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**PRESS RELEASE**

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## The EU is not prepared to tackle the real causes of biodiversity loss, even if the wellbeing of its citizens is at stake

**Budapest, HUNGARY – The European Commission released today the mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan [1]. Clearly the continuing loss of biodiversity is one symptom proving that our societies are unsustainable. Even though the Gothenburg Council in 2001 committed to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, the EU and its MSs are still not ready to face the true underlying causes and develop effective responses.**

The EU Biodiversity Action Plan (EU BAP) aims to identify actions necessary for halting biodiversity loss and thus meet commitments at EU, Pan-European and global levels. In order to meet the 2010 target, environmental policy makers have been trying to integrate biodiversity into other sectors such as agriculture, transport, energy, fisheries, through adjusting their policies, and have been fighting to ensure increasing financial resources for biodiversity conservation.

This task is even more pressing as biodiversity provides a huge and indispensable contribution to human wellbeing. 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.

However, this might not be always like that. The EU BAP mid-term review reveals that the EU is highly unlikely to meet its 2010 target of halting biodiversity decline. The report shows some progress *inter alia* in reversing unfavourable species trends on local level through targeted actions, or designating the terrestrial part of Natura 2000, the European ecological network. Work has also started to investigate the economics of biodiversity loss and the valuation of ecosystem services. However, the report concludes that intensive efforts will be required over the next two years, both at EU and national levels, if the EU wants even to come close to achieving its own objective.

CEEweb for Biodiversity sees the most important reason for the lack of delivery in the fact that decision makers ignore the drivers behind environmental pressures [2]. Even though it is a positive sign that the EU BAP identified some of the deeply underlying causes, including population growth, growing *per capita* consumption, failures of governance and economics as well as globalisation, the identified actions hardly consider these drivers and thus cannot change their course. Consequently, no matter how much efforts is made on reducing environmental pressures like habitat fragmentation, degradation and destruction, over-exploitation, the spread of invasive species and pollution, these pressures will be continuously regenerated by the constant fundamental drivers behind.

Klára Hajdu, Executive director of CEEweb said, “We cannot afford much longer to bury our heads in the sand and hope that our deep, underlying problems will just disappear. Unless we are courageous enough to open debate on economic issues that have been taboo so far, we will continue going against the tide and cannot deliver significant results for the environment.”

Thus CEEweb calls for fully exploring the structural, institutional and cultural drivers behind environmental pressures and investigating the various relationships among the environmental, social and economic issues. In its view this should form the basis of a future post 2010 biodiversity policy, which the EU will start discussing at a high-level conference in April 2009.

Besides, 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, defining absolute limits on land use and the exploitation of natural resources as well as effectively controlling pollution.

The current economic regulatory system does not only lead to environmental degradation, but also to social injustice at national, EU and global levels. Hajdu said, “Current policies should be rethought and a new regulatory framework should be set up that can tackle environmental and social challenges *at the same time* and can improve human wellbeing in the long term. This, however, requires a change how we approach our problems, and the EU should be spearheading in this process. This is the only chance to face challenges related to the financial, food and fuel crisis of today – while scientists are already warning about the ecological crisis of tomorrow.”

#### 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.

#### For further information please contact

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#### Editors' notes

[1] The mid-term review of the EU BAP can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/pdf/bap\\_2008\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/pdf/bap_2008_report.pdf)

[2] 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.