

## EDITORIAL

The first quarter of 2018 saw, amongst others, the launching of the "**Prague Process: Dialogue, Analysis and Training in Action**" initiative in January 2018. Funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), PP DATA represents one component of the **Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF)**. The initiative will focus on continuing the senior- and expert-level dialogue among the 50 participating states, providing targeted capacity-building by means of the Training Academy, and further accumulating knowledge and analytical expertise in the framework of the Prague Process Migration Observatory.

The Mobility Partnership Facility started its second phase of implementation, and is approaching the 10th anniversary of the first Mobility Partnership, which the EU concluded with Moldova in June 2008. The overall impact and effectiveness of this policy tool will be

discussed at the International Mobility Partnership Conference in Baku in May 2018.

The European Commission recently revived the long-awaited debate on the EU accession of the Western Balkan States and released the Communication "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", outlining the reforms needed for positively impacting the WB countries and for joining the EU as of 2025. Another important development affecting regular travellers and tourists from the non-EU countries is the EC proposal to reform the EU's common visa policy.

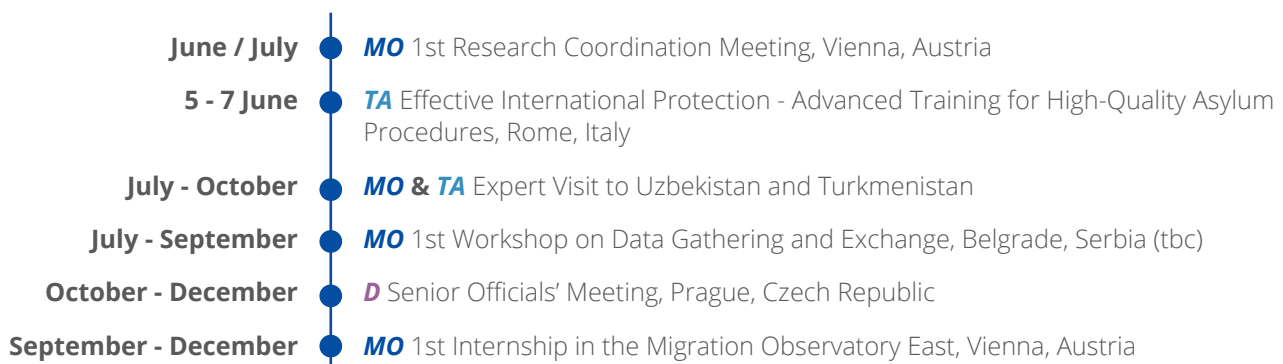
Armenia, meanwhile, is looking at how to cut remittance costs, assessing the most innovative solutions in this area.

More on these developments in this issue of the Prague Process Quarterly Review. Have a good read!

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## Looking ahead: indicative timeline of the Prague Process activities in 2018



**MO** - Migration Observatory  
**TA** - Training Academy  
**D** - Senior-level Dialogue

## The Prospects of EU accession by the Western Balkan states

On 6 February 2018 the European Commission issued the Communication for “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”, following an earlier announcement by President Juncker in his 2017 State of the Union address. Underlining the achievements made within the region to date, the Communication proposes concrete reforms for strengthening both the Western Balkan region and the individual states as (potential) accession candidates, while also preparing the EU itself for welcoming new members.

The year 2025, considered by many as the possible accession date for the frontrunners of accession talks - Serbia and Montenegro - sets a reference period for all candidate countries to join the EU as reconfirmed by Juncker during his visit to Albania. As the European Commission underlined that the enlargement process will fully depend on the objective merits and results achieved by each country, the period until 2025 provides the right momentum for the countries of the region to progress on many fronts.

The proposed reforms are clustered in **6 flagship initiatives** targeting specific areas which should be tackled in the coming years. By and large, the focus is on stability and prosperity, whereby the envisaged reforms shall have a positive impact with regard to:

- strengthening the rule of law
- supporting socio-economic development
- connecting the infrastructure
- fostering digitalisation and digital innovation
- supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations
- reinforcing engagement on security and migration among the candidate and potential candidate countries.

Reflecting on the 2015-2016 migration challenges, **the initiative to reinforce engagement on security and migration** is not surprising. The list of key areas linked to the **operational and strategic cooperation on migration**

**and border management** refers to “ensuring access to international protection, sharing of relevant information (such as risk analyses), enhancing border control, ensuring the effective implementation of re-admission and return policies and the fight against irregular migration and migrant smuggling”. The need for international and regional cooperation, targeting both capacity building and information exchange on migration, is also well pronounced in the Communication. Other recommendations relate to maintaining the principle of free movement of workers and transitional measures in this area, enhancing partnerships between municipalities in the Western Balkan region and those in the EU Member States, and a proposed pilot mobility scheme for learners and trainers in vocational education and training. All these measures and actions shall ultimately support the accession process.

Moreover, a number of events is scheduled in the first half of 2018, including the intended Adoption of the Enlargement package on April 17th and the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on May 17th.



