

Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2026 – June 2027)

“V4 a Stronger Europe” – Together for a Stronger Europe

Slovak’ seventh presidency of the Visegrad Group, the V4, comes in unprecedented times. We are witnessing the substantial erosion of international relations, which were founded in respect for international law and, consequently, predictability. At the same time, it is evident that security concerns and the sense of threat are increasingly determining the onset and course of intergovernmental negotiations and interactions between countries. The Russian aggression against Ukraine, still ongoing four years later, armed conflicts in many regions of the world and trade wars of increasing frequency present challenges that threaten both regional and global stability. No state can face these challenges alone; they must be tackled **in cooperation with our closest partners**. In this vein, the V4 countries will support efforts aimed at bringing back lasting peace in Europe, particularly through diplomatic engagements, supporting Ukraine and exercising international pressure on Russia to uphold long-lasting standards of international law and UN Charter.

Among the V4 countries, cooperation takes place within the framework of their European Union and NATO membership. For more than 20 years, the V4’s aim has been to contribute jointly to fulfilling the objectives of these international structures. It is vital that we operate in a predictable environment within a strong, independent and competitive Europe that is building strategic partnerships and globally engaged. The Slovak Presidency believes the V4 countries should continue to aspire to offer joint responses to the challenges facing the EU and NATO, thereby strengthening their capacity for action. This is reflected in the Presidency’s motto: **“V4 a Stronger Europe” – to contribute jointly and constructively to the unity, strength and synergies of the European Union and NATO**. The V4 countries share similar interests and positions in a number of areas, and these can be defended or promoted through joint actions. The Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore propose a variety of meetings, such as joint coordination meetings on areas of common interest ahead of European Council meetings or Council of the EU meetings in their various configurations. The aim of the Slovak V4 Presidency is to engage, discuss and seek solutions in the V4+ format with strategic partners and key countries in the EU as well as outside, such as Germany, France, United States, United Kingdom, Western Balkan countries and Türkiye.

The Visegrad Group is the format of regional cooperation commonly used by the countries of Central Europe. Over the 35 years of its existence, it has made a major contribution to good neighbourly relations at both the highest political level and at the people-to-people one. Bearing in mind the Kroměříž Declaration of the Heads of Government (12 May 2004), the Slovak Presidency of the V4 will adhere to and utilise the principles and mechanisms of mutual cooperation among the V4 countries, set out in the annex to the declaration, **in order to further deepen understanding and partnership in the region**. The International Visegrad Fund has an invaluable role to play here and supporting it will be one of the objectives of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group. Adopting a coordinated approach to promoting common positions and interests among the V4 is key to ensuring the prosperity and stability of the region as a whole.

The structured dialogue among the **V4 parliaments** on EU and foreign affairs related issues constitutes a significant dimension of the Visegrad Group on the level of the Speakers of Parliaments, as well as on the level of the parliamentary committees. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group intends to continue the practice of previous presidencies in enhancing the parliamentary cooperation on both levels, in V4 only and V4+ formats.

The recent fundamental shift in the international environment has been accompanied by a complete change in the way actors are perceived. **The transatlantic partnership** is the cornerstone of the foreign policy of the Visegrad Group countries. In the light of the developments on the international stage we need to recommit our efforts to maintaining and further deepening ties with partners in North America. The US is not only a key element of our security and defence, and a major player in Europe's security architecture, but also an important trade and investment partner with great potential for cooperation in the energy sector. The aim of the Slovak V4 Presidency will be to seek to revive US interest in the Central European region, including through political contacts and broader consultations. The Visegrad Group will also work with Canada to deepen its engagement in and understanding of the V4 countries and our region.

In recent years, **the Indo-Pacific** region has become the world's **geopolitical and geo-economic centre of gravity**. Each of the V4 countries has of course responded to these changes. The aim of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will be to seek to revitalise traditional and time-tested partnerships with countries in the region, particularly with Japan and the Republic of Korea. There is also scope for joint engagement by the V4 countries in the V4+ format with India and China.

Following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the emergence of the multipolar world, there was great emphasis on the role of **multilateralism** as a key instrument in international relations, yet it is now being dismantled. One of the long-term priorities of the Visegrad Group countries must therefore be to ensure the effective functioning of multilateralism, with the United Nations playing a central role. Effective multilateralism guarantees mutual interaction between countries based on equality; regardless of the size, power or economic performance of the country. The Slovak V4 Presidency will seek to contribute actively to discussions about reforming the UN Security Council, so the interests of the Visegrad Group countries are reflected in the overall direction of the discussions.

