



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Closing Statement – Concluding Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> Economic and Environmental Forum**

As delivered by Darren Perdue  
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Prague, Czech Republic  
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Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Good morning, fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests. On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairperson and the German delegation; Dr. Yigitguden, Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, and his staff; and Jan Plešinger and the OSCE Document Center in Prague for the tremendous work organizing this week's events.

Let me also express appreciation to all of our expert panelists and speakers, whose remarks and presentations sparked a number of interesting discussions and questions. The moderators were particularly effective in keeping the debates lively and focused, resulting in a more energized Forum. We also appreciate the contributions from NGOs, academia, international organizations, and, of course, the business sector.

The importance of good governance was repeatedly emphasized during the Forum this week. As expert speakers and panelists noted in several sessions, good governance has a profound effect on the business climate and sustainable economic development; the fight against corruption, money laundering, and terrorism finance; environmental issues and green energy solutions; trade facilitation; the prevention of labor exploitation in supply chains; and the integration of migrants, including into our labor markets. As the very foundation of effective government, good governance and the fight against corruption continue to be priorities for the United States, and we support the OSCE's continued focus on them.

As Special Representative Dr. Erlar discussed in his keynote speech, there is broad agreement that greater weight should be given to economic issues in the OSCE as a means to build trust and create momentum for political solutions. Within this context, the concept of greater economic connectivity was discussed as having the potential to reduce tensions and improve stability within the OSCE region. The United States agrees with this concept, and is, in fact, working to strengthen connectivity in the Caucasus and Central Asia through regional efforts such as the New Silk Road initiative and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program. Having said that, it is clear that sufficient political will must exist before economic connectivity can play its part in building trust and restoring security. Without sufficient political will, connectivity remains mostly a theoretical concept.

During this week's Forum, there have been calls for participating States to avoid creating new divisions or dividing lines in the OSCE by imposing or maintaining economic sanctions. The argument was put forth that sanctions run contrary to the concept of improved security and stability through greater economic connectivity. Mr. Chair, let me be clear. No one wants sanctions, including the United States. All of us should regret that sanctions are still necessary. And we agree that closer economic ties and connectivity among states can contribute to improved security and stability. In fact, this is a fundamental principle of the OSCE and the Helsinki Final Act. This is why we should not kid ourselves about who is responsible for creating dividing lines in the OSCE. Through its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, and its aggression in eastern Ukraine, Russia has made the choice to create new divisions by clearly violating its international obligations and contravening its OSCE commitments, demonstrating Russia's disregard for the principles that undergird not only this Organization, but European security itself.

Mr. Chair, since my distinguished Russian colleague raised the issue of sanctions in this Forum, I would like to clearly state the position of the United States. Sanctions are not anti-Russian. Rather, they are meant to encourage Russia to abide by its obligation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors. Sanctions imposed against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain in place until Russia fully implements the commitments it made in the Minsk agreements, including the withdrawal of foreign forces and equipment, and the return to Ukraine of full control over its international border. Our separate Crimea-related sanctions related to Moscow's occupation of Crimea will also remain in force until the occupation ends and Russia returns control over the peninsula to Ukraine. Attempting to link a discussion of ending sanctions with the OSCE's Second Dimension will not succeed.

It is misguided to suggest that progress in the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension, including toward consensus on new decisions at the Ministerial Council in Hamburg, cannot be made as long as sanctions are in place. There is important work to be done in the Second Dimension, and broad support exists for ministerial texts on a number of issues, as discussed in the German Chairmanship's Food for Thought Paper. As noted by Special Representative Dr. Erler earlier this week and today by you, Mr. Chair, statements made on behalf of the majority of delegations during the session on The Way to Hamburg demonstrated this support, and we should seize the opportunity. In that spirit, Mr. Chair, we should not allow any participating State to hold our common progress hostage by trying to tie sanctions to the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension.

As we look toward the Ministerial Council in Hamburg, the United States promises to be an energetic, committed, and constructive partner with the Chair and those delegations that wish to advance OSCE efforts related to economic and environmental issues. We also appreciate Ambassador Raunig, Head of the Task Force for Austria's 2017 Chairmanship, sharing Austria's priorities today. Thank you, Ambassador. We look forward to working closely with you.

In closing, we again thank the German Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities for your dedication and commitment to organizing this week's activities. Thank you to all of the impressive panelists, delegates, and OSCE field missions for sharing your insights. And thanks once again to the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic for so graciously hosting our Forum again this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.