



**DYNAMIC  
VISEGRAD  
FOR EUROPE**

SLOVAK PRESIDENCY 2018/2019 OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

**PRESIDENCY  
PROGRAMME**

## SUMMARY

The Slovak Republic is holding its **fifth Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4)** from **July 2018 until June 2019 in the period of key events in European area**. The V4 Presidency will start at the time of ongoing negotiations on the **next Multiannual Financial Framework followed** by the preparation of a new **Strategic Agenda for the EU for the years 2019 – 2024**. The **elections to the European Parliament in May 2019** will have a significant impact on the discussion as well as the setting of a new institutional cycle. In the same month, our countries will commemorate the **15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our EU membership** and in case of Slovakia also **the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO membership**. Another important, but regrettably unprecedented event of the upcoming year will be **the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union at the end of March 2019** and the question of the future arrangement of mutual relations.

The V4 countries have made **full use of their EU and NATO membership** potential and established themselves in the European and transatlantic environment. Despite EU's multiple crises (gas, economic, migration), this period has represented a **dynamic development and stable progress** for the whole V4. The Visegrad countries demonstrate an attractive model of economic a social transformation and a positive example for other reforming states, confirming the success of EU's enlargement policy. **Economic growth in the V4 has actually exceeded the EU average**. V4 countries in recent years have also contributed to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area through participation in the **Alliance and the EU missions and operations**.

### DYNAMIC VISEGRAD FOR EUROPE

For a quarter of a century of its existence, **Visegrad cooperation has moved from coordination** of countries' integration processes **to the promotion of common positions** at European level. The V4 countries are **a full-fledged part of the EU** where the V4 represents a platform for pragmatic cooperation, **not an EU alternative**. The European Union is our common existential space, providing us with a high level of peace, security and prosperity. Therefore, we want to actively promote a **positive agenda** and to act within the EU as a constructive and relevant player bringing its own views and solutions. Opinions of the V4 resonate among European partners and they are taken into account at all levels. However, different views on several topics are a legitimate and natural part of a democratic European discussion in the spirit of the *united in diversity* principle.

The Slovak Presidency wishes to put emphasis on the **strengthening of internal dynamics, competitiveness, security, interconnectivity and cohesion of the Visegrad region** within the EU. The motto of the Slovak Presidency *Dynamic Visegrad for Europe* expresses the fulfilment of these ambitions.

### BASIS OF THE PRESIDENCY

The Slovak Presidency will **continue** the implementation of priority initiatives within strategic objectives set during the **previous Presidencies** and will look for a closer cooperation with the **upcoming** Czech Presidency. A successful mastering of the Presidency priority topics is **based on three assumptions**:

- ☆ **promoting unity wherever it is possible** – we will strive to achieve a consensus in matters which we can jointly promote in a better way at European level
- ☆ **offering solutions where it is beneficial** – we are interested in a mutual implementation of such projects that have a practical positive impact on citizens in our countries
- ☆ **respecting differences where it is necessary** – we will seek consensus while fully respecting national interests

## PRIORITIES OF THE SLOVAK PRESIDENCY

The objective of the Slovak Presidency is to bring tangible results for the benefit of the citizens of our countries in **three priority areas**:

- ☆ **Strong Europe**
- ☆ **Secure Environment**
- ☆ **Smart Solutions**

### STRONG EUROPE

**Strong Europe** is a key factor for further dynamic development and prosperity of the Visegrad countries. The V4 is ready to actively contribute to the current **discussions on the future of the EU** resulting from Bratislava process, framed by a so-called Leaders' Agenda. We will focus on **strengthening the EU** by offering concrete solutions. One of our key priorities is to **strengthen common European perspective** and to **prevent the creation of dividing lines within the EU**. We will keep supporting the role of the European Council in setting Europe's strategic direction within the EU Treaties framework on a consensual basis providing that adopted agreements are respected in the further work of the EU institutions. We are ready to shoulder our share of responsibility for maintaining and **strengthening European unity**.

The Slovak Presidency will continue in intensive cooperation in proven V4+ formats with European, regional and transatlantic partners. We will primarily focus on the **deepening of the existing partnerships**. The Presidency will use recognized international events in Slovakia, such as GLOBSEC or TATRASUMMIT, as a **platform for organising V4+ summits**.

The Visegrad voice will continue to be heard clearly in discussions and decisions on the key EU policies, whether in relation to its **institutional arrangements**, the future of individual **sectoral policies, migration and security**, or the **Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework**, which is necessary for the correct set-up of the Union's political priorities financing. Results of the discussion must be reflected in practical policies with visible benefits for the EU citizens. The Slovak Presidency will also contribute to the **maintaining of the EU27 unity** in course of **negotiations on United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU** and in relation to negotiations on future agreements between the EU and the UK. **National parliaments** should be more engaged in the discussion on the EU's future and in the overall decision-making process. Regular dialogue of V4 countries' legislative bodies is a real value added to a predominantly inter-governmental nature of Visegrad cooperation.

The V4 cooperation on matters of the **EU Single Market** could contribute to a successful promotion of our common interests. From our point of view, the Single Market must remain key area of the EU activity in the next years. In particular, more attention is needed to eliminate existing barriers and enhance services and goods markets.

Under Slovakia's leadership, the V4 will advocate for a strong **Cohesion Policy, Common Agricultural Policy**, as well as **other European policies**, which considerably contribute to the EU growth and employment. An important aspect of the current developments in Central Europe is the support and further development of democratic society with focus on solving problems our citizens suffer from the most. Boosting joint V4 activities can bring concrete benefits for people, simplification of services, and stimulation of mutual relationships between entrepreneurs. Therefore, we will continue to pay attention to the building of missing **transport networks**, on which the competitiveness of the region as a whole is significantly dependent.

In order to bring benefits for citizens, the Slovak Presidency will also focus on the implementation of specific steps in **social sphere, health care and education**. Strong Europe

also represents common European **cultural** heritage. We will therefore focus on activities, which strengthen our **affiliation with common European family**. **Invigoration of the civil dimension** of Visegrad cooperation will be an important part of the Slovak Presidency. **Strategic communication** with citizens plays a significant role. Practical level is something that people understand best. Therefore, we will focus on a critical discussion of concrete benefits of the European Union based on real facts. With this objective, we will stimulate cooperation with non-governmental organisations and support activities of the **International Visegrad Fund**, which is the only one institutionalized form of the V4 cooperation. The Slovak Presidency will explore possibilities for using the Fund as an optimal tool to be of assistance to innovative cooperation projects within the V4 and in selected third countries and regions, especially these of the Eastern Partnership and in Western Balkans. The aim is to contribute to enhance awareness about Fund's advantages in supporting common V4 projects and projects in third countries and to consider enhancing cooperation forms to other countries with innovative potential.

Concurrent Slovak Presidencies in the Visegrad Group and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2019 will provide a good opportunity for identifying common programme goals whether related to regional security area or in military, political, economic, environmental, and human rights dimension.

## SECURE ENVIRONMENT

**Secure environment** is one of the main preconditions of a successful and stable foreign policy. The world as we knew it has changed and the security situation in many of its parts including the immediate V4 neighbourhood has recently significantly deteriorated. Breaching of essential elements and norms of international law, violating sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, erosion of international arms control regime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and increase of hybrid activities occurred. With regard to the current development, the EU and NATO Member States are predetermined to cooperate more intensively in the field of **common foreign and security policy**. A key instrument for external action remains the implementation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.

In this context, the EU's strategic role in stabilising the European neighbourhood is in our natural interest. Therefore, the Slovak Presidency will put special emphasis on keeping regular **political dialogue with the Western Balkan and the Eastern Partnership countries** led by the V4 as the only European regional grouping. In this respect, we will continue to **support the EU enlargement process** and the open character of integration processes. The V4 will provide political and project-oriented assistance to both regions in order to support their Euro-Atlantic integration and thus contribute to the strengthening of local civil society and regional cooperation. The V4 countries simultaneously realise their share in the **strengthening of European security and defence** – in synergy with NATO activities – whether by participating in projects of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (**PESCO**) or by the preparation of the **EU Visegrad Battle Group**.

**Migration** is topic that will continue to resonate strongly in all its aspects during the Slovak Presidency. We want to contribute constructively to the discussion by formulating V4 joint positions and responsible adoption of specific measures to bring long-term solutions. The V4 will advocate the **restoration of the normally functioning Schengen** without internal borders, as one of the most successful and most comprehensible European integration projects for our citizens.

Other aspects of the secure environment, which we will pay attention to, include **energy and climate security with using nuclear energy** as a low emission and stable energy source, as well as other environmentally-friendly solutions. The issue of **dual food quality** with the active

involvement of V4 partners has become more dynamic after the Bratislava Consumer Summit. We welcome measures adopted to fight against this phenomenon, and, during the Slovak Presidency, we will advocate their effective implementation in practice.

## SMART SOLUTIONS

The third block of the Presidency's priorities, whose objective is to bring **smart solutions**, represents a way for the V4 countries to create optimal and user-friendly conditions for on-line world, which already is a part of people's and entrepreneurs' everyday life. It is not only the Central European region which is facing the **digital transformation** challenge in all aspects of the society. Therefore, we will continue the tight V4 coordination of **digital agenda**. This field is currently proving an intensive dynamic growth, but it also brings a specific benefit for the whole society, whether through the access to prepaid on-line services or problem-free on-line shopping throughout the EU. The Slovak Presidency will also actively respond to the current **innovative technological trends**, the use of which is growing in real economy. **Circular economy and waste management** are some of the innovative fields advocated by all 4 Visegrad countries. We will stimulate an open discussion on these policies that will support the innovation potential of economies and new investments.

