

Dr. Ljupco Ristovski
Welcome address
at the Second Meeting of the Project Steering Committee
31 May 2013, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the Second Steering Committee of the IPA Project "Building Resilience to Disasters in Western Balkans and Turkey". I would like to welcome all of you dear friends in the beautiful and sunny Macedonia. I do hope that you will feel once again the fullness of the wide known Macedonian hospitality.

Experience is a great achievement in general. The wisdom is to learn from other' experiences almost as equally as from your own. Bad experiences often happened. Many of those were catastrophic. The Macedonian experience 50 years ago with the disastrous Skopje earthquake is deep into the conscious of the modern generations. 50 years are not a lot in a historical distance but the memories are still fresh. In my country alone, according to the EM-DAT database, in the past 15 years the direct economic losses due to disasters caused by natural hazards exceeded 262 Million US Dollars. This figure is likely to be conservative since losses caused by extensive and low-impact disasters are not included. Skopje earthquake killed over 1.100, left 130.000 homeless and caused over 1 Billion US Dollars of economic damages.

That experience taught us that the society needs an organized effort in direction of preparedness and mobilization of all intellectual

potential of the nation in order to strengthen the overall capacity for prevention and efficient dealing with any kind of catastrophes.

We as Macedonia are supportive to DRR activities from the very beginning. We have successfully participated almost in all undertaken activities by UNISDR and particularly within the European Forum agenda.

In this regard I would like to congratulate Paola and her team for the extraordinary efforts they are investing in the safer future of Europe and particularly the Balkans. Knowledge is the most important element in many areas of life but in the DRR activities seems to be an essential. Building knowledge, exchanging experiences and information, sharing achievements and common efforts toward a common goal is the right approach.

As we have stressed in our Official Statement of the Republic of Macedonia at the 4th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction ... “We welcome the UN ISDR commitment to underscore very important issues on this Forum, which in our opinion are instrumental to provide better ground for more preventive readiness of states and regions...”

If the people should understand each other they must speak one to each other. Step forward, if the leaders from the Balkans and wider - South East Europe would like to provide safer and more prosperous future for the generations to come, they need to speak to each other more than in any other part of the world. Unfortunately, one of the promising occasions to make such an approach effective has been cancelled because of the political misunderstandings and calculations. And instead of continuing discussions, many have decided to avoid it and to stay in their home yards only. That is not promising.

We are sorry about the latest developments of the situation, particularly because of the topic that should have been discussed at the Presidential Summit i.e. DRR & CCA efforts for a safer future titled as “Solidarity in Action”. It was a great opportunity to raise this issue on a highest possible political level and to increase the influence to the Governments and political elites in the region.

The Summit had a general goal “...to enhance regional cooperation to further strengthen the capabilities of SEECP participating states for DRR and CCA through creating a Regional Action Plan in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action, defining long term priorities in compliance to already existing activities in South East Europe ... and to advance regional efforts to integrate DRR and CCA measures in major policies and financial instruments related in particular to: agriculture, energy, infrastructure, health, environment, environmental impact assessment, land use, urban, and spatial planning, social policies, response and post-recovery programmes.”¹.

Ladies and Gentlemen, “...the overall objective of the Summit was to secure political commitment and strong leadership among heads of state governments to strengthen the institutional capacities for reduction of the impact of disasters and build the resilience of communities in South Eastern Europe”.

What we need in this moment is to refresh the political commitment on a highest possible level and increase their awareness and mobility within the European structures to vigorously impose DRR&CCA components as obligatory for the candidate countries in further approaching the EU structures. Better financial mobility and significant overall increase of the Agency and other European funds for

¹ Official Statement of the Republic of Macedonia at the 4th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, May 21, 2013

DRR&CCA efforts is needed more than ever. In that regard, it complies with the 21st's century challenges that we are all going to face.

Projects like the one we are gathering for, "Building Resilience to Disasters in Western Balkans and Turkey" are another great opportunity to put closer our mutual efforts in that direction. I am pleased to see that the project built also important partnerships with actors such as EUMETNET for the tasks focusing on climate risk management and the World Bank and Europe Re for the task related to promoting insurance and re-insurance in South Eastern European countries.

My personal opinion is that we need to invest all together as governments and international organizations not only in the knowledge and cooperation, but also in equipment and strengthening the institutional and human capacities. In this part of Europe the economic situation is not promising due to many reasons. But, this does not mean that the more prosperous nations should stay aside and not interfere in supporting through stretching hands towards new promising projects and ideas.

Only together we can improve the current stage in this segment and we are called upon to unite our mutual efforts now, at the beginning of the 21st century, more than ever before. Catastrophes do not recognize frontiers, nationalities, states and people. They are universal and our approach in that regard should be almost the same - universal in character and efficient in action. I use this opportunity to plead for more closed future cooperation, for greater openness towards each other and for stronger stance towards sharing everyone's achievements, God's given material wealth and goodness, mercy and love that is essential for every human being.

Thank you for your attention.