

**Second Preparatory Meeting of the 25th
OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**

*Greening the economy and building partnerships for
security in the OSCE region*

Keynote speech by H.E. Christine Muttonen (MP, Austria),
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

“The role of parliamentarians in supporting the transition to a green economy”

Astana, Kazakhstan
15 June 2017

Check against delivery.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address this meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in Astana, a city I have visited several times over the years. I have witnessed Astana grow into a booming metropolis.

Kazakhstan is an excellent location for this meeting for many reasons. In recent years it has undertaken remarkable efforts to diversify its economy and energy resources and to use its natural resources more carefully.

It has become a regional leader when it comes to capping greenhouse gas emissions in the extraction sectors. But Kazakhstan is also leading in supporting regional efforts to develop renewable sources of energy – actually right here – at Nazarbayev University.

As we saw yesterday, those new technologies are being showcased to the rest of the world. For the next three months, the Astana EXPO will visibly demonstrate that there is no fundamental conflict between economic growth and environmental protection, and that our future depends on developing a green economy that works for us all.

We need renewable sources of energy and we need a sustainable green economy if we want to ensure peace and stability.

Environmental destruction and resource scarcity are the reasons for many serious and longstanding conflicts worldwide – only think of limited water resources or fewer fertile grounds!

Climate change is threatening to trigger even worse clashes in the future. Already now we are faced with communities that suffer from disasters and consequences of climate change. Already now we are faced with families that are forced to leave their homes to seek safer grounds.

Particularly here in Central Asia, the exhaustion of reserves of fresh water has the potential to seriously affect relations between states and population groups. Climate change may also lead to collapsing animal and human food chains, destabilizing the agricultural sector. The threat to food security will be most evident, especially for the region's poor.

It is therefore one of our most challenging security tasks within the OSCE to do everything possible to prevent irreversible climate change, to foresee possible negative effects and also manage negative developments that cannot be prevented anymore.

This is why I deeply regret the Trump administration's recent decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. In response, I encourage all other OSCE participating States to reaffirm their commitments and launch new initiatives to speed up action to fight climate change.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, I assure you the full support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Nine years ago – here in Astana at its 17th Annual Session – the OSCE PA implored in its final declaration all States to sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocol, to support the Bali process and to take concrete steps to address the threat of global climate change.

We pushed participating States to commit to a global transformation through energy efficiency, energy savings and renewable energies.

We did it because we already understood: if we succeed in developing renewable energies, we can make a substantial contribution to reduce carbon emissions. And we can do this – and this is important – without compromising access to energy and hampering economic development.

Today for that same reason, we clearly see that the transition to a green economy is the key to preventing future conflicts – the key to promoting greater stability in the OSCE area.

And what's more, renewable energy and a green economy can also help us to improve the everyday lives of many citizens especially in poorer areas of the OSCE.

For example, they can eliminate the safety and health concerns of families who – for lack of alternatives – have to burn kerosene or firewood in their homes. They can ensure a stable access to electricity and heating so children live in the right conditions.

Renewable energies are particularly attractive in isolated rural areas, where they can power medical or manufacturing equipment and enable long-distance communications.

Overall, these new energies are the guarantee that all our communities are set on the track to greater prosperity.

Distinguished Delegates,

The OSCE PA will continue to use its annual declarations to urge and push the participating States towards a greener economy. But this is not where our commitment ends! Parliamentarians can do more! We have a unique role to play in promoting the transition to a green economy – within the OSCE, to our governments back home, to our industries and to our citizens.

We have the power to lift some of the barriers that have so far hampered the proper development of new energy sources. For example infrastructures and subsidies that favour the extraction of fossil fuels.

Let's be frank: still today many of our current policies inhibit sustainable development. It's a matter of fact that electricity generated from fossil fuels is still cheaper than electricity from renewable sources and the construction of green energy facilities is more expensive than traditional generators.

What we need are incentives to make green energy more affordable and parliamentarians who use their position for reforms.

We can pass laws, reform taxes and adopt budgets to shape adequate regulatory frameworks and oversee the implementation of green energy policies. We can use hearings to encourage our governments to be more ambitious and improve targets for renewable energy development.

But, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is also crucial to get the acceptance by citizens and communities. In all our countries, we have been confronted by projects which have suffered from public opposition.

Wind turbines have been decried as noisy eyesores harmful to birds.

Solar farms have been criticized for lowering the value of nearby properties.

We can reduce our population's potential opposition to these new infrastructures by informing about the advantages and benefits of green projects. At the same time we have to offer solutions for those directly affected by changes.

In order to do this, parliamentarians need a great understanding of the implications of transitioning to a green economy. And they need ideas on how to best implement the necessary policies.

Forums like the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly offer a great opportunity to meet and exchange important knowledge and inspiring ideas.

During our last Winter Meeting, our General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment held an inspiring debate on “Managing natural resources, addressing water security and combating climate change.”

This was another occasion for parliamentarians from North America, Europe, and Asia to highlight various projects in their home countries. Projects developing innovative solutions to the challenges raised by climate change.

Your excellencies,

We all need more political action to live up to our commitments.

We as parliamentarians are ready to support the transition to a green economy. Only then we can we ensure sustainable development, and greater security and stability in the OSCE area.

Thank you.
