

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP (2001/2002)

On the basis of the results of the co-operation, the program of the Hungarian presidency aimed at making the Visegrad group such a successful forum of member states, which can demonstrate the European partners that a developed and stable core group of countries has emerged in Central Europe.

The program of the Hungarian presidency put special emphasis on the following issues:

- the harmonisation of the infrastructural development, the further connection of the national development plans,
- preparation for the NATO summit in November 2002 in Prague, support of the NATO membership of Slovakia,
- strengthening the identity of Central Europe and the internal cohesion of the V4 area,
- participation in the European strategy concerning Ukraine,
- contribution to the stability of the eastern and south-eastern environment of the V4 area,
- preservation of the principle of solidarity and differentiating among the V4 countries.

Political co-operation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The preparation of the countries of the Visegrad Group for EU membership proceeds well. Attention has to be concentrated on preserving the dynamism of the process in the upcoming crucial phase of negotiations to conclude accession negotiations by the end of 2002 and to become member of the EU by 1 January 2004. The regular meetings of the high-level representatives of the countries of the Visegrad Group contribute at a large extent to the implementation of the above mentioned aims and provide adequate opportunity for mutual exchange of information.

According to the program of the Hungarian presidency the informal meeting of the V4 prime ministers took place in Tihany on 23-24 August 2001.

During the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group, the Benelux and the Visegrad countries held two informal high-level meetings on 5 December 2001 in Luxembourg, and on 25 May 2002 in Trenčín (Slovakia). The consultations between the Prime Ministers and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs opened the way for a promising collaboration destined to bring participating countries closer.

On the basis of the authorisation of the premiers, the under state secretaries had prepared the meeting of the foreign secretaries on 21 September 2001, which approved of the program of the Hungarian presidency.

During the Hungarian presidency numerous experts' meetings were organised.

The meeting on strategic planning realized between the analysers of the V4 countries, USA and the Russian MFA, resulted in a useful exchange of information.

During the experts' meeting, the parties involved have finalised the draft document of the Visegrad Initiative for co-operation between the V4, the European Union and Ukraine in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, in particular in the preparation for the future external borders of the European Union. At the consultation, the Ukrainian party has stated its serious interest in the success of the Visegrad Initiative, and expressed its will to take part in the initiative.

A V4-Sloven expert meeting was held in Ljubljana on 5-6 September 2001, which discussed the issues of EU integration, the situation in South-eastern Europe. At this meeting the V4 representatives indicated that a co-operation could be useful in the fields of home affairs, the infrastructure of transport, the energy administration, the security policy, the culture and the science, and V4 expressed its intention to consider Slovenia's co-operation with the Visegrad Fund.

According to the commission of the V4 foreign state secretaries, the Hungarian presidency informed the Croatian party about the V4's willingness to co-operate.

On the level of Prime Ministers, the Romanian party initiated the co-operation between the V4 countries and Romania during the Hungarian presidency.

On 1 March 2002, a meeting between the political directors and the European correspondents of the 13 candidate countries and the European member countries was held in Budapest.

In the framework of the co-operations between V4 countries and the United Kingdom, a consultation about the accession to the European Union was organised on the level of foreign states secretaries on January 2002 in the Czech Republic.

Based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed at Warsaw in December 1999, the consular services (consular sections of embassies, consulates, Consular Departments of MFAs) of four countries carry out a comprehensive co-operation in all areas of consular work.

Sectoral co-operation

Economic co-operation (Ministry of Economic Affairs)

During the last year of Hungarian presidency basically expert consultations were held between the four Visegrad countries in the fields of economic issues, energy, cross-border co-operation and tourism. All the organised meetings were considered successful and useful especially in as much as previously basically bilateral co-operation existed between the four countries in the above mentioned fields. All the participants agreed that in the future it would be very useful for all the participant countries to tighten the co-operation.

In the field of small and medium-sized (SME) enterprises an expert meeting was held in Budapest on June 11, 2002 with the following issues. The legal background of the SME promotion and the enterprise development institutions; the main tools of the state support; measures to improve the business environment and to facilitate access to finance.

