



Ministry of Environmental  
Protection



# THE ANNUAL REPORT

ON THE RIO CONVENTIONS  
IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES IN  
THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FOR **2020**

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IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES IN  
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# ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>AEWA</b>	African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
<b>AESS</b>	Academy of Engineering Sciences of Serbia
<b>AP</b>	Autonomous Province
<b>BUR</b>	Biennial Update Report
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gasses
<b>GCF</b>	Green Climate Fund
<b>IED</b>	Industrial Emissions Directive
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>INC</b>	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
<b>IPBES</b>	The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature
<b>KBF</b>	Kopaonik Business Forum
<b>LDN</b>	Land Degradation Neutrality
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Programme
<b>NAP</b>	National Adaptation Plan
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution
<b>NC</b>	National Communication
<b>LOF</b>	Landscape of Outstanding Features

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<b>RC</b>	Rio Conventions
<b>RS</b>	Republic of Serbia
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEA</b>	United Nations Environment Assembly
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNCCD</b>	United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CITES</b>	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
<b>CMS</b>	Convention on Migratory Species
<b>CNVP</b>	Connecting Natural Values and People Foundation
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>CCA</b>	Climate Change Adaptation
<b>WB</b>	Windbreak belts
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature

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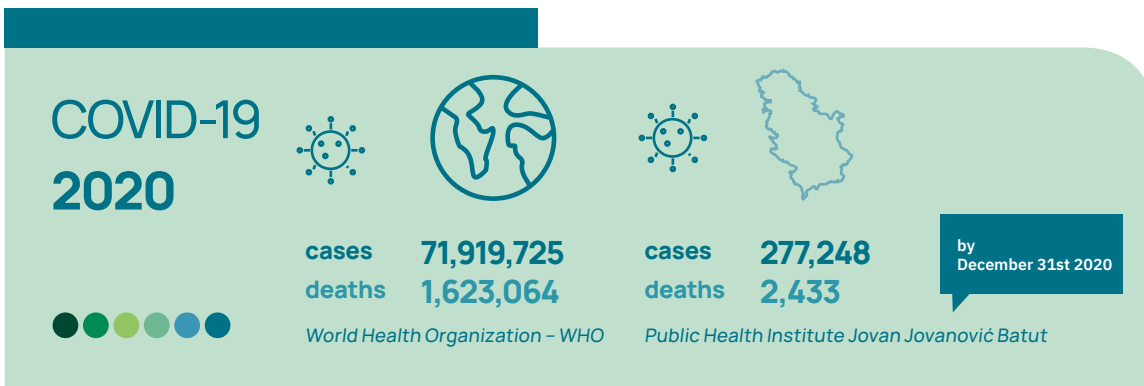
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# 1. Introduction

The year 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were 71,919,725 cases of COVID-19 by the end of the year, while 1,623,964 people died from this illness. The virus was registered in almost all countries around the world, including Serbia, in which there were 277,248 cases and 2,433 deaths by December 31st 2020, according to the Public Health Institute *Jovan Jovanović Batut*. The global economy has suffered a substantial blow, with the damage assessed at around 4.3% of gross global product, and this crisis will push almost 130 million people into extreme poverty. The pandemic had the biggest negative impact on tourism, followed by micro, small and medium enterprises that employ a large number of individuals from vulnerable groups (women, low-skilled workers, elderly). It is assessed that the airline industry will suf-

fer losses in the amount of 252 billion EUR and close around 4.8 million jobs, which will reduce the total number of jobs in this sector by 43% in comparison to the time before the pandemic. Other activities at risk are production of car parts and equipment, oil and gas research, sports and recreation capacities, and the hospitality industry. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) report *COVID-19 Assessment of Social and Economic Impact*, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected healthcare, financial security, lifestyle and work culture. The crisis caused a major GDP drop compared to the same period last year. Along with directly impacting the economic activities, the pandemic has also taken a toll on personal health, employment rate, access to education, and income security, which affects the people's ability to provide for their needs, and additionally worsens the health outcomes. Ultimately,



this resulted in restricted and modified social patterns—but also in short-term environmental improvements, such as lower air pollution and GHG emissions. On the other hand, disruptions in the hospitality industry, followed by increased online purchases, resulted in a higher use of disposable plastic items.

The pandemic has proven that environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and intensive food systems increase the likelihood of zoonotic diseases. Immediately after the pandemic restricted economic activities, movement and consumption, there was a drop of pollutant emissions and consumption of natural resources. Now, however, there is a danger that people whose livelihoods are threatened resort to excessive exploitation of natural resources. Isolation and lockdown have delayed the planned pivotal negotiations on climate change and biodiversity in 2020, which had been marked as the “super year” exactly because some key global documents were supposed to be adopted. Once the pandemic is over, there is a real risk of increased pressure on the environment, if recovery investments target “dirty” industries instead of “green” options. Nevertheless, the pandemic made us reimagine our lifestyle and habits, which is a proof that individuals and entire societies can come up with new value hierarchies, a.k.a. new lifestyles and livelihoods which would have a lower impact on the environment. The implementation of activities and measures foreseen by the Rio Conventions took place in line with the circumstances described above.

The Annual Report on the Rio Conventions Implementation Activities in the Republic of Serbia for 2020 (hereinafter, the Report) is sig-

nificantly shorter than the reports for 2018 and 2019, given that the pandemic restricted all activities. The Report covers events and documents relevant to the implementation of the Rio Conventions: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – UNFCCC, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification – UNCCD, and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD.

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The implementation of the Rio principles contributes to the achievement of 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the Republic of Serbia. In particular, this includes SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

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Many obligations under the Rio Conventions and other multilateral treaties in the area of environmental protection are aligned with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by heads of states and governments in 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York, as well as with the EU environmental protection directives. The Serbian legislation in the area of environmental protection is largely aligned with the obligations under the Rio Conventions, multilateral treaties, and the EU environmen-





tal regulations. This creates a legal framework to fulfil the accepted international obligations while defining the conditions for further EU integrations.

## 1.1. A brief history of the Rio Conventions

### 1.1.1. United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

In late 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published the first report on causality between human activities and climate change. Soon after, the General Assembly of the United Nations formed the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to formulate the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Convention was adopted at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in May 1992. During the first Conference of the Parties in Berlin, Germany, it was noted that the obligations defined by the Convention were inadequate to meet the foreseen goals. This was corrected at the Third Conference of the Parties in Kyoto, Japan, held in 1997, with the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol. By 2020, this Convention has been ratified by 197 countries.

