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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
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**THREE DIMENSIONAL ROAD MAP
FOR ACHIEVING A FULLY OPERATIONAL EMERALD NETWORK
IN 7 COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE
SOUTH CAUCASUS**

- FINAL -

*Document agreed at the Final Conference of the EU/CoE Joint Programme
“Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II”
and compiled by Mr Dave Pritchard*

1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS ROAD MAP

- 1.1 This Road Map identifies the key steps to be undertaken by relevant national authorities and others between 2016 and 2019 to conclude the establishment by 2020 of a complete and fully operational Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (Emerald Network) in four countries of Central & Eastern Europe (Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine) and three countries in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).
- 1.2 The Road Map expands on the milestones already agreed in the revised “Emerald Calendar” for 2011-2020¹. The aim of the Emerald Network is to ensure, on a common basis shared by all European countries, the long-term survival of internationally important species of wild fauna and flora and their habitats.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 According to Article 4.1 of the Bern Convention, each Contracting Party shall take appropriate measures to ensure the conservation of (i) natural habitats that are endangered and (ii) the habitats of wild flora and fauna, especially species listed in Appendices I and II of the Convention. Under Article 4.2, Parties are to use their planning and development policies to avoid or minimise deterioration of the areas they protect for the purposes of Article 4.1. Articles 4.3 and 10.1 require coordinated special efforts in respect of areas of importance for migratory species.
- 2.2 In 1989 the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention adopted a Resolution and three Recommendations on habitat conservation, including Recommendation No. 16 on the development of a network of “Areas of Special Conservation Interest” (ASCIs). The process of setting up this network then paused for a few years while the European Community (now the European Union) brought into operation its “Natura 2000” network, so that coherence between the two networks could be assured.
- 2.3 In due course the Bern Standing Committee agreed Resolution No. 3 of 1996, which effectively re-launched the ASCI network with the new short-form name of “Emerald Network”. Resolution No. 5 of 1998 subsequently confirmed that in the case of Member States of the EU (all of which are Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention) their Natura 2000 sites constitute their contribution to the Emerald Network. By the same token, thanks to harmonisation of the two processes, the Emerald Network effectively constitutes an extension of the Natura 2000 network to European non-EU countries. Hence a coherent pan-European system has been created.
- 2.4 Moreover, by virtue of Resolutions No. 3 of 1996 and No. 5 of 1998, participation in the Emerald Network has been invited from European countries which are not yet Parties to the Convention, and from Parties to the Convention lying outside Europe. As a non-Party observer State the Russian Federation has participated actively in the process since 1999, and its contribution is reflected in the present Road Map.
- 2.5 All the relevant countries have, through the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international fora, also committed themselves to Target 11 in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which provides that “*By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes*”.
- 2.6 In order to progress the establishment of the Emerald Network in the seven countries named above, a programme of work known as “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II” has been

¹ Bern Convention (2015a). Revised calendar for the implementation of the Emerald network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest 2011-2020. Document T-PVS/PA (2015) 16 agreed by the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee, Strasbourg, December 2015.

undertaken on a joint basis by the Council of Europe and the European Commission (DG NEAR) in the period 2012-2016. The present Road Map was produced as an output of the Final Conference of this joint programme, held in Minsk, Belarus, on 4-5 October 2016.

3. DIMENSION 1: ACTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING AND DESIGNATING SITES

3.1 Standing Committee Resolution No. 3 (1996), Recommendation No. 16 (1989) and Resolution No. 5 (1998) have provided guidance on the process of identifying and designating ASCIs for the Emerald Network in countries other than EU Member States (in the latter it is taken care of by the compatible process for identifying and designating SPAs and SACs for the Natura 2000 network, under the EU Directives on Birds and Habitats). The process consists of three phases (which are pursued iteratively rather than necessarily in a linear sequence).

Phase I

3.2 The first step in Phase I is for participating countries to identify species and habitats that require specific conservation measures, in the terms of Recommendation No. 14 of 1989. Lists of these have been compiled by the Standing Committee (habitats in Resolution No. 4 of 1996 and species in Resolution No. 6 of 1998²). The lists were revised (species in 2011 and habitats in 2014), mainly to harmonise with changes in the Annexes of the EU Directives resulting from successive EU enlargements.

