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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREAS KÜPPERS,
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATOR
AT THE GEOFORSCHUNGSZENTRUM POTSDAM,
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The role of and opportunities for research, training and education

The *GeoForschungsZentrum Potsdam* (GFZ) is Germany's national research centre for geosciences and was established in Potsdam after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It has since become a member of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres and currently has some 855 employees. As early as 1992, it began, under the direction of Professor Christoph Reigber, to conduct geodetic, geological and geophysical observation missions and field campaigns to resolve key geodynamic questions in Central Asia, and this work is still going on. Fundamental questions include: How quickly are the Himalayas growing? What rates of movement do we find in the Pamir-Tianshan and how do the glaciers behave? How deep are the roots of the Urals and what movement can we expect in the future? How fast is this movement, and where in particular do we have to reckon with severe earthquakes?

For logical reasons, a close partnership developed quite quickly with researchers in Kyrgyzstan and led, amongst other things, to an active exchange of researchers. An agreement on scientific and technical co-operation between Germany and Kyrgyzstan was eventually concluded at the presidential level in 2002 with the aim of establishing and building up the Central Asian Institute for Applied Geosciences (CAIAG). The institute in Bishkek is classed as a foundation under Kyrgyz law and since its official opening in 2006 it has been led jointly by a Kyrgyz co-director, Dr. Bolot Moldobekov, and his German counterpart, Professor Christoph Reigber with great success. The centre is in principle open to researchers and scientists from the entire region and is intended to serve as a strategic starting point for highly visible research and development projects to be carried out in co-operation with surrounding countries, with all parties taking joint responsibility. As early as 2007, following the adoption of the first interdisciplinary research programme, practical implementation of plans for a multi-disciplinary Global Change Observatory in the region could begin.

The regional research network "Water in Central Asia" can be traced back to a joint GFZ and CAIAG proposal, inspired and promoted by Foreign Minister Steinmeier. It takes up the "Water Initiative" and incorporates important research initiatives in the Central Asian region. In addition to solving key scientific and technical problems, the network also makes a contribution through comprehensive training programmes and the implementation of tertiary

education structures in close collaboration with Western European partners as well as creating at a political and cultural level the basis for long-term co-operation beyond national borders. Project activities will be initiated in July of this year with some 15 partners and will subsequently be developed and expanded in stages. In view of this expansion, it is essential that the required resources be made available in stages by both the individual countries and the international institutions.

An important goal here is the fostering of collaboration between the people and institutions in Central Asia, the European Union and international research stakeholders. Considerable progress can be expected in the joint political decision-making process if it proves possible to use the results of careful scientific research carried out with the most advanced equipment as a basis for decisions and agreements. To this end, boosting the knowledge transfer is just as important as having fair competition wherever an unequal distribution of resources by nature prevails and geological assets are not equally available to all.

The three thematic core areas within the network are:

1. Monitoring of key hydrological and terrestrial parameters;
2. Management of water resources;
3. Quantification and interpretation of global change throughout the region.

In the course of a project, these core areas are divided up into work packages. Even if a prototype version is advisable to begin with in view of the limited financial resources available — for example, ten field stations instead of 100 spread across a huge region — excellent opportunities arise for others to join from different fields or at a later stage.

This should directly result in knowledge transfer measures for the future and sustainable scientific co-operation for years to come. The development of new training programmes and knowledge packages will be initiated in Potsdam to begin with and undergo a series of intensive tests. Appropriate steps for wide-scale implementation in all the Central Asian States are to be subsequently prepared using Bishkek as a base.

The Federal Government initially intends to finance the “Water Network” for three years. The seeds for long-term effectiveness are however sown early on in the training curricula development since courses designed to meet the precise needs of the respective countries and therefore extremely sustainable are to be set up at universities, and we are all aware that universities tend to have considerably longer lifespans than governments. There are numerous international donors ready to finance curricula development. The ability to make young people the focus within the network is undoubtedly of decisive importance for the success of the overall project.

There are a range of ways in which the OSCE can play a part in shaping and supporting the regional research network “Water in Central Asia”. Let me outline a few of them briefly. How the Organization signals its support will certainly be of great importance. The generation of political will on all sides for intelligent exploration and use of resources along with the mitigation of natural disasters through joint efforts is clearly an ambitious goal, but not an unattainable one. The OSCE can significantly aid integration by

actively bringing together at an international level those organizations that carry out extensive monitoring activities in the individual countries and in so doing lay the groundwork for a platform for geological, meteorological and geophysical services. The establishment of a common framework for disaster protection, comparable to Eurocode 8, would also be appropriate. Lastly, the OSCE can show its particular strength when it comes to the wide-ranging identification of suitable donors for future projects. All in all, it will be of decisive importance how successful we are in taking a clear and analytical view of the future and giving joint sustainable use of resources and the prevention of natural disasters the priority they deserve in the face of the visible risks and threats.

Thank you for your attention.