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SOFIA BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE
CONCLUSIONS OF THE SOFIA BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE
Second Regional Workshop on EU Accession - Opportunity or Threat to
Biodiversity in Central and Eastern Europe

prepared by

Slovenia and
the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONCLUSIONS

of the

**THE SOFIA BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE 2nd REGIONAL
WORKSHOP ON**

**"EU ACCESSION - OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT TO
BIODIVERSITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE"**

held in

MARTULJEK, SLOVENIA, 23-25 APRIL 1998

This workshop, hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia, and organised by the Joint REC/IUCN Biodiversity Secretariat, involved 38 participants from 12 Central and Eastern European countries: representing 11 Ministries of Environment in Central and Eastern Europe, officials from the European Commission's DG XI and DG XVI, leading international organisations and national NGOs, as well as representatives of the EU Member States.

It is expected that the recommendations and follow-up activities of the workshop will be of mutual benefits for all the CEECs, whether “Accession” or “non-Accession” countries, and also the Member States and certain international organisations. In particular, CEECs are urged to pay due attention to the following recommendations when drawing up National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis

BACKGROUND

Most Central and Eastern European countries are rich in biodiversity and this will become an asset of the EU upon successful Accession, a process which has widespread political commitment.

Biodiversity and landscape diversity is an important issue for CEECs, but it is felt that to date a low priority has been given to biodiversity issues within the Accession process. CEECs wish to express their concern at this situation.

Each country has its own unique natural and cultural features, including biodiversity, and the precise approaches and strategies will similarly vary. Furthermore, different countries are at different stages concerning the Accession process. However, the necessary goals, processes, and activities are equally applicable and of the same vital importance for all CEECs, not just the 10 “Accession” countries but also the 5 “non-Accession” countries.

The period of economic transition is causing significant social changes in rural areas in all CEECs, with actual or probable negative effects on typical landscapes, biodiversity and cultural diversity. At present, there is insufficient institutional capacity for the implementation of the required measures.

In order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Accession process, three priority areas of future action were identified:

- the transposition and implementation of EC nature conservation legislation,
- the integration of biodiversity into agricultural policies, and
- the use of ISPA facility for programs with strong biodiversity objectives.

Institution building was also considered and recommendations made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Transposition and implementation of EC nature conservation legislation

The Birds and Habitats Directives should be transposed and implemented as soon as possible. Special emphasis should be on the early development of lists of species and habitat types on the national level, to be submitted for amendments and exceptions from the annexes of the Habitats Directives.

For the transposition and implementation of the Directives, model Tables of Concordance and Implementation Questions under development by the REC will be very useful. In addition to this, there is a need for broader awareness-raising, information exchange and training in relation to the Accession process. Initiatives such as the Accession Information Pack by Birdlife International are very useful.

It is also important to identify areas and sites of importance for European biodiversity to be included into the Emerald Network and subsequently into the Natura 2000 network. These sites can be identified on the basis of ongoing programs and projects including: Corine Biotopes, EIONET (Environmental Information Network), pan-European and national ecological networks, Important Bird Areas, and the Important Plant Areas under preparation.

National lists of species, habitats and sites of importance should be developed using the standards of the EUNIS database through EIONET network, and involving NGOs, the scientific community and other sectors. For the designation of sites, it is important to involve local communities in decision-making. Public awareness is therefore a pre-requisite for this step.

There is an urgent need for standardised clarification and dissemination of the many requirements, initiatives and networks which are of relevance to biodiversity.

2. Integration of biodiversity into agricultural policies.

Agri-environment programmes offer important opportunities for the inclusion of biodiversity considerations into agricultural policies as well as vital social, job creation and cultural benefits. In doing this the existing experience from various preparatory projects in CEE countries can be of great value.

A dialogue between environmental and agriculture authorities as well as with other stakeholders in rural areas has to be established as soon as possible. This dialogue should be the vehicle for step-by-step development of national agri-environment policies including zonal programs and horizontal measures. This dialogue may take the form of joint committees of two or more national authorities.

Mainstream agricultural development must take into account the principles of sustainability. A key issue is the prevention of further loss, degradation, or fragmentation of important agricultural habitats. Mechanisms for the promotion of these considerations include the environmental appraisal of the EU support programs, Environmental Impact Assessment of specific projects and Strategic Environmental Assessment of national and EU policies.

3. Use of ISPA facility for programs with strong biodiversity objectives.

The ISPA mechanism that will start with structural support for the Accession Countries in the year 2000 offers another opportunity for the development and implementation of programs and specific projects with strong biodiversity objectives. The Conservation Authorities can take advantage of it by working together with local communities and other actors in the rural areas.

Flexibility should be sought over the 5 MECU lower budget threshold of the ISPA facility, since biodiversity projects will typically be significantly smaller than this. For other ISPA projects, particularly in the transport sector, it is important to ensure that adequate EIA is carried out to prevent negative impacts upon biodiversity.

Relevant pilot or preparatory activities are already taking place in a number of countries. Such programmes should be developed both within and outside protected areas with the active participation of local communities.

4. Institution building

There is tremendous need for capacity building and exchange of experience among CEECs and with Member States. In particular, this includes co-operation and training in the field of identification, preparation, and implementation of local sustainable development projects. Greater inputs from different sectors should be sought, concentrating in particular on agriculture, rural diversification, and job creation.

An important goal is the development of basic capacity of policy research with multi-disciplinary analysis, in order to assist all the stakeholders explore the full range of biodiversity management issues and policy options.

Such activities should make use of funding opportunities for institution building under the new Phare Guidelines. All CEEC governments should be actively seeking to mobilise national resources in order to meet national co-funding requirements of different funding programmes.