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**Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe
in the field of biological and landscape diversity
(CO-DBP)**

Group of specialists – European Diploma for Protected Areas

20-21 January 2003
Room 2, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

**Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve
(Russian Federation)**

RENEWAL

Expert report by
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*Document established by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

The European Diploma for Protected Areas was first awarded to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation) in 1998 and is now being renewed for the first time.

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the reserve.

Appendix I reproduces Resolution (98) 25 which was adopted when the Diploma was awarded. In Appendix II the Secretariat presents a draft resolution for possible renewal.

INTRODUCTION

The visit to the reserve took place from 18 to 21 June 2002.

The expert had been instructed to pay special attention to the following questions:

- new species discovered in the reserve;
- the reorganisation of the reserve and preparation of new regulations governing activities in it;
- the effects on the reserve of the transfer of competence from the State environmental protection committee to the Department for environmental protection and ecological safety of the Ministry of Natural Resources;
- the extension of the reserve's units recommended when the diploma was awarded.

I TSENTRALNO-CHERNOZEMNY STRICT NATURE RESERVE

I-1 LOCATION

The Tsentralno-Chernozemny nature reserve lies near Kursk, some 500 km south-east of Moscow. It is made up of six separate units (originally nine) covering total areas of some 5,300 ha, two thirds of which is steppe and remaining third forests and a wetland area. It is one of the last regions in Europe containing fragments of still-virgin relict steppes not given over to agriculture.

I-2 INTEREST

The diploma was awarded to the reserve in category A.

Since 1935, when it was set up, the reserve has carried out major research programmes and extremely close monitoring of its environments, which is remarkable in every respect. Its international scientific interest is widely recognised; its great plant diversity and high number of endemic species make it an exceptional asset to ecological and landscape diversity in Europe. Its international importance is further enhanced by its location on the Black Sea migration route.

I-2-1 General criteria

I.2.1.1 European interest: the reserve is undeniably of European interest (cf § I-2) owing to the presence of numerous steppe species¹ and is of particular importance for preserving biological diversity in Europe; it includes habitats of species that are endemic or whose conservation status is unfavourable², providing reproduction sites for protected species and/or migration stages for several of them³.

¹ See appendix 1 (list of new species discovered in the reserve during the period 1997-2002); the marbled polecat (*Vormela peregusna*) is present in several units for example.

² By way of example, the expert visited a station of Large yellow lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*) (about 40 plants) and observed Orsini's viper (*Vipera ursinii*) in the Bukreyeviy Barmi unit (the latter species has been reintroduced in the Lysye Gory unit).

³ Among other species, the smew (*Mergus albellus*) was observed in 1998 and the red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*) in 1999.

The diploma area also meets several of the criteria under § I.A.3 of the regulations and includes particularly beautiful sites and landscapes that are increasingly rare and exceptional in Europe.

I.2.1.2 Protection measures: the area enjoys a highly protective legal status to preserve its characteristics with strict zoning and regulation of use and activities, which take account of the sensitive nature of its ecosystems and fulfil the obligations imposed by the diploma regulations.

I-2-2 Specific criteria

I.2.2.1 Main purpose of the area: the area meets all specific criteria 1 to 6 of the regulations.

I.2.2.2 Other purposes: it also meets specific criteria 1 to 5 of § B of the regulations.

2 APPRAISAL

2-1 WITH REFERENCE TO APPENDIX 3 TO THE REGULATIONS

2-1 European interest: (cf § I-1-2-1 above); the area meets this criterion.

2-1-2 Merits and protection system:

2-1-2-1 The territory of the reserve was altered in 1999: three of the nine units making it up were assigned to the Belogorye reserve⁴ (Yamskoy, Lysye Gory and Stenkiy Izgoria). The expert visited the first two units⁵ and met the manager of the Belogorye reserve.

However, the European diploma is awarded to protected areas and not to bodies; any change in the assignment of management responsibilities for a diploma area between several authorities should therefore not affect the geographical scope of the diploma. It is the steppe characteristics of the units and their value for the conservation of Europe's ecological and landscape diversity that must guide the Group of specialists in its opinion and the Committee of Ministers in its final decision. Thus, if the decision of the Committee of Ministers favours renewal of the diploma, it must not refer to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny reserve as is currently the case but specify the exact composition of the area, including the three units now incorporated in the Belogorye reserve.

Finally, *the diploma is issued to the authorities directly responsible for managing the diploma area* (Article 1, paragraph 4 of the regulations); the final decision must be sent to the managers of the two reserves containing the units making up the diploma area.

A further consideration is that the Tsentralno-Chernozemny reserve has been extended to Poima Psla since the diploma was awarded⁶; this unit comprises a wetland and not steppe habitats. Although it is of a lesser ecological and landscape interest, it is proposed, for simplicity's sake, that it be included in the diploma area. One third of the latter's surface area already comprises forest⁷ or wetland ecosystems of a lesser interest; this proportion should not undergo any further significant increase within the diploma area in future, or the diploma would be depreciated.

