



Event Report

**Workshop on Biodiversity
in Western Balkans and Turkey**

19 November 2019, Brussels



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1 Introduction

The regional workshop

The regional workshop on “Biodiversity in Western Balkans and Turkey” took place on November 19, 2019, in Brussels. The workshop was organized in cooperation with TAIEX, and under the EPPA project work programme, activity 5.1.4 “Organisation of regional conference on Biodiversity Strategy”.

The participants were senior practitioners, decision makers and negotiators engaged in biodiversity policy and its technical implementation in the administrations of the beneficiaries of EPPA. They represented the beneficiaries’ line Ministries for Environment and Nature Conservation.

The speakers came from a variety of institutional backgrounds, including the European Commission, Member States development agencies, environment Ministries, research centers, international organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and EPPA project senior experts.

The presentations will be available at both the TAIEX website and the EPPA project website.

Biodiversity relevance

The Western Balkans and Turkey are identified as being Biodiversity hotspots by the IUCN. The features of interest being the extensive mountain areas, relatively unspoilt river and lake systems and the coastline. In the Western Balkans these resources are frequently covering the territory of several countries and their effective protection and management requires good transboundary cooperation. These areas support significant populations of endemic species, large carnivores and are of value for migratory birds. The biodiversity of this region is under threat from the impacts of development, particularly for tourism, hydroelectricity, and abandonment and decline of agricultural land.

Working methods

The workshop sought to create interactions between the participating stakeholders by structuring the procedures around moderated discussion panels, integrating open dialogue with the attendees.

2 Objectives and expected results

The conference goal was to elevate the priority of regional cooperation on biodiversity, both at policy and technical levels, in the EPPA beneficiaries.

At the policy level, the conference provided support to the preparations and conclusions of a foreseen ministerial conference under EPPA, in early 2020. That conference will be held in the context of the implementation of the Biodiversity elements of the forthcoming European Green Deal in enlargement countries by promoting alignment with the EU proposals for global, post 2020 Biodiversity objectives expected to be endorsed by COP 15 of the Biodiversity Convention in October 2020. There will be a close relationship between these two elements¹.

At the technical level, the conference will enable exchange of experience from EU MS, explore and identify options for the enhancement of national action and regional cooperation in biodiversity management in the region. The effective protection of biodiversity of this region requires sound cross border cooperation. Attention to biodiversity issues has been the subject of a number of projects over the years supported by international organisations, individual donor countries and various non-governmental environmental organisations in the beneficiaries. The conference aimed to engage EU Public Administrations, and different organisations concerned, and use their results as a good basis for considering future action, thus complementing earlier programmes. This priority is consistent with the objective of promoting cross border cooperation in the EU’s Western Balkan Strategy.

The specific objectives were:

¹ The EU Green Deal will include the objective of reinforcement action to protect biodiversity in the EU and the EU demonstrating global leadership in biodiversity action. Recognizing the importance of this in its own right as well as the value of natural systems in mitigating climate change. The meeting of the COP in 2020 will be the first opportunity for the EU to demonstrate leadership with the COP planned to agree proposals for global objectives and action on Biodiversity up to 2030 and beyond. The support and engagement of enlargement countries alongside EU member states will be of great value in ensuring adoption of EU proposals.



1. Engage and support the beneficiaries in aligning to the EU New Green Deal and encourage them to develop corresponding ambitions
2. Build on the review of the key biodiversity resources of the region and the challenges, identify priorities for commitments in the run-up to the CBD-COP15 and for revised NBSAPs following the adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, covering national and transboundary action
3. Draw on experience within the region and elsewhere to identify mechanisms and approaches for enhancing regional cooperation, acknowledging the need for biodiversity policy to be supported by the integration of actions across wider policy areas
4. Prepare cooperation position proposals for approval by ministers
5. Establish a contact group, managed by EPPA Secretariat, to draft final positions/proposals for the ministerial conference, to be organized under EPPA in early 2020.

3 Highlights from the workshop

3.1 Session 1: Panel discussion - Introduction and policy framework (Moderated by Mr. Nicholas Hanley)

The European Green Deal and the Biodiversity Agenda: Introduction of goals and scope, Mr. Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director, DG ENV

Mr. Humberto Delgado Rosa set the stage to his talk by presenting markers of the state of global environment. He mentioned the degradation of environmental resources and the progressive erosion of the biosphere's capacity, endangering life cycles and affecting everyone on the planet. He then moved to the unprecedented commitment of a new Commission to preserving and restoring ecosystems through an EU Green Deal to be presented within 100 days of the new Commission taking its mandate. The overarching objective of the Green Deal, in Biodiversity, will be to curtail biodiversity loss in five years and offer EU global leadership on the subject.

The main issues facing biodiversity governance are the lack of mainstreaming in key driver sectors and lack of measurability. In order to address that, the Green Deal will seek to establish long term targets (a vision for 2050) that are compelling and mobilizing. In addition, those targets must be action oriented, directly impacting over the drivers of biodiversity loss. The setting of targets must be accompanied by stronger implementation and review systems. Through the EU Green Deal, the EU is seeking to lead by example starting with COP15 of the Biodiversity Convention, where it will present ambitious policy commitments.

Mr. Humberto Delgado Rosa invited the representatives of enlargement countries to take the following ideas into consideration when outlining their positions for COP15, but also in the context of their efforts to align with the EU.

