
Funded
by the European Union



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Implemented
by the Council of Europe

**EUROPEAN COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENT
WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION**

DCI-ENV/2012/289-173

**Joint Programme funded by the European Union
and implemented by the Council of Europe**

Preparation of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites – Phase II

**2nd INTERIM NARRATIVE REPORT
28 February 2014 – 27 February 2015**

1. Description of the Programme

1.1 Name of beneficiary of grant contract:

Council of Europe

1.2 Name and title of the Contact person:

Mrs Iva Obretenova, Project manager, Directorate General of Democracy, Directorate for Democratic Governance, Department for Democratic Initiatives, Secretariat of the Bern Convention

1.3 Name of partners in the Action:

NA

1.4 Title of the Action:

“Preparation of the Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites – Phase II”

1.5 Contract number:

DCI-ENV/2012/289-173

1.6 Start date and end date of the action:

9 October 2012 – 08 October 2016

1.7 Target countries:

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine

1.8 Final beneficiaries and/or target groups:

Target groups:

- Armenia: European Projects Implementation Unit
- Azerbaijan: Department for Biodiversity Protection and Specially Protected Natural Territories, Ministry of Ecology and Natural resources
- Belarus: Belarusian Public Association “Ecological Initiative”
- Georgia: NGO NACRES – Centre for biodiversity conservation and research
- Republic of Moldova: Biosafety Office
- The Russian Federation: Charity Organisation “Biologists for nature conservation”
- Ukraine: NGO Interecocentre

Final beneficiaries:

Nature protection NGOs, local authorities, stakeholders and population, school practitioners, academia and University staff, research organisms and the citizens of the targeted countries through a strengthened natural environment.

2. Assessment of implementation of Action activities

2.1. Executive summary of the Action and highlights¹

The Action aims at improving biodiversity protection in seven target countries, through the establishment of an ecological Network of areas of special conservation interest (the Emerald Network). More specifically it aims at contributing to the full operational launch of this pan-European instrument of the Bern Convention by 2020, by striving to ensure the long-term survival of threatened species and habitats of European importance².

The second project implementation year (2014) was dedicated to (1) identifying additional potential Emerald sites in all target countries, (2) improving the national Emerald databases submitted in January 2014 for the species and habitats populations and distribution, (3) preparing the countries for the biogeographical evaluation process to start in 2015 and (4) continuing efforts in disseminating the project results and objectives and improving its visibility. All activities for 2014 were implemented as planned, at both the national and regional levels and were aimed at contributing to the achievement of the project specific objectives 1 and 2. Activities were guided by a quality check/quality analysis report on the countries 2013 Emerald databases and individual country terms of reference drafted on its basis.

From a **quantitative point of view** clear progress was achieved during the second Action implementation year. The number of newly proposed Emerald sites for 2014 was 426 bringing the total number of sites identified to 1588. The project results in terms of number of sites and territory they cover is summarised in the Table 1 below. Maps illustrating progress since the beginning of the project can be found in Annex 2 of this report.

Although these additional sites are not evenly distributed among the countries, this significant numerical increase shows that efforts deployed in 2013/2014 at the national level, through desk research, intensive data gathering, various collaborations between institutions and governmental agencies and field research, have yielded positive results.

This numerical rise further indicates that the national Emerald teams and their competent authorities have understood the main messages of the project coordination team throughout 2013/2014, in particular the need to further identify smaller additional sites at national level and go beyond the nationally protected areas systems. This is very important for ensuring a good geographical coverage of the national territories, which is at the basis of the completeness and coherence criteria of the Emerald network. Therefore the fact that countries have progressed in the number and distribution of sites on their territories is very positive, as it clearly contributes to the achievement of expected result 1 and 2 of the project.

Table 1: Potential Emerald sites: Number of sites and total area covered by January 2015³

Country	End 2012		January 2014		January 2015		
	Sites	% country coverage	Sites	% country coverage	Sites	Area covered (km ²)	% country coverage
AM	9	7,68	13	9,88	14	3469,50	11,56
AZ	10	11,46	12	9,72	14	8527,38	9,80

¹ The revised project logframe can be found in Annex 1 to this report

² Lists of species and habitats of the Emerald Network and the EU Natura 2000 Network are harmonised

³ Although countries like the Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan seem to have decreased the total coverage of the national territories they cover with their Emerald sites, it is important to underline that the sites boundaries are often changing and will be considered as final only at the end of the Action period.

BY	12	4,39	16	4,71	64	18971,23	9,12
GE	20	8,42	21	13,20	34	14219,82	20,40
MD	17	12,24	18	11,53	26	3955,14	11,74
RU	740	7,13	923	8,0	1267	479199,86	+/-12,30
UA	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%

Three out of the seven target countries (Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation) propose a Network going beyond 10 % of their territory, while Georgia reaches a percentage beyond 20%. Azerbaijan is also close to this threshold. Belarus, achieving results closer to 10% of the national territory comprised in the Network, has a big potential as the country started the work on the network much later than the other countries.

From a **qualitative point of view**, the scientific evaluation of the sufficiency of the proposed and candidate Emerald sites is the only process which can give us a clear indication of the quality of the chosen areas for achieving the Network objectives. This long-term evaluation process is starting in 2015 and will continue through 2016 and forms the expected result 2 of the Action. Three conclusions could however be made from a qualitative point of view, mid-term through the project implementation:

- 1) Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Russian Federation have identified the most additional new areas and have clearly been oriented towards looking for smaller stepping stone areas to complete their Network. A simple look at the maps in Annex 2 demonstrates that countries have been working towards filling in the geographical gaps of the Network coverage on their territories.
- 2) Progressing between the scientific identification (1st step) towards the political proposal (2nd step) of areas for the Network is a very time and effort consuming process. It involves numerous collaborations and various coordination actions between a multitude of actors and agencies at the national level. The selection of additional potential Emerald sites is thus resulting from a complex multi-actor cooperation. If various actors like Ministries, Agencies, NGOs or Academia have agreed with proposing these new 426 potential sites for joining the Network, it can be assumed that the planning of future conservation and management measures for the areas will be eased thanks to the large consensus around the biodiversity value of these areas.
- 3) In addition, on a more political level, the 1162 sites proposed in January 2014 by the target countries have been nominated as candidate Emerald sites by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention and thus its Recommendation No. 157 (2011) the status of candidate Emerald sites and guidelines on the criteria for their nomination applies to these areas. The same is expected to happen for the 426 newly proposed sites at the end of 2015. Governments are thus requested to take all necessary measures to keep the ecological value of the nominated Emerald sites before their official adoption as Emerald sites and not to compromise the benefit they bring for the long-term conservation of the species and habitats they are selected for.

Eventually, throughout 2014, the Action again supported improving the target countries knowledge on biodiversity in their territories. The data available on biodiversity in the countries continued being enriched through data collection and analysis of the population and distribution of species and habitats of European importance. The number of records of species and habitats in the national Emerald databases increased substantially in the past two years, including updated GIS maps.

Table 2: Information for each thematic layer contained in the Emerald database

Thematic layer	AM	AZ	BY	GE	MD	RU	UA	Total 2014	Total 2011	Total 2010	Total 2009
Sites	14	14	64	34	26	1267	169	1588	959	249	143
Amphibians/Reptiles	18	37	63	71	51	288	387	915	795	370	250
Birds	462	757	1492	585	374	7587	16914	28171	16450	8770	5234
Fishes	8	36	93	29	6	321	837	1330	1174	603	348
Habitats	75	35	402	107	68	2442	1861	4990	3849	1224	850
Invertebrates	12	28	108	184	21	538	1037	1928	1254	670	357
Mammals	82	64	203	430	35	1202	485	2501	1714	851	591
Plants	18	27	107	62	21	1193	288	1716	1379	298	185

2.2. Activities and results

Activity 1 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd national Emerald Workshop for the Republic of Moldova (Chisinau, 7-8 April 2014, 40 participants)

The event gathered around 40 participants, among which Mr. Lazar Chirica, Deputy Minister for the Environment, representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the State Forestry Agency “Moldsilva”, the State Ecological Inspectorate, the Academy of Sciences, as well as of national scientific reserves, NGOs, the ENPI/FLEG project and University students.

The meeting was aimed at discussing and agreeing on an overall methodology for the completion of the Emerald Network on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and on the identification and description of additional sites. It was mentioned that the political frame for the Network implementation was very positive, with the Emerald Network being part of the National Ecological Network, the National Strategy on Environmental Protection for 2014-2020, the draft national Biodiversity strategy and Action Plan for 2014-2020 and of course the Association Agreement EU/Moldova.

The need for addressing the possible issues of sufficiency of sites identified for ensuring the long-term survival of Emerald species of flora and fauna was a key message at the meeting. A suggestion was made to work on a revision of the list of species included in the reference tables of the Republic of Moldova, from the point of view of their survival, especially in the bordering area of the biogeographic zones (continental and steppe). It was agreed that throughout 2014, the national Emerald team should complete the national reference table and database on Emerald network according the quality checks reports of the country 2013 database and continue the identification of additional sites in particular in areas where the geographical insufficiency is clear. The team was also charged with involving representatives of government, academia and NGOs in the national discussion to find consensus and agreement for the sufficiency of sites and to therefore prepare for the preparatory and real biogeographical seminars.

The meeting was followed by a field research trip to Orhei National Park, in the company of the local forestry administration “Moldsilva”, the ecological inspection and the administration of the National Park.

The meeting achieved to provide feedback to the country Emerald team on their achievements so far in the project and possible gaps in their Network coverage and to train the experts on ways of interpreting the sufficiency criteria for the network. It further delivered a concrete planning of the practical steps to be undertaken by the team throughout 2014. The inclusion to the Emerald process and consultation of Agencies like the one responsible for forests management is very positive so far, and efforts should be continued in the same direction for involving other key sectoral partners, like agriculture and land planning.

Activity 2 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Georgia (Tbilisi, 26 April 2014, 16 participants)

Similarly to all other target countries, Georgia organised their 2nd national Emerald workshop in the frame of the project in Tbilisi on 25-26 April 2014. The event gathered the national Emerald Team, the scientific experts to the project from Latvia and Belgium, representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, the Agency of Protected Areas, GIZ and academia in the country.

The workshop discussed findings of the Report on the Quality Assessment and Quality Check of the Emerald Sites database (QA/QC) of Georgia submitted in 2013. The workshop confirmed the necessity to re-evaluate the existing database compiled prior to 2014. The latter, being mainly a result of compilation of literary sources from the seventies and eighties, had produced only an intermittent picture. Besides, the process of QA/QC identified certain shortcomings and gaps regarding the existing database and GIS maps. Frequently, the data collected within certain ASCIs (Emerald sites) did not coincide with the data presented in maps of species and habitats. In parallel, the national Emerald Team concluded that the maps used by the Emerald Network development project reflecting the distribution of plant species contained certain errors due to the sporadic and unsystematic scientific information about the plant distribution - a problem common for many post-Soviet countries.

The main outcome of the meeting was an agreement on a concrete work programme to be followed and achieved throughout 2014 by the colleagues from the national Emerald team in Georgia. The presence of a large delegation from the Ministry of Environment and Agency of PAs was appreciated, although the country needs to start planning and coordinating their work with representatives from the other sectors and institutions.

