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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

33<sup>rd</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2013

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**Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Group of Experts  
on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks**

*Document prepared by  
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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The 5th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks was held in Strasbourg (France, on 18 and 19 September 2013).

The Standing Committee is invited to:

1. take note of the report of the meeting of Group of Experts and of the progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest;
2. examine and, if appropriate, adopt the following documents:
  - Draft revised Emerald Network Standard Data Form of Annex 1 of Resolution No. 5 (1998);
  - Draft revised Criteria for the evaluation of the sufficiency of proposed ASCIs – revised to include additional criteria for the evaluation of bird and migratory bird species;
3. Clarify the procedure to be followed for the use of the sign # marking some species of European importance listed in Resolution No.6 (1998);
4. consider the proposals for the future activities on the setting-up of the Emerald Network and the Pan-European Ecological Network, when adopting its programme of activities and budget for 2014-2015;
5. thank the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity for the vital technical and scientific support provided for the successful implementation of the Emerald Network throughout 2013.

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

The Chair, Mr Jacques Stein (Belgium), welcomed the participants (list in appendix 2) and wished them a successful meeting. A welcome and introduction session was held, presenting the recent activities of other Bern Convention groups of Experts and initiatives, which are of interest for experts on protected areas and for the setting-up of the Emerald Network.

### **2. Adoption of the Draft Agenda**

The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix 1 to this report.

### **3. Presentation of national reports**

Contracting Parties present at the meeting communicated the outcomes of their activities in relation to the Emerald Network and pan-European ecological network.

The delegate from the Republic of Moldova informed on the current implementation of the EU/CoE Emerald Joint Programme (regional project targeting 7 Eastern and South Caucasus countries) aiming at completing the biogeographic evaluation of the proposed Network in these countries by the end of 2016. The delegate from Moldova emphasised in particular the awareness-raising activities implemented in the country during this year, targeting both decision-makers and large public such as University students and academia.

Serbia informed on the implementation of a new IPA funded project aiming at the mapping of Habitats of European importance, using Geographical Information System (GIS) and special data. The conclusions from the biogeographic evaluation of the Emerald sites proposed for Serbia are thoroughly used for this plant communities mapping. The first results of this work are expected to be available at the end of 2014.

Armenia also reported on the implementation of the Joint EU/CoE Programme for the setting-up of the Emerald Network. The country already has 8 candidate Emerald sites and has been working on the identification of additional 4 sites and their description. National experts used a methodology consisting of comparing data on distribution of plants and ecosystems in Armenia and the map of Armenia with identified possible sites, in order to propose the additional most suitable areas for joining the Network.

The delegate from the Russian Federation informed on progress the implementation of the Emerald Network Joint EU/CoE Project in the country, in particular thanks to the involvement of the different constituent entities (regions, oblast, etc.). Enhancing the representativity of the Network in the country is counting on an improved cooperation with the regional entities of the Federation and therefore on targeted awareness-raising activities toward their authorities.

The Ukrainian delegate reported on the implementation of various activities in the frame of the EU/CoE Joint Programme for the Emerald Network and underlined the identification of 7 new areas, additional to the 151 already nominated officially as candidate Emerald sites. The country is further considering the preparation of guidelines on the management of Emerald sites, once they are officially adopted.

The delegate from Georgia informed on the inclusion of the Emerald Network completion by 2020 as a clear objective in the new Georgian biodiversity strategy. The country is also working on the implementation of the JP EU/CoE Emerald Network and is currently conducting field researched

aimed at updating the knowledge on various species and habitats which distribution and population is only available from published but old data.

In Switzerland, further to the adoption of the first 37 Emerald sites situated in the country, a study on the differences in the legal framework and implementation of the Emerald and the Natura 2000 networks was commissioned. The report is now available in German language and could be of interest to all countries working on the Network, as well as for the Secretariat of the Convention. The delegate reported the country is now busy with the identification and ecological description of additional areas, basing their work on the conclusions made at the 1<sup>st</sup> biogeographical Seminar for the country organised in 2011.

