



Presentation of priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU
in the area of environment
to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament
24 January 2018, Brussels

Madam Chair,

Vice Chairs,

Committee Members,

Let me say how excited I am to present here to you, the members of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, the environmental priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency.

As one of the oldest countries in Europe, Bulgaria can have no other role but to enrich and develop the European cultural identity. Bulgaria contributes to Europe's cultural diversity not only with its rich history and cultural achievements but also by giving Europe one of the three alphabets – the Cyrillic. A country at a geographical crossroads, over the centuries Bulgaria has protected Europe from foreign invasions at a great sacrifice and today we are still the guardians of the southeast “gate” of the old continent.

Our role as guardian also includes protection of our outstanding natural biodiversity. Bulgaria’s biodiversity, including as a location of new biological species, is among the greatest in



Europe. In this respect, we see economic development and growth in the context of their balance with environmental protection. We will work actively and consistently to preserve this balance during our Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

In our Presidency of the Council, it is essential for us to establish effective and open dialogue with the European Parliament as a co-legislator. I view the presentation of the legislative and political priorities in the area of the environment as an important element of our relations with the European Parliament. Accepting the challenge of the first Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, I express our willingness for continued contact with a view to finding workable solutions and achieving tangible results in protecting the interests of European citizens and basic European values.

Europe and its citizens need more security, stability and solidarity. **Security** which guarantees and protects the health of the planet and of the people. **Stability** which creates a competitive environment, including through sustainable growth and a “green” economy with a focus on the transition to a circular economy and eco innovations. **Solidarity** which is based on cohesion and the overall convergence of European society, while taking into account the geographic, cultural and socioeconomic specifics of the regions.

In our programme, we put emphasis on the **transition to a circular economy** which is resource-efficient and with reduced environmental footprint. We will work for sustainable growth and for an environment and conditions conducive to **eco-innovative solutions**.

The circular economy and eco innovations are our main priorities. We welcome **the Mini Package on the Circular Economy** approved by the European Commission last week. We plan to give priority to the new Plastic Strategy by organising a debate at ministerial level during the March

Council. We will focus discussion on how we can increase recycling and significantly decrease landfilling and burning of plastic waste. Based on the results of the debate, we will work for approval in June of Council Conclusions in which we will provide guidance to the Commission on the next steps and on which measures of the Strategy have to be applied as a matter of urgency and higher priority. I wish to mention at this point that the Communication on the interface between chemicals, product and waste legislation will be part of the debate.

We are also focusing our Presidency on **improvement of air quality**. Air pollution is not only an environmental but also a social problem, posing many challenges in the management and mitigation of the effects of harmful pollutants. This is a problem that not only the different Member States – according to the European Commission, 16 countries face this problem - but the European Union in general has to cope with. Therefore, we will focus our efforts on initiatives promoting the use of different mechanisms, including innovative solutions, for air quality improvement with a view to protecting the health of European citizens and the environment. This will be the key topic of a high-level Conference on Innovations which we will organise in cooperation with the European Commission on 5 and 6 February in Sofia. The air quality topic will also be the subject of a debate in the Informal Environment Council in April. I would like to take the opportunity to invite you, Madam Chair, to attend both events.

Our priority is also **better regulation** with a view to ensuring that the environmental legislation is more efficiently applied. This is our shared responsibility, to the extent that the existing European legislation contains conflicting objectives which have not been prioritised and create insecurity and a sustainability gap in its implementation. This is also a problem in terms of the relationship between the environmental legislation and the legislation on agriculture, energy and climate. Addressing these conflicts is essential to ensuring better implementation and the attainment of more ambitious goals. In this connection, apart from the political discussion on the



topic during the Informal Council in April, the issue will be further addressed in the context of “greening” the European Semester during the March Council.

Not least, with a view to avoiding potential speculations or misinterpretations, I would like to emphasise clearly that Europe has maintained a political consensus on **climate change** and the measures to be taken and that Bulgaria is part of this consensus. During our Presidency, we will work to maintain this consensus.

There will be active preparation for COP24 and the upcoming “facilitative dialogue” on implementation of the accords of the Paris Agreement in the months ahead. We will also address the adaptation issues in the light of the potential of the Union’s policies and better mobilisation of financial resources from the Union’s budget.

The new legislative framework for **decarbonisation of transport** is another strand we will work actively on. We will strive to make progress towards political consensus in the negotiations with you on the proposal for the monitoring and reporting of CO2 emissions from new heavy-duty vehicles.

We have also started intensive discussions on the proposal setting new CO2 emission standards for new passenger cars and light commercial vehicles. Taking into account its importance for the automobile industry and for all European citizens, we plan a debate at ministerial level during the June Council with a view to deriving political guidance for the process and a vision for decarbonisation of the sector.

Finally, the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council comes at a key point for the future of the Union. We have been faced with challenges we could hardly predict and with crises we had



forgotten in the times of prosperity. I believe that the challenges brought us together and made us stronger, and the crises taught us that we should not take anything for granted. I believe that we should respond to crises with “more Europe” because I believe that the future belongs to a united, prospering and inclusive Europe. Because United We Stand Strong!