

Dear Ambassador Žugić,  
Dear Ambassador Greminger,  
Dear Secretary General Zannier,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me thank all those who have contributed to the success of this meeting. And in this first month of the year let me also thank Switzerland for its work last year in organizing the two preparatory meetings and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF) in Prague. Switzerland has set high standards for any Chairmanship to come.

As a future holder of the Chairmanship, we shall build on the work done by previous Chairmanships, taking into account the decisions of previous Ministerial Councils, especially the most recent one in Basel, which has given us a number of tasks in the second dimension, especially in the area of good governance. One of our priorities will be to advance implementation.

As our work is based on consensus, we shall, like previous Chairmanships, start a consultation process after the spring recess with a view to achieving consensus on priorities for next year's EEF in time for submission to the Permanent Council before the summer recess. I invite you all to contribute your expertise to this process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the present meeting. First of all, I would like to commend Serbia for having chosen the guiding theme of "water governance".

The catastrophic floods in the Balkans last year showed us yet again how vulnerable to natural disasters we are and how easily they can cross national borders.

The floods demonstrated that water governance is of the utmost importance and that it can only be implemented successfully when we look – and co-operate – beyond national competencies. They have also shown that cross-border co-operation can also work in regions where co-operation may seem difficult because of a difficult historical and political background.

For all of you who attended last year's EEF, it has certainly been a heartening experience to see the successful establishment of a cross-border project on the detection and safe removal of mines left

over from the Balkan wars that had been unhinged and washed away by the floods. This example certainly has the quality of a role model as such should be studied and followed-up on by us all.

This preparatory meeting has shown how many facets water governance has. To mention only some of these, it is about energy and food security, protection of the environment, technological innovation, local and national administration and trans-border co-operation, good governance, transparency and fighting corruption, and the role of civil society. And it also has a global context.

More specifically, water and energy are closely interlinked and have much in common. In both cases, the core issue is the exploitation and distribution of a scarce resource. As the 2014 UN World Water Development Report points out, global and regional crises originating in poverty, insufficient food supply and health problems are often linked through water and energy. In the case of water, the problems are often more pressing, since it seems that energy has a greater lobby and can mobilize more capital than water.

Regions which have scarce water resources are especially vulnerable. In 2008 my government initiated the Central Asia Water Initiative, which is now entering its third phase. The focus will be on regional co-operation in water governance and on the strengthening of regional institutions. Which is exactly what this meeting has been all about.

As the EU pointed out in its opening statement, Europe has a long history of cross-border water governance, e.g., through the Danube Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR). The latter is a striking example: only five years after the end of the Second World War in Europe, France and Germany, together with Switzerland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, sat down together to agree on measures to protect the water resource represented by the river Rhine. At the beginning, many obstacles which had roots way back in western Europe's history had to be overcome. But the political will was there on all sides. Today, the ICPR serves as a model for cross-border water governance all over the world.

Ladies and gentlemen.

At the close of this meeting I would like to share some observations with you.

First: The presentations of the past two days have clearly shown the close link between water governance and security: water is a scarce resource and at the same time is a cause of natural disasters and closely related to their consequences. Shortcomings in water government can therefore easily lead to national and international tensions and insecurity. As several speakers have rightly pointed out, water crises are listed at the very top of the "Global Risks Landscape

2015” of the most recent World Economic Forum Report “Global Risks 2015”.

Second: The word most often heard during these two days has indisputably been “co-operation”. In fact, when examples of shortcomings in water government have been considered, the underlying reason for such shortcomings has usually been a lack of co-operation among the stakeholders.

Third: As presentations in the last two days have made abundantly clear, good governance is a condition for successful water governance. The many facets of water governance can only be integrated if water governance is based on transparent, inclusive approaches that take all stakeholders on board.

Fourth: Key to success is political will. Unlike what is the case in other areas of global concern such as energy or food, in water governance it seems that the technology we need to perform our task is basically in place. We know how to catch or “impound” water and how to build dams. In order to apply these skills and use these instruments, we need the political will to bring the stakeholders together, as the example of the ICPR shows.

It is very positive that this example has been followed in more recent times by the four countries which set up the International Sava River Basin Commission, which has been referred to on several occasions in our meeting’s presentations. It was certainly not an easy decision for these four countries, but the political will was there and its success has proved that they were right.

The OSCE, which has “security” and “co-operation” in its very name, can certainly reduce security risks by making significant contributions to the improvement of water management in its area. It has the mandate to do so and is the most experienced organization in Europe when it comes to mediation, facilitating dialogue and bringing together stakeholders, both nationally and across borders. It is up to us, the participating States, to use this asset that we have at our disposal. It is also about making full use of the second dimension.

In conclusion, let me thank the former Swiss Chairmanship for bringing disaster risk reduction to the attention of the OSCE; the Serbian chairmanship for having adopted water governance as the topic of this year’s EEF; and the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for their support.

As a Troika member we stand ready to support the Chairmanship and look forward to the next Preparatory Meeting in Belgrade in May.

I thank you for your attention.