

## United States Mission to the OSCE



# **U.S. Opening Statement at the 30th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Preparatory Meeting in Vienna**

As delivered by Bahram Rajaei, Political Officer  
to the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Preparatory Meeting  
February 14, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by thanking OSCE Chair of the Permanent Council Halacinski, Secretary General Schmid, and Deputy Minister Golecki for their introductory remarks.

The United States applauds the Polish Chair-in-Office for making sustainable pandemic recovery the focus of the 2022 Economic and Environmental Forum. To be clear, despite progress over the past two years, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic remains a significant challenge to prosperity and security in the OSCE region. The hundreds of thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars in economic damage sustained—with disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable among us—are a testament to this reality.

Some have suggested the pandemic's impacts do not warrant discussion in the Second Dimension. The theory is that those impacts may be temporary or perhaps less relevant in the future. However, it seems quite clear from our collective experiences and the data in hand that the pandemic's far-reaching effects—on our economies, societies, and indeed on our lives—will be with us longer than any of us previously imagined or hoped. Moreover, the CiO's focus on long-term issues, including greening the economy, good governance, anti-corruption, digital transformation, and women's economic empowerment, are essential components of building back better from the pandemic and supporting sustainable economic recovery. All of these topics build on substantive policy discussions we have already had in this forum and on the commitments we have made.

Mr. Chair,

The United States fully recognizes the linkage between sustainable economic recovery and comprehensive security in the OSCE area. I would like to briefly touch upon three specific aspects of this linkage we will seek to emphasize this year.

First, as we take the urgent steps required for near-term recovery in the United States, we are also seizing the opportunity to build back in ways that make our country more resilient and secure. A key part of this process involves making the clean energy transformation a central pillar of our economic recovery efforts. This transformation will generate prosperity and increase the development and deployment of clean energy technologies. The 2021 Ministerial Council decision on climate change has provided a strong foundation for meaningful collective action on this issue at the OSCE.

Second, we all recall the detailed deliberations we had in the EEF last year regarding the disproportionately large and negative social and economic consequences of the pandemic on women and girls, minorities, and historically marginalized communities. In the United States we place great emphasis on this issue, and here I would note the recent publication of the U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, which establishes economic empowerment as one of the key U.S. gender priorities. Countering these consequences and the systemic disadvantages of women and girls, minorities and historically marginalized communities requires action to address the structures, policies, and practices that contribute to them. These populations can substantially contribute to economic growth, including in the green and blue economies. We therefore strongly encourage the CiO and delegations to continue to emphasize the need to consider the needs as well as encourage the contributions of these disproportionately affected populations in our discussions on sustainable recovery.

Third, I would like to note that anti-corruption remains one of the United States' key national security priorities, as reflected by our first-ever Strategy on Countering Corruption published in December. Corruption is a security threat; it hinders economic growth and erodes democratic institutions. As we build back better in the wake of the pandemic, we in the Second Dimension must affirm the centrality of transparency, accountability, and good governance in countering any corruption that may accompany pandemic recovery efforts.

The United States welcomes the opportunity to engage on these topics with other delegations in the 2022 EEF cycle. We encourage the active participation of civil society, the private sector, and academics in Second Dimension events throughout the year to contribute their perspectives and inform the organization's work. It is our hope these discussions will result in a draft Ministerial Council text on sustainable pandemic recovery that will be timely and relevant to our current challenges, and that we can collectively move toward a consensus on it. We offer our full support to the Polish CiO throughout this process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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