3.3 The second step is for countries to select potential ASCIs according to the criteria in Recommendation No. 16 (1989). A site will qualify if it:

- contributes substantially to the survival of threatened species, endemic species, or any species listed in Appendix I or II of the Convention; *or*
- supports significant numbers of species in an area of high species diversity or supports important populations of one or more species; *or*
- contains an important and/or representative sample of endangered habitat types; *or*
- contains an outstanding example of a particular habitat type or a mosaic of different habitat types; *or*
- represents an important area for one or more migratory species; *or*
- otherwise contributes substantially to the achievement of the objectives of the Convention.

3.4 Countries then complete standard data forms for each selected site, using the template appended to Resolution No. 5 of 1998 (the version updated in 2013), and they submit these electronically to the Bern Secretariat. Following preliminary verification by the Secretariat of the quality and completeness of the data³, the sites become officially accepted by the Standing Committee as “candidate Emerald sites”.

Phase II

3.5 Phase II involves an evaluation of the proposed sites on a biogeographical basis, by means of regional scientific seminars which assess the adequacy of the relevant country site lists, species by species and habitat by habitat, according to guidance adopted by the Standing Committee⁴ and the relevant Group

² The habitats list applies universally, whereas the species list indicates some species which do not necessarily require special conservation measures in every country, owing to their relative abundance in certain parts of Europe.

³ As described in the Appendix to Recommendation No. 157 (2011).

⁴ Bern Convention (2013). Criteria for assessing the national lists of proposed Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) at biogeographical level and procedure for examining and approving Emerald candidate sites. Revised version of initial guidance from 2010, adopted as Document T-PVS/PA (2013) 13 by the 33rd meeting of the Standing Committee, Strasbourg, December 2013.

of Experts⁵. An adequate list is one deemed sufficient to enable a favourable conservation status for a given species or habitat type in the biogeographical region concerned, and which:

- represents sites from the entire distribution range of every Emerald species and habitat at the national level (and at the biogeographical level if the country concerned straddles more than one region);
- reflects the ecological variation of the habitat and the genetic variation of the species within the biogeographic region concerned; and (for species) includes the full range of habitats required over the different stages of its life-cycle;
- is well adapted to specific conservation needs, in particular to those related to distribution patterns and to the threats and pressures affecting the species and habitats concerned;
- includes significant proportions of the total national area of the habitats and populations of the species concerned.

3.6 The seminars may conclude that a site list is sufficient, or may identify gaps needing to be filled, and/or may specify other work required. Once a country's list emerges from this process it is subject to final scrutiny and approval by the Group of Experts before being transmitted to the Standing Committee for formal adoption as part of the Emerald Network.

3.7 The biogeographical evaluation process is an iterative process, and the organisation of several successive assessments might be necessary (experience in practice shows that they are) if the initial proposals are not considered sufficient for all features to be protected.

Phase III

3.8 Phase III consists of the national designation of the adopted Emerald Network sites (ASCIs) and the implementation of management, monitoring and reporting measures (see sections 4 and 5 below) in line with Resolution No. 8 of 2012.

Actions identified from the CoE/EC Joint Programme Final Conference in 2016

<i>Organisation of the process</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeframes to be constructed for the action steps and milestones required to ensure that completion of each national network is achieved by the target date of 2020.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National authorities to identify and make arrangements for fully involving all relevant stakeholder groups who may be able to contribute to the site identification and designation process, including sub-national authorities and civil society as well as the full range of scientists with relevant competences (bearing in mind for example the need to avoid biased emphasis on the more well-studied taxa and habitats). Consideration to be given to the need to organise special multi-stakeholder sub-regional seminars, especially to progress site identification and designation work in the larger countries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanatory and guidance materials on the Emerald Network site identification and designation process to be widely disseminated in relevant languages, to support the fullest possible involvement of all those who may be able to contribute. Newly summarised guidance on the processes (for example on sufficiency evaluations) may also be necessary to assist stakeholders who have lower levels of familiarity.
<i>Data gathering and site identification</i>

