

Inauguration Reception in Vienna

Speech by Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, Partners and Friends,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address you today for the first time as the newly elected Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Thank you for accepting my invitation to this reception. I received a vote of confidence by our 15 Member States in the very first round of voting, something which I do not just take for granted. I would like to thank the Steering Group for their trust in me and will indeed do my best to deliver on that trust. I would also like to thank the ICMPD staff members who have worked hard to make this inauguration event happen so shortly after I took office.

There is no need for a lengthy explanation on the significance of migration these days. Last year's events have made this very clear. As Commissioner Hahn pointed out in his video message, Europe is confronted with an unprecedented challenge: the largest influx of refugees since the end of the Second World War. A recent UN report showed that there are also more migrants than ever before – namely 240 million - 50 million more than 10 years ago.

And while more migration can bring more opportunities for migrants as well as more opportunities for countries of origin and destination to benefit, the rising number of forcefully displaced people is certainly bad news for everyone. The unregulated arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees, like in Europe last summer, could make the situation even worse, and has created political pressures unlike anything we have witnessed in the past decades.

Since its foundation in the early 1990s, ICMPD has worked on various aspects of migration, looking both at long, mid and short term developments and solutions. Our mission statement says that "migration is about people". And what might sound obvious at first, can be quite decisive at a second glance. When we speak about people, we unquestionably speak about the migrants and their rights. But we also speak about the populations in the destination and transit countries. Migration policies cannot be developed or even be discussed without looking at this bigger, human, picture. We don't talk about managing transportation of goods. We always talk about people, their fates and how they are affected by migration.

This broad approach towards migration also determines how we conduct our work. We do policy-oriented research. We support intergovernmental dialogues between Europe and its Eastern and Southern Neighbours through the Budapest and Prague Processes and the EU-

Africa Migration and Mobility Dialogue. Furthermore, ICMPD supports and advises national governments and regional organisations on all migration issues.

Last year's events in Europe have made one thing very clear: the existing structures, mechanisms and processes to protect refugees and to manage our borders do not function well. Instead of acting proactively, Europe seemed one step behind the developments. And more often than not, European states acted unilaterally - even where joint mechanisms would have existed and would have been more effective.

In this very complex setting, ICMPD is just one of several actors. We do take our role very seriously, however, and will not call for simple solutions to such a complex crisis. We see a set of challenges for Europe and its partners, which will have our particular attention, namely:

1. We need to regain control of the movements and regulate entry to our states. For that, we will need to curb smuggling of migrants and refugees, but also provide safe and legal ways towards protection - one does not work without the other.
2. Europe needs to ensure the proper functioning of the European protection system, including providing reception under decent conditions, but also implement return when needed. Without this, Europe will lose the trust of its citizens, and will not be able to provide protection to those in need;
3. Guarantee that refugees who will stay in Europe have the rights and possibilities to integrate and participate, and that obligations of both the newly-arrived and the host society are clear. Only through successful integration in the labour market and educational systems can we reap the full benefits of migration. And this is key to prevent the radicalisation of disenfranchised youth.
4. And finally, we need to develop a new, truly European migration regime, defining what the objectives of our migration and protection systems are. Europe has to act in solidarity, with a clear distribution of responsibilities.

These priorities are all complex and demanding and have to be tackled at a time of great political insecurity about the future of Schengen, of Europe even. ICMPD is ready to play its role to support you in this.

In this sense, I want to strengthen ICMPD in two fields of action:

First : we all know that to master the current situation, we need to follow a holistic approach. It will not be enough if certain countries or institutions just pull individual levers, work on isolated policy areas, regardless of being on the "pull" or "push" side. Doing this means underestimating the dimension and the complexity of the situation. The current situation requires comprehensive solutions. It is also clear that no country can shoulder these challenges alone. We can and will succeed only by working together.

However, as each country also follows its national interests, it takes a neutral broker to bring change forward. A platform that can analyse, act and communicate beyond national interests, and beyond tomorrow's news headlines. The international community needs a "dialogue and mediation" platform for migration. An organisation which understands the priorities and interests

of countries of origin, of transit and of destination. For this purpose, I would like to continue developing ICMPD in the future and offer its services to states and to Europe.

This platform should also be able to break new ground, the needs for which are only just emerging. I think for example especially about the difficult question of return and readmission. Few topics – if any – can have such a negative impact on relations between countries as the discussion on return, especially when forced. ICMPD should offer a platform that does not shy away from discussing these essential issues, listening to the concerns of everyone involved, proposing concrete solutions and finding ways to break through deadlocked situations.

Second: Europe needs to prepare itself better for future developments. It must succeed to recognise certain developments further ahead. The European public was caught by surprise by the dimension and intensity of the recent migration flows. If their governments had been better prepared, then they could have acted more deliberately, more harmonised and more successfully – this would have been in the interest of both, the arriving refugees and migrants, as well as the European destination countries. It is in everyone's interest to improve anticipation of future developments as early as possible.

In this sense, I want to strengthen ICMPD as a think-tank, which provides independent research on future developments of migration, linking policy and practice . Moving from ideas to action. This think tank will deal with issues that go beyond individual states and beyond the EU. Only the broadest possible perspective will reveal migration trends of the future. The think tank will develop scenarios and complete impact analyses. For instance: What would the conclusion of certain agreements lead to? What will be the effect on flows; what will be the impact on other countries? How can Europe prepare for environmental degradation or for political turmoil?

In summary, ICMPD will in the future:

1. become the mediation platform for migration issues and
2. ICMPD, as a think tank, will provide solutions for future migration issues.

and continue pursuing its current mission vigorously.

The prerequisite for this expansion of the ICMPD is obvious: the broadest possible base of supporters and member countries. The broader our support, the greater the acceptance and recognition of ICMPD's work will be. In this sense, I will work with my Steering Group to strategically expand the backing of our organisation and to make ICMPD the leading European Migration Organisation.

Practically my whole career was dominated by two challenging issues: international politics and mediation. This was the case throughout my activity as a Member of the European Parliament, as the second President of the Austrian National Assembly and during my five year tenure as minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria. Today, it is a great privilege for me to be able to use my experience in both politics and mediation in my new capacity as Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. I look forward to this task and look forward to working with you all.

As Gabriela Abado has already said earlier today, The International Centre for Migration Policy Development was founded in the early 1990s when Europe was affected by a major political

shift in the East and a war in the Balkans, leading to the largest migration and refugee movement in decades. As a response to the crisis, ICMPD did exactly what needed to be done: it worked to understand the refugee crisis, to learn from it, to draw the right conclusions, to take the necessary measures and ensure that the international system emerges strengthened by it. ICMPD contributed to laying the foundation for the Europe as we know it now – including the enlargement of the EU, and the improvement of migration and border management concepts, without which we would have been hit far harder by the situation this summer.

Today, it is our call to address the current crisis, learn from it and again make Europe and indeed the whole international system emerge stronger than before.