

UNODC Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants, 10th session,

5-6 October 2023

Statement of the Republic of Lithuania

- Thank you Chair,
- Distinguished delegates, in Lithuania and throughout our region, there are two sometimes combining definitions of migrant smuggling.
- A classic or conventional one, which is carried out by organized criminal groups and a new phenomenon – hybrid threat –when the other state is engaged to this activity to influence and achieve its political goals.
- Lithuanian institutions, responsible for the protection of our state border, which is also the external border of the European Union, are observing of attempted violation of this border by individuals crossing it illegally from Belarus to Lithuania.
- In this regard, Lithuania faced intensified smuggling activities in 2021 and 2022.
- In 2021 70 pre-trial investigations were initiated, in 2022 the number has risen to 168. While in previous 2 years we had only 32 such investigations.
- Belarusian authorities not only took a blind eye to human smuggling activities.
- But also, were actively involved in these activities – organized special trips, including new flights, issued visas, accompanied, and physically helped migrants illegally cross the border.
- We face a phenomenon of ‘state sponsored smuggling’.
- As a response, Lithuania initiated legal measures to hold the Belarusian regime accountable.
- A certain measure is being taken to lodge a complaint against Belarus for non-compliance with the provisions of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.
- We only must regret that we must take appropriate legal actions not only against the criminals but also against the responsible authorities of another country.
- As regards conventional crimes, in 2022 the largest number of smugglers (231) was arrested, and the largest number of pre-trial investigations (168) were initiated regarding the illegal transportation of people across state border.

- Since Lithuania remains a transit country, illegal border crossing is in most cases combined with illegal secondary movement.
- Criminal networks involved in the transportation of migrants make extensive use of various social media channels and platforms to advertise their services.
- In this context, the countries of our region have strengthened their cooperation.
- Operational Task Force, coordinated by Europol, was established in Lithuania in 2022.
- To have a systematic impact on organized criminal groups, not only countries directly bordering Belarus (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland), but also Estonia, Finland and Germany are involved.
- The main goal is to help national institutions fight against the intensified activity of smuggling migrants from Belarus to the EU.
- Dear Delegates, smuggling is particularly important topic in the current context, when Russia commits unjustified act of aggression against a sovereign state – Ukraine.
- As a result of this war, millions of people had to leave their homes and seek asylum in neighbouring countries.
- Criminals use this situation of particularly vulnerable persons – women and children – for their own interests.
- The aftermath of the war will have long-term consequences for the people and for the security environment not only in Ukraine, but also worldwide.
- In this regard, we need to mobilize the international community to enhance efforts in the fight against cross-border crime, in particular the organization of illegal transportation of persons across the state borders.
- Dear delegates, Lithuania is ready and open for cooperation.
- Only together we can stop these inhumane crimes.
- Thank you.