Energy

The first meeting of the V4 Energy Working Group was held on February 1, 2002 in Budapest, Hungary with the participation of the representatives of the energy

administration of the four Visegrad countries. The main tasks of the meeting were to sketch up the potential possibilities of co-operation, to exchange information – especially in the field of energy policies and energy market liberalisation – in the future and to establish bases of having such meetings regularly.

Representative of MOL Rt. (Hungary) presented the proposal regarding the possible co-operation in the field of maintaining stocks of crude oil and petroleum products. The co-operation of stockpiling companies of the countries was also considered important and necessary. As the internal regulation of each country is different, the conditions of establishing such agreements have to be examined in details by the participant countries.

In the field of electric energy the possible fields of co-operation were presented by the representative of MVM Rt.(Hungary) under interconnection issues. This included the following: new power transmission line from Hungary to Slovakia; development of network connections between Poland and the Czech Republic and between the Czech Republic and Slovakia to facilitate trade of electricity; discussing “non-correct behaviour” in electricity transit in relation to trade of electricity; certain discriminative trade conditions of EU member states towards CENTREL (V4 countries); joint reparation for the coming accession of Ukraine and the Southern Slav countries to UCTE.

In case of the hydrocarbon industry, MOL Rt. (Hungary) presented the possible fields of co-operation as follows:

- Exchange of views (on expert level) on technical and financial feasibility of eventual import of Norwegian gas into the V4 countries, consultations on comparing diversification efforts and energy policies, including the opportunities for co-operation in expanding and inter-connecting of underground gas storage facilities.
- Opinions related to the Slovakian proposition for inter-connecting of the oil product pipeline systems of the V4 countries, and reviewing the technical and financial feasibility.
- Consultations on the multilateral projects aiming at the planned inter-connection of the Friendship and the Adria crude oil pipelines.

The second meeting of the energy experts of V4 countries was held in Warsaw, on 24 May 2002 organised by the Polish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the following fields were mostly emphasised during the discussions:

- Exchange of information on energy policies, privatisation strategies, market liberalisation.
- Electricity network interconnections, co-operation between CENTREL and UCTE, consequences on new accessions to UCTE. Possible co-operation on gas pipeline construction and on gas storage.
- Oil stock obligation – co-operation in fulfilling EU requirements, consultation on oil pipeline projects.

Cross-border co-operation

An expert meeting was held in the field of EU Structural Funds and the preparation of the National Development Plan (NDP) on 13 March 2002 in Budapest, Hungary with the aim of

discussing the experience attained and the problems that have emerged during the elaboration of the National Development Plan and the preparatory arrangements for the implementation of the Structural Funds in the four Visegrad countries.

The expert consultation of V4 Programme in the field of ISPA pre-accession fund and the preparation for the Cohesion Fund was held on 14 May 2002 in Budapest, Hungary in order to exchange experience.

Tourism

In the field of tourism Hungary established the base of a prosperous co-operation by organizing a Visegrad Countries Meeting on Tourism on 4 April 2002, in Visegrad, Hungary. At the meeting the parties agreed to strengthen the relationship between each other. As the result of the event a Protocol was signed, including the most important fields of co-operation between the four countries, like concerted actions in order to promote and develop cross-border tourism, furthermore tourism promotion in each other's countries and in overseas markets, co-operation in media, including television and world-wide web etc.

To achieve all these goals the participant countries agreed to set up a working group involving beside the national tourism administration the national tourist offices, the regional tourism organizations and representatives of the private sector. The parties decided to organise regular meetings, the forthcoming one is planned to be held in Poland.

Foreign trade

Consultations were carried out with our partners with the aim of further liberalising foreign trade relationships. As a result an agreement was reached on the enlargement of the circle of the bilateral agriculture reduction. The results were recorded in the 10. Minutes of CEFTA, and have been implemented since January 1, 2002.

Defence issues (Ministry of Defence)

V4 expert level consultations continued with the aim of further supporting the preparations of Slovakia for NATO membership, sharing experience of NATO admission and promoting the integration endeavours of Slovakia. Expert level consultations covered the following topics: transformation of the Defence portfolio, questions of the civilian control, realisation of law harmonisation, practical question of interoperability of Army according to NATO standards, defence planning and its operation in practice, harmonisation with the defence budget.

