

Key note – Conference “Austria: A Locomotive for Cooperation in Central Europe and the Balkans”

Speech by Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

Check speech against delivery

Diplomatic Academy, Vienna, 8 April, 2016

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, Partners and Friends,

Allow me first of all, to express my thanks to Ambassador Hans Winkler and previous speaker, Sir Malcom Rifkind (optional). I would also like to thank the Diplomatic Academy for the invitation to deliver a key note at today’s Conference on “Austria: A Locomotive for Cooperation in Central Europe and the Balkans”.

The agenda of today’s conference is not only timely but very well-chosen in terms of the questions it raises in the context of cooperation in the region and beyond. As Minister for Foreign Affairs I worked closely with Austria’s Central European and South-Eastern European partners while also negotiating and cooperating with many countries outside of Europe, always believing that cooperation, negotiations and talks are the best way to find common ground and to solve the challenges at hand. And functioning cooperation is particularly important between neighbours. But as a minister I also had to be aware of a fundamental requirement – I always had to balance the demands of the two main policy domains - on the one hand the demands of domestic policy where elections are won and lost, on the other the challenges of international and foreign policy where solutions and compromises have to be found between states and partners which at times can be very different in their views and interests. To find this balance is particularly difficult in the area of migration, and I am very aware of that also in my new position as Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

In line with the work of my organization I would like to focus my key note on the issue of migration and highlight a few aspects. First of all, even while we are confronted with the most difficult migration situation in recent history we have to look beyond the current challenges and have to focus on holistic, balanced and long-term solutions. What we need is a holistic concept for all aspects of migration; and such a concept has to achieve many things at the same time.

It has to offer protection to those in need but provide for return and reintegration of those who are not in need of it. It has to tackle irregular migration but also offer opportunities for legal migration. It has to start in the countries that people leave and to address the main root causes of migration – conflict, economic imbalances and the lack of perspectives especially for the younger generations in these countries. It has to deepen the cooperation with the main

countries of transit along the migration routes in order to support them in dealing with their own challenges and to pave the way for joint solutions. And it has to ensure successful integration of genuine refugees and legal immigrants in countries of destination while gaining the acceptance of the voters for related policies.

But it does not stop there. In Germany, for example, 80 percent of Syrian refugees have stated that are willing to go back once the war has ended. Therefore, first and foremost, we need to do everything possible to bring peace to Syria and the other major conflict zones fueling the global refugee flows. Then, we can start – and should start - to support the return of those refugees who want to go home and support them through programs which would also help them build solid foundations for their future.

It is safe to say that European governments will be fully occupied with addressing the current crisis also in 2016 and trying to regain control over migration flows and to find common ground for functioning European responses. The cooperation between Austria, its neighbours and the countries along the so called Western Balkans route during recent months is a good example for how important it is that countries work together in finding such approaches – even when these approaches are not applauded by every observer.

The EU – Turkey agreement from March 2016 is another important milestone, however, it can only be one of many steps on the way to a functioning global solution. The agreement has started to show immediate effects and the numbers on the Western Balkans route went down significantly. But will that be enough? Will it be sustainable? Without a doubt, many of the points of the agreement - like the return of irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece, the commitment of Greece to step up its asylum system, the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the EU, Turkey's commitment to prevent the emergence of new routes, or the disbursement of up to 6 billion Euros for temporary protection mechanisms in Turkey - play an important role in returning to an orderly migration management system in the European context. Equally important, and despite of all legitimate criticism, the agreement represents one of the few successful attempts to reach a comprehensive agreement with a major non-European country of transit. However, its implementation will be difficult. And even if it works, it will not provide an answer to all our challenges. For Libya, where up to 800,000 migrants are estimated to wait for a passage to Europe, a similar agreement is not in reach at the moment and also not in the near future. The agreement also does not answer the question of new migration routes emerging, like the Eastern Balkans route, the Black Sea route or the Baltic route.

Refugee and migration potentials remain exceptionally high. More than 4.5 million refugees from Syria are estimated to stay in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. More than 13 million people inside Syria are believed in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. But Syria is not the only crisis we are looking at. In Iraq almost 4 million people are internally displaced. Estimates say that up to 1 million Afghans who currently stay in Iran want to come to Europe. Similar numbers can be assumed for Pakistan and Afghanistan itself. For 2015, UNHCR estimated a total of 32 million “populations of concern” on a global scale, out of which 12 million persons resided in the Middle East and North Africa, 5 million in Eastern and the Horn of Africa, 3 million in Central Africa and 2.2 million in South-East Asia. This implies that the potential for short-term flight and irregular migration to Europe remains extraordinarily high, even when the equally high potentials for economic migration are not taken into account.

And we have to look at these potentials as well. Today, 2 billion persons live in the main regions of origin of migration – Africa, the Arab World and South Asia. By 2050 it will be 3.6 billion persons. Although many of these countries make good progress in terms of economic development they do not develop enough gratifying positions in their economic and social systems for their younger generations. Emigration pressures will continue to exist and if only 10% of the young people who do not see a future for themselves decide to move abroad, it will exceed the admission and integration capacities of countries of destination by far. We have to be honest; migration will need control, will need limitations also in the future.

But Europe also needs immigration. The continent has entered a phase of demographic ageing. European states will be affected differently by this trend but all of them will have to enhance their populations in the working age and share of the population contributing to their welfare systems. A simple opening of our labour markets for immigrants is however not the answer. We need to ensure that the right numbers of people with the right qualifications come to Europe. We need to identify the real demographic and labour market needs of our societies; establish functioning information and recruitment systems in countries of origin; and transfer our skills and training standards. This, by the way, would also have important development impacts for countries of origin.

Still, the need for labour immigration is anything but commonly accepted. We have not managed to get this message across to the European populations who feel rather overwhelmed by immigration than seeing its potential positive effects. We have to become much better at gaining the support of our populations for labour immigration. The issue of integration is closely linked to that. Success and acceptance of our migration policies depend on a successful participation of migrants in our societies, with regard to rights and obligations and with regard to economic, social and cultural inclusion. We need to become better in assessing the skills of those who have come and will come in the future, in bridging gaps in education and training, and in teaching our languages AND values. But integration is also a security issue. If it fails, this feeds exclusion and in the worst case leads to criminality or violent extremism. In view of the heinous terrorist attacks in Belgium, France and Turkey we have to be very aware of that. Successful integration does not only help migrants; it is a precondition for security and cohesion in our societies as well.

Finally, let me say a few words on how Europe has responded to the migration crisis so far. To put it simple, it has not been managed very well. It is obvious: as we see the divergent positions among the member states of the EU and the poor cooperation within the Union and beyond. The existing European migration regime has come under the immense pressures caused by the migration situation and the lack of agreement and unity between the EU MS. Many of the European instruments that had been developed at different times for different situations have lost the capacity to solve today's challenges. New instruments are either not developed yet or do not gain sufficient political support. 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. And we must not forget that the issue of migration is so important that purely national approaches have the potential to drive the EU and Europe further apart. And this might have very serious

consequences that go far beyond the field of migration and affect the European economy, security, cohesion and many other agenda points of today's conference.

The task is a big one but we have to meet it. I am deeply convinced that we can advance towards better solutions to the current crisis but also to managing migration more effectively in the long run.