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DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE
THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE ECONOMIC FORUM**

Prague, 23 May 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I should like to express our great appreciation for the enormous amount of work undertaken by the authorities of the Czech Republic, the Slovenian Chairmanship and the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities to prepare for this Forum and to make it a success.

The subject of the Thirteenth Meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum is of relevance to all participating States. For example, demographic issues are quite a serious problem in our country too. The Russian Government is currently implementing a series of measures to increase the birth rate and average life expectancy. These measures include reforming the health service and improving legislation in the area of maternity protection, child welfare and social assistance for needy citizens.

The processes of transborder labour migration are increasing in this period of globalization. Some several million foreigners, mainly from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, are legally working in Russia. They make up for the shortage of labour resources on Russia's internal market and, at the same time, make a notable contribution to solving problems of socio-economic development in their own countries. For example, these migrants transfer each year from Russia some 12 to 15 billion United States dollars in the form of wages and revenue from entrepreneurial activities to their home countries through official channels alone.

Unfortunately, our country, like many others, is encountering more and more illegal migration. In order to deal with this problem, we are computerizing the system for monitoring the entry and residency of foreign citizens and seeking the best ways to encourage individuals with an unclear legal status to "come out of the shadows", inter alia, through their legalization.

Migration issues deserve to be given constant attention by the OSCE. Migration flows between the Organization's participating States are increasing. This is also important for ensuring stable economic development, combating the "shadow" economy and corruption, and preventing inter-ethnic conflicts.

The subject of migration has one very important aspect: the need to guarantee the rights of migrants. In the majority of cases, we are talking about people who belong to a different ethnic group, culture and religion.

Russia is a multi-ethnic State, in which protection of the rights and interests of national minorities is one of the most important aspects of State policy. For example, in quite a number of republics and territories of the Russian Federation languages of national minorities are used as the official language along with Russian. In 9.9 per cent of schools in our country lessons are taught not in Russian but in the languages of the local population; in 16.4 per cent of schools these languages are taught as a subject.

As we examine the subject of integration of national minorities, we believe it necessary to draw your attention to the situation concerning the Russian-speaking population in Latvia and Estonia. Some 460,000 inhabitants of Latvia and 150,000 inhabitants of Estonia are discriminated against as “non-citizens” in their own countries. They are prohibited from, or at least face restrictions when, participating in elections, occupying posts within the organs of government or acquiring property. Unlike in the majority of other European countries, even in areas where the proportion of the Russian-speaking population is 50 per cent or more, the Russian language is not accorded any special legal status. The Russian-language education system is being systematically destroyed.

We feel that the OSCE ought to devise and implement real steps that would help to ensure the legal rights of the national minorities living in Latvia and Estonia.

We should like to take this opportunity to mention briefly the Russian Federation’s ideas regarding the future development of the OSCE economic dimension.

Our country is in favour of the economic dimension becoming an integral and tangible part of the OSCE’s comprehensive security concept. This is important because under the conditions of globalization the relevance of socio-economic and environmental security factors is increasing considerably and new threats of an economic and environmental nature are emerging, which require joint efforts on the part of OSCE participating States to eliminate or minimize them.

In our opinion, particular attention should be given to the implementation of the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension. The content of the second “basket” should be made more balanced and oriented towards concrete results in co-operation with other international organizations. The Russian proposals that a conference on energy security in the OSCE area be held and that transport problems be chosen as the main topic for the next OSCE Economic Forum remain valid.

In general, the OSCE’s activities in the economic dimension must become more flexible and be adapted to new risks and challenges.

There is a need to increase the overall effectiveness of the Economic Forum and to strengthen its ability to generate original ideas and practical proposals, which could then form the basis of the relevant decisions of the OSCE governing bodies.

In conclusion, we should like to express the hope that the Forum's work will be successful, the discussions fruitful and the informal consultations interesting and useful.

Thank you for your attention.