



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement at the Concluding Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

As delivered by Dustin DeGrande, Political Officer
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Austrian Chairmanship in Office; Ambassador Zugic, Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities; and the Government of the Czech Republic for organizing and hosting this week's forum in Prague.

Allow me to also express appreciation for the active participation of our fellow delegates, representatives from civil society, and our distinguished panelists and speakers. The moderators did an excellent job at providing perspectives from the field missions, capitals, and multilateral fora. Their choice of topics spurred lively debates, which will help lead us to our shared objectives of ministerial decisions that support economic and environmental partnership and growth.

There does, indeed, appear to be broad support among delegates for further work on two potential ministerial decisions, along the lines of the food-for-thought drafts circulated by the Austrian delegation: one on greening the economy, and one on connectivity and economic participation. As we shared earlier in the week, the United States will continue to fully engage in constructive dialogue on these potential decisions as we look toward the Vienna Ministerial.

From our discussions, it seems there is already consensus growing around the need to include transboundary water issues, disaster preparedness and response, and energy security. Aside from the environmental benefits of these efforts, they could also contribute to economic prosperity and regional security. The OSCE, which has great experience to draw from in transboundary water issues, in the Caucasus and Central Asia in particular, can build on this through a continued partnership with UNECE and others. As we heard in presentations at this week's Forum, transboundary water agreements have not only improved access to this critical resource, but also helped build trust between neighbors. In a similar manner, securing reliable and affordable electricity in, for instance, Southeastern Europe via a better developed network of transmission lines and policies, could help improve neighborly relations while improving the economy, environment, and security.

It was good to clarify in yesterday's session the importance and prospects of connectivity in support of economic participation and development in the OSCE region. As we heard, connectivity relates to the sharing of best practices and building the capacity of participating States to facilitate trade and transport. We share the view that connectivity is not about regional integration, which expert panelists agreed was best left off the table for the foreseeable future. In Central Asia and Southeastern Europe, both of which are regional transit hubs, connectivity could have the most immediate positive impact. We have already seen OSCE field missions in Central Asia train customs agents in customs harmonization and trade standards, and such efforts could be expanded. The expansion of travel corridors and infrastructure development also offer opportunities for the OSCE.

Finally, we appreciate the overview from Ambassador Azzoni of the incoming Italian Chairmanship's priorities for the Second Dimension, and look forward to working closely with you and your team throughout 2018.

In closing, we again thank the Austrian Chairmanship, Secretary General Greminger, and the OSCE Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities for your excellent organization this week in Prague. The choice of issues to discuss, the impressive array of panelists, and the inclusion of OSCE field missions with eyes on the ground lent a much-needed credibility to our discussions and should hopefully result in more authoritative decisions in the near future. And thank you, once again, to the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic for graciously hosting us in this beautiful venue.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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