Activity 3 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Azerbaijan (Baku, 28 – 29 April 2014, 23 participants)

The 2nd national Emerald workshop for Azerbaijan in the framework of the Action was aimed at debating the results of the quality check of the 2013 Emerald database of the country, and to plan activities for 2014 aiming to remedy gaps and inconsistencies identified. The need for inviting a large spectrum of participants was not reached as no other relevant Ministry other than the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources was present. However, a positive point was that the WWF office in the country attended the event, together with the GIZ Office in Azerbaijan.

Among the participants was Mr. Vaqif Javadov, Director of Protection of Biodiversity Department at the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. He stressed the importance of relations between Azerbaijan and the international organisations, among which the Council of Europe and European Union plays a special role. After a session of practical work on the Emerald software and database and a discussion on the quality check reports for the 2013 Emerald database of the country, it was concluded that the national team should equally concentrate efforts on correcting their 2013 database of 12 sites and work on the description of 2 possible new sites (Gil island and Kura river delta). The experts from the national Emerald team confirmed their interest in reviewing the national species and habitats database and GIS distribution data. A selection of features to concentrate the research on was agreed.

The workshop was followed by a 1-day field trip to the Absheron region, which will be a part of the Absheron Emerald Site.

The meeting was very useful for completing a hands-on session for the members of the Emerald team on the use of the Emerald Software and understanding the different options offered by this tool for

revising their national database. The project team also helped the country experts understand how to read the QA/QC report on their database and to identify gaps and inconsistencies. The meeting succeeded in planning the work ahead of the team, focusing first on revisiting their national reference list for species and habitats from Resolutions No. 6(1998) and No. 4(1996) of the Bern Convention present in the country and thus identifying species and habitats for which they need to find additional areas.

Activity 4 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for the Russian Federation, 13 May 2014, Saint Petersburg (20 participants)

Similarly to all other target countries, the Second national Emerald workshop for the Russian Federation was aimed at debating the quality check results of the 2013 Emerald database and plan activities for 2014, focusing on ways to remedy to the gaps and inconsistencies identified.

The meeting took place on 13 May 2014 in Saint Petersburg. It was attended by the project manager and scientific experts and ten members of the so-called Emerald national team in the country, including the national project leader. The absence of a representative of the national authorities was regretful, but the national scientific Emerald team was charged to pass all the important messages on to the relevant colleagues from the national Ministry. However, a representative from the competent national authorities from the Leningrad Region was present, which was positive and helpful for better understanding of the considerations regional entities could have in the implementation of the Network and on the issue of finding additional suitable areas.

The scientific experts of the project pointed out several “white” geographical spots in the country, where biogeographically it is clearly visible that no potential Emerald sites are identified. This was pointed as clear insufficiency case for the network. Experts involved in the constitution process were trained on how to read the criteria for the sufficiency of the Emerald Network and transpose them to the reality of their country in their future work. After interesting and rich discussions

The meeting succeeded in agreeing on an overall methodology for the completion of the Emerald Network on the territory of European Russia and on a concrete work plan for the identification and description of additional sites. The experts further concluded the need for preparing carefully and training for the launching of the sufficiency evaluation of the country site proposals in 2015 by carefully studying the sufficiency criteria for the Network.

Activity 5 (Expected results 1 and 2): Meeting of regional nature conservation authorities in European Russia on the setting-up of the Emerald Network, 14-15 May 2015, Saint Petersburg (around 40 participants)

On the two days following the 2nd national Emerald Network for the Russian Federation, a dedicated event gathering representatives from 16 regional conservation authorities/ institutions from Russian regions (sub-federal constituent entities) and the Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment took place. The objective of the meeting was to introduce the state of play of the Emerald Network in Russia, and debate the mutual benefits of the regions’ involvement in the Network setting-up.

The Russian Federation is not a Contracting Party to the Bern Convention, but actively contributes to the setting-up of the Emerald Network, in its capacity as Observer State. Therefore the project manager presented the frame in which the Emerald Network is being implemented, -the Bern Convention-, its objectives and monitoring mechanisms and reminded of the official invitation by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to the Russian Federation to join the Convention.

The project manager further presented the legal framework of the Emerald Network, while the two scientific experts working with me on the Joint Programme explained the objectives of the Network

and the methodology for its practical implementation, giving concrete examples on maps of the representativeness' gaps of the Network in the country proposed so far. Two more presentations were also given by experts from Norway and Finland, two neighboring countries whose nature conservation efforts depend largely on coordination and cooperation with the Russian Federation. They tried to familiarize the participants with their practices and experiences from the establishment of the Emerald Network in Norway and the Natura2000 Network development in Finland.

A discussion was held in the afternoon session, with various questions raised by the participants on the added value of the Convention and the Emerald Network to the country's existing protected areas system (both at federal and regional level). The need to enhance the involvement of the 50 sub-federal entities was clearly shown using map support, as the development and identification of further areas suitable for joining the Emerald Network will largely depend on them. Discussions were held on ways of ensuring that the already proposed Emerald sites in the country are supplemented by more and smaller nature areas. This is a prerequisite for ensuring the coherence of the Bern Convention Emerald Network and its ecological connectivity, necessary for the long-term conservation of the threatened species and habitats.

The meeting was particularly useful for bringing together regional authorities responsible for nature conservation, the federal level of competence in this field and representatives of the Bern Convention. It concluded the need for stronger cooperation between the regional entities for succeeding to involve them sufficiently in the Network constitution process, but also the need for better and continuous facilitation by the Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the exchange of experiences between regions in the field of biodiversity conservation, and more specifically on the Emerald network. More meetings involving all regions should be organised, as many regions are still not responding at all to the calls for collaboration. Communication with the large public and with all relevant Ministries at regional level on the Emerald Network and its objectives was agreed as essential, including passing on the message of the mutual benefits for all actors from functioning protected areas networks.

Activity 6 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Ukraine, 19 May 2014, Kiev (15 participants)

The 2nd national Emerald Workshop for Ukraine was held on 19 May 2014 in Kiev and took the form of a web-conference. The methodological aspects of the project implementation for 2014 in Ukraine were discussed by the Emerald Network team from the country, representatives from the Department of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, including its Deputy Director and the project manager and scientific experts (based in Strasbourg, Riga and Brussels).

The meeting was aimed in particular at explaining in details the methodology for the scientific evaluation of the proposed Emerald sites during the biogeographical Seminars in 2015 and in pointing some clearly visible gaps and insufficiencies in the completeness of the Network in the country using maps. Project scientific experts spend some time in explaining the way the sufficiency criteria for Emerald are interpreted during the evaluation of the site proposals

The main result of the meeting was a clearer understanding of the Network requirements and criteria from the national experts and Ministry representatives. The national Emerald team succeeded in planning the further steps to be undertaken during 2014, in cooperation with the authorities, for identifying additional Emerald sites.

Activity 7 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Belarus, 5-6 June 2014, Minsk (25 participants)

On 5-6 June 2014, the 2nd Emerald Workshop for Belarus took place in Minsk, gathering the members of the Emerald scientific team in the country, the project manager of the project, the scientific experts and representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the

Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Academy of Science of Belarus, other research organizations and environmental NGOs.

Mrs. Natalia Minchenko, Head of the Department of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection presented the relevant national environment protection and biodiversity related strategies and laws, showing the existing capacity of Belarus in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. The scientific and management team of the project explained in details the findings of the quality check of the Emerald database from the country for 2013 and demonstrated the visible geographical gaps in the representativity of the Network in Belarus. Participants then discussed the opportunities before the national Emerald team for improving the Network coverage, taking into account the country capacity and the objectives of the project.

The result of the event was a concrete planning of actions to be implemented in 2014, in order to address the issues of sufficiency identified in the QA/QC report and further steps to be undertaken for the revision and improvement of the Emerald Database for Belarus. The meeting further succeeded in training the national experts, as well as representatives from Academia not yet involved in the Emerald process, on the sufficiency criteria for the Emerald Network and how these should be interpreted for the country.

Activity 8 (Expected results 1 and 2): 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Armenia, 5 -6 June 2014, Yerevan (15 participants)

The 2nd national Workshop on the implementation of the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Program Emerald Network, Phase II” in Armenia took place in Yerevan on 5-6 June 2014 at the “Environmental Project Implementation Unit” (EPIU) State Institution (SI), (Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia). The workshop was attended by the national Emerald team, the project scientific expert and representatives of the European Union Delegation to Armenia, of nature protection NGOs, the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia, the National Academy of Science of Armenia (Institutes of Botany and Zoology), Climate Change Convention Program Coordinator, UNDP Armenia and other research organizations.

The report on the quality check of the Emerald database of Armenia for 2013 was used as a main document guiding the discussions during the meeting. Participants were gathered to debate ways of improving the coverage of the Emerald Network in the country and thus addressing the issues of insufficiency identified in the quality check report. The project scientific expert demonstrated the gaps in the representativity and completeness of the Network, in particular some clearly visible geographic gaps which illustrate well the need for the identification of more and small additional Emerald sites.

After reviewing the current state of play of the network in the country, participants planned the work forward during 2014, which should lead to an improved database corrected of all technical inconsistencies and to the identification of additional areas. By using cross-check methods, a decision was made to re-verify the database and the separately submitted reference tables with habitats and species from the Bern Convention lists present in the country. This initial analysis would lead the country to check the presence of the new species added to Resolution No. 6 (1998) of the Bern Convention in the existing Emerald sites in Armenia and plan where new sites should be added.

The event resulted in a concrete work plan for the national Emerald team throughout 2014 for completing the Network on the national territory of Armenia. It further helped clarify the criteria for the sufficiency of the Network and interpret these for understanding the current gaps and insufficiencies of the national Emerald Network in Armenia.

Activity 9 (Expected results 1 and 2): Preparatory Emerald Biogeographical Seminar for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Tbilisi, 23-24 October 2014 (16 participants) and Activity 10 (Expected results 1 and 2): Preparatory Emerald Biogeographical Seminar for Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine, Chisinau, 6-7 November 2014 (25 participants)

Both Preparatory Emerald biogeographical Seminars were organised with the objective of kicking-off the implementation of Phase II of the Emerald network constitution process in the target countries. Both events sought to prepare the ground for the main biogeographical seminars to be held in 2015-2016, when the real evaluation of the countries' site proposals will take place. National authorities from all target countries attended their respective Seminar, represented by the Focal points of the Bern Convention from their relevant Ministries. The NGOs sector was well represented as well, including academia and research institutions' representatives.

Overall, the purpose of Emerald biogeographical process (Phase II of the Emerald Network constitution process) is to assess at a biogeographical level the extent to which the candidate Emerald sites in each country are sufficient to ensure proper conservation of habitats and species listed respectively in Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998) of the Bern Convention. This phase is a necessary step before sites can be officially designated as ASCIs/Emerald by the Bern Convention's Standing Committee.

Both Seminars had almost identical agendas, only the targeted countries were different. During the meetings, the methodology of the Emerald biogeographical evaluation, as provided for the document T-PVS/PA(2013)13, adopted by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention was explained. As part of the capacity building training of the Seminar, a simulation exercise of a real biogeographical evaluation took place in the first afternoon, for a selection of species and habitats to be protected by the Emerald Network.

A representative of the European Habitats Forum, an umbrella organisation of nature conservation NGOs in Europe, presented what the role of the national NGO sector (including academia, local actors and nature conservation civil organisation) is during the evaluation Seminars. He gave examples on how these organisations can help improve the Emerald Network coverage in the countries and presented real life examples with maps used during the evaluation of the Swiss Emerald site proposals and German Natura 2000 site proposals.

