

# Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> European Regional Meeting

## on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention

Yerevan, Armenia, 4-8 December 2004

### INTRODUCTION

The Meeting was held on 4-8 December 2001 at the Armenia Marriott Hotel in Yerevan. It was attended by 109 participants, representing 35 Contracting Parties in the European Region, four intergovernmental organisations, three of Ramsar's international organisation partners, several non-governmental organisations plus a number of invited experts.

Parties represented were Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Apologies were received from Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Monaco, and Turkey. Missing were Greece, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland.

The aims of the Meeting, its detailed programme and annotated agenda, the participants list and texts of most of the presentations delivered during the plenary sessions and workshops are available on the Ramsar Convention website at:

[www.ramsar.org/mtg\\_reg\\_europe2004\\_index.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/mtg_reg_europe2004_index.htm)

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the presentations during the plenary sessions, including the reports on the eight thematic workshops.

### OPENING PLENARY

#### **Wetland conservation in Armenia – its contribution to sustainable development and poverty alleviation**

Minister Vardan Ayvazyan opened the Meeting on behalf of the Armenian Government, and Ms Gordana Beltram, chairperson of the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee, welcomed the participants. Then, Karen Jenderedjian, of the Armenian Ministry of Nature Protection, presented an overview of wetland conservation in Armenia:

The Government of Armenia recognizes that social justice and ecological safety are important provisions for the sustainable development of the nation. The adaptation of the legislative framework to European standards requires special efforts. Environmental issues have been integrated in the development concepts for the energy, transport, industry, agriculture and social sectors. New systems of economical mechanisms have been introduced ensuring sustainable use of natural resources. Much more should be done for the formulation and enforcement of regulative frameworks.

- Armenia's priority environmental issue is the restoration of the ecological balance of lake Sevan, the water and biological resources of which are of vital importance for the socio-economic growth of the country.
- Another basic concern is the effective and sustainable use of water resources. Water has always been considered as Armenia's greatest wealth. This is why wetlands remained comparatively undisturbed for a long time, especially when compared to heavily exploited forests, steppes and meadows.

However, during the socialist period, wetlands were considered as harmful wastelands. Draining wetlands was part of a set of major hydrological works performed in the USSR.

- Realising the true value of wetlands, less than two years after independence, on 6 July 1993, the Republic of Armenia became a Party to the Ramsar Convention, designating two sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance: lakes Arpi and Sevan. Three other sites are currently under consideration: Khor Virap marsh, Ardenis pond and the relict wetlands of the Lori highlands.
- Important measures to solve environmental problems override the capacities of one country, they need international cooperation. This requires joint approaches to the implementation of international treaties. The "Ecoregional nature protection programme for the southern Caucasus", launched by the German Ministry of Cooperation and Development, is a good example of such a common approach, promoting cooperation between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

### *Wetlands brochure*

Mr Jenderedjian's presentation was most usefully complemented by an illustrated brochure of 64 pages "*About wetlands, and around wetlands, in Armenia*", produced specially for the participants of the European Regional Meeting. The booklet provides facts about Armenia, its nature and wetlands, their values and threats, and briefly presents the most notable wetlands in each of Armenia's eleven provinces (*marz*).

### *Excursion to lake Sevan Ramsar site*

On 6 December 2004, the Meeting participants visited the north-western shores of lake Sevan (1240 km<sup>2</sup> surface, 1900m asl). They were introduced to the lake ecosystem, to Sevan National Park and its management in the field, at the remains of Hayrivank monastery (9-12<sup>th</sup> century) on the rocks overlooking the lake and nearby Gavaraget river floodplain, and in the National Park Museum in Sevan town. The participants also visited Sevan peninsula (an island until 1949 before the lake water level dropped dramatically due to over-abstraction of water) and its 9<sup>th</sup> century churches before going underground to visit the installations of the uppermost Sevan hydro-electric power plant, one in a cascade of six, constructed in the 1930-60s along Hrazdan river, the outflow of lake Sevan towards Armenia's capital. This provided the opportunity to discuss water management problems of lake Sevan and to learn about the current ecological restoration programme (executed with international support).

