

Introductory Plenary Session
Keynote speaker

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on behalf of

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

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the government of Spain and the OSCE Secretariat for inviting the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to address today's meeting.

At the same time, I regret to inform you that Mr. Marek Belka, UNECE Executive Secretary, cannot be here to address you in person. Pressing commitments in Central Asia do not allow him to be in Prague today. Nevertheless, Mr. Belka has asked me to deliver this keynote address on his behalf.

As you may know, the UNECE celebrated its 60th anniversary last month. During the anniversary session, the UNECE was pleased to welcome a special guest, the OSCE Chair-in-Office, Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos.

On behalf of Mr. Marek Belka, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Minister Moratinos for his contribution to the success of the UNECE anniversary session.

Sixty years ago, a United Nations regional economic commission - UNECE - was established to help rebuild Europe. However, the deterioration of international relations in post-war Europe forced the UNECE to scale down its ambitions. With the tensions of the cold war the UNECE focused on "building bridges across bipolar Europe".

In the last 60 years, these "bridges" have taken the form of international conventions, agreements and standards. They span across Europe. Many are also global - connecting Europe and the rest of the world.

While the UNECE has continued to work to integrate nations, Europe has simultaneously been creating an environment of stability and peace. In this context, proper recognition of the importance of collaboration between European institutions should be made. From the UNECE perspective, its long-standing collaboration with the OSCE is particularly important.

UNECE members welcome co-operation with the OSCE. It is an excellent example of a complementary partnership - a partnership that highlights the link between security and economic/environmental dimensions.

Last year, both organizations demonstrated that mutually beneficial work could be undertaken in the area of transport. This year, the objective of strengthening environmental co-operation is very topical for the agenda. I hope that the UNECE and OSCE can build upon the successes of last year and will develop an even stronger and mutually reciprocal environmental co-operation.

The UNECE has a good record of collaboration with other international organisations. The UNECE is now a partner in the **Environment and Security Initiative**

(ENVSEC) and is working effectively with its ENVSEC partners, including the OSCE.

Transboundary water co-operation in **the rivers Chu and Talas**, shared by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and **Dniester**, shared by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have developed significantly due to joint UNECE - OSCE efforts.

The UNECE also works well with individual countries. Last year, for example, the UNECE began working with the incoming Chair-in-Office. **“Dam safety in Central Asia: capacity building for regional co-operation”** is a major and successful joint undertaking of the UNECE and the Finnish government. The UNECE looks forward to continuing mutually beneficial co-operation with Finland in 2008.

In general, the UNECE is open to joining forces with other organizations to address various developmental challenges in Europe. And let it be no doubt: there are still many remaining challenges in the UNECE region.

The pursuit of environmental protection is one of those challenges. It is also a topic of today’s forum – one which is no longer solely “Economic” but also “Environmental”.

There have been previous discussions about the environment at the OSCE (in 1999 and 2002). However, I believe this is the first time the OSCE Chair-in-Office has put forward such a comprehensive and ambitious environmental program of action.

The environment is also featured prominently on the UN agenda. One of the **Millennium Development Goals** seeks to “ensure environmental sustainability”.

The goal’s targets to “integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources” as well as to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”, are very much desired.

The UNECE is actively contributing to meeting these targets. Let me give you a few tangible examples.

The UNECE’s forest area has continued to expand by roughly one million hectares per year since 1990 due in part to effective promotion of sustainable forest management by the **UNECE Timber Committee** (in co-operation with the FAO). By comparison, the world as a whole loses about 13 million hectares of forest per year.

The UNECE Timber Committee monitors every aspect of forests - environmental, social and economic. This information is used to ensure greater environmental security. The Committee is also concerned with governance issues. It works with its partners, notably FAO, in the field of illegal logging.

I understand Mr. Jan Heino, Assistant Director General of the FAO Forestry Department is attending the Forum. He will elaborate later about the joint UNECE – FAO work.

Energy use per unit of GDP is decreasing in the UNECE region contributing, in turn, to a lower rate of CO2 emissions. The **UNECE’s Energy Efficiency 21 Project (EE-21)** is actively promoting the formation of an energy efficiency market in Eastern Europe. Recently, the EE-21 Project contributed to the creation of a €30 million fund and is now working to create a new €50 million public-private equity fund for energy efficiency and renewable energy investments.

The **Protocol on Water and Health** - developed under the auspices of the UNECE and WHO - is helping reduce the number of people who do not have access to safe water and adequate sanitation. In the UNECE region, about 140 million people live in such conditions making them vulnerable to water-related diseases. Every year in the UNECE region, over 13 thousand children die due to poor water conditions. This clearly requires urgent action.

