

“Diversity in Unity”:

Chulalongkorn University-Visegrád 4 Collaboration Project

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CU-V4 Project's Logo: Flower of Diversity
Designed by Ploy Nikadanont

Mission Statement

The Visegrád Group (also known as the “Visegrád Four” or “V4”) was established on 15 February 1991 at a meeting attended by Václav Havel, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, József Antall, Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, and Lech Wałęsa, President of the Republic of Poland. The 1991 meeting, which took place at the Hungarian castle town of Visegrád, harks back to a historic meeting in 1335 attended by Charles I of Anjou, King of Hungary, John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, and Casimir III, King of Poland. Both congregations are united across time by the shared mission to strengthen friendship and cooperation among the three countries which, after the Dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, expanded to four countries in Central Europe with shared historical and cultural heritage: Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic.

All of the Visegrád countries became members of the European Union on 1 May 2004. Therefore, the Visegrád Group should not be

regarded as part of the alternative integration efforts which are in competition with the EU. On the contrary, it should instead be regarded as part of the efforts to optimise the existing cultural and historical cohesion as well as collaboration among Central European neighbouring countries.

Thailand, which has been preparing to join the ASEAN economic community, will not only benefit from its close collaboration with the Visegrád countries, but also learn from Visegrád's socio-economic cooperation forum which places strong emphasis on close collaboration among neighbouring countries on many levels in the areas of trade, culture and education. The Visegrád Group's collaboration in the field of education, as reflected in the founding of the International Visegrád Fund, is a shining example of the humanitarian civic dimension and of a most sustainable outcome of transnational economic integration. The International Visegrád Fund was established in the year 2000 as part of the efforts to support the development of cooperation in culture, tourism industry, research, and scientific exchange, particularly, the exchange of students and academic staff across national borders. It would be most beneficial for Thailand and its neighbouring countries to aim for similar development and cooperation objectives, particularly in the field of education. With good understanding of the history and culture of other countries, different nations and cultures can also bring about peace and harmony, strengthening the unity which can be found within and through diversity.

Objectives

1. To promote knowledge and in-depth understanding of the histories, cultures and socio-political contexts of the Visegrád countries and the Central European region among Thai students, teachers and interested public
2. To strengthen collaboration between Chulalongkorn University and educational as well as cultural institutions in the four Visegrád countries

Activities

- "Diversity in Unity: Central Europe's Past and Present": The Visegrád Open Day Lectures and Launch of the Chulalongkorn University-Visegrád 4 Collaboration Project on 14 May 2015
- The Visegrád Arts & Culture Weeks from February 2016 to September 2017

In each semester, a week of events featuring Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak cultural performances, film screenings and public lectures will be organised as part of the CU-V4 Project.

Czech Arts & Culture Week	February 2016
Hungarian Arts & Culture Week	September 2016
Polish Arts & Culture Week	February 2017
Slovak Arts & Culture Week	September 2017

Contacts

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Venue

Chulalongkorn University

Duration

May 2015-May 2018

Expected Output

A more extensive collaboration between Visegrád countries and Chulalongkorn University, which will lead to long-term collaborative projects between Visegrád countries and Thailand, and also beyond. Such collaboration might be an initial step leading to the inauguration and offering of special courses on Central and Eastern Europe in undergraduate and graduate curricula and intensive courses on the languages, cultures, literatures and histories of Central and Eastern European regions at Chulalongkorn University.

The Visegrád 4 embassies in Thailand will be asked to lend or contribute their resources, such as films, lecturers, performances and cultural productions, to the planned events and activities. Chulalongkorn University will provide a venue and intellectual platform where academic discussion and cultural exchanges take place for the benefit of the people of the Visegrád countries and Thailand.

**Message from His Excellency Vítězslav Grepl
Ambassador of the Czech Republic**



I am pleased and honoured to have this opportunity to address the students of the Chulalongkorn University and all the participants of the exceptional and meaningful project aiming to introduce and bring together four countries of Central Europe to the Thai audiences. It is a pleasure for me to cooperate together with our partner countries that we form so called Visegrád Group that will in 2016 celebrate its 25th anniversary. All of the 4 countries, namely Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, we are neighbours in the heart of Europe. Our history, culture and lives of our people have been intertwined and shaped as the centuries of the European history were passing by.

In the year 2016 the Visegrád Group, also known as Visegrád Four (V4), will celebrate 25 years of its existence. It will be celebrated during the Czech Presidency in the Group, which begins on 1st July 2015 with a motto “V 4 Trust” – common trust. This motto sums up the quality that the Czech Republic perceives as the most important value added of this cooperation – unique level of mutual trust based on functioning, close ties and open exchange of views among partners, that do not necessarily need to agree on everything every time, but whose cooperation can be exceptionally productive in some areas. The purpose of this initiative, V4, is seen in developing concrete projects at political or people to people

levels, everywhere where there exists a will of all 4 countries to find a common ground and positions. This type of cooperation can contribute to the strengthening of the identity of the Central European region and towards formulating and defending regional interests within the broader European Union.

