



**Polish Presidency
of the Visegrad Group
July 2020–June 2021**

PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME

Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
Presidency objectives	4
Presidency priorities.....	4
Proposed activities	7
Economy and connectivity	7
Economy	7
Connectivity.....	20
Security.....	28
Society	32
Other spheres of cooperation	38

PROGRAMME
OF THE POLISH PRESIDENCY OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP (V4)
1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021
“Back on track”

Introduction

Poland takes over the annual Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) on July 1st, 2020. The Presidency coincides with an unprecedented crisis in the world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has put the functioning of societies to a severe test. The response - medical, social and economic - of Europe and the world to this pandemic will have a major impact on the development of individual countries, regions, the EU and the whole world. The pandemic and the process of overcoming its consequences will also have a significant impact on the course of the Polish presidency in the V4, in many areas and aspects. **V4 countries will have to actively cooperate in tackling the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and work together to bring socio-economic life in the region and the EU back on track.** Building the image of the Central European region and V4 as a flexible and constructive partner remains an ongoing task. Dialogue is essential in these difficult times. Gestures of solidarity and goodwill also count.

The Polish V4 Presidency coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation (February 1991). The high-level meeting in Hungarian city of Visegrad three decades ago was of great importance for Central Europe. Speaking about the important anniversaries for V4, it should be pointed out that still in the first half of the Polish presidency we will have the opportunity to continue the celebration of the 20th anniversary (June 2000) of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF).

These two important anniversaries and related events define the year of the Polish presidency of V4. Building on the work and achievements of the Czech V4 presidency, we will focus on the problems of the region and EU issues concerning our region. The V4 Presidency also offers an opportunity to implement projects (both symbolic and practical) to highlight the importance of V4 cooperation for its members and achieve practical progress.

The motto of V4 cooperation during the Presidency will be "Back on track".

Presidency objectives

1. Strong V4 in a strong Europe

Objective related to the coordination of V4 countries' activities within the EU:

- Consultation and coordination of V4 at EU political level; strengthening of V4 countries influence on the EU decision-making process;
- Jointly tackling serious problems such as droughts and dwindling water resources (“V4 water”);
- Deepening V4 cooperation in sectoral policies;
- Cooperation in the V4+ format.

2. Return to normality

Objective related to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences:

- V4 cooperation to return to normality after the pandemic (“V4 recovery”) as soon as possible;
- Cooperation in health and science.

3. People-to-people contacts

Objective related to integration and cohesion objectives within V4:

- Cooperation in the area of broadly defined connections and synergies (“V4 connectivity”);
- Developing contacts between societies in V4 countries (V4 people), e.g. in the field of culture, youth, education, justice, sport;
- Joint/mutual promotion within V4;
- Restoring and strengthening cooperation and cross-border contacts affected by the pandemic.

4. Digital V4 - e-V4

Objective related to the development of V4 cooperation in the digital sector:

- V4 cooperation in the area of the digital agenda, including the digital transition, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, e-commerce, cybersecurity;

Building sustainable V4 relations allowing to advocate and safeguard the common interests of the region within the EU digital transition;

- Strengthening and enhancing V4 cooperation in the area of innovation and application of new technologies;
- Enhancing V4 cooperation in the area of Government Technology (GovTech), digitization and innovation support through cross-border initiatives and promoting collaboration between regional private and public actors.

Presidency priorities

During the Polish Presidency, the European Union (EU) will remain the key platform for V4 cooperation. It is through an effective influence on the European agenda that our four countries can partly shape the global order and have a real impact on our immediate environment.

The coming year will be for the EU and its Member States a time **to recover from the crisis related to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, including its socio-economic consequences.**

The task of the Polish Presidency will be to present common position toward the details of architecture of the European Recovery Instrument (ERI)/Next Generation EU), in the final stage of the negotiation of the package MFF-ERI. In the context of the crises related to the pandemic, the coordination of V4 is also crucial in relation to current post-COVID-19 initiatives. Cooperation in the area of **health** will be of particular importance. Coordination of V4 in the area of **transport** is also desirable and needed. Special

attention is also necessary for strengthening V4 vital economic interests while shaping foundations of economic sovereignty for the EU industry (level playing field for/between V4 companies).

Coordination of V4 in the EU should also cover a number of other EU initiatives on, inter alia, the **internal market, including its digital dimension** (in particular the AI and the Digital Services Act), **industrial policy, social policy** and **agriculture**.

The pandemic has shown how crucial addressing the issues of digital and innovation policy has become. With the emergence of new technologies in fields such as AI, IoT, quantum computing, cybersecurity and others, it becomes crucial to address both the opportunities and challenges of such tools. The Polish presidency will strive towards developing clear, agreeable and practical policy frameworks on both, multilateral and EU-wide levels in these and other areas of GovTech. Special emphasis will be placed on ensuring that digital gains achieved and valuable initiatives conducted in this field during the pandemic persist regardless of epidemiological recovery and supporting the digitization of private and public institutions throughout the region.

During the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group, key and final decisions concerning the size and structure of the **Multannual Financial Framework (MFF)** for 2021-2027 will be made, including those concerning the Cohesion Policy and its implementation system. An important element of the Presidency will therefore be the coordination of V4 activities in the sphere of MFF negotiations and programming of the **Cohesion Policy** and the **Common Agricultural Policy**

The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly influence the shape of the **Cohesion Policy** legislative package and programming documents. On the one hand, this factor determines the priorities and the way the EU institutions work (including the programme and the V4+ cooperation calendar), and on the other hand, it will force the adaptation of the Cohesion Policy legislative package for 2021-2027 and even the whole MFF proposals to the new socio-economic reality. The V4+ cooperation will probably be advisable in connection with talks concerning the use of funds still available under the Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020 for combating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative).

Climate policy will remain a key challenge for the EU and its Member States. This policy has a horizontal impact on a number of other European policies. The Communication presented by the European Commission (EC) "**The European Green Deal**", which is a new EU growth strategy, will require coordinated economic and environmental actions, especially in the current situation of the pandemic. Currently, in the face of the expected economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, the regions most affected by the costs of transition to a climate-neutral economy will face an additional burden. It is necessary to secure ambitious financial resources for the realization of the climate policy objectives during the negotiation of the future MFF, including adequate financing for the sectoral policies allowing the implementation of the EU climate strategies in different sectors.

Migration policy will remain important on the EU agenda and it will be necessary to keep V4 active and unified in this area especially that work on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum will start soon in the EU Council, as well as work on the asylum reform will continue. It is crucial to take full advantage of V4 countries cooperation in this respect in order to effectively prevent the introduction of solutions that are contrary to V4 states common position, in particular those regarding mandatory redistribution of migrants.

The COVID-19 epidemic confirmed both the **labour market** mismatch and the demand for key occupations and skills and the lack of social security for employees of so-called atypical forms of

employment. During the Polish Presidency, the V4 may raise issues of automation and robotisation of employment and remote working.

With regard to the update of the EU action plan in the area of digital education, it will be interesting to exchange within the V4 the experiences related to the need to switch to **remote education and its implications for educational systems** (also in connection with aspects of counteracting digital exclusion).

The ongoing discussion on the **future of the EU integration** is also fundamental. We believe that the Conference on the Future of Europe will provide an appropriate framework to discuss new ideas, based on which we can build a stronger, more resilient and more competitive EU. Within this framework there may be a need to develop a common V4 approach to selected challenges that are the subject of its work.

The challenges for the EU will continue to be generated by **Brexit**, mainly in the economic sphere (e.g. the need to negotiate a new trade agreement), but also in the political sphere. During the Polish Presidency, the current coordination of activities and positions of V4 in the area of negotiations with the UK and their consistent presentation on the EU forum will continue.

From the V4's point of view, it will be extremely important to work towards the closest possible **transatlantic cooperation**. The Polish presidency will also give due attention to regional cooperation in the **Three Seas Initiative** as a framework linking the V4, EU and transatlantic cooperation.

Security cooperation will be crucial for V4. This cooperation will concern the development of a coherent V4 position on key **defence policy** issues discussed in the NATO and EU.

Uncertainty as to the real progress of **EU enlargement policy** will remain a challenge, potentially jeopardising Europe's strategic interests, especially those of Central Europe. Therefore, coordinated political support from V4 to the EU enlargement process and efforts to support the pro-integration aspirations of the **Western Balkan countries (WB)** will continue. In this context, an important task for V4 is to exchange V4's experience with the WB countries on the EU accession process and the first years of EU membership and motivate them to carry out necessary reforms. Using its Presidency experience in the Berlin Process, Poland plans to maintain the existing V4/V4+ consultation schemes with the WB countries. In support of the regional ownership in the Western Balkans region, V4 will implement through the IVF the agreed technical assistance to the Western Balkans Fund.

The **Eastern neighbourhood of the EU** remains important to the V4. The dynamic situation in Ukraine and Belarus is crucial here.

It remains important to increase the interest of EU countries in the **Eastern Partnership (EaP)** region. The aim of the Polish V4 Presidency is to further promote and expand V4 cooperation with activities and projects supporting the development of the EaP - as an invariably paramount long-term V4 priority especially in the area of resilience. The Polish Presidency will also try to take into account the economic aspects of V4+EaP cooperation. It is of paramount importance that the V4 helps bring the EaP Summit schedule "back on track" as soon as possible, in order for the next full-fledged Summit to take place during the CZ EU PRES in 2022.

For V4, it will be important to support the implementation of EU association agreements, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which are an integral part thereof.

V4 consultations on **development cooperation** will continue. The Presidency will seek to strengthen the V4 consultation mechanism in this area, with an emphasis on sustainable solutions and not just ad hoc

ones. To this end, the Presidency will initiate consultations on sharing good practices, developing directions and areas for V4 joint action.

Cooperation of V4 **consular services** will be developed. It will enable the exchange of opinions and experiences on current challenges in consular work and discussions on positions on the current EU visa agenda.

Efforts will be continued to increase the **internal coherence of V4** in all non-political spheres of common interest and activity of the Visegrad Group countries. In the economic sphere the field of interest will traditionally be broadly understood **infrastructure connections** (transport, energy, etc.). Cooperation in other sectors of the **economy** will also be continued.

The cooperation of V4 during the Polish Presidency is intended to strengthen the V4 as a community. Multi-level contacts between societies and the promotion and dissemination of the culture and history of Central European countries will be supported. An indispensable role in this task will continue to be played by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) with its numerous instruments (grants, scholarships, etc.). Celebrating its **20th anniversary in 2020, the Fund** will actively participate in celebrating the **30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation**.