The Republic of Serbia became a party to the UNFCCC on June 10th 2001, and a party to the Kyoto Protocol on January 17th 2008, with the status of a developing country. By ratifying the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, the Republic of Serbia accepted the obligation to define and implement measures and activities at the national level in order to achieve the adopted goals. During the first mandatory period, 2008 – 2012, the Republic of Serbia did not have the obligation to implement the quantified measures for GHG emission reductions.

The Cancun Conference in Mexico continued the negotiations on obligations of parties under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol for the period after 2012, resulting in the adoption of the Can-



IPCC published the first report on causality between human activities and climate change.

1990

The General Assembly of the United Nations formed the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to formulate the UNFCCC.



1992

The Convention was adopted at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.



1997

Adoption of the Kyoto Protocol.



2008

The Republic of Serbia became a party to the Kyoto Protocol.

cun Agreement, which introduced a new set of decisions. Then, in 2012, the Doha Conference was held in Qatar, where 39 decisions were adopted, articulated in a paper officially called the Doha Climate Gateway. Among other things, the Doha Climate Gateway contains an amendment on the Kyoto Protocol (the Doha Amendment) which defines the second mandatory period of the Kyoto Protocol. Finally, at the 21st Conference of Parties in Paris, France, in 2015, a new legally binding document was adopted – the so-called Paris Agreement. One of the main goals of this new agreement was to limit global warming to well below 2°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

The Republic of Serbia ratified the Doha Amendment in 2017, in line with its obligations under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. In June 2015, Serbia submitted its GHG emission reductions goal by 2030 (compared to 1990), which stood at 9.8%. Serbia was one of the first ten countries globally and the first country in the region to do so, and the agreement was ratified in 2016. As for revisions, Serbia will develop its Climate Change Strategy with Action Plan, in which it will revise its goals and long-term strategies for GHG emission reductions. At the Bonn Conference, held in Germany in 2017, 31 decisions were adopted. Among other things, they allow the creation of the Paris Agreement implementation mechanisms, and provide guidelines for the further work of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

### 1.1.2. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

At the United Nation Conference on Desertification, held in 1977, the Action Plan against Desertification was adopted, aiming to create global partnerships to reduce the scope and intensity of desertification (desert spreading) and land degradation, and to ease the consequences of drought in areas at risk. The main topics were poverty reduction, sustainable development implementation, and environmental protection. At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the General Assembly of the United Nations established the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, thus launching the process of convention preparation. The United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification was subsequently developed and presented in 1992. By early 2020, the UNCCD was ratified by 197 countries, out of which more than 140 countries are affected by desertification and land degradation. To facilitate the UNCCD implementation, all parties were categorised into groups (annexes): Annex 1 is on Africa; Annex 2 is on Asia; Annex 3 is on Latin America and the Caribbean; Annex 4 is on the Northern Mediterranean; and Annex 5 covers Central and Eastern

European countries. The Republic of Serbia is a party of Annex 5 of the UNCCD, and it ratified the Convention by adopting the Law Ratifying the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.<sup>1</sup> The authority competent for implementing the UNCCD in the Republic of Serbia is the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

The latest, 14th Conference of Parties was held in September 2019 in New Delhi (India). Here, the parties reiterated the resolve outlined at the 13th Conference of Parties held in Ordos City, China, in 2017, concerning the land degradation mitigation efforts through the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The UNCCD promotes the standpoint that solutions for the issues of desertification, land degradation, and drought should be articulated at the level of local communities at risk, with the support and partnerships with other relevant stakeholders, both domestic and international. The desertification process is an extreme, often final form of land degradation, when the soil completely loses its biological and production potentials. Different forms of desertification and land degradation are spread around the globe, meaning that land as a resource is one of the constraining factors of development in the 21st century. The processes of desertification and land degradation are closely connected to the consequences of climate change and inadequate human activities, primarily in the areas of agriculture, forestry, and water management. Along with the impact of climate factors, land degradation is usually caused by inadequate agrotechnical measures, excessive cutting of forests or complete deforestation, uncontrolled spreading of pastures, aggressive urbanisation, exploitation of minerals, and various forms of pollution. The levels of land degradation vary: from lowered fertility and crop yield, to reduced ecosystem productivity and loss of habitats and biodiversity. The current and projected climate

<sup>1</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia – International Treaties, No.102/2007

change trends place the Republic of Serbia in the area of high risk, involving the following phenomena: steep increase of average annual air temperature (for the period 1985–2014, this increase stood at 1.2°C, while between 2075 and 2100, the expected increase is 3.2–4.5°C), with increasingly warmer and longer dry periods, and the drop of average annual rainfall by 10–20%, with reduced snowfall and frequent extreme pluviometric events during spring and summer. From 2000 to 2020, the Republic of Serbia experienced several extreme climate and weather episodes, which resulted in loss of human lives and enormous material damage (droughts, flash floods). The increasing frequency of forest fires, mass drying out of forests, and consequent erosions have a major adverse effect on the stability and productivity of land.

### 11.3. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Report of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) of the United Nations on the Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services was presented on May 6th 2019 at the United Nations Summit in Paris. The report was prepared by 450 scientists from the entire world: it took three years of intense work and it had 1600 pages. One of the most striking facts that this report revealed was that almost a million of plant and animal species were at real risk of extinction, due to the excessive and irresponsible exploitation of primary natural resources (forests, water, and land). This poses a threat to 75% of land and 66% of aquatic ecosystems. This only further highlights the notable trend of endangering numerous living species and entire ecosystems, which has been growing for the past 50 years. This is why the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) formed the Informal Working Group of Experts on Biodiversity in 1988. The goal was to formulate a convention that will respond to the issue of endangering biodiversity at the global level. In May 1989, the Informal Working Group of Technical and Legislative

Experts was formed, and in 1991, it presented the Consolidated Text of the Convention on Biodiversity, adopted in 1992 at the Conference in Nairobi (Kenya). The Convention was officially adopted at the Earth Summit held at the highest scientific and administrative level in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and by 2020 it was signed by 196 countries. The CBD respects the sovereign right of each party to dispose with its own resources and biodiversity, but the parties are expected to contribute to the achievement of the three main CBD goals: 1) protection of biological diversity; 2) sustainable use of biodiversity components; and 3) fair distribution of benefits gained from the use of genetic resources. The Convention does not refer to individual species and habitats, but it is based on a wide ecosystem approach. After fine-tuning and lessons learnt from the CBD implementation, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was adopted in Quebec City (Canada) in 2000. Another important document is the Nagoya Protocol, which elaborates on the correct implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity in the area of genetic resources and their fair and equal distribution. The Republic of Serbia adopted the Law Ratifying the Convention on Biodiversity in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

