

**22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

**“Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting  
co-operation and security in the OSCE area”**

**Concluding Meeting, 10-12 September 2014, Prague**

**Concluding Plenary Session, 12 September 2014**

**Closing Statement  
by Ambassador Thomas Greminger**

**Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent  
Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE  
2014 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship**

Check against delivery

Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have reached the concluding session not only of our meeting here in Prague but of this twenty-second Economic and Environmental Forum process. We have had an ambitious agenda and covered an extensive range of issues during the three meetings we have held. Our discussions have benefited from the insights of a vast range of experts and stakeholders. On behalf of the Swiss Chairmanship, I would like to express our thanks to all panelists, speakers and moderators who have participated in the meetings and shaped our dialogue.

When Switzerland proposed the theme of the Forum, our intentions were two-fold:

On the one hand we wanted to put the comprehensive management of natural disasters on the agenda of the OSCE, as we are convinced that the challenges of natural hazards can mobilize people to work together, and thus can help build confidence and trust, beyond borders and despite conflicts. On the other hand, our objective has been to not only raise awareness of this important issue, but also to propose viable ways to strengthen our capabilities, encourage co-operation and generate political will for further engagement of participating States.

When it comes to drawing conclusions at the end of this Forum process - and that is what I was asked to do here – I would start by saying the following. The (high interest and) attendance during the whole Forum of high-ranking officials from our capitals and partner organizations, as well as from Vienna delegations, the fruitful debates we witnessed during this year’s Forum meetings and the numerous bilateral meetings

that took place in the margins of our discussions, do confirm the relevance of Disaster Risk Reduction in the OSCE area. There is no doubt that the OSCE can bring real value added to the ongoing international efforts and that the Organization has a role to play when it comes to disaster risk reduction. Just listening to the panel debate this morning, I felt compelling evidence of this was offered.

It has also come clearly out of the discussions that the OSCE should fit into existing initiatives and cooperate and support major institutions, including global processes taking place this year and next year. In this regard, we had a very interesting panel on Wednesday on such global processes and discussed how the OSCE could bring added value to them. From the remarks and suggestions made, I have noted the following 5 points:

1. The OSCE community has been invited several times to contribute a security perspective to the global Disaster Risk Reduction Agenda (Hyogo Framework for Action 2) and Development Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals).
2. DRR as a common theme has a potential to link the main current global processes (HFA2, Post 2015 Development Agenda, International Climate negotiations)
3. Organisations like the OSCE are needed to translate the global commitments into concrete actions at the regional level fully in line with Chapter 8 of the UN Charter.
4. Coming to the climate change issue, I liked very much one of the headline presented by Prof. Stocker. He said: "A 1-in-20 year hottest day is likely to become a 1-in-2 year event by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century". That illustrates quite well the increasing probability of extreme weather situations and the knock-on effect that will have on the frequency of disasters.
5. That reinforces another quote we heard: "we are the first generation that can feel the effects of climate change and the last who can do anything about it".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have also seen in the course of the 3 meetings that the OSCE does have expertise in dealing with environmental challenges and disasters– both in the secretariat and the field presences. It was repeatedly noted that the OSCE has experience in environmental good governance which is a key element in the effective management of natural disasters. This is obviously not to say that we should not aim at further expanding and strengthening the capabilities of the OSCE, including field missions and secretariat.

The review report by UNDP on the implementation of OSCE Commitments related to natural and man-made disasters also gives us an excellent overview and a set of recommendations for further engagement. During Session IV yesterday, the examples of Forest fires and floods were presented as concrete areas where the OSCE has been very active in the past. We should build upon this expertise, further develop it, exchange best practices and reinforce our commitments where it is needed.

We have heard in the panel debate this morning some concrete messages on where the role of our Organization lies in promoting cooperation between States in disaster risk reduction. Let me just recall the following three aspects:

1. The OSCE as a platform for dialogue in coordinating Disaster Risk Reduction across borders in areas where this needs to be facilitated. We also heard this can be effective as a confidence-building measure in the security context.
2. The key role that Aarhus Centers play when it comes to information and awareness raising at the local level. Switzerland is currently reinforcing the capacities of Aarhus Centers in different countries in DRR through an ENVSEC project. As we heard from an OSCE Field office, continued support in this vein is needed.
3. The OSCE should reinforce its role in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and the exchange of best practices across borders and regions.

