

22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Prague, September 10 – 12, 2014

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you in Prague on the occasion of the 22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. I would most sincerely like to welcome the President of the Swiss Confederation and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Didier Burkhalter, the Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier, the representatives of the fifty-seven participating States in the OSCE, members of the OSCE Secretariat, as well as the representatives of Partners for Cooperation and of international organizations and other participants in this meeting.

At the outset, let me take this opportunity to thank the Swiss Chairmanship and the OSCE for all the efforts in assisting to solve the crisis in and around Ukraine. The recent developments are of deep concern to us. The security situation within the OSCE area has drastically deteriorated since we gathered in this forum last year. What is at stake are the established fundamental principles that have provided a solid cornerstone for our area in the last almost 40 years. As we know from our own history, it is very easy to destroy trust and it takes years to rebuild it again. Therefore I reiterate the urgent need for a sustainable political solution based on respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence. In this regard, I welcome Friday’s agreement in Minsk on a ceasefire and on launching a political process to resolve the crisis, with the assistance of the OSCE. Let me also express my wish that, also in view of the upcoming 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the fundamental OSCE principles will be yet again reconfirmed and built upon by the participating States.

Let me now turn to the theme of our today’s gathering and thank the Swiss Chairmanship for all the efforts that made the First and the Second Preparatory Meetings of the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum successful. The present concluding meeting will enable us to consider again environmental challenges as a means to greater cooperation and security in the OSCE area. The previous

discussions held in Vienna and in Montreux revealed the paramount importance of an efficient Disaster Risk Management at the international level. Nowadays the disaster risk is growing simultaneously with the ongoing climate changes, global warming and increasing human interaction with nature. Therefore, we hope that the open discussion we are going to hold during the next three days will lead to concrete outcomes.

Environmental challenges often overpass national borders. It is important that the OSCE promote trans-boundary cooperation since a lot is to be improved in the area of harmonization and simplification. In general, a closer cooperation between the OSCE countries in Disaster Risk Management is desirable. Networking, promoting the dialogue with different stakeholders including the civil society and exchange of information, experience and knowledge can only increase the OSCE countries' resilience to natural and human-made disasters.

However, the OSCE's role is not only to promote cooperation between countries. The OSCE could also make an effort to enhance the participating States' capacity for prevention, response and recovery from environmental disasters. The Economic and Environmental Forum could have an impact on capacity building of the OSCE countries if it called for specific measures. The EEF could require an increase in the awareness of disaster risks among populations, promote the role of local authorities in prevention mechanisms or try to involve the private sector.

I would like to stress again the importance of Disaster Risk Management for security and stability in the OSCE region. If we succeed in reducing disaster risk and in enhancing our capacity to respond effectively to environmental challenges, it will contribute to greater security of populations. Furthermore, close cooperation in the field of Disaster Risk Management can act as an influential Confidence-Building Measure.

In conclusion, let me once again express again my thanks to the Swiss Chairmanship and also wish much success to the upcoming Serbian Chairmanship.

Hoping that the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum will give rise to a productive and enriching debate, I would like to wish you a pleasant stay in Prague.

Thank you for your attention.