

DECLARATION

ON THE CREATION OF THE PRESPA PARK AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESPA LAKES AND THEIR SURROUNDINGS

We, Prime Ministers Costas Simitis, Ljubco Georgievski and Ilir Meta, met today February second of the year 2000, on the occasion of the World Wetlands Day at Aghios Germanos in Greece, and agreed that the Prespa Lakes and their surrounding catchment are unique for their geomorphology, their ecological wealth and their biodiversity, which gives the area significant international importance. The Prespa Lakes and their surroundings provide habitat for the conservation of various and rare species of flora and fauna and offer refuge for the migratory bird populations. They constitute as well a much needed nesting place for many species of birds threatened with extinction.

We recognize that the conservation and protection of an ecosystem of such importance not only renders a service a service to Nature but it also creates opportunities for the economic development of the adjacent areas that belong to the three countries. Furthermore, the long history of the human presence in the area proves the compatibility of traditional activities and knowledge, with the conservation of nature.

We are aware that conservation of Nature and sustainable development largely depend on the respect by governments and people of international legal instruments, which aim at the protection of the natural environment. Participation in such agreements and conventions is helpful for the protection of the Prespa Lakes and their surroundings. Individual national activities should be complemented by international collaboration in this field.

Furthermore, we recognize and value the importance of the work done by the Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, especially when combining their different though complementary experiences and skills. To that effect we are pleased to recall that such a non-governmental organization, namely the Greek Society for the Protection of Prespa, was honoured in 1999 with the Ramsar Convention Award as an outstanding example of a pioneer approach to wetland management. Finally we would like to underline the benefits of public awareness in order to achieve the goals of the protection of nature and sustainable development.

Having in mind the above, We decide to declare the "Prespa Park" as the first trans-boundary protected area in South Eastern Europe and present this initiative as a "gift to the earth" in the context of the WWF Living Planet Campaign. This campaign is aimed at securing the conservation of the world's most important biological resources and ecosystems into the next millenium. The "Prespa Park" consists of the respective areas around the Prespa Lakes, and each of the three countries has declared them as Ramsar Protected Site.

This Declaration will be followed by enhanced cooperation among competent authorities in our countries with regard to environmental matters. In this context, joint actions would be considered in order to a) maintain and protect the unique ecological values of the "Prespa Park", b) prevent and/or reverse the causes of its habitat degradation, c) explore appropriate management methods for the sustainable use of the Prespa Lakes waters and d) to spare no efforts so that the "Prespa Park" become and remain a model of its Kind as well as an additional reference to the peaceful collaboration among our countries.