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Delegation of Austria to the OSCE

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

20 July 2006

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I should like to note that Austria fully endorses the statement by the European Union (EU) regarding agenda item four, and I should like to thank the Belgian Chairmanship of the OSCE once again for its efforts up to this point to promote dialogue and co-operation in matters of traffic and transport security.

Austria would like to take this opportunity to refer briefly to the usefulness of evaluating the environmental effects of transport infrastructure.

In its previous statements, the EU has stressed on several occasions that the environmental factor is of utmost importance when planning transport infrastructures. It is thanks to strategic tests to assess the effects on the environment that we can be sure that the expansion of highways is carried out in such a way as to take into account the impact on the environment. Tests of this kind have already been employed in the EU for the Trans-European Networks (TEN) and have shown that considerable costs for subsequent corrective measures can be saved in this way.

The prerequisite here of course is that the legal bases first have to be established at the national level for environmental impact tests and the necessary implementation capacity must also be available.

The modernization and expansion of the railway network is also important from the point of view of environmental policy. All in all, railways cause far less environmental damage and have much lower environmental costs and an enormous transport capacity.

Lastly, I should like to mention the general problem of the security of energy supplies, especially in the form of fossil fuels. A diversification in the energy mix (electricity, biomass, etc.) undoubtedly represents an essential security and stability factor for transport operators.

In view of all these facts, the conclusion is that an integrated transport, environmental and energy policy that takes into account these problems can massively reduce the conflict potential of a one-sided expansion of the transport infrastructure — prevention is better than cure.

What do these somewhat technical comments have to do with today's meeting? We are convinced that the OSCE can assume a forward-looking role in co-ordinating and supporting the OSCE participating States in this area. What other organization would be better suited to this task?

For that reason, we welcome the proposals of the Chairmanship to develop a greater awareness of the environmental effects of transport infrastructure and will actively support specific measures along those lines.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman