OSCE Statement on capacity building
Esra Buttanri, OSCE Secretariat

12 September 2017 at 17.30–18.00 p.m.

On behalf of the OSCE Secretariat, let me start by expressing our deep gratitude to our hosts, the Government of Montenegro, as well as to the UNECE for convening us here in Budva.

Sustainable development and environmental issues constitute an integral part of the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security. Environmental dialogue and cooperation between countries, and within countries among a wide array of stakeholders contribute to security and stability. Let me also underline the importance of good environmental governance. Increased public awareness on linkages between environment and security, enhanced transparency and accountability, participation of well-informed citizens and civil society organizations in environmental decision-making and having effective mechanisms in place for access to justice contribute significantly to stability and peace both within and across borders.

In this context, the Aarhus Convention provides us, the OSCE, with an exceptional tool.

Since our last gathering in Maastricht, the OSCE through its Secretariat in Vienna and through our field operations continued to support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in countries of South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, in close cooperation with the Aarhus Convention Secretariat.

The Aarhus Centres constitute the major component of our support in this respect. There is currently a wide network of 60 Aarhus Centres in 14 countries.

As we have already heard in the morning, these Centres provide a platform for cooperation between public authorities, civil society and other stakeholders in
addressing environment and security challenges. They also foster implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its PRTR Protocol by making it possible to reach out to stakeholders at national and local levels and help to raise awareness of a wider audience. They provide assistance in the dissemination of environmental information and in organizing and monitoring procedures of public participation in decision-making.

As the OSCE, we attach great importance to the networking among the Aarhus Centres. The annual meetings that we organize help to exchange experiences and lessons learned and enable replication of best practices. These meetings are attended by representatives of Governments, including Aarhus focal points, Aarhus Centres, NGOs, the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and OSCE field operations and other regional and international partners. The 2015 Annual Meeting of Aarhus Centres was marked by the signature of the Joint Declaration on Co-operation among the 14 Aarhus Centres from the South Eastern Europe which was also mentioned in the morning. I would also like to refer to our support for the co-operation between the Osh Aarhus Centre in Kyrgyzstan and the Khujand Aarhus Centre in Tajikistan as per the agreement signed between these two Aarhus Centres to work together in addressing environmental challenges in Fergana Valley. The 2016 Annual Meeting had the major focus on how the Aarhus Centres individually and collectively contribute to the transition to green economy - a topic which is being extensively discussed in the OSCE this year under the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship. Earlier this year, we also launched a new online platform dedicated to activities of Aarhus Centres.

We also continue to strengthen capacities of Aarhus Centres and their networking in tackling priority environmental challenges that have transboundary implications, such as water management, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and hazardous waste management including for instance stakeholder engagement in remediation of uranium legacy sites.

In addition to our support for the Aarhus Centres, we also join our efforts with the UNECE and other partners in reinforcing the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention through various capacity building and training activities. The subregional workshop on access to justice that took place in Tbilisi in February 2015 is a good example in this respect. Organized together with the UNECE and the
Government of Georgia, this workshop brought together high-level judges and representatives of national judicial training centres of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. As you have heard from my colleague from the OSCE Mission to Serbia, many of our OSCE field operations have also conducted several capacity building activities in support of the third pillar of the Convention.

Let me conclude by thanking once again to all our national counterparts and international partners for their active engagement and contribution to the OSCE activities in support of Aarhus Convention, and **reiterate our commitment to further advance our efforts.**

And let me **invite you all to our side event on Thursday, 14th of September** where we will celebrate the **15 years of Aarhus Centres**, hear about their wide array of activities and discuss their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Side Event will take place on Thursday noon time here in Splendid Hotel.

Thank you for your attention.