

**Remarks for the Head of Presence at the National Conference on
Environmental Crime
Tirana, Hotel International Tirana
7 December 2018**

Good morning everybody,

Dear Minister of Environment and Tourism, dear Deputy Minister of Interior, dear Chair of Parliamentary Committee, dear Mayors and participants,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here in this beautiful, sunny, winter day at this conference organized on something pretty ugly, on environmental crime. We organized this conference together with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

We believe that environmental crime is an important area where Albania needs support, needs improvement.

Three years ago, we started working with the Minister, then still only the Minister of Environment, on this issue. And we helped set up an inter-institutional working group, so that the different bodies in the country, which were dealing with environmental crime, could share information, conduct joint actions and propose legislative changes.

Since then, this group has achieved quite a bit. There were a lot of events in various municipalities organized by this working group to raise public awareness; a draft strategic action plan against environmental crime for 2018-2021 was developed; and there was expert input provided for legislative changes on environmental crime, and also training curricula for the Security Academy.

The fingerprints of environmental crime are visible in the country. I mean you just need to drive around, cross a river, get to the edge of a village with an illegal dump. We all know that. It is difficult to estimate the dimension that that has: the more we see it, the more we perceive the environmental crime as being extremely ugly. Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive data. The country still lacks proper reporting mechanisms and lags behind also in prosecuting such crimes.

We have the figures from the General Prosecution from 2017 about 2016, and there were only 216 referred cases to the Prosecution of which only 45 cases were sent at court and 32 were sentenced. This low number of cases that was

referred shows that there has not been enough evidence, not enough investigations. Therefore, the whole chain inspectorate-police-prosecution-courts should be strengthened, and that should be an issue this inter-institutional working group should focus on.

And we know that the country remains affected by illegal logging of forests and protected areas, by the illegal dumping causing heavy pollution both on land and in waterways.

Environmental crime is sometimes very well organized and sophisticated, and fighting it needs resources, institutional co-operation and legislative changes including in the penal code.

To this end, we are supporting this national conference today aiming to come up with concrete solutions for what should be done next. Only through effective co-ordination our achievements will become sustainable.

I hope that the recommendations to come out of this conference will translate into real action on the part of the relevant agencies. And the presence of the Chair of Parliamentary Committee, of the Minister of Tourism and Environment, and the Deputy Minister of Interior shows me that this is taken very seriously here. We stand ready to continue to support Albania in this field.

I wish you a successful meeting and thank you for your attention!