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**T-PVS/PA (2017)13**

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

37<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 5-8 December 2017

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**REPORT OF THE 8<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS  
ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS**

*Document prepared by  
the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation*

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

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked the Serbian Ministry for Environmental Protection for the kind invitation to host the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in Belgrade as well as the Secretariat for the preparation of the documents.

The Assistant to the Minister of Environmental Protection, Aleksandar Vesic, welcomed the participants. He stated that the Ministry of Environmental Protection has been recently established and it is responsible for more than 30% of the duties and obligations for the Serbian accession to the EU. He thanked the Secretariat for having organised the meeting in Belgrade. Serbia has endeavored to integrate environmental protection in sectorial policies. The strategy for biological diversity was revised in order to achieve global biodiversity targets. The EU integration is a priority as the transposition of the EU acquis in national nature protection legislation. 180 persons were recruited by the Ministry to work on the Serbian accession to the EU in 2019, including young educated people to secure future work progress. He stressed the relevance of implementing the Emerald Network and Natura 2000.

The Secretariat welcomed the participants and expressed gratitude to the Serbian authorities for the excellent cooperation and invitation to hold the meeting in Belgrade. He underlined the active participation of Serbia in the Bern Convention's programme of work and invited the country to become leader in the region for the development of the Emerald Network in South-East Europe. He pointed out the importance of this meeting and the need to take decisions for the development and monitoring of the Ecological Networks. The Secretariat thanked the Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, Oystein Storkersen, for his presence at the meeting, as well as the representatives of the European Commission.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix I.

## **3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> meetings of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention**

The Secretariat recalled the main decisions taken at the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, as well as the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats at the 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> meetings of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.

## **4. Development of the Emerald Network guidance**

### **4.a Reporting on negative changes impacting Areas of Special Conservation Interest and especially the shrinking of the areas**

Otars Opermanis presented the draft guidelines [T-PVS/PA\(2017\) 7](#) on how to report on negative changes in the Emerald Network databases.

He recalled that most of the countries benefited from a first biogeographical evaluation seminar. 9 Emerald biogeographical seminars were organised so far.

The conclusions resulting from the evaluations set priorities of work for the Contracting Parties in order to improve the sufficiency of their respective networks. As the Emerald Network is based on an iterative process, the Secretariat is expecting the submission of updated databases including new species and habitats records.

The experience has shown that instead of positive changes, negative changes occurred which might affect the sufficiency conclusions of the Emerald Network sites concerned. These changes need to be additionally explained. If the size of sites has been reduced, there is a need to reevaluate the situation of species and habitats to assess possible negative changes. This is to be considered as a quality check procedure.

The draft guidelines proposed present the way Contracting Parties should report the negative changes and especially the shrinking of Emerald Network sites.

The guidelines were agreed on by the Group of Experts without questions or comments

#### **4.b The concept of the “ecological character” of the sites in the Bern Convention/Emerald Network context**

Dave Pritchard introduced the concept of “ecological character“ of sites referring to the document [T-PVS/PA\(2017\)8](#). It is a combination of attributes, feature, functioning and significance of a site which makes a site different from another.

The concept of “ecological character” appears in Resolution No. 9(1998) - Art 4.2 and 4.3 of the Bern Convention. There is a need to fill in a gap in the guidance of the Bern Convention and to support the implementation of the existing provisions.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands defines ecological character (of wetlands) as “the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time”. The Bern Convention could adopt its own definition reflecting on the one proposed by the Ramsar Convention.

It is important to define and detect change in the ecological character in the Emerald Network sites and to address questions such as:

- What kind of change?
- How much change is meaningful?
- What is the significance of change?
- Is monitoring in place to detect change?

It is proposed to Parties to develop a set of support material which would enable rapid response and be disconnected from periodic reporting.

The document presented by Dave Pritchard results in recommendations in order to tackle the gap in guidance and help Parties to implement existing provisions of the Bern Convention.

