

Intergroup
SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES
Intergroupe
CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES
Intergruppe
NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN
Intergruppo
CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI
Intergupo
CAZA SOSTENIBLE, BIODIVERSIDAD & ACTIVIDADES RURALES

Meeting on 26.09.2007

Hunting, public perception & education

MEP

BACO, Peter (NI, Sk)
BERLATO, Sergio (UEN, It)
EBNER, Michl (EPP-ED, It)
GOUDIN, Hélène (IND/DEM, Se)
GRABOWSKI, Dariusz (UEN, Pl)

HELMER, Roger (NI, UK)
KELEMEN, Atilla (EPP-ED, Ro)
LEHTINEN, Lasse (PSE, Fin)
RÜBIG, Paul (EPP-ED, At)

Represented

BUSUTTIL, Simon (EPP-ED, Mt)

Absent

DESS, Albert (EPP-ED, De)
DIAZ de MERA, Agustín (EPP-ED, Es)
DOYLE, Avril (EPP-ED, Irl)

EK, Lena (ALDE, Sw)
NICHOLSON of WINTERBOURNE,
Baroness (ALDE, UK)

Experts / Observers

ANTAUSSEN, Ola? (Journalist)
BASSO, Roberto ("Museo Jesolo" Director)
BOSTEELS, Jean-Louis (FACE-Be)
CARETTA, Cristina (CONFAVI)
de TURCKHEIM, Gilbert (FACE President)

MAGNE, Philippe (Ministry of Agriculture
& Fishery, Fr)
PÜTZ, Ralf (DJV)
SVATONOVA, Lucie (EP)

Assistants

BENNETT, Emma (R. HELMER)
KOMAKI, Mariko (H. GOUDIN)
MICALLEF, Jan (S. BUSUTTIL)

MOSER, Verena (M. EBNER)
RUDOLF, Kathrin (M. EBNER)

Secretariat

ESPÁRRAGO, Manuel (FACE)
LAWRENCE, Timothy (FACE)
LECOCQ, Yves (FACE)
von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)

1. Introduction and opening remarks

M. EBNER, *President Co-ordinator* of the Intergroup, opens the meeting and welcomes all present and represented MEPs, as well as invited speakers, experts and guests. After his opening remarks, he gives the floor to *Co-President* S. BERLATO.

2. Hunting, public perception & education

S. BERLATO thanks the participants for their attendance at this meeting. After having introduced the three arrived guest speakers he gives the floor to the first speaker Roberto BASSO, Director of the *Museo die Storia Naturale die Jesolo*.

R. BASSO explains that this is a very delicate topic and that his report refers to direct experiences of 30 years in the school system and museum sector. He expresses his concern about the developments with children's education, relating this to the rapidly changing environment. Modern media especially help keep children farther and farther away from nature, as their lives mainly take place in a virtual world of computer and television, and hence give wrong impressions about real nature and the environment. Cartoons create problems (for children) where animals are repeatedly being personified, represented with humanized characters, which are in a dramatic struggle with "evil" man – very often represented as the hunter. Children start adopting this false image and identify with this role allocation. With reference to different works of important cultural representatives and researchers, like, for instance, the Austrian Nobel prize winner and Ethnologist Konrad LORENZ or the Nobel prize winner for literature Ernest HEMINGWAY, he explains the evolution of a so called "pseudo culture" where young people create a false image of sweet, innocent nature, which has nothing to do with reality any more.

Through various classroom visits to his nature historic museum, R. BASSO says he discovered that very often the way questions and comments are raised by youth, the imaginations about real nature, repeatedly communicated at schools, have little to do with the real nature any more, where the cat does kill the sparrow and eat it. With careful references and presentations, as well as courses at their "laboratory for natural history", he and his staff try to communicate a more realistic way of nature education.

Especially in the context of the food chain, the aspect of "killing" is again and again suppressed and is related to cruelty. Thus blurred attitudes and habits towards animals arise, to the point that people start believing that animals would understand them and take over their habits. Already, young people start considering themselves as vegetarians, or even vegans, and their relationship with pets become more important than school friends or family.

By presenting historical and traditional pictures, tools, materials and gadgets of former times, the museum tries to give an impression of the real development of the relation between man and animal – including hunting – as an attempt to bring back reality. This has an amazing impact as interest shown by young people is stirred again, the relationship of man/nature presents itself in its unspoiled way, and the blurred pictures from school and media are partly challenged or freshly examined. Again, this motivates pupils to report to their school classes their experiences with, for example, hunting by family members, and to stand up for more accurate images.