The delegation from Norway informed on the progress achieved in the setting-up of the Emerald Network and stressed in particular the organisation of the 1<sup>st</sup> biogeographical Seminar organised for the country. Observers from Iceland, Sweden and Russia have attended the meeting. The conclusions established on the sufficiency of the proposed 633 sites in the country for the long-term survival of the species of European importance are now being used for guiding the work on further identifying additional areas to join the network.

The delegate from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia informed that management plans are currently being prepared for three National Parks in the country. Further to the 1<sup>st</sup> biogeographical evaluation of the areas proposed to join the Emerald Network, dating from November 2011, the country is now working on the selection of additional areas, within the frame of an IPA funded project.

Croatia reported that since their accession to the EU, the country is now busy with the designation of their N2000 sites and is using IPA funding for preparing Management plans for the 6 of the sites. In addition, the country authorities have started implementing a monitoring programme on the conservation status of the species and habitats at stake.

Turkey explained that the country is active on several projects, in particular the identification of sites suitable to join the Natura 2000 Network and on updating their knowledge on biodiversity and improving their species and habitats databases.

Morocco informed on a new law currently being in preparation, aimed at changing the classification of all protected areas in the country and providing for the adoption of new management plans. The delegate mentioned the IUCN Mediterranean Commission project on the mapping the red list habitats in the country which is of interest and direct relation to the Emerald network. The Secretariat informed that further to the wish expressed by the country to start implementing a new Emerald Network project, funds have been foreseen in the Programme of Activities of the Convention for 2014-2015 for launching a new project in Morocco for the identification of further areas suitable to join the Network.

#### **4. Developing the Emerald Network and its tools and regulations**

##### **a. Emerald Network Reference Portal**

The Secretariat presented the newly established Emerald Network Reference Portal, which is designed for becoming the reference point for all Contracting Parties working on the Emerald network and searching for useful information, technical tools, legal documents, guidelines, etc.

### **b. Standard Data Form**

A revised new Standard Data Form was presented to the delegates. This second draft (T-PVS/PA(2013)08) is an improved version of the 1st draft presented to the Group in 2012, according to the comments and suggestions expressed by the delegates. The adoption of the new form (adapted from the new N2000 SDF) is necessary prerequisite for the adaptation of the new N2000 Software for the needs of the Emerald Network. The Secretariat informed on having discussed the issue with the EEA and that as soon as the new SDF for Emerald is adopted works can start on the adaptation of the new Software.

The Group agreed with the new format of the Form and decided to send it for official adoption to the Standing Committee.

### **c. Reporting form for the first reporting exercise of 2018**

As foreseen in Resolution No. 8 (2012) on the national designation of adopted Emerald sites and the implementation of management, monitoring and reporting measures, the Group of Experts was charged to discuss a Reporting form for the first reporting exercise of 2018 to which Contracting Parties working on the Emerald Network will be submitted in 2018.

A draft list of topics to be included in the reporting format (T-PVS/PA(2013)11) was presented to the Group. In a following discussion, delegates expressed their fear that countries may be busy with the adoption and implementation of management measures for their adopted Emerald sites and may not be ready to correctly implement monitoring measures in order to report on the conservation status of species and habitats.

The delegate from the Russian Federation pointed out that it might be useful to make a very small selection of species and habitats from the Resolutions No. 4 and No.6, which are indicators of the state of biodiversity in the country and which might be particularly endangered. Other delegations pointed out that the reporting on conservation status of a selection of species should remain an option in the future form. If a selection of species is made, they must be the same for all countries, in order to allow for a pan-European analysis.

The Secretariat was charged with preparing a complete form and to submit it for discussion to the next meeting of the Group of Experts in 2014.

