



Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group Countries

Prague, 8th June 2016

We, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries, meeting in Prague on 8 June 2016 on the occasion of the summit to mark the end of the one-year Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group hereby adopt the following Joint Statement:

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Visegrad Group. The situation in Europe has changed significantly since that time. While the 1990s were marked by the spirit of optimism and vision of the emerging European house as the common goal, nowadays we witness signs of erosion of mutual trust and emergence of new dividing lines. The reasons for this are manifold but may be found especially in the economic developments as well as in the return of geopolitics to Europe with the emergence of intense war conflicts in the closest vicinity of the European Union.

This is why the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group with its slogan “V4 Trust” tried to address and overcome these trends by the selection and focus of its priorities as well as by the strengthening of the V4+ format. In addition, a very important role in the process of deepening mutual understanding in the region was traditionally played by the International Visegrad Fund.

The slogan “V4 Trust” implies also trust in the European Union and in the European integration project. It echoes the shared conviction by the Visegrad Group countries that a strong and effective European Union hand in hand with a robust Transatlantic bond is the only guarantee for a common and secure future of the region. The sound economic policy, growth and convergence of the Visegrad Group countries achieved within these institutional frameworks are illustrative in this respect and the Visegrad Group countries stand ready to share their experience.

To provide room for strategic reflection on the common European anchoring of the Visegrad Group countries, the Czech Presidency contributed to the related ongoing debates on the future of Europe in general and of the European Union by the “Prague European Summit” which is the first element of a series of conferences to be organized by the Visegrad Group countries between 2016 and 2018 entitled ‘The V4 Perspective on the Future of Europe’.

Thanks to common efforts of the Visegrad Group as well as its partners inside and outside of the European Union, the Czech Visegrad Presidency constantly provided inputs to identifying common European responses to the challenges that Europe and the European Union were confronted with. In this spirit of European commitment, the Visegrad Group countries continued in their material, financial, expert and other forms of support both to the Member States as well as to countries outside the Union.

The European integration process with all privileges, freedoms and benefits is an ongoing and long-term process where nothing can be taken for granted. The main prerequisite for the success of the European integration process is particularly an active and constructive dialogue, willingness to understand positions taken by the partners and effective endeavour to overcome any potential divides which may emerge. In this sense, the Visegrad cooperation has been from the very beginning a genuinely European project with a view to playing an active role in the European integration process and in promoting democratic values. Accordingly, the Visegrad Group remains a reliable and

constructive partner for an open dialogue and day-to-day collaboration, building a common European future embedded in a strong Transatlantic relation.

With this in mind, the countries of the Visegrad Group wish the upcoming Polish Visegrad Presidency which is to be assumed as of 1 July 2016 every success and hereby adopt the Polish Presidency program. In the same spirit, the Visegrad Group countries are looking forward to the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union as of 1 July 2016. The countries of the Visegrad Group express Slovakia their firm support in this challenging task bearing in mind that Slovakia will focus on its institutional role of an honest broker to serve the interest of all European Union Member States.

Migration

With migration remaining the key challenge of the day, the Visegrad Group countries are convinced that it is essential to seek common and coherent European solutions which focus on tackling the root causes of the current migratory pressure, including ending of war in Syria and Iraq and stabilising of situation in Libya.

Today trust in the European Union and in its institutions depends to a large degree on the ability of the European Union to tackle the migration challenge in an effective manner. Effective measures and solutions in this complex area must be based on consensus among Member States and on feasibility. The Visegrad Group countries therefore reiterate their continued support for a thorough protection of the European Union external borders, proper border management, fully functioning hotspots, effective return policy, treating the root causes of migration right at their source, full implementation of the EU – Turkey deal and emphasise their openness to discuss and agree on proposals promoting these objectives. In the spirit of solidarity, the countries of the Visegrad Group stand ready to provide further support to the front-line Member States to the countries of the Balkan migration route and to the Eastern Partnership countries.

An effective functioning of the Dublin system is a must. Therefore, an incremental and result-oriented reform of the Dublin rules remains a priority of the Visegrad Group countries starting with a full application of the existing rules and respecting the political guidelines of the European Council. However, the Visegrad Group countries continue to hold that the proposals based on a mandatory system of redistribution of asylum seekers could act as a pull factor and will further divide Member States (and their respective societies), but also they simply do not work in reality. By the same token, the “corrective allocation mechanism” and the penalty system proposed by the European Commission in its May package on the reform of the Dublin system fail to enjoy unanimous support by the Member States as well as to address the weaknesses of the current asylum policy as they redirect attention from the very issue of the EU asylum policy reform.

The Visegrad Group countries therefore invite the Commission and the Member States to pursue a more balanced and more realist take on Dublin reform. They remain convinced that strengthening of the Dublin system should follow an evidence-based step-by-step approach focused on practical improvements rather than on attempts for revolutionary systemic changes.