It is proposed to:

- Organise a consultation process among Contracting Parties;
- Develop guidance in 2018 (definitions and concepts, harmonization, monitoring, risk assessment, Environmental impact assessment / Strategic Environmental Assessment, decision making for responses, compensation principles, network issues);
- Synthetise lessons from past cases files under the Bern Convention.

The delegates of Switzerland and Norway stated that it could be too early to start this job and it will be better to postpone it.

The delegates of Serbia and Iceland supported the recommendations and proposals.

The Assistant to the Serbian Minister of Environmental Protection, Alexander Vesic, emphasized the importance of horizontal communication between the conventions and directives in order to create synergies. He recalled his contribution to the preparation of the strategic environmental assessment protocol and pointed out the relevance to define plans and strategies. He stated that the strategic environmental assessment in Serbia is, unfortunately, not respected. Most activities were developed 20 years before the establishment of the strategic environmental assessment and it is now essential to implement it.

The Chair of the Standing Committee pointed out that Parties need guidance for what is a baseline for “ecological character”. The Bern Convention has the case-file system to follow up on changes and on-the-spot appraisals but they require adequate financial resources.

Dave Pritchard highlighted the need to capture the changes in a streamlined way without waiting for the annual national reporting. Parties will be equipped with new principles and guidance without any additional burden for the country. The emphasis will be in a rapid respond mechanism.

The Secretariat pointed out that the Guidance shall provide concrete steps to detect and report on negative changes in the sites. The document presented by Dave Pritchard is a stock taking document which could be linked *inter alia* with the case files. The Guidance may even prevent some case files. It will take time to prepare it and Parties could initiate the process already in 2018.

The Group of Experts decided to give the Secretariat the mandate to proceed with the preparation of the practical Guidance.

#### **4.c Proposals of additional species to Resolution No. 6 (1998) and/or habitats to Resolution No. 4 (1996) and follow-up on previously proposed additional habitats to Resolution No. 4**

The Secretariat reminded that the deadline for the submission of proposals is set on 1st 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 that the evaluation of the eventual proposals received is done in close cooperation with the EEA and the Catalogue of Life.

The Secretariat also informed the Group of Experts that he would look into the implications of adding two habitats proposed in 2014 by Switzerland (*C3.2 Water fringing reedbeds and tall helophytes other than canes* and *G1.41 Alnus Swamp Woods not on acid peat*) and that it would be reported on at the next meeting of the Group of Experts.

He recalled the outcomes of the Joint Programme with EU in the Eastern Partnership countries and the Russian Federation. As part of the conclusions of the joint programme it was made clear that the sufficiency of the Emerald Network sites in Central and Eastern Europe as well as those proposed in South Caucasus would be improved if the species and habitats listed in the Resolutions No. 4(1996) and No. 6(1998) would be complemented with features predominantly present in Eastern Europe.

### **5. State of play of the Emerald Network and future perspective – Reports by Contracting Parties and list of Emerald Network candidate sites**

The Secretariat underlined the importance to understand what the Contracting Parties have been doing for developing the Emerald Network since the last meeting of the Group of Experts in 2015 and requested the Parties to provide a brief update on major achievements and state of their respective databases.

He recalled the [Revised Calendar 2011 - 2020](#) which was revised in 2015 and it is backed up by [a three dimensional Road Map](#) endorsed by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in 2016.

At the end of 2016 the Emerald network consists in nearly 3 500 candidate or fully certified sites in 16 countries, almost 700 000 km<sup>2</sup>, an average of 12.5% of the national territories of the countries involved.

The Secretariat also reminded the launch of the [Emerald Network Viewer](#) in May 2017. The Group was informed that it will be difficult to negotiate a new Joint Programme with the European Commission (DG NEAR) for providing additional support to the development of the Emerald Network in the Eastern Partnership region.

The Secretariat will however explore other cooperation opportunities such as TAIEX which is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission and which could be used to fund some Emerald Network activities in the Eastern Partnership region.

The Secretariat informed the Group of Experts of the report on the [Status of the Emerald Network in the Eastern Partnership and the Russian Federation](#) which takes stock of the progress achieved in the region since 2009.

