

**STATEMENT
DELIVERED BY THE HEAD OF MIGRATION AGENCY
OF THE MINISTRY OF TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
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At the Fourth Session of the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
20 January, 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,

Today illegal migration represents a challenge for all the countries worldwide, including those considered as a sending country like Armenia. This is, firstly, due to the emerging of a pool of own nationals outside their countries of origin whose rights are impossible to protect because of their illegal status. Secondly, the deported and forcibly returned nationals bring with them a prominent diversity of problems that need to be addressed on the spot. In the case of Armenia, another reality comes to add to the general picture: the Armenian illegal migrants very often distort the good image and reputation built by our nationals over 5-6 generations residing in the destination countries.

This is why Armenia is so much interested in applying tools against this reality, *inter alia*, by entering into readmission agreements. Earlier, in 2000s, we just started to receive offers from the European States for signing of readmission agreements, however our position towards the issue has been pretty much alert. Our concern has been that the signing of such agreements will result in a mass return of our citizens along with the effects that may arise out of it. But there is a saying: “The devil is not so black as he is painted”. Why? I’ll tell you why! As a result of the intensive discussions of those years, we have recorded that the return of our nationals was, indeed, taking place notwithstanding the absence of such agreements. Simply, by entering into such agreements we lay a legal ground that foster the cooperation between the agencies concerned, define the authorized agencies of the Parties, return dates, document types as well as introduce clarity in the issues related to the accepting of the citizens from third countries, and so on... On the other hand, such agreements witness of the readiness of Armenia in tackling a very important and delicate outstanding issue like illegal migration in a civilized manner and on the background of cooperation.

Starting from 2003 Armenia has been actively engaged in the signing of readmission agreements. We now maintain contractual relations with 5 European States: which are Denmark, Switzerland, Lithuania, Germany and Bulgaria. Negotiations have been completed with Norway, Sweden, countries of Benelux and Poland, while respective negotiations are underway with Check Republic, Romania, Estonia, Cyprus and some CIS countries, such as Russia, Ukraine and Moldova.

I’d like to invite the attention of our participants to the following aspect: while Armenian remains unbiased and committed to its international obligations, we are always ready to launch negotiations around this important issue with the authorities of the States concerned.

Meanwhile, please note, that we have our specific approach related to the acceptance of citizens from third countries and of those without citizenship. The point is that the entry countries usually demand that the third country citizens and the stateless, who have entered the given country directly from the exit country or held a transit visa issued by the exit country, should be accepted back. Probably, such an approach is justified in case of the countries with a shared land border. Yet, in the case of Armenia the situation is completely different since our connection with potential “entry” countries is exceptionally by air, which renders impossible to cross the border without a transit permit granted by the “entry” state. Our authorities only grant a permission for transit if the permit from the entry state is available. This is why in such cases the Armenian side is always guided by the following principle – to accept back only those third country citizens or stateless who had a valid status to reside in Armenia or a valid entry permit at the moment when their illegal residing in entry country was revealed.

Mr. Chairman,

I will not be mistaken if I say that the readmission agreement itself cannot be considered as an efficient tool in combating the illegal migration. A set of other activities should be undertaken, amongst which the awareness campaigns have to be considered as a priority that will raise the awareness of the nationals in the countries of origin in the issues related to the to the destination countries, such as the entry and residence procedures as well as the labor and other conditions.

The following state of things should be considered here: generally, the illegal migration in the countries of origin stems from a legal migration and only afterwards it is transformed into an illegal shape. Being in lack of sufficient information people are very often deceived and become a victim in the hands of the “businessmen” who abuse the cherished delusion of such persons. For example, the social research conducted in Armenia has revealed that 58.7% of the population is unaware that a labor permit shall be required for taking up a job abroad. Hence, we view the implementation of such activities as an effective prevention on the eve of illegal migration, of which we have a proven record for the results achieved in Armenia.

The next important component in the general context of the combat against the illegal migration is the implementation of reintegration projects for the returned citizens, in the face of the fact that after their return, these persons are usually trying to flee back to the country from where they have been forced out. Which are the reasons? Well, the constraints in the labor markets of the exit countries resulting in the limited opportunities for finding a job; the lack of social project to support the returned, totally changed and completely strange for the returned social life aspects, lost social links, acceleration of the stressful condition related to the return... All these factors are weighty with implications for such persons not to feel themselves at home thereby urging them to find whatever ways to flee back. Here we come to deal with a phenomenon, which can be otherwise expressively named as illegal migration “recycling”, the prevention of which requires alteration to the readmission processes directly in the countries of origin through introduction of reintegration projects. I should say that we already have success stories related to the implementation of such projects.

Eventually, we consider the creation of opportunities for legal labor migration as an effective alternative to the illegal migration. Of course, we are well aware of the restrictions that are applied against foreign job seekers with the aim of protecting the domestic labor market. However, due to the demographic changes, development

dynamic in the specific fields of economy and lack of attractiveness of this or that type of works and specialization, a number of countries are compelled to lower the requirements allowing the penetration of foreigners into their job market.

We are convinced that the situation is compelling and demands a drastic action of starting, without a delay, negotiations between the countries traditionally engaged in import and export of labor force. Otherwise, we will pass the opportunity to the organizations that earn on migration processes and the majority of labor migrants will persistently appear in an illegal status.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to close my speech by presenting you one of our latest initiatives targeted towards our nationals that are willing to return, which I will put in a couple of words. Within the past 2-3 years there has been, not a massive, but a flow of people returning to Armenia. In our attempts to promote to the process and provide correct guidance to those willing to return, we have created a special web portal available at [www.backtoarmenia/am/com](http://www.backtoarmenia.am/com). It enables to browse for useful information on various subjects starting from education and healthcare systems in Armenia up to the military service related issues. In addition, the website enables our nationals abroad to directly address questions to the respective state authorities online. And last but not least, the system provides a possibility for direct online communication between the migrant and respective state official which aim is to seek immediate response to the questions of the migrant's concern.

We are hopeful that we will gain fruitful outcomes as a result of our new initiative, and it will contribute to the return of our nations to their home country.

Thank you for your attention.