



# Connecting V4 and other regional expert networks & researching potential for future EU coalitions: V4 & Nordic states

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# Introduction

Upon the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, the dynamics of decision-making within the EU were reshaped. Partnerships among the remaining 27 Member States have been affected and new alliances facilitated among them. The coalition potential of individual EU members has changed, directly affecting qualified majority voting, as well as the blocking minority in the Council of the EU.

The Visegrad Group (V<sub>4</sub>) remains one of the most prominent coalitions inside the EU. However, extending cooperation with other groups of countries would certainly serve the group well, and therefore active engagement in other regional networks should be on its agenda. In order to explore the potential for such partnership with the EU Nordic countries, Res Publica Foundation/Visegrad Insight conducted a roundtable discussion with international experts and diplomats on 8-9 December 2020. The roundtable "EU Climate Policy and Regional Cooperation: Can Visegrad Group and EU Nordic Countries Do More Together?" was part of a project that focuses on building inter-regional connections across the EU by connecting V<sub>4</sub> and other regional expert networks and researching the potential for future EU coalitions. The project is being implemented by Association for International Affairs (AMO) in cooperation with the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy (CEID) and Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), with the support of the International Visegrad Fund. The roundtable discussion serves as the basis for this policy paper which lays out an overview of the key points suggested by the participants, as well as other noteworthy aspects and the main conclusions and recommendations.

The policy paper opens with a look into the background of the V<sub>4</sub> and its cooperation with Nordic countries which serves as a starting point for further exploration of the topic. The paper then outlines potential platforms for cooperation between the groups and provides conclusions and recommendations on how to enhance the partnership.

## 1. Background

### 1.1. 99 years of Nordic and Visegrad cooperation

In 2022 the Nordic Council comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden as well as the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands will turn 70. Together with the 30 years of V<sub>4</sub> cooperation celebrated in 2021, it totals nearly a hundred years of regional cooperation experience within Europe. While today, the majority of the above-mentioned countries are members of the EU they initiated a regional cooperation project before joining the block. In retrospect, the experiences of the Nordic Council may seem like a parallel perspective to the V<sub>4</sub> on the European Union. At the same time, different economic, cultural, historical and geographical contexts between the two blocs often make it difficult to identify common points beyond general similarities.

### 1.2. The basis for cross-regional cooperation in the EU

The Lisbon treaty introduced the double majority rule which is unfavorable to the V<sub>4</sub> alone unless they are able to bring on board allies for a particular vote. Moreover, the Council's vote on the status of posted workers' terms in 2017 demonstrated the



effect of bigger member states splitting and playing on the internal and structural divergences within the group<sup>1</sup>.

To create a blocking minority, at least four member states representing 35% of the total population of the EU (cca 115,75 million) are needed, but this is almost twice the population of the V<sub>4</sub>. Therefore, cross-regional coalition-building potential has become crucial for Visegrad since the adoption of the Lisbon treaty. The EU treaties provide a broad legal basis for potential cooperation, such as the open method of coordination, enhanced cooperation, the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), and Intergovernmental treaties.

### **Achievements where the V<sub>4</sub> shaped EU policy:**

- Schengen (Against delayed accession, 2006) - As Poland and Slovakia lagged behind in legal harmonization, a potential delay arose in 2006. But due to the successful exploitation of collective action and preparation, the V<sub>4</sub> demands to join on the originally scheduled date (December 2017) were met.
- During the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis in 2009, the V<sub>4</sub> initiated strengthened cooperation on energy procurement and infrastructure development which resulted in the establishment of the High Level Energy Security Group in 2010.
- Despite democratic backsliding, as well as energy and economic ties with Russia, the V<sub>4</sub> is still promoting transition expertise (Western Balkans, Eastern partnership,) and lobbying for EU initiatives that promote a transition away from authoritarianism in the EU's neighborhood (sanctions on Russia, Belarus in 2020).
- The V<sub>4</sub> is enhancing the EU's north-south infrastructure corridors (TEN-T network revision - ongoing procedure).<sup>2</sup>
- In line with an aggressive anti-migrant narrative, the V<sub>4</sub> helped to enhance the EU's border protection measures (Frontex) and prevent mandatory migrant relocation mechanisms.

In the history of the Visegrad Group and its influence within the EU, the year 2015-2016 was a turning point. Ever since Central Europe's transition to democracy, the V<sub>4</sub> has been a cooperative project based on the principle of costs and benefits. But during the refugee crisis, cooperation within the Visegrad Group gained considerable significance because opposition to the migration quota system provided an opportunity to promote the V<sub>4</sub> as an alternative center of power to the Western EU member states. Deep divisions between the member states on how Europe should approach the refugee and migration crisis enabled the V<sub>4</sub> to defend its line of strongly opposing mandatory relocations. Eventually, once the EU-Turkey deal and other measures had achieved a dramatic drop in the flow of migrants, the V<sub>4</sub> successfully advocated for the protection of external borders of the EU.

### **Achievements where the Nordic countries shaped EU policy:**

- The Nordic states were among the first in the EU to aim for a higher level of environmental protection, and positioned themselves as pioneers in this regard. Due to their domestic consensus and a united

<sup>1</sup> Georgi Gotev, "Macron Courts EU's Eastern Leaders over Posted Workers, Antagonises Poland," [Www.Euractiv.Com \(blog\)](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/macron-courts-eus-eastern-leaders-over-posted-workers-antagonises-poland/), August 25, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/macron-courts-eus-eastern-leaders-over-posted-workers-antagonises-poland/>.

