

The Visegrad Group Joint Statement on the Future of the Eastern Partnership

Due to the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) postponed the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 and the Eastern Partnership countries with the Foreign Ministers of Croatia, Germany and Sweden, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission and the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement as special guests, originally planned for April 8th, 2020. However, the Ministers of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia decided to issue this Joint statement on the Future of the Eastern Partnership.

1. Ahead of the Summit of the Eastern Partnership in June this year we acknowledge 10 years of successful Eastern Partnership policy framework based on principles and values set by the Prague Declaration (May 2009) and will seek to adopt an ambitious program to be set for the future inspired by the structured consultations. We took note of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy “Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all” providing a solid basis for summit deliberations.

2. We will ensure that the Eastern Partnership will maintain its strategic importance and high priority in the EU’s external action and welcome the commitment of the new leadership of the EU institutions to take the Eastern Partnership to the next level. We will work on reflecting this priority also by allocating adequate resources for the policy in the next MFF. The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020 must build upon the implementation of 20 Deliverables for 2020 allowing tailor made approach with Partners. Political association and economic integration of the Eastern partners with the EU remain our main goal.

3. Future policy must be credible, dynamic and attractive to our Partners, while reflecting shared values as fundamentals of the Eastern Partnership: rules-based international order and international law, democratic practices, the rule of law and independent judiciary and media, protection of human rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, good governance, sustainable development and market economy. There is also a need for a better use of conditionality and incentives and better monitoring of the reform progress. We acknowledge the process made by Partners and encourage them to continue empowering democracy and prosperity making their citizens direct beneficiaries of transformation. We reconfirm our readiness to continue in sharing our transformation experience and expertise, and to provide assistance with capacity building.

4. The Eastern Partnership should continue to be inclusive and support the European aspirations and choices of the Partners concerned and at the same time differentiate on the basis of Partners commitments and aspirations. It should allow a deeper sectoral partnership with prepared and interested Partners. Implementation of the framework agreements with partners is encouraging; in this context, we would welcome the finalisation of negotiations with Azerbaijan and Belarus. An upgrade of AA/DCFTAs with associated Partners in areas of common interest should be further explored. We stress the importance of the EU’s continued assistance in capacity building including in developing professional civil service and support the idea of creating an EaP Academy of Public Administration.

5. The current complex international environment puts a special emphasis on resilience of individual countries. The Eastern Partnership must focus on comprehensive assistance to Partners to build resilient societies. Resilience as a broad concept that includes democratic, economic and societal aspects, as well as

security, environmental and humanitarian dimensions should be transformed into practical activities supported by appropriate resources for the benefit of Partners and the regional stability of Europe's neighbourhood. Building information security and fighting disinformation require independent media, professional journalism and media literacy. Hybrid threats including cyber-attacks need to be addressed in a collaborative way through activities aimed at strengthening resilience. Ongoing COVID-19 pandemics has exposed the need of better civil disaster cooperation and of higher healthcare resilience and preparedness.

6. We support the reallocation of 140 mil. € of immediate help and other 700 mil. € prepared for the mitigation of socioeconomic impact of coronavirus crisis in the Eastern Partnership countries by the EU. As the V4, we have decided that we will launch an extraordinary „V4EastSolidarity program” for the EaP countries under the International Visegrád Fund, with a simplified procedure dedicated to the practical strengthening of the health, social, economic resilience of the groups of citizens of the EaP countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

7. We stress the indispensable value of engaged, committed and active civil society, working for the better future of their communities or countries. We commend the contribution of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to the development of the relevant policies. We support more people-to-people contacts and Youth initiatives including the creation of the network of regional youth cooperation offices.

8. Prosperity and economic progress represent another key focus of the Eastern Partnership. The EU and the Eastern partners should make bold steps to increase and improve their connectivity, transport and infrastructural bedrock for the sake of future economic success. Digital economy and digital connectivity should be part of this effort. We endorse the vision of gradual access of our partners to the EU Single Market up to the levels recognized as mutually beneficial for the partners and the EU Member States. We also recognize the importance of investments for the prosperity of the Eastern Partnership and support the idea of creating an Eastern Partnership Investment Agency.

9. The effort to address global environmental challenges including climate change should be adequately reflected in the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. These policies should be consulted with Partners in order to address their environmental needs efficiently.

10. We condemn the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, which we do not and will not recognise. We call on all parties for a swift and full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. We remain united in our firm support of Ukraine's and all partner countries unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

11. We stress the urgency of the soonest settlement of the unresolved conflicts in the territory of the Eastern Partnership countries on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, as enshrined in the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act.

12. We express our strong view that a close cooperation of the EU with the United Kingdom, the United States and other allies is beneficial especially in the field of regional stability, resilience of our Partners and their economic prosperity.

13. We declare our readiness to continue supporting and developing the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020, to contribute to an ambitious outcome of the Summit, and a successful and prosperous future of Eastern partners.