

**Joint Statement of the 20th Meeting of the Ministers of Environment of the
Visegrád Group Countries,
Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania**

8th May, 2014, Visegrád, Hungary

The Ministers of Environment of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Republic of Poland, Slovak Republic, Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia and Romania

REAFFIRMING the importance of the cooperation of the Visegrád Group countries, Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania in the field of environmental protection and climate policy,

BEARING in mind the previous meetings of the Environment Ministers of Visegrád Group countries and Visegrád Group countries, Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia and Romania,

NOTING the Program of the 2013/2014 Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group,

RECOGNIZING the potential of the European Union policies and their impact on the environment – hence the need to coordinate national positions related to those policies,

have agreed as follows:

European policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030

Regarding the European policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 the Ministers took note of the conclusions of the March European Council. However, the Ministers felt that there are some important missing elements and tasks ahead of the Council and the Commission to make further work for the June European Council. These tasks should be in line with the international climate change negotiations' agenda. There is a need for further analysis by the Commission of the implications for individual Member States of the Commission's proposals.

The Ministers maintained their position that there is no need for any legally binding renewable energy and energy efficiency targets, and that the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target should be set at a realistic level to be achieved in a technology-neutral and cost effective way. Besides that, it should respond to the challenges of industrial competitiveness as well as relevant state-aid rules.¹

In line with the Commission's findings, the Ministers expressed their concerns that the target could put disproportionate burden on the lower income Member States, therefore the

¹ Croatia does not support this paragraph.

Ministers emphasised the need for agreeing on the rules of fair and equitable effort and burden sharing within EU ETS allocation of EUAs and under non ETS too. The Ministers agreed that proper mechanisms that would allow lower income Member States to be compensated for the excessive burden borne by the implementation of the new climate and energy framework need to be elaborated and agreed upon as soon as possible, before the final decision on the new policy framework for energy and climate is taken. This is one of the key elements to pave the way for a decision on GHG reduction target by the European Council in a timeline allowing a submission of the EU intended contribution in the first quarter of 2015.

The Ministers noted that it is stated in the Commission's Communication of January 2014 that the EU ETS shall remain the core element to fulfil the European emissions reduction commitments until 2030. Bearing that in mind the Ministers agreed that the efficient operation of the system should be ensured, including the elaboration of adequate carbon-leakage protection mechanisms to be applied.

Kyoto Protocol's ambition mechanism based on the Commission's proposed submission

As for the Kyoto Protocol ambition mechanism, the Ministers concluded that the global GHG emission reduction efforts should be effective, hence global and equitable. While the Ministers appreciate that the EU keeps its leadership position in addressing climate change, the Ministers also emphasised that it is crucial that all Parties do their fair share in this endeavour. Hence, the Ministers encouraged all developed country Parties to join the EU in taking on similarly ambitious mitigation commitments before 2020. Concerning developing countries, the Ministers underlined that the EU should appreciate their efforts to contribute adequately to global emission reduction efforts according to their differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, bearing in mind that the responsibilities and capabilities evolve over time. The commitments of all Parties, shall be nationally determined so as to enable the Parties to tailor their action according to their development needs to grow in a sustainable manner and preserve their competitiveness. The Ministers hope that at the June Ministerial Roundtables in Bonn all Parties will discuss how domestic and international action on climate change, now and in the future, should build a strong foundation for a fair and ambitious 2015 agreement.

The Ministers support the EU's commitment to contribute to the global efforts by reducing its GHG emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 compared to 1990 and to implement policies towards achieving this goal. The Ministers took note of the parts of Assessment Report 5 which were published and are looking forward for further work by the IPCC to feed in global negotiations.

EU Clean Air Policy Package – exchange of opinions on the further development of this dossier

The Ministers discussed the Clean Air Policy Package of the European Commission and agreed that the V4+ countries should take joint actions during its negotiations. As regards the

proposed aims and consequent reduction commitments, based upon preliminary assessments, V4+ countries consider them to be overly ambitious and disproportionate.

The Ministers considered the application of EU-wide average cost minimisation principle alone for the determination of reduction commitments unacceptable as it would result in higher burden to Member States with lower GDP per capita. In order to reach a more equitable result, other approaches, such as the polluter pays principle, cohesion, economic potential should also be applied.

An increase in pollutant emissions outside the EU as a result of reductions within the EU has to be avoided. In this respect competitiveness of EU Member States should also be taken into account.

V4+ countries do not support inclusion of methane in the NEC regulation before comprehensive assessment of its characteristics and air polluting effects, exploitation of low or negative-cost measures for emission reduction by scientific bodies under the LRTAP Convention.

The V4+ countries would take joint steps to guarantee that emission limit values for medium scale combustion plants are determined in a way that they do not impose any unbearable burden to small medium-sized enterprises and households in their countries.

For the countries of V4+ the sector of small scale combustion is a very important part of the emission reduction by 2030. To achieve maximum reduction, an ambitious Ecodesign regulation for boilers and heaters is a key factor and at least part of the regulation should enter into force before 2022 (preferably on the basis of current technical standards).

GMOs

The Ministers highlighted the importance of subsidiarity and sovereignty of countries with regard to the cultivation of genetically modified organisms, therefore they agreed to express their common and general support for the proposal of a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory. Proposed text, which, was widely discussed at the working group, seems to be satisfactory for both, countries opposing and supporting the cultivation of GM crops. Therefore, the Ministers agreed that it is their common interest that after long standing negotiations this particularly important issue should be resolved as soon as possible, and the Council should come to an agreement in the course of the first semester of 2014 in order to provide Member States with the freedom to decide on the cultivation of GMOs in their territory.

Respecting the different GMO-strategies of the neighbouring countries, the Ministers should cooperate with a view to ensure appropriate information sharing and may take appropriate

measures in order to avoid the unintended presence of GMOs in the border areas. Sharing of experience and cooperation between neighbouring countries are necessary for the successful protection of biodiversity and the interest of farmers in the border areas.

The introduction of national coexistence measures regarding the cultivation of GMOs is of utmost importance. Therefore, the cooperation, the exchange of experience and information among the countries with regard to the respective co-existence measures are crucial in order to ensure the safe use of GMOs and avoid cross-border contamination.

International context of the V4 environmental cooperation

The Ministers are looking forward to the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and express their commitment to making this first historical session a success. The Ministers consider the themes of UNEA, both for the Plenary and discussions, of utmost importance. In order to achieve this highest impact of UNEA, we declare our willingness to ensure the appropriate, thus negotiated outcome of the first session. The Ministers are open to participate in an interactive ministerial debate at the first UNEA session.

The Ministers believe that sustainable development can only be achieved by an integrated and balanced approach to all three dimensions - economic, social and environmental. The Ministers agreed that water issues, biodiversity, climate change, sustainable consumption and production, marine issues are subjects that should be incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals and we will take joint action to achieve this.

Done in Visegrád, on 8 May 2014

For the Czech Republic

For Hungary

For the Republic of Poland

For the Slovak Republic

For the Republic of Bulgaria

For the Republic of Croatia

For Romania