Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like the organisers for inviting me to this timely and highly relevant event. Let me start by stating that it is important but at the same time also highly delicate to discuss migration in the context of Terrorism; maybe it is a little less sensitive to discuss it in the context of Corruption and Crime. Why am I saying that?

We know that in the beginning security experts considered it unlikely that terrorists would move within the huge and largely uncontrolled refugee flows of last year, because they assumed that terrorist organisations would have better and faster means to infiltrate mainland Europe. Today, we know that individuals involved in the attacks in Paris, Brussels and Germany have indeed moved within the refugee flows of 2015 - and maybe also 2016. But so far we do not really know why. Was it to send a message? Was it to discredit the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from exactly the kind of violence these groups are inflicting in the source regions? Was it “made terrorists” travelling or did people radicalise at later stages? We have not all the answers to these questions yet. But we know two things: First of all, the individuals who are a real security threat represent a microscopic minority among the people on the move. We have to do everything to identify them and to prevent them from taking action. But we must not discriminate the overwhelming majority of those who are fleeing from this kind of violence. Second, we know that many of the attacks were led by home-grown terrorists or involved their participation. Some of biographies identified them as citizens of their home countries, often with migration background, often grown up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, often not able to improve their socio-economic status, often not achieving their goals in life. Discrimination – whether objectively experienced or subjectively felt - is by no means the only factor leading an individual down the road to radicalisation. But it can be one of the many factors causing it. We have to be very careful not to increase discrimination by stereotyping certain backgrounds and religious beliefs in the context of terrorism. This will not help us in avoiding radicalisation; it will increase it. We should treat terrorism as a security issue and not as a migration issue. Of course we should not ignore links to the migration field when they really exist. But we should not rush to conclusions too quickly and make connections where there are none.

We are on much safer ground when we discuss the links between migration and Organized Crime. Two areas of migration-related crime come to everybody’s mind immediately – Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling. To start with: the two concepts are not
the same, they are substantially different. Migrant Smuggling means helping with an illegal border crossing and illegal entry against payment. It always has a transnational element. This is not always the case with Trafficking, where the key defining elements are coercion and endured exploitation of the victims. Trafficking can also involve cases where no borders are crossed or where the entry takes place legally.

Trafficking is an almost “classic activity” of Organised Crime Groups who control the red light business, are used to exerting violence and have no problem to intimidate and exploit their victims. The setting of Migrant Smuggling is a lot more complex. We all know the horrible pictures of people drowning in the Mediterranean and dying by their thousands. All of them are victims of Migrant Smugglers and a cynical way of smuggling people. Notwithstanding this, millions of clients of Smugglers arrive at their destinations rather safely and for the agreed price. Much more than in Trafficking we see a customer – service provider relationship, where the clients are in a position to choose between different offers on the market. The different nature of the two migration-related crimes has its impact on the organisational side as well. Normally, Traffickers are professional criminals, part of Organised Crime Groups and engage in other types of crime as well. Migrant Smuggling appears in form of a huge “illegal travel industry” where thousands of actors, networks and organisations operate and interact. Everything that is needed to run a travel business is found in this illegal travel industry as well – agents, bookers, guides, drivers, accommodation providers, document providers, advertises, warranties, group packages, luxury and cheap tours, you name it. All these elements need to be addressed to tackle Migrant Smuggling more effectively, which makes this task so difficult.

