Reviving Visegrad Group Inter-governmental Cooperation and Boosting the 3 Seas
Business community perspectives and expectations

Policy Brief note to the Visegrad Group Governments (Prime Ministers' Offices, Ministries of Economy, Foreign Affairs, Energy, Climate/Environment, and Innovation)

From: Informal Business Roundtable, Dubrovnik at the sides of the Three Seas Initiative Summit, 29 April 2026

Purpose: To inform preparations for the Slovak V4 Presidency (July 2026) and overlapping 3SI Presidency (January 2027) with business-driven recommendations.

Executive summary

Business leaders from across the Visegrad Group (V4) countries – representing energy, logistics and ports, e-commerce, manufacturing, digital/cloud services, finance, construction chemicals, space, and innovation sectors – see a strong window of opportunity to revitalise V4 cooperation by the governments.

Political alignment following recent elections in Hungary, combined with Slovakia's dual presidencies (first part of 2027), creates a timely moment for delivering concrete results.

The opportunity for the V4 is not primarily as a "blocking minority" but as <u>a government-led compact platform for agenda-setting on competitiveness, industrial policy, energy security, and regulatory simplification</u>. Business leaders emphasise synergy with the broader Three Seas Initiative (3SI), which enables positive majority-building in the EU related to growth and global positioning of the region.

Key expectations include reducing cross-border bureaucratic barriers for SMEs, facilitating regional scale-up and innovation consortia, strengthening North-South infrastructure connectivity, and advancing joint EU advocacy to

protect the region’s industrial base. Business stands ready to provide ongoing input and partner on deliverables.

Background and strategic context

The discussion highlighted V4’s proven, decades-long track record (e.g., coordinated energy security responses and early warnings on competitiveness and diversification needs) while acknowledging past political divergences that weakened the format in some capitals. Participants stressed that business voices can provide the pragmatic, non-ideological impetus needed to rebuild trust and momentum, particularly in Prague and Bratislava.

V4 and 3SI are seen as mutually reinforcing formats. The V4 offers a tight-knit core for rapid alignment among four countries that share the highest number of key sectoral characteristics, while 3SI expands reach to 13 EU member states for wider coalitions.

The region's soft (economic) power is built on a distinctive profile – strong entrepreneurial spirit, manufacturing orientation, and per-capita income and societal set-up. That context, part of the EU's internal diversity, produces a number of different constraints for the government priorities in the V4/3SI vs others, like Berlin or Paris. Hence, regulatory challenges in the region differ from many in Western Europe. This justifies arguing for tailored regional EU approaches rather than one-size-fits-all EU solutions.

Key business perspectives on revitalisation potential

1. **Industrial competitiveness and EU agenda-setting**
   The V4 should proactively shape EU policy rather than react late. Priorities include ETS reform, carbon management, methane regulation, and a balanced green transition that preserves affordable energy and the manufacturing base (automotive, steel, chemicals, heavy industry). Participants warned against deindustrialisation trends observed elsewhere and called for united advocacy on

diversification from Chinese technologies and subsidies in energy-transition supply chains.

2. **Regulatory simplification and single market functionality**
   Fragmented national rules hinder intra-V4 trade and e-export despite the EU single market. A concrete, immediately actionable example is the creation of a V4 one-stop shop for EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility like waste management registration) and similar administrative burdens affecting SMEs. Business expects working groups under the Slovak Presidency to identify and resolve such 'pain points' quickly.

3. **Digital, innovation and scale-up support**
   The region possesses the talent and companies to build resilient digital infrastructure (e.g. cloud, data) and compete globally, but individual markets are too small. Participants called for:

   - Cross-border consortia and joint projects (modelled on recent space-sector memoranda between regional businesses enabled/sponsored by governments);

   - Regional competitiveness or investment funds to support startups and scale-ups in defence, digital, and green technologies;

   - Strengthened public-private facilitation for international expansion.

4. **Infrastructure and energy connectivity**
   Full utilisation of existing LNG terminals (Poland, Croatia) and Baltic/Adriatic gateways requires removing remaining bottlenecks in gas, electricity, and rail/intermodal networks. North-South corridors are essential for trade flows, diversification, and future integration of Ukrainian markets.

5. **EU financial instruments**
   With the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Horizon

Europe-type programmes expected to centralise significant innovation funding (~€200 billion proposed), V4 companies must be positioned to win on "excellence" criteria. Participants urged strong opposition to any geo-balancing mechanisms that would disadvantage the region.

Expectations from governments

- **Deliverables over ideology**
  Top-level political commitment (Prime Ministers' Offices) to re-prioritise V4 as a platform for region-specific solutions.

- **Structured business input**
  Regular, institutionalised dialogue channels (e.g., V4 Business Advisory Group or working groups on competitiveness, digital, and energy).

- **V4/3SI Slovak presidency priorities:**

  - Launch concrete initiatives on regulatory harmonisation (e.g. EPR one-stop shop as a quick win).

  - Advance joint positions ahead of key EU negotiations (ETS, MFF, industrial policy).

  - Facilitate cross-border projects in digital, space, defence, and logistics.

- **Pragmatic leadership**
  Use the Slovak presidencies to demonstrate results that rebuild trust and encourage broader participation.

Recommended next steps

1. This note will be circulated among participants for review.

2. Establish V4 ministerial working groups (economy, digital, energy/climate) with business participation around the July 2026 V4 presidency of Slovakia.
3. Organise a follow-up meeting on the margins of the Europe Future Forum (Warsaw, 14-16 September 2026) to refine deliverables.
4. Explore V4/3SI potential synergies with existing ministry-level coordination (e.g., environment/climate ministers' meetings) and expand to economic portfolios.

The business community expressed a strong desire to contribute expertise, data, and project proposals. Revitalised V4 cooperation, grounded in shared economic interests, can amplify the region's voice in Brussels, accelerate growth, and position Central Europe as a competitive, resilient industrial powerhouse within the EU.