UNEP

CBD

Convention on Biological Diversity

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/19/INF/16
28 October 2015

ENGLISH ONLY

SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC,
TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE
Nineteenth meeting
Montreal, Canada, 2–5 November 2015
Item 3.1 of the provisional agenda*

THE BERN CONVENTION AND THE AICHI TARGETS: A EUROPEAN CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY GOALS

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. The Executive Secretary hereby provides, for the information of participants in the nineteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), a note on the above mentioned subject prepared by Directorate of Democratic Governance of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention). The information is provided by the Executive Secretary in the language and format in which it was received.

* UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/19/1.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 27 October 2015 **T-PVS/Inf (2015) 28**
[Inf28e_2015.docx]

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

THE BERN CONVENTION AND THE AICHI TARGETS: A EUROPEAN CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY GOALS 2014-2015

Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (CETS No. 104) is a Council of Europe binding treaty which was opened for signature in September 1979 in the Swiss federal capital, Bern. We shall refer to the Convention by its most common name "Bern Convention". It entered into force in August 1982 and counts, in 2014, with 51 Parties including 46 European States[1], four African States (Burkina Faso, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia) and the European Union.

The Bern Convention was the first international treaty to deal with all the aspects of nature conservation. It is not a specialised Convention, like other treaties in this field which aims specifically at protecting a type of habitat (e.g. the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands), a group of species (e.g. the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species), or at addressing a particular conservation problem (e.g. the Washington Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species).

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), much like the Bern Convention, was drafted to promote an overall strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife and biodiversity and, in this sense, the Bern Convention can be mentioned as a precedent to the CBD.

While the Bern Convention's main limit is geographical, as its territory of application is constrained to Europe and a few states of northern Africa, its scope is broad and developed around three main aims: *a.* to conserve wild flora and fauna and natural habitats; *b.* to promote co-operation between States; *c.* to give particular attention to endangered and vulnerable species, including endangered and vulnerable migratory species (*cfr.* Art. 1 of the Bern Convention[2]).

The Bern Convention establishes very strict obligations for Parties on the protection of natural habitats and on the protection of a large number of species mentioned in its three appendices. More concretely, the Parties committed to:

- Promoting national policies for the conservation of wild flora and fauna, and their natural habitats;
- Having regard for conservation in regional planning policies and pollution control;
- Promoting education and information; and
- Encouraging and co-ordinate research related to the purposes of the Convention.

In addition, the Convention promotes co-operation of its Parties through a number of mechanisms, including the organisation of technical scientific groups (called Groups of experts) and the adoption of recommendations, guidelines, codes of conduct and action plans.

The Convention is managed by a Conference of the Parties called "Standing Committee", which includes all Contracting Parties as well as observer States and organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, at the national and international level. The Standing Committee meets annually at the Council of Europe premises in Strasbourg, and adopts recommendations concerning measures that should be taken to achieve the Convention's objectives and improve its effectiveness. It also monitors the implementation of the Convention and provides guidance on its further development. As non-governmental organisations can easily request the Observer status and actively participate in Standing Committee meetings, the Committee has become a very important forum in Europe for the participation and representation of civil society in the environmental debate.

1 These accounts for all European states with the exception of two: San Marino and the Russian Federation.

2 Available at the following web address: http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/104

2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BERN CONVENTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AICHI BIODIVERSITY TARGETS

In decision X/2, the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, held from 18 to 29 October 2010, in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture (Japan), adopted a revised and updated Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, for the 2011-2020 period. This plan provides an overarching framework on biodiversity, which Parties to the CBD and other partners engaged in biodiversity management and policy development[3] should implement.

The provisions contained in the Bern Convention, together with the Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee to extend the reach of the Convention, form a tight tissue of international law which is coherent with many of the aims and objectives of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and its Aichi Targets. Indeed, the critical role played by the Bern Convention to facilitate the co-ordinated implementation of global biodiversity obligations in Europe, including relevant parts of the Convention on Biological Diversity, has been recalled by the Standing Committee in the "*Bern Declaration on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Europe: 2010 and beyond*[4]". The Committee further urged Contracting Parties, and invited Observer States to use the Bern Convention as *a fundamental instrument to implement the global post-2010 targets.*

More particularly, the implementation of the Bern Convention by Parties directly contributes to Parties' fulfilment of the following Aichi Targets:

- **Target 1:** By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.
- **Target 5:** By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.
- **Target 9:** By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment.
- **Target 10:** By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning.
- **Target 11:** By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.
- **Target 12:** By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.

Indirectly, the activities and mechanisms foreseen under the Bern Convention, including the so-called case-file system, can be used by Parties and civil society as tools and means for the fulfilment other Aichi Targets, as for instance Targets **3, 7, 14, 17 and 19**.

