

## Environmental Security: A Key Challenge for the OSCE

### *Background*

The OSCE is the largest regional security organization in the world and has been the primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation in Europe. But since its inception in Helsinki in 1975, the political landscape has dramatically changed. Twenty-first century threats and challenges to our security are asymmetric, complex, dynamic, and cross-border in nature. Globalization, increasing inter-state dependence, and the emergence of new threats to security, including from non-state actors, are leading to a further blurring of lines between the three dimensions that characterize the work of the OSCE, making its comprehensive approach to security more important than ever before. The OSCE must therefore continue its efforts to create a more solid dialogue and stronger co-operation among its participating States and with partner organizations.

Among the emerging challenges, those relating to sustainable development and the environment take paramount importance: To the extent that humankind neglects to maintain the Earth's life-supporting ecosystems, current and future generations will be confronted with increasingly severe instances of environmentally induced change.

Such events will test our traditional concepts, boundaries, and understandings of national security and alliance politics, and, if not acted upon, may lead to conflict, including violent conflict, at global, regional, national, or local level. Though not designed as an environmental organization, the OSCE has a clear role in addressing environmental issues, operating on the premise that promoting co-operation on environmental problems contributes to the reinforcement of international security.

The immediate drivers of conflict in the OSCE area, as in the world at large, are likely to remain national and regional power struggles; ideological, ethnic, religious, and national tensions; and severe economic, social, or political inequality. A typical feature of conflict in today's world is a vicious circle of political instability and economic stagnation. However, the cumulative impacts of environmentally induced changes – in particular climate change – can exacerbate these drivers of conflict, and particularly increase the risk to those states already susceptible to conflict, for example where weak governance and political processes are ill-equipped to mediate successfully between competing interests.

As regards predicting instability, the OSCE is well positioned as it has a mandate “to assess potential security risks stemming, wholly or in part, from economic, social and environmental factors” and has been tasked to “catalogue and monitor economic and environmental challenges and threats to security and stability in the OSCE region, in collaboration with relevant international organizations”.

The OSCE acts as a catalyst in preventing disputes before the issues concerned are voiced among its participating States and can serve as a platform for preventive diplomacy.

### *Environmental Security*

The link between environment and security is a common focus of debate in international policy circles and the academic community. As widely documented in the reports of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), the interaction between the environment and other human security pressures in contributing to or reducing the threat of instability is complex and context-dependent.<sup>1</sup> Although conflicts have multiple causes, research suggests that the degradation, depletion, or mismanagement of natural resources linked to demographic change can have a negative impact on local and international stability by:<sup>2</sup>

- reinforcing and increasing grievances within and between societies: Where few alternatives remain, or where perceived inequities or opportunities for enrichment are great, groups may compete for resources, increasing the probability for violence to emerge;
- weakening states, whether by the diversion of revenues for insurgents and criminal groups, by depressing economic productivity, or by undermining the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens, as well as foreign investors.

On the other hand, environmental co-operation can also provide a basis for international peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and reconcili-

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1 On the links between natural resource scarcity and violent conflict, see, for example, Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*, Princeton 1999; Geoffrey Dabelko/Steve Lonergan/Richard Matthew, *State of the Art Review on Environment, Security and Development Cooperation*, IUCN/OECD Development Assistance Committee, 2000, available online at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/51/2446676.pdf> or [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2002/envsec\\_oecd\\_review.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2002/envsec_oecd_review.pdf). On the links between natural resource abundance and violence see, for example, Karen Ballentine/Heiko Nitzschke, *Beyond Greed and Grievance: Policy Lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict*, IPA Policy Report, October 2003, and Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank, 2003.