A strong Europe is in the interests of every country in the Visegrad Group. **The programme of the Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore be based on four interlinked pillars**. The first focuses on fostering competitiveness, preparing the EU's new multiannual financial framework, and on energy. EU enlargement policy is a long-term priority for the V4 countries and an investment in further developing the continent. Recent discussions within the EU have concentrated on the accession process for candidate countries, as well as on internal EU reform. The second pillar of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will therefore focus specifically on enlargement. Sectoral policies are the key element of the third pillar, targeting police cooperation, defence cooperation and infrastructure links. While the fourth pillar is concerned with people, well-being, relationship building and connections between people.

I. Together for a stronger, competitive Europe

The competitiveness and resilience of the EU and its Member States have recently been the centre of attention in negotiations in Brussels and Luxembourg, as well as in the media and society, spilling over into domestic policies. It is therefore natural that these issues will also be a priority during the Slovak Presidency of the V4. Here the focus will be on systematic coordination between the participating countries with regard to the preparation review and simplification of the European policies and the EU-level legislative initiatives that have a major impact on the region's industrial competitiveness. Particular emphasis will be placed on identifying common ground between national priorities and promoting interests in industrial decarbonisation, energy-intensive sectors, the transformation of the automotive industry, and the establishment of realistic regulatory frameworks that take into account the specific characteristics of the industrial make-up of Central European countries. Further emphasis will also be placed on ensuring secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials, which are key to industrial and energy transition and to the development of strategic value chains. The focus will primarily be on solutions that foster technological development and investment and maintain industrial production in the region. It is the Slovak Presidency's ambition to strengthen coordination and underpin a common V4 approach to the forthcoming revision of the renewable energy (RED III) and emissions trading scheme (ETS) directives to ensure that the specific nature of the Central European countries is taken into account as much as possible.

Slovakia will hold the Presidency of the Visegrad Group during a period of key negotiations on the new **EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** for 2028–2034. Following the position of the Friends of Cohesion, the emphasis will be on coordinating the V4 countries in efforts to ensure sufficient resources for policies stemming from Treaty obligations, such as Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which play a fundamental role in promoting convergence and growth. These policies should retain their central position in the new MFF.

The new financial framework is being radically revamped by the proposals of the European Commission: the traditional policies are being streamlined into a single new instrument and EU Member States will draw down funds through the **National and Regional Partnership Plan (NRPP)**. Preparing this key document for future use of the EU funds will require strong coordination at the national level and extensive cooperation and consensus between both national and local representatives as well as socio-economic partners. Hence the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will seek to provide a platform for the V4 countries to actively coordinate their positions, including assessing whether this approach is the right way forward and if it is enhancing their involvement in shaping the legislative rules for the NRPP at EU level. We advocate strengthening the position of existing policies, particularly Cohesion policy and the CAP. The aim of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group is therefore to contribute to a clear, impartial, non-discriminatory and transparent framework for the rules, whether it is a single rule for all the funds or placed in separate regulations, whilst ensuring sufficient flexibility for Member States. That will lead to simpler and more effective use of EU

resources, benefiting the development and progress of the EU as a whole, whilst also supporting the development of the V4 countries and regions.

The newly proposed **European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)** is set to play in the new MFF a central role in fostering European competitiveness. The future of industry in the V4 countries and elsewhere will also depend on the effective utilisation of resources from this strategic EU instrument. To increase participation and foster capacity-building across the EU, specific measures and related incentives should be introduced for improving the access of less developed countries and less experienced entities to competitive calls. The Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore concentrate on coordinating approaches to the preparation of advisory and coordination mechanisms to support the implementation of the ECF. Strengthening the role of Member States in these processes is of particular importance.

On the revenue side of the next MFF, V4 countries are open to discussing proposals for new own resources that would effectively ease the pressure on the Member States' budgets. These discussions must be linked to the overall MFF negotiations. Any new own resources must be genuine, fair and not regressive (i.e. leading to a disproportionate burden on less prosperous Member States), without adding administrative complexity. It is also essential that the V4 consistently maintains and clearly communicates its firm position on the non-renewal of the correction mechanism (rebates), as agreed in 2020.

Given current geopolitical developments, it is important for the V4 countries to re-establish and strengthen **energy cooperation** and to coordinate jointly on issues of energy security and supply. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will therefore concentrate on the energy security of V4 countries as well as the wider Central European region. A key priority of the Presidency will be to promote an open dialogue to **ensure stable and affordable energy supplies**, as these are essential for the functioning of the economy and the daily lives of the inhabitants of the V4 countries.

The landlocked countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia have long faced specific challenges linked to limited access to diversified energy sources. Hence the Slovak Presidency will advocate for closer coordination in the **development of energy infrastructure**, which is central to diversification and strengthening the resilience of the region as a whole. Discussions will focus on the **modernisation of existing energy networks** to enable the effective integration of new energy sources, including hydrogen, and support the integration of renewables, thereby securing mutual benefits for all V4 countries.

In discussions on natural gas supplies, the Slovak Presidency will direct its attention **to developing and strengthening cross-border interconnections and removing bottlenecks** to improve the region's ability to respond flexibly to disruptions or fluctuations in supply. Discussions will also consider the potential use of Polish LNG terminals, which could contribute significantly to the diversification of gas supplies in the V4 countries.

