

29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Concluding Meeting

Welcome speech of H. E. Mr. Jakub Kulháněk Minister of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic Prague, 9 – 10 September 2021

Dear minister Linde,

Dear Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to everyone and welcome at the Concluding Meeting of the 29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Special welcome to OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde and OSCE Secretary General Ms. Helga Maria Schmid.

This meeting traditionally takes place in Prague here in the Czernin Palace. I am happy that most of you are here in person today.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unfortunate that still some of you haven't been able to travel to Prague but at least you are joining us online.

So once again welcome to everybody here in Prague and all of you who are joining us online.

The COVID 19 pandemic has exposed the fault lines of today's interconnected world. The virus simply does not stop at borders.

All the restrictive measures have profoundly affected our lives.

However, the most severely affected ones have often been women and girls, especially those living in precarious and unstable conditions.

This brings me to the title of this meeting – 'Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women's economic empowerment'

As women are more exposed to the consequences of the pandemic – be it in their roles as primary caretakers at households or as primary frontline health workers –

we must ensure that all recovery plans provide adequate gender-sensitive support programmes so as to accommodate all the specific needs of women and girls.

As for the Czech Republic, promoting women's economic empowerment and their participation in public life as well as gender equality are our long-term priorities.

We are proud to support projects focusing on women's involvement in politics or women taking up leadership positions.

In line with our long-term policy of involving all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making, we implement these measures in close cooperation with NGOs and other members of the civil society.

The Government has recently adopted a new Gender Equality Strategy and a new Employment Policy Strategic Framework. Both strategic documents represent our vision of a modern employment policy.

Colleagues from our Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will tell you more about specific projects tomorrow in the morning session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The COVID-19 pandemic has also proven that no institution or state actor can take on the economic, environmental, or social challenges of today's complex world just on its own. The best way to succeed in reviving our economies and societies is a collective response. International cooperation is, therefore, the most effective way to contain the virus and to emerge stronger from the crisis.

I'm convinced that the OSCE has an important role to play in this effort.

The Czech Republic seeks to contribute to achieving progress in all OSCE dimensions.

Unfortunately, the overall picture of the security environment in the OSCE area remains deeply worrying.

We see a number of persisting crises and conflicts, while the OSCE principles and commitments are being deliberately violated.

Facing the complexity of the current security challenges and threats, we need to update the tools and mechanisms we have.

Moreover, we have hit some serious roadblocks as we struggle to implement our joint OSCE commitments.

Look no further than the latest very difficult negotiations on the Annual Security Review Conference, or the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting or us trying to agree on the unified budget.

And again, there is no magic bullet solution to this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

For us - as the OSCE - to succeed in our crucial mission we need more political will and more genuine engagement on part of all participating States.

To conclude, let me assure you that my country remains deeply committed to our constructive and active role in the OSCE.

I would like to reiterate our full support in this regard to Sweden as the OSCE Chair and its successors.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and to the OSCE Secretariat for organising this event.

I wish you all an inspiring and fruitful debate over the next two days