



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

“Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women’s economic empowerment”

**Concluding Meeting
Prague, 09-10 September 2021**

**Ambassador Vuk Žugić
Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Closing remarks

Mr. Moderator,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking all moderators, speakers and delegations for their significant contribution to the success of this meeting. Their thoughtful interventions provided considerable food for thought on how to leverage women’s potential in the post-pandemic recovery phase.

In particular, I wish to thank the Swedish Chairpersonship for the excellent cooperation with my office throughout the year and the spirit of collegiality demonstrated along the Forum cycle.

As we approach the Ministerial Council meeting in Stockholm, my office is ready to provide any support and advice that might be deemed necessary during the negotiations.

I would also like to thank our Czech friends for their traditional hospitality.

Let me now share with you a few thoughts about the discussions that took place during the last day and a half.

With its focus on women economic empowerment, this year's Forum cycle shed light on the many social and economic obstacles that women and girls still face in their quest for equal opportunities and rights.

Through the voices and experiences of our speakers, we learned that the overall picture of gender equality is far from being satisfactory. Data confirm that despite improvements in the last decades, economic growth and prosperity was unevenly distributed already before the outbreak of COVID-19.

The economic crisis triggered by the pandemic has worked as a magnifying glass, fostering socioeconomic disparities and slowing down development everywhere in the world, including in the OSCE region. The long-term security implications of this situation are self-evident.

However, crisis such as the current one present opportunities to build more sustainable, resilient and inclusive economic systems, where the benefits of economic growth are enjoyed widely and fairly.

To do so, it is critically important to involve women in the design and implementation of measures aimed at boosting growth and development in this post-pandemic recovery phase. They include gender-responsive policies that ensure a level-playing field for women and improve their social and economic rights, in particular access to education, financial services and technology.

In this context, participating States must further build their national capacities for collecting and compiling gender-disaggregated data. Only evidence-based analysis can inform sound decision-making and help policy-makers assess the impact of gender policies and introduce corrective measures if and when necessary.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,**

Devoting greater attention to women's voices and needs mirrors the very nature of the OSCE, particularly its tireless work to bridge divides since its very establishment. Bridging the digital divide between men and women and the existing gap in career opportunities can be the new frontier in the OSCE's effort to promote security and stability.

We do not start from scratch. The OSCE already has a number of commitments, which include the 2004 Gender Equality Action Plan and the Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision. Both documents can support a greater role of women throughout the OSCE multidimensional security approach.

Furthermore, the OSCE Maastricht Strategy and other Ministerial Council Decision adopted in recent years make specific references to improving the business and investment climate towards greater socioeconomic participation of women and youth, as crucial agents of economic growth, stability and sustainable development. In Stockholm, we have an opportunity to build upon these commitments and adopt new ones that leverage women's economic potential for sustainable growth and development.

Colleagues, over the last two days the climate change topic has featured prominently in our discussions. We have heard many participating States and experts approaching it from various perspectives, which is yet another sign of how complex and multifaceted this topic is. The recent IPCC report reveals that there is no place on Earth that will be unaffected by climate change. In the OSCE region, we are already witnessing several pressing climate-induced challenges ranging from wildfires to floods, heatwaves to droughts, and others, which not only impact our economies, environment, and societies but also threaten our security and stability. Our action is needed now more than ever.

The OSCE can provide a significant contribution to climate action by providing a platform for dialogue, co-operation and sharing of good practices and lessons learned on a wide range of issues including technology, innovation, and digitalization for strengthening climate resilience, sustainable growth and prosperity, especially in a post-COVID era. The OSCE can also support collective action for prevention and preparedness, for mitigation and adaptation.

The 2007 Madrid Declaration emphasized the “complementary role” of the OSCE in addressing the climate change challenge in its region. I believe, time is ripe to unfold and further strengthen this role. Most importantly, we need to build on the positive spirit of co-operation and partnerships among participating States, among stakeholders, among sectors and among international partners in line with the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the Swedish Chair, all participants, conference services and all our interpreters for having facilitated our proceedings.

I thank you for your attention.