



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE Chairmanship Business Conference 2017 Partnership and Innovation for Sustainable Economies

Welcoming remarks by the OSCE Secretary General Vienna, 25 January 2017

President Leitl,
Minister Kurz,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship for organizing this important conference, given the increasingly significant role that sustainable economies play in building inclusive and secure societies.

It has been said that ‘short-term thinking is the greatest enemy of good government’. Indeed, sustainability has become a fundamental part of the OSCE’s work to foster security and co-operation in Europe. This morning I would like to focus on three main aspects of sustainability at the core of our economic and environmental activities.

The first is good governance.

Good governance is a cornerstone of stability and security: it plays a key role in ensuring a sound business and investment climate, and in promoting economic prosperity and sustainable development. Good governance requires governments to be transparent and accountable towards their citizens, adopting comprehensive, long-term development strategies, effective economic policies, transparent budget and procurement processes, and streamlined international trade and customs regulations to create an environment in which business can thrive and investor confidence can grow.

It is not by chance that the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development considers good governance an essential element for achieving sustainable development. As the world’s largest regional security organization under the UN Charter, the OSCE is well placed to support its members in implementing the SDGs, including those focused on providing access to justice for all, building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and tackling corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing.

Let me give a couple of examples of OSCE activities aimed at promoting good governance.

- In cooperation with partner organizations such as UNECE, UNODC, OECD and the World Bank, we actively support our countries in implementing their anti-corruption commitments. As part of these activities we engage civil society and the private sector in order to enhance transparency, promote the rule of law as well as accountability of public institutions. Many policy makers and practitioners in the OSCE region and beyond, who seek to prevent

corruption and suppress this destructive phenomenon, benefit of our Handbook on Combating Corruption.

- Through our field offices we regularly offer policy advice and support to host countries. Last year alone we focussed our support to Tajikistan, Mongolia, Moldova and several countries in South Eastern Europe, particularly on the areas of anti-corruption and preventing and combating money laundering.

A second aspect of sustainability is economic connectivity.

Economic connectivity has great potential to enhance regional co-operation and stability across the OSCE area. As national economies become increasingly interdependent, enhanced harmonization, transparency and predictability of transport and customs procedures, and as simplified regulations for trade and business are more and more important – and ultimately will bring peoples and countries closer together. Information and communication technologies can play a major role in helping to enhance connectivity.

With the adoption of a Decision on good governance and connectivity at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg last month, the OSCE has been tasked to consider how to help strengthen economic ties as part of broader political confidence-building between East and West. Bringing business and politics together is not new to the OSCE. Commercial exchange was given a prominent place already in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Lasting peace and stability will not be achieved – in the OSCE region or elsewhere – unless economic ties are strengthened across the board, and this can only be done in partnership with the business community. The private sector plays a key role and its involvement in the OSCE's work has proved particularly beneficial and highly relevant.

And just two days ago, in the context of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, the Austrian Minister of Finance Hans Jörg Schelling stressed the importance of connectivity by stating that “closer cooperation in the field of trade, transport, customs and energy can be mutually beneficial to all participating States”, arguing that “we need a new vision of a Common Economic Space between Vancouver and Vladivostok.” This fits very well with the main theme of the Forum, to be held as always in Prague in September, which will be dedicated this year to green economy.

This leads me to the third and final element: environmental sustainability. The OSCE fully recognizes the two-way relationship between environment and security, and works to bring a security perspective into the international environmental debate. We support the implementation in our region of Sustainable Development Goals related to water governance, climate change and security, disaster risk reduction, energy security, and waste management.

Environmental considerations need not be an obstacle to economic development. Instead, they can be a catalyst for innovation, increased productivity and jobs creation. Good environmental governance not only contributes to a sound investment climate, but can help in addressing the concerns and interests of all stakeholders, helping prevent tensions and conflicts.

The OSCE strives to transform environmental security risks into opportunities for co-operation that can enhance security and stability and contribute to sustainable development.

Let me give 3 examples of OSCE initiatives.

*The OSCE ‘Aarhus Centres’ (60 centres in 14 countries) have proven to be a useful platform for civic engagement and contribute to a transparent and inclusive transformation towards a green economy. They are particularly active in the fields of water governance, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

*A visit to Austria and Germany last July by Sustainable Energy specialists from our Mediterranean Partners stimulated cooperation between high-level government and private sector energy decision makers and showcased the newest renewable energy technologies. I would like to express my gratitude to the Austrian Economic Chambers for supporting us in this endeavour. We plan to continue this initiative in 2017.

*In November, we facilitated together with the Austrian Institute of Technology a fact finding mission to Austria and Switzerland by Kazakhstan’s Vice Minister for Energy Sadibkov. This mission led to the establishment of the International Centre for the development of green technologies in Astana.

In concluding, as president Leitl pointed out, building sustainable economies is, for the OSCE, an element of the broader work we do in strengthening security, stability and promoting mutual trust in Europe and beyond. To address the “sustainability challenge” effectively, however, we need to learn how to engage in new ways, moving beyond purely inter-governmental dynamics. We should develop a coordinated approach that involves both governmental and non-governmental actors – including civil society, the business community, women and young people, international organizations, the media and academia – working in flexible and creative coalitions within a multilateral framework and guided by strong and farsighted political leadership.

In this sense, the OSCE has considerable potential to enhance co-operation and build new partnerships throughout the OSCE region. Today’s conference offers an excellent opportunity to make even better use of this potential.

Thank you.