Along with the CBD, the Republic of Serbia signed the protocols of Cartagena and Nagoya, as well as other multilateral treaties in the area of biodiversity such as: the Convention Concerning the Protection of World and Natural Protection (World Heritage Convention), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Water Fowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS, the Bonn Convention and pertaining acts), the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS), the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Berne Convention), the Framework Convention on the Protection

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<sup>2</sup> Official Gazette of FRY – International Treaties, No.11/2001.

and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) and the European Landscape Convention. The Ministry of Environmental Protection is the authority competent for monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity in the Republic of Serbia.

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All reports on the implementation of this Convention in the Republic of Serbia were drafted in line with the CBD provisions. Furthermore, in 2020, Serbia became the 137th member state of IPBES.

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## 2. Fulfillment of obligations of the Republic of Serbia under the Rio Conventions – activities implemented in 2020

### 2.1. Fulfilment of obligations under the UNFCCC

The Ministry of Environmental Protection (hereinafter: the Ministry) is the national coordinator for the implementation of the UNFCCC and its pertaining protocols and agreements. When undertaking activities related to the UNFCCC obligations, the Ministry collaborates with relevant ministries, agencies, administrations, directorates, and other stakeholders (local self-governments, civil society organisations, scientists and other experts), in line with the cross-sectoral nature of the climate change impact. In the past few years, the Ministry has particularly focused on improving its collaboration with local self-governments and other stakeholders, aiming to include them in the process of climate change policies preparation and implementation, especially concerning the adaptation and mitigation measures.

The UNFCCC obligations are being fulfilled through various projects, initiatives, and social events that we will present in the text that follows.

UNDP Serbia and the Ministry of Environmental Protection are currently implementing the project called *Second Biennial Update Report and*

*Third National Communication for the Republic of Serbia to the UNFCCC for the Republic of Serbia*, which started in June 2018. The project supports Serbia in fulfilling the reporting obligations under the UNFCCC. The Biennial Update Report (BUR) is submitted every two years, while the National Communications (NC) is due once in four years. The project foresees the following results: drafting of the climate change mitigation scenario in line with the appropriate strategic recommendations and the Paris Agreement requirements; development of different climate change scenarios, vulnerability assessments, costs and benefits analyses, and cost assessment of adaptation measures implementation; preparation of mitigation measures according to sectors and in line with the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement and the EU accession priorities; assessment of progress level of adaptation/mitigation measures from the previous BURs and NCs; coordination of climate change and DRR activities at the national and local levels; mainstreaming of climate change issues into sectoral policies (agriculture, water management, forestry, biodiversity, energy, transport, industry, waste management); capacity building of institutions; public awareness-raising on climate change issues; and submitting of the second BUR and the third NC under the UNFCCC.

**January 13th 2020.** At its 26th session, the Environmental Protection Committee of the National Assembly (held on January 13th 2020, chaired by Maja Gojković, Speaker of the Parliament and the Chairwoman of the Environmental Protection Committee), discussed and positively assessed the Negotiation Position of the Republic of Serbia for the Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union for Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change). The Minister of Environmental Protection Goran Trivan attended the session of the Environmental Protection Committee.



## Chapter 27



The Negotiation Position for **Chapter 27** is a very complex document that was prepared for more than two years, with the participation of



**28**

institution



**150**

individuals

During its development, the Negotiation Position was discussed with all stakeholders, which included the representatives of local self-governments, businesses, and NGOs.

The Negotiation Position for Chapter 27 is a very complex document that was prepared for more than two years, with the participation of 28 institutions and around 150 individuals. During its development, the Negotiation Position was discussed with all stakeholders, which included the representatives of local self-governments, businesses, and NGOs.

The Negotiation Position was analysed twice during informal consultations with the European Commission, whose opinion on the fulfilled obligations of Serbia under Chapter 27 was affirmative. Serbia is the only country in the region that opened Chapter 27 without any additional conditions. The Negotiation Position contains 14 appendices in total, with 1,650 pages of text. Along with the detailed description of the implementation status and plans, the Negotiation Position also includes the following strategic documents:

- Specific implementation plans for waste and water management regulations that require major financial investments;
- Specific implementation plan for the Industrial Emissions Directive;
- Multiannual investment and finance plan;
- Action plan for administrative capacities development;
- Rationale of the request to modify the bio-geographical regions on the territory of the Republic of Serbia;
- Rationale of the request to modify the Annex of the EU Birds and Habitats Directive; and
- Annexes providing evidence-based rationales for transition periods for each EU regulation that requires major financial investments in the implementation period.

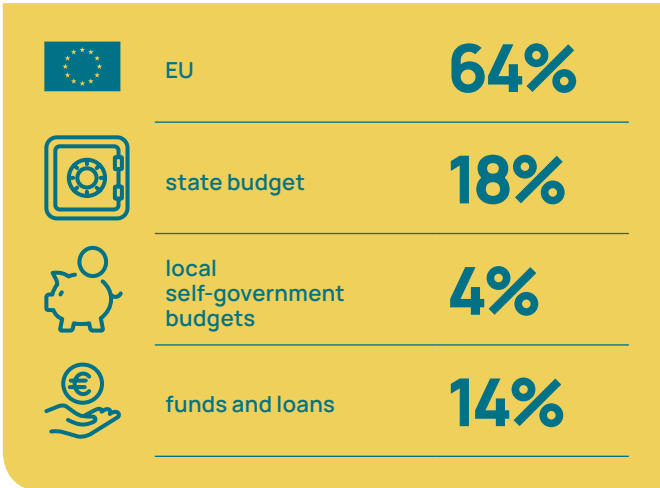
The high costs and limited financial resources necessitated the “transition periods”, which is the time needed to implement the directives that regulate waste and water management. The

assessed investment costs in water and waste management sectors stand at around 7.5 billion euros. These investments are supposed to be financed from the EU funds (64%), state budget (18%), local self-government budgets (4%), and various funds and loans (14%). The participation of the private sector in project financing is foreseen, especially in the area of waste management. The implementation of the Industrial Emissions Directive is not feasible without major investments from the private sector. Out of 227 plants from Annex I of the Industrial Emissions Directive which currently exist in Serbia, 68 plants will need an extended implementation period, including 19 plants that are not operating at the moment – with the total amount of investments of around 1.3 billion EUR.

