

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me tell you a personal story.

When my father left his home country Iraq to come to study in Belgium in the 1970ies, he fell in love with my mother.

This provoked **big emotions**.

- Happiness, love, and excitement. Quite obviously.
- But also sadness, for what was left behind;
- And fear and confusion for what was about to come.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, **migration always is emotion**.

And my father was not alone with these emotions. Because his journey impacted others.

- My mother and the children they were going to have.
- Families, neighbours, childhood friends, the communities they left and joined.
- Both countries, and all the ones in between.

One single story. One small stone altering the course of the water.

One act, touching the lives of many.

And migration was emotion when four years ago, our leaders met in Marrakesh.

In many of our home states, there was a debate about the Global Compact.

And in my home country, the federal government fell over its public endorsement of the GCM.

Migration is emotion. Because it is about people.

About those who move, but also about those who never move.

About migrants and non-migrants

It is our job and duty, as politicians, to properly manage migration.

To try to remove social tensions. To provide for opportunities. But also to create order and rules.

My vision has been translated in a **national Belgian Action Plan**, that I am proud to present to you today.

This action plan focuses on **five GCM objectives**.

First, Belgium will continue to invest in **evidence-based policies**. Our policies can and should be further rationalized to result in more predictability.

Second, my country commits to the establishment of tailor-made **legal pathways** that allow people to migrate. This goes hand in hand with the fight against illegal employment, which is one of the key drivers of irregular migration.

Third, Belgium will strengthen its response to the **smuggling and trafficking of migrants**. We need to dismantle organised criminal groups. We need to break the business model.

Fourth, migration comes with certain rules and limits. Progress should urgently be made on **safe and dignified return schemes**, with the goal to provide for the sustainable reintegration in home communities.

This brings me to the fifth and final area of focus of the Belgian Action Plan. We need each other to make the system work. **Working together on the EU level** is an important factor.

But we also need to strengthen **global partnerships**. Not just by talking, but by taking actions to bring the GCM objectives into practice.

Today, I re-affirm the commitment that Belgium will continue its work on building a safe, orderly, and regular migration system.

I thank you.