

## **23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

### **“Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability through cooperation”**

**Concluding meeting  
Prague, 14-16 September 2015**

#### **Closing session**

#### **Written contribution by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan expresses gratitude to the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship, Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities for organizing, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for hosting the Concluding Meeting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Both the preparatory segment and the Concluding Meeting of this year’s Forum cycle provided an ample opportunity for experts to exchange views and best practices on water governance.

In the course of the Forum meetings our experts shared national experience of Azerbaijan, gained, inter alia, through cooperation with international partners, and drew the attention of Forum participants to the challenges it faces as a downstream country, as water pollution has wider implications for Azerbaijan and for the Caspian sea.

We underline the importance of compliance of transboundary water co-operation with relevant multilateral environmental agreements, specifically the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. Responsible management of transboundary water resources is crucial to prevent and reduce adverse impacts across border. In this regard, we reiterate our call on the OSCE and other relevant international organizations to promote the soonest accession of upstream countries to international legal instruments in the area of water protection including the aforesaid Convention.

It has been our longstanding position that bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including in the area of water governance, requires respect for the founding principles of OSCE, outlined in the Helsinki Final Act, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. We have engaged in partnership with other countries, including

OSCE participating States, on this basis, and it would be unrealistic to assume that we could extend cooperation to a country that has violated these principles by occupying part of the territory of Azerbaijan.

OSCE's possible role in the field of water governance should be assessed against the background of the existing conditions, the mandate of its executive structures and strict compliance of their activities with the relevant norms and principles of international law and the Helsinki Final Act. We note, in this regard, that the 2006 OSCE-led environmental assessment mission to the fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was conducted under United Nations General Assembly resolution "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan" in the context of OSCE's involvement in the activities aimed at prevention and elimination of fires in the occupied territories.

Cooperation on water governance could probably play a role of a confidence building measure to prevent conflicts in the regions experiencing tensions over the use of shared water resources. In the South Caucasus region, though, confidence and trust can be built through restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders. This in turn, could pave the way for exploring cooperation opportunities that would benefit the entire region. Regional projects in South Caucasus, that Azerbaijan has initiated and is part of, are based on respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good-neighbourly relations. Countries wishing to be part of similar cooperation and enjoy its benefits should learn from this positive experience.