

3rd International Border Management Conference, 23-24 November 2020

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you today to the third edition of the annual “International Border Management Conference”. I think we all would have preferred to meet in person for this occasion; unfortunately, this is not possible at the moment. The pandemic has its grip on the world but thankfully, we have learned to use our digital tools to meet and to work together, even when there is some distance between us. Although we are still in the middle of the most severe crisis since many years, we should start to take stock of what we have learned and how we want to shape our future work, once we have started to overcome the pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me start with a principle remark. Very often, border management is seen mainly in terms of security and control. Sometimes it is also seen as 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. Borders are no barriers. They represent the necessary distinctions between states and their legal systems. They are vital to keep these systems intact.

In addition, in the future, borders will stay with us. However, they should never turn into obstacles to mobility, trade and development. Our policies must reflect their potential as enablers instead of allowing them to become barriers. The absence of comprehensive and functioning border management does not lead to more and easier mobility and cooperation. It leads to the opposite: delays, harassment, violation of rights and economic damage.

Modern and functioning border management has to emphasise both, the aspects of control and of facilitation. Both aspects should not contradict but complement each other. It is safe to say that this task becomes increasingly demanding. Our modern world is complex and moves at a high speed. The expectations towards border management are higher than ever before.

Border agencies should not hinder mobility and trade, but at the same time guarantee security and control. They should prevent the crossings of irregular migrants and cross-border criminals, but ensure access to protection for those who need it. They should use state-of-the-art technology in information gathering and sharing, but respect the privacy of travellers and data protection rules.

In addition, they are expected to solve challenges that are outside their core domain. We just have to think of the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, when border agencies were the first responders to managing the huge and sudden inflows of hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants. And we should also think of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, when border agencies had to handle border closures and travel restrictions from one day to the next and at the same time ensure that basic supply and the mobility of essential workers could be maintained. In both cases, border agencies delivered well. They prevented a crisis from turning into a catastrophe.

We should be grateful for that; we should highlight the role of border agencies and maybe thank them more often than we actually do. Even more important is that we do our best to ensure that they have the procedures, the resources and the equipment at their hands to meet the challenges and opportunities the future will hold for us.

This brings me to the themes of today's conference. Border management can only function when it is based on good cooperation between a broad number of stakeholders across borders and within states. Consequently, the first aim of the conference is to discuss such frameworks and how they manage to bring together border guard, police and customs agencies, as well as many other actors from the public and private spheres.

But border management also depends on the use of the most advanced technologies and procedures. "Seamless" or even "touchless" border controls have become a reality by now, whether it is at land, air or sea borders. These innovations have a tremendous impact on the performance of border controls and trade facilitation. Thus, it is the second main aim of the conference to discuss how we can use some of those innovations in the best possible way and what we can expect from technology in the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me stress again that border management is never only about borders. It is about mobility, trade, development, security, international relations,

public health and many other vital aspects of our modern world. At ICMPD we will continue to emphasise and promote this understanding. We are very proud of the excellent cooperation we have established with all of you and we hope to keep and further expand it in the future.

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. Last but not least, I look forward to seeing you again next year at the Fourth International Border Management Conference. And I hope that by then we will be able to meet in the good old fashioned way - in a conference room, in person and in a face-to-face format.

Thank you.