



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Opening Statement at the 1<sup>st</sup> Preparatory Meeting of the 26<sup>th</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

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

Good morning, fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests. I would like to begin by thanking the Italian OSCE Chairmanship and Ambassador Žugić, Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, for organizing this week's very pertinent preparatory meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum.

The United States welcomes the Italian Chairmanship's closer look this week at innovation and new technologies to drive economic growth and fight corruption, both critical components of security. We see great opportunities for Second Dimension collaboration with the new Chairmanship and our fellow participating States. The United States recognizes economic prosperity as a foundation of national strength. We see the OSCE as a natural partner in the effort to foster enabling environments for the development and expansion of new technologies. Over the next several days, we aim to engage with participating States and experts to explore methods of doing so.

Important to our overall theme is the need for governments to create an environment conducive to the expansion of global broadband Internet connectivity. The World Bank has shown that for every 10 percent increase in the number of high-speed Internet connections, a country's gross domestic product rises by 1.4 percent. In addition to increasing economic output, the Internet is also a net creator of jobs, as Ambassador Azzoni said this morning. One study showed that for every job displaced by Internet technology, another 2.6 jobs are created. In the United States, digitally-delivered services account for 54 percent of total U.S. services exports, reaching \$400 billion in 2014 and rising steadily.

The Internet also expands markets, facilitates innovation, reduces transaction costs, enables individuals to acquire new skills and find jobs, and helps small and medium-sized enterprises – the drivers of job creation – to compete with larger companies. Social media cultivates customer loyalty, raises awareness about products and services, and helps business owners reach new customers and markets. At the same time, as the Secretary General said, as ideas are shared at an accelerated pace, intellectual property rights must be respected and a careful eye on cyber security maintained.

The digitalization of procurement, trade processes, and business registration procedures significantly reduces opportunities for corruption, thereby encouraging e-government solutions by increasing transparency and competitiveness in government contracts that foster a more vibrant private sector. U.S. foreign assistance programs have helped countries around the world in these areas. Within the OSCE area, the United States has helped the governments of Ukraine, Moldova, Albania, and Kosovo facilitate transparent and effective institutions for asset trading, develop ICT excellence centers, launch electronic tax filing systems to reduce opportunities for corruption, and create e-procurement systems to make government tenders more cost-effective and transparent. As just one example, digitalized one-stop shops in Albania reduced the time required to register a new business from 42 days to just three. The new approach also had the effect of bringing new businesses into the tax system, thereby expanding the country's tax base and revenue. These and other related efforts to address corruption and implement good governance have a direct impact on security and economic and political stability.

Finally, it is worth noting in this discussion that we are facing around the world a gender digital divide. This refers to women and girls' lack of access to, use of, and development of information communication technologies. Globally, 250 million fewer women than men are online, and more than 1.7 billion women do not own a mobile phone, according to industry sources. The gender digital divide poses a threat to economic, social, and political progress because it restricts the full participation of women and girls in formal economies, equal access to legal and financial institutions, access to education, and social interactions. The United States encourages the OSCE and Italian Chairmanship to increase the Organization's focus on this important issue.

Once again, the United States thanks the Italian Chairmanship and OSCE Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities Ambassador Žugić for your hard work organizing this week's preparatory forum. These are worthy and important topics we look forward to discussing. We also look forward to everyone's active participation in discussions as we work to increase security and cooperation in the OSCE region through the Second Dimension.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.