Budapest Process
14th Meeting of the Budapest Process Working Group on the South East European Region

Budapest, 3-4 June 2014

Summary/Conclusions

1. On 3-4 June 2014, the 14th Meeting of the Budapest Process Working Group on the South East European (SEE) region was held in Budapest, Hungary.

2. The Working Group meeting gathered 62 participants from 23 countries – Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Kyrgyz Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan – as well as the European Commission, The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

3. The meeting was built upon the conclusions of the last meeting of the Working Group for the South East European Region held in Zagreb on 25-26 April 2012, where all participants had agreed that the group would establish an action plan to address mixed migration flows through the region. The meeting marked the first Working Group meeting on SEE since the adoption of the Istanbul Ministerial Declaration on a Silk Routes Partnership for Migration in April 2013. The Working Group on SEE benefits from a focus on the Silk Routes region and developing cooperation between the two regions.

4. The Working Group meeting was held immediately following the kick-off meeting for the project ‘Support to the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration under the Budapest Process’. As a result, synergies between planned activities in the Silk Routes region and the proposed Cooperation Plan for the SEE region were easily identified, and officials from Silk Routes countries were able to provide input to the proposed plan.

5. Hungary opened the introductory session as hosts and Co-Chairs of the Budapest Process, followed by an opening statement by Croatia as Chair of the Working Group meeting. Croatia highlighted that migratory movements through the SEE region and on towards the European Union had been a significant trend for the past six years, but that positive steps had already been taken to reduce irregular migration and strengthen asylum systems in the region, in part
due to the previous activities of this Working Group. Croatia emphasised the importance of deciding on the remit of the Working Group for the coming period.

6. Turkey, as Chair of the Budapest Process emphasised the increased relevance of the Working Group in relation to the adoption of the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration and the importance of this unique forum for linking countries of origin, transit and destination within and beyond the SEE region.

7. The European Commission stated that a coordinated approach is required to address flows from the Silk Routes countries towards the SEE region that primarily transit Turkey. The importance of communication between migration services of different countries to coordinate their activities was emphasised, as was the potential of the Working Group framework to establish and support communication between relevant stakeholders with a practical and specific approach.

8. In the first session, the Budapest Process Secretariat and Croatia presented a brief history of the Working Group and the proposal for a Silk Routes Partnership Cooperation Plan for the South East European Region.

9. The Budapest Process Secretariat presented the Silk Routes Partnership Cooperation Plan for the SEE region. The plan focuses on addressing challenges associated with mixed migration flows through developing a comprehensive and regional approach, encouraging inter-governmental and inter-regional cooperation, and making full use of available legal, administrative and cooperation tools in coordination with relevant initiatives in the regions concerned. Four priority areas were identified based on the previous meetings:
   i. Cooperation on data collection and analysis.
   ii. Improved exchange of information.
   iii. Developing a network of cooperation with and in the Silk Routes region.
   iv. Developing a framework for identifying priorities for practical cooperation.

10. Croatia, as the Chair, opened discussions of the cooperation framework with an overview of recent developments of mixed migration flows through the region and the current response. It was noted that recent changes to Croatia’s legislative and operational approach to managing irregular migration and border management had been influenced by EU border policy and the accession process. Croatia has begun implementing projects along its’ EU external land borders, currently the second longest in the EU, with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Migrant flows from the Silk Route region are typically the most numerous identified, although migrants from Syria and Somalia are also significant nationalities transiting the region. The chair highlighted the need for countries in the region to focus on four areas; fighting irregular migration and promoting legal residence; determining illegal migration and the identity of migrants; return handling and protection of special groups; and finally, reception and stay procedures prior to return.

11. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia then provided brief updates on developments and challenges faced by their countries, to be integrated into the cooperation plan.