<sup>2</sup> European Council, "Information from the Polish Delegation on the 'Joint Visegrad Group Statement on the Upcoming Revision of the TEN-T Network,'" accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47193/8-tte-pl-info-visegrad-group-statement-ten-t-network.pdf>.



external front, they could meaningfully influence the EU's environmental policy with regards to achieving higher environmental standards.

- Denmark, Finland and Sweden, as undisputed digital frontrunners, have been advocating within the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Nordic-Baltic region to 'show the way for digitalization of Europe. The Nordic-Baltic digital region has been openly aiming to "show the way for digitalization of Europe". By advocating for exchanging experiences, developing common solutions and sharing best practices within the area of digitalization, the group is positively influencing the development of the Digital Single Market in the EU.
- The Nordic countries are advocating for a stronger Europe, based on economic growth, competitiveness and solidarity. With their high income levels, fiscal stability, and low levels of unemployment, the Nordics were strong proponents of the establishment of the EU Social Pillar in Gothenburg in November 2017.
- Being small, economically open countries, they have traditionally been associated with a proactive, comprehensive and well-grounded free-trade policy towards Europe. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sweden started to mobilize eight like-minded countries (including Finland, Denmark and the Czech Republic) to push for "open, free and fair trade" in opposition to protectionism.

## 2. Potential platforms for cooperation

### 2.1. Eastern Partnership and Russia

The Nordic region is linked by a number of regional organizations such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation. It shares this in common with the V4 region, and, given the historical, cultural and political integration similarity, the region is a natural partner to the Visegrad Group.

All Nordic countries have been long time supporters and contributors to the democratic process and nation building in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and in particular to Belarus and Ukraine, whose strong partnership with the Baltics emphasize their geographical proximity to the region.

Sweden was one of the initiators of the EaP together with Poland and was investing in democracy assistance in this region long before the EaP was started. Finland is supportive of the association and of economic integration, prioritising those lines in its EU policy<sup>3</sup>. Denmark has been implementing a Strategic Framework for the Danish Neighborhood Programme 2017-2021 (DANEP) with priorities for Ukraine and Georgia and plans to extend it further in the 2021-2025 period<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.2. Security and defence

There is a long history of interregional cooperation between the V4 and the Nordic countries. In fact NORDEFECO, the regional defence cooperation of the Nordic countries including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden was the model in the early days of Visegrad security cooperation. Although NORDEFECO includes

<sup>3</sup> Finland MFA, "Guidelines for Finland's Policy on the Eastern Partners of the EU and on Central Asia," accessed March 23, 2021, [https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/guidelines\\_for\\_finland\\_s\\_policy\\_on\\_the\\_eastern\\_partners\\_of\\_the/04aac7b4-ac24-568d-1b89-e2b13ad44742?t=1525861299550](https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/guidelines_for_finland_s_policy_on_the_eastern_partners_of_the/04aac7b4-ac24-568d-1b89-e2b13ad44742?t=1525861299550).

<sup>4</sup> Danish Neighbourhood Programme, "DANEP 2017-2021 Ukraine Country Programme Document," October 2017, <https://um.dk/~media/um/danish-site/documents/danida/danep%20-%20ukraine%20programme.pdf?la=da>.



Nordic countries that are not members of the EU, it should remain the principal partner of the V4 in developing potential cooperation areas.

Similarly to the development of the V4 cooperation, interregional cooperation should first focus on confidence building projects such as knowledge transfer and short term exchanges of personnel between the defence planners, participating in common trainings and exercises, and organising conferences to share experiences of international deployments.

Any interregional cooperation, especially in the field of defence, however has a strong obstacle in the different levels of participation of individual states in international military and defence alliances. Norway is not a member of the EU, and as such does not participate in EU defence cooperation projects. Finland and Sweden are not members of NATO, and at present cooperate with NATO on specific issues like joint military exercises or cyber-operations. Their activity with NATO is incomparable to other neutral countries cooperating with NATO through the Partnership for Peace like Austria or Malta. However, the Swedish defence policy is changing, including military buildup, and even turning in the public debate towards possible NATO membership. Moreover, both countries share with NATO a similar threat perception of Russia. And finally, Denmark, the only Nordic country with a membership in both organisations, decided not to participate in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) of the EU.

It is worth having a closer look at the EU projects within PESCO as the fastest developing project of EU defence cooperation. All V4 countries as well as Sweden and Finland are members of PESCO, which aspires to push structural integration forward to increase interoperability and deepen cooperation among member states. There are already 46 PESCO projects developed within the framework, but as is often highlighted, there are almost none with the participation of all V4 member states. Among the exceptions to this rule, we have to mention the Military Mobility project which aims to simplify and standardise cross-border military transport procedures.<sup>5</sup> Almost all PESCO members (Denmark and Malta are the only non-participating EU member states) take part in this project, therefore inter-regional cooperation has limited added value.

It is worth mentioning that there is not a single other project out of the remaining 45, that includes both Sweden and Finland proving that it is not only the V4 that has not used its regional cooperation format for planning the participation of member states in projects.

From the remaining projects the “European Medical Command” includes all V4 members and Sweden and the Integrated Unmanned Ground System includes Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Finland. Based on the project list it is safe to say that PESCO most likely will not be the main driver of inter-regional cooperation, unless countries can agree to join or initiate a project. It is possible, however, that Norway, as a non-EU Nordic Council member interested to participate in PESCO if there were a third-country participation option, could be an additional external factor to push for more inter-regional cooperation from the perspective of the other EU-Nordic countries.