### **d. Requests for exceptions for species marked with the sign “#”**

The Group discussed the issue of the requests for exceptions for the designation of Emerald sites for a number of species in Annex I to the Resolution No.6 marked with the sign “#”. The Secretariat recalled that at the time of the adoption of Resolution No. 6 (1998), the # sign was added to some species with the explanation that “some species may be abundant in parts of Europe and may not require specific habitat conservation measures everywhere”. It was reminded that the issue was first raised at the biogeographical seminar for Norway organized in June 2013 where the country expressed its willingness to make use of the # sign and requested information on the procedure to be followed.

The Secretariat proposed a draft form (T-PVS/PA(2013)04) that should be used by Parties planning to request an exception from including one or more species marked with the sign “#” in their national reference lists of species and habitats. The reason behind the preparation of the draft form was the need for receiving a written and scientifically motivated demand on behalf of the Contracting Party.

The Secretariat proposed that the requests are examined by the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, when necessary in consultation with other Groups of Experts. Each exception should then be submitted for official agreement by Standing Committee to the Convention, after the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks has provided its opinion.

The Group of Experts largely discussed the issue. While some Parties considered a simple notification from the Contracting Party concerned will be enough for excluding some species from the national reference lists, other Parties considered that a more formal and scientifically motivated demand was necessary. NGOs present at the meeting reminded the Group that they should not lose sight of the ultimate objective of the Emerald Network and that some countries have particular responsibilities regarding some species at pan-European and world levels, even though their national populations may be abundant.

The Group agreed that the matter requires the consideration of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, who will be asked to clarify the procedure to be followed in case of requesting exceptions linked to the # sign.

**e. Harmonising the lists of threatened habitats of the Emerald and N2000 Networks**

The habitats expert from the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD) which has been working on the revision of the list of Habitats from Resolution No. 4 to include all the habitats from the Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive explained the methodology followed for this exercise and the draft result.

The Swiss delegation welcomed this development and reminded that the revised Annex 1 of Resolution No. 4 will include a wider range of habitats and will therefore create additional responsibilities for Parties working on the Network implementation. The Swiss delegation regretted that some habitats of particular importance will still not appear in the revised version of the Resolution and informed on their willingness to propose some habitats to be included in the new version of the Resolution.

Taking into account the parallel exercise that some Contracting Parties are working on, in particular the possible proposals for inclusion of new habitats in the Annex 1 of Resolution No.4, the group decided to leave the adoption of the draft revised Annex 1 for next year's meeting.

**f. Interpretation Manual on Resolution No. 4 (1996)**

The latest version of the Habitats Interpretation Manual was presented to the delegates. The Secretariat and the ETC/BD thanked the countries which have contributed to improving the descriptions of many of the habitats and said that more comments are welcome.

The Group agreed that taking into account the parallel exercise of revising the Resolution No. 4, it will be wiser to maintain the Interpretation Manual as a living document and tool which can be completed at any time when there is a need. Comments and suggestions from all Contracting Parties are expected all through the year.

**g. Additional criteria for assessing the sufficiency of proposed Emerald sites for bird species**

As provided for in the Criteria for the evaluation of proposed Emerald sites, adopted by the Standing Committee in 2010, the expert from the ETC/BD presented some additional criteria on how exactly the evolution of the bird and migratory bird species will be done for the Emerald Network (T-PVS/PA(2013)05). The delegate from the Russian Federation welcomed the additional criteria and

explanations provided and stressed that these criteria will provide additional protection for some very endangered and rare bird species in Eastern Europe.

The Group discussed agreed that the additional criteria should be included in a revised version of the general Criteria document and forwarded to SC for endorsement.

#### **h. Updating the lists of species and habitats to be protected under the Emerald Network**

A discussion was opened on additional species and habitats which could be proposed to the Bern Convention lists [Resolutions No. 4(1996) and 6(1998)] 7 countries from Eastern and Central Europe and the South Caucasus are working in this direction, with the support of the Secretariat. Many of the countries explained that they do not think it is realistic to expect actual proposals to be sent to the Secretariat in the short term. The delegation from Switzerland reminded that they will be working on proposing some additional habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996).

