



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

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

**Opening Remarks**

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**Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

It is an honour to address this opening session of the First Preparatory Meeting of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. The focus of this year’s Forum is linked to security in a profound way: in the absence of good water governance, water might become a source of conflict. At the same time, well governed water provides opportunities to build confidence and help prevent conflict between those sharing water resources.

I am very pleased to welcome so many reputed experts who joined us to share their in-depth knowledge on different aspects of water governance. Today, we have with us many government officials from the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, representatives of international and bilateral organisations, of international NGOs, academia and the private sector.

Within the Economic and Environmental Dimension, water has always been high on our agenda. Over the years, we have built a strong record of projects supporting participating States in strengthening water governance at national level as well as in a transboundary context. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – also as the holder of the UNECE Water Convention- has always been one of our main partners in this endeavour.

I would like to use this opportunity to give you a few examples of what my Office and our colleagues in the Field Operations have been doing in the field of water governance:

In **South-Eastern Europe**, we have been involved in the **International Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin** since its early stages and also contributed to the work of the International Sava River Basin Commission. Currently, our engagement in the region is more targeting community-based disaster risk reduction, particularly through the network of Aarhus Centers. At this point, I would also like to refer to the OSCE Mission to Serbia which has a long track record in supporting participative flood risk management. They have

done so already long before the May 2014 floods. The Mission has invested significant efforts towards capacity building and community engagement in flood risk reduction, often together with the Aarhus Centres network. Similarly, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to support policy makers in addressing disaster risk reduction plans from a regional perspective, as well as the Aarhus Centres network in their work with local communities to increase their engagement in shaping local flood response plans.

Let me now turn to **Eastern Europe**, where eight years of our joint work with Moldova and Ukraine has led to the signing of the Treaty on the **Dniester River Basin** in 2012. This is a crucial step towards establishing a sound legal framework for good water governance at transboundary level. The Treaty broadens the existing co-operation to cover the entire river basin and all sectors that are important for the management and protection of shared waters. We continue our support to the Dniester Basin through several projects within the framework of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative. One of the most recent results is a draft basin-wide strategic framework for climate change adaptation developed within the framework of an OSCE-led ENVSEC project on climate change and security. The project is financed mainly by the European Union's Instrument for Stability and the Austrian Development Agency and implemented together with UNECE, UNEP, UNDP and REC.

In the **South Caucasus**, together with UNECE, we have facilitated negotiations between Azerbaijan and Georgia on a cooperation agreement on the management of the **Kura River Basin**. We organized six rounds of bilateral consultations to develop a legal framework for co-operation on water pollution, biodiversity, emergency situations, information sharing and public participation. The draft Agreement also envisages the establishment of a joint commission for protection and rational use of water resources of the Kura River Basin. The Agreement is currently under consideration by Azerbaijani and Georgian Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The OSCE stands ready to continue its support and facilitate the finalization of the agreement.

In **Central Asia**, thanks to our Office in Tajikistan, the OSCE has long been engaged in facilitating transboundary water co-operation along the **Upper Amu Darja River** - also known as the Panj River - between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. I would also like to mention our support, together with UNECE, to the establishment and operation of a bilateral water Commission between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the basins of the **Chu and Talas Rivers**. A new follow-up project on the Chu and Talas Rivers is currently under preparation. At this point, let me underline the support and commitment of particularly the Centre in Astana. Their support to basin councils and to capacity building for Integrated Water Resources Management requires special recognition. Efficient irrigation is another area where several OSCE Field Operations in Central Asia are actively engaged.

Let me underline that most of our activities related to water governance are taking place in the framework of the **Environment and Security Initiative**. For over a decade now, ENVSEC has been a unique mechanism to create synergies and jointly address environmental challenges, inter alia, related to water.

Excellencies,

Good water governance based on the principles of co-operation has an essential role to play for building trust and strengthening security. The fundamental importance of good and co-

operative water governance for security and stability within and across borders calls for continuous dialogue and involvement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders at different levels. Our agenda for the next two days will provide an opportunity for this. Allow me a few words on the **specific sessions** of this meeting:

Water is a medium that links air and land through the hydrological cycle. Water is also a vital link between people, communities and countries that are sharing it. Well governed water is essential to maintain public health and sound environment as well as to foster stability. In the **first session**, we will discuss the water governance concept, principles underlying good water governance, as well as best practices in implementing it.

Energy and food production heavily depend on freshwater supply. Pressure on water and land resources in the OSCE area is increasing due to population growth, changing consumption patterns and climate change. Responding to these challenges requires more effective accommodation of future energy and food demands as well as environmental considerations. The **second session** today will be dedicated to water governance across sectors with a focus on fostering food and energy security. The session's deliberations will in particular touch on the water-energy-food nexus and new approaches to sustainable hydropower and efficient irrigation.

Freshwater ecosystems are among the most extensively altered systems on Earth. Rivers, streams, and lakes have experienced various changes as a result of large-scale water diversions, introduction of invasive species, overharvesting, pollution, and climate change. The **third session** will discuss protection of ecosystems and increasing of water efficiency. The session will also look at climate change in the context of water governance.

Governing water resources involves a range of stakeholders at local, national, regional, and international levels. While water often appears to be a local issue, even local water challenges may have implications transcending boundaries and national borders. In the **fourth session**, we will take a closer look at water governance at different levels with a focus on community-based water governance and basin management.

Lack of transparency and corruption are both a cause and a result of poor water governance. Transparency, access to information, and integrity build a sustainable foundation for good water governance and reduce the potential for conflict. The **fifth session** will focus on transparency as the vital prerequisite of good water governance including the roles of economic instruments, civil society and the business sector.

Exchange of knowledge and experience is crucial to develop evidence-based policy, make informed decisions, raise awareness and build trust and confidence between different stakeholders, including at transboundary and regional level. Sharing of technology and innovation on water management has a valuable role to play in this process. The **sixth session** will enable us to have a lively discussion on these aspects.

In concluding, I would like to welcome you all once again and I strongly encourage you to actively participate and contribute to our Forum's deliberations. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.