

Budapest Process

23rd Meeting of the Senior Officials of the Budapest Process

Budapest, 14 – 15 December 2015

Summary/conclusions

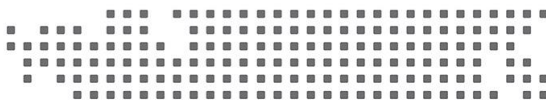
1. On 14-15 December 2015, the 23rd Meeting of the Budapest Group of Senior Officials was held in Budapest, Hungary. The meeting was hosted by Hungary – the Co-Chair of the Budapest Process – in the premises of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior. The meeting was chaired by Turkey – the Chair of the Budapest Process.
2. The Senior Officials meeting gathered **74 participants from 31 countries** – Albania, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Italy, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom – as well as the European Commission, the European Union Council, European External Action Service (EEAS), FRONTEX, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
3. Hungary welcomed all countries and organisations and dedicated a minute of silence to commemorate Dr. Krisztina Berta, Deputy State Secretary of EU and International Relations of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior. She was a dear friend of the Budapest Process, and her sudden passing shocked all who worked with her.
4. During the first part of the meeting **opening statements** were made by the Chair, Co-Chair, Secretariat and the European Commission referring to the **migration situation in 2015**. It was emphasised that since the last Senior Officials Meeting in 2014 the migration reality in Europe had changed and the immense migration pressure experienced by Turkey and other countries in the years before now reached Europe. It was underlined that this challenge needed to be addressed in a holistic way. In this regard, the importance of the EU-Turkey partnership was mentioned as well as the importance of close cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination – among others via the Budapest Process. In the face of expected increasing flows from and within the Silk Routes Region in the near future, return and readmission will be an increasingly important factor in the relations between all countries. At the same time, measures are needed for the integration of those refugees who will be staying in the countries of destination and safe routes to protection need to be considered. Even though countries currently tend to focus on short-term solutions, it was stressed that also medium to long-term strategies were needed.
5. Following the opening statements, the Budapest Process Secretariat reported on the activities held in 2015 within the Budapest Process (BP) and the Silk Routes Partnership Project (SRP project). Overall, two meetings were held by the Silk Routes Region Working Group (SRWG) – one in Islamabad on irregular migration and return, human trafficking and migrant smuggling and one in Dhaka on migration and development. The Black Sea Region Working Group (BSWG) also met once in Sofia discussing the effects of crisis situations on

migration management. Bulgaria as the Chair of this WG reported that the participation of all Silk Routes countries in that meeting showed the continuing importance of the BSWG, which links migration routes from and between several regions.

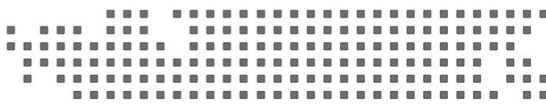
6. In the second part of the Senior Officials meeting the Silk Routes countries Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq including the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Pakistan reported on the latest developments concerning the **migration situation** in their countries:
 - i. **Bangladesh**, which hosted the SRWG meeting on migration and development and is the Chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in 2016, reported that migration governance became integrated into their development strategies in order to reach the aim of poverty reduction. A new law – the overseas employment act – was adopted to improve recruitment practices and safety for labour migrants. A welfare bank has been set up for expatriates and returnees to provide them affordable loans. Bangladesh mentioned the planning of further measures such as collecting fingerprints and online visa checking to combat irregular migration.
 - ii. **Iran** underlined that currently migration matters are not a priority for Iranian politics, because other topics are higher on the national agenda. Nevertheless, Iran discusses the establishment of a migration authority since all migration related issues are being dealt with by many different bodies and ministries that do not necessarily coordinate. Iran reminded the participants that mass influx from neighbouring countries was a reality for the country since decades and not only recently. At the same time the country was struggling with sanctions. The mass migration did not occur in 2015, but it simply reached Europe this year.
 - iii. **Iraq** reported that although previously being a migrant receiving country, the IS security threat led to the displacement of more than 3 million people, of which more than 250.000 fled the country. The Iraqi government is against mass emigration of Iraqis and works on improving security and economic conditions in the country to trigger the voluntary return of its citizens abroad. Iraq is interested in participating in awareness raising campaigns that could be implemented to inform about the risks of irregular migration. The **KRG** reported that they initiated a coordinated activity to find missing migrants and to bring back those migrants who died on their journey and offers assistance to surviving dependants of dead migrants. In this regard, the KRG requests data and information exchange with the EU and other countries in order to be able to return their nationals who died or are imprisoned abroad.
 - iv. For **Pakistan** awareness raising remains of utmost importance. Although people from Pakistan more often migrate legally, they might then end up in an irregular situation. While a pre-departure briefing mechanism – mainly on the Gulf countries – exists, further information sharing is needed for other regions in the world, to help people to make an informed decision pro or contra migration. Therefore, Pakistan appreciates very much the activities under the pilot project 1 of the SRP project, which among others will set up two Migration Information Centres in Islamabad and Lahore. These centres should fill the information gap between the EU and Pakistan and subsequently help to eliminate the role of smugglers.

