

# **ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP BRATISLAVA – BUDAPEST – PRAGUE – WARSAW, (JUNE 2000)**

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Visegrad Group**

The Visegrad Group was formed in 1991. The leaders of three Central European countries met on 15 February 1991 in the ancient town of Visegrad, Hungary, to sign the „Declaration on the cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary on the road to European integration“. Four summits were held in the V3 format: in April 1990 (Bratislava), February 1991 (Visegrad), October 1991 (Krakow) and in May 1992 (Prague).

In October 1998, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland declared their interest in revitalizing Visegrad cooperation. The Visegrad summit in Bratislava on 14 May 1999 was held for the first time in the new V4 format, with former Czechoslovakia divided into two independent states. The Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia issued a joint statement and approved the programme document „Content of Visegrad Cooperation“ outlining the political framework for cooperation in the fields of foreign and security policy, internal security, education, culture, youth and sports, science and technology, environmental protection, infrastructure and cross-border cooperation. The Visegrad Group was finally getting down to business.

The Czech Republic coordinated V4 activities in the Visegrad Year between the May 1999 summit in Bratislava and the June 2000 summit in Prague. The primary achievement of this period is the full utilization of the political framework for contacts on all levels, from the Presidents and Prime Ministers to parliamentarians and experts. A genuine spontaneous cooperation has been set in motion, with potential for further development in all useful areas.

Key priorities of the Czech Republic's term as V4 coordinator included the promotion of understanding of Visegrad cooperation among the general public. The new Website ([www.visegrad.org](http://www.visegrad.org)) provides updates on the Visegrad Group, its current activities, meetings and statements. Information about the International Visegrad Fund and its grant allocations will be available shortly. The members of the Editorial Board of the Website come from all Visegrad countries.

Great numbers of articles dealing with the Visegrad cooperation appeared in press of V4 countries. Thanks to public activities of the politicians of V4 countries and other promoters the Visegrad cooperation became an integral part of political vocabulary.

### **1.2. Structure of Visegrad cooperation**

The Bratislava Summit agreed that no institutional structures should be set up for the Visegrad Group, with the sole exception of the secretariat of the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava. Visegrad cooperation is based on regular meetings of representatives of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia at various levels.

The Visegrad Year is structured as follows:

The Prime Ministers hold an annual official meeting in the coordinating country. They may also meet unofficially between the official summits.

The Ministers may meet their respective counterparts as needed.

The Secretaries of State of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs hold biannual meetings.

The Ambassadors of the V4 countries meet regularly in individual countries.

The Visegrad coordinators (National Coordinators in each V4 country) hold biannual consultations at the level of directors of department at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The coordinator for the 1999/2000 Visegrad Year has been Director of the Central European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The coordinator of the 2000/2001 Visegrad Year will be Director of the Central and South European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

Beside contacts at the government level, the Content of Visegrad Cooperation envisages meetings of Presidents, parliamentarians and representatives of the civil society.

## **2. Fields of cooperation**

### ***2.1. European integration***

Like in the initial period (1991-1992) the entry of the V4 member countries into the EU remains a priority of the Visegrad Group. The Group does in no way regard itself as an alternative to the EU. On the contrary, it wants to be perceived as a contribution to the all-European integration efforts just like other regional groupings (Benelux, Nordic Council).

The four Central European countries are convinced that they can well help each other on their road to the European Union. By this they do not mean merely taking joint positions towards the EU or closer coordination of attitudes in the negotiation process. They rather have in mind the exchange of information related to the process of negotiations with the EU and the state of preparation of the V4 member countries for EU membership. To this end, consultations of negotiators with the EU have been agreed and are regularly held. An example of assistance of technical nature was a meeting of representatives of border police forces of the V4 countries to discuss the building and technical support of border guards with respect to the Schengen standards.

An informal meeting of V4 Prime Ministers (October 1999) and a meeting of Presidents (December 1999) focused among other topics on European integration issues. Both meetings, held in the High Tatra Mountains, stressed the will of the four Central European countries to provide support to one another on their road towards the European Union.

The first meeting of high-level representatives of the candidate countries responsible for the field of European integration was held in Bratislava from 4 to 5 November 1999. Its agenda included cooperation between the V4 countries in the European integration processes. The negotiators agreed that their aim was not to create an institutional framework but rather to define the contents of cooperation between the V4 and the EU. Their talks then focused on questions of the Third Pillar with particular attention paid to the Schengen system.

