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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital
- Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Presidency on the above subject, which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Environment Council meeting on 17 December 2014.

Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital

- Information from the Presidency -

The informal meeting of the Nature & Biodiversity Directors of the European Union, hosted by the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, was held on 25 and 26 November at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome.

The EU Nature & Biodiversity Directors agreed to support the “Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital”, an instrument aimed at increasing awareness of the important synergies between Natural and Cultural Capitals in Europe, as well as at enhancing the integration of biodiversity concerns into sectoral policies, also in order to develop a greener economy.

To achieve these objectives, the Charter identifies the following actions:

- improve the knowledge of Natural Capital and enhance the accessibility of data;
- support the full implementation of EU Nature legislation;
- enhance the contribution of Natura 2000 to the conservation and restoration of natural and cultural capitals;
- promote efficient investments of public and private sector;
- maintain and restore healthy and productive ecosystems;
- identify and take into account stocks and flows of ecosystem goods and services;
- integrate the values of natural and cultural capital into sectoral policies.

The text of the “Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital” is reproduced in the Annex.

Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital

Foreword

The Charter of Rome is a bridging initiative on the interrelations and interactions between Natural and Cultural Capital. It aims at strengthening nature and biodiversity policy, mainstreaming it into other policies related to the territory and the economy.

The current economic crisis in many Countries calls for rethinking economic policies and the promotion of measures aiming at supporting long-term and sustainable growth and jobs to be implemented at all governance levels, from EU to national and regional.

The EU Strategy 2020 on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is a key step towards the establishment of a renewed European governance, centred on the needs of society and of the whole planet, as well as to the close links between economic, social and environmental policies, including jobs ¹.

The European Commission put all of these issues at the centre of a number of initiatives to relaunch growth and jobs in the EU, such as the “Green Employment Initiative: Tapping into the job creation potential of the green economy” ².

Among the potential instruments and initiatives to be implemented on the promotion of green jobs, some key strategic ones are those supporting investments on the restoration and conservation of Natural Capital and on the development of synergies between Natural and Cultural Capital, such as the Green Infrastructure Strategy ³. The overall goal is to tap into both of these Capitals to generate economic benefits, employment opportunities, and support key sectors such as tourism.

¹ 7110/10 - COM(2010) 2020 final.

² 11752/14 - COM(2014) 446 final.

³ 9436/13 - COM(2013) 249 final.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 ⁴ aims at protection of biodiversity for its intrinsic value and refers to the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems and their services and contributes, among other, to the EU's sustainable growth objectives and to the mitigation and adaptation to climate change, while promoting economic, territorial and social cohesion and safeguarding the EU's cultural heritage. The Strategy also emphasizes that the full implementation of EU nature legislation is key to conserving and restoring biodiversity, and hence Natural and Cultural Capital.

The EU Birds and Habitat Directives (2009/147/EC; 92/43/EEC) aim to meet “*ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic and recreational ones*” and “*to promote the maintenance of biodiversity, taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements, ... making a contribution to the general objective of sustainable development; whereas the maintenance of such biodiversity may in certain cases require the maintenance, or indeed the encouragement, of human activities*”.

The European Natural Capital is intimately linked to the cultural dimension and history of the EU. Taking into account Natural and Cultural Capital assets together in decision making is essential in the EU given the human influence on ecosystems. We all want to ensure that this influence remains positive and sustainable.

The Charter of Rome on Natural and Cultural Capital seeks to achieve the long-term vision of the EU 7th Environmental Action Plan: in 2050, we live well, within the planet's ecological limits. The Charter of Rome aims at providing support for strengthening implementation of Birds and Habitat Directives and for the protection, conservation and enhancement of Natural Capital and to further develop synergies with Cultural Capital in the European Union and in its Member States.

⁴ 9658/11 - COM(2011) 244 final.

NATURAL CAPITAL

1. Improve the knowledge of Natural Capital

Our natural environment is important because it provides people with goods and services that are vital for wellbeing and prosperity. Natural Capital is the stocks of natural assets that provide these benefits. Good knowledge of the biodiversity and ecosystems that make up these stocks is essential.

This knowledge base should be made more accessible to citizens and decision makers to ensure that policy continues to build on a sound understanding of the state and dynamics of the environment.