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Read full strategy in English:

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/eu-western-balkans-strategy-credible-enlargement-perspective\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/eu-western-balkans-strategy-credible-enlargement-perspective_en)

Check media opinions in English:

Deutsche Welle <http://www.dw.com/en/my-europe-how-realistic-is-2025-for-the-western-balkans/a-43128004> & <http://www.dw.com/en/opinion-western-balkans-have-a-place-in-the-european-union/a-42531422>

## Mobility Partnership Facility: the second phase

Since January 2018, the Prague Process represents one strand of the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF), a European Union funded initiative contributing to the operationalisation of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility. The MPF aims at strengthening the EU dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility issues with its main partner countries in this area.



Mobility Partnership Facility

Initiated in January 2016, the MPF provided an ideal setting for targeted, flexible and tailor-made assistance. Through its Call for Proposals, launched in April 2016, the MPF was thus far able to support 12 Actions – concrete projects on a variety of topics – involving 15 European Member States, six

Mobility Partnership countries and two countries that signed a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM). Following the success of the first phase, the MPF's second phase was launched in January 2018, featuring the following four strands or components:

- Operationalisation of MP and CAMM Joint Declarations through targeted Actions (Strand A);
- Horizontal activities supporting MP and CAMM constituents (Strand B);
- Political dialogues and processes – the third phase of the Prague Process (Strand C);
- Pilot projects in the area of legal migration with selected partner countries (Strand D).

Following the practise of the first phase of the MPF, the first two components -

Strands A and D will be translated into calls for proposals open to EU MS public bodies. Strand A will target actions involving Mobility Partnership and CAMM countries, while Strand D will focus on a number of partner countries selected by the European Commission. Proposals under both Strands can include private law bodies and non-governmental organisations, as co-applicants, while international organisations can only apply under Strand D.

The MPF is funded from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Internal Security Fund for Police Cooperation (ISF-Police) and the Internal Security Fund for Borders and Visa (ISF-Borders), managed by DG HOME.

For more information on the MPF and on its calls for proposals, please visit our webpage [www.icmpd.org/mpf](http://www.icmpd.org/mpf) or contact the MPF Team at [MPF@icmpd.org](mailto:MPF@icmpd.org).

## International Mobility Partnership Conference in Baku

On 14-15 May 2018 the European Union funded project 'Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan (MOBILAZE)' implemented by ICMPD in Azerbaijan is organising the **International Mobility Partnership Conference** in Baku. The Conference will take stock of the second year of the MOBILAZE project implementation and its contribution to the Mobility Partnership objectives set in the joint EU – Azerbaijan Declaration signed in 2013.

In February 2017, Azerbaijan launched the process of negotiating a new comprehensive agreement with the European Union, which should replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and better reflect the shared objectives and challenges the EU and Azerbaijan face today. Supporting this development, the State Migration Service of Azerbaijan is expected to outline the national priorities in terms of cooperation on migration and mobility during the conference.





The event will also provide an opportunity for Mobility Partnership ‘frontrunners’ such as Georgia and Moldova, to share their national experience with Belarus and Azerbaijan who signed their Mobility Partnerships more recently.

The Conference will therefore feature a joint exercise on implementation of the Mobility Partnership projects and a panel discussion on Mobility Partnerships evaluation.

Taking place 10 years after the signature of the first Mobility Partnership with Moldova, the Conference will provide a timely opportunity to reflect on the challenges and benefits of the cooperation to date as well as an outlook into the forthcoming cooperation.

## Armenia develops a new software to cut on remittance costs

Armenia receives a sizeable portion of its GDP in personal remittances, around 1,5 billion USD or 13% of GDP in 2016, placing it well in the top-20 of receiving countries in the world.

Enabling these transfers to reach Armenia in a safe manner and with as little administrative costs as possible is therefore of importance to the Armenian Government. The Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) recently developed the Armenian Remittances Unified System (ARUS), which offers a cheap and reliable channel for sending money. Transfer fees to Armenia were already relatively low by international standards (from 0,5 to 2%) but further reducing them would leave additional millions of USD to the receivers.

ICMPD and the project “Support for Migration and Border Management in Armenia” (MIBMA), jointly with the CBA and the State Migration Service of Armenia has commissioned a feasibility study to assess several innovative services that benefit receivers of remittances by lowering costs while at the same time encouraging the development of electronic money. These services are to be linked to the ARUS system as modules. After having studied the financial and legal requirements for implementing financial products, the following modules will be further explored and potentially developed for implementation:

- Electronic bills and payments for both private and public transfers
- Pay 2 Go (payment of utilities, taxes and fees to central and local government)
- Mobile application of ARUS system and the attached modules

- E- money Hub: the ARUS system can become the standard for all sorts of electronic money applications
- Connection with debit and credit card issuers to enable users to receive and use funds through their cards

Once implemented, the implications for remittance sending Armenian migrants and their families at home are clear. They will have the opportunity to transfer money through banks or money transferring organisations using all combinations of cash, card and accounts in a faster, more reliable and – most importantly - cheaper way, with a likely maximum transfer fee of 0,5%. Both senders, receivers and service providers will benefit from using electronic transfer methods to pay for fees, bills and taxes in Armenia. For the Armenian state, the increase in the use of electronic money is equally important in order to decrease the size of the informal economy and corruption risks.