## KEY ISSUES FOR THE WORK OF THE CONVENTION IN EUROPE

## **The role of the Ramsar Convention in the modern world of multilateral agreements**

The many environmental agreements in existence nowadays need to achieve a good global governance structure. Ramsar tries to achieve this by clarifying common areas of interest, simplifying and harmonizing approaches and guidance to Parties, enhancing collaboration on implementation at national and global levels, and through playing a significant role in developing inter-convention synergies (rather than more work), through agreements, joint work plans and programmes.

- More formal working relationships need to be established with the European Union. Ramsar and EU instruments need to complement each other with their respective strengths. They should not be seen as competing “labels”. Focusing wetland conservation exclusively on the objectives of the “Natura 2000” network (or the “Emerald” network in non-EU countries) would be a trap. Ramsar’s focus is wider than only natural habitats and species and relates for example to the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive. However, EU instruments have jurisdictional strength which Ramsar is lacking. This should be applied to Ramsar sites, whenever possible.

The international scientific Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), to be concluded in 2005, is also designed to meet assessment needs of international conventions, including Ramsar. It focuses on the consequences of changes in ecosystems for human well-being. The MA framework for assessment links directly to current work of Ramsar’s STRP, reviewing the definitions of “wise use” and “ecological character”. The draft MA “*Ramsar Synthesis Report*” was sent to all national Ramsar focal points (administrative authorities and STRP) for comment until 20 December 2004. In February 2005, STRP will be invited to endorse the final report, to be launched at COP9 in November 2005.

- The MA Ramsar Synthesis Report concludes that diminishing services from wetlands will threaten human well-being at individual, community, national and global levels. Maintaining sustainable wetland ecosystems can significantly contribute to local development, improved sanitation and poverty reduction. The Ramsar Convention has the approach and the tools to support delivery of the water and ecosystems agenda for the future. However, to achieve the maintenance of wetland ecosystem services, cross-sectoral understanding and collaboration are essential.

## **Assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention**

In January 2004, STRP presented a preliminary report on the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention to the Standing Committee and is since working on a list of indicators. This revealed that most of the current assessment processes under the Convention (National Reports, Work Plans, etc.) measure rather activity than the ecological outcomes of that activity. Thus, it is difficult to assess the difference made by Ramsar - what would have happened without the Convention?

- Findings about our effectiveness implementing the Convention should feed back to policy and identify outcomes to be achieved. We should focus more on effectiveness targets, baselines, controls, and on proving causations.

Recent updates, prepared for the Meeting by the Secretariat (details in the tables on the Meeting website) show that:

- Only 21 (48%) of 44 European Ramsar Parties have designated a technical expert as national STRP focal point and a governmental and a non-governmental focal point for CEPA programmes. Seven Parties have not designated any focal point at all. The absence of national focal points is likely to prevent these countries from participating in information exchange and profiting from coordinated approaches through the network of national focal points.
- For only 5 European countries (11% of the Parties) good quality Ramsar Information Sheets and maps exist for all or most of their Ramsar sites. Only in 6 European countries site-specific management plans are being implemented at all or most Ramsar sites. The number of Ramsar sites in each European Party varies between 1 and 159, covering collectively a surface between 0.1% and 19% of each country's national territory. Compiling up-to-date information on Ramsar sites is a basic requirement to implement the strategic vision for the Ramsar List. Such information is also likely to provide baseline indicators to monitor ecological change.
- Currently, 25 European Ramsar sites are listed in the Montreux Record. A rapid analysis shows that most of them could probably be removed before COP9, as the reasons for listing them do no longer exist. For a minority of the sites, the Secretariat invites the Parties concerned to identify specific actions to address the problems that lead to their inclusion in the Montreux Record (e.g. proposing a Ramsar Advisory Mission).

