



EUROPEAN UNION

First Preparatory Meeting of the 30th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 14 – 15 February 2022, Vienna

EU Opening Statement

1. The European Union and its Member States are pleased to participate in the First Preparatory Meeting of the 30th Economic and Environmental Forum. We would like to thank the Polish Chairmanship, as well as the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his team, for organising this meeting.
2. We would also like to thank the speakers for their introductory remarks, which gave us a glimpse into the scope of our discussions over the next two days. We are looking forward to an exchange with speakers from various backgrounds, including from the private sector, academia and civil society, during this Forum and throughout the entire year within the framework of the second dimension.
3. This year's Economic and Environmental Forum, focusing on *“Promoting security and stability in the OSCE area through sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”*, is a valuable and crucial opportunity to further deepen and broaden our work on this timely issue. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken Europe and the OSCE area to its core, disrupting our societies and economies. The impact of the pandemic has manifested itself with particular violence on groups that were already more vulnerable at the outset.

4. Our generational challenges - the green and digital transitions – are even more important now than before the pandemic started. However, in adversity often lies an opportunity. Indeed, it is now time for us to repair our economies and to build a better, more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future for the next generation. Massive investments and strong co-operation are needed to live up to this extraordinary challenge. To this end, the EU adopted the largest stimulus package ever financed in Europe. To ensure that Europe bounces forward, more than half of the €1.82 trillion package – consisting of a revamped multiannual budget and a €807 billion recovery plan, “NextGenerationEU” – will support modernisation, including through research and innovation, and fair climate and digital transitions.
5. Setting off on our path to recovery, the European Commission also updated its Digital Education Action Plan and launched a new Skills Agenda to improve and adapt skills, knowledge and competences of our workers and strengthen competitiveness and social fairness of our economies. We further launched the Global Gateway Initiative to deliver sustainable and secure links and to build clean and green infrastructure bringing lasting benefits without indebting future generations. All these actions today will render post-Covid societies and economies more resilient, sustainable and fair.
6. In our meeting today and tomorrow, we will discuss various prospects of contributing to resilience, growth, sustainability and stability in our societies and economies. We are happy that good governance and anti-corruption, as well as trade and transport facilitation are included in our agenda for this Forum. We also appreciate a discussion on human capital development in the last session of this meeting, which we consider to be a prerequisite for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness and thus for the stability and well-being of our societies.
7. In conclusion, we would like to express our continuous support to the Polish Chairmanship and we are looking forward to fruitful discussions over the next two days.

The Candidate Countries TURKEY, REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, SAN MARINO and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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