



The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss

Reunion Island, 07-11 July 2008

An Official Event under the French Presidency of the European Union

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General context and challenges

The European Union counts 7 Outermost Regions (ORs) as integral elements of its territory and is furthermore closely associated with 20 Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). These 27 entities form a unique network distributed across all the world's oceans.

The ORs and OCTs harbour an extraordinary wealth of biological diversity, which represents a globally important natural heritage and is at the same time an essential dimension of their social, cultural and economic potential. This heritage has for a long time faced a number of severe threats including the destruction of habitats, the rapid spread of non-indigenous species and the pollution of the natural environment. These threats are now further compounded by the effects of climate change to which the ORs and OCTs tend to be particularly vulnerable. Under the coordination of IUCN, a scientific review of these risk factors is currently being undertaken that will be published, in French and English, prior to the Reunion conference.

In this context, the ORs and OCTs deserve the attention of the entire European Union. They are inhabited by European citizens and are located in areas of global ecological importance. Moreover, many of them neighbour countries - ACP countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) - with which the Union closely cooperates and which face many of the same ecological challenges. The ORs and OCTs therefore provide the European Union with an opportunity to both develop its sustainable development policies and to reinforce its global and regional contribution to environmental issues. With the support of Europe, the ORs and OCTs can become centres of excellence in research on sustainable development, the sustainable conservation of biodiversity, the development of renewable energy sources and the adaptation to climate change.

Building on existing policies and commitments, the overall objective of this conference is to initiate a process leading to a new dimension in European Union environment policy, based around the ORs and OCTs and their cooperation with the neighbouring ACP countries and SIDS.



*ORs : Azores • Canary Islands • French Guiana • Guadeloupe • Madeira • Martinique • Reunion Island •
OCTs : Anguilla • Aruba • Bermuda • British Antarctic Territory (BAT) • British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) • British Virgin Islands • Cayman Islands • Falkland Islands • French Polynesia • French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF) • Greenland • Mayotte • Montserrat • Netherlands Antilles • New Caledonia • Pitcairn Islands • Saint Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Ascension Island • Saint-Pierre and Miquelon • South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands • Turks and Caicos Islands • Wallis and Futuna*

PARTICIPANTS

Along with a number of representatives from Reunion Island, the conference will welcome around 350 participants from around Europe and the world. These will include politicians, experts and members of civil society representing European, national, regional and local levels. More specifically, delegates will represent:

- all the ORs and OCTs (elected representatives and officials concerned),
- EU member states and their relevant national agencies (Ministers and officials concerned),
- the European Commission (Commissioners and officials concerned),
- the European Parliament (Members concerned),
- certain Small Island Developing States (Ministers),
- relevant regional and international organisations,
- relevant scientific institutions,
- civil society, including at least one NGO for each OR and OCT, as far as possible.

The conference will close with a high-level day during which ministers and other decision-makers will come together in order to make political commitments.

EXISTING POLICIES AND COMMITMENTS

The conference will build on:

- a. the Green Paper “Adaptation to Climate Change in Europe - Options for EU Action” adopted by the European Commission in June 2007;
- b. the European Commission Communication “Halting the Loss of Biodiversity by 2010 - and Beyond” of 22 May 2006;
- c. the final Declaration of the OCTs at the 2006 OCT-EU Forum in Nuuk, in which they requested the reinforcement of their cooperation with the European Union in terms of adaptation to climate change and management of the oceans and biodiversity;
- d. the “overseas entities” part of the 2006 Message from Paris on “Integrating biodiversity into European development cooperation”, approved in December 2006 under the Finnish Presidency by the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council;
- e. the resolution on “European Policy and Biodiversity in Overseas Territories”, adopted in 2004 by the 4th World Conservation Congress in Bangkok.

OBJECTIVES

- A. Reinforce awareness amongst the European institutions, the EU Member States, the relevant regional and global institutions and the media about the unique natural heritage of the EU's overseas entities, the threats that this heritage faces and the opportunities it can present;
- B. Enhance the effectiveness of action and cooperation between the EU, the Member States and the ORs and the OCTs in terms of adaptation to climate change, a model energy policy as well as the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity;
- C. Enhance regional cooperation between the ORs, the OCTs as well as their neighbours, and strengthen the voice of the ORs and OCTs on the international environmental scene in concert with the European Union and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 1. Propose a Programme of Action to the European Union, the relevant member states and the ORs and OCTs on biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation, aimed at:**
 - a. promoting knowledge about and strengthening the implementation of already existing policies and financial mechanisms;
 - b. while respecting the different competences of the ORs, the OCTs, the Member States and the EU, ensuring that the ORs and OCTs are strongly taken into account in the following policies:
 - the Communication on adaptation to climate change being prepared by the European Commission,
 - the European Strategy on invasive species currently being prepared,
 - the European Maritime policy and the European Marine Strategy,
 - the EU Water Framework Directive.
 - c. enhancing the protection and sustainable management of threatened species and habitats of the ORs and OCTs, in particular to strengthen their resilience in the face of climate change;
 - d. increasing the financial resources allocated to biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation in the ORs and OCTs, particularly through the creation of sustainable financing mechanisms and a small-grants scheme;
 - e. ensuring that the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss are adequately integrated into the future Strategy for the Outermost Regions and Green Paper on the renewal of the association of the OCTs with the EU;
 - f. ensuring that the assets and opportunities provided by the ORs and OCTs in relation to the development and utilisation of renewable energies are effectively exploited by the relevant European strategies and financial mechanisms;
 - g. in terms of scientific research:
 - conducting in-depth research to increase understanding about the impacts of climate change and the effective management of ecosystems in the ORs and OCTs,
 - converting the 27 ORs and OCTs into key assets in European research on biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management, climate change adaptation and renewable energies.

- 2. Connect the stakeholders concerned with the environmental challenges in the ORs and OCTs:**
 - a. put in place a permanent working group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the programme of action, bringing together the European Commission, the EU member states, the authorities in the ORs and OCTs, regional organisations, relevant experts and civil society;
 - b. promote the launch of an initiative to fight Invasive Alien Species in all the European overseas entities;
 - c. strengthen the NET-Biome Initiative on “Networking tropical and subtropical Biodiversity research in the ORs and OCTs in support of sustainable development” and explore opportunities for integrating new partners in the future;
 - d. promote the creation of a new ERANET following the NET-Biome model, focused on the polar and sub-polar OCTs and on other relevant partners.

- 3. Reinforce regional and global cooperation on environmental challenges between the European Union, its Member States, the ORs and OCTs, as well as Small Island Developing States:**
 - a. reinforce cooperation on environmental issues in the regions where ORs and OCTs are located: the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the Guyana Shield, the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the Southern Ocean and Macaronesia;
 - b. strengthen the participation of the ORs and OCTs in global initiatives focusing on the environmental challenges faced by islands;
 - c. enhance the involvement of ORs and OCTs and allow their joint mobilisation with the EU and SIDS in environmental conventions and international negotiations on biodiversity and climate change.