e. English and German);*
- *a conference of the V4 countries + Slovenia and Croatia (tbc) in order to exchange experience and best practices in court administration – division of responsibilities for the execution of the judicial power and for the operation of courts;*
- *a cycle of seminars for the V4 judges and state prosecutors on the topic of cross-border cooperation in criminal and civil matters (potential participation of neighbouring countries as well, e.g. Germany, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia).*

## Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

The priorities will be coordinating with the V4 partners in sport.

- *To this end the Czech Olympic Committee will organise the 22nd session of the V4 steering committee for sports competitions of “Olympic hopes” (experts/representatives of the V4 Ministries dealing with sport).*

Another goal will be increasing cooperation between the V4 countries and Romania with the countries of the Eastern Partnership on youth policies. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport will thus organise:

- *a working seminar for the V4 countries and the Eastern Partnership focused on healthy youth lifestyles (autumn 2015);*
- *a traditional working seminar for the V4 countries, Romania, Slovenia and Eastern Partnership, under which the working plan for cooperation in the field of youth under the CZ V4 PRES will be evaluated and a new working plan to be realised by the upcoming PL V4 PRES will be drawn up (May/June 2016).*

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Emphasis will also be placed on developing mutual cooperation in the field of research, development and innovation. We will follow up on the SK V4 PRES in efforts to further strengthen and deepen cooperation between the Visegrad Group and third countries.

In particular, the cooperation with Japan will be further developed as selected joint research projects are to be supported in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2015. A V4+Japan workshop in the Czech Republic will be organized with a primary goal to establish new contacts between the V4 countries and Japan research communities with special emphasis put on multilateral cooperation development. A discussion about the 2<sup>nd</sup> call for the V4+Japan joint projects will be initiated. Development of cooperation with the United States as a follow-up to the Slovak Visegrad Group Presidency activities belongs to our priorities as well. Particular steps would rise from the outcomes of the planned V4+USA working meeting.

## Ministry of the Interior

The Interior Ministries will continue with sharing information, experiences and good practice, primarily on the following topics:

- the fight against extremism and terrorism;
- human trafficking and illegal migration;
- cybercrime;
- spectator violence;
- environmental crime – cooperation in protecting wildlife within the V4 states, in particular against poaching (in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment);
- tax crime (see also the activities of the Finance Ministry) – close cooperation with the tax and customs administrations, Financial Analysis Unit and other partners; intensive exchange of information and joint activities (e.g. creation of joint teams);
- corruption during public procurement;
- seeking out and seizing the proceeds of crime;
- asylum and migration (ahead of being discussed by the heads of governments).

Aside from ongoing contact with partners from the V4 countries, the following will take place during the Czech Presidency:

- *annual expert-level conference devoted primarily to the topics of extremism and terrorism (November 2015);*
- *a meeting of ministers / deputy ministers responsible for migration dedicated to coordination of V4 positions on the “European Agenda on Migration” and other EU legislature on migration;*
- *high level meetings of police experts on the topic of human trafficking and illegal migration;*
- *regular meetings of the directors of foreign police from the V4 countries and analysts of foreign police services in the V4 countries, and potentially other guests (e.g. Germany, Austria);*
- *expert talks of the representatives of joint police and customs centres and representatives of the central authorities of police cooperation, which will primarily seek solutions for effective exchange of information within the joint centres (electronic communication) and coordination with the central authorities of police cooperation;*

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- a meeting of the directors general of the authorities responsible for dealing with emergencies and disasters in order to evaluate the international agreements on emergency assistance concluded with the V4 countries.

## Ministry of Health

In the field of health, we will focus on:

- a) evaluating the investment of funding from EU structural funds into healthcare, health promotion and completed or ongoing model programmes on changing health care systems within the V4 countries;
- b) sharing experiences in negotiating the conditions for the new 2014–2020 ESIF programming in the context of health protection and health promotion (including primary health care, chronic disease management), primary disease prevention and modernisation and humanisation of psychiatric care.

The CZ V4 PRES will also devote itself to topics currently being negotiated at the EU level and the strategy for developing eHealth.

The Czech Ministry of Health will organise an *expert meeting* on these topics (November 2015). The *ministerial meeting* (April 2016) will continue thematically from the results of the expert meeting.

## Ministry of Agriculture

The main topics for cooperation in agriculture will be:

- simplification of the conditions and reducing of the administrative and supervisory burden within the new Common Agricultural Policy, in particular as regards greening of direct payments, issue of active farmers (discussion on revision of the definition and revision of the conditions for demonstrating negative activity), evaluation of the conditions for providing support to the legal entities regarding young farmers and management of common markets organisation;
- prevention and reduction of food losses throughout the whole food chain, removing of administrative burden and solving the question of relations within the food chain

Attention may also be focused on the following topics:

- reducing of the negative impact on fisheries production resulting from the preference of piscivorous predators protected by law at the expense of other organisms;
- exchange of views on the implementation of the new EU Forest strategy and the Timber regulation, as well as on the achievements and the future of the Forest Europe process;
- best practice in the land management, in particular as regards soil quality improvement, solution of the soil erosion and increasing of the landscape retention capacity;
- further possible topics will be included on the agenda in accordance with the current development.

