



*Check against delivery*

**First Preparatory Meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum “Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting cooperation and security in the OSCE area”**

**Closing Statement of the OSCE Permanent Council Chairperson,  
Ambassador Thomas Greminger**

**28 January 2014**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now concluding the First Preparatory Meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. I would like to express our satisfaction for the dynamic and constructive discussions we have had. In a couple of sessions during the past two days, we have indeed seen the kind of interaction between speakers and the audience that we are aiming at. I truly hope that together we can continue on this path.

I was equally encouraged to note the willingness, expressed by many of you during the debates, to deepen our co-operation to address together - and in a spirit of solidarity - environmental challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Integrated Disaster Risk Management is an investment”. That is a sentence that came up during one of yesterday’s sessions and that I would like to elaborate on for these concluding remarks.

Managing disaster risks is not only about managing disasters, but first and foremost

about managing risks. We have heard that risk prevention and risk reduction are investments that ultimately limit the potential human, social and economic costs of disasters.

The trans-boundary and global characteristics of risks require cooperative efforts in their assessment and management. In our view, the OSCE, as the largest regional security organization, is very well placed to address these risks and enhance cooperation between participating States. Cross-border cooperation in disaster risk management might moreover serve as a confidence-building measure to be further explored in the context of the OSCE.

Another point that was raised several times and that is fundamental when it come to disaster risk management is the collaboration between all involved actors, starting with children. Effective risks management requires action from a variety of stakeholders of local, sub-national, national, regional, and global levels as well as those of a public and private nature. For instance, activities on the level of local communities and of small-scale disasters are often neglected. Let me also recall the previous session that clearly showed that civil society has a crucial role to play. In this context we should take duly into account that women are essential actors.

Let me also come back to the international framework of disaster risk management. Within the UN family, a couple of important global review processes related to this topic are ongoing as it was pointed out several times. The work of OSCE participating States, also being part of the UN family, should not be disconnected from ongoing global UN processes. The debates we are having under the umbrella of the 22<sup>nd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum should feed into the reflections leading to the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and the post-2015 development agenda and goals (MDGs) as it has been suggested by several speakers.

In the current frameworks and national platforms, the emphasis has so far been put on disaster preparedness and response. We have heard repeatedly, that we have to go beyond this stage and look more systematically into vulnerabilities, underlying causes of disasters, and disaster prevention.

Within the OSCE we see the same pattern. Current OSCE commitments are dealing

with disaster preparedness and response, but not with disaster prevention. The OSCE could endeavor to find a role in the context of disaster prevention, risk mitigation and in making our societies more resilient. For instance, the OSCE could support, e.g. through the network of Arhus centers, activities that increase awareness on disaster risks.

During this two-day meeting we have received some answers to some of the key questions that have been raised; for some questions we have received only partial answers and there are many questions which require further attention and that we will address during the upcoming meetings in Montreux and Prague.

Let me therefore turn now to the second preparatory meeting, taking place in Montreux, Switzerland. In one of the sessions in Montreux the Swiss Chairmanship would like to further deepen the understanding on how to deal with the underlying causes of disasters, be it Unplanned Urbanization or Environmental Degradation. These have been mentioned several times during the past two days and the issue of “un-action” was raised by the representative of UNISDR. Another session could address the topic of Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacements and the potential implications of natural disasters on conflicts. Finally, we would also like to focus on Cooperation with International Organisations and concrete Capacity Building in the OSCE region. We understand from several interventions that capacity building is an important component where participating States can profit from each other’s know-how and where we could exchange good practices and lessons learned. That could be the programme of the first day.

On the second day of the Preparatory Meeting in Montreux we will go on a field trip. As you can see from the pictures, it will be a very different experience than sitting in a conference room. So don’t forget to pack your boots when coming to Switzerland in May!

We will break out of the conference premises and look into applied disaster risk management in the field. In two groups we will go on a field trip to the canton of Valais in order to have a deeper look into possible ways of managing disaster risks in a mountainous region. On the one hand we will look into the transnational Italian-Swiss cooperation in applied risk management along the transnational route of the Grand-Saint-Bernard. On the other hand we will look into the risk management of

natural hazard triggered disasters that could have a spillover effect causing industrial accidents.

The Concluding Meeting in September in Prague 2014 will be dedicated to conclusions on what the OSCE can contribute in managing risks, increasing the security of nations and communities, and in which concrete areas enhanced cooperation of participating States is needed. The Swiss Chairmanship will facilitate this process and count on your support to reach consensus on practical and balanced recommendations for the OSCE.

Let us try to increase the political and economic imperative for managing disaster risks, changing the perception of investment in risk management as an additional cost to one of an opportunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot conclude without thanking the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities for the excellent collaboration with our Chairmanship in the preparation of this event. As in past years, the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities will compile a Consolidated Summary of this meeting which will serve as a background for further discussions. Thank you for that.

Last but not least, let me thank all those of you who contributed to this successful 1<sup>st</sup> Preparatory Meeting: the Moderators, Speakers, Rapporteurs, representatives of International Organizations and of NGOs, the conference service staff and interpreters as well as my colleagues involved in the preparation of this event at the Swiss mission and in Bern.

My thanks go also to you, dear participants, for your active participation, in particular those of you coming from the capitals. I wish you a safe trip back home and see you all in Montreux!