When a small group of people took the first steps back in 1974 to set up a new organisation to coordinate environmental NGOs in relation to what was then the EEC, it would have been hard for them to imagine how Europe would change and how environmental policy would develop over the following decades. Probably none of them knew that the EEB would grow to become Europe’s largest federation of environmental NGOs, playing a key role in shaping EU policy over that period.

Despite reaching the distinguished age of 40, the EEB is showing no signs of a mid-life crisis. The operation remains lean and mean, and at the cutting edge of EU environmental policy debates. And we continue to innovate, develop and grow. Last year saw the expansion of the range of countries from which our full members come, to cover all countries wholly located in the continent of Europe. The first applications for full membership from some of the ‘new’ countries will be considered at the AGM in December. In addition, the incorporation of the former staff and activities of ANPED, the Northern Alliance for Sustainability, has created new opportunities for the EEB to engage more actively in global and regional processes on environment and sustainability.

Despite the overall difficult economic situation in Europe, the EEB continues to grow in staff numbers and financial turnover, with the 2014 figures expected to show a substantial increase from 2013. But alongside these positive indicators, recent political trends, notably the downgrading of environment in the set-up of the new Juncker Commission, leave no room for complacency. On the contrary, pressures for deregulation in the environmental area have increased in recent months. The EEB needs to continue strengthening its membership base and effectiveness in order to rise to this challenge. We do that in a very positive spirit. Onward and upward!

Mikael Karlsson - President
Jeremy Wates - Secretary General

MISSION ONGOING
The start of the EEB was not the result of a long academic exercise. Rather, it was a pragmatic step following the observation by environmental NGOs in the early '70s that the European Economic Community (EEC) (now Union) was growing in importance in most matters relating to environmental policies and sustainable development. The start involved a number of like-minded individuals, rather than a long academic exercise. Rather, it was a group of 1973, I discovered that the Sierra Club was planning a US-European meeting of environmental NGOs and the Club asked to help with the selection of participants and of themes for discussion. At the time, I was an active volunteer in the local environmental movement but also in the Belgian federation Bond Beter Leefmilieu/Interenvironnement.

That meeting took place in February 1974 in Brighton, UK. The European participants of the Brighton meeting came to the conclusion that the proper coordination and organisation of NGOs in the EEC was more urgent than their participation in a worldwide organisation.

Involved in the discussion and conclusion were many British, Dutch and Italian NGOs, and also Louis Paul Suetsens, an academic from the University of Leuven. The then Belgians, Louis and myself, were invited to follow up on the conclusions.

Upon our return, several people in Brussels were enthusiastic about the initiative. The most important to mention is Genevieve Verbrugge who was then a volunteer at Interenvironnement and later the key volunteer of the EEB for many years; and also Mady Tassin who later became EEB treasurer.

In summer and early autumn 1974, I visited environmental NGOs in many countries to promote the idea of a European environmental presence at the centre of European decision making. The European Commission’s DG Information saw the importance of the growing environmental movement and was willing to sponsor a meeting. That meeting took place in December 1974 in the office of the Bank for Local Authorities and was the formal start of the EEB. All member countries of the then EEC were present.

Louis Paul Suetsens chaired the meeting and was elected President. Gerrit Vonkeman (Netherlands) and Bernardo Rossi Dona (Italy) became Vice Presidents and myself the Secretary General.

Edgar Kesteloot, a Director of the Museum of Natural Sciences, provided office space at the museum, free to start with. It was the first address of the EEB (rue Vautier) and the EEB secretariat became operational in Spring 1975.

Two other important subjects were the Common Agriculture Policy, where Finn Holford Walker of the UK Council for Protection of Rural England and Desideria Vautier played a leading role. A group led by Tom Burke of the Friends of the Earth UK made a magnificent defence of energy savings and alternative energy and the EEB was the moral victor of the hearings.

The founding organisations wanted to have a focal point in Brussels helping them to coordinate and strengthen their input in the European Economic Community politics and, in particular, the emerging environmental policy. The administrative unit in charge of environment and health at the Commission (at that time there was no Directorate General for the environment) and the EEB gained in strength in parallel during the same period.

Hubert David was the first Secretary General of the EEB from its inception in 1974 until 1984.
The EEB is a unique organisation, not only in its focus but also in the strength and diversity of its membership

Ralph Hallo - Former EEB President

By the early 1990s, the EEB had recognized that EU environmental policy, no matter how strong, could not stand alone. Environmental considerations and requirements needed to be part of what the EU did in other policy areas, especially areas such as transport, energy and agriculture where impacts on the environment could be significant.

