



European leaders state that

“Europe’s biodiversity
is a lifeline for economy”

From 22 to 24 September the 5th Intergovernmental Conference “Biodiversity in Europe” took place at Liege University, Belgium. Over 120 government and business representatives and environmentalists met to discuss the state of Europe’s biodiversity and post-2010 biodiversity targets for the pan-European region.

They decided to step up efforts to conserve biodiversity and enhance the services provided by ecosystems; this also in the light of the governmental efforts to green Europe's economy. Ecosystems support human well-being and health, and provide other direct benefits, such as flood control, water purification and regulation, carbon capture, food production, raw materials, and emotional, recreational and spiritual values.

Mr Pavan Sukhdev, leader of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative, emphasized that current generations are consuming the ecosystem services of future generations at a rapid rate. "The measurable cost of the loss of biodiversity is somewhere between 1.5 and 3 trillion euros per year. In comparison: the total sum of all the financial packages approved by governments worldwide to mitigate the worst financial crisis of the last century was 3 trillion per year." These figures illustrate the economic value of the sound management of our natural capital.

Deputy director general of the Norwegian Ministry of Environment and host of the conference, Mrs Birthe Ivars, added that "we should utilize the financial crisis to stimulate innovation in sustainable development and biodiversity and increase biodiversity performance of governments and enterprises. It should not be used as an argument to slow down biodiversity conservation and management".

Ms Snezana Prokic, representing the South-East European region, added that "the region is jeopardized by climate change impacts on biodiversity and nature". She stressed that "further efforts are required to integrate conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into sectoral policies, including water management, agriculture and tourism".

The conference resulted in a "Message from Liege", in which European conservation leaders list a range of priorities and recommendations to conserve ecosystem services, to address the biodiversity impacts of climate change, and to integrate biodiversity into other sectors of society. A new target was suggested to "halt any further loss of species and habitats and, by 2025, restoration of degraded areas with an emphasis on links between biodiversity, ecosystem services, climate change and human well-being".

The advisor for the Belgium Ministry of Environment, Mr Frédéric Chemay, closed the conference on behalf of the Minister of Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Paul Magnette, highlighting the importance of a focused pan-European cooperation between all 54 European countries.

Note to the editor:

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The conference was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Council of Europe in the framework of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), together with the Norwegian Ministry of Environment and with assistance from Belgium.

UNEP and the Council of Europe service the PEBLDS, through which governments and civil society organizations cooperate at pan-European level. The PEBLDS promotes the regional implementation of the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).