



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”

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

Vienna, 27-28 January 2014

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

It is an honour to address this opening session of the First Preparatory Meeting of the 22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. This year’s topic focuses on a special aspect of environment and security: the risks of natural disasters and ways of mitigating these risks and strengthening resilience.

I am very pleased to welcome today so many experts that are here to share their knowledge on these issues: government officials from the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, representatives of international and bilateral organisations, of international NGOs, academia and the private sector.

Within the OSCE, challenges posed by natural disasters and the need for co-ordinated response have already been discussed on several occasions, starting with the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, as mentioned by the Secretary General . Since then, participating States have repeatedly recognized the importance of managing disasters in a co-operative way: in the 1999 Istanbul Summit Document, the 2002 Porto Ministerial Declaration and the 2005 Ministerial Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant as well as in the 2003 OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension and the 2007 Madrid Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Security.

The cross-dimensional nature of the topic and its links to different aspects of security are also reflected in several policy documents of the Politico-Military Dimension, including the MC Decision 02/09 on Further OSCE Efforts to Address Transnational Threats and Challenges to Stability and Security, and the MC Decision 03/11 on Elements of the Conflict Cycle. The OSCE Border Security and Management Concept adopted at the 2005 Ministerial Council in Ljubljana also referred to facilitation of

cross-border co-operation in case of natural disasters or serious accidents in border zones.

Within the Second Dimension, we have taken some concrete steps to put these commitments into action. Let me give you some examples of what my Office has been doing:

Since 2006, we have been actively engaged in wildfire management in the South Caucasus. We started with an OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission to fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Our next engagement was the Joint OSCE/UNEP Environmental Assessment Mission to Georgia in the fall of 2008 following the forest fires that occurred as a consequence of 2008 conflict in Georgia. Based on the needs identified in these assessments, we have since 2009 been supporting a fire management capacity building programme covering all three countries of the South Caucasus. Our leading expert in this project will share his experiences in the panel debate this afternoon.

These activities are taking place in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative – ENVSEC - where the OSCE co-operates with UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, REC and NATO as an associate partner. ENVSEC offers a unique mechanism to create synergies and jointly address environmental challenges related to natural and cascading disasters. In November last year, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of this initiative, and we can discuss during our meeting how we can further facilitate sharing of best practices and their replication, as appropriate.

Let me mention just one other example of our disaster-related work within ENVSEC, one which addresses water: the joint efforts by the OSCE, UNECE and UNEP to support a framework for co-operation in the Dniester River Basin. It resulted in the bilateral Treaty on the Dniester River Basin signed by Ukraine and Moldova in 2012. One major element of our activities was a basin-wide impact and vulnerability assessment, as well as detailed flood-risk modelling in two selected sites.

The Dniester is also a pilot basin for the development of a transboundary climate change adaptation strategy and vulnerability assessment in the framework of an OSCE-led ENVSEC project on climate change and security. This project, financed by the European Union's Instrument for Stability, and implemented together with UNEP, UNDP, UNECE and REC, assesses security implications of climate change in three regions – Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. The impact of climate change on the frequency and severity of natural disasters will be one of the security concerns we will address.

Apart from the ENVSEC activities, my Office organized in 2012 a workshop on International Responses to Major Natural and Man-made Disasters and the Role of the OSCE. It facilitated the exchange of best practices in the area of national and multilateral civil emergency response to major disasters. It also reviewed the respective activities of multilateral and regional structures, and discussed major challenges in this sphere.

The OSCE Field Operations are also very active in this field. Let me mention just two examples of activities implemented last year:

- The OSCE Centre in Astana co-organized, together with the UN, a regional conference on reducing disaster risks for Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- The OSCE Mission in Serbia held a regional workshop on inclusive flood risk management practices. I am happy to see many of our colleagues from the Field Operations here and we are looking forward to your contributions to the discussions.

Based on the existing experience of my Office and the Field Operations, we will continue to foster dialogue and co-operation between various stakeholders at local, national, and regional levels. In this regard, the OSCE-supported Aarhus Centres are well positioned to reach out to communities and promote community-based disaster risk reduction activities in close partnership with local administrations and civil society organizations.

Excellencies,

Responding to environmental challenges and promoting co-operation and security in the OSCE area are key priorities of the Second Dimension and an integral part of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. The increasing importance of sound environmental governance and co-ordinated action to reduce disaster risks require continuous dialogue.

Our agenda for the next two days will provide an opportunity for this. We will start by discussing the human, social and economic impacts of natural disasters in order to learn how preparedness and prevention can reduce losses. We will hear concrete case study examples of past disasters and of successful co-operation in natural disaster management: co-operation between different states, between the military and civilian actors, between government and civil society, and between local and national levels of government. We will discuss how environmental good governance and sustainable management of natural resources can foster addressing environment and security challenges. And we will also take into account gender aspects. Better education of women has measurable effects on reducing vulnerability through better awareness as well as faster responses to alerts and more reliable social networks. In this respect, civil society and business sectors are important actors and we will have a chance to benefit from their contributions in these two days.

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

Thank you for your attention.