

## REVIEW OF MAJOR EVENTS UNDER THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP OCTOBER 2017 – MARCH 2018

### Meeting of Directors General for International Development – 2 October, Brussels

HUPRES organised a coordination discussion with the participation of the V4 Directors General for Development in Brussels before the informal humanitarian aid and development meeting of EU DGs. Participants introduced their current strategies and policy documents related to international development, while Hungary provided information on the preparation of its Humanitarian Strategy. Moreover, the DGs have shared their experiences of OECD DAC membership. Czechia presented experiences regarding its Voluntary National Review introduced at the UN HLPF, as Hungary, Poland and Slovakia will report in the coming years.

### HUNGRAIL Hungarian Rail 2017 Conference — 3 October, Budapest

The high-level conference, attended by 250 professionals from the Rail Sector, was devoted to North-South rail connections and the improvement of the competitiveness of rail freight. The conference focused on V4 cooperation in the railway sector and discussed perspectives and visions of the Government, railway undertakings and operators regarding rail freight development. A roundtable discussion on the idea of a 'Visegrail Pass' also took place.

### Meeting of National Visegrad Coordinators & Visegrad Fund Expert Meeting – 3 October, Budapest

The regular meeting of NVCs, and an enlarged meeting with the participation of the Visegrad Fund's executive director and other colleagues took place in Budapest, at Várkert Bazár ('V4 House' during the Hungarian V4 Presidency). The parties discussed and made decisions on current developments and tasks related to Visegrad cooperation and the Visegrad Fund.

### V4+ workshop of development bank representatives — 4 October, Budapest

Representatives of the Polish, Czech and Slovakian, as well as Croatian and Slovenian development institutions attended the workshop, invited by the Hungarian Development Bank, to review possibilities of cooperation and exchange experience related to development banking operations. One key objective of the consultations was to identify energy and transport infrastructure projects implemented in and by members of the Visegrad Group and to review how such projects could receive financing from EU funds. The parties also discussed possibilities of funding investment vehicles operating in the context of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), and central EU programmes, as well as possible cooperation in potential energy and transport projects.

### Meeting of V4 Ministers of Interior — 5 October, Budapest

At the first meeting of the Ministers of Interior under HUV4PRES, the parties discussed current issues of on the regional and the EU agenda. They focussed mainly on the current migration crisis, border protection and border management. The Ministers adopted a joint declaration expressing their will to continue close cooperation, outlining the V4 joint stance on the reform of the Common European Asylum System, and emphasising the V4 commitment to strengthening border management and law enforcement efforts.

### Consultation of V4 MFA experts on digital diplomacy – 5 October, Budapest

The participants exchanged views about the use of social media in the field of diplomacy and shared best practices regarding the application of modern digital tools in their respective ministries. The experts underlined the importance of social media in country promotion and encouraged cooperation among the ministries in digital diplomacy to strengthen the V4 brand outside the region.

## Consultation of V4 security policy directors – 5 October, Budapest

The meeting aimed at discussing developments regarding NATO, European security and defence issues as well as the non-proliferation agenda. The parties supported the idea to strengthen security and defence cooperation among each other and within Europe. The directors also exchanged views about the upcoming NATO Summit in 2018 and highlighted the importance of collective defence, solidarity and unity within the Alliance.

## Informal Meeting of V4 State Secretaries and Sherpas for EU affairs – 5-6 October, Budapest

V4 State Secretaries and Sherpas for EU affairs discussed their common position on the future of the European Union. In the context of the next MFF, participants agreed that it was the primary interest of the four countries to maintain the structure of the current framework. Regarding energy policy, the meeting welcomed that a common V4 position was developed during the Hungarian V4 Presidency on the draft regulation on the management of the EU Energy and the Renewable Energy Directive. The parties also discussed the follow-up of the Tallinn Digital Summit, as well as Brexit. The meeting also largely contributed to the elaboration of the V4 common approach concerning the political and technical aspects of the revision of the Posting of Workers Directive. HUV4PRES developed a V4 common approach regarding the revision of the Posting of Workers Directive on 10 October with a view to the ministerial debate of 23 October in the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO). In the position paper the V4 countries laid down the clear joint position that a special arrangement needed to be found for the transport sector due to its highly mobile nature.

## V4 MFA Political Directors' Consultations in Albania and Serbia – 5-6 October 2017

Political Directors from the V4 countries visited Albania and Serbia on 5-6 October, which was an excellent opportunity to send positive messages about the commitment of the V4 countries to the EU enlargement process in the region. Discussions centred on the EU integration perspectives; it was generally stated that leaders of the Western Balkan countries were encouraged by the latest statements of Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker. Partners in both Albania and Serbia expressed a strong appreciation for the consistent support of the V4 countries.

## Session of the V4 EU Battle Group (EUBG) working group – 9-11 October, Bratislava

At one of its regular meetings, the working group made progress in processing lessons learned from the first time the V4 EU Battlegroup was on standby in 2016, and building the different modules for the next standby period of the formation in the second half of 2019.

## Meeting of V4 and Western Balkans Foreign Ministers – 11 October, Budapest

As EU enlargement is a key priority for the V4 countries, the Hungarian Presidency hosted the regular ministerial meeting of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans, in an enlarged format involving representatives also of Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Romania and Slovenia. V4 ministers adopted a joint statement emphasising their commitment towards the Western-Balkans' integration path. At the meeting, the ministers discussed the progress achieved in the integration process by the respective Western Balkans partners, as well as the possible future NATO-enlargement and the political and security-related developments of the region. Special emphasis was on fostering cooperation between the Western Balkans countries. In this context, given the Visegrad Group's long-standing political and technical support to the creation of the Western Balkans Fund (WBF), current developments and plans related to the WBF were presented by the institution's executive director Gjergj Murra. The WBF and in particular its upcoming first call for applications received welcome and support from the parties.

## Meeting of V4 + 4 Ministers for Environment – 11 October, Lillafüred, Diósgyőr

V4 Environmental Ministers discussed sustainable waste management, climate and energy policy with a view to the sustainable forest management and on the spread of invasive alien species. The already existing V4 and Bulgaria + Romania format was extended to the delegations of Croatia and Slovenia. The ministerial meeting was also attended

by Mr Jan Dusík, UN Environment Regional Director. This high-level event was followed by the Fifth Conference of Parties (CoP5) to the Carpathian Convention on 12 October.

## **Meeting of the V4+ Border Management Chiefs — 11–13 October, Szeged**

The Border Management Chiefs of the V4 countries, together with Bulgaria and Romania met to discuss prevailing issues related to the management of borders. The parties concurred that instead of reintroducing border controls on the internal Schengen borders, external borders and eastern borders under serious migratory pressure should be strengthened. They expressed that border offenders should be sent a unified and clear message in order to ensure the success of readmission agreements, joint investigations and assistance provided to each other. The representatives of the V4 countries expressed their gratitude to Bulgaria and Romania for participating and for contributing to the security of the area.

