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T-PVS(2024)04

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
44th meeting

Meeting of the Bureau
20-21 June 2024
(Online meeting)

- MEETING REPORT -

*Document prepared by
the Secretariat of the Bern Convention*

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, Ms Merike Linnamägi, opened the second meeting of the Bureau of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention for 2024.

The Chair presented the agenda to the Bureau members.

Decision: The meeting agenda was adopted (See Appendix I).

2. REPORT FROM THE SECRETARIAT

2.1. Follow up to the Session of the Committee of Ministers of 16-17 May 2024 in relation to the decision on the Reykjavik Process

Ms Tanja Kleinsorge, Head of the Department on the Reykjavík Process and the Environment, informed the Bureau that the ministerial session held on 16-17 May 2024 invited its Deputies to set up an *ad hoc* intergovernmental multidisciplinary group (GME) to prepare a Compendium on existing activities, planned activities, and proposals for new activities on the environment within the Council of Europe, as well as to prepare a Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment and a related action plan. Terms of reference of this GME will be discussed by the Rapporteur Group on human rights (GR-H) on 9 July 2024 with a view to their adoption by the Committee of Ministers on 10 July 2024.

The GME will be composed of representatives of Council of Europe member States of the highest possible rank in the field of protection of the environment and countering the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights. Relevant bodies of the Council of Europe (including the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention) and other international organisations, as well as some specific non-member States of the Council of Europe and civil society organisations will also be invited to send their representatives to the GME meetings. Two meetings of the GME are planned in 2024 and three in 2025.

Decision: The Bureau took note of the information and nominated its Chair to represent it in the upcoming meetings of the GME.

3. FINANCING AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BERN CONVENTION

3.1. Financing of the Bern Convention – state of play

The Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, Ms Merike Linnamägi, provided an update on the issue of the financing of the Bern Convention. She highlighted the two meetings of the Committee of Ministers' Group of rapporteurs on Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and Environment (GR-C) (26 April and 3 June 2024) which she had attended and during which the work on an amending protocol to the Bern Convention had been called into question, in particular due to the broader context of the Council of Europe.

Several remarks on the draft amending protocol had been made, such as, in particular:

- In the Council of Europe setting, core conventional functions are, as a general rule, funded through the Ordinary Budget following institutional rules governing member states contributions to the budgets of the Council of Europe (Resolution Res(94)31). Having a protocol amending the Bern Convention to put in place a mechanism of mandatory financial contributions – different from the general rule – could creating a precedent with unforeseeable effects on the mechanisms of other conventions.

- The issue of the rate of the EU's contribution under an amending protocol to the Bern Convention can't be evaluated in isolation from existing rules and the overall context of the Council of Europe-EU interplay.
- The proposed voting regime in the draft amending protocol is not in line with the Statute of the Council of Europe where unanimity is not practiced, and it could have the unintended effect of making it possible for any Party to block the adoption of the budget by the Bern Standing Committee entirely, and, as a consequence, its activities.
- An amending protocol requires a lot of time to enter into force, even with a clause on provisional application pending its entry into force.

The Bureau held an exchange of views with Mr Rafael Benitez, Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment on the various issues raised in the context of the financing of the Bern Convention. Despite the difficulties on the drafting of an amending protocol to the Bern Convention, and the important increase in the ordinary budget allocated to the Bern Convention in November 2023, the aim to secure a sustainable long-term financing of the Convention was recalled. In this context, the idea of setting up a Council of Europe environment trust fund to finance activities on human rights and the protection of the environment, including activities under the Bern Convention, was mentioned during the GR-C meeting. It is expected that the decision to set up such a trust fund would be taken at the May 2025 ministerial session of the Committee of Ministers.

The Bureau acknowledged that since the suggestion of an environment trust fund was not known when the Standing Committee approved the revised terms of reference of the *ad hoc* drafting group on an Amending Protocol in December 2023, the tasks entrusted to the Group were limited to the amending protocol. The Bureau also noted that, since it was not advisable to wait for the next meeting of the Standing Committee in December 2024 to revise the terms of reference of the *ad hoc* drafting group in order to start exchanging on the issue, the Bureau could take a decision on the basis of Rule 19 c of the Rules of Procedure which allows the Bureau to ensure continuity between meetings as necessary.

