

# GREENING EUROPE

## PRIORITIES OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL FOR THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY – JANUARY TO JUNE 2008

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### Introduction from the Director of DOPPS, BirdLife Slovenia

With more than one third of its territory designated under the Natura 2000 network Slovenia is rightly called a “green piece of Europe”. Being aware that site designation is only a first step to protecting its “nature jewels” and achieving the EU’s 2010 target to halt biodiversity decline, Slovenia has also undertaken some important initiatives ensuring proper management and financing of these sites. DOPPS, the BirdLife Partner in Slovenia, is looking forward to the Presidency to be used as an opportunity to share this experience with other countries and show some successes on the ground during the visits of Members State and EU representatives to Slovenia. By implementing Natura 2000 and the EU Nature Directives Slovenia also helps its unique and diverse habitats to adapt to climate change.

During the Presidency, Slovenia will be tasked to take the lead in negotiations on very important issues with significant implications on biodiversity and the environment in general, most notably the CAP Health Check, the Renewable Energy Directive, and first discussions on the Budget Review. In May the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will take place in Europe and Slovenia acting on behalf of the whole EU will have a great responsibility to make this important UN conference a success.

### Top priorities for BirdLife: Sustainable rural development and forest management

Over the last years Slovenia has demonstrated increasingly well how EU Rural Development funds can be used to protect biodiversity, to support traditional High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems and combine environmental improvement with economic diversification and high quality farming.

Slovenia should use the opportunity of opening the CAP Health Check debate to initiate transparent and fair discussions on the long term objectives the EU wants to define for farming and rural development.

Sustainable forest management has more than 100 years of tradition in Slovenia. With over 50% of the national territory under forest cover and a great share of it being designated under Natura 2000 the Slovenian Presidency should be used as a unique opportunity for presenting the sustainable forest management principle in all Member States and thus encouraging its implementation.



Andrej Medved,  
Director of DOPPS - BirdLife Slovenia

## Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010 – The final countdown

The Birds and Habitats Directives form the backbone of Europe's efforts to protect biodiversity. Their full implementation is crucial to reach the EU's 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss. One of the key deliverables of the Directives is the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. In the EU Biodiversity Action Plan the date of completion of the terrestrial Natura 2000 network is given as 2006, however, this deadline has slipped again. In 2007 the European Commission has initiated legal action against several Member states, for insufficient designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. The list of countries that received warning letters on this matter from Brussels includes almost all new Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. All this means that a large number of Europe's sites of outstanding natural value are still left unprotected and vulnerable to uncontrolled development.

For those sites that have already been designated, financial support is badly needed to maintain or restore them to favourable conservation status. EU funds, like Rural Development or

Structural Funds, do provide opportunities for the management and upkeep of protected areas. There are only a few countries, however, who set aside reasonable sums of money to this end and Slovenia can be congratulated on being one of them. The first half of 2008 is the time when these funds should start to be used to manage Natura 2000 sites for conservation and people.

We urgently need information on how the populations of species and their habitats are doing within and outside these protected areas. In 2008, the conservation status of habitats and species (listed in the Habitats Directive) will be evaluated at biogeographical level. This will show for the first time whether their status has got better or worse since the Directive came into force in 1992. The regular reports under the Birds Directive, the next one being due in 2008, could be a start for a similar process for bird species across the EU.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

*Bald Ibis - Jurij Mikuletič*

- Urge other Member States to follow Slovenia's good record in SPA designation, and at the same time finalise its own network of Natura 2000 sites.
- Make the most of the EU funds for the protection, management and communication of Natura 2000 sites and transfer its innovative ideas and expertise to other Member States, in the context of a Presidency event.
- Use the Nature Directors meeting to discuss the practicalities of setting up national monitoring systems to regularly assess the status of species, habitats and Natura 2000 sites and how to involve all stakeholders in this process.

## Climate change adaptation

An important aspect of climate change policy that has received insufficient attention until now has been how the EU is to adapt to the effects of climate change that are already unavoidable and which will hit Europe and the world in the coming decades. The European Commission's June 2007 Green Paper on adaptation made a good start in outlining the challenges and possible responses.

