

Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference

6/7 November 2019

Vienna, Austria

JOINT MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Upon the invitation of the Austrian Salzburg Forum Presidency, the Ministers of the Interior and/or representatives of the Salzburg Forum Member States (hereinafter: the Ministers), the Group of Friends from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova, Schengen partners (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Switzerland) as well as the Minister from Kosovo* as special guest met for the Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference in Vienna, Austria, on 6/7 November 2019.

Representatives of the European Commission, Europol, the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Secretariat of the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCC SEE) also attended the Conference.

This Declaration has been adopted by the Salzburg Forum Member States, with all other participants being observers.

The main challenges discussed were as follows:

Human smuggling, borders, security

Current and future challenges and developments that might be expected along the Eastern / Central Mediterranean routes, require a stronger focus to be placed by the European Union on the fight against human smuggling:

- This was underlined by the Finnish Presidency's report, the relevant discussions and the non-paper presented by Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece at the JHA Council on 8 October 2019.
- Consequently and in view of current developments in Southeast Europe, a particular focus needs to be further placed on the Eastern Mediterranean route.
- In order to prevent a new migration crisis swift joint measures are considered necessary.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC Resolution 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration on independence

Further work can build on the excellent bi- and multilateral cooperation in Central / Southeast Europe as well as different agreements already achieved at European and regional level with the aim to fight human smuggling and enhance border protection. That said, it is now about implementing joint and/or coordinated concrete operational measures.

The Ministers thus agreed on the following:

- As a first step, coordinated short-term measures in the areas of situational awareness, human smuggling, borders and security that are necessary to prevent a new migration crisis along the Western Balkans route shall be taken, building upon the meeting of the Chiefs of Border Police in Vienna on 6 November 2019. In this context, the European Commission will be requested by the Salzburg Forum Presidency to coordinate in cooperation with Greece a short-term support package for the best possible protection of the Greek EU external border that is of particular relevance for all those involved as well as for targeted activities to be implemented along the route.
- The European Commission and all involved partners are also invited to proactively engage in the process of concluding status agreements with remaining Western Balkan states as a basis for the Frontex Agency engagement in common operations in the Western Balkan states.
- Furthermore, medium-term, structured, pro-active and joint anti-smuggling cooperation along the Eastern Mediterranean route shall be launched, including especially the following elements:
 - regular joint investigations making better use of the JOO and regional formats such as SELEC;
 - enhancing cooperation with Turkey and other relevant countries, including in the Task Force Western Balkans (TFWB);
 - cooperation with / support to particularly affected partners in key areas that are relevant for fighting human smuggling, such as border management, identification of persons, return, capacity building / support in the area of asylum.

The operational measures required to this effect will be coordinated in regular intervals and the European Commission, EU agencies and other relevant institutions will be asked for support.

Through coordinated and sustained efforts of the Salzburg Forum Members and their Group of Friends from the Western Balkans, supported by relevant EU partners, institutions and agencies, cooperation along the Eastern Mediterranean route could become a best practice model for joint efforts in the fight against human smuggling, thus contributing to the implementation of the Whole-of-Route approach proposed by the Finnish EU Council Presidency.

Dublin and Schengen – a new approach towards migration

The EU asylum and migration policy, as well as the functioning of Schengen are key areas for the future of Europe.

- The EU's asylum system including Dublin is not working properly.
- The "Schengen" system still needs to be reinforced.
- Experience has shown that the current asylum system is not capable of successfully meeting the challenges posed by the sustained mixed migration pressure on Europe for all affected.
- The difficulties in preventing and combating illegal migration have particularly challenged the proper functioning of the Schengen area.
- Against this background, effective control of EU's external border combined with increased external actions and measures on the internal aspects are prerequisites for a functioning EU asylum policy and a sustainable return to Schengen.
- Moreover, a solution to Dublin is one of the prerequisites for a resilient Common European Asylum System.
- According to the European Council conclusions of June 2018 this solution should be based on consensus and a balance of responsibility and solidarity.
- Furthermore, there is still an urgent need to combat secondary movements within the EU as well as to enforce returns for those who are not in need for international protection.
- What is thus called for are rules on asylum and migration in the EU that are accepted, consistently implemented and enforced by all EU Member States.

It is to be expected that the new European Commission will soon draw up proposals for a new pact on asylum and migration. Therefore and based on the results of their political discussions, the Salzburg Forum Member States will identify possible core elements for a future European asylum and migration system to be forwarded to the European Commission. The following overall goals should be taken into account:

- Ensuring that people in Europe can live in safety and security, and providing assistance to persons in need of international protection subject to admission capacities in the EU;
- Definitely breaking the business model of the smugglers and eliminating all incentives to abuse the asylum system;
- Further stemming illegal migration to Europe and secondary migration within Europe;

- Striking the right balance between responsibility and solidarity;
- Intensifying efforts for a more efficient EU return policy.

Overview of the Austrian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum

The Ministers welcomed the results of the Salzburg Forum Police Chiefs meeting, which was held in the margins of the European Police Chiefs Convention in The Hague on 2 October. The Ministers also welcomed the results of the meeting of the Salzburg Forum Coordinators as well as of the Witness Protection Working Group, both of which were organized in October 2019.

Outlook on the Bulgarian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum

The Ministers welcomed the information on the programme of the upcoming Bulgarian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum and expressed their commitment to continuing close cooperation on issues of common interest within the framework of the Salzburg Forum.

The upcoming EU Council Presidencies of Salzburg Forum Members

The Ministers agreed to make best use of the Croatian (2020), Slovenian (2021) and Czech (2022) EU Council Presidencies in the joint interest of the Salzburg Forum.

Cross-border Enforcement of Road-Safety Related Traffic Offences

The Ministers took note of the operational start of exchange of data between Bulgaria, Hungary and Austria on the basis of the Agreement on Cross-border Enforcement of Road Safety Related Traffic Offences ("CBE Agreement"). Furthermore, they underlined their commitment that regional cooperation in the area of road safety should remain high on the Salzburg Forum agenda.

Vienna, 7 November 2019