2 Cf. Colin H. Kahl, *States, Scarcity and Civil Strife in the Developing World*, Princeton 2006.

ation.<sup>3</sup> A convincing body of work has demonstrated that nations are more likely to co-operate than to fight over control of international river basins.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, many security-related issues have transboundary dimensions and can lead to international tension. The risk of conflict may increase because of a combination of a growing demand for resources – population growth plus increased consumption per capita – and the expected deterioration of the environment. Disputes over land, water, and other natural resources can be used by political leaders to mobilize groups of supporters. Pollution impinges particularly on the issues of water, food, and habitat. It does not stop at international borders, and unresolved pollution issues can lead to international disputes or exacerbate existing tensions. We will address this issue more in detail below in connection with ENVSEC.

Particularly in states where the authority of the government is shaky, the population divided along ethnic or religious lines, or the economy in difficulty, economic or environmental tensions may come to a head. Even if such issues do not in themselves cause tensions, they can be an important factor in other kinds of disputes such as ethnic conflicts, where they often exacerbate matters.

State intervention frequently plays a critical role in determining whether population movements will cause conflict or not. This risk is particularly acute when there is an association between a region and an ethnic group. In particular, if an ethnic group finds a neighbouring kin-state prepared to take up its cause, international conflict may ensue. Clearly, such challenges to security are present in the OSCE region.

For instance, environmental issues played a leading role in the political mobilization of Eastern European citizens in the *glasnost* period and, more specifically, in the growth of national consciousness in many non-Russian republics. For their water supplies, the Central Asian republics depend on rivers running through southern Russia, which makes them vulnerable to external pressure. Man-made disasters such as the drying up and pollution of the Aral Sea compound their problems. The over-exploitation and pollution of the Caspian and Black Seas have already led to tensions between the riparian states. The legacy of nuclear tests in Kazakhstan is an important factor in colouring the Kazakh perception of Russia and the Russians. In Ukraine, the Chernobyl disaster, acidification, and erosion have caused the loss of hundreds of thousands of acres of arable land. Confronted with rapid population growth and “endowed” with a cotton monoculture, a number of Central Asian regions find food production is also under threat. In the Fergana Valley with its 14 million inhabitants, where Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan border on each other, the struggle for land and water has already resulted in

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3 Cf. Ken Conca/Geoffrey Dabelko, *Environmental Peacemaking*, Baltimore 2003.

4 See, for example, Aaron T. Wolf/Shira B. Yoffe/Mark Giordano, International Waters: Identifying Basins at Risk, in: *Water Policy*, 1/2003, pp. 29-60 and Abigail Makim, Resources for Security and Stability? The Politics of Regional Cooperation on the Mekong, 1957-2001, in: *Journal of Environment & Development*, 1/2002, pp. 5-52.

violent conflicts. These water and land issues are sometimes entangled with border disputes.

For many states, oil or gas exports are the main source of essential hard currency earnings. Disputes over the exploration and transportation of oil and gas have a number of states struggling for control of energy sources and the territories where they can be found or over which they have to be transported. (e.g. the Caspian Sea and, more recently, the Arctic Ocean).

*The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC): Transforming Risks into Opportunities for Co-operation*

One of the best examples of how synergies with partner organizations can be developed is the Environment and Security Initiative. ENVSEC is a partnership between the OSCE, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the Regional Environment Centre (REC), with NATO as an associated partner. The ENVSEC initiative provides a framework for co-operation on environmental issues across borders and promotes peace and stability through environmental co-operation and sustainable development.

ENVSEC builds on the combined strength of each organization's expertise, experience, and field presence. One of the strengths of the initiative is that the different partners respond to different constituencies. While UNEP mainly deals with ministries of the environment, UNDP deals with development ministries, NATO with defence departments, and the OSCE with ministries of foreign affairs. This is one of the key benefits that the OSCE brings to the picture as a political security organization. The OSCE can help to bring environmental issues onto the political agenda and then generate political will to address them at the highest level.

Global environmental security will increase or decrease according to our ability, or lack thereof, to make innovative institutional arrangements and/or technological advances that will enable us to manage the environmental security challenges we face. If we continue to neglect the ecosystems that are the source of all our water, food, medicine, and clean air, current and future generations will be confronted with increasingly severe instances of environmentally induced change. As noted above, such events will challenge our concepts of national security and alliance politics and may lead to conflict.

