

**DECLARATION OF THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEES
OF PARLIAMENTS OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP**

4 - 5 December 2022, Bratislava

The Chairpersons of the Defence and Security Committees of the V4 parliaments held a meeting on 4 - 5 December 2022 in Bratislava during the Slovak presidency of the Visegrad group to discuss relevant issues in the field of defence and security. The Chairpersons discussed the priorities and perspectives of security and defence cooperation in the Visegrad group; security challenges, opportunities and risks in the context of the migration crisis on the EU's external border; and strategic communication as a tool to counter hybrid threats.

The Chairpersons reiterated the unwavering support of the V4 countries for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognised borders. They condemned Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. The V4 countries demand that Russia and its proxy forces cease all military actions, in particular the attacks against residential areas and civilian infrastructure, and that Russia withdraw all military forces, proxies and military equipment from the entire internationally recognised territory of Ukraine.

The security and defence cooperation in the Visegrad group: Priorities and perspectives

The Chairpersons confirmed that the V4 countries will continue supporting Ukraine in their justified fight for sovereignty and territorial integrity against the illegal, unprovoked and unjustified aggression by the Russian Federation.

The Chairpersons noted that the European Peace Facility proved to be a valuable and effective tool to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces and pointed the need to maintain a high level of EPF assistance for Ukraine in the coming years.

The Chairpersons welcomed the EU decision to launch the EU Assistance Military Mission for Ukraine (EUMAM), expressed full support to Poland who is hosting a mission's multinational command structure on operational level and declared active involvement of the V4 countries in Mission's activities.

The Chairpersons agreed to remain committed to continue the development of defence cooperation within the V4 in line with the Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on

Their Defence Cooperation and the regularly updated Action Plan of the Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation.

The Chairpersons reached consensus that the V4 countries would focus on the next stand-by period of the V4 EU Battlegroup (BG) in the first half of 2023, reaching the full operational capability of the V4 Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (V4 JLSG HQ), improving joint education, training and exercises with the aim of producing capable, professional and highly interoperable Armed Forces and will continue seeking possibilities for further broadening and deepening of our cooperation in the area of defence.

The Chairpersons reiterated that the V4 countries will continue to increase their defence expenditure and look for synergies in defence planning and capability development with the aim of achieving ever-increasing interoperability of Allied Armed Forces.

The Chairpersons, in this vein, expressed that they stand for a collaborative approach within the V4 in the areas of capability development, joint procurement of military equipment and cooperation of defence industries, where a clear added value can be identified.

The Chairpersons committed to further cooperate and help shape the efforts aimed at strengthening the Eastern flank of NATO within the ongoing lines of work on the implementation of the Madrid summit decisions on deterrence and defence of the Alliance.

Furthermore, in perspective of the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, the Chairpersons advocate for further steps to strengthen Allied deterrence and defence on the Eastern Flank against Russian threat, and taking into account Belarussian support for Russia's military actions.

The Chairpersons welcomed the invitation of Finland and Sweden to NATO. In this context they expressed satisfaction that the ratification procedures will soon be completed by all V4 countries. The Chairpersons stressed the importance of strengthening EU-NATO strategic partnership which is essential for European security.

The Chairpersons endorsed the efforts made within the EU to bolster European defence by improving the coherence and increasing the use of the EU's defence initiatives.

The Chairpersons confirmed the need to substantially enhance the military mobility, in particular by accelerating the implementation of military mobility infrastructure projects with appropriate EU funding assured.

The Chairpersons, in this context, appreciated the ambition to encourage further collaborative projects supporting the development and procurement of capabilities in order to address critical gaps while improving the interoperability of our Armed Forces.

The Chairpersons support the development of cooperation with important partners in the V4+ format, where a clear and united V4 message and benefit is identified. While most commonly working with partners such as the UK, France, Germany, the USA, Republic of Korea and the CEDC format, the V4 is open to cooperating with any partner who is aligned with its values.

The Chairpersons perceive the clear danger, which hybrid threats pose to our societies. In particular, disinformation in the modern era of rapid dissemination of information by digital means may cause serious damage to the level of trust established between the citizens and their governments. Since this impacts the cohesion and resilience of our societies, it is imperative that V4 countries adopt a whole-of-society approach to countering hybrid threats and devote special attention to strategic communication in order to preserve their security and overall foreign policy orientation.

Security challenges, opportunities and risks in the context of the migration crisis on the EU's external border

The Chairpersons drew attention to the increased volume of transit illegal migration from the third countries especially through the Western Balkan route, which is currently affecting the EU as well as the V4 countries the most since the migration crisis in 2015. The Chairpersons agreed that their citizens need to be reassured that both the V4 Group and the EU are able to act and swiftly implement measures that will contribute to improving the situation.

The Chairpersons reached consensus that their common goal should be to reduce illegal migration to the lowest possible level, allowing for the removal of reintroduced internal border controls and the full re-establishment of the Schengen area as soon as possible.