The cooperation of V4 think tanks gathered in the Think Visegrad platform (TV) will be further developed. In this context, among others, the implementation of the traditional mid-term conference is planned. The experience exchange programme organised by TV under the Civil Servants Mobility Programme (CSMP) will be continued. Analytical cooperation of V4 will be conducted within the V4 Energy Think Tank Platform.

Proposed activities

To provide a symbolic structure to the comprehensive Visegrad cooperation in sectoral policies during the Polish Presidency, the proposed initiatives and activities are divided into three pillars:

1. **Economy and connectivity;**
2. **Security;**
3. **Society.**

Economy and connectivity

Economy

Activities aimed at counteracting the coronavirus pandemic, considering the rapid proliferation and spread of the COVID-19 virus in Europe, led in the first quarter of 2020 to the necessity of closing down borders and imposing substantial and onerous restrictions on those wishing to cross them. These restrictions had a major impact on the V4 regional balance in political, economic and social terms.

During Poland's Presidency, the challenge faced by all the V4 countries is **to ensure that returning to normality occurs as soon as possible**. This is especially important because every month during which the restrictions persist causes economic losses. **Achieving this objective will require intense dialogue and harmonious collaboration within the region and the entire EU**. Taking these steps is of utmost

importance because our countries are tightly integrated socially and economically and are main trading partners for each other. Accordingly, the Polish V4 Presidency wishes to **give greater weight to collaboration within the V4 in various, primarily economic, areas, including collaboration with the EU to rebuild and deepen the European Single Market**. Considering the current situation, immediate assistance should be provided to the traditional common market, and especially the services sector which bears the brunt of restrictions caused by counteracting the pandemic. Such assistance should be one of the major objectives of the European post-epidemic reconstruction plan aimed at rebuilding the supply chains of services and restoring the flow of goods in the EU. Due to their favourable location, integration with leading European value chains, educated workforce and relatively high share of industry in GDP, the V4 countries should have an impact on the post-crisis European industrial and competition policies. The economic aspects of the **Polish V4 Presidency should reflect this challenge by discussing reindustrialisation on both the level of prime ministers and heads of economic ministries** as well as collaboration between experts.

In this context, the key issue is the planned adoption and implementation of the European climate law in the form of a regulation of the European Parliament and EU Council paving the way for the “European Green Deal”. The climate law is intended to establish a framework for the gradual decrease of emissions of greenhouse gases and increase of absorption and to seal the 2050 climate neutrality target as legally binding for the EU. This will not be without effect for the future condition of the economy which is additionally saddled with the consequences of the pandemic.

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

The first attempt to finalise the Multiannual Financial Framework (2021–2027) negotiation process was made in February 2020 and revealed a lack of agreement due to persisting divergences in expectations of member states, and especially the continued strong insistence of net payers on looking for savings and reducing instrument allocation. The process of working out a position, due to internal (the coronavirus threat) and external circumstances, might be protracted. Achieving an agreement within the Council does not mean, however, that designing subsequent MFF will be over – there still remains the issue of reaching a compromise with the European Parliament whose consent is required in a special unanimity procedure. The V4 is at the heart of building a wider coalition which can include up to 17 member states and may act as a counterbalance to the so-called net payers. The V4 is part of an informal group called the Ambitious Europe (formerly known as the Friends of Cohesion Group), but also other formats: V4+4 and V4+3B.

Activities:

Joint initiatives may include both a number of technical consultations between the V4 countries on the level of directors of units responsible for MFF negotiations, Sherpa-level consultations, and coordinating positions before meetings of the General Affairs Council (GAC).

Possible convening of a cohesion summit [following the initiative undertaken by the Slovak Presidency (November 2018) and Czech Presidency (November 2019)] – to be decided later depending on the course of the MFF 2021–2027 negotiation process and preparations for the MFF review or discussions on post-2027 MFF.

Water and drought prevention (V4 Water)

We need to reinforce the environmental, nature-friendly dimension of the V4 and responsible involvement in solving global problems. Due to climate changes, Central Europe can expect to face more prolonged drought periods in the coming years. The frequency of violent and very intense precipitation will also increase, carrying an increased risk of floods. These changes make it necessary to develop a new approach to managing and protecting water resources. This issue is of a trans-border nature and requires close collaboration. Supplying water with suitable quantity and quality for industry, agriculture and

households is a regional and continental challenge. The protection of water resources is also discussed on the EU level. The limited availability of water with suitable quality parameters is increasingly becoming a hindrance to economic growth. It is thus in the V4 interest to include in its agenda the topics of **irrigation, melioration, sustainable landscape management and small and large water retention infrastructure, especially the nature based solutions** (Natural Water Retention Measures). Therefore, a priority in this area will be consulting national drought prevention plans (NDPP) and water retention programmes as well as submitting joint applications for financing of these activities from EU funds including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The Polish V4 Presidency plans to organise the celebrations of the World Water Day¹, designed to demonstrate the impact of proper management of water, including in particular water with suitable quality parameters, on the social and economic condition of countries.

Agriculture – application of new technologies in the context of climate challenges

Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, discussion and collaboration to mitigate its negative effects for the agricultural sector and rural areas of the V4 countries is planned within the V4.

The ongoing climate changes have increasingly severe consequences for agriculture. As the average global temperature keeps rising, many regions experience smaller total annual rainfall, leading to extreme conditions such as drought, heat waves or long-lasting lack of snow cover in wintertime.

In this situation, rapid and accurate reaction to changes occurring in the environment is of key importance for agriculture. This is why it is so important to discuss and exchange experiences concerning precise agriculture, including innovative crop planting methods, development of satellite technologies, preventing drought and coping with its effects².

The Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD Protocol) entered into force in 2020. The Protocol offers potential for wide range of cooperation that can be facilitated by the support of V4 countries. Planned activities among others include prevention of adverse impacts on air, water, soil, landscape and biological diversity, integration of the objectives of sustainable development of the agricultural sector and rural areas into sectoral policies marketing of typical agricultural and rural products and services and promotion of extensive farming and organic production.

Soil protection (soil management), e.g. soil fertilisation

V4 countries will continue cooperation in the area of water and soil management connected *inter alia* with drought combat.

Joint V4 activities aimed at including liming of soil in future CAP with simultaneous exclusion of these activities from *de minimis* state aid are envisaged. V4 will also discuss other topics related to efforts to improve the quality of soils (reducing their acidification, increasing the assimilability of nutrients by plants etc.).

¹ World Water Day is an annual observance day designated for 22 March by the UN General Assembly in its resolution of 22 December 1992. WWD was established during the 1992 Earth Summit (UNCED) conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as part of Agenda 21.

² For example co-financing activities to ensure that water is stored and retained in soil, cultivating plant species and variations resistant to water stress, and introducing new production technologies that limit water consumption, as well as popularising knowledge on possible activities, including those involving agricultural engineering, to increase the volume of water in soil and cultivate species and variations suitable for particular soil and water conditions.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2020 – negotiating reforms and/or getting ready for implementation

The final shape of the CAP reform proposed in 2018 by the EC is of prime importance for the possibility of supporting agriculture and rural areas after 2020. Depending on the pace of negotiation in the EU, activities of V4 will be oriented on continuing work on the 2018 draft regulations package establishing provisions to implement the CAP in the next programming period and on discussion on implementing the CAP reform among V4 members. In this sense a continuous exchange of information on the preparation of national CAP Strategic Plans would be relevant. In this context the impact of the Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 should be analysed. An important feature of these activities may also be the coordination of positions of V4 countries on temporary provisions related to delay in implementing the reformed CAP. Well-funded CAP is essential also to overcome the current crisis related to COVID-19 and to meet high environmental standards presented in new EU strategies. V4 should discuss the possibilities of increasing competitiveness of EU agricultural sector.

Biodiversity and food system

V4 countries should discuss the measures that can be taken in relation to the proposals arising from the presented strategies of the European Commission related to the European Green Deal - A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system and EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which presuppose the involvement of citizens, businesses, the social partners and research and communities at local, regional and European level.

Collaboration pursued by Central and Eastern European countries as part of the BIOEAST initiative, possible proposal for joint projects under the Horizon 2020 programme and the post-2020 Horizon Europe programme, oriented on research and innovation in agriculture, will be continued

The V4 countries can mobilize localized primary production supply, helping to achieve European food self-sufficiency, making the continent less dependent on global trade and imports. The V4 and other BIOEAST countries sustainable food system could benefit the entire sustainable European food systems. However, the sustainability and competitiveness questions do require research and innovation investments; accordingly, the BIOEAST countries need to be helped to be able to mobilize their potential and to develop new business models to better, engage the BIOEAST countries primary production into the sustainable European food system is key.

The new role of Central and Eastern European countries (BIOEAST countries) in the context of European food systems in the area of research and innovation investments should be discussed.

African Swine Fever (ASF) – activities to combat the disease in the EU

V4 will hold discussions concerning the ASF (the role of wild boars as a key reservoir of ASF, EU regulations, EC financial support); V4 will develop closer contacts (exchanging experience on combating and preventing the spread of ASF, scientific and research collaboration), and undertake joint efforts in the EU institutions to obtain support for issues relating to the “Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia on combating African Swine Fever (ASF) in the European Union” (adopted in Prague, 4 October 2019).

Counteracting and limiting food waste in supply chain

Limiting food loss and waste is part of promoting sustainable food systems, taking into account both sustainable food production and sustainable food consumption, both of which have an important place in

the “green” economy. Counteracting unhealthy dietary habits and obesity prevalence mainly among children and young people in the EU is also paramount.

V4 will also tackle the question of promotion of healthy habits in society and combating obesity as part of the CAP. Continuing the “EU school schemes” in the next financial perspective at least on the current scale and level of financing.

Given the current pandemic situation, the Polish V4 presidency will examine possible ways – in compliance with EU law – to promote the consumption of local and regional (food) products, which not only strengthens the competitiveness of regional small and medium enterprises, but it would also promote sustainability in the supply chain.

Establishing producer organisations and development of cooperatives to increase the organisational level in the sector

V4 will hold consultations concerning multi-aspect support instruments forming part of the future CAP to strengthen the position of farmers in the food chain. One proposed solution is to introduce mechanisms that encourage agricultural producers to consolidate their activities by establishing, for example, cooperatives, groups of agricultural producers, or recognised organisations of producers and their associations/unions to build partner relationships with downstream links in the value chain.