## I. Strong Europe

### *Institutional issues*

The future form of the EU is directly connected with institutional framework. During the Slovak V4 Presidency, elections to the European Parliament (EP) will take place, which will bring a change in the composition of the EP also due to UK's withdrawal from the EU. Ambition of the Presidency will be to maintain the unity of the V4 and a wider group of like-minded countries with respect to maintaining institutional balance and contractual compliance. The V4 coordination will also take place in the cases of other institutional proposals related to the composition of the European Commission (EC), the strengthening of democratic legitimacy and the role of national parliaments in the EU decision-making process or the creation of a position of a joint finance and economy minister and an overall institutional eurozone architecture.

The European Union, with regard to the methodology of its reforms, must remain united, although not at the price of stagnation nor to the detriment of progress. We stand for the further integration in the fields where it makes sense and brings added value. In this context, we must emphasise the need for social and economic convergence between Member States as a basis of a genuine EU unity. As for reform efforts, we consider it necessary to maintain effective use of the present instruments and agreements. The further work of the EU should be based on the thorough compliance with agreed common rules and the principles of geographical balance, equality of Member States, proportionality, subsidiarity and institutional balance.

### *Planned activities:*

- *Coordination meetings of the V4 before the meeting of the Council or the European Council*

### *Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework*

A draft of Post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be one of the key proposals of the European Commission in 2018. The EC draft package contains roughly 40 legislative proposals. The negotiations on the structure of the Post-2020 MFF, the amount and composition of revenues and expenditures of the EU and conditions for the implementation of the EU

programmes will probably take place until 2020. With regard to the later submission of the proposal due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, the time and financial aspects will present a challenge. The V4 countries especially promote a balanced EU budget, which will unite rather than create new fractures in the Union.

The V4 will traditionally represent a core of the group of countries advocating for a strong Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy. The two key policies both form the core of the EU budget and represent the best examples of European integration.

Due to the importance of Common Agricultural Policy in the V4 countries, we expect that its share and amount in the Post-2020 MFF will have no negative impact on the allocations for the V4.

The main challenge and simultaneously the main effort of the Presidency will be to find a right balance between the financing of new EU priorities and the traditional policies, which contribute to fulfilling the still valid objectives arising from Treaties on the EU.

The Presidency will, together with its V4 partners, strive to negotiate a balanced MFF, which will be faithful to the principles of balancing both the income and the expenditures of the EU budget. One will then have to take into account both the socio-economic situation in regions and nations and the differences between the Member States.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *A V4 seminar on priorities of the future MFF (Brussels)*
- *Expert meetings of directors of departments responsible for the Post-2020 MFF (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018, 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019, Bratislava)*
- *A working meeting of ministers of finance of the V4+ countries and the European Investment bank regarding the future MFF proposal, the utilisation of financial instruments, and the identification of necessary financial strategic projects of regional importance (the beginning of October 2018)*

#### ***Supporting strong EU Cohesion Policy***

Presidency will support maintaining of the strong position of Cohesion Policy at EU level, as a main investment policy of the EU for supporting growth and employment after 2020. Priority will consist of discussion on and identification of common positions about the future mechanisms for the implementation of a Cohesion Policy post 2020 and the effort to find common proposals for solutions for topics related to negotiation process focused on a draft package of legislative regulations of the EU for Cohesion Policy post 2020, submitted by the European Commission in May 2018.

Evaluation is an important element that will contribute to the fulfilment of the vision of economic, social and territorial cohesion and convergence of the EU regions. Its objectives are to assess the impact and effects of the financial support from the EU funds, while its findings and recommendations will contribute to fulfilling of the main objectives of the Cohesion Policy and influence the creation of new strategies. The intention of the Presidency will be to present the results of assessments of the EU funds within the V4 countries, linked to new challenges in the EU Cohesion Policy.

Discussion on the further direction of Cohesion Policy post 2020 will take place in the standard V4 format with the additional involvement of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of ministers of V4+4 countries on the EU Cohesion Policy post 2020 (October 2018, Bratislava)*

- *Cohesion Countries High Level Summit (October/November 2018, Bratislava)*
- *A meeting of V4+4 countries on current issues of the EU Cohesion Policy (June 2019)*
- *A Conference “Evaluation of EU Funds - Can We Learn Our Lessons?” (September 2018, Bratislava)*
- *Expert meetings of representatives of V4+4 countries on the EU Cohesion Policy (July 2018 – June 2019)*
- *A meeting of Directors General of V4+4 countries on the EU Cohesion Policy post 2020 (September 2018, Bratislava)*
- *A conference “Strengthening of synergistic and complementary effects between European structural and investment funds and community programmes” (November 2018, Bratislava)*
- *A conference “Convergence of Economies of V4 Countries after Their Accession to the OECD and the EU” (October 2018, Paris)*

### ***United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU***

The beginning of the Slovak Presidency in the V4 will, to a significant extent, be influenced by the finalisation of negotiations on conditions for the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the EU and by drafting a political declaration on the framework of future relations between the EU and the UK. Basic political limits of the EU27 for these negotiations have already been determined, however, the V4 will continue to try to achieve a balanced agreement on the withdrawal that will reflect the interests of this grouping, while maintaining the unity of the EU27. As for the work on the political declaration about a framework for future relationships, the V4 will prioritise the fields of common interest: especially trade and economic relations, air and road transport, mobility, common foreign and security policy and judicial cooperation in civil and criminal cases. After a balanced Agreement on the withdrawal is signed at the end of 2018, the V4 is prepared to actively act in favour of successful ratification with the objective of an organised exit of the UK from the EU. Within the EU27, the V4 countries will strive for such legal settings of future relationships with the UK, which will ensure legal certainty for our citizens and economic operators following up on the end of transitional period.

Presidency will also focus on the maintaining of the continuity and cooperation with the UK in the field of judicial cooperation as effectively possible. Practical aspects of future cooperation with the UK should be a topic of the Presidency at a working level.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *Political consultations at the level of directors of departments concerning future relations with the UK*
- *Expert consultations at the level of directors of departments in the field of judicial cooperation in criminal and civil cases (April 2019)*

### ***The status of the audit authorities of the European structural and investment funds in the programming period 2014-2020***

The Presidency will present solutions in key topics of the European structural and investment funds in the 2014-2020 Programming Period, since legislation has brought new institutes, be it legislative or procedural, which represent a diversion from established practices set up in the previous programming periods. This change brings an emerging need to exchange experience and *good practice* with other Member States. It is important to establish communication bridges, search for common solutions and exchange information aiming at finding answers to a variety of issues arising from implementation of this legislature.

#### ***Planned activities:***

*A conference System of control/audit in the programming period 2014-2020 and exchange of experience and case studies “good practice” between audit bodies in this field (the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)*

### ***Consumer protection, industrial development, promotion of investment and trade***

With regard to the protection of economic interests and increased consumer awareness, the Slovak Presidency will support the efforts to strengthen consumer protection in the digital economy and to **increase awareness of consumers and entrepreneurs about their rights and duties**.

We shall continue to support better enforceability of consumer rights via non-judicial means in order to identify existing problems and shortcomings and to subsequently implement measures for eventual improvement. An alternative dispute resolution scheme will be the main instrument of use, by means of which it is also possible to resolve cross-border consumer problems.

In the field of investments, we propose a cooperation between countries in attracting large investors into the border regions. That way, an investor from one country can use a supplier from another. On the technical side, the analysis will focus on such potential jointly functioning territories.

Within the grouping of the V4 countries, a strong position belongs to **the automotive industry**. It has recently been undergoing a turning point with respect to the negotiations of the EU industrial policy, trying to convert to a low-carbon economy, reducing emissions and increasing the automotive industry's share in the overall economy of the EU countries. This sector simultaneously faces new challenges, such as electro-mobility, digitalisation, and the use of alternative fuels. This topic is covered by **Newmatec, a knowledge forum**, focused on new materials, technologies and innovations that identify the current and future trends in the automotive and related industries.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *Slovak cooperation exchange at the level of state secretaries (September 2018) and ministers (13 November 2018)*
- *Newmatec 2019 - a knowledge forum focused on automotive industry at the level of ministers/state secretaries (March 2019)*

**The mid-European Group on Biocides** provides a platform for Central European countries. The aim of Biocides Legislation is to improve the Internal Market functioning through harmonization of rules, which regulate the use of biocides products in the market and which safeguard a high-level protection for human, animals and environment. Thanks to their geographical proximity, historical context and similar climatic conditions, the Central European countries are facing a similar challenge in many areas. The Presidency will propose an initiative aiming at acceleration of cooperation, intensification of expert and juridical information exchange between Central European EU countries in biocides field.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *23. meeting of the Mid-European Group on Biocides (20–21 September 2018)*

### ***Transport, construction, tourism***

The Presidency will try to continue to coordinate positions of the V4 countries in the field of the EU transport policy for individual transport modes, including a push towards common positions to the current drafts of legal regulations and strategic documents of the EU. The



Presidency will also focus on the **issue of intelligent transport systems** and the building of infrastructure for alternative fuels.

