

Mr. Nikola Ružinski
State Secretary
Ministry of Environmental Protection Physical Planning
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Mister Chairman, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to thank Republic of Serbia for excellent organisation of this conference.

For a number of years, the Republic of Croatia has been actively participating in the *Environment for Europe* process, a process which has provided a broad and very significant political platform for cooperation and discussions on environmental policy, and has assisted in the establishment of relevant legal instruments bringing about progress in environmental protection and promoting sustainable development. In this sense, I am pleased to state that the Republic of Croatia has ratified all relevant international environmental agreements, including, in December 2006, the Aarhus Convention.

Since the Kiev Conference, South East Europe, as one of the UNECE sub-regions, has undergone significant positive changes in environmental policy. The main characteristic of this sub-region is the effort of all its countries to achieve high environmental protection standards, which is also supported by the EU approximation process. Furthermore, one of the prominent features of this subregion, as well as of the entire UNECE region, is the diversity of the countries. This is also recognised in the Ministerial Declaration itself. We deem that the existence of differences should be viewed in a positive sense, as it enables an individual approach to each of the countries of South East Europe, as well as focusing the necessary activities, both national and international, to precisely identified shortcomings and gaps. In this way that the necessary synergy in the entire South East Europe region is achieved.

The Republic of Croatia, as an EU candidate country, is undergoing an intensive process of legislation harmonisation, and at same time it is implementing newly adopted regulations, particularly in the waste management and air quality sectors. A special contribution in this respect is provided by the efficient operation of the Croatian Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund, as a source of significant financial means ensuring, at the national level, implementation of these newly adopted regulations. Thus the *polluter pays* principle is systematically implemented as one of the main environmental protection instruments. Moreover, activities for the establishment of an integrated waste management system have been initiated, and this will also be contributed to by the newly adopted Waste Management Plan. In view of these achievements, we would like to express our readiness to share experiences with the countries in the region.

Croatia attaches great significance to climate change issues and has, as a party to the Kyoto Protocol, prepared a Draft National Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol; the adoption of this Strategy is expected by the end of this year.

We have also started with the preparation of the Strategy for Sustainable Development as an important strategic document through which Croatia will continue its efforts towards a long-term economically and environmentally sustainable progress. In this regard, in the context of the South East Europe region, the Republic of Croatia has prepared, in cooperation with UNEP, the Category II document: *Sustainable Consumption and Production in South East Europe*, containing recommendations for future actions for the achievement of a satisfactory level of sustainable consumption and production in South East Europe.

In addition, the Republic of Croatia has also prepared a document entitled „Towards a healthier and more productive Adriatic ecosystem“, in which the „ecosystem approach“ is emphasised as the basic marine environment protection principle. This document is an indicator of the cooperation and efforts undertaken by the Adriatic states for the conservation of the Adriatic Sea and it provides a guideline for further measures towards achieving a more efficient Adriatic Sea protection.

Croatia welcomes, within the *Environment for Europe* process, the efforts directed towards result-based and action-oriented activities, as well as efficient utilization of already existing initiatives. We would also like to state our willingness to cooperate with all the countries in the region on achieving environmental protection and sustainable development goals.

For the future, we deem the success of each long-term process, including the *Environment for Europe* process, dependent on its capacity for adaptation to changes and new circumstances. We support the modifications of the *Environment for Europe* process as proposed by the document on the future of the process, regarding improvement of its structure, the focus on priority thematic areas not covered by other existing instruments and processes, and an approach based on individual sub-regional or national needs.

Thank you Mr Chairman.