



EUROPEAN UNION

First Preparatory meeting of the 29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Vienna, 15 – 16 February 2021

EU Closing Statement

The European Union and its Member States would like to thank the Swedish Chairpersonship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his team for organising this meeting. We would also like to thank all speakers for their interesting presentations, the moderators for stimulating our debates and all participants for their contributions.

This meeting has provided a valuable opportunity to learn about the importance of women's economic empowerment and dig deeper into the roots of gender-inequalities which need to be addressed. We have listened with interest to the panel discussions. They confirmed the scale of the problem and illustrated the extensive amount of effort, work and political will required to just move closer to gender equality.

The speakers also challenged our perceptions of some indicators. For example, it was noted that an increased number of women in the labour market does not automatically mean that the situation for women has improved. Working with gender-segregated data and mainstreaming gender in our policies is key in our steps towards equality. The discussions pointed out that unpaid or unrecognised work of women, perceptions of care and household work as women's job and undervaluation of work in the care sector, including healthcare, despite its high social value, are some of the major problems to be solved. Gender stereotypes remain impediments for women's equal economic participation, including in leadership positions or digital and STEM fields, as well as women's access to

financial services. These stereotypes prevent our societies from using the potential we have, towards productivity, innovation and towards building inclusive and prosperous societies.

We hope that the discussions from these past two days will serve as a basis to identify a common approach towards concrete measures to progress towards gender-equality through enhanced economic empowerment of women.

An example of an opportunity to contribute to enhancing women's participation was the 2020 "Draft MC Decision on the Promotion of Gender Balance Among Speakers at OSCE Events" and we are pleased that the Swedish Chairpersonship is putting maximum effort into ensuring balanced panels.

Furthermore, the OSCE should lead by example. Following the progress towards gender-balance in the OSCE's top management, we should focus on reaching similar results at all levels of the OSCE. The statistics for both seconded and contracted positions show that women still do not represent even one quarter of all international positions in the OSCE.

The First Preparatory Meeting of the 29th Economic and Environmental Forum demonstrated our common perception of the issue of women's unequal participation and we hope to engage with all participating States on identifying possible means and tools for addressing it. We are looking forward to our continued dialogue on this topic.

The Candidate Countries 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 countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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