

**JOINT STATEMENT
OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES,
BULGARIA, ESTONIA, LITHUANIA, LATVIA, ROMANIA AND SWEDEN**

(Warsaw, 24 November 2008)

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden and the State Secretaries of Estonia and Romania, meeting in Warsaw on 24 November 2008*,

- aware of current and upcoming challenges that the European Union has to face,
- welcoming the good co-operation among their countries and their readiness to look for common positions,
- wishing to voice full commitment to and responsibility for the development of the European Union,

have agreed as follows:

I

- 1.** The Ministers declare their support for the French Presidency with regard to current challenges the European Union is facing as well as their support for the priorities of the incoming Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies in 2009.
- 2.** The Ministers stress the need for a more competitive Europe and support all efforts aiming at meeting the goals of Lisbon Strategy through necessary reforms - both at EU and national level.
- 3.** The Ministers declare their commitment to a consistent effort towards the alleviation of remaining barriers among EU Member States, notably in the field of internal market and free movement of goods, services, workers and capital.
- 4.** The Ministers express their hope that during the Czech and Swedish Presidencies the European Council will give a clear and strong political signal to further implement and develop the European policy on security of energy supplies as well as a viable and well-integrated EU energy market. The Ministers declare their support for the Czech Presidency initiatives aiming at intensifying the relations with the EU neighboring countries, including countries of the Caspian Sea region and other supplier and transit countries.

*The meeting was also attended by a representative of Slovenia with observer status, due to the ongoing formation process of the new Slovenian Government after the recent general elections.

5. The Ministers share the view that the consensus regarding the climate-energy package, which is expected to be reached by the European Council in December 2008, should consider solutions appropriate to all sectors of the European economy and all Member States, having regard to each Member State's specific situation [and taking into account the reduction of CO₂ emissions already achieved]*. More emphasis has to be put on regional co-operation and joint initiatives that could optimize national strategies on how to reach EU targets regarding the climate - energy package.

II

6. The Ministers stress the importance of regional forms of co-operation which can contribute to deeper integration of our continent in different fields. In this context they welcome initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Black Sea Synergy and the Regional Co-operation Council. The Ministers agreed that the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Strengthening of the macro-regional approach in the European integration should enhance the cohesion and competitiveness of the EU and allow more benefits from the achievements of the enlargement process.

7. It is the view of the Ministers that a deeper integration between the EU and its Eastern neighbours is of profound importance. Therefore, the Ministers emphasize their commitment to and full support for the initiative of the Eastern Partnership addressed to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Furthermore, they express their readiness to contribute to its successful launching and consolidation.

8. The Ministers believe that within the framework of the Eastern Partnership the EU should offer new forms of co-operation with Eastern partners and far-reaching projects aimed at deepening their relations and co-operation. In that respect the Ministers expect the Eastern Partnership to be assigned ambitious goals, including enhancing the EU support in adaptation of Eastern partners to EU legislation, norms and standards, creating a deepened free trade area, launching the process aimed at a visa-free regime with these countries as a long term goal, implementing important multilateral and regional projects.

9. The Ministers believe that in order to ensure a successful development of the Eastern Partnership and efficient co-ordination of its implementation an efficient institutional structure should be established, including possibly a Special Co-ordinator of Eastern Partnership, foreign and sector-oriented ministerial meetings, as well as senior officials working bodies. The Ministers stress that the Eastern Partnership must be underpinned by adequate funding and hope for the EIB, the EBRD and other IFIs to work closely with the EU in order to aid intensifying co-operation with the partner countries of the Eastern Partnership.

10. The Ministers support all efforts aimed at easing the EU visa regime for the EU's Eastern Partners. As a first step they point out the importance of reducing the visa fees.

*Sweden and Estonia do not join the statement made in the second part of the sentence.

11. The Ministers support the pro-European course of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and are convinced that their commitment to European values will be maintained and will, in turn, pave the way for a responsible attitude of all political forces leading these countries to the achievement of European standards in all areas.

12. The Ministers believe that the EU should preserve its openness to dialogue and co-operation in its relations with Belarus. Recent developments suggest a possible shift of attitude of Belarusian authorities which gives hope for a deepened dialogue in the future. The Ministers consider suspension of the visa sanctions for Belarus officials as an important act of good will from the EU and expect significant steps to respect democratic values, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including reforms of the electoral code on the part of Belarusian authorities.

13. The Ministers welcome the continuing dialogue between the EU and Russia. They stress, however, that the EU must remain firm on its position regarding Russia having to fulfill all the conditions with respect to Georgia's territorial integrity.

14. The Ministers express deepest concern and strongly condemn the incident in Georgia on 23 November 2008 when machine-gun fire was opened in immediate vicinity of a motorcade carrying the presidents of Georgia and Poland, close to South Ossetia, Georgia. The Ministers call for proper investigation and clarification of the incident.

III

15. The Ministers express their wish to celebrate jointly in the EU important anniversaries that symbolize the end of the communist era on the European continent.

16. The year 2009 will mark the 20th anniversary of the democratic changes in Central and Eastern European countries and should be object of common celebrations throughout not only this part of the continent but the EU as a whole. The same year four Visegrad countries together with the Baltic States and Slovenia will celebrate the 5th anniversary of their accession to the EU.

17. In 2009 three Visegrad Group countries will commemorate the 10th anniversary of NATO membership and seven other European countries – the 5th anniversary of membership in the Alliance. The commemoration of these important events reminds us also of the common values that underpin the Euro-Atlantic partnership and its importance in view of the new global challenges that we should face together.

18. On this special occasion the Ministers wish to emphasise the symbolic dimension of the Czech Presidency motto – “Europe without barriers”.

IV

19. In view of the Second EU-Brazil Summit in Rio de Janeiro on 22 December 2008, the Ministers believe that the EU should continue to insist that the Brazilian authorities recognise full and unconditional market economy status of EU Member States Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as negotiate and finalise as soon as possible a short stay visa waiver agreement between the EC and Brazil.