

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to address the 2017 Economic and Environmental Forum on its 25th anniversary. I believe I am the first President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to do so. Adding on, as I am the Czech President of ECOSOC, it is even more special. On top of that, I am honored that this forum is hosted in my hometown in these magnificent rooms.

As former OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier stated at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 “there are milestones in history when universal values are translated into political commitments that change the course of events”.

The cooperation between the OSCE and the UN was established in 1992 when the then CSCE was declared to be “a regional arrangement in the sense of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations”. That same year, UN Member States also convened in Rio de Janeiro for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, the so-called Earth Summit. This Summit recognized that “peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible”.

Since then, cooperation between the OSCE and the UN has come a long way.

As one of the six main organs of the UN, ECOSOC is at the heart of the United Nations system to advance the three dimensions of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental.

The Council’s deliberations provide a unique platform to promote the mainstreaming of sustainable development across all policy areas, to address cross-cutting issues, and to identify emerging challenges. It also provides a platform for engaging a variety of stakeholders in global policy debates on sustainable development, and for forging partnerships to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 2030 Agenda has strengthened ECOSOC’s role in coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up are critical to the overall follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

The main theme of the 2018 ECOSOC session “From global to local: supporting sustainable and resilient societies in urban and rural communities” resonates well with this year’s EEF theme on “greening the economy and building partnerships”.

As we seek to transition to a greener, cleaner and smarter economy, new job opportunities will emerge. However, as Minister Zaorálek said, the economy will not thrive in isolation. The transition process also requires to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4), to adopt social protection policies (SDG 10.4), and to promote decent work for all (SDG 8) as well as gender equality (SDG 5). It requires ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy (SDG 7) and closing infrastructure gaps, including through improving regional and transborder infrastructure and by significantly increasing access to information and communications technology (SDG 9.1; 9.C). It requires responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (SDG 16.7). These issues remain major challenges in many parts of the world and are critical to deliver on the promise to leave no one behind.

At the same time, we need to pave new pathways for preserving our planet and its natural resources. Sustainable management of water and improved disaster risk reduction will be critical for sustaining development gains across the globe.

Priority areas for action may vary between countries. However, integrated approaches maximize the synergies between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and are an important pillar of sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. Thorough evaluations of how interventions in one policy area may impact other sectors will enable policymakers to better manage potential trade-offs between SDGs and targets and strengthen efforts to advance sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rising inequalities in many countries across the globe have undermined social cohesion and universal participation in economic, social and political life. The effects of climate change and the protracted nature of conflicts around the world have renewed the focus on the linkages between institution building, peace and sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda reiterates that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. The agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom.

In 2016, the twin resolutions on the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture emphasized that sustaining peace requires coherence, sustained engagement and coordination between the main bodies of the UN.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has made prevention a priority of his term and has stressed that - I quote - “the best means of prevention, and of sustaining peace, is inclusive and sustainable development”. Progress across all 17 goals will thus make a critical contribution to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

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Inclusive societies based on strong and transparent institutions are an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, and are explicitly recognized in the SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda. Building sustainable and inclusive societies is a crosscutting endeavour, which will be critical to the achievement of all SDGs. That is why the development of initiatives towards fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all will be the key priority during my presidency of the Economic and Social Council.

As the experience of the Czech Republic shows, long-term prosperity and security are not sustainable without ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to play an active part in the society. Leaving no-one behind is a key to a better society. Moreover, equal participation in political and public affairs is also a human right which must be respected and protected; not merely an optional or discretionary principle.

I believe that the Czech priority for ECOSOC is in line with and complementary to the efforts of many other international organizations and platforms such as the UN Human Rights Council, the OSCE, the EU, the OECD. As far as the OSCE is concerned, it is well aligned with both its second dimension – for example, aspects of good governance, and its third dimension – for example, participation in public affairs including the right to vote and be elected.

I am planning to convene an ECOSOC Special Meeting at UN Headquarters in May 2018 to explore further collective action in addressing issues of participation and inclusion within the context of the 2030 Agenda. The Special Meeting will be complemented and informed by preparatory meetings, which will explore policy actions and innovations that can foster participation, transparency and inclusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2017 marks the 25th anniversary of not only the EEF but also the cooperation between the OSCE and the UN.

The OSCE has observer status in the UN General Assembly. As such, the OSCE may participate, without the right to vote, in the deliberations of ECOSOC on questions within the scope of the activities of the organization.

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges the importance of the regional and sub-regional dimensions, regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable

development. Regional and sub-regional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at national level.

The OSCE has undisputable expertise in many areas required to successfully implement the SDGs, and can thus inform UN thinking about them. Therefore I believe that there is scope for more cooperation between ECOSOC and the EEF in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Excellencies,

The importance of collaboration and partnerships across sectors and across the national, regional and global levels cannot be overemphasized. Joining hands will be critical to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. We must work together and make all efforts to achieve this promise we have set out: to leave no one behind. Truly no one! No human being deserves to be excluded from society.

Winston Churchill said that “It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations” but I will take the risk and quote the former UNSG: “There is no plan B because we do not have a planet B. We have to work and galvanize our action.”

In this spirit, I am counting to continue the co-operation between the OSCE and the UN to coordinate and leverage efforts to address global challenges. The OSCE has been a trusted partner for the UN in many fields and I am convinced that this fruitful collaboration will continue.

I am confident that your discussions will contribute to fostering partnerships to work towards a “just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met”.

I wish you success in your deliberations. Thank you.