

**The Thirteenth Meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum  
May 23 – 27, 2005**

**“Demographic Trends, Migration and Integrating Persons belonging to National Minorities: Ensuring Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE Area”**

**Welcoming remarks by the representative of the Government of the Czech Republic,  
H.E. Mr. Pavel Svoboda, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**Dear Chairperson of the Economic Forum,  
Dear Secretary-General,  
Dear Commissioner Špidla,  
Dear Executive Secretary Madame Schmögnerová,  
Dear Director-General McKinley,  
Dear Participants, Distinguished Guests, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!**

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to welcome you on behalf of the Government of the Czech Republic on the occasion of the Thirteenth OSCE Economic Forum meeting here in Prague. As the host country, the Czech Republic will do its utmost to make it a success.

Before approaching the subject matter of this forum, I would like to say a few words on the OSCE in general. The OSCE is no exception among international organizations in adapting and reforming its activities and structures to reflect present strategic environment. This process will no doubt cover also its economic and environmental dimension. We are confident that discussions on needed changes in the economic and environmental dimension will profit from conclusions and recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons. The Czech Republic welcomes the recent adoption of the unified budget for 2005 that finally put the functioning of the organization on the sound financial footing. We hope for an agreement on the scale of contributions to be reached as soon as possible in order to ensure an effective functioning of the OSCE in the years to come.

The subject of this year's Economic Forum “Demographic Trends, Migration and Integrating Persons belonging to National Minorities: (and thus) Ensuring Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE area” is highly topical for today's Europe. The population of a big part of Europe is growing old which, on one side, reflects overall positive trends in improvement of living standards but which, on the other side, brings about a lack of qualified personnel in given professions and financial disequilibrium of pension systems. Moreover, disparities in economic development within the so-called bigger Europe give birth to structural unemployment together with a heavy burden on social networks. We have gathered here to tackle these two sides of one coin.

In line with the EU common foreign policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Czech Republic recognizes the need to support other countries in the area of economic development and prevention of illegal migration flows. As the overall situation evolves, “countries of origin” may become “transit” or even “countries of destination”. With regard to

the recent trends, it is inevitable for all of us to meet the challenges of migration, namely to reduce negative consequences of illegal migration and, at the same time, to allow for legal economic migration under given conditions according to the law. Both require effective international cooperation, at least between the countries of origin and destination.

Demographic trends in Europe call for opening of the labour market for qualified labour force from abroad. This should be accompanied by integration and regularization of the status of residence of those foreigners already staying on the EU territory. Experience of some European countries in this field may help other countries to acquire that practice, to follow good examples and to implement workable solutions.

The process of mutual exchange of experience on this year topic launched by three preparatory seminars should bring us at the end of the week closer to common understanding and approaches. I thank the Chairmanship and organizers of previous debates for embracing their role extremely well. I also thank the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, OSCE Secretariat and its Prague Office for all the preparatory work done. My appreciation goes to the International Organizations present here today which have brought their individual inputs to this week's debate. Let's turn it fruitful and substantiate its outcome in favour of all concerned!

I wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Prague.

Thank you for your attention!

*Check against delivery!*