

Budapest Process

Thematic Meeting on Integrated Border Management (with a focus on the Silk Routes Countries)

Date: 4-5 October 2023

Location: Sofia, Bulgaria

Summary

1. Budapest Process representatives from all participating and observer states were invited to attend this thematic meeting on Integrated Border Management. The **meeting gathered 61 participants from 18 countries and 6 organisations** – Armenia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Serbia, Ukraine, United Kingdom as well as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Iraq, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process.

2. Meeting background and objectives: The overall objectives of this thematic meeting were: to understand the specific needs of Budapest Process Partners, specifically countries of origin and transit, in the area of border management; and to develop modalities for engagement on integrated border management with a focus on Silk Routes countries' specific needs.

3. This meeting was the first under the newly established **Thematic Working Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation** and was **opened by its Co-Chairs: Bulgaria and Iraq.**

4. A **keynote speech** was delivered by the Head of the Border Management and Security Programme of ICMPD while a border management expert '**set the scene**' of the meeting by elaborating the recent strategic developments in the area of integrated border management.

5. Delegates participated in **four main sessions** (including a session that had participants split into two simultaneous working groups). These sessions covered national good practices and upcoming priorities from the Silk Routes Region as well as key elements for improving national and international operational cooperation on integrated border management. More specifically, sessions focused on risk analysis, professionalisation (including institutional processes and training systems), innovative practices for information exchange and usage of modern technologies. The presenters (representatives of Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Iraq, North Macedonia, Pakistan and Romania; FRONTEX and EUAM-Iraq) enlightened their peers on various national and (inter-)regional projects and initiatives, new knowledge and research, ongoing issues and emerging trends. A fifth session was conducted to allow delegates to provide input regarding integrated border management related action points that could be considered for future meetings as well as the next Budapest Process Ministerial Declaration.

As a result of the interventions and discussions over the course of meeting, the following **good practices**, and **opportunities** for cooperation emerged:

Good Practices from countries of origin, transit and destination

Strategic level actions

- An overarching integrated border management strategy works best when the concepts are understood, tailor made, incorporated and put into practice by all relevant institutions in a systematic manner;
- In order to have good inter-agency cooperation, it is better to have one single agency, ministry or authority that ensures liaison and coordination with other agencies, ministries or authorities. National Coordination Centre (NCCs) are considered a good practice as coordinators in this regard;
- Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) in other countries are considered a good practice to enhance international cooperation with border management agencies;
- Regulatory frameworks and policies should be harmonised and they should be updated frequently as often times rapid developments on the ground can make certain laws and policies become out-of-date in as little as a couple of years, for example with the evolution of encrypted digital messaging, planning and payment tools.

Operational level actions

- The access and availability to the *watch-lists* of criminals/wanted persons, that are updated in real time, is a good practice. These *watch-lists* should be updated within secure information sharing mechanisms so that trust is maintained between border management agencies;
- Technological solutions (such as the use of AI, biometric passports , e-gates, etc.) need to be increasingly adopted by countries of origin, and knowledge sharing and technology transfer among countries of origin and destination should be promoted within existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks;
- Risk Analysis and Contingency Planning tools and procedures are proving to be necessary for border management agencies; while at the same time, the extensive use of modern document security and behavioural observation methods is enabling border control to increasingly prevent irregular migration and cross border crime with aim to have open but secure national borders;
- Joint patrols and integrated and technology assisted border surveillance are considered good practice and could be enhanced with modern tools such as thermal scanning, use of drones, etc.

Capacity building actions

- Common Core Curriculums have been seen as effective tools to standardise the training of border management officers and therefore ensure quality assurance; Leadership training programmes are also essential to improving the capacities of decision-making officers and raise their awareness on new trends and developments;
- Master Training (i.e., Train the Trainer – ToT) programmes are seen to be sustainable and effective approach in creating a pool of national trainers that can be delivering trainings at

intra agency and inter-agency level but also be deployed abroad to learn from trainers at regional and international level;

- International cooperation and support in strengthening capacities of first line border control has led to the development of second line capacities and infrastructure as well as benefits in improving detection, investigation and prosecution capabilities, and other institutional reforms.

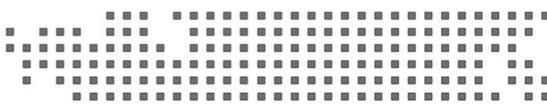
Opportunities for further cooperation within the dialogue and its flanking projects

Strategic level actions

- International organisations can increase support to countries on achieving a whole-of-government approach to integrated border management;
- International support should also be provided to countries in terms of infrastructure development and provision of modern equipment to prevent and fight cross border crime (such as people smuggling, trafficking in human beings, terrorism, smuggling of illegal goods, etc.)
- Regular communication channels via diplomatic missions or via international border management agencies are considered challenging and time consuming at present, therefore alternate (even informal but in line with regulatory framework) means of communication via ILOs or focal points can complement official communication between countries;
- Information and data sharing needs to be further strengthened between countries of origin, transit and destination so that quick actions can be taken within reasonable time;
- While regional cooperation is ongoing (e.g. within Europe and within South and West Asia), it was noted that inter-regional cooperation can be further improved in order to fight cross border crime more effectively.

Operational level actions

- Funding mechanisms of smugglers and traffickers need to be countered and dismantled. The increasing use of digital tools and platforms is a huge challenge and capacities of border management agencies should be strengthened to raise awareness on trends, cyber crimes and security. A team of experts shall be created to allow for more robust actions in the digital sphere;
- Threats and risks of each country are constantly evolving, hence risk analysis and contingency planning should be continuous practices that are systematically utilised by all border management agencies. Situational Awareness Pictures/Reports (with qualitative and quantitative information and data) should be developed regularly and systematically, including identifying bottlenecks and areas for urgent action;
- An increasing amount of smuggling and trafficking across borders is occurring by sea, where borders are more challenging to patrol. Border management agencies must find the ways to detect and prevent the border crossings and identify supply chains of boats/equipment used for sea crossings.



Capacity building actions

- Joint inter-agency trainings between different border management authorities at a national level should be developed and systematically implemented to strengthen an inter-agency cooperation and operational capacities. At the same time, international exchange and capacity development activities could complement those national efforts, in particular on the newly developing topics;
- Training courses and systems need to be constantly updated and modernised with refresher courses delivered to border management officers as on job trainings; in addition, countries should consider offering a *Diploma* and/or *Master's degree in Strategic Border Management* to their officers, established/strengthened via national or international academic partnerships;
- Training courses can be taught by practitioners and academics in combination, as both have complementary knowledge and skills, both from a more operational and academic perspective and training courses should be monitored and evaluated for their impact;
- Mobile training units should be deployed for trainings of officers at remote BCPs, to effectively use human and financial resources and administrative burden of bringing officers to a central venue.

6. Way forward for the Budapest Process Working Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation

- The Co-Chairs concluded that the recommendations and ideas generated in this meeting should be presented at the annual Senior Officials Meeting as well as incorporated in a summarised manner in the next Ministerial Declaration and its Action Plan, so that the recommendations and ideas can be translated into action in the form of new projects and trans-national/regional initiatives;
- In addition, the recommendations and action points generated in this meeting will be provided to all the ongoing and upcoming projects on integrated border management being implemented by various international organisations, especially in the Silk Routes region. This feedback loop ensures that dialogue meetings such as this allow operational projects on the ground to constantly improving their approaches.
- Capacity building partnerships on integrated border management should include knowledge-sharing of state-of-the-art border management technologies. The Budapest Process can be used to request support in terms of partnership building and networking.