

A bridge to the Future: Preparing the upcoming EU Presidency

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Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here and I am delighted to address all eminent guests and participants of this conference.

At the beginning I would like to emphasize the importance of this meeting, outlining the awareness of the new opportunities and challenges that are before us after all the discussions during these last two days. The presence of policy makers, representatives of businesses, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations gives us an opportunity to discuss the importance of business and biodiversity here and now. There has been a constructive debate, exchange of views and presentation of a number of good examples on where and **how biodiversity and business can work together and be complementary**, and in particular, what are the possibilities for future cooperation.

In the framework of German, Portuguese and Slovenian presidency we agreed on a very ambitious goal to achieve a better recognition and understanding of the importance of biodiversity conservation, and better implementation of conservation measures at the EU level in achieving the 2010 biodiversity target – halting the loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity conservation will be a priority also during the Slovenian presidency in the first half of 2008.

This conference in Lisbon has reconfirmed that biodiversity counts and that we need to even better integrate biodiversity objectives into responsibility schemes which address such issues as corporate social responsibility, strategic environmental assessment, social and environmental accreditation and labelling and socially responsible investment, to mention just major themes discussed during this meeting.

For Slovenia, situated at the junction of four European bio/ecoregions (Alpine, Mediterranean, Dinaric and Panonic) it is of high importance to respect regional principles in planning its development. At the same time, to develop and conserve our high biodiversity, the role of global treaties, such as the CBD, as well as the Alpine, Barcelona and Danube Conventions is crucial. Applying an ecosystem approach in spatial planning and sustainable use of natural resources is of vital importance to address global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, and local consequences of droughts and floods. Countries in the region more and more recognise a need to increase transboundary, regional and global cooperation, and implement projects that integrate a more effective and sustainable

management of natural resources. Additionally, by chairing the Bureau of the Barcelona Convention and establishing the Adriatic Sea partnership, Slovenia has actively contributed in the implementation of the objectives of the Mediterranean sustainable development strategy and development of the EU maritime policy.

We have to look into the possibility of establishing markets as well as business opportunities for biodiversity-friendly goods and services. I would like to give you some examples of existing cooperation between business and biodiversity conservation efforts in Slovenia. I believe they can further contribute in developing examples of good practice:

1. The Port of Koper supports wetland restoration and awareness raising activities in a nearby Nature reserve of Škocjan Bay, which is an example of business and biodiversity conservation working hand in hand. In the 1980s the wetland area was planned for urbanisation and port development. In the 1990s, due to heavy pressures from the NGOs and local public the trend changed and to-date the wetland area has been restored and represents an example of good cooperation and investments of national and local governments, NGOs and the port itself.

2. Mobitel, the mobile phone company, supports biodiversity conservation through its partnership with DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia since 1995 and has recognized the benefits of being a "nature-friendly" corporation to keep a high number of users of their services. The company has set a milestone in Slovenian nature conservation by undertaking the management of the protected area, a Ramsar site and a Natura 2000 area, the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, in 2001. After being contracted to the private manager (Mobitel), there has been a remarkable improvement in maintenance, conservation, marketing and promotion of the area. Mobitel has provided most of the funding for the restoration of the traditional salt-making process. In addition, it has shared experiences in developing marketing tools for selling the salt and related products. In return, the company can use Park's images for marketing its own products and services. To-date, the Nature Park harvests salt in a traditional way and has developed a number of salt related products for the market.

3. Slovenia is a country with rich biodiversity and the highest percentage of Natura 2000, covering almost 36% of Slovenia's national territory. However, more effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of its components including Natura 2000, is increasingly seen as a good business opportunity. For example, our sustainable "close to nature" forestry enables companies and private landowners to apply management practices that effectively conserve forest biodiversity. Such practices, with a more than a century long tradition, have also resulted in high

percentage of Natura 2000 areas in our forests and can provide for their outstanding conservation status in long term.

4. Petrol, an oil company, is in cooperation with three nature conservation institutions supporting a marine turtle rescue programme, thus helping to protect the small and vulnerable population of *Caretta caretta* in the north Adriatic Sea. It also helps to conserve local biodiversity hotspots.

5. Helios, a chemical company, is in cooperation with local communities for a number of years taking care of restoration and improvement of local wells and other water sources, thus helping to improve water and wetland biodiversity.

The business-biodiversity linkages related to the forestry sector are the ones we want to develop further during the Slovenian presidency: particularly the interactions between biodiversity, sustainable forest management, climate change commitments and biofuels production. On the one hand, common activities have been included into our Countdown 2010 commitments, and on the other, biodiversity, climate change and second generation of biofuels production will be the main issues of discussion of the environmental ministers at their informal meeting in Slovenia. In both cases, integration of biodiversity objectives is essential.

The linkages discussed at this conference and particularly in the four workshops are critical in the establishment of the common ground for future work. Partnerships established between businesses and NGOs provide good examples, but biodiversity-business partnerships are needed across sectors and Europe. Political will and a common goal at the EU level as well as a clear commitment by the MSs is needed to affectively contribute towards achieving the 2010 biodiversity targets.

The commitment to protect biodiversity and integration of biodiversity criteria into business decision-making and corporate governance ("Business and Biodiversity") is recognised as a common priority in the political agendas of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian presidencies of the EU. And it is particularly the Portuguese and the EC colleagues that have elaborated on this issue, and the IUCN is looking into this relationship between B&B for some years now. Initially focusing at the EU level and establishing an EU leadership on this issue is a valuable catalyst for national action, sharing of experience and good practice, and for the communication and mainstreaming of results. Integration of biodiversity into major EU policy areas such as agriculture, regional development, fisheries, energy, transport, trade, development aid and research means that there is a clear added value to an EU action on Business and Biodiversity.

The guiding principle spelt out by the DG Environment should be guiding activities also at the MS level to complement the initiative started at the EU level. Slovenia supports establishment of a technical support facility to promote the continued

development of the EU Business and Biodiversity Initiative. We believe that a platform at the EU level can well promote and facilitate developments at national level and stipulate MSs to act.

It has clearly reconfirmed that the EU agenda on biodiversity which includes establishing and strengthening the linkages between business and biodiversity can have fruitful results. For the first time the EU agenda goes beyond focusing only on conservation objectives. It emphasises the need to focus on the goods and services that healthy ecosystems provide. However, it requires clear commitments from private and public sectors and understanding that biodiversity is important not only for its intrinsic value, but also for the goods and services on which all life depends. It has been established that there is a link between healthy ecosystems that underpin sustainable development and the consequences of the loss of ecosystem goods and services. To halt biodiversity decline the biodiversity sector has to reach out to other sectors and stakeholders. I believe that integrating and mainstreaming biodiversity is critical for successful partnership of B&B.

At CBD-COP8 Parties to the Convention committed themselves to engage more prominently with the private sector. In response to this CBD decision B&B was included as a common priority in the Biodiversity Agenda of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian EU presidencies, launched in Berlin in December 2006. Therefore, Slovenia will promote the Message from Lisbon and will ensure that it is well reflected in the relevant EU positions leading to the COP and at COP9 in Bonn. Having the next Conference of the Parties to the Convention in Europe, I believe that the EU Member States and the European Community together with the European companies can contribute considerably in the future developments of the issue and private sector engagement. In closing, I would like to reiterate that the "... Message from Lisbon will contribute to the 2010 targets of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy and of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010."

Thank you for your attention.