But as we are trying to find common positions with our partners or defend our interests in the EU etc. each country at the same time has its uniqueness and specific features that I believe the project of the Chulalongkorn University will help to present not only to the Chulalongkorn University students but also to the broader public.

The Czech Republic

The Czech Republic lies in the heart of Europe, in the centre of the European continent. Situated at the crossroads of many trade routes, historical events and cultures, its territory has naturally been a place of encounter of people of different nationalities, beliefs and skills. They all influenced the culture and have been shaping the country and its people till present days. The Czech Republic, the union of several historical lands (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), is nowadays the youngest form of the Czech state, that has existed for almost twelve hundred years.

On October 28, 1918 the first independent Czechoslovak state was founded from territories that were previously part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first president Tomáš G. Masaryk, a remarkable personality and figure of modern European liberal democracy, humanism and tolerance, became the leader of a state that was based on the principle of self-determination.

Czechoslovakia became one of Europe's first successful multi-party parliamentary democracies, and it was stable enough to withstand the international depression of the 1930s. Czechoslovakia became then one of the ten most developed countries of the world. But a period of twenty years of flourishing democracy and prosperity was ended by the aggression of Nazi Germany and World War II. The conference in Munich and the following Nazi German occupation in March 1939 brought the end of the independent Czech state.

After World War II, the restored republic became part of the Soviet sphere of influence. A period of "limited" democracy was ended by a communist

takeover in February 1948 that lasted until November 1989. Only then Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic returned to its democratic foundations and principles again.

Thanks to its location at the crossroads of various cultures in the heart of Europe, the Czech Republic has countless cultural and historical points of interest. When discussing tourism in Czech Republic, one cannot overlook the overwhelmingly popular tourist destination of Prague. The city is generally considered to be one of the most beautiful world capitals with an exquisitely preserved historical center. Many other towns and historic monuments in the Czech Republic are well-preserved and are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

But the Czech Republic is not only full of tourist attractions. The Czech Republic is not only a modern and developed economy that builds on its famous industrial tradition, but nowadays is also a leading country in innovative and modern technologies.

Czech universities, colleges and specialized institutions are sought after for their attractive fields of study and high quality by students from all over the world. Compulsory education was introduced in Bohemia in 1774 by the enlightened ruler Maria Theresa. However, the history of Czech education reaches even farther back in time. It was in 1348 that the oldest university in Central Europe - now the Charles University - began teaching Czech scholars. The university is linked to this tradition and continues to develop it in terms of Europe of the 21st century.

The Czechs are very often described as a very cultural and cultured nation that has contributed a large number of prominent figures and personalities to the world. The most significant rulers and heads of state have included Emperor Charles IV, Presidents T.G. Masaryk and Václav Havel. Personalities that achieved world recognition include scientists Jaroslav Heyrovský (Nobel Prize laureate in Chemistry), Otto Wichterle, a Czech chemist who invented contact lenses, or Antonín Holý, who discovered a drug treatment for AIDS. World renown is also an entrepreneur Tomáš Baťa. The list of famous personalities in the culture sphere includes composers Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Leoš Janáček, writers Franz Kafka, Karel Čapek, Jaroslav Seifert (Nobel Prize laureate) or Milan Kundera, film directors Miloš Forman or Jiří Menzel, artists Alfons Mucha and František Kupka, and many others.

In the year 2014 we celebrated the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Czech Republic and Thailand. In that year we also commemorated the 80th anniversary of the State Visit of King Rama VII to Czechoslovakia and the 20th anniversary of President Václav Havel's State Visit to Thailand.

Important part of building our relations is also creating opportunities for the people of our countries to get to know each other, share they knowledge and experience, learn from each other. I am pleased to see that there exist direct links between the universities in the Czech Republic and Thailand. The universities cooperate in the field of research and development and also exchange academics and students. We are very happy that the Thai students often choose Czech Republic as a place for their studies. Many of them study under the Erasmus Mundus Programme. And on the other hand young Czechs come to study at the universities in Thailand.

I hope that the project of the Chulalongkorn University will bring the Czech Republic closer to Thai students and hopefully we can also attract Thai students to consider furthering their studies in one of the universities in the Czech Republic. The Embassy will also play a role in creating partnership between the Chulalongkorn University and educational institutions in the Czech Republic.



(H.E. Vítězslav Grepl,
Ambassador of the Czech Republic)

**Message from His Excellency Péter Jakab
Ambassador of Hungary**



It is a privilege and great honour to greet the readers of the present publication entitled “The Visegrád Group and Thailand – Diversity in Unity”. Indeed, the strength of modern societies derives from their pluralistic nature and healthy diversity, encapsulated in the mottos “Unity in Diversity” and “E pluribus unum” (Out of many, one). It is equally true to our region, Central Europe, for the four countries that today form the Visegrád Group have always been part of a single civilization sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots, which they wish to preserve and further strengthen. All the V4 countries successfully completed a challenging period of political and economic transition, eventually becoming Member States of the European Union, perceiving their integration in the EU as another step forward in the process of overcoming artificial dividing lines in Europe.