1. The need to commit to different types of agriculture, moving away from intensive, monoculture crops to more sustainable farming practices
2. Focus on conservation and restoration, including nature-based solutions, by, for instance, increasing the percentage of protected areas within national territories and the good conservation status of those areas.
3. Develop the governance tools to ensure conservation (EIA, administrative capacities, enforcement and legal, financial capacities)

The enlargement process and the environmental challenges, Ms. Guillemette Vachey, Policy Officer, DG NEAR

Ms. Guillemette Vachey started by stating the importance of the EPPA project for regional cooperation and that the EU's commitment with the Western Balkans remains unchanged, despite recent developments with the applicant status of Albania and North Macedonia. Regarding Turkey, the partnership with the EU is of mutual interest. The spring 2020 EU summit in Zagreb will be an opportunity to reaffirm the EU's commitments towards enlargement countries.



In DG NEAR's perspective, the challenges ahead for the region are the implementation and enforcement of the EU acquis, which will require structured cooperation between all ministries and administration levels and civil society. In addition, regional cooperation for transboundary issues should remain a priority.

As for the enlargement green agenda, which will reflect the priorities of the Green Deal, the focus will be on improving governance through mainstreaming – moving from a thematic approach to a strategic approach. The main focus areas are forecasted to be circular economy, climate neutrality, biodiversity preservation and energy transition. It is expected the green agenda to contribute to the sustainable development of the region and make it more attractive to investment and tourism. Work is in progress to develop a strategic document and declaration to be adopted in the Zagreb summit.

Western Balkans challenges in setting and implementing targets in biodiversity protection and ecosystem services, Ms. Ivana Vojinovic, Director General, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, Montenegro

Ms. Ivana Vojinovic presented Montenegro's biodiversity heritage. Currently, around 13% of the territory corresponds to some form of protected area (natural parks, nature reserves, etc.). Legally, Montenegro declared in its constitution to be an ecological state. That legal consecration is operational via specific nature protection laws, a sectorial strategy and action plan, and also reflected in the country's National Strategy for Sustainable Development. The priority is to maintain the process of adoption and implementation of the EU acquis.

Montenegro is also aware of the value of ecosystem services for the economy. She presented an estimate in which investment in Montenegro's natural capital may yield a return of 1.5 billion euros over 25 years.

However, there are challenges for biodiversity. Montenegro is facing a lack of information due to limited monitoring systems. Urban development, land use, pollution, impacts of climate change and unsustainable use of resources, for instance forests, all present threats to biodiversity.

Ms. Ivana Vojinovic listed as next steps the need to recognize implementation failures and recommit to goals, put a higher emphasis on biodiversity 2020 targets and CBD implementation, increased financing, increased capacities, partnership development, base environmental governance in scientific guidance, higher engagement of the regulated communities, the definition of quantitative targets for the post 2020 framework together with the adoption of standardized indicators, and further regional cooperation.

Challenges of Central European subgroup to IPBES regional assessment, Mr. Peter Skoberne, Ministry of Environment, Slovenia

Mr. Peter Skoberne introduced the different policy levels at stake when discussing biodiversity (CBD, EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy and the forthcoming Green Deal). He then looked at the latest IPBES regional assessment report for Europe, highlighting the results for the Dinaric region. The region is rich on biodiversity but faces significant risks. The social erosion of remote agricultural areas presents conservation difficulties, there are pressures from energy sector, tourism, and infrastructure development. In addition, the low political profile for nature conservation leads to weak capacities and weak enforcement. The available data is dispersed data and knowledge on biological diversity is incomplete.

Mr. Peter Skoberne then gave the example of Slovenia and how the country manages nature, namely the Natura2000 network which covers 37% of the country and poses significant challenges. The key factors for success have been support of top decision makers, participation of stakeholders, solid data on biodiversity and available financing mechanisms. Finally, he highlighted the need to cooperate and network, both nationally and internationally on the framework of existing and coming platforms.

3.2 Session 2: Panel discussion – Alignment of positions for CBD-COP 15 and Reaction to the European Green Deal (Moderated by Mr. Nicholas Hanley)

Mr. Anne Theo Seinen, International Relations Officer, DG ENV



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Mr. Anne Theo Seinen stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders, Commission, Member States and enlargement countries, in the cooperative development of ideas in the framework of the Green Deal and the positions for the CBD COP15. In this sense the workshop comes at a pertinent time. A global biodiversity governance can only work with ownership and commitment of all involved parties. The EU wishes to have a stronger review and implementation mechanism with measurable actions and outcomes, based on SMART targets addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss.

There is already a database of global indicators managed by OECD. Those indicators can be a base for the desired SMART targets, allowing for comparability and impact measurement. In parallel, national strategies need to be aligned with the new targets. Both components will drive better implementation. It is recognized that COP15 might not result in immediate alignment of national strategies, due to different timelines, but it would be important to develop commitments for each country regarding the implementation of the post 2020 framework.

Finally, in the review and implementation mechanism, a ratcheting up component should be included to address fluid results and potential gaps or problems.

Mr. Anne Theo Seinen also highlighted the discussion on the outcome-oriented targets. He gave the example of the zero human induced extinctions. Such targets will require action across the board, involving other policy sectors like sustainable development, poverty eradication, etc. Another area for indicator development is ecosystem health. There is already some work in progress within the EU in this area. Ideally, there should also be efforts to connect the indicators with already existing frameworks like the “Good Environmental Status” under the Marine Framework Strategy Directive.

Another topic for discussion are area based targets, for instance 30% of protected areas. There is a pertinent argument for the increase of such areas. Within that, connectivity and effective management are also points of focus.

Mainstreaming of biodiversity concerns and involvement of business should be on the agenda. Businesses not only impact natural capital, but they also depend on it for their value chain.

As a final point for discussion, Mr. Anne Theo Seinen referred to the intention to adopt a long-term strategy for capacity building in COP15 CBD, that will take a comprehensive view on the subject even beyond CBD goal posts. That capacity building should target stability of governance systems and create links to scientific and educational systems.