Decision: The Bureau decided that, as a new situation has arisen further to the GR-C meetings, the *ad hoc* drafting group on an Amending Protocol should meet in due time before the 44th meeting of the Standing Committee to improve the drafting of an amending Protocol on the basis of the remarks made on technical issues.

The Bureau also decided that, due to its expertise, the *ad hoc* drafting group should also be informed of the new situation in order to exchange views on the setting up of a possible Council of Europe environment trust fund and give initial feedback. The Standing Committee would be informed of any developments at its 44th meeting and would provide guidance.

Despite the actual positive situation of the ordinary budget, the Bureau stressed the importance to guarantee the long-term satisfactory financing of the Bern Convention as well as to keep interest and motivation of the Contracting parties in active involvement on the issue of financing.

3.2. Working Group on overseeing implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030 (10 April 2024): outcomes

The Secretariat presented the main conclusions reached by the Working Group on overseeing implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030 at its meeting of 10 April 2024.

It informed the Bureau that Mr Jan Plesnik (Czech Republic) was elected as its Chair.

The main issue on the agenda was the “Follow-up of implementation of the Strategic Plan – Workplan for 2024”. The Working Group discussed Objectives 1-5 from its Terms of Reference, i.e.:

- further advancing technical work on the Monitoring Framework and indicators for the Strategic Plan;

- considering linkages between the Strategic Plan and other instruments of the Bern Convention for implementation, including action plans;
- ensuring ongoing complementarity of the Strategic Plan with other relevant international instruments and strategies;
- providing proposals on how to translate priority goals of the Strategic Plan into the annual programme of activities of the Convention;
- increasing the visibility of the Strategic Plan;

In terms of indicators for the Strategic Plan, members were provided with an easy-to-use template to provide their feedback. In fact only few replies were received. The independent consultant for the Working Group nevertheless prepared an analysis of these replies.

The Bureau took note that the Vision and Strategic Plan would be on the agenda of the technical and scientific groups of experts under the Bern Convention to ensure that the work of these groups of experts contribute to the achievement of the targets of the Strategic Plan.

The Bureau was informed that in view to increase the visibility of the Strategic Plan, a [dedicated webpage](#) on the Bern Convention main website had notably been created, and that, overall the Working Group approved its [Workplan](#).

Decision: The Bureau congratulated the Working Group on its work. It decided that the analysis of the replies prepared by the independent consultant for the Working Group should be sent to the members of the Working Group for their possible reaction on them in view of its next meeting.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES AND BUDGET FOR 2024

4.1. Emerald Network: outcomes of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks (Vaduz, 17-18 April 2024)

The Secretariat informed the Bureau of the outcomes of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks which took place in Vaduz (Liechtenstein) on 17-18 April 2024.

Members of the Bureau welcomed the election of Ms Danielle Hofmann as Chair of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks.

With reference to the legal framework of the Emerald Network, the Bureau took note that the Group of Experts supported a two-step approach: 1. the drafting of a document bringing together in an accessible language binding and non-binding obligations and outlining unclear aspects of requirements for the consideration of the 44th Standing Committee and 2. the drafting of detailed guidance documents on currently unclear requirements.

The Bureau took note that the Group of Experts agreed on targets for the Post 2020 Strategic Workplan of the Emerald Network considering the capacity of Contracting Parties and the state of implementation of the Emerald Network in Contracting Parties.

The progress in developing the Emerald Network was measured by the Sufficiency Index. The target proposed was an increase in the Sufficiency Index of individual Parties, with different target values based on whether Parties have benefited from 1, 2 or 3 biogeographical evaluations.

To measure progress in the implementation of the Phase II of the constitution process of the Emerald Network focusing on the legal protection of the Emerald Network sites, the target proposed was that by 2030, all Emerald Network sites which had undergone bio-geographical evaluations until 2028 would be adopted by the Standing Committee.

In relation to the Phase III of the constitution process of the Emerald Network, sites required management plans including conservation objectives and adequate conservation measures planned and

implemented along with the monitoring of species and habitats. The target proposed was that by 2030, 40% of the Emerald Network sites would have management plans.