12. Albania explained that it has implemented Schengen standards at all border crossing points, and has adopted the concept of integrated border management (IBM). The greatest challenges currently faced are managing the green land borders with Greece, Montenegro and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). The major countries of origin of migrants/persons potentially in need of international protection identified in Albania are Pakistan and Syria.

14. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia emphasised recent changes in migration trends, including an increase in detection of irregular migrants from the Near and Middle East and North Africa. The southern land border is vulnerable, and a large number of irregular migrants cross at this point. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has taken measures to amend legislation and implement projects to reduce irregular migration, document fraud and protect vulnerable groups as well as to reduce abuse of the visa liberalisation with the EU.

15. Serbia is aiming to join the EU in 2018, and has begun adopting its legislative framework in line with EU directives. During 2011-2013 there was a peak in numbers of apprehended migrants. Now it can be noted that the numbers towards Croatia are dropping and the numbers to Hungary and Bulgaria are the same or increasing. The highest numbers of apprehended migrants/persons potentially in need of international protection in 2013 were from Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan. Serbia enjoys close cooperation with its neighbours – Bulgaria and Hungary. Operational priorities include strengthening Serbian/Bulgarian border operations to deter smuggling of migrants. Serbia stated that the main challenges faced include monitoring the border to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and establishing the identity of persons and identifying repeat applications by asylum seekers. A biometric data base has been established to enter the data (fingerprints) of all people apprehended in or returned to Serbia. Serbia noted that this Working Group is a new door to cooperate with countries of origin and welcomed the initiatives in the draft cooperation plan. Finally it emphasised the importance of working in cooperation with countries of origin, especially in areas such as data exchange, harmonisation of terminology and definitions, return and reintegration, and access to vetted officials to liaise with when tackling organised criminal groups.

16. Both Croatia and Hungary emphasised the importance of cooperation in the region. Hungary noted an increased pressure on its border following the EU accession of Croatia and emphasised the excellent neighbourly cooperation among relevant countries. Implementing effective processes for information exchange between countries was highlighted as a key tool in supporting concrete activity in this area. The Chair stated that the comments presented by delegates would be integrated into the Silk Routes Cooperation Framework for SEE draft, and presented in the following session for discussion.

17. The second session, beginning on Wednesday 4 June, was opened by comments from Silk Routes countries.

18. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq referred to the kick-off meeting of the Silk Routes Partnership Project and the potential the Budapest Process offers for countries of origin, transit and destination to improve cooperation. Iraq noted that the portrayal of the situation in Iraq by the media was counter-productive to facilitating return migration, and also contributed to non-Iraqi’s claiming Iraqi citizenship during asylum processes in order to aid applications. All Silk Routes countries have made strong progress already by reforming legislation, signing partnership agreements, developing advanced border controls and implementing new technology such as e-gates at border crossings. These initiatives take time to implement however, due to the large number of officials that require training.
19. Pakistan emphasised the opportunity provided by the Silk Routes Partnership to work in coordination with countries from different regions. It was noted that harmonising definitions used by different countries and stakeholders is important to facilitate cooperation between the two regions across all thematic areas; not only when addressing irregular migration, but also when facilitating legal migration, mobility and integration and counteracting xenophobia.

20. EU Agencies and International Organisations provided an overview of their ongoing activities, and commented on the proposed cooperation plan:

   i. EASO explained the role they play in supporting EU MS in strengthening asylum and reception capacity and the effectiveness of early warning systems. Activities being conducted in Jordan and Tunisia under an ENPI project were both highlighted as relevant to the Silk Routes countries.

   ii. FRONTEX emphasised the results of their risk analysis for 2014, noting the occurrence of secondary movements and mixed migratory flows through the SEE region. Lack of interpreters and screening personnel, and low reception and detention capacity were noted as key challenges to be addressed through increased cooperation. It was also noted that different regions (e.g. South Caucasus, SEE) might share expertise and practices in terms of setting up legal and institutional frameworks, infrastructure and administration as well as actions to take concerning a comprehensive migration management approach. The first EU funded capacity building project to be managed by Frontex in cooperation with international partner organizations (WCO, IOM, ICMPD) for EaP countries was briefly mentioned regarding facilitating the movement of persons and goods across the region and at EU borders while enhancing security.