As the climate changes, ecosystems are changing, too, with implications on their ability to provide environmental services such as biodiversity, flood control, clean air, water and food. Humans will depend on these services even more in times of extreme weather events caused by climate change. Therefore it is absolutely crucial to increase the resilience and support biodiversity of ecosystems – by addressing already existing pressures and through additional

efforts helping them to adapt to climate change (e.g. by increasing the integrity, coherence and connectivity of Natura 2000 sites and the biodiversity friendliness of the wider landscape)

While the Commission Green Paper recognises to some degree the threats to biodiversity from climate change and the need to strengthen ecosystems, it fails to clearly promote guiding principles for adaptation policy (such as "ecosystem proofing" of all measures) and could have done more to propose specific actions in different EU sectoral policies, especially the Common Agricultural Policy. BirdLife looks forward to these issues being addressed in the forthcoming White Paper.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

- Raise the issue of adaptation to climate change on the EU agenda.
- In the discussions on the Green Paper, promote the principle of ecosystem resilience as a key objective and benchmark for all adaptation measures.
- Ensure biodiversity protection and swift and full implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives is included as key first-action measure for climate change adaptation in the forthcoming White Paper.
- Urge the Commission to come forward with concrete, ecosystem supporting, sectoral actions to respond to climate adaptation, particularly in the area of agriculture and landuse.

## The CAP Health Check - moving towards sustainable rural development?

In parallel to the wider EU budget review (see separate article in this issue), Commissioner Fischer Boel has launched a review of the Common Agriculture Policy, dubbed the “CAP Health Check”. The Commission outlined the issues covered by the Health Check in November 2007. The Slovenian Presidency takes over in the key period covering the end of the public consultation, the publication of the Commission’s legislative proposals (May 2008) and the first stages of political debate within the Council. A final decision is expected under the French Presidency at the end of 2008.

From the Health Check a new vision for the CAP after 2013, and concrete stepping stones for the transition period, must emerge. Only that way can the EU meet the huge challenges facing the rural environment in coming years, such as the crisis of degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity, and the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

BirdLife International is arguing for a new CAP that would pay farmers and land managers to deliver specific public goods such

as biodiversity conservation and improved ecosystem services. That way, the new CAP should also provide adequate funding for the management of Natura 2000 sites and support High Nature Value farming systems that are threatened by economic marginalisation and abandonment.

Enacting a deep and far reaching reform of the CAP will also provide farmers with a stable investment horizon and will re-legitimize EU spending of public money on farming and rural areas.

Slovenia has a very good track record in using Rural Development funds to protect biodiversity, support traditional High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems and combine environmental improvement with economic diversification and high quality farming. It is thus in a good position to show leadership and promote a deep and transparent debate about the CAP’s objectives and the best tools to deliver on them

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

- Promote an open and transparent debate about the long term role and objectives of the CAP in the context of sustainable development: for example through a wide stakeholder conference or in the informal Council of Agriculture Ministers.
- Champion the need to retarget agriculture support at High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems, Natura 2000 sites and the delivery by farmers of environmental goods and services.
- Champion the need for an effective implementation of cross compliance across the EU.
- Argue for the need to shift more money from Pillar I to Pillar II within the current programming period, as a step towards a future CAP that is clearly objective driven, and at the same time transparent and accountable.
- Ensure that the loss of Set Aside is compensated by the introduction of an equivalent but better targeted environmental tool.



## Showing the way to genuine sustainable forest management

Not surprisingly, Slovenia has chosen forests to be one of the important topics of the Presidency. With 58% of its territory covered by forests and 100 years of forestry tradition Slovenia is perfectly placed to lead other EU Member States in this field. Equally, Slovenia is one of the countries in Europe committed to sustainable forest management and which is largely putting this into practice. Healthy and diverse forest ecosystems are especially important in the light of climate change adaptation.

Sustainable forest management has been discussed at various fora for many years now and it also strings through the whole Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which is the framework for achieving the CBD objectives for forests. In 1993 in Helsinki, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) elaborated resolutions giving guidelines on sustainable forest management and conservation of forest biological diversity. A number of criteria and indicators were set to evaluate sustainable forest management implementation. But despite all existing documents, genuine implementation has not been observed to-date. Although forest cover in Europe is increasing, its environmental quality is declining.

In order to maintain viable populations of many forest species, sustainable forest management is crucial, both inside and outside of protected areas.

Another urgent priority in forest conservation is the need to develop a set of understandable quantitative indicators that can serve to measure the impact of certain forest conservation and management measures. BirdLife has a lot of experience with using birds as biodiversity indicators, reflecting the quality of certain habitats and ecosystems. For example a farmland bird indicator developed by BirdLife is now used as an official measure of the ecological impact of the EU Rural Development regulation.

