

The 23<sup>rd</sup> 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

**Welcoming Remarks**

**by Mr. Aleksandar Nikolić  
State Secretary, Ministry of Interior, Serbia**

Dear guests, dear colleagues,

First of all on behalf of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a warm welcome and fruitful work during the 23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum and your stay in Serbia.

The leading topic chosen for this Seminar is the water governance, and it is not just one more environmental issue but one of the most important challenges we are currently dealing with, especially concerning last year flooding that occurred in Western Balkans region. Therefore, we would like to see discussion not only about improvement of the entire water governance, as the set of rules, practices, and processes related to the management of water resources and water courses, but to hear your expert opinions on good practices and developing practical tools to assist state agencies and other stakeholders in the OSCE countries in engaging effective and sustainable water governance policies.

You are all probably aware that during the May 2014 floods Serbia faced not only unprecedented emergency situation in its history but also experienced unprecedented engagement of foreign civil protection and rescue units. Therefore, we learned from our own experience how cooperation can increase security and stability and this was one of main reasons for organizing this kind of Seminar during the Serbian Chairmanship in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

A natural disaster caused by extreme floods that last year struck Serbia had certainly disrupted most, if not all the aspects of daily life, including the lives of citizens, their basic social and related needs, the local economic activities, functioning of public services, transportation, the production of energy, just to name a few. Therefore, we would like also to see a discussion on organizational issues regarding the worst scenarios for related emergencies and planning of coping capacities for large scale disasters. In our case, and what I think it is the situation with the majority of the OSCE countries, the engagement of all available national resources in protection and rescue activities is possible, but at one moment it will be clear that these resources will not be sufficient and eventually you will have to ask for a humanitarian assistance in terms of the international flood rescue teams, the teams for high capacity pumping, etc. both on bilateral basis, as well as multilaterally through the

European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Therefore, during the Emergency Situation, we accepted assistance from 14 countries (22 teams with 563 members in total). Another kind of international humanitarian assistance was related to delivery of food and water, equipment, etc. Beside many countries, organizations and other private donors, it is important to emphasize that the OSCE reacted promptly during floods and donated one high capacity pump and three others that were useful in that very moment.

As it was said at the beginning, in dealing with a large scale disasters there must be a cooperation with other countries but as it was said during the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in Sendai, Japan, there is a general agreement that we must move from managing disasters to managing disaster risk. Therefore, regarding severe weather conditions and apparent climate changes disaster risk reduction and specifically water governance is something we surely will be dealing in future years and thus it is important to emphasize its importance on every occasion. With the completion of the assessment for the entire state territory, the Republic of Serbia will be covered with prospected potential risks that may threaten the territory of cities and municipalities, and at the same the establishment of civil protection structures at the local level (the level of cities and municipalities) will be completed.

The main limiting factor in planning and undertaking preventive operational measures is unfortunately, the continual deficiency of financial resources on the territories of local authorities (cities and municipalities), which has impact on reducing the effects of the consequences of disasters. But something needs to be done and, as disaster risk reduction is becoming national and local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation, disaster risk reduction policy is generally accepted by all stakeholders.

Regarding identification, assessment and monitoring of risks and enhancement of early warning system, Serbia is adopting standards and assessment methodology and identifying risks from natural and other disasters are in accordance with the recommendations of the European Union. Guidelines on the methodology for the development of risk assessment and plans for protection and rescue in emergency situations have been adjusted to EU regulations.

Beside this there is a constant work on improvement of functioning of protection and rescue system stakeholders at national and local level by connecting with scientific and research organizations, and good cooperation with the media with goal to promote a policy of disaster risk reduction with the availability of information to citizens in order to strengthen the public awareness and culture of safety in the field of protection, rescue and disaster risk reduction. This is also a good place to mention one more aspect of cooperation between Sector for Emergency Management of the Ministry of Interior and the OSCE Mission to Serbia which was presented in the form of a joint work on a Family Guide for Emergency Preparedness and Response.

Accurate, comparable and appropriately scaled information on disaster losses, hazards, vulnerabilities and risks is fundamental for designing and implementing effective policies and programmes that reduces disaster risk. In partnership with the OSCE and the United Nations

Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), UNDP and CIMA Foundation, the SEM/MoI recently organized the Workshop “Learning from past disasters: from recording loss data to fostering prevention policies” regarding development of a database on disaster losses based on DesInventar. Beside this the OSCE Mission to Serbia provided necessary donation for organizing several Emergency Management table top exercises for county level across Serbia.

Also in order to improve regional coordination and operational cooperation through joint monitoring information exchange and joint trainings, a number of protocols with neighboring and other countries were signed.

Once again enjoy your stay in Serbia. Thank you for your attention.