



The V4, the Eastern Partnership, and the multilateral dimension: the road so far¹

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The four Visegrad countries may diverge on many foreign policy questions, but the Eastern Partnership is one policy which, at least at the level of political declarations, is of great interest to all four. However, most of the activities of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are carried out on a bilateral level with individual countries of the Eastern Partnership – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and not much attention is paid to the potential of the EaP's multilateral dimension.

Back in 2009, when the Eastern Partnership was officially initiated, many experts expressed their doubts as to the added value of the project, especially when taking into consideration the already existing European Neighbourhood Policy.² At the same time, however, many experts appreciated and welcomed the creation of the multilateral dimension of the EaP, which aims at bringing the six countries of the Partnership together with all the member states of the EU in order to “foster multilateral cooperation between the EU and the EaP countries and between the partner states themselves.”³

The main aim of this research was thus first and foremost to create an overview of the involvement of V4 countries within the structures of this multilateral dimension, and to highlight the main activities and spheres in which these four countries contribute the most. In addition to this overview, the research also aimed at assessing the major strengths and weaknesses of the multilateral dimension of the EaP from the point of view of EU member states, particularly the V4 countries. The third aim was to evaluate whether there is ongoing V4 cooperation within the multilateral dimension, and, last but not least, to propose recommendations on the further development and improvement of the multilateral dimension based on the findings of the research and on feedback from representatives of V4 ministries.

Due to space limitations, this article includes only a few main aspects of the whole study, reflecting V4 cooperation within the EaP framework, and presenting the major strengths and weaknesses of the multilateral dimension, as well as recommendations on its further development. The complete findings of the research – including a detailed overview of the

¹ The research for this text was partly conducted during a fellowship at the Institute of International Relations in Prague in 2013 as part of the “V4 Flying Experts Initiative” financed by the International Visegrad Fund.

² P. Kratochvíl, “Evaluating the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership,” Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2011. Available online: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=123963> (accessed on October 3, 2013).

³ Ibid.

inception and development of the multilateral dimension and the activities of individual V4 countries – are available online, in the section “Publications” at the official website of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

V4 cooperation within the EaP?

Regardless of the individual initiatives of the four countries towards the Eastern Partnership as a whole, or towards its six countries individually, the Visegrad Four has always presented a consistent and supportive approach towards the EaP policy as such.

This was expressed at a number of joint meetings of the highest political representatives of V4 countries and EaP states, and by numerous joint statements made by the V4 on the EaP,⁴ on its development and support, and on the situation in individual countries. On the eve of the Vilnius summit, for example, the V4 countries, together with the Benelux, prepared and distributed a joint non-paper on the Eastern Partnership; and in June 2013, the Czech MFA hosted a meeting of “like-minded” EU states concerning issues relating to the Eastern Partnership, at which a letter was signed supporting the “more for more” principle within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).⁵ Following the recent developments in Ukraine, the Visegrad Group has adopted four statements on Ukraine made by foreign ministers and prime ministers, expressing their deep concern over the dramatic development of events in Ukraine, and also strongly condemning the killing of demonstrators, which cannot be justified by any reason.⁶ Furthermore, according to a statement made on February 24, 2014, the V4 countries are ready to establish the coordination of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and are calling for a speeding up of the visa liberalization process and (among other things) an increase in the

⁴ 1) See extended V4 foreign ministerial meeting in Budapest, March 2010 with the participation of representatives of the Baltic States, EaP countries, Belgium, Spain, and the EC, at which a joint statement was also released: “Joint statement of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group, Budapest, 2 March 2010.” Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2010/joint-statement-of-the> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

2) Meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of V4 countries, Germany, the six EaP countries, EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP in Bratislava, March 2011.

3) “Joint statement on enhanced Visegrad group activities in the Eastern Partnership. V4 Prime Ministers’ summit in Bratislava, 16 June 2011.” Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/joint-statement-on-the> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

4) Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership Countries, as well as representatives of Denmark, the Baltic states, EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP in Prague. See: “Joint statement of ministers of foreign affairs of the Visegrad Group, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Prague, March 5, 2012.” Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-v4-ee-lv-lt> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

5) “Joint statement on the Eastern partnership of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group, Ireland and Lithuania from the meeting in Krakow, May 17, 2013.” Available online: <http://www.mfa.gov.pl/resource/650eb774-a136-45c4-9fe1-51c1cbb13ed2:JCR> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

⁵ “The Eastern Partnership,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, December 12, 2012. Available online: http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/european_union/the_eastern_partnership.html JCR (accessed on March 6, 2014).

