

**23<sup>RD</sup> 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*

**Opening Address by**

**H.E. Ivica Dačić**

**Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE**

**First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**Republic of Serbia**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to speak today at the Concluding Meeting of the twenty-third Economic and Environmental Forum of the OSCE. On behalf of the Serbian Chairmanship let me express my gratitude to the Czech authorities for hosting this important event for so many years now.

Let me also warmly welcome our distinguished speaker, Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter, and the OSCE Secretary General, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier.

I am also pleased to welcome representatives from the OSCE participating States, Partners for Cooperation, international organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector. This impressive group of participants underscores once again the role of this Forum as a unique platform for inclusive dialogue and for building strategic partnerships to address the most urgent economic and environmental challenges in the OSCE area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Economic and Environmental dimension of the OSCE has traditionally been somewhat in the shadow of the other two dimensions. Taking into account the crisis in and around Ukraine and its economic underpinnings, as well as today’s migration challenges which are

happening at our very doorstep – in the OSCE region, the Economic and Environmental Dimension potential is more than obvious. We need to step-up our collective efforts, in the so called Second Dimension of the OSCE, in order to promote security, stability, prosperity and cooperation in our region. By strengthening the Second dimension we will be able to holistically tackle the Organization's comprehensive security approach and its relevance for a world going through economic hardships and social turmoil.

The possibilities for using the OSCE as a platform for dialogue within the economic-security nexus are vast. The OSCE can play a role in enabling us to return to shared perspectives and values with regard to economic cooperation and build bridges between regional and sub-regional formats. It is an important framework for the 57 participating States to identify ways for further strengthening OSCE-wide connectivity through cooperation, and this can go well beyond the economic field. Let us be honest, none of this will happen overnight. But the time has come for a thorough discussion on these issues.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Although much has changed since 1975, the principles and commitments of this document and our collective responsibility to act in accordance with them remain as vital as ever for the OSCE and its participating States. In today's world, the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and its commitment to dialogue, cooperation, compromise and peaceful resolution of disputes are critical to rebuilding trust and confidence, which will help us create a positive agenda for the future.

The Economic and Environmental Forum process is an excellent example of this. By bringing together around the same table a wide array of different stakeholders – policy makers and experts, government officials, civil society and representatives of the private sector – the Forum facilitates the exchange of ideas and practical experiences on the most pressing economic and environmental issues affecting the OSCE region. Both strategic policy decisions and practical co-operation have emerged from the Forum's deliberations in past years. I hope that this year's Forum will be equally fruitful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Serbian Chairmanship – in the framework of our joint work plan with Switzerland – has proposed to specifically focus on how good water governance can contribute to security and stability in the OSCE region, which can at times be a very challenging and politicized security issue. Although water is not a new topic for the OSCE, we believe that there is a need for greater political engagement, increased co-operation, and a better understanding of its complex connections with security and related challenges. Last year's devastating floods in the Western Balkans vividly demonstrated how important transboundary co-operation can be in addressing the negative impact of man-made and natural disasters.

The Serbian Chairmanship has focused on promoting dialogue and co-operation on good water governance within the OSCE area through the sharing of best practices and lessons learned and by raising awareness of the importance of water governance for security and stability at all levels – transboundary, national, and local. Good water governance should also include a gender and youth perspective to maximize environmental, social and economic benefits while contributing to increased security in the OSCE region.

The OSCE is the largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. By tackling contemporary challenges like water governance, we can make a

tangible contribution to global security and prosperity in a regional context. The adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals later this month, and the UN conference on climate change in Paris later this year, both of which are closely connected with water, make today's deliberations all the more timely and necessary.

Considering the successful outcomes of the preparatory meetings, I am confident that this Forum will provide critical inputs for Ministerial Council decisions in Belgrade later this year on how to advance security and stability in the OSCE area through good water governance. In particular, I look forward to your proposals for possible future follow-up actions that the OSCE Secretariat and the OSCE field operations could take in this area. On our part, we will gather and summarize the most important deliverables from the First and Second Preparatory Meetings in Vienna and Belgrade, as well as this Concluding meeting, and start working towards a comprehensive Ministerial Council Decision on this topic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In promoting good water governance, as in other areas of our work, an integrated and cross-dimensional approach and international cooperation are crucial to our common success. Only by working together can we make real progress towards identifying and implementing mutually beneficial solutions to enhance water governance and security in our region. Promoting water governance across the OSCE region means promoting cooperation among participating States, as well as with other international organizations, the private sector and civil society.

I trust that at the end of this Forum we will have a clearer picture of our priorities for engagement in water governance and the most effective ways for the OSCE to achieve them, as well as to renew its commitments and ensure adequate and effective follow-up.

In this spirit, I would like to once again encourage all of you to contribute your ideas for improving water governance and co-operation, which will help strengthen security for citizens, communities and countries throughout the OSCE region and beyond.

Thank you.