After years of stagnation, the **nuclear energy** sector is beginning to revive, particularly in relation to the necessary transition to zero-emission energy sources. The V4 countries support the use of nuclear energy, as it plays a crucial role both in our decarbonisation efforts and

ensuring safe and affordable energy. The Slovak V4 Presidency will strive for joint coordination among the V4 countries, to ensure in particular that nuclear energy enjoys the same status and benefits as renewable energy sources. It will also seek to improve access to funding for nuclear projects in the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034. Negotiations within the V4 format will provide a suitable platform for exchanging experiences, particularly regarding operational safety, the modernisation of existing facilities and the preparation of new projects. The V4 countries have long-standing experience in this field, which they are ready to share. Discussions will also focus on the long-term management of spent fuel, supply chain cooperation and the possibility of coordination on development of small modular reactors and the strengthening of regulatory frameworks, which are key to the sustainable and safe development of nuclear energy in the region.

Environmental quality and climate policies are increasingly coming to the fore and affecting industrial production and the competitiveness of Member States, as well as the EU as a whole. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will focus on coordinating the V4 countries in an effort to revise EU climate policy, particularly the greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme for buildings, road transport and other sectors, known as ETS2, with the aim of preparing common positions and activities relating to the revision of the ETS Directive. Identifying potential like-minded countries and intensifying joint diplomatic activities directed towards these countries with the aim of jointly promoting the same positions will also form part of the Slovak Presidency objectives. Another topic of discussion will be the coordination and promotion of common V4 positions on the revision of national targets and flexibilities in the EU climate policy framework legislative package. **The protection of nature, biodiversity and the landscape** remain a highly topical issue, particularly in relation to the European Natura 2000 network of protected areas, the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the protection of plant and animal species. Here the aim is to work together to shape and promote nature conservation objectives that improve rural development and public health as well as the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. The Slovak Presidency will also build on and enhance existing cooperation on V4 **geoparks**. The positions will be also coordinated regarding the **environmental omnibus** package including further common proposals (i.e. packaging waste) that have a potential to bring forward the simplification of legislation and reduction of administrative burden. In this regard, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will strive to develop a common V4 position on the upcoming Circular Economy Act.

The automotive industry accounts for a significant proportion of industry in the V4 countries and is undergoing a period of major transformation owing to geopolitical pressures and the need to meet climate targets. The Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore advocate for more intensive coordination and the preparation of joint initiatives to improve the competitiveness and resilience of the automotive industry, whilst enabling effective transition to the use of alternative fuels ensuring technological neutrality (primarily through electromobility, but with adequate flexibilities for European manufacturers to stay competitive) and the development of the necessary infrastructure. The main focus will be on mutual cooperation and the coordination of common positions and initiatives, building on both the existing legislation (e.g. the revision of the regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, CO₂ emission standards

for new vehicles) and new EU legislation (e.g. the *Battery Booster Strategy* and the regulation on green corporate fleets). Here exchanging experience in building charging infrastructure and alternative fuel refuelling stations will be key (including on the construction of core infrastructure as part of the TEN-T network for cars, light commercial vehicles and heavy-duty vehicles), as will sharing countries' insights and approaches to developing new ecosystems and the technological upgrading of the automotive industry (e.g. the battery ecosystem).

Technological independence is another key area of competitiveness. The Slovak V4 Presidency will focus on supporting and deepening regional cooperation in building a **semiconductor ecosystem**, concentrating on strengthening the resilience of value chains and enhancing the use of technology in industry in the V4 countries. Discussions will centre around identifying the potential for cooperation between national chip competence centres and industrial partners so as to create complementary regional value chains. The ambition of the Slovak V4 Presidency is to help bridge the gap between research, innovation and industrial deployment. The V4 region has the potential to be a useful partner in shaping European semiconductor policy.

A functioning **agricultural sector** is a key pillar of self-sufficiency and competitiveness. Here the aim of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will be to help achieve a sustainable, modernised agricultural sector, capable of responding to current and future challenges and of competing at the EU and global level. The central theme will be preparing for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2027 and promoting common interests and priorities relating to CAP at the EU level. Given the combined external import pressures and variation in production costs, the Slovak V4 Presidency will seek to identify common elements relating to the CAP post-2027 with a view to promoting them during the EU negotiations. Discussions during the Presidency will centre around exchanging experiences in drafting the proposed NRPPs, as well as preparations for potential crisis situations and crisis payments.