Moreover, it was important that the Treaty recognized that the EU was no longer exclusively or even primarily a ‘European Economic Community’ but that it needed a broader mission of sustainable development. ‘Greening the Treaty’ succeeded, among other things, in giving the integration principle and sustainable development a central and prominent place across Europe.

THE ‘E’ IS FOR ESSENTIAL

Ralph Hallo was President of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) from 2000 to 2005 and a member of the EEB Board from 1992, representing the member organisations from the Netherlands.
Bernhard Zlanabitnig, EU Environment Bureau, Austria

HAPPY 40th ANNIVERSARY
AND
ALL THE BEST EEB!
FROM THE ECOLOGICAL GROUP FOR
COOPERATION, ROMANIA

Happy Birthday EEB!

First Environmental
Information Directive
adopted

First Earth Day
celebrated

Packaging and Packaging
Waste Directive adopted

Maastricht Treaty signed
creating the European Union

Habitats Directive
adopted

Introduction of co-decision
procedure - increase of
EP power

UN Convention on
Biological Diversity adopted

Habitats Directive
adopted

EP elects first European
Ombudsman

Rio Earth Summit –
adoption of Agenda 21

UN Convention on
Biological Diversity adopted

EP elects first European
Ombudsman

Integrated Pollution Prevention
Control Directive adopted

Kyoto Protocol signed to
reduce GHG emissions

Start of enlargement process to East
and Central Europe (10 Countries)

Austria, Finland and
Sweden join the EU

Schengen agreement comes into effect

Integrated Pollution Prevention
Control Directive adopted

Start of enlargement process to East
and Central Europe (10 Countries)
At the start of this Commission’s mandate we faced the double challenge of improving the quality of the environment and contributing to economic recovery. Our environment faces numerous threats including pollution of air and water, biodiversity loss, depletion of resources, destruction of ecosystems and generation of waste. Dealing with these threats may be seen as expensive in the short term, but is an absolute necessity for Europe’s longer-term growth and competitiveness. We have consistently argued that the environment and the economy must go hand in hand. The fragility of the environment we depend on is very often underestimated and environmental concerns are far too often pushed at the bottom of the political agenda. It would seem that there have been more ‘urgent’ things to deal with. But unless we protect the environment and our natural resources, unless we change the way we produce and consume goods, and unless we change the way our economies are set up, we will end up in much deeper trouble than we are now.

“Nature can teach us a lot about the sustainability for our economies and our competitiveness”

We cannot ignore what is happening on our planet: The global population will rise to more than nine billion by the middle of the century. Every day there are 200,000 to 300,000 people being added to the population of our planet: The global population will rise deeper trouble than we are now.

RESOURCES EFFICIENCY

In Europe as we struggle out of the economic crisis, we have to understand that our future growth and jobs are wholly dependent on what our environment can provide. We are a densely populated continent and we use so many resources. Half a billion Europeans use on average 15 tonnes of resources per person, per year, whilst generating nearly six tons of waste, with half of municipal waste that ends up in landfills. Those resources and the energy we use are getting more and more expensive and Europe is highly import-dependent for many materials and for energy. We import more than half of all the materials we use and we import six times more materials than we export.

So, for Europe, embarking on a less resource-intensive growth path is a competitiveness issue as well as an environmental one. We need to wake up to a reality where the economy and the environment go hand in hand. We need a new revolution, based on two things: Firstly, we need to get more value out of each ton of materials, each joule of energy, each hectare of land and each cubic meter of water. But the EU’s future industrial competitiveness will depend not only on using fewer raw materials, less energy and less water, it will also depend on our ability to replace raw materials and imports with supplies of secondary raw materials, where they are available, and to produce goods that can be re-used, repaired, refurbished and recycled. We need to move from a linear economic model, where we extract, produce, use and throw away to a circular economy model, where waste from one stream becomes the raw materials for another.

Setting the foundations to move in this direction is for me one of the greatest achievements of my mandate. First of all, we created a robust policy framework for future action - we embedded resource efficiency as one of the flagship initiatives in the Europe 2020 Strategy and we adopted a Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe setting out a vision for 2050 and an agenda for competitiveness and growth. Secondly, we adopted the Circular Economy package in which we are proposing to make Europe a society without waste. We want to take the 600 million tonnes of materials contained in our waste and pump them back into productive use in the economy.

