

The EU biodiversity strategy- welfare and economics- for sustainable development.

On the 20th of May 2020 the European Commission presented the document *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives*¹, outlining the actions that will be fostered during the 2020-2030 ten-year period to encourage the protection and revitalization of biodiversity throughout the European Union. The aim of the document- and of the policy- is twofold: on one hand, it puts forward a number of commitments and a framework for the development of the European economy in the post-COVID phase and in the next crucial ten years; on the other hand, it aims to lay the foundations for Europe, enabling it to take a “leading role on a worldwide scale in tackling the global biodiversity crisis”. The objectives reflect the policy of the President Ursula van der Leyen, who is committed to consolidating the role of the European Union as an economic and political key player in sustainable development at an international level.

The Commission’s approach consolidates the one followed in documents prior to the *Biodiversity Strategy*: in the *Farm to Fork Strategy*, in the *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)* and generally speaking, in specifying the *European Green Deal*, the Commission states that inaction and conservatism are simply not feasible. The failure to face the challenges of climate change, the depletion of natural resources and the loss of biodiversity- problems clearly highlighted in the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* – will have devastating effects on the future of Europe and the Earth. In order to address them, the European Commission has set ten-year objectives, broken down into macro-themes: promoting more protected areas, according to a plan that sees European countries collaborating and cooperating together; the creation of a new governance model, which provides for greater commitment in enforcing EU legislation at local level and is also aimed at promoting the participation of companies in safeguarding activities, and finally, the consolidation of the political role of the Union at a global level- the Commission aims to play a leading role in the fight for the protection of biodiversity and the fostering of good practices.

What are the strategies the Commission identifies in order to achieve its objectives? The *EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030* is clear: “Biodiversity is essential for life. Our planet and economy depend on it. When nature is in good health, it protects, thrives and yields. Biodiversity and the ecosystems ensure that we have food, health, medicines, raw materials, leisure activities and welfare. They filter water and air, they contribute to climate balance, transform waste into new resources, pollinate and fertilize crops and much more besides. Nature also provides and supplies businesses: half of the world’s GDP, 40,000 billion Euro, derives from nature.²”.

These words reflect the European Commission’s definition of the value of biodiversity in the general European Union vision: and the paragraph uses, at the beginning and at the end, a powerful pairing, which defines the theoretical and operational framework in which Europe places the safeguarding of biodiversity. On one hand, “biodiversity is essential for life”: not simply well-being and human lives, but the very existence of life on earth, with a utilitarian, anthropocentric approach and take on the definition, in which the value of nature results in essential resources for flora and fauna, and, above

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030_it

² EC, *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Bringing nature back into our lives - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the regions*, Bruxelles, European Commission, 2020.

all for mankind. On the other hand, the economy: half of the world's GDP derives from nature, an estimated 40,000 billion Euro. The “anthropocentric dimensioning” therefore acquires a clear calculation, making the “economic impact” of nature on the European system tangible and quantifiable.

The anthropocentric approach is used to create a framework of tangible values and to “redeem” an economic-financial lexicon to defend biodiversity, beneficial to understand the dimension of the problem. Once the value deriving from nature is set at 40,000 billion Euro, it is much easier-and takes on a more serious air-to understand exactly what an annual loss of anywhere between 3.5 and 18.5 billion Euro in ecosystem services actually means³.

Safeguarding biodiversity and the environment can lead to benefits and well being to the European Community- meant as a whole, all of its inhabitants collectively. A natural world under attack, underlines the Commission, can easily be a source of pandemics and microbiological dangers, it is necessary to work on restoring the balance between human living and the natural environment. The economic, social and political knock-on effects of COVID-19 are most certainly not to be minimized, and the Commission quite rightly takes them into account: attention is given to the issue of fairness in the post-pandemic development phase, understood both in terms of complying to the limits of natural resource exploitation as well as the protection of human rights. In the documents attached to the *EU Strategy* there are direct references to *Just transition*, the investment package for an inclusive economy, created by the European Union to facilitate the transition towards the *green economy*, supporting the regions most affected-and which run the greatest risk in terms of job losses, and high redevelopment and regeneration costs. The Commission aims for a process of transformation that involves the entire European community, so there are countless references to the fact that nature and biodiversity go beyond the borders of countries: they are indeed international issues.

The involvement of the corporate world is one of the fundamental factors of the *Biodiversity Strategy 2030*. The economic and anthropocentric calculation of the strategy, in this way, contributes to giving an understandable, qualifiable and quantifiable dimension to the business and corporate world and essentially consolidates the logical and strategical bond with the European Green Deal. The actions fostered by the Commission include:

- assessing the *Non-Financial Reporting Directive* (which was introduced in Italy as “Dichiarazione Non Finanziaria” Legislative Decree 254/2016), to check and analyse the quality and range of the data/results;
- developing a European network – European Business for Biodiversity – which connects all those businesses committed to fostering biodiversity;
- putting into practice the system used for checking the impact its programmes have on biodiversity – the *biodiversity proofing framework* – to be aligned with the *Strategy*.

The three aforementioned actions play an essential role in creating a common project with *non-state actors*, which in recent years have acquired-or better, have been recognized with having- a key role in the success of development and sustainability projects⁴. The Commission has developed a system

³ OECD, *Biodiversity: Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action.*, Paris, Organization for Economic and Cultural Development, 2019 ; EC, *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Bringing nature back into our lives - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the regions*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ Sander CHAN, Idil BORAN, Harro VAN ASSELT, Gabriela IACOBUTA, Patrick TOUSSAINT et Geoffrey WAMBUGU, « Promises and risks of nonstate action in climate and sustainability governance », *WIREs Climate Change*, 10-3, 2019,

in which the *Biodiversity Strategy*, the *Farm to Fork Strategy*, the *Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy* and more generally speaking the actions revolving around the European Green Deal are all part : this ecosystem, made up of policies, structural interventions and guidelines, has the general objective of fostering cooperation and collaboration with the business, entrepreneurial and financial world. The three actions outlined above (assessing the *Non-Financial Reporting Directive*; developing a European network; putting into practice the *biodiversity proofing framework*) are needed so as to unite economic and financial activities in the challenge for sustainability, considering them fundamental for sustenance, replicability and for the localization of European policies and programmes. It is a fair consideration, which lays the foundations for a change in model and for a redefinition of roles in the fight against climate change, the depletion of natural resources and in the safeguarding of biodiversity.

The European Commission, by creating the system and in establishing an alliance between the EU and the economic-financial world sets an important challenge. First and foremost, with itself- as the writers of the document and many observers admit- to prove their ability to implement their own directives and policies on a national and international scale. The *Conference of Parties 15* of the **Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD, in October, will be the first** important spotlight under which the European commitment and the political ability of the Union to be the bearer of more incisive global action, will be tested.