



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

**23rd OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM
“Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability
through co-operation”**

CONCLUDING MEETING

**Prague, 14 - 16 September 2015
Welcoming Remarks**

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

I join our host in welcoming you to this Concluding Meeting of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. It is good to see so many high-level representatives of the OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation, international, regional and non-governmental organizations, as well as from academia, civil society and the private sector with us today.

Since the First Preparatory Meeting of the Forum in January, there have been significant developments at the global level. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted by UN Member States in March 2015. In June consensus on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, a new framework for development financing was reached. And the United Nations also reached agreement on a new sustainable development agenda that will be adopted later this month at the Sustainable Development Summit in New York.

We are also only 10 weeks away from the Paris Climate Change Conference – COP21 – which aims to adopt a new, global agreement on climate change. Good water governance has an important role to play in achieving goals set in these processes. In this context, the year

2015 provides unparalleled opportunities for our Organization to explore synergies with our partners and take concerted action for a more sustainable and secure future.

Within the framework of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum process, we have facilitated a comprehensive discussion on water governance and its potential for increasing security and cooperation in the OSCE area. I am confident that the deliberations during the preparatory meetings in Vienna and in Belgrade have advanced a deeper understanding of water governance and its relationship with sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk reduction. Over the next three days, we will devote further attention to these linkages in dedicated sessions.

Allow me to share a few points that I consider important in the context of this meeting's discussions.

1. Water is a **strategic resource** and an essential element of national and regional security. Growing water demand, pollution, and climate change put water resources under stress and set water availability at risk. In this respect, the OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organization, should make full use of the potential offered by water diplomacy and water governance to increase security and stability in our region and beyond.
2. Water is a **common good**. Governing water resources in a transboundary context requires mechanisms, norms and agreements that are equitable, adapted to the specific context and take local traditions and conditions into account. Fostering local ownership, developing trust and the political will to move forward together are essential conditions that a regional organisation such as ours can help advance.
3. The countries in the OSCE region have the advantage of a **legally binding convention** – the so-called *UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*, or, as it is often referred to, the Water Convention. **Legal and political co-operation** can mutually reinforce each other and contribute to achieving successful outcomes. There are a number of best practice examples in our region – some of them facilitated jointly by the OSCE and UNECE. [Following this opening session, UNECE will present their *Review Report on the implementation of OSCE commitments* in the field of water governance. This

comprehensive report has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Water Convention and is yet another concrete illustration of the lasting and fruitful partnership between our two organizations.]

4. The OSCE is well placed to support the participating States in various aspects of good water governance. They include:
 - Establishing effective *inter-sectoral co-ordination* at local and national levels;
 - Ensuring *transparent and accountable decision-making*;
 - Enabling *stakeholder participation* inclusive of civil society, youth, women and men, as well as the private sector and academia;
 - Improving *data and information sharing*; and
 - Putting in place *sound regulatory frameworks*.

5. **Local communities** should be involved in addressing water governance issues and be part of confidence-building efforts because the effects of water challenges are often most acutely felt at the local level. The OSCE, including through its Field Operations and the network of 59 Aarhus Centers in 14 countries, already engages with local communities on issues relevant to water governance and - more broadly – environmental governance in many locations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We will continue supporting good water governance in our region, in close partnership with other international stakeholders, as demonstrated by OSCE Secretariat participation in the OECD Water Governance Initiative.

In the follow-up to the Sendai Framework, the Basel Ministerial Council Decision “Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction” provides us with comprehensive guidance and we are taking concrete steps towards implementing our commitments.

Only a few weeks ago, together with the Serbian Chairmanship and the Government of Switzerland, we organized a seminar entitled “Co-operative water governance: catalyst for sustainable development and comprehensive security” at the 25th World Water Week in Stockholm. The seminar discussed water co-operation in South-Eastern Europe and the lessons learnt from the floods in May 2014; and featured the Dniester River Basin as a

successful example of bilateral water co-operation, in this case between Ukraine and Moldova, that was developed with the support of the OSCE and UNECE.

Finally let us turn back to the global agendas I mentioned a minute ago.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals represent a strong, ambitious, and visionary set of commitments. The OSCE can engage in areas such as water, climate change, energy, land degradation and disaster risk reduction, as well as gender equality, the promotion of inclusive societies and many others. My intervention at the upcoming UN Summit in New York will touch upon their linkages with security and the OSCE's role.

Regarding the **COP21**, the agreement to be reached in Paris, if it is reached, has the potential to limit global warming and avoid catastrophic and irreversible consequences that would have severe adverse implications for security. We will support the "Road to Paris" by organizing an OSCE Security Day devoted to "Climate Change and Security" on 28 October in Vienna.

As for this Forum, I expect that it will help us identify and further articulate the OSCE's role in the context of water governance, not least in view of the forthcoming Ministerial Council. But our discussions can also contribute to the larger debate on the contribution the OSCE can make to support the global process that will to an extent shape our agenda in the coming years and decades.

In conclusion, let me emphasise how much we appreciate the co-operation and partnerships we have built in the field of water governance with a number of international organizations, including in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC). These partnerships continue to strengthen our joint engagement to increase environmental security in the OSCE area.

I look forward to a productive discussion over the next few days. Thank you.