

**The 16th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (Part 2),
Prague, 19 – 21 May 2008**

**Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area:
Increasing security and protecting the environment**

**Opening address by Ms. Astrid Thors, Minister of Migration and
European Affairs, Finland**

Mr. Moderator, Mr. Minister,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today to address maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area. The 16th Economic and Environmental Forum discussions in Helsinki, Vienna and Ashgabat have covered many key aspects of theme and taken in almost the whole OSCE geographical area. I am pleased that our deliberations can continue here in Prague. I wish to pay a special tribute to our Czech hosts, and to thank Minister Tomáš Pojar for having the Prague Forum arranged in these grand premises.

Seas and other waterways are vital to our common security and prosperity, and they are essential for the health of the environment. Security and the environment are here joined issues. Challenges and pressures on marine and inland waterways are manifold, ranging from aquatic invasive species, eutrophication and water pollution to risks of accidents and threats of terrorist acts. Healthy, secure and safe seas and waterways are vital for ensuring economic growth and sustainable development.

We need a vision of the goals that we seek to attain, and to recognize clearly the risks that concern our watercourses and affect our future security and the environment. A holistic and integrated approach is essential. Bearing in mind the dramatic days of flooding of the Danube some years ago, I do think we really see the need for common and coherent action.

How can this be achieved?

I wish to highlight a number of points that I believe we all share. To my mind, six interrelated issues stand out:

Firstly, there are a number of agreements and international conventions. It is essential to step up the implementation of those agreements and to find the political will for that.

The whole OSCE area can benefit from the advanced environmental agreements that have been negotiated in the frame of the UN or IMO or regional organisations. To mention one that is particularly relevant to our discussions is the UNECE 'Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes'. This Convention provides an excellent instrument to solve both economic and environmental management issues in often conflicting situations. Another is IMO's the MARPOL Convention, which for decades has

acted as the regulatory framework against pollution from ships. The worldwide problem of transfer of harmful invasive aquatic species in ships' ballast water requires also further attention from all OSCE participating States. All participating states should promptly ratify the 'International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments' and other relevant conventions.

I would note also that the European Union has a comprehensive environmental legislation. The Water Framework Directive, for instance, encourages EU Member States to collaborate with non-EU neighbours in watershed management in all cases in which the watershed is shared. The Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) component of the EU Water Initiative seeks to promote integrated water resources management in the countries of the EECCA region.

UNECE is also a key partner in this undertaking, as is the OECD concerning the water and sanitation component of the initiative. I wish to encourage EU Member States and the EECCA countries to support and to make full use of this cooperation framework.

IMO's efforts to protect the marine environment and to make travel and transport by sea as safe and secure as possible are recognized world wide. Its regulatory and capacity building work deserves support from all fronts. These words do not mean that I do not see the need to further develop the IMO's agenda. It is urgent to develop international rules against deliberate release of graywater in highly sensitive waters. Secondly the safety of the transport through mandatory rules on pilotage in the same kind of waters needs to be considered.

My second point is that throughout the OSCE area and beyond, the common objective should be to create extensive stakeholder

participation and ownership, based on knowledge, technology and good working relations, as well as increased synergies for concerted approach and innovation. We should avoid wasting energy on institutional details, and focus on achieving sustainable and concrete results. If actions come too late, the cost of learning lessons can be extremely high.

The third point I wish to raise is that regional and sub-regional coordination and co-operation as well as regional ownership are important factors in increasing sustainable use of waterways.

When addressing regional matters, frank and close consultations between all parties are indispensable, especially as this also contributes towards a common vision of the goal. Regional co-operation, being also more resource-efficient than individual efforts, goes one step further than building bilateral relationships.

Against this background, I wish to take the Baltic Sea and the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) as an example.

HELCOM, encompassing all Baltic Sea states and the European Community, is active in the restoring of a vulnerable marine ecosystem. The aims are clear: to take concrete steps for the benefit of the marine environment, improve maritime safety and accident response capacity, prevent pollution involving hazardous substances as well as to halt habitat destruction and the decline in biodiversity. To this end, HELCOM is making history with a recently adopted cross-sectoral Action Plan to restore the Baltic Sea's ecological status by 2021, to which all States are committed.