The initiative of Chulalongkorn University to launch a project that aims at promoting knowledge and understanding of the histories, cultures and socio-political contexts of the Visegrád countries among Thai students, academics and the general public comes at a time of reflection on the remarkable progress Central European countries have made since they managed to reclaim their freedom. It is 25 years ago that the fall of the communist regimes came about, and last year we celebrated the 10th anniversary of our countries’ accession to the European Union. It is also timely for our Thai friends to study and analyse our recent history

of cooperation and integration as Thailand, along with its neighbours, is preparing to join the ASEAN Economic Community later this year.

It is also important to note that the economic development of Visegrád countries contributes to the success of the European Union and is in fact a key factor in boosting growth in Europe. The V4 together is the 5th largest economy and has the 3rd largest export capacity within the EU as well as being the world's 12th largest economy, and the region still keeps developing dynamically. The V4 countries and Thailand, strategically located in the heart of the European continent and Southeast Asia, respectively, and having good logistics infrastructure to connect to a market of more than six hundred million people in their respective regions share many other interesting features well worth exploring. I would just like to emphasize one such characteristic that I find very impressive in both Thailand and Central Europe: the creativity and entrepreneurship of the people – probably the result of our turbulent past that compelled us to constantly adapt to an ever changing environment and come up with new ideas in order to survive.

Although we are living within successful regional integrations these days where cooperation replaced conflict, it is still important to study our history and try to gain a better understanding of our cultural similarities and differences alike. I am sure Chulalongkorn University's project to initiate introductory cultural events and the inauguration of special courses on the languages, culture, literature and history of the Visegrád countries will serve this purpose well. On behalf of the Hungarian Embassy in Bangkok I confirm our commitment to support this endeavour and contribute to achieving its objectives by all possible means.



(H.E. Péter Jakab,
Ambassador of Hungary)

**Message from His Excellency Zenon Kuchciak
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland**



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Poland is the tiger of Europe! Its development dynamics equals that of some East Asian countries during their high growth periods. Poland is also a member of the European Union, the most ambitious integration project in the world, and a member of the Visegrad group (V4), a group of countries who share common history, common values and common faith, who cooperate and support each other. Poland is just entering its Golden Age. The success of Poland makes it an ideal economic and political partner for cooperation.

Thailand is the second largest economy in the ASEAN group, who has transformed from a rural society to an industrialized upper middle income economy. Its economic success attracts investment, trade and people from abroad. Its natural beauty and culture attracts millions of visitors. Thailand is an excellent partner for cooperation.

The strength of Poland partly lies in it being a member of the regional grouping, the EU and the Visegrad group. The strength of Thailand partly lies in it being an ASEAN member state and from 2015 a member state of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). These strengths call for enhancing and deepening bilateral and inter-regional cooperation. If one wants to cooperate one needs to learn about each other.

Poland and Thailand have been enjoying their mutual friendship and trust for over one hundred years; that is from the time of the visit to Poland of His Majesty Rama the Fifth. From that moment relations in the spheres of politics, economics, culture and tourism have been developing rapidly. In Poland, many times we have hosted the members of the royal family, leaders of Thailand and leading politicians. The most important Polish politicians have been received in Thailand. We have a bilateral Strategic Political Dialogue. We implement a number of bilateral agreements. We have a similar point of view on a number of issues from the sphere of international politics. We support each other in most important issues concerned with international peace. Gradually, we intensify our economic cooperation and trade, which in the last year stood at one billion two hundred million US dollars. In other words, we are friends. Nevertheless, it is time to get to know each other better and a forum dedicated to V4 is an excellent opportunity for this.

The History

Poland has a history of formal statehood of over one thousand years. This history has been very turbulent. For centuries we had to fight with mighty invaders from the North, the South, the West and the East of Europe and from Asia. Unfortunately, internal political conflicts and too often a lack of an agreement among the state elite were used by our neighbours. We gradually lost our territory and importance and in 1795 we lost our independence.

Only on 11th of November 1918, Poland regained its independence. We didn't enjoy it for too long. In 1939 Hitler's Germany and two weeks later Soviet Russia invaded Poland. The Second world war cost six million Poles their lives. In 1945, the great empires left Poland in the sphere of Soviet influence, where we remained for over 40 years.

In 1981, when the empire of the communist bloc was still powerful and still posed the main challenge to Europe and the United States, in Poland a mass and spontaneous protest movement against the communist regime was born – Solidarity. It was headed by then unknown future Nobel Peace prize laureate Lech Walesa. The movement, mighty in scale, did not demand the handover of the full political power from the authorities and its army, but asked for respecting fundamental rights and freedoms to gather and for free speech, for freedom of political associations, for access to media and for

abolishing of censorship, for free and democratic parliamentary elections. It demanded respect for its members' work and achievements; it demanded the hope for better tomorrow for the young generation.

Having denied the democratic opposition the dialogue, the authorities introduced martial law on 13th December 1981. The power was taken over by the structure called the Military Council for National Salvation. The world protested, but the inevitable logic of political reality was that, as were the earlier cases for hundreds of years, Poles had to solve their problems on their own, without the assistance from the outside. The just international ostracism which met the military regime had adverse negative effects on the national economy, on the welfare of ordinary people and doomed Poland to further developmental failures.

