



EUROPEAN UNION

22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Concluding Meeting

Prague, 10-12 September 2014 EU Opening Statement

The European Union and its Member States are pleased to participate in the concluding meeting of the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum and thank the key note speakers for their thought-provoking interventions.

This year's EEF process fulfilled the purpose of serving as a forum for political dialogue. It provided us with an opportunity to exchange experience and good practices in the area of disaster risk management. We have learned more about activities of various international actors and individual participating States on prevention, preparedness and response to natural disasters.

Following the discussions in Vienna and Montreux on various aspects of disaster risk management, we appreciate that the concluding meeting in Prague focuses on current issues of disaster risk management and reduction. We welcome especially the inclusion of a session on lessons learned from recent floods in South Eastern Europe and the role of the OSCE. The European Union and its Member States provided immediate assistance to the affected countries through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism which has been activated upon the request of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Significant amount of assistance and support was also offered by civil society groups in our Member States as acts of solidarity and the European Union continues to support the reconstruction efforts in the affected areas. Assistance was among other international stakeholders provided also by the OSCE. Thus, we hope to hear concrete proposals which lessons for possible further OSCE engagement in the area of disaster risk reduction and management were drawn from these events for the future. We would be interested to hear from the speakers of this session more on possible niche for OSCE engagement taking into account its specific mandate as a regional security organisation that could have been identified in course of these tragic events.

Furthermore, as the Chairmanship rightly points out in its Food-for-Thought Paper, disaster risk reduction is high on the global agenda this year and will continue to be in 2015, culminating next year by the expected agreement on the post-HFA framework for disaster risk reduction in March in Sendai, Japan. The European Union and its Member States are committed to play an active and constructive role in the ongoing negotiations with a view to contribution to an ambitious outcome of the Conference, which builds on the current HFA. The European Union and its Member States will continue to be closely involved in the developments of the negotiations in the run-up to the Sendai summit on the basis of the following five key principles:

- Improving accountability, transparency and governance;
- Role of targets and indicators to measure progress and encourage implementation;
- Strengthening the contribution of disaster risk management to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- Addressing vulnerabilities and needs in a comprehensive framework;
- Ensuring coherence with the international agenda, including the 2015 agreement on climate change.

We look forward to learn more about ideas how the OSCE, as a regional security organisation under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, can become involved in these global discussions. We agree with the Chairmanship that the OSCE should effectively utilize its comparative advantages and its strengths in the field of disaster risk reduction while avoiding duplicating activities in areas where other and better placed institutions are already leading efforts. In this regard, we welcome the inclusion of a special session on the disaster risk reduction on the global agenda. We look forward to hear to what extent the OSCE as a security organisation could contribute to ongoing global processes taking into account the connexion between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

Environmental emergencies do not respect international borders. Cross-border cooperation is thus essential to prepare for such events and to deal with the aftermath. Targeted exchange of experience and best practices, enhancing dialogue and cooperation can furthermore contribute to building trust and confidence in the OSCE area.

Resilience to disasters and ways how to achieve it has been discussed throughout the EEF process as an important element of disaster risk reduction. Enhancing the EU's resilience to disasters, as well as its capacity to anticipate prepare and respond to risks, especially cross-border risks, is amongst the objective of the Europe 2020 Strategy and will be presented in greater detail by Ms Catherine Ebah-Moussa from DG ECHO, European Commission, later during this meeting.

Finally, we would like to thank the Swiss Chairmanship and the OSCE CoEEA and his staff for preparing the concluding meeting as well as the Czech authorities for hosting it. We look forward to our discussions in the upcoming two days which will hopefully help us to identify possible concrete ideas for further OSCE engagement in the area of disaster risk reduction as we approach Basel.

Thank you for your attention.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia*and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.