



MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2ND HIGH-LEVEL 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 Bonn in November 2017 under the framework for the implementation of the South East Europe 2020 (SEE 2020) Strategy and its Environment Dimension, re-affirm our strong commitment to strengthen regional cooperation, join efforts and call for concrete common action in addressing the existing environmental and climate challenges together with preventing and mitigating the future ones,

Expressing our gratitude to the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and to the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Environmental Protection, for hosting and co-chairing this high-level meeting and commending the work and outcomes of the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env),

Aware of the extraordinary momentum of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change adopted at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which entered into force on 4th November 2016, as the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels,

Determined to jointly respond and contribute to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals, to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change through Western Balkans' determined contributions to it, or through objectives of the Low Emission Strategy,

Recognising that those contributions must be embedded into the national development strategies and the sustainable development goals, translated into actionable policies and measures in all sectors of the economy,

Underlining the importance of ambitious policies on circular economy and resource efficiency, sustainable land and water management, air quality, biodiversity, and ocean governance for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change,

Stressing the close interlinkages between the environment and climate change and other policies, and the need for closer cooperation between the ministries for environment and ministries for other sectors, such as energy, transport, agriculture, tourism and regional development, to ensure the effective integration of environment and climate change into other policies,

Committed to support the transition towards a circular economy in line with the EU Action Plan for a Circular Economy which will boost global competitiveness, foster sustainable economic growth and generate new jobs while reducing resource needs, waste and greenhouse gas emissions, and to contribute to reducing biodiversity loss through support for the EU Biodiversity Strategy,

Recognising the determined and distinct vision of the Energy Union Framework Policy to fight climate change, ensuring secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy for all Europeans and strengthening integrated energy and climate approach,

Mindful of comprehensive legislative packages designed to keep the Union competitive and pursue a transition towards low emissions and climate-resilient society, also contributing to the achievement of 2030 energy and climate framework targets,

Recalling the South East Europe 2020 Strategy – Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective adopted in November 2013 by our Governments that provides a framework for strengthening regional cooperation and boosting prosperity in different areas and also mindful of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019 put forward to improve resilience to climate change and enhance sustainable use of natural resources.

Recalling the Podgorica Declaration adopted in April 2016, which provides the first common regional platform for addressing environmental and climate challenges in South East Europe through integrative cooperative approach within the framework of the SEE 2020 Strategy,

Mindful of the Sustainability Charter signed by our Governments at the Paris Summit in July 2016 as part of the Berlin Process and of the initiative of the Energy Community with the aim of expanding the WB6 Connectivity Agenda beyond regional electricity market integration to incorporate energy efficiency and smart support measures and fostering climate action together with transparency of sustainable energy markets,

Have adopted the following Ministerial Declaration:

1. We welcome the EU perspective of Western Balkans unequivocally confirmed in Trieste. In this context we call for further strengthening of the synergies and regional cooperation for the implementation of the environment and climate change priorities in the region, as well as for strengthened high-level policy dialogue between the Western Balkans and the EU.
2. We acknowledge the work of the RWG Env for the implementation of the Environment Dimension of the SEE 2020 Strategy coordinated by the RCC in

cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP Med) and the Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD).

3. Recognising the growing need in the region to improve the coordination of existing regional initiatives and projects (ClimaProof, on climate proofing in transport infrastructure development; and Nexus, on critical interlinkages between water, energy and food security), as well as those which will be developed to serve the SEE 2020 Strategy goals, we call upon the RCC in cooperation with the relevant partners to provide a mechanism for steering, regular monitoring and half-yearly reporting through the RWG Env on the implementation of these initiatives and projects and the main developments.
4. We praise the establishment of the Task Force on Biodiversity (TF BD) under the RWG Env as a regional platform for planning, coordinating and monitoring the regional activities on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Recognising the richness and the significant importance of the biodiversity for the region, we call upon the TF BD to provide a mechanism for regular monitoring and half-yearly reporting on the implementation and main developments through the RWG Env.
5. We acknowledge the climate change challenges and the need for promotion of sustainable development of the rural and cross-border regions with a special emphasis on nature conservation and proper management of natural resources, for promoting environmental and socio-economic development in the SEE region.
6. We praise the support provided by the European Commission under the Environment and Climate Regional Accession Network (ECRAN) project for strengthening regional cooperation and administrative capacities in the region as a way to assure proper alignment with the EU acquis in the areas of environment and climate change and we look forward to the upcoming regional projects, such as the Regional Implementation of Paris Agreement Project (RIPAP).
7. Recognising strong interlinkages between energy, and environment and climate change policies, we call upon strengthening inter-sectorial cooperation at the highest political level and consideration of environmental and climate challenges also within the framework of the Energy Community Climate Action Group as well as ensuring multi-sectorial national planning and reporting for the period beyond 2020 towards 2030 climate and energy framework goals. An integrated approach to energy and environment considerations is fully aligned with the objectives of the Energy Union and the Sustainability Charter signed within the framework of the Energy Community Treaty.
8. We acknowledge the adoption of the Recommendation to implement the Monitoring Mechanism Regulation (MMR) as part of the Energy Community acquis in 2016 and the European Commission Decision to propose to the Energy Community Ministerial Council later this year the adoption of the Recommendation on preparing for the development of integrated national energy and climate plans by the Western Balkans Contracting Parties of the Energy Community, and we invite the RCC and partners to cooperate closely with the Energy Community and its structures.
9. We draw attention to energy efficiency, with the focus on public sector which has 30-40% of energy saving potential, by promoting and increasing the application of clean, environmentally sensitive and climate-friendly technologies and products, increasing awareness on eco-design and promotion of sustainable consumption patterns.
10. We 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 environment and climate change areas.
11. We call for regional efforts in implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, integration of the environment and climate change into other policies and strengthening of the capacities of the RWG Env and Energy Community Climate Action Group as well as of local governments to implement relevant environment and climate change policies.
12. We acknowledge the need for enhanced efforts and cooperation for improved water resource management and we call for initiating implementation of the actions of the Environment Dimension of the SEE 2020 Strategy related to Trans-boundary Water Resource Management, the Regional Integral Water Management, as well as private sector participation in financing water infrastructure.