An informal meeting between the V4 Deputy Foreign Ministers and the British Minister of State for Europe Keith Vaz in London from 31 March to 1 April 2000. The meeting, confirming that the UK perceives the V4 as a clearly defined group, focused on public opinion in the EU and candidate countries and on communication with the media. The Minister of State, Mr. Vaz, appreciated the V4 efforts to achieve EU membership in the foreseeable future.

A meeting of V4 chief negotiators in Brussels on 6 April 2000. The working meeting of the chief negotiators was held at the beginning of the Inter-governmental Accession Conferences at the level of deputies between the EU and the „Luxembourg Six“ countries and shortly after the beginning of the IGCs also between the EU and the Slovak Republic and other countries of the so-called Helsinki Six (28 March 2000). The meeting was therefore a good opportunity for exchanging information and views on the results of the IGCs and other questions of common interest of the V4 countries, including Schengen agreement. Apart from specific questions of the integration process, the negotiators discussed also how the public in their countries perceive negotiations with the EU.

Meeting of Prime Ministers of the V4 countries with FRG Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in Gniezno on 28 April 2000. The Prime Ministers discussed European solidarity in the process of integration and the situation in Central Europe. They signed a joint declaration in which they committed themselves to working together in their efforts to materialize the aspirations of nations and communities to live in a unified Europe and to cooperation in building a European future, while respecting the diversity of cultures, national traditions and regional differences.

Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Four with French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in Budapest on 4 May 2000. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin met in Budapest the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries, Miloš Zeman of the Czech Republic, Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Jerzy Buzek of Poland and Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia. The meeting took place upon the initiative of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The Prime Ministers of France and of the Visegrad Four discussed the internal developments in the European Union and reviewed the progress of accession negotiations of their countries to the EU. The special importance of the Budapest meeting was emphasised by the fact that France will fill the rotating post of the EU Presidency in the second half of 2000. The period of the French presidency is of crucial importance for completing the EU's Inter-governmental Conference on institutional reforms, and continuing the enlargement process successfully.

## **2.2. Security issues**

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined the North Atlantic Alliance on 12 March 1999. All three countries expressed support for the admission of Slovakia to NATO. Accordingly, they welcomed the decision taken at the NATO summit in Washington to include their partner from the Visegrad Group among the candidate countries.

The process of trilateral consultations which gained momentum following the NATO summit in Madrid helped increase the efficiency of overall preparations of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland for NATO membership. The three new Allies are now sharing their experience with Slovakia.

The chairmen of foreign affairs and defence and security committees of the Parliaments of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia met in Budapest on 5 October 1999.

The statement issued by the committee chairmen underlines the importance of continued NATO enlargement and their interest in the open door policy. Together they called upon the Alliance to admit another V4 country, Slovakia, as soon as possible. The admission of Slovakia would comply with the conclusions of the Washington Summit and express NATO's appreciation for the political changes in the country. They expressed deep concern over the Kosovo crisis caused by the undemocratic policy of Slobodan Milošević, and support for the international action to halt ethnic cleansing. The committee chairmen also supported the enhancement of the European Security and Defence Identity and at the same time expressed their conviction that transatlantic cooperation has an irreplaceable role in preserving peace on the continent. Issues of collective defence should in their opinion remain within the competence of NATO.

The Ministers of Defence met for the first time in the V4 format in Poland on 4 November 1999. The Ministers discussed regional security, defence cooperation and Euro-Atlantic integration. They emphasized the commitment to contribute to the international efforts to resolve the crisis in the Balkans and discussed their experience concerning SFOR and KFOR missions. The Defence Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland reaffirmed their preparedness to support Slovakia in its efforts to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures and pledged to continue their cooperation namely in areas enumerated in the Membership Action Plan.

An example of very concrete cooperation were the V4 consultations in the process of preparation for the adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) the significant contribution of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the quality of the Slovak National Membership action plan.

Meeting of the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs, European Integration and Defence Committees in Bratislava from 26 to 28 April 2000. Security issues among other topics were on the agenda of the meeting. In their joint statement representatives of V4 parliaments expressed support for the endeavours of the Slovak Republic to join NATO. They expressed their conviction that the Alliance's policy of open doors is a key factor for the strengthening of security in the Euro-Atlantic area as well as their readiness to take part in the effort leading to the development of Common Defence and Security Policy. In this context representatives of V4 parliaments are convinced that a wider cooperation of the V4 in the field of defence industry and procurement would be a positive contribution of V4 governments.