“This is not just about GDP growth, it will have to be Sustainable Growth”

This reinforces a positive vision of a resource-efficient Europe, exploring new, sustainable sources of growth and prosperity. It is a clear recognition that environmental and economic policies can go hand-in-hand, and that is why the proposals in the package were led not just by me, but also by my fellow Commissioners for research and innovation, for employment and for enterprise and industry. Thirdly, we worked hard to green the European Semester, to ensure that our macroeconomic policies are sustainable, not only economically and socially, but also environmentally. The need for member states to shift the tax burden away from labour to areas less detrimental to job creation and growth – such as the environment – and the need to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies has become a consolidated part of the European Semester. But there are still many gains to be made.

We should promote resource efficiency and a circular economy as a central part of the main structural economic policy within the EU – in line with the 7th Environmental Action Programme and invest more in waste and water management as drivers for job creation, securing scarce resources and materials, and saving costs. This requires a transition. Member States should address these challenges in particular by setting the right price signals through market-based instruments, including producer responsibility schemes.

Addressing skills gaps and integrating more people into the labour market through green job creation, e.g. jobs linked to the “circular economy” (de-design, re-use, recycle and recovery, new markets for secondary materials) is another way the environment can contribute to economic and social governance. It is estimated that in 2012, 3-4 million people were employed in eco-industries, a 55% increase compared to 2000. Measures can be developed to ensure that the skills required by employers in emerging clean technology sectors are anticipated and addressed, as well as promoting employment and resilience in traditional industries in the transition to a low-carbon, resource and energy efficient economy.

As already indicated in previous work, full implementation of EU waste legislation would create around 400,000 jobs. The water industry generates value added for the European economy of 29 billion Euros and around 470,000 full-time-equivalent jobs. In some clean technology sectors, there are skills gaps which are preventing growth. In addition, these are holding back the scope for innovation in some more traditional industries that would help them become more resource efficient.

BIODIVERSITY

Nature can teach us a lot about the sustainability for our economies and our competitiveness. It is the most complex circular economy based on millions of years of experience and adaptation. It has an enormous economic value that is often underestimated. And it is crucial for our survival and our economic prosperity. However, 60% of the world’s major ecosystems that help produce the resources our economy needs have already been degraded or are being used beyond their natural limits. Unless water use efficiency is improved, we will need 40% more fresh water than we can access at present by 2030. That’s why this has also been a priority focus of my mandate and also one of the greatest achievements of my mandate. We got the EU member states to agree on a new biodiversity strategy.

continued on page >
Full implementation of EU environmental legislation will bring an annual benefit of €50 billion at EU level. That is an enormous sum, and we are talking about direct benefits in terms of growth, jobs and wellbeing across the continent. The long-term remediation costs – for example to clean up illegal waste sites and restore damaged habitats – can be much higher than the costs of prevention. At the same time, innovative or improved implementation methods can reduce administrative burden and create a more level playing field for economic operators.

**CONCLUSION**

Europe’s long-term competitiveness will be determined by how well we manage limited resources. Unless we transform our economies into resource-efficient, low-carbon, inclusive economies, we will find ourselves in much deeper economic trouble over the coming decades. If there is to be GDP growth, it will have to be Sustainable Growth. This was to some extent already recognised 5 years ago as the Barroso II Commission prioritised the notion of “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” in the Europe 2020 Strategy, with a cluster of targets and headline indicators setting out the direction and enabling monitoring of progress. This was an important advance on the previous “Lisbon strategy”.

To conclude, our future growth needs to be sustainable, otherwise there will be no growth – full stop. •

Janez Potočnik, was EU Commissioner for the Environment from 2010 to 2014.

**HOW THE EEB INFLUENCED MY AGENDA, AND EUROPE’S**

Stavros Dimas, Former EU Commissioner for the Environment

The support and information of the EEB was instrumental in my effort to change Europe’s approach towards environment and climate change and in defeating attempts to sideline the environmental agenda and make it subordinate to narrowly defined competitiveness proofing.

It is possible to design environment and climate friendly policies that also act as drivers for growth and jobs. The EU’s climate and energy package is a characteristic case. It shows that moving to a low carbon economy will encourage innovation, provide new business opportunities and create new green jobs.

In 2008 on the basis of my proposal the European Union took a historic decision: to agree a target of a 20% cut in greenhouse gases by 2020, and to put in place the steps needed to make this happen.

Europe made the most radical step towards addressing climate change yet seen. Europe was the first economy in the world to put in place legally binding measures that allows it to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With this ambitious package of legislative measures Europe showed itself ready to give global leadership to tackle climate change and to make the European economy a model for sustainable development in the 21st century.

