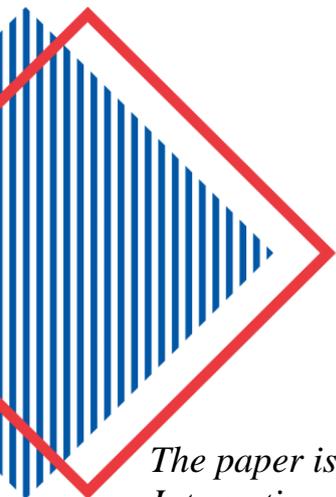


MAIN FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



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This paper offers a brief overview of the main research findings from the “Sharing Know-How in Paradiplomacy: The Visegrad Dimension” project, including a summary of the main policy recommendations. The project research was focused on the legal and institutional conditions of regional paradiplomacy in three Visegrad (V4) countries – Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. In the project we examined the national legislative and institutional frameworks for regional paradiplomacy in the three countries as well as the practices and experiences of selected regions: South Moravian Region and Liberec Region (CZ), Podkarpackie Voivodship and Lower Silesian Voivodship (PL), and finally, Trnava Self-Governing Region and Prešov Self-Governing Region (SK). The policy recommendations are set out as lessons learned from best practices and/or shortcomings in the field in the hope that they might serve as inspiration for other V4 governments and regional authorities seeking to improve both the legal and institutional conditions under which their regions engage in international cooperation as well as regional paradiplomacy practices. We assume that successful regional paradiplomacy is in the public interest of all countries and therefore the central authorities should be interested in supporting it as much as possible. Cross-border and territorial cooperation between regions is one of the basic instruments of EU cohesion policy, and we firmly believe that it plays an important role in strengthening cohesion within the V4.

Main findings

Geography matters

The basic geographical data (on area and population) show that Polish regions (16 voivodships [*województwa*] – classified as NUTS2 level) are on average about twice as large as the Czech regions (14 regions [*kraje*], including the capital city Prague – NUTS3) and about three times larger than the Slovak ones (8 regions – NUTS3 [*kraje*]). Consequently, on average Czech regions are about twice as large as Slovak ones.

Although there are no major legislative differences between the regions of the three countries regarding their administrative competences, including those relating to paradiplomacy, the size of the region is an important factor that predetermines their “political weight” in developing international cooperation. For foreign partners larger regions with greater economic potential and larger populations are more attractive. Hence, the Polish regions have stronger paradiplomatic potential than the Czech and Slovak ones, and the same, applies to comparisons of the Czech and Slovak regions, although to a lesser extent. In addition, the size of the region has a significant impact on political leverage in domestic politics and positioning towards central governments. The greater the region’s economic and population potential, the stronger its capacity to influence government decision-making, and consequently, its capacity to engage in paradiplomacy.

Geographical differences, which largely determine the “political weight” of the region vis-à-vis the national central government, are one of the main factors explaining

the differences in Polish, Czech and Slovak regions’ access to the management of EU structural funds.

...and so does “European policy”

In the EU cohesion policy programming, NUTS 2 regions (Polish voivodships) are defined as “basic regions for the application of regional policies.” NUTS 3 regions (Czech and Slovak regions) are defined as “small regions for specific diagnoses.” Hence, in terms of regional development programming, the Polish voivodships represent self-sufficient territorial units insofar as the application of EU cohesion policy is concerned, which makes it easier for them to plan the use of EU structural funds, including access to managing the funds. Whereas if the Czech and Slovak regions want their regional development plans to reflect EU cohesion policy, they can only do this by coordinating with neighboring regions within the country. In other words, additional political effort is required but there is no guaranteed outcome because agreements with other regions depend on political factors that are not always predictable. As the Czech experience of the 2007–2013 programming period shows, firstly, these efforts do not always turn out well, particularly, if there is corruption and misuse of EU funds at the regional level, and secondly, the need to work with other regions requires greater political leverage and/or coordination by the central government. Unlike in Czechia, the Slovak regions have not yet attempted to enter into agreements with regional coalitions to create regional alliances corresponding to the NUTS 2 statistical units. Consequently within the 2014–2020 EU financial Perspective, 16 regional operational programs were set up in Poland to draw on EU funds (together with an additional operational “Eastern Poland” program), which were managed by Polish regions. By contrast in Czechia and Slovakia, a single integrated operational program was set up managed by government ministries. Almost half of the EU structural funds earmarked for Poland (around 40%) are managed directly by the regions, while the Czech and Slovak regions have no direct access to their management.

