

6th Budapest Process Ministerial Conference „The Istanbul Commitments“ – Opening Statement

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to the 6th Budapest Ministerial Conference on behalf of the Secretariat of the Budapest Process together with our friends and partners from Turkey, Hungary and the European Commission.

As a former minister of foreign affairs, I learned to appreciate the value of multilateral dialogues, both informal and formal. However, on an issue as potentially beneficial, but also as potentially divisive as migration such dialogue is especially important.

As long as we find the willingness and strength to share our ideas, our visions but also our disagreements, our seemingly opposing objectives or opinions - as long as we do that - we can try to find solutions, and a way to move forward. And we can identify opportunities for operational cooperation. Networks, mutual understanding and trust are essential elements for any operational cooperation. These can only be built by listening to each other, and to have the opportunity to exchange also informally.

The Budapest Process started just over 25 years ago at a time of great nervousness in Western Europe about migration. Just a few years after the Cold War, and with the break up of Yugoslavia still forcing millions to leave their country, countries met in the capital of Hungary to discuss ‘migration’. The Budapest Process was born.

With Hungary as its chair, the Process started to grow fast in terms of its participation but also in terms of its relevance. During its long history it went through several transformations but always kept its key principles of flexibility, informality and equal level participation. And it is safe to say that

its approach is not only the basis for its own success but also served as a blueprint for many other regional migration dialogues.

Dear colleagues,

Today we have come together to adopt the “Istanbul Commitments on the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration” and “A Call for Action – a five year plan”. These documents are the result of a long negotiation process. But they also build on the extraordinary, and ever deepening, cooperation which developed in the Silk Routes partnership framework since the last Ministerial Conference in 2013. This is all the more remarkable when one considers the dramatic events of the last 5 years. Not all initiatives at the international level, inside and outside the migration topic, can claim that.

In that sense the Istanbul Commitments on the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration shall open the doors to a new stage in migration governance among the regions it covers. It will give guidance, it will provide a common vision and it will remind us of the priorities we have set jointly and across all different viewpoints and positions. It is a truly common agenda, also because it does not limit itself to those positions which everyone can agree upon easily. It went the difficult way of bringing together the viewpoints which differ, where there is no agreement from the outset, and where compromise is necessary but difficult to achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Budapest Process is a state-led dialogue. States take the decisions, set the agenda and initiate the activities of the dialogue.

And states also decide whether or not they feel bound by these ministerial conclusions. Of course it is regrettable that no compromise was found which would have satisfied all states. However, I am confident that even those states who might not subscribe to all what will be adopted today, they still will be interested to participate in the dialogue. Indeed, several of them have indicated this already. It happened before, and might happen in the future. Openness and voluntary participation has always been a strength of the Budapest Process.

Dear Ministers, dear friends,

As a secretariat, the role of ICMPD has since the beginning always been to support the chairs and the participating states and organisations in their

efforts. We have assumed this role with great pride and are very grateful for the trust you have put in us throughout the years, also in preparation of this Ministerial Conference.

We at ICMPD believe that it is always possible to improve migration governance. I hope that also our work as Secretariat of the Budapest Process has made a contribution to this important goal.

All that is left for me now is to thank our chair and co-chair again for entrusting ICMPD to be part of this important initiative. I want to thank you for being such great hosts and partners. Of course I want to thank all States and organisations that are present today and have supported the process that led up to it.

And last but not least, I want to thank all of my ICMPD colleagues – especially Cecilia and her team - who have been involved in the preparation of this Conference.

Thank you very much.