When we want to make a simple distinction, we could say that Trafficking is a form of “Organized Crime” whereas Migrant Smuggling is rather a “Crime that is organized”. But one thing is for sure – both crimes would not function without corruption, without bribing, without persuading the authorities to turn a blind eye. Today, there is hardly an irregular migration movement which is not supported by Migrant Smugglers at one point or the other. And at many of these points corruption plays a vital role. Why is that the case? Well, corrupt officials make the process just so much easier. To give you just two examples: the biggest Migrant Smuggling operations known were conducted by the use of visa. These visa were not falsified but wrongly obtained by corrupting Embassy and Consulate Officials. Not all of these cases involved money, many of them were so called honey-traps or other types of persuasion. And to give you an idea of the significance of these cases: some of them involved hundreds of thousands of visa that were issued to irregular migrants. A second, more obvious example: we invest millions and millions in stepping up border control systems around the world. But even the tightest border has gates that can be opened. And when the gate-keepers are poorly paid and Migrant Smugglers offer a few hundred Euros – will he or she keep the gates shut? More often than we might wish for, he or she will not keep the gates shut but open them for the money offered.

But there are also many other areas where the many faces of corruption play an important role in the context of migration. It is sad to say but often corruption is the only way for refugees and forced migrants to find protection. Corruption might be necessary to get out of the conflict zone or to organise the journey to a country which is secure. The safest methods offered by Smugglers are the ones based on fraudulent documents. Normally they are also the most expensive ones and require the highest degree of involvement of corrupt state officials.
Corruption impedes the development benefits of migration. Remittances are not used for the families at home or the development of the country. They have to be spent on bribes for permits, licenses and other official documents. The same refers to ODA – official development assistance – where it is never guaranteed that the money is used as intended and is not channelled towards self-enriching elites. The EU intends to invest more than 60 billion Euros over the next years in main sources countries of migration. And the first question that comes up is – will this money end up where it should, or will it disappear in the dark channels controlled by the powerful few? As you can see, a whole pillar of the emerging new European migration policy is largely impacted by corruption.

But corruption is also one of the main reasons why people leave their home countries in the first place. Most people do not leave because of poverty but because of a lack of perspective and because they are frustrated with the conditions in their home country. Corruption and state despotism make them lose their faith in local opportunities and make them seek such opportunities somewhere else. Linked to this, corruption also prevents people from returning home. They know when conditions have remained or even worsened and do not feel intrigued to return to the levels of corruption they have tried to escape.

Corruption also undermines the assistance given to refugees and migrants. Many of such cases have been reported where the people running the refugee camps, local criminals or powerful officials have managed to channel funds and goods in their own pocket. Regularly, the decreasing standards in the camps are one of the reasons why people try to move on. It is safe to say that corruption in its many manifestations almost always occurs when a refugee camp or reception centre is opened. We do not have to look abroad, this also happens in Europe and it happens all the time.

Irregular migration and corruption go hand in hand, they complement; they reinforce each other. It is almost a vicious cycle. The high revenues of Migrant Smuggling can be used for corruption, which in turn makes Smuggling easier and more profitable. From a migration policy perspective it is simple – in a world without corruption, many of the methods used by Migrant Smugglers and irregular migrants would not work anymore. The flipside would be that many refugees and forced migrants would not be able to reach the safe countries of Europe. We have to be honest on this.

Last but not least, I of course should name a few priorities in tackling corruption better than we do at the moment. I know that the list of potential measures is a long one but I want to focus on a few priorities which are linked to migration and are based on the experience of my organisation. First of all, sanctions matter. We have to identify those who engage in corruption and bring them to justice. Thus, sanctions should not be imposed on individuals only but also on states who do not engage in the fight against corruption. Second, we have to make sure that civil servants are paid well, especially those in low-income countries. Otherwise, they will be prone to bribery even when they might have to face serious punishment. Third, critical positions in state administrations have to be critically monitored. “Lead them not into temptation”; and a couple of monitors looking over one’s shoulder can do miracles in this respect. Fourth, when it comes to economic and development cooperation – we have to look very carefully where the money goes and apply some pressure that it goes in the right channels. Last but not least, we should invest in smart technology at Embassies, consulates and borders which makes it more difficult for the individual to circumvent the rules without leaving a trace.
As said before, I could continue this list for quite some time. But if we make progress in the five areas quoted, we would make a lot of progress in breaking up the close links between corruption, Migrant Smuggling and irregular migration.