



Statement

by

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at

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure today to address this Concluding Meeting of the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. I thank Ambassador Žugić for the kind invitation to join you today.

In recent years, I have had the privilege to work closely with OSCE in my capacity as Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the international organizations in Vienna. I am very happy to continue these professional links in my new position as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

UNECE and OSCE enjoy close cooperation on a broad range of issues. Under the multi-agency Environment and Security Initiative, for example, we collaborate on water projects in transboundary river basins. We have worked together on inland transport security, including border crossing facilitation, connectivity, infrastructure development and inland navigation.

OSCE is also a key partner for advancing implementation of our Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and its Protocol, including through the remarkable support of nearly 60 Aarhus Centres in countries with economies in transition. I hope that we will be able to enhance and strengthen our cooperation even more during my tenure.

Today's theme, the green economy, is very close to us in UNECE. Green economy fosters economic progress while ensuring environmental sustainability and social equity. It needs to be at the centre of efforts made by UN Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs have been my priority since my first day at UNECE.

The norms, standards, conventions and guidelines that UNECE develops provide practical solutions to the challenge of achieving the global goals. Many of them can assist in transitioning to a green economy too. Examples include our energy efficiency standards for buildings and vehicles, our Air Convention and our work on sustainable forest management.

Green economy was one of the main themes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, which took place in Batumi, Georgia, last year. The Conference that UNECE organized endorsed the "Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy". To operationalize the Strategic Framework, Ministers launched the "Batumi Initiative on Green Economy", more simply called "the BIG-E".

The BIG-E provides an incentive for countries, organizations and other public and private stakeholders to voluntarily develop concrete actions towards a green economy. These actions deliver economic benefits with environmental and social co-benefits.

The BIG-E was developed under Swiss leadership with the involvement of experts from developed and transitioning countries, international organizations and NGOs. It covers many sectors such as housing, buildings and construction; energy; mining; manufacturing; and transport. The initiative contributes to all 17 SDGs.

As of today, 117 BIG-E commitments have been submitted by 25 countries and 13 organizations in the pan-European region. The latest stakeholder to join the initiative was the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development from Central Asia, which submitted a commitment on revising its subregional environmental action plan in the context of the SDGs and green economy.

Many of the commitments address security – energy security, for instance. Poland committed to implement a national energy advisory system to spur investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. Uzbekistan committed to enhance national legislation to develop alternative energy sources.

Also under SDG 7, on affordable and clean energy, and under SDG 13, on climate action, the Netherlands committed to shifting towards electric propulsion and alternative fuels in transport sectors. The commitment will improve air quality and resource efficiency, reduce noise pollution and increase food security and political stability.

Kazakhstan will improve waste management and water resources, agriculture, electric power and energy efficiency. The commitment will enhance Kazakhstan's national security, including water security. These are but a few of the BIG-E commitments made.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite countries or stakeholders present here today, including from the private sector, to join the BIG-E or make additional commitments. In line with the Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Strategic Framework will continue until 2030. The BIG-E will be open for commitments by stakeholders until then. Please join this unprecedented multi-stakeholder cooperation at the regional level and show leadership for greening the economy and implementing the SDGs through concrete action at national and regional levels.

UNECE and UN Environment jointly service BIG-E and more information may be found on our partner's Green Growth Knowledge Platform.

In Batumi, Ministers sent another important signal for their continued support of the green economy approach: They extended the mandate of the Green Economy and Environment Action Programme Task Force, or GREEN Action Task Force, hosted by OECD. The Task Force assists countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe and promotes the integration of environmental considerations into economic, social and political reforms.

Let me close with a few thoughts on the review of the implementation of OSCE commitments in the field of green economy to which UNECE contributed, as we did in years past.

The review provides a fresh start for future OSCE engagement in the green economy. It recommends action in four areas:

- First, a specific Ministerial Council Decision is proposed on greening economies and fostering environmental cooperation in the OSCE region with a view to integrating the topic into the broader work of OSCE.
- Second, countries need to establish institutional and policy frameworks to promote the transition to a green economy. UNECE can assist in this work in areas such as energy, transport, environment and forests. Moreover, countries can gain international recognition for their actions by declaring them also as commitments under the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy.
- Third, stronger capacities need to be built and awareness has to be raised. Most importantly, action has to be taken now. Some participating countries may wish to request assistance from OSCE and others to take those vital steps.
- Fourth, additional action is encouraged at the international level, in particular to deepen partnerships. OSCE is not alone in its commitment to green economy. I have already mentioned the work of UNECE, UN Environment and OECD. There are other important players such as the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. These organizations routinely work together in support of member States. Let us deepen this collaboration.

I particularly look forward to continuing the long-standing cooperation between UNECE and OSCE. I would like to see this excellent partnership strengthened further. Perhaps we can define it more explicitly to recognize our differing but complementary mandates and identify additional synergies. There is a lot more we can do together.

I wish you a successful Forum leading to concrete outcomes that will support sustainable development and the stability of our region. Thank you.