The Belogorye reserve might be expanded in the future through the incorporation of new steppe ecosystems, which would strengthen the interest of the diploma area, on condition that the Russian authorities request that these be included.

⁴ The Group of specialists of the Diploma *took note* of this change decreed by Ministerial decision no. 502 of 29 march 1999, without any further comment (Doc PE-S-DE (2000)56 of 21 February 2000).

⁵ It was not possible to visit Stenkiy Izgoria owing to lack of time.

⁶ Inclusion of this unit was still at planning stage at the time of the previous appraisal.

⁷ This is the case, for example, of the Barkalovka unit, which is currently largely made up of secondary forest of little European interest and moreover comprises two areas about 3 km away from each other.

The team staffing the reserve is about 70-strong⁸; staffing levels have been stable on the whole since the diploma was awarded. About fifteen staff are assigned to conservation duties.

The reserve's financial resources showed a marked increase over the period 1997-2001, mainly owing to factors present at that time, linked to outside programme-based funding⁹. The reserve's own funds are still deeply inadequate to cover everyday management of the diploma area.

2-1-2-2 No significant damage to the area since the previous appraisal was apparent.

However, conservation of the units would be improved by extending the buffer zones, particularly in Yamskoy, where the creation of a nature park is being considered; the setting up of a buffer zone including the lower reaches of the area would improve its conservation; the recent reappearance of steppe species – flax (*Linum sp.*), peony (*Paeonia officinalis*), corncrake (*Crex crex*) – are indicators of positive development.

It would also be useful to extend Barkalovka so that its two sections are linked up; the unit's current environment is one of extensive livestock farming zones where the agricultural pressure is relatively low but whose ecological interest would then be recognised. It is proposed, therefore, that this unit be maintained in the diploma area despite now being mainly a forest area¹⁰. The same applies to Bukreyeviy Barmi, which is also in two parts. Extending the buffer zones would accentuate the corridor effect and improve protection for the diploma area as a whole¹¹.

Control of wild boar populations, which cause substantial damage to the steppes, remains a difficult problem for the reserve's management; the local community has difficulty in realising that the shooting of these animals is authorised in a strictly protected area.

The number of incident reports and infringements have fallen somewhat since 1998, while the number of penalties imposed has increased; this suggests an improvement in anti-poaching measures.

2-1-2-3 The zoning of activities and land use is more or less unchanged since the diploma was awarded; it corresponds to the very precise programming of operations on the grasslands so that their steppe characteristics are preserved.

2-1-2-4 The reserve's land property system has not changed much either; only administrative permission for permanent use of Zorinskiy and Poima Psa were granted to the reserve in 1999¹².

2-1-2-5 Land occupancy and use have not been modified other than for the changes mentioned above.

2-1-2-6 The outside walls of the museum near the management building have been repainted; however, the teaching facilities and permanent exhibits have seen better days. Council of Europe European Diploma signs were put up at the entrance to the management building and the museum door in honour of the appraisal visit. Signposting and footpath-marking in the reserve remains "discreet" and could be improved. Such measures, combined with the forthcoming publication of information documents on the reserve, could provide a useful boost for the project, now under way, to install a visitors centre near the management building.

2-1-2-7 The reserve is very competently and professionally managed by the present team.

⁸ 71 in 2000, 70 in 2001.

⁹ GEF (3-year programme aimed at restoring the original structure of the steppe), WWF, Council of Europe (Development of an ecological network of existing and restored steppe ecosystems) etc.

¹⁰ This argument is bolstered by the fact that it appears to be the only unit of the diploma area regularly frequented by the wolf (*Canis lupus*).

¹¹ However, it would be illusory to imagine, in the short and medium term, that there could be direct links between the diploma area's units, which are separated by great distances.

¹² For further information, see the annual report for 1999.

2-1-2-8 There has been no other significant change to visitor facilities and infrastructure. Visitor numbers in the reserve are slightly up for the period under consideration.

2-1-2-9 Scientific work has always represented a substantial part of the reserve's activities¹³; this trend has been confirmed over the period 1998-2001.

2-1-2-10 The diploma area is also a biosphere reserve placed under the auspices of UNESCO.

2-1-2-11 The expert met the staff of the reserve and the director of the Belogorye reserve, as well as the deputy director of services of Kursk *oblast* and his assistant responsible for environmental matters; this meeting provided an opportunity to emphasise the efforts required to increase the reserve's resources and the impact of the diploma for the region and its image, including at international level.

The reserve has close links with local schools and the media; it organises and hosts events on a regular basis, which help to raise its profile.

