

SBSTTA 24 Meeting, 17-19 February 2021

Agenda Item 4. Synthetic Biology

Statement

Belarus on behalf of the CEE region

Dear Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to address the statement on behalf of the Central and Eastern European Region.

We would like to thank Secretariat for preparing Document CBD/SBSTTA/24/4/REV1.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to the Secretariat of the Convention for organizing, ensuring and supporting the effective work of the Open-ended Online Forum on Synthetic Biology and the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Synthetic Biology.

The CEE Region *welcomes* the suggested recommendations of the Document on synthetic biology and support them to be adopted by SBSTTA and submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its fifteenth meeting.

The CEE Region would like to support the need for further work of the AHTEG group on synthetic biology.

There is increased emergence of technologies that are expanding the scale and depth of ecosystem-wide engineering, and thus increasing risks to biodiversity and human health. Therefore, we welcome the process for broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology, so as to be able to adequately review new information regarding their impacts.

We stress the need for the Multidisciplinary Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology to support this process, to incorporate the expertise needed to cover the increasing diversity of developments that are rapidly expanding in different fields, and fully take into account human and animal health, cultural and socioeconomic impacts, etc.

The horizon scanning, monitoring and assessment process should be informed by the trends in new technological developments identified by the AHTEG on Synthetic Biology.

The Multidisciplinary Technical Expert Group should review and assess these new technological developments in synthetic biology as well as synthetic biology applications that are in early stages of research and development, vis-à-vis the three objectives of the Convention.

We would like to note that research and development on organisms containing engineered gene drives is progressing, and reiterate that the organisms that are developed by gene drive technology

and intended for release into the environment or which may be a subject of unintentional release have the potential to result in an irreversible impact on biodiversity. A precautionary approach to such organisms has to be applied.

We would note that the detection, identification and monitoring of organisms, components and products of synthetic biology, are important issues, including in a situation of unintentional release into the environment.

We urge further work in this respect, including through the Network of Laboratories for the Detection and Identification of LMOs, in particular, to identify potential organisms of synthetic biology for which current detection tools are not sufficient and to develop additional detection, identification and monitoring tools.

We would also like to emphasize the need to continue cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives, including academic and research institutions, on issues related to synthetic biology.

The CEE Region also reiterates a critical need for capacity building in the field of synthetic biology, including risk assessment, monitoring, control, detection and identification of such organisms.