7. On the second day, the meeting focused on **the role of the Budapest Process in the current migration situation**. In that context the ICMPD Secretariat opened the session by presenting the draft activity plan for 2016 and the first 4 months of 2017¹.
 - i. **Frontex** presented most recent data on irregular migration. In 2015 the Eastern Mediterranean route was the most sensitive area for irregular border crossings, which were twelve times higher than in 2014. Syrian nationals were the biggest group, followed by Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistani. The increase of Afghans among migrants reaching Europe was worth mentioning, who were mostly coming from transit destinations, such as Iran, where they had been staying unregistered. Another challenge was the phenomenon of swapping nationalities – screening activities had shown that 14% of migrants with Syrian documents were not Syrian nationals. Furthermore, fatalities continue to be difficult to calculate.
 - ii. **UNHCR** in its presentation alerted participants to the several challenges ahead, the biggest being the fast moving and transitory nature of the routes that migrants took. Due to new physical barriers, new political decisions and the winterization, routes were constantly changing. UNHCR also reminded that root causes of migration needed to be addressed and that legal channels for migration were missing, but were needed to offer an alternative for people on the move. UNHCR reminded the participants that the current issues needed a pan-European and international approach.
 - iii. **IOM** stressed that migration was not a problem to be solved, but a coherent approach would be needed to manage migration effectively including combating criminal smuggling networks, promoting legal migration channels, addressing political and economic instability in countries of origin, improving asylum systems, etc.
 - iv. **ICMPD** as Secretariat of the BP emphasised that the current situation had no quick fixes. Integration measures have to be implemented and populations of destination countries have to be prepared to this changing environment. The potential for racism and xenophobia and the creation of links between migration and security risks need to be addressed. Future challenges for countries of destination will include return and readmission of migrants with no legal right to stay, also among the countries of the Silk Routes region as many of them are receiving and refugee hosting countries at the same time. Concerning future projects, the regional dimension should be kept and deepened whilst more targeted interventions at national level should be designed on the basis of the priorities and needs of beneficiary and donor countries.
8. Following all presentations, the floor was opened for discussion. Overall, the focus of the discussion was on how the BP and the SRP project could be **adjusted to react more efficiently to the current migration situation**.
 - i. Concerning the immediate reaction towards the ongoing refugee situation, Hungary reminded the participants that the BP's potential as a well-functioning and well-established framework should be used as part of the tool box and not as a solution that could replace bi-lateral or short-term actions. Furthermore, Hungary recalled that the BP should not become a platform to tackle solely irregular migration issues, but should remain a balanced dialogue addressing all migration-related topics.

¹¹ The SRP project runs until the end of April 2017. The draft activity plans includes both the BP and SRP project activities, which are closely interrelated.



