

Address by
His Excellency Mr Ilir Meta, Prime Minister of Albania

On the occasion of the establishment of Prespa Park
February 2, 2000, Aghios Germanos, Greece

Dear Mr. Prime Ministers,

It is a great pleasure for me to greet, on behalf of the Government of Albania, today's meeting with the participation of the three Prime Ministers of the respective countries. We have gathered here today to discuss a joint initiative of a transboundary ecological habitat of the Ohrid and Prespa Lakes in the framework of the Stability Pact.

The environmental dimension of this initiative compels us to tackle with priority problems of environment protection in our region, problems which therefore require regional solutions.

The all-round process of reconstruction of Southeastern Europe, in the framework of the Stability Pact, offers us the right opportunity to integrate our environmental concerns in such sectors as economic development and infrastructure. In this respect, such an initiative should be viewed as a commitment of our governments, people and countries getting closer. It is a sign of our mutual endeavors for boosting the economic development and similarly preserving our common natural resources.

In this regard, a particular importance should be given to our joint effort in taking concrete steps for a sustainable exploitation of such natural resources which are unique not only for the region but to the world as well. The Government of Albania would like to express its firm belief that the regional cooperation in the field of the environmental protection, in particular among neighboring states, would benefit the citizens and the environment of the respective countries as well as will certainly contribute to the achievement of the Stability Pact goals, which are related to the democratization, economic development, and security of the region.

We are all aware of the local and international importance of this region, which has scientific, ecological, cultural and tourist values. We are conscious of the need for quick-impact intervention with the view of recuperating losses in biodiversity, extinction of various species, deforestation, and soil infertility.

The protection and the exploitation of this region bearing precious natural treasures and with such a rich diversity should be considered as part of the world's natural and cultural heritage.

This requires an integrated protection of the soil and water ecosystems in the basin of the three lakes, by establishing joint coordinating mechanisms and by undertaking joint regional measures.

By duly estimating the great natural and biological values of the area, the Government of Albania approved February 1999 a decree declaring the Albanian part of the Prespa Lakes National Park whereas the Ohrid Lake was declared "Protected land and water territory". Hence, the Albanian National Park of Prespa, being considered as an extension of the Galicica and Prespa Parks, provides a land protection of these transboundary lakes

We are confident that the involvement of the Albanian side in the regional development policies will increase the efforts to protect and restore this ecosystem, it will serve as a starting point for a sustainable development of the region Through the establishment of an economic and ecological pattern, through scientific research, monitoring of the species and increase of population awareness, we believe that we can achieve a lot.

The development of tourism constitutes an important economic element for the entire region which should be supported by measures aiming at the preservation of the natural and historic heritage of the area.

To achieve this goal, it is more than necessary for us to take decisive steps for the rehabilitation of infrastructure, boosting of activities such as the fruit-tree cultivation, ecological agriculture, etc. Also, the undertaking of the required hydro studies in the region of Prespa and the implementation of well-thought plans, would improve significantly the biodiversity in the region.

We are fully aware of the specifics of our respective countries; however, it is more than required that we join our efforts in supporting our common interest for the safeguarding and recuperation of the unique ecological values of the region.

The Government of Albania, in cooperation with the governments of your countries, will engage itself in the implementation of sustainable policies which target the development and the protection of this area.

Finally, allow me to, once more, reiterate the commitment of my Government which is in line with the whole process of the reconstruction of Southeastern Europe, to join efforts with your countries and build a better future for ourselves and the generations to come.

The efforts made and the actions taken by the Government of Albania and your countries in the ecological field aiming at securing a safer environment both at national and regional level, should provide the ground for the establishment of a well-defined regional transboundary cooperation in other fields as well.♦