All V4 countries are members of NATO, along with Denmark. V4 countries maintain defence cooperation with Sweden and Finland as part of the NATO framework cooperation. Additionally, defence contracts with Finnish and Swedish companies are part of the national security agenda in all V4 countries (for instance SAAB and Patria). Therefore, defence industrial cooperation could be an important focus of cooperation.

The defence industry is growing rapidly in the context of the common threat perception of Russia by NATO countries as well as non-NATO Nordic countries. Recent major procurements from the Nordic countries could potentially

<sup>5</sup> PESCO, “Military Mobility (MM)”, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/military-mobility/>.



strengthen not only industrial cooperation but even more importantly from the perspective of EU defence, joint research and development. As the EU will significantly raise the budget spent on defence related R&D, early initiatives could be extremely successful. The involvement of universities for the planning would be highly beneficial.

Another avenue of cooperation is the EU battlegroups. The V4 has repeatedly put its own battlegroup on standby, performing joint exercises and inviting other nations (Ukraine in 2016, Croatia in 2019) just as Nordic Battlegroups before. Nordic-V4 cooperation may not be immediately in the plan but particular countries from both regions are participating in those programs (e.g. Germany, Austria, Czechia, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands and Sweden in 2020).

### 2.3. Energy security

Regional cooperation along the North-South axis is ongoing. The V4 consumes over 42 bcm of natural gas per year and the dominant position in CEE is held by the Russian Federation. This dependence on Russian gas comes from the Soviet era pipelines that were built from east to west. Diversification of energy supplies is a goal for the entirety of the EU which has identified “projects of common interest” which will allow the entirety of the EU to benefit from a competitive gas market.<sup>6</sup> Three of these projects are already existing platforms for Nordic-V4 cooperation, these being the Baltic Pipeline,<sup>7</sup> the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL),<sup>8</sup> and The Baltic connector.<sup>9</sup> The Baltic pipe will be able to transfer 10 bcm of natural gas from Norway, through Denmark to Poland and back, opening up the Nordic and V4 regions to Norwegian gas, and imported LNG from Świnoujście. This project will strengthen the diversification of the natural gas market within both the Nordic countries and the V4 as well as reducing the dependence on Russian supplies. The interconnections between Poland and Lithuania would connect the Baltic States to the wider EU gas market and the connection between Finland and Estonia will connect Finland to the EU gas market to which it previously did not have access.<sup>10</sup>

The Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) and Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity (CESEC) are two ongoing projects that will contribute towards energy security.<sup>11</sup> BEMIP was established in 2009 and includes Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Sweden, facilitated by the European Commission. The goal of the BEMIP is to achieve open and integrated regional electricity and gas markets between EU countries in the Baltic Sea region, inter alia to end the energy isolation of the Baltic States.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, “Diversification of Gas Supply Sources and Routes,” Text, Energy - European Commission, July 31, 2014, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-security/diversification-of-gas-supply-sources-and-routes\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-security/diversification-of-gas-supply-sources-and-routes_en).

<sup>7</sup> Baltic Pipe Offshore Gas Pipeline, “Baltic Pipe Project Offshore Gas Pipeline – Implementation Stage,” May 2020, <https://www.baltic-pipe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BalticPipeProject-Implementation-Stage.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, “Construction of the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL) Including Supporting Infrastructure,” Text, Innovation and Networks Executive Agency - European Commission, March 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-energy/8.5-0046-pllt-p-m-14>.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, “Project of Common Interest: The Balticconnector,” accessed March 23, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/pci\\_factsheet\\_balticconnector\\_2017\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/pci_factsheet_balticconnector_2017_0.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Baltic Connector, “Project Purpose and Objectives,” accessed March 23, 2021, <http://balticconnector.fi/en/the-project/>.

<sup>11</sup> Three Seas Initiative, “Diversification of Gas Supply Sources and Integration of Gas Infrastructure in the Three Seas Region,” accessed March 23, 2021, <https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/diversification-of-gas-supply-sources-and-integration-of-gas-infrastructure-in-the-three-seas-region-diversification-of-gas-supply-sources-and-integration-of-gas-infrastructure-in-the-three-seas-region-with-the-implementation-of-the-baltic-pipe-project-and-cross-border-interconnections-republic-of-poland-slovak-republic-and-republic-of-poland-ukraine>.



The interconnection between Poland and Slovakia should be put into operation in 2022, which will complete the missing part of the North - South connection. Since the 2009 gas crisis, Projects of Common Interest were key for Visegrad countries, for example, the upgrade of the Slovak - Hungarian interconnector or reverse flow from Czechia - Slovakia, Slovakia - Ukraine.

Energy security in the V<sub>4</sub> is important to the Nordic countries from the point of view of the common threat perception regarding Russia and its dominant role in gas supplies. It links directly to the Baltic States. Furthermore, the energy mix of the V<sub>4</sub> needs to be diversified and greener which matches the ambitions and know-how of the Nordic partners.

