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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

36th meeting
Strasbourg, 15-18 November 2016

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE 3RD STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
EU/COE JOINT PROGRAMME
„EMERALD NETWORK OF NATURE PROTECTION SITE,
PHASE II“**

STRASBOURG, 14 JANUARY 2016

*Document prepared by
by the Directorate for Democratic Governance*

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1. Composition and role of the Steering Committee

The project Steering Committee is composed of the Manager of the project at the Council of Europe, the responsible for the project oversight at the European Commission, the appointed national project leaders in each of the seven target countries and a representative from the competent national authorities in each target country. The Steering Committee is the decision making-body of the project and meets every year (3 times during the project lifetime). The Steering Committee reviews the progress in the achievement of the project objectives, plans all project activities and discusses solutions to eventual shortcomings in the project implementation.

The agenda of the 3rd Steering Committee meeting was prepared in cooperation with the European Commission.

2. Project achievements in 2015

1. Progress in the project implementation was steady across the target countries. Emerald sites cover from 7.5 to 11 per cent of the national territories. In all countries new potential Emerald sites and habitats were identified, which will result in nearly 200 new areas in 2015 alone; borders of some Emerald sites were extended; the national databases and maps were revised and new entries were made therein; field visits and meetings were conducted; multiple stakeholders were involved; cooperation with other international initiatives was pursued; publications and visibility materials were issued;
2. Furthermore, the countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU in 2014 (Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) pursued efforts to approximate national legislation and the EU environmental acquis and raise the status of the Emerald areas. For instance, the project leader of Georgia presented the draft law On biodiversity and a new chapter On protected forests and high conservation status areas in the Forest Code in Georgia;
3. In the Republic of Moldova, the Emerald Network was integrated in the national action plan whereas some elements of the Emerald Network were included in the University curriculum;
4. Both country representatives and project leaders agreed that it is necessary to mainstream the project results to high-level decision makers as well as across the scientific community;
5. The countries presented diverse visibility initiatives, including reporting under international conventions, publications, TV programmes, news articles, leaflets, meetings and workshops (including ministerial, meetings with farmers, students and academia), presentations at global events, a drawing competition for children, integrating the Emerald Network in the university curriculum (Republic of Moldova), or setting up a museum of the Emerald Network (Ukraine). As regards future initiatives, the Russian Federation plans to publish the results of the biogeographical seminars in order to raise awareness across the scientific community, as well as guidelines on the Emerald Network to raise awareness across Ministries and regional authorities;
6. The project leaders stressed improved cooperation with other international organisations and biodiversity initiatives, such as the UNDP, the WWF, BirdLife and local NGOs. Importantly, cooperation with the UNDP helped Belarus identify 11 new potential candidate sites whereas cooperation with GIZ helped Georgia draft biodiversity laws;
7. As highlighted by the scientific experts, the sufficiency statistics obtained as a result of the national biogeographical seminars show that more efforts should be deployed by the countries in order to reach the project target, i.e. the setting up of an operational Emerald network. At the same time, the experts praised the countries for their dedicated work and emphasised better results compared with the Natura 2000 results at the same stage of the biogeographical process in the 1990s. The experts emphasised that the statistics should be handled with caution due to the absence of a direct correlation between quality and quantity in the sufficiency assessment and the time needed to reach the target;
8. The biogeographical seminars organised in 2015 in Tbilisi, Petrozavodsk and Minsk received a very positive feedback from the target countries. Not only did they help the countries better understand the distribution of species and hence work towards filling in the gaps, but they also contributed to a better understanding of the process and targets, broader stakeholder involvement, experience exchange and to establishing new contacts and cooperation schemes;

9. The countries agreed that scientific data collected insofar can be made public;
10. Possible improvements to the biogeographical seminars in 2016 were highlighted by the countries: to hold preliminary meetings with all stakeholders involved (Belarus), to publish the results of the seminars as guidelines (the Russian Federation), to involve more stakeholders (the Republic of Moldova), to upgrade data on species and habitats (Ukraine, Georgia), to reach out to a wider community, including scientists (Ukraine).

