

## STATEMENT – NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Dear colleagues, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, we welcome the new work programme prepared by the Bureau. It sets out a valuable guide that we will use in the future planning of our activities. As outlined in the work programme we strongly support the development of pilot projects and capacity-building activities at the subregional and national levels.

At the time of restricted movement, introduced to prevent the spread of the pandemic caused by COVID 19, maintaining inclusive environmental dialogue has become more relevant than ever before. Looking ahead, the economic downturn, faced by states across the globe will pose a new threat to the natural surroundings as economies venture into new job openings through industries that harm nature.

In light of these challenges, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia will partner with state and independent institutions, chambers of commerce, think tanks and civil society organizations to develop policies at state and local levels, aimed at supporting sustainable development, to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

This will be achieved by engaging into capacity building events for new convocations of local and parliamentary assemblies, established in the aftermath of Parliamentary and local elections, which took place in the Republic of Serbia in July this year. This will be done with support of international organizations, foremost the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the OSCE). The events will, as a matter of rule, include the participation of Aarhus Centers and other environmental CSOs. The cooperation with partner organizations, in particular with OSCE, Aarhus Centers and other environmental CSOs and capacity building is also essential for the implementation of the future work programme prepared by the Bureau.

As an illustration of good cooperation with partner organizations and effective modalities of work in COVID 19 conditions, I wish to briefly present the process of developing the Fourth National Implementation Report on the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the Republic of Serbia. In June 2020, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia launched a call for public input to the draft Report. The document was placed on the Official Website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and was made available for public scrutiny. However, the response to the invitation was rather weak. Therefore, the Ministry of Environmental Protection reached out for support to the OSCE Mission to Serbia and organized a meaningful series of online discussions with interested stakeholders, in partnership with the Network of the Aarhus centres in Serbia.

To observe the preventive measures aimed at reducing the spread of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, the public consultation process was organized in a virtual format, through the Zoom platform, over a two-week period, from 14<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2020. A total of five public discussions, addressing the draft Fourth National Implementation Report, were organized for

participants across the country, from the most northern town of Subotica, to the most southern City of Niš.