



Strasbourg, 23 October 2025

T-PVS/(2025)15

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Working Group on exploring sustainable financing options for the
Bern Convention
Meeting

9th September 2025
(from 10:15 to 12:30 pm)
online

Report

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING & ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without changes.

2. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

Charle-Henri de Barsac (France) was elected as Chair of the Working Group.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE SCOPE AND MANDATE OF THE WORKING GROUP ACCORDING TO ITS TERMS OF REFERENCE

[[T-PVS\(2024\)21](#) – Report of the 44th Standing Committee meeting – See Appendix II]

The Secretariat recalled that the Working Group's mandate is to finalise the amended Protocol to the Bern Convention for sustainable financing, as per the 2024 Standing Committee's decision, and to consider any decisions taken at the May 2025 session of the Committee of Ministers regarding a possible dedicated Council of Europe Environment Trust Fund (CETF). The primary task includes exploring compulsory contribution mechanisms to secure stable long-term funding.

4. VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED IN 2025: STATE OF PLAY

[[T-PVS/Inf\(2025\)18Rev](#) - Table of the voluntary contributions received in 2025]

As of September 2025, the accumulated voluntary contributions towards the Bern Convention amounted to approximately €78,000, reflecting a positive increase compared to the €56,700 registered in September 2024. This rise not only represented a growth in the total funds but also in the number of contributing parties, which increased from six to seven. Additionally, prospective contributors such as Burkina Faso have demonstrated promising interest in supporting the Convention's work. However, the annual amount of voluntary contributions has decreased compared to the amount received in 2022.

During the meeting, calls were made by the Secretariat to strengthen efforts to secure and increase voluntary contributions. Suggestions included enhancing communication strategies, such as sending formal letters and conducting targeted bilateral outreach to encourage broader participation. The overall emphasis was placed on the necessity of sustained and coordinated actions to maintain and expand the pool of voluntary funding, which remains essential for the continued viability and growth of the Bern Convention's programmes.

The Working Group acknowledged the ongoing budgetary constraints affecting the Bern Convention Secretariat. Despite increased funding in recent years, the Secretariat continues to rely heavily on voluntary contributions from the Parties for much of its operations. While these contributions supplement the limited ordinary budget, they remain insufficient to ensure the Secretariat's operational capacity or to finance the programme of activities comprehensively.

The Chair of the Group reiterated the unpredictable nature of voluntary contributions and expressed his concerns for the future, given the increasingly budgetary constraints faced by the Parties, which may prevent some donors from continuing their contributions.

At the request of one of the participants, the European Union clarified that it currently does not foresee increasing its voluntary contributions beyond the levels outlined in Resolution No. 9 (2019). Any increase in contributions would require high-level discussions to address political priorities and justify increased investment.

5. REPORT FROM THE SECRETARIAT – UPDATE ON THE 134TH MINISTERIAL SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS (LUXEMBOURG, 14 MAY 2025)

The Secretariat informed that no progress had been made on establishing a Trust Fund due to lack of political will at the Committee of Ministers' level. At the same time, the group was informed that negotiations on the ordinary budget were ongoing and that its amount should remain stable. The urgent need for sustainable financing was reaffirmed, with four strategic options under consideration: Partial Agreement, Trust Fund, Conference of the Parties, and continuation of the Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention.

5.1 Partial Agreement

The Partial Agreement was discussed as a possible sustainable financing solution that would provide independence from the Council of Europe's ordinary budget by instituting mandatory contributions. However, there are still substantial legal and technical obstacles, notably the requirement for the scope to extend beyond the Bern Convention to encompass multiple environmental conventions. Integrating the European Landscape Convention into the expanded Partial Agreement could provide a concrete and feasible way to broaden its scope, offering a more comprehensive response to environmental governance needs.

5.2 Trust Fund

A significant amount of preparatory work has been carried out in order to establish a Trust Fund. This would offer financing flexibility, enabling Parties to contribute according to their means, and would include some mechanisms intended to enhance multi-year stability. However, participants emphasised that voluntary contributions are vulnerable to fluctuations, particularly during periods of economic hardship. A lack of political will led to the suspension of the Trust Fund project in 2025, pending more favourable conditions for its revival.

5.3 Conference of the Parties

The Secretariat explained that the Conference of the Parties (COP) provides an official platform where Parties come together to adopt financial principles and guidelines, to be approved by the Committee of Ministers. This promotes political clarity and greater visibility regarding financial responsibilities. The aim would be to produce a clear text reflecting the defined principles and

obligations, which will then be submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. The COP will therefore be able to establish a set of reference standards and rules, laying the foundations for a structured and progressive system of contributions.

5.4 Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention

See dedicated paragraph below.

Consensus was reached to advance work on the Protocol while also exploring alternative solutions for financial sustainability. Participants agreed that urgent action was needed to develop sustainable financing solutions to support the work of the Bern Convention, and that it was important to continue engaging with all Contracting Parties on financial matters.