⁵ Bern Convention (2015b). Emerald Network sufficiency evaluation (Phase II): methodology, practical organisation and outcomes. Document T-PVS/PA (2015) 2 prepared for the 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas And Ecological Networks, Strasbourg, September 2015.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigations to be undertaken into the potential contribution of additional sources of data from beyond the nature conservation field, for example forest inventories, agricultural land use classifications and water resources management data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good use to be made of reputable “grey literature” and other reputable data and information sources in addition to peer-reviewed scientific publications, especially in situations where published research to date is limited and where conservation needs are urgent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In transboundary situations, data, consultation and evaluation to encompass inputs from both/all sides of the border/s concerned, including between EU countries and non-EU countries where applicable. Attention to be given to shared ecological systems, migration routes and corridors on an ecologically functional basis, and a Eurasian perspective to be born in mind where this is biogeographically appropriate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas regarded as “wilderness” to be included in consideration of possible sites, since lack of use/occupation does not equate to an absence of threat.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful negotiation efforts to be planned where particular interest groups (e.g. landowners, hunters) may have a history of concerns or antagonism towards nature conservation designations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where relevant, marine sites should receive equivalent attention and efforts as terrestrial ones in the identification and data gathering. The Bern Secretariat and Standing Committee to consider the establishment of a Group of Experts on marine conservation.
<p><i>Constructing a sufficient Network</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each country to specify a programme of specific action steps (with timeframes) required to address the “sufficiency” conclusions relating to its own habitats and species, as produced by the relevant biogeographical seminars that have been undertaken so far.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiency of national lists of sites to be assessed not only in relation to the Emerald criteria but also in relation to the Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (which seeks effective conservation by 2020 of at least 17 per cent of each country’s terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of its coastal and marine areas), bearing in mind that the percentage of territorial coverage is not a unique criterion for measuring success in achieving the Emerald Network objective: the long term survival of species and habitats of European importance (see also previous bullet point).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In countries/biogeographic regions where good progress has been made towards sufficiency of coverage of species and habitats following initial evaluation seminars, options to be explored for convening second-round seminars in 2017 (notably in relation to non-avian species in the Caucasus and Boreal regions, involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Russian Federation or in Ukraine for end 2017/beginning of 2018). The Bern Standing Committee in November 2016 to make the requisite provision for this in its forward planning decisions. Bilateral meetings (as opposed to multi-country seminars) may be an appropriate solution in some cases in more distant future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations to be progressed for updating the lists of species and habitats protected through the Emerald Network (Resolution No. 4 of 1996 and Resolution No. 6 of 1998) to represent more completely the ecology of the seven countries. National authorities to complete the proposal proformas for this as required, and to consider indicating priorities in respect of the deficiencies that are perceived to be the most urgent. Regard to be had in this, where appropriate, to compatibility with comparable listings under other biodiversity-related Conventions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to be given to the sufficiency of the Network on an on-going basis beyond the initial evaluation conclusions, since (1) ‘natural’ changes in species and habitat distribution and abundance (e.g. climate change) and (2) changes in knowledge may require further additions to the Network. This will ensure that sufficiency is maintained over the time.
<p><i>Capacity and resources</i></p>

- A variety of potential sources of financial and other support to be explored, including LIFE+, INTERREG and Eastern Partnership tools. The Bern Standing Committee to assist the seven countries in their efforts in this regard by providing high-level encouragement to governments and others in a position to offer such support. Options also to be explored for providing central guidance and advice on identifying and accessing potential sources of funding support.

4. DIMENSION 2: ACTIONS FOR PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Success of the Emerald Network cannot be achieved by designations alone, but depends on securing defined conservation outcomes for the relevant species and habitats.
- 4.2 According to Recommendation No. 16 (1989), once ASCIs have been designated by the States, the States are asked to ensure wherever possible that:
- the sites are subject to an appropriate regime designed to conserve the factors that are the basis for their inclusion in the Network (reference to “an appropriate regime” means that legal protection is not necessarily expected);
 - the agencies responsible for management and/or conservation of the sites have sufficient training, equipment and resources (both human and financial) to enable them to fulfil their role;
 - appropriate and coordinated research is conducted to further the understanding of critical elements in the management of ASCIs and the monitoring of their status; and
 - activities adjacent to or in the vicinity of the sites do not adversely affect them.
- 4.3 The States are further recommended in respect of ASCIs to:
- draw up and implement management plans with short- and long-term objectives;
 - regularly review the management plans in light of changing knowledge or other conditions;
 - clearly mark the boundaries of ASCIs on maps and as far as possible also on the ground;
 - advise landowners and relevant authorities about the location and important features of the sites; and
 - provide for monitoring of the sites.
- 4.4 Further elaboration of these various core measures and of additional options (such as acquisition and incentives) is provided in Recommendation No. 25 (1991) and Resolution No. 8 (2012) and in a guidance document produced in 2014⁶. The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks has also prepared draft guidelines on managing Emerald sites with particular reference to climate change adaptation and mitigation, which can be consulted on the Convention website⁷.