This document is intended to give an overview of the work carried out under the Bern Convention. Delegates of Contracting Parties are invited to share it with their national correspondents at the level of the CBD.

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3 See: http://www.cbd.int/sp/

4 See: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/WCD/Declarations_en.asp#

2.1 Target 1: By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably

Article 3 of the Bern Convention states *that Each Contracting Party shall take steps to promote national policies for the conservation of wild flora, wild fauna and natural habitats, with particular attention to endangered and vulnerable species, especially endemic ones, and endangered habitats, in accordance with the provisions of this Convention. (…) Each Contracting Party shall promote education and disseminate general information on the need to conserve species of wild flora and fauna and their habitats.*

Although Article 3 puts the related obligations on Contracting Parties, the Convention has its own instruments for promoting the values of biodiversity. The Groups of Experts are its most important tool. They are composed of scientists appointed by governments, and mandated by the Standing Committee to address the current and emerging challenges related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, ensure international cooperation, identify species and habitats in need of protection and produce guidance. The participation of the NGOs in the work of these Groups ensures meeting the objective of public awareness about nature conservation.

More recently, the Bern Convention launched a Facebook page which is also used to raise awareness about the intrinsic value of nature and the need to safeguarding it for future generations.

(*see also chapter 2.3 of the present document for the event organised to celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity*)

2.2 Target 5: By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced

Article 4 of the Bern Convention provides that Parties *shall take appropriate and necessary measures to ensure the conservation of endangered natural habitats* (including natural and semi-natural forests) and requires Parties to *have regard to the conservation requirements of such areas in their planning and development policies, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas.*

The Bern Convention pays the same attention to all natural habitats types. However, already in 1989, the Standing Committee requested Parties to identify the endangered natural habitats requiring specific conservation measures in their national territories. These were first listed in 1996[5], based on the Palearctic classification, and included a large number of forest types such as Beech forests, *acidophilous* Oak forests, mixed *thermophilous* forests, a number of types of Fir forests and Spruce forests, some types of mountainous Pine forests, Scots pine forests, Black pine forests, oro-Mediterranean Pine forests, etc.

More recently, the list of habitats requiring special conservation interest has been updated in light of the work carried-out by the Group of experts on the setting-up of the Emerald Network of protected areas. The revised list is based on the EUNIS habitats classification developed and supported by the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity. Moreover, both the lists of species and of habitats requiring specific conservation measures have been compared to and harmonised with the lists set up by the European Union for the Natura 2000 Network. In December 2014 the Standing Committee examined and adopted a revised list of habitats, including 3 new habitats proposed by Ukraine and Switzerland.

Apart from the work carried out for the setting-up of the Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (see chapter 2.3 below), in 2015 the Convention reviewed the implementation of the Standing Committee's Recommendation No. 25 on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper. The results of the review are available in document T-PVS/PA (2015) 8, and are based on

5 Cfr.: Resolution No. 4 (1996) listing endangered natural habitats requiring specific conservation measures.

the assessment of the reports submitted by Parties to both the Bern Convention and the CBD (CBD 5 and CBD 4 reports).

The review concludes that there is much action on biodiversity conservation outside the protected areas proper. Countries indeed do take general measures and there is much expertise and experience in the countries, but it is hard to develop a balance within and between countries. New existing and developing technologies can be used in policy making, but this requires international cooperation and knowledge sharing. There are differences between countries in Europe that clearly seem to be related to their economic situation. Nevertheless, there are European countries with a high level of knowledge on conservation policy, biodiversity planning and management, monitoring reporting and stakeholder involvement. Others are in need of capacity building in these fields. The European Union is an important driver of the biodiversity conservation process, especially through its Biodiversity Strategy, the Habitats and Species Directive and Birds Directive. The Marine Framework Directive is instrumental in the development of a coordinated European network of Marine Protected sites. But marine protection would benefit from a Pan European approach as well. Moreover, changes in land use and management are important drivers of transformation in biodiversity conservation. Land abandonment leads to an increase in forests, but also to a decrease in grassland biodiversity. On the other hand changes in the central and eastern European countries caused by the breakdown of the iron curtain has brought governments in many countries to transform former military training areas into nature and the symbol of this peaceful Europe is the Green Belt project.

Besides, management plans are developed or under development in most countries becoming part of a standard conservation strategy. Also EIA and SEA procedures are becoming more common for projects that impact potentially the designated Emerald sites.

Another important finding of the review is the change from a policy of only protected areas to a policy of conservation of networks of protected areas connected by ecological corridors is becoming predominant in Europe. Every country has important and threatened habitats. It will be especially important to conserve and manage well the karstic areas of Europe that are important for biodiversity and water management, but also attractive as a touristic area. They are especially vulnerable as all surface pollution will come down in these sensitive systems and they are in many cases situated in countries that need support in knowledge and management. Wetlands, bogs, mires and mountain summits are other important sensitive habitats requiring attention.

