

# ESSAY

## CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE PRIORITIES PRESENTED BY THE BRATISLAVA DECLARATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The year of 1989 conveyed a major breakthrough in relations on the old continent. Simultaneously with the transformation of the political and economic development in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, there was born the phenomenon of "modern regionalism". It was seen as an attempt to overcome the existing divisions and the need to use mutual cooperation in the historical, cultural, political, economic and social similarities as well as natural geographical proximity.*

## BRATISLAVA PROCESS AS A RESPONSE TO A NEW REALITY

The year of 1989 conveyed a major breakthrough in relations on the old continent. Simultaneously with the transformation of the political and economic development in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, there was born the phenomenon of "modern regionalism". It was seen as an attempt to overcome the existing divisions and the need to use mutual cooperation in the historical, cultural, political, economic and social similarities as well as natural geographical proximity. The creation of formations was the way to stabilize the situation in this part of the world, and its basic objectives were security and development. After the fall of communism, a common denominator for the East-Central European countries' decisions was integration with the western democracies within the European Union and NATO. The collapse of the Eastern bloc and its mechanisms gave impetus to the double process of integration with the political, military and economic structures of the western world. To achieve this objective, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland decided to commence regional cooperation within the Visegrad Triangle and, after the split of Czechoslovakia, the name of the Visegrad Group entered in use, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. In the economic sphere, these countries have also started collaborating in the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement. Despite many differences, cooperation of those four partners is still being continued, although many analysts predicted the end of it after the main objectives were achieved. Today the group remains a precious form of dialogue and exchange of experiences, a forum for consultation on important European issues

In 2017 the future prospects of the European Union are somewhat uncertain due to a compilation of the conflict taking place. The ongoing crisis of migration, questions about the future of the common market after the British referendum and the EU's role in world politics characterized an uneasy last year for Europe. As if it was not enough, the situation is complicated by the fact that member countries do not want to aim for one goal. Each has its own idea for further functioning of the organization. “Never before have I seen so much fragmentation, and so little commonality in our Union”,<sup>1</sup> said Jean-Claude Juncker making it hard not to agree with him.

Nevertheless, if those 27 states seriously think about survival of the European Union as a form of integration, which does not have precedence in the history, they are aware of the necessity to establish a dialogue and find a ‘golden mean’. Thus, on 16 September 2016, the heads of states and governments of the EU members gathered informally to talk about political and practical effects of Brexit and to debate on the future of the organization without the United Kingdom. The leaders agreed on the general principles and action plan with the most important objectives for the following months. The President of the European Council, the Presidency of the Council and the Commission proposed a work program that was widely accepted by the members.

The “Bratislava roadmap” assumes some objectives in particular fields

- Restoring full control of the external borders
- Ensuring internal security and fighting terrorism
- Strengthening EU cooperation on external security and defense
- Boosting the single market and offering better opportunities for young Europeans

After the meeting, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council said: "I hope that the Bratislava Summit will lead to the renewing of trust and confidence in the European Union. This will only happen if and when people realize that we are delivering on our promises through loyal cooperation between Member States and institutions. Today I can say that there is hope."<sup>2</sup> The "Bratislava roadmap" sets out the goals ahead of the Rome meeting in March this year, when they want to conclude this process.

It must be underlined that not only did Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia participate in that summit as single states with different interests, but also they declared the Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries. They concentrate on three main issues: security, the new agreement concerning the migration crisis<sup>3</sup> (based on the principle of 'flexible solidarity')<sup>4</sup> and the common market. Thus, from the Visegrad Group's point of view, those are the priority areas over which the EU should focus when it comes to the vision of the united Europe's future. Furthermore, The Visegrad Group stresses the need for strengthened cooperation in the area of defence in the face of terrorism and international crime. The V4 calls for more efforts to implement the commitments already made in the field of security in the Schengen area and the protection of external borders. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the statement says "The biggest advantage of the EU is its scale," and "We have to work together and overcome divisions", at the same time it emphasizes the role of national parliaments.