### ***From Yerevan to Kampala - a lot to do and less than a year to do it in***

The Deputy Secretary General outlined the development of Ramsar's scope in the context of the global water agenda (UN Commission on Sustainable Development 13 on water policy in April 2005, World Water Forum in 2006, UN Decade of Water 2005-2014) and listed the major preparatory meetings for COP9 in 2005: STRP 1-4 February, Standing Committee COP9-Group 7-9 March, SC Finance-Group 10 March, full SC 7-10 June). He stressed the need for continued outreach, mentioning the Ramsar-MedWet award for the best film on water and wetlands and the preparations for World Wetlands Day 2005 in full swing.

- National Reports for COP9, according to the easy-to-use format adopted by Standing Committee in January 2004 (sent to all Contracting Parties under diplomatic notification on 22 April 2004), need to be submitted to the Secretariat until **28 February 2005** for analysis prior to COP9.
- A preliminary draft text of the Convention Work Plan for the triennium 2006-2008, updating the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 (adopted through Resolution VIII.25), was distributed to the Meeting participants for comment. Structural changes were introduced in order to make the updated plan clearer and more focused. Comments received by the Secretariat will be included in a revised version to be submitted to COP9 for adoption.

### **Key conclusions of the 5<sup>th</sup> European Regional Meeting**

The aims of the Meeting were shared with all participants prior to the Meeting (available on the website). As a result, the discussions during the plenary sessions and workshops - and in the corridors - were well focused and lively. From this, a number of key conclusions and recommendations can be distilled:

- Wetland management is intrinsically linked to water management at catchment/river basin level. The Meeting recognized the close link between wetlands and water as a fact, mirrored by the presence of many water managers and the focus on this vital link stressed in many presentations and discussions.
- Ramsar's initial "wise use" principle needs a new definition that is consistent and compatible with the conceptual framework devised by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the "ecosystem approach" advocated by the Convention on Biodiversity and others. In the context of wetlands, the hydrological catchment basin delineates the functional ecosystem. Such ecosystems should essentially be looked at as water providers, rather than be seen only as water users.
- CEPA is - or should be - part of all our activities. CEPA should not be an add-on activity only, but an integral part of each project. Let's not preach to the converted. We need outreach to convince other sectors and stakeholders about the better solutions that we are proposing. Better solutions will provide benefits for all involved. Thus, they will also be accepted by all sides.
- Hydrological catchments often transcend political and administrative boundaries. Thus, transboundary cooperation is an essential prerequisite and an urgent necessity for many shared wetland sites and water catchments throughout Europe.

Two important meetings were announced and all European countries invited to send national experts and to assure sufficient inter-sectoral communication on their themes at home:

- the seminar on "*Ecosystems as water providers*" on 13-14 December 2004 in Geneva, organised by Switzerland in cooperation with the UNECE Water Convention and the Ramsar Convention Secretariats; and
- the conference on "*Water for food and ecosystems*" on 31 January-4 February 2005 in The Hague, organised by the Netherlands in cooperation with FAO, and its preceding e-conference to increase cooperation between the water, agriculture and wetland sectors.

## RAMSAR'S WISE USE CONCEPT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

### Workshop A: **National Wetland Policies and Committees**

Obstacles for National Wetland Policies (NWP) and Committees (NWC):

- Often, the same few persons have to do the work for many different international environmental conventions, which means they have to set priorities, given the general limitations of resources and capacity.
- Although an NWP is a key tool for raising national awareness of wetlands and their services to people, its implementation can be costly and sufficient resources are often lacking.

Experienced benefits of NWCs & NWPs:

- All countries who have established a NWC regard it making a valuable contribution to the Convention implementation. NWCs provide the forum to discuss practical problems

of implementation as well a mechanism for discussion and reporting of pressures and impacts on wetlands, from site level to national and international levels.