The Visegrad Group countries have long highlighted the growing distortions in the application of the EU's internal agricultural production standards to imports from third countries and recurrent market crises. These factors have a **significant impact on farmers in Central Europe**, weaken the competitiveness of domestic producers, destabilise agricultural commodity markets and pose risks to the EU's long-term food security. The Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore focus on strengthening coordination among V4 countries in addressing market crises and disruptions to the internal market caused by excessive, price-distorting imports from third countries, should such a situation arise. During the preparatory meetings the Slovak V4 Presidency will also take into account the upcoming new EU regulations (FRM, PRM). Particular emphasis will be placed on a coordinated approach by the V4 countries as part of the European agenda with the aim of promoting more effective measures to protect the EU internal market when needed, ensuring fair competitive conditions for European farmers, and ensuring that imports from third countries comply with production and environmental animal welfare, sanitary and phytosanitary standards of the EU.

At European policy level, the Slovak Presidency will support a joint approach by the V4 countries to advocating protective measures for Member States sharing a border with Ukraine and affected by high levels of imports of agricultural commodities that cause significant disruption to regional markets. Should imports of sensitive products cause serious market distortions, the aim will be to promote the use of the available EU trade and market policy instruments in full compliance with the EU acquis, including safeguard clauses, automatic stabilisation mechanisms and the possibility of regionally targeted measures to enable an appropriate and rapid response to the disproportionate impact of such imports on the agricultural markets of Central European countries. At the same time, the V4 will underline the importance of facilitating the gradual alignment of Ukraine with EU standards.

The Slovak V4 Presidency will also focus on the planned revision of the EU legal framework on **unfair trading practices (UTP)** and coordinating the V4 countries' common positions on banning the sale of agricultural products at below-production costs. On the revision of the UTP Directive, it will advocate for uniform harmonisation that ensures UTP inspections can be carried out within the framework of cross-border cooperation.

The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group intends to promote **sustainable forest management** and, in this context, seek for the solution on how to prevent further fragmentation of policies related to forests and forestry at the EU level. Focus will also be on adapting forests to climate change to safeguard forest health, resilience and productivity and the provision of ecosystem services and on how the EU framework can support the achievement of this goal.

Approaches to **sewerage and municipal wastewater treatment** are very similar in the V4 countries, with comparable technical and technological infrastructure (sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants), and the challenges they face are much the same as in other EU Member States. The challenge in the V4 countries lies in implementing new approaches to municipal wastewater treatment, particularly energy-neutral wastewater treatment plants, integrated management plans for stormwater and municipal wastewater, the introduction of quaternary treatment in areas sensitive to **micropollutant pollution**, along with extended producer responsibility for products containing micropollutants. The Slovak V4 Presidency will focus on strengthening cooperation in this area, especially through the exchange of experiences and approaches to the creation of national implementation programmes and the search for a common approach to extended producer responsibility in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries for products containing micropollutants. This will involve sharing opinions on harmonising the approach to introducing extended producer responsibility across the V4 countries.

Climate change is causing **major changes to the water cycle within the environment**, resulting in extreme events such as floods and severe droughts. The most affected areas of society include food security for the population, drinking water supplies, public safety in the event of extreme flooding and renewable energy. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will therefore focus on sharing opinions on the *“European Integrated Framework for Climate Resilience”* adaptation package, which is to be unveiled in the fourth quarter of 2026. Discussions will centre around water management and water protection, including the “ageing”

water infrastructure and required maintenance. Improving the resilience of agricultural production to drought and extreme weather events is another key topic, to be addressed through exchanging experiences in water management in agricultural landscapes and support for measures to enhance the ability of agricultural systems to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

Science, research and innovation are the drivers of greater competitiveness. The V4 countries have long sought to strengthen their position within the European Research Area, particularly through greater participation in the EU framework programmes and improving research excellence. The Slovak V4 Presidency will seek to coordinate positions on the preparation of the EU's Tenth Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, the successor to the Horizon Europe programme (FP10). Emphasis will be placed on strengthening cooperation in research infrastructures, such as within the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). The aim of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will be to identify specific research and innovation themes in which V4 countries share high levels of expertise and where collaboration would benefit all, building also on long-term cooperation networks at the broader macro-regional level, such as BIOEAST. There is **scope for exchanging experiences on the computerisation and digitalisation** of public administration. Here the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group plans to tackle issues relating to the support for **cyber security** measures and promoting the ethical, responsible and effective **use of artificial intelligence within the V4 countries**. Particular attention will be paid to enhancing innovative capacity and economic competitiveness (e.g. through advanced AI systems, including agentic applications, AI laboratories and testing environments, including regulatory sandboxes) and on exchanging experiences of the implementation of EU funds in informatisation and digitalisation. The Presidency will support coordination among V4 countries on AI compute infrastructure, including EuroHPC JU initiatives (like AI factories), shared testing resources and support for industrial deployment. Particular attention should be paid to the exchange of best practices in the deployment of trustworthy AI, in line with European AI initiatives and respective national AI strategies. **The digitisation of education** is key to educating a new generation in preparation for life in the 21st century and the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group sees this as offering potential for further cooperation among the V4 countries. Key topics will include the digitisation of education, the use of AI in education, cyber security in schools and legislating on young people's access to social media. Cooperation in higher education is particularly relevant, given the similar challenges faced by the V4 countries in the areas of inclusion, internationalisation and the modernisation of degree programmes. During the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group, cooperation on talent mobility will be guided by up-to-date legislative frameworks in the V4 countries that support academic, virtual and practical student mobility, as well as doctoral school partnerships and joint supervision of doctoral theses and promote the attractiveness of academic careers and university staff mobility. Particular attention should also be given to strengthening the international visibility and competitiveness of higher education institutions, including those in the V4 region, by supporting their active participation in joint European initiatives, expanding strategic partnerships, and further enhancing student and staff mobility within both V4 and broader EU frameworks.

