

**Joint Statement
of the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group
and Luxembourg Presidency of the Benelux Union**

Prague, 13th June 2016

On 13th June 2016, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Benelux and Visegrad Group countries met in Prague upon invitation by the Czech Republic's Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) to discuss the challenges that the European Union and its Member States are currently facing and to explore avenues for closer cooperation to find common solutions. Strengthening relations with other regional groups of countries in order to best serve citizens' interests constitutes a priority for both the Luxembourg Presidency of the Benelux Union Committee of Ministers and the Czech Presidency of the V4. In the light of celebrations of the Emperor Charles IV's 700th anniversary, this Benelux-V4 meeting demonstrated the continued cooperation of these countries in the field of Foreign and European policy.

The European Union is currently going through difficult times, facing an unprecedented migratory crisis, security threats posed by terrorism as well as conflicts in neighboring regions, and growing skepticism within its societies. Against this background, Ministers emphasized that an open and constructive debate among EU Member States is the most effective way to tackle these challenges, while taking into consideration the respective national concerns and international obligations.

Ministers took stock of the cooperation between the Benelux and the V4 countries. They agreed that consultations among Benelux and V4 countries shall be pursued at different levels. They also discussed how civil society and academics from both the Benelux and the V4 countries could be involved in this process.

On migration, Ministers stressed the need to further strengthen the work on the external dimension of migration policy and affirmed their commitment to seek a comprehensive and geographically balanced approach on migration, based on shared responsibility, solidarity and security. They also exchanged views about national initiatives for further strengthened EU action towards third countries. In view of the upcoming European Council, they discussed about ways and means to strengthen the EU's common approach.

Ministers took stock of the Eastern Partnership and exchanged views on the progress in reforms.

They also exchanged views on the future of EU-Russia relations and the internal situation within the EU, in particular with regard to the upcoming British referendum on its membership in the Union. In view of the evaluation to be held under the Slovak presidency, Ministers had a first exchange of views on ways to enhance the dialogue within the Council of the European Union on the rule of law.

Ministers also took the opportunity to take stock of preparations for the upcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw.

The Ministers agreed to continue the dialogue in the V4+Benelux format during forthcoming Polish V4 Presidency.