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CEEweb's Summary and Position on the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy

After multiple postponements, the European Commission has published and adopted the new EU Biodiversity Strategy, as well as the Farm to Fork Strategy on the 20th of May 2020. Both strategies are major pillars of the EU Commission's Green Deal and strategic work until 2030.

At the press conference held on the day of the strategies' launch, the Commission, represented by Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans, Commissioners Stella Kyriakides and Virginijus Sinkevičius, has reinforced its commitment to increase Europe's resilience and improve the health of European citizens and our natural environment, efforts in which both strategies will have an integral role to play. Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans rightly stated that around half of the World's GDP is in some way connected to nature, so better protecting it is not only an environmental case but a business opportunity as well.

Protecting species and habitats

The 2030 Biodiversity Strategy is in line with the ambition of the European Green Deal. It builds on commitments for protecting and restoring biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems. Healthy nature is fundamental for human well-being and for the capacity to cope with global challenges and threats, as well as to recover from disasters and crises, like the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature-based solutions that aim to protect and restore ecosystems have direct benefits for both our fight against climate change and for many sectors of economy, as well. The new strategy addresses all main drivers of biodiversity loss, such as the conversion of natural habitats into agricultural land, the expansion of urban areas, the overexploitation of natural resources, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species.

The strategy is based on four elements: under the aim of '*Coherent network of protected areas*', the strategy seeks to place at least 30% of EU land and 30% of EU sea area under legal protection by 2030. This goal, on one hand, builds on existing Natura 2000 areas, on the other hand, aims to complement them with new nationally protected areas. At least one-third of protected areas will be strictly protected which covers areas of very high biodiversity value. As part of this strict protection target, it is crucial to define, map and monitor all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests and other carbon-rich ecosystems, such as peatlands, grasslands, wetlands, mangroves, and seagrass meadows. Ecological corridors get special importance in the Trans-European Nature Network. The protection in itself is not enough, however, since all protected areas need to be managed effectively along clearly defined conservation objectives and measures, with appropriate monitoring.

The new **EU Nature Restoration Plan** aims to improve the health of existing and new protected areas, and bring diverse and resilient nature back to all landscapes and ecosystems. It means reducing pressure on habitats and species

and ensuring the sustainable use of ecosystems. The EU wishes to broaden and strengthen the existing legal framework and in order to do so, in 2021, it will present legally binding EU nature restoration targets with the aim to have healthy and resilient ecosystems, with a focus on the most carbon-rich ones. An impact assessment is intended to identify the appropriate level of and conditions for the targets, as well as the most effective measures to reach them. The restoration plan aims to improve the conservation status or trend of at least 30% of EU protected habitats and species that are currently not in a favourable status. Moreover, with regard to marine species, it also aims to eliminate by-catch of protected species or reducing it to a level that allows full species recovery and does not threaten their conservation status.

In order to increase the area of EU forests, three billion new trees will be planted in the EU, in full respect of biodiversity and ecological principles. In line with the Renewable Energy Directive, the Commission will also develop operational guidance on the new sustainability criteria on forest biomass for energy in 2021.

Ambition on freshwater ecosystems calls for at least 25,000 km of rivers to be restored into free-flowing rivers through the removal of barriers and the restoration of floodplains. Member State authorities will be required to review water abstraction and impoundment permits to restore ecological flows in order to achieve good status or potential of all surface waters and good status of all groundwater by 2027.

Invasive alien species can significantly undermine efforts to protect and restore nature, therefore addressing this issue is also an important step to achieve set biodiversity targets. The strategy calls for significantly limiting the introduction of invasive alien species and reducing the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species by 50%.

As part of the greening of urban areas, cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants will need to develop an ambitious Urban Greening Plan.

In the frame of the '*Enabling transformative change initiative*' the Commission will put in place a new European biodiversity governance framework, including monitoring and review mechanism with a clear set of agreed indicators, which will enable regular progress assessment and set out corrective action if necessary. The full implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation - focusing on the completion of Natura 2000 network - is at the heart of this strategy, for which political support, as well as financial and human resources will need to be prioritised and allocated. The Strategy seeks to stimulate tax systems and pricing to better reflect real environmental costs. At least 20 billion EUR per year will be unlocked for nature protection and restoration. Moreover, a significant proportion of the 25% of the EU budget dedicated to climate action will be invested in biodiversity and nature-based solutions. Under InvestEU, a dedicated natural-capital and circular-economy initiative will be established to mobilise at least EUR 10 billion over the next 10 years, based on public/private blended finance.

