



Stronger Together

V4 Joint Statement

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries met in Budapest on the 21st of June, 2018 to address the key challenges Europe is facing and to discuss how to best contribute to a stronger, more secure and competitive EU, less than one year before the European elections.

Europe is our common future

Approaching the 30th anniversary of freedom from the communist regimes in 1989 which paved the way towards an effective political and economic transformation and the EU accession in 2004, the V4 countries consider the reunification of Europe to be a remarkable success not only for the V4 countries but as a precondition for Europe to strengthen its position politically and economically in the world. Making the EU stronger through constructive and open dialogue and effective cooperation continues to be our main objective.

In this effort, we must, first of all, build on the major achievements of the previous decades and fully use their potential, in particular the integrity of the Single Market, the respect of the four freedoms and the policies which help us achieve our common objectives and ensure security and welfare of our countries and citizens. The EU should do more in areas of clear added value and benefits for citizens, while refraining from action in areas where Member States are more effective, fully in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

The integrity of the Treaties, including values and procedures, should be safeguarded and no circumvention of the Treaty provisions through lower level legal acts can be allowed.

However, the legal and institutional framework of the European Union needs to be examined continuously, to make sure it fits the new realities. The democratic debate needs to be continued and possibilities should be left open. Unless a decision is taken in a legally solid and democratically acceptable manner, the existing Treaties must be applied in full, while preserving the institutional balance. The democratic legitimacy of the European decision-making process should be strengthened e.g. through an increased role of national parliaments.

European values link us together. Mutual trust and respect, the equality of Member States and non-discrimination must remain our guiding principles.

Working for a stronger European economy

The V4 countries recognize that the openness of markets, both within the European Union and globally, remain key factors in stimulating Europe's competitiveness. The V4 countries will continue their active work within the EU to preserve the four fundamental freedoms and the achievements already reached in building the Internal Market and to avoid the creation of any further barriers and continue work on dismantling existing barriers including completion of missing core infrastructure. We support further development of the Internal Market with a special focus given to enhancing the

services sector, keeping also in mind the challenges the industry has to face. European policies, such as Cohesion Policy, research and development, and innovation should play important roles in fostering competitiveness in parallel with maintaining the integrity of the Single Market. The V4 countries are aware of the challenges and opportunities of the digital transformation and recognize the importance and positive impacts on the whole economy of completing the Digital Single Market with a special focus on meaningful benefits for our citizens and businesses.

Establishing a new Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027

We are engaged in creating a Multiannual Financial Framework.

The Visegrad countries are first and foremost interested in the quality of the outcome of the negotiations, rather than their speed. We call for an effective and balanced approach which avoids uneven impacts on any Member State. The objective is to agree on an EU budget, which fully respects the principle of spending taxpayers' money in an effective and smart manner and enables financing of policies which support Member States' objectives more efficiently at the Union level. We will pursue these goals during the upcoming negotiations.

The V4 countries follow the objective of ensuring appropriate financing for policies providing strong European added value like Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy. Cohesion Policy is the most important investment policy; it creates market opportunities and ensures a level playing field enabling all EU citizens to benefit from the internal market of the EU. Common Agricultural Policy forms part of the European model by strengthening food security, and as a safeguard for the European rural lifestyle.

Cohesion Policy has proved to be very efficient in reducing disparities among the regions. This process is not finished yet and should continue. EU support could accelerate the rate of overall convergence of regions that are still at a lower level of development expressed in terms of per capita GDP. Cohesion Policy's mission is to ensure true convergence for these regions towards the average level of development in the EU, which is an important objective that should not be jeopardized. The new multiannual budget must ensure that none of the less developed regions faces a disproportionate decrease in funding as compared to the more prosperous ones. That should be ensured through appropriate rules for capping and a fair safety net.