**Road transport:** In the field of road transport, the development of road transport infrastructure or the implementation of cross-border projects within basic network (TEN-T) and its corridors remains the priority of the Presidency. In this context, we will focus on cooperation and enforcement of common proposals, projects and concepts within the V4 or a V4+Austria+Ukraine+Western Balkan format in terms of TEN-T network and relevant corridors of basic TEN-T network, including cooperation within the Via Carpathian corridor, especially in terms of cargo road transport. A clear intention is to include this corridor into priorities of the TEN-T network in terms of cargo transport. The Presidency will exert effort to create a systems concept of connecting long-distance transport on the intersection of 5 capital cities of the V4 and Austria and to build a system of charging and gas stations.

The Presidency will more closely cooperate and communicate in the acquisition of multi-modal transport data from neighbouring countries (V4+Austria+Ukraine) for the needs of the National System of Transport Information (NSDI) and updating our Transport Model. The Presidency will also focus on cooperation, exchange of experiences and continuation of common procedure of the V4, as the so-called cohesion countries, and on ensuring and supporting financial mechanisms of the EU and the financing of transport infrastructure.

In the field of autonomous and connected vehicles, there will be a benefit in the exchange of experience between the V4 countries from implemented pilot projects and from experiences of the Czech Republic and Hungary within the **EU - C-Roads initiative**.

Coordination of the position of the V4 countries in the further negotiations on proposals in the first *Road Package* will be important in terms of the European agenda. The agenda on the posting of workers in the field of international transport and the improvement of their working conditions will be especially important. It is in the common interest of the V4 countries to agree on uniform and enforceable rules for this specific sector and simultaneously to guarantee equal access to the single European market. At the same time, the Presidency will pay attention to discussions on unfinished second package of legislation, dominated by measures for reducing CO2 emissions in transport. The Presidency will also be ready to react to topics brought by the EC's final draft of measures in the form of the third *Road Package*.

**Waterways and ports:** The Presidency will promote the deepening and intensification of cooperation between the V4 countries in the field of the development and modernisation of waterways and ports in order to enhance competitiveness and development of water transport, including by means of equipped and functioning ports. The Presidency will advocate the development of a financial instrument to support the modernisation of an inland waterways fleet.

**Rail transport:** Priorities of the Presidency include the connectivity of countries through rail transport within Central Europe (V4+Austria), the competitiveness of rail transport (V4), supporting public passenger transport and urban mobility (V4+Austria). Furthermore, it is the cooperation of joint activities in connection with the building of basic and comprehensive TEN-T network and primarily of the corridors of the basic TEN-T network and the implementation of cross-border projects, together with supporting combined and inter-modal transport from the funds of Member States and the EU. The Presidency aims to set up a system connection of the five capital cities – Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, Warsaw and Vienna – with a central long-distance transport based on the current infrastructure and will support the implementation of a **project of their high-speed rail link**.

**Air transport:** The V4 countries have a common interest in an adequate and feasible revision of regulation *on safeguarding competition in air transport*, which is currently one of priorities of the Council of the EU. Within an *Open and Connected Europe* air package, the Presidency will look for more constructive, more competitive and fairer solutions for the EU.

In connection to the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, the Presidency will try to achieve an agreement that would make it possible to maintain all the existing air links between the V4 countries and the UK, while not jeopardising connectivity within the EU regions that immediately relate to the V4.

**Tourism:** The Slovak Presidency will continue to exchange experiences and implementation of marketing and promotional activities for the year 2019 under a common brand *Discover Central Europe*. Countries will exchange information, examples of good practice and expertise on the latest developments in tourism. They will try to intensify and improve on-line presentation by means of the existing common website [www.discover-ce.eu](http://www.discover-ce.eu).

**In the field of construction and spatial development,** the Presidency will focus on the coordination of spatial development of the V4+2 countries (Romania, Bulgaria) and the exchange of information in the field of spatial planning in compliance with the *V4+2 countries' Spatial Development Strategy*.

**In the field of postal services,** an expert meeting will take place during the Presidency in order to exchange opinions and plans related to the issues of universal service and its expected development in the future years in the V4 countries in connection with the revision of Postal Directive.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of a control group on a document "V4+2 countries' Spatial Development Strategy" (November 2018)*
- *A negotiation of representatives of the V4 countries + Austria in the field of water transport at the level of experts (March 2019)*
- *A meeting of directors of national tourist agencies of the V4 (November 2018)*
- *A meeting on a joint marketing of tourism of the V4 countries at the level of state secretaries (March 2019)*
- *A negotiation of rail transport experts on the development of a public transport timetable in order to create a system of fast interconnection of capital cities in the V4+Austria format (February 2019)*
- *A meeting at a V4 expert level on postal issues focusing on universal service and its expected development in the future years in the V4 countries (8–9 November 2018)*
- *A negotiation of experts and designers in the field of rail transport and infrastructure in order to develop alternatives of the construction of a high-speed rail on the intersection of capital cities in the V4 format (November 2018)*
- *A meeting of expert in the field of intelligent transport systems focusing on cross-border exchange of data and information from the implementation of pilot projects in the field of autonomous and connected vehicles (October 2018)*
- *A V4 meeting on supporting transport within a 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (July 2018)*

#### ***Labour, social affairs and family***

The recently published *Social Justice Package*, which contains an important draft regulation on the creation of a new EU agency – **the European Labour Authority**, represents a priority topic

for the Slovak Presidency in the field of social policy. As it is a political priority of the current Commission, we can expect an intensive progress of negotiations.

**In the field of fight against undeclared work** and ensuring decent working conditions for all workers in the EU, including third country citizens, the Presidency, in cooperation with its V4 partners, will regularly evaluate the already functioning cooperation between competent institutions, will focus on mutual exchange of experience and effective procedures, and will provide relevant information and free consultancy to these workers in order to effectively prevent their discrimination. This topic is highly relevant and current due to the increasing trend of employing third country workers in the V4 countries. This priority is further relevant at the EU level, with regard to the ongoing reform of labour mobility rules.

**Social economy and social enterprises:** in connection with a new legislation in the field of social economy and social enterprises in Slovakia, the Presidency is interested in the creation of a space for the exchange of experience between V4 partners in order to make this agenda for the region of Central and Easter Europe visible. We consider the topic of social policy important, because it significantly contributes to employment, sustainable growth and more equitable distribution of revenues and wealth.

**The protection of the V4 workers rights in the UK and a strategy of making labour re-emigration back to the V4 region more attractive.** It can be assumed, that after the UK leaves the EU, there will be a movement in a significant fraction of the labour force, which has a high potential in terms of work habits and experience and qualification. The Presidency will exert a targeted effort to acquire the biggest part of this labour force and create a space for sharing strategies on making the labour re-emigration into the V4 region more attractive in the form of discussion forums.

**Reducing wage disparities across the EU:** significant, and historically established, the wage disparities between the EU countries has given the V4 countries an important competitive advantage, from which our countries have been benefiting for a long time. This potential, however, is starting to vanish and it will be limited in the few upcoming years in the form of various measures. Meanwhile, the V4 countries can currently rely on other forms of competitiveness, such as labour productivity and quality of work. Pressure to reduce wage disparities across the EU, which is also reflected in the effort to strengthen convergence in the social sphere of the EU, is one of the offer solutions of this irreversible development. The Presidency wants to open this topic and include a discussion on the strengthening of the institute of social dialogue, including at its European level.

**V4 position coordination in connection with Austrian draft legislative concerning the indexation of family allowances:** Austria has revisited its former attempt to introduce the indexation of family allowances for children, which have residence outside of Austria. In the context of measures adopted by the Austrian Government, the Slovak Presidency is ready to coordinate the V4 positions in this extraordinary sensitive topic.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- ***Ad hoc meetings aiming at V4 coordination concerning the indexation of family allowances***
- ***A meeting at the level of ministers of the V4 or V4+ (April 2019)***
- ***A meeting of experts focusing on social economy (April 2019)***
- ***A meeting of the representative of labour inspectorates and labour offices of V4 or V4+ at the level of experts***

#### ***Education***

**In the field of lifelong learning** and in accordance with a dynamic development on labour market, the Presidency wants to focus on developing basic skills and increasing the level of digital competences of adult population in all age categories. We wish to continue in the *New Skills Agenda for Europe*, which was adopted during the Slovak EU Presidency in 2016. The Presidency also wants to continue to support the exchange of experience and the implementation of an **OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies**. Interest in highlighting the results of informal education, informal learning and the recognition thereof in the context of acquiring relevant qualification on labour market, including making further training more attractive, will be another key aspect of the Presidency.

***Planned activities:***

- *A conference on the implementation of OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies focusing on the skill levels of adult population (27–29 November 2018)*

**In the field of regional education**, the most important issue is connecting education with the world of work by means of vocational training and preparation. At the time of rapidly and dynamically growing labour market, it is essential for vocational training and preparation to reflect the latest development trends in the field of industry and services and to include them into the educational programmes in secondary vocational schools. Activities follow a “*New Agenda of Skills for Europe*”.

**Vocational training and preparation:** The Presidency focuses on connecting vocational training and preparation with the needs of labour market by means of engaging employers into the process of vocational training and preparation. The Slovak Presidency also focuses on supporting the education of teachers of vocational subjects and the exchange of experience and possibility to promote the vocational training and preparation system of the V4 countries in the Balkan countries.

