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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEKSANDR OPIMAKH,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT PART II OF THE 16th MEETING OF
THE OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

Prague, 21 May 2008

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

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, allow me to thank the Finnish Chairmanship, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) and Mr. Bernard Snoy personally for the comprehensive and balanced approach taken in organizing the discussion of various aspects of maritime and inland waterways security and co-operation and environmental protection as well as the problems facing landlocked countries.

We should also like to thank the keynote speakers for their interesting and informative presentations both at the Prague part of the Economic and Environmental Forum and during the Preparatory Conferences. The exchange of views that has taken place on such issues as how to overcome the problems facing landlocked countries, transboundary use of inland rivers, maritime and river traffic safety, prevention of oil spills and good governance in these areas revealed the complexity of the questions we are examining and enabled us to identify possible ways of solving problems that arise at a regional, national and bilateral level.

Thanks to the active involvement in the Forum's work of such respected organizations as the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the World Customs Organization and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), we were better able to assess possible areas of collaboration which would lead to enhanced effectiveness of work rather than duplication of efforts.

It is clear that the OSCE, whose mandate encompasses the strengthening of security and co-operation in its area of responsibility, can and should make a positive contribution towards helping participating States overcome problems as they arise. The basic approaches and ideas with respect to this contribution were outlined in the food-for-thought paper prepared by the OCEEA and confirmed during the discussions held in Vienna and Prague.

During the preparatory events and working sessions of the Forum, the Republic of Belarus had an excellent opportunity to present its view of new and existing security challenges, along with prospects for co-operation. We are confident that support by the OSCE for regional and bilateral initiatives aimed at increasing the level of co-operation in the area of transportation and simplification of border crossing procedures, joint use of water resources and environmental protection will help to further strengthen confidence and expand co-operation between States. This kind of project activity involving the OSCE, notably the ENVSEC Initiative, is aimed at achieving precisely these goals.

In our opinion, the OSCE can make an important contribution by supporting countries interested in acceding to and implementing the relevant international conventions and bringing their national laws into line with existing international norms and standards.

Our experience of project-based co-operation aimed at helping Belarus to implement the Aarhus Convention has been fairly positive and work is under way in connection with the Kyoto Protocol. As has already been mentioned, the human factor is one of the principal causes of environmental degradation of ecosystems and can have an extremely negative impact on climate change.

In that connection, we should like to inform you that Belarus has put forward a proposal to establish quantitative commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the Republic of Belarus to 92 per cent of the 1990 base level. We urge participating States to promptly ratify our proposed amendment to Annex B to the Kyoto Protocol, thereby enabling Belarus to make its contribution to the global efforts to alleviate man's impact on the climate. We hope that the OSCE will support this appeal.

We fully support the appeal made to participating States earlier to share appropriate technologies and practices so as to help narrow the gap between States in compliance with technical and environmental standards.

Also of considerable interest is the regular holding of reviews of the implementation of commitments in the OSCE economic dimension in order to identify bottlenecks and confirm our commitment to strengthening co-operation among States in the economic and environmental sphere. At the same time, effective implementation of commitments, including those in the economic and environmental sphere, is possible only if there is real co-operation on the part of all participating States.

As emphasized in the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension (paragraph 2.1.2), "Our co-operation should be based on solidarity, transparency, equal and non-discriminatory partnership, mutual accountability and full respect for the interests of all the OSCE participating States. If action in the economic field has a negative impact on other participating States, we will seek to minimize this, in line with our international obligations".

Despite this, some participating States exert economic or other kinds of pressure; this represents a serious violation of fundamental OSCE principles and is unacceptable under generally recognized norms of international law. Artificial restrictions or sanctions of any kind merely undermine the socio-economic development of participating States and hamper the implementation of economic, environmental and social programmes. Only through co-operation and dialogue is it possible to solve problems, and the OSCE should focus its

activities on establishing precisely this kind of constructive dialogue and not allow the emergence of new dividing lines.

We were interested to hear the theme proposed by Greece for the next OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. The Republic of Belarus is ready to make a constructive contribution to forthcoming discussions on the theme of the Forum and to its successful consideration in 2009.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the Government of the Czech Republic for its hospitality and the fine opportunity afforded for the successful work of the Forum.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.