

PROGRAMME FOR THE CZECH PRESIDENCY OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

2019/2020

“V 4 Reasonable Europe”

1. Introduction

The Czech Republic assumes the Visegrad Group Presidency at a time full of challenges on the national as well as global level. During the Czech Presidency, the European Union will enter a new institutional cycle following the European Parliament elections. The Union will identify its new priorities and finalise its 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. It will have to address the consequences of the expected withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, as well as long-standing issues related to security, asylum, and migration.

The Czech Presidency will follow up on the Slovak Presidency programme. It will advocate a rational, pragmatic and constructive approach to the challenges and problems, which our countries and the whole Europe are facing. It will support efforts contributing to the stability of our continent, including EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Czech Presidency's overall aim is to strengthen the Visegrad Group's position in the EU and NATO while fostering unity and cohesion of the two organisations. The Visegrad Group should thus contribute to the building of a strong, effective, competitive and secure Europe based on the values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, as well as on the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and sustainability.

The Czech Republic sees the Visegrad Group as a traditional platform for dialogue and result-oriented cooperation in Central Europe, valued especially for its high level of mutual trust, respect and readiness for compromise. Visegrad cooperation should remain effective, informal, flexible and inclusive. It should focus on concrete and positive projects bringing specific added value to the Czech Republic, the Visegrad Group and the whole European Union. The Visegrad Group should seek a way to keep its cooperation formats and projects open to other European partners (especially to neighbours) in order to enhance its coalition potential within the Union.

2. Priority areas of interest to the Czech Presidency

2.1 Reasonable solutions

The 30th anniversary of the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe will be commemorated during the Czech Presidency term, in autumn 2019. Earlier in 2019, we will mark twenty years since the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO, and fifteen years since both Slovakia's accession to NATO and all V4 countries' to the EU. We will also commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe to which all V4 countries belong. These anniversaries provide an opportunity to maintain for the future and revitalise the positive ideals with which the V4 countries welcomed the return of freedom and democracy, and their hopes for reunification of Europe based both on universal human values and on respect for different national particularities.

In the first priority area, the Czech Presidency, inspired by these ideals and their updating for the current times, will attempt to act actively and rationally and to deliver proposals benefiting the people across the V4 countries and the whole Union. The guiding principles will be "Unity in Diversity", solidarity in all areas of cooperation among the EU Member States (in particular deepening of the Single Market and promotion of economic and social convergence) and close cooperation with countries and regions in the Union's neighbourhood.

This area includes in particular the main crosscutting topics: **deepening of the Single Market and preservation of its four freedoms, support of the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans, promotion of the EU Eastern Neighbourhood Policy, cooperation in the area of security and defence and encouragement of people-to-people contacts and civil societies in V4 countries and their wider neighbourhood.**

The Czech Presidency's principal objective in this area is to coordinate and promote V4 positions in the process of defining the future priorities of the **Union's economic and social policies**, in such a way that these policies accelerate **economic and social convergence** across the EU, while fully respecting the Member States' fundamental principles of their social security systems and the financial equilibrium thereof. The focus will be on **deepening of the Single Market** and on the need to eliminate all remaining barriers. Importance of initiatives aimed at improving social standards throughout the EU will be recognised, while respecting the principles of conferral, subsidiarity and proportionality in order to prevent the emergence of new and artificial obstacles and restrictions on the free movement of workers and other persons, services, goods and capital. The competitiveness of the EU is ensured also through **free and fair trade**. Therefore V4 should support the EU in ambitious trade policy on multilateral and bilateral level, including the process of WTO modernisation that may bring opportunities for V4 in the future.

The **Western Balkans** remains the priority region for external action of the V4 and the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). Continued support for the **EU enlargement process**, both within the Union and in the context of bilateral cooperation with the Western Balkan countries, is one of the principal objectives of the Czech Presidency. Other important issues include encouraging Western Balkan countries to ensure the viability of the Western Balkans Fund, and the implementation of specific IVF projects in the region.

The Czech Presidency will support activities assisting the pro-European orientation of the **Eastern Partnership** (EaP) countries in compliance with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Czech Presidency will take an active part in the implementation of

the conclusions of the Brussels Eastern Partnership summit. Apart from the focus on the development of practical cooperation contributing to the resilience of EaP partners, the Czech presidency will also strive to contribute to the definition of a strategic perspective, in particular for the EaP partners who seek a closer relationship with the Union, while respecting the principles of differentiation (taking into account the differences among EaP partners) and inclusivity (preserving the EaP as a framework policy for all partners).

In each of **these two regions**, the Czech Presidency will continue the support of economic and political reforms in cooperation with like-minded countries. The focus will be on youth and education, and on promoting civil society, rule of law and public governance. If mutual interest is expressed, the Czech Presidency may continue to organise workshops to share the V4 experience of OECD accession and membership in order to support a long-term goal of promotion of the OECD standards in third countries.

In the area of **security policy**, the Czech Presidency will aim to further promote the V4 position within NATO and the EU and to reinforce EU-NATO cooperation and cooperation of NATO with its partner countries, notably Ukraine and Georgia. The V4 EU Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) will be on standby in the second half of 2019 and the Czech Republic will support building the battlegroup again in the first half of 2023.

The **IVF** is a key and respected tool that makes it easier for the V4 to work together at all levels, especially to promote **people-to-people and civil society contacts**. It also plays a key role in developing practical cooperation with the Western Balkans and EaP countries. The Czech Presidency will commemorate the IVF's 20th anniversary in 2020.

The Czech Presidency will encourage the excellent cooperation between **V4 NGOs and think tanks** and a V4 dimension of a wide range of conferences and events such as the Prague European Summit, Forum 2000 and the CEPA Forum, and the V4 countries' 'strategic conferences' supported by the International Visegrad Fund.

Apart from the well-established formats of meetings of the V4 governments, **Parliamentary cooperation** will continue.

2.2 Revolutionary technologies – innovative economy and its social impacts

V4 societies welcome the Fourth Industrial Revolution with its new development opportunities opened by science and research, and its dynamic technological, especially digital, progress. On the other hand, rapid development of technologies including the artificial intelligence gives rise to concerns about their sustainability and creates a range of new questions and challenges, social as well as ethical. Innovations and their efficient implementation, as well as good business environment represent key elements for maintaining the competitiveness of the V4 economies, which are characterised by above-average proportion of the manufacturing sector in creation of the value added. Growth of the V4 economies is further hampered by the shortage of workers. This means that V4 countries need to promote technological progress, innovations and entrepreneurial creativity by establishing advantageous framework conditions, in order to succeed in their highly competitive environment. At the same time, they need to be able to use new technologies efficiently and safely in both the private and the public sectors, to support education, skills and adaptability of people to changes in the labour market. V4 countries aspire to become a source of inspiration for other regions.

