

Biodiversity

Main messages (+/- 1400 words)

- As people of faith, our conversation about biodiversity has a common starting point: that creation belongs to God, who made the world in love.
- The Genesis account of creation speaks of a God who made light, sky, land and sea, plants, fish, animals and birds, before making human beings in his image. The psalmist reminds us that “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” [Psalm 24:1].
- Looking at creation through the eyes of our shared faith as Christians: the very beginning of John’s Gospel tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and that through him all things were made. Paul writes to the Colossians that in Christ, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth; all things have been created through him and for him [Col.1:16].
- As people of faith gathered here in Taizé, we can say, therefore, that there is a theological imperative, rooted in our understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, to have regard for creation in all its diversity.
- There is a scientific imperative, too. Nature is the web of life that supports our existence and quality of life. Healthy, biodiverse ecosystems – from forests and meadows, rivers and wetlands to oceans and coastal ecosystems – maintain the processes that ensure human wellbeing.
- They keep soils fertile, store and recycle nutrients and water, provide habitats for pollinators and a rich pool of wild genetic resources. They purify the air we breathe and the water we drink.
- Nature is also our biggest ally in the fight against climate change. Ecosystems capture and store carbon in organic matter. They regulate the climate and act as buffers against natural disasters.
- Yet climate change and biodiversity loss pose existential risks. Especially for your generation and those who will come after you.
- If left unchecked, climate change and biodiversity loss will undermine our food security, health, peace and quality of life – here in the EU, but also across the whole planet.
- We are utterly dependent on the rest of creation and the benefits it provides. That is one reason why we must act now to reverse the decline of biodiversity.
- Creation is in crisis due to climate change. Species and ecosystems are in decline; resources are being overharvested; and land, water and air are polluted.
- These direct pressures on biodiversity are the result of deep drivers in the way we produce, consume, trade and manage our ecosystems.
- This brings me to a second theological imperative. Which is to challenge the very notion of the right of one part of humanity to use up the resources of the rest of creation, in the way we have done up until now.
- Green theologies draw our attention to the need to steward the good gifts that have been entrusted to us, rather than to dominate or exploit. In the creation narratives, there is no question of one part of creation having less value than another.
- When God tells Noah to go into the ark, he has to take two of all living creatures, not some. Not only the strong ones, the beautiful ones or the useful ones. All. And Psalm 104 speaks of the earth being “full of God’s creatures”, living things, “both large and small”. We see the value that God places on biodiversity.

- Faith-based organisations are increasingly stepping in to help safeguard and restore natural spaces that have been degraded by human activities. People of faith like you are becoming environmental influencers in their communities, championing nature-based solutions that are crucial to saving the ecosystems around us.
- We see this here in Taizé too, with this parcours today and your efforts to be part of a network of green churches.
- The EU is also determined to act on these challenges.
- In the European Green Deal, we have set out a vision for a future that is healthy and safe. One of the core initiatives of the Green Deal is the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030. It is the most powerful, ambitious and comprehensive biodiversity strategy the EU has ever had. It is our roadmap for getting nature back on track to recovery.
- It is also the basis on which we aim to lead by example at the international level, in the negotiations for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework that will be adopted at the end of this year, in Montreal, at the international biodiversity conference [COP15].
- As the European Commission, we are delivering on the actions to which we have committed in our biodiversity strategy.
- Together with the EU Member States, we are working to set up protected areas on one-third of EU land and sea areas.
- In 2021, we have published a new EU soil strategy to bring all soil ecosystems to a healthy condition by 2050.
- We have developed a new EU forest strategy, to help support forest biodiversity, sustainable economic development and the fight against climate change.
- We are supporting our Member States to improve learning for environmental sustainability, to equip people of all generations with the attitudes, skills and knowledge to engage in the green transition.
- Just two months ago, we have proposed new EU legislation on nature restoration: a new law to restore ecosystems. This is also contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and reduce disaster risk.
- A lot has been done to put in place a solid policy framework. But the challenges remain very real, and major work is still ahead.
- In the years ahead, our political commitments need to be matched by proper implementation on the ground. This means our objectives to protect and restore biodiversity need to be taken up in other policies. From agriculture, fisheries, maritime policy, transport and energy, to industry and urban infrastructure.
- All this, while, as we know, there are many other challenges we are facing: the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine, energy prices, and the impact on the cost of living.
- Given these pressures, it could feel as if the space for biodiversity protection and restoration is squeezed out by all the other situations we need to deal with.
- But there is no contradiction between the goals of the European Green Deal and our response to the current crisis. On the contrary, protecting our planet, investing massively in renewable energy, and putting sustainability at the heart of everything we do, hold the key to a more prosperous and secure future.
- And contact with nature is essential for our physical and mental health. It boosts the cognitive development of children. It is a source of cultural identity, spirituality and inspiration.
- And this brings me to our third theological imperative.

