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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

GROUP OF EXPERTS ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS

**Minutes of the preparatory Emerald biogeographical seminar
for six West Balkans countries**

26-27 January, 2011
Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris

*Document established by
The European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity*

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The seminar was chaired and opened by *Jan Plesnik*, Chair of the Bern Convention Standing Committee with a welcoming speech by *Gilles Boeuf*, President of the MNHN.

Opening remarks

Jan Plesnik explained the context of the seminar, highlighting its importance as a preparatory step towards an assessment of Emerald Candidate sites in the West Balkans region. He acknowledged the fruitful partnership set up between the Council of Europe and the European Environment Agency and its ETC on Biological Diversity to support this Emerald process. He introduced [the participants](#) and insisted on the need for everybody to consider this seminar as a working meeting, to feel committed and be interactive.

Introduction to the seminar

Ivana d'Alessandro, Secretary of the Bern Convention, reminded the participants of the historical background to the Emerald process including with 32 pilot projects implemented across Europe since 1999 and highlighted some of the important decisions taken at the Standing Committee in November 2010 i.e a clear calendar for the implementation of the Emerald network for the period 2011-2020 as well as agreed criteria to assess lists of proposed ASCIs at biogeographical level and a procedure to examine and approve Emerald candidate sites. She detailed the three phases of the Emerald process which are now formally recognised.

Iva Obretenova, Emerald project manager at the Council of Europe, explained how the process for the West Balkans countries will also be a test for other countries which have almost completed their first phase of Emerald implementation such as Switzerland and Norway.

Dominique Richard, Manager of the ETC/Biological Diversity stressed the importance of this seminar as a learning process for all participants. She also explained how, based on an experience acquired over the last fifteen years with the Natura 2000 process, the EEA-ETC/Biological Diversity will support the second phase of the Emerald process in the Balkans, i.e the biogeographic assessment, while ensuring as much as possible consistency with the Natura 2000 process. For the purpose she referred to a [presentation made at the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention](#) in December 2010 and specifically slides 2 and 4 which show respectively the original calendar for Natura 2000 implementation and the three phases identified for Emerald implementation. She explained the rationale of the agenda of the meeting, with a particular focus on the simulation exercise on species and habitats assessments organised on the second day. She also insisted on the crucial need to have good data provided by the countries to allow the real assessment process at the next biogeographical seminar.

Setting the scene

Emerald network evaluation process: from database submission to ASCI list

Zelmira Sipkova, ETC/BD core team, explained the [first steps of the biogeographic assessment procedure](#), i.e the establishment of reference lists per biogeographic region, database submissions, Quality assessment/ Quality control procedures and mini-checks.

Otars Opermanis, ETC/BD core team, detailed the [principles and approaches applied by ETC/BD to evaluate sites proposed for individual species and habitats](#) under the Habitat Directive and explained how these were adapted for the Emerald process, insisting on the work to be done before the seminar. He mentioned the specificities of an approach for birds. *O. Opermanis* suggested that experts from each country should look at the [Natura 2000 viewer](#) to see which sites have been proposed in the neighbouring EU countries.

Doug Evans, ETC/BD core team, presented the [historical background and the rationale for a biogeographic approach](#) to assessing the Natura 2000 and now the Emerald networks. He explained how the seminars are organised, who is invited and what are the different steps before, during and after the seminar. He introduced the simulation exercise of the second day. He highlighted what should be the outcomes of the “real” biogeographic seminar, i.e:

- biogeographic reference lists of species and habitats for each region,

- conclusions on sufficiency of proposals by each country for each species and habitats in each biogeographic region,
- in the specific case of the Emerald biogeographic seminar a first agreed list of proposed ASCIs¹ per biogeographic region.

Introduction to the data of the Balkans region

Mark Roekaerts, consultant to the Council of Europe and to the ETC/BD (through ECNC partner) presented an [overview of the existing data](#) (slides 1-22) received from all 6 Balkans countries with their status on December 2008. He recognised that new data have been delivered in December 2010 for two countries (Croatia and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”). For the other countries, updates might exist but were not delivered before the seminar.

