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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

40th meeting
Strasbourg, 30 November-4 December 2020

**REPORT OF THE 11TH MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOLOGICAL NETWORKS**

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Participation*

The 11th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks was held virtually on 7-8 October 2020.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting of the Group of Experts;
- Welcome the assessment of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and encourage Contracting Parties to reply to a questionnaire on their own experience of the reporting;
- Welcome the comparative legal study on the obligations of Contracting Parties towards the Emerald Network and invite the Secretariat to elaborate proposals to complement the legal framework of the Emerald Network along the recommendations of the study;
- Examine and, if appropriate, adopt the monitoring framework of the Emerald Network and invite the Secretariat to further elaborate on the format and the hosting of the online barometer;
- Welcome the development of the Emerald Network Webapp and Viewer and thank the European Environment Agency for its technical and financial support to these developments;
- Welcome the transfer of UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network as adopted sites;
- Welcome the development of the Emerald Network in Belarus thanks to the Council of Europe country specific Action Plan and look forward to the updated and complemented national Emerald Network database;
- Express its concern regarding the on-going revision process of the Emerald Network in Armenia;
- Take note of the evaluation of the implementation of the Revised Calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (2011-2020);
- Welcome the principles of the proposed post 2020 strategic workplan for the Emerald Network and mandate the Secretariat to further develop it in light of CBD's global targets and the EU interpretive guidance related to the targets set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030;
- Consider the proposals for the future activities supporting the setting-up of the Emerald Network when adopting its Programme of activities and budget for 2021;
- Consider the relationship between the COVID 19 pandemic and biodiversity in the post 2020 vision for the Bern Convention.

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1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair, Mr Tore Opdahl, opened the 11th virtual meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks by welcoming the participants. He praised the reduction of the footprint of the meeting and invited the participants to briefly introduce themselves.

The Secretariat welcomed the participants to the unprecedented virtual Group of Experts and provided guidance to participants aiming to ensure a smooth run of the meeting and a constructive discussion.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Appendix I. Upon the proposal of the Bureau of the Standing Committee, the Group of Experts agreed to discuss under item 9 Any other business the relationship between COVID 19 and protected and conserved areas.

3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention

The Chair of the meeting recalled the main decisions taken at the 10th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks. The Secretariat further informed that these decisions resulted in the adoption by the Standing Committee of Recommendation No. 207 (2019) on the progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest, Recommendation No. 208 (2019) on detecting, reporting, assessing and responding to changes in the ecological character of Emerald Network sites, the revised Recommendation No. 157 (2011) on the status of candidate Emerald sites and guidelines on the criteria for their nomination and the revised Annex I to Resolution No. 4 (1996).

4. Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012)

The Secretariat recalled that first reporting cycle on the conservation status of species and habitats was carried out in 2019 and that this reporting was mirroring the reporting under Article 12 and Article 17 of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The expert, Marc Roekaerts, wrapped up of the outcomes of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) as presented in the document [T-PVS/PA \(2020\) 03](#).

The first reporting cycle focused on a subset of 46 representative species and habitats common to EU and non-EU Contracting Parties.

Seven Contracting Parties and one observer State took part in the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and delivered 71 % of the expected reports with high variety of data quality.

Considering that the countries which delivered reports are dispersed, data were aggregated and analysed in a pan-European context.

The analysis of the merged dataset including both non-EU and EU data shows that non-EU countries possibly host large proportions of the whole European resource for several if not many species and habitats and confirms the interest for having a combined assessment of the conservation status of species and habitats in the future.

However due to the relatively small number of reporting countries, the variety of degree of completeness of the reports submitted, the limited resources and tight timing for correcting errors and inconsistencies in the reports a comprehensive assessment of the conservation status was not feasible.

In the discussion which followed several Contracting Parties informed that the reporting represented a significant amount of work which mobilised a lot of human and financial resources, in particular when data were completely absent. Parties supported the preparation of a questionnaire which would aim to identify the obstacles to and the challenges of the reporting, as well as the lessons learnt.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

The members of and Observers to the Group of Experts invited the Standing Committee to take note of the outcomes of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and mandated the Secretariat to elaborate a questionnaire aiming to understand the challenges of and obstacles to the reporting.

5. Development of the Emerald Network guidance

5.a Legal framework of the Emerald Network

The Secretariat recalled that a comparative study aiming to assess obligations of Contracting Parties towards their Emerald Network was initiated with a twofold objective:

- To compare the obligations of countries regarding their designated sites once adopted as set in the Emerald Network and in the Habitats and Birds Directives;
- To clarify the status of candidate site i.e. when should a proposed site become candidate, what are the obligations for countries hosting candidate sites, what differs in the obligations of countries towards candidate vs adopted Emerald Network sites.