Product labelling

Developing a common V4 position on the EC proposal to introduce mandatory designation of the place of origin of milk as well as milk and meat used as ingredients in foodstuffs.

Negotiation of a common position of the V4 countries on the need to mark products as “GMO free”.

Climate policy

In the global dimension, the COVID-19 pandemic has already had a considerable impact on the climate change negotiation process. The next session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), COP26, which was to take place in November 2020 in Glasgow, has already been officially postponed to 2021, as notified by the summit’s Presidency. Despite these changes, in the context of negotiations on the global forum it should be expected that during the Polish V4 Presidency work will continue to update nationally determined contributions (NDC) of EU members and draft legislation supporting the European Green Deal. In particular, publishing an evaluation of effects of the Climate Law regulation, which assumes achieving climate neutrality by 2050, is expected in the autumn of 2020, as is the proposal to revise climate legislation in order to allow achieving the mentioned higher energy saving target (June 2021). The issue of increasing the target for 2030 will probably be on the agenda during the October 2020 session of the European Council. In addition to mitigation, climate law also deals with adaptation to a climate change. The point of reference in this context is Article 7 of the Paris Agreement. Member states will be required to prepare and implement adaptation strategies and plans, taking into account risk management, and then subject them to periodic reviews. Evaluation will also encompass the joint progress of member states towards adapting to a climate change and the adequacy of measures applied by individual member states for this purpose. During the Polish V4 Presidency, legislative works on the European Climate Law regulation will continue.

Another important topic forming part of the European Green Deal is the Just Transition Fund. The Fund’s resources are supposed to support the modernisation of mining sectors and climate neutrality, but the activities must be planned and properly implemented. One of the most basic features of the Just Transition Fund are the territorial transition plans to be drafted by member states, which should include detailed principles for proceeding with the transformation process until 2030 and must comply with

submitted National Energy and Climate Plans. Polish Presidency will encourage V4 cooperation as regards future negotiations on the regulation draft.

Work done as part of the EU Emissions Trading System is not without importance for the V4 either. Right now, arrangements on the operation of, among others, the Modernisation Fund or Innovation Fund and free allocations are being finalised. All those mechanisms allow supporting just transition, therefore taking the V4's position into account when determining its principles is paramount.

Activities:

Consultations between the V4 countries;

Developing a joint V4 position;

Drafting a joint V4 document in the form of a statement/letter (if necessary).

Energy policy: safe energy for the future

1. Just transition of the energy sector towards climate-neutral economy, role of energy transformation in stimulating the economy when the COVID-19 pandemic ceases

a. Coordination of the V4 countries' positions concerning the EU strategy to transform the economy towards climate neutrality in 2050 ("European Green Deal") and ensuring that key projects are carried out to stimulate the economy when the pandemic ceases.

Consultations concerning legislative framework (ETS directive, RES and energy efficiency).

Coordination of a common position taken during works at the EU level in order to reinforce the voice of the V4 countries and effectively promote their proposals.

b. Collaboration and exchange of experience concerning the implementation of the "Clean energy for all Europeans" package, including as regards the common electricity energy market, new market services, readiness to face threats to the electricity power system, and electric energy efficiency within the electricity market.

- Coordination among the V4 countries to exchange information and develop common positions relating to implementing the clean energy for all Europeans package and effectively achieving the EU energy and climate policy objectives.

c. EU funds for transformation of the energy system also in the context of post-pandemic economy stimulation programmes

- Coordination of V4 activities to ensure adequate power grid financing on all levels of voltage and energy infrastructure, including flexible gas-powered generation sources and extending the possibilities of trans-border energy transmission.

d. Just transition of energy systems in V4 coal regions.

Exchange of good practices and implementation of projects for V4 coal areas included in the EC's "Coal regions in transition" initiative which is prioritised by the EU.

More intense collaboration concerning the EC's "Coal regions in transition" initiative in the context of implementing the European Green Deal. Ensuring adequate financial resources to expedite switching the energy sector to low-carbon sources as part of modernising the entire economy.

2. Future of the European natural gas market regulatory framework

a. Developing a common V4 position on proposed regulations for the European natural gas sector.

b. Maintaining support for natural gas by assigning it the status of "transition fuel" and, in appropriate cases, also "destination fuel."

- Organisation of the **V4 Gas Forum**, an expert seminar attended by administration officials, transmission grid operators and regulatory authorities;

- Including this topic in the work of the **V4 Energy Think Tank Platform**.

- Coordination of the V4's position as an important contribution towards building a coalition promoting natural gas.

Innovative technologies in the energy sector

- a. Support for and development of **e-mobility** in the V4 countries by expanding charger infrastructure.
- b. Conducting joint V4 research projects to develop technologies for storage and generation of electricity as well as for using alternative fuels in transport.
- c. Drafting a joint V4 strategy to extend the use of hydrogen in transport and energy systems and its manufacture from renewable and conventional sources.
- d. Developing a common V4 position on amending the directive on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure.

Activities:

- Initiating a joint V4 platform which would focus on innovations relating to clean technologies. The main objective of the platform will be to promote climate neutral technologies which will also stimulate and rebuild the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Zero emission nuclear power

- a. Coordination of the V4's position on current matters within the agenda of the EU and other international organisations dealing with nuclear power.
- b. More intense industrial collaboration among entrepreneurs from the V4 countries and extending scientific and research collaboration in the nuclear energy area; organisation of a V4 nuclear industry forum.

Activities:

-Developing common V4 positions on the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and counteracting the exclusion of nuclear power from sustainable taxonomy on the level of delegated acts while ensuring timely, objective, evidence-based and scientific assessment of nuclear energy in the context of Taxonomy before publication of the first batch of Delegated Acts

-Developing a common position on the EC's proposed reform of the Euratom Treaty.

-Discussion on the potential establishment of the Nuclear Alliance/Low Carbon Alliance for Nuclear Energy.

-Collaboration of V4 directors in the area of nuclear power, initiation of thematic meetings, current exchange of information on the status of nuclear power programmes.

-Discussion on the future role of the European Nuclear Energy Forum and its potential recreation in expert format

- Joint initiatives concerning social communication and development of human resources in the nuclear power area, for example social communication workshops attended by media workers from the V4 countries.

Innovation

Continuation of cooperation in connection to the Warsaw Declaration signed by the V4 countries in 2017, which provides for a strategic alliance for innovation, the use of the V4's potential in sectors of key importance from the viewpoint of the industry's future (intelligent healthcare, low-carbon industry, industrial Internet of Things and cyber security).

Comprehensive V4 coordination between scientific research and technology development will be encouraged. V4 will discuss more intense collaboration within the 4.0 economy, including the role of innovative economy in mitigating the consequences of the global pandemic crisis.

Bioeconomy

Circular economy – unleashing the bioeconomic potential of the V4 countries (in the context of, among others, the Bio-based Industry Joint Undertaking of the European Union and European industry sector).

-Exchange of experience between central and local government officials, scientific units and research institutes on one hand, and members of industry, in particular bioindustry of the V4 countries responsible for planning, implementing and financing bioeconomy (circular economy) activities, on the other.

-A round table meeting and discussion on conclusions and recommendations to be contained in a report on the bioeconomic potential of the V4 countries.

-Drafting a joint document (declaration) relating to the common approach of the V4 countries in the area of bioeconomy/circular economy initiatives in the EU in order to unleash the bioeconomic potential of the V4 states and increase the share of units from these countries in bioindustrial competitions (whose objective is to design new technologies for sustainable transformation of renewable natural resources into products, materials and fuels based on biological materials).

Industrial policy

The V4 countries should pursue a policy of promoting themselves as a region attractive for industrial investments, in particular in the context of potential backshoring and nearshoring which may occur when the COVID-19 pandemic is suppressed. The V4 region comprises countries with rapidly developing infrastructure, stable legal systems, well-educated and qualified workforce and labour costs still below Western European standards. The nearness and stability of our markets may be an important incentive for European investors who view them as an alternative to Asian markets which suffer from remoteness of their manufacturing centres and long supply chains, factors exposed by the current pandemic crisis.

It will be important to maintain a consistent V4 position as regards the ambitious objectives of the new EU Industrial Strategy. The V4 countries are less competitive compared to the technologically advanced original EU members. The gap in development may potentially threaten keeping the playing field level for V4 economic operators on the common market and in contacts with non-V4 countries. It is necessary to review the real possibilities offered by the EU Industrial Strategy to the V4 countries, taking into account the expected economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 epidemic.

The new Cohesion Policy framework for 2021–2027

- Continuation collaboration among V4/V4+ states concerning both the coordination of positions when renegotiating the Cohesion Policy, including a new regulation establishing the Just Transition Fund (JTF), and the exchange of information and best practices relating to programming and implementing the Cohesion Policy in the next perspective. In addition, cooperation in the V4+ format in connection with new challenges faced by the Cohesion Policy, in particular those resulting from social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the investment plan for the European Green Deal.

Activities:

- Coordination of negotiation positions in the Cohesion Policy area, including as regards the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of climate neutrality objectives (with particular emphasis on financial mechanisms provided for in the investment plan for the European Green Deal).

- Drafting and negotiating programme documents (Partnership agreement and operational programmes). Member states must meet general and thematic conditionalities as a prerequisite of using Cohesion Policy funds.

- The compliance of member states with the principle of thematic concentration, including in particular those relating to mandatory limits of funds for climatic expenses set on the Cohesion Policy level and in the ERDF and Cohesion Fund.

- Implementing the selected Cohesion Policy mechanisms and instruments (e.g. territorial instruments, financial instruments, new principles of settling technical assistance).
- Exchange of experience concerning planned instruments to support enterprises in research, development and investments in the 2020+ perspective and presentation of best practices in support instruments in the 2014–2020 perspective.
- Assessing the implementation of centrally managed programmes. Joint discussion on factors facilitating success in programmes of this kind and an attempt to identify good practices.
- Formulating recommendations for V4+ countries to increase the participation of the region's countries in using funds from centrally managed programmes.
- Coordination of activities and complementarity of the 2012–2027 cross-border and trans-national Interreg cooperation programmes with the participation of V4+ states. Exchange of experiences and ideas to improve the effectiveness of programmes, including easier access by beneficiaries and increased visibility of Interreg project results.
- Cooperation on evaluation (staging an evaluation conference, arriving at the common understanding of evaluation terms and activities for the 2021+ perspective, carrying out research projects).

