

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

Venue: via Zoom

Second Preparatory Meeting

Welcoming Remarks

Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Vienna, 15 June 2020

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Good Morning and welcome to this Second Preparatory Meeting. Thank you for joining us today.

I would like to extend a special welcome to **Mr. Li Yong**, Director General of UNIDO, and **Professor Paola Severino**, our Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Corruption. Thank you for delivering keynote speeches in this opening session.

I also thank **Ambassadors Hasani and Zugic** and their teams for organizing this meeting, and our **ICT-colleagues** for their technical support. This virtual meeting is owed to circumstances but chimes well with digitalization as one of the central themes of the Forum process this year.

Dear colleagues,

The COVID pandemic is adding another layer to our discussions on anti-corruption and the role of innovation, transparency and digitalization.

It also adds further urgency to our discussions on ways to counter the pervasive and damaging effect of corruption on our economies and our societies.

For all we know, corruption has already hampered government crisis response to protect public health and economic well-being. And in recent weeks, there have been ample warnings about the likely corrosive effect of corruption on the post-COVID recovery.

Crisis watchers are convinced that tackling corruption will be a critical element in the ability of many countries to re-emerge from the crisis. As unprecedented amounts of public funds are pumped into the economy, the corruption challenge is set to grow. So should our resolve to fight it.

Dear colleagues,

COVID-19 is responsible for the tragic loss of countless human lives and its repercussions are truly devastating. But amidst the gloom there are positive aspects, too. The pandemic has been credited with speeding up the pace of digitalisation – not least by changing mind-sets about applying digital tools to our work and daily lives. In the context of our anti-corruption efforts, this change of gear could become the silver lining of the COVID crisis.

E-government and open data platforms offer great potential for enhancing transparency and accountability. This is the moment to promote their use as critical tools to improve the economic outlook and secure sustainable economic recovery.

Over the last decade, many governments in the OSCE region have launched e-government initiatives to enhance the efficiency and transparency of public administration and improve their interaction with citizens and investors.

New technologies to ease access to public information, to monitor the efficiency and integrity of government services and to make financial information more transparent, can bolster good governance and enhance public sector integrity. Their use can also significantly enhance a country's attractiveness for foreign investments – a vital factor for powering the economic recovery in many of our countries.

Together with other international organizations, we have been encouraging the use of digital tools for these purposes. One example is the OCEEA's work in Ukraine to improve the quality of municipal governance through digital platforms.

Dear colleagues,

When fighting corruption through digital means, we must be mindful of the digital divide that separates the sexes in many of our societies and restricts the full participation of women in economic, public and political life. We should ensure that our programming finds ways to offset this disadvantage wherever possible.

We should also consider the role of youth. Their openness towards innovation and natural familiarity with digital tools can be an important asset. Ensuring their inclusion in our activities will benefit the sustainability of our work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In assessing the likely impact of the COVID pandemic, domestic and international regulators have sounded the alarm about growing vulnerabilities in the financial system in light of the emergency funds dispersed by governments. These weaknesses create profit opportunities for organised crime and strong incentives for us to step up OSCE engagement in support of prevention and stronger law enforcement measures.

We will support participating States in building capacity to enhance risk-based mitigating measures in combatting money laundering. And we will continue our involvement in relevant areas such as combating terrorist financing as well as promoting measures to recover assets resulting from the proceeds of crime.

In closing, I want to commend the OCEEA for its pro-active approach towards assessing the economic and environmental impact of COVID-19, not least through its webinar series launched a few weeks ago. If you have not done so already, I encourage all of you to take part in these stimulating and interactive conversations.

We may not have fully realised COVID's effect on our personal lives yet, but its impact on comprehensive security could be severe if we fail to react early on and make full use of the tools at our disposal.

Thank you for being with us today. I wish you the best of success in discussing these critical issues.