Ms. Ornela Cuci, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Albania

Ms. Ornela Cuci presented Albania’s biodiversity heritage. In 2018, Albania had 18.8% of its territory as protected areas. That number is planned to grow to 21% in the next two years.

In terms of biodiversity priorities, the country is seeking to continue legislative approximation with the EU, to update its biodiversity strategy, to start implementation of the existing management plans for protected areas, to identify Natura2000 sites, to improve implementation and monitoring.

Ms. Ornela Cuci exemplified the Government’s willingness to improve the state of nature conservation with the 2014-2021 hunting ban, which is resulting in the return of wild species and increasing the several species population numbers. Another example provided was the forest moratorium from 2017 to 2027. Albania had lost around 37% of its forest in recent years. Since the logging ban is in place that alarming decrease has been halted. Ms. Ornela Cuci announced the Council of Ministers was prepared to adopt a ban on plastic bags on November 20, 2019, to be followed by a projected ban on all single use plastics.

The speaker continued by giving other examples of governance initiatives related to nature conservation. The Clean and Green 2020 project is promoting the planting of 20 million trees, by connecting planting drives with school education and births (one new born, one new tree).

The project Smile Albania employed 500 students over the three summer months to provide environmental education to the general public using an “educate and protect” approach. Ms. Ornela Cuci stated that the project resulted in a 100% increase in the number of visitors to protected areas.

Another project mentioned was the Create Your Own Oxygen, where schools have assigned areas to plant and manage trees under the principle that each child adopts one tree. It is seen as a means of sustainable reforestation.



In terms of perceived needs in Albania, the speaker identified regional cooperation in creating and sharing nature monitoring data as a basis for policy making and management and regional cooperation to develop home-grown technical expertise. In connection with the previous point, it is considered that Albania has a knowledge and research gap.

Ms. Sandra Milicevic Sperlic on behalf of Mr. Ivan Karic, State Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Serbia

Ms. Sandra Milicevic Sperlic summarized the Serbian reaction to the EU Green Deal proposal. The current strategy for biodiversity is the backdrop policy document to engage in any discussion about the post 2020 biodiversity framework. Serbia supports exploring potential solutions for improvement. In addition, the post 2020 framework should take into account other international policy making like the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

There was a recent consultation about the post 2020 biodiversity framework organized by the Ministry in Belgrade. One of the main conclusions was the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity policy in other sectors like forestry, water management and agriculture, while also securing the necessary funding.

Serbia expects to finalize by December the coordination of its negotiation position for Chapter 27, including nature protection and its stakeholders. Serbia made significant progress in the transposition of nature acquis and corresponding policies. The country is currently developing capacity for the assessment and evaluation of ecosystem services, and for the identification of sites for the Natura 2000 network in the country based on several IPA projects and national funding. Serbia sees the development of capacities for the enforcement of the WTR as an important step. The country is also preparing for alignment with the IAS regulation.

Serbia also participates in Biodiversity taskforce (BDTF), a technical and advisory body to the regional working group on environment of the RCC. Transboundary action for nature conservation in the western Balkans is necessary to halt the loss of biodiversity in the region. Serbia already has established cooperation with Romania, Hungary and Croatia for the management of certain cross border nature areas.

The Ministry sees ecosystem services as an important tool to preserve biodiversity and serve as climate change mitigation and is currently preparing a strategy to link climate change and biodiversity. In this regard, the draft low carbon development strategy analyses 3 sectors most vulnerable to climate change and proposes mitigation options. In addition, the second national communication of the Republic of Serbia contains a list of adaptation measures related to nature.

Serbia is also preparing a strategic document for nature protection, that will be aligned with the post 2020 biodiversity objectives.

Mr. Jani Makraduli, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning North Macedonia

Mr. Jani Makraduli started by setting the context of the EU Green Deal discussion. According to him, Europe is facing a twin crisis of environment and economy. The outcomes of the last European Parliament elections in May 2019 voiced citizen concern about those twin crises, which led the new Commission to propose a policy answer to tackle both: the EU Green Deal. He then gave an overview of the Green Deal based on publicly available information so far, highlighting the main pillars of the new policy: Europe to become the first climate neutral continent by defining 2050 targets in law, extending the EU Emissions Trading System, promoting a just transition, reinforcing the circular economy, promoting the European climate pact, investing in green financing, defining ambition targets for 2030, and including a biodiversity strategy. In terms of biodiversity the emphasis is on preserving and restoring ecosystems, setting new standards for biodiversity cutting across trade, industry, agriculture and economic policy (Biodiversity Strategy for 2030), and provide global leadership lead starting with the 2020 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in the same way like at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.



Mr. Jani Makraduli then schematized how the Green Deal might translate into an enlargement green agenda, which will in turn reflect on policy drivers for North Macedonia, or, as he put it, “a new carrot and stick for the region”. He continued by quoting from the latest North Macedonia progress report in order to set the stage for the country’s progress in Nature issues.

Macedonia has a National Strategy for Nature Protection (2017-2027) and a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2018-2023). The latter has 5 strategic goals and 20 ambitious targets. He then presented the national system of protected areas. Currently, 8.9% of the territory is under some form of protection. Management plans are either developed or in development for specific areas. He used the recently released UNECE Environmental Performance Review of North Macedonia to highlight some of the needed next steps: biodiversity monitoring, inventories and research programs; development and implementation of policies, strategies and conservation action plans; strengthening the national protected area network; and establishing a strong institutional framework for nature protection.

In terms of regional cooperation, North Macedonia is also a member of the Biodiversity taskforce (BDTF), a technical and advisory body to the regional working group on environment of the RCC. He summarized some of the work done by the group.

In terms of climate change impacts, North Macedonia released a communication on the matter, mapping the sensitive areas. 18 habitats and 58 plant species were identified as vulnerable on climate change.

