

**International Expert Conference on
“The Safety of Navigation and Environmental Security in a
Transboundary Context in the Black Sea Basin”**

**Odesa, Ukraine
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Welcoming remarks by
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Head of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force

Your Excellencies Minister Rabotnyov and Minister Gurskyi,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to greet the participants of the Odesa Conference on behalf of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship. As you may recall we commenced discussions on cooperation in the Black Sea region already at the Helsinki Preparatory Conference in September 2007. The Finnish Chairmanship welcomed the early initiative of the Ukrainian Government to host an International Expert Conference on "Safety of Navigation and Environmental Security in a Transboundary Context in the Black Sea Basin".

Sea routes and inland waterways have played a determining role in the history of countries, and they have shaped national identities. Now that the volume of waterway transport is constantly growing navigation safety issues and the environmental impact of navigation deserve urgent attention of governments and other stakeholders. The effects of climate change are about to make water in every shape and form a security issue of great importance.

There is an obvious need to build up national and international capacities as states are asked to take a greater responsibility for their actions. Pollution needs to be reduced irrespective of its source. To this end, it is vital to make good use of international cooperation and organizations that can make a difference – bi- and multilateral, regional and sub-regional, governmental and non-governmental. None of them can master the challenges alone.

In the Baltic Sea region efficient regional cooperation is considered to be a key to decrease environmental risks and promote pollution prevention. Another step in this direction was taken by the Helsinki Commission HELCOM through newly adopted Action Plan, which aims at restoring the good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. The implementation of agreed commitments in a concrete way is critical for its future success. In spite of all these efforts the environmental status of the Baltic Sea has yet to improve and the risks of serious accidents have increased. There is no reason for complacency.

The primary goal for all stakeholders must be to do their utmost to prevent accidents in advance. If an accident takes place efficient means must be at their disposal to limit the damage. Besides national capacity building, Finland has emphasised international cooperation and agreements as an important part in ensuring vessel and navigation safety. Part of this approach is the Gulf of Finland Mandatory Reporting System, GOFREP, which divides the international sea areas into three monitoring zones, each of which is monitored by Finland, Estonia and Russia. Each state also monitors their own territorial waters and provides vessel traffic services.

Cooperation in closed or semi-closed sea areas in the OSCE region is particularly important. Transparency and the assessment of the environmental impact of projects, especially those affecting several countries, are vital for building consensus and creating sustainable solutions. This applies to the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and other sea areas as well as landlocked countries.

Increasing pressures placed on our waterways across the OSCE area cannot be ignored. The OSCE can deepen the awareness of the security aspects of environmental issues in the framework of its comprehensive approach to security. The UNECE, IMO and other specialized international organizations are of course best placed to develop the necessary legal commitments and carry out projects that require a high degree of specialization. The OSCE is pleased to cooperate with them and offer them our support. The OSCE is also pleased to cooperate with the regional organizations involved such as the Black Sea Commission and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

The Finnish Chairmanship is convinced that this Conference will succeed in focusing on questions, which affect waterway cooperation in the Black Sea basin and highlight the necessary next steps.

I would like to warmly thank the Ukrainian authorities for hosting this Conference and for the great effort they have put in organizing it. I wish to thank the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Mr. Bernard Snoy and his team for their ideas, support and hard work. I also wish to thank the OSCE Project Co-ordinator Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj's office for their valuable contribution.

I am looking forward to the discussions and the unique experience that the discussions and excursions of this Conference will provide in the coming days.

Thank you.