

**30TH OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM
CONCLUDING MEETING**

Prague, 8 – 9 September 2022

Welcome speech of H. E. Mr. Jan Lipavský

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you all at the Concluding Meeting of the anniversary 30th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague. I am especially delighted to welcome the OSCE Chairperson in Office my Polish counterpart Minister Zbigniew Rau and the OSCE Secretary General Ms. Helga Maria Schmid.

The main theme of today's Economic and Environmental Forum, which is "Promoting security and stability in the OSCE area through sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic", was approved by the OSCE Permanent Council already at the end of 2021. At that time, economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be a key issue across the OSCE region. We also expected this year's EEF to be mainly marked by the celebration of its 30th anniversary.

The theme of reconstruction after the COVID-19 pandemic is of course still relevant. Not to mention the fact that, at the moment, it is by no means certain that the COVID-19 pandemic is just a chapter in history. In addition, especially for us in the Czech Republic, where the Economic and Environmental Forum is traditionally held, its 30th anniversary is undoubtedly worth a proper commemoration. It is for us a great honour that the OSCE or more precisely its predecessor the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, chose Prague as the venue for its Economic Forum on the initiative of my esteemed predecessor Mr. Jiří Dientsbier, the first Czechoslovak Foreign Minister after the return of freedom to our country in 1989.

However, on 24 February 2022, Russia launched a premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified and extremely brutal war of aggression against Ukraine and its people. We would now certainly prefer to debate only the most appropriate policies for reconstructing our economies, so badly hit by the COVID-19 epidemic, and celebrate the landmark anniversary of the EEF.

Yet the Russian war against Ukraine deeply affects also our efforts in the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. It has devastating consequences for Ukraine and it has severe effects on all of us. Indiscriminate attacks by Russia's forces on civilian infrastructure inflict tragic human losses. They also cause huge environmental damage and hamper economic recovery in Ukraine and beyond. Russia's war of aggression has led to global economic repercussions in the form of food insecurity, increase of energy prices and even imminent risk of extensive nuclear catastrophe.

This unprecedented breach of international law and even the most fundamental OSCE principles and commitments clearly challenges the international rules-based order, which is an unconditional prerequisite for any meaningful joint international effort in the field of economy and environment. I regret to say that even today in Prague, we cannot continue with business as usual as long as the brutal war goes on in Ukraine; all of the damage that Ukraine has suffered will eventually have to be addressed also via the OSCE's 2nd dimension programmes.

Even as the very foundations of our cooperation within the OSCE are being shaken, we have to bear in mind that the OSCE comprehensive approach to security, which encompasses all three dimensions, remains valid and must be bolstered. On this occasion, I also need to stress that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) remains an important platform for human rights dialogue involving also civil society and NGOs. We are deeply disappointed that yet again no consensus was found on holding HDIM. The Czech Republic has been a staunch supporter of the OSCE human dimension and has contributed to various extra-budgetary projects of the OSCE Autonomous Institutions. These Institutions – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Representative on Freedom of the Media and High Commissioner on National Minorities – are indispensable partners. We support their independence, impartiality and efficiency. Their added value is, *inter alia*, the fact that they can cooperate with any country independently of the OSCE field presence there.

No one can remain indifferent to the brutal effects of Russian aggression against Ukraine. The role of the OSCE must continue to be to draw attention also to gross violations of human rights, international humanitarian law and the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The activation of the Moscow Mechanism proved to be an effective mechanism in this regard. We remain extremely concerned with the worsening situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol of Ukraine by the Russian Federation as well as other occupied territories in Ukraine. Russia's

actions, with the Belarusian regime's complicity, must stop now. Moreover, those responsible must and will be held accountable.

Likewise, we remain deeply concerned about the ongoing human rights abuses in Belarus. Therefore, we strongly support active involvement of the OSCE in this country.

In my speech today, for understandable reasons, I focused particularly on Ukraine.

Although, fortunately, not as dramatically as in Ukraine, security challenges also affect other parts of the OSCE area. The South-Eastern Europe region is very important for the Czech Republic in this respect. The OSCE is engaged in this region, *inter alia*, in the area of climate change and security, and the Czech Republic, through my ministry, is proud to support these OSCE activities financially.

In this connection, let me invite you to our side event that will take place today at 1.45 pm during the lunch break here in the Great Hall on the topic of "Security Implications of Climate Change in South-Eastern Europe". We have prepared this event in cooperation with the OSCE Group of Friends on the Environment in the wake of the adoption of the 2021 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on challenges caused by climate change, on the occasion of the current Czech EU Presidency and last but not least the 30th anniversary of the EEF in Prague. You are most welcome to enjoy your coffee while participating in the side event (from 1:45 pm here in this hall).

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to the 2022 Polish OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat for organising this event. I wish you an inspiring debate over the next two days.

Thank you.