Under the Action Plan for Development of Administrative Capacities in the Area of Environmental Protection, the Negotiation Group and the Ministry of Environmental Protection have foreseen the employment of around 1,450 new staff in environmental institutions at the national, provincial, and local levels. There are 19 EU regulations that require a transition period in order to secure the funds for their implementation and build the appropriate institutional and administrative capacities in line with the economic and social potential of Serbia.

The Negotiation Group and the Ministry of Environmental Protection have established a constructive collaboration with the European Union bodies concerning Chapter 27. This was confirmed by the donor countries, especially Sweden, through donations in the area of environmental protection. It was underlined that the use of the EU regulatory mechanisms allowed for a more efficient management of the current environmental issues in Serbia, especially those that concern air and water quality, waste recycling, and industrial pollution.

**January 13th 2020.** At the EU Info Centre, as part of the public debate on the national strategic documents in the area of climate change, the following documents were presented:



- Proposal of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy and its Action Plan; and
- Draft Report on the Strategic Assessment of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy’s Environmental Impact.

The adoption of these documents is a clear contribution of Serbia to climate action, and it also contributes to the UNFCCC goals. Additionally, it benefits the future processes of modernisation and competitiveness-raising of the Serbian economy in the global market, while it also contributes to environmental quality, advancing environmental protection, and changing the people’s mind-set on climate accountability.

The long-term Low-Carbon Development Strategy and its Action Plan set forth 27 measures that will cut the GHG emissions and lower the overall rate of environmental pollution. The Strategy foresees six different scenarios of



reducing and mitigating the climate change consequences. Its projected target is for Serbia to reach the status of climate-neutral and resilient country by 2050.

Draft Report on the Strategic Assessment of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy's Environmental Impact shows that the implementation of measures foreseen by the Strategy will result in positive effects at national, regional, and international levels. The development of this document included the widest public, from the drafting phase to the report's adoption. The public debates on Proposal of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy and the Draft Report on the Strategic Assessment of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy's Environmental Impact lasted until January 24th 2020, and they included participants from various state authorities and institutions, scientists and experts, civil sector, and interested individuals. You can find these documents on the website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection ([www.ekologija.gov.rs](http://www.ekologija.gov.rs)), the eGovernment portal (eUp-rava), and the website of the relevant project ([www.klimatskastrategija.eu](http://www.klimatskastrategija.eu)).

**January 17th 2020.** The Minister of Environmental Protection Goran Trivan and the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Republic of Serbia Sian Macleod talked about the environmental priorities in Serbia and collaboration opportunities in this area, and exchanged their experiences on how to respond to climate change and the air pollution problem in the region and around the world.

The commitment of Serbia to protect its environment and reach the European environmental standards was highlighted, which is reflected in the Negotiation Position for Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change). The necessity to solve the problem of wastewater and communal waste treatment was underlined, as was the need to prepare an adequate investment cycle, with the involvement of foreign and local companies and timely preparation of technical documentation for the construction of waste and wastewater treatment plants.

The importance of afforestation and shutting down of individual boiler rooms in the environmental protection process was emphasised. These initiatives have a regional importance, and they are supported by the position of Serbia as Deputy Chair of 26th Conference of Parties and the 5th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

**January 21st 2020.** The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the decision to submit the Negotiation Position for Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change) to the European Commission, which created conditions to open this very important Chapter. Prior to this, the positive opinions of the Environmental Protection Committee and the National Convention on the European Union were adopted without any substantial remarks concerning the proposed Negotiation Position. Additionally, the European Integration Committee also issued a positive opinion on the proposed Negotiation Position of the Republic of Serbia drafted for submission to the Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union for Chapter 27.

**March 3rd 2020.** The panel *Climate Change: Local Challenge – The Role of Circular Economy* was held during the Kopaonik Business Forum 2020. The Minister of Environmental Protection Goran Trivan emphasised Serbia's efforts to take part in the European process of creating a "green continent", opting for circular economy as the fundamental tool for faster development based on the environmental protection principles. Circular economy, which entails private initiatives and the use of new technologies, plays a major role in combatting climate change and mitigating its consequences. Along with "green" economy and a healthier environment, it also sets up conditions to create almost 30,000 new jobs.

It was said that Serbia suffered more than 6.5 billion USD of damage in the past ten years due to droughts and floods. Additionally, the participants were informed that some crucial docu-



ments were completed: the Draft Law on Climate Change (which was submitted to the Government for adoption), the Low-Carbon Development Strategy, the Draft Waste Management Strategy, and Draft Amendments of the Law on Packaging and Package Waste.<sup>3</sup> The budget for environmental issues was increased by 27%, which allowed the investment of several hundred million dinars to design technical documentation for wastewater treatment plants in local communities. So far, 11 regional sanitary landfills were built, while two more are being constructed. There is a notable progress in the recycling industry, even if the issue of the deposit system within the Amendments of the Law on Packaging and Package Waste remains open. The Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Sem Fabrizi presented the EU goals in various areas that aim to turn Europe into the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050, noting that the EU considers to expand the Green Deal to the Western Balkans, in which the role of Serbia is very important.

Among the panellists, there were also Violeta Kokir Belanović (CEO of *Sekopak*), Paul Hickey (economist, European Investment Bank), Jelena Kiš (Manager for Sustainability and Regulatory Affairs for Central and Eastern Europe, *Ball Packaging Europe*), and Roland Kókai (CEO of public company *Vojvodinašume*).

**March 11th 2020.** The introductory meeting for the UNDP-implemented project *Advancing Medium and Long-Term Adaptation Planning in the Republic of Serbia* was held. More than 50 representatives of the stakeholders attended the meeting (Republic and provincial institutions, local self-governments, businesses, academia, civil society organisations), along with the members of the Working Group. Among others, the meeting was attended by the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Mining and Energy, and relevant public companies.