***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of an expert group of the V4 countries and Austria on the implementation of dual education (April 2019, Bratislava)*

## ***Youth and sport***

**Youth policy:** The Presidency will focus on supporting and developing talent and potential of young people in the V4 and Eastern European countries. The intention is to strengthen cooperation of non-governmental organisations and youth workers while effectively using sufficient funds from the International Visegrad Fund and the Erasmus+ programme.

***Planned activities:***

- *A V4 and EaP seminar on supporting and developing talent (April 2019)*

**Sport:** The Presidency will continue a joint project of strengthening regional cooperation of the V4 countries in the field of sport in the form of organising sport competitions in the category of juniors under the name ***Olympic Hopes***.

***Planned activities:***

- *The 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of steering committee of V4 competitions “Olympic Hopes” (29–30 November 2018, Bratislava)*

## ***Culture***

**In the field of culture,** the Presidency will focus on ***issues of common cultural roots and historical experience*** in the context of historical changes of Europe. In the context of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War I and the emergence of new states in the former territory

of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1<sup>st</sup> annual **theatre-art festival Transmisje** will take place in Rzeszów during the Slovak V4 Presidency. In first half of 2019, the second year of the above festival will focus on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the iron curtain.

**The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018:** the Presidency will focus on activities that encourage more people to explore and get to know the cultural heritage of Europe and to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a common European family. We will put emphasis on the value of cultural heritage for society, its economic contribution, its role in European cultural diplomacy and the importance of its preservation for the next generations.

In addition to these, the Slovak Presidency will deal with the exchange of experience in the system of financing of culture and minority culture in the V4 countries, emphasising independent or non-State culture, its current status, starting points, and new trends.

**Planned activities:**

- *An international conference on early-medieval sacral architecture focusing on Great Moravia period (October 2018, Kopčany)*
- *The 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of ministers of culture of the V4 countries (June 2019)*
- *A meeting of representatives of working group for cultural heritage of the V4 countries (the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019, Bratislava)*
- *An international conference on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the University Library in Bratislava (the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)*
- *The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual theatre-art festival Transmisje (the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019, Košice)*
- *A colloquium of book-information experts of the V4 countries*
- *A Visegrad audio-visual cooperation initiative*
- *A project of International Master Courses (V4 and the EU)/Convergence Academy*
- *Rings on the Water – a competition with an exhibition, ÚEUV Gallery (18 October 2018, Bratislava)*

## II. Secure Environment

### ***The building of good and stable foreign policy relationships***

**Common Foreign and Security Policy:** The basic political background of building the V4 countries' cooperation in this area is the EU membership. Our objective is to emphasise the maintenance and strengthening of dialogue and unified EU position in this field. We will advocate a close coordination and strengthening of cooperation in topics in which we have sufficient expertise and experience and thus can bring incentives for interesting solutions within relevant formats for the EU as a whole.

**The security of the Western Balkan region** affecting the security-political environment of our continent is an integral part of Europe's security. Therefore, the Presidency will continue to support actively implementation of the *Global EU Strategy*, stating that credible enlargement policy is a strategic investment to European security and prosperity.

The progress on the way to EU membership is to be assessed on the basis of each country's own merits in conducting the necessary reforms. The Commission's strategic document on the Western Balkans *Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans* adopted in February 2018 represents an effective contribution to and support for the enlargement policy. The strategy confirms the prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkan countries as well as greater engagement of the EU in the region. In order further strengthening the dynamics and credibility of integration, the Presidency will focus on supporting the implementation of the above-mentioned strategy. We will make use of V4

special relations with the Western Balkan Fund to contribute to a further deepening of cooperation and reconciliation in the region.

**The stabilisation of the Eastern section of the European Union** is in our common strategic interest. Through dialogue, the V4 contributes to the successes of reform processes in these Eastern European countries and supports them in their pro-European trajectory. The partner countries have right to choose their foreign policy orientation while their sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected. The Slovak Presidency will focus on the implementation of the November 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit conclusions, with emphasis on enhancing the resilience of the partner countries. In this context special attention should be paid to the fight against hybrid threats, i.e. in view of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine in 2019.

In cooperation with other EU Members, the Presidency will support the positive development of the Eastern neighbourhood with the aim to keep the policy of the Eastern Partnership high on the EU agenda. We will foster policy of close alignment of **Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine** with the EU acquis in order to achieve the maximum in the AAs/DCFTAs implementation and thus help these countries in moving closer to the EU and NATO. At the same time, the Presidency will support cooperation with **Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus** including the implementation or preparation of new framework agreements with the EU on condition that all the necessary criteria are met.

The Slovak Presidency will also follow good and proven traditions and will arrange special ministerial sessions with the countries of the **Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership**.

The presidency will continue the dialogue with **Central Asia**, if there will be issues of mutual interest including interregional cooperation in the field of trade and economy, energy supply and transportation, education and culture as well as security related challenges.

The Presidency will also direct the V4's attention to **Africa**, where the V4 actively started a common **support project for farmers in Kenya** and – in the form of a contribution to the *EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa* – supported an Italian cross-border management project in **Libya**.

In the field of security and defence, we want to strengthen V4 cooperation in the fields of **hybrid and cyber threats and strategic communication**.

In the field of the strengthening of security and international cooperation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, the Slovak Presidency will strive for a closer cooperation and coordination of the V4 with the **Slovak OSCE Presidency Programme**, which will take place in 2019.

The Slovak Presidency will continue the **traditional V4+ formats** of consultancies on different levels with countries of the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, USA, Canada, Turkey, Israel, Japan, and South Korea.

#### **Planned activities:**

- *V4 + Germany Summit of Prime Ministers (autumn 2018, Bratislava)*
- *V4 + France Summit of Prime Ministers (autumn 2018, Bratislava)*
- *V4+France+Germany at the level of MFA European affairs directors (2019, Bratislava)*
- *V4+Western Balkans at the level of ministers of foreign affairs (April/May 2018, Bratislava)*
- *A V4 round table on EU priorities in the WB6 countries emphasising the EU enlargement (spring 2019, Brussels)*

- *V4+Eastern Partnership at the level of ministers of foreign affairs (autumn 2018, Bratislava)*
- *Continuation of a project “Roadshow V4 for Ukraine” (2019)*
- *V4+Israel Summit of Prime Ministers*
- *V4+Japan Summit of Prime Ministers during ASEM (18–19 October 2018, Brussels)*
- *A conference CEPA Forum (24 September 2018, Washington DC)*
- *Consultations of political directors in the regular V4+ formats*

### ***Effective migration and asylum policy***

The topic of external and internal dimension of migration will also strongly resonate during the Slovak Presidency. Migration represents one of the main challenges for the European community, which is also confirmed by the fact that this issue will be the main topic of the summit of the European Council in October 2018. The risk of new migration flows into Europe were not fully eliminated. Its development should be continually monitored, so that it will be possible to timely react to it.

The Presidency is interested in continuing cooperation of the V4 countries in the **responsible management of the migration crisis**, which requires a comprehensive and balanced approach based on compliance with adopted rules, responsibility and solidarity, taking into account the real possibilities of individual countries. The V4 rejects any activities and measures that introduce mandatory refugee redistribution mechanisms in the EU Member States.

The Presidency will follow the good practice of **coordination of positions and opinions** related to legislative proposals within the framework of the **reform of the Common European Asylum System**, especially the **Dublin Regulation**, and also the **Global Compact for Refugees and Global Compact for Migration**, that is being prepared.

We see the resolution of the current migration problems mainly in the countries of origin and transit and therefore shall focus on **mutual cooperation in the field of supporting the development of third countries and solving the root causes of migration, especially in Africa and Middle East countries**. We shall continue to **develop and implement a Migration Crisis Reaction Mechanism project**, whose objective is to **improve migrants’ conditions in third countries**.

A functioning **protection of external borders** is an important pillar of the effective management of migration, the strengthening of the EU internal security and the **proper functioning of the Schengen Area**, which is crucial for us. An informal EU summit in September 18, in Salzburg, will deal with this topic.

In the context of the introduction of an Entry/Exit System into practice, the Slovak Presidency will strive for an intensive cooperation of the V4 countries, possible also with Bulgaria and Romania. This mechanism will bring a fundamental change in the way border controls are conducted, which will represent a major challenge for the Member States.

In the field of the ***fight against illegal migration*** and related smuggling, our ambition is to intensify international police and judicial cooperation. We shall also prepare an annual *Common Analytical Report on Illegal Migration* in the territories of the V4 countries, which constitutes a basis for joint activities in this field in our region.

