

**“Europe’s Refugee Crisis: How Should the US, EU, and OSCE Respond?”**

**HEARING**  
before the  
**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

**Witness**  
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Chairman Smith, Co-Chairman Wicker, Commissioners, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today on the issue of the migrant crises in Europe. I would also like to thank you for organizing this important hearing, which highlights the fact that the complexity and the magnitude of this problem makes it incumbent upon all of us to give full and serious attention to it.

I am here to offer the views of the Republic of Serbia, the chair-country of the OSCE as well as the country which is at the very center of the Western Balkan migration routes.

Today's global migration scenario shows how migratory movements are driven, often inseparably, by traditional economic pull and push factors, as well as by instability and the lack of security in a growing number of local contexts. The migrant crisis, bursting through and over the political, administrative and civilization borders, speaks tellingly of the inter-relatedness of faraway countries and peoples, highlighting the consequent need for a responsible and energetic approach to the quest for a lasting and comprehensive solution to this burning issue. Partial and limited local steps are not a solution. In the process of solving these problems, the support of all of us, the Member States of the most important multilateral organizations, including the OSCE, is of paramount importance.

The OSCE region is witnessing the largest refugee influx in decades. Apart from being a significant economic challenge, this is a process with potentially very serious security implications and the cause of concern in regards to the respect for human rights.

As the international community is struggling to find responses that reconcile refugee protection and human rights commitments with security considerations, the OSCE for its part reflects on the role it could play in supporting the shared interests of its participating States and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. As the world's largest regional security arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE is in a distinctive position to contribute to the handling and resolution of the current crises. Its comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to security is a unique asset.

Traditionally, OSCE decisions have largely framed the OSCE mandate on migration within the second dimension. As a result, the Office of the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) has been tasked with assisting in the implementation of OSCE commitments, particularly in the areas of comprehensive labor migration management, gender aspects of labor migration policies, and migration data collection and harmonization.

Over the years, the OSCE has also widened its third dimension's mandate, including issues related to migrants' integration and the protection of human rights of vulnerable migrant groups. The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) promotes the development and implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks that respect the rights of migrants, with special attention to the vulnerable categories.

Further roles and responsibilities have been progressively allocated to Executive Structures and specialized units in response to the evolving nature of the migration phenomenon, which has been shaped by the many trends that have come to characterize the increasingly inter-connected OSCE region. In particular: Conflict Prevention Center for the protection of persons at risk of displacement or

already affected by it in all phases of the conflict cycle, including cooperation with specialized agencies such as UNHCR. Gender Section for addressing the specific aspirations and vulnerabilities of migrant women. Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for the protection of the rights of victims of trafficking who have been involved in vulnerable migration processes, particularly if irregular migrants. TNTD/Strategic Police Matters Unit, Border Security and Management Unit (BSMU) and Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) for migration-related crimes, in particular human trafficking and migration smuggling as well as enhancing Travel Document Security (TDS) as an integral part of strengthening border management.

OSCE Field Operations have also been increasingly involved in migration-related activities and projects although they have been unevenly mandated, reflecting the diversity of agreements with the host countries and the different local priorities and needs.

As the presiding country Serbia recognizes the importance of this issue and is trying to provide more active and concrete approach of the OSCE in addressing it. In light of this bleak security situation and looming instability, it is paramount that all the mechanisms that were designed and adopted by the participating States to oversee the implementation of commitments are strong and functioning.

At the initiative of our presidency a Joint Meeting of the Security Committee, the Economic and Environmental Committee and the Human Dimension Committee on Migration was held in Vienna on October 6th.

In the conclusions of the meeting, among others, the following specific courses of action and proposals of activities are listed:

First Dimension: Maximum use of all three platforms (border management, the police and the fight against terrorism) for exchange of information with a special focus on the fight against trafficking and smuggling. This in particular since it has been determined that a large percentage of migrants are among the total number of victims of trafficking.

Second Dimension: Intensification of cooperation with other international organizations dealing with migratory movements, as well as activities to implement obligations in the field of labor migration.

Third Dimension: Ensuring full respect for the obligations in the field of human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, freedom of movement, integration of migrants and so forth. ODIHR stands ready to carry out missions in the field and provide support to member countries at their request, in assessing the situation in the light of respect for human rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and respect for their freedom of movement.

As the OSCE chair-country Serbia supports the position of the US by which the concrete ideas for OSCE activities in terms of migration crises should be put into the context of the preparation of the upcoming Mediterranean Conference in Jordan, as well as the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade. The Serbian Chairmanship is pursuing an ambitious package of Ministerial Council Decisions in view of the forthcoming Belgrade Meeting. Only in the field of the human dimension 9 Ministerial Council Decisions are now under consultation with participating States. As we start negotiating in the coming days, we intend to incorporate into the draft decisions as many concrete recommendations as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to point out that Serbia is not dealing with this issue only in the capacity of the OSCE chair country. The migrant wave from the conflict-ridden areas, flooding many European countries, has not by-passed my country. Although Serbia is not the final destination for most of the migrants and refugees, it has found itself at the very center of the Western Balkans migration routes and almost all migrants and refugees coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other unstable areas, primarily from the Middle East, have transited through it, heading to the countries of Western and Northern Europe via the two EU Member States – Greece and Bulgaria.

It is important to notice that the numbers of migrants on the “Western Balkan route” were constantly rising since 2009 and thus, this is not an entirely new problem. What is essentially new is that in 2015 we are facing a dramatic increase in their numbers. Using the figures - from the beginning of this year until the October 8th, the Republic of Serbia has registered over 200.000 irregular migrants. The tendency is such that these numbers will not subside, but only increase.

Migrants who enter our territory are being registered (including fingerprints taken) and provided with accommodation, food and medical care. The way in which we have dealt with this pressure and the various aspects of the migrant crisis, namely our approach and empathy that was demonstrated so far, were very positively evaluated by both EU institutions and EU member states, as well as by the migrants themselves and by the Arab countries.

While this can make us proud, it is obvious that the burden we bear during this crisis is becoming increasingly difficult. Specifically, aside from the financial costs of the current crisis, Serbia is almost for two decades now, dealing with over 500.000 refugees and Internally Displaced Persons from wars in Yugoslavia from 1990's.

In a nutshell, all of the experiences we had, either directly or indirectly, during the crisis have demonstrated to all of us that the solution (or solutions) for this crisis cannot be based on partial or local steps (such as closing borders or building fences). Cooperation and coordination within the international community a must.

It is necessary to reach a comprehensive and sustainable solution, as soon as possible, at the EU level, to include also transit countries on the Western Balkan route. We wish to be part of this common solution and we are ready to take our share of responsibility, once the European Union agrees a migrant crisis settlement strategy. I would like to point out that Serbia will continue to be a credible EU partner and treat the migrants in a manner that is fully consistent with European and international standards. We are also committed to actively participating in the implementation of all agreed upon today, including comprehensive border management.

On a more global scale, aside from greater solidarity, there should be an increased readiness for the political response to the source of the current crisis. That means more readiness to seek political solutions and for creating conditions for sustainable peace and development at the source of the crisis. The alternative to such actions is much worse and that would lead to further deterioration of the situation and degenerate into a humanitarian crisis, with hardly conceivable magnitude and consequences.

Thank you for your attention.