Expert level discussions started on the possibilities of defence industrial co-operation between the four countries and – in connection with the realisation of EU Headline Goals – on questions of practical co-operation within the field of NATO-EU military co-operation.

On 23 January 2002 V4 Defence Ministers had a meeting in Budapest where their co-operation was evaluated and an intention was declared to develop it further. During the course of this meeting it was decided that the preparatory activity of modernisation of Mi-24 helicopters to be accelerated. Discussions were continued on National Armament Directors level and, as a result, a "Memorandum of Understanding" was signed at the meeting of the V4 Defence Ministers on 30 May 2002 in Piešťany (Slovakia).

Cultural co-operation (Ministry of National Cultural Heritage)

The conference organised in co-operation with the Central European Initiative, the Council of Europe and the European Union, on „The Impact of International Trade Contracts to the

Cultural Policies in the Member States” (2-6 December, 2001, Budapest) proved to be mutually useful for the participant countries and the organizations. The experience of the different countries and the variety of solutions for the existing problems, contributed to the improvement of work in the process of joining the EU as well.

The first (later: annual) V4 Folklore Festival was organised in Budapest, as agreed upon at the Wroclaw meeting of the cultural ministers. The event was arranged jointly to the Budapest Spring Festival Dance House meeting, from 19 to 21 March, 2002. The presentation of folklore heritage in three categories, gave not only a view on the preserved folklore heritage, but opened the way for strengthening the study of common cultural roots and the study of methodology in research and everyday practice at the same time.

Co-operation in the field of Education (Ministry of Education)

The „Human resources development and employment policy in V4 and Quadrilaterale countries” consultation was held on 30-31 May 2002 in Budapest with the participation of representatives of ministries and research institutions dealing with human resources development and European integration. The invited countries were Croatia, Italy, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The aim of the consultation was to strengthen the working relations with the partner countries, especially in the field of Structural Funds preparations, to share their experiences on the management of human-resources development programmes supported by the EU and on the preparation of the National Development Plan.

The creation of a multi-lingual electronic Visegrad dictionary in a standalone CD and online versions was decided by Visegrad countries until the end of June 2002. The Slovak partner proposed to establish a Bilingual Grammar School in Cadca with the support of the Visegrad countries. The school year 2001/ 2002 was devoted to the preparation of the establishment of the school, with the support of the International Visegrad Fund.

Co-operation in the fields of Youth, Sport and Drug issues (Ministry of Child, Youth and Sport)

On 'Youth V4 conference', Visegrad, 13-15 July, 2001, the governmental and non-governmental delegates have concluded the following priorities:

- Promoting the co-operation between governmental and non-governmental youth organizations of the region's countries.
- Exchange of experience of volunteer and official youth worker education. – Emphasizing the role of youth in public life, since later on today's youth will work together under common economical and political circumstances in the united Europe.
- Exchange programmes.
- Common information basis development.

A conference was held in Budapest on Youth Policy Development in the perspectives of the White Paper in the candidate countries of the European Union, between 18 and 21 April 2002.

A regional legal meeting was held in Budapest, 6-9 June 2001. The meeting aimed at developing common co-operational strategies against drug trafficking and money laundering among Danube States and along Southern Balkan Routes.

Co-operations in the field of home affairs (Ministry of Interior)

The interior co-operation is implemented in three formats:

- V4: co-operation of the local authorities and border guards,
- V4+1 (Austria): co-operation in guarding,
- V4+2 (Austria, Slovenia): co-operation in disaster prevention

On 10 October 2001, Gödöllő was the venue of the meeting of the ministers of the interior of the V4 countries and Austria, where the former co-operation was evaluated and the objectives of the future co-operation were defined, which were also laid down in the Gödöllő Declaration signed by the ministers.

Also, Hungary was the host to the meeting of the state secretaries of the ministries of the interior of the V4 countries, where it was stated that the work groups who are active in the field of public administration contributed to the further development of the public administration system of the participating countries and, besides the similar historical and economic development, by evaluating the general experience and in consideration of the regulation practices in the individual countries they promoted the further development of the system of local authorities, the sphere of civil service and certain areas of information technology.