Many experts say there is a crisis inside the V4 group due to different interests and the struggle for influence. However, those four countries of the Central Europe succeed in expressing common positions and unifying through one voice. None of them want to be on the European periphery also because of the 'Eastern Europe' stigma (which is present in the mind of the West and has a negative

connotation). In contrast to the opinion of sceptics, those states, from the historical and geopolitical point of view, share a lot. Therefore, significantly more powerful neighbours surround them resulting in a loss of sovereignty for all of them in the past. They are characterized by similarity in both internal structure and implemented outside politics. Indeed, despite many differences they want to act together in the face of the richer and larger EU members.

As a result, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia regularly lead talks to work out a common position of the region to the ongoing discussion on the reform of the European Union. On 25 March in Italy the jubilee EU summit on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome will be held. The Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni expressed his belief that the document, which was raised during this meeting, would outline the EU perspective for the next 10 years.

Bearing in mind the importance of this event, on 2 March 2017 in Warsaw the extraordinary meeting took place with an aim to agree on a joint declaration before the Rome summit. Preserving the unity of the EU, the development of the single market, a stable euro zone, the maintenance of the Schengen area, the control of external borders, strengthening of democratic control and to ensure that the EU remains a global player – these are the main challenges facing the EU, according to the statement “Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust”.

Under no circumstances do the attempts to stay in tune in front of the rest of the European Union members mean that the V4 countries reject merit of EU as a concept. They are just aware of their weakness and lack of card, which can play so strongly to independently exert influence on the most important decision-making bodies at the highest level. It cannot be forgotten that they

are, in the first place, beneficiaries of financial resources. Notwithstanding, while taking care of their own interests, they must also try to make their voice heard, even by the most influential governments. These factors do not minimize the breakthrough event in their history which was joining the framework of the EU. As proof, during the Bratislava summit, the Slovak Prime Minister said the Visegrad Group would never turn against the European Union: “We will have our original position, but we will not push it at the price of damaging the EU”.<sup>5</sup>

## CHALLENGES WAITING FOR HUNGARIANS

Within the organizational structures of the Visegrad Group, every country takes over the rotating presidency from 1 July to 30 June of the following year. In 2017 this role will belong to Hungary.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that Magyars<sup>7</sup> will be responsible for the beneficial implementation of the EU reforms in the Bratislava process. Their term of office falls on the enormously important moment in the ongoing crisis inside the European Union. It is an important time to consider the expected priorities and challenges facing the Visegrad Group within the EU under the Hungarian leadership, not forgetting “the Bratislava Roadmap” and the joint statements of the V4 members.

Above all, they shall determine the procedure of leaving the organization by the United Kingdom. As follows from the consultation of foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group, which was held in Prague in June 2016, Lubomír Zaorálek<sup>8</sup> expressed the need to find a way to create new relationships based on equivalence. At the same time he pointed out that that effort could not only come from the V4, but the British must perform work to be completed successfully. Further, the Slovak Prime Minister

Robert Fico in an interview with Reuters said that the Visegrad Group members were ready to veto any agreement on Brexit, which would limit the right of its citizens to work in the UK. The reality is Fico's stance is no different to the rest of the Union so the Visegrad Group can count on the support of the allies.

Another sensitive point within the EU is the issue of migration crisis. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia agree that preventing excessive immigration should be done by the significant strengthening of the protection of the external borders of the EU, as well as the increase in aid to refugees in the first safe country to which they reach. Moreover, in late August 2016 in Warsaw, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel heard due to the threat of terrorism and the need to ensure the safety of their own citizens, the Visegrad Group states would not adopt immigrants living in refugee camps in Greece and Italy. As an alternative, V4 members propose the formula ('flexible solidarity' which was mentioned earlier) that only countries that want to accept immigrants, welcome them. Those which, for various reasons, do not want to, help countries by guarding the external borders of the EU as well as co-financing funds which allow immigrants to stay in countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and contribute to the functioning of development funds (e.g. one created by the EU for Africa). This overall indicates that the proposals prepared by the V4 are likely to be adopted by all 27 member states.

