



Recharging Europe

Hungarian Presidency 2021/22
of the **Visegrad Group**



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MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF INTERIOR OF THE VISEGRÁD GROUP AND FRANCE

Budapest, 24 February 2022

JOINT DECLARATION

Within the context of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group, the representatives of the interior ministers of the Visegrád countries held a discussion on current topics in the field of home affairs on 24 February 2022 in Budapest, in the presence of France representing the Council of the European Union.

During the meeting, representatives of the V4 focused on issues related to the strengthening of the Schengen area and the challenges of the fight against irregular migration, as well as on the possibilities for cooperation with third countries, notably in the area of return. They discussed the legislative proposals contained in the Commission's Schengen package on topical issues of border management in Europe, the effectiveness of returns in cooperation with third countries and the way forward in these areas.

Acknowledging the difficulties and challenges caused by irregular migration, also in context of unacceptable instrumentalization efforts, the V4 countries supported the current French Presidency in its effort to work gradually on the consensual topics of joint interest while assuring proper political steer.

In this context, the representatives of the V4 ministers also reiterated their strong reluctance to mandatory relocations and reiterated the need to avoid creating a pull-factor.

In the context of possible escalation of situation along the Eastern and Southern borders, they also exchanged views on their preparedness and contingency and expressed their willingness to further coordinate their policies to this end.

With regard to these main topics, the V4 countries agreed as follows.

Strengthening the Schengen area and combating irregular migration

The representatives of the Visegrád Group interior ministers agreed to remain committed to preserving the integrity of the Schengen area. The overall aim of the reform should be the restoration of a fully functioning Schengen area without internal border controls.

Their common objectives include the effective management of external borders, the fight against illegal migration and smuggling networks, the protection of human life, the prevention of new migration crises, the strengthening of asylum systems and ensuring common action against hybrid threats linked to migration.

The V4 countries agreed that the difficulties caused by mass irregular migration are a major burden not only for the frontline countries but also for the EU as a whole,

The strong position of the V4 is that the approach to tackling migration must start with prevention of irregular migration and the full protection of external borders. The secondary movements are a result of primary movements as well as insufficient safeguards, which allows the abuse of the EU asylum system. This challenge should be tackled at its roots. In our view, the effective protection of external border begins in third countries via supporting their border control and other capacities with a view to prevent mass irregular migratory flows towards Europe in accordance with the four-tier access control model of the EU.

Border management measures already in place to stem irregular migration at the external borders should be recognized, together with other alternative forms of solidarity, as an instrument of solidarity of equal standing, as they protect the integrity of the Schengen area and ensure the internal security of all EU Member States, as well as reducing secondary migration. The V4 representatives also confirmed their conviction that physical barriers should be acknowledged as an instrument of external border protection. To this end, they consider that the EU should support these measures financially.

The V4 countries supported an enhanced role for the Council on Schengen-related issues via the Schengen Council proposed by the French Presidency and expressed their commitment to the full implementation of the European integrated border management. At the same time, they underlined the need for further coordination at the EU level in the ongoing legislative negotiations in the current context, in particular on border management issues, in the face of continued migratory pressures, hybrid threats, security risks and future challenges.

Return – cooperation with third countries

The V4 countries stress that all necessary steps must be taken to speed up the return of persons residing in the EU illegally.

The representatives agreed that the establishment of a truly operational and swift return system is a prerequisite for an effective and sustainable migration policy. In this regard, the concept of safe countries of origin and safe third countries should be increasingly applied.

Cooperation with third countries in area of return was debated agreeing on the need of comprehensive and condition-based relations with third countries in different areas such as visa, development and trade policy. In this context, the representatives expressed their great expectation from the implementation of Art. 25a of the Visa Code and called for further actions to be taken under the MOCADDEM framework.

The V4 countries believe that close cooperation between the interested parties should be ensured. Also in the area of return, all possible means should be used to support third countries and to make better use of existing structures. The Return Coordinator proposed by the European Commission should not overlap with existing efforts and bring a clear added value, notably when it comes to the external dimension of returns. In the same vein, they consider it appropriate to review the mandate of Frontex in order to allow returns directly from third countries.

The representatives expressed their commitment to continue to work together and to coordinate their respective policies in their common interests, in order to ensure the security of their countries and of the EU, to protect European values and to build a stronger Europe that respects fundamental rights, different views and different achievements. Based on the above, we clearly see the possibility to move forward on a genuine reform of the EU border, migration and asylum policy and are ready to support the current and upcoming Presidencies in this endeavour.