This biased image of nature is promoted by extremist organisations or associations who distribute totally arbitrary messages in society, that have become popular, because the commercialised society cannot make distinctions for itself any more, while mass media helps fuel this point of view. Hunting associations have also underestimated this problem for a long time and have not reacted actively on these developments. It would be crucial that any instructors, especially teachers, to communicate a neutral and balanced image of nature. Courses of instruction should be kept but due to pressure by parents, who do not want, that the existence of hunting and fishing is taught, these are not followed any more. According to him, it is not acceptable that, for instance, children need to defend themselves against teachers and schoolmates because their parents hunt; such situations have to be prevented also by law.

R. PÜTZ, an education consultant for the German Hunting Federation, DJV, presents the project “*Lernort Natur*” that for the past 16 years has familiarised all age groups, especially young pupils, with nature again. These actions are normally supposed to take place outdoor. By monitoring education, it emerges that there is a growing lack of knowledge as well as an increasing lack of adequate study material. Thereby one focus is on the topic of sustainability by various users of nature.

“*Lernort Natur*”, initiated in 1991 across Germany, is practiced at national and regional level. All activities are normally carried out by volunteer hunters who especially use so-called “*Rollende Waldschulen*” (travelling forestry schools), whose utilisation is very flexible (schools, nature, exhibitions, conferences) including a number of nature-orientated demonstration material, like trophies, taxidermy, brochures, etc. Over the last few years, “*Walderlebnisschulen*” (forestry adventure school) have been established and the cooperation at “*Waldkindergarten*” (forestry kindergarten) has been highly developed, this together with strong participation of local hunters’ organisations and with active cooperation in agencies and local authorities. Since 1997, staff and hunters have been able to take further training in basic education, as well as in public relation, in order to give children and young people a wider and improved range. The same goes for the learning material that is produced on an educational valuable basis. According to a survey, some 120,000 children, mainly from primary schools, participate in these programmes each year. The courses address various areas – beside the focal point Flora and Habitat – including also “*full sensory learning*”, where the different characteristics of nature, habitats and wild animals is explained. The illustration of hunting is a clear part of these education programmes and for the design of school classes, as well as the presentation of tools or visits to hunting grounds and forests. Part of the public relations is inter alia the presence at big events, markets and exhibitions but also the participation of hunters in regional holiday programmes and the contribution to full-time schools, while pedagogy for handicapped also plays a role. The development of material for school classes and their partly free distribution is also part of these tasks. In the future, instructors and material shall be certificated to guarantee some kind of quality assurance, and, furthermore, these programmes shall also be extended to older age groups, as well as seniors.

Concerning the reaction to this project, R. PÜTZ confirms that because of the growing demand for nature and environment education, “*Lernort Natur*” is also accepted with great interest. The communication of information through hunters is seen as trouble-free and reliable, and there are in deed no reservations between teachers and educators. For this kind of environmental education, it is important for the hunting community to present itself as users of nature; as one of the most important messages to emerge from this project is that the use of nature and conservation can coincide.

Finally, he sums up that the current trend of environmental education stemming from countryside, forestry and hunting associations can overall lead to a turnaround for it, demonstrated more and more, especially at regional level through the increased participation by hunters.

The floor is given to Ms. C. CARETTA, President of the *Umbrella Association of the Italian Hunting Associations*, CONFAVI, who reports on the relationship of hunting, the media and public affairs. A positive relationship between the hunting community and the public serves their own interests in many ways, but a number of hunters are not aware of this fact, and respectively they often do not behave in favour of a positive approach between the two groups. Among them, the commitment in the field of conservation of wild animals and species protection, healthy game meat and nature management are praised, however, these positive initiatives and results are not successfully passed on to the public and the media. The large majority of people, for instance, are not aware of the fact that such a commitment by hunters for the public is mainly voluntarily and free of charge, which shows that there is a huge lack of information.

According to her this lack of exchange of information is one of the main reasons for the irrational aversion towards hunting. Even though new strategies for improvements are always developed, it certainly makes sense to orientate it towards the anti-hunting organisations and people who oppose hunting. For instance, animal rights groups often use their resources much more effectively to position themselves in the minds of the media-savvy public.

