

**Joint Statement**  
**of the Ministers of the Benelux Union**  
**and the Visegrad Group**

*Brussels, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019*

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Benelux and the Visegrad Group resumed their tradition and met at the joint invitation of Luxembourg's Presidency of the Benelux Union and the Czech Republic's Presidency of the Visegrad Group.

The meeting took place symbolically in Brussels, a capital of the European Union, at the time when Europe commemorates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, a historical moment in which especially the Visegrad countries played a significant role in leading a larger region of Central and Eastern Europe in their search for freedom and democracy. This event marked also the beginning of the common endeavor to reunify Europe after more than forty years of separation, a process which still bears a number of challenges, and which remains a priority for the countries of the Benelux and the Visegrad Group.

The common meetings of the Benelux and Visegrad countries traditionally seek to address the most topical problems which the European Union is exposed to, and to improve mutual understanding through dialogue. The scope of issues discussed did not exclude themes where different opinions exist, since having an open and sincere debate is of a great importance for all participating countries, and it represents one of the biggest achievements of the EU. Ministers have in this spirit touched upon topics of migration, EU enlargement, rule of law, or energy and climate in a quest for mutual understanding and common positions.

The results of the May 2019 European election confirmed the trust of the majority of EU citizens in the European project. Nonetheless, the European Union still has to face internal challenges, while aspiring to a more prominent role on the global scene vis-à-vis the ambitions of a number of third countries with increasingly competing views on current international relations, thus putting into question part of the legacy that the EU and the wider international order have been built on.

In this spirit, ministers reconfirmed their common goal: to enhance common responsibility to build a strong, effective, competitive and secure Europe, based on the values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, as well as the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; and expressed their readiness to explore avenues for rational, sensible, and proportional solutions shared by all European citizens.

Ministers took stock of current challenges faced by society and the environment that stem from insufficient action at the global level, and acknowledged the importance of multilateralism in order to protect global trade rules, tackle climate change, as well as ensure environmental protection and sustainable development. Ministers also stressed the need to focus on the full and effective implementation of Single Market rules, including with a view to advance the digital economy and to foster innovations in this area. Ministers underlined the importance of further strengthening the European Union's role at the global level.

Ministers believe that the proposals of the new European Commission, following the EU Strategic agenda 2019 – 2024, will offer constructive and balanced solutions to these pressing issues, and smooth out differences as well as prevent new dividing lines between countries.

Ministers agreed that the EU perspective on future accession of the Western Balkan countries needs to remain credible and they are ready to engage constructively in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the accession process.

Ministers also discussed the impact of Brexit and expressed the view that the Withdrawal Agreement is the best possible outcome as regards the ongoing Brexit process. They stressed their desire to establish a close, efficient and complex partnership between the EU and the UK as soon as possible, building on the clear expectation that a level playing field in all relevant fields will need to be maintained if a comprehensive market access is sought. For this purpose, the negotiations on future relations should start immediately after the UK's withdrawal.