

The Visegrad Group supports the Eastern Partnership

The launch of a special grant facility to support the Eastern Partnership as part of the International Visegrad Fund was agreed on 16 June during the summit meeting of the Visegrad Group prime ministers in Bratislava. However, this symbolic reinforcement of the Fund's engagement in the East does not exhaust the Group's potential in this area. The Czech Republic, which is taking over the annual presidency of the Visegrad Group from Slovakia, will make efforts to coordinate activities linked to developmental and transformational assistance. The need to further coordinate the stances of the Central European countries in the EU was emphasised during the summit. The leaders of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary declared their full support for the priorities of the Polish presidency of the Council of the EU.

The prime ministers of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary and the deputy prime minister of the Czech Republic agreed to establish the programme Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) as part of the International Visegrad Fund during the summit, which was also attended by the prime minister of Moldova. The programme is aimed at supporting democratisation and transformation processes and the development of regional co-operation and civil society in Eastern Partnership countries. Each of the Group member states has undertaken to allocate 250,000 euros annually for this programme starting next year, which means that the Fund's budget will increase from 6 to 7 million euros. It was emphasised in a declaration published after the summit that all member states of the Visegrad Group see the Eastern Partnership as a high priority issue in their foreign policy.

The Visegrad Group countries are interested in developing co-operation not only in the areas concerning the EU's neighbourhood. A priority task of the Czech presidency of the group, which will commence on 1 July, will be co-operation during the debate inside the EU on the EU's new financial perspective for 2014–2020, especially in the area of cohesion policy. The continuation of the projects for developing infrastructural energy connections in Central Europe will be important. One of the Visegrad Group's major challenges is to reinforce the cohesion of Central Europe. The Group should also deal with synchronising activities as part of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy (in which Poland participates) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which was approved during the EU summit on 24 June and covers the other Visegrad Group member states along with other countries. <grosz, mag>