Let me first of all express my appreciation for this important and timely initiative.

The enlargement of the Schengen area is as important for Europe as it is sensitive. And the subject needs a careful approach, both from a ‘technical’ side as well as in the public debate.

I hope this public hearing may contribute to widening the understanding on the different interests and positions regarding the forthcoming enlargement of the Schengen area, which will extend the Schengen privileges to some 30 million people in Romania and Bulgaria.

Having in mind the limited time for my intervention, I would anyway first use this opportunity to shortly introduce ICMPD to those of you who are not familiar with the organisation.

ICMPD

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development is an intergovernmental organisation, established in 1993 on initiative of Austria and Switzerland, currently comprising of 14 members.

In addition to Bulgaria and Romania, these include: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland.

We are based in Vienna with offices in Brussels and various other countries in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

ICMPD is a European migration organisation.

This implies, that we follow closely the developments here in Brussels that we work with European institutions that the interests of Europe and its partners are central to our work that we accept and live the European understanding of migration and that we work within a well developed human rights framework.

These cornerstones are reflected in the three pillars where we work:
• **Firstly: Research and documentation** – we conduct state-of-the-art academic research, comparing and analysing the results of migration policies and working on trends for future flows.

• **Secondly: Migration dialogues** – The various – often EU funded - dialogues we support cover in addition to Europe all the ex-Soviet states, the Middle East and part of Asia as well as the whole of Africa.
Supporting these dialogues provides us with a strong understanding of the political setting in countries of origin and destination, and contributes to trust building among the participating states.

• **And finally: Capacity building activities** – supporting peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and training in operational projects allows us to understand the operational realities of migration professionals.

This three-pronged-approach allows us to think and work on migration issues from a variety of perspectives, something which is especially relevant for sensitive topics, which brings me to the topic of today’s agenda.

**Schengen accession and EU migration policy.**

The present ongoing discussions on the forthcoming enlargement of Schengen by the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, represents a typical and important example on the complexity of the migration debate.

First of all: Schengen is much more than “a migration issue”. But in addition to the security aspects, migration seems to stir most emotions in the debate on the Schengen enlargement, and I will focus on that issue.

Most people, at least most politicians, are convinced that in the long term Schengen enlargement is positive. And indeed the majority of the EU Member States agrees to this.

If the developments from the last Schengen enlargement can serve as an example, accession to the Schengen area will give a boost to the European integration process of Bulgaria and Romania.

It will support not only their economy, but also that of other EU Member States, it will ease the freedom of movement for millions of people. And most important: through the so called compensatory measures e.g. common visa procedures, the SIS and the enforced police cooperation it will raise the security level in the accession countries, in the EU-MS and in the EU as a whole.

Still, despite these clear positive outcomes, and despite the fact that both countries have fulfilled all Schengen criteria, some countries still resist accession.
Three reasons can be identified for this:

1. Real or perceived inconclusive results in the fights against corruption and organised crime in both countries
2. External factors such as the possible increased migration pressure on Europe
3. Internal factors, mainly referring to domestic public and political concerns in the respective Member States.

Let’s have a closer look on the question, whether it is true, as often stated, that apart from the first factor – which by the way is not a formal Schengen requirement – Bulgaria and Romania can’t do much to influence the other two factors?

Well, actually, **they can - and they do!**

**Let’s first focus on the external factors, the migration pressure.**

Many people fear that after the successful FRONTEX operation in Greece, Romania and especially Bulgaria will be the next targets for international smuggling networks.

With the ‘Arab Spring still causing much displacement, with Afghanistan and Iraq still unsafe, and the large economic differences between Europe and many other countries, there clearly is a lot of ‘clientele’ for the smuggling organisations. And it is clear that those smugglers will have an interest in trying to test new entry routes – something they always have been doing and will continue to do.

But here, we can prepare ourselves.

The EU has the instruments in place to support the countries in case of short term crises, most notably via FRONTEX operations.

Mid- and longer term, the regional cooperation and information exchange among the countries along key migratory routes is essential. And also here, many initiatives, both multi-lateral as well as bi-lateral have been taken.

My own organisation supports for example the Budapest Process Black Sea Working Group – chaired by Bulgaria – where the main states along the Black Sea region discuss possible ways for cooperation on migration issues.

ICMPD is also involved in the framework of other initiatives, such as the Prague Process on migration partnerships and the ‘Silk route working group’, where cooperation initiatives are planned.

Obviously, on operational level it would help Bulgaria and Romania if the readmission agreement between the EU and Turkey would have been in force. Hopefully 2012 will bring some progress here.
But even without this agreement: with EU support both countries have been working hard to improve their respective migration and asylum systems, and are also prepared for contingencies.

Here it is also worth mentioning a very timely initiative by Bulgaria: the long-term Migration Strategy recently elaborated with the assistance of ICMPD which has just been presented by Mrs. Marinova

Now, let’s discuss the internal political factors in the states objecting Schengen accession of Bulgaria and Romania.

As an ex-civil servant having worked for about 20 years in the Austrian Ministry of Interior, I know from my personal experience that especially on migration issues the public debate and sometimes the policy–making process is steered more by emotions than by facts.

But especially negative emotions stem from misinformation and lack of trust. Without beautifying the reality and without wanting to sound naive: here we all can do a lot to improve the mood in our countries.

Instead of focussing on most negative scenarios, such as selected paragraphs from various reports that there might be an increase in organised crime, we should focus on the measures taken against it. Instead of repeating existing prejudices, we can focus on the reality. We have to focus on the positive aspects and experiences of the recent Schengen enlargements, and there are many as mentioned before.

Falling into the trap of copying the slogans of the Euro sceptical populists in order to save votes will bring us nowhere. Actually, the opposite seems to be true: the more their words are incorporated in the programmes of ‘mainstream’ parties, the stronger the extreme right seems to become.

Here, a lot of responsibility lies with the mainstream – in the sense of ‘non-radical’ – political parties in Europe.

Is there more that can be done by Romanian and Bulgarian politicians and civil society actors?

Possibly, they could be even more active in the countries sceptical about their accession. Open debates, TV-interviews, cultural exchanges all can contribute to building trust at the public level. At the political level, exchanges such as the one we are having today can create better understanding among politicians and contribute to a partnership based on mutual trust.

ICMPD has been supporting and will continue to support both countries in their accession process, and afterwards.

Whether we talk about technical cooperation in the area of border management or trafficking in human being; supporting the development of national migration strategies; or facilitating dialogue
and trust building efforts: we work closely with our Member States to help them reach their migration management priorities and ‘acceding to the Schengen area’ clearly is among the most important priorities.

In my view the actual preparations in both countries comprise much more than the measures for ‘fulfilling the formal Schengen Standards’. And they are doing this not only in view of the aspired Schengen accession but also with the conviction that a comprehensive migration policy according to EU-Standards positively contributes to the security situation in their countries.

Thank you