

Final draft

Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries

“Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust”

Input to Rome Declaration 2017

The 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the past achievements and future direction of European integration. It should continue to provide for peace, security and prosperity. The symbolism of the March celebrations gives a new impetus to our cooperation and should send a strong signal of unity and cohesion of EU-27.

The global geopolitical environment is changing fast. Instability in the European Neighborhood, new dynamism on the global level and internal developments in the EU represent challenges the Union needs to address in the spirit of shared interest and responsibility. Old paradigms such as “more Europe” or “less Europe” do not solve existing problems. We need a strong Europe capable to act.

Our commitment to the EU

The EU remains the best instrument to address the challenges we are facing. Values it has been based upon - human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights - remain valid. The EU should remain open towards those countries who share these values, including towards Western Balkans countries and our Eastern neighbours.

Ten years ago in Berlin, we committed ourselves to *always renew the political shape of Europe in keeping with the times*. History has proven that the EU is a vivid organism, which develops and adjusts itself. We must remain determined to ensure that the European Union is capable of responding to Member States’ interests and citizens’ needs to regain their trust. In Bratislava, we started to fine-tune our priorities in response to the current challenges. We must continue implementing and developing this reform agenda.

Unity as the principle of our cooperation

The EU’s unity is of vital importance and should always be the starting point of our approach. 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. However, to ensure a necessary flexibility, we can take advantage of enhanced cooperation, as stipulated in the Treaties. Yet any form of enhanced cooperation should be open to every Member State and should strictly avoid any kind of disintegration of Single Market, Schengen area and the European Union itself. We must safeguard the greatest achievements of the EU.

Single Market

Single Market is a project of fundamental significance for all European economies, the welfare of its citizens, as well as for social, territorial and economic cohesion of the EU. A synergy between measures both at European and national level should strengthen competitiveness, cohesion and convergence. Four freedoms of the Single Market must be preserved and further developed. We

should take further courageous steps to remove the outstanding barriers, fight new obstacles and oppose protectionism both within and outside the EU. Measures at national level should be complementary to this goal and not create additional barriers or distort the functioning of the Single Market. The social welfare of our citizens is a key objective for us: social standards cannot be uniform and social progress should follow economic growth. We must enhance structural reforms, competitiveness, productivity and the Single Market to accelerate proper convergence of economies.

We should focus on those areas of the Single Market which deliver the most tangible results to European citizens. There is still a large potential to deepen Single Market further, in particular by completing the Digital Single Market and the Energy Union as well as in the services sector, where we shall set ambitious agenda. Simultaneously, we should exploit synergies among various policies with the objective of fostering EU growth and competitiveness on the global scale.

In order to safeguard economic convergence and social security we should make the most of the already existing instruments and principles. The EU budget should continue to provide long-term, predictable and stable investment. Research and innovation, infrastructure and education policies are also key. The role of the cohesion policy in this regard is irreplaceable.

Euro / non-euro Member States relations

A stable and resilient euro area is a prerequisite for a healthy economic environment in the Union as a whole. Any new developments should be designed transparently and kept open to all Member States. The EU institutions, together with the Member States, will facilitate the coexistence between different perspectives within the single institutional framework ensuring consistency, the effective operability of Union mechanisms and the equality of Member States before the Treaties. Respecting the integrity and indivisibility of the Single Market, inclusiveness and openness, fair treatment among all EU Member States, as well as no discrimination based on the currency and respect for the Council's powers and respect for financial autonomy of all Member States are the overarching principles in the EU economic governance that should strengthen the unity of the European project.

Security

Citizens feel secure only if they are confident that they live in an area where full control of external borders is ensured and where the relevant authorities have sufficient instruments to protect people from danger. Over the past few months we have made an important progress in protecting the external borders of the EU. Now it is time to return to a proper functioning of the Schengen area. We should make sure that free movement across the EU remains one of our most outstanding achievements appreciated by citizens. Therefore, we have to continue implementing measures that have been adopted in Malta concerning the external dimension of migration policy. At the same time, we believe much more work is needed to be done when it comes to the cooperation in internal security, which is crucial for protecting our people's lives, most notably from the threat of terrorism.

Global environment

Our ambition is to ensure the Union remains a global player. While the global governance is changing, the EU must be ready to take pro-active leadership on global issues of European interest. Security and defence, as well as the European Neighbourhood Policy, as identified by European Global Strategy, are areas of utmost importance. We are committed to further support our neighbours, ensuring a balanced engagement in both dimensions of the European Neighbourhood.

By strengthening the security and resilience and by supporting sovereignty and territorial integrity of our neighbours, we are investing also in our own security. Complementarity between the EU and NATO has to be ensured, as agreed during the NATO Warsaw Summit. We should strive for deepening our cooperation in defence and achieving European strategic autonomy. The European defence capabilities have to be developed, while preserving the role of NATO in providing collective defence in Europe.

Equally, in order to tackle common geopolitical and security challenges, the Union should strive to strengthen the transatlantic relations and to continue close cooperation with the United Kingdom.

We should reaffirm the EU's position as a major global trading partner, advocate an open, rules-based trading system and continue establishing new partnerships based on principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit.

Member States – the EU institutions – citizens interaction

The relations between Member States and institutions should fully respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Berlin Declaration's commitment of Member States and European institutions to interact in the spirit of sincere cooperation has not lost its profound relevance. Member States' identities and diverse traditions represent a key asset of the EU and shall remain a reference for its further developments. They strengthen our shared responsibility for the European future.

Democratic control over legislative and political processes of the EU at national level must be strengthened. More significant and definitive role of the national parliaments should be considered as it would enhance legitimacy of the EU decision making process. The European Council must play a key role, setting major political objectives. In particular, the European Council shall profoundly discuss issues of European agenda which are of major national interest to Member States.

To regain the trust of Europeans, both the Member States and EU institutions should fundamentally modify their approach to communication – towards the citizens and also among ourselves. We should be frank and straightforward in our communication. It is a shared responsibility of the institutions and of the Member States to make sure we have a robust and honest narrative for an interconnected Europe.

The countries of the Visegrad group believe that the Rome declaration should thus become a driver for an even more successful Union. A Union based on the principles of mutual respect and reality, inclusiveness, shared responsibility for our common future and unity in diversity. A Union living up to its fundamental common values as defined in the Treaties. To make this happen, we need to make bold decisions. We should build on the Bratislava roadmap and with a clear implementation timetable translate into practice the vision of Union of Action and Trust.