North Macedonia is also working towards the application of the ecosystem services concept (mapping ecosystems, developing indicators, define payments) and nature-based solutions and protected areas to improve urban biodiversity and health.

He finalized by calling for a clean energy transition as an economic opportunity and environmental imperative. A long term, overarching vision is needed for the Western Balkans to address the biodiversity threats: impact of development, tourism, hydroelectricity.

In the discussion that followed, Mr. Anne Theo Seinen, responding to the carrot and stick remark, commented that the new policy is still in the making and that the region has much to gain from getting involved in the CBD COP15 preparation process and to formulate realistic ambitions, in that framework, on how to tackle negative trends.

Ms. Ornela Cuci raised the issue of the challenges facing countries dealing with chapter 27 negotiations. Alignment challenges existing implementation systems, the area where more assistance is needed. In this regard, Ms. Ornela Cuci called for more involvement in EU initiatives to improve enforcement and, in particular for Albania, requested more attention to the need to support the deployment and monitoring of existing and future strategies and action plans.

Mr. Nicholas Hanley commented that indeed the outcome of alignment should be more than just transposition. All EU countries have implementation issues, it is not an exclusive gap to the enlargement area. Recognition of regional cooperation in the workshop is encouraging, which shows the region’s ambition to do better. In this regard, the CBD COP15 gives the enlargement countries a unique opportunity to show that ambition and translate it into policy leadership.

3.3 Session 3: Panel discussion - Biodiversity challenges of the region and the case for cooperation (Moderated by Mr. Ventzislav Vassilev)

Threats to the Balkan Green Belt, Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer, CEO, Euronatur

Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer presented the biodiversity and cultural richness of the Western Balkans as a backdrop to efforts to preserve it for the present and future generations. He contextualized the Balkan Green Belt within the larger initiative of the European Green Belt. The European Green Belt runs from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, spanning eight distinct bio-geographical regions and twenty-four states in Europe. Along the twelve thousand five hundred (12.500) kilometres it connects wilderness areas, cultural landscapes, water ecosystems, coasts and large woodlands. It roughly corresponds to the former Iron Curtain and it contributes to the crossboundary management of ecosystems and to function as an ecological network connecting high-value natural and cultural landscapes (in this regard it is also a good example of green infrastructure) whilst respecting the economic, social and cultural needs of local communities.



In the western Balkans the corridor has a 50 km width, around 115000 km² of proposed area, reflecting the region's richness. The corridor defines the area where activities of the initiative are concentrated. 40% of that area already corresponds to nature protection sites.

Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer finalized with an appeal to include the Balkan Green Belt area into national spatial plans as priority area for nature conservation and sustainable development. The area offers opportunities for transboundary ecosystem management on the ground (Prespa, Ohrid, Bojana-Buna delta, Shebenik-Jablanica, Shar Planina/ Khorab, Osogovo, Djerdab and many others).

Mr. Vlatko Trpeski, Head of Nature Department, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, North Macedonia

Mr. Vlatko Trpeski started by characterizing North Macedonia. It has a very diverse nature, represented by various elements of geodiversity, biodiversity and landscape. The abundance and variety of ecosystems, types of natural habitats and wild species, as well as genetic resources, are the main features of biological diversity in the country. According to the available information, this wealth comprises more than 23 019 species, out of which more than 976 species are endemic.

In terms of policy developments, he highlighted the new law on Nature protection, which is in line with EU Birds and Habitat Directives. Work to establish monitoring protocols for national and EU species and habitats is also in progress.

The country is now implementing the actions from National Strategy for Nature Protection with the Action Plan (2017-2027)" and the "National Strategy for Biodiversity with the Action Plan for the period (2018-2023)". In parallel, there is field research for future Natura 2000 sites, and high nature value forest identification and beach forest nomination. The national red list assessment for herpetofauna and selected plants (IUCN methodology). There are plans to develop a new information system for natural heritage.

Mr. Vlatko Trpeski then gave updates regarding the management of protected areas, including the procedures to declare new areas.

Regarding regional cooperation, the Ohrid Prespa Nature Fund (PONT) was mentioned, as well as the GEF project "Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Extended Drin River Basin". There is bilateral cooperation between neighbours (Bulgaria and Greece). In addition, Mr. Vlatko Trpeski presented in more detail the BD TF of which Macedonia is a member of. The group organizes regular meetings and promoted the joint participation and presentation of SEE economies at the CBD COP14: BDTF inputs for the HLS segment, SEE Aichi poster and side-event in partnership with SADC, EC and CBD. The BDTF also participated in the CBD Consultation Workshop on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework for Central and Eastern Europe in Serbia, 2019. Currently the group is working on a communication strategy, a Biodiversity Information Management and Reporting (BIMR) Policy Paper, regional guidelines on ecosystem services assessment and valuation (ESAV) in processes of establishing (PAE) and managing (PAM) of protected areas in Western Balkans, preparing the position of BDTF for CBD COP 15 and EU Post 2020, joint participation at the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, supporting the implementation of priority actions for Aichi Target 11, and it seeks to be a partner for the EU Green Deal.

Ms. Jelena Ducic, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Sector for Nature and Climate Changing - Head of Department for Biodiversity, Serbia

Ms. Jelena Ducic welcomed the workshop as a relevant venue to coordinate positions on the run up to CBD COP 15. Serbia is a part of a number of multilateral agreements and is committed to international cooperation for better governance.

She then explained that Serbia is in the process of preparing its Natura2000 network. The ecological network will cover 21% of the territory, but there are expectations to enlarge that figure over time. The backbone of nature protection in Serbia is its Law on Nature Protection. Serbia has developed 4 IUCN red lists and more will be forthcoming based on state budget funding.

