

INFORMAL EU NATURE & BIODIVERSITY DIRECTORS MEETING

(ROME, 25-26 November 2014)

Conclusions

The EU Nature and Biodiversity Directors had fruitful discussions on the items in Agenda and agreed upon the following:

NATURAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL – THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

- The Nature Directors stress the importance of biodiversity and sound ecosystems – our natural capital - for human well-being and the development of alliances and synergies to implement green growth strategies and highlight, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources as one of the main objectives of sustainable development.
- They underline the efforts made to integrate nature and biodiversity into the European Semester process and recognize Natura 2000 as a key instrument to protect and enhance biodiversity at European level.
- They welcome the work on further defining green jobs and in particular links with green infrastructure.
- They stress the need to keep biodiversity issues high in the agenda especially concerning its integration into other sectoral policies under the next Presidency as well as under the new Commission's work program and priorities.
- They emphasize that the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES) could improve the knowledge base for the biodiversity and the natural capital agenda and provide a unifying framework for a number of ecosystem-related policies taking into account synergies and trade-offs between ecosystems services and biodiversity.
- They highlight that further work is needed to ensure that the impacts on natural capital and the benefits that flow from it are fully taken into account in decision making, as well as into other environmental policies. Further ways for encouraging investments from the public and the private sectors should also be considered, also based on the evaluation of experiences such as the Natural Capital Financing Facility.
- They will share existing studies giving evidence on socio-economic impact of

biodiversity policies and return on investment, in particular of protected areas and ecological continuities.

- They recognize the strong interconnection between Natural and Cultural Capitals assets and between these assets and activities with a territorial dimension and the benefits of integrated management of those assets, including under the Natura 2000 framework.
- They support the Charter of Rome and welcome the Italian Presidency intentions to present it as Presidency conclusions at the Environment Council next December, recognizing it is a tool to raise political awareness of biodiversity and nature conservation, *inter alia*, through the consideration of the positive synergies between the Natural and the Cultural Capital. As set by the EU Council conclusions of 28.10.2014 on the “Greening the European semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy - Mid-term review”, synergies between Natural and Cultural Capital can help mainstreaming biodiversity, ecosystems and their services into sectoral policies.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU 2020 BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

- The Nature Directors recognize the need for full implementation of the EU nature legislation and welcome the positive results and initiatives in conserving and restoring natural habitat and species, particularly in putting in place and managing the Natura 2000 Network, including *inter alia* new lists, the new Biogeographical process, the Natura 2000 Award and the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores.
- They take note of the Fitness Check of the nature legislation, recall the critical information already provided by the Article 17 and 12 reports and recognize the importance of providing all the necessary evidence in the context of forthcoming consultation to support a comprehensive evaluation of the Directives, having regard to the fact that they are key tools for protection of biodiversity and sustainable development.
- They reiterate the Athens conclusions and stress that the joint efforts for full implementation of the fisheries measures for Natura 2000 sites should be strengthened, also through closer cooperation between environment and national fisheries authorities. They invite the Commission to facilitate these efforts in a pro-active manner. The updated guidance note on the implementation of the relevant provisions of the CFP in preparation by DG ENV and DG MARE is a good example of a joint approach to be applied at all relevant levels so as the work on frequently asked questions on the implementation of article 11 of CFP. Recommend that these documents involve both Fisheries and Biodiversity experts to ensure effective implementation.
- They recognize the need of further reflection on the way to implement Restoration Prioritization Frameworks (RPFs) as foreseen under Action 6a of the Biodiversity Strategy, and recall the potential of linking restoration with the Green Infrastructure agenda.
- They welcome the adoption of the EU Regulation on IAS, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on the 4 November 2014, and look forward to its successful implementation.

MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE EU 2020 BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

- The Nature Directors highlight the Mid-Term Review as a priority process to assess progress at EU and Member States level towards achieving the Targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. This comprehensive assessment will lay the ground for considering possible actions on how to fill the gaps to put the EU on track for achieving its biodiversity objectives in 2020. A high quality Mid-Term Review will be critical to ensure political importance of biodiversity and nature policies in the new Commission and Parliament, as well as in relation to the ongoing Fitness check of nature legislation.
- They take note that the review will be based on the evidence provided by the Mid-Term Report, and communicated to the Council, Parliament, Committee of the Regions and Social and Economic Committee.
- The Nature Directors welcome the use of an integrated framework for monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress in implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and will support the provision of relevant information to the Commission for the Mid-Term Report, including on the links between national targets, actions and indicators with the EU ones, based on their Fifth National Report to the CBD.

FINANCING

- The Nature Directors stress that the essential transition towards a greener economy, mentioned in the Council conclusions of 28.10.2014 on the “Greening the European semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy - Mid-term review”, can’t be separated from the need to maintain ecosystems and their services in a favorable conservation status, which is possible only by ensuring the availability of adequate resources.
- They recognize the need for the Commission and Member States to explore how to better integrate resource efficiency and Natural Capital in the EU 2020 Strategy and reduce environmentally harmful subsidies.
- The Nature Directors reiterate the need to establish tracking systems at Union and Member State level to assess progress towards attaining biodiversity objectives and to better integrate biodiversity/Natura 2000 issues in the measures financed by European Structural and Investment Funds (CAP, ERDF, CF, ESF and EMFF) through closer cooperation amongst the relevant authorities whilst assuring the proper consistency with the PAFs.
- Welcome the special report by the European Court of Auditors n°12 “Is the ERDF effective in funding projects that directly promote biodiversity under the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020?” and support its conclusions and recommendations in particular to monitor the actual implementation, identify difficulties and facilitate the funds mobilisation.