***Delegation from Represented by***

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Position Paper for the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA)

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia) endeavors to make firm steps to ensure the protection of the environment and to foster environmental sustainability in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Pursuant to Article 8 Nr. 10 of its constitution, Macedonia stresses the importance of and looks forward to discuss the following issues in the UNEA: I. Combating Illegal Trade in Wildlife; II. Implementation of the Paris Agreement; and III. Sustainable Use of the Oceans, Seas, and Marine Resources.

I. Combating Illegal Trade in Wildlife

Over the past decades, the world has seen an alarming loss of species. Illegal poaching is one of the biggest threats to wildlife and causes significant economic damage to affected regions, since it weakens fiscal stability, deters investments, contributes to income inequality and can lead to civil conflicts. Though Macedonia represents a hotspot for biodiversity in Europe and profits economically from its rich flora and fauna, its natural richness is often endangered. Illegal poaching specifically poses a great threat to the Balkan lynx, a national symbol of Macedonia, which nowadays is on the brink of extinction because of its highly coveted, spotted golden-brown fur. Macedonia thus welcomes the objectives and measures outlined in UNEP/EA.1/Res.3, which were stressed and expanded in UNEP/EA.2/Res.14. Macedonia has acceded to most important international and regional environmental agreements, namely to the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD), the *Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats* (Bern Convention) and the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES).

**Nationally**, Macedonia has adopted and is constantly implementing several significant environmental laws, rulebooks, strategies and sustainable development indicators such as the *Law on Nature Protection*, *the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan* and the *National Strategy for Sustainable Development* in accordance with its international commitment. On a **regional** level, the country has been active in the work of the *Regional Environmental Center of Central and Eastern European Countries* (CEEC). **Internationally**, Macedonia has been an active Member State of the *International Union for Nature Conservation* (IUCN) and of the *United Nations Environment Programme* (UNEP), and, since 1995, of the *World Center for Biodiversity Monitoring*. Further, Macedonia appreciates A/RES/69/314, reaffirmed by A/RES/70/301, and highly welcomes the *European Union Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking*.

In the **short term**, Macedonia calls for all Member States to acknowledge the crucial role civil society plays in tackling illegal poaching. Member States affected by poaching are encouraged to join forces with local civil society organizations (CSOs) and relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the form of working groups to launch educational work. A change in the attitude of local communities towards illicit trafficking in wildlife and local support for wildlife protection, for example by rangers or anti-poaching drones, is of utmost importance for its success. The working groups thus shall raise awareness for the issue, reduce acceptance of illegal poaching and lower the demand for wildlife products through offensive campaigns. In the **medium term**, Macedonia calls upon all Member States to introduce and enforce harsh deterrent penalties for illicit poaching and trafficking in wildlife and strict trading bans on wildlife products. The *Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytical Toolkit* of the *International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime* (ICCWC) provides valuable guidance for national agencies in this regard. Furthermore, Macedonia strongly encourages local agencies to develop conservation strategies and monitoring schemes, as it has been done for the Balkan lynx in Macedonia. In the **long** **term**, Macedonia accentuates that the development of sustainable and alternative livelihoods for communities living in and next to wildlife habitats is imperative for the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. Alternative livelihoods could result from sustainable farming and wildlife watching tourism. To facilitate the establishment of industries in Africa, Macedonia advises to start a platform to bring together relevant regional authorities and potential investors. Joint Ventures and private-public-partnerships can promote value addition, research and development as well as technological innovations for a sustainable use of biodiversity.

II. Implementation of the Paris Agreement

Climate change is one of the most urgent threats to humanity. Since the majority of Macedonia’s rural population depends on agriculture, Macedonia is especially vulnerable to the risks of global warming. To limit the damages of climate change, Macedonia thus finds immediate global action indispensable. Hence, Macedonia notes with deep appreciation the enactment of the 1994 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), the 1998 *Kyoto Protocol* and ultimately the 2015 *Paris Agreement*.

**Nationally**, climate change politics in Macedonia is strongly interlinked with the European Union (EU) integration process as well as with the wider political horizon. Macedonia has since its ratification of the UNFCCC made great efforts to fight climate change: The country has established the *National Climate Change Committee*, serving as an advisory body for policy-making related to climate change. Mitigation of and adaptation to climate change have been integrated into several strategic documents such as the 2015 *Renewable Energy Action Plan* published by the Macedonian *Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning* (MoEPP) and the *Local Environmental Action Plans* (LEAPs). Additionally, a *Coordinating Body on Cooperation and Dialog* between the MoEPP and fifty environmental CSOs has been created in 2013. **Internationally**, Macedonia signed the *Paris Agreement* on 22 April 2016. Although Macedonia has not yet ratified the Agreement, it submitted its *Intended Nationally Determined Contributions* (INDC) in line with paragraph 14 of the *Lima Call for Climate Action* before the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Paris (COP21). Macedonia also welcomes UNEP/EA.2/Res.6.