The prerequisite for achieving the targets proposed would be that Parties update their Emerald Network databases on a regular basis. Therefore, Parties would be required to submit two updated Emerald Network databases by 2030.

The Bureau took note that the Group of Experts examined the changes agreed on Natura 2000 Standard Data Form (SDF) and discussed the opportunity to reflect them into the Emerald Network SDF. An information document would be presented at the next meeting of the Standing Committee so that Parties could consider the implications of and options for revising the Emerald Network SDF along the changes introduced in the Natura 2000 SDF.

The Bureau welcomed the decision of the authorities of Liechtenstein to request the 44th Standing Committee to adopt their 2 candidate Emerald Network sites.

4.2. Kresna technical workshop in line with recommendation No.212 (2021): “Challenges & opportunities for the conservation of reptiles and large carnivores during linear infrastructure development in South-East Europe” (22-24 April 2024): outcomes

The Secretariat presented the main outcomes of the technical workshop in line with Recommendation No. 212 (2021): “Challenges & opportunities for the conservation of reptiles and large carnivores during linear infrastructure development in South-East Europe” which was held in Kresna, Bulgaria, on 22-24 April 2024.

Decision: The Bureau welcomed that the dialogue between the NGOs and the Bulgarian authorities was re-established and that some positive steps were made, such as the joint Declaration at the end of the workshop. It also welcomed that defragmentation and mitigation measures were foreseen and noted that a book of abstracts of the interventions would be made available in the coming weeks.

4.3. 5th meeting of the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Reporting, (30 April 2024): outcomes

The Secretariat informed the Bureau of the outcomes of the 5th meeting of the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Reporting which took place online on 30 April 2024.

The Bureau took note of the on-going revision of the checklists of species and habitats considered for the reporting and encouraged all non-EU Contracting Parties to actively participate in the revision process.

The Bureau further took note that the Working Group discussed whether new fields added to the reporting format or fields which were significantly amended should be optional or mandatory and how this could impact the outputs of the reporting.

The Bureau noted that Members of the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Reporting examined the extent to which the list of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) of Union concern referred to in the format of the reporting under Article 17 of the EU Habitats Directive would be relevant for the reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012). Members of the Working Group supported that non-EU Parties would be required to mandatorily report on IAS of Union concern complemented on a voluntary basis using for example the EASIN catalogue or, if relevant, national lists of IAS.

Finally, the Bureau noted that a consultation on the Explanatory Notes of the Reporting Guidelines was ongoing with a deadline set on 15 September 2024.

4.4. 2nd meeting of the National Focal Points for the Pan-European Action Plan for the Conservation of Sturgeons (10-11 June 2024): outcomes

The Secretariat informed the Bureau of the outcomes of the second meeting of the National Focal Points for the conservation of Sturgeons which took place in Strasbourg on 10-11 June 2024.

The Bureau welcomed the growing interest of range Contracting Parties in the conservation of sturgeons. The meeting was attended by 18 National Focal Points which compared to the attendance of the 1st meeting represented an increase of 100%.

The Bureau took note that Participants examined draft guidelines on habitat assessment, population monitoring and *ex situ* conservation measures and that they supported that the guidelines would be presented to the Standing Committee for approval (possibly in the form of recommendations).

The Bureau welcomed the creation of a webpage dedicated to sturgeon conservation under the website of the Bern Convention. The webpage would bring together the resources available and display information provided by range countries on national, regional initiatives subject to their availability in English.

4.5. Group of experts on the Conservation of Birds and IKB (8-11 October 2024): state of preparations

The 5th Joint Meeting of the Bern Convention Network of Special Focal Points (Bern SFPs) on Eradication of Illegal Killing, Trapping and Trade in Wild Birds and the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) will be held in Istanbul, from 8 to 10 October 2024. The Joint Meeting will be held back-to-back with the 8th Meeting of the Bern Convention Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds, on 11 October 2024. The meetings will be hosted by the Directorate General of Nature Conservation and National Parks, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Türkiye.