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To this end the Ministry of Agriculture is planning:

- *a meeting of Agriculture Ministers of the V4+3 (Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania) within the Bread Basket trade fair – August 2015;*
- *the continuation of talks at the ministerial level in the V4+3 format, e.g. in the margins of the TECHAGRO trade fair (March 2016).*

## Ministry of the Environment

The main topics for talks with Visegrad partners:

- the issue of circular economy and changes to European legislation on waste;
- the EU climate and energy policy framework up to 2030 – legislative drafts stemming from the conclusions of European Council from 24 October 2014;
- international negotiations on climate change – preparations for COP 21 in Paris 2015;
- Clear Air Policy Package;
- continuation of the V4 seminar on actual nature conservation issues, including the management of Natura 2000 sites and of priority habitat types and species, as identified under the Natura 2000 biogeographical seminars organised by the EU Commission;
- (poss.) cooperation regarding implementation of Directive (EU) 2015/412 amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in their territory.

To this end the Ministry of the Environment will realise the following:

- *a meeting of the Environment Ministers of the V4+ countries (October 2015);*
- *coordination meeting of the V4+ countries before session of the Council of the EU on the environment.*

*Expert meetings* will also be held on the following topics:

- meeting the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy (Q1 2016);
- Clear Air Policy Package (second half of 2015);
- supporting cooperation in implementing the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), focusing on the suppression of illegal trade with such specimens in the Central European region (2–3 day workshop, first half of 2016);
- implementing the European Commission's Smart Cities and Communities initiative (in collaboration with the Ministry of Regional Development):
  - working level seminar for new EU Member States, Q4 2015;
  - conference and presentation on the approach to this initiative in the V4+ countries, Q4 2015;
- support for implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (on the occasion of the Czech Presidency of the Carpathian Convention in 2014–2017):
  - expert meeting of the V4+3 (Serbia, Romania, Ukraine) and Working Groups under the Carpathian Convention for landscape protection and care, with a focus on ecological connectivity and green infrastructure in mountainous areas (Q4 2015);

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- expert meeting of the V4+3 (Serbia, Romania, Ukraine) and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) with a focus on sustainable tourism in mountainous areas (Q1 2016);
  - exploring the opportunities for cooperation between Visegrad countries under EUROPARC CEE (talks in the V4 or V4+ format during the General Assembly of EUROPARC CEE, Q1 2016).

## National Security Authority

The goal of the National Security Authority, which is responsible for coordination of cyber security in the Czech Republic, in cooperation with the V4 partners will be above all to increase the effectiveness of cooperation under the Central European Cyber Security Platform (CECSP) and help boost the CECSP's position at the international level.

Specific activities:

- *At the strategic level, the CZ V4 PRES will seek progress in harmonising the approach of individual states and their positions and opinions on major cyber security issues within international organisations, forums and discussions. This includes primarily the legislation being negotiated in the working bodies of the Council of the EU and European Commission and documents negotiated under the OSCE and International Telecommunication Union;*
- *At the operational level among top CERT sites we want to organise workshops on selected topics (e.g. intrusion detection and honeypots, penetration testing, etc.);*
- *The CZ V4 PRES is committed to implementing standards and secure channels in communications among CECSP states.*

