

“Breaking the political gridlock in the European Migration Debate”

“From Tampere 20 to Tampere 2.0”, Finlandia Hall, Helsinki, 24 - 25 October 2019

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I want to thank the Finish Presidency and Prime Minister Lipponen for inviting me to speak at this prestigious conference and to participate in this opening panel together with my distinguished colleagues from UNHCR and IOM. An anniversary is always a reason to celebrate and to recall the progress that has been achieved. And there are very good reasons to celebrate the many achievements that were made since the Tampere Council. But an anniversary is also a good opportunity to take a step back, to make an honest assessment and to discuss the issues that are still open.

I think that there are three events that might drive our discussions today and tomorrow. The first event is of course the twenty years anniversary of the Tampere Conclusions. The second event is the so called refugee crisis from 2015, which has put in question the system that we started to build twenty years ago. And the third event are the European elections of this spring. I think we all hope that they will serve as starting point for the next phase of reforming the European migration governance system.

I will not go too much into detail on the achievements made since the Tampere Council twenty years ago. There are simply too many of them. But let me just quote some examples of how the EU migration governance system has developed. The first EU Readmission Agreement, for instance, entered into force in 2004. It was concluded with Hong Kong. In 2006 it was followed by the agreement with Albania, the first in the neighbourhood of the Union. Today, there are seventeen EU Readmission Agreements and six more are currently negotiated. Frontex was established in 2005, the Fundamental Rights Agency in 2007 and the European Asylum Office in 2011. In the area of legal migration, the first Visa Facilitation Agreement was signed with Ukraine in 2007 and the first Mobility Partnership with Moldova in 2008. Twenty years ago the discussion on the link between migration and development had just started. Today we have instruments like the Valetta Action Plan, the EU Trust Fund or the Migration Partnership Framework which strongly focus on development aspects and have lifted the cooperation with partner countries to a new level. Last but not least, Tampere was one of the first occasions where immigrant integration was mentioned at the political level of the EU. Today, many EU Member States implement far-reaching and well-tested integration policies whose principles are not questioned anymore.

The list of such examples is long. What we can conclude from them is that the European Union and its Member States have built an impressive migration and asylum management system. They have done this from scratch and in a very short time-span. But we also know that this system was not fully equipped to deal with the situation of 2015. The refugee crisis has showed us that we were not ready, and that there is a lot of work that remains to be done.

Following the European elections of this spring, the incoming head of the Commission Ursula van der Leyen has made clear that migration will be one of the absolute priorities of her presidency. For the first time, there is a Vice President overseeing migration affairs for the whole Commission. This is something we as ICMPD have proposed for a long time and we strongly support this development. The proposals on migration that have been tabled are pragmatic but still ambitious. They refer to a reform of the asylum rules and to defining new ways in the areas of solidarity; search and rescue; return; protection and skilled migration.

Of course, this political programme needs to be developed in detail once the new Commission has been approved by the Parliament. But the broad lines are defined and they correspond very much to our own thinking at ICMPD. In view of the European elections, we have devoted this year to define our own views of what should happen in the next phase of European migration policy making.

We have called our programme “Breaking Gridlocks and Moving Forward”. A gridlock means that positions are so different that they block each other and no one can move ahead. I think that this resembles the situation we have in Europe in the area of migration. And since we do not believe that there is a single solution that could bring together all the different positions, we think that we need to work ourselves out of the gridlock slowly and on a step-by-step basis.

We think that we should use the existing system and improve it from the bottom up. In this regard, we propose a total of seventy points in eight main areas. Don't worry, I will not go through these points now. But I will run quickly through the main priorities that would form a better system: We need to renew our common vision of international protection in Europe and beyond; we need to secure the external borders and safeguard Schengen; we need more effective return policies; we should create a proactive European labour migration policy; we should put integration firmly back on the European agenda; we should include the Western Balkan countries in the European migration system; and last but not least we should broaden our cooperation with partner countries outside of Europe.

But in order to fulfil these goals, the EU and its Member States must also reconfirm their commitment towards a common vision, approach and system. We need a reformed European migration agenda that is developed and supported by all partners and has a clear concept of what exactly European migration policy aims to achieve. This can only be managed when we

leave behind the political controversy revealed by the 2015 crisis and use the momentum of the election year for hitting the reset button of EU migration policy making.

Coming back to the theme of this conference, let us celebrate the anniversary of the Tampere conclusions and let us explore ideas and suggestions for the future. Let us look at the practical, the political and the legal aspects; but let us not forget that we always have to work in good partnership with our partners outside the EU but also in partnership with our European citizens. I look very much forward to the discussion and all your thoughts and insights. I am sure that we will learn a lot over the next two days and I wish all of you an interesting and inspiring conference.

Thank you.