The Secretariat reminded that the deadline for the submission of proposals is set to the 01 July of each year, using the Information Form adopted for this purpose by the Standing Committee in 2010, in order to allow of the assessment of the proposals before the annual meeting of the Group of Experts in September. The Secretariat equally recalled it is working on ensuring the evaluation of the eventual proposals received is done in close cooperation with the EEA and the Catalogue of Life.

#### **i. Draft guidelines on the management of Emerald sites**

The Group of Experts discussed the revised version of the Draft Guidelines on the management of Emerald sites (T-PVS/PA(2013)07).

The Norwegian delegation informed they believe the Guidelines too complex and hard to implement. The Swiss delegation considered that the Guidelines should be simplified and addresses issues such as how to manage conflicts between different species in one site which have different needs.

The Delegate from the Czech Republic reminded that the guidelines have been prepared on the initiative of both the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological networks and the Group of Experts on Climate Change and Biodiversity, aiming to answer to the concussion from recent research that current PAs are not well adapted to protect the species and habitats with regards to climate change and its impacts. The idea of the guidelines is to help parties working on the Emerald Network to include adaptation and mitigation measures already in the planning stage of new protected areas of the Network. Other parties explained that the voluntary nature of the Guidelines are in line with the flexible approach they present – letting each Contracting Party choose how to use them according to its specific needs and

The Group concluded that the Guidelines should be further revised, general issues deleted to lighten the format, include more information on the Emerald Network and possibly boxes with good practices and examples.

#### **j. Draft European Guidelines on Protected Areas and Invasive Alien Species**

The final draft version of the European Guidelines on Protected Areas and IAS was equally presented to the Group of Experts. The expert from the Regional Parks Agency – Lazio Region thanked the members of the Group of Experts for disseminating the on-line survey to the right persons in their respective countries, which contributed to receiving more answers and improved the representability of the recommendations issued. More comments and suggestions are welcome during

October and November 2013, from experts from the Group or other national experts, as the final version will be sent for adoption at the 33rd meeting of the Standing Committee in 2013.

The Group decided that some of the main conclusions from the Guidelines should be included in the revised version of the Guidelines on the management of Emerald sites.

### **5. Exchange of experiences in managing N2000/Emerald sites**

Initiated during the 2012 meeting of the Group of Experts, the session devoted to facilitating the exchange of practices between Emerald and Natura2000 countries proved to be a central element of the meeting of the Group of Experts.

Three good practices were presented, illustrating the implementation of management measures at three different levels: (1) inclusion of the Natura 2000 legal framework in national legislation (case study from Denmark, presented by Lars Dinsen from the Danish Nature Agency of the Ministry of Environment); (2) implementation of management measures at the local (N2000 site) level, linked to agricultural practices in the Burren region, presented by Andy Bleasdale from the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Ireland; and (3) ways used for integrating the Emerald Network in Switzerland and its regional cantons, presented by Sarah Pearson Perret from the Federal Office for Environment in Switzerland.

The Swiss delegate informed that the country has adopted an approach of using the Emerald Network sites and obligations for filling the gaps concerning key areas for biodiversity in the country. The Federal authorities are working towards ensuring coherence between the national sectorial plan for biodiversity and the Spatial Planning Act, in order to secure space for biodiversity conservation.

### **6. Cooperating with NGOs on the setting-up of the Emerald Network**

Collaboration between NGOs and national authorities has always been encouraged by the Bern Convention Secretariat, who is equally working towards enhancing its cooperation with various NGO actors at the European and world level. The objective is improving the visibility of the Emerald Network and the work of the Convention, as well as ensuring support to the management of the Emerald Network sites at national level through targeted partnerships.