In this priority area the Czech Presidency will concentrate on **support for research, development and innovation** (especially innovative business and so-called smart investments) and on access to sources of financing (especially exchange of experiences of V4 countries and partner countries with regard to the use of EU funding for science, research and innovation, and preparation for the post-2020 programming period).

The Czech Presidency will support the development of an **innovative ecosystem** (especially start-ups and scale-ups) and capital markets to increase investment in innovation, knowledge transfer and research-business linkages. The V4 countries will use synergy of cooperation as well as the joint presentation of the V4 as an innovative region and a convenient Central European destination for “smart” investments and transfers of experience and advanced know-how to the Central Europe. Beyond the EU region, the V4 will develop contacts in this area especially with the United States, Israel and Asian countries.

The Czech Presidency will promote V4 priorities for the Union’s Single Market, especially development of the **Digital Single Market** and elimination of barriers and administrative burdens for businesses, including building national and cross-border digital infrastructures, effective legal frameworks and e-government. In the context of digital transformation of economy, the most important topic will be **artificial intelligence (AI)**, also as a follow-up to the **V4 non-paper on AI** of April 2018 defining the common priorities, and the **EU Coordinated Plan on AI** of December 2018. Preparation of national AI strategies represents an opportunity for the V4 countries to increase their synergies. These national strategies should focus on cross-border cooperation of the V4 countries in the areas of research, development and implementation of the AI technologies. The Czech Presidency plans to host a high-level conference on AI in Prague presenting the results of basic and applied AI research, contributing to academic networking across partner countries, and drawing attention to the V4 in Europe. The Czech Presidency also intends to play an important part in the European discussion on the geographic location of new AI centres of excellence: it is in the common interest of the V4 to have an AI centre of excellence in their own region. Other important topics include **free movement of data**, the development of services with high added value in the manufacturing sector (**servitization**) or the concept of integrated city management, so-called **Smart Cities** concept.

Under this priority area, the Czech Presidency will also facilitate the strengthening of V4 cooperation in the field of **space activity**.

Furthermore, one of the priorities of the Czech Presidency in this area will be sufficient **labour supply** and prospects for labour in times of technological change and digital transformation (Work 4.0). Issues such as qualifications, education standards and the legal and social aspects of work will be raised in debates within the V4 and with partners (especially Germany).

3. Reconciling approaches

While V4 societies observe the technological development with optimism, the prevalent sentiment about the future social and political development in Europe is apprehensive of the unknown and even sceptical. The Czech Presidency's principal objective in this third priority area is to try to overcome the dividing lines and contribute to cohesion within each V4 society, within the V4 as a group, and within the European Union. The task of the V4 is to advocate a rational approach and to encourage political and interest groups in the V4 countries as well as in the whole Union to resume a non-ideological,

substantial and constructive dialogue with a goal to rediscover their common ground and to reinforce the trust of the citizens in the EU as the guarantor of the security and political, economic and social stability in Europe.

The Czech Presidency will, in the spirit of openness, promote cooperation in the V4+ format with the goal of expanding the V4 coalition potential and increasing acceptance of V4 positions, especially with the key EU partners such as e. g. Germany, France, Austria, Benelux and the Nordic and Baltic countries and eventually also beyond the EU (United Kingdom).

In the framework of the beginning of the **new EU institutional cycle** the Czech Presidency will organize V4 coordination, especially in the process of negotiations leading to the formation of a new Commission and election of a new President of the European Council. It will advocate the inclusion of the common V4 priorities in the new Commission's programme.

The Czech Republic will lead the V4 during the final stages of negotiations on the EU's new **Multiannual Financial Framework**. In this context, the Czech Presidency will stress the issues of social and economic convergence among EU member states, and promote the V4's well-founded interests in areas such as cohesion and structural funds, agriculture, cross-border transport infrastructure, and modernisation of the energy and manufacturing sectors.

The Czech Presidency will try to deepen political and practical cooperation and coordination of their positions with the goal to contribute to finding the comprehensive solution in the future **migration and asylum policies**, including their internal as well as external dimensions and to focus on strengthening of the EU external border protection in order to ensure security of EU citizens and proper functioning of Schengen area.

The Czech Presidency will also attempt to continue regional cooperation on **infrastructure connections** including intended for alternative fuels in transport and **energy policy, especially nuclear energy**.

Sectoral cooperation during the Czech V4 Presidency

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT

EU topics, especially those related to the European Council's agenda, are a long-standing key priority for cooperation between V4 Prime Ministers who meet at V4 summits and before each European Council meeting in Brussels. The Czech Presidency's main areas of interest include the future of the Union; effective functioning of the Union and its institutions in the context of the transition to a new institutional cycle; the impending UK withdrawal from the EU, its implementation and impacts; negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework and Cohesion Policy; migration policy including its external dimension; support of economic growth and employment (investment, Single Market, digital agenda, social dimension); coordination of economic policies (including issues relating to the Economic and Monetary Union); enlargement and the EU Neighbourhood Policy, Common Security and Defence Policy, and current issues relating to the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The V4 will also discuss the preparation of a programme for the 2022 Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Activities planned:

- *V4 Prime Ministers will discuss the above mentioned topics at several V4 summits with guests and with other partners on the sidelines of V4 summits; they will continue the tradition of regular coordinating meetings on the sidelines of European Council meetings;*
- *State Secretaries for EU Affairs (their equivalents and Prime Ministers' sherpas) will meet regularly before each V4 summit and before each General Affairs Meeting (in person and/or through videoconferencing) to prepare the agenda for the Prime Ministers meeting. In addition, State Secretaries for EU Affairs will meet in the beginning of the Czech Presidency term to consult on current EU issues;*
- *Departmental directors responsible for coordinating European policies will meet for consultations as necessary, no more than twice during the Czech Presidency term, in order to prepare the agenda for meetings of State Secretaries for EU Affairs (their equivalents and Prime Ministers' sherpas). Heads of other relevant Government Office departments may be invited to the consultations in order to deepen V4 cooperation in other areas.*

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic will work with the Office of the Government to coordinate the Czech Presidency in the above-mentioned areas. Cooperation in sectoral policies will be the responsibility of sectoral ministries and its results will be reviewed at the concluding V4 Prime Ministers summit.