- NWCs provide the “visible face” of the Convention in the country – and should be encouraged to publicise their activities (developing websites, issuing press releases, handing over Ramsar site diplomas, etc.).
- For a successful NWC, the involvement of governmental and NGO representatives, as well as strong stakeholders is vital. Although it may take longer to reach agreement, having key stakeholders (of opposing interests) on the Committee can be a powerful tool. The NWC thus acts as a “sounding board” for disputed issues.
- NWCs may help to prepare National Reports, they can assist in the promotion and designation of new Ramsar sites. They demonstrate a commitment by the Contracting Party for a good Ramsar implementation.
- Committee meetings can be arranged to be attractive to participants by including site excursions, information about recent wetland projects, CEPA activities, the presentation of Ramsar site diplomas to politicians, etc.
- Separate wetland and “Natura 2000” committees are generally preferred, but exchange of information between them is crucial. NWCs have to cover key Ramsar implementation tasks, such as CEPA, including e.g. National Wetland Education and Training Centers, and can help transferring such issues and approaches to the “Natura 2000” debates.
- A step-by-step approach for the development of a NWP could facilitate its establishment. A NWP can be a compilation of existing policy documents and funding instruments. It can play a valuable role in developing national wetland strategies – even when such a strategy is non-binding. It can provide direction and approaches which can then be formulated into legal mechanisms.

## Workshop B: **Integrated Water Resource Management**

Main conclusions and recommendations:

- Ramsar objectives on site designation, wise use of water resources and international cooperation are closely linked to Integrated Water Resource Management; IWRM is a new challenge for Ramsar.
- Wetland managers are natural partners of water managers, synergies need to be explored and exploited. Bridging the gap between the wetland and water sectors may be difficult. Wetland experts need to learn and speak the water managers’ language in order to increase the understanding of the concept of wetland management being part of water management. To this end, closer cooperation between the Ramsar and the UNECE Water Convention should be developed.
- It is crucial to work on a river basin scale, based on an ecosystem approach. River basin management must be integrated with spatial planning and agriculture, as well as other sectors. River basin management must also take account of and build on protected areas.

- River basin management frequently requires international cooperation. Difficulties include ethnical and cultural diversity, but effective inter-state coordination may overcome this as shown by several examples.
- It is time to move from agreed principles to action on the ground. A number of projects have indeed been started already, among others, in the framework of the EU Birds Directive, Habitats Directive and Water Framework Directive.
- Ramsar and these EU directives underpin and reinforce each other. Further synergies need to be strengthened, particularly in the use of definitions, in the practical implementation of guidelines and reporting requirements. The WFD has helped to focus cooperation among both EU and non-EU countries with shared river basins.
- Functions of wetlands must be explained to stakeholders. There is social demand for the values of wetlands, such as river landscapes and recreation areas. We must build on this.
- Effective partnerships based on a common vision need to be built between governments, NGOs and other stakeholders (fisheries, agricultural sector, etc.). For instance, the migratory salmon in the Rhine has attracted the attention of a wide array of stakeholders. Long-term and persistent efforts may be necessary to reach results.
- It is important to provide rivers with sufficient space for their natural dynamics (spatial planning must combine aspects of flood mitigation, water supply, benefit to local economies and proper functioning of existing ecosystems, including the creation and restoration of new wetlands).
- It is also crucial to stick to obligations: all efforts must be taken to avoid deterioration of designated sites; the principle of “compensation” should not be used as an easy way out of such obligations

## INCREASING OUR CAPACITY TO COPE WITH NEW REQUIREMENTS

### Workshop C: **Role and effectiveness of CEPA activities**

The diverse case studies presented stimulated a broad-ranging discussion that focused on several key CEPA issues. Although the value of a CEPA Action Plan to coordinate a more strategic CEPA programme was not disputed, the majority of countries felt that the challenge of developing such a plan at the national level was too demanding. Alternative suggestions included:

- a top-down approach by integrating a CEPA programme within the National Wetland Policy/Strategy to mainstream CEPA as management tool; or
- a bottom-up approach through site-based activities and projects. Effective CEPA programmes can be developed this way but of course they do not necessarily lead to the development of a coherent, strategic CEPA programme nationally. Examples of such programmes include:
  - integrating a CEPA programme within site-specific management plans so that it becomes an integral part of site management,
  - using flagship species or the cultural values of a site or habitat type to deliver a broader wetland message rather than a site- or species-specific message,

- using children as awareness ‘targets’ in CEPA projects as a way to reaching their parents and, through them, reaching local communities, so that broader partnerships in wetland management can be developed.