## ■ ANNEX: High Level Meetings during CZ V4 PRES

| Organizer   | Venue   | Location           | Date   |
|---|---|--------------------|--|
| Office of the President of Hungary                    | V4 Presidents   | Hungary            | 8–9 October 2015 (tbc)                               |
| Office of the Government                              | Two V4 Prime Ministers Summits (one with the Republic of Korea, one with the Benelux countries) | Prague             | Winter 2015, Spring 2016 (tba)                       |
|   | V4 State Secretaries for EU ( <i>informal meeting</i> )   | Prague             | End of Fall 2015                                     |
|   | Conference on Energy  | Brussels           | July 14, 2015  |
| Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of the Czech Republic | Speakers of the V4 Parliaments  | Prague             | 1× during presidency                                 |
| Ministry of Agriculture                               | V4 Ministers of Agriculture + Bulgaria + Romania + Slovenia (2×)                                | České Budějovice   | August 2015, 1 <sup>st</sup> half 2016               |
| Ministry of Justice                                   | V4 Ministers of Justice + Croatia + Slovenia  | Kroměříž or Prague | 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2016                         |
| Ministry of Industry and Trade                        | V4 Ministers of Industry and Trade (2×)   |                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half 2015, 1 <sup>st</sup> half 2016 |
|   | V4 Deputy Ministers responsible for energy  |                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half 2015                            |
| Ministry of Health                                    | V4 Ministers of Health  | Prague             | April 2016   |
| Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs                 | V4 Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs   |                    |  |
| Ministry of Interior                                  | V4 Senior Officials responsible for extraordinary situations                                    |                    |  |
|   | V4 Foreign Police Directors   |                    |  |
| Ministry of the Environment                           | V4 Ministers of the Environment + Bulgaria + Romania  | Čejkovice          | October 2015   |
| Ministry of Culture                                   | V4 Ministers of Culture   |                    | May / June 2016                                      |
| Ministry of Regional Development                      | V4 Deputy Ministers of Regional Development   | Prague             | End of 2015 or Spring 2016                           |
| Ministry of Transport                                 | V4 Ministers of Transport + Austria + Germany + EU Commission                                   |                    | March 2016   |
|   | V4 Deputy Ministers of Transport + EU partners ( <i>on the road freight transport</i> )         |                    | tba  |
| Ministry of Defense                                   | V4 Ministers of Defense   |                    | Spring 2016  |
|   | V4 Senior Body (level of State Secretaries or Deputy Ministers)                                 |                    | 2× during presidency                                 |
|   | V4 Defense Policy Directors   |                    | 2× during presidency                                 |
|   | V4 Chiefs of General Staff  |                    | 2× during presidency                                 |

|  |   |                                       |  |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Ministry of Foreign Affairs            | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + Western Balkans + Slovenia + Croatia + EU                                     |                                       | October / November 2015                |
|  | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + Eastern Partnership + tba + EU  |                                       | May 2016                               |
|  | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs: informal meeting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group | Prague                                | February 2016                          |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Ukraine ( <i>V4 Road Show, topic education</i> )  | Ukraine (not Kyiv)                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of 2015           |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Ukraine ( <i>V4 Road Show, topic SME</i> )  | Ukraine (not Kyiv)                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of 2015           |
|  | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + Germany   | Prague                                | March 2016                             |
|  | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + Japan ( <i>in the margins of the ASEM Ministerial – tbc</i> )                 |                                       | November 2015                          |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Germany ( <i>a year after the previous meeting under SK V4 PRES</i> )                     |                                       | July / August 2015 (tbc)               |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + IVF partners  |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Switzerland   |                                       | End of 2015                            |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Western Balkans   |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers only ( <i>consultations before the NATO Summit in Warsaw</i> )                              |                                       | Spring 2016                            |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + USA ( <i>on security</i> )  |                                       | 1 <sup>st</sup> half of 2016           |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Benelux ( <i>on EU topics</i> )   |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + Germany ( <i>on EU topics</i> )   |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + EaP countries ( <i>following the V4 joint trip to Moldova under SK PRES</i> )             |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers + France ( <i>on EU topics</i> )  |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs & Defence + Israel (4x2 + 2) ( <i>on security</i> )                      |                                       |  |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia   | Tbilisi, Baku, Yerevan                | 1 <sup>st</sup> week of September 2015 |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Canada   | Ottawa                                | September 2015 (tbc)                   |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Mexico   | New York                              | September 2015 (tbc)                   |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Brazil   | Brasilia                              | September 2015 (tbc)                   |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Slovenia, Croatia  | Prague                                | October/November 2015 (tbc)            |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Benelux  | Brussels                              | November 2015 (tbc)                    |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Ukraine  | Kiev/Prague                           | December 2015 (tbc)                    |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Belarus, Moldova   | Minsk, Kishinev/Prague                | January 2016 (tbc)                     |
|  | V4 Political Directors + USA  | Washington DC                         | March/April 2016                       |
|  | V4 Political Directors + BiH  | Sarajevo                              | April 2016                             |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Israel   | Prague                                | May/June 2016                          |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Republic of Korea  | Soul                                  | June 2016                              |
|  | V4 Political Directors + Japan  | Tokyo                                 | June 2016                              |
|  | NB8 Presidency  | V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + NB8 |  |
| Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport | Lower levels  |                                       |  |
| Ministry of Finance                    | Lower levels  |                                       |  |

**Programme for the Czech Presidency  
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**Published by**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic  
Public Diplomacy Department  
Loretánské náměstí 5, 118 00 Praha 1  
Prague 2015

**Graphic Design**

[www.flashstudio.cz](http://www.flashstudio.cz)

**Circulation**

1200 copies

ISBN 978-80-7441-023-9





Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of the Czech Republic

Published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic  
Not for sale.

ISBN 978-80-7441-023-9