

NATIONAL STATEMENT

From the young people of the Republic of Bulgaria Concerning COY16

Introduction:

"Bulgarian Water Association - Youth Chapter" was established 11 years ago, its main goal is to create a shared space for young professionals in the water sector in the Republic of Bulgaria. By 2021, the section has 152 members under the age of 35, almost all of whom are students, PhD students, and water engineers. The BWA Youth Chapter is also part of the "International Water Association - Young Water Professionals Network"(IWA - YWP). BWA Youth Chapter also maintains close relationships with other international NGOs, such as the Global Water Partnership - Central and Eastern Europe (GWP-CEE). The European Youth Parliament for Water (EYPW), the Youth Water Community - Central and Eastern Europe (YWC-CEE), etc. Water is one of the areas directly affected by climate change. Given the scientific and expert potential and experience of the BWA Youth Chapter, we believe that this position will contribute to the creation of a constructive, sustainable, and evidence-based National Position of Young People in the Republic of Bulgaria for the COY16 event.

"Youth Parliament Water - Bulgaria" was established in 2011 and aims to synchronize the work of school eco-clubs and to increase the ecological culture of students. It plays the role of a link between the institutions of the Ministry of Environment and Water and the primary and secondary schools in the country. Training initiatives for students from all over the country in nature and activities on the ecological calendar are held annually.

"Fridays for Future - Bulgaria" is a youth movement for climate and eco-social justice, a branch of the international movement Fridays for Future. The movement aims to draw public attention to the threats of climate change and to mobilize it to demand from the authorities immediate and effective measures to deal with the climate crisis. The movement brings to the fore the issue of climate justice - or the various injustices directly linked to the climate crisis.

"Young for the Earth" (YFE) is the youth network of the ecological association "For the Earth" (FE), established in 2014. YFE follows the mission and vision of "For the Earth" - an independent, non-governmental organization uniting the efforts of people determined to work for environmentally friendly and equal life on our planet, which excludes the exploitation of people and nature. FE works in the areas of "Energy and Climate", "Clean Air", "Zero Waste", "Food and Agriculture", "Economic Justice". The

main priority in the work of YFE is in the direction of Energy and Climate - the achievement of climate justice and the introduction of climate education in every educational degree, in every subject. FE works in cooperation with many environmental organizations at the national and international levels. The association is part of the Friends of the Earth: Friends of the Earth Europe and Friends of the Earth International network, which brings together 74 organizations, 5,000 local activist groups and more than 2 million supporters around the world. Together we run campaigns on the most pressing environmental and social conflicts in the world. We challenge the current model of economic and corporate globalization and offer alternatives to sustainable communities with a responsible attitude towards people and the environment. FE, it is also a member of the following international organizations: CEE Bankwatch Network, CAN Europe, GAIA, SEEN, European Environmental Bureau. YFE is the Bulgarian member of the European youth network "Young Friends of the Earth Bulgaria".

Rationale:

Climate change affects a number of aspects of modern lifestyles, both globally and nationally. The latest published data and analyzes by the United Nations Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that natural phenomena are unprecedented for the last century (<https://www.ipcc.ch/>). The main reason for this is the increase in greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Anthropogenic activity is a major driver of this process. Extracting carbon compounds from the bowels of the earth in the form of fossil fuels (oil, coal, natural gas, etc.) and storing them on the surface and in the atmosphere in the form of products of their processing (plastic, carbon dioxide, etc.), human activity changes the natural cycle and balance of carbon in nature. As a result, extreme and record temperatures, prolonged droughts, floods, melting glaciers, acidification of the world's oceans, and a number of other changes in the environment and natural ecosystems are observed.

In recent years, the Republic of Bulgaria was directly affected by these changes. This is evidenced by the data from the latest reports of the Executive Environment Agency (<http://eea.government.bg/bg/soer/2019>).

Efforts have been made in recent years to combat climate change at the national level. As positive examples we can point out the tendentious increase of the forest fund (<http://eea.government.bg/bg/soer/2019/forest/gorskite-resursi-i-tehniya-prinos-kam-globalnite-tsikli-na-vaglerod-1>) the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (<http://eea.government.bg/bg/soer/2019/climate/climate1>), the achieved target levels of

renewable energy sources by 2020 (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Renewable_energy_statistics), as well as the development of a number of strategic documents in the field of combating and adapting to climate

change at the national level
(<https://www.moew.government.bg/bg/klimat/mejdunarodni-pregovori-i-adaptaciya/adaptaciya/>).

Nevertheless, we must be seriously concerned that the efforts made are not enough. Examples from the last two years are the revelations about the incineration of illegally imported waste from abroad due to lack of adequate control, lack of preventive measures regarding the water crisis in Pernik city in late 2019, early 2020, the current case with the work of District Heating Inc. - Sofia, the lack of concrete solutions regarding the operation of LCP Maritsa East 2 in the direction of a fair energy transition, etc.

Legislative changes and the implementation of technological solutions alone are not enough to achieve sustainable change in minimizing the negative effects of climate change. It is also necessary for society to realize the need and to accept a change in our way of living, which should be based on a moral value system following the impact of humans on the environment.

Based on the above, we - the young people of Bulgaria, would like to draw the attention of all stakeholders to the following key issues:

1. Energy

At present, nearly 50% of the electricity produced in Bulgaria is from fossil fuels - a method that significantly contributes to the carbon footprint of our country. Reducing this percentage through measures for decarbonization of the electricity system is a mandatory process, which should be consistent with meeting the needs of Bulgarian households and businesses.

There is no clear and specific strategy for heat and electricity production in Bulgaria, which can answer the questions of how?, where?, what?, and when? the introduction of alternative technologies for electricity generation and storage are technically and financially justified.

The level of energy efficiency of the households and the industrial production facilities is not satisfactory.

2. Mobility and Transportation

The right of free movement of people and goods is a prerequisite for the development of Bulgaria. Conventional modes of transport based on vehicles using fossil fuels are without alternative, given the existing infrastructure. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of a well-planned, built, and maintained one for low-carbon modes of transport such as pedestrian areas, bicycle networks, electric urban transport, rail transport, shared travel, electric cars. There is a lack of effective

incentives for the population and businesses to switch to alternative transport methods.

3. Loss and Damage

In recent years, extreme natural disasters have become more frequent in Bulgaria and around the world, leading to significant material damage and human casualties. Early warning, notification, and prevention measures should be a priority for responsible authorities and society. There is a lack of qualified staff to monitor and prepare risk assessments for disasters due to climate change. Bulgarian citizens are not insured in the event of a natural disaster that could damage their health and property. These risks arouse insecurity and fear. Private insurance cannot be considered by the government as a universal solution to this problem.

4. Sustainable Consumption and Production

In modern society, every product has its environmental footprint. It is not in vain that the UN's 12th SDG is entitled "Sustainable Consumption". Although the Bulgarian society covers some of the parameters, in other areas there is space for future development such as green and circular public procurement and the introduction of durable and recyclable products after a life cycle analysis of the products.

5. Waste management

In many cases, landfills, which are the final recipients of municipal and construction waste and are at the bottom of the waste management hierarchy, are not functional and pose a risk of contamination of soil, air, groundwater, and surface water. The low involvement of citizens concerning the problems and risks related to the environment leads to diffuse dumping of waste in nature. At present, the territory of Bulgaria lacks a sufficient number of facilities for recycling, composting, and waste processing. At present, many incineration plants are in the design process, however, plants for the production of raw materials from waste are in the background.

6. Food and Agriculture

At present in Bulgaria high-tech, energy-saving, agroecological techniques and technologies are rarely applied. This leads to an increase in the carbon footprint from agriculture. Another problem that is observed is the inefficient use of the territories, as a result of which there are many vacant agricultural areas.

The lack of control and public awareness in our country for the use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides has a significant impact on environmental parameters.

Industrial monocultural agriculture, widespread in many countries, has a huge carbon footprint and is associated with serious damage to nature.

7. Water and Sanitation

As a member of the EU, Bulgaria implements strict monitoring programs for both qualitative and quantitative parameters of water resources. However, access to this data is often very difficult and/or lacking. In some regions, it is necessary to optimize monitoring programs and tighter control over the use and pollution of natural water resources.

The water supply and sewerage systems in Bulgaria are technically obsolete. Although they are currently being reconstructed and expanded, the most efficient methods for water supply and sanitation in settlements are not always selected.

Given the geographical characteristics of Bulgaria, our country is extremely sensitive to droughts and water shortages. This fact is often overlooked by the competent authorities and the public.

8. Politics and Policy Making

In Bulgaria, there are many developed strategic documents. However, the main drawback is that the population and various departments are often not familiar with them. In the process of drafting environmental policies, strategies, legislation, measures and/or specific investment proposals, there are rare cases of active participation by the local stakeholders and sustainable dialogue with those in power, at the expense of lobbyists. This provides a basis for manipulating and using key issues, such as climate change, for political propaganda and self-interest.

