



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**23<sup>RD</sup> OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

**“Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability through co-operation”**

**SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING**

**Belgrade, 11-13 May 2015**

**Closing Remarks**

**Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitguden**

**Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Dear Ambassadors,

Dear Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding the Second Preparatory Meeting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, please allow me to express my gratitude for the constructive discussions, the insightful presentations, the competent moderation and the ideas put forward.

Let me shortly outline the main discussions we have had over the last two days. The keynote speeches by President of ICPDR, Assistant Minister Kurecic and Mr. Keiner of UNECE have underlined the importance of participatory and accountable water governance, in particular, in the context of disaster risk reduction. The keynote contributions highlighted a number of legal and institutional multilateral frameworks that offer the potential and tools for more effective decision-making in governing waters and addressing associated disaster risks.

We have been able to learn extensively about the management of the 2014 flooding disaster in South Eastern Europe, including valuable insights about individual countries' approaches, regional and international co-operative responses and the role of the OSCE. As noted by many of the speakers, challenges associated with the disasters can also provide opportunities for building further co-operation and solidarity, including across borders. I would like to commend those who have presented a range of useful lessons and reflections from South Eastern Europe - which are also relevant across the OSCE region.

An extensive discussion was dedicated to addressing water, security and disaster risk reduction in a more global context. These deliberations benefited from a presentation on the recently adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015 – 2030). A number of important linkages between water governance, disaster risk reduction, climate change and security were identified, including security benefits of transboundary water co-operation for disaster risk reduction.

The year 2015 has on several occasions been highlighted as an important year for acting on synergies between these areas, also in the OSCE context, given this year's conclusion of several global processes, including the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, expected adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in New York and negotiations for the Paris Climate Change Conference.

A number of best practices on flood and drought response and examples of effective governance approaches for addressing water-related disasters and climate change from several participating States were presented. The OSCE's on-going endeavours to translate political commitments on disaster risk reduction into practical outcomes on the ground were also referred to as having an important role in the context of water governance.

Discussions referred to water as an issue of foreign and security policies due to its complex interlinkages with many aspects of development and stability, as exemplified in the nexus-concept. Transboundary water co-operation along with good water governance holds many benefits ranging from security to environmental and economic benefits. The OSCE has shown that it can holistically address water – from DRR to water diplomacy. With its longstanding tradition of dealing with all aspects of security and its presence on the ground, it is in an ideal position to act as a facilitator to find solution to water challenges in the OSCE area.

Our deliberations underlined the indispensable role of different stakeholders in the process of formulation and implementation of effective strategies and plans to address water governance issues. The OSCE network of Aarhus Centres was highlighted as an effective instrument in catalysing public participation. The role of youth as the agents of change and future decision-makers makes youth particularly well placed to be active players in water governance. Non-governmental organizations active in the field of environment and water were noted as important contributors to endeavours aimed at building confidence and trust.

We will thoroughly review the recommendations that have been generated over the last two days and look at possible follow-up activities. My Office has significant experience in the area of water governance and will continue to build on this experience also within the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) to support OSCE participating States.

I believe the exchange of experience will continue during a field visit to the municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia that have been affected by the 2014 flood. Those of you who join the field trip will have an excellent opportunity to be exposed to first-hand accounts and experience of these municipalities in facing up to the disaster.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would also like to say a few words about the Concluding Meeting in Prague in September. An important component of every concluding meeting is a review of the OSCE commitments related to the theme of the Forum on that specific year. Allow me to note that this year's review is being prepared by UNECE, a long-term key partner of the OSCE, also within the ENVSEC Initiative. We are looking forward to the outcomes of this year's review.

The Concluding Meeting will consolidate the outcomes of the Forum discussions throughout the year. It will help crystalize conclusions and recommendations for OSCE's continued action in the area of water governance.

Thanks to the rapporteurs, a Consolidated Summary including the main key suggestions and recommendations made by the participants during the deliberations will be prepared by my Office and shared with all of you in the coming weeks.

I would like to thank the Serbian Chairmanship, the moderators, speakers and rapporteurs, the interpreters, the conference service staff, as well as the colleagues from my Office for their joint contribution to the success of this event.

I also want to thank all of you for your active contribution and wish an informative field visit and a safe trip back home.