



ENGLISH only

**Statement made by Mr. Zdravko KRMEK,
State Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture,
Forestry and Water Management**

(Session IV of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, Vienna, 23 January 2007)

Mr. Chairman,

in the framework of our today's discussion I would like to stress the importance of a consultation between neighbouring states and at the regional level when combating soil degradation in the aim to avoid social problems linked to sustainable development.

The Republic of Croatia, as probably a number of other states who have been part of former federations or composite states, has interesting experience in the field: rivers or river basins of internal nature are now of international character. This requires a number of interstate agreements on integral water management.

One of the best examples for good cooperation on the regional level is without any doubt the Framework Agreement in Sava River Basin signed in 2003 by four countries of the Former Yugoslav Federation: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia with the participation of international partners including the Stability Pact and the OSCE. This initiative is today better known as Sava River Initiative and the first experience shows that this is a very good basis for further cooperation between these four countries.

With the Republic of Slovenia there is also the Agreement of Integral Water Management, signed in 1997, as well as with Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996. With the Republic of Montenegro a preparation of such an agreement is in final phase, as well as with the Republic of Serbia.

Although this does not belong to the same category, the Agreement on Integral Water Management with the Republic of Hungary from 1994, covering Drava River Basin as well as parts of the Danube, is also a very good example of excellent interstate cooperation. We hope that the stabilization in the region and the above mentioned future agreement with the Republic of Serbia will give the opportunity to enlarge such a good cooperation to the other parts of the Danube.

Concerning the cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina which is very good and constructive in the frame of the Sava River Initiative we also expect to find a solution for another problem which is actually jeopardizing the Delta of Neretva river. The project of the construction of some hydro energetic power plants in the south-eastern part of BH (in the Republika Srpska), known as "Upper Horizons", connecting Neretva and Trebišnjica basins, could seriously affect the water regime in the lower Neretva.

Quantities of salty sea water will enter deeply into the Delta of Neretva and decrease the quality of soil with very dangerous consequences to agriculture which is the economical basis of sustainable development in this part of Croatia. The first phase of the above mentioned project which started 20 years ago in the former State has already caused some of such problems. We do hope that the environmental impact study for the second phase of the project will be done very soon and that we will be provided by complete information. The cooperation in looking for a solution is in the interest of both countries and we expect it could be found through bilateral agreement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.