

**MINISTERIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REC
SZENTENDRE, HUNGARY, 27-28 JUNE 2005**

**Declaration
of the Signatories to the Charter of the
Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe
on the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the foundation of the REC**

We, the Ministers of Environment and/or high level Officials of the Governments of the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Bulgaria, Canada, the Republic of Croatia, the Czech Republic, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Italy, Japan, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Malta, the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Poland, Romania, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Slovenia, Switzerland, the Republic of Turkey and the United States of America, as well as the European Commission (hereinafter as "Signatories") in our capacity as Signatories to the Charter of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, having met in Hungary on June 27th and 28th, 2005 issue the following declaration:

We look back with satisfaction on the achievements of the Regional Environmental Center, recalling how this organisation was established in 1990 as a partnership initiated by the United States of America, the European Commission, and Hungary, and later joined by 26 other governments.

We highly appreciate the Regional Environmental Center's contribution to the policy development, capacity building, facilitation of dialogue and networking, information exchange on environmental issues and supporting the civil society. The Center has proven to be a viable and independent organisation providing services to governments, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and businesses.

We acknowledge the founders and all supporters of the Regional Environmental Center for their initiatives and continued support, in particular for untied voluntary contributions to the Center.

We extend our appreciation and thanks to all those who have contributed to the achievements of the Regional Environmental Center during the last 15 years as former and present members of the Board of Directors, the General Assembly, the staff of the Center as well as all individuals who supported the work of the Regional Environmental Center.

We note with satisfaction that the Regional Environmental Center has achieved a viable presence at the country level in the beneficiary area, developing a network of offices led and assisted by the head office in Hungary. We regard this network as a single organisation, and - understanding the historical reasons of remaining differences in the legal status of country offices - we call for the completion of the harmonisation of the legal status of the offices to that of the Head Office of the Regional Environmental Center, and pledge our assistance to this harmonisation.

The recent enlargement of the European Union presents major opportunities for the Signatories of the Regional Environmental Center for further contribution to the sustainable development, the implementation of European environmental policy, for the exchange and transfer of lessons learned, and for new environmental initiatives. The present difficulties and challenges facing the European Union ask for a strengthening role of the Regional Environmental Center.

The demand for environmental cooperation at the local, national, and European level is continuous and will grow. The role of the Regional Environmental Center will be of importance in bridging between the European Union, South Eastern Europe, Turkey and the regions of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia, in the transfer of experience and know-how, as well as in the facilitation of stakeholder cooperation promoting sustainable development.

We, Signatories to the Charter of the Regional Environmental Center maintain and confirm our political ownership of the Center, and express our intention to continue to channel support to environmental protection and sustainable development – inter alia - through the Center as an international organisation eligible for direct program assignments and agreements in bilateral and multilateral assistance schemes.

We invite governments when embarking on the extension of their foreign aid and assistance programs into the environmental dimension of sustainable development to consider the services of the Regional Environmental Center as one of the potential vehicles for this support.

We regard it important for the future that the Regional Environmental Center remains ready to support the whole beneficiary area based upon its needs and priorities. We agree that all Signatories are encouraged to call upon the services of the Center.

We support the “Strategy of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe for 2006-2010” as a basis for further development of its services and programs, in line with its mission, with the growing and diversified needs of the Center’s beneficiaries, and as a basis for the further development of the Regional Environmental Center itself.

Szentendre, 28th June 2005.