

Vienna Migration Conference 2017

Opening Speech by ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger

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Let me welcome all of you to the 2017 “Vienna Migration Conference” under the title “Migration Partnerships – Frameworks for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”. It is a great privilege to have you all here today.

The VMC is our annual flagship event where we want to discuss the most burning issues in the field of migration together with decision makers, experts, the academic world, media and civil society. We want to do this from a European and from a global perspective. And we want to see what progress the last year has brought but also where gaps persist and questions are still open.

Last year’s conference took place at a time when the so called refugee crisis had reached its peak and European governments were slowly but surely regaining control of the situation. The EU – Turkey Statement had seen its first months of implementation and together with the closing of the Balkan Route shown its impact on arrivals. The UN Member States had adopted the New York Declaration and initiated a two years process of developing two compacts on migration and refugees. The EU and its Member States had initiated a new Migration Partnership Framework with important countries of origin together with already existing but still quite young instruments like the Valetta Action Plan or the EU Trust Fund.

Nevertheless, everybody at the Conference knew that we were only at the very beginning of a long journey towards better solutions on migration and that it would take a fundamentally different approach in order to get there. The Conference also confirmed that none of the traditional instruments of migration policy would have the potential to really address the main drivers of migration which were identified as conflict, demography, income disparities, and socio-economic development and transition. There was wide agreement that we need to address these drivers much, much better if migration should become a matter of choice rather than necessity, and if confidence should be restored that migration can be managed in a beneficial way. If this should be achieved, the Conference concluded, we need progress in three main areas, namely protection, prosperity and partnership.

Partnership on migration is of course not a new concept. As a slogan it was widely used in formal speeches and official documents since many years. But more often than not, it appeared as an empty phrase rather than a real commitment. Has this changed now? We

think that there is some reason for hope. The instruments and initiatives that have emerged over the last two years reflect the notion of partnership better than previous attempts. There seems to be a new impetus for investing in long-term partnership on migration. The question is whether there is enough political vision, will and endurance to bring about fundamental change as well.

And this is the main question we want to discuss today and tomorrow. We want to learn from our distinguished guests and discussants: How do they understand partnership on migration? What Good Practices do exist? Do we need new ideas and concepts? Can we develop realistic objectives and find ways to achieve them? Do we need a global normative framework? And which concrete actions should we see as priorities?

We at ICMPD have identified a number of general principles for migration partnerships, such as better crisis responsiveness, refugee autonomy, responsibility sharing and pathways to protection, addressing the regional dimension of migration and displacement, the promotion of pathways to legal migration, the creation of perspectives for the young and educated in countries of origin, and last but not least more intelligent policies on return.

In all of this we strongly believe that migration partnerships will have to go beyond the margins set by migration policy. They will only work when we lift the involvement of the private sector to a completely new level. Private sector investment and know-how will be crucial factors to make a real difference. They will also bring new opportunities for economic cooperation and development. It would be the biggest achievement if cooperation on migration related goals would evolve to something much bigger, benefitting all partners and reducing global inequality at the same time.

Migration partnerships require sound technical expertise and a strong commitment to actual policy-making. And this brings me to tonight's panel. I have the great pleasure to welcome a panel of distinguished discussants who combine both – great knowledge on migration issues and great experience in policy-making. I want to thank all of them again for joining us tonight and look very much forward to our discussion.

But before, that I have the honor and special pleasure to welcome our key note speaker for tonight and thank him for coming to Vienna – His Excellency Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank, who will share with us his views on the role and potential of partnerships in better managing migration.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that you will enjoy tonight's panel and tomorrow's conference.

Thank you.