To this end, the idea of establishing a “Friends of the Bern Convention” group was put forward. Consisting of committed stakeholders, this group would work collectively to advocate for sustainable financing solutions, emphasise the importance of the Convention, and mobilise political and financial support. Such a group could serve as a valuable platform for coordination, lobbying and raising awareness at national and international levels, thereby contributing to the financial sustainability of the Convention.

6. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT PROTOCOL AMENDING THE BERN CONVENTION

*[[T-PVS\(2023\)13](#) - 3rd Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention, 18 October 2023]
[[T-PVS\(2023\)13](#) - 3rd Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention, 7 September 2023 - comments by France]
[[T-PVS\(2024\)10](#) – 4th Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention, 3 October 2024]*

The Secretariat informed the participants of the opinion prepared by the Directorate of Legal Advice and Public International Law (DLAPIL) and the Directorate of Programme and Budget (DPB) of the Council of Europe, which indicated that the 3rd version of the Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention ([T-PVS\(2023\)13](#)) does not fully comply with the internal regulations of the Council of Europe.

Another version of the Draft Protocol was drafted to align it with the legal and budgetary frameworks of the Council of Europe ([T-PVS\(2024\)10](#)).

While the first version does not fully comply with the internal Council of Europe regulations, it may allow a political agreement to be reached on the issue of the European Union’s contribution to the Convention. The second version, although consistent with the Council of Europe’s internal regulations, remains problematic due to the lack of agreement on contribution scales and voting threshold required for the adoption of decisions by the Standing Committee under the draft Protocol (whether unanimity or two-thirds majority).

Adjustments regarding the drafting were also requested and endorsed to ensure better compliance and clarity.

The Group acknowledged the two versions of the Protocol amending the Bern Convention. Participants shared the view that the path to ratification remains challenging and will require sustained effort over a long period of time.

Despite these challenges, there was consensus on the need to continue working on the Protocol, while simultaneously exploring alternative options to secure sustainable financing for the Bern Convention in the future.

It was asked that a dedicated meeting be organised between Council of Europe and EU officials to openly discuss and explore financing opportunities and any existing difficulties in relation to the Draft Protocol amending the Bern Convention, thereby facilitating stronger cooperation and understanding on funding matters.

Appendix I – List of Participants

National Representatives and Attendees:

Country	Name
Andorra	Ms Maria SALAS Chef d'Unité d'Évaluation d'impact environnemental, biodiversité et paysage Govern d'Andorra, Ministeri de Medi Ambient, Agricultura i Sostenibilitat
Belgium	Ms Sandrine LIEGEOIS Service Public de Wallonie pour l'Agriculture, Ressources naturelles et Environnement
Czech Republic	Ms Kateřina BUCHTELOVÁ Department of Species Protection Ministry of the Environment, Czech Republic
Denmark	Ms Julie HAUPT KRØYER Project Manager, Department of the Environment Mr Alexander ANDERSSON Special Advisor, Ministry of the Environment
European Commission	Ms Telma BRANCO WUNSCH Policy Officer 'Nature Conservation' Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission Ms Iva OBRETENOVA Direction CINEA, European Commission
Finland	Ms Maria WESTERMAN Senior Ministerial Adviser Ministry of the Environment, Department of the Natural Environment, Biodiversity
France	Mr Charles-Henri DE BARSAC Chargé de mission "accords internationaux et européens faune sauvage", Sous-direction de la protection et de la restauration des écosystèmes terrestres Ministère de la Transition Ecologique et Solidaire
Italy	Ms Laura Giardina FANCIULLI Officer Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security – DG Biodiversity and Sea Protection
Malta	Mr Luca LACITIGNOLA Assistant Director, Policy Development & Programme Implementation Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Regeneration of the Grand Harbour
Monaco	Ms Céline IMPAGLIAZZO Cheffe de Division Département des Relations Extérieures et de la Coopération, Ministère d'État
Norway	Ms Eva Hauge FONTAINE Senior Adviser, Nature Management Department Norwegian Environment Agency
Slovakia	Ms Jana DURKOSOVA Directorate for Nature and Biodiversity Protection Ministry of the Environment

Slovenia	Ms Maja HUMAR Nature Conservation Division Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
Switzerland	Mr Norbert BÄRLOCHER , Office fédéral de l'environnement (OFEV) Département fédéral de l'environnement, des transports, de l'énergie et de la communication (DETEC)

Council of Europe Secretariat:

Name	Position
Mr Rafael BENITEZ	Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment
Mr Gianluca SILVESTRINI	Head of Department a.i. of the Reykjavik Process and Environment Department
Ms Grazia Alessandra SIINO	Secretary of the Bern Convention
Mr Mikaël POUTIERS	Co-Secretary of the ad hoc Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment (GME)
Mr Michaël NGUYEN	Administrative and Project Officer of the Bern Convention