

## **Visegrad Group, Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia**

### **Ministerial Meeting**

**19 January 2016, Prague**

#### *Joint Declaration of the Ministers of the Interior*

As part of the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4), the V4 Ministers of the Interior held a meeting in Prague on 19 January 2016 to discuss the challenges Europe is currently facing in the field of internal affairs. The discussion of the Ministers concentrated particularly on the issues of illegal migration and fight against terrorism. A part of the meeting was held with the participation of Ministers of some other EU Member States and countries from the region of Western Balkans for the purpose of discussing measures regarding the Western Balkans migration route. The representatives of Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia attended this part of the meeting as guests of honour.

With regard to the main areas of discussion, the Ministers agreed on the following:

#### **Issues of the Internal Security of the EU – Response of the European Union to the Migration Crisis; Measures to Control Illegal Migration into the EU and Fight against Terrorism**

The V4 Ministers of the Interior agreed that the functioning of the Schengen Area is directly linked to the proper functioning of common European policies in the field of migration and internal security and expressed a joint interest in stabilisation of the common European management of migration, including protection of the external borders of the EU. At the same time, the V4 Ministers of the Interior expressed agreement on the interest to maintain free movement of persons and goods within the Schengen Area as one of the key achievements of European integration and to reject any attempts to restrict free movement that go beyond the EU legal framework. With this goal in mind, the Ministers expressed their interest to implement common European measures that will result in reducing the migration pressure on the European countries as well as the EU as a whole.

The Visegrad Group Countries emphasise the need on integrated EU approach to border management, while ensuring full respect to competences of the Member States and the Union, and to proceed further in taking steps leading to an enhanced protection of external borders of the European Union.

In the opinion of the V4 Ministers of the Interior, the key element to achieve this goal is to restore control over migration flows at the external borders of the Union, including consistent identification and registration of all arriving persons. This goal should be achieved primarily by means of implementation of the concept of “hotspots”. This approach should be supplemented by functional measures that will reduce misuse of the international protection by distinguishing legitimate refugees from economic migrants in an effective and timely manner and by returning the latter to their countries of origin from the point of their first entry into the EU. All the procedures carried out in the hotspots as well as in the relocation process must guarantee that security aspects are taken into account.

In this context, the V4 Ministers of the Interior called for all the planned “hotspots” to be set up and put into full operation in the EU Member States concerned without any further delay. This is the only way of ensuring that migrants arriving to Greece and Italy are properly registered and that their fingerprints are taken. If this system is to provide a functional response to the current challenge, “hotspots” must also have detention capacities. In this regard, the V4 Ministers of the Interior reiterated that any further measures – including possible revision of the Dublin Regulation – can be discussed only after the European Union regains its control over its external border, reduces the inflow of illegal migrants and evaluates thoroughly the measures implemented up until now. In this context the Ministers agreed on the rejection of proposals that would lead to a mechanism of automatic relocation of migrants entering the EU.

The Visegrad Group Ministers of the Interior taking into account their efforts and contributions made to restore the control over the EU’s external border declared their readiness to continue the cooperation at the EU level with the EU Member States concerned, also in the context of the Western Balkans migration route.

The Ministers expressed their agreement on the shortcomings of the existing political-strategic approach of the EU, which lacks proposals for measures that would effectively lead to reducing the migration flows into the EU and to preventing the misuse of international protection. The V4 Ministers of the Interior hold the opinion that one of the key challenges is to find a well-balanced solution that would prevent illegal migration and asylum abuse while not limiting the opportunity for persecuted persons to seek international protection in the EU. In this context, the Ministers concurred on the need to address, at the EU level, the issue

of “pull factors” of illegal migration, including existing common European rules for access to the asylum procedure.

The Ministers highlighted the fundamental significance of return policy and call on the European Commission to achieve progress in finding a strategic solution to the current ineffectiveness of returns – including in the context of the aforementioned combat against asylum abuse.

The fight against terrorism remains a priority of the V4 states that are committed to support all the necessary instruments on the EU level which help to prevent and suppress this phenomenon effectively. In this regard the Ministers welcomed the non-paper on Enhanced Cooperation in Counter-Terrorism.

The Ministers are fully aware of the need to fight actively against terrorism. As regards the regulation of the possession of firearms, it is necessary to focus the adopted measures primarily on illegal firearms, not legally-held firearms.

Illegal firearms represent a serious threat. Within the European Union, it is necessary to prevent infiltration of illegal firearms from the risk areas.

It should be taken into account that bans on possession of certain types of firearms that are not, in fact, abused for terrorist acts can lead to negative consequences, especially to a transition of these firearms into the illegal sphere. The V4 states have profound historical experience with such implications.

In cases such as collecting, hunting, sport or possession of firearms for defensive purposes, the possibility to lay down conditions for the handling of firearms must be left to, to reasonable extend, each Member State according to its needs.

European legislation in the field of firearms shall be harmonised, where necessary, and prepared with a consistent consideration of potential impacts.

***Cooperation with the Western Balkan states in the Field of migration (Pilot Project of Operational Cooperation with Macedonia in Border Protection)***

At the joint meeting of the V4 Ministers of the Interior and the representatives of Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia, discussed particularly the need to strengthen cooperation with the goal of regaining control over the migration flows heading into the EU along the Western Balkans migration route was discussed.

The Ministers expressed their agreement that the European Union must strive for comprehensive measures that will contribute to a multi-tiered solution of the current crisis along all migration routes leading to the EU.

Therefore, the Ministers noted the request of Macedonia for support in handling the current migration situation in its territory. As a possible model of cooperation, a draft programme which aims to support Macedonia in handling the current migration situation in its territory was presented by the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group for consideration. The cooperation programme should be launched in early 2016 with the goal of stabilising the migration situation in Macedonia, particularly by measures on the Macedonian-Greek border that would significantly reduce the movement of unregistered illegal migrants along the Western Balkans migration route. These measures would complement the already existing operational support provided by EU Member States which aim to improve the situation at the EU's external borders, including the *Poseidon Rapid Intervention 2015* in Greece coordinated by Frontex.

*Prague, 19 January 2016*