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T-PVS (2016) 17

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
Strasbourg, 15-18 November 2016

9th Meeting of the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change

31 May – 1 June 2016
Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

- MEETING REPORT -

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

The 9th meeting of the Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change took place in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) from 31 May 2016 to 1st June 2016.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting;
- Thank the conservation authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Membership of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the excellent hosting of the meeting;
- Take note in particular of the priorities proposed by the Group for the implementation of the Programme of Work on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation endorsed by the Standing Committee in 2015;
- Take note of the proposal that full government-designated Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change and a smaller Select Group of Experts meet in alternate years, in order to allow faster progress on issues such as assessing the vulnerability of species to climate change or adaptation management of protected areas;
- Take note of the need to improve awareness of the strong relationship between climate change and biodiversity and the opportunity to better link, after the Paris negotiations, two of the Rio Conventions, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the CBD;
- In the context of the point above, consider the opportunity to trust the Secretariat of the preparation of a concept note for a possible “Nature for Climate” campaign in 2020 as a follow-up and renewal of the Council of Europe 1970 and 1995 “European Years on Nature Conservation”.
- Examine and, if appropriate, adopt the draft Recommendation on improving communication on Climate Change and Biodiversity

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

The meeting was opened by Ms. Edita Dapo, Minister of Environment and Tourism Igor Planinić, representing the Croat Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Dragan Čović.

Minister Dapo pointed out the close interconnection between climate change and biodiversity. Change in ecosystem services may affect livelihoods. Thus it is vital to adopt both mitigation and adaptation policies and address the impact on climate change on biodiversity. The appropriate institutional and international framework to deal with this issue come from both Rio Conventions, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the different instruments and targets set such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the CBD “Aichi Biodiversity targets”. After the great step forward of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change of April 2016, there is hope that co-ordinated international action may set the bases for nature-friendly solution. In 2014 the whole South East Europe suffered terribly the effects of climate change through catastrophic floods. The work of this group of experts is thus considered as of outmost importance.

The Chair, Ms. Hasmik Ghalachyan (Armenia) welcomed participants (list in appendix 2) and wished the Group would produce results to help governments maintain biodiversity in a context of climate change.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted as it figures in appendix 1 to this report.

3. INTRODUCTION BY THE SECRETARIAT – OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING AND DECISION OF THE 35TH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

[Relevant documents: T-PVS (2014) 4 – Report of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts T-PVS/Inf (2015) 25 Draft Programme of work on Climatic Change and Biodiversity Conservation]

The Secretariat recalled that this was the 9th meeting of the Group and that the Convention had started to work in the issue since 2005, a very pioneer work at the time. Since then the Standing Committee had adopted 10 recommendations and commission an important number of reports on the impact of climate change on different taxonomic groups and on the effects of climate change in ecosystem change involving invasive alien species, forest fires and different types of ecosystems.

At its last meeting the Standing Committee had endorsed a new Programme of Work on Climatic Change and Biodiversity Conservation, while noting that such plan was ambitious.

The Standing Committee had invited Parties to urgently implement the rather extensive guidance and recommendations adopted and to put in place the tools for the effective implementation of the work plan and to report on its progress.

The Group of Experts has the role to follow implementation, assisting States where necessary. The Group was invited to report on implementation of recommendation and examine carefully the Action Plan on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation endorsed by the Committee in view of suggesting some priorities for action.

4. REPORTS FROM PARTIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RELEVANT STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf (2016) 9 – Compilation of National Reports]

All Parties at the meeting that had sent reports to the Secretariat were invited to present their national reports. In all 14 reports were received.

The representatives of Albania, Armenia, Iceland, Latvia, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom presented their national reports.

In all the general impression is that most States are well aware that climate change is having important implications in the way biological diversity needs to be managed and most are drafting policy document and strategies based on a growing volume of scientific evidence on the risks for many species and ecosystem as well as the threat to ecosystem services. Yet remedial action is patchy,

with a great variety of responses from States. Efficient policies have not yet been implemented in the ground. Climate change adaptive management for protected areas at the moment is the exception rather than the norm. Protected areas managers are coping with change without specific tools and on a case-by-case approach, even if the effects of climate change on species abundance is recorded satisfactorily. A much more careful monitoring of change is a real need. The impact of Bern Convention abundant guidance is also open to interpretation.

5. UPDATES ON BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORK IN OTHER FOR A – OPEN TO PRESENTATIONS BY:

5.1 Impacts of climate change on wildlife

By Mr Olly Watts, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Mr Olly Watts presented facts about birds' distribution, which is changing with climate change in the United Kingdom. He stressed the need to adopt a European-wide perspective, as many species will just move to Northern latitudes but will not significantly increase their populations while for other this transition may be problematic. He noted how the spread north of some species, like the little egret, is much helped by protected areas. First they will colonise protected areas, later they will spread to the wider countryside. The conclusion for biodiversity conservation is that network of protected areas needs to be substantially enlarged and diversified to help new colonies.

