



## **EU/CoE Joint Programme “Emerald Network of Nature Conservation Sites, phase II”**

1st Steering Committee meeting  
Strasbourg, 18 October 2013

### **Meeting report**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Steering Committee gathered the project manager at the Council of Europe, the project scientific expert, the project leaders in all the seven target countries and one representative from their respective national authorities with competence for nature conservation.

The project manager at the Council of Europe presented the state of play of the project, activities which took place during the year and recent decisions taken in the frame of the Bern Convention, in relation to the Emerald network, which are of importance for the implementation of the project.

#### **2. Achievements' review for 2013**

A list of questions was sent to the national project leaders ahead of the meeting, aiming to guide the presentations they were requested to make on the achievements of the project implementation at national level during 2013. Many of the project leaders in the countries welcomes these questions, as they found them very helpful in guiding their presentations, but also the work they need to do at national level to prepare their databases for Phase II. These questions were the following:

- As explained during the national Emerald Workshops in each target country during 2013, the evaluation of the candidate Emerald sites in Phase II will be done on a species by species and habitat by habitats basis. Please explain how the national Emerald team has estimated the gaps in the sufficiency of the sites proposed so far and what has been done to overcome these gaps? How the newly identified areas suitable to join the Network have been chosen, which are these areas, etc.
- Did the Emerald team use certain methodologies to identify the representativity gaps of the Emerald sites proposed up to 2011/2012?
- Did the Emerald team check the Reference Databases on species and habitats; did you encounter difficulties in identifying possible presence of certain species or habitats in your countries; did you check presence of species and habitats within biogeographical regions?
- Did the Emerald team verify the distribution maps for species and habitats delivered in 2011/2012; What about the delivery of distribution maps for a new selection of species and habitats under the 2013 AAs?
- Please communicate clearly on how the implementation at national level of the Emerald Network is envisaged by the national authorities (in particular for countries where the project implementation is ensured by an NGO), issues encountered, possible solutions found, etc.

**Armenia:**

During 2013, the country identified four new areas suitable to join the Network, bringing the number of potential Emerald sites in the country to twelve. The team checked the distribution of all species and ecosystems in the two bio-geographical regions present in Armenia. The databases and the digital boundaries using GIS were prepared for all 12 Armenian "Emerald" sites. In addition, the project leader informed that nine of the 12 Emerald Network sites are included in the list of "Specially Protected Nature Areas of Armenia", while five sites have management plans. Currently the strategy for the "Specially Protected Nature Areas in Armenia" is being developed at national level and activities concerning the "Emerald Network of Armenia" will be included. This will facilitate the development of management measures for the future Emerald sites.

The country also informed on the enhanced cooperation at national level between the Emerald project and a project evaluating the impact of climate change on some of the country's protected areas, including some potential Emerald sites. The climate change risk assessment implemented in the frame of the project has been using the Holdridge life zones system. Various visibility activities have taken place in the country, in particular aimed at spreading information about the Emerald Network within the Ministry of Nature Protection. A special environment-oriented Calendar is being prepared and will be published for 2014. This is one of the means the team has planned for disseminating information about the Emerald Network in Armenia.

**Azerbaijan:**

During 2013, Azerbaijan concentrated its efforts on filling the gaps in the country database from the 1<sup>st</sup> Emerald project (2009-2011), which unfortunately included a lot of inconsistencies and errors. The change in the project leader in the country at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> project was beneficial, but a lot of efforts are necessary for catching up the work achieved by the rest of the countries. Experts from the Academy of Science of the Azerbaijan Republic were involved in the project and checked all the information communicated so far regarding species and habitats in the country candidate Emerald sites database, taking as a main reference the recently published Red Data book of Azerbaijan. The team changed the boundaries of some of the sites. However, a reflection has been initiated on the possibility to add additional sites to the country database and two sites are currently being considered for joining the Network.

**Belarus:**

Belarus has spent a lot of the funds received for 2013 in field research, with a protocol foreseeing that the field data gathered by the field expert is checked after being received by the Emerald team members and then by the Ministry, where a specific person was designated to work on Emerald. The accession of Belarus to the Bern Convention in 2013 positively raised the momentum for the Emerald Network implementation in the country and initiated a revision of the national "Law on Environment Protection" developed in September 2013. The law was amended to include the notion of "rare and typical habitats and natural landscapes", which are recognised as the territories for which a special regime of protection and economic use should be installed. In addition, four new areas are currently being included in the country Emerald database.

**Georgia:**

The country concentrated a lot of efforts already since 2012, after the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> project on the Emerald Network, to review its database and take care of correcting inconsistencies or gaps. A lot of field work was done through 2012 and 2013 and new techniques for habitats mapping are being used, such as remote satellite sensing. Collaboration with other projects implemented in the

country is being reinforced and the main advantage of that is the exchange of data on species and habitats. One new potential Emerald (nature monument status) site is being identified and ecological data and boundaries gathered, however, its inclusion in the database still needs to be agreed with the Ministry. The national biodiversity strategy of the country was updated in 2012 and includes a specific mention of the Emerald Network. For 2014, the country plans to organise interministerial meeting, aimed at informing other Ministries in the country on the objectives of the Emerald Network and thus facilitate the possible identification of additional sites with the agreement of all relevant Ministries.