The expert, Arie Trouwborst, presented the findings of the comparative study ([T-PVS/PA\(2020\)07](#)). The Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) was created and progressively developed through a series of Resolutions and Recommendations, adopted by the Standing Committee. Parties' legal obligations regarding the designation and conservation of protected sites result from provisions in the Convention, principally Article 4, and also Articles 1, 2, 3, 6(b) and 9. The various Resolutions and Recommendations guide Parties in the implementation of these substantive Convention provisions, and inform those provisions' interpretation. Legally binding obligations under the Bern Convention are essentially similar for candidate and adopted Emerald Network sites (and indeed also for the proposed sites on the national lists submitted by Parties).

It follows from Article 4, interpreted in conformity with Resolution No. 1 (1989), that each Party to the Convention has a general obligation of result with regard to the candidate and adopted Emerald Network sites on its territory. Parties must take those measures regarding their candidate and adopted Emerald Network sites which are required and suitable to effectively ensure the conservation of the habitats of species and the natural habitat types involved.

This entails providing the areas with an appropriate protection regime, taking the necessary management measures to ensure the maintenance or restoration of the habitats involved, providing for sufficient monitoring, and anticipating and responding to threats posed by potentially harmful activities, plans and projects, by providing for a prior authorisation scheme, prior impact assessment where necessary, and the refusal of incompatible projects, barring in exceptional cases by applying Article 9 of the Convention.

To a significant degree, the current obligations that non-EU Contracting Parties have under the Convention regarding the Emerald Network sites, are similar to what is required from EU Member States under the Habitats Directive regarding Natura 2000 sites. Notable differences, however, concern the degree of certainty that is expressly required under the Habitats Directive before a potentially harmful plan or project can be permitted, and certain conditions in the exception clause of Article 6(4) of the Directive that are more restrictive than the conditions of Article 9 of the Convention. Regarding the latter, Article 6(4) only allows exceptions for harmful projects for "imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature" (compared to the longer list of eligible purposes in Article 9), and subject to the taking of compensatory measures (which is not explicitly required by Article 9).

A closer alignment between the obligations of non-EU Convention parties with the obligations of EU member States regarding Natura 2000 sites with regard to the scope of possible harmful projects, the assessment of their possible impact and the compensatory measures in the case these projects cannot be avoided could be envisaged.

In the subsequent discussion it was mentioned that an overarching interpretive document clarifying the requirements of the Convention regarding the Emerald Network could complement the existing legal framework. Some Parties suggested to prepare different options and to examine them at the 2021 Group of Experts.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

The members of and Observers to the Group of Experts mandated the Secretariat to elaborate proposals to complement the legal framework of the Emerald Network along the recommendations of the study and to present them at the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in 2021.

5.b Monitoring framework

The Bureau of the Standing Committee at its second meeting in September 2019 expressed its concern regarding the delays in the Emerald Network calendar and the lack of commitment of many non-EU Contracting Parties.

Consequently, the Bureau mandated the Secretariat to set up a periodic review of the Emerald Network country by country accompanied by country specific technical and scientific advices.

To back up the periodic review a proposal of monitoring framework ([T-PVS/PA\(2020\)2](#)) was presented to the Group of Experts by Otars Opermanis.

Such a monitoring framework did not exist so far. The framework builds on the three phases of the constitution process of the Emerald Network and proposes objective indicators specific to each phase to measure progress. Considering that Contracting Parties are engaged in the three phases of the constitution process at the same time, the indicators will reflect their progress in each of the phases.

The indicators suggested draw on the data available in the consolidated Emerald Network database and can therefore be regularly updated and feed into IT tools.

The indicators are presented in table below:

Phase I			Phase II			Phase III
Number of all site types	Area of all site types (km²)	National coverage of all site types (%)	Sufficiency index (%)	Number of adopted sites	Area of adopted sites (km²)	National coverage of adopted sites (%)
						Proportion of adopted sites with management plans

For the time being the indicator chosen for the phase III is based on the information reported by Parties in their national databases. However, the proportion of Emerald Network adopted sites with management plans does not guarantee that conservation objectives are in place, conservation measures are implemented and monitored. An additional indicator should therefore be developed in the near future to address this gap.

The monitoring framework will also result in a barometer which will be updated every year ahead of the Standing Committee and be published on the website of the Bern Convention. An objective and scientific based evaluation of the implementation of the Emerald Network will therefore be at the disposal of the Standing Committee to measure progress.

