

JOINT DECLARATION
of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia
on the negotiation process of the Commission's Proposals for the Cohesion
Policy 2014-2020 Regulatory Package

***** Final version adopted by the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy
on 12th October 2012 *****

The Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy (CP) in the Visegrad Group and Slovenia met in Katowice, the Republic of Poland, on 11-12th October, 2012 to discuss the progress in the negotiations of the future Cohesion Policy regulatory framework published by the European Commission (Commission) on 6 October, 2011. The Director General for Regional Policy and Urban Policy and Member of the European Parliament also participated in the meeting.

BEARING in MIND the development challenges faced by the European Union (EU) and the need to ensure highest possible effectiveness and efficiency of investments financed from the EU budget,

UNDERLINING that Cohesion Policy post 2013 is one of the key EU investment policies to support the objectives of the Europe 2020 which is a result of its integrated nature and adaptability to territorial contexts as well as of the new regulatory elements that aim for its enhancing strategic orientation and focus on results,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the partial general approach on ten negotiating blocks agreed upon by the Danish Presidency at the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 April and 26 June, 2012 and the Joint Declaration of the Visegrad Group of Countries and Slovenia on the Commission's Proposals for the Future Cohesion Policy Regulatory Package agreed in Prague, on 22 March 2012,

The Ministers of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia HAVE AGREED on the following:

General remarks

1. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia WELCOME and STRONGLY SUPPORT the significant progress of the Council's negotiations achieved due to the efforts of the Danish Presidency and LOOK FORWARD to substantial further progress under the Cypriot Presidency.
2. It shall be underlined again that it is of utmost importance for the EU at large to start the implementation of new programmes and projects from the very beginning of 2014. For that reason, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia CALL ON the Cypriot Presidency to avoid re-opening of already agreed thematic blocks unless it is necessary for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) or as a result of the Financial Regulation negotiations.
3. Additionally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia STRESS the necessity of the Council's Structural Actions Working Party to contribute to the negotiations on the MFF concerning elements related to Cohesion Policy post 2013 and the discussion on the concept of better

quality of spending. In this regard, we **INSIST** that the current system of VAT eligibility should be kept and extended to all Funds of the Common Strategic Framework (CSF); that the current co-financing rates for the less-developed and the former Convergence regions including for the European Territorial Cooperation programmes should be maintained.

Programming

4. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **AGREE** that the CSF should provide a strategic guidance to Member States in the programming process especially with regard to territorial and sectoral coordination of the EU's resources and policies which should be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in its entirety. At the same time, it should not introduce any additional obligations as regards programming and implementation above those already agreed by the Council in its partial general approach.

5. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **CONFIRM** that the country-specific recommendations of the Council (CSRs) are important means to keep the delivery of Europe 2020 objectives on track. In this respect, CSRs constitute one of the elements that the Member State should take into account during the programming process. However, the relevance of the CSRs for Cohesion Policy is determined during preparation of the National Reform Programme where it is decided whether the CSR will be implemented through national policies or with the help of the European Funds and afterwards in the Partnership Agreement. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **UNDERLINE** that the long-term stability and structural character of CP have to be respected.

6. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **EXPRESS** the opinion that in order to ensure clear and coherent regulatory framework for the CSF funds, provisions shall also refer to specific cases of implementation, like projects implemented under national programmes and involving regions of various categories or phasing and bridging financing which need transparent transitional provisions.

7. To this end, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia also **EMPHASISE** that capital regions are important catalysts of the Europe 2020 objectives and engines of economic growth with functions in service of the whole country. Such capital regions are often stricken by internal disparities, with their relatively high development level resulting from the statistical effect of the capital. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia, therefore, **STRESS** that addressing the issue of capital regions with customized solutions is indispensable for facilitating progress towards the Europe 2020 goals and for enhancing competitiveness both at regional and national level.

Financial Management and Management and Control

8. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **UNDERLINE** that the positions of Member States regarding the financial management and control systems of the next programming period were clearly articulated during the negotiations of the Financial Regulation. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia therefore **INSIST** that this debate must not be repeated and any amendments to be introduced shall be limited only to the issues resulting directly from the Financial Regulation, especially as regards irregularities and corrections.

9. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia **UNDERLINE** that any corrective measure should aim for ensuring the legality and regularity of the concerned programmes' transactions. To this end, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia **BELIEVE** that net correction does not increase

effectiveness in this regard but on the other hand will hamper the progress towards goals set in the Treaty.

10. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia CALL for more flexibility in the implementation to facilitate the achievement of better results, e.g. the application of the decommitment rule should be more flexible compared to the proposed provisions and maintaining of a sufficient level of pre-financing should be ensured.

11. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia MAINTAIN AND UNDERLINE their opinion that procedures, especially criteria, for designating programme authorities shall be more focused on the principles of result orientation, sound financial management and simplification.

Further progress in the negotiations

12. Taking into account the programming processes that have already been launched by Member States, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia UNDERLINE the need for a quick presentation by the Commission of all delegated and implementing acts, which in many cases will directly affect national implementation systems. We also CALL ON the Commission to provide as soon as possible timeframes and information on the content of those acts and - where possible – to involve Member State experts in these processes.

13. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia ENCOURAGE the Commission to allocate sufficient capacity for the negotiation process on the legislative package and programming documents and at the same time to ensure equal treatment to all Member States with a view to that as well as timely adoption of the whole set of Partnership Agreements and operational programmes. We COUNT especially on the effective cooperation with the Commission when putting into practice the new CP elements, such as ex-ante conditionalities or performance framework and when translating the new intervention logic into the operational programmes.

14. Above all, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia UNDERLINE that the common, fair, and transparent approach of the Commission to all Member States is a fundamental principle and a crucial condition of successful implementation of CP. General requirements and procedures used for requests and decisions addressed to Member States should be the same in all similar cases (e.g. major projects, state aid issues, etc.), taking into account an individual nature of each case. Otherwise uncertainty and delays in the implementation may occur.

15. The Visegrad Group and Slovenia ARE DETERMINED to coordinate their negotiation efforts in order to enforce the above common proposals and translate them into practice. We MUST strive to finish the negotiations of the legislative package as soon as possible after the closure of the MFF negotiations.

16. Additionally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia INVITE the acting Cypriot and the upcoming Irish Presidency to inform the Member States of the negotiations with the European Parliament in a timely, regular and exhaustive manner.

17. Finally, the Visegrad Group and Slovenia OFFER their constructive cooperation and support in order to reach a good compromise between all co-legislators.