3. Challenges in 2015

1. Similar challenges were faced by the target countries in the project implementation. The main challenge relates to insufficient and outdated data, particularly in the dynamic birds area, which requires a data inventory and updating distribution maps;
2. Other challenges are mostly country-specific and relate, for instance, to border management and the management of new habitats (Georgia); insufficient information and awareness through the decision making (Republic of Moldova); status of the Emerald sites at the national level (Armenia); high travel costs, taxonomic issues, pending harmonisation of some habitat types with the EUNIS habitat classification, the application of the Emerald technical rules concerning the borders (the Russian Federation).

4. Project planning for 2016 and follow-up action

1. As a result of a fruitful discussion, the following project milestones backed up by appropriate follow-up actions were established for 2016:
 - Results of the Minsk seminars, by the experts: 22 January 2016
 - Reporting, by the national project teams: 22-31 January 2016
 - Final conclusions of the 3rd Steering Committee, by the Project Manager: 22 January 2016
 - Draft national Terms of Reference, by the Project Manager: 22 January 2016
 - Comments on the final conclusions and the draft Terms of Reference, by the project leaders: 29 January 2016
 - Revised databases to the experts, by the project leaders: by 31 January 2016
 - Signature of the Administrative Arrangements, by the countries: 29 February 2016
 - Project non-extension request, by the Project Manager: as soon as possible and advisably before the submission of the interim reports;
 - Interim reports to the EC, by the Project Manager: 30 April 2016
 - Final project publication, including results, achievements and pending issues, in a visual format (around 40 pages), by the Project Manager: to be started in spring 2016
 - Biogeographical seminar in Chisinau: change of dates (11-13 May 2016 as 9-11 May are public holidays). The Project Manager will check by 1 February 2016, against the budget and with the EC if appropriate, if it is possible to extend the seminar over 3 days (initially 2.5 days)
 - Biogeographical seminar in Kyiv: 6-8 September 2016, 3 days (no changes)
 - Biogeographical seminar in Tbilisi: 6-7 December 2016. The Project Manager will check by 1 February 2016, against the budget and with the EC if appropriate, if it is possible to extend the seminar over 2 days (initially 1.5 days)
 - Final scientific data delivery, by the countries: by 30 September 2016
 - Final Event: Strasbourg, 4 October 2016 (tbc). Shall the no-cost extension request be granted by the EC, the Project Manager will consider postponing the Final Event to December 2016-January 2017, in coordination with the countries and the EC. The possibility of holding a farewell party and a field visit as well as organising the Event outside Strasbourg will also be checked against the budget/with the EC;

- Final Reporting to the EC: 3 months before the end of the project.
2. Regarding the Final Event (4 October 2016, tbc), the countries put forward a number of proposals with a view to increasing the visibility of the project and preparing its future: to involve multiple stakeholders (Ministries, NGO, academia); to discuss managerial/legislative best-practices from other successful Emerald and Natura 2000 countries (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Baltic States); to invite CBD, IUCN; to present the Emerald viewer; to organise a farewell party; to consider holding the Final Event outside Strasbourg (Baltic States); and to include a field visit.

Annex 1 : Agenda of the meeting



**European Union/ Council of Europe Joint Programme
“Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II”**

3rd project Steering Committee meeting
(Strasbourg, Palais de l’Europe, Room 14
14 January 2016, 9:30-18:00)

