

Podgorica, 24 March 2023

Dear Colleagues,

It is our great pleasure to invite you to the Joint Conference of the European Migration Network and the Podgorica Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC), hosted by the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro in Podgorica, on 6 June 2023.

Bearing in mind that the migration situation in the region remains complex and challenges the institutional capacities of the Western Balkans, particularly in relation to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, this conference aims to proactively add to the discussion on how to tackle common challenges on the Western Balkans route and future actions both on regional and national level.

The Western Balkans are at the heart of the European continent, surrounded by EU Member States, which makes this region a key corridor for migrants trying to reach the EU from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Authorities in the region have registered more than 1 million migrants since 2015. Even though the numbers have decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the strategies used to enter the EU have largely diversified, this route remains very active.

The number of detections more than doubled in 2022 compared to 2021 along the Western Balkans route, which remains a key migratory path into the EU. Attention has been mounting on the migration situation in the region that has been challenging the institutional capacities of the Western Balkans, particularly in relation to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

In October 2022, challenges along this route were discussed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council and the Berlin Process Ministerial, followed by the European Commission's Action Plan for the Western Balkans in December.

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To this purpose, as the capacity of in-person attendance is limited, we kindly ask to appoint up to two representatives per Delegation/Organisation with direct competencies in the area.

For your convenience, please find attached the Practical details and Provisional agenda.

We very much look forward to greeting you at the conference in Montenegro.

Sincerely,

Sergej MUČALICA
Acting Director General
Ministry of Interior of Montenegro

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Mučalica'.

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