

## Vienna Migration Conference 2019

### Breaking the gridlock and moving forward: Recommendations for the next five years of EU migration policy, High-Level Political Panel

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Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome all of you to the “Vienna Migration Conference” under the title “Breaking the gridlock and moving forward: Recommendations for the next five years of EU migration policy”. It is a great privilege to have you here today.

It is a special pleasure for me to open the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of our annual flagship conference for a number of reasons. First of all, it is the biggest VMC so far and organisers are always happy when their conferences grow in terms of participation and relevance. So I want to sincerely thank all of you for joining us tonight. Second, I have the honour to welcome no less than six ministers, state secretaries and executive directors to our first panel tonight. We are very happy to have such a broad number of high-level decision-makers on our political panel and I want to thank all of you for coming to Vienna tonight, despite the busy agendas you have. We are very grateful for that. And finally, the VMC concludes a busy year for ICMPD and our policy work, where we tried to develop our own vision of what should happen in the next five years.

2019 was a special year for EU migration policy. We had the European elections in spring deciding over the composition of a new Parliament and a new Commission, which is going to be established in these days. We all know that migration issues remain among the highest concerns of our European citizens and consequently must remain high on the agenda of European policy makers as well.

But 2019 was also the year to celebrate the anniversary of the Tampere Conclusions. It was only twenty years ago that the European leaders decided to build a common asylum and migration policy. Twenty years ago there was no migration Acquis, there was no visa facilitation, no Fundamental Rights Agency, no Frontex and no EASO. There were no EU readmission agreements, no mobility partnerships and no EU Blue Card to facilitate skilled migration. There were no instruments like the Valetta Action Plan, the EU Trust Fund or the Migration Partnership Framework which 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 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 EU and its Member States have built an impressive system 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 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. Of course, a political programme will have to be developed in the coming months. Only 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 defining our own views of what should happen in the next phase of European migration policy making.

In line with the title of this year's VMC, we have called our programme "Breaking Gridlocks and Moving Forward". Why did we choose this title? A gridlock means that positions are so different that they block each other and nobody 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 overcome the gridlock slowly and on a step by step basis.

In this regard, we propose a total of seventy points in eight main areas, such as developing a balanced protection system, a deepening of the migration partnerships with our partners outside the EU and the integration of the Western Balkan countries into Europe's regional migration system.

You find all our recommendations in the published version of the programme, which we have released this week and shared with you in preparation of the conference.

But in order to break the current gridlock, the EU Member States must find a new 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 wants 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.

And this brings me to tonight's agenda. I have the great pleasure to welcome a panel of distinguished discussants who combine great knowledge on migration and great experience in policy-making. I want to thank all of them again for joining us tonight and look very much forward to our discussion.

Thank you very much for your attention.