## 2.4. Nuclear energy

Two of the Nordic countries (Sweden and Finland) have long-standing expertise in the area of nuclear energy with the entire region having 16% of its energy from nuclear.<sup>12</sup> Of all the Nordic countries only Sweden and Finland have reactors generating a significant part of their national energy mix, around 40% in Sweden and 34% in Finland.<sup>13</sup> Denmark does not use nuclear energy nor plans to do so. V<sub>4</sub> countries view nuclear energy as the future to meet their growing energy needs. Currently, three of the V<sub>4</sub> countries have nuclear power already within their borders and already making up a sizable part of their energy mixes. In Czechia 15.81%, Hungary 14.62% and in Slovakia 21% of their electricity in 2019 came from nuclear energy.<sup>14</sup> Poland has submitted a National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) in which it plans to build a 1.5 GW nuclear reactor by 2033 with another 5 to be launched in 2 to 3 year intervals bringing nuclear electricity production up to approx. 6-9 GW to be launched by 2043.<sup>15</sup>

All V<sub>4</sub> countries consider energy transition impossible without nuclear components. A point of divergence comes with plans on the future of nuclear energy. While Sweden plans to phase out their nuclear power in favour of renewables and biofuel, all V<sub>4</sub> countries plan to expand this sector.<sup>16</sup> While the Nordic countries and V<sub>4</sub> countries may differ on the role that nuclear power can play in the future it is in everyone's interest that the V<sub>4</sub>'s nuclear projects meet high levels of safety. There is possible room for cooperation between the Nordic nuclear countries and the V<sub>4</sub> in updating and creating proper nuclear facilities that will meet the high levels of safety that the Nordic countries are able to achieve.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.5. Renewables

In renewable energy the V<sub>4</sub> and Nordic countries have many opportunities to cooperate. The Nordic countries have very high levels of renewables, which covered

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<sup>12</sup> Anders Kofoed-Wiuff et al., "Tracking Nordic Clean Energy Progress 2020," April 2020, 30. <https://www.nordicenergy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tracking-Nordic-Clean-Energy-Progress-2020.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Byron J. Nordstrom, "Nuclear Power in the Nordic Countries," October 28, 2020, <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/nuclear-power-in-the-nordic-countries/>.

<sup>14</sup> Our World in Data, "Share of Primary Energy from Nuclear," Our World in Data, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/nuclear-primary-energy?tab=chart&time=earliest..latest&country=POL~CZE~SVK~HUN>.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, "The National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021-2030 Objectives and Targets, and Policies and Measures," December 18, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/pl\\_final\\_necp\\_part\\_1\\_3\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/pl_final_necp_part_1_3_en.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> World Nuclear News, "Austria Fails to Turn Neighbours against Nuclear Power: Nuclear Policies - World Nuclear News," January 17, 2020, <https://world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Austria-fails-to-turn-neighbours-against-nuclear-p>.

<sup>17</sup> Lauri Virkkunen, "The Nordic Experience in Nuclear Power - World Nuclear News," September 8, 2016, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/V-The-Nordic-experience-in-nuclear-power-08091601.html>.



42% of their primary energy demand in 2018. The Nordic countries would like to transition even further from fossil fuels by increasing wind generation five-fold by 2050. They are also looking at other ways of reducing their carbon emissions without resorting to nuclear energy and thus moving ahead with Solar and Geothermal energy sources.<sup>18</sup>

Though the V4's historical favorites of coal (particularly in Czechia and Poland) and nuclear energy resources remain dominant, there is progress, albeit slow, in terms of renewables. While Slovakia and Hungary have been very successful in phasing out coal they still rely on nuclear energy, in addition to Czechia expanding and Poland planning to introduce nuclear power. Polish business executives (also from public companies) have started to support investments in offshore wind power, and solar energy subsidies for small scale production by consumers are promoted on a national level.

Poland, as the only V4 country with a coastline, has ambitious plans to develop offshore wind. It aims to install 3.8 GW by 2030, an additional 10 GW by 2040 and 28 GW by 2050.<sup>19</sup> It is also considered a key technology within Poland's NECP.<sup>20</sup> Hungary has agreed to increase the share of renewable energy to at least 21% with emphasis put on photovoltaic (PV) generation.<sup>21</sup> Czechia has agreed to reduce their total greenhouse gas emissions by 30% with investments in solar and wind.<sup>22</sup> Slovakia has agreed to increase its renewable energy share to 19.2% by 2030.<sup>23</sup> In all four Visegrad countries the diversification of their energy supplies as well as an increase in renewables is taking place.<sup>24</sup>

There is a significant opportunity for cooperation between the Nordic countries and the V4 here. The V4 needs to set their goals for the renewable energy share of the market higher and it can also be done with the technology and infrastructure that is already highly developed and in use in the Nordic countries. Sharing of best practices and expertise could prove very beneficial for the V4 countries in achieving their NECP goals. The Nordic countries are also home to many firms invested in renewables that could be a source of investment and expertise for the V4 countries. Firms such as Akershus Energi, and Statkraft<sup>25</sup> have expertise and resources within many areas that V4 countries are attempting to expand such as Hydropower, Wind power, and Solar power. Closer cooperation between V4 countries and Nordic countries could lead to attractive investment deals that can further the transition within the V4. In Hungary the phase out of the Mátra power plant will rely on many renewable sources such as solar and biomass. In Poland, with a focus on wind energy, there are opportunities for investments from Nordic firms such as Danish Ørsted which specializes in wind.<sup>26</sup>

Another point of potential cooperation between the clean energy production in the Nordic countries and the energy-hungry states of the V4 is in

<sup>18</sup> Kofoed-Wiuff et al., "Tracking Nordic Clean Energy Progress 2020."

