



**Third meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes,
Madrid, 26-28 November 2003**

Statement by Mr. Tomáš Novotný, Deputy Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the Czech Republic participates at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes for the first time as a Party, I would like to use this opportunity to present to you the approaches that have been taken in the Czech Republic to ensure integrated protection of water resources and aquatic ecosystems. These approaches have allowed us to achieve substantial improvements in the water sector during the relatively short period since 1989.

The Czech Republic is located on the water divide of three seas – the North, Baltic and Black. In this way the country is divided into three main river basins - the Elbe, Odra and Morava. Almost all watercourses in the Czech Republic flow out into the territories of neighbouring countries, and thus the Czech Republic is completely dependent on atmospheric precipitation for its water resources.

At the beginning of the new political arrangements in 1989, the Czech Republic faced major problems in environmental protection. These problems were greatest in the areas of water and air pollution. Therefore the new policies in the Czech Republic also had to include new approaches and strategies for protection of these components of the environment. The strategies, which have been adopted by the Czech Government, were further developed and implemented through legislation, instruments for its enforcement, and also through economic and other instruments including voluntary agreements.

During the early stages, it was necessary to concentrate our attention on substantially reducing the pollution originating from urban and industrial point sources. In addition, it was important to adopt framework principles, such as integrated water protection in river basins, which were introduced at national and also at international level.

These efforts, together with huge investments in the environment sector, resulted in substantial progress in the adoption and implementation of remedial measures. In turn, these measures led to substantial improvements in the chemical and ecological quality of aquatic ecosystems in the Czech Republic. At present, urban wastewater is treated at all municipalities with a population equivalent of over 10 000. Since 1989 discharged pollution has been reduced by more than 80% as measured by the main parameters: biological oxygen demand, chemical oxygen demand and the concentration of suspended substances. Species diversity and abundance of fish populations in Czech rivers is improving.

The entire territory of the Czech Republic has been designated as a sensitive area in terms of pollution originating from urban wastewater. This designation imposes stringent requirements for wastewater treatment.

In addition to point sources of pollution, increasing attention is being paid to area and diffuse sources. In order to reduce pollution of water by nitrates originating from agriculture, the Czech Republic has designated approximately 43% of its agricultural land as vulnerable. Within these vulnerable areas special programs will be implemented. These measures are particularly important in view of the fact that more than 50% of drinking water in the Czech Republic originates from surface water resources.

These improvements in the area of water protection are associated with huge investments. By necessity, these are mainly in the areas of wastewater collection, wastewater treatment, drinking water supply, and measures to reduce pollution stemming from agricultural sources. In order to maximise the efficiency of these investments, it was necessary to adopt an endowment system that combines public and private financial resources.

Other specific instruments for water protection have been in the form of voluntary agreements. Two examples are particularly noteworthy.

- A voluntary agreement has been concluded with the Association of Detergent Producers on the production of exclusively phosphate-free detergents; and
- Agreement has been reached with the Czech Dentists Chamber on the use of high efficiency facilities for the absorption of amalgam by all dentist laboratories.

Both of these objectives should be met by the end of 2005.

The measures that have been taken have had to be supported by the development of relevant legislation and also by associated international activities.

The Czech Republic has adopted a system of primary and secondary environmental legislation. Legislation in the water protection sector is presently based on standing principles and harmonised approaches. The new Water Act, which entered into force on 1st January 2002, amends and improves the system for development, adoption and implementation of river basin plans and programmes of measures. These plans and programmes are aimed at ensuring rational use of water resources whilst ensuring good environmental quality of water and aquatic ecosystems. The legislation includes a system of permissions required for the use of surface water and groundwater and for discharges of wastewaters. This system uses new emission and pollution limits, which have been adopted in the relevant secondary legislation. The user-pays and polluter-pays principles have been adopted through the setting of fees for water withdrawals and for discharges of wastewaters. Enforcement of the legislation is supported by imposing fines for its violation, particularly in respect of water abstractions and water pollution.

The Czech Republic has concluded agreements on co-operation in transboundary waters with all neighbouring countries. The Czech Republic is involved in three international conventions on the protection of the Elbe, Danube and Oder Rivers and participates actively in the International Commissions for Protection of these main rivers. The Czech Republic is Party both to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and to the Protocol on Water and Health.

Co-operation at the European level was significantly enhanced in 1993 when the Czech Republic signed the Association Agreement with the European Communities. Since then, the country's highest priorities have included harmonisation of its legislation with that of the EU and fulfilment of its obligations in the water protection sector for the membership of the EU.

In conclusion, it is clear that effective legal, economic, enforcement and institutional arrangements have been developed and implemented in the Czech Republic during the period since 1989. Together with the international co-operation, which I referred to earlier, and the great number of environmental measures that have been taken, these arrangements provide a good example of the successful integration of steps to improve the quality of water and the aquatic environment. I firmly believe that the systems we have developed form a reliable basis for achieving further progress in the water sector in the Czech Republic.