

*Dear Chair, distinguished speakers, dear audience,*

*On behalf of the European Committee of the Regions, I would like to welcome you to this conference.*

*For those who may not be familiar with the European Committee of the Regions and its work, allow me this few informations : the Committee was installed by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and is the political assembly that provides both regional and local authorities with a voice in EU Policy development and legislation. The Committee's 350 members come from all 28 EU Member States.*

*I myself acted as rapporteur for the European Committee of the Regions' contribution to the fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. In Luxembourg am I president of a large association of municipalities which cooperate in the Natura 2000 network and in biodiversity management more generally. Furthermore, I am president of "natur an ëmwelt" (nature and environment), the largest nature protection organization in Luxembourg. Given this background, it is no surprise that I fully support the initiative of your organization to hold this conference.*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*Biodiversity and loss of biodiversity is one of the key problems of our decades. But most often people only think of the loss of animal species. We must put the loss of plant species, and ergo seeds, on the same level of priorities (and not only the few commercially important plant species). Biodiversity is one of the key factor for the stability of our ecosystems. I am therefore satisfied that seed-diversity is a more and more concrete subject in the public discussion, a fact that I recognize also in Luxembourg (with some presence today here at the Committee's locations).*

*But overall does biodiversity of species stand for an endless panoply in genetic variations. And it is this genetic diversity that guarantees the ecosystems ability*

*to adapt to changements and to react to calamities. And I don't have to tell you that we can't lose this trump card (I apologize for this trump word). In the actual fast changing environment, not to say degradation, in fauna, flora and climate, we must act and re-act against the empoverishment of our nature.*

*That's why agriculture has to reconsider their priorities. We have to succeed – with the upcoming new common agriculture politics CAP – in strongly greening this important actor in nature and biodiversity protection. Instead of rapidly losing all our “old” species must we promote these variety of old seeds, plants and animals to save the genetic patrimony. And in opposition to the modern agricultural favorites do they not need pesticides and fertilizers, thus being a win-win situation. And a large variety of our crop plants is as well a high cultural heritage that is to be protected also from that point of view.*

*Similar to the bottom-up politics in the field of climate change actions should the local and regional actors be much more involved in this political subject. It are the small producers that matter as well, it are those that are closest to nature. Thus should the EU legislation create the legal environment for these small actors and not force them to produce according to rules that apply to the large industrial agriculture.*

*I hope this meeting will show a large variety of initiatives and solutions that will help us react against loss of biodiversity and genetic empoverishment. I wish you a successful conference.*

*Roby BIWER*