The next important action that must be taken is innovation. One of the manifestations of this objective is Eastern and Central European Congress of Innovation and Innovators, which will take place on 28 March in Warsaw. According to the Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło "Young entrepreneurs know best how to remove obstacles to their activities, so they should keep in touch with the Government and law-making officials".<sup>9</sup> At the congress

are invited, among others, representatives of innovative companies from the V4 countries, start-ups and non-governmental organizations. It is unbelievably important to promote new ideas and creativity because the young generation is the future of the economic development. This meeting is the culmination of the Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group and somehow sets the path of conduct for Hungary. It remains only to continue the work by supporting the development of individual units.

Furthermore, the Visegrad Group attaches great importance to the protection and development of the single market. In economic terms, existence of those four states depends on maintaining the integrity and the four freedoms,<sup>10</sup> as well as completing the construction of the common market in the digital and energetic dimension. Taking this into consideration, the social well-being of European citizens remains the most important objective, but “social standards cannot be uniform and social progress should follow economic growth”.<sup>11</sup> To achieve that, the best resolution, according the Visegrad group, is to strengthen structural reforms, competitiveness, productivity and the single market in order to accelerate the convergence of the national economies. They postulate that every form of cooperation should remain open to all member states in order to absolutely avoid the disintegration of the common market, the Schengen area and the European Union itself. Dr Ryszard Żółtaniecki from Collegium Civitas<sup>12</sup> thinks Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary may push through their call for the protection and development of the single market, but it all depends on how that provision would be formulated<sup>13</sup> This is a big challenge for the Visegrad Group before the jubilee summit in Rome if the representatives do not want to go back from Italy with nothing.



Another vital point is maintenance of The Schengen Agreement and control of external borders, which is closely related to the migration crisis. The group advocated the establishment of a European border guard that has been realized in the form of the European Border and Coast Guard,<sup>14</sup> working to meet the new political realities and challenges facing the EU. It has taken important steps involving, among others, the establishment of mandatory reserves rapid response in the form of border guards and the right equipment, but also the creation of new reserves for intervention teams responsible for returns. These reserves can be mobilized to support the member states that are directly responsible for the strengthening of controls at external borders. The EU funding for the Agency will gradually grow: from 250 million euros in 2016 to 320 million euros in 2020. The number of employees of that institution will be increased from 400 people in 2016 to 1000 in 2020. Admittedly, the ongoing operations of the Guard continuously record deficits in terms of seconded staff. The EU governments must therefore endeavour to ensure that these deficiencies are properly supplemented. Thus, joint investment and commitment of the member states ensure that the Border Guard become fully operational as soon as possible and are the practical expression of their engagement to share responsibility and solidarity in the common interest. The task for the future is to provide a fully operational staff and equipment of the European Border Guard and Coast. The countries must ensure the continued availability of the necessary resources for current and future joint operations, as well as to launch the mandatory reserves for the needs of rapid border intervention. They will also have to take into account the results of assessments of the vulnerability to fix the shortcomings noted. The first results of this work have become the basis to eliminate the most important weaknesses urgently. This

means a possibility to respond on the most pressing issues related to migration in the coming months.

Then, the Visegrad countries want the EU to remain a global player - significant and respected in the world arena. Due to dynamic changes in international relations, the strengthening of transatlantic relations and close cooperation with the United Kingdom can be the key points in the long term. Over the years the European Union has gradually formed its own foreign and security policy, so in the international forum can speak with one voice and act as one. Working together, the 27 member states can exert more influence on the world than if each country acted alone. Especially this presents that the EU plays an important role in solving plenty of issues of international importance, ranging from the monitoring of Iran's nuclear program, restoring the balance in Somalia and, more broadly, in the Horn of Africa, and ending the fight against global warming. Moreover, the Union occupies a leading position in world trade and emits the second most important currency in the world - the euro. As member states speak about foreign policy issues more frequently with one voice, the importance of the EU grows. Not only does that organization work with all major partners in the globe – not excepting the emerging powers, but also the European Union seeks to ensure that the partnership is based on common interests and benefits to each party had both rights and responsibilities. To encapsulate, the survival of the values underlying the EU Treaties is the task and responsibility of all the signatories.