#### **Republic of Moldova:**

One additional site was identified in Moldova and is currently being described with all necessary ecological data. In addition, the national team have followed the QA/QC reports sent on their 2012 Emerald database and are working on the correction and completion of data. A draft Environment Strategy is being prepared in the country and the Emerald Network is included in the Strategy as one clear target. The draft Strategy is currently being open for public hearing for the moment. A lot of efforts have been deployed for the visibility of the Emerald Network in the country.

In a discussion after the presentation on Moldova, the issue of the exclusion of a species or a habitat from a country reference list due to the fact that its presence is not confirmed for some time. The project scientific expert replied that one of the conclusions from a biogeographical Seminar could be Scientific Reserve (SR) to reference list (RL), which will call for the implementation of field research after the Seminar to confirm or infirm the presence of the species/habitat. Another rule that can be taken into account for the exclusion or not from the RL is to consider the possibility for restoration of the species.

#### **Russian Federation:**

During 2012-2013, the national Emerald team in the Russian Federation has been very busy with the revision of their Emerald database. They proceeded to dividing the biogeographical regions present in the country into sections, which were subsequently checked to ensure all sections are present in the lists of Emerald sites. They then focused their work on regions with very few Emerald sites and on species and habitats still not covered sufficiently. Using tables, the Emerald team checked which of the species and habitats from their reference database are currently not covered at all in the current network.

Data gathered through other projects, for example a project on steppe areas and a project on Barents Sea, were used for the needs of Emerald. Some new areas were included in the database, for example from the Tver region. The difficulty in the country, linked to the important territory covered and the competence of not less than 51 regions over protected areas is to commit these regional authorities to the work on Emerald. For some countries this is an easier task than for others. A recent instruction letter was sent by the Federal Ministry of Natural resources to the regional conservation agencies, requesting they cooperate with the project implementer in the country (Baltic fund for nature). An important amount of experts are working for the project, including a network of volunteer contributors.

#### **Ukraine:**

In Ukraine, the Emerald team adopted a methodology which helps them check the availability of sites for all the species and habitats of the Bern Convention lists (Res. 4 and Res. 6) present in their reference database. In addition, the recent update of the Res. 6 added 41 new species for which sites have to be identified if they are not sufficiently covered in the already proposed sites. The choice of areas for potential field work by experts was based on the description of habitats and on occurrence

updates received from local experts. Seven new Emerald sites will be added to the database, including one marine area. In addition, the country dedicated efforts on the future management of Emerald sites and decided to prepare Guidelines on Emerald network management, taking into account the national specificities and developed in Ukrainian language.

In a discussion after the Ukrainian presentation, the question of whether the boundaries of the Emerald sites and their protection is discussed with the relevant Ministries? While the boundaries for the moment are the ones which are dictated by the ecology of the areas and its current protection status, if there is one, these boundaries might change once the management for the Emerald sites are being debated, including with stakeholders. In some cases, there might be a need to merge few sites, in order to facilitate their management.

### **3. Technical requirements for the Emerald data deliveries in view of then preparation for the biogeographic seminars**

The project scientific expert made an overview of the requirements for the 2013 national databases, which should be submitted as soon as possible, before the end of January 2014 at the latest. He pointed out some recurrent errors and inconsistencies and explained why these should be taken care of, namely, the impossibility to start a biogeographical seminar if the database is not faultless from a technical point of view.

More details on his remarks can be found on the power point presentation of the scientific expert.

### **4. Planning of the project activities for 2014 and of the ToR of AAs with target countries for 2014**

A provisional planning of the project lifespan was presented to the Steering Committee, with more details on the organisation of the biogeographic seminars. 5 biogeographic Seminars are planned for the moment, although it should be stressed that the sequence of the organisation of the Seminars depend a lot on the quality and technical readiness of the national databases submitted in January 2014. One should remember that the planning will again be reviewed after the expert was able to evaluate the country databases.

The possible items to figure on the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Administrative Arrangements to be signed with each country for 2014 are also mentioned in the planning document. However, the project manager reminded that a more individualised approach will be implemented from next year onwards and country specific issues/needs can also be addressed through the ToR for 2014, i.e. funds for the preparation of guidelines for Emerald sites management, awareness-raising activities targeting other relevant Ministries, etc.

Comments are suggestions to the planning from the project leaders at national level are welcome.

### **5. Reminder of the administrative requirements to target countries**

The project Manager at the Council of Europe reminded the requirements linked to the financial and narrative reports which have to be submitted to the Council of Europe on the use of the funds. For more details please check power point presentation made at the event.

The project managed advised the national project leaders to regularly check the use of the funds and to possibly reallocate some unspent funds to other activities, after consultation with the Council of Europe.

## **6. Conclusion of the meeting**

The project manager and scientific expert thanked the national Emerald team members for their hard work during the year and wished them good luck for the finalisation of the databases and the timely submission of the narrative and financial reports for 2013.