Despite the prohibition of independent unions, despite the persecutions and the imprisoning of many leaders of the democratic opposition and student movements, despite the brutal actions of the military and the police against those who continued to protest, despite the massive emigration of the young generation, in time, the opposition to the regime grew rather than wane. People got used to the fear. They started demanding not only independent unions and a dialogue with the authorities, but also the dismissal of these authorities, the conducting of free and fair elections, and finally, the abandoning of the communist camp and the return to the European family.

Despite the threat of a military invasion from the Soviet Russia, the democratic opposition and the regime sat at a negotiation table. At this roundtable one decided not only about the protesters demands, but foremost about the face of the new Poland, about the change in the state ideology, about the introduction of a market economy, about the interim parliament, about the change of constitution and the establishing of a new double chamber parliament, about the civil control over the army, and about the Soviet army leaving Poland; in fact, about regaining the independence. The agreement allowed for peaceful handover of power from the communist regime to the democratic opposition. This agreement served as an inspiration for similar movements in other socialist countries. It encouraged our German neighbours to speak up about the unification of Germany and it gave the impulse to the later fall of the Berlin wall. It accelerated the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the establishing in its place of independent states.

Regaining real independence and democracy in the political sphere, allowed for unprecedented social and economic development of Poland. In the last 25 years we became a NATO member, a European Union member, a responsible partner in activities concerned with international peace, in fight against terrorism. In the last 25 years we also changed our perception of the world. We have friends far away, and we have friends nearby, just outside of our borders. What binds us to them are similar universal values, democratic state, respect for law and civic freedoms. Some of our closest friends and partners are in the Visegrad group.

The Success Story of Poland's Transformation, Integration and Development

As it embraces around 25 percent of the human population, post-socialist transformation, which Poland underwent, is by all means a process of historical significance. It is hardly possible to imagine complex and extensive systemic changes that equal those taking place in parts of Europe and Asia. In simplistic terms, the process is twofold in nature; from the political perspective, authoritarian regimes are being replaced by democracies and, from the socio-economic perspective, the systems are being transformed from centrally-planned economies based on state ownership domination and bureaucratic control mechanisms into the free market economies based on private ownership and a deregulated market. In Poland both processes has been completed successfully. We have become a modern market-based open economy and a liberal democracy.

In fact, as far as Poland's socio-economic development is concerned, World Bank economist, dr. Marcin Piątkowski, in his ground-breaking paper entitled "Poland's New Golden Age: Shifting from Europe's Periphery to Its Center", writes:

"Poland has likely never had it so good before. The distance between Poland's and Western Europe's level of income, quality of life, and perceived happiness now seems to be the shortest since at least the 16th century. Based on the current projections of independent forecasters [...] Poland will likely continue converging with Western Europe until at least 2030, reaching around 80 percent of the Western European level of income, the highest in the country's history. This convergence will be supported by Poland's strong economic DNA, which helped it become the European champion of growth in the last twenty five years. The quality of life in

Poland will also likely continue rising, reaching levels even higher than what the level of GDP per capita alone would suggest. The economic rise of Poland [...] heralds the arrival of its new, 21st century Golden Age, for the first time since the 1500's. [This rise is helping to] shift Poland from the European economic periphery, where it languished for centuries, towards Europe's economic, political and social center. Together with the increasing prosperity of the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, the continent [will] become more balanced than ever before, breathing with both of its Western and Eastern European lungs."

In his text published by the Brookings Institution Piątkowski names the sources of Poland's miracle:

"First, from the very beginning Poles seemed to know where they were going: towards European integration. In the process, they adopted Western institutions, rules, and social norms that are at the very foundation of economic development: the rule of law, independent monetary policy, robust competition, free press, and democracy. Second, Poland expanded the quantity and quality of education. Today every second young person studies at the university level, above the EU average, up from only one out of ten in 1989. Despite relatively low spending on education, young Poles are also well educated: according to the OECD PISA 2012 study, Polish 15-year-olds are more functionally literate than most Western European and North American peers. Finally, Poland also benefited from large inflows of EU funds that helped connect Poland with Western Europe by highways for the first time ever. An improved business climate also helped, with Poland leading the World Bank's Doing Business ranking among the EU and OECD countries in the pace of reforms. Lastly, the country's strong supervision and conservative risk profile has helped maintain a healthy utility-like banking sector."

Piåtkowski then answers the question what gave Poland an edge relative to its regional peers:

"There were a number of likely factors. First of all, Poland seems to have been more thorough in introducing market oriented-reforms at the beginning of transition (as well as during the dying days of socialism). This helped spawn a private sector boom and move the country out of the post-transition recession already in 1992, before others. Poland was also quick to follow the early market reforms with robust institutional building, and was rewarded with an accession to the OECD in 1996. Quite importantly,

it managed the privatization process in a broadly efficient and transparent way. [...] Lastly, Poland benefited from a large and rapidly growing domestic market, which helped to insulate it from external shocks, such as those in 2008-09."