Last but not least, the priority of the V4 in 2017 may be to preserve the cohesion of the European Union and strengthening democratic control, but with respect for the role of national parliaments. Any form of enhanced cooperation within the EU should be open to each member state with no form of discrimination or marginalization

can be allowed. The Visegrad Group should declare the necessity of returning to the roots and do not let differences of opinions led to the negative political and economic effects. In Input to Rome Declaration 2017 the partners announce:

*“Reaching consensus is indispensable if we want to foster confidence in our activities. Regardless of the speed of integration, we all need to pull in one direction, have a common objective, vision and trust in a strong and prosperous Union”.*

What is worth mentioning, the role of national parliaments is particularly important for East-Central Europe due to their history. Polish Marshall of the Sejm Ryszard Kuchciński noticed that their importance could increase by ordering certain rules clarifying terminology. For example, the principle of cohesion and the functioning of subsidiarity resulted from the Treaty of Lisbon.<sup>15</sup> To achieve this, it is necessary to further debate and concretize the vision of strengthening the independence of states.

Taking everything into consideration, the importance of collaboration among the V4 partners has not only political, but also economic dimension. Even before the EU accession, the Visegrad Group governments have signed a free trade agreement that strengthened their economic cooperation. In fact all these countries have a lot in common. We are dealing with the post-communist, fast-growing economies, which are just building their positions. A typical feature of these states is a relatively high share of industry in GDP<sup>16</sup> and wide relationships with the European Union through a main focus with Germany. German companies are attracted to them as they are considered relatively cheap and with high-quality workforce.

In the Visegrad countries exist 64.3 million people, which is 12.7 percent of population of the whole European Union. Although in

terms of population, the V4 cannot compare with Germany. Its GDP is almost four times smaller with exports 2.5 times less. The total GDP of the Visegrad Group, calculated at current prices, is not much bigger than the Netherlands and, adjusted for purchasing power of the currency, is roughly equal to the GDP of Spain. Also, in direct investments in the V4 countries, capital from Western Europe prevails. The key question is how much the V4 states can stand up to the countries of Western Europe, whose economic importance is incomparably greater than the rest of the EU. As it was mentioned before, both the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have a high share of industry in GDP and they are trying to attract foreign investment by competing with each other in this area to determine which country will offer the best conditions. They are dependent on energy imports (mainly from Russia) and are looking for markets primarily in the Western Europe. Today it is rather unlikely to create conditions for deeper economic integration among the Visegrad countries. The most important task of the V4 economies is to diversify the structure of the commercial partners with the intention of reducing the dependence on the Western economic contractors. Any slowdown in the German economy can therefore be partially offset by economic cooperation within the Visegrad Group or other countries.

### DIFFICULT PARTNERSHIP

Visegrad cooperation has always been difficult and rarely arranged seamlessly. In 1993, weakening of regional links could have been seen which was caused, among others, by attitude the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus who was very critically approached to the concept of cooperation within the Visegrad Group. He rejected a Central European identity that not only significantly hampers cooperation in the previously accepted formula, but also above all expressively undermined the sense of a

continued functioning of such an association. The situation changed in 1998 when the Visegrad Group has again become the desired consultative forum and instrument of support in the international arena. Thanks to removing from power the Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, Slovakia could return to the path of negotiations with the EU and NATO.

The biggest challenge for the Visegrad countries was joining the European Union in 2004, which also meant fulfilling the main task, setting the V4 itself. Almost immediately there appeared doubts concerning the further existence of the Visegrad Group and its possible transformation. The members announced the declaration of highlighting need for further operation. It was stressed that the organized form of cooperation between member states was a useful tool to help fight for the interests and position of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in the structures of the European Union.

In 2016 the importance of the role of the V4 in the EU unexpectedly increased, which was the effect of the immigration crisis and Brexit. For many years the cooperation within the Group was loose, although the meetings of the leaders and ministers were held frequently. Nowadays, the Visegrad countries proclaim common declarations on key issues in the reform of the European Union, including the approach to immigrants and even Ukraine and Russia. Needless to say, the key issue that cemented the group's operations during last time was the question about forced relocation of refugees. All four member states are strongly opposed to this idea and with one voice proclaim it during debates with Brussels. Perhaps this is why the former presidential candidate from Austria, Norbert Hofer, admitted that he wanted his country, in the near future, to join the V4. In fact it is not something that,

indeed, most distinguishes the V4 states from the rest of the EU - many other countries manifest less overt resistance.

