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AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AT PART I OF THE FIFTEENTH
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FORUM**

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**Session IV — Environmental security and sustainable
economic development**

Environmental security and sustainable development issues in the Republic of Belarus

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Industrial and agricultural production operations, as well as the after-effects of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, are factors that contribute to the heavy burden on the unique and rich natural environment that is found throughout virtually all of the Republic of Belarus.

Almost one-fourth of the country's territory, which was home to 2.2 million people, was exposed to radioactive contamination, and the losses associated with the accident are estimated at US\$235 billion.

High-risk installations, including the Smolensk, Rovno and Ignalina nuclear power plants that are located in areas bordering the Republic of Belarus, pose a potential danger.

Accordingly, in addition to protecting the human habitat and biological and landscape diversity, the vital interests of the Republic of Belarus in the environmental sphere also include dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and other negative impacts on the biosphere and the human habitat.

Furthermore, the Republic of Belarus is troubled by Lithuania's plans to build a storage facility for radioactive waste from the Ignalina nuclear power plant in direct proximity to our country's border. As a result of efforts undertaken by Belarus, the Radioactive Waste Management Agency of the Republic of Lithuania agreed to reconsider the options for the location of the storage facility, and is now looking at a site close to the Ignalina nuclear power plant as the one farthest away from the Braslav nature reserve that lies along the Belarusian border.

We should like to take this opportunity to thank Lithuania, which is engaged in a constructive dialogue regarding this situation, although it has not acceded to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, and we would like to ask the OSCE participating States to support the resolution of the waste burial problem that has been outlined.

The Conceptual Framework for the National Security of the Republic of Belarus, which devotes particular attention to environmental security issues, has been approved.

In addition to those already mentioned, the main factors that threaten the environmental security of the Republic of Belarus are:

- Natural disasters (floods, droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, magnetic storms, etc.), as well as man-made emergencies (accidents, explosions and the like);
- The operation of high-risk facilities within the country (chemical plants, oil and gas pipelines, pipelines carrying other products, the burial of highly toxic and radioactive waste, etc.) and their location close to residential areas and public utility systems serving the population's vital needs;
- Industrial emissions, dumping and waste that lead to chemical, radioactive, mechanical, thermal or electromagnetic pollution of the atmosphere, lithosphere or hydrosphere;
- Land degradation, soil erosion and negative changes in natural systems in areas with large-scale land reclamation operations. Pollution and degradation of forest tracts;
- A lack of up-to-date industrial and agricultural production technologies that provide for the environmentally acceptable extraction, utilization and reproduction of natural resources. Ageing industrial equipment at potentially hazardous facilities.

The top priorities for ensuring environmental security in the Republic of Belarus are:

- The establishment of an integrated State-wide system for environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources;
- The creation of economic incentives for the conservation of resources, and also for the development and introduction of environmentally friendly technologies and processes in industry, the energy sector, agriculture and transportation.

The country adopted a State research and technology programme to develop and introduce new socially significant and ecologically compatible technologies for the utilization and recycling of natural resources and environmental protection (the Environmental Security programme) for 2006–2010 and beyond. The main goal of the programme is to develop technologies compatible with the biosphere for the utilization and recycling of local natural resources and to promote the rapid development of basic and applied research on the environmental principles of the country's sustainable development, which provide for a healthier human habitat and improvement of human living conditions and which call for a

transition to the sustainable use of resources based on the preservation, development and reproduction of the country's natural resource potential:

- Implementation of the National Environmental Monitoring System of the Republic of Belarus;
- Fulfilment of commitments made by the country under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (a National Implementation Plan for 2007–2010 and up to 2028 has been drafted);
- Implementation of measures to comply with the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A position has been formulated regarding quantitative commitments to limit emissions of greenhouse gases, measures to comply with the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol have been approved and a State Commission on Climate Change Problems has been established, in addition to a number of other actions;
- Development and utilization of safe substitutes for ozone-depleting substances;
- Adoption of a Republic of Belarus law on genetic engineering and implementation of measures to carry out the law;
- Improvement of mechanisms for providing environmental impact assessments of all programmes and projects that involve commercial and other activities. Belarus acceded to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context in 2006 and is working on issues concerning accession to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment that supplements the Convention;
- Implementation of special programmes to preserve biological diversity, including rare and endangered species of plants and animals, and typical and unique landscapes and ecosystems;
- Upgrading of the rapid response and notification system for environmental pollution caused by industrial accidents, natural disasters or the destruction of natural resources. Upgrading of the State Emergency Warning and Post-Emergency Clean-Up System;
- Comprehensive utilization of forest resources based on ensuring that the conservation function of forests and mineral and raw materials resources is given priority, as well as the comprehensive development and utilization of water resources, improvement of water quality and ensuring the sustainability of water ecosystems;
- Improvement of the system of fees for the use of natural resources and environmental pollution, and the system to provide compensation for environmental damage;
- Implementation of measures to deal with the after-effects of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

In 1997 the Republic of Belarus became one of the first countries in the former socialist camp to draft a Sustainable Development Strategy.

In 2004 the Ministry of Economy, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, drew up the National Sustainable Development Strategy of the Republic of Belarus to 2020 (as part of a project). Issues involving the country's economic development are closely linked in this document to problems of the environment and human development. The provisions of this programme document serve as the basis for the drafting and adoption of the country's economic, social and environmental plans and programmes.

The drafting of the strategy, as well as the main programmes, is governed by the Republic of Belarus Law on State Forecasting of and Programmes for the Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus.

The Key Elements of Socio-Economic Development for 2006–2015, the Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2006–2010 and similar yearly programmes have been approved and are being implemented. They all contain sections on environmental protection and the utilization of natural resources, which set indicators for the release of air pollutants, the discharge of waste water and the use of water in recycling systems, as well as targets for geological prospecting activities, including the extraction of major mineral resources (oil, potassium salt and table salt). They also outline key tasks in resource utilization and environmental protection for the future. Social policy issues and indicators are an integral part of these programme documents, including raising the standard of living and improving quality of life, social protection for the population, pension security and demographic and youth policy, among other things.

The Head of State has approved the Key Elements of State Urban Development Policy of the Republic of Belarus for 2006–2010 and the State Plan for the Comprehensive Territorial Organization of the Republic of Belarus to 2015, which are based on the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental protection.

The Government of Belarus is currently completing work on the State Programme for the Development of Regions and Small and Medium-Sized Towns for 2007–2010. In addition to raising the standard of living and the prestige of living in small towns, the goals of the programme include the resolution of environmental protection issues (primarily waste recycling and improving the treatment of waste water that is discharged into surface water sources), providing the public with good quality drinking water and rehabilitation of towns that were affected by the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (there are plans to establish a business environment in these towns that is similar to that in place in free economic zones).

In the light of implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy in Belarus, a number of separate programmes involving the utilization of natural resources have been adopted. The principal document among this group is the National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus for 2006–2010 (three similar five-year programmes have already been successfully implemented in Belarus).

Measures to employ economic instruments to affect the utilization of natural resources have been undergoing successful development since 1991. Environmental pollution (the release of pollutants into the atmosphere, the discharge of waste water into natural water sources and waste disposal) is currently subject to an environmental tax, as is the removal

(extraction) of natural resources. Limits are set on the utilization of natural resources in this manner.

Tax and other concessions have been introduced with a view to providing incentives for the adoption of measures aimed at the sustainable use of natural resources and reducing negative environmental impacts. A nature conservation fund was established in the Republic in 1991. Today State financing of conservation measures is provided primarily through this fund.

Virtually all of the country's major enterprises have performed the certification of quality control systems based on the ISO 9000 international standards. In accordance with the requirements of the ISO 14000 international standards, enterprises in the Republic are providing for the establishment and functioning of environmental management systems. The introduction of environmentally-oriented standards of this nature is having a positive impact on the competitiveness of our country's businesses.

Efforts are being made to introduce the principle of expanded responsibility of producers of goods that generate waste once they are no longer of use to consumers.

The Republic of Belarus, which fate has placed at the centre of Europe, is seeking to integrate itself into the processes that are taking place in Europe, while remaining cognizant of its own intrinsic geopolitical, geographical, socio-economic, environmental, demographic and other characteristic features.

Thank you for your attention.