



11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Wetlands: home and destination”

Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012

Welcoming address by Secretary of State Bogdan Aurescu

at the official opening of the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar
Convention, Bucharest, 6 July 2012

Minister Plumb,
Ministers and vice-ministers,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour as well as a pleasure for me to welcome you, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania to the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Ramsar Convention here in Bucharest, the capital of Romania.

As some of the participants may recall, organizing a meeting of the Ramsar Convention Conference of the Parties in Romania has been one of the main issues brought forward by Romanian delegations to previous meetings of this Conference. And finally, in 2008, during the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the delegations unanimously accepted Romania's invitation to host the next Conference of the Parties in Bucharest.

The decision taken in Changwon was the accomplishment of Romania's extensive efforts in the field of environmental diplomacy, and a sign of the increased relevance of this part of Europe within the Ramsar Convention.

Never, until now, has Romania hosted such an important conference in the field of environment, which I am sure will prove a milestone in Romania's environmental activities both nationally and internationally.

We also hope that this Conference will also prove a milestone in the protection and sustainable development of wetlands, especially in a time when economic considerations seem to take precedence.

Together with the Standing Committee of the Convention, we have tried to identify a theme that would emphasize the role wetlands can play in the development of regions, and even countries where they are located. Tourism and recreation is precisely such a theme. Wetlands, in our view, do not stand against economic development, because their sustainable use allows for both for the development of local communities living in or around wetlands and the protection of wildlife, water and soil.

Reconciling the interests of development and protection of the environment has always proved a difficult task, and I believe that here we can find the main merit of this Conference of the Parties, the courage to approach this task directly. I am very interested to see how this will reflect in the decisions to be taken during the meeting.

The Ramsar Convention is in itself a courageous international law instrument which is aimed at the protection of areas which have been seen during the human ages as potential agricultural resources. In the 60's for example, wetlands along the Danube River were drained in order to increase Romania's agricultural output. 30 years later, we discovered that although agricultural output had increased the loss of wildlife and diversity had been an extremely high cost to pay for such increase. Therefore, a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at creating a Lower Danube Green Corridor brought together four states willing to protect the Danube Delta and the remaining wetlands along the Lower Danube River.

Wetland protection has become a very important aspect of many international law instruments for the protection of the environment, to name only, for example, the Carpathian Convention, and the effective protection of wetlands is an indicator of a country's commitment to the overall protection of the environment.

Many of these wetlands are shared, and in such geographical context, their protection through the mechanisms provided by international law instruments is essential. Conferences like the one we are participating to today are such mechanisms. Through the decisions you will adopt, you will ensure the protection of endangered wetlands, the sustainable development of wetlands, the strengthening of the Ramsar sites network, as well as other things beneficial to the environment.

I wish you every success in attaining this objective, and assure you that Romania has done and will do all efforts in order to facilitate your work here in Bucharest.