AGENDA

09:30 – 09:50	<p>1. Opening of the meeting and welcoming remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance, Council of Europe</i> • <i>Ivana d'Alessandro, Head of Biodiversity Unit, Council of Europe</i> • <i>Laura Giappichelli, Programme Manager, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Unit C2 - Regional Programmes Neighbourhood East, European Commission</i>
09:50 – 11:30 <i>(including coffee break at 10h45)</i>	<p>2. Introduction to the meeting by Christina Baglai</p> <p>Review of achievements and lessons learnt for 2015 - Presentations by the national project leaders (<i>10 min each</i>):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Armenia – Hasmik Ghalachyan ii. Belarus – Yuri Solovjev iii. Georgia – Kakha Artsivadze iv. Republic of Moldova – Angela Lozan v. Russian Federation – Nikolay Sobolev vi. Ukraine – Leonid Protsenko
11:30 – 12:10	<p>3. Results of the Emerald Network evaluation Seminars in 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of results, sufficiency statistics and lessons learnt, presentation by <i>Marc Roekaerts</i> and <i>Otars Opermanis, international experts to the project</i> • Discussion on countries' observations and lessons learnt from the Emerald evaluations in 2015
12:10 – 12:30	<p>4. Discussion on the expectations from the evaluation Seminars in 2016, possible improvements to the process</p>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Lunch break</p>
14:00 – 14:30	<p>5. Draft Guidelines on the management of Emerald sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the draft guidelines, <i>Christina Baglai, Secretariat of the Bern Convention</i> • Discussion
14:40 – 16:10 <i>(including coffee break at 15h10)</i>	<p>6. Project planning for 2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed planning of the Emerald biogeographical Seminars in 2016, by <i>Christina Baglai, Secretariat of the Bern Convention, and Marc Roekaerts, international expert</i> • Planning of the national terms of reference for 2016 for the target countries, discussion moderated by <i>Christina Baglai, Secretariat of the Bern Convention</i> • Final project event: exchange of ideas and planning of the event, discussion and proposals
16:10 – 16:50	<p>7. Visibility, dissemination of results and final reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines for final reporting, <i>Laura Giappichelli, European Commission</i> • Presentation of the national initiatives and activities implemented in 2015, <i>presentations by the national project leaders and discussion (5 min each)</i>
16:50 – 17:20	<p>8. Cooperation with other projects/initiatives in the field of environment/biodiversity at national level, presentations by the national project leaders (5 min each)</p>
17:20– 17:50	<p>9. Exchange of ideas regarding the future of the EU/CoE Joint Programme</p>
17:50	<p>10. Any other business</p>
18:00	<p>11. Conclusions of the meeting</p>

Annex 2 : List of participants



**3rd Steering Committee meeting
Joint EU/CoE Programme Emerald Network, Phase II
Palais de l'Europe, Room 14**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Armenia

1. Hasmik GHALACHYAN, Head of Plant Resources Management Division, Ministry of Nature Protection

Azerbaijan

1. Rashad ALLAHVERDIYEV, Senior Specialist of protection of biodiversity and development of specially protected nature areas department, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (apologised)

Belarus

1. Yuri SOLOVJEV, Chair of Council, NGO "Ecological Initiative"
2. Tatsiana TRAFIMOVICH, Department of Biological and Landscape Diversity, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection

Georgia

1. Kakha ARTSIVADZE, National Project Leader, Centre for Biodiversity, Conservation and Research, NGO NACRES

Republic of Moldova

1. Angela LOZAN, Manager of Biosafety Office, Emerald Project Leader
2. Veronica JOSU, Deputy Head, Natural Resources and Biodiversity Department, Ministry of Environment

Russian Federation

1. Nikolay SOBOLEV, Senior researcher, Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Science, Laboratory of Biogeography
2. Maria DRONOVA, Advisor, Department of international cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Ukraine

1. Leonid PROTSENKO, Director, NGO Inter-Eco Centre

Experts

1. Marc ROEKAERTS, Scientific expert to the project
2. Otars OPERMANIS, Scientific expert to the project

European Commission

1. Laura GIAPPICHELLI, Programme Manager, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Unit C2 - Regional Programmes Neighbourhood East, European Commission

Council of Europe

1. Claudia LUCIANI, Director of Democratic Governance
2. Ivana D'ALESSANDRO, Head of Biodiversity Unit
3. Christina BAGLAI, Project support Officer, Biodiversity Unit
4. Tania BRAULIO, Project Assistant, Biodiversity Unit
5. Daria CHEREPANOVA, Administrative Assistant, Biodiversity Unit

Annex 3 : Address by Ms Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance, Council of Europe

**3rd Steering Committee meeting of the
European Union/ Council of Europe Joint Programme
“Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II”**

on 14 January 2016

Welcoming remarks

- Dear colleagues, I’m really pleased to welcome you in the 3rd Steering Committee meeting of one of our most successful projects: the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II;
- I’m also pleased to welcome Ms Laura Giappichelli, Programme Manager in charge of Environmental Projects at the European Commission. She represents the Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations at DG NEAR, a DG which I visited in November 2015 to discuss about the future of this project.
- In this regards, I would like to express our gratitude to the European Commission for the long-term financial support given to the constitution of the Emerald Network:
 - In 2009 through the financing of the first phase of the Emerald constitution network in your 7 countries, aimed particularly at the identification of the potential Emerald candidate sites.
 - In 2013 with the financing of the second phase, aimed at the evaluation of the sufficiency of the Emerald candidate sites proposed by your countries to ensure the long-term conservation of the species and habitats under the Bern Convention and, by extension, by the EU legislation.

