

Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, 23 April 2008, Czech Republic

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group met in Prague on 23 April to discuss recent V4 and foreign political issues. This meeting was followed by a meeting with Sweden and Ukraine as guests, which resulted in a separate Joint Statement concerning relations with Ukraine. The Czech Foreign Minister briefly summed up preliminary results of the Czech V4 Presidency. The V4 Ministers stated that the Czech Presidency in the Council of the EU will be a good opportunity to further enhancing the Visegrad cooperation and to intensify the dialogue between the V4 member state presiding EU and the Visegrad Group on common priorities. The Visegrad countries look forward to the Czech Presidency and offer their support for its success. The Czech Republic explained that during their EU Presidency they intended to focus in issues such as Competitiveness, the Four Freedoms, Liberal Trade Policy, sustainable Energy Policy, Transatlantic Relations, Western Balkans and relations with eastern neighbours of the EU.

The Visegrad Group is ready to contribute to the ongoing discussion and effort to strengthen the ENP, which reflects the Group's joint interest in further enhancement of EU relations with the East European countries. The V4 strongly supports the concept of specific projects of cooperation and selective sector-based integration, as outlined in the Commission Communication in December 2007. The Group looks forward to the establishment of the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), which is to provide considerable investment funding to the ENP countries. The Group supports initiatives aimed at creating a multilateral component of the EU's cooperation with the Eastern neighbours, in accordance with December 2007 European Council conclusions.

The Visegrad countries consider cooperation with Ukraine on European integration as an important element, as reflected in the "Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, Sweden and Ukraine". The Visegrad Group countries will therefore support an effective course of negotiations on the enhanced EU - Ukraine agreement as well as on the agreement of creation of the Free Trade Area between the EU and Ukraine.

The Visegrad countries welcome the entry into force on 1 March 2008 of the Regulation on granting additional autonomous trade preferences to Moldova. The Visegrad countries attach great importance to further strengthening the EU-Moldova relationship and support starting a reflection on a new agreement going beyond the PCA. The Group also underlines its continuous support to the settlement of the conflict in Transnistria.

The Visegrad countries support EU's offering full partnership with Belarus in the ENP framework provided that Belarus takes concrete and convincing steps towards democratization, respect for human rights and the rule of law. In the meantime the V4 are interested in extension of people-to-people contacts between the EU and Belarus without the EU refraining from its requirements towards the Belarussian regime and its representatives. It is a firm belief of the Visegrad countries that the European Union should support the process of democratisation of Belarus also by facilitating the travel of Belarussian people into the EU. The V4 are convinced that the issue of visas for Belarussian citizens is an important part of this approach. The Group is in favour of the idea to flatly reduce the visa fees for Belarussian citizens and waiving visa fees for youth of Belarus. The V4 calls for a discussion of the EU Member States on possible procedure of this EU unilateral step. In the meantime the V4 express their commitment to the further enhancement of the local Schengen consular

cooperation mechanism in Minsk that could also contribute largely for the improvement of the present situation.

The V4 welcome the Georgia's progress achieved so far in the implementation of the ENP Action Plan and support further deepening of the EU - Georgia relations. The Group particularly calls for a start of negotiations on a deep and comprehensive FTA as well as on a visa-facilitation and re-admission agreement. The Visegrad countries also call for a more proactive stance of the EU on the breakaway regions, on the basis of Georgia's territorial integrity, reaffirming in this context the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on Georgia of 18 April 2008, and its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders in particular.

The Visegrad countries support Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations to become NATO Members and cooperation between NATO and both Ukraine and Georgia. The Visegrad countries believe that joining the Membership Action Plan (MAP) by Ukraine and Georgia would be an important step towards deepening cooperation in political, defense, security and other spheres. In this context, we welcome the NATO's commitments made at the recent summit in Bucharest. The Visegrad countries are ready to assist Ukraine and Georgia in their implementation of effective mechanisms of public information on Euro-Atlantic integration.

Complementary to political initiatives aimed at countries in the neighbourhood of the EU the V4 agree on using the means from the IVF Flexible Fund to finance special projects aiming at promoting the Visegrad cooperation and its member states' democratic values in third countries. Beside Belarus, the target countries could be Georgia and Serbia.

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