

23RD OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

“Water governance in the OSCE area:

Increasing security and stability through co-operation”

CONCLUDING MEETING

Prague, 14-16 September 2015

Closing Statement

by Ambassador Vuk Žugić

**Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Serbia
to the OSCE and other International Organizations**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Serbian Chairmanship at the closing of the twenty-third OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. First of all, I would like to thank all participants for the fruitful and lively discussions.

Over the last three days, the Forum has once more proved its added value in developing relevant political recommendations addressing common concerns and interests in the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE comprehensive concept of security. This year's Forum in particular has strengthened and enhanced focus on water governance in the OSCE region.

We had an ambitious agenda covering an extensive range of issues. The two thought-provoking keynote speeches by CiO Dacic and Minister Burkhalter as well as the many other interventions underscored the urgency of increased co-operation on water governance within the OSCE region and the importance of a well-defined approach.

At the beginning of this year, as you all know, the Serbian Chairmanship identified water governance as its priority in the economic and environmental dimension. The discussions over the last three days have demonstrated that this was the right approach since it clearly showed that water is not only about development, health and food, but that there is also a clear connection to security related challenges in the OSCE region.

The catastrophic floods in the Western Balkans last year provided a powerful example of how vulnerable we are to natural disasters, and that they are not contained by national borders. The floods have also demonstrated that water governance is critical to security and stability and can only be implemented successfully through cooperation across national borders. Ensuring a framework for multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder coordination in water

governance is a necessity, and not only States, but also civil society, the private sector and local communities must all play an active role.

At this Forum, we heard numerous positive examples of how we can cope with water-related challenges. These successes had three things in common: they received the necessary attention at the political level, adequate resources were invested to address them, and they were the result of genuine cooperation and partnership at all levels.

This approach is very much in line with the relevant provisions in the Helsinki Final Act's Chapter on Co-operation in the Field of Economics, Science and Technology and of the Environment, which gives a wide range of opportunities for participating States to develop mutual co-operation in the area of water governance. Building on this cooperation, we put water-related issues high on the OSCE agenda by including water scarcity and sustainable water management in our joint Serbian-Swiss work plan last year, and I have been very pleased to see how effectively this year's Forum has fostered dialogue and joint action on water governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to share some observations with you which resulted from the deliberations we had during the course of the Forum.

First: The presentations and debates in the First and Second Preparatory Meetings, as well as the Concluding meeting, have clearly shown the close link between water governance and security. Water is a scarce resource that is critical to the well-being of people, the security of whole communities and regions without regard to national borders and at the same time it has the potential to deeply affect the stability of affected countries.

Second: Water governance is not only a relevant issue in relations between States, but it also concerns many different stakeholders within a State. Cross-sectorial dialogue, as mentioned by several speakers, is needed to ensure appropriate use of water resources. Integrating all stakeholders, particularly women and youth, in decision-making processes is critical to good water governance. The OSCE should use its unique expertise to increase efforts to strengthen national processes for stakeholders' engagement.

Third: Political will is critical to successful water governance when dealing with issues of security and stability. Although technologies for more efficient water use are increasingly available, technology alone is sometimes not enough. This is why we devoted the Forum to water governance rather than water management. By discussing and addressing governance-related aspects like decision-making processes, transparency, and division of competencies we can strengthen security and stability through water issues.

Fourth: The discussions during the preparatory and concluding parts of the Forum indicate a strong interest among participating States for the area of water governance. As we move towards the Belgrade Ministerial Council Meeting in December, we must maintain the momentum and translate this political will into a sound and well-focused document, reaffirming and underpinning the OSCE mandate in the area of water governance.

Within such a document, several following points could be included, among others:

- Implementation of the principles of good water governance, in particular to broaden public participation and transparency in water governance.
- Increased use of environmental co-operation, including in the area of water, as a tool in diminishing tensions as part of a broader effort to prevent conflict, build mutual confidence and promote good neighbourly relations.
- Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Increased investments in educating young generations on water governance, and strengthening of its collaboration with youth organisations
- Promotion of a gender perspective in its activities related to water governance and water diplomacy
- Coordination of water-related activities with other international and regional organizations active in this area
- A mandate for the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) to expand the role of the OSCE in water diplomacy and continue its support for transboundary water co-operation.
- A mandate for the OCEEA to make increased use of co-operation in the area of water as a tool for de-escalating tensions, preventing conflict, building mutual confidence and promoting good neighbourly relations.

The Serbian Chairmanship will also advocate for a political declaration in the area of sustainable development at the Ministerial Council in Belgrade. The Forum's discussions repeatedly referred to the importance of the new UN Sustainable Development Goals and the crucial role that water plays in achieving them. The OSCE as a regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter should also contribute to this global process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Serbian Chairmanship I would like to thank again all participants for their significant contributions and active involvement. Let me thank in particular the OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitgüden, and his team, as well as the OSCE Prague Office for their excellent co-operation in preparing and co-ordinating this year's Forum. I would also like to warmly thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for once again hosting the concluding part of the Forum in this beautiful and always fascinating city.

Let me also express my gratitude to the speakers, panellists, moderators and rapporteurs for their valuable inputs, the economic and environmental officers from OSCE field operations for their outstanding efforts, and our interpreters for their exceptional services.

I wish you all a safe trip home.

Thank you.