

**Mrs Agnieszka Bolesta, Undersecretary of State
on behalf of Mr. Jan Szyszko
Minister of the Environment, Poland**

**The challenges of the 21st century –
conserving nature under a changing global climate**

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguish Delegates

Let me first to thank to the government of Serbia for organisation of this conference which evidently will be a step forward in improvement of the status of the environment in Europe.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are two basic challenges for mankind which are related to the natural environment.

At the same time, the actions for the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity support the measures to tackle climate change. The well-preserved, efficiently functioning ecosystems – particularly forest areas and wetlands – limit greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, accumulating substantial quantities of carbon. Such ecosystems ensure the greater protection against dangers and natural disasters related to climate change, such as floods or the extreme droughts. The actions for preserving biodiversity and tackling climate change should be connected with the actions for the soil protection. Soils play an important role in the carbon dioxide sequestration system, they are the basis for the correct circulation of matter and energy and the necessary condition for the existence of biodiversity.

The connection between two international instruments: the Climate Convention and the Biodiversity Convention provides a real tool for mitigating climate change, while stimulating the sustainable development of populations and regions. The potential of natural systems should be used to mitigate climate change. Actions should be taken to enhance the carbon dioxide sequestration by forest ecosystems. The increase of forest cover and the improvement of forest management are some of the most effective methods for compensating for the increasing of the carbon dioxide emissions caused by the economic growth. Therefore, it becomes so important to monitor the carbon bound in the course of managing forest ecosystems and to predict its variations depending on the different action scenarios.

Appreciating the importance of forest ecosystems for the natural environment and the human well-being, Poland takes an active part in international cooperation in forestry. In the next month the Fifth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe will be held in Warsaw. The Conference will address the issues related to the interactions between water and forest management as well as the promotion of the use of wood, including its use as a biomass – an energy carrier. An important issue is to ensure the continuity of the multi-functionality of forests under the conditions of changing climate.

In the climate change context, designation of protected areas is also one of the basic instruments for the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity. It also significantly contributes to achieving the 2010 target. Core areas, together with buffer zones, connected by the network of ecological corridors, condition the survival of species and their habitats, and determine undisturbed functions of ecosystems. The priority importance of protected areas is reflected in the Kiev Resolution, where two out of 10 key tasks for achieving the 2010 target concern the Pan-European Ecological Network.

Development of the uniform Pan-European Ecological Network, based on common principles, creates a great challenge for our region. It should be a consistent and complete system, both in spatial aspects, as well as regarding management structures. In spite of many years of tradition in nature protection and the existence, for many years, range of concepts of protected areas, many valuable natural areas are not yet protected, and they often get irreversibly damaged. Moreover, the current protected areas were often designated without considering existing ecological and physical interdependencies, what narrowed and isolated those protected areas. Lack of appropriate management plans, or their improper implementation causes enormous biodiversity loss.

It is necessary to concentrate on improvement of cooperation and exchange information between stakeholders involved in development and implementation of the protected areas and ecological networks in Pan-European region. Sharing experiences of Nature 2000 network and EMERALD network, allow us to make use of good examples and to avoid mistakes made in the past.

We cannot forget that protected areas are designated under specific social and economic conditions, in the territories which have often been inhabited and economically used for hundreds of years. Our main aim should be combining the interest of nature protection with ensuring appropriate conditions of living and social development, as well as with achieving the Millennium Development Goals. That is especially difficult to achieve in those countries where a level of economic development is not very high, and where underinvestment in the previous years, allowed to retain substantial natural resources which require protection. In such situation currently intensified investments, often lead to conflicts with nature protection requirements. That is why it is necessary to include all relevant stakeholders into the process of the development of protected areas, and demonstrate that this process facilitates and does not hinder regional development.

The achievements of the Pan-European region in the implementation of protected areas and their networks, especially comparing to other regions in the world, are significant. For example, protected areas in Poland cover 32% of the country. We have established 23 national parks, 121 landscape parks, 411 areas of protected landscape, almost 1500 natural reserves and some hundred Nature 2000 areas. But the development of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) is not finished yet, and still more efforts should be made in that field.

Current achievements do not excuse us from the continuation of our work and we have to state that in front of us there is still a lot to be done.

Thank you for your attention.