A part of this success can also be attributed to the integration with the European Union. The EU membership awarded Poland additional economic, social, political and legal benefits. The common market contributed immensely to Poles' well-being, political structure ensured stability. We are a country guided by modern and transparent, European-style, laws.

Nevertheless, the Visegrad group has always been of paramount importance to us. The official website of the Visegrad group explains why:

"The Visegrad Group [...] reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have always been part of a single civilization sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots in diverse religious traditions, which they wish to preserve and further strengthen. [...] The V4 was not created as an alternative to the all-European integration efforts, nor does it try to compete with the existing functional Central European structures. [...] On the contrary, the Group aims at encouraging optimum cooperation with all countries, in particular its neighbours, its ultimate interest being the democratic development in all parts of Europe."

The Cooperation

For us, in Central Europe, V4 is a household name, an obvious consequence of our common history, close cooperation and friendship. Together we constitute the most dynamic region of Europe. This has clearly been noticed by Thailand's authorities and is being examined by Thailand's academics.

On 17th March 2015, the Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP) of the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, organized in Bangkok a forum entitled "The Central European Day". It aimed at showing the opportunities for bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Representatives of all four embassies were present with their lectures on why and how we should cooperate. The forum gathered over 200 Thai firms. The B2B talks lasted until the evening.

Naturally, this is just the beginning. DITP and the embassies are organizing similar events in the DITP regional offices, as it is important to reach Thai business communities and Thai society outside of Bangkok.

It is extremely important that we promote sectors for bilateral cooperation. We are facing here a clear win-win situation, which only obstacle may be a lack of adequate information.

A good example is investment. Within the next 10 years Thailand has a chance to become the biggest outward investor among the ASEAN member states. The economic success translated into the willingness to go global. One of the best investment destinations in the world is Central Europe. Poland, for example, has all the necessary ingredients to be a perfect investment destination: a transparent and fair law, which does not inhibit foreign businesses; a liberal and open market economy; a proximity of a large market of over 500 million people; educated, skilled and relatively inexpensive labour force, with millions of University graduates, who speak foreign languages; an excellent physical infrastructure and high connectivity – the term used so often in reference to AEC – with Germany, France and the rest of Europe; a modern and well-performing banking sector; and finally its special economic zones, where setting up and doing business is simple and the necessary assistance is provided. Several big Thai companies have already invested in Poland. And they are all happy there.

There are a number of sectors Poland and Thailand can cooperate in, in terms of trade and investment. Green technology is the most promising one. A Polish government-led green technology incubator called GreenEvo has been created to disseminate knowledge and technology around the world. As part of this strategy, Polish small and medium enterprises (SMEs) – members of GreenEvo – participated in the Thailand Innovation and Design Expo (TIDE) in Bangkok in September 2014. Thailand – the economic success story – is working towards making its growth greener. The Polish technologies and products can undoubtedly come handy.

There are also a number of other sectors we can cooperate in, agriculture being an obvious choice. Both countries are grand food producers, but we are not competitors as we produce different goods. Recently, Polish dairy products found their way into Thai market. We hope that the same will happen with Polish fruits, especially apples, meats and processed foods.

We are confident that the Thai consumers will be eager to buy our products as much as we are eager to consume foods made in Thailand. Defence is another interesting sector. Modern equipment offered by the Polish defence industry can support the modernization efforts of Thailand's defence forces, especially air forces and the land army.

Not all need to be trade and investment. Tourism is another hot issue. There is a chance that this or next year the number of Poles who come on holidays to Thailand will reach 100,000. And perhaps we are down the line in the statistics, but nevertheless, the number will keep growing as Thailand is becoming the main tourist destination for the Polish tourists. However, there is also growing interest of Thai tourists to explore Central Europe. This is where V4 comes as a solution, with its rich history, culture and natural beauty supported by excellent tourist infrastructure. Trips to Europe can easily combine several places, and Central Europe is by all means the new frontier. When you go to Prague visit also Krakow! Poland offers many types of attractions for a picky traveller, among them being the history and culture – old town, castles, palaces and the natural beauty – primary forests, lakes and mountains.

The culture is what intensifies the international fascination of Central Europe. Polish culture has been met with appreciation all over the world. Moreover, Polish vibrant modern theatre and opera, modern design and movies became one of our best brands, synonymous with the highest quality. This year we have celebrated the biggest success of the Polish cinematography: the first ever Polish movie - "Ida" directed by Paweł Pawlikowski - won the Oscar in the category of Best Foreign Movie.

Poland is a modern, competitive economy which offers unparalleled cooperation opportunities. Poland is also a liberal democracy and a member of the European Union. However, part of our strength and attractiveness comes from Poland being a proud member of the Visegrad Group. And this is indeed a wise choice to cooperate with the Visegrad group.



