



United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Statement, First Preparatory Meeting, 2015 Economic and Environmental Forum

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the EED, Vienna
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Good morning, fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests. I would like to thank Ambassador Zugic of the Serbian Chairmanship, Secretary General Zannier, and the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Dr. Yigitguden, for bringing us together to open the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum. The United States welcomes the opportunity to focus this year's forum on improving security within the OSCE through better water governance, and we thank the opening speakers for setting the table for a good discussion.

I would like to make **three main points**.

The **first** simply is that the United States strongly supports this year's focus in the OSCE on water governance. Improving water governance at local, national, and regional levels contributes to security, and we believe that the OSCE can play a meaningful role in strengthening national processes and institutions for managing water resources and in supporting country efforts to address shared water challenges.

The need for these processes and efforts is clear. By 2025, only 10 years from now, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will be living under water-stressed conditions. Water scarcity and poor water quality will increase disease, undermine economic growth, limit food production, and become a growing threat to peace and security in many regions of the world, including in the OSCE.

We are seeing many of these effects today on global health and economic wellbeing. Diarrheal disease is the second leading cause of death in children worldwide and a key factor in global malnutrition and stunting. Droughts and floods now affect more people than all other natural disasters combined. Sources of freshwater are overexploited – threatening food supplies, energy

production and exponentially increasing risk for the private sector reliant on water inputs. Climate change will exacerbate all these challenges.

Increasingly, water is also becoming a more direct source of conflict. A 2012 U.S. Intelligence Community Assessment on Global Water Security noted that water challenges will increase the likelihood of instability and state failure, promote regional tensions, and distract countries from working on policy objectives important to their own development and to the United States and our global partners.

My **second** key point is not meant to discourage us, but rather to challenge us.

This is a complex set of issues. We must push the tools and capacities of the OSCE to their highest potential.

Getting people the water they need, where they need it, when they need it, and in a sustainable manner is not easy. It's a hardware problem, meaning getting the water systems themselves right: the dams, irrigation systems, water pipelines, and other components. It's a software problem, meaning developing the right human resources and know-how to run systems well and with the proper oversight and input from users. It's a financial problem, of course, and in many cases it's also a social, cultural, or political problem.

Good governance also plays a key role here. We know that is true of any natural resource management, but particularly so for water resources. Governments must take the lead role in ensuring the benefits of water are optimized among competing uses and that the mechanisms are in place to support development at the water basin level. And of course the voice of civil society will be crucial to effective and fair management. We should all be suspicious when advocacy organizations working on water and environmental issues are silenced. We speak often of good governance in the OSCE, and its importance will be no less during our discussions on water governance.

My **last point** is to outline several key goals that we hope to work toward this year, together with all of you, through this Forum process.

- First, we aim to help participating States advance economic growth and sustainable development. This can come through improved water resources management, strengthened resiliency to climate change, and increased security and productivity of water resources, both for food and energy production.

- We want to prevent conflicts over water. We understand that there are disagreements within the OSCE region over water issues that will not be solved easily. But we should not shy away from the potential of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue on these tough issues. I am confident there are ways we can use this organization to mitigate tensions associated with shared waters and to use water as a means to promote trust and cooperation in regions where water is, or may become, a source of conflict.
- We want to reduce water and sanitation-related disease. This may not be something that impacts a majority of our citizens, but frankly it should not affect any of our citizens, including the citizens of our Partners for Co-operation. We should look for opportunities to raise the priority of water and sanitation in national development plans and strategies and increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation where needed.

The goals I have just outlined are not revolutionary, and I suspect most of us around the table would agree on them. My hope is that we can use this Forum process to see where greater cooperation can occur in their pursuit. As with other issues in the Economic and Environmental Dimension, there are organizations and tools in place that we can work with to achieve these goals, and I imagine we will hear about some of those today and in the sessions to come. I encourage participating States to consider joining these existing platforms, such as the United Nations Shared Waters Program, which supports regional dialogue on shared waters to build trust, promote cooperation, and prevent conflict in key regions.

The Serbian Chairmanship, together with the entire Western Balkans region, has a great deal of experience in solving many of these challenges. We look forward to examining where those and other key lessons might be used elsewhere in the OSCE region, and how we can leverage the tools and assets of this Organization to reduce security risks and to increase cooperation between participating States as we deal with these challenges.

We again thank the organizers of this Preparatory Meeting of the Forum. We look forward to an engaging discussion with you all over the next two days and throughout the year. We commit to advancing the OSCE's role in encouraging sound water governance and encourage all of you here today to do the same.

Thank you Mr. Chair.