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**The Green Climate Fund donated the funds for the project implementation in the amount of 1.94 million USD. The main project partner is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management, and it is supposed to last from 2019 to 2022.**

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The general goal of the project is to build the capacity of the Government of the Republic of Serbia to assess climate risks and vulnerabilities, by

- advancing medium and long-term planning of climate change adaptation measures with the National Adaptation Plan (NAP);
- supporting the improvement of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC); and
- building the capacity of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Climate Change Adaptation (CCA).

**March 22nd 2020.** The World Water Day was celebrated with the slogan “Water and Climate Change: An Inextricable Link”. With this campaign, the United Nations highlight that water is one of the most important resources. Protection and responsible management of water should secure an equal supply to all users, along with the protection from floods and pollution. The importance of sanitation and water resources during the COVID-19 pandemic was underlined. In the Balkan region, Serbia is the poorest country in terms of autochthonous surface waters that are exposed to anthropogenic impact, especially pollution, which affects the water supply and food production safety. Therefore, the implementation of strategic plans in the area of wastewater and waste treatment with the construction of adequate plants was intensified. This is part of the investment development plan “Serbia 2025.”

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<sup>3</sup> Official Gazette of the RS, no. 36/2009, 95/2018

**March 27th 2020.** As part of the global environmental efforts, the Ministry of Environmental Protection took part in the event called “Earth Hour.” It called upon the citizens to turn off their lights for one hour on Saturday, March 28th 2020 (from 8.30 to 9.30 PM) with the aim to rationally consume energy, preserve natural resources, and reduce GHG emissions. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) participated in the event with the slogan “Return to Nature,” along with numerous organisations and individuals. The message was that steps forward in combat against climate change were possible. The necessity to halt environmental degradation and destabilisation of natural ecosystems was underlined, as well as to change the current concept of excessive exploitation of natural resources.

**April 22nd 2020.** The Ministry of Environmental Protection celebrated the Earth Day as part of the United Nations global initiative, with the message that, by systematically destroying Earth’s resources, mankind disrupts the stability of all ecosystems, therefore jeopardizing its own existence. It is necessary to initiate global actions, find creative and inventive solutions to reduce pollution, transfer to circular economy, suppress the use of fossil fuels, and achieve carbon neutrality. The negative impacts on biodiversity, agriculture, forestry, water management, transport, industry, tourism and health-care are evident. The global shortage of water is concerning, while there is an increasing number of local wars and numerous “climate” refugees, which results in substantial social pressures, especially on the territory of the European Union. The cutback on industrial and similar activities, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a reduction of global pollution. Even before this pandemic, the World Health Organisation has warned that the climate change and anthropogenic influences would result in outbreaks and spreading of infectious diseases.

**September 30th 2020.** The Minister of Environmental Protection Goran Trivan participated in the informal meeting of the ministers of environmental protection of the EU member states, dedicated to the global biodiversity policy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the contribution of Europe to achieving the global climate goals, from September 30th to October 1st 2020 in Berlin, Germany.

Minister Trivan said that the rate of biodiversity reduction is one of the key indicators of the overall condition of our planet. The territory of the Balkans, including Serbia, is still an “oasis” of conserved biodiversity. This is why it is necessary to implement global and regional activities against climate change and for pollution reduction, such as afforestation. Serbia’s effort to be part of the European Union’s process to reduce the GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and to become a carbon-neutral continent by 2050 was highlighted. All preparations to adopt the pivotal Law on Climate Change and the Low-Carbon Development Strategy with its Action Plan were completed. Additionally, Serbia developed the reports under the UNFCCC, the first draft of the revised NDC, and the Draft of the Second BUR under the UNFCCC, while currently the Third National Report under the UNFCCC is being developed. Due to these achievements, Serbia was selected to be one of the co-chairing countries for the upcoming 26th Conference of the Parties of UNFCCC, which will take place in November 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Minister Trivan had the opportunity to meet with several important officials of the attending countries: Svenja Schultze, Federal Minister of Environment, Protection of Nature and Nuclear Security of the Federal Republic of Germany; Sergio Costa, Minister of Environment, Land, and Sea of the Republic of Italy; Tomislav Čorić, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia; Naser Nuredini, Minister of Environmental Protection and Spatial Planning of North Macedonia; and Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment and Urban Planning of the Republic of Turkey.

## 2.2. Fulfilment of obligations under the UNCCD

**January 29th 2020.** The Ministry of Environmental Protection submitted the Report on Implemented Methodology and Identification of Goals for Establishing Land Degradation Neutrality in the Republic of Serbia to the UNCCD, in line with its obligations under this Convention. At the same time, Minister Goran Trivan sent a high-level note to Mr Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD Secretariat, with precisely listed measures that should be implemented in the Republic of Serbia in order to meet the proclaimed national goals of LDN.

The following measures for reaching LDN by 2030 were presented:

- Increase the forested areas in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina to 14.3% (of the entire territory of the Province), primarily by using the system of forest windbreaks;
- Increase the forest cover in the areas of bare and degraded land in mountainous areas south of Sava and Danube, with the surface of 100,000 ha, by 2030, in order to control erosion and floods;
- Maintain the determined positive LDN trend by implementing the appropriate measures and activities in spatial documents and plans.

It was said that almost 6.47% i.e. 567,300 ha of national territory belongs to the category of degraded land. Afforestation measures bear a major positive impact on a whole range of issues for which adequate solutions must be found: mitigating the climate change effects in rural and urban areas (increasing O<sub>2</sub> emissions, decreasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions); protection from erosion (more than 70% of state territory is at risk of erosion); protection of catchment areas of water reservoirs that are part of the water supply system (located in mountainous areas which

are threatened by erosion and have large parts of bare land, resulting in filling the reservoirs with silt); prevention of flash floods connected with erosion, which are the most frequent natural disaster on the territory of Serbia; implementing the concept of agroforestry to develop the mountainous regions; conservation and renewal of biodiversity. It is particularly important to increase the forest cover in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which is a lowland territory where most of Serbia's cereal crops are grown. This should be done primarily by establishing forest windbreaks systems to protect the arable land from wind erosion; to safeguard the road, railroad, and water supply infrastructure (the Danube–Tisa–Danube Canal); and to form corridors to restore biodiversity and establish an ecological network. Therefore, the afforestation measures are important not only for forestry, but also for a whole range of vital activities aiming to renew the ecosystem services, prevent natural disasters, and protect the economic potential of the country, which is reflected in the most important planning and strategic documents of Serbia.