## **V4 Startup and Innovation Tour — 12 October, Bratislava; 26 October, Prague; 16 November, Warsaw**

In line with the Hungarian Presidency's 'Digital Visegrad' priority and its focus on innovation, the first events of the V4 Startup and Innovation Tour were held in Bratislava, Prague and Warsaw, involving more than a hundred entrepreneurs, local startup ecosystem stakeholders such as incubators, accelerators and investors, and decision-makers. Each stop of the Tour had its own theme in the following order: Smart Cities, Smart Cars, Digital Health. Enlightening presentations and panel discussions were followed by local semi-finals of the 'Get in the Ring' international startup competition. During these, the participating innovative companies presented their ideas and competed in front of a professional judges' panel. The aim of the Tour was to empower regional collaboration, provide business and growing opportunities to startups within the V4 region and beyond, and to strengthen our regional startup ecosystem worldwide.

## **V4 Prime Ministerial meeting at the Summit for Equal Quality of Products for All;**

### **Meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers with the President of the European Council — 13 October, Bratislava**

The Summit for Equal Quality of products for All, held on 13 October 2017 in Bratislava, was attended by the V4 Prime Ministers, the Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, the Commissioner for Health and Food safety, representatives of Member States, as well as relevant stakeholders, who aimed at seeking possibilities for a joint approach to the problem of the dual quality of foodstuffs in the EU. The participants agreed that EU consumers should be treated equally and fairly, and reiterated that consumers within the Single Market may generally expect branded products to be of a similar quality regardless of the countries where they are sold and therefore may have difficulties in understanding possible differences.

On the margins of the summit, the V4 Prime Ministers met with EUCO President Donald Tusk, focusing on the EU reform process. The leaders discussed the Leaders' Agenda and highlighted their ambition for sustaining the political unity of the EU27 as laid down in the Bratislava Roadmap and the Rome Declaration. The participants agreed that the positive agenda and constructive engagement of V4 in the process created an important added value to the overall debate on the future of the EU and should be further reinforced.

## **Summit of the Heads of State of the Visegrad Group — 13-14 October, Szekszárd**

The main topic of the discussion held in the first part of the Summit was the situation and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans. Hungarian President János Áder pressed for the speedier integration of the Western Balkan countries with the European Union. His V4 counterparts: Miloš Zeman (CZ), Andrej Kiska (SK) and Andrzej Duda (PL) agreed with the Hungarian position, which was demonstrated at the press conference as well. The second topic of the Summit was the protection of the environment. The joint opinion of the Heads of State was based on the common steps needed to improve circular economy. In the third part of the Summit, Presidents discussed the social effects of digitalisation.

## **BEST LNG Summit – 16-17 October, Budapest**

The Budapest LNG Summit, the first international LNG conference of the CEE countries was organised under the patronage of the Hungarian V4 Presidency, gathering more than 200 industry leaders, experts and policymakers to discuss the prospects of LNG (liquefied natural gas) in the CEE region. The purpose of the event was to create an exclusive, high-level forum for top leaders from 20+ countries, enabling them to network, explore and consider the medium and long-term prospects for the LNG business in our region. The Summit's focus was connecting regional demand with the international supply chain, while also sharing insights and perspectives from the sector, as well as discussing the region's key LNG projects. Representatives of the region and top leaders of the largest international energy companies highlighted that the Polish LNG terminal (Świnoujście) would remain a key provider of access to LNG for Central and Eastern Europe, while gas delivery is expected to begin in 2020 in the Croatian terminal (Krk LNG). The key players also shared their expectation concerning the new gas routes and sources in the CEE countries.

## **V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council – 17 October, Brussels**

At the meeting convened by Hungary's State Secretary for EU affairs Szabolcs Takács, parties discussed V4 positions on the General Affairs Council's agenda items such as migration, digital Europe, defence, the future of the EU, rule of law and Brexit (Article 50). The participants specifically coordinated their position regarding Schengen and the external dimension of migration.

## **V4 + Canada MFA Political Directors' Consultations — 17 October 2017, Budapest**

At their annual consultation with Canada, V4 Political Directors met with Assistant Deputy Minister for International Security and Political Affairs Mark Gwozdecky and discussed European and transatlantic security, including NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. The topics also included the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, migration, Eastern Europe as well as the Western Balkans, and current issues of the transatlantic partnership.

## **V4 Senior Body Meeting (defence) – 17-18 October, Székesfehérvár**

The Deputy Ministers of the V4 Ministries of Defence met to discuss key current issues on NATO and EU agenda as well as the opportunities for extending V4 defence cooperation. Among current NATO and EU issues, they took stock of the Alliance's ongoing efforts to tackle challenges from both East and South. They also overviewed the implementation of the EU Global Strategy in the field of defence. As for V4 defence cooperation, they endorsed the V4 Planning Group's (PG) recommendations from September. In this context, they tasked the PG, inter alia, to review the V4 Capability Development Matrix and to draft the Memorandum of Understanding of the V4 Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters during the Hungarian Presidency.

## **Meeting of State Secretaries of V4 Economic Ministries — 17-18 October, Budapest**

The main topic of the meeting was how to maintain and even develop the rate of growth in the region—which already exceeds the European average—by e.g. harmonising economic policies and sharing best practices. The parties shared the common view that the automotive industry had a key role in the technical-technological and economic development of our countries and agreed to deepen cooperation regarding the challenges of the future of the automotive sector. The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange ideas on industry digitization as well as the EU's new industrial strategy. As a result of the successful talks, an agreement was reached on prospective cooperation in the following areas: common V4 statistics, labour issues, supplier networks, cyber security, new business models, and a common industrial policy non-paper focusing on the future of the automotive industry.

## **V4+ expert level meetings on Cohesion Policy — 18 October, Budapest; 20-21 November, Budapest; 6 December, Brussels**

After the first one in September, three additional expert meetings were held on Cohesion Policy, at which the experts of the V4+4 countries discussed numerous topics such as indicators, differentiation versus proportionality, or a broader sense of simplification. As a result of the meeting in October, a non-paper on indicators was drafted with the objective

of sending it to the European Commission as a common V4+4 position. During the meeting in Brussels, the experts discussed the first draft of the Joint Statement to be adopted at the ministerial meeting in 2018.

## **V4 prime ministerial meeting in preparation to the European Council — October 18, Brussels**

Commission President Juncker and the Visegrad Prime Ministers discussed in detail some ongoing European issues with a special view to the V4 positions and the added value of Central Europe to major EU dossiers, such as migration, the future of the EU and the application of the four fundamental freedoms on the Single Market. The leaders agreed that they should continue this form of exchange of positive atmosphere in the future in order to foster mutual understanding between the Commission and the V4.

## **Visegrad Gas Forum – 19 October, Budapest**

The annual V4 Gas Forum was attended by governmental and industrial players of the V4 countries on expert level. The participants examined several relevant topics in the Central-European gas sector, such as the implementation of the revised EU regulation about security of supply, the regional perspectives of gas storage and the regulatory practices of gas trading licenses. Regarding the implementation of the revised EU regulation about the security of supply, the governmental delegations agreed on joint work about the preparations of the agreements, which shall be concluded on the details of the regional cooperation in a gas crisis situation. The participants discussed the role of gas storages in the future towards the development of LNG in CEE countries. The stakeholders of the NRAs had the occasion to discuss the administrative framework of gas trading within the EU.

