



STATEMENT

**by OSCE Chairman-in-Office Dr. Dimitrij Rupel
at the 13th OSCE Economic Forum “Demographic Trends, Migration and Integrating
Persons belonging to National Minorities: Ensuring Security and Sustainable
Development in the OSCE Area”**

Opening Plenary Session

Thank you Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Commissioner Špidla,
Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to warmly welcome all of you to the 13th OSCE Economic Forum devoted to the topics of demography, migration and integration of persons belonging to national minorities. I'm very pleased that this year's Senior Council meeting has attracted so many distinguished, high-level policy decision-makers from international organizations and national governments. Thank you for coming.

I would also like to express my thanks to our hosts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, headed by Mr. Cyril Svoboda, as well as the OSCE Office in Prague for the excellent organization of this Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues of demography, migration and integration of persons belonging to national minorities are tightly interwoven, and it is impossible to address one issue without addressing the other.

The OSCE Chairmanship has decided, together with all participating States, to place the complex theme of “migration-integration” at the heart of economic-environmental, human and politico-military dimensions as a priority of the OSCE in 2005.

Dear Colleagues,

The importance of demographic development, migration and integration of persons belonging to national minorities is growing. At this year’s Forum we will discuss, among others, population developments, root economic and environmental factors behind migration, the informal sector and illegal migration, needs for improved information sharing and applied research as well as awareness raising and economic integration of migrants. We will also be discussing policies and positive practices of economic and social integration of persons belonging to national minorities.

The demographic writing is on the wall, and it changes all the conventional rules. Facing a reversal in its growth pattern, Europe’s population will drop from nearly 730 million in 2005 to approximately 650 million in 2050. Meanwhile, in 2050, the world’s population is expected to have risen to 9.1 billion people, up from the 6.5 billion today. Populations in the developed countries by mid-century as a whole are expected to remain unchanged, but will age substantially. The proportion of elderly people, defined as those over 60 years-of-age, will rise from the current one-fifth of the population to one-third in 2050. In contrast, the population of the fifty least developed countries in the world is projected to more than double with young population age structure. However, not all of these countries will experience the same development pattern; some regions and countries might face depopulation due to ecological problems, famine and drought, economic depression, social instability, wars, epidemics or specific combination of these factors.

Considering all of the above, the OSCE faces many challenges. It could be tasked with facilitating modernization and sustainable development in less developed participating States, taking into account traditional lifestyles and the cultural richness of individual regions. It could also coordinate efforts to assist the least developed participating States in their development and in improving living conditions and economic opportunities there. The OSCE could initiate concerted programmes and measures designed to change some traditional patterns of life that contribute to the unsustainable population explosion in certain

environments and to offer people other options, particularly better economic, social and living conditions, education and mobility. These programmes and measures should be observed also in the context of more successful management of global migrations. Example: Serbia and Kosovo: brain-drain from Serbia, demographic explosion in Kosovo.

The OSCE also faces many challenges in the most developed OSCE participating States. Longevity there is becoming the central most strategic issue of the 21st century, affecting every aspect of social and political life. That people are living longer is a human triumph. However, the rise in the number of older people, combined with the sharp decline in fertility rates among wealthier nations, requires radical changes in existing thinking and perceptions about our societies – including new approaches to social, health, pension, demographic and migration policies and systems. We can already see signs economic instability in some OSCE participating States. Existing social, healthcare and pensions systems need to be reformed substantially. Perhaps the OSCE can help in efforts to design and implement sustainable social networks for the elderly and programmes for their full integration into society. This can be done also by creating opportunities for the full productive inclusion into the economic sphere of all elderly persons still willing and able to contribute actively. However, by now it has become evident that regardless of all such efforts and programs for the elderly, these societies will not be able to preserve their present levels of development and welfare without immigration from other, particularly less-developed regions and participating States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migration is a complex and omnipresent phenomenon in the history of humankind, which is related and contributes to interdependence between peoples, civilizations and economies. The OSCE area and its bordering regions encompass both societies of origin, located largely at its borders, and the target societies for numerous migrants – economic and other, legal and illegal. We are confronted with phenomena such as forced migration and ethnic cleansing, resulting largely from war and its consequences, but also from ecological disasters.

Freedom of movement is a human right with strong economic, political and social implications. It is therefore essential that we identify them so as to base our rules, policies and regulations on relevant facts, which will enable us to create effective institutions, stimulate economic development and, at the same time, preserve a healthy environment. By promoting

the implementation of existing mutual agreements, encouraging the development of bilateral and regional agreements, and by developing a common global strategy, we can boost the positive effects and reduce the negative consequences of migration.