**March 25th 2020.** The Ministry of Environmental Protection published the UNCCD call ([www.unccd.int](http://www.unccd.int)) for young people to raise awareness and indicate the strong link between land, biodiversity and climate, with the topic “Food. Feed. Fibre.” (slogan of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2020). The call invites young people, between 15 and 30 years of age, to become UNCCD Land Heroes by participating in a video and photography competition. The goal is to encourage peers and like-minded individuals to show accountability toward land as a resource, and become part of the solution to mitigate climate change effects.

**May 1st 2020.** In line with Article 32 of the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Environmental Protection informed the public about the beginning of development of the Draft National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation on the Territory of the Republic of

Serbia (hereinafter: NAP).<sup>4</sup> The provisions of the Law Ratifying the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa stipulate that parties of the Convention have the obligation to prepare national action programmes. The goal of these programmes is to identify the factors contributing to desertification, and set up practical measures necessary to combat desertification and land degradation with an approximate cost assessment for the implementation of foreseen activities.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection formed a Working Group for drafting of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation, and upon completing the preparation, revision, and adoption processes, it will be submitted to the UNCCD. The Working Group consists of representatives of relevant state authorities and organisations, science and expert institutions, and civil society organisations. They will provide the relevant information and data from the scope of competences of their institutions, which will improve the process of drafting the NAP from a professional standpoint.

**June 17th 2020.** To mark June 17th, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2020, the Ministry of Environmental Protection informed the public about the necessity to combat the phenomena that contribute to the degradation of land and other natural resources and threaten biodiversity. The United Nations have established this day to highlight the need for a joint global response to the destructive consequences of desertification and droughts which jeopardize a large part of our planet. The event was held in Novi Sad, and Minister Goran Trivan said that the disappearance of the arable land, as the most important natural resource, results in reduction of biodiversity, degradation of ecosystems, reduced availability of food, and lower quality of food, air, and drinking water.

<sup>4</sup> The Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, *Official Gazette of RS*, no. 30/18.

Afforestation was highlighted as one of the most efficient measures to protect and restore the global ecosystem.

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The UN Convention, which was adopted on June 17th 1994 in Paris, has been ratified by 197 countries so far, out of which more than 140 countries are affected by desertification and land degradation processes.

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The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought promotes the goals of this Convention, and each year it is focused on another topic. In 2020, its slogan was “Food. Feed. Fibre.” emphasising the impact of food production and the fashion industry on land. The topic was suggested by Mr Irfan Miswari who pinpointed the impact of the fashion industry on land and water in the Indonesian province of West Java. This region is known for growing cotton, and during the drought season it transforms into a semi-desert area. Still, in West Java more than a hundred textile and fashion companies spend over 2,500 litres of water to manufacture a single T-shirt.

In 2007, Serbia signed the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (hereinafter: the Convention). In line with its obligations under this Convention, Serbia is implementing a set of activities. After joining the Land Degradation Neutrality Programme, the Ministry of Environmental Protection has established a cross-sectoral working group, and in February 2020 it submitted to the Convention’s Secretariat the Report on Implemented Methodology and Identification of Goals for Establishing Land Degradation Neutrality in the Republic of Serbia. Additionally, the Ministry developed a document called *Drought Initiative, Republic of Serbia - Recommendations for Development of*

*the National Drought Plan of the Republic of Serbia* as the foundation for further combat against drought and its consequences which have caused more than 5 billion EUR of damage in Serbia since 2000. This document was submitted to the Convention's Secretariat in November 2020.

In 2020, the United Nations marked the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought by discussing how the growth of global production and wide consumption impacts the planet, causing the degradation of over two billion hectares of formerly arable land, and changing more than 70% of natural ecosystems. World population growth, increased agricultural production and the industry of wide consumption goods (clothes, footwear, household appliances, cars) have a major negative impact on land, ecosystems and biodiversity. It is assessed that food production will need additional 300 million hectares of land by 2030, which will intensify climate change due to the increased GHG emissions. Therefore, the United Nations called upon mankind to modify their daily personal choices, change food and clothes habits, and live in harmony with nature in order to contribute to the preservation and renewal of land, protection of biodiversity, and mitigation of climate change consequences.

**August 8th 2020.** The Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Belgrade office of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) received the third working version of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia. All three working versions of NAP were prepared by the group of experts from the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University. The first and the second working versions of the NAP were submitted on April 8th and June 12th respectively, after which they were revised in line with the suggestions, recommendations and remarks of the members of the Working Group.

The NAP is developed within the GEF/UNEP umbrella project *Support to GEF Eligible Parties*

*for the UNCCD 2018 Reporting Cycle*, for which UNEP is the implementation agency and FAO is the executive agency in the Republic of Serbia. For the purposes of NAP development, the Ministry of Environmental Protection formed a cross-sectoral working group consisting of representatives of all relevant state institutions and civil society organisations. The NAP development was supported by the group of experts from the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University: Dr Ratko Ristić, professor, Dr Boris Radić, associate professor, and master engineer Siniša Polovina, teaching assistant.

The implementation of UNCCD and its 2018–2030 strategic framework is a complex task that can be met only through a cross-sectoral approach. The National Programme for UNCCD implementation is the key document to identify the factors contributing to desertification, land degradation and drought, and to implement the practical measures for their control, suppression, and mitigation of consequences.

### 2.3. Fulfilment of obligations under the CBD

**January 31st 2020.** On January 31st 2020, the Ministry of Environmental Protection organised the celebration of the World Wetlands Day (Ramsar Day, February 2nd). The central event was the conference called *Wetlands Biodiversity*, organised in the Visitors' Centre of Landscape of Outstanding Features "Vlasina" in collaboration with the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation, and the Tourist Organisation of the Municipality of Surdulica.

Globally, the Ramsar Day is marked every year on February 2nd, on the anniversary of signing the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Water Fowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), in the Iranian city of Ramsar (1971). The World Wetlands Day is celebrated by organising various events, both locally and nationally, to raise the public aware-

ness on the importance of wetlands, conservation of biodiversity, and ecosystem services. At the same time, the vulnerability of these areas to human activities is emphasised.

