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United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Remarks

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Gary Robbins
Economic and Environmental Forum First Preparatory Meeting
Vienna, Austria
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

We would like to thank the Irish Chairman-in-Office, Secretary General Zannier, Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities Svilanovic, and our Austrian hosts for bringing us together to open the 20th Economic and Environmental Forum. The United States welcomes the opportunity to focus the work of the Forum this year on an area where the OSCE can add value in economic and environmental matters, namely by highlighting and developing good governance and transparency as ways to promote security, stability, and prosperity.

Over the next two days, we will examine many facets of money laundering and the financing of terrorism, the ways to expand and strengthen our efforts to combat these security threats, and the relationship between these efforts and other aspects of good governance. These efforts line up with our commitment in the 2003 OSCE Maastricht Strategy to “develop, implement, and enforce financial legislation and regulations on combating money laundering and corruption and criminalizing the financing of terrorism.” We look forward to sharing the experience the United States has gained in developing domestic capacity, coordinating action across government departments and agencies, and working with international partners.

At the outset, as so many have pointed out in connection with other areas of economic and environmental activity, we must define the OSCE's role in a way that is complementary to and not duplicative of the work of other actors. This need is especially great in combating money laundering and financing of terrorism, where the Financial Action Task Force, the Egmont Group, MONEYVAL, EAG and many others have developed standards that States should use in developing the capacity to take down transnational criminal networks. The OSCE's role is rightly focused on raising awareness, building capacity at the local level, and facilitating coordination and collaboration among the experts in the field.

Just as important is the question of values. The experts on combating financial crime have the knowledge and the resources to execute their missions. Alongside these capabilities, however, there must be a focus on protecting the rights of citizens, to ensure that instruments intended to suppress criminal activities do not infringe on civil liberties.

In the past year, we have seen a growth in cooperative efforts to combat financial crimes in the OSCE region. This is a positive development. Still, the best-written laws can be misused to stifle the exercise of fundamental freedoms such as expression, assembly, and association. The challenge we face in this regard is to ensure that efforts to combat criminal activities are firmly anchored in respect for civil liberties and human rights. This work must take place in the context of government institutions that are transparent and accountable to their citizens, including strong, independent judiciaries capable of dispensing justice.

We look forward to the proceedings of the next few days, and hope that this meeting will open up new opportunities to support States' efforts to implement the FATF standards. The United States is ready to engage in a constructive and substantive dialogue on how best to improve our collective ability to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism, in ways that are in keeping with the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security across all three dimensions.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.