The members of the Group of Experts presented the latest progresses for the development of the Emerald Network and databases.

The representatives of Norway and of the Russian Federation informed the members of and observers to the Group of Experts of their intention to adopt their Emerald Network sites. The Secretariat recalled that their respective authorities should officially inform the Secretariat to the Bern Convention by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 in order to seek for the formal endorsement by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention which will meet the first week of December 2017.

## 6. Recent developments of Natura 2000 and plans for the near future

The representative of the European Commission (DG ENV), Frank Vassen, recalled the history of the EU Birds (1979) and Habitats (1992) Directives, as well as the establishment of Natura 2000 for all sites designated according to both directives. He also introduced the Life programme (1992) which is the financial instrument for the implementation of Natura 2000 till 2020. Significant progress was made in terms of designations and legal protection of Natura 2000 sites, as well as in data quality and national reporting (6-yearly). Guidance documents on many aspects of the Directives were also produced.

The EC representative pointed out that Natura 2000 should become a coherent EU-wide network of protected sites. Sites shall make a significant contribution to the maintenance or restoration of species and habitats to a “favourable conservation status”.

Natura 2000 counts:

- 27,500 sites;
- 1,2 10<sup>6</sup> km<sup>2</sup>;
- 18% of EU’s land area;
- ca. 6% of EU’s marine area.

The Natura 2000 network is now mostly completed on land.

In the recent years, the progress focused mainly on:

- The national protection of Natura 2000 sites;
- The definition of site specific conservation objectives;
- The definition of maintenance and restoration measures.

Following a thorough evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, the European Commission has adopted the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy to improve their implementation and boost their contribution towards reaching the EU's biodiversity targets for 2020.

The objectives of the Action Plan until 2019 are:

- To realize the full potential of the Directives to achieve healthy ecosystems, whose services benefit of people, nature and the economy;
- To boost their contribution towards reaching the EU’s biodiversity targets for 2020;
- To improve the Directives’ coherence with broader socio-economic objective.

## 7. Reporting under Resolution No. 8(2012) of the Bern Convention

The Secretariat presented the outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ad-hoc restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest held on 26 September in Belgrade.

The Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts agreed on:

- The reporting format on the conservation status of species and habitats, which was adapted from the one developed by the EU, to ensure systematic and pan-European approach between EU and non-EU countries.
- Revising/reviewing the reporting format in the light of the outcomes resulting from the first reporting exercise and the challenges faced by the Contracting Parties.
- Using the reporting format as an exercise/trial to assess the national capacity for gathering scientific data on species and habitats, and evaluate the availability of the required reporting information.
- Organising training seminars for Parties on the methodology for reporting and sharing good practices from EU countries in order to strengthen national and local capacities.
- Developing guidelines to help Parties convert national distribution grid data towards the pan-European 10x10 km projection grid.
- Transmitting comments to the Secretariat on the draft Guidelines for reporting which were adapted from the one adopted by the EU: deadline 20 October 2017.

- Following the format of the reporting tool which is the same developed for the reporting under the Nature Directives.
- Reducing artificially the selection of species and habitats, to be considered for the 1st reporting cycle for the Russian Federation and Ukraine that have the highest features to report on.
- The deadline for submitting the report: December 2019.

The representative of UK pointed out that the reporting format may be reviewed and improved as a result of the first trial.

The Chair stressed that the reduction of the species is only made for the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The delegate from Moldova pointed out that some countries have limited resources to provide the required reporting information. She recommended supporting the Parties through financial mechanisms for gathering information and building the necessary capacities.

The Secretariat recalled the difficulties to continue the Joint Programme with the European Commission to develop the Emerald Network in the Eastern Partnership and admitted that the reporting will be a first trial to understand where the challenges are.

Finally, the Group of Experts approved the conclusions which will be transmitted to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for formal endorsement.

