



**First preparatory meeting of the 22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum “Responding to environmental challenges with a view to promoting cooperation and security in the OSCE area”,
Vienna, 22 – 28 January 2014**

Written Contribution

The topic of the Twenty-second OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum addresses a key issue the significance of which hardly ever displayed itself in such emergency as it does now. Globally, societies are facing occurrence of environmental hazards of a magnitude never recorded previously, having cascading effects never foreseen before, as well as life, social and economic losses in highest numbers ever. The risk-coloured picture draws itself more and more hostile whilst scientific forecasts continue predicting even more rapid occurrence of severe weather events, as changes in weather are further recorded across the globe in relation to climate change.

One important achievement of this forum even before it commenced, is to admit that we are facing these challenges. The second one thus is that it puts forward the importance of co-operation (as both, a background (a common cause) and recommendation (only working together we can face it)) in disaster risk reduction. However, as various examples have shown, even though strongly desired, and well-grounded as a need, international cooperation in disaster risk reduction is yet still a difficult case to be implemented in both main modes – experience sharing, as well as operational activities.

It is with great interest and appreciation for a possibility to get closer engaged into a discussion that a regional organisation all Member States of which are members of the OSCE as well, Council of the Baltic Sea States joins the discussion with a contribution from its Secretariat. We believe that a contribution that an international Member State organisation with a very concrete geographic focus can deliver on the one hand, can indeed well inform the overall discussion in a particular way. On the one hand, it is important to put forward our successful experiences and cases that were developed on a focused level, among a smaller group of Member States, in order to highlight certain operational trends that, if successful, could be implemented on a broader scale. Finally, an advantage of a smaller framework is also that they are more flexible to test things out and then propose solutions to further benefit of other countries.

While perhaps the Baltic Sea region is not an area where hazards of the most devastating magnitude may occur, experience from several past years has shown that severe weather events, especially winter storms, floods and forest fires manifests an ever growing risk to the societies across the Baltic Sea region. It cannot be forgotten that countries of such close geographic proximity are naturally more exposed to emergencies having cross-border impact, as well as to the need in sharing expertise and capacity among States. It is exactly due to such proximity that the necessity and need to develop a common understanding of environmental challenges, as well as a common approach to responding to those may unfold itself in the most immediate urgency. The question of how to achieve the highest level of cross-border interoperability and co-operation among the Member States emerges as the central one.

Against the backdrop of this, there have been certain developments within the CBSS regional cooperation that we would like to put forward as contribution to the discussion. In 2012 CBSS Member States commenced a project under the financing of the European Union Financial Instrument, the project called “14.3”. 14.3 was a project that aimed to develop scenarios and identify



gaps for all main hazards in the Baltic Sea region. This 18 months long project was finalised in June 2013. The project was led by the CBSS Secretariat, and almost all CBSS Member States participated in the project, with the only exclusion of Iceland. The result of this project was developed macro-regional risk assessment guidelines for the Baltic Sea region, as well as six scenarios including gap analysis. The scenarios covered accidents and hazards that were considered mostly relevant to the region: winter storm, forest fire, flood, accident at sea, nuclear accident and pandemic flu. Additionally, separate task groups were developing a mapping of flood prevention and preparedness among six countries in the Baltic Sea Region as well as inquiring into the need and possibility to develop one common forest fire prevention system for the Baltic Sea region. The results of the task groups work were published in a set of publications *Fourteen Point Three Notebooks* and are available in print and online.

Since then, regional efforts in the Baltic Sea region within the setting of macro-regional cooperation has mainstreamed topics such as common understanding of risk, common risk assessment, joint efforts and cross-border interoperability in strengthening capacity in full-cycle disaster management: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. As 14.3 project experts have presented:

“Risk and vulnerability analyses are important tools in order to have an overview of risks and vulnerabilities within a territory of one country. However, there are significant variations between the different sectors and different nations in how they carry out risk and vulnerability analyses. Some risks and hazards do not consider national borders as a barrier, and may create needs for both international cooperation as well as international assistance. Thus, a need for a systematic approach to risk assessments has been identified to enhance civil protection and emergency planning.”

In the Baltic Sea region, we share an understanding that we are still at the very start of a long journey towards an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction, and that a lot of work still remains to be done in strengthening our capacities to cooperate. But in times when social and economic losses caused by a failure to prevent and rapidly respond to environmental challenges are sky-rocketing, we know that we simply cannot afford not to co-operate.

Looking retrospectively at the first steps made, we already can identify certain issues that will need to be answered in order to turn this great vision of countries responding to environmental challenges and ensuring better societal security together. It is suggested that the Forum will address the questions such as trends in natural disaster frequency. **Mapping** disaster trends in the OSCE area is with no doubt an important task leading to preparedness, prevention and response level identification in the area, including related gap analysis. A further – and even more informing – issue would, however, be highlighting **trends in disaster risk reduction management and methodologies**, leading to a **map of capabilities and capacities** to respond to environmental challenges in the given area.