The Preparatory Emerald Seminar in Tbilisi was very successful in both its missions, familiarising potential actors of the real biogeographical seminars with the methodology, practical organisation and different actors' role during the real evaluation Seminars and building capacities among actors in this regard. All participants participated in the simulation exercise with enthusiasm. A round table debate took place the second meeting day, with all participants presenting their observations from the evaluation simulation exercise and debating how national authorities and NGO sector can best prepare for this important exercise to take place as from 2015. In order to facilitate coordination of the representation during the real biogeographical Seminars of national authorities and NGOs, the project manager was charged with the preparation of a short document summarising the biogeographical evaluation methodology, organisation, actors and of course objective.

Activity 11 (Expected results 1, 2 and 3): 2nd Project Steering Committee meeting, 1 December 2014, Strasbourg (16 participants)

The project Steering Committee is composed of the manager of the project at the Council of Europe, the responsible for the project oversight at the European Commission, the appointed national project leaders in each of the seven target countries and a representative from the competent national authorities (Focal Points to the Bern Convention). The Steering Committee met for a second time on 1 December 2015. Its meeting was planned back-to-back with the 34th meeting of the Bern Convention Standing Committee, in order to ensure the presence of the Focal points of the Bern Convention in the

countries. All Focal points of the Bern Convention from the target countries were present at the meeting. The Russian Federation, which was the only country participating in the project without being a Contracting Party to the Convention, was unfortunately unable to send a representative of its national authorities at the meeting. The scientific leader of the project represented the country.

The Steering Committee reviewed progress in the achievement of the project objectives. All national project leaders presented the achievements of their national Emerald teams in the past years, ahead of the official submission of their renewed 2014 Emerald databases.

The meeting debated the methodologies adopted by the different country teams for finding solutions to eventual shortcomings on the project implementation in their respective countries. In addition, project leaders from all target countries presented the national policy and legal frameworks in which the Emerald Network is being implemented at national level, with very important progress in the last years in Belarus, Armenia and in the three targeted countries which have signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 (Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

National project leaders from all countries demonstrated a very good understanding of the process and methodology of the Emerald biogeographical evaluation process and methodology. The main challenge remaining for all target countries is the coordination of the country (national authorities) positions during the real biogeographical evaluation to start in 2015. The necessity of sharing information at national level, on the methodology and process of the Emerald biogeographical evaluations, including the roles of each actor involved was again underlined.

2.3. Overall project implementation in the target countries

Project implementation in Armenia during 2014 (Expected result 1)

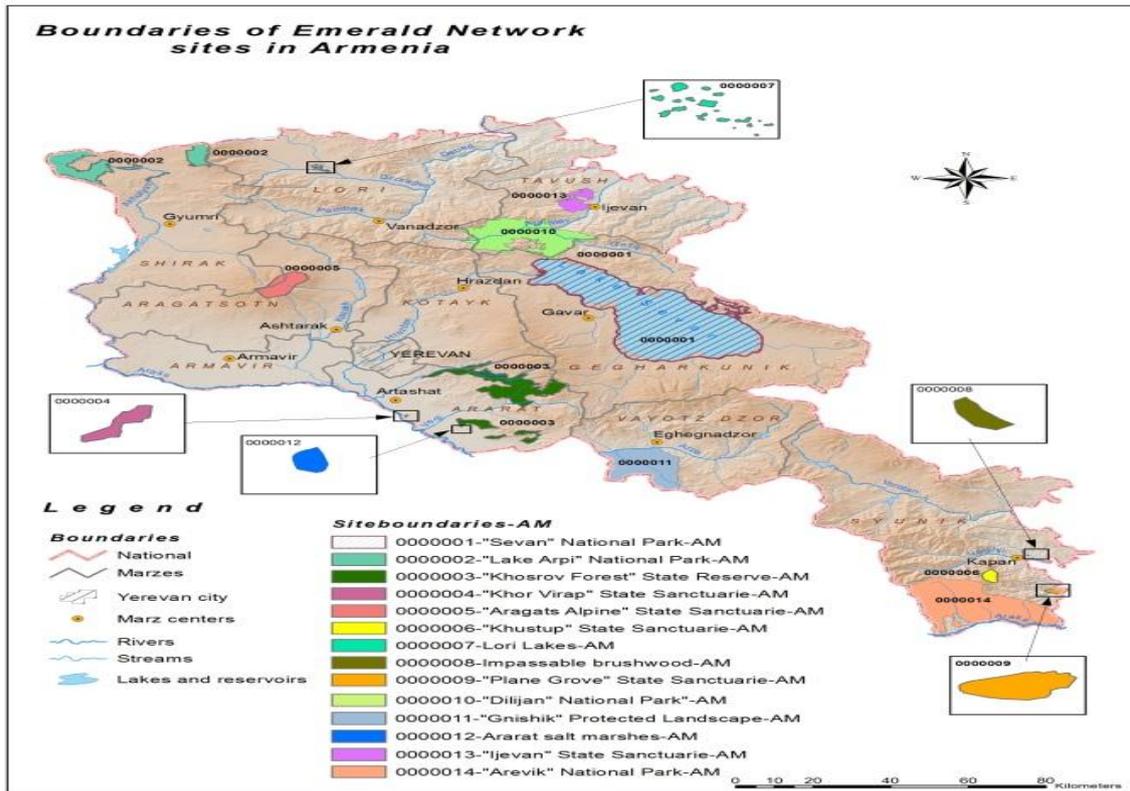
The implementation of the project in Armenia in 2014 counted the implication and support of experts from the following organisations:

- Institute of Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia;
- Institute of Zoology of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia;
- Climate Change Program UN Convention on Climate change, UNDP Armenia;
- Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (ASPB);
- NGO Nature Rights Protection, Sustainable water environment.

Throughout the year, the Emerald team members investigated all published materials on species and habitats of interest for the Emerald Network, including maps of their distribution. Their work was aimed at ensuring that all “Emerald” species and habitats present in Armenia are present in at least one Emerald site proposed up to 2013. In case the result of this self-evaluation was showing that there are Emerald species or habitats with no sites, the team had to find additional areas suitable for them.

Nevertheless, the team concentrated their search for additional sites mainly in areas with existing or planned special state protection. The team used published data on the distribution of plants and ecosystems/habitats in the country and compared this information with the map of Emerald sites of Armenia. Data gathered through the field research trips has equally contributed to improving the quality of information provided through the Emerald database on the presence, population and distribution of species and habitats of European importance in the country.

As a result of the activities implemented throughout 2014, the national Emerald team added one additional site to the reviewed and improved 2013 Emerald database and decided to divide one of the previously identified 12 sites in two separate sites. The new additional site identified in 2014 is Arevik National Park, while the Dilijan-Ijevan Emerald site was divided into two sites: Dilijan National park and Ijevan State Sanctuary. The project team provided the map below presenting the Emerald Network sites in the country:



Eventually, it is important to underline that through a Government Decree “The Development strategy and 2013-2020 action plan of the Special Protected Nature Areas of Armenia” was approved. The strategic documents include information about the Emerald Network, its legal basis, objectives and the areas included in the Network. The country equally included information on its work on the Emerald Network in its 5th report to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Through a Government Decree, the authorities further decided to disseminate information regarding the areas included in the Emerald Network to the larger public. In this relation, a workshop was organised on 22-23 November 2014 in the “Zikatar” State Sanctuary, disseminating information on the Emerald Network and its state of implementation. An “Emerald book of Armenia” was also published in the local language.

Project implementation in Azerbaijan during 2014 (Expected result 1)

In accordance with the decisions of the 2nd national Emerald Seminar and the analysis of the gaps and inconsistencies of the country 2013 database, the Emerald team in Azerbaijan started work by conducting a rapid assessment of Emerald species and habitats presence in the country and representativity in current Emerald sites. The work was done in a participatory manner, both through desk research and field studies.

Throughout the year, all bioregions within the country have been examined and assessed individually. Assessments regarding relevant species and habitats, selected at the 2nd national workshop, were mapped (1:200 000 scale topographical maps) and then collated into a single map. The team has taken the necessary time to distribute data of species and habitats within each Emerald site boundaries, as an added value to their annual work. The team tried to use all available information for the assessments, re-examining research data and adding all new information resulting from the field research as well. Several meetings between the team members and other experts took place in view of refreshing the available data and analyzing the information from the field research.

The issue of the species of high conservation value for the country and at the global level missing from the Resolution No. 6 (1998) was stressed again. The Emerald team members identified these species, but in agreement with the authorities, in order to officially propose these new species to the Resolution No. 6 (1998), further detailed field work should be implemented.

As a result of the work in 2014, two new proposed Emerald sites have been added to the country database of Azerbaijan. These two new areas show progress, as the country authorities and national team understand now the need for adding numerous additional and small sites to the Network in order to ensure coherence and completeness. However, further site identification is necessary, taking into account that both additional sites are located at the Caspian Sea and geographical gaps are visible without a proper scientific evaluation at biogeographical level.

The country needs to continue efforts in disseminating information on the work in the frame of the project and Emerald process in general and in including relevant Ministries, agencies and institutions in the work. This is particularly valid in view of the upcoming Emerald biogeographical Seminars.

Project implementation in Belarus during 2014 (Expected result 1)

As agreed during the 2nd Emerald Seminar for Belarus, work on the project implementation in Belarus in 2014 started with the review and amendment of the reference database of Belarus. Experts used the comments presented in the regional QA/QC report on the presence in the country of the species and habitats from Resolutions No. 6 (1998) and No. 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention. Experts verified again the database and separately submitted reference tables with habitats and species using the cross-check methods.

The Emerald team organised 10 field research visits in the country during the spring-summer period 2014 as well, aiming at verifying the presence of species and habitats of the revised reference database in potential new areas and thus propose new potential Emerald sites. In the search for additional suitable areas, special attention was paid to IBAs, newly nominated Ramsar Sites and other Protected Areas and areas which have no protection status yet.

As a result of the work in 2014, 47 new potential Emerald sites have been identified by the National Emerald team and added to the database: 35 Natural reserves, 12 other potential territories.

All relevant data about this significant number of the potential Emerald sites was collected with the assistance of all national stakeholders – governmental institutions (MNREP, Ministry of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture, etc.); directors of all republican Protected Areas; local municipalities, responsible for management of regional protected areas, etc. All new potential Emerald sites were described based on the revised Emerald reference database of the country and according to the requirements of the newly revised Emerald Standard Data Form.

The presence of areas other than the strictly protected national areas, including some experimental fish farms and IBAs is very positive and shows the national scientific team and authorities have made the necessary step for going beyond the areas already benefiting from some sort of protection at national level.

On 23-24 January 2015, a national Seminar on the Emerald Network and its implementation in Belarus was organised. The event aimed at opening a broad discussion among all stakeholders/authorities in future Emerald Network sites, actors which will potentially be responsible for the areas management. The seminar was attended by all Emerald team experts in Belarus, representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Forestry, and the National Academy of Science of Belarus, other research organizations, and administrations of the biggest potential Emerald sites and environmental NGOs. The event was also aimed at informing ecological NGOs about the progress

in the implementation of the Emerald Network in the country and inspiring their active involvement in the “Emerald” activities in Belarus.

During the Seminar, practical issues on the implementation of the provisions of the Bern Convention and the Emerald Network in Belarus were discussed, including the development of the appropriate national legislation base, strengthening of the institutional capacity and further expanding of territory of the Nature Protected Areas in Belarus. The management of future Emerald sites was the issue which was given the most particular attention. Representatives of all Ministries confirmed that the intention of the Government was to ensure all relevant legislative and institutional activities are implemented in order to give a protection status to the potential Emerald sites, in particular those who do not have any protection status for the moment.

