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Central European leaders meet in southeastern Poland

The presidents of four Central European nations discussed a range of political, economic and social issues at a two-day meeting in southeastern Poland on Friday and Saturday.

On Saturday, the four leaders - Poland's Andrzej Duda, Slovakia's Andrej Kiska, the Czech Republic's Milos Zeman and Hungary's Janos Ader - took part in a session in the city of Rzeszow where they discussed the European Union's energy policy and developments in the Central European gas sector, in addition to a planned gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, according to the Polish president.



Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary together form a regional alliance known as the Visegrad Group (V4).

After Saturday's session, Duda told reporters that the plan to build the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany is not economically viable; the project is politically motivated and would harm Europe's ability to create an efficient energy union, the Polish president said.

All four presidents agreed that an efficient energy union means one that will ensure competitive energy supplies in Europe, combined with a "real diversification of sources of gas supplies," according to the Polish president.

Maros Sefcovic, vice-president of the European Commission for the Energy Union, was a special guest of the Rzeszow session.

President Duda also told reporters on Saturday that the four-nation Visegrad Group "wants to speak with one voice" on key issues in Europe.

According to Duda, values shared by Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are the source of these four Central European countries' "strength and value."

It is important that V4 countries pass on their experience to other countries in the European Union, Duda said. The four nations experienced "the dark years of communism" as a result of which they have "an extremely strong spirit of freedom," he added.

"This experience has taught us to fight against any attempts to impose things on us from the outside. As a result, we have a great desire for self-development, a great desire to preserve our values, but also a great sense of the community," he said.

According to the Polish president, the V4 leaders also talked about the history of the region, "common values" and "the path to take in the EU."

"We all want a Europe of homelands, but at the same time we absolutely cannot imagine our homelands without Europe," Duda said. "We want to speak with one voice about issues that are common and most important to us."

We believe this is our strength and value ... in a united Europe."

"We believe that our shared values are a great benefit for the European Union," Duda added.

Central European nations do not agree to any refugee quotas and forced resettlement of refugees within the European Union, Duda also told reporters on Saturday.

He noted that migrants coming to Central European countries do not seek to stay there on a permanent basis. That's why Western Europe "looks at the problem in a different way, and we see it differently," he said.

The Polish president also remarked that the Visegrad Group's "flexible solidarity" plan for migration policy is gaining support in the EU and that politicians in Western Europe are "beginning to look at the migration crisis in a different way."

Duda told reporters that the two-day talks in southeastern Poland also concerned issues such as "the future of young generations," demographic developments and "the responsibility of politicians for creating opportunities, including job opportunities, for young people."

On Friday, the first day of their meeting in southeastern Poland, the four presidents took part in two plenary sessions at Lancut Castle near Rzeszow.

Summing up the first day of the meeting, Szczerski, a minister in the Polish President's Office, said that during their first session that day the V4 presidents discussed the issue of emigration among young people, a problem faced by all four countries.

"The presidents discussed ways to encourage those who have already left to come back," Szczerski said, adding that the leaders also exchanged views on what individual countries can do to deal with the problem.

The leaders agreed that young people need to be provided with opportunities and a head start in business as well as on the job market, but also with the right family policy, according to Szczerski.

He added that President Duda mentioned the Polish government's Family 500-plus child benefit programme in this context as a standout example of a project that supports young people.

"The presidents came to the conclusion that support for young people should cross borders," Szczerski said. "They talked about joint scholarships and other forms of regional support for innovative young people."

During their second session on Friday, the leaders discussed European identity, Szczerski said. They agreed that Europe is "not just an institution" and that "it is not only about politics, but above all about culture," he said.

Europe is "a community that makes us understand what it means to be European," and in this context the Polish president "said that our goal is a Europe of homelands," Szczerski said.

Duda also pointed out that Europe is a community of national identities and that these together make up "the fabric of European civilisation."

Szczerski added that the presidents also talked about the migration crisis, which has exposed "the weaknesses of European policy, while also posing a major political and cultural challenge."

The four leaders on Friday also visited a museum honouring Poles who saved Jews during World War II, Szczerski said.

Source: PAP, president.pl

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