The Chairpersons agreed on the need to maintain EU unity in addressing the current challenges, including the admission of refugees from Ukraine, and to improve cooperation with key third countries by maintaining political outreach and operational support, using all instruments, necessary incentives and leverage (including visa, trade and development leverages) to increase returns and reduce irregular arrivals.

The Chairpersons stressed the importance of sufficient funding from the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to strengthen the asylum and migration capacities of key partners along the main migration routes, underlining the role of EU agencies and NGOs in supporting the overall efforts within the Union.

The chairpersons discussed the Commission's Action Plan for the Central Mediterranean, which aims to reduce irregular migration and strengthen solidarity between Member States, balanced with responsibility through cooperation with partner countries and international organisations, a more coordinated approach to Search and Rescue (SAR) and the strengthening of the implementation of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism and developing sustainable migration and asylum policy.

The Chairpersons drew attention to the challenging development along the Western Balkan route and therefore called upon the Commission to develop a similar action plan on this route as well.

The Chairpersons agreed that processing asylum applications outside the EU could have a strong disincentive effect on smugglers or potential irregular migrants, recognising the importance of a strong fight against smuggling.

The Chairpersons highlighted three measures that they consider to be essential: firstly, the proper protection and management of EU external borders, refusing all attempts to instrumentalise migrants, with the active involvement of Frontex; secondly, the need to step up EU support and cooperation with all partner countries and organisations to prevent departures and avoid loss of life, to address the root causes of migration and fight against smuggling networks and to significantly improve return and readmission; thirdly, on the basis of the Commission's proposals, and with a view to a common approach, building more resilient migration and asylum system and dedicating all efforts to find compromise on the reform of the EU asylum and migration policy as soon as possible.

Strategic communication as a tool to counter hybrid threats

The Chairpersons emphasised that hybrid threats including disinformation have become an important element of the security ecosystem of the 21st century and that disinformation attacks democracy itself, our values, and our way of life and these key principles must be protected. The Chairpersons noted that disinformation undermines the trust of our citizens in institutions, sabotages our democratic system.

The Chairpersons agreed on the need to strengthen media literacy and societal resilience including by giving more focus to critical thinking.

The Chairpersons expressed their commitment to be proactive and vocal in public discourse considering that remaining silent causes filling the information vacuum by disinformation narratives. Therefore, a complex response focused on strong independent media is needed; as well as clear consistent and value-based strategic communication and measured regulation and restriction.

The Chairpersons stressed the responsibility of all democratic states to continuously work on increasing their resilience to hybrid threats across all domains as well as the importance of a strong and coordinated response demonstrating NATO and EU solidarity in the event of a hybrid attack or a foreign interference campaign targeting Allies, the Union and its Member States.

The Chairpersons encouraged EU initiatives to strengthen accountability and obligations for large digital platforms to counter malicious behaviour online.

The Chairpersons underlined the need of a comprehensive approach to combating disinformation, which must also include improvement of the education process and enhancement of critical thinking in society.

The Chairpersons welcomed a rich discussion on international cooperation in the fight against hybrid threats in general and disinformation in particular and emphasised the need for a common approach and action, as the Visegrad countries cannot act in isolation, and must work together to create a resilient society. In this context the Chairpersons welcomed the progress with regard to implementation of the Strategic Compass, i.e. the Hybrid Toolbox.

The Chairpersons agreed that Ukraine was the first country to suffer the consequences of the modern hybrid war tactics on an unprecedented scale, when Russia began the occupations of Crimea. It suffered serious attacks on its critical energy infrastructure in 2015 and it continued to be the epicenter of hybrid warfare, constantly facing cyberattacks, until the attacker decided to start a full-scale conventional attack.


The Chairpersons stressed that today Russia is using the ongoing war in Ukraine to increase polarization and amplify tensions in the global arena. Its hybrid tool include undermining world food security - a significant disruption of food supply is caused by Russia's aggression on Ukraine - threatening a nuclear incident and blackmailing energy consumers.



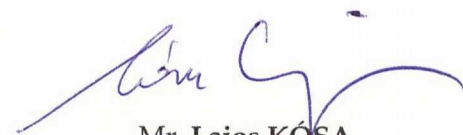
Mr. Juraj KRÚPA
Chairman of the Defence and Security
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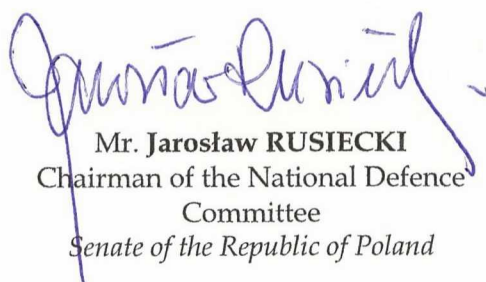
Mr. Pavel FISCHER
Chairman of the Committee on Foreign
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Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic



Mr. Martin EXNER
Deputy Chairman of the Committee on
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*Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the
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