In the discussion which followed, it was raised the indicators should further reflect on the effectiveness of the management plans and on the connectivity of the network.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and observers to the Group of Experts welcomed the proposal of monitoring framework and invited the Standing Committee to consider its adoption. It further mandated the Secretariat to elaborate additional indicators or to adapt the proposed indicators along the guidance provided by the CBD for the post 2020 Global Biodiversity targets.

The Group of Experts also invited all Parties which already have adopted sites to update their databases with up-to-date information regarding management plans.

6. Emerald Network tools

At its Extra-ordinary meeting in June, the Bureau supported the development of Emerald Network Webapp and Viewer as an alternative to activities which were put on hold due to the pandemic.

In the meantime, the EEA informed the Secretariat that they were ready to support the development of the Emerald Network tools thanks to their own savings. The agreement reached is that the Bern Convention would cover the costs of the Webapp which relates to the data flow and that the EEA would take care of the harmonisation of the Viewer itself with the one of Natura 2000.

An IT company has therefore been entrusted with the development of the Webapp. The IT developments will result in the following improvements:

- QA/QC are carried out during the data delivery by Parties onto the Common Data Repository (CDR) hosted by the European Environment Agency;
- Data are managed at international level with the Emerald Network WebApp;
- Data are made public with the Emerald Network Viewer.

The IT developments will include:

- More elaborated QA/QC reports for tabular and spatial data;
- Semi-automated harvesting of data from the CDR;
- Creation of change reports for tabular and spatial data;
- Creation of the lists of Adopted and Candidate site together with references to the accepted changes to the site boundaries and site tabular data;
- Comparison of two data sets from different years;
- Production of a yearly new release of the Emerald Network database to be made available to the public with Emerald Network Viewer.

Finally, the Emerald Network Viewer will also be aligned with the Natura 2000 Viewer and display all types of Emerald Network sites, enable queries on sites, species and habitats, propose different types of maps and be updated on yearly basis.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts welcomed the on-going developments.

7. State of play of the Emerald Network and future perspectives

7.a Transfer of Natura 2000 sites from the UK under the Emerald Network

The Secretariat informed that discussions for the transfer of UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network have continued throughout the year.

The authorities of the UK confirmed their willingness to ask the 40th Standing Committee to recognise their Natura 2000 sites as adopted Emerald Network sites.

James Williams (JNCC) presented the state of play of the preparation of the transfer ([T-PVS/PA\(2020\)06](#)). The transfer of species was relatively straight forward. The transfer of habitats required more work because of the different codification of habitats in Natura 2000 and the Emerald Network.

UK has also overlapping sites due to historical reasons and because birds deserve specific sites.

While the transfer of all sites was envisaged at once further analysis revealed that an equivalence between Annex I of the Habitats Directive and Resolution No. 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention could not be found for 26 habitats.

As a result, the UK proposed to proceed the transfer in two tranches.

In the discussion which followed, international experts stated their readiness to further assist the UK authorities in finding equivalences to the 26 outstanding habitats by using the Interpretation Manual of Habitats.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts welcome the state of preparation of the transfer UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network.

7.b Development of the Emerald Network in Belarus

The Secretariat recalled that a small envelope originating from a country specific Action Plan for Belarus was allocated to the Bern Convention. A series of activities aiming to extend the Emerald Network in Belarus, address the conclusions of previous biogeographical evaluations, embed the Emerald Network provisions in national legislation, work towards managing Emerald Network sites were initiated.

Ten local and two international experts were contracted. Despite the political unstable situation in Belarus, a launch meeting took place on 21 August to provide general guidance to the local experts. Despite some delays, the objective of the project remains to address the conclusions of previous biogeographical evaluation seminars, to designate new Emerald Network sites and in the end to deliver an updated national Emerald Network database.

A bilateral evaluation meeting could therefore be foreseen somewhere in 2021 to assess the progress in the sufficiency of the list of sites proposed by Belarus.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

The Group of Experts took note of the information provided and encouraged the authorities of Belarus to take advantage of the technical and scientific assistance of the Bern Convention to expand their list of Emerald Network sites and to work towards rising their sufficiency.

7.c State of play of the Emerald Network in Armenia

In June 2019, the Secretariat was informed that the authorities of Armenia were revising their list of Emerald Network sites. This revision could result in a drastic shrinking of the national coverage.

More recently, within the framework of a complaint regarding the Amulsar gold mine project and its impacts on Emerald Network sites examined by the Bureau at its second meeting, the authorities informed that the Emerald Network sites concerned by the complaint were designated by mistake.

