



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

First Preparatory Conference to the 18th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Astana, 12-13 October 2009

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

Welcoming Remarks by

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference in Astana is the first major step in preparing the Economic and Environmental Forum of 2010, under the Chairmanship of Kazakhstan.

I am pleased to see around the table government officials and experts from the OSCE participating States, representatives of key international and regional organizations, civil society representatives, business people and academics. The OSCE has always valued the interaction between various stakeholders and I am looking forward to the presentations and debates over the next two days.

I take this wide and high level participation in this meeting as a sign of interest and confidence in what the OSCE has to offer in the economic and environmental dimension and in particular in the field of transport and border crossing facilitation.

The main topics we are going to debate today and tomorrow are well established on the OSCE agenda. They are reflected in the Maastricht Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension (2003), the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept, the Ministerial Council (MC) Decision No. 11/06 on Future Transport Dialogue in the OSCE and the Ministerial Council Decision No. 9/08 on Follow-up to the 16th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

The Decision on Future Transport Dialogue in the OSCE gave our Organization, and my Office, an important and far reaching mandate. In the past years, together with partners – and here I want to mention our excellent cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - and with the support of the participating States, we did our utmost to fulfil this mandate. A Background Paper (SEC.GAL/144/09) highlighting our activities linked to the next year's Forum theme was circulated recently in Vienna and is also available here. This is, I believe, a solid foundation on which we can build further.

At this point I also want to praise the important contribution the OSCE field presences have made and the invaluable assistance they provided to their host countries in addressing transport and border crossing related issues. I am pleased to welcome the OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers present here and thank them for all their efforts.

I am particularly pleased to note the high level of participation from the Central Asian participating States. The fact that so many of you found it useful to attend this meeting shows indeed that there is a need to address the issues at stake. Last week, in Washington, I attended a Private-Public Sector Conference on Central Asia - Silk Road Trade and Investment, organized by the US Chamber of Commerce, and attended by Ministers of Economy and Trade from Central Asian countries. The ministers reaffirmed their commitments to act towards more effective transport, trade and cross-border facilitation across the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today and tomorrow we will focus on some key building blocks of the Forum's theme. We will discuss, among others, transit transportation and the challenges of landlocked developing countries, combating trafficking in weapons, drugs and human beings at border-crossing points, streamlining customs and border regulations. The aim of our discussion should also be to identify recommendations and priorities for the first part of the 18th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, to take place on 1-2 February in Vienna.

Development and economic growth are among the highest priorities for all our countries, but development and growth rely on trade, and trade needs cross-border transportation that is efficient and secure. Transportation is thus the basis for economic

development and represents one of the fundamental cross-sectoral communication channels. Still, physical as well as non-physical barriers to cross-border trade keep on hampering sustainable regional or sub-regional economic development.

This brings us to the OSCE role in this regard. I do believe the OSCE is capable of playing the role of a facilitator, a political catalyst offering a platform for dialogue and cooperation among international actors as well as among its participating States. The OSCE has also proved instrumental in promoting the exchange of experiences and in delivering training and capacity building activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As mentioned earlier, our goal at this Conference is to prepare the political deliberations of the Vienna Forum at the beginning of February. So we want to listen closely and carefully to what you, distinguished participants, will tell us about your experiences, your policies, your views, your ideas, your priorities and your proposals.

Before concluding, I would like to thank all those who greatly contributed to the preparations for this Conference – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh Delegation in Vienna (Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov), the OSCE Centre in Astana (Ambassador Alexandre Keltchewsky) and the staff of my Office.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Greek OSCE Chairmanship for its leadership of the OSCE this year, a task which they are accomplishing with diligence and success. We are all looking forward to a successful Ministerial Council in Athens.

Both myself and my colleagues are working closely with the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE along the 18th Economic and Environmental Forum process. We have already established a very good cooperation and this Astana Conference is a first proof of this.

Thank you.