From practical experiences, both site-based and project-based CEPA activities can assist in the development of a coherent, strategic national approach to CEPA, since they help identify baseline wetland issues that serve as a starting point for the development of a national CEPA plan.

EU Habitats and Bird Directives – are they good for Ramsar and CEPA?

- They can be seen as diverting both attention and funding from the development of Ramsar’s CEPA programme. As a strategy to deal with this, we should not compete with the “Natura 2000” network in CEPA activities, but work to create synergies instead, delivering broad wetland messages rather than uniquely Ramsar-labelled messages at “Natura 2000” sites.

Funding

- CEPA programmes are often under-resources. We should continue to effectively use the Danone-Evian group (private sector) funding for effective CEPA activities at international and national levels. At the national level we should continue to seek LIFE-nature and LIFE-third parties funding, and involve NGOs in CEPA programmes and projects

World Wetlands Day

- 2 February is a difficult date in northern Europe for organizing outdoor WWD activities. Countries in this region should consult among each other on an agreed alternative date.

Indicators of CEPA effectiveness

- These need to be developed to assess CEPA interventions. The Secretariat’s CEPA programme officer should ask the CEPA specialists group to help identify indicator tools. Consider also making use of the tools to be developed by IUCN’s CEC/UNESCO project on indicators on the effectiveness of education for sustainability activities.

Workshop D: **International cooperation**

The conclusions of the structured discussion are:

- Cooperation across borders in favour of wetlands is expanding in Europe to additional sites, making use of the dynamic created by the enlargement of the European Union, and is deepening tending towards more formal, long-term and substantial forms.
- The EU enlargement, however, is producing new problems, as the establishment and ‘hardening’ of its outer frontiers, compounded by the Schengen Agreement, makes cooperation with non-EU member states more difficult and may have a negative impact on the conservation of some species. Consultation with the relevant European Commission directorates on methods to resolve (or alleviate) these problems could produce positive results.



- Transboundary cooperation requires the participation of all stakeholders, and each has its particular role to play. Thus the contribution of all is necessary in assuring the success of such ventures. More specifically, NGOs are invaluable in preparing the ground and initiating co-operation initiatives. Governments need to provide legitimacy and deal with sovereignty issues. Local authorities can inform and involve the local inhabitants and catalyse cooperation on the social and cultural level. International organisations can provide encouragement, guidance and support. Not only electronic means should be used: face to face meetings are highly appreciated.
- From the case studies presented, a number of lessons were identified:
  - preliminary work and multi-level contacts are necessary to prepare the ground,
  - legitimacy must be acquired by the full involvement of the pertinent authorities on the two sides of frontiers,
  - clear goals, modest and attainable, must be agreed before a co-operation initiative is launched,
  - administrative structures –at least at the early stages– must remain light and flexible, and be supported by existing organisations,
  - cooperation must be oriented towards specific actions with concrete outputs,
  - building trust among organisations and individuals is a key objective,
  - it must be recognised, however, that transboundary co-operation is not an easy process, and that it requires sufficient time, optimism in the face of difficulties and persistence.
- The importance of sharing knowledge and experience is widely considered as a powerful support for transboundary cooperation efforts, and various ideas for facilitating it were discussed. A proposal was accepted to establish an informal, *ad hoc* working group to study these possibilities and present appropriate options to the Convention. The following participants volunteered to contribute: Carsten Dettmann (Germany), Thymio Papayannis (MedWet), David Pritchard (BirdLife), Tobias Salathe (Ramsar Secretariat), Saulius Svazas (Lithuania), Doug Taylor (Wetlands International). Any others interested to participate in this task are highly welcome.
- Finally, it was recognised that broader efforts of cooperation on the intra-regional, regional and sub-regional levels, in accordance with Resolution VIII.30, have their own important contribution to make. The MedWet Initiative was mentioned as a model. The Carpathian Wetland Initiative is starting with positive omens. Norway is leading a promising cooperation effort for Baltic and North Sea wetlands, through a conference to be held in Trondheim in March 2005. Unfortunately, the Black Sea Wetland Initiative, discussed at the Ramsar European meeting in Bled 2002, has not yet materialised.