The Bureau suggested that the general situation of the Emerald Network in Armenia should be evaluated during the Group of Experts for Protected Areas and Ecological Networks meeting.

The representative of Armenia informed that Armenia has currently designated 23 Emerald Network candidate sites, representing 1 033 719 hectares and 34.7% of the national territory. She confirmed that a revision process led by a national expert group was underway. The ground for this revision process is the existence of very large sites in which conflicts of interest between landowners, land users and nature conservation NGOs are challenging the establishment of comprehensive management plans.

The revision process aims to reduce the size of large sites by reassessing the distribution of the species and habitats. The revision process will result in an increase of the number of sites from 23 to 28 representing 455 645.7 hectares and 15.3% of the national territory.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts expressed their concern regarding the on-going revision process of the Emerald Network in Armenia. It invited the authorities of Armenia to clarify the timeline for completing the revision and deliver a new database and recalled that the changes in the existing database need to be explained and justified.

7.d Evaluation of the implementation of the revised calendar for the Emerald Network (2011 – 2020)

The Secretariat recalled that the Emerald Network calendar for the period 2011 – 2020 was due in 2020. A comprehensive evaluation of the achievements but also of gaps in its implementation was carried out.

The final evaluation has shown the weaknesses of the on-going calendar in particular its unrealistic objective, the absence of indicators and the lack of frame for a periodic review.

The expert, Otars Opermanis, presented the findings of the evaluation ([T-PVS/PA\(2020\)04](#)) stressing that none of the 2020 targets were met, that out of 41 activities listed in the 2011-2020 workplan 45% were outstanding and that 9 Parties have still not started the implementation of the Emerald Network.

As the calendar did not foresee measurable targets, the indicators proposed for the Emerald Network monitoring framework (see item 5b) were extrapolated and used for measuring progress. The reference value chosen is the historical data of Natura 2000 ten years after the start of the biogeographical evaluation process.

This evaluation approach led to the following results:

- The average national cover of all types of Emerald Network sites in 2020 is 14.8% ;
- The average national cover of SPAs and SCIs in 2006 was respectively 12.1% and 8.9% ;
- The average sufficiency index for non-EU Contracting Parties in 2020 is 21.7% ;
- The average sufficiency index for EU member States in 2006 was 82.6% .

The comparison shows that the national coverage is almost similar. One possible reason for the gap in the sufficiency index is that the Emerald Network sites designated were not be the most appropriate for meeting the objective of the network.

The subsequent discussion focused on the reasons of failure to reach the objectives and of the lack of commitment of some Parties.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts took note of the outcomes of the evaluation of the Emerald Network calendar over the period 2011 – 2020. It mandated the Secretariat to carry out a survey among non-EU Contracting Parties to understand what the obstacles to the implementation of the Emerald Network are.

7.e Post 2020 Strategic workplan for the Emerald Network

In the light of the outcomes of the assessment of the Emerald Network calendar a proposal of new strategic workplan was drafted.

The proposal of new workplan intends to correct the weaknesses of the previous calendar and therefore proposes achievable targets grounded on the experience of Natura 2000, sets measurable, objective and realistic indicators and creates a direct link with the monitoring framework discussed under item 5b.

The expert, Otars Opermanis, presented the outline of the post 2020 strategic workplan for the Emerald Network ([T-PVS/PA \(2020\)04](#)).

The workplan builds on the indicators proposed in the monitoring framework and distinguishes four targets along the phases of the Emerald Network constitution process.

Goal and targets	Expected results according to the “realistic” approach (Table 4 above)	Indicators with reference to Emerald Network monitoring framework	Means of achievement: activities (see more detailed descriptions in text)
Overall goal	Ensure a favourable conservation status of species and habitats listed respectively under Resolution No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) in all non-EU Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention.	Analysis of the reports under Resolution No. 8 (2012) for the periods 2019-2024 for mid-term assessment and 2025-2030 for final assessment	All of below plus conservation activities outside the Emerald Network
Target 1 (Phase I)	All non-EU Contracting Parties propose Emerald Network sites for the species and habitats for whom they have responsibility on their territory so as to reach [To be decided] % of their terrestrial and marine territory.	Indicator 1: National coverage (%) of all types of Emerald Network sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study • Pilot project • Field studies or existing information review • Database submission • Preparatory evaluation seminar