II. EU enlargement as an investment in a stronger Europe

Enlargement policy is generally seen as a **strategic investment** into Europe's peace, prosperity, stability and security. It was the V4 countries, over 22 years ago, that were first to experience the benefits brought by EU accession. The enlargement process has to be effective and dynamic so as to provide candidate countries with a credible European perspective and the necessary incentives to implement reforms. One of the aims of the Slovak V4 Presidency is to **stimulate discussion on the enlargement process**. Enlargement is not merely about admitting new members but is also related to internal reforms of the EU's functioning. A key development in this area is the forthcoming publication of the European Commission's Communication on an in-depth review of the impact of EU enlargement on individual policies, which has long been anticipated and is awaited with a great interest. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will concentrate on coordinating the priorities of the V4 countries aimed at ensuring the EU enlargement process continues on the principle of merit without undue delay, whilst ensuring that the Union and candidate countries are fully prepared.

The Western Balkans region has long been a priority area of the political investment of the V4 countries, and we have built up a good reputation among our partners. Since 2004 the Visegrad Group countries have reaped the benefits of EU membership, which is why all four are staunch supporters of enlargement policy. We view EU enlargement as a means of consolidating stability and prosperity not only within the region but across the whole of Europe. The accession process for the Western Balkan countries has become protracted. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group believes if a Western Balkan country were to complete the integration process early that would send a positive signal to the rest of the region. That could encourage the remaining candidate countries to engage fully with the implementation of the necessary reforms. Accordingly, we welcome the significant progress made by Montenegro and Albania in the accession process. The establishment of the ad hoc working group for the drafting of Montenegro's Accession Treaty marks a milestone of historic importance. The V4 countries reaffirm their steadfast commitment to supporting the accession negotiations of both countries and to further advancing their European integration. The Slovak V4 Presidency will concentrate on ensuring that the Western Balkan enlargement policy remains at the centre of the EU's attention. It will focus on streamlining and accelerating the accession process, achieving progress in the gradual integration of partners into the single market and the implementation of the Growth Plan, as well as on cooperation in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) areas and migration. The ambition is for a resumption in the V4 ministerial meetings with the Western Balkan countries in order to further positively motivate these countries on their pathway to integration.

Where the EU candidate countries in the **Eastern neighbourhood** are concerned, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will strive primarily to support accelerated political, economic and social reforms and connectivity. Emphasis will be placed on areas such as aligning legislation with the EU acquis, sharing experiences on rule of law reforms, the fight against corruption, reforming public administration and facilitating decentralisation. Cooperation in the defence industry is of strategic importance to our region in relation to

Ukraine. In connection with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will support **preparations for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction** and strengthening the role of the V4 countries as a key transit and reconstruction corridor. Here the aim of the Presidency will be to strive for a coordinated approach in preparing logistical and infrastructure capacities so that the V4 countries can effectively ensure the movement of materials and support future reconstruction activities. This coordination will emphasise the organisation of logistics flows and transit mechanisms in such a way as to avoid disruption to V4 agricultural markets. Insofar as agriculture is concerned, Ukraine's integration into the EU internal market must be conditional upon the full application of the EU production standards. Ukraine's high production potential and specific structure of its agricultural holdings, much more concentrated than in the EU poses the risk of excessive pressure on agricultural markets. Should market disruptions occur due to high level of imports into the EU, a safeguard mechanism should be used as well as compensatory measures for EU producers and rapid-response mechanisms. Where **Moldova** is concerned, the Slovak Presidency and V4 partners will assist with the professional training of Moldovan experts and negotiation teams through the implementation of joint activities and projects relating to the sharing of integration experience and expertise, including through study visits and residencies. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will support and initiate visits and meetings by the Executive Director of the International Visegrad Fund in the region.

