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Closing statement by

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2018 OSCE Italian Chairmanship

First Preparatory meeting of the 26th Economic and Environmental Forum on

**“Promoting economic progress and security in the OSCE area through innovation,
human capital development and good public and corporate governance”**

Vienna, 23 January 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking all those who have contributed to the success of the First Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum 2018. In particular, I would like to thank the Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Vuk Žugić, and his able team for co-organizing the meeting as well as our excellent moderators for having chaired our five thematic sessions. Furthermore, let me express my gratitude for all outstanding presentations and the constructive ideas put forward over the last two days.

This meeting proved the value of the OSCE as a platform able to bring our participating States and stakeholders together to exchange ideas and best practices

even on new topic of discussion, such as the role of digital economy as a driver of innovation, competitiveness and inclusive growth.

The discussions we had in the last two days were very encouraging. The active involvement of the participating States in all five sessions has clearly pointed out that the impact of the digital economy affects the whole OSCE area.

All speakers have stressed that while new technologies offer vast opportunities for improving the wellbeing of our societies, they are also likely to pose many challenges to the security of our countries and people. A mutual collaboration between our participating States can help us to overcome these new challenges.

The ways in which digitalization can assist us in guaranteeing the security of our participating States are many in the OSCE area. Through in-depth-discussions in all thematic sessions, we have gained new insights into how States benefit from the digital economy as well as how digitalization can help to enhance connectivity and business interaction among countries. Our speakers argued that when well designed and implemented, digital means can help dealing with significant challenges such as unemployment, low GDP growth, and corruption. Furthermore, we should not forget to mention the contribute that the digital economy can offer in achieving the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the last two days, particular attention was also given to the need of focusing on human-related aspects of the digital transformation as well as to ensure that the benefits of this transformation are shared widely.

The importance of preventing internet crimes by creating international standards and legal regulations on the use of blockchain and cryptocurrency was also underlined.

Our participating States are already doing a lot to harness the benefits of digitalization. Moreover, the presentations made by Ambassador Verba and

Ambassador Pierre von Arx with regard to their respective OSCE Field Operation highlighted that the OSCE is already playing a key role in assisting its participating States in harnessing the potential of the digital economy.

Dear Colleagues,

We should not be frightened by technological changes. On the contrary, we should join together in seeking strategies for improving our exchanges of best practices to effectively face the challenges posed by an increasingly digitalized world while taking advantage of the opportunities and potential offered by digitalization.

Our governments should take advantage of the existence of platforms of dialogue like the OSCE to allow the creation of new economic models and international standards able to transform innovations into a source of wellbeing and prosperity for the human kind.

It was highlighted by several delegations that the OSCE should play a more relevant role in the future as to these security related aspects of the digital economy. It is our responsibility to closely consider all these recommendations and integrate them in the further discussions throughout the Forum process.

I believe that the last two days helped us to build a solid basis for further discussion on our Chairmanship priorities in the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

I would like to thank all participants for their active contribution to the successful outcome of this meeting. We are looking forward to continuing our discussion during the Second Preparatory Meeting that will be held in Italy in May.

Thank you very much for your attention. We count on your support and your engagement throughout the year.