20 years ago, Austria and Switzerland signed the founding agreement of ICMPD. The migration situation back then looked different – as did the economies, societies and political landscape in Europe. ICMPD as an organisation also looked very different – 2 Member States at the time of its foundation, 15 Member States now and some countries on the way to joining the organisation.

20 years ago the global political world changed. After the fall of the iron curtain, ICMPD’s activities in Eastern Europe contributed to the process of bringing those countries closer to Europe and finally include them in the European Union. At the same time, ICMPD supported these countries in their development from being countries of origin and or transit to countries of destination for migrants.

We should not underestimate the appreciation of free movement, especially of people who had lived in countries without this possibility; therefore, ICMPD has supported its Member States in their endeavours to become a member of the Schengen area.

Migration is about people! This is the guiding vision for our organisation; it is about those who migrate, those who stay and those who receive migrants in their societies. And we strive to find solutions for all of them.

But migration is also about numbers: 215 million migrants; 800 million internal migrants; thousands of asylum seekers; hundreds of thousands of victims of trafficking in human beings; and unknown numbers of irregular migrants.

These numbers are important when it comes to migration management.

But here is what is more important: all these numbers represent millions of people, with their own individual stories, families, expectations, qualifications and dreams.

Some of these migrants already came to Europe in the sixties and early seventies, together with many labour migrants called to support economic development in Central and Western Europe. The consequence was a tripled number of emigrants.
Soon after economies started to grow slower or even stopped growing; and from 1973 onwards, states tried to motivate migrants to return, albeit not very successfully. As Max Frisch, the Swiss novelist said: “We asked for workers. We got people instead!”

At the beginning of the 1990s, migration to Central and Western Europe again rose. The reasons were manifold: political conflict, economic crisis and demographic pressure. Many of the asylum seekers and refugees came from the Western Balkan countries to flee the war in their countries. The main destination countries were Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

This was exactly the time when Austria and Switzerland decided to found ICMPD to provide insight on what could happen and to deal with a rapidly changing migration environment; Bulgaria joined 10 years later.

Likewise, the migration situation in Europe has changed and successful policies have been developed. ICMPD has grown from a small organisation with 2 Member States to a powerful European migration organisation working in the global hot spots of migration!

It is important for ICMPD as an organisation to reflect the priorities of our Member States and anticipate future developments.

Traditionally we have been very active in South-East and East Europe, as well as in the former Soviet Union countries, in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. For the past few years, the countries of the so-called Silk Route are equally important (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, (Bangladesh and China)).

In the light of recent and to be expected developments, we are now also active in the Mediterranean Area, the Middle East or even farther away countries in the South like Nigeria, Ghana or the whole ECOWAS Region.

The Migration Dialogues ICMPD supports offer a platform for open and informal exchange for all participants – countries of origin, transit and destination, civil society actors and of course migrants. These platforms should lead to concrete activities.

We support countries in developing their national capacities and conduct training; our research results are not only the basis for our work as a European migration organisation, but are also valuable input for our Member States and Partners.

Based on the experience of the last 20 years, we believe that migration is a global topic; but at the same time we are convinced that regional approaches are the most successful ones! We are convinced that it is the region that holds the most potential for creating functioning mobility schemes.

ICMPD’s holistic approach, to include all partners in finding a solution, made the organisation different. This partnership approach, as well as the long-standing experience in taking all interests seriously – interests of countries of origin, of transit and of destination, of NGOs, of civil society actors and, of course, of migrants – and fostering exchanges with actors on an equal footing, makes the organisation unique!
We have lived a **Global Approach on Migration and Mobility** already before the concept was named as such by the European Commission!

The European Union and its policies have successfully developed during these last 20 years – although one could get a different impression when following current national political debates, especially in the pre-election period of EU elections. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to do, especially in the political area we discuss today:

- A Common European Asylum System was developed, BUT we still have huge differences in the EU 27.
- The economic crisis affected EU Member States differently.
- When looking at the countries of origin of asylum seekers 20 years ago and now it is clear that this picture has also changed.
- The approaches to deal with migration, integration or the nexus to other policy areas, e.g. development, have changed.
- Labour market policies have been adapted according to changing needs.

If we look into the **future another 20 years ahead**, the world will look quite different again, but some things will not have changed:

- We still want to live in a prosperous and peaceful world.
- We want our children and grandchildren to have access to good education and decent jobs.
- We still want stable and modern social security systems.

We think that migration can contribute to achieving these goals. We all believe in the **benefits of migration** when properly managed. But without a strategic, long-term approach, the potential of migration can’t be fully realised, community confidence is sapped, resources are stretched and the benefits are lost or forgotten.

