



Cross-border co-operation in water governance can significantly contribute to security and safety of citizens, concluded the participants of a two-day discussion on water management in the OSCE area, which closed in Belgrade today.

Over 200 officials and key stakeholders from non-governmental organizations, academia and international organizations representing the OSCE's 57 participating States, discussed water governance in the OSCE context at the second Preparatory Meeting of the 2015 OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum on 11 to 13 May 2015.

"Water governance is not just one more environmental issue but one of the most important challenges we are currently facing," said Serbian State Secretary of the Interior Ministry, Aleksandar Nikolić. "Regional co-ordination and operational co-operation in joint monitoring, information exchange and training, with neighbouring and other countries, is crucial if we are to succeed."

Last year's devastating floods in the Western Balkans showed the importance of trans-boundary co-operation in case of natural disasters. "The risk of flooding is one of our main threats," said the President of the International Commission for Protection of Danube River, Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, Dražen Kurečić. "With joint efforts and the development of forecasting systems, we can overcome this threat and give our citizens the security they need."

The Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Halil Yurdakul Yigitguden, stressed that the involvement of stakeholders and collaborative decision-making processes can ensure responsiveness to local needs and contributes to increasing transparency. "Good water governance is key to meeting water demands and preventing conflict."

The Director of the Environment Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Marco Keiner, said: "Participatory and accountable water governance is necessary for well-informed choices and can help prevent or reduce negative effects of investments on development and on water resources." He also stressed the importance of co-operation in the management of natural resources, tackling environmental threats and increasing security and

stability.

On 13 May, some 100 participants will visit the areas most affected by the May 2014 floods, namely Bijeljina in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Šabac and Obrenovac in Serbia. These field trips are supported by the OSCE Missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.