- At the end of the book of Job, when Job has lost everything and is without comfort, overwhelmed by the hopelessness of his situation: it is through creation that God speaks to him. God shows Job the bigger picture: the heights of the heavens, the depths of the oceans – but also young birds, and lotus plants. God is not remote from creation, but speaks through it, and this is the sense of perspective Job needs.
- In difficult times like we are facing now, we cannot afford to be so overwhelmed by the other challenges of life, that we disregard creation and the way God speaks to us through it.
- Just a few kilometres from here where we are in Taizé, we have the *bocage, forêts et milieu humide du bassin de la Grosne et du Clunisois*. It is a dense mosaic of meadows and forests. It is home to vulnerable species of bats and amphibians, such as yellow-bellied toads, that we simply do not see in other, more urbanised areas.
- These habitats are under threat from agricultural intensification, land abandonment and disturbance. Their preservation depends on a system of protection, management and restoration measures. They need the right kind of farming to maintain forest openings. They need biodiversity-friendly forestry and drainage to maintain small forest wetlands, and controlled tourism, speleology and mining to reduce disturbances to wildlife in the area's caves.
- This is why we are protecting this area through the EU Natura 2000 network. And it is why we have our biodiversity strategy. To improve the management of protected areas, such as this site, with clear conservation objectives and measures, monitoring their implementation in practice, and supporting local efforts with funding.
- Putting nature on a path to recovery requires protection and restoration.
- But it also needs deeper and wider, transformative changes.
- We need to reconcile apparently diverging values and interests, with a deeper understanding of our common dependency on the rest of creation. We need openness and courage for constant dialogue with all parts of the economy and society. With a sense of solidarity, responsibility and hope.
- Citizens – especially young people - have been very loud and clear, as we have seen in the recommendations coming from the Conference on the future of Europe. The very first proposal in the final report asks for “*safe, sustainable, just, climate-responsible, and affordable production of food, respecting sustainability principles, the environment, safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems, while ensuring food security*”.
- All of us play an essential role here, especially as people of faith. But particularly you, as young people. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed”. [cf. *Rom. 8:19*]. So this is our task, but it is your task too.
- I am grateful for this opportunity to engage with you and to hear about how you will become more involved in these issues, that are shaping the future of our planet, our common home. For your generation, and for generations to come.

Defensives

The EU has been hit by major crises: from the pandemic through natural disasters to Russia's war in Ukraine. How has that affected the ambition on the Green Deal and biodiversity?

- A lot has happened since we adopted the European Green Deal and the biodiversity strategy. The pandemic took a heavy toll. Numerous disasters have exposed our vulnerability to climate change. Russia's war in Ukraine has shocked the world.

- In the face of these crises, the European Green Deal is a beacon of change, a clear statement of our long-term goals. It is also what is going to help us be less dependent on Russia for the energy we need. It is a roadmap without an alternative, for delivering a future that is secure, healthy, and safe, for citizens today and tomorrow.

What are your ambitions for change at the global level?

- Together with our Member States, we are actively engaging in discussions with global partners to ensure an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework.
- We aim for ambitious and measurable goals and targets for 2030 and 2050, with strong mechanisms for the monitoring of implementation, and a solid package on financing for implementation.
- We will advocate a target to protect at least 30% of land and at least 30% of the global oceans by 2030 ('30x30' target). We will also push for an ambitious restoration target of 20% of all land area and 10% of the oceans and seas. And we will aim for targets focussing on direct and indirect drivers of loss.
- We want to see strong provisions on stakeholder involvement and rights of indigenous peoples, gender equality and intergenerational equity.

