



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**

**Genk, 8 October 2010  
PCE 215/10**

**Remarks by  
Herman VAN ROMPUY,  
President of the European Council,  
at "A sign to the world" at Hoge Kempen National Park**

Dear Commissioner,  
Geachte Mevrouw de Minister,  
Geachte Mijnheer de Gedeputeerde en Burgemeester,  
Geachte directeur en team van het Regionaal Landschap,  
Dear presidents and members of different NGO's

Ladies and gentlemen,

A Latin expression says: "*Natura magister artis*". In my case, nature is indeed a "teacher of art". It is a major source of inspiration, the basis for the haiku poems I write. But nature also offers me a perspective of continuity, in a world where everything changes fast. At the end of an intensive working week in the city, it feels good to be here in this beautiful park, surrounded by almost 6.000 hectares of nature.

I am also proud to be here. The National Park Hoge Kempen is a pioneer in Belgium, and it is admired in the rest of the world. I want to express my respect to you, Ignace Schops, and to your whole team.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We actually have no excuse not to protect nature, we have many reasons to do it. Let me give some. First of all, there is certainly- as I explained it for myself – an emotional argument: nature plays a role in our mental well-being.

Second, ethically. We have the moral duty to take care of what we have received. Nature is not just something to admire from time to time. We have to adapt our lifestyles to limit the damage we cause.

**P R E S S**

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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 km<sup>2</sup> (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 committed in Copenhagen to jointly provide 100 billion dollar (or 72 billion Euro) in 2020. Also for biodiversity more resources will be needed. World leaders will have to reflect about new and innovative ways of finance. And the public and private sector will have to join efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is hope on the horizon. I believe that the economic crisis offers opportunities for environment, even although the picture seems mixed. On the one hand, we see that tough economic situations limit resources for environment policies. Certainly in developing countries, the fight against poverty is even higher on the agenda. And in Europe too, there is the argument that since the economic crisis has diminished the investment capacity of our companies, we cannot impose stronger climate targets now. On the other hand, we also see another logic or “*school of thought*” arising, a more promising one for environment. The economic crisis is now widely perceived as a moment to rethink traditional economic approaches. And to invest in “sustainable” or “green growth”. This offers major opportunities for the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Conference of the Parties in Nagoya starting in less than two weeks (18 -29 October) is important for nature and for the belief that multilateralism can still deliver here. Asian and European leaders expressed earlier this week in the ASEM meeting I chaired their willingness to reach a successful result. You can count on the EU for a constructive and ambitious position in Japan. The Commissioner and the Minister present here today will defend our interests. I am interested to listen together with you to their views.

Dear friends,

It happens from time to time that I end a speech with a haiku. Now that we are here to show that nature matters, now that we talk all afternoon about it, what else can I do than end with a haiku, or maybe two ?

*Stones in a globe for  
natural diversity  
a sign to the world.*

*From lots to little  
From riches to scarcity  
This spiral must stop.*

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