It is evident that the Polish regions, with direct access to the national management of regional OPs, are much more motivated to strengthen and finance their representations to the EU institutions and their presence in Brussels, compared to Czech and Slovak regions, which do not have direct access to the management of OPs at the national level. This difference in access to the management of EU funds explains the key difference in the Polish regions’ approach to European policy: they are more motivated to develop active contacts and cooperate with the EU institutions in Brussels than the Slovak and Czech regions are. All the Polish regions have a representation office in Brussels, whereas less than half of the Slovak and Czech regions do. The Czech and Slovak regions need to increase their control over EU structural funds vis-à-vis the national government. Such a move could be seen as part of “external” relations as they would be gaining control over external resources for use in regional development, but it would also be part of the domestic political relationship at the national level, not “purely” paradiplomacy in terms of a relationship with a foreign partner. As it stands the Czech and Slovak regions are

likely to achieve less in European policy than their Polish counterparts. This is one of the main elements distinguishing the regional paradiplomacies of the three countries.

Similar competences

The constitutions of Slovakia (1992), Czechia (1993) and Poland (1997), adopted after the change of political regimes at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, contain provisions for the establishment of higher territorial units in the form of self-governing regions. All three countries have implemented these constitutional provisions by adopting specific laws establishing higher territorial self-government at the regional level. These set out the administrative competences of the self-governing regions, including those relating to international cooperation. The laws on establishing the self-governing regions, together with related laws on fiscal decentralization and the transfer of administrative competencies from central government, underpinned a substantial part of the public administration reforms in all three countries. Law establishing self-governing regions were adopted in Poland in 1998, in Czechia in 2000 and in Slovakia in 2001.

There are no fundamental differences between the Czech, Polish and Slovak legislations on the administrative competences of the self-governing regions. The regional authorities are responsible for regional development and land development, including spatial planning, secondary (and higher) education, social services, environment, regional road network and public transport, health care services (hospitals), tourism, culture, sport, youth, public safety, including prevention of criminality, civil protection, fire safety and other matters devolved by the central authorities. There are also country-specific competences, e.g. in Poland the regional authorities deal with economic policy and employment as well, while in Slovakia, the regions grant licenses to pharmacies and private physicians.

The national frameworks for regional paradiplomacy in the Czech, Polish and Slovak regions are similar, in that the regions have the right to develop cooperation with foreign partners, primarily through the adoption of the European legal framework for the international cooperation of sub-national governments (Conventions of the Council of Europe and the EU legal acts on cohesion policy and territorial cooperation) via national legislation. The self-governing regions in all three countries have the right to establish and develop cooperation with foreign partners, especially with self-governing regions in other countries or with the state authorities of other countries who are responsible for regional territorial governance, including the right to become members of international regional associations. The above rights apply to cooperation with foreign partners within the scope of their administrative competences stipulated in the respective national laws.

In terms of the dynamics of the public administration reforms in the post-communist period, including the establishment of the self-governing regions and endowing them with the right to engage in international cooperation,

it can be argued that Poland has progressed faster than Czechia and Slovakia. Poland was relatively quick in adopting Madrid Convention no. 106 back in 1993, whereas Czechia and Slovakia adopted it seven years later in 2000. Poland was also faster in adopting a law on the establishment of self-governing regions, as mentioned above.

