

Managing Migration Together

24 February 2016, Vienna

Declaration

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior of Croatia, Slovenia and Austria (as host of the Conference) together with our colleagues from the Western Balkans 6 participating in the Conference “Managing Migration Together” held in Vienna on 24 February 2016 in the presence of Bulgaria as an observer

CONCERNED by the continued and sustained flows of refugees and migrants along the Western Balkans route

RECOGNISING that although the situation regarding illegal migration and asylum differs widely, the current migration situation poses a considerable challenge to the entire region

ACKNOWLEDGING that migration routes may change quickly and the pressure on the region as a whole is still very high

EMPHASISING the important role of the Western Balkans with regard to security and stability in Europe

RECOGNISING that the Western Balkans constitutes an important area of transit for migrants and asylum seekers on their way to the European Union and at the same time is also confronted with increasing numbers of asylum applications

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the EU perspective of the Western Balkans, which is strongly supported as well as their willingness to share responsibilities in this context as candidate and potential candidate countries

AWARE of the risks of crime, violent extremism and terrorism, which may spread as a consequence of irregular migration

RECALLING the Vienna Declaration “Tackling Jihadism Together” of 20 March 2015 as well as the Joint Statement on Terrorism adopted by the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Tirana on 24 May 2015

REFERRING to the Ministerial Declarations of the Salzburg Forum Conferences in St. Pölten on 4/5 May 2015 and in Sofia on 18/19 November 2015, in the framework of which the “Alliance on Current Challenges in the Area of Migration” was established

REACTING to the current challenges in the field of migration, PREVENTING people from taking the risks of irregular migration and SHAPING a positive environment which gives people a perspective in their respective countries of origin

AGREED on the following comprehensive approach:

1. Efficient management of the migration and refugee crisis requires a coordinated and comprehensive approach addressing all aspects in order to find sustainable and fundamental rights-compliant solutions, and not only temporary results. This includes increased efforts of all relevant EU actors and partners.
2. Persons in need of international protection should receive protection as soon and as close to their countries of origin as possible. There is a need to better share responsibility in Europe as a whole in order to avoid disproportionate pressure on singular partners.
3. It is not possible to process unlimited numbers of migrants and applicants for asylum, due to limited resources and reception capacities, potential consequences for internal security and social cohesion as well as challenges with regard to integration.
4. The right to asylum does not include the right of applicants for international protection to travel onwards and choose a country of preference.
5. The migration flow along the Western Balkans route needs to be substantially reduced with a view to alleviating disproportionate burdens on the partners along the route.
6. Migrants and applicants for asylum must follow the rules of national and EU legislation and should be aware of the consequences in case of non-compliance. The principle of “non-compliance – no rights” should be communicated and applied.
7. Closely coordinated measures in line with international and European law especially the Schengen Border Code should be taken, in particular concerning border management, capacity building and mutual support with regard to asylum, return and readmission, the fight against illegal migration, communication activities as well as cooperation with third countries.
8. Cooperation and mutual support at the borders in the region must be further intensified. This requires the establishment of common standards, in line with international and European law as well as national legislation, for the management of migration along the Western Balkans route, especially regarding registration (screening, document checks and fingerprinting), the conditions for refusal or permission of entry at the border – aiming at persons in clear need of international protection – and the further handling of migrants, including return or transition. We need to get back to a situation where all Members of Schengen area apply fully the Schengen Borders Code and refuse entry at external borders to third-country nationals who do not satisfy the entry conditions or who have not made an asylum application despite having had the opportunity to do so.
9. Persons without travel documents, with forged or falsified documents or migrants making wrongful statements about their nationality or identity will be refused entry at the border. The same applies to persons who do not cooperate in the registration procedure or who have attempted to unlawfully cross the border. This will contribute to a better control of the borders and prevent the route from being misused by migrants who are not in need of international protection.