Cool-adapted species will be in decline in much of Northern Europe, some with little alternative habitat. Those species should receive priority conservation attention. Web interactions will also change, for instance in species depending on food that depend on plantation. More frequent extreme weather conditions may also take a toll on certain species. Floods in the United Kingdom, for instance, are thought to be responsible for bearded tit population crash in 2001. A more diversified habitat may permit to buffer impacts on species threatened by climate change, so site management will become more important to help wildlife to adapt.

Careful monitoring of species is more needed than ever to follow change. Other important priorities could be to continue mitigation efforts, provide suitable habitat (enlarging protected areas and enhancing an adaptive management reduce other threats on wildlife and use ecosystem based adaptation for human adaptation.

6. COMMUNICATING ON CLIMATE CHANGES AND BIODIVERSITY – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 Communicating on climate change and biodiversity: challenges and opportunities

By Mr Lucas Sánchez Sampedro, Scientific Manager, Scienseed

[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf(2016) 11 – Communicating climate change and biodiversity to policy makers]

Mr Lucas Sánchez presented a Manual on “Communicating on climate change and biodiversity to policy makers”. He stressed the difficulty in presenting scientific information to policy-makers. Scientists are keen on accuracy when presenting complex phenomena while policy-makers favour clarity to precision. Yet simplification of scientific information (especially as complex as climate change) is not always possible. He recommended avoiding jargon, stressing how biodiversity is particularly important to livelihoods and avoiding referring to climate change as a future threat rather as to a present change in our surroundings, due to past human impacts on the biosphere.

He recommended to take into account psychological phenomena, to avoid too much of an emotional/moral debate and present problems and solution concisely and clearly, stressing what possible loss or positive changes in our life and natural surroundings may be brought by climate change.

He encouraged the Convention to use a growing attention by the public and governments to the climate debate to forward sound biodiversity conservation policies. Climate change should be seen as an opportunity to enhance how much humans depend from ecosystem services. Linking both climate change and biodiversity and presenting biodiversity as a resource to mitigate climate change could indeed make this sector of activity more relevant to policy-makers and the public.

The Group welcomed the Manual developed by Scienseed and recognised the tool can be extremely useful for channelling communication to decision-makers on the urgency climate change brings to addressing biodiversity and ecosystem services loss. It was suggested that a draft Recommendation is prepared and sent to the Standing Committee for examination and possible adoption. The Recommendation will be aimed at reminding Contracting Parties to the Convention of the above mentioned challenges and urge the competent authorities to use the Manual (to be appended to the draft Recommendation) in their work.

7. BERN CONVENTION PROGRAMME OF WORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf (2015) 25 – Programme of Work on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation]

The consultant, Mr Brian Huntley, presented the programme of work he had prepared for the Standing Committee. He emphasised that climate change had been occurring for the past century so there was no time to wait and actions had to be implemented without delay. The role of the Group of Experts could be to monitor implementation, prioritise action and advise governments. Some responsibilities were on the side of States but other tasks could be undertaken co-operatively by the Group of Experts.

The guidance provided in previous recommendations and in the programme of work was quite comprehensive. Implementation was regrettably slow and partial. Parties should focus on:

- Prevent or reverse habitat loss;
- Facilitate permeability of landscapes to species and increase “defragmentation” of habitats;
- Assess vulnerability of species to climate change. [In this context it was noted that IUCN Climate Change Specialist Group was close to completing guidelines for assessing species vulnerability to climate change.]

For the assessment of species vulnerability, it would be important to do it as the scale of the whole Europe, or even the World, so a better perspective is obtained. In the discussion that ensued, experts noted that, if done at the national level, a species moving northwards might be seen to be increasing while, at the same time, its overall European or World population might be in decline. Experts also noted that there were many different methodologies to assess the vulnerability of species to climate change, often with contradictory results. The Group agreed this was a priority, focusing on Bern Convention species.

Another priority was to build a more solid and resilient system of protected areas. Synergy with the Group of Experts on protected Areas was necessary. Guidance for Emerald Network should ensure that “adaptive management” became the rule rather than the exception. It was noted by the consultant and the experts that most likely the Emerald Network (and Natura 2000) would not be able to ensure the preservation of the species protected in the Appendices of the Convention from climate change effects unless they undergo radical changes and become more ambitious. An extension of present protected areas was needed to make the whole natural system more resilient to change.

Other aspect of importance presented by the expert and discussed by the Group was monitoring. It was critical to assess the impact of climate change on species and is also needed to assess the effectiveness of species and habitat conservation measures. Monitoring needs to become more systematic better funded and more technically sound through the adoption of a standard methodology.

Another important point discussed was to continue assessing the role of biodiversity in maintaining ecosystem function and ecosystem service, as well as to promote nature-based solutions for climate mitigation

Other points raised included the need to forward research and awareness on the stress that climate change will bring to natural systems, particularly fragile areas like the European Arctic where impacts are expected to be high.