We had an insightful and engaging session on the management of the horrendous floods in South Eastern Europe on the first day of our meeting and identified some points that could be further deepened and reflected on, such as:

Regional/cross-boundary cooperation was crucial and effective in the response to the situation. As was demonstrated by the presentations of representatives from the three Balkan countries, this emergency assistance does not have to be politicized.

The floods in South East Europe have shown the crucial role of the media in information-sharing with affected populations. By quickly and accurately informing population, panic situations can be averted. The media can also advise on effective responses to a disaster and inform of measures taken by governments to address concerns of immediately affected populations. The OSCE can further assist in providing training to media officials to ensure responsible reporting of disasters and in the dissemination of information following these incidents. I was also struck by the fact that presentations almost exclusively focused on disaster management . Processes on identifying lessons learnt in view of Disaster Risk Reduction, in view of Disaster Risk mitigation and prevention have hardly started. This is certainly also a field where the OSCE could play a supporting role.

I will not linger on this topic as the incoming Serbian chairmanship will be best placed to continue working in this area, especially with the theme they have chosen for the 23rd EEF, Water governance. Ambassador Vuk Zunic will give us some initial indications of their plans in a minute. Be assured that Switzerland will remain committed to the topic beyond our current Chairmanship and will closely work with Serbia on this.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like now to turn to the follow-up of this Forum.

I see an immediate need to work on a wording about the linkages between climate change, disaster risks and security, that the OSCE could contribute to the drafting of the new Hyogo Framework of Action that it currently ongoing. As it was suggested, the Swiss Chairmanship will task the Secretariat to come up with a wording that could be presented and discussed within the Economic and Environmental Committee quite soon.

Another concrete follow-up emerging from the Forum is a Ministerial decision to be discussed in the coming weeks. The Swiss Chairmanship has indicated that it plans to bring forward elements on supplementing OSCE commitments related to DRR to be adopted at the Basel Ministerial Council. We have developed some proposals in our food-for-thought paper. Listening to discussions here in Prague, the Swiss Chairmanship has been encouraged as our own thinking appears to be in line with the views being expressed by the delegations. We will be reflecting on the recommendations from this meeting in the coming days and, in close collaboration with the Secretariat, we will be issuing a text in the next few weeks.

Allow me to mention some of the key elements the Swiss Chairmanship would see as part of this draft:

- focus on disaster prevention and preparedness,
- concentrate on the nexus between disasters, climate change and security
- adopt a comprehensive risk management
- foster cross-border cooperation, especially in light of its potential as a confidence-building measure
- act as platform for knowledge sharing
- foster local resilience through its OSCE field presences
- mainstream DRR into the OSCE comprehensive security approach
- engage in the global processes currently going on.

This is not an exhaustive list, but I believe these are some of the pillars of renewed commitments which could be adopted by the Ministers in Basel.

Let's join our efforts, so that by the end of the year, many of this Forum's conclusions and recommendations are successfully translated into political decisions!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding this Forum Meeting, I would like to thank all participants for their active involvement in the discussions and debates, all the speakers and panelists for the high quality and pertinent interventions. In addition, I would like to congratulate

the moderators for their professionalism and the rapporteurs for making sure that all the voices are well reflected in the summaries.

I would like also to express my gratitude to Dr. Yigitgüden and his team for the excellent cooperation and in particular for their work in preparing this year's Forum, as well as to the Prague Office and technical staff of the meeting who work behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of this event here each year. Another vital contribution has been the work done by interpreters. Thanks as well to the Economic and Environmental Officers from the OSCE field presences for their recommendations for speakers and input.

Last but not least, I would like to warmly thank our host, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, for providing us with all the facilities to organize the concluding part of the Forum in this beautiful city.

Finally, I would like to wish every success to the incoming Serbian Chairmanship, in organizing and conducting the next Economic and Environmental Forum cycle on water governance. You can count on our support.

I wish you all safe trip home. Thank you.