

**Joint Statement
of the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad Group
on the Eastern Partnership**

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4) and Eastern Partnership Countries met under the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group on April 29, 2021 in the VTC formula. This event was also attended by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Portugal as the EU Presidency, Finland and Sweden, as well as by the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement and Secretary General of the European External Action Service.

Warsaw, April 29, 2021

The V4 Ministers reaffirmed their strong support for the Eastern Partnership as a strategic dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy and pointed to its key role for stability, security and economic prosperity in the region. They reconfirmed the values enshrined in the Prague Declaration adopted at the Summit founding the Eastern Partnership in 2009. They called on the EU institutions to keep the Eastern Partnership high on the EU's agenda, stressing that political association and economic integration of the Eastern Partners with the EU remain the main goal of the Partnership.

Ahead of the upcoming 6th EaP Summit in autumn 2021, the V4 Ministers emphasized that the Eastern Partnership should gain new energy and fresh initiatives. The Summit should deliver an ambitious EaP agenda that promotes common values, including democracy, human rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and rule of law, as well as protect common interests of the EU, its Member States and Partners. The new agenda should contribute to independent and accountable judiciary, prosecution and law enforcement as well as free media, building strong democratic states and institutions, strengthening societies' resilience to external and domestic challenges, including security threats. They agreed that the Summit Declaration should reflect different aspirations of the Partner Countries and offer a European perspective to Associated countries, in accordance with their individual choices.

The V4 Ministers welcomed the efforts of the European Commission and the European External Action Service to develop targets for the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. They expressed their determination to pursue the EaP agenda in its bilateral and multilateral dimension with full respect to the principles of co-ownership, differentiation, inclusivity and conditionality. They underlined the importance of unity of the Partnership and regional cooperation of the Partners. Ministers also reiterated their support for further strengthening of civil society and free and independent media in the EaP countries.

The V4 Ministers took note and appreciated the non-paper by Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova on the future of the Partnership aiming for their deeper engagement with the EU within the existing EaP framework. The Ministers agreed that the most advanced countries, aspiring for a deepened cooperation with the EU, should be offered further possibilities of closer integration. An upgrade of Association Agreements with Partner Countries in areas of common interest should be further explored. They stressed that the implementation of the necessary reforms remains the precondition for such integration and offered their assistance to the reform efforts.

The Ministers expressed their support for economic and sectoral integration between the EU and Partner Countries. They endorsed the vision of a gradual access of Partners to the EU Single Market up to the levels recognized as mutually beneficial. They also emphasized the significance of people to people contacts, especially between young people, and the role of civil society. Also in this field the V4 countries are committed to further supporting the EaP region, including through the International Visegrad Fund.

They pointed out to the importance of the EU's and Member States' assistance in fighting the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic including its socio-economic impacts. Ministers positively assessed the results of the extraordinary "V4 East Solidarity Program" for the EaP Countries launched last year under the International Visegrad Fund.

Following on the package provided to the 6 countries under Team Europe approach and to ensure international vaccine solidarity, the Ministers called for a successful rollout of COVID-19 support to the region, including vaccines, notably through the COVAX Facility.

The Ministers agreed that the Eastern Partnership targets beyond 2020 should adequately address global environmental challenges, including climate change and energy efficiency.

Given the growing security challenges relevant both to the EU and to the Eastern Partners, the Ministers underlined that the broad concept of security should play a more prominent role in the future agenda of the Partnership and should be transformed into concrete activities. The EU should strive towards forging comprehensive tailored security engagements with the interested Partners in order to foster security sector reforms, energy security, resilience and capacity building. Special emphasis should be put to hybrid threats, including cyber-attacks and disinformation. Intensified security cooperation with the interested EaP States should lead to more intensive cooperation with Partners also in the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy.

The V4 Ministers expressed their deep concern about the recent build up and movements of Russian armed forces along the Ukrainian border and in the illegally annexed Crimea, and urged the Russian Federation to lower tensions with Ukraine and to implement the Minsk Agreements swiftly and fully.

The Ministers stressed their firm support to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Partner Countries within their internationally recognized borders. They emphasized the urgency of settlement of unresolved conflicts in the territory of Eastern Partners with respect to human rights and on the basis of the norms and principles of the international law, as enshrined in the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act.

The Ministers condemned the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, which they do not and will not recognize. They also condemned the protracted occupation of the territories of Georgia and incidents along the administrative boundary line.

They welcomed the cessation of hostilities in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and urged both sides of the conflict to engage in a meaningful dialogue to resolve further issues, also using the OSCE's engagement

and mediation efforts, to open up opportunities of mutually beneficial economic and transport cooperation. They are of the opinion that the Western community might play a role in the post-conflict reconstruction of the affected territories.

The V4 Ministers condemned serious violations of human rights, democracy, rule of law and media freedom in Belarus in the aftermath of presidential elections, which were neither free nor fair. They also renewed the call for immediate release of political prisoners and refraining from violence and repressions. The V4 Ministers called for an inclusive intra-Belarusian dialogue, recalling the readiness of the OSCE to facilitate this process. They underlined the need to support the Belarusian civil society also through the quick adoption of the EU Comprehensive Plan of Economic Support for a Democratic Belarus initiated by the V4 states. The V4 Ministers stressed their support for sovereignty of Belarus and its democratic future.

The V4 Ministers noted with satisfaction the headway in building better framework with partner countries and their societies, namely the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements coming into force on 1 July 2020 and the entry into force of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) on 1 March 2021.

The V4 Ministers expressed their expectation that the cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan would further develop and that the negotiations on a new Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement would be concluded soon.

The V4 Ministers declared their readiness to continue development of the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 and make a contribution to an ambitious outcome of the Summit and a successful and prosperous future of the Eastern Partners.