

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

MIGRATION CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: POLICY OPTIONS FOR BUILDING A STRONG AND FREE EUROPE

American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
April 7-8, 2016

Over the year 2015, the countries in Southeast Europe experienced unprecedented migration flows with hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and other migrants crossing their land and sea borders to seek safety and better life. On the other hand, some of the countries in the region continued to produce significant numbers of asylum seekers fleeing towards Western Europe. Whether their countries are source, transitional or destination points, governments from Skopje to Bucharest, Ankara to Zagreb and Sofia to Budapest, have faced difficult policy choices balancing the protection of national borders and domestic political pressures with fulfilling their international obligations in the area of asylum. In some cases, policy decisions and actions have stirred tensions with the neighboring counties, have limited the liberties of migrants and host communities alike, and have challenged the foundational values and principles of the European community.

In these circumstances, increased regional cooperation on the issue of migration among EU members, candidates and non-members alike, and the constructing of viable and practical policy options, which respect human rights and contribute to building a European society strong in its diversity, are vital.

The international conference *Migration Challenges in Southeast Europe: Policy Options for Building a Strong and Free Europe* will bring together Members of the European Parliament (MEP), policy-makers, civil society organizations, media professionals, academics and students from the region to discuss the challenges brought over by increased migration. The participants will develop common positions on what are the most pressing issues and their causes, and corresponding viable policy options. In its concluding session, the conference will adopt a declaration with the key policy proposals, drafted by the team of the rapporteurs of each of the roundtables and workshops.

The 1.5-day conference is hosted by the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), located in the Southwest part of Bulgaria, near the Greek, Serbian and Macedonian Borders. AUBG has a diverse student body in which most countries from the region are represented, a liberal arts tradition and renowned academic programs, and is the perfect venue for a policy-oriented event of regional and European-level significance.

Organizing partners: American University in Bulgaria (AUBG); Friedrich Naumann Foundation Southeast Europe; Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria and the Refugee Support Group.

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PROGRAMME

DAY 1, April 7, Thursday

08:00 – 14:00 Arrival of participants in Blagoevgrad and hotel check-in

13:00 – 14:00 Registration

14:00 – 14:15 Welcoming remarks

Stratsimir Kulinski, President of AUBG

Rainer Adam, Regional Director of Friedrich Naumann Foundation Southeast Europe
South and Southeast Europe

14:15 – 14:45 Keynote speech

Markus Löning, FDP Germany, Former Federal Government Commissioner for Human
Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid

14:45 – 16:15

Roundtable 1: Countries of Mass Transition – the “Western Balkans Route”

1. **Zoran Đoković** – OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
2. **Dusan Gamser** – Liberal Democratic Party, Serbia
3. **Boris Blazekovic** – Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats
4. **Jasmina Golubovska** – Open Society Foundation, Macedonia
5. **Nikolaus Scherak** - Vice President of NEOS Party Austria, Spokesman for asylum,
integration, justice, human rights, constitution, ethnic groups, former Chair Foreign
Policy Committee of Parliament

Moderator: Prof. Emilia Zankina, Chair, Political Science dept., AUBG

16:15 – 16:45 Coffee Break

16:45 – 18:15 Workshops 1 & 2 (concurrent)

Workshop 1: Borders, Smuggling, and Trafficking

1. **Elena Petreska** – International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Macedonia
2. **Dobryana Petkova** – Acting Secretary of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Bulgaria
3. **AnnaStiina Kallius** – Migszol, Hungary

Moderator: TBD

Workshop 2: Media and the migration “crisis”

1. **Clive Leviev-Sawyer** – Editor-in-Chief, The Sofia Globe, Bulgaria
2. **Istvan Szekeres** – Journalist, Hungary
3. **Maria Cheresheva** – Journalist; Vice President of Association of European Journalists Bulgaria

Moderator: Zornitsa Stoilova, Kapital newspaper, Bulgaria

DAY 2, April 8, Friday

09:00 – 09:30

Recap of previous day

09:30 – 09:45 Opening speech

Daniel Mitov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria (TBC)

09:45 - 11:15 Roundtable 2: Southeast Europe as the EU’s “Buffer zone”

1. **Representative of UNHCR** – Bulgaria
2. **Philip Gunev** – Deputy Minister of Interior of Bulgaria (TBC)
3. **Representative of FRONTEX**
4. **Hakan Ataman** – Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Turkey
5. **Sandy Protogerou** – Greek Council of Refugees
6. **Kamelia Dimitrova** – Secretary, Bulgarian National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Moderator: Prof. Anna Krasteva – CERMES, New Bulgarian University

11:15 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00 Workshops 3 & 4 (concurrent)

Workshop 3: The role of civil society: volunteerism, humanitarianism, political action

1. **Gordana Grujić** – Group 484, Serbia
2. **Miriana Ilcheva** – Center for the Study of Democracy
3. **Tzvetko Tzankovski** – Refugee Support Group, Bulgaria
4. **Lilla Zentai** – Menedék, Hungary

Moderator: Tzvetko Tzankovski – Refugee Support Group, Bulgaria

Workshop 4: Addressing the hate speech, hate crimes, and the rise of far right attitudes

1. **Orhan Ceca** – Liberal Alternative Institute, Macedonia
2. **Bobby Phillips** – Professor of Political Science, AUBG
3. **Margarita Ilieva** – Director of Legal Programme, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

Moderator: Radostina Pavlova – Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 Presentation of the findings from the workshops, open discussion, and policy proposals

15:00 – 15:45 Adoption of policy brief outline and guidance on providing input for finalization

15:45 – 16:00 Closing remarks

Daniel Kaddik – Project Director of FNF Southeast Europe
Radostina Pavlova – Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria

16:00

End of event and departure of participants