

Think  
Visegrad  
V4 Think-Tank Platform



Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group  
July 2016–June 2017



Permanent Representation  
of the Republic of Poland  
to the European Union  
in Brussels

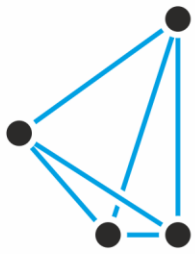
Report from the international conference *The Visegrad Contribution to the EU Digital Single Market* organized by EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy and by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016 in the framework of the 'Think Visegrad in Brussels' project.

## For Visegrad it's Now or Never in Digital

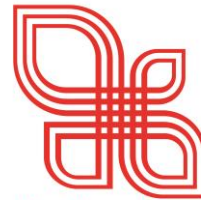
The Visegrad countries have a strong potential to lead in the digital area, but only if the key stakeholders manage to coordinate efficiently to grasp this 'once in a lifetime' opportunity. This was one of the recommendations resulting from the Think Visegrad conference that took place on 30.11.2016 in Brussels, debating the **Visegrad Contribution to the EU Digital Single Market**. The event was organized in the framework of the 'Think Visegrad in Brussels' project by the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy and by the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group. It was hosted by the Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU. The conference debated two aspects of the DSM in particular: **how to create a regulatory environment to support innovation and how to ensure digital skills to materialize it**. Apart from two high-level panels, it included presentations by young winners of the Visegrad Hackatons that demonstrated cutting-edge digital skills in practice.

### No such thing as friendly regulation

The first panel was opened by Stephanie Lepczynski from the Brussels think-tank Lisbon Council, who described what challenges the EU regulation poses to the scale-up of start-ups in Europe and referred to the recent Scaleup Manifesto for recommendations on how to improve it. Luc Hendrickx from UEAPME echoed a similar plight on behalf of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), claiming that the way to encourage innovation in any area, is to have regulation that is suitable for the SMEs that form the vast majority of EU businesses. In his view, regulation is often drafted with large enterprises in mind and therefore difficult to implement for small companies, while what works for the small, works for the big as well. The Chairman of the Council of the Czech Telecommunication Office, Jaromír Novak, recommended that companies be proactive in co-shaping the legislation but expressed scepticism over whether regulation can be 'friendly' – there either are rules or there are not. It was stressed that the Visegrad countries can have great influence at the EU policy level if they work together and Peteris Zilgalvis from the European Commission highlighted the drive of the current Slovak EU Presidency in particular. Lex Paulson from Democracy 2.1 zoomed from the EU to the local level, underlying the openness and potential for innovation on the ground in the V4.



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## Need to Close the Digital Skills Gap

The silver line of the second panel was the middle skills gap characteristic of the Visegrad region, where there are some with very advanced digital skills and many with very little, missing much of the in-between category. An additional issue mentioned by Lucilla Sioli from the European Commission is the difference in skills between the cities and the country in the V4. On that note, Professor Zdzislaw Krasnodebski, MEP, urged the need for equality and inclusive digitalization. Focusing on the positives, Marta Poslad from Google noted that the Visegrad countries have more high level skills graduates in engineering than the U.S. She asserted that effective collaboration between the state, educational organizations and private companies could help them make the most of their potential and leapfrog in digitalization. Bob Kartous from EDUin underlined that given the pace of change, the cooperation with business is crucial, as the state itself can not react quickly enough. The panel suggested that our lives in the computerized world will require a change of mind-set and István Erényi, the Digital Champion of Hungary, formulated the need to develop new human qualities to operate in the digital society.

## Cooperate. Quickly.

Overall, the conference struck an optimistic tone about the possible contribution of the Visegrad Group in the Digital Single Market. Krzysztof Szubert, the Strategic Advisor to the Minister of Digital Affairs and a keynote speaker at the conference, called on the V4 to work together in the EU policy-making, taking inspiration from a fruitful cooperation in telecommunications. The conference praised the Visegrad countries' innovation potential and cutting-edge ICT skills, while identifying challenges of the middle skills gap and geographical differences. The agreement was that the V4 states can go far and ahead if they address these issues by uniting main actors from the public and the private sphere in a decisive action. It is crucial that they act quickly as this is a now or never moment for them.

Focusing on a positive agenda for the EU and identifying its tangible benefits for the EU citizens, the Visegrad countries have a track record in promoting an open Internal Market. In the same vein, they have been **pushing together for embracing the digital revolution and completing the Digital Single Market to encourage job creation**



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