

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES

PRAGUE, 3 DECEMBER 2015

We, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovak Republic convene in Prague on 3 December 2015 on the occasion of the Visegrád Group Summit adopt hereby the following Joint Statement:

In response to the 13 November brutal terror attacks perpetrated in Paris, we express solidarity and deepest sympathy with the French nation. We especially regret the number of innocent victims. Our thoughts are with their families. This inhumane terrorist act represents an attack on the values which bind the European nations together. Faced with this unprecedented security threat we stand side by side with France as firm partners in the European Union and allies within NATO. We are ready to offer France all the necessary support and cooperation.

Given the nature and scope of this security challenge the European Union has to act. We underline that the upcoming December European Council must take a clear stance on fighting terrorism. The discussion should build on the action taken so far, identify further possible elements of a united and complex response of the European Union to the current security challenges and make sure this response is implemented quickly and effectively. All relevant means of countering terrorism must be mobilised. We place particular emphasis on the need to improve information and intelligence sharing within Europe, to finalise the Passenger Name Record Directive, on measures aimed at combatting financing terrorism and organised crime, as well as on a conclusive debate on a transparent EU framework for firearms control.

We stress our full support to an effective coordination of efforts to fight and destroy Daesh, both on the level of the European Union and internationally. Making tangible progress in solving the conflicts in Syria and Libya is part of this objective.

The December European Council will be an opportunity to proceed further also in addressing the migration-related challenges and their root causes. This implies allocating adequate financial resources in the European Union budget, while other essential European policies, namely growth-oriented instruments such as cohesion policy, must not be affected. Any proposals that would follow such logic will meet our resolute rejection.

We expect the Conclusions of the December European Council to mark decisive steps leading to an enhanced protection of the European Union external border. The countries of the Visegrad Group are

prepared to continue their actions towards this objective, including by providing practical assistance to the countries under significant pressure, especially to countries of the Western Balkans.

A more effective external border protection will include using the full potential of the Frontex agency, emphasis on a swift implementation of hotspots (including their detention function), more effective asylum procedures and a rigorous application of registration and fingerprinting rules. In this regard, we recall our pledge to provide a total of 300 experts for FRONTEX and EASO.

Schengen remains a key practical and symbolic achievement of European integration. We reaffirm our determination to preserve Schengen so that European citizens and businesses continue to fully enjoy its benefits. We underline the need for respecting Schengen rules and declare our openness to discuss how to best improve them. A proper functioning of Schengen and the preservation of free movement is not a divisive issue but must remain the key objective for all Member States and the European Union institutions. We therefore call on other European leaders to work together towards this objective in a constructive manner. This effort could be facilitated through an enhanced and focused dialogue among like-minded Member States. We thus agree to initiate steps to put together a group of Friends of Schengen to provide a platform for an open and productive discussion.

Any opportunistic proposals for revolutionary transformation of the current Schengen into the so-called “mini-Schengens”, in whatever possible forms and extents, are not acceptable and so would be any open or hidden attempts to limit free movement that would go beyond the legal framework and endanger the major achievements of European integration. Such proposals do not address the root causes of the current situation but only divert political attention.

We welcome the outcomes of the EU-Turkey summit of 29 November and we expect that both the European Union and Turkey start implementation of key instruments in the agreed timeframe. The role of Turkey is crucial in the endeavour to stabilize our neighbourhood and pivotal in the process of controlling the migration flows from the South. Therefore, the European Union should keep an intensive and result-oriented dialogue with Turkey on this issue.

Concerning the issue of European Union reform, we welcome the recent letter by the United Kingdom Prime Minister in which he had unveiled some of the key elements he deems essential. We agree that we remain open to discuss all four pivotal issues identified in the letter in a constructive manner. By the same token, we emphasise that the political debate to come should avoid any discrimination and limitations to free movement. We expect the December European Council to provide the necessary political agreement on orientations for our further work.

Lastly, we agree that energy and energy security are one of the top priorities for the Visegrád region as well as for the European Union as a whole. We therefore took note of the first assessment of the state of the Energy Union presented by the European Commission and of its focus on implementation

and on action to be taken in the upcoming period. Much remains to be done, not only in completing the internal energy market but also in terms of strengthening energy security which implies assessing compatibility both with the European Union law and the principles of the Energy Union, as well as the impacts of any new gas infrastructure on the European Union and on countries in our neighbourhood. In this respect we invite the December European Council to reflect on the state of the Energy Union, including energy security and diversification of sources, suppliers and routes, and to pave way for a full implementation of the Energy Union. We also await strengthening the European Union's security of supply under the future SoS Package.