



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Marcin Swiecicki, Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Swiecicki for your comprehensive report. I would also like to thank the Slovenian Chairmanship for its substantive leadership in developing the theme for the 13th Economic Forum -- as we have said on previous occasions, we believe migration and integration are two of the most important issues facing OSCE states today.

I cannot fail to thank our Czech hosts for the superb setting for the Forum, the Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, and Conference services, which saw to every logistical and administrative detail.

As the Economic Sub-committee will take up discussion of substantive follow up to the Economic Forum, I'd like to take the opportunity today to focus more on the organizational and procedural aspects of this and other OSCE conferences, and in doing so to pick up on some of the remarks made by Ambassador Borodavkin last week. I want to note in advance, and especially in light of what I am going to say, that I may exceed the five minute time limit.

The OSCE has hosted three major conferences in the last four weeks: the Economic Forum, the Cordoba Conference and the ASRC. What we have noticed is that regardless of any substantive achievements we do in fact accomplish, we invariably fail to organize the meeting we initially wanted.

Almost without exception, OSCE conferences look far better on paper than they are in reality. We have no difficulty drawing excellent speakers who deliver fascinating, thought provoking addresses.

The excellent work that goes in to preparing these conferences, however, is too often to some extent undone by the way the meetings unfold.

For example, we are almost universally unwilling to enforce speaking limits, or to keep the number of keynote speakers proportionate to the length of a particular session. The opening plenary in Cordoba ran over by five hours, forcing us to squeeze subsequent sessions.

Despite our stated interest in interactive discussions in plenary and working sessions, and predictable statements of dismay when this does not occur, most delegations have been

unwilling to give up presenting pre-cooked statements that often have nothing to do with the keynote presentations. This type of "interaction," if you can call it that, is probably the main reason we have difficulty making our conferences relevant to policy makers.

As someone noted once about the Economic Forum, it's a discussion body that doesn't discuss and a decision body that doesn't decide. How, then, can we convince senior officials from our capitals that these events warrant their participation?

I want to be clear that we recognize the considerable improvements to the Economic Dimension meetings in the past several years. The Coordinator's Office has exerted great effort to develop more lively formats for working sessions, such as the highly successful panel discussion introduced this year, to improve management of the sessions, including finding moderators willing to enforce time limits, and has found a way to deftly rebuff canned statements from the floor.

These organizational improvements have done wonders to improve the substantive results of Economic Dimension meetings, as evidenced by the rich collection of ideas and suggestions contained in the summaries of this year's preparatory seminars and Economic Forum.

What frustrates my delegation and, I believe, others around this table, is that lessons learned in one part of the OSCE are not working their way into other areas of the organization. For all of the conferences and meetings that the OSCE puts on, we should be able to ensure that they meet our needs and are relevant to our policy makers. We need meetings to be result-oriented if their aim is to attract participation from capitals.

If all we are going to do is exchange prepared statements, we can do that from the comfort of our offices via the emails we receive from Conference Services.

If we are serious about having spontaneous debate and a lively exchange of views, we need to have keynote speeches well in advance, and we need to show up ready to react to these presentations and other interventions from the floor, to be disciplined about keeping our presentations short and to the point, to use interventions to make concrete proposals, and to structure the sessions so that, as happened at the ASRC on Tuesday, the speakers list does not have to be closed at 4:20 to ensure that the session ends on time at 6pm.

Mr. Chairman, my intention in raising these issues today was not to blast conference organizers but to offer some constructive criticism, based on my delegation's observations over several years. I should note too that we all bear the responsibility for conferences falling below our expectations.

But, it does not have to remain this way. The OSCE does excellent work that will get more attention if we improve the way we organize and administer our meetings and conferences. We should take this challenge upon ourselves and fix what is broken.

I would urge that we consider devoting part of a PrepComm meeting to this topic and that we invite all OSCE entities that plan and organize conferences to participate and to share best practices and lessons learned.

Before closing, and lest I leave Mr. Swiecicki with the impression that my remarks were directed at him -- they were not -- let me thank the Coordinator for his enthusiastic

stewardship of the Economic and Environmental Dimension over the past three years. The conduct of Economic Forum meetings has, in fact, improved considerably - and much of that credit is due to the Coordinator.

As we noted in Prague, under Mr. Swiecicki's leadership, the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension has expanded significantly in the scope and quality of its work, and today boasts an excellent staff in Vienna and outstanding Economic and Environmental officers in the field. Our warm thanks go to the Coordinator, and we wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.