



## United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 11, 2021

The United States welcomes Coordinator Žugić for his final appearance at the Permanent Council.

We support the work of the OSCE in the Second Dimension and believe there is untapped potential to contribute to security, stability, and prosperity in the OSCE area. We applaud the Swedish Chair-in-Office initiative to discuss Women’s Economic Empowerment at the First Preparatory Meeting of the *Economic and Environmental Forum* last month, and climate and security at the first thematic meeting of the *Economic and Environmental Committee* that took place yesterday.

The presentations by the numerous experts in these sessions, and the resulting substantive dialogues—ably supported by OCEEA staff—exemplified how exchange of best practices and public policy successes can aid our implementation of commitments in the Second Dimension.

The EEF, for example, included a broad range of panel presentations and speakers over two days which delved deeply into policy approaches and challenges to Women’s Economic Empowerment—such as the importance of entrepreneurship, the lack of access to finance, the marginalization of women in the labor market, and the need to chart a path for women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) careers. We look forward to the Second Preparatory EEF meeting in June, and hope conditions will permit us to convene in person in Stockholm.

The Biden-Harris administration placed climate at the center of U.S. foreign and National Security policy. We are engaging partners on this issue bilaterally and in multilateral fora such as the OSCE. One of the main outcomes of yesterday’s EEC meeting was a sharpened understanding of the real and potential impact of climate change on security in the OSCE region. That discussion underscores what we all know to be true, that work on environmental issues should be an urgent focus of the work of the Second Committee in 2021. We are pleased that the United States was able to offer a speaker, Senior Advisor on Climate Policy at the U.S. Department of State, Stephanie Epner, to participate as a panelist. We were also pleased to join a *Group of Friends of the Environment* statement to demonstrate our shared commitment to identify and address climate-related security challenges. We look forward to our upcoming thematic meetings, notably the session in April on the importance of biodiversity and security and in October on good environmental governance.

Much work remains ahead of us as we identify specific areas where the OSCE can contribute to meeting the many environmental threats to our planet. We believe participating States must take this opportunity to demonstrate leadership and take tangible actions to address security risks stemming from climate change and environmental degradation. We continue to believe the OSCE is an appropriate forum to examine and address the nexus between trafficking in wildlife, timber, and other natural resources, corruption, and transnational organized crime. We must also recognize that

preventing future outbreaks with pandemic potential requires addressing the fundamental drivers of zoonotic disease emergence: human contact with high-risk wildlife through encroachment in wildlife habitat, markets, and wildlife trafficking. Almost eight years after the most recent Ministerial Council decision on the environment, the relationship between the environment and our collective security is more obvious than ever. We need to act.

Coordinator Žugić, your report underscores the wide range of activities the OCEEA conducts across OSCE space as well as the effect of the pandemic restrictions on these activities. We appreciate the breadth of work by your team to reinforce our collective commitments *via* extrabudgetary projects to combat corruption, enhance trans-boundary water management and energy security, among other topics. As one of the OSCE's major donors, the United States welcomes strong project proposals in key Second Dimension areas.

We welcome new opportunities and collaborative efforts to identify and to implement projects that advance our shared values on both economic and environmental issues. We encourage your outreach not only to governments, but also to the private sector and civil society, which have much to contribute to our Second Dimension efforts across the OSCE region. We also encourage greater efforts to strengthen the accountability and efficacy of OCEEA's programmatic work through robust monitoring and evaluation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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