



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

T h e S e c r e t a r i a t

**Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE
Economic and Environmental Activities**

Vienna, 22 November 2006

To: All OSCE Delegations
Partners for Co-operation
Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation

Subject: **Concluding Remarks by Mr. Bernard Snoy, CoEEA, at the first Preparatory Conference held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 17 November 2006.**

Please find attached the Concluding Remarks by Mr. Bernard Snoy, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, presented at the first Preparatory Conference for the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum “Land Degradation and Soil Contamination”, Bishkek, 17 November 2006.



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic
and Environmental Activities**

Bishkek, 17 November 2006

First Preparatory Conference to the Fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

“Land Degradation and Soil Contamination”

Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, 16-17 November 2006

CONCLUDING REMARKS

**by Mr. Bernard Snoy
Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you at the concluding session of the First Preparatory Conference for the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. We have spent together two days of rich and fruitful debate. This conference has been rich in the exchange of information, sharing best practices and highlighting problems and questions. We have also heard a number of concrete suggestions for possible follow-up actions by the OSCE. I believe that we can all be satisfied with the results of this Conference.

My Office, together with the incoming Spanish Chairmanship will carefully analyze all the valuable ideas and suggestions emerging from our meeting. I am confident that many of these ideas will soon be translated into concrete activities by the OSCE, by its participating States, or in co-operation with others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before attempting to briefly present what are in my opinion the most important conclusions we can draw from this conference, I would like once again to express my warmest thanks to the Government of Kyrgyzstan for their warm hospitality. I would also like to thank the incoming Spanish Chairmanship for very smooth co-operation in preparations for the conference. Dear Ambassador, we had a good start here in Bishkek and I am looking forward to working together with you over the next year.

Let me now turn to the conclusions.

Plenary Session I – The challenges of land degradation and soil contamination; ensuring environmental security and sustainable development

This first session introduced some fundamental concepts and issues and set the stage for the whole Conference. We were again reminded that states and organizations alike should recognize that security encompasses an environmental dimension, that many conflicts between and within states may be related to the scarcity or the mismanagement of natural resources. Land degradation and soil contamination is no longer a matter of academic studies. It is a security concern. Therefore, policy makers, the public, and the scientific community must work together to combat the threats related to natural resources and should strengthen their co-operation in that regard. The OSCE, as a political organization, having a comprehensive approach to security, is very well placed to promote this idea and to act on it. In fact, through our flagship programme – the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative - we are already doing so. We have experience, we have partners and we have a solid basis to build upon.

In this context I want to commend again the incoming Chairmanship for choosing to place this topic- Key Challenges to Ensure Environmental Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE Area: Land Degradation, Soil Contamination and Water Management – high on the OSCE agenda next year.

Plenary session I also highlighted a number of instruments and activities developed by other organizations. We heard about the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which is a tool for sustainable development and provides the necessary regional framework for the exchange of experience on land use management. We were also informed about the EU's comprehensive thematic strategy on soil protection. The OSCE will further explore ways of co-operation with the Secretariat of the UNCCD, in the context of the next year's Forum process. The EU Soil Strategy can also provide guidance for non EU countries in developing their policies on soil protection and land degradation. The OSCE might be instrumental in promoting this.

Plenary Session II – The impact of hazardous activities on environmental security

This session was a very important one as it highlighted the great challenges many countries in the OSCE region but in particular from Central Asia are confronted with, as a result of industrial and/or military legacies or mismanagement. The costs of remediation are extremely high. As an example the Maili Suu uranium mining tailing dams require 37 Million USD for remediation. Much higher though is the cost of non action.

Military legacies like Rocket Fuel component as well as transboundary problems like the illegal transport of hazardous waste pose an environmental security threat to the OSCE participating States. The added value of the OSCE was exemplified during the session. The OSCE can tackle problems affecting the environment and livelihoods from a cross dimensional perspective. The OSCE “mélange” program is a good example in this regard and can be already considered a “success story”. OSCE involvement in strengthening the capacities of Border control agencies could be another example of cross dimensional activities.