#### ***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of the Ministers of Interior*
- *A session of directors of migration services (April 2019, Bratislava)*

- *A session of national coordinators of the V4 on a Migration Crisis Reaction Mechanism initiative (November 2018, Bratislava)*
- *A negotiation of experts preparing the analyses of illegal migration risks in the V4 countries (April 2019)*
- *A meeting of directors of border police of the V4 countries + Romania and Bulgaria, including a preparatory meeting at the expert level (March/ April 2019)*
- *A meeting of heads of operative services of the V4 countries responsible for the detection and investigation of crimes connected with illegal migration and smuggling (April 2019)*
- *A meeting of directors of National Passenger Information Units of the V4 countries + Austria (October/ November 2018)*
- *Meeting of Consular Department Directors of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019, Bratislava)*

### ***The strengthening of European security and defence***

In the field of ***defence***, the Slovak Presidency will continue developing cooperation in accordance with a regularly updated document *Action Plan for Defence Cooperation of the V4 Countries*, which includes cooperation in the field of defence planning, training and exercise, joint protection of airspace, and military education. The Presidency will focus on the continuation of the preparations for the Command of the joint logistics support group, together with their respective units, which the V4 countries are jointly building in accordance with the Competency Goals 2017 for the benefit of NATO. Moreover, we support the potential of cooperation in the field of joint procurement in order to modernise the outdated systems of the V4 countries. We regard the integrated matrix of defensive capabilities of the V4 countries a living document, whose content is periodically updated and which can serve our countries as an instrument for harmonisation of defence planning and procurement.

The Presidency will stand for timely mutual exchange of information and for the continuation of regular meetings of the V4 countries in order to mutually coordinate stances to defence & security topics that are promoted and accepted during meetings on a multilateral level.

***The EU's security and defence cooperation:*** At the end of 2017, with the participation of all V4 countries, a **Permanent Structured Cooperation** became a main instrument of the deepening of the EU's security and defence cooperation. Therefore, the Slovak Presidency will exert effort to exchange experience of the V4 countries at PESCO level and also to open a discussion about an eventual joint project of the V4 countries within PESCO, which could be a part of further waves of PESCO projects. The Presidency will make use of the space for mutual information exchange between the V4 countries on the development of PESCO projects with the emphasis on those projects, of which the V4 members are participants or observers, including a project under the Slovak leadership called *Euro Artillery – Indirect Fire Support*, as well as a project on *Military mobility* under the leadership of Netherlands.

The Presidency will continue the preparation and building of an **EU V4 Battle Group**. The Presidency will continue cooperation of the V4 in the field of training on the basis of a *Mid-Term Plan for the Training and Exercise of the V4 Countries* and will continue to support and initiate the coordination of national positions in the issues related to the NATO and the EU. The first document regarding training activities of the V4 countries for 2019-2020 will be published by the end of August 2018.

***Cooperation within NATO:*** The Presidency will strive for a joint coordination of the V4 countries' activities on the Eastern flank of the NATO. We also realise the need to pay attention to the south wing of the NATO, also in connection with the continuing migration phenomenon, where the **cooperation between the EU and NATO** has proved. A targeted assistance, training



and consultancy we provide (and plan to further provide also within the framework of a future NATO mission) to the Republic of Iraq are a valuable contribution to enhancing stability in the region.

Stability in neighbouring area has an indisputably positive influence on the improvement of security situation across the entire European area. The Slovak Presidency will **continue to help and support Ukraine** and other important NATO Partner Countries in Europe in the form of handing over experience and support in the implementation of security sector reforms. The Slovak Republic, as a leading country of the **NATO-Ukraine Trust Fund** in the field of the liquidation of unexploded ordnance and the fight against improvised devices, will strive to make use of the V4 format to share experience and acquire support from partners. The Slovak Presidency will support synergies between the V4 countries acting in the NATO-Ukraine Trust Fund.

**Development of strategic cooperation of the EU and NATO:** The current security environment makes an intensive cooperation of the EU and NATO mandatory. The Presidency will therefore emphasize the strengthening of mutual interactions of the EU and NATO with respect to the *Joint declaration of the leaders of the EU and NATO regarding strengthening of strategic cooperation* and to the relevant developments within both organisations.

#### *Planned activities:*

- *A meeting of defence ministers (autumn 2018, spring 2019)*
- *A meeting of chiefs of staff (autumn 2018, June 2019)*
- *A meeting of State Secretaries in the Senior Body V4 format (autumn 2018, spring 2019)*
- *A meeting of political directors of ministries of defence (autumn 2018, spring 2019)*
- *Meeting of Security Policy Department Directors of ministries of foreign affairs (November 2018)*
- *An informal meeting of commanders of the air force within SIAF (September 2018)*
- *A negotiation of national directors for arming (December 2018, June 2019)*
- *A meeting of experts in the field of defence planning of the V4 Planning Group (autumn 2018, spring 2019)*
- *The 9<sup>th</sup> annual international scientific conference of the V4 “National and International Security 2018” (25–26 October 2018)*
- *An expert group negotiation on the construction of V4 EU Battle Group (autumn 2018)*
- *An international seminar on PESCO project EuroArtillery (September 2018, spring 2019)*
- *A meeting of military clerics of the V4 countries (spring 2019)*
- *A conference about training, military exercises, and education of the V4 countries (autumn/winter 2018, spring/summer 2019)*
- *A conference of military medicine services of the V4 countries – Visegrad Military Medicine Conference – VIMIMED 2019 (February 2019)*
- *A working meeting of the commanders of special operation forces of the V4 countries (June 2019)*

#### ***Fight against terrorism***

In the past years there was an increase in the number of terrorist attacks in the EU countries. These mainly targeted “soft targets” with a modus operandi as simple as possible without extensive preparations and with easily available instruments (handguns or stabbing weapons, automobiles as a weapon, handmade explosive devices) and with minimal financial costs. It is not ruled out that terrorists can attempt to misuse even chemical, biological, radiological, or atomic weapons during attacks. With regard to the international character of terrorism, it will

be the ambition of the Presidency to intensify mutual cooperation in the fight against terrorist threats.

#### *Planned activities:*

- *Meeting of experts on counter-terrorism operations and planning of the joint V4+Israel counter-terrorism exercise (March 2019)*
- *A joint anti-terrorist exercise of intervention units of the V4 and Israel (June 2019)*

### **Cyber security**

Digital evolution and the development of cyber space bring an increasing number of cyber-attacks, which, in some EU Member States, even exceed the number of standard crimes. Therefore, within the Presidency of the V4, we shall focus on the **strengthening and improvement of cooperation in the fight against cybercrime connected with the misuse of crypto currencies, especially bitcoin**. This almost untraceable and anonymous currency on the *dark* internet is misused for illegal activities, increasingly for arms trade, drug trafficking, false documents, and child pornography.

The V4 countries and Austria have been cooperating in cybersecurity since 2012 in the format of the *Central European Cyber Security Platform* (CECSP). The cycle of presiding over CECSP is not aligned with that of the V4 Presidency. The format of CECSP regularly facilitates meetings of national representatives on expert and decision-making levels. With regard to CECSP cooperation, during the Slovak Presidency in 2017 the member countries started to coordinate their activities, stances, and positions even on the EU level. This initiative did not go unnoticed by other members of the EU. For example, as a result France joined in on the coordination of CECSP activities in matters of the cybersecurity of the European Union.

#### *Planned activities:*

- *A working meeting of V4 experts in relation to the solving of cybercrime connected with the misuse of crypto currencies (especially bitcoin) (November 2018, Bratislava)*

### **Effective crisis management**

In an effort to increase security of citizens, property, and environment, we also focus on the **strengthening of mutual cooperation in the field of crisis management**. In the field of prevention, we will deal with the **development of cross-border cooperation within new approaches to the European emergency number 112 and the strengthening of the protection of critical infrastructure**. We will also pay attention to the issue of **forest fires**, which are increasing caused by the impacts of climate change, and which, besides environmental damages, **threaten the lives of people and bring substantial financial losses**.

#### *Planned activities:*

- *A workshop on New Approaches to European Emergency Number 112 (February 2019, Žilina)*
- *A meeting of general directors of civil protection of the V4 countries (May 2019, Bratislava)*
- *The 21st annual International Conference of Disaster Medicine (MEKA 2018) (October 2018)*
- *A FIRECO International Conference 2019 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2019, Trenčín)*

### **Fight against environmental crimes**

The impacts of environmental crimes do not know borders. We will hence try to strengthen the mutual cooperation in the field of **the fight against selected, most serious forms of environmental crimes**.

**Planned activities:**

- *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Central-European meeting of environmental crime specialists (November 2018)*
- *Three police security actions near selected border crossings (September – November 2018)*

**Energy security and climate policy**

**The completion of Energy Union:** This topic will continue to be important for the V4. At present, several legislative proposals within the *Clean Energy for All Europeans* package are a subject of dialogues with the EP. A gradual closing of the legislative proposals is expected. Therefore, during the Presidency, there will be discussions primarily focused on the implementation and transposition of revised legislative acts in the V4 countries. The preparations of integrated national plans in the field of energy and climate, which will also be discussed, will be highly topical.

The finalisation of political discussion on the objectives of **energy and climate policies** for the year 2030 with perspective until 2050 will be a dominant topic not only at the EU level, but also within the V4 grouping. Climate issues will also be dealt with in regard to obligations stemming from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The V4 group is interested in a coordinated promotion of a common requirement to maintain competitiveness, security of supply, adequate prices for end consumers, and sovereignty in the selection of energy mix for each member state.

A key challenge is to also secure financial measures for energy security from cohesive funds after 2020. Despite marked investments in the past years, there still exist tight places in the energy infrastructure.

**Renewable energy sources** play an important role in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The growth of their share in the final consumption of energy will require a closer coordination and cooperation of the V4 countries in the forming of strategies and national contributions of renewable energy sources in the context of the preparation of energy-climate plans.

**Energy effectiveness:** The Presidency will focus on promoting energy effectiveness across the entire energy supply chain, from production to consumption.

