14th February 2017, was a historic day for Greece’s policy record in the field of nature conservation and sustainable development. The parliament of the country ratified the international ‘Agreement for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area’ by an overwhelming majority. The agreement was originally signed on 2nd February 2010 by the Ministers of Environment of the 3 littoral countries and the EU Commissioner for the Environment, but Greece did not ratify it for the 7 years that ensued. Nonetheless, it has now done so and the agreement is free to enter into force and be implemented.

This development is pivotal for Greece, as it is the first time that the country has gone ahead with the official establishment of a system of permanent collaboration in a border area that is protected for its outstanding biodiversity. The case of Prespa provides a compelling instance of Greece overcoming its economic malaise and overall insecurity to boldly visualise and build the future of an area which is small in size and population but intensely symbolic. The participation of the EU as a contracting party in the ‘Prespa Agreement’ reconfirms exactly how important the region is from an environmental, geopolitical and symbolic viewpoint.

Besides its importance for Prespa and Greece, the implementation of the 2010 agreement will definitely be a milestone for SE Europe too. In 2000 the declaration on the establishment of the transboundary Prespa Park relayed a message of peace and co-operation between the peoples of the region, following the years of great upheavals and wars of the 1990s. In today’s world of insecurity, introversion and new nationalisms, the implementation of the international agreement for the Prespa Park takes on an optimistic symbolism once again, as it will cultivate friendship and peaceful coexistence for the sustainable prosperity of local societies on the basis of nature conservation. It is thus reconfirmed that environmental protection is not a restriction, but rather an opportunity.
and a means for sustainable development; it is also reiterated that the way forward is not isolationism and hostility, but bridging differences and building synergies for the benefit of all.

These are also the ideas behind the European Green Belt, on which the Prespa basin lies. The EuroNatur Foundation - as chair of the European Green Belt Association - congratulates the Greek Parliament on this important decision and calls on the three littoral countries sharing the Prespa Park to promptly implement the agreement.

The undersigned 5 environmental organisations - EuroNatur, KORA, MES, PPNEA and the SPP - joyfully acknowledge this day, which marks the beginning of a new and more mature phase in transboundary co-operation in the Prespa basin. Its main feature will hopefully be the operation of new permanent and official joint institutions with the participation of local authorities, protected area authorities and environmental NGOs alongside the state authorities, i.e. all the significant stakeholders who believe in the effectiveness of this model of local and transboundary governance.

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