



## EUROPEAN UNION

# OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 1<sup>st</sup> Preparatory Meeting Vienna, 22-23 January 2018

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## EU Opening Statement

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The European Union and its member States are pleased to participate in the first preparatory meeting of the 26th Economic and Environmental Forum, and would like to thank the Italian Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his staff for organising this meeting. We also thank the speakers for their introductory remarks.

The topic of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum – Promoting economic progress and security in the OSCE area through innovation, human capital development, and good public and corporate governance – provides a good opportunity to continue and deepen our work on important topics such as good governance, connectivity and economic participation while also including new areas. Particularly combatting corruption remains a priority for the EU and we welcome the decision by the Italian chairmanship to appoint a special representative on this topic.

We are confident that our work this year will bring us forward in implementing inter alia the recent Ministerial Council decisions on Promoting Economic Participation and on Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connectivity.

In our meeting today and tomorrow we will discuss various aspects of "digital economy". The digitalisation of the economy is an important phenomenon that transforms the way economies function and interact with each other. Emerging digital technologies such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and Big Data, will lead to further disruptive innovation, and create new opportunities and

challenges that can also have different kinds of security implications. Digitalisation also bears high potential for improving connectivity.

In the EU the creation of a "Digital Single Market" is one of the key priorities on the political agenda. A Digital Single Market is one in which individuals and businesses can seamlessly and securely access and exercise online activities under conditions of fair competition with and a high level of consumer and personal data protection. It offers opportunities for start-ups and existing companies in a market of over 500 million people. Also citizens can benefit from improved access to information and improve their job opportunities. Promoting the necessary digital skills is key in this regard.

We believe that digitalisation can and should also play a role in making our economies greener and more sustainable. We, therefore, welcome that a session on this topic is included in the agenda. Furthermore, we are particularly looking forward to hearing how digitalisation can contribute to enhancing good governance, transparency and the fight against corruption.

In conclusion, we are looking forward to fruitful discussions in the coming days and stand ready to engage constructively on the topics selected by the Italian chairmanship.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.