

14 SEPTEMBER, 10:00h, HOTEL SPLENDID

Joint High Level Segment of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR Protocol)

OPENING SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO MR IVAN BRAJOVIĆ

**Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,**

It is my honour and my pleasure to open this significant and great international event on behalf of Montenegro. We are honoured due to the fact that our country is hosting this event which gathers in one place the delegates from the 56 member states of the Economic Commission for Europe, delegates of non-member states, academics and professionals from several fields, numerous international organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations.

Our Montenegro, even though it is not big in size or the number of its citizens, is known for its jealous protection of its freedom, its heritage, openness towards friends and dedication in alliances. At the same time, we are recognised as a treasury of uncommon natural beauty, a great number of striking cultural and historical monuments, an area where the cultures of the west and the east intertwine, and - as our guests say - a country whose people are adorned with exceptional hospitality and openness.

In a political sense, the modern Montenegro, which is oriented towards Europe and the adoption of European values, is a regional leader in integration processes. We got the validation of the clear orientation of our path on 5 June of this year, when we became the 29th NATO member state.

Simultaneously with the international processes, we also work strategically on improvement of our economy in all segments, with emphasis on improvement of the business environment, and thus the positioning of Montenegro as a significant investment destination. We can say with pleasure that today we represent one of the most attractive tourist and investment destinations in this part of Europe, especially with regard to investment in the sectors of tourism and energy, and sustainable development projects.

By adopting the Declaration of Ecological State in 1991, with a view to protecting natural resources and preserving the identity of its unique space, Montenegro became the first ecological country in the world. It is said in the Declaration of Ecological State that "being aware of our debt to the nature, which is the source of our health and inspiration of our freedom and culture, we dedicate ourselves to its protection in the name of our own survival and the future of our descendants".

Following that determination, our Constitution contains a designation of Montenegro as an ecological state, based on the principles and requirements of sustainable development, while the right to a healthy environment, to information on the state of the environment, the right to participate in the decision-making process relating to the

environment, as well as the right to legal protection are recognised as fundamental human rights, included in the Aarhus Convention.

The Aarhus Convention represents one of the most progressive international agreements regarding the environment, it defines the direction of sustainable development and strengthens basic democratic principles.

The goal of the Aarhus Convention is “to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being”.

The principles of the Aarhus Convention are increasingly becoming a part of our daily lives in an attempt to make the right to access to information, to participation in decision-making and to legal protection the foundation for the protection of public interest and the achievement of ecological and economic standards of developed countries.

The new National Strategy of Sustainable Development of Montenegro by 2030, adopted last year, promotes the politics of sustainable development of Montenegro, while in the context of increasingly intensive European integration process, which Montenegro has chosen as its development path, we are intensively working on adopting and implementing demanding European standards oriented towards ensuring effective protection of the environment.

Activities in the negotiations under Chapter 27 have begun in 2012 with the formation of a working group that, in addition to representatives of state institutions, involved the civil sector as well.

Chapter 27 - Environment is undoubtedly one of the most demanding chapters, primarily because of its enormity and complexity, as well as due to the dynamics of the amendments to the legislation at the level of the European Union, which is very evident precisely in this area.

Its full implementation brings with it a considerable number of challenges, which are set before the society as a whole, including politics, administration and economy. Legislative, implementation, and financial tasks await us in the field of environmental protection. While the harmonisation of legislation is quite advanced, the implementation of regulations and the construction of necessary ecological infrastructure is essential for the entire process.

For this reason, joint efforts of all stakeholders of the society are needed, because not only Montenegro, but the whole world as well, is faced with challenges in the field of environment. Healthy environment, preserved natural values, sustainability of natural resources, sustainable economic development and the rule of law are the goals towards which Montenegro has been striving as an ecological state, responsible state, a future member of the European Union.

The success of achieving the set goals depends on our openness and readiness to intensify communication with citizens. Public participation is a prerequisite for successful

defining of policies and decision-making process, as well as for establishing transparent, open and democratic governance. Organised public participation shows citizens that they are part of the community and that their opinion is important. In these efforts, the role and professional approach of the media are paramount.

As in all other areas of the broadest social interest, the participation of all stakeholders must be encouraged, and in particular impartial professionalism-based participation of the expert public in debates and planning processes concerning the sustainable development of the society. It is particularly important to improve the transparency of governance with timely provision of information to the interested public and to enhance the public's ability to influence the work of public administration at an early stage of the process of adopting and implementing regulations, public policies, programs and projects by providing opinions and remarks.

I would also like to point to the goal of preserving the natural beauty of Montenegro through the concept of sustainable development, which must truly become a strategic determinant of the development of our country, its present and future, in a significantly different and significantly wider context. Namely, economic development must be achieved without the exhaustion of cumulative potentials and without making damage to any part of the society, respecting the highest standards of environmental protection, and harmonising them with long-term national social and economic interests.

Holding of this event in our country will contribute to an even greater degree of commitment of Montenegro to the goals of sustainable development and the Aarhus Convention. It will also have the effect on the promotion of our country at the international level, which thanks to its natural beauty and favourable geographical conditions, has the status of a popular tourist destination, where tourism has been recognised as one of the priority branches of economic development.

I wish you successful work and I hope for your return visit to Montenegro!