Specific measures and legislative proposals to address the related challenges should reflect an overall political objective and guidelines determined by the European Council. The countries of the Visegrad Group believe that the objective of the EU policy should be to ensure the reduction of the mixed migratory pressure on Europe by identifying genuine asylum seekers and through an integrated set

of CFSP/CSDP/Development policy tools including the consideration of establishing of hotspots outside the territory of the EU and the protection of external borders.

Defence

The Visegrad Group countries appreciate the progress achieved in defence cooperation, particularly in the areas of V4 EU Battle Group certification and stand-by, V4 permanent modular force modalities, multinational (air) training, information sharing and coordination in defence planning, and “V4 Plus” cooperation formats.

The Visegrad Group countries consider the upcoming NATO Summit hosted by Poland to be an important milestone in the process of the long term adaptation of the Alliance. The Summit should adopt decisions reinforcing Alliance’s deterrence and defence posture, capabilities and structure - inter alia through forward presence of NATO forces on the territories of members from Central and Eastern Europe - while promoting the unity of the NATO and the comprehensive approach to the Transatlantic security to be able to respond to all challenges and threats emanating from different directions. In this context, we reiterate the importance of unity and solidarity and indivisibility of security of all member states of the Alliance. Also, the Visegrad Group countries expect the NATO Summit to enhance partnership cooperation and to confirm NATO’s open door policy.

While reiterating the Wales Summit commitments, the countries of the Visegrad Group encourage steps to defence modernisation and increasing interoperability of defence capabilities of the NATO member states.

The Visegrad Group countries support an effective and adequate reinforcement of the Baltic States and are ready to contribute to this effort. Specifically, we endorse the plan for the V4 rotational exercise activity in the Baltic States in 2017 in support of NATO’s assurance measures. Concerning our engagement further afield, the Visegrad countries remain active contributors to international efforts in tackling the diverse challenges in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa and committed to maintaining the security in the Western Balkans.

The Visegrad Group countries will work to achieve an enhanced and more productive cooperation between NATO and EU, progressing towards a strategic relationship, in particular in areas such as countering hybrid threats or cyber defence. We expect that the EU Global Strategy will be presented at the June European Council and will work closely with the upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union and HR/VP Federica Mogherini on the follow up tasks.

In this context, we support a stronger and more flexible Common Security and Defence Policy underpinned with adequate capabilities able of rapid and meaningful reaction, and reiterate the importance of a strong and geographically balanced European defence industry.

United Kingdom Referendum

While recognizing that it is only up to the British people to make their decision, the Visegrad Group countries feel it desirable to express their shared strong and sincere interest in the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union. There are many daunting challenges ahead of us and the Visegrad Group countries believe that coping with them will be easier with the United Kingdom remaining the Member of the European Union.

Ukraine

The Visegrad Group countries welcome and fully support the recent recommendation by the Commission that Ukraine should be granted a visa-free regime after once having successfully met all the benchmarks under the Visa Liberalization Action Plan. In this respect, the countries of the Visegrad Group support swift adoption of the respective legislative proposal.

According to the provisions of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit Declaration the Visegrad Group countries encourage Ukraine to carry on with the reform process under the Association Agenda and reiterate their readiness to support Ukraine on the reform path. We are aware that reform efforts are hampered by the unresolved conflict in the east of the country, and that is why we consider the peaceful settlement respecting Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, through the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement, crucial for creating an environment that would enable Ukraine to focus fully on its modernization and reform agenda.

The countries of the Visegrad Group will stand firmly on the position of supporting of Ukraine's resilience through bilateral and multilateral initiatives, also taken in the format of NATO-Ukraine cooperation.

At the same time, the Visegrad Group countries reiterate the importance of maintaining the gas transit route via Ukraine to Central Europe.

Multiannual Financial Framework

The Countries of the Visegrád Group are looking forward to the debate on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework after 2020 and stand ready to take an active part in this exercise. In order to ensure predictability and stability of the EU budget the mid-term review should focus primarily on stock-taking of the functioning of the current EU Multiannual Financial Framework so far. The Countries of the Visegrad Group are convinced that both the mid-term review and the debate on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework should follow the notions of transparency, simplicity, cohesiveness, performance and European added value. Special emphasis should be put on strengthening investment, competitiveness and employment with the ultimate objective of ensuring convergence across the European Union by maintaining the proper financing of traditional policies set out by the Treaties.

Tackling the Situation on Agricultural Commodity Markets

The Countries of the Visegrad Group are deeply concerned by the situation on agricultural commodity markets, especially regarding dairy and pork meat. The current negative trend creates uneven impacts on Member States and risks serious economic and social repercussions. The countries of the Visegrad Group therefore urge the Commission to present an effective common European solution to be further discussed at the highest level.