Environment, biodiversity : community strategy

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OBJECTIVE: to define a Community strategy for biological diversity in the EU. SUBSTANCE: the communication from the Commission indicates that in recent decades there has been a spectacular decline in global biodiversity. It may be recalled that biodiversity is defined as diversity of living organisms of whatever origin (sea, land, etc.) and comprises diversity both of species and of ecosystems. The objective of the proposed Community strategy is to help to reverse this phenomenon of erosion and to preserve species and ecosystems (including those which are agricultural) in a satisfactory state of conservation in the Union and elsewhere. The basic elements of this strategy are closely linked to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, ratified by the Union on 21.12.1993. At present this is the only worldwide legally binding instrument in its field (Rio Conference, 1992). All Member States are contracting parties to the Convention and have adopted national implementation strategies. The Community strategy seeks mainly to consolidate and implement existing Community policies and instruments in application of the objectives of the Convention. Two stages are envisaged: a. the adoption of a strategy laying down the broad outlines of the policy to be pursued; b. the drawing up and implementation of action plans and other measures by the Commission to attain the objectives derived from the Convention. The main elements of the proposed Community strategy are as follows: 1) the main themes of the strategy: 4 horizontal themes are formulated, within which specific objectives must be attained by means of the action plans and other Community measures, both existing and future: - conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (in situ and ex situ): restoration of ecosystems and populations of species in their natural surroundings; -sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources: access to genetic resources and sharing of the benefits of biotechnology including research and commercial partnerships; technology transfer; scientific cooperation and improved knowledge of traditional life styles; -research, identification, monitoring and exchange of information: intensification of efforts to identify and monitor the constituents of biodiversity and the threats to it; - education, training and awareness: implementing measures to improve public awareness of the causes and consequences of loss of biodiversity. 2) action plans and other measures to attain at Community level the objectives formulated for each theme and field of activity: a procedure is to be devised to ensure that biodiversity aspects are taken into account in the Union's sectoral policies: conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, regional policy and regional development, forests, energy and transport, tourism, development aid and economic cooperation. As regards conservation of natural resources, the following measures are proposed: -establishment of networks of designated areas, particularly the EU NATURA 2000 network, -financial and technical assistance with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these areas, -development in cooperation with Member States of instruments to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity across the territory outside protected areas. In the field of agriculture, the strategy stresses taking biodiversity into account in the reform of the CAP announced in Agenda 2000. There is also an emphasis on the ecological function of rural areas, promoting farming methods which promote biodiversity (particularly by making farm support conditional on respect for ecological criteria). With regard to regional policies and land use planning, the Community strategy devotes special attention to rural areas, where farming is often the only barrier to loss of biodiversity and deterioration of natural habitats.