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**“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: land degradation, soil contamination and water management”**

**INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

**The possible role of the OSCE**

This document attempts to outline the topics expected to be discussed during the 15<sup>th</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF) (Part 1 – Vienna, 22-23 January 2007), contributing thus to identifying the most suitable recommendations for follow-up activities. The ideas and proposals put forward in this document should be seen as having a preliminary character and are meant to stimulate the discussions. With due consideration for the guidelines received from Delegations, through the Economic and Environmental Committee and at the Forum itself, the OCEEA will prepare and present a more comprehensive plan of action at a later stage.

The OCEEA is looking forward to comments and suggestions and stands ready to further consult with the interested countries as well as with international organizations and other stakeholders. The OSCE Field Presences will also be closely associated in the process of identifying the most valuable recommendations, as well as in implementing follow-up activities.

This document is based on a number of general principles guiding the OSCE involvement in the economic and environmental dimension (EED), including the Strategy Document for the EED, and draws on the conclusions of the first preparatory Conference on Land Degradation and Soil Contamination (Bishkek, 16-17 November 2006), on previous OSCE involvement in the above mentioned area and on the results of consultations with various other relevant international organizations. This document does not attempt to be exhaustive. Other OSCE documents as well as the Consolidated Summary of the Bishkek Conference (SEC.GAL/221/06) can provide further food for thought in preparation for the Forum.

Issues related to Water Management will be discussed in greater detail at the second Preparatory Conference (Zaragoza, 12-13 March 2007) and the possible role to be played by the OSCE in that area will be further defined and discussed, ahead of the second part of the Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague, on 21-23 May 2007.

The environmental challenges that provide the theme of the EEF are already addressed by a number of international institutions such as the UNEP, the UNECE, the European Commission, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) etc., as well as international instruments such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the UNECE Water Convention, etc. However, the OSCE can make a contribution in its unique capacity of pan-European, trans-Atlantic and Euro-Asian platform for political dialogue, using also its unique network of field presences.

### **Environmental security and the specific challenges of land degradation and soil contamination**

The direct link between environmental issues and security is becoming more and more preeminent on the international agenda. Global climate change, desertification, scarcity of resources, unsustainable use of natural resources and mismanagement, military and industrial legacies, and transboundary pollution all have security implications. Therefore, addressing land degradation and soil contamination is a key challenge to ensure environmental security and sustainable development. If not properly and timely addressed, they do not only negatively affect the environment but may cause severe economic losses. They impact on peoples' wellbeing, and on states alike, and may lead to a deterioration of relationships between states.

All these elements have been recognized by the OSCE, and, consequently, together with partners, the OSCE took action. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is the most relevant example of OSCE involvement.

In view of the above and building upon existing experiences, the relevance of the environmental aspects of security should be emphasized in the future. The OSCE could contribute in a number of ways:

- By raising awareness among its membership of the need to address environmental security and sustainable development concerns when designing national policies;
- By emphasizing the importance of international, regional and bilateral agreements and co-operation in addressing such issues, as environmental problems transcend borders;
- By emphasizing the need for a cross-dimensional, thus intra governmental, approach to environmental challenges and tackling such threats through developing cross dimensional activities;
- By promoting existing international instruments, experiences and best practices relevant for the matters under discussion;
- By continuing its activities, in particular through ENVSEC, and focusing on areas at risk, exercising thus its conflict prevention role;
- By developing, as proposed by the Spanish Chairmanship, an OSCE Environmental Security Strategy, further elaborating and concretizing the Maastricht Strategy Document.

### **Environmental governance, in particular as it affects land degradation and soil contamination**

Promoting good governance in both the economic and environmental realms is at the core of OSCE activities. Good governance is often the answer to many of the environmental challenges mentioned in the previous section. Having a comprehensive approach, the OSCE

strives to improve good governance with the final goal of improving environmental protection, democratic governance and sustainable economic development.

The OSCE has been working on transparency issues in various areas. In the environmental domain it has done so through its work on promoting the Aarhus Convention. The principles of the Aarhus Convention – access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice – are extremely relevant as far as issues related to land degradation and soil contamination are concerned. The OSCE also assists governments and civil society organizations in fighting corruption.