(H.E. Zenon Kuchciak,
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland)

**Message from His Excellency Vladimír Halgaš,
Ambassador of the Slovak Republic**



THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Slovak Republic or Slovakia is an inland country located in the heart of Europe, since the geographical center of the “old continent” is situated close to the St. John church in Kremnické Bane (*a Slovak village in Žiar nad Hronom district*). The total area of Slovakia is 49038 square kilometers, which is similar with Denmark. Its population consists of 5.5 million people, about 86 percent of whom are ethnic Slovaks. The most numerous ethnic minorities of the country are Hungarians, Roma people, Czechs, Ukrainians and Germans. Slovakia is located between Poland in the north and Hungary in the south. Its western neighbors are the Czech Republic and Austria, while the Ukraine lies behind its eastern border.

The Slavic tribes settled in the territory of Slovakia in the 5th and 6th century. In 631, the first empire was established in the territory and called Samova ríša (Samo’s Empire) after its founder who unified the Slavic tribes. After his death, the empire fell apart.

Another significant state founded in our territory was Veľká Morava (Great Moravia Kingdom) established in 833. The upswing of Veľká Morava after 863 spread Christianity and learning in the old Slavonic language that people understood. The Kingdom gradually fell apart at the beginning of the 10th century. Afterwards, the Territory of today’s Slovakia became part of Uhorsko (the Hungarian Kingdom) and stayed that way until 1918 (the end of the First World War). After the War in 1918 historical development in Europe united Slovakia with Bohemia and Moravia and created

Czechoslovakia which became a federal state in 1968 and on 1 January 1993 split peacefully into two successor states the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic.

Slovakia is a parliamentary democracy. The head of the state is the president who serves a 5-year term. He shares his powers with the parliament, the official name of which is the National Council of the Slovak Republic. This top legislative authority of the Slovak Republic is single-chambered and has 150 members. The Slovak Republic has been a member of NATO since 2004 and became a member of the European Union in the same year. The country was included into the Schengen Area in 2007 and became the 16th member of the European monetary union, the Eurozone in 2009.

Regardless of its small area, Slovakia has been blessed with diverse **natural beauty**. Monumental mountains consisting of tall and sharp mountain peaks towering above mysterious gorges and deep valleys are as a destination even further decorated with a picturesque waterfalls, streams with a crystal clear water and finally, with a preview of European wildlife which is significantly endangered in present times.

One of the most precious resources in Slovakia is water, as the country has the highest density of presence of mineral and thermal springs in the world. As a result, many Slovak thermal spas are famous around the world for their curative effects (diseases: cardiovascular, skin and neuromuscular, osteoporosis, disorders of the musculoskeletal system, psychiatric, neurologic, respiratory, urologic, and various other illnesses). Besides spas, healing water is also available in thermal swimming pools which are presented for example in Galanta, Besenova, Kováčová, Dudince, Bojnice and other cities.

History is best preserved in Slovakia in its towns by historical buildings and other monuments and best represented by many **castles** which are one of the greatest tourist attractions (there are 180 castles, chateaus and manor houses in Slovakia in addition to 425 aristocratic mansions) built many centuries ago. They served mainly as a protection against raids of enemies and also as a home for the nobility. There are four castles just in Bratislava and its immediate vicinity – Bratislava Castle, Devin Castle, Rusovce mansion, and Červený Kameň (Red Stone Castle). Bratislava Castle was built at a strategic point overlooking the crossing of the important trade routes, the Amber Road and the Danube Road.

Trenčín Castle proudly rules the countryside from a rock next to the railway route – even though the inscription carved into the rock in the year 179 by

Roman soldiers cannot be seen from here, it serves as a proof of how far the Roman legions got while defending the Danube borders of the Roman Empire.

Taste the excellent **local wines** while traveling the Malokarpatská Wine Path, which will take you across 25 towns and villages famous for their wine production. It connects the ancient royal towns Bratislava, Svätý Jur, Pezinok, Modra, Trnava and a number of local villages which have retained to these days their unique folklore. The extraordinary quality of the current brand of Slovak wines have been proven in the 2013 Concours Mondial du Bruxelles competition, which had been held for the first time in Bratislava – Slovakia was awarded three Grand Golden Medals plus 19 golden and 38 silver medals.

Slovakia is very successful in **economic development**. Its economy grew the fastest among the EU countries throughout the past decade. The country's rapid economic development was strengthened further since the adoption of the Euro currency in 2009, the implementation of a flat tax system and maintenance of the lowest debt ratio in the Eurozone. The productivity of the Slovak labour force, relative to labour cost, is the highest in Central and Eastern Europe. Slovakia has best conditions for doing business in Central and Eastern Europe according to ranking of the World Bank.

As an **open and export-oriented economy**, Slovakia is directly dependent on close regional co-operation and good-neighbourly relations. Its strong economic ties with the Visegrad countries are visible in foreign trade. Slovakia has a positive balance and surplus of exports over imports with regard to all countries of V4.

Exports in Slovakia increased to 5416 EUR Million in February of 2015 from 5040 EUR Million in January of 2015. Exports in Slovakia averaged 2634.95 EUR Million from 1993 until 2015, reaching an all-time high of 6227 EUR Million in October of 2013 and a record low of 312 EUR Million in January of 1993. Export in Slovakia is reported by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

The productivity of the Slovak labour force, relative to labour cost, is the highest in the Central and Eastern Europe region. Moreover 93% of Slovak workforce has a secondary or higher education and about 90% of Slovak population speak other language than mother tongue. Slovakia has gained its reputation of an ideal investment destination for production and assembly plants. Nowadays it intensifies its focus on high added value projects and investments. One of such projects is the Slovak invention of a flying car, which was a few years ago only a curiosity. However, today

it is the subject of serious interest of a number of foreign companies (see XXX).

