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Opening address

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**Second Preparatory Meeting of the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental
Forum „Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security“
Astana, 15 June 2017**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Austrian Chairmanship it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Second 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 Mr. Roman Vassilenko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and thank him for hosting us here in the beautiful city of Astana in the margins of the Expo 2017. I would also like to welcome the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Vuk Zugic and thank him and his able team for co-organizing this event. Furthermore, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome today's keynote speakers:

- Ms. Christine Muttonen, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr. Daniele Violetti, Chief of Staff of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change

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 academia and civil society as well as from companies and business associations – and last but not least the economic and environmental officers from the Secretariat and 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. International relations have reverted to the bloc-based thinking of the past, and divisions in the OSCE area are increasing – not only in the political sphere, but also in the economic and environmental sphere. Under these circumstances, mutual engagement 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 its economic and environmental dimension. Austria is convinced that the **Second Dimension** can contribute more to our overall objective of rebuilding trust and confidence throughout the OSCE area.

Our thematic focus today and tomorrow not only corresponds with the theme of this year's Economic and Environmental Forum which carries the title "**Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security**", but it also underlines our intention to put **equal emphasis** on both pillars of the Second Dimension - economic and environmental aspects of security. At the First Preparatory Meeting in January we discussed different ways to strengthen good governance, to build economic partnerships and to increase economic participation in the OSCE area. The promotion of sustainable trade relations with the vision of a Common Economic Space between participating States can contribute to rebuilding trust and confidence, thereby strengthening stability and security in the OSCE area.

However, it is not only in the economic field, but also in the **environmental field** that the OSCE's actions are capable of making a difference: Therefore, the Second Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum will focus on environmental aspects of security.

Our meeting today and tomorrow offers an important opportunity to discuss environmental cooperation with a view to „greening the economy“. Common challenges linked to the use of natural resources can bring people to work together towards a common goal; thus, we are convinced that environmental cooperation can act as a powerful tool for preventing conflicts and building confidence between communities and societies.

The **transition to a green economy** as a key path to sustainable development calls for enhanced cooperation on a broad range of economic and environmental topics – both among and within countries. The Austrian Chairmanship firmly believes that closer cross-border cooperation in areas such as

- resource efficiency,
- energy efficiency and renewable energy and
- environmental risk reduction
- good environmental governance

can prevent or reduce tensions resulting from resource scarcity and environmental degradation.

Today and tomorrow our discussions will be held in three different sessions and three corresponding working groups.

In the first session we will discuss **Greening the economy, resource efficiency** and the model of **circular economy** which are complementary approaches to enable countries to effectively contribute to addressing environmental challenges and to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Resource Efficiency is understood as using Earth's limited resources in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the environment. It allows us to create more with less and to deliver greater value with less input. Since in a globalized world, we depend on each other in sharing our limited resources, it is imperative for us all to enhance our cooperation in this field and to use resources more efficiently, and to produce and consume more consciously. We believe that the OSCE is well-placed to address issues such as water governance and desertification, unprecedented land degradation and the loss of

arable land but also hazardous waste management, since they all have significant security implications. The sustainable management of resources - also across borders - can limit the risks of scarcity, minimize negative impacts on the environment and, as a consequence, strengthen OSCE-wide security. The involvement of the private sector is key to succeed in this endeavour as resource efficiency can be a profitable concept for the business community to apply.

The second session will focus on **renewable energy fostering energy security**. We strongly believe that alternative energy solutions and green technologies have significant economic and environmental benefits, thereby contributing to energy security as a whole. As national and international legal frameworks are essential for improving the investment climate, we would like to discuss incentive schemes and legal frameworks that increase the share of renewables in the energy mix. Clean and resource-efficient production processes, the shift to clean technologies through technology transfer and innovation as well as challenges of integrating accessible and affordable renewables into national and regional energy systems need to be addressed. Furthermore, closer cooperation in the field of energy can play an important role for rebuilding trust in the social, environmental and economic interest of all of us.

During the third session on **reducing environmental risks and strengthening good environmental governance**, we would like to address the major drivers of environmental and disaster risks that are caused by anthropogenic activity as well as by the degradation of the ecosystem. In this session, we would like to discuss the security implications of environmental risks and the measures through which they can be mitigated effectively. Sustainable public procurement, that is to say green and socially responsible purchasing by public authorities, as well as sustainable usage and management of shared natural resources are prominent examples.

Moreover, we would like to deal with establishing integrated environmental risk reduction approaches into development and climate change adaptation strategies.

Let me underline the well-known fact that environmental threats and hazards do not stop at regional barriers, national borders, or conflict lines. As a regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE has a complementary role to play in addressing these security related challenges.

It also can serve as a useful platform for the sharing of best practices also with a view to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The involvement of all stakeholders, including youth through educational activities and awareness-raising will be crucial. Lastly, it is important to note that Partnerships among the public sector, private sector and civil society are essential to make the green economy beneficial for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are huge benefits and gains to be made on numerous fronts in the transition process to a green economy. Ecosystem and resource management, renewable energy and recycling have a particularly high potential for employment growth. Economic stability will increase as resource efficiency is a way to tackle security of supply and reduce market volatility of critical resources. Switching to a low-carbon economy will help our fight against climate change. This can be done through the further development of existing technologies, such as renewable energy sources and electric vehicles and by investing in low-carbon and low-emission infrastructure.

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.