Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to this timely and highly relevant event. I want to very briefly discuss some aspects of the link between technology and migration-related crime. My focus will be on the role of technology in organising irregular migration, mainly because this issue is maybe the highest on the political agenda.

Technology has always played a big role in migration-related crime. We just have to think of altered vehicles to hide smuggled migrants, GPS units to bypass border controls or fake visa to organise an apparently legal entry of an irregular migrant.

Criminals have always adapted to technical change and integrated new technology in their modus operandi. But what we have seen in recent years is not gradual adaptation; it is a revolution in the true sense of the word. Over the years, ICMPD has conducted a lot of research on how migrant smuggling networks operate. And we found that their organisational structure and their modus operandi had not changed too much over the last ten, fifteen years. But what has changed completely are the technical means to organise their business. And I do not speak about any high-tech gear or sophisticated technology. I speak about the device I assume almost all of us carry in our pockets – the smart phone and its regular features. We all were part of a revolution. In 1990 only 0.25 % of the world population had a mobile phone, today it is almost 70 %. In 1990 less than 0.1 % of the world population used the internet, today it is more than 50 %. The smart phone provides access to almost unlimited information; it allows for communicating over large distances; it allows for sharing and analysing of information between hundreds of thousands of people at any given moment.

In the summer of 2015 we all witnessed what tremendous impact the IT revolution had on the old business of migrant smuggling. Within a few weeks the smuggling networks managed to completely redirect the flows of refugees and other migrants from the Central to the Eastern Mediterranean route. This led to a temporary breakdown of border control and migration management systems and to one of the biggest political crises in the history of the EU. Without the internet, without the smart phone, without social media – this would not have happened the way it did; maybe it would not have happened at all.

I am afraid, however, that the closing of a few Facebook posts and chat forums will not be sufficient. We have to become a lot smarter and more creative when we want to use technology for law enforcement purposes. Thus, we need new partners as well. We have to bring in the tech sector, who has the know-how and the innovative power we urgently need. So far, law enforcement and the tech sector are very disconnected. We need to bring them
together and make them learn about each other’s needs and capabilities. There are some good examples for such cooperation. Albania, for instance, runs a phone app for reporting cases of human trafficking, directly linked to the national victim helpline. In the US a web-based tool is available for law enforcement to identify victims of child trafficking by analysing online advertisements. Those are only two examples and I think that there is huge potential for technology to improve the capacity for pro-active law enforcement action.

Let’s face it. This is not a job for the “best agers” among us. This is a job for young people. There is a huge cultural gap between the generations and their use of technology. Only the young and creative ones will be able to develop solutions we cannot even imagine ourselves and they will know how to reach out to migrants who are rather young as well.

This brings me to my final request, which is not a new one. When smuggling and migrant networks can process millions of communications every hour; in a decentralised and efficient way, law enforcement must be able to do the same. The authorities must find better ways to access and share information and intelligence. This is not a technical issue. It is a question of political will and the readiness to collaborate. Only if we manage this we can make sure that law enforcement stays one step ahead in the game of migration, crime and technology.

Thank you.