## **8. Road map for achieving a fully operational Emerald Network: conclusions from the Joint EU/CoE Programme “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II” implemented in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.**

Dave Pritchard presented the [three dimensional Road Map](#) for achieving a fully operational Emerald Network in 7 countries of central and eastern European regions which resulted from the conclusions of the implementation of the joint EU/CoE programme “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites – Phase II” involving the Eastern Partnership countries and the Russian Federation. The Road Map now constitutes the plan of key steps to be undertaken by relevant national authorities and others to achieve a complete and fully operational Emerald Network by 2020 in the seven countries of Central & Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus covered by the joint programme.

The Road Map was agreed on the governments and stakeholder groups and endorsed by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in November 2016.

The three dimensions of the Road Map are mutually dependent:

- A. Identifying and designating sites
- B. Protection and Management
- C. Communication

### **8.a Working Group sessions**

The Secretariat proposed to the participants to split in three Groups to discuss whether the actions proposed in the Road Map would be adapted to their respective contexts and identify possible future actions for the development of the Emerald Network on the following topics:

- A. Identifying and designating sites
- B. Protection and Management
- C. Communication

In order to facilitate and structure the discussions, the Secretariat provided each group with a short list of questions and designated a rapporteur and a moderator, accompanied by one member of the Secretariat.

## 8.b Feedback from the Working Groups

The rapporteurs of the three Working Groups presented the conclusions of their sessions with respect to the questions which guided the discussions.

### A. Identifying and designating sites

*What is your country doing to address the “sufficiency” conclusions relating to its species and habitats resulting from the biogeographical seminars?*

- Countries reported on their specific situation on the designation of sites and how to reach sufficiency. There are as many different situations as number of countries. The Road Map was new to many countries but describes in detail the process of designating sites.
- In general Parties could transform it into National Road Maps to reach an operational network by 2020.
- Countries can find good examples on how EU countries have reported on their sites in the publication [Protected areas in Europe, an overview](#) produced by the European Environment Agency.
- Software packages (Zoneation, Marxan) are available to optimize site network design.

*What are the groups of species and habitats for which identifying additional/new sites is the most difficult and why?*

- Invertebrates and freshwater species e.g. fish, and marine environment.

*What are the challenges in your country for adopting/designating Emerald Network sites?*

- National legislation is often an issue for the adoption/designation process.
- Even though Parties do not have to legally protect sites before proposing them as Emerald Network sites, in some countries legal protection status and adoption/designation of sites are interrelated.
- The adaptation of the Road Map to specific country situation could be a catalyst for the designation/adoption of sites.

*How could the Secretariat of the Bern Convention facilitate the adoption/designation?*

- The Secretariat has a mandate to assist countries at any level (ministerial-, scientific- and technical level).
- Assistance in biodiversity data management is the responsibility of the EEA.
- In case countries have sufficient new data, bilateral meetings could replace more expensive biogeographical seminars.
- Sending individual international experts with specific role to visit countries could be very helpful in implementing Emerald Network.
- The development of a ranking system could be an incentive for national authorities to support the adoption and designation process.

### B. Protection and Management

*To what extent are the Emerald Network provisions reflected into your national legislation?*

- There is a mixed picture across Contracting Parties, but the overall trend is positive.
- Efforts concentrate in reflecting the provisions of the Bern Convention (and of other nature conservation international treaties) in the existing legislation, in new legislation or in non-legislative strategic documents.

*With reference to item 4b of the Agenda of the Group of Experts on The concept of the “ecological character” of sites in the Bern Convention/Emerald Network context what kind of monitoring process is in place in order to detect negative effects on the ecological character of the Emerald Network sites?*

- The lack of national monitoring systems or systems not officially adopted is a major obstacle in defining the ecological character and the change, moving from passive to active actions.



- Where monitoring exists it is often piecemeal and not systematic.
- This results from a lack of resources which implies a deficiency of coordinated infrastructure between administrations, protection agencies and site managers.
- There is a shift away from work “in the field”. Specialists need to be trained. Citizen science needs to be strengthened and coordinated.
- There is a need for clear guidelines and for designated information systems (in line with the Bern Convention and the EU requirements).
- Parties cannot wait for effective monitoring systems to be in place before setting out management measures.

