

Realising that environmentally sustainable development is the purpose of all our actions,

Aware that the consumerism-based dominant economic model is devastating for the environment and people's health,

Determined to struggle to protect our planet and its resources for the current and future generations,

We, the new green politicians and activists from Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia, representing DOM – Macedonia and the Bulgarian Greens – members of the European Green Party, the Serbian Greens and the Green Party of Serbia, as well as civil society organisations from the three countries, publish this

DECLARATION

for Sustainable Future through Green Economy in South Eastern Europe

and appeal to national and local governments, fellow political parties, the civil society and international organisations, operating in our region, to commit to it and act for its implementation.

The challenges of today

We are facing extraordinary challenges for humanity and ecosystems, which affect our region, Europe and today's world: the climate change, biodiversity lost and exhaustion of resources. These challenges undermine communities' well-being, create disparities and conflicts, and force millions to leave their homelands in search for more prosperous and healthier life. They all are result of an existing unsustainable economic model, based on mass consumption and limitless exploitation of natural resources. But our natural environment has its limits, so we urgently need to boost a transition to efficient and sustainable solutions to change this model. Progressive countries and regions already recognize the danger and started working for transformation of their economies. The United Nations adopted the Agreement on Climate change and defined Sustainable Development Goals. The European Union is framing legislation package for circular economy. Countries like Costa Rica and Iceland are now

100% renewable energy supplied. Many local authorities, chambers of commerce, small and middle size enterprises and other actors convert to more sustainable and efficient models.

Unfortunately, the countries in the South and East of Europe are not among the leaders in the shift to circular economy on the basis of sustainable development and the triple bottom line framework for the prosperity of our societies. That is why we as new green politicians from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia, strive to raise the awareness of people and communities and urge our governments to act decisively to strengthen and speed up the transition to green economy in our countries.

Complex and interrelated problems

Green economy has great potential for opening new jobs and overcoming the economic crisis, while at the same time protects the environment and offers new opportunities for vulnerable groups. But there are many obstacles that we need to solve in the next few years.

The problems that stand in the way are economic, environmental and social. The issue that stands out and that we need to solve first is an inadequate legislation and poor implementation of environmental laws.

Some of the economic problems that we are facing include: high intensity of energy consumption by the industry; monopolies and oligarchic structures that derail the free market and prevent small and middle sized business; undeveloped organic production in the field of agriculture; poor waste management; lack of primary and secondary separation of the waste and low recycling rates; bad ecotourism infrastructure and inadequate use of renewable resources. Good examples exist of small and medium enterprises that successfully employ green and circular economy models, but these are disconnected and not well known by the public. Structural, cohesion and pre-accession funds from the EU, and investment funding from international and private financial institutions do little to shift the economic paradigms in the direction of green, sustainable and equitable economy and in many cases accelerate the existing problems.

The beautiful natural heritage of the Balkan region, but we are destroying it extremely fast. Heavy fossil fuel use pollutes our air, the waste is polluting water resources, and pesticides and GMOs are destroying our land. Our region has amazing national parks, that are not well preserved. There is no systematic control over polluters, no co-constructed strategies and action plans for decreasing a pressure on nature.

Social factors are very important for green economy development. Great numbers of young and educated people are leaving the Balkan region, because of bad economic and social conditions. Economic growth and new jobs creation is often decoupled from social care, infrastructure for people with disabilities, gender and LGBT perspective. Our countries are struggling with high level of corruption, lack of rule of law, and deteriorating freedom of speech, which prevent sustainable economy development.

Green Economy solutions for environmentally sustainable development

In order to boost Green Economy we need to develop new and adapt existing legislature.

The new Green politicians and civil society activists from the Balkans propose the co-creation of national and regional strategies promoting green economy, based on a participative approach, accompanied by action plans and budgets.

Economic instruments for the purpose of promoting alternatives of green economy, in order to stimulate consumers: e.g. subsidies, taxes, grants, loans, need to be designed and implemented.

With these economic instruments societies should support the creation of green jobs in different sectors such as: use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency; eco - design packaging; eco-tourism; organic food, beverages, medical and cosmetics production; natural materials and zero energy buildings; smart and innovative technologies for efficient use and storage of resources; green infrastructure; waste management; sustainable transport.

Green economy is a local and regional economy which requires cohesion and social action. We insist on active inclusion of all vulnerable groups, and integrating gender equality perspective, create quality chances for young, educated people in all fields of policy, regulation and action by decision makers.

The prosperity of our countries needs more innovation and willingness, in order to find and promote new solutions and new, greener technologies.

For the purpose of assisting the implementation of new legislature and appropriate economic instruments, as well as knowledge – transfer, civic and formal education needs to promote green economy vision and solutions: in the schools and universities, but also in the chambers of commerce, workers unions, and mass media.

Greens have started regional cooperation around these issues many years ago. Now we urge other decision makers and stakeholders to join us and work together for this important transition. We do not have any more time to waste!

Skopje, October 17, 2016