Although often pushed by deficiencies in home environment, migratory flows are predominantly driven by the migration policies of the countries of destination. Here we must beware of the fact that by definition migratory movements entail loss of human resources for typical countries of origin, while in countries of destination they may give rise to political, economic or social tensions. On the other hand, the standard of living in many OSCE countries of destination would deteriorate significantly without migrant inflow. So immigration is increasingly becoming an element of sustainable prosperity in countries of destination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Managing migration requires activities in countries of origin and countries of destination. Activities in countries of origin should primarily focus on the improvement of population's social and economic conditions. At the same time, they should be directed towards providing relevant information to potential migrants on reality in countries of their destination. It is evident that countries of origin themselves cannot address and resolve these issues alone and require the assistance of the international community and more developed countries.

Ideally, all migration should be legal from the point of human rights and labour market. In order to achieve this and maximize economic advantages of migration it is important to control and regulate migration when necessary. The basic principle to be followed here is the principle of immigrants' full and equal integration.

In many OSCE participating States migration remains high on the political agenda. Although we all agree that it is a sensitive issue, it is the fact that contemporary immigration policies and regulations are no longer corresponding to today's realities. For some developed OSCE regions immigration is welcome as a buffer against the threat of fall in fertility rates. For last decades a typical stimulus for migratory flows in countries of destination is also a growing need for labour with various skills to fill both public as well as private sector jobs. As immigration is not a sustainable solution to these problems, developed countries will have to

combine their immigration policy with reforms of their pension systems and labour market regulation. Hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants working in the informal sector represent only an additional problem to be solved.

In times of economic recession, locals in developed countries often blame immigrants for unemployment and the difficulties in securing public housing. Immigration is by far the most pressing issue for the upcoming general elections in many established democracies. At times unnecessary atmosphere of intolerance is created. Promising “freedom from overcrowding”, “an end to economic migration” and making explicit appeals to anti-immigration sentiments, some political parties in some OSCE participating States are intent, unfortunately, on jumping on the anti-immigration bandwagon.

Attitude towards migrants is rather one of marginalization and exclusion than of inclusion and integration. That is why the OSCE should help facilitate the exploration, in participating States, of improved legal means of entry for migrants and more effective integration into the political, social and educational structures of the host societies. The OSCE can in this context also help in the process of identifying good practices on migration systems and management.

I hope that the Forum will lead to a comprehensive identification of the OSCE’s role as a policy participant in the field of economic and environmental migration. This could be upgraded into an Action Plan/Strategy as well as into the formulation of a Statement of Principles guiding the integration of persons belonging to national minorities. Furthermore, I expect that we will learn more about the most successful practices and policies in addressing the current demographic challenges, the migratory movements and the needs for integrating persons belonging to national minorities.

Dear Colleagues,

National governments are beginning not only to recognise the ever-increasing need to manage migrations and integrate immigrants, but also to ensure the adequate protection of persons belonging to minorities, in order to ensure peaceful coexistence, sustainable development and stability within individual societies, both in societies of origin and target societies, and in the international community. It is absolutely essential that we strive for the full implementation of the OSCE standards related to the respect of fundamental freedoms and protection of human

rights, including minority rights. Recognizing the need for integration of national minorities, but not necessarily assimilation in the cultural, social, political and economic fabric of society is also important in reducing the risk of tension and dissatisfaction stemming from minority issues which have the potential to lead to violent conflicts.

The protection and adequate integration of persons belonging to national minorities – “affirmative action towards im/emigrants” - their protection and integration of migrants in the OSCE area should be further developed in such a way as to take into account their specific situations, needs and interests. For example, the disappearing borders in Europe have reduced substantially pressure on minorities.

The Chairmanship believes that the OSCE could serve here as a forum for the participating States in expanding the discussion to include economic and social aspects of integration as well. The Organization already has experience in facilitating economic integration through its development of small and medium enterprises and economic empowerment work which also targets minorities and vulnerable population groups.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Taking into account the fact that a meaningful political process can only be instigated through an informed and focused debate, the Chairmanship has strived to steer the cycle of this year’s three preparatory seminars towards constructive discussions. All this would not have been possible without the valuable contribution and expertise of the International Organization for Migration, International Centre for Migration Policy Development and OSCE Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities as well as all of the participants in the preparatory seminars; I would like to thank you all for your valuable support and tremendous contribution.

The outcome of the Economic Forum shall serve as the platform for the future action of the OSCE in selected thematic areas. In realizing many of the suggestions and recommendations resulting from our upcoming discussions, the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities will have to continue its close work with other OSCE institutions, especially the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Here I would also like to highlight the

OSCE missions on the ground, which are crucial for the implementation of the OSCE mandate. Most importantly, to provide for the implementation and effective practical results of our common endeavours, the OSCE's field capacities and institutional expertise must be suitably matched with fruitful and lasting cooperation with international actors of substantial resources. Only by doing so can we entertain real hope for our joint success in realizing common goals.

Thank you.