



EUROPEAN UNION

Concluding Meeting of the 31st OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 12-13 September 2024, Prague

EU Opening Statement

1. The European Union and its Member States are pleased to participate in the concluding meeting of the 31st Economic and Environmental Forum. We thank the Maltese Chairpersonship, as well as the OSCE Coordinator of Economic Activities and his team, for organising this meeting. We would also like to thank Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre and Deputy Head of the OSCE Secretariat Catherine Fearon, Minister Lipavský and Permanent Secretary Cutajar for their opening remarks, which gave us a glimpse of the topics which we will address over the next two days.
2. We welcome the adoption of the PC decision on the 31st Economic and Environmental Forum. We reiterate the importance of mandated events taking place across all three dimensions, and regret that some participating States systematically have blocked PC decisions on other mandated events, including the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.
3. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law remain among the EU's core values, including in our green and digital diplomacy. The EU underlines the importance of enhancing the voice and full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and young people in decision making at all levels to improve climate, energy, environment and water policies, as well as to contribute to discussions on the rapidly changing digital landscape. The EU also stresses

the importance of ensuring inclusive multi-stakeholder participation, including of civil society.

4. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and waste will continue to impact global security in the coming years, including by increasing the risk of conflict. In this regard, we welcome the sessions which highlight security risks related to climate change, critical energy infrastructure, and water management. Furthermore, we welcome the consideration of digital and technological innovations, which we consider essential for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness, and consequently, stability and well-being in our societies. Efforts to develop co-operation in the fields of trade, industry, science and technology, the environment and other areas of economic activity also contribute to the reinforcement of peace and security in Europe.
5. Urgent action is needed. The EU and its Member States remain committed to addressing global food security, which is threatened by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including through the "Grain from Ukraine" programme and EU-Ukraine "Solidarity Lanes".
6. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Minister of Environmental Protection Svitlana Hrynychuk for sharing her assessment of the situation in Ukraine, inflicted by Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia's war of aggression has had a profound environmental and economic impact in Ukraine and beyond in the OSCE region, including in the Black Sea. Intentional targeting of civilians and critical civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, including agriculture and energy facilities, and port infrastructure, blatantly violates fundamental provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This has not only devastated local ecosystems but also disrupted regional and global supply chains, exacerbating economic instability and food insecurity. OSCE should continue providing support to Ukrainian citizens and authorities in order to minimise economic and environmental threats to security, in coordination with other international partners.

7. We underline the need to assess the damage and are committed to addressing it in the context of Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. Russia and its leadership must and will be held accountable for all the crimes committed and the massive destruction caused by its war of aggression. In this regard, we welcome today's Side Event which highlights the Assessment of Environment of the War against Ukraine ExB Project. We look forward to productive discussions in the coming days.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.