

3rd International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj

Podgorica, Centre Ville, 11th April 2017

Welcome note by Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director, EuroNatur

Distinguished Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues and Friends,

We are gathering here today for the third time to discuss the protection of the Salina Ulcinj. Therefore I assume I don't need to repeat how important the protection of the Salina is. But what we need to emphasize – and in this respect I am not sharing statements made earlier this morning – no progress has been made, but the contrary: the site is in a severe process of deterioration and the costs to restore the site are increasing day by day.

I would like to remind all of us about the agreements and commitments approved two years ago at the 1st International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj, when the former State Secretary and the General Director of the responsible Ministry have been present. Practically all commitments of that conference are not fulfilled until today: the site is not protected neither under national nor under international law and the water management is not properly in place.

Last year I raised the question if the Montenegrin Government still has the political will to protect the Salina Ulcinj. The former Minister Gvozdenović reacted clearly on my expressed doubt. He stated many times that the protection of the Salina Ulcinj is just a question of a few more months. And former Minister Gvozdenović warned everyone to challenge the dedication of the ministry to protect the Salina Ulcinj. One year later the promises are not fulfilled and I am wondering what Mister Gvozdenović is doing in his today's capacity to contribute to the protection of the Salina Ulcinj.

It is unfortunate that the current Minister Radulović is not present today, but he has an appointment in Brussels with EU Commissioner Vella and the Chair of the Delegation of the European Parliament to Montenegro. The European Commission expressed already two times in the respective annual reports reflecting the accession process of Montenegro to the European Union that the European Commission expects resolute efforts to protect and manage the Salina Ulcinj. Last year's report from November 2016 reads as follows: "There is a significant delay in establishing protection over the potential Natura 2000 site of Salina Ulcinj. Resolute efforts and urgent actions are needed to ensure protection of this site." And the European Parliament emphasized this concern in the resolution on the Commission's report published one month ago; highlighting the significant delay in protecting the site. So, I assume Minister Radulović will receive the same message today in Brussels as well as from this conference in Podgorica.

Taking the last year's statement serious, that there is political will of the Montenegrin Government to protect the Salina Ulcinj, and taking into account the international attention this issue has received in the meantime, I am puzzled and perplex why there is no progress at all.

If the Montenegrin Government takes the protection of the Salina Ulcinj serious, but still no progress has been made, then other questions has to be raised. One of these questions is: has the Montenegrin Government the power to protect this site of international importance? And if the

Montenegrin Government has not the power to protect the site, this leads to the question, who has the power?

To conclude: we are expecting urgent and resolute steps from the Montenegrin Government to protect the Ulcinj Salina. We expect that Prime Minister Marković is taking this as a priority for his government.

I am looking forward to the 4th International Conference on the Protection of the Salina Ulcinj, but I sincerely hope that we will not just repeat what has been said at the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd Conference, but that we will be able to focus on the tremendous technical challenges connected with the restoration of the Salina Ulcinj and the water management system.

Local NGOs from Ulcinj, Montenegrin NGOs on national level and international NGOs will not give up. We will continue our work towards safeguarding one of the most important stop-over and breeding sites for birds in Europe.

Gabriel Schwaderer, EuroNatur