

SALZBURG FORUM MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

18-19 November 2015

Sofia, Bulgaria

JOINT DECLARATION

The Ministers of Interior of the Salzburg Forum Member States met on 18 and 19 November 2015 in Sofia, Bulgaria, on the occasion of the Ministerial Conference under the Bulgarian Salzburg Forum Presidency.

The conference was attended also by the respective Ministers from the Group of the Friends from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova, as well as by representatives of the European Commission, EASO, Europol, FRA, Frontex, DCAF/PCC SEE Secretariat, ICMPD, IOM, and UNHCR.

Special guests of the conference were ministerial delegations from The Netherlands as the upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and Kosovo*.

The Ministers strongly condemned the heinous terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 and expressed their condolences to the French people. They reiterated the support and readiness of their Governments to assist the French authorities in the investigation of the tragic events. The Ministers underlined that the current threats to the security of the EU citizens and the attempts to undermine the fundamental values of the Union prove once again the need of strong and united Europe, which will face these threats together with all necessary means and ruthless determination.

The Ministers agreed on the following with regard to the main topics for discussion:

Migration – Stability and Security

The Ministers agreed that the efficient management of the migration and refugee crisis requires a holistic, coordinated, comprehensive and horizontal approach addressing all aspects in order to find sustainable and fundamental rights-compliant solutions, and not only temporary results.

They shared the view that the efforts should be focused not only to directing and controlling the mixed migratory flows towards Europe through the set of operational

* This designation is without prejudice to the positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

measures as defined inter alia by the extraordinary JHA Council on 9 November 2015, but also to reducing them, especially through cooperation with third countries being source of migration to the EU.

The Ministers underlined that working towards the gradual establishment of an integrated management system for external borders is a key element for strengthening the protection of EU external borders. In this regard the Ministers look forward to the Commission proposal on improving the management of EU external borders, respecting the national competences of the Member States, and expect that the proposal will be presented as soon as possible.

The Salzburg Forum Ministers reiterated their support for the enhancement of the mandate of Frontex, in particular reinforcing its role in the area of return, stressing that the Agency should have sufficient capacities in order to assist efficiently the Member States, and at the same time develop its own technical resources and improve mechanisms related to the deployment of experts within the European Border Guard Teams.

With regard to the efficient counteraction to human smuggling, the Ministers welcomed the planned establishment of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) at Europol and invited the Agency to strengthen further its capacity to support Member States in better preventing and fighting against migrant smuggling. The Ministers reiterated their support for further extending of the Europol actions with a focus on the Western Balkans area, in close cooperation with all relevant EU agencies, and in particular Frontex, EASO and Eurojust.

Fight against Terrorism

In light of the series of brutal terrorist acts in the EU since January 2015, the Ministers reiterated their firm resolution and political commitment to continue the implementation of the measures in the Statement of the Members of the European Council of 12 February 2015.

Building upon their last declaration on that issue in May 2015 the Ministers share the view that radicalisation and violent extremism are seen as common challenges. This includes the need to uphold fundamental rights and better communicate their meaning in everyday life. The Ministers agreed to step up efforts in order to contribute swiftly and effectively to the immediate operational measures to be set at EU level.

The Ministers underlined the necessity for the rapid adoption of the EU Passenger Name Record Directive (EU PNR) as an effective tool to combat terrorism and organised crime.

In view of the decisive progress on that issue in recent months and ongoing trilogue on the adoption of the Directive, the Ministers reiterated their common understanding that the EU PNR is an effective tool to combat terrorism and organised crime.

They agreed that Member States should make advanced preparations for creating the necessary conditions at national level for the practical implementation of the Directive. In this regard they took note of the discussions at expert level held in Sofia on 13-14 October 2015 on the possibilities for a common implementation approach, focused on harmonisation of national decisions where possible, in order to establish an effective

future cooperation between national units. The key elements of this approach should be common understanding on the types of data to be exchanged between the PIU's, technical interoperability of the national systems and their capacities, as well as possibility to use the expertise of the relevant JHA agencies, including to analyse the opportunity of identifying a common procedure for receiving PNR data from the air carriers, in order to achieve a swift and cost effective solution.

