**YОUR EXCELLENCIES,**

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

 I would like to express my special gratitude to Minister Nedimovic and his team for the excellent organization of the forum and the hospitality provided.

 The Coordination Mechanism proved that interaction in the 16+1 format is an extremely important platform for scientific, economic and trade cooperation in the forestry sector and continued efforts are therefore needed.

 The adverse effects of climate change over the last decades represent a serious challenge for conservation of biodiversity and development of forest ecosystems.

 Increasing the forest area and improving the forest conditions is the most cost-effective method to reduce the carbon emissions in the atmosphere and the resulting greenhouse effect.

 The Republic of Bulgaria is one of the countries which has been affected by climate change in recent decades. There is an increasing risk of natural disasters such as forest fires and floods, which often result in human casualties as well. The area of forests affected by diseases and pests, favored by droughts, is also expanding.

 In order to overcome these problems in Bulgaria we have adopted a number of strategic documents laying down concrete measures to enhance and emphasize the specific role of forests.

Let me briefly outline the most important ones:

* Third National Climate Change Action Plan 2013-2020, defining 4 priority axes containing direct and indirect measures to increase greenhouse gas absorption and carbon retention in forests;
* National Strategy for Development of the Forest Sector in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2013-2020, which provides 4 measures to expand the area of forests and improve their condition in order to increase their greenhouse gas absorption capacity and carbon retention;
* The Strategic Plan for Development of the Forest Sector 2013-2023, adopted in 2014, foresees a number of measures to increase the forested area of ​​the country, to improve forest management, prevent forest fires, and increase the sustainability and adaptation capacity of forest ecosystems to climate change.

 Special attention in the field of forestry should be paid to the tendency of increasing the share of forest biomass for energy production as a substitute for non-renewable energy sources. In order to avoid air pollution, it is necessary to stimulate the more efficient use of fire-wood by introducing advanced technologies for the production of heating energy.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

 The Republic of Bulgaria considers the protection of forests and the enhancement of their role in mitigating climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as a priority objective.

 I am confident that this forum as well as the future activities of the Coordination Mechanism shall contribute to finding adequate and appropriate solutions aimed at mitigating climate change by further development of effective scientific, economic and trade cooperation in the forestry sector between China and the Central and Eastern European countries.

 **Thank you for your attention!**