In the **short** **term**, Macedonia calls upon the UNEA to set out common modalities, procedures, and guidelines for accounting, reporting, and verification of all Parties’ implementation and compliance with their NDCs. Since the self-commitments under the NDCs are not compulsory and any form of punishment for non-achievement would lead to less ambitious contributions, the UNEA should consider the introduction of incentives for the achievement of progressive NDCs. In order to increase society’s understanding of the impact climate change has on the different public sectors, Macedonia further suggests the establishment of networks similar to the Macedonian *Rural Development Network*,which from 2012-2016 has been in charge for the “Adaption of Climate Change to Agriculture“ in Macedonia.Those networks shall be delegated with the organization of various workshops, Climate Change Caravan events and quiz-bowl styled climate change contests for the sake of the mobilization of communities. In the **medium** **term**, Macedonia encourages all Member States to establish a connecting body between environmental CSOs, NGOs and the relevant national authorities based on the example of the *Coordinating Body on Cooperation and Dialog* in Macedonia. These bodies shall enable the exchange of ideas as well as empower vivid dialogues and joint initiatives in order to effectively implement the respective NDCs. In order to encourage the private sector to invest in environmental friendly projects, Macedonia proposes fiscal incentives such as but not limited to tax and duty exemptions or subsidies. In the **long term**, Macedonia stresses the importance of a decarbonized energy supply through the shift to renewable energy and the improvement of energy efficiency. As a state mainly using domestic lignite for energy production, Macedonia is fully aware of its significant potential for greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Macedonia hence calls on all Member States to prepare and present plans for the stepwise reduction of fossil fuels for energy and heat production.

III. Sustainable Use of the Oceans, Seas, and Marine Resources

Dedicated to Article 43 of its Constitution, Macedonia emphasizes that “everyone has the right to a healthy environment to live in“. Bearing in mind the significance of the oceans for global sustainable development in accordance with the SDGs, Macedonia particularly recognizes the importance of reducing marine pollution and working towards sustainable fisheries management worldwide. Thus, Macedonia strongly calls for focused actions on all levels to effectively address the issues arising on the sustainable use of our oceans and on their governance with special regard to Part XII of the 1978 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS).

**Nationally**, the Macedonian Government and the MoEPP are consistently working on their environmental management under the Macedonian *Law on Environment*. Macedonia’s government particularly stands in line with the EU community, their Coastal and Marine Policy and their actions worldwide. Though Macedonia is a landlocked country, **internationally**, Macedonia is party to the UNCLOS and the *International Maritime Organization* (IMO). Further, the country is in accordance with A/RES/70/226 and A/RES/70/303.

In the **short term**, Macedonia encourages all Member States to promote campaigns in order to raise public awareness for the hazardous impact of marine pollution and the exploitation of marine resources by taking advantage of today’s technological progress: Macedonia thus endorses not only street campaigns, but also the utilization of all available social networks and online platforms, including the creation and usage of Mobile Applications (Apps) like RIPPL by the *Ocean Conservancy*, which is a free App that delivers weekly green living tips to its users. Those Apps shall help civil society to make easy sustainable lifestyle choices by sending regular reminders. In addition, Macedonia emphasizes the priority to proceed with sustained ocean observation and the dissemination of marine data within the *Global Ocean Observing System* in order to assess the amount and extent of water pollution and the scale of overfishing. In the **medium term**, Macedonia strongly encourages developed nations to take advantage of their role model function. They shall use their experience to support developing nations in establishing appropriate infrastructure for ocean waste management as well as fisheries management. Their support should particularly include the provision of technological expertise as well as the setting of formally managed regulation systems. With the aim to conserve the oceans and to fulfill SDG 14 in the **long term**, Macedonia shares the opinion that it is essential to focus on the engagement of CSOs and citizens at the local and the national level. With the international community’s support and the UNEA serving as the joint High-Level-Coordination-Platform, CSOs shall be nationally assigned to advocate for policies required on the national and communal levels, monitor progress in the implementation of this specific SDG and push for action where needed. Thus, with regard to this purpose, Macedonia strongly recommends the enactment of SDG Watch Groups, serving as the umbrella organization for all existing environmental CSOs. They shall be based on the example given by the recently launched *SDG WATCH EUROPE,* functioning as a “watch dog“ and accountability partner of state governments for the successful implementation of the SDGs and especially SDG 14.