The priority issues for implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network” in 2015 were also discussed. In particular, the Ministry of Environment confirmed the intention to allocate the financial resources from the state budget in 2015 on scientific work related to identifying possible presence of species and habitats included in the Bern Convention in Vitebsk region of Belarus where the experts faced a lack of data needed for implementation of the Joint Programme “Emerald Network”.

Project implementation in Georgia during 2014 (Expected result 1)

Using the main findings of the QA/QC report for Georgia and the discussions during the 2nd national Emerald Workshop, the Emerald team decided to implement activities in the following four directions, during the period May 2014 - January 2015:

- Verification and validation of the database for all selected sites;
- Verification and validation of habitat distribution GIS maps (according to the EUNIS habitat classification) and species GIS maps delivered before 2014;
- Identification of new potential sites;
- Promotion of the Emerald Network in Georgia.

The Emerald team underwent a long process of review and update of their whole Emerald database 2013, crosschecking the database against GIS maps compiled throughout 2014, checking the areas of “Emerald” habitats and species in the country and assessing the relevance of the Emerald sites proposed so far using freshly verified maps and keeping in mind the Emerald sites role and objectives. The work was organised around national meetings with participation of the Emerald Team, representatives of academia, and other stakeholders, as well as eight field research trips to areas which were assessed as problematic because of lack or outdated data.

In order to ensure that all candidate sites met the Bern Convention requirements and qualified as Emerald sites, it was necessary to further verify the distribution of habitats listed in Resolution No. 4 (1996). Therefore, the National Emerald Team carried out additional desktop and field studies involving the satellite imagery. The same task was done for species listed in resolution No. 6 (1998). Based on the field research and discussions, the boundaries of certain sites (Borjomi, Askhi massive) were modified. New GIS maps were compiled for the modified sites and presented to the donor via the Central Data Repository (CDR) along with the final updated database.

The 2nd national workshop in May 2014 revealed the need for identification of new sites for the Emerald Network. The majority of selected sites in Georgia were located within the protected areas. Meanwhile, many crucial habitats were left without any protection status. Simultaneously to the data verification process through the field surveys and desktop research work, the Emerald Team focused on the collection of any new data from recent studies. The result of this new data collection was then discussed during the different meetings organised with all relevant stakeholders.

13 new potential Emerald sites were thus identified. Five of these are located in Abkhazia and one in Tskhinvali region. The national Emerald team has thus submitted a reviewed database 2014 for the 21 candidate Emerald sites in the country and for 13 additional potential sites. The Emerald network coverage thus represents 20, 40% of the total country coverage.

Since the beginning of the project, the national Emerald team has paid special attention to the promotional and awareness-building activities. The purpose of these activities was not solely to promote the idea of the Emerald Network, but also to ensure the integration of its requirements into any relevant biodiversity conservation policy of the country. Notably, the recently initiated EU-Georgia Association Agreement requires Georgia to develop the Emerald Network⁴ through the following concrete steps:

- Completion of the inventory of Emerald sites, designation of these sites and establishment of priorities for their management (Article 4);
- Establishment of measures required for the conservation of such sites (Article 6).

In 2014, the Emerald team paid special attention to activities increasing the awareness of decision-makers and governmental agencies. The team organized permanent meetings with the interested parties, including governmental agencies (the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, National Forestry Agency, and the Ministry of Agriculture). Representatives of corresponding agencies were informed about the requirements of the Emerald Network and the Bern Convention.

The Emerald team leader Kakha Artsivadze participated in a training organized by the Czech Development Agency, gathering high-rank officials of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Energy, the Environmental Supervision Agency, Agency of Protected Areas, and the Forestry Agency. The training concerned the requirements of the Association Agreement regarding the environmental protection including the biodiversity conservation, the Natura 2000 and Emerald Networks. Mr. Kakha Artsivadze informed the participants about the country's obligations towards the Bern Convention as well as the Habitats and Birds Directives. The audience was updated about the implementation of the Emerald Network project.

The Emerald team and implementing organisation NACRES held series of productive meetings with the Agency of Forestry in light of the on-going forest sector reform. The members of the Emerald Team have been active participants in the Committee on the reform to ensure that the new forest policies effectively address the need to protect species and habitats of the Bern Convention. In addition, the Emerald Team members have been part of hearings and discussions of the new bill on the use of natural resources meant to replace the important legislation such as “the Law on Animal Protection” and “the Law on the Red Book and the Red List.”

Project implementation in the Republic of Moldova during 2014 (Expected result 1)

In accordance with the country specific terms of reference set for 2014, the national Emerald scientific team has put in place several activities in order to identify additional areas suitable to join the Network.

The national scientific team organised a “self-assessment” process through expert meetings, aiming at assessing the sufficiency of the proposed sites for the species and habitats of interest for the Emerald Network. They have further established internal criteria on the suitability of possible additional areas for joining the Network and contributing to the achievement of its purposes. The team further prepared check lists for species, their distribution on maps and areas which are not yet included in the

⁴ Appendix XXVI, Article 306. Nature protection (Directive No 92/43/EC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora amended by Directive No 97/62/EC, No 2006/105/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003)

Emerald Network. The organisation of several field visits took place, namely Orhei National Park, Soldanesti, Donduseni and Stefan Voda. A desk research of scientific publications accompanied the field studies.

In a result of the work described above, the team was able to propose 8 new potential Emerald sites, which represents a nearly 45% increase for one year and is very encouraging. All of these 8 additional areas are a natural or landscape reserves by law in the country.

The country needs to continue consulting and coordinating its work with all relevant agencies and authorities, but also with NGOs and academia, including disseminating results among relevant stakeholders at local level. This is particularly valid for the upcoming Emerald biogeographical Seminars, organised also as part of the official and adopted work programme of the Bern Convention for 2015.

Project implementation in Ukraine during 2014 (Expected result 1)

As agreed during the 2nd national Seminar for Ukraine, the scientific experts from the national Emerald team started working on the identification of additional Emerald sites in the country. They have first performed a basic check consisting of verifying whether all Emerald species and Habitats occur in at least one proposed Emerald site.

Further to the revision in 2011 of Resolution No. 6 (1998) listing the species of importance for the Emerald Network, the Ukrainian team carefully analysed the list of species and concluded that 49 of the newly added species occur in Ukraine. The experts assessed the distribution of these species in the 169 existing and new Emerald sites and gave relevant data for the new Emerald Software. All 49 new species were available at least in 1 from 169 Emerald Sites. They have thus concluded that all species from Res. No. 6 (1998) and habitats from Res. No. 4 (1996) are represented at least in one from the proposed 169 Emerald sites in Ukraine.

The team involved one additional ornithologist in the work, working on some problematic bird species. As the result of the work of these specialists, 5 species of birds were excluded from the reference list in Ukraine. In addition, the administration of proposed Emerald sites, when these sites are protected areas at national level already, have also been involved in checking the correctness of data included in the Emerald database for the areas of their competence. The result of this work was a confirmation of the high quality of work of the experts, which did not have the possibility to visit physically all areas, but using various sources of information to fill in the Emerald database. One new expert in ichthyology was equally added to the team in 2014 as well. During the year, field surveys were undertaken to check availability of Emerald species and habitats in selected 7 new areas. Other 5 sites had enough published scientific data about availability of Emerald species and habitats within sites. During the field visits, a GIS expert also participated in view of verifying the habitats distribution using satellite images.

Throughout the year, several discussions took place between the national authorities (Ministry) and the expert Emerald team on a first list and maps of tentative 29 new areas with high biodiversity and potential availability of Emerald species and habitats. An extension of the total area of two already nominated candidate Emerald Sites was also discussed.

As a result of the work described above, the country submitted a new Emerald database for 2014, which includes 10 new Emerald Sites (and their maps) and the extension of the total area of two previously submitted sites. The database for all previously submitted Emerald sites was also improved with new data on species presence and distribution and habitats coverage. Eventually, the existing reference database of Ukraine (2013) was added with data on new sites. The map below presents the Emerald sites identified in the period 2009-2013 (green) and those identified in 2014 (red) in Ukraine.

The national Emerald team has clearly been working towards filling in the clear geographical gaps of the Emerald network on the country territory, showing improved and very robust understand of the Network objectives and needs, as well as of the biogeographical evaluation to be initiated in 2015.



Project implementation in the Russian Federation during 2014 (Expected result 1)

During 2014, the Emerald team in the Russian Federation represented a cluster of around 30 experts from 23 organisations/institutes (an extended group of experts in comparison to previous years), guided by the project implementer in the country, the Charitable Public Organization “Biologists for nature conservation”. Its composition has somewhat changed in accordance with the goal to conduct a more detailed study of smaller than before groups of target sites. For the same purpose, several geographical regions within the European part of Russia were defined.

Work on the project implementation was organised around 34 tasks aiming at studying the following target objects: habitat types – 11 tasks, plants – 8 tasks, invertebrates – 6 tasks, fishes and cyclostomatous – 1 task, amphibians and reptiles – 1 task, mammals – 3 tasks, birds – 4 tasks with special attention paid to migratory species. Special attention was also paid to relatively rare types of habitats and species which were represented in no more than 10 potential ASCI's, as well as target objects, which have previously been overlooked.

This work was carried out on the basis of original and other available scientific materials. Experts have been working with the data available in scientific literature and in collections and funds were used to support three field expert visits to the herbaria located in other cities. Field surveys to nature areas in Kurskaya, Lipetskaya, Orlovskaya, and Ryazanskaya Oblast's (RSU), Belgorodskysya and Kurskaya Oblast's (IG RAS), the Gulf of Finland (BFN) were equally organised. Experts have also analysed additional data on previously proposed Emerald sites in order to identify the presence of target species and habitats other than those identified already in the potential sites.

Close to 350 new potential Emerald sites were added to those identified in 2013 and the total number of potential Emerald sites in the European part of Russia now counts 1267 sites. The total area of the identified potential ASCI's covers close to 480 000 km², which is approximately 12, 1 % of the total project area. This is a really important improvement of the coverage of the Network in the European Russia and shows the importance of efforts deployed by the national Emerald team, with the support of the Federal Ministry towards achieving the project results ahead of the scientific evaluation to be launched in 2015. The efforts deployed by the Russian Federation and results obtained in 2014 show the importance of the country for biodiversity conservation at the level of the continent.

In addition, the national team performed a self-evaluation of their achievements from the previous two years. They concluded that the proportion of the species and other taxa in the identified ASCI's in relation to the total number of the Emerald taxa present in European Russia is the following: all 11 moss species, 61 out of 69 confirmed plant taxa, all 7 mollusc species, 42 out of 47 confirmed

arthropod species, all 3 lamprey species confirmed for Russia, all 14 confirmed fish species, all 3 species of amphibians, all 7 species of reptiles, 36 out of 37 mammal species, all 140 confirmed bird species. This self-evaluation analysis shows the important level of understanding of the Network methodology and its implementation by the Emerald team in the Russian Federation.

The national project team concluded that further to the revision of the Resolution No. 4 (1996) operated in December 2014, harmonising the lists of targeted habitats of the Emerald and Natura 2000 Networks, the country will have to keep on working on the identification of potential ASCI's for habitat types newly entered in the Resolution. In addition, as only 16 out of 50 regional entities were present at the dedicated event organised in St Petersburg, additional efforts should be deployed for inspiring the other entities' authorities to fully contribute to the Network implementation.