...but different structures

The Polish system of public administration differs from the Czech and Slovak systems in two important respects. The first is the existence of a central state administration at the regional level in the form of the governor's (*voivode*) office. Regional administrative authority in Poland is thus shared between the governor, appointed by the government, and the self-governing authorities. The governor is the regional representative of the central government and acts on behalf of central government institutions at the regional level. The governor and the prime minister are both responsible for checking that the activities of the self-governing regional and local authorities adhere to the law. The regional parliaments (*sejmiks*) are elected in direct regional elections and the executive head of the regional self-governance (marshal or *marszalek*) is elected by the regional parliaments. Poland's mixed system of regional governance presupposes close interaction and coordination between the *voivode*, who represents the central government in the region, and the *marshal*, who is the highest representative of the regional self-governing authority. Both are responsible for managing regional policy, within their competences, and for contributing to the development of the region and so have to cooperate and coordinate their actions. Where the cooperation between them is harmonious, it benefits the region, bringing effective communication with the central government and governmental support for regional policies. Where the relationship is less harmonious, the regional self-governing authorities inevitably face problems achieving their goals, including in paradiplomacy. There is a risk that regional policies will be less effective if the outcomes of the national and regional elections diverge and the *voivode* and *marshal* do not represent the same political parties. In such situations, achieving a harmonious relationship between the state administration and the self-government at regional level depends on informal factors that cannot be foreseen or legally guaranteed, i.e. on whether the highest state representatives and self-governing powers at regional level have the personal qualities and capacities to reach agreement and act jointly and in a coordinated manner.

The Czech and Slovak self-governing regions face no such risk because there is no state authority at the regional level with whom they have to share management and coordinate the implementation of regional policies. The regional level of state administration in both countries was abolished as a result of the public administration reforms at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s. Of course, there is a risk in Czechia and Slovakia of communication between the regions and central government being hampered if regional election results differ from national ones, i.e. the regional leaders do not represent any of the political parties making up the national government. Nevertheless,

the leaders of the Czech and Slovak regions have a freer hand to exercise their competences within their regions since there is no need for them to continually coordinate their policies with state administration bodies. This applies to international cooperation as well.

The second difference concerns the existence of an intermediary level of territorial self-governance in Poland: the counties (*powiaty*), which operate between the regions (voivodships) and the municipalities (*gminy*). The Polish experience of the municipalities may prove instructive for Czechia and Slovakia. The problem is the fragmented structure of the municipalities. Many of them are too small to be capable of providing an adequate level of public services to their inhabitants. In Poland territorial self-government has a three-level structure (region – county – municipality) with a state administration present at the regional level. By contrast the Czech and the Slovak territorial government has two levels: the self-governing regions and municipalities, with no state administration at the regional level. In both countries the state administration is organized at the central (national government) level and the lower local level (district offices); however, there is no regional level of state administration in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The political systems of the three countries have an impact both on the regions' ability to participate in the domestic legislative process and politics and to act abroad. The national parliaments in Czechia and Poland are bicameral and in a sense their upper chambers (*senates*) represent the regional chambers of parliament. Members of the Polish senate are elected in 100 constituencies and members of the Czech senate are elected in 81 constituencies. This adds an important regional dimension to the national politics in both countries. The Slovak parliament is unicameral and its 150 deputies are elected in a single constituency and a significant number of the MPs (usually between a third and a half) come from one of the eight regions – unsurprisingly, the capital city Bratislava and the Bratislava Region. The Czech regions have the right to initiate legislation in the national parliament, which is an exceptional and unique competence in Central Europe. The Polish and Slovak regions do not have this competence.

Government supervision

Conditions for regional paradiplomacy in the three countries also differ in the nature of the relations between the regions and the central government. In all three countries the legislation stipulates that the regions' international cooperation cannot conflict with the constitution, law, international agreements and the country's obligations and/or public interest (the constitutions have similar and almost identical provisions including laws on the establishment of self-governing regions). However, the laws relating to state control of regional paradiplomacy and day-to-day political practices in intergovernmental relations differ in all three countries.