Presentation by representatives of the Balkans countries and by an NGO representative

Presentations were made respectively by:

- *Petrit Hoda* for the presentation on [Emerald sites proposals and the situation in Albania](#)
- *Dejan Kulijer* for the presentation on [Emerald sites proposals and the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina](#)
- *Jasminka Radović* for the presentation on [Emerald sites proposals and the situation in Croatia](#)
- *Milena Kapa* for the presentation on [Emerald sites proposals and the situation in Montenegro](#)
- *Jasmina Šinžar Sekulić* for the presentation on [Emerald sites proposals and the situation in Serbia](#)

No presentation on the situation in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

On behalf of European Habitat Forum, *Friedrich Wulf* (Friends of the Earth Europe) presented the [potential role of NGOs in the assessment of sites](#) proposed by countries, using as an example NGOs’ experience with Natura 2000 sites proposals in Germany

Reference lists of 6 Balkans countries. Shift towards EUNIS habitat classification

Mark Roekaerts presented the data available so far in the database on [species listed in Bern Convention Resolution 6, and habitats listed in Bern Convention Resolution 4 and on Habitats Directive Annex I](#) (slides 23-29) As regards to habitats, he explained the decision taken at the last Bern Convention Standing Committee to shift from the Palearctic classification – which was the current reference for habitats listed in Bern Convention Resolution 4, now outdated - [towards the EUNIS Habitat classification](#) (slides 30-35). *Doug Evans* presented some of the consequences of the change to the revised Resolution 4.

From today, all habitat data for Emerald sites should refer to this new version and the former data will need to be translated. The correspondence table was explained, and possible relationships reviewed. The correspondence table will also be available on the Council of Europe website.

Review of current status of Emerald sites databases

Mark Roekaerts addressed the issue of [database quality assessment](#) (slides 36-37) and showed the type of checking that each country expert should perform before sending a new version of the country database to the ETC/BD.

Seminar simulation using selected examples

Habitats: *Doug Evans* presented a simulation on assessments of countries’ proposals for the following habitats: 11.3 Sea-grass meadows, 13.2 Estuaries, 37.2 [Eutrophic humid grasslands](#) & 41.1 Beech forests.

¹ ASCIs : Areas of Special Conservation Interest

Species: *Otars Opermanis* presented a simulation on assessments of countries' proposals for two birds (*Alcedo atthis* and *Aythya nyroca*) and a terrestrial mammal (*Ursus arctos*). *Zelmira Sipkova* presented assessments for a marine Mammal (*Tursiops truncatus*), a Butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*) and a freshwater fish (*Hucho hucho*).

Conclusions of the seminar. Next steps

Dominique Richard summarised the main points to be concluded from the seminar, including an **action list for the different “players”** of the process:

The ETC/BD:

- to prepare short note of the meeting and to circulate to all participants
- to prepare individual country feedback on their data/ and guidelines;
- to prepare a discussion paper on habitats/ species which may need a specific discussion between Council of Europe/ European Commission and ETC/BD to streamline the approach between Natura 2000 and Emerald. This issue is particularly critical and an urgent response to Croatia is required

National representatives:

- to identify and forward to M. Roekaerts the name of a person to get access to the [EEA Central Data Repository](#);
- to ensure data delivery according to QAQC principles and respecting the agreed time-table;
- to integrate and inform ETC/BD on all relevant information sources of relevance to the assessment process;
- to ensure proper internal discussion at country level with scientific societies, relevant NGOs,

NGOs:

- to ensure coordination at national level but also with European Habitat Forum in preparing “shadow” analysis

Council of Europe:

- to submit conclusions of the seminar to the bureau of the Bern Convention;
- to rapidly consider discussion with EC to streamline the N2000/Emerald process;
- to rapidly consider discussion with EC on a process for keeping the Bern Convention annexes and resolutions harmonised with Habitat Directive annexes.

The **suggested time-table for action** is as follows:

<p><u>15 February:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsible person for the CDR identified in each country and name communicated to ETC/BD; - Individual country guidelines/feedback sent to countries by ETC/BD <p><u>End February:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - response to Croatia on which habitat code to be used for reporting for Emerald <p><u>1st March:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - countries to upload to CDR the most recent version of the databases; - quickly followed by a short technical validation by ETC/BD on the basis of CDR principles <p><u>1st May:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new version of updated data uploaded by countries <p><u>15 June</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - report back to the countries by ETC/BD, after QA/QC database assessment <p><u>1st August:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - final delivery, by countries, of data to be used for the assessment seminar

The **second West Balkans biogeographic seminar** is likely to take place by end October (or beginning November) in Strasbourg. This will shortly be confirmed.

Closing of the seminar

Recognising the very usefulness of this preparatory seminar which allowed for all to better understand the process, to exchange experience and to address issues to be solved at the more strategic level, the *Chair* warmly thanked all participants and encouraged them to keep confident with the possibilities for further progress despite well-known difficulties at national level with human and financial resources. He then closed the seminar.