



**Statement of Ambassador Thomas Greminger,
Permanent Representative of Switzerland**

**Closing Session
First Preparatory Meeting of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental
Forum**

27 January 2015, Vienna

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank Ambassador Vuk Zugic and Sanja Milinkovic of the Serbian Chairmanship, Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, Yurdakul Yigitgüden, and his team for having organized this first Preparatory Meeting of the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum and for having brought together so many experts here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start with a quote: “Any two countries engaged in active water cooperation do not go to war for any reason whatsoever”. This sentence is from the Strategic Foresight Group, an Indian Think tank that Switzerland actively supported. It is taken from a study on water diplomacy based on 148 countries and called “Water cooperation for a secure World”.

I very much like this sentence, because it is not only a strong call for water cooperation but also a call for stability and security. One could even say a clear call for the OSCE to become more active in the field of water governance! Water is not
*) Redistribution due to change of distribution status, text remains unchanged

only about development, health and food. Water is also about the security of people and nations. The lively discussions that we have had during the last two days are clearly a proof of it.

By choosing water governance as its main topic in the second dimension, the Serbian Chairmanship is shedding light on what we can do to address the multitude of water challenges and the diverse nature of their effects. The good news is that everyone has a role to play in ensuring water governance: not only States, but private sector, civil society and communities, as it was repeatedly mentioned yesterday and today. We heard numerous positive examples of how we can cope with water related challenges if we give them sufficient weight on the political agenda, if we invest in means to address them and if we go forward in a spirit of cooperation and partnership at all levels. That is the positive message I would retain from this 1st Preparatory meeting.

What does this mean for the OSCE?

The OSCE, as the largest regional security organisation, can and must address the challenges of water which are now firmly established on the global security agenda. Water is not a new issue for the OSCE, but one that calls for renewed attention. Let us remind that the 1989 Sofia Meeting on the Protection of the Environment organized by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) paved the way for the major international legal instrument on water - the “UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes”, also known as the Water Convention. Since then, fostering water co-operation and security has been an area of work of the OSCE. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) for instance, has been an excellent instrument for co-ordinated international action in this field.

By putting sustainable water management and water scarcity on our Joint Work plan, Serbia and Switzerland intended to place water issues high on the OSCE agenda again and increase the sense of urgency for a comprehensive approach.

From our discussions during the past 2 days, I would like to **highlight the following five key elements:**

1) **First, water governance is not only a relevant issue between states, but also one between different stakeholders within a State.** Cross-sectorial dialogue is needed to ensure an appropriate use of water resources. Therefore, integrating all stakeholders – of which women are an important group – in water-related decision-making processes is a key issue in water governance. I believe the OSCE can play a meaningful role in strengthening national processes based on its vast expertise.

2) Second, **in water governance, there is no one size fits all.** We have heard, among others, from Dr. Pohl, the Adelphi representative, that **we should better reflect and address the different political realities in each river basin.** Examples of good functioning transboundary water cooperation were presented: the work done under the Albufeira Convention between Portugal and Spain, for instance. But we have also heard - and felt here in the room - existing tensions where there is a lack of dialogue between OSCE participating States. We must strive to apply the OSCE tools and assets also in the field of water governance, in order to rebuild trust and confidence.

3) Third, **as in many fields, implementation is key.** Several speakers pointed out the challenges posed by weak implementation of national or international agreements and illustrated them with some concrete cases. There also, the OSCE has a role to play: our Organization can be used as platform of dialogue and should encourage full implementation of the commitments taken by participating States.

4) Fourth, **the importance of local environmental governance** was highlighted several times during our discussions. When we look at most of the cases of water disputes, we can see that these situations usually arise when local stakeholders and communities are insufficiently included in decision making. The Aarhus Centres, as it was illustrated with the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, are particularly well suited to be partners in inclusive approaches to water management and could also link water policies to general environmental policies.

5) **Finally, transparency, integrity and good governance are key** if we are to address the water-related challenges in a comprehensive manner. The “Water Integrity Network” put forward some concrete ideas this morning. There again, I am convinced that the OSCE, with its comprehensive approach of security and its solid

experience in good governance, can support country efforts to become more transparent in water related issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turning now to **the priority areas that we should further discuss** in the course of the next stages of the Prague Forum cycle, I would like to mention the following two:

1. We touched upon the risks of water-related disasters and the adaptation to climate change during the last two days. We are convinced that we should further discuss this important issue. As you know, flood and drought are the most frequent natural hazards affecting the OSCE participating States. You will all remember the horrendous floods that Western Balkans experienced last year in May. There were also many signs of solidarity across borders and dividing lines. Ambassador Zugic already mentioned that the second Preparatory meeting will give us a chance to better understand the role Disaster Risk Reduction can play in building confidence. This event will ensure continuity to last year's main topic in the 2nd dimension and to the Ministerial Council Decision on Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in Basel last December. Switzerland will closely work with Serbia in preparing for the second Preparatory meeting.
2. Second, we should build upon the Security Day on Water Diplomacy held in Vienna last year in July and look closer at the specific role of the OSCE. We heard a lot about the concept of water governance yesterday and today. Now, we should concentrate on the role the OSCE should play in water governance and further discuss the importance of strengthening transboundary water co-operation and water diplomacy as an effective tool to enhance security and stability in the OSCE area.

The OSCE could for instance engage more in the international discourse on water diplomacy, by being present at major events and by contributing its own approach to frame "water diplomacy" from a security perspective.

We should also discuss how to use the tools and capacities of our organization in the field of water governance. I would like to mention the

following: our mediation capacities, the use of environmental fact finding missions in regions where the dialogue is lacking, the OSCE capacities of connecting key actors, the exchange of best practices, the creation of a code of conduct in the field of water governance. We need to discuss the concrete steps our Organization should undertake. We need also to look at how we could develop and promote the valuable experience gained so far by the OSCE in water diplomacy.

Those are in my view the most important topics our Organization still needs to tackle in the next stages of this year's Forum.

Water is a common good, and we have to find equitable ways and mechanisms to share benefits as well as responsibilities in managing this unique resource. We have started the discussion during these two days. Let us all take the chance to continue it in the course of the year in order to find a common understanding around this topic within the OSCE.

Let me finish by expressing a personal wish. We have heard yesterday from the Chair of the OECD Water Governance Initiative that water has become a strategic priority of his organisation. It is my strong wish that at the end of this Forum cycle, we can say that water is not only a strategic priority for the OECD, but also for the OSCE!

Thank you for your attention.