**Energy security** is one of the strategic priorities of the V4 countries with regard to their common high dependence on the import of energy raw materials from third countries. In this regard, the Presidency will concentrate on consultations and coordination of the V4 countries in the promotion of projects that will strengthen energy security of the Central European region and that will, to the maximum extent possible, make use of the existing infrastructure.

**Gas industry:** The Presidency will strive for cooperation and coordination within regional gas industry groups, primarily focused on the application of a new Regulation of the European Parliament and Council Regulation concerning measures to safeguard security of gas supply, as well as for respecting the conclusions of regional groups, such as the CESEC or the Three Seas Initiative. Priority will be placed on activities towards the conclusion of the North-South corridor.

**Electric power engineering:** As for the V4 countries, these electricity loop flows are considered the largest obstacle in further development of electricity market in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, we want to support the coordination of opinions of the V4 related

to the resolution of this problem in a new EU legislation in the field of a new design of electricity market that is being prepared.

***Nuclear energy:*** The Presidency will concentrate on joint procedures focusing on defining the status of nuclear energy on the EU internal electricity market and also on promoting nuclear energy as a primary source to achieve EU objectives in the field of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Coordination in the preparation of possible negotiations about the revision of Euratom Treaty will be of high importance. The Presidency will also initiate common discussions and coordination of V4 positions before negotiations within the EU and other international platforms on documents concerning nuclear energy. We will continue a joint V4 project for securing nuclear and energy security for **new generation reactors ALLEGRO**.

***Planned activities:***

- ***Regular coordination negotiations before formal and informal Councils at the level of ministers/state secretaries.***
- ***A meeting of V4 ministers responsible for energy during a Central European Energy Conference (November 2018)***
- ***A V4 energy working group at expert level (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018)***
- ***A V4 forum for the integration of gas market at expert level (V4 Gas Forum) (the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)***
- ***A workshop focused on energy security in electrical power engineering with attendance of an OECD International Energy Agency expert (March/April 2019, Bratislava/Paris)***

***The strengthening of key areas in agricultural sector***

A stable V4 cooperation is a chance to improve conditions of farmers, who are – on daily basis – facing many challenges resulting not only from climate change and extreme weather conditions, but also from different livestock diseases. A significant part of the V4 countries' territory is covered by forests. Therefore a sustainable forest management has an irreplaceable importance for the development of rural areas and landscape protection in central Europe.

The main objective of the Slovak Presidency in the field of agriculture are as follows:

***Supporting the maintenance of strong Common Agricultural Policy*** post 2020 and the coordination of common positions of the V4 to the key topics.

***The strengthening of the status of agriculture in the food supply chain:*** The Presidency will lead a discussion and coordinate positions of the V4+3 concerning the draft *Directive on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain*.

***Supporting innovative solutions in agriculture and forestry with respect to bioeconomy:*** In this field, priority will be put on the coordination of cooperation in the promotion of interests in the EU research programmes and regional programmes by means of a *BioEast Initiative*.

***Double food quality:*** The Presidency will furthermore deal with so-called *New Deal for Consumers*, which also deals with the issue of double food quality. Ambition will be to increase public awareness of qualitative parameters of food.

***Sustainable agriculture, food industry and forestry under conditions of climate change:*** energy efficient and effective ways of environment friendly agricultural production and food processing, the development of technologies and procedures for a higher level of primary agricultural production, enforcing and implementation of sustainable forestry respecting international obligations.

**Multifunctionality of agriculture**, which parallel to the food production will also carry out other activities such as: environmental protection, maintaining landscape nature and biodiversity, maintaining rural settlement, the development of rural regions, and agro-tourism.

**Food security** and the related ambition to increase the V4 agricultural production and the production of processed food with a higher value added and quality.

**Risk management**: to implement measures for the prevention of risks associated with weather events, impacts of climate change and livestock diseases and to build support mechanisms in order to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters.

**Economic growth**: to utilise support instruments of the *Common Agricultural Policy* and to revive the production of agricultural and food products, for which we have a suitable natural and climate and historical conditions, as well as knowledge, which will contribute to higher gross domestic product of the country, the reduction in imports and to the improvement of foreign-trade balance.

**Reduction of Sustainability of food availability**: to produce sufficient quantity of quality and affordable foodstuffs for population and simultaneously to rationally utilise limited natural resources (water, land, etc.), to minimise food waste and losses and to reduce negative impacts of agricultural production on the environment.

***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of ministers of agriculture of the V4+Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia (August 2018 and April/ May 2019)*
- *A conference - Risk Assessment and Risk Management Instruments in Agri-food sector with the participation of ministers of agriculture of the V4+Austria and the OECD (17–18 October 2018, Bratislava)*

***Supporting sustainable development***

In order to fully implement this ambitious agenda, it will be necessary in the next phase to provide sufficient funds and to anchor sustainable development as a cross-cutting priority and as an integral part of all internal and foreign policies of the states. In this regard, the Presidency will propose mechanisms for a better cooperation and exchange of experience between the V4 countries.

***Planned activities:***

- *A high-level conference on the implementation and financing of the Agenda 2030 in the V4 countries (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018)*

***State support for export***

The Slovak Presidency will focus on common consultations with regard to the approach of the V4 countries to open issues within state-supported export credits. The ambition is to achieve the same approach, to form a joint position, and to promote them at international level as well as within the International Working Group on Export Credits, where rules for state-supported export credits are being established.

Within their historically first meeting in September 2017 in Budapest, the state export-credit agencies of the V4 countries signed a joint declaration on cooperation. The signing was preceded by an expert level conference. In the second half of 2018, the Slovak Presidency will organise the second V4 joint conference of these agencies.

***Planned activities:***

- *A conference of officials of export-credit agencies of the V4 countries (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018)*

## ***Safe and modern health policy***

**Drug policy:** The Presidency will focus on solving the lack of and unavailability of some drugs for patients. This topic has long been a subject of the EU health policies and a priority of several Presidencies of the Council of the EU, including the Slovak. The exchange of information in the field of horizontal scanning is one of activities that Slovak Presidency plans to initiate.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***A drug policy working group (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018, the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)***
- ***A conference of drug policy experts (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018)***

**Human resources:** Central Europe faces a lack of doctors and nurses in primary practice, who migrate to other, especially older, EU Member States. The Presidency will therefore develop V4 cooperation in the field of information exchange, cases of good practice and experience in education and the management of human resources especially in health care areas with shortages of doctors and nurses. Slovakia has introduced a new form in the system of further education of physicians. This so-called *Resident Programme* is focused on the reduction of age average of general practitioners and paediatricians in regions, and the enhancement of quality and availability of health care in primary contact. Successful pilot project was financed in 2014 and 2015 from the EU funds and it acknowledged that this form is an effective instrument for supplementing and stabilising the number of physicians in both specialisation fields. A motivation scholarship was introduced for nurses and increase of their wages is planned as a stabilisation element.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***A human resources working group (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018 and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)***
- ***A conference of human resources experts (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018)***
- ***A meeting of ministers of health of the V4 (October 2018)***

The ambition of the Presidency includes supporting the strengthening of public health services, supporting the forming of national coalitions of main partners, and formulating and implementing national public health strategies in close cooperation with the national offices of the World Health Organization.

We also focus on joint solutions of the ***issue of methamphetamine***. Increased incidences of this drug have long been recorded in the V4 countries.

The Presidency will endeavour to initiate a discussion about the experience of the V4 countries regarding the occurrence of ***infectious diseases*** due to migration and in the area of implementation of immunology overviews and the subsequent changes to the vaccination strategy.

In connection with ***the issue of drinking water*** in the V4 region, the Presidency will focus on the issues of drinking water quality control. This control includes its health security, the execution of state health supervision over supplying citizens with drinking water, the monitoring of drinking water quality indicators, as well as on the issue of contamination of drinking water resources with pesticides. The Presidency will follow up on the negotiations on the revision of *Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Quality of Water Intended for Human Consumption*, which was submitted in February 2018 and the main objective of which is to protect human health against unfavourable effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption.

The Presidency will also focus on the development of the V4 countries' cooperation in the field of exchange of information, experience, and good practice in ***the treatment of tuberculosis***, especially for population groups at risk. We would like to confirm our commitment to

participate actively in the ***fight against noncommunicable diseases***, in particular addressing nutritional risk factors and combating all forms of malnutrition.

Fight against the increasing trend of ***childhood obesity*** in the V4 countries will be one of important themes of our Presidency. To achieve this goal it is essential to allocate necessary resources. Activities should focus not only on obesity prevention measures, but also strengthening the capacity and efficiency of the health care systems providing obesity care for both children and adults.

The Presidency will also strive to support solving the global antimicrobial resistance problem, as well as to support prevention in all fields of health and health care. It will also preoccupy itself with the exchange of experience and information about effective application of policy aimed at *Patient Safety management* and sustainable development goals.