## EU Visa Policy Reform: benefits for regular travellers

In March 2018, the European Commission put forward a proposal to reform the EU's common visa policy with the objective of making it easier for tourists and legitimate travellers to obtain a Schengen visa. The updated EU Visa policy will also cater for strengthening security, mitigating irregular migration risks, and improving cooperation on return and readmission.

Among the most important changes, targeting regular travellers to the EU, is the proposal to reduce the processing time for visa applications from 15 to 10 days with the possibility of submitting visa applications 6 months in advance instead of the 3 months that apply nowadays.

The proposal to facilitate the electronic submission of visa applications may be even more important. As said in the communication, the European Commission will launch a feasibility study and initiate the discussion on how the visa process can be fully digitalised before the end of the year.

## Digital practices from the Prague Process participating states: Estonia and Georgia

⇒ In December 2014, **Estonia** launched the so-called **e-Residency** programme for location-independent entrepreneurs such as software developers and writers. The e-Residency represents a government-issued, digital identity that empowers entrepreneurs around the world to set up and run a location-independent business. The program allows non-Estonians' access to Estonian services such as company formation, banking, payment processing, and taxation. The main goal of the e-Residency program is to make life and business

significantly easier for freelancers, digital nomads, business owners, international partners, and any other non-resident who has a relation to Estonia. As of June 16th, 2017, over 20,200 people from 140 countries have applied for e-Residency - and 19,254 of them have already received their e-Residency digital ID card.

⇒ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Georgia** has launched **e-Visa** portal allowing short-term visitors to get their visa in an effortless way. Prospective travellers have the possibility to obtain

their short-term visa without visiting a Georgian Embassy or Consular Office, following three simple steps: applying through the dedicated portal, making an online payment and printing out their e-Visa. There is no need to make an appointment or present original documents to the Embassy or Consular Office. The e-Visa provides the same right to enter Georgian territory as an ordinary sticker-visa in the passport. All one needs is internet connection, credit or debit card and scanned copies of documents.

For trusted, regular travellers the updated Visa policy shall ease the process of obtaining multiple entry visas with a validity for up to 5 years, as well as allow for obtaining single-entry short-term visas directly at the external land and sea borders valid for a stay in the issuing EU MS.

The downside of these improvements for regular travellers and tourists will be an increase of the visa fee from 60 to 80 EUR. This surplus will be invested into upgrading of the necessary IT equipment and software with the aim of ensuring stronger security screenings.

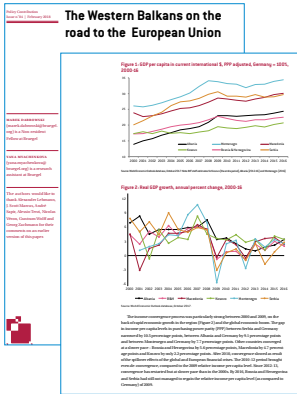
The European Commission also proposed introducing a new mechanism targeting readmission and return. This mechanism implies stricter conditions for processing visas when a partner country does not cooperate on the readmission of irregular migrants. The mechanism will also apply to regular travellers who entered by obtaining a visa, but overstayed. Such measures shall allow the Commission to assess cooperation on return with non-EU countries, and, if needed, decide upon more restrictive implementation of the Visa Code.

Finally, the reform of the Visa Information System (VIS) shall ensure swifter and more effective background checks on visa applicants and enable national authorities to access and exchange information on long-stay visas and residence documents. The proposal to revise the VIS is expected this spring.

**Check the press release:** [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-1745\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-1745_en.htm)

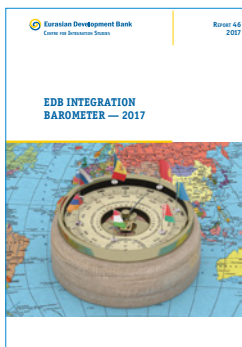
**Check the Q&A:** [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-18-1762\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-1762_en.htm)

**Interesting reads:**



Bruegel Policy Contribution No 4, February 2018: *The Western Balkans on the road to the European Union*  
<http://bruegel.org/2018/02/the-western-balkans-on-the-road-to-the-european-union/>

*MICIC Summary Paper: Improving our responses to migrants caught in crises: Conclusions and policy recommendations for global migration policy-making*  
[https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/1\\_2018/MICIC\\_Summary\\_Paper\\_final.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/1_2018/MICIC_Summary_Paper_final.pdf)



*EDB Integration Barometer 2017*  
[http://russiancouncil.ru/upload/iblock/528/edb-centre\\_2017\\_report-46\\_edb-integration-barometer\\_eng.pdf](http://russiancouncil.ru/upload/iblock/528/edb-centre_2017_report-46_edb-integration-barometer_eng.pdf)

*IOM World Migration Report 2018*  
[https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2018\\_en.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en.pdf)



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