The **Global Biodiversity Agenda** includes efforts to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which require raising the level of ambition and commitment worldwide. The post-2020 global framework will include the following elements:

- under the vision of 'living in harmony with nature,' all of the world's ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected by 2050,
- in this strategy ambitious global 2030 targets in line with EU commitments,
- a much stronger implementation, monitoring and review process revising National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans by the end of 2021,

- an enabling framework to bring the ambition to life, across areas such as finance, capacity, research, innovation, and technology,
- fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources linked to biodiversity,
- a principle of equality including respect for the rights and the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Creating a sustainable and resilient EU agriculture and food production

The EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to ensure, on the food production side of the value chain, that nature is brought back to agricultural lands. To be aligned with the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the national CAP Strategic Plans, the F2F Strategy calls for a gradual but clear transition towards farming practices that are built on agroecological principles. Agro-forestry, precision agriculture, organic farming, low-intensive permanent grasslands, and stricter animal welfare standards are encouraged by the new strategy. The strategy clearly acknowledges that since farmland birds and insects, particularly pollinators, are key indicators of the health of agroecosystems and they are also vital for agricultural production and food security, it is essential that their alarming decline is reversed. In order to do so, the strategy includes specific quantified targets:

- to reduce by 50% the overall use of – and risk from – chemical pesticides by 2030
- to bring back at least 10% of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features (this includes buffer strips, rotational or non-rotational fallow land, hedges, non-productive trees, terrace walls, and ponds) - Member States will also need to translate the 10% EU target to a lower geographical scale to ensure connectivity among habitats
- at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land must be organically farmed by 2030 (a dedicated future Action Plan is intended to help Member States to achieve this target)

With regard to soil health, the Biodiversity Strategy first of all acknowledges that soil is an essential, non-renewable resource that is vital not only to human health but also to economic health, and of course, to food production. As a response to the ongoing process of soil degradation and desertification, the strategy strongly encourages the adoption of sustainable soil management practices in order to protect soil fertility, reduce soil erosion and increase soil organic matter. As far as the related policy instruments are concerned, in addition to the CAP and the two new strategies, the Commission will update its EU Soil Thematic Strategy in 2021, and will adopt the Zero Pollution Action Plan for Air, Water and Soil next year to ensure measurable progress towards its objectives on soil health and land-degradation neutrality.

As part of its ambition to protect and restore forest ecosystems, the Commission is assessing the EU and global biomass supply, demand, and related sustainability, so that potential climate and biodiversity risks can be avoided.

Under its commitment to reduce pollution, the Biodiversity Strategy sets out the following target related to agricultural practices: to reduce the use of fertilisers by at least 20% (this will be supported by the Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan to be developed in 2022).



The **Farm to Fork Strategy** has the consumer in the centre of its focus, as it builds on social commitments such as the goal to have better informed citizens who are able to make more responsible food choices (e.g. with the help of labelling that provides information on the nutritional value of food products). The strategy also intends to contribute to an improved public health by helping citizens to avoid unsustainable consumption patterns. The overall goal is to make the entire food value chain sustainable and to create a "*fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system.*"

When it comes to its environmental commitments, in addition to the afore mentioned targets of the Biodiversity Strategy, the F2F strategy includes the below targets:

- to reduce the overall use and risk of more hazardous pesticides by 50% by 2030 (in order to support efforts towards pesticide reduction targets, the Commission will revise the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive and enhance provisions on integrated pest management)
- to reduce nutrient losses by at least 50%, while ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility (in order to address nutrient pollution at source, national integrated nutrient management action plans will be developed)
- to reduce overall EU sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture by 50% by 2030
- to improve animal welfare by strategic guidelines and labelling
- to improve seed security and diversity (a target in which innovative techniques, including biotechnology, may also have a role)

In conclusion, we can say that both strategies include ambitious targets and commitments that, as Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius has also emphasised, finally acknowledge nature's and biodiversity's essential role to a stable economy and for farmers, as well as, for European citizens. If properly enforced, monitored and aligned with the CAP and other policy instruments, these strategies can potentially play a major role in an agroecological transition, protecting pollinators and improving the resilience of not only our socio-economic systems, but our agroecological systems, as well. Commissioners during the press conference have strengthened their commitment to avoiding harmful subsidies (while admitting that the definition of this concept is blurry and lacks common agreement). The ongoing crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on both strategies, from an agricultural perspective, it has led to an increased emphasis on the resilience of our food system, a better protection of natural ecosystems and food security.

Both strategies are yet to be endorsed by the European Parliament and the Member States. Some of the commitments can only be achieved by an improved implementation of existing legislation, while others will require new legislative instruments. Their successful implementation then can only be achieved if the budgetary background is similarly ambitious and major investments are committed to reaching the set-out targets. The Commission is expected to make an announcement about its Green Recovery package and its plans for the EU budget on the 27th of May. Civil society organisations then can play a major role in influencing their national governments and Members of the European Parliament to show commitment to both the strategies and investments of a required magnitude.