<sup>19</sup> WindEurope, "Poland Adopts Historic Offshore Wind Act," WindEurope, January 14, 2021, <https://windeurope.org/newsroom/news/poland-adopts-historic-offshore-wind-act/>.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, "Executive Summary of Poland's National Energy and Climate Plan for the Years 2021-2030," accessed March 23, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/pl\\_final\\_necp\\_summary\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/pl_final_necp_summary_en.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, "National Energy and Climate Plan," accessed March 23, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/hu\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/hu_final_necp_main_en.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, "National Energy and Climate Plan of the Czech Republic," November 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/cs\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/cs_final_necp_main_en.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, "Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021 to 2030 Prepared Pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action," December 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/sk\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/sk_final_necp_main_en.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Tomasz Rokicki and Aleksandra Perkowska, "Changes in Energy Supplies in the Countries of the Visegrad Group," *Sustainability* 12, no. 19 (September 24, 2020): 7916, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197916>.

<sup>25</sup> Statkraft, "About Statkraft," accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.statkraft.com/about-statkraft/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ørsted, "Our Company," accessed March 23, 2021, <https://orsted.com/en/about-us/about-orsted>.



Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs). The Nordics have the natural geography that allows them to optimally produce clean energy that is relatively inexpensive, to the point that there is enough to sell to other countries. With PPAs, countries like those of the V4 can buy clean energy from the Nordic countries and reduce their carbon emissions much more quickly. These agreements give a long term guaranteed price for energy from a guaranteed green source. This could benefit the Nordic countries, whose boom in offshore wind farms has driven prices to the point of mothballing and shutdowns.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.6. Green agenda, climate change

The Nordic countries, as front-runners in renewable energy, are very supportive of the Green Deal. In 2019, Nordic leaders came to an agreement to make the region the most sustainable and integrated in the world by 2030.<sup>28</sup> The Nordic Energy Ministers approved a declaration which sets out guidelines for the post COVID-19 future of a Green Deal based Nordic electricity market.<sup>29</sup> The Nordic countries see large potential for export of their green energy into the wider EU market.<sup>30</sup>

Initially, the V4 except Slovakia opposed the EU's climate neutral deal, fearing it would prevent investments in nuclear and coal projects from being labelled as green. The positions within the group had shifted again by 2020 when Hungary and the Czech Republic gave up their reservations and committed themselves to the 2050 carbon neutrality target in December 2019, seeing the prospect of funding within the Green deal.

While V4 countries are more reluctant to adopt the Green deal, with time all V4 countries have adopted plans to move towards it, but without as much ambition as the Nordic countries. The V4 has the potential to adopt some of the Nordics' best practices and to sign up to the Nordics' more global outlook at lowering carbon emissions. The latest V4 presidency program stresses that the regions most likely to be hit hardest by the pandemic are the same regions that will suffer the most from the implementation of the Green Deal, which is why the V4 will attempt to achieve additional funding for such regions.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.7. Forests

Forests are not mentioned in the EU treaties and generally belong to Member States' competence. That being said there is plenty of secondary legislation that affects forestry. Sweden and Finland have the largest amount of forests per country within all of Europe (Sweden being 68.9% covered in forests and Finland 73.1%).<sup>32</sup> In the V4 countries forests play a smaller, but still important role. There is a clear divide within

<sup>27</sup> Elin Akinci, Samuel Ciszuk, and ELS Analysis, "Nordic PPAs – Effects on Renewable Growth and Implications for Electricity Markets," February 2021, 19.

<https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Insight-84-Nordic-PPAs-effects-on-renewable-growth-and-implications-for-electricity-markets.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Björn Bjarnason, "Nordic Foreign and Security Policy 2020 Climate Change, Hybrid & Cyber Threats and Challenges to the Multilateral, Rules-Based World Order," July 2020,

[https://www.government.se/49f308/contentassets/c128b79doe9143469e7df83648eddb3c/nordic\\_fo\\_reign\\_security\\_policy\\_2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.government.se/49f308/contentassets/c128b79doe9143469e7df83648eddb3c/nordic_fo_reign_security_policy_2020_final.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Nordic Co-Operation, "Energy Ministers: Green Energy Conversion to Power New Start after COVID-19 | Nordic Cooperation," May 26, 2020, <https://www.norden.org/en/news/energy-ministers-green-energy-conversion-power-new-start-after-covid-19>.

<sup>30</sup> Kofoed-Wiuff et al., "Tracking Nordic Clean Energy Progress 2020",

<https://www.nordicenergy.org/publications/tracking-nordic-clean-energy-progress-2020/>

<sup>31</sup> Visegrad Group, "2020/2021 Polish Presidency," text ((C) 2006-2010, International Visegrad Fund, July 2, 2020), <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2020-2021-polish>.

<sup>32</sup> The World Bank, "Forest Area (% of Land Area) - Sweden | Data," accessed March 23, 2021,

[https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.FRST.ZS?end=2016&locations=SE&most\\_recent\\_val\\_ue\\_desc=true&start=2016&view=bar](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.FRST.ZS?end=2016&locations=SE&most_recent_val_ue_desc=true&start=2016&view=bar).



the EU on the role the EU should play in forestry policy. This divide is between Finland and Sweden, who are of the opinion that forestry policy should lie within the Member States, and other EU states which agree that the EU should play a more formal role in forestry policy.

While two of the Nordic countries have a strong stance against taking forestry to the EU level they must accept it as inevitable with the support it currently has throughout the bloc. Currently, it is within the program of the Polish presidency of the V4 to discuss and create a common approach towards an EU forestry policy. With the V4 currently formulating a common position, Sweden and Finland along with the other Nordic countries can take advantage of the policy formation window to have the V4 countries as allies in the EU for their preferences in forestry.

