



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**The 15th Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
Part 2 / Prague, 21 – 23 May 2007**

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

Introductory Remarks by

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Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 15th Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum. I should like to thank the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship for the leadership provided during the preparations for this meeting. The Chairmanship and my Office have tried over the past year to ensure that our debates are dynamic, pragmatic and action-oriented with a view to delivering concrete results.

I should also like to express my gratitude to all the high-ranking guests and participants for joining us in Prague to take part in our deliberations. I am also very pleased that the OSCE field presences are widely represented and will certainly play an active role in our deliberations. I am particularly pleased about the large and high-level participation from partner international organizations, NGOs and representative of the business and academic community, who join us at the Forum. We consider all of you to be key partners, without whom we would not be able to implement our comprehensive mandate. Allow me to particularly thank the UNECE for preparing an

excellent and timely report on the implementation of commitments in the environmental sphere, which we will discuss tomorrow morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Economic and Environmental Forum remains a key OSCE yearly event in the economic and environmental dimension, and together with the preparatory meetings reflects the Organization's preoccupation with traditional and new challenges to security.

This year, the Forum focuses on "Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: land degradation, soil contamination and water management". This is indeed a very relevant topic for the OSCE. As stated in the 2003 OSCE Maastricht Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, *"Environmental degradation, unsustainable use of natural resources and mismanagement in the processing and disposal of wastes have a substantial impact on the health, welfare, stability and security of our countries and can upset ecological systems. These factors, together with problems of access to resources and negative external effects of pollution, can cause tensions between countries."*

Unlike potential military threats, environmental threats are real and ongoing. When considering environmental security issues, it is important to recognize the root causes as well as the interplay and the effects of a multitude of variables. As the Chairman-in-Office, H.E. Minister Moratinos, said in his speech at the preparatory

conference in Zaragoza, “the effects of negative environmental processes are already a reality, as reflected in reports of international organizations and groups of experts ... such changes point directly to human activity and above all to developments that ignore environmental ramifications”. Most security problems are generated by (and generate in their turn) complex situations involving environmental, political, social and economic issues.

An organization such as the OSCE, which aims at promoting comprehensive security, can therefore play a useful role in tackling issues related to environmental security, sustainable development and sustainable management of land and water resources. I think we have already proved that we can bring added value to international, regional, national and local efforts aimed at improving the governance and the management of land and water resources, at promoting enhanced transboundary co-operation, and exchanges of information and of know-how. In the follow-up to this year’s Forum, our Organization should reinforce its co-operation with regional and international organizations and direct its efforts toward building political will and local capacities, filling existing gaps and strengthening and enforcing existing co-operation mechanisms.

However, not every environmental issue will result in a security problem. It is therefore important for an organization like the OSCE to focus on those issues and on those contexts that pose risks to security.

A great number of ideas and recommendations emerged from the preparatory conferences in Bishkek and Zaragoza and the Vienna Forum. Now, in Prague, the

time has come to streamline and prioritize them. I hope that you found useful the ‘Tentative outcome’ paper, which is designed to stimulate the discussions and elicit reactions, contributing in this way to identifying the most suitable follow-up.

I should like to draw your attention to special events with a more regional focus and also to take this opportunity to commend the initiative of Sweden to convene an event dedicated to transboundary water management.

Before concluding, I am pleased to announce the release of the Annual Activity report of my Office for the period June 2006 to May 2007.

I look forward to hearing our distinguished keynote speakers and then the comments and interventions from the floor. I am confident that our discussions in the coming days will be fruitful and that we will achieve our goals.

Thank you for your attention.