

Parliament of Finland: EU Committee on root causes of migration Speech by Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, Partners and Friends,

It is with special pleasure that I have the opportunity to address you today on a highly important issue – the root causes of international migration. In my capacity as Director General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) I want my organisation to focus on these very causes because I am deeply convinced that no European migration policy will work which does not manage to find solutions for these issues – as difficult as this may be.

But before I share a few thoughts with you on this important matter; I want say a couple of words about my organisation. The ICMPD was founded in 1993 by Switzerland and Austria in reaction to the fall of the Iron Curtain and in expectation of major challenges resulting from increased migration flows from the East. Many new challenges have come in addition over the years; some have been met with good solutions, some are still waiting for responses to be found. From its very beginning, ICMPD wanted to promote cooperation between its Member States, with the EU and of course also other countries, partners and stakeholders. Today ICMPD has fifteen Member States, about 150 staff members, an increasing network of missions, operates field offices and representations in the European neighbourhood and further abroad and runs more than 60 capacity building projects, migration dialogues and research initiatives in many parts of the world. Finland is and has been a very much appreciated partner in many of our initiatives over the years and I truly hope that this excellent cooperation will continue or even deepen in the future.

But let's turn to migration now, one of the current burning issues on the European and Global agenda. Today, we experience the highest numbers of displacement since the 2nd World War. More people than ever before since 1945 are estimated to have fled from war, conflict and violence. A majority of these refugees are located in the wider neighbourhood of the EU; and as we had to learn last year, many of them have tried to make their way to Europe across the Mediterranean and via the so called Balkans route. Throughout the whole of 2015 and beginning of 2016 the countries along the routes and the other European partners had struggled with finding solutions, reaching agreements and regaining control of the entries to their territories. It is clear that in a crisis like this there was disagreement on the right approaches. And for some time it seemed as if European states had lost the will to work together. The EU – Turkey agreement of March 2016 spreads some hope that regardless of all challenges there is

a reinforced commitment towards joint solutions. These solutions will not be perfect but better than the ones that were at hand some months ago.

We must not fool ourselves. We have made steps in the right direction. But we have to be aware that we are only at the starting point of finding global and functioning solutions. On the Central Mediterranean route, figures in 2016 move along last year's trend. The question on how to cooperate with Libya is pending. The fundamental issue of how to fulfil the obligations of protection in the age of mass migration waits to be resolved; as much as the long-term issue of emigration pressures from Africa, Asia and other world regions. And this brings me to the main question of today's hearing – what are the main root causes of international migration? What are the policy options to address them?

International migration is a highly complex phenomenon which is influenced by a magnitude of factors and motivations at the levels of the individual, the family, bigger social groups, whole societies and states. It is quite difficult to understand all of them and to classify them regarding their relevance. It is definitely impossible to do that in the format of a short key note. Consequently, I want to focus on three main root causes today; root causes that are highly relevant but not always recognised in their significance. These three root causes are conflict, demography and development.

The first root cause for today's challenges in international migration is conflict. It is estimated that about 60 million people have fled from war, conflict and violence on a global scale. In 2015, close to 1.3 million refugees, displaced persons and irregular migrants had applied for asylum in the EU, the highest number since the end of World War II. The so called "large and spontaneous" arrivals are almost always linked to war, civil war and armed conflict. When we look at the asylum application figures in the EU in 2015 for we find Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq on the top three positions, together accounting for more than 660,000 or 52.0 per cent of all applications. However, before the civil war there was hardly any migration from Syria to the EU. And although this is not always remembered, also for Afghanistan and Iraq asylum figures started to grow only after the countries were drawn into war and civil war. When we turn our attention to African countries of origin, we see a similar picture – Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia or Sudan are all plagued by war and violent conflict. The only exceptions to this pattern are found in the immediate neighbourhood, like Kosovo or Albania. But here it is also possible to find common solutions quite quickly as the significant reduction of applications from these countries during 2015 made obvious. For the other main regions of origin the conclusion has to be clear. There will be no sustainable solutions in migration and for solving the refugee crisis without successful conflict resolution in the main regions of origin of flight migration to Europe. As difficult and cumbersome as this undertaking might be, it has to have absolute priority when it comes to the policy options available for addressing the root causes of international migration.

Closely linked and equally important is another policy priority. We have to work together to improve the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the countries neighbouring conflict zones. We have to ensure immediate assistance but also temporary economic integration, education for the children, access to health care and housing etc. For this we need to cooperate with the countries hosting large numbers of refugees on an open and fair basis, knowing that we

will experience difficulties and setbacks in this cooperation. But if we fail on this even bigger numbers of refugees and migrants will try to move on to Europe.

