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#### NOTE

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From:	Slovenian delegation
To:	Council
Subject:	Summary of activities during the Slovenian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum (January-December 2023)

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Delegations will find in annex a summary of the activities during the Slovenian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum (January-December 2023) highlighting the outcomes of the Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference in Brdo pri Kranju (11-12 December 2023).

**Short presentation from Slovenia on the Slovenian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum  
(1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023)**

Slovenia took the presidency of the Salzburg Forum from Slovakia on 1 January 2023, our presidency ended on 31 December 2023. On 1 January 2024, Austria took on the presidency of the Salzburg Forum.

The Salzburg Forum is a Central European security partnership based on an initiative of the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior starting in the year 2000. The member states are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and third states (Western Balkan countries and Moldova). Over the years, more Salzburg Forum member states joined the EU and thus the Salzburg Forum has become a useful arena for discussion on important issues and legislative acts in the EU.

The Slovenian presidency of the Salzburg Forum focused on issues revolving around increased migratory pressure and the re-introduction of border controls in the Salzburg Forum countries.

Slovenia organised a **meeting of the Heads of Border Police of the Salzburg Forum Member States**, which took place on 26 September 2023 in Ljubljana. Delegations discussed the current migratory situation, modus operandi of persons with different nationalities in their attempts to reach the European Union, the abuse of asylum procedures and possible measures to counter these activities.

Slovenia also organised a **meeting of the Salzburg Forum Expert Group on Witness Protection**, which was held in Ljubljana in October 2023. Current issues and ongoing activities were discussed by the delegations.

The main event of the Slovenian presidency of the Salzburg Forum was the **conference of the Ministers of the Interior of the Salzburg Forum Member States**, which took place on 11 and 12 December 2023 in Brdo pri Kranju in Slovenia.

Recent events and the situation in the EU neighbourhood, which is partly linked to the decisions of an increasing number of Member States to temporarily reintroduce internal border controls, show that the EU may be moving away from the aim of a functioning Schengen area. The ministers discussed not only the current situation in the Schengen area, but above all its future – on the attitude towards the balance between the free movement of people, goods and services, as the greatest achievement of the EU, and internal security measures.

The conference also addressed the issue of cross-border organised crime, which remains a key threat to the smooth functioning of the Schengen area. The current situation of irregular migration in the EU clearly shows the need for effective and efficient strategies and tools to combat migrant smuggling, which must also include ensuring the dignified and sustainable return of persons residing irregularly in the EU as an important element in the fight against the activities of smuggling networks. Ministers were invited to discuss measures to successfully address irregular migration, in terms of the importance of timely exchange of quality operational information, strengthening cooperation with third countries, and effective return.

At the conference, all ministers of the Salzburg Forum highlighted and acknowledged the importance of the help and support provided by Europol and the European Migrant Smuggling Centre. At the initiative of Slovenia, a joint letter was then prepared in which the ministers expressed their support for strengthening the role of Europol in the field of combating migrant smuggling.

All nine ministers of the interior of the Salzburg Forum member states signed the letter and it was sent to the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms Ylva Johansson, and to the Chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament, Mr Juan Fernando López Aguilar.