It is with great support that we welcome the meeting as touching upon the concept **of integrated disaster risk management**, which is an instrumental approach in aiming to put forward the best practices and identify gaps in several thematic areas. While foreseeing the strengthening of macro-regional capacity in disaster risk reduction, an important issue to address is cross-border **interoperability**. Considering interoperability, however, further dimensions unfold once a key issue of **complex disasters** is touched upon. These include, among others, very important **levels of cross-sectorial and cross-institutional interoperability from cross-boundary perspective** the issues that recently became of interest to the Baltic Sea region, with reference to developed macro-regional risk



scenarios. **Public-private-partnerships** can play a defining role in ensuring success and impact of the processes that should be in place aiming to secure societies from devastating effects of environmental challenges. Last but not least, the critical importance of **gender-specific approach in disaster prevention and relief** must be taken as an important issue when discussing both, strengthening resilience to prevent the occurrence of natural disasters, as well as in reducing the level of social and economic losses in case of major emergencies. One of the new initiatives in the Baltic Sea region called **Baltic Leadership Programme** prioritizes a developmental dialogue on various levels to **build capacity in management and leadership** in order to enable our future talent in **societal security** and thus to better contribute to disaster risk reduction.

We would further like to stress that:

- Close interrelation of environmental emergency response, contingency planning and preparedness with climate change adaptation
- Need to stronger link climate change adaptation with disaster risk reduction and with civil protection (Rio +20, HFA 2), at policy as well as practical level

Climate change is perhaps one of the most pressing environmental issue in the world today. Many regions have made cutting greenhouse gas emissions their main environmental priority. But regardless of how well the world manages to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, some climate change is inevitable. Impacts of climate change can result in meteorological, hydrological and climatological disasters. To increase its readiness to climate change, efforts should be made to facilitate the development of a plausible macro-regional approach to adapt to current and foreseen impacts of climate change.

Adaptation to climate change implies two sets of measures. Preventive or proactive adaptation is conceived to reduce the risk of potential disaster and carried out well in advance the hazardous impact on communities and facilities actually occurs. It includes both non-structural (e.g., land-use planning with risk mapping at core, legal regulation of economic activities in hazardous areas, etc.) and structural (e.g., construction of dams and dykes, weatherization of buildings, etc.) activities. Meanwhile, actual or current adaptation is employed immediately before and/or after the emergency strikes to provide both reduction of losses and damage caused by a hazardous impact.

Thus, this written contribution argues that climate change adaptation as a civil protection measure can lead to risk reduction and preparedness and therefore are to be seen as two sides of the same coin that shall lead to close interrelation between civil protection and climate change adaptation in policy development and practical implementation.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS with its Unit Baltic 21 in very close cooperation with relevant partners from the Baltic Sea Region has facilitated the development of the climate change adaptation strategy for the Baltic Sea Region through a well-established multi-level governance process. Recognizing that national, sub-regional and local adaptation strategies, in most cases, are the key instruments to address climate change, the BSR-wide climate adaptation strategy aims to be instrumental in mobilizing joint action in areas of work requiring or significantly benefiting from coordinated response on transnational level.



The BSR climate change adaptation strategy defined the following macro-regional goals for work on climate change adaptation:

1. Raised awareness concerning the need for climate change adaptation on all levels of governance;
2. Shared macro-regional knowledge base;
3. Research cooperation and science policy dialogues in order to identify and address knowledge gaps;
4. Facilitation of science-policy-business-dialogues at and between all governance levels
5. Cooperation on disaster risk management to cope with increased risks to due climate change and expected impacts;
6. Reviewed and mainstreamed sectoral policies in light of climate change adaptation concerns and cooperation on the development of strategies and action plans and especially acknowledging the role of sub-regional and local authorities, responders and communities;
7. Cooperation in order to ensure solidarity and funding of adaptation measures;

With a view to interrelation between climate change adaptation and civil protection it is envisioned to

1. Access to operational warning systems in the region for climate induced disasters (impacting e.g. infrastructure, agriculture, health) available through common BSR systems and well established cooperation between national warning system services in the region;
2. Strengthening the interdisciplinary cooperation and dialogue across national and sectorial borders in the field of climate change adaptation through the on-line information portal CLIMATE ADAPT and the establishment of a dialogue platform on climate change adaptation of all BSR countries facilitating a cross-sectoral dialogues between climate researchers, policy makers in environmental protection, spatial planners, contingency agencies and local actors; the platform may tackle risk reduction, awareness raising, disaster response and recovery - bringing schools of thought and different types of actors closer and finding integrated approaches with the aim to prepare, build capacity and raise awareness;
3. Intergovernmental cross-sectoral process of mainstreaming climate change adaptation across relevant sector policies by promoting and implementing the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region;
4. Macro-regionally established insurance systems for economic losses as result of extreme weather events based on solidarity and risk reduction concepts;

In order to achieve these goals the following actions are proposed:

1. To cover aspect that are missing from existing national adaptation strategies, ensuring coherence with national disaster risk management plans;
2. Improve the market penetration of natural disaster insurance and unleash the full potential of insurance pricing and other financial products for risk awareness, prevention and mitigation and ensure for long-term resilience in investments and business decisions;
3. Promotion and R&D support for the development of innovative technologies, including early warning systems;



Furthermore additional recommendations on actions are given:

- Harmonizing overarching policies; ensuring wide consultations from climate change and civil protection community;
- Bridging the gap between “reducing vulnerabilities” and “handling the crisis”;
- Long-term vs. short-term monitoring and assessment tools.

The framework provided by the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum is a great opportunity to address these issues by sharing experience, various approaches and proposals in order to achieve the highest level of security in the area. We are looking forward to fruitful discussion.