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PRESS RELEASE

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Is there a future for European nature, which can contribute to the long term improvement of human wellbeing?

Budapest, HUNGARY – A high level EU conference was held in Athens on 27-28 April to discuss the future of nature conservation policies in the European Union. Clearly the stake is high, as biological diversity underpins human wellbeing and provides the basis for all social and economic activities [1]. However, the policy makers do not seem to be yet ready to face the true underlying causes of biodiversity loss and develop effective responses that can bring about the substantial changes needed for people and the planet alike.

The EU policies aim to identify the actions necessary for nature conservation and thus meet the own commitments of EU Member States for halting biodiversity loss by 2010. However, it has been clearly articulated at the Athens Conference that the 2010 target is beyond reach, and thus urgent actions are needed.

The main outcome of the conference is a political manifesto, the so called Message of Athens [2]. While policy makers identify some undoubtedly important measures for biodiversity conservation in the Message they turn a blind eye to the real problems they need to tackle. CEEweb thinks the true cause of continuing loss of nature in Europe is in connection with the socio-economic trends and structures of today's society. These socio-economic drivers are behind the growing environmental pressures [3].

Consequently, no matter how much efforts are made for habitat protection, the reduction of pollution, over-fishing or the spread of invasive alien species, these pressures will be continuously regenerated by the unchanged socio-economic drivers behind.

“Politicians need to realise that it is not enough anymore to make small fixes to sectoral policies, because there are some fundamental forces that lead to sectoralisation, and those forces need to be changed. We need to define different boundary conditions for our economy, which can prevent the conflicts even before they would appear.” – says Klára Hajdu, Executive Director of CEEweb for Biodiversity.

CEEweb insists that in addition to keeping and strengthening the current tools of biodiversity conservation such as Natura 2000, holistic environmental policies should regulate all types of environmental pressures. The boundary conditions of the economy shall be changed through defining absolute limits on areas of land and on natural resources used for human purposes, as well as through effectively preventing and controlling invasive alien species, genetically modified organisms together with pollution.

The Message of Athens proposes scaling up efforts to better integrate biodiversity concerns in agriculture, transport, energy, and fisheries through adjusting policies to and increased financing for nature conservation. Biodiversity policy makers both in national governments and in the European Commission have been constantly fighting for these purposes without achieving real success. Therefore CEEweb is afraid that strengthened effort in these fields won't deliver desired result in the future either.

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.



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Hajdu said, "The Athens Conference gave the false message that nature conservation and sectoral integration measures are enough to safeguard nature. The challenge is much bigger than that, but it is a common interest of the rich and the poor to respond to that challenge if we want to improve or even to ensure our own livelihood in the future."

Thus CEEweb calls the new European Commission to be set up during this summer to fully explore the structural, institutional and cultural drivers behind environmental pressures as well as to investigate the various relationships among different environmental, social and economic issues. In its view only this can form the basis of an effective future EU biodiversity policy.

Clearly the role of the next European Parliament will be also crucial. The new members shall take courageous steps to ensure, that the long term wellbeing of their voters can be improved within a changed economic structure and a better preserved environment. Otherwise they will need to explain their failure for actions to their voters in a little while.

About CEEweb for Biodiversity

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in Central and Eastern Europe working together to protect the biological heritage of the region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.

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Editors' notes

[1] Without biodiversity and healthy ecosystems humankind would not have food, clean water, wood for housing or heating, and the natural mechanisms essential in disease control, flood prevention or climate regulation would not make the conditions on earth hospitable for humans. Humankind receives these services as "presents" from nature only as long as ecosystems can function properly to be able to provide them.

[2] Press release of the European Commission about the Athens Conference
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/649&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

[3] Environmental pressures are the direct effects of human activities on the environment, in the case of biodiversity loss they include habitat fragmentation, degradation and destruction, over-exploitation, the spread of invasive species and pollution. These pressures are caused by the underlying socio-economic drivers. CEEweb identifies structural drivers (e.g. consumption and production patterns, infrastructures, urban structures), institutional drivers (e.g. economic and legal regulations, sectoralisation in institutions, the education system) and cultural drivers (knowledge, approach, values of the people). Socio-economic drivers touch upon the most fundamental characteristics of the functioning of the society and economy.

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