The second root cause I want to discuss is demography. Demography is often quoted in the debate on migration but it is worthwhile to take a more detailed look at the related challenges and opportunities. First, a few basic facts: today, the world population is estimated at app. 7.3 billion people. By 2050 it will have grown to app. 9.7 billion. And this growth will have been very uneven among the world regions. Africa's population will more than double from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion people. Asia's population will increase less significantly but still grow from 4.4 to 5.3 billion people. Let's have a look at some of the main countries of origin of migration to Europe. Today app. 32 million people live in Afghanistan; 2050 it will be 55 million. In Iraq the population will grow from 37 million people to 80 million; in Somalia from 10.5 million to 30 million; and in Nigeria from 174 million to app. 400 million. I think these figures speak for themselves and although many of these countries are expected make good progress in terms of economic development they still face a huge problem. Their populations will not only have grown by 2050, they will also be very young. There will not be enough gratifying positions in their economic and social systems to provide perspectives to the younger generations. Some experts argue that for every free vacancy in developing countries there is a minimum of four to five candidates, who are often well-educated and have aspirations similar to ours when it comes to their life and future. If only 10% of these people decide to move to the highest developed countries, it will exceed their integration capacities by far.

Contrary to that, Europe's population is expected to shrink from 740 to 707 million people until 2050. And the "old continent" will get much older during the process of demographic decline. Based on continued immigration trends, Eurostat predicts that the median age within the EU will rise from 42.5 years in 2015 to 46.4 years in 2080. Without migration it would be 49.8 years. But there is a more important demographic indicator, which goes by the bulky term of "old-age dependency ratio". Simply put, it measures that relation between the number of people in the working age against the number of people in retirement age. Today, in the EU there is one person above 65 years on 3.5 persons in working age. In 2080 and with continued immigration this ratio will be 1:1, without immigration even worse.

Obviously, the need for immigration is not just a media catchword; demographic ageing is a reality that will affect our economies and welfare systems more than many are aware of. We will need immigration as part of a policy mix that comprises higher participation rates, longer working life, economic growth; higher productivity, technological innovation and family-friendly labour policies for higher birth rates. Immigration alone will not solve the problems of demographic ageing in Europe but without immigration it will be almost impossible to solve these problems.

But we have to be realistic – it is not about simply taking in people. Each country needs the right kind of immigration with the right kind of skills, qualifications and characteristics. A lot of work needs to be done to bring educational and vocational training standards together, to make migrants fit for European labour markets. This has to be a main priority of development cooperation and will help both the countries in demand and in supply of labour migration. We

have to become smarter in managing mobility between the two sides. We can do this; and we have to do this if we want to meet the economic and demographic challenges of the future.

This brings me to the third root cause I want to address today – and that is development. This might sound a bit surprising but contrary to widespread beliefs it is not so much poverty which causes migration but economic and social development. Development brings fundamental changes within a society, changes that cause emigration. Before the industrialisation of the agriculture, the majority of the population lives in rural areas; many hands are needed to work the land and child mortality is high. In order to get by, families need many children, some of them die at a young age and the others are needed to give a hand. Development changes that. Machines replace the many hands needed before; child mortality goes down, population figures go up as much as educational levels and aspirations. But there are not enough perspectives for the growing numbers of young people that are not needed anymore in agriculture. They move to the next big city or move abroad to build their lives. In the past, European countries went through this phase until birth rates went down, population growth stabilised and emigration pressures dropped. Will African and Asian countries go through similar developments? Already now the growth in birth rates slows also in many African and Asian countries while the average GDP per capita rises. Thus, it is likely that at some point they will also turn from emigration to immigration countries. But this point is in the distant future and until then it will be about supporting them in creating more and better opportunities for their younger generations at home.

As I said before, there are many reasons for migration but three root causes I discussed today definitely need to be addressed to ensure “orderly migration”. The EU and its Member States need to engage more strongly in conflict resolution. They need to invest in educational and vocational training of the younger generations in the main regions of origin for more development and better functioning labour migration. And they need to cooperate on development with the young and growing economies in Africa and Asia to create more perspectives for their populations, to strengthen good governance but also to gain more acceptance for return and readmission.

Europe will have to do its homework. It will have to build a new migration architecture, find new ways to guarantee international protection, and better manage legal and labour migration. And it will continue to rely on functioning migration control. But this will only work if European migration policy also addresses the three root causes for migration I have presented today