



“By sharing our experiences the European Overseas can make a significant contribution to the COP21 process and future commitments”

Maurice Ponga Member of the European Parliament

EU decision-makers and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to discuss the pivotal role of European Overseas and the significance they play in protecting biodiversity, and how EU- European Overseas partnerships are strategic as nature based solutions have been proven to be cost-efficient and should be promoted at the COP21. From the tropics to the poles European Overseas are home to more diverse biodiversity and ecosystems than continental EU, and they are particularly vulnerable to human induced and natural impacts including climate change.

One year after the Message from Guadeloupe Island was adopted and a few weeks ahead of UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris, Maurice Ponga MEP gathered Politicians, experts and stakeholders on 20 October to take stock of on-going efforts and initiatives in the Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and discuss the importance of promoting partnerships.

ORs and OCTs are already feeling the effects of climate change at economic, social and environmental levels. Being mostly islands they are fragmented and isolated as well as very vulnerable to external threats and pressures. However they are already showcasing their potential for innovative solutions. It was underlined by George Pau-Langevin, French Minister of Overseas that the European Overseas *“have a multitude of local initiatives being implemented with regards to innovative technologies, renewable energy, and it is imperative that these actions be promoted and highlighted at COP21”*. Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director *“Mainstreaming Adaptation and Low Carbon Technology”*, DG Climate Action pointed out as well that European Overseas can *“play a pivotal role in demonstrating that resilience and adaptation must and can be built successfully”*.

In the run up to Paris it was highlighted that COP21 must provide a voice for the European Overseas and that tools and mechanisms developed in these areas can be a good source of inspiration.

The global importance of the European Overseas’ terrestrial and marine biodiversity was stressed by all participants and Carole Martinez, Senior coordinator of the IUCN EU Overseas and regional Seas programme, stressed the fact that *“European Overseas are fundamental actors and allies regarding global challenges, this reality is particularly true for meeting the international, European and national targets for biodiversity conservation”*. In the light of the EU Biodiversity strategy mid-term review, the implementation of the Guadeloupe Message is emphasised.

The key role of oceans was particularly raised as OCT and ORs provide to the European Union and Members States the largest marine domain in the world. It was underlined by Maina Sage, Member of the French Parliament, French Polynesia that *“the ocean is a*



climate regulator as it absorbs 25% of CO2 emissions, which must be recognised at COP21 in Paris and it is critical to preserve ecosystems and to preserve them in good health that they support the economy, the livelihoods as well as the culture". It was suggested to launch a "Paris Challenge" dedicated to the oceans and islands in order to catch up a long-lasting oversight while the oceans are key in the climate machinery and climate solutions.

The value of nature and the importance of investing in nature as our life insurance were highlighted by several representatives from the European Commission. Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director-General for the Environment pointed out that *"investing in nature provides the highest return"* and he stressed the fact that biodiversity and climate change are intrinsically linked. He highlighted the importance of the BEST initiative evolving into a sustainable partnership. The group called for in the Message from Guadeloupe shall be convened in the beginning of next year.

Hence, the meeting called for synergies and complementary actions for biodiversity loss and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Bernard Whiteman, Chair of the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (OCTA) stressed that the European Overseas are *"linked to the EU through their political and historical relationships"* and emphasised the need for *"good partnerships and the inclusion of these areas if the EU is to meet its sustainability goals"*.

The need to work in partnerships and collaboratively at all levels was stressed as well as the need to provide adequate funding to mobilise research and innovation. Theodore Saramandis, head of the OCT taskforce presented the BEST 2.0 Programme providing new and tailored funding opportunities for projects in OCTs. It was also stressed that *"we must build on experiences from the past"* by measuring the *"accomplishments, difficulties, and obstacles in order to provide the levers necessary to act in a faster and more efficient way"*.

Maurice Ponga, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the *"Islands & Overseas Entities"* working group of the EP Intergroup on *"Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development"* chaired this event.

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