



United States Mission to the OSCE

24th Economic and Environmental Forum “Strengthening stability and security through cooperation on good governance” Opening Statement – First Preparatory Meeting

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests; and a special “welcome” to those who have joined us from capitals, from other international organizations, from the private sector, and from civil society. On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank Ambassador Eberhard Pohl and the German Chairmanship, Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, Coordinator Dr. Halil Yigitguden, and your teams for planning this week’s First Preparatory Meeting of the OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Forum. We also warmly welcome Director General Dr. Helge Wendenburg and Professor Dr. Klaus Töpfer to the OSCE. Your participation in this Preparatory Meeting demonstrates the importance the German Chairmanship and the OSCE place on good governance and its effect on stability and security.

Good governance was at the center of our two keynote speakers’ remarks—whether the challenge is addressing externalities, setting and enforcing targets, or developing fair and transparent ways to incentivize environmentally responsible behavior—none of these is possible without rule of law and good governance.

I would also like to express appreciation to the Serbian and Swiss Chairs for their leadership and commitment to advancing the OSCE’s work on Economic and Environmental issues, particularly on water governance and disaster risk reduction. This is important work that should continue, and we should find an early occasion to remedy the missed opportunity of our collective failure to adopt a decision on water governance at Belgrade.

The United States enthusiastically welcomes the German Chairmanship’s commitment to strengthen the OSCE’s work in the Second Dimension. During this challenging time for Europe and the OSCE region, we share your view that economic and environmental issues present opportunities for enhanced cooperation and improved security. By working together on issues that will be addressed in this year’s Economic and Environmental Forum meetings – namely environmental governance; improving the investment climate by fighting corruption, money-laundering, and the financing of terrorism; and the OSCE’s response to the migration and refugee crisis – we can accomplish the goals outlined by German Foreign Minister Steinmeier. If we commit ourselves to achieving tangible progress in these areas, we can renew dialogue, rebuild trust, and restore security across the OSCE.

We welcome the focus of this meeting on good environmental governance. From the historic December 2015 Paris Agreement, affirmed by 188 countries, to water and land management, to local efforts to clean up communities, this topic touches all of our lives and has far reaching consequences.

When the Clean Air Act was enacted in 1970, smog was choking American cities, and the public was fed up. The then brand-new Environmental Protection Agency was tasked with creating science-based air quality standards and bringing the entire country into compliance with them on an aggressive schedule. The Clean Air Act proved to be one of the greatest public health and environmental successes in the world. We're proud that this important law helped cut air pollution in the United States by 70 percent since 1970, while our nation's economy has tripled, demonstrating that a healthy environment and a strong economy reinforce each other. Sustainable, innovative approaches that are grounded in science are instrumental to solving today's environmental challenges. Gina McCarthy, the current Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has made clear the United States is moving beyond traditional regulatory approaches to environmental protection, as we build sustainability into day-to-day operations. In the United States, we have made much progress, but still have work to do to address environmental challenges.

Today's environmental problems require cross-cutting programs and new tools that promote innovation, incentives, and partnerships. We must also provide greater access to environmental data, enhanced community engagement, environmental education, new measurement tools, and increased analysis. While these are not new ideas, taken together they represent a balanced approach toward good environmental governance that reflects OSCE principles and commitments.

On a final note, the United States would like to express its strong support for the German Chairmanship's effort to increase the involvement of the private sector in the OSCE's Second Dimension work, starting with this Preparatory Meeting. With the right policy, regulation, and incentives, the private sector can play a significant role in developing innovative solutions to some of our most difficult challenges. We look forward to working with you, including at the Business Connectivity Conference in Berlin in May. We enthusiastically offer our full support.

We again thank the organizers of this week's First Preparatory Meeting and extend a warm welcome to our visitors. We look forward to an engaging discussion over the next two days and throughout the German Chairmanship in 2016.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.