



## German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

### **15<sup>th</sup> Economic and Environmental Forum**

**Prague, 21 May 2007**

## European Union Opening Statement

Mr Chairman, Your Excellency Minister Moratinos, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. The European Union is very pleased to participate in this year's Economic and Environmental Forum here in Prague. The Forum provides an excellent opportunity to discuss some of the "key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area". As we have said before, the topics chosen by the Spanish Chairmanship match the EU's own focus on strengthening international cooperation to address threats posed by the degradation of ecosystems.

The two preparatory conferences as well as the first part of the EEF in Vienna have reminded us of the urgent need to address challenges to the environment. They have, at the same time, identified some options for cooperation on the issues of land degradation, soil contamination and water management. As discussed in Bishkek, Vienna and Zaragoza, these problems can have transboundary implications. While they can be particularly acute in zones of conflict, they may also provide opportunities for confidence building via joint action.

Similarly, the Zaragoza preparatory conference demonstrated that water management provides opportunities for cross-border cooperation. The conference examined a series of examples of successful water management cooperation in the OSCE area. Within the EU, economic, social and environmental aspects of water management are regulated through the Water Framework Directive. Most South-East-European countries are already applying the approach of the Water Framework Directive on a voluntary basis. The European Neighbourhood Policy, the Strategic

Partnership with the Russian Federation as well as the EU's Strategy for Central Asia – to be adopted next month – provide good opportunities for the application of the Water Framework Directive to other areas of the OSCE region.

This part of the EEF will also provide an opportunity to discuss the state of play regarding the implementation by participating States of OSCE commitments in the field of the environment. The UNECE secretariat has adopted a selective approach, which is justified in view of the Ministerial conference on Environment for Europe that will take place in October in Belgrade. We would like to thank the UNECE secretariat for its valuable report.

The EU attaches great importance to the integration of the work of the OSCE's field operations and the respective economic and environmental officers in the Forum. We therefore welcome their active participation and look forward to further strengthening the links between the 2<sup>nd</sup> Committee in Vienna and the field presences. We also very much welcome the participation of non-governmental organisations in the Forum.

We should like to thank the Spanish Chairmanship for their presentation of the first draft of the proposed OSCE Environmental Security Strategy. The EU attaches great importance to environmental issues and to the link between security and the environment. This second part of the EEF will provide us with the opportunity to share our views and ideas on the proposed decision and action plan.

Finally, we would like to thank the Czech Republic for once again hosting the second part of the EEF and for the warm welcome. We are also very grateful to the Spanish Chairmanship who, together with the OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities and his dedicated staff, have done an excellent job in preparing the Forum. We look forward to interesting discussions in the days ahead.

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

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\* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.