Wood products are a source of trade surplus for Sweden, Finland, and all V4 countries except for Hungary.<sup>33</sup> The forestry sector has potential to grow as more alternatives for plastics are being discovered and put to use. The Planting, harvesting and replanting of forests to create biodegradable alternatives to traditional plastic will thus require large forests that can be used for such purposes.<sup>34</sup> The Swedish model of forestry has reforestation as a requirement for forest owners.<sup>35</sup> Sweden has now doubled the number of forests it has compared to one hundred years ago due to reforestation.<sup>36</sup> Through formulating a stance with Sweden and Finland that will not hinder the forestry sector and working with the Nordic countries on the creation of an economically viable EU framework, the V4 along with Sweden and Finland can exploit this potential renewable resource for the Green Deal and profit while contributing to a circular economy.

## 2.8. Transportation, infrastructure

Transportation and infrastructure are both areas where the Nordic countries and V4 countries can develop their cooperation. Other than military infrastructure, civilian infrastructure connecting the two regions is considered important by both regions. Finland has already joined a Three Seas Initiative (TSI) project, Rail Baltica, which goes through the Baltic States to Warsaw. Such a connection will allow Finland better access to the V4 and the rest of Europe through rail.<sup>37</sup> All EU Nordic countries and Poland of the V4 are members of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) where cooperation on TEN-T projects and other means of transport within the region are discussed.

Both for the EUSBSR and the V4, the Baltic-Adriatic TEN-T project is key. The EUSBSR stresses the importance of three TEN-T projects in connecting the Baltic Sea Region, these being the Baltic-Adriatic, Scandinavian-Mediterranean and North Sea-Baltic.<sup>38</sup> Two of these TEN-T projects go through Warsaw, and the Baltic-Adriatic project goes through three of the V4 states. The Baltic-Adriatic project is of

<sup>33</sup> Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Wood Products (HS: IX) Product Trade, Exporters and Importers | OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity," accessed March 24, 2021, <https://oec.world/en/profile/hs92/wood-products>.

<sup>34</sup> UNECE, "Circularity. Rethinking the Way We Use Resources and Make Products," accessed March 24, 2021, <https://unece.org/forests/circularity>.

<sup>35</sup> The Swedish Forest Agency, "The Forestry Act," accessed March 24, 2021, <https://doi.org/en/laws-and-regulations/skogsvardslagen/>.

<sup>36</sup> Alex Gray, "Sweden's Forests Have Doubled in Size over the Last 100 Years," World Economic Forum, December 13, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/swedens-forests-have-been-growing-for-100-years/>.

<sup>37</sup> Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications, "Competitive Tendering in Rail Transport Proceeds, Project Companies to Finance the Investments," (Liikenne- ja viestintäministeriö, January 2, 2019), <https://www.lvm.fi/en/-/competitive-tendering-in-rail-transport-proceeds-project-companies-to-finance-the-investments-997648>.

<sup>38</sup> EUSBSR, "Connecting the Region Efficiently, Affordably and Sustainably," February 15, 2021, <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/news-room/highlights-blog/item/122-connecting-the-region-efficiently-affordably-and-sustainably>.



high importance to the V<sub>4</sub> region and is stressed in Poland's presidency of the V<sub>4</sub> region. The Nord-Baltic project is important to Finland as it will increase its connection to the V<sub>4</sub> and European markets through the elimination of bottlenecks between Helsinki and Antwerp.<sup>39</sup> With these projects, the transport links between Nordic countries and V<sub>4</sub> countries will be improved, enriching both regions and facilitating cross regional trade.

## 2.9. Frontex and migration

Frontex and its agenda is an area where cooperation between the Nordic countries and the V<sub>4</sub> can take place. The Nordic countries emphasize EU cooperation in defence and partnerships such as Frontex, Schengen and Europol.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that the Hungarian government was bashing Frontex domestically, the V<sub>4</sub> supported strengthening Frontex while stressing the requirement that it only plays a "supportive" role and that borders must stay a competence of member states.<sup>41</sup> Recent developments will however hamper V<sub>4</sub> unity as the Orbán government's much-criticized treatment of persons who seek international protection in the country has pushed Frontex to suspend its operations in Hungary.

Migration is also a potential area of cooperation for both groups, despite the fact that during the migration crisis the Nordic countries and the V<sub>4</sub> took different stances. In particular, both groups of countries emphasize the external dimension of migration and would like to see more interaction with countries that are the sources of migration in order to reduce irregular migration into their regions.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.10. Economy

Just like the Nordic countries, the V<sub>4</sub> countries' economies are smaller and more open to the world than those of some larger European countries but a higher share of V<sub>4</sub> countries' trade and investment is interconnected primarily with EU markets.<sup>43</sup> They are heavily dependent on Germany, which is the most important trade partner for each member of the group.<sup>44</sup>

Over 70% of foreign trade for all V<sub>4</sub> states takes place within the EU.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the competitiveness of V<sub>4</sub> depends on the continuing competitiveness of bigger EU economies (with a slight difference in Poland, which has a more diverse economy structure with a bigger internal market).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Innovation and Network Executive Agency, "CEF Support to North Sea - Baltic Corridor," May 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/inea/sites/inea/files/cefpub/cef\\_transport\\_2020-corridor-b-northsea-baltic\\_metadata.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/inea/sites/inea/files/cefpub/cef_transport_2020-corridor-b-northsea-baltic_metadata.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Bjarnason, "Nordic Foreign and Security Policy 2020 Climate Change, Hybrid & Cyber Threats and Challenges to the Multilateral, Rules-Based World Order."