Current unsustainable use and management of natural resources deprives future generations of the value of nature. What is the EU doing to tackle this? How can young people engage more effectively in decisions that impact on their present and future?

- Inter-generational solidarity is at the core of sustainable development. I dare say that change is already happening – young people have a stronger voice, representation and, increasingly, impact on decision-making at different levels. A large part of this change is driven by youth movements themselves. You are better educated about environmental issues than any previous generation. Young people are aware and assertive of their place in society. Young activists and movements are making their voices heard at the local, national, European and global levels.
- As the Commission, we are constantly seeking new ways of engaging young people, creating and supporting youth. We have done this at a general level, for example in the context of the Conference on the future of Europe, but we also do it on very specific topics, such as pollinators.
- We are also working to develop citizenship values and skills for the green transition. This is why we are supporting our Member States on learning for environmental sustainability.
- This is all part of giving young people a stronger voice in decision-making. This is why I value the opportunity to engage with you today and to think about how the Commission can support more active engagement and impact of young people.

Background

Increasing EU ambitions for biodiversity at the global level

The EU and its Member States are aiming for an ambitious and transformative post-2020 global biodiversity framework that effectively addresses the ecological crisis. The COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) on 5-17 December 2022 in Montreal will aim to adopt this global framework.

The EU aims for a package that combines ambitious and measurable goals and targets for 2030 and 2050, with strong mechanisms for the monitoring of implementation and review of ambitions, and a solid package on financing from all sources. Goals and targets focussing on direct drivers of biodiversity loss must be complemented by goals and targets to address the indirect drivers of loss, notably the mainstreaming of biodiversity across all policies and sectors.

The Commission has announced that it will double international financing for biodiversity. This should be of significant help in coming to an agreement. The global package must cover the means of implementation in a broad sense and financing from all sources, including domestic financing and the benefits from the removal of harmful subsidies.

Implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030

The EU **biodiversity strategy** for 2030 was **adopted as a Communication in May 2020** as a **core element of the European Green Deal**. It is a comprehensive, ambitious and long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The strategy aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. It contains specific actions, commitments and targets to protect and restore ecosystems, and to ensure their sustainable management and enable transformative change. It is also the proposal for the EU's contribution to the upcoming international negotiations on the global post-2020 biodiversity framework, to be concluded at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on its fifteenth meeting (CBD COP15) to be held in December 2022 in Montreal. The targets are to be implemented by the Commission, Member States, and other relevant stakeholders by 2030.

It covers four main areas:

- nature protection, with the commitment to achieve, by 2030, **30% protection of EU land and sea, a third of which (10%) should be under “strict” protection** (i.e. essentially undisturbed by humans);
- nature restoration (under a nature restoration plan, as this part of the strategy is called), with targets and actions to (i) restore and sustainably manage the main ecosystem types such as marine, freshwater, soil, forest, urban ecosystems and (ii) addressing the main drivers of biodiversity loss in key economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry and energy generation. The **main 2030 commitments** are:
 - **50% reduction in the risk and use of chemical pesticides;**
 - **50% reduction in the loss of nutrients from fertilisers;**
 - **10% of agricultural area under high diversity landscape features;**
 - **25% of agricultural area under organic farming;**
 - **three billion new trees planted in the EU**, in full respect of ecological principles;
 - **restoration of at least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers;** and
 - **50% reduction in the number of red list species threatened by invasive alien species;**
- enabling measures, including governance, implementation and enforcement, financing, engaging the whole of the society, improving knowledge, education and skills; and
- EU action in the global context.

The EU has made significant progress in implementing the strategy since its adoption. About **25 out of over 100 commitments have been completed**. Two online tools have been developed, which track progress in implementing the strategy:

- an online actions tracker, providing up-to-date information on the state of implementation of the strategy's actions; and
- a targets dashboard, showing progress towards the quantified biodiversity targets set by the strategy, at EU level and in the Member States.

