

**European Parliament Intergroup
Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside
“Fitness Check of EU Nature Regulation:
For a Better Implementation?”**



PRESS RELEASE

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The **EU's Birds and Habitats Directives** are among the most important pieces of EU legislation for conservationists, farmers, land managers, hunters and all those with a stake in Europe's biodiversity. Together, these two directives form the basis for Europe's Natura 2000 network, which protects around 18% of the surface of the EU. Currently, the European Commission is engaged in a review exercise of these two Directives, a **ReFIT**, in order to determine whether or not they are both achieving their goals and whether they are compatible with modern countryside management.

Today, the **European Parliament Intergroup on “Biodiversity, Hunting, and Countryside”** met with land managers, policy makers and NGOs in order to discuss both the current review and the implementation of the Bird and Habitats Directives. Together, they agreed that open cooperation between the different stakeholders was the only way forward in order to achieve the best and most accepted implementations of the directives.

As the body representing the owners and managers of much of the European countryside, the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) has a close and practical understanding of the working of the two Nature Directives. The ELO therefore organised this event in order to have this extensive debate with MEPs and key stakeholders before the European Commission delivered the results of its ReFIT.

The 100 participants, speakers and delegates recognized that innovation, both in terms of practice and of knowledge, was much needed in order to make sure that the results of these European policies were visible in the field and achievable for Europe's land managers.

According to the **President of the Intergroup, MEP, Karl-Heinz Florenz**, "The preservation of biodiversity concerns and affects all of us. Many Europeans consider this a very important issue and expect us to succeed. Personally, I believe the implementation of EU nature legislation on national

and regional level should become better, more pragmatic and more flexible. We have to involve local stakeholders much more. Only by doing that we will be able to increase acceptance at regional level and stop the loss of biodiversity. It is for instance problematic that the construction of a simple garage can take many years and may require environmental impact assessments. I am therefore advocating for more flexibility at regional level and I believe the EU nature laws allow for such flexibility.”

Annie Schreijer-Pierik, MEP and Secretary General of the Intergroup, added “The fitness check of the EU Nature Legislation is of the utmost importance to the EU in general and to citizens of the Netherlands as a Member State in particular. The current implementation in policy fields such as hunting, agriculture and water management directly contradicts our EU goals in other policy fields. This can sometimes even cause contradictions between the goals of EU natural conservation policy itself! Therefore time has come to enable a more flexible implementation of EU nature legislation at the level of Member States and local authorities.”

Seger van Voorst tot Voorst, Director of the Hoge Veluwe park in Netherlands, said "The Birds and Habitats Directives are vital parts of our National Park De Hoge Veluwe. As someone who needs to be both a practical manager of nature and of policy, I want to ensure that all land managers are given the right tools and freedoms to write their own management plan and allow biodiversity to thrive.”

Philippe Plisson, Député of the Gironde department and President of the Study Group ‘Chasse et Territoires’ of the French National Assembly said “Our world is a place of violent conflicts that involve human lives. In this context, I find it regrettable that we devote so much energy for so many years to issues related to the implementation of the Birds Directive, which with a bit more of common sense, reason, and mutual consideration would be solved definitively. ”

Wouter Langhout, EU Nature Policy Officer, BirdLife commented : “The Birds and Habitats Directives together form a solid and mature legal framework for nature conservation in the EU, which has proven to work well when properly implemented. However, implementation and enforcement of the directives has been poor in many Member States, and remains chronically underfunded. As an outcome of the Fitness Check, we want the Commission to make sure that they bring a step change in implementation and enforcement across all Member States, and secure adequate funding for conservation efforts.”

Finally, **Konstantin Kostopolouos, Adviser of the ELO** stated “we believe that the necessary adjustments of the Nature Directives should take into account the results of the ReFIT and the state of nature report published by the European Commission last spring. Furthermore, any reform should be done in close consultation with those who manage Europe’s land. Rather than introducing new legislation, maximum use should be made of the flexibility provided by the existing Directives and by a better guidance as regards their implementation. Finally, we need better links with the main financial instruments of the European Union in order to create the much-needed outcomes”.

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About the Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside” of the European Parliament

The Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity, Countryside activities and Forestry Intergroup was created in 1985 and is one of the oldest and most active parliamentary platforms. It gathers MEPs from different political groups and various stakeholders promoting wildlife conservation, sustainable hunting and fishing, as well as the sustainable management of the countryside and cultural heritage.

The objectives of the Intergroup are to promote the role of hunting and other forms of sustainable use of wild species for biodiversity, wildlife management, rural development and forestry issues. Additionally, the Intergroup regularly focuses on cross cutting issues that affect socio-economic activities in rural areas and seek to build bridges between the civil society and decision makers.

In 2004, ELO (European Landowners’ Organization) joined the Intergroup as Co-Secretariat, bringing expertise in countryside-related topics.

About the ELO – European Landowners’ Organization

The European Landowners’ Organization is a unique federation of over 60 national associations from the 28 EU Member States and beyond, which represent the interests of landowners, land managers and rural entrepreneurs at the European political level. Independent and non-profit, the ELO stands for all rural entrepreneurs, promoting a prosperous countryside through the dynamism of private landownership and stewardship. www.elo.org