

**Statement by Switzerland
Opening Session
1st Preparatory Meeting,
23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum,
26 January 2015, Vienna**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

Switzerland would like to congratulate Serbia on the priority chosen for this year's Economic and Environmental Forum and thank the distinguished speakers for their insightful presentations. Water governance represents indeed a crucial topic for all of us.

Increasing competition and stress on water resources pose a significant security risk that the OSCE, with its comprehensive security approach, must address effectively. By choosing a positive approach such as water governance, we will focus our discussions on integrated water resources management, transboundary cooperation, good governance, knowledge and information sharing: those are all effective tools to enhance security and stability in the OSCE area.

In our view, the nexus Water-Security-Climate change also deserves our full attention and we understand this will be the main focus of the 2nd Preparatory Meeting to be held in Belgrade in May. This will ensure continuity with last year's topic: Disaster Risk Reduction.

Another fundamental topic the OSCE should discuss during this Forum's cycle is the role of Blue peace diplomacy.

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You will remember that last July, the Secretary General organised a very successful Security Day on water diplomacy supported by the Swiss Chairmanship. During the discussions, we heard a clear call for reinforced action of our organization in the field of water diplomacy. We hope this year's Forum will build upon the outcomes and recommendations of last year's Security Day. We see water diplomacy and the role the OSCE should play in that regard as an excellent topic to be further discussed during the Concluding meeting in Prague.

For Switzerland, effective water governance has always been important and thus high on the agenda of my country. As the "Water Castle" of Europe, and thanks to a long experience, Switzerland has gained solid technical, scientific and political expertise in the area of water governance. In recent years, much valuable work has been done in watercourse projects throughout Switzerland. Consideration has been given in many cases both to flood protection and environmental concerns. Numerous restoration and rehabilitation projects have been carried out, and new flood protection concepts have been developed. With effective interdisciplinary cooperation between experts representing the concerns of river engineering, biology, ecology, agriculture, spatial planning and the economy, appropriate solutions were found. This will not only benefit watercourses but serve the interests of society as a whole.

On the international scene, Switzerland is using this expertise and its network to path the way for a safe and sustainable future. In our development cooperation, water management has become one of our priorities through the years and we are active in different regions of the globe. You will hear more details in the next session from one of our experts, Ms. Hofstetter, from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Switzerland is convinced that water has to be treated as

one of the highest priorities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and we will continue to promote and advocate for this.

We are also convinced that water security is a key topic for the OSCE. In this sense, we are looking forward to those two-day discussions and to a fruitful debate.

Thank you.