

28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by
preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased
transparency and digitalization

Closing Meeting

Welcoming Remarks

Prague, 10 September 2020

*Minister Petříček,
Acting Minister Cakaj,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,*

Allow me to join Minister Petříček and Acting Minister Cakaj in welcoming you to Prague for this Concluding Meeting of the 28th Economic and Environmental Forum.

Let me thank the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs for hosting us. I would also like to express my appreciation to Ambassador Hasani and his Chairmanship team, as well as the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague, for ensuring that even under these extraordinary times we can focus on important economic and environmental issues. To give credit where credit is due, on the Secretariat side, my dear colleague Ambassador Zugic and colleagues in the OCEEA as well as our able ICT-colleagues are making this annual meeting possible, this year in a blended format. Personally, I am happy that it is providing me the chance to visit Prague again.

This year, discussions in the preparatory meetings of this Forum have further strengthened our understanding of how innovation, transparency and digitalization can help us to address corruption and improve governance and economic development. We assessed associated risks and explored promising opportunities.

On the one hand, digital tools and new innovative approaches are improving the efficiency, responsiveness and transparency of public service delivery.

On the other, criminals have been quick to adopt digital tools to syphon off public funds and conceal corruption and related money-laundering activities.

In the meantime, the overall challenge that corruption poses to our shared security continues to grow. In particular, corruption could seriously undermine the ability of some countries to re-emerge from the COVID-19 induced economic crisis. So there is added urgency in stepping up our fight against this pervasive and damaging phenomenon, and in strengthening the resilience of our economies.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE's extensive track-record of supporting participating States in their anti-corruption efforts covers advice at strategic policy levels as well as grassroots advocacy support. Our activities in this area stretch across a wide spectrum of topics, from anti-money laundering to enhancing the business climate and empowering women to act as agents for positive change.

In recent years, OSCE meetings, not just in Vienna but also regionally in Almaty or Skopje, have assessed the potential of digital technologies for enhancing transparency and reducing corruption risks. OSCE capacity-building projects on issues such as the use of open data, and in support of open government initiatives have involved many relevant stakeholders from government, civil society, businesses and academia.

These activities have reached considerable depth and notably, are having an impact. They have also afforded us great opportunities to build synergies with other international and regional organizations.

In the process, we have also become more sensitive to the digital divide that exists in many of our societies, and the impact that this may have on the effectiveness and sustainability of our programming.

Indeed, corruption is not gender blind and effective anti-corruption measures must take into account the fact that corruption impacts women and men differently. Unequal access to resources, including digital solutions, all too often puts women at a disadvantage and should be offset wherever possible.

On the positive side, we have also realized that technological innovation offers a good opening to engage with youth as part of our broader efforts toward greater inclusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to say that the Albanian Chair's initiative to hold first discussions on two specific Second Dimension deliverables starting today is most welcome.

A Ministerial Council Decision on "*Preventing and Combatting Corruption through Digitalization and Increased Transparency*" could provide a welcome mandate update for what has become a flagship area of OSCE engagement. Digitalization holds great potential that we should use to enhance the quality of governance and to address corruption as a central challenge to our security, especially in the context of the current pandemic.

Similarly, a Ministerial Council Decision on "*Protection of the Environment and the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources*" would be an important step towards fostering better governance and transparency in the environmental sphere. New digital solutions have an important role to play in improving access to information and in strengthening the public monitoring of environmental risks. In this, the OSCE can build on extensive work with managing transboundary resources and supporting Aarhus centres throughout the OSCE area.

Dear colleagues,

The impact of technology on security is a discussion that is worth promoting across the OSCE's comprehensive agenda. We can only benefit from being proactive in addressing challenges and opportunities related to this area.

This year's Forum discussions, and the upcoming consultations on concrete deliverables for the upcoming Ministerial in Tirana, are tangible proof of our joint resolve to uphold and strengthen the OSCE's relevance in the digital era.

Leveraging the power of innovation can be a great resource for enhancing security, stability and prosperity for us all.

Thank you.