## **Coordination meetings of Employment Ministers of V4 and like-minded Member States at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) - 23 October, Luxembourg**

Heads of delegations of the V4 countries and other like-minded Member States (Croatia Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom) took the occasion at the EPSCO Council to conduct several meetings during the intense discussions to reach a general approach on the proposed modification of the Posting of Workers Directive. Thanks to these constructive discussions, the V4 stood firm until the very end of negotiations. However the final agreement did not entail any guarantees for the treatment of the transport sector and concluded that it should be dealt by a special sectoral legislation (called 'lex specialis') within the Mobility Package. Therefore, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia opposed the agreement, whilst the United Kingdom, Ireland and Croatia abstained during the voting. The V4 cooperation regarding the lex specialis intensified after the political agreement struck at the EPSCO Council in order to safeguard the competitiveness of the transport companies of the region.

## **Conference on early childhood education and social catch-up in the V4 – 26-27 October, Budapest**

Participating experts highlighted that V4 countries should ensure access to discrimination-free quality education for Roma children. Therefore, they encouraged the further development of early childhood services in the V4 states for the disadvantaged, including Roma children and their families. The participants agreed on three principles that should be followed in order to help Roma children. Firstly, long-term planning is of utmost importance, especially within the framework of Europe 2020 and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Secondly, to achieve the desired development, a continuous improvement shall be guaranteed for the sector. Finally, it is a vital policy interest to show the social and economic benefits of development in numbers. To this end, it is necessary to promote specialized research, international cooperation and exchange of experiences.

## **Informal meeting of the V4 EU State Secretaries with France at the TATRA SUMMIT — 27 October, Slovakia**

On the margins of the 2017 TATRA SUMMIT, V4 EU State Secretaries organized an informal meeting with Ms. Nathalie Loiseau, France's Minister for European Affairs. The leaders discussed major European topics such as migration, EU negotiations on free trade agreements and the enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans. Concerning migration, the participants acknowledged the positive developments on the Central-Mediterranean route during the summer of 2017 as a result of Italy's efforts, while challenges concerning the Western-Balkan route were also pointed



out. The meeting demonstrated that the V4 countries are able to come to joint positions in the most significant European issues in strong cooperation with their Western European partners.

## **V4 directors' meeting on a common V4 position paper on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – 2-3 November, Budapest**

In accordance with the conclusion of the V4 Sherpa and EU State Secretary meetings in October, experts from the Visegrad countries met in Budapest to discuss the shared political expectations on the post-2020 MFF, which were to be laid down in a common V4 non-paper outlining our priorities. As a result of a detailed discussion on certain technical issues, the participants coordinated their views and prepared a position paper adopting their general joint position on the upcoming MFF.

## **Western Balkans Diplomatic Days – 6-10 November, Budapest**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary organised a five-day long programme for diplomats responsible for regional and EU issues in the Western Balkans and the Visegrad Group, with the aim of strengthening the dialogue on the possibilities of cooperation. Participants met high-level officers and experts of the Hungarian MFAT as well as other institutions.

## **V4 Military Training Conference – 6-7 November, Budapest**

Military training experts met at a V4 Training and Education Synchronization Conference (TEESC) to update the V4 Mid-term Training and Exercise Programme (V4 MTEP) for the period 2017-2021.

## **V4+Korea Conference on transition – 8 November, Budapest**

In the framework of the V4+Korea cooperation, a conference was organised on the experiences of the Central European regime changes at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade. At the event Hungarian, Czech and Polish experts presented the experiences of democratic change between 1989-1991 which could be useful in the case of a democratic transformation of North Korea. Cho Byung-jae, Chancellor of the Korean National Diplomacy Academy (KNDA) underlined the importance for Seoul to gain knowledge about Central European transition experiences.

## **Vision4Tech Conference – 8 November, Budapest**

The Ministry of National Development of Hungary organised a one-day expert meeting on strategic digital affairs and tech matters, where digital and ICT achievements, as well as future technologies have been showcased in cooperation with industry associations. The topics covered automation, connectivity, entrepreneurship and mobility, discussions reflected the full spectrum of disruptive technological trends such as Industry 4.0, robotics, AI, Big Data, 5G, IoT, High Speed Networks and Fintech. The political representatives of the V4 countries agreed on a Call for Action on Connectivity, which set our common goals in the fast deployment of 5G networks in the V4 region.

## **Round Table Meeting in connection with Brussels II a Regulation – 10 November, Budapest**

The Ministry of Justice of Hungary hosted a roundtable discussion in Budapest with V4 partners on the revision of the 2201/2003/EC (the so-called Brussels IIA) regulation. The Regulation is the most important EU-legal instrument in cross-border family matters, regulating jurisdiction, recognition, and enforcement of decisions made in matters of parental responsibility. The participants agreed on submitting a common proposal to be considered during the EU negotiations.

## **V4 Defence Ministers Meeting – 13 November, Brussels**

V4 Defence Ministers exchanged views on the priorities of the Hungarian V4 Presidency in the field of defence cooperation, on the progress of EU-NATO cooperation and on the launch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). They agreed on the necessity to further strengthen V4 defence cooperation as well as to reinforce defence cooperation between the V4 and the Central European Defence Cooperation countries (V4 + Austria, Croatia and Slovenia), especially concerning the management of the migration crisis. They also supported to organize a V4 defence

industry forum during the Hungarian Presidency with the aim of exploring opportunities for V4 defence industry cooperation.

## **Meeting of the Tallinn Group (V4+ experts) – 14-15 November, Budapest**

The Tallinn Group serves as an informal forum for exchange of views regarding the EU enlargement process. The regular meeting of the Tallinn Group was also attended by Slovakia and Slovenia. The experts from the ministries of foreign affairs of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and Slovenia discussed the state of play of the integration process of the Western Balkans and Turkey. They agreed on the strategic importance of a reliable and tangible EU-perspective for the enlargement countries. They reinforced their commitment to give a momentum to the enlargement process in 2018 with the active involvement of the EU institutions.

## **Launching Seminar of V4 – Securing the Swiss Contribution – 15 November, Budapest**

The launching seminar was organised by the Department of Trade Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary on expert level. The main goal of the meeting was to exchange views and experiences about the Swiss Contribution and the Norway Grant. The participants of the V4 countries agreed that they would continue working closely together and take joint steps in order to reach successful negotiations.

## **Visegrad Group + Brazil high level meeting – 15 November, Budapest**

Santiago Irazabal Mourão, Undersecretary General for International Cooperation, Trade Promotion and Cultural Themes of Brazil, visited Hungary on the occasion of the III. Hungary - Latin - America Forum, on the margins of which a V4+Brazil consultation on current international issues and cooperation opportunities took place, chaired by Deputy State Secretary Szilveszter Bus. The meeting showed the V4's increasing global visibility and the Group's openness to dialogue with key global players such as Brazil.

## **Common V4+4 position on smooth transition (cohesion policy) – 16 November**

As a result of the expert level meeting on Cohesion Policy in September, a non-paper on the smooth transition between programming periods has been prepared and sent to the European Commission on 16th November 2017 as common position of the V4+4 countries.