Another issue discussed in this session was the mining industry. Mining operations are short term activities with long term consequences. It is necessary to involve the local communities and the private sector to prevent environmental damage. Good governance practices are in place in USA and EU with clear regulation that envisages reserve funds to be used in remediation activities. The OSCE's supported project on assessing mine legacies in Armenia highlights the importance of research institutions and the relevance of addressing the perceived risks of local population.

While existing problems have to be addressed as soon as possible, prevention should also be a key priority for everybody. The OSCE could be instrumental in sharing best practices in both regards. He heard during this session about some good examples from Spain related to waste management planning and soil contamination recovery, including the military.

Plenary Session III – Forest management

Sustainable Forest Management is essential to preserving soil, preventing erosion and landslides, as well as combating climate change. Forests also have an economic importance that is not to be neglected. Besides sustainable timber, they also provide vital protective and regulatory functions within the larger context of ecosystems services. Sustainable Forest Management requires sound legislation, based on international definitions of what actually constitutes a forest. Forest governance and law enforcement is an essential component of sustainable forest management. Environmental crimes such as illegal logging on a commercial scale need to be stopped. Adequate energy, at reasonable prices, constitutes part of the solution to avoiding illegal deforestation. There might be some room for increasing the economic importance of forests, if forests are included in the next round of the Climate Change convention.

The OSCE should encourage its participating States to consider these issues when developing their national policies. Forests should be seen as part of the solution rather than a part of the problem, as they represent the necessary link between soil and water protection, and an essential part of watershed management. Due consideration should also be given to non wood forest products and services – as our host country, Kyrgyzstan, is doing already.

The OSCE should also encourage its participating States to take into account the security related aspects of sustainable forest management. The OSCE can also add its contribution from the point of view of security to other international forest related fora. A closer cooperation between OSCE and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) was suggested in this context.

In more concrete terms, the OSCE could assist forest law enforcement and governance through education, training and capacity building among all levels of stakeholders and can further contribute to the exchange of experiences in the implementation of national forest programmes, in particular concerning their security related consequences.

Plenary Session IV – The challenge of environmental migration

Environmentally induced migration is likely to be a major issue affecting the OSCE area in future years. A lack of definition of the phenomenon, resulting from inadequate understanding of the link between environment and migration has however hampered development of policies and

legislation to address this issue. Environmental refugees are currently not recognized under international law, despite their growing number.

The UN is in part addressing this issue through the development of cluster programs, whereby the UNHCR has the lead for internally displaced people and camp development, even in the case of natural disasters. There is a gap however when it comes to internationally displaced people because of creeping disasters, such as sea level rises or desertification.

The OSCE, having a strong human rights background combined with the environmental dimension, could be the right political platform on which the issue of environmental refugees is discussed among various agencies and actors.

The OSCE could also facilitate targeted research into this area through its research networks, which are an outcome of the 12th Economic Forum. It could also develop strategic environmental projects designed to protect populations at risk of being displaced. On the migration side, the OSCE should continue to improve information for potential migrants. Finally, in order to retain jobs in degraded areas and thereby reduce migratory push pressure, the OSCE could catalyze alternative economic development, for example through the promotion of solar energy in desertified areas.

Plenary Session V - Sustainable use of land, agriculture and food security

In plenary V, which I moderated this morning, we heard of the vast problems related to sustainable land use, agriculture and food security. Some possible solutions were mentioned. The historical legacies of the region still play a role in the life today and, as an example we heard from our speakers that large areas of land are under irrigated, people are using outdated farming equipment and poor agricultural practices are still currently being used. All of this leads to land and soil degradation as well as to loss of revenue to the farmers and their countries.

As I mentioned in the plenary, this session offered us great challenges as well as hope. The OSCE, being a political organization, could support research and consequently link it to governmental action. For this, it is important that we work together with other actors, in particular local ones, in order to reach the right goals and address the right needs.

Participants in the session concurred that there is a need for raising the responsibility of land users, a need for drafting national action plans, supporting research and training. Above all, addressing problems of governance was identified as a key issue.

Panel I – Integrated Watershed Management

Water related issues will be discussed in greater details during the second preparatory Conference but this session was instrumental in identifying priorities and needs, in particular in Central Asia.

This panel introduced various issues related to water management. Panelists, from Spain as well as from Central Asia, presented some examples of dealing with water related problems. Integrated water resource management concepts, groundwater, international agreements and regulations were discussed. The EU framework Directive on Water and its participatory approach was noted as was the need for political decisions and targeted budgets.

