

Role of Economic and Environmental Forum at OSCE: UK statement

The UK welcomes the opportunity to reflect on the operation of the economic and environmental forum and dimension. This dimension offers particular opportunities for dialogue and cooperation that may not be open to our colleagues working on other issues, as demonstrated by our success in recent years in achieving consensus on these topics.

Environmental confidence-building measures, such as trans-national water cooperation or forestry protection, can better protect both sides from environmental disasters, whether natural or man-made; whilst greater economic connectivity can deepen ties across States, building resilience to conflict. And of course the existential threat of climate change makes the second dimension more relevant than ever.

In 1992, in this city, OSCE Ministers agreed to strengthen the organisation's focus on the transition to, and development of, free-market economies, as an essential contribution to the building of democracy. While environmental issues were subsequently added to the OSCE's mandate, the forum's original objective of promoting better relations through regional connectivity and cooperation remains as important as ever – a fact made more obvious as one participating State now chooses economic isolation and weaponisation over collaboration and partnership.

As with the adding of environmental issues, what is important is the Forum's – and the wider dimension's – ability to respond to new challenges. For example, as climate change presents itself increasingly as a threat to regional security, so should the OCEEA shift focus to this topic. We welcome their doing so. Similarly, as the economies of the OSCE region – and especially Ukraine – are threatened, so should the OCEEA respond to this new challenge. And we welcome their proposed programme of work.

We are asked in this session to consider emerging themes. With Russia's refusal to engage with the international community we have witnessed the end of the economic cooperation necessary for economic recovery and growth. The OSCE remains a useful platform for economic cooperation, but as long as Russia rejects international norms and behaviours, isolates itself from the international community, and violates the forum's economic principles, the OSCE will not be able to reach its potential. We continue to call for Russia to live up to the commitments it has freely signed up to.

The UK believes in co-operation on these issues in a wider Europe. We have a positive experience of economic cooperation with states across the OSCE. For example, our development programme in Central Asia supports efforts on anti-corruption, innovation, the growth of small businesses, diversifying the private sector, and economic policy delivery. This work includes drawing on best practices from comparable contexts and building local capacity – exactly the sort of work the OSCE does best.

We also promote regional cooperation and connectivity in Central Asia through the CASA-1000 energy transmission project, which connecting hydropower stations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. We see the benefits of deeper economic connectivity across the region, and welcome the OCEEA's role in enhancing trade, transport and digital facilitation. Connectivity and cooperation amongst peaceful states are central to resilience – we cannot rely on those who may threaten us. We welcome the OCEEA's work on the protection of critical energy infrastructure and advancing energy security in Central Asia.

We also recognise the important role the OSCE can play in water diplomacy and water management. The work done since 2004 on the Dniester river basin has yielded strong results. As climate change exacerbates water scarcity, transboundary co-operation will only become more important.

To conclude, there is no division in the OSCE between sub regions when it comes to our ability to cooperate on economic and environmental issues. And it is in all states' self-interest to do so. However, so long as one state continues to shun the offers of cooperation and pursue a violent, unilateral campaign against a fellow OSCE participating State, it will drag the whole region down in the process. In considering the future orientation of the second dimension, we must look afresh at how we mobilise our economic and environmental tools to increase our collective resilience against such barbarity.

Thank you.