Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Adamos **ADAMOU** (EUL/NGL, CY) in response to the European Commission’s communication entitled 'Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 - and beyond: sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being'. It welcomed the Communication, seeing it as a good starting point for a more focused approach to achieving the 2010 biodiversity target. However, Parliament expressed profound concern at the continuing loss of biodiversity and the related decline of ecosystem services, stressing that climate change and biodiversity loss are closely linked and are equally important. It recognised the potential importance of the emerging concept of ecosystem services promoted by the Commission Communication as a tool for incorporating the economic value of biodiversity into other policy areas, and suggested that the maintenance of ecosystem services should become a fundamental goal of all EU horizontal and sectoral policies. Parliament warned, however, against reducing the value of biodiversity to the benefits humans could derive from it, or viewing the loss of biodiversity as only an economic concern. Whilst welcoming the "EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond", Parliament felt that the Action Plan would be insufficient to conserve biodiversity and sustain ecosystem services in the longer term. Accordingly, it asked the Commission to start developing a long-term EU vision for biodiversity, as a framework for further policy development.

Most important habitats and species (Objective 1): Parliament stressed the vital role played by the Birds and Habitats Directives in protecting the EU's biodiversity, and recognised the importance of completing the Natura 2000 network on land and at sea. The promotion of selective fishing methods constituted a priority, since it would reduce by-catches, and Parliament drew attention to the need for ecological preservation of the oceans as a guarantee for the economic development of sectors such as fisheries and tourism. It also called for legislative measures to be taken for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of the outermost regions.

Wider countryside and wide marine environment (Objectives 2 & 3): land use planning and exploitation of wild species are key factors affecting biodiversity and ecosystem services. Parliament recognised both the threats to high-nature-value farmland and forests posed by intensification and abandonment, and the threats posed to fish stocks and marine habitats caused by ecologically unsustainable fishing practices. It stressed the importance of implementing the reformed common fisheries policy (CFP). The Commission was asked to draw up a specific action programme to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU). Parliament was also concerned about the repercussions the introduction of exotic species and the likely escape of genetically modified fish into marine ecosystems might have on biodiversity, and called on the Commission to study the dangers.

It went on to point out that the CAP and the associated developmental dynamic leading, on the one hand, to specialisation and intensification and, on the other, to marginalisation and under-utilisation of land, had contributed to a significant biodiversity loss in recent decades. Biodiversity should be one of the main principles of the 'health check' on the CAP due to be carried out in 2008. Parliament called for the further integration of biodiversity and ecosystem service considerations into the CAP and CFP and the identification, in particular, of the opportunity provided in this regard by the 2008-09 budget review. It also regretted that large-scale agriculture had eroded the biodiversity and beauty of landscapes, and felt that restoring landscapes, such as hedgerows between meadows, would be widely applauded and would help to restore biodiversity.

In other recommendations under this heading, Parliament called on the Commission to consolidate the Natura 2000 network further by extending it to the ten Member States which acceded to the EU in 2004 and to Bulgaria and Romania since the Black Sea now forms part of Community waters. Recognising the

immense damage being done to EU ecosystems by pollutants and certain pesticides, Members stressed the importance of reducing pollutant pressures and of effective implementation of REACH. **Regional and territorial development (Objective 4):** Parliament asserted that with careful planning, damage to ecosystems could be greatly reduced and opportunities to benefit ecosystems identified. Member States were urged to ensure that projects funded by cohesion and structural funds did not harm biodiversity and ecosystem services and to prioritise recovery of biodiversity and ecosystem services in spatial planning at national, regional and local levels.

Invasive alien species and Alien Genotypes (Objective 5): Parliament urged the development of a comprehensive Community response to the problem of invasive alien species (IAS), the spread of which was exacerbated by the increasing movement of people and goods. Such a response should include an early warning system, and filling gaps in the legislative framework, including the development of an EU Strategy on IAS. Parliament also urged the Commission to allocate financing for European research into immunocontraception, which could play a decisive role in the control of mammalian IAS. It went on to emphasise the importance of fully implementing the EU legislative framework on Genetically Modified Organisms, highlighting the potential risks to biodiversity of industrial-scale production of GM crops.

International governance (Objective 6): strongly supporting the effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Parliament urged EU leadership in this respect. It stressed the need to conclude work on an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing. Parliament proposed that third countries receiving EU subsidies should respect EU biodiversity policies. It advocated an agreement on the protection of biodiversity in the high seas under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, urging the EU to continue taking a lead role in this. Parliament advocated integration of the biodiversity dimension into international trade and into global efforts to change unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The Commission and Member States must give first priority to recognition of the Non-Trade Concerns in the ongoing WTO negotiations.

External assistance (Objective 7): Parliament shared the strong concern of the Court of Auditors' Report on environmental integration in development cooperation, and pointed out that there was very limited 'earmarked' funding for biodiversity in the Community's and Member States' external assistance programmes. It stressed the vital importance of committing limited earmarked funds to biodiversity priorities in third countries, and of effective 'mainstreaming' of biodiversity concerns in Community and Member State external assistance programmes (including budgetary support measures). Despite the policy aspirations, in reality there was a high risk that the new generation of Country and Regional Strategy Papers would continue to disregard biodiversity needs without a much more proactive engagement of the Commission with recipient countries in this regard.

Trade (Objective 8): the Commission and Member States were urged to identify major impacts of trade on biodiversity and ecosystem services, in particular through sustainability impact assessments. Parliament expressed deep concern at the EU imports of commodities, including wood, palm oil and soybean, which drive tropical deforestation. In addition, the emerging drive for biofuels might exacerbate pressure on tropical forests, and urgent action was needed from Commission and Member States, including bilateral agreements under the forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) programme. Member States must reinforce efforts to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species. Parliament was deeply concerned that fisheries partnership agreements had exacerbated pressures on fish stocks, non-target species and marine habitats in the waters of third countries.

Climate change (Objective 9): a period of unavoidable climate change has begun. Parliament called on the EU to continue taking a strong lead internationally in working to decrease global greenhouse emissions. Mitigation measures, such as the development of renewable sources of energy, should be assessed for potential negative impacts on biodiversity and impacts should be prevented or minimised –

notably in relation to windfarms, hydropower and biofuels. Parliament stressed the vital importance of a large, coherent protected areas network (especially Natura 2000 sites) and of the need to reduce 'conventional' pressures on ecosystems (fragmentation, overexploitation, pollution, invasive alien species).

Knowledge (Objective 10): the level of resources dedicated to research on biodiversity and ecosystems was far too low given the critical importance of the issue to our prosperity and wellbeing, and Parliament urged that higher priority be given to funding for biodiversity research in Community (FP7) and national research programmes. It was also concerned about the fact that the scientific reports of ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) were only partially adhered to, if at all, when setting the annual TACs (total allowable catches, and that there must be strong reasons and good arguments for not complying with the scientific recommendations.

Financing: Parliament expressed strong concern at financial constraints for support to Natura 2000 and other biodiversity actions in the EU Action Plan to 2010 and Beyond, resulting from Financial Framework decisions. Greater consideration must be given to financial needs in the 2008-09 budget review, during which there should be an assessment of the sufficiency and availability of EU financing for biodiversity, especially for Natura 2000. It regretted that the Commission proposal to provide EUR 20 billion more for rural development policy under the financial framework 2007-2013 had not been accepted by the Council, and deplored the fact that the available EAFRD funding falls woefully short of what would be necessary to produce the desired effect on management of the Natura 2000 network, as determined by farming and forestry, the support proposed for improving knowledge and monitoring being particularly meagre.