

**Mr. Tomáš Pojar, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic**

Dear Mr. Chairman,  
Dear Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests!

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to welcome you on behalf of the Government of the Czech Republic on the occasion of the sixteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum here in Prague. As the host country, the Czech Republic will do its utmost to make it a success.

At the outset, let me give my most cordial welcome to the lead OSCE representatives present here, to ministers of participating countries of the OSCE (especially to those from the far-off region of Central Asia), to representatives of international organizations and to other participants of this meeting as well.

This year's theme „Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area: Increasing security and protecting the environment“ is undoubtedly very up-to-date. The Economic and environmental forums are a very suitable platform for the dialogue on all problems concerning the security of the OSCE region including a possible threat caused by the degradation of environment. For this reason, it is necessary to utilize to maximum the advantage of the forthcoming proceedings for an open discussion and formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

In spite of the Czech Republic being a landlocked country, not having the sea and ports of its own, it participates considerably both in inland water and partly also in maritime transport of the OSCE states. In recent years the volume of water transportation is increasing and this trend is going to continue. Therefore, the Czech government puts a strong accent on the development of water transport.

Currently 4340 crew members of all professions are working on inland waterways ensuring the inland water transport in the territory of the Czech Republic and on the

waterways of the European Union. Further, the Maritime Office Register includes 1770 seafarers of different professional levels who sail both the seas of the OSCE region and the other seas of the world.

In the Czech Republic the inland waterway transport concentrates mainly on the bulk cargo transportation, carriage of construction materials and fuels. Transportation of these commodities by inland waterways also contributes to protection of the environment, economy of energy spent on transport and at the same time the safety of other transport branches is increased due to the reduction of their transport load.

With respect to the increasing movement of goods which considerably grew up after the Czech Republic has joined the European Union, it becomes necessary to ensure their smooth movement both in the territory of the Czech Republic and their transit to other European states. For this reason, it is necessary to make the inland water transportation in the territory of the Czech Republic more efficient.

It is possible to make the inland waterway transport more efficient in different ways, e.g. by increasing capacity of goods transported per traffic unit on condition that its safety does not decline and the environment is not harmed. I would like to express my hope that the financial resources our states put in the water transportation will increase in value by its higher quality, environment enhancement and higher safety in other transport branches not only at domestic level but also in the European Union and in the whole OSCE region as well.

I strongly recommend to intensify further the co-operation with the UN Economic Commission for Europe in implementation of the OSCE commitments in the field of economic and environmental dimension of security. Strengthening co-ordination and collaboration with the UNECE which keeps at disposition quality experts and experience is sure to manifest itself by a significant synergistic effect in the final outcome.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope that the sessions of the second part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Economic and environmental forum will largely contribute to solving of the questions specified by its subject matter. The process of mutual exchange of experience on this year topic launched by preparatory seminars should bring us at the end of our sessions closer to common understanding and approaches. I thank the Chairmanship and organizers of previous

debates for embracing their role extremely well. I also thank the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, OSCE Secretariat and its Prague Office for all the preparatory work done. My appreciation goes to the International Organizations present here today which have brought their individual inputs to the forthcoming debate.

I wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Prague.

Thank you for your attention!