Key actions delivered so far include the **EU forest strategy**; the launch of a **MapMyTree counter to track progress towards the 3 billion tree commitment**; **guidance** documents to help Member States achieve the protected area commitments; the **EU soil strategy**; a proposal on **fighting deforestation**; the launch of a **new knowledge centre for biodiversity** and a **new Horizon Europe biodiversity**

partnership; a Council recommendation on education for environmental sustainability; a proposal for regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides, making the 50% reduction target legally binding; and, most importantly, a proposal for a new regulation on nature restoration (see below).

The implementation of the biodiversity strategy is also crucial for achieving the EU's climate objectives. The EU promotes this integrated approach and calls for an increased use of nature-based solutions to address climate change.

Ensuring adequate funding is crucial for the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, which calls to unlock at least EUR 20 billion/year for nature. The **EU will allocate at least 10% of the MFF to biodiversity in 2026 and 2027** (and 7.5% in 2024). To achieve this, the Commission and Member States must actively mainstream biodiversity in EU funds and programmes, and incentivise private actors to invest in nature restoration. The Commission will also double its external funding for biodiversity in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The Commission is finalising a new biodiversity methodology to track biodiversity expenditures in the MFF.

We must also ensure that the rest of our spending lives up to the 'do no harm' principle enshrined in the European Green Deal. Under the MFF, the Commission has developed tools to help Member States apply sustainability proofing across EU funds and programmes.

Proposal for an EU regulation on nature restoration

This ground-breaking legal proposal was adopted on 22 June 2022 by the Commission. It is the first comprehensive law of its kind, setting out legally binding targets for nature restoration. It includes an overarching objective (20%) for the EU as a whole, to which all Member States should contribute, and a number of binding targets across a broad range of ecosystems to be achieved in each Member State, coupled with an effective implementation framework.

The Commission is responding to the call from the European Parliament to step up efforts to restore ecosystems, by moving away from voluntary commitments. The proposal also responds to calls from citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Climate and biodiversity

Substantially increasing the protection and restoration of land and sea, and ensuring their sustainable use, are indispensable for achieving the EU and global climate objectives. Having a clear joint understanding of nature-based solutions is crucial for accelerating and scaling up implementation. It is key to avoid abuse of the concept and greenwashing.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework must also include a target that focuses on climate change as a major driver of biodiversity loss, encouraging adaptation and increasing resilience. Nature-based solutions can be addressed in this target.

Natura 2000

Natura 2000 represents the largest coordinated network of nature conservation areas in the world. It covers almost one-fifth of the EU's terrestrial land area and approximately 10% of Europe's seas. This network is the backbone of EU nature conservation, maintaining and improving the conservation status of targeted habitats and species. While the terrestrial component of Natura 2000 is almost complete, further marine sites are necessary. The Natura 2000 network currently comprises almost 28 000 sites, classified either as 'special protection areas' under the Birds Directive, or designated as 'special areas of conservation' (and 'sites of community importance') under the Habitats Directive.

The objectives of these two directives and the Natura 2000 network are: (i) to ensure the long-term protection, conservation and survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats; and (ii) to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of these species and habitats. This is achieved through the designation of the Natura 2000 sites, as well as through site-specific conservation objectives and measures.

France hosts 130 habitat types and 291 species covered under the Habitats Directive. It also hosts populations of 145 birds listed in the Birds Directive. By 2021, 12.9% of the national land area of France was covered by Natura 2000 (EU-27 average: 18.5%). There is still insufficient protection for migratory birds (e.g. turtle doves) and in marine coastal areas. The Commission is encouraging France to complete its Natura 2000 network, particularly the marine network. We have ongoing dialogue with France on this.

Due to the implementation of Natura 2000, we can see the following benefits in Member States: (i) the network of facilitators; (ii) the high number of sites with management plans; (iii) the way the effectiveness of the network is assessed; (iv) financing efforts; (v) the bottom-up approach; (vi) the involvement of local authorities and representatives of interest groups; (vii) the stability and expertise of different bodies working on biodiversity, who are based around the sites themselves. However, we are still encouraging Member States like France to address (i) lack of diversification of funding sources; (ii) the underuse of the LIFE programme; (iii) lack of management at sea; (iv) the low level of visibility of Natura 2000; and (v) there is not enough ecological connection between the sites.

