

Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia

We, The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4), the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia met on 10 July 2017 in Budapest, under the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad Group 2017–18. We exchanged views on current developments affecting the prosperity, stability and security of our region, with a focus on interconnectivity including transport, energy and digital issues, the Western Balkans and the enlargement of the European Union, as well as Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership.

Underlining that effective, mutually beneficial regional cooperation is an important added value to European integration; we discussed potential further cooperation among our countries. We agreed to continue, as appropriate, political dialogue, including considering potential joint initiatives e.g. in the field of supporting stability and security in our neighbourhood.

In the field of energy, we see regional cooperation as a priority to ensure secure, affordable and sustainable energy supply, which is a precondition for economic growth and prosperity. In line with aspirations of the Energy Union, the effective use of existing infrastructure, sound development of the regional interconnectivity and realisation of possibilities for further cooperation on the commercial level will bring significant benefits in terms of the security of supply and market integration, not only for the V4 but for the whole Central European region. Our countries are determined to build on the achievements of the existing cooperation allowing for diversification of sources (e.g. LNG) as well as supply routes and keep on contributing as much as they can to the expansion of ongoing infrastructural and market development projects within our region.

As regards transport, we acknowledge the role and importance of the improvement of transport infrastructure for social and economic development. We will endeavour to intensify dialogue and cooperation in the field of transport and transport infrastructure in the interest of our citizens and to our mutual benefit. In this context strategies should be developed to fully integrate the V4 and Central Europe area into the EU and global transport structures, in order to allow our region to profit from global cooperation in the best possible way.

As for the digital dimension, we actively participate in a process of establishing a fully-fledged European Digital Single Market, which is of essential value for the future of the European society, economic growth and job creation, as well as the EU's global competitiveness. To this end the development and implementation of modern digital technologies and infrastructure, including cross-border connectivity, should be supported within the EU. It is vital to ensure an affordable access to high speed internet for citizens and entrepreneurs. We should also take action on issues including data economy, cross-border e-commerce, the development of new fields of business, data protection, cybersecurity as well as digital skills. We must also pick up on key forward-looking trends including autonomous systems, 5G and start-ups. We are convinced that our regional cooperation and coordination will also be of value to deliver these ambitious but necessary goals.

Based on our strong commitment to the stability and prosperity of our neighbourhood, we agreed to continue encouraging and supporting the Western Balkan countries on their path to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. A credible enlargement policy is especially important in light of today's growing uncertainties and security challenges affecting the region, and thus it has to remain in the focus of the EU. We stress the importance of regional cooperation and reconciliation among the Western Balkan countries, including addressing bilateral issues, but also the need of greater regional focus from the EU to counter challenges deriving also from external sources. Furthermore, we pledge to support the Western Balkan partners in their endeavours, including their determination to strengthen the rule of law, fight organized crime and corruption, prevent radicalisation, and keep under control the migratory movements. Therefore, actively supporting the enlargement process and assessing the current state of affairs with the participation of the Western Balkan countries is a key priority of Hungary's current V4 Presidency. Furthermore, we express our readiness to examine the possibility of supporting joint projects in the Western Balkan region through synergies of already existing frameworks, such as the activities of the International Visegrad Fund.

Stressing the importance of the stability in our Eastern neighbourhood, we continue to firmly support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine

within its internationally recognised borders. A democratic, politically and economically stable Ukraine, committed to its ambitious reform agenda remains a priority for our countries. In this context, we expressed strong desire for a sustainable solution to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine that can only be reached with the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements by all sides. We commend all international efforts especially within the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group as well as all responses of the OSCE and its current Austrian OSCE Chairmanship focused on steps and initiatives to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis. We reiterate our full support to the continued work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM). We highlight the importance of ensuring safe and unhindered access for monitors throughout Ukraine in order to help SMM fulfil its agreed mandate. With deep regret we note the unacceptable intimidation and restrictions of the SMM that continue to take place.

Budapest, July 10, 2017

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary