

## **Salzburg Forum Agenda 2030**

### **I. Assessment of cooperation**

On 27<sup>th</sup> July 2001, the founding states of the Salzburg Forum<sup>1</sup> signed the first Joint Declaration of the Salzburg Forum which formalised their dialogue and cooperation in the area of internal security.

Since then, the Salzburg Forum has developed into the largest and most important regional security partnership within the framework of the European Union. Moreover, including the Western Balkan countries and the Republic of Moldova as “Friends of the Salzburg Forum” has contributed to increasing security not only in the Salzburg Forum region and the EU, but also in the EU neighbourhood. Since May 2004 when all founding members of the Salzburg Forum have already been part of the EU family, later followed by Romania and Bulgaria and most recently by Croatia, cooperation within the EU in the area of Home Affairs has been gradually developing as one of the central functions of the Salzburg Forum. Against this background, the Salzburg Forum has been aiming to contribute to an ever-closer Union based on the principle of subsidiarity.

The Salzburg Forum Vision 2020 adopted in 2010 set the goals for cooperation within the Salzburg Forum for the next ten years in three key areas: cooperation within the EU, regional cooperation and cooperation with third countries. Agreeing on the necessity to build a professional framework for cooperation while maintaining the informal character of the Salzburg Forum, its members also outlined the future structures and methods of cooperation, including the new coordination mechanism.

Over the previous ten years, cooperation within the Salzburg Forum has further developed in the light of the goals and principles anchored in the Salzburg Forum Vision 2020. Nevertheless, progress has been reached in individual areas of the Salzburg Forum work to different extents and its potential has not always been fully utilised.

Most recently, work within the Salzburg Forum has been unprecedentedly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Related restrictions have not allowed the organisation of traditional in-person meetings, thus temporarily hampering the Salzburg Forum cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

## **Cooperation within the EU**

In the spirit of the goal to actively contribute towards further strengthening the area of freedom, security and justice in the EU, the necessity to further enhance coordination of positions of Salzburg Forum members on issues of common interest and their promotion at the EU level has been repeatedly highlighted.

Several initiatives, most recently the preparation of the joint position paper in the context of the discussions on the future EU asylum and migration policy in December 2019, have confirmed the potential of the Salzburg Forum as bridge-builders in this regard.

However, the opportunities for participation of the Salzburg Forum in the shaping of EU policies have not been used to the full extent. This applies not only to the idea of organising on-site coordination meetings of Salzburg Forum members before respective meetings at the EU level (in particular JHA Council, COSI, SCIFA, etc.), but also to coordination and promotion of Salzburg Forum candidacies for high-level management positions in or seats of EU institutions.

There have also been attempts to prepare future EU Council presidencies of Salzburg Forum member states together. For example, Austria initiated the “Vienna process“ for the preparation and implementation of its last EU Council presidency (July – December 2018) in which all Salzburg Forum partners were included.

## **Regional cooperation**

In the previous decade, in the light of continuing convergence of regional security interests of its members, the Salzburg Forum has made a major contribution towards its goal to build a regional security cluster in the centre of Europe based on practical and operational cooperation.

Salzburg Forum countries have continued in their well-established cooperation in a number of security-related areas, including witness protection, road-traffic safety or cross-border organised crime. To this end, meetings of respective experts as well as police chiefs or border police chiefs have been organised.

## **Cooperation with third countries**

Being aware of the growing relevance of developments outside the EU to the security within the Union, the Salzburg Forum has constantly aimed in its activities at effectively contributing to a coherent and credible EU external relations strategy towards third countries in the security-relevant neighbourhood.

In close cooperation with partners in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova on the basis of the platform of Friends of the Salzburg Forum, joint efforts have been focused on increasing security in the region through capacity building and training in particular in the areas of border protection, preventing illegal migration and countering serious crime, as well as through enhancing operational cooperation and exchange of

information. At the same time, the Salzburg Forum has aimed at bringing the Western Balkan countries and the Republic of Moldova closer to EU standards and supported them on their way to the EU. In this spirit, encouragement to the Western Balkan partners was given at the Zagreb Summit in May 2020 in order to speed up their efforts towards the accession to the EU.

Most recently, following the Vienna Declaration on effectively combating illegal migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route adopted at the Ministerial Conference in July 2020 in Vienna, the Salzburg Forum together with its Western Balkan Friends and a number of other partners have established the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP) as a coordination structure coping with illegal migration along this route.

## **Working methods**

The Salzburg Forum has developed a number of cooperation forms, ranging from the preparation of joint position papers on EU issues, to organising meetings to discuss topics of common interest as well as to coordinate joint activities, with the focus on promoting practical cooperation and exchange of best practices not only within the Salzburg Forum, but also in close relation with its Friends in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova.

As agreed in the Salzburg Forum Vision 2020, a group of General Coordinators of the Salzburg Forum has been set up. This group comprising high-level representatives from the capitals responsible for preparing positions on EU and international policies has been supported by the group of Salzburg Forum Coordinators. Salzburg Forum General Coordinators have met, in person or via videoconferences, in order to prepare Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conferences as well as to discuss strategic and policy issues, such as the preparation of the joint position on the future EU asylum and migration policy or operational initiatives such as the establishment of the JCP.

Furthermore, with the aim to adjust structures of cooperation within the Salzburg Forum to those of the EU, we have initiated drafting and implementing 18-months work programmes of respective Salzburg Forum presidencies. Nevertheless, this practice has been abandoned in recent years.

## **II. Key objectives for future cooperation**

### **Objectives for future cooperation within the EU**

In the area of future cooperation within the EU, the Salzburg Forum will focus on maximising its potential in terms of coordination of positions on issues of common interest and their lobbying at the EU level. In order to ensure this on a regular basis, continuous analyses are to be carried out to identify suitable topics.

Taking into account recent as well as expected developments, different aspects have to be considered and the following joint approaches are envisaged as regards core internal security issues:

- Regarding asylum and migration and starting with the Slovakian EU Council presidency in 2016, Salzburg Forum states have been considerably influencing the debate on asylum and migration at the EU level. In this context, it is worth taking into consideration the experience from drafting the Salzburg Forum joint position paper on key aspects of the future EU asylum and migration policy (December 2019). We will continue to follow this path and further strengthen the model cooperation with partners against illegal migration along the Eastern Mediterranean route. For this purpose, all appropriate sources such as situational reports of the JCP will be used effectively. We are committed to the creation of a resilient asylum and migration system that puts a strong focus on protection in the regions of origin as well as on the prevention of irregular migration towards the EU and inside the Schengen area.
- At the same time, we are committed to further strengthening police cooperation within the EU with a special focus on improved cooperation in the Schengen area (making best use of Europol, Frontex, CEPOL, MEPA<sup>2</sup>, AEPC<sup>3</sup>, etc).
- In this regard, we reiterate our support to Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia towards their full Schengen membership.
- In this context, we will further develop Salzburg Forum cooperation within the EU on relevant topics, in particular on serious and organised crime, extremism, terrorism and radicalisation, protection of public spaces, removing illegal content on-line, data retention, new threats, cyber security, protection of critical infrastructure / resilience of critical entities as well as on issues relating to new technologies and their impact on police work. Law enforcement authorities need adequate legal and technical tools to successfully fight serious crime and terrorism in a rapidly changing digitalized world.

In order to increase chances of successful promotion of shared interests at the EU level, Salzburg Forum cooperation will be extended in a targeted manner by involving other like-minded EU partners with regard to similar positions on migration and security or shared interests in the area of operational cooperation, e. g. the JCP, if appropriate.

The Salzburg Forum could also benefit from using the specific possibilities for cooperation according to EU primary law, such as enhanced cooperation of at least nine EU members (Article 20 TEU and Article 87.3 TFEU) or legislative initiative of a quarter of the EU Member States in specific areas, e. g. in the area of police cooperation and measures to ensure administrative cooperation between relevant units of EU Member States (Article 76 TFEU). Moreover, Member States may organise between themselves and under their responsibility forms of cooperation and

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<sup>2</sup> The Central European Police Academy

<sup>3</sup> The Association of European Police Colleges

coordination as they deem appropriate between the competent units of their administrations responsible for safeguarding national security (Article 73 TFEU).

Moreover, the Salzburg Forum should also draw the best advantage from preparing EU Council Presidencies of Salzburg Forum countries together.

The Salzburg Forum is underrepresented as regards high-level management positions and seats of institutions within the EU. Therefore, the common potential for promoting Salzburg Forum candidacies for such positions in or seats of institutions within the EU should be used more effectively. To this end, Salzburg Forum member states will share information on their envisaged candidacies as well as on their preferences in this regard as early as possible.

### **Objectives for future regional cooperation**

In the years to come, regional cooperation within the Salzburg Forum in the area of Home Affairs will be further promoted as a key tool for fight against cross-border crime and ensuring safety in the region while keeping the focus on practical and operational cooperation.

In order to further strengthen regional cooperation in specific areas (such as countering cross-border crime, countering terrorism and radicalisation, fight against illegal migration and human smuggling, return, witness protection, road-traffic safety, etc.), established forms of cooperation will be used. Besides expert meetings as well as regular meetings of Salzburg Forum Police Chiefs, meetings of Directors-General for Migration will take place on a regular basis.

Salzburg Forum members work closely together to enhance road-traffic safety. In that context, the conclusion of the Salzburg Forum CBE Agreement in 2012 between Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Austria was an important step and has already shown its significance in practice. It therefore seems appropriate to consider involving other Salzburg Forum partners in this cooperation.

Salzburg Forum states will explore possibilities for regional cooperation across the wide range of issues including, in particular countering transnational and cross-border drug-related crime, convergence of national practices as regards cross-border surveillance or exchange of best practices in various law enforcement related fields, e. g. use of modern technology or use of anti-conflict teams in the work of police forces. Moreover, Salzburg Forum members could benefit from a closer cooperation of forensic institutions of Salzburg Forum member states by further developing a coordinated approach in EU projects on biometrics or within the European Forensic Science Area (EFSA) in order to enable further development in this field. Salzburg Forum countries could also share their experiences in tackling extremist tendencies or domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as exchange information on the functioning of police forces in times of crises (lessons learnt both from the pandemic and from the recent terrorist attacks, e. g. in Vienna). Last but not

least, we could focus on strengthening cooperation of Salzburg Forum police and customs authorities with Europol.

In the area of migration, we will place a strong focus on the prevention of secondary movements. We will also aim for improvements in our bilateral cooperation, particularly in the area of readmission and return. Therefore, we will closely cooperate within the Salzburg Forum in all relevant aspects to safeguard and strengthen the Schengen area.

In the spirit of the idea of building the Central European Operational Network (CEON) as anchored in the Salzburg Forum Vision 2020, Salzburg Forum countries could also take advantage from extending its regional cooperation by inviting the Western Balkans Friends, e. g. in the area of witness protection. In this regard, we should focus on developing and approving a clear framework for practical operational cooperation with our Friends from the Western Balkans on this topic.

In the overall context, the Salzburg Forum could be further promoted as "Model Region Central and Southeast Europe" with regard to strategic and operational cooperation within the EU as well as with third countries.

### **Objectives for cooperation with third countries**

Taking into account the ever deepening interlinkages between internal and external security, we will pay more attention to the external dimension.

Bringing the Western Balkans countries and the Republic of Moldova closer to EU standards of the area of freedom, security and justice as well as promoting security in the region is a top priority.

In this context, an immediate goal of the Salzburg Forum is to make the JCP fully operational, so that it can fulfil its mandate to effectively prevent and combat illegal migration and contribute to security and stability along the Eastern Mediterranean Route in close cooperation between Salzburg Forum states and relevant friends and partners. To this end, Salzburg Forum countries will consider further strengthening the structure of the JCP, e. g. by deployment of personnel.

Taking into account a wide range of national projects implemented in the Western Balkans, making a list of bilateral aid provided to these countries which would be updated regularly could help improve the efficiency of joint efforts of the Salzburg Forum in the region. Besides continuing activities in ensuring road traffic safety in the Western Balkans, potential for mutual closer cooperation also in other areas should be used to the maximum, e. g. in the area of fight against travel and residence document fraud. Furthermore, the Salzburg Forum could also benefit from strengthening cooperation with Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs) at EU external borders.

Being aware of the growing importance of the external dimension of migration and pursuing the common goal of reducing the pressure of illegal migration on the states of the Salzburg Forum and the EU as a whole, the countries of the Salzburg Forum will



think more intensively about joint, migration-related measures and projects in third countries. In this regard, we highlight the importance of the comprehensive approach. Information campaigns will also play an important role in this regard.

In its future activities, the Salzburg Forum should also strive to benefit more from synergies offered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as well as of other regional cooperation platforms and organisations, e. g. the Brdo Process, PCC SEE, EASO Third Country Cooperation Network, SELEC or ICMPD.

At the EU level, the Salzburg Forum will focus in particular on contributing jointly to the external policy vis-a-vis the Western Balkans and South Eastern Europe in the area of Justice and Home Affairs. Salzburg Forum states support their friends from the Western Balkans on their way towards EU membership.

Moreover, Salzburg Forum states will regularly explore possibilities for information exchange and cooperation with regard to other relevant third countries:

- In particular, given the geographic proximity, developing closer cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries as a whole will be considered in order to bring these countries closer to EU standards as well as to actively contribute to building a mutual security partnership.
- Relevant actors for Salzburg Forum cooperation can also be other third countries that influence developments in the field of internal security within the EU and especially in Central and South Eastern Europe. Salzburg Forum countries will inform each other about relevant developments and, if necessary, examine whether joint steps would be appropriate.

### **Future methods of cooperation**

With the aim to be even more efficient and successful in the future, the Salzburg Forum needs a more targeted and structured regular cooperation and better coordination at different levels while maintaining its flexibility and informal character in order to avoid unnecessary administrative burden. At the same time, we should benefit from synergies in relation both to work at the EU level as well as to other regional platforms.

We will make the best possible use of established cooperation channels including meetings of Salzburg Forum General Coordinators, Police Chiefs and Directors-General for Migration, expert meetings, exchange of information, experience and the best practices as well as joint activities and joint projects, including joint training activities.

In this context, Salzburg Forum coordination meetings before EU meetings on Home Affairs (JHA Council, COSI, SCIFA, etc.), eventually in the presence of other like-minded EU countries, will be organised on a more regular basis, whenever added value is foreseen. In the spirit of efficiency and flexibility, such coordination meetings will be generally organised on-line in advance of respective EU sessions (as soon as the agenda is available). If a need for coordination arises before JHA Council session, such meetings will be held at the level of Salzburg Forum General Coordinators.

Since all key challenges to our security require a medium to long-term approach, General Coordinators of the Salzburg Forum will examine whether the idea of trio presidencies and 18-month work programmes should be further developed for this purpose or whether other forms of cooperation would seem more appropriate in this regard.

With the aim of continuous improvement of our Salzburg Forum cooperation, a mid-term review of goals set out in Salzburg Forum strategic multi-annual documents will be carried out in order to ensure an interim evaluation of progress, identification of gaps and the opportunity to provide recommendations for improved cooperation.

Building on experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Salzburg Forum will make the best possible use of digital communication and coordination. Virtual exchanges should not only ensure necessary contacts in times of crisis but will be established as an additional regular cooperation tool, in particular for the purposes of coordination.

### **Salzburg Forum Public Relations work**

So far, the Salzburg Forum has concentrated more on substantive work and less on promoting it publicly together. Of course, the outcomes of the joint work themselves are the best PR, including presentation of joint position papers on EU issues or joint initiatives such as the JCP.

However, an increased and more regular internal and external communication of common positions and activities could raise transparency and awareness of the importance of Salzburg Forum cooperation internally as well as externally. Against this background, options for regular internal and external public relations work of the Salzburg Forum will be developed.

### **III. Implementation and further steps**

The implementation of this Agenda will be launched during the presidency of Hungary (July – December 2021).

In 2026, a mid-term review of the goals laid down therein will be carried out in order to receive necessary feedback as well as recommendations for the best possible implementation.