## WETLAND INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

### Workshop E: **Wetland inventory and assessment**

The workshop examined existing and developing inventory, assessment and monitoring approaches through four presentations, and considered drivers of change and the need to understand the status and trends of wetland ecosystem health and biodiversity.

- Inventory at national level should be strategic and promote Ramsar site identification, but also needs to satisfy national needs, such as regulation. It should set the basis for future assessment.

- Designation of wetlands should be associated with adequate buffering to protect the core interests especially for water quality, and in the case of karst wetland needs to recognise their vulnerability to distant impacts on water flow and quality.
- Floodplains, grassland and steppe peatlands are assessed as remaining vulnerable to continuing loss, and require special attention.
- Inventory and assessment increasingly needs to include multi-scalar GIS-based links between different biotope and land cover classification systems in addition to the Ramsar scheme, e.g. CORINE, EUNIS, to enable change analysis and the potential for reporting on status and trends to different Directives or multilateral agreements.
- The desirability of working with outcome-oriented indicators was also discussed and Contracting Parties are urged to simplify their own reporting on outcomes.

It was noted that the Ramsar Information Sheet and National Reports were developed for a different purpose than recording ecological change or biodiversity status, therefore requirements for more effective status and trend information reporting will require further development of tools. A proposed cultural heritage inventory approach was discussed, this could extend the tools for wetland valuation, which is a high priority issue for the development of guidance by the STRP.

The workshop heard that the Ramsar STRP is considering at a global level the potential use of CBD indicators for assessment of biodiversity of inland and coastal waters. However, there is a gap at European regional level for practical indicators to be selected to assist with Ramsar and EU-related reporting.

- One proposal is for STRP National Focal Points to communicate with each other and for STRP to share ideas, especially because it was noted that it is difficult to reconcile the obligations under the Ramsar Convention and EU Directives and with national situations. More cooperation between the EC and Ramsar is required.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) was considered as potentially a very useful tool to aid communication between water and nature managers. The EU “Horizontal guidance on wetlands“ is available to assist implementation, although there is concern about its structure and value.

- The workshop participants agree that the WFD represents both a major challenge and an opportunity to raise awareness and appreciation of wetland hydrological functions (and other ecosystem services) within water management agencies.

#### Workshop F: **Ramsar site designation**

A number of existing Ramsar site networks were presented and discussed under different aspects, such as the Spanish development of a national Ramsar list using “Natura 2000“ biodiversity-related criteria, the UK experience of Ramsar site review focusing on under-represented habitat types and threatened species, indicating that Ramsar can be used as tool to protect habitats and species not listed on the Annexes of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, Nordic progress in peatland conservation, including Sweden’s 2010 target to ensure protection of all 374 priority mire sites listed in the National Mire Protection Plan, the relevance of the Ramsar network for

peatland conservation throughout Europe, and the role of Ramsar sites for waterbirds. This lead to the following recommendations:

- National reviews are not easy, but most countries have at least some relevant data that can be used to commence a review: you do not need to wait for perfect data to make a start.
- Within the EU, Natura 2000 is not comprehensive in its scope: designation of Ramsar sites provides a further opportunity to protect threatened wetland habitats and species and to address limnological and hydrological significance (Ramsar Convention Article 2.2)
- From Conference Resolutions to action: good policy responses at national level to the COP7 call for designation of under-represented peatlands (and other under-represented wetland types).
- Need for better information to understand linkages between Ramsar sites at different spatial scales.
- Data collation needs: better information flow via Ramsar Information Sheets is a critical need.
- Do not restrict thinking on national networks just to biodiversity interests: much scope for innovative thinking re many other values and functions of Ramsar sites.

