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V4 Statement on the Future of Europe

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The Visegrad Countries reiterate their common approach concerning the Future of Europe as expressed in their declarations before the Bratislava and Rome meetings of the Heads of State and Government as well as their support to the Bratislava roadmap and the Rome declaration. The Visegrad countries welcome the debate on the future of the EU as they believe that the EU is the best framework to face and tackle both internal and external challenges. We are ready and willing to work along the lines of the Leaders' Agenda on the basis of consensus for strengthening unity and to prevent fragmentation of the EU. It is in this spirit in which we stress the importance of the following:

1. **SAVE ALREADY ACHIEVED RESULTS** – We believe that the reflection process in the European Union should continue and should be based on the existing foundations established through the efforts of previous generations. We should focus on how the Union can expand integration to new areas aiming at reinforcing our security and competitiveness underpinned by industrialization or how to deepen it in already existing areas, such as the Economic and Monetary Union. However, our first objective should be safeguarding the tangible achievements and results of integration. Fundamental achievements should be kept intact. We must restore the proper functioning of Schengen, as well as regaining full control over the external borders. Equally we must protect and further develop the Single Market based on four fundamental freedoms, including the free movement of workers and services. These constitute just as important pillars of the Single Market as the movement of goods and capital. Preserving and enhancing the integrity of the Single Market is and should remain a key priority as well as its further development and adaptation to the challenges of the digital era. We must keep the Union open for further enlargement towards the Western Balkans. On top of that, ways need to be sought to boost the Union's engagement in assisting our Eastern neighbors on their path to European standards.
2. **UNITY IN DIVERSITY** – A strong and efficient EU is in our interest. We need to preserve and strengthen the unity of the Union, while respecting our common European values, the identities and specificities of Member States. A strong Europe can only be composed of strong Member States, supported by effective EU institutions performing their tasks based on their competences as defined by the Treaties. EU Institutions should treat all Member States equally and act strictly within the remits of their respective Treaty-based competences. The right of Member States to carry out domestic reforms within their competences should be respected.
3. **AN INCLUSIVE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE STEPS** - We propose the preservation of an appropriate ratio between the Union's evolutionary and transformative strands. Respect for the existing legal framework should serve as a starting point of our considerations when it comes to the next steps. We have formulated our common vision for the future in Bratislava and Rome. On this basis, we need to engage in collective and inclusive considerations on our future as EU27.
4. **COMPETITIVENESS** - We should strengthen the competitiveness of the Union in internal and global terms as well. Digitalization, innovation, development of human resources and reduction of the administrative burden on entrepreneurs can be achieved by improving synergy between national and European policies. The undistorted competition on the Single Market can be the most important contribution of the Union to these efforts. In our view cohesion policy along with the competition

on the Single Market contributes to the enhancement of the much desired social and economic convergence among Member States which is beneficial for the EU as a whole. That objective should be pursued in the course of the next MFF. Furthermore, as the world economy is rapidly becoming digital and data-driven, we need a connected European Digital Single Market. Only then will the EU be able to shape the digital transformation and maximize its benefits. While new challenges and policies emerge, adequate financing of existing and Treaty-based cohesion policy must be ensured. CAP constantly plays a fundamental role in sustainable European food production, social development of rural areas supplemented by an ambitious, but balanced EU trade policy.

5. DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY - The inter-institutional balance enshrined in the Treaties is the most important basis for a well-functioning, democratic and legitimate European project. The European Council should maintain the key role in defining the general political directions and priorities including the future of Europe. The decisions made by the Heads of State and Government must not be disregarded at the lower levels of the decision-making process. According to the June 2014 European Council conclusions we should further consider the process for the appointment of the President of the European Commission. When addressing the key institutional issues of the EU in February, in particular the Spitzenkandidaten mechanism the results of our debates must be in full compliance with the Treaties and should not undermine the current balance between the EU institutions and among the Member States. From this perspective we disagree with the establishment of a transnational list. We are convinced that the number of seats in the European Parliament needs to be reduced. As encompassed by the Treaties, the democratic control of Member States over legislative and political processes of the EU should follow the principle of subsidiarity. It should be considered how vital national interests can be safeguarded under the present voting system, bearing in mind that the European Council is destined to be a broker where sensitive issues are on the table. On matters of strategic national interest every Member State should be entitled to demand a unanimity-based decision at the European Council. The unity of the EU shall be our main goal. Democratic legitimacy of the EU legislative process can be based on and strengthened through the democratic control by national parliaments by the introduction of the red card system. We should narrow the distance between European citizens and Brussels-based institutions, and we are ready to engage in broad public discussions on our European future according to the national practices.

6. Comprehensive APPROACH TO Migration POLICY - The migration crisis has shaped the realities of Europeans for more than two years, creating still unresolved challenges for national migration and security policies. As a consequence of the crisis the EU has to face major challenges, like the necessity to guarantee the protection of external borders and the differentiation between genuine asylum seekers and illegal and economic migrants. Our experience has shown that only those solutions that have been approved by consensus bring the best results in practice and are able to effectively address the crisis. The major part of these actions was undertaken within external aspects of migration policy, highlighting the need for cooperation with countries of origin and transit. Now comes the time to elaborate a sustainable consensus on a comprehensive approach to migration and asylum policy. Taking into consideration our common experience, any overall solution for the crisis must therefore be constructed with the objective of not to distribute but to prevent the migratory pressure on Europe. That is the reason why we contribute to the border protection in Libya with 35 million Euros. The Visegrad countries will contribute to the ongoing debate on a comprehensive migration policy, based on the principle of an effective, responsible and enforceable external border protection to avoid obligatory quotas to be applied which are ineffective and have already divided Europe.