



EUROPEAN UNION

Concluding Meeting of the 29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Prague, 9 - 10 September 2021

EU Opening Statement

The European Union and its Member States are pleased to participate in the Concluding Meeting of the 29th Economic and Environmental Forum. This year's Forum is an opportunity to further deepen and broaden our work on the crucial topic of women's economic empowerment. There is a pressing need to advance gender equality and strengthen women's empowerment in all stages of women's life and in all spheres of our societies and economies.

Progress on women's rights is hard won but easily lost. The data from the 2021 EU Report on Gender Equality confirms that the hard-won achievements of past years have been 'rolled back' by the pandemic. Women remain underrepresented in leadership and decision making, underpaid and bare the majority of unpaid work. In the 2020 World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report*, it is estimated that it will take 99 years to close the gender gap. Due to COVID-19, the number increased by a generation to 135 years.

It is now more important than ever to intensify our efforts as gender gaps in employment, in unpaid care work and in remuneration stubbornly persist. The COVID-19 recovery should present an opportunity to change the status quo, create a just recovery and rebuild a gender equal world. It is essential to ensure that women are part of this recovery and that policy proposals in all sectors are gender responsive.

In our lasting fight against gender-inequality, the power of disaggregated data has to be deployed for evidence-based policy making and targeted actions. Similarly,

quality education remains key to empowering women, promoting their participation in STEM, combating gender-stereotypes and providing a conducive environment, free of violence and discrimination. Removing all barriers to women's leadership, including tackling all forms of discrimination, harassment and violence, should remain high on our agenda.

To harness the potential of girls and women, we must respect the choices that each woman and girl makes. We must encourage all women and girls to dare to lead, dare to live. This is also essential for our shared future, for finding solutions to pressing challenges, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, and for strengthening climate resilience, including through climate-smart technology and solutions that support the livelihoods of women. It is imperative that women's and girls' voices are heard and that women and girls, as well as men and boys, are equally part of designing sustainable and gender-responsive interventions and are beneficiaries of solutions to tackle national, regional and global challenges and their consequences.

We should not forget the essential role that a vibrant civil society, including young people, plays in advancing women's and girls' leadership, meaningful participation, gender equality and enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls. Our role is to support their independent work and ensure their inclusion in the decision making process.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Swedish Chairpersonship and the OSCE Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and his team for organising this meeting. We thank the speakers for their introductory remarks that stressed the importance of strengthening our focus and our actions in the area of women's empowerment and gender equality. We are looking forward to fruitful discussions over the next two days.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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