### ***2.3. Justice and home affairs***

During the Visegrad Year, Ministers of the Interior met once in the V4+Austria format, Secretaries of State/Deputy Ministers of the Ministries of the Interior met twice in V4 format. Representatives of border police forces of V4 countries met once. Expert Groups of the Ministries of the Interior of V4 countries have started their work.

The Border Police Directors met in Budapest from 21 to 22 September 1999. Representatives of border police forces discussed the tasks connected with the building of border guards according to the Schengen principles on the protection of the prospective Schengen external border. Representatives of the border police agreed to hold regular meetings, to actively participate in the International Border Police Conference (IBPC), to exchange experience and technical experts. They agreed to increase their cooperation in combatting organized crime and illegal migration.

The meeting of Secretaries of State/Deputy Ministers of the Interior of V4 countries held at Donovaly, Slovak Republic, on 22 September 1999. The Joint Statement adopted at the conclusion of the meeting contains an agreement concerning continued exchange of information on the progress of public administration reform in V4 countries. The information exchange should take place at two levels, namely at the level of Secretaries of State/Deputy Ministers who should meet annually, and at the level of expert groups on specific areas of public administration.

Expert groups were set up for the following areas:

Working Group No. 1 - Distribution of competences between the government and local self-government;

Working Group No. 2 - Possibilities for utilization of information systems in public administration;

Working Group No. 3 - Preparation and training of public servants and local self-government staff.

Working Group No. 1 - Distribution of competences between the government and local self-government - met in Bratislava from 6 to 7 March 2000. The agenda included exchange of experience and debate on the decentralization of competences, on models of public administration, territorial units, competences of the State and self-government bodies at different levels, public administration financing and supervision.

Working Group No. 2 - Possibilities for utilization of information systems in public administration - met during the European Information Society Workshop held in Hradec Králové from 27 to 28 March 2000, and the meeting continued in Prague on 29 March. The agenda included the integration of government authorities into social processes and the legislation governing the role of government authorities in the computerization of public administration (Czech Republic - Government Council on State Information Policy, Hungary - Interministerial Committee on Reform, Slovakia - Government Office, Poland - Government). The experts noted significant progress achieved in all V4 countries in the utilization of IT in public administration, although the development is not fully comparable in all respects due to different policies applied in the past. The meeting focused on the financing of public administration computerization projects, the questions of basic registers (namely the register of inhabitants), transfer of certain functions from the police to civil authorities, production and distribution of basic personal documents such as identity cards, passports, driving licences.

Working Group No. 3 - Preparation and training of public servants and local self-government staff - met in Warsaw from 28 to 29 February 2000. The agenda included questions relating to competent and trained public servants, the need for continuous training of public servants, the status of local self-government staff. All expert group meetings issued joint communiqués summarizing the conclusions and outlining further possibilities and areas for cooperation. Expert group proposals for future cooperation were submitted and recommended for adoption at the meeting of Secretaries of State/Deputy Ministers of the Interior of the V4 countries held in Prague from 12 to 13 April 2000.

The Ministers of the Interior of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Austria met on 15 October. The Ministers appreciated the work of the expert groups established for combating corruption, car thefts, sport event's violence, nuclear arms and material trafficking and agreed to create an additional expert group for action against computer crime. They also agreed to explore possibilities for setting up joint posts at the borders on

the basis of bilateral agreements. The responsibilities of such posts would include readmission of foreigners, coordination of border guards, joint operations involving specific thorough checks, and the addressing of any other problems that may arise in the border area. The Ministers paid special attention to the harmonization of visa policies with EU standards. They agreed on the importance of cooperation and exchange of information on legislation, regulations and other measures adopted in connection with EU entry.

The Ministers of Justice met informally from 5 to 6 November 1999. Ministers of Justice have expressed their full support and they will create the conditions for further development of the mutual cooperation in area for law; for this purpose they have exchanged the informative materials accepted in their countries with the aim to strengthening the independence of the judiciary. Ministers of Justice consider, having in mind the historical experience, as the most appropriate to use the natural law as the ideological ground of the prepared Charter of Fundamental Rights. Ministers of Justice have accepted the proposal of the Minister of Justice for the Slovak Republic to initiate in cooperation with the Council of Europe the common Slovak-Czech-Hungarian-Polish seminar in Trenianske Teplice on the implementation of the Recommendation No. R(93)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council for Europe an effective access to the law and justice for the very poor.

