



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

23RD OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

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

SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING

Belgrade, 11-13 May 2015

Opening Remarks

Dr. Halil Yurdakul Yigitguden

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

It is an honour to address this opening session of the Second Preparatory Meeting of the 23rd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum and continue our deliberations on water governance. During the first preparatory meeting in Vienna, at the end of January, we discussed the basic elements of water governance, its importance with regard to cross-sectoral co-ordination and environmental protection, as well as the need for multi-level approaches and transparency.

During the discussions, it was reiterated that the multiple water challenges related to global growth and climate change can threaten social and political stability and that good water governance is key in meeting water demands and preventing conflict. Among the recommendations derived from the speakers was that the OSCE should mainly focus on multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches to water security and should foster transboundary co-operation and exchange of knowledge.

Moreover, the importance of involving stakeholders and the public at large was stressed by several speakers. This is in particular relevant at local level, where the involvement of stakeholders and collaborative decision-making processes can ensure responsiveness to local needs and contribute to increasing transparency, affordability of operation and maintenance costs, and provision of better and equitable services.

We are very pleased the OSCE Serbian Chairmanship decided to have this meeting in Belgrade. Gathering here, in a region that experienced in 2014 an unprecedented flooding which affected Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, is the right place to focus on the importance of water governance for disaster risk reduction and to build upon last year's EEF and the Basel Ministerial Decision on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Last year, our Second Preparatory Meeting under the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship was held in Montreux . We were discussing disaster risk reduction, at a time, when the peak of the floods hit the Western Balkans. It brought the urgency of this topic immediately to the mind of all participants. At the Concluding Meeting of the 22nd EEF in Prague in September last year, one session was devoted to the flooding disaster in South Eastern Europe and on the national responses and cross-border co-operation in the aftermath. Among the key issues raised was the efficiency of cross-border co-operation in responding to disasters. All panellists back than agreed that regional co-operation had been excellent. Not only I was deeply impressed by the spirit of solidarity and co-operation among the concerned countries, it also became obvious that the civilian population, NGOs and volunteers were of tremendous support in effective disaster response. The inclusion and participation of the public in water governance is therefore another topic on which we would like to focus during this meeting.

Excellencies,

Allow me a few words on the **specific sessions** of this meeting:

The **first session** is dedicated to the experiences and lessons learned in the context of water governance during the 2014 flooding disaster in South Eastern Europe. It will look at the regional and international co-operation in flood response, the security challenges associated with flooding, and the role of the OSCE field operations in flood response and recovery. This session will also discuss if and how environmental risks and challenges can be opportunities for co-operation.

While the first session is focussed on South Eastern Europe, we will broaden the scope in the **second session**, which will look at water, security and disaster risk reduction in a more global perspective. It will address water governance in the context of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which was adopted in March this year. When discussing security risks of water-related disasters, it is important to look not only at extreme weather events like floods and droughts, but also at slow onset disasters as climate change and their challenges for water governance. We will also hear from several participating States about the security benefits of transboundary water co-operation related to disaster risk reduction.

The **third session** is devoted to the sharing of experiences on water governance in the context of disaster risk reduction. Speakers from several OSCE participating States will share their best practices on flood and drought response and effective governance approaches for addressing water-related disasters and climate change. This will also include OSCE activities to support DRR in its participating States and the implementation of the Basel Ministerial Decision on DRR.

After this session, I would like to invite you to an informal **side event** with an exhibition of posters and other visibility material that present the practical activities on water governance and disaster risk reduction of our field operations and the Aarhus Centres in South Eastern Europe. As you know, my Office, together with several OSCE field operations, has been supporting the establishment and activities of Aarhus Centres, that are providing a forum for dialogue and partnership among stakeholders and support the implementation of the UNECE Aarhus Convention. I am happy to welcome several

representatives of Aarhus Centres, who joined us for this meeting and are ready to tell you more about their work and its impacts during this side event.

On the second day, our focus will be mainly on awareness raising and participation in water governance. **Session IV** is dedicated to awareness-raising on the benefits of good water governance and will look at this topic from various angles: from the view of foreign and security policies, from the perspective of investments and development assistance, in relation to sustainable development and with the concept of Water Stewardship.

Finally, the **fifth session** looks at water governance from different stakeholders' perspectives. It will address the subjects of public participation, gender and water governance, and of awareness raising among different stakeholders such as civil society, local communities, and youth.

Before we conclude the second day and depart for the field visit, we will have another interesting **side event** organized by the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit. It will focus on technological risk reduction in the framework of disaster risk reduction, and share the experience of identifying industrial hazards during the 2014 South Eastern Europe flood and their possible impacts on human and environmental health.

Allow me now to introduce our distinguished keynote speakers:

Mr. **Dražen Kurečić** of the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia, who is the President of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River Basin – ICPDR. The ICPDR is for sure one of the strongest international river commissions – involving 15 contracting parties and covering a range of issues - from water quality monitoring to flood protection to prevention of accidents. The ICPDR has also developed strong tools for the active involvement of stakeholders and civil society on all levels of its work.

Our second keynote speaker is **Mr. Marco Keiner**, Director of the Environment Division of UNECE, a long-term and close partner of the OSCE in the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative. As a host of several environmental conventions, including the Water Convention and the Aarhus Convention, the UNECE is a forerunner in developing tools for good water governance, in particular in transboundary contexts, and in fostering participation of different stakeholders and the public on all environmental matters.

I am very pleased to welcome you and all other experts who join us to share their in-depth knowledge on different aspects of water governance. In concluding, I would like to strongly encourage you to actively participate and contribute to our Forum's deliberations. I am looking forward to fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.