



Report from the Secretariat of the Intergroup

Constituent meeting of the Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

**October 21st, 2009
European Parliament, Strasbourg**

The Constituent meeting of the Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development” was well-attended – MEPs, representatives of the Secretariat of the EP Fisheries and Environment Committees, representatives of Members States and International Organisations, stakeholders, journalists etc –.

The presentation given by IUCN on climate change and biodiversity was followed by a very lively discussion. It enabled participants to raise issues of particular interest to the Intergroup and expressed their views. Furthermore, Chairs of the various subgroups were officially appointed.

The Constituent meeting was held on the occasion of the Plenary Session in Strasbourg.

1. Statement by Struan Stevenson, Chair of the Intergroup

Mr Stevenson highlighted the history of the Intergroup. He pointed out that the Intergroup on Sustainable Development was renamed in February 2009 as the Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development” in order to provide a stronger focus on these two critical issues. He stressed that the Intergroup has been working very efficiently since its establishment in 1994 with numerous successful meetings organised.

Mr Stevenson recalled that the Intergroup is in the process of being renewed. In this regard, 110 signatures of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been gathered so far. He encouraged members of the Intergroup to continue to promote it so as to have the support of at least 3 political groups required by the EP rules to renew it. This promotion is essential, especially because there are about 200 applications aiming to set up and/or renew Intergroups.

He thanked EBCD and IUCN for the very good work done as Secretariat of the Intergroup.

2. Establishment of subgroups and appointment of the Chairs

Mr Stevenson was reappointed as Chair of the Intergroup.

The following MEPs were appointed as chairs of the various subgroups.

Subgroup “Agriculture” – Chair: Mr Capoulas Santos (Portugal, S&D, AGRI Committee). He was the Chairman of the subgroup on “Agriculture” during the last part of the previous mandate.

Subgroup “Forestry” - Chair: Mr Franco (France, EPP, ITRE Committee)

Subgroup “Fisheries” - Chair: Mr Gallagher (Ireland, ALDE, FISH Committee)

Subgroup “Energy & Industry” - Chair: Mr Prodi (Italy, S&D, ENVI Committee)

Subgroup “Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Regions” – Chair: Mr Arsenis (Greece, S&D, ENVI Committee)

Subgroup “Water and Nature Conservation” - Chair: Ms Gutierrez-Cortines (Spain, EPP, ENVI Committee)

Subgroup “Transport and Tourism” - Chair: Mr Koch (Germany, EPP, TRAN Committee)

Subgroup “Cooperation et Development” - Chair: Mr Goerens (Luxembourg, ALDE, DEVE Committee)

3. *On the road to Copenhagen & 2010: International Year of Biodiversity – Presentations by Sebastian WINKLER – Head of the Countdown 2010 - International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)*

“Climate change is the greatest threat to biodiversity and natural ecosystems”, said Mr Winkler at the beginning of his presentation. Its impacts are amplified because habitats and species are fragile and under stress.

Polar and Tropical islands of the European overseas entities have been identified as the most vulnerable ecosystems to climate change. The other vulnerable ecosystems in Europe are:

- Coastal habitats;
- The European part of the Arctic; and
- Mountain ecosystems.

Most affected species are:

- Rare/endemic species;
- Species already threatened; and
- Migratory species.

Mr Winkler explained that **climate change and biodiversity are inextricably linked**. “They are the two sides of the same coin”, he said. Solving biodiversity loss requires addressing climate change, which aggravates threats such as pollution and affects the role of biodiversity in regulating climate through ecosystem services. It is equally true that solving climate change requires addressing biodiversity loss.

To reach these goals, **the existing legislation, especially the one related to the Birds and Habitats Directives, has to be implemented**. In this regard, the **Nature 2000 network should be fully established and more robust**, through:

- A greater connectivity between sites;
- An increased financing; and
- Adaptation measures for species most at risk from climate change.

Furthermore, innovative measures should enable to connect protected areas, which should be the foundation of spatial planning policies.

In addition to the full implementation of the existing legislation, new legislation and additional funding are needed in order to reinforce the resilience of ecosystems in the EU's outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories, highly affected by climate change.

Mr Winkler warned that **some mitigation measures such as hydroelectric schemes, wind farms etc can have detrimental impacts on biodiversity.** Biodiversity considerations have therefore to be taken on board at an early stage.