The role of the Emerald Network for the conservation of the European biodiversity

- As you know, the setting-up of the Emerald Network is one of the possible ways to comply with the obligations stemming from Article 4 of the Convention. But I also want to underline the more general role of the Network for the proper conservation of biodiversity at the pan-European level. Covering non-EU Member States, the Emerald Network plays a key role in ensuring harmonisation of biodiversity standards at the level of the continent. Achieving its full complementarity with the EU Natura 2000 network has been a key mission for the Secretariat in the past three years; this work has also ensured the extension of the EU biodiversity standards to non-EU neighbouring countries, namely through the implementation of the current project.
- This JP is inscribed in the wider CoE framework. The Bern Convention supports the work on the setting-up of the Network in a total of 16 non-EU countries: in South-East Europe, in the Eastern Partnership countries, in the Russian Federation, in Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Morocco. Over 3,000 Emerald sites covering nearly 600,000 km² have been already identified for conservation in non-EU member States. Thanks to this work, last December the Standing

Committee could nominate 429 additional areas as candidate Emerald Sites, namely in Georgia, Norway and the Russian Federation.

- The frame for the Emerald Network constitution process is the [Calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network \(2011-2020\)](#), according to which the Network shall be operational by 2020. I want to stress that the present JP has undoubtedly be an important driving force for your countries to be able, so far, to keep on schedule with the milestones set in the Emerald Calendar.

Achievements of the target countries in the Emerald Network constitution process

- We are aware that you have undertaken remarkable efforts in the identification and evaluation of the Emerald sites on your territories, and I'm also thankful to the independent experts and the European Environment Agency, together with its European Topic Center for biodiversity, for the vital technical and scientific support provided. The three evaluation seminars organised in 2015 testifies of these efforts and I'm sure this will be the case also for the three evaluation seminars foreseen in 2016.
- I must say that we, as Secretariat, are very proud of the success of the evaluation process so far. It was the first time that such biogeographic assessments were carried out in your countries, and indeed the first attempt of this kind under the Emerald Network. Judging from the feedback that I received from my colleagues, this has been a most fruitful learning exercise despite being at the same time a very complex process to organize and lead. The involvement of the national authorities has surely been a crucial factor for this success and at the same time – in line with the participatory culture developed at the Council of Europe - I'm also very happy to learn about the high quality participation of the civil society as well as of representatives of the academia and research institutions with a specific competence in the area of habitat conservation. The open participation of stakeholders is a matter to which the Council of Europe attaches a lot of importance, and is indeed a sign of good democratic governance of the project.
- The evaluation results shall guide any future work of the EU-CoE JP after its end in 2016.
- Last year we also got another important feedback, from the Mid-term review of progress in the setting-up of the Emerald Network. The review targeted the 16 countries involved in this process, and showed a contrasted picture: some countries¹ are already getting results, and have contributed to increasing both the overall level of achievements of the Emerald Calendar and the aggregated figures of the Emerald Network. But there are still countries which have not yet proposed any Emerald site on their territory. In the context of this JP, there are three² out of seven countries which need to deploy further efforts to reach a similar level of achievements, although we are aware that this is also due to the significantly bigger territorial coverage of these three countries.

Challenges related to the end of the JP (10/2016)

- There are still uncertainties regarding the format but the framework for EU financial support to biodiversity projects will change.
- Thus in the follow-up phase, close attention will be given to the sustainability of the whole process. This implies that States will have to demonstrate their highest level of commitment towards the setting-up of the Network, for instance through the official adoption of candidate sites

¹ AR, AZ, GE, MD

² BL, RUS, UA

at national level, as well as of relevant legislation to ensure their future protection. Political support at the national level will play an important role as it will allow assessing how reliable countries will be in setting and achieving future project's goals.

