

ENGLISH only

FIRST PREPARATORY CONFERENCE OF THE 16th ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM (**OPENING SESSION**)

**SPEECH OF THE HEAD OF THE TASK FORCE FOR THE SPANISH OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP, AMBASSADOR JOSE ANGEL LOPEZ JORRIN.
SPANISH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Secretary of State, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the OSCE Spanish Chairmanship, I would like to welcome you to the First Preparatory Conference to the 16th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, which focuses on “Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area: Increasing security and protecting the environment”.

I would like to thank the Finnish government for the excellent organization of this meeting, and Mr. Bernard Snoy, Coordinator of the Office of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, and his staff, for their very efficient work not only to get everything ready for these two days, but also and very especially for their very professional and helpful job during this year’s Chairmanship. I can already advance to my Finnish colleagues that you will be very impressed by them.

From the very beginning let me wish every success to the incoming Finnish Chairmanship in conducting the preparatory work for the next year’s Forum. I am convinced that under the able guidance of Finland the OSCE economic and environmental dimension will continue to develop on an ascending path, that the progress achieved and the new impetus the second dimension gained over the last couple of years will be further consolidated. Spain is proud to contribute to this process. Spain will remain committed to the continuous strengthening of the effectiveness of the OSCE in the economic and environmental field.

I am pleased to see around the table representatives of key international and regional organizations, government officials and experts from the OSCE participating States, civil society representatives, business people and academics. The OSCE always valued the interaction between various stakeholders and I am looking forward to the presentations and debates over the next two days.

For Spain, a country with almost 8.000 kms of coastline, the Finnish theme: “Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area: Increasing security and protecting the environment”, is particularly important. In strategic places like the straight of Gibraltar, or in the Canary Islands (which witness how more than 60% of the oil tankers which supply European markets pass off their coasts, where more than two million people live), environmental security is very much at stake, and Finland’s proposed theme will give us an opportunity to tackle it.

Furthermore, the theme of maritime and inland waterways co-operation provides for an integrated approach of economic and environmental aspects. It also represents an opportunity for exchanging best practices and experiences in an intra and inter-regional context, for strengthening political commitments in this regard. It also offers the opportunity to establish and strengthen partnerships with other actors and to integrate OSCE activities into other regional or global processes.

To raise awareness about the link between environment and security is precisely the main part of the Spanish theme this year, and I am quite satisfied to see that there will be continuity next year. For an organization like the OSCE, so much devoted to security, this is an essential point, as environment could so dramatically endanger human life if it is not handled properly.

In this regard, this Conference and the 16th Forum represent an excellent opportunity to further strengthen and streamline the environmental component of OSCE activities. This is an issue which is very close to our hearts and minds. There can be neither lasting security and stability nor sound economic development if we do not pay due attention to the environmental aspects. In this context I would like to mention the proposed Strategy on Environment and Security that Spain has submitted to the OSCE Delegations.

Nowadays we can see with satisfaction that the times when environmental issues were lagging behind other priorities in politics are over. While carefully avoiding duplications, the OSCE should play a bigger role in protecting the environment, especially when our security is at stake.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I encourage all of you to engage in the preparatory process for the next year's Forum in a pro-active way, starting now, with a view to achieving concrete results.

I thank you and wish you all a successful Conference.