

## Written interview with Mr. Igor Kalezic, Senior Police Inspector I class, Police Directorate at the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro following the participation in the World Border Security Congress 2025



### 1. In what ways has Montenegro's active participation in the Prague Process strengthened border management capacities at the national and regional levels? Can you share specific examples of its impact?



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

At the end of last year, the Prague Process celebrated its 15th anniversary. This platform has produced numerous benefits and contributed to the development of Border police of Montenegro. I am convinced that you also have positive experiences from our partnership.

As a candidate for membership in the European Union, Montenegro is constantly harmonizing its border and migration policy with European standards by implementing legal solutions and best practices in its system. Throughout all the years of

harmonization, the Prague Process has supported our efforts and been a source of new knowledge, connecting experts and providing information on integrated border management, illegal and legal migration, preventing and combating migrant smuggling and other important topics for border security.

By attending conferences, congresses and thematic meetings, this unique international platform has given us the opportunity to expand our network of professional contacts, build friendships in the region, Europe and the world. It has enabled us to hear new ideas – successful stories and use them to make the system in our country better.

High-quality seminars, thematic workshops and study visits, especially in the areas of illegal migration, readmission, return, asylum and integrated border management, provide education for our officers and enable them to apply modern working methods, lessons learned and good practices in their daily work. The diversity of participants at the events enabled a concrete picture to be created of migration movements and new trends - from countries of origin, through transit, to countries of final destination. Also, Training Academy developed by the Prague Process, offered us a growing online library of materials for training our officers.

Year after year, the Prague Process is becoming more ambitious, better and more mature. It promotes new ideas and creates a positive, pleasant atmosphere for work. Its existence has a strong impact on the international context of cooperation and the development of a network of contacts between border police officers of the Western Balkans and European countries.

**2. Montenegro has implemented an Integrated Border Management (IBM) Strategy, which involves strong inter-institutional and international cooperation. What are the main achievements of this strategy so far, and what challenges still need to be addressed?**



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

In 2006, the Government of Montenegro adopted the first Integrated Border Management Strategy, which was based on the European Commission's guidelines for the Western Balkan countries. The Strategy created conditions for improving overall security in Montenegro and the Western Balkan region, as well as for the process of harmonization with the European legal framework.

This process was accompanied by a series of activities undertaken in the previous period, in cooperation with the European Union, and in particular in relation to priorities such as: harmonization of legislation, conclusion of bilateral agreements on the state border, border crossing points and border traffic, signing of bilateral agreements on police cooperation and protocols on joint patrols, harmonization of the organizational and personnel concept, modernization and improvement of the education and training system, raising the level of professionalism of border service members, improvement of the information system and border infrastructure, procurement of technical equipment, establishment and improvement of risk analysis and information exchange. Then, strengthening capacities for inter-institutional cooperation, capacities for the fight against corruption and strengthening the legal framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The European Union, through the concept of Integrated Border Management, has developed an efficient system of border control and management, which we also strive for. It enables the free flow of people and goods on the one hand and the prevention of cross-border crime and illegal migration on the other, while respecting high standards of protection of human rights and freedom. Efficient integrated border management implies close cooperation between the services operating at the border.

By adopting the Integrated Border Management Strategy 2025-2028, just last week, Montenegro continues to develop and align its own concept with the new European concept of integrated border management with the aim of efficient border surveillance and strengthening inter-governmental and international cooperation.

The new Strategy defines the focus of our further development. It is necessary to improve the quality of border control in order to facilitate legal border crossings, improve the integrated control system of the Adriatic Sea, develop risk analysis, strengthen inter-institutional cooperation, international and regional cooperation, cooperation with EU institutions, especially FRONTEX, modernize equipment and electronic systems, improve migration policy, the readmission and return system, carry out preparations for taking measures in the Schengen area, support innovation and research. Then, ensure respect, protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and professional conduct of officials, as well as continuous education. Also, one of the important guidelines is to continue strengthening our capacities for autonomously conducting investigations in the field of migrant smuggling, cross-border crime and corruption.

**3. In recent years, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Montenegro has actively participated in the annual International Border Management Conference and World Border Security Congress (WBSC). How have these experiences advanced national efforts in integrated border management? What knowledge has been applied in your daily work?**



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

That's right, thanks to the support of the Prague Process, my colleagues and I attended these important events. They offered us the opportunity to hear expertise, experiences, strategic approaches, innovative solutions, practitioners, policymakers and representatives of the private sector in the field of border management from all over the world in challenging times.

