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**First National Workshop for the implementation of the
EU/CoE Joint Programme Emerald Network Phase II
in Belarus
(DCI-ENV/2012/289-173)**

Minsk, 22 – 24 May 2013

The National inception workshop for the implementation of the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme “Emerald Network, Phase II” took place in Minsk on 22 – 24 of May 2013. The workshop was attended by the representatives of the EU Delegation to Belarus, Ms. Elena Rakova, Council of Europe, Mr. Mark Roekaerts, the NGO implementing the project – “Ecological Initiative”, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, the National Academy of Science of Belarus, other research organizations and environmental NGOs. The event was publicized in mass media, too, due to participation of the news reporters from the most prominent news agency of Belarus (Belta), a popular republican newspaper – “Respublika”, first channel of the Belarusian National Radio.

The agenda of the workshop covered issues such as the overview of the results and achievements of the first Emerald Network Programme (2009-2011), the priorities of Phase II of the Emerald Network constitution process, the analysis of the country report and Emerald database, as well as a discussion on the draft Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention and the Draft Guidelines for the management of Emerald sites.

It was stressed that the implementation of the first Emerald Network Programme in Belarus contributed to the sooner accession of the country to the Bern Convention. Special thanks to the Council of Europe and the EU for the support through the Emerald Network Joint Programme to Belarus’ accession to the Convention were expressed by the Head of the Department of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, Ms. Natalia Minchenko.

The working part of the agenda began with the analysis of Belarus’ results from the first Emerald project in terms of database, GIS maps and distribution/population data. The conclusion was that some technical inconsistencies in the reporting materials still exist, although they can be easily corrected. A decision was made to re-verify the database and separately submitted reference tables with habitats and species from the Bern Convention lists present in the country, by using the cross-check methods.

Mr. Roekaerts insisted on the recent strategic developments of the Emerald network and the particular tasks they create for countries working on its setting-up. He further insisted on the expected changes in the reporting and management requirements for the Emerald Network. The consultant also urged that all potential Emerald sites in Belarus are identified by the end of this year, in addition to the 12 sites already nominated officially as candidate Emerald sites.

The representatives of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus presented a recently published book on the rare habitats of Belarus, which includes the habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention, classified by different classification. This topic raised a particular interest among the participants of the workshop, also in relation to the discussion on the Draft Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4.

As not all the stakeholders were able to study the documents proposed for discussion and comments (in particular the Interpretation manual for new version of Resolution 4 (1996) and the Draft Guidelines for the Management of Emerald sites, it was decided to have them translated into Russian for wider involvement of all stakeholders in their discussion. A deadline for the presentation of such comments was established.

The National workshop launched the implementation of the Joint Programme Emerald Network Phase II in Belarus, and helped set definite tasks and terms for the project implementation in the country. Thanks to the mass media participation in the workshop, the general public was informed of the start of the project and the Emerald Network aims and objectives.