The extractive industries play an important role across the OSCE region when it comes to economic development and environmental protection. Mining operations are short term activities with long term consequences. Furthermore, corruption in the natural resource sector, besides the misallocation of government and private resources can also be detrimental to environmental goals. The existence of adequate legal frameworks within which the mining industry is obliged to operate is therefore of utmost importance.

Forests are an important resource for many OSCE participating States, having an economic as well as an environmental function. There are strong links between forest, land, soil, and water management.

The OSCE needs to promote environmental governance, in particular as it affects land degradation and soil contamination. It could make a contribution, again in close co-operation with partners:

- By providing a platform for dialogue for the many players active in the area of environmental governance and by building and keeping a political momentum;
- By continuing and deepening its activities related to the Aarhus Convention, through Information Centers, and promoting public discussions on land degradation and soil contamination related aspects;
- By providing advice and capacity building to the extractive industries sector and governments in addressing the environmental implications of these industries as well as the use of revenues from that sector for environmental remediation measures, and by exploring new possible avenues of cooperation in this regard with other organizations;
- By promoting the principles of sustainable agriculture and sustainable forest management among its membership, building national and local capacities in this regard, and by exploring new possible avenues of cooperation in this regard with other organizations;
- By setting up regional cooperation mechanisms to combat land degradation and soil contamination;
- By involving local communities and strengthening local capacities to address environmental governance issues;
- By supporting all efforts to combat environmental crime, in particular illegal trafficking of waste and illegal logging.

### **Social effects of land degradation and soil contamination**

Environmental problems directly impact the life of people. Land degradation and soil contamination have a consequence on ecosystems, notably in dry areas or in rural areas, where livelihood depends on agriculture, leading to loss of economic opportunities and generating poverty. Environmental hazards, natural or man made, combined with population

growth, and lack of economic opportunities or poor economic performances, represent a strong “push” factor for people to move. This leads to the growing problem of environmentally induced migrants and internally displaced persons. Not only people forced to move will suffer but population movement may lead to tensions and social conflict elsewhere.

The connection between environmental degradation and migration phenomena was pointed out during the discussions at the 13<sup>th</sup> Economic Forum, in ENVSEC Assessments, by the Panel of Eminent Persons (2.3/23 e) and more recently in the preparatory Conference in Bishkek. Environmentally induced migration is likely to be a major issue affecting the OSCE area in future years.

The future OSCE role, working closely with partners, in addressing the social effects of land degradation and soil contamination could consist in:

- Raising awareness of the issues of environmentally displaced persons and environmentally induced migration, promoting conceptual clarity and international dialogue on these issues;
- Promoting targeted environmental protection/rehabilitation projects for at-risk populations and working on diversifying economic opportunities in degraded areas in order to reduce ‘push’ factors;
- Promoting agricultural policies which ensure the sustainable use of land;
- Supporting research in these areas and advocating the importance of linking the results of such research to governmental action.

### **Environmental security and sustainable economic development**

Environmental protection and economic development play a key role in environmental security. Economic development and environmental protection can be and should be complementary. Governments and businesses should recognize that they can maximize their long term returns by minimizing their negative environmental impact. Through responsible action, businesses will become more competitive, not less. In turn, governments should create and enforce a legislative and institutional environment conducive to that goal. This holds true in the case of big multinational companies as well as of small and medium enterprises, in various branches of the industrial sector as well as in agriculture or municipal services.

Promoting a constructive, multi-stakeholder dialogue between governments, the business community, the civil society, and the public at large has always been part of the OSCE focus in the economic and environmental dimension. Other international organizations are also active in this field.

The OSCE could continue its involvement in this area:

- By working with the business community and the financial institutions, and encouraging their assistance to OSCE participating States in developing sustainable and environmentally friendly business practices;
- By promoting public private partnerships conducive to sustainable development;
- By emphasizing the need for appropriate, effective and clear legislation in areas such as property rights and criminal responsibilities with regard to soil contamination;

- By working at the local level to build institutional capacity in support of small community projects, grassroots movements, bottom up approaches that address environmental concerns and also have potential for revenue generation;
- By developing cooperation with other international organizations in promoting environmentally sound technologies, environmental management systems, corporate social responsibility, through training workshops, expert group meetings etc.