



EUROPEAN UNION

22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 1st Preparatory Meeting

Vienna, 27 – 28 January 2014 EU Opening Statement

The European Union is pleased to participate in the first preparatory meeting of the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum and thanks the key note speakers for their thought-provoking interventions.

Natural disasters represent a serious challenge for the governments of participating States. The impact of global losses from disasters is made worse by poverty, increasing population density, rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation and climate change.

The European Union has developed a comprehensive and integrated approach to disaster risk management. This promotes strengthened focus on prevention, mitigation and preparedness as equal priorities to response.

To improve the effectiveness of systems preventing, preparing for and responding to natural or man-made disasters occurring both inside and outside the EU, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament adopted in December 2013 a new Union Civil Protection Mechanism which significantly strengthens the already existing cooperation between 32 participating states (28 EU Member States, plus former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) in the field of civil protection.

Natural and man-made disasters know no borders. International co-operation in civil protection is increasing as various countries and organizations come to each other's aid during an emergency. The European Civil Protection Mechanism has responded to many emergencies outside the EU. The European Union has a number of agreements with third countries, regional initiatives and international organisations to

facilitate the provision of civil protection assistance and to undertake joint preparedness measures. We recognise that exchange of good practices in prevention and preparedness is the backbone of cooperation.

OSCE's engagement in the field of disaster prevention, risk reduction and response has been so far limited, also due to its broad but weakly specified mandate. The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension of 2003 and the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security of 2007, recognize that natural and man-made disasters pose security threats. The Strategy Document calls for co-operation among OSCE participating States on natural and man-made disasters, without however, specifying a role for the OSCE.

Without duplicating existing efforts, we could further build on the work done during the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship in the framework of "V to V dialogue" as well as on the concrete work done in the field. We see particular merit to exploring further options in Disaster Risk Management in the context of regional and cross-border cooperation in the OSCE area.

We appreciate that representatives of many of specialised forums have been invited to our today's meeting. We are looking forward in particular to the contributions of civil society representatives.

Finally, we would like to thank the Swiss Chairmanship and the OSCE Co-coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for preparing this first meeting.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

** the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.