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**SALZBURG FORUM MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**  
**29 November 2018**  
**Bratislava, Slovak Republic**

**JOINT DECLARATION**

The Ministers of Interior of the Salzburg Forum Member States met on 28-29 November 2018, upon the invitation of the Slovak Presidency of the Salzburg Forum.

The Conference also gathered respective Ministers belonging to the Group of Friends from the Western Balkans and Moldova, as well as representatives of the European Commission, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Europol and ICMPD. Special guest of the conference was the Minister of Interior of Kosovo\*.

The main challenges discussed by the Ministers were as follows:

**Proposal for a Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard**

The Ministers of Interior of the Salzburg Forum agreed that appropriate human resources are needed for the European Border and Coast Guard to fulfil its mandate and to provide adequate support to Member States', as well as third countries' authorities. They stressed that the Member States contributions to Frontex operations should be based on the real need of the Agency. Since the role of Frontex should be to provide effective support to Member States without affecting national competences, the Ministers highlighted the need to provide the Agency with human resources in a way that would not have negative impacts on Member States' capabilities.

The Ministers also shared their views on the proposed executive powers of the team members deployed from the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps. The Ministers supported the strengthening of the European Border and Coast Guard as regards cooperation with the third countries as well as in the field of return.

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\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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## **Recast of the Return Directive**

The Ministers welcomed the recast of the return directive and recognised that it is aimed at higher harmonization and efficiency of return procedures.

In this context, the Ministers underlined that for an efficient return policy, not only amendment of the legislation at EU level is needed, but first and foremost efficient application and use of existing concepts and legal tools is essential. Therefore, they consider that the recast of the Return Directive, while removing inconsistencies that hinder effective returns and speeding up return procedures, will highly depend both on further correct application by the Member States and the improvement of the cooperation of third countries. At the same time, the Ministers recognized the need to further enhance the cooperation among Member States, the cooperation with EBCG in the field of returns and the exchange of best practices. Furthermore, they discussed some of the challenges that the proposed amendments in the recast of the Return Directive pose to some Member States as regards the national established practice or national legislation.

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

The Ministers reaffirmed their conviction that in addressing the current migration and security issues in the EU, the Western Balkans region represents a key partner.

The Ministers took note of the information on specific additional technical and operational assistance which would be of high importance for the Western Balkan partners in the area of border management, at the moment. They agreed on the importance of continuing support for all partners along the Western Balkan migratory route also in the future.

The Ministers welcomed the progress achieved in the preparation of the status agreements between the EU and particular Western Balkan countries on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. In connection with the future new mandate of the Agency, the Ministers exchanged their views on the relevant provisions and appreciated the extended possibilities for cooperation with third countries contained in the current draft regulation. However, they agreed that

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this should not negatively affect the effective cooperation in border management of the EU Member States with their neighbouring Western Balkan partners.

### **Fight against smuggling and trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings**

The Ministers welcomed the strategic discussion regarding the operational cooperation concerning the main security threats. The Ministers agreed on intensifying the cooperation and exchange of information on the basis of existing structures and tools.

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

The Ministers welcomed the results of the meetings held during the Slovak Presidency of the Salzburg Forum so far - the meeting of the Witness Protection Working Group (03 – 05 October 2018, Bratislava) and the meeting of the Border Guard Chiefs (22 – 23 October 2018) – and took note of the planned meeting of the Salzburg Forum Police Chiefs (4 – 6 December 2018).

### **Upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum**

The Ministers welcomed the information on the priorities of the upcoming Slovenian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum and reiterated their determination to continue the cooperation on issues of common interest within the framework of the Salzburg Forum.

Bratislava, 29 November 2018