

First Preparatory Conference for 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

16-17 October 2008, Prague

Opening Statement

Mr Ilkka Rentola, Co-ordinator for Migration Policy, MFA, Finland, OSCE Chairmanship

Minister Pojar,
Secretary General Skylakakis,
Mr Moderator,
Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship I would like to express my appreciation to the Government of Czech Republic for hosting this first Preparatory Conference for the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

I would also like to thank the incoming Greek Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat for preparing this meeting and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for making a very comprehensive background document that lists key migration policy issues to be discussed. It is our challenge during the process to identify most relevant issues that would be further studied and complemented.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With globalisation and demographic changes we are facing a new era of international mobility. The number of persons living outside their country of birth has been growing and will grow. In Europe population is aging and there is a growing imbalance of demand and supply of labour. This is also the case in the OSCE region.

In a time of global networks and internet people can easily get access to information on labour market opportunities. The question is how disciplined and managed the movement of people will be and are we able to minimize the negative effects of migration.

This requires partnerships and cooperation among the governments. The cooperation should be for benefit of the countries of origin, transit and destination but we should not forget the migrants themselves that often are in vulnerable situations.

A major change in migration policy thinking has taken place, namely the shift from primarily reducing migratory pressure to a more balanced approach guided by better understanding of all aspects of migratory flows, making migration and mobility positive forces for development and giving greater consideration to the positive impact of migration also to the economic development.

This new policy direction has had its implications also to national migration policies for example Finland adopted in 2006 a Governments Migration Policy programme with a stronger emphasis on labour migration and active recruitment.

In the OSCE Chairmanship programme Finland has emphasised continuity, coherence and coordination. These concepts are very important also in the context of migration. Continuity in a sense that the process should be based on what has been achieved up to now and that the future Chairmanships would follow-up and be committed, especially in terms of implementation of the political commitments agreed.

With regard to coherence of the OSCE approach and actions, it is important not to perceive migration only as an economic issue but as a cross-cutting one that has a link to the other dimensions of the OSCE. And with regard to coordination, we, of course, mean both internal, within the organization and the participating States, and external, with other relevant international organizations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

OSCE can serve as an excellent and unique forum for extending the migration dialogue among the governments and the civil society and we are looking forward to participating in the process.

Let me use this opportunity for wishing good luck for Greece for their challenging task as the incoming Chairmanship and express our willingness to give our full support.

Thank you.