

**Address by His Excellency Leonid D. Kuchma,
President of Ukraine, at the International Conference on
Environmental and Sustainable Development of the
Danube - Carpathian Region
(Bucharest, April 30 2001)**

Dear Mr. Chairperson,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me express my gratitude to the organizers of this important forum for a warm reception and hospitality.

I especially would like to thank my colleague His Excellency Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, who has dedicated a lot of his own efforts and energy to make this Conference a success.

I can not but point out the significant contribution of the World Environmental Fund and namely His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to the preparation of the Conference. Ukraine highly appreciates the attention that the Fund is paying to the conservation of biological diversity in the region of Carpathian Mountains and in the delta of the Danube River.

This forum is supposed to become an important benchmark in the implementation of basic principles and commitments at regional and European levels under the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. The adoption of the Bucharest Declaration will demonstrate our commitment to the Rio Declaration and thus will become an important stage towards the preparation of the "Rio +10" Summit in Johannesburg.

I believe that the main objective of the Conference is to make sure that the development of environmental and sustainable mentality becomes an imperative in all areas of regional policy of the participating countries.

The need for such an approach is especially strong in the era of globalization. Today when dangers to the environment have acquired a global dimension, "green values" seem to have had an appropriate place in the policy of the world leading countries and international institutions.

But immediate and often egoistic industrial interests rarely

give in to ecological priorities. Our concern is that the efforts by international community to liberalize world trade and capital flows are not supported with adequate measures in environmental protection.

This phenomenon is most vividly demonstrated by the fate of the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on Climatic Changes.

In this context I would like to emphasize that despite complicated economic problems of the transition period Ukraine has not turned away from abiding by international commitments in environmental protection since independence.

The closure of Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant on the 1th of December last year has become the most vivid example. Ukraine has demonstrated a responsible attitude to undertaken obligations by placing ecological priorities and safety of the people above economic interests under the conditions of severe fuel deficit and the lack of compensating capacities.

Our country will long be suffering from the consequences of ignorant attitude to the environment that dominated in totalitarian past. At the same time gradual implementation of state ecological policy is bringing some tangible results despite this sad heritage.

I will give just a few examples.

Since independence the total area of environmental reserves has grown two times and is expected to total 64 000 sq.km., or more than 10% of the territory of Ukraine by the year 2005. Today the country protects three times more of animal species than it used to protect during Soviet times. National program on ecological recovery of the Dnipro River basin and improvement of the quality of drinking water has been developed and is being implemented.

Ukrainian efforts to preserve the biological diversity are recognized and supported by the international community. In particular five nature sites in Ukraine have already been recommended to be entered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Consistent fulfillment of our obligations and constructive orientation towards international cooperation characterize Ukrainian position on environmental development of the Carpathian and Danube regions.

The conservation of the unique ecosystem of the Carpathian Mountains is one of the priorities in our policy. The Carpathians are a reserve for the European densest diversity of flora, fauna and landscapes.

As of now the antropogenic pressure on the region has achieved its critical limit. The situation is becoming more complicated due to the lack of effective legal instruments for joint environmental protection measures by different countries.

That is why Ukraine has proposed to develop and sign the International Convention on the Protection of the Carpathian Region. We are grateful to those countries that have supported this idea and we hope that this important agreement will be ready for signing at the Conference of the Ministers of Ecology "Environment For Europe" that will be held in Kyiv in 2003.

I believe the creation of international biosphere reserves, resorts and national parks is another promising way to cooperate. Ukraine is ready to submit specific proposals on this issue to the Conference.

I also want to draw the attention of the participants of the Forum to the work of a very unique, in its nature, ecological European region "Upper Prut" that was set up on the basis of Ukrainian, Romanian and Moldovan proposals. With the support of the European Union, TACIS and PHARE programs we successfully implement joint UkrainianRomanian-Austrian project "Ecoprofit" aimed at mitigating the adverse impact of industrial activities on the environment and at improving the competitiveness of enterprises.

Upon the initiative of the Council of Euroregion the issue of establishing the Center for Clean Production is discussed. By the way, similar Centers have been working within the framework of relevant UN programs in 16 countries of the world.

I think that the experience gained in Ecoeuroregion and the initiative on its further development deserve a full-fledged support by European and international ecological institutions as well as by the World Environmental Fund.

Prevention of natural catastrophes in the basin of the Tisza River is another problem that requires expedient international measures for its solution.

More than 117 floods that occurred in the Transcarpathian

region and in the Tisza river basin over the last 30 years have vividly demonstrated the scale of this danger. The last two floods – in the autumn of 1998 and in March 2001 – surpassed all the previous ones in their destructive impact.

Fully determined to withstand this natural calamity. Kyev and Budapest have recently initiated the elaboration of the International Agreement on the integrated anti-flood management of the Tisza Basin. I call upon all the participants of the Forum to support this initiative extremely important for the whole region.

International project “Integrated Program on the Management of the Tisza basin”, prepared with the involvement of EU experts and passed by the Council of the Carpathian Region this month, also requires serious international support.

I would also like to call~for facilitating the implementation of the Agreement on the establishment of the international military engineering battalion “Tisza” to assist in eliminating the consequences of technological and natural catastrophes.

An instructive example of cooperation in preventing natural catastrophes is provided by NATO removed as it may seem from the environmental issues. In particular the Alliance has approved a pilot project on flood prevention as proposed by Ukraine. Full support by all Carpathian countries testifies to the relevance of the project.

Environmental protection and the conservation of biodiversity in the Danube Basin are priority tasks in our ecological policy.

We believe that a more active cooperation is required within the framework of the International Commission on the Protection of the Danube River in order to implement the Plan on Reduction of Pollution of the river.

During 1998-1999 Ukraine systemized a number of measures to prevent the pollution of the Danube basin in the Transcarpathian region, in the basins of the Prut and Syret rivers, in the Lower Danube. The Lower Danube project within the framework of the Euroregion aimed at renewing the protection and improvement of ecological conditions of the lakes in the Danube delta is worthy of international support.

One of the problems of sustainable development of the

region is to clean the Danube waterway and restore navigation. We think that the solution of this problem is groundlessly delayed. Ukraine is prepared for a full-fledged financial and logistic participation in this project and it calls upon all the countries and institutions involved to settle all their disputes and embark on the work as soon as possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ensuring sustainable development of the Danube-Carpathian region and resolving its ecological problems have become a matter of general European importance.

The borders of the expanded European Union will be crossing that region very soon. And the problems we are discussing today are the problems on the agenda of the EU internal development.

That is why I would like to call upon all Europeans and first of all EU countries and institutions to pay due attention to very complicated issues concerning the development of the Danube and Carpathian regions. Because if we ignore them today, the whole Europe may incur huge losses tomorrow.

It is not by chance that the following principle underlines the World Strategy on Environmental Protection adopted by UN: "We did not inherit the Earth from our predecessors, we borrowed it from our children".

Future generations of the citizens our countries' citizens will breath clean air and enjoy picturesque landscapes of both the Carpathian mountains and the Danube with its streams but we must take good care about it today.

I hope the Bucharest Forum will bring results that will be recalled gratefully by our successors many years from now.

Thank you.