



EUROPEAN UNION

23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 1st Preparatory Meeting

Vienna, 26 – 27 January 2015 EU Opening Statement

The European Union is pleased to participate in the first preparatory meeting of the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum, and would like to thank the Serbian Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for organising this meeting. We would also like to thank the key note speakers for their insightful presentations.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of water for sustainable development and the preservation of peace. Growing tensions and conflicts over access to water are directly affecting international peace and security. Indeed, reconciling different uses of water resources such as drinking water and sanitation, agriculture, food production, industry and energy are major water security challenges.

The EU can speak of its own experience on good water governance and the prevention of conflicts. Sixty per cent of the EU's territory lies in trans-boundary river basins and some of these are shared with non EU countries. EU water policy has successfully contributed to water protection over the past three decades, for example in the Rhine and Danube river basins, and the implementation of trans-boundary water management principles enshrined in EU legislation has been key. But some challenges remain because of a lack of trans-boundary river basin agreements with some EU neighbouring countries.

The importance we attach to water management and cooperation is reflected both in the EU's internal and external policies. In July 2013, the EU adopted Council conclusions on EU water diplomacy. Our ministers concluded that comprehensive responses were needed to tackle water security challenges,

including through integrated water resource management at trans-boundary level.

For the European Union, the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans-boundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki 1992) and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (New York 1997) are important instruments to promote equitable, sustainable and integrated management of trans-boundary water resources.

EU water diplomacy also aims at promoting ratification and responsible implementation of these conventions and other relevant international agreements as the basis for collaborative, sustainable and rule-based solutions on water security challenges and for subsequent regional or bilateral trans-boundary river basin agreements.

The OSCE only has two documents specifically relating to water, MC.DEC/7/07 and MC.DEC/9/08. Perhaps there are possibilities of finding new areas of cooperation. We therefore look forward to the discussions during the 23rd EEF process. We believe that the 23rd EEF will provide an opportunity to take stock of the OSCE's achievements in the field of water governance as well as identify possible areas for its further engagement in this area. In particular, we look forward to hearing concrete suggestions on how the OSCE can add value whilst avoiding duplications in dealing with this important topic.

We appreciate that this meeting aims to explore the linkages water governance has with energy security, climate change and good governance.

We welcome that the 23rd EEF aims to promote regional and cross-border cooperation, capacity building, awareness raising and the sharing of good practices. Environmental challenges are often cross boundary in nature and the OSCE, as a regional security Organisation, is well placed to play a significant role in facilitating and enhancing dialogue and confidence building measures through cooperation in this regard.

We appreciate that representatives of many specialised forums, including representatives of civil society, have been invited to this meeting.

Finally, we would like to once again thank the Serbian Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for preparing this first meeting, and we hope it will be a fruitful one.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and MONACO align themselves with this statement.*

** The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*