Appropriate resources should therefore be allocated to properly finance new challenges, while at the same time keeping sufficient allocation for traditional policies. The V4 countries support a proper reflection of these challenges and priorities in the new MFF. Europe must be able to address the challenges of the changing technologies and different factors of competitiveness in the age of globalization and digitalization, as well as security and defense. In this context the V4 countries support a strong role of the EU in its neighborhood with a special emphasis on the external dimension of migration. An appropriate level of funding should be ensured to support the external action instruments in order to enable the EU to perform its role on the global scene.

Migration

The V4 countries stand ready to support the creation of a solid framework for the EU migration and asylum policy, focusing on the protection of external borders.

In line with the repeated conclusions of the European Council, the V4 countries believe that it is time to take divisive concepts off the table and focus instead on elements which unite us and are working on the ground, like designing a border protection-based system, which aims at stemming the irregular migratory pressure by common European action in the area of the external dimension and by effective, responsible and enforceable border protection.

In order to provide a comprehensive response to the recent challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans region, we need to intensify our efforts in the region to prevent a mass migratory flow – in this regard border protection and the external dimension are essential. We are committed to urgently enhancing the technical and human support to the Western Balkan countries, ensuring a timely and effective answer to the challenges.

Western Balkans

The V4 countries continue to strongly support a credible prospect of accession for the countries of the Western Balkans. Provided they are ready and able to meet the conditions of accession, the EU should make the necessary preparations within the next Multiannual Financial Framework for the accession of new members. This should go in parallel with strengthening the pre-accession partnerships aimed at developing the infrastructural links between the Western Balkans and the EU and strengthening the principles of good governance. The V4 countries support enhancing political and institutional cooperation with the partner countries by offering them membership in selected EU programs and agencies.

The V4 countries appreciate the results of Greek-Macedonian negotiations on the name issue, noting that, according to the earlier decision by NATO, it opens the way for Macedonia to start NATO accession talks and begin negotiations with the EU.

Security and defense

The V4 countries regard the building of capabilities for strengthening internal and external security to be an area where citizens rightfully expect the active role of the European Union. The V4 countries are ready to play full part in this process. We support the further enhancement of V4 security and defense policy cooperation. The V4 EU Battle Group format should be maintained and further developed with a view to its next standby in 2019.

Uncontrolled illegal migration flows can be misused by terrorists as proven by the number of terrorist attacks perpetrated in EU countries in recent years.

In the fast-changing geopolitical environment the EU needs to reaffirm its position of a global player responding actively to external crises and threats of all nature. The Visegrad countries welcome the initiatives strengthening European defense, with special regard to PESCO and the European Defense Fund. The EU should continue with deepening the defense cooperation. The European defense capabilities have to be developed, while preserving the role of NATO in providing collective defense in Europe. The European institutions and national authorities need to coordinate their steps aimed at confronting new threats such as hybrid challenges.

Democratic legitimacy

The V4 countries continue to be convinced that decisions on the future of Europe and strategic priorities of the European Council, the next European Parliament and European Commission have to be based on the expectations and wishes of our citizens. That is why the V4 countries welcome the emerging framework of democratic consultations in Member States, which can assist leaders in making appropriate decisions at the appropriate time about the future.

Brexit and future relations with the United Kingdom

The V4 countries firmly believe that the European Union and the United Kingdom must reach a fair agreement on withdrawal while also constructively working towards establishing a new relationship with the UK as a third country, particularly with regards to cooperation in safety and security as well as in free-trade and a broad economic partnership.

V4 regional cooperation

Regional cooperation established by the V4 countries within Central Europe remains important for the V4 countries themselves but grows in weight in its added value, as well for a united, secure and prosperous European Union. Building and improving physical interconnections, including in key energy networks and the transport connections between the capital cities of the V4 countries, as well as strengthening people to people contacts, is one of the main challenges. To meet these objectives, the V4 countries will cooperate to identify and secure the necessary financial resources. The Visegrad countries are determined to maintain intensive and mutually beneficial dialogue with all European partners.