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**STATEMENT BY
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EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS OF AUSTRIA,
AT THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE
OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Vilnius, 6 and 7 December 2011

Mr. Chairperson,
Secretary General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me pleasure to represent Austria at the closing conference of the Lithuanian Chairmanship. At the Summit Meeting in Astana a year ago the Heads of State or Government tasked the Organization with gradually building up a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

A year later this Ministerial Council has decisions before it that will be determinant for the quality and success of the work of the OSCE, its participating States and Partners for Co-operation. Austria is determined to contribute to a substantive outcome of this Council. I should like to thank you personally, Mr. Chairperson, and the Lithuanian teams in Vienna and Vilnius most sincerely for your commitment in the service of our Organization and for your hospitality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I should like to state that Austria fully aligns itself with the statement by the European Union.

Austria welcomes the joint candidature of Switzerland and Serbia for successive chairmanships in 2014 and 2015. We thank both States for their willingness to make themselves available and hope in the interests of the Organization that a decision will be made as soon as possible, at all events by the middle of the year.

The Heads of State or Government showed far-sightedness in Astana when they agreed in the Summit Declaration to upgrade the partnerships for co-operation. The partnerships provide an opportunity for dialogue on an equal footing and co-operation in all dimensions of the Organization. We thank the Lithuanian Chairmanship, Secretary General Zannier and the heads of the OSCE institutions and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly for their unequivocal attitude towards the North African partners.

The Round Table this afternoon is a visible expression of this commitment and will serve the OSCE as a platform for co-operative security.

After the revolutions in North Africa and with reference to the continuing democratization process, Austria is in favour of increased co-operation with the Mediterranean partner countries. For this to happen, however, there is an urgent need to simplify the procedure.

In his letter in mid-September, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger put forward Libya as a possible OSCE Partner for Co-operation. The positive reactions are encouraging, and I am particularly pleased that two representatives of Libyan civil society have already taken part in the Round Table “Making women’s voices heard” here in Vilnius.

Austria would welcome the inclusion of Mongolia in the OSCE. It is now up to the Ministerial Council to make a clear pronouncement.

The OSCE mission in Croatia is a successful example of OSCE commitment. The completion of the mission’s mandate is noted in the final report. Agreement on the closure of the OSCE Office in Zagreb would therefore be expedient and desirable.

In implementation of the task set out in Astana, the Chairmanship has presented a large set of draft decisions. The adoption of these decisions would strengthen the role of the OSCE as a modern and effective regional security organization and provide it with effective instruments. We believe that substantive decisions on early warning and early action to strengthen the conflict cycle, transnational threats, cybersecurity, more effective protection of journalists, tolerance and freedom of opinion and religion, and fundamental rights in the digital media are a particular priority.

In this context I should like to comment on the current budget negotiations. Austria believes that it is important for the OSCE to have a balanced budget in 2012 that exploits savings potential but enables the Organization to deal effectively with new tasks.

The unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area remain as central challenges for the security community that we have undertaken to build up. The efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement, which are contingent on the corresponding political will of all parties involved in these conflicts, must obviously continue. We regard specific confidence- and security-building measures as an important factor in achieving this goal.

As representative of the country in which the headquarters of the OSCE are located, I should like to touch on one further point. Austria attaches great importance to permanently fixing the OSCE’s legal status, which is indispensable for the efficient functioning of the Organization.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank Lithuania for its dedicated Chairmanship and to wish the incoming Irish Chairmanship every success.

Thank you for your attention.