The host agreement necessary for the former meeting will be finalised and signed shortly, including the Bern Convention sponsoring the interpretation between English and French, to ensure active participation of the French speaking representatives from the South Mediterranean countries. The meeting agenda will be finalised in July, following an online meeting of the MIKT Consultative Group. The agenda of the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds will also be circulated over the summer, and it will include elements proposed by the host and those stemming from the 2022 meeting of the group in Valencia. Nominations by the States Parties to the Bern Convention are being collected and the link to the online registration is to be sent out in July.

The Bureau took note of the state of preparations regretting that some countries may not be represented for budgetary reasons. The Secretariat informed that the meeting was to happen in a hybrid mode, thus extending the possibility to participate to a larger audience, and offered to explore whether additional participants could be covered by the Bern Convention, beyond the list indicated in the 2024 budget.

4.6. Large Carnivores: results of the Transnational exchange platform for the management of large carnivores in the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos region, Sofia, Bulgaria (11-13 June 2024)

The meeting gathered representatives of the national authorities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. No representative of the Albanian authorities was present. Researchers and practitioners involved in the conservation of large carnivores attended. The Bern Convention was present at the meeting alongside the European Commission (online presence) and IUCN as a part of the international context of the large carnivore conservation policies in Europe.

Some data on the status of populations of Eurasian and Balkan lynx, brown bear, grey wolf, wolverine and golden jackal in the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos region were shared and some of the international and national conservation and management policies for the large carnivores in the region were discussed. One of the key issues identified was the perception of the presence of large carnivores, which differed depending on their population size, the history of their presence in the given region and the culturally conditioned general attitude.

As a follow-up to the meeting, it was agreed that the national authorities would: share in writing further information about their implementation of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention most relevant and recent recommendations related to large carnivores; express their needs/proposals in relation to the future direction of the Bern Convention secretariat's work on large carnivores, in particular the themes that could usefully be addressed by the Group of Experts, which is meant to hold a meeting (the first since 2012) online in the autumn of 2024; and express their views in relation to the continuation of the activities of the Platform. Indeed, the future of the Platform was uncertain due to project-based funding and insufficient number of signatures of the region-wide memorandum of cooperation. It was proposed to consider continuing the highly valued cooperation thanks to earmarked voluntary contributions to the Bern Convention by participating countries.

The Bureau took note of the proceedings and conclusions of the meeting. The Secretariat was to explore the possibilities of supporting the Platform, if this may be required. The Bureau confirmed that the topic of perceptions of large carnivores was essential and could be in the focus of a meeting of the Group of Experts, advising it to be held in the beginning of 2025. It also suggested to collect some information on the implementation of the Standing Committee recommendations related to large carnivores from the States Parties to the Convention ahead of the meeting.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: CASE-FILES

5.1. Open files

- 1986/08: Greece: Recommendation No.9 (1987) on the protection of *Caretta Caretta* in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos

Decision: The Bureau received from the complainant an urgent request for action in relation to Open File 1986/08: Greece: Recommendation No. 9 (1987) on the protection of *Caretta Caretta* in Laganas bay, Zakynthos. It noted with concern that this was about alleged large-scale illegal work, land intervention and road opening and the decision issued by an administrative court without jurisdiction to annul all fines previously imposed.

The Bureau noted that, in their reaction, the Greek authorities merely stated that they were not competent to comment on or intervene in decisions of Justice, including Court rulings.

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to contact the European Commission for any possible information on this matter. It also recalled that this file was on the agenda of its Autumn meeting for decisions to be taken, with a deadline set to 31 July 2024 for both parties to send their updated report.

5.2. Complaints on stand-by

- 2018/01: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site "Polonina Borzhava" (UA0000263) from wind energy development
- 2018/05: Ukraine: Alleged threats to the Emerald Network sites Skhidnyi Svydovets Marmaroski ta Chyvchyno-Hryniavski Hory and Carpathian Biosphere Reserve

Decision: The Bureau recalled that further to a request from the Ukrainian authorities and an exchange of e-mails among its members, it decided to postpone this item to its Autumn meeting for decisions to be taken, with a deadline set to 31 July 2024 for both parties to send their updated report.

