



DG ENVIRONMENT

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SPEECH

Sixty years ago in Rome, the foundations were laid for the European Union, including the largest single market in the world.

The Union brought us stability, peace and prosperity.

It also became rapidly clear that economic growth had a price as not only people, goods and services flow freely over borders.

Pollution was crossing borders well before the single market existed.

In the sixties, we saw the first large oil spills from super-tankers.

We recognised the environmental and human dangers of pesticides.

We witnessed the first collapses of fishing stock due to deteriorating environmental conditions and overfishing.

The emissions produced by our growing economic activities did not stop at borders.

We all remember the damages to our forests from "acid rain" caused by emissions transported over long ranges through the atmosphere.

It became clear that common environmental problems needed common solutions, also to ensure level playing field.

As a consequence, we adopted the first Environment Action Programme in 1973, based on the 'polluter pays' principle and the ideas that prevention is better than cure.

It was also in the seventies that Earth observation from space started to show its tremendous potential for the monitoring and management of our planet.

Since then satellites have provided us with information about our changing planet over time.

They allowed us to monitor the evolution of the ozone layer, to witness tropical deforestation and showed us the dramatic effects of our changing climate.

They played and continue to play a major and increasing role in raising the public awareness on the state of our planet.

They contributed fundamental data to the scientific evidence that underpins a wide range of international conventions.

So where do we stand today?

From our modest environmental policy beginnings in the 1970s, where we are now a regional and global leader in many areas of environmental policy and policy-making.

Forty years of environmental policy making and integration into other policies improved significantly level of environmental protection in most parts of Europe.

It delivered a wide range of direct and indirect environmental, economic and societal benefits.

Air, water and soil pollution has significantly been reduced.

EU citizens enjoy some of the best water quality in the world and over 18% of EU's territory has been designated as protected areas for nature.

Our chemicals legislation has been modernized and the use of many toxic or hazardous substances has been restricted.

And all this, while according to Eurostat's latest figures, the contribution to growth and employment of the environmental economy over the last decade largely exceed those of the overall economy.

However, many challenges persist both in Europe and worldwide.

One of the main issues we are struggling with is living up to our commitments for implementing environmental legislation and agreements we signed up to.

In the field of biodiversity and nature there still issues with our protected sites and targets of putting an end to biodiversity losses have not been achieved.

On air quality there are still large implementation gaps in most countries where we are not meeting our agreed targets.

For water there are gaps in compliance with the key water quality legislation in relation to current targets.

In the marine environment our plans and programmes still have to show their effects.

For these reasons we are not fully realising the environmental benefits of our legislation.

This 'implementation gap' has a cost estimated as high as fifty billion Euro a year.

In addition the uneven implementation across countries risks distorting the competition among our industries.

It was also for this reason that the seventh Environmental Action programme puts forward in 2013 **better implementation** of legislation, **better information** and **better**

integration into other policies together with **more and wiser investment** for environment and climate policy as the key enablers for reaching its objectives.

Our action programme refers to Earth observation, in particular the **Copernicus programme** as one of the means for supporting these tasks.

In the last twenty years, Earth observation was still very much the subject of research and development.

Now the time has come to reap its potential for helping to close these costly implementation gaps and to become more effective in addressing international environmental and climate-related challenges.

Thanks to the Copernicus initiative on which we have been working closely together with our Commission colleagues, Member States and the European Space Agency for over fifteen years we now have an operational programme in place.

We have addressed to a large extent the obstacles of data policies and the lack of long-term observation capacities.

We are and working together globally with other nations to share and exchange Earth observation data.

In Europe we have adopted in 2007 the INSPIRE Directive with references to what is now the Copernicus programme, to

ensure that in-situ data and information that we need to combine with the satellite data are made available.

However, more needs to be done:

1. We need easy to use applications that deliver fit-for-purpose information needed by public authorities for concrete implementations activities on the ground.
2. Such will require investments, a consequent implementation of the INSPIRE Directive and more efficient coordination between local, regional, national and European actors that govern the data relevant for the different applications.

From our side we are now sending out clear political signals:

We have recently concluded a 'fitness-for-purpose' assessment of all the statutory **monitoring and reporting** under our EU environmental legislation.

One of the outcomes of this 'Better regulation' initiative is to use the Copernicus programme to improve monitoring and reporting and reduce the administrative burden of reporting.

Another of our initiatives regards environmental **compliance assurance**, which is proposed in the Commission's Environmental Implementation Review process

In this initiative we have an action dedicated to using geospatial intelligence to support better implementation through compliance promotion, inspections and enforcement.

Let me illustrate this with one example tested by the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law - IMPEL.

It regards the Guidance Document on the use of Copernicus data for the Detection and Assessment of Water Over-abstraction and Illegal Water Abstraction.

Part of this study focused on Malta where thanks to the Energy & Water Agency of Malta all kinds of data on crops, weather and water use were made available to test the methods described in the Guidance Document produced by IMPEL

The findings of this study are highly encouraging:

1. The methods for detecting illegal water abstraction and over-abstraction that make use of Copernicus data are mature and reliable.
2. The Earth observation potential goes far beyond the compliancy assurance as it also provides very effective solutions on water resources monitoring and management.
3. However, Earth observation data are of little use if additional data on weather, parcels, crops, water metering, permits etc. are not fully available in digital format, integrated, georeferenced, validated and easily accessible through Internet.

4. Competences on agriculture and water resources management are frequently shared among different organizations. It is therefore important to implement the INSPIRE Directive as the databases have been developed separately and are not interoperable.

Conclusion

At the dawn of our EU environmental policies The Club of Rome published in 1972 "The Limits to Growth" which stressed, for the first time, the importance of the environment, and the essential links with population growth and energy consumption.

Today, we are reliving history as economic crises, and the growing awareness of humanity's impact on the environment make us realise more than ever that the prevailing model of economic growth — founded on ever-increasing consumption of resources and emission of pollutants — simply cannot be sustained in a world of finite resources and ecosystem capacity.

In the 2013 European Environmental Agency report 'Towards a green economy in Europe' a total of 63 legally binding targets and 68 non-binding objectives have been identified in nine environmental policy areas in period 2010–2050 which could set us on the right path.

It is unlikely that all solutions for reaching these goals and targets will be found in space.

However, it is beyond any doubt that Earth observation and the many applications it could support to reach those targets and close existing implementations gaps, can and will play an important role in supporting us on this transition to 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'.