



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

ENGLISH only

29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

“Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women’s economic empowerment”

FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING

Vienna, 15-16 February 2021

**Ambassador Vuk Žugić
Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Closing remarks

Distinguish delegates and representatives,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current security challenges underline the significance of the OSCE as a forum for broad and inclusive dialogue, aimed at promoting peace, stability, cooperation and security through common solutions addressing issues of common interest and concern.

The OSCE is a platform not only for exchanging best practices, but also for agreeing on a shared perspective on these issues.

Allow me to underline again the main message of the Secretary General and I quote: “*what is good for gender equality is good for the whole economy and society*”. I believe the whole discussion in the last two days has provided solid grounds to conclude that by supporting each and every woman we support each and every one.

The discussions we had confirmed this recommendation that is grounded in a significant volume of economic research. The recent Working Paper of the International Monetary Fund “*Gender inequality and Economic Growth: Evidence from Industry-Level Data*” provides empirical support to the argument that gender equality is critical to the achievement of macroeconomic stability, and should be assigned a high priority on the policymakers’ agenda. Policies designed to ensure a level playing field for women, such as improving women’s social and economic rights and in particular women’s health, access to education, financial services, and technology are not only a matter of equity and social justice. They are powerful levers to boost economic growth—benefiting the economy as a whole.

Indeed, the OSCE commitments were shaped around this evidence. And I am referring not only to the 2004 OSCE Gender Equality Action Plan and the Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision, which both offer solid grounds to support a greater role of women throughout the OSCE multidimensional security approach. The OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension adopted in Maastricht, the Ministerial Council Decisions on *Economic Participation, Human Capital Development in the Digital Era, Preventing and Combating Corruption Through Digitalization and Increased Transparency* make specific reference to improving the business and investment climate towards greater socioeconomic participation of women and youth, as crucial agents of economic growth, stability and sustainable development.

Today we were often reminded that the impact of COVID-19 is calling for urgent actions to turn these commitments into actual policy-relevant actions. Yet, despite international and OSCE commitments as well as evidence-based analysis – generously provided by our speakers today - greater gender equality still triggers resistance and, sometimes, opposition.

In this regard, I believe that economic growth and innovation needs to go hand-in hand with equality and participation. And I welcome the recommendations put forward by some speakers, including the need to abolish all legal discrimination hindering women's equal rights to housing, land, and property; to strengthen measures to combat all forms of corruption that hinders women's equal participation; to ensure the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention; to ensure that women are meaningfully included in economic decision-making processes. These are some of the important areas, some important areas to be further explored during next meetings of the EEF, also building on the activities implemented by the OCEEA.

Dear Ambassadors, speakers, participants,

I believe this first preparatory meeting provided considerable food for thought on how we can leverage women's potential towards post-pandemic recovery that leaves no one behind. I join my voice to those who already commended the 2021 OSCE Swedish Chairpersonship for bringing up this topic in the agenda of this year Economic and Environmental Forum process.

My Office will continue to act as a catalyst of inclusive dialogue, supporting the efforts of the Swedish Chairpersonship in bridging positions towards multilateral engagement and broad-based actions.

Before concluding, a final word of thank to and appreciation for the continuous support of our colleagues of Conference Services and our interpreters.

Thank you.