Furthering the idea of reviving the partnership with the EUROPARC Federation, Federico Minozzi, presented the objectives and activities implemented by the organisation since its creation 40 years ago. He identified the Emerald Network, but also the European Diploma for Protected Areas and the PEEN as possible areas for cooperation between the Bern Convention and EUROPARC in the coming years.

Presenting a good example of volunteer civil involvement in ecological data gathering, Gabor Mesaros from the Serbian NGO Protego explained the work of the web based platform for on-line gathering and publishing of data on biological diversity of Serbia – BioRaS. He concluded by offering to contribute to the work done at the level of the national authorities in the country for completing the N2000/Emerald Network in Serbia.

Tom Langton, representing the Infra Eco Network Europe, a network for sustainable green infrastructure compatible with transport routes and corridors, presented the work of the organisation on addressing the impacts of transport infrastructure in Europe on biodiversity, among others. The barrier effect of highways on various species, in particular, amphibians, invertebrates and large carnivores is studied and guidelines providing solutions to wildlife and traffic cohabitation, or on

defragmentation solutions. He informed on an important IENE International Conference to be organised in Sweden in the autumn 2014, on Transport and Ecology.

In a conclusion, Mr Langton proposed an enhanced cooperation between the Bern Convention and IENE and proposed that Contracting Parties are requested to report on the implementation of Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper for the next meeting of the Group of Experts.

## **7. Establishment of the Pan-European Ecological Network**

The European Commission representative, Milena Novakova, presented the objectives and actions foreseen in the recently adopted EU Green Infrastructure Strategy. She stressed that the challenge ahead of the successful implementation remains in stimulating the decision-makers to act on the strategy and in coordinating and promoting action beyond the EU borders as well.

In close relation to the newly adopted EU GI Strategy is the long-term work of the Bern Convention on the establishment of the PEEN. Further to the elaboration of the Action Plan on the development of Pan-European Ecological Network in 2012, the Secretariat of the Convention secured funds for the implementation of some targeted actions from the Action Plan. The preparation of a Toolkit on the benefits of the establishment of functional ecological networks at pan-European level, targeting stakeholders and decision-makers from both national and sub-national levels (decision and delivery levels), was delegated to the long-term partner in the implementation of activities with respect to the PEEN, the ECNC. Work on this Toolkit was made possible thanks to the voluntary contributions from some Contracting Parties during 2013.

Aysegul Cil presented the ECNC and informed on the main objectives they are planning to pursue through the preparation of the Toolkit. The ECNC sees the PEEN as the continuation of the GI initiative at pan-European level. The Toolkit will address the need for raising the awareness of different actors and support the implementation of green infrastructure initiatives, a tool to maintain connectivity and to ensure interaction with other land use practices.

The Group of Experts decided that the awareness of the Standing Committee should be raised regarding the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan on the development of PEEN thanks to the support from Contracting Parties and further remind of the indirect support these activities provide to the broader implementation of the EU GI initiative.

## **8. Any other business**

The mandates of the Chair of the Group, Mr Jacques Stein and the Vice-Chair, Tore Opdahl, are extended with two additional years. The Secretariat of the Convention thanks them for their support to the work of the Group and looks forward to working with them in the coming years.

## **Appendix 1: Agenda of the meeting**

### **Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks**

5<sup>th</sup> meeting  
18 – 19 September 2013

*Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> September*

#### **09:30 – 10:00 Welcome and opening**

- 1. Opening of the meeting by the Chair, Mr Jacques Stein**
- 2. Adoption of the agenda**
- 3. Decisions of the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the protection of natural habitats** – Secretariat of the Bern Convention
- 4. Relevant work under other Group of Experts of the Bern Convention in 2013** – Secretariat of the Bern Convention

#### **10:00 – 11:00 Progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network**

- 5. State of play of the setting-up of the Emerald Network**
  - 5.1 Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus
  - 5.2 Switzerland and Norway
  - 5.3 West Balkans
  - 5.4 Morocco and Tunisia

