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Thirdly, socially. What may sound as a luxury for the rich, is certainly a necessity for the poor.

Fourthly, economically. Our lands, our seas deliver fish, raw materials, fresh water. Nature generates tourism and research. The National Park here is a good example: it developed here, in part because new employment had to be created when the coal mines were closing.

I do not look down on those who favor protection of nature for economic reasons, out of self-interest rather than for “*green idealism*”. The importance is that we do protect nature, more than the reasons why !

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here today to give “*a sign to the world*” that protecting the environment is a “must”. Actually, the European Union has been given that sign already for decades, through the development of sound environmental policies. Europe is protecting biodiversity since more than 30 years, long before an international framework was set up. Already in 1979 and later in 1992 we adopted crucial directives to protect vulnerable birds and other species. This had led to an impressive network of 26.000 protected areas in Europe, an area of more than 850.000 km² (square kilometer). This is almost one fifth (18%) of the EU’ s land area !

However, we see that halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 has not been possible. In March of this year, the Environment Council has defined new targets, endorsed by the European Council. Later this year, a strategy for concrete action will be presented by Commissioner Janez Potocnik.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Europe, we have the political will to protect the environment, we have the budgets to stimulate it and the laws to enforce it.

But results at global level are lacking. Harry Mulish- the well known Dutch novelist- said “*nature is different from art in the sense that there are no boundaries*”. Well, protecting nature can have no boundaries either. First of all, protecting nature and the environment is a task for all of us: politicians can draw the rules of the game, but citizens, companies and all of us have to act. We need strong partnerships with you, civil society. I am glad to see that today many nature conservation organizations are here us today.

Secondly, we need commitment at world level. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was a milestone. World leaders recognized for the first time that they have to act to protect the planet. But we are almost 20 years later now, and this effort in multilateralism has yet to deliver.

Thirdly, we need concrete action. Commitment is important, but not enough. Let me give an example in the field of climate change policy. The US indicated in Copenhagen to be committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but almost 1 year later, we see no action. At the other side, China is reluctant to sign up to internationally binding climate targets, but it does takes concrete actions. We have to recognize the value of this action.

Fourthly, we need resources. For the fight against climate change, developed countries have