Target 2 (Phase II)	Non-EU Contracting Parties ensure that their lists of sites proposed are sufficient to ensure a coherent Emerald Network. By the end of the decade all non-EU Contracting Parties reach a sufficiency of [To be decided] %.	Indicator 2: Sufficiency index (% of sufficiency conclusions versus all conclusions).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bio-geographical evaluation seminar involving multiple countries, either by geography or by bio-geographical region • Bilateral evaluation seminar with a single country • Site adoption • Special assistance for individual countries between 2 assessment rounds
Target 3 (Phase II)	All non-EU Contracting Parties propose Emerald Network sites for the species and habitats for whom they have responsibility on their territory so as to reach [To be decided] % of their terrestrial and marine territory and are officially adopted Emerald Network sites.	Indicator 3: National coverage (%) of Adopted Emerald Network sites.	
Target 4 (Phase III)	Non-EU Contracting Parties take necessary steps to set management schemes. At the end of the decade [To be decided] % of Emerald Network adopted sites have up-to-date management plans and are designated at national level.	Indicator 4: Proportion (%) of Adopted Emerald Network sites with management plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management seminars to exchange knowledge • Setting site conservation objectives • Management plans • Introduction of appropriate conservation measures • Monitoring of conservation measures vs conservation objectives

The proposed workplan discusses whether to set ambitious targets in line with the commitments of the EU in its Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 or more realistic targets considering the previous Aichi targets and the experience of Natura 2000.

The workplan also proposes a progress review every 2-3 years and a mid-term evaluation in 2025.

In the following discussion, it was raised by some Parties that the Aichi targets were already ambitious and that aligning the targets of the workplan on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 might be unrealistic. The representative of the European Commission informed that guidance regarding how to interpret the target set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to “Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the land area and 30% of the sea area” would be issued before the end of year.

Some other Parties stated that it is crucial to ensure an effective management so that protected areas can produce the expected results they are designated for. Consequently, an indicator for measuring the effectiveness of management measures should be elaborated.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts agreed on the principles of the post 2020 strategic workplan for the Emerald Network. However, the Group of Experts decided to postpone the discussion regarding the targets

to be achieved until the European Commission has provided interpretive guidance regarding the targets set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and until the Conference of Parties of the CBD has agreed on the global biodiversity targets and indicators.

7.f Nomination of Emerald Network sites

The Group of Experts is mandated to examine any proposals of nomination of Emerald Network candidate or adopted sites.

In the light of the information provided by James Williams under agenda item 7a, the Group of Experts was already informed that the UK intends to ask the Standing Committee to endorse part of its Natura 2000 sites as Emerald Network adopted sites.

For the records, last year at the 39th the Standing Committee, Georgia objected that 12 sites become candidate sites although they were evaluated at biogeographical level and considered as meeting the requirements of the Emerald Network.

The Secretariat further informed that in August this year, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia informed the Secretariat that the boundaries of the 12 sites expected to become Emerald Network candidate sites last year, were slightly changed and that the sites should be reconsidered as possible candidate sites. Furthermore, the Ministry has identified further 7 sites to become part of the network.

The Secretariat recalled that according to the Emerald Network constitution process, the 12 revised sites and the 7 new sites should be evaluated at biogeographical level prior to their nomination as Emerald Network candidate sites (recommendation No. 157 (2011/2019)). Finally, as agreed by the Group of Experts in 2017, the Georgian authorities will be invited to report on the negative changes in the Emerald Network database (guidelines T-PVS/PA(2017)7).

Finally, the representative of the Russian Federation informed that around 100 new sites were identified and will be proposed as Emerald Network sites beginning of 2021.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts supported the transfer of UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network and welcomed the identification of 7 additional proposed sites by Georgia and 100 additional proposed sites by the Russian Federation.

The Group of Experts instructed the Secretariat to assess the extent of the changes reflected in the Standard Data Forms of the 12 sites which were expected to become candidate sites in 2019. Pending the findings the Secretariat should either add the sites on the draft list of officially nominated candidate Emerald Network sites to be examined by the 40th Standing Committee or evaluate at biogeographical level the impact of the changes on the sufficiency of the list of Emerald Network sites of Georgia.

8. Future work of the Group of Experts

8.a Programme of activities 2021

The Secretariat informed the Group of Experts of the proposed activities in 2021:

- Follow up on the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) with a questionnaire to understand what went well, what could be improved and what were the obstacles to the delivery of data.
- Possible bilateral evaluation of the list of Emerald Network sites of Belarus
- Possible bilateral evaluation of the list of Emerald Network sites of Georgia
- Further development of the Emerald Network IT tools (Webapp and Viewer)
- Creation of the Emerald Network online barometer

- To provide technical and scientific assistance to Parties wishing to start implementing the Emerald Network to ensure the geographical scope of its development is more balanced and increases the overall sufficiency of the network.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

The Group of Experts supported the proposed activities.