Regarding landscape features all countries give different emphasis on these and there are clear problems to make the inventory, to keep these up-to-date and integrate them in national and regional policy. However, among others the Great Britain Countryside Survey has successfully shown that this is technically possible and can be successfully used in policy.

More specifically on forest habitats, the review shows that forest policy is different between timber producing countries and those where this is a minor issue. In the latter countries forest conservation has more priority. However also in a number of timber producing countries forest conservation gets increasing attention. Forest reserves and Woodland Key Habitats have been established. A consistent forest conservation policy will be advantageous for the implementation of the Bern Convention provisions outside Protected Areas proper as well. Besides, it should be recalled that a number of recommendations and resolutions were adopted by the Standing Committee[6] for particularly protecting

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6 Cfr. for reference : Resolution No. 16 (1976) of the Committee of Ministers on the deterioration of Mediterranean maquis; Recommendation No. 12 (1982) of the Committee of Ministers on alluvial forests in Europe; Recommendation No. 11 (1988) on ancient natural and semi-natural woodlands; Recommendation No. 25 (1991) on the conservation of natural areas outside protected areas proper; Recommendation No. 55 (1996) on giving consideration to ZNIEFF (nature reserves of ecological interest for fauna and flora) in the development of projects for the Biltzheim Forest and the areas of Niffer and the Petit Landau (France); Recommendation No. 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland.

specific forest habitat types encouraging Contracting Parties to avoid any deterioration, making appropriate inventories of their biological diversity, designating for protection most valuable woodlands. Moreover, Parties are encouraged to adopt sustainable forestry management policies, favouring the return to conditions closer to the natural state and avoiding the substitution of natural woodlands by stands of fast-growing tree species.

Finally, regarding European mountain systems, these benefit from good cooperation between the countries that share them. However, an important threat in all mountain systems is climate change, which has a severe impact on connectivity since average temperatures, which in the Alps increase faster than the average in the Northern Hemisphere, push fauna and flora to higher altitudes. Urbanisation, land use and connectivity are important threats as well. In the north (Scandinavia) and the south (Atlas) land management practice is most important.

2.3 Target 11: By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

In 1996, Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention engaged in the setting up of the Emerald Network, an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ACSIs), whose implementation was launched by the Council of Europe as one of the main tools for the Contracting Parties to comply with the obligations set under article 4 of the Convention. The Network is however also open to non-Contracting Parties, as it is the case for the Russian Federation.

Before being officially adopted as Emerald sites, all sites proposed to join the Network are thoroughly assessed at biogeographical level, according to scientifically robust criteria elaborated together with the European Environment Agency and is European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity, in view of checking their sufficiency to achieve the ultimate objective of the Network[7]. This is the long term survival of the species and habitats listed under two specific resolutions adopted by the Standing Committee, and requiring specific protection measures. Once the areas proposed are officially adopted by the Committee as Emerald Network sites, they have to be designated and managed at national level.

A month after the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention adopted an ambitious Calendar for the implementation of its Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs). The Calendar covers a ten-year period (2011-2020) and aims at a full operational launch of the Network by 2020. It sets milestones and objectives for the Contracting Parties and Observer States involved in the setting-up of the Network. The Calendar further sets indicators for the strategic development of the Emerald Network, in particular its practical tools and legal framework.

In December 2012, for the first time, the Standing Committee officially adopted 37 areas in Switzerland as the first Emerald sites. Switzerland is now working on the identification of additional areas on its territory, necessary for the completion and ecological connectivity and coherence of the Network. In 2013, the Criteria for the evaluation of the proposed sites were completed with the inclusion of additional criteria for the specific evaluation of the sites proposed for bird species in general and migratory bird species in particular.

Two years later, in 2015, the Convention carried out a first mid-term review which showed that the adoption of the Emerald Calendar in the aftermath of the agreement on the world Aichi biodiversity Targets 2020 triggered sustained commitment from European national authorities in the countries concerned. For Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention, the Emerald Network is a practical tool for implementing the UN Aichi Targets on protected areas on their territories.

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7 In 2010, after several years of discussions, the Standing Committee adopted the criteria for the biogeographical assessment of the list of proposed Emerald sites.

3000 Emerald sites (newly proposed Emerald sites, candidate Emerald sites and adopted Emerald sites) covering nearly 600 000 km² have been already identified for protection by European countries which are not members of the EU. However, the review also shows a contrasted picture between the countries involved in the Emerald setting-up process. Some countries have firmly paved the way for the achievement of their own milestones from the Calendar, with continuous efforts in the past five years which already give results. Their work helped increase both the overall level of achievements of the Emerald Calendar implementation and the aggregated figures of the Emerald Network. On the contrary, there are still other Parties to the Convention which have not yet proposed any Emerald site on their territory.