The Czech Presidency will continue and develop V4 cooperation with the **United Kingdom** whose post-Brexit role will probably begin taking shape during the Czech Presidency. Priority areas will include economic, foreign policy and security issues.

The Czech Presidency will focus on the existing priorities of the V4's external action: supporting the EU's enlargement to include the **Western Balkan countries**, and assisting **Eastern Partnership countries** on their path to Europe.

The **Western Balkans** remains the priority region for external action of the V4 and the IVF. Continued support for the EU enlargement process, both within the Union and in the context of bilateral cooperation with the Western Balkan countries, is one of the principal objectives of the Czech Presidency. Other important goals include encouraging the stakeholders in the Western Balkans to ensure the viability and sustainability of the Western Balkans Fund, and the implementation of specific IVF projects in the region. The Czech Presidency will engage

with other EU partners and encourage their participation in the V4's activities in this area, in order to enhance the coalition potential of the V4 within the Union.

The Czech Presidency will take an active part in implementing the conclusions of the Brussels **Eastern Partnership** summit. The focus will be on the development of practical cooperation contributing to the resilience of EaP partners, and on the need to provide a strategic perspective especially for those EaP partners who seek a closer relationship with the Union. The Czech Presidency will cooperate on these tasks with like-minded countries. It will pay special attention to implementation of the AAs/DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Other important topics are hybrid threats and strategic communication capabilities in contexts including, but not limited to, the parliamentary elections in Ukraine. The V4 will develop cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus while respecting the principles of differentiation, inclusivity and common ownership of the EaP policy.

The Czech Presidency will promote transfers of experience benefiting the public administration sector in the above countries. The transfers are to be facilitated by IVF programmes and projects supporting civil society, freedom of the media and the rule of law, including the Think Visegrad network. The V4 will offer to share its experience of OECD membership.

The Czech Presidency will develop **V4 cooperation with traditional partners** (V4+ format) but only in areas where the V4 have the necessary capacities and the cooperation is in line with common EU interests. The cooperation must have specific content, and it must create added value and bring benefits for the V4 as a group as well as for each V4 country's own bilateral relationship with the partner. The Czech Presidency will continue the V4's regular contacts with the **United States** on current issues and in areas of common interest (foreign and security policy, energy, trade) especially at expert level. The Czech Presidency will develop the V4's relations and cooperation with **Israel**, including on issues of security and the fight against terrorism, and it will advocate Israel's inclusion among the traditional V4 partners. The V4 will continue to build contacts with other Middle East countries, especially with Egypt (following up on the first ever V4+Egypt summit organised by the Hungarian Presidency) and Lebanon, and to develop relations with the traditional Asian partners: **Japan** and **South Korea**.

In the area of **security policy**, the Czech Presidency aims to further promote the V4 position within NATO and the EU and to reinforce NATO's cooperation with the EU and with NATO's partner countries, notably Ukraine and Georgia. Other important topics include European defence initiatives and the development of the civilian component of the Common Security and Defence Policy. The objective is to enhance security and defence cooperation especially in collective defence, military mobility, cyber security, hybrid threats, terrorism, strategic communication capabilities, and regarding challenges emanating from the South.

In the interest of strengthening international security, the Czech Presidency aims to further develop a closer consultation and cooperation of the V4 concerning the resolution of protracted conflicts in the **OSCE** area, also in line with and building on the excellent work of the 2019 Slovak OSCE Chairmanship.

Activities planned:

- *Foreign Ministers meetings: regular coordination in advance of FACs and GACs, and meetings during the UN GA session in New York; V4+ meetings with the EaP (spring 2020), Western Balkans (spring 2020), and NB8 (spring 2020); other meetings depending on the development or as a follow-up on the Slovak Presidency (Benelux, UK, South Korea, Japan, etc.);*
- *Deputy Foreign Ministers/Political Directors meetings including, but not limited to, V4+ meetings and consultations (United States, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, etc.);*

- *Expert consultations at the level of departmental directors held according to the established V4 scheme and whenever necessary, in a broadened format where useful (depending on the topic). The topics will include especially EU affairs including enlargement policy, security policy, V4 external action in relation to East and Southeast Europe and cooperation in other V4+ formats, political planning, consular and visa cooperation, international law, international trade, etc.*

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

In area of transport, the Czech Presidency will follow up on the previous Presidencies. The most important topics identified by the V4 Prime Ministers and Ministers of Transport include **high-speed rail** links between V4 capitals and major urban centres. The last V4 Transport Ministers meeting (Štrbské pleso, October 2018) agreed to set up a permanent working group on high-speed rail. The group is to meet every three months and, as proposed by the Czech Transport Minister, the meetings are to be chaired by the current V4 Presidency. The Czech Transport Ministry is ready to chair the working group starting from July 2019 and to continue the work in all areas opened by the Slovak Presidency.

It is a common goal that the V4 countries become eligible for the largest possible amount of EU financing for the key cross-border infrastructural developments in general and of the planned joint V4 high-speed railway project in particular. The V4 countries should make a joint proposal on how to include/emphasize all relevant sections of the V4 high-speed railway network into the Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 (TEN-T guidelines) even before or during its next review foreseen in the coming years. Therefore, the coordination should be started at expert level (meeting).

Another important topic is **water transport**. The Czech Presidency plans to hold an expert meeting on the main issues including the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor, recreational boating, water transport emissions, and river information services. Since the Czech V4 Presidency term coincides with the Croatian EU Presidency, the Czech Transport Ministry considers it useful to invite Croatian representatives since water (especially maritime) transport is to be one of the Croatian EU Presidency's most important topics in the transport sector and its focus will be on recreational boating. The meetings will be prepared in cooperation with the Waterways Directorate of the Czech Republic.

The Czech Presidency will use the V4 strategic partnership with **South Korea** to move forward in progressive areas such as **intelligent transport systems** and Smart Cities.

The V4 will continue to actively raise **road safety issues** in the context of relevant EU and UN initiatives.

The Czech Presidency will also strive to reach, where possible, a common V4 position on **EU legislative proposals** in the transport area which are already being consulted by the Commission and are to be published at the early stage of the next legislative term.