The ENVSEC initiative generally aims to achieve its goals by following a three-stage process: vulnerability assessment and monitoring of environment and security linkages; capacity building and institutional development; and policy development, implementation, and advocacy.

Putting environmental threats to security on the map is a key objective. In identifying potential threats to security, the ENVSEC initiative works with a broad definition of “conflict”, including under that term a continuum ranging from mere differences in the positions of actors, via sporadic use of violence, to armed conflict. It would be too narrow to examine only the latter, as most environmental conflicts are found below the threshold of violence. Furthermore, non-violent conflicts provide more scope for co-operation and confidence building. For the purposes of our argument, we will use the term “conflict” to describe a situation in which severe social tensions and political disruption may occur that could result in the use of violence.

The activities of the initiative generally have two sides:

- Identifying the environmental sources of stress between communities, regions, or countries, particularly where these have the potential to undermine social and economic stability and lead to conflict.
- Designing tools and approaches that can be used to bring about or strengthen co-operation and good governance between communities, regions, and countries, so that environmental problems are adequately addressed, social and economic stability is reinforced, and conflict is avoided.

The ENVSEC initiative chose to adopt a regional approach in the belief that many potential sources of environmental conflicts can only be dealt with in their regional context, and that transborder co-operation on such issues can contribute to peace-building, particularly around scarce common goods. For example, in post-conflict settings, joint efforts to clean up contaminated sites and restore natural spaces may revitalize both the environment and the trust among peoples and nations. Two pilot regions, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe, were covered in the first phase, two more, South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, were added in 2004.

This has led to the identification of regional priorities. The assessment phase led to the identification of soil degradation, salination, and desertification as potential threats to security. Other issues included water supply and contamination as well as industrial, municipal, and hazardous waste. These types of environmental issue are typically classified as threats to human security, and are linked to national security by their potential for causing discontent, migration, unrest, and destabilization.

Although both pilot regions are affected, Central Asia presents the greatest urgency, with over 80 per cent of its territory classified as dry, sub-humid, semi-arid, and arid zones. The land area affected by desertification is significant, ranging from 66 per cent in Kazakhstan to 97.7 per cent in Tajikistan.

With the collapse of the Soviet system and agricultural subsidies, the post-independence period has seen significant increases in rural poverty. As poverty became more widespread, people's options for pursuing a livelihood diminished and they were driven to seek quick returns from unsustainable practices, which lead to land degradation and reduce carrying capacity and crop yields. Considering that the majority of the population lives in rural areas, desertification and land degradation take a high toll on their ability to survive.

Waterlogging and salinity present two major land-quality problems in the region. In all five countries, maintenance of the water canals, drainage networks, and irrigation schemes was largely neglected in the 1990s. In Tajikistan, a mountainous country, irrigation in foothill zones induces groundwater recharge and intensifies waterlogging and salination of the lower areas. In Uzbekistan, 50 per cent of irrigated land is considered to be saline, with a high concentration of up to 95 per cent in downstream areas, especially in Karakalpakstan. These issues are linked to water scarcity and overexploitation of existing resources.

As much as 90 per cent of the region's crops are produced on irrigated land, with cotton the dominant crop and a particularly thirsty one. The focus on cotton as the main source of employment and foreign exchange has led to monocultivation, which further contributes to soil degradation and severely reduced biodiversity.

Toxic industrial waste has been dumped and buried extensively throughout the region, adversely affecting water, air, and soil quality, which in turn has a serious impact on the health of the population and wildlife. The Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site in Kazakhstan, for example, hosted 470 tests between 1949 and 1989, resulting in radioactive fallout on an area as large as 300,000 square kilometres.