It noted that parties to these two case files had already been informed.

5.3. New complaints

- 2023/02: Switzerland: Alleged damage to protected habitats and species due to logging activities in the Belpau Emerald Network site (CH0000028)

Decision: The Bureau was concerned by the lack of response from the Swiss government and thus requested the relevant authorities to send a comprehensive report by 31 July 2024 for the Autumn Bureau meeting. This report should cover all requests made since March 2024 (the period when this complaint was supposed to be addressed by the Bureau), specifically including the existing management plan, impact assessments, any monitoring data, and the Swiss authorities' obligations as a Contracting Party to manage, set conservation objectives, and monitor the Belpau Emerald Network site, despite the fact that the management was transferred to the Canton.

The complainant may, if it so wishes, provide updated data.

- 2024/01: France: Alleged insufficient protection of the Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo Hermanni*)

Decision: The Bureau noted that a new complaint was filed against France on an alleged insufficient protection of the Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo Hermanni*).

It acknowledged that this new complaint was put on the agenda of its Spring 2025 meeting. In the meantime, it instructed the Secretariat to contact the European Commission and the Secretariat of the CITES Convention to obtain possible information on this case since the European Commission has been contacted by the complainant on the same issue and CITES is of major importance concerning the species concerned in this complaint.

5.4. Consequences of the denunciation by Belarus of the Bern Convention on case-file 2018/06: Belarus: Presumed threats to Emerald Network sites "Olmanskiye bolota" (BY0000012) and "Topila Bog" (BY0000083)

Decision: The Bureau noted that a legal advice was requested from the Council of Europe Legal Department on the consequences of the denunciation by Belarus (Belarus is no longer a Party to the Bern Convention as of 1 April 2024) on the case-file at stake.

It recalled that on 17 March 2022 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided to suspend all technical cooperation with Belarus which made it impossible for the Secretariat and the Bureau to be in contact with the Belarussian authorities.

It also recalled that at least one of the two complainant NGOs have been deregistered by the Belarussian authorities (there were no contacts with the second one for more than two years) and that, legally speaking, it didn't exist any longer.

The Bureau was therefore of the view that the continuation of the proceedings in this case-file was impracticable and that, as a consequence, decided to dismiss the complaint.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1. Comments on [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2273 \(2024\)](#) – “Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis”

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that the Standing Committee had been invited on 30 April 2024 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to comment on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2273 (2024) – “Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis”. Because of a tight deadline (21 June 2024), it had not been possible to organise a consultation of the whole Standing Committee.

Decision: The Bureau considered and adopted the comments prepared by the Secretariat as they appear in Appendix II.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1. Possible synergies on climate crisis between the Bern Convention, the Landscape Convention and EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement: participation in the 81st Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

The Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, Mr Carl Amirgulashvili, reported on his Participation in the 81st Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA). He presented the Bern Convention and highlighted that the Standing Committee was ready to cooperate with the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and the Conference on the Implementation of the Landscape Convention to establish synergies on the climate crisis. He highlighted notably that the work carried out under the Bern Convention contributed to fighting against the climate crisis, through its groups of specialists and in the context of the Emerald Network, in particular. He also indicated that the Reykjavik process seems to be an ideal platform for this sharing of activities.

Decision: The Bureau thanked its Vice-Chair for this information and appointed him as its contact person for EUR-OPA.

7.2. Dates of the Autumn Bureau meeting

The Secretariat recalled that the Autumn Bureau meeting was scheduled to last two days in person (10-11 September 2024) but due to the number of items to be dealt with, this duration could be too limited. It therefore suggested prolonging that meeting by a half day (morning of 12 September 2024).

Decision: The Bureau decided that its Autumn meeting would last two-days and a half, from Tuesday 10 September 2024 in the morning until Thursday 12 September 2024, noon.