Relevant speakers provided us with insight into the latest trends in the field of migration policy, drug trafficking, terrorism, human rights, digital technologies and tools that are changing border security day by day thanks to artificial intelligence, as well as advanced training and education to strengthen human resources.

A particularly interesting part related to border management adapted to tourism, as an important economic driver for many countries. Positive models of system optimization through the introduction of new technologies and digitalization were presented in order to facilitate tourism while ensuring security, i.e. balancing between ease of access and necessary security measures. This is especially important for Montenegro, which is a tourist country.

The activities at these events are designed to create an interactive environment for participants, with an emphasis on practical experience and lessons learned, which we can apply in our daily work. I would like to note that the Montenegrin border security system is a small system, so the development of a network of contacts, the support of our partners, international organizations and European countries, is an important driving force for our development.

**4. What have been the main advancements in border security technologies, digitalization, and data management? What technological solutions and good practices could further enhance Montenegro's border management?**



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

The European Security Union Strategy, the Frontex Strategic Framework and national European strategies see research and innovation as the main pillar of the development of integrated border management. Digital identity, digital passenger data, the growing number of trips, require digital verification, i.e. modern - digitalized border control. The traditional concept of securing a state border is not enough for modern threats and risks and it must change and adapt rapidly.



Modern technologies for border surveillance, prevention and detection are a necessity today. Safe borders mean safe people. The congress presented the latest trends in the field of electronic systems, such as: the use of drones, risk assessment and protection against the use of drones, innovative solutions for controlling shipping containers by detecting fumes without opening them, Entry Exit System, facial recognition, biometric recognition, access control systems and data analysis using artificial intelligence. A special segment was the presentation of the use of OSINT, as an excellent tool for analysing open sources of information - media, social networks, online stores, public databases, dark and deep web. This tool enables timely risk monitoring, analytical data processing and proactive threat addressing. Thanks to the support of the United Kingdom, the Montenegrin Border Police uses this tool.

Also, in mid-2023, the project “Individual Measure for Strengthening Integrated Border Management Capacities in Montenegro” was launched, implemented by IOM, and aims to strengthen the border security system in Montenegro with European Union funds. As part of this project, we are building a border police building that will house our Coordination Centre, improving the electronic surveillance system of the state border, establishing operational and logistical bases on Lake Skadar and the Adriatic Sea, and introducing an electronic system for identification and registration of migrants that will be compatible with EURODAC.



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

Our intention is to modernize the border security system using modern solutions and thus ensure a faster flow of legal travellers at our border, while at the same time setting up strong barriers to criminal activities.

## 5. This year, you had the opportunity to visit the EUROSUR National Coordination Centre as part of the WBSC 2025 program. What insights did this visit provide?



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

In cooperation with the Spanish Ministry of the Interior and Guardia Civil, the World Border Security Congress provided us with a visit to the National Maritime Surveillance Centre.

This Center, located in Madrid, plays a key role in monitoring and managing the maritime border of Spain, namely the southern European coast. It functions as a central hub for the exchange of

information and coordination between the various state border surveillance authorities, such as Guardia Civil, the Maritime Safety Agency and Customs. The Centre monitors a wide range of activities. From illegal migration to drug smuggling and other forms of cross-border crime, using advanced technologies and systems for maritime and land border surveillance, as well as data analysis and detection of potential threats.

On the other hand, the Border Police of Montenegro, with the support of the European Union, FRONTEX and other international partners, is building and developing its Coordination Centre, which will be established in accordance with EUROSUR standards. The Centre will provide better awareness of the situation at the border, by connecting all surveillance sensors, as well as a better ability of the forces to react. Strengthening and operationalizing our Coordination Centre remains one of the key priorities, so this visit is important for modeling its concept. Also, in cooperation with FRONTEX, a working group on the Coordination Centers of the Western Balkans was formed at the end of last year, in order to support their process of harmonization with EUROSUR.

#### 6. Looking ahead, what do you see as the most pressing border security challenges for Montenegro? How can international cooperation and dialogue help address them?



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

We are witnesses that challenges and crises are changing the focus in the world - the migrant crisis, Covid, refugee crisis, events in the Middle East and Ukraine directly affect European security and are reflected in our region. The Border Police of Montenegro, in parallel with the implementation of regular tasks and tasks, is implementing the process of reform and strengthening its capacities through the adoption of modern work methods and standards.

