



Republic of North Macedonia
Ministry of Interior

Department for European Union and International Cooperation
Sector for International Cooperation
Section for Multilateral Cooperation and Professional Translation

Address of the Minister of Interior

Oliver Spasovski

at the 71st Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR

October, 2020

Distinguished High Commissioner,

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, allow me, on my behalf and on the behalf of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia to welcome the holding of this event, to thank the High Commissioner for his time and especially for the questions he raised in his speech.

We are an active partner of the United Nations, as well as EU and other international organizations. In order to harmonize our legislation with the regulation of the European Union, the new Law on International and Temporary Protection entered into force in 2018 - it is mostly in line with the Directives of the European Council and Parliament, as well as with a large number of bylaws.

The country is a contracting party to all key international instruments of UNHCR. In terms of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration, we have given strong support and made several commitments – at the same time remaining dedicated to their further implementation and promotion.

Amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, our Ministry started conducting interviews with asylum seekers through an online platform. We were among the first ones in the region who complied with the recommendations of the European Commission and health authorities and regulations, and yet in doing so, we insisted on meeting the deadlines in accordance with the law and above all preserving the health of the asylum seekers and our officers as well.

Additionally, for the entire duration of the state of emergency, an unhindered access to the procedure was provided and all new asylum seekers were accommodated in a separate quarantine unit in the Reception and Transit Centre.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Effective migration management is one of our priorities, that is, early detection and prevention of illegal movements along the so-called "Western Balkan route". In the past period the focus was not only to reduce the threat to border security, but also to reduce the risk to life and health.

It is worth mentioning that since the outbreak of the pandemic, no positive cases of COVID-19 have been registered in the Reception Centre for Foreigners, which

is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. Strict observance of the protective measures against COVID 19 is ensured in the reception centres.

The pandemic in the most restrictive period (March-May) resulted in a significant reduction of the number of prevented attempts for illegal entry and exit, cases of smuggling of migrants, trafficking in human beings, etc. Mixed patrols with neighbouring border services were cancelled upon previous joint agreement, participation of Frontex to joint operations was suspended at the beginning, while later, part of the activities were completely cancelled.

The global pandemic, however, did not have a major impact on the cooperation with other countries along the Western Balkans route and the European agencies, the exchange of information continued smoothly, the meetings and trainings were replaced by alternative solutions (video conferencing). Video conferences of the Chiefs of Police of the countries along the route, as well as video conferences of the President of the European Commission supported by FRONTEX, EUROPOL, EASO, UNHCR and IOM were held on a regular basis.

The past years have confirmed that successful dealing with transnational threats is possible if the response is such - transnational and coordinated. The international and legal instruments of UNHCR, and more recently the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration can be essential to inspire the international community to develop innovative solutions for global migration management, mitigate causes, deal with trafficking in human beings and organized crime and can contribute to saving lives.

Allow me to emphasize that the good coordination and cooperation, exchange of information and experiences and shared responsibility between various relevant stakeholders may greatly contribute to solving the current global challenges, and we remain committed to these principles.

Thank you.