Actions identified from the CoE/EC Joint Programme Final Conference in 2016

<i>Protection</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options to be clearly established in each individual case for the eventual appropriate regime to be used to conserve the designated areas (in the terms of Bern Recommendation No. 16 of 1989); whether this is to be full legal protection or some other suitably effective conservation measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of different approaches to legal site protection measures to be shared among the countries

⁶ Bern Convention (2014). Towards management of Emerald sites. Document T-PVS/PA(2014) 8 prepared for the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas And Ecological Networks, Strasbourg, September 2014.

⁷ Bern Convention (2015c). Draft guidelines on managing the Emerald sites, including climate change adaptation and mitigation. Document T-PVS/PA (2015) 10 prepared for the 7th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas And Ecological Networks, Strasbourg, September 2015. Available at <https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2792842&SecMode=1&DocId=2298568&Usage=2>.

<p>so that effort is not wasted in re-originating good models. Experience of transposition into national legislation of the nature Directives in EU countries to be included in this.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location and significance of candidate Emerald Sites to be reflected in relevant policy and planning instruments in non-conservation sectors as well as in conservation plans, for example in regional development strategies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries which have incorporated aspects of Emerald Network provisions into national legislation to document their approach and experiences of this, as case examples to assist others who may be considering doing likewise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bern Convention Secretariat to seek opportunities to organise a seminar/workshop on the legal issues for designation of Emerald Network in all countries dealing with its establishment.
<p><i>Management</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each country to define realistic and prioritised action steps for achieving eventual full coverage of its Emerald sites by suitable management plans, having regard to existing good practice guidance and experience where applicable (see below), and including <i>inter alia</i> attention to influences on the site from its surrounding landscape, and provisions for monitoring and reporting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels of knowledge transfer and capacity-building from EU countries to be explored so that the seven countries can benefit to the maximum extent from experience gained in the EU in establishing management measures and good practices for sites in the Natura 2000 network, particularly in respect of semi-natural habitats.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels of experience-exchange and joint problem-solving to be explored between all the countries involved, and with their transboundary neighbours, so that successful methods and lessons learned can be shared.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps to be taken to secure sources of external funding support for the development of site management plans.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Focal Points for the Emerald Network to coordinate with the Focal Points for other Conventions in each country to ensure experience-sharing and harmonised approaches to management planning, taking full advantage of methodologies and good practice standards which may already exist in these other frameworks (e.g. for wetland sites, the management planning guidelines adopted under the Ramsar Convention).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accommodate a variety of systems and mechanisms for delivering effective management of the sites, including those based on regulations and mandatory standards and those based on incentives and voluntary measures. To accommodate also a variety of levels of ambition concerning objectives and outcomes, provided that the minimum expectations agreed in Recommendation 16 (1989), Recommendation 25 (1991) and Resolution No. 8 (2012) are met.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make arrangements for fully involving all relevant stakeholder groups who may be able to contribute to the planning and implementation of site management, including the NGO sector as well as resource management agencies and competent scientists. Involvement may include, <i>inter alia</i>, sharing of information and data, direct delivery of management measures, participation in decision-making, and representation on relevant bodies having responsibility for the governance or oversight of management regimes.
<p><i>Monitoring and effectiveness assessment</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each country to make arrangements for monitoring of all of its Emerald Network sites, sufficient at least to ensure that any changes likely to have substantial negative effects on the ecological character of the site can be detected and reported to the Bern Secretariat (as agreed in Resolution No. 5 of 1998) and so that appropriate conservation responses to threats and changes can be initiated when required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each country to define the mechanisms it will employ to monitor and assess the ecological effectiveness of the management of its Emerald Network sites, by reference to the conservation and

management objectives defined for each site.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and effectiveness assessment of Emerald Network implementation to be integrated with monitoring of the implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and/or action plan for each country, as appropriate. |
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5. DIMENSION 3: ACTIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

