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**THE EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE**

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Dear participants,

I am honoured to open this important event and I would like to extend a warm thank you to Mrs. Veronique Mathieu for inviting me and for taking this initiative today to let us discuss upon the importance of biodiversity in European Agriculture.

I would like to address some main issues about the role of agriculture policy in supporting European biodiversity.

First of all, I want to underline that around half the EU's land is farmed and agricultural land management has been a positive force for the development of the rich variety of European landscapes and habitats.

Many valuable habitats in Europe are maintained by extensive farming, but, at the same time, inappropriate agricultural practices and land use can also have an adverse impact on natural resources.

Second, biodiversity is a public good and the future Common Agricultural Policy must address, as much as possible, the expectations of the European Union's citizens.

European citizens want the EU to have a competitive agriculture but they also want an agricultural sector that makes better, more efficient use of natural resources.

Third, preserving biodiversity is an objective that cannot be reached independently from economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Biodiversity are under threat not only from intensive agriculture but also and foremost from depopulation and land abandonment.

In the future CAP we have to find the right balance between the economic, environment and social dimensions, and if this is met, then intervention through public financial support is entirely justified.

We have to support, in general, the potential of farming and forestry in terms of CO2 sequestration, improvement in water use efficiency and biodiversity conservation.

The Common Agricultural Policy already offers instruments that allow for a rational use of natural resources.

All the social and environmental values included in the concept of multifunctionality (food safety, animal welfare, biodiversity, rural landscape, environmental protection, biodiversity etc.) translated into the production of goods and services, have gradually increased in importance in the history of CAP reforms

The post 2013 CAP will be more close to the needs of our citizens and it will be more oriented to support the provision of public goods than now.

In a new era in which the agriculture sector will need to produce more and pollute less we must have in mind, however, that only with a system of competitive and efficient farms is it possible to increase the production capacity of EU agriculture and, at the same time, enhance the level of public services linked to agricultural land use management.