Then, Mr Winkler raised **critical issues for the Post-Kyoto period:**

- Which commitments for CO2 emissions reduction?
- Which approach for mitigation measures? - historical responsibility vs common but differentiated responsibility –
- What funding and governance for adaptation measures?
- Technology development and transfer.

The goal of halting biodiversity loss has not been met, recalled Mr Winkler. **17 000 species are threatened.** To reverse the trend, the future biodiversity target should notably:

- Be ambitious but realistic and achievable;
- Build upon positive achievements;
- Recognise links between human well being, biodiversity and ecosystems services and their intrinsic and existence values;
- Create synergies with “international processes”; and
- Recognise that there is no baseline against which to measure change.

Mr Winkler concluded by insisting on the critical role played by conservation and sustainable use in mitigating climate change, helping us to adapt and maintaining options for the future. “Healthy ecosystems should be the foundation of European sustainable development and climate change policies.”

4. Discussion with the members

Ms Gutierrez-Cortines (MEP, EPP) is very happy to lead the subgroup on “Water and Nature Conservation”. Water challenges are numerous and will be tackled by the subgroup. Furthermore, she mentioned the importance of ecosystem approach.

Ms Bearder (MEP, ALDE) wondered how we are going to stop global warming. She insisted on the need to mitigate the social effects of climate change.

Mr Prodi (MEP, S&D) welcomed the resolution adopted by the Environment Committee on climate change. He expressed doubts about the outcome on the Climate Change Summit. Some countries will be probably reluctant to give their green light to an ambitious agreement.

Land availability decreasing and desertification combined with an increasing population will generate major problems, said **Mr Stevenson** (MEP, ECR).

Mr Skylakakis (MEP, EPP) insisted on the necessity to act for biodiversity. He took the example of the Mediterranean forest, which has been destroyed significantly over the last years. Mitigation measures are needed and issues related to the Mediterranean Sea should be addressed properly. Furthermore, he stressed the immense impacts of population rising on biodiversity. That is why, education is so essential.

Citizens' involvement was emphasized by **Ms Girling** (MEP, ECR). Population is divided into three parts:

- A small part denies climate change;
- Another part is involved in the fight against this phenomenon;
- and the others, who are the majority, recognize that climate change is an issue to tackle but it is not an issue of concern in their daily life.

Ms Rosbach (MEP, EFD) pointed out that in 2050 there will be no more resources. This is the reason why, in her view, we have to learn and reflect on how to use waste. Waste is not a burden but an opportunity, she said.

Mr Fernandez-Galiano (Head of the Biodiversity Unit, Council of Europe) explained that even if Copenhagen talks are successful, climate change will happen. Not only mitigation but also adaptation measures are needed. In this regard, more money needs to be put on the table. Moreover, he highlighted the linkages between climate change and biodiversity.

Mr Arsenis (MEP, S&D) voiced that climate change is not only a threat but also an opportunity. The role of ecosystems services in mitigating climate change and regulating it was emphasized.

Mr Capoulas Santos (MEP, S&D) indicated that everybody knows the problems and the tools we have to use to cope with. Agriculture is a part of the problem and above all a part of the solution. He strongly hopes that the Intergroup will continue to be a room for discussing and influencing policies.

Mr Gallagher (MEP, ALDE) denounced the fact that the Common Fisheries Policy does not focus enough on small islands where population depends on fisheries for their livelihood. He expressed support for sustainable fisheries management. Furthermore, he is in favour of a comprehensive control system, which could be a very interesting issue for the Intergroup, and common fines when fishermen break the law.

Mr Angelidis (Counsellor for forestry and food issues, EP) wishes to contribute as much as possible to make the Intergroup successful.

Mr Winkler (IUCN) stressed how critical science is. He made a reference to the International Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which is being negotiated. The role of citizens is undoubtedly essential.

Mr Stevenson concluded by saying that we have to share the dream that man can change the situation.

5 - Ways forward

The Intergroup will organise:

- a **conference on “Climate Change: Towards an ambitious agreement in Copenhagen?”** on the 19th of November from 10am to 12.30pm in the European Parliament in Brussels.
- a **meeting on IUU fishing in West Africa** on the 3rd of December from 10am to 12.30pm in Brussels.