- ii. The United Kingdom made clear that it expected adjustments in the BP and SRP project's approach although the project was planned well before the outbreak of the migration situation. More short and medium-term activities should be designed and implemented to come up with an accelerated schedule to react to the current situation. The comprehensive approach towards migration and the 2013 Ministerial Declaration are both still valid. A reinvigorated thematic approach and more analysis of the drivers behind irregular migration are needed.
- iii. The Netherlands underlined that Europe was currently more focused on short-term solutions rather than longer-term cooperation. Overall, the dialogue should first reflect on short-term solutions as the political atmosphere may shift against dialogue. The current first priority should be the return of those with no legal right to stay. The BP work plan for 2016 should clearly reflect these priorities.
- iv. Germany confirmed its recent financial pledge to the BP and shared the sentiments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in terms of a new approach to address the current migration situation. A continuation of the information and awareness raising campaign was much welcomed. Germany underlined that the mass migration influx had created a political and societal climate where any policy development regarding legal channels of migration came to a full stop. Rather return and readmission were subjects that were of interest to political leaders and the public.
- v. Bangladesh underlined the importance of diaspora policy and skills development as priority areas for their country.
- vi. Iraq demanded that the information campaign within the SRP project should be expanded as there was a need for clearing up misperceptions among peoples in countries of origin including Iraq where people are totally misinformed and expecting an easy entry, an easy access to housing and job market and even citizenship.
- vii. Pakistan stressed that rather than expanding its scope, projects and interventions should focus on certain priority areas to get desired results. More regional interaction between the Silk Routes countries is desired.
- viii. Sweden underlined their continued support for and interest in the area of migration and development, but also see the need to address current challenges, e.g. reunite unaccompanied minors with their families.
- ix. Turkey declared saving lives as a first priority. For that purpose international protection needed a more streamlined approach.
- x. Italy demanded that the BP – although being an excellent platform for dialogue – should send clearer signals with appropriate activities that it took this migration situation as serious.
- xi. Norway underlined that the approach should be to save people before they started a dangerous journey, rather than rescuing them from drowning in open sea. Norway also highlighted the importance of distinguishing between refugees eligible for protection and economic migrants who came because they wanted a better life.
- xii. Iran reminded the participants that people were not only looking for protection, but for a better life. Iran asked the governments affected by mass migration to show more solidarity with each other.



- xiii. Russia stressed its continued interest in the BSWG and that it further supported the BP as a comprehensive dialogue on migration.
 - xiv. Bulgaria, as the Chair of the BSWG, expressed its strong support and commitment to the BP and to deepen the cooperation between the BS region and the SR region. To enrich the content of the BSWG, Bulgaria is considering options such as capacity building activities and sharing of expertise.
9. In response to the interventions, the BP Secretariat (ICMPD) informed the participants that return and readmission was one of the priority topics in 2015. As return numbers will further increase in the next years to come, an honest and open debate on how to implement various forms of return is needed.
 10. The financing of the BP was raised by the Chair and Co-Chair. In order to continue its work in the years to come and also to be able to respond to emerging needs, the BP would need a more stable funding structure. Therefore, all participating states were encouraged to further contribute to the budget. Although the independent financing scheme of the BP is an advantage for its participating states, the senior officials were reminded that more ad-hoc services responding to emerging situations could only be delivered with a more stable budget.
 11. Overall, participants expressed a strong interest in more ad-hoc cooperation within the BP to react to certain migration realities in a targeted manner, and providing the framework for discussing not only long-term but also short-term solutions. Against the background of the current migration situation, several European countries underlined their priority to focus on return and readmission also in 2016. A majority of participating states agreed that awareness raising campaigns shall continue and be possibly broadened in 2016. In general, it was emphasised that the regional dimension of the BP and the SRP project should be kept and deepened whilst more targeted interventions in certain priority areas at national level should be implemented.
 12. In closing, the Chair shortly summarised the discussions and thanked Hungary for hosting the meeting and all participating countries and organisations for the contributions in form of presentations and interventions. The Secretariat was entrusted to summarise the discussions in form of meeting conclusions and to circulate the results and coordinate the feedback.