



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

22ND OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

“Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting co-operation and security in the OSCE area”

SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING

Montreux, 20-21 May 2014

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Allow me to start by expressing my gratitude for the warm hospitality of the Swiss Chairmanship. I am confident that this beautiful venue on the shores of Lake Geneva will inspire us in our deliberations. I also highly appreciate the commitment of the Swiss Chairmanship to promoting more reliable management of natural disasters in the OSCE area which also contributes to strengthening the role of OSCE’s economic and environmental dimension in this field.

Please let me express my deep sympathy to our colleagues from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. The recent flooding that affected South-Eastern Europe reminds us painfully about the importance of the topic we discuss today. Please accept our sincere condolences for the losses suffered.

We planned to have a representative of the Emergency Management Sector of the Serbian Ministry of Interior with us today. We invited him to share with us the Serbian experience about national co-ordination mechanisms. We fully understand that under the current circumstances, he had to cancel his participation.

The devastating wildfires in the Southern California was another recent disaster that the world witnessed.

We send our thoughts and best wishes to all those working for the remedy of these disasters in the affected regions. To reduce sufferings from disasters like this is the very reason why we are here today.

Today, we start the Second Preparatory Meeting of the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum, dedicated to “Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting co-operation and security in the OSCE area”. This meeting is unique

in the sense that it will combine an in-depth discussion of disaster risk reduction with hands-on experience of its practical application. During tomorrow's field visits we will be able to see how Switzerland applies integrated disaster risk management, including in transboundary areas.

Our discussion today will build on the results of the First Preparatory Meeting in January in Vienna. Back then, we examined the human, social and economic consequences of disasters and concrete case studies of past disasters and co-operation in this field. We also analysed the role of environmental good governance and sustainable management of natural resources in addressing environment and security challenges that are linked to disasters. Our discussions in Montreux will shed light on a number of important topics ranging from disaster risk reduction at the local level to cross-dimensional impacts of disasters. This will also cover impacts on security and population movements, as well as coping measures for reducing disaster risks in the international, cross-border and national contexts.

From the very outset, I would like to emphasize that our Forum's deliberations should benefit from the dynamic exchange of ideas among different stakeholders. No single group or organisation can address every aspect of dealing with disasters. If we aim for making a significant progress in disaster risk reduction, we should seek and encourage an active involvement of civil society and the private sector.

Allow me a few words on the specific sessions of today's meeting:

Disaster-related challenges faced by the urban and rural settlements highlight the importance of adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction at a local level. This will be the focus of our discussion in the first session. Emergency response and recovery capacities are critical for a community's resilience to disasters. Equally important are the availability of risk assessments and prevention measures. Well-functioning early warning mechanisms are yet another important prerequisite for effective local action. These measures and instruments can be effectively brought to life only if people are aware and have reliable access to environment- and climate-related information as is envisioned by the Aarhus Convention that the OSCE has been supporting over a decade.

As we know, disasters may have far-reaching consequences for the security and safety of individuals, communities, countries and even whole regions. Such disasters tend to aggravate pre-existing problems and disproportionately affect vulnerable segments of the society. The consequences can be felt for years, with some people being compelled to move to other areas or countries. In our second session today we will take a closer look at the existing approaches to mitigating these effects.

The third session today will be dedicated to coping measures to reduce disaster risks at an international, cross-border and national level. Within our efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness, it is important to recognize that disasters do not have respect for political boundaries. Addressing disasters in such context requires effective international and cross-border co-operation as well as robust co-ordination mechanisms at national level. Preparedness for cross-border implications is vital to facilitate a speedy and effective response and to deal with cross-border movements as a consequence of disasters. This session will also introduce a self-assessment tool developed by the OSCE

to increase participating States' preparedness for cross-border implications of such crises.

Distinguished participants, let me now touch upon the role of the OSCE in disaster risk reduction:

The OSCE provides a platform for dialogue and for the exchange of best practices and information on important issues that have implications for security and stability. Disaster risk reduction is one of them. The OSCE is therefore well placed to contribute to international co-operation and global discussions in this field, including those within the framework of the 2014 Climate Change Summit, post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

My Office and the OSCE field operations already support participating States in their efforts to strengthen disaster risk reduction at different levels and to promote transboundary co-operation through the development and implementation of concrete projects. The Environment and Security Initiative - ENVSEC-, provides an effective framework for co-ordination and implementation of on-going and future OSCE projects in this field.

The wildfire management project in South Caucasus is a good example of how OSCE can contribute to institutional capacity building, policy formulation, and inter-agency co-ordination for management of a disaster- in this case fires. We hope that our deliberations this year will pave the way for replicating this project in other regions and further deepening OSCE's engagement in this field. Another example is the climate change adaptation project including flood management in Moldova and Ukraine.

In addition, several new projects have been launched or are about to be started in partnership with other ENVSEC partners. Let me mention just a few examples.

This month, the OSCE is launching an ENVSEC-project to strengthen the capacities and roles of communities in disaster risk reduction through the Aarhus Centres. Under the leadership of the OSCE, the project will be implemented in selected countries of South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia.

One more project planned within ENVSEC will aim to increase the potential for ecosystem restoration to mitigate floods in two transboundary river basins in Eastern Europe. The OSCE in partnership with UNECE and UNEP will support a combination of activities that aim for capacity building and concrete implementation.

The OSCE Field Operations are also active in disaster management field through several initiatives and projects. In an effort to mainstream disaster risk reduction to the work of our field operations, my Office has been collaborating with the Swiss Chairmanship to organize Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Integration Guidance (CEDRIG) trainings targeting our field colleagues. Last week, the training for South Caucasus region was successfully conducted in Tbilisi. This will be followed by trainings for Central Asia and South Eastern Europe in fall.

I would like to thank my colleagues in field operations for their efforts and to strongly encourage them to actively participate and contribute to our Forum's discussions.

Once again, welcome to all of you here. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.