During the past couple of years, global corporations representing various industries have selected Slovakia as the top location for their expansion in the Central and Eastern Europe region. Currently the most important industries in Slovakia are the automotive industry (Volkswagen, KIA, PSA - Peugeot Citroën) and electronics (Sony, Samsung, AU Optronics, Delta Electronics Slovakia). Important sectors are also machinery, chemical industry and IT.

Slovakia produces highest number of cars in the world per capita. Slovak automotive industry is well diversified, with three different types of car producers surrounded by well-established automotive sub-supplier networks, all of which are effectively interconnected. The sector produces various categories of cars as Volkswagen's Hybrid Touareg, Porsche Cayenne, Peugeot 207, Kia Sportage and Ceed. Since 2000, electrical engineering has been the fastest growing industrial sector in Slovakia.

Slovak companies are offering their expertise in top technologies related to medical equipment, power industry, renewable energy, water and waste management, environment protection, defence and machinery.

In Slovakia there are also successfully established companies originating from Thailand such as Delta Electronics Slovakia and Sappe Europe.

European Economic Forecast Winter 2015				
Forecasts for Slovakia	2013	2014	2015	2016
GDP growth (%)	1,4	2,4	2,5	3,2
Inflation (%)	1,5	-0,1	0,4	1,3
Unemployment (%)	14,2	13,4	12,8	12,1
Public budget balance (% of GDP)	-2,6	-3,0	-2,8	-2,6
Gross public debt (% of GDP)	54,6	53,6	54,9	55,2
Current account balance (% of GDP)	0,8	1,1	0,8	0,7

XXX Aeromobil (Flying car)

AeroMobil, beautiful flying car, transforms in seconds from an automobile to an airplane, gives you freedom to move. AeroMobil is a flying car that perfectly makes use of existing infrastructure created for automobiles and planes, and opens doors to real door-to-door travel. As a car it fits into any standard parking space, uses regular gasoline, and can be used in road

traffic just like any other car. As a plane it can use any airport in the world, but can also take off and land using any grass strip or paved surface just a few hundred meters long. <http://www.aeromobil.com/about>

Slovakia places emphasis on higher education and education in general. It is difficult to select only one university among many Slovak excellent universities; many of them already have ongoing cooperation with Thailand. To name a few: The Slovak Agricultural University has ongoing cooperation with Kasetsart University, the Slovak Technical University has cooperates with Chulalongkorn University and recently Economic University in Bratislava cooperates with NIDA on PhD exchange programs. I would like to introduce **Comenius University in Bratislava**, which is the oldest university in the Slovak Republic. It was founded on **June 27th, 1919** and follows the university tradition of the Academia Istropolitana which was established in Bratislava by Matthias Corvinus, the Hungarian King, in **1465**. The Comenius University's fundamental mission is the advancement and dissemination of knowledge and its understanding. As a higher education institution, which aspires to be a member of leading European centers of academic excellence. Comenius University in Bratislava is as an internationally oriented university, which is open to collaboration with foreign universities and research institutes also from Thailand.

Creation of Visegrad cooperation

- The Visegrad Group was formed on 15th February 1991 (next year 25th Anniversary) at a meeting of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, the President of the Republic of Poland, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary.
- Visegrad Declaration made it clear - the cooperation was a forum for consultation, and had no legal or other binding force.
- First phase of Visegrad Cooperation started in 1991 with the Visegrad Declaration and ended with the Kroměříž Declaration, characterized by the cooperation outside the framework of the EU.
- The Visegrad Group reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration. The joint priority of all V4 countries was joint return to Europe.
- All the V4 countries aspired to become members of the European Union. They reached this aim on 1st May 2004.

- The V4 was not created as an alternative to the all-European integration efforts, nor does it try to compete with the existing functional Central European structures. Its activities are in no way aimed at isolation or the weakening of ties with the other countries.
- On the contrary the Group aims at encouraging optimum cooperation with all countries, in particular its neighbours, its ultimate interest being the democratic development in all parts of Europe.

The Structure of Visegrad Cooperation

- Visegrad cooperation is not institutionalized in any manner. It is based solely on the principle of periodical meetings of its representatives at various levels (from the high-level meetings of prime ministers and heads of states to expert consultations).
- Official summits of V4 prime ministers take place on an annual basis. Between these summits, one of the V4 countries holds presidency, with the responsibility to draft a one-year plan of action. Coordination is at the level of MFA as well as relevant ministries.
- The only organization within the V4 platform is the International Visegrad Fund. The Fund—established in 2000 with the aim of supporting the development of cooperation in culture, scientific exchange, research, education, exchange of students and development of cross-border cooperation and promotion of tourism—represents the civic dimension of the V4 cooperation.