#### ***2.4 Transport and communications***

The State secretaries for transport of the V4 countries met in Bratislava on 14 October 1999. The key issues discussed were the development of transport corridors connecting Northern and Southern Europe and the cooperation in the field of transport related to European and North-Atlantic integration. The four officials expressed their willingness to have further consultations in year 2000, possibly on the level of ministers.

Cooperation between the Czech Post, Hungarian Post, Polish Post and Slovak Post. Closer cooperation between the four Posts has been developing since the beginning of 1993. Originally, cooperation began to develop in this field after the proclamation of independence of the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic when there was a need to agree transitional measures to introduce a normal regime of international relations between the two countries in this area. Later on, the Polish Republic and the Republic of Hungary also joined in. Cooperation has been developing through consultations of representatives of the four countries' posts, twice a year as a rule, and focuses on the following fields:

- increasing the quality of postal services between the participating countries in order to achieve EU standards. Bilateral agreements on the quality of mail services concluded between the four posts form the basis for achieving this aim. Special bilateral quality tests are made to provide information on the real levels achieved;
- introduction of new products on both national and international scale, particularly within the exchange of experience;
- coordination of activities in relation to the Association of European Mail Operators PostEurop.

#### ***2.5. Culture, science and education***

The dominating V4 activity in the field of culture, science and education in the „Visegrad Year“ were preparations for the establishment of the International Visegrad Fund. Other events included meetings of representatives of the Ministries of Culture, Academies of Sciences and a Theatre Festival.

International Visegrad Fund. In the document entitled „Contents of Visegrad Cooperation“, adopted in Bratislava on 14 May 1999, the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries undertook to „take steps aimed at the establishment of a fund to finance activities in the field of education, culture and sports“. An Agreement on the Establishment of the International Visegrad Fund will be signed at the summit of the V4 Prime Ministers on 9 June 2000. The main purpose of the International Visegrad Fund will be above all to promote and develop cultural cooperation, exchanges in the field of science, research, cooperation in education, youth exchanges and regional cooperation. The intention of the founders of the Fund is to promote activities outside the framework of projects funded by individual Ministries. Preference will be given to projects involving the greatest number of member countries and contributing to greater awareness of the jointly shared Central European area. Thanks to the joint efforts of the V4 Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the first grants will be awarded in the second half of 2000. Immediately after the summit of the Prime Ministers, the Fund Secretariat will start gathering and processing grant applications. The V4 Governments are already now examining joint projects that will be eligible for grants from the Fund and informing potential applicants of this opportunity.

An International Theatre Festival was held from 8 to 9 October 1999. It was the 10th theatre festival held under the title „Na hranici“ held alternatively in Eeský Tišín, Czech Republic, and in Cieszyn, Poland. In 1999, the festival was for the first time attended by all four V4 member countries which sent 19 ensembles to take part. The festival was organized by the civic society „Iovknahranici“ in Eeský Tišín, The Theatre in Eeský Tišín, Dom Narodowy Cieszyn, „Stoelnice“ Eeský Tišín and Stowarzyszenie Solidarnosc Polsko - Czesko - Slowacka, odzial Regionalny Cieszyn. The festival was held under the honorary patronage of the Council of Europe Secretary-General and the V4 Ministers of Culture.

The V4 Ministries of Culture have set up a system of cooperation, agreed regular meetings four times a year held in their countries by rotation. In this „Visegrad Year“, the meetings discussed above all the Visegrad Fund, funding in the field of culture, promotion of joint projects taking into account the objectives of the European Community related to Euroregions and economic aspects of the protection of cultural heritage. A communique from The meeting of the Ministers of Culture in Krakow (February 15 - 18, 2000) noted such issues as is the commercialization of culture, problems of European integration and of cultural policy and funding of cinematography. The agenda of the meeting focused further on the following subjects: 1. Model of funding cultural institutions; 2. Sponsoring of artists; 3. Economic aspects of protection of cultural heritage.

