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|  | EUROPEAN UNION  Delegation of the European Union |

Skopje, 29 November 2021

**Promotion of the Green Deal campaign with mayors**

Venue: Plateau of the National Opera and Ballet, 11h55

Speaking points

**Ambassador David Geer**

**Head of Delegation**

*Dear Deputy Prime Minister, ministers, mayors, colleagues,*

* It is a great pleasure to see so many of you at this event. **The issues we are discussing today need the support of as many people as possible. They require practical actions, with each of us doing their share.**
* **It is the eleventh hour. We are running out of time. Climate change is a fact**. **And so are its consequences, which will become ever more severe and affect all parts of the planet. We need to act - immediately and globally.**
* **A recent assessment put North Macedonia among the six most vulnerable European countries to climate change and its consequences.** In the last five years, more than 50% of the population have been affected by natural disasters such as heat waves, forest fires and flooding. We all remember the fires of last summer. And the deadly floods of 2016. What is really worrying is that - globally - such events are becoming more frequent and more intense.
* **The campaign we are launching today concerns the EU’s response: the EU Green Deal.** Its aim is to tackle climate change, halt environmental degradation and the collapse of biodiversity. It promotes an economic model based on sustainable growth. The Green Deal is more than just a political ambition. It consists of practical actions which all of us are need to implement – current and future Member States.
* **What are the aims?**
* **Firstly, it is decarbonising our economies.** This is essential to mitigate the consequences of climate change. Since 1990, the EU has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 30%, while growing by 60%. However, globally, we will have to do more - and faster. The goal of the EU, as a global leader on climate action, is to cut emissions by 55% by the end of this decade and to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050.
* **Secondly,** it is **climate adaptation and reducing the risks in case of extreme weather events**. Urban heat, limited green spaces and reduced natural drainage make **cities particularly vulnerable to extreme events** **such as heat waves and flooding**. The number of European cities committed to adapting to climate change has grown substantially in the last decade. This means making resilience to climate-change a part of urban planning – through early warning and evacuation systems, flood defences, the creation of more green spaces, the adaption of buildings, more efficient and greener mobility. I am pleased that the **EU Copernicus satellite images has helped several municipalities here prepare urban adaptation maps**.
* In 2008, the mayors of a number of European cities launched a **Covenant of Mayors for climate and energy.** This has becomethe world’s largest movement of cities taking action on climate and environment action.
* Recently, the European Union opened the covenant process to **Mayors in the Western Balkans and Turkey**. There are currently, **86 signatories from the six Western Balkans countries, of which six are in North Macedonia. We hope that many more will join the movement.**
* **Climate change cannot be tackled through small-scale initiatives alone - it requires comprehensive policies to be put in place, with a strong political commitment and the deployment of full administrative capacities at national and local levels.**
* **The government and the municipalities have a major role to play in all this.** This means comprehensive reforms. This means implementing the actions under the Green Agenda for the WB, to which North Macedonia and all the other WB countries committed at the 2020 Berlin Process Summit in Sofia. This means generating initiatives that can attract green investment – public or private. **It is an opportunity to be seized, but you should be the ones in the lead.**
* **Of course, we are here to support you. The EU remains the biggest donor in the country and roughly, 40% of the annual assistance budget is spent on projects implemented locally in different sectors.**
* This year we launched a new initiative in support of local self-government. We have recently signed contracts with eight municipalities for projects supporting innovation and the circular economy.
* In addition, we are strongly supporting international and cross-border partnerships between municipalities in the EU and in North Macedonia focused on local environmental issues.
* The EU will also provide **grants for municipalities** for energy efficiency in public buildings. **The public sector should lead by example in energy efficiency activities and inspire other sectors to follow suit. But, again, this depends on action by you.**
* Complementary to this grant scheme we are also providing thefunding to address the poor quality of air**.**
* **For years, a number of cities in North Macedonia, especially Skopje, have been considered among the most polluted cities in the world.** The impact on health and well-being is enormous. And it has an economic price too.
* **The EU for Clean Air action aims to help change this**. It will help the country align its legislation with that of the EU, and - most importantly – ensure that these standards are applied in practice. The project will also support **renovation of district heating** in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Bitola.
* As regards Skopje, we will also support **affordable mobility solutions** by increasing the fleet of green buses. Transport is another significant source of air pollution in the city. The renewal of public transport with non polluting buses will have an immediate effect on air quality. I hope this scheme can be replicated in other cities.
* Toward the end, allow me to share some remarks about **civil protection and disaster risk reduction.**
* We are currently responding to a request from the association of local self-government units (ZELS) for a study visit to EU Member States that will help municipalities develop **new competences in firefighting**. Such a visit will familiarise local firefighting units and personnel in charge of local crisis plans with **European best practices** in the area.
* The EU is ready to do more. Assistance in helping municipalities become more resilient to disasters, including developing early warning systems and flood emergency plans, is already available under the ongoing **EU support for Flood Prevention and Forest Fires Risk Management.**

*Dear colleagues, dear citizens,*

* I have outlined the many ways in which the EU can help you in tackling the challenges of climate change and making the country’s cities and towns worthy of its citizens and ready to face the future.
* **But the onus has to be on you to act. The initiative remains with you. You are all at the beginning of your mandates. You have an opportunity to plan for a better future in the interests of those your represent, in the interests of your children.**
* We firmly believe in the potential of municipalities together with citizens and with grassroots initiatives from local communities to make a difference now. Therefore, from next year the EU Delegation plans to launch an **annual award for “Green Municipality”,** which will recognise best local practices in areas such as waste management, energy efficiency, the protection of environment and others.
* **Let’s work together. Let’s create opportunities together using this Green Deal campaign as an inspiration: to change hearts and mind. Let us not allow the Museum of the Future to become a reality. Let us make this campaign the beginning of a better and greener future for all.** Thank you.