

CoP4 – Statement by Dr Martin Bartenstein, Austrian Minister for the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs on behalf of the European Community and its Member States

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak to you here on behalf of the European Community and its Member States. The following countries associate themselves with this statement:

Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

Before I even enter into the substance of our negotiations here, let me express our heartfelt sympathy in connection with the tragic events in Central America. Our condolences go to the people of Central America. The devastating effect of the hurricane must urge us on to take precautionary action.

We have enough evidence that anthropogenic interference with the climate system is a very perilous matter. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is a milestone in humanity's endeavours to protect the global climate system.

At COP-3 we took a further historical step in combating the global threat of anthropogenic climate change by adopting the Kyoto Protocol and agreeing on legally binding commitments for Annex I Parties for the very first time. The EU has played a leading role in these negotiations from the beginning. We showed this in April of this year when the Protocol was signed by all EU Member States and the European Community. We appeal to all Parties who have not yet done so to sign the Protocol as quickly as possible.

Here in Buenos Aires we have two main tasks to accomplish. We have to make progress on the implementation of the Convention itself. Transfer of environmentally sound technology, further work on assisting developing countries in adapting to climate change and the review of the adequacy of commitments are among the priorities for our negotiations.

We have to carry forward the momentum of Kyoto. We have to reach decisions on as many outstanding issues as possible and to establish a clear and efficient workplan, inter alia on the further elaboration of the mechanisms and a strong monitoring and compliance system.

We see a definite need for decisive action, taking into account that environmental credibility must be our main concern. A lot of work still remains to be done, but we are confident that we will leave Buenos Aires with a substantive outcome. In this context, I wish to stress that the Protocol requires us to make demonstrable progress in our commitments by 2005.

The mechanisms defined in the Kyoto Protocol can provide a useful tool for achieving emission reductions in a cost effective way; however, their use has to be supplemental to domestic action, which should provide the main means for meeting the commitments under Article 3 of the Protocol. The principles, modalities, rules and guidelines for the operation of the mechanisms have to be developed in parallel and ensure that they do not undermine domestic action or weaken these commitments. A concrete ceiling on the use of flexible mechanisms has to be defined in quantitative and qualitative terms and based on equitable criteria to achieve these aims.

The reasons for our insistence on domestic action are very compelling. We feel bound by our commitment that the industrialised countries should take the lead in combating climate change. We also believe that climate change is an opportunity that promotes technological innovation and efficient use of resources. All industrialised countries have a potential to benefit from changes in this direction.

While we devote considerable efforts to the unfinished business concerning the Kyoto Protocol we must not forget that there are also issues under the Convention which require our immediate attention, as I have outlined at the beginning. We have to acknowledge that the commitments in Article 4.2 (a) and (b) of the Convention are not adequate to meet the ultimate objective of the Convention. The second review of the adequacy of commitments should therefore address the question of what additional action would be needed to meet the objective of the Convention and the information necessary to answer that question.

The EU recognizes the need to see action under the Convention in the light of the need for sustainable development. In particular, we have to meet the concerns of developing country Parties which are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

The development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies as well as capacity building have a vital role to play in enabling developing countries to meet their commitments under the Convention as well as in their participation in projects under the clean development mechanism. We believe that there is a need for improving the conditions for technology transfer in recipient countries.

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit a habitable planet and can enjoy a healthy environment.

Thank you for your attention.