

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE VISEGRÁD GROUP COUNTRIES

BRUSSELS, 17 DECEMBER 2015

We, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád Group countries, convening in Brussels on 17 December 2015 in the margins of the European Council, adopt hereby the following Joint Statement:

The Visegrád Group countries welcome the focus of the December European Council on key challenges of the day. Political guidance for further steps of the European Union is needed, especially as regards migration, fight against terrorism, the question of the UK reform agenda, as well as the Energy Union.

Migration remains in the centre of attention. The Visegrád Group countries welcome the focus of the European Council Conclusions on addressing the root causes of the current migratory pressure with particular emphasis on an effective protection of the external border. A common resolute and united action is needed to improve, support and preserve Schengen as one of the cornerstones of the European integration project. We call on all true friends of Schengen to join this effort towards a conclusive debate on the key proposals tabled by the European Commission in this respect.

The prime objective for the European Union and Member States is to regain full control at the external borders and to ensure systematic and coordinated security checks with all relevant databases which should include also individuals enjoying the right of free movement. This goes hand in hand with making hotspots a functional system. Unfortunately, this is still not the case and the Visegrád Group countries therefore support the strong impetus provided by the European Council Conclusions in this regard. We join the voices expecting that all the envisaged hotspots in the frontline Member States be established and become fully operational without further delay. Only then can proper registration and fingerprinting of all arriving migrants be ensured. To make the system functional in terms of responding to the current challenge, hotspots should also have detention capacity. In this light, we reiterate that any other measure could only be discussed once the European Union regains control over external border, stems the inflow of irregular migrants and assesses thoroughly the measures taken so far.

The Visegrád Group countries have already made significant efforts to contribute to an effective protection of the external borders. They are committed to uphold their contribution and further continue their cooperation along the Western Balkans route and with other relevant third countries.

The Visegrád Group countries support all the measures proposed in the December European Council Conclusions to fight terrorism. We are committed to improve information and intelligence sharing; we strongly support a swift adoption and implementation of the Passenger Name Record Directive. Progress is needed also on measures aimed at combating financing terrorism and organised crime. We agree that the European Union needs a transparent framework for firearms control and expect that the respective Commission proposals will be thoroughly discussed at the expert level.

The Visegrád Group countries appreciate that discussion on the UK reform agenda will take place at the December European Council. We believe we can build on this debate and reach a comprehensive agreement by February 2016. We can support those elements of UK reform proposals with a potential to modernise the European Union, especially as concerns increasing competitiveness and a stronger role of national Parliaments. However, as the Visegrád Group countries consider the freedom of movement one of the fundamental values of the European Union, proposals regarding this area remain the most sensitive issue for us. In this respect, we will not support any solutions which would be discriminatory or limit free movement.

Implementation of the Energy Union represents a key priority for the Visegrád Group countries. The geopolitics of today shows that energy security and related topics gain importance at the top of the European Union agenda. Therefore, we welcome that the European Council Conclusions pave way for a full and thorough implementation of the Energy Union, especially in the light of the first report of the state of the Energy Union presented recently by the European Commission. The Visegrád Group countries underline that the Energy Union implementation requires swift action. We are looking forward to discuss and put in place strengthened security of supply measures scheduled for 2016.

We reiterate that coherence of the European Union energy policy with the European Union external and neighbourhood policies must be ensured. We support the completion of the European Union internal energy market and build-up of robust energy infrastructure as means of strengthening energy security. In this respect, we call on the European Commission to ensure full compliance of any new infrastructure with the existing EU legislation, including the Third energy package, and with the objectives and principles of the Energy Union, such as reduction of energy dependency and diversification of sources, suppliers and routes.