OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization

First Preparatory Meeting

Welcoming Remarks
Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Vienna, 17 February 2020

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

Good morning!

I would like to join Ambassador Igli Hasani in welcoming you to Vienna for this First Preparatory Meeting. I commend the Albanian OSCE Chair for the theme they have chosen for the 2020 Economic and Environmental Forum. This year's focus on addressing corruption through innovation, transparency and digitalization will help us to deepen our understanding of how new technologies are affecting governance and economic development, as well as stability and security in the OSCE region.

Our societies and economies are undergoing rapid and transformative technological change that continues to gather speed. This digital revolution is having far-reaching effects on how we work, live and interact with each other.
Technology and security is a discussion we need to have across the board and one that we are pursuing in a proactive manner in many other areas of the OSCE's mandate – whether in relation to fighting terrorism and organized crime, combating trafficking in human beings or protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Dear colleagues,
In recent years, new digital solutions such as e-government platforms and single-window services have significantly improved the efficiency and transparency of public services. They have facilitated interaction between state institutions, the private sector and ordinary citizens.

Digital databases are making information more easily accessible and increasing transparency to levels never seen before.

Yet, digitalization is not a silver bullet that eliminates corruption in the blink of an eye. And new technologies in and by themselves do not in some magical way block corrupt practices. Indeed, when misused by criminals, digital tools can facilitate corruption and money-laundering.

Instead of enhancing oversight, digital public services may enable the concealment of corrupt actions by IT-literate individuals. We should also not forget that solutions based on data depend on the data they are built upon. If the data provided is corrupted or forged, those flaws will be embedded in the system, allowing criminal groups and individuals to use it for their own profit.

That is why it is essential that we consider the security implications of digitalization in a comprehensive way and determine how international organizations like the OSCE can best contribute to managing this process.

Dear colleagues,
The OSCE is already actively supporting participating States in their anti-corruption efforts, through comprehensive capacity-building and policy support on technology-related issues. Let me give you just two examples:

Last October, in co-operation with the 2019 Slovak OSCE Chair and the Anti-Corruption Agency of Kazakhstan, we organized a high-level regional conference on the role of digital technologies in reducing corruption risks. Participants from across Central Asia met in Almaty to discuss the use of new technologies in monitoring and implementing anti-corruption strategies, public procurement procedures, asset declarations and disclosure policies.

We have also started to implement a new project focused on the use of open data to improve governance, transparency and accountability in the public sector. In close collaboration with other international organizations, we are working on open data and open government initiatives, to build the capacity and expertise of OSCE participating States in South Eastern Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Innovation and digitalization hold great potential for enhancing the quality of governance and public services delivery, improving the investment climate and fostering economic growth.

Good environmental governance and transparency in the management of natural resources is another important aspect calling for our attention. New digital solutions can go a long way to improving access to information, public monitoring of environmental risks and environmental governance.

Today and tomorrow, we have an opportunity to exchange ideas and to share experiences from many different OSCE participating States. Our main objective is to maximize the potential gains and make innovation and digitalization a powerful source of security, stability and prosperity for all.

In moving forward, I have four recommendations to make:

1. Throughout our activities, we should continue to make a strong effort to identify openings for closer partnership with other international and regional organizations, civil society, businesses and academia.

2. We should also make sure that we are sensitive to how technological innovation in this field might affect equality issues between men and women.

3. The more systematic inclusion of young people in our discussions and programming can help us cover a wider range of opinions and opportunity.

4. Finally, greater awareness of how we contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular but not exclusively in relation to *SDG 16* on *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*, can help us identify synergies with other stakeholders and leverage our respective strengths.

In closing, I wish to thank all speakers and participants for joining us here in Vienna. Thank you for taking an active part in this discussion. I look forward to many practical suggestions on how to further enhance the OSCE's role in addressing corruption in this new digital age. Thank you.