To address this challenge we need to:

- Promote and Support scientific knowledge on Natural Capital at the international, national, and local levels including research on the societal benefits;
- Make information and quality data sets and systems available to research and decision making, either in public and private sectors;
- Map, assess, monitor, evaluate, plan and manage ecosystems and their services.

2. Invest in Natural Capital

Investment in Natural Capital supports smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. To address this challenge we need to:

- Reduce environmentally harmful subsidies and provide economic and financial incentives to support Natural Capital investments (cost/effectiveness) in the public and private sector;
- Implement methodologies for accounting for Natural Capital stocks and flows, including economic flows aimed at the enhancement of Natural Capital;
- Increase knowledge, communication and information to all on the overall benefits of ecosystems;
- Include Natural Capital and ecosystem approaches into all territorial decisions, spatial planning and management.

3. Secure the functionality of natural and healthy ecosystems

Healthy and resilient ecosystems can provide society with a full range of economically valuable goods and services.

To address this challenge we need to:

- Strengthening implementation of the EU nature legislation by appropriate conservation and management of habitats and species and the contribution of Natura 2000 network in protecting Natural and Cultural Capitals;
- Make use of good knowledge and data on biodiversity, ecosystems, their structures and functions, and on links with ecosystem services and associated benefits;
- Maintain, restore and enhance ecosystem capacities to provide a range of goods and services and associated benefits;
- Explore Natural Capital as a solution to major challenges such as those related to urban areas, climate change and adaptation, agriculture and soil, forestry, hydrogeological risks, tourism and recreation.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

4. Link Natural and Cultural Capitals

Human influence on European ecosystems has been constant and widespread throughout History. The Cultural Capital includes the capacity of human populations to deal with the Natural Capital.

The Cultural Capital is related to three main features of individual people and groups in each given and specific geographical and socio-economic context: - knowledge, including the traditional and scientific dimensions; - capacities as the way knowledge is retained, increased, elaborated and developed; - practices corresponding to all activities producing tangible and intangible flows of goods and services.

Natural and Cultural Capitals are dynamics and synergies should be strengthened providing goods and services with different degrees of contribution from each capital, e.g. forest wild fruits vs. arable irrigated crops.

To maintain a positive link between Cultural and Natural Capitals we need to:

- Take into account social and cultural dimension of ecosystem management;
- Promote locally-adapted knowledge, capacities and activities with positive impacts on Natural Capital;
- Link benefits, goods and services from ecosystems (supply) with the patterns of culture, society and economy (demand).

5. Create synergies among green infrastructure, urban and rural areas

Species, habitats, ecosystems, land units and infrastructures are part of a multifunctional and interconnected spatial structure of natural and semi-natural areas.

Green infrastructure connects natural and semi-natural areas with urban and rural areas. They are drivers for transition to a green economy and have many natural, cultural, social and economic connections.

To address this challenge we need to:

- Identify the inter-connections and multi-functionality of natural and semi-natural areas.
- Improve the synergies between natural and semi-natural areas (including protected areas), green infrastructure, urban and rural areas;
- Map, assess, monitor, evaluate, plan and manage the territorial links between natural and semi-natural areas, green infrastructure, urban and rural areas;
- Consider green infrastructure as a cost-effective alternative or complementary measure to 'grey infrastructure' in support of both nature and people.

CONCLUSIONS

In line with the EU nature and biodiversity strategies, relevant environmental directives and overall policies, a strong interconnection between Natural and Cultural Capital assets, and between these assets and activities with a territorial dimension are fundamental for biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems in Europe, in particular in the context of the current financial and economic crisis.

Further investigation on the linkage among Natural and Cultural Capital needs to be put in place, with special reference on those knowledge, capacities and activities that contribute to sustainable management of biodiversity.

Mainstreaming ecosystems and their services into strategies, planning, management and practices of public and private actors is an important way, to achieve key targets and for the development of a sound green economy, that need to be implemented at EU, national and regional level, starting from the opportunity provided within the financial framework 2014-2020.

In order to achieve these objectives the EU and its Member States will need to: - improve the knowledge of biodiversity and Natural Capital and data availability; - pursue the full implementation of the EU nature legislation, enhance the contribution of Natura 2000 to the conservation and restoration of Natural and Cultural Capitals; - promote efficient green investments from the public and private sectors; - maintain and restore healthy and productive ecosystems; - identify and account for stocks of ecosystems and flows of ecosystem goods and services, as well as - integrate Natural and Cultural Capital values in sectoral policies.