## **V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council – 20 November, Brussels**

The V4 State Secretaries and Permanent Representatives discussed two major topics at the meeting: the next MFF and the possible financial contribution of the four countries to the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The participants discussed the common position on the next 2020 MFF which was later laid down in a V4 non paper. The State Secretaries coordinated their position and mutual support before the respective voting on the new seat of the European medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Banking Authority (EBA).

## **V4+2+Croatia+Slovenia Water Conference – 22–23 November, Budapest**

The Ministry of Interior of Hungary organised a meeting of water experts from the countries of the V4+Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia. The consultations aimed at identifying specific problems of the region, establishing a unified position, and creating a prior consultation mechanism regarding the 2019 review of the 2000/60/EC Water Framework Directive, the revision of Directive 98/83/EC on the quality of water intended for human consumption, the implementation of Directive 91/271/EEC, and concerning the practice of flood and drought management. An informal meeting of the Water Directors was also held, to prepare for the EU Water Directors' meeting.

## **Life Cycle Management (LCMG) working group session - 22-23 November, Budapest**

The LCMG expert working group reviewed national capability development plans and discussed opportunities for cooperation in preparation for the National Armaments Directors (NAD) in 2018 Q1.

## Conference on the development of human resources in the health sector – 24 November, Budapest

The main objective of the conference was to discuss issues related to the status of human resources in health care in the Visegrad countries, as well as to exchange best practices and to further develop cooperation. Apart from the V4 countries, experts from the United Kingdom, Finland, Estonia, Norway, Belgium and Slovenia also attended the conference. The challenges of healthcare were discussed, including the financing incentives for healthcare workers, extended care and the shortage of family doctors.

## Experts' Meeting on "Audit Aspects of a Service Provider Tax Administration" — 29 November, Budapest

In line with the priorities of the V4 Hungarian Presidency and for the purpose of further deepening the Visegrad cooperation, the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary organised an expert meeting (V4+AT, SI) to share its recent experiences about the so-called supportive procedure launched as of January 2017. The participants highly appreciated the introduction of the Hungarian initiative, the case studies and the initial experiences. It was also agreed that it was necessary to continue holding expert meetings on the issue of tax audit aspects of the tax administration as service provider.

## The 24th Meeting of the International Olympic Hopes Steering Committee – 30 November, Budapest

The Olympic Hopes Competitions (OHC) is a traditional event of the Visegrad countries. In November, an annual assessment event was held, and the Hungarian Presidency organised the steering committee meeting with the aim of evaluating numerous sport competitions that took place in 2017.

## V4 Meeting of the Speakers of the Parliament — 30 November – 1 December, Budapest

At the first Meeting of the Presidents and Speakers of V4 Parliaments during the Hungarian V4 Presidency, the parties discussed potential ways to strengthen the representation of national parliaments in the EU's institutional structure, and introduced ideas concerning possibilities for the enlargement of the European Union. Upon the initiative of the Presidency, the V4 parties agreed to establish a V4 parliamentary 'rapid reaction group' for the subsidiarity check of EU legislative proposals. The V4 Subsidiarity Group – with the appropriate political mandate and supervision – could play a decisive role in the development of the relations with EU institutions, especially in ensuring the flow of information.

## V4 Health Ministers' Conference – 30 November - 1 December, Budapest

The V4 delegations discussed current challenges in the pharmaceutical system, fair pricing and the provision of medicines (on which the ministers also issued a joint V4 document), cooperation regarding vaccines used for immunization programs, and joint vaccine procurement.

## International cluster conference — 30 November - 1 December, Budapest

More than 150 participants from 17 countries, including the V4, attended the 'Clusters in Europe IV – How can we draw from the lessons of past to secure future success' conference, which gave an overall picture about the European cluster scheme from the beginning to the present, focusing on the triggers and driving forces in different countries, regions that initiated a new network based approach in Europe. The event featured a V4 panel as well.

## V4-Google Innovation Forum, 'Visegrad in the Ring' startup contest – 30 November-1 December, Budapest

Hungary initiated closer cooperation of the V4 in the field of RDI. In this context, the V4-Google Innovation Forum was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, given Google's leading role in developing new technologies. The event, attended by V4 high level officials and Google vice president Nicklas Lundblad, provided an occasion to explore the potential for technology-based investments in the V4 area. This forum was part of a major event concluding the Hungarian Presidency's V4 Startup and Innovation Tour, which was finished by the 'Visegrad in the Ring' startup contest. The event gathered CEE policy makers, multinational corporations & innovative startups, shaking up not just the Hungarian but the regional ecosystem.



## Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group + Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia – 4 December, Budapest

The meeting signalled the Hungarian Presidency's strong focus on cooperation with V4+ partners from the broader CEE region. The participating countries' representatives discussed the future of the European Union, energy security and EU enlargement. There was an overall agreement that the normal functioning of the Schengen Area should be restored, and that the EU should facilitate energy diversification in the CEE region since new energy transport routes are required to ensure energy security. The ministers have taken a stance in support of accelerating EU enlargement.

## Conference on university and business cooperation in Central Europe – 4-5 December, Budapest

The 'CUBCCCE' conference was held for the second time at Óbuda University, this time in the framework of the Hungarian V4 Presidency, to showcase the opportunities and benefits of University and Business Cooperation, to share best practices, discuss successful projects within the CEE region and to highlight the benefits of Cooperation from SMEs to large corporations.

## Roma youth in higher education & EU Roma Framework Strategy V4 conference – 4-5 December, Budapest

V4 experts discussed the V4 countries' higher education programs and how they support the acquisition of qualifications for Roma youth.

## Meeting of the V4 Migration Authority Director Generals – 5–6 December, Eger

The main issues on the agenda were the current state of affairs of the Migration Crisis Response Mechanism, the infringement procedures initiated by the EU, the transformation of the EASO into the EU Agency for Asylum, and the question of unaccompanied minors. The organising Hungarian Immigration and Asylum Office informed V4 partners about the current situation regarding the previous offer to the EASO to hand over free of charge the Reception Center's Registration System, a software developed to the identification of the movement of asylum seekers or illegal migrants in the reception institutions.

## V4+2 expert meeting on spatial planning and territorial development — 7 December, Budapest

The main objective of the Steering Group was to exchange views on the territorial dimension of post-2020 cohesion policy and initiate discussion on the IT background of spatial planning and Smart City regulations. As a regular part of the SG meetings, the countries presented their latest achievements and news in the field of regional policy and spatial planning. The Hungarian V4 Presidency proposed a stronger representation of common interests of the V4+2 countries at the different forums of territorial cohesion and urban development, especially when negotiations on post-2020 cohesion policy start to intensify. Regarding the ongoing renewal of the Territorial Agenda 2020, we have a common interest in highlighting the priorities included in the V4+2 Common Strategy.