Regarding regional cooperation, Serbia is a part of the Green Belt initiative and it runs several cross-border cooperation activities with neighbouring countries, including EU Member States. Serbia is also a



part of the BD TF, which it sees as an important venue for technical, regional cooperation and a tool to harmonize the position of its members regarding the post 2020 biodiversity framework. Ms. Jelena Ducic also mentioned the Serbian presidency of EUSAIR and ongoing work to develop joint management plans for large carnivores.

Mr. Boris Erg, Director, IUCN Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (IUCN ECARO)

Mr. Boris Erg focused his talk on regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, its state of play and ways forward. He started with summary facts about the region. The Western Balkan is home to rich and important biodiversity, including many threatened, rare and endemic species. It is a part of the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot, one of the 35 global biodiversity hotspots. The Dinaric Karst has been identified one of the two most important karst system in the world, next to the South China Karst World Heritage site. The region includes 21 Ramsar sites, 4 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, and 3 natural or mixed World Heritage sites (including transboundary ones). The European Green Belt Initiative intersects vast part of the region forming the southernmost section of the initiative – the Balkan Green Belt. Countries are working on establishing the Natura 2000 Network as part of the accession process to the European Union.

In terms of the state of nature conservation in the region it falls behind when it comes to one important indicator, PA designation – Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. Currently (2018 numbers), at 8.8% of territory regionally.

He then went through some of the main threats, namely tourism, hydropower, urbanization, pollution, intensive agriculture, exploitation of natural resources and poaching, climate change and excessive alteration of rivers and wetlands.

Regarding regional initiatives Mr. Boris Erg focused on the SEE Biodiversity Task Force, of which IUCN acts as Secretariat. He provided details on the structure and organization of the task force and listed work in progress, namely: opening of BD TF to applications for associate members and invited experts, developing the BDTF strategy for communication and stakeholder engagement, developing the BDTF visual identity, co-organizing side-events at the CBD COP14, IUCN Regional Conservation Forum, upcoming SBSTTA-23, drafting recommendations to the post-2020 area-based target including a focus on management effectiveness and SMART elements.

He also mentioned the BIMR regional platform (Biodiversity Information Management and Reporting) seeking to consolidate biodiversity information and data management and fostering the SEE region towards joining the GBIF community, as well as the development of an Information System for Nature Conservation (ISNC).

He concluded with the main take home lessons for biodiversity in the region. The region's ecosystems/natural capital won't stand growing pressures without being effectively managed – current investment in nature is not sufficient. In addition, to make biodiversity conservation work, we need to set ambitious, clear and measurable targets for 2030 and 2050. And strongly support the engagement of the Western Balkans in discussions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and integration of the new framework into national policies (working group on the post-2020).

Regional and transboundary cooperation and conservation in the Western Balkans are key to tackling the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services at landscape-scale level.

Wild Rivers-Campaign 'Save the Blue Heart of Europe', Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer, CEO, Euronatur

Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer presented the SEE Wild Rivers-Campaign 'Save the Blue Heart of Europe'. He started by establishing the good state of rivers in the Western Balkans. Often, these waters are also inside protected areas. The campaign developed specific criteria to perform a hydromorphological assessment of the waters in the WB. Data was collected on around 80 000 km of rivers, resulting in the classification of rivers in 5 categories (ranging from Near-natural to Severely modified). The mapping resulted in an overview that shows that a significant part of the region's rivers are Near-Natural or only slightly modified, the top 2 categories.

This state of affairs is threatened by the development of hydropower, that sacrifices river based biodiversity. There are currently 2,796 hydropower plants planned and 188 under construction. Out of



those, around 1000 are planned inside protected areas. Around 1600km of wild rivers have been lost already since 2008.

Based on the hydromorphological assessment, Euronatur is proposing that top rivers (near natural and slightly modified states) be protected from hydropower, including the adjacent areas, through a “no-go” areas map. That corresponds to 76% (61 033 river-km) of all the rivers analysed due to their high quality and other biodiversity conservation factors. Euronatur estimates that 89% of the planned hydropower is within their proposed no-go areas, most being smaller than 10MW and contributing no more than 3% of the region’s energy supply. Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer questioned if the high cost of loss of nature and biodiversity is worth those 3%.

The discussion then turned to energy transition. Euronatur ordered an energy study for the region. The conclusions were that most WB countries would fail to reach renewable targets, even if all dams would be built; wind and solar could deliver enough opportunities to accomplish the countries NREAP targets and could substitute “no-go dams”.

Mr. Gabriel Schwaderer finalized with some recommendations on possible ways forward. The most important of which is a switch in energy policy to focus on energy efficiency and demand reduction, development of an ambitious strategy towards renewables (focus on solar), stop subsidies for hydro and redirect to real renewables like solar. In addition, develop an eco-master plan for rivers with no-go zones, use wild rivers as a cornerstone for a sustainable tourism strategy, and develop cross border river basin management plans.

3.4 Session 4: Panel discussion - Experience of cooperation in the region and elsewhere (Moderated by Mr. Mihail Dimovski)

CSBL project challenges identified in nature legislation implementation in water, fishery and biodiversity protection at Skadar, Ohrid and Prespa lakes, Ms. Andrea Goertler, Advisor for Transboundary Cooperation, GIZ

Ms. Andrea Goertler presented the lessons learnt in the GIZ Project “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity at Lakes Prespa, Ohrid and Shkodra/Skadar” (CSBL) in terms of opportunities and challenges in transboundary management of water resources, fisheries and biodiversity. Ms. Andrea Goertler presented the project’s biodiversity products, among which are preselection of priority species and habitats for monitoring and conservation, transboundary Action Plan for bats species at Lake Shkodra/Skadar, improved protection of core breeding zone of Dalmatian Pelican at Lake Skadar, Harmonized monitoring and conservation of priority species and habitats (transboundary and GO-NGO collaboration), improved biodiversity data management, monitoring Manual for Lake-bound Species and Habitats and N2000 habitat mapping at Skadar Lake (MNE) and draft reference list.