Activities planned:

- *V4 ministerial meeting on high-speed rail; additional topics will include road traffic safety and current multilateral and/or EU issues (May 2020);*
- *Expert meetings of departmental directors on the above topics:*
V4 working group on high-speed rail (13 September 2019, 13 December 2019, 6 March 2020, 19 June 2020);
V4+Croatia meeting on water transport (second half of 2019);
V4+South Korea meeting on intelligent transport systems and Smart Cities (first half of 2020);
V4 meeting on current issues of road safety (first half of 2020);
- *Ad hoc meetings on current issues in the EU transport policy area.*

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

The Czech Presidency will focus on the final stage of negotiations on the Union's 2021-2027 **Multiannual Financial Framework** and on other priorities including, but not limited to, **economic convergence, coordination of economic policies, and reform of the Stability and Growth Pact**.

In the **customs area** the Czech Presidency will further increase the present very intensive V4 cooperation especially in combating customs and tax fraud, and on other issues such as education and training, customs laboratories, mobile units, and audit. V4 customs authorities and other relevant bodies will continue to meet and consult on these issues (the meetings are not included in the Czech Presidency calendar).

Activities planned:

- *V4(+) meetings of Deputy Ministers/departmental directors on current issues (2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, coordination of economic policies, Stability and Growth Pact, and other areas) .*

MINISTRY OF CULTURE

The Czech Presidency will continue the existing V4 cultural cooperation projects. The focus will be on **joint V4 strategy for presentation of Central European performing arts**. One example is the Performing Arts Central Europe – Visegrad Countries Focus (PACE V4) project coordinated by the Arts Institute-Theatre Institute in Prague. Other areas of interest include the **V4 Heritage Academy** (international summer training programme on management of UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Sites in V4 countries); **library management** and exchange of experience on national library digitisation programmes; cooperation in building the **Central European Art Database (CEAD)** within the framework of the Central European Forum Olomouc project; and debate on the current issues of **heritage conservation** at the 5th Heritage Forum of Central Europe (Heritage and Environment).

Activities planned:

- *V4 Culture Ministers meeting (May/June 2020);*
- *V4 Heritage Academy (Sustainable Ideals) (July 2019);*
- *Colloquium to exchange information and experience on library digitisation (spring 2020);*
- *PACE V4 conference on Changing Paradigms in Central and Eastern Europe (V4+ format); the Czech independent theatre research project: revisiting the positive ideals and hopes of the 1990s, confronting them with the present situation and the sector's development over the past 30 years) (September 2019).*

MINISTRY FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the area of **Cohesion Policy**, besides debates addressing the current programming period and its selected issues regarding sharing obtained experience and the best practice, the programme of the Czech Presidency will be devoted primarily to the future. The aim is to coordinate national positions of V4 countries, seek intersections in the final phase of negotiations on legislation of the Cohesion Policy Funds and ideally to create a common V4 position. Further, common priorities and investment intentions will be discussed. Crucial in this respect will be links to cross-border cooperation, regional policy and also directly managed programmes due to their growing importance in the post-2020 period. At the same time, further debates on these topics in the V4+ format (including primarily also Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia but not excluding other relevant countries) will go on, taking into consideration the synergies with the similar ongoing processes at the level of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the EUSDR Croatian presidency in 2020.

In the area of regional development and the spatial dimension, the most important topics include V4+ cooperation on integrated urban development (especially on improving the living space in urban areas); V4+ coordination on questions of territorial dimension and integrated territorial development tools in the context of preparation for the post-2020 programming period; and the Smart Cities concept, practical use of Smart Cities solutions and the tools supporting them.

In the area of **tourism**, the focus will be on V4 cooperation under the Discover Central Europe marketing initiative in new source regions with growing potential for incoming tourism; strengthening cooperation with commercial travel providers in the V4 region and beyond (including multi-source funding); and encouraging cooperation among V4 embassies and other public sector partners to more effectively promote V4 countries abroad.

Activities planned:

- *V4 Directors General meeting on the Cohesion Policy (September 2019, June 2020 – tbc.);*
- *V4 Directors General meeting on mechanism of removing administrative and legal obstacles (spring 2020);*
- *V4 ministerial meeting on the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy (November 2019; June 2020 – tbc.);*
- *Friends of Cohesion; all EU Member States (spring 2020);*
- *Regular meetings of departmental directors and experts responsible for the Cohesion Policy;*
- *Workshop with V4+4 evaluation units on the post-2020 Cohesion Policy; evaluation conference (October 2019);*
- *Expert meeting and workshop V4+ on current and future implementation of financial instruments in cohesion policy (Prague, November 2019);*
- *European Urban Forum on integrated urban development and Smart Cities (Prague, October 2019);*
- *Conference on post-2020 territorial dimension and integrated territorial development tools (Prague, February 2020);*
- *V4+ roundtable and conference on Smart Cities during the URBIS Smart City Fair (Brno, second quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert meeting on architecture and building culture policies (Prague, spring 2020);*
- *Meeting of the Spatial planning observatory group of V4+2 Countries (Prague, spring 2020);*
- *Series of working meetings on topics such as exchange of experience on reducing the administrative burden in public procurement, public procurement digitalisation (to be addressed also in V4+ format with Estonia); and effective use of ex-ante preventive measures in public procurement;*
- *Workshop on the use of ESIF monitoring systems in the 2014-2020 programming period and preparation for the 2021-2027 programming period (October 2019);*
- *Expert meeting on the use of EU programmes, synergies with ESIF and other tools (January 2019);*
- *Workshop on digitisation of the building permit process (April 2020);*
- *Working meeting of representatives of V4 national tourism authorities on issues relating to marketing (fourth quarter of 2019);*

- *Meeting of V4 Deputy Ministers responsible for tourism and representatives of national tourism authorities to sign a protocol on V4 cooperation in the area of tourism and a marketing plan for 2020 (first half of 2020).*

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

The Czech Presidency will actively respond to the fundamental changes of security environment and their impact on Euro-Atlantic and global security and stability. It will support policies addressing these changes and increasing the common defence potential and capabilities of the V4 and international organisations. A substantive and open discussion should focus on a strategic review of the future V4 defence cooperation in a changed security environment and in the light of activities and initiatives aimed at strengthening the defence and security dimension within the EU and NATO.

The Czech Presidency will move forward with work in the priority areas identified in the **Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening their Defence Cooperation**, with reference to the tasks set in the **Action Plan** (to be revised and updated during the Czech Presidency term). The attention will be paid to prospects of **harmonising the V4's national defence procurement plans** and creating opportunities for joint acquisition projects, and on continuing the common armament projects and identifying new areas for cooperation in this area.