⁶ “Joint statement of the Visegrad Group’s MFAs on Ukraine. Joint statement of the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia,” January 29, 2014. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/joint-statement-of-the> (accessed on March 6, 2014); “Joint statement of V4 foreign ministers on Ukraine. The ministers of foreign affairs of the Visegrad countries—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia—have discussed the recent developments in Ukraine,” February 24, 2014. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-of-v4> (accessed on March 6 2014); and “Statement of the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries on Ukraine,” March 4, 2014. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/statement-of-the-prime> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

share of Eastern partnership allocations within the International Visegrad Fund (IVF).⁷ This brings us directly to one of the best examples of cooperation among the Visegrad group in relation to the Eastern Partnership.

Visegrad 4 the Eastern Partnership

The most visible cooperation within the V4 with respect to the Eastern Partnership is via the Eastern Partnership Programme of the IVF. This initiative is perceived as a very useful and efficient tool, with which all four countries have produced tangible results.⁸ The Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program (V4EaP) was initiated back in June 2011 in Bratislava, with the main aim of enhancing cooperation between the Visegrad region and the six partnership countries.

As with the setting up of the Eastern Partnership itself, the V4EaP started off with flagship projects in areas of mutual interest and importance to all the countries: the democratization and transformation process, regional cooperation, and support for civil society. An important criterion for any new project is that – in order even to be considered – all four V4 countries and at least two countries from the EaP must be included.

Another important feature of the IVF program is that it has remained open to third countries and to pooling financial resources for EaP partner countries. So far this has enabled the Netherlands (1.5 million euros in June 2012), Sweden, and the US Emerging Donors Challenge Fund to contribute to the initiative. The total budget for the V4EaP program in 2012 was 1,456,800 euros (860,000 euros for Standard Flagship Projects and Visegrad University Study Grants (VUSG), and 596,800 euros for the V4EaP Scholarships).

Since 2012, when the V4EaP program was launched, 30 Flagship projects have been supported and a 1,716,000-euro budget allocated between the grantees. The Extended Standard Grants scheme has supported 49 projects and allocated a budget of 2,110,000 euros to the grantees.⁹ Within the VUSG, eight projects were awarded grants during 2012–2013 – the annual budget of this program is 80,000 euros, and it offers grant funding to projects developing university courses for degree programs that will be launched at colleges and universities accredited within EaP countries.¹⁰ The V4EaP Scholarships scheme supported 73 students from EaP countries coming to V4 countries in 2013, and a total of 75 students in 2012.¹¹ With its allocated funds, the V4EaP is currently the IVF's biggest grant program, and, based on the official statements of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, its volume and activities will broaden further in the future.

According to the IVF itself, and also to interviewees at the ministries of foreign affairs within the four countries, a very good meeting point for V4 and EaP partner countries is the sphere of

⁷ "Joint statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine," Visegrad Group, February 24, 2014. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/joint-statement-of-v4> (accessed on March 6, 2014).

⁸ "Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership Program," International Visegrad Fund, Bratislava, 2014. Available online: <http://visegradfund.org/v4eap/> (accessed on March 1, 2014).

⁹ All detailed information on the projects can be found at the International Visegrad Fund webpage, in the separate and their results.

¹⁰ "Visegrad University Studies Grants EaP," International Visegrad Fund, Bratislava 2014. Available online: <http://visegradfund.org/v4eap/vusg-eap/> (accessed on March 1, 2014).

¹¹ University students from EaP countries were receiving grants also before the establishment of the V4EaP program, however this study only focuses on the situation after 2012. More information is available at http://visegradfund.org/scholarships/approved_scholarships/ (accessed on March 1, 2014).

good governance, democracy, support for self-government, and regional cooperation.¹² This has also been reflected in a number of joint projects. The EaP is without a doubt interested in benefiting from the V4's experience; one must bear in mind, however, the evident fact that not all patterns are applicable to both regions. This is seen also in the fact that the EaP countries predominantly prefer the bilateral track – regional cooperation being not so attractive at the higher political levels (i.e. upwards from the level of citizens, civil associations, NGOs, universities or local governments).

