



CEEweb for Biodiversity  
Széher út 40, 1021 Budapest, Hungary  
Phone: +36 1 398 0135  
Fax: +36 1 398 0136  
ceeweb@ceeweb.org  
www.ceeweb.org

## Cultural diversity is one of Europe's most important values, but do we recognize the vital importance of biological diversity as well?

The recommendations of CEEweb for Biodiversity for the work of the Hungarian EU Presidency

Biological diversity is the basis of healthy and functioning ecosystems. The more complex an ecosystem is, the better it can be regenerated after disturbance and is able to adapt to different changes. In addition, only smoothly functioning natural systems are able to provide those services that are essential for humankind. Such essential services are *inter alia* clean water, food and timber; but they include also regulation of pathogens and diseases; flood prevention or climate control, without which it would not be possible for humanity to survive on Earth.

Humanity has only partially recognized the importance of biodiversity and thus it has made its efforts to protect it accordingly. Recent studies show that biological diversity is still declining. Globally more than one third of the examined species are close to extinction, and 60% of the Earth's ecosystems have been degraded in the past 50 years, negatively influencing also the services these natural systems provide<sup>1</sup>. The first major study about the most vulnerable habitats and species of Europe says that only 17% of them fall under favourable status. The most endangered habitats are grasslands, wetlands, estuaries and coastal habitats<sup>2</sup>.

The EU's 2010 biodiversity target - which aimed to stop the loss of biodiversity in Europe until 2010 – is not met. According to the European Commission, causes of failure are the lack of proper knowledge and data sets, the failed integration of biodiversity into other sectoral programmes and strategies, the insufficient financial support as well as the ignorance of fairness. However, nature conservation NGOs see reasons behind the failure of delivery somewhere else. According to CEEweb, paradigm shift is needed in environment policies to make policy makers take notice of the drivers generating pressures on the environment. Unless this shift is not made, no matter how much efforts are undertaken in order to reduce environmental pressures. Habitat fragmentation, degradation and destruction, over-exploitation, spread of invasive species and pollution are going to continue, as long as these pressures are constantly regenerated due to the underlying principal drivers behind them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Millennium Ecosystem assessment (2005) <http://www.maweb.org/en/index.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> COM(2010) 4/4 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/policy/pdf/communication\\_2010\\_0004.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/policy/pdf/communication_2010_0004.pdf)



CEEweb for Biodiversity  
Széher út 40, 1021 Budapest, Hungary  
Phone: +36 1 398 0135  
Fax: +36 1 398 0136  
ceeweb@ceeweb.org  
www.ceeweb.org

The European Commission issued its Communication including four alternative post 2010 biodiversity targets. Luckily, the EU committed itself to the most ambitious one. However, at the same time, the "EU 2020" Strategy, which will guide the EU in the coming decade, does not pay appropriate attention to biodiversity and its related target<sup>3</sup>. But how can the "EU 2020" Strategy be future orientated if it does not consider protecting natural environment as a priority, and does not reckon that nature gives the basis for the operation of economy and society?

The Hungarian EU Presidency provides an opportunity to resolve the above mentioned inconsistencies. In the light of the "EU 2020" Strategy, getting out from the crisis as well as promoting sustainable growth and competitiveness play central role in the current EU Trio programme. Simultaneously, the Trio has set goals to significantly improve the status of biodiversity in the EU. Reflecting to these both-sided challenges the first half of 2011 gives a chance to advocate for complex practical measures, which could offer solutions for both side of the same coin.

During the Hungarian EU Presidency CEEweb advocates for further exploration of driving forces behind natural and social problems and also for developing and implementing practical solutions to tackle them. Consequently, the identification and management of these drivers could help address effectively different kinds of environmental and social issues such as climate change, energy independence, biodiversity loss, unemployment, societal justice and equity.

The drives behind biodiversity and other, only seemingly sectoral problems fall into three groups:

- *Cultural drives*: history, ideology, customs, behaviour, values among which far the most dominant one is our faith in material goods, etc.
- *Institutional drives*: economic and regulatory frameworks which allow cheap fuel, thus cheap transport means to spread, as well as high energy and natural resource demanding products and services to flourish, etc.
- *Structural drives*: unsustainable production, consumption and space use practices supported by the above-mentioned driving forces

Without changing these drives that are the roots of all problems no action will reach its goal. The economic crisis, its social consequences, and the fact that Hungarian EU Presidency aims to put forward urgent daily cases give a chance to think over the basis and the failure of our current economic and regulatory frameworks.

CEEweb practical proposals to change the drivers are:

- Hungary is highly affected by energy challenges including security and it plays an active role in addressing them. Besides, the Hungarian EU Presidency supports a global, ambitious and legally binding climate agreement and

---

<sup>3</sup> COM (2010) 2020, [http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/1\\_HU\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v1.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/1_HU_ACT_part1_v1.pdf)



CEEweb for Biodiversity  
Széher út 40, 1021 Budapest, Hungary  
Phone: +36 1 398 0135  
Fax: +36 1 398 0136  
ceeweb@ceeweb.org  
www.ceeweb.org

considers it also in its energy policy. Moreover, the Presidency is in favour of delivering the post-2010 biodiversity target and thus starting the implementation of EU Biodiversity Strategy. Therefore, advocating for stopping unsustainable use of energy and natural resources should be the key of the Hungarian EU Presidency's work. CEEweb believes that by 2020 limits to energy and natural resource use at EU levels must be set embedded in a newly established green economic framework. These set limits than can be decreased gradually until they reach the carrying capacity of the EU.

Fossil fuels	3% decrease/year
Absolute source of energy	2% decrease/year
Natural resources (pl. soil, wood, water, fishery)	2% decrease/year

- To protect healthy ecosystems is essential for maintaining human well-being and the operation of economy. Therefore, besides setting limits on energy and natural resource use, humanity must let natural habitats be connected by relinquish its claims to capture new natural areas. Indeed, it is even necessary to return at least partially the built-up or cultivated land to nature. The EU's new initiative to build a green infrastructure and its efforts to have a Soil Framework Directive adopted by the Members States are good steps forward, but more is needed. Further measures and arrangements should be made in the field of spatial planning, space use and rehabilitation of natural areas. Moreover, subsidies of agriculture, forestry and fishery have to be rethought. Those perverse supports must be eliminated that favour intensive farming and those subsidies should be promoted that support maintain the richness of ecosystems and biodiversity.
- To realize the capping of natural space and resources use in a longer term, advocating actions should be carried out in the short run. At the same time, early detection and elimination of harmful subsidies, establishing EU's Green Infrastructure and the adoption of a Soil Framework Directive are also essential on order to safe biodiversity, the basis for all life on Earth for future generations.
- In order to deliver most of these actions fundamental changes are needed in the legal and economic frameworks. Besides, the next EU Budget should play significant attention to these challenges and thus contribute to the overall greening of EU leading policies.