

Mesaj eveniment "25 de ani de Mediu", Anne Burrill – Acting Head of Unit, DG Environment, European Commission

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since Mr. Vella was unable to be here in person, he asked me to follow up his video statement with a few words, particularly about the years when Romania was preparing to accede to the EU -- when I represented the Commission in the technical talks with Romania on the environment "chapter"...

It was a time of rapid change - exhilarating - every day you were taking important steps forward. The capacity of the environmental administration was strengthened at all levels, you developed a productive working relationship with the NGO and academic communities, and you brought your legislation into line with the EU environmental 'acquis'. Considering that the EU has over 300 significant environmental directives, this was a huge challenge, but you did it. And, I am proud to have been part of the process.... Sometimes congratulating you on accomplishments, sometimes pushing you to do more, but always working to ensure that we - the Commission - could tell the Member States in the Council that you were on the right path and would be in a position to meet your commitments upon accession. I retain very fond memories of working with the teams led by several of the ministers who have spoken today. I was therefore also very pleased to be invited to celebrate with you today.

Your hard work during the accession period has borne its fruits as can be seen today: Romania has a sound legal basis for the environment. You have plans and programmes in place to implement most of these laws. You also have a sound knowledge base and many examples of good practice in addressing environmental challenges. As a result, over the (almost) decade since joining the EU, Romania has continued to show significant improvements in environmental performance. This is wonderful.

But, just as happened during the accession years, I cannot stop there. I have to speak on, to encourage you to keep going, to move ahead, to ensure full implementation of your environmental legislation and full compliance with the EU directives.

We already knew back in 2007 that the legislation in the areas of waste and water would be particularly challenging, which is why the accession treaty included long transition periods for directives in these areas. But these transition periods are coming to an end soon...

Your national waste law, as amended in July 2014, is a major step forward, and you have set yourself the admirable target of ensuring that 50% of waste is recycled or reused by 2020. You therefore have the will and the laws to comply fully with the EU waste legislation. What is needed now is to ensure full coverage of municipal collection services, to raise landfill gate fees to make recycling and reuse economically attractive and to ensure enforcement.

Similarly, as the transition period for the urban waste water directive comes towards its end, there are still parts of Romania that lack the necessary infrastructure. I encourage you to accelerate investments in UWWT infrastructure, including through making good use of the available EU funds.

While mentioning EU funds, I want to recall the EU's dedicated programme for environment and climate action, the LIFE programme. Although LIFE cannot finance infrastructure, it is an importance source of support for meeting other types of challenges, particularly restoration of habitats and development of management plans for SPAs and SCIs. LIFE can also help finance projects for developing innovative ways of meeting environmental challenges in sectors like water, waste, air, etc. Romania has already had 68 projects financed by LIFE over the past 25 years, about two-thirds of them related to nature and biodiversity. I encourage Romania to take advantage of all of the possibilities under LIFE, including through various new types of projects introduced under the present LIFE programme.

Before closing, I would like to underline something mentioned by Mr. Vella, namely that improving the environment is something that can only be done through partnerships - partnerships between the various relevant parts of the administration, and partnerships with citizens, partnerships with economic actors. During the accession process, you worked to open communication with the 'stakeholders' and 'citizens'. They are still important partners today. I therefore hope that you will ensure that the results of the past 25 years of Environment in Romania - as celebrated today - are widely communicated. You should be proud of what has been accomplished and citizens should know about it. They should also know how all Romanians can help to meet the remaining challenges, to continue to improve the quality of the Romanian environment, and the quality of the lives of Romanians. ... always still in partnership with us in the Commission's DG Environment.