The mid-term review of the implementation of the Emerald Network's Calendar includes conclusions with recommendations to both Parties and Observer states to the Convention, on ways and means to step-up future work and reach the objectives and milestones set in the Calendar.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF CANDIDATE EMERALD SITES	TOTAL COVERAGE (KM²)
ALBANIA	25	5224,30
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	29	2504,55
"THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA"	35	7543,83
MONTENEGRO	32	2400,77
SERBIA	61	10210,78

Table 1: Candidate Emerald sites in the West Balkan region

COUNTRY	END 2012		JANUARY 2014		JANUARY 2015		
	SITES	% COUNTRY COVERAGE	SITES	% COUNTRY COVERAGE	SITES	AREA COVERED (KM²)	% COUNTRY COVERAGE
ARMENIA	9	7,68	13	9,88	14	3469,50	11,56
AZERBAIJAN	10	11,46	12	9,72	14	8527,38	9,80
BELARUS	12	4,39	16	4,71	64	18971,23	9,12
GEORGIA	20	8,42	21	13,20	34	14219,82	20,40
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA	17	12,24	18	11,53	26	3955,14	11,74
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	740	7,13	923	8,0	1267	479199,86	+/-12,30
UKRAINE	151	7,20	159	7,4	169	46494,66	7,70
	959	**AVERAGE: 7,15%**	**1162**	**AVERAGE: 9.2%**	**1588**	**574837,59**	**AVERAGE: 11.8%**

Table 2: Number of proposed Emerald sites and total area covered by January 2015

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF PROPOSED AND CANDIDATE EMERALD SITES	TOTAL COVERAGE (KM²)
NORWAY	711	52418,11

Table 3: Number of proposed and officially nominated candidate Emerald sites in Norway

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF CANDIDATE EMERALD SITES	TOTAL COVERAGE (KM²)
MOROCCO	11	5728,20

Table 4: Number of candidate Emerald sites in Morocco

Habitat protection is indeed an area on which the Bern Convention has worked constantly and thoroughly for the past 20 years. However, although site selection is an important first step to habitat and species and thus natural life-supporting processes conservation, there are still numerous examples of continued habitat fragmentation, deterioration, destruction and loss in protected areas due to failure to manage protected sites properly or effectively. The Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks addresses this and other challenges in its Programme of Activities.

Finally, a particular reference should be made to the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA), a prestigious international award which is granted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the proposal of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention. The EDPA is awarded to natural or semi-natural areas or landscapes of exceptional European interest for the conservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and which are managed in an exemplary way. It is granted for a five year period, and it is renewed every ten years provided that the holding areas prove the continuous fulfilment of the conditions set when the award was first granted.

As of today, 74 protected areas received the award. They are located in 29 European countries, both member and non-member states of the Council of Europe.

This year marked the golden jubilee of the European Diploma, which the Bern Convention celebrated through an international Workshop on "Protected Areas in Europe: the next 50 years", organised on 21-22 May, as a contribution to the International Day for Biological Diversity. The Workshop took place at the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli (Italy), and counted with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Environment of Italy and of the Tuscany Region, and the cooperation of EUROPARC Federation. The event enabled government representatives, protected areas' managers, and NGO's to further plan for future, reflecting on how they can better together protect European common natural and cultural heritage. The workshop highlighted the need to react with innovative and specific responses to societal and technological changes, as well as to existing and new challenges threating biological diversity. Participants committed to use the EDPA to trial innovative nature conservation management and demonstrate novel approaches, working with communities to find creative mutually beneficial nature-based solutions. They further adopted the "Pisa Declaration" calling on responsible governments, national and local authorities, local communities, nature conservation NGOs, and the Council of Europe, to ensure that EDPA continues to receive the necessary political and financial support for the further development of its network.

2.4 Target 9: By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment.

Article 11, paragraph 2.b, of the Bern Convention requires Contracting Parties "*to strictly control the introduction of non-native species*". In order to help interpret these obligations, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in 1984 a specific recommendation[8] in which it asked governments of member states to: prohibit the introduction of non-native species into the natural environment; authorise certain exceptions to the prohibition (on the condition of risk-evaluation studies); take steps to prevent accidental introductions; and inform other governments on introduction schemes or accidental introductions.

8 Cfr. Recommendation No. (84)14 of the Committee of Ministers concerning the introduction of non-native species.

The action of the Bern Convention was marked by these four subjects, together with the enhancement of European cooperation in this field and the work aimed at adapting national legislations accordingly. In 1992 the Standing Committee to the Convention decided to create a specialised group of experts originally called "Group of experts on the legal aspects on introduction and re-introduction of wildlife species", which met for the first time in March 1993. The main task of the Group has been to collect and analyse different national laws dealing with invasive species and propose work aimed at the harmonisation of national regulations on introduced species, particularly on the fields of definitions, territorial scope of regulation, listing of species whose introduction is undesirable, identification of authorities responsible for permits, conditions for issuing such permits and control involved.

During the early 2000's the energy of the Group of Experts was largely devoted to the preparation and negotiation of a fundamental text to promote and guide European activities on Invasive Alien Species: the *European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species*[9]. This strategy was adopted soon after the adoption, by the 6th CBD CoP of "Guiding Principles for the prevention, introduction and mitigation of impacts of alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species" (Decision V1/23). The Group of Experts followed these "guiding principles" but went further into the actions recommended and pioneered - at European level - scientific investigation of emerging issues such as the risks related to the use of potentially invasive plants as biofuels, the impact of IAS in European islands[10], and the combined impact of climate change and IAS.

Since five years now, the Group of Experts has concentrated its work on the identification of pathways, risk assessments, and on the preparation of voluntary instruments, mainly Codes of Conduct, intended to offer solutions for addressing the roots of the problem. Voluntary codes of conduct and best practices are in fact considered as *fundamental flexible "implementation" tools which could be scaled up with support from public bodies, industry federations, user groups and/or NGOs as appropriate, with the aim of ensuring responsible, proactive policies, and applying these in a coherent manner across Europe* (Shine et al. 2010).

So far, the Standing Committee endorsed the following Codes of Conduct:

1. Code of Conduct on Horticulture and Invasive Alien Plants (2008);
2. Code of Conduct on Pets and IAS (2011);
3. Code of Conduct for Botanical Gardens on IAS (2012);
4. Code of Conduct for Zoological Gardens and Aquaria and IAS (2012);
5. Code Conduct on Hunting and IAS (2013)
6. European Guidelines on Protected Areas and IAS (2013)
7. Code of Conduct on Recreational Fishing and Invasive Alien Species (2014)
8. Draft Code of Conduct on Plantation Forestry and Invasive Alien Trees (for possible adoption in December 2015)
9. European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species (first draft)

Moreover, in 2015 the Group of Experts further worked towards the harmonisation of biodiversity standards and legislations across Europe, through the analysis of the ways in which the Bern Convention could extend and adapt the measures contained in the recently adopted European Union (EU)'s Regulation 1143/2014 on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species to non-EU member states.

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9 See document T-PVS/Inf (2004) 1 : European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species.

10 See the "Charter on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity on European Islands" [document T-PVS/Inf08rev (2011)], endorsed by the Standing Committee at its 31st meeting, devoting its Principle 4 to the prevention, detection, eradication and control particularly in priority sites and to safeguard highly threatened species

2.5 Target 10: By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning.

Climate change and its interrelation with biodiversity conservation has been part of the Bern Convention's work since 2006, when the Standing Committee decided to set up a Group of experts on Biodiversity and Climate Change to exchange information and review the effects of climate change on Europe's biological diversity, and to provide support and guidance to Parties in developing appropriate mitigation and particularly adaptation policies.

The Group has so far elaborated ten comprehensive recommendations[11], providing guidance and suggesting around 60 specific actions, on topics such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, climate change in mountain regions, in protected areas, on European islands, climate change and wildland fires, conservation translocations in the light of climate change, marine biodiversity and climate change, among others.

In addition, the Group produced a number of specific technical reports addressing the challenges related to the spread of IAS and vulnerability of ecosystems to biological invasions; the impacts of climate change on amphibians and reptiles, on plant species, on invertebrates, and on migratory birds.

In July 2012, the Group of Experts evaluated the implementation by Parties of the guidance so far adopted. The conclusions of the assessment report showed a high level of awareness of the potential impacts of climatic change upon biodiversity and of the need to incorporate this issue when developing policy and conservation strategies. Moreover, steps were being taken by most of the Parties for identifying and targeting as a priority the most vulnerable species and ecosystems, and improve knowledge on those. However, the report also identified important gaps in the implementation of some of the recommended actions, particularly concerning the management of protected areas in the light of climate change, enhancing the adaptive capacity of vulnerable species, improving knowledge on plant species and invertebrates of special concern, and implementing efficient and regular monitoring schemes able to provide data about the responses of various species and ecosystems to climatic change. The report also noted that many of the actions recommended, but as yet rarely implemented, could almost certainly be commenced under existing national conservation legislation.

