



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The 18th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum – Part II

"Promoting good governance at border crossings, improving the security of land transportation and facilitating international transport by road and rail in the OSCE region"

Prague, 24-26 May 2010

Welcoming Remarks by

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Dear Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Allow me to join the previous speakers in warmly welcoming you all to the second and concluding part of the 18th Economic and Environmental Forum. I would also like to express my most sincere thanks to our Czech hosts and to the Kazakh Chairmanship for their efforts in making this meeting possible.

The two preparatory Conferences in Astana and Minsk, as well as the first part of the Forum in Vienna, laid a solid foundation for our work here in Prague and helped us define some key priorities. In this regard, my Office prepared a Food-for-Thought Paper on Follow-up Ideas (EEF.GAL/6/10) which should support our debates and channel them towards concrete and viable recommendations for the OSCE.

In the course of the Forum process we have focused on road and rail transport facilitation, on transport security, and on environmentally sustainable transport. We have addressed these issues based on the positive assumption that transport brings people and businesses together, that it is the main vehicle through which customers are provided with their goods and services and that it ultimately helps foster co-operation between regions and countries.

However, the global financial and economic crisis has struck many of our countries. Over 2009 for instance, GDP in the OECD area fell by 3.4%. The crisis has also had a major negative impact on the transport sector which provides oxygen to our trade and thus stimulates economic recovery. For example, according to statistics from the International Transport Forum, world container traffic fell as much as 26% last year.

On top of this the international land transportation in many parts of the OSCE region is still hindered by cumbersome border crossings. According to a recent study carried out by the OECD, the costs of poor border procedures could come up to 15% of the total transaction value of global trade. In the global supply chain, border crossings often tend to be major bottlenecks, despite the fact that increasing their efficiency can be done without major investments.

That is why the choice of the theme for this year's Economic and Environmental Forum has been a good and very timely one. Maximising our region's transport and transit potential, and creating more efficient and secure border crossings along major transport routes can help our economies to overcome the consequences of the crisis. It is here that the OSCE is well placed to contribute, by raising awareness and providing capacity-building. The benefits of an improved transit situation between Asia and Europe are clear, facilitated and more secure transportation would lead to higher volumes of trade and revenue collection and to reduced opportunities for smuggling and corruption.

The Forum should focus on the role of the OSCE and the areas where it can bring its added value. I am confident that this Forum meeting will finally allow us to define clearly the follow up actions and to elaborate policy recommendations.

In this regard, as always, I count very much on the invaluable input our Economic and Environmental Officers from the field presences could provide. I encourage them to actively engage in the debate throughout the meeting and in particular in the concluding session on Wednesday. I also count very much on the active involvement of all participants. I wish us all a rewarding and valuable dialogue and look forward to vivid discussion over the next two days.

Thank you for your attention.