Meanwhile, the Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdrój has highlighted the rift inside the Visegrad Group. For Poland and Hungary the V4 the group could be actual counterbalance to the alliance of Berlin and Paris. They are afraid if there is no reform of the EU, other countries can follow the UK and also decide to leave its structures. Viktor Orbán stated: "We need to move as hussars. Polish-Hungarian relations are more important than politics. The saying goes that if you trust someone, you can steal horses together. The Hungarians will gladly steal horses with the Poles". Even so, the Czech Republic and Slovakia do not share the imperial plans of their partners. They do not want neither more nor less in Europe than it is today. Their approach to membership in the community is primarily a pragmatic attitude and the implementation of specific interests. They are not interested in the ideological crusade. In Prague and Bratislava the European Union looks differently than in Budapest and Warsaw. Czechs and Slovaks do not understand the ideological obstinacy of their right-wing partners. According to many experts, the power of the Visegrad Group and its leading role in the European Union is a pipe dream to come true. Too many things divide its members. Even such issues as looking at the policy towards Russia (Poland wants to maintain the sanctions while the rest of the V4 sees in the Kremlin a political partner), the future of the European Union (the Czechs are in favor of maintaining the status quo whereas Poland and Hungary want 180 degree changes) or their position within it. Therefore, the Czechs and Slovaks prefer to focus on what unites rather than divides the Visegrad states. "The V4 relatively recently joined the European Union but, thanks to the cooperation, achieved in the Community a strong position; Now their influence is

threatened by internal disputes about the future of the EU” – writes the *Financial Times*.<sup>17</sup> After the referendum, which determined the Brexit, Warsaw and Budapest grew up on the most vocal critics of the EU, jointly calling for radical changes in the EU treaties. Diplomatic sources warn that internal divisions will weaken the positive perception of the Visegrad Group. The FT reminds the strong position of the regional bloc led to subsidies for modernization of roads, railways and cities, the combination of national electricity grids and caused a weakening of the guidelines on combating climate change, which could badly affect the mines and power plants in the region.

According to the newspaper, Slovakia, which belongs to the Eurozone, is a V4 country most integrated with the EU and, as the country currently holding the EU presidency, is trying to act as the "conciliation negotiator" and mitigate its own nationalist rhetoric.

The Czech Republic is traditionally perceived as the most pro-Western V4 state who appreciates relations with Germans more than with other allies. Some observers predict the Czech Republic and Slovakia can start touting alternative alliances, e.g. with Austria, to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the hard rhetoric of their partners in the V4. Not to mention that in the Group there is also opposition to the Hungarian proposal of extending the format of Croatia.

## MEMBERS OF THE UNITED EUROPE ABOVE ALL

The nature of the external challenges encountered by the EU makes the Visegrad cooperation an effective inspiration for the concurrence of countries of the whole Eastern and Central European region, covering the area between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea. Worth mentioning is that the Visegrad Group

countries (like most other new EU member states) actually differ from the old countries because of the rapid increase in living standards. Eurostat<sup>18</sup> data confirm that assumption. In 2003, just before the EU accession, GDP per capita was in Poland (according to purchasing power) only 48% of the EU average. In 2015 it was already 69%. In Slovakia, there was an increase from 55% to 77%, in the Czech Republic from 77% to 82%, and in Hungary from 62% to 68%. At the same time, many old the EU countries stayed in the same place or lost, in particular Greece (from 93% to 71%), Italy (from 111% to 95%) and even the United Kingdom (from 123% to 110%).

Perhaps another essential topic for the Hungarian presidency will be energy security. One of the most relevant tasks is to ensure broad political support for the project to build the North-South gas corridor. At the discussion, matters like security of oil supplies and the issue of shaping energetic and climate policy cannot be forgotten.

