

EF.DEL/15/07
23 January 2007

ENGLISH
Original: GERMAN

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREAS BIEBER, HEAD OF THE
SOIL PROTECTION AND CONTAMINATED SITES DIVISION OF
THE GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AT
PART I OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE ECONOMIC
AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

Vienna, 22 and 23 January 2007

**Panel Discussion
The role of the OSCE in follow-up to the Forum**

The Introductory Note by the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities is ambitious and far-reaching, perhaps even a little too far-reaching. It may be doubtful whether all of the proposals are feasible given the scarce human and financial resources. It would therefore be a good idea to decide on more concrete proposals during the evaluation of the Forum.

The Environmental and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is an excellent example of sensible co-ordination (networking) of regionally and sectorally oriented environmental projects under the umbrella of several international organizations, including the OSCE. Germany is wholly in favour of the medium- and long-term strengthening of this Initiative. There could be an opportunity to do just that at an event entitled “Integrating Environment, Development and Conflict Prevention — European and National Approaches and Challenges” in Berlin on 29 and 30 March, which is being organized by Germany in conjunction with the European Commission within the framework of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). The results are to be discussed in detail at a government-level conference of the EU Member States on 24 May.

Building on positive experiences, the OSCE should exploit the comparative advantage of the OSCE field missions. They should pursue the transboundary dimension of environmental co-operation as a priority. Exchange of information and a common understanding of the underlying problems could be a first step towards future co-operation with the aim of sharing benefits. As became clear from several examples in the course of the Forum, there are still a great many opportunities here.

A priority in this context is of course transboundary water co-operation. The fact that there will be a follow-up conference on this important subject and a second Forum is most definitely to be welcomed. Germany is ready to play an active part in these discussions, building on its experience in co-operation with regard to transboundary rivers such as the Danube or its role in the Petersburg Process to promote transboundary water co-operation.

Let me turn now to the subject of land degradation and soil contamination.

Two World Wars in the last century did not just bring untold human suffering. They left lingering traces felt not only by the generation directly involved, but also by those of us alive today. In addition to the many explosive devices, which we in Germany still find buried in the ground even to this day, there is soil contamination as a result of the direct effects of war and as a result of armaments factories and military installations, which needs to be cleaned up at great expense.

After the Second World War the military confrontation between East and West had a great impact on Germany. Until reunification Germany had the highest concentration of military installations on its territory in the world.

More than 2 million people were under arms and more than 20,000 square kilometres of land was being used for military purposes. This also had a detrimental effect on the soil.

Following reunification and the resulting withdrawal of troops, it was therefore necessary to develop suitable instruments and methods to identify, examine and remediate the soil damage. It was primarily a question of removing immediate dangers to human health and the environment, but often it was also necessary to prepare the areas previously used by the military so that they could be put to use for civilian purposes.

The knowledge and experience gained back then is available for others to use. Now and then we have been able to pass on that knowledge.

I am aware that many other countries have similar experiences to share. So far, however, it seems to me that we have failed to pool this knowledge.

I would say, therefore, that it is important to make this knowledge available in such a way that States facing similar problems can profit from it.

The creation of a “virtual marketplace”, in which providers of this knowledge and those interested in obtaining it can be brought together, could be a task for the OSCE.

This virtual marketplace should initially be set up for non-commercial services, but could later be expanded to include commercial services as well.

In addition to knowledge about how to deal with environmental damage and environmental remediation related to the hazardous legacy of the military, we also need to draw on knowledge about dealing with land contaminated as a result of industrial production and waste disposal.

We can also learn from the specific experience Germany has gained in connection with the rehabilitation of brown coal and uranium mining sites (performed by the Wismut company).

Germany would be delighted if it were able in this kind of marketplace to make use of its extensive knowledge and the tools it has developed.