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Redner/in:	Mr Jochen Flasbarth, Director-General
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome - also on behalf of the German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel - to the fourth in our series of conferences on nature conservation and agriculture, this time entitled "Nature Conservation and the EU Policy for Sustainable Land Management in the new EU Member States". Many of you already got to grips with the topic yesterday during a field trip. I hope that it gave you some good ideas and that you have enjoyed the time you have already spent here.

I am particularly pleased to be able to welcome many participants of previous events. It is clear that this exchange of ideas is seen as valuable - something the organisers will also be very pleased to hear. Also some of you attended the German EU Presidency Conference in April.

I would like to say a warm welcome to Mr Antonis Constantinou, Head of "Rural Development", and to Ms Inge van Oost from "Direct Support" in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as to representatives of the European Court of Auditors, Riemer Haagsma and Jan Huth. I am very pleased that they have agreed to speak to us and to join in our discussions here.

At our last conference in this series in Bonn in 2005 the focus was on the second pillar of agricultural policy and on developing it further. At the time negotiations were going on in Brussels on the Council Regulation on Support for Rural Development, known as the EAFRD Regulation.

We are now into a new financing period and have already done a fair bit of the work

on getting assistance underway. We are currently in the middle of approving the programmes.

The programmes of the Czech Republic and of Sweden were the first to be adopted. I was pleased to read that both focus on measures in Axis 2 and will be spending 55% and 71% respectively of their overall budget on this area, well more than the 25% required minimum.

In my view, the EAFRD Regulation provides us with many opportunities for financing nature conservation and it is up to us to put them to good use. However, after the first enthusiasm on these opportunities this was followed by some disappointments regarding the EU budget.

Although two years before that the agreed obligatory modulation was at least to begin to create a balance between the strong first and the very much narrower second pillar, the cap on the EU budget in 2005 put a cap on the second, not the first pillar of the CAP. I cannot understand what this is based on, and it relativises the diverse statements made regarding the strengthening of rural regions. Again: Agriculture policy out of balance in contradiction rural development objects.

Nevertheless, the budget for the second pillar of the Member States' current planning period varies quite considerably and, in the new Member States, is by no means as disappointing as for some of the EU10, in particular Germany, where the level of previous assistance could not be maintained, despite a higher modulation rate. At any rate, we are looking forward to your reports on the new programmes with the expanded budget and more wide-ranging financing possibilities.

Looking at our programme it is easy to see the focus of this conference on rural development. Among other things, we will be having intensive discussions on the following questions:

- Does the current Common Agricultural Policy open up new opportunities for rural regions and does it support a form of development of European agriculture that is compatible with nature and the environment?
- Does support for rural development actually meet the requirements of sustainable

development, that is does national implementation take all three pillars of sustainability into account in a balanced fashion?

- Are funds being put to targeted use?

However, along with these issues, general agricultural policy will also be one of our focuses:

- What is the role that Cross Compliance played up until now as a tool to "green the CAP"? What can it achieve? How should it be further developed and what role can it play in the future?
- What does the future hold for agricultural assistance in general terms? What steps need to be taken as part of "health checks" in terms of the CAP and budget revision in 2008/2009? What form should EU policies regarding agriculture and rural development take in future?

I would like to report very briefly on an event organised by the Federal Environment Ministry, which only a few of those present today took part in.

On 23 and 24 April 2007 I organised a conference on "Nature Conservation, Agriculture and Rural Development - where is the EU headed?" as part of Germany's EU Presidency, to which the nature conservation directors of the EU Member States as well as representatives of the scientific community and associations were invited.

The event focused on the impact of the EU's Agricultural Policy on the situation of nature and the environment, as well as how it was to be developed further in a manner that was compatible with nature and the environment. One particular issue that was addressed was the role of nature conservation in the field of agricultural policy and policies for rural regions.

One key principle which very many at the conference supported was that agricultural policy had to be reoriented towards targeted measures. Taxpayers money should be used to support concrete measures and services for public goods - from the point of view of nature conservation, of course especially for biodiversity, clean water and intact soils.

That means rethinking direct payments which have little targeted impact. Priority

should in particular be given to results-oriented payments for services to biodiversity, as well as more measure-oriented assistance, such as classic agro-environmental measures.

One thing became very clear at the conference: We do not have much time. Discussions on the Health Check 2008/9 and the budget revision have begun. And that means that preparations for the period after 2013 have started. From the point of view of nature conservation much more is now at stake than the question of a certain amount of additional modulation.

Colleagues,

I hope that the conference will again generate many ideas and much impetus, as well as motivation and inspiration for our everyday work. Thank you for your attention.