

KEYNOTE SPEECH

by Ms. SONJA LEPITKOVA

Deputy Minister
Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
of the Republic of Macedonia

Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am really honoured and pleased to address you, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning. I thank the Government of Serbia and the Ministry of Environmental Protection for hosting us in the beautiful City of Belgrade, and congratulate them for the excellent organization of this so important Conference.

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia has recognized the great importance of cooperation between the countries over the World, Europe and especially in the Region of South Eastern Europe whenever we discuss, act and manage the environment. In this context, I would like to stress the fact that this Session, as an outcome of the cooperation of our Ministries, clearly demonstrates our commitment towards regional cooperation.

Regional approach has proven efficient in the past. An outstanding example of this is the cooperation of the Western Balkan Countries with the European Environment Agency, as EU information gathering and disseminating body. Our countries have shown exceptionally high performance not only in reporting environmental data and information to the Agency, but also in terms of mutual cooperation in this process. This, you have to agree with me, deserves to be awarded by granting our countries full membership in the Agency as one of the EU agencies admitting non-EU Member States in its membership. In this way, our **voluntary** contributions to the reporting process would be transformed in **obligation** to the benefit of the EEA completing the European environmental map. We are sure we are capable to undertake such responsibility in full, of course through continued support by the European Union.

The regional cooperation is a learning process, exchange of experience and good practices to provide better environment and improve quality of life. Having that in mind, we can offer technical assistance in many fields of the environment where the Republic of Macedonia is doing well. For example: compared to other countries, we are well advanced in the domain of approximation of the EU legislation. The full set of environmental laws has completely transposed the relevant provisions of EU Directives, and incorporated our multilateral obligations. I am very proud that the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning has been the first to approximate the legislation in the true sense of the word, which gives these laws a specific weight. At the same time, it has to be stated that we still need

the support by developed countries and new Member States, to solve the problems appearing in the process of enforcement of the legislation.

Let me take the advantage of this opportunity to highlight our leading role in the initiative for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Mountains in South East European Region. These mountains possess breath taking beauty; they are habitat of a remarkable flora and fauna; they are home of particularly high numbers of relict and endemic species. As a matter of fact, some of them exist in no other place but this part of Europe. These mountains are biologically most diverse in Europe! They are place of origin of different language speaking people, cradle of spirit, cultures and religions and host real assets of natural and human wealth.

To mention some of the achievements, besides the outstanding results in the process of reporting environmental data to EEA, my country is well ahead in the processes of reduction and elimination of Ozone Depleting Substances, fulfilling completely the Montreal Protocol provisions, which makes us the leading country, not only in this Region, but at global level. Macedonia has also eliminated significant amount of PCBs containing equipment and organochlorinated pesticides under the Stockholm Convention, which is a huge step for us.

As a Party to the UNFCC Convention, we are well ahead in developing institutional capacities for reduction of GHG. Recognizing the opportunity of implementation of the projects under the Clean Development Mechanism, the Republic of Macedonia has ratified the Kyoto Protocol even before its entry into force. Currently, we are implementing activities set in the National Strategy for the Kyoto Protocol Implementation for the first commitment period 2008-2012 under this Protocol.

I will take this opportunity to thank all of our bilateral partners and multilateral organizations, especially for the support provided by EU, without which we could have never achieved these results.

Yet, there are certain environmental fields where we need much more to do: inspection, enforcement of laws, establishment of partnerships between public and private sector. Lack of financing sources is one of the main constraints standing on the way of the implementation of environmental infrastructure projects in our Region. We are fully aware that the current level of investment is more than insufficient while raising domestic funds for major environmental investments has proven difficult. This, therefore, remains a special challenge in future, too.

Addressing this challenge is to a large extent a matter of ensuring appropriate absorption capacity for preparation and implementation of environmental infrastructure projects.

In the above context, I would like to point out that, in the coming period, the Republic of Macedonia will allocate domestic financial resources towards strengthening the central and the local capacities for projects implementation, as well as for the management of projects in the domain of infrastructure investments, with particular accent on the establishment and maintenance of

integrated waste management and wastewater treatment systems. All these activities will rest on the goal to achieve the EU standards.

I hope that we will achieve the above goals with further and stronger financial and technical EU and bilateral support.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to assure you once again that the Republic of Macedonia will remain to be a promoter of cooperation in this Region and will make its utmost contribution to the achievement of the main objectives of this Conference.

I am confident that you share my views and visions. There are two reasons supporting my confidence: first – we all intend to join the EU! And second - we are, by tradition, in love with the environment! And, with joint efforts, we can much easier become what we intend to, and much more efficiently protect what we love!

Thank you!