We are encouraging Member States (like France) to do more to prevent damage caused by agricultural, forestry and fishing practices. An infringement case is open because there are no measures in France to prevent by-catch of marine species in Natura 2000 sites. Unwanted fish and other marine creatures are trapped by commercial fishing nets when fishing for a different species. We also see that the quality of the objectives and measures for sites is not always sufficient, and they are not always tailored to the ecological needs of the designated habitats and species, so there is still work to do.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and biodiversity/ the European Green Deal

Farmers play a vital role in preserving biodiversity. They are among the first to feel the consequences when biodiversity is lost, but also among the first to reap the benefits when it is restored. Biodiversity enables them to provide us with safe, sustainable, nutritious and affordable food and provides them with the income they need to thrive and develop.

Certain agricultural practices are a key driver of biodiversity decline. This is why the CAP must contribute both to reducing negative impacts on the environment and climate, including biodiversity, and to improving the state of the environment and nature.

We will achieve this through a mix of mandatory and voluntary measures for farmers in all Member States. Mandatory measures include requirements to ensure the protection of soil, water and biodiversity and to safeguard the management of agricultural land in a way that maintains good agricultural and environmental conditions. Voluntary measures support and incentivise farmers actively to contribute to improving water, soil and air quality, as well as the protection of natural habitats and plant and animal species, both under conventional and organic farming. There is support for investments that benefit natural resources, and for knowledge exchange or partnerships, to raise awareness and build the skills needed to protect biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

The Commission is currently in discussions with Member States to ensure that the new CAP, which comes into force in January 2023, sufficiently reflects a higher level of environmental ambition compared to previous years, that measures and requirements are targeted to the specific environmental challenges in each Member State, and that sufficient budget is available to support farmers in the transition to sustainable practices.

Impact of global food security concerns following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – changes to EU agricultural policies and link to biodiversity

The Commission has responded with several measures, including using the agricultural crisis reserve to alleviate difficulties for the most affected European farmers. We have supported farmers to continue production and resume grain exports. Work on the “Solidarity lanes” is starting to bring results.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered a sharp commodity price surge and has an impact on the supply and demand for agricultural products at global level. In particular,

global wheat output is at risk both from the supply shock stemming from the size of Ukraine's and Russia's share in wheat markets and from the shock in input costs, especially in natural gas, nitrogen fertiliser and oxygen.

Following a request from EU Member States, **on 22 July 2022 the Commission proposed a temporary short-term derogation from rules on crop rotation and maintenance of non-productive features on arable land**. The impact of such measure will depend on the choice made by Member States and farmers, but it will maximise the EU's production capacity for cereals aimed for food products. It is estimated to put back 1.5 million hectares in production compared to today. Every tonne of cereals produced in the EU will help to increase food security worldwide. The Commission proposal will be sent to EU Member States before it is formally adopted.

Given the importance of standards on good agricultural and environmental conditions for preserving soil potential and improving on-farm biodiversity, as part of the long-term sustainability of the sector and to maintain the food production potential, the derogation is temporary, limited to claim year 2023, and restricted to what is strictly necessary to address the global food security concerns arising from Russian military aggression against Ukraine. It therefore excludes the planting of crops which are typically used for feeding animals (maize and soya).

The Commission's proposal is a result of **careful balancing** between global food availability and affordability on the one hand, and protection of biodiversity and soil quality on the other. The Commission remains **fully committed to the Green Deal**. The proposal envisages that Member States who make use of the derogations shall promote eco-schemes and agri-environmental measures programmed in their CAP strategic plans. The long-term sustainability of our food system is fundamental for food security. Even though we are in an extraordinary situation with regard to food security, we need to continue the transition to a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector in line with the farm to fork and biodiversity strategies, and the nature restoration law.

Contacts – briefing contribution: