

Dear participants,

This Spring Session on Environmental Governance comes at a very important moment in the development of the European Union Agenda. The European Union is persistent in achieving good governance standards. From this point of view, the implementation of environmental standards gains strength, coherence and perspective, by including the countries of Southeast Europe, the candidate countries and the potential candidates for membership in the EU.

Good governance and sustainable environmental governance have a strong correlation between them, which also gains ground through regional co-operation, awareness raising and tackling common problems and cross-border environmental issues.

Excessive consumption of environmental resources is one of the most problematic issues in efforts to achieve a higher level of environmental sustainability, as is the continuing challenge for a balance between ecological, economic and social development priorities.

Now the approaches have changed. Public welfare and the environment have for a long time been considered as the sole responsibility of governments. Nowadays, the traditional hierarchical coordination of governments and their administrations has been replaced with coordinating mechanisms that resemble a network and market-oriented approach, incorporating different social levels. Gradual shifting from the hierarchical direction of governments, involving increasingly private and public actors, has increased the responsibility for environmental management.

The precondition for effective environmental governance is strong oversight of Executive's policies. This needs accountable elected representatives at all levels, as well as effective parliamentary committees, able to support the development of sustainable environmental policies, review proposed laws and regulations, monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the adopted legislation, undertake investigative hearings and enhance the activity of lawmakers and government representatives in regional networks.

Three years ago, though with little experience and without tradition, we as SAI carried out an audit of the performance of government's environmental policies. We found that, although structurally, the environment in Albania has well-organized public institutions, we have dozens of documented and undocumented hotspots inherited from the communist system, as well as dozens of hotspots or other environmental problems created by polluting industries in the last twenty years. Although some improvements in landfills and wastewater treatment have been noted, progress has been generally minimal and in some countries regression has been noted, showing a dangerous environmental trend and the achievement of EU environmental criteria.

By showing the consequences for European citizens, environmental audits in many European SAIs have been able to raise awareness of environmental issues between citizens and governments. Linking the consequences of environmental degradation to public health issues has enabled the emergence of an environmental cause, where poor management or even worse, mismanagement risk serious consequences for citizens, such as threats to food safety, drinking water and air pollution.

Although we are a small SAI and in the way of modernizing our audit activity and achieving the full compliance of the ISSAI Standards in our work, inspired by membership in the EUROSAI Environmental Auditing Work Group in 2013, we realized in these five years some important environmental audits. We have understood as SAI that environmental audits can successfully devote the disclosure of environmental assets and liabilities, as well as compliance with national and international conventions and legislation, by interacting intensively with the government, but especially with those governmental segments that aim for good governance.

Therefore, we are convinced of the added value of audits that can be devoted to measuring and promoting the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government policies in sustainable environmental management.

We have concluded that the destruction of natural parks, pollution of river and seas waters, soil pollution, the eradication of forests and the rapid disappearance of biodiversity and ecosystems may be irreversible if continued at the current pace. They can result in a serious risk to the life of Albanian citizens in the long run, as well as an obstacle to Albania's successful integration into European structures. We have requested from the Ministry of Environment of Albania to fully implement relevant bylaws, mainly related to the EU Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Crime. We have noted that insufficient Government preparation to monitor and establish systems to mitigate the anticipated or unforeseen negative impacts can bring deterioration of living conditions for the citizens.

We as the SAI should be aware of the importance of achieving good governance standards in sustainable environmental management, as we can affect citizens' lives only if we lead by example. Applying pro-environmental policies to our SAIs is one of the best examples we can give.

I am confident that the experiences gained from the audits carried out in relation to environmental governance, as well as discussing the involvement of the public and citizens in environmental audits, will bring added value to these two days of the Session in our efforts to protect the environment and ensure it a sustainable management.

By wishing success to all the participants in this Session!

Thank you!