

Opening speech by
Mr. Alexandros Tsiatsiamis
Special Secretary for the Development
of International Programs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece
OSCE Chairmanship



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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Greek OSCE Chairmanship for 2009, it is my personal great pleasure to welcome you all to this Second Preparatory Conference of the 17th Economic and Environmental Forum on “Migration management and its linkages with economic, social and environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security in the OSCE region”.

The Greek Chairmanship is convinced that the topic of this year’s Economic and Environmental Forum does not only stem from and rely on the mandate given to the OSCE, but also proves to be essential for the future course of the OSCE’s second dimension. Indeed, the Forum addresses a number of topical and burning issues, while concurrently building on outcomes and conclusions drawn in previous OSCE Forums.

On behalf of the Greek Chairmanship I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the successful conduct of the first part of the 17th Forum, which was held earlier this year in Vienna. The first segment of the Forum concentrated on improving migration governance and focused on promoting legal migration channels and reducing illegal migration through a combination of comprehensive policy instruments and control mechanisms. The benefits of legal migration and the negative impact of illegal migration were analyzed. The main challenges in effective migration management across the OSCE region were reviewed. By drawing from numerous examples and experiences from participating States and international experts it became clear that effective migration management requires strong policies and legislative and institutional frameworks to facilitate legal migration and to provide a tough stance against illegal migration and other related criminal activities. As we experienced, attention also needs to be given to the need for gender sensitivity in migration management.

The discussions during the Forum process so far did not leave a doubt on the necessity to promote synergy between countries of destination, transit and origin, in order to develop more flexible, coherent and comprehensive migration management policies. Stressed numerous times, it is of utmost importance for OSCE participating States to mitigate the negative aspects, but to also not forget the benefits of migration and the advantages that are associated with it. Among key recommendations we learned about the significance of data

collection, processing and harmonization, the need to design migration programs as well as the importance to understand and follow the effects of remittances on development.

With this in mind, let us now continue the 17th Forum process with this second preparatory conference. After discussing the frameworks of migration management, the next step foresees addressing another key element of this complex phenomenon. In today's era of unprecedented human mobility the need for a comprehensive view on the impact of migration on the economy, social life and the environment for countries of origin, transit and destination, is urgent. Properly managed migration can not only benefit migrants, but also promote economic prosperity and development in the OSCE region. Moreover, it is closely linked with social policies and impacts on the environment. Despite the strong linkages of these issues, most countries have been elaborating on these public policies separately. There is a clear need for a more coherent implementation of economic, social and environmental policies in the OSCE region.

In this regard let me draw your attention to two major world-spanning and key influencing factors: first, the current global financial crisis, and second, the phenomena of climate change. The Greek Chairmanship strongly urges OSCE participating States to not only to be aware of their security impacts but also to use fora such as this Conference to include such considerations into jointly elaborated recommendations for future works in the area of migration.

Although the depth and extent of the global financial crisis cannot be fully predicted at this stage and it affects OSCE participating States on different levels and in different intensities, it is nearly certain that the crisis is expected to lead to a considerable downswing in the global economy. Among the group of most aggrieved victims of deteriorating economies are migrant workers. They face exacerbated problems, such as higher risk of job losses, reduction in wages and they are likely forced to return to countries of origin. Some other consequences might be the decline in remittances flows and the adoption of more restrictive immigration policies. However, let us not lose sight of the positive forces of migration. Adequately regulated migration flows can conceivably contribute to an easing of tense economic situations.

Similarly, global climate change and deteriorating environmental condition stand in direct connection with migration patterns. The importance to address these cross-cutting topics within the framework of the OSCE becomes clear when considering the consequences of environmental degradation and decreases of productivity. Environmental degradation does not only cause the movement of people, but migration flows also effects surrounding ecosystems. Having in mind the mandate of the OSCE we shall particularly be aware of the security implications of this development.

Excellencies,
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During this Second Preparatory Conference we will build upon Prague's and Vienna's conclusions and recommendations and will emphasize on the need to strengthen the linkages between migration and key public policies so as to ensure stability and security in the OSCE region. We aim at discussing long-term economic policies that encourage good governance, attract investment and ameliorate the business environment. In this context we will also touch upon issues such as the re-integration of returning migrants into domestic markets, Diaspora involvement in the economic development as well as ways and means for effective co-operations between destination and origin countries through co-development programmes.

As for the linkage of migration with social policy issues the Greek Chairmanship is looking forward to discussing mechanisms to protect and promote the rights of migrant and their social empowerment. The session dedicated to this topic will also address the social costs of migration, social welfare and social security. In that regard, we should emphasize the need for co-operation between governments and social partners, nationally as well as bilaterally and at the regional level.

The debate on the interrelations between environment and migration and the effects on the security and stability for the OSCE region is expected to raise awareness on the potential implications of environmentally induced migration and should also lead to the elaboration of possible responses and actions.

The OSCE's unique setting allows for an open platform for dialogue and co-operation. It facilitates the exchange of best practices and expertise. Moreover, it provides a political podium on comprehensive security issues that brings together the governments of the OSCE participating States, the Asian and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation as well as representatives of regional and national social partners, relevant non-governmental and international organizations. This wide participatory approach deepens and enriches the discussions.

The main objective of the Conference is to formulate concrete recommendations for the OSCE on how to address the aforementioned issues, in particular under the influence of the current economic crisis and given the implications of the global climate change.

We believe that now is the time for proving the core assets and qualities of our Organisation: in-depths co-operation among its participating States and its partners, up-to date and highly substantial discussion and the elaboration of concrete and long-term political recommendations.

Our objectives for this coming two days are ambitious, and set as high as the Chairmanship's expectations for this preparatory conference.

Yet, as the Greek philosopher Aristotle formulated already about 2400 years ago:

“First, have a definite, clear practical ideal; a goal, an objective. Second, have the necessary means to achieve your ends: wisdom, materials, and methods. Third, adjust all your means to that end.”

To that effect, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Greek Chairmanship is very much encouraged by the strong interest of all the participants meeting here in Tirana and in the course of the Forum process, and confident that the active co-operation of OSCE participating States and our collaboration with experts from other international organizations contribute to the succeeding of our aim.

Let me, on this point, express my warm thanks and appreciation to all the speakers as well as moderators, commentators and rapporteurs who have accepted our invitation to the Forum. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Mr. Svilanovic, and his Office for their excellent work, their dedication and their support in organizing this Forum. I also wish to deliver a special thank to the Government of Albania for taking the initiative to host this Conference.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing and referring back to Aristotle, I wish us all the wisdom necessary to further successfully elaborate on this year's theme of the Forum. I am looking forward to seeing the development of the OSCE's methods in addressing migration management and its linkages with economic, social and environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security in the OSCE region.

Thank you for your attention.