

**Opening remarks of State Secretary Stana Božović
On the occasion of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
concerning "Water management in OSCE participating states – increasing
the security and stability through cooperation"
26-27 January, 2015, Vienna**

Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished members of the Forum,

Please allow me to greet you on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection as well as on my own behalf, and to thank you for giving Serbia the honor to chair the OSCE in 2015.

This is an extremely important year both for the Republic of Serbia and the whole region.

Through joint work, we will realize the importance of regional cooperation, especially in activities concerning the protection of the environment, especially water protection.

We have been entrusted with a great responsibility and obligation, but this is also an opportunity for Serbia to contribute greatly to the progress of the whole region.

We particularly point out water governance in the member countries of the OSCE – increasing security and stability through cooperation.

My commitment as a person responsible for environmental protection in the Republic of Serbia in 2015 will be focused primarily on the protection of River Danube and its tributaries, sustainable use of natural resources, as well as increasing security and stability of the countries in the region.

I also wish to point out that I will advocate for a quick and efficient exchange of information between all countries in the region, concerning environmental protection with particular emphasis on water protection.

A timely exchange of information is of great importance since it is the main instrument for the prevention of damage and accidents caused by significant water pollution and pollution of the environment.

Pollution represents a serious problem, especially pollution by organic matter and nutrients.

It is also necessary to work on the education and raising public awareness regarding the protection and management of waters in the region.

From the aspect of human safety and security we have to put special emphasis on climate change, which have greatly affected huge floods in the region and represent main threat to Danube River Basin and all its tributaries.

I would particularly stress the importance of good regional cooperation during catastrophic floods in May 2014.

On this occasion I also wish to express our strong support and commitment to regional cooperation, the intention to continue maximum engagement on further improvement of cooperation as well as my gratitude for the financial support that has so far been provided to the Republic of Serbia by the European Union and other donors.

The political will of the Danube River basin countries and the EU was necessary for the signing and ratification of the Danube River Protection Convention.

In this way the necessary framework or mechanism for sustainable environmental management of the Danube River basin was created.

This agreement legally binds countries to cooperate on the issues and fundamental problems related to the water management of the Danube River and of the waters in its catchment area, with the inclusion of all available legal, administrative and technical measures with respect to conservation and environmental protection.

All Danube River Basin countries that have already become members of the EU, as well as those that have started their accession process, are required to comply with the EU directives related to water management and the environment, in particular the EU Water Framework Directive, the EU Nitrates Directive and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

In joint efforts for the protection of river Danube a significant role belongs to the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.

It is important to note that the Republic of Serbia shares the interest with other countries in the region and actively participates in the work of the International Sava River Basin Commission.

Since one of the priorities of the Government of the Republic of Serbia is the EU accession, we must be aware that the realization of this priority requires hard work on the implementation of the requirements stipulated by EU directives in the field of water management, protection from adverse effects of water and navigation issues.

The tasks that are before us call for serious work and investment of large financial resources, especially at the local level.

I put special emphasis on the following priorities and goals that throughout 2015 will be significant for addressing issues concerning the protection and water governance in OSCE participating states:

- Implementing the principles of good water governance through the application of best practices in implementation, which includes the reduction of the impact of pollution caused

by urban wastewater in the whole region, then the development of local projects that will address the issue of wastewater treatment;

- Giving priority to security of sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems, as well as consider the impact of climate change on this resource;
- Providing an opportunity for establishing partnership framework for environmental protection and efficient use of water at local, national and transboundary levels;
- Maximizing the use of economic instruments for greater efficiency in the field of water protection;
- Focusing on the transparency in the water sector at regional, national and local levels, etc.

I sincerely hope that our joint efforts and the involvement of professional institutions of all countries in the region, as well as other international bodies and organizations will continue towards completion of all planned activities for improvement of the legal framework, as well as our friendly relations and cooperation of mutual interest, related to the conservation and sustainable use of water resources in OSCE participating states.

I wish you successful work and thank you for your attention.