2-2 WITH REFERENCE TO THE DECISION TO AWARD THE DIPLOMA

2-2-1 The decision to award the diploma:

The European diploma was awarded to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny reserve with four recommendations attached:

2-2-1-1 Recommendation 1 (*pursue the research into and monitoring of the biological and landscape diversity of the reserve*): the expert believes that this recommendation has been taken into account by the management;

2-2-1-2 Recommendation 2 (*ensure that the budgetary resources permit the high and exemplary level of the state of conservation of the reserve to be maintained*): the situation is disparate and the completion of current programmes backed by outside funding could result in a drop in the reserve's resources, which are already quite inadequate for normal management of the diploma area;

2-2-1-3 Recommendation 3 (*strengthen the protection status of the peripheral zones around the different units of the reserve*): a greater degree of policing is the only noteworthy element here; continued efforts to combat illegal activities might be sufficient to protect these zones satisfactorily in the future;

2-2-1-4 Recommendation 4 (*proceed to a systematic effort to extend all the units of the reserve and to promote the constitution and restoration of ecological corridors between these units*): no significant progress has been made where the steppe environments are concerned since the award of the diploma.

2-2-2 The instructions of the Council of Europe Group of specialists

2-2-2-1 New species discovered in the reserve: this point has already been dealt with in paragraph 2-1-2-9.

2-2-2-2 The reorganisation of the reserve and preparation of a new document regulating activities in the reserve: this was dealt with in paragraphs 1-1 and 2-1-2-1. The reorganisation of the reserve has resulted in a redefinition of the zones making up the diploma area. The publication of updated regulations for managing the reserve, announced in the annual report for 2000, was not mentioned to the expert but new regulations governing activities in the reserve were published in December 2000.

¹³ To date, the reserve has generated 180 doctor's theses, 42 professor's theses and over 600 scientific projects.

2-2-2-3 The effects on the reserve of the transfer of competence from the State environmental protection committee to the Department for environmental protection and ecological safety of the Ministry of Natural Resources: officially, the transfer of competence effected in 2000 has not had a major impact on the management of the reserve which is now entrusted to the Ministry of Natural Resources. In practice, however, it appears that these new circumstances occasionally lead to hesitation on the part of the management when allocating tasks at central level; the expert was aware of a similar apprehension in Kostomuksha.

2-2-2-4 The extension of the reserve's units recommended when the diploma was awarded: see § 2-2-1-4.

CONCLUSION

The expert proposes that the European diploma be renewed for a further period of five years. However, he suggests that the decision of the Committee of Ministers, if it is favourable, specifies the units making up the diploma area and includes those of Poima Psla and Zorinskiy; he proposes that the decision be addressed to the authorities responsible for the reserves of Tsentralno-Chernozemny and Belogorye, of which only part of the territory would hold the diploma.

He proposes that the following recommendations be attached to the diploma renewal:

- **Recommendation 1:** increase the two reserves' own funds and seek additional outside funding;
- **Recommendation 2:** create and/or extend the buffer zones around all units of the diploma area, particularly those of Yamskoy;
- **Recommendation 3:** extend the surface area of Barkalovka and take the necessary steps for the two disconnected parts of the unit to be brought together in a single, joined massif;
- **Recommendation 4:** improve signposting and marking of the units making up the diploma area;
- **Recommendation 5:** maintain research and conservation in the diploma area at the same excellent standards as currently achieved.

APPENDIX I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (98) 25

**ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
TO THE TSENTRALNO-CHERNOZEMNY BIOSPHERE RESERVE
(Russian Federation)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 September 1998
at the 641st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP);

Having noted the agreement of the Government of the Russian Federation;

After deliberation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category A, to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve;

Places the aforesaid zone under the patronage of the Council of the Europe until 18 September 2003;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. Pursue the research into and monitoring of the biological and landscape diversity of the reserve;
2. Ensure that the budgetary resources permit the high and exemplary level of the state of conservation of the reserve to be maintained;
3. Strengthen the protection status of the peripheral zones around the different units of the reserve;

Proceed to a systematic effort to extend all the units of the reserve and to promote the constitution and restoration of ecological corridors between these units.

APPENDIX II

Draft resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma, as amended by Resolution (98) 29 on the Regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas;

Having regard to Resolution (98) 25 awarding the European Diploma to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation)

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists - European Diploma of Protected Areas on 20 and 21 January 2003;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the Field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP);

Renews the European Diploma to the Tsentralno-Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve (Russian Federation) until 18 September 2008;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal

1. increase the two reserves' own funds and seek additional outside funding;
2. create and/or extend the buffer zones around all units of the diploma area, particularly those of Yamskoy;
3. extend the surface area of Barkalovka and take the necessary steps for the two disconnected parts of the unit to be brought together in a single, joined massif;
4. improve signposting and marking of the units making up the diploma area;
5. maintain research and conservation in the diploma area at the same excellent standards as currently achieved.