Poland's legislation enables the highest level of direct state intervention in the regions' international cooperation. The regions' paradiplomacy planning documents adopted by regional self-governing authorities, including

agreements with foreign partners, have to be approved by the foreign minister. The foreign ministry's approval is required at the final stage, before the signing of the agreement. The regions can initiate, negotiate and draft agreements on their own but the MFA has to approve any agreements. This is why the Polish regions are motivated to consult the MFA on an ongoing basis when concluding agreements with foreign partners, and not just before the signing, in order to avoid any potential misunderstandings with the central authorities.

Neither the Czech nor the Slovak legislation provides for the state authorities to have such direct supervisory and interventional competences over the regions' paradiplomatic activities. In neither country do the regions have a duty (formal or informal) to consult central authorities on their international agreements or the drafting, and nor is there a mechanism whereby central government can supervise the regions' paradiplomacy. Obligations can only be imposed on regions by law or through an international agreement, and paradiplomatic activities can only be terminated by a court ruling. The Czech legislation is the most liberal as it allows state intervention in regional paradiplomacy, but does not specify how it should be implemented. The Slovak legislation excludes state interference in regional paradiplomacy as obligations can only be imposed on regions by law or an international agreement that Slovakia has entered into. However, there is a control mechanism that can be used by the district state offices. Regions have to register their international agreements, and if the district state office finds the agreement violates the law, it can initiate court proceedings. Consequently the region may have to terminate its international cooperation, annul the international agreement with the foreign partner or cancel its membership of the international association.

...and support (not necessarily provided)

Government efforts to coordinate international cooperation and regional paradiplomacy through institutionalized dialogue is greatest in Poland. Its formal forum for dialogue between the MFA, including other ministries, and regional governments is the Working Group for International Affairs, which operates under the Joint Government and Territorial Self-Government Commission. The group consists of 14 members, seven of whom represent the government and seven different levels of self-government. The group is divided into two subsections: the first deals with Poland's EU affairs, and the second with foreign affairs. Nevertheless, that does not mean that cooperation between the government and regions in Poland can be described as systematic and regular, and that the government strives to support and develop regional paradiplomacy. It would be more accurate to describe the government's efforts as an attempt to coordinate regional paradiplomacy with Polish foreign policy.

In Czechia and Slovakia, cooperation and dialogue between the regions and the government on foreign affairs is sporadic and ad hoc, indicative of the minimal effort by government to coordinate the regions' foreign activities with state foreign policy. In Czechia the relationship between the regions and the central state authorities

regarding foreign activities has gradually become more structured but is still quite loose. After the establishment of the regions in 2000, the MFA chose not to strive for greater coordination or to create more formalized communication platforms. Only in the run up to the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2009 did the regions and the MFA conduct more comprehensive cooperation. In May 2007 the MFA signed a Memorandum on Cooperation in European Affairs with the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic, emphasizing the MFA's willingness to share information on European affairs with the regions. A memorandum between the MFA and the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic on cooperation in economic diplomacy was signed in 2017 but has not been implemented.

Cooperation between the Slovak regions and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of SR (MFEA), is similar to that in Czechia, but so far the MFEA has not even attempted to establish systematic cooperation and/or dialogue with the regions on paradiplomacy. Unlike the Polish and Czech regions, the Slovak regions have yet to implement a single project under the SlovakAid program, which is managed by the MFEA; although they do have partners in countries that are eligible beneficiaries of Slovak Official and Development Assistance. Despite the Act on the promotion of tourism obliging the Slovak regions to contribute to promoting the good brand of Slovakia abroad, no regional representatives were invited to the Working Group on the unified promotion of Slovakia abroad, established by the MFEA back in 2013. One can therefore conclude that cooperation between the MFEA and self-governing regions is sporadic and non-systemic.

