



Opening Statement by

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“With Swing on the Road to Resilience”

**2nd Preparatory Meeting of the
22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

Montreux, May 20th, 2014

Check against delivery

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests*

Welcome to Switzerland and welcome to Montreux on the occasion of the Second Preparatory Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Montreux, on the shores of Lake Geneva, is best known as the city of Jazz. And Jazz is probably the musical genre that has been most effective in bringing people, religions, countries, and traditions together by fusing styles and crossing cultures.

Also the OSCE - as the largest regional security organization encompassing 57 participating States from Vladivostok to Vancouver - has a reputation for successfully bringing people and countries together around a same table. And with its unique multi-dimensional security approach it would appear a predestined melting pot for fusing and crossing politico-military, economic, environmental and human security perspectives in order to build peace and security, confidence and trust amongst its participants.

So why is it that unlike Jazz we don't always feel the groove and swing in the OSCE's daily pulse?

Integration of the three Dimensions in the OSCE – Integrated Risk Management

We all acknowledge that the Economic and Environmental Forum is the main meeting of the OSCE in the second dimension; as the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is the main conference in the third dimension. This is setting the stage: generally, the three dimensions work independently, focusing around dimension-specific goals and deliverables, while overlaps and interaction between them remain the exception rather than the rule.

Why is it that these three dimensions predominantly perform as soloists, when everybody agrees that the OSCE's holistic approach to security, based on the legacy of the historic 1975 Helsinki Final Act, is its key asset and comparative advantage? How do we blend these three dimensions together to form a merry combo?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The goal of this year's Forum is to identify the role of the OSCE in assisting participating States in how to better respond to environmental challenges. As a matter of fact, Disaster Risk Reduction should be an integral component of a comprehensive security perspective. One possible niche for the OSCE could be exactly at the crossroads between its three dimensions. Indeed, natural disasters can trigger instability and conflicts, human rights violations or displacements.

I therefore particularly welcome today's Keynote speech by Dr. Tipson on the nexus between disasters and security, and the Panel Debate in the early afternoon on the impacts of natural and technological disasters on conflicts and on population movements. Probably not many of us are aware that more people are being displaced by disasters than by persecution and conflict.

Furthermore, I am convinced that natural and environmental risks affecting emerging or pre-existing tensions and conflicts, as is often the case with slow-onset disasters such as droughts, should become an integral component within the OSCE's conflict cycle. To give you an example: the period of severe drought in Syria between 2006 and 2011 led to the displacement of around 1.5 million people within the country and might have contributed to the outbreak of this bloody conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Breaking down the barriers and shelving the silo mentality is also a - if not *the* - key challenge to a comprehensive risk management approach. Disaster risk governance will only be "integrated":

- if there is a political will from the government,
- if it is taking into account multiple hazards and their numerous interactions,
- if it is spanning across relevant policy sectors,
- if it is encompassing main stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society,
- and if it is involving all levels of authorities: from national down to local governments.

Let me stress the local echelon. Indeed, most kinds of hazards are local and have predominantly local impacts. The first to be affected and to respond to a disaster are local actors. It seems therefore only natural to empower them such that they can develop the necessary instruments to assess, prevent and mitigate risks at a local level. I'm confident that today's first session dealing with disaster risk reduction at a local level will advance some answers to this challenge.

Do we need disasters in order to progress?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Until the unfolding of the crisis in Ukraine and the establishment by consensus decision of the Special Monitoring Mission, the OSCE was not highly on the agenda of the world top news and had a rather low profile. The crisis was the defining moment that allowed the organisation to reassert its *raison d'être*.

Similarly, experience shows that major natural and man-made disasters are often wake-up calls for decision makers generating a set of lessons learned that sometimes dramatically change public perceptions, national policies and socio-economic patterns.

Does humanity need stresses and shocks, tensions and disasters in order to learn? Are we going to evolve through crises rather than proactive behaviour?

Sure, our modern society with its main institutions, including our democratic political systems and our market economies are tuned to maximise short-term benefits sometimes at the cost of future problems. So when considering the challenges climate change is potentially posing to our existence: do we actually have to rely on disasters to bring us to reason and to save us from more severe calamities as philosopher Hans Jonas put it 25 years ago? In other words: should we really engage in disaster risk reduction, if crises might be the fuel necessary for human development and change?

The answer is clear-cut, if we don't want to sound sardonic: Prevention is always the better and more efficient investment than response and rehabilitation. All the people affected by severe disasters will certainly also agree with this.

This is true across all sectors. Preventing disease and maintaining good health is better than any medical therapy. Preventing conflicts and radicalization before violence erupts could save lives, avoid the destruction of infrastructure and the impairment of the economy. These are often irrevocable processes that post-conflict rehabilitation cannot reverse. That's why the spectre of new rifts looming on Europe's horizon must be taken seriously by the OSCE in order to build bridges and prevent these rifts from widening.

Natural hazard-triggered disasters have caused more human casualties world-wide in the past hundred years than both World Wars combined. Last year alone, natural disasters have generated economic costs of almost 200 billion \$. So yes: we should definitely invest in disaster prevention and risk mitigation!

In this context, let me express on behalf of the Swiss government and of the Swiss people our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathy to the people and the government of Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia, especially to those who lost loved ones and are suffering from the devastating floods and triggered secondary effects like landslides. Switzerland stands ready to assist the affected people in their difficult situation.

The road to resilience. Cross-border cooperation as CBM.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The growing interconnectedness, complexity, technical dependence and urbanization of our multipolar world exacerbate the vulnerabilities of societies to hazards and the risks of unforeseen cascading effects. Building risk resilient nations – the topic of our second keynote speech today – will indeed be of paramount importance. Disasters, like other cross-cutting global risks such as cybercrime, often transcend national boundaries. No state can deal with such risks in isolation. Collective prevention, preparedness and response are indispensable.

Hence, a pillar to achieve resilience in our interdependent world is stronger cross-border collaboration both among governmental and non-governmental actors. Technical cross-border cooperation in disaster risk management is a win-win situation for all parties involved and can be a powerful apolitical way to bolster trust and confidence among stakeholders. Those who have chosen to participate in tomorrow's first excursion along the transit route of the Great St Bernard will get the chance to learn more about a specific example of cross-border cooperation between Italy and Switzerland.

In this context, let me seize this opportunity to convey the best regards of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Mr. Didier Burkhalter, to the participants of this Preparatory Meeting. He cannot be with us today, as the president of the Italian Republic, Mr. Giorgio Napolitano, is currently paying a state visit to Switzerland and is being received by the Swiss Federal Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Collaborative risk management and collective action not only among neighbouring states but involving stakeholders from across government, private sector and civil society will be imperative to achieve national resilience. Resilience - the capacity of a system to buffer against outside attacks - is as such a comprehensive concept that goes far beyond disaster mitigation. In particular we must be looking at the systemic interlinkages between politico-military, socio-economic, financial, environmental and transnational components.

The OSCE, if it fully taps its potential as an organization with a broad, multi-dimensional security perspective, is well placed to adopt an integrated risk governance approach and to contribute to pave the road to resilience. It might be a long and winding one. But I hope that the swing of Montreux will accelerate our pace towards this target.

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