8.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts

The Secretariat informed that the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks could take place back to back with the Group of Experts on Climate Change and Biodiversity in October 2021. The Secretariat called on Parties to volunteer to host the meeting, pending the sanitary situation is compatible with physical meetings.

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts recommended that the meeting is scheduled after the Conference of Parties of the CBD to ensure that CBD's decisions inform the discussions of the Group of Experts in particular on the targets of the post 2020 strategic workplan of the Emerald Network and the indicators to be considered in the monitoring framework of the Emerald Network.

9. Any other business

The Bureau at its second meeting asked the Group of Experts to investigate the relationship between the COVID 19 pandemic and protected areas. The [essay](#) whose link was made available from the agenda of the Group of Experts reflects on the impact of the pandemic and lock down on protected areas and also explores how an effective management of protected areas could contribute avoiding similar situations in the future.

In the following discussion it was mentioned that the Bern Convention was already tackling the pandemic in a draft study on Alien Pathogens and Pathogens spread by IAS which will be enriched with possible updates related to the pandemic.

It was further mentioned that IPBES was producing an extensive report on the relationship between COVID 19 and biodiversity. Members of the Group advised that the Standing Committee considers the relationship between the pandemic and biodiversity in the vision of the Bern Convention.

Decision of the Group of Experts:

Members of and Observers to the Group of Experts invited the Standing Committee to consider the relationship between the COVID 19 pandemic and biodiversity in the post 2020 vision for the Bern Convention.

10. Conclusions of the meeting

The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks took the following decisions:

- To invite the Standing Committee to take note of the outcomes of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and to mandate the Secretariat to elaborate a questionnaire aiming to understand the challenges of and obstacles to the reporting;
- To mandate the Secretariat to elaborate proposals to complement the legal framework of the Emerald Network along the recommendations of the comparative legal study and to present them at the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks in 2021;
- To invite the Standing Committee to consider the adoption of the monitoring framework for the Emerald Network and to mandate the Secretariat to elaborate additional indicators or to adapt the proposed indicators along the guidance provided by the CBD for the post 2020 Global Biodiversity targets;

- To invite all Parties which already have adopted sites to update their databases with up-to-date information regarding management plans.
- To encourage the authorities of Belarus to take advantage of the technical and scientific assistance of the Bern Convention to expand their list of Emerald Network sites and to work towards rising their sufficiency;
- To express its concern regarding the on-going revision process of the Emerald Network in Armenia and to invite the authorities of Armenia to clarify the timeline for completing the revision and deliver a new database and to explain and justify the changes in the existing database;
- To mandate the Secretariat to carry out a survey among non-EU Contracting Parties to understand what the obstacles to the implementation of the Emerald Network are;
- To agree on the principles of the post 2020 strategic workplan for the Emerald Network and to postpone the discussion regarding the targets to be achieved until the European Commission has provided interpretive guidance regarding the targets set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and until the Conference of Parties of the CBD has agreed on the global biodiversity targets and indicators;
- To support the transfer of UK's Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network and to welcome the identification of 7 additional proposed sites by Georgia and 100 additional proposed sites by the Russian Federation;
- To instruct the Secretariat to assess the extent of the changes reflected in the Standard Data Forms of the 12 sites which were expected to become candidate sites in 2019. Pending the findings the Secretariat should either add the sites on the draft list of officially nominated candidate Emerald Network sites to be examined by the 40th Standing Committee or evaluate at biogeographical level the impact of the changes on the sufficiency of the list of Emerald Network sites of Georgia;
- To invite the Standing Committee to consider the relationship between the COVID 19 pandemic and biodiversity in the post 2020 vision for the Bern Convention.

Annex 1: Agenda

		Documents	Expected results
Wednesday 7 October			
9.00	1. Opening of the meeting		
	2. Adoption of the agenda	Meeting agenda T-PVS/Agenda(2020)08 For adoption	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the aims of the meeting and adopt the agenda.
	3. Mandate of the Group and decisions of the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention <i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i>	Report of the 10 th meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks T-PVS/PA(2019)15E Extract from the list of decisions and adopted texts on the protection of habitats T-PVS/PA(2020)05 For information	The salient points of the 39 th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention are recalled.
	4. Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) <i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts / Otars Opermanis</i> <i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed on the results of the Reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) and invited to exchange views on possible follow up work.</i>	Final assessment of the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) T-PVS/PA(2020)03 For discussion and decision	Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the follow up to be given to the results of the assessment.
	5. Development of the Emerald Network guidance		

