



## **V4 – 25<sup>TH</sup> anniversary: Successes and perspectives of future collaboration**

The first panel discussion of the Visegrad Youth Forum 2016 took place at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica on December 8, 2016. The discussion was titled “V4 – 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary: Successes and perspectives of future collaboration”. The discussion was introduced by Radovan Javorčík, Director of the State Secretary Office of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Speaking at the discussion were Peter Kormúth, Director of the Second Territorial European Department of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Piotr Samerek, Minister Counsellor at the Embassy of Poland to the Slovak Republic and Michal Vít, research fellow at EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. The panel was chaired by the Vice President of the Euro-Atlantic Center Jakub Fedor.

The premise of the discussion was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Group, which proves that the V4 was able to define itself as a constructive and responsible entity and as a symbol of successful political and economic transformation. Despite this, a lot of people don't know the specifics of the V4. They know that the Group exists, yet they don't know the details about how the Visegrad Group really functions.

Speaking first, Peter Kormúth stated that the V4 is undeniably a success story. This is proven by 25 years of its existence and can be regarded as the most successful regional format in Central Europe. The Visegrad Group has also become an international brand, gaining recognition throughout the European continent. Mr. Kormúth further mentioned that the Visegrad Group became vital for newly-formed Slovakia after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, as Slovakia is the only member country to border on all other V4 members. He also stated that the success of the V4 was proven in the past, as the Group didn't end with the integration of members states into the EU.



Mr. Samerek spoke second, highlighting the flexibility of the Visegrad Group, which is proven by the Group's rotating presidency, with the presiding country offering suggestions in various fields to other member states. He mentioned the dialogue with Scandinavian and Baltic countries, which is part of the V4+ format. The dialogue aims to strengthen the cooperation between Europe's North and South (in this case Central Europe), as part of the goals of the V4 is to cooperate with other regional formats. Mr. Samerek then described the two dimensions of the V4, the first being cooperation among members countries of the V4 and the other being the V4 member states trying to find a common position among member states of the EU.

Mr. Vít spoke last, underlining that despite the successes of the V4, cooperation between Central European countries can't be taken for granted, as cooperation in the region wasn't always and still isn't the main focus of foreign policies of the region's countries. He said that the V4 is the result of natural development, as cooperation among the member states isn't something that is dictated and this is what keeps the cooperation intact. Mr. Vít stated that the perception of the V4 as a relevant political and cultural player in Europe should be considered as one of the Group's biggest achievements. Despite all the successes, the V4 is currently also facing several problems – topics that are too confronting are slowly being left out of the agenda of the V4 and some political leaders are starting to push their agendas, which isn't benefiting the cooperation as a whole.

The end of Mr. Vít's speech opened the discussion, with the audience having the opportunity to ask questions. The questions mostly focused on challenges the V4 is currently facing. All three panelists agreed that the migrant crisis represents a difficult challenge, with mutual understanding among V4 countries being key to finding a common solution. Furthermore, the panelists acknowledged that the scenario of a collapsing EU could very well mean the end of the V4, as it is vital that the Group exists as a part of a functioning European framework.