

**Address by the
Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Dr Tina Birbili
at the Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative
Athens, Friday October 22nd 2010**

It is a privilege and pleasure to be here today and address you in this forum in favor of the merits on the Mediterranean Climate Change Initiative and the benefits that may accrue from its launch.

The Mediterranean is our sea.

It is what has shaped our history, our culture, our livelihood, our nature.

It is the common defining influence for all our countries and through the millennia that they exist in the present or similar forms.

But the Mediterranean will not be the same without its Climate.

For all these reasons, it is worth every effort to preserve it and to assure that it remains viable in the new millennium for our children and grandchildren.

Repeatedly in the last years we are reminded that Climate change is here. The heat waves of this last summer, the floods in the northern shores, the forest fires, the reduced agricultural yields underscore the fact that Climate Change is not a future threat, but a current one which is expected to increase in intensity in the coming years.

The international efforts to agree on meaningful measures to reduce emissions worldwide and thus limit the impacts were dealt a severe blow in Copenhagen. There, we at least agreed that it is desirable to limit the increase of mean global temperature to 2oC.

What that means locally is something else.

In the Mediterranean all predictions point to a much larger increase in temperature and a considerable decrease of rainfall, which is already small and unable to meet even present day demands in a sustainable fashion.

What is there to do?

Three things:

1. Engage even more actively in the international negotiations.
2. Prepare to operate under the changing climatic conditions that we will be facing locally in the future, both by identifying areas and sectors that will be under pressure, and putting in place mechanisms to assist them and by changing production patterns to different ones that are better suited for the new conditions.
3. Try to address the root cause of the problem, that is the ever increasing GHG emissions, so as to reduce the impact, with the minimum possible disruption to our economies and social structures.

This is not something new. It is a different way of saying adapt and mitigate, the 2 key words that one hears continuously, and rightly so, in the negotiations.

What is new is the focus on the Mediterranean.

Come to think of it, even this focus is not entirely new. There are a large number of international organizations both private and state that are concerned with the protection and development of the area.

What is really new, is the concept of putting together an umbrella group of countries of large diversity, large and small in size or population, developed and developing, members of other established groups to act on climate issues.

A group that may, because of this, have a fresh voice in international negotiations and at the same time achieve a synergy in addressing all aspects of climate change.

A group that sees the need for action to adapt and reduce emissions not as an obstacle to the improvement of the welfare of its people but as a opportunity to develop their economies in a more sustainable fashion that clearly leads to increased benefits over the long run.

A group that appreciates the advantages of developing wider strategic plans in critical sectors, such as energy transportation and utilization and in seeking ways to increase efficiency in common actions through sharing resources, data, information and good practices as for example in climate research and dissemination, rational use of energy and conservation, water management and agricultural innovation.

This vision may seem overly ambitious.

Yet, I am sure that its time has come!

A small sign of the need for such action is a news item that appeared yesterday, in these times of deep concern with the financial markets and the heavy burden of the cost of borrowing on our economies. CERES, a US national coalition of investors, environmentalists and public interest groups, put out a report that criticizes the major bond rating companies (Moody's, Standard and Poor, Fitch) for not taking into consideration water scarcity from climate change in rating bond issues.

We really, truly, need to quantify now and ameliorate as soon as possible the new risks that we face because of climate change.

And we need to make sure that we communicate the most recent and reliable findings of our scientific community, with all their uncertainties, to our citizens so that they support and participate in this effort. Without them it cannot be done.

There is a last item that needs to be mentioned. This new initiative can only be meaningful if all our countries embrace it and nurture it especially in its initial stages. This means that those of us that are persuaded that there is merit in this proposal should start work to put the skeleton together and then meat to the bones.

We need to discuss the structure, the procedures, the resources, the operational aspects so that we can have a Mediterranean voice in next year's negotiations as a first priority.

We need to decide on the mundane things that would jump start this process, that is, to decide here in Athens our next organizational steps and to identify the necessary resources which in any case are not large.

But most importantly, we need to believe that our Mediterranean and its climate are worth all effort necessary to remain the truly exceptional and magical place that it is.

Thank you.