



EUROPEAN UNION

22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 2nd Preparatory Meeting

Montreux, 19-21 May 2014 EU Opening Statement

We express our sympathy and solidarity with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with respect to the recent flooding. In response to the situation, the European Union and its Member States began providing immediate assistance through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism which has been activated upon the request of both countries. A total of 14 EU Member States offered assistance such as motor boats, helicopters and pumps and deployed over 300 relief workers to the two countries. Two EU Civil Protection teams have been sent to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to help with the coordination of relief efforts. At these difficult moments, the people of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina can rely on the solidarity and continued help from the European Union and its Member States.

Mr. Chairperson,

the European Union is pleased to participate in the Second preparatory meeting of the 22nd Economic and Environment Forum and thanks the speakers for their presentations.

We especially value the focus of the opening session on the nexus between natural disasters and security and the importance of resilience of cities to disaster and climate risks. The security aspect is key for OSCE's engagement on a wide range of economic and environmental topics to complement the work of other specialised international forums or regional cooperation mechanisms. We encourage the distinguished speakers of our today's meeting to further reflect on the conclusions of this opening panel.

We appreciate the participation of many international, regional and national stakeholders engaged in disaster risk management and related areas in the meeting today. We hope that their expertise will help us to identify areas where they see the main challenges and the role the OSCE could play in the area of responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting cooperation and security in the OSCE area.

We value the focus of the 2nd Preparatory Meeting on important areas identified during the first segment of the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum in Vienna this year. The crucial role the local and community levels play in disaster risk reduction was highlighted as well as the necessity to cooperate across borders and in regional context. We look forward to our deliberations in this regard which will hopefully enlighten us on a possible role for the OSCE as we approach Prague and Basel.

Disasters and climate risks have a major impact on the economy as well as on the security and well-being of citizens. In recent years, exposure to disasters has increased significantly due to climate change, rapid and unplanned urbanisation, demographic pressure, construction and more intensive land-use in hazard prone areas, biodiversity loss and eco-system degradation. Impacts of natural disasters vary across regions, however all countries are vulnerable to disasters. The European Union is not spared, with natural disasters causing 80,000 deaths and EUR 95 billion in economic losses over the last decade.

Thus, enhancing the EU's resilience to disasters, as well as its capacity to anticipate, prepare and respond to risks, especially cross-border risks, is amongst the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Significant achievements have been made both through European Union policies and financial support. The new provisions in the revised EU civil protection legislation set the framework for implementation of a cross-sectoral disaster risk management policy, promoting a holistic approach for all natural and man-made risks throughout all phases of the disaster management cycle (prevention, preparedness, response). Key actions to support the implementation of the EU disaster risk management framework include a wide range of issues.

- Mainstreaming of disaster risk management: risk prevention and management considerations have been integrated in a number of key EU policies and financial instruments to support resilient investments (transport and energy, critical infrastructure protection, cross-border health threats, environmental impact assessment, water, flood risk management, etc.)
- Addressing cross-border impacts (through macro-regional projects and strategies such as the Baltic Sea strategy, Danube Strategy or regional maritime strategies) and cooperation activities with candidate, potential candidates and other neighbouring countries.
- Strong synergies with adaptation to climate change as outlined by the EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change, on cross cutting areas such as sharing of data and knowledge, assessment of risks and vulnerabilities etc.
- Risk assessment and analysis and improved risk management planning.
- Encouraging learning and exchange of experience to improve governance.
- Finally, the EU and its Member States plan to play an active and constructive role in the ongoing negotiations on a post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action. A renewed international framework for disaster risk reduction is a unique opportunity to build on the achievements of EU policies to better address future challenges.

(Further information and documents on EU and disaster risk reduction can be found under:
http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/prevention_preparedness/dipecho_en.htm)

Mr Chairperson,

we would like to thank the Chairmanship and the OCEEA for organising the meeting and for inviting us to this beautiful place of Montreux. We look forward to today's discussions. We at the same time welcome the innovative approach of the Chairmanship which will allow us to leave this conference room and spend a full day in the field. We see it not only as a pleasant change in the EEF's 'routine' but also as an excellent opportunity to share experience and best practice on integrated disaster

risk management with particular emphasis on cross-border cooperation, multi-stakeholder and multi-hazard approaches.

Thank you for your attention.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

** the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*