When representatives of the ministries were asked about cooperation between countries on a level other than that of the IVF, their answers were rather modest.¹³ Although the four countries have common interests in issues such as transborder cooperation, border management, and transport, actual joint cooperation (especially within the multilateral dimension) is rather limited. However, there are a number of reasons behind the limited cooperation, both within the four thematic Platforms¹⁴ of the multilateral dimension and the Flagship Initiatives.

For example, there are certain distinctive features of each Visegrad country which are determined by its own particular focus. For example, Hungary pays a lot of attention to regional and sub-regional cooperation – this does not mean, however, that it regards the democratization and support of civil society as unimportant or irrelevant. Rather this is connected with the legacy of Hungary's development aid and foreign policy. Hungary gives a lot of its attention and resources to regions in which there is a considerable Hungarian minority – mainly the sub-Carpathian and Transnistria regions – and works in this field very actively, which isn't the case with the other three countries.

Furthermore, the interests and focus of V4 countries with respect to the Platforms may vary, even though they are all encompassed, for example, under the umbrella of "border management." Secondly (according to some representatives), some V4 countries (in particular Poland) have enough confidence and resources (human or financial) to coordinate most of their activities alone – for example in the case of public administration reform. This same trend was also confirmed by some of the representatives at the Czech MFA.¹⁵

Moreover, as one respondent from the Czech MFA stated, cooperation among the V4 is not needed in every field, and what the Czech MFA rather strives to achieve (for example in the area of public administration) is to invite the help of experts from Western European countries – who may not be so enthusiastic about the EaP but have the requisite expertise, and can furthermore offer a perspective that is somewhat different to the relatively similar view of close neighbors.¹⁶ The workshops and trainings are not political acts, but a sharing of expertise, and, as many of the respondents stated, there is no need to artificially push forward the V4 element in the multilateral dimension, just for the benefit of the V4.

¹² Interviews with V4 representatives at the MFAs responsible for EaP, October, 2013

¹³ Interviews with V4 representatives at the MFAs responsible for EaP, October, 2013.

¹⁴ Platform 1. Democracy, good governance and stability, Platform 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies, Platform 3. Energy Security and Platform 4. People-to-people contacts

¹⁵ Interviews with Polish and Czech representatives at the MFAs responsible for EaP, October, 2013.

¹⁶ Interview with Czech representative at the MFA responsible for EaP, October 15, 2013.

Mutually identified strengths and weaknesses of the multilateral dimension

On a positive note

To start off with a positive aspect of the multilateral dimension: most of the questioned experts agreed that the fact that all partner countries of the EaP are able to participate in the Platforms, Flagship Initiatives, and all lower level and non-governmental forums, is of great importance – as this allows them to mutually support and motivate each other, as well as exchange their best experience and practices in the process of approximating their regulations and norms to those of the EU. Furthermore, many of the respondents highlighted the fact that the multilateral framework can also serve as a context for socialization, cultivating relations, and improving the atmosphere between countries – as well as being an opportunity to share and to contribute their best practices.¹⁷

According to some, the multilateral dimension has also witnessed positive examples of cooperation between countries – something which might prove difficult or impossible at higher political levels (e.g. Armenia–Azerbaijan) – as a result of the multilateral platforms' focus on technical issues, regulations, etc. The fact that their focus has remained on the technical matters of approximation and regulatory frameworks, has also meant that the relevant issues could be dealt with at the multilateral level (though of course variations exist among countries). This multilateral dimension is also important for Belarus – in which case it is not otherwise present at the higher political level due to the authoritarian regime of President Lukashenka. This is especially true in the Civil Society Forum, where Belarus's nongovernmental organizations and civil society are very active and present. However, according to a report commissioned by the EaP CSF and published in January 2014, the external policy successes of the Forum remain modest – although there are some positive examples, such as the contribution of the National Platforms and the Steering Committee to the drafting of the Roadmap to the Eastern Partnership's Vilnius Summit.¹⁸

According to an earlier evaluation by Petr Kratochvíl in 2011, one of the strengths of this Forum is its relatively simple operational structure.¹⁹ This has also been demonstrated during the last three years. Also, the EU has been flexible and open to some changes, e.g. the setting up of the Secretariat of the Civil Society Forum, and the creation of flagship initiatives and working panels, which have proved to be most important. Furthermore, despite the fact that its structure has been flexible, the Forum has remained quite comprehensive.