*Are there already management measures/plans in place for your Emerald Network sites (even in the case these sites were not nationally designated)?*

- Generally seemed to be acute awareness of the importance.
- Management is often based around developing management plans (mainly in the most important sites) but there is a lack of systematic approach to developing management measures across the ecological network.
- The lack of monitoring should not be a barrier to setting management measures.
- Setting management frameworks has an added value even if there are barriers to their implementation. Parties agreed that management should start small, build the evidence in order to build political understanding.
- There is a loss of traditional management knowledge (inter-generational) and the importance of habitat management is not recognised.
- There is a lack of political will and knowledge about implementing traditional management nurtured by the interplay between different sectors such as agriculture and environment/nature conservation.
- Knowledge could be captured by involving ethnologists and fostering interdisciplinary research/collaboration.
- There is a need for guidance.

*In which way can the Secretariat of the Bern Convention contribute to the setting up of protection and/or management measures for the Emerald Network sites?*

- Consider whether Parties implementing the Emerald Network could be observers in the EU biogeographic / marine region process in order to become familiar with long-term management issues.
- Acute need for an online platform for Contracting Parties to share experiences and best practice on elements of the Road Map.
- There is need for guidelines or templates for Contracting Parties to develop conservation objectives and conservation measures at the national level.
- Regarding traditional management and knowledge, the Secretariat should look at the provisions under the CBD’s Article 8(j) on traditional knowledge and the capacity building elements set out in COP 10 Decision X/40.
- Identify mechanisms to promote the effective participation of indigenous and local communities in the work of the Convention.

### C. Communication

*To what extent is your country communicating about its Emerald Network sites? (target audience(s), means, etc....)*

*Are there successful communication/awareness raising/visibility actions you would like to report on and which could inspire other countries?*

- The Natura 2000 Award could be transposed for the Emerald Network or transformed into a Joint Award for Natura 2000 and the Emerald Network.

- A certification – Green Listing - for well managed areas could be set up.
- A monitoring system of the management status/level of sites (ie 3 traffic lights) could be created.
- Stakeholders could be encouraged to develop or improve monitoring regimes / schemes with financial incentives.
- Capacity building and awareness raising activities should be fostered.
- Printed brochures promoting the benefits of the Natura 2000 and Emerald networks for the stakeholders and the community should be developed.
- Groups of scientists should be established and encouraged to discuss the issues regarding ecological networks.
- Awareness about the Ecosystem Services should be raised.
- Local communities should be further involved.

*What are the obstacles to communication? How can the Secretariat of the Bern Convention support the communication of the Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention about their Emerald Network sites?*

- The Emerald Network is not seen as a Network - but as a project.
- The lack of awareness about the Emerald Network results in fear from stakeholders.
- There is a need for training materials and detailed communication plans/strategies at international level.
- The Emerald Network Viewer should be more visible and easier to access.

The Secretariat expressed contentment for the outcomes and proposals made by the three Group sessions and it will look on possible follow up and assistance.

## **9. Data flows and tools**

### **9.a Data flow principles including scoring**

Marc Roekaerts presented background information on data flows and tools. There is a need to clarify the data delivery process and the timeline. The systematic production of the list of candidate sites and the list of Adopted Emerald sites requires defining more strictly the data delivery timing.

In December of each year the updated list of candidate and adopted sites list should be endorsed by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.

Therefore the updated lists of candidate and adopted site should be prepared not later than 1<sup>st</sup> November of each year. Data uploaded to the Common Data Repository (CDR) will be considered for establishing the updated lists.

Each of the lists will contain site code, site name, site area, biogeographical information

Following the endorsement of the lists of candidate and adopted sites by the Standing Committee, Contracting Parties are required to amend their national databases by introducing the adoption dates in the Standard Data Forms of the sites concerned.

Updated national databases including new information as a follow up on corrections of inconsistencies and/or on conclusions of biogeographical seminars should be submitted through the Emerald Software not later than 28 February of each year.