During the period of the Hungarian presidency, the earlier established work groups continued their work in the field of co-operation both with the local authorities and the police forces. The work group dealing with the topic of political extremity, which was established during the presidency of the Czech party, and the work group dealing with the struggle against international terrorism, which was convoked by the Slovakian party, held their first meeting as new work groups.

According to the decisions made at the meetings of the prime ministers held in Krakow in June 2001 as well as in Tihany in August 2001, efforts were made – within the framework of the border protection co-operation – to work out a document specifying the directions of the co-operation between the border protection organizations of the V4 countries and Ukraine.

The meeting of the heads of the border guards of the V4 countries was also organised last year (September 2001) in Slovakia. The main topic of the work meeting was the fight against crime committed by foreigners who temporarily or permanently reside in the territory of the V4 countries.

The tasks prescribed in the field of disaster prevention have been fully performed, the framework has been elaborated for regional co-operation, and in October 2001 we organised the first meeting of the general directors of disaster prevention, which was not only attended by the V4 countries but also by the representatives of Austria and Slovenia. The participants of the meeting signed a Joint Declaration, and they also laid down the

framework of medium-term co-operation in the document entitled Guidelines forming the appendix to the Declaration.

Apart from the above, last September the event „Week of the Languages of the V4 Countries” was also organised in Dobogókő by the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, with a contribution by the EU.

Co-operations in the field of Justice (Ministry of Justice)

Under the Hungarian presidency, a ministerial meeting was held in Český Krumlov (Czech Republic) between 18 and 20 October 2001 with the participation of ministerial delegations from the 4 countries of the Visegrad Group. The main issues of this meeting were the following: the changing role of state organs responsible for administering justice; the emergence of alternative forums for arbitration (mediation); and the criminal liability of legal persons.

Matters concerning the acceptance and implementation of the foreign judicial decisions in civil matters were discussed at an expert negotiation held on May 20-22 2002 in Kroměříž.

Co-operation in the field of Transportation and Water management (Ministry of Transport and Water management)

The areas of railway transport, combined transport, the development of North-South connections and the intensification of the co-operation in the field of water management have received high priority during the Hungarian Presidency. Besides, new areas of co-operation were identified (e. g. international aviation), in which the intensification of relations is desirable.

It was a significant event when the transport ministers of the V4 countries met for the first time and agreed upon the further expansion of their relations on 19 October 2001 in Visegrad (Hungary). At the proposal of the Hungarian Minister of Transport and Water Management, they signed the Visegrad Statement covering proposals and tasks – inter alia – concerning the development of North-South connections as well as the intensification of co-operation in the fields of railways and combined transport. The ministers established the Forum of Transport Ministers of V4 Countries, to be co-ordinated by the transport minister of the country presiding the Visegrad Group.

Railway transport has been a key element in the V4 co-operation. The International Railway Union (UIC) initiated the development of a unified international high-quality railway-transport network corresponding to modern demands. This project aims at improving railway connections between the capitals and major cities of the region, to encourage new groups of passengers to use the services of the railways and to modernise railway transport in the region. The CEOs of the railway companies of the V4 countries met in Zakopane (Poland) on 1 March 2002. In the declaration they signed, they confirmed that they support all activities promoting the integration of the railways of the Central-European region into the European railway system.

In their Visegrad Statement the transport ministers of the V4 countries decided to stimulate the use of environment-friendly transport modes with special regard to combined transport. The working group, which was established at the meeting of the state secretaries of transport of the V4 countries in Brno (Czech Republic) on 12 October 2000, met in Sopron (Hungary) on May 6-7, 2002 and laid down the main principles of the memorandum on combined transport.

The development of the East-West Pan-European transport connections has mainly been concluded. Emphasis is now shifted to the development and the modernisation of North-South links. The main trends involve the establishment of overland connections between Scandinavia/Baltic region – Adriatic Sea/Black Sea through the V4 countries.

From the standpoint of the V4 Group the modernisation of the Budapest-Vác-Szob-(Šturovo) main railway line establishing a connection from Hungary towards Slovakia and Poland receives a high priority.

The road bridge across the Danube between Esztergom (Hungary) and Šturovo (Slovakia), which was inaugurated on 11 October 2001, contributed to the development of North-South connections, as well.

