

INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION

Migration and the Environment

Intervention of the Greek Foreign Ministry Secretary General for Economic Relations and Development Cooperation Mr. Th. Skylakakis

I am glad that I have the chance to actively participate in this year's International Dialogue on Migration, addressing an issue of great interest both to Greece and myself, as, on top of my other duties, I am also Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for climate change.

It is common ground that climate change constitutes one of the greatest complex challenges that the international community has to deal with now and in the years to come, with significant influence on migratory patterns.

Climate change can have severe effects in both developed and developing countries. It is, however, indisputable that developing countries – and most of all least developed countries, states in situation of fragility and Small Island Developing States – will be affected the most, due to their geographic position and to their reduced capacity to adapt and respond to climate change imposed challenges. Therefore, migration might, in certain cases, seem as the only possible response for people in vulnerable regions. We are already witnessing population movements directly or indirectly connected to climate change. Of course, climate alone may seem unlikely to be the sole or the most important “push factor” in migration decisions. However, climate change induced droughts, floods, wildfires, extreme weather events and natural disasters are likely to further intensify preexisting stresses in vulnerable regions such as food insecurity, scarcity of water, reduced agricultural production, unequal access to resources, breakout of epidemics and spreading of diseases. The obvious cases that could lead to migration are the effects of sea rise, in small island states, or catastrophic weather events. However I believe that most of the actual climate induced migration in the next decades will come from gradual disasters that will occur due to desertification and loss of agricultural production that could upset the delicate balance in least developed countries with limited adaptive capacity.

This sort of challenges may gradually lead to degradation of – an already weak - infrastructure, weakening of institutions and even present a threat to peace and security by compounding the propensity for violent conflict.

According to scientific evidence, climate change is already a reality and its inevitable, (for the next few decades), consequences will become more apparent within the next forty years. Therefore, considerable population movements are to be expected in the near future and we should already provide for their effective management. Specially if one takes also

into account the results of the expected population growth of 2,5 billion people, mainly in the developing world, during the same time period.

Greece is located at the crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia and has already an important experience of migratory flows. Moreover, we are ourselves in a region where, due to our geographical position and weather pattern, climate change is expected to have severe impact. Taking into consideration that the population of Greece has risen by 10% within the last 15 years due to migration, we may well have to face very soon a new migratory influx, posing a serious strain to our society, due also to the extremely delicate situation of that kind of migrants: These people, having experienced a violent uprooting, will be in a significantly more stressing and painful situation than those who simply choose to leave their home countries, in order to seek a better future in countries of the developed world.

Nevertheless, the uncertainty in predicting where a climate change disaster will strike next, as well as the difficulty to pinpoint the exact routes of affected populations call for collective preparedness and burden sharing in our response.

Climate change is a serious global threat and it demands an urgent global response. Mitigation, adaptation and technology transfer are the three pillars if we want to have sound foundations in this global policy for tackling climate change.

Without downplaying mitigation, by any means, the international policy agenda needs to focus on adaptation to climate change as well, especially with reference to LDCs and SIDS. Regardless of the measures we are adopting, regardless of the efforts and resources committed, the repercussions of climate change during the next two or three decades cannot be avoided.

In this respect, and keeping in mind the interplay between climate change, the level of development of the affected countries and migratory flows, it is important to promote coherence between the relevant policies adopted.

Integration of sustainable development and climate change concerns, into development cooperation programs and partner countries' national policies and development strategies, are essential.

Moreover, targeted development assistance and cooperation for the promotion of capacity building and sustainable development in partner countries can lead to better migration policies.

Where climate change and migration can create a potential vicious circle of destructive effects, adaptation and development can be combined to construct a virtuous circle of sustainable development with a view to enhancing stability and accomplishing the Millennium Development Goals.

Greece has already stressed the need for incorporating climate change into our development aid policies, especially within the EU, and intends to contribute to this end for the reshaping of the relevant European policies and implement this principle in its own bilateral development policy.

Furthermore, we are currently planning the creation of special “greek funds”, in cooperation with regional organizations, in order to finance adaptation projects for Africa and the SIDS.

The link between migration and development is also increasingly recognized in the national legislative and policy framework of Greece.

The Greek development cooperation policy, in cooperation with the office of the International Organization for Migration in Athens, intends to support and finance programs with the objective to encourage the contribution of legal migrants in Greece to the development of their home countries. This shall not only be seen as means towards the enhancement and the promotion of coherence between Greek policies for migration and development. It is also an essential step to guarantee “ownership” and participation of migrants in development efforts in their own countries. At the same time it is also a way to make their ties with the host country even stronger.

At this stage allow me to say that we are currently having the pleasure to work together with the International Organization for Migration for the realization of another Greek initiative.

As you may already know, the current Greek Chairmanship of Human Security Network has adopted as its main priority the impact of climate change on human security and in particular on vulnerable population groups, such as women, children and people fleeing their homes due to climate change.

It is important to stress that this priority has also a geographical dimension. We intend to concentrate on Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States, that, although they have played a minor role in the creation of the problem, they will pay the heaviest toll.

In this framework, we are preparing a relevant policy paper with the help of the United Nations University and we are also organizing in February 2008 in Geneva and in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, an event concerning the issue of moving population groups due to climate change, where we would be glad to see all of you.

Having said that, I would like to thank you for your attention and I hope that we will have the opportunity to hold a fruitful discussion here today.