

Working together for Biodiversity

**European Biodiversity Day
(Strasbourg, France, 28 April 2010)**

**Speech by Gaye Doganoglu
President of the Committee on Sustainable Development
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Council of Europe**

Dear Presidents,
Dear Mrs Rafik, Dear Mr Roch,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to represent the Congress and speak on behalf of our President ad interim, Mr Ian Micallef. He and our Vice-President, Dubrava Suica send their regrets that they are unable to be here today.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Conference of International NGOs, for this excellent initiative to mark 2010 Year of Biodiversity with today's conference and a joint Declaration.

In the Congress we believe it is important to show a united front on this imperative and vital subject. It is important to join our voices to ensure that the message for the protection and improvement of the state of biodiversity is heard by other international organisations and national governments, and throughout our networks of NGOs, parliamentarians and local and regional authorities.

Our coming together for this conference is not only a real example of our close cooperation in this area. It is also proof that the importance of biodiversity is no longer in question and that there is growing awareness at all levels of governance that preserving biodiversity and reversing its loss must become a priority issue on the top of our political agenda.

The problems of biodiversity represent one of the major threats facing our planet and humankind. An unprecedented loss of biodiversity is undermining the life-support system of our planet to the point of no return, calling upon all of us to act responsibly and without delay.

In the Congress, it has always been our philosophy that preserving our natural environment is essential because nature has an intrinsic value as a part of our culture and our history. Nature is also the foundation for our quality of life, and it is in the same spirit that we attach particular importance to the issue of landscape protection and preservation. The questions of sustaining biodiversity and preserving landscapes are indeed inter-twined, and the European

Landscape Convention, of which the Congress was at the origin, is an important tool in this respect, the first of its kind.

The Congress has also taken a pioneering role in recognising the importance of urban biodiversity. Cities are disproportionately responsible for pressure on biodiversity and today's lifestyles demand far more resources than others, meaning that the so-called 'urban ecological footprint' extends far beyond city boundaries.

Cities are part of the problem and have to be part of the solution. This is why, in its 2008 recommendation on 'Biodiversity Policies for Urban Areas', the Congress invited member states to take into broader account the positive effects which biodiversity and a balanced ecosystem can have for society and the economy.

Biodiversity is also an integral part of a healthy environment which we are seeking to build in our cities and regions. We are convinced that living in a healthy environment is a human right of our citizens, of all human beings. This conviction is also shared by the Parliamentary Assembly, and we strongly support their active lobbying for this right to be enshrined in the Convention on Human Rights.

Building a healthy environment, nourishing biodiversity and reversing its loss is one of the lasting and sustainable responses to the global challenge of climate change. Last December, I was a member of the Congress delegation to the Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, where we reaffirmed this position, insisting on the inclusion of the human rights dimension in any new agreement on climate.

It is also our position that biodiversity and climate change are of equal importance and closely linked as the major challenges for the future of our planet. Indeed, some possible solutions for the protection of biodiversity also offer a response to controlling climate change and vice-versa.

In the Congress, we strongly believe that biodiversity and climate change demand the same kind of coordinated political effort by the international community..

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With all this in mind, the Congress has been actively involved in mounting action on biodiversity, along with its many partners among associations of local and regional authorities and NGOs. I am pleased to say that the Countdown 2010 initiatives on biodiversity, led by a network of partnerships and organisations, were a great start.

The efforts of the Congress and local authority networks to lobby for the recognition of the crucial role played by cities and local authorities in areas which have direct effects on biodiversity were fruitful. In May 2008, the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which recognised this role, represented an important step.

The potential of what local and regional communities can achieve is truly impressive, and it is already revealing itself in their action on climate change. It is certain that measures to reduce greenhouse emissions, to encourage innovation and the use of clean technologies, to better manage natural resources and spatial development, and to promote changes in attitudes and lifestyles – all matters where local and regional authorities play a crucial role – will also serve to halt the loss of biodiversity. I am only pleased that the Joint Declaration, which will be signed today, reaffirms this once again.

In fact, an increasing number of local and regional communities have already moved to act and contribute to the success of our common efforts. In March, the Committee on Sustainable Development of the Congress organised a hearing on biodiversity as a local challenge, to mark 2010 Biodiversity Year. It was an exchange of best practices, where we could see firsthand the very interesting and innovative projects that cities have undertaken, including our host city Strasbourg, and hear presentations of several networks..

We very much appreciate the contribution to the capacity-building of local governments by such networks as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the European Centre for Nature Conservation and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, with its Local Action for Biodiversity initiative. Today, not only governments and parliamentarians, but also local and regional authorities are now much more aware of their role and possible action on biodiversity.

The Congress also strongly supports its main partner within the European Union, the Committee of the Regions, which is preparing a draft opinion on international biodiversity policy beyond 2010 and, in particular on an EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, setting an ambitious target of “halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by stressing once again that our initial awareness-raising efforts are bearing fruit. Yet, the situation with global biodiversity loss remains dramatic, and we need to seek to restore a healthy ecological balance.

I am convinced that we must now move to make biodiversity a mainstream issue. We must take the initiative to transform a matter of opinion into political action.

For our joint efforts to succeed, biodiversity must become part of any action for sustainable development, part of any definition of a healthy environment – the right to which we defend – and part of any action on climate change. These three dimensions represent a wholesome package, of which biodiversity is an integral component.

Therefore, biodiversity must be integrated into strategies and policies dealing with sustainability, environment and health as well as mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

We must urge all international organisations, national governments and parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society to do so **today** – because **tomorrow** depends on it. It is our future that is at stake, the future of our children, and the future of our planet.

We must act now.

Thank you.