Naturally, the next step is now to provide a high-quality bird-based indicator for forests.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

- Present an ambitious vision for the implementation of “sustainable forest management” principles in all EU Member States at the CBD COP-9 side event on forests.
- Propose “sustainable forest management” as a principal topic during the EU Forest Directors meeting in Slovenia, focusing on how the principles can become a reality on the ground.
- Promote and take forward the work on creating a scientifically credible set of indicators for forests, involving relevant stakeholders.
- Work with the Commission and other governments to ensure that Member States carry out national development policies in compliance with environmentally sound forest exploitation, sustaining the biological diversity in all types of forests.



## The future of renewable energy in Europe

In January, the Commission is expected to table a draft Directive on renewable energy. BirdLife warmly welcomes this urgently needed initiative and the commitment to meet 20% of the EU's energy consumption using renewable sources. Next to reduction of energy consumption and increase of efficiency, the strategic development of renewable energies is of crucial importance.

To be successful, this Directive must, inter alia, allow for energy generation to work alongside Europe's other world-leading environmental standards, such as the EU nature legislation. The EU must adopt the paradigm that renewable energy sources must be truly sustainable – and make a significant difference to reduce Greenhouse Gases (GHG).

In that context BirdLife is deeply concerned about the European Commission's proposal to replace 10% of transport fuels with biofuels. With the current lack of safeguards, instead of helping reduce climate change, this may make matters worse. Greenhouse Gas emissions savings from biofuels are often small while growing biofuels can contribute to tropical deforestation, food supply issues and biodiversity declines from agricultural intensification. A moratorium on any new biofuel target should be imposed until it can be shown that they can be grown sustainably.

In addition, the sustainability of proposed national "Renewable Action Plans" must be ensured. Strategic Environmental Assessment should be used to ensure that developments meet EU environmental standards, including biodiversity protection, sustainable forest management, and water conservation. Strategic planning of renewable energies is also important to ensure planning security for investors and for reducing conflicts with stakeholders at the project level.

BirdLife strongly endorse the Greenhouse Gases emission reduction mechanism contained in article 7a of the proposed new Fuel Quality Directive. The Slovenian Presidency will oversee the most important phases in the legislative process of this key Directive. We expect oil companies to be required to shoulder their share of the burden in reducing the life cycle emissions of transport fuels. We strongly recommend in this context the adoption of strong sustainability criteria for any biofuels that would be used to meet the Directive's requirements and expect overall targets to be set taking into full consideration the actual potential for sustainable production.

*Great Cormorants- Jurij Mikuletič*

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

- Welcome the renewable energy target of 20% and champion the need for this development to take place in a sustainable and strategic way without causing wider environmental harm, such as damage to sensitive wildlife sites.
- Back calls for a moratorium on new biofuel targets until sustainability can be proved.
- Promote the obligatory use of Strategic Environmental Assessment for national Renewable Action Plans in Council of Ministers negotiations.
- Support the adoption, within the Fuel Quality Directive, of the life cycle based GHG emission reduction mechanism while introducing meaningful sustainability standards and setting targets at an appropriate level that would not lead to reliance on unsustainable biofuels.



*White Stork - Jurij Mikuletič*

## Taking responsibility for global biodiversity: COP9 of the CBD

In spring 2008, during the Slovenian Presidency, the 9th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will take place in Bonn, Germany. Slovenia will represent the European Union at this conference.

During COP7 in 2004 the Parties had committed to establishing a network of protected sites, both terrestrial (by 2010) and marine (by 2012). One of the most important topics of COP9 will therefore be the implementation of this global network of protected areas, covering also regional responsibilities for species and habitats conservation. For the EU the Natura 2000 network clearly is the most important contribution to reach this aim, and a model for the other CBD parties around the world. Therefore, it will be essential for the success of the conference to promote the implementation of Natura 2000 and to demonstrate the clear commitment of the EU Member States to this concept.

COP9 will also discuss the impact of biofuels on global biodiversity, and the need for a certification system to ensure the ecological sustainability of their production, transport and consumption. The Slovenian Presidency has an important role to play showing credible and ambitious leadership on behalf of the EU to make progress on this important issue.

