Background

The Mobility Partnership (MP) Conference was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 14 – 15 May 2018, within the framework of the EU-funded ‘Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan (MOBILAZE)’ project and aimed at bringing the fulfilment of the Mobility Partnership objectives in Azerbaijan to multilateral and regional dimensions, in order to:

1. Take stock of the Mobility Partnership implementation in Azerbaijan through (but not ultimately) the MOBILAZE project;
2. Benefit from the experience of those Mobility Partnership countries that have valuable experience to share;
3. Exchange on effective tools of the Mobility Partnerships results monitoring;
4. Support further initiatives within the Mobility Partnership or other cooperation between EU and Azerbaijan instruments;
5. Strengthen expert exchange and cooperation between Azerbaijan and other Mobility Partnership countries in migration management areas;
6. Assess impact of the Mobility Partnership in Azerbaijan and discuss possible measures for improvement.

The one and a half day conference gathered representatives of state institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan involved in the Mobility Partnership implementation and the MOBILAZE project, the Delegation of the European Union to Azerbaijan and EU Member States, signatories of the MP with Azerbaijan, ICMPD and other international organisations (i.e. IOM, UNHCR), as well as representatives of migration authorities from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, including Belarus, Georgia and Moldova (those countries that also have a MP with the EU) and Ukraine.

The Conference was organised by ICMPD as an implementing partner of MOBILAZE project in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

This project is implemented by ICMPD
The Conference was opened by Mr. Jeroen Willems (EU Delegation to Azerbaijan), Mr. Parviz Musayev (State Migration Service of Azerbaijan) and Mr. Alimirzamin Askerov (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan), who welcomed the participants by stressing the importance of cooperation in the area of migration and mobility between the EU and Azerbaijan, and its people, and addressing the most important priorities in cooperation in this area.

Mr. Radim Zak (ICMPD) in his turn made a statement on the long standing cooperation between ICMPD and Azerbaijan in the context of the MP objectives.

Following the introduction to the Conference agenda by Ms. Violeta Wagner (ICMPD), Mr. Oleg Chirita (ICMPD Brussels) gave a presentation about the Mobility Partnership (MP) in general, and Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) in particular. MPF – is a support tool in the implementation of Mobility Partnerships (MPs) providing targeted, flexible and tailor-made assistance, mainly through grant contracts signed with EU MS public authorities. In his presentation, Mr. Chirita emphasised MPF II and specifically, the types of activities that can be funded under this instrument, such as peer-to-peer expertise; training sessions and technical equipment; review and development of legislation; and conferences and experts’ meetings in the areas covered by MPs cooperation.

Ms. Violeta Wagner (ICMPD) acquainted the participants with the status quo of the MOBILAZE project implementation. The presentation included an update on each out of five projects’ components. The EU Member States representatives and project partners from Lithuania, Poland, the Netherlands, and Maastricht University also shared their feedback on the selected initiatives implemented within the MOBILAZE project during the past two years.

The session continued with presentations of representatives of the EaP countries, signatories of a MP with the EU, on their country priorities under MPs:

- Mr. George Jashi (State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia) briefed the participants on the implementation of the EU – Georgia Joint MP Declaration and the areas it was covering, also mentioning other strategic documents in the area of migration management in Georgia, such as Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and Georgia’s migration strategy and action plan;

- Mr. Mihail Chutkou (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus) shared priorities of Belarus in cooperation on migration and mobility with the EU; highlighting the MP between the EU and Belarus as well as the enclosed Working Programme as the most recent to be signed with the EaP countries (in 2016);

- Ms. Daniela Morari (Ministry for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova) in her presentation elaborated the steps that had preceded the signature of the MP between EU and Moldova (2018 marks the 10th anniversary of EU – Moldova MP signature) and made an emphasis on evaluation and monitoring tools of the MP.
Session Two: Experience Sharing in Implementation of the MP projects and other innovative initiatives on migration

During the afternoon session, the conference continued in separate working groups (WG) where specific experiences of the MP countries in project implementation were shared by the participants. Discussions in the working groups were moderated in order to identify the most relevant experience and practice.

- **Group 1: Support to return and readmission.** Participants in this group shared relevant experience on how the MP initiatives could support return programmes, including projects related to possible direct assistance to returnees, protection of their human rights and development and implementation of reintegration programmes. The following projects and initiatives were presented and discussed:
  1. Support Reintegration of Georgian Returning Migrants and the Implementation of the EU–Georgia Readmission Agreement (the Targeted Initiative for Georgia, TIG project);
  2. PARE 1+1 Improving Moldova's Remittance-based Investment Programme.

- **Group 2: Maximisation of positive impact of migration and mobility including diaspora engagement.** This WG focused on different aspects of legal and labour migration and mobility, including circular migration, student mobility, as well as initiatives related to diaspora. The following projects and initiatives were presented and discussed:
  1. MOBILAZE project study Determination of the Demand for Foreign Labour Force in the Labour Market of Azerbaijan;
  2. Strengthening the Development Potential of the EU Mobility Partnership in Georgia through targeted Circular Migration and Diaspora Mobilisation;
  3. The MOST project;
  4. Examples of specific diaspora policy of Moldova.

