



Regional Cooperation Council



Ministry of Environment
and Physical Planning



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Draft Ministerial Declaration

on the occasion of the 3rd Ministerial Panel on Environment and Climate Action in the Western Balkans

We, the Ministers from Western Balkans responsible for the environment and climate change, gathered in Skopje on 21st November 2018 under the framework for the implementation of the South East Europe 2020 (SEE 2020) Strategy and its Environment Dimension,

STRESSING that good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the Enlargement Process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process and **WELCOMING** the progress made so far,

RESTATING the importance of maintaining of a permanent structured regional Ministerial dialog and discussing the key priorities and challenges for the region,

ASSERTING our strong commitment to join efforts and call for concrete common action in addressing the existing environmental and climate challenges together with preventing and mitigating the future ones,

RECOGNIZING the need for strengthening regional cooperation and using the extraordinary momentum of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and in light of the preparations for the upcoming 24th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

COGNIZANT of the findings of the RCC Study on Climate Change in the Western Balkans Region showing observed temperature increase of 1,2°C and expectation to warm further by alarming 1,7 - 4,0 °C by the end of the century,

AWARE of the significant progress achieved so far in the implementation of a number of regional projects (RIPAP, ClimaProof, Nexus and regional Biodiversity Task Force among others),

DETERMINED to jointly respond and contribute to the 2030 energy and climate goals through effective policy development, implementation and enforcement of legislation as well as enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation,

AWARE of the huge challenges the transposition, implementation and enforcement of the *acquis communautaire* in the area of environment and climate action impose to the Western Balkans region,

REAFFIRMING our commitment to continue our approximation to the EU through policy harmonization, transition towards a circular economy and fulfilling commitments under international environment initiatives,

HONOURING the continued efforts by the EU institutions in strengthening of environment and climate institutions in Western Balkans and reinforcement of their administrative and technical capacities to cope with the challenges mentioned above,

WELCOMING the continued and unequivocal support by the EU for the European perspective of Western Balkans as reconfirmed by the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia as well as by the Western Balkans Summit in London, and a strong need to vigorously integrate elements of sustainability as well as climate protection and adaptation in the implementation of Regional Economic Area,

RECALLING the South East Europe 2020 Strategy adopted in November 2013 by our Governments, that provides a framework for strengthening regional cooperation and boosting prosperity, as well as commitments from Podgorica and Bonn Ministerial Declarations,

EXPRESSING our gratitude to the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and to the Host Government and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, for hosting and co-chairing this ministerial meeting and commending the work and outcomes of the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env),

HAVE today agreed on the Joint Declaration by which we:

1. **CALL** for further strengthening of the synergies and regional cooperation for the implementation of the environment and climate change priorities in line with EU *acquis*, and maintaining policy dialogue within the RWG Env framework.
2. **WELCOME** the work performed by the RWG Env on the implementation of the Environment Dimension of the SEE 2020 Strategy coordinated by the RCC.
3. **PRAISE** the progress achieved in the implementation of the existing regional initiatives and projects financed by ADA (ClimaProof and Nexus) through coordinated regional approach and **WELCOME** the potential for better understanding of local impacts of future climate patterns emerged from the initiatives such as the Summer School on High Resolution Climate Change Projections organised under the scope of the ClimaProof project.
4. **PRAISE** the progress achieved by the Regional Biodiversity Task Force (BD TF) in defining priorities by 2020, planning of follow up activities and the first ever regional representation at the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP14) in Egypt, supported by GIZ ORF BDU and IUCN ECARO.
5. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the achievements of SWG RRD on supporting economic diversification, environmental protection and employment in rural areas of South East Europe with the aim of contributing to balanced socio-economic development, competitiveness and natural resource management, in targeted rural border regions, by improving policy-development processes, regional networking and encouraging community-based initiatives.
6. **EXPRESS** gratitude for the support provided by the European Commission and readiness to ACTIVELY ENGAGE and enable the effective implementation of on-going, new and future projects on environment and climate action such as Regional Implementation of Paris Agreement Project (RIPAP), the upcoming regional projects on Transition Towards the Low Emissions and Climate-resilient Economy, the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession, Twinning and TAIEX projects.
7. **CALL** for further mainstreaming and focusing of the EC assistance on the regional needs and priorities and stand ready to provide regional coordination and support for the implementation of the assistance through the existing RWG Env as an intergovernmental regional platform in the areas of environment and climate change.
8. **PRAISE** the progress achieved by the Energy Community Secretariat in advancing the work of the Energy and Climate Committee (ECC) and its Technical Working Group by launching a Talanoa regional dialogue, adopting a Recommendation on preparing for the development of integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), endorsing a Guidance document that explains the key steps from now until the finalisation of such plans, as well as by engaging with Contracting Parties in a discussion regarding 2030 energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and greenhouse gasses emission reduction targets that adequately reflect an equal EU ambition level.
9. **SUPPORT** a holistic approach towards achieving the 2030 Energy and Climate targets and express our commitment and readiness to strengthen cross sectoral cooperation with RCC, the Energy Community and other relevant institutions in order to facilitate achievement of mandatory targets when adopted.
10. **CALL** for strengthening the role and capacities of local governments and implementation of concrete projects, exploiting potentials of state of the art technologies and smart solutions in environment protection and fight against climate change.
11. **WELCOME** the initiative of the UN Environment and the World Health Organization to address air pollution in the region, as one of the most significant environmental problems, which negatively impacts human health, and hampers economic development, and call for support to develop and maintain systems for monitoring, assessment and management of air quality.
12. **WELCOME** the initiative of UN Environment and its partners to promote climate change adaptation in mountain regions building on the results of the "Outlook on Climate Change Adaptation in the Western Balkans" financed by the Government of Austria and **CALL** for strengthened efforts towards climate change adaptation in mountain regions including regional dialogue and cooperative action.
13. **COOPERATE** on implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and commitments to meet long-term goals.
14. **COOPERATE** in the area of environmental governance, aiming for the adoption and effective implementation of SEA and EIA procedures, also in a transboundary context, in line with EU standards and international conventions.
15. **PROMOTE** the transition to green and circular economy, making best use of the benefits and opportunities it offers for economic diversification, resource efficiency, climate neutrality and sustainable low emission development.
16. **INCREASE** action to ensure the effective enforcement of legislation and fight against illegal activities that have an adverse impact on the environment.
17. **SUPPORT** mainstreaming of environment, climate change and sustainable development objectives in all policy areas and enhance cross-sector and inter-Ministerial cooperation.
18. **SUPPORT** the involvement of civil society on decision-making, strategic planning and implementation, as well as results' monitoring of environmental policy, programmes and plans, in line with the Aarhus convention.
19. **CONTINUE** to work with IFIs to ensure that all partners engage in a planned strategy to reduce wasteful energy consumption and increase energy efficiency particularly in the residential, public and transport sectors.
20. **COMMIT** to further improve and share environmental information in order to ensure transparency, accountability and support evidence-base decision-making.
21. **INCREASE** capabilities of national administrative structures to address environmental and climate challenges, including where possible through enhancing capacity building.
22. **MEET** in one year time to assess progress on cooperation.

In Skopje,
21st November 2018