The respondents, as well as the evidence compiled in this research, have shown that there are initiatives within the multilateral dimension that have proved very effective, and have actually brought added value and concrete changes on the ground: most notably the Flagship Initiative on Integrated Border Management, but also the SMEs Facility that has supported small and medium-size enterprises via the East-invest program, and the SME Facility by its lending of funds.

¹⁷ Interviews with V4 representatives at the MFAs responsible for EaP, October, 2013.

¹⁸ H. Kostanyan, "The Civil Society Forum of the EaP four years on," *CEPS Special Report*, January 2014. Available online: [http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/HK-EaP-Civil-Society-Forum-\(2\)\(1\).pdf](http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/HK-EaP-Civil-Society-Forum-(2)(1).pdf) (accessed on February 25, 2014).

¹⁹ P. Kratochvíl, "Evaluating the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership," Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2011, pp. 5. Available online: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=123963> (accessed on October 3, 2013).

The multilateral dimension might also prove important and useful in the future, as a result of the fact that it is already now clearly visible that some countries will move slower and on a smaller scale than others towards the possible signing of the AA and DCFTA (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and for the time being also Ukraine). The multilateral framework can, however, keep them on the same track, and in the company of other countries with which they can still exchange their best practices in the approximation process.

Mutually identified weaknesses

The primary weakness of the multilateral dimension (and one not surprising after the research findings) is that despite all the attractiveness it could produce, the bilateral track for mutual relations between the EU and the EaP partner countries has strongly prevailed. Although many of the respondents agreed that the multilateral dimension has an added value, they have confirmed the dominance of bilateral relations.²⁰ However, this “weakness” comes as a natural and logical one, as reforms can be implemented only at the national level, and the multilateral dimension should serve mainly as a tool for enhancing cooperation or sharing the best experience, since it exists essentially in order to support the national and bilateral track (and not the other way round). Secondly, the funding options available for the multilateral dimension are very limited. The four Platforms, Flagship Initiatives, panels, working groups, etc., have received a total volume of 350 million euros for the period of 2010–2013. This sum might be sufficient for organizing trainings and seminars; however, if the partner countries wish to move towards more ambitious projects, they have to face the reality of insufficient funding.

The preference for the bilateral track, however, comes not only as a result of the decision of EU member states, but as a trend preferred also by the EaP countries themselves. For example, at the beginning, when the EaP was introduced together with the Platforms and initiatives, Ukraine was sceptical not only of the EaP itself, but also of the multilateral dimension, as it did not perceive it as anything above and beyond the relations it already had with the EU and particular member states. Some Ukrainian representatives, in fact, were rather of the impression that the other five countries were being offered only a similar model of relations that Ukraine already had with the EU, and that these other countries – especially within the multilateral framework – would function as brakes, as Ukraine would have to “wait” for them.²¹ However, as time has showed, Ukraine did participate in the multilateral dimension, yet it is questionable to what extent this is evidence of a real interest, or merely a move that secures a seat at the table and a good image.²² In political terms it is right to keep certain options available to everyone, but the principle of more for more should be also present, and this will be one of the challenges in the future: how to keep them open to all and at the same time apply the principle more for more – and how to balance this. This is important also because the EaP countries themselves fear that even if they proceed in a better way, they will have to drag the slower ones with them.