These global challenges - armed conflicts, humanitarian and refugee crises, pandemics, cross-border crime, terrorism, drug and arms trafficking necessarily require partnership, coordinated measures in the area of border security.

Considering the configuration of the terrain, mainly inaccessible hilly and mountainous areas of our state border, the biggest challenges we face are of a logistical nature and relate to infrastructure, the lack of modern technical means and application solutions, stationary and mobile electronic surveillance systems, the impassability of roads and paths along the state border, especially in winter conditions, as well as an insufficient number of police officers. Smugglers often use inaccessible mountainous and swampy terrain, sometimes with the logistics of the local population for their criminal activities. Our focus is precisely on these vulnerable sections of the state border, which we cover with available technical and human resources.

Therefore, smuggling, cross-border crime and illegal migration on the one hand and the establishment of European standards in all segments - infrastructure, equipment, training and a sufficient number of officers, on the other, are our constant challenges.

The modalities of cross-border crime are changing and indicate an increase in organization, networking and the use of sophisticated technologies and digitalization in the commission of criminal offenses, so communication with partners and the exchange of information are of crucial importance.

When it comes to international cooperation, I would especially like to emphasize the cooperation between the Border Police of Montenegro and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency - FRONTEX. Thanks to projects, education, study visits and joint operations, our system has been developing, and officers have been improving their knowledge and competencies for performing border control tasks, for the last 15 years.

In May 2023, a new Agreement was signed that enabled the organization of joint operations and the deployment of FRONTEX teams in Montenegro, who now carry out border control tasks together with border police officers. An integral part of the operation is also electronic surveillance of the Adriatic Sea using multi-sensor surveillance from aerial aircraft, and surveillance on land from a specialized MSS vehicle. In August last year, a contingent of terrain patrol vehicles was delivered to monitor the state border, which strengthens our operational activities.

We believe that one of the important factors in reducing illegal migration in our country is the work of FRONTEX forces on the border of Montenegro, the work of the joint debriefing team in the Reception Centre, as well as the surveillance of FRONTEX aircraft on the Adriatic Sea and vehicles on land. Therefore, thanks to the Status Agreement, our officers are adopting new knowledge, police standards and behavioural practices of their European colleagues and this represents an excellent example of support and partnership.

## **7. What concrete opportunities do you see for further collaboration with regional and EU partners, also in the context of EU accession and the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?**



Image credit: Border Police of Montenegro

The signing of the Convention on Police Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe laid the foundation for the development of operational police cooperation between the countries of our region. As you know, agreements and protocols on the organization of joint patrols, joint meetings, protocols on the work of joint police cooperation centres, as well as the exchange of data and information between the countries of the Western Balkans have their basis in this Convention.

Progress has been made in the last two decades, but there is a lot of room for improving our joint work and cooperation. I believe that strengthening trust is very important in terms of achieving better results in the fight against illegal migration and cross-border crime. Professional cooperation, trust and timely information exchange with regional and international partners must be a priority for all of us.

Specific activities that should be addressed include promoting the exchange of information and best practices with a focus on addressing the root causes of illegal migration, strengthening the joint fight against migrant smuggling networks and human trafficking, identifying and providing adequate protection and assistance to vulnerable groups, strengthening capacities for establishing the identity of illegal migrants, return and readmission, as well as developing a European model of integrated border management using modern electronic systems. For border police, a particularly sensitive aspect is the identification of terrorist threats related to migration.



Image credit:

In addition to strengthening trust, harmonizing the legislation of the Western Balkan countries with the legal framework of the European Union should be our priority. The accession process is extremely demanding and each candidate country has a certain degree of compliance and success stories that it can share with the neighbors. This is a segment in which the Prague Process can contribute, by understanding our needs, active action, networking and expert support.

The new Pact on Migration and Asylum is demanding for the European Union members themselves, as it prescribes stricter procedures, rules and requires significant logistical support. Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries will need the support of developed EU countries on this path.

Efficient management of the EU's external borders is a key element of the Schengen area without internal border controls. So this year, within the framework of complementary EU support, we started a Twinning project aimed at revising the 2017 Schengen Action Plan and developing a calculation of the necessary personnel and training plan for border police, as well as a plan for the necessary equipment in accordance with standards.

Although we are a small system, through our engagement so far we have shown that we can be a partner and contribute to border security in the region and Europe. I believe that we will continue our cooperation to mutual satisfaction.

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