## First meeting of the V4+Israel Working Group on Research, Development and Innovation – 11 December, Budapest

The Working Group was convened under the coordination of the Hungarian Presidency to follow up the decision made by the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries and the State of Israel at their first-ever summit in Budapest on 19 July 2017 to deepen their partnership in building innovative and creative economies. The Working Group is tasked with translating this decision into action by identifying relevant areas for cooperation and by launching concrete projects in V4+Israel format. The first meeting of the WG was productive in considering several initiatives regarding mobility, training of young entrepreneurs, RDI knowledge sharing, capacity building for SMEs and technology transfer. This dialogue will provide a framework for target-oriented cooperation to help make our economies more competitive, adding yet another pillar to the fruitful and mutually beneficial partnership of the V4 and Israel.

## V4 + Benelux MFA Planning Directors' Meeting – 11-12 December, Budapest

In the V4+Benelux format (the latter represented by the Netherlands), with the participation of Oxford Analytica and Think Visegrad experts, topics on the future of Europe and the role of regional groupings, the issues on Eastern Partnership and also those of the transatlantic relations were debated. The working dinner discussion of a Think

Visegrad paper on the EU-African Union co-operation gave opportunity to express common views on the development policy and to pronounce differently on migration issues.

## **V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council – 12 December, Brussels**

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss two major ongoing issues: the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the joint V4 donation to the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The V4 EU State Secretaries also coordinated the position of the four countries regarding the agenda items of December European Council (defense, education and culture, migration, the future of the euro zone and Brexit).

## **Meeting of Chairs of parliamentary committees of foreign affairs of V4 and WB — 13 December, Budapest**

The Chairpersons of the foreign affairs committees of the Parliaments of the V4 countries held a meeting in Budapest with the participation of their counterparts from the Western Balkans. The parties discussed several issues of common interest in relation to the Western Balkans, including the European and the Euro-Atlantic enlargement process of the respective countries, the way forward in their integration paths and the expectations with regard to the European Commission's strategy paper on the Western Balkans.

## **Meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and Jean-Claude Juncker – 14 December, Brussels**

On the margins of the European Council, V4 Prime Ministers met with Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission and Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni to announce their financial support to the implementation of a project within the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The project is led by the Italian government and aims at developing capacities of the Libyan authorities responsible for border and migration management, to better combat human smuggling, improve the protection of sea and land borders and improve the Libyan migration management system. The V4 countries will provide the full financing of the project's second phase with 35 million euros, offering cooperation in its implementation.

## **V4+ Republic of Korea Political Directors' meeting — 14 December, Budapest**

Annual political consultations in the V4+RoK format were held in Budapest, with the political directors of the Visegrad Group meeting their counterpart, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Korea Yoon Soon-Gu. They exchanged views on topical issues including the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and in Europe. They have also looked at the prospects of economic cooperation among their respective countries, with special regard to the exceptionally comprehensive free trade agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Korea. The contribution of the Republic of Korea to the International Visegrad Fund was also on the agenda.

## **Meeting of the V4 Energy Ministers — 18 December, Brussels**

The V4 coordination meeting of the V4 Energy Ministers took place, as traditionally, on the margins of the Energy Council Meeting in Brussels. The meeting focused on the common points of the position of V4 countries related to the Council Meeting's agenda items: proposals on the electricity market; renewable energy and governance regulation (Clean energy package). Hungary enjoyed the support of Poland on its position about the maintenance of regulated prices, which was accepted by the Energy Council. A general approach was adopted about the directive on renewable energy and the governance regulation as well.

## **Meeting of the Social Welfare Committees — December 20-21, Budapest**

The Chairpersons of the Social Welfare Committees of the Parliaments of the V4 countries concluded the meeting by adopting a closing declaration in which the sides agreed that the family is the fundamental, natural and living cell of society, which is the basis for every other community and society itself. Participants also called their parliaments and governments to dedicate special attention and resources to the support and protection of the family at the regional, national and the local levels.

2018

## V4+4 Director Generals' meeting on Cohesion Policy – 11-12 January, Budapest

The Director Generals' meeting was successful in preparing the ministerial meeting and fine-tuning the ministerial Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group to be adopted in February 2018 in Budapest.

## V4 + Australia meeting of Ministers for Foreign Trade - 19 January, Budapest

The first-ever ministerial meeting between the Visegrad Group and Australia, attended by Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment Steven Ciobo from Australia, was organised in line with the Hungarian Presidency's Global Visegrad priority. The meeting underlined the V4's increasing global visibility and the Australian side confirmed that it followed actively the Visegrad Group's dynamism within Europe. The consultation of the ministers responsible for external trade focussed on trade relations including the issues of the EU-Australia Free Trade Agreement, global challenges such as migration, and other areas of possible cooperation. Both sides – the V4 and Australia – emphasised appreciation toward each other's' success in economy and other fields, as well as their openness to deepening relations.

## Extraordinary meeting of V4 + 4 Agricultural Ministers – 25 January, Budapest

The meeting was attended by the V4 and Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, as traditionally, and cooperation was extended this time to Croatia as well. H.E. Phil Hogan, EU Commissioner was a guest participant. The substantive agenda focused on the future framework and financial aspects of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for the V4+4 countries to receive direct information from the European Commission, which was important in light of the Reflection Paper on the Future of EU finances adopted by the European Commission on 28 June 2017 and its Communication on "the Future of Food and Farming" on 29 November 2017. The V4 countries and Croatia issued a joint ministerial declaration on the Commission Communication on the Future of Food and Farming.

## II. Regional Digital Summit - 25-26 January, Budapest

While the first summit in 2016 focused on autonomous vehicles, the 2018 event focused on the fourth industrial revolution. With a regional (V4+/CEE) focus, the event's agenda included the digitization of the industry, the development of smart cities and the introduction of new areas of digitization - fintech, blockchains, and electronic payment procedures. Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner responsible for the Digital Economy and Society also participated and underlined that the EU should invest more in R & D in the future, because the US and Japan precede the EU in this regard. The RDS's guest of honour was Israel, a country dedicated to digitalization, smart solutions and innovation and which could be a global example.

## V4 Prime Ministers' Summit and panel discussion on the future of Europe – 26 January, Budapest

The Visegrad Group Prime Ministers' Budapest summit focussed on EU-related matters on the agenda of the informal European Council of 23rd February 2018, including institutional affairs of the Union and the new EU budget after 2020 (MFF). The heads of governments also exchanged views and coordinated positions on recent developments related to migration. The Prime Ministers adopted a V4 joint statement on the future of the European Union.

Following the meeting, the V4 Prime Ministers participated in a joint panel discussion on Europe's future. They underlined that the Visegrad Group contributes significantly to Europe's economy and stability, and reinforced their commitment to V4 cooperation in several areas including infrastructure (e.g. high-speed railway connections). The Prime Ministers highlighted multiple strategic issues in which the Visegrad countries formulate joint positions, such as rejecting illegal migration and protecting the EU's borders, preserving the leading role of the European Council in the EU decision making, ensuring the EU's competitiveness e.g. by maintaining cohesion policy, and speeding up the Western Balkans' EU integration.