However, uniquely, Slovakia has secondary legislation (to the constitution and the Act on establishing the self-governing regions) setting out the regions' competencies in paradiplomacy, especially participation in cross-border cooperation (law on regional development) and activities aimed at tourism promotion (law on the promotion of tourism). Both laws are key to the regions' paradiplomatic activities as they set out the rules on cooperation with the government, including on the ministries' obligation to provide financial support for their paradiplomatic activities. The Slovak regions can establish regional development agencies, with financial support from the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (MIRDI). In addition, Slovak regions can apply to the MIRDI for funding to cover the cost of co-financing cross-border projects with foreign partners. They can also establish regional tourism organizations that are co-funded by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. The secondary legislation mentioned above, obliging some government ministries to support regional paradiplomacy in selected segments, specifically cross-border cooperation and tourism support, including the provision of financial support, is exceptional and hence not found in Poland and Czechia.

A common example of regular cooperation between governments and regions in paradiplomacy is the regular involvement of regions in the work of the bilateral intergovernmental commission for cross-border cooperation. The commission was established on the basis

of bilateral agreements between neighboring countries, including Poland, Czechia and Slovakia. In Poland and Slovakia, national delegations to the commissions are led by the interior ministry and in Czechia by the foreign ministry.

Regional practices and capacities

The analysis of the experiences of the regions examined in the three countries shows that the main drivers of international cooperation are the heads of the regional executives (in Poland the *marshal* of the voivodship, in Czech regions the *hajtman* and in the Slovak regions the president [*predseda*]). In terms of political weight and leadership in regional governance, including paradiplomacy, the presidents of the Slovak regions have the greatest political leverage as they, unlike their Polish and Czech counterparts, are directly elected in regional elections together with the members of the regional parliaments. The leaders of the Polish and Czech regions share their executive competences with the councils of the regions (the regional governments), and their party affiliation, like that of the heads of the regional executives, reflects the composition of the elected regional parliaments. The presidents of the Slovak regions, who gain their political legitimacy directly from the citizens, have a freer hand in exercising their executive powers, although, naturally, their ability to push for legislative change also depends on the composition of the regional parliament. The personal characteristics of the leaders of the regions, their political agenda and the personal energy they devote to their responsibilities, communication, diplomatic skills and their political relations with the central government are key factors influencing the region's paradiplomacy.

The executive leaders also play a central role in the management of paradiplomacy at the regional administration level. In all the cases examined, we found the same institutional practice: the regional administration departments responsible for international cooperation and regional relations do not have superiority over the regional administration departments responsible for the region's sectoral policies. Therefore, if they succeed in establishing cooperation with a foreign partner in a sectoral policy area, e.g. education, the role of the education department in this international cooperation has to be coordinated from higher up, usually by the executive leader (or their office) or, in the case of the Polish and Czech regions, by departments set up by the councils of the region. The fact that the international cooperation departments have equal status to the other sectoral departments in the regional administration (the regional administrations in all three countries have a vertical organizational structure) complicates the regions' efforts in international cooperation, making them less flexible in their contacts with foreign partners and strengthening the centralist decision-making within the regional administrations. Another related problem is the insufficient foreign language skills of the staff of the sectoral departments. Although international cooperation departments have staff with good foreign language skills, the implementation of international projects is often hampered by the insufficient foreign language skills of the staff in the sectoral departments.

With the exception of the Polish regions and South Moravian Region in Czechia, there is no planning on international cooperation development. The Polish regions are obliged by law to draw up regional development plans and planning documents for international cooperation development, and the foreign minister has to approve the planning documents. By contrast the Czech and Slovak regions are obliged by law to have regional development plans, but not international cooperation development plans. An exception and a good example is South Moravian Region, which chose to plan international cooperation despite not being legally obliged to do so. The absence of planning affect the results of international cooperation. In regions that do not have plans on paradiplomatic activities, there is a much greater lack of systematic international cooperation, including a higher number of established formal partnerships that have no real substance, do not bring benefits and exist only on paper.

