



23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

“Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability through co-operation”

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

Vienna, 26 - 27 January 2015

CLOSING STATEMENT OF THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (REC)

The Regional Environmental Center would like to thank the Serbian OSCE chair and the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities for organising the first preparatory meeting for the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum; the Government of Austria for hosting the meeting; and the distinguished delegations and speakers for their presentations and interventions.

While water governance presents significant challenges, it also provides opportunities for policy makers to prevent conflicts and enable greater regional cooperation. This becomes ever more important as water quality deteriorates and as demographic and socioeconomic developments increase the demand for water resources. The trend is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, which contribute to shortfalls in supply, salinisation, floods, and disasters caused by extreme weather events. Environmental changes are likely to intensify existing, and trigger new, social and political conflicts over water, in particular in regions that lack robust institutions for cooperation.

We therefore welcome the theme of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum and wish to acknowledge its relevance in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 agenda.

The Regional Environmental Center, an international organisation governed by a membership of 31 countries and the European Commission, is committed to continuing cooperation with the Republic of Serbia, the OSCE, the participating states and the partners for cooperation in the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum. Serbia’s



chairing of the OSCE not only coincides with the 25th anniversary of the REC, it also thematically reflects a topic that has been at the heart of the REC's activities over the past 25 years.

The REC has been facilitating dialogue among governments, civil society, academia and the private sector on the subject of water governance reform and implementation in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. As highlighted through various examples during this meeting, our work programmes promote good water governance at local, national and river basin level using a multi-stakeholder approach and with a strategic focus on policy development and implementation; knowledge sharing, awareness raising and capacity building; integrity, transparency and accountability; and assessment and monitoring.

Mandated as a change agent in Central and Eastern Europe with the continuous support of the European Commission, Austria, Sweden, the USA and several other bilateral partners, we call upon Serbia as OSCE chair, the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and all participating states and partners for cooperation to work together to leverage efforts to promote water governance. The REC will catalyse and contribute to this year's discourse as it fulfils its mandate as host of the Environment and Security Initiative's Regional Desk Office for South Eastern Europe, and as coordinator of the Environment Dimension of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy.

We are greatly encouraged by the ideas and proposals shared at this first preparatory meeting for the 23rd Economic and Environmental Forum and are ready to jointly refine them before the second preparatory meeting in the Republic of Serbia. As we head towards the ministerial event to be held on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the REC on June 11, 2015, the REC will actively engage in the forthcoming discussions with our membership and key partners in order to build, together with the OSCE, a partnership for sustainable development that contributes to security and stability through cooperation.