   iii. UNHCR and IOM presented the ongoing Western Balkan Initiative on refugee protection and international migration they are jointly leading. The initiative is aimed at addressing mixed migration flows in SEE by (1) strengthening capacities of States and other stakeholders (2) fostering national and regional dialogue and practical cooperation on these issues; and (3) creating synergies between activities of relevant international and regional organizations in this area. Based on preparatory work, including a series of national as well as regional and inter-agency consultations carried out since 2012, a concrete and detailed action plan had been developed in close cooperation with the Western Balkan Countries covering the areas of migration and asylum management relevant to addressing mixed flows. UNHCR and IOM also noted the need to coordinate the Silk Routes Partnership Cooperation Plan for the SEE region with ongoing initiatives in the region to avoid duplications.

   iv. In its presentation, UNHCR emphasised the fact that the vast majority of the persons within the mixed flows transiting through the Western Balkans originate from refugee-producing countries, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Mali and Sudan and thus likely have international protection needs. Hence, the need to further strengthen the asylum systems in the region and to take into account protection safeguards when considering exchange of information between countries of transit and asylum with countries of origin.

   v. The OSCE informed the Working Group about a joint IOM-OSCE-UNODC project which aims at investigating the link between organised crime and migration and increasing cooperation between criminal justice and migration...
authorities as first responders to cases of irregular migration. The project aims to standardise definitions and modus operandi and streamline agency response when dealing with irregular migration across SEE. The research phase of the project covered six countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Serbia, Germany and France. The final workshop will be held in Athens 11-12 June 2014.

vi. MARRI and the RCC highlighted the importance of regional dialogue and explained the role of each organisation in the SEE region and also highlighted that they are both regionally based and owned organisations

vii. The International Federation of the Red Cross described their relevant activities, highlighted the importance of a migrant centred approach and the protection of vulnerable groups.

viii. Participants welcomed these updates, as it supported international organisations in the coordination of their activities.

21. The Chair welcomed the contributions from participants and stated that the key points presented were well reflected by the draft Silk Routes Partnership Cooperation Plan for the SEE region. The Chair presented the proposed Cooperation Plan including the plan to establish an expert group with focal points tasked with the follow-up and continued work on the Cooperation Plan.

22. Several key comments were made from the floor regarding the Cooperation Plan:

i. Joint activities by countries of destination in the SR region, such as setting up embassy networks, need not be only confined to cooperation between countries from the SEE region, but could also include all members of the Budapest Process with an interest.

ii. Activities of the Budapest Process should not just focus on countries of origin and destination, but must take account of countries of transit. This was noted as especially relevant for enforcement activities addressing smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Pakistan suggested that a mechanism for coordinating enforcement activities between countries of origin and destination with transit countries would be welcomed.

23. The Secretariat finished by emphasising that all of the activities of the Budapest Process, both operational activities and the work of the geographic Working Groups, are carried out within the framework of the Istanbul Ministerial Declaration “A Silk Routes Partnership for Migration” and contribute to the same goals. The proposed Cooperation Plan draws on the Ministerial Declaration and is designed to provide a framework for future work of the SEEWG for improved cooperation, exchange of experience, ideas and to discuss concrete cooperation. While the plan is focused on the SEE region in relation to cooperation with the Silk Routes, all BP countries and organisations are invited to participate and contribute to the outcomes.

24. The Chair summarised discussions held, and explained that there will be written follow-up to the Working Group meeting giving all participating countries opportunity to comment on the Cooperation Plan. All participating countries were thanked for their engagement and contributions and the Secretariat was entrusted with the task of summarising discussions and conclusions as well as to circulate results.