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United States Mission to the OSCE



Session 4: Migration Management

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Moderator,

The history of the OSCE region is the story of people on the move. Last year, the International Labour Office reported on OSCE implementation of commitments related to migration at the 17th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. In that report we learned that as of 2005 the countries of the OSCE were home to over 115 million international migrants, making migration a critically important issue for the OSCE participating States to address. The economic, social, and security impacts – both positive and negative – for origin, transit, and destination states cannot be underestimated. And the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security means that during this review conference, migration should be a topic that is discussed in all three dimensions.

As the OSCE participating State with the largest immigrant population, and as a country built by immigrants, the United States continually works to balance the need to secure borders with the desire to embrace opportunities made possible by migration. But we are certainly not the only OSCE country working on appropriate migration policies.

As participating States, our commitments to provide an orderly system of migration and to provide for the protection of personal and social welfare of migrants date back to the Helsinki Final Act. Most recently at the Ministerial Council meeting in Athens we pledged to “provide a broad regional platform for dialogue on migration and security issues, both among OSCE participating States and between participating States and Partners for Co-operation, with the involvement of other relevant stakeholders.” These stakeholders should include entities and organizations that already have expertise in migration issues, such as the International Organization for Migration and the Transatlantic Council on Migration, as well as those political entities already taking a regional approach to migration management, such as the European Union.

While migration presents numerous challenges, it is incumbent upon all of our governments to ensure that debates and policy prescriptions for migration are based on realities, not rhetoric. In recent times, xenophobic political platforms and the ensuing rhetoric that demonizes migrants has not only fueled intolerance, but also led to the adoption of broad policies that could negatively impact the rights of both migrants and citizens and severely impact the work and safety of documented migrants.

My government has taken note of expulsions of Roma and other persons in the OSCE region. Other overtly discriminatory policies, and policies that overly rely on detention and expulsions, are also of concern. Such practices could result in the wrongful detention and deportation of citizens and documented migrants in addition to asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking, and others in need of protection. They may also contribute to discriminatory policing, including targeting migrants for abuse and extortion. Automatically assuming that migrants are involved in criminal enterprises or security threats is as imprudent as it is unjust, for it tends to squander precious resources by investigating dead ends and protecting against non-events, instead of concentrating efforts on eliminating genuine threats.

We would do well to focus on initiatives that would support regular migration amidst the current political climate as noted in the “2008 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Astana Declaration Resolution on Recognizing the Economic, Cultural, Political and Social contributions of Migrants” offered by now U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. In particular, implementing policies that combat discriminatory practices toward migrants in the workplace would assist in such efforts. We continue to investigate such wrongful practices in our own country and support such efforts throughout the region.

As a forum and platform for dialogue, the OSCE has mechanisms for bringing these issues to the fore, including through the Economic and Environmental Forum and through the Annual Review Meeting concept currently under discussion. A Migration Information Network may be a useful adjunct to work already being done both within the OSCE and in other regional fora, but we need a thorough discussion of how such a network would be used, what resources would be required, how to avoid overlap with other fora where migration is being discussed, and most importantly, how fundamental freedoms and human rights will be protected in the context of information sharing on migration.

Successful migration management will require a comprehensive approach. We must seek to balance the rights and needs of individuals with the social and security concerns of states to ensure that migration management allows maximum benefit at minimum risk.