2.4. Please list activities that were planned and that you were not able to implement, explaining the reasons for these.

All events and activities planned for 2014 have taken place and were implemented as foreseen. The only change in the initial planning of activities concerned the 2nd National Emerald Workshop for Ukraine, which took place in the form of a Web meeting and not a face-to-face meeting.

The meeting was nevertheless a success and was particularly helpful in helping some of the participants in Kiev to feel more comfortable in expressing more spontaneously their opinion or asking questions to the coordination team in Strasbourg, Brussels and Riga. The fact of participants being physically present only in between nationals in Kiev, gave the meeting a certain added value for achieving its objectives.

2.5. What is your assessment of the results of the Action so far?

From a coordination point of view, the project implementation during 2014 was smooth and without major issues encountered. The management team remained organised around one project manager, one scientific expert and one assistant working half-time. The short term support of three additional scientific experts (one on GIS maps, one on animal species and one specifically working on invertebrate species) was added to the core coordination team work during the year.

As far as the achievement of the project overall objective is concerned, -improved biodiversity protection in the target countries-, countries continued improving their knowledge on biodiversity on their territories, but also reviewing their standards and methodologies in gathering biodiversity data. This is particularly valid for habitats and their definitions, as national post-soviet Union habitats classifications are not adapted to modern and European habitats classifications' requirements. Target equally countries continued to enrich their Emerald databases in particular regarding the data available on species and habitats of European importance and their distribution. The significant raise in new records entered in the country national databases in 2014 clearly shows this improvement (see Table 2 above). In addition, not less than 70 field research trips in various candidate and newly proposed Emerald sites took place during the year.

Regarding the achievement of Expected result 1 and 2, although there are differences in the achievements for 2014 in the different countries, the important quantitative growth by all countries together is very encouraging. Three out of the seven target countries (Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation) propose a Network going beyond 10 % of their territory, while Georgia reaches a percentage beyond 20%. Azerbaijan is also close to this threshold. Belarus, achieving results closer to 10% of the national territory comprised in the Network, has a big potential as the country started the work on the network much later than the other countries.

When looking more in details on the data gathered and specific sites added by both Ukraine and the Russian Federation in 2014, it is clear that the countries have been working towards qualitatively improving their Network in 2014.

One should bear in mind that quantity is not the most important indicator of success in such kind of Actions. Quality and well selected small areas can be far more suitable for the achievement of the project objectives and for responding to the Emerald network requirements than additional big areas. One of the questions the biogeographical Seminars in 2014-2016 will answer is “Are the areas chosen by the countries suitable and sufficient” for the network and its criteria or with other words are we selecting for protection the right areas.

Reaching beyond the nationally protected areas was and still is an important objective of the network and project. Belarus, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova have slowly moved towards this kind of interpretation and direction of their work. The rest of the countries can still make efforts in this direction as in addition to the Emerald Network requirements, this is closely linked to the commitments towards the UN CBD and its Aichi targets (Specific project objective).

Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have put many efforts in ensuring the necessary inter-ministerial coordination of the work on the Emerald Network. Georgia appears as a pioneer in this, as the country organised not only coordination and consultation meetings between all authorities’ actors, but equally awareness-raising meetings disseminating adequate information on the network objectives and its potential benefits as well. We expect that the first biogeographical evaluations in 2015 will lead to further improvement of this part of the work, as national authorities will experience first-hand the necessity to coordinate better their work with all relevant governmental institutions.

For the needs of the implementation of the Action (Expected results 1 and 2), contracts called Administrative Arrangements were again signed with each national Emerald implementer in 2014. All project implementers were appointed to work on the project by the competent Ministry in each of the target countries. Annual country specific terms of reference were guiding the conclusion of 2014 contracts, based on the results of the quality check/quality analysis prepared for the national 2013 Emerald databases. These terms of reference were included in each annual contract with each national implementer. The tasks included in the contracts are linked to the organisation of national events, meetings, field research, visibility activities, preparation of publications or other materials and expert fees. The Administrative Arrangements are annual and always cover a period of 9 to 10 months depending on the needs of the country and the period necessary for their drafting and agreement. The same practice was followed during the first Joint Programme (2009-2011).

Please find below a table summarising the different contracts signed in the framework of the action for the period covered by this report:

Nationality of beneficiary (ISO Code)	Beneficiary	Action duration (months)	Grant Amount
AM	Environmental Project Implementation Unit (EPIU)	9	23920,25
AZ	Department for Biodiversity Protection and Specially Protected Natural Territories, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources	9	24000
BY	Belarusian Public Association “Ecological Initiative”	10	57208
GE	NGO NACRES	10	25451,08
MD	Biosafety Office	10	22000
RU	Charitable Organisation Biologists for Nature Conservation	9	68 938,00
UA	NGO Interecocentre	10	56 500,00

2.6. Please provide an updated action plan ⁵

The third implementation year (2015) will follow two main directions.

Firstly the year will be dedicated to the organisation of three Emerald biogeographical Seminars and thus the launching of the biogeographical Emerald evaluation process in the target countries. The Seminars are planned so they concern all project countries at least once during the year. However some countries, holding several biogeographical regions are targeted by two events.

Secondly, in parallel to the biogeographical evaluation process, during 2015 countries will still be provided with guidance and resources for continuing the work leading to the identification of new potential areas suitable to join the Emerald Network on their territories. They will have to submit a new Emerald database for their countries in January 2016, and whenever possible this database will have to take into account the conclusions from the Emerald evaluation.

Year 2015														
Activity	Semester 1						Semester 2						Implementing body	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
Expected result 1: The outstanding potential Emerald sites of protected areas in all target countries will have been identified and their ecological databases completed.														
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Moldova for 2015														Biosafety Office, Moldova
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Georgia for 2015														NGO NACRES
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Azerbaijan for 2015														Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Russia for 2015														Charitable Organisation "Biologists for nature conservation"
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Ukraine for 2015														NGO Interecocentre
Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Armenia for 2014														Environmental Project Implementation Unit (EPIU)

⁵ This plan covers the financial period between the interim report and the next report.

Signature of contract (ToRs) and implementation of the action in Belarus for 2014													Belarussian Public Association Ecological Initiative
Expected result 2: Potential Emerald sites in all seven target countries will have been assessed in view of their sufficiency for ensuring the long-term survival of the Bern Convention species and habitats. Expected result 3: Guidelines on the national designation and management of the adopted Emerald sites will have been drafted and national authorities of the target countries will have started using them													
Emerald biogeographical Seminar (Tbilisi, 27-29/05) for AM, AZ and GE for all habitats and species (except birds) and all biogeographical regions, including marine Black Sea (GE) and marine Caspian Sea (AZ)													Council of Europe
Emerald biogeographical Seminar (28-30 September, Russian Federation) the Arctic and Boreal biogeographical regions (BY, RU) for all habitats and species (except birds), Alpine region for the Urals and marine for the Baltic and Arctic (RU)													Council of Europe
Emerald biogeographical Seminar (Week 23-27 November, Minsk, 2 days) for bird species for BY, MD, RU and UA													Council of Europe
Year 2016													
Activity	Semester 1						Semester 2						Implementing body
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Expected result 2: Potential Emerald sites in all seven target countries will have been assessed in view of their sufficiency for ensuring the long-term survival of the Bern Convention species and habitats. Expected result 3: Guidelines on the national designation and management of the adopted Emerald sites will have been drafted and national authorities of the target countries will have started using them													
Analysis of the databases 2015 submitted by the seven target countries													Council of Europe

Expected result 1: The outstanding potential Emerald sites of protected areas in all target countries will have been identified and their ecological databases completed.											
Expected result 2: Potential Emerald sites in all seven target countries will have been assessed in view of their sufficiency for ensuring the long-term survival of the Bern Convention species and habitats.											
Expected result 3: Guidelines on the national designation and management of the adopted Emerald sites will have been drafted and national authorities of the target countries will have started using them											
3 rd meeting of the project Steering Committee											Council of Europe

3. Partners and other Co-operation

3.1. How do you assess the relationship between the formal partners of this Action (i.e. those partners which have signed a partnership statement)? Please provide specific information for each partner organisation.

NA

3.2. How would you assess the relationship between your organisation and State authorities in the Action countries? How has this relationship affected the Action?

In 2014, the situation regarding the ratification of the Bern Convention by the target countries remained unchanged. All countries are Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention, with the exception of the Russian Federation which is an Observer State. Coordination with the Focal points to the Bern Convention in the Contracting Parties and Observer States taking part in the Action is positive. The Focal Points to the Convention are designated by the Ministries competent for environment in these countries. These Focal Points have also attended and contributed to the 2nd project steering Committee meeting which took place on 1 December 2014 in Strasbourg. The ownership of the whole process at the level of the national authorities is always ensured, although the project implementation in some countries is done through an NGO or specialised Office at national level.

The overall implication of national authorities in the action implementation and in the Emerald process in general is very positive and continuous in almost all target countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Belarus and Armenia).

3.3. Where applicable, describe your relationship with any other organisations involved in implementing the Action:

The implementation of the Action has benefited greatly from the continuous cooperation ensured by the Bern Convention with its long-term partners like the European Environment Agency, the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity, Birdlife International, Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, IUCN.

The use of EEA's Reportnet CDR is going on smoothly and the Agency is providing additional support to the Emerald network in the frame of its Memorandum of Cooperation with the Bern Convention, in particular on the Emerald Software, the European biogeographical regions' maps, etc.

Partnership with Birdlife International, IUCN, WWF, GEO BON and the European Habitats Forum has been initiated or strengthened. These collaborations are important (1) as the establishment of a background species and habitats database to be used as a mean for the verification of the sufficiency of the proposed Emerald sites is needed and (2) the support and presence of NGOs at the Emerald biogeographical process Seminars is key for the success of the evaluations.

3.4. Where applicable, outline any links and synergies you have developed with other actions.

Cooperation with projects implemented in the target countries both by other international donors and national funds continued to be sought and ensured throughout 2014.

In Georgia, cooperation with other relevant projects has been another key element of the promotional and awareness building activities in the country. WWF-CAUCASUS implements a project aimed at the identification of important sites for the conservation of biodiversity in Georgia. The list has a potential to be used for the infrastructural planning within the key sectors like energy and transport. WWF has agreed that the project will take into account species under the Bern Convention and emerald Network Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998).

The national Emerald team cooperated and coordinated its activities with the projects dealing with impacts of climate change such as “Sustainable Management of Pastures in Georgia to Demonstrate Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Benefits and Dividends for Local Communities” (UNDP/EU) and “Institutionalization of Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in Georgia” (USAID/NALA).

The national Emerald team has developed a new project aimed at building the capacity of the Georgian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection to develop the Emerald Network. The Team has secured the support of the German Development Cooperation – GIZ to implement the initiative in 2015.

In the Republic of Moldova cooperation with the ENPI FLEG project is still sought and collaboration is focussing on the exchange of data and coordination when additional areas for the Network are selected.

In Armenia, the colleagues from the national Emerald team have sought coordination with the UNDP-GEF team in the country.

In Belarus, collaboration with the GEF/UNDP project «Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation into Territorial Planning Policies and Practices» is developed, as well as with the EU/UNDP project «Support to the development of a comprehensive framework for international environmental cooperation in the Republic of Belarus».

