



**EUROPARC Federation
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Title:

Our Beautiful Europe

Recommendations:

For information

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OUR BEAUTIFUL EUROPE - mobilizing the positive voices in Europe

Scoping paper prepared by ECNC, the EUROPARC Federation, Eurosite, and CEEweb
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EUROPE IS BEAUTIFUL

*Europe's natural heritage is a myriad of habitats, landscapes and ecosystems,
sculpted by nature, shaped by man*

Europe is one of the most densely populated continents, characterized by large urban conglomerations and an interconnecting mosaic of beautiful landscapes. Europe's impressive mountain ranges feed large rivers, which flow to the sea. Large wetlands along the rivers provide homes to millions of birds. The coastal and marine areas are true biodiversity hotspots, and are also where most Europeans live. Europe's natural heritage has no boundaries: therefore, we believe that networking and cooperation are the best way to sustainably and effectively manage our natural resources and ensure the future protection and conservation of nature and landscapes.

In recent decades, tremendous changes have occurred in European landscapes: the face of Europe is changing as we speak. Most European seas have been confronted with the dire consequences of marine litter, mainly plastics, over 80% of which come from terrestrial sources. Fisheries have intensified, with the introduction of new techniques such as deep-sea bottom trawling; other demands on the sea, such as mining and maritime transport, have increased enormously in scope and impact. On land, changing markets and increased competition have led to the abandonment of millions of hectares of agricultural land and their associated settlements.

Since its establishment, the EU has successfully created a sustainable basis for countries and inhabitants. Local currencies have been replaced by the euro in many EU countries, and EU membership has grown. However, the EU is now facing internal and external problems: economic, social, environmental, etc. Moreover, support for the EU is decreasing, resulting in a negative mood in Europe and about Europe, particularly about the EU and eurozone cooperation.

The gap between Europe and its people is increasing. We find ourselves in a time when both politicians and citizens are more negative about Europe and EU cooperation. European citizens are being bombarded with news about developments in the EU and the Eurozone which appear in a negative way in the media, and often "feel lost and overwhelmed" by the things that are happening "for them but without them".

However, there is and must be another Europe. That is a Europe that is reconnected to the people, to their daily lives and interests; a Europe that values the immense beauty of the continent and that cherishes the stability the European cooperation has created in terms of peace in the EU zone.

It is a Europe which also can better relate to decisions about European cooperation, and the usefulness of European funding and cross-border cooperation, and the usefulness for our daily lives. We feel that we should give priority to working on this 'other Europe' and to regaining the positive energy that led to the creation of the EU and Europe-wide cooperation.

EUROPE, A CONTINENT OF PEOPLE & NATURE

A society flourishes when people plant trees under which they never will sit themselves, but enjoy the fact they are investing in a sustainable future for future generations

Europe is beautiful! Europe belongs to the people of Europe. Europe belongs to the nature of Europe. And Europe belongs to the world, because we are interconnected by genes, culture, nature, and history.

The 'other Europe' that we envisage consists of happy people, living on a prosperous and diverse continent: a Europe that cherishes its natural heritage, and where the quality of life is good.

According to the Special Eurobarometer 416 (2014) the most acute concerns of people in the EU 'relate to pollution of both air and water, the amount of waste that is generated in the EU, and the depletion of natural resources. The impact on health of chemicals used in everyday life is also a source of serious concern. Meanwhile, problems such as species loss and deforestation – even in places far distant from Europe– continue to be big issues for many citizens of EU Member States'.

However, there is more than only "concern". All over Europe, people are in love with their landscapes, gardens, and natural and cultural legacy. All over Europe, millions of volunteers are working for nature at local and regional levels, and communicating with millions of other Europeans on social media, sharing their interests and concerns. All over Europe, small and medium-scale businesses are popping up, enriching the landscape and local economy. All over Europe, tourists travel considerable distances to be close to nature. All over Europe, we can find Europeans who know 'their' local nature and landscapes like the back of their hand. All over Europe, artists and nature conservationists are working together to promote conservation. All over Europe, nature is being integrated into the thinking of urban centres, including through biodiversity gardens, allotment gardens, urban farming, and even 'guerrilla gardening'. All over Europe, the importance of nature and a clean environment is being acknowledged as a major contribution to human health.

There is a lot of positive energy pervading Europe. People love to connect with others to exchange experiences, draw inspiration, seek recognition, and interact.

These are the voices of Europe that are prominent in social media but don't make headline news. These are the voices of Europe that are highly sensitive about changes and are willing to defend their local values. These are the voices that are concerned about environmental impacts such as climate change, deep-sea mining, oil and gas drilling in the Arctic, and the relaxation of EU policies on pesticides. These are the voices of Europe that express their concerns about the EU Nature Directives, but want to move beyond that.

