

KEYNOTE ADDRESS GIVEN BY PIA BUCELLA, DIRECTOR OF DIRECTORATE NATURAL CAPITAL AT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S DG ENVIRONMENT AT THE FACE BIODIVERSITY 2020: HUNTING FOR SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

13 SEPTEMBER 2013, BRUSSELS – www.face.eu

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here today and to have the opportunity to address this interesting and promising conference which accompanies the General Assembly of FACE.

Let me start by thanking you, in particular your president, Mr Gilbert de Turckheim and Secretary-general, Mr Angus Middleton, for your long-standing contributions to the efforts of the Member States and the European Commission to preserve Europe's most threatened species and habitats. The European Parliament has been very supportive of the Commission's ambitions and Madame Veronique Mathieu, president of the EP Intergroup for Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity, Countryside Activities & Forestry, has brought additional leverage to these efforts.

I begin with the recent agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the new EU Environment Action Programme to 2020, "Living well, within the limits of our planet". The 7th EAP identifies nine priority objectives, including one on protecting nature and strengthening ecological resilience.

This accord sends a clear signal that the EU and its Member States firmly support a strong and smart environment policy as a key condition for healthy living and a competitive, resource-efficient and low-carbon economy in Europe. Now the EU institutions and the Member States should turn their commitments into action.

The active involvement of all the stakeholders like you will be essential to deliver on this Action Programme. Looking back on the many years of fruitful cooperation with you, I know we can count on you in the future.

The 7th EAP draws heavily on recent policy documents and contains the commitment to implement the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. This strategy has 6 main targets, several of which are of direct relevance for your activities, such as Target 1 to fully implement the EU nature directives, Target 2 – to maintain and enhance ecosystems and their services, or Target 6 – to help avert global biodiversity loss.

This strategy is in fact a regional Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan under the work programme of the UN Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). The implementation of the strategy at the EU level is monitored through the Common Implementation Framework, and FACE actively takes part in a

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number of working groups, such as ones on Reporting under Target 1, the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and Services and the No Net Loss Working Groups under Target 2, or the one on Biodiversity and Development under Target 6. I can only encourage your further engagement in the efforts at the Member State level.

Hunters play a very important role in supporting the implementation of the EU nature legislation, as shown by new leaflet produced by the European Commission in cooperation with FACE and Birdlife on Sustainable Hunting and Natura 2000, which is available to you at this conference.

After many years of hard work, this Monday the Commission proposed a new regulation for preventing and managing the rapidly growing threat from invasive alien species. This prime example of an area where Europe is better when working together, will allow us to focus on the most serious threats and to improve the effectiveness of national measures in the most cost-effective way.

It was high time that such an action was taken. About 15% of the over 12 000 alien species present in Europe are invasive and cause estimated damage worth at least 12 billion euros every year, through hazards to human health, damage to infrastructure and yield losses in agriculture. They can seriously damage ecosystems and cause extinctions of species which are needed to maintain the balance of our natural environment. Many Member States already have to spend considerable resources in dealing with this problem, but their isolated efforts are not effective enough.

The proposal centres round a list of invasive alien species of Union concern, which will be drawn up with the Member States using risk assessments and scientific evidence. Selected species will be banned from the EU, meaning it will not be possible to import, buy, use, release or sell them, with a transitional period to deal with issues arising with traders, breeders or pet owners.

The interventions foreseen are prevention, early warning and rapid response, and finally, management of established invasive alien species of concern. It encourages a shift towards a harmonized and more preventive approach, increasing efficiency and lowering damage costs and the cost of action over time.

The community of hunters are expected to play a very important role in the harmonized European efforts in combatting invasive alien species. A good example is a LIFE project by hunters and game managers on managing the racoon dog in the North-European Member States.

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Turning to the broader countryside, let me speak about Green Infrastructure. Ecoducts, or wildlife passages, for instance, have been proven to be beneficial for populations of both small game such as the hare, and big game like the red deer. FACE very actively participated in the working group assisting the Commission in preparing a communication on this topic, and I would like to thank you for your contribution.

What are the opportunities in the recently agreed post-2013 Common Agricultural Policy to improve the state of wildlife?

The CAP's contribution to the improvement of biodiversity and wildlife is clearly crucial – and there has been considerable progress over the last 20 years. However, much clearly still needs to be done because the state of biodiversity and wildlife is still not good on agricultural land.

The Commission's CAP proposals were for a significant new step in this direction with the proposed introduction of the greening elements in the first pillar. However, the CAP agreement of last June unfortunately weakened our ambition, and introduced considerable flexibility; so the responsibility for progress now rests to a large extent with Member States. The risk of green washing will be high unless Member States are determined to maximise the CAP's contribution to wildlife protection, and help achieve our biodiversity targets by 2020.

We have identified a specific target for agriculture within our Biodiversity Strategy to maximise by 2020 the areas under agriculture across grasslands, arable land and permanent crops that are covered by biodiversity-related measures under the CAP. This will be achievable if Member States show determination to make the most of the environmental opportunities in the new CAP.

Let's look at grasslands, which are important for the goose species that you hunt. The CAP definition of permanent grassland has been enlarged to include other grazable areas which are not herbaceous, and Member States should take this opportunity to include their grazed heather, trees and bushes in their eligible area. This should help to avoid some unfortunate cleaning of natural features off the land also important for other game species, which has resulted, in recent years, from an unimaginative implementation of current CAP eligibility rules.

In the coming programming period, Rural Development will be a key in ensuring the targeting of specific measures to the local situation of wildlife species. Rural Development offers the possibility to use a diverse array of tools to achieve the same goal for the same species and it is crucial that Member

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States use this potential. Rural Development is also a key financial fund, not only for financing measures inside, but also outside Natura 2000 areas. A thorough diagnosis of the situation of wildlife on agricultural land will be needed in the strategic Rural Development Programme documents. This analysis should be consistent with the Prioritized Action Frameworks used for the financing of Natura 2000. But it also needs to go beyond Natura 2000: remember that about two-thirds of High Nature Value farmland areas are actually outside the Natura 2000 network.

A key element of success is capacity building. The CAP supports the reinforcement of the environmental capacity of farmers. Among other things, this system aims to help farmers to better understand and meet the EU rules for the environment which I personally believe is crucial.

I think it is in all our interests that all opportunities are taken to make the most of the new CAP to protect and enhance wildlife. DG Environment will be watching Member States' efforts in this area very closely, and we hope that they will show that they are committed to a greener CAP. Getting the relationship between farming and the environment right is so much in the interests of every EU citizen that the longer term design of the CAP is likely to depend to a significant extent on how environmentally ambitious Member States move in the coming year or two.

There is no hunting without wildlife and no wildlife without rural areas. Therefore the CAP is crucial for hunting. So what is the role of your community?

You can help to convince the competent authorities of the value of investments in biodiversity and our natural environment, and they could also benefit from your expertise as land managers. And as custodians of game and wildlife and their habitats, you can show leadership by developing and transferring good practices.

Thank you for your attention.