



Recharging Europe

Hungarian Presidency 2021/22
of the **Visegrad Group**



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MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF INTERIOR OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP, AUSTRIA AND SLOVENIA

Budapest, 5 October 2021

JOINT DECLARATION

Within the context of the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group, the ministers of interior of the Visegrád countries held a discussion on current topics in the field of home affairs on 5 October 2021 in Budapest, in the presence of the Slovenian minister of interior and Austria. At the meeting, the ministers focused on the current challenges of the migration situation, including the instrumentalization of migration by the Belarus regime and the possible consequences of the evolving situation in Afghanistan. Current issues of European border management were discussed, notably illegal migration and related cross-border crime, Schengen evaluation and enlargement, the new EU Schengen Strategy, in particular the reintroduction of internal border controls and the impact of Covid-19 on EU internal and external border control.

With regard to these main topics, the ministers agreed as follows.

Addressing the current challenges of the migration situation

The ministers of interior of the Visegrád Group, Austria and Slovenia agreed that their common objectives included the effective control of the external borders, the fight against illegal migration, the protection of human life, the prevention of new migration crises, the strengthening of asylum systems and the contribution to the safety and stability along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes.

The ministers expressed their solidarity and further support for Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, which are most affected by the hybrid actions on the border taken by the Belarus regime in retaliation for the sanctions adopted by the EU and support for the

Belarusian civil society, and acknowledge their efforts to protect the EU's external borders.

The ministers of interior strongly condemn and reject practices of third countries using migratory pressure, thereby contributing to the organization of illegal border crossings to the European Union, and attempting to instrumentalize human beings for political purposes. The current situation requires continuous monitoring and coordinated measures and actions that do not create pull factors. The EU must take lessons learned from this crisis while improving common EU policy.

The ministers of interior of the V4, Austria and Slovenia agreed that the situation in Afghanistan and neighboring countries deserves special attention, bearing in mind its many dimensions, not only humanitarian and migratory dimension but also development aid, international protection, foreign policy and the overall security. They remain committed to working together on bilateral and at the EU level to avoid a recurrence of past uncontrolled large-scale illegal migratory movements and most of all to be prepared for all potential scenarios. The situation in Afghanistan must not lead to a new security threat for EU citizens. Clear and consistent communication and actions are key – targeted information campaigns should be created in order to combat the narratives used by smugglers and to prevent the exploitation of the most vulnerable population. Aid to countries in the immediate vicinity of Afghanistan needs to be stepped up, to ensure adequate protection for those in need.

Jointly addressing challenges in the field of border control

The ministers of interior of the V4, Austria, and Slovenia emphasize the need for a proactive, permanent and structured approach to effectively address the challenges in the field of external border control, with real results based on concrete steps.

The ministers agree that migrants trying to illegally cross land and sea borders, and thus endangering their lives must not be encouraged. A common challenge is to combat the spread of false information and to curb the exploitation of vulnerable people. Operational cooperation and exchange of information should be strengthened in order to prevent smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings.

The ministers of interior of the Visegrád Group, as well as Austria and Slovenia believe that close cooperation between stakeholders should be ensured and that existing structures should be implemented more effectively. To this end, the mandates of EU agencies should be used to their full extent.

The ministers emphasize their commitment to support Member States at external borders of the EU, standing at the forefront of the fight against illegal migration, and to support the Western Balkan countries – including through the Joint Coordination Platform and other initiatives – in protecting their borders as part of a comprehensive approach to migration.

Ministers aim to speed up EU efforts to deal more effectively with multifaceted deficiencies to the Schengen area via the Schengen evaluation mechanism. For the future of Europe, we must stand up for European values and take effective measures at political level, including support for introduction of enhanced technical and procedural tools to control external borders. We must step up our efforts to reach full interoperability, which is an essential element in efficient border control.

In order to enhance ownership in control of the external EU borders and strengthen its surveillance, we must work together closely in aim to re-open on the European level the discussions and prepare the effective road map that would allow to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, as well as Croatia to the Schengen Area in the nearest future.

The Western Balkan countries must be supported in their efforts to join the European Union, with special attention to strengthening capacities and cooperation in the areas of security and migration. The processes for their accession must be accelerated.

The ministers express their determination to continue working together and to coordinate their respective policies, in the common interest, to ensure the security of their countries and the EU, to protect European values and to build a stronger Europe that respects fundamental rights, differences in views and achievements.