

V4 – Conference – Where to carry on?  
‘The Visegrád cooperation’s present and perspectives’<sup>+</sup>

( *Merre tovább? A Visegrádi együttműködés jelene és távlatai* )

*Eotvos Lorand University* – Budapest, April 28, 2015

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(Introductory remarks)

The Visegrad Group was formed on 15th February 1991 as V3 at a meeting of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, József Antall.

This high-level meeting in Visegrad, Hungary, was preceded by a similar □ meeting, which took place there in 1335 and was attended by John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, Charles I of Anjou (Charles Robert), King of Hungary, and Casimir III, King of Poland. The central motif of the two meetings was the desire to intensify mutual cooperation and friendship among these Central European states.

The formation of the modern Visegrad Group was motivated by four factors:

1. the desire to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe;
2. the desire to overcome historic animosities between Central European countries;
3. the belief that through joint efforts it will be easier to achieve the set goals, i.e. to successfully accomplish social transformation and join in the European integration process; and
4. the proximity of ideas of the then ruling political elites.

It was especially in the initial period of its existence (1991–1993) when the Visegrad Group played its most important role during talks with NATO and the EU. In the following years, the intensity of cooperation between the V4 countries began to slacken due to the prevalence of the idea that individual efforts towards accession to the Euro-Atlantic integration formations will be more efficient. Active Visegrad cooperation was resumed in 1998.

Visegrad cooperation remains also nowadays, in these difficult times, an important and integral part of our foreign policy. It includes aspects that would be difficult to replace. The network of mutual trust that we have created between our states is a factor that needs to be appreciated and we would like to continue to work with it.

We have not reached always within V4 consensus on solutions to some foreign policy issues, or common position within EU Framework. As a minister for European Affairs and later deputy agriculture minister I participated in lots of coordination meetings. Sometimes we agreed, sometimes not, but agreements prevailed. However, the times when we have been forced to have one common position are fortunately history and I hope, that will never ever return. The critics and wrong-wishes of V4 cooperation should bear this in mind.

Certainly, Visegrad cooperation in the EU was not always successful, but in most cases it reached concrete results. We highly appreciate mutual exchange of information and experience, coordination of positions, including cooperation on specific issues.

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Because of unfounded comments and criticism in Hungarian press concerning some recent events in the central European regional policy, we had, together with the Slovak Embassy, issue a joint statement, in which we strongly denied information about the falling apart of the V4 group:

We continue a closer cooperation in all fields, including strategic fields, such as defense and military cooperation, energy security, Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans and internal cohesion. We closely cooperate in supporting cultural, science, applied science, sports activities etc among the V4 countries and V4+. In my view a bigger effort/focus should be directed towards V4 public diplomacy. As Minister, my motto was „EU user friendly“. May be it is time to transfer this motto also to „V4 user friendly“.

We currently do not consider the direct enlargement of the Visegrad Group, but put an emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation in V4 plus format. It must be stressed, despite wrong-wishers and critics, that V4 is more and more attractive for third countries seeking our cooperation/support on various levels, including International Visegrad Fund.

The Visegrad Group cooperates with other regional bodies, as well as with single countries in the region and beyond on an ad-hoc or regular basis. The Benelux countries, countries of the Nordic Council of Ministers, countries within the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans belong to the Group's priorities as well as cooperation with USA, Canada, Japan or South Korea.

*Programme for the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2015-2016*

Motto: V 4 Trust

In 2016, the Visegrad Group (V4) will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. The aim of the Czech Presidency (CZ V4 PRES) is to concentrate on the main themes with a specific practical impact. This means narrowing down the agenda focusing on real objectives and needs. Only in this way is it possible to avoid the risk of changing quality of mutual cooperation for its quantity.

The programme for the Czech Presidency aims to expand cooperation in areas where joint efforts can bring concrete results and thereby reinforce trust in the usefulness of Visegrad cooperation and among the Visegrad partners. It will be based on the document “Guidelines on the Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation” (the Kroměříž Declaration of V4 PMs), where the relevant ministries identified promising themes and forms of cooperation.

Thematic priorities of the CZ V4 PRES 2015-2016

1. Togetherness – internal cohesion of the V4 region and focus on IVF
2. Energy Union
3. European Neighbourhood Policy, enlargement policy, transition support and development aid, WBF
4. Security and Defence Cooperation (focus on V4 Battle Group, cyber security, NATO etc)
5. Active practising of the principle of solidarity in the EU – close coordination of positions
6. Development of Infrastructure
7. Combating tax fraud and evasion

Important event in Hungary during our V 4 PRES will be the Lustig train:

In 2015 the whole world will celebrate 70 years since the end of the WW II and remembering the holocaust. This fact will be reflected also in the scenario of the project Lustig Train - The Train of Freedom. A special historical train unit, conducting exhibition and theatre-performance will undertake a month-long journey leading through the territory of Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary (Budapest, July 5-7, Győr July 8), Austria and the Czech Republic. We believe that the international scope of the project Lustig Train-The Train of Freedom is a highly representative and unique project.

*Juraj Chmiel, Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Hungary, April 2015*

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