Appendix I – Agenda

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING & ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

2. REPORT FROM THE SECRETARIAT

2.1. Follow up to the Session of the Committee of Ministers of 16-17 May 2024 in relation to the decision on the Reykjavik Process

3. FINANCING AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BERN CONVENTION

3.1. Financing of the Bern Convention – state of play

3.2. Working Group on overseeing implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention for the period to 2030 (10 April 2024): outcomes

[T-PVS(2024)2 – meeting report]

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES AND BUDGET FOR 2024

[Calendar of meetings 2024]

[T-PVS(2023)21 - Programme of Activities and budget for 2024]

4.1. Emerald Network: outcomes of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks (Vaduz, 17-18 April 2024)

[T-PVS/PA(2024)09 - meeting report]

4.2. Kresna technical workshop in line with Recommendation No. 212 (2021): “Challenges & opportunities for the conservation of reptiles and large carnivores during linear infrastructure development in South-East Europe” (22-24 April 2024): outcomes

4.3. 5th meeting of the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Reporting, (30 April 2024): outcomes

[T-PVS/PA(2024)10 - meeting report]

4.4. 2nd meeting of the National Focal Points for the Pan-European Action Plan for the Conservation of Sturgeons (10-11 June 2024): outcomes

[T-PVS/Agenda(2024)06]

4.5. Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds and IKB (8-11 October 2024): state of preparations

4.6. Large Carnivores: results of the Transnational exchange platform for the management of large carnivores in the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos region, Sofia, Bulgaria (11-13 June 2024)

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION: CASE-FILES

[T-PVS/Inf(2024)1 – Register of Bern Convention’s case-files]

5.1. Open files

➤ 1986/08: Greece: Recommendation No. 9 (1987) on the protection of *Caretta Caretta* in Laganas bay, Zakynthos

5.2. Complaints on stand-by

➤ 2018/01: Ukraine: Presumed threat to Emerald site “Polonina Borzhava” (UA0000263) from wind energy development

- 2018/05: Ukraine: Alleged threats to the Emerald Network sites Skhidnyi Svydovets, Marmaroski ta Chyvchyno-Hryniavski Hory and Carpathian Biosphere Reserve

5.3. New complaints

- 2023/02: Switzerland: Alleged damage to protected habitats and species due to logging activities in the Belpau Emerald Network site (CH0000028)

[T-PVS/Files(2024)38]

- 2024/01: France: Alleged insufficient protection of the Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo Hermanni*)

5.4. Consequences of the denunciation by Belarus of the Bern Convention on case-file 2018/06: Belarus: Presumed threats to Emerald Network sites “Olmanskiye bolota” (BY0000012) and “Topila Bog” (BY0000083)

6. CONSULTATION

6.1. Comments on [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2273 \(2024\)](#) – “Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis”

[T-PVS(2024)03]

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1. Possible synergies on climate crisis between the Bern Convention, the Landscape Convention and EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement: Participation in the 81st Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)

7.2. Dates of the Autumn Bureau meeting

Appendix II – Comments by the Bureau of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, on [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2273 \(2024\)](#) – “Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis”

1. The Bureau of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) welcomes the opportunity given to it by the Committee of Ministers to comment on Recommendation 2273 (2024) – “Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis” and its accompanying Resolution 2546 (2024).
2. As rightly noted in Resolution 2546 (2024) (para. 5), “the preservation of biodiversity of seas and oceans is one of the objectives of the (...) Bern Convention” and that “this convention provides a good basis to contribute to better protection of seas and oceans around Europe.”
3. As acknowledged in the report accompanying Recommendation 2273 (2024) (para. 31), the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention conducts a number of activities directly related to seas and oceans.
4. Indeed, since 2007, a [group of experts](#) has examined all types of issues relating to biodiversity and climate change, including in marine environments. In 2009, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention also set up a Group of Experts on Island Biodiversity in Europe, which has drawn up a [Charter on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity in European Islands](#).
5. The conservation scheme for migrating sea turtles in the Mediterranean is another topic addressed by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. In this context, it adopted in December 2023 a [Guidance tool](#) on the conservation of sea turtles nesting sites which it will promote whenever needed.
6. Another species-specific initiative under the Bern Convention is the [pan-European Action Plan for Sturgeons](#), which aims at restoring all existing sturgeon populations and re-establishing self-sustaining sturgeon populations as well as their life-cycle habitat in their historic range to an extent that ensures species survival and representation of the subpopulations where possible. Sturgeons in fact are excellent flagship species for ecologically healthy rivers and seas due to their size, longevity, diverse habitat utilisation and their migratory life cycle that connects coastal waters to the upper reaches of riverine ecosystems. Therefore, their protection needs a holistic approach, connecting international waters, coastal areas, and often multi-national river systems, which is the aim of the meetings organized under the Bern Convention of the National Focal Points on the conservation of the Sturgeon.
7. Further, the Bern Convention’s [case-file system](#) is a unique monitoring tool which allows NGOs or private citizens to submit complaints for possible breaches of the Bern Convention by countries that have ratified the Convention. A number of these case-files relate to marine species and coastal water management, notably cases concerning marine turtles and marine mammals.
8. As acknowledged in the report accompanying Recommendation 2273 (2024) (para. 31), several [European diplomas](#) have also been awarded to marine areas of exceptional European importance for the preservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and which are managed in an exemplary way, such as the Ekenäs Archipelago National Park (Finland) and the Selvagens Islands Nature Reserve (Portugal) and to wetlands in direct contact with the sea. The Bern Convention is also implementing the [Emerald Network](#) which is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest and which aims to ensure the long-term conservation of species and habitats of European importance requiring specific protection measures and protected by the Bern Convention. Several Emerald Network sites (or candidate sites) have a marine part or are exclusively marine.

