

Geneva, 1 December 2005

STATEMENT
of the Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria
to 90th Session of the Council of IOM

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Director General,
Excellences,
Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Bulgarian delegation, I wish to join the previous speakers in extending my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Bureau on your election. May I also thank the Director General and Deputy Director General, as well as all previous speakers for their statements which provide an excellent basis for a constructive debate on key challenges in the achievement of policy coherence on migration.

Migration continues to gain in importance as a topic on the international agenda. The central role of IOM in the international management of migration was reflected in the recently presented report of the Global Commission on International Migration. We pay tribute to the good performance of IOM and its contribution to the International Dialogue on Migration. The rapidly growing membership of IOM is clear evidence of how much countries value being part of its activities and its vision. I take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of IOM at this session – Ghana, Cameroon, Belarus and the Togolese Republic, and wish them a warm welcome.

Policy coherence is a necessity for governments to make genuine and long-lasting progress in addressing both current and future migration management challenges. The IOM has proven its capabilities in bringing together many disparate and sometimes even competing aims, issues, priorities and interests within or between governments and other partners, and in providing practical advice, solutions and programs. We look forward to the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in the UN General Assembly in September 2006 for discussing the report of GCIM and its key recommendation – to create an Inter-Agency Global Migration Facility as a mechanism for better information sharing and coordination among all international institutions concerned with migration.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to focus attention on some policy considerations that are particularly relevant for my country and, perhaps, for the region where I come from.

As you know Bulgaria has a strategic geopolitical position on the Balkans *vis a vis* the Balkan migration route. Bulgaria is one of the first entry gates into Europe from Asia as well as a safe country where migrants coming into Europe can claim asylum. With the accession of the country to the EU on January 1, 2007 it will become an external border of the EU. This will inevitably pose new greater challenges to the Bulgarian migration, refugee and asylum systems.

The development of the Bulgarian economy will inevitably lead to an increased demand in manpower and the consequent transformation of Bulgaria into a predominantly recipient country for migrants.

In this context of increased migration, Bulgaria strictly implements the EU policies and laws in the field of justice and home affairs. A national migration strategy has been developed in this line seeking the optimum balance between the principles of free movement of people, control over irregular migration and respect for migrant rights and human rights in general.

Special attention is being paid to labour migration - a bilateral Agreement between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the IOM serves as a basis for the promotion of orderly labour migration programs in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria continues to be a transit country for irregular migration flows towards Western Europe. Trafficking in human beings is a grave crime and a blatant violation of human rights. In that respect I wish to point out some of the major steps among the consistent measures taken by the Bulgarian government to counter illicit cross border movement to and combat trafficking in human beings. The legislation framework of combating trafficking in human beings has been completed bringing the national legislation in full harmony with the European and international norms and standards. A National Interagency Commission on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established and a National Program for Prevention and Counteraction to Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of its Victims for the year 2005 is successfully being implemented.

We are pleased to recognize that IOM and its Country Mission to Bulgaria have always been key partners of our Government in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and coordinated national strategy for combating and preventing trafficking in human beings and in the elaboration of a coherent migration policy in general. Our cooperation extends over a wide range of activities including the development of effective working practices and models of cooperation at international, national and local levels between the law enforcement and the judiciary in view of effective prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking, as well as between state institutions, IOs and NGOs in view of developing the social support network for victims' protection. We believe that an efficient mechanism for victims' protection and support especially of children has been established

We also believe that the excellent and beneficial rapport between IOM and the relevant national and local institutions in Bulgaria could be the basis for a transfer of acquired expertise especially to countries from the Black Sea region. Bulgaria's strategic geopolitical position as well as close cultural and historical ties with these countries are good arguments for considering the potential growth of the IOM Information and Consultancy Migration Center in the town of Bourgas into a fully fledged migration services center with wider regional functions in the Black Sea area.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Bulgarian Delegation I have the pleasure to express our deep gratitude to the IOM and to the Director General Mr. McKinley for the beneficial cooperation. The Bulgarian Government reaffirms its readiness to work together with IOM, other relevant international institutions, Governments and NGOs for achieving sustainable development and stability through effective management of migration.

Thank you for your attention.