In line with the Report of The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, it was said that Earth was facing frequent mass extinctions of species, because almost one million species are on the brink of extinction, 75% of land areas are substantially changed, and over 85% of wetlands are completely lost.<sup>5</sup>

**May 22nd 2020.** The International Day for Biological Diversity (May 22nd) was celebrated around the world amidst the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the slogan “Our Solutions Are in Nature”. The loss of biodiversity is caused by degradation of ecosystems due to fragmentation and cutting of forests, excessive exploitation of ocean and land resources, pollution, intense urbanisation, development of infrastructure, and uncontrolled migration flows of human population. According to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), out of 116,177 registered species, more than 31,000 are on the brink of extinction.

The Republic of Serbia is one of European centres of biodiversity, rich in protected areas, of which the surface is 677,484 ha, i.e. 7.65% of the national territory. The Programme for Conservation of Nature of the Republic of Serbia 2020–2022 was prepared in line with the goals of the most important international treaties and documents on the conservation of nature, preservation of biological diversity, and combat against climate change. The ecological network of Serbia was established to conserve the most valuable habitats, important for biodiversity, and it consists of around 20% of the territory of Serbia.

<sup>5</sup> IPBES, available at: <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>.

The Rulebook on Declaration and Protection of Protected and Strictly Protected Species of Plants, Animals, and Fungi includes 2,633 species, out of which 1,783 are strictly protected and 860 are protected.

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### Additionally, red books of Serbian fauna were published:

the Red Book of Serbian Fauna I – Amphibians;

the Red Book of Serbian Fauna II – Reptiles;

the Red Book of Serbian Fauna III – Birds; and

the Red Book of Serbian Fauna IV – Orthoptera.

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The representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection participated in the activities of the Biodiversity Task Force of South-East Europe, under the auspices of the Regional Working Group on Environment of the Regional Cooperation Council, whose goal is to coordinate the regional activities in the implementation of international commitments and EU policies in this area. At the moment, this Task Force is working on long-term cooperation plans until 2030.

The International Day for Biological Diversity, celebrated on May 22nd, was established by the United Nations to raise the global awareness and initiate activities aiming to protect and conserve the endangered biodiversity.

**June 5th 2020.** At the proposal of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Decision to Join the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), thus becoming the 137th member of this organisation. This process was supported by UNDP and the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University.



The goal of IPBES is to connect science and politics in the area of biological diversity and ecosystem services, in order to preserve them and assure sustainable use. IPBES carries out global and regional assessments of the condition of biological diversity and ecosystem services. Additionally, IPBES supports its member states to fulfil the key international obligations arising from the Sustainable Development Goals, global goals of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (Aichi Targets), and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.



### 3. Overview of other activities that contribute to the efficient fulfilment of obligations under the Rio Conventions, implemented in Serbia in 2020

A range of activities was carried out in 2020, aiming to improve the implementation of international agreements in the area of environmental protection and to create synergies between these agreements in Serbia, by strengthening the consultative process and mainstreaming these agreements into public policies and programmes at the national and local levels. In 2020, along with state authorities and institutions, other actors took part in this endeavour, such as the academia, science and expert organisations, organisations of students and youth, and the media. They all played an important role in the implementation of activities related to the Rio Conventions.

#### 3.1. Academia and science organisations

**November 4th 2020.** A science conference called *Significance of Development Research and Innovations for Improving Serbian Forestry and Agriculture* was held, organised by the Academy of Engineering Sciences of Serbia (AESS), Department of Biotechnical Engineering Sciences. The event took place at the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University. Twelve papers were presented, out of which nine were about innovations in crop growing, plant protection, and weed suppression; two were about suppression of invasive species of trees and bio-economy of forestry; and one was about global

trends in disaster prevention and their relevance to the environmental protection in Serbia. To various extents, all presented papers took into consideration the links between the current and the projected climate change, food production security, preserving the quality of land, control of degradation processes, and disaster prevention.

**November 18th 2020.** The international workshop 100 years of *Milanković's Theory of Climate Change* was held, organised by the Association *Milutin Milanković* from Belgrade. Experts from nine countries took part (Serbia, France, Hungary, Austria, Canada, Belgium, USA, Brazil, and Montenegro) and they presented 24 papers in total. Among the presenters, there were leading global experts for climate change, who are deeply familiar with the work and ideas of Milutin Milanković.

**November 19th 2020.** The regional webinar *Integrating Water Aspects in Forest Management* was held, organised by the Connecting Natural Values and People Foundation (CNVPPF) from Skopje (North Macedonia). The connection between forest ecosystems and water management was discussed, as well as the connection between land degradation and natural disasters in the context of current and projected climate change. Along with several dozen experts from Europe and the region, a few experts from Serbia participated in the webinar.



**December 14th 2020.** The publication *Guidelines for Establishment and Maintenance of Forest Windbreaks in Serbia* was developed within the project *Capacity Development for Improved Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements* funded by GEF, and implemented by UNDP in cooperation with the institutions of the Republic of Serbia. The publication was prepared by the group of experts from the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University.

So far the Republic of Serbia has not utilised its potential for the establishment of windbreak belts, which has resulted in major damages for the sectors of agriculture, forestry, water management, road and railroad infrastructure, nature protection, tourism, sports and recreation. At the same time, lack of windbreaks denies beneficial ecosystem services to the whole communities in the domains of mitigating effects of climate change, rehabilitating and preserving biodiversity, quality environment, particularly protection of settlements against pollution. Wind erosion is dominant in the whole territory of AP Vojvodina, as well as in flat areas south of the Sava and the Danube rivers, with particularly susceptible regions being western parts of Srem and Bačka, lower areas of southern Banat, upper Pomoravlje, Vranje with its surroundings and the Braničevo district.

Forest windbreaks are necessary in order to achieve the following goals: protection of arable land against wind erosion; protection of the DTD canal system against drifts from wind erosion; protection of the road and railroad infrastructure against snow drifts; protection of settlements against pollutants travelling during wind episodes; visual isolation of communal landfills and disposal sites; protection of water areas (lakes, ponds); protection of facilities significant for beekeeping; establishing plantations for production of biomass for energy generating purposes; establishing corridors for biodiversity rehabilitation and protection; establishing sports-recreational infrastructure within the windbreak system (cycling and pedestrian tracks, outdoors exercise grounds, resting places, educational tracks, children

playgrounds, contents for persons with disabilities; linking urban green infrastructure with the existing and planned windbreak belts; networking of belts into systems of „blue-green“ and environmental corridors); protection of settlements against noise and pollution.