In Azerbaijan, the national Emerald team has strengthened cooperation with WWF and GIZ offices, but were additionally advised to seek collaboration with the Birdlife partner in the country in particular for the exchange of data on Important Bird Areas.

In the Russian Federation, collaboration resulting in data exchange was developed with Transparent World Non-Commercial Partnership leading the work on steppe site inventory in Russia (UNDP / GEF / MNRE of Russia Project «Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia»). This was the case also with natural area mapping project targeting the Barents Euroregion («Barents Region Protected Areas Network» project of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council).

The national team in the Russian Federation continued to use extensive reliable ecological data collected by the Russian Bird Conservation Union in relation to IBA’s of global and European importance, including those defined as the key sites on bird migration routes. The Birds and People NGO, the Russian Geographic Society and the Russian Academy of Sciences have also greatly contributed to the work of the Emerald team in the identification of new areas for the Network.

3.5. If your organisation has received previous EU grants in view of strengthening the same target group, in how far has this Action been able to build upon/complement the previous one(s)? (List all previous relevant EU grants).

The current Action is a continuation of a previous Joint EU/CoE Programme on the setting-up of the Emerald Network, implemented in the period 2009-2011 in the same target countries. It builds directly on the results of the previous project and this is strongly reflected both in the description of the Action and in the other sections of this report.

The previous EU/CoE Joint Programme title was: “Support for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity Programme of work on Protected areas in the EU neighbouring policy East area and Russia: Extension of the implementation of the EU’s Natura 2000 principles through the Emerald Network” (DCI-ENV/2008/149-829).

4. Visibility

The new project webpage continues to be updated with relevant new information on project achievements in the countries: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/emerald-network>.

EU’s financial contribution and logo is always mentioned during each meeting organised in the frame of the action, but also in the frame of the Bern Convention institutional meetings. EU Delegations in the target countries have also been invited to the national meetings, and have been present in some of them to ensure the visibility of the support from the EU to the action and thus support its implementation.

In 2014 again the target countries have also implemented various visibility activities and produced different materials to support this process:

- In Georgia, a publication aimed at informing the public about the Emerald Network and its role in nature conservation of Georgia was published. The publication targets the decision-makers, academic circles, students, and other interested parties. It provides information on the Bern Convention, Emerald Network, Natura 2000, and the *relevant acquis communautaire*;
- In the Republic of Moldova, the good initiative of the travelling bus “Caravana BIO” continued to take place in 2014 as well. The bus is visiting schools (in 2014 to Cahul, Orhei, Donduseni, Stefan Voda districts) around the country and presenting the Network, the project, but also aiming to explain to young generations what is biodiversity and what is its importance for human well-being and democracy;
- In the Republic of Moldova, an Emerald round table for students took place on 26 November 2014 at the State University of Moldova;
- The Republic of Moldova also issues a 2015 Year Calendar presenting the Emerald Network in the country and signed by the Minister of Environment Mrs. Valentina Tapis;
- Similarly to the Russian Federation in 2013, Armenia prepared and published an Emerald Book of Armenia, presenting the most valuable biodiversity areas in the country and sites proposed to join the network;
- In Armenia, the project team prepared an Environmental friendly Year 2014 Calendar, featuring all important days celebrated around the world and in Armenia, as well as pictures and information on the potential Emerald sites in the country;
- A publication on the Emerald Network in Armenia is also being published and should be available in March 2015;
- In Belarus, a booklet the “Implementation of the Emerald Network in Belarus” was developed in English and Russian languages. In addition, both the 2nd national Emerald Seminar and the national awareness-raising meeting on the Emerald Network which took place in January 2015 attracted a lot of media attention;
- In Ukraine, the Emerald network and its progress so far in the country was presented in a small booklet as well, published in Ukrainian;
- In Ukraine, the Emerald Network and the action were reported on in several local newspapers. Information on the Network and its methodology is included in biology school books and

various extra-curricular activities in the field of ecology proposed in some schools feature information on the Emerald Network.

Name of the contact person for the Action: Iva Obretenova, Project Manager

Signature:

Location: Council of Europe, Strasbourg

Date report due:

Date report sent:

Funded
by the European Union



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented
by the Council of Europe

Annex 1: Revised project logical framework, version April 2014

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROJECT				
	Intervention logic	Objectively verifiable indicators of achievement	Sources and means of verification	Assumptions
Overall objective	Improved biodiversity protection - especially the long-term survival of threatened species and habitats - through Emerald sites in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evolution of the protected areas surface in the countries ▪ Improvement of the national environmental data on biological diversity ▪ Evolution of species and habitats in the Emerald sites ▪ Adoption of national strategy on protected areas and their development, according to requirement of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National legislative acts on protected areas ▪ National environmental statistics ▪ National progress reports to CBD and Bern Convention ▪ Opinion of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention ▪ EEA and EIONET data from ENPI East countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political stability within the target countries ▪ Political will in the target countries to take further measures to protect biodiversity ▪ Sufficient financial resources committed by the target countries' authorities to nature conservation
Project Objective	Full operational launch of the Pan-European Emerald network of nature protection sites of the Bern Convention by 2020, thereby (i) supporting the implementation of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and its Aichi Targets on protected areas by the ENP East countries and Russia and (ii) aligning nature protection standards in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surface of the nationally protected areas proposed to become part of the Emerald Network ▪ Surface of sites without any national legislative protection to become part of the Emerald Network ▪ Percentage of the total national 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National progress reports to CBD and Bern Convention ▪ National legislation on protected areas ▪ Management plans on protected areas ▪ Statistics from National authorities ▪ Statistics from NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political ownership of the project and its objectives by the national authorities in all target countries ▪ Sufficient financial resources engaged by the target countries to protected areas identification and management

	this region with the standards of EU and its Natura 2000 Network.	<p>territory represented by the proposed Emerald sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusion of marine areas in the proposed Emerald sites ▪ Creation of management plans for the proposed Emerald sites ▪ Effective implementation of legislation on protected areas and of the management plans of the Emerald sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interim and final reports of the project 	
Expected Result 1	The outstanding potential Emerald sites of protected areas in all target countries will have been identified and their ecological databases completed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surface of the potential Emerald sites and their respective percentage of total national territory ▪ Number of selected potential Emerald sites ▪ On-time delivery of ecological data by countries ▪ Quality checks of the technical and ecological data submitted for each site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data deliveries per country ▪ Quality check reports by the project scientific expert ▪ Quality checks opinion by the ETC/BD experts when necessary ▪ Adjustments to the size and/or number of proposed Emerald sites when necessary ▪ Progress and final reports of project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political stability within the countries ▪ National Emerald teams involved in the 1st Joint EU/Coe Programme are maintained ▪ Full cooperation by national authorities in the countries where the implementer is not directly the Ministry in charge
Expected Result 2	Potential Emerald sites in all seven target countries will have been assessed in view of their sufficiency for ensuring the long-term survival of the Bern Convention species and habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First agreed list of proposed Areas of Special Conservation Interest per biogeographic region, to be submitted for adoption to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention ▪ Conclusions on the sufficiency of proposals by each country for each species and habitats in each biogeographic region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conclusions of scientific assessment of proposals by the ETC/BD, in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the project scientific expert ▪ Nomination as ‘official candidate sites’ by the Bern Convention Standing Committee for all proposed sites by all target countries ▪ Conclusions of national, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stakeholder (NGOs) involvement to ensure successful implementation of the biogeographical Seminars

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biogeographic reference lists of species and habitats for each biogeographic region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> biogeographical and Steering committee meetings Adjustments to the size and/or number of proposed Emerald sites when necessary 	
Expected Result 3	Guidelines on the national designation and management of the adopted Emerald sites will have been drafted and national authorities of the target countries will have started using them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific guidelines for the development of management plans for the Emerald sites in the region, to be prepared and submitted for adoption to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention Preparations for national designation of the adopted Emerald sites are started and the guidelines prepared are used Number and territory coverage of the protected Emerald sites to reach the Aichi target 11 rate Inclusion of the regional/local authorities and communities in the sites management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National progress reports to CBD and Bern Convention National legislation on protected areas Management plans on protected areas Conclusions of national, biogeographical and Steering committee meetings Opinion of the Bern Convention group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks and of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National authorities' and NGOs' input to the development of the management guidelines Dialogue is established between the responsible national authorities from the targeted countries and the NGOs and international actors in the field of nature and biodiversity conservation
Activities	<p><u>Expected result 1 - Finalisation of Phase I and preparation for Phase II of the Emerald Network constitution process:</u></p> <p><u>Russian Federation, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project kick-off meeting identification of the second half of potential sites and the respective sites data collection and delivery 	<p>Means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project manager Secretary (half time) International scientific expert to the Council of Europe National Emerald teams composed of project leader and scientific experts in various fields of nature conservation, as well as an expert in GIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data deliveries per country Quality check results by the project scientific expert Quality checks opinion by the ETC/BD experts when necessary Progress and final reports of project Guidelines for management plans for the Emerald sites, for the 7 ENPI countries, adopted by the Bern Convention Standing Committee 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 Emerald National Seminars per country ▪ Preparatory Biogeographical Seminar for the 4 countries <p><u>Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project kick-off meeting ▪ Quality check of the ecological and technical data delivered and corrections when necessary ▪ 1 Emerald Seminar per country ▪ Preparatory Biogeographical Seminar for the 3 countries <p><u>Expected result 2 - Phase II of the Emerald Network constitution process:</u></p> <p><u>All target countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 Biogeographical Seminar ▪ 4 Bilateral Seminars when necessary <p><u>Expected result 3 - Developing guidelines on management plans for the Emerald sites, reporting and monitoring measures</u></p> <p><u>All target countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project kick-off and final event ▪ Consultations and development of guidelines on Emerald Network management plans and reporting and monitoring mechanisms, in cooperation with the national Emerald teams (2013 & 2014) ▪ Submission of the guidelines for 	<p>mapping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical equipment and facilities for the national Emerald teams ▪ Kick off and final project events ▪ Steering committee (2 representatives per target country, one from implementing organisation, one from the national authority responsible) ▪ Organisation of coordination meetings Project manager/scientific expert and Steering Committee meetings ▪ Travel expenses 	
--	---	---	--

	<p>discussion by the Bern Convention Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks (2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submission of the guidelines for adoption by the Bern Convention Standing Committee (2015) ▪ Information on the Natura 2000 management plans and reporting obligations, provided to Emerald National teams during the kick-off, national and bilateral seminars (2013 - 2016) <p><u>Expected results 2 and 3 - Improving trans-boundary cooperation in the region</u></p> <p><u>All target countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project kick-off and final event ▪ Inclusion of trans-boundary co-operation issues in the Specific Guidelines on Emerald Network management plans and reporting and monitoring mechanisms (2014), to be prepared in the frame of the project ▪ Dialogue on conservation standards for future Emerald sites, in particular the ones which straddle border, is established between the countries' national authorities 		
--	--	--	--

