



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 1st Preparatory Meeting Vienna, 28-29 January 2019

EU Opening Statement

The European Union and its member States are pleased to participate in the first preparatory meeting of the 27th Economic and Environmental Forum, and would like to thank the Slovak Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for organising this meeting. We also thank the speakers for their introductory remarks.

The topic of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum – Promoting economic progress and security in the OSCE area through energy co-operation, new technologies, good governance and connectivity in the digital era – provides a good opportunity to continue and deepen our work on important topics such as good governance, connectivity and economic participation in the light of digitalization.

We are confident that our work this year will bring us forward in discussing the implications of digitalization on economic progress and security. In this regard, we want to emphasise the declaration on digital economy, which was adopted in Milan last year and which we see as a successful starting point for our discussion. The EU promotes the work towards gender equality in all policy areas. The incorporation of a gender perspective into, and ensuring the equal participation of men and women, in OSCE activities are essential components of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The implications of digitalization for women and girls therefore warrant our particular attention. We also very much welcome efforts to ensure that our work aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In our meeting today and tomorrow we will discuss various aspects and implications of the digital era on the economy. The digitalisation of the

economy is an important phenomenon that transforms the way economies function and interact with each other. Emerging digital technologies such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and Big Data, will lead to further disruptive innovation, and create new opportunities and challenges that can also have different kinds of security implications. Digitalisation also bares high potential for improving connectivity.

In the EU the completion of the "Digital Single Market" is one of the key priorities on the political agenda. A Digital Single Market is one in which individuals and businesses can seamlessly and securely access and exercise online activities under conditions of fair competition with and a high level of consumer and personal data protection. It offers opportunities for start-ups and existing companies in a market of over 500 million people. Also, citizens can benefit from improved access to information and improve their job opportunities. Promoting the necessary digital skills is a key requirement in this regard.

We believe that digitalisation can and should also play a role in making our economies more sustainable and inclusive. New technologies and digitalisation have the potential to empower communities and act as a new source of inclusive global economic growth. We, therefore, welcome that a session on this topic in connection with energy co-operation is included in the agenda. Furthermore, we are particularly looking forward to hearing how digitalisation can contribute to enhancing good governance, transparency, women empowerment and the fight against corruption.

In conclusion, we are looking forward to fruitful discussions in the coming days and stand ready to engage constructively on the topics selected by the Slovak chairmanship.

The Candidate Countries, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.