

The Mobility Partnership Conference

27 June, Baku

Opening speech of Mr. Michael Spindelegger

Director General, ICMPD

Your excellences, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today at the Mobility Partnership Conference organised already for the third time within the MOBILAZE [Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan] project funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by Azerbaijan, participating Member States of the European Union and ICMPD.

This event also serves as a final conference of the MOBILAZE project, however, similarly to the previous years, the concept of today's conference goes beyond a traditional project meeting. While we will certainly have many opportunities to discuss the results of the MOBILAZE project in detail, we will also debate the implementation of the Mobility Partnership instrument in general. As you all know, the Mobility Partnership provides a framework for direct cooperation between participating Member States of the European Union and its partners, and such projects as MOBILAZE equip this framework with specific tools that enable the cooperation and exchange. Therefore, it is important to learn how the Mobility Partnerships are implemented in other countries of the region, and what tools of cooperation are selected there. Today, we will also discuss the examples of such initiatives undertaken in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova with the aim to evaluate when and how experience and lessons learnt of these countries could be relevant and serve as a source for inspiration for future accomplishments in Azerbaijan and the region. In this regard, we should bear in mind that the type and the scope of the implemented projects are not that important. It could be short intervention activities, such as small-scale technical assistance, or a long-term multi-thematic initiative like the MOBILAZE project. What does really matter is the power of the broader impact of the cooperation between the Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union: for the country, for further development of such cooperation, and of course – for migrants, be that our own nationals or foreigners. Therefore, it further evidential that the MOBILAZE project which draws to a close in a few weeks is an important element of the dialogue between Azerbaijan and the EU, as well as a powerful tool to enhance the migration management system in Azerbaijan, which took into account the specific needs, interests and priorities of this country.

Talking about the relations between Azerbaijan and ICMPD, I would like to mention that Azerbaijan is a long-standing partner and an old friend of my organisation; therefore, when we learned at the

end of 2015 about opportunity to develop and implement this multi-disciplinary and all-encompassing project, we could not miss it. Today, I am very glad to acknowledge that the Government of Azerbaijan had the same approach and our relations and cooperation became even stronger throughout the implementation of the MOBILAZE project. In this regard, I would particularly like to thank our long-standing partners and friends from Azerbaijan: namely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Migration Service, the State Border Service, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, the Ministry of Education and the Baku State University. All of you provided a strong support during the development phase and throughout all 42 months of the project implementation. When I say that Azerbaijan and ICMPD are long-standing partners these are not empty words. We signed the Cooperation Agreement in Baku 13 years ago. The practical realisation of the commitments of the Agreement has been ensured through numerous joint initiatives and projects. First of all, I would like to highlight joint work within the two migration dialogues supported by ICMPD, the Budapest and the Prague Process, where Azerbaijan has been active since the very beginning of these platforms. Secondly, our present cooperation builds on years of joint capacity-building projects, namely, numerous projects in the area of border management and visa together with the State Border Service; anti-trafficking projects and targeted actions within the framework of MIEUX.

I would like to thank the European Union, and its Delegation to Azerbaijan, for funding such initiatives as the MOBILAZE project, for the confidence and trust in ICMPD, and for the support in the implementation. I am convinced that the project results went beyond the original expectations only thanks to the dedicated work grounded in mutual trust between Azerbaijani, EU and ICMPD partners.

I would also like to welcome the representatives of the participating Member States of the European Union at this Conference: without you and your devotion, the cooperation within the Mobility Partnership and the MOBILAZE project would not be possible. Your engagement and support gave us a new impetus for further bilateral and multilateral cooperation possibilities in the field of migration and border management.

The MOBILAZE project implementation many times confirmed that in addition to benefits for one country, such initiatives further strengthen regional cooperation on migration. The conference today is the best example of such practice. In this regard, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our colleagues and friends from Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. ICMPD has been implementing numerous initiatives and projects with these countries within the Mobility Partnerships but also beyond. Your presence today gives us a unique chance to exchange best practices and lessons learned not only with the European Union but also regional partners.

I am convinced that the MOBILAZE project is a success story that resulted in many sustainable outcomes. I am also glad to state that this project brought the cooperation between Azerbaijan and ICMPD to a new level of trust and friendship. I also believe that we will continue being trustable partners of Azerbaijan and European Union in the filed migration and continue our activities here for making migration better.

Thank you for your attention and I wish all of us a very successful work today and in the future!