As a result of the diversion for irrigation of four fifths of the water that used to feed what was at the time the world's largest freshwater lake, the Aral Sea started shrinking. Between 1960 and 1998 the sea's volume declined by 80 per cent and the Aral desert was formed. Sea and river beds are exposed to wind erosion and contaminated dust is carried over vast distances, affecting crops and causing respiratory diseases.

In other areas, for example in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, poverty and lack of income alternatives force local communities to engage in intensive cattle grazing, thus causing deforestation and erosion. Wood cutting for firewood exacerbates this problem and increases the probability of landslides.

Environmental factors do not themselves lead directly to violent conflict; they are rather one strand within a complex web of causality, in which various socio-economic problems are intertwined, such as overpopulation, poverty, forced mass migration, refugee movements, hunger and starvation, political instability, and ethno-political tensions. Environmental degradation

and natural resource scarcity can be the causes of such socio-economic problems, as well as being caused or exacerbated by them.

Although unsustainable patterns of consumption and production on the part of richer nations may be a strongly contributing factor to negative environmental change, environmentally induced conflicts appear to arise mainly in underdeveloped regions with a lack of development policy alternatives, whose history makes them prone to conflict and where crises and conflicts are evidently an inherent part of the development process.

Whether environmental stress harbours a risk of conflict or even leads to violence depends upon a series of socio-economic context variables, primary conflict factors, and cognitive processes. These include cultural circumstances and traditions, ethno-political factors, civil society mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution, the stability of the internal policy system, and, finally, societal, institutional, economic, and technological capabilities. Alongside regulating consumption and ensuring an equitable distribution of renewable resources, therefore, it follows that the identified context variables also offer points of leverage that can help to prevent environmentally induced conflicts.

Despite the complexity of the sources of conflict, environmental components provide a potential for preventive measures. Global environmental policy, in particular, relies on the principles of co-operation and reconciliation of interests. Environmental policy instruments or negotiations on environmental problems can thus be used to resolve conflicts in which a peaceful solution to other, perhaps more decisive sources of conflict, is not possible.

Within the framework of the ENVSEC programme, the partner organizations are developing regional, national, and sub-national projects that strengthen social and institutional capacities to address threats to human security triggered or accelerated by environmental stress. The initiative basically consists of three distinct but interlinked pillars, dealing in turn with vulnerability assessment and monitoring, capacity building and institutional development, and policy development and implementation.

Steps are to be taken to promote and improve vulnerability assessment and monitoring, development of appropriate indicators, setting up an integrated database, and establishing a long-term monitoring system. Regional stakeholder dialogues are initially concentrating on information sharing, data exchange, knowledge networking, and indicators for early warning. The monitoring system also allows monitoring of the progress of the initiative and the environmental threats to security being addressed.

Two key elements are capacity building and institutional development. The vulnerability of an economy or a state as a whole to environmental stress depends heavily upon its institutional capabilities: whether or not there are appropriate environmental policy institutions at the national, regional, and local levels, such as a functioning environmental administration, legal and economic instruments by which to regulate resource consumption, and a

monitoring system. It also depends upon the potential for creating economic alternatives for developing societies, the ability to engage in long-term planning processes, the ability to adopt strategic policies, and the integration of state and non-state resources and capabilities.

Policy development and implementation come next. Integrating environmental activities with conflict prevention and mediation initiatives is seriously hampered by the difficulties involved in combining theoretical and conceptual insights from both fields into multilateral and bilateral donor activities. ENVSEC aims to overcome this problem by facilitating knowledge transfer to assist donor policy and project development.<sup>5</sup>

The ENVSEC initiative has been recognized as a model of co-operation among international organizations that could be replicated elsewhere. A successful replication of the initiative would require that the right combination of partner organizations could be convened for the effort. A key feature of the ENVSEC initiative is precisely the close co-operation between international organizations whose particular mandates ensure that security, environmental, and social issues are all taken into account.

