

## Conference “ENHANCING COOPERATION with BUSINESS DIASPORA in AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND and GERMANY”

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*Web Conference, 16 June 2021*

Dear Minister Joksimović, Dear Minister Atanasković, Your Excellency Ambassador Lutterotti, and President Cadež, Dear Partners and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for being our honourable guests and keynote speakers today. ICMPD's work feels strongly appreciated and I am sure we will use this conference to review previous activities and lessons learned, and to foster even stronger cooperation for the benefit of the Serbian institutions, agencies, the diaspora and the private sector. Most importantly, all of this is also intended to support the perspective of the Republic of Serbia of becoming member of the European Union and joining the European Single Market.

Dear colleagues, when listening to the previous speakers and their thoughts on the priorities of Serbia in terms of economic cooperation, development and diaspora engagement, I think I can proudly say that the Link Up! project tries to address many of them. It aims to promote local and regional development through diaspora engagement. It wants to foster the local business eco-system and environment. And it provides mentorship and brokering to attract investment to the country, to make companies ready for the international market and to enhance the knowledge on transnational entrepreneurship activities, which are the foundation of the European market.

I would especially like to thank Minister Joksimović for being our appreciated partner and strong supporter in the implementation of the Link Up! project. Without your support we would not be able to achieve our results. I would also like to thank the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, the Serbian Development Agency, and the six Regional Development Agencies. They have adjusted the international know-how on the topic of business diaspora to their strong local know-how and experience. The resulting synergies and concepts will provide a solid and sustainable foundation for new initiatives involving the diaspora in Serbia.

As an organisation active on three continents and engaged in migration dialogues, research, policy development and capacity building, many of the ICMPD projects have strong diaspora components. We are fully aware of the potential the diasporas can bring to their countries of residence, their home countries and the European Union as a whole. But we also believe that it requires targeted policies and intelligent measures to fully utilise the potential of diaspora engagement for development.

The Republic of Serbia is already addressing the issue in an excellent way by developing targeted strategies, by establishing responsible agencies and by devising the necessary support measures – some of which we will learn about in the course of this conference.

ICMPD remains dedicated to the Western Balkans and specifically Serbia as the central and pivotal state in the region and is very happy to support Serbia with our knowledge and expertise on the topic. We had started this cooperation together with the Austrian Development Agency in 2016 in the framework of the first Link Up! Serbia project, which focused on research on the Serbian diaspora in Austria. Concretely, we wanted to learn about the business profiles of the Serbian community in Austria, how the business support system in Serbia could reach out to them, and which mechanisms are needed to boost diaspora investments.

We found partners in Regional Development Agencies, local municipalities and the Chamber of Commerce for follow-up work and initiatives. Last but not least, the Link Up! Serbia project organized the “Regional Forum on diaspora direct investments - Experiences from the Western Balkans” in September 2017, a conference that gathered a great number of experts and participants, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Regional Development Agencies, municipalities and the diaspora itself. Research, stakeholder involvement and the discussions at the forum laid a strong foundation for the Link Up! Serbia II project, which turned into ICMPD’s pioneer project for business diaspora engagement in the Western Balkans region.

Link Up! Serbia II, which started in November 2019, includes all elements that were identified as priorities in this process. It foresees the development of mentorship programs for small and medium enterprises. It provides technical assistance to local municipalities for creating and promoting investment opportunities. It sets up a national coordination framework to address diaspora needs and to foster business partnerships. It develops an online business platform to inform about investment opportunities. And last but not least, it will help to organise business events in Serbia and in Austria, Switzerland and Germany that will bring together the diaspora, municipalities and the business sector to discuss and develop very concrete initiatives.

Despite of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought also to Link Up! II, the project has managed to provide technical assistance to 30 local municipalities, to pilot a Diaspora Business Hub and to develop guidelines for diaspora business engagement. Currently, the project is working on the online platform for business diaspora in close cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia; and is preparing the Zurich Diaspora Business Summit for Serbian companies to take place later in the year.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude with a principle remark. At ICMPD we strongly believe that many of the migration challenges can be solved and many of the opportunities linked to

migration can be successfully utilised when States and all other stakeholders work together in a spirit of full respect, mutual trust and true partnership. We also believe that many of these solutions have to involve economic aspects, include the private sector and reach out to migrants where their own economic interests come into play. The Link Up! project and the cooperation with Serbia and all other stakeholders fulfil exactly those priorities. Link Up! applies the principle of partnership in its design and in all of its activities, it emphasises economic aspects and it fully considers the interests of migrants and the communities they live in. I think that this approach is the reason why the project is successful and will hopefully continue to produce successful outcomes in the future as well.

I would like to conclude my keynote by again thanking all our partners and everyone participating in this conference. I wish you a successful forum and very fruitful discussions.

Thank you.