The project also delivered important results in water management including a Programme of Measures for Lake Skadar (MNE) – integrated into RBMP Adriatic and a Programmes of Measures for lakes Shkodra (AL) and Prespa (AL) – to be integrated into Drin RBMP. In terms of fisheries the project will deliver capacity building of fisheries authorities and associations, lake reports on fish and fisheries and establishment and handover of database on fish assemblages (> 130,000 entries) and a transboundary Eel Management Plan.

In terms of lessons learnt and drivers of success Ms. Andrea Goertler firstly pointed out the technical Working Groups as Motor of Transboundary Cooperation which brought together institutional counterparts from 3 countries, combined local knowledge with capacity building for new processes, supported long-term joint investigations and development of methodologies, facilitated information sharing and access to data and drove ownership of the processes and products. EU Approximation was a second important driver for transboundary cooperation in the programmes of measures and development of methodologies. The Value of Transboundary Agreements / Commissions also deserves a mention as it allows for institutionalization of transboundary cooperation, even if “slim” (avoiding oversized bureaucratic structures). Planning and taking national actions with a transboundary perspective can facilitate harmonized management of shared resources across borders and, finally, interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral integration allows to mainstream and integrate sectoral measures with other areas.



From Ms. Andrea Goertler's perspective challenges remain both in the wake of the project, but also more broadly applicable to any project-based intervention. She mentioned that continuous monitoring of paramount importance, as well as data sharing and ownership. Good donor coordination is needed to avoid replication – especially in regional initiatives. National governance/institutional cohesion and financial sustainability is a necessary basis for being a good transboundary partner. Finally, there is a financial gap to achieve EU standards, especially for waste water treatment facilities.

Bird areas and conservation challenges, particularly the Adriatic flyway, Mr. Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia

Mr. Ariel Brunner talked about the Adriatic flyway across the western Balkans. Many vulnerable species use the wetlands habitats along the flyway, but there has been a three quarters loss of those areas over the last 150 years. Some of the remaining sites have a great importance at European level. In addition, the majority of free-flowing rivers remaining in Europe are located in the Western Balkans. The region also has pockets of old growth forest providing unique habitats, as well as dry grasslands rich in endemic species. Large tracks of traditional farm land remain, which are important components of a biodiverse ecosystem. Mr. Ariel Brunner understands the need to develop agricultural production, but he recommends that the development leapfrogs over the current standards of intensive agriculture to avoid further damage.

In terms of the most relevant problems for birds, unsustainable hunting and poaching are grave threats with millions of birds killed annually. Rapid urbanization (and subsequent waste and air pollution) and disruption of hydrological elements also threaten the habitats bird populations depend on. It should be a priority to increase energy efficiency to avoid the destructive advance of hydropower. Deforestation is also a major concern.

In Mr. Ariel Brunner's opinion the Natura 2000 will be an essential infrastructure for the region to manage its biodiversity. In general, EU alignment offers opportunities to build better governance by enacting active policies seeking positive outcomes.

The most important areas for policy making and cooperation are building capacities for law enforcement, standardizing investigation techniques, improve control on the borders, invest in species conservation and coordinate the implementation of Natura2000 across borders.

Green infrastructure deployment and ecological connectivity status: corridors for movement between protected sites for large carnivores and other species, Mr. Ventzislav Vasilev, Senior Expert, EPPA

Mr. Ventzislav Vasilev presented the study on green infrastructure being developed by EPPA. He provided a context of where the study stands in terms of the project work plan and in terms of conceptual framework. He also provided a reference in terms of the current situation of natural areas in the Western Balkans. The region needs to move from smaller isolated PAs with strict protection towards a broader network of structurally and functionally connected green areas, which support the biodiversity but also broader set of ecosystem services. This follows the new nature conservation concepts globally, and particularly the EU policies (as a part of the EU accession process). The region should ensure the connectivity between the PAs and the green areas of various protection status by identifying and protecting the main existing natural green corridors and steppingstones (rivers, mountain chains, etc.), protecting and improving the connecting elements of the landscape in human-affected landscapes (e.g. green strips along roads, green bridges etc.), and restoring and successfully managing ecosystems, particularly those of transboundary importance.

Regarding the study it is methodologically based on recent studies and projects with similar objectives and comparable geographical scope (i.e. BioREGIO Carpathians focused on umbrella species and ECONNECT project in the Alps, further developed by ALPBIONET2030, landscape oriented). After consultations with EC and internal discussion, the team of EPPA made the decision to focus the analysis on the connectivity of large carnivores as umbrella species.



Currently, the work is progressing through data collection from international and national sources, identifying and prioritizing the core conservation areas, taking stock of relevant projects / initiatives, analysing the ecological connectivity (spatial analysis).

The study outcomes will be 1) a study report including ecological connectivity status, core conservation areas, main green corridors and important ecosystem fragmentation issues, identification of priority areas where ecosystem restoration and green infrastructure deployment are needed, GIS and maps; 2) recommendations: technical, policy and legislation, socio-economic and communication, and analysis of funding sources; and 3) a regional workshop presenting the results of the study and discussion on concrete proposed measures / projects to ensure follow-up actions at country level and transboundary level.

The Carpathian Convention example, Ms. Sonja Gebert, UN Environment, Vienna International Center – UNEP

Ms. Sonja Gebert presented the geographic features of the Carpathians. It is the largest, second-longest, most twisted and fragmented mountain range in Europe. It provides essential ecosystem goods to communities in seven countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine). Over 50% of the territory are natural and semi-natural forests and it is the habitat for the largest European populations of brown bears, wolves, chamois, and lynxes. Carpathians are an ecoregion of Global importance. They are called the “Kingdom of the Carnivores”.

