

Address by Mr Antoni Podolski,

**Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Interior and Administration,
at the panel: Surveillance and control of the borders in the context of
equipment in European Union**

Berlin, 10 November 2008

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am very pleased to be given an opportunity to participate in the conference on functioning European borders. I am deeply convinced that the large group of experts, both from the Member States and institutions of the European Union, represented at the conference will enable us to talk about a number of significant issues, and, as a result, to further increase an efficient functioning of external borders of European Union. Discussion about the solutions of increase of the level of security, shall make supervision and control, which are mentioned in the title of the present panel, not lead to impediments for citizens to cross the border.

I would like, primarily, to present briefly the activities recently implemented by Poland mainly under the European funds, as well as the crucial challenges faced by European Union for incoming years. It is important to underline the obvious fact, that the projects co-financed under the EC instruments were implemented within the European standards. Polish preparations for full participation in the Schengen area (which took place in December 2007) led to realization of many investments which assure that infrastructure as well as necessary equipment are the best available in the market.

In my opinion, Polish membership in European Union followed by the lifting of the control on the internal borders (predated by the series of evaluation missions) is the best proof of fulfilling rigorous requirements on maintaining effective and properly controlled external border.

Implementing the projects related to national borders, Polish administration led to full cooperation of such services as the Border Guards, Customs Service, veterinary and fitosanitary services and voivodes responsible for construction new border crossings. The Interdisciplinary Team for National Border Management was assigned to coordinate the activities of mentioned services. The Programme for Integrated National Border

Management 2007 – 2013, prepared by the Team, allowed to strict coordination of activities and effective allocation of the granted funds. Due to the Programme It was possible to implement common standards of equipment what results in full interoperability of different services.

The European funds have perfectly complemented the state budget resources spent on intense actions with a view to comprehensively modernise the state border, to strengthen migration policy and intensify actions undertaken for the benefit for the refugees. As a result, I can say today that a significant part of the infrastructure, especially along the Eastern border of the Republic of Poland, being also the external border of the European Union and of the Schengen zone, has been modernised and it is now an example of the best European standards. The modernisation of border infrastructure involved construction and reconstruction of road, air, railway or sea border crossing points; it also involved providing modern equipment for the relevant services, i.e. the Border Guards and the Customs Service, with a view to ensure high quality of operation without adverse impact on border crossing procedures.

The border consists not only of the border crossings but also of the road sections between them. Such sections need to be protected, especially against illegal crossings or smuggling of hazardous goods. What is important, the Polish section of EU external land border is among the longest in Europe, and it is the longest among the Member States, that joined the EU in 2004. Therefore various types of equipment were purchased for the Border Guard needs, in particular the means of transport. The infrastructure of Border Guard posts has also been developed, so that the border availability for the officers of this formation improved. It implicates the necessity of proper training of the officers, and twinning projects were good opportunity to exchange experience of practices for control and surveillance of the border.

Suitable conditions to carry out the procedures associated with the illegal migrants and people applying for the refugee status or permanent stay in Poland are a significant aspect of state border operations.

A significant part of resources available was spent on the tasks associated with the construction and modernisation of the broadly understood telecommunications systems. It is commonly known nowadays that efficient functioning of the state border along with the

internal security of the European Union depends largely on the quality and functionality of these systems. In particular, completing the construction of second generation Schengen Information System and Visa Information System will guarantee even greater efficiency in fulfilling the border service tasks.

Realization of such great amount of projects on external border does not mean that the process of implementing the changes in border functioning has come to an end. On the contrary, there are further challenges faced by Member States which are related to further lifting of control on internal borders between Member States..

The largement of Schengen area is accompanied by the discussions on compensation means, especially on the role of border control in combating the serious crimes and intelligence of suspicious of such crimes, as well as the reduction of illegal migration.

Taking into account the increase of passenger flows travelling via external borders, it is necessary to work out the solutions which allow maintaining smooth flow as well as providing effective means against illegal migration and other threats. It is important to draw attention that some third country nationals, i. e. businessmen and tourists, do not constitute any danger to European security. For those people, who fulfil entry requirements, crossing external borders of European Union should be easy and fast. It is very important to facilitate contacts in border regions and between family members. Border management should support the economic growth of border regions. One of the successes of European policy was adoption the regulation on 'local border traffic' as the way of simplifying the procedure of crossing border for inhabitants of border regions between Member States and third countries. Poland, as other Member States, immediately took up negotiations with third countries aiming to sign bilateral agreements foreseen in the local border traffic regulation.

The next stage in development of cooperation between Member States is the Visa Information System (VIS). The main purpose of the system is verification if the person who has applied for visa is the same who entries EU areas. This is the reason that the system shall be based on biometric data – the face look and fingerprints. Currently, this aspect of system architecture is the most controversial since the decision on the range of biometric data to be verified shall have an effect on the technologies used on border crossings.

Directly connected to technologies used for border checking are also regulations adopted on European level. It is extremely significant for conducting border checking of individuals travelling by train, as well as the one conducted in the heavy weather conditions, for example in winter. I expect that the multiannual experience of Polish border services shall be used in the works on the common standards to be eventually implemented.

Another element of the system leading to fight against the illegal migration shall be European System on Border Surveillance – EUROSUR. Its main task shall be to react immediately in any case of illegal migration.

In my opinion, after implementation EUROSUR will prove decisive in the European system of integrated border management. Standardization and unification of the solutions used in the tasks related to border control is particularly visible in preparatory works on construction of such system. Polish position, pointing out the necessity of the extensive use of existing systems, reflects in current version of assumptions of the system.

Therefore, I believe that the technical as well as practical solutions, worked out on the Polish external borders shall be one of the most significant part of the standards used at the other parts of the EU borders. Poland is willing to share the gathered knowledge and experience in the range of national border management.

To sum up my address, I would like to draw your attention to another aspect of realisation of activities related to border management in Poland, that is not only national, but especially European dimension of achieving the effects. As regards the projects related to functioning of the borders and migration, it is important to underline multinational aspect of border managements. In my opinion there only few projects realised by the Member State which are said to have effects on all other Member States. It is the best proof that of projects co-financed under the EC financial instruments are successful.

To end up, I would like to draw your attention to one of the greatest challenges to be faced by Poland and European Union. It is the effectiveness of functioning of external border during EURO 2012. Standards in national border management, which are now the subject of discussions, shall be then verified as thousands of travelling will cross the border at the same time. Only effective supervision and control of its functioning shall lead to the success of whole event.