1. On 12-13 November 2012 the third meeting of the Budapest Process Working Group on the Black Sea Region was held in Sofia, Bulgaria. The meeting gathered 54 participants from 21 countries - Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan as well as 7 organisations – the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Frontex, the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, (ICMPD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. The meeting was opened by Bulgaria as the host and the chair of the Working Group on the Black Sea Region, Turkey as the Chair of the Budapest Process, Hungary as the Co-Chair and the Hanns Seidel Foundation as donor to the meeting.

3. The topic of the meeting was considered both timely and important, and the meeting catered for active participation and discussions. The objective of the meeting was to investigate links between regular and irregular migration in the Black Sea Region, approaching the topic from four different angles; “Irregular migration, recent trends in the Black Sea Region”, “Labour migration in the Black Sea Region”, “Channels for legal migration and mobility in the Black Sea Region including misuse of such channels” as well as “The role of administrative procedures and secure documents”.

4. The introductory presentation, held by the research unit of ICMPD, explored the relationship between regular and irregular migration drawing on results of comparative studies, i.a. the CLANDESTINO – study conducted under the 6th Framework Programme of the European Union by i.a. the University of Oxford and ICMPD. The presentation stressed the complexity of relations between regular and irregular migration and the need to follow a country-specific approach to understand them fully. It pointed to the need to open regular migration channels and to implement more flexible labour migration arrangements in order to reduce irregular migration pressures and argued, that overstaying of visa, and not irregular entry, was the main pathway to irregularity. Furthermore it highlighted, that the tightening of immigration channels may well reduce irregular inflows, but on the other hand might also add to an
increase in irregular stocks, as people with irregular status will refrain from leaving the country.

5. The first panel discussion was titled “Irregular migration, recent trends in the Black Sea Region” and was chaired by Bulgaria. It was introduced by two presentations, one by the Border Police and one by the Migration Commission Directorate. Several countries and organisations contributed to discussions with interventions and presentations; notably Turkey, Ukraine, Frontex, MARRI and UNHCR.

   a) The discussions focused on recent trends in the Black Sea region, especially following the tragic events in Syria. Some countries of the region, especially Turkey, are faced with massive inflows of Syrian nationals that are given temporary protection and shelter. The important role and assistance from Turkey in hosting large numbers of refugees was recognized by participants. A comparatively low number are actually continuing from Turkey and other main hosting countries. The need for regional and international solidarity in dealing with the repercussions of the tragic events in Syria was highlighted. Support to hosting countries is important also to prevent onward movements.

   b) In this regard, the cooperation between affected countries was considered crucial; especially between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. Monthly coordination meetings take place at the borders. The three countries will further strengthen their cooperation through a tri-lateral agreement on the setting up of a common coordination center.

   c) Some countries of the region there has recently been a sharp increase in percentage of apprehension numbers (even though comparatively low in absolute numbers). There are some other changes in structures of migration flows to Bulgaria; recently persons from Algeria have been detected in migration flows. Also in Ukraine some very distant nationalities form part of migration flows; for example Somalis and Bangladeshi persons.

6. The second panel discussion was titled “Labour migration in the Black Sea Region” and was chaired by Romania. It was introduced by a presentation illustrating the system for admission for labour into Romania as well as giving some statistical overview of the labour migration situation in the country. Several countries contributed to discussions with interventions and presentations; notably Afghanistan, Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Pakistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and ECO.

7. Some important observations were made;

   a) The positive effects of well-managed labour migration on the economic and social development of hosting countries were underlined. Following the economic crisis, there is a reduction of legal economic migration in some countries. The main part of legal migration in several countries is formed by family reunification.

   b) Legal channels for work and mobility are very important to prevent and reduce irregular migration. People do not wish to migrate illegally and if they have the choice, they will use legal channels.

   c) Labour market agreements are an important tool to organise labour migration flows, to channel labour force, match needs and to regulate migration. In this way it is also
possible to protect workers and prevent labour trafficking. Protection of workers is in general a key issue in organising labour migration.

d) Consequently it is very important that there is sufficient information available to prospective migrants about possibilities to migrate legally as well and on their rights and obligations (as well as warning about the dangers of irregular migration). Also transparent and accessible labour market rules are important in this regard. It is important to make understandable information available to prospective migrants, also considering language barriers. Efficient information systems should be prioritised.

e) It was also mentioned as priorities to train workers, collect and share data on labour migration, and improve cooperation also with consular services.

8. The third panel discussion was titled “Legal migration and mobility channels” and was chaired by Georgia. It was introduced by a presentation focusing on ways to improve mobility channels and strengthen the system for granting mobility. Several countries contributed to discussions with interventions and presentations; Afghanistan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Poland, the Russian Federation, Turkey and ICMPD.