It was explicitly timed to inspire the UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in December 2009, showing global partners that credible and concrete action was possible and that, with the right design, building a low carbon society could be part of economic modernisation, but not a drag on economic growth. As an added incentive to promote an international agreement, the EU agreed to raise its commitment from a 20% cut to a 30% cut, if others followed its ambition. Copenhagen did not meet our expectations.

I would like to urge governments and private sector leaders to listen to the EEB and also send to these leaders a clear message: we can improve the economy, protect the environment and tackle climate change at the same time.

Stavros Dimas was EU Commissioner for the Environment from 2004 to 2009.

> This will ensure that Europe’s natural capital is managed sustainably. It includes six main targets to deal with the main causes of biodiversity loss, and 20 concrete actions to help Europe reach its goal to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2020. It also anchors biodiversity objectives in key policies such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry to reduce the main pressures on nature and ecosystem services. Work with the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy is progressing, building on the foundations of our Natura 2000 network which celebrated its 20 year anniversary. In partnership with Member States, we continued to expand the Natura 2000 network – this now counts 27,000 sites containing Europe’s most valuable natural treasures. And this is perfectly compatible with economic activity and ensuring people’s livelihoods. The management of Europe’s nature in general has generated a value of over €400 billion.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

We are not just making laws about the environment to have something good on paper. To achieve concrete results on the ground, the environmental laws we make should be applied. That’s why implementation or compliance with EU environmental legislation has been my third priority challenge.

Full implementation of EU environmental legislation will bring an annual benefit of €50 billion at EU level. That is an enormous sum, and we are talking about direct benefits in terms of growth, jobs and wellbeing across the continent. The long-term remediation costs – for example to clean up illegal waste sites and restore damaged habitats – can be much higher than the costs of prevention. At the same time, innovative or improved implementation methods can reduce administrative burden and create a more level playing field for economic operators.

**ADVICE FOR THE FORTHCOMING PERIOD**

My advice would be to take a more strategic approach where decisions are based more on longterm thinking. The challenge for the Juncker Commission will be to define the right growth path for Europe for the coming five years and beyond, beginning with the review of the Europe 2020 strategy and the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey for next year. Both documents will need to recognise that the transition to a resource-efficient, low carbon economy is simply a necessity.

The review of the Europe 2020 is for instance an opportunity to address the missing link in our array of Europe 2020’s headline targets. In the Circular Economy Package, we argued that resource productivity, measured on the basis of Raw Material Consumption to GDP would be a good proxy to measure progress on resource efficiency.

“Full implementation of EU environmental legislation will bring an annual benefit of €50 billion at EU level”

EU Energy and Climate Summit adopted 20-20-20 targets

Lisbon Treaty enters into force

Massive oil spill in Gulf of Mexico

EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy adopted

Ro+20 Conference on Sustainable Development

EU’s nature in general has generated a value of over €400 billion.
“The role of the EEB is to be an interlocutor between local, regional and national NGOs and the European institutions. Simultaneously the EEB provides a fundamental contribution to European Authorities to help them better understand priorities identified by local and national NGOs.”

“The establishment of the EEB in 1974 facilitated access to the European policy arena for NGOs at European and national level. The EEB's aims and objectives, still valid today, necessitated the sharing and development of coherent long term visions for a sustainable future, expressed in policies and visible actions.”

“The EEB is not just a network, it is a tool for effectively transmitting collective NGO views to European decision makers, to influence environmental and sustainable development policies in Europe and beyond. It is, and will remain, the roof under which our common family meets! Being its President was a most rewarding experience.”

“The EEB’s strongest point is its ability to look at EU environmental policies in an integrated manner. This includes the EU multi-annual Environmental Action Programmes. The current one, agreed in 2013, exists only because the EEB campaigned hard for it, and is exceptionally important with the orientation of the new Juncker Commission.”

“WHAT DO SOME OF THE EEB’S EX PRESIDENTS AND SECRETARY GENERALS THINK THE EEB’S BIGGEST IMPACT HAS BEEN?”

MICHAEL SCOULLOS
EEB PRESIDENT
1986 - 1992

MARGARET SWEENEY
EEB PRESIDENT
1980 - 1986

ARMANDO MONTANARI
EEB PRESIDENT
1992 - 1998

JOHN HONTELEZ
EEB SECRETARY GENERAL
1996 - 2011

The European Environmental Bureau is the environmental voice of European citizens, standing for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. We want the EU to ensure all people a healthy environment and rich biodiversity. The EEB groups together around 140 member organisations from some 30 countries. The EEB gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the European Commission. This publication reflects the authors’ views and does not commit the donors.

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