#### *The 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF)*

The Economic and Environmental Forum is the most important annual event organized by the OSCE under its economic and environmental dimension. It is attended by high-level officials from the Organization's 56 participating States.

The 15th OSCE EEF, which took place during the Spanish OSCE chairmanship, was dedicated to "Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: land degradation, soil contamination and water management". Because of the topic chosen, this EEF could indeed become a turning point for the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension.

The forum was split into two sessions. The first took place in Vienna on 22-23 January 2007, and the second in Prague on 21-23 May. Each was preceded by a preparatory conference at expert level. While the first preparatory conference, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 16-17 November 2006, concentrated on land degradation and soil contamination, the second one, in Zaragoza, Spain, on 12-13 March 2007, focused on water management.

The second session of the EEF in Prague was a clear success, in terms of both the number of participants, which exceeded 300, and in terms of the active engagement of the participants in the discussion on the forum's theme.

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5 Cf. UNEP/OSCE/UNDP Environment and Security Initiative, Addressing Environmental Risks and Promoting Peace and Stability. The post Kiev process, 24 April 2003, p. 6, available online at: [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2003/envsec\\_post\\_kiev.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2003/envsec_post_kiev.pdf).

The key message conveyed in the opening session of the meeting by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, was the following: Global security will be increasingly at risk because of man-made environmental threats but, with the right political will, the promotion of good governance, and deepening regional co-operation, the threats can be reduced. “It is important”, he said “to include environmental security issues in political agendas by fostering the participation of national, international, public and private actors [...] Environmental co-operation can be an effective catalyst for reducing tensions, broadening co-operation and promoting peace”. He continued: “It is high time to think about where the OSCE should stand in regards to environmental matters and to strongly promote the Economic-Environmental dimension.”<sup>6</sup>

Similar views were echoed in the statements of other keynote speakers:

- Cristina Narbona, Minister of Environment of Spain, referred to the recent discussions on the security implications of climate change that have taken place under the aegis of the United Nations Security Council, where it was stressed that the impact of climate change will fall disproportionately on poor countries and that richer countries have a moral obligation to act. She drew also attention to the expertise developed by Spain in combating land degradation and dealing with reduced availability of fresh water, for instance thanks to desalination plants.
- Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director of the European Environmental Agency (EEA), outlined some key draft conclusions of the “Europe’s Environment Assessment Report” to be issued by the EEA at the “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, which took place in Belgrade in October 2007. She sees “unsustainable patterns of production and consumption leading to increased resource needs in the region and a heightened vulnerability”. In her view, resource conflicts are inevitable; emerging economic and social instability will lead to asymmetric threats to security that cannot be resolved by military force or within traditional domains of security policy such as defence, foreign relations, and strategic planning but could benefit from partnerships to deal explicitly with other transformations and environmental concerns. She proposed that the OSCE, the UNEP, and the relevant UN conventions and commissions launch a joint initiative with the EEA to create prospective frameworks to anticipate risks and vulnerabilities.
- Justin Mundy, Senior Adviser to the UK Foreign Secretary’s Special Representative for Climate Change, referred to a recent report by a retired US General, who had concluded that climate change is a threat multiplier: It places additional stress on an already stressed system. It is

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6 OSCE, Secretariat – Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Press release, *OSCE meeting fosters co-operation to reduce environmental threats, says Chairman*, at: [http://www.osce.org/eea/item\\_1\\_24589.html](http://www.osce.org/eea/item_1_24589.html).

not enough to deal with the hot spots; we must address in a global way the environmental threat to our security; “climate change”, he said “can bring us together, if we are wise enough not to allow it to bring us apart”. He argued that there is a need for more co-ordination and less duplication among international organizations dealing with this problem. He saw a role for the OSCE in establishing early warning systems based on the analysis of environmental security issues at country level. He also saw an OSCE role in transboundary environmental issues and in dealing with the social impact of climate change.