These findings have been taken into consideration for the preparation, in 2015, of a new Programme of Work for the Group of Experts. The priorities identified for the coming years are the following:

- Boosting, as a matter of urgency, the implementation of existing guidance at national level but with a global perspective. In particular, Parties should implement practical actions that will facilitate the ability of species to respond to climatic change; sharing of best practice on this aspect is strongly recommended and Parties are invited to report on their success;
- Assessing (or re-assessing) species vulnerability, so to ensure that the species at higher risk are prioritised. The situation of seasonally migrant species should be also carefully assessed, in cooperation with the CMS. Moreover, the Group should assess the importance of European biodiversity in relation to the capacity of European ecosystems to adapt to climate change;

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11 See for reference: Recommendation No. 159 (2012) on the effective implementation of guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change; Recommendation No. 158 (2012) on Conservation translocations under changing climatic conditions; Recommendation No. 152 (2011) on Marine Biodiversity and Climate Change; Recommendation No. 147 (2010) on guidance for Parties on wildland fires, biodiversity and climate change; Recommendation No. 146 (2010) on guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change in European islands; Recommendation No. 145 (2010) on guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change in mountain regions; Recommendation No. 143 (2009) on further guidance for Parties on biodiversity and climate change; Recommendation No. 142 (2009) on interpreting the CBD definition of invasive alien species to take into account climate change; Recommendation No. 135 (2008) on addressing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity; Recommendation No. 122 (2006) on the conservation of biological diversity in the context of climate change.

- Completing the assessments of the vulnerability to climate change of all Bern Conventions species. The Group should develop a common monitoring scheme for the monitoring of targeted species and of the effectiveness of conservation measures;
- Ensuring the adaptive management of protected areas. The management plans for such areas should take into account, and respond to, the expected consequences of climate change, and the need to facilitate the responses of species. This should also target the management of Emerald and EDPA sites;
- Addressing Arctic biodiversity and climate change, by following and supporting the work of the Arctic Council and transpose, under the framework of the Convention, the necessary recommendations for its Contracting Parties.
- Ensuring effective communication on climate change challenges and opportunities, by developing a manual to help delegates of Contracting Parties to promote their national policies on climate change with particular focus on biodiversity and the opportunities and benefits afforded also with Emerald network sites.

Pending the availability of resources, the Convention should also promote research to underpin the development of more permeable landscapes, thus facilitating species' range shifts. Another field for promoting research would be the analysis of the impact of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures on biodiversity.

The draft Programme of Work is awaiting the endorsement of the Standing Committee at its forthcoming meeting.

2.6 Target 12: By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.

Species conservation is an issue mainstreamed across all the activities carried out under the Bern Convention and a goal pursued by all the Groups of Experts set-up so far.

- ***Amphibians and Reptiles***

Set-up already in 1986, the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles monitors the implementation of the species Action Plans prepared and adopted under the Convention, and examines the conservation status of some threatened species.

The Group held its 8th meeting in 2015 and drew up a list of priorities for herpetofauna conservation in Europe. These include:

(i) Monitoring and surveillance of herpetofauna across the Bern Convention area;
(ii) Identifying, in view of their designation, some Important Herpetofauna Areas (IHA) within the existing Natura 2000 and Emerald (including candidate) sites and, where this is not possible, also outside them;
(iii) Elaborating a set of basic principles common to all Parties to avoid or reduce the impact of transport defragmentation in Europe;
(iv) Reviewing the impact of alien predators on amphibian and reptiles;
(v) Addressing pending taxonomic issues.

Moreover, the Group of experts assessed the impact of the spread, in some European countries, of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans chytrid fungus*, a new fungal disease imported from Asia that already caused mass mortality and massive population declines (96% decline) in populations of *Salamandra salamandra* in the Netherlands. To respond to this threat, the Group of Experts identified a series of measures that should contribute to prevent, control, and halt the spread of the fungal disease in Europe. These measures are included in a draft Recommendation that is submitted to the Standing Committee for adoption at its 35th meeting.

Finally, in 2015 the Convention contributed to the organisation, on 19-24 April 2015, of the "5th Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles: filling the gaps for basin-integrated management". The Conference analysed demographic models for the conservation of sea turtles, reviewed the available information about the demographic parameters of the two species of marine turtles nesting in the Mediterranean (*Chelonia mydas and , Caretta caretta)* as well as the methods to assess the by-catch rate of sea turtles and associated mortality. It delivered a proposal for a basin-wide monitoring project which will be submitted to the Standing Committee for endorsement at its 35th meeting.

- ***Birds***

The Bern Convention makes particular reference to migratory birds and contains, in its Appendix II (Strictly protected species) nearly all European migratory song-birds, regardless of their conservation status. Moreover, all European species of birds not included in Appendix II are protected by Appendix III. In order to supervise compliance with the provision of the Convention and assessing bird conservation in Europe the Standing Committee set up, in 1995, a dedicated Group of experts on the conservation of birds. This Group of Experts has the peculiarity of being co-convened by the Bern Convention and BirdLife International and monitors the compliance of Parties with the relevant Standing Committee's recommendations, as well as informs on the progress in the implementation of the action plans endorsed by the Committee.

