



Conference on the Fitness Check of the EU Nature Legislation.

The Square - Brussels Meeting Centre, Mont des Arts, 1000 Brussels

November, 20th, 2015

Speech of Minister Carole Dieschbourg

Minister of Environment, Luxembourg

Dear Karmenu,

Léiwen Roby,

Dear Mark (Demesmaeker),

Cher Hans (Bruynincks),

Dear speakers, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be with you this morning and to share my views on the opportunities and challenges of the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives, the legal framework of EU's Nature Protection Policy.

I am pleased that the evaluation study has been released and that this conference will allow the reflection of the emerging findings. In this regard I want to thank the Commission for involving all relevant stakeholders in the Fitness Check process and considering the comments of the questionnaire in its final outcome.

I am still amazed that more than 520'000 people took part in the online consultation "Nature Alert". This very high level of involvement shows that nature is indeed important to people and allows for only one conclusion: We

can in no case accept a lowering of nature protection goals and standards in Europe. It is a question of credibility!

I am sure that the conclusions that are supposed to be adopted at the Environment Council on 16th December on our common achievements regarding the Mid Term Review of the Biodiversity strategy to 2020, will furthermore help to identify the areas where most effort is still needed.

From reading the emerging findings of the study to support the fitness check of the nature directives, I can clearly see that the Nature Directives are **effective**: They make a major contribution to the EU biodiversity targets both in terms of habitats and species. Nevertheless the study also reiterates that the directives alone cannot achieve the EU headline target “halting the loss of biodiversity”.

Obviously, we have overcome legal uncertainty of the directives: After a slow start, we have improved awareness, management, planning and enforcement further improving the **efficiency** of the directives. We can still expect positive effects to set in, in the future. I am not a gambler and I am part of the many people quoted in the evaluation study that think that we should not risk a legal void of reopening the text, which could even jeopardize our achievements.

In this context I want to recall the letter that I have sent together with the Environment Ministers of Germany, Croatia, France, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain to Commissioner Vella in which we all agreed “*that the directives should retain their current form*” and in which we expressed our strong belief “*that amending or merging the directives is not expedient*”.

Enforcement of the directives and improving implementation should be our first priority at this stage. In this context, the fitness check study highlights financial incentives to be crucial for implementing the Directives and that a current lack or at least a false distribution of financial resources is hindering

the directives from reaching their true potential. This is a vital aspect that we have to work on.

The **Relevance** of the Directives for the EU today is higher than it has ever been. With pressures on natural habitats remaining high, the nature directives have safeguarded the recovery of highly endangered species, and have helped to protect threatened habitats. In my home country Luxembourg, after completion of the currently ongoing enlargement, 25% of the territory will be lying within the Natura 2000 Network. Establishing a coherent network of this extent at national level, based on regional cooperation with our neighbours, would not have been possible without the Birds and Habitats Directives as legal instruments.

The nature directives are the key tools for nature protection, but they are not the only ones. The **coherence** and ultimately their success also depend on consideration of biodiversity in other key policy areas.

The reorientation of the Common Agricultural Policy through better targeted actions is key in order to reach the goals of the EU's 2020 biodiversity strategy.

It seems bizarre, but over the last 50 years we have created a situation where people think that nature protection and agricultural production exclude each other. The evaluation study states that we have to increase pillar II funding and Member States have to better target subsidies for sustainable agricultural practices. Farmers should not see Natura 2000 sites as a burden, but they should cherish them.

When I read that the Natura 2000 network **alone** produces benefits worth 200-300 Billion € per year, and when I read that the costs of ecosystem destruction rise exponentially over time, I do not understand why "public money for public goods" is not a key principle.

A well-functioning Natura 2000 network will help to achieve goals and resolve problems that go far beyond the EU 2020 biodiversity strategy, which is a true **EU-added value**:

Implementing the nature directives and strengthening the Natura 2000 network helps to protect crucial carbon sinks, and protect us from the negative effects of climate change.

In relation to the climate policy, I strongly hope that as EU we will convince all Parties at the Paris COP21 that a long term goal is crucial to lead us towards a sustainable climate neutral and climate resilient society and economy.

Sustainability is a key principle of the Natura 2000 network which is a key element for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Management plans incorporate and promote sustainable economic activities in Natura2000 areas.

I am not a pessimist, however, in history the success of all advanced civilisations was clearly linked to their ability to recognise and adapt to their natural habitat and a changing environment. We really have to realise, that we can't afford to lose any more of our natural capital.

Thank you very much for your attention!