

**Opening address by Michael Linhart, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Federal
Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria**

**First Preparatory Meeting of the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental
Forum „Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security“**

Vienna, 23-24 January 2017

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Austrian Chairmanship it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the First Preparatory Meeting of the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum which is dedicated to the topic of „Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security“.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and to the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Dr Yigitguden. Let me also thank the Co-ordinator and his able team for organizing this event.

Furthermore, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome today's keynote speakers:

- Dr Hans Jörg Schelling, the Federal Minister of Finance of the Republic of Austria, and
- Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Member of the Board and Minister of Integration and Macro-economics of the Eurasian Economic Commission.

Finally, I would like to welcome all representatives of the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, officials from ministries and government agencies, representatives of international, regional and non-governmental organizations, from

companies and business associations as well as academia and civil society – and last but not least the economic and environmental officers from our field missions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we find ourselves confronted with the most severe security crisis in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Our continent is in danger of reverting to the bloc-based thinking of the past, and divisions between East and West are increasing – not only in the political sphere, but also in the economic sphere. Under these circumstances, mutual engagement and a broad and open dialogue are crucial.

The OSCE provides us with a framework to enhance this dialogue. It is important that we use this platform to look at all aspects of security, including on the economic and environmental dimension of security. The promotion of sustainable economic and trade relations between participating States can contribute to rebuilding trust and confidence, thereby strengthening stability and security in the OSCE area.

This year's Economic and Environmental Forum carries the title „Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security“. In a bid to put equal emphasis on economic and environmental aspects, we have identified **four main topics**:

1. Reducing environmental risks;
2. Resource efficiency and renewable energy fostering energy security;
3. Business Partnerships and good governance for security;
4. Economic participation for strengthening security.

In addition, the Austrian Chairmanship attaches high importance to the broadest possible **inclusion of women** in economic and environmental decision-making processes.

Today and tomorrow our discussions will focus on **good governance, connectivity and economic participation**. Allow me to say a few words on these three issues:

Good governance will be at the core of the first thematic session today. Enhancing good governance, fighting corruption and strengthening business integrity and corporate responsibility are essential for a sound investment climate and sustainable growth. Here, the private and the public sector must join forces to prevent misconduct, tackle the various forms of corruption and labour exploitation, including in supply chains, and establish and preserve a culture of integrity and trust in doing business.

In **Session 2** we are going to look at **Connectivity**. The Austrian Chairmanship aims to build upon the successful work of Germany, Serbia and Switzerland and on the Hamburg Ministerial Council Decision on „Good Governance and Connectivity“ which provides a strong basis for our future work. Key OSCE documents, including the Astana Declaration of 2010, have called for the creation of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, with a common economic space being one important pillar.

Unfortunately, we have recently seen the opposite development – increasing economic fragmentation and new dividing lines. Therefore, the Austrian Chairmanship wants to reverse this trend by further promoting connectivity within and between OSCE participating States. This can play an important role both at regional level, where we intend to strengthen “**micro-connectivity**” in the framework of regional conflicts, and through open discussions on economic co-operation and integration across the OSCE area, in order to strengthen “**macro-connectivity**”.

Even though the OSCE is not an economic organization, it can also make important contributions in this area. Due to its convening power, the OSCE is able to gather all relevant stakeholders around one table and to address the increasing economic divisions between East and West. Closer cooperation in the field of trade, transport, customs and energy can be mutually beneficial and add value for all participating states. Therefore, the Austrian Chairmanship intends to discuss these topics in more detail at an academic conference which will be held back to back with an Ambassadorial Retreat from 15-17 May in Linz.

Our third topic, **economic participation** for strengthening security, relates to a key priority of the Austrian Chairmanship: the prevention of radicalization. Through the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE we can contribute to tackling to main root causes of radicalization: unemployment and the lack of economic prospects. Education and vocational training, local and regional investment strategies as well as enabling framework conditions for entrepreneurship can support business development and job creation. We want to discuss how OSCE participating States can strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship and foster job creation and economic growth, also in regions affected by conflicts.

This is also closely related to the **OSCE Chairmanship Business Conference** which will take place on Wednesday at the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber. The conference will provide opportunities for dialogue between companies, business associations and representatives from government institutions from all 57 OSCE participating States. We want to explore possibilities to overcome barriers to trade and investment, foster connectivity and create stronger business partnerships. We look forward to your active participation in this conference.

As you can see, our program for the Second Dimension focuses on the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. We are convinced that the Economic and Environmental Dimension can contribute substantially to our overall objective of promoting confidence and cooperation throughout the OSCE area.

Let me finish by encouraging all of you to actively contribute to our thematic sessions and working groups over the next two days. I look forward to open and constructive discussions.

Thank you very much for your attention.