## WETLAND MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

### Workshop G: **Ecological character, local development and site management**

Experiences with managing Ramsar sites in Belarus showed that:

- Prior to undertaking wetland restoration projects, the underlying causes of ecological degradation need to be analysed systematically. Extensive consultation of local people during the restoration project resulted in their support for the project aims. Such consultation should be portrayed as CEPA in action.
- The experience gained in Belarus was explained to Russian Ramsar site managers in a special seminar. Through such sessions, useful links can be established with other sites in the Ramsar network, e.g. in view of managing a network of „stepping-stone“ sites for migratory species, such as the aquatic warbler.

Armenia is embarking on restoration projects for its two existing Ramsar sites, stimulated by their Ramsar status. Each of them will fit in to the context of a basin-scale management plan.

- In defining the restoration target state, there is a choice to make between maximum naturalness, optimum productivity, favourable conservation status, etc. Ecological character should be a foundation for this, and need not be limited to a site, but could relate to the catchment (including socio-economic and services targets). For floodplains, it is crucial to recreate natural water flow dynamics.

- Continuing post-project maintenance management is critical. Economic benefits of restoration need to be emphasized more. Restoration projects need to provide win-win economic solutions. Often restoration activities can be achieved with relative little costs, but can produce immense economic benefits to local populations (example of Danube delta). This increases public awareness, if CEPA activities are correctly built into the project.

Cyprus reported on the clean-up and restoration project of its Ramsar site suffering from heavy lead pollution. The case put an end to arguments from shooters that lead was not the cause of bird mortality. An important by-product was a persisting higher level of public awareness through a visible flagship species (the greater flamingo).

Romania reported on the recent opening of the Bystre Danube mouth for deep-water navigation through the Ukrainian part of the transboundary Danube delta Ramsar site. Ukraine completed the factual information provided by Romania. A Ramsar Advisory Mission (jointly with UNESCO-MaB) addressed the issue of deep-water navigation through the dynamic delta area in late 2003. Since, an on-the-spot appraisal by the Berne Convention in July 2004 and an international mission in October 2004, lead by the European Commission, visited again the area. Ramsar is an initiative partner of the ongoing, concerted, international initiative to discuss the management problems and international obligations.

- Ramsar should make sure to have an early warning system in case for future such situations (this was the case here, as early warnings came already in early 2003). Ramsar should then apply its specific tools: Article 3.2, Montreux Record, Ramsar Advisory Missions.
- Ramsar sites are “Wetlands of International Importance”. They are thus of international concern, particularly to Ramsar Parties (also overseas). In accordance with Article 8 of the Convention, alterations to the Ramsar List and changes in the character of Ramsar sites need to be discussed at the COP.
- While the Ramsar Convention often cannot prevent site damage, since this remains subject to sovereign decisions of national governments, it must be as skilful as possible in applying political pressure.
- Further conflicts between wetland conservation and the needs of river navigation are likely to occur in the near future, given the EU proposals for inland waterways in the framework of the Trans-European Transport Network.
- Increased cooperation for the sustainable management of this transboundary wetland is an urgent need. A trilateral management plan is now available for the lower Prut and Danube delta area, shared between the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania.
- Participants expressed their concern with the evolution of the Danube delta and appreciated that a clear message from the Convention is needed for an effective implementation of its provisions.

