



## EUROPEAN UNION

# Economic and Environmental Implementation Meeting Vienna, 13 November 2023

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## EU Opening Statement

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1. The European Union places great value on the Economic and Environmental Dimension as an integral part of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The European Union is therefore pleased to take part in the 2023 Economic and Environmental Dimension Implementation Meeting and thanks the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia and the team of the Office of the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities for the organisation of the meeting. We would also like to take the opportunity to express our appreciation for the work done by the Austrian Chair of the Economic and Environmental Committee throughout this year.
2. We warmly welcome the keynote speakers to our meeting and thank them for their valuable and insightful contributions.
3. Indeed, advancing the work in the field of environment and security is a priority for the European Union and its Member States.
4. However, we regret that some participating States systematically have blocked PC decisions on mandated events throughout all the OSCE Dimensions and that EEDIM is the only mandated event taking place this year. A selective approach is not acceptable. Mandated events should be the rule and not the exception. All participating States have an obligation to ensure that mandated events take place across all Dimensions, which is key in the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.
5. The topic chosen for this year's meeting is of crucial importance since Russia's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. The environmental consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will have long-lasting effects in Ukraine and the wider OSCE region, including in the Black Sea. We are deeply concerned about the sustained damage to farmlands, water supply and sewerage systems, the long-lasting damage to valuable ecosystems, biodiversity and marine sites,

including those affected by the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP) dam in the Kherson region of Ukraine, as well as by the increased risks to nuclear safety in Ukraine and beyond. Military equipment and toxic chemicals in water, soil and the air could persist for decades. Up to half a million hectares of Ukraine's territory are now suspected to be contaminated with mines, and it will require decades to clear this land of them and the unexploded ordnance. Russia's war of aggression is damaging Ukraine to such a profound extent that the economy, environment and health of inhabitants of Ukraine could suffer adverse consequences for years. To that end, the EU and its Member States will continue to provide long-term support to Ukraine to address the economic and environmental challenges caused by Russia's brutal war of aggression.

6. Moreover, we believe that the OSCE should continue contributing to addressing and alleviating the economic and environmental consequences of Russia's war of aggression, including through the implementation of the project "Assessment of environmental impacts of the war against Ukraine and options for remediation". Also, the OSCE can play a vital role in strengthening Ukraine's disaster risk management. We applaud all efforts within the OSCE to assist the Ukrainian authorities and citizens to minimise economic and environmental threats to security in coordination with other international partners.
7. Risks of corruption have also been exacerbated following the COVID-19 pandemic but also by the economic recovery measures, transition to green economy and food insecurity connected to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Corruption represents not only a threat to security and democracy, but may contribute to the degradation of the environment. Lack of good economic environmental governance exacerbated by corruption is an enabler of environmental crime, as well as trafficking of natural resources and wildlife. It is imperative to recognise and address these linkages.
8. Moreover, the risks of corruption and natural and man-made disasters underline the importance of swift climate change mitigation and action. Climate change is intrinsically connected with environmental degradation and extreme weather events. Climate and environmentally induced instability and resource scarcity can be and is actively instrumentalised by armed groups and organised crime networks, corrupt or authoritarian regimes, and by other parties, including through environmental crimes. The latter has already become the fourth largest and growing global crime sector further accelerating the environmental crisis including through the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.
9. The OSCE with its comprehensive approach to security provides for an ideal platform for facilitating dialogue, sharing practices and supporting co-operation among our countries on these issues. Among its commitments in

this field, the OSCE recognises the importance of enhancing co-operation in the area of environment and security in the OSCE region since environmental degradation, including natural and man-made disasters, could additionally contribute to conflicts.

10. We strongly believe that the environment and security nexus, and the fight against corruption in the sphere of environment should remain high on the agenda of our deliberations and a priority for the work of the whole OSCE.
11. The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to continue efforts to promote and advance cooperation on these issues and to advance the work of the OSCE second dimension to achieve comprehensive security. We believe that our discussions will advance our efforts of implementing our common commitments in the economic and environmental dimension, and enable the OSCE to better deliver on the environment and security nexus. We look forward to fruitful discussions.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member 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.