



***The European Union and its Overseas Territories:  
strategies to counter climate change and biodiversity loss***

***Conclusions by the French Presidency of the Council of the European  
Union***

***Reunion island - 11 July 2008***

Considering the outstanding biodiversity in European overseas countries and territories (OCT) Europe's Outermost Regions (ORs) as compared with continental Europe;

Considering that the social and cultural diversity of each European overseas and outermost country, territory and region is a major asset in terms of the well-being of their inhabitants and of their economic development;

Considering the need for European overseas countries and territories to act within a regional framework in order to counter climate change and biodiversity loss;

Considering the vulnerability and proneness of natural habitats and species in European overseas territories to the impact of climate change;

Considering, therefore, the socio-economic, health and food-related risks to which people in ORs and OCTs are exposed and the resulting migratory trends (economic and environmental refugees);

Considering the leading role played by overseas regions and territories in the search for and experimentation in the field of environment protection;

And, faced with all the afore-mentioned challenges, considering the need to undertake action within the European Union as a whole;

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the light of the work and findings of participants attending the La Reunion conference on "The European Union and its Overseas Territories: Strategies to Counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss", strongly urges:

- The European Union to strengthen its policy on countering the effects of climate change based on the experience gained by Europe's Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), notably with regard to monitoring the effects of global warming and the implementation of adaptation measures where undertaken;

- The European Union and its member-states involved in international negotiations on biodiversity loss and climate change to leverage experience gained by European ORs and OCTs;
- the European Union, ORs, OCTs, ACPs and SIDSs to engage in international initiatives to combat climate change and biodiversity loss;
- the European Union to draw on and emulate the action taken in overseas countries and territories to implement EU development aid in the field of countering the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss;
- the member-states, the ORs and OCTs concerned to draw up plans for each OR and OCT to adapt to climate change and to include climate change and biodiversity loss in their economic development and spatial planning strategies;
- the EU member-states, ORs and OCTs concerned to promote greater energy efficiency and the use of renewable forms of energy, notably by enacting existing strategies in these areas;
- the European Union and its member-states concerned, ORs and OCTs to favour regional frameworks for action, notably with a view to sharing their experience and know-how with their neighbours (ACP countries, Africa Caribbean Pacific and Small Island Developing States), and to enhance environmental protection strategies deployed by regional organisations;
- the European Union to commit to the "Regional Seas" conventions to which one or more EU member-states are parties through their respective ORs;

the European Union to further deploy its intervention instruments with ORs, OCTs, ACP countries as well as with the Small Island Developing States (SIDSs), while easing and smoothing access to such instruments;

- the European Union to draw on the message issued by the Reunion Conference to implement Community-wide measures to preserve biodiversity and to combat climate change, in particular:
  - o undertake a programme of specific actions to meet the challenges raised by integrated management of coastal and marine zones in European overseas territories and in keeping with the principles laid down in the recent European marine strategy;
  - o in drafting the forthcoming statement from the Commission, consider tightening import and export controls to prevent the introduction of exotic
  - o promote synergism and complementarity between different territories in research, in particular by facilitating the joint access of ORs and OCTs to European-wide programmes;
  - o the creation, in partnership with the authorities concerned, of a mechanism aimed at conserving species and habitats based on the voluntary commitment of ORs and OCTs;
  - o support in enacting local regulations on urban planning as well as laws specific to building and construction in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Reinforcing regional cooperation is key and crucial in order to achieve these objectives. This requires overcoming regulatory or other differences in the pursuit of joint policies.