Moreover, Marc Roekaerts informed the Group of Experts that there are ongoing discussions on a scoring system for the data delivered to the European Environment Agency.

The scoring criteria are 1. the timely delivery and 2. the quality of the data delivered. While there are no formal deadline requirements for the delivery of data regarding the Emerald Network, the assessment of the quality of the data will require some further discussions among the EEA, the EU and the ETC/BD to agree on the SDF's fields to be considered.

The Secretariat emphasized the importance of formalizing the delivery of the national database which can be made visible to stakeholders and general public through the Emerald Network Viewer.

## 9.b The Emerald Network and Natura 2000 Viewers

Marc Roekaerts presented the [Emerald Network Viewer](#) launched in May 2017. It is still under development. It has limited functionalities so far but the objective is that the Emerald Viewer mirrors the functionalities of the Natura 2000 Viewer in the future. The Viewer gives access to the Standard Data Forms of the Emerald proposed / candidate / adopted sites providing information on the species and habitats occurring in the sites.

The representative of DG ENV, Frank Vassen, presented the new [Natura 2000 Viewer](#). The Natura 2000 Viewer exists since 2010. In 7 years' time, the quantity and quality of data significantly increased.

A new version of the Natura 2000 Viewer was launched on 15 September 2017.

The main search and display functions are:

- Search a Natura 2000 site (by name or code)
- Search all sites for a species (by name or code)
- Search all sites for a habitat type (by name or code)
- Search EU distribution area (for a species or habitat type)
- Search EU breeding distribution area (for a bird species)

## 10. Future work of the Group of Experts

### 10.a Programme of activities 2018-19

The Secretariat presented proposals for the Programme of activities in 2018-2019.

The next annual meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Area and Ecological Networks will be organised back to back or jointly with the Group of Experts on Climate Change.

The Secretariat will support Contracting Parties in their reporting exercise on the conservation status of species and habitats under Resolution No. 8(2012) over the period 2013 – 2018 in organising two training workshops on monitoring and reporting with the support of the European Environment Agency.

A biogeographical seminar could be organised in South-East Europe, if there is an expression of interest from the countries of the region.

Resources will be allocated for the development of the Emerald reporting tool and viewer.

### 10.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts

The Secretariat proposed to organise in 2018 two-day meeting of the Group Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks. One day will be devoted to meet jointly with the Group of Experts on Climate Change in order to discuss topic of common interest such as, for example, the development of adaptive management of protected areas and the importance to include climate change in the monitoring system of the conservation status of species and habitats, communication, etc.

The Secretariat would also like to identify possible synergies with the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement on ecosystem based solutions for disaster risk reduction.

The meeting could be organised during the first week of October 2018 in Strasbourg. The representative of Switzerland will explore the feasibility of holding the meeting in Bern.

The representative of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” supported the Secretariat’s proposal on the joint meeting which can contribute *inter alia* to Aichi targets.

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks agreed with the proposal and instructed the Secretariat to organise the next meeting with the Group of Experts on Climate Change during the first week of October 2018.

## 11. Video on the European Diploma for Protected Areas

The Group of Experts took note of the [video](#) produced on the European Diploma for Protected Areas targeting the large public.

The UK representative pointed out that the video does not give evidence of the process on how a country can get the European Diploma and it should provide more detailed information.

The Group of Experts took note of the [video](#) created on the Emerald Network targeting the large public.

The Chair encouraged the Group of Experts to use and spread the video in order to promote the Bern Convention actions on protected areas.

## 12. Any other business

No other business was raised.

## 13. Conclusions of the meeting

The Secretariat presented the conclusions of the meeting.

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks agreed to submit to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for formal approval the following decisions:

- to carry out a reporting exercise under Resolution No. 8(2012) for the period 2013 – 2018 on the conservation status of species and habitats.

The agreement on the reporting includes:

- a selection of species and habitats
  - a 10 x 10 km projection grid
  - draft guidelines
  - a provisional timetable
- to use the guidelines on reporting on negative changes impacting on ASCIs
  - to initiate the development of specific guidance on detecting, assessing and responding to changes in the ecological character of ASCIs

The Secretariat recalled that Parties should send before the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 a formal letter to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention indicating the Emerald sites they wish to adopt.

