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Statement on Water Security and Water Management

**delivered by Ana Novak, Head of the Global Issues Department at the
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Globally, the last decade has been characterized by climate change and an increasing frequency of extreme weather, including droughts and water scarcity which have a major impact on security and stability also in the OSCE region. Scientists claim that the future is not promising. By 2025, more than 2.8 billion people globally will face severe water stress as a result of climate change and other human pressures, including population and economic growth, as well as degradation of freshwater ecosystems as a result of land-use change.

Sustainable use and management of natural resources is essential for long-term environmental security. Among natural resources, water can be singled out as the most critical and in order to assure water security, improved water management is essential. It requires a cross-sectoral approach, taking into account the interdependence between different uses of water. Due to its complexity, the water challenge is multi-faceted: water is indispensable for human health, economic and social development, as well as for the preservation of natural ecosystems. Adaptation to climate change will require above all improved water management and building resilience to water-related natural disasters (e.g., floods and landslides).

The consequences of non-sustainable water management can be devastating, not only for the environment but also for the well-being of humans and economic development. The shrinking of the Aral Sea is probably the most obvious case on the global scale. However, the problem is not just the Aral Sea but the entire Aral Sea Basin, home to some 50 million people.

In the field of international politics, water is often considered a strategic asset, particularly in regions with scarce water resources. Migrations due to floods and droughts can contribute to instability. Disputes over the control of water resources may even threaten international peace and security. However, water alone is rarely the cause of conflict. More often, water merely strains pre-existing political tensions.

Water is primarily a catalyst for cooperation. Shared water resources require joint water management to ensure sustainable use, protection from pollution, and to fully develop the economic potential of water resources (e.g., hydropower, transport). From the environmental and economic perspective, the most appropriate geographical entity for the management of water resources is a river basin. More than 260 river basins, home to over 40% of the world's population, are shared between two or more countries.

Transboundary water cooperation, therefore, is essentially a win-win situation. Nevertheless, it is inevitably embedded in the political process. It can foster dialogue and promote confidence-building, even in war-torn regions. The Sava River Basin is one of the best examples of how water cooperation can be a starting point for political dialogue, as it was after the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s.

Transboundary water management should focus on the following four priorities:

1. Ratification and implementation of international legal instruments, in particular the UNECE Water Convention (Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes).
2. Enhancing water governance by the establishment of joint river commissions to regulate sustainable use of water, taking into account the interests of all riparian states.
3. Capacity building, including improved water monitoring, in adapting to climate change, drought management as well as flood control and disaster prevention.
4. Partnerships at local, national and regional levels for sustainable water management that would involve civil society, local authorities and private sector.

The water challenge, although sometimes hidden in other global issues (e.g. food security, health, energy, migration, climate change), is coming more and more to the forefront also of the global foreign policy agenda. Global dialogue on water is already taking place within the UN and it is important for regional organizations also to address this issue.

Water is not new on the OSCE Agenda. Water management was a priority of the 2007 Spanish Chairmanship and OSCE has been actively contributing to co-operation in the management of transboundary water resources in the whole OSCE region. However, the water challenge deserves sustained attention by the organization and its participating States. Water security is an essential pillar of the EED; moreover, it touches on all three OSCE dimensions. The work of the OSCE Secretariat and the OCEED, combined with the activities of OSCE field missions, is essential in risk assessment and early warning. A lasting solution to these challenges requires first and foremost enhanced regional cooperation, particularly within river basins. To achieve this aim, it is important to further strengthen co-operation and co-ordination with other relevant international organizations in the field of water management (e.g., UNECE, EU (EUWI), UNDP and UNEP). The promotion and exchange of best practices are equally important.

Slovenia supports enhanced dialogue on water and has launched Green Group initiative: a dialogue of six foreign ministers (Cape Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, Singapore and United Arab Emirates) to promote environmental issues on foreign policy agenda. Water is among top priorities of the Green Group ministers, who promote water debate at key global forums and highlight the water dimension within other global challenges. Slovenia is also actively engaged in water management. This year, Slovenia is holding the presidency of the ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River). Danube river basin management can be considered to be one of the best examples of comprehensive water

management and community building, which could be applied in other river basins. Slovenia is also hosting the Drought Management Centre for South-eastern Europe, aimed at improving environmental monitoring and adaptation to climate change.

To sum up, water security is a global challenge that is best dealt with at the regional level. Faced with increasing water scarcity and degradation of water resources within the OSCE region, we cannot afford any delay in addressing this challenge.