

Inauguration Reception in Brussels

Speech by Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

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Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues and Friends,

Allow me to first thank our host for his kind hospitality. I would like to underline though that there is more to it than simply 'an Austrian connection'. Indeed, Austria assumes the chairmanship of the Steering Group of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in other words, the board of ICMPD member states, in 2016. We are very grateful for that!

Thank you for accepting Ambassador Grahammer's invitation. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address you today for the first time as the newly elected Director General of ICMPD. 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.

As you know better than I do, developments at the European level with regard to migration issues are overwhelming at the moment: the informal JHA Council just finished— migration and asylum currently and for the years to come determines our political agendas. I am convinced that, unless we come with new ideas, new approaches, we see enormous dangers to the Europe as we know it now.

In the course of my career I was allowed to repeatedly deal with two major challenges: On the one hand this was 'international politics' and, secondly, the very important task of 'mediating'. In my functions as Member of the European Parliament, as the deputy president of the Austrian National Parliament and during my five years as foreign minister of the Republic of Austria, both mediation and the international aspects of politics were always determinative.

Of course, I do ask myself what would I do today if I was still in government with regard to migration and asylum? With the distance I have now, I can reformulate this question and ask myself, what would I have needed, if I was still in government in order to shape policy and take the right decisions?

In this very complex setting, ICMPD is just one of many actors. But we do take our role very seriously, however, and will not call for simple solutions to such a crisis. National governments are currently undertaking tremendous efforts in order to find answers to the day to day challenges. We see a number of challenges for Europe and its partners, which will have our particular attention, namely:

Regaining control over the movements, countering smuggling and trafficking of migrants and refugees, and developing sustainable safe and legal ways towards protection;

Ensuring the proper functioning of our refugee status determination processes, including proper reception AND return when needed. Without this, we will lose the trust of our population, and we will not be able to provide protection to those who need this;

Making sure that those who will stay have the rights and possibilities to integrate and participate, and that obligations of both the migrants and the society are clear. Only like that we can prevent radicalisation of a youth which needs our particular attention.

Developing a new migration regime, defining what the objectives are of our migration and protection systems, and how we implement them – in solidarity, and via a clear distribution of responsibilities.

The privilege of leading an organisation such as ICMPD is that I can work on new ideas and approaches in order to provide first and foremost the ICMPD member states, but also other partner countries and EU institutions, with support when national politics has mainly to deal with the short-term measures.

ICMPD was founded at the beginning of the 90s when Europe faced a major war and a major political shift, confronting it with the largest migration and refugee movement in decades. As a response to the crisis ICMPD did exactly what needed to be done: that is: to understand the crisis, to draw the right conclusions and to take the necessary operational measures. ICMPD supported the creation of important foundations – 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 current situation today.

Migration needs a broad approach with regard to understanding its dynamics and finding the right operational measures.

ICMPD does policy relevant research, supports intergovernmental dialogues between Europe and its Eastern and Southern Neighbours such as the Budapest and Prague Processes in the East or the Rabat, Khartoum Processes in the South as well as the EU-Africa Partnership. And finally, ICMPD supports and advises national governments and regional organisations on all migration issues, be it through support on legislation, strategy or administrative reform or more technical capacity building. This can be in the area of border management such as in Tunisia, Lebanon or Central Asia or in the area of diaspora outreach such as in Georgia, Jordan or Ghana. ICMPD is both a research and an operational organisation.

With my experience in national government and in international politics, it is my firm intention to strengthen ICMPD in two ways:

1. Firstly: we all know that to solve the current situation, we require a holistic approach. We should not underestimate the dimension and the complexity of the situation. It is also clear that no country can shoulder these challenges alone - we can and will succeed only by working together if we don't want to be always one step behind developments.

At the same time, as a former politician, I don't see a problem of putting forward national interests – this is absolutely legitimate. However, it takes sometimes a platform that can analyze, act and communicate beyond national interests. For this role, I would like to continue to develop the ICMPD in the future and offer its services first and foremost to its member states, which also include non-EU countries, for instance Switzerland (as co-founding state), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia, our future member state Turkey and associate the other EU member state as well as Norway. We need a "dialogue and mediation" platform for migration. We need an organisation which understands the priorities and interests of countries of origin, of transit and of destination.

This platform should also be able to break new ground. I definitely think about the difficult question of return and readmission. Few topics – if any – can have such an enormous 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 looking for ways to break through deadlocked situations. I believe that ICMPD has already proven its ability to gather countries around the most difficult topics and we have to pursue into this direction.

2. Secondly, we need to arm ourselves better for future developments. We must succeed to recognize certain developments way ahead. We need to get from a "reaction" to an anticipatory "acting". This can only be done on the basis of solid evidence and analysis and through a thorough understanding of all facets of migration.

In this sense, I want to strengthen ICMPD as a think tank, which deals mainly with the mid and longer term future developments of migration. This Think Tank is to deal with issues that go beyond individual nations and beyond the EU. It involves the broadest possible perspective, because only then the big migration trends of the future will reveal. I also want it to look at scenario's and impact analyses. What would certain agreements lead to? What will be the impact on flows; on other countries? We have been working into this direction already with our member states, but we will strengthen this much more. I think that our understanding of the so called Silk route of the Western Balkans, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan could very much benefit from such an approach.

In summary, my objective for the new ICMPD will be:

1. Pursuing our ongoing research, our support for dialogues with third countries and our numerous operational capacity building activities and expand them using new instruments such as the trust funds;
2. Developing ICMPD's capacity to act as a mediation platform for migration issues and
3. Further expanding ICMPD's think tank capacities in order to better deal with the challenges of future migration issues.

It is these three elements which I would have liked to be able to draw on, if I was still in government. Three key areas of support for governments offered by a European organisation so that policy thinking, anticipating developments and implementation don't remain empty words.

The prerequisite for this expansion of the ICMPD is obvious: a 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 Membership base of our organisation and to develop ICMPD in the near future to the European Migration Organization.

Today, it is a great privilege for me to be able to use my experience on these tasks in my new capacity as Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development with its headquarters in Vienna, but it is very clear to me that I will spend considerable time in the capitals of ICMPD and EU member states as well as in Brussels.

Thank you very much for your attention and I am looking forward for engaging with ICMPD and EU member states at the Brussels level.