The Convention is a framework convention for cooperation and multi-sectoral policy coordination, adopted on 22nd May 2003 it entered in force on 4th January 2006. It is now ratified by all the seven Carpathian countries.

The Convention has regular COPs and a standing Implementation Committee that is supported by multiple working groups (biodiversity, climate change, forestry, etc.). The Convention has a number of Protocols on specific areas:

- Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity *in place*
- Protocol on Sustainable Tourism *in place*
- Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management *in place*
- Protocol on Sustainable Transport *in place*
- Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development *in place*
- Protocol on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge *in progress*

In terms of Biodiversity, the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity was adopted in 2008 and a respective strategic action plan since 2011.

The Convention has contributed to several Interreg projects for green corridors, protected areas management and linkages of transport infrastructure with the green corridors. Another project funded by the EU developed a green corridor between the Alpine region and the Carpathian region securing migration and genetical exchange among wildlife.

The convention is seeking to implement and develop an International Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of the Carpathian Populations of Large Carnivores. The objectives are harmonizing the monitoring of large carnivores in the Carpathians, preventing fragmentation of habitat, identifying key ecological corridors, and development and implementation of ecological network for large carnivores, capacity building, education, and awareness raising.

In terms of forestry the Convention has an inventory of virgin forests in progress. The Convention is also developing a strategy for sustainable agriculture and rural development. Some of the objectives will be to create a database on agriculture in the Carpathians (structure of land use), list the biggest problems in the field of agriculture and rural development in the Carpathian area, promote organic production and strengthen development of local products, and develop a common approach on agrobiodiversity.

The Convention is seeking the EU to accession to the convention while it aims to be the regional mechanism for implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Adapting European Forests and biodiversity to climate change: Opportunities and challenges, Mr. Debojyoti Chakraborty, Austrian Research Centre for Forests



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Mr. Debojyoti Chakraborty focused his opening message on the interlinkages between nature sectors. Ecosystems are not isolated and they require interdisciplinary thinking. One can't have food security without ecosystem services to sustain agriculture, and one can't conserve forests and other ecosystems without thinking about how to feed a population, and one can't grow food without enough water. Nevertheless, forests are an important component of biodiversity. Forests are one of the largest pools of terrestrial biodiversity, they help stabilize the climate, regulate ecosystems, and play an integral part to drive sustainable growth. Therefore, adapting forests to climate change has immense policy relevance for biodiversity conservation.

Europe should aim at having adaptive forest management, which will preserve and develop the functionality of forests as a prerequisite for fulfilling the future need for forest ecosystem services. Part of the adaptive management is to reforest relying on genetic diversity, where seeding materials are chosen base on their compatibility to prevailing and expected conditions under climate change, even if it means planting trees traditionally not found in certain areas.

Mr. Debojyoti Chakraborty demonstrated, based on a study by the Austrian Research Centre for Forests (SUSTREE Project), that reforestation, or forest conversion in Europe, should be done in different parameters than so far allowed. Countries establish and legislate on allowable species and seed sources based on the existing stock. However, climate change will require that species be diversified and planted outside its origin areas in order to increase forests resilience under shifting climatic conditions. Future systems should go beyond national borders and should allow to include climate change. The productivity and vitality of many tree populations will decrease and vulnerability will increase with climate change if local provenances are being used. Assisted seed transfer will help to stabilize and improve forest productivity and decrease vulnerability. Broader information on provenance use is needed for forest and nursery managers. Seed management needs to be strongly harmonized on transnational level.

The SUSTREE Project established a transnational model for seed transfer through transnational seed zones, maps of species vulnerabilities, etc. It also enabled access to national forest genetic resource information by providing a harmonised access to national registers connected to the transnational seed zones, etc. Finally, the project promoted climate change adaptation for forest ecosystems by implementing new seed transfer models within forest companies as pilot applications and raising awareness to stakeholders and policy makers. The project is also preparing a mobile app "Sus-SELECT Decision support tool" to allow decision makers to choose the most appropriate seeds, as well as listing possible sourcing options, taking into account vulnerability to climate change of the intended seeds and areas of plantation.

3.5 Session 5: Discussion based on previous sessions and ideas paper of options for enhanced action (Moderated by Mr. Nicholas Hanley)

The assembled participants took stock of the ideas put forward during the previous sessions and voiced their comments. The discussion sought to harmonize views on transboundary cooperation, including success stories, and to identify concrete priorities that can serve as basis for aligned positions towards BCD-COP 15, as well as transboundary cooperation. The conclusions of the discussion are presented below.

4 Conclusions

The workshop was well attended by representatives from all the beneficiaries of EPPA, EU member states, Commission officials and representatives from a range of international organisations and environmental NGO's active in the region.

In the opening session Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director of Nature and Biodiversity from DG ENV in the Commission, outlined the key elements of the priority being given to biodiversity by the new Commission which will be shortly commencing its term of office. Central to this is the establishment of a new European Green Deal to be finalised in the first 100 days of the new Commission. Biodiversity is to be a central element of this deal raising the level of ambition for EU policy both domestically but also



in setting out a leadership internationally with a view to the establishment of global objectives to be agreed in the upcoming conference of the parties of the CBD planned for October 2020.

The representative of DG NEAR, Guillemette Vachey, explained how this Green Deal would be translated into a Green Agenda for the accession process.

Both Commission representatives expressed the interest in seeing the accession countries responding positively to the Green Deal and aligning their positions to that of the EU in support of an ambitious and positive outcome to the CBD COP 15.

The workshop had a full agenda of discussion of the biodiversity importance and challenges faced by the beneficiaries as well as the success being achieved by a number of projects and programmes.

