

**The 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
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Session I: Managing migration in a changing global environment
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**The impact of the global economic crisis on migration trends
and migration management: the case of the CIS area**

Dear Forum participants!
Ladies and gentlemen!

The global economic crisis has dramatically increased the relevance of issues offered by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe as the theme of the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. It is obvious that the current global crisis is setting a new thinking about the role of migration in development, the necessity of more flexible mechanisms of migration management, and the role of governments in this management.

For the CIS area these problems seem to be of particular acuteness as the crisis in this region appears deeper than in other OSCE member states. This can be explained by a number of reasons.

First, the CIS area includes many source countries, for which participation in international migration as labour suppliers and return remittances flows have become an essential source of livelihood for a substantial part of population. In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Moldova every third household has at least one member working in another country, mainly Russia. Meanwhile, in the fourth quarter of 2008 compared to the third quarter migrants' remittances from Russia to other CIS states declined by 25%. This was not the result of seasonal outflow of labour migrants but direct result of the crisis: declining industries, frozen construction projects where migrants are concentrated, arrears in wage payments, and lay-offs. In the first quarter of 2009 the downward tendency in the scale of remittances continued that resulted in worsening standards of life for population in origin countries.

Second, economic recession in Russia that was urged by the global crisis and enforced by the structural imbalance of the Russian economy, was followed by cut down of investment projects in construction and other industries and reduced size of the Russian labour market. In turn, this situation resulted in lay-offs and unemployment growth, both among Russian and foreign workers. Unemployment in Russia increased by 30% during the last half a year and reached about 9% of labour force by May 2009. The estimated outflow of migrant-workers from Russia in late 2008 is over 1 million.

Third, the CIS area is a closely interrelated space where the post-Soviet countries are linked by historical, economic, social, cultural, and political factors. Due to this reason disturbance of social stability in certain countries can provoke general instability in the region. This fact makes the governments of the CIS member states persistently seek for common compromise solutions in the field of migration management in order to minimize the costs of the crisis.

Fourth, even before the crisis the CIS area was characterized by wide spread irregular migration, to be more exact, unregistered employment of migrants. Reduction of the number of official jobs because of the crisis can push job-seekers to agree to non-official forms of employment, deliberately waiving their social and labour rights. It is a well known fact that migrant workers are usually more flexible in their social demands, so they are the first in such a shift of the labour market towards informal employment schemes. As a result, the legalization process that was started in 2007 in Russia with a migration reform can make a reverse and numbers of unprotected and socially vulnerable irregular migrants can grow up.

In this context two questions arise.

The first question is: How serious are the stability and security threats associated with the current deep economic recession and the relating change in the migration situation in the CIS area?

The above-mentioned figures and facts are shaping an answer to this question. For many countries in the region reduced employment opportunities and despairing decrease in standard of living of the population mean a threat of social upheaval that can put these countries on the verge of humane disaster.

Besides, the crisis is fraught with increased risk of exploitation and coercion for migrants. Labour migrants are doubly vulnerable for violations both from the side of employers and those locals who would vent their discontent with the economic hardship on somebody.

The second question is: What is to be done? In other words, how could the negative effects of the economic crisis on international migration and development be alleviated by means of national migration policies and intergovernmental efforts?

In search of an answer to the second question the most important is: (1) to understand what is going on and (2) to have the long-term outlook.

(1) In order to understand what is going on it is essential to monitor and analyze the changing economic and migration situation, to conduct the studies that are dramatically scanty in the CIS area, create new platforms for inter-ministerial and inter-state dialogues, actively counteract xenophobia and discrimination in all their forms.

In this context, international organizations can provide and do provide support and assistance. The International Organization for Migration initiated the round table discussion on peculiarities and opportunities of migration policies during the economic crisis that was held in Moscow in February 2009. This discussion resulted in an analytical report on 'Migration Policy at the Time of Economic Downturn: Short-term Reality and Long-term Strategy' that I was honoured to write. The International Labour Organization has conducted extremely resultant studies of labour migration trends and consequences in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2008. Valuable research initiatives come also from the OSCE as we can see from the distributed list of the Follow-up Activities to be developed in the OSCE area including projects focusing on the CIS region.

(2) The second part of the answer to the above question is to hold on the priority of the long-term outlook in the migration policy. Understanding international labour migration as the permanent structural factor of development of both sending and receiving countries (that is the approach we see in the documents proposed for discussion at this Forum) makes a basement for cooperation between countries participating in international migration flows and for generating the mutually acceptable, generally humane and partially compromise solutions.

The CIS area gives good example of how migration issues are inserted in the agenda of inter-government regional organizations acting in the post-Soviet space. I will mention the most recent examples only. The *Council of Migration Principle Bodies' Heads of the CIS Participating States* acts within the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) since mid-2007. A couple of days ago, on 14-15 May 2009, the meeting of the Council took place in Kazan. It was the fifth meeting of the Council during 1.5 years of its existence. A year ago the *Council on Migration Policies* was founded under the Integration

Committee of the Organization for Eurasian Economic Co-operation (EurAsEC).

It will not be an exaggeration to say that regional organizations in the CIS area are very active in inter-government activities aimed at improvement and harmonization of migration policies and entering it in the general context of economic, social and political cooperation. The good examples are: the *CIS Concept on Legal Status of Migrant Workers and their Family Members* and the *EurAsEC Concept of Concerted Social Policy* (adopted in 2007) that includes migrant workers' social rights guarantees.

Thus, when discussing migration management issues at the present Forum, when the situation is seriously complicated by the current global crisis, it is nevertheless very important to have a common understanding that open inter-government dialogue and co-operation in the field of migration management – rather than protectionism – is the most reasonable way to alleviate the migration-related negative effects of the crisis.

Thank you for your attention!