The V4 will continue to exchange information on the content of their policy and planning documents with a view to harmonising their **defence plans**, especially in the longer term. They will coordinate their positions on defence planning and capabilities development in advance of meetings in broader NATO and EU formats as well as in relation to their partners. The Czech Presidency will promote the development of a common V4 expert and political position on harmonisation of the NATO Defence Planning Process and EU defence initiatives. It will look for opportunities for a possible joint V4 PESCO capabilities development project and examine opportunities for V4 co-operation in the framework of the European Defence Fund.

V4 EU Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) should be ready for its standby period during the Czech Presidency in the second half of 2019. The Czech Presidency will support building the battlegroup again in 2023. At the conceptual level, our priority is to establish the general principles of V4 EU BG generation.

The Czech Presidency will implement the **V4 Training and Exercises Strategy**. In this regard, we will mainly use the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC-NE) headquarters in Szczecin and associated divisional level headquarters. Our aim is to continue developing a robust training programme and gaining experience at higher command levels ideally in cooperation with key partners, especially the United States and Germany. The cooperation amongst V4 military educational institutions will continue, with an emphasis on language training. At the same time, we will exchange the experience in the field of human resources management and the role of women in the armed forces.

The Czech Presidency will search for opportunities for **joint V4 operational deployment**, building on its own positive experience of operational deployments abroad. Furthermore, the Czech Presidency will look for possible joint actions on the NATO's Eastern flank. In accordance with the Czech Government strategy of addressing illegal migration at its source, the attention will be paid to the Sahel region and on supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force (e.g. training, material and financial aid). The Czech Presidency will strive to share its experience of operational deployment in the region (EUTM and UN MINUSMA missions in Mali).

Activities planned

- *V4 Defence Ministry Policy Directors (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*
- *V4 Senior Body (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*
- *V4 Defence Ministers (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*
- *V4 Armament Directors (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*

- *V4 Planning Group (second half of 2019, first half of 2020) ;*
- *Personnel administration agencies of V4 Defence Ministries (second half of 2019);*
- *V4 Chiefs of General Staff (second half of 2019, first half of 2020) ;*
- *V4 Logistics Principals (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*
- *V4 Air Force Chiefs (second half of 2019, first half of 2020);*
- *V4 Training, Education and Exercise Coordination Conference (second half of 2019, first half of 2020)*
- *V4 Medical Man 2019 (second half of 2019);*
- *V4 Military Medicine Conference (first half of 2020).*

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

The Czech Presidency will focus on the challenges of **demographic change**, especially on population ageing and its impacts on the social system and labour market, care for the elderly, and financial sustainability of social systems in the coming decades. Family support will be one of the priorities.

Another priority in this area is **Work 4.0**. The Czech Presidency will focus on the impacts of technological change on the economy and labour market, and the education/labour market nexus (workers' skills and qualifications). The Czech Presidency will develop cooperation in the V4+Germany format, taking advantage of the existing bilateral cooperation under the Czech-German Strategic Dialogue.

The Czech Presidency will promote V4 **exchange of views and coordination on EU social policies**. The V4 would consult their positions on the future priorities of the EU social and economic policies, and jointly advocate policy solutions that will accelerate economic and social convergence across the EU. The focus will be on deepening the Single Market. Initiatives to improve social standards throughout the EU in the spirit of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which might contribute to the continued public support for the European integration project, must however respect the principles of conferral, subsidiarity and proportionality in order to prevent the emergence of new and artificial obstacles and restrictions on the free movement of workers and other persons, services, goods and capital.

Activities planned

- *V4 ministerial meeting on issues of demographic change, especially family support (first half of 2020);*
- *Expert meeting/s on the above priorities;*
- *Senior officials meeting/s on EU social policy (autumn 2019).*

MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE

The Czech Presidency will focus on initiatives in the area of research and development, innovation, digital agenda, Industry 4.0, smart technologies, energy including nuclear energy, clean mobility, competitiveness, and economic convergence as well as, elimination all remaining barriers to four freedoms of the EU Single Market. To remain competitive, the V4 countries need to develop their trade, innovative business and investment, and support their SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups.

Dual quality of goods and unfair trading practices (e.g. territorial supply constraints) are significant topics that remain in the interest of the V4 countries.

The Czech Presidency will focus on **deepening of the Single Market, including further integration of the services sector**. Continuous effort is necessary to remove barriers to cross border trade in services within the Single Market and to prevent the introduction of new ones. Also, implementation and enforcement of Single Market rules needs to be ameliorated and strengthened. Attention should also be drawn to the implementation of the recently adopted directive on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain. The Czech Presidency will seek V4 cooperation to promote this approach.

The Czech Presidency will promote the **development of digital economy in a barrier-free Single Market**. The V4 must offer a good business climate with an effective interplay of the Single Market policy, digital transformation and industrial policy. Emerging technologies such as **AI**, and free movement of data and servitization must be allowed to play their full part. In the area of digital economy and society, the important topics will include:

- the V4's participation in the Digital Europe programme;
- high-performance computing and artificial intelligence (including V4 exchange of experience and possible cooperation in developing and implementing national AI strategies, and in negotiations on the distribution of AI excellence centres);
- the V4's active participation in the building of Digital Single Market;
- support in establishing and interconnecting Digital Innovation Hubs;
- cooperation in building digital infrastructure by enhancing internet connectivity and promoting high-speed internet;
- support of V4 cooperation in science, research and innovation in digital economy;
- cooperation in shaping the EU agenda regarding a competitive legal framework for digital economy(which may cover, e.g.: modernisation of data protection; free flow of industrial data, trustworthy and human centric AI, cross-border portability of online content, taxation of the digital sector, competition policy for digital sector and regulation of online platforms, security of ICT infrastructure and 5G);
- citizen-centric government;
- and optimal mechanisms for V4 exchange of experience.

In the area of **applied research**, the V4 will seek to gain more experience in order to derive more benefit from centrally managed community programmes (Horizon Europe) and especially to increase the volume of funds drawn down by SMEs.