This is true, however, not only the case of Ukraine – according to the respondents, the other countries also operate under a sort of “cherry picking” strategy and only take part in initiatives where they perceive the most gain for their countries, and rather omit those that might gradually result in the kind of intense regional cooperation for which the multilateral

²⁰ Interviews with V4 representatives at the MFAs responsible for EaP; October, 2013

²¹ Interview with senior Czech representative at the MFA responsible for EaP; October 15, 2013

²² Interview with senior Czech representative at the MFA responsible for EaP, October 15, 2013.

dimension strives, e.g. the sharing of best practices in the approximation processes, etc.²³ Some respondents from V4 countries (joined by voices from the EaP states) also consider the multilateral dimension to be too weak and of low relevance, since it focuses predominantly on "soft projects," seminars, trainings, etc. – in other words, that unless more of the projects are of the kind that result in greater investments (for example), it will remain a bubble with no great value.²⁴ This "soft" approach, however, is very unlikely to change, as it has the support of EU institutions, including the Commission and the EEAS. Some respondents, especially from the V4 region, have called for "harder" projects in Platform III – Energy security – the most notable being the Czech proposal for creating a Flagship Initiative on the South Corridor, which was not approved.²⁵ What one has to keep first and foremost in mind, however, is the limited financial resources available for the multilateral dimension, rendering it powerless to initiate, for example, large infrastructure projects.

According to some respondents from within the V4 region, it is not so easy to work towards fostering multilateral cooperation between the EaP states, as they still lack a regional success story that could be sold as a positive example, and in fact the six countries do not really perceive themselves as naturally belonging to a single club. Furthermore – and this issue was highlighted already by Kratochvíl in 2011 – it has not always been quite clear why certain matters were even included in the multilateral dimension. As he argues, some of the issues – such as public administration or judiciary reform – may of course be discussed at a multilateral forum, however the reforms themselves must be implemented strictly domestically.²⁶ Yet, as this study has shown, the field of public administration reform has gained much attention and was evaluated as a successful example of cooperation. However, one must also add that the exchange of best practices is the most common added value of these initiatives.

From the four preceding sections dedicated to the Visegrad countries and their involvement in the activities of the EaP's multilateral dimension, it has become evident that the interest in this framework is coming mainly from the ministries of foreign affairs, while the other ministries are not so devoted to it. This comes often as a result of a lack of information, a lack of human or financial resources, or solely due to the fact that various ministries typically engage with the six Eastern Partnership countries on a bilateral basis.

Another problem identified by V4 countries is that the EaP – and the multilateral dimension even more so – are rather ignored by the older member states (with the exception of Sweden and Germany), who do not take part in the activities.²⁷ This trend is obvious not only at the level of platforms or flagships, but also at relatively high profile meetings. It will be one of the big challenges of the EEAS and "like-minded" countries to keep the EaP in the already dimmed spotlights and to make sure that it receives sufficient attention. Yet this trend was already anticipated at the time when the EaP was initiated, and reflects the naturally higher interest of those Western European states located further south – in the area of the Mediterranean – and countries in the MENA region.

²³ Interview with senior Slovak representative at the MFA responsible for EaP, October 22, 2013.

²⁴ Interview with senior Czech representative at the MFA responsible for EaP, October 15, 2013.

²⁵ P. Kratochvíl, "Evaluating the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership," Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2011, p. 2. Available online: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=123963> (accessed on October 3, 2013).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷ Interview with senior Czech representative at the MFA responsible for EaP, October 10, 2013.

As was already mentioned at the beginning of this study, the multilateral dimension is in the shadows not only as a result of the greater successes and importance of the bilateral track, but also due to the very limited information available regarding this dimension. Although the European External Action Service provides basic information regarding organizational structure, finances, and dates of meetings, yet it does not go further into the details of the actual workings of the platforms, nor does it provide complex lists of projects or activities carried out under the flagship initiatives (although some of these have their own websites with information – the best case being the IBM FIT).

Furthermore, much of the information available is obsolete and no longer valid. The situation in the V4 countries is also somewhat the same, although the ministries of foreign affairs, especially those of the Czech Republic and Poland, try to keep their sections on the multilateral dimension updated. Thus – and this is the qualitative risk of this study – the multilateral activities and initiatives of the four countries might actually be broader than reported; however, due to the limited time and human resources available, it was in fact not possible to collect all of the information on the V4 countries' participation in the multilateral dimension. Although the Eastern Partnership as such has improved its visibility in recent years, the multilateral dimension still lacks a coherent communication strategy.