Funded
by the European Union

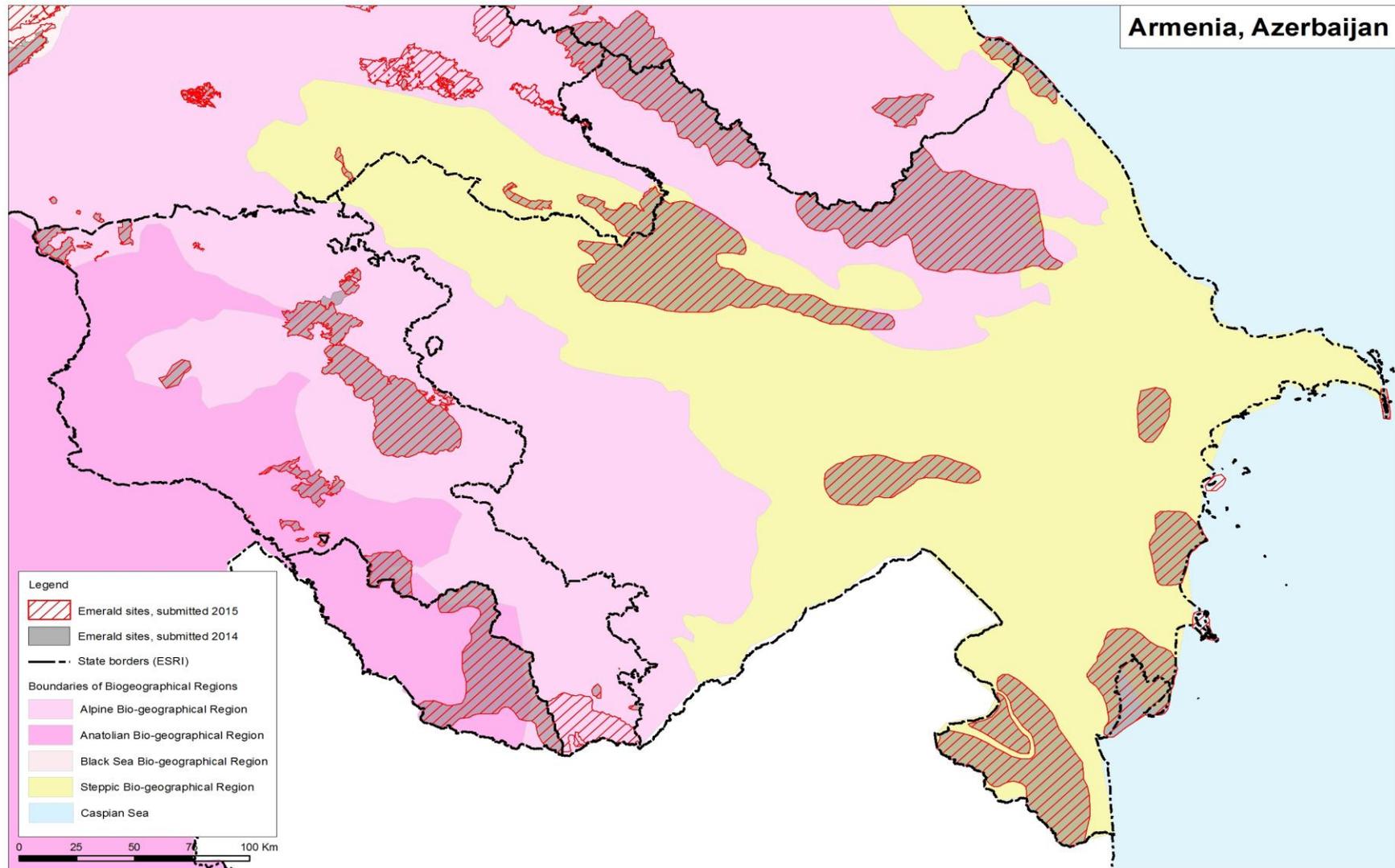


COUNCIL OF EUROPE

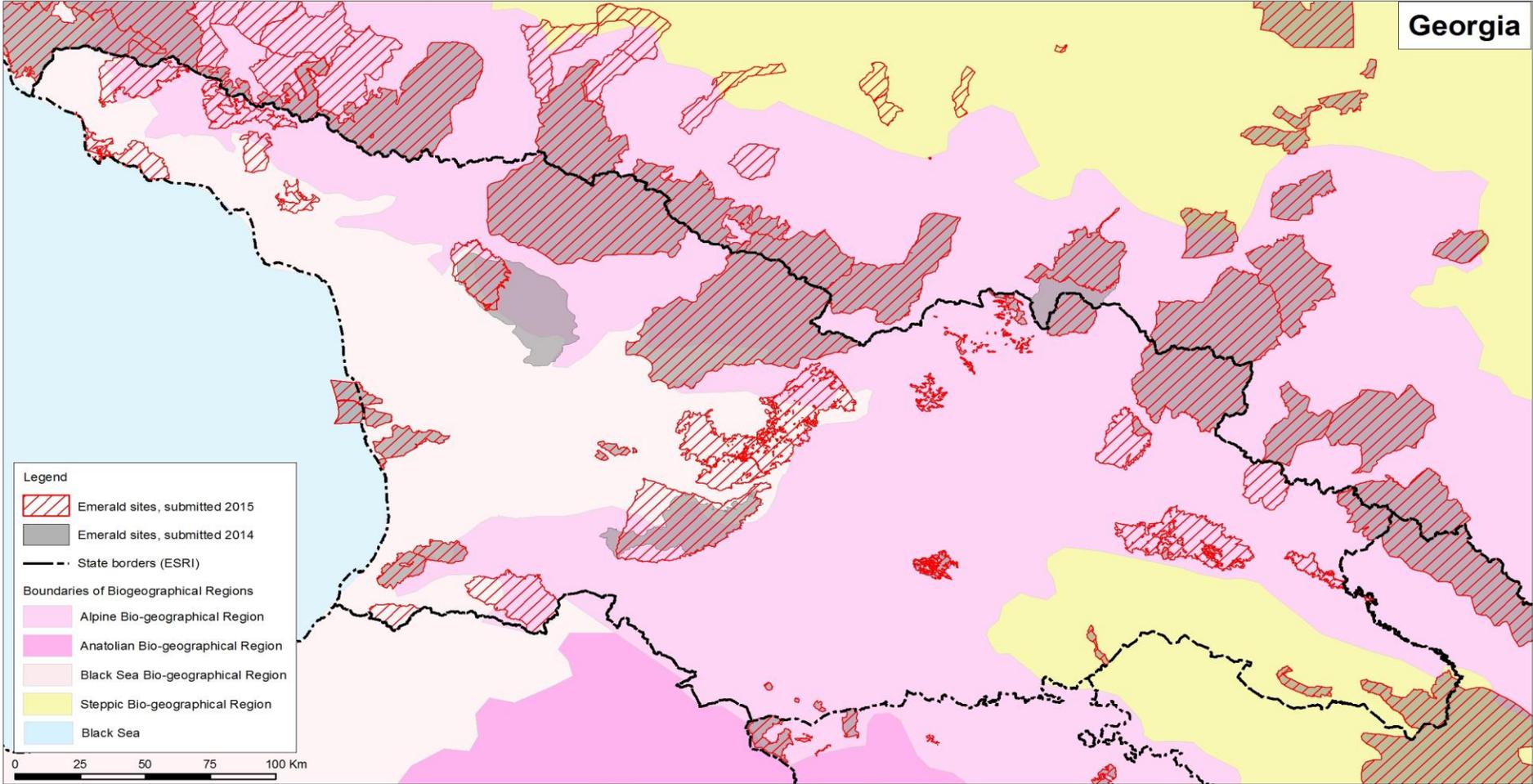


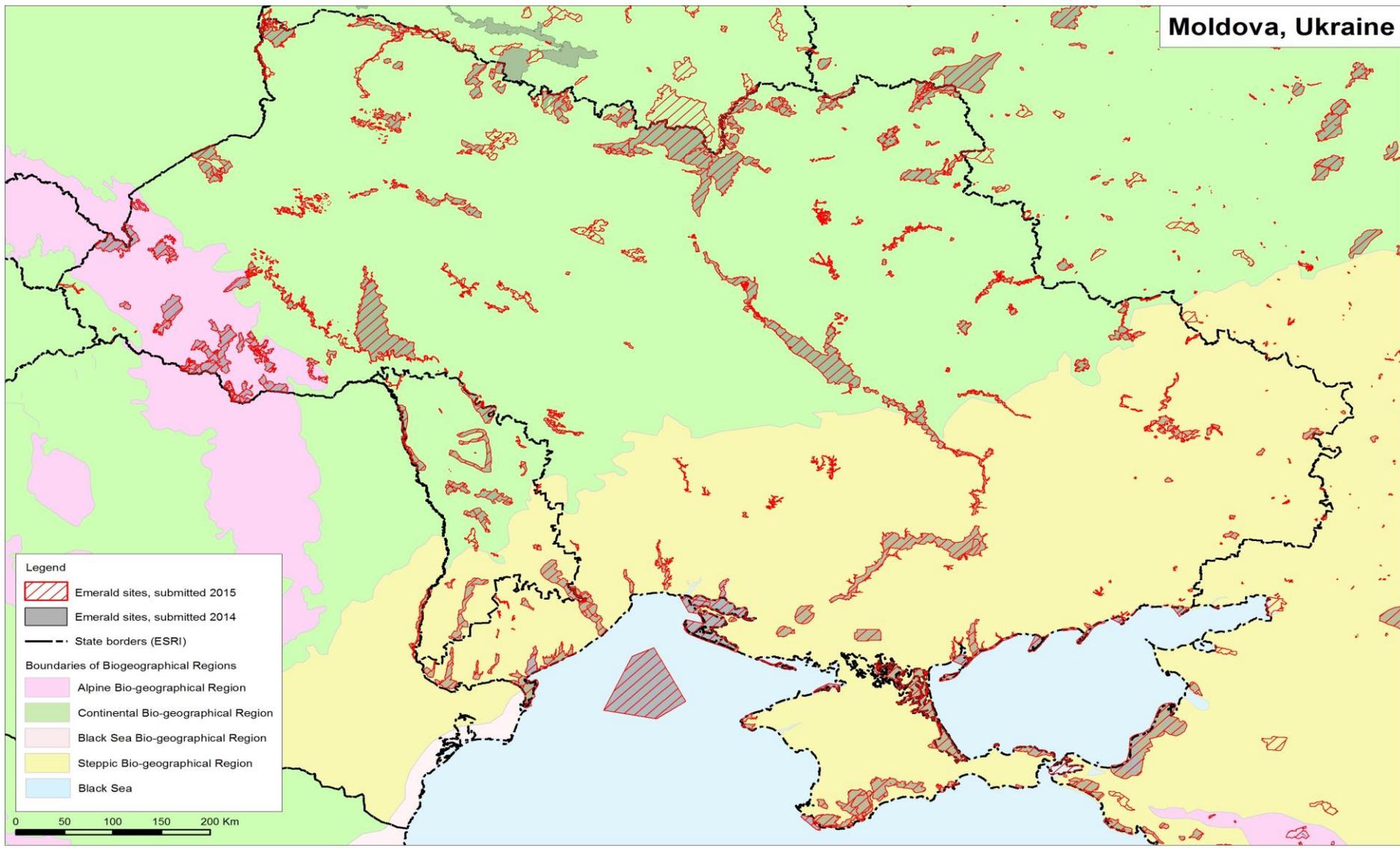
Implemented
by the Council of Europe

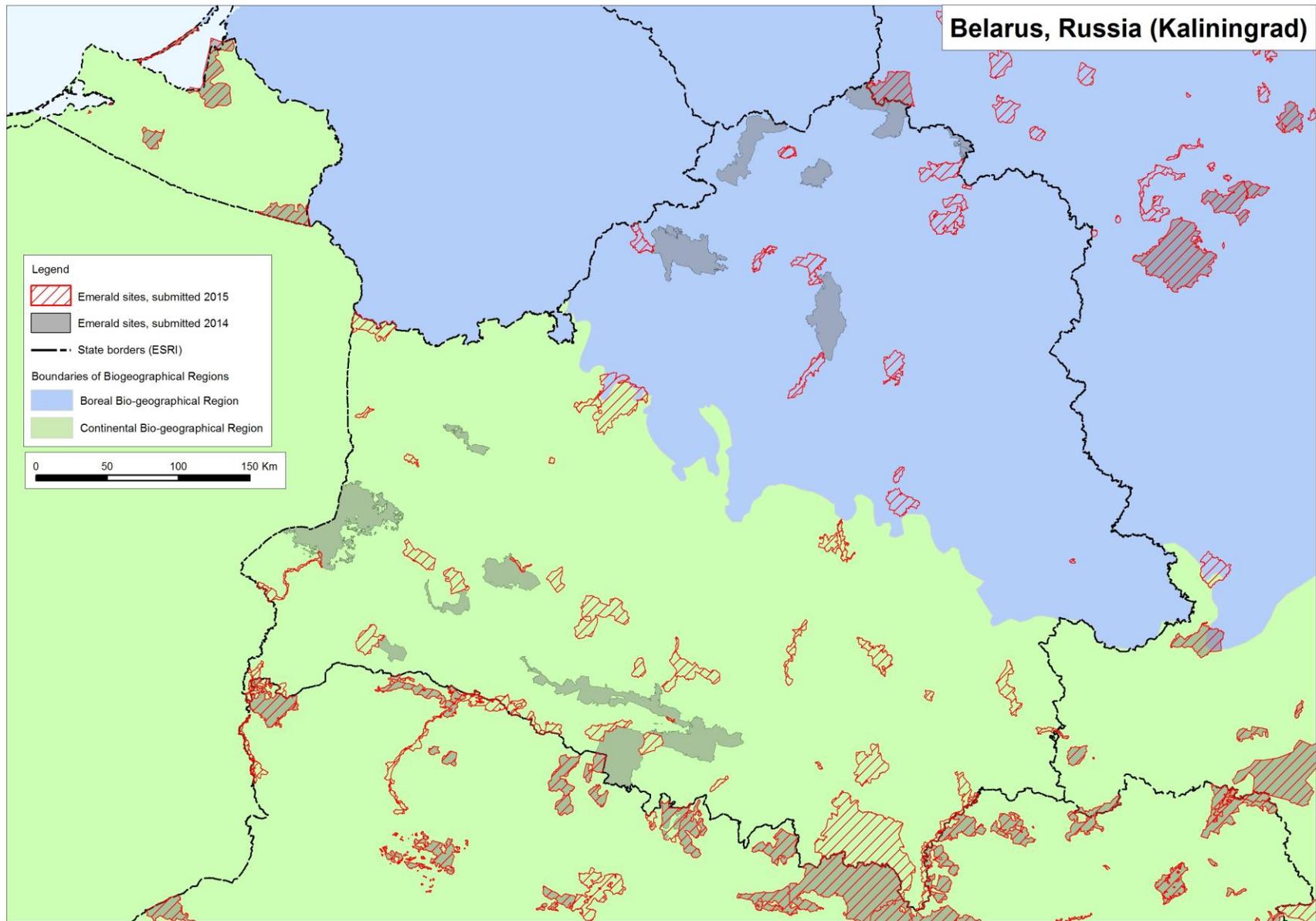
Annex 2: Maps presenting the newly proposed Emerald sites in Jan.2015 and candidate Emerald sites proposed in Jan. 2014 and nominated in Dec.2014