The **circular economy** is one of Europe's foremost cross-cutting topics. The Czech Presidency will focus on boosting the market for recyclates and secondary raw materials; promoting efficient use of resources to prevent waste generation at all levels; increasing waste recycling and reuse; radically reducing landfilling; increasing the substitution of secondary for primary materials; promoting ecodesign of products; promoting technologies for effective use of primary raw materials and for extraction, processing and use of secondary raw materials in accordance with the EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy (and related national strategies, policy concepts and policies).

In the area of **foreign trade** the Czech Presidency will focus on current trade policy topics, especially on supporting the EU in its effort to preserve **the multilateral trade system**, including to ensure functioning of the WTO Appellate Body; to develop and deepen **trade relations with partners across the world through** the EU network of free trade agreements;. Stabilising and deepening cooperation with the United States is in the V4's joint interest. The V4 will also pursue experience sharing in relation to screening of FDIs. Negotiations on post-Brexit trade relations with the United Kingdom might begin during the Czech Presidency term. The V4 will advocate the **closest possible EU-UK cooperation**, and seek to continue their cooperation with the United Kingdom in sectors of common interest in order to minimise tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. Another important topic is development of trade and economic cooperation with neighbouring regions, the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. The V4 will pay more attention to trade and economic relations with the countries through which goods move in transit between the V4 and East Asia in the light of the countries' growing economic and transport potential.

Activities planned:

- *One or two meetings of V4 Economy Ministers/Ministers responsible for Innovation and Technology (autumn 2019, spring 2020);*
- *One or two meetings of V4 State Secretaries/Deputy Economy Ministers (possibly in wider formats depending on the topic);*
- *High-level Eurasian conference on connectivity and development of trade;*
- *Conference on AI for the 21st century;*
- *Roundtables and expert workshops to exchange experience and examples of good practice in each priority area;*
- *Working groups on V4 cooperation on Digital Innovation Hubs, the V4's role in HPC technologies, Digital Single Market, and the V4's active participation in the Digital Europe programme;*
- *Workshops and/or consultations hosted by the Czech Permanent Mission to the OECD in Paris on digital transformation in the V4 region in context of Phase II of the OECD Going Digital project;*
- *Continuation of the 2019/2020 V4+Korea Knowledge Sharing Program on innovation (Opening workshop and high-level meetings in Prague in summer 2019, meetings in Seoul in winter 2020, Concluding workshop and high-level political dialogue in Prague in spring 2020);*
- *Deepening V4-Israel cooperation in applied research, innovation and startups: continuing a successful project and issuing the second Call for Proposals in cooperation with CzechInvest agency to broaden cooperation between V4 startups and their partners in Israel;*
- *Political consultations aimed at increasing V4+United States cooperation with focus on transatlantic trade relations*

A special topic is the **promotion of smart investments in the V4 region**. The V4 will develop their cooperation and share experience in areas such as promotion of smart investments in the light of current job market trends, ongoing digitisation and Industry 4.0.; the Union's regulation of investment aid; positive cross-border effects of smart investments and of their promotion; perception of the V4 region abroad; marketing the V4 region as a convenient destination for smart investment; support and legislation for smart investment and Industry 4.0 investment in the V4 region.

Activities planned:

- *Workshop/panel discussion of V4 investment agencies at the 2019 Brno International Engineering Fair;*
- *Comparative study (with input from independent experts) on permit processes and permit terms and conditions for Industry 4.0 and smart investments in V4 countries.*

Other important topics include developing the **startup ecosystem** and capital markets to encourage **investment in innovation**; promoting solutions to increase scalability of V4 business (Digital Single Market, VAT simplification, etc.); promoting endogenous companies in the CEE and EU regions; V4 cooperation (joint PR) beyond the V4 region, especially in priority destinations (United States, Asia, Middle East) and in areas of interest (IT, Industry 4.0, smart technologies, etc.); know-how transfers; transfers of advanced know-how to the CEE region.

Activities planned:

- *Consultations with the European Commission's representatives on policies to improve the capital market (angel investment, seed finance) for innovative V4 companies; and conducting a comparative study on the state of investment in the V4 region;*
- *Joint events at trade fairs, where useful and possible IVF-funded;*
- *Helping startups with expansion in the V4/CEE region (scalability of business);*
- *Expert fora, workshops, sharing and transfer of experience relating to employment of non-nationals, startup visas, public contracts with startups, etc.;*
- *Incoming missions in V4 countries; facilitating expansion of startups in individual countries of the V4 region.*

The Czech Presidency will promote exchanges of experience on **job market impacts of the 4IR**, digital transformation and new technologies (employer and employee perspectives).

Activities planned:

- *Meeting of the CEE Initiative (Central and East European industry and employers federations);*
- *Meeting of V4 social partners and the V4 tripartite HLG;*
- *Meeting of presidents of V4 economic chambers, meetings of regional economic chambers in the context of cross-border cooperation such as the traditional Contact-Contract event organised by the Regional Economic Chamber in Brno.*

In the area of **energy**, the Czech Presidency will focus on coordinating V4 positions in negotiations on legislative and non-legislative proposals with the European Commission and the EU Presidency. The most important topic is **nuclear energy**, especially in the context of the Commission's communication "A Clean Planet for All" and the communication "A more efficient and democratic decision making in EU energy and climate policy" published by the Commission on 9 April 2019. The Czech Presidency will initiate V4 coordination in advance of the EU pro-nuclear group's meetings. The Czech Presidency will underline the role of nuclear energy as a reliable emissions-free technology (while respecting the technological neutrality principle) but it will also draw attention to the need for further research in this area. The EU should support research into all promising technologies including nuclear energy. The Czech Presidency will organise several events on the future of nuclear energy.

The Czech Presidency will organize regional consultations in the process of developing the **National Energy and Climate Plans** required by the regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the governance of the Energy Union and climate action (specifically by article 12 of.

Activities planned:

- *Meeting of V4 energy ministers on the future of nuclear energy (September 2019): joint letters and statements of ministers/deputy ministers, coordination meetings;*
- *V4 nuclear energy industry roundtable;*
- *V4 regional cooperation on National Energy and Climate Plans.*

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Czech Presidency's priorities include further development of **international judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters**; support of **modernisation of court proceedings**; more efficient **international cooperation in the fight against corruption**; support of **penitentiary and post-penitentiary care**; development of **prison and probation services**; assessing and comparing **national training systems for candidate judges**; and mapping the **development of criminal justice in V4 countries** since the end of the totalitarian rule, especially the progress in introducing restorative elements including the use of modern technologies.