- 5.1 To be fully effective, the Emerald Network will need to maintain high levels of public, political and institutional support. This in turn will depend on prominent (and positive) visibility, easy access to information, inter-sectoral cooperation and good engagement by civil society. Actions defined on this topic in this Road Map may in due course be developed further and separately into a distinct “Communications Plan” for the Network.
- 5.2 In 2012, an Action Plan on the strategic development of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN, which includes Emerald sites) for 2012-2020 was prepared by the Bern Group of Experts. It contains proposals for raising awareness about the benefits of ecological networks (including Emerald) by means of short publications aimed at decision-makers and other stakeholders in various sectors. Sharing experiences with those who have undertaken communication activities to promote the Natura 2000 Network in the EU will also be important.
- 5.3 As well as maintaining the case for support, the credibility and efficient functioning of the Network will be aided by transparent access to information and efficient sharing of data. Recommendation No. 5 (1998) stipulates that a database of information on ASCIs shall be public (except for anything classed as confidential), and that the Group of Experts will regularly publish lists of designated ASCIs. The Standing Committee also, in the guidance it agreed in 2013, decided that final detailed conclusions of the biogeographic seminars (see section 3 above) should be published on the Council of Europe website.
- 5.4 Monitoring and evaluation, as referred to in section 4 above, are only meaningful when associated with processes for *reporting*, and this is considered here as a further aspect of communication. Resolution No. 5 (1998) asks governments to inform the Secretariat of any changes likely to have substantial negative effects on the ecological character of a designated ASCI. Resolution No. 8 (2012) asks governments to report every six years on the implementation of the management measures they have planned and put in place for their Emerald sites, and the first of these reporting exercises is due in 2018. (The Group of Experts has been charged with developing a format to be used for this).

Actions identified from the CoE/EC Joint Programme Final Conference in 2016

<i>Taking a strategic approach to communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To the extent that capacity permits, and with external assistance where possible, strategies/programmes for Emerald Network communication activities (possibly including public information campaigns) to be drawn up at national level in each participating country, on a joint basis between governments and NGOs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral and multilateral channels of communication to be developed and enhanced at both formal and informal levels between the seven countries, and between each of them and their neighbours, for increasing awareness about the setting up and operation of the Emerald Network.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bern Secretariat to exchange information about the Emerald Network with other MEA Secretariats, seeking joint or harmonised approaches where appropriate on communication, education, participation and awareness work in relation to site networks in the Emerald area. The Bern Standing Committee to support this by giving encouragement to governments to ensure close liaison between the respective Focal Points of the different Conventions at national level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of successful communication initiatives to be shared among the countries, and between

NGOs and governments, so that lessons can be learned, existing materials can be adapted for wider use, and different approaches can be considered for different target audiences (schools, tourists, etc).
<i>Enhancing dissemination and impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Articles and other communication and awareness-raising materials to be disseminated through available outlets not only of the primary implementing organisations but also through the websites, publications, social media platforms and other publicity channels of all relevant collaborators.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Bern Secretariat to enhance provision of guidance and other materials in user-friendly formats on the Emerald Network pages of the Convention’s website.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential sources of financial support to be explored in particular for additional translation of communication materials into relevant local languages, and for employment of skilled communication professionals to convert scientific and technical materials into attractive products for the public.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The “Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II” Joint Programme represents a landmark in cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. It has led already to impressive results, and to a remarkable degree of cooperation not only between the seven countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus covered by the programme, but also between the governments, civil society and scientific institutions within those countries. Their shared sense of purpose and strong collaborative spirit was a key feature of the final conference which produced this Road Map.
- 6.2 The Road Map therefore emerges as a powerful consensus agreement about the way forward. It should however not be seen merely as a report, but as a practical working tool, with the signposts and routes that are mapped out here being subsequently converted into individual action steps and greater operational detail. In many cases this will involve capitalising on and intensifying existing efforts rather than necessarily embarking on new activities; and the technical foundations have been well built already by the substantial results of Phases I and II of the joint programme.
- 6.3 All three “dimensions” of the Road Map are equally important and indivisible. Taken together, they provide a strong triangle of stability for achieving a complete and fully operational Emerald Network by 2020, and for ensuring its sustainability thereafter. The future of Europe’s wildlife and habitats depends on this.