



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

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

Vienna, 22 January 2007

The 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Part 1 / Vienna, 22 - 23 January 2007

**“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development
in the OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and water
management”**

Opening Remarks by

Bernard Snoy

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to join the previous speakers in welcoming you all to this meeting. It is a great pleasure to see that so many representatives from OSCE participating States, OSCE Partners for Co-operation, International Organizations, the private sector, as well as from the academia and NGOs came here for these two days to share their experience and expertise.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the Economic and Environmental Officers from the OSCE field presences for their valuable input during the preparation process for this 15th Economic and Environmental Forum.

As the Secretary General has pointed out, it has indeed been a wise decision of Spain to propose this year's theme. Land degradation, soil contamination and water management are highly interlinked and of great relevance for a growing number of OSCE participating states. The topic of the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum represents an excellent opportunity to further strengthen the environmental component of our activities, and to better focus and streamline our actions. I am convinced that under the guidance of the Spanish Chairmanship we will reach this objective. Mr. Chairman, let me assure you of the full support of my Office.

The International Community is realizing more and more the direct link between environmental issues and security. Global climate change, desertification, scarcity of resources, unsustainable use of natural resources and mismanagement, military and industrial legacies, and transboundary pollution all have security implications. Today's keynote addresses will give an overview on how these issues are being tackled in the OSCE area and will also make suggestions for possible future OSCE involvement.

Let me now move on and briefly refer to the substance of the Forum's sessions.

Following the Bishkek Conference, together with the Spanish Chairmanship, we identified four overarching topics the OSCE should focus on, namely:

- Environmental security
- Environmental governance
- Social effects of environmental problems
- Environment and economic development

You will see that these issues have found their way into the agenda of this forum and we should explore how to address these topics effectively. I hope you all received and consulted the Introductory Note (EF.GAL/02) which is meant to help us identifying the most suitable recommendations for follow-up activities.

Session I will deal with “Environmental security and the specific challenges of land degradation and soil contamination”. States and organizations alike should recognize that security encompasses an environmental dimension; we should constantly stress this basic truth. The OSCE, building upon existing experiences, such as the ENVSEC Initiative, should further emphasize the need for a cross-dimensional approach to environmental challenges and could focus on areas at risk, exercising thus its conflict prevention role. This session could also be instrumental for discussing the proposal made by the Spanish Chairmanship to elaborate an OSCE Environmental Security Strategy.

Session II will focus on “Environmental governance, in particular as it affects land degradation and soil contamination”. I am convinced we will get valuable recommendations regarding the principles of good governance and their applicability to the environmental sphere. We will mainly focus on three areas: how can the OSCE further promote the principles of the Aarhus Convention – access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice; how can we work with the extractive industries sector and governments in addressing the environmental implications of these industries as well as the use of revenues from that sector for environmental remediation measures; and how can the OSCE promote sustainable forest management.

Tomorrow, **Session III** will deal with the “Social effects of land degradation and soil contamination”. Speakers in this session will give us detailed information on how environmental problems affect the lives of more and more people not only in the OSCE areas but in the entire world, and how this, ultimately, can have direct effects on our security. Since environmentally induced migration is likely to be a major issue

affecting the OSCE area in future years, this session will be crucial to raise awareness and define further activities in that regard.

Session IV “Environmental security and sustainable economic development” will demonstrate that land degradation and soil contamination, if not properly and timely addressed, do not only negatively affect the environment but may cause severe economic losses. On the other hand, governments and businesses should recognize that they can maximize their long term returns by minimizing their negative environmental impact, through responsible action. Promoting a constructive, multi-stakeholder dialogue between governments, the business community, the civil society, and the public at large has always been part of the OSCE focus in the economic and environmental dimension. Other international organizations are also active in this field and we shall see how we can further co-operate in advancing the complementary objectives of economic development and environmental protection.

The role of the OSCE in follow-up to the Forum will be then further discussed in a panel discussion scheduled tomorrow afternoon.

I strongly encourage you to use these two days efficiently, to engage in a genuine free flowing and action oriented dialogue. Let me stress once more, that the Economic and Environmental Forum is aimed at identifying realistic recommendations for the OSCE, so please, keep your interventions short and concrete in order to allow others to speak their opinion. The more concrete and specific your suggestions are, the better. We will take note of all the suggestions, and I am confident that by tomorrow evening, we will have made decisive progress in delineating our role, highlighted possible partnerships we could establish with other bilateral or multilateral institutions and managed to identify our own added value. The Forum recommendations will finally be translated into concrete action and activities aimed at combating some of the most pressing problems of our time.

Thank you for attention.