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Thirteenth OSCE Economic Forum
“Demographic Trends, Migration and Integrating Persons belonging to National Minorities, within the Context of Ensuring Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE Area”
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Statement by H.E.
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I would like once again to congratulate the Slovenian Chairmanship for choosing the issue of migration and integration as one of this year’s priorities for the work of the OSCE. As there is a strong link between demographic trends - migration and integration on one hand and human rights, economic development and security on the other - the OSCE with its comprehensive approach to security is well suited to deal with this subject.

The sensitivity to changes in demographic, political and economic conditions is an important feature of migration. This is particularly visible during times of deep socio-economic transformations, profound economic reforms and geopolitical changes. These are the times we have been living in for the last 15 years. It is worth recalling that the OSCE has been regarded as an excellent instrument for the management of change. It is my belief that the Organization can still be used as such an instrument.

The countries are often confronted with the dilemma created by human rights and economic demands on one hand and political and security pressures on the other. This is also true with regard to migration and integration. Uncontrolled large scale migratory flows may be a source of instability or conflict. It also may result in reshaping ethnic or social structure and market conditions. That concerns all continents and countries.

However, well managed migration can have a number of positive effects on the economy of countries of destination, in particular on the background of declining demographic trends. Challenges related to those processes need adequate response and require from international organizations timely preparations and decisions.

The relationship between migration and security has become increasingly important and visible for policy makers after September 11, 2001. Migration policy may constitute an important instrument to counteract international terrorism and transnational crimes. A number of measures are being undertaken by governments in that respect, for instance enhanced border control, tighter internal migration controls or increased collection and exchange of data.

The issue of integration of an immigrant population is important from the point of view of security. Success of such integration into the host country community and local labour market may result in less promising recruitment ground for criminal and terrorist networks. It is therefore crucial to pursue programs aimed at education of societies, promotion of tolerance, combating xenophobia and discrimination, thus avoiding alienation of migrant groups.

The experience of traditional immigration countries shows that the immigration policy of the receiving country at the early stage of immigration is a decisive factor that determines character of an ethnic group. Policy that favors illegal stay or work may contribute to forming gray sphere of migration and lead to social marginalization and exclusion. The responsibility for the success of integration policy lies on both sides – migrants and hosting states. It is a state role to provide minorities with opportunities for proper education and facilitating their participation in political, economic and cultural life, in particular on the local level. It is also up to minorities to use opportunities given to them by the host state. Active involvement of non-governmental organizations and media in programs directed at training, awareness raising and information-sharing can be of special importance here.

Poland is a country of a relatively favorable age structure of population and the negative demographic and socio-economic phenomena related to aging process of society are expected to happen around 2020. Due to high unemployment Poland is still considered as country of emigration, although the EU membership proved mass westward emigration of Poles unlikely. After 1 May 2004 no flood of emigrants from 10 new members of the EU had been registered. However, Polish migration policy faces various challenges, such as the need to prevent the outflow of specialists sought in Western European countries.

It should also be noted that in our close neighborhood there are countries, which have significant migratory potential. Poland becomes with time more and more attractive country to immigrants coming from various countries around the globe. Moreover, Central Europe has become one of the major transit region for hundreds of thousands people. This is a major challenge for internal security systems of countries, especially since the migrant transit stay period lasts not days, but often weeks, months or even years.

A concise report concerning Polish migration situation and policy, containing basic statistical data will be distributed to all participants. A short information on Polish integration policy, especially regarding education will be also presented.

As to integration policy, the leading role is given to the Minister for Social Policy. The Minister coordinates also an inter-ministerial task force for social integration of foreigners', which serves the Prime Minister as support-advisory body.

In the field of integration policy Poland pays particular attention to education. Polish system assures and facilitates persons belonging to national minorities learning of their mother tongue and provides them easy accessible opportunities to learn polish language. The education for national and ethnic minorities is an integral part of polish educational system. A key role in choosing the path of education for the child is attributed to its parents.

A number of constructive ideas and suggestions concerning the possible OSCE role in migration and integration matters have been already formulated during discussions at the Preparatory Seminars to the Forum and Human Dimension Seminar which took place ten days ago in Warsaw. It seems that basic problems related to those issues have been identified and that the OSCE and partner organizations possess considerable expertise on how to deal with these problems. This Forum will succeed if, in the course of our discussion, it will be possible to set the priorities and practical tasks for the Organization's work in the area of migration and integration. We should aim at achieving synergy of action between different international organizations, as well as between the OSCE institutions and structures, in particular ODIHR, High Commissioner on National Minorities, Coordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and field missions.

It is also worth mentioning that in the Action Plan adopted week ago at the Council of Europe Summit, the European Heads of States and Governments stressed the importance of population movements within Europe and from other continents to Europe. Management of this migration was recognized as a major challenge to 21st-century Europe. It is a task for all of us to work out adequate response to this challenge.

Concluding, I would like to thank Mr. Świącicki and his staff for preparation of this meeting and the Czech Government for the hospitality.