V4 Transformation as a “Success Story”

- Over the last 15 years, we have done proportionally better in **economic terms** than the average of Europe. The **GDP** of the four countries has grown more than **three times** since the early 90’s. Our **public debt rates** are also still lower compared to other regions with long-standing market economies.
- V4 countries remain among the **fastest growing regions within the EU** and macroeconomic forecasts suggest a long-run perspective of our growth. If counted together, the **V4 represents today already the 5th largest economy in Europe and ranks 12th place in the world and 4th largest EU exporter.**

- The **trade exchange** between V4 countries and Germany is bigger than between Germany and France.
- Exports of V4 countries grew three times faster than exports of the old EU15 during the last 10 years.

V4 Today

- The V4 cooperation can currently be referred to as the most clearly profiled initiative in Central Europe. The backbone of this cooperation consists of mutual contacts at all levels—from the highest-level political summits to expert and diplomatic meetings, to activities of the non-governmental associations in the region, think-tanks and research bodies, cultural institutions or numerous networks of individuals.
- The successful **“V4plus” formula**. It is in the interest of the V4 countries to coordinate their external activities, because from the perspective of global partners we are still perceived as one region. The co-operation with our traditional partners in the wider region and in Europe, such as **Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Benelux or Nordic and Baltic states**, with the **Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries**, with some global partners, such as **the United States, Japan or South Korea**. **In the future there is a potential to include ASEAN and Thailand in the V4plus formula.**

Slovak V4 PRES

- The current one-year Slovak Presidency (7/2014 – 6/2015) of the Visegrad Group, carried out under the slogan **“Dynamic Visegrad for Europe and Beyond”**, focuses on strengthening of the internal cohesion of the V4 region and fostering its competitiveness by developing joint meaningful projects. SK V4 PRES continues in fulfilling strategic initiatives of the V4 in the areas of energy security: building North-South gas interconnections and creating the V4 Gas Market. Also important is the transport infrastructure and building of transport corridors, with the aim to create better Adriatic-Baltic road and rail connections and build the missing physical infrastructure among the V4 countries.
- **Visegrad Patent Institute**
On 26 February 2015, the Agreement on the Visegrad Patent

Institute was signed in Bratislava. It will be an important contribution to the efforts of the respective patent offices to foster innovation and creativity and to promote economic growth and competitiveness in the Central and Eastern European region. The advantage for applicants will be the ability to communicate in their native language. Furthermore, the services will be cheaper and facilitate easier Access.

- **Digital Agenda**

The ambition of SVK4 PRES is also to bring new elements into the V4 cooperation and extend it on the area of digital agenda, industrial policy, support for start-ups and innovative companies. A new V4 Task Force was created with the main priority to coordinate the V4 cooperation in support of start-ups. Another idea is to promote creative industry, digital research and innovations.

- **Transfer of experience**

V4 countries **have the capacity ready to share its experiences and lessons learned from the democratization and transformation process with ASEAN and Thailand in:**

1. institution building including cultural institutions and regional educational institutions for ethnic minorities;
2. parliamentary work also on level of parliamentary committees and in constitutional amending;
3. sectorial reforms such as educational system, healthcare system and others.
4. economy transformation such as: banking reform, public finances and taxation reform, privatization of state enterprises, industrial conversion;

Slovakia has already been active in the area of transfer of experience in Western Balkan countries, Eastern Partnership countries - Ukraine, Tunisia and others.



(H.E. Vladimír Halgaš,
Ambassador of the Slovak Republic)

The Visegrád Group and Thailand: Transcending the “Freezer-Purgatory” Dilemma

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As Jacque Rupnik points out in his 1990 article entitled “Out of the Ice and into the Fire”, the Polish journalist David Warszawski has controversially likened Communism to a freezer “in which, half a century ago, living people were stored. Normally one would not survive such treatment, but in addition, the freezer broke down! So everything that was put into it fifty years ago comes out in very poor condition” (Rupnik 59). Referring to Warszawski as his departure point, Rupnik suggests that, after the thaw of the long deep authoritarian freeze, ideologies such as xenophobia, ultra-nationalism, religious extremism and right-wing fundamentalism began to melt and the traces of their (decaying) lives returned to the stage in an uncanny and anachronistic fashion. However, Rupnik does not stop here. He goes on to make an even more controversial claim that Communism can also be seen as a form of purgatory, a condition where Central and Eastern Europe has come to learn the art of democracy (60). In this case, if the past was indeed a form of purgatory, the modern-day forms of alliance and cooperation among post-Communist countries could then be likened to a new kind of freezer, the true challenge which awaits Central and Eastern Europe.

The Visegrád Group, which is an alliance of four Central European states of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic, is one of the modern-day forms of alliance and cooperation in Europe facing such a challenge. The member countries, in their own ways and as a unified group, are conscious of their newly gained agency to dictate their own future and destiny. Perhaps, in a region called “Central Europe”, a label which—often used in the past as a concept in service of foreign interests as reflected in the term and history of “Mitteleuropa”—has escaped definitions throughout history, the freezer and the purgatory can be avoided if regional cooperation is treated not as a fixed destination. Regional cooperation can be likened to a tool