

Joint Statement
of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Germany

13th March 2020

On March 13th, 2020, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4) and Germany, at the invitation of the V4 Presidency of the Czech Republic, had an open exchange of views in an atmosphere of mutual trust and frankness.

The Ministers underlined the importance of strengthening dialogue and cooperation within this format as a significant contribution to making the European Union a more united, efficient and effective actor, both internally as well as at the international stage – a priority of both the current Czech V4 Presidency as well as of the upcoming German EU Council Presidency.

The Ministers shared the assessment that only a united, well-coordinated and self-confident EU can play an active, ambitious geopolitical role, as is also a priority of the new European Commission. To reach this goal it is of utmost importance that all Member States as well as European institutions - while taking into consideration national sensitivities and competences - actively support the work on a common ground and understanding and implement agreed policies and positions with regard to the most topical geopolitical issues:

With regard to the closest neighborhood, Ministers confirmed the need for the EU to build mutual trust, to foster understanding and thus to remain a credible partner. Hence, the EU should efficiently make use of the adopted policies and instruments provided in order to give impetus for further transition and reforms strengthening stability and prosperity, regional cooperation, democracy and the respect for the rule of law as well as the protection of human rights including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities both in the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership countries. The Ministers confirmed their commitment of working together to make upcoming EU summits with these regions successful with tangible results. They also agreed to pay particular attention to allocation of adequate resources for the both regions within the next MFF 2021-2027. Ministers called for the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, on the basis of the interim progress reports of the European Commission. Ministers also reiterated the necessity to continuously support the socio-economic, human rights and good governance agenda of cooperation in the southern neighborhood, as well as address security challenges in Libya, Syria and wider Middle East region.

With regard to key international partners, Ministers agreed that it is crucial to jointly deepen transatlantic cooperation - based on shared democratic values and mutual interests - in all aspects of EU-US partnership. Given the growing complexity of EU-China relations, a need

for a strategic and balanced relationship between both partners should be underlined at the upcoming high-level EU-China meetings. The Commission's focus on strengthening cooperation between the EU and Africa to address key challenges both partners are facing - such as the need to promote sustainable growth, peace, security and good governance - is highly welcome.

The Ministers will continue to abide by the policy of non-recognition regarding the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. Ministers reiterated that the "five guiding principles" remain the valid base for shaping EU-relations with Russia including restrictive measures and in this context welcomed the initiative of the EU High Representative to initiate a stock-taking exercise on their implementation.

Ministers voiced their strong concern with the decision of the Russian government to list the European Endowment for Democracy as an „undesirable organisation“. They called upon the Russian authorities to repeal this decision.

The Ministers are united in their firm support of Ukraine's and all partner countries unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within their internationally recognised borders.

With regard to a changing global environment, uncertainty and large-scale challenges that the world is facing the ministers highlighted the importance of strengthening responsible EU global leadership with a focus on reinforcing multilateralism and a rules-based international order. In this sense, the Ministers also expressed their full support to efforts to combatting climate change and on updating and reforming the World Trade Organization and called for a positive outcome at the 12th WTO Ministerial conference in Nur-Sultan.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Germany concluded by confirming their willingness to continue their coordinated dialogue and cooperation within this format as well as to consolidate this format as traditional and constructive regional working platform within the EU.