- The fact that the Emerald Network is already in the political agenda of your countries, whether this concerns the Association Agreements or the National Biodiversity Strategies, is a first positive step. However from now on, we will ask you to go a step forward with the view of taking full ownership of the whole process.

Concluding remarks

- To conclude, I want to reassure you of the interest of the EU in continue supporting the Emerald Network's constitution process, and tell you that I'm confident that our counterparts at the EU level will be able to advise on possible ways forward towards ensuring the continuation – at least for some countries – of the financial assistance.
- I now invite you to look at this Steering Committee meeting as a good opportunity for discussing this and other matters, but also for celebrating the achievements of yet another very successful year.

Annex 4 : Address by Ms Ivana d'Alessandro, Head of Biodiversity Unit, Council of Europe

**3rd Steering Committee meeting of the
European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme
“Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites, Phase II”**

- I'm pleased to join the Director in greeting and welcoming the participants, and thank Ms Laura Giappichelli for her participation in the meeting, which testifies of the importance that the EU attaches to the Emerald Network's project.
- The Director has touched upon the main strengths and challenges of the whole Emerald process, and I'm grateful for her personal commitment in supporting your work and the work of the Secretariat also through the involvement in the financial negotiations for the future.
- I would though like to emphasise on some of the points already raised, starting from the uncertainties related to the still unknown conditions and administrative framework for a hypothetical third Emerald Network joint project for the period 2017 on.
 - a. As we already did in 2012 at the end of the first Joint Project, we will need to adjust and adapt our work and working methods to the specific needs of a new EU financial scheme, but also to the challenges of the third phase of the Emerald Network constitution process. We were successful in 2012 - despite having a break in the financial assistance for one year - mainly because we focussed on ensuring the sustainability of the project and on keeping up the momentum. Thus my first message to you is that we will be successful in the future as we already did in the past.
 - b. However, it is crucial to start already now preparing for the follow-up. The next phase will require an additional effort from the participating countries. This is not only linked to a possibly new financial scheme that might not be suitable for all of them, but also to the natural evolution of the Emerald Network: Once the candidate Emerald sites are submitted to the Standing Committee after their scientific evaluation, they are approved to formally integrate the Emerald Network, and they must be then designated at national level by national authorities, together with the respective framework for their management, reporting and monitoring.

The success of the whole process will also depend on the level of ownership that we will have achieved to build together, and this necessarily requires increasing efforts as from now, for instance for the identification of new areas that are suitable for completing the national networks on your territories by the end of the current project. To this end, the outcomes of the biogeographic seminars are a crucial feedback to guide you towards future achievements. The Secretariat will be particularly vigilant to ensure that the lessons learnt from the seminars are implemented in the practice and of course we will be happy to continue guiding you in this successful work.
- Also, I would like to invite you to always consider the Emerald Network constitution process in the broader contexts of the Bern Convention and of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
 - a. The setting-up of the Emerald Network has to be seen as a collective effort which involves other countries that couldn't benefit from the financial assistance of a joint

project and that yet are working hard and getting encouraging results, as it is the case for Norway.

- b. The adoption of the Emerald Calendar in the aftermath of the agreement on the world Aichi biodiversity Targets triggered sustained commitment from the national authorities of all the Emerald target countries, and certainly raised also the interest of EU Member States in following more closely, and also supporting, this process.
- c. Nowadays the vocation of the Network is to complete the Natura 2000 Network and to provide Europe with a whole interconnected system of protected areas. From the figures collected last year, the progress towards this goal appears as steadily growing, and I think we can all be proud to note that in 2020 Aichi Target 11 will probably be attained for our continent thanks to the identified Emerald sites.
- d. Therefore I come back to the word “sustainability” and I invite you to ensure as from now that the Emerald Network is present, visible, and sufficiently high in the political priority lists of your countries, so to be able to continue working on its further implementation in an autonomous way. This will be also useful to prepare for the “post-phase III” financing, which will rely on national resources.
- e. You will thus have an additional key role this year: the one of being the advocates of what was born as a visionary project and is now becoming a tangible asset for our continent.

I wish you a happy, lucky, healthy and fruitful 2016, and I encourage you to use this meeting not only for planning, preparing, and learning, but also for celebrating the achievements of the past year.