

EF.DEL/57/05  
25 May 2005

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Permanent delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE

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REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DELEGATION OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF BELARUS, AT THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE  
OSCE ECONOMIC FORUM**

Prague, 25 May 2005

**Session I: Population Developments**

Mr. Chairman,

As a follow-up to the information presented by the keynote speakers, allow me to mention briefly a few details concerning the situation in Belarus with regard to migration as well as the measures being taken by the Government to manage migration processes effectively.

Since the 1990s, the Republic of Belarus has been an active participant in the migration processes taking place, which are an inherent feature of modern economic relations. The demographic situation in Belarus began to become more complicated during this period. It is characterized by steady and growing depopulation processes. Natural population growth is negative. It is predicted that by 2020 13.5 per cent of the total Belarusian population will be below working age, 59.2 per cent will be of working age and the proportion of the population above working age will exceed 27 per cent.

The after-effects of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant have had an extremely adverse effect on the health of the Belarusian population, especially children, and have led to a reduction in life expectancy and an increase in the death rate.

Given the current situation, immigration is becoming an important factor with a positive effect on demographic processes in the Republic of Belarus.

The level of foreign labour migration recorded in Belarus is not very high at the present time and does not have any notable effect on the country's labour market. For example, the number of migrant workers entering the Republic of Belarus to work and leaving the country in 2003 was insignificant — around 8,000 persons or approximately 0.2 per cent of the economically active population of Belarus. Unlike the situation in other countries, there are no quotas in Belarus for the use of foreign labour.

It goes without saying that what we have here are officially recorded levels of foreign labour migration. In general, the scale of labour migration, especially the number of Belarusian citizens leaving for abroad, is somewhat higher.

With a view to regulating migration processes in Belarus in a civilized manner, a State Migration Policy Concept has been developed. At the present time, the migration laws in effect in Belarus meet the relevant international standards.

The Government has also done a great deal in terms of regulating relations in this matter with other countries at an inter-State level.

In particular, a Treaty on Equal Rights of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation has been concluded between Belarus and Russia, in accordance with which citizens of the Republic of Belarus have the same right to work in the Russian Federation as citizens of the Russian Federation. In turn, Russian citizens have the same rights as Belarusians to work in the Republic of Belarus.

The Republic of Belarus has also concluded intergovernmental agreements on temporary employment with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Kazakhstan. We have also ratified the Agreement between the Governments of the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on Co-operation between the CIS Member States to Combat Illegal Migration.

Mr. Chairman,

The geographical location of the Republic of Belarus, its proximity to economically developed countries and the “porous nature” of its borders with countries of the former Soviet Union make illegal entry into Belarus particularly attractive for foreign citizens and stateless persons.

Most illegal migrants come to Belarus in order to travel on to other countries in Western and Northern Europe. They are mainly citizens of Asian countries, including those countries where international crime is rife and terrorist organizations are active.

In addition, some illegal migrants enter Belarus in order to engage in illegal activities, including trafficking in narcotic drugs and weapons.

In 2004, 1,086 illegal migrants were registered. In co-operation with border guards and State security agencies, the law-enforcement agencies arrested more than 20 groups of illegal migrants.

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that Belarus was not the ultimate goal of these migrants. Their intended final destination was somewhere in Western Europe. Wide-ranging measures of an organizational and practical nature are being taken in the Republic of Belarus to counter illegal migration of foreigners through its territory and to monitor the residence of foreigners in Belarus.

It is obvious that in this case Belarus is acting as a donor of security to others. The considerable financial expenditure involved places quite a burden on Belarus’s national budget. In the fight against illegal migration, we are counting on greater co-operation with the relevant international organizations, including the European Commission, and their active involvement in the financing of measures to put a stop to illegal migration on the territory of Belarus.

With a view to increasing the effectiveness of migration management processes at the international level, we consider one of the most urgent tasks to be the establishment of unified information systems on migration issues and the launch of appropriate databases with possibilities for exchanging information.

This is all the more relevant because now the situation is complicated by the fact that some of the countries bordering on Belarus have joined the European Union. As a result, we can expect a further increase in the activities of transnational criminal groups. We believe that we need to give thought here, in co-operation with our western partners and international organizations, to how this flow of illegal migrants can be stemmed in good time.

In that connection, I should like to give special mention to the principled and fair position taken by the International Organization for Migration in these matters.

We are also grateful to the Slovenian Chairmanship for increasing the attention paid to the problems of migration, placing this subject among its priorities.

We trust that the work in this important area will continue in the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.