

Speech

of Mr Jan Dusík, Deputy Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic at the ICPDR Ministerial Meeting in Bucharest on 23 February 2007

Madam President, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

first of all allow me to congratulate representatives and citizens of Romania and Bulgaria to their accession to European Union. This historical step is important for both countries as well as for European Union itself. This fact has also great importance for the cooperation in the framework of the ICPDR, whose main activities correspond with the requirements of the EC legislation, especially with the Water Framework Directive.

The Czech Republic has been an EU member state since 2004 together with other Danube countries - Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. More than 18 years after the important political and economical changes in the Czech Republic, we are fully aware of the complexity and magnitude of problems related to improvement of environment and its components. We are prepared to share our experience with other countries in the framework of the ICPDR and other international bodies for the protection of European river basins.

Since the last decade of the 20th century, a great deal of work to improve the environment in the Czech Republic has been done in the framework of preparation for EU accession and meeting the obligations of membership. Bearing in mind the position of the Czech Republic at the roof of Europe, and serious problems of the water quality that we faced in 1990s, a quick action was necessary. Most of the requirements of the EC environmental legislation have been met by the date of accession to the EU. The bulk of EC legislation has been transposed into Czech national legislation through the "Water Act", "Act on Water Mains and Sewers for Public Use" and the "Act on the Public Health". These Acts were supplemented by a number of related regulations and decrees.

The main attention of the Czech Government concentrated on substantial reduction of pollution originating from urban and industrial pollution sources. Framework principles, such as integrated water protection in river basins, were introduced at both national and international levels. Administrative efforts together with huge investments in the water sector led to substantial improvement in the chemical and ecological quality of water.

A satisfactory amount of good-quality drinking water is now available to the population. Since 1990 the discharged pollution has been reduced by more than 90% as measured by main parameters: biological oxygen demand, chemical oxygen demand and the concentration of suspended solids. The entire territory of the country has been declared as a sensitive area. In addition to point sources of pollution, increasing attention is being paid to diffuse sources. In order to reduce pollution of water by nitrates originating from agriculture, the Czech Republic has designated approximately 46% of agricultural land as vulnerable. Within these vulnerable areas special programs are being implemented. As a result of improvement of the water environment, species diversity and abundance of fish population in the Czech rivers is improving.

Improvements in the water sector are without doubt associated with huge investments, mainly in the areas of wastewater collection and treatment, drinking water supply, measures

to reduce pollution from agricultural sources and measures for the protection against flooding. In order to maximise the efficiency of these investments, a financing system combining public and private financial resources has been established. The public resources include essential support from the EC structural and cohesion funds as well as loans from international financial institutions.

In meeting the water quality requirements, we consider not only our own interests, but also the interests of entire river basins in relation to the state of rivers and seas. The Czech Republic is party to the international agreements on the protection of the Danube, Elbe and Oder River basins and we are pleased that these “river commissions” serve as coordinating bodies for implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive, which we see as a basis for achieving common targets in water protection at national and international levels.

We appreciate the fact that international commissions for protection of international river basins are concerned not only with the water quality but also with the protection against flooding. We welcome the work of European Commission and EU Member States on the draft Directive on the Assessment and Management of Floods with the aim to improve the status of flood protection in Europe. This fact is especially important for the Czech Republic since our country has recently suffered from several catastrophic flood events, which led to loss of lives and high material damage. The importance of international cooperation in this domain can be demonstrated by starting cooperation with our neighbours Austria and Slovakia on the concerted approach to flood forecasting, warning and mitigation flood management in Morava River basin. Concrete flood protection measures will be part of the Czech national Plans of River Basin Districts to be elaborated in line with the Water Framework Directive.

We are aware of the fact that most effective measures to improve water quality must be based on cooperative and coordinated approach at international level. That is why we welcome the possibility of this meeting showing the cooperative spirit not only inside the International Commission for Protection of the Danube, but also in relation to the International Commission for Protection of the Black Sea. We also welcome the presence of high representatives of international financial institutions and donors at this meeting and the possibility to express our acknowledgement to the UNDP/GEF for their outstanding support to ICPDR activities. Let me conclude by expressing my gratitude to the Romanian Government for the warm hospitality during this event.