- Tom Spencer, Vice Chairman of the Institute for Environmental Security, based in The Hague, former Chairman of the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights and Defence Policy, foresaw the chain of effects of climate change, with the disruption to agricultural societies of the developing world leading to mass migration first to urban centres in the south and then to countries in the north, creating a terrain favourable to fundamentalism. “The OSCE”, he said, “is underused for the context we find ourselves in”. The Aral Sea basin, with all its mineral resources, could become the Balkans of Central Asia. He also expressed particular concern at the effects of global warming on the Arctic region and at the “bubbles of methane” emerging massively from the defrosted tundra in the Russian Federation, Canada and Alaska and contributing massively to greenhouse gas emissions.

On the substantive side, discussions led to a number of specific outcomes and follow-up activities:

- Further to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the OSCE and the UNECE, Kaj Barlund, Director of the UNECE Environment Housing and Land Management Division, presented a review of the implementation of OSCE environmental commitments, stemming in particular from the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Maastricht Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension (2003). His presentation highlighted the major achievements, the remaining weaknesses, and the way forward for OSCE participating States in their environmental performance, public participation, compliance with multilateral environmental agreements, handling of transboundary water management, and environmental information and education. He also put on the table very specific proposals for OSCE/UNECE co-operation, among others, for building capacity for environmental monitoring and reporting by enterprises and public authorities in Central Asia.
- The forum provided an opportunity for delegations to give reactions to the Spanish proposal for the adoption of an OSCE strategy on environment and security, which was later submitted for approval to the OSCE Ministerial Council, which took place in Madrid at the end of Novem-

ber 2007. A first draft was distributed by the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship at the end of April, a revised version in July. The draft document had two sections: a more general “Madrid Declaration on the threats and opportunities in the area of environment and security”, which explored the links between security, economy, and the environment, and described the evolving environmental security threats and challenges in the OSCE region; it also included the key elements of a possible decision, building on the consensus established in the 2003 Maastricht Strategy. The second part was a more detailed “OSCE Action Plan as a response to evolving environmental security threats and opportunities”, which outlined how these decisions can be translated into action by OSCE participating States, executive structures, institutions, field presences, and mechanisms. Key sections dealt, for example, with raising awareness on climate change and its economic implications and on promoting environmental security as a tool for co-operation and for confidence building. With all this on the table, the delegations engaged in a lengthy and highly interesting negotiation process, which finally resulted in the adoption of the “Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security”. It is true that this declaration only contains some of the elements initially proposed, but it is a clear political signal that the 56 participating States could reach a consensus that recognized the crucial importance of environmental security issues.

- A very important session was dedicated to transboundary water co-operation. The OSCE has already supported programmes and projects bringing together countries and stakeholders around the Sava, Dniestr, Kura-Araks, and Chu and Talas rivers, and through its ENVSEC initiative, is considering offering similar support to water co-operation projects between Tajikistan and Afghanistan on the Amu-Darya River. Special attention was given to the acute environmental problems of the Aral Sea basin. As a follow up to the EEF, a conference on integrated land and water resources management in Central Asia was held on 30-31 October 2007 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, which also examined how transfers of technology could help. In this context it should also be noted that the Madrid Ministerial Meeting adopted a decision encouraging participating States to strengthen dialogue and co-operation on water management within the OSCE. It is the first time that the OSCE, as a political security organization, has taken a decision on water management at ministerial level.
- To deal with the new challenges of environmental security, we need not only technology transfer and transboundary co-operation but also improved governance in managing natural resources. A plenary session was dedicated to this subject in Prague, with very interesting contributions from a representative of the Forestry Department of the Forest and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), who invited the

OSCE to contribute to existing international efforts to fight illegal logging and to support undertakings such as the EU initiative on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. Another was made by a representative of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, a coalition of 190 leading companies pursuing an agenda of environmental awareness, measurement, and reduction of their environmental impact, which aims to build bridges and trust with other stakeholders such as government and civil society to create a sustainable future. The Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation to the Prague Forum proposed that a conference be held in the Russian Federation in the autumn of 2007 to be attended by the OSCE and other relevant international organizations and to focus on public-private partnerships for environmental security and sustainable development.