Urban policy

Issues concerning *smart cities* and urban development feature regularly on the V4's agenda. At the same time, awarding the organisation of the 2022 World Urban Forum to Poland allows to extend this discussion to other topics relating to the challenges posed by contemporary urbanisation and modern municipal policy, including current development of municipal policy instruments that ensure a flexible response to global threats (climate change, epidemic threats such as COVID-19).

The 2022 World Urban Forum

- Cooperation to develop the World Urban Forum programme and to organise the event(s) together with partners from V4/V4+ states.

Smart Cities

- Identifying good practices in implementing the smart cities concept with particular emphasis on activities intended to protect the environment and compensate for climate change as well as on health threats relating to pandemics. The project will help identify cities in V4 countries which can boast good solutions, aligning with the *smart cities* concept, in specific areas. These solutions will be evaluated for possible application in cities of the other V4 countries. On this basis, a good practice manual for the area under consideration will be designed.

Regional policy – current challenges

Exchange of views and experience on pursuing regional policies in the V4 countries in the context of current development challenges and previous experiences of each country resulting from pursuing regional policy and implementing territorial instruments.

Carpathian cooperation

The Carpathian Convention

Joint efforts to make the EU join the Carpathian Convention. More intense collaboration on Carpathian issues. Looking for synergy between the Polish V4 Presidency and the presidency of the Carpathian Convention (starting at the forthcoming meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention) for the next three years.

EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region (EUSCARP)

Due to benefits from collaboration within macro-regional EU strategies, it is planned to continue cooperation to develop the Carpathian region and include it in a macro-regional strategy. The proposed activities are also aligned with activities of the Polish Presidency under the Carpathian Convention from 2020 to 2023.

Activities:

Commissioning an updated social and economic diagnosis of the region and, on this basis, proposing to delimit the Cross-Border Carpathian Functional Area to serve as an expert voice in determining the optimum extent of the Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathian Region.

Propose *smart specialisation* for Carpathian regions. Define priority topics and specific joint projects for the entire Carpathians in order to provide a strong, positive stimulus for development (e.g. the Carpathian Tourist Brand, development of RES in mountainous areas, green technology industries etc.)

The joint drive of the V4 countries, especially those that signed the Krynica declaration in 2018 and are members of the Carpathian Executive Council [i.e. PL, SK, HU + UA] to have the EC commence works on a suitable document as quickly as possible and to obtain financing for carrying out the Strategy in the new 2021–2027 financial perspective. For this purpose, the V4 may encourage other countries from the Carpathian region to participate in the process leading to establishment of the new strategy and to cooperate and/or coordinate their activities with these countries to implement the strategy.

Increased activity and collaboration in projects carried out as part of programmes managed centrally by the European Commission (in particular Horizon Europe) in the 2021–2027 financial perspective

It is recommended to extend the opportunities to carry out projects by proposing project initiatives together with other entities from the V4 countries showing similar interests (for example initiatives for cleaner air).

Cooperation in drafting and implementing LIFE programme projects

Activities:

Workshops teaching interested entities (public and non-public) how to fill out LIFE applications, including joint applications, and a meeting of officials from relevant national authorities to exchange experience on implementing the LIFE programme and the challenges posed by the new 2021–2027 financial perspective.

Nature protection

1. Strengthening the role of the Carpathian Convention as a regional sustainable development instrument and exchange of experience related to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Developing a common V4 position on the importance and role of the Carpathian Convention.

2. Exchange of experience on implementing nature conventions – the Washington Convention (CITES) and provisions on access and benefit sharing (ABS) resulting from the Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Continued efforts to exchange experience on the protection of species by regulating trade and starting similar cooperation among experts dealing with implementing regulations ensuring access to genetic resources and sharing the benefits of their use.

Activities:

Organising a two-day meeting of authorities involved in these issues, scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2020 in Warsaw, whose agenda will include current concerns relating to CITES provisions.

Organising a meeting for experts dealing with implementing regulations ensuring access to genetic resources and sharing the benefits of their use (or the Nagoya Protocol and EU regulation 511/2014) in 2011 to exchange experiences, particularly with respect to supervising the users of genetic resources.

Sustainable forest management in the context of climate change and other economic and environmental factors

Discussion on challenges faced by sustainable forest management both in the context of climate change and other economic and environmental factors, based among others on the joint declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the V4, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia on forests, sustainable forest management and adaptation to climate change, and in connection with the current epidemiological situation worldwide.

Discussion on the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy to ensure more comprehensive approach to forestry by highlighting the role of forests in achieving EC's political priorities as part of the European Green Deal programme. Ensuring effective coordination and synergy between various EU forest-related policies and ensuring that sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forest is appropriately recognised in the most important European Commission discussions and efforts on the highest political level. Promoting strategy as the main tool for integrating the forest sector with Green Deal priorities in order to ensure consistent and well-coordinated activities on the EU level.

Discussion on EU strategy towards post-2020 biological diversity, especially as regards issues relating to forestry.

Promoting the actions of state forest authorities

Activities:

Designing a joint position encompassing key features to be included in the post-2020 EU Forest Strategy.
Organising a high level meeting to continue discussion on sustainable forest management, climate change and the role of forests in achieving EC political priorities as part of the New Green Deal project / adopting a joint declaration on the post-2020 Forest Strategy
A meeting of experts for organisations dealing with forest arrangement in the V4.

Improvement of air quality

- Implementing National Air Pollution Control Programmes under the NEC Directive (Directive 2016/2284 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2016 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants).
- Implementation of Air quality plans according to the art. 23 of the Ambient Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC in connection to the infringement procedures imposed to the V4 member states for noncompliance with the air quality standards. Discussing the intention of the European Commission to revise the air quality standards according to the European Green Deal and according to the Council conclusions on Improvement of Air Quality as adopted by the Council at its 3754th meeting held on 5 March 2020. Stricter air quality standards will be certainly challenging to achieve for the V4 states and will require implementation of costly measures.
- Exchange of information on main programme objectives set and problems encountered; challenges relating to adopted activities and implementation schedules; links to other policies/strategies, in particular National Energy and Climate Plans.
- Exchange of views relating to the stricter air quality standards and feasibility of achieving them in V4 member states.

Industrial emissions

In connection with published EC implementing decisions on BAT conclusions for specific industries, installations may struggle to comply with requirements specified in the conclusions due to cuts in investments caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Presidency proposes to undertake collaboration and exchange experiences with the other V4 countries with respect to the approach applied in such cases in each country.

Long-term strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the EU

On 6 March 2020, the EU submitted to the UNFCCC Convention Secretariat a notice on long-term low emission strategy. The V4 should pursue cooperation on long-term low-emission EU strategy and strive to have the EU adopt provisions favourable for the V4 countries and the Central Europe region as regards Just Transition, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Waste management

- Exchange of information on methods of implementing extended producer responsibility (EPR) in individual V4 states, in particular as regards the V4 countries enforcing the liability, using means of distance communication, against producers offering packaged products delivered to the V4 countries.
- Discussion (at a meeting of V4+ environmental ministers or experts) on the V4 countries mutually enforcing the liability, using means of distance communication, against producers offering packaged products delivered to the V4 countries.
- Drafting a joint document analysing EPR systems in each V4 country following amendment of EU regulations.
- Exchange of information on dealing with waste during the pandemic, in particular whether other countries anticipate larger volumes of mixed municipal waste and whether such expectation will affect the possibility of achieving the levels of recycling and preparing for re-use specified in the directive of the European Parliament and the Council 2008/98/EC of 19 November 2008 on waste.
- Exchange of information on transposition process of single-use plastic directive (SUPD) in V4 countries.

Management of raw materials

In times of the COVID-19 pandemic, when national economies slow down or even freeze certain industries completely, the raw materials policy of the V4 countries may become particularly important. V4 discussion about a plan of using mineral resources on both national and V4 level. In addition, the role and importance of secondary mineral resources should be discussed.

Clean transport

- Organising a V4 meeting during the Global E-Mobility Forum to be held in September 2020 in Warsaw.
- Developing a common V4 position on mobilising European instruments to support e-mobility development.

Sustainable development

Agenda 2030

- Organising the 2030 Agenda Forum and sustainable development goals in the extended V4+ format (sharing good practices and solutions adopted by V4+ states in response to identified challenges in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), both at national level and in the context of development cooperation undertaken by them). An alternative is to adopt a joint declaration concerning future activities in this respect.

- Consultations on sustainable development, taking into account the involvement of member states in achieving the UN's 2030 Agenda and the EU's New Strategic Agenda and statements of the EC president to base the future EU development model on sustainable development principles.
- Organising a ministerial level conference (a political session attended by experts and organisations of entrepreneurs) in the V4/V4+ formula (tbd);
- Reconciling the ambitions of green and digital transformation with the condition of EU economy after the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – opportunities and challenges for the V4.

Development cooperation and the 2030 Agenda

- Development cooperation with developing countries, the participation of the private sector in the cooperation, and creating space for V4 discussion on issues essential to implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- Drafting V4 recommendations and positions to expedite actions to achieve the SDGs on both national and regional levels. Consultations on financing sustainable development (covering positions on issues and challenges relating to, among others, introducing a sustainable financing package).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Definition of SMEs

V4 consultations on developing a common position on defining SMEs (in the context of debate about the future of state aid regulations).

The “V4 Innovators in Israel” training programme

Continuation of the V4+Israel innovators/ start-ups programme. Verification of the market potential of start-ups (their ideas, solutions, products, services). Allowing young V4 entrepreneurs to acquire practical knowledge and solutions helping them build an innovative enterprise based on Israeli experience.

The Knowledge Sharing Programme

Continuation of the V4+Rep. of Korea the Knowledge Sharing Programme. Exchange of knowledge and experience on innovation policy and innovation support system in the V4 countries and Rep. of Korea.

Topics for cooperation: National Innovation Systems and Innovation policy for SMEs in the Era of Industry 4.0, innovations in the service sector, in particular its support instruments.

Priorities in the trade agenda of the new European Commission

Achieving today's basic objectives which should include reforming the WTO system and counteracting a new wave of protectionism, leading to more stable trading conditions for our entrepreneurs. An important task in this respect will also be starting work on a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom which is and will remain an important trade partner for the V4 countries.

Considering the methodology differences in foreign trade statistics in each V4 country the Presidency will encourage even closer cooperation between V4 statistical institutes for a more detailed analysis and, if possible, unification of these methodologies. At the same time, it would be worthwhile to study not only trade flows (exports and imports) between V4 countries, but also their collaboration in global value chains and, for example, the share of foreign added value in gross exports.

