

Keynote
by **Mr. Dzhevdet Chakarov**
Minister of Environment and Water,
Bulgaria¹

Your Excellencies, dear colleagues,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to congratulate all participants in the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", to wish all of us successful work and to thank the Government and the people of the Republic of Serbia for their warm hospitality.

Significant efforts have been made since Kiev towards the implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements in the region of the United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe, despite the differences among the countries. Nevertheless, a region-wide implementation is still a goal for all 5 conventions, and there remains a need for further action.

Bulgaria for example has invested in multilateral environmental agreements as a means of addressing a series of administrative, financial and environmental problems. Our country has taken the attitude that the implementation and enforcement of multilateral environmental agreements facilitates solutions to environmental problems on a national level and in a transboundary context. A good example in this respect is the current draft of the Multilateral Agreement on Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment under the Convention among the countries in South-East Europe. It undergoes now the national procedures for adoption and will be open for signature at the 4th Meeting of the Parties to the Convention in May 2008, in Bucharest, Romania.

Reports on the status of national implementation of the conventions show their increasing application by increasing numbers of parties in the region. The majority of Parties have introduced adequate legislative frameworks for proper implementation of the provisions of the conventions.

Despite the apparent commitment, there are weaknesses and problems in the conventions' implementation in certain countries. Except the adequate legal and institutional frameworks to implement the provisions of the conventions, a better coordination and cooperation between competent national minorities is needed.

In most cases the institutional framework relevant to the respective multilateral environmental agreement is a complex one. Usually many institutions are involved in implementation of the conventions including local authorities, scientific institutes and non-governmental organizations. The clear division of functions and responsibilities of the central institutions on management of the components of the environment and the development of cooperation between the individual institutions are crucial to the successful implementation of the multilateral agreements in the country and for the coordination of the activities of all stakeholders.

In the majority of the countries the insufficient domestic funding is a barrier to implement the conventions. In Bulgaria, lawmaking initiatives have been accompanied by the adoption of multiple strategies and programs aimed at ensuring effective law enforcement by establishing institutional coordination, planning, mobilizing financial and human resources, and drawing upon the potential of the academic, non-governmental organizations and

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business community. This approach carries forward principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 through the involvement of major groups. One of the keys to effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, especially in case of insufficient financial and human resources involves taking advantage of the potential of such major groups.

The attraction of financial resources from foreign donors for the implementation of the environmental protection policy and the efficient absorption of international technical and financial assistance are of major importance for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. Setting priorities is a very useful exercise for the attraction of donor's assistance. Another successful approach is the attraction of additional financial resources as a result of environmental investment programs prepared and controlled by large privatized enterprises.

All conventions in the region of the United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe have established systems for regularly collecting information by questionnaires sent to Parties and using it for reviewing, implementation and compliance and for general information. Despite successes achieved, problems remain in some countries. In many cases similar data and information are being reported to several bodies or instruments. In order to reduce the burden, the data reporting should be harmonized with other reporting regimes.

Capacity-building is seen as an important activity in all conventions. The training of enforcement authorities and strengthening the capacity of the institutions and agencies are essential for the implementation. Further efforts is required, both by donors and by recipients, to ensure that capacity-building is effective and that it leads to sustainable implementation.

The use of penalties and other enforcement tools is important for the successful implementation of the provisions of the multilateral environmental agreements. Imposing only sanctions is not the most effective way to enforce the requirements of the respective multilateral environmental agreements. The better approach is to prevent the occurrence of such activities.

Another useful tool to enhance implementation offers the process of the Environmental Performance Reviews. Following the recommendations in the reports can lead to better application of the multilateral agreements to which the particular country is a party and to improvement of the state of the environment as a whole.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international environmental policy of the United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe is based on the five environmental conventions. A priority should be given now to their successful implementation in order to achieve better environment for us and for our children. I am convinced that our joint efforts towards better implementation and our willingness to cooperate and share experience will be of benefit for the whole region.

Thank you for your attention.