



MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

*Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference*

*Budapest, 14 December 2021.*

**JOINT DECLARATION  
of the Ministers of the Salzburg Forum**

The Ministers of the Interior and the representatives of the Member States of the Salzburg Forum held – in view of the coronavirus epidemic – an online ministerial conference on 14 December 2021 during the Hungarian Presidency.

In addition to the Member States of the Salzburg Forum, the conference was attended by the Ministers and representatives of the Western Balkans countries and representatives of the management of the Joint Coordination Platform.

The Ministers noted that the Salzburg Forum continues to play a unique role in strengthening regional security cooperation in the region and thus expressed their commitment to further cooperation within the Forum, promoting strategic and operational cooperation both within the EU and with third countries.

The participating Ministers agreed on the main items on the agenda as follows:

***Asylum and migration***

The Ministers of the Interior of the Salzburg Forum noted that the Member States of the European Union and neighboring partner countries have been making continuous efforts to manage migration risks more effectively. In this context, the Ministers noted that the phenomenon of secondary movements poses considerable and increasing challenges to reliable systems and increases their already significant burden. The Ministers acknowledged the efforts in the fight against illegal migration, and expressed their solidarity with and further support to the most affected Member States on the external borders of the EU, condemning the state-sponsored hybrid attack as a political tool to destabilize the European Union.

The Ministers assessed the current debates on the EU level when it comes to the existing and proposed *acquis* and achievements in the external dimension of migration and asylum to date, and agreed that a joint pro-active approach, in addition to cooperation, coordination, sharing of best practices and information, the fight against secondary movements and the effective

protection of external borders, are key to tackling illegal migration. The Ministers confirmed their readiness to work towards a legal basis that serves the interests of the Member States and does not act as a pull factor of illegal migration.

According to the Ministers, a strong EU-wide asylum and migration system that is prepared to cope with a constant migratory pressure, hybrid attacks on our external borders and sudden crises needs to be set up as a matter of priority. Such a system then also needs to be effectively implemented in all EU Member States.

Recent developments at the European Union's external borders have highlighted the need to adapt the existing legal framework for the management of external borders to the new realities. Border control at the external borders requires more effective tools than current ones, such as, as an exceptional measure, the creation of physical barriers and the use of smart devices, for which the Union must provide adequate financial support for Member States. Special measures are required to respond to hybrid attacks.

Furthermore, the Ministers agree that there is an urgent need to tackle secondary movements in the EU.

### ***Opportunities for joint action against illegal migration networks involved in migrant smuggling***

The Ministers reviewed options for joint action against networks involved in migrant smuggling. They concluded additional measures should be prepared including sanctions for all the stakeholders involved in such criminal actions as well as awareness campaigns in partner countries of origin and transit.

In recent years, the EU has made significant progress in the fight against migrant smugglers. The Ministers will monitor the effective implementation of the renewed EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling (2021-2025) published by the Commission on 29 September 2021. The new challenges call for concrete and effective action, in addition to a comprehensive approach, both between Member States and in dialogue with third countries.

Enhancing border protection, strengthening police cooperation and security in the Western Balkans, as well as the fight against transnational organized crime including the conclusion of safe third country agreements must remain on the agenda of the EU and the countries of the region.

The overall objective is to undermine the business model of smugglers through measures in the external dimension that enhance protection and livelihoods in the region, and that reduce

illegal migration flows along the migration routes. Furthermore, safe third country concepts should be explored and pursued in the EU.

### *Illegal migration along the Western Balkan route*

The Ministers of the Interior of the Salzburg Forum and the Ministers and representatives of the Group of Friends of the Western Balkans reviewed the current situation of illegal migration in the region and shared their experience on the latest developments.

It was pointed out that the illegal migration route through the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans has continued to be a major challenge for the countries of the region as well as countries of destination. Although the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a temporary decline, illegal migration pressures are now reaching pre-pandemic levels or above. The situation might even deteriorate further in the near future, as the humanitarian crisis following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, and the ongoing crisis on the EU's common borders with Belarus poses even greater risks of illegal migration. Furthermore, secondary migration within the Schengen area continues to be a major pull factor.

Keeping in mind the conclusions of Brdo Process Ministerial Meeting 2021, the Ministers agreed that the strategic importance of the Western Balkan countries is indisputable. The Salzburg Forum countries provide significant border management assistance to the Western Balkans on a bilateral basis, using their own resources and national capacities. In this context, it was agreed that their joint efforts would be designed on a country-by-country basis, examining the possibility of mobilizing EU funds to finance identified actions and measures. In this regard, the implementation of action plans prepared for the priority partner countries of origin and transit is also of utmost importance. The Ministers also agreed to jointly take action to limit current flows and prevent situations like in 2015/2016.

The EU - Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs held on 2-3 December 2021 confirmed the importance of the regional cooperation in the field of migration management and fight against trafficking, smuggling and organized crime.

Finally, the achievements of the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP) in 2021 were acknowledged, in particular that, despite the coronavirus pandemic, substantial work has already started with several countries to launch programs in the Western Balkans. The JCP is encouraged to continue and further strengthen its coordination efforts with special focus on returns from the Western Balkans.

### ***Overview of the Hungarian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum***

The Ministers took note of the results of expert-level meetings held over the past six months and endorsed the results of the online meeting of police and border services chiefs of the Salzburg Forum countries on 25 November 2021.

### ***The incoming Polish Presidency of the Salzburg Forum***

The Ministers welcomed the priorities of the incoming Polish Presidency and expressed their commitment to work together effectively on issues of common interest in the framework of the Salzburg Forum in the future.