

## Vienna Migration Conference 2016

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*Vienna, 10 November, 2016*

### **Opening Speech by ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger**

Ministers; Excellencies; Representatives of governments, international organisations and the civil society; friends in the media; colleagues from the academic world; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome all of you to the 2016 “Vienna Migration Conference” of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. It is indeed a privilege to have you all here today; but it is also a very important event for the policy related work of the ICMPD.

European migration policy is going through challenging times. Last year, roughly 1.3 million persons applied for asylum in the EU, which has been the highest number for more than 60 years. And 2016 did not see a fundamental change to these trends. Refugee and migration potentials remain exceptionally high. More than 65 million people around the world have fled from war, conflict and violence. This figure is more than three times higher than it was fifteen years ago. And even if we manage to resolve the current crisis and the violent conflicts causing it, immense challenges will remain. 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 of mainly young people in search of jobs, of income and of perspectives for their lives. We have to find solutions to the current refugee crisis, which is by no means over. But we also have to find solutions to the challenges resulting from demographic change and the uneven distribution of wealth and prospects on our globe.

When I took up the position of Director General at the beginning of this year, one of my main objectives was to strengthen the policy dimension of ICMPD’s work. This objective responds to a request of our Member States and partners; but it also reflects a need of the day. Many of the instruments that have formed the international and European migration regime have come under immense pressure. Many of them have lost their capacity to provide adequate responses; many of them have lost their political support.

From the beginning, the Dublin System had put an uneven burden on the Member States situated at the external borders of the Schengen area; it never really worked and finally collapsed under the mass influx of 2015. The Temporary Protection Directive had been designed for such a mass influx; but was not triggered by the Council when the situation emerged. A functioning control of the external borders of

the Union remains a big challenge. At the same time, the EU and its Member States never managed to develop functioning and transparent policies on labour migration, which is one of the reasons why migrants choose the irregular path or make use of asylum systems. Last but not least, there is no satisfying answer and no political agreement on how to ensure international protection for those who need it. Simply put, we need to think of a new international and European migration policy architecture, because the old one is not working anymore.

On 19 September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Declaration calls for the development of a new global framework for protection based on the vision of “safe, orderly and regular migration”. At this year’s “Vienna Migration Conference” we want to look at the consequences, the challenges and the opportunities resulting from the New York Declaration. We want to do this together with political decision makers; government experts; and representatives from the academic world, the media and civil society. We want to do this from the European perspective but also from the perspective of our many partners from outside Europe. We want to identify those areas where progress has been made. But we also want to see where gaps persist and questions are still open.

And this brings me to tonight’s political panel. Under the heading “European Migration and Refugee Policies – The Way Ahead” we want to discuss the progress, the gaps and the visions for better solutions with a panel of high-level decision-makers and representatives from international organisations and research institutes. Let me take the opportunity to thank of all of them for joining us here tonight.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that you will enjoy tonight’s panel and tomorrow’s conference. Now it is my pleasure to introduce our distinguished panelists.