

„Pathways for addressing Irregular Migration in the Mediterranean“

Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean 2-2017

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Mr. Admiral, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for inviting me to today’s conference and for the honour to share a few thoughts with you on Irregular Migration in the Mediterranean, one of the most burning issues not only in the context of migration but also in the context of the present and future situation of the European Union as a whole.

Today, the Mediterranean is the global region where almost all of the challenges related to displacement and migration materialise in their most complex forms. This makes it also the region which will decide over success or failure of the new migration policy instruments that have started to emerge over the last two years at the European and at the global level.

Looking back at the events of 2015 and 2016 I think we still ask ourselves whether these events were exceptional, whether they were the result of bad policies which have been improved by now; and whether they are getting under control as the decrease in irregular arrivals might suggest. Have we witnessed a “perfect storm” that will be over at some point? Or have we entered a period of “climate change” that will produce such storms at regular intervals? We at ICMPD believe that we have to speak about “climate change” rather than of single events; and that the storms might become more frequent and even heftier.

There are a number of facts and figures to support this assumption. Today, there are 244 million international migrants. If previous trends continue and the expected increase in the world's population is accounted for, the number of migrants will increase to 309 million by 2050. This is not a dramatic number but since two thirds of all migrants reside in the rich countries of the north, those countries will most probably experience more significant increases in immigration in the future. At the same time we speak about more than 67 million refugees or internally displaced. And we have recorded more than 2.4 million persons applying for asylum in the EU just in 2015 and 2016. This year has seen a decrease in figures. The 150,000 arrivals in Europe by sea that had been observed by beginning of November are significantly less than the 335,000 arrivals of November last year. However, 75 percent of this year’s arrivals were recorded by Italy alone. The 500,000 asylum applications submitted in the EU by the end September suggest that we see a significant decrease compared to last year 2017. But that does not mean that we see an easing of the situation. Absolute numbers are still exceptionally high and this year alone has seen the death of more than 2,800 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea by the end of October.

And when we look at the main drivers of migration – conflict, demography, socio-economic development and prosperity gaps – we can only conclude that their potential impacts in the Mediterranean region will increase and not decrease in the years to come. This will have serious implications for how we have to respond to the large movements of people. When a storm comes you might just sit and wait until it is over. You cannot do the same with climate change. Climate change does not simply pass by; it does not stop at your national border; it does not leave you the option to ignore it. States, societies and economies will have to accept climate change as a reality and to adapt to the fundamental changes it brings about. This is true for the “real climate” but also for the “global migration climate.”

The good news is that things are happening both at the European and the global level. The political developments of the last two years have addressed the issue with an intensity and seriousness like never before. The Valletta Summit, the EU – Africa Trust Fund, The EU – Turkey Statement, the New York Declaration, the global compacts and the new EU partnership instruments have high potential to provide for better solutions on migration. At the same time we have to be aware that a real change can only come when we manage to address the root causes for migration and displacement much better than in the past. This is the only way to make migration a matter of choice rather than of necessity and to build up confidence that migration can be managed in a beneficial way. Despite of all political progress I think it is safe to say that we are only at the beginning of a long journey towards better solutions and that we need new thinking and new approaches in order to get there.

Let us be realistic: None of the existing instruments of migration policy will have a major impact on the main drivers of migration I have quoted before. And that is why the pathways to address irregular migration in the Mediterranean will have to chart new territory. We at ICMPD think that we need progress in three main areas, namely protection, prosperity and partnership. First of all, we have to find ways to ensure the access to protection for those in need of it without forcing them to rely on the services of Human Smugglers and to undertake dangerous and life-threatening journeys. We all know how difficult the discussion on pathways to protection and responsibility sharing continues to be, but we must not give up the work on trying to find improvements to the current situation. As a second priority, we have to create opportunities for the young and well educated in countries of origin, so that they do not see themselves forced to seek opportunity in Europe in an irregular and dangerous way. And thirdly, we have to develop cooperation on migration with countries of origin and transit on basis of a real sense of partnership which takes into account the challenges and priorities of all parties involved in a constructive and respectful way. In all of this we believe that new partnerships on migration will have to go beyond migration policy. They will only work when they involve the private sector at a completely different level and with much more intensity than this is currently the case.

All of these new approaches, however, will only work when they address the regional dimension of migration and displacement. States differ regarding their situation and their migration policy interests. There is still a large gap between national interests that dominate the migration agenda of today and global solidarity that should drive an international policy framework of the future. Regional actors and organisations and the regional migration dialogues and frameworks have the experience and know-how to bridge these gaps, to bring together countries with divergent interests and to promote cooperation between stakeholders with - at times - fundamentally different views and perceptions.

We just have to take the example of migrant smuggling. Regardless of any progress in the areas I have mentioned before, European States and their non-European partners will have

to continue to need to take firm and consistent action against migrant smugglers. Operations in the Mediterranean, such as Operation Sophia, are geared towards that end, focusing on the interception of irregular cross-border movements and on the training of local and national border management forces. However, regional border management is undermined by the transnational nature of smuggling networks. One actor can be removed from the chain and swiftly replaced by a new one without affecting the network as a whole. This is why multilateral cooperation is needed for effective counter-smuggling activity. Dialogue platforms like the Rabat and Khartoum Process or the Euromed IV initiative, all funded by the EU and implemented by ICMPD, provide all partner countries with the opportunity to jointly address human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Of course this also refers to the SHADE MED network and today's and tomorrow's conference. There cannot be any doubt. We will have to control migration also in the future and we will have to effectively combat the criminal networks standing behind migrant smuggling and irregular migration. We have to regain control over who enters our territories and under which conditions. What happened in 2015 and 2016 led to a deep rift between European governments and populations as governments displayed their inability to control borders and steer entry of non-citizens which is a key state function. This went much deeper than the question whether European populations support the idea of providing protection to large numbers of refugees. It shook the basic confidence that our political leaders are on top of things. And the leaders have to get on top of things again. Migration policies which emphasise protection, prosperity and partnership are a pre-condition for that. But these policies must not forget that they will only work when they can rely on functioning migration and border control and an effective international fight against migrant smuggling networks

I am sure that we will learn a lot today and tomorrow on how to become more effective in this regard, and wish all of you an interesting and inspiring conference.

Thank you.