The Gulf of Finland Reporting system (GOFREP), a mandatory ship reporting system, is another example. The system combines international co-operation between Finland, Estonia and Russia,

increases safety and enhances protection of marine environment. What is more, the system has been approved by the IMO.

Regional co-operation is not only important in the catchment areas of watercourses; it also matters to landlocked countries in order to ensure safe and secure transportation and transit and to overcome the prevailing challenges.

My fourth point is really an appeal to step up national and international efforts to address the challenge of climate change.

The European Commission and the High Representative of the EU have brought attention to the issue of conflict prevention in the context of climate change. Not surprisingly, the analysis suggests that many of the potential sources of conflicts which increase as a consequence of the climate change are water related. Already, some OSCE participating States have identified climate change as one of the key elements of their national water policies. I hope that this Forum will help to identify further aims and measures to mitigate the harmful consequences of this great environmental challenge.

The maritime sector can be both a problem and a solution as comes to climate change. Water transports are very efficient and save resources if rightly handled. That is why we need to step up our efforts to ensure that the European waterways are well-functioning and contributing to the saving of energy in the transport sector.

But as I said – the maritime sector can also be a problem. Statistics differ, but if we are not careful the maritime sector will be a bigger CO2 emitter than air transport.

The way in which the maritime sector should or could contribute to diminishing the risk of climate change must therefore be debated. It

is a difficult task taking into account the nature of the maritime sector.

With interest we are looking forward to the updated report by IMO on greenhouse gas emissions.

It is also possible that Climate Change will open new transport corridors in the Arctic and we need to take that into account when setting safety standards.

My fifth point is the question; Are we moving in the right direction and are we doing enough?

My answer is that the direction is right, but that more progress must be achieved. Countries should be ready to do more at the national level, as well as regionally and internationally. And, such actions must then be followed by effective implementation and execution.

Finally, I wish to touch upon the role of the OSCE.

I believe we can only succeed if we act together. We need to build partnerships – networks of multifaceted partnerships – as they are essential for decreasing vulnerabilities and for building sustainable strategies. This entails partnerships and transparency, between States, the private sector and the whole civil society.

International actors and organizations are essential parts of this network. The OSCE has excellent working relations with numerous other international actors, and this year's theme has further strengthened the links. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) have substantially contributed to this year's theme and discussions.

The OSCE is the largest regional security organization, with specialised central Institutions and 18 Field Presences. The Organization has also built close relations with its Partners for Co-operation in the Mediterranean and Asia. In addition, the OSCE has developed efficient co-operation and partnerships with several other international organizations. This broad network and the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security provide an appropriate framework for reviewing this year's objectives of the 16th Economic and Environmental Forum.

In the OSCE area, participating States face common challenges because of the simple fact that the seas and inland waterways are interconnected. The decision to address maritime and inland waterways co-operation reflects the attention and political will that the OSCE can bring to these complex security issues. The intention is not to duplicate the work of other international organizations or specialized institutions, but to complement them where value can be added and progress achieved.

The OSCE can have an active role to play in political consultations and in generating political will.

Furthermore, the OSCE could have a role to play in exchanging best practises, as well as in capacity building. We should really promote the best models of governance at different levels as well as recognize other waterways that would need to develop common governance models. This is also linked to a general matter of enhancing good governance, including also efficient management of borders, cross-border facilitation and sustainable water management.

On behalf of the Chairmanship, let me conclude by thanking the Secretary General, Mr. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut for his

commitment and support, and the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Mr. Bernard Snoy and his team, as well as the OSCE Prague Office for their hard work in the preparation of this Forum.

I wish you all the best of success for this Forum and look forward to the plans of the incoming Greek Chairmanship on improving migration governance, which is a most topical issue in the OSCE Area.

Thank you for your attention.