The Serbian representative broadcasted a [video](#) on the Danube River.

The Chair thanked the Serbian authorities and the Secretariat for the successful meeting and achievements.

**Annex 1: Agenda**

		<b>Documents</b>	<b>Expected results</b>
<b>Wednesday 27 September</b>			
<b>9:30</b>	<b>1. Opening of the meeting</b>  <i>Opening speech by Mr Aleksandar Vesic, Assistant to the Minister of Environmental Protection</i>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>2. Adoption of the agenda</b>	Meeting agenda T-PVS/PA(2017)4  <b>For adoption</b>	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the aims of the meeting and adopt the agenda.
	<b>3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 35th and 36th meetings of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention</b>  <i>Presentation by Gianluca Silvestrini</i>	Report of the 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2015)13E</a>  Report of the 2016 meeting of the Ad-hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2016)9E</a>  Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2016) 5E</a> <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2017)6E</a>	The salient points of the 35 <sup>th</sup> and 36 <sup>th</sup> meetings of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention are recalled.

		<b>For information</b>	
	<b>4. Development of the Emerald Network guidance</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>4.a Reporting on negative changes impacting Areas of Special Conservation Interest and especially the shrinking of the areas</p> <p><i>Presentation by Otars Opermanis</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the working document and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>Guidelines for explaining negative changes in Emerald Network proposed, candidate and adopted sites</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2017) 7</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Follow up actions are agreed on by the members of and observers to the Group of Experts.</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>4.b The concept of the “ecological character” of sites in the Bern Convention/Emerald Network context</p> <p><i>Presentation by Dave Pritchard</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to discuss the assessment report and to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i></p>	<p>Study on the “ecological character” of sites</p> <p><a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2017)8</a></p> <p><b>For discussion and decision</b></p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the development of a new Bern Convention guidance on detecting, assessing and responding to changes and likely changes in the ecological character of ASCIs.</p>
	<p>4.c Proposals of additional species to Resolution N° 6 (1998) and/or habitats to Resolution N° 4 (1996) and follow-up on previously proposed additional habitats to Resolution N° 4</p> <p><i>Reminder by the Secretariat (Marc Hory)</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are reminded that they should inform the Secretariat of the lists of species and</i></p>	<b>For information</b>	<p>No additional species and/or habitats are proposed by the representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states.</p>

	<i>habitats they propose for Resolution N° 6 (1998) and/or Resolution N° 4 (1996)</i>		
<b>10:50 – 11:20</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p><b>5. State of play of the Emerald Network and future perspectives - Reports by Contracting Parties and list of Emerald Network candidate sites</b></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are invited to present orally the major achievements regarding the development of the Emerald Network in their respective countries. Presentations should be limited to 4 minutes.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are invited to confirm that all newly proposed sites from their latest national databases are to be sent for official nomination to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</i></p> <p><i>Representatives of the Contracting Parties and Observer states are invited to inform the Secretariat whether their country is submitting its candidate Emerald sites for official adoption as Emerald sites by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</i></p>	<p>Revised calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network (2011-2020) <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2015)16</a></p> <p><u>Publication:</u> Emerald Network status in the Eastern Partnership region and the Russian Federation</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed on progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network in all Contracting Parties and Observer States concerned.</p> <p>Countries which request their newly proposed Emerald Network sites for official nomination as candidate Emerald sites by the Standing Committee are identified.</p> <p>Countries which request the official adoption as Emerald sites of their candidate sites by the Standing Committee are identified.</p>
<b>12:40 – 14:00</b>	<b>Lunch</b>		
	<b>6. Recent developments of Natura 2000 and plans for the near future</b>		Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of latest developments of the Natura 2000 network.

