

4th International Border Management Conference 23-24 November 2021

Kyiv, 23 November 2021

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you today to the fourth edition of the annual “International Border Management Conference” on behalf of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. It is my great privilege to be here and meet so many of you in person. I also to welcome even more participants joining the online stream and discussion, we have some xxx colleagues joining us ‘virtually.

At the end of its second year, the Covid-19 pandemic still has its grip on Europe and the world. We have developed vaccines as the instrument that will hopefully end this deep and global crisis at some point. We have found ways to keep our economies and societies running in a state of stress and emergency. We had to restrict the movement of people inside countries and across borders like never before since the end of the Second World War. However, we quickly learned how to manage mobility and to ensure the necessary flows of goods and people in the midst of a global crisis, thanks to a large part of the commitment of border police, customs and sanitary agencies.

This crisis is not over, the situation is fragile and we need to remain very careful. Still, our systems have become more resilient than they used to be and we have learned to cope with extremely challenging situations. In this regard, much is owed to our border guards who stood at the frontline from day one together with the health services and other essential workers. Without their professionalism, their determination and their know-how we would have faced a situation much more dangerous than the severe crisis we anyways have to cope with.

We should thank them. But we should also not lose the lessons that we have learned during the past two years. First of all, we need to understand that we have to equip our border authorities well, we have to give them the resources, the staff, the technical means and the training to apply their know-how and to perform their tasks for the benefit for all of us. Secondly, we have to understand even better that security in the context of border management goes beyond prevention and restriction. It is also about enabling and controlling the exchange and transfer across borders to keep our shops full, our logistics intact and our hospitals open. And thirdly, we have seen that cooperation, within countries and across borders, is not just a buzzword that we use in conference rooms but an absolute necessity to provide security, mobility, trade and stability.

As ICMPD we have a long tradition in border management. It has always been one of our main priorities and an essential pillar of our activities. We never understood borders solely as a means of control, restriction or only migration management. On the contrary, we always believed that the management of borders is a key state function that has to contribute to many different goals. Of course it has to ensure security and the control of irregular migration. But it also has to facilitate trade, allow for economic exchange, ensure mobility and legal migration, promote tourism, guarantee health protection and the supply of essential goods.

For us, border management has always been both at the same time, a safeguard of security and an enabler of development. And I am very happy that this year's International Border Management Conference will discuss exactly this issue with an impressive set of high-level speakers and experts and I look very much forward to the results of this discussion.

Closely linked is the second main point of the agenda, namely the question whether we need to enhance and streamline the information flows between border management actors, and if yes, how we should do this in practice. When we look at its role as an enabler of development we have to understand border management as an "ecosystem" that involves a broad number of actors that follow their own priorities and have sometimes conflicting interests. To establish and maintain dialogue between them and to ensure that information travels where it is needed, is anything but an easy task. It is, however, an absolutely essential one. I am sure that this Conference will make an important contribution to the debate also in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me a few words on migration. The recent events in Afghanistan and at the border between Poland and Belarus remind us once more that non-regulated migration holds many challenges for us, at the political, the security and the humanitarian level. We rely on functioning border management, on well-equipped border authorities and on good European and international cooperation to steer through these difficult situations, to protect the rights of migrants, but also those of states. We obviously cannot solve the related challenges with border management alone. But we need well-functioning border management as a fundamental basis for all our attempts to address the challenges and to seize the opportunities linked to international migration, in Europe and beyond.

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.