

Dear Mr. President, your excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like, on behalf of the Czech delegation, to thank Italian colleagues for organizing the COP-9 here in Milano and for their hospitality. Our delegation very much appreciates the effort made to provide a good space for discussions and negotiations.

Let me use this opportunity to speak not only on behalf of my country, but to address some more general issues common for countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, because I feel my responsibility to raise our voice at this very prominent occasion.

We are talking here about the climate change. As you all know, countries in the heart of Europe had in the past undergone also a kind of change. Long awaited change towards a democracy. Change of the political systems. Change of the economic systems. Change in an incredibly short time.

When looking back to early nineties, it can be said that one of the main environmental problems in our countries, which was a result of a practically non-existing environmental policy in communist times, was the air pollution, in particular the ambient air quality in some areas. It must be said that the progress in the following years was tremendous and despite economical and political transformation, we were able to improve the quality of environment to the European standards in a relatively short time.

As you can imagine, the process was not easy. More to that, the process was not cheap. I would like to use this opportunity to thank all of you, who provided us the assistance in this process, for your help. Your assistance helped us to mobilize our own resources and started the process of successful and long lasting cooperation, which is something we are trying to achieve internationally also in the area of climate change. Our experience is, that the successful assistance and cooperation must be based on clear rules, clear responsibilities, clear consensus between both sides and must be made in the environment of cooperation and willingness to share the same objectives. Unfortunately this is the element we sometimes miss here at the climate change negotiations.

When talking about climate change, it must be said, that it did not belong among the top priorities in early nineties in our countries. There were more alarming environmental problems to address – I have already mentioned them before. The climate change was something virtual, which you cannot touch or see. However, later on, supported by extreme weather events in the last years the situation changed. These extreme weather events are concrete, they can be seen, they can be touched and they are taking its toll, not only in economic terms, but also in lives of people. Suddenly, the climate change is raising the interest in a much wider audience.

The reason why I am so long explaining these circumstances is to give you more complete picture of our today's situation. Yes, some of our countries have no problems with fulfillment of our Kyoto Protocol targets. But this advantage was not free of charge as some of you can think. If you compare the data on economic

performance and GHG emissions you will – surprisingly for some – see that these two are not directly linked, so this advantage is not solely the result of economic recession. However, this advantage does not mean that we have no problems in the climate change area. This advantage is on the other hand also the reason why to prepare and pro-active climate change policy is – despite the recent experience with floods and droughts - a very demanding and difficult task.

I am putting the stress on this to explain you that we are – as a kind of paradox - in a difficult position.

Going back to the Czech Republic, I'm happy to inform you, that a few days before the beginning of the COP-9, the Ministry of Environment approved our National program on Climate Change, which was then forwarded for interministerial discussions and is expected to be discussed by our government by the beginning of the next year.

The program gives a clear priority to renewable sources of energy and energy savings which are a key elements for improving of our energy efficiency, so it gives a clear priority to measures on domestic level. Climate change mitigation is however a cross-cutting issue so the program stresses the importance of cooperation among various ministries and their programs, especially in joining the effort in achieving improvements in environmental quality in economically feasible way.

As I have already mentioned before, for country like the Czech Republic, which is expected not to have any problems in meeting the Kyoto protocol targets, to prepare and implement an active climate change policy represented a not easy task. However, the extreme weather events in the Czech republic in last few years, including flooding in 3 years out of last five, when in 2002 one third of our country was flooded, including our beautiful capital, followed by a extreme drought this year, helped us by raising the attention to climate change and interest in real aspects of this process.

That is the main reason, why our program puts a stress among of mitigation targets going beyond the Kyoto protocol targets both in its strength and time scale, also on adaptation measures, research and development, systematic observations and involvement of public.

As a conclusion, I would like to say that countries with the surplus are sometimes blamed for trying to find the way how to make only money out of the climate change process. I must say that not all the countries in this position are the same.

We have already done a lot to improve our environment. We are on a way to do more. We know that the way will not be easy, we know that the way will not be cheap.

Despite the number of challenges in front of us – with the EU accession being the most important one for some of our countries – where further improvement of the quality of the environment is one among dozen others, we will try to do our best in joining those who clearly showed the interest to continue in the process which has started some years ago in Kyoto. We are convinced that it is the way to the right

direction. It is the way of cooperation, it is the way of global response to global challenges, it is the way of common interest of all of us. We are trying – knowing that our resources are limited compared to others – to fulfill our commitments by action, not by words.

I have already mentioned that the way we are taking is not easy. Let me wish all of us good luck in this effort, I am sure that it will be also needed.

Thank you for your attention.