So far, the Group produced 28 Recommendations on birds[12] (specific to a species or to a geographical area) and brought the Standing Committee to the endorsement of 54 Bird species Action Plans, mainly elaborated by the European Union, the AEWA, or BirdLife International.

The Group of Experts is also leading European action against illegal killing, trapping and trading of wild birds. In 2010 it promoted the organisation of the first "European Conference on illegal killing of birds"[13] to prepare an effective and coordinated response to this problem, involving other transversal aspects like the transit of the killed and captured birds through third countries, the difficulty to identify the illegally killed species, the capture of endangered species, the need for countries to co-operate and to work with nature conservation NGOs, the need for proper enforcement with appropriate penalties at all levels.

The Conference delivered the "Larnaca Declaration" and Recommendation No. 155 (2011) on the illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds. The key message of the Larnaca conference was "Zero tolerance toward illegal killing of birds", and the event had the merit to set a pan-European vision to tackle the issue at stake. A Second Conference followed in 2013, taking place in Tunis on 29-30 May 2013 during the Bern Convention/CMS Week on the Conservation of Birds. It delivered the so-called "Tunis Action Plan for the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds, 2013-2020", finally adopted by the Standing Committee at its 33rd session.

The concrete implementation of the Tunis Action Plan is the responsibility of the Parties with the assistance of the Bern Convention, but receives the support of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, the European Union, INTERPOL, BirdLife International and the FACE. More important, the adoption of the Tunis Action Plan 2013-2020 has contributed to catalyse efforts towards the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds, and encouraged other related initiatives such as the EU Roadmap towards eliminating illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds, and the CMS Task Force pursuing the same objective in Mediterranean regions. The setting-up, under the Bern Convention, of a Network of Special Focal Points for illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds is a first major step towards improving coordination and knowledge sharing on these issues.

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12 The list of the Recommendation adopted so far is available at the following link: http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/recommendations-on-birds

13 Held in Larnaca, Cyprus, on 6-8 July 2011.
See for reference: http://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/on-the-conservation-of-birds

The review of implementation of the recommendations adopted so far shows sensitive progress on a number of issues, namely:

(i) The adoption or preparation of national action plans against wild-bird crimes;

(ii) Higher convictions rates in some Parties;

(iii) Training for police officers regularly organised in some Parties and planned in others;

(iv) A more systematic approach to reporting on wildlife crime cases.

The use of new tools and/or technologies is also progressing through the use of DNA forensic analysis or satellite tracking for prioritised species.

This year, the Group of experts produced three major documents that should help Parties improving enforcement further. These are:

(i) A methodology document for the identification of black-spots of illegal killing of birds, to be used for a cost-efficient allocation of resources;

(ii) A list of gravity factors to be used on a preliminary basis by investigators, prosecutors, and also the judiciary, in order to evaluate wildlife crime in a similar way across all Parties' jurisdictions;

(iii) A set of basic standards, for informing the process for the imposition of sanctions in wildlife crime cases, especially the illegal killing, taking and trading of wild birds.

- ***Large Carnivores***

Large Carnivores attract a lot of public attention. They are well known and widely distributed species. Their effective conservation requires adequate protection of large areas to ensure availability of food, appropriate habitat for breeding, prey species and dispersion of young. Conservation of large carnivores is particularly challenging because it needs co-operation between different groups of interests, including farmers, conservationists, foresters, hunters, landowners, and land management bodies, central government and local authorities.

Activities on Large Carnivores have been going on for over 25 years on the Convention. A milestone was the adoption of five European Action Plans produced in collaboration with the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) in 1999, for the wolf, the Eurasian lynx, the bear, the Iberian lynx and the wolverine. The main goal of carnivore conservation has been to maintain existing populations in a favourable conservation status, reverse their decline and secure them by gaining public acceptance and support. While three species (wolf, bear and Eurasian lynx) are recovering part of the space they lost and may create conflict with livestock raising, the Iberian lynx is critically endangered and the wolverine is under some threat.

The Convention is now working, in cooperation with the IUCN Cat's Specialist Group and the WWF, at enhancing leopard conservation in the Caucasus. In this area the species is critically endangered and needs special conservation attention. An International Expert Workshop was organised in October 2014 as part of a wider biennial project, aimed at assessing the implementation of the "Caucasus Leopard Strategy" endorsed by the Convention and the National Action Plans prepared by concerned governments. The outcome of the project is the development of recommendations concerning monitoring and research, as well as targeted conservation actions to be included in a revised regional leopard strategy. The project will end in 2016.

