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**Speech of Ms. Maia Bitadze at the Session II: Reducing Environmental Risks and Strengthening Good Environmental Governance**

**25th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum:  
“Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security in the OSCE Region”**

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Prague, Czech Republic

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor and great pleasure to be here today on behalf of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia and participate in the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum “Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security in the OSCE Region”. I would like to once again extend my sincere appreciation to the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship and the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities for giving me the opportunity to speak at this important session addressing the most crucial issues of sustainable development such as reducing environmental risks, strengthening good environmental governance and enhancing cross-border cooperation in order to ensure peace and stability.

Let me emphasize that the Government of Georgia has set as one of its primary goals enhancing **good environmental governance** through implementing international commitments under multilateral environmental agreements, environmental requirements of EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA) and environmental dimension of SDGs. Development of a comprehensive policy and its effective implementation is essential for addressing environmental challenges to reduce environmental risks and ensure security, and thus improving human well-being.

The Government of Georgia took an initiative to contribute to the **sustainable development** and carried out active measures to adjust **SDGs** and its targets to the national goals and priorities. Georgia was one of the 22 countries that presented National Voluntary Reviews at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) last summer. Since then, the number of goals and targets identified as the national priorities has grown. This process is coordinated by the Administration of the Government of Georgia with full participation of all line Ministries and state institutions. Fulfilment of the SDGs is extremely important for the environmental ministries as most goals and targets are directly or indirectly related to the environmental issues. Therefore, during the nationalization process of SDGs, we prioritized targets that should be implemented at the very first stage. Though we are planning to follow and implement all the environmental targets in due course. In May 2017,

the Government established the SDG Coordination Council to further advance dialogue on SDGs implementation.

The UNECE Eighth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” - **Batumi Ministerial** played an important role to promote green economy development in the country. Georgia together with other UNECE countries was pleased to endorse the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy and to take **BIG-E** voluntary commitments in order to support transition to the green economy in the country and to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Georgia submitted the following 4 voluntary commitments, including a) elaboration of Green Growth Strategy of Georgia, b) development and Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development Strategy (ESD) and Action Plan of Georgia, c) development of Extended Producer Responsibility policy in Georgia, d) promoting greening SMEs and resource efficient production and consumption in Georgia. We are convinced that the ongoing process in Georgia since Batumi Ministerial, will benefit to move towards greener and more inclusive economic patterns. Georgia has officially joined the OECD Green Growth Declaration, elaborated the draft Green Growth Policy Paper and has started to develop Green Growth Strategy, which is supposed to serve as a guide for promoting the country’s economic growth while protecting the environment, creating green jobs, and encouraging social equity.

One of the most important priority directions of the Government of Georgia is a **harmonization of national legislation with EU acquis** in order to enhance good environmental governance. By signing the EU-Georgia Association Agreement Georgia has reaffirmed its strong aspiration to become a member of the European family through both gradual harmonization with the EU legislation and institutional reforms. Several steps have already been done in this direction. Along with number of important legislative changes it is worth to mention that a new Environmental Assessment Code has been adopted this year, which will significantly improve environmental governance and ensure higher degree of public participation not only in decision-making processes but also in planning process, and thus contribute to the better implementation of the national and international obligations. Moreover, a new Law on Environmental Liability is currently in the process of elaboration that implies range of responsibilities to polluters. We are deeply convinced that these developments, among others, will promote the rule of law, good environmental governance and contribute to further enhancing stability in our country. We fully realize that new obligations will require more efforts from the government not only in terms of their fulfillment but also in terms of including all stakeholder in this process along with civil society.

Let me underline that transforming the population towards sustainability requires respective knowledge and skills. **Environmental education** and awareness raising have a crucial role in this process as they are key instruments in promoting environmental sustainability and assisting in the implementation of SDGs. Our efforts in promotion of environmental education at the national and international levels is reflected in many activities. In particular,

the ESD National Strategy and Action Plan, I mentioned above, which covers all levels and forms of education and is focused on green development, among others. It is also noteworthy, that a UNEA resolution - *“Investing in human capacity for sustainable development through environmental education and training”* was adopted last year that was prepared by Georgia together with Mongolia.

In addition to the important issues discussed above, I would like to refer to the crucial **role** and significant **contribution** of **OSCE in enhancing a good governance and transboundary cooperation** in the region. It is obvious that environmental challenges cause conflict and security problems in the countries and between them which increase political uncertainty. Therefore, proper approach to the environment, such as conservation and rational use of natural resources greatly contributes to minimizing security problems. International cooperation in this process is very important. We see the OSCE and the ENVSEC Initiative as main players in supporting the countries to address environmental challenges through cooperation.

In order to promote security and stability in the South Caucasus and the OSCE region, one of the most important aspect is **environmental risk reduction** and one of the effective tools is a **transboundary cooperation**. Let me emphasize the importance of OSCE and ENVSEC Initiative for their efforts to reduce the security challenges in the region by boosting the cooperation among and between the countries. We highly appreciate the significant work already carried out by the organization, such as: development of transboundary water cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan to promote the negotiation process, implementation of the projects on fire management as well as elaboration of the National Forest Fire Management Policy of Georgia, among others.

With this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the most recent forest fire broken up in Georgia in August that caused tremendous damage to our environment. Let me use this opportunity and express our deep appreciation and gratitude to our neighbors, especially Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus for their great efforts and provided assistance in dealing with this forest fires.

Considering the significance of the issues discussed throughout the sessions of the meeting, I believe, that outcomes of this Forum will highly contribute to further strengthening regional and global cooperation, supporting good environmental governance and expanding partnership in order to ensure security, stability and sustainable development of our countries.

Thank you.