

Border Management Symposium 2018 “Crossing Borders in the next 15 years – Visions – Realities - Constraints”

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Dear Deputy Minister, Dear Director General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by sincerely thanking the Bulgarian Presidency and the European Commission for hosting today's symposium together with the ICMPD. Border management is a topic very close to us as an organisation. It has been one of the main pillars of our activities from the beginning and is still one of our main priorities today. But even more important is the role that we think border management has to play for migration policy and migration management.

In short, we see this role as fundamental. In the public debate, border management is often seen only in terms of security. This also implies that border management would be an instrument of restriction; an obstacle to the free movement of people, goods and services; and a potential hindrance to mobility and interaction. We at ICMPD do not share this view.

Borders have no existence of their own. They are the physical and visible distinctions between nation states and their legal systems. We live in a world of nation states with defined territories, national jurisdictions and external borders. The increasing globalisation might suggest that the borders between nation states will diminish and that the nation state will be replaced by other models of governance. However, there is little reason to believe that. Since the end of World War II, the number of UN Member States has increased by nearly four times from 55 to almost 200, and the trend of state dissolution is unbroken, we just have to think about the current situation in Spain. Most likely our world will continue to be a world of nation states and a world of national borders. But these borders should not be seen as hindrance or obstacles to mobility and interaction but as points of transfer from one legal system to another. And border management should be seen as the process to facilitate this transfer in line with the underlying rules and regulations.

Borders will stay with us and our policies must reflect their positive potential as enablers for mobility, trade and inter-state cooperation. The absence of functioning border management does not mean facilitated movement of people, goods and services across state borders. It means the opposite: delays, harassment, violation of rights and corruption. Its absence hampers mobility, trade and development. Modern border management has to emphasise two aspects – the aspect of security and the aspect of facilitation. More interaction between states and more human mobility will not imply less border control, but should imply better border management.

And this brings me to the purpose of today's event. We want to look ahead and discuss how the crossing of borders and the management of borders might change in the coming fifteen years. We want to do this from the perspective of policies and institutions, against the background of legal and protection issues but also with a view to new technologies for border management. But before discussing the visions, realities and constraints of the future, maybe we should take a few minutes and look fifteen years back and to see how much our world has changed since then.

We all have been part of a revolution in terms of technical developments and their social consequences. In 2003 about 10 percent of the world population used the internet, today it is 52 percent. In 2003, 22 percent of the world population had a mobile phone, in Sub-Saharan Africa it was only 5 percent, in the Middle East and North Africa only 13 percent. Today an average 70 percent of the world population own a mobile phone and in many African, Middle Eastern and European countries the mobile phone coverage is a 100 percent, at least in statistical terms. And the smart phone provides access to almost unlimited information for its owners; it allows for communication over large distances; it allows for sharing and analysing of information between hundreds of thousands of people at any given moment in time. There were many other landmarks over the last fifteen years that have changed our world. Just to name a few: Facebook went online in 2004; the first iPhone was released in 2007; and in 2011 social media and mobile devices were used to spread the protests of the Arab spring.

All of this affects the area of migration and migration policy in a dramatic manner as well. In the summer of 2015, for instance, we all witnessed what tremendous impact the IT revolution had on the business of migrant smuggling. Over the years, ICMPSD has conducted a lot of research on irregular migration and on how migrant smuggling networks operate. And we found that the organisational structure of these networks and their modus operandi had not changed too much over the last ten, fifteen years. But what has changed completely are the technical means to organise their business. In the summer of 2015 the smuggling networks managed within a few weeks to completely redirect the flows of refugees and other migrants from the Central to the Eastern Mediterranean route. This led to a temporary breakdown of border control and migration management systems and to one of the biggest political crises in the history of the EU. It is safe to say that without the internet, without the smart phone, without social media – this would not have happened the way it did; maybe it would not have happened at all.

Coming back to the topic of today's event, I think it is extremely important that we discuss border management the way we will do today; that we look at the technical, the political and the legal aspects all at once; and that we try to look into the future while doing so. All that is left for me now is to thank all our panellists for joining us today. I look very much forward to all your thoughts and insights. I am sure that we will learn a lot today and wish all of you an interesting and inspiring conference.

Thank you.