***Planned activities:***

- *A V4+ meeting of directors of national WHO offices in cooperation with the Slovak Health Ministry (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018)*
- *A V4+ specialised anti-drug conference (Germany and Austria) on the issue of methamphetamine (November 2018)*
- *An expert level meeting of representatives of the V4+ countries on clinical standard procedures (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018)*
- *An expert negotiation of representatives of the V4+ countries on the instruments of the evaluation of evidence, implementation and auditing of standard procedures (the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019)*
- *A conference of chief hygienists of the V4 (April 2019)*
- *Preparatory meeting on tuberculosis issue (July 2018)*
- *A conference of tuberculosis experts (the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2018 or the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019)*

***Public procurement***

**Direct negotiated procedure:** The Presidency will initiate a discussion aimed at the experience exchange of the V4 countries in the field of public procurement through direct negotiation with respect to the justification of its uses and risks with regard to its limiting of the competition.

**Value for money** creates space for a discussion about procurement on the basis of criteria other than the lowest cost. That is, a discussion about the questions of the value for money in the context of public procurement. The goal is to answer such questions and to discuss them with other V4 countries.

***Planned activities:***

- *A conference on direct negotiated procedure – value for money and other questions of a public procurement (September 2018)*

**Unfair practices:** The Presidency will initiate a discussion within the V4 countries to exchange experiences in the field of prevention of conflicts of interests, which have the potential to disrupt or limit fair competition or break the core principles of public procurement, as well as a discussion of other forms of unfair practices that occur in public procurement.

***Planned activities:***

- *A workshop on unfair practices (December 2018)*

**Secondary policies and experience of other countries with their implementation thereof:**

Green public procurement represents a special form of public procurement, which applies requirements that are to ensure that the procured subject of contract, including related activities,

for instance, with its supply, assembly, installation and operation, will have a favourable impact on the environment. The objective of the Presidency will be to initiate a discussion focused on the exchange of practical experience of individual states with the implementation of secondary policies.

**Planned activities:**

- *A workshop on secondary policies and experience of other countries with the implementation thereof (June 2019)*

### III. Smart Solutions

#### **Science, research, innovations and introduction of digital technologies**

The Slovak Presidency will support the implementation of policies focused on innovations, research and development by means of exchange of experience on application of the *Smart Specialisation Strategies*. At the regional level, our objective is to strengthen competitiveness of EU regions by ensuring sustainable development based on an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. We aim to make external and internal environment of regions more visible and more attractive in the form of exchanging and sharing experience with implemented activities, using smart solutions and the development of innovations. The Presidency tries to search for intersections between individual *Smart Specialisation Strategies* (national or regional) and to search for instruments to adopt future measures in the interest of increasing competitiveness of the V4 countries not only across the EU, but also at the global level.

**Planned activities:**

- *An expert level conference for the purpose of the exchange of experience with the utilisation and application of Smart Specialisation Strategies (spring 2019, Bratislava)*

#### **International scientific and technological cooperation**

During the Presidency, international scientific cooperation will primarily focus on supporting the continuation of joint projects and programmes initiated within the V4 and V4+ formats. It is also important to support regional cooperation in the V4 format within programmes of European territorial cooperation at transnational and cross-border levels, within programmes and initiatives of the *Interreg Central Europe* and the *Central European Initiative*, the *EU Strategy for the Danube Region*, or other EU macro-regional strategies.

In the context of the development of the European Research Area, the Presidency primarily aims at the coordination of common priorities and common procedure for negotiations related to the preparation of the ninth EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation within a newly created **V4+ Task Force** platform.

**Planned activities:**

- *Meetings of a V4+Task Force working group on the preparation of the 9<sup>th</sup> EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2018 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2019)*
- *Expert meetings of the V4+Austria (September, November 2018, and May 2019)*

#### **The Visegrad Patent Institute and supporting research and innovations**

The Presidency will support the functioning and further development of the Visegrad Patent Institute. In the context of completed transposition of the provisions of the *European Parliament and EU Council Directive to approximate the laws of the Member States relating to trademarks*, the Presidency will stimulate the exchange of experience from post-



approximation practice in the V4 countries. It will also focus on the exchange of opinions concerning the contribution of the application of individual procedures in proceedings on trademarks, implemented within convergence initiatives.

**Planned activities:**

- *A meeting of representatives of national industrial property offices (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2019)*

**Support for the development of Single Digital Market**

The most recent challenge the V4 region is currently facing, is the digital transformation of the whole ecosystem covering not only industry but also public administration. The Presidency sees the future of the V4 region in educated citizens with at least the basic digital skills enabling them to lead a full life in the modern era and to participate in events in the virtual world. Therefore, the Presidency will start an active cooperation of national coalitions for digital skills and jobs, which will exchange best practices in relation to the implementation of effective measures.

With regard to digital transformation of public governance of the V4 countries (eGovernment), the Slovak Presidency will support mutual exchanges of proven procedures and know-how aligned with the *European eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020*.

One of the ongoing tasks is to continue the V4 coordination of legislation on Single Digital Market.

Transformation of V4 economies will be significantly influenced by a gradual robotisation and automation of industry. Artificial intelligence represents the future not only for industry, but also for the whole society. In the near future, also the V4 countries will have to introduce their own artificial intelligence national strategies, especially in the field of research and development. The Presidency wants to create a constructive platform within which individual Visegrad countries would be able to exchange experience and information from their own national approaches to artificial intelligence.

**Planned activities:**

- *A workshop with the participation of Digital Coalitions of the V4 countries for the purpose of the exchange of experience and good practice in the field of building digital capabilities during the ITAPA conference (13-14 November, 2018)*
- *Expert meetings, support for the exchange of best practice within e-Government in the framework of conferences such as ITAPA (November 2018)*
- *Consultations at expert level (Brussels)*
- *A conference on artificial intelligence (11 October, 2018, Brussels)*

**Support for investments in the field of trade, SMEs, start-ups and smart cities**

Within the V4, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the main source of job opportunities. They contribute to the higher competitiveness of both the country and the whole V4 region.

*The working group V4 Innovation Task Force*, which was created during the last Slovak V4 Presidency to support new companies, could in the long run lead to the creation of a common platform of the V4 countries in Silicon Valley for innovative start-ups. Its purpose is looking for common positions and supporting start-ups, in order to ease their entry to market.

**Planned activities:**

- *V4 Innovation Task Force at the level of department directors (May 2019)*

- *A workshop on internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises at the level of directors (February 2019)*
- *A session of representatives of the V4 countries on “Generational Change in Family Businesses” at the level of state secretaries (16–17 July 2018)*

The Presidency wants to enable start-ups from the V4 countries to apply for benefits brought by *StartUp Awards/FutureNow*. It is a competition in Central Europe, originally proposed for Slovak technology start-ups, which intends to help start-ups meet mentors and potential investors, as well as to grant a financial award to the best ones.

In September 2018, the Presidency will, on the margins of the 72<sup>nd</sup> UN General Assembly Session in New York organise a *V4 Investment Forum* that should follow a successful V4 Google Leadership Forum during the Slovak Presidency of September 2015. The main point will be the presentation of investment opportunities in the V4, B2B meetings and a dialogue at the highest political level.

**Planned activities:**

- *StartUp Awards/FutureNow at the level of state secretaries (24 October 2018)*
- *A V4 Investment Forum (September 2018, New York)*

In relation to the USA, the Presidency is interested in continuing V4 cooperation by means of a *We4Startups* platform, introduced by the Slovak Republic in April 2015 in Silicon Valley. This cooperation focuses on the presentation of the V4 as a region with a dynamic innovative ecosystem and with a potential for investments in science and research.

*Smart Cities* are the future of not only the V4 countries, but also of the EU. It is the intention of the Presidency to broaden the economic and business cooperation of the V4 countries through cooperation to improve the quality of living in cities and to improve the business environment through smart solutions.

**Planned activities:**

- *V4 Smart City Conference (March/ April 2019)*
- *A working meeting of National development banks, European Investment Bank, and state secretaries responsible for the support of Smart Cities projects in the V4+ format on the priorities of projects concerning Smart Cities and Smart Regions (February 2019, Bratislava)*

The Presidency will, *in the field of innovations, continue to work with foreign partners, such as South Korea, Israel, and Japan.* The main focus of the cooperation consists in the mutual exchange of information in supporting the development of industry, research and innovations, for the best utilisation of the potential of the V4 region and a third country, and the intermediation of cross-border partnership of research, academic institutions and businesses, together with institutional cooperation.

In cooperation with *South Korea*, the ambition of the Presidency will be to propose a policy and instruments for Korea and the V4 countries, by means of joint research activities in the field of innovations and research. Since the innovation ecosystem of South Korea differs from the ecosystem of the EU and the V4 countries, there is a space for the mutual utilisation of information and knowledge during events and activities, and also for a more intensive cooperation at expert and political levels.

There has been a significant progress in cooperation with *Israel* thanks to an agreement of prime ministers of the V4 countries in July 2017 on joint promotion of innovation, research, and development. Specific measures include the establishment of an innovation centre of the

above-mentioned countries. Participating states have promised cooperation between innovative SMEs and research centres, support for the transfer of business and university technologies, development of capacities for start-ups and SMEs, exchange of experience between entrepreneurs, development of a V4 innovation ecosystem, and training of young experts from V4 in the form of university scholarships, technology internships or placements in enterprises.

The Presidency is interested in the continuation of the scientific cooperation with Japan. Therefore, it will strive to identify scientific areas for future collaboration between the V4 and Japan on basis of project-based cooperation scheme. The Presidency will work towards organizing of joint V4-Japan scientific and technology transfer seminars.

