



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Speech by the
OSCE Secretary General,
Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut,**

**“Furthering the Coherence of the OSCE”
Second Preparatory Conference
to the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

**“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in
the OSCE area: Water Management”**

**Zaragoza, Spain
12-13 March 2007**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and honour to welcome all of you to this second preparatory Conference to the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Before referring to the issues to be discussed at this Conference, **let me extend my warmest thanks and appreciation to our hosts**, the City of Zaragoza and the Region of Aragon, for their hospitality and for the work done in preparing this conference.

I wish to thank also the Spanish Chairmanship, both the teams in Vienna and Madrid, for their excellent co-operation with the Secretariat in preparing this event. I very much look forward to the special address by the Chairman-in-Office, H.E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé. We regard his presence here as an additional sign of the Chairmanship’s strong commitment to make this year’s EEF a success.

May I say also that **I had the pleasure to follow directly the First Part of the Forum** that took place in Vienna, on 22-23 January 2007. As you know, this focused on “Key

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

That meeting provided a clear demonstration to us all that there exists a strong political will among OSCE participating States to tackle these issues and to work towards improving the environmental security and the environmental governance in our region.

Today and tomorrow, here in Zaragoza, we will take an additional step towards the 2nd part of the Forum, in Prague. The topic of water management and the possible OSCE role is of vital importance.

Indeed, the modern challenges, faced by our States and societies, such as that of water management, are complex and multi-dimensional. The first line of response to new risks remains the responsibility of States. So much, indeed, can be done at the State and national levels in order to design well-targeted policies in reply to difficult new challenges.

However, responding at the State level to such complex issues as water management is not enough. Such challenges require States to co-operate in new and innovative ways with each other. The importance of our meeting today lies here.

Comparing notes between ourselves, debating ideas, resolving on common action – all of these are, indeed, key to building an international society of States in the OSCE area that is effective in responding to difficult new challenges, such as water management. I see our meeting today, therefore, as an example of the kind of network for innovation and common purpose at the international level that is so crucial for crafting the 21st century that we wish to see emerge.

The OSCE is unique in its ability to forge precisely the networks of innovation and partnership that are required to face the complex challenges of the 21st century. On water management, I have no doubt, the OSCE has an important role to play.

At the conceptual level, it is important that the OSCE has recognized very clearly the strong link between water and security, and that the Forum in 2002 focused on

water management and co-operation. This has led to a number of concrete activities, in which the OSCE is currently supporting projects related to water. These activities include data gathering, the drafting of bi-lateral and multilateral agreements, capacity-building exercises and facilitating partnerships.

Please allow me to provide you with a bit more detail on OSCE activities. In South Eastern Europe, the OSCE has provided continued support to the co-operation process in the Sava River basin, shared by Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. Establishing a network of local actors concerned about water resource management and offering them a platform to meet and discuss regularly has been an integral part of the OSCE approach.

In the case of the Dniester River, the OSCE developed a project together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in support of the governments of Moldova and Ukraine. The project consisted of a diagnostic study of the river basin produced by national and international experts with the aim of enhancing regional co-operation. A follow-up project is currently being implemented, with the key output being an agreed Action Programme including a revised legal framework for the cooperation.

In Central Asia, the OSCE has worked, in co-operation with the UNECE and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), to support the project of establishing an inter-governmental transboundary water commission between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, including developing the Commission statute and other actions aimed at effective implementation of a bilateral agreement on Chu-Talas, signed in 2000. Supporting public participation in the management of Chu and Talas rivers and empowering local stakeholders to promote their interests was another important component of the OSCE involvement.

Water management issues are one of the key environmental issues in the South Caucasus countries, and they are also an important confidence-building activity in a region featuring protracted conflicts. In this regard, the OSCE and NATO (Security through Science Program) have facilitated a regional project on monitoring the water quality of the Kura-Araks river basin in the South Caucasus. This regional project has supported co-operation between scientific communities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

So, the OSCE has been working at very different levels, on different aspects of the issue and in different contexts.

After five years, it is time now to evaluate the experience that we have obtained and knowledge we have gained. Such is our collective task over the next two days. I am certain that, together, we will be able to identify new areas for follow-up activities and to forge new partnerships with other relevant actors.

I wish to take this opportunity, therefore, to welcome to our meeting the experts from State institutions across the OSCE region, the representatives of various international and regional organizations, of NGOs, of the academic community, as well as of the business community.

I am also glad to see many Ambassadors and delegates from Vienna. The Secretariat is looking forward to working closely with you under the leadership of the Spanish Chairmanship in defining the recommendations that will emerge from such meetings and in clarifying future actions we should take.

I am also delighted to see here our Economic and Environmental Officers, working in the OSCE field presences. I do not see them often enough, but, rest assured, I know that we can all count on them, as they represent the backbone of our Organization and play a singular role in implementing our decisions, principles and commitments.

The substance of this Conference is substantive and wide-ranging. First, we will assess international and regional experiences regarding water co-operation, such as the UNECE Water Convention, the EU Water Initiative, etc. On this basis, we will look then more closely into existing OSCE experience in various regional contexts (for example, on Sava, Dniester, Chu and Talas rivers). Later today, we will focus on economic governance aspects of sustainable water management, such as the value of water-related ecological services. And tomorrow, we will deal with one of the core items of OSCE business – conflict prevention.

The key themes of our discussions are clear. Throughout our deliberations, we will emphasize the importance of good governance, as well as the need for strengthening regional co-operation initiatives. These twin objectives should guide our thinking and our action.

Water management and water co-operation are political issues in their nature and are presently high on the international agenda. Numerous regional and international organizations have started tackling these issues from different perspectives, and this is only correct. Water is a vital resource for the well-being of people, it supports economic development, and is vital for agriculture and for the industry. Given its importance, good planning is crucial -- emergency response, disaster preparedness and drought plans are needed before events require them. In addition, we recognise that water supply and allocation can lead to tensions that may spill-over into conflict.

It should be clear, therefore, that sharing and protecting water resources has now become an important item on the agenda for international co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE has an important role to play in making use of water issues as a strategic factor of development and peace. Within the OSCE region, there are some 180 watercourses extending over the territory of more than one country. Co-operation is the only way to enhance development, security and stability throughout our common area.

Improving governance of water resources is, therefore, of high priority for the OSCE. It is also a prerequisite for achieving the goals as set out in the Maastricht Strategy Document for the economic and environmental dimension. The stakes are high.

In this respect, I especially look forward to the final discussions of our meeting, on 'The Role of the OSCE: Follow up to the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum.' I hope that we will, indeed, be able to identify relevant recommendations for our future joint action.

I look forward to hearing your views. Thank you for your attention.