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COMMUNIQUÉ DE PRESSE

Meeting of the Ministers for Economic Affairs of the Visegrad Group and France

As part of the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group, on June 21, 2021, the Ministers for Economic Affairs of the V4 countries and France met in Kraków (Cracow). The meeting was hosted by Mr Jarosław Gowin, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Technology of the Republic of Poland.

The main topic of the ministers' discussion was the industrial policy of the European Union, including an overview of the most important challenges and measures as indicated in the updated industrial strategy, published by the European Commission in early May this year. In addition, the ministers discussed the current economic situation in their countries and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and presented the main assumptions of their National Recovery Plans.

The experience of over a year of the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the need to support the green and digital transformation of our economies, while at the same time highlighting the difficulties resulting from overdependence in strategic areas for the European economy. In October 2020, the European Council agreed that achieving strategic autonomy while preserving open economy is one of the key objectives of the European Union.

The ministers agreed that it is necessary to jointly increase the production capacity of European strategic industries, build capacity for green and digital transformation, while focusing on diversified, resilient, open and stable supply chains based on European technologies and adopting European instruments ensuring a global level-playing-field. There is a need to strengthen Europe's independence in priority sectors, to fill the investment and innovation gap in the field of modern technologies, and to maintain the competitiveness of the EU economy vis-à-vis external partners. Moreover, it is necessary to create industrial policy instruments and solutions that will ensure the security of our economies in the event of possible future crises. Industrial cooperations thanks to instruments such as Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) or through the European budget and *Next Generation EU* will be key to translate our ambitions into practice.

Building industrial potential as well as green and digital transformation based on domestic technologies and production should be a priority for the EU. The well-functioning single market, based on the four freedoms and the principle of non-discrimination, constitutes Europe's strategic autonomy. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to restore Europe's independence, reduce dependence on third countries in sectors important for the EU, and strengthen its resilience and develop its industrial

potential, including the production of medications and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). I am counting on close cooperation in this regard with other countries of the Visegrad Group and France – said Jarosław Gowin, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Technology of the Republic of Poland.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown how much our prosperity depends on the EU sovereignty. France, together with the Visegrad countries, shares the objective to strengthen Europe's most important industrial ecosystems. We will continue to work together to shape the Union's industrial policy and create the right framework conditions to support the decarbonation and digitalization of our industries. In this context, the Important projects of common European interest (IPCEI) being developed by Member States, such as in the health sector, should allow us to foster wider cooperation to overcome market failure and enable breakthrough innovation – underlined Bruno Le Maire, Minister for Economy, Finance and Recovery of the French Republic.

Global challenges such as climate change or growing populations coupled with the impact of a global pandemic is leading us to redefine our way of thinking about natural resources and reorganising the strategic industrial value chains towards a European economy that is creating more value with using less resources. This technology-led transformation “from volume to value”, will be underpinned by substantially increased and focused expenditures into the research and development of new industrial technologies enabling this transformation. We need to coordinate our activities and deploy our current strategic resources to bring together value for money for people, the environment and businesses – stated Karel Havlíček, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic.

For more than a year, we have been living in a world marked by various measures to combat coronavirus, and these anti-pandemic measures have also hit the economy, industry and business hard. As the world unites together in an effort to beat the coronavirus, as well as in economics, joint steps need to be taken to restart it again. Therefore, I gladly accepted the invitation to negotiate with European partners, because mutual cooperation can help to closer cooperation between our companies, scientists and researchers. I believe that the result can be a faster transition to Industry 4.0, new beneficial innovative solutions as well as greener economy – underlined Richard Sulik, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic.

European strategic autonomy may only be achieved by a high degree of technological sovereignty and solid industrial base. We have to do more to exploit our creative resources and ensure their uptake for the benefit of our societies and well-being. Our role is to enhance this process and protect the achievements – said László Palkovics, Minister of Innovation and Technology of Hungary.

The ministers also discussed the concept of strategic autonomy in the field of the pharmaceutical industry. In order to emphasize the role of the pharmaceutical sector in building an innovative economy and improving access to safe and effective medication, the ministers signed *the Joint declaration on mutual cooperation in the field of pharmaceutical industry development*. The aim of the declaration is to coordinate activities aimed at improving the competitiveness and developing the pharmaceutical potential of the V4 countries and France as part of the implementation of the EU pharmaceutical strategy priorities, in particular in developing production infrastructure, new active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and medications, and cross-border pharmaceutical projects. The Ministers expressed during their meeting a wider interest in fostering industrial cooperations between themselves and with their European partners going forward.

At the end of the meeting, the Minister of the Economy, Finance and Recovery of the Republic of France, Bruno Le Maire, presented the main topics that should be considered during the French Presidency of the EU Council, mainly concerning the industrial and competition policy.

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