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## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to the Report by Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Vuk Žugić**

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 5, 2020

Thank you very much I appreciate your courtesy in particular with the challenges of the proceeding speakers.

Mr. Chairman, I want again to repeat, the United States wants to express our condolences in particular to our OSCE staff person in Bishkek, who has passed away as a result of coronavirus, this strikes us very much at the home of who we are and what we are doing across the OSCE region. Likewise we express our frustration and anger with respect to the terrorist attack that took place here in our home city of Vienna. It really wasn't an attack directed at us, I believe, but it is a very large international community, including staff members and people connected to us, so we are all very frustrated about it, and we think that anybody that tries this kind of activity doesn't further their political or other goals in any way shape or form to the contrary.

I do want to welcome Ambassador Žugić back to the Permanent Council. I want to thank you very much for your report on the activities of the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. We want to thank you for the efforts that you and your team have made during these challenging times, with unprecedented restrictions due to the COVID virus pandemic, in helping participating States to continue to make progress on their commitments in the *Economic and Environmental Dimension*. All of us, I think, are fighting through this pandemic, I know I certainly am, and I think we are all coming out of the other side eventually.

In particular, Ambassador Žugić, we applaud your team's efforts, made in close cooperation with the Albanian Chairmanship, to proceed with the planning and implementation of key events over the past several months. I commend the Second Committee's ability to continue its work in an uninterrupted manner this year.

Substantively, they have provided us with a needed and deeper understanding of anti-corruption work, the sustainable use of natural resources and efforts to combat wildlife trafficking, and disaster risk issues and the important roles that they are playing in regional security and stability. It is the Second Dimension that highlights these particular areas of our combined security. But the effort that has gone into all these events, including the collective expertise, should result in tangible outcomes in the Second Committee.

The *Economic and Environmental Dimension* is an essential component of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The Second Committee is therefore not simply a place to build

bridges or avoid contentious discussions that might be uncomfortable. Preventing and combating corruption—including when linked to organized crime, malign foreign influence, or the illegal exploitation of natural resources—is critical to effectively promoting good governance and the rule of law, sustainable market-based economic growth rooted in trust, and ultimately, integration based on shared values and rules. These all support greater stability, security, and prosperity in the OSCE area. Moreover, economic opportunities help to ensure people are less susceptible to radicalization and criminality. Economic development helps people to resist radicalisation and criminality; those things can destabilize countries and the wider region. Building cooperation and trust in the Second Committee is not incompatible with deliberately and thoughtfully engaging on these topics. We welcome serious discussions and encourage other participating States to welcome it as well.

For example, in the Second Committee the United States has cited our concern regarding the malign activity of actors across a range of issues that directly undermine security and stability in the OSCE area, and the shared values that ground them. The People's Republic of China has engaged in concerning behavior from its corrupt and predatory financing practices for its *One Belt, One Road* initiative, to the long-term threat it poses to data privacy which erodes internationally accepted digital trust principles, to its role as the world's largest consumer of illegal wildlife and timber products, to its ongoing targeting and abuse of members of ethnic minority groups such as Uyghurs in forced labor camps. It is almost impossible to believe that in the modern age, this kind of behaviour goes on, but it is the conflict that we face and that the final act and the OSCE Helsinki principles stand for. Given the scope and impact of these interrelated challenges, we should discuss forthrightly their clear consequences for the Second Dimension.

We noted with interest the emphasis in your report on applying the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic and using digital tools and remote or blended activities to support the ongoing work of the Second Committee. Given that the pandemic will likely impact operations for the foreseeable future, it is important these steps maintain existing momentum while supporting creative approaches until restrictions are eased. We applaud your office's continuing engagement with other organizations, including with the OECD, *Financial Action Task Force*, and UN *Economic Commission for Europe*. We also support the ongoing work to enhance your offices' online presence and activities, including the numerous webinars that you have convened and which your report discusses.

Finally, we urge you to continue to consider ways to emphasize the tangible results of your work, particularly with participating States regarding measurable outcomes as well as with the general public by effectively communicating the success stories as you do.

We particularly view the ability of participating States to better track extra-budgetary projects via the new confluence platform your team is developing as an important goal, and urge you to consult broadly to ensure that this new platform incorporates the information and functionalities that are most needed. Similarly, to help participating States accurately assess their support and budget priorities, we and our capitals require timely, transparent, and consistent reporting that clearly shows the impact of those efforts.

The United States continues to believe there is untapped potential in the Second Dimension. You have our support for your work, and we thank you for today's comprehensive report.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for your leadership.

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