Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

Let me start by joining the previous speakers in thanking you for attending this first preparatory meeting for the 5th Budapest Process Ministerial Conference. I am pleased to see the strong attendance from more than 30 countries, important international organisations, as well as the European Commission.

Today I am especially proud that ICMPD can support Turkey and all other countries and stakeholders in this initiative to start “A Silk Routes Partnership for Migration” and that my organisation can fulfil its mandate to facilitate dialogue between states on migration policy development.

ICMPD facilitates several migration dialogues, both between the EU and African partners, as well as between Europe and its Eastern neighbours. The Budapest Process is the first and most long-standing framework and ICMPD has filled the Secretariat function since the establishment of the organisation in 1993.

Today’s meeting marks the official start of a new initiative – “A Silk Routes Partnership for Migration” - and at the same time, the furthering of an already begun process. This process will deepen and advance cooperation, anchor future plans on a ministerial level and receive ministerial endorsement for even further reaching cooperation.

The framework offered by this dialogue is unique.

The Budapest Process stands for a functional and credible framework for cooperation. It is a bounteous framework. It is a slim framework. It can and has adapted to the needs of states. In other words – it is flexible. In this key feature, coupled with other important principles for cooperation - informality, voluntarism, equal level cooperation and a state-driven approach – lays the main secret behind the successful cooperation of more than 20 years and the reason that the Budapest Process has always managed to remain relevant through its three phases.

Since its restructuring in 2010, the Budapest Process has focused on the Silk Routes Region in all three regional Working Groups – the Working Group on the Black Sea Region, the Working Group on the Silk Routes Region and the Working Group on the South East European Region.
The working groups function as regional and thematic platforms to discuss issues of special relevance for each region.

Several of the Silk Routes countries that were invited in 2010 have become regular, stable participants or observers of the meetings. I am looking around the table at the delegations of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and again, am especially welcoming them here.

Some countries have already participated in previous meetings: Bangladesh, Iraq and Syria. Missions are planned to Bangladesh and Iraq. With other countries, cooperation has started more recently, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Iran, which is for the second time participating in a Budapest Process meeting. We are looking forward to deepening cooperation.

Furthermore, the Secretariat visited India in September and had talks with relevant officials who indicated India’s interest to also join the cooperation. A new round of visits to the Silk Routes Region is being planned in fall.

Speaking in my personal capacity, as someone who for many years was sitting where you are sitting today, I would also like to encourage states to make even more use of this framework and seize the opportunity to shape it according to your needs. I would also like to remind us of the need to be patient. Usually it is said that Rome was not built in one day - the same goes for the ancient Silk Road. I believe this is equally true for this new cooperation endeavour. We need to remain ambitious, remain open, anchor our commitments and be creative in our efforts to find joint avenues for cooperation.

Today is the starting point of tomorrow’s cooperation arrangements and I would like to encourage states to be bold in setting the political framework. Let us use the Working Tables organised in the afternoon to share our thoughts and test our ideas for the future. This is the place and time to think big and not let present day limitations limit future opportunities. We should lay a wide basis for cooperation, and ensure a future mandate for continued policy dialogue, as well as capacity-building measures. The agreement states reach in April next year should open up the necessary follow-up measures on a large and small scale.

To conclude, I believe that the Budapest Process and its Preparations for a Ministerial Conference starting today will contribute to a more practical cooperation between the partners on common priorities, challenges and opportunities in the area of migration.

But all our joint efforts must never lose sight of our common responsibilities regarding migrants, refugees and vulnerable groups, such as victims of trafficking, minors and children. And we always have to keep in mind that 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 – and we want to work with you to find solutions for all of them!

With my sincere thanks to our hosts for this great initiative and hospitality. I would like to wish us all a productive meeting!