



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

23RD OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

“Strengthening stability and security through co-operation on good governance”

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

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Opening Remarks

Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitguden

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

It is an honour to address this opening session of the First Preparatory Meeting of the 24th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. The theme of this year’s Forum is closely linked to sustainable development and is therefore of importance in the context of strengthening security and stability.

I am very delighted to welcome so many out-standing experts who joined us to share their in-depth knowledge and practical experience on different aspects of good environmental governance. Today, we have with us many government officials from the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, representatives of international organisations, NGOs, academia and the private sector.

In this context, let me underline that this meeting as well as the remaining meetings in this year’s Forum process place a special emphasis on the broad involvement of business in the active discussion. I find it very promising that already in this First Preparatory Meeting we have the private sector well represented amongst other stakeholders. As you can see from the agenda, every session has at least one speaker representing the private sector.

The OSCE provides a platform for dialogue designed to embrace a variety of actors and perspectives. Fully appreciating the German Chairmanship’s endeavour to further strengthen the OSCE engagement with the private sector, I see **countless opportunities for business to contribute** to sustainable development through commitment to seeking shared value and through commitments to environmental compliance and innovation. I also see a lot of **benefits for business and investors** in operating in a peaceful and stable environment. Let me extend a particularly warm welcome to you.

There is a growing recognition that many of the environmental challenges we face today are linked to governance aspects. Improving environmental actions and outcomes not only

depends on legal frameworks and the capacities of the environmental authorities and sector ministries, but also largely on external factors that provide the enabling environment.

Within the Economic and Environmental Dimension, **environmental governance** has an important role. Over the years, we have built a **strong record of projects** supporting participating States in addressing different environmental challenges at national level as well as in a transboundary context. The vast majority of these projects also contribute to strengthening good environmental governance in one way or another. I would like to use this opportunity to briefly refer to some of the examples of our work in this area.

My Office has been closely co-operating with the OSCE field operations to step up efforts to facilitate good environmental governance. In this regard, I want to specifically emphasize the activities undertaken by **60 Aarhus Centers in 14 countries** as well as at regional level. The Aarhus Centers serve as a platform for dialogue between civil society, government and business and promote principles of good environmental governance. They have been active in several areas, especially in the field of water governance, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. In many cases, these activities also involve co-operation at regional level. For example, last year the Aarhus Centers of South-Eastern Europe signed a Joint Declaration for Co-operation that will bring their relationship to a new level.

Another area where the OSCE has for many years contributed to strengthening governance aspects is **water governance**. Water knows no borders and its quality and quantity depends on the interaction and co-ordination among different sectors. Together with UNECE, the OSCE has been involved in supporting the capacity of participating States in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia to govern water resources well in a transboundary context. A lot of work to help strengthen water governance at national and local level has also been accomplished by our Field Operations or in co-operation with them.

Two other areas where we have also contributed to achieving good environmental governance are **disaster risk reduction**, including wildfire management and reduction of flood risks, as well as **waste management**.

Let me underline that most of these activities are taking place in the framework of the **Environment and Security Initiative** which the OSCE is chairing again this year. For over a decade now, ENVSEC has been a unique mechanism to create synergies among its partners and jointly address environmental challenges, inter alia, by supporting different aspects of environmental governance.

Excellencies,

Our agenda for the next two days will provide an opportunity for a comprehensive discussion of good environmental governance in different contexts, including its linkages to sustainable development and security. Allow me to add a few words on the **specific sessions** of this meeting:

Governing natural resources and the environment well is of fundamental importance for sustainable development and can effectively contribute to fostering stability and security. In the **first session**, we will discuss good environmental governance, economic development and competitiveness. We will look at it in the context of sustainable development and

enhancing stability and security, and discuss its impact on the investment climate and competitiveness. This session will also share some examples of the best practices on environmental performance in the business sector.

Environmental legislation has an important role to play in creating an enabling environment for business. Better implementation not only helps to achieve the objectives for a cleaner and healthier environment but also to ensure a more level playing field and incentives for sustainable growth. At the same time, implementation of environmental legislation, including multilateral environmental agreements, can pose a challenge in many countries in the OSCE region. The **second session** today will be dedicated to environmental legislation and its impact on business and investment. At this session we will also have an opportunity to discuss some of the best practices on environmental compliance.

Measures that strengthen such crucial governance aspects as transparency, access to information and public participation may be equally or even more important than specific environmental policies or projects in order to address environmental challenges effectively. The **third session** will give a chance to discuss these aspects of governance more in-depth.

Raw materials have enormous potential to create and support sustainable development in many of the countries. However, their poor management can have unfavourable social, environmental and public health impacts and may be a cause for corruption. In the **fourth session**, we will focus on this sector and look at how good environmental governance can be applicable in the context of the raw materials sector, including best practices of local community and private sector interaction.

Using limited natural resources in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the environment, makes it possible to create more with less and to deliver greater value with less input. Green technologies and innovation have an important role to play in this process. The **fifth session** will look at resource efficiency and green technologies as instruments for sustainable development. Some of the aspects of green economy and its relevance from both economic and security perspectives will also be elaborated.

Managing increasing waste streams is currently one of the biggest challenges for growing urban areas both in the OSCE region and beyond. Waste management is also an issue of global concern since the decay of organic material in solid waste contributes to global greenhouse gas emissions. The **sixth session** will enable a discussion of the role of sound waste management frameworks in the context of good environmental governance. It will be particularly enlightening to hear about best practices in addressing waste-related challenges from different parts of the OSCE region.

In concluding, I would like to welcome you all once again and I strongly encourage you to actively participate and contribute to our Forum's deliberations. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.