

## Summary of the panel discussion

### ”The OSCE in the migration and refugee crisis”

March 16, 2017

At the Austrian Institute for International Politics (OIIIP)

The migration crisis that hit Europe from the opening of the Balkans route in Spring 2015 to its purported closing in the beginning of 2016 has had an important impact on the European Union. But it has also affected the work of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its field operations operating throughout the Western Balkans.

How are migrations and comprehensive security challenges related with each other in the agenda of the OSCE? What role can the OSCE play in migration governance in Europe and beyond? What challenges does the OSCE and Western Balkans states face in their response to the migration crisis? What is the Austrian approach in this area, as participating State assuming the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office in 2017? In order to answer these questions the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (Vienne), the Southeast Europe Association (Munich) and the Austrian Institute for International Politics (Vienna) organised a panel discussion on March 16, 2017 on the topic of **The OSCE in the migration and refugee crisis**. To introduce the event, a welcoming written word of Special Representative of the German OSCE Chairmanship Gernot Erlor was distributed (to be downloaded from [www.oefz.at](http://www.oefz.at)).

Secretary General from The Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, **Ambassador Johannes Kyrle**, introduced the evening with facts and figures concerning the migration crisis, underlining the challenge Europe has faced – and still faces - since 2015. First of all, the roots of the migration crisis have not been addressed, even though the number of refugees and migrants arriving to Europe has declined (370 000 in 2016). War, insecurity and uncertainty continue to push people to leave their country. In the Balkans, more than 75 000 of them remain stranded in very harsh conditions, following the closing of the Balkan route last year.

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, the migrant death toll has soared: about 5000 migrants have perished in 2016. The likelihood to die while crossing the Sea has thus surged to 1 in 88. This being said, Johannes Kyrle underlined that the migration crisis has had major repercussions both in domestic politics and in European and international politics. In domestic politics, it was seized by populist parties as an opportunity to discredit ruling parties and/or to reinforce their electoral power. In European and international politics, it strained cooperation, revitalised state's

commitments to national interests and marked a return to border politics. No wonder that that against the backdrop of the migration crisis, migration governance has been defined as key security priority by a number of member states of the EU and has been recognized as important challenge by the OSCE. A key challenge therein is the definition of a global security strategy on migration governance, allowing this complex issue to be addressed in a suitable way.

**Ambassador Clemens Koja**, Permanent Representative of Austria to the OSCE, then addressed the audience with a speech stressing the complexity of the migration problem and the difficulty to respond properly. He pointed out that “a possible failure to respond in a co-ordinated and comprehensive manner, with respect for human rights and due attention to security concerns, would compound the problems we are facing”. Clemens Koja then argued that the OSCE is well-placed to contribute to international efforts to better protect refugees and manage migration. In addition to facilitating inclusive political and policy dialogue and fostering regional co-ordination and co-operation among participating States on migration, the OSCE promotes structural development and resilience, for instance through its democratization and security sector reform initiatives. In particular, it assists its participating States on the ground through its network of field operations. Clemens Koja finally underlined the Austria’s intention to support these objectives in the framework of Austria’s Chairmanship of the OSCE while addressing key challenges such as statelessness or labor migration.

**Tobias Flessenkemper** from the Southeast Europe Association chaired the debate and introduced the study on the role of the OSCE in migration management (available on [www.oefz.at](http://www.oefz.at)), conducted under the auspices of the SOG with the support of the German OSCE Chairmanship in Office of the OSCE.

**Florian Marciacq**, Chargé de mission of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe / University of Luxembourg, presented the study. He started by explaining why the OSCE should and does address the challenge of migration governance. First of all, the OSCE’s comprehensive security agenda, including a non-traditional security dimension, intersects well with migration challenges. Secondly, the geographical coverage of the OSCE is an asset in this specific issue-area, as the OSCE includes both countries of origin and countries of destination as well as countries of transit among its participating States and partners for cooperation. But most importantly, migration governance is part of the original mandate of the OSCE, as defined by the Helsinki Final Act. Florent Marciacq notes that migration governance entered the realm of OSCE concerns in the 1970s through Economic and Environmental Dimension. It was then seen as precondition for general sustainability in contemporary security. In the 1990s, the OSCE build up its commitments in this field, in particular with respect to labour migration. Legal, circular migration was viewed positively as a means to support economic growth and alleviate development differences and diffuse potential tensions linked to them. Subsequently, the OSCE developed a set of migration governance-related commitments with respect to the protection of human rights, the fight against illegal migrations and more recently, forced migrations. These commitments, for forced migrations, emerged in response to the war in Yugoslavia. They provide that OSCE participating States should undertake a “concerted effort to share the common burden”

of forced migration; refrain from strengthening their own security at expenses of other participating States; respect in all circumstances humanitarian law and seek ways to enhance protection of civilians; make sure their national policies comply with international obligations; and treat individuals with dignity and prevent discrimination. These commitments, according to Florent Marciacq, are more topical than ever. A final asset of the OSCE, supporting a greater involvement of the OSCE in migration governance-related challenges, is its network of field operations, which allow to gain first-hand knowledge of development on the ground.