C. CARETTA underlines that the most important topics hunters are successfully working on have to be more public-savvy; for example, she mentions the commitment for the conservation of biodiversity whose success not only profit hunters but constitutes an added-value for all. As financial and human resources are limited, the cooperation among hunting organisations has to be improved in order that the hunting community's messages get across to the global media as well. Cooperation with journalists plays an important role as a structure of mediators supports the further distribution of information and messages, the same which applies for the cooperation with the economic and social sectors that are connected to the hunting sector. As long as the strategies do not focus more intensively on this particular sector, other environmental and animal rights organisations will continue to supersede the hunters – it is time for the hunting associations to move from the defensive to an offensive strategy in order to work against this danger.

Following the presentations L. LEHTINEN states that it is very much related to the approach of school children. He explains that in Finland there are currently some 10,000 hunters under the age of 18 who are entitled by law to acquire a firearm for hunting. In his current position as PSE – *shadow rapporteur* for the derogation of the ‘Firearms’ Directive, he is faced with enormous difficulties to explain this situation although he would like to remain the same. Therefore, he inquires into the situation in Italy and how they deal with this maturing group of young people.

FACE President G. de TURCKHEIM thanks the speakers for their presentations. He refers to a new strategic consideration: the anti-hunting movement gains more and more ground in Europe; partly it is not about the approach of hunting towards nature but more about a total rejection of using natural resources although the hunters, of all people, commit themselves to the principle of the sustainable use of nature. He is also of the opinion that the defensive strategy has to be changed to an offensive one including considerations about how this can be financed.

For a long time, the hunting organisations have been quite restrained; therefore, a necessary financial upgrade should be invested to actively engage in the process and development of environmental policies.

R. HELMER wants to know what is done in the United Kingdom to act against the comprehensive organised campaigns – partly including teachers and “education packages”.

A. KELEMEN again highlights the totally wrong-headed illustration of hunting already in children's books and comics where the hunter is always the “bad” one and the animals, like the “kind, honey-eating” bear, are always portrayed as the “good” one. It is difficult to compete with that, even though, like as in Romania, bears regularly attack humans and thus the reality reveals quite a different picture. Some years ago, hunters proudly gathered in public and were part of the image of society, but now due to growing non-acceptance, they increasingly become more withdraw.

M. EBNER thanks the speakers for their direct comments. He supports an assertive approach that could include a kind of marketing of projects involving the public. He refers to trophy exhibitions in his home region of South Tyrol, which has to take place publicly, is used to explain to schools and other groups the different cycles of nature and ecology. This takes place in co-operation with the hunting community and schools, despite initial difficulties with issues of death, illness, and animals that are repetitively pushed aside. Today, everybody demands meat but nobody is interested in its origin and how it is produced. He considers the collaborations of rural stakeholders like the *Countryside Alliance* in the UK or the *Forum NATUR* in Germany as very useful to proceed together.

M. EBNER explains that the Intergroup wants to adopt a *Declaration for a European Green Day* where the European Commission will be proposed, in relation to the “Green Week” and in cooperation with the hunting community, to declare this day for the environment and nature inter alia general picking up and cleaning actions at biotopes, natural habitats, etc.

Concerning the issue of young hunters, he says that Italy is part of the Member States (MS) which prohibit the possession of firearm under the age of 18; however, this is the case in some other MS, like Austria or Spain. The general standardisation in Europe under the smoke screen of harmonisation often ignores regional traditions and experiences. The consideration of the important principle of subsidiary is unsatisfactory in this context. He speaks out that if individual MSs are successful with their systems, including hunters under the age of 18, then they should not simply be subject to general EU regulations. This is like in so many other sectors that are not always accepted by the public.

Before S. BERLATO ends the meeting he finally raises the question how the necessary funds for the implementation of the different programmes and initiatives can be acquired, and he appeals to all who are connected with hunting and nature to stand up against any kind of collection by society through misrouted tendencies of false understanding of conservation and animal protection. This can particularly be successful if all pull together.

3. Any other business

The Intergroup’s Draft *Declaration for a European Green Day* is to be seen as adopted as no comments have been tabled by the Members. The *Declaration* is attached as a separate document and is available in EN, FR, DE, IT and ES.

4. Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on **Wednesday 14th November**

S. BERLATO and M. EBNER thank all guests and participants and end the meeting.

Max von STEYNITZ
Public Affairs Officer