**8th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the**

**African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird**

 **Agreement**

**Budapest 26 – 30 September 2022**

**Opening statement**

**Mr. Chair, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In this meeting, the Czech Republic in the role of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union has the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

First of all, we would like to welcome the accession to the Agreement by the Republic of Cameroon and the announcement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the intention to join the Agreement.

We would like to thank the Government of Hungary for its generosity and hospitality in hosting this meeting and for the very warm welcome we have all received from the local authorities and the people of the beautiful city of Budapest.

At the same time, we would like to express our thanks and congratulations to the Secretariat, the Technical Committee and the Standing Committee for their excellent work on preparation of this meeting.

We are meeting in a difficult time - the covid pandemic has affected our entire planet, affecting not only individual regions and countries, but also the lives of each one of us. We are witnessing that globalization can also bring challenges. On the other hand, it has become clear that international cooperation is crucial for solving crisis situations in various areas of human activity. We continue to believe that international cooperation is also crucial for nature conservation, including the protection of habitats, species and entire ecosystems. The protection of nature and natural resources should be an inherent part of state policy, it should be a regular part of education and a regular part of people's lives, not some superstructure that only comes into play in a crisis.

For the protection of waterbirds, which are the subject of the AEWA agreement, the conservation of their habitats - i.e. wetlands - is essential. Unfortunately, we see continuation of negative trends in many areas, wetlands are still decreasing and the global state of biodiversity is deteriorating.

Mr. Chair, the representatives of the EU Member States present in this meeting are committed to ensure the future of migratory waterbirds, a group of animals whose existence is directly dependent on international cooperation. Waterbirds are an integral part of the planet's biodiversity; their migration routes connect our countries and remind us of our shared responsibilities.

Let's use this week to discuss and approve measures that will help. We as the EU Member States commit ourselves to a constructive discussion this week that will help to ensure the future of waterbirds, their conservation and sustainable use.

Thank you for your attention.