The concept of payment for ecosystems services was raised and it was suggested this was an issue we are likely to continue to encounter in the future, also in Central Asia. It was emphasized that there is a strong relationship between watershed management and land management and that international agreements need to be translated into local level actions.

The OSCE is well placed to promote cooperation, both at the international level as well as at the national level. We currently work with other organizations, such as the UNECE, on water agreements between riparian states. From today's panel, we can see we are on the right path and that there is a clear need to continue this work. It is not a coincidence that the participating States of the OSCE have, twice, chosen the OSCE to deepen the dialogue on water, in 2002 and next year in 2007. I am sure the incoming Spanish Chairmanship will lead us further down this important road.

Panel II - Public and private response to meeting the challenges of land degradation and soil contamination

In the Panel II, we were exposed to some of the most crucial issues when it comes to preventing land degradation and soil contamination, namely the role of the public and private sector. Indeed, true attention to these problems will only be successful if there is a constructive dialogue with industry, businesses and the public at large.

We heard of two organizations doing excellent work in this area, the Kazakh Business Council for Sustainable Development and the UNIDO Cleaner Production Centers. The key message was that economic performance and environmental performance need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed there are many good examples of win-win situations.

As we heard already during last years Economic Forum, we were reminded again of the fundamental role of Environmental impact assessments for new industrial investments. What was new, was the suggestion I heard for the development of environmental impact assessments for the agricultural sector.

I was also very glad to hear about the successful initiative in Osh with regard to waste management and how the local community was involved. Small community projects like these are something I believe the OSCE should continue to support, given the direct link with human health, economic development and environmental degradation.

This point of involving the local communities is of vital significance and cannot be repeated enough. The mobilization of local populations through grassroots movements, bottom up approaches and awareness raising is perhaps one of the most powerful tools we can use to prevent land degradation. Local knowledge is a vast reservoir of insights into local ecosystems and should not be forgotten when designing and adapting legislation. Finally we heard of the key role property rights and land reform play in ecosystem improvement or degradation. This is also something the OSCE has been addressing, although it was not mentioned here today.

Panel III – The role of the OSCE and co-operation with other International Organizations

In the last panel we heard about a number of local projects initiated and carried out by the OSCE Field Missions as well as about initiatives of international organizations such as the ADB

supported Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management and UNIDO's Cleaner Production Programme. The ENVSEC Initiative was also discussed, with a view to further develop and streamline our activities.

I want to use this opportunity and commend the OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers for their dedicated work. We had two of them in the panel and many others took the floor. The activities they develop at local level do improve the life of many people. Their activities empower communities, civil society, youth, and government officials to better tackle problems and identify solutions. Such projects as the ones presented to us today should continue and we should all support them.

The UNIDO representative indicated the interest in developing cooperation among the existing networks of OSCE offices and UNIDO Cleaner Production Centres in Sustainable Industrial Development activities. OSCE and UNIDO could work together in promoting environmentally sound technologies, environmental management systems, corporate social responsibility, etc.. We could jointly promote and develop Cleaner Production Centres in the region, organize training workshops and/or expert group meetings. We will continue to explore this avenue of co-operation with our colleagues from UNIDO in Vienna.

These are my final remarks and the main conclusion I draw from this conference. The list is not exhaustive and we will carefully analyze the rapporteurs' reports. We are also looking forward to receiving further feed-back from you, the participants in this meeting.

Before concluding I want to thank the moderators, the stimulating speakers and panelists and the rapporteurs. Special words of thanks go also to the interpreters and to the logistic team and as well as to the team from our OSCE Center in Bishkek. In addition I want to mention all the efforts made by the staff of my office, in particular Ms. Andrea Gredler.

Dear participants,

Our deliberations would not have been possible without your active involvement in the discussions. I would like to thank you all for your support and contributions - all the OSCE Delegations taking part, the International Organizations, NGOs and Academics, business representatives, OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers, thank you very much.

It was an honor and a great pleasure to be with you in Bishkek these two days. I am looking forward to our continued co-operation. We will expect you in Vienna, on 22-23 January, at the first part of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

I wish all of you a safe journey home.