They want to live in a Europe in which their natural heritage and local values are as important as national and European investment schemes such as job creation. Many Europeans want to take back control of their lives, while contributing to the European dream of a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous continent in the way that they think best.

BEAUTIFUL EUROPE MOVEMENT

*Logic will get you from A to Z - imagination will get you everywhere
(Albert Einstein)*

Europe is beautiful and we want to keep it that way. Several European nature NGOs have decided to join forces to facilitate a Beautiful Europe movement: **ECNC – the EUROPARC Federation – Eurosite – and CEEweb**. These organizations are the proud guardians of Europe’s natural heritage. They represent many members, networks and partners in European countries, and those members and networks represent thousands, sometimes millions, of people. Together, these organizations represent a considerable ‘voice of Europe’ and they want to focus that voice on conveying positive messages, linking positive energy, exchanging positive experiences, and acknowledging positive local actions undertaken by millions of European citizens, nature lovers, land and sea users, and entrepreneurs.

Approach & Direction

What is the Beautiful Europe movement? The characteristics of a movement are that it is: inspirational, spontaneous, people-driven, not institution-driven, without predefined boundaries or limitations, and based on people’s passion and interest. The Beautiful Europe movement is a movement of inspiration, a movement that builds bridges between countries, interests, sectors.

Therefore, the organizations involved in facilitating Beautiful Europe will not set hard targets or predefine deliverables that we cannot anticipate now. However, we will be clear about the direction we take: mobilizing the voices of Europe to celebrate and cherish the beauty of Europe, and to link people to Europe, and Europe to people. We aim to contribute to a “Beautiful Europe” where people are heard and feel appreciated and acknowledged.

We will start at the grass roots: link to people and networks, offer opportunities, and listen. We will acknowledge local actions, try to expand them where appropriate, give recognition, support and stimulate. Of course, we will also address the relevance of EU nature and biodiversity policies and instruments, but from a positive angle, and from the perspective of citizens.

We will approach the European Parliament, the representative body of citizens in the EU, and ask them to endorse the intentions of Beautiful Europe. We will also approach the EU Committee of the Regions, which represents the regional and local levels in the EU.

Tools & Structure

The Beautiful Europe movement will be facilitated through the following structure:

- Beautiful Europe website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram;
- Beautiful Europe citizens' network, where people can exchange information, inspiration, experiences, and ideas, or raise concerns about developments which may jeopardize our Beautiful Europe. The Beautiful Europe citizens' network will combine and scale up the positive local actions of citizens, entrepreneurs, volunteers, consumers, local politicians, land and sea users, etc.;
- Beautiful Europe youth network, facilitating youth councils and movements in European countries: 'Youth for a Beautiful Europe';
- Beautiful Europe business network of enterprises that invest in a Beautiful Europe at local, regional or European level;
- Beautiful Europe nature + culture + art network, bringing together networks with similar objectives, such as safeguarding natural and cultural heritage, or promoting art and nature;
- Beautiful Europe Fund, via which positive actions of people towards ensuring a "Beautiful Europe" in their daily lives or local/regional environment can be supported.

We want the Beautiful Europe approach to be open and non-exclusive, and to act as a true voice of European people. We want it to be a positive movement, although it should of course always allow concerns to be raised.

We feel that many people in Europe are ready to see the positive side of Europe, provided that they are heard and that they experience Europe from the inside, not just from the outside.

The Beautiful Europe approach is therefore important not only for the people of Europe, but also for Europe as a concept of cooperation and for the EU as an institution. Unless the voice of the people is mobilized, the EU as an institution will eventually be confronted with grave problems of legitimacy and lack of support. We therefore feel that the Beautiful Europe movement should become part of the thinking of all policymakers and politicians in Europe. The European Parliament could be instrumental in achieving this aim.

We will benefit and build on relevant European and international outreach and awareness activities and initiatives, both past and present, such as Countdown 2010, the EU Campaign on Biodiversity, the European Business and Biodiversity Campaign, and the Natura 2000 Award. However, we will try to avoid being a movement of 'senders': we want Europe's citizens to be both the senders and receivers.

Beautiful Europe will be instrumental in connecting people to nature, Europe to people, and people to Europe. It is essential that we succeed, for Europe's sake, but above all for the sake of all those Europeans who want to live a good life in a good environment.

Next steps

In order to bring the initiative to live, the initiating organisations consider taking the following steps:

- Approaching the President of the European Parliament, the President of the EU, and the President of the European Commission;
- Approaching networks of grass root organisations with European coverage;

- Approaching possible funding sources, for both initiative as also related “Beautiful Europe Fund”;
- Setting up an operational structure to coordinate the initiative in the spirit of the initiative.