9. The discussion referred back to the above regarding the importance of creating legal channels for migration and mobility and to provide information to prospective migrants as well as the importance to provide for better integration in host countries. In addition the following main remarks were made:

   a) Circular migration is an important tool to open and control legal migration channels; however there are also drawbacks which have to be recognised. There are no single recipe fitting all, but each agreement has to be tailored to the particular situation of the countries involved. Already existing arrangements should be assessed.

   b) It is important that borders remain secure but open. Systems for regulating movements should not build up “walls” and should be transparent and accessible. Visa facilitation measures should be used as practical tools to open for bona fide travelling, facilitate people to people contacts, provide for business exchange and strengthen economic relations between countries.

   c) The process towards visa facilitation and liberalisation with the EU as well as EU accession processes should be used as important vehicles to implement reforms in the migration management systems. In this regard, action plans and roadmaps for fulfilling requirements are important tools.

   d) Even though irregular migration is comparatively just a small part of regular migration, and the amount of legal border crossings vastly surmounts illegal crossings, it should also be recognised that there is misuse of legal channels (especially considering that one of the most important grounds for illegality in a country is overstay of visa and permits – not illegal entry). For example, entry for studies, is sometimes used a pretext for other activities or illegal work in a country.

10. The fourth panel discussion was titled “The role of administrative procedures and secure documents” and was chaired by Bulgaria. It was introduced by a presentation by the Identity Document Directorate in the Ministry of Interior. Several countries and organisations contributed to discussions with interventions and presentations; notably Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine as well as Frontex and ICMPD. The following main points were made:
a) Misuse of migration systems can be reduced through improved methods for identification – i.e. to securely link document to person. Many processes are still new and are in need of constant improvement and clarification, for example regarding fingerprints and as of what age fingerprints can be taken.

b) However, also primary documents – breeder documents – must be protected. Furthermore, a reliable population register is a pre-condition for secure issuing of identification documents.

c) At the same time, it must be recognised that there are no perfect systems or perfect documents. The human factor must be taken into account – no system is better than the persons using them, and advanced equipment can only help to a certain extent. For this reason continuous training of staff is extremely important.

d) Use of impostor documents is common and seems to be on the rise (i.e. genuine documents used by another person).

e) It should be noted that advanced technology can also be used to facilitate travelling for bona fide persons. For example, Georgian citizens can under certain conditions travel to Turkey with an electronic ID card.

11. The following general conclusions and observations were made:

a) The participating countries stressed the importance of regional ownership of this working group as a very important and needed platform for cooperation and the importance of strengthening cooperation within and with the region. In this regard regional solidarity was also emphasised.

b) It is important to strengthen migration management capacities in the region, to use good practice and experience from other countries in the region for this process, to share information and to work towards coordination of policies.

c) While there is much uniting the countries of the region, it must also be acknowledged that their situations and realities also differ widely. To a certain extent, challenges and priorities are shared, but there are also strong variations from one country to the other. Consequently, although much knowledge can be shared, there cannot be a common “recipe” for all.

d) Although irregular migration pressures in the Black Sea Region are at the moment not daunting, there is a need to keep the preparedness for possible shifting migration pressures in the future. It was noted that several countries that in the past have been mostly countries of origin and transit are increasingly becoming countries of destination.

e) Further cooperation on labour migration in the region would be important, looking at existing channels and future needs. In this regard it would be important to exchange information on channels of legal migration, labour migration flows and stocks, the use of bilateral labour migration agreements between countries and to assess demand and supply in the labour markets.

f) The participating countries underlined the importance of open but secure borders, that regulations for migration and mobility are transparent and not creating unnecessary burdens or hinders and that migrants receive understandable
information at each stage of the migration process. All of these aspects are important to ensure protection of migrants and prevent exploitation.

g) There are several links between irregular and regular migration – most importantly participants pointed out that the opening of possibilities to migrate legally will most likely reduce illegal flows in the longer term. At the same time misuse of existing channels for migration must be addressed as well as other forms of irregular migration.

h) It was agreed to use the results of the Working Group on the Black Sea Region as a regional contribution to the preparations of the Ministerial Conference “A Silk Routes Partnership for Migration” to be held on 19 April 2013.

12. The Chair thanked all participating countries for their engagement and contributions and entrusted the Secretariat to circulate results and coordinate follow-up. Participants thanked Bulgaria for the warm hospitality as well as the able organisation and chairing of the meeting and the Secretariat for administrative and substance preparations.

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