



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

Vienna, 26 - 27 January 2015
Welcoming Remarks

Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the **First Preparatory Meeting of this year’s OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum** devoted to water governance in the OSCE area.

I am just back from the **World Economic Forum in Davos**, where I participated in a panel discussion on climate change and extreme weather events. The global business community is well aware that climate change, natural disasters and water crises are major threats to sustainable development and prosperity. In its yearly Global Risk Reports, the World Economic Forum always lists water crises as one of the highest global risks. In this year’s report **water crises are identified as the number one global risk** in terms of possible impacts.

Water crises manifest themselves in different ways: floods in one place, scarcity and droughts in another, pollution problems in yet another. But the fact of the matter is that reduced availability of clean, fresh water has far-reaching effects on society, the economy and security. In many countries, the foreign policy, security and defense communities are increasingly aware of the growing challenges related to the availability of **water but also food and energy**. A better understanding of the complex interconnections between **water and security** is developing and will help us identify the most pressing problem areas.

In the OSCE context, water was first mentioned in the 1975 **Helsinki Final Act**. Over the past decade it has gained prominence on the OSCE's agenda. In 2003, the **Maastricht Strategy Document**, which is fundamental for the OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension, called for sustainable management of shared natural resources, including water. In the 2007 **Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security**, participating States reaffirmed their commitment to improve environmental governance by, among other things, strengthening the sustainable management of water. That same year, a **Ministerial Decision** called on participating States to enhance their co-operation on water management, and it was also instrumental in establishing closer collaboration on water management with the **UN Economic Commission for Europe** and other international organizations.

The **OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum** focused on water issues in 2002, 2007 and 2008 – and now again this year. OSCE political decisions related to water and the ensuing discussions have been translated into many **concrete project activities** to support the efforts of OSCE participating States to develop more sustainable water management.

It is meanwhile widely acknowledged that **better water governance** can go a long way in alleviating and mitigating water shortages. In this context, a shared understanding of water resources as a common good that we have to use responsibly is of fundamental importance. In pursuing the objective of better water governance, we also need a **comprehensive and inclusive approach**. Water governance can only be effective if all **stakeholders**, including civil society, the private sector and academia, are fully involved. Transparency and access to information are primary prerequisites for this.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given the two-way relationship between water and security – **water as a source of conflict and water co-operation as a tool for conflict prevention** – water issues offer significant potential for meaningful OSCE engagement. In other words, if we want to be serious about conflict prevention, we have to address water-related challenges to security.

Last year, the potential for cooperation in **preventing and managing water-related disasters** featured high on our agenda. As if to remind us of the urgency of the topic, we witnessed the devastating floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The

response of these three most-affected countries and of others that offered their support was impressive, providing a good illustration of the cooperation and solidarity that is possible when confronted with disaster. The lesson of course is that more efforts will need to be invested in prevention and better preparedness to avoid calamities on such a massive scale in the future.

In Basel, the **Ministerial Council Decision on Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction** took this into account. It recognizes that sustainable use and management of water, along with other natural resources, is essential for the prevention of disasters. The OSCE participating States also committed to further developing good practices in the field of water management and flood risk management.

Let me also mention the **OSCE Security Days conference on Water Diplomacy** that we organized last July. Two of the main conclusions from that meeting were that we have to **focus on policy instead of politics**, and that we need to take a **multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach**. During this Forum, we will hear examples from various OSCE participating States where such an approach has been put into practice. The OSCE is well placed to support practical efforts to enhance water governance through project activities and to work towards greater recognition of water as a prominent security issue.

It is obvious that interest in water governance transcends the OSCE region. A **Workshop on Environment and Security Issues in the Southern Mediterranean Region** held in Vienna in December provided experts from both the OSCE region and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation with an opportunity to discuss a range of pressing environment and security issues, including transboundary water co-operation. I believe that we can safely say that water security will continue to be a topic of joint interest and increasingly common action with the OSCE's Partners for Co-operation.

This year, water will be discussed in a number of prominent international fora. In March, the **Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction** will be held in Sendai, Japan. In April, the **7th World Water Forum** will take place in South Korea. In August, World Water Week will celebrate its 25th anniversary in Stockholm. And in September, the **Sustainable Development Goals** are expected to be adopted by the UN General Assembly, including one dedicated to the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Finally, when discussing water we should be mindful of **climate change** and negotiations that

continue under UN guidance and that will culminate at the **Paris Climate Change Conference** in December.

The 2015 Economic and Environmental Forum process will give us ample opportunity to discuss ways to further develop the OSCE's role in this important area. We will do this in close concert with other international actors, foremost our partners in the **Environment and Security – ENVSEC – Initiative** with whom we have a long-standing co-operation on water projects. I wish to express my gratitude to the speakers and to all participants for joining us here in Vienna to take an active part in our deliberations.

Thank you.