Moreover, last year the Standing Committee provided advice in respect of hybridisation, in particular between wild wolves (*Canis lupus*) and domestic dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*), through the adoption of Recommendation No. 173 (2014). The latter recommends, *inter alia*, that Parties monitor, prevent and mitigate hybridisation between wild wolves and dogs, and that government-controlled removal of wolf-dog hybrids takes place after government officials and/or the bodies entrusted by governments for this purpose and/or researchers have confirmed them as hybrids using genetic and/or morphological features.

Finally, in October 2015 the Convention supported the International Balkan Lynx Symposium, organised by the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme (BLRP) at Dajti National Park (Albania). The symposium gathered over 80 experts from Albania, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Kosovo*, and Montenegro, to discuss about ways and means for recovering the population of the critically endangered Balkan lynx. A future role for the Bern Convention appears to be reserved in particular in respect of a prospective Balkan lynx recovery strategy for 5 (potential) range countries involved. The interesting possibility of uplisting *Lynx lynx balcanicus* as a subspecies to Appendix II of the Convention was also raised and discussed during the meeting. This species is also expected to be officially included in the IUCN Red List as a critically endangered subspecies.

- ***Invertebrates***

A practical example of the contribution of the Bern Convention to species conservation is given by the attention brought to invertebrates, which account for nearly 95% of the animal kingdom and occupy a primordial position in biological cycles, both on dry land, in marshland and in water. These species started to appear in national legislations shortly after they were included in Appendices II and III of the convention, in 1988. Their status then suddenly changed: ceasing to be disregarded, they started to be seen as potential bio-indicators for the condition of habitats and became the target of very effective protection measures.

The Group of Experts on the Conservation of Invertebrates, set-up in December 1989, is still the only European forum exclusively dedicated to this group of species. The Group is at the origin of the European Strategy for the Conservation of Invertebrates, the first regional instrument for the conservation of invertebrates.

The Group held its 10th meeting in September 2013, in Tirana, Albania focussing on the Strategy's promotion and awareness-raising at national level. Despite optimistic progress reported by the national authorities in increasing the specialists' knowledge and information on threatened and data-deficient species, the meeting pointed to the need for the Parties to step-up efforts to further develop and promote national conservation policies. This entails ensuring that the real value of invertebrate species in national conservation policies is fully recognised and that initiatives to encourage environmental education and participation of relevant stakeholders in implementing these policies receive adequate support. The Group should reconvene in 2018.

- ***Plant species***

In 1990 the Standing Committee set-up a Group of Experts on Plant species, with the mandate of sharing experiences on the management and conservation of wild plants, as well as elaborating, and consequently monitoring, the implementation of guidelines and action plans for some species. The Group holds its meetings during *Planta Europa*[14] conferences. In 2008, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention adopted the "*European Strategy for Plant Conservation (ESPC) 2008-2014*", jointly prepared by the Council of Europe and the Planta Europa network. The objective of such action is to provide a European framework for the development of work aimed at halting the loss of plant diversity in Europe. The implementation of the Strategy is monitored at the occasions of Planta Europa conferences.

The most recent 7th Planta Europa Conference "Plants for People, People for Plants"[15], focussed on discussing the implementation of Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) and identifying the main current threats for plant species. The Conference delivered the Crete Declaration deciding – among others - to extend the current ESPC 2008-2014 at least until the next Planta Europa conference, scheduled to take place in 2017.

14 Planta Europa is a network that brings together more than 77 members organisations from 35 European countries. It was established in 1995 as an international initiative focused on the conservation of wild plants and fungi as well as their habitats.

15 Crete, Greece, May 21 - 25, 2014

ANNEX I

DRAFT CALENDAR OF THE MAIN MEETINGS FOR 2016

	Meeting	**Date**	**Place**
1	3rd Steering Committee meeting of EU/CoE Joint Programme Emerald Network Phase II	16 January 2016	Strasbourg
2	Group of Specialists on the European Diploma	22 February (t.b.c.)	Strasbourg
3	1st meeting of the Bureau	22 March	Strasbourg
4	Select Group of Experts on Illegal killing of birds	19 - 20 April	Venue t.b.c.
5	Emerald biogeographical Seminar for bird species for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia	18-19 May 2016 (t.b.c.)	Tbilisi, Georgia
6	Select Group of Experts on IAS	End of May/Beginning of June	Venue t.b.c.
7	Group of Experts on Climate change	30 June - 1 July	Mostar, BiH
8	Emerald biogeographical Seminar for all habitats and species for Belarus, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine	28-30 September (t.b.c.)	Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
9	2nd meeting of the Bureau	19-20 September	Strasbourg
10	Group of Experts on Protected areas and Ecological Networks	22-23 September	Venue to be confirmed
11	36th Standing Committee meeting	15-18 November	Strasbourg
12	Emerald biogeographical Seminar for all habitats and species for Belarus, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine (continuation)	6-8 December (t.b.c.)	Venue to be confirmed, the Russian Federation

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