**11:00 – 11:20 Coffee break**

#### **11:20 – 12:30 Strategic development of the Emerald Network**

- 6. Developing the Emerald Network and its tools and regulations**
  - 6.1 New Emerald Reference Portal – Secretariat of the Bern Convention
  - 6.2 New Emerald Sites Standard Data Form (SDF) and Software – Marc Roekaerts, consultant to the Council of Europe
  - 6.3 Reporting on the Emerald Network: features and objectives of the 1<sup>st</sup> reporting format – Secretariat of the Bern Convention and Marc Roekaerts
  - 6.4 Requesting exceptions to the national reference lists of Emerald species and habitats – Secretariat of the Bern Convention and Marc Roekaerts
- 7. Enhancing Emerald and Natura 2000 compatibility**
  - 7.1 Harmonising the lists of threatened habitats of the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks: revised Annex 1 of Resolution No. 4 (1996) – Doug Evans, Senior officer, European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity
  - 7.2 Interpretation manual on Resolution No. 4 (1996) using the EUNIS habitats classification – Doug Evans, Senior officer, European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity
  - 7.3 Criteria for assessing the National Lists of proposed Areas of Special Conservation Interest for bird species – Otars Opermanis, Senior Officer, European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity

**12:30 – 14:00 Lunch break****14:00 – 15:30 Strategic development of the Emerald Network (cont.)****8. Update of the lists of species and habitats to be protected under the Emerald Network**

8.1 Proposals for inclusion of new species and habitats to the Emerald lists [Res. 4 (1996) and Res. 6 (1998)] – Secretariat of the Bern Convention and Marc Roekaerts

8.2 Discussion on the intentions of national authorities from the countries making proposals

**15:30 – 15:50 European Ecological Network****9. European Ecological Network: recent developments and exchange of experiences**

9.1 EU Green Infrastructure Strategy – Milena Novakova, DG ENV, European Commission

**15:50 – 16:10 Coffee break****16h10 – 17h30 Preparing for managing Emerald sites****10. Managing future Emerald sites: exchange of experiences**

10.1 Case studies from Natura 2000: national systems of management, monitoring and reporting mechanisms

- Andy Bleasdale, Science and Biodiversity Section, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Ireland
- Lars Dinesen, Head of Planning, Nature and Forests Unit, Danish Ministry of the Environment

10.2 National institutional frameworks and possible ways of including the Emerald Network: presentations and discussion

- Sarah Pearson Perret, Federal Office for Environment, Switzerland

*Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> September*

**9:30 – 10:30 Emerald Network implementation and enforcement****11. Managing future Emerald sites: guidelines**

11.1 Draft Guidelines on the management of Emerald sites, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, revised version – Secretariat of the Bern Convention

11.2 Draft Guidelines on Protected Areas and IAS, revised version – Andrea Monaco, Naturalist, Regional Agency for the Nature Parks – Lazio Region

11.3 Discussion

**12. Involvement of NGOs and their contribution to the Emerald Network setting-up**

12.1 Example of NGO initiatives and cooperation with national authorities

10.2.1 Federico Minozzi, Project Officer, EUROPARC

10.2.2 Gabor Mesaros, Chairman of Protego NGO, Serbia

12.2 Discussion

**10:30 – 10:50 Coffee break**

<b>10:50 – 12:30 European Ecological Network (cont.)</b>
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**13. European Ecological Network: recent developments and exchange of experiences (cont.)**

13.1 IENE initiatives on ecological connectivity – Tom Langton, Infra-Eco Network Europe (IENE)

13.2 Implementation of the Action Plan on the development of the Pan-European Ecological Network – Aysegul Cil, European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC)

**14. Future work of the Group of Experts**

14.1 Next meeting of the Group of Experts

14.2 Programme of activities 2014

**15. Any other business**

**16. Conclusions of the meeting**

## Appendix 2: List of participants

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