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German Presidency of the European Union

15th Economic and Environmental Forum

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European Union Opening Statement

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the European Union is very pleased to participate in the first part of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. The EU would like to take this opportunity and welcome, once again, the renaming of the forum. This illustrates the growing importance of environmental issues to economic and security policy, as well as the willingness of participating States to address them.

The EU would like to reiterate its appreciation to the Spanish Chairmanship for proposing an Economic and Environmental Forum dedicated to some of the key challenges to environmental security and sustainable development in OSCE and partner states, namely land degradation, soil contamination and water management. The topics chosen match well with the EU focus on environmentally sustainable innovations and on strengthening international instruments to address threats posed by degrading of the ecosystems and climate change.

We are convinced that economic development must become sustainable in order to ensure prosperity and security. The future of human security and of all our economies rests on four vital pillars of prosperity, namely energy security, climate security, food security and water security, which are fragile and should be preserved with care. Therefore, a sound balance between economic growth and the utilisation of resources is essential. Economies must achieve not only greater growth, but better growth. If we want to achieve a continuous and lasting development, we need to shift our approach.

The first preparatory conference for the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum has reminded us that land degradation and soil contamination pose immense threats. These issues need to be addressed. The EU welcomes the growing consensus among participating states on the necessity of regional and international cooperation. Land degradation and soil contamination often have transboundary implications, as also underlined in our cooperation in the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. In zones of conflict these problems can be particularly acute. However, they may also provide opportunities for expert intervention, and a basis for confidence building measures.

With regard to the OSCE's role in addressing threats posed by land degradation and soil contamination, the organisation, with its comprehensive concept of security, can provide a unique forum for dialogue, as it facilitates awareness raising and the exchange of views and best practices among participating States. In addition, the Office of the OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities and the OSCE's field operations can provide valuable expertise. Their cooperation within ENVSEC, the Environment and Security Initiative, is a further asset providing expertise and resources to OSCE participating States.

Several activities prove the specific value the OSCE can add to the solution of problems at hand. Military legacies, e.g. the stockpiles of the Rocket Fuel component known as Mélange, and toxic industrial waste, e.g. waste of uranium industrial sites, are only two out of numerous examples where the OSCE and its field operations support activities of utmost importance to the populations affected.

The EU is looking forward to an intensive debate on the above-mentioned issues during the first part of the Economic and Environmental Forum. We are pleased that a number of representatives from partner organisations are attending and will contribute to the discussions. As an outcome, we would very much welcome concrete recommendations for the future work and role of the OSCE.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, as well as the EFTA country Norway, a member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.