Collaboration with other institution and for a (CBD and other relevant MEAs) was also recommended by the Group, as well as more governmental action.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTED AREAS: ADAPTATION OF MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE WATCH

As discussed in the point above, the Group was in favour of working in synergy with the Group of Experts on Protected Areas to provide guidance for “adaptive management”. At present management of protected areas (particularly in the Emerald Network and Natura 2000) seems to be purely “reactive” to climate change.

The Group recommended a more pro-active management focused on species threatened by climate change, more control of invasive alien species that increase their impact on native biodiversity as conditions for their spread improve and a greater focus on climate change in the drafting of management plans.

In a sense a new time had come for managers of protected areas as they will need to embrace a new more dynamic approach to management or see the loss of species and endangered habitat types.

The Group noted that protected areas have an important role to play in the monitoring of change. As many of them have competent scientific teams, register of change in species composition and abundance will permit a record of change and the forecast of biological change.

The networking and “defragmentation” and interconnection of protected areas were also mentioned. There is certainly a more acute need to demolish artificial barriers that make species movement difficult. More corridors and broader “buffer zones” around protected areas should be envisaged.

9. SYNERGIES AND CO-ORDINATION WITH OTHER FORA

The Group thought it was important that the Bern Convention keep present synergies on the topic with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Union and different MEAs (Multilateral Environment Agreements) active on the topic, such as the Convention on Migratory Species and its related agreements.

10. PROPOSALS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE TO THE BERN CONVENTION

The Secretariat noted that the Standing Committee had already invited Parties to implement appropriate recommendations on the topic and develop specific action proposed in the “Programme of work on climate change and biodiversity conservation” adopted by the Committee in 2015.

The Group suggested three specific actions that, among others, could help to improve and promote species and ecosystems threatened by climate change. They could be summarised as follows:

1. Review management plans of protected areas in the light of climate change threats. The “adaptation management” approach should also be the rule for future management plans for protected areas.
2. Consider enlarging substantially protected areas to cover an increased variety of habitats, thus facilitating colonisation by species changing their distribution areas because of climate change.
3. Assess threatened species in Appendices I and II of the Bern Convention to see if those species will increase its level of threat in 30 years because of climate change. This exercise does not need to be complex and there are a number of methodologies in place that could be used. The purpose could be, for each species, to be able to tell if:
 - it will be severely (negatively) affected by climate change;
 - it will be moderately negatively affected by climate change;
 - it will not be significantly affected by climate change or it will be favoured by climate change.

Such analysis would help the identification of species whose conservation status may be more severely affected by climate change and establish appropriate remediation policies.

On the example of the work achieved on IAS by the Convention, it was proposed that the full delegates Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change and a smaller Select Group of

Experts meet in alternate years, in order to allow faster progress on issues such as the species' vulnerability assessment to climate change. Cooperation of the eventual Select Group on Biodiversity and Climate change with IUCN Climate Change SSC is facilitated.

11. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR (AND VICE-CHAIR)

Mr Trausti Baldursson (Iceland) was elected Chair for the next two meetings of the Group, and Ms Silvamina Alshabani (Albania) was elected Vice-Chair.

12. ANY OTHER ISSUES

No other issue was raised.

Appendix 1



Strasbourg, 7 April 2016

T-PVS (2016) 2

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS

Bern Convention Group of Experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change

31 May – 1 June 2016
Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

AGENDA

1. **OPENING OF THE MEETING**
2. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**
[Relevant document: T-PVS (2016) 11 – Preliminary Draft Agenda]
3. **INTRODUCTION BY THE SECRETARIAT – OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING AND DECISION OF THE 35TH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE**
[Relevant document: T-PVS (2014) 4 – Report of the 8th meeting of the Group of Experts]
4. **REPORTS FROM PARTIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RELEVANT STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS SINCE THE LAST MEETING (JUNE 2014)**
[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf (2016) 9 – Compilation of National Reports]
5. **UPDATES ON BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORK IN OTHER FORA**
 - Impacts of climate change on wildlife
By Mr Olly Watts, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Discussion
6. **COMMUNICATING ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**
 - Communicating on climate change and biodiversity: challenges and opportunities
By Mr Lucas Sánchez Sampedro, Scientific Manager, Scienseed
[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf (2016) 11 – Communicating climate change and biodiversity to policy makers]
7. **BERN CONVENTION PROGRAMME OF WORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION**
[Relevant document: T-PVS/Inf (2015) 25 – Programme of Work on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation]
 - Presentation
By Mr Brian Huntley
 - Discussion on priorities for the next biennium
8. **CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTED AREAS: ADAPTATION OF MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE WATCH**
9. **SYNERGIES AND CO-ORDINATION WITH OTHER FORA**
10. **PROPOSALS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE TO THE BERN CONVENTION**
11. **ELECTION OF THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR**
12. **ANY OTHER ISSUES**

Appendix 2

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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