## V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council (Article 50) – 29 January, Brussels

The purpose of the meeting convened by Hungarian EU State Secretary Szabolcs Takács was to discuss the V4 positions about the items on the agenda of the General Affairs Council (GAC) in EU27 format, specifically the transition period after Brexit and the applying negotiation directives. The participants coordinated their position regarding Brexit issues. At the subsequent GAC meeting, EU27 ministers adopted negotiating directives for the Brexit negotiations which detailed the EU position regarding the transition period.

## V4+Central European Defence Cooperation – Defence Policy Directors meeting – January 30-31, Budapest

The V4 Defence Policy Directors coordinated their positions on key issues on the NATO and EU agenda, such as preparations for the NATO Summit on 11-12 July 2018, and the joint participation in the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). They also laid the policy groundwork for the meeting of V4 Defence Ministers on 27 March 2018. On 31 January, together with their colleagues from Austria, Slovenia and Croatia they discussed the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency of Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC): deepening regional defence cooperation on managing illegal mass migration, and examining the possibilities for launching a common CEDC PESCO project. The back-to-back V4 and CEDC DPD meetings were organised in line with the Hungarian V4 Presidency's goal of promoting V4+CEDC cooperation, as Hungary holds both the V4 and CEDC Presidency in the first half of 2018.

## V4+ RAIL CEO SUMMIT - 31 January – 1 February, Budapest

The railway conference organised by the Hungrail association was attended by representatives from the Visegrad Group, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Austria. The most emphasized topic of the conference was how to handle the increasing Asian container traffic. The sides had a joint opinion on increasing the competitiveness of the railway movement of goods along the north-south railway lines in order to utilize the capacity of the railway infrastructure.

## V4+4 ministerial meeting on Cohesion Policy – 1-2 February, Budapest

The Hungarian Presidency organised its most substantial meeting related to Cohesion Policy on 1-2 February in Budapest with the purpose of adopting the Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group. All participants emphasized and appreciated the effort of the Presidency regarding the document. Commissioner Günther Oettinger (Budget and Human Resources), Commissioner Marianne Thyssen (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility) and Director General Marc Lemaître (Regional and Urban Policy) were invited to share the Commissions' position regarding the future of Cohesion Policy and the Multiannual Financial Framework. As a result of the strong cooperation of the V4+ countries during the Hungarian Presidency, a Joint Statement was adopted on the cornerstones of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 not only by the Visegrad countries but also Croatia.

## V4-Korea Knowledge Sharing Program - Interim Reporting and Policy Practitioners' Workshop - 5-8 February, Seoul

The workshop took place in the framework of the V4-Korea Knowledge Sharing Program (KSP), a multi-year, multilateral program launched in 2016 to strengthen the economies of its participants through sharing knowledge in the field of science, technology and innovation. The overarching theme for the 2017/2018 KSP cycle is "Innovation Policy for Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Era of Industry 4.0".

## V4 defence planning experts workshop - 6-7 February, Budapest

The meeting focused on fleshing out the details of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the common V4 NATO capability target, setting up a V4 Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ).

## Meeting of the Economic Affairs Committees of V4 Parliaments – 7-8 February, Budapest

The meeting focussed on the targeted revision of the 'posting workers' directive, the preparation for the next European Union budgetary and cohesion policy period, as well as related economic policy and economic development plans. The representatives of the V4 economic committees signed a joint memorandum on the meeting's agenda items.

## V4+U.S. MFA Political Directors' consultations – 13 February, Washington D.C.

High-level meetings between the Visegrád Group MFA Political Directors and their counterparts in the US administration were held in Washington D.C.. The V4 Political Directors met with Thomas Shannon, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, and Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia. U.S. government officials from the Department of Defence and the National Security Council also took part in the meeting. The full day of panel meetings focused on topical European and transatlantic issues, including the European neighbourhood, energy cooperation and regional security. The V4 Political Directors welcomed the opportunity to enhance their cooperation with the United States, as strategic partners and natural allies on a host of geopolitical issues. The partners agreed to cooperate on specific projects of common interest, thereby strengthening the U.S.-V4 aspect of Transatlantic Cooperation.

## Think Visegrad Mid-Term Conference 2018 – 13-15 February, Tata, Budapest

Together with the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy, the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT) organised the *Think Visegrad Mid-Term Conference 2018* in Tata and Budapest. More than 40 experts from the Visegrad region, Europe and other transatlantic and international partners participated. The meeting provided in-depth insights and analysis into the development of V4 cooperation under the Hungarian Presidency. The conference was supported by the Visegrad Fund, the Hungarian V4 Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

## Meeting of the Agricultural Committees of V4 Parliaments – 14-15 February, Budapest

Participants discussed the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020 and issues related to double standards in food quality and unfair commercial practices towards the consumers. The parties considered it necessary to introduce EU-level measures in order to put an end to unfair commercial practices vis-à-vis the consumers. In this respect, they welcomed that the European Commission continued to deal with this issue at a high level thanks to the concerted action of the V4 countries. At the end of their meeting, heads of delegations signed a closing joint V4 document on the CAP reform and double standards.

## V4 director level discussion about the Multiannual Financial Framework - 16 February, Budapest

The State Secretariat for European Union Affairs organised a videoconference with the V4 partners to discuss the Leaders' Agenda and the Commission's communication on the post 2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. The participants agreed that the Commission's schedule for the negotiation is really ambitious, however, the quality of the agreement prevails over the timing. The V4 countries acknowledged that the new challenges should be tackled at EU level, therefore additional financing should be provided for securing and strengthening the EU's external border protection, addressing the root causes of migration and enhancing European defence cooperation. Meanwhile the EU should not lose the focus of its long-term objectives, therefore the allocations for common agricultural policy and cohesion policy should be maintained. The directors agreed to emphasise these messages at the informal EUCO meeting in February.

## Opening of the contemporary art exhibition "A View from V4" - 20 February, Brussels

Szabolcs Takács, Secretary of State for EU affairs of Hungary opened the exhibition, emphasising its message that the V4 countries have been important parts of Europe for many centuries, having a shared cultural identity.

## V4 Health Ministers' Conference - 20-23 February, Budapest

V4 parties signed a joint statement on strengthening their cooperation and confirmed their commitment to actively participate in combating non-communicable diseases, in particular addressing nutritional risk factors and combating all forms of malnutrition. Minister of Human Capacities of Hungary Zoltán Balog underlined that the V4 countries made the first steps towards the cooperation in the fair pricing of medicines, the joint acquisition of vaccines and the contribution to the innovative medicines.



## V4 + Australia meeting of Foreign Ministers – 22 February, Budapest

After the first V4+Australia ministerial meeting on external trade in January, the first-ever *foreign ministerial* meeting of the Visegrad Group and Australia was held in Budapest. The sides jointly regarded illegal migration as a threat to the stability of the societies. The parties also discussed the EU-Australia Free Trade Agreement. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia thanked Hungary for supporting the signing of the Free Trade Agreement with the EU, which in her opinion would profit all participants.

## Meeting of V4 National Armaments Directors (NAD) - February 22, Budapest

At one of their regular consultations, the V4 NAD focused on deepening cooperation in the field of defence related research and development.

