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**THE UNECE'S COOPERATION WITH OSCE IN THE ECONOMIC AND
ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF SECURITY IN 2006**

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The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), based in Geneva, is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. It is a forum where the countries of western, central and eastern Europe, central Asia and North America – 56 countries in all – come together to discuss regional cooperation. That cooperation concerns economic development, statistics, environment, transport, trade, integration, sustainable energy, timber and habitat.

Foremost, the UNECE offers a regional framework for the elaboration and harmonization of conventions, norms and standards. Under the UNECE's roof, there are five environmental conventions and twelve related protocols as well as 56 conventions, agreements and protocols in the area of transport. Also, the UNECE establishes voluntary standards, policy guidelines and recommendations. They number in hundreds and cover wide-ranging fields such as trade facilitation and electronic business, commercial quality standards for agricultural products, guidelines on condominiums, social housing and land administration, statistical concepts and methodologies as well as definitions of forest products. UNECE experts provide technical assistance to the countries of South-East Europe and the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia countries. This assistance takes the form of advisory services, training seminars and workshops where countries in transition can share their experiences and best practices.

Both the UN Economic Commission for Europe and OSCE have developed a close and productive relationship in the area of economic and environmental dimension of security. There are many reasons for this. First, their respective areas of expertise are complementary. The OSCE provides a political platform and a network of field offices while the UNECE has secretariat capacity, expertise in norms, standards and international conventions. Second, both organizations share virtually the same membership and provide to their constituents the same neutral framework for discussions. This close overall relationship is encouraged and supported by members at the meetings of the UNECE annual sessions and the participating States at the OSCE.

This effective partnership has been fostered through many activities and projects undertaken jointly in the last 15 years. Since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations in December 2004, this co-operation has become even closer. In the field of economics, as stipulated in the MOU, the UNECE reviews annually OSCE commitments – grouped in five clusters – on a rotating basis. The commitments are contained in declarations such as the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the Declaration of the Bonn Conference of 1990, the Istanbul Charter of 1999 and the OSCE Strategy for Economic and Environmental Dimension of 2003. The sessions reviewing the implementation of OSCE commitments have become a regular feature of the OSCE annual Economic Forums since 1996. For example, in 2005, the UNECE reviewed the performance of OSCE participating States in implementing commitments in the area of international trade, integration and transport. In 2006, a more detailed review of transport was undertaken.

In the area of the environment, UNECE and OSCE activities have focused on the development and implementation of water-related projects, in particular those concerning the shared use and protection of water resources. These joint activities with the OSCE are typically components of

the Environment and Security Initiative, which the UNECE has recently joined. Geographically, there is an emphasis on Central Asia, but activities are also carried out elsewhere. There is also close cooperation between the Secretariat of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and the OSCE Secretariat. The provisions of the Aarhus Convention form a basis of many OSCE activities, in particular, those related to the work of so-called “Aarhus-centres” in many countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In 2006, a prime example of UNECE/OSCE cooperation in the area of the environment was the creation of the Chu-Talas Rivers Commission inaugurated in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 26 July. The Chu-Talas Rivers Commission represents a mutually beneficial way for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to share the responsibility for water infrastructure used by both countries. As part of the bilateral agreement, Kazakhstan has agreed to pay part of the operating and maintenance expenses for a number of Kyrgyz dams and reservoirs supplying water to both countries. This arrangement represents a significant step towards addressing a contentious issue and achieving a breakthrough in water relations in Central Asia, as the sharing of water resources, in particular between upstream and downstream countries, is often characterized by tension and insecurity.

The Statute of the Rivers Commission has been prepared and agreed on by the concerned ministries and agencies of both countries, and the bilateral Commission can start work to implement a bilateral agreement. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have equal standing in the Commission, and each country will report to its water management agency.

The establishment of the Chu-Talas Rivers Commission has been supported by a joint project implemented by two United Nations regional commissions – UNECE and UNESCAP – and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In addition, the European Union has implemented a project on integrated water resources management in the basins of the Chu and Talas rivers while the Asian Development Bank has provided support for setting up the Commission secretariat and renovating some infrastructure on the rivers.

In conclusion, a low level of economic development and environmental degradation are important sources of insecurity. In this respect, both UNECE and OSCE – fully supported by their members and participating States – have developed over time close and fruitful relationship in the areas of economic development and the environment. Both organizations – through joint projects and close cooperation – work to establish and nurture conditions, which seem necessary to secure a safer world.