Connectivity

V4 connectivity

As a field of V4 cooperation, *connectivity* should be understood widely as the development of multi-tiered links involving key role of the green infrastructure, transport and logistics, but also energy generation and digital technologies, leading to closer business, people-to-people, and political contacts in the region. Tighter cooperation in the area of *connectivity*, transport and infrastructure should take into account post-epidemic reality so as to rebuild collaboration in this sector while not contributing to another wave of infections.

The Presidency will strive to develop a position matching V4 interests in the face of the increasingly distinctive European strategy on *connectivity* in Eurasia, which will define European policy towards Euro-Asiatic transport corridors, including the issues of transport, infrastructure financing, etc. Stressing the role of the V4 as a logistics and distribution intermediary between Europe and Asia will help advance discussions on ensuring a strong position of Central European transport enterprises in the EU, as well as highlighting common interests.

As regards transport infrastructure, prominence should be given to the idea of building a high speed railway network linking Warsaw, Brno (with connection Brno - Praha), Bratislava and Budapest. On the other hand, in development of road links in the region an important place is occupied by the Baltic-Adriatic corridor and the Via Carpatia route. In inland navigation Danube-Oder-Elbe project is one of the priorities.

Proposals to eliminate cross-border bottlenecks and infrastructural deficiencies will be aligned with a wider context of Central European efforts to increase the EU cohesion. It is therefore important to build a V4 consensus that extending transport links and streamlining logistics provide synergies for the entire region as a place in which production and logistics enterprises can be located.

Considerable potential is offered by V4 cooperation in intermodal transport and logistics to strengthen mutual links and make the region as a whole more attractive for investors.

is essential to promote connections between the transport, shipping and logistics industries in the V4 countries on the level of business associations and individual enterprises.

From the V4 region viewpoint, an essential investment may be the Central Communication Port which is set to become a regional air and rail hub.

On the EU policy level affecting connectivity in the region, an important part is played by the transport law created at EU level. In order to maintain possibilities of free access to the Western markets, closer cooperation among the V4 countries is advisable.

Infrastructure/transport

- V4 coordination of implementing infrastructural North-South projects, with particular attention to the V4 High Speed Rail (V4 HSR) Service. Selection of most cost-effective solutions and ensuring financing from EU funds and synchronization of design, planning and carrying out of works. Continuation of work of the V4 HSR working group.

- Analyse the possibility to organise a V4+ meeting to look for a common denominator between the V4 HSRS and the concurrently implemented Rail Baltica.
- Coordination of joint V4 activities to add the Via Carpatia route to the TEN-T base network.
- Coordination of promotional activities of the V4 countries increasing the chances for ensuring EU financing for infrastructural projects of interest to them.

Coordination of positions concerning the most important European law instruments

- Probing the possibility of coordinating V4 positions on implementing EU-level support instruments and other necessary activities to rebuild the transport sectors in the post-COVID-19 era.

TEN-T policy

- Designing a joint V4 position during the TEN-T network revision process.

Aviation

- Coordination of V4 positions versus the so-called aviation package.
- Coordination of V4 positions regarding the reform of the Single European Sky initiative.

Support for the European aviation sector

- Elaborating a V4 position on extending the scope of application of Regulation (EU) 2017/2392 of the European Parliament and Council of 13 December 2019 and amending Directive 2003/87/EC on the emission trading system with a view to counteracting the persistent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for the entire transport industry and the resulting increase in costs.

Mobility package

Examining possibilities for coordinating the positions of the V4 countries regarding possible further steps vis-a-vis international road transport operators in the EU, stemming from the analysis (Impact Assessment) carried out by the European Commission, in order to secure fluid performance of the single market and in line with broader policy objectives relating to the environmental aspects of the European policy.

Combined transport and connected and autonomous driving (“CAD”)

- Organising a meeting of the V4 working group for combined transport
- Organising a V4 meeting on transport automation – connected automated driving (CAD).

EU funds of transport projects

Topics relating to transport projects are essential in the context of joint implementation of infrastructural investments, plans to apply for CEF funds in the 2021–2027 perspective, launching the “military mobility” component, and the planned revision of the TEN-T network. Faced with the COVID-19 crisis, issues relating to transport projects will also involve cooperation in preventing threats to implementing these projects.

Considering previous collaboration and proposals of new infrastructural projects, expert level meetings in this scope will be continued in the V4/V4+ format, also taking into account analyses of possible financing of joint projects.

CEF2 multiannual work programme (timetable of calls, budget, conditions of implementation)

Activities:

- Cooperation to implement joint EU projects (financed from CEF or Cohesion Policy funds) in the transport sector (cross-border links, multilateral projects).
- V4 collaboration in military mobility within CEF, considering that CEF 2021–2027 will include a new military mobility component (financing of dual use civil and military infrastructure).
- V4 coordination of positions in negotiating a new regulation on CEF and other detailing documents.
- Challenges to implementing investments co-financed from the CEF as a centrally managed instrument, exchange of experiences, the role of member states in CEF.
- Combining co-financing from different funds.
- Analysis of threats to the implementation of transport projects during the COVID-19 crisis, identifying and designing remedial measures and good practices to mitigate the effects of the crisis in the area of implementing transport projects.

Inland navigation and maritime policy

- Debates on improving the navigability of rivers included in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).
- Consultations on creating the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor as a convenient transport alternative for Southern European countries.
- Obtaining European financial funds to develop inland water transport in the V4 countries.

The joint objective is to ensure that the V4 countries are qualified for the highest amount of EU financing possible for cross-border infrastructural projects in general, and the planned inland waterway connection between V4 countries including Danube-Oder-Elbe link project and the development and inclusion of the Oder Waterway in the TEN-T European base network in particular.

. Accordingly, one of the more important topics of V4 meetings devoted to inland water transport will be to develop a V4 position on the TEN-T revision process.

Digital sector

Initiatives in robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI):

- Developing a V4 position on the expected legislative proposals concerning AI on the EU forum in the form of a joint non-paper.
- Conducting an analysis of V4 capabilities in robotics and AI.
- Establishing a network of technical universities and Digital Innovation Hubs in the V4 countries together with a service platform to exchange information and coordinate research on robotics and AI as well as to ensure possibilities of implementing results of this research.
- Extending the innovative procurement and digital innovation support models, including the relevant digital tools exemplified by GovTech Polska to all V4 countries. Promoting intra-V4 and external exchanges of officials, students, academics and other key technology-driving professions.
- Commencing dialogue on using AI in individual sectors of the economy in partnership with the private sector.
- A follow-up discussion on digital areas after the V4 economic congress.
- Agreeing a joint framework of the V4 on innovation and investment promotion by, inter alia, showcasing (on a dedicated platform) the technological potential of the region, especially the start-up sector.
- Holding dedicated events and promoting exchange of experience in the field of Smart City and Smart Village.

-Facilitating the cross-border collaboration of digital businesses on all levels (from SMEs to Champions) and establishing a forum for dialogue between private sector entities and the V4 governments.

Activities:

-Holding the Autumn high-level summit, if possible, during Europe's largest hackathon - HackYeah, held in Warsaw, and ensuring V4 presence in both participants base and challenge/category sponsors. Splinter events across the V4 countries are also to be considered.

-Engaging on the V4 level in the Internet Governance Forum and surrounding activities

-Organising and promoting innovative digital innovation tools such as hackathons, CTFs, game jams, service jams, edit-a-thons, start-up weekends etc.

-Signing a joint declaration on collaboration in digital innovation support, GovTech and other related fields, outlining the political priorities of the V4 countries with respect to these areas.

Initiatives in the cyber security area:

- Signing a joint declaration on mutual cooperation in cyber security, to serve as a roadmap for V4 activities – main activity areas include:

- increasing the capability for reacting to incidents by, among others, developing the management of cross-border incidents in combination with consultations, as well as conducting international exercises to improve adaptation in taxonomy, collection and analysis of digital evidence and collaboration in prosecuting cyber criminals;
- building common situational awareness in cyber space, especially by exchanging information on cyber threats in real time between national level CSIRT teams;
- developing new methods and tools to test, assess and certify ICT products, processes and services (as part of the Cyber Security Act);
- developing a new generation of cryptographic algorithms resistant to quantum computing;
- improving multilateral collaboration and national capabilities in cyber security, among others in the R&D area.

- Consultations with a view of finding topics of mutually beneficial cooperation in cyber security. These consultations will primarily take place through established channels, especially the Central European Cyber Security Platform, and may include:

- cross-border incident management;
- situational awareness;
- international exercises;
- digital evidence;
- research and development (in topics such as post-quantum cryptography);
- supply chain security;
- international law applicable to cyberspace operations.

Initiatives in the data area:

- Developing a common V4 position, in the form of a joint non-paper, on industrial data.

- Developing an analysis of joint V4 policies and actions for the use of national and European HPC networks exploiting their huge real-time capabilities in data-processing in order to handle major catastrophes (e.g. global pandemics or other serious catastrophic threats) and mitigate their harm.

- Ascertaining the current status and possibilities of coordinating activities related to national computing clouds in the V4 countries according to the "cloud federation" idea.

- In order to consolidate efforts in realising cross-border e-Government development, with a view to better EU policy implementation, developing an analysis (expert opinion) on the capability of the V4 countries to exchange information (data) between public entities in cross-border relations (G2G exchange);

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the analysis should in particular involve healthcare, research, and location data.

- Promoting and designing data exchange standards and importance of data quality relating to “high-value datasets” established by the Directive (EU) 2019/1024.

Initiatives in developing telecommunication networks

- Development of cross-border connections of telecommunication networks and building digital highways along main transport routes such as Via Carpatia.

- Cooperation to monitor and negotiate Ukraine’s release of the 700 MHz band for mobile connectivity purposes. In this respect, the initiative envisages establishing a joint committee consisting of V4 member states.

- Collaboration in matters relating to satellites and assessing the possibilities of building joint satellite infrastructure for the purposes of, among others, satellite connectivity or Earth observations.

- Strengthening V4 multilateral cooperation on the ITU forum.

- Exchange of good practices and experience in supporting the construction of modern and safe telecommunication networks.

Initiatives in the area of e-government

- Implementation of the Ministerial Declaration of V4 on the Mutual e-Government Cooperation adopted in 2019 in particular by:

- Developing common position on practical and efficient implementation of the EU Single Digital Gateway based on similar technological approach;

- Working out joint position towards incoming review of the eIDAS Regulation by identification key obstacles for cross-border electronic identification and trust services.

