**30 years of Visegrad cooperation and Polish Presidency**

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Earlier this week, Presidents of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia gathered in northern Poland to celebrate 30 years of strong partnership and cooperation at the Visegrad Forum. This was the sixth Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group (V4) beginning from July 1 2020 and will last till June 30, 2021. Theme for the Polish presidency at V4 is “Back on Track” referring to the cooperation to bring back socio-economic development in the same way as it was before the COVID-19. Visegrad Forum was established as an informal body of political and economic cooperation in the region on February 15 1991, at the castle of Visegrad, Hungary. Presidents of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Prime Minister of Hungary signed a Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Republic of Poland and Republic of Hungary in a strive for grand European Integration. Established under the Polish presidency main thematic areas that will remain in focus are the EU’s fight against the COVID-19, integration within V4, digitalization of V4 cooperation. Over the past 30 years, V4 cooperation amongst the countries of Central Europe has built a new vision for the European integration to transform the regional political-economic and social development landscape. The V4 established International Visegrad Fund has been established in 2000 to grant support in several important projects of scientific development, education, and cultural projects across the four countries. The forum has emerged as though a non-institutional organization but has improved its influence in the European regional and global political system. V4 cooperation provides a solid opportunity for the countries of the region to build collaboration in diverse sectors at the forum and with the EU framework. V4 is the strongest voice in the EU decision making process.

Under the polish Presidency, the focus of the coming years V4 will further expand and deepen with EU on increase the youth mobility, cross border cooperation

Visegrad cooperation amongst countries of central Europe dates back to the fourteenth century. Its present day chapter was opened in the 1970s by meetings between anti-communist dissidents. Their vision of freedom soon became a reality. Europe was in shambles as a result of World War II and later the Cold War. There was a war of communism and capitalism ongoing where the countries had to set their priorities right to find the right direction for the future. The political breakthrough in the countries of Central Europe in 1989 resulted in efforts to reverse the geopolitical situation, ensure the withdrawal of Soviet troops and eradication of the division of the continent symbolized by the concept of the “Iron Curtain”. The next goal was equally ambitious “to return to Europe”. On February 15 1991, the Visegrad Declaration was signed. Later the military alliance of the disintegrated Soviet Union that is Warsaw Pact got dissolved on July 1, 1991. In the core documentation of the declaration of Visegrad, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia found to reinvigorate the European nationalism, liberal market economy, joint military alliance for their territorial security, human rights insurance, free governance and parliament thus negating the ideology of totalitarianism. Even the first free trade agreement in Europe was taken in practical by these four nations of Visegrad and Central Europe which is named as Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Over the next decade the Visegrad Group of countries joined NATO to strengthen security and stability in the region. After the end of the Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia became independent and Slovakia became part of the group. All the four members joined the European Union in May 2004.

With ongoing polish presidency, which at the same time dealing with the grappling COVID-19 crisis. Pandemic has put everyone to test especially to develop collective response to the medical, social and economic not only at global scale but also at the regional level too and V4 is not an exception. V4 countries are building the capacities and trying to find the pandemic together to bring socio-economic prosperity in the region back on the track. Polish presidency is also building on the image of Centralof Central Europe and especially V4 countries apart from creating spaces for dialogue. Apart from V4 30th anniversary, International Visegrad Fund continues to enter its 20th year of existence. Both these Anniversaries are defining the Polish presidency. Following a discussion of prime ministers of the V4 countries, a V4 Virtual Centre for Information Exchange on COVID19 has been created. Its inauguration took place on 9 October 2020. The aim of this initiative is to improve the exchange of information between the V4 countries in the field of health system management, border traffic, air transport, or internal regulations and restrictions implemented in connection with the pandemic. This is a great example of the flexibility of cooperation within the V4 and its adaptation to new challenges.

The future of V4 is optimistic and clear with Polish Presidency is spearheading the alliance to new dimensions. Apart from focusing on COVID-19 challenge and great cooperation within EU, V4 is dealing with a greater influx of Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees. The pandemic of Covid-19 has changed a lot of traditional views of European Nations. The cooperation is creating opportunities for the Central Europe to come out of this huge challenge through attracting foreign investment for the EU but it is also ensuring sustainability and stability of the whole region. V4 insists that the economies of the post COVID world and EU region must accompany the idea of a single market. The V4 dialogue regarding the single market economy is vital before the commencement of European Council discussion in March 2021. For the coming decade, the body of the V4 cooperation has sketched the framework of digital transition. In this framework, digital communication, e-commerce, e-education and e-skills have been prioritized and to be operationalized in this decade of 2020-2030.

Under the polish Presidency, the focus of the coming years V4 will further expand and deepen with EU on increase the youth mobility, cross border cooperation, EU energy transition and security of supply, cooperation in the issues of asylum, migration and border management. Under the polish presidency significant steps have been taken so far in order to achieve the set goals and objectives at the forum. With joint efforts and togetherness, the regional challenges can be dealt easily.

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