I have already told you about the 60 years the UNECE has spent constructing “bridges” across Europe and beyond. As a result of this painstaking work, the UNECE Secretariat - presently - manages five environmental conventions and twelve related protocols.

Four of the five UNECE conventions focus on regional or transboundary co-operation. Not only do they provide frameworks to address cross-border environmental issues, but they are also practical and indispensable instruments to prevent conflict. The UNECE Aarhus Convention, the fifth convention, promotes dialogue between countries at the level of civil society. In doing so, it also contributes to increased regional security.

In this context, all five UNECE conventions very much deserve – in my view - to become integral parts of the future “OSCE Environmental Security Strategy”.

Let me highlight the existing UNECE environmental security instruments.

First, the UNECE with the help of its **Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes** is tackling a wide range of water problems: overexploitation, droughts, floods and contamination.

The water challenges are complicated by the transboundary nature of water resources in the UNECE region. More than 150 major rivers and 50 large lakes run along or straddle borders. Twenty countries depend on neighbouring countries for over 10 per cent of their water resources and five countries draw 75 per cent of their resources from upstream countries.

Second, **the Espoo (Environmental Impact Assessment) Convention** requires countries to assess the environmental impact at early stages of planning. It also obliges countries to notify and consult each other on all major projects that are likely to have a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact.

Third, **the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents** helps countries to prevent industrial accidents that can have transboundary effects, to prepare for accidents and to respond to them. The convention also encourages countries to help each other in the event of such an accident; to co-operate on research and development; and to share information and technology.

Fourth, **the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution** deals with problems of air pollution. Air pollutants can travel several thousands of kilometres. The convention sets up an institutional framework to address these issues and brings together policy and research.

Finally, **the “UNECE Aarhus Convention”** - this convention is not only an environmental agreement, but it is also a convention about government accountability, transparency and responsiveness. It does not focus on regional issues *per se*, but on interactions between the citizens and their public authorities.

These international legal instruments together with the UNECE Secretariat represent effective institutional structures. They have been in place for years. Behind them, there are hundreds of national experts linked in professional networks. This intergovernmental machinery is operational and ready-to-be-engaged as needed.

Moreover, the UNECE serves as secretariat to the **“Environment for Europe”** process. This is a unique partnership of the UNECE member states, organizations of the UN system, other intergovernmental organizations, regional environment centres and NGOs.

The UNECE is now preparing the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" which will take place in Belgrade on 10-12 October 2007.

I urge the OSCE Chair-in-Office to take full advantage of the existing institutional architecture managed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, when preparing further commitments on the environment.

Let me now turn to the specific role played by the UN Economic Commission for Europe at this meeting. It is becoming a well-established tradition that the UNECE presents its review of the implementation of OSCE commitments at the Forum.

Tomorrow, I will provide you with a detailed presentation on the UNECE assessment of progress made in the area of environment. Today, however, I will briefly highlight the major findings and recommendations.

The UNECE review emphasizes Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE). The OSCE participating States in these two regions have made considerable progress in implementing their environmental commitments. However, implementation has been uneven and there remains much work to be done.

The UNECE report makes the following recommendations:

- Governments of EECCA and SEE countries should urgently turn their attention towards their environmental institutions. The institutions should be strengthened in order to make them more proficient and effective
- National environmental priorities should be re-assessed and more realistic programs should be developed if they are to attract financing
- Greater effort should be devoted to more effective implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Their ratification should be sped up, where necessary
- Monitoring, reporting and assessment should be made more prominent instruments in environmental policy-making
- Finally, more attention should be paid to “education for sustainable development”.

I would like to stress that there remains much room for improvement in the elementary – but indispensable – areas of data collection and dissemination, target setting, indicator-based assessment, compliance monitoring and education.

To begin the process of improved implementation of OSCE environmental commitments, the UNECE report contains four project proposals. The projects aim at addressing those fundamental and essential areas.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the OSCE Chair-in-Office for its determination in putting the environment on the OSCE agenda. The draft “OSCE Environmental Security Strategy” is impressive in its proposed scope and ambition. It will be a challenge in the further development of the Strategy to make it realistic and focused, giving the OSCE additional leverage to work for improved environmental protection and management of natural resources.

The UNECE with its expertise, 17 environmental legal instruments, abundant experience in regional approaches and long tradition of co-operation with the OSCE stands ready to assist.

Thank you for your attention.