## V4 prime ministerial meeting in preparation of the informal European Council - 23 February, Brussels

At their informal meeting, Heads of Government of the V4 discussed two major topics, institutional issues on the one hand, such as the future composition of the European Parliament and the Spitzenkandidaten process, and the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) on the other hand. The Leaders' Agenda being the main fundament of the discussions, the meeting did not produce formal conclusions. The idea of introducing transnational lists at the next European Parliamentary elections was rejected and the proposal of reducing the number of MEPs after Brexit won broad support.

## V4+Central Asia meeting of Foreign Ministers – 27 February, Budapest

In line with the Hungarian V4 Presidency's Global Visegrad priority, Budapest hosted the first-ever Visegrad Group + Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) meeting of foreign ministers. Participants exchanged views on opportunities of interregional dialogue and various current global challenges such as religious radicalism, terrorism, illegal migration, human trafficking and organized crime. The meeting was also attended by the EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian. Participants expressed their readiness to continue the process of bringing closer the two regions by consulting on a regular basis.

## V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council - 27 February, Brussels

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss preparations of the General Affairs Council (priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency, preparations of the March EUCO, rule of law as well as the preparations of the General Affairs Council (Article 50). The Council began preparations for the European Council meeting on 22 and 23 March by discussing an annotated draft agenda. The meeting focused on measures to strengthening growth, creating new jobs and improving competitiveness, among other political issues, such as the rule of law in Poland and the forthcoming EU-Western Balkans summit.

## Series of Conference on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework from the V4's point of view - 27 February 2018 - 15 March, Brussels

Under the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group, the Antall József Knowledge Centre in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union and the State Secretariat for European Union Affairs organised a four-event debate on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), jointly with the following partners: Window Polska, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy (Czech Republic), and 'From the Tatras to Schuman' (Slovakia), and the respective Permanent Representations to the European Union. The first event on 27th February focused on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework from the V4's point of view, a General Approach and the role of European Added Value. The second conference on 15th March provided an opportunity to exchange views on the impact of Brexit.

## V4+Malta Prime Ministerial joint letter concerning the ongoing dialogues of the modification of the Posting of Workers Directive - 27 February

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrád countries and Malta sent a joint letter to Presidents Jean-Claude Juncker and Antonio Tajani, as well as to Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov concerning the ongoing interinstitutional negotiations (dialogues) on the modification of the Posting of Workers Directive. The purpose of the letter was to express their common concerns regarding the Commission's proposed solution (the so-called 'sunset clause') regarding the applicability of posting rules in the road transport sector. As a positive outcome, this proposal was rejected and was not included in the final text of the revised Directive.

## V4 Senior Body meeting and V4+RoK Deputy Defence Ministers meeting - February 27-28, Budapest

Besides reviewing priorities in NATO and EU, the Senior Body – whose task is high level supervision of the V4 defence cooperation – approved the agenda and deliverables of the V4 Defence Ministerial on 27 March 2018. With their South Korean colleagues, the deputy ministers compared notes on respective regional security challenges and discussed opportunities for further cooperation.

## Official Meeting of V4+ Speakers of the Parliament – 1-2 March, Budapest

The meeting focused on topics such as the assessment of the V4 Hungarian presidency and the reinforcement of the V4's parliamentary cooperation. Hungarian Speaker László Kövér informed his partners that the cooperation between the V4 parliaments has never been as intensive as during the Hungarian presidency, and emphasised the significance of the V4 joint action in defence of European values. The Speakers/Presidents of the V4 Parliaments issued a comprehensive joint statement with strong messages on the joint V4 positions in current European affairs, reinforcing the V4 countries' commitment to a strong and efficient Europe, by preserving past achievements and successes, respecting the legal frameworks in force—with special regard to the Schengen system and the single market—as well as the protection of the external borders.

## Ministerial Summit “Future competitiveness of the road transport sector in light of the Mobility Package” - 6 March, Budapest

The conference, attended by representatives from Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain was aimed at developing a common approach on the way forward on the negotiations. The event concentrated on the following issues: the social and market issues of the first Mobility Package inter alia posting of drivers, driving and rest time rules, spending the driver's regular weekly rest in the cabin and returning home. The discussion enabled the participants to have a shared approach during the negotiations within the Council and with the European Parliament in order to find a balanced and reasonable solution when setting new rules applicable to the road transport sector.

## V4 Emergency Response Exercise (oil stocking) – 8 March, Budapest

The main purpose of the event was to introduce the V4 delegations to each other's local supply disruption mechanisms, to practice the international procedures applied in case of an emergency situation, in order to establish the framework of a long-term cooperation, possibly with the establishment of a regional emergency working group.

## V4 Smart Platform International Workshop - 8-9 March, Bratislava

Carrying on the professional dialogue with identified V4 partners, the National Mobile Payment Plc., project leader of the V4 Smart Platform held a two-day international workshop to establish the professional base for the project white paper document, containing the identified areas of collaboration in the field of Mobility, Payment and Data. The white paper document, to be published by the end of May, will serve also as the base to trigger the identified pilot projects to be implemented during the next (2018-19) Slovakian V4 presidency.

## V4 + UK expert roundtable on improving the collaboration of industry and research organizations – sharing best practice – 12 March, Budapest

The British Embassy and the NRD Office organised a round table discussion about enhancing cooperation between the industry and research organisations, with the involvement of RDI experts from the Visegrad Four (V4) countries and the UK.

## EU HoMs meeting - 13 March, Budapest

EU HoMs meeting was organised by the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Visegrad-House in the framework of the cooperation between the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group and the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The speaker of the event, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Mr Levente Magyar elaborated on EU and foreign affairs related topics with an emphasis on the synergies of the two presidencies. Common positions within the Visegrad Group related to infrastructural projects were also presented to the Heads of Missions.

## Second meeting of the V4+Israel Working Group on Research, Development and Innovation - 13 March, Jerusalem

The Working Group reached an agreement on the details of its first project which aims at sharing Israeli innovation expertise with the V4 countries' young entrepreneurs/start-uppers, as well as giving an overview of the Israeli innovation scene that could be useful in developing a public policy supportive of the development of innovation. In conjunction with the meeting, the Working Group conducted a professional program in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem to meet the relevant actors of the vibrant Israeli innovation ecosystem, such as the Israeli Innovation Authority, Tel Aviv Global Labs Tel Aviv shared space for innovation, Ecomotion focusing on the dynamic community involved in the Smart Transportation sector, OurCrowd (the leading equity crowdfunding platform), as well as with various start-ups, a VC and a law firm.

## Future of cars - cars of the future: a conference on the future of cars and car industry - 13 March, Brussels

Organised by the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU, high level representatives from V4 governments and the European Commission, car industry representatives, experts and researchers had an in-depth discussion on the future automobile sector and mobility at the event.

## V4 Conference on Social and Technological Innovations – A Full Participation of Persons with Disabilities - 13-14 March, Budapest

The Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary held a two-day conference on disability policy within the framework of the V4 Hungarian Presidency. The focal point of the conference was today's social and technological innovation. The purpose of the event was to provide ample opportunity for the participating countries to exchange experiences on disability policies and practices, and to identify common directions and interfaces. At the end of the conference the state secretaries responsible for disability affairs of the V4 countries, together with the participants of the Disability Conference reaffirmed their commitment to further implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 Action Plan and to formulate recommendations to the European Commission for the post-2020 strategy.

