

**The 18th Meeting
of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

ENGLISH only

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

Part 2 / Prague, 24 – 26 May 2010

Welcoming Remarks by Mr. Pavel Kafka, Director General for Economic Cooperation and Culture Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

**Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,**

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 eighteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum traditionally here in Prague. As the host country, the Czech Republic will do its utmost to make it a success.

At the outset, let me most cordially welcome the leading OSCE representatives, including Secretary-General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, present here, the ministers of the participating countries of the OSCE (especially those from the distant region of Central Asia) and the OSCE Partners for Co-operation as well as the representatives of international organizations and other participants in this meeting.

We should make the most of this opportunity for an open discussion and formulation of conclusions and recommendations and identify the best practices, since the Economic and Environmental Fora are a very suitable platform for a dialogue on all problems concerning the security of the OSCE region, including those associated with international transport and cross-border traffic. This year's theme “Promoting good governance at border crossings, improving the security of land transportation and facilitating international transport by road and rail in the OSCE region“ is a topical one.

Transport is a sector of strategic importance for the economic growth of OSCE participating States. Yet challenges are complex and diverse. That is why the OSCE has been actively involved in efforts to improve its organization and planning, and to address the related security and environmental concerns. However, to achieve change, it is necessary to first eliminate the obstacles that still exist among the participating countries.

Beside physical obstacles among the EU countries and their neighbours, there exist many non-physical ones. Some of them are caused by administrative and border control procedures. They result in delays and idle time, which increases the price of the transported

goods, discourages individual travel and tourism, and diverts traffic to alternative, often longer, routes.

In this context, one of the focal points for the OSCE are customs policies. In addition to collecting import and other customs duties, the customs service has a major role to play in reducing the risks associated with international crime and terrorism. However, this all adds up to a time-consuming process which delays traffic and causes idle time for drivers at border crossing points. This shows that our customs policies should strike the right balance between the security of citizens and transport facilitation. We need to harmonize the international standards for modern electronic customs information systems, standardize the data requirements in customs declarations, and above all improve the interoperability of our customs systems.

The discussions held in the first round of the Forum in Vienna and later in Minsk confirmed that the topic of transport and transport-related issues are of great importance as part of comprehensive approach to security in the OSCE and neighbouring regions.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope that the sessions of the second part of the 18th Economic and Environmental Forum will mark a step forward in our effort to deal with these issues. Mutual exchange of experience on this topic, which started at the preparatory seminars, should eventually bring us closer to a common understanding and common approaches. I thank the Chairmanship and organizers of previous debates for their excellent efforts. I also thank the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, the OSCE Secretariat and its Prague Office for all the preparatory work they have done. And last but not least, let me express my high appreciation to the international organizations present here today for their valuable input to our debate.

I wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Prague.

Thank you for your attention.