III. Sectoral cooperation for a stronger Europe

The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group is seen as an opportunity to strengthen **defence cooperation** among the V4 countries, given the deterioration in the security environment, mainly due to Russia's illegal and illegitimate war of aggression against Ukraine, its airspace violations, military build-up, hybrid warfare, which together pose the most significant and direct threat to European and our regional security. Closer and more intensive cooperation in defence would benefit all the countries in the group, by contributing to greater security, defence capabilities and shared preparedness for the challenges posed by the current security situation, in the region as well as our neighbourhood. It will also contribute to strengthening the deterrence and defence posture of NATO, which remains the key pillar of our security. The Presidency's activities foresee, but not limit, the involvement of, Austria, Spain, the USA, Canada, Ukraine and Türkiye, countries with which we perceive deepening defence cooperation as beneficial for the entire grouping. The aim of the Slovak V4 Presidency is to strengthen and deepen defence cooperation through political consultations at several levels, which will subsequently be reflected in practical cooperation. The main priorities will be strengthening defence cooperation, military cooperation and defence industry cooperation. Through a combination of political consultations and expert activities, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group aims to deliver tangible results in the form of continual progress in mutual cooperation. A key aspect will be the effort to strengthen cooperation within the defence industries of the V4 countries, particularly through joint research and development in defence industry products. The main event will be *Defence Industry Day*, focusing mainly on opportunities for cooperation within the SAFE mechanism, as well as components of the EDIP programme. The Slovak Presidency will seek common ground for cooperation in modernising

equipment and armaments, as well as joint procurement as a mean of enhancing the interoperability and readiness of the armed forces of the V4 countries, as a regional support towards wider NATO environment.

The current security environment is highly unpredictable, with a spectrum of challenges ranging from the illegal use of force by states and violations of the UN Charter to hybrid security threats, cyberattacks, illegal migration and instrumentalisation used by hostile regimes and individual applicants with ulterior motives, as well as the impacts of climate change leading to natural disasters and other emergencies. The thematic focus of the expert events organised by the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will reflect these challenges. Given the high degree of interconnectedness in the Central European region on the eastern NATO and EU borders, and the cross-border nature of the threats and risks, systematic cooperation is essential. This will involve the mutual exchange of professional expertise and best practices, as well as a joint search for solutions to strengthen preparedness, resilience and the ability to respond effectively to crisis situations and maintain the stability and security of the V4 countries.

In this context, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will also seek to initiate a discussion on the possibilities and added value of developing joint V4 capacities in **satellite-based Earth observation systems** for security purposes. In an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving security environment, the ability to access timely, accurate and independent information is becoming a key element of effective decision-making and crisis response. Satellite observation capabilities can significantly contribute to enhancing situational awareness, including in areas such as border monitoring, critical infrastructure protection, disaster response and the detection of hybrid threats.

The discussion will focus on assessing the strategic relevance, feasibility and potential benefits of closer regional cooperation in this domain, while taking into account existing European frameworks and initiatives. Particular attention will be paid to exploring synergies in data sharing, technological development and industrial cooperation among V4 countries. The objective is not to commit to the establishment of a dedicated system, but rather to provide a platform for an open exchange of views on the suitability, potential scope and practical modalities of developing such capacities within the V4 framework.

A priority of the Slovak V4 Presidency will be **police cooperation**, with an emphasis on opportunities for joint action in protecting soft targets (bomb threats targeting schools, government offices, etc.). We will also continue and enhance our long-term partnership in other areas such as civil protection and public administration. In public administration, the focus will be on the cross-border exchange of experience between local authorities, on modernising local state administration and on strengthening the capacity of public administration to respond to crisis situations. These issues will also be addressed at the traditional “*Good Governance Forum*” in the V4+ format.

The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will devote considerable attention to **the fight against illegal migration**, be that within the EU, or in the context of cooperation with the Western Balkan states. In June 2026, shortly before the Slovak Presidency of the V4 commences, the legislation for the Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into force. This will

present an appropriate moment to monitor the first practical experiences of implementation. The regular meeting between the heads of migration and asylum offices will also focus on this topic. Apart from the discussion on the implementation of adopted legislation, the Presidency will also discuss solutions to migration challenges beyond the Pact, such as enhanced protection of external borders and focus on the operationalisation of **innovative solutions**, ensuring preparedness for a potential migratory pressure due to geopolitical instability in various regions (including the Middle East).

A nation's resilience is built around an efficient and interconnected infrastructure. Such an infrastructure fosters economic development and regional connectivity, whilst also improving transport flows within the Visegrad Group region. In the new geopolitical situation, the Slovak V4 Presidency will strive for a coordinated approach to **military mobility**, focusing on **the development of dual-use infrastructure, including joint efforts for extension of fuel infrastructure on the Eastern flank (NATO Central Europe Pipeline System – CEPS) and European Military Mobility Corridors**. The aim will be the coordinated construction of roads, bridges and railways that can be used for both civilian transport and defence purposes. The priority will be **to develop a modern and resilient transport network** in line with international commitments, national strategic documents and regional development objectives. Discussions within the V4 will focus on creating key transport corridors and **strengthening cross-border connectivity within** and beyond Central Europe, including TEN-T corridors, which will help improve connectivity between the V4 countries as well. The discussion will also touch upon potential cooperation among the V4 countries in terms of funding transport within the EU multiannual financial framework for 2028–2034.

