



## **JOINT STATEMENT OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP (CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY, POLAND, SLOVAKIA), BULGARIA, CROATIA, ROMANIA AND SLOVENIA**

Prague, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016

*We, the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy in the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia (V4+4) met in Prague on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 upon the invitation by the Czech Republic holding the V4 Presidency between July 2015 to June 2016 to discuss and identify the most important areas of the debate on the role of Cohesion Policy with a view to making a timely contribution to the discussion on the future of this crucial policy.*

*We, the Ministers responsible for the Cohesion Policy in the Visegrad Group Member States, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia:*

1. **STRESS** that Cohesion Policy is the fundamental investment policy of the European Union supporting development, growth, creating jobs and competitiveness in all Member States and their regions which brings added value for the European Union as a whole, and contributes to the balanced functioning of the Single Market; **REMINDE** that investments in the less developed regions positively influence also the economies of more developed regions in direct and indirect ways, including through flowback.
2. **UNDERLINE** that Cohesion Policy has the unique potential to address long-term structural challenges taking into account the specificities and goals of individual Member States and regions and the EU priorities as it was also proven during the economic crisis.
3. **HIGHLIGHT** that Cohesion Policy is the main EU policy that effectively contributes to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy also taking into account the European Semester as it was widely recognized during the negotiation processes.
4. **ARE CONVINCED** that after the 2014-2020 reform Cohesion Policy is one of the most innovative, coherent and best-evaluated EU policies respecting the

objectives of the performance-based budgeting approach and that experience therewith should be reference for other policies including those managed at the EU level.

5. Therefore STRESS that Cohesion Policy must remain one of the major priorities of the EU budget also after 2020.
6. STRONGLY BELIEVE that new challenges in the EU should not be addressed at the expense of relevant important policy objectives by re-labelling the existing resources, but by introducing more flexible programming arrangements taking into account differentiated territorial impacts of such challenges while maintaining the overall long-term investment nature of the policy.
7. EMPHASIZE that centrally managed instruments are important, however concentrating mainly on them would leave territorial impacts out of consideration and could result in isolated or parallel investments and increase regional disparities leading therefore to two-speed Europe; also STRESS the need for achieving maximal synergies and complementarities between EU policies, directly managed programmes of the EC and the ESI funds programmes.

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8. UNDERLINE that potential changes and further improvements to Cohesion Policy should follow lessons learned and should be evidence-based and result from 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation and mid-term evaluation of the present programming period.
9. With regard to the future of Cohesion Policy EMPHASIZE the need to discuss among others the shape of the shared management and proportionality principle, further simplification together with strengthening the certainty for beneficiaries and administrations including sound interpretation of the specific conditions and rules, preventive role of audits and implementing early warning mechanisms.
10. AGREE on the importance of a joint and open dialogue among Member States, representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of Regions and other relevant partners from the EU institutions, as well as EU cities and regions focusing on the setup of future shape of Cohesion Policy.

On behalf of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia:

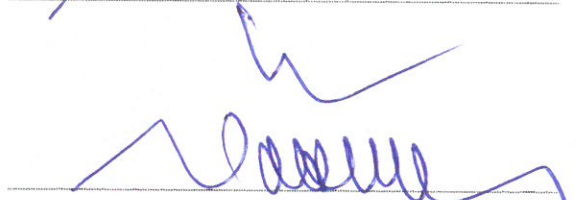
**For the Czech Republic**

Her Excellency *Ms. Karla Šlechtová*  
Minister of Regional Development



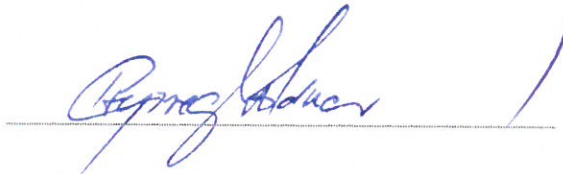
**For the Slovak Republic**

His Excellency *Mr. Lubomír Vážny*  
Deputy Prime Minister for Investment



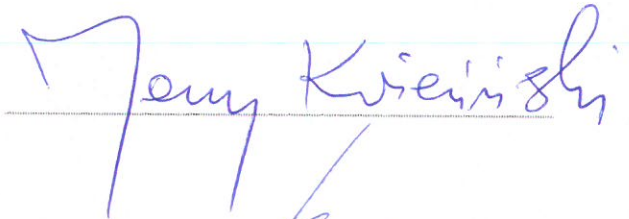
**For Hungary**

His Excellency *Mr. Nándor Csepreghy*  
Deputy Minister, Prime Minister's Office



**For the Republic of Poland**

His Excellency *Mr. Jerzy Kwieciński*  
Secretary of State, Ministry of Development



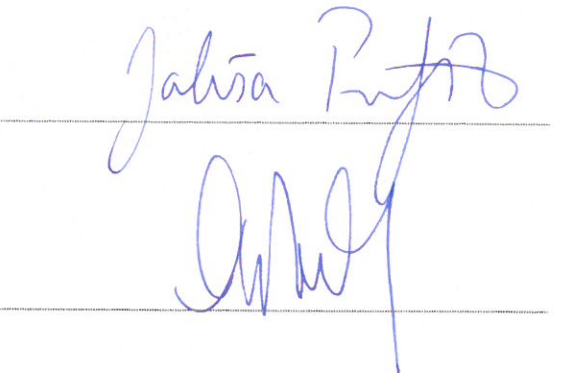
**For the Republic of Bulgaria**

His Excellency *Mr. Tomislav Donchev*  
Deputy Prime Minister for EU Funds and  
Economic Policies



**For the Republic of Croatia**

His Excellency *Mr. Jakša Puljiz*  
Deputy Minister of Regional Development  
and EU Funds



**For Romania**

Her Excellency *Ms. Aura Carmen Răducu*  
Minister of European Funds



**For the Republic of Slovenia**

Her Excellency *Ms. Alenka Smerkolj*  
Minister without portfolio responsible for  
Development, Strategic Projects and  
Cohesion

