



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement at the 28th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 2nd Preparatory Meeting

As delivered by Dustin DeGrande, Political Officer
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Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the organizers and the speakers.

Based on our discussions at the First Preparatory Meeting in February and the Second Preparatory Meeting this week, the United States sees at least two possible areas for further elaboration at the EEF Concluding Meeting in Prague in September. We hope the Chairmanship will explore these ideas more thoroughly, possibly even as Ministerial Council decisions later in the year.

First, much in the world has changed since our last OSCE commitment exclusively on the topic of corruption, the 2014 Basel Ministerial Council Decision on the Prevention of Corruption. Basel described the dangers of corruption, made the explicit link between corruption and organized crime, and reminded participating States that are parties to the UN Convention against Corruption of their commitments under the Convention. This nexus poses a critical threat to security in many parts of the OSCE region and demands our urgent attention.

Since Basel, digitalization has increasingly offered participating States tools to raise awareness of, prevent, identify, investigate, and prosecute these crimes. Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic has shown that corruption and organized crime can disrupt supply chains, discredit public institutions, and damage health care systems – just as the world needs them the most. The Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) in April published guidelines on preventing these disruptions that could be a valuable basis of discussion in our future meetings. The adoption of international standards for infrastructure, investment, digital technologies, and other sectors can secure supply chains, attract private investment, and build resilience to future economic shocks.

Second, in the same way that Basel offered participating States a starting point to update the OSCE’s anti-corruption commitments, so too did multiple OSCE commitments give us a springboard to clarify the OSCE’s role and confirm its relevance on another critical and growing threat: trafficking in natural resources, especially wildlife and timber. These issues affect us all. A Ministerial Council decision on the nexus between corruption, organized crime, and trafficking in natural resources would greatly help guide our work, ensure the

OSCE's activities complement the efforts of other international entities in this area, and make a valuable contribution to environmental protection – which is overdue.

The United States is not immune to these challenges, and protected species in the U.S. may be poached for medicinal use, shot illegally for sport, or trafficked for the exotic pet trade. The Department of Justice has launched cases against auction houses involved in organized trafficking. Just weeks ago, the New York Times and Deutsche Welle reported on voracious Chinese demand for trafficked wildlife, criminal groups in Russia “ravaging” vast Siberian forests, and the facilitating role of official corruption. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that in Kazakhstan, the saiga antelope is critically endangered due to trafficking for medicinal remedies. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and international NGO “TRAFFIC” report that wildlife trafficking has become one of the largest transnational organized criminal activities. Europe is both an end point for illegal wildlife and a major transit point between Africa and Asia. The illicit market includes live animals, ornamental plants, timber, food, leather, ivory, curios, and wild plant-based medicines. And, of course, the pandemic we all now face may have zoonotic disease origins associated with wildlife wet markets and trafficked pangolins.

We have been hearing in our meetings for at least three years that these crimes are low-risk, high-profit, and growing exponentially. The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The World Economic Forum estimates that the illegal wildlife trade is worth up to \$23 billion dollars annually, which points to how the levels of exploitation, habitat loss, and other factors related to poor governance are depleting wildlife populations. The UN, INTERPOL, and others have the lead in these issues, but OSCE has an important complementary role to play. Now is the time to clarify this role and explore how we can use the OSCE to make concrete progress on these critical issues.

The United States looks forward to exploring these topics over the coming months and converging on consensus ideas that will strengthen security across the region.

Thank you.