The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will actively support the modernisation and expansion of railway infrastructure, including safety systems (ERTMS), along with **the development of the V4 High-Speed Railway project**, aimed at improving long-distance and high-speed rail connections both within the V4 countries and across Europe. Discussions in the transport sector will also focus on **promoting intermodal transport**. The aim will be to create uniform conditions for supporting this type of transport in the V4 countries in terms of the legislation, finance and project implementation. A harmonised approach will enable coordinated planning, more efficient use of European funds and the elimination of disparities that are currently hindering intermodal transport within the region.

Creating a resilient 21st-century society requires us to **see healthcare as an integral part of critical infrastructure**. Here the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group aims to launch a discussion on defining healthcare expenditure as key to national strategic security. The discussion will also consider potential cooperation among the V4 countries in negotiating the draft EU multiannual financial framework for 2028–2034, in which the health sector comes under the European Competitiveness Fund, which brings together programmes supporting innovation, strategic technologies, digitalisation and artificial intelligence. One of the priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will be a discussion on **medical supplies and lack of availability for certain diagnoses**, particularly where patients' health could be harmed as a consequence. The discussion will focus on sharing V4 country experiences, including on insulin supplies. The aim is **to create a common framework for the procurement of**

medicines for rare diseases, including technical preparations and the assessment of a suitable legal model. Within V4 cooperation, we see potential for information sharing on pharmaco-economic assessments of medicines for rare diseases, their inclusion in the system, the sharing of clinical practice data, and exchanging experiences of creating and negotiating risk-sharing agreements.

During the Slovak V4 Presidency, one of the key priorities will be to share knowledge and best practices on cross-border cooperation in emergency medical services, specifically between V4 partner countries and in implementing international treaties and related implementation agreements between states.

Public health, especially prevention and health promotion, will form a significant part of the Slovak Presidency programme. The aim is to deepen cooperation in prevention, particularly screening programmes, cancer prevention and data-driven public health, focusing on exchanging experiences, methodologies and data.

Another key topic will be **monitoring and early identification of new psychoactive substances (NPS)**, in order to facilitate the coordinated exchange of experiences of monitoring, legislation, laboratory identification, prevention and capacity building, based on data from UNODC and EUDA.

In the field of public health security, particular attention will be paid to **highly dangerous infectious diseases**. The aim is to initiate a technical dialogue with partners from V4 countries focused on exploring opportunities for mutual cooperation, especially diagnosis and the potential treatment of these diseases. Discussions during the Slovak Presidency will aim to assess the capacities, technical equipment and specialist staff of partner countries, as well as the possibility of cross-border admission of patients to specialised healthcare facilities in the region, in accordance with the relevant biosafety standards.

Closely linked to this is **the risk of the spread of infectious diseases**. Migration flows resulting from geopolitical crises, armed conflicts, climate change and instability in neighbouring regions are a significant factor affecting the epidemiological situation in Europe. A joint V4 approach would enable improvements in epidemiological security, coordinated responses to health risks associated with migration, and support the effective functioning of health systems in the Central European region.

Particular attention will be paid to **enhancing public health systems and preparedness for health crises** in the context of global trends, lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing negotiations on the Pandemic Agreement and deepening geopolitical instability. This area will also include the exchange of experiences on strategic noise mapping following the implementation of Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1967.

In relation to the ongoing **implementation of the Regulation on Substances of Human Origin (SoHO)**, the Slovak V4 Presidency will concentrate on promoting enhanced regional cooperation, sharing experiences and coordinating procedures for the practical implementation.

All the V4 countries are facing comparable challenges, particularly in relation to ensuring the availability and long-term sustainability of healthcare personnel. Key themes for the further

development of cooperation in this area during the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will be **workforce planning, education and training, as well as the mobility and retention of healthcare staff**. The emphasis will be on the exchange of experiences in strategic human resources planning and the alignment of educational capacities with the needs of the healthcare system, including nurses and non-medical healthcare professions.

The digitisation of healthcare is another key healthcare area for the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group. The primary objective of digitisation is **to improve quality, safety and continuity in healthcare provision through the effective sharing of medical records** among healthcare professionals.

The digital revolution is redefining every aspect of society and ushering in new challenges, both positive and negative. **Justice and the judiciary** are no exception. The Regulation and Directive on the digitisation of judicial cooperation and access to justice in cross-border civil, commercial and criminal matters are bringing extensive changes that are transforming the face of justice and propelling it into the digital age – for citizens, businesses and judicial authorities alike. In the area of judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters, electronic communication between courts has been in use since 1 May 2025 for requests transmitted under the Service of Documents Regulation and the Taking of Evidence Regulation, making them the first instruments in practice to operate fully in this new digital environment. The EU legislation on electronic evidence in criminal law matters will soon enable faster access to electronic evidence within the European judicial area, while the EU Regulation on Artificial Intelligence relates to the justice sector, where the emphasis is on high standards, classifying it as high-risk due to the potential for infringements of citizens' fundamental rights. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will focus on **sharing best practices in implementing digital solutions in justice**.