<sup>41</sup> Visegrad Group, "Joint Declaration of the Ministers of the Interior," text ((C) 2006-2010, International Visegrad Fund, October 17, 2019), <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2018/joint-declaration-of-the-190107>.

<sup>42</sup> Visegrad Group, "New Pact on Migration and Asylum Joint Position of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia," December 10, 2020, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=457>.

<sup>43</sup> European Commission, "Single Market Scoreboard – Trade in Goods & Services," Single Market Scoreboard, accessed March 24, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/scoreboard/integration\\_market\\_openness/trade\\_goods\\_services/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/integration_market_openness/trade_goods_services/index_en.htm).

<sup>44</sup> World Integrated Trade Solution, "Hungary Trade Indicators 2018 | WITS Data," accessed March 24, 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/HUN/Year/2018>.

<sup>45</sup> Eurostat, "International Trade in Goods in 2018. A Third of EU Trade Is with the United States and China. At Member State Level, Trade within the EU Largely Prevails," March 20, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet\\_file\\_entry/2995521/6-20032019-AP-EN.pdf/oebd7878-dad5-478e-a5fo-3ae2c91f7ea3](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet_file_entry/2995521/6-20032019-AP-EN.pdf/oebd7878-dad5-478e-a5fo-3ae2c91f7ea3).

<sup>46</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Visegrad Group: A New Economic Heart of Europe?," DW.COM, May 7, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/visegrad-group-a-new-economic-heart-of-europe/a-49483505>.



Another general parallel is a differentiated participation in the eurozone. Sweden, along with Czechia, Hungary and Poland have not yet fulfilled their obligations to join the monetary union, Denmark remains in the ERM2 since 1999 and the most geographically eastern countries (Finland and Slovakia) have already adopted the euro. This mixed bag of experience and integration levels does not result though in coordinated positions regarding the future of the European economy.

Since Denmark has an opt-out from joining the European Monetary Union and Sweden has what is known as a de facto opt-out, they are potential allies for Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic in protecting the interests of the non-Eurozone countries in the debate on the future of the EU.

## 2.11. SMEs

The Nordic countries underline the importance of their SMEs. With funds such as the Nordic Project Fund (Nopef) they help develop their SMEs sustainably.<sup>47</sup> This focus on sustainability also leads the Nordic countries to innovate in simplifying sustainability reporting for SMEs.<sup>48</sup>

The V4 Polish presidency has put the counteracting of protectionism and reform of the WTO on its agenda. The V4 stresses that this approach will lead to more stable trading conditions for their entrepreneurs. Deregulation for the small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as supporting their interests against big industrial lobbies, could also be a point of convergence for V4 and Nordic countries. As the V4 moves towards a greener future there is an incentive and opportunity to learn from the Nordic region on how to best implement sustainability into SME strategies. There are also possibilities for V4+ exchanges of good practices with Nordic region entrepreneurs.

## 2.12. Research & Development

The Nordic countries put great emphasis on Research and Development and invest heavily in the business enterprise and the higher education sectors,<sup>49</sup> significantly benefiting from the Horizon 2020 instrument.<sup>50</sup>

The V4 countries have so far benefited less from Horizon 2020. Acknowledging the importance of taking proper advantage of the next-generation Horizon Europe instrument, Poland, in the framework of its V4 presidency, plans for relevant regional discussions for potential strategies on acquiring this funding. This opens up an opportunity for cooperation between the V4 and Nordic countries in order for regional scientists to collaborate with each other, and share best practices on achieving Horizon Europe funding, as the Nordic countries are much more successful and experienced in this respect. However, the poor performance of the countries (especially Slovakia) is connected with poor performance of universities overall. The need for improvement of higher education in V4 is so great that every reform in this area offers a potential for cooperation in itself.

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<sup>47</sup> NEFCO, "Nordic SMEs Are Driving the Global Green Transition with Support from Nopef," Nefco, February 4, 2019, <https://www.nefco.int/news/nordic-smes-are-driving-the-global-green-transition-with-support-from-nopef/>.

<sup>48</sup> Nordic Innovation, "First Study: New Standard for Nordic Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Sustainability Reporting," Nordic Innovation, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.nordicinnovation.org/news/first-study-new-standard-nordic-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-sustainability-reporting>.

<sup>49</sup> Mona Nedberg Østby, "More R&D in All Nordic Countries," March 2019, [https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2589377/2019-6%20NordicNewsletter\\_March.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2589377/2019-6%20NordicNewsletter_March.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

<sup>50</sup> Alison Abbott and Quirin Schiermeier, "How European Scientists Will Spend €100 Billion," *Nature* 569, no. 7757 (May 22, 2019): 472–75, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-01566-z>.



Another potentiality would be to establish a V<sub>4</sub> advanced studies and research institution to augment potential international cooperation in research and development. The V<sub>4</sub> academic institutions could network better to increase their research potential and become partners to more advanced research and development projects in the Nordics. All parties could increase their research output as well as their absorption of the EU funds.

### **2.13. The Future of Europe Conference and further EU integration**

The public consultation on the state of the European Union and the future of its shared politics can be another opportunity for finding common ground.