A common problem identified in all the regions examined is the absence of any regular evaluation of the results of international cooperation. In most cases the evaluation is limited to project implementation, is descriptive and is not linked to the regional development plan indicators. In general the challenge is for all the regions examined to link their regional development plans with their international cooperation, even the Polish regions, which are required by law to produce both types of plan. In practice there is no strategic approach towards international cooperation development and to establishing foreign partnerships with clearly defined measurable objectives linked to the fulfillment of regional development goals. But these could drive and guide the efforts of the international cooperation departments in the regional administrations. In other words, the regions have yet to grasp that international cooperation is a regional development tool. Consequently there is a relatively high number of ad hoc acts of ceremonial paradiplomacy, which raises questions about whether this is a good use of the invested resources and the human potential of the regional administrations.

Another challenge is the extent to which regional actors engage in networking on the sectoral policies within which the paradiplomacy is embedded. In most cases domestic regional actors do little or no networking. As a result regional paradiplomacy is mainly carried out “from above,” based on regional authorities’ decisions, and not “from below” as a service provided by the regional administrations to local organizations and stakeholders at the regional level. The low level of regional networking by domestic actors is partly down to the lack of staff in the regional administrations’ international cooperation departments and the subsequent limited capacity to perform the internal functions of paradiplomacy, i.e. communicating with and involving actors in and outside the home region.

The most important “external” source of investment for the regions is the EU Structural and Investment Funds, and this is determined by the geographical nature of the region, relations with the national central government and, in case of Czechia and Slovakia, their willingness and capacity to create regional coalitions. Another key source of “additional” funding is the Interreg cross-border cooperation projects. Gaining access to these two main resources is the key motivation for developing paradiplomacy in these regions and is reflected in their main efforts. They engage in cooperation with foreign partners who are not their immediate neighbors to a much lesser extent, and when they do, the cooperation does not always correspond to sectoral priorities of their regional development plans. The same applies to the regional international associations they choose to become members of. Some of these engage in relevant international activities; however, we also found regions that were not a member of an interregional association and were not making much effort to find foreign partners, even though such cooperation could help them meet their regional development goals. This is another problem stemming from the lack of sufficient paradiplomacy planning and is undoubtedly an area in which there is scope for the V4 regions to further develop paradiplomacy.

Policy recommendations

- ✚ the foreign ministries in all three countries should provide more systematic support for the regions’ paradiplomatic activities. None of the countries provided sufficient support for the regions’ international cooperation. We assume that successful paradiplomacy is in the public interest of all democratic countries and that it is therefore in the interests of the central authorities to provide as much support as possible. In addition the state has far greater capacity in the sphere of international relations, including educated and trained personnel, the institutional infrastructure (embassies in foreign countries) and public finances, whereas the regions’ resources are much more limited. Cooperation between the state authorities, and especially the foreign ministries, and the regions in paradiplomacy could produce interesting synergies and make an important contribution to fulfilling the country’s foreign policy goals.
- ✚ Government support for regional paradiplomacy should not be limited to the MFAs as the administrative competencies of the regions are sectorally structured and overlap with the work of other ministries, including in international cooperation. Poland and Czechia may find inspiration in the Slovak legislation on regional development (cross-border cooperation) and tourism promotion that set out the rules for cooperation between regions and ministries in Slovakia, including government financial support for regional development and the regions’ tourist promotion agencies. It is a good example of how governments support for regions can be tied directly to

paradiplomacy. However, similar support should be provided to other areas of regional international cooperation as well.

