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STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF AUSTRIA AT THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Kyiv, 5 December 2013

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,

I am pleased to represent Austria at the concluding conference of the Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship in 2013.

Mr. Chairperson, with an eye for the essential and for balance you have presented the community of States assembled here a selection of possible decisions that could help our Organization to move forward in important areas. Austria is determined to make its contribution to a substantive outcome. I should like to thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and your teams in Vienna and Kyiv for your great commitment in the service of our Organization and for your hospitality. I should also like to warmly welcome our colleagues from Mongolia and the representatives of our partner countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Austria of course fully endorses the statement by the representative of the European Union. It is a priority concern for Austria to make our security community fit to meet the present and future challenges. Our concept of comprehensive security must be developed through practical measures and adapted to changing conditions, based on the implementation in full of the OSCE's commitments in all three dimensions. The present domestic crisis in Ukraine shows the importance and topicality of OSCE commitments like freedom of assembly and opinion. The protection and full respect of the rights of journalists is paramount in this respect.

The adoption of a Ministerial Council declaration on the Helsinki+40 process is an important signal. Contributions by OSCE institutions and executive structures are as valuable in this regard as those of the Parliamentary Assembly, civil society and academic institutions. We appreciate the work of the Ukrainian Chairmanship and will continue emphatically to support Switzerland and Serbia in their efforts.

Regular and systematic exchange with civil society is essential for our work. Non-governmental organizations, media and human rights defenders play a central role in drawing attention to security issues and helping States to meet their commitments. This applies in particular to a restructuring process like Helsinki+40.

A year ago in Dublin we called for further intensification of collaboration with our Partners for Co-operation, particularly Afghanistan. In view of forthcoming elections and the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force in 2014 we are all called upon now to support the continuing transformation of this Partner for Co-operation. Here too, we attach particular importance to strengthening the role of women.

The OSCE field missions make valuable contributions in the regions. They are not just the eyes and ears but also the hands of the Organization. Institutions like the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe play a regional role. The work carried out in the region is in the interests of all participating States; we should not hesitate to recognize this in full as well!

The unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area remain the central challenge to the security community that we are endeavouring to build. Efforts to find a peaceful solution to these conflicts must be stepped up.

The adoption of a statement on the Transdniestrian conflict at the Ministerial Council meeting in Dublin was a great achievement. We thank the Ukrainian Chairmanship for its efforts within the “5+2” negotiations. Austria remains willing to offer its hospitality for the holding of discussions in Vienna.

The Geneva Discussions under the co-chairmanship of the OSCE, United Nations and European Union must be continued. Practical projects, water supply for example, that are of utility to the local population should be pursued more forcefully as confidence- and security-building measures.

In our understanding of an OSCE security community, men and women have an equal place. In this conviction, Austria, together with Finland, Turkey and Kazakhstan, already proposed an OSCE-wide action plan on “women, peace and security”. This project needs to be vigorously pursued next year as well.

The full respect of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are a permanent feature of Austria’s foreign policy. My country is currently active in the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE in particular promoting freedom of the media, protection of journalists, respect of human rights including online privacy and the unrestricted applicability of freedom of assembly and opinion. The proposed decisions on the protection of journalists and freedom of thought, conscience and religion have Austria’s full support. We also welcome the presentation of a decision for enhancing OSCE efforts to implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area.

Austria currently chairs the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. Together with the future Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE we shall be holding a high-level conference in Vienna on 17 and 18 February 2014 on trafficking in human beings. Here too there are important synergies with our agenda in Kyiv.

Regional disarmament and arms control and the prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction are among the priorities of Austria’s security strategy and core areas of the OSCE’s politico-military co-operation.

Austria calls for the OSCE to play an active and effective role as an indispensable factor within pan-European security co-operation. We are particularly interested in the further development of a comprehensive conventional arms control regime in Europe and therefore support the priority set by the forthcoming OSCE Chairmanships to discuss conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building. We are all called upon in accordance with the mandate of the Astana Summit to work actively together in this regard.

In the area of cybersecurity we welcome the decision on an initial specific list of confidence-building measures with particular emphasis on ensuring freedom of the Internet, freedom of expression and also protection of the privacy of correspondence.

Progress can also be achieved in the second dimension. In order to safeguard our future, the production, transport and consumption of energy must be made more environmentally compatible. To that end we are basically in need of good governance with the involvement of civil society initiatives, business and academia. Valuable input can be provided by the OSCE and its missions, but also by local Aarhus Centres and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank Ukraine for its committed Chairmanship and wish the incoming Swiss Chairmanship every success. I should also like to say a word about the forthcoming year-end decision on the Organization's budget. In view of the economic situation, thrift is the order of the day. The OSCE has shown in the development of its budget over the past few years that it is aware of this situation. It is in the interests of all of us to equip the OSCE for 2014 with a balanced budget that ensures that the Organization can manage the important tasks that we have entrusted it with.

Finally, I should like to recall the need for a permanent definition of the legal status of the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.