



**Statement by Minister Counsellor Dr Robert Kokalj, Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, at the Ministerial Conference on Financing the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, Yerevan, 17 - 18 November 2005**

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,

With a view to actively contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security, Slovenia is engaged in a number of challenging foreign policy projects. The most recent one is the current Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to address this Conference as the representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Dr Dimitrij Rupel. On his behalf, I would especially like to express appreciation and gratitude to our host country Armenia and to the OECD for the organization of this important event.

We have all gathered here with the goal of exploring and furthering our understanding of the complex issues of water supply and sanitation from the financial, environmental and security aspects. I am confident that the conference will serve as an important contribution in addressing most critical issues in the water sector in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the current OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenia strongly promotes the Organization's cross-dimensional approach. This approach reflects the understanding and consensus of 55 participating States that only through consistent and coordinated action can we gain for ourselves more comprehensive and longer lasting human, economic and environmental security.

The OSCE's mandate in enhancing environmental security is primarily political and can be fulfilled by promoting the implementation of existing conventions, securing political support from governments and citizens, mobilizing and coordinating resources and helping to recognize the warning signals.

Similarly to energy sources, water, too, is a strategically important resource that crucially impacts on security and the economic development particularly in those regions where it is insufficient due to geographic position or inappropriate ecological development. Even those parts of the planet that currently experience no lack of water will soon be faced with the problem of deficient water accessibility. It is

therefore urgent that we tackle this issue within the OSCE as well. Water has frequently been the reason for conflicts between neighbors or even wars, as is evident from a whole series of cases. Therefore, the concept of security is closely linked with water security and access to water.

Ever since the 10<sup>th</sup> OSCE's Economic Forum in 2002, which was devoted to the sustainable use and protection of the quality of water, the Organization strives to play a constructive role in the water sector as well. Water serves as an instrument for co-operation, sharing of good practices and exchange of valuable information. All of these key building-blocks fit adequately with the OSCE spirit.

Developing effective instruments of co-operation in securing proper use of water resources represents a major contribution to reinforced security in the OSCE regions. For this reason, the OSCE is particularly active in promoting greater co-operation in water management, in identifying and addressing security risks, and, consequently, in enhancing its early warning and conflict prevention capacity. The Organization focuses its activities in the Aral Sea Basin in Central Asia, the Kura Araks Basin in the Caucasus and the Sava River in South-Eastern Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE and NATO have jointly developed a South Caucasus River Monitoring Project. The aim of the project is to establish the social and technical infrastructure for an international, cooperative, trans-boundary river water quality and quantity monitoring, data sharing and watershed management system among the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The specific objectives of the project are to increase technical capabilities among partner countries, cooperatively establish standard sampling, analysis and data management techniques for all partner countries, establish data and model sharing system accessible to all partners via the internet, and establish a social framework for whole-watershed management.

This is, in the view of the OSCE, a very important step towards regional co-operation in the South Caucasus. As funds for financing water supply and sanitation are made available, studies like the "South Caucasus River Monitoring Project" will be necessary to identify the priority areas where investment is needed, as well as the main problems in terms of pollution that the region is facing.

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of the Conference, the high level of attendance by representatives of participating States, international organizations, financial institutions, academia and NGOs promise fruitful deliberations. On behalf of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, I therefore wish you a productive and rewarding exchange of views.

Thank you.