- ✚ In turn Czechia and Slovakia could draw inspiration from Poland's public administration reforms, especially the intermediate level of local self-government represented by the counties (*powiaty*). In both Czechia and Slovakia the large number of small municipalities that do not have the capacity to provide their inhabitants with adequate public services is a persistent problem. Grouping municipalities together in counties could help them deliver better services and become more reliable partners for the self-governing regions' international cooperation.
- ✚ Poland could serve as inspiration for Czechia and Slovakia in terms of its management of the EU funded regional operational programs. It is impossible to change the geography of the regions, but the Czech and Slovak regions could create regional coalitions that meet the NUTS2 criteria. Despite the Czech attempt to do this for the 2007–2013 financial perspective ending badly because of corruption among the regional elites, the government's decision to centralize regional operational programs into a single integrated government-managed one is the only means of streamlining the use of EU funds for regional development. Another option would be for Czechia and Slovakia to keep one integrated regional program, under the administration of the regions and, of course, government supervision. If they do not opt for one of these solutions, which require the goodwill of the government and the regions, Czechia and Slovakia will remain at the tail end of the EU member state ranking of the absorption of EU funds.
- ✚ Regions should follow the EU agenda closely and adapt dynamically. The European Green Deal and digital agendas will probably dominate the EU pathway for decades to come. Adaptation represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the regions. New legislation and ideas emerge very rapidly in the EU institutions and dynamic adaptation could bring tangible positive results. Direct communication between the regions and the EU institutions is greatly needed, especially now, with the launch of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. However, it is very difficult for a region to attract the attention of decision makers in Brussels on its own. It is worth several regions considering opening a shared Brussels office together, like for example East Poland House, as that could help and additionally cut operating costs.
- ✚ Regions in V4 countries should consider creating regional coalitions and cooperating closely with one another in Brussels. There is not much sense in creating a coalition of V4 regions that includes all or most of the V4 regions, it would be more natural and more effective to create flexible sectoral coalitions that reflect the sectoral priorities of the V4 regions, which would enable them to better communicate their interests vis-à-vis the EU institutions in the context of EU cohesion policy, including the use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The V4 regions make very little use of the opportunity to create sector-specific EGTCs, but this would allow them to obtain additional resources from EU funds to meet their sectoral priorities in regional development.
- ✚ Regions should introduce systematic planning of international cooperation development, clearly linking it to the regional development plans. The implementation of international cooperation plans and paradiplomatic activities should be regularly evaluated using measurable indicators of how much they contribute to the fulfillment of regional development objectives. The regional administrations should use strategic paradiplomacy plans to audit their international cooperation to date, revitalize existing cooperation and set goals for future development that correspond to their regional development priorities. They should avoid ceremonial paradiplomacy and focus on developing functional partnerships.
- ✚ International cooperation departments (ICDs) should have a coordinating (superior) position in the organizational structure of the regional administrations over other sectoral departments, so they can more effectively negotiate cooperation with foreign partners. The foreign language skills of sectoral department staff also require improving so they are able to implement international cooperation projects independently, under the supervision of the ICD, rather than requiring constant participation in the project implementation as that ties up the ICD's capacity that should be used to fulfil its main tasks. The optimal scenario for the functioning of the ICD would be to make it a contact point that mediates the contact with sectoral departments, including other regional stakeholders.
- ✚ The regional administrations' ICDs should also perform in-country tasks, i.e. networking with regional actors and communicating the regions' sectoral development priorities, raising awareness of paradiplomatic plans, opportunities for cooperation with foreign partners and ensuring that they are involved in international cooperation projects. Networking by domestic actors at the regional level could help the ICD and regional administration to streamline planning on paradiplomatic activities. Paradiplomacy should not only be implemented "from above" at the behest of the regional administration and its leaders, but should be seen as a service to regional actors and stakeholders inspired "from below." In order to convince local and regional stakeholders of the profitability of foreign cooperation, it is important to engage large groups in exchange and mobility programs especially between schools, cultural societies and NGOs.