- At another session in Prague, dedicated to Land Degradation and Soil Contamination, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Conventions to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) announced that, further to request of the Central Asian States, the UNCCD Secretariat, together with OSCE, had started the process of establishing a Drought Management Centre for Central Asia. A similar centre for South Eastern Europe is being established in Slovenia. A number of training activities on soil conservation strategies and on watershed rehabilitation techniques in zones affected by drought are planned in several countries. The OSCE field presences can support these UNCCD initiatives.
- The subject of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum was of special relevance for the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. All of them spoke at the forum, particularly in a special session on challenges to the management of water resources and to countering desertification in the Mediterranean region. They expressed interest in technology transfer and also made clear the link between these environmental challenges and migration, which is another very important topic on which the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities has been actively engaged, working together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). As a follow-up to the EEF, in December 2007 the OSCE co-hosted with NATO a workshop on "Water Management, Land Degradation and Desertification in the Mediterranean region – Environment and Security Linkages".
- Last but not least, a number of special events were organized in the margins of the forum. At one of them, a report entitled "Environment Security: transforming risks into co-operation" and assessing the environmental situation in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine was launched. The report was developed within the scope of the ENVSEC initiative.

It is also worth mentioning that the 15th forum was the first OSCE carbon neutral event, as the Spanish Chairmanship has invested in projects to reduce carbon dioxide emissions equal to those produced by the conference, through a carbon-offset and climate-consulting service.

*The OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension: The Way Ahead*

The economic and environmental dimension is currently the smallest of the three OSCE dimensions by far. It absorbs less than two per cent of the combined budgets of the OSCE Secretariat and the OSCE field presences.

This article might help to give a few answers to the crucial question of how the OSCE, endowed with neither large amounts of money for assistance projects – at least not in its unified budget – nor vast reservoirs of technical expertise in economic and environmental matters, can act most efficiently to counter environmental threats to security.

The OSCE is also the only organization that can establish a comprehensive set of politically binding commitments regarding economic and environmental co-operation within the OSCE region that places all the participating States on an equal footing and aims at enhancing their security.

Therefore, on the one hand, the norm-setting approach through the intergovernmental process is extremely important. The OSCE needs to continue to promote the full implementation of existing international documents to make sure that all participating States honour commitments they have made. It also needs to take the political initiative if necessary and engage participating States in the drafting of new documents.

Uneven fulfilment of commitments decreases collective security by damaging the confidence that neighbouring States have built up over the years. We therefore need to assist participating States whenever necessary with capacity building and use a variety of educational tools to make sure they are in a position to live up to the commitments as outlined by international treaties and conventions. The OSCE Secretariat, for instance, has done a great deal to promote public awareness of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, because its principles are directly in line with general principles of good governance. And we strongly advocate the importance of an informed public that is able to put pressure on governments, should they not play by the rules.

The OSCE can also be very effective as a catalyst in implementing small, cost-effective projects that can have a snowball effect. OSCE field presences have a crucial role to play in this regard. Through their daily contacts with national and local authorities, NGOs, academia, and the business community, they can detect concrete issues and obstacles to sustainable economic and social development. The OSCE can thus serve as an important

early warning instrument. By responding appropriately and addressing potential economic and environmental threats through concrete action, generally in close co-operation with partner organizations, the OSCE can diffuse potential tensions and greatly contribute to confidence building among its participating States.

In the years to come, more attention will certainly be given to environmental security issues – to the links between the economy, the environment, and security. The adoption of the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security is to be seen as an important commitment and certainly a step in the right direction, but we should not fool ourselves: Unless we continue to take earnest and rapid action to ensure that the development of our planet is undertaken in a more sustainable manner, history will judge us harshly for having jeopardized the livelihood of coming generations.