#### Workshop H: **Site management at catchment basin scale**

The results of the discussions on different aspects of the case studies presented are:

- Although the catchment approach has lots of benefits, not many examples are yet available from large-scale planning right down to implementing measures on the ground, because the catchment is not a unit represented in administration, and the number of stakeholders rapidly increases.
- We need to emphasise that Ramsar is a lot more than only site protection and nature conservation, and that wetland wise use is not only the responsibility of the nature conservation sector.
- Zones outside actual Ramsar sites need more attention, not only buffer zones, but also zones which supply (or not) wetlands with water, nutrients, etc. Such zones are usually not fully covered in wetland conservation activities, as the hydro-ecological mechanisms are often not fully understood.
- Linking site management at catchment scale to the EU Water Framework Directive can be very useful as it defines the river catchment as a unit for special concern and has a long term planning approach (target date 2015), however many details of the procedures are yet unclear.
- The role of stakeholder involvement in all phases (discussing, planning, implementing measures) is essential. A lot of patience is necessary to overcome mistrust of local people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The participants and the Ramsar Secretariat express their sincere thanks to the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia for hosting and covering many costs of the 5<sup>th</sup> European Regional Meeting on the Ramsar Convention. Particular gratitude is expressed to Minister Vardan Ayvazyan<sup>1</sup>, to Karen Jenderedjian and to his colleagues of the Ministry of Nature Conservation; to Gagik Kirakossian, President of the Orientation Union, to the Union members and to all others involved in the preparation of the Meeting, the organisation of its logistics and of the travel arrangements for sponsored delegates.

Thanks to the generous financial contributions from a number of Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat was able to cover the additional costs, including those of many delegates from Central and Eastern Europe. Financial contributions were received from the:

- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, United Kingdom
- Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands
- Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany
- Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water, Austria
- Ministry of Environment and Water, Hungary
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Thanks are expressed to those who prepared, introduced and chaired the workshops (in alphabetical order): Henk Eggink (the Netherlands), Sandra Hails (Ramsar Secretariat), Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium), Thymio Papayannis (MedWet Initiative), Gerhard Sigmund (Austria), David Stroud (United Kingdom), and Doug Taylor (Wetlands International). They were supported by a number of rapporteurs to prepare workshop conclusions and recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> All accents in names have been omitted – for the ease of e-mail transfer.

Thanks go to all those who delivered oral presentations (in alphabetical order): Gordana Beltram (Slovenia), Olga Belyakova (Belarus), Vidmantas Bezaras (Lithuania), Maka Bitsadze (WWF International), Susana Calvo (Spain), Nick Davidson (Ramsar Secretariat), Zamir Dedej (Albania), Carsten Dettmann (Germany), Eugen Draganovic (Croatia), Goran Gugic (Croatia), Miroula Hadjichristoforou (Cyprus), Amalia Hambartsumian (Armenia), Karen Jenderedjian (Armenia), Jan Kadlecik (Slovakia), Irina Kamennova (Wetlands International), Adriana Klindova (Slovakia), Alexander Kozulin (Belarus), Torsten Larsson (Sweden), Christophe Lefebvre (France), Bert Lenten (UNEP-AEWA), Colin McLeod (United Kingdom), Tatiana Minayeva (Wetlands International), Virgil Munteanu (Romania), Wolfgang Pelikan (Austria), Inga Racinska (Latvia), Jose Ramon Picatoste (Spain), David Pritchard (BirdLife International), Cristian Rusu (Romania), Trevor Salmon (United Kingdom), Aliona Stratan (Republic of Moldova), Saulius Svazas (Lithuania), Alexandru Teleuta (Republic of Moldova), Patrick Triplet (Eurosites), Ilya Trombitsky (Republic of Moldova), Carlos Villalba (Spain), Maria Jose Vinyals (Spain), Pierre-Emmanuel Vos (France), Edith Wenger (WWF International), and Marie-Claude Ximenes (France). "Powerpoint" files of their presentations are available from the Ramsar Secretariat on request.

A number of participants exhibited posters on specific Ramsar sites, wetland projects and national programmes.

Finally, thanks go to the chairs of the plenary sessions (in alphabetical order): Georgi Arzumanyan (Armenia), Sten Asbirk (Denmark), Gordana Beltram (Slovenia), Vija Busa (Latvia), Jan-Petter Huberth Hansen (Norway), and Dirk Schwenzfeier (Germany).

At the Ramsar Secretariat, Estelle Gironnet and Tobias Salathe were involved with the organisation of the Meeting, Paulette Kennedy with financial aspects.