	<i>Presentation by Frank Vassen</i>	<b>For information</b>	
	<b>7. Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) of the Bern Convention</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Outcomes of the 2nd meeting of the Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest</p> <p><i>Presentation by Marc Hory</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed on the outcomes of the 2nd meeting of Ad-Hoc Restricted Group of Experts on Reporting on the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest and are invited to propose follow up actions.</i></p>	<p>Final draft of the legal analysis of the Emerald Network reporting requirements under the Bern Convention <a href="#">T-PVS/Inf(2017)11</a></p> <p>Reporting format for the period 2013-2018 <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2017)9</a></p> <p>Proposal of selected species and habitats <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2017) 10</a></p> <p><a href="#">Guidelines, favourable reference values, pressures and threat lists, conservation measures list, species checklist</a></p> <p><b>For approval</b></p>	<p>The draft format of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) is agreed on by the members of and observers to the Group of Experts and sent for adoption by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</p> <p>A selection of species and habitats to be considered for the 1st reporting cycle under Resolution No. 8 (2012) is agreed on by the members of and observers to the Group of Experts and sent for adoption by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</p> <p>Supporting documents for the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) are agreed on by the members of and observers to the Group of Experts.</p>
	<b>8. Road map for achieving a fully operational Emerald Network : conclusions from the Joint EU/CoE Programme “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II” implemented by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine</b>	<p>Three dimensional road map for achieving a fully operational Emerald Network in 7 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and South Caucasus <a href="#">T-PVS/PA(2016)10</a></p> <p><b>For information</b></p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are aware of the outcomes and conclusions of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II”;</p>



	<i>Presentation by Dave Pritchard</i>		
<b>15:10 - 15:40</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  <i>End of the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting day 17h10</i>	<p>8.a Working Group sessions</p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to join their respective working group and discuss the proposed topics:</i></p> <p><i>Working Group A: Identifying and designating sites</i></p> <p><i>Working Group B: Protection and Management</i></p> <p><i>Working Group C: Communication</i></p>	<b>For discussion</b>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- discuss whether the roadmap is relevant to their own respective context.</li> <li>- know each other better and understand where their peers stand in the implementation of the provisions of the Emerald Network.</li> <li>- learn from each other's success stories and challenges.</li> <li>- the Secretariat knows about the priorities of and challenges faced by the Contracting Parties.</li> </ul>
<i>Reception offered by the Ministry of Environmental Protection</i>			
<b>Thursday 28 September</b>			
<b>9:30</b>	<p>8.b Feedback from the Working Groups</p> <p><i>Rapporteurs of the working groups report to members of and observers to the Group of Experts on the outcomes of the discussions in their respective working groups</i></p>	<b>For information</b>	<p>Follow up actions for the implementation of the road map are identified.</p> <p>Priorities for the future work of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention are identified;</p>
	<b>9. Data flows and tools</b>		

	9.a Data flow principles including scoring <i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts</i>	<b>For information</b>	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the latest data flow updates and of the on-going Eionet's discussions on scoring.
	9.b The Emerald Network and Natura 2000 Viewers <i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts</i> The new Natura 2000 Viewer <i>Presentation by Frank Vassen</i>	<b>For information</b>	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the functionalities of the Viewers and can use and promote it.
<b>10:45 – 11:15</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>		
	<b>10. Future work of the Group of Experts</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10.a Programme of activities 2018-2019 <i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to propose and discuss new activities in 2018</i>	<b>For discussion and decision</b>	Priority activities are identified and will feed into the Programme of activity 2018-2019 of the Bern Convention (subject to the availability of financial and human resources)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts <i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts wishing to host the next meeting of the Group of Experts are invited to inform the Secretariat.</i>	<b>For decision</b>	The provisional venue and dates of the next meeting are agreed on.
	<b>11. Video on the European Diploma for Protected Areas</b> <i>Members of the Group of Experts interested in a version of the video with subtitles of voice over</i>	<b>For information</b>	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are aware of the video and can use and promote it.

	<i>in their national language are invited to inform the Secretariat.</i>		
	<b>12. Any other business</b>		
	<b>13. Conclusions of the meeting</b>		
<b>12:15</b>	<b>End of the meeting</b>		

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