10. In order to support effective border protection the deployment of police officers to borders of particularly affected regions, e.g. through joint patrols, common action and monitoring at authorized border crossing points, must be speeded up.
11. Illegal migration via the Western Balkans route is a challenge for the reception and asylum systems of all partners concerned. Fair and efficient asylum systems and procedures in line with the Geneva Convention and capacities to accommodate persons in need of international protection will be ensured by all partners. Within the framework of the EU accession process, necessary asylum reforms will be accelerated aiming at compliance with the EU acquis. For this purpose, financing of the necessary harmonisation activities via EU instruments should be supported.
12. Migrants not in need of international protection must be swiftly returned in full respect of their dignity and human rights. Therefore national and coordinated efforts have to be increased, in particular at the point of first entry into the EU. Technical assistance by Frontex and EASO would be highly welcome. In this context, Austria offered to share its expertise. Further efforts are also needed to speed up the conclusion and implementation of readmission agreements by the EU.
13. Fast and uncomplicated communication between the partners is crucial in order to promote coordinated and pro-active migration management in the region and to ensure quick responses to current and upcoming challenges. Information exchange is also decisive as regards relevant data bases in the field of migration and security like EURODAC. The necessary steps in this context will be taken.
14. Mutual support as regards asylum capacities is of utmost importance. In this regard, Slovakia assisting Austria in accommodating 500 asylum seekers was mentioned as an example.
15. The cooperation with Greece for the management of migration flows along the Western Balkans route remains essential. Further effective communication and strengthened cooperation between Greece and Macedonia is necessary and strongly encouraged.
16. In order to reduce pressure on the region, cooperation with third countries will be intensified. A special focus at EU level should be put on implementing the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. At the same time, initiatives with other countries of transit or origin will also be supported. In order to help people in need of protection as close as possible to their country of origin, it is necessary to develop initiatives together with third countries close to conflict areas.
17. As migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings might increase due to certain measures taken, efforts in these fields shall be increased and already existing or planned initiatives shall be put to best possible use. In this regard, the Joint Operation Office (JOO) in Vienna was mentioned.
18. Austrian experiences have shown that targeted information may reduce the influx of illegal migrants from particular countries of origin. Therefore joint communication strategies in relevant countries of origin will be developed aiming at the dissemination of accurate information on the risks of migrant smuggling and human trafficking as well as on the consequences of illegal entries to and stays on the territory of another country. EU delegations should also be tasked to this end.

19. Appreciation for existing cross-border cooperation was underlined. With a view to supporting migration and border management and maintaining safety and security in the Western Balkans, future cooperation will build on lessons learned and make best use of existing organisations, initiatives, platforms and projects. In this regard, the Salzburg Forum and the Brdo Process have to be taken into consideration as well as the capabilities of different institutions, like the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Agency for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) or the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), which could be used as a common Think Tank and platform for dialogue, ideas and exchange. Relevant EU projects and activities, such as the project “Regional Support to sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey” under IPA II, will be supported. Moreover, all relevant available resources, including within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), should be used to achieve the defined goals.
20. In view of the increasingly visible connections between illegal migration and extremism, relevant measures agreed in the Vienna Declaration “Tackling Jihadism Together” of 20 March 2015 will be swiftly implemented.
21. Civil-military cooperation could also play an important role. The Ministers took note of the cooperation between the Austrian police and the Austrian Armed Forces in the field of border management.

The Ministers took note of the Joint Statement of Heads of Police Services from Austria, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia agreed upon at the Meeting held in Zagreb on 18 February 2016. The included operational measures are a decisive contribution for the implementation of this Ministerial declaration.

The Ministers of the participating EU Member States will present and promote the results of the Conference “Managing Migration Together” at EU level.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior will ensure that the agreed measures are implemented in their respective areas of responsibility and will see to it that these measures will also be pursued in the cooperation between the Western Balkans and the European Union as well as in regional cooperation fora, such as the Salzburg Forum (Ministerial Conference on 14 June 2016), the Brdo Process of the ministers of the interior (18/19 April 2016) or the cooperation with regard to the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (15th Meeting of the Committee of Ministers to be held on 10/11 May 2016 in Austria). A review envisaging possible further steps will follow in the course of a conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior in Sarajevo in 2016.