Countries like Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Benelux group generally agree on a multi-speed Europe. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron have also been stressing that “unity does not equal uniformity” and in order to make the EU more efficient, a more flexible cooperation would be desirable in the long run. The way the EU works today already incorporates elastic cooperation and various groups of Member States are willing to deepen cooperation in an increasing number of policy areas.

Even though the V<sub>4</sub> countries are generally voicing concerns against a multiple-speed EU, concerned about being left on the periphery, the group is not homogeneous. Neither are the Nordic countries.

While the Visegrad countries are fully integrated in five areas (Schengen, Unified Patent, PESCO, Area of freedom, security and justice - AFSJ, Common Security and Defence Policy - CSDP), the group is often divided when it comes to areas of possible enhanced cooperation. They have been for a long time rejecting calls for harmonisation or coordination of tax policies, or social standards, but since the Slovak government changed its position on cooperation in the tax policy area, the picture has become less uniform. Slovakia as the only V<sub>4</sub> member of the Eurozone is the most embedded in the existing structures: with the exception of two areas, justice and home affairs (divorce, property rights of international couples), it has been integrated at all policy levels.



### Visegrad Group states' participation in selected areas of EU integration

	SK	PL	HU	CZ		
M: member						
C: candidate	M	C	C	C	Euro	<b>Economic and fiscal policies</b>
-: not participating	M	-	-	-	ESM	
	M	M	M	-	EFC	
	M	C	M	C	SRM	
	M	M	-	-	Euro+	
	M	-	M*	-	SRF	<b>Justice and home affairs</b>
	M	M	M	M	Schengen	
	M	-	M	M	Charter	
	-	-	M	-	Divorce	
	-	-	-	M	Property of Int. Couples	
	M	-	-	M	European Prosecutor	<b>Security &amp; defence</b>
	M	M	M	M	AFSJ	
	M	M	M	M	CSDP	
	M	-	M	-	Prum Convention	
	M	M	M	M	PESCO	
	M	M	M	M	Unified Patent	<b>Other</b>
	M	-	M	-	Use of EU symbols	
	M	-	-	-	FTT	
	M	-	M	M	Unified Patent Court	

**Abbreviations:** ESM - European Stability Mechanism, EFC - Economic and Financial Committee, SRM - Single resolution mechanism, SRF - Single Resolution Fund, AFSJ - Area of freedom, security, and justice, CSDP - Common Security and Defence Policy, PESCO - Permanent Structured Cooperation, FTT - Financial transaction tax, Charter - Charter of Fundamental Rights.

**Zdroj:** Europolicy.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Europolicy, "Visegrad States and Multispeed Europe: Perceptions, positions, strategies," December 2018, <https://euractiv.sk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2018/12/EUROPOLICY-ANALYSIS-Visegrad-countries-and-multispeed-Europe1.pdf>.



Poland and Hungary are currently advocating for a “Union of nation states” in order to curb the competencies of Brussels, and their governments perceive further EU integration as a threat against national sovereignty. While Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic as net beneficiaries from the EU’s budget are against setting up exclusive parallel structures because they are concerned that it might create a second tier of membership, Slovakia is on a bit of a different page. Because of its Eurozone membership, Bratislava seems to be more open to Brussels taking further competences from Eurozone members. As its priority is to be part of any future EU core, Slovakia would go along with the majority of EU states when it comes to strengthening fiscal capacities.

Finland and Denmark have not formed a clear position on flexible multi-speed integration yet and tend to wait for the final decision of the majority, while Sweden is rather against a multispeed structure fearing loss of influence on the key EU policies while not adopting the euro. Thus, there is potential to forge a coalition with the Visegrad 3 against multi-speed-Europe supporters. There is a window of cross-regional partnership to oppose flexible cooperation that could institutionalise dividing lines in the EU or the dominance of the bigger countries.

## Summary

Both Nordic and V4 groupings share similar principles of cohesion, EU cooperation and to a certain extent similar threat perception. Energy security, democracy assistance in EaP countries and defence cooperation remain viable platforms of cooperation in the critical areas.

Energy, natural resources and climate represent an interesting and complex system of cooperation with various caveats. While there are substantial differences in areas related to nuclear energy there are many other policy areas related to renewables or forests that both groups may even find common positions on at a sub-regional level.

The level of economic cooperation stems from the existence of win-win opportunities for both regions in terms of acquiring capital and know-how on one hand and investment opportunities for the capital on the other. It is in the interests of both to develop north-south transportation and mobility potential but the approach to dealing with crisis situations in these areas - like during the refugee crisis - demonstrated also conflicting perspectives.

A nuanced approach to further EU integration and to the Future of Europe Conference across both groupings may open potential avenues for coordinated positions but in any case the EU framework is determining the potential cooperation in all advanced areas from the New Green Deal to R&D.



## Association for International Affairs (AMO)

AMO is a non-governmental not-for-profit Prague-based organization founded in 1997. Its main aim is to promote research and education in the field of international relations. AMO facilitates the expression and realization of ideas, thoughts, and projects in order to increase education, mutual understanding, and tolerance among people.



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## Visegrad Insight, Res Publica Foundation

Res Publica Foundation is a non-partisan, political and culture-oriented NGO with over 30 years of publishing and project management experience in CEE. It was established in 1987 with the purpose of developing culture, research and education and improving the quality of public debate. The Foundation runs Res Publica Nowa, a periodical in Polish, and Visegrad Insight, an analysis and debate platform in English, the only such medium on Central Europe, from Central Europe.

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