

Item 3

Keynote speech

by Dr. Sándor Fazekas Minister of Rural Development, Hungary

Plenary III. - Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems

Dear Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Allow me to start with the evidence that water is crucial for all aspect of life and express appreciation that water is chosen as one of the focus topics of this conference.

I wish to thank the host country for the excellent organisation of this event and hospitality. It is a special pleasure for me to be here being also the President of the Society of Hungarian-Kazakh Friendship.

2. We are aware that sustainable management of water resources will most likely be one of the key challenges our world will be facing in the coming decades. More concentrated efforts are needed at all levels and by all concerned. That is why Hungary - beyond her activity in the pan-European and global water arena - has put the issue of water also on her EU presidential agenda in the first half of this year to give the issue higher political attention. As a result a set of Conclusions of the Council of EU Ministers on EU water policy was adopted three month ago.

3. In our EU initiative we put emphasis on the ecosystem approach, the climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, the importance of the international cooperation within and beyond the EU border, the role of water in efficient use of natural resources and the necessity of integration of water into other policies.

Due to limited time I wish to highlight the first 3 aspects only now:

- Ecosystem approach is gaining increasing acceptance. However while progress has been achieved in the field of ecosystem protection, valuation of and payment for ecosystem services is still an emerging issue. It would be interesting to hear about such practices later from the participants.

- As we all are aware, effects of climate change and occurrence of extreme phenomena are unevenly distributed geographically as well as in time. Even too much and too little water can occur in the same area. Possible solutions against the consequences of climate change should be explored which can facilitate the integrated management of extreme hydrological events in water and other sectors including rural development, agriculture.

- Availability of water in necessary quantity and quality increasingly affects also cross-border and regional relations. As most of the water resources of the world are of transboundary nature, the challenges need to be tackled jointly by riparian countries. It is joint responsibility and at the same time joint opportunity. The Danube basin cooperation can be referred to as one positive example. The recently launched EU Strategy for the Danube basin with its strong intersectoral approach can further contribute to the sustainable development of the region. Hungary is proud to be the leader of the two water-related priority areas of this macroregional program in cooperation with Romania and Slovakia respectively.

Firm legal basis is necessary to make international water cooperation successful. Applicable instruments and related supportive tools for transboundary water management are available. We encourage those who are not party to these instruments yet to join and use them. Further

international law development could be achieved by the entering into the force of both the UN Watercourses Convention and the Amendment to the UN ECE Water Convention as soon as possible.

4. In the spirit of moving from declarations to actions we welcome the “Astana Water Action”. Similarly to some other countries Hungary has taken commitments under it. Law enforcement, incorporation of regional priorities into the national governmental policies, development and financing programs are important preconditions of success. Innovative strategies such as cooperating with private sector and other stakeholders as well as interactions with NGOs would add value in achieving results. Environmental education programs and campaigns organized by both the government and the civil society are also important.

Further technical and financial assistance is required to meet the MDGs. I wish to reiterate here the initiative of Hungary to raise the profile of water in the further EU development policy and also refer to the ongoing renewal of the EU Water Initiative which should focus on “Water for Growth and Development”. Coordination and synergies of the assistance programs should also be strengthened.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. I wish to conclude by expressing my hope that fruitful further discussion on the mentioned aspects as well as on others will take place during the roundtable discussions in the coming 2 hours.

Thank you for your kind attention.