Collaboration in the area of finances

- Consultations on the level of **EU unit directors and heads of finance ministries of the V4 countries.**

The initiatives emerging on the EU forum and challenges in the area of finances require closer cooperation between the V4 countries to ensure that solutions adopted at EU level match the interests of states in the region.

- Due to the rising scale of customs and tax abuses and frauds relating to cross-border transactions, it is necessary to tighten administrative collaboration between customs and tax institutions of the V4 countries, in particular within the “European Compact against VAT fraud” initiative oriented on improving the efficiency of combating VAT tax fraud.

Customs services

- Consultations between heads of customs administrations of the V4 countries to discuss the possibilities for further tightening of cooperation (2021).

- Meetings of the Mineral Oil Tax Evasion group, also in the V4+ format.

- Exchange of experience and *ad hoc* activities, including joint customs operations, related to supervision of trading in dangerous substances (with particular emphasis on products containing fentanyl).
- Combating crime in the area of tobacco products, planned cooperation in an extended format (V4+) assuming involvement of international institutions (potential joint operations with EUROPOL, WCO, TAXUD).
- Continuing efforts to develop effective solutions in monitoring the movements of trucks (boxes). Establishing a working group to exchange information and experiences (best practices).
- *Ad hoc* actions utilising information exchange and agreements on reference prices to prevent underdeclaring the customs value of imported goods from specific groups.
- Continued training programme for V4 customs services – among others on using non-invasive inspection (RTG) equipment, staging operations, collaboration between mobile groups, and combating corruption.

Tax administration

- Collaboration within and outside the V4 to combat and prevent negative economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic through suitably implemented tax policies (exchange of information and national experiences).
- Collaboration within and outside the V4 to combat and prevent tax abuses and frauds and to prevent tax evasion, including:
 - strengthening and tightening cooperation between V4 member states and other EU member states as part of the “European Compact against VAT fraud” initiative aimed at improving the effectiveness of combating VAT fraud by, among others, exchanging VAT-related information;
 - strengthening cooperation in counteracting VAT avoidance and fraud, including coordinating joint operations relating to the Customs Procedure 42 (import of goods with deferred VAT collection) and intra-community transactions; a planned meeting of tax experts from the V4 countries;
 - strengthening cooperation in the transfer pricing area, a planned meeting of tax experts from the V4 countries;
 - exchange of information, experience and good practices on important domestic tax measures aimed at sealing and improvement of tax systems of the V4 countries.
- Exchange of views related to legislative and non-legislative EU initiatives related to VAT, particularly with respect to: reform of VAT rates, definitive VAT system, VAT treatment of financial and insurance services, VAT treatment of sharing economy and e-commerce, transaction based reporting and e-invoicing;
- Exchange of view related to widely understood digital economy taxation issues (raised for example in the Tax Challenges Arising from Digitalisation project managed by OECD), also with respect to:
 - taxation of digital platforms operating in the V4 countries; making an attempt to develop a common position in respect of taxation of digital platforms operating in the V4 countries;
 - taxation of sharing/gig economy in the V4 countries and tools that might contribute to limiting tax evasion using this business model; exploring the possibility of adopting a draft joint document in respect of taxation of sharing/gig economy in the V4 countries and tools that might contribute to limiting tax evasion using this business model;
 - collaboration to agree on a common position with respect to ongoing efforts in the EU to draft the consolidated corporate tax base (CCTB) Council Directive;

Collaboration of financial intelligence units of the V4 countries in the area of combating money laundering and terrorism financing

It is proposed to bolster the operational cooperation of V4 financial intelligence units through, among others, regional-level exchange of experiences relating to discovered money laundering and terrorism financing risks and developing common positions with respect to EU initiatives related to money

laundering and terrorism financing, among others during a regional meeting of experts from V4 financial intelligence units.

Cooperation in the financial services sector

- Cooperation concerning stability of the financial market: exchange of experiences and an attempt to arrive at a common position of V4/V4+ countries as part of the ongoing EU efforts relating to crisis management and cross-border integration in the banking sector; issues arising from efforts relating to the European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS) and connected with implementing the BRR2 Directive (amending the BRR Directive with a view to recovery and resolution of credit institutions and investment firms).
- Collaboration to finalise work in the EU relating to the Capital Market Union (the so-called “Next CMU”).
- Cooperation to develop new technologies on the financial market (FinTech) and the impact of FinTech on the future of the financial market – potential areas of collaboration, EU context and local experiences.

Science

Cooperation between the V4 countries within the “Horizon Europe” framework programme³

Improved competitiveness and more intense interoperation and cohesion between EU and national research systems, taking into account the importance of geographical balance.

Mission-based approach in national research and innovation financing systems of the V4 countries

V4 collaboration to exchange experience between administration officials and institutions responsible for planning, designing, financing, implementing, and monitoring research activities in each country, in particular in the context of increasing synergy between national systems and the EU. Drafting a joint document on implementing a mission-based approach in national research and innovation financing systems of the V4 countries (V4+ formats, for example V4+Sweden, to be considered).

Solutions towards extending participation in “Horizon Europe” – how to make optimum use of this potential?

- Exchange of experience on planned strategies, actions supporting best use of the potential offered by the new solutions, in particular by National Contact Points supporting the participation of national entities in the EU framework programme. Increasing the participation in “Horizon Europe” of scientists from countries underrepresented in previous collaboration programmes.
- Elaborating a common V4 position on increasing the ability to build new and join existing international collaboration networks.
- Including various stakeholders (in addition to National Contact Points) in coordinating activities to bolster the potential of national entities by opening up their contact networks and improving so-called collaborative links.
- Supporting collaboration between research/analytic centres and exchange of information to reinforce analytic potential in research and implementation areas.

Internationalisation of science and higher education (for example as regards scholarship policy and development assistance provided by the V4 countries)

Consultations on experience and best practices used by V4 institutions. Examining the possibilities of undertaking joint initiatives, including scholarship initiatives, for example in the CEEPUS programme.

³ Successor to the “Horizon 2000” programme.

Public procurement

Continuation of cooperation between public procurement offices of the V4 countries. Expert level meetings in the V4+ formula are planned.

Industrial property

Collaboration between national industrial property offices of the V4 countries will be pursued. V4 common positions will be developed on the most important aspects of industrial property under discussion by the European Commission, EU Council, European Union Industrial Property Office (EUIPO), European Patent Organisation (EPO), and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

In parallel, collaboration in the **Visegrad Patent Institute (VPI)** will be continued. Support will be provided for the operation and further development of VPI and all activities designed to improve the quality of services provided by the Institute to system users from VPI member states and their neighbours.

V4–Japan Joint Research Program

The preparation for the second joint call between Japan and V4 countries should be continued focusing on the identification of the priority areas, timing and budget allocation.

Pandemic cooperation

Encouraging the continuation of the pandemic cooperation, established in the course of tackling the COVID 19 crisis, between V4 institutions, universities and medical-research teams.

Security

Defence policy

The main objectives of the Polish Presidency in the defence area are as follows:

- Elaborating a common V4 position on the most important issues discussed on the NATO and EU fora;
- Increasing practical V4 participation in allied deterrence and defence;
- Ensuring synergy of V4 activities in developing defence potential;
- Counteracting the negative effects of COVID-19.

These objectives will be consistent with priority V4 cooperation areas found in the “Long-term Vision of the V4 Countries on Deepening Their Defence Cooperation”:

1. Establishing multinational formations and contributing to multinational forces and initiatives;
2. Harmonizing defence planning and capability development;
3. Improving joint education, training and exercises to enhance interoperability;
4. Cooperating with partners.

Activities:

- Joint activities, in line with NATO’s 360 degree approach, to increase the readiness and availability of forces to support the implementation of NATO’s core tasks. In particular consolidating the V4 military presence on the eastern flank for example by participating in one of the eFP Battlegroups and NATO’s Readiness Initiative as well as mutual involvement in NATO command and force structure elements located on the V4 territory.
- Further works on the common V4 target to develop and provide Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ) in required readiness.
- Common V4 effort during apportionment of Capability Targets 2021 and development of the V4 capabilities.
- Continued joint exercises and training to improve the interoperability of forces.
- Further improvement of cross-border and regional cooperation.
- Commencing discussions to establish the Visegrad Battle Group planned to go on stand-by in the European Union in 2023 and continue to update the V4 EU BG Concept.
- Developing a common position and coordinating activities during debate on the so-called EU Strategic Compass (including joint assessment of threats), the PESCO strategic review and the EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) review.
- Analysing the possibility of collaborating with partners in EU defence initiatives and developing defence cooperation with Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries.
- Tightening cooperation between military medical forces, defining the possibilities for V4 cooperation in case of epidemic and other crisis situations.
- Exchanging experience relating to cyber issues and space.
- Exchanging experience relating to civil and territorial defence forces.
- Tightening defence cooperation between the V4 and selected partners (V4+USA, V4+UK).

Projecting stability and NATO policy on partnerships and enlargement

Increasing the synergy of V4 activities in NATO to continue the process of NATO enlargement and stabilising/increasing the resilience of Balkan and Eastern partners.

Activities:

Coordinating V4 activities to stabilise the direct neighbourhood of the V4 region;
V4 consultations (on the level of delegations to NATO) to develop a common position on deepening collaboration between NATO and:

- Western Balkan Partners: Bosnia and Herzegovina and, as part of stability projection: Kosovo⁴ and Serbia;
- Moldova (stability projection/NATO partnerships policy);
- Georgia and Ukraine (partnerships and enlargement policy) – due to lack of short- and medium-term enlargement prospects, both countries require a special status (MAP for Georgia, EOP for Ukraine) and support for their Euro-Atlantic ambitions.

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Increasing the number of projects involving all V4 countries in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), maintaining the readiness of the Visegrad Battle Group to go on stand-by in 2023, coordinating positions (as part of the EU's MFF 2021–2027 efforts) to guarantee EPF funds for collaboration with Eastern European and Western Balkans partners. Support EU-NATO cooperation, so that European Defence strengthens the Transatlantic bond and contributes to coherent Transatlantic response to threats from all directions.