The Salzburg Forum Ministers invited the upcoming Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU to support discussions at expert and technical level within the EU on the above mentioned key elements.

Addressing Challenges Posed by the Increased Migratory Pressure along the Western Balkan Route - Common Measures and Enhancement of the Cooperation

The Ministers took note of the recent developments in this area at EU level and in the Western Balkans region and reiterated their firm belief that the increased migratory flows along the Western Balkans route are not a regional, but common European and global problem. Therefore they require a common European approach using all available policies and tools. Reinforcing the security along the EU external borders, strong and decisive measures against the smuggling networks together with the implementation of an effective return policy are matters of primary importance.

The Ministers expressed their readiness to continue active cooperation within the Salzburg Forum and with interested partners from Central and Southeast Europe in this area, in order to contribute to the efficient implementation of the measures outlined in the Joint Declaration from the High-level conference on the Eastern Mediterranean/Western Balkans Route and the Leaders' Statement from the Leaders' Meeting on refugee flow along the Western Balkans Route.

They stressed the importance of closer cooperation with the EU agencies, especially Europol, EASO and Frontex, as well as close interaction between the agencies themselves, with particular focus on the Balkan region.

The Ministers also underlined that the international organisations and the regional initiatives working in this field can also contribute to unique and targeted approach towards migration as a phenomenon in the Western Balkan region

The Ministers outlined that the Salzburg Forum is already implementing measures which have recently been agreed at EU level. The Salzburg Forum informal network on real-time exchange of information and intelligence on migrant smuggling can serve as an example of the EU network of single operational contact points on migrant smuggling which will be set up by 1 December 2015.

The Ministers endorsed the joint concept on *Alliance on Current Challenges in the Area of Migration*. It was agreed that the joint concept will be a living document which is subject to constant updating, taking into account relevant developments with regard to operational cooperation, structural cooperation, cooperation at EU level and further operational needs. The implementation of the measures will be reviewed at the regular meetings of the Police Chiefs and the SF General Coordinators; based on their findings strategic measures shall be discussed during ministerial meetings.

EU Perspective of the Western Balkans and Promoting the Deepening of the Cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Moldova

The Ministers reiterated the support of the Salzburg Forum to the EU perspective of their friends from the Western Balkans, as well as the deepening of the cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. They support the new “pragmatic approach” the EU adopted to enlargement for the following years, consistent with its fundamental principles of “own merits” and the “individual progress”, which ensures objectivity and is forwarding the right signals to all countries on the way to accession.

They agreed that the Group of the Friends of the Salzburg Forum from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova has served as a positive platform for enhancing regional cooperation in the past eight years, inter alia by facilitating the introduction of EU standards and best practices thus contributing to the positive results by the countries of the region in different areas related to justice and home affairs.

Overview of the Bulgarian Salzburg Forum Presidency

The Ministers took note of the meetings held during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum.

They outlined the importance of the discussions of the Police Chiefs and the heads of the national units for counteraction to human smuggling, thus contributing significantly to the joint activities addressing this negative phenomenon accompanying migration.

The Ministers welcomed also the outcomes of the meetings of the Witness Protection Working Group, the expert meeting on the practical implementation of the future EU PNR Directive and the expert meeting on facilitating cross-border enforcement of road safety related traffic offences.

They expressed their support for the workshop on promoting EU procedures and best practices on information exchange in case of fires, disasters and emergencies, which will be held in the beginning of December 2015.

Upcoming Croatian Salzburg Forum Presidency

The Ministers welcomed the priorities of the upcoming Croatian Presidency and expressed their determination to continue the fruitful cooperation on issues of mutual interest in the framework of the Salzburg Forum.

Sofia, November 19th, 2015