	<p>5.a Legal framework of the Emerald Network</p> <p><i>Presentation by Arie Trouwborst</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed on the gaps in the legal framework of the Emerald Network and invited to exchange views on the opportunity to reinforce it.</i></p>	<p>Comparative study with Natura 2000: Obligations of Bern Convention parties regarding the conservation of candidate and adopted Emerald Network sites: a legal analysis T-PVS/PA(2020)07</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the follow up to be given to the comparative studies and mandate the Secretariat to draft recommendations to be examined at the 40th Standing Committee.</p>
	<p>5.b Monitoring framework</p> <p><i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts/ Otars Opermanis</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the criteria considered for the monitoring framework and invited to exchange views on the opportunity use it for assessing progress of Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Emerald Network and for the online barometer.</i></p>	<p>Monitoring framework for the implementation of the Emerald Network T-PVS/PA(2020)02</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the follow up to be given to the monitoring framework and mandate the Secretariat to build on it for the assessment of progress of Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Emerald Network and for the online barometer.</p>
	<p>6. Emerald Network tools</p> <p><i>Presentation by Marc Roekaerts</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the development of the Emerald Network Webapp and Viewer.</i></p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts take note of the development of the Emerald Network tools.</p>
	<p>7. State of play of the Emerald Network and future perspectives</p>		
	<p>7.a Transfer of Natura 2000 sites from UK under the Emerald Network</p>	<p>Background document T-PVS/PA(2020)06</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the principle of the transfer of Natura 2000 sites from UK under the Emerald</p>

	<p><i>Presentation by James Williams</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the intention of UK's authorities to ask the 40th Standing Committee to approve the transfer of their Natura 2000 sites under the Emerald Network and invited to exchange views on the challenges and possible consequences of the operation.</i></p>	<p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Network and mandate the Secretariat to follow up on the technical obstacles.</p>
	<p>7.b Development of the Emerald Network in Belarus</p> <p><i>Presentation by the Secretariat</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the progress in the implementation of the Emerald Network in Belarus within the frame of the Council of Europe country specific action plan.</i></p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts take note of the development of the Emerald Network in Belarus.</p>
	<p>7.c State of play of the Emerald Network in Armenia</p> <p><i>At the request of the Bureau of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the current negative developments regarding the Emerald Network in Armenia.</i></p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts take note of the situation of the Emerald Network in Armenia.</p>
	<p>7.d Evaluation of the implementation of the revised calendar for the Emerald Network (2011 – 2020)</p> <p><i>Presentation by Otars Opermanis</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the results of the assessment of the implementation of the Emerald Network calendar.</i></p>	<p>Assessment of the Revised calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network (2011 – 2020) T-PVS/PA(2020)04</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the follow up to be given to the assessment report.</p>

	<p>7.e Post 2020 Strategic workplan for the Emerald Network</p> <p><i>Presentation by Otars Opermanis</i></p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are informed of the draft post 2020 implementation workplan of the Emerald Network and invited to exchange views on the feasibility of its objectives.</i></p>	<p>Post 2020 workplan for the Implementation of the Emerald Network</p> <p>T-PVS/PA(2020)04</p> <p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on the post 2020 implementation workplan and invite the Standing Committee to adopt it.</p>
	<p>7.f Nomination of Emerald Network sites</p> <p><i>Reminder by the Secretariat</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 as candidate sites 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 Network sites for official adoption as Emerald sites by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention.</i></p>	<p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Countries may request the official nomination of their newly proposed Emerald Network sites as candidate Emerald sites by the Standing Committee.</p> <p>Countries may request the official adoption as Emerald Network sites of their candidate sites by the Standing Committee.</p>
	<p>8. Future work of the Group of Experts</p>		
	<p>8.a Programme of activities 2021</p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts are invited to propose and discuss new activities in 2020</i></p>	<p>For discussion and decision</p>	<p>Priority activities are identified and will feed into the Programme of activity 2020 of the Bern Convention (subject to the availability of financial and human resources)</p>

	<p>8.b Date and place of the next meeting of the Group of Experts</p> <p><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></p>	<p>For decision</p>	<p>The provisional venue and dates of the next meeting are agreed on.</p>
	<p>9. Any other business</p> <p>Covid-19 and protected areas</p> <p><i>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts discuss the opportunity to address in the future the role of protected areas in the face of pandemics and the impact of pandemics on protected areas.</i></p>	<p><u>Editorial Essay: Covid-19 and protected and conserved areas</u></p> <p>For discussion</p>	<p>Members of and observers to the Group of Experts agree on whether the Group of Experts should focus on the theme “Covid-19 and protected areas” in the future.</p>
	<p>10. Conclusions of the meeting</p>		
<p>13.00</p>	<p>Thursday 8 October</p> <p>End of the meeting</p>		

