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Welcoming remark

**THE 17th OSCE ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM PART
1: “Migration management & its linkages with economic, social and
environmental policies to the benefit of stability & security in the OSCE
region”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Greek OSCE Chairmanship for 2009, it is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the meeting of the 17th Economic and Environmental Forum – Part I. This meeting is not only the first major OSCE gathering, following the inauguration of the Greek Chairmanship last week but it also marks an important step within the current Economic and Environmental Forum process. The relevance of the theme of the Forum was reemphasized by the discussions held at the First Preparatory Conference in Prague last October. I would like to stress, from the outset of my intervention, that our goal at this meeting is to build upon the conclusions reached in Prague, to define more clearly the role of the OSCE in addressing migration management related challenges and opportunities and to formulate recommendations for future actions.

The Greek Chairmanship is confident that, with your valuable help, this objective will be reached. We are encouraged by the strong interest in this theme, manifested by the high level of attendance in this meeting by the participating States and by the excellent co-operation and organizational support we have received from a number of partner international organizations which are present here today. In order to ensure the effective implementation of our jointly formulated recommendations and enable us to show practical results, the OSCE's capacity and institutional expertise should be effectively linked with other key actors in this field. Open dialogue and co-operation on all levels are key factors for success. In our attempt to further dialogue and regional co-operation to reach a more comprehensive approach to migration management we are not starting from scratch. As I mentioned before, the Preparatory Conference in Prague produced a valuable set of recommendations. We will of course continue to build upon the OSCE 'acquis' and support activities that facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practices and can contribute to building further capacity to deal with future challenges related to international migration. We should also take into account existing regional, sub-regional and international frameworks dealing with migration management, e.g. the Global Forum on Migration and Development (the next one will as you know take place in Athens in this year) , the Budapest Process and the Barcelona Process. Furthermore, a number of organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Office (ILO), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Council of Europe (European

Committee on Migration), as well as EUROPOL and UNODC are important contributors and partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In approaching the theme of this Forum, we should start our deliberations having in mind some, I believe, fundamental truths. The most important of these truths has to do with the coming increase of the world population. The current predictions amount to more than 2 billion people in the next four decades. Most of them in areas close to the OSCE regions. Are all these people going to stay at home? The answer is not easy, it depends on many different factors. Economic development, climate change and both traditional and human security are the most important of these factors. What we can be certain of is that those that do move, are going to pass through the existing migration routes. From east to west and from south to north, and both their transit and destination countries will mostly belong to the OSCE.

So we are going to need effective migration management, that encourages legal migration and brings benefits to the economic and social development of both sending and receiving countries. Migration management improves the living conditions of millions of migrants and safeguards against potential security challenges, posed by illegal migration and criminal networks that perpetrate this phenomenon.

Effective migration management is however impossible without co-operation between States. If we try to avoid the problem by passing it through to our neighbours we all end up with the worst of the possible worlds. It is like trying to cool a number of hot potatoes by transferring them to each other. We all end up with our hands burned. It would be a lot better if we cooperate to cool them in a pot of cold water. But cooperation is not easy. Most times in the issue of migration states tend to follow a policy of myopic national interest, simply because they do not trust their neighbours enough.

In this regard, the OSCE as an organization, as well as the Economic and Environmental Forum process, provide a unique platform for continued dialogue on how to strengthen co-operation.

It is also evident that the global economic environment has severe impacts on migration patterns. Both in the long term and in the short run, specially in these times of global economic difficulties. So we should pay more attention to the economic root causes of migration, to the links between economic and migration policies, to the ways and means of maximizing the economic gains that migration could bring about when effectively managed to countries of origin and destination as well as to the migrants themselves. We should turn the financial crisis into an opportunity and work together to enhance the existing co-operation, promote best practices that have proven successful and possibly conceive new, innovative initiatives regarding migration policy and co-operation frameworks.

Finally, as I explained in Prague, the possible combination of climate change and slower growth could urge an even larger number of people to leave their countries and seek a safer environment, than previously estimated. Climate change induced droughts, floods, wildfires, extreme weather events and natural disasters are likely to further intensify pre-existing stresses in vulnerable regions, such as food insecurity, water scarcity, reduced agricultural production, unequal access to resources, breakout of epidemics and spreading of diseases. This sort of challenges may gradually lead to degradation of infrastructure, weakening of institutions and even put forward a threat to peace and security by compounding the propensity for violent conflict. As I mentioned in Prague, climate change is, by far, the most important environmental challenge for migratory movements in the next decades. Allow me to repeat that the wider Eurasian area might be heavily influenced, by possible, environmentally forced, migratory movements, in the years to come. This may happen, not only directly, as Central Asia and Southern Mediterranean are considered to be two of the most vulnerable regions, in terms of

climate change impacts, but also indirectly, as climate change will continue to hit sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia, where a lot of people are already moving, due to natural disasters . It is more than obvious, that if we pass the “tipping point”, in terms of unpredictable and destructive climate change impacts, then we could expect massive migratory inflows, from these vulnerable regions, following already existing migratory routes, into the OSCE area. This is one of the reasons why the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. D. Bakoyannis, stated here in Vienna that the Greek Chairmanship will develop the idea of “Greening the OSCE,” in order to promote a more environmentally friendly Organization, by improving the every day practice of the Organization and providing for a promising new generation of environmental programs. Among the tools that we must use, permit me finally to refer briefly to the opportunities provided by the development assistance policies. Not only in the traditional sense of facilitating economic development and thus limit the need for migration, but also by linking immigrants in the destination countries with development assistance to the countries of origin. This is a new field of development cooperation, which is highly expected to become crucial in the years to come. In Greece, having recognised this need, we are shaping such a program, in cooperation with the IOM. We intend to use our development assistance funds and remittances to co-finance projects in the countries of origin and promote social work and the creation of businesses together - and with the help- of our immigrants. Both in Africa and in selected OSCE countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before closing my intervention, I would like to express my special thanks and appreciation to all the speakers as well as moderators, commentators and rapporteurs who have accepted our invitation to participate in the Forum. Your contribution will be much appreciated. I would also like to take the opportunity to warmly thank the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Mr. Svilanovic and his Office for their excellent work, their dedication and their support in helping us to organize this Forum. I am looking forward to a fruitful discussion during this Forum. Greece, having placed the environmental dimension high on the agenda of the 2009 OSCE Greek Chairmanship, will have the honour to welcome you all, ladies and gentlemen, in Athens on May 18-20 2009 for the second segment of the 17th Economic & Environmental Forum.

Thank you for your attention.