Activities:

- 1) **PESCO – exchanging experience and looking for possibilities to develop cooperation, for example by having all V4 countries participate in joint PESCO projects.** Activities to support the development of military infrastructure, simplify border crossing procedures, and ensure tax exemptions for international military mobility, including within the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).
- 2) **Analysis of the policy of collaboration with partners in EU defence initiatives.**
- 3) **Continued stand-by of the V4 Battle Group** (scheduled to go on stand-by again in 2023).
- 4) **European Peace Facility (EPF)** – EPF is an important CFSP initiative with considerable budget, which should be used not only in Africa, but also in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, based on a needs-driven approach. The V4 countries should seek a uniform position on EPF geographical balancing.

Cooperation between defence industries

Pragmatic V4 consultations to revitalise cooperation between defence industries of the V4 countries, including joint research and development of military capability projects financed from the European Defence Fund (EDF). Initiate conceptual works on common armaments programmes.

Activities:

- Efforts to intensify military and technical collaboration envisaged in the memorandum of Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian defence ministers of 26 January 2009.⁵
- Supporting the modernisation of V4 armed forces, also based on the 2022 Regional Support Assistance Programme (ReSAP).
- Undertaking and supporting activities relating to V4 collaboration in common armaments programmes.
- Continuing the (CZ) initiative of closer cooperation between the V4 countries and Austria as regards military equipment development projects which could apply for co-financing from the pilot European Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), and then from EDF.

⁴ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁵ The collaboration was to involve: weaponry (in particular research and development works), harmonisation of military parameters and procedures, and the production, sourcing and logistical support of military equipment. On the basis of the memorandum, working groups have been appointed for the following tasks: CBRN, 21st century soldiers, air defence, strategic transport, life cycle management, quality and codification; however only the last two and the air defence group remain active.

- Proceeding with ongoing projects and initiatives (e. g. the project of joint purchase of ammunition initiated during the Czech V4 Presidency).

Internal security

- **Joint V4 assessment of emerging threats** and developing effective methods to counteract them (including in the context of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on internal security in the V4 countries).
- **V4 collaboration in the civil protection area.**
- The purpose of the activities is to reinforce national and international capabilities of preventing, preparing for, and reacting to everyday events and natural and man-made disasters in the V4 countries.
- Cooperation to increase internal security of the V4 countries through more intense joint efforts of **police and border guard forces**;

Collaboration in border protection, migration and asylum policy, as well as humanitarian and development assistance

- Continued joint efforts of the V4 countries in asylum, migration, border protection and security matters is planned, including through **developing common positions on issues of key importance to the V4**, also in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Plans to lobby to include the position of V4 and possibly other like-minded states in works on the Migration and Asylum Pact, asylum reform and other initiatives undertaken by the European Commission and European Council with respect to migration and asylum**, including in connection with the epidemic situation in Europe and its vicinity. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected migration processes and has caused the need to account for health security issues in future solutions.
- As part of a comprehensive approach, considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular the worsening humanitarian situation among migrants, including refugees, it remains important **to maintain V4 engagement in activities relating to the external dimension of migration policy**, among them reinforcing the ability of third countries to manage migrations, protect borders and develop effective asylum systems, and collaboration in preventing illegal migration and combating its root causes, mainly in the countries of origin. In 2020–2021, V4 projects will be carried out in third countries (V4+Germany in Morocco relating to border management; V4 in Jordan relating to international protection, V4+Italy in Libya relating to border management).
- **Plans to lobby for the effective implementation of the new mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), while adjusting the implementation modalities to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic**, and use it to manage returns (with potential expert consultations to design mechanisms and opportunities for supporting returns from third countries).
- Monitor the process of signing status agreements with the Western Balkans countries with the view to ensure its swift conclusion where it is still ongoing and to avoid any further delays in their implementation.
- **Joint efforts to support the development of capabilities of national authorities responsible for border protection through a new dedicated instrument** (complementary to Article 61 of the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard 2.0) **within the new financial perspective** to minimise negative impact of developing the standing corps on national capabilities. Designing consistent crisis management mechanisms regulating Frontex operations in the face of extraordinary events will be an important factor in the discussion.

- Measures taken by states to suppress the spread of coronavirus restricted the free movement of persons and slowed down transport throughout Europe while also negatively affecting the functioning of the internal market. The EU members are facing the need to unblock border checkpoints and ensure an adequate balance between, internal security, health security and the free movement of goods and persons and services. In this context, **V4 exchange of experience / best practices from that period and potentially an attempt to design possible methods of dealing with similar challenges in the future. An important component in V4 talks will be the exchange of best practices and ensuring coordination on the EU external borders, while simultaneously ensuring the free movement of goods**
- The **“Joint Efforts 2021” exercises** for the Border Guard will be held in the first half of 2021 – another edition of the “Joint Efforts” staff exercise dealing with the migration crisis response, including simulation of commanding a joint V4 police and border guard battalion to prepare for supporting activities on the territory of a third country or possibly on the territory of an EU member state in reaction to potential mass migration. Due to the current situation related to COVID-19, the exercise is projected to involve factors relating to epidemiological threats and the occurrence of an epidemic.
- **The annual joint analytic report on illegal migration in the region will be drafted and a meeting of expert analysts held**, discussing the contribution of the V4 countries and formulating joint conclusions for the report (the first half of 2021).
- More intense collaboration in the Migration Analysis Centre is planned.

Society

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to which all V4 countries are parties. This Convention adopted in the framework of the Council of Europe is undoubtedly the cornerstone of the human rights protection in Europe. The Visegrad Group should thus contribute to the strengthening of Council of Europe which will help to maintain for the future and revitalize the positive ideals with which the V4 countries welcomed the return of freedom and democracy after the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Health

The global COVID-19 pandemic has shown that mankind cannot feel entirely safe from a biological point of view. In these times, more than ever, particular attention should be paid to the advancement of research and to seeking solutions for managing healthcare systems to effectively respond to the need for mass response in the event of a previously unknown health risk.

It is important that (national and international) health institutions and organisations worldwide work together in this area. The Visegrad Group is one of the suitable formats for this type of activity.

There is a need for coordinated public health response and risk management measures. The priority should be Needs Assessment and Planning the Public Health Response for the pandemic situation.

The primary healthcare priority of the Polish Presidency will be the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19.

The Polish Presidency will focus on cooperation with V4 partners in exchanging information on coronavirus research, the work to develop a vaccine, organisation of the healthcare systems, and good practices used in individual countries aimed at reducing the spread of the virus.

The first part of the Polish Presidency (2020) is the time to respond to the current situation, while the second half, i.e. the first half of 2021, gives hope for an improved epidemiological situation and will provide a good opportunity to summarise the actions taken by individual V4 countries to combat COVID-19.

COVID-19 has demonstrated how critical is the ability to adapt processes of the health care systems in the time of crisis. In this sense, the Polish Presidency of V4 will proactively increase sharing of best practices of health care policies and support cooperation between national stakeholders and experts at all levels. V4 plays also an important role to simplify interconnection of national information systems in this regard.

1. Drug policy

The Polish Presidency intends to follow up the recent discussion of the successive V4 presidencies on the availability of drugs. An in-depth exchange of information will be crucial, on measures used to address drug shortages in other countries and, in the context of COVID-19, on research on the virus and a vaccine, and the distribution of medicines and active substances from third countries. Joint efforts to advocate EU funding for research and innovation allowing for development of the V4 pharmaceutical sector.

Work will be continued on the Fair and Affordable Pricing initiative (FaAP) (V4 & Lithuania), an international, multi-annual project aimed at ensuring fair and affordable prices of pharmaceutical products.

2. Cooperation in emergency medical services

An in-depth discussion on tools enabling cross-border cooperation in the area of emergency medical services. Exchanging experience as regards the differences in EMS systems (especially in the context of

cross-border cooperation) in individual countries and as regards the functioning of cross-border emergency medical service agreements in the V4 countries; and the role of the emergency medical service system in the fight against the epidemic.

3. Medical staff

Existing legislation and directions for changes made by the V4 countries as regards access to medical professions (physician, dental practitioner, nurse) for citizens who have acquired their professional qualifications outside the EU.

Measures to reduce the administrative burden and to ensure migration of competences in the context of possible changes in the need for creating new medical professions such as physician assistant and medical secretary, as well as increasing the competences of nurses (exchange of experiences in this area).

Solutions for staff shortages in a situation of mass epidemics.

Culture

The epidemic situation in Europe has presented cultural practitioners and those responsible for cultural policy with unique, new challenges. It will have a fundamental bearing on the subjects raised during the Polish Presidency. We are planning to introduce into the programme a platform for exchanging experience and knowledge with respect to the crisis's impact on the functioning of the cultural sector but above all to measures and mechanisms to support the sector. Using new media and the internet will be of particular importance in strengthening the sector during the crisis and in promoting cultural participation through such means among V4 societies. Also discussed will be the economic aspects and the role of the cultural sector in mitigating the economic downturn in the region. These issues will be addressed by both experts and ministers of culture at an annual meeting in spring 2021.

Regardless of the current circumstances, the Polish Presidency's plans to include expanding the existing areas of cooperation and implementing projects under the auspices of V4 ministers of culture. Research on the region's cultural heritage and identity as well as its popularisation remain an important element of the V4's work. The Working Group of Experts on Cultural Heritage of the V4 countries will continue its operation and hold another Heritage Forum of Central Europe in Cracow. Projects will also continue promoting achievements in individual artistic fields (e.g. the PACE V4 project, which involves joint presentations of performing arts worldwide; V4 design as part of the Rings in Water project; and film art through projects such as Visegrad Cinema Days).

Activities:

- V4 Heritage Academy, Management of UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Sites in Visegrad countries – 2021;
- Conference on EU funds in culture;
- 3rd International Music Festival of Central-Eastern Europe EUFONIE- November 2020;
- National Libraries Representatives Meeting;
- 6th Heritage Forum of Central Europe "Heritage and Economics" ;
- Meeting of V4 Ministers of Culture - May/June 2021.

Youth

Continuation of cooperation on the youth of the V4, Eastern Partnership, and Western Balkan countries is an important element in building friendly and good neighbourly relations in the region. In this area, the **social inclusion of young people** is the priority theme of the Polish Presidency. The coronavirus pandemic

and its economic and social consequences, including the acceleration of technological change in education, the labour market, and broadly understood social life, have shown that ensuring equal opportunities for those at risk of exclusion remains one of the factors that determine societies' resilience to crises.