Presentations were made by most of the accession countries outlining the progress they were making in the implementation of their national biodiversity strategies, related to both their commitments to the CBD and in implementing EU biodiversity policy and legislation. While this was positive they still have significant further progress to achieve to respect the engagements made.

The presentations by international organisations and NGO's outlined the significance of the Western Balkans and Turkey as being biodiversity hotspots and, regrettably, the continuing trends of decline and threats to the biodiversity of the region. The pressures of development, particularly of hydropower, urban development and tourism, were identified as being of particular concern.

The discussion of a number of projects and processes in the region provided interesting examples of approaches that could be usefully replicated to address the challenges identified. A GIZ project has in particular promoted cross border cooperation in the management of the lakes and rivers in the region and the integration of biodiversity into other policy areas. The presentations on the Balkans green belt and the experience of the Carpathian convention emphasised the importance of extending these approaches with respect to other biodiversity resources in the region.

The ongoing work of the Biodiversity Task Force of the Regional Cooperation Council was seen as of value in promoting cooperation between the countries of the region.

Results

The participants recognised the importance of biodiversity in the region and the challenges they are facing both in their own countries and in the region in ensuring the protection and management that is necessary to safeguard this vital resource.

The debate that this conference has launched is welcomed and the participants agreed to form a contact group to develop proposals for consideration and approval at a ministerial meeting in early 2020 for submission to the projected Summit meeting for the western Balkans planned for 21-22 April 2020.

Potential elements for such proposal may include:

1. A response from enlargement countries to the European Green Deal and prospective enlargement Green Agenda. This could set out some form of engagement by the countries individually or collectively to match the ambition of the EU.
2. Engagement of the enlargement countries to align their positions for the CBD COP 15 with those of the EU and support ambitious targets for the post 2020 objectives to be agreed in October 2020. Furthermore, and consistent with this, the identification of processes to review their national biodiversity strategies and programmes to implement such engagements.
3. Recognising that the biodiversity of the region is characterised by many species and habitats that span over areas which cross over national boundaries, consideration of potential mechanisms and commitments to reinforcement cross border cooperation in the protection and management of these resources.

Contact group

Enlargement countries representatives were asked to signal to the EPPA secretariat their nominees for this group with all their contact details.



In addition, all participants of the workshop are invited to submit their ideas and suggestions for the proposals to be submitted by the contact group. The proposals will however be the responsibility of the group, supported by the secretariat of the EPPA.

The Commission services are asked to keep the group regularly informed of the development of text for the Green Deal, enlargement green agenda and EU submissions for COP 15 (some of these are already available on the CBD web site).

The EPPA secretariat will draft potential text for consideration of the group which will mainly operate by email exchanges but the option of a meeting to finalise proposals will be considered subject to funding possibilities. The objective is to finalise proposals by early April.

Workshop outputs

The workshop's main outputs were:

1. EPPA beneficiaries involved in a new policy dialogue structured around the EU New Green Deal. EPPA integrated into the bigger picture of the Enlargement Green Agenda.
2. Better mutual understanding in Western Balkans and Turkey, in the run-up to the CBD-COP15, regarding priorities for commitments covering national and transboundary action.
3. Identified best practices and future options of transboundary cooperation in the biodiversity sector within the region and beyond.
4. Better understanding of the need for biodiversity policy to be supported by the integration of actions across wider policy areas, e.g., land-use change, pollution, climate change, forestry and fisheries
5. Established contact group to support preparations and to draft final proposals/positions for the ministerial conference

5 Evaluation

The participants were asked to evaluate the workshop, post-factum, by TAIEX. This report will present the results once TAIEX evaluation data is made available.



6 Annexes

6.1 Annex 4: Joint Statement

JOINT STATEMENT ON STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION ON BIODIVERSITY

19 November 2019

On the occasion of the Regional Workshop on “**Biodiversity in Western Balkans and Turkey**”, organized by TAIEX in cooperation with EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) on 19 November 2019, in Brussels, the participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, in addition to the representatives of the European Commission (DG ENV and DG NEAR), IUCN ECARO, Euronatur, GiZ, RCC, BirdLife Europe, and the Austrian Research Centre for Forests acknowledged the importance of biodiversity in the region and the challenges faced nationally and regionally in ensuring the protection and management that is necessary to safeguard this vital resource.

Taking into consideration the Biodiversity elements of the forthcoming European Green Deal and the corresponding enlargement green agenda and the post 2020 Biodiversity objectives expected to be endorsed by COP 15 of the Biodiversity Convention in October 2020, the participants welcome the debate launched and agree to form a contact group.

The contact group will develop proposals for consideration and approval at a ministerial meeting in early 2020, the outcomes of which will be submitted to the projected Summit meeting for the western Balkans planned for 21-22 April 2020.

Those proposals may include:

1. A response from enlargement countries to the European Green Deal and prospective enlargement Green Agenda. This could set out some form of engagement by the countries individually or collectively to match the ambition of the EU.
2. Engagement of the enlargement countries to align their positions for the CBD COP 15 with those of the EU and support ambitious targets for the post 2020 objectives to be agreed in October 2020. Furthermore, and consistent with this, the identification of processes to review their national biodiversity strategies and programmes to implement such engagements.
3. Recognising that the biodiversity of the region is characterised by many species and habitats that span over areas which cross over national boundaries, consideration of potential mechanisms and commitments to reinforcement cross border cooperation in the protection and management of these resources.

The EPPA beneficiaries have agreed to conclude this joint statement for further consideration in their cooperation in international fora, and in sectoral initiatives and projects to address biodiversity targets.

The participants conveyed gratitude to the European Commission for the support offered through the EPPA project and TAIEX.

*This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with the UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence



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