Dear Ministers, Colleagues, Friends

It is now the second time that I participate in a Brdo Process meeting as DG of ICMPD, and as such, I appreciate and acknowledge the positive impact of this dialogue on cooperation on home affairs issues between the participating states. And allow me to sincerely thank the Slovenian Ministry of Interior for again inviting ICMPD, also in the new set-up of this consultative process. I am convinced that ICMPD can provide added value in supporting the implementation of the conclusions of your deliberations.

ICMPD, as you all know, is an international intergovernmental organisation working in the field of migration since 1993. Our mission is to promote comprehensive, sustainable and future-oriented migration governance. And we do so with the interests of our Member States at the forefront. At present, 4 of our Member States participate in the Brdo Process (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and our host, Slovenia).

Dear Ministers,

The establishment of ICMPD 20 years ago took place in a period of a rapidly changing Europe. Both the peaceful and violent changes in Central and Eastern Europe created a new political landscape, which also altered the migration realities in Europe. At the same time, we have to realise that this process of change is still continuing. Whether it is the visa liberalisation, the upcoming accession of Croatia to the EU or indeed the enlargement of the Schengen area to Romania and Bulgaria: all of this has had or will have an impact on migration flows in Europe, in general, and in the Brdo Process countries, in particular.

While migration is just one of the topics of your agenda today, it is one of extreme importance. I read with interest your discussion paper on visa liberalisation and mixed migration flows. And I share your conclusions. The social and economic gains made by the visa liberalisation for the
citizens of your countries and the citizens of Europe outweigh the negative impacts caused by the increase in asylum applications. And the causes behind the very targeted abuse - because we do talk about abuse in 99% of cases - are to a large extent to be found also in the asylum systems of the target countries. While we should not neglect certain push factors related to the socio-economic situation of particular groups in our society, pull factors seem to be playing a more important role. And it should be clear to everyone that reintroducing visas, or even discussing this option, is a dangerous route which will have incredible negative effects.

Your countries have also been confronted by new migration flows arriving via the Turkish-Greek border. While presently at least the land border situation seems to have improved dramatically, there are signs of shifting flows. Therefore, I would welcome any initiative leading to an improved exchange of operational information as suggested in your background paper. Build upon existing initiatives, for example from Frontex or Europol or the European Migration Network, such a system can help states to react quicker and be better prepared. Whether you decide to do this within the Brdo Process, or use channels like the BP WG on SEE: my organisation stands ready to support you!

For the past two years, ICMPD has been supporting your colleagues in the fight against trafficking in human beings through acting as the secretariat of the platform of national anti-trafficking coordinators within the Brdo Process. I am proud to share with you here today that the work carried out within this platform culminated in a joint declaration on transnational cooperation on human trafficking, which resonated widely in Europe during the last EU anti-trafficking day on 18 October 2012. On that occasion, countries of the Brdo Process and some of their neighbours showed their colleagues in the rest of Europe how regional cooperation can lead to concrete results in the fight against trafficking and in supporting the victims of this horrible crime.

Migration has increasingly been recognised for its potential as a positive force for the development of economies, but this can only be possible with the cooperation of all relevant actors – source countries, countries of transit and destination and the migrants themselves!

Ladies and gentlemen:

Migration is about people. It is about those who are on the move, about those who remain and about those who receive migrants in their communities. We need to take the interests and concerns of all these people seriously. Supporting our Member States and partners in
developing such a balanced approach is at the heart of ICMPD’s mandate. Whether it is on border management, THB, illegal migration, asylum, labour migration or migration and development: I look forward to working with you on this.

Thank you.