

17th Economic and Environmental Forum
Athens, 18th May 2009
EU Opening Statement

The European Union is very pleased to participate in the second part of the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

The theme of this forum covers many topics of major interest for the European Union and its Member States, and it connects very well with strategic external policies of the EU.

We are convinced that well-managed labour migration can represent not only one of the sources of economic and social prosperity not only in countries of destination, particularly when labour migration policies are implemented in full compliance with the labour market needs, reception capacities and priorities of countries of destination, but also a force for economic, cultural and social development in countries of origin. We believe that, by further promoting integration as well as by preventing and countering illegal migration, we could take better advantage of the positive potential of the migration process.

Madame Chair, during the last decade the European Union and its Member States have gradually established a comprehensive approach to migration policy as defined in the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum and the Global Approach to migration based on three principles: managing legal migration, tackling illegal migration and encouraging the synergies

between migration and development. Practically speaking, this translates to: 1) the development of partnerships with countries of origin and of transit; 2) a common European asylum system in accordance with Member States' obligations under international law; 3) fair treatment for third country nationals, aiming to give them comparable rights and obligations to those of nationals of the Member State in which they live; 4) a comprehensive approach to the management of migration flows.

As outlined during the first part of the EEF, the EU, with the adoption of a Global Approach to Migration, stressed the importance we attach to the development of partnerships with countries of origin and of transit.

In order to support the implementation and further development of the EU Global Approach to Migration in its Eastern and South-Eastern dimension, and the principles of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum a Ministerial conference was held on 27 - 28 April 2009 in Prague. The aim of the Conference was to elaborate a new set of conclusions and ministerial recommendations enabling the participating states to build migration partnerships.

The Ministerial Conference gathered 49 Countries of the Eurasian region and adopted a joint Declaration in which Ministers agreed to strengthen co-operation in migration management, to explore and develop agreed principles and elements for close migration partnerships following a comprehensive, balanced, pragmatic and operational approach, and respecting the rights and human dignity of migrants and their family members, as well as of refugees.

These partnerships will take different forms according to migration challenges, migratory routes and priorities of the partners. They will address the following objectives: to prevent and fight illegal migration,

including by taking action against criminal networks behind smuggling and trafficking in human beings, to promote readmission, voluntary return and sustainable reintegration, to address legal migration with a special emphasis on labour migration, to further promote the integration of legally residing migrants in their host societies, and to make migration and mobility positive forces for development.

Ministers also committed to addressing the challenges and opportunities of international migration and to integrating the elements of migration partnerships into national strategies, policies and actions, while preserving the comprehensive and balanced nature of the approach.

Madame Chair, the EU believes that the discussions we will have in days to come can be a useful step to the better understanding among participating States of the way forward to the voluntary implementation of the migration partnerships. The OSCE as a political forum for promoting dialogue and building bridges between policy-makers and experts of participating States and of the OSCE Partners for Co-operation, as well as between various other stakeholders, private sector, academia, and NGOs, could then serve this purpose.

Finally, we would like to thank Greece for hosting the second part of the EEF and for the warm welcome. We are also very grateful to the Greek Chairmanship who, together with the OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff, have done an excellent job in preparing the Forum. We look forward to interesting discussions in the days ahead.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA* and FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA

AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and ARMENIA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.