The response of the OSCE to the migration crisis, according to Florent Marciacq, has been twofold. On the one hand, at the level of the organization, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly advocated more involvement; ad hoc and informal structures were created and a Ministerial Council Decision was eventually agreed upon in December 2016, which encourages OSCE executive structures to continue their work within existing mandates and available resources and encourages the participating States to use the OSCE platform to address migration-related issues. The OSCE response, at this level, was all in all rather limited. At the level of the field operations, by contrast, some missions proved very pro-active and innovative, primarily these in Serbia and Macedonia.

Florent Marciacq stated, furthermore, that during the migration crisis, OSCE field missions worked quite autonomously from the Secretariat. They took initiative in starting activities in this field. However, the mandates of the OSCE field operations differ significantly. For instance, the task of the mission in Skopje is mainly focused on monitoring borders and ensuring stability whereas in Tirana the task of the mission is nothing less than assisting the country to build a functional State. Notwithstanding these differences, the response to the migration crisis of OSCE field missions can be identified as follows: Increase in monitoring activities; Increase in reporting and liaising activities (background report, joint visits...); Promoting human rights-based approach to the crisis (support for a regional network of CSO); Raising awareness at the community level; Local governance and CS capacity building (training of frontline workers); Policing and combatting migration-related crime (assistance and training of local forces, support for creation of joint operation platforms...).

In his conclusion, Florent Marciacq pointed out that the OSCE's response to the migration crisis was all in all quite limited, firstly because the participating states did not necessarily agree on handling the issue within this specific organization; and secondly because some important links (like "countering violent extremism" and "migration") were missing. Florent Marciacq argued that there is a lack of a comprehensive, systematic and coherent approach to migration-related issues, as the EED remain second to the 1st and 3rd baskets and expert capacities in that field are missing. Florent Marciacq called for a more regional OSCE approach and an overarching framework to better combine the securitised aspects of migration governance with the economic, environmental and human rights dimensions. More generally, he called for giving migration-related issues a higher priority in the OSCE agenda.

**Senada Šelo-Šabić**, researcher at the Croatian Institute for Development and International Relations, led a study concerning the refugee flux on the western Balkan route 2015/2016. The outcome of the study showed that institutions like OSCE or EU did not play a major role in addressing the migration crisis; the prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries tackled the problem on a regional basis. In her study Senada Šelo-Šabić showed how Western Balkan countries responded differently to the crisis. One of her main findings was that EU-membership did not affect the way a country handled the crisis: Macedonia and Slovenia followed a securitarised approach, whereas Croatia and Serbia focused more on the humanitarian aspect. She underlined as well that Macedonia developed a political narrative presenting the country as being most useful to the European Union as it stopped refugees on their way to Austria/Germany. Senada Šelo-Šabić summed up that civil society of all the Western Balkan countries helped the refugees. All countries in the region demonstrated humanitarian concerns, at least after ensuring that the refugees would leave again, to *become someone else's problem*. Indeed, the countries in the Western Balkans do not consider their economic situations good enough to receive refugees, all the more since many of their nationals migrate from Western Balkans to Western Europe in search for better economic conditions.

**Vedran Dzihic**, Senior researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Politics addressed the fundamental dilemma between the humanitarian and the normative/security approach. He pointed out the different points of views countries had, comparing Austrian Foreign Minister Kurz with the German Chancellor Merkel; the first representing the securitarised approach (with an emphasis on building barbwire fences and calling for the closure of the Balkan route), the second incarnating the humanitarian approach, following her principle: "Ja, wir schaffen das!" ["Yes, we can do it!"]. Vedran Dzihic underlined the necessity of a deal between the countries in order to handle the migration flux, thinking of the EU-Turkey deal. Concerning Austria's OSCE Chairmanship he claimed that Austria will not revitalize the normative core of the OSCE but can do the first step in its direction.