9. The Bern Convention bodies work in close co-operation with civil society actors dealing with the protection of seas and oceans as well as with relevant international organisation. Some of them have even observer status such as MEDASSET (Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles), Oceana, Sea Shepherd, The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (ARCHELON), and, for international organisations, ACCOBAMS (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean sea and contiguous Atlantic Area), ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas), OSPAR (Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic), UNEP / MAP (Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution) and the Black Sea commission (Convention on the protection of the Black Sea against pollution).

10. Despite an already large variety of activities in the field of the preservation of biodiversity of seas and oceans as demonstrated above, the Bureau of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention can't agree more with the conclusion reached by the Parliamentary Assembly in Resolution 2546 (2024) (para. 5), that "the activities of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention should be further strengthened to protect marine ecosystems effectively and safeguard the rights of future generations." This would indeed contribute to a better protection of seas and oceans in Europe. The Bureau of the Standing Committee therefore welcomes the recommendation included in the report accompanying Recommendation 2273 (2024) (para. 31), which states that "it is vital that our States and parliaments support it." In fact, this support has already started with the Committee of Ministers increasing in November 2023 the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe dedicated to the activities of the Bern Convention and its staff, which the Bureau of the Standing Committee wishes to acknowledge once again. It nevertheless shares the renewed call of the Parliamentary Assembly, as it appears in its Resolution 2546 (2024), to "support the Bern Convention and stabilise the resources allocated to its implementation" (para. 6.3), particularly with a view to increase its activities.

Appendix III – List of participants

CHAIR

Ms Merike LINNAMÄGI, Advisor, Biodiversity Conservation Department, Ministry of the Climate, Estonia

VICE-CHAIR

Mr Carl AMIRGULASHVILI, Head of Biodiversity and Forestry Policy Department, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Georgia

BUREAU MEMBERS

Ms Jana DURKOŠOVÁ, Director, Nature Protection Department, Ministry of the Environment, Slovak Republic

Mr Claude ORIGER, Policy Adviser, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Luxembourg

Mr Andreas B. SCHEI, Senior Advisor, Norwegian Environment Agency

SECRETARIAT

Council of Europe / Directorate of Social Rights, Health and the Environment

Mr Rafael BENITEZ, Director of Social Rights, Health and the Environment

Ms Tanja KLEINSORGE, Head of the Department on the Reykjavík process and the Environment

Mr Mikaël POUTIERS, Secretary of the Bern Convention

Ms Marta MEDLINSKA, Administrator, Bern Convention

Mr Marc HORY, Project Manager, Bern Convention

Mr Michaël NGUYEN, Administrative and Project officer, Bern Convention

Mr Mark BARLOW, Administrative assistant, Bern Convention

Ms Irina SPOIALA, Administrative assistant, Department on the Reykjavík process and the Environment

Ms Nadia CHOLET, Study visitor