Thematic Conference on Border Security, Safe EU Borders – Secure Union
Panel 1: Current and future policies and priorities of the management of the EU's external borders

Mr. / Ms. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to start by thanking the Bulgarian Presidency for hosting today's conference on the future of the management of the EU's external borders and for inviting me as a speaker. Border management is a topic very close to ICMPD as an organisation. First of all, it has been one of the main pillars of our activities since our early days; but even more important is the role that we think border management has to play for a functioning migration policy.

In short, we see this role as fundamental. Border management and control are often seen only in terms of security. This assumption implies that border management is an instrument of restriction and an obstacle to the free movement of people, goods and services. We at ICMPD do not share this view. We live in a world of nation states with defined territories, national jurisdictions and external borders. And these borders are the necessary distinctions between states and their legal systems. Globalisation might suggest that they will diminish and that the nation state as a model will be replaced by other modes of governance. However, there is little evidence for such a development. Since the end of the Second World War the number of UN Member States has increased by almost four times from a total of 55 to 193. 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 obstacles to mobility, trade and development, but as the points of transfer from one legal system to another.

Borders will stay with us; and our policies must reflect their potential as enablers instead of allowing them to become barriers. The absence of comprehensive and functioning border management policies, however, does not lead to more and easier mobility. It leads to the opposite: delays, harassment, violation of rights and corruption. Modern and functioning border management has to emphasise both the aspects of security and of facilitation. Both aspects should not contradict but complement each other.

Such an approach will have to include the element of control as well. When we look at the events of 2015 and 2016 and the European elections that followed, we all have received a

plain and simple message. European voters expect their governments and the EU to control the external borders in a successful and functioning way. This does not mean that they are against migration as such; this does not mean that they are against showing solidarity with those who have to flee war and conflict; but it means that they expect their governments to fulfil a fundamental condition of state sovereignty, namely to control who enters their territory and who does not.

And this is not an easy task. Today, the Union's land borders are more than 13,000 kilometres long; this is almost three times more than 25 years ago. The EU coastline is almost 66,000 kilometres long, and as we know, extremely difficult to control. In 2017 a total of 205,000 illegal border-crossings was detected; in 2016 – the second year of the so called refugee crisis - it was more than 510,000; a figure ten times higher than 25 years ago.

What are the reasons for this development? Well, we just have to look at the main drivers of international migration. The most important ones are 1) war and conflict; 2) economic disparities; 3) socio-economic development which enables more people to migrate; and 4) demographic imbalances that result in movements from poor and young regions to rich and older regions. The geopolitical situation of Europe is affected by all these factors. And none of them will go away any time soon. On the contrary, they will become more significant.

We do not have to think of the worst case; even in the best case we can expect an increasing demand for migration to Europe and big challenges to cope with it. Our situation does not allow for an unlimited liberalisation of mobility but also not for full restriction. What Europe needs is a realistic and future-oriented policy on migration and protection that addresses the challenges and utilises the opportunities. And this brings me to a major dilemma. Most of the current migration challenges in Europe have their origins in countries and regions outside of Europe. Europe will not solve these challenges at home but only in constructive cooperation and partnership with the whole international community.

The cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the framework of the so called "EU – Turkey Statement" is a good example for the actual impact constructive dialogue and cooperation can have. When the European governments and Turkey signed the statement in 2016 it was in an attempt to end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, to foster the resettlement of refugees and to ensure protection and integration of refugees in Turkey.

Thus, we should not see the EU –Turkey Statement as an isolated feature; we have to see it in connection with the other policies and initiatives that emerged during and after the 2015 crisis, like the Valletta Declaration and Action Plan, the EU Emergency Trust Fund or the Migration Partnership Framework with third countries. And we also have to see it in connection with the reinforced cooperation and control measures along the Western Balkans

Route. When looking at new arrivals, the Statement had its immediate effects on the numbers of refugees and migrants trying to reach mainland Europe. But what matters the most is that both sides maintained the Statement despite a difficult political situation and sometimes difficult relations.

When it comes to partnerships on migration, Europe needs to understand that the current migration challenges are not only humanitarian in nature, they are global and economic, and require an effective global response. There are many things we can do: address the youth bulge in developing countries; provide investment capital; promote intelligent return policies combining readmission, reintegration and investment; or promote skills development on emerging labour markets. This will help our partners to solve their most burning challenges; and it will motivate them to help us when it comes to solving our own. I think that if such cooperation is based on concrete needs and is conducted in a spirit of respect and partnership, it will also be sustainable.

But it will take time, patience and money. And even when they work; migration partnerships will not be able to end global inequality. Today, the average GDP in Europe is about ten times higher than in Africa. And although many African countries make very good progress when it comes to economic development and growth, it will take many more years before this gap closes. Europe will continue to attract more people than it can successfully integrate, despite of demographic ageing and labour market needs. And this is where border management and the control of the EU's external borders come in; not as an instrument of restriction but as a crucial and absolutely necessary instrument of a functioning, politically accepted and more open European Union migration policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, what happened in 2015 and 2016 has led to a deep rift between European governments and populations. It went much deeper than the question whether they support the idea of providing protection to millions of refugees but shook the basic confidence that European governments and the EU are in control of the situation.

A number of important steps have been made at the global and European level to regain control. We can be optimistic but have to be realistic as well. We still have a long way to go. For this we need strong and unified action in Europe and the European Union, which of course has to include an even deeper involvement of the Western Balkan countries, not only when it comes to managing our borders but also when it comes to shaping a realistic, humane and functioning European Union policy on migration and asylum. As ICMPD, we aim at supporting all our friends and partners in establishing these policies in the framework of our migration dialogues, in the research and policy work we do, in capacity building initiatives, and hopefully also in their work on the new European and global initiatives.

Thank you very much.