### 3.2. Involvement of students and youth

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Activities of college students and youth (high school, primary school, and younger children) that aim at awareness-raising and consist of specific actions to protect the environment are particularly important and valuable, because they substantially contribute to the practical implementation of the Rio Conventions. In the text that follows, we will present the activities of Belgrade University Students focused on environmental protection, awareness-raising, and education of youth.

**February 29th – March 2nd 2020.** Around 30 students of Belgrade University planted around 8,000 seedlings on the territory of Sremski Karlovci.

**March 13th 2020.** An afforestation action was carried out in Lipovička Šuma, when around 150 students of Belgrade University planted around 3,000 seedlings.

**September 9th 2020.** Four student teams competed in the 8th national student competition to create eco-innovative food products – *Ecotrophelia Serbia 2020*, organised by the Serbian Association of Food Technologists as part of the implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (4S) in which one of the priorities is *Food for the Future*, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technological Development, and with the support of the Competitive Economy Project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNDP, and Science and Technology Park Belgrade. The winning

team participated in the European competition *Ecotrophelia Europe* in October 2020.

**November 3rd 2020.** In collaboration with the Student Centre, ten students of Belgrade University carried out an afforestation activity in Student City (*Studentski Grad*) in Belgrade. Around 300 seedlings were planted.

**November 7th 2020.** Belgrade University students carried out an afforestation activity in the vicinity of the King Aleksandar I Memorial Fountain in Lisičji Jarak.

**November 15th 2020.** Belgrade University students planted around 100 seedlings on the territory of Bor. This was part of the wider action *Make a Move for the Climate*, which included workshops, training courses, and developing afforestation apps (which help identify suitable areas and types of trees).

**December 6th 2020.** Belgrade University students planted around 200 seedlings on the territory of Niš, as part of the wider action *Make a Move for the Climate*.

**December 2020.** A group of 25 students from the Legal Clinic of the Faculty of Law of Belgrade University provided legal support to prepare the proposal of the Law on Environmental Protection, the overview of the Ombudsman's practice in cases concerning environmental protection, and analyses of long-term implications of the EU Green Deal on Serbian national policies and European integrations. The work of students was supported by UNDP through the project *Capacity Development for Improved Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements financed by GEF*.

### 3.3. Media activities

For several years, the media corporation *Adria Media Group* and the *Dm drogerie markt Serbia* are implementing the campaign *Plant a Tree* to foster the culture of environmental accountability with the slogan "Sustainable Future". The aim of the campaign is to present the importance of the 17 Strategic Development Goals to the citizens, to create a participatory approach, and to implement a range of activities. The *Adria Media Group* covers a vast media space (television, daily newspapers, and websites) that it uses to raise the public awareness about the importance of sustainable development and environmental protection. The crown activities consist of planting trees, which is the paradigm of changing the mind-set and paying our dues to the planet. Along with the citizens, the following partners are taking part in this activity: the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management – Forestry Directorate; Jevremovac Botanical Garden – Faculty of Biology of Belgrade University; public company *Srbijašume*; public company *Vojvodinašume*; the Environmental Movement of Serbia (*Pokret Gorana*); the Faculty of Forestry of Belgrade University; and Forestry High School of Kraljevo.

In October and November 2020, 81,905 seedlings were planted in 65 places in Serbia, and around 1,500 kg of seed was collected to produce more seedlings for the future activities. This activity will last until March 2021. During the planting activities in 2019, more than 51,000 seedlings were planted in a single day on November 17th 2019 on the whole territory of Serbia.

More than 2,000 volunteers applied to participate in these activities through the website. Around 250 articles, podcasts, interviews, and forums were produced. In addition, documentary movies were made: *Seed, Sowing, Planting Trees, Biodiversity, and Natural Capital Economy*, which all had over 1.5 million views.



### In October and November 2020



**81,905** seedlings



**1,500** kg of seed



**65** places



on November 17th 2019



**51,000** seedlings

## 4. Conclusions

It is of vital interest for the Republic of Serbia to participate in activities aiming to create a realistic perception of climate change issues, land degradation, and conservation of biological diversity. This provides the foundation to design measures for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of negative effects. The problems described here are present all around the globe, which is why we need global activism and collaboration between all countries of the world, as it is outlined by the United Nations and the complex activities of the three Rio Conventions: the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Republic of Serbia is party of the three Rio Conventions, which is verified by the appropriate legislation and confirmed by fulfilment of precisely defined obligations, which include reporting to the Convention's authorities. The Annual Report on the Rio Conventions Implementation Activities in the Republic of Serbia is a comprehensive overview of steps to implement these three Conventions in Serbia in 2020. The Republic of Serbia is diligently fulfilling its obligations in line with its own interests, social and economic status, and legislative, technical and technological capacities. This Report provides a comparative overview of the activities of the Republic of Serbia under the Rio Conventions, along with the fulfilment level of set goals which are complementary to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13

(climate action), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The Republic of Serbia belongs to the region of Southeast Europe, an area exposed to the highest level of threats from current climate change at the global level. The trends projected by mid and late 21st century and their impact on the economic stability and development perspectives of local communities are especially alarming. The climate change will take shape, among other things, in growth of average annual air temperature, unusually long drought seasons, frequent intense rainfall episodes resulting in flash floods, increasingly lower number of snow days, and major reduction of hydrographic network water flow during the low water season. All these phenomena have a strong and obvious impact on the environment and economic activities in Serbia, such as drying out of forests, frequent forest fires and tree diseases, drastic reduction of agricultural production, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, and overall vulnerability of lives and property to disastrous floods. Additionally, the general health of the population is exposed to a growing risk due to the phenomena such as the extreme "heat island" effect and pollution of water and air in urban environments, which impact both smaller settlements and large cities. Intense construction activities in protected natural areas (national parks, nature parks, special nature reserves, strict nature reserves) are a major risk factor, as they consist of building new electrical energy infrastructure (derivative small hydropower plants), road infrastructure, and tourism capacities.

Additionally, the goals of Rio Conventions and the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda are incorporated in the EU directives to various extents. To Serbia, as an EU candidate country, this provides guidelines for the successful implementation of this process.

Documents developed to implement and fulfil the obligations arising from the Rio Conventions are umbrella, consolidated acts that provide an overview of the current environmental state in Serbia, the public perception of achievement of environmental protection goals, and the level of fulfilment of accepted international obligations in this area. The mutual connection and complementarity of principles and activities contained in the Rio Conventions allow the Republic of Serbia to define its priority lines of action, corresponding to its national goals and international obligations.



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