Annex 2: List of participants

I. CONTRACTING PARTIES

ANDORRA

Ms Maria SALAS SOPENA Head of the Biodiversity, Landscape and Environmental Assessment Unit
Area of Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Landscape, Department of
the Environment and Sustainability, Ministry of the Environment,
Agriculture and Sustainability

ARMENIA

Ms Hasmik GHALACHYAN Chief specialist of the State Cadastres, Maintenance of Registers and
Monitoring, Division of the Licenses, Permits and Compliances
Department, Ministry of Environment

BELGIUM

Mr Xavier ROLLIN Directeur, Service public de Wallonie, Département de la nature et des
forêts, Direction de la nature et des espaces verts

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mr Jan PLESNÍK Unit of International Conventions, Department of Species Protection and
Implementation of International Commitments, Ministry of the
Environment

FINLAND

Ms Inka KERÄNEN Finnish representative, Ministry of the Environment,

GEORGIA

Ms Salome NOZADZE National Biodiversity Monitoring Coordinator of the Ministry of
Environmental Protection and Agriculture

Ms Vazha KOCHIASHVILI

Ms Mariam SULKHANISHVILI

ICELAND

Mr Trausti BALDURSSON Icelandic Institute of Natural History

Ms Olga KOLBRÚN VILMUNDARDÓTTIR

Ms Sunna BJÖRK RAGNARSDÓTTIR

MALTA

Mr Robert BAJADA Environment Protection Officer, Environment and Resource Authority,

Ms Lara GALEA Environment Protection Officer, Environment and Resource Authority,

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Ms Veronica JOSU Principal Advisory Officer, Department on Biodiversity Policy, Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment,

Ms Angela LOZAN Manager Biodiversity Office, Environmental Projects Implementation Unit within the MoARDE

Mr Ion COTOFANA GIS expert, Biodiversity office, Environmental Projects Implementation Unit within the MoARDE

NORTH MACEDONIA

Mr Aleksandar NASTOV Head of Biodiversity Unit, Nature Department, Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning

NORWAY

Mr Tore OPDAHL Senior Adviser, Protected Areas Section, Norwegian Environment agency, Chair of the Group of Experts

Mr Øystein STØRKERSEN Principal Advisor, Norwegian Environment Agency

SERBIA

Ms Snezana PROKIC Representative of the Ministry of Environmental Protection

SWEDEN

Ms Melanie JOSEFSSON Swedish environmental protection agency, EU Unit

SWITZERLAND

Ms Sophie RUDOLF Déléguée pour la Suisse de l'office fédérale de l'environnement.

UNITED KINGDOM

Ms Clare MASON DEFRA

Mr Tom TANGYE Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr Kerry VITALIS Policy Advisor, Protected Areas Team, Natural Environment, Trees & Landscape Directorate, DEFRA

Ms Clare WHITFIELD Senior EU Exit Adviser, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Mr James WILLIAMS Biodiversity Indicators Manager, UK Scientific Councillor for the Convention on Migratory Species, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

II. MEMBER STATES NON-CONTRACTING PARTIES AND OTHER STATES

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Mr Nikolay SOBOLEV Senior scientific researcher, Laboratory for Biogeography Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences

III. INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Ms Laura GARILAN	European Topic Center on Biological Diversity,
Ms Mette LUND	European Environment Agency
Mr Juan-Pablo PERTIERRA	European Commission, Directorate General for Environment, Unit D.2 Biodiversity

IV. OBSERVERS

Mr. Kakha ARTSIVADZE	Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research – NACRES
Mr Doug EVANS	Expert in Habitats
Ms Carol RITCHIE	Executive Director, EUROPARC Federation (Germany),

V. SPEAKERS

Mr Otars OPERMANIS	Expert and Technical Consultant to the Bern Convention for the setting up of the Emerald Network (Latvia)
Mr Marc ROEKAERTS	Scientific and Technical Consultant to the Bern Convention for the setting-up of the Emerald Network (Belgium)
Mr Arie TROUWBORST	Associate Professor of Environmental Law, Tilburg Law School, The Netherlands

VI. SECRETARIAT OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**Bern Convention, Directorate of Democratic Participation, Directorate General of Democracy (DGII)**

Ms Ursula STICKER	Secretary of the Bern Convention
Mr Marc HORY	Project Manager
Ms Helena ORSULIC	Assistant