



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

Co-ordinator of OSCE  
Economic and Environmental Activities

Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and  
International Migration in Central Asia

Almaty, 15 March 2011

Opening Statement

by

Goran Svilanović

**“The need for a comprehensive approach to effectively address opportunities  
and challenges of international migration”**

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and as the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, it is a great honour for me to be given the opportunity to address this Regional Migration Conference today. We are going to address the important topic of protection challenges of mixed migration flows in Central Asia, and the need for building cooperation and partnerships for developing more comprehensive and effective approaches to migration management. We believe that taking such an approach will also have a positive impact on stability and security in the OSCE region and therefore we are pleased to support the Government of Kazakhstan, UNHCR and the IOM in organizing this conference.

With the current migration and refugee crisis going on in the neighbouring areas to Libya, affecting many of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation as well as OSCE participating States, it has shown us that migration outflows can be very mixed. And although the majority of the people leaving Libya have been labour migrants, there are also persons among them that are refugees and asylum-seekers. Therefore, it is important when discussing setting up effective migration policies and programmes to also give due attention

to what types of entry systems are in place and how effective they are in profiling new arrivals and their different needs to determine who might be in need of international protection and assistance.

I would like to stress that a key factor in finding effective solutions to mixed migration challenges is the formation of good cooperation and close partnerships between concerned governments, governmental agencies and relevant international and regional organizations.

In the OSCE, we have for some years now promoted a comprehensive and cooperative approach to migration management. This we have done in cooperation with the IOM and the ILO. However, I believe it is time for us to also give deeper thought to how we might establish more protection sensitive entry systems while at the same time managing the borders and ensuring national security. Within the comprehensive approach to migration management, we have in the OSCE also reviewed and discussed the legal frameworks pertaining to migrants and labour migrants, integration and reintegration issues as well as how to prevent trafficking and labour exploitation. We are looking forward to learning more about how our mutual efforts can be strengthened in regards to further improved responses to migration management, refugee protection, and countries' security and stability concerns.

Today, being here in Central Asia, I would like to emphasize the importance of the international migration phenomenon in this region. There are currently around 126 million migrants in the OSCE region. Some of the biggest sending and receiving migration countries are part of the CIS region. For example, the Russian Federation, which is home to half of the migrants residing in the CIS, has the second largest immigrant population in the world, after the United States, and Kazakhstan is ninth. At the same time, other CIS countries are among the top ten countries of origin in the world. This picture of the new realities we live in, not only in this region but in the OSCE region as a whole, poses great challenges to governments. But great challenges are also great opportunities. And we should not underestimate the opportunities and potential for economic growth and social richness that come with international migration. It is not by chance that the countries with the highest levels of immigration are among the most successful economically. But to realize this economic potential, interstate cooperation and coordination is vital to make sure that labour migration happens in a regular and orderly manner.

## Opportunities

A comprehensive approach to international migration is essential to effectively manage the movements of people and their potential economic, social, and cultural contributions in both countries of origin and destination.

Indeed, statistical evidence shows that migrants' work increases economic output and growth, and their investment in new businesses and new business initiatives contributes to an increase in employment in countries of destination. Moreover, they can also make important contributions to the host countries' gains in terms of social diversity and capacity for innovation. In order to maximize migrant's contributions, it is necessary to enhance migrants' access to the formal labour market. This may involve supporting regularization of the existing labour migrants, and granting better recognition to diplomas and qualifications. Helping migrants to adapt their skills by providing them with improved access to language classes could also help them to contribute more effectively to the economy. Thus, migrants are not only net contributors to the economy, but may also play an essential role in supporting social security for future generations, while rejuvenating populations.

Countries of origin can also profit from organised labour migration. As you know, migration can have significant impacts on poverty reduction and reduce pressures on the internal labour market. Indeed, in countries of origin, the impacts of migration through remittances are felt in higher family income. So even if migration is not a substitute for broader development efforts, and remittances are not a robust growth strategy, mobility may be integral to an effective overall strategy for development.

Facilitating a successful labour migration experience is crucial for ensuring a positive experience for all parties concerned. This includes closer linkages between labour market demand and legal entry channels, more effective regulation and monitoring of recruitment agencies and employers, especially in risk sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality and domestic services. Equally important are the reintegration services provided to returning migrants such as finding new employment at home and facilitating the transfer of earned pensions and other social benefits obtained abroad.

For example, Bilateral Labour Agreements have proved to be good tools to formalize each side's commitments to ensure that migration takes place in accordance with agreed principles

and procedures. This way, economic sectors with seasonal requirements such as agriculture and construction can bring advantages to both destination and origin countries, regulating the whole migration process from entry to return.

While migration provides new opportunities for migrants and clearly benefits national economies, little attention is paid to the fact that almost half of all migrants are women. Female migrants are often confronted with gender-specific disadvantages in the migration process due to different factors such as stereotyped labour roles for men and women, lack of policies addressing female migrant workers' specific needs and limited legal channels available to them, thus often pushing them into irregular employment. Gender sensitive policies can make a significant difference to the living and working condition of female migrant workers. Such a policy approach will not only benefit female migrants, but also contribute to the countries' overall economic gains.

My office continues to work on providing support to all OSCE pS to implement and develop more effective migration management including sensitivity to gender aspects. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to make use of all the publications my office has produced together with other international organizations in the last years in the area of comprehensive labour migration management. They are all available on the OSCE website.

### **Challenges**

Before I conclude, I would like to say a few words on some of the challenges which still need strong and coordinated inter-state efforts. One of the challenges is availability of reliable and comparable migration data. Effective policy making needs up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable data.

I know that the barriers to change the current situation can be sometimes difficult to overcome: different data needs at the national and international levels, high expenses linked to altering data collection systems, need for legislative changes, insufficient relevance for own data collection needs, different institutional set-ups and capacities and so on. It is definitely not easy to set up harmonised systems, but to address current challenges and prepare for future scenarios, reliable and comparable data is needed both in this region as well as in other OSCE regions.

For this reason, my office and the IOM have joined forces in a joint project that supports the establishment of a harmonized data collection process among Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. The main outcome, a *Handbook on migration data collection*, will include three country assessments, a common draft template for harmonised migration data collection, general recommendations and final conclusions, and will be presented at a Regional Conference in Vienna in June 2011.

Given the scale of migration flows in the region, integration of migrants in line with the relevant OSCE commitments presents another challenge. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE has therefore begun work to assist the OSCE participating States in assessing their migrant integration policies.

Your Excellencies,

Please let me conclude by calling for reflection and consideration of the currently existing migration policies in our participating States, and contemplating the potential gains to all our economies from developing and implementing comprehensive and cooperative migration management approaches that also take into account the protection needs of refugees, victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups.

Let us face these modern challenges and opportunities.

Let us shape our own future.

Thank you very much.