Recommendations

- Even after four years of operation, it seems that all the V4 countries and their MFAs have a problem coordinating their EaP activities with other ministries, and finding a model in which all ministries of the government would actively take part in the EaP, especially in its multilateral dimension. Despite the fact that the MFAs play the leading role, the work of the other ministries is also important. A solution for this problem might be to better institutionalize the cooperation among the ministries, and to bring the Platform work closer to them, creating a schedule with key events and tracking the attendance of each ministry. Furthermore, the MFAs should improve their flow of information towards the other relevant state actors regarding the multilateral dimension.
- There should be an update of the platforms' programs, including their priorities, flagships and an indication as to which projects should receive the greatest support. Furthermore, a road map with clear benchmarks for the platforms and a logical timeframe could clarify the significance of the multilateral forums and lead to their greater use, as currently they are perceived as being rather hard to interpret. It is also of key importance to monitor the implementation of activities within the multilateral dimension as well as in the EaP as such. This process should be undertaken not only by the EU, but also by EaP countries themselves, and last but not least, by civil society organizations in the six countries.
- Cooperation should increase in the EaP – and even more importantly coordination in the EU – in order to prevent a duplication of efforts. Cooperation might be difficult because each country has its own priorities and sees itself as a leader; but nonetheless, information on what individual countries are doing within the multilateral dimension could be of great use, and thus information sharing should increase. Furthermore, while preparing for various projects involving the countries of the EaP, the MFA as well as other state institutions should support and engage in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations and the business sector, as these have the relevant expertise on many pressing issues pertaining to the six countries.
- What the multilateral dimension has shown over the years is that it is a very good forum for involving the non-governmental actors of the six Eastern Partnership countries. This

is especially true of the Civil Society Forum. The EU, including the V4, should continue their support of civil society in EaP countries, focusing both on the multilateral and national levels – i.e. the national platforms of the CSF. The national CSF platforms are those that should directly interact with their governments, as they pursue processes of reform together. It is here that the EU should pay special attention, and work towards strengthening the position of the national platforms and their involvement with the EU, and with national, regional and local governments – a good example being the Civil Society Facility introduced back in 2008.

- As was shown especially in the case of Slovakia and the research of Vladimír Benč and Alexander Duleba, the current legislation tends to demotivate state institutions from taking part in development and technical assistance. In order to improve this situation, a legislative change is needed so as to ensure that institutions taking part in projects receive the necessary financial and human resources.
- What needs also to be strengthened is the link between those attending to the work of Platforms and Flagships with those that are at the top of the political pyramid within the EaP and V4 countries. The outcomes of discussions and seminars should be communicated to officials, who could then take advice on how to reform their institutions in order to be compatible with the EU *acquis*, and to open up the road towards the AA – and in some cases also EU membership in the more distant future.
- Since it is not certain whether the financial resources for the upcoming period will increase, it would make sense to conduct a revision of the Platforms and Initiatives, and to consider their efficiency and relevance to the EaP countries, and the involvement of these countries in them – reflecting also on the outcomes of the Vilnius Summit. Another example of how funds could be better put to use is by creating a system of internship and secondments of officers, rather than the current short seminars and trainings.
- With regard both to the EaP and its multilateral dimension, the communication strategy should improve. In each country there exists a like-minded group of people working for the goals of the EaP, yet very little is known of this or shown to the public. At every ministry, basic information about the EaP (not to mention the multilateral dimension) is either limited or outdated, or nonexistent. Not only V4 governments but also NGOs should consider how to “sell” the EaP, and not just at the highest level of the summit. And not only the EaP – they should work also on selling V4 cooperation in the region.
- With respect to the IVF – which is regarded as the most effective tool for promoting cooperation and is also a realm in which the V4 countries are fully active – a process of revising already implemented projects should be carried out. The V4EaP initiative has been functioning for more than a year now, and it is vital to conduct an audit of its projects, their implementation and continuation, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the currently existing model.
- The V4 countries should also continue to increase the level of finances for the IVF, as was the case, for example, in 2007, 2009, 2012 and 2013, where the budget rose to 8 million euros as compared with 3 million in 2007. With an annual budget of 1,456,800 euros, plus another 1,500,000 from the Netherlands' MFA, the V4EaP is currently the IVF's biggest grant program. Furthermore, not only the IVF, but also the EaP as such should further explore the possibilities of finding co-financing for its operation, for example in the European Endowment for Democracy.