The Visegrad countries also joined efforts to implement common EU defence policy. In particular, the Polish and Czech governments recently flowed calls for the creation of a European army. This long-term plan, difficult to implement, is roughly in accordance with the proposals of The President of the European Commission. However, for now this idea seems impossible to fulfil because of the Euro-scepticism among growing number of citizens and questions about the subjectivity of national states. It is not a secret that having the own army is one of the traditional attributes of statehood.

The V4 countries consider themselves as successful countries, which was made possible also thanks to membership in the Union. The present multi-dimensional sphere of not only financial, but also awareness crisis poses to the whole of Europe new challenges and the threat of renewed divisions on the continent. Noticeable is



the criticism of the changes. The Visegrad countries, like the rest of Central Europe, shall not remain neutral to these dangers. While getting involved in the unification of the continent, they must strive for proper development of the European agenda, defence achievements in the field of freedoms and civil liberties, deepen the single market as well as continue the development of the neighbourhood policy. The protracted crisis promotes national egoisms and makes it difficult to reach a consensus. On the contrary, the societies of the Visegrad countries still represent a large enthusiasm for that idea, despite the problems associated with the phenomena of deadlock, transformation costs and burdens resulting from the adjustment to the EU requirements. The V4 members shall put greater emphasis on improving infrastructure, facilitating contacts between their societies, as well as the further development of economic, cultural or scientific. It is extremely important to promote exchanges of young people, students and academic fields. There is also a need for better understanding of their societies, burdened with historical stereotypes and the use of the geographic location for the acquisition of new investment, growth and strengthening national security. The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia also must ensure the full use of all these factors in the region, which confirm the real value of the EU *acquis communautaire* and embody fundamental freedoms, which are the pillars of European integration (free movement of goods, capital, services and people). Furthermore, greater consistency and resulting from it, even closer cooperation should contribute to the attractiveness of the region.

In July 6-7, 2017 in Wrocław, Poland takes place the Wrocław Global Forum.<sup>19</sup> This is one of the leading transatlantic conferences on current politics and economics in East-Central Europe. The organizers of the WGF are: the Municipality of Wrocław, the Polish

Institute of International Affairs and the prestigious American think-tank, the Atlantic Council. Every year, for a few days several hundred politicians, economists, politicians, journalists and community leaders come to Wrocław. These include heads of state, foreign ministers, renowned political analysts, parliamentarians, regularly across the Atlantic arrives in Wrocław strong representation of the US Senate and House of Representatives. The subject of the debates includes the hottest phenomena of the modern world, e.g. the last two editions of the WGF dominated the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the wave of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. This year Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the United States, is also invited. It shows that the V4 does not want to become isolated from the world and recognizes the need for dialogue.

## CONCLUSION

The Visegrad Group is a regional association, lacking an institutional administration. The cooperation is based on the rotational presidency and meetings of representatives of all countries at various levels. As a result, regular meetings of heads of government as well as individual ministers, enable comprehensive involvement of the Group in solving the problems of the region. It seems that maintaining current standards of operation is the most desirable. The mission of the Visegrad Group did not end in 2004 but then took an additional dimension on many levels. Identification of new priorities has shown the important role played by the V4. The ties between members of the Group are now much stronger than at the moment of its inception. The Visegrad partnership became a symbol and role model of integration for other regions. Moreover, the V4 has become a famous brand – an example of successful initiatives for the realization of common interests and a key element of cooperation in Central Europe. It

should be emphasized again that in recent years, after some ups and downs during the first decade of development, the Visegrad cooperation has reached an impressive level of intensity. This allows the V4 increasingly engaging in solving the growing problems of the globalization era. Through increased cooperation, the Visegrad Group - a kind of nucleus of Central Europe and a reference point for the other partners (including those from other continents) - found a place in the consciousness in the political, social and cultural sphere, as well as in planning business ventures. Speaking of the Visegrad Group, we are talking about common interests, even though we know that it does not mean unanimity. However, it is important that the development of the Visegrad cooperation in the EU has established the belief that this partnership brings added value for the consistency and stability of the region and is also beneficial for the European Union as a whole. The strong, effective and determined Visegrad Group effectively strengthens the EU. What is important, the V4 leaders determine their further cooperation by acting within the Union and aim towards a strong and united continent. The Visegrad Group makes the sense of participation in European affairs sharper and puts a stronger emphasis on the political role of Central European cooperation in the EU. What can the leaders do now? Communicate and seek opportunities to synchronize ways to further interests of the V4 countries and highlight the objective community of interests so that the role of the wider cohesion of the region and the EU is invaluable. Their will to cooperate within the European Union has been strongly emphasized in the aforementioned declaration from Warsaw:

