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United States Mission to the OSCE

25th Economic and Environmental Forum “Greening the economy and building partnerships” Closing Statement – First Preparatory Meeting

As delivered by Darren Perdue, Political Officer
Vienna, Austria
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On behalf of the United States, I would first like to thank you Mr. Chair, Ambassador Florian Raunig, and the Austrian Chairmanship; Coordinator Dr. Halil Yiğitgüden; and the members of your staffs for all your hard work in planning this week’s First Preparatory Meeting of the OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF). This week’s EEF meeting was enhanced by the participation of expert panelists and OSCE field officers, including the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, as well as a number of economic and environmental officers from across the region. We appreciate your active participation and insightful contributions.

This Preparatory Meeting provided an opportunity to explore how the OSCE and participating States can increase security and stability through good governance, greater economic participation, and economic partnerships. We gained perspective from a number of government officials, technical experts, international organizations, and businesses about the role the OSCE can play in these areas. Our sessions identified concrete steps our Organization can take to help participating States prevent corruption, strengthen the business and investment climate, improve economic relations, and increase economic participation, particularly by women and youth.

The format of this week’s EEF, which included working groups on three topics led by the Permanent Representatives of France, Slovakia, and Spain, was a welcome innovation. We see this as a helpful change in our approach, which resulted in livelier and more in-depth discussions on issues important to us all. We are pleased to hear that the Austrian Chairmanship will continue this practice in future EEF and related meetings throughout 2017.

As we noted during the opening session yesterday morning, the United States welcomes Austria’s priorities in the OSCE’s economic and environmental dimension and continues to believe that the Second Dimension provides opportunities to strengthen security and stability.

We heard from numerous speakers at this week’s EEF about the vision of a single, unified economic zone – either from Lisbon to Vladivostok, or Vancouver to Vladivostok – and ideas for how to begin operationalizing this vision. While the United States supports the forging of closer economic ties and greater connectivity, the concept of a common economic area requires that participants respect each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law, and the rules-based international system that we have all

committed to uphold. Clearly, these fundamental elements do not exist today among all OSCE participating States.

Therefore, in the United States' view, it is premature to focus on the necessary steps to create a single economic zone across the OSCE. We regret that a significant portion of this Preparatory Meeting's agenda was spent specifically exploring how to integrate the Eurasian Economic Union with the rest of the OSCE. The Hamburg Ministerial Decision on Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity (MC.DEC/4/16) is five pages long and contains twenty-one operational taskings. There is a great deal of work to be done in areas in which we have reached consensus, and we believe the focus should be on those issues.

Finally, the United States looks forward to continuing our active engagement in the Economic and Environmental Dimension. We welcome Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, as the new Chair of the Economic and Environmental Committee, and are eager to work with him and the very able team from Kazakhstan. We also look forward to participating in the Second Preparatory Meeting of the EEF, to be held in Astana in June.

In closing, let me again express our appreciation to the Austrian Chairmanship, Coordinator Yiğitgüden, and the staff of the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities for coordinating this First Preparatory Meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.