Activities planned:

- *V4 Justice Ministers conference on current issues relating to the above topics (first half of 2020);*
- *Meeting of representatives of V4 Justice Ministries responsible for international cooperation in criminal matters to discuss current issues in this area (second quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert conference on judicial cooperation in civil matters to discuss current issues in this area, especially cross-border service of documents and taking of evidence (second quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert meeting of national anti-corruption coordinating bodies to discuss whistleblower protection and lobbying activities (second quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert meeting on the use of videoconferencing in cross-border judicial cooperation (second quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert meeting on issues relating to penitentiary systems (first half of 2020);*
- *Three expert meetings on probation, mediation and restorative justice (one meeting on October 2019, two meetings in the first quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert conference to discuss the issue of qualifications for judicial positions and to compare V4 national training systems for candidate judges.*

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS

In the area of **youth policies**, the Czech Presidency will promote support for **the Western Balkans and EaP countries**, including exchanges of experience. The principal objective is to develop cooperation on national youth policies while respecting cultural differences. The V4 should benefit from this experience of cultural diversity and use it as a source of peer-to-peer learning and inspiration for its policies addressing a new national and European priority objective in this area: tapping the potential of rural youth. Annual two-day V4-EaP youth policy workshops have been a regular feature on the V4 calendar since 2011. The Czech Presidency will broaden the format and invite Western Balkan partners to a workshop to be held in Prague in spring 2020.

In the area of **language education**, the Czech Presidency will promote content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Another important topic is sharing good practice for secondary-level language education in V4 countries.

In the area of **sports**, Czech Presidency will seek to strengthen V4 cooperation and dialogue.

In the area of **research and development**, the Czech Presidency will concentrate on preparations for the post-2020 programming period. This will involve taking stock of the existing experience and exploring future opportunities for the use of European structural and investment funds in the post-2020 and post-2023 periods. The Czech Presidency will conduct a structured dialogue with partners to exchange experience and good practice concerning the use of European structural and investment funds in higher education and research and development sectors and to share national perspectives on the Union's post-2020 Cohesion Policy.

Activities planned:

- *V4+Western Balkans and EaP workshop on rural youth, youth work, and digitalisation of youth work;*
- *26th session of the V4 “Olympic Hopes” steering committee (V4 experts and representatives of ministries responsible for sports, organised by the Czech Olympic Committee);*
- *V4 workshop on care for young sporting talents;*
- *V4 ministerial conference (public sector and research community).*

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

The Czech Presidency will promote V4 cooperation in the areas of internal security, modernisation of public administration, and civil protection.

Migration and asylum policies remain an important topic for the V4 and the whole Union. The Czech Presidency will continue the existing political and practical cooperation. The approach to migration and asylum will be comprehensive, covering the external dimension (exchange of information on solidarity measures implemented by V4 countries in source and transit countries) and the protection of external borders, as well as the internal dimension. The main aim will be to work in the direction of crisis-resistant and sustainable migration system based on consensus. To this end, the V4 will continue their consultations on proposed EU legislation, and translate the main policy priorities into practical cooperation.

In the area of **fight against drugs**, the focus will be on preventing the diversion of precursors and other chemicals frequently used for the illicit manufacture of drugs. Czech and Slovak representatives on the European Commission's Group of Experts on Drug Precursors will gather support for the proposed regulation on trading in red phosphorus and end user identification. The Czech Presidency will advocate restrictions on the availability of pharmaceutical products containing pseudoephedrine (frequently used in the production of methamphetamine), and propose that non-EU imports of such products should be subject to an import licence.

Another important topic is the **protection of soft targets** (places with high concentration of people and low or non-existent security against terrorist attacks and other violent acts).

The Czech Presidency will promote closer V4 exchange of experience and cooperation on **cybercrime**, especially between national cybercrime contact points and law enforcement authorities (public prosecutors and the police). The focus should be on the protection of critical information infrastructure and important information systems.

The Czech Presidency will promote V4 cooperation on **modernisation of public administration** at all levels.

The Czech Presidency will continue the existing regular V4 cooperation on **civil protection**.

Activities planned:

- *V4 ministerial conference on current issues relating to V4 cooperation (tentatively autumn 2019);*
- *Sending police officers to the Western Balkans, cooperating within the V4 Migration Crisis Response Mechanism (MCRM);*
- *Meeting of heads of migration and asylum authorities and MCRM focal points;*
- *V4+ Austria expert meeting on the sending of police officers and equipment to the Western Balkans: debate on strategic interests in the region, exchange of experience and good practice (first half of 2020);*
- *Meeting of heads of immigration and border police forces, and expert meeting of immigration and border police analysts: discussion on external border protection (first half of 2020);*
- *V4+ expert meeting on the issue of methamphetamine in the Czech Republic (first quarter of 2020);*
- *Workshop on the protection of soft targets: presentations of national policies, exchange of experience and good practice (first quarter of 2020);*
- *Expert conference organised by the Czech Republic Police: current trends in cybercrime and cybersecurity (November 2019);*
- *V4 Good Government Forum: a regular Deputy Interior Ministers meeting in V4 or broader format initiated during the 2015/2016 Czech Presidency (end of 2019/beginning of 2020);*
- *Meeting of V4 Directors General responsible for civil protection: the future of the Union's future Civil Protection Mechanism in the light of threats in Central Europe (April/May 2020).*

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The principal objective of the Czech Presidency is to promote systematic approach to the question of **human resources in medical and paramedical professions**, including the problems of labour migration as well as the increasing average age of healthcare professionals.

Another important topic is **pharmaceutical policy**. The Czech Presidency will build on existing V4 cooperation, and develop especially the V4+ debate on reexports of medicinal products.

Other topics include the **decline in vaccination rates** across the V4 region and the whole Europe.

The Czech Presidency will promote V4 cooperation with the **WHO** in implementing the **11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)**.

The Czech Presidency will follow up on the WHO Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health held in Ostrava in June 2017 and draw attention to the question of **links between the environment and human health**.

The Czech Presidency will initiate further debate on the **Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine and its Additional Protocols**.

