

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

**Date:** October 27,2020

**Report Number:** E42020-0079

**Report Name:** EU Member States Adopt Their Position on the Biodiversity Strategy

**Country:** European Union

**Post:** Brussels USEU

**Report Category:** Agriculture in the News, Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security

**Prepared By:** Sophie Bolla

**Approved By:** Lisa Allen

**Report Highlights:**

On October 23, 2020, the EU Ministers for Environment adopted the Council Conclusions on the Biodiversity Strategy. The Conclusions are the official position of the Member States on the Biodiversity Strategy. It lays down the position of the Council on different initiatives listed in the Strategy such as plant protection products, protected areas in the EU and biotechnologies. Separately, Hungary published an official statement to express its discontent that some of the targets seem impossible to achieve.

On October 23, 2020, the 27 EU Ministers of Environment met in the ENVIRONMENT Council and adopted the [Council Conclusions on the Biodiversity Strategy](#). This document is the official position of the Member States on the Strategy<sup>1</sup>.

With these Conclusions, the Council endorsed the objectives of the Commission's Strategy. Commenting on the adoption of the text, Svenja Schulze, the German Minister for the Environment, who was chairing the meeting, stated that "biodiversity is our life insurance: it supplies clean air and water, food, building material and clothing. It creates jobs and livelihoods. With the destruction of nature there is also the risk of disease outbreaks and pandemics."

While the Member States welcomed the Strategy, they also called on the Commission to provide thorough impact assessments for any legislative proposals that it may put forward, including an assessment of the subsidiarity<sup>2</sup> and proportionality of the proposed measures and, if need be, an assessment of compensation and its financeability.

The Environment Council also highlighted the international aspect of the Biodiversity Strategy, noting that the EU should lead by example. The Council stated that biodiversity is a core priority of the EU's external action. Therefore, it called on the Commission to scale up outreach on biodiversity as part of a coherent 'EU Green Deal diplomacy' in diverse fora such as United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation.

In its Conclusions, the Council commented on some of the future proposals laid down in the Biodiversity Strategy such as plant protection products and new protected areas, which are outlined below.

The European Commission is currently drafting individual legislative and non-legislative proposals, most of which are expected to be published between 2021 and 2022. This official Council position gives an indication of where the Member States may stand on these forthcoming proposals.

### ***Plant Protection Products***

The Council welcomed the targets put forward by the European Commission in the Strategy of reducing by 50 percent overall the use and risk from chemical pesticides as well as the reduction by 50 percent of the use of the most hazardous pesticides by 2030<sup>3</sup>. However, the Council stressed that it is necessary for the Commission to come up with clear definitions, taking into account the EU's international obligations. The Council also stressed that national specificities as well as measures already taken in Member States have to be taken into account with regard to the accomplishment of the EU-level targets.

---

<sup>1</sup> More information about the Biodiversity Strategy can be found in GAIN Report '[Green Deal Strategies for the EU Agri-Food Sector Present a Politically Ambitious Policy Roadmap](#)'.

<sup>2</sup> In EU law, the subsidiarity principle aims to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen. Except in cases where the EU has exclusive competence, action at European level should not be taken unless it is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level..

<sup>3</sup> More information on the initiatives for plant protection products in the F2F can be found in GAIN Report '[Pesticides Initiatives in the EU Farm to Fork Strategy](#)'.

One Member State, Hungary, decided to publish [a statement](#) accompanying the Conclusions to express its disagreement with the targets proposed by the Commission. Hungary stated that “the fulfilment of some of the targets put forward by the European Commission seems impossible to achieve or may place a disproportionate burden at Member State level. We consider especially that the 50 percent decrease in the overall use of chemical pesticides and the 25 percent organic farming target are unfulfillable within the timeframe of the strategy at Member State level.”

### ***Protected Areas***

One of the key proposals of the Biodiversity Strategy is to protect a minimum of 30 percent of the EU’s land area and 30 percent of its sea area, one third of which strictly protected. The Council agreed with this objective but emphasized that there is a need for clear definitions and criteria for the designation of additional protected areas as well as a definition of ‘strict protection’. The Council also called for clear definitions on conservation objectives and measures.

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.