



EUROPEAN UNION

23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 2nd Preparatory Meeting

Belgrade, 11-12 May 2015 EU Opening Statement

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union is pleased to participate in the second preparatory meeting of the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum, and would like to thank the Serbian Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for organising this meeting. We would also like to thank the key note speakers for their interesting presentations.

Sustainable water management can be an important factor to preserving peace, security and stability. Water scarcity and water stress, exacerbated by climate change, as well as poor water quality, drought or floods are factors which can contribute to tension and conflicts which can in turn deprive many people from access to water.

Drawing on the experience and knowledge gained by the EU and its Member States in water management, the EU attaches great importance to regional and transboundary water cooperation as factor of social and economic development but also for political stability, peace and security. In this context, we welcome the opening of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Water Convention) to all UN Members States and the entry into force, in August 2014, of the United Nations Watercourses Convention.

Proactive engagement in transboundary water security challenges with the aim of promoting collaborative and sustainable water management arrangements encouraging regional and international cooperation is a concrete objective of EU water diplomacy, adopted by the EU in its July 2013 Council Conclusions.

We welcome that this meeting aims to promote regional and cross-border cooperation as well as looks at water governance as a catalyst for cooperation and confidence building. The OSCE, as a regional security organisation, is well placed to play a role in facilitating and enhancing dialogue and cooperation and thus contributing to increasing trust and confidence.

We appreciate that the meeting also intends to explore the linkage water governance has with disaster risk reduction and climate change and provides thus continuity to our last year's discussions. We return to the topic of disaster risk reduction only few weeks after the third UN Conference on DRR in Sendai reviewed the Hyogo Framework for Action of 2005 and adopted the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030.

Effective implementation of the new framework will be key to ensure the delivery of results and measurement of progress.

Risk management measures are already a part of numerous key EU policies and financial instruments. The revised EU civil protection legislation has a very strong focus on preparedness, prevention and response.

The 2007 EU Floods Directive provides a framework for the assessment and management of flood risks, aimed at reducing the adverse consequences for human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity. Ultimately Flood Risk Management Plans focusing on prevention, protection and preparedness should set the objectives and include measures to achieve flood risk reduction.

We welcome that lessons learned from the 2014 devastating floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia were included into the agenda of our meeting today. We would be particularly interested to hear concrete proposals on which lessons might be relevant for the OSCE given its specific mandate as a regional security organisation.

We would like to once again express our sympathy and solidarity with all those affected by these tragic events. We recall that the European Union and its Member States provided immediate assistance to the affected countries through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism which was activated following the requests of Serbia and

Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was the largest operation in the history of the Mechanism, 23 countries offered assistance, 800 relief workers were deployed, 1.8 Mill EUR immediate financial assistance was provided to NGOs. In addition, for Serbia alone the EU provided 60 Mill EUR from our solidarity fund, 30 Mill EUR in immediate reconstruction of housing, public buildings and support to agriculture as well as 62 Mill EUR mid-term grants for early warning systems, prevention and risk reduction as well as to cater to the remaining needs in housing and economic growth. In this context, we are happy that our host country, Serbia, joined the EU Civil protection mechanism recently.

We look forward to an intensive and fruitful debate in the days ahead and encourage the speakers to focus on identifying areas for future action of the OSCE in the area of water governance.

We are aware that issues of water governance and water diplomacy are of growing relevance in particular, but not only, to the region of Central Asia and we look forward to hearing from various representatives of participating states, OSCE structures and field missions about their views on this issue.

Finally, we would like to thank the Serbian Chairmanship for hosting this meeting in Belgrade.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as MONACO align themselves with this statement.

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