



Margrete Auken's tale ved Financing Natura

Taler

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Introduction

Thank you for the invitation to speak on the financing of Natura 2000. I am the European Parliament's rapporteur on the Commission's communication to the Council and the European Parliament on Financing of Natura 2000. I have shortly after receiving the communication from the Commission drafted a report to the European Parliament. My report has been discussed in our Committee for Environment and is due to be voted in that Committee next week – and later same week to be voted in Plenary.

Our speedy reaction to the Commission communication shows that the European Parliament gives very high priority to the protection of Nature and Environment. But it also shows that the Parliament is extremely concerned about the Commission strategy – or lack of a clear and adequate strategy.

Firstly, I would underline that our exercise on Natura 2000 financing has a very important precondition. The question is "How to finance Natura 2000?" That is the question we have been requested to answer. We are not discussing if we should finance Natura 2000 at all. That's a very important precondition to remember.

Back in June 2001 at the Gothenburg Summit, EU Heads of State committed themselves to the target of halting biodiversity loss in the EU by 2010. This commitment was reaffirmed at the June Summit in 2004 and forms part of EU's commitment to stem losses of global biodiversity; and recently reaffirmed by commissioner Dimas at the International Conference on "Biodiversity, Science and Governance" on 24 January 2005 in Paris.

So far significant progress has been made in the establishment of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas through the designation of more than 18,000 sites across the EU. When finalised, the network is expected to cover more than 15% of the EU's territory.

Delivering a well designed and adequately financed Natura 2000 network is a key opportunity to help deliver the 2010 Gothenburg Target. But without financial security, this target will be put at risk.

And there is still good reason to be concerned: The European Environment Agency's Third Environmental Assessment (2003) stated that "important ecosystems continue to be at risk" while "species population trends are mixed - some previously highly threatened species are starting to recover, others continue to decline at alarming rates [and] decline is now also perceptible in previously common species."

Estimated costs Before starting the discussion on how to finance Natura 2000 it is crucial to have a reliable estimate of the costs. According to the Commission estimate the cost of Natura 2000 in EU-25 is 6.1 billion annually. The Commission estimate is based on input received from Member States following a Commission questionnaire sent to Member States in 2003. Preliminary calculations by NGOs state that this is likely to be a significant

underestimate. They estimate the yearly costs to be 2-3 times higher than the estimate of the Commission. I therefore only consider the Commission estimate based on input from the Member States as an absolute minimum 'advisory cost'! Should the real cost of financing Natura 2000 exceed the Commission estimate - we should all be prepared to react and show our firm commitment to protecting Europe's nature and be responsible. Responsible politicians should be prepared also to make unpopular decisions, including decisions reallocating present EU-funding.

Strategy

Commission's strategy The Expert Group Report (Working Group on Article 8 of the Habitats Directive) proposed three options for co-financing:

- Use of existing EU funds;
- Increasing and upgrading the LIFE-Nature Fund;
- Creation of a new funding instrument dedicated to Natura 2000.

The Commission's strategy is to pursue the first option and integrate financing of Natura 2000 into existing Rural Development and Structural Fund. Such mainstreaming should be welcomed but it must be noted that currently this strategy has some conspicuous limitations and obstacles.

My respond has been to support the integration approach suggested by the Commission but at the same time improve the suggested strategy. Let me explain how and why!

Strategy of the European Parliament

Funding According to the Commission estimation the cost of Natura 2000 is 6.1 billion euro annually (without taking into account marine protected areas). There are several reasons for why the Commission has proposed the integration approach. The Commission consider that approach effective - but I also believe that the reasoning behind this approach is that it doesn't add any extra cost to the EU-budget. If the EU should finance between 50-75 % of the total cost of Natura 2000 it would lead to an increase of the EU-budget by 3-4%. This is not realistic because several Member States, including France and Germany do not accept any increase in the EU-budget.

Politicians should have visions and also be willing to fight for our visions. But I am sure that it would be a very difficult almost impossible exercise to convince Germany and France to support an increase of the EU-budget by 3-4 % to finance Natura 2000. I also believe that even if we succeed increasing the EU-budget by the necessary amount the integration approach would still be the most efficient option.

In my report I have prepared to the European Parliament I call for EU-money for Natura 2000 - but at the same time I am prepared with another strategy – should the Council and Commission fail to deliver increased funding for Natura 2000.

I am prepared to earmark money under Structural, Cohesion and Rural Development Fund for Natura 2000! Often I hear, but why should poor farmers pay for Nature. My answer is: We should all pay – also farmers. If we don't dare to take money away from those who already have - EU will never develop!

