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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

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**Sustainable financing options for the
Bern Convention**

*Document prepared by
the Secretariat*

At its first meeting held on 9 September 2025, the Working Group on Exploring Sustainable Financing Options for the Bern Convention reached a consensus on the need to examine four strategic options to secure long-term financing for the Convention:

1. Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA);
2. Environment Trust Fund (ETF);
3. Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the Bern Convention; and
4. Protocol amending the Bern Convention.

Background information concerning options 1, 2 and 4 is available in documents “The Bern Convention financial situation” ([GR-C\(2024\)7-rev](#)) and “The Bern Convention financial situation” ([T-PVS/Inf\(2024\)19](#)).

1. Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA)

The establishment of an EPA for the Bern Convention had been considered in recent years but was discontinued in 2021, following the Council of Europe Legal Service’s opinion that it would not comply with [Statutory Resolution Res\(93\)28 on Partial and Enlarged Partial Agreements](#). According to that opinion, an EPA cannot have as its sole objective the operation of a single convention but must cover a broader thematic scope (for example, the environment or a set of related Council of Europe conventions). Moreover, a preliminary discussion in the Committee of Ministers’ Rapporteur Group on Culture, Science, Education and Environment (GR-C) revealed insufficient support to meet the minimum threshold of member States required for establishing such an Agreement.

Since then, significant developments have occurred in the environmental field. The environment has become a key priority for the Council of Europe following the Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Government (2023), the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Environment (GME, 2024), and the adoption of a [Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment \(2025\)](#), among others.

In 2024, when consulted on the possibility of establishing an EPA covering not only the Bern Convention but also other environmental instruments, and potentially linked to the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment, the Legal Service considered that such an approach would be consistent with applicable rules - provided there was sufficient political support.

An EPA would entail mandatory contributions from its members. Provisions could ensure that all Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention¹ - and possibly those to the Florence Convention²- would be members of the EPA, thereby creating a self-standing budget separate from the Council of Europe’s

¹ Currently forty-nine countries and one international organisation have ratified the Bern Convention:

- Forty-five member States of the Council of Europe (in bold those that have also ratified the Florence Convention): Albania, **Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom;**
- four African states: Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia;
- and the European Union.

² Currently forty-one Council of Europe member States have ratified the Florence Convention: Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

ordinary budget. This mechanism would ensure financial autonomy, visibility, and accountability regarding State contributions.

While this option is highly attractive, it would require broad political commitment from the Parties. Its scope should be carefully considered - whether limited to the Bern and Florence Conventions (cf. Objective 5 of the [Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment \(2025\)](#)) or extended to the Strategy as a whole. Preparatory work previously undertaken on the EPA proposal for the Bern Convention could serve as a useful basis for further progress.

This option could be advanced in consultation with the upcoming Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. It would benefit from the support of a “group of friends” willing to contribute and champion the initiative to build wider support.

2. Environment Trust Fund (ETF)

The option of establishing an Environment Trust Fund (ETF) was explored in the second half of 2024 and early 2025 in preparation for the Committee of Ministers’ Ministerial Session in Luxembourg (May 2025). However, it did not obtain the necessary political backing at that stage, pending more favourable political and economic conditions and possible future reconsideration.

The ETF would gather voluntary funding, including from Parties to the Bern and Florence Conventions, as well as from other contributors linked to the [Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment \(2025\)](#). Some degree of mandatory character (e.g. in duration or amount of contributions) could be introduced in the terms of participation. The ETF would be a distinct financial mechanism with its own legal agreement, governance structure, and financial framework.

The Fund would complement the core budgetary resources of the Convention provided under the Council of Europe’s Ordinary Budget and would allow targeted allocations in line with contributors’ priorities. Extra-budgetary contributions could also be channeled through the Fund.

As in the case of the EPA, this option could be promoted with the support of a “group of friends” - a small coalition of member States willing to make contributions, carry the initiative forward, and mobilise further political support.

3. Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the Bern Convention

Convening a Conference of the Parties (CoP) distinct from the Standing Committee could strengthen the financial governance and sustainability of the Bern Convention. The CoP would bring together all Contracting Parties to adopt decisions, in the form of resolutions, on the Convention’s financial sustainability—including matters such as financial contributions or consideration of the EPA and ETF options. These resolutions could then be transmitted to the Committee of Ministers for endorsement, thereby ensuring political legitimacy.

This politically engaging approach could be implemented in the short term without formal amendments to the Convention. A CoP would provide a dedicated forum for reaffirming Parties’ financial responsibilities and enhancing visibility of the Convention’s budgetary needs among all Parties and within the Committee of Ministers.

4. Protocol Amending the Bern Convention

For several years, the Standing Committee’s permanent correspondents have worked on a draft Amending Protocol aimed at introducing a system of regular, mandatory financial contributions by the Parties to ensure sustainable and autonomous financing.

The third version of the Draft Protocol ([T-PVS\(2023\)13](#)) raised a number of institutional, legal and regulatory concerns, which were repeatedly brought to the attention of the Standing Committee. Key issues remained unresolved, including the rate of contribution of the European Union—matters that fall beyond the sole competence of the Bern Convention. It was also recognised that this approach was unlikely to yield results in the medium term, given the low prospects for entry into force. Moreover, it could send an undesirable signal to the Committee of Ministers and risk setting an unfavourable precedent for other Council of Europe Conventions.

A fourth, revised version ([T-PVS\(2024\)10](#)) addressed some of these issues. Nonetheless, several key questions remain, notably concerning the EU contribution rate and the voting thresholds for Standing Committee decisions under the Protocol (unanimity or two-thirds majority). The Council of Europe's financial regulations and the Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Ministers would remain fully applicable.

From a practical standpoint, although intended to provide greater stability and predictability, the Protocol would in reality not offer medium-term certainty. It cannot move forward without full alignment with the Council of Europe's legal and regulatory framework and a solution regarding the EU's contribution in conformity with the Committee of Ministers' requirements.

Conclusion

Securing the financial sustainability of the Bern Convention remains an urgent priority, as it cannot be ensured solely through the Council of Europe's ordinary budget. It is essential to decide and focus on those options which are more likely to materialise and produce results in the short term.

While the Protocol option does not currently provide a viable solution, the EPA and ETF options could be further developed with the support of a "group of friends" and a Presidency of the Committee of Ministers willing to place the issue on its agenda. A CoP could provide the necessary political impetus and serve to mobilise support pending the establishment of an EPA and/or ETF.

The Council of Europe's growing engagement in the environmental field, strengthened by the adoption of the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment, offers a favourable context for moving forward.

Work towards sustainable financing should proceed within an 18-month timeframe, with target milestones at the Committee of Ministers' Ministerial Sessions in May 2026 (Moldova) and May 2027 (Montenegro).