*“The EU remains the best tool to meet the challenges ahead of us. The values on which the EU is based, i.e. - human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights -*

*remain valid. The EU should remain open to those countries, who share these values, including in particular the Western Balkan countries and our eastern neighbors”.*<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, cessation of internal struggle and agreement on mutual concessions in order to reach a compromise. Back to the roots and cooperation in the name of common values. These are the most significant challenges of the Hungarian Presidency in the Visegrad Group. Experience has shown that together they can win. Going deeper, identity and visibility of the V4 are important as well as building unity based on common heritage and values, the social aspect of partnership and effective communication strategies.

The predictable objectives of the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group of 2017 are ambitious. But the times, in which we live, require ambitious action. Being ambitious is an inherent feature of the V4 as such.

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European Commission Speech State of the Union Address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends. Strasbourg, 14 September 2016. <http://europa.eu>

<sup>2</sup> Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the Bratislava summit. September 16, 2016 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>

<sup>3</sup> See: Stepper Péter: The Visegrad Group and the EU Agenda on Migration: A Coalition of the Unwilling?, *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* 1 : 1 pp. 62-82. (2016)

<sup>4</sup> ‘Flexible solidarity’ would enable member states to decide on specific forms of contribution taking into account their experience and potential. Additionally, it notes that any distribution mechanism should be voluntary. Vég, Zsuzsanna. Intergovernmentalism or differentiated integration: the way out of the current impasse. December 19, 2016. <http://visegradinsight.eu>

<sup>5</sup> WORLD NEWS. Jancarikova, Tatiana & Hovet, Jason. September 17, 2016. <http://uk.reuters.com/>

<sup>6</sup> The term of 2016/2017 is a period covering the Polish presidency

<sup>7</sup> Hungarians call themselves Magyar and their country Magyarország; Magyar is a representative of the Finno-Ugric people who settled in the 10th century in Hungary. <http://sjp.pwn.pl>

<sup>8</sup> Lubomír Zaorálek is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

<sup>9</sup> The speech of Polish Prime Minister on the second day of the 26th Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdrój, Poland on 6-8 September, 2016

<sup>10</sup> The European Single Market guarantees the free movement of goods, capital, services and people – the ‘four freedoms’ within the European Union

<sup>11</sup> Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust. Warsaw, March 2, 2017. <http://www.msz.gov.pl>

<sup>12</sup> Collegium Civitas is a Polish non-public university located in Warsaw, Poland. To learn more, go to <https://www.civitas.edu.pl/en/>

<sup>13</sup> Eksperti: Głos Grupy Wyszehradzkiej zostanie wysłuchany w Unii Europejskiej. March 4, 2017. <http://www.pap.pl/>

<sup>14</sup> REGULATION (EU) 2016/1624 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC

<sup>15</sup> These conclusions were the result of a work meeting of the presidents of parliaments of the Visegrad Group which was held in Przemyśl, Poland, December 6, 2016

<sup>16</sup> GDP (Gross Domestic Product); the value of a country's overall output of goods and services (typically during one fiscal year) at market prices, excluding net income from abroad. <http://www.businessdictionary.com>

<sup>17</sup> Foy, Henry & Byrne, Anrew. Splits over EU test relations between Visegrad Four. October 6, 2016 <https://www.ft.com>

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/home>

<sup>19</sup> To learn more, go to <http://www.wroclawglobalforum.com>

<sup>20</sup> Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust, Warsaw, March 2, 2017. <http://www.msz.gov.pl>