Integration The Commission stresses that the Habitat Directive recognises the need for EU-funding for Natura but only in exceptional cases where Natura 2000 leads to heavy financial burden on certain member states (Member States with a high concentration of species and nature). The Commission has identified the relevant funds which could be used by Member States to finance Natura 2000. But it is important to stress that the Commission puts the responsibility on the Member States.

The relevant funds are Structural Funds, Cohesion Fund, Rural Development and LIFE (LIFE-Nature). The Commission is optimistic when formulating its integration approach. The Commission says we have provided the funding but it is up to the Member States when formulating their programmes to include Natura 2000. Including Natura 2000 in the programmes is a possibility not a requirement.

I believe that this optimistic approach is the biggest shortfall in the Commission Strategy. So far most Member States have made limited use of the opportunity under the current Rural Development Regulation to implement Natura 2000; and the Rural Development and Structural Development Programmes have often worked against EU nature conservation priorities. Often we have seen that nature is losing when a new highway or a bridge is constructed; or when the Government or Local Authorities gives approval to an extension of agriculture production (pig farms).

I have therefore suggested that the release of any EU-funding should be made conditional upon adequate national Natura 2000 financing plans. Only those Member States who take the Natura 2000 Commitment seriously will receive EU-funding. I have also suggested that there should be a minimum funding earmarked for Natura 2000 under the Structural, rural and LIFE+ programmes.

Conditionality is the only way to guaranty Natura 2000 so EU can live up to its international commitment and deliver what EU-citizens expect. I hope that the Commission will amend the relevant proposals; and the Council together with the Parliament will support this strategy.

Unfortunately, my report is not a binding legal act. The Parliament will next week in Strasbourg adopt a Resolution - but it is then up to the Commission and Council to react on our Resolution. We should therefore continue the pressure on the Commission to modify its approach (and include the Parliament's ideas). I therefore warmly welcome any event like today's conference where we across Europe can discuss Nature and Environment in a broad context and keep the discussion alive. I will after next week's vote invite my colleagues in the Parliament to a strategic discussion on how to maintain the pressure on the Commission.

Due to the fact that the Parliament has limited influence on Natura 2000, in my report I also invite the Commission to report on the implementation of the integrated approach when the outcome of the structural, fisheries and rural development regulations is known - and in the event that no earmarked funds for Natura 2000 management are included in the Commission's proposals - we have invited the Commission to make a proposal for a dedicated Natura 2000 fund. If the Commission doesn't show responsibility there is now other way forward! It is absurd if EU as one of the world's richest regions can not live up to a Commitment made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

Other Regulation Even though my report only concerns financing of Natura 2000, I will stress that another very important condition for success with our Natura 2000 is that we recognize that nature is linked to a lot of different activities; and our ability to improve other regulation with an impact on nature. Obviously there is a relationship between many human activities, the pressure they produce and the impact of these pressures on the environment in general and biodiversity in particular. If we do not recognize that fact - our strategy will never succeed!

We would therefore also need to strengthen our general Environmental Laws – so protecting environment and nature is always given the highest priority when regulating agriculture, fisheries, industry, transport, cities etc.

Let me finish my presentation by telling what I saw when I recently went to Poland to visit the huge Danish pig-farms.

Danish investors - including a husband to a member of the present Government and the husband to the Danish Commissioner for Agriculture - have started a strategy of extending the "Danish" pig production by investing in huge pig-farms in Poland, Russia and Ukraine. More countries will follow!

During my stay in Poland I saw the sad consequences of this cynical strategy. The pig-farms are placed close to some of Poland's most vulnerable and nature rich areas. Weak environmental laws (derogations under the Accession Treaty from the IPPC-Directive to specific companies) and pure environmental control lead to the beginning of transforming Poland into a Green Desert like Denmark. When I met with the Polish Ministry for Environment they had a

very despairing attitude. They almost gave up on beforehand.

The Polish Government has been under pressure from both US and Danish companies to weaken its environmental laws. Happily, I just heard that the Polish Parliament resisted some of the US-attacks. This is a wise strategy because the turnover and jobs these investments create in Poland are limited while the damages are enormous; and it would take generations and cost huge amounts of money to re-establish the Polish Richness of Nature.

Conclusion A proper strategy for financing Natura 2000 is far more complicated than what has been included in the Commission communication.

We need:

- To re-think nature into a broader perspective;
- To extend the integration approach;
- To introduce conditionality;
- Earmark Natura 2000 funding under existing funds.

Tags

EU, Politisk tale, Socialistisk Folkeparti

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