

The 16th Economic and Environmental Forum / Part I

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

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WELCOMING ADDRESS
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Your Excellency, Minister Tiilikainen,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Finnish Chairmanship, and as Chairman of the Permanent Council, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the first segment of the 16th Economic and Environmental Forum. I am very pleased to see so many of you here today.

At the outset, I would like to express my special thanks and appreciation to Minister Tiilikainen for attending the Forum. I would also like to thank all other speakers as well as moderators and rapporteurs who have accepted our invitation to participate in the Forum. Your contribution will be appreciated very much. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Snoy and his team for their hard work in organizing this Forum.

In its Chairmanship Programme Finland stresses the importance of continuity in the work of the OSCE. This approach guided us also when we proposed the theme for this year's Forum. The theme "*Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area: Increasing security and protecting the environment*" draws on the work already undertaken by the previous chairmanships. The Belgian chairmanship in 2006 addressed transport issues whereas the Spanish Chairmanship discussed questions related to environment and security. Also the workshop on Transport, Security and Environment organized by Norway in October 2006 should be mentioned as a source of inspiration for the Forum.

Another aspect that Finland stresses in its Chairmanship Programme is co-operation. We believe that promoting co-operation in economic and environmental matters contributes to greater stability, security and prosperity, prevents conflicts and fosters reconstruction. On the other hand, neglecting economic and environmental challenges and problems may increase tensions inside and between States and regions. This applies to issues related maritime and inland waterways as well, and the aspect of co-operation is very much emphasised in the Forum process.

However, the theme was not chosen only because of the aspects of continuity and co-operation but because the topic is very important and topical, and because the OSCE can make a contribution by addressing security and environment related questions in the area of maritime and inland waterways co-operation. The theme covers the whole OSCE area as it addresses issues related to maritime and inland waterways as well as specific challenges of the landlocked countries.

The Forum process started already in Helsinki last September, when the first Preparatory Conference was held. Presentations and discussions showed clearly that security issues in the context of maritime and inland waterways are pressing and need to be addressed. In addition, the discussions in Helsinki underlined the complexity of the increasing number of environmental problems that we need to solve together.

Some preliminary conclusions were drawn at the end of the Preparatory Conference Helsinki. It was mentioned that the OSCE can play a key role in mobilizing political will in participating States in order to address security and environmental issues in relation to maritime and inland waterways co-operation. The OSCE could also support the work of relevant international organizations by offering a platform for dialogue. The OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security, is well-placed to discuss these questions, raise awareness, enhance cooperation and exchange best practises.

In my view, these preliminary conclusions are still valid. Today and tomorrow we will continue discussions and build upon the outcome of Helsinki conference. Our aim is to develop ideas further and come up with recommendations for the OSCE. I would like to stress that in our deliberations we should concentrate in particular on the role that the OSCE can play in maritime and inland waterways co-operation.

I encourage you to participate actively in the discussions and wish you all an interesting and stimulating Forum here in Vienna.

Thank you for your attention.