

Regional Workshop on Enhancing and Strengthening International and Cross-border Co-operation in Addressing Irregular Migration-related Crimes in the Western Balkans

31 August – 1 September 2016

Podgorica, Montenegro

CONCEPT PAPER

Background

The unprecedented flow of people on the move throughout 2015 and its continuation into the present year, has posed significant challenges to European states and in particular the Western Balkan region. Motivated by conflict and insecurity as well as socio-economic hardship, thousands of individuals and families turn to illegal means to migrate to Europe in an effort to find a safe haven and better living conditions. The responsibility placed consequently on origin, transit and destination countries is immense and entails a substantially pressing obligation to react not only to human rights and security issues, but also to criminal organizations making large profits from migrants' and refugees' vulnerable situation.

The urgency of the overall situation with regard to enhancing migration management is most clearly demonstrated by statistics indicating the number of refugees and migrants entering the European Union having exceeded 1 million in 2015¹. While the Mediterranean Sea serves as a main entry point, Western Balkan states were affected increasingly by the unabated flow of

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https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/migrant_smuggling_europol_report_2016.pdf
p.5

migrants in a transit country context, eventually resulting in strict border controls as well as border closures in the Western Balkans and neighbouring countries.

In an effort to identify a concept to balance the protection of migrants' human rights and states' security interests and to enhance the fight against trafficking in human beings and smuggling of irregular migrants by transnational criminal networks, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have co-organized three workshops since 2013. This has strongly consolidated the existing co-operation framework between these three organizations. The focus has been put on “strengthening cross-border co-operation in addressing irregular migration-related crimes in the Western Balkans”.

As a result of the migration crisis, a revenue of at least \$5 billion is estimated to have been gathered through the smuggling services provided by criminal organizations in 2015,² which adds up to the illegal proceeds of previously existing human trafficking activities.

On the basis of previously identified key findings and outcomes, and the heavily mixed migration flows experienced by the Western Balkan states in the past year, IOM, OSCE and UNODC agreed to follow up on previous events by emphasizing international and cross-border co-operation concerning irregular migration-related crimes, such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling and illicit financial flows or money laundering processes associated with organized crimes.

Structure of the workshop

This workshop is targeted at policy-makers, experts and practitioners from relevant bodies and aims to promote interactive discussions regarding persistent challenges characteristic to different areas of expertise and to identify efficient measures and possible shortcomings in international and cross-border co-operation on irregular migration-related crime by identifying gaps and challenges, promote interactive discussions and share good practices and put forward recommendations.

² https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ep-ip_report_executive_summary.pdf, p.4

Areas of prevention, prosecution and assistance provided to victims, migrants and refugees will be closely examined during the event.

The workshop is expected to gather senior experts within criminal justice and migration practitioners, including law enforcement officers from a variety of agencies, judges, prosecutors, officials from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice, liaison officers based in the Western Balkan states and representatives of non-governmental organizations who are dealing with migration-related crimes.

Professionals representing international and regional organizations, as well as the private sector and academic circles will share their experiences in regard to the workshop's topic. Criminal justice and experts on migration from IOM, OSCE and UNODC will further facilitate discussions by illustrating their views and know-how within their respective mandates.

The discussions are intended to result in concrete propositions for enhanced international and cross-border co-operation concerning irregular migration-related crime in the Western Balkans, involving criminal justice and migration practitioners as well as other relevant stakeholders from the public and private sector. A set of main findings and outcomes will be compiled at the end of the workshop, which will serve as a guiding instrument for States and regional organizations to continue discussions on this topic.

The event will be held in Podgorica, Montenegro on 31 August and 1 September 2016. The working language of the workshop will be English with translation into Montenegrin and Albanian.