#### **Planned activities:**

- **Knowledge Sharing Program in the format of V4+South Korea at the level of directors of departments (April 2019)**
- **V4 Innovators in Israel Training Program (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018, Israel)**
- **Participation of V4 in DLD Tel Aviv innovative festival (3–6 September 2018, Tel Aviv, Israel)**

#### **Digitalisation and challenges in the field of justice**

Digitalisation brings about not only opportunities to improve the quality of services for the citizens, but also many challenges and risks. In this context, the Presidency will focus not only on the question of more effective access to justice and its effectiveness as a whole, but also on the sensitive and relevant topics such as hate speech or new forms of cybercrimes. With the influx of extremism in Europe, not excluding the V4 countries, it is necessary to focus our efforts on its prevention. It is especially important to support common measures against manifestations of hate speech in the public, including those on the Internet. The exchange of experience and evaluation of effectiveness of already taken measures on both the European and national levels will be key in this matter.

Moreover, the Digitalisation of the society also brings about new forms of cybercrimes and ways to commit criminal activities, as well as the use of newly implemented technologies to commit more traditional crimes. The investigation of cyber criminality sparks a highly sensitive discussion about personal data protection, opportunities and conditions of storing data for the purposes of criminal proceedings, and simplifications of access to electronic evidence in order to obtain it more quickly or its subsequent use in courts. Finding the balance between citizens' privacy and the protection of their lives and health is currently a highly contentious challenge.

#### **Planned activities:**

- **A meeting of justice ministers in the V4+Slovenia and Croatia format (April/ May 2019, Bratislava)**

#### **Common environmental protection**

The issue of an effective water management, and the prevention of negative impacts of droughts particularly, receives a lot of attention and the importance of this topic continues to grow. Therefore, the Presidency will promote a proactive approach of the V4 in this field. With the goal of minimising the impact of drought, the Presidency will focus on the discussion and concrete steps and measures to retain and return water within the country in order to minimise drought, to improve the monitoring of drought as well as its crisis management system, and to ascertain supply of water during long term periods of drought.

At the same time it will focus on the current legislative proposals within the EU, such as the *Revision of Water Framework Directive* and *Directive on the Assessment and Management of*

*Flood Risks*, and the implementation of standing European legislature (such as the *Directive on Urban Waste-Water Treatment*).

In this regard, the Presidency will continue to harmonise the positions of V4, Bulgaria and Romania and to promote regional interests of Central European countries at the EU level.

**Climate change** is a global phenomenon affecting everyday life of people in Europe and around the world. Its negative impacts are increasingly affecting Central Europe. In pursuit of the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the Presidency will support the cross-sectoral discussion and concrete solutions leading to a gradual transition to low-carbon economy based on innovative environmental solutions (for example in the area of clean mobility) and reflecting mitigation and adaptation measures aimed at fighting against climate change.

During the Presidency, the V4 will mainly focus on three key political moments in this agenda. The first is facilitation, or Talanoa Dialogue, aiming at consolidation of the common efforts to meet the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement and to encourage nations to increase their ambitions. The second is the COP24 conference in December 2018 in the Polish city Katowice, during which new rules for the implementation of Paris Agreements will be taken, the so-called Paris working programme. The third key point is a discussion about the preparation of EU's low emission strategy.

### ***Circular economy management***

**Circular economy**: the V4 countries will actively advocate for Europe's common vision of achieving gradual transition to a resource-efficient, low-carbon and circular economy that supports competitiveness and innovation potential of economies along with the new investments. As reflected in the *Bratislava process of a transition to circular economy*, the Presidency will support an open discussion on policies relevant to the transition to circular economy at both, regional and European level.

An effective **waste management**, which is one of the greatest challenges in the V4 countries, remains an important precondition for an effective transition to a circular economy. Therefore, during the Presidency, the V4 will pay attention to national policies and current EU legislative and non-legislative initiatives in this area, such as the Waste Package, measures of the Circular Economy Action Plans, a circular economy mini package (EU Strategy for Plastics, Monitoring Framework for the Circular Economy, possibilities to solve the overhaul of the legislation on chemicals, products and waste, etc.) and Circular Economy National Action Plans.

### ***Planned activities:***

- *An annual meeting of the OECD GREEN Task Force+V4 (22–23 October 2018, Bratislava)*
- *An international conference “Transition to Green Economy” (November 2018, Bratislava)*
- *An international conference “Contaminated sites” (8–10 October 2018, Banská Bystrica)*
- *A meeting of ministers of environment of the V4 countries+Israel on “The Fight Against Drought and the Mitigation of Consequences of Climate Change” (the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2019)*
- *A meeting of Water Directors of the V4+ countries with focus on Revision of Water Framework Directive*
- *An expert meeting following the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Carpathian Convention (autumn 2018)*
- *An expert workshop on electromobility*
- *An expert workshop on resource efficiency and circular economy*
- *1-2 events regarding the then current topics*

## ***Support for innovation in the financial sector and accounting for new business models and trends in the field of taxes and customs duties***

The Presidency wants to actively react to the current innovative technological trends, the use of which in the real economy is growing, including in financial services. In this regard, the V4 region has an exceptional potential from both the European and global perspective, especially due to a relatively high share of young people in total population, who are talented and qualified, which is showcased by growing IT valleys.

In terms of the future position of the V4 countries in the field of financial markets, it is necessary to try to create a competitive environment, which will be an equal partner of more developed financial markets and centres of Western and Central Europe. The objective is to achieve a higher degree of harmonisation compared to the present time, when the V4 countries (also due to the absence of a wider harmonisation with the EU legislation) deal with this topic primarily from their national perspectives.

**Supporting FinTech companies:** the exchange of information and experience about the creation and support of an environment that assists the establishment and development of FinTech companies in compliance with the EU legislation is one of the building blocks of cooperation. This could result in a closer coordination of national policies in order to create a synergy effect at the V4 regional level and the common promotion of the V4 FinTech environment and innovations. Such coordination could create with hindsight a large market that would serve as an interstage for the expansion of FinTech companies to European or global markets.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***Technical workshops of employees of the ministries of finance***

**Cooperation of financial authorities of V4 on direct and indirect taxes:** The Presidency plans to intensify the cooperation of financial authorities of the V4 beyond the EU and OECD cooperation in order to highlight the regional perspective of the current challenges in the field of direct and indirect taxation. We see space for broader cooperation especially in the possibility of joint controls on transfer valuations, more intense tax information exchanges between the V4 financial authorities, and in sharing of best practice and experience.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***A meeting of state secretaries of V4 finance ministries and top representatives (presidents, chairmen) of financial authorities***

**Digital economy** represents a perspective and growing sector of the economy for the V4 countries. Therefore, the Presidency will focus on the presentation of identified, new models of business in the field of digital economy in the V4 countries, their impact on the implementation of instruments of a project about the erosion of tax base and profit shifting, as well as on the instruments for fair taxation of income arising from the digital economy.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***A meeting of state secretaries of the ministries of finance of the V4***

**Fight against mineral oils fraud:** For the purpose of the fight against mineral oils frauds, the Presidency will perform activities within a V4 working group *Mineral Oil Tax Evasion*.

### ***Planned activities:***

- ***A plenary working meeting on the fight against mineral oils frauds with the participation of 21 countries and representatives of organisations (September 2018, Bratislava)***

**The fight against tax frauds related to VAT:** The Presidency will support the exchange of information among the V4 countries on new trends of tax frauds, especially the sharing of best practices in the field of the fight against tax frauds related to VAT. The information will be subsequently utilised for supporting the detection of domestic frauds, carousel frauds, and initiating multilateral controls and a better exchange of information between financial administrations.

***Planned activities:***

- *A seminar focused on sharing best practices related to the fight against tax frauds related to VAT (the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019)*

**Silk Road:** The Presidency has an ambition to actively develop discussions with other V4 partners about the customs aspects of the implementation of the Silk Road project, which was established in order to facilitate trade and faster flow of goods between Asia and Europe. The Presidency will create space for the exchange of experience with the implementation of the Silk Road project at national levels, adopted legislative instruments and measures for facilitating trade including electronic commerce and prevention of customs duty and tax losses, utilisation of modern technological solutions for the exchange of information, and guarantees of security and defence, e.g. e-Locks.

***Planned activities:***

- *A meeting of state secretaries of the ministries of finance of V4*

***Public procurement digitalisation***

**Computerisation of Public procurement:** Starting on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018, under European directives, the entirety of public procurement communication will have to be in an electronic form. With regard to the fact that this is a common challenge for all Member States, the Presidency will initiate a discussion focused on the exchange of opinions and experience between individual states.

***Planned activities:***

- *A workshop on public procurement computerisation (March 2019)*

***Support for the digital processing of data in health care sector***

The V4 countries have always been close to each other on the issue of health care, since we are connected by all critical social, epidemiological, and organisational features of the health care system. Therefore, mutual coordination on the exchange of data, best practices, and successful projects will be an integral part of international cooperation during the Presidency. The Presidency will also advocate a **better quality and availability of data in the development of health policies**. Using the above-mentioned steps, we will fulfil not only national, but also transnational objectives of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Presidency will focus on the issue of computerisation of health care systems and on the exchange of information and experience at the regional level in order to make the provision of health care at national and international level faster, more efficient, and more attractive.

***Planned activities:***

- *A conference Computerisation of Health Care System in the V4 countries (the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)*
- *Expert meeting of Health policy working group (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018, the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2019)*