Delegations of Academies of Sciences from the V4 countries met in Bratislava on 22 March 2000. The participants in the meeting agreed to set up a Central European academic forum to meet once or twice a year and to discuss topical issues in the field of science. The forum will hold its first meeting in Budapest in October 2000 to discuss brain drain issues. The forum is expected to welcome also participants from Slovenia and Austria. The Bratislava meeting further dealt with the significance of science as an integrating factor, the coordination of activities of the Academies of Sciences in various fields, including publication of journals, status of the Academies of Sciences and their cooperation with universities, implementation of projects of the 5th EU Framework Programme and reflections on priorities of the future 6th Framework Programme.

## **2.6. Environment**

In 1999, the Visegrad Group paid intensified attention to environmental issues. Cooperation in the field of environment became one of the key issues of the Visegrad Cooperation.

The first meeting of the V4 Ministers for the Environment held in Banská Štiavnica, Slovak Republic, from 7 to 8 May 1999. Ministers discussed concrete forms of further cooperation in the context of efforts of the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Republic of Poland and Republic of Hungary in speeding up the process of their entry into the European Union. This meeting restarted the process of intensification of contacts between the four countries. A joint statement adopted at the conclusion of the Banská Štiavnica talks specified the most important fields of cooperation. These include the solution of environmental issues related to the transboundary environmental impact assessment, transboundary air pollution, transboundary waste management, contamination of surface and subsoil water resources, overall regional development and landscape policy and ecosystems. The Ministers also agreed on cooperation in environmental education and awareness as well as in promoting the exchange of information on the basis of harmonized environment information systems in keeping with international standards and close cooperation in implementing international programmes aimed at reducing risks of climate change. The Ministers further encouraged the integration of environmental factors, including all basic issues, in all sectoral policies, in particular those concerning economy.

The second meeting of the Ministers for the Environment of the V4 countries took place in Český Krumlov from 8 to 9 October 1999. The meeting focused on four specific areas:

Climate change - The V4 countries will regularly exchange information on the preparation of their delegations for the 5th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change with a view to coordinating their positions. They will try to move forward the negotiations concerning compliance with the ultimate objectives of Article 3 of the Kyoto Protocol. They will cooperate in the formulation of national strategies on climate change issues as one of the priorities of their respective countries in the field of the environment. The Environment Ministries of the V4 countries will support AIJ/JI projects for GHG emission reductions under Article 6 of the Kyoto Protocol as the most effective tool of the Kyoto mechanism. They will cooperate in formulating national rules for the development and assessment of such projects, in line with the envisaged international rules. In negotiations on GHG trading, the V4 countries will bear in mind the high degree of inaccuracy in their GHG emission projections for the period 2008-2012. They will also intensify cooperation in the field of science and research, education and public awareness. In order to contribute to the international negotiations on cooperation with developing countries and on possible incentives for their increased commitment, the V4 countries will seek options enabling the developing countries to commit themselves to GHG stabilization or reduction on a voluntary basis. These commitments should be based on economic factors. The V4 countries will intensify cooperation in the field of climate change research. A very effective tool for increasing the efficiency of such cooperation are the national climate programmes supported by the 13th Congress of the World Meteorological Organization.

Accession to the European Union - The Ministers agreed, inter alia, that their countries will exchange information on the formulation of financial strategies and their successes and failures. The Ministers also agreed that their countries should, whenever possible, file joint applications for funding from different international sources. The primary tools for

integrating environmental issues into other sectors are the National Environmental Policies adopted in all V4 countries, and the strategic environmental impact assessment enabling the evaluation of economic and development policies from the perspective of environmental impact. The V4 governments have adopted strategies for informing the general public about the implications of EU membership. The Ministers agreed that the environment will be among the crucial concerns in this process and are prepared to cooperate and exchange experience in this respect. The Ministers are aware that all candidates for accession to the EU, and namely the V4 countries, are faced with similar problems in the accession process. The current relatively good information exchange should be further improved e.g. within the AC-Impel framework or through expert meetings on specific topics. The Ministers support more extensive exchange of experience among all candidate countries. The Ministers would welcome an opportunity to take part in the process of formulation EU environment policies already before their entry into the EU. For this reason, they call upon the EU to involve the candidate countries in the preparation of the 6th Action Programme on the Environment. The Ministers also agreed to strengthen the cooperation between the Cleaner Industrial Production Centres in their respective countries and to regularly exchange information and experience concerning the transposition and implementation of the IPPC directive (integrated pollution prevention and control) in individual V4 countries.

