

Biodiversity proofing and seeking for biodiversity criteria in EU funding – roles and opportunities

Conference report

**Venue: The Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights
H-1051 Budapest, Nádor u 22.**

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EU funds (Structural and Cohesion Funds) already require indicators showing that projects consider sustainability and social aspects. However, there are still no system of criteria for biodiversity and ecosystem services consideration, which allow projects having negative impacts on these assets. As developing program supplement documents and call for proposals of the Operational Programmes (OPs) 2014-2020 are still being formulated in 2014 and next years, Member States should be alerted to include these aspects in EU funding schemes and enable funding for those projects only, which have no or limited negative impacts on the environment. With the aim to work out such criteria hand in hand with an advocacy strategy to lobby for its implementation, CEEweb for Biodiversity with contribution of Friends of the Earth Hungary organised a conference and workshop.

About 60 participants attended the event from different sectors: the European Commission and representatives of the DG Environment, national and international NGOs as well as the government sector. The conference was opened by **Marcel Szabó, Deputy Commissioner for Future Generations, Hungary**. After welcoming the attendees and emphasizing the importance of the topic he mentioned that instead of island-like protection holistic and systematic protection is needed. He drew attention to the fact that despite nature conservation areas are growing, biodiversity is still being lost due to the main policy structures and economic constrains. He emphasized the destructive effect of the “Business as usual” aspect on nature and expressed his concern about the implementation of environmental and conservation strategies. However, he accounted the presence of the European Commission’s representative already as a success which allows us to give hope for the utilization and implementation of the discussions on this conference.

The opening of the conference was continued by **Ágnes Zólyomi, General Secretary of CEEweb for Biodiversity**, who appreciated the attendance of the presenters and participants. She outlined the main goal of the Biodiversity Strategy and the importance of integrating the system of criteria for biodiversity into EU financing processes, emphasizing the importance of Cohesion and Structural Funds on biodiversity. She set as the goal of the conference to draw up how to integrate this system of criteria. **Strahil Christov, European Commission, DG Environment** explained Biodiversity proofing in Structural and Cohesion Funds – describing lessons learnt, goals and tools for 2014-2020 period. He spoke about the methodology of reaching the goals of the Biodiversity Strategy, described the 6 Targets and highlighted Target 2 and Action 7. He presented the steps done and the further steps needed to be taken for taking biodiversity aspects into account. Director of the **Ecological Institute, Iván Gyulai** presented the cornerstones of the **CEEweb guidelines for biodiversity proofing**. He identified the key problems of the current environmental approach, emphasizing that not the impacts

have to be reduced but the pressures. He drew attention to the importance of a holistic and coherent EU policy and also to the importance of maintaining natural processes and soil biodiversity. He criticized in current regulation that driving forces are not well managed and that it just focuses on significant environmental impacts, while “insignificant” ones are not considered. He mentioned as a problem of the current instruments that postponed negative impacts cannot be/or are indicated too late. He sees the improvement of biodiversity in supporting projects that have better outputs than the current ones, emphasizing that public money should support public goods.

The presentations and questions were followed by a panel discussion. First to comment was **Elin Soomets**, representative of **Estonian Fund for Nature**, who presented a positive and a negative EU funded case study (The first Ecoduct in Estonia and Restoration of Narva Victoria bastion). After describing briefly the projects she demonstrated their impact on biodiversity, summarizing the main problems, conclusions and lessons learnt. **Gyene Gyöngyvér** in representation of the **Prime Minister’s Office** draw up the horizontal conditions in the next financial period. She stressed how important EU funds are, as in Hungary 80 % of the investments are realized from them. She drew attention to the non-intentional negative environmental impacts of investments. She presented the assessment of the last financial period, showing the typical problems, such as transferring the problems and the centralization of the funds. She emphasized the importance of cooperation between the Commission, Member States and non-governmental bodies, and the demand of a precise data collection. **Attila Pánovics**, from **The Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights** underlined the necessity of implementing the different goals defined in strategies and documents. He mentioned that to put through biodiversity aspects, the national civil sector needs to be enforced in accordance with European expectations. **Strahil Christov** expressed, that though significant amount of funds is spent on investments, we have to make distinction among the different levels of responsibility. He emphasized the need of involving different regions, and emphasized the possibility to enhance the cohesion of the different policies. Besides, he underlined the opportunities laying in info-communication and its role in biodiversity aspects. **Iván Gyulai** drew attention to the negative environmental impacts of the Estonian positive example. Referring to the Brundtland Commission’s report he underlined that the increase of environmental pressures need to be separated from economic growth, and if this doesn’t work, we cannot talk about sustainability. Since we haven’t any evidence on this, any economic growth will harm environment. He mentioned that instead of focusing on GDP growth, well-being should be supported, and the approach is the most important that we have to change.

After the panel discussion short questions and answers followed. The conference was closed by **István Farkas, president of National Society of Conservationists (FoE Hungary)**.

Auditory materials and all presentations in ppt format can be downloaded on the following link:

<http://www.ceeweb.org/event/ngo-workshop-on-biodiversity-proofing-and-seeking-for-biodiversity-criteria-in-eu-funding-roles-and-opportunities/>

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