The main share for the carbon footprint of Bulgaria is created by the various industries, as at present the legislation and the envisaged sanctions in case of violation of the ecological norms are not a sufficient incentive for reduction of the generated pollution. There is no connection between science, business and those in power in terms of modern scientific achievements developed at the national and international level.

Climate policy is not yet integrated into other sectoral policies.

Commitment:

We, the young people in Bulgaria, believe that taking immediate measures to raise the awareness of Bulgarian society is a key component for solving the problems related to climate change. The practical results of this process will not be immediate, therefore concrete actions should be consistent and sustainable in the future. Based on the above, we consider it is necessary:

1. There is a need for an earnest dialogue between society, experts, and policymakers on climate change and environmental issues. This dialogue needs to be in the direction of a low-carbon transition, a circular economy, and adaptation to climate change in all aspects (human, infrastructural, etc.).
2. Raising public awareness of climate and environmental issues is an important step. The causes and consequences of climate change, as well as issues related to the environment, need to be strongly addressed in both the education

system and professional development in every sector. Public media and public figures should pay more attention to the issues of climate change and the environment, taking a responsible approach to the selection of information. The dissemination of manipulative, half-hearted and/or implausible information and misinformation in the official public space is unacceptable and inadmissible.

3. We declare our desire for enhanced control over environmental protection. We appeal to all citizens of Bulgaria to report to the competent authorities in cases of established or suspicion irregularity. Therefore, we insist on a serious attitude of the responsible authorities.
4. Financial incentives and sanctions for both citizens and businesses should be a staple approach to the sustainable development of the transport, agricultural, energy, and other sectors.
5. The implementation of a circular economy as an instrument of reducing the use of raw materials from natural resources should be represented better in the production practices in Bulgaria.
6. Innovation in the field of ecology and climate should be stimulated.

Demands:

We, the young people of Bulgaria, are aware that every citizen can contribute to a more sustainable future. Creating favorable conditions for this is within the capabilities of those in power. For this reason, we address them with the following requirements:

1. We appeal to the creation of a space for dialogue between the generations. As an example, we can point out the annual summer schools supported by the Basin Directorates. We insist on more such initiatives, which are on a larger scale and include experts and decision-makers.
2. The establishment of climate education in all Bulgarian schools is needed. Providing opportunities for raising the qualification of teachers in primary and secondary schools on topics related to climate change is key to creating an environmentally responsible generation. It is necessary to prepare and provide specialized training materials on the topic.
3. It is mandatory to start a constructive dialogue between the separate stakeholders from the national and local administration, the scientific sector, and the affected citizens on the key topics listed above. We believe that the responsibility for creating such a space is on the decision-makers.
4. We believe that increasing remuneration in the field of the environment would have a positive effect on solving the problems of climate change. Attracting young and energetic experts, both in the public and local administration and in the scientific sector, would contribute to more sustainable approaches in this direction.

5. The use of available financial instruments at the national and international levels has to be promoted to the public. It can happen both through information campaigns and by facilitating the administrative application procedures.
6. Infrastructure improvements must be carried out sustainably, including careful planning, construction, and control.
7. In order to evaluate the scenarios for Bulgaria's future energy mix, a detailed analysis of all aspects of the green transition in our country is needed, including the technical and financial parameters and the social consequences in the short and long term. It should include the ways to mitigate the potential energy shortage through a targeted reduction of the country's overall energy consumption (households and industry). In addition, the commitments must be linked to specific deadlines that are consistent with the warnings of the global scientific community.
8. Increase in public investment to strengthen prevention, education, and adaptation to the negative effects of climate change and disasters. Expand ecological and public transport to make it the preferred choice for all citizens. Expand the railway network in the country and increase its quality. Increase the frequency and ecological status of urban transport. Introduce incentives to reduce traffic in cities.
9. Initiation of effective government incentives to increase the number of small and organic farms with diverse crops.
10. Establishment of a functioning nationwide network for waste recycling by 2030. Strengthen control of hazardous waste by businesses. Implementation of a deposit system and door-to-door waste collection system, including a regular collection of organic/green waste. Establishment of composting facilities (composting plants).
11. Ending the burning of coal and other fossil fuels in heating and power plants and restoring areas damaged by mining, including the installation of solar panels on those places. Ban the import of waste for energy recovery.
12. Ban of plastic bags and other disposable plastic items. Requirements to large organizations to collect their waste in compostable bags, including public institutions. Incentivize deposit systems for reusable packaging at restaurants, stores, and festivals. Introduce free compostable bags at dog parks.
13. Prioritize the protection of designated nature areas in the Natura 2000 network and protected areas, combined with measures to restore wild nature in Bulgaria. Stop illegal construction on the coast Black Sea and in the mountains.



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