

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour and my great privilege to be opening this conference on Economic Migration in the European Union.

On behalf of the co-organisers of our conference:

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy,
the Representation of the European Commission in Poland,
and the Polish-American Freedom Foundation,
and of course on my own behalf –allow me to welcome all of you.

I would like welcome:

Mr Jan Olszewski, former Prime Minister, today representing the President of Poland.

Warmest greetings are also extended

to the other representatives of the public authorities of this country,
to the ambassadors of the European Union member states
and to the representatives of both houses of the Polish Parliament and the
Constitutional Tribunal

I am delighted to welcome representatives of the European Union, the United Nations and the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I am also very pleased to see here members of the Episcopate of the Catholic Church in Poland, and the heads of Polish Catholic Missions from a number of European Union countries.

I gladly note that we also have scholars, representatives of NGOs and eminent journalists today in attendance.

But particular words of welcome I would like to extend to my colleagues: the Ombudsmen and their representatives from the European Union member states and to my friends, the Ombudsmen from Georgia and Ukraine.

However far you have travelled to come to this symposium, I am happy that you have taken the time to join us here for what I am sure will be a very interesting conference.

Most of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank:

the President of Poland, Mr Lech Kaczyński,
and the President of Portugal, Mr Anibal Cavaco Silva, who is currently presiding over the European Union,
for their Honorary Patronage of this conference.

This Patronage not only shows the attention paid to the issues discussed here but it also has, in my opinion, a symbolic dimension.

Geographically, Portugal and Poland are on opposite borders of the European Union, the Union which brings together the people of our continent and which cooperates closely with our neighbours.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I find it meaningful that we are gathered here today at the Royal Castle in Warsaw. This place is symbolic for the modern Polish state as it witnessed the adoption of the first written constitution in Europe in 1791.

I hope that the spirit of this place, the spirit of freedom, civic cooperation and European solidarity will accompany our meeting.

This conference is dedicated to the problems and challenges of economic migration in the European Union after the accession of the ten new member states from Central and Eastern Europe.

These accessions have opened before millions of citizens prospects of employment, sometimes of employment more suitable to their skills and talents, and chances to start professional careers and often a better life.

From an individual's perspective, the fundamental right of European citizens, the free movement of persons, with all its implications:

– free choice of residence, travel, country of work, and the right to equal treatment with nationals of the receiving state – forms the most visible aspect of our continent becoming truly united.

The decision to change one's country of residence is conditioned by a number of factors, to mention only a few:

the situation on the labour market,

differences in earnings,

the existence of emigration networks which are supposed to help the integration of newcomers into the host society or better housing conditions.

But such a decision is double-edged: it involves the cost of moving to a foreign country, into a different culture and language, and it might also pose a threat to family life and cause difficulties for spouses and children. The benefit of finding better work is often accompanied by the high price to be paid in cutting off the family and cultural and social ties.

Reflecting upon economic migration from the perspective of the whole Union, one might note that intra-EU migration is vital for the efficient use of EU labour force since it might ease the difficulties of those sectors where labour shortages occur.

For host countries, economic migration forms a source of economic growth, not to mention the income stemming from taxes, which certainly surpass the costs of social welfare. To give you an example, according to a study commissioned by Ernst and Young in 2006, Polish people working in the United Kingdom generated (zero point two) 0.2 per cent of GDP and contributed as much as (three hundred) 300 million pounds to the British budget in income tax.

The sending countries might also gain from labour migration, by migrant remittances in the first place. In terms of world money transfers, migrants' remittances are the largest international exchange value after petroleum and are well above the level of international development aid. In the case of Poland, their amount can be compared to the resources received by this country from the European Union.

Another type of benefit might be the achievement of skills and labour knowledge, which nevertheless act in favour of the development of the sending country only if the migrant returns. Otherwise it creates a loss, and may lead to a "brain drain" and a "youth drain". This is particularly frightening as, according to studies produced by IOM and confirmed by Eurostat, Poland and other Central European countries are experiencing the phenomenon of an ageing population and demographic stagnation. Another new phenomenon, due to the accessibility of cheap flights, is the so-called circular migration.

However, it is not the pros and cons of the work migration that has made the Polish Ombudsman invite his colleagues from so many different countries to debate, along with distinguished experts in the field, the post-accession economic migration.

The key issue which stimulates our lively interest in this problem is the fact that the application of the *acquis communautaire* in the everyday life of (seventy four) 74 million new European citizens is exposed to most serious difficulties. It is not only a question of various administrative, legal or other burdens and restrictions which may be applied by individual countries of the EU for a maximum period of seven years. It is most of all the problem of the enormous gap developing between the content of EU citizenship and the legal and, above all, factual situation faced by an individual when choosing to work in another state.

We cannot turn our eyes away from those alarming signals of abuse and sometimes extreme exploitation taking place in most civilised countries which prompted me, at the beginning of my term of office, to make the problem of migrant workers the key issue of the year.

We are looking forward to a thorough analysis of the treatment of Polish and other Accession Eight economic migrants in the European Union Member States from Professor Jo Carby-Hall, the key speaker of today's conference. His address today will be based on over eighteen month research in cooperation with correspondents and researchers from several countries.

The international and the Polish perspective will be presented at this conference by Dr Cholewiński and Dr Grzyb, respectively.

I am sure that many recommendations for policy action on workers' mobility will be discussed by Mr Tony Venables and Ms Julianna Traser of the European Citizen Action

Service in session three today, where we will also have the pleasure of learning about the views of the European Economic and Social Committee from Ms Brenda King.

Year 2006 was declared the European Year of Workers' Mobility. The main achievements of the Year of Workers' Mobility and the prospects for the Mobility Action Plan will be presented in detail by Mr Jérôme Vignon from the European Commission during our second session.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

As you can see from this brief introduction, which has turned out to be not so brief, there are many and various problems we have to reflect upon.

What is more important, however, is that we are faced with the expectations of many men and women whose situation is the main subject of our debates.

I hope we will make good use of every minute of this conference. As someone once said, the first ninety minutes of a football match are the most important.

Now I would like to give the floor to Mr Jan Olszewski, today representing the President of Poland.

Mr Olszewski thank you. I would like to ask you to pass to the President my thanks for his kind words and now would like to introduce Mr Paweł Kowal, the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Dr Janusz Kochanowski