## V4 EU Battlegroup (EU BG) Working Group meeting - 19-21 March, Prague

The working group completed the force generation process for the next standby of the V4 EU Battlegroup in the second half of 2019.

## V4 coordination meeting prior to the General Affairs Council - 20 Marc, Brussels

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the political positions of the four countries concerning the agenda items of the General Affairs Council and the subsequent General Affairs Council in EU27 format under Article 50 (Brexit). The coordination meeting convened by EU State Secretary Szabolcs Takács focused on the preparations for the European Council of 22-23rd March 2018.

## V4 tourism workshop - 21 March, Seoul

Under the aegis of the Hungarian V4 Presidency, the Hungarian Tourism Agency organised a V4 tourism workshop in Seoul. The event generated business opportunities for suppliers from the V4 countries through presentations and one-on-one meetings. The one-on-one workshop facilitated networking in the course of which Korean buyers and V4 suppliers shared market overview and ideas on new products as well as promotion opportunities for each destination.

## V4 prime ministerial meeting in preparation to the European Council - 22 March, Brussels

Before the March European Council, a usual preparatory V4 summit was held in Brussels with the participation of the four prime ministers, focusing on the major topics of the two-day meeting of the EU heads of state of government (migration, trade, taxation, internal market, social issues, Brexit) as well as other European issues and upcoming high-level meetings.

## V4 Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Employment – 22nd of March- Visegrad House Budapest

The first major topic of the meeting was the modification of the directive concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services. Secondly, the ministers discussed the new proposal of the European Commission of March 13, 2018 concerning the establishment of a European Labour Authority. All participants agreed that more time was needed for the detailed evaluation of the proposal and that it needs to be handled with care. The necessity of this new authority and its added value to the existing institutions is uncertain; participants emphasised the importance of national sovereignty and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

## Signing event of the common V4 letter of intent of EUTF Africa – 22 March, Brussels

Following the V4 countries' decision to jointly finance a EUR 35 million project of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa in Libya aimed at effective border control, State Secretaries of V4 countries signed the letter of intent on 22 March 2018, in accordance with their contribution in Brussels. The V4 expressed that they supported the joint efforts of the EU and its Member States to stem irregular migration in the Central Mediterranean route and the departures of migrants from Libya towards Europe, by tackling the root causes of migration and effective border protection.

## V4+AT+SI Meeting for Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) and Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) – 22-23 March, Budapest

The main objective of the meeting hosted by the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary was to share experiences related to country profiles on the MAP/APA, the legal background, statistics and the changes according to the BEPS project. The parties expressed their strong interest to continue the exchange of views, best practices and experiences in the form of a working group, to ensure regular meetings and developing expert contacts, which is highly important also from the EU Directives' perspective.

## Budapest Talent Summit 2018 – V4 High Level Conference on Talent Care - 22-24 March, Budapest

The aim of the conference organised by the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary was to present talent supporting methods and best practices and to highlight the significance of developing future cooperation. The sides considered the joint reflection of the V4 countries primarily important in order to formulate common solutions to similar problems in talent management. In accordance with the aims of the International Visegrad Fund, they emphasized their joint endeavours to share best practices. They will explore the possibility of including talent management in support of the objectives in the field of education.

## V4+China Political Directors' meeting - 22 March, Beijing

The Visegrad Group MFA Political Directors and their Chinese counterpart, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Chao met to conduct high-level governmental V4+China talks. The V4 Political Directors also paid a courtesy call on State Councillor, Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi. The discussions focussed on topical issues of mutual interest, at international and regional levels. Political directors exchanged views on the cooperation of the Visegrad Countries and





## V4-Korea Knowledge Sharing Program - Final Reporting Workshop 2018 – 27 March, Budapest

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary hosted the Final Reporting Workshop and Senior Policy Dialogue of the 2017/2018 cycle of the Visegrad 4-Republic of Korea Knowledge Sharing Program (KSP). The V4-Korea KSP is aimed at contributing to a more innovative and robust economy of the participants through sharing knowledge in the field of science technology and innovation. The main theme of the 2017/18 V4-Korea KSP is strengthening the innovative capacities of small and medium-size enterprises. The programme will provide policy recommendations for the participating countries. The final report will summarize the conclusions of the experts' work and will be published in June 2018.

## V4 defence Planning Group (PG) meeting - 27-28 March, Budapest

This body of senior defence planning officials met to finalize the text of the MoU on meeting the common V4 NATO capability target: setting up a Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ).

## V4+CEDC Defence Ministerial Meeting- 27-28 March, Budapest

The Ministers discussed political priorities within NATO and the EU, with special regard to harmonizing policy positions ahead of the NATO Summit on 11-12 July, or cooperation in the framework of EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). For example, they were united in supporting the reform of NATO's Command Structure, and agreed that one of the new land Component Commands should be created in Poland. They noted progress in preparing for the next standby of the V4 EU Battlegroup and agreed that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on meeting the common V4 NATO capability target – setting up a Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ) – will be signed at the NATO Defence Ministerial in June 2018. The ministers issued a joint statement covering the full range of key issues discussed. On 28 March, the V4/CEDC ministers (HU, SK, CZ, AT, SI, HR and Poland as an observer) discussed the primary security challenges affecting the Western Balkans, with special regard to the migration crisis, and welcomed the Hungarian proposal to organize another regional border defence exercise in 2019. They also tasked their Defence Policy Directors to make further efforts in order to develop a CEDC PESCO project.

## V4 Ministerial Conference on Family Affairs - 28 March, Budapest

In the framework of the thematic year "Year of Families" in Hungary in 2018, the Ministry of Human Capacities organised a conference titled "*Strong families for a strong Europe!*", focusing on demography and the family and work balance. The event aimed to contribute to the joint reflection about Europe's future, and the strengthening of V4 cooperation. After the ministerial panel discussion, a joint declaration was signed, stating that the family was a fundamental unit of the society, on which every other community and the nation itself is built. The ministers responsible for family affairs of the V4 countries emphasized the importance of protecting and strengthening families and the importance of cooperation in this field.

## V4+Israel Counter-Terrorism Conference – 28-29 March, Gárdony

As a next step of the cooperation that started with the Counter-Terrorism Preparatory Forum held in Visegrád in September 2017, a V4+Israel Counter-Terrorism Conference was organised to strengthen the cooperation between the V4 countries and Israel on counter-terrorism issues. The event aimed at developing professional relations, and discussing the plans of the sub-working groups in the areas of intelligence, operations and protection of persons within the V4+Israel Working Group.

## think.BDPST innovation conference with Korea as guest of honour – 28-29 March, Budapest

Organised by the Antall József Knowledge Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary and with the support of the International Visegrad Fund, the annual think.BDPST strategic conference in 2018 focused on the future of transport, smart cities, and urban innovation. The guest of honour of the conference was the Republic of Korea whose representative recalled the successfully developing V4+Korea cooperation in various fields including RDI.