

## Climate change – Challenges in South East Europe

SPEECH HELD AT THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE “CLIMATE CHANGE – CHALLENGES IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE” (BUCHAREST, 05-07 SEPTEMBER 2012)

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Regional Conference on the topic of „Climate Change – Challenges in South East Europe“ on behalf of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

I am delighted that experts from more than 15 countries have come to Bucharest to share experience and information, to build up a hopefully sustainable network and to develop and discuss strategies for the future.

I am also delighted to welcome some high ranking guests from our host country. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome Ms Sufina Barbu, Member of the Chamber of Deputies and its Committee of Public Administration, Territorial Planning and Ecological Balance.

I am honoured to welcome H.E. Madame Andrea Gustovic Ercegovac, Ambassador of Croatia and Mr Joao Sabido Costa, Charge d’Affairs from the Embassy of Portugal.

I am also very pleased that several other Embassies are represented today, such as the British, the US, Canadian, Norwegian

and Serbian Embassies, you are all very welcome. And as representative of a German foundation please allow me to acknowledge the presence of the Head of the Legal and Consular Section Dr. Johannes Dietrich, in particular.

As a Christian Democratic Foundation we are committed to the protection of the environment and as a Rule of Law Program it is within the scope of our tasks to discuss whether we have suitable legal instruments to protect the environment.

But climate change is not just a challenge for Christian Democrats, to perceive climate change as one of the major challenges of our time should not be an issue on which democrats from all parts of the political spectrum should be divided over. We may discuss political strategies on concepts controversially but we should be united in accepting the facts provided by scientific research and stubbornly neglect them, there is too much at stake for that.

“We behave often as if we were the last generation to inhabit the earth” is a quotation attributed to Rene Dubos the famous French American Microbiologist. And in fact in the past economic prosper-

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ity was very often achieved at the expense of the environment, the responsibility for solving the problems caused by the current generation was shifted to future generations.

This is a strategy that cannot work forever and if we talk about it in the context of climate change it is almost sure that it will not work. If we don't act now it may be too late.

Climate change is happening now. Temperatures are rising, rainfall patterns are shifting, glaciers and snow are melting and the global mean sea level is rising. We expect that these changes will continue, and that extreme weather events resulting in hazards such as floods and droughts will become more frequent and intense. The global temperature has risen by about 0.8°C over the past 150 years, and is projected to increase further. Exceeding an increase of 2 °C above pre-industrial temperatures raises the risks of dangerous changes for global human and natural systems.

It is a common assumption that Southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Already now southern SEE countries are coping with water scarcity due to the combined effect of high temperature increases and reduced precipitation.

Other impacts of climate change in South East Europe may include: a rise in the frequency of extreme weather events, increased coastal erosion, sea level rise, impacts on marine biodiversity, rising water levels in tidal rivers, increased flooding, increased forest and scrubland fires, changing agricultural landscapes, including crop failure, changes in habitat composition and species distribution, richness and diversity, and increasing problems caused by invasive alien species.

There is almost a consensus among scientists that most of the global warming since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is due to the observed increase in greenhouse gas concentrations as a result of emissions from human activities. Human activities are releasing large amounts of green house gases into the atmosphere, increasing the atmospheric concentrations of their gases and thus enhancing the greenhouse effect and warming the climate.

We can mitigate climate changes by making sound policy, technology and investment choices that lead to GHG emission reductions with a focus on scaling up clean and renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and energy conservation

We have to support developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation.

We will have to adapt to climate change reducing our vulnerability and using ecosystem services to build natural resilience against the impacts of climate change.

And we should enhance knowledge and communications to raise awareness of climate change impacts among decision-makers and other target audiences.

In the context of this conference we will learn about the current state of research in South East Europe, we will discuss the interrelation between human rights and climate changes, we will look at the status of international conventions on climate protection and discuss options for legal development, the Air and Climate Change Program of the European Union will be explained to us, the European network "Climate Alliance" will present its activities in more than 1,000 European municipalities. The Head of the Environment Commission of the Union of Baltic Cities, which I co-chaired myself for a couple of years will show us how to set up

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a regional network that deals with Climate Change all we will assess the state of affairs in nine South East European countries.

I wish to express my profound thanks to all the keynote speakers to each of you who attends the conference and to all those who have prepared it.

Last but not least I wish to thank the representatives of the media which play such an important role in public awareness rising.

With the support of all of you this conference will be a big success.