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Closing Statement by
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Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria

**Second Preparatory Meeting of the 25th OSCE Economic and Environmental
Forum „Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security“
Astana, 16 June 2017**

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Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking all those who have contributed to the success of the Second Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum 2017. Thank you, Ambassador Kairat Sarybay and your able team for hosting us here at the margins of the EXPO. Furthermore, I would like to thank the Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Ambassador Vuk Zugic, and his able staff for co-organizing the meeting. Let me also thank our three excellent moderators for chairing so professionally our three thematic sessions and the parallel working groups.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last two days, we have seen and heard a broad range of informative presentations on different possibilities to increase resource efficiency and to promote energy security through renewable energy. We also discussed potential ways to enhance good environmental governance and environmental risk reduction. Moreover, many participants clearly pointed to the organizational powers that the OSCE and its structures have when it comes to capacity building, to sharing and implementing best practices and last but not least to the huge potential that

confidence building measures offer also in the environmental field.

Let me highlight some of the **main results** of our discussions:

During the session and working group on **Enhancing Resource Efficiency and Greening the Economy**, several speakers underlined that in a globalized and interconnected world, where we depend on each other in sharing the limited natural resources on our planet, we need to use those resources more efficiently and cooperate more closely. It was emphasized that the private sector has a particularly important role to play in the context of greening the economy. There was broad consensus that the OSCE due to its convening power is an ideal platform to raise awareness about the sustainable management of natural resources and share best practices among different stakeholders including the private sector.

During the session and working group on **Contributing to Energy Security through Renewable Energy**, all speakers agreed that closer cooperation in the field of renewable energy will have positive impacts on the environment, the economy as well as the security in the OSCE region. Our discussions underlined that a diversified energy mix with renewable energy sources can help decrease import dependence, create jobs and boost economic growth thereby contributing to more stability and security in the OSCE region. It was emphasized that energy security depends on good governance, incentive schemes, a stable investment framework to attract sufficient international financing as well as strong public private partnerships. Special emphasis was put on the role of energy connectivity for rebuilding trust and confidence in the OSCE area.

During the session and working group on **Reducing Environmental Risks and Strengthening Good Environmental Governance**, all speakers agreed that as environmental risks transcend boundaries, collective prevention and response efforts across and within borders are much needed. Improving good environmental governance is essential when it comes to responding to environmental risks in a more efficient, resilient and more sustainable manner. To be successful, environmental risk reduction needs to encompass all main stakeholders including the private sector and civil society. There was broad consensus that the OSCE with its field missions as well as the Aarhus centres can play an important role with regard to education and

awareness-raising.

But disaster risk reduction is much more: we still recall the tremendous floods in South Eastern Europe in 2014 and the instantaneous reaction by the OSCE field missions in Bosnia Hercegovina and in Serbia to alleviate the catastrophe in close cooperation with the regional and local authorities.

Also in Eastern Ukraine and possibly in other conflict regions the OSCE tool box should be used and better used to identify and to help addressing imminent environmental threats such as the flooding of coal mines, hazardous waste in heavy industries and agriculture and with regard to conflict related damages to water infrastructure.

Through in-depth-discussions in all thematic sessions, we have gained valuable insights into different aspects of resource efficiency, and environmental good governance and risk reduction.

It was highlighted by several delegations that the OSCE as a platform for dialogue and exchange of best practices should play a more relevant role in the future as to these security related aspects of the environment.

The **new format with three parallel working groups** has proven again to be a successful method to stimulate lively discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The last two days helped us to build a solid basis for further discussion on our Chairmanship priorities in the Economic and Environmental Dimension. And our work will continue, with several high level events in the Second Dimension in the months to come. Let me give you a brief **overview** of the most important dates and topics.

As already mentioned, the **Concluding Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum**, will take place in Prague on **6- 8 September 2017** and will build on our substantial work over the last two days as well as the discussions during the First Preparatory Meeting, the Business Conference, the Academic Conference and the Ambassadorial Retreat in Linz.

Furthermore, I would like to mention this year's **Economic and Environmental Dimension Implementation Meeting** (EEDIM) on **16 and 17 October** in Vienna will provide another opportunity to continue our discussions on environmental cooperation.

I am confident that the Economic and Environmental Forum Process as well as the Economic and Environmental Implementation Meeting will provide us with enough "food for thought" in order to have substantial decisions in the Second Dimension at the **Ministerial Council** on **7 and 8 December** in Vienna. In this context, I would like to underline once more that the Austrian Chairmanship puts **equal emphasis on both pillars** of the Second Dimension - economic and environmental aspects of security. Therefore, the Chairmanship hopes for decisions in both pillars of the Second Dimension at the Ministerial Council in Vienna.

We are grateful for the broad support that we received already at the first ever Ambassadorial Retreat solely devoted to the Economic and Environmental Dimension in Linz regarding the Chairmanship's intention to identify aspects of environmental cooperation for of a **possible Ministerial Council Decision** .

Possible elements could include:

- closer cooperation and exchange of best practices in the areas of environmental risk reduction
- intensified efforts for energy efficiency and renewable energy to prevent tensions resulting from resource scarcity

- strengthening environmental good governance through the involvement of all stakeholders
- and finally enhancing environmental cooperation across regions and borders to the benefit of particularly the local population since the environment doesn't care about barriers, borders and conflict lines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Strengthening the Second Dimension remains one of the Austrian Chairmanship's priorities, and I believe that the last two days have been a substantial step forward in this direction. Economic and environmental activities should play a more prominent role in our efforts to strengthen the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

I would like to thank all participants for their active contribution to the successful outcome of this meeting. The Austrian Chairmanship is looking forward to continuing to work closely with all of you and is counting on your support and your engagement throughout the year.

Thank you very much for your attention.