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**STATEMENT BY MR. DAVIT HAKOBYAN,
DEPUTY HEAD OF THE MIGRATION AGENCY AT THE
MINISTRY OF TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, AT PART II OF THE 17TH MEETING OF
THE OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

Athens, 18 to 20 May 2009

**“Migration management and its linkages with economic, social and
environmental policies to the benefit of stability and security in the
OSCE region”**

Session IV: Enhancing the development impact of migration

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished colleagues,

I should like to welcome the participants in the 17th meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum and hope that we shall all work fruitfully together.

The organization of a meeting at such a high level is in itself evidence of the fact that the management of migration processes has long since progressed beyond the limits of national or even bilateral and regional co-operation, and today has truly become a global problem.

Migration management is a matter of strategic importance for Armenia because once it became independent, in addition to other problems, our country was forced to counter the challenges posed by population movements on an unprecedented scale, which involved virtually the entire spectrum of migration flows.

In spite of the serious problems caused by large-scale migration flows, the link between migration and development can clearly be seen in the case of Armenia.

Over the last 20 years, around one million persons or one third of the population have left Armenia. Funds transferred by our compatriots living abroad amount to around two billion dollars per year, which accounts for around 20 per cent of the Republic's gross domestic product. In spite of the fact that a reduction in the volume of transfers has been observed since the end of last year as a result of the global financial and economic crisis, these transfers nevertheless still play an important role in the country's development.

It is generally recognized that the impact of migration on development processes is directly linked to money transfers being turned into a source of investment in the economy.

Research has shown that in Armenia 80 to 85 per cent of the transfers are used directly for the family's needs, while the remainder is saved indefinitely for varying reasons. These sums, amounting to 400 million dollars per year, are usually held in private households, hidden away in a money-box. The idea of using these funds as a source of investment in the economy is therefore becoming a pressing issue. If the banks were able to develop and offer new financial products based on money transfers, these sums would be incorporated into the banking system, and, in addition, even more money transfers could be expected from abroad.

Migrants' savings, regardless of whether they are kept abroad or in Armenia, represent a fairly hefty sum, which with the appropriate marketing, incentives, guarantees and regulation could be used as potential investments.

In this connection, we are very keen to establish dialogue with other countries and international organizations, especially as a number of European Union countries have successful migration-development programmes.

In terms of increasing the influence of transfers on the development of the countries of origin, we believe that joint measures carried out by the host nations and the countries of origin could play an important role. Both bilateral and multilateral agreements could serve as a legal basis for these measures. In particular, the host nations and countries of origin could pool their efforts to carry out the following measures:

- Inform the public about the benefits both for the host nation and the country of origin of programmes to direct money earned by migrants towards the development of their country of origin;
- Encourage the creation of migrants' associations to develop their country of origin, help to strengthen these associations and encourage migrants to participate in them;
- Assist programmes to transform migrants' savings into investments, particularly through the joint financing of local development programmes;
- Encourage high-calibre specialists from the diaspora to play an active part in the development of their country of origin.

Just as important is the role that can be played by the development of services to provide migrants with information to promote their entrepreneurial involvement in their country of origin.

In terms of migration and development, we also attach importance to helping migrants return to Armenia. We fully agree with the view that the principal aim of a migration policy should be to provide any individual with the opportunity to live in and shape their country. Reintegration programmes for returning citizens represent an important aspect of the migration process.

Armenia has already had some success in carrying out these programmes with various European countries. For example, together with the Federal Office for Migration and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, a programme has been implemented to assist the reintegration of our citizens returning to Armenia from Switzerland. The programme involved 24 families, nine of whom were given microcredits. Similar projects are currently being carried out in co-operation with the National Agency for the Reception of Foreigners and Migration under the auspices of the French Government and with the Armenian Association for Social Assistance in France, and also with the Belgian Government. Under these programmes, more than 150 citizens who have returned to Armenia have already received microcredits as well as social, medical, consultative and other forms of assistance.

We are interested in expanding the geographical scope of this co-operation.

Distinguished colleagues,

Today the financial and economic crisis is having an impact on the migration situation in our region and throughout the world.

As a country providing migrant workers, Armenia currently finds itself in a situation where, it is difficult for seasonal migrant workers to find work outside the country and, at the same time, a movement in the opposite direction is very likely to begin, with some long-term migrant workers also returning home.

With a view to providing objective and complete information to our compatriots living abroad and wishing to return home to Armenia, we have devised and introduced an electronic information system that enables all persons wishing to return to Armenia to connect via the Internet directly with the relevant Armenian government agencies and receive answers to any questions that might be worrying them.

The system offers four levels of information.

Level I provides information on the laws governing various aspects of life in Armenia and answers questions.

Level II provides information in a more popular format in the form of frequently asked questions.

Level III allows the system administrator (the Migration Agency) to pass on specific questions on to the relevant government bodies involved in the network.

Level IV offers direct contact online with the relevant government officials.

During the few months that this site has been in operation, several thousand people have already visited it each month. More than 300 persons have contacted the Agency with specific questions.

You can learn more about this system by visiting the website at www.backtoarmenia.am or www.backtoarmenia.com.

In conclusion, I should like to inform the distinguished participants in this Forum that work has been under way in our country over the last two years to reform the administrative management of the migration system. We are seeking optimum solutions that will bring the State migration management system more in line with the best models in the world. In this context, I should like to thank all the international organizations and various countries that have provided us with help and I very much hope that this co-operation will continue.

Thank you for your attention.