Other important questions are the identification of suitable tools for financing protected areas, e.g. by trust funds or taxes on tourism, the improvement of Access and Benefit Sharing, a major review of implementation of the Convention, invasive alien species, and the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

*Shag - Jens Christensen*

- Present Natura 2000 as the leading model in the world to create a coherent network of protected sites with clear criteria for shared responsibilities of regions and states.
- Push for a robust certification system to ensure sustainability of production, transport and consumption of biofuels in the EU as well as worldwide.
- Set a high level of ambition for the EU's contribution to worldwide standards for the conservation of, in particular, marine and forest habitats, and for the provision of necessary funding.
- Take leadership on improving the mandate for Access and Benefit Sharing and ensure that the negotiations for a new regime are concluded by 2010.

## Slovenia – small coastline but big role for Europe's marine environment

As the Slovenian Presidency takes the EU helm it has the responsibility of steering all coastal EU Member States towards fulfilling the deadline to designate their marine Natura 2000 sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive by 2008. This deadline was included in the EU Biodiversity Action Plan which was endorsed by Environment Ministers at the December 2006 Council.

BirdLife Partners all over Europe are active in identifying marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) which form the widely accepted basis for SPAs. These sites need to be designated and protected without delay, while existing knowledge gaps need to be filled as soon as possible. As inventories on marine biodiversity are costly, they should be one of the key priorities for the EU's financial instrument LIFE+ and for specific Member State funding – with a particular regard for trans-boundary projects.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

*Shag - Jurij Mikuletič*

- Encourage all coastal EU Member States to work towards achieving the 2008 deadline for designating marine Natura 2000 sites.
- Call on Member States and the European Commission to invest in improving and enlarging the scientific information needed to underpin the identification and management of marine Natura 2000 sites. In particular, Member States should support applications for project funding from LIFE+, but also earmark own long-term funding to ensure the financing for marine protected areas.

## No taboos - reforming the budget, making Europe more sustainable

While the institutional reform of the EU is being finalised with the new Treaty, the next big strategic debate has already begun: the review of the EU's budget, which the Commission started by launching a wide consultation, running from September 2007 to April 2008.

Directly afterwards, under the Slovenian Presidency, a political conference is planned that will inform the Commission's concrete proposal for this reform, which is expected to be presented under the French Presidency in the second half of 2008.

Instead of looking at the concrete size of individual budget lines, this review aims to redefine long-term priorities for EU spendings

### Public Money for Public Goods

BirdLife International wants to ensure this opportunity to make the EU more sustainable is not missed. In particular biodiversity decline and climate change need to be addressed in the future budget, as these two are the most pressing challenges for the environment and a big threat to human well-being and socio-economic development.

The key principle behind any decision on the future budget should be that public money is only spent on public goods. In an

and revenues, recognising the fundamental new challenges the EU faces in the 21st century, from climate change to global poverty, from demographic change to economic globalisation. The Commission invites to a debate "without pre-conditions and taboos". This means the budget review represents a unique opportunity to influence the future directions of the EU, with much wider implications than just the financial dimension.

More concretely, discussions will include questions like "do we still need to spend public EU money on agriculture", "should we have a special fund for climate change and biodiversity", "how can the EU generate its own income" or "what is the best balance between EU and national spending".

environmental context this means that the activities funded by the EU must not cause harm to ecosystems, and on the contrary, aim to contribute to a healthy environment. This can be realised for example by paying farmers for biodiversity friendly land-use, by supporting energy efficiency programmes or through directly financing the development of management plans for the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. At the same time the EU has a great responsibility to enhance environmental protection outside its borders and to contribute to biodiversity protection globally.

### The Slovenian Presidency should:

*Montagu's Harrier - Jens Christensen*

- At the political conference in spring (and elsewhere) strongly promote the principle of "public money for public goods" and the need to make biodiversity decline and climate change key areas of future EU spending.
- Put the budget review on the agenda of other relevant EU conferences (e.g. informal Council meetings) and in that context promote the idea of using this review to make the EU the most energy and resource efficient economy in the world.
- Link the 2008 Health Check of the Common Agriculture Policy to the long term review of the budget, and that way make a first step towards a truly sustainable land management policy for the EU.



## BirdLife International Partnership

The BirdLife International Partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. This memorandum to the Slovenian Presidency was produced by the European Division of BirdLife International and DOPPS, the Partner of BirdLife International in Slovenia. For further information please contact:

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