The Ministry of National Education plans to organise a seminar bringing together representatives of ministries, youth workers and representatives of civil society (youth councils and youth organisations) from the V4, Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries. The purpose of the seminar will be to exchange experiences and good practices in the area of actions which increase the social and civic participation of young people at risk of exclusion and which ensure their involvement in decision-making processes and better preparation for entry into the labour market. In view of pandemic-induced restrictions, the following themes will be particularly important: addressing the digital exclusion of children and young people, infrastructure constraints, lack of equipment, and the unavailability of internet services, enhancing the digital skills of youth workers, and responding to changes in the labour market.

Education

As part of the annual Congress for the Development of the Education System, a V4 and Eastern Partnership panel will be held in Autumn 2020. The panel is planned to take interim stock of Erasmus+ 2014-2020, the European Union programme for education, training, youth, and sport, in the context of V4 and Eastern Partnership countries. The panel will also reflect on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on learning mobility and the need for adapting its cooperation formats to the new reality, e.g. for a greater use of virtual mobility, extending the use of eTwinning to other target groups, and implementing partnership projects remotely. It will be an occasion to share experience gained during the disruption caused by the pandemic and consequently obtained from distance learning including the use of relevant European platforms.

Justice

1. Exchange of experience and information with the V4 countries on problems with the implementation of Art. 6.1 and Art. 13 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights of Fundamental Freedoms in the context of the **excessive length of judicial proceedings** and the effectiveness of the domestic remedy against the excessive length of proceedings. A meeting⁶ of national experts who specialise in the monitoring of these issues and the training of judges; developing good practices with respect to addressing the excessive length of judicial proceedings and to using an effective remedy against the excessive length.

2. Developing best practices in carrying out the tasks of the Central Authorities of the V4 countries (or V4 + Bulgaria and Romania), set up in accordance with EU Service Regulation No. 1393/2007 of 13 November 2007 and EU Taking of Evidence Regulation No. 1206/2001 of 28 May 2001. A meeting of the V4 countries' Central Authorities; exchange of experience and information on practical problems related to the execution of their tasks (in particular as regards the interpretation of the concept of a civil and commercial case and the execution of requests from respective Member States' courts to establish the address of a person residing in another V4 Member State); a meeting of experts on the future cooperation

⁶ Should the COVID-19 pandemic persist, it is proposed that the proposed exchanges be held in the form of videoconferences.

between the V4 Member States and the United Kingdom's authorities after the end of the transition period based on the Agreement of 24 January 2020 on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the EU.

3. Developing best practices in the cooperation between the contact points of the European Judicial Network in Civil and Commercial Matters (EJN). Consultations with V4 countries' EJN contact points (or V4 + EJN contact points of Bulgaria and Romania); exchange of information and experience in practical problems related to the execution of EJN contact points' tasks.

4. Preparing the V4's initiative to take action by the EU to make it easier for citizens to reduce (at a cross-border basis) the effects of **identity theft**, if and when the competent authority has recognised this fact. The purpose of such a joint V4 initiative would be to provide the basis for implementing effective cross-border cooperation mechanisms including diffusion of information about identity theft in relevant public registers and to ensure that this information can be taken into account under national law. Action to bring about effective practical protection of the interests of EU citizens (joint action by the V4 countries would increase the chances for such an initiative within the EU).

5. "153+1" **Cyber security** competition Carried out in a modern CTF (capture the flag) format: providing participants with tasks without indicating the only right path towards a solution, which allows the participants to find a solution to the task using a path unforeseen by the organisers, scored equally with the "predicted path of solution". Available on the website, all tasks encourage participants to make use of IT knowledge and tools (combining theory and the ability to apply their knowledge in practice). It is dedicated to post-primary school learners (secondary and vocational schools as well as technical colleges) at the final stage prior to studies (higher education). Objectives: 1. to strengthen the region's defence against cyber-attacks by educating young people (the region's cyber security depends directly on the number and skills of specialists there); 2. to integrate young people in the V4 region; 3. to develop cooperation and to share experiences in cyber security in the V4 region; 4. to make young people in the V4 region interested in cyber security, a high-margin sector of the economy (the possibilities for creating numerous start-ups in this sector in the future and for the region's economic growth).

6. A conference on cyber security in the V4 region (under a working title: "Cyber security for justice"). Its goal is to share experiences in: i. prosecuting cyber criminals in individual V4 countries; ii. changes in law on cyber crime in the V4 countries; iii. securing public administration infrastructure against cyber threats; iv. protecting citizens and young people against new threats such as: cyber violence, sexting, patostreaming, hate speech, minors' access to pornography, etc.; v. implementing innovative IT solutions in the prison system, the judiciary, prosecutor's offices, and other public administration units (to improve both IT and physical security). Additional goal: promoting IT education and increasing awareness of cyber threats among V4 young people and citizens. It is planned that the final of the "153+1" competition (mentioned in point 5) and presenting awards will take place during the Conference.

7. The V4 Justice Ministers' meeting with regard to the implementation of common procedures to protect the role of family in contemporary international community, in the context of current challenges resulting from the area of global development.

8. Consultations about good practices and legislative solutions related to the functioning of the judiciary, including the **functioning of courts during the COVID-19 pandemic**. These measures can take the form of a one-off video conference / teleconference or regular meetings in this formula (depending on the epidemiological situation). They will be implemented at working level.

9. Exploring the feasibility of the establishment of a **Visegrad Institute of Comparative Law** with a mission to provide expertise for V4 states in the area of comparative law and legislation as well as foreign and international law.

Social policy

1) Coordinating the V4 countries' positions on the EU social and employment agenda (in particular, initiatives in the area of the European minimum wage and the European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme).

2) Challenges facing the modern labour market:

- the future of the labour market, also in the context of automation, digitalisation and robotisation;
- atypical forms of employment;
- promoting equal opportunities for men and women on the labour market;
- staying longer on the labour market;
- creating high-quality and new type of jobs;
- forecasting demand for specific occupations;
- updating rules for the operation of labour market offices and institutions (in the context of changing socio-economic realities);
- creating solutions that will address challenges related to the effects of intra-EU migration of employees for migrants' countries of origin.

Activities:

- Platform Work Summit (EC), 2020 (possible declaration).

3) Measures for active and dignified ageing:

- activation on the labour market;
- educating senior citizens;
- developing tele-care (deinstitutionalisation of social assistance);
- preventing solitude and isolation of the elderly;

4) Measures to improve the situation of persons with disabilities:

- using new technological solutions to ensure greater participation of persons with disabilities in social life;
- support instruments for persons with disabilities (institutional and non-institutional);
- raising public awareness about persons with disabilities and mental health problems;
- gathering information and statistical data on persons with disabilities and the implementation of related policies.

Goals (for points 2-4): sharing opinions, experiences, and good practices, possibly adopting joint conclusions or proposals.

5) Pro-family measures:

- countering population ageing (measures to increase fertility rates).

Over the last ten years (2009-2018), fertility rates have increased in seven European countries only: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, and Germany. In all these countries the rates have risen from very low levels (from 1.3-1.4 to 1.5-1.7). In all remaining countries, fertility rates have remained at the same level or have decreased.

- preventing family breakdown (promoting stable relationships and preventing divorces);
- family as a source of human capital and the development of innovation;
- cooperation with pro-family organisations in Europe, e.g. ELFAC (European Large Families Confederation) and FAFCE (Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe).

Goal: sharing good practices and reaching a common position at the EU and UN.

Sport

Continuation of the V4 cooperation in sport among sports associations in the V4 countries, for example during the Olympic Hopes Tournaments that take place in individual V4 states (a lot of attention will be devoted to problems that TNO organisers face due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Circumstances permitting, Cycling Associations in the V4 countries will continue the Visegrad Bicycle Race project, the V4 Future Sports Festival and the Central European Diplomatic Football Cup of 6 nations (Germany and Austria included).

Tourism

Tourism has been particularly badly affected by the pandemic brought about by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which is why during the Polish Presidency it will be of key importance for all V4 members to seek methods and effective measures to ensure the necessary support (financial and methodological) for entities operating in the broadly understood tourism industry.

The tasks launched during the Czech Presidency will be continued, e.g. strengthening cooperation with private travel agencies in and outside the V4 region. However, the absolute priority will be to seek tourism financing from many sources, including the European Union, for example as part of the work on the budget and the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2021-2027 and the planned Recovery package.

The V4 will cooperate in tourism marketing and common promotional measures carried out primarily by the V4 states' national tourism organisations. Titled "Discover Central Europe", the cooperation is based on a marketing plan that is agreed upon and signed every year. It will be necessary to place more emphasis on the European market, as well as continuing activities carried out in previous years on selected remote markets. The current priorities related to promotional measures primarily in China, India, the US, Rep. of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the Middle East countries will be subject to a thorough analysis.

In order to carry out the tasks, the most effective marketing tools will be used, including promotional roadshows, presentations, industry workshops, e-learning platforms, and online promotional campaigns.

The V4 countries will carry out actions to increase cross-border tourism between neighbouring regions, for example by developing common cross-border tourism products. These products will focus on the most famous tourist attractions, such as towns and cities, architecture, UNESCO World Heritage sites, castles and palaces, nature, as well as culinary tourism, active tourism, health tourism, spa and wellness.

Other spheres of cooperation

Parliamentary cooperation

Relations between the parliaments of the V4 countries are an important part of dialogue between the V4 countries. An increased frequency of high-level meetings in the recent years will be accompanied by efforts to intensify contacts between parliamentary committees, and simultaneously to enhance cooperation between offices of the V4 parliaments. Efforts will be made to strengthen the current cooperation and to develop new forms of cooperation between the V4 parliaments, as well as coordinating actions undertaken under the EU agenda (e.g. increasing the role of national parliaments in the EU in the context of the Conference on the future of Europe).

As part of the V4 parliamentary cooperation, there are plans to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad cooperation.

Cooperation between local authorities

The Polish Presidency will promote the development of cooperation between various levels of local authorities in the V4 countries. The Presidency will support joint V4 actions promoting the development of collaboration between local authorities, cross-border cooperation, and sharing V4 experience in this area with Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries.

Statistics

During the Polish Presidency the Statistics Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny – GUS) will continue intensive cooperation with national statistical institutes in the V4 countries (cooperation is based on the “Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation among the statistical institutes of the Visegrad Group countries,” which was adopted in April 2018).

Activities:

Implementing the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation adopted by the statistical institutes of the V4;

Sharing knowledge, experiences, and good practices in statistics;

Intensifying cooperation in statistics between the V4 countries. Analysing i.a. the GVC framework and the share of foreign added value in gross exports;

Implementing joint statistical projects and development activities;

Promoting the V4 countries’ statistical publications.