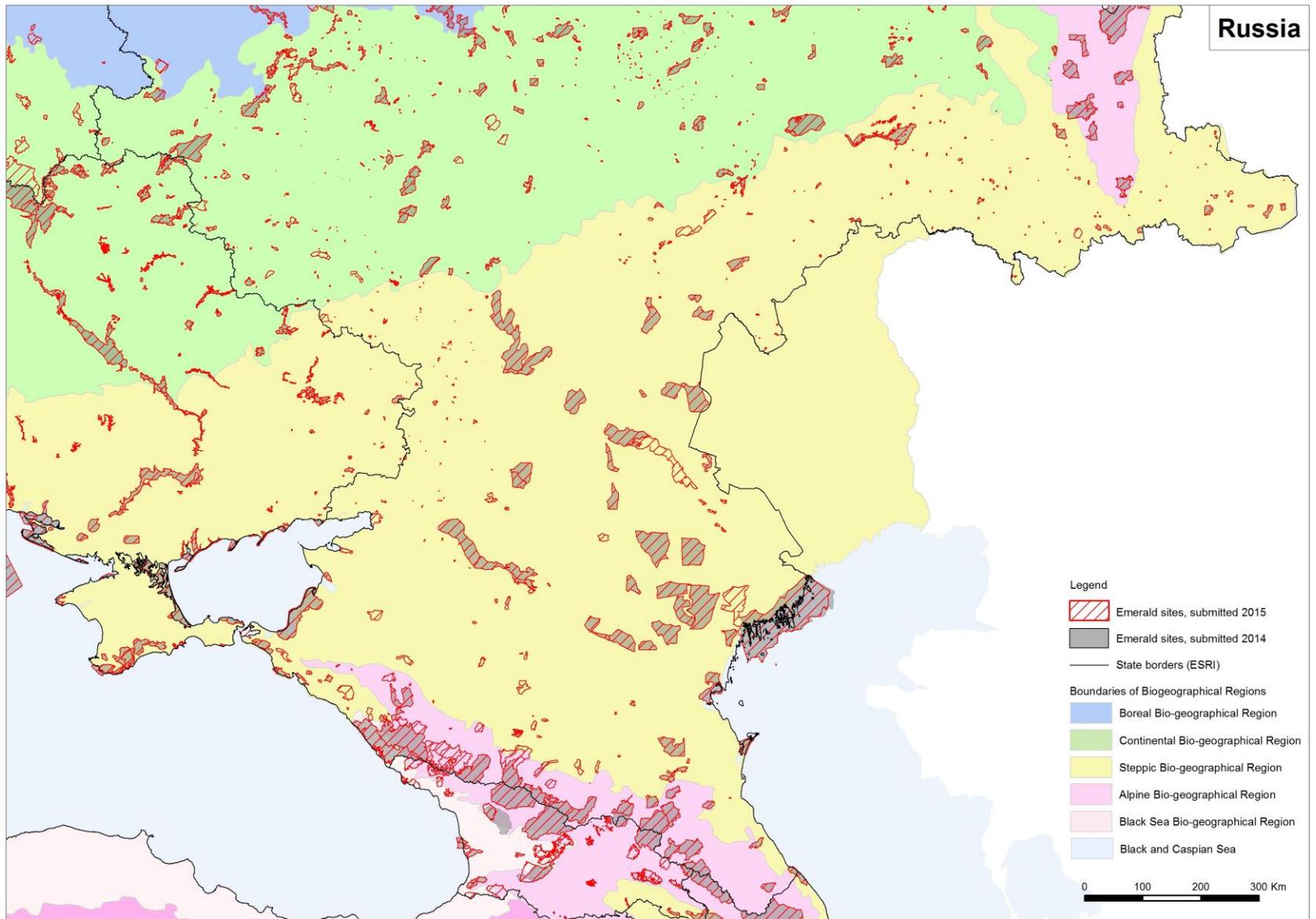


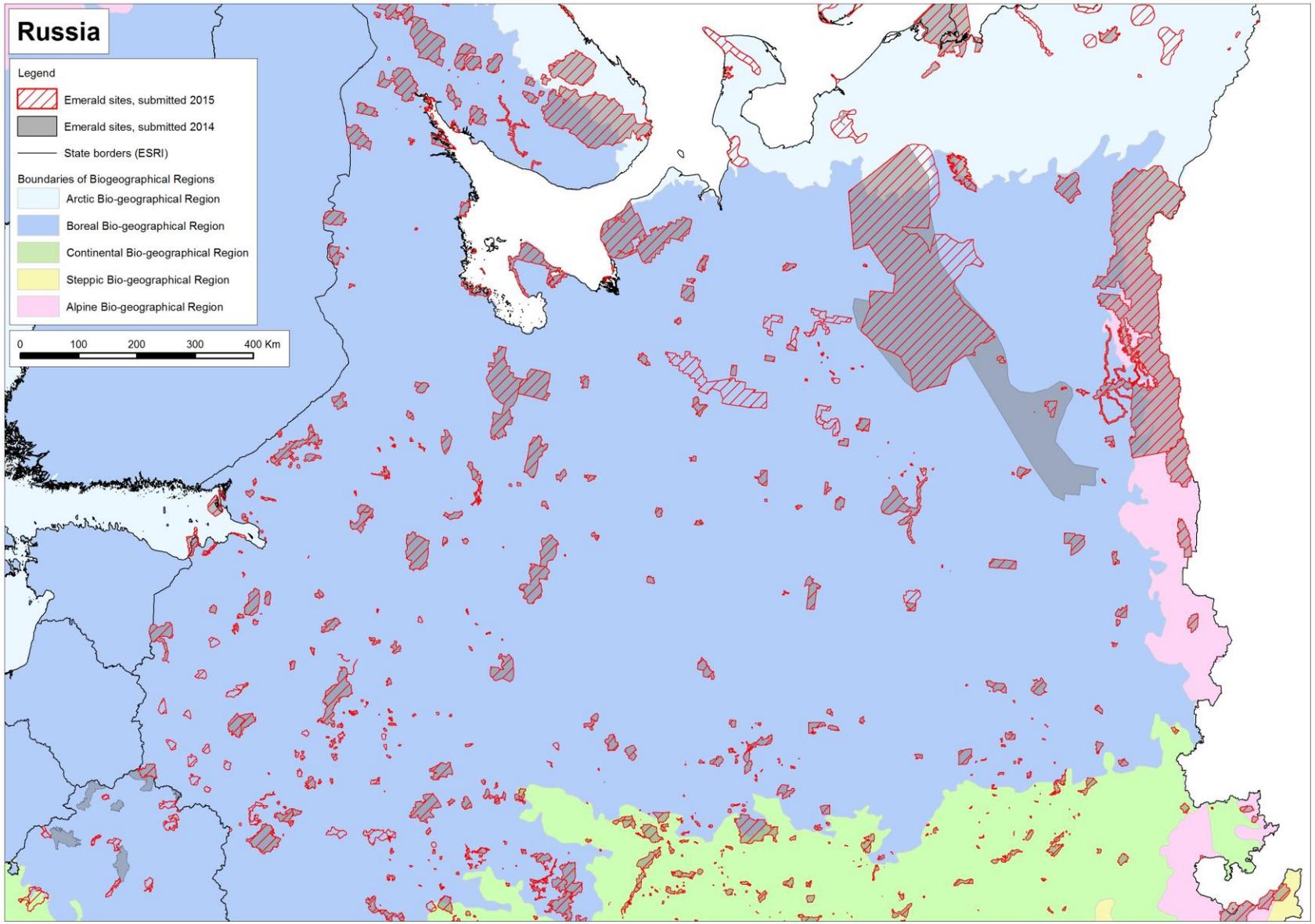
Georgia











Russia

Legend

-  Emerald sites, submitted 2015
-  Emerald sites, submitted 2014
-  State borders (ESRI)

Boundaries of Biogeographical Regions

-  Arctic Bio-geographical Region
-  Boreal Bio-geographical Region
-  Alpine Bio-geographical Region

0 100 200 300 400 Km