Sustainable development - The Ministers are aware of the urgent need to work for more friendly attitudes of the general public to the environment; the urgency is due to the impacts of globalization on the environment as well as to the growth of the world population and its needs. A factor of overriding importance is the involvement of the entrepreneurial sector which at present plays a crucial role in environmental protection. The Environment Ministries of V4 countries will work together to identify and address priority problems, incorporate them in the National Environmental Policies and to intensify the activities promoting the change of consumption and production patterns. Cooperation in this field will focus on Ecolabelling, namely exchange of information in the context of accession to the EU. Another area of concern are the environmental management and audit schemes (EMAS) which should inter alia, improve the competitive potential of producers from the V4 countries.

The process of environmental impact assessment - With regard to the fact that most bilateral agreements on environmental protection concluded between the V4 countries do not consistently and sufficiently emphasize cooperation in the field of EIA, the Ministers agreed to work together for the implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention). The Ministers appreciate the ratification of the Espoo Convention by Poland (12 June 1997) and Hungary (11 July 1997). Slovakia signed the Espoo Convention on 28 May 1993 and the proposed ratification was approved by the Slovak Parliament on 30 September 1999. The Czech Republic succeeded into the signature of the Espoo Convention on 30 September 1993. The ratification proposal is presently going through the Government and Parliament and the whole process should be completed in the first half of 2000. The above facts indicate that in the year 2000, all V4 countries will be Parties to the Espoo Convention. The Ministers are aware of the need to conclude bilateral agreements. Agreements on EIA cooperation in a transboundary context will comply with the provisions of Article 8 of the Espoo Convention concerning further enhancement of cooperation between neighbouring countries. To this end, the Ministers intend to set up bilateral working groups of neighbouring countries for the formulation of agreements in the field of international EIA. In

the context of implementation of these agreements, the V4 countries will exchange information and experience.

The meeting in Český Krumlov was concluded by the signature of a joint statement based on the results of the expert negotiations, containing four joint statements including proposals for future cooperation between the V4 countries in the field of the environment.

The meeting in Český Krumlov was held on the occasion of the 25th international festival of films and videos on the environment - EKOFILM. The Ministers attended the events organized during the festival and the closing ceremony.

The third meeting of the Ministers for the Environment of the V4 countries took place in Budapest from 11 to 12 May 2000. The meeting focused on four specific areas:

- preparation for EU accession
- prevention and mitigation of climate change
- nature conservation
- environmental aspects of privatisation

First officials of the state geological surveys of the V4 countries met for the first time in Visegrad from 10 to 12 January 2000. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed, aiming to promote the joint actions of the V4 countries in geology and geophysics, to set up a V4 forum of this expertise along the European Union admission procedure, and to define this agency-level forum as a prescribed organisation of geosciences in the Visegrad Co-operative procedures. The meeting and the Memorandum talked about few regional co-operative actions, for example: working out joint meta-databases of the region using the EU standards; transboundary and transregional data exchange, joint map compiling, regional modelling; and harmonised activity in paneuropean scientific projects. The Memorandum prescribes harmonised steps in EU admission, for example, V4 countries will jointly apply for membership of the EuroGeoSurveys, and they inform each other on FP5 project proposals.

### **3. Conclusion**

The primary task set for the first year after Bratislava summit was to prepare for signature the Agreement on the Establishment of the Visegrad Fund to support activities in the fields of science, education, culture and sport. The task has been completed successfully, opening new avenues for cooperation and closer contacts between the citizens of the V4 countries.

A major political task has been to assist Slovakia in catching up with the integration processes. Again, the Visegrad cooperation is bearing fruit. Over the past year, Slovakia has made remarkable progress in its integration efforts and actively contributed to V4 activities.

The Visegrad Group is today well known in member countries and carries weight far beyond their borders. The „V4 format „ joint positions presented on many occasions by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are accepted and respected by international fora. The Group's significance is further underlined by the interest of other countries who seek to participate in its activities. Although the Visegrad Group decided in Bratislava not to admit any new members, it is interested in seeking suitable forms of

cooperation leading to an expansion of the zone of stability and mutually beneficial cooperation. And this, together with the need to develop V4 activities at the regional level, is the challenge for the upcoming year after Prague summit.

[Quelle: [http://www.visegrad.org/annual\\_cont.php](http://www.visegrad.org/annual_cont.php)]