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## **Large movements of migrants and refugees – a security challenge for the OSCE**

### **German 2016 OSCE-Chairmanship's review**

In his opening address to the OSCE Permanent Council on 14 January 2016 the Chairman-in-Office, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, declared: *“Especially on migration, we should make use of this organization’s potential. Its geographical span and comprehensive approach make it a suitable vehicle. It is a good forum for discussion and exchange. And it is the right place to look at the social impact of migration and immigration – with a special focus on tolerance and non-discrimination.”*

#### **Substantial debate**

Building on discussions under the Serbian Chairmanship, the German Chairmanship decided to intensify work on the topic. The debate was guided by the core question how the OSCE could contribute to international efforts to address large movements of migrants and refugees.

The German Chairmanship set up an Informal Working Group (IWG) under the Swiss Permanent Representative to the OSCE, Ambassador Claude Wild. In a comprehensive and transparent process the IWG reviewed migration-related activities and expertise of the OSCE. From the outset delegations participated constructively, expressing shared concerns and challenges and developing common views on the work of the OSCE. It was clearly established that the OSCE has a long record of expertise and valuable activities related to migration, in particular in the fields of labour migration, protection of human rights, promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination, combating organized crime including trafficking in human beings, law enforcement cooperation, border management and integration. Autonomous OSCE institutions, in particular ODIHR, and a number of field presences have been actively engaged in migration-related activities. At the same time delegations agreed that more coherence within the OSCE was needed to make these numerous activities more effective.

Discussions during the year, inter alia with the IOM Director-General, William Swing, the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Dr. Volker Türk, and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for International Migration, Peter

Sutherland, have highlighted the large degree of existing cooperation of the OSCE with other regional and international organizations. The OSCE is a much appreciated partner with unique expertise and competences in specific migration-related areas. The important role to be played by the OSCE was unanimously confirmed. A high-level Security Days Conference organized in Rome in March 2016 by the OSCE Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier, stressed the role of the OSCE in line with its comprehensive concept of security.

### **Reference document**

As a result of the discussions in the Informal Working Group, its Chairman issued a comprehensive report that has become a useful reference document for further OSCE engagement.<sup>1</sup> It convincingly argues that migration and refugee flows constitute a security challenge that needs to be put high on the OSCE agenda. It highlights the impressive scope of engagement of the OSCE relating to migration and the tools the OSCE has at hand. The report also identifies a need for more coherence and visibility of the OSCE's activities in order to improve their outcomes.

Substantive recommendations were developed during the IWG's discussions and retained in the report. Above all, the recommendations propose specific measures for a more effective contribution of the OSCE to comprehensive governance of large movements of migrants and refugees affecting the OSCE area.

A special meeting of the Permanent Council discussed the report and its recommendations. Participants, including ODIHR-Director Michael Link and the Chairman of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, Filippo Lombardi, confirmed the benefits of a substantial migration-related debate in the OSCE. Despite diverging positions on how to address particular aspects of large movements of migrants and refugees participants agreed that international cooperation was essential and that the OSCE was a suitable platform for cooperation among participating States, with OSCE Partners for Co-operation and with other regional and international organizations. Representatives of participating States concurred that the OSCE had developed considerable expertise on which it should build. As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, it could contribute to the implementation of global efforts, they underlined.

### **Strengthening coherence**

Efforts during the German Chairmanship to increase the visibility of the OSCE's migration-related expertise and activities have strengthened coherence and coordination within the OSCE and with other stakeholders. The OSCE Secretary-General was invited to update the Permanent Council on steps taken in this regard. The Secretary General reported that a migration focal point had been designated in his office and an internal coordination group of OSCE executive structures had taken up regular meetings. Recommendations of the report

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<sup>1</sup> Distributed on 27 July 2016 under reference CIO.GAL/117/16/Rev.1

relevant to their respective areas of work were debated in the Security Committee, the Economic and Environmental Committee and the Human Dimension Committee.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the intense work during the year: Large movements of migrants and refugees are a security challenge for OSCE participating States. The topic therefore needs to be put higher on the OSCE agenda. The OSCE is well placed to address migration-related issues - its comprehensive approach to security, its well-established cooperation with OSCE Partners for Co-operation and other regional and international organizations and its field presence are assets unique to the organization. On these grounds the OSCE should contribute to global and in particular United Nations efforts in addressing large movements of migrants and refugees.