At their latest meeting in Bratislava on 20 March 2002, the State Secretaries responsible for transport reviewed the development of the co-operation of the V4 countries and proposed a new field of co-operation: air transport. They agreed that aeronautical experts would discuss the development of international aviation and how it affects V4 countries.

Co-operation in the field of Environmental Policy (Ministry of Environmental Policy)

In the frame of the two regular ministerial meetings held in the reporting period (30-31 August 2001, Olomouc, 20-21 March 2002, Visegrad, Esztergom) consultations of the ministers covered actual questions of environmental policy with special attention to the EU accession process, the implementation of major international conventions, programmes, strategies and policies on environment and nature conservation.

For the year 2002 special attention was given to the actual questions of sustainable development aiming at preparations for the Rio+10 events, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg September 2002). As a contribution to the World Summit the V4 countries initiated to communicate the Partnership Initiatives “Visegrad Group Countries Summer School of Development Aid” and “Co-operation and the Workshop on Environmental Economics, Environmental Policies and International Environmental Relations in the Context of Sustainable Development” to the Third session of the Preparatory Committee. The ministers agreed to propose the issue of the World Summit for the agenda of the next V4 Prime Ministers’ meeting.

A significant step of V4 co-operation was the adoption of the Joint Environmental Program of the V4 countries in Visegrad in March 2002 providing a frame for a long-term environmental co-operation.

Expert consultations were held in the following topics:

- Elaboration of publication and joint map of ecological networks of V4 countries + Croatia and Ukraine (held in Hungary); finalisation of the Joint Environmental program (held in Hungary);
- Discussion on the development of trans-boundary co-operation in the V4 and the neighbouring region with special attention to increasing the environmental security in the spirit of the regional Environmental Initiative of the Hungarian Government (held in Hungary);

– The Visegrad countries and the preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable development (held in the Czech Republic) Workshop on co-operation on control of transport of radioactive materials (held in the Czech Republic).

Co-operation in the field of Central Banks (Hungarian National Bank)

The central bank governors agreed to have regular meetings (the so-called G5) during the bimonthly governors' meetings held in the BIS. The NBH organised such a meeting on 11 March 2002 in Basle.

Co-operation in the field of Informatics (Ministry of Informatics)

For the sake of co-operation a new Working Group on Knowledge-based Economy was established in Budapest on 21 September 2001, following the Declaration of the four Premiers accepted in Krynica on 7 September 2001. The Working Group will consider the co-operation with the European Union as the most important, attaching importance to the other international organizations, especially to the OECD and the World Bank.

The Working Group members have agreed to work out common actions as a joint contribution to the emergence and development of the knowledge-based economy:

– The Prime Ministers of the Candidate Countries together with the European Commission launched the eEurope+ Action Plan at the Göteborg Summit in June 2001. It provides a proper framework for closer co-operation, especially for the Visegrad 4 Countries. The eEurope+ Action Plan aims to develop our countries to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies in the world. The V4 Countries are dedicated to profit in all the co-operation fields of eEurope+ Action Plan.

– The V4 Countries are concerned that the goals of co-operation on the fields of higher education, research and development can be better achieved by joint participation in all the open EU Community Programs, such as IST, eContent, and IDA II.

– In the field of the adaptation of the Acquis Communautaire, a co-operation should be established especially in the field of the legislation governing the commerce and e-commerce to ensure the free flow of electronic business between V4 countries as soon as possible.

Proposals for future co-operation

We propose enhanced co-operation in the field of fight against terrorism.

We suggest – in the field of Justice and Home Affairs co-operation – that we pay special attention to the following:

– Organised crime, corruption, with special regard to the possibilities of taking steps against smuggling people, spreading children's pornography through the Internet

– Refugee matters, migration

– Border control

– Disaster prevention

– Ministerial meeting in the field of co-ordination drug affairs

Possible fields of future collaboration and issues in the field of small and medium-sized enterprises:

- comparing the practice of simplification of the business environment
- methods applied in helping SMEs to prepare for EU accession
- to continue the co-operation in the theme of preparation of the National Development Plan and future possibilities of cross-border co-operation

Esztergom, 29 June 2002

[Quelle: http://www.visegradgroup.org/anunual_presidency_hungary.php]