



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

22ND OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

“Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting co-operation and security in the OSCE area”

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

Vienna, 27-28 January 2014

Closing Statement

by Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitguden

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Dear Ambassadors,
Dear Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding the First Preparatory Meeting of the 22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum on “Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting cooperation and security in the OSCE area”, please allow me to express my gratitude for the constructive discussions, the comprehensive presentations, the competent moderations as well as the ideas put forward over the last two days.

The theme of this year’s Forum proves to be of major importance for all 57 participating States of the Organization, by placing a particular focus on risks related to natural disasters and on how we, as a part of the international community, could contribute to finding solutions for reducing these risks.

We in the OSCE will spare no efforts to enhance the results achieved at this First Preparatory Meeting, also by complementing the efforts and activities of government agencies, UN organisations, the business sector and non-governmental organisations in this area of debate. We have seen that disaster prevention is not just a technical matter, but that it is closely linked with environmental good governance and sustainable management of natural resources. This represents also one of our core activities in the Second Dimension.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The two excellent keynote speeches by Ms. Guha-Sapir and Mr. Hess as well as the presentations in the first session showed clearly the urgency of addressing this topic and the devastating impact on human, social and economic life which disasters can have if we fail to invest in prevention, preparedness and management.

We have learned about global statistics and trends, but we have also got familiar with the concrete impacts of past disasters in the OSCE sub-regions, like the earthquakes in Turkey and Central Asia, or the recent floodings that affected various OSCE participating States. In this respect, the presentation on the flooding in Georgia which caused leakage of arsenic waste, showed the particular management challenge when natural disasters cause secondary technological accidents.

Other practical case studies showed us successful approaches of co-ordination and co-operation among different actors and levels in disaster management – for example the cooperation of public entities with insurance companies, the cross-border co-operation within the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe or the manifold bilateral co-operation of Slovenia with its neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, over the last two days we have addressed the topic of disasters from various perspectives, including the role of human interactions with environment, such as: unsustainable development practices, inadequate land management, poor spatial planning or infrastructure failures. And once again the role of prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation was stressed.

Aware of the fact that a successful approach towards an integrated disaster risk management requires a multi-stakeholder approach, we have dedicated one session of this meeting to the role of civil society. It showed that co-operation with local communities, civil society and the business sector provides concrete added value in strengthening resilience. Also the work of the Aarhus Centres has been and continues to be of high value in this respect. We will continue to further expand the capacities of Aarhus Centres on disaster risk reduction in order to further enable them to strengthen in particular the awareness and capacities of communities.

There were suggestions and recommendations from the experts and the participants about the possible areas where the OSCE could provide its support and where it could play an important role in the field of reduction of disaster risks.

It is our responsibility to closely consider these recommendations and to look at possible follow-up activities. At the same time, we will continue to promote ratification and implementation of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements to support efforts in the field of disaster risk reduction.

Moreover, my Office, with the support of the participating States, will continue to promote training and capacity development on relevant topics for national, regional and local

administrations, as well as for the business community and civil society. Our Organization has engaged itself over the last decade, together with our ENVSEC partners, in disaster risks reduction - including on fire management related activities and we will further advance our engagement in this framework in close partnership with Global Fire Monitoring Centre and other specialized partners.

At the political level, as laid down in several Ministerial Council decisions, we will continue our efforts to promote dialogue and co-operation both among the participating States, as well as among non-governmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector on issues related to environment and security including disaster risk reduction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last two days, we have received answers to many of our questions. However, there is still room for debate. The Second Preparatory Meeting, which will take place in Montreux on 20- 21 May, will provide opportunity for this and will bring us closer to achieving the main objective of this year's Forum process: to renew, deepen and better define the OSCE's political commitments and engagement in addressing preparedness, emergency response and recovery related to environmental challenges.

Thanks to the *rapporteurs*, a Consolidated Summary including the main key suggestions and recommendations made by participants during the deliberations will be compiled by my Office and made available to all of you within the next weeks.

Before passing the floor to Ambassador Greminger for the closure of this session, I would like to thank the Swiss Chairmanship, the Moderators, Speakers and Rapporteurs, the interpreters, the conference service staff, as well as the colleagues from my Office for their joint contribution to the success of this event.

I also want to thank all of you, dear participants, for your active contribution, and to wish you a safe trip back home.