While saying this, I do not want to deny the **challenges**:

People are facing a difficult, rapidly changing situation and feel insecure about their own future. The economic crisis contributed very much to this feeling and enabled the growth of xenophobic and populist, sometimes even racist, movements. This requires **leadership**. We all have to stand up against these developments. Everybody has to contribute: politicians, academics, international organisations, NGOs and media.

Looking at the tragic incidents at the coasts of Italy or at the situation of the hundreds of thousands of refugees coming from Syria, we have to ask ourselves:

What impact will this have on future concepts of migration policy?

**Will we** change politics or will **these tragedies or wars change** politics?

Migration will have an important influence on how Europe evolves in the coming years. We need a Europe that gives all people the opportunity they deserve: those who migrate, those who stay and those who receive migrants in their societies. In the end, it is about people!
Last year, in honour of our 20th anniversary, we started a project to look at the future of migration. We asked researchers and academics around the world about their views and we are very honoured to have received 10 essays, which will be published very soon.

Let me highlight a few (5) points which I consider as the most relevant for all of us:

1) The main indicators for future migration patterns are demographic and economic disparities.

It is only during the last 40 years that more than 95% of global demographic growth has shifted to emerging markets and developing countries. The richer parts of the world are already experiencing rapid demographic aging. Mid- and low-income countries will soon face this development too. Today 75% of growth is coming from emerging markets. Thus, in emerging economies, emigration will sooner or later decline too (e.g. as already observed in Mexico or Turkey). The number of immigration countries will increase and the number of emigration countries will decrease – which means that the global hunt for talent will intensify.

Europe should, therefore, prepare for a changed geography in international migration:

2) A central question is: where will labour supplies in Europe come from in the future?

Currently many states look at Asia and Latin America rather than Africa as desired regions of origin for future labour market demands. In the long run, however, Asia will be competing with Europe for labour force and China will require at least 50 million workers and will have to reach out beyond the region to recruit. The biggest challenge is in the area of intermediate skills (skilled craft and industrial workers). European states will have to engage in a more targeted and much more substantive cooperation with countries of origin. However, European labour migration will change from a supply-driven to a demand-driven market, which has to successfully compete with an increasing number of other attractive destinations.

Europe therefore needs to re-think its approach towards labour migration and focus on the three most important questions:

- How do we get the best qualified?
- How do we keep them?
- And how do we get the best out of them?

Equal pay and social security coverage for migrants, as well as portable rights, will benefit sending countries and will make receiving countries more attractive destinations in the future race for talent.

To avoid misunderstandings:

International migration is only one possible answer to future mismatches between supply and demand of labour and skills.
For countries with aging populations, it can form part of a global strategy, comprising others, such as broader labour market reforms, higher employment rates of women, longer periods of participation and family policies that result in higher birth rates.

3) When speaking about migration, we also have to look at the topic integration – a topic that is high on the political agenda.

Integration policies are seen as a key element of migration management in order to promote social cohesion. But it would be wrong to argue that social cohesion is challenged solely by migration. Other factors like modernisation, globalisation, and changing economic structures, cultural codes and lifestyles are even more important factors in this regard. Integration policies are important instruments as long as they are embedded in overall policies promoting social cohesion both for migrants and non-migrants.

4) High on the political agenda as well is the prevention of abuse. Trafficking in human beings is one of the topics in the migration area where we all agree that it is an unwanted, criminal offence. But, unfortunately, it is reality! The current THB framework aims at fighting against a crime in the context of organised crime but does not directly aim at liberating a person from an exploitative situation. Accordingly, the criminal justice approach asks for very specific types of victims, which do not necessarily correspond with the types of victims in exploitative situations.

We have to ask ourselves whether there is a need to adjust the existing THB framework in order to tackle trafficking for labour exploitation.

5) Since the first High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006 the topic has attracted global attention. But we have to keep in mind, that development and migration have always been intimately linked social processes. The main challenge European states face today is how to move from short-term and narrow migration and development measures to more coherent and longer term objectives that include all other policy domains that affect or are affected by people moving across borders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, we all know that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all solution’. Migration is a multifaceted political topic that will have a big influence on how Europe will evolve in the coming years.

To harvest the benefits of migration:

We need an open and transparent debate.

We need realistic policies and strong political leadership.

We need to recognise that diversity makes our societies stronger.

We need a fair and controlled system that people can support.
Migration is too important to fail!

Coming to an end, ladies and gentlemen,

I want to thank Bulgaria – not only for having organised this event, but also for being one of our most active and committed Member States.

Thank you!