Cooperation with V4 partners will also seek to identify common ground in drafting new EU legislation and in implementing existing legislation in the field of justice, particularly in criminal matters. In the field of civil justice, the focus will be mainly on the proper implementation of existing instruments, while maintaining a common objective to coordinate common positions among V4 partners in other areas.

Besides current European initiatives, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will also consider restorative and alternative justice, aiming to explore ways of improving mutual cooperation among V4 countries in this area.

The Slovak Presidency sees an opportunity to strengthen cooperation among the V4 countries in **policy coherence for sustainable development, building governance capacity** and measuring well-being. Discussions will focus on experience-sharing among the V4 countries. The aim is for enhanced cooperation within the V4 to contribute to better quality public policies and long-term sustainable development in Central Europe.

National and EU competitiveness is partly determined by the flexibility and adaptability **of the labour market**. The Visegrad Group countries number among those facing long-term challenges and structural issues – in particular labour and skills shortages, unfavourable

demographic trends, low-labour market participation rates among certain population groups, youth migration, and the need to update current labour market policies. The strategic objective of the Slovak V4 Presidency will be to help achieve a more functional, inclusive and sustainable labour market in the V4 region through exchanging best practices, supporting the coordination of employment policies and strengthening the social dimension of regional cooperation. Particular emphasis will be placed on the Fair Labour Mobility Package, as well as on the social economy as a tool for ensuring an inclusive labour market, high-quality local services and regional resilience in the V4 – looking especially at solutions and implementation tools that are applicable across the V4.

IV. An active people-to-people dimension for a stronger Europe

The **International Visegrad Fund (IVF)** has long played a key role in creating and reinforcing links between the non-governmental sector, educational and scientific institutions, and citizens in the V4 countries. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will continue to support its activities not only within the V4 countries, but also in relation to partner countries in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood. It will exploit all opportunities to improve its effectiveness and overall appeal as a formalised institution of the Visegrad Group. The aim of negotiations at both expert and political levels during the Slovak Presidency of the V4 will be to offer opportunities to participate in the activities of the IVF, as is the case with the Republic of Korea.

Tourism is one of the best ways to get to know a country and foster relationships between people. Sustainable tourism is becoming increasingly popular and so the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will hold expert discussions on strategies for sustainable tourism and for the development and sustainability of the spa industry. A key theme will be enhancing the resilience of regions and reducing regional disparities, partly through identifying thematic funding priorities in each of the V4 countries. Tourism has the potential to boost regional employment, stabilise demographics in peripheral areas and reduce population outflows from less developed regions across the V4 countries. Another important aspect is coordinating Visegrad Group countries' efforts to attract tourists from more distant foreign markets. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will build on the V4's usual cooperation under the umbrella brand "*Discover Central Europe*" and, via Slovakia Travel, will focus efforts on a joint marketing plan and framework budget for the "*Discover Central Europe*" brand for the coming period. Through these efforts, Slovakia aims to contribute to a stronger, more interconnected and future-oriented Visegrad tourism region that is competitive, sustainable and attractive for both domestic and international visitors.

The Central European region has a unique **cultural** identity. One of the priorities of the Slovak Presidency is to help restore relations between the culture ministries to their previous high standard, by strengthening systematic cooperation and communication and by efforts to continue **the annual International Visegrad Prize**. Discussions during the Slovak V4 Presidency will therefore focus on injecting momentum into cultural relations, especially by setting up coordination platforms to tackle common challenges and identify joint project opportunities, including through the sharing of good practice across the V4 countries. Focus

will be given also to strengthening cross-border volunteering, cultural mobility and fostering town twinning partnerships could also contribute significantly to achieving the stated objectives.

The V4 countries face similar challenges in **youth health, digital behaviour and physical activity**. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will tackle these through joint V4 sports and youth events to promote talent, fair play and regional cooperation. The aim will be to exchange experiences in youth work, the use of artificial intelligence and fostering AI literacy among youth workers.

Minorities and inclusion are a strategic priority of the Slovak Presidency of the V4, where the aim is to promote social cohesion and regional stability and to harness the potential of national and ethnic minorities in developing the region as a whole. The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group will work towards creating a common framework for Roma inclusion, supporting minority education and cultural heritage, and improving the participation of minorities.

Families play a key role in shaping and maintaining well-functioning economic and social systems, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, cooperation regarding family issues is of crucial importance among V4 countries, sharing best practices and experiences in this regard.