

## **Kanownik: The Visegrad Group accepts the challenge of digitisation**

**As the Visegrad Group, we have a unique chance to take the vacant spot of Great Britain as the EU's leader in effort for digitisation. A particularly good chance in fact, because the digital industry of our region identifies the digital challenges ahead of V4 in advance and takes action to tackle them, putting us at the very tip of the digital spear in the European Union. Indeed, we have all it takes to lead this charge – writes President of Digital Poland Association (ZIPSEE) Michal Kanownik.**

### **An empty driver's seat**

Once Great Britain has left the European Union, a specific vacuum appeared. Our partners from the United Kingdom, until recently, have set the course and the rate of efforts taken for digitisation in Europe. In the aftermath of Brexit, the spot at the head of charge to digitisation in Europe, remains empty. This creates an opportunity for us and our region. We have a perfect chance to take up the digital legacy of Great Britain. The Visegrad Group in fact does have all of the qualities required for that task.

Luckily, we are not alone in the struggle to take the lead in digitisation. The Polish minister of foreign affairs Jacek Czaputowicz, while discussing the recent beginning of Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group, stated that the region's impact in the EU has been consistently increasing. In fact, our voice is reckoned with in the Council of the EU, and the dynamically growing markets of CEE countries were the pillar of EU-wide economic growth. Importance of the Group was clearly visible e.g. during the discussion on the European budget. If we are equipped with

a political capital sufficient to affect issues of military defence or infrastructure, then we most definitely can use this capital to take up the spot of a leader in determining the digital fate of the EU.

The Polish presidency might come down in history of the Group with exactly such a success, especially given that minister Czaputowicz considers development of digital cooperation, innovation and tight collaboration for technological growth as one of our main goals, next to strengthening the integration and coordinating the activity of already well recognised V4. He has directly addressed the fundamental significance of developing a safe 5G network as well. It is deeply important, that the Polish government appreciates the weight of digitisation and the meaning of ability to steer this process, which while benefiting the whole EU, will allow our region to grow in particular. And the region has worked for such a potential for a long time. The road to securing our position as a leader of digitisation for good is, however, riddled with challenges.

### **A difficult road to leadership**

Effort for reaching our goals is also taking place in scope of Digital V4 – an initiative of digital and advanced technologies industry from the countries of Visegrad Group, established in 2019, which aims to build a common policy supporting innovativeness and digitisation in Central Easter Europe. Digital V4 knows perfectly well that our common success can only be built by tackling a whole set of obstacles, which the group clearly sees and identifies. Those challenges include the need for rapid development of the 5G network, raising awareness and building infrastructure for improved cybersecurity, improving digital competence, spreading access to the Internet and advanced services, responsible data management, and effective investments in technology and innovative enterprises.

The 5G network takes up a special spot on that list, as it remains fundamental for the future of our region and the whole EU. As the V4 Group, we should use the great opportunities of 5G to the fullest in order to propel ourselves towards the digital leadership and boost our position. The technology will also determine the fate of the EU globally. The way our economy and the services available to citizens will change as a result of building a functional next-generation network, will be easily compared to the industrial revolution. Still, we must keep in mind challenges such as automatisisation, robotisation and development of the industry 4.0.

What also awaits us, is the hard work of raising awareness of the possibilities of digitisation and the value it brings. We must come up with a plan for actively improving digital competence in our society, while reducing digital exclusion. We are obliged to support our native, regional digital brands on the global market and to

invest in upcoming companies and start-ups. After all, digital services and products allowed us to retain a piece of normality and keep the business, education, culture and social life afloat in the face of pandemic.

With great optimism, Digital V4 declares complete readiness to pick up the gauntlet and solve all of those challenges. Apart from industry experience and know-how our region's digital organisations gladly share with their individual governments and their European representatives, we also have some unique characteristics of our region at our disposal. Central Eastern Europe is a hungry market, gladly adopting new technologies. And these are in abundance, because our start-up environment supports commercialisation of innovative digital services and products. We have a great luck of being home to a vast population of ambitious, capable and determined engineers and specialists, able to make their ideas come true thanks to a constantly growing access to R&D centres and production lines. In other words, a strong position on the European arena is supported by an excellent internal climate for digitisation.

### **More than opportunities**

Although development of 5G network and enhanced digital transformation has to be recognised for the great opportunities it presents, it is also a necessity. As the European Union we have an obligation to reorganise our economy in the spirit of digitisation, if we want to remain competitive against the United States and China. Digitisation is a requirement for not falling behind the global race of the 21st century. The role of Poland and the Visegrad Group, we are about to preside for the next year, is significant in that regard. Our region still holds a great digital potential and our voice in that field is becoming dominant on the European arena. This way, we are filling up the vacuum left in the place of Great Britain and we are effectively moving into the position of leading the digital charge of the European Union.

It's worth mentioning that we will be soon celebrating the 30th anniversary of Visegrad Group's establishment. It is truly symbolic, how long of a road we have come and how great of a technological progress we have made over the past three decades. We now hold a political power and a unique digital climate, which can be used to effectively and permanently take the lead in the field of digitisation in the European Union. Steadily digitising V4 is a real strength, which now has a chance to turn its hard work on tackling challenges of the 21st century into a position of a true European leader.

*Author: Michal Kanownik, ZIPSEE*