Activities planned:

- *V4 Health Ministers meeting: human resources in the healthcare sector, pharmaceutical policy (autumn 2019);*

- *V4 Health Ministers meeting: taking stock of the Czech Presidency and reviewing the results of expert group meetings (spring 2020);*
- *Expert meeting on human resources in the healthcare sector (autumn 2019);*
- *V4+Benelux expert meeting on pharmaceutical policy (autumn 2019);*
- *Meeting of Chief Public Health Officers (spring 2020);*
- *Expert meetings with WHO representatives (autumn 2019 and spring 2020);*
- *KlasifiKon conference (autumn 2019);*
- *Expert meeting organised in cooperation with the Environment Ministry (autumn 2019);*
- *V4+ Austria and Germany expert conference (spring 2020).*

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

The key priorities of the Czech Presidency in the area of agriculture will be:

1. **Future of the Common Agricultural Policy;**
2. **Dual quality of foodstuffs;**
3. **Discussion on EU Forestry Policy** (adaptation to climate changes and possible solutions of bark beetle issue);
4. **Water and soil management.**

The principal objective of the Czech Presidency is to promote V4 cooperation and its common position preferably also with support from other Member states in the final stages of negotiations on the **post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy**, especially on issues such as the adequate funding for new policy goals, definition of active/genuine farmers, capping of direct payments and performance framework. The Czech Presidency will also focus on preparations for the **transition period needed to complete the delayed negotiations of legislative proposals for the new Common Agricultural Policy; voluntary support coupled to production** in order to help sensitive sectors and **support for young and new farmers**.

Another key topic of Czech Presidency will be exchange of experience and adaptation of legislative frameworks on **unfair trading practices** and business-to-business relationships in the food supply chain, mainly concerning the **dual quality of foodstuffs**.

In addition, the **sustainable forestry management**, including adaptation to climate changes, will be among key priorities of the Czech Presidency, bearing in mind the contemporary situation regarding the bark beetle.

Other key priority of the Czech Presidency will also be **water and soil management**, mainly focusing on soil erosion risks, water retention of landscapes, soil quality improvement, sustainable land management for soil resilience to climate change, climate- and environment-friendly agricultural practices contributing to biodiversity conservation and improvement.

Other topics include reducing the **negative impacts of Brexit on V4 agricultural and food exports to the United Kingdom; bioeconomy** and cooperation within the BIOEAST initiative; continuing consultations and exchange of experience concerning the current legislative proposal for a regulation on the **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027**; support of **freshwater aquaculture**; reducing the impacts of negative factors in fisheries production (piscivorous predators such as cormorants and otters, climate factors such as droughts and floods); promoting cooperation and exchange of experience on **education, training and research in the agriculture and fisheries sectors**; situation in **commodity markets** (especially in the sugar sector); and continuing cooperation in **phytosanitary protection** (in the context of overall worsening conditions for successful and cost-

effective application of phytosanitary measures); and continuing cooperation in eradication of **animal diseases** such as African Swine Fever.

Activities planned:

- *Agriculture Ministers meeting in V4+5 format with Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, and Austria (tentatively planned for 3-4 October 2019);*
- *V4+5 Agriculture Ministers meeting in the margin of the TECHAGRO fair (tentatively planned for 31 March – 1 April 2020);*
- *Conference on Plant Health for Better Life (February/March 2020);*
- *Expert workshop (tentatively planned in V4+6 format with Germany, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria) to exchange experience concerning the application of the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC.*

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

The main topics of the Czech Presidency in the field of the environment will include **improving air quality in cities**, with an emphasis on exchanging experience on improving air quality in cities and finding a common position of V4 countries to address air quality issues.

The Czech Presidency is to coordinate the internal debate of V4 countries on the EU long term strategy, taking into account V4 States' specificities while safeguarding and creating sustainable employment and decent work that are crucial to ensure public support for long-term climate policies.

Another important topic of the Czech Presidency is to promote V4 cooperation in **implementing CITES**, especially in suppressing illegal trade in endangered species in the Central European region. The Czech Presidency will also focus on **mitigation measures and water in the landscape**. As a result of the debate on possible mitigation measures related to climate change and water scarcity in the landscape, some of the identified objectives could form the basis for the common priorities of the EU's 8th Environment Action Program, which will follow the 7th Environment Action Program expiring in 2020. Among the possible common V4 priorities, drought and soil protection could emerge.

The Czech Presidency will also initiate a debate on the topic of **light pollution**.

The Czech Presidency will promote debates and exchange of experience on the current state of **environmental remote sensing** and its possible uses in related sectors.

The V4 countries share a common legacy of **sustainable development challenges**, including challenges related to the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The Czech Presidency will promote exchange of experience and information on the implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (Agenda 2030). To this end, it will initiate occasional V4 coordination meetings on the side-lines of the sessions of the Council of the EU Working Party on the 2030 Agenda. The Czech Presidency will also endorse cooperation of the V4 countries civil society aiming at raising public awareness on the 2030 Agenda. Within the coordination meetings, the Czech Presidency will create an opportunity for debate and exchange of views of the V4 countries on the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and its role in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

Activities planned:

- *CITES Workshop for experts from V4 environment ministries, inspectorates and customs authorities (two or three days, fourth quarter of 2019);*

- *V4 expert seminar on improving air quality in cities (one day, fourth quarter of 2019);*
- *V4 expert conference on 8EAP (fourth quarter of 2019);*
- *Environment Ministers meeting in V4+4 format with Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia (first half of 2020);*
- *Workshop in advance of the 2020 Copernicus User Forum; V4+4 experts will be invited to attend the 2020 Copernicus User Forum (first half of 2020).*

ADMINISTRATION OF STATE MATERIAL RESERVES

The principal objective of the Czech Presidency is to increase **V4 coordination and sharing of government material reserves in emergencies**. The Czech Presidency will propose a cross-border emergency assistance mechanism based on existing cross-border cooperation of V4 emergency and rescue services. The mechanism would enable the V4 to share their government material reserves in cross-border emergencies, or to promptly deliver vital commodities to a V4 country in need. The V4 should consider the need to negotiate an international agreement setting up the mechanism, and identify any legislative changes required for this purpose.

CZ V4 PRES is going to initiate a workshop (working seminar) on oil security within the V4 countries. It will focus mainly on common reactions on major oil supply disruptions, verification of the IEA emergency response mechanisms and identification of possibilities of deepening mutual cooperation in the area of oil security, including the potential for the creation of a regional working group for oil emergency.

Activities planned:

- *Workshop for representatives of authorities administering government material reserves, Interior and Foreign Ministries and possibly other V4 authorities;*
- *Workshop on oil security comprising representatives of the relevant governmental bodies of the V4 countries, their central stockholding entities, representatives of oil transport and petrochemical industry and representatives of IEA.*