



Friday 8 October 2010

Speech of

JOKE SCHAUVLIEGE

VLAAMS MINISTER VAN LEEFMILIEU, NATUUR EN CULTUUR

Sign to the World Genk

Good afternoon everyone,

Mayor Dries,

Commisioner Potocnik, glad to see you again,

Voorzitter Van Rompuy, beste Herman,

You probably know the song by Dean Martin from 1965: "*Let me tell you about the birds and the bees*". There was a time that this song sounded happy and carefree; nowadays the story of the birds and the bees is less happy. And a lot less carefree.

Worldwide more than 190 bird species are threatened with extinction. It's a global problem, ranging from Mexico to Australia, and also – let's be frank – to Flanders.

Concerning the bees, the last decennium has not been very kind on them. The last years the mortality among bee population has incredibly increased, in winter times **and** in spring

times. Numerous causes have been named: the varoa parasite, the red Tffp On 06/25/2010 12:50:22 beC

offering us – ironically – unusually cold and long winters, something which the bees are very sensitive to. We all know what the dramatic consequences are: less pollinators mean less seed, less young plants, less fruit, etcetera etcetera.

What seemed to be an innocent, almost insignificant element – the bee and its tragic fate – has had grave consequences among the whole web of nature's organisms and the fruits we reap from it. We've learned the lessons, we've learned the importance of biodiversity. And we've learned it the hard way by suffering the consequences.

Ladies & gentlemen,

Let me be very clear: the story of biodiversity exceeds the subject of birds and bees. This is why I'm very happy to be at this event that wants to give a sign to the world that business as usual cannot be our objective, that we cannot go on like this. As the current president of the EU environment chair I have pushed very hard to put this theme on the international agenda. In the beginning of September we organized a European Conference in Ghent and we agreed on a very consistent message. Allow me to make a short synthesis:

First of all, we have to provide **strong science for strong policy**. In the past we haven't realized enough the dangers that face us as biodiversity is degrading in front of our eyes. We have to bridge the knowledge gaps and keep monitoring the situation 'in real live'.

Secondly, **biodiversity has to become a horizontal issue**. It has to be taken into account on all levels, including in tough pickles like trade agreements. This is the **only way** to integrate the theme among **all** policy lines, programs and initiatives.

Thirdly, to really integrate the issue among all policy lines, **the whole of society has to be infused with this idea**. All stakeholders and especially the private sector have to be aware of what is happening, and preferably take action to preserve and improve our biodiversity. Only one fifth of the biggest hundred companies in the world see biodiversity as an important issue. It's a start but it's not enough.

Fourthly – and you will notice that all of these necessities are interconnected – we will be able to

At the end of April this year there were already 500.000 new trees planted in Flanders in the '1 million trees campaign'. **Now I may announce you that we are very close to 750.000 trees.** On a global level ten **billion new trees** have been planted in the world with support of the United Nations (UNEP) program. On a European level we have built a network of 25.000 protected areas, almost 17% of the total surface of the European territory.

The regional landscape Kempen and Maasland is an excellent example of one of these protected areas. This landscape has made wise choices and has chosen a balanced integration of nature, heritage, landscape and tourism. Thus, they have shaped a strong local sense of ownership and participation. Everyone – entrepreneurs, farmers, ngo's, individuals, ... – could have their say and ultimately found satisfaction in the many qualities of this project.

It is by no means a coincidence that Ignace Schops, as a founder of the National Park Hoge Kempen and driving force behind the Regional Landscape, was given the title International Biodiversity Ambassador by IUCN. Ignace has the gift of persuasion. From NIMBY to PIMBY! (Not In My Backyard to Please In My Backyard!)

It's a transition we can all agree on. As the TEEB report states: "Natural systems can save on future municipal costs, boost local economies, enhance quality of life and help secure livelihoods."

I have **nothing** to add to that. Except maybe one thing; after this speech we will add a stone to the globe. I can only say: our dedication to the cause of biodiversity is solid as a rock.

Thank you for your attention.

Joke Schauvliege

Flemish minister of Environment, Nature & Culture