

OSCE Security Days: Refocusing Migration and Security: Bridging National and Regional Responses

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Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues and Friends,

Allow me, first of all, to express thanks to the moderator, Mr. Roderick Parkes, and previous speaker, Mr. Javier Carbajosa. I would also like to thank the OSCE for the invitation to speak at the Security Days conference and note that ICMPD has extensive experience working on some of the key security issues under discussion; trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling, and the impact of crisis situations on migration and migrants. I intend to share the expertise and advice we have in these areas today.

At a conceptual level, one of the largest challenges we face is correctly defining the nature and scale of security threats in the migration context. When we look at the situation from a security perspective, it is necessary to find a balance of two aspects: state security and human security. State security refers to the preservation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of a state. Human security can be understood as ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of people in response to current and emerging threats. In the current situation there is an inevitable tension between security-related interests of states and the need to apply a-human rights centred approach in pursuing them.

Labelling any issue a security threat has implications in terms of the laws and policies that may be considered justified in response. In the context of migration, the security threat label could be used to justify greater surveillance, detention and more restrictive policies. The impact of this on migrants may be denying asylum seekers access to safe countries, thus driving more migrants into the arms of migrant smugglers and human traffickers.

I think we would need to focus on a number of priorities:

- First, States have to regain control over the present migration flows, including international information exchange, registration, reception, and status determination. This will only work via close cooperation among police and border authorities in the area of border management and the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings; States have to offer protection to those in need of it, but also ensure the return and functioning reintegration of those who are not in need of protection;

- Second, at the regional and international level, the current crisis suggests the international framework, the instruments and tools to manage migration are neither fully functional nor fully sufficient anymore. In the EU context, the Dublin Convention, the Schengen System, the Common European Asylum Systems, the EU Acquis on legal and labour migration were all developed in times of comparatively modest inflows and are now under immense pressure in the face of recent inflows. The same may be said at the international level of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1968 Protocol. Put simply - at the regional and international level, we are failing in our duty to provide international protection to those that need it. We must re-conceptualise the framework we use when discussing, and responding to migration related security challenges. We must place protection at the centre of our policies; if we wish to regain control of migration flows and our borders; if we wish to disrupt smuggling operations and irregular border crossing; if we wish to prevent trafficking in human beings and ensure the human security of those fleeing violence, persecution and death in their own countries. Such is the complexity of the situation faced, it is difficult to imagine that this challenge can be met at the national level and by individual policies alone. A truly comprehensive response must be built through regional structures, such as the European Union and OSCE, as well as by making full use of available international fora, instruments and institutions of the UN.
- Third, we must take immediate and urgent measures to reduce the vulnerability of people displaced by conflict and crisis to exploitation, trafficking and abuse. Recent ICMPD research on the impact of the Syrian crisis on human trafficking highlighted that in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the Kurdish Region of Iraq, more and more families have no alternative for survival other than situations of trafficking and exploitation. While some cases of trafficking are committed by organised criminal groups, the majority of cases take place at a lower level involving immediate and extended family members, acquaintances and neighbours. This does not fit the classic organised crime framework used for understanding trafficking, and requires a paradigm shift in how aid structures, access to protection and anti-trafficking policies are pursued. It is therefore paramount that we concentrate efforts in countries hosting IDPs and refugees by investing in infrastructure to provide for basic needs such as housing and food, and ensure opportunities for income generation are available. This will increase resilience and provide alternatives to the “least bad option” for vulnerable people displaced by conflict.
- Fourth, we must complement operational enforcement policies targeting smuggling networks with increased access to international protection for refugees. Smuggling must be understood within the framework of supply and demand dynamics, and policies must address both aspects to be effective. For refugees wishing to seek protection in third countries, the only viable way to access international protection from countries of origin and transit is to pay smugglers substantial sums of money, and maybe even going into debt in the process. This significantly increases migrant vulnerability. As we know, the journeys undertaken are often extremely dangerous, as the 428 deaths crossing the Mediterranean already reported in 2016 demonstrate, and because a migrant smuggling

situation can develop into one of human trafficking along the journey. Current security policies aimed at disrupting migrant smuggling have primarily focused on the supply side; targeting smugglers, facilitators and financial flows through border control and law enforcement operations. The latest research on smuggling that ICMPD carried out for the European Commission suggests that smuggling operations are based around very loosely affiliated networks of service providers. They are not run, in the majority, by professional, international organised criminal network. People involved in smuggling operations may simply be those who are locally based near transit hubs or border crossing points that are willing to financially exploit migrants and make a profit. One major issue we have to tackle is to prevent the propaganda of the smugglers that might involve people that are not in need of protection. Journeys are rarely organised from beginning to end, routes are flexible and can easily change. Enforcement operations must therefore be comprehensive, and target the smuggling hubs and wider networks to be effective. On the demand side; the large (and increasing) volume of migrants embarking on life-threatening crossings of the Mediterranean suggests that demand for smuggling services is relatively static in relation to the price paid by migrants (either in financial terms or the risks faced.) When migration is driven by crisis, and no legal channels to international protection are available, the demand for smuggling services by migrants will not change, regardless of price or risk. It is therefore imperative that policies targeting smuggling networks (the supply side), must be implemented in parallel with policies that provide access to international protection for migrants to address the demand side. Enforcement measures targeting smuggling operations must be accompanied by measures that equally disrupt the demand for smuggling services. Failure to do so will only result in smuggling routes being displaced to riskier, less patrolled crossing points and higher smuggling fees. Simply put, without the means for migrants to access international protection processes in a meaningful and realistic way from their countries of origin and transit, criminal smuggling operations will continue to thrive and profit.

- Finally – we must prepare for migration and security threats on the horizon. When conflicts or disasters strike, migrants in the crisis-stricken country are often among the affected population. As we have seen in Syria over the past 4 years, war and conflict can have a devastating effect on populations and forced migration.

It is clear that in a crisis like this there is disagreement on the right approaches. But we must not lose the will to work together. We need a reinforced commitment towards joint solutions, which will not be perfect but can be decisively better than the current ones or any solutions that focus solely on the national context. There is no simple, single solution. We have to become better in a number of areas: new approaches in refugee protection; border management and control; more effective tackling of migrant smuggling and trafficking; labour migration; integration; and dialogue with countries of origin and transit. And we have to put more emphasis on the “real” root causes of migration by improving the perspectives of the younger generations in the countries of origin of international migration flows. The task is a big one but we have to meet it. Only then we can ensure security in Europe.