- **Group 3: Fight against irregular migration and Trafficking in Human Beings (THB), including border management.** Participants of this group discussed measures to strengthen border management and security as well as implementation of capacity building projects within the thematic areas covered by MP. The following projects and initiatives were presented and discussed:
  1. Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Organised Crime, Phases 1 and 2 projects;
  2. Activities of the Dutch Royall Marechaussee (KMAR);
  3. Experience of the Moldovan Border Police;
  4. Strengthening of Georgia’s Migration Management (ENIGMMA) and its follow up Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia (ENIGMMA 2).

- **Group 4: Strengthening the asylum procedures and integration of persons granted asylum.** Different aspects related to improvement of asylum policies and practices through cooperation with the EU MS, international organisations and EU asylum institutions were in the centre of discussion of the WG. The following projects were presented and discussed:
1. GDISC (General Directors’ Immigration Services Conference) ERIT Ukraine (Capacity Building and Technical Support to Ukrainian Authorities to Effectively Respond to Irregular Transit-Migration);
2. High Fidelity – Exercising for asylum procedures project in Georgia (MPF project);
3. QIEE (Asylum System Quality Initiative in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus).

Session Three: Presentation of the Working Groups conclusions and discussion

The concluding session of day one of the conference was dedicated to bringing forward the outcomes of the working group discussions, sharing of best practices and possible suggestions for the way forward.

Return and Readmission

Participants of WG 1 agreed that return process required strong cooperation and partnership between the sending and receiving countries at all stages – starting from identification of citizenship (nationality) and concluding with reintegration activities.

Promotion of good practices in the field of return management and readmission is an important element. While successful return and reintegration positively contribute to development of the country, one shall not forget that human rights of returnees shall specifically be in the focus during the entire return procedure.

Participants of the WG 1 confirmed the need for sustainable programmes for reintegration of returning migrants in receiving countries (countries of origin) based on individual needs’ assessment. It is necessary to ensure particular support to most vulnerable groups of migrants and provision of direct support when it comes to education; vocational training; health protection and temporary accommodation.

Legal migration, mobility and diaspora

Summarising the good practices presented in WG 2, participants drew possible country-specific recommendations for Azerbaijan to:
- Continue efforts to match foreign labour offers to actual market and economy needs;
- Provide support to reintegration of returnees, as well as skills development of potential migrants, including pre-departure training;
- Establish circular migration schemes and/or implementation of short-term professional contracts and exchange;
- Strive to develop evidence and trust based diaspora policies.

Fight against irregular migration and THB with particular focus on border management

Participants of WG 3 agreed on the importance of strengthening national and translational responses to THB and related cross-border crimes in Azerbaijan. This can be achieved through making use of experienced experts’ technical assistance and enhanced capacity
building on document security, victims of trafficking identification, interview techniques, etc. as essential milestones in fight against irregular migration.

Enhancing implementation of the IBM concept and strengthening operational capacity, as well as active and efficient awareness-raising are essential elements for prevention of irregular migration and THB.

Asylum procedures and integration of foreigners granted asylum

Participants of WG 4 identified the following conclusions on specific needs of Azerbaijan in the field of asylum:

- Need for establishment of professional interpreters pool for asylum procedures in all instances, including use of technical equipment such as video-conference for example;
- Continuous training on interview techniques within asylum procedures, in particular, for vulnerable groups such as traumatised persons, unaccompanied minors, etc.;
- Establishment of COI unit and capacity building of the staff, including possible development of national COI web-portal;
- Application of modern training techniques on asylum, including possibly virtual simulation exercises and e-learning tools;
- Strengthening of regional approach to capacity building and exchange through targeted initiatives on asylum.
This session of the Conference focused on monitoring and evaluation of the MP initiatives looking both at analysing the already existing evaluation experiences (for example, scoreboards) and ways forward with regard to impact analysis (i.e. MP local cooperation platforms, HL meetings) based on the experiences of the MP signatories on the EU level.

The framework for the podium discussion was set by a keynote speech delivered by Ms. Sarah Langley (Maastricht University Graduate School of Governance), who addressed selected challenges and lessons learned in the recent MP evaluation. The presentation touched upon the assessment currently being conducted by Maastricht University Graduate School of Governance for the MPF of the MPs in Cape Verde, Georgia and Moldova. Although the evaluation was limited to the MPs implementation in above mentioned countries, the following general conclusions for the evaluation of the MP could be drawn:

- Regarding the conclusion of new MPs, it is recommended to:
  o clearly evaluate overlapping of interests among stakeholders before the signing of a Joint Declaration;
  o engage in expectation of legal migration opportunities from the perspective of future MP countries intending to sign the Joint Declaration;
  o Identify and communicate a clear and well-defined definition of the MP framework that is accepted and verified by all stakeholders;
- With regard to the implementation of the MPs, the following is proposed:
  o increase the financial and human resources available to the MPF to enable it to:
    • become a key source of institutional memory for all MPs;
    • provide better coordination and information flows between the participating EU MS and partner countries;
    • Widely promote the MP framework;
    • Identify/pursue synergies between MP and legal instruments or governance tools;
    • Work with stakeholders to create a strategic vision for each MP.
  o encourage international organizations and EU agencies, as well as NGOs and academic institutions in Member States to play a larger role in implementing the MPs and addressing the self-identified needs of partner countries;
  o clarify the role of EU Delegations in promoting and implementing the MP and properly equip them to do so;
- With regard to future MPs evaluation and monitoring, the study recommends to:
  o adapt MP monitoring and implementation tools such as High Level Meetings, Local Cooperation Platforms and Scoreboards to better accommodate analytical thinking, critical discussion and forward-looking programming under the MP framework;
  o establish clear indicators of success with buy-in from key stakeholders;
  o establish baseline measurements before signature of Joint Declaration which would be individually adapted to the specific needs of the countries;
  o utilise a representative sample for evaluation;
  o strengthen data tools to allow for further quantitative evaluation;
  o further employ MPF as an excellent opportunity for more focused/ in-depth evaluation.
Continuing the discussion Mr. Oleg Chirita (ICMPD Brussels) addressed the representatives of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Maastricht University with specific questions allowing them to share insider views on the MP evaluation.

According to the representative of Azerbaijan, Mr. Hamid Nasibov (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the signature of MPs simultaneously contributed to policy coherence inside the country and promoted the inter-institutional cooperation. In case of Azerbaijan, the practical implementation of the MP has started recently and it is coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The evaluation of the MP in Azerbaijan has not yet taken place and it would be premature to conduct it at this early stage, but the country is on a good track when it comes to development and proposing new initiatives under MP.

The context for the monitoring and evaluation of MPs matters a lot, according to the representative of Belarus, Mr. Mihail Chutkou (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus). The youngest MP was signed with the Belarus (in 2016), but there are projects that are already being implemented within this framework in the country. When it comes to defining national objectives, legal and labour migration, student mobility, status of foreign citizens, and readmission are all priorities for the country. Development of the migration policy concept is also one of the top priorities. The general mechanism for definition of national priorities is based on national interests and agreement among national responsible institutions.

For Georgia, a country that has multiple frameworks of cooperation with the EU (i.e. post-VLAP action, the Association Agreement and its Agenda inter-alia covering the MP provisions), the MP stimulates further effective action and exchange with the EU, according to Mr. George Jashi (State Commission on Migration Issues). In that sense, it is indeed important to re-evaluate the practical aspects of MP implementation, modernize its operability in order to match with above ongoing effective mechanisms provided by the EU as a platform for contemporary cooperation.

The representative of Moldova, Mr. Roman Gutu (State Border Police), highlighted that Moldova was the first country that signed the MP with the EU and, therefore, evaluating the results of the MP in the country is particularly essential (approximately 110 projects have been implemented within the MP framework in Moldova). One of the achievements reached with the support of the MP is the visa liberalisation with the EU.

The podium discussion was followed by three more presentations, one dedicated to the MP in the South and the second one, dedicated to migration management in Ukraine, an EaP country that doesn’t have a MP signed with the EU and the third one on the Prague Process, as a migration dialogue uniting multiple states and stakeholders:

- In her presentation on the MP in the South, Ms. Sarah Schlaeger (ICMPD Jordan), provided an overview of the MPs signed with Cape Verde, Morocco and Tunisia, with a special emphasis on the EU-Jordan Mobility Partnership and the work carried out by ICMPD to support the MP objectives in Jordan, especially when JEMPAS (Support to the Mobility partnership between the European Union and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) is the only EU-Jordan MP support project;

- The presentation by Mr. Serhii Donskyi (State Migration Service of Ukraine) focused on the migration management reform in Ukraine and specific developments in the State
Migration Service, including implementation of the conditions for the introduction of the EU visa-free regime for Ukraine; identification system reform; and introduction of biometric documents.

- **Mr. Radim Zak (ICMPD)** briefed the participants on the latest developments and initiatives in the **Prague Process**, especially the opening of the Prague Process Training Academy and creation of the Migration Observatory East.

In the **concluding remarks** the representatives of the **State Migration Service of Azerbaijan** emphasised both **the existing cooperation with ICMPD** within the MOBILAZE project as well as the development and **implementation of future priorities in the EU-Azerbaijan cooperation**.

**The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan**, as the co-organiser of the MP Conference and a coordinator of the MP implementation in the country, highlighted the importance of events allowing sharing experiences with the countries in the region and expressed its appreciation for organising the conference and the existing cooperation with ICMPD in Azerbaijan.

ICMPD and the EU MS joined the State Migration Service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in expressing their appreciation for the existing cooperation as well as assurance in the continued cooperation in the future.