



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

On behalf of the European Commission, I would like to thank you for the transmission of the opinion of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 {COM(2011) 244 final}. Let me apologise for the undue delay in replying to this Opinion.

The Commission welcomes the Romanian Chamber of Deputies' view that the objectives and guidelines of the Strategy correspond to the interests of the European Union and largely meet the requirements and conditions in Romania. The Commission notes, however, that the Chamber of Deputies considers that a number of important considerations have not been sufficiently addressed in the Strategy.

With regard to funding provided for biodiversity protection under the Common Agricultural Policy, the Commission would like to point out that such an overview has been provided in the Consolidated Profile accompanying the report of the Commission on the 2010 assessment of implementing the 2006 Biodiversity Action Plan {SEC (2010) 1163 final}.

On the issue of conservation of fishery resources in inland waters the Commission would point out that several of the Strategy's targets and actions will, when implemented, have positive benefits for fisheries resources in inland waters. Examples include improved habitat and species conservation efforts under target 1, ecosystem restoration and green infrastructure development under target 2, and the prevention and control of Invasive Alien Species under target 5. Moreover, the Commission is currently producing guidance on applying the management and protection provisions set out in Article 6 of the Habitats Directive to inland waters in Natura 2000 sites. Stakeholders, including Member States, are closely involved in the development of that guidance.

With regard to the coordination of biodiversity policy with forest management policies throughout the EU, the Commission would point out that Target 3b of the biodiversity strategy is aimed specifically at ensuring that these linkages are met, while at the same time recalling that the formulation of forest policies is the competence of the Member States.

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The Commission shares the Romanian Chamber of Deputies' view that indicators for biodiversity and those related to agriculture and fisheries policies need to be better harmonised, while recognising the complexity that the formulation of indicators entails. Indeed, several issues cited in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies' opinion, including the harmonisation of indicators, data collection (including from remote-sensing and GIS techniques) and management, and the identification of research gaps will be dealt with under the common framework for monitoring, reporting and assessing the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy which will be put in place in the coming months.

Moreover, an overarching Common Implementation Framework involving the Commission, Member States and other stakeholder representatives will be established to ensure that specific measures to implement the strategy are indeed carried out at the appropriate level. The Framework will also serve as a forum for those concerned to identify needs and share experience and best practice.

The Commission also agrees with the Romanian Chamber of Deputies that communications and awareness-raising activities surrounding biodiversity – particularly those targeting children and youth – are of crucial importance. The Commission financed an extensive communications campaign on biodiversity in 2010, which was disseminated through modern channels including Social Media, which are widely used by the younger generation. The campaign website¹ is still accessible to the public and continues to attract visitors. The Commission has also produced a video news release on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and plans to launch a specific campaign focusing on Natura 2000 in 2013.

With regard to the role of the EU in formulating policies based on the Rio Conventions and in the plans to implement those Conventions, the Commission would point out that the EU plays a leading role in Multilateral Environmental Agreements and its influence was particularly instrumental in the formulation and adoption of the Strategic Plan 2011-2020 of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD) in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. Indeed, the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 reflects many elements of the CBD Strategic Plan. When it comes to EU support for coordination between the Rio Conventions, the Commission would point out that the need to improve collaboration, synergies and the establishment of common priorities between the Rio Conventions is acknowledged in the Strategy. However, it is beyond the scope of the Strategy to delve in greater depth into this issue, responsibility for which lies in other fora.

Finally, the Commission fully concurs with the Romanian Chamber of Deputies that monitoring verification and prevention of the risks of corruption or poor management of EU programmes aimed at or concerning biodiversity is of crucial importance. This relates also to the careful use of public resources referred to by the Chamber of Deputies in its opinion, and applies to all EU funding, including and beyond biodiversity-related programmes. The Commission would point out that there are specific mechanisms in place for this purpose. In particular, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has the mission inter alia to protect the financial interests of the European Union by combatting fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities affecting the EU's financial interests.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/campaign/>

I hope these clarifications will address the comments and concerns raised in the Opinion submitted by the Romanian Chamber of Deputies and I am looking forward to continuing our constructive political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*