



## DG ENVIRONMENT Humberto DELGADO ROSA

### “Nature Day 2025 – high level event in Slovenia”

#### Lines to take / Speaking points

##### **Nature Day 2025**

##### **The Urgency of Nature Restoration for a Resilient European Union**

It is a true honour to join you today, even if remotely, to discuss nature restoration in Slovenia- a country where nature is not only a source of pride but an integral part of identity.

When we speak of nature in Europe, we often think of what is threatened, what is lost. But in Slovenia, we are also reminded of what is still intact. From the crystal-clear Soča River to the ancient forests of Kočevsko, the alpine lakes and karst plateaus, Slovenia still holds some of Europe’s most beautiful and biodiverse landscapes. This is something very precious – and not to be taken for granted.

Yet even in Slovenia, the pressures on nature are growing. Pollution, habitat loss, intensive farming, water shortages, invasive species, and climate change are all impacting the very fabric of our ecosystems – quietly, steadily, and sometimes invisibly. We are in a decade where action can no longer be optional. It must be deliberate. And it must start from the deep understanding that *nature is not a luxury, it is a foundation*.

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#### **Why is nature restoration urgent today?**

First, because the science is crystal clear. In Europe, over **80% of habitats** are in poor condition. Species once considered common are declining. Ecosystem services – those silent, everyday benefits that nature gives us – are weakening. These are not abstract indicators. They translate into real risks for health, food security, water availability, and even peace.

Nature restoration is not about returning to the past. It is about building *resilience* for the future. In a time of climate extremes, restoring peatlands, wetlands, forests, and marine habitats increases our ability to adapt and respond. In a time of geopolitical tensions and food chain vulnerabilities, healthy soils, pollinators, and freshwater systems are *strategic assets*.

In that sense, nature restoration is no longer just an environmental concern. It is a *security policy*. A *climate policy*. A *rural policy*. An *economic opportunity*. And yes, a *moral responsibility* to future generations.

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### **Why is this relevant for the European Union?**

Because the resilience of the European Union depends on its ecological coherence. Our climate targets, food policies, biodiversity commitments – they all require a solid, living foundation: restored nature across landscapes and seascapes.

That is the aim of the **EU Nature Restoration Regulation** – which was adopted in June and entered into force on 18 August 2024. It is the first EU law that goes beyond conservation and sets legally binding restoration targets for ecosystems. Whether it's pollinator-rich grasslands, or resilient coastal habitats – the law challenges us to not only *protect what remains*, but to *repair what has been degraded*.

The Regulation will also help the EU and its Member States to meet their international commitments to nature restoration under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and support food security.

It is a historic opportunity. Now the first important step in the law's implementation is the preparation of National Restoration Plans by each Member State, due by September 2026. These plans will lay the foundation for successful implementation, guiding concrete action on the ground and shaping the long-term trajectory of nature restoration across the EU Member States.

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### **What role for Slovenia?**

Slovenia is in a privileged position. It still holds vast stretches of near-natural forest. Over 37% of its territory is part of the Natura 2000 network. It is rich in wetlands, glacial lakes, Alpine meadows, and wild rivers. It has local knowledge, scientific expertise, and a strong nature culture.

But with that privilege comes a responsibility. Slovenia can be a leader in demonstrating that *restoration is possible – and beneficial*.

Take, for instance, river restoration. In Slovenia, projects have shown that restoring the natural flow of rivers not only improves habitats, but also reduces flood risk and enhances local tourism. Restored meadows and wetlands support both biodiversity and traditional farming. Old forests, left to recover, become sanctuaries for lynx, woodpeckers, and carbon storage.

So, this is a message not of limitation, but of *opportunity*.

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### **Nature as a development opportunity**

Too often, we hear that nature restoration is a cost. But the real cost is *not acting*. Degraded land leads to economic loss, health risks, and missed development potential. Degraded seas lead to less carbon storage potential and depleted fish stocks. Nature restoration is an investment that pays off; our impact assessment has shown that the multiple benefits of nature restoration, such as climate mitigation/adaptation, provision of food, natural resources, clean air and water, health and well-being, by far outweigh its cost. For every €1 invested we will get €8 euro in return in the form of ecosystem services.

Investing in nature also means investing in:

- **Jobs:** in ecosystem management, organic agriculture, green tourism, water purification, and ecological engineering.
- **Health:** green spaces reduce stress, support mental well-being, and offer cleaner air and water.
- **Innovation:** nature-based solutions drive new research, new partnerships, and smarter land use planning.
- **Social resilience:** nature brings communities together. It offers meaning, beauty, and connection.

In fact, the restoration economy is one of the fastest-growing green sectors globally. And in rural and mountain areas – like much of Slovenia – it provides diversification, pride, and purpose.

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### A few reflections to close

Nature restoration is not about going back to some imagined past. It is about moving forward wisely.

The EU is offering tools, frameworks, and funding. LIFE projects and Horizon research initiatives are already strongly directed towards restoration, offering practical solutions, scientific insights, and valuable experience to build on. The **Nature Restoration Regulation** provides a